The Good Men of Suan Kulap An Ethnographic Genealogy of an Elite Thai School and the Making of Political Subjects

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the institutional culture of Suan Kulap Withayalai, Thailand's oldest state-run secondary school and the alma mater of seven prime ministers. Using the critical theory of genealogy combined with methodologies common to ethnography, it traces the gradual development of the school's symbolic and disciplinary infrastructure through time. In addition, it also provides a descriptive analysis of the school's ritual events and ideological projects during the 2018/9 academic year. Using a range of sources, including historical documents, personal writings, life histories, and participant observation, the thesis explores how the school has been deeply implicated in the maintenance of power in Thailand and how it has sought to produce certain kinds of political subjects favourable to the interest of a shifting centre. It positions Suan Kulap as an overlooked institution in the scholarship of Thailand's political culture. The thesis also augments and challenges the current literature pertaining to Thai education, which relies heavily on the study of pedagogic materials and has tended to characterise students as submissive recipients of the state's ideological messaging. Highlighting the writings and words of those who worked and studied at the school, the thesis creates an alternative narrative of crypto-colonial innovation and sporadic conflict that is assiduously suppressed by the school administration. At a time when Thai high school students are protesting *en masse* against what they see as an authoritarian educational system, this thesis provides a historically informed ethnography of the practices that Thai schools engage in to maintain political stasis. More generally, the thesis is an intimate portrait of an institution deeply implicated, and reflective of, the ideological struggles and psychosocial movements that have shaped recent Thai history.

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Statement of copyright

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To my family,

and to Eder, for making the world sparkle

Preface

The origins of this thesis can be traced to 2013, at a time when I was enjoying a brief career in Thailand's colourful TV news media. The job, acquired through a friendship with a local producer, was to offer an 'international' perspective on the headlines of the day for a new TV show that favoured an informal, off-the-cuff style broadcasting. I was, it turns out, a middling presenter; I struggled to improvise naturally in Thai and frequently failed to manufacture a discernable opinion. Nevertheless, I enjoyed filming immensely, particularly the long periods between recording when 'real' Thai journalists would sit for make-up or go to lunch while holding forth on topics of national importance, often displaying a candor and wit that would be considered untransmissible in the kingdom's suppressive media climate.

For me, the most fascinating elements of these impromptu disquisitions were those that touched upon the obscure rivalries and entrenched privileges of Thailand's social elite, a baroque coterie of politicians, entertainers, generals, aristocrats, businessmen, and playboys who seemed to live their lives at the very centre of the political realm. Commonly referred to as the 'hi-so' (a localized rendering of 'high society'), this is a category of citizen whose power and influence can often be traced back several generations, to parents and grandparents who presided over the country's political direction for much of the last century. Today, they sit on the board of national companies and attend glamourous parties at exclusive venues. They pose for Tatler, smiling in tastefully decorated living rooms alongside a growing brood of dynastic successors.

One evening, some months into the job, I began to think about the formal education of this social class. I had been invited (as a plus-one) to a formal gala dinner in a well-appointed hotel ballroom; the kind of party in which one's place at the dinner table is dictated by an elegant calligraphy nameplate. After listening to a welcome speech given by a former prime minister, I turned to address my fellow diners, all older men, who commenced an animated conversation about their schooldays at Debsirin, a prestigious boy's school in central Bangkok. Seeing that I was left out of the conversation, the man next to me offered a brief history of his alma mater and some of the political and commercial achievements of the people with whom he had studied during the 1950s. His colleagues were in the process of organizing the annual reunion, he explained, and still undecided about which venue they would select for

the occasion. ‘How nice’, I offered, ‘to be so connected to your secondary school after all these years’. (I, myself, seldom thought about the dreary education I had received in a West Midlands comprehensive). In response to my observation, one of the diners, a tall gentleman with a red bow tie and wire-framed glasses, turned to me and smiled. ‘In Thailand, our school friends are like brothers’, he said. ‘We can rely on them to show loyalty when things get hot’. The men sitting about him dropped their conversation and began to nod in agreement. ‘My old headmaster used to tell us a story’, the man continued. ‘There is a Debsirin man who finds himself alone on a dark and rainy road. His vehicle is dead, and he needs help. What must he do?’. He paused for effect. I shrugged. ‘He must seek out a fellow old boy, any will do. A Debsirin man is bound to help his brother. The problem will be fixed; his car repaired, his belly full’. The men around me let out a satisfied murmur of approval. Then the diner to my right raised his glass and said, ‘sometimes you just need to call a big man in the police’. With his free hand, he held a closed fist to his ear, mimicking a phone. ‘Those guys get a lot of late-night calls. I wonder they get any sleep at all’. The table chuckled in recognition.

The close affiliation that is fostered between peers in Thailand’s elite boy’s schools is well-known in Bangkok. Earlier that year I had visited the Museum of National Education, a little-known exhibition housed in the stately surroundings of Suan Kulap Withayalai, the oldest and most eminent of Bangkok’s four great boy’s schools. Expecting a general history of Thai educational development, I was struck by the exhibit’s presentation of the school’s institutional ideology, which put great emphasis on the values of loyalty, honour, sacrifice, kinship, and obedience. By instilling such values, the exhibit proposed, Suan Kulap had not only prepared its alumni for future success but guaranteed the moral stability of the nation writ large; it had furnished the state with a succession of ‘good men’, exemplary leaders uniquely qualified to exercise power responsibly. I was intrigued about where these ideas about good governance had come from and how they were instilled within the school.

Meanwhile, elite power wranglings were threatening my job at the news station. In the aftermath of the 2014 coup, the network I worked for— a station funded and managed by a political clique that was antagonistic to the ‘good men’ of the new regime— was taken off the air. When it was finally reinstated, the last of all the Thai channels, it was placed under the surveillance of an armed military detail. Each morning a camouflaged Jeep parked on the studio compound while three or four bored servicemen sat waiting for orders, their rifles

squashed on their knees. We were banned from discussing local politics on air. On one occasion, an outspoken colleague was invited to the Army Headquarters for a session of 'attitude adjustment'. A few months later, I was partly relieved when the channel reduced its output and our program was axed. I returned to the UK and began to think more seriously about Thailand's political cliques and the institutions in which they were formed.

My proposal to undertake PhD research was initially concerned with studying the ideals of masculinity and ethical citizenship that prevail among Thailand's middle and upper classes. After being accepted to Durham University in October 2016, I began to formulate a viable research plan for the project and decided that Suan Kulap would provide a fertile fieldwork site for the observation of such phenomena. From my limited understanding, it appeared the institution played an outsized role in propagating and sustaining certain expectations of masculinity, fraternity, and moral citizenship among the putative elite. I wanted to learn more about these ideals by immersing myself in the rhythms of school life and observing the social relations it generated. My plan was to attend the school daily, spending time with teachers and administrators, while observing classes, assemblies, and extra-curricular activities.

As so often the case with ethnographic research, this initial fieldwork plan was promptly scrapped. Before leaving for Bangkok, my departmental ethics board advised me that interviewing and observing young children would entail complex and challenging issues related to safe-guarding and consent. I thus abandon my plan to observe classes and interview current students. It is for this reason that the following thesis—perhaps unusually for an ethnographic account of a school— contains no descriptions of classroom activities or student interaction. These troublesome restrictions, however, proved to be an advantage once I arrived in Bangkok since they freed me from having to spend endless hours in the classroom, listening to the dissemination of Thailand's national curriculum, a topic that has already been discussed in the anthropological literature (see introduction). Instead, I was able to explore the school from a broader and historically deeper perspective. My first strategy was to locate and interview as many alumni as I could so that I could begin to collect an oral history of the school. I was also keen to assemble several life history narratives that might illuminate the ways in which the institution had shaped the lives and careers of alumni after graduation.

It was with trepidation that I approached my first interview. Suan Kulap alumni have a reputation for fierce allegiance to their institution and several Thai friends had warned me

that it would be challenging for an outsider to recruit former students. My concerns were confirmed when I met my first interlocuter, a retired Air Marshall, whom I interviewed three weeks after returning to Bangkok. As we sat in the school's low-lit reception room, positioned underneath a huge photograph of King Bhumibol, the Air Marshall seemed perplexed by my interest in his alma mater and listened to my description of the project with guarded hesitancy. At some brief allusion to Suan Kulap being the 'Eton of Thailand', however, his attitude softened and he began to suddenly enthuse about the project, proclaiming it would provide an opportunity for the world to know more about the school and its illustrious legacy. As part of his 'duty' to Suan Kulap, he answered my questions at length and proceeded to facilitate several introductions with fellow alumni. These men took time out of their schedules to meet me in cafes, offices, and restaurants to talk about their careers and relationships, and share memories of school life. Within four months, I had interviewed thirty alumni and was beginning to build a nascent social history of Suan Kulap, a fragmented institutional biography as told by men who had spent their formative years at the school over the last seven decades.

Two things happened during these initial interviews. Firstly, as I listened to my interlocutors describe their schooldays, I became increasingly fascinated by the unusual relationship the school enjoyed with the modern bureaucratic state that had birthed it. Founded at the end of the nineteenth century, an era of ambitious central expansion, Suan Kulap had provided the state with the literate administrators it required to construct a British-style bureaucracy, a system of governance that allowed the Bangkok elite to concentrate power within a tightly bound polity. To many, the school still functioned as an institutional nursemaid to the political class— a place where privileged and talented young men are groomed for power. Yet despite official claims to continuity and tradition, the school appeared to have implemented radical reforms over the last century, a period that saw the Thai state survive more political coups than any other country in modern world history. With each political convulsion and fresh shift of power, it is possible to discern in the recollections of alumni major changes in the school's administrative and disciplinary structure. As the century rumbled on and power became increasingly fractious, alumni alluded to increasing moments of tension and structural violence on campus. Increasingly, I came to see these stories as events of historical and anthropological significance; compelling expressions of how power can be directed on the minds and bodies of children. I wanted to know more about how these changes had affected

the social, psychological, and political lives of these men; how they may have shaped their moral preoccupations when they came to power. In sum, my focus shifted away from viewing Suan Kulap as a conduit for upper class masculinity, and towards the school as a socio-political institution in its own right.

As I made that decision, I had a second realization. Interviews with alumni were only going to get me so far. Memories concerning events that occurred many decades prior were frequently partial or non-existent. Additionally, alumni were notably reticent to discuss aspects of school life that could be interpreted as negative or critical of their alma mater, particularly those that acknowledged conflict and thus violated the school's claims to corporate unity. To corroborate and augment what I had recorded, I arranged to meet Naponeenim 'Nim' Thongthammachart, the director of the school museum, which holds a sizable repository of school documents and photographs. Khru Nim was an important informant to my project and aided me in navigating the museum's records, particularly student produced yearbooks and magazines, as well as the many commemorative brochures and publications the school and alumni had published over the years, often in very small numbers. In these unguarded documents, I found the majority of the information from which I built my historical chapters. I supplemented these findings with documents from the National Library, which included contemporaneous newspapers and journals, as well as autobiographical publications written by alumni and former faculty, and Thammasat library, which holds many publications relating to the student dissent of the 1970's. Some of these documents, written by Suan Kulap students, implicate certain members of faculty in instigating outbreaks of physical violence at the school and, as such, remain politically sensitive. These documents and are held in the University's banned books section and may only be accessed in short, supervised sessions. Other useful series were the Teacher's Council annual teacher biographies, in operation since the 1920s but now fully archived online, which provides detailed and intimate information of Thailand's notable educators, usually written by colleagues who knew them both personally and professionally. In addition, a colleague at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., which holds a large catalogue of historical Thai newspapers, managed to source much of the material relating to the student unrest of the 1930s. Finally, a book entitled *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades*, an account of the school's historical development compiled by a research team of Suan Kulap teachers in the early

1990's, provided a general, if hagiographical, overview of the school's evolution. I discuss the political circumstances that prompted the compilation of this document in chapter two.

As I was compiling this history, I visited the school regularly, attending numerous cultural events, including sports days, anniversary occasions, retirement parties, alumni dinners, student orientation, and the ceremonial opening and closing of the school year. At such occasions, I was the invited guest of Khru Nim, who acted as my sponsor and guarantor. Such occasions allowed me to become acquainted with members of the faculty, most notably the retired Ajarn Sommay, Suan Kulap's first headmistress, who agreed to sit for a long interview with me after we met at an event. More importantly, these occasions allowed me to experience the importance of Suan Kulap's 'consensual rituals', Bernstein's (1966:429) expression for those features of a school that 'recreate the past in the present and project it into the future'. Such rituals— which include the lineaments of dress, the imagery of signs, punishment and reward, assemblies, and the revivifying of special historical contexts— 'function so as to bind all members of a school, staff, and pupils as a moral community, a distinct collectivity…[that holds] appropriate sentiment towards the dominant value system'. By combining my ethnographic and archival research, I began to concentrate on how these rituals were developed and augmented over time; and how these changes reflected the changing moral community that the state sought to construct for its putative elite.

'…who knew that those schoolboys who chewed mung beans in the corner, who secretly gulped candy, would one day grow to be big men…'

Prakep Klongtruat, Suan Kulap student 1931-1935

(Image courtesy of Noppawit Lertutsahakul)

Introduction
The Suan Kulap Disease

It is the Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentleman and the dawn sky is the colour of iron. Hundreds of students are gathered in the playing field. A blur of black shorts and white shirts being shepherded by brown suited teachers. Surveying the operation, a squadron of earnest older students pace the perimeter of the field while issuing urgent updates into their crackling radios. They pass a section of long tiered benches where the school band are warming up to the first few bars of Yankee Doodle. Somewhere near the flagpole, a loud tannoy system barks instructions to the indifferent crowd

Everywhere, pink and blue flags hang limply in the morning air.

I look back through the school gates. Vans with PPTV and MCOT News printed on their doors are parked beside a row of pink and blue gazebos. A couple of reporters talk to cameramen, waiting for studios to broadcast the scene live to homes across the county. The first day of the school year is a regular fixture of Thailand's annual news cycle, as is the eccentric pageantry of The Wondrous Day. Last year, MCOT praised the event as an occasion that 'instills beautiful morals of national benefit' (MCOT, 2017). Much of their coverage centered on the day's most unusual custom. Each year, as a batch of new freshmen enter the institution for the first time, they are welcomed by a cohort of elderly alumni wearing identical school uniforms. These men entered Suan Kulap exactly fifty years earlier and consider it their duty to initiate the freshmen into the community via a series of ritualized activities. This year, the duty falls to the schools 87th generation, who linger at the margins, ready to begin.

Under the concrete overhang that shades the school's basketball court, a group of entrepreneurial alumni have assembled a temporary marketplace selling a miscellany of branded products. Suan Kulap

watches are placed beside Suan Kulap baseball caps and Suan Kulap t-shirts. Even unexpected items have been given the Suan Kulap treatment. From the school's official gun club, you can purchase a tan leather holster stamped with the words 'Suan Kulap', or a golf bag stitched with the school emblem. How about an ashtray embossed with an artistic rendering of the school's famous Long Building? For 22,000 baht, you can get your hands on a gold signet ring designed by Dr. Ditsanan of the 104th class. 'For True OSK identification...Only OSK members will understand', reads Dr. Ditsanan's advertising board. Somewhere in the mass of pink and blue objects, a particularly enterprising alumnus has designed a small air conditioning unit in the shape of the school insignia.

Such paraphernalia permeates the city, once you start looking. Sit in a downtown traffic jam and you might see an unobtrusive Suan Kulap logo on a custom license plate. Waiting for a root canal, I noticed that my dentist had a large round wall clock that read "Suan Kulap must show its mettle" (สวนกุหลาบต้องไว้ลาย) in calligraphic type. I once had occasion to interview a retired military officer who arrived for our meeting dressed head to foot in alumni regalia; a Suan Kulap cap, t-shirt, and three pink and blue silicone bracelets. The letters OSK ('Old Suan Kulap') had been welded to his belt buckle in large metallic characters. He said soberly, 'the only occasion I wear anything but school colours is for a funeral. But I'm not crazy. Some alumni paint their houses pink and blue!'

I continue back to the field where one of the reporters is interviewing five members of the 87th class. One of them has applied coloring to his hair so that clumsy patches of pink and blue dye flash toward the camera whenever he declines his head to speak into the microphone. 'I was afraid they weren't going to let me in' he laughs. 'Fifty years ago, they would have shaved my hair off!' He laughs again, before becoming very serious. 'But I love my school, I love my teachers and I love my younger brothers'. Another member of the group adds, 'everything has changed from our time here. Technology was not what it is today. Our young brothers are

from the age of 5G and we can't keep up. But we can support them to success'. Everybody nods solemnly. Then old man with the dyed hair shouts 'The blood in my body is red… but the blood in my heart is pink and blue'.

Then there is an announcement over the tannoy. The ceremony is about to begin.

This thesis is an ethnographic genealogy of Suan Kulap Withayalai, Thailand's oldest and most prestigious public secondary school. It is arranged in two intersecting parts; the first part comprises a detailed genealogy of Suan Kulap's emergence and development over the first sixty years of the institution's existence; from its establishment in 1882 until the year 1941, when the bombing raids of the Second World War forced the school to temporarily close. Using a range of primary sources, principally the written testimonies of former pupils, this genealogy charts how the policies of successive political administrations transformed Suan Kulap from a small and informal palace academy in the late 19th century to a large and militarised public institution in the 1930s, a school widely perceived to be the strictest in the kingdom. In the course of this genealogy, the thesis explores the personal characteristics of the individuals who administered Suan Kulap in its early history and who contributed to its development as one of the most important socio-political institutions of the emerging nation. Through the words of those who studied and worked at the school, it explores the changing practices and mechanisms by which the state sought to mould generations of elite young men for power and privilege through the volatile political landscape of the 20th century. The second section of this thesis comprises a series of ethnographic writings derived from a period of fieldwork undertaken at Suan Kulap during the 2018-2019 academic year. These chapters explore aspects of the school's ritual and symbolic life today, including the ways in which history and historiography have been utilized to manufacture a charismatic institutional ideology in the face of continued political instability. They address the considerable work that goes into sustaining this ideological construct and how it relates to other institutions within the bureaucratic state. To create a dialogue between these two investigative modes, the thesis alternates between ethnographic and genealogical chapters, a structure that I explicate in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Objectives

This thesis contributes to the anthropology of Thailand in two principal ways. Firstly, it offers an intimate ethnographic analysis of an important political institution that has yet to be adequately studied by scholars of Thai society. In doing so, it sheds light on several understudied aspects of a significant contemporary issue. Since the 1980s, political analysts have identified Thailand's elite educational institutions as productive sites for the formation of influential political networks that determine how power is circulated within the kingdom. Yet there are no ethnographic analyses of the enclosed institutional spaces in which such networks are forged and maintained. This thesis contributes a historically informed ethnography of one such environment, prioritising the embodied and the experiential testimony of those who passed through the institution. As such, it offers an alternative analysis of Thailand's wider political culture as well as a contribution to the anthropology of elites, a growing literature that seeks to 'probe the intimate spaces' of powerful groups and examine 'the relationships among knowledge, identity and the constitution of power (Herzfeld, 2000:2,5).[1]

Secondly, this thesis presents a novel addition to the anthropology of Thai education, whose studies have typically specialized in rural institutions and the literary analysis of curricula. Such studies, I argue, have generally emphasised the intensity of the state's nationalistic messaging in Thai schools at the expense of the lived experiences of those who work and study at such sites. As a result, a complex socio-political field is often reduced to that of a vehicle for the transmission of state ideology; a site in which authoritarian ideologues proselytise to the next generation of docile citizens. In the wake of ongoing political demonstrations, in which high school students across the country have made unprecedented calls for political reform, these axioms are no longer tenable. By creating a genealogy of a single site, the thesis charts the evolving relationship between the state, the school, and its pupils over time, thereby uncovering a history marked by conflict, accommodation, and constant change. Without resorting to explanations of 'traditional culture', it examines the

[1] See also de Pina-Cabral, 2000; Shore, 2002; Armytage, 2018; Kenway et al, 2018

accumulation of specific practices, some of which are deeply 'colonial' that have shaped Thailand's state education since its beginnings in the late nineteenth century.

Finally, this thesis seeks to propose ethnographic genealogy as a mode of enquiry that is especially productive in the study of Thailand, a country with a conspicuously rigid historiographical record. By incorporating the disruptive power of genealogy with the study of life history materials and ethnographic techniques, I demonstrate in a subsequent section of this introduction how an ethnographic genealogy is capable of destabilising and challenging dominant narratives of the centre.

Suan Kulap and the protests of 2020-2022

In September 2020, a coalition of students calling themselves *The Suan Kulap Association to Fight Suppression* (ภาคีสวนกุหลาบเผด็จศึก) released a video denouncing Thailand's system of public education.[2] Sitting before a green-screen image of the school's famously long neo-classical building, three students declared that the 'situation in Thai schools is untenable'. Speaking in turn, they listed their grievances. Students were intimidated and unable to express themselves politically and socially; they were forced to wear uniforms and style their hair a certain way; teachers were poorly assessed and acted with impunity; the curriculum was not fit for purpose. In a subsequent interview with the school newspaper, two anonymised protest leaders described a culture of endemic subjugation at the school, reporting that students are told they are 'low' and admonished for having 'no beauty of action or manners' (*Suan Pim Online*, 2020). One student claimed that the school 'chips away at the psyche' (บั่นทอนจิตใจ) and 'diminishes human dignity and worth'. 'Children should not have to endure such things', they remarked.

The video, which was reported widely in the national media, was not an isolated incident. In early 2020, an extraordinary political movement emerged in response to the Constitutional Court's decision to dissolve the Future Forward Party (FFP), a progressive political rival to the incumbent government. The party had enjoyed a passionate following among young Thais who took to the streets in protest, organizing flash mob rallies through social media that

[2] Video available at https://www.facebook.com/suannondebate/videos/4006601832689370

attracted upwards of 50,000 demonstrators. As the movement grew stronger and more galvanized, protesters began to vent their frustration towards a broad range of state entities including the monarchy, a traditionally revered institution protected by draconian lèse-majesté laws. Some rallies challenged deep-seated cultural taboos by openly calling for republicanism and the end of monarchical rule.[3] Vociferous attacks were also aimed at the national education system, which protesters claimed was oppressive and dogmatic. Students reported a culture of submission that proliferates in classrooms. 'They are trying to instil in us that we are only little people in an authoritarian society', said one young protestor (Juarawee, 2020). At a student rally outside the Ministry of Education in September 2020, speakers accused schools of psychological intimidation, physical violence and sexual abuse (*Voice TV*, 2020). Demonstrators created a new political slogan that seemed to crystalize their anger at the role state education played in sustaining suppressive social structures; 'Our first dictatorship is school'.

These protests present a challenge to the current anthropology of Thai education. For decades, analysts have proclaimed the authoritarianism of Thai pedagogy, arguing that it is little more than a vehicle for the transmission of state ideology. At a time when sociologists in Britain and America were writing about the 'hidden curriculum' of Western institutions, ethnographers found that there was little 'hidden' about the curriculum espoused by the Thai government. In his ethnography of a Central Thai village in the late 1950s, Hanks (1959:13) notes that Thai teachers typically 'recognise and accept their role in remaking the nation', while Keyes (1991:35), recalling fieldwork undertaken in an 1960s Isan school, states that the 'primary objective' of Thai education is to prepare children to enter into a 'Thai national world'. Chayan (1991:53) makes a similar observation in relation to a rural Northern community in the 1980s, noting that the local school seemed 'more concerned with state legitimacy and with asserting ideological control than with providing skills and knowledge'. The ultimate goal of the curriculum, he argues, is to maintain the existing socio-political order. Students were encouraged to develop 'unswerving loyalty to, and faith in, the nation, Buddhist religion, and King'. Everything was aimed towards 'raising the level of Thai

[3] As of March 2021, 60 individuals connected to protests have been charged with royal defamation (Agence France-Presse, 2020) while rallies have been dispersed with water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets (Bloomberg, 2021).

consciousness regarding nationalism, national security needs, and civic responsibility for national defence' (Chayan, 1991:164).

More recent ethnographic studies suggest similar messaging continues. In 1997, anthropologist Niels Mulder described the 'distorting mirror' (1997:3) of the state's social studies syllabus, confirming that 'the task of the school is to reproduce morally good people who are determined by a rather simple-minded set of social values' (Mulder, 1997:53). Bechstedt (2002:246) describes the school of his fieldwork as a 'secondary socialisation' reinforcing 'recognition of authority, tendency toward conformity, and acceptance of social etiquette and polite manners'. After observing a Bangkok state school at around the same time, Somwung and Siridej (2002:105) report that 'moral and social conduct is cultivated in students all the time', and that 'respect for the institution of nation, religion, and king' is achieved via a regime of 'order, discipline, and social development'.

Outside anthropology, historians and political scientists have been similarly censorious of Thai education. In his excoriation of Thai feudalism in 1957, the Marxist historian Chit Phumisak argued that 'the decayed remnants of the *sakdina* [feudal order] continue to hold the curriculum…tightly in their grip' and 'shut off any original ideas which might lead to [their] destruction' (quoted in Somsamai, 1994:59-60). The system works, he continues, by keeping students compliant to authority and 'down in ignorance'. More recently, Thongchai (2016:9)— a former student at Suan Kulap— implicates modern Thai schools in the 'production, reproduction and innovation of excessive royalism', an observation corroborated by Connors (2003:36) who notes the classroom's 'endless affirmations' of identity, dynasty, and the nation. Ferrara (2015: 194; 291), another political analyst, characterises Thailand's state education as a 'service of ideological propagation', writing that the system 'rewards conformity over independent thought… and an official ideology that still denies the majority of the population an equal political role'.

These studies illuminate various ideological features of official state curricula—their tendency toward ethnocentrism, hierarchism, social conformity, royalism, and moralism— but are sparing when it comes to detailing how these abstract tenets are actually conveyed in schools and, most importantly, how they are received by students. Most of these analyses are concerned with national processes, such as state development or ideological propagation, and devote less than a page or two to local education. They typically rely on analyses of state

produced materials, particularly high school textbooks, that provide little experiential insight.[4] The result is an ethnographically 'thin' representation of Thai pedagogy as praxis. There is an unchallenged assumption that students accept the messages of the state at face value. Axiomatic language abounds. Teachers tend to be 'authoritarian',[5] while students are 'submissive' and 'docile'.[6] There is a tension, often unresolved, between the world as presented in state manuals and the world in which students live and study. Mulder admits that he cannot tell if 'students and teachers take all that is printed by the Ministry for granted' (1997:78) yet also states that 'almost all the minds of upper- and middle-class Thais have been captured by the prevailing moral model taught at schools' (Mulder, 1997:2). Even Keyes (1991:390) struggles to reconcile the gap. He concedes that it is 'hard to determine the effectiveness' of state pedagogy, while also stating that 'the basic idea of being a Thai citizen and subject of the Thai king is deeply rooted in most children by the time they finish fourth grade'.[7] Only Chayan (1991:157) entertains the notion that the state's ideological grip on its students may not be as comprehensive as has been otherwise assumed. He suggests that pupils 'will eventually see the discrepancies between what they are taught and the reality in which they live'. However, he suggests that this revelation does not arrive until adulthood.[8]

More recently, the work of Bolotta (2021) has challenged this tendency to overlook the voices and experiences of Thai children. Drawing from six years living among Bangkok's 'slum children', Bolotta (2021:12) explores the political construction of childhood in Thailand while positioning his interlocutors 'as competent social actors equipped with agency'. In doing so, he presents convincing ethnographic evidence that these marginal actors exercise considerable strategic agency when negotiating their status of *phu noi,* or 'small people', particularly in the 'hyper-normative and stigmatising environment' of some schools, which he identifies as 'militarised political laboratories for the creation of child-citizens' (Bolotta, 2021:47). By performing deviant behaviours— mocking the teacher, downloading

[4] See Phillips, 1965:44; Keyes, 1966:165-168; Chayan; 1991:165; Mulder, 1997:26-151.
[5] Keyes, 1991:30; Chayan, 1991: 166; Chutikarn, 2008:58; Vallin and Åkesson, 2012:9
[6] Chayan, 1991; Bechstedt, 2002:245; Chutikarn, 2008:4.
[7] Keyes (1991) 'proposed world' theory actually goes some way to adopting a more holistic approach to the study of Thailand's state pedagogy. Though light on ethnographic particularities, his analysis incorporates the use of institutionalised ritual and symbol to convey the curriculum as an embodied experience, rather than a process of intellectual indoctrination.
[8] Chayan's was unsuccessful in his attempt to explore the '[long-term] effects of school experience on the formation of ideology'. Elderly villagers 'could not recall their interactions with teachers during their school years' (Chayan, 1991:163).

pornographic images, arranging secret meetings— Bolotta's belittled subjects actively embodied an antithesis of the submissive 'good Thai child', a construct assiduously cultivated in Thai pedagogy, that acknowledged their structural inability to benefit from the class privileges that accompanies such performances. In dealing with Western representatives from international aid agencies, however, slum children were adept at conjuring performances of victimized childhood that would result in a greater allocation of resources and material support. By calling attention to the lives of Bangkok's most disenfranchised young citizens, Bolotta's research provides an instructive and necessary counterpoint to the current study. Notwithstanding the social distance that lays between our respective participants, both research projects explore the Thai state's ideological construction of moral citizenship through the voices and experiences of children. In doing so it uncovers a complex history of conflict and negotiation commonly overlooked in Thai anthropology. In the wake of recent protests, in which students have revolted *en masse* against a system to which they are supposedly enthralled, more ethnographic analyses of Thailand's education system are imperative. It is necessary to reconcile what remains a considered cleavage between the implementation of state policy in the abstract, and the lived experiences of those who work and study within the vast public education system of Thailand.

The anthropology of a political network

At the time of writing, Suan Kulap has educated seven prime ministers, thirteen education ministers,[9] and three Privy Council Presidents. This distinguished history inspires some members of the Suan Kulap community to exhibit an intense loyalty to the establishment that continues for many decades after they graduate. The historian Charnvit Kasetsiri (2014:92), who studied at the school in the late 1950s, refers to this unusually strong form of institutional attachment as *rok suan kulap*, or the 'Suan Kulap disease'. Charnvit recalls that his father, a proud OSK who embraced the school's traditions and ideals, would sometimes take his son to the elegant campus of his alma mater so that the young Charnvit would have the opportunity to 'soak up Suan Kulap-ness'. Later, when a fire ravaged the family home, Charvit's father painted the restored rooms sky blue and magenta, the sporting colours of his former school.

[9] See Appendix I for full list of Suan Kulap prime ministers and education ministers.

The types of relationships and affiliations that elite Thai schools such as Suan Kulap inspire in their students is yet to be significantly addressed by anthropologists. The current literature concentrates overwhelmingly on rural education and the experiences of provincial institutions. This is particularly limiting in a Thai context, where metropolitan schools may have markedly different pedagogic objectives to their rustic counterparts. Village schools, notes Chayan (1991: 163), are generally satisfied with producing 'rural cultivators who will be law-abiding citizens', while prestigious urban schools 'have long since been turning out agents of production for the expanding capitalist-oriented economy and bureaucracy'. Several historical analyses have addressed the development of some elite Thai schools—most memorably Wyatt (1969) and Kullada (2004), in relation to the fifth reign, as well as Chanan (2013) and Vella (1978) in relation to the sixth— yet there remains a dearth of literature pertaining to contemporary institutions. This represents a significant void. Political scientists have long postulated that power in Thailand operates within and through influential political networks that are often formed within military academies and exclusive schools. Chai-Anan and Morell (1981:16-17) observe that 'most senior officials attended the same schools and advanced up the promotion ladder together'. Such schools, Girling (1981:129) suggests, socialize pupils within an institutional culture that encourages 'shared formative experiences that shape a certain familiarity of outlook'. He notes that the cohesion between graduates of the same class is particularly strong, stating that *run diawkan* (รุ่นเดียวกัน)— literally, "belonging to the same generation"—creates enduring moral obligations and the reciprocal exchange of material benefits. As a result of such connections, Reynolds notes, it is possible for students to 'leap across class and status cleavages' (Reynolds, 2014:268-9). Meanwhile, anecdotal evidence suggest that these political networks are actively nurtured through distinct pedagogic practices. Reynolds (2014:268) suggest that Vajiravudh College 'strips incoming students of their family and status markers and rebuild its own meritocratic hierarchy based on seniority in the student body'. However, no ethnographic analyses have explored the environments and practices by which these important political attitudes and associations are secured. The reader is left to imagine the nature of these 'shared formative experiences' and how such durable structures of reciprocity are established and maintained.

A study of such practices at Suan Kulap contributes significantly to our understanding of Thailand's wider political culture. In 2005, McCargo's influential 'network monarchy' theory

proposed that Thailand's political order has, since the 1980s, been dominated by a powerful syndicate of top military leaders and bureaucrats that allowed King Bhumipol—ostensibly a constitutional monarch— to circumvent democratic procedures and intervene in domestic politics. The lynchpin of network monarchy, claims McCargo, was former Prime Minster (1980-1988) and Privy Councillor (1988-2019) Prem Tinsulanont, a Suan Kulap alumnus who attended the school in the late 1930s. McCargo details how Prem orchestrated an 'ingenious web of patronage' (McCargo, 2005:513) that ensured key posts in the military, legislature, and bureaucracy were held by clients loyal to the network. By his own admission, McCargo's theory of network monarchy remains 'a very basic and simplistic sketch' (McCargo, 2008). Nishizaki (2020:199), who has recently attempted to elaborate the model, suggests that network monarchy fails to show 'what kinds of people…make up the amorphous network and how they are connected to each other'. His work traces generations of intra-elite marriage to demonstrate that network monarchy is strengthened by convoluted dynastic ties that link families to the royalist regime.

To date, there have been no comparable studies that explore how 'network monarchy' may operate through institutional affiliations. In his memoirs, Prem is candid about his formative years at Suan Kulap and how integral they were to his subsequent career. A relatively poor entrant from Thailand's Deep South, Prem recalls how his father sold the family home to pay for the education of his seven children. Once at Suan Kulap, Prem experienced a period of 'colossal loss' when he discovered his beloved mother had died after a short illness and that he would be unable to return home due to his examination schedule (Prem, 2006:49). He recalls that 'Suan Kulap became my third parent…it gave me love and unity, taught me how to know love for the group and to protect the school's honour' (Prem, 1988:260). He threw himself into school life, finding comfort from his grief in the harsh disciplinary standards and *esprit de corps* that prevailed at Suan Kulap in the pre-war period.

At the end of his two years at Suan Kulap, Prem followed many of his peers to The Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy, and thereafter made a career as an army officer of prodigious discipline and sacrifice. In 1979, he was 'handpicked' (McCargo, 2005:506) by King Bhumiphol to serve as Army-Commander-in-Chief and Minister for Defence and proceeded to promote his own allies over those of his rival (Handley, 2005:277-8). The following year, after a palace-sanctioned coup manoeuvred him into the Prime Minister's office, Prem was

elected President of the Suan Kulap Alumni Association, a position, I argue, that allowed him to establish a network of political patronage among his fellow graduates.

From his own graduating class, Saun Kulap's 54th generation, Prem installed Gen. San Chitrpatima as Deputy-Commander-in-Chief to the Thai Army. As his foreign minister, he selected Siddhi Savetsila, a long-time political ally who later become an influential Privy Councillor.[10] Suli Mahasantana, previously the manager of a cement company, was invited to become his minister attached to prime minister's office, while Police Lieutenant Charn Manutham, a man with no political experience, was made both minister attached to prime minister's office and deputy minister for transport and communications. Most controversially, Prem also appointed his close friend and classmate Sudsai Hasadin as an additional minister attached to the office of prime minister. The leader of the Red Gaurs, an extreme far-right paramilitary organisation, Sudsai had been useful for orchestrating the violent dispersal of student and labour protests in the 1970s. His promotion to office was a sign of Prem's favour following the Thammasat student massacre four years earlier. According to Prem, Sudsai was a classmate upon whom 'he could always rely (Prem, 2001:25).

In addition to appointing members from his graduating class, Prem also expressed a personal preference for working with Suan Kulap graduates in general, attributing to them certain moral qualities that made them ideal political figures. Towards the end of his premiership, he wrote that Suan Kulap 'takes great pains to ensure pupils are disciplined, punctual, and honest' (SKEC, 1988:260). He also noted that 'every teacher, both Thai and *farang*, was serious in teaching us to be good people' (ibid). Accordingly, his network extended to alumni beyond his immediate cohort. His Deputy Prime Minister, Serm na Nakorn, had studied a grade below Prem while at Suan Kulap. Admiral Amorn Sirikaya, deputy minister for the Department of Transport and Communications was a graduate of the 53rd class, while his minister for agriculture and co-operatives had studied at Suan Kulap following the Second World War. One of Prem's close aides was Kramol Thongthammachart, a Suan Kualp junior by fifteen years who later became a Supreme Court judge. In 2001, when Prem was lobbying the court to acquit Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra for concealing assets, it was Kramol's

[10] The only time Prem considered joining a political party was when Siddhi became deputy party chairman of the Social Action Party (Withaya, 1983:278). The then-leader of this party was Kukrit Pramoj, another Suan Kulap old boy.

last minute vote change that secured the Premier's exoneration (Handley, 2005:426). Five years later, when the network moved against Thaksin, Prem mobilized Surayuth Chulanont, his most dependable Suan Kulap acolyte, to engineer a putsch. Surayuth was subsequently made Prime Minister (2006-8) and, after Prem's death in 2019, succeeded his former mentor as Privy Council President (2020-present).

The resources accrued during Thailand's 'Premocracy' (Yos, 1989) filtered throughout the Suan Kulap community. Six days after he became Prime Minister in March 1980, construction began on a grand alumni headquarters that would act as the network's base of operations. The state-of-the-art complex, which provided social areas for members to relax and network as well as office spaces for the association's growing corpus of salaried administrators, was built close to Prem's residence on a plot bestowed by the Crown Property Bureau (Samreung, 1982:77). Opened by Serm and Prem in March 1982, the project took two years to complete and, under the supervision of Pridi Hiranpruet, the club secretary and Prem's Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, ran wildly over its fourteen-million-baht budget (Samreung, 1982:77). Such costs were easily met by the ascendant network. Using funds from the newly established Suan Kulap Foundation, Samreung Nilpradit, a graduate of the 60th class, was able to purchase new vehicles, construct a foreign language laboratory, and increase scholarships (SKRC, 1995:277, 282). By 1987, Suan Kulap's prominence was such that the school's 105th anniversary was televised on channel five, with famous musicians invited to perform alongside the school's marching band.

Reynolds rightly observes that Thailand's political cliques are notoriously 'difficult to parse' (Reynolds, 2014:268); a capricious nexus whose shifting loyalties are governed by nepotism, marriage, business links, personal grievances, and competing institutional allegiance. In identifying a Suan Kulap network whose machinations may coincide with McCargo's network monarchy, I do not seek to understate the complexity of Thailand's fractious political landscape. During his career, Prem was twice betrayed by Suan Kulap allies. In 1981, General San Chitrapatima staged a coup against Prem's government, capturing high ranking officers that included another Suan Kulap alumnus (Girling, 1982: 225; Niksch, 1982:192). Four years later, Serm na Nakhorn, whom Prem had known for nearly fifty years, was announced as the leader of a subsequent failed putsch. In both instances, the aspirant coup makers aligned themselves to a rival faction forged within the Chulachomkhlao Military Academy,

substantiating the hypothesis—posited by Girling (1981), Chai-Anan and Morell (1981), and Reynolds (2014)—that institutional alliances are important channels for the circulation of Thai power. It is important, therefore, that all analysts recognise such institutions as sites of socio-political significance worthy of serious attention. If the kingdom's political centre operates, in part, through relationships, obligations, and attitudes forged decades earlier within the gates of certain educational institutions, it is expedient to shine a light on such sites; to scrutinize their evolution over time as well as the mechanisms and ideological messages by which they elicit these powerful bonds. In doing so we elucidate and demystify what some analysts have called Thailand's 'parallel' (Chambers and Napisa, 2016) or 'deep' state (Mérieau, 2016).

Suan Kulap and the propagation of 'good people' politics

In recent years, anthropologists (Chaisinthop, 2014; 2017; Funahashi, 2016; Taylor, 2021) working in Thailand have contributed to a growing literature pertaining to the concept of 'good people', a seemingly quotidian term that has come to dominate Thailand's political rhetoric. Broadly conceived, the 'good people' doctrine— which was introduced during the 'semi-democracy' (Neher, 1988) of the Prem era— advances the notion that 'true democracy' can only be secured under the guidance of an unelected governing elite. The logic of this credo posits that the inherent morality of such men—and they are invariably men— would steer the nation towards stability and away from the deleterious effects of a 'parliamentary dictatorship' chosen by the ignorant masses (Case, 2015:17; see also Pawakapan, 2014; Ferrara, 2015; Chalita, 2019). First legitimized in a royal speech towards the end of Prem's premiership, the 'good men' doctrine has been invoked repeatedly in the last forty years during times when political developments have threatened the interests of elites (Laurisden, 1998:1575; Handley, 2005:412; Suraphot, 2017). Before polls opened for Thailand's last general election in 2019— a contest widely believed to have been structurally rigged—voters were urged by King Vajiralongkhorn to discern between 'good' and 'bad' candidates and ensure the latter stopped harming the country (Termsak, 2019:4).

Ethnographies by Chaisinthop (2014;2017), Taylor (2021) and Funahashi (2016) detail how the 'good person' rhetoric has flourished among the Thai middle class, who are increasingly likely to support non-democratic governments. According to Taylor (2020:255) 'good people'

has become the favoured ideology of what he calls the 'new ultra-right'; 'an odd mix of ultraconservatives, reactionaries, semi-fascists, pseudo-intellectuals, and even former leftists'. Taylor (2020:265) claims this group works to 'eradicate emerging liberal democracy' by targeting the middle class with 'semi-fascistic' propaganda. In her work, Chaisinthop documents how the 'good person' rhetoric is deployed to explicate a wide range of Thailand's socio-political problems, from widening inequality to child prostitution. As such, these problems become 'rendered moral' (2014:395), that is, attributed to the iniquity of individuals in need of moral correction rather than existing power relations. Thus diagnosed, the solutions to social problems appear to be moral reform rather than political reform.

Some of Thailand's most vocal advocates for 'good people' politics are Suan Kulap alumni. During the political protest of May 2009, when rallies of up to one hundred thousand protesters demanded the removal of Prem and Surayuth Chulanont from office for their alleged role in toppling Thaksin (Woraphon, 2009), more than a hundred Suan Kulap alumni came out in support for their 'elder brothers' (*Khom Chad Leuk, 2009*). Led by Pichian Amnatworaprasert, the vice-president of the Suan Kulap Alumni Association who had also sat on the post-coup constitution drafting assembly, the cavalcade of well-wishers marched to Prem's house to deliver flowers and encouragement. Later that month, Privy Councillor and former Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichien, Prem's Suan Kulap contemporary, published an influential article entitled '*Morality and the problem of youth in Thai society*' in which he argued that Thailand's 'moral crisis' must be solved in public schools. According to this article, the state needed to 'secure future generations of good people… by raising the moral standard of youth through training in schools' (Thanin, 2009:1; see also Thanin, 2004:12). Thanin writes; 'we need to create a new value system… there must be an exemplar of morality that will inspire pupils to maintain morality. This will stimulate students to learn the works of these individuals, their learning methods and ideologies' (Thanin, 2009:16).

Following Thanin's publication, a slew of research papers, thought pieces, seminars and theses began referring to Thailand's 'crisis of morality'.[11] Academic articles citing Thanin's paper proposed that the expansion of moral training in schools would be a viable and effective

[11] See Duchduen, 2010:3; Wasana Namnuam, 2010; Nutdanai, 2014; Donnnaya, 2016; NIDA Poll, 2016:1; Chatree et al., 2018:356; Kaosod, 2019.

solution to the country's systemic political problems.[12] At Suan Kulap, former headmistress Ajarn Sommay (2013:4) became so distressed by what she considered a 'decline in pupil quality'—particularly in relation to their 'ignorance of Suan Kulap traditions and values'—that she convened a special committee of retired teachers, alumni, and 'individuals of great competence' to arrange a new experimental syllabus called Suan Kulap Studies, a compulsory five-year curriculum designed to 'protect the properties of the Suan Kulap gentleman' (COSKS, 2013:11). In her biography, Ajarn Sommay writes that the ultimate purpose of this program was to bolster 'Suan Kulap-ness' and ensure that the school 'continues to produce good men' who can 'go on to repay their nation through morality, knowledge and gratitude' (Sommay, 2013:3). In the handbook to the programme, former Prime Minister Surayuth Chulanont, who was invited to chair the committee, provides an animated introduction, writing; 'if the love and pride the Thai people felt for their nation could equal the love and pride Suan Kulap children felt for their school, ours would certainly be a nation in progress' (Surayuth, 2013:9).

By the time I began fieldwork in 2018, the purported properties of Suan Kulap-ness were so familiar to the individuals who work and studied at the school that they had assumed the rigidity of an instinctive doctrine. Students, alumni, and teachers incant the attributes of Suan Kulapness like a mantra; "Suan Kulap gentlemen are leaders, they love their friends, respect their elders, honour their teachers, are grateful to their parents and look after their juniors". In assemblies and special occasions pupils were asked, and asked each other, to affirm these qualities, repeating the lines of an initial speaker in a format common to temple chanting.

Through the course of this thesis, I show that Suan Kulap Studies is just the latest manifestation in a long line of initiatives by which a threatened elite has intervened in the political discipline of Suan Kulap students. Using a genealogical perspective, the thesis charts how ideological constructions such as the 'good men' have been embedded within institutional structure over time using a range of multi-sensory techniques, some of which are deeply colonial in nature.

Structure of the thesis

[12] See Nalintip and Den, 2015:31; Wiraphong, Sampruet and Prichchan, 2015:59; Prapaporn, 2016:1, Saowanee, 2017:1; Suphimol, 2017: 1; Settawat, Wikarnda and Kreangsak, 2018: 16-18; Thantip, 2018:130; Usanee, Pruet and Thirapat, 2018: 289.

This thesis is presented in six chapters, producing what I term an ethnographic genealogy, a concept I elucidate in the following section. The first chapter, entitled Rationalisation, traces the genealogical emergence of Suan Kulap from its opening in 1881 until the year 1911, when the school relocated to its current site at Wat Ratchaburana. The chapter traces the gradual implementation of several experimental technologies at Suan Kulap that enabled those who studied and worked at the institution to be subjected to greater political scrutiny. Chapter two, entitled Museum, presents an ethnography of the school museum, constructed in 2002. It explores the circumstances in which the museum was constructed and the local technologies of power it harnesses to move students to adopt certain political doctrines. Chapter three, the second genealogical section, addresses a period between 1894 and 1938 when Suan Kulap was administered by a series of six British headmasters. During this time of Anglicisation, the school established a strong institutional culture that borrowed heavily from the symbolism and rituals of Borough Road College, a prestigious teacher training institute from which each of these principals had graduated. I trace how this ideology was gradually translocated into the pedagogic structures of Suan Kulap and the ways in which it changed what kind of political subject the school sought to produce. The focus of the fourth chapter is an ethnographic analysis of The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentlemen, the event that began this introduction. Utilising the theories of van Gennep (1960) and Turner (2008), I explore how first year entrants are initiated into the Suan Kulap community and what this process can tell us about the relationship between ritual, politics, and cosmology within the institution. In chapter five, I present a genealogy of Suan Kulap from 1932-1941, a nine-year period in which much of the future Suan Kulap network attended the school. During this time, the school adopted a highly martial culture characterised by fierce disciplinary standards. I consider the wider political implications of this short era and how it many have informed the important political networks that were forged at Suan Kulap during this time.

What is ethnographic genealogy?

Genealogy is a critical theoretical device used throughout this thesis. It is used to disturb and interrogate contemporary practices, beliefs and structures of power by exposing

their chance emergence in history. Foucault, perhaps the most famous exponent of the approach, explains that genealogy seeks to trace how the present has been constituted in ways that seem to us natural and indisputable, but are in fact only the erratic effects of certain historical, cultural, political, and economic configurations. By attending to the 'accidents' and 'minute deviations' of history (Foucault, 1977b:106), genealogy 'fragments what was thought unified' and suggest the openness of a future with alternative modes of existence (Foucault, 1984:82).

The academic study of schools appears to invite genealogical analyses. In *The Evolution of Educational Thought,* Durkheim pre-empts Foucauldian genealogy by some seven decades when he declares that the only means to understand the 'inner life of an institution' is to excavate its past and reveal the successive organisational forms that have 'progressively come to cluster together, to combine and form organic relationships' (Durkheim, 2013:15). Turning his attention to French secondary education, Durkheim sifts through centuries of teaching models and practices— from the impersonal scholasticism of the medieval Cathedral to the intense surveillance of the Jesuit classroom (Durkheim, 2013:262) — to demonstrate how new forms of pedagogic practices emerge at moments of wider political change. French educational thought, he observes, does not proceed from a continuous and persistent pedagogic doctrine, but a rather more tortuous process of crises and circumstance. He concludes that 'certain peculiarities in our modern thought still bear the stamp of very remote influences' (Durkheim, 2013:19).

Despite the similarities of their theoretical approach, Foucault and Durkheim differed greatly in their interpretations. To Durkheim, the primary function of the school is to socialize a child so that they can conform to and flourish within their social milieu. It furnishes the child with patterned ways of viewing, describing, and explaining the world so that a significant degree of social agreement and coherence can be guaranteed. This strengthens an inherently fragile moral order and thus curbs the upsetting effects of egoism and anomie. Punishment is necessary, since acts of deviance or disobedience, while not dangerous in themselves, erode confidence in the prevailing social order. Education, for Durkheim, is 'the means by which society recreates the conditions of its very existence' (Durkheim, 1956:123).

Foucault saw something far more troubling in institutional practices. They were the malign effects of a *dispositif,* a power-knowledge regime rooted in nothing more than erratic

historical processes. For Foucault, institutional disciplinary practices began as something primarily negative— a means to control contagious disease, to prevent military desertion, or deal with an increasing school population. As they became entrenched, however, disciplinary practices began to actively generate 'objective' truths that fundamentally reshaped society and its structures of power. In schools, the individual is compared, measured and evaluated, which forms the basis of knowledge about society and human behaviours. Once sanctioned, this power-knowledge is used to normalize the social body (Clifford, 2001:37) and classify non-conformity as madness, criminality, or deviance— states that require correction through further discipline. Foucault's concern is to expose the haphazard and unstable formation of these seemingly unified and consistent 'truths'.

Despite the analyses of Durkheim and Foucault, there remains no procedure for how one may construct a genealogy. Foucault is vague, writing that the process requires 'patience, a knowledge of details… [and] a vast accumulation of source material' (Foucault, 1984:76). He explains; 'I set out from a problem expressed in the terms current today and I try to work out its genealogy' (Foucault in Kritzman, 1988: 262). He seeks in *historical documentation* a re-evaluation of *contemporary* phenomena. Yet his genealogies can seem incurious toward most facets of social life, what Knauft (2017:8) calls 'the pressing realities in the ethnographic trenches'. His materials are archival— textbooks, manuals, 'case records'—and do not extend to living persons (Middleton, 2003:41-2). In his endeavour to present subjectivity as merely the effect of disciplines and relationships of power, he determines to 'get rid of the subject itself' (Foucault, 1980:117), a strategy that reduces the individual to little more than an impotent body without agency or autonomy in the face of disciplinary power (McLaren, 2012:39).[13]

In recent years, however, a small number of analysts from disparate research traditions have begun to broaden the genealogical framework by incorporating life histories (Middleton, 2003), personal writings (Tamboukou, 2013), and participant observation (Liokaftos, 2017) within the previously narrow approach. Tomboukou and Bell (2003:3-4), who have written

[13] In later works, notably *The History of Sexuality volumes II and III,* Foucault softens this position and considers the potential for human resistance, acknowledging that the individual may appropriate from the 'patterns that he finds in his culture' (Foucault, 1987:11) certain values and practices by which he can identify himself as an ethical subject. However, scholars engaged with genealogical analysis tend to overlook these later works, as they appear to represent a break from the method (Saar, 2002:232).

extensively on the 'intellectual border crossing' required to work between genealogy and ethnography, note that the combination of these discrete practices can be highly productive and identify several points of coincidence between the two critical traditions. Both approaches, they suggest, are highly sensitive to local specificity and context; both interrogate universalist dogmas of 'truth' and the supposed connections between reason and progress; both highlight the centrality of the body as a site of interaction between material and symbolic forces; both recover excluded subjects and silenced voices; and both concern themselves with the circulation of power and how some groups are able to impose their definitions of reality on others (see also Knauft, 2017:7).

My own configuration of an 'ethnographic genealogy' incorporates archival material—Foucault's research field *par excellence*— but also insights, experiences, and testimony generated by life history materials and participant observation. There exists an extensive and diverse body of historical and literary materials relating to Suan Kulap that includes speeches transcripts, ministerial reports, public notices, architectural drawings, bureaucratic correspondence, newspaper reports, reference letters, curricula, annual budgets, examination papers and student assessments. These are the 'grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary' (Foucault, 1984:76) materials without which a genealogical analysis is unfeasible. I also draw upon a vast corpus of literary materials published by the school, or by those connected to the school, for public consumption. These include yearbooks, school newspapers, cremation volumes, published autobiographies, retirement commemorations, poetic compositions, song lyrics, amateur histories of the school, teacher biographies, and alumni produced essays. Many of these documents include personal writings and auto/biographical testimony that belong to the category of 'life history', a term favoured by anthropologists to describe a range of biographical testimony.[14] Some are contemporaneous with the events they describe but the greater part are documents composed many years later, after their subjects have reflected on their past. In April 2018, I began to add to this literature by recording forty-eight life history interviews—43 with Suan Kulap alumni ranging from the

[14] See Cole and Knowles (2001:15-21) for a comprehensive discussion of the term. The analysis of life history materials in the study of schools and education has a rich history (Bullough, 1998:20-1; Ball and Goodson, 1985; Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010; Erben, 1998; Goodson, 2013; Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996, 1997; Sikes and Measor, 2013)

age of 18 to 86, and 5 with current and retired faculty aged 35 to 78. Through such materials it is possible to replace the hamstrung subject of Foucauldian genealogy with agents who look and sound 'real', and who strive towards beliefs and practices they consider valuable and moral (Tamboukou, 2010).

Working across and between ethnography/genealogy, notes Tamboukou (2003: 210-1), requires improvisation and experimentation. She compares the process to the composition of a musical piece, in which notes are brought together only temporarily and provisionally, operating in relation to what came before and after. It is necessary to 'find a rhythm'. While Foucault's genealogies diagnosed contemporary 'problems' and traced their descent backwards, this thesis presents an oscillating dialectic between genealogy/ethnography, past/present in which both modes of enquiry interact, impinge, and inform one another. This 'rhythm' is reflected in the unusual structure of this thesis. At the interstices of each genealogical chapter, I insert sections of ethnographic observations from fieldwork, drawing upon anthropological theory to engage with the forces of the present in a way that Foucauldian genealogy inhibits. I am particularly drawn to moments in which the school assembles to perform collective ceremonial activities, such as the rituals surrounding the opening of term, as these are times when the forces that act on the individual are at their most discernible. By drawing upon the techniques of both participant observation and genealogy, I hope to produce temporal fragments that create new contexts of relation with other moments in time. In this way the text resists linearity to reflect in its structure the curious temporal resonances that are constantly at work within the site itself.

One of the chief theoretical contributions of this thesis is to propose ethnographic genealogy as a productive mode of enquiry for the study of Thailand, a country with a rigid historiography dominated by a 'particular version of men, Bangkok, the court, and wealth' (Haberkorn, 2008:191). In Thailand, Haberkorn (2008:189) notes, the experiences of those at the margins of power— particularly women and children— threaten to undermine the centre's image of 'timeless permanence' and expose the practices by which it 'accumulates and maintains power'. As such, they are apt to be squeezed from the historiographic record. Yet exclusion also occurs within the centre itself. Men with status and position in Thai society are 'not monolithically dominant' (Haberkorn, 2009:189) and often find their narratives suppressed and erased if they do not correspond to official narratives. Reynolds (2006)

provides a similar critique, claiming that a partial narrative of the Thai centre, one that begins in ancient times and continues majestically to the present, has become an important part of public culture—useful for 'making Thailand's people obedient and loyal citizens' (Reynolds, 2006:137). Any discourse that detracts from this narrative, which prevails in both the public arena and the academy, is considered highly suspect and subject to significant censorship.

Both Reynolds and Haberkorn call for new modes of enquiry that can 'expose and critique the centres of power' (Haberkorn, 2008:189). Haberkorn suggests that to challenge dominant narratives, Thai studies must image and engage with alternative sources and methodological practices. She advocates for 'incomplete' histories that preserve events and experiences that have been lost or deemed unworthy of recording; 'the small local upsets, the temporary reversals, the messy cascade of contingent events holding together the ruling order' (Haberkorn, 2008:190). Reynolds seeks 'seditious' accounts; histories that overlook 'the earthquake and volcanic explosion' in favour of the 'little rumours, the false warnings, the almost imperceptible blips' of everyday life (Reynolds, 2006:137). He suggests we study the 'fragments that do not fit' and allow them to disrupt the immutable centre (Reynolds, 2006: 137).

The life histories of *Luang* Seksunthorn

The disruptive power of a genealogy that incorporates life history materials, ethnographic techniques, and documentary analysis is well illustrated in the case study of *Luang* Seksunthorn, a teacher whose career at Suan Kulap is addressed in chapter five. *Luang* Seksunthorn is a towering figure in the historiography of Suan Kulap. He began working at the school as a French substitute teacher in 1913 before rising to become a formidable and severe Deputy Headmaster in 1933. This tenure, which ended with his death in 1940, coincided with a period of unprecedented political turmoil. Following a coup in 1932, the new post-absolutist state struggled against the indignant Ancien Régime while an ascendant military began exhorting a fascistic national ideology. *Luang* Seksunthorn, who had once taught some of the coup makers, responded to these events by introducing an intense disciplinary regime at Suan Kulap wherein students were rigorously surveilled and caned for minor infractions. Physical penalties were administered with such frequency during this period that pupils began to refer to *Luang* Seksunthorn's regime as *sai ti leum ti dok ti* (สายตี ลืมตี ตกตี)— 'late: caned; forget:

caned; fail: caned' (SKRC, 1995:443). For his services to the state, *Luang* Seksunthorn was inducted into the upper echelons of the Thai bureaucracy receiving a noble title and 240 baht salary. He was awarded *The Most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand* and the rarely conferred *Order of the White Elephant.*

Luang Seksunthorn has enjoyed a curious legacy at Suan Kulap. Twenty years after his death, a former colleague wrote a short biography of his friend for The Teacher's Council of Thailand (Samretwannakit, 1960) in which he detailed the ferocity of *Luang* Seksunthorn's pedagogic philosophy. Though generally favourable to the old deputy, Samretwannakit notes that colleagues were often upset by *Luang* Seksunthorn's authoritarianism and voiced their belief that teachers who resorted to the cane were 'second rate' (Samretwannakit, 1960:202). In 1983, former Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichien asked his peers to submit narratives of their schooldays for inclusion in a commemorative volume that was to be printed at the height of the Premocracy, when many of *Luang* Seksunthorn's former students had risen to positions of considerable influence. Their submissions were dominated by memories of *Luang* Seksunthorn. Chalong Pinkleaw (1985:271,266), a retired headmaster, recalls his 'terror' of *Luang* Seksunthorn's vicious floggings and the 'suffering' he experienced as a schoolboy. Another pupil confesses that he once wet himself when cornered by the teacher (Duang Ya Dam, 1983:69-76). 'None of us studied out of personal dedication (ขยันประจำตัว)', claims a third student, 'but out of fear from sinning' (S.K. 2010, 1984:155). Despite these pitiable disclosures, many alumni attributed the subsequent prominence of their cohort to the punitive practices *Luang* Seksunthorn promulgated during their formative years. Pichit Samutklin (1984:340), who would later serve as a Rear Admiral, credits the schoolmaster with making him a 'good citizen', noting that punishment was necessary to secure social stability. 'If you are wrong and accept your punishment, your school will be peaceful and orderly, as will your place of work. This affects society, which will too become peaceful and orderly'. 'We didn't hate him', assures Duang Ya Dam (1983), 'he taught us to have discipline and responsibility later in life'. Sawat Thamikrak, who graduated to become a professor of engineering at Chulalongkhorn University, writes; 'there are tears in my eyes contemplating the kindness of my old teacher… If he didn't love us, why would he hit us?' (1983:193-4). Another contributor, Chalong Pinkaew, expresses his gratitude to *Luang* Seksunthron in verse:

Seksunthorn, a man of care, regulation, and discipline

corrected our manners for all to see
personal morality was his goal.
If insolent, he would chasten all evil
to build people who do good[15]

(Chalong, 1985: 273)

Chalong is not alone in identifying *Luang* Seksunthorn's regime with the production of moral subjects. At a time when the 'good people' doctrine was in genesis, contributors to Thanin's volumes identified *Luang* Seksunthorn as a figure whose severity furnished their peer group with the personal traits of moral leadership. General Suthin Sampatawanich (1985:183), an author of popular science books, observes that 'the sharpened point of *Luang* Sek's cane caused us to be good people, to be successful people to this day.' He describes the visceral reaction— 'a rush of pride and happiness'—he experienced after being caned, a physical response to the realisation that his teacher 'loved me enough to help me become a disciplined adult' (1985:183). In the next decades, these narratives had ossified into an institutional orthodoxy. Ten years after the publication of Thanin's volumes, an official school history wrote that;

> *[Corporal punishment] was the reason old boys from this era met with such huge success. When they recall these times, they feel no anger towards their teachers. Quite the contrary, they constantly praise them and consider their great merit in receiving character training that led them from wrong and toward success.* (SKRC, 1995:220)

When the school opened its museum in 2002, an exhibit dedicated to *Luang* Seksunthorn featured a placard with similar sentiment alongside a portrait of the old master and a golden podium that held four of his bamboo canes placed on a gold podium. The exhibit is called 'Canes Build Ministers' (ไม้เรียวสร้างรัฐมนตรี).

[15] เสกสุนทร ท่านอาวรณ์ ระเบียบและวินัย

ประพฤติตน ผิดหนอ ที่ข้อห้าม	ท่านคอยปราม เหลียวแล ช่วยแก้ไข
มารยาท ดีเด่น เห็นทั่วไป	เป็นหลักชัย คุณธรรม ประจำตน
บรรดาศักดิ์ เป็นหลวง ใช่จ้วงจาบ	คอยกำราบ ความชั่ว ทั่วแห่งหน
อยู่ในกรอบ ระบอบอย่าง ช่างน่ายล	ท่านสร้างคน ให้เป็นคน เกิดผลดี

As Haberkorn noted earlier, much of Thai historiography sustains a 'particular version of men, Bangkok, the court, and wealth' that obscures the way in which certain groups are able to 'accumulate and maintain power' (Haberkorn, 2008:189). It tends to suppress and erase narratives that do not correspond to an official historiographic record that encourages 'obedient and loyal citizens' (Reynolds, 2006:137). Yet counter-narratives can be found. In Thanin's third edited commemorative volume, published in 1985, he asks his fellow alumni to stop submitting essays about *Luang* Seksunthorn and mentions that he had to 'excise some dangerous passages' on the basis that they could constitute slander, with the result that both writer and editor would 'become defendants one and two in a libel case'.[16] We cannot know whether *Luang* Seksunthorn is the subject of these 'dangerous' passages, though Thanin's post-script appears to indicate the erasure of a seditious counter narrative. Is this 'the moment at which silence becomes part of the construction of what is known about the past'? (Reynolds, 2006:137). In 2009, however, Thanin produces his own 'seditious' narrative. Writing in *Morality and the youth problem of Thailand,* Thanin launches a staunch attack against one of the central tenets of the *Luang* Seksunthorn narrative.

> *I have an example I think appropriate to share when considering the case for flogging school children. Seventy years ago, a government school regarded discipline with the utmost importance. Every infraction, be it absenteeism, fighting, stealing, exam failure, failure to submit homework, tardiness, incorrect dress or looking out the window to the street below, received a penalty of the whip. The master of discipline held absolute righteous power with severity. One day it happened that a student broke some regulation and received a flogging. The boy was badly injured, which his father could not accept. On reporting the incident to the school's district police station, he found the inspector unwilling to take the complaint. No crime had been committed; an errant schoolboy caned by his teacher was common enough. The inspector informed the father that he himself had attended the school in question and received the same manner of punishment from this very*

[16]Streckfuss (2010) describes Thailand as a 'defamation regime' in which the criminal punishment of speech, as decided by social elites, plays an important role in determining 'truth'.

educationalist. But the father was unsatisfied and arranged a conference with the Minister of Education. The Minister's response was that the father was free to withdraw his son from the school if he did not find their penal code to his liking. He said; "the school takes discipline very seriously. I myself am an old boy and that teacher punished me in the same fashion. Any goodness in me is thanks to the cane of that man" ("ที่ผมได้ดิบได้ดีเป็นตัวเป็นตนมาได้ก็เพราะไม้เรียวของท่านแท้ๆ").

The opinion of Mr. A.C. Churchill, the headmaster of Suan Kulap at this time, is interesting. He believed teachers who resorted to the cane were second-rate but allowed his employees discretion in matters of corporal punishment. As for me, I do not believe school children should be struck and agree strongly with the Ministry of Education's decision to ban caning or any other such violent punishments against students, as well as punishments inspired by anger or vindictiveness, or punishment that does not take into consideration the age of a pupil. The current Minister for Education, Professor Wichit Srisa-arn,[17] is of the same mind, saying on the 22nd November, 2006; "The method of caning students is one we should use as little as possible. If it is not necessary, it should not be administered". I do not agree with the many factions calling for its revival… if you were brutally hit as a child, the case may be that you are not moral and that those beatings concealed the foul temperament (อารมณ์ร้าย) of the castigator.

(Thanin, 2009:15-16)

'Violence breeds violence', warns Thanin (2009:15), a former prime minister whose short administration is regarded as the most brutal and ideologically extreme of modern Thai history (Anderson, 1990; Baker and Phongpaisuk, 2014:194-5; Textor, 1978:360).

Finally, I include a passage by Somchai Asonchinda, a celebrated writer, director and actor who provides an evocative account of an experience that occurred while he was a student at Suan Kulap in 1937. This incident, surrounded by the rich work-a-day details of life at the

[17] Wichit Srisa-arn entered Suan Kualp in 1953 and was installed as Minister for Education by Surayuth after the 2006 coup (Chambers, 2013:94)

school during this period, documents one of the 'small local upsets' (Haberkorn, 2008:190) and 'false warnings (Reynolds, 2006:137) that often go unrecorded by history but which remain integral to an ethnographic genealogy and its capacity to disrupt.

> *About twenty years ago, the news reported some misfortune that occurred in the staff accommodation of a Bangkok tobacco factory. A father killed his wife and son (with an axe) and then himself to escape a life plagued by uncommon distress and poverty. I was saddened by the news and, in a customary manner, prayed his soul may meet with happiness. But when I saw the man's name, I realised we were friends.*
>
> *We had both studied at the highest educational institute, Suan Kulap, when we were just fifteen or sixteen in grade seven class four with Teacher Waitayaphet. I remember it so clearly, as we hadn't been studying many months, it was perhaps July, when Teacher Waitayaphet (who had been a champion swimmer in Singapore) fell suddenly ill and died of pneumonia. Our new teacher was Sawat Buspareuk, a national tennis champion, who looked as though his heart was not really in this new posting. Class four were weak scholars and misbehaved. Some forgot to bring their charcoal. Nevertheless, we were all rather good at language.*
>
> …
>
> *We ate together in the cafeteria every day; raad naa noodles and omelette for three satang. Some days 'he' knew my pocket was light and paid the Chinaman (เจ๊ก) before I had chance. Coming from a high family much honoured back in those days, his purse was daily refreshed with enough coins to fill the stomach of a poor friend. He was serious and very humble with a thick, short physique. On the rare occasions he smiled, it was very beautiful and brought others joy.*
>
> *Between the years 1935-6 we had "Yuwachon" which pupils were encouraged to 'volunteer' for[18]. I dragged my feet on the thing, but actually*

[18] *Yuwachon* was a militarised youth organization based Germany's Hitler Youth (Surasak, 2006). For details see Chapter 5.

wanted to join. During school hours, I would borrow Vichian Vichianphetyakhom's military cap during school hours— Vichian was the son of Luang Vichian, Siam's first Thai-national hospital director. One day, I was doing just that when I was remonstrated by teacher Luang Seksunthorn.

"You scoundrel"' ("ไอ้ตัวเซียน"), he scowled, "how dare you wear a cap in the classroom!" He made to drag me out for a whipping but both Vichian and 'him' tried to calm the situation by making excuses for me. "Somchai was just trying it on for size, sir". "He means to apply for Yuwachon today, sir". "He wanted to be sure to buy the right size is all, sir".

'He' was a good kid and trusted by all the teachers. His words carried weight. Luang Seksunthorn didn't whip me on his credit.

One week later I had applied for Yuwachon and was wearing my stylish new uniform in school. I wasn't wearing my hat— possibly I was just holding it because I was afraid to mess up my oiled hair. Luang Seksunthorn saw this and dragged me into his room where he flogged me three times with a switch an inch thick, completely ruining my favourite trousers. The students who witnessed the incident erupted in peals of laughter.

I was ashamed and furious.

The following day I took my father's chromium revolver with one round of bullets and made to kill the teacher.

"Cane me again...I will fucking shoot you", I would snarl.

'He' warned me.

"It will change nothing, Somchai". Your dead father's soul will find no peace and what will your mother do if you are in prison?"

Now…this person who stopped me from killing a teacher. My 'giving' friend is in the news for killing his son and his wife. I cannot believe it is the same person. 'He'… Supat Sengchuto? Who killed his wife and son with an axe and then himself? Those who say he was mad or lost his mind... I cannot believe

> *this. I cannot believe this friend met with such misery that he was so determined to flee this world. At that time, the tobacco factory was run by Seni Chinwala, a friend who studied in the same year with us at Suan Kulap. I remember that some Suan Kulap folk were suspicious and irritated at the time. Why, they said, did Seni not help out his fellow Suan Kulap brother?' Many people said that if Seni knew the truth, he should have helped his friend in any way he could. But I did not let that burden my heart. I believed Seni did the best he could. Supat was a 'giver' and could not accept being a 'receiver'. He held his pride too dear. He was not psychotic. He killed because he loved, and he was fearful. He wanted the wretched life of his beloved wife and son to end with his*.

Somchai's passage is an excellent example of how a rich life history can contribute to the previously restricted parameters of Foucauldian genealogy and thereby offer alternative stories for the study of Thai society. Incidental details conjure Somchai's cognitive journey: the fate of Mr. Sawat the maths teacher, the poor academic reputation of grade seven class four, the cost of a Chinese vendor's cafeteria meal, the 'voluntary' Yuwachon program, sartorial discipline, the accessibility of guns, the moral obligations owed to deceased parents, the spectacle of the public caning, etc. After the humiliation of caning, Somchai did not contemplate the kindness of his teacher or experience a thrill of pride and happiness. His rage was murderous and a deadly confrontation between teacher and student was only narrowly averted. Somchai presents a fragment that does not fit; a counter-narrative to which Thanin only hints— a portrait of violence, resistance, repression, and murder. Maybe canes don't build ministers.

Provincialsing Genealogy

In the final section of this introduction, I wish to address briefly the theoretical and ethical concerns that accompany the uncritical application of a genealogical framework to non-Western contexts. The first and most pressing cause for trepidation is the overt Eurocentrism of genealogy. Foucault (1982:777) wanted his genealogies 'to create a history of the different modes by which, in *our* culture, human beings are made subjects' (emphasis added). 'Our' is a telling possessive. Foucault's subject is 'Western' modernity and his

intended reader belongs to this tradition. Foucault never engages with colonialism or non-Western culture in any meaningful way. The disciplinary techniques he traces emerge fully-formed from within a hermetically sealed imaginary of nineteenth century Europe; 'as if history itself took place only among a group of French and German thinkers', quips Said (1988:9-10). His few works that do acknowledge Eastern societies have been called 'empty and abstract' (Megill 1985: 256), hampered by reductive assumptions and an insistence on the Occident-Orient distinction (Almond 2007: 25). In addition, numerous scholars have questioned the universality of genealogy's intellectual foundations. Clifford (2001:1-2) notes that even as Foucauldian genealogy seeks to unmask and expose the epistemic configurations of European enlightenment, it remains intellectually aligned to a number of thinkers, notably Nietzsche but also early liberals like John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, who measure 'modernity' via the template of European progress (Clifford, 2001:1-2).

Post-colonial writers are wary of such intellectual projects, warning that notions of 'modernity' or 'civilisation' that emanate from Europe are not the inevitable terminus for all mankind. Such rhetoric consigns subaltern populations to a temporal limbo; a space of perpetual uneven development where 'modernity' never quite arrives. It is a form of tacit intellectual imperialism that confined the colonial world to an 'imaginary waiting room of history' where appeals for self-rule 'now' could be effectively frustrated with a constant 'not yet' (Chakrabarty, 2000:8). Such a blinkered intellectual approach, born of imperial vanity, would be best avoided by the analyst who concerns themselves with non-Western cultures. And yet, Chakrabarty notes, it is 'impossible' to think of political modernity anywhere in the world without recourse to concepts that found their form during the European Enlightenment. The physical and psychic world of the colonized were transformed by concepts preached by the nineteenth century imperialist (Chakrabarty, 2000:4). Notions such as citizenship, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, scientific rationality, and the nation state, have become taken-for-granted 'universals' that frame the borders of modernity around the world. The solution, Chakrabarty suggests, is not to dispense with Western critical theory but to modify it with findings from non-Western locales. We thereby dislodge Europe as the site where narratives of modernization are mainly produced and revise its status as the silent referent for the rest of the world. He calls this process the work to 'provincialize Europe'.

Similar conversations have been taking place within the field of Thai studies in recent years. In a piece entitled *The Thai Appropriation of Foucault's 'Discourse'*, Thanes (2010) rebukes a recent trend for taking 'fashionable' Foucauldian concepts as a 'ready-made tool kit' for revealing mechanisms of power and domination in Thailand. The Thai academy, he notes, has appropriated such works 'like chopsticks'—'as instruments for eating ideas' (Thanes, 2010:161). He warns that these imported analytics risk ignoring important local specificities that do not correspond to Foucault's parochial frames of reference. Sharing these concerns, Peter Jackson (2010:48) rebuffs the suggestion that 'the non-West needs to learn a Western theoretical idiom to be able to speak its own truth', observing that 'we need to beware of falling into the trap of believing that a Marx, a Foucault, a Derrida, a Bhabha, or a Spivak has already done the hard theoretical work and that the only task for Thai studies is to feed raw data into epistemological machineries produced in other places' (Jackson, 2010:55). Yet he recognises Chakrabarty's dilemma. Thailand was never formally colonized, though it has been long recognized as a 'semi-' or 'crypto-colonial' polity subject to considerable interventions and curtailments by European powers. The result is a hybrid and highly idiosyncratic social domain with a 'complex nexus of entailments and cultural hierarchies' (Herzfeld, 2010:174). Echoing Chakrabarty, Jackson cautions against dispensing with Eurocentric critical theories and instead challenges the limits of these conceptual frameworks using meticulous empirical findings from Thailand. These findings can then engage with these theories to create 'a hybridized analytical idiom' (Jackson, 2010:41) that is intelligible to local conditions while opening Western frameworks to other contributing voices.

Jackson has already begun this work, using Foucauldian analytical tools to build on anthropological studies of political power and institutional authority in Thailand. He takes as his starting point the propensity for Thai power to intensely monitor and police public behaviours, representations, and images (Jackson, 2004a:181). These expressions of power manifest in cultural practices that often appear contrary to 'Western' observers, such as the official denial of things known to be true and the use of state power to silence public discourses that undermine prominent individuals or institutions. More confusing to the 'Western' subject is that this impulse to expunge non-normative behaviours and statements from the public realm is coupled with comparative tolerance of *private* desires and performances, which are permitted to exist virtually unexamined. Morris (2002) postulates

that this concern with surface demonstrates that Thai power operates laterally across surfaces, rather than vertically, as in the all-seeing panopticon mode Foucault diagnoses in Europe. Like several anthropologists before her, Morris attributes this cultural logic to the legacy of pre-modern religio-cultural patterns. Jackson, utilizing a Foucauldian approach, proposes instead that this distinctive 'Thai regime of images' is neither static nor "traditional", but a dynamic system emerging, in part, from historically contingent power relations that accompanied Siam's semi-colonial encounters with the imperial West.

In order to avert direct colonization in the 19th century, writes Jackson (2004b:231-240), the absolute monarchy in Bangkok was forced to enter into uneven and humiliating treaties that stripped Siamese courts of their jurisdiction over visiting Western subjects. To regain sovereignty, the Court mobilized a new form of 'self-civilising' bio-power that would incite the Siamese people to adopt public representations that aligned with the sensibilities of a bourgeoisie Victorian ecumene. Intense efforts were directed to counter negative Western critiques of Siamese 'barbarity'; legal interventions sought to clothe the 'naked' Thai body, visually differentiate masculine and feminine bodies, and expunge erotic temple murals and literature to the private realm (Jackson, 2003; Jackson, 2004b). Nevertheless, the state took almost no interest in the character of its citizens' private lives, which continued with little disruption. Unlike in Europe, where respectability began as a politico-ethical project, a mechanism for an ascendant bourgeoisie to challenge a profligate nobility, Siam's self-civilising project was a politico-aesthetic effort in which the aristocracy sought to secure and cement its authority in the eyes of imperial agents. With the key audience for this 'civilized' performance thousands of miles distant, Thai leaders perceived that a projected image was sufficient to convince the metropole. Thai power thus bifurcated; behaviours and representations were heavily policed only when expressed in the public-cum-international sphere where they could be subject to the critical Western gaze.

In his analysis, Jackson does not impose and reproduce Foucault's Eurocentric categories but adjusts and transfigures them to correspond to local forms of power. The power/knowledge regime of Europe, he suggests, makes little sense in Thailand, where power is not directed towards discovering the truth (knowledge) of statements or seeking out genuine essences. In Thailand, power seems to be mobilized according to a power/prestige regime, in which what can and cannot be articulated as public knowledge is determined according to its capacity to

establish and enhance the prestige of high-status symbols. Intense reactions, including legal and social sanctions, may be invoked when a revered image is seen to be damaged by a discursive act, whether or not this act is demonstrably 'true' according to the logic of veracity. This is not the historically distinct regime described by Foucault, in which power is mobilized to protect statements depending on its 'truth' value. Jackson shows in this inversion how a genealogical approach that utilizes Foucauldian tools while 'forgetting' Foucauldian conclusions can generate new understandings of contemporary Thai power.

This thesis continues the effort to 'provincialize Europe' by commandeering the tools of a modified Foucauldian genealogy to demonstrate that many 'European' disciplines bear deep colonial traces. In chapter three, for instance, I examine the significant influence Borough Road College exerted upon Suan Kulap in the early twentieth century, when the latter began to employ several headmasters who had graduated from the prestigious London institution. In *Discipline and Punish*, his most celebrated genealogical study, Foucault analyses the Borough Road 'monitorial' school that birthed the college, noting the 'careful measure of forces' and 'precise system of command' that prevailed therein (Foucault, 1977a:165). By engaging older boys to act as monitors, the school's founder, Joseph Lancaster created a 'machine for learning' in which 'each pupil, each level and each moment, if correctly combined, were permanently utilized in the general process of teaching' (Foucault, 1977a:165). Foucault details how Lancaster minutely organized time, space and 'correct' behaviours in his Borough Road School through finely calibrated mechanisms of reward, punishment, and continuous surveillance. Yet Foucault overlooks the colonial origins of Lancaster's pedagogy. Though he claimed to have arrived at his system independently, Lancaster was heavily influenced by the techniques developed in Rev. Dr. Andrew Bell's *An Experiment in Education*, which details the pedagogical methods he developed during his time as an instructor at the Military Male Orphan Asylum in Madras (Bartle, 1976:4). When Lancaster's underfunded free school became overwhelmed by the masses of South London's ragged boys in 1789, Lancaster turned to the principles developed by Bell to train older monitors in teaching duties (Bartle, 1976:2). As the popularity of Lancaster's system spread, and he trained more and more monitors in his methods, Borough Road effectively became, in 1804, England's first teacher training institute (Hassard and Rowlinson, 2002:629). From here the technologies formulated in Madras and developed in London then made their way

back to the colonial world. Ten years later, the school's supervisory body changed its name to The British and Foreign School Society, a name reflecting its eminence in training British and native teachers bound for colonial schoolhouses. Methodist missionaries established British and Foreign School Societies in the West Indies, India and Sierra Leone (Bartle, 1980:3). The Siam Court sent promising young administrators to Borough Road for two years training in the new 'science of education'. A Suan Kulap alumnus called *Chao Phraya* Thammasak Montri studied at Borough Road in 1893 before serving as Minister for Education for eleven years. Between the years 1895-1932, nine Borough Roadians secured postings at Suan Kulap and fundamentally reformed the school according to the disciplinary principles they acquired at the college.

These are circulating technologies that did not emerge from a European enclave but were, in fact, colonial innovations designed for the surveillance of mutinous or unproductive subaltern bodies. They then re-emerged in the metropole when they were re-purposed to achieve different political objectives—usually on the bodies of the young, the ill, the poor, and the condemned— before being exported back to the colonial frontier. There they interacted with local socio-political conditions to produce new articulations. Laidlaw (2013:39) laments that anthropologists 'have to keep remembering or rediscovering that there is no simple opposition between the modern Western individual and the "traditional" relational self because so little of the creation, transmission, and complex exchange of theories of subjectivity have been told in any anthropological detail'. A genealogy that invites empirical findings from other socio-historic settings can reimagine disciplinary power and, in doing so, dislodge Europe as the silent referent for the rest of the world.

Chapter I

Rationalisation

This chapter is concerned with Suan Kulap during the first three decades of the school's establishment, a period spanning 1881-1911. Most notably, it traces the process of rationalisation that occurred at the school at a time when the royal court sought to establish a separate pedagogic system from the extant ecclesiastical model. During this period, several new technologies were introduced to the school structure that allowed the growing state to subject students to new forms scrutiny and discipline. These include: the standardisation of examinations and curricula, the normalisation of student advancement, and imposition of official disciplinary frameworks. This thesis explores the application and consequences of these technologies at the school, including how they were deployed by the centralising state to produce new kinds of political subjects.

Establishment

In 1880 Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, the eighteen-year-old half-brother to King Chulalongkhorn, was appointed commander of the Royal Pages Bodyguard Regiment, a corps of young officers who provided security to the monarch and attended to his various personal needs. The role was a significant posting. The regiment enjoyed close proximity to the king and was considered a prestigious channel for young noblemen to gain access to royal favour *en route* to a distinguished position at court. Seventeen years prior, when Chulalongkhorn ascended the throne, the young monarch had received more than a thousand applicants to join the regiment, from whom he had selected men with close familial ties (Wyatt, 1969:16). In the years since, however, the division had 'atrophied' (Damrong, 1963:26) and failed to attract quality recruits. Damrong describes his new subordinates as 'duty officers from a bloodline of moneyed civilians' (Damrong, 1963:26). The cause of the decline was clear: the king was in the process of expanding his bureaucratic administration and required an unprecedented number of state officials. As a result, many young noblemen who would have once joined the regiment were able to find ministerial work without the need to court favour as a page. Commander Damrong, who desired to attract more high-born recruits, made two new policies. The first was to permit young members of the lower nobility, namely those of

mom chao and *mom ratchawong* status, to enter the corps at the higher rank of sergeant and lieutenant (Damrong, 1963:26).[19] This would automatically place them in a superior position to lower-born recruits and thus circumvent the possibility of a military hierarchy that was inconsistent with social rank. Additionally, Damrong petitioned the monarch for the right to establish a new school for the corps that would prepare them for a career in the reformed bureaucracy. The school would concentrate on practical skills, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, for which the elite were generally ill prepared.

To house the school, Damrong scouted viable locations within the extensive palace complex. The barracks, where the division ate and slept, were too cramped to accommodate a sizeable classroom. Instead, he alighted upon an old Chinese-style villa constructed in the second reign (1809-1824). Now kept as 'a messy storeroom of very little benefit' (Damrong, 1963:27), the villa had in previous generations been surrounded by a lush rose garden that provided the palace with ceremonial flowers. This had been ripped out during the third reign, but the villa was still known as *Phra Damnak Suan Kulap*, the Palace of the Rose Garden.

The Suan Kulap Palace School opened in September 1881, with a student body of ten lieutenant officers, most of whom were of noble descent (Damrong, 1963:27). Academic affairs were overseen by *Phraya* Owatworakit, an accomplished royal scribe, while military matters were supervised by *Luang* Surayuthyorthahan, a second lieutenant who ensured all ten lieutenants wore the regulation blue-black uniform, attended classes, participated in training, carried a firearm, and slept within the school (Bunchuea, 1957:16). As commander, Damrong kept a close eye on the school and was integral in developing the syllabus, which followed the six stages of the *munlabot banphakit,* a set of simplified language drills developed by Owatworakit's former colleague, *Phraya* Si Sunthrorn.[20]

[19] The highly polygamous Siamese royal line followed the 'declining descent rule' by which hereditary status and rank diminished by one degree with each generation. *Mom chao* rank is bestowed on the son or daughter of a prince and commoner wife. The son or daughter of a *mom chao* is a *mom ratchawong*. At five generations removed from a monarch, the children of a *mom ratchawong* are simple commoners. See Haas (1951:585-87) for more details on descending rank in Thailand.

[20] Considered to be the first the first example of a rationalized curriculum in Siamese history, the six stages of *mulabot banphakit* are:
1) *mulabot banphakit*, the study of basic vowels, consonants, and tone modulation
2) *waninik*, the study of high-class consonants
3) *aksorn prayok*, the study of consonant clusters
4) *sangyokphitna*, the rules of spelling
5) *waipothpicharn*, the study of homographs and homophones

Figure 1: An image of Suan Kulap Palace taken during the fifth reign (National Archives of Thailand)

The Royal Pages School succeeded in attracting applicants to the regiment. By the following year, student numbers exceeded the corps' limited positions, and the decision was made to convert the academy to a civilian establishment which would be known as the Suan Kulap Palace School. The transition pleased Chulalongkhorn, who was concerned that a number of young nobles had garnered a damaging reputation for 'roguishness' (ประฤติเสเพล) and 'thuggery' (เป็นนักเลงหัวไม้) (Chulalongkhorn, 1963:29). An educational institute that offered both intellectual and moral direction could stop such men from 'going to ruin' by 'providing a channel through which they would know right and wrong' (Chulalongkhorn 1963:29). As a pedagogic experiment, the king was also interested in Suan Kulap as a prototype for similar 'royal schools' that could be incrementally rolled out across the kingdom. Having received part of their formative education from British tutors, both Damrong and Chulalongkhorn appear to have been genuinely enthusiastic to create a national system of Western-style

6) *phisalakaran*, the study of diacritical markers (National Archives, ม.ร.๕ ศ ๑/๒๓))

secular educational in Siam, though these efforts had been initially thwarted by an older generation of conservative nobles (Wyatt, 1969:73-78). As these elder figures left the political scene, Chulalongkhorn was able to pursue Western-style educational reforms. This would ultimately benefit the throne by providing literate officials who could centralise royal power over the offices of state the vacated nobles once held.

Unlike military students, who remained in uniform, Suan Kulap's new civilian entrants were permitted to study barefoot and could wear the traditional *jongkrapen,* which the school provided for free (Laksamansuphot, 1963:5). Military training was abolished for new entrants, but could be taken as an optional course for students who had passed the initial stages of the *munlabot banphakit.* To attract the sons of elite families who remained unconvinced by the advantages of secular education, the school continued to pay a salary for attendance and did not limit students in terms of age. It was common for a man in his early twenties to study the same material alongside a child less than half his age. Prince Bidyalongkhorn, who entered the school in 1886, recalls that a father and son attended the school at the same time during his schooldays, and that it was the son who was first to graduate (Bidyalongkhorn, 1963:45).

School days at the Palace School followed a regular routine. Each morning began with the recitation of a Pali chant composed by Si Sunthorn for the moral benefit of students (Bidyalongkhorn: 1963:47). The *kham namatsakan khunanukhun* (คำนมัสการคุณานุคุณ), which is still performed in schools, extols the virtues of the Buddha, the Sangha and the dharma, as well and one's parents and teachers, who are described as 'kind and compassionate' and capable of 'eradicating stupidity and anger'. At the close of the school day, at 4pm, students chanted an homage to the king, which was intoned with much enthusiasm (Bidyalongkhorn, 1963: 47).

In its first year as a civilian school, the school also received its first institutional symbol; a bronze idol of the seated Buddha consecrated by King Chulalongkhorn (SKRC, 1995:348). Known as *luang por suan kulap*, the figure is clothed in a silk robe and subject to great reverence and ritual attention. Additionally, the monarch granted the school a seal that could be used to authenticate official documents. Featuring Chulalongkhorn's personal insignia under the image of a radiating crown, the seal expressed the close links between the school

and the throne and underlined the monarch's desire that 'royal schools' be viewed as the product of 'his majesty's beneficence' (Chulalongkhorn, 1963:30).

Emerging practices at Suan Kulap Palace School

The pedagogic model that Damrong and Chulalongkhorn sought to establish at Suan Kulap Palace was self-consciously 'Western'; informed by the princes' formative educational experiences under British tutors (Wyatt, 1969:63-73). An earlier tour of colonial Java and Singapore, taken at the beginning of Chulalongkorn's reign, had also inspired the monarch. Described by Damrong as a fact-finding mission wherein the royal gaze would contemplate innovative techniques that could 'improve the country' (Damrong, 1946:163), the expedition was a pre-emptive measure by the palace to ensure that foreign visitors to the kingdom would have no cause 'to look down upon' the Siamese (Damrong, 1946:171). During the trip, Chulalongkhorn toured some of the complex Anglo-Indian institutions that had emerged in Singapore, including schools, factories, and the Bras Basah penal complex, a convict gaol that housed transported felons from India. Described by Pieris (2009:98) as an 'industrial factory' that maintained 'a specifically colonial form of power', the Bras Basah of 1870 was a veritable hub of industrial manufacturing in which a surfeit of regulatory systems— 'a world of schedules and classifications mediated by spatial constraints'— were imposed on the inmate population (Pieris, 2009:68). The nearby Tanglin barracks, a two-storey infantry garrison established by the British following the Indian mutiny of 1857, had also impressed the monarch. When the royal party returned to the kingdom, Chulalongkhorn commissioned a new barracks for the Royal Pages based upon the Singaporean design.

Despite these influences, the pedagogic practices that emerged at Suan Kulap in its first decade were less formalized than the institutional models Chulalongkhorn had encountered at the colonial frontier. Indeed, the school's initial academic structure shared many features common to the traditional monastic classroom, a form of ecclesiastical training that had been operating in the region for several centuries. To explore how Suan Kulap both conformed to and deviated from the monastic school of the late nineteenth century, it is necessary to provide a broad overview of this extent pedagogic template and the educational practices it employed.

It is important to establish, in the first instance, that Siam's traditional educational practices occurred within a highly variegated, dispersed and informal system whose historical composition is poorly documented.[21] Larger temples may have attracted handsome patronage and many hundreds of students keen to study medicine, arithmetic, astrology, and law. Smaller monasteries may have comprised only a single master with one or two juvenile novices studying rudimentary literacy (Wyatt, 1969:1-35). Indeed, the term 'school' may mislead the modern reader since such sites may be better imaged as 'any place where there are a collection of teachers and students who gather to discuss texts and learn how to conduct rituals' (McDaniel, 2008:28). Notwithstanding this variation, it is possible to extrapolate from available sources some general characteristics of traditional Siamese education that stand in contrast to the institution that emerged at Suan Kulap in 1881.

Firstly, monastic education did not follow a regular schedule or curriculum and could be discontinued and re-engaged at any time without fear of reproof or dishonour. In an article entitled *Ancient Education* (โบราณศึกษา) published in 1896, an unnamed elderly monk notes that a novice or un-ordained 'temple boy' might study writing and recitation for an hour or two after noon, before a teacher would wake up and examine him orally to assess progress (Phae, 1959:18). If satisfied, the master may prescribe his student more challenging material. This ad-hoc and highly differentiated tutelage system encouraged independent study, but could result in a confusing academic environment. Temple boys aged seven or eight sat alongside twenty-year-old novices, with each individual student reading aloud their appointed texts in a 'chaotic clamour of accents' (Phae, 1959:18).

> *Monks instruct teachers who chant away. Literate novices write, then read, then begin to chant. Literate temple children write, then read, then begin to chant. Those that can't write have their hand guided so they can construct the desired character with their instruments, which are laid down helter-skelter throughout the area.*
>
> (Phae, 1959:18)

[21] Wyatt (1969:21), an authority on the history of Thai pedagogics, notes that evidence between the fourteenth and seventeenth century is 'so meagre' that it is 'difficult to assess what changes occurred'. McDaniel (2008:83) reports that 'there is simple no information…no eyewitness reports, no royal edicts' about scholasticism in Northern Thailand until the twentieth century.

This arrangement, which shared characteristics with the *schola* of medieval Europe,[22] exasperated nineteenth century Christian missionaries such as McFarland, an American Presbyterian, who characterised the monastic classroom as a site 'free from all the trammels of school laws and school committees'; a 'school of idleness and vice' that prepared pupils for 'a lazy, aimless existence' (McFarland, 1884:210, 212).

> *The whole work is controlled by the whim of the teacher at the time, without principle and without rule…If a boy recites once or twice a week, all is well, and if he recites only once or twice a month, still it is all right; and if in the course of eight or ten years he has learned very little, there is no one to complain*'.
>
> (McFarland, 1884:211)

For Phaes's elderly monk, the pedagogics of the nineteenth century monastery were built around the principles of individual choice and personality autonomy. A pupil could 'study whatever they pleased, to any point they wished', and could 'battle on through the night, if that was their choice' (Phae, 1959:20). Prince Damrong, who elected to study the art of magical incantation corroborates this claim, noting that his studies occupied his time before lunch after which he was free to indulge in an afternoon nap and wander about the city without fear of reprimand (Damrong, 146:196). Of monastic discipline, he explains that 'there were no printed materials declaring temple rules' and that the abbot enforced only minimal obligations.[23]

This brings us to a second salient feature of monastic education; the temple was generally disinterested in monitoring the movements of pupils, who were typically free to roam beyond the grounds and associate with whomever they pleased. The anonymous informant of *Ancient Education* asserts that it is 'in the nature of children to play boisterously from morning till

[22] Ariès (1962:178) describes an early fifteenth century thus: 'the *grammaticus* and his assistant, if he had one, gave instruction together on the same premises to several dozen or several hundred children, all mingled together in spite of the difference in their ages'. As late as 1894, some English schools consisting of a single room occupied by the master's rostrum and, in the four corners, the assistant masters' platforms (Ariès, 1962:185)

[23] As a novice, Damrong would have been subject to the ten precepts to which all novices are bound according to the monastic code of the Vinaya. However, a recent work by Voyce (2017:1) suggests that the Vinaya should not be understood as a form of 'law' or 'code', as it is frequently presented in Anglophone interpretations, but as a as a 'training scheme' that shapes subjects through a degree of freedom.

evening' (Phae, 1959:49) and that, though he encouraged his novices to complete beneficial tasks such as fetching water, gathering firewood, or massaging one's teacher, it was not always possible to stop them 'gallivanting about all day' (Phae, 1959:41). At the prestigious Bowonniwet monastery, where Damrong took his novitiate, he observed that the casual itinerary that he followed allowed him to 'indulge in the childish concern to pursue fun' (Damrong 1946:201). Though he was compelled to perform certain duties for his master, which in his case extended to collecting the spittoon and toothbrush of the temple abbot's, these responsibilities were absolved after a week. A typically day for the thirteen-year-old Damrong involved rising early to collect alms, before returning to the temple to join morning chant, which he did for 'fear of being admonished as lazy' (Damrong, 1946: 201). After this ritual, he would 'hop on a cart or boat to eat lunch somewhere'. When Chao Phraya Putharapai and Chao Phraya Mahintarasaktamrong were raising an army to fight in the Haw Wars, Damrong travelled in his robes to see the troops being trained in the ancient ways. Afternoons were spent in the area surrounding the Prasatsada temple where he exchanged stories and let off Chinese fireworks with younger officers of the Royal Pages corps, the division he would later command (Damrong, 1946: 201). In the evening, novices who shared an acquaintance with an older monk might wander to his cell, or *kuti*, where they would 'sit and chat comfortably'. They drank tea with sugar or honey and entertained one another until it was time to enter the chanting hall or retire. 'Nobody knew I was shirking', writes Damrong.

A more complex story emerges in relation to the use of physical punishment in monastic schools, the third feature of traditional ecclesiastical education I wish to address. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Prince Damrong, son to the king, makes no reference to corporal punishment during his novitiate at Bowonniwet. Indeed, he seemed to be entirely unaccustomed to physical correction. In a passage of his memoir that recalls an incident with his British tutor Francis George Patterson three years earlier, Damrong writes:

> *I did not wholly escape misfortune at the school, for I was unfamiliar with the mode of discipline. Not two or three days into my studies, the teacher caught me mischievously tormenting my fellow classmates and subjected me to a* farang *punishment. He bade me stand fifteen minutes atop a chair placed, humiliatingly, at the corner of the room (no doubt the first such instance of a Thai child receiving*

> *this penalty). Seeing the bizarre spectacle, the other students stared at me fixedly, as if from a single eye. Some smiled and tittered as tortuous beads of sweat marked my disgrace. I never misbehaved in class again, though I felt stigmatised (อัปยศ) for many days, until the teacher slapped the palms of two other boys with a wooden rule. Witnessing this far crueller remonstration subsided my irritation completely.*
>
> (Damrong, 1946:203)

Further evidence suggests that the elite families who sent their sons to study with Patterson did not condone the tutor's use of extra-local disciplinary techniques. Just a few months after the incident described, the *Royal Gazette (*1874) was moved to print an announcement assuring parents that all tuition in the school was conducted 'in an orderly manner by teachers who are given no dispensation to scold, strike, or be impolite to students'. [24]

In the less exclusive pedagogic setting of the non-royal monastery, sources indicated that a broad range of disciplinary technologies were applied to pupils, including physical punishment. The elderly monk interviewed by Phae states that he prefers to correct unwanted behaviour by advising with 'compassionate mercy' (Phae, 1959:49), though he notes that some masters used physical techniques to regulate interactions between pupils and sacred items. In his experience, a penalty of three, five or ten strikes of the cane could be administered if pupils failed to perform a series of deferential bodily gestures towards their instructor and the materials of study.[25] Physical punishment could also be used to remedy 'undesirable characteristics' (Phae, 1959:51) such as 'using evasive language', 'not listening', 'avoiding everything by sleeping or hiding away', 'meeting all activities with a scowl', 'escaping after waking from sleep', and 'excusing oneself with cunning'. In extreme cases, a student

[24] The announcement ultimately failed. From an initial intake of fifty pupils in 1874, only five students remained by the following year—included Prince Damrong, who became Patterson's star pupil (Wyatt, 1969:70-72). When Patterson's contract ended in the middle of 1875, the school closed.

[25] Before a class could commence, pupils were required to prostrate three time in succession to their teacher and writing slate, and refrain from dropping or stepping over any study materials. Pre-pubescent pupils were generally allowed a discretionary period of three to seven days in which they could play around the temple grounds while gradually acclimatizing to these practices via direct observations of older peers (Phae, 1959:46-47)

could be caned with his hands 'bound and suspended', a penalty designed to cause 'great emotional distress' (Phae, 1959:51).[26]

In the absence of a commonly accepted framework, it appears that the character of pedagogic discipline in pre-modern Siam was largely determined by the personal temperament of the presiding master and the relative social status of the student in question. In a publication of 1869, *Phraya* Si Sunthorn— the former monk whose textbooks later provided the curriculum for the Suan Kulap Palace School—goes into some detail regarding his philosophy of pedagogical discipline. Having spent most his life teaching and studying in monasteries, Si Sunthorn apprises the reader that 'not all children are the same' (Si Sunthorn, 1959:76) and that sanctions and penalties should be modified according to the dispositions of individual students. He writes:

> *There are some [students] who will commence study only through fear of punishment from a teacher or parent. Others desire only knowledge and intelligence and will persevere on that love alone. Fear is no inducement for such students. Others descend to boredom and discover all manner of tricks and evasions. When these stratagems are intercepted and chastened with significant force, the terror of sanctions will return some to constant study. Then there are children who, no matter what penalty or threat may be applied to them, will never cease to disobey, hoodwink, and sneak. In such instances, adults tire of punishment and abandon the practice completely.*
>
> (Si Sunthorn, 1959:76-77)

Si Sunthorn writes that a teacher must be able to discern 'whether to browbeat and intimidate or flatter, praise and encourage' (Si Sunthorn, 1959:76) since it is 'hard to find one

[26] A verse by the renowned poet Sunthorn Phu (2008:85) corroborates the dispensation of corporal punishment in the temple school of the early nineteenth century. He writes:
ระวังตัวกลัวครูหนูเอ่ย ไม้เรียวเจียวเหวย
กูเคยเข็ดหลาบขวาบเขวียว
หันหวดปวดแสบแปลบเสียว หยิกซ้ำซ้ำเขียว
(My translation: Be sure to fear the teacher, young one, his cane is sure and keen
I once was scared of its stinging strike
Of the ache and thrill
The pinch; frequent and green)

child in a hundred who possesses the natural inclination to apply themselves to solitary study' (Si Sunthorn, 1959:76). He advises that pupils of 'high heritage who cherish their lineage' tend to become particularly 'fed up and dispirited' if they are subjected to 'ridicule or coarse words and actions' (Si Sunthorn, 1959:80). By contrast, children of low birth may benefit from a 'rough punishment' befitting 'the lowly disposition of the peasant' (Si Sunthorn, 1959:80). More generally, he advocates for teachers to treat their students with 'courtesy' (อัชฌาสัย) and refrain from 'playing dirty' or attempting to 'mock' a child. 'A teacher must not be coarse nor roughly scold in a manner that will hurt the child' since such actions may cause the taught to lose respect for their teacher (Si Sunthorn, 1959:80).

From these general observations of monastic education in nineteenth century Siam, it is possible to discern several features of the antecedent ecclesiastic pedagogic model that were incorporated into Suan Kulap when it opened in 1882. Like monastic education, students entered the institution voluntarily and could discontinue their studies at any time. The study body was diverse in age and progressed by means of regular and informal oral assessments. Additionally, variation in individual aptitude was easily accommodated. Some students mastered the six stages of the *munlabot banphakit* in a single year, while others took three (Bidyalongkhorn, 1963:43). Some of the permissive disciplinary practices reported by Prince Damrong at Bowonniwet were also shared by Suan Kulap. According to Bidyalongkhorn (1963:44), the lack of formal rules or discipline made it possible for older or high-status students to subject subordinates to physical harassment and humiliating pranks, which were referred to as 'ordinations'. Bidyalongkhorn (1963:44) reports receiving several beatings from his school peers. He writes; 'I did not fight back, though my hand was not stopped by a nobility of the soul, but because my assailant was fourteen and I only ten'. At other times, Bidyalongkhorn was himself the 'preceptor performing the ordination' (เป็นอุปัชฌาชย์ให้อุปสมบท) and 'found it fun to torture' his schoolmates (Bidyalongkhorn, 1963:44)

Nevertheless, Suan Kulap Palace School deviated from the monastic model in several other respects. The instructor who supervised study was no longer a clerical figure guiding postulants through religious texts but a salaried employee of the state contracted to follow a regular and consistent timetable. Whereas in the temple, the pedagogic space may have been a requisitioned chanting hall, a small *kuti*, or even a shaded patch of ground, teaching at Suan

Kulap took place within a single architectural space, known as the *rong rian* (โรงเรียน) or classroom, in which students could be constantly supervised and insulated from external distractions. The content and form of the curriculum was also substantially altered. The Indianized religious treatises of the temple were replaced by a tiered, homogenous curriculum whose completion guaranteed the pupil some form of functional literacy. By 1886, the six levels of the *munlabot banphakit* provided the basis for the creation of discrete classrooms in which groups of equivalent capability were taught by a single master in a separate room.[27] Previously, segregation at the Royal Pages Schools had only paid attention to military rank, which was often commensurate with social status. Now the principal criterion by which a student was categorized was his relative intellectual development.

These changes— a salaried teacher, constant supervision, a consistent timetable, and differentiated classes— were further formalized in 1884 with the introduction the Suan Kulap written exam, the first secular assessments in the history of Siamese pedagogy. Designed by a committee of state actors, the examinations replaced the monastic convention of oral evaluation with a standardized framework by which the state could assess the capabilities of potential bureaucrats. In the following section, I examine how this seemingly inconsequential innovation brought profound changes to the administrative organization of Suan Kulap and how it enabled the institution to exert qualitatively different forms of disciplinary power than had ever been utilized in the monastic school.

The Suan Kulap Exam

After three years of institutional growth, Damrong became concerned in 1884 that a considerable number of Suan Kulap students were abandoning their studies to join the bureaucracy as semi-literate officials (Damrong, 1963:31). To incentivise students to complete the entirety of the *mulabot banphakit*, Damrong proposed the creation of a mandatory formal exam. If a student wished to graduate or progress to the next stage of study, they would have to submit to a pre-prepared written test that would provide

[27] In 1886 the six classrooms at Suan Kulap were arranged thus:
Room one—Phraya Anukulwithan teaching basic vowels and consonants
Room two—Khru Sing Tor teaching high-class consonants;
Room three– (teacher unknown) the study of consonant clusters, and
Room four—Khru Tuan combined the study of homographs and homophones with correct usage of diacritical markers (Bidyalongkhorn, 1963:43)

documentation of their competencies alongside a personalised score. Rigorously planned by Prince Damrong, the elderly Si Sunthorn and three other trusted officials (*Royal Gazette*, 1884), the logistics of the inaugural examination were as follows: at 10.30 am on an early May morning, students who wished to progress would be required to assemble in a room and answer an unseen paper assessing sentence composition and word reproduction. To minimise copying or fraudulence, the procedure was to be conducted in silence under the supervision of a disinterested invigilator whose duties included recording the time at which each test paper was submitted (Damrong, 1963:31). Upon completion, each paper would be assessed and allocated a score corresponding to the number of correct answers given. If that score was above a stipulated minimum, the student would be permitted to progress to the next stage of the *mulabot banphakit* or receive an accredited certificate that confirmed his graduation from the school (Damrong, 1963:31). Forty candidates sat five separate papers on the inaugral Suan Kulap exam, resulting in the graduation of five students of *mom chao* and *mom rachawong* status. [28]

The introduction of the examination had two significant effects. Firstly, students had a greater incentive to finish the course at Suan Kulap and were thus more likely to be literate by the end of their studies. In addition to the motivation of gaining a higher score than one's peers, the school arranged an elaborate prize-giving ceremony in which the king bestowed certificates and awards to candidates before an assembly of parents and officials on the school lawn (Chulalongkhorn, 1963).[29] The king even commissioned a great two-metre stone tablet on which the names of successful graduates were engraved beside regnal insignia. With new political ceremonies and symbolic markers, individual academic achievement was thus conflated with the glamour of royal power. The second, more significant effect was that the state was now in possession of a standardized technology of evaluation by which it could accumulate information relating to the individual. This not only allowed the state to closely monitor access to powerful positions, it also created a whole archive of analytical documents that included examination marks, the time taken to complete assessments, and awards given.

[28] For a copy of the original transcripts of the inaugural exam see SKRC, 1995:69.

[29] These prizes became more elaborate over time. In 1892, Minister of Religious Affairs Phon Bunnag and Crown Prince Vajiravudh presented the recipient of the highest *prayok* two score with a glass-fronted wall clock, a stationary set, a large metal box embossed with the school logo, and a bag full of money (Laksamansuphot, 1963:6). The tradition of a royal family member presiding over university graduations continues to this day (Thongchai, 2016:18).

Such materials were collated and sent to a special desk in Damrong's Royal Pages office, where they were used to calculate new norms and standards for the kingdom's once heterogeneous pedagogic landscape.[30]

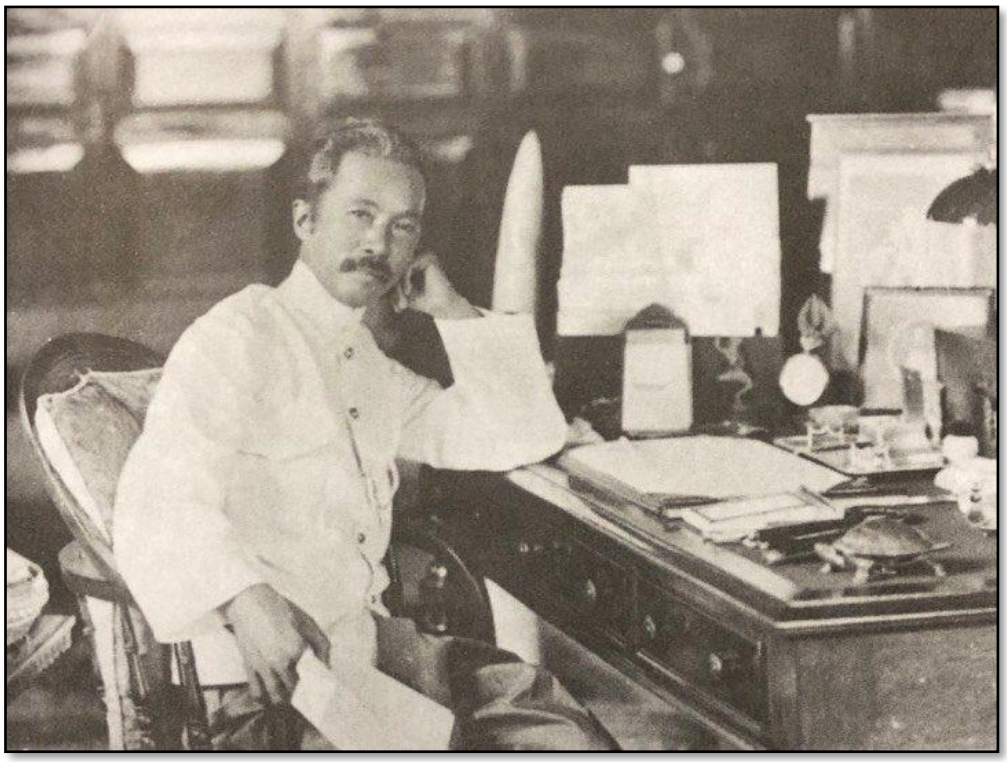


Figure 2. Prince Damrong at his desk in the Ministry of Interior, Sala Look Khun, Grand Palace, circa 1907 (National Archives of Thailand).

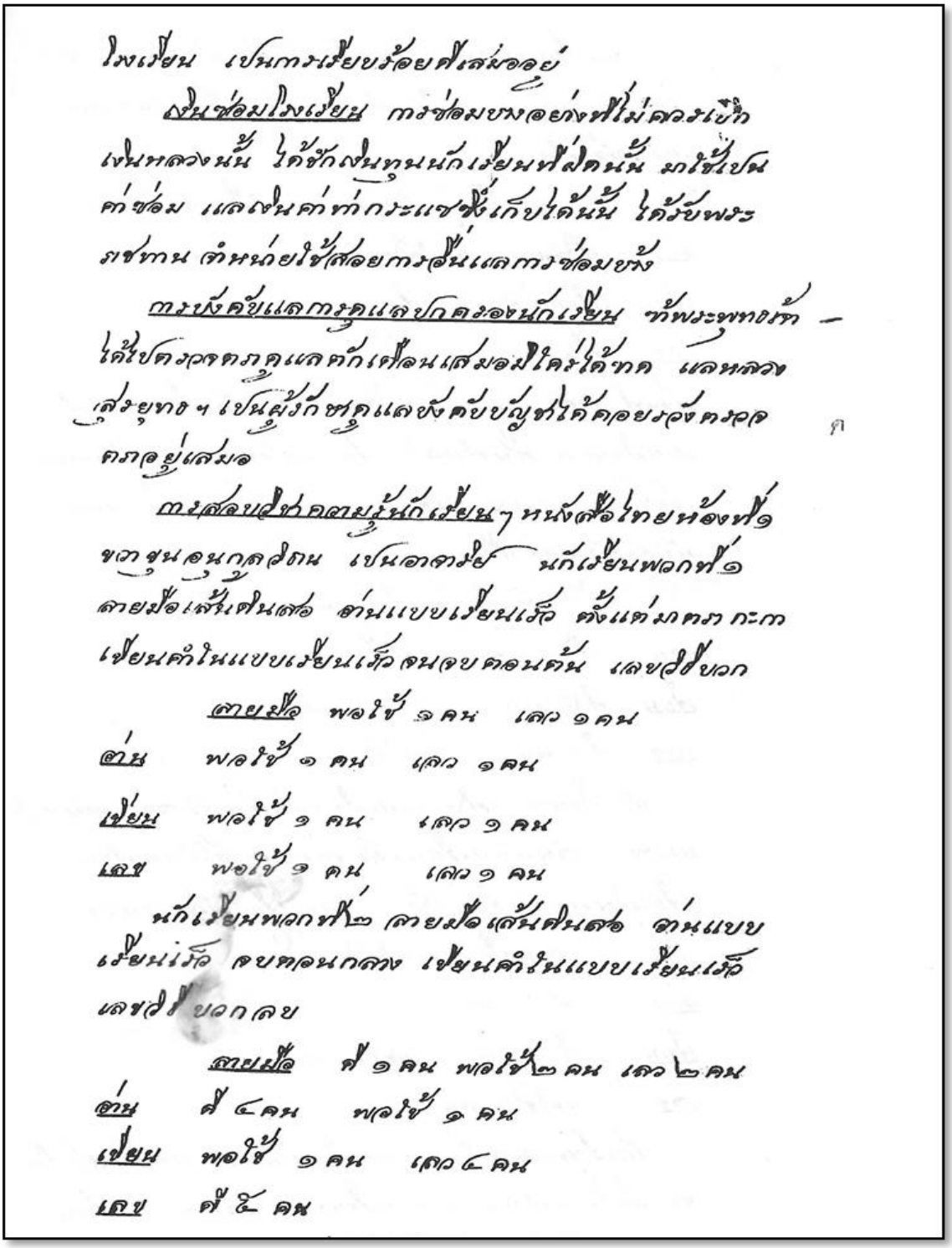
Just four months after the inaugural examination, a meeting between Headmaster Phraya Owatworakit and Si Sunthorn, and four other officials, determined how a centrally administered public school system similar to that of Suan Kulap could be expanded in the kingdom. They determined that these schools be housed within the existing monastic framework with the caveat that all teachers must now use standardized textbooks and become salaried employees (Wyatt, 1969:112; Kullada, 2004:74-6). The Suan Kulap syllabus was also reformatted into a two-tier system. The first tier, designated *prayok* one, comprised the original curriculum of the *mulabot baphakit*, while *prayok* two, taught on the upper floor of the school and only accessible to graduates, assimilated an advanced clerical course in letter writing, summarization, arithmetic, and accountancy (SKRC, 1995:71; Laksamansuphot,

[30] For an early example of such documents see SKRC, 1995: 66-69.

1963:5). As Damrong's interest in constructing a centralised system grew, his desk at the Royal Pages began to use the letterhead 'Office of the Education Department' and he became known as the 'commissioner of schools' (Wyatt, 1969:114). Two years after Damrong left the military to become a civilian administrator in 1890, the desk was subsumed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, a new government department established to oversee ecclesiastical matters, museum administration, healthcare, and education. The ministry, which already possessed eight years' worth of Suan Kulap documents, quickly designated the site an official 'laboratory school' (โรงเรียนทดล) in which teaching methods and curricula could be developed and tested (SKRC, 1995:88). The ministry then dispatched inspectors who applied the technology of examination to every school that fell under their jurisdiction, producing meticulous reports that assessed nearly every aspect of the institution, from the cost of any maintenance work to the penmanship standards of individual students.[31]

The data contained within these reports was used to calculate new normalising standards at Suan Kulap, including the school's first expectations for minimum attendance. Prior to the founding of the Ministry, the only sanction Suan Kulap students faced for non-attendance was a deduction of their monthly stipend. By 1892, each student was required to pay a deposit of three *salung* which would be returned to the individual only if his monthly absence was less than three days (Laksamansuphot, 1963:5). More standardisation followed. In 1893, the Ministry implemented the *common school curriculum,* a national education policy that, for the first time in Siamese history, stipulated precisely how long a student must study before he could advance to a subsequent educational stage. As in the monastery, the rate of progression had hitherto been determined by

[31] See figure 3 for an example of an inspection report for Suan Kualp dated 1892.



ใบเงิน เป็นการเรียบร้อยดีเสมออยู่

เงินซ่อมใบเรียน การซ่อมบางอย่างที่ไม่ควรเบิก เช่นหลังนั้น ได้หักเงินทุนนักเรียนที่ป่วยนั้น มาใช้เป็นค่าซ่อม และเงินค่าทำกระแชงที่เก็บได้นั้น ได้ส่งพระราชทาน ตำหน่ายใช้สอยการปั้นและการซ่อมบ้าง

การบังคับและการดูแลปกครองนักเรียน ท้ายพระพุทธรูป ได้ปิดประกาศการดูแลตักเตือนเสมอมิได้ขาด และหลวงเสนียุทธฯ เป็นผู้บังการดูแลบังคับบัญชาได้คอยสอดส่องตรวจตราอยู่เสมอ

การสอบไล่ของนักเรียนๆ หนังสือไทยห้องที่ ๑ ขาดชุนอนุกูลสถาน เป็นอาคันตุกะ นักเรียนพลกที่ ๑ ลายมือเส้นดินสอ ต่านแบบเรียนเร็ว ตั้งแต่มาตรากะกา เปียนคำในแบบเรียนเร็วจนจบตอนต้น เลขไม่ได้บวก

ลายมือ พอใช้ ๑ คน เลว ๑ คน
ต่าน พอใช้ ๑ คน เลว ๑ คน
เปียน พอใช้ ๑ คน เลว ๑ คน
เลข พอใช้ ๑ คน เลว ๑ คน

นักเรียนพลกที่ ๒ ลายมือเส้นดินสอ ต่านแบบเรียนเร็ว จบตอนกลาง เปียนคำในแบบเรียนเร็ว เลขไม่ได้บวกเลย

ลายมือ ดี ๑ คน พอใช้ ๒ คน เลว ๒ คน
ต่าน ดี ๔ คน พอใช้ ๑ คน
เปียน พอใช้ ๑ คน เลว ๔ คน
เลข ดี ๕ คน

Figure 3. Ministry of Religious Affairs school inspection report for Suan Kulap, 1892 (Document ม.ร.๕ ศ ๑/๒๓, National Archives of Thailand). This page includes details of school finances and discipline, including an evaluation of Ajarn Anukhunwiton's room one Thai class.

individual ability. Just seven years earlier, Suan Kulap student Pia Malakul had completed both *prayok* one and two within a single academic year (Saran, 2016). Now education was subject to temporal standards. *Prayok* one, renamed *mun sueksa*, was divided into an upper and

lower level which required three and four years study respectively. *Prayok* two, now called *matayom sueksa*, was fixed at four years, with the study of English language now mandatory (SKRC, 1995:88). Combined with an 1896 law that prohibited older students from enrolling at secular schools, these reforms terminated the open-ended and versatile nature of Siamese pedagogy by fixing elementary education within a narrow stretch of childhood. This allowed the state to carve childhood into thin slices wherein every student was the same age and subject to the same measures of 'normal' progression as defined by a central administrative body.

The new system roused the suspicion of many Thais who mistrusted the intervention of a growing bureaucratic state in what had traditionally been considered an act of religious devotion. Why were a group of officials in a Bangkok office taken with the sudden urge to educate the population? Why did royal power contrive to collect the personal data of individuals when it had hitherto shown no such interest in the lives of its subjects? Many concluded that the scheme was a ruse. The state sought information on children— their age, domicile, parentage— so that they could be more easily compelled into corvée military service. On the first day the first monastery converted to public school status, the abbot of Wat Mahan reported losing all his students (Kullada, 2004:75). Nevertheless, the new educational structure began to slowly supersede older pedadgogic methods at many Siamese monasteries. Local responses to examination methods were still wary. For many years, rural parents insisted on accompanying their children into the examination room. Sometimes even distant relatives huddled into the hall to offer encouragement and advice to sitting students (Pathom, 1957:67-8). Only when British inspectors began to ban the custom at end of the nineteenth century did this practice discontinue.

Thus, the new technology of the standardised exam took root in Suan Kulap and gradually made its way into the extant monastic system, where it allowed the state to create a centrally administered system of education. By 1896, 115 primary schools pupils sat their graduation examination at the Suan Kulap examination centre (Kullada, 2004:76). Though it cannot be definitively ascertained, it is probable that Damrong was inspired by similar technologies being utilized in Western Europe from the mid-eighteenth century. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979:187-93) theorizes that the introduction of examination in the West signalled the emergence of the individual as an object of political and scientific concern. By subjecting

individuals to new forms of 'compulsory visibility" (Foucault, 1979:187) institutions such as the school or the hospital were able to train, discipline, normalize, and exclude whole sections of the population. This theory is worth considering in relation to the Siamese case. On the occasion of Suan Kulap's first prize-giving ceremony, King Chulalongkhorn announced to the crowd that henceforth examination would be used as a mechanism to exclude certain individuals from access to resources and political power. He told the assembly 'any person unable to complete an exam to specification will be unfit to be ennobled' (Chulalongkhorn, 1963:29).[32]

Yet we should be wary of designating these mechanisms as localised variants of an Enlightenment technology. Research by DuBois (1970) and Rowbotham (1992:1055) suggests that early European liberals who advocated for civil service examinations, such as Voltaire and Quesnay, directly referenced the practices of Imperial China, where such exams had been operating for many hundreds of years. Indeed, the first time The Indian Civil Service used standardized examination to select candidates in 1833, its architects document being strongly influenced by the reports of British diplomats and missionaries working in China. A few decades later, when the British Civil Service Commission was established, it was pointed out in a parliamentary debate that the only real precedent to government examination was that of the Chinese system (Wiggins, 1973:515-6). Damrong and his committee devised the Suan Kulap exam in 1884, by which time the Siamese government already held several British advisors, some of whom had come directly from the employ of the Indian Civil Service (Brown, 1978:196). It is possible, therefore, that the Suan Kulap examinations were influenced by technologies that were returning to Asia via the staging post of Western Europe.

Enlargement and Formalisation (1884-1900)

In the same year as the school's inaugural examination, Suan Kulap began to relax its exclusionary enrolment policy. Previously, the school had been almost completely attended by pupils of *mom luang* and *mom ratchawong* rank. But in 1884, the school admitted the sons

[32] The mobilization of examination to exclude and normalise is seen in other contemporaneous examples in Siam. When Damrong's half-brother Prince Wachirayan was appointed director of the Mahamakut Buddhist College in October 1893, he began to hold Pali examinations that favoured the interpretations of the Palace-backed Thammayut sect. This allowed the institution to exclude and deny the divergent local practices of powerful religious leaders and claim legitimacy as a 'purer' canonical schism. As the political clout of the sect grew, the palace was able bring an obstreperous monastic order under the direct jurisdiction of the monarch in the Sangha reforms of 1902 (see Murdoch 1974; Phibul, 2011:258-269)

of higher officials and, by around 1892, extended entrance to gifted commoners who had excelled in standardized exams. The demography of Suan Kulap altered considerably as a result. On the event of the first Suan Kulap prize-giving ceremony, every recipient of a graduate certificate had been of royal or noble rank. Nine years later, in 1893, every recipient of a special award held common status, most from households not yet in possession of a family name.[33] Hailing from rural settlements, many of these students were unfamiliar with the practices they encountered at Suan Kulap, and were saddened by the bullying they experienced at the hands of their highborn contemporaries. One such student, the son of a Suphanburi banana farmer called Bun, rowed for three days to reach the capital where he was 'teased and looked down upon' by his supercilious peers (Laksamansuphot, 1963:6). Only after Headmaster Owatawornkit asked Bun to cover for an absent teacher did his peers show any respect.[34] By the end of the nineteenth century, however, elite families had been convinced of the merits of Western education and exploited increased transportation links with the West to send their sons to prestigious European institutions. As the school's population of commoners increased, the old privileges of high-born students, such as the right to dine separately or receive a decorated stationery box, disappeared and students were less differentiated according to status (Bidyalongkhorn, 1963:44).

Following the liberalisation of admissions policy, the student body increased rapidly; from 136 pupils in 1886 to 245 in 1888. By 1891, the school had 306 enrolled students before peaking, in 1899, to just over 400, a number that could no longer be contained within the limited of confines of the palace (SKRC, 1995:79). To alleviate overcrowding, the ministry decided, in 1892, to separate Suan Kulap into a separate Thai and English school under the authority of a

[33] See figure 3

[34] After graduation, Bun enrolled at the Ministry of Justice Law School and enjoyed an illustrious career at the Bangkok Court of Justice. He died in 1963, having been ennobled to the rank of *phraya*, leaving behind nine children by his minor wife (Laksamansuphot, 1963:1-23)

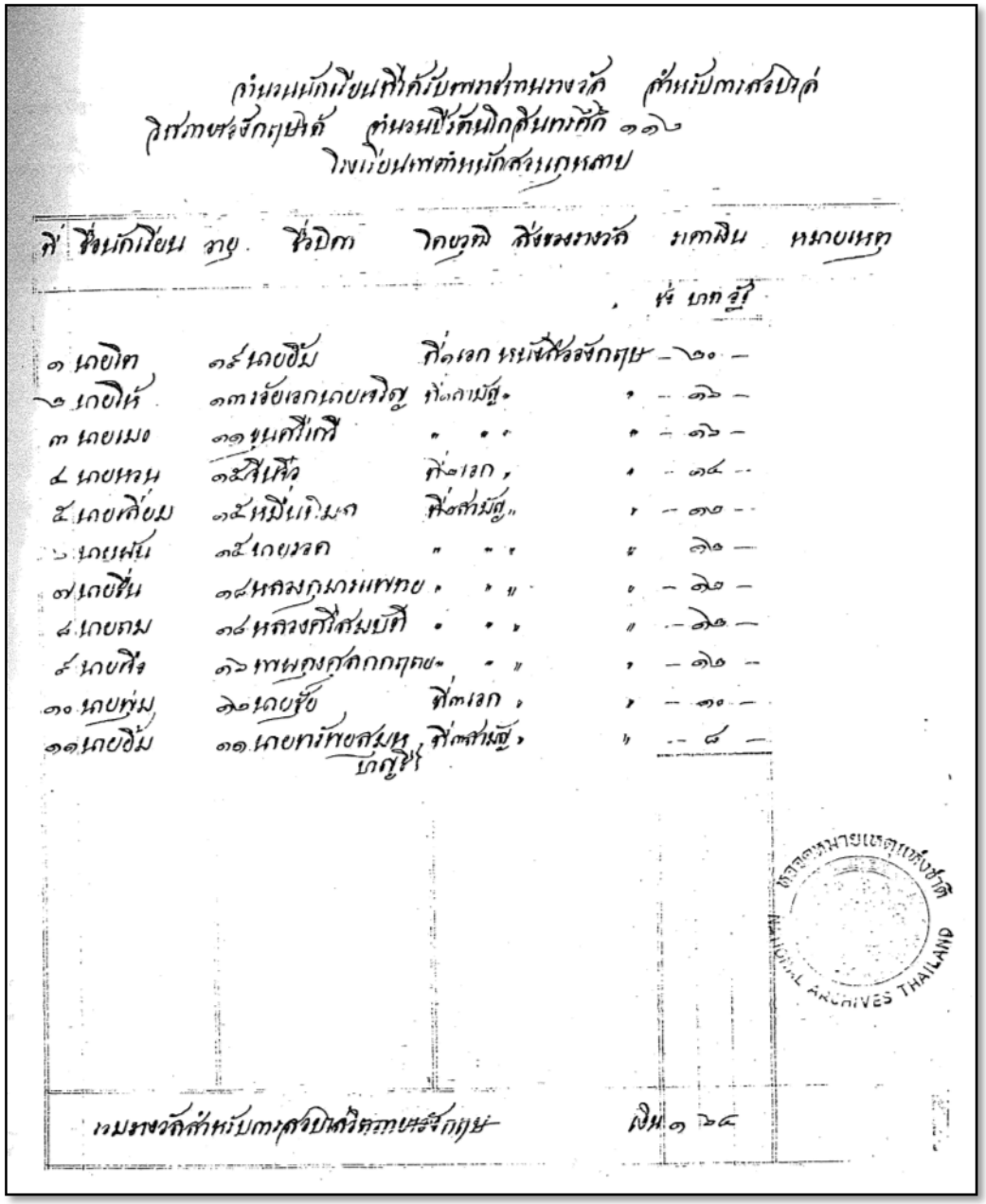


Figure 4: A register of the eleven prize winners from the 1893 Suan Kulap English exam. None of the recipients are yet in possession of a family name.

single commander (*Khong chot mai*, 1897-1899). Five years later, the Royal Household requested the return of the palace and the Ministry was forced to dismantle the school altogether. With just eighty students, the smaller English school was permitted to remain within the Grand Palace in a building close to the Suthaisawan Throne Hall. The much larger Thai school had to look for alternative sites outside the palace compound. After rejecting six potential locations, the ministry agreed to rent four converted buildings from Wat Mahathat, a large temple complex located close to the centre of the old city (*Khong chot mai*, 1897-

1899).[35] Despite the relocation, the ministry allowed both schools to retain the title 'Suan Kulap' (Damrong, 1963:40).

In the aftermath of the move to Wat Mahathat, Suan Kulap Thai School began to establish a much more formal organisational structure than had been followed in the old palace school. On 16th November 1898, Acting Suan Kulap Director *Luang* Winitwithayakarn wrote to Prince Kitiyakara Voralaksana, Director-General of The Department of Education and former Suan Kulap pupil, regarding the establishment of a formal disciplinary code at Suan Kulap Mahathat (Winitwithayakarn, 1898). In the letter, Director Winitwithayakarn proposes a series of twelve official regulations, the first in Suan Kulap history, to which all three hundred students would be bound. The rules appear to be an attempt to curb some of the boisterous behaviour that had been generally tolerated in older pedagogic environments, particularly habits of tardiness and poor attendance. The new rules, which regulated student action, speech, and timekeeping, were authorised by Prince Kitiyakara Voralaksana the following day (*kong chotmai*, ศธ 50.16/56). The ordinances were:

1. *Pupils must arrive at school no later than 10am*
2. *Upon hearing the bell, pupils must rush to class, taking no more than 2 minutes to do so, or they will be marked as absent*
3. *Food or toys may not be bought into the classroom. Endeavour to preserve the cleanliness of the classroom.*
4. *When entering or leaving the room, do not frolic, push or overtake one another. You must walk in orderly lines.*
5. *Once sat in the class, do not converse noisily or allow study materials to fall to the floor. This is terrible manners. You must avoid angering others*
6. *Do not chew betel nut or smoke in class as it destroys concentration to the task at hand*
7. *Do not rise from you seat for any improper purpose, such as copying the work of one's neighbour*
8. *Do not throw debris, spit, nor throw water from the windows under any circumstances.*

[35] For a chart representing Suan Kulap's various relocations during throughout its history, see appendix II.

9. *Do not converse in coarse language. It is highly inappropriate, particularly for those who desire prosperity.*

10. *If there is a fight in class, both parties shall be fined and the cause investigated*

11. *Do not wander elsewhere during study time unless given permission by a teacher. There is already a break time.*

12. *Pupils may not leave the classroom by the midday cannon or the school bell. They must wait for the teacher's signal*

In addition, the school was granted permission to impose the school's first punitive framework in the form of five graduate sanctions that may be applied to students who violated stipulations. These were:

Rank 1: Detained during study break

Rank 2: Made to stand, read or calculate in front of class for a specified time

Rank 3: Be made to study in a lower-level class

Rank 4: Reduce pupil's money and record incident in the register

Ranks 5: Expulsion from the school

(Winitwithayakarn, 1898)

Students were not the only bodies that the school began to regulate more closely. The following year, in 1900, the school introduced the *Suan Kulap School Government Service Regulations and Duties Protocol,* a charter of professional practice relating to faculty, administrators, clerks, and janitors.[36] According to the protocol, teachers were banned from 'acting beyond the orders and authorization of the headmaster' and commanded to 'ensure that all expenses and accounts were arranged in order and not miscategorised'. If unoccupied, they were instructed 'to inspect the property for faults and uncleanliness, repairing with glaze, paint or whitewash when necessary'. For clerks, the new ordinances were primarily concerned with the keeping of consistent documentation, particularly pertaining to the actions of 'undisciplined' individuals. The legislation specifies that clerks act 'as a witness' to the proper functioning of the school, superintending sporadic financial audits and faithfully record any 'incidents' that occur on campus. If a boy did not attend school on a particular day,

[36] For a transcript of the full charter, see SKRC, 1995:121-2.

it was the clerk's duty to dispatch a formal letter to his guardians informing them of the absence. If a student was on probation for some disciplinary offence, it was the clerk's duty to compile an evaluative behavioural report for the boy so that his conduct could be more closely monitored.

Clerks were also given new powers to survey teaching staff. This extended to monitoring the relatively high incidences of faculty absences during the period, a situation that was becoming a significant financial burden to the school.[37] When a faculty member failed to attend, the school was obliged to engage a *matayom* grade student as his substitute, at the cost of 58 *att* per day.[38] This cost was passed on to the Department of Education via an official request from the school director. To monitor these absences, Suan Kulap clerks were expected to 'produce a monthly report of staff illnesses and absences, and one report of teaching expenses'. As a result, the school began to construct a more rigid bureaucratic structure based upon the principle of hierarchical observation, wherein each member was implicated in the regulation and control of those directly below. Student behaviours were scrutinized by teachers, who were, in turn, monitored by the clerk. The efficient maintenance of this system was ensured by the headmaster and school inspectors who reported directly to the Ministry, the body that paid salaries and sanctioned any structural changes to the institution. The further down the hierarchy, the more numerous were the regulations that governed behaviour.

We see, for instance, that the staff protocol of 1900 is most exhaustive when dealing with the duties and movements of school janitors, a group that worked at the very bottom of the employee pecking order. According to regulations, janitors were required to 'work every day of the month without holiday'. Before the ten am school bell, it was their responsibility to dust and open all windows and doors, before commencing gardening and maintenance tasks. When teachers and pupils left the school at four pm, janitors were expected to sweep the classrooms, replenish lantern oil, refill water jars, and lock windows and doors. Throughout the evening, they had to sleep in alternating shifts in order to 'apprehend strange intruders' who may wander into the premises. Any insubordination or dereliction of duty on the janitor's

[37] Records show that four instructors from a teaching staff of twelve were marked absent at some period during December 1896 (*nangsue ratchakarn*, 56/115). Mr Sut, who taught grade two, was absent for two days, one of which he failed to account for. Deputy Headmaster Thammapimon was absent through illness. Mr Chom Yai is recorded with two absences, one unexplained while his brother Mr. Chom Lek was absent for fourteen days

[38] The *att* is a defunct unit of currency. Eight *att* made one *fuang*, the equivalent of 1/8 of a baht.

part was quickly reported up the hierarchy. The final janitorial edict in the 1900 protocol states that 'if any of the aforementioned responsibilities are disobeyed, performed with carelessness, or neglected, a letter will be sent to the Department of Education requesting monthly salary be reduced by one-quarter or two-thirds for a period of up to three months'.

Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century, Suan Kulap began to overturn some of the personal freedoms afforded by monastic pedagogy by arranging itself in an administrative pyramid that maintained structure through examination, hierarchical observation, and formal codes and penalties. These changes occurred with great rapidity in a very specific context. The school's recent relocation may have played some role in the reform. Suan Kulap's presence within Mahathat was contingent upon the good will of the abbot and monastic community. In the event that their hosts chose to evict the institution, Suan Kulap and the Ministry of Religious Affairs would face significant financial costs converting a new structure into a functional schoolhouse. It was in their interests to monitor and regulate the activities of students more stringently while the school remained inside temple grounds. The sheer number of students by 1898 was most likely an additional factor. Dunbar, an evolutionary anthropologist, suggests that any human social group that exceeds a critical limit of 150 to 200 members, will struggle to stabilize social intercourse using only personal contacts, peer pressure, and trust (Dunbar, 1996:71-5). At this ceiling, humans are prone to produce formal regulations and organisational structures. In the case of modern institutions, Dunbar calculates that a population of two hundred is the threshold at which centralized structures emerge to 'ensure that each employee knows what he or she is responsible for and to whom they should report' (Dunbar, 1996:72). As the state began to create larger institutions that could no longer function by face-to-face interactions, the imposition of such structures may have been inevitable.

More generally, it is possible to situate the formalisation of Suan Kulap Thai school within a context of wider administrative reforms reshaping Thai society. At astonishing speed, the Bangkok monarchy had assembled a regular salaried army, a consolidated judiciary, a police force, and a centralized system of taxation that diverted new concessions to the palace treasury rather than regional lords. The Sangha had been brought to heel through the work of Prince Wachirayan, while Prince Damrong, ensconced in the Ministry of Interior, was expanding Bangkok's power into the political hinterland. The resulting structure, note Baker

and Phongpaichit (2014:53), 'looked uncannily like the colonial government of a British Indian district'— a pyramidal bureaucracy that extended from the very top right down to the local level. The state formalised this new administrative structure in 1899 (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2014: 53), the same year Suan Kulap introduced its first code of student behaviour. Thus, the form that Suan Kulap was beginning to assume during this period reflected wider administrative changes and qualitatively different forms of political control extending throughout the inchoate state.

Reunification (1901-11)

Suan Kulap's Thai and English schools occupied various locations during the decade they operated as separate institutions. However, in 1908, the Ministry of Religious Affairs devised a plan to reunify Suan Kulap into a single institution located on the grounds of the Front Palace, a site close to the Ministry of Religious Affairs' new headquarters. Once the three customised building were completed, however, the site proved too small for the combined student population and only the Thai school was invited to relocate (Withitongsawutdrai, 1903). Two years later, Damrong's protégée and former personal secretary, Pia Malakul, used his position as Director of the Department of Education to engineer another opportunity for reunification. In a letter to the king in April 1910, he suggests that a reintegrated Suan Kulap could be housed on land belonging to Wat Ratchaburnana, a temple located at the end of the Phahurut Road, a newly paved thoroughfare known for the commercial interests of the city's Annamese immigrants. In his letter to the king, Pia explains that the area he proposes is already the site of a nascent pedagogic hub.

> *After much long seeking I can find no more appropriate site for our acquisition than that of Wat Ratchaburna. Firstly, the original temple already holds a primary school that stands opposite the* kuti*, to which was added a high school…By noon, the place is full of matayom students numbering some 400. In the afternoons, once the school day has ended, one of the buildings is occupied by a congregation of teachers who gather to discuss teaching methods and introduce miscellaneous knowledge with which teachers should be familiar. They call this The Teacher's Association (สามัคยาจารย์สมาคม). Another building provides evening English classes to*

> *those who are occupied with work during the day. Science and other specialist subjects that require significant investment, such as physics and chemistry are also practiced here… Around 700 people are on any given day engaged with study in this location, which began to plant its roots about four years ago in 1906. Such growth, it is agreed, should be firmly structured in the future, though it may prove challenging to make perfect this place of learning with limited royal funds.*
>
> (Pia, 1910)

As former ambassador to the United Kingdom, Pia was intimately familiar with the British system of education and had become convinced that a united Suan Kulap— his alma mater— could function as the kingdom's first advanced educational institute. His ambition was to make Suan Kulap 'a seat of great learning that in other countries is called a college, academy, polytechnic, or university, or some other word for which the Thai do not yet have a name' (Pia, 1910). To entice the monarch to invest in his scheme, Pia laid out a savvy economic strategy that involved evicting the current tenants on the land— a group of precarious merchants— and convincing the wealthy temple to construct the school for the state. This would allow the ministry to design an elaborate structure, without having to shoulder the cost of construction. In turn, the temple would collect rent which the school could meet by charging each student a tuition fee of one baht. As something of a polymath, Pia even offered his own architectural recommendations arguing that 'there must be no dissipation of beauty'.

> *The building should not be of an unusual form and should follow the design of a row building (ตึกแถว), though with some small adjustments. All rooms, both on the lower and upper floors, must be the appropriate width and length for teaching and the structure must be long enough to follow the road to which it will run parallel. In the interior, there shall be an extended paved veranda that will function as a passageway. As for construction details such as the thickness of the walls, such issues can be resolved by the recommendations of the treasury department*.
>
> (Pia, 1910)

Chulalongkhorn was convinced by the ambitious proposal and commissioned the building, appointing his Minster for Public Works, *Kromluang* Naresawaruet, as project manager (SKRC, 1995:138). Construction began on 8th October 1910 when the lay-warden, or *maknayok*, of Wat Ratchaburana signed a contract with the builder, a wealthy Sino-Thai timber merchant called Eng Liang Yong. The final blueprint for the structure included fourteen rooms and an elegant gallery based upon the 'lady's colonnade' of the inner-palace. The total budget for the build was set at 30,110 baht, with the plan that the department of education would rent the property from 1st July 1911.

Figure 5. The newly built Suan Kulap Withiyalai with the Teacher's Association positioned at the right (*Bangkok Daily Mail*, 1925:97)

Once completed, the two-storey Suan Kulap Building measured more than eleven meters in width and 193 meters in length, making it the longest building in the kingdom. Its vast façade, complete with 166 windows and 164 doors, held thirty-seven sizable rooms and was one of the architectural marvels of the city.[39] Walking across the colonnade, it was possible to maintain a continuous observation of the school grounds while inspecting each of the classrooms distributed at regular intervals along the way. Across the field, there was an unobstructed view of the Teacher's Association, which would host faculty meetings and provide the school with a well-stocked reading room (Insri, 1985:89). From this period, Suan

[39] For copies of the school's early architectural designs see SKRC, 1995:510-4.

Kulap became the state's unofficial flagship school, a place where foreign dignitaries would be brought to marvel at the accomplishments of Siamese pedagogy. After an elaborate merit-making ceremony that took place on 25th June 1911, the school began welcoming students under its current name of Suan Kulap Withayalai, a title that suggested an institute of high academic standards.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the emergence of several rationalizing technologies at Suan Kulap from 1881, when the school opened as a military academy for the Royal Pages regiment, until 1911, when it relocated to Wat Ratchaburana. Though a secular educational institute modelled on 'Western-style' pedagogics, Suan Kulap initially retained many features common to Siam's pre-modern ecclesiastical tutelage. Students were free to discontinue their studies at any time, progressed at their own speed via informal oral assessments, and were not subject to formalized disciplinary structures. Other features of the new system, such as the scheduled workday, the presence of a salaried instructor, continuous supervision, and a standardized curriculum, represented innovations that were not previously part of local pedagogic practices. In short time, the expanding state's need to control and monitor productive staff and citizenry saw it gradually curb the prerogatives of individual autonomy that had been an important epistemological feature of traditional Buddhist education. Following the introduction of test papers in 1884, the school began to calculate new age restrictions, rates of normalised progression, and minimum attendance that reconstructed local pedagogic practices, and created new relations of power between the child and the state. An inaugural disciplinary code was introduced which sought to codify new behavioural standards. By 1900, the state mandated a formalised hierarchical structure at the school in which each individual was subject to the continual scrutiny of direct superiors. Through the intermediation of teachers, clerks, headmasters, and school inspectors this administrative structure brought the schoolboy under the indirect observation of the centre in a way that had been neither possible nor politically expedient in previous generations. Moreover, the school's status as a 'laboratory school', meant that the Suan Kulap model functioned as a template by which the centre could reform monastic education. When the school was

relocated to its current site in 1911, this new and peculiar form of bureaucratic institutionalism formed the basis of Suan Kulap's structural composition.

In these decades, the growing state needed literate officials capable of expanding and maintaining a hierarchal centralised bureaucracy that funnelled power and resources to the Bangkok monarch. The school also sought to temper the feudal excess of profligate nobles who were attracting a poor reputation in the urbanising city. As Suan Kulap opened up to commoners, the school utilized its administrative structure to implement increasingly restrictive curbs on children's behaviour, including punishments, in an effort to train them for a career within these bureaucratic institutions. In chapter three, the next genealogical chapter, the thesis charts how a new generation of British headmasters augmented the school's institutional culture by introducing crypto-colonial practices, rituals, and symbols designed to create a new kind of political subject; that of the Suan Kulap gentleman. The following chapter illustrates this point by way of an ethnographic analysis of a museum that was established at Suan Kulap in 2002.

Chapter II

Museum

May can be a languid month, even in the city. The sun-bleached heat of April has been tempered by sporadic rains, but the streets remain humid and quiet. Schools are closed, traffic is a little lighter. Many residents of the city are in the provinces, not yet returned from the childhood homes where they celebrated Songkhran. Seeking distraction, I happened one day upon a website that listed some of the city's lesser-known attractions and came across an entry for the Museum of National Education. The image for the museum featured a grand sunlit corridor lined with a polished teak floor and decorative ceramic pots. On the walls of the hallway were hung several large sepia portraits showing a beautiful, dilapidated building. The description read:

> *The museum retains many valuable antiques that relate to the history of Suan Kulap Withayalai. Visitors will learn about the capabilities of Suan Kulap's administrators, the wisdom of its teachers, and the pride and history of its alumni— a history that current students hold as a model for teaching and learning. You will see the beautiful culture of Suan Kulap students; the clear expression of reverence toward teachers; the unity between seniors and juniors; gentlemanliness; and respect for the Long Building*

A number of regulations followed. Visitors to the museum were asked to dress politely and refrain from loud noises or 'causing nuisance' (ก่อความรำคาญ). They must not take photographs, touch the materials on display, nor consume food or drink inside the exhibit.

I walked through the Pak Khlong flower market to get to the museum. Near the Saphan Put Bridge, where the road becomes broader before the river crossing, it is possible to see the towering iron gates that signal the south entrance to Suan Kulap. A row of decorative golden spears run along the middle of the barriers, which are painted royal blue and extend several feet over my head. At the center of each gate, welded to the bars, are two identical devices,

also rendered in iron. They depict the image of an iron quill, an iron pencil, and an iron ruler inserted into the pages of large iron book embossed with the insignia of King Chulalongkhorn. Surrounding the arrangement are four cut-stem iron roses around and a twisted pink banner that reads; 'The Royal School of Suan Kulap' (โรงเรียนหลวงสวนกุหลาบ).

On the other side of the gate, a uniformed guard was napping on a plastic chair with a thin wet cloth covering the upper half of his face. Behind him, I could make out the open expanse of a pleasant well-trimmed field and an elegant neo-classical building painted a pleasant shade of honey-yellow. At the top of the field, behind a row of bare flagpoles, a group of young boys listlessly kicked a plastic ball under the shade of a concrete structure whose unesthetic functionality seemed at odds with the distinguished setting. I gestured to the guard through the gate and asked, 'Is this The Museum of National Education, elder brother?', He stirred and made a gesture in the opposite direction. 'Keep going until you reach the red gates', he said, pointing toward the old market. I had got the wrong building. I thanked him and turned around, walking for a humid-half mile until I reached the red gates he had described. They belonged to the National Museum, an exhibition that was unconnected to Suan Kulap and the collection I wished to visit. I returned to the school and told the guard that I did, in fact, wish to see the Museum of National Education located inside the Suan Kualp campus. He appeared confused, giving little indication that such a place even existed.

The Museum of National Education or, as it is known in the school, the Suan Kulap Museum, attracts few impromptu visitors and almost no Westerners. Most Thais are unaware of its existence. Entry, the guard explained, is reserved for invited guests, since the place is ordinarily locked up and certain utilities— such as lighting and air-conditioning— must be properly prepared before a visit can take place. I gently persisted and was eventually permitted to enter the grounds and sit inside a well-appointed office while the guard enquired if an appropriate chaperone could be located. The room, cooled by air-conditioning, featured a portrait of Bhumibol Adulyadej large enough to cover the entire back wall.

After some minutes, a young man entered. He wore a full uniform—white shirt and black shorts, despite the summer recess— and had a large walkie-talkie clipped to his belt. He introduced himself as Neung, my tour guide. He was, he explained, a final year student

preparing for the upcoming term's welcome events, a series of social gatherings and ceremonies that required extensive planning and rehearsal. Despite his commitments, he indicated that he was happy to take me through the school museum.

We left the office and Neung led me along a stately colonnade that ran the length of the honey-coloured building I had seen through the bars of the gates. The passage was open to the freshly mown playing field on the right and curved slightly to the left, making it impossible to see where the gallery ended. 'This is the longest building in the country', Neung said as we walked along the wooden gangway. He began a monologue, which indicated to me that the tour was now commenced. 'Suan Kulap School was established in 1882 by King Chulalongkhorn and was the first government school in the country. It is considered the original school of the modern national education system. "Suan Kuap" derives from the name of the palace that housed the original school. The school relocated to this larger site in 1911. Today, Suan Kulap teaches 3,600 boys aged 12 -18 and has produced many important figures in Thai history, including seven prime ministers.'

Figure 6: Ground floor colonnade of the Long Building as seen from reception room

Neung stopped at an antique wooden door painted the same shade of pastel green as the slatted wooden shutters that dotted the length of the gallery. Turning the lock, he instructed me to step inside the room, which was dark and oppressively humid. Going ahead, he flicked a series of switches that activated the room's electricity, generating pockets of soft theatrical lighting that illuminated specific objects within the dim space. A row of scuffed wooden chairs and desks began to glow. A standing wooden chalkboard scribbled with mathematical equations. In a large glass case, the light caught the faint copperplate names of a yellowed school register and a leathery classroom textbook dramatically uplit in a little niche. At the back of the scene, the bronze school bell, long dulled with age, was suspended from a wooden bracket. Other curios completed the strange simulation. Against the far wall of the room, a placard on a large desk read: THIS DESK ONCE BELONGED TO HEADMASTER NORMAN SUTTON. It was elaborately carved and had been painted a pale shade of blue with the edges accented in gold. A framed portrait of King Chulalongkhorn dressed in a suit and bowler hat stood atop the desk. On an adjacent wall, another portrait was printed on a large board. The image, which was old and colourless, showed a stern, thin faced man with a neatly trimmed moustache. A small assemblage of items had been arranged beneath his portrait; a small brass bowl, a yellow silk handkerchief, and four bamboo canes.

Before I could inspect these exhibits in any detail, Neung exited the room via a narrow and dimly-lit hallway. It was lined with red velvet drapes and illuminated wooden boards that hung from the ceiling on metal ropes. 'These are the names of graduates who have built greatness and honour for the school', Neung said, pointing to a board on which a list of names appeared under the title 'Air Force'. I cast my eyes over other the boards. They were a roll call of alumni who had found success in their respective fields; medicine, politics, the military, prime ministers, entertainment, royalty, business, police, civil servants, poetry, literature. Turning to Neung, I made an ill-judged joke. Noting the ideological disparity between some of the alumni, I remarked that an almighty row would ensue if these men were to find themselves at such close quarters in real life. Neung disagreed. 'They are Suan Kulap brothers. Even if they did not agree, they would still love one another'.

Figure 7: The alumni gallery, Museum of National Education

We proceeded to another picture gallery, more formal and ostentatious than the previous. It was a portrait room hung with a row of grainy ferrotypes encased in gold frames. Dark-suited Victorians stared out from the freshly painted walls and words like 'Yorkshire', 'Borough Road College', 'E.S Smith', and 'W.G. Johnson' were rendered into Thai script on small copper captions. Neung explained that the portraits depicted Suan Kulap's old headmasters. 'The school wanted students to become English gentleman, so they got English headmasters', he explained. In 1939, the British subjects abruptly disappear, with the white-jacketed A.C. Churchill being the final Westerner to be featured in the gallery. From here the names are all Thai and the costumes more militaristic. By the 1970s, the images burst to colourful life, replaced by studio-produced shots of men wearing the sashed uniform of the modern Thai

bureaucrat. I notice that from the years 1992-1995, the school was administered by a female principal called Sommay Wathanasiri.

After the gallery, Neung took me to a small, square room in which great care had been taken to preserve the building's original features. The carved door lintels and dark teak floor were illuminated in a pool of soft light. It was quieter than the other exhibits, far away from the busy sounds of the street. On the far wall, a large backlit portrait showed an elderly man dressed in elaborate ceremonial uniform. Beside the image, a mannequin had been dressed in a simple grey tunic and placed behind a protective glass case. It was accompanied by a photograph of the same old man wearing the tunic and shaking hands with another man at what looked like a political conference. Four more portraits of the same individual were hung around the room. About the space were dotted glass-topped cabinets contained books and pamphlets with stately titles like *Development Philosophy: A New Theory According to His Majesties Activities; His Majesty is the Teacher of the Land; To Be Born Means You Must Repay the Nation*. 'This is the honour room of Prem Tinsulanont', Neung said. 'It inspires good morals in students. Prem is a true Suan Kulap gentleman; a leader who loves his friends, sacrifices for his country, and honours his teachers. We call him Uncle Prem.'

Figure 8: The Honour Room of Prem Tinsulanont, Museum of National Education

I move about the room. Prem would live for another year after my visit to the museum, yet the space already felt like a reliquary. Materials from his life— a pen, a tunic— had been sequestered, like totemic objects, behind sheets of clear glass. Captions eulogized Prem's professional achievements and personal qualities of honesty, integrity and morality. There were images of Prem the statesman, looking resolute in military dress, but also intimate images taken from his domestic life, a photograph of him sitting on an armchair in a Suan Kulap jersey looking enervated and frail.

It was time to move on. That day Neung took me round fourteen rooms spread over nearly a thousand square meters. His knowledge of the exhibits was extensive and impressive. He told me about the school's events and sporting achievements, showed me the Suan Kulap prize room, and the museum's meticulously constructed dioramas. At the end of the tour, he escorted me back down the long gallery to the school's front entrance, where I thanked him for his help before stepping out onto the cracked pavement of the Tri Petch road.

Principal Sommay Wathansiri and the creation of the Suan Kulap Museum

It took the work of several intermediaries to schedule an appointment with Ajarn Sommay Wathansiri, the former headmistress who created The Museum of National Education. Now in her eighties, Ajarn Sommay no longer visits the campus as regularly as she once did, though she still commits large portions of her day to Suan Kulap and her work with the government. Ajarn Sommay is considered an official *khlang samong,* or 'repository of knowledge', and provides consultation on issues involving education, culture, and traditions for the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council. She also sits as an associate judge for the Youth and Family Court of Nonthaburi. At other times, she drives about the city in her sedan to supervise the management of *The Association of Former Suan Kulap Teachers*, an organization she established in the 1990s. She arrived for our meeting in the school library carrying a tote bag full of documents related to ongoing Suan Kulap projects. How does she manage such productivity?, I enquire. She looks at me and lays a thick folder on the desk 'You can't retire from life', she says.

Ajarn Sommay emanates competence. She is warm, personable, and candid—prone to issuing decisive no-nonsense statements. Her policy towards troublesome teachers is clear—'Get rid

of them! Let them ruin the atmosphere at some other school!' Problem students also get short shrift: 'we don't want selfish people here!' She recently suffered a serious illness and relates the facts of the matter in the same phlegmatic tone she reserves for the discussion of school matters. To hear it, her convalescence was never in doubt—another administrative complication to be quietly dispatched. Within the school, she commands an affection and respect that borders on adoration. She took me to visit the Kulap Petch room— a campus facility she established to provide specialist tuition to talented students— where every teacher and student dropped their conversations and performed a reverential *wai*. Walking around campus, I felt I was with a visiting dignitary. One gets the impression that she is beloved.

Ajarn Sommay expresses a deep and unwavering commitment to Suan Kulap that she believes is inextricably linked to her personal history. She credits the school with providing her the opportunity to 'truly act in this world' and forge a successful bureaucratic career. She takes her role as a teacher with great solemnity. For Ajarn Sommay, the fate of the kingdom is determined by the quality and commitment of its teachers. It is thus incumbent upon all educators to pursue their careers 'as though the very nation is at stake' (บ้านเมืองมาเป็นเดิมพันนั่นเอง). Those teaching at Suan Kulap must be held to even higher standards since the school remains 'duty-bound to provide quality children for the nation's use according to the wishes of his majesty'. On August 8th 1992, in her first faculty meeting as headmistress, Ajarn Sommay introduced a nine-point 'policy of teaching practice' to ensure that these lofty standards were always met. Teachers were required to 'be loyal to Suan Kulap' and 'perform their duties with sacrifice, seriousness and sincerity'. They were to promote unity between juniors and seniors by 'respecting seniority'. They had to promise not to 'reveal school secrets'.[40]

Ajarn Sommay's early life was not easy. At the age of thirteen she moved from her parent's home in rural Saraburi to attend a newly-opened girl's school in the provincial capital. Since little money could be spared for their daughter's education, it was decided that Sommay would lodge with an older cousin in town and provide household labour in lieu of rent. Study

[40] This final regulation appears to promote a general culture of confidentiality, of localized cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 2016), within the school rather than supress any particular secret. For full list of Ajarn's nine-point policy, enacted in 8th October 1992, see appendix v.

times were limited to the early morning, when Sommay was charged with lighting the fire. Sommay could sometimes go days without food. 'I got used to hunger', she laughed, 'but at lunch time I avoided groups who would gather to eat together. I had no lunch money and I didn't want to see people eating and laughing, so I would do something to distract myself'.

During her time at the school, Sommay's lost her mother to a sudden illness and her father remarried and moved away. Meanwhile, Sommay had passed the entrance examination for Chulalongkhorn University, but lacked the funds for tuition fees and uniforms costs. In search of a patron, she turned to the wife of Saraburi's governor who ran an organization called The Women's Culture Club, an association that awarded academic scholarships to promising girls. To receive the funds, Sommay agreed to work for two years at a local school in Saraburi after her graduation. The money was limited. Sommay walked for miles each day because she couldn't afford the bus fare and did not attend her graduation for want of a dress. Nevertheless, she graduated with a degree in science in 1961. 'I was helped by so many people who weren't even family', she says of this period in her life.

Two years later, with her commitments to The Women's Culture Club fulfilled, Sommay entered Suan Kulap as an apprentice science teacher and was immediately struck by the sense of community at the campus.

> *The lab equipment was as good as the chemistry department at Chulalongkhorn University. The library was stacked with every kind of book you could imagine and full of students from six in the morning until evening. I was truly impressed with the memorial room which told the history of the school by celebrating successful pupils. I saw this was a good thing. It was a motivator for students and teachers to try to do good things so that the great legacy of the school could be continued. It was always open and everyone would drop by when they passed. They never tired of it. It created an atmosphere that you felt at the school. Something in the way teachers interacted with pupils both in the classroom and outside. Everyone was friendly, warm and responsible*.

Sommay proved an effective and trustworthy employee. When her apprenticeship ended, she was hired as a homeroom teacher, then year head, and, finally, head of department. As a teacher, she was empathetic but strict. She once caned an entire class after nobody confessed to startling

a new teacher by placing a small snake inside her chalk box. One day, a student who had been absent for some weeks approached Ajarn Sommay with a new-born baby in his arms and asked for her help, telling her that he would have to leave the school to care for the infant. Sommay convinced the boy to stay and ensured his baby received sufficient provision throughout his studies.

In the early 1970s, Sommay noticed a shift in the Suan Kulap community. Thailand was experiencing significant political instability. In December 1972, an OSK ('old Suan Kulap') student called Thirayuth Boonmee mobilized The National Student Centre of Thailand (NSCT) to oppose the corrupt government of Thanom Kittikachorn, a military dictator who had dissolved parliament by staging a coup against his own government. By June 1973, the government had closed universities and publicly claimed demonstrators were manipulated by communists (Prizzia and Narong, 1975:23-30; Phongpaichit and Baker, 2014:186). As tensions grew, it was agreed in a meeting at the Interior Ministry that 'two percent of the student population' should be 'sacrificed for the survival of the country' (quoted in Phongpaichit and Baker, 2014:186).

Ajarn Sommay saw the consequences of these developments manifest inside the school gates. Students became involved in political activities that deeply concerned the school administration, who adopted a strategy of distraction. As protests raged in June 1973, Ajarn Sommany and her colleagues hastily organized a 'clean-up week' in which students planted trees and received prizes for the neatest classrooms. The following month, the school received funds from Gen. Narong Kittikachorn,[41] the OSK son of Prime Minister Thanom, to hold a three-day training camp in Chonburi province. In the words of Headmaster Suwan Chansom, the training camp involved various physical and group-building exercises designed to 'train and adjust the personality of pupils' and 'lead [them] away from the changing political situation' (SKRC, 1995:445). In its first year, it was considered a great success in

[41] Widely believed to inherit his father's power, Narong was a hot-tempered and unpopular political figure who abhorred democratic scrutiny. He regularly referred to students as 'larvae' and stifled critical media (Praphansak, 2013:138). According to Thirayuth, 'any editor that printed real news wound up chained in Narong's dungeon' (Thirayuth Boonmee, 2013:95). He was especially disliked by the students of Suan Kulap's close neighbor, Pho Chang Art Academy, who believed Narong had (unsuccessfully) lobbied for the removal of their school so that the Suan Kulap Association could use the site for their new offices (Phadung, 2009).

soothing the disharmonious pupil-teacher relations and continues to be held annually to this day.

Four months later, in October 1973, external events caused the faculty to lose control of the situation. Thirayuth and twelve other activists were arrested and denounced by Deputy Prime Minister Prapas for plotting to overthrow the government. On the morning of 12th October, pupils arrived at Suan Kulap to find the doors and walls of the school daubed with chalked instructions directing them to join the 50,000 strong protests being held at Thammasat University, located a twenty-five-minute walk from the campus (*Student Committee of Suan Kulap Withayalai*, 1974:251). In a bid to dissuade students, Headmaster Suwan called an emergency assembly of older years, informing them that they were still children in the eyes of the law and insufficiently responsible to join the demonstrations. The head boys held their own meeting, during which they voted unanimously to join the protests later that evening, despite an angry interruption from Suwan (*Suan Kulap Student Committee*, 1974: 251-2). The following day, the state relented and agreed to promulgate a permanent constitution, though soon after perpetrated a violent crack-down on demonstrators that resulted in 77 deaths. In the public backlash, Thanom and Narong relinquished power and fled the country.

The resulting 'democracy era' unleashed a surge of political activity that left Suan Kulap dangerously polarized.[42] In a climate of increased activism, some pupils pushed for radical educational reform, while their less progressive pupils began to resent the disruption to school life. As these two groups moved further apart, their ideological differences became hostile. A lightning rod for these contentions came in June 1974, when Suan Kulap's Thai Language Club arranged an exhibition that argued Thai literature was an instrument of ruling oppression that did not belong to the people. Amid strong disapproval, during which some club members were accused of trying to destroy the monarchy, the exhibition was cancelled and the Thai Language club split into two ideological factions (*Suan Kualp Student Committee*, 1974). In response, Headmaster Suwan Chansom chose to make Ajarn Sommay, and another senior administrator, a 'governor' who would help him lead the school through the challenging period. Together the triumvirate established tighter controls on club activities deciding, at a meeting on July 11th 1974, that a group of 'consulting teachers' would have final

[42] For an analyses of this political polarization at the national level see Anderson, 1977 and Prajak, 2006.

approval on all club positions and could repress any activity with the potential to 'debase the reputation of the school' (*Consulting Teacher Committee*, 1974). Arguing that the new rules were backward and dictatorial, a student committee sent a letter to Sommay and her colleagues stating their intention to oppose the measures. On 19th July, a meeting with pupils ended when a teacher walked out after banging his desk in frustration. The following day, the campus was filled with posters accusing leftist pupils of violence towards teachers (*Suan Kulap Student Committee*, 1974:323).

Two months later, the febrile atmosphere on campus was exacerbated when a group of leftist final year students produced a 300-page publication called *Suek* (ศึก) in place of the usual Suan Kulap yearbook. Rather than the usual collections of memories, stories, and poems, *Suek* contained nineteen strident essays with titles such as 'Consulting Teachers: A Source of Great Tyranny' and 'The Role of Education in Oppression and Misdirection'. *Suek* was an inflammatory polemic that contained public criticism of the school's administration and individual faculty members. In one essay, it was claimed that staff conspired to distract pupils from the ongoing protests at the Ministry of Education by arranging an event called the 'Day of the Blossoming Rose' (วันดอกกุหลาบาน) in which the student body were encouraged to drink alcohol, smoke, and flirt with invited female guests. One teacher was accused of ordering pupils to produce the posters that had denounced leftist students. In reaction to the publication, a group of antagonistic students held a book burning on the school field and physically attacked some of their peers.[43] According to Sommay, the school was heavily monitored by security agencies at this period and subject to unannounced inspections from the Ministry of Education.

After the horrifying spectacle of the student massacre at Thammasat on October 6th 1976, Ajarn Sommay found herself caught between her students and a paranoid state. She discovered during this period that her name had been added to a list of suspicious individuals compiled by The Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), a military division that suppressed leftist 'subversion' through paramilitary violence and psychological operations (Puangthong, 2017). Some months earlier, she had allowed several of her *matayom* four

[43] According to a banned student booklet, these attacks were co-ordinated by an 'administrative teacher' at Suan Kulap who 'relied on students to use power as an instrument of suppression' (*Buddhist Theology and Culture Group of Suan Kulap Withayalai*, 1975:x)

students to accompany her to a monthly meeting at the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology so that the pupils could suggest their own ideas for reform of the outdated chemistry syllabus. The state, believing the petition to be ideologically motivated, sent operatives to obtain the name of each student in the party. Knowing that at least one of the boys had played a role in earlier uprisings, Ajarn Sommay refused to comply. Later that year, the ministry transferred Sommay to Sribunyanin, a failing secondary school further down the river where she was charged with reforming the institution as the school's first headmistress.

After thirteen years at Suan Kulap, Ajarn Sommay now found herself responsible for a school that had none of the prestige of her former posting. Staff were demoralized and work-shy, attending classes only sporadically. Across the road, the school's relationship with its temple had become so acrimonious that the Abbot was trying to build a large wall that would separate the two buildings. The posting was also dangerous. Rival gangs from the nearby vocational college fought violent confrontations down the school's narrow sideroad. Gunfire was common. From the teacher's lounge window overlooking the street, Ajarn Sommay was able to see the pools of blood that were left behind after each skirmish. Sometimes strange men would enter the school to inject themselves or sell drugs to the children. Early in her tenure, a man on a motorcycle rode into the campus and kidnapped a pupil.

Seeing only indiscipline, disorder, and the breakdown of hierarchy, Ajarn Sommay immediately set to work, using her experience at Suan Kulap to construct a new institutional culture at the school. Her first move was to repair the broken relationship with the temple. She approached the abbot, promising him that the two institutions should work together to tackle the problems. If he was not satisfied after six months, she would request her own transfer. Next, she arranged for a daily boat collection that would allow students to enter and leave the school from the riverbank, without risking a journey down the dangerous side road. Regular urine tests allowed Sommay to identify pupils who required medical help for their addictions. Recovering drug users and doctors from Kluay Nam Thai hospital were invited to present their experiences of drug abuse to students and parents. Teaching standards were also raised, with substandard staff members swiftly moved on; 'This was unacceptable', Ajarn Sommay recounted with absolute seriousness.

There was resistance from some quarters. Sommay's management style upset a handful of the school's original teachers and students, who lobbied for her removal or simply left. To account for the drop in numbers, she was summoned to the Ministry of Education where the Director-General for public education, Dr. Aekwit na Talang, listened patiently while Ajarn Sommay explained the problems she faced. Not long after this meeting, on a hot April afternoon, a young man doused Ajarn Sommay's car in petrol and set it ablaze. In response, Sommay turned to a 'powerful gentleman' for answers and learned that the arsonist was a hitman who had been hired to execute the headmaster of Sribunyanin. After discovering that the target was a woman, the assassin decided to call off the murder and settle for arson. Sommay used her contact to arrange a sit-down with the gunman, speaking to him for forty-five minutes about her educational philosophy and priorities as a school director. She told him:

> *I understand what you did. You are doing what your career demands. And so am I. But my career involves looking after more than three thousand lives, and if one of those three thousand lives belongs to your child, I will look after them. When I look after them it is not for a few days or until they do something wrong and are asked to leave. I need to care for them until some quality is born within them.*

At the end of their conference, the man offered Ajarn Sommay personal security and for the following six years arranged for her car to be trailed by a protective motorbike whenever she left her home. In 1983, Sribunyanin received the King's School of Excellence Award and Ajarn Sommay felt her work was done. 'I wanted to go but it turned out the monks, the parents and the neighbours didn't want me to, so I asked for bureaucratic leave to study a master's degree, even though I was 40 years old!', she laughed.

Ajarn Sommay finally returned to Suan Kulap Withayalai in the second semester of 1992, more than sixteen years after being transferred by the ministry. This time she was headmistress, the first in the school's history with three years to make her administrative changes before she reached the age of mandatory retirement. Excited to begin, she compared the experience to a homecoming, like 'coming back after completing one's studies and

knowing what's what'. In one of her first days at the school, she received a handwritten letter from former Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanont asking her to 'please look after the school'— a message with a subtle yet unmistakable meaning.

After a decade of prosperity under the Premocracy, Suan Kulap was in the middle of an institutional crisis. Network monarchy had managed to oust the democratically elected Chatichai Choonhavan, a fantastically corrupt politician who marginalized Prem's network, and install Anand Panyarachun, a so-called 'liberal-conservative' whose new policies were unpopular at the school (Christensen, 1990:182; Connors, 2003:96). Parents and alumni were particularly dismayed by Anand's National Education Development Plan (1992–1996), which stipulating that government funded schools such as Suan Kulap would be required to draw 60% of pupil intake from untested local children. Fearing that the plan would cause the school to 'lose its quality' (SKRC, 1995:256) stakeholders began hosting fretful, angry meetings on campus. One alumnus, now a successful educator, organized a protest march on the Ministry of Education with a group of fellow senior students who were convinced that the policy would lead to a sharp decline in the school's academic and behavioral standards.

Exacerbating these anxieties was a sense of the school's fading political influence. Suan Kulap had traditionally enjoyed an advantageous association with the Ministry of Education, partly because of historical origins and the fact that so many of its bureaucrats had attended the school.[44] Now that relationship seemed to be deteriorating. In the last year, the Ministry had unilaterally allowed two under-performing mixed schools within the Bangkok metropolitan region to adopt the name 'Suan Kulap', presumably as a means to rehabilitate their poor public image.[45] This prompted concerns that the school's closely guarded reputation would be damaged by association with unknown institutions. Many alumni deeply resented that the graduates of these schools were calling themselves 'old Suan Kulap', or OSK. Additionally, the educational reforms of 1992 heralded the end of a long-standing tradition in which the principalship of the school was given to an OSK who understood the distinct culture of Suan Kulap. Between 1937- 1991, an alumnus-headmaster had governed Suan Kulap for all but

[44] Se Appendix I for a list of OSK ministers for education.

[45] Over the next xx years, the Ministry woudl extend the Suan Kulap franchise to futher seven schools. See appendix VI for a full list of the Suan Kulap network schools.

seven years. This arrangement ended with the new reforms. When Ajarn Sommay's predecessor, Suthi Pengphan, retired in 1992 he became the school's last old boy headmaster. Also retiring in 1992 were two former old boy headmasters, Suwan Chansom (1970 – 1976) and Samreung Nilpradit (1979 –1983), who had held significant clout within the ministry. For their joint retirement, the school booked out the Bangkok Convention Centre and hosted the biggest send-off it had ever organized. But a sense of uncertainty and anxiety about the future was palpable behind the celebrations. Even the physical structure of the school seemed to be in decline. Photographs from this period show the walls of the eighty-year-old Long Building cracked and bowed with an unsightly rot creeping upwards through the brickwork, fracturing the features of the once beautiful edifice.

As at Sribunyanin, Ajarn Sommay immediately set to work. In her first teacher's assembly on the 8th October 1992, she announced her intention to commission a detailed survey of the school that would document the institution's faults, challenges, wants, and needs. These findings would be ranked according to their relative importance and urgency, and formulated into a fully costed plan to be completed before her retirement in 1995. Her most pressing concern, apart from the school's physical deterioration, was to restore and rebuild the distinct Suan Kulap culture she had encountered as a sixteen-year-old apprentice in 1963. She invited parents to attend a seminar aimed at 'finding ways to prevent the decline of student quality' (SKRC, 1995:289). It was decided in this session that students needed to be immersed in a school culture that 'builds beauty and goodness for young people within the framework of ongoing national development'. The success of this project, a report suggests, depended on 'an effort to utilize procedures that steadily build the values of Suan Kulap-ness'— a new term that would become ubiquitous during Ajarn Sommay's tenure (SKRC, 1995:289).

The drive to inculcate Suan Kualp-ness within the student body began with the instigation of an ambitious research project entitled *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades*. Using funding from wealthy alumni, Ajarn Sommay established a committee of forty investigators, largely comprised of retired and active teachers, tasked with producing a comprehensive institutional history of Suan Kulap. After three years (1992-1995) of conducting interviews and collating historical documents, the committee produced a 550-page report composed of old examinations papers, architectural blueprints, speech transcripts, alumni lists, and

bureaucratic correspondence. As in an academic study, these materials were structured by a series of research objectives and a cohesive theoretical framework, described as a 'historical approach with analytical description' (วิธีการทางประวัติศาสตร์ และนำเสนองแบบพรรณาวิเคราะห์).

The bulk of the compendium is given over to a decade-by-decade account of the school's historical development. This begins with a brief description of the educational systems of the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods, before a more detailed discussion of the circumstances surrounding the school's establishment in the late nineteenth century. Much of what follows adheres closely to what Thongchai (2001:24) calls 'the royal-nationalist ideology of Thai history'. The monarchy is credited with establishing modern education as part of a benevolent sacrifice to the Thai people. Periods of political instability are attributed to the deleterious effects of modernisation and foreign doctrines. The volume suggests, for instance, that the complex ideological struggles of the 1970s were caused by 'the problem of encroaching American culture and new hippy values' (SKRC, 1995:255). It explains that people began to 'favor a lifestyle free from order with no interest in the family'; they began to 'take tranquilizing drugs for the purpose of recreation and forgetting one's personal problems' (SKRC 1995:256). The effects on the lower classes were deemed to be particularly pernicious. 'American military personnel would live extravagantly, leading to an increase in bars and massage parlours which relied on the services of rural girls. In this era, Thai society became a society of deceit and Bangkok a heaven for rural people. The beautiful culture was destroyed' (SKRC, 1995:256). With traditional values eradicated, the study continues, pupils began to express 'extreme ideas and would not listen to instructions like past students' (SKRC, 1995:272). 'Some groups', the report continues, 'received certain notions from university elders who wanted society to improve quickly and this led to the problems that caused the 6th October incident' (SKRC, 1995:272).[46]

After these historical sections, *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades* dedicates itself to exploring the conceptual values of Suan Kualp-ness and the various ways it can be 'instilled' (หล่อหลอมให้เกิด) within the student body (SKRC, 1995:457). The results of a survey — created by a 'special expert' and completed by a sample of 550 students, teachers, alumni, parents,

[46] 'The October 6th incident' (เหตุการณ์ 6 ตุลา) is a common euphemism for the 'unsayable' (see Thongchai, 2020) and unresolved national trauma of the Thammasat massacre.

and retired employees— propose that Suan Kulap-ness is engendered by seven interconnected elements. These are: the school's origins; its long history; 'sacred objects' (สิ่งศักดิ์สิทธ์ประจำโรงเรียน); emblematic buildings; signs and symbols; activities and traditions; and moral attributes.[47] From this final category, the moral attributes of Suan Kulap-ness are further deconstructed into seven constituent components. These are: respect and trust between juniors and seniors; love, unity and harmony; leadership in society; sacrifice and perseverance; initiative; and orderly, courteous manners.

The study concludes by presenting as the most prominent Suan Kulap attribute the quality of *katanyu* (กตัญญู), a word that implies 'gratitude', 'cognition of benevolence', 'deference', 'dutifulness', and 'reciprocation toward elders'. The report claims that *katanyu* 'runs through the blood of every Suan Kulap body, preparing us to sacrifice for the institution and society' (SKRC, 1995:504). This is supported by a quotation from Prem's writings which observe that '*katanyu* is a superb and beautiful quality inherited among us Suan Kulap alumni…that allows us to succeed, enjoy prosperity and always survive crises…it is the mark of a good man' (SKRC, 1995:504).

The work to define and propagate 'Suan Kulap-ness' at this time shares several features in common with an ambitious ideological project orchestrated at the national level during the Prem administration throughout the 1980s. In *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand*, Connors (2003) documents the process, beginning in the late 1970s, by which various state actors, including the National Security Council (NSC) and Prime Minister's office, sought to manufacture a national ideology that would inoculate the populace against competing political doctrines. In documents circulated by the NSC during this period, Connors reveals that security agents charged with monitoring political protests had become concerned that the existing ideology of nation, religion, and king— a doctrine rooted in the Victorian-style nationalism of Rama VI— failed to galvanize a modern and disillusioned population. Official memos fret that the ideology had lost its power to 'stimulate' subjects who were 'confused, anxious, and without a common standpoint' (Prime Minister's Office, 1983:20-1 quoted in Connors, 2003:137). Such people, the document warns, were vulnerable targets to Communism, an 'opposition that has a rigid and stimulating ideology that will hegemonize

[47] See appendix IV for full results of survey.

the thinking of the people, before our side' (Prime Minister's Office, 1983:20-1 quoted in Connors, 2003:137:21).

To assemble a broader, more compelling national ideology, Connors notes, the state relied upon a report submitted by Professor Kramol Thongthammachart, a Suan Kulap alumnus who was now Dean of Political Science at Chulalongkhorn University. Noting that ideology is something that can be created, changed, and inculcated, Kramol proposed that the state return to a more conscious and creative cultural propagation on a par with modern political doctrines such as fascism and communism, a strategy that had been employed in the 1930s and 1940s, when the playwright and bureaucrat Luang Wichitwathakan had developed the bellicose concept of Thainess (ความเป็นไทย) (Kramol and Sippanon, 1983:11; see also Barmé, 1993). Kramol specifically recommended the state harness social and political institutions towards ideological ends, ensuring that this process is properly supervised for the effective and unified transmission of ideas. As client of Prem's Suan Kulap network, Kramol sat as an executive member on the newly founded National Identity Board, a body that sought to propagate and police the ideological doctrine of 'Thai-ness'. This board separated the concept of Thai-ness into seven constituent elements; the people, the territory, sovereignty and independence, government and administration, religion, monarch, culture and pride.

After defining Suan Kulapness, Ajarn Sommay began to address the school's neglected infrastructure. The old meeting hall, a decrepit Romanesque building that once hosted assemblies, lectures, and drama performances, was torn down and in its place built the modern Suan Kulap Memorial Building, a six-story development of administrative offices, meeting spaces and, on the top floor, a great hall that could accommodate 2,000 people. The building was officially opened by Princess Sirindhorn on 8th March 1995 in a lavish ceremony in which hundreds of handsomely printed copies of *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades* were sold to alumni. Restoring the Long Building was a more delicate operation, though one that Ajarn Sommay was determined to achieve. 'The Long Building built people, and those people built the nation', she said, before reminding me that King Chulalongkorn himself had come to inspect the nearly completed structure shortly before his death in 1910. The Prem administration has listed the Long Building as a 'national heritage building' in 1987, so Sommay was required to liaise closely with both the Ministry of Culture's Fine Arts

Department, the Ministry of Education, and the alumni association during the renovation. Expert craftsmen and architects were drafted to restore the structure, which was completed in 1995 at a cost of 136 million baht to the state. Such costs were necessary as Ajarn Sommay planned to convert the entire lower floor of the Long Building into an extravagant museum. In *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades*, she outlines her ambitious plan for the space:

> *Love and unity have brought the Suan Kulap people together, allowed us to pool resources and repair the Long Building so that we may create a Museum of National Education, which represents the beautiful future of the pink and blue people. We have come together to construct an important piece of historical architecture. We have collated the wisdom of Suan Kulap gentlemen, the men who created Thai education so that the people could live their lives beautifully and equally in a civilized country (อารยประเทศ). This is the next stage in the twelfth decade of Suan Kulap.*
>
> (SKRC, 1995:502)

It took another seven years after the publication of *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades* to complete the Museum of National Education. When it was officially opened on March 8th 2002, each of the museum's fourteen rooms was dedicated to a particular aspect of Suan Kulapness that had been identified by Sommay's research committee. Intricate dioramas were constructed to showcase Suan Kulap 'activities and traditions', including a model classroom that contained a small plastic student bowing at his teacher's feet. Another tableau simulated a packed football stadium where hundreds of pupils wearing pink and blue jerseys execute a perfectly syncopated 'card stunt'. To document the school's collective symbols and sacred objects, a vivid exhibition charted the genesis of the Suan Kulap house colours, its uniform, songs, crests, and guardian spirits—with detailed expositions of their various meanings and significance. The more ephemeral characteristics of school culture, such as the moral attributes of Suan Kulapness, were represented in exhibitions such as the alumni gallery and the Prem room. In these spaces, selected figures from Suan Kulap history were presented as moral exemplars for students to emulate. Finally, the museum celebrated the school's physical structure in a striking exhibition that culminates in a room-sized mimesis of the Long Building itself— a scaled-down replication of the structure's distinct façade complete with

miniature iron gates and Doric columns. Within this room an even smaller representation of the Long Building is encased within a large glass cabinet, with each of the structure's architectural features rendered to an accurate scale. To manage the museum, the school hired a permanent on-site curator called Nopmaneenim Thongthammachart, a distant relative of Professor Kramol.

The Museum as Reliquary

In *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Hooper-Greenhill (1992:172) observes that there is no 'essential' form for the museum and that materials are selected, confined, and organised in relation to local techniques and epistemological frameworks. In Thailand, the specific historical emergence of the museum combines with pre-modern political technologies to inform the structure of such sites and the functions they are expected to fulfil. In Siam, the first adoption of museum technologies emerged as the local elite sought to elevate it status in the eyes of the world by presenting an exhibition at the 1867 World's Fair (Thongchai, 2000). At significant cost, further exhibitions were created for international fairs in Paris (1889 and 1900), Chicago (1893), St Louis (1904), and Turin (1911) (Thongchai, 2000:541), while the Frenchman Amédée Gréhan was engaged to produce a three-volume compendium of Siam that would render the kingdom's history, religion, and government legible to a European audience. Thus, the exhibition emerged as an important mechanism by which the Thai centre orchestrated a national image through which they could accrue political legitimacy in the metropole.

In reference to the experiences of Egypt, Mitchell observes that local elites who sought to engage with the spectacle of the World's Fair were obliged to engage with new modes of representation and simulation that were often at odds with local epistemologies and subject positions. The Enlightenment drive to categorize, classify and order the world, he argues, meant that local actors had to arrange metaphysical concepts like history, cultural practice, and progress in 'objective form' (Mitchell, 1988:33). Complex cosmologies and ways of existence had to 'become readable, like a book' (Mitchell, 1988:33) so that the Other could be 'ordered up, put into circulation, and consumed' (1988:168). Mitchell's startling proposal is that back in Egypt, the peculiar logic of the exhibit came to increasingly structure the world beyond the expo.

> *'Everywhere one went in the modern world, 'things' seemed more and more to be built, arranged, handled or consumed as 'signs of something further'. A certain street, a particular view, a book, an advertisement or a commodity appeared as a mere object or arrangement that somehow always stood, as in an exhibition, for some more original idea or experience. The arrangement of buildings seemed to express the institutions and authority of a political power…Life was more and more lived as though the world itself were an exhibition'.* (Mitchell, 1988:172)

This 'world-as-exhibition' constructed an entire realm of meaning and truth that seemed to stand mysteriously apart from the world's material domain. Never before had the moral and political order been conceived in terms of a fixed and mechanical framework, as though subject to the same universal laws that govern the natural world (1988:173). The certainty of this conceptual order, moreover, was not merely *reflected* in the careful layout, order and simulation of the exhibition— the exhibition was the very means of its *production*. The result of this 'mysterious political metaphysics' (Mitchell, 1988: 131) was what Mitchell terms 'the strange novelty of modern subjectivity' (1988:59) that entailed certain beliefs about structure, order and progress.

As countries became more adept at manipulating the technology of the exhibit, first in Europe and eventually everywhere, Perzios (1996:170) claims that the museum became a means for nations, and eventually institutions, to fabricate and maintain their own ideologies of modernization. In Thailand, the exhibits created for the World's Fair were afterwards displayed to a domestic audience. In 1912, Suan Kulap's expansive playing field began hosting the Arts, Crafts, and Commerce Fair (งานศิลปหัตถกรรม), the kingdom's largest annual exhibition, in which students and members of the public from around the country submitted designs, handiworks, and performances for display and trade. In 1920, the Minister for Education, Suan Kulap alumnus *Chao Phraya* Thammasakmontri, defended the substantial costs of the Suan Kulap fair by arguing that it not only promoted trade but demonstrated the 'nation's beautiful progress' (SKRC, 1995:165). In 1926, as the monarchy found its position threatened by a nascent middle class, King Prajahipok used the technology of exhibition to inaugurate a National Museum that presented a story of royalist nationalism (Thongchai,

2000:545). For many years, the National Museum took possession of *luang por suan kulap*, the Buddha idol that Chulalongkhorn commissioned for the school in 1882 (SKRC, 1995:349). This was used to demonstrate the beneficence of the king in providing the nation with modern education.

Yet the process of transculturation is rarely merely imitative and usually involves a process of transformation and reinterpretation. Despite the colonial provenance of exhibitions, at Suan Kulap the mechanisms of the museum—naming, dating, interpreting, labelling— are deployed in conjunction with much older political technologies, such as local techniques of relic production. One of the most striking features of the Suan Kulap museum, for instance, is that several ostensibly secular items in the collection are presented within a local aesthetics of consecration that renders the materials as both historically significant and worthy of devotional attention. In one exhibit, for instance, the viewer is invited to gaze upon several portraits of the Thai Royal family. These images are exhibited in thick gold frames, mounted on taffeta embellishments and surrounded by traditional instruments of worship such as flowers and *phan phum* (พานพุ่ม). Such an arrangement indicates that these representations are venerable and infused with the charisma of their subject. Visitors to the museum, who are already following the institution's behavioural and sartorial guidelines, are required to observe additional codes of bodily practice, such as genuflection, when interacting with these materials. This introduces the prospect of taboo and heightens the aura of religious and aesthetic spirituality. In close proximity to the royal portraiture, several objects containing images of the school's notable alumni are presented within a similar *mis-en*-scène.[48] Their photographs, much smaller than the adjacent portrait of Queen Soawapa, are enframed in similar gold casings with the same back-drop of gold and green taffeta. Items of worship are placed in the space between the royal and alumni portraits suggesting an unbroken genealogy between the school's venerable alumni and the repository of royal power.

[48] See figure 9

Figure 9: Portrait of Queen Soawapha (left) presented beside images of prominent alumni (right).

This visual technique is echoed in the Headmaster's Gallery, where devotional flowers are placed below the sculpted busts and gold-framed portraits of previous Headmasters. On each portrait, the subject is presented within a gold oval frame with biographical information inscribed below. This arrangement recalls representations of individuals with extraordinary wisdom and charismatic powers such as *arahants*, or sainted mendicants, in sacred spaces such as temples.[49]

[49] See figure 10

Figure 1-: Composition of 'The Hall of 29 Arahants', Museum for Sustainable Buddhism, Bangkok (above) in comparison to the 'Gallery Hall of Headmasters', Suan Kulap Museum (below).

In other exhibits, secular objects relating to the school's past are placed in proximity to materials that imply sanctity. Headmaster Norman Sutton's great writing desk, which has been gilded in gold, has a *pan phum* placed on its top alongside a portrait of King Chulalongkhorn. Elsewhere, four bamboo canes once belonging to *Luang* Seksunthorn, an austere disciplinarian from the school's past, are mounted on a gold podium covered by a

golden silk cloth, with three overhead spotlights illuminating the display.[50] An image of their owner's face is situated behind and above the canes, in a presentation that is redolent of how Buddhist relics are displayed in temples throughout the kingdom.[51] Unlike the staging of Buddhist relics, which are usually displayed wordlessly or with minimal inscription, the *Luang* Seksunthorn exhibit is accompanied by an extensive label which fixes the object within a linear frame of reference. The viewer is told that 'canes build ministers' and that many of *Luang* Seksunthorn's former pupils would not have achieved success without the virtues and energies acquired from the ascetic practices he imposed. The canes are presented as 'quasi-objects'— Serres' (1982:225) term for an item that 'marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject' (Serres, 1982:225). Like the *arahant*, the vital energy and charism of the old master is transmitted within the objects, which are presented as relics and handled with great care (Tambiah, 1984:335)

Figure 11: Comparative staging of *Luang* Sek exhibit, Suan Kulap Musuem (right image) and the mineral relics of Buddhasdasa at Wat Santitham (left), Chiang Mai

[50] The placing of secular objects on golden pedestals has been noted elsewhere in Thai political history. When the People's Party sought to cement their authority after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932, they made seventy ornamental replicas of the new constitution, placed them on golden pedestals to make them appear "mystical" (ขลัง), and sent them with great pageantry to every province (Puli, 2018: 643-4). Thais were encouraged to worship the replicas with flowers and joss sticks and they quickly became fetish items protected by desecration laws (Puli, 2018:625).

[51] See figure 11.

In *The Reliquary Effect*, Cynthia Hahn (2017:9) notes that relics hold no intrinsic worth and 'require ritual, story, and social actors to find their place in social meaning'. It is, in other words, the reliquary that makes the relic.

> *Without the script supplied by labels and inscriptions, without the set design and lighting of brilliant substances, without the supporting cast of other relics and sacred things in a surrounding treasury and the ritual actions of the devout, the relics remain mute— a silent and speechless thing not even responding to a subject in dialogue'* (Hahn, 2017:11)

This work of selection, collection, and enshrinement has long 'constituted a core technology of the [Siamese] state' (Blackburn, 2010:319). According to Wyatt (2001:63) every major monarch of the pre-colonial region, from at least the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, took great pains to acquire, protect, and enshrine Buddhist relics, as their possession was considered a crucial signifier of righteous authority. Indeed, relics of renowned potency conferred to their patron a political legitimacy many times greater than claims to hereditary succession and therefore played an integral role in stabilising political rule (Ladwig, 2015:1882). The acquisition of relics and religious sacra furnished a 'sense of moral authority, personal self-confidence, and public support' (Wyatt, 2001:64) that provided a cosmic guarantee of moral and political order.

In his meticulous analysis of cultic images and amulets, Tambiah (1984) observes that periods of psychic, economic, and political distress in modern Thailand often coincide with the increased production of sacred objects. He (1984:344) describes the 'fetish obsession' with which educated urbanites once behaved toward amulets, relics, charms, and sacra, attributing the intensification of relic veneration among the Bangkok elite of the 1970s and 80s to a 'crisis of legitimacy' at the political centre. As in the political communities of pre-colonial Siam, anxious elites turned to sacred material as a 'magico-religious guarantee of rank and prosperity'.

At times of crisis and transition, Suan Kulap has turned consistently to the technology of relic production. During the instability following the 1932 revolution, a committee of concerned alumni petitioned the government to return the *Luang Por Suan Kulap* to the school resulting

in its restoration on April 2nd 1933 (SKRC, 1995:358). In 1972, at the height of the political antagonism between teachers, students and alumni, the school enshrined an additional sacred icon called *Por Pu Samphao Thong* (พ่อปู่สำเภาทอง), or Holy Father of the Golden Ship (see fig. 4), a handsomely designed idol designed by an artist at the adjacent Poh Chang Art Academy.[52] *Por Pu Samphao Thong* holds a large dagger in his left hand and was enshrined by Phrakhru Pawanwarakhun directly opposite the school's main entrance; a position from where the idol could observe those who entered and exited the campus. Within a short time, concomitant rituals developed around the icon. At twilight on the last day of the school year, outgoing students prostrate themselves before the shrine as their final act as Suan Kulap students. During examination periods, parents and students offer tributes of Thai cigars to the guardian spirit in the hope that he may intercede on behalf of their academic prospects. More institutional sacra were manufactured two decades later, when the school was struggling to incorporate local students. In 1994, Ajarn Sommay commissioned Supreme Patriarch Ariyavongsagatanana and other venerable monks from Wat Bowonniwet to bless a number of commemorative coins that had been minted on behalf of the school. Impressed with an image of *Luang Por Suan Kulap*, the school rented the coins to parents, teachers, and alumni— who believed they would bring good fortune. The resulting funds helped to pay for the construction of the museum (SKRC, 1995:349).

Following Tambiah (1984:344), we may view the intensified production of Suan Kulap sacra as a magical mechanism by which the school sought to legitimate a disturbed political hierarchy. At a time of liberalisation, when the school had lost political influence and was compelled to incorporate students who occupied a lower status in the moral hierarchy, the construction of the museum can be seen as an attempt to create a new institutional reliquary in which a range of materials are enshrined as sacred objects for the purposes of buttressing the moral legitimacy of the community. Some of the materials in the museum were already established sacra and merely required ritual revivification and relocation to new shrines. An official ceremony performed by visiting monks ensured that *Luang Por Suan Kulap* was

[52] See figure 13.

Figure 12: *Luang Por Suan Kulap* enshrined within the museum

Figure 13: *Por Pu Samphao Thong*, Suan Kulap.

correctly established in the museum after being moved from the headmaster's office. Others had to be actively identified as charismatic objects using established reliquary strategies such as the indication of sacred space, the evocation of stories, and the use of sumptuous accoutrements—particularly gold or gold-hued materials but also velvet, taffeta, and silk. Norman Sutton's desk was labelled, gilded, and situated among religious objects. *Luang* Seksunthorn's canes were placed on a golden bowl and inscribed with a history and legend. Elsewhere, strategies of consecration were used to represent selected individuals from the institution's past. Images of former headmasters were arranged in an ecclesiastical fashion and propitiated with floral offerings. The names of designated alumni were presented in dramatic set-pieces. Even the building itself was subject to what Hahn calls the 'reliquary effect'. In one curious *mise en abyme* the visitor is led through one of the Long Building's winding corridors only to be met with an extravagant mimesis of the building's exterior, with a miniature model of the building enclosed within a vitrine at the back of the room. Hahn (2017:12) observes that this multiplication of frames is common in reliquaries across cultures; they frequently 'destroy any clear sense of interior and exterior' creating a 'funhouse sequences of iterations and enclosures', interiors within interiors that, protect, hide and reveal the relics they hold.

The technology is particularly evident in the Honour Room of Prem Tinsulanont, where the arrangement of objects is purported to 'stimulate good values'. Pupils are encouraged to spend time in the presence of the materials and contemplate their meaning. No signage indicates the kind of performances and practices the museum moves its viewer to enact in the world, yet a powerful narrative is evoked. Carrithers refers to such minimal narratives as 'enacted story seeds', condensed diegeses that aim to tacitly lead others to an appropriate performance by calling up well-worn and 'mostly comfortable components lying ready at hand' (Carrithers, 2009:42). Jory (2021:29-39) suggests that Thai notions of legitimate moral authority are deeply bound up in the concept of 'the perfect man', typically presented as a high-status male figure understood to have accumulated *barami* ('perfections') over countless lifetimes. As courtly society diminished in the late 19th century, Jory observes that the moral exemplar of the 'perfect man' became an increasingly secular and egalitarian figure, grounded not in the Buddhist concept of *barami* but utilitarian notions of one's duty towards the state (Jory, 2012:70).

Conclusion

In 1992, Suan Kulap entered a period of profound institutional anxiety, when the resources of the school and its associate networks were threatened by an ascendant doctrine of liberalism and increased participation. This included the supposedly destabilizing threat of incorporating a greater proportion of low status individuals within the community. To inoculate the organization from these hazards, the school's new headmistress, a redoubtable and skilled administrator called Ajarn Sommay, assembled a committee of forty 'experts' charged with drafting a cohesive institutional ideology modeled on the state's propagation of 'Thainess' as outlined by Kramol Thongthammachart in the early years of the Prem regime. Deploying empirical investigatory methods, the committee carefully quantified and explicated the existence of a charismatic institutional ethos it termed 'Suan Kualpness', noting the range of personal characteristics and values that were intrinsic to its expression. Their report even determined the constituent metaphysical elements of the doctrine—the school's history, 'sacred objects', signs and symbols etc.— to which exposure was necessary for inculcation. As a construct, Suan Kulapness reimagined the institution and its communities as a cohesive historical fraternity who values of pliancy, hierarchy, and gratefulness form an important substructure of the royalist-national state. Competing ideologies, such as the globalism that 'caused' the instability of the 1970s, were positioned as an ever-present threat to the order and stability of this 'beautiful culture'.

Completed in 2002, the Museum of National Education functions as the physical and spiritual centre of this ideology. In this space, the colonial technology of exhibition is utilized to materialize a Suan Kulap cosmology in the physical realm. Through the arrangement of certain objects, visitors are invited to experience the community's 'reverence toward teachers, unity between generations, gentlemanliness, and respect for the Long Building'. Drawing from local articulations of power, objects, and aesthetics, the museum is also a site for the production and enshrinement of sacred items, the possession of which indicates the righteous authority of custodians.

Yet the assemblage of elements that comprise Suan Kulapness were not created from thin air. As an ideological project, *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades* represents merely the latest iteration of a conscious process of identity-making at the school that began at the end of the

nineteenth century. As political relations shifted over the course of a turbulent twentieth, this construct has been modified and recalibrated according to shifting exercise of state power. The following chapter is an account of the gradual construction of a distinct embryonic Suan Kulap culture that emerged under the principalship of several British headmasters from 1894-1938. During this era of Anglicisation, a succession of administrators lay the foundations for a distinct institutional identity that would inform precisely what kinds of political subject the institution sought to produce.

Chapter III

Anglicisation

This chapter is concerned with the years 1894-1938, a forty-four-year period during which Suan Kulap English School and Suan Kulap Withayalai were administered by a series of six British headmasters. During this era the school underwent a process of Anglicisation that built on the rationalizations that were explored in chapter one. In this chapter, I trace a genealogy of the construction of a distinct Suan Kulap culture that was assembled during the Anglicisation era. Specifically, I look at how successive administrators of the school borrowed heavily from the symbolism and rituals of Borough Road College, the teacher training institute from which they were graduates, to create a charismatic and stimulating institutional ideology. Using the testimonies of those who worked and studied at the school during this period, I also consider the legacy of this construct; how it interacted with wider political movements; how it created new forms of institutional relations; and how it shaped the lives of individual subjects who spent their formative years at Suan Kulap.

The Arrival of the British Master

Suan Kulap Palace School hired their first British teacher, Reverend J. Wastie Green, in early 1885— the year following the introduction of examination. An Anglican clergyman, Rev. Green was former principal of the defunct Camberwell Collegiate School in London and an experienced scholar in the study of world religions (*The Ecclesiastical Gazette*, 1855:143). His appointment followed the dismissal of Baboo Ramsey Pultar, a 'Calcutta Brahman' whose performance as the school's English teacher had displeased Commander Surayuthyothahan (Wyatt, 1969:109). Green appears to have taught rudimentary English to the students of *prayok* one and two, many of whom had never before interacted with a *farang* and found his presence at the school a source of curiosity. Prince Bidyalongkhorn, (1963:46) one of Green's younger pupils, recalls that the English master was an Oxford MA who taught in a black cap and gown despite the tropical climate. Scandalously, it was rumoured that Rev. Green— whom the students thought to be a 'British-style monk'— also drank alcohol, a discovery that caused them to secretly refer to the English teacher as *sami khiao* (สมีเขียว), or 'defrocked

Green'. They imagined their teacher's intemperance had caused him to be excommunicated from his English temple and forced to tutor children in the tropics (Bidyalongkhorn, 1926:46). Following a pattern that would become common for the school's early British teachers, Green left his posting after a short tenure and was replaced by Mr. Thompson, an Englishman who inspired similar fascination among the student body. Bidyalongkhorn (1926:46) records that younger pupils would flee in fear when they saw Mr. Thompson approaching. A third British teacher, whose name is unrecorded, was drafted in to replace Thompson when he left. It is unclear if the school engaged another foreign teacher until 1894, the year after the Ministry of Religious Affairs introduced the common school curriculum.

That year, the Ministry hired Ernest Young, a twenty-four-year-old educationalist from Middlesbrough, to serve as Headmaster of the newly established Suan Kulap Palace English School. With more than ten years teaching experience—Young had served as a teacher-pupil at his local church school—and a degree from Borough Road College, Britain's first and foremost teacher training institute, the decision to employ Young represented a new ministerial policy. Finding little success with graduates from prestigious English universities, the Ministry began to employ Britons specially trained in the modern science of pedagogy, particularly in methods that had been tried and tested in international schoolhouses. These men would be placed in positions of administrative power within the ministry, including as principals of the state's most prominent schools, where they would contribute to the formalisation of Siam's public education system.

As headmasters of the Ministry's 'laboratory school', Young and his successors found themselves entering unfamiliar political institutions, the successful navigation of which required perspicacity and tact. As he entered the kingdom, Young's 'friend' (Young, 1898:ix) Robert Morant, former assistant to Prince Damrong, was in the process of being expelled from court by a bevy of affronted officials who had baulked at the Englishman's costly schemes and overbearing manner (Daglish, 1983).[53] Wider political currents were also affecting the work

[53] The decision to dismiss Morant did little to inhibit the former tutor's 'ruthless tenacity' (Eaglesham, 1963:6). After leaving Siam discredited and penniless, Morant presented himself for interview at the Parliament Street offices of the Education Department where he was appointed assistant to the Director of the Office of Special Inquiries (Taylor, 1985:48). Within three years, Morant's Machiavellian machinations has seen him leapfrog some thirty colleagues to become Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education from where he assembled a

of the ministry. Just months before Young's arrival, Siam's humiliating capitulation to the French at Pak Nam had left the king distraught and temporarily retired from public life, possibly in the throes of a nervous breakdown. Concurrently, Prince Damrong, Chulalongkhorn's chief champion of educational affairs, was too busy settling the unruly Northern provinces to devote attention to pedagogic policy.

Despite the reduced motivation to pursue educational reforms, Young threw himself into his new posting and found himself enamoured by the temperament of his young charges, noting that they were 'little dears' who 'laugh merrily, avoid quarrelling…and are most unselfish' (Young: 1908:15). His chief concerns appear to have been directed towards their smoking habits and poor attendance rate, which he describes as 'neither regular nor punctual' (Young, 1908:18). In relation to the wider system of education, Young made an interesting observation. 'There is no "esprit de corps" in any school unless it is cultivated by the master in charge', he later wrote (Young, 1898:56). He was confident, nevertheless, that sentiments of institutional pride and mutual loyalty that marked the late Edwardian British school

> *can be easily developed up to a certain point for just the same reason that the adoption can be ensured of certain rules and maxims in the schoolboy's code of honour, not so much on account of the intrinsic value of the maxim or the rule itself, as because it has been put before them as a European custom. It is therefore to be imitated if they wish to appear "up to date*".
>
> (Young, 1898:56)

After a quick promotion to the Ministry's division for School Inspectors in 1895, Young was unable to pursue these reforms as principal of Suan Kulap, though his brief tenure represented a watershed moment for the school. Not only was Young the first foreign national to occupy a managerial position at the school, he was also the first of six subsequent headmasters who would graduate from Borough Road College, an institute whose distinctive educational doctrines would influence the school's development for the next forty years.

'strong centralized education administration' that suited his 'taste for power and authority (Taylor, 1985:52-3). According to Lowe, Morant was the most powerful administrator 'to mould the face of English secondary education for much of the 20th century' (Lowe, 1984:37).

Indeed, the transformative cultural changes that emerged during the period of Suan Kulap's Anglicisation from 1894-1938 would be incomplete without some account of the Borough Road teaching college and the distinctive esprit de corps into which six of the school's subsequent headmasters were inducted.

The Borough Road of the Suan Kulap Generation

The Borough Road Teacher Training College began as an ancillary institution to the Borough Road free school founded by Joseph Lancaster in 1798 to provide basic literacy education to the ragged children of Southwark. Heavily influenced by the innovative work of Andrew Bell, an Anglican educationalist working in an orphanage near Madras, Lancaster's school followed a pedagogical framework known as the 'monitorial system', a teaching method that permitted a single master to simultaneously teach hundreds of students by delegating slightly older monitors to supervise the instruction of small groups (Bartle, 1976:4). In the Lancasterian method, the duties of monitors were more 'systematic and regular' (Lancaster, 1821:7) than in Bell's configuration since each exercise had to be meticulously assessed so that the teacher may 'notice every single act of exertion to improve' (Lancaster, 1821:23). To keep students motivated and compliant, Lancaster also devised an elaborate scheme of 'emulation and reward' (Lancaster, 1821:23). If work was found to have been performed diligently, monitors and students were given tokens which could be accumulated and exchanged for toys or books. For his top monitors, whom Lancaster called his 'nobility' (Bartle, 1976:4), a collection of medals could be awarded and pinned to capes. Conversely, mischievous or inadequate students were subject to a system of non-violent punishments designed to expose them to the ridicule of peers. Lancaster, a savvy self-promoter, pronounced that his system produced students who resembled a well-disciplined military regiment— a claim that won the admiration of Jeremy Bentham and King George III, who considered his method a solution to the growing problems of urban crime and delinquent pauperism (Bartle, 1991)

There is no precise date to mark the beginning of a teacher training institute at Borough Road, but by 1810 Lancaster had received sixteen young boarders who took instruction in his monitorial method (Bartle, 1976:9). By 1814, the training school was firmly established, with a growing international reputation. Keen to utilise the new science of mass education that

had developed at Borough Road, foreign governments sent talented administrators to the college for an intensive two-year course (Mitchell, 1988:89). To reflect the college's new international focus, the Lancasterian Society changed its name in 1914 to The British and Foreign School Society, a title that also deflected any association with the school's founder, who was accused of having 'flogged apprentices for his own amusement' (quoted in Bartle, 1976:7). The society grew, with branches in the West Indies and Sierra Leone as well as a large presence in India and the Far East (Bartle, 1983:6)

Despite this success, the quality of Borough Road's training instruction had deteriorated in the decades before Ernest Young enrolled at the college in 1889. Under Principal John Curtis, an ex-pupil hired in 1863, the college had become a place of 'sordid conditions and petty tyrannies' (Bartle, 1976:37) in which students were forbidden to leave the premises without permission or speak to one another during mealtimes. Runciman (1887:142), a student in the Curtis era, remembers the college as an 'unspeakably forbidding' place where the 'asceticism of a workhouse was blended with the solidity and ugliness of a jail'. With teaching reduced to the recollection of dry facts, Runciman claimed that the Borough Road of his day 'starved the minds of some of the cleverest men in England' (Runciman, 1887:142). Curtis died in 1888, the same year Ernest Young arrived at Borough Road as an eighteen-year-old student. The following year, Ernest Godfrey, future headmaster of science at Suan Kulap began his studies at the college. F. Billingham, destined to teach at Suan Kulap, enrolled in 1891, followed by Principal Henry Spivey in 1895, teacher James Sedgewick in 1896, Principal Norman Sutton in 1900, Principal William Johnson in 1901, Principal Ernest Smith in 1902, and Principal Arthur Churchill in 1904.[54] The college these men entered was vastly different from the Borough Road of the Curtis era. In 1888, governorship passed to P.A. Burnett, a young Oxford classics graduate who enacted radical changes. Though he 'looked a mere boy' (Ballard, 1937:47), Barnett was an insightful and inspiring figure who declared, in his inaugural speech at the college, that education was concerned with the development of the mind and appreciation of leisure (Bartle, 1976:46). In April 1890, he relocated the college to rural Isleworth, transferring the institution's 139 students from the slums of Southwark to a large gothic building where 'orchards stretched as far as the eye could see' (*The B's Hum,* 1948:8 quoted

[54] All dates derived from *Transcript of the list of Male Students at Borough Road College 1810-1916*, available at Brunel University archives.

in Bartle, 1976:48). At the new Isleworth campus, class were conducted during morning hours with afternoons devoted to games, including rugby, cricket, boxing, and association football, a sport that became an 'all absorbing topic of conversation in the common room, dining room and everywhere else' (*The B's Hum*, 1896:23 quoted in Bartle, 1976:57). The emphasis on sporting excellence led to a fundamental shift in the culture at the school. According to Bartle (1976:20), an educational historian;

> *This policy hastened the transformation of Borough Road at Isleworth from a prototype of the Victorian residential training college into an institution not unlike a Victorian public school, with a premium on examination successes, a prefectorial system and a strong emphasis on games and physical fitness*'.

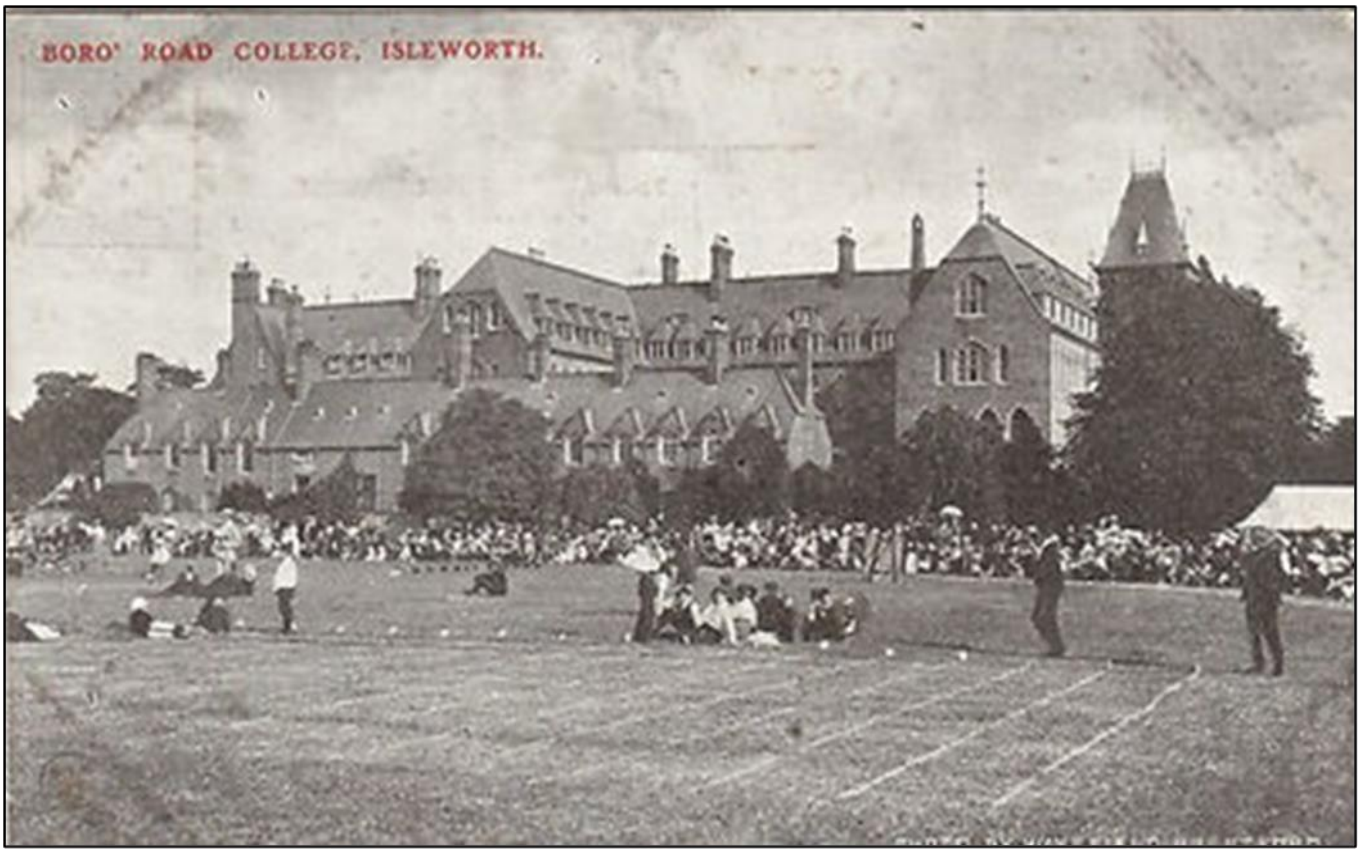


Figure 14 Borough Road College playing field, Isleworth, 1905 (Brunel University Archives)

The men who would go on to administer Suan Kulap over the next four decades epitomized the new, muscular Christianity of the Borough Roadian man.[55] William Johnson, Suan Kulap's second British headmaster (1895-7), authored a book promulgating the moral integrity of games and the discipline needed to master its various techniques (Pathom, 1957:60). His successor, Ernest Smith (1897-1903), was a talented footballer with experience playing centre-forward for the Aston Villa XIs (Sawasdisansataraput, 1958:19). Norman Sutton, the school's longest serving British principal (1915-30), was an all-round sportsman at the college and recognised as Borough Road's premier footballer, cricketer, and hurdles athlete (Sawat, 1959:110).

In addition to the strong physicality promoted by the new Borough Road curriculum, Barnett challenged the intellectual quality of the Suan Kulap generation, knowing them to be highly driven young men seeking to rise above their generally humble origins. Many had served as 'teacher-pupils' from the age of fourteen and, by eighteen, had passed the competitive Queen's scholarship examination, a challenging evaluation of reading, writing, history, geography, and arithmetic for trainee teachers (Bartle, 1976:27). To stimulate his students, Barnett hired several Oxbridge graduates who could supplement the work of senior staff and give lectures on a range of subject areas. The effect of these lectures, combined with the unifying power of team games, was significant in building a new communitarian ethos at Borough Road that bound the men of that generation throughout their professional lives. Old Boy's Clubs were established in Leeds, Birmingham, and London so that alumni could remain connected to the alma mater after leaving college. From February 1899, a monthly student magazine called *The B's Hum* began publishing essays and informal reports about the activities of student and alumni (Bartle, 1976:42).

As in many schools and colleges of the era, Borough Road also devised a new language of symbols and images that represented the reformed institution. Around 1900, the college adopted its own house colours—chocolate and white— as well as a new scholastic motto;

[55] First coined in 1857, the term 'muscular Christianity' referred to a cultural and philosophical movement originating in England that preached the values of manliness, adherence to Christ's teaching and the development of the physical body, particularly through team sports (Harrington, 1971:1-20). Originating amid industrialization and urbanization, the movement was seen as a remedy to poor health and effeminacy, as well as an appropriate vehicle for advancing British Imperialism (see Mangan, 1998). In 1901, the Old Harrovian J.G. Cotton Minchin (1901:113) wrote: If asked what our Muscular Christianity has done, we point to the British Empire'.

'*Una Mente',* or 'One Mind' (Bartle, 1976:42). A new badge was created featuring an image of two industrious bees flying over two rose buds. This was stitched onto blazers or neckties so that alumni might recognize one another at public functions. The year after Norman Sutton left Borough Road in 1902, the pride in being a Boro' man was at its zenith and the school was firmly invested in the doctrine of muscular Christianity. In an excitable speech delivered to the student body by Thomas Macnamara in 1903, the incoming principal declared:

> *These are the Borough Roadians*. *What fine clean, healthy-looking lads*. *What fortunes for themselves and their Empire these lads would make in the Colonies*. *What a fine company of soldiers thrown away*!
>
> (Macnamara, 1903:228)

William Johnson (1895-1897)

By 1898, Ernest Young had returned to Britain and published a well-received monograph about the peoples and cultures of Siam, the first of two such publications he would produce on the subject over a prolific literary career. In this sense, Young was quite unlike the Borough Road principals who followed him, most of whom spent the rest of their professional careers within Siam's Department of Education. His successor, the twenty-five-year-old William Johnson, arrived in Siam in 1895 and quickly became fluent in Thai, converted to Buddhism, created a mixed-race family, and died in the country following his retirement. An adept and trusted official, Johnson's contributions to the department were such that— according to his son— the king once asked the Briton to head the entire department as a minister, a role that Johnson declined as improper for a foreigner. According to the source, the king responded by saying 'it is appropriate as you were Thai in a previous life' (Pathom, 1957:69).

Though Johnson remained at the Suan Kulap English School for only two years, one of the innovations he introduced would have a profound effect on the future of the institution. Not long after arriving at Suan Kulap, Johnson was assigned to work with Pia Malakul, then Minister to the United Kingdom, who was attempting to identify two 'white elephants', that is, two exceptional students, royal or commoner, who would be capable of prospering in overseas schools. These students would be allocated a royal scholarship, a substantial academic bursary previously limited to members of the royal family, before returning back to

the capital to contribute to national development. To sift candidates, Johnson compiled a demanding three-day written examination, similar in content to the challenging Queen's scholarship evaluation he had sat less than a decade prior. For selection to the King's scholarship, as the Thai bursary became known in English, students were required to obtain the highest aggregate scores in arithmetic, mental arithmetic, translation (English to Thai and Thai to English), English composition (comprising two essays), English dictation, social studies, and general knowledge (SKRC, 1995:381). These subjects correlated closely with the curriculum that Johnson had lately introduced to the English School, thus giving Suan Kulap students a significant advantage in acquiring the prestigious award. In the event, all but three of the top ten students were from Suan Kulap, with the prize eventually going to a student called Phum who was sent to study Russian in London alongside Prince Chakrabongse, Chulalongkhorn's favorite son (SKRC, 1995:381). Phum then entered the Russian Imperial Court where he enjoyed a distinguished career in the Hussar regiment, though his decision to change nationality embarrassed the Siamese who discontinued sending students to the country (Natanaree, 2011:40-41). The second recipient was also a Suan Kulap alumnus. The well-born Chin Bunnag (later styled Phraya Niphathakulapongse) opted to study civil engineering at King's College London before returning to work on Siam's canal infrastructure. Soon after, King Chulalongkhorn sent a letter to the Minister of Public Works recommending Chin be transferred to the Railways Department. Within eight years the former King's Scholar had been ennobled, promoted to Commander to the Department of Naval Engineers, and hired as Chulalongkhorn University's first Dean to the faculty of Engineering (The Bunnag Lineage Club, 2005).

The extraordinary careers of these early King's scholars generated great public attention. Some recipients, such as future Education Minister and OSK Chaophraya Thammasakmontri, were even sent to study at Borough Road to be trained in the latest techniques of British educational management.[56] A future professor of Thai literature, Wit Siwasriyanont, who was studying at Suan Kulap during the early years of the King's Scholarship, recalls that recipients of the award enjoyed vertiginous social elevation. They were, he writes, 'held in the highest

[56] Other Thai students to be sent to Borough Road in this era include Phraya Methathibordee, future director-general of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development (entered Borough Road 1901); Major General Suksasombun, former headmaster of the Suan Kulap Front Palace School (1903); and Phraya Phontracha, Suan Kulap teacher and later Chancellor of Chulalongkhorn University (1907).

possible regard (มีหน้ามีตาที่สุด) due to their supreme wisdom and perseverance' (Wit, 1963:186). The aura of celebrity that surrounded the award greatly benefitted Suan Kulap, which garnered a reputation as a hothouse for King's Scholars. Over the next fifteen years, the school produced twenty-four, in addition to forty-one student recipients of similar overseas funding from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Forestry Department. In 1912, the school set a new national record when nearly all the kingdom's scholarships, ten in total, were secured by Suan Kulap students.[57]

To maintain Suan Kulap's reputation as the kingdom's preeminent preparatory school for King's Scholars-in-waiting, various schemes and initiatives were introduced by a succession of Borough Road principals. In 1907, English School graduates still under the age of eighteen, and therefore eligible for the bursary, were invited to study for free at the school as 'special' (พิเศษ) students working towards the exam. This status, which was conferred by the Education Department, was contingent upon the students continued application and could be revoked by the headmaster at any time (*National Archives*, Document ศธ 50.16/03 box 7). To keep the profile of the school as high as possible, by 1915 Suan Kulap students were sent to march or cycle about the city on results day announcing the names of successful alumni to members of the public they passed along the way (Prakep, 1970:108). In the 1920s, the names of each scholarship recipient were engraved on a series of varnished honours boards that were prominently installed in the library lobby (Prakep, 1970:108). When Suan Kulap became the first to win every major educational scholarship in 1931, the entire student body dressed as English gentlemen and street hawkers to wave banners in the streets (*Suan Kulap Withaya*, 1931a).[58] Recipients were sent around classrooms to receive blessings from each teacher, who ensured the class knew the name of the student and the country in which he would be studying (Chinwut, 1984:89). On the day of departure, large parties of pupils and faculty gathered at the Borneo port and East Asiatic Company to bid farewell to the lucky scholar bound for London or Marseilles.

The intensity of these initiatives generated much public interest in the award, resulting in an annual outbreak of scholarship fever whenever the examinations were held. Parents hoping to improve their family prospects scrambled to get sons into Suan Kulap for the final two years

[57] All figures derived from records prominently displayed in the Suan Kulap museum.
[58] See figure 15

of *matayom*. Some pupils were forced to live with distant friends and relatives, while a considerable number chose to repeat their final *matayom* grade in order to re-sit the gruelling exam. In 1924, a Suan Kulap student called Ud Murangkun sat eighth grade for three consecutive years before he was awarded an international scholarship (SKRC, 1994:162). Others succumbed to the overwhelming pressure of the examination. Kumut Chandruang, a student at another elite school, recalls in his memoirs that he collapsed from exhaustion during the scholarship exam and had to be carried from his desk by ministerial staff (Kumut, 1940).

Figure 15: Parade of students dressed as street hawkers and top-hatted 'gentlemen' to celebrate the school's King's Scholarship performance in 1931 (*Suan Kulap Withayalai*, 1931a)

Inside the school, the celebrated success of former pupils contributed to a nascent feeling of institutional pride. Chinwut Sunthornsima, a future General in the Thai army, records that students were encouraged to gaze upon the honours boards every day. He writes; 'we knew all their names, and when we heard that they were important civil servants we would be so proud of father Suan Kulap' (Chinwut, 1984:89). Pradit Phanichkan, a pupil in the 1920s who went on to become Director-General of the Department for Corrections, writes:

> *We took pride in the fact that our school had produced so many accomplished students who gained scholarships to study various disciplines abroad. We were the white elephants come in from the forest…We went forth to benefit the entire country bearing a prestige that extended to all places'* (Pradit Phanichkan 1986:39)

During his two years at Suan Kulap, Johnson also tackled the high levels of absenteeism at the English School. Preferring Lancasterian techniques of reward and emulation, he devised a roster of medals for students who achieved perfect attendance; copper for one year, silver for three, gold for eight (Insri, 1985:90). Later, when ensconced in the ministry, he introduced another innovation straight from the Lancasterian handbook. The student who had achieved the highest grade in the monthly examination was permitted to sit on the 'golden desk', a specially imported wooden chair and table placed at the front of every class. Pin Malakul, future Minister of Education, remembered sitting on a golden desk as a student at Suan Kulap and later introduced a similar practice at Triam Udom Suksa, the country's first co-educational school. In Pin's version the golden desk was replaced by a flower garland that could be worn around the neck (SKRC, 1995:775) Principal Johnson's brief, if significant, tenure at Suan Kulap ended in 1897, when he was promoted by the department to Chief Inspector of Schools, a role that required monitoring curricula and teaching standards across Siam's expanding educational infrastructure. As inspector, Johnson helped standardise Thai language assessments and banned the practice of allowing parents and other family members to enter examination rooms (Pathom, 1957:76-8). He was also advisor to three successive Ministers of Public Education, including Suan Kulap alumni Pia Malakul (1912-1916) and Chaophraya Thammasakmontri (1916-1926, 1932-3).

Principal Ernest Smith (1897-1903) and Henry Spivey (1903-1915)

Johnson's replacement at Suan Kualp was a fellow Borough Roadian called Ernest Smith, a man who embodied the Isleworth love of sport and team games. A former player for the Aston Villa XIs, Smith was deeply immersed in the tradition of athleticism that emerged in the public schools of late nineteenth century Britain (Mangan, 2000). Acting as coach and

referee, Smith established a sporting culture at the school by establishing regular training and an early inter-school association football tournament that encouraged sporting rivalry between Suan Kulap and a handful of other prominent boy's schools (Sawasdisansataraput, 1958:20). According to Chirat Chantasaen (2017), a historian of Thai sport, Smith was the first person to ever score an association football goal in the history of Siam. The occasion occurred during a fixture on Sanam Luang in March 1890 in which a team comprised of employees in the Ministry of Religious Affairs (which included fellow Borough Roadians William Johnson and Henry Spivey) competed against a Thai-European team calling themselves 'Bangkok'.

Figure 16: Principal E.S. Smith (left) and Principal W.G. Johnson (right)

In addition to the promotion of physical education, Smith also presided over a curriculum emphasising personal morality and appropriate behaviour. Building from the older subject of *thammajari* or 'good manners', a subject that had been taught since 1892, the leading luminary of this discipline was Pia Malakul, the Suan Kulap alumnus with whom Johnson had worked on the King's Scholarship examination. In 1900, Pia published a didactic manual of

manners called *Qualities of a Gentleperson* that sought to replace the monastic school's older ethical frameworks of merit and karma with new behavioural standards rooted in the bourgeoisie ideals of the Victorian ecumene (Jory, 2021).[59] Emphasising tidiness, orderliness, honesty, and individual duty to the state, Pia's textbook was taught throughout the Thai education system where it was highly influential among the rising middle class, a group who valued ambition and meritocracy over the feudal privilege of aristocrats (Jory, 2021:76-81). The course became a highly important component in how the state sought to inculcate certain behaviours through the alteration of school curricula.

When Principal Smith left the English School to join his colleague William Johnson in the ministry, Suan Kulap hired Henry Spivey, the school's fourth Borough Roadian, who stayed at the school for twelve years. During this time, in which Spivey continued the work of his former colleagues, the school moved to its current site on the Tripetch road, reunited with the Thai School, and changed its name to Suan Kulap Withayalai, a title that represented Pia Malakul's vision of a great national academy in the British fashion. Co-ordinating with the Ministry, Spivey developed the infrastructure of Suan Kulap, ensuring school facilities were comparable to those offered by the great Edwardian colleges.

[59] Coined by Beckenbridge (1989), the 'Victorian ecumene' refers to the transnational cultural world in which local nineteenth century powerbrokers sought political legitimacy by adopting the aesthetics and practices of an emergent global elite. For the Victorian ecumene in Thailand, see Peleggi (2002).

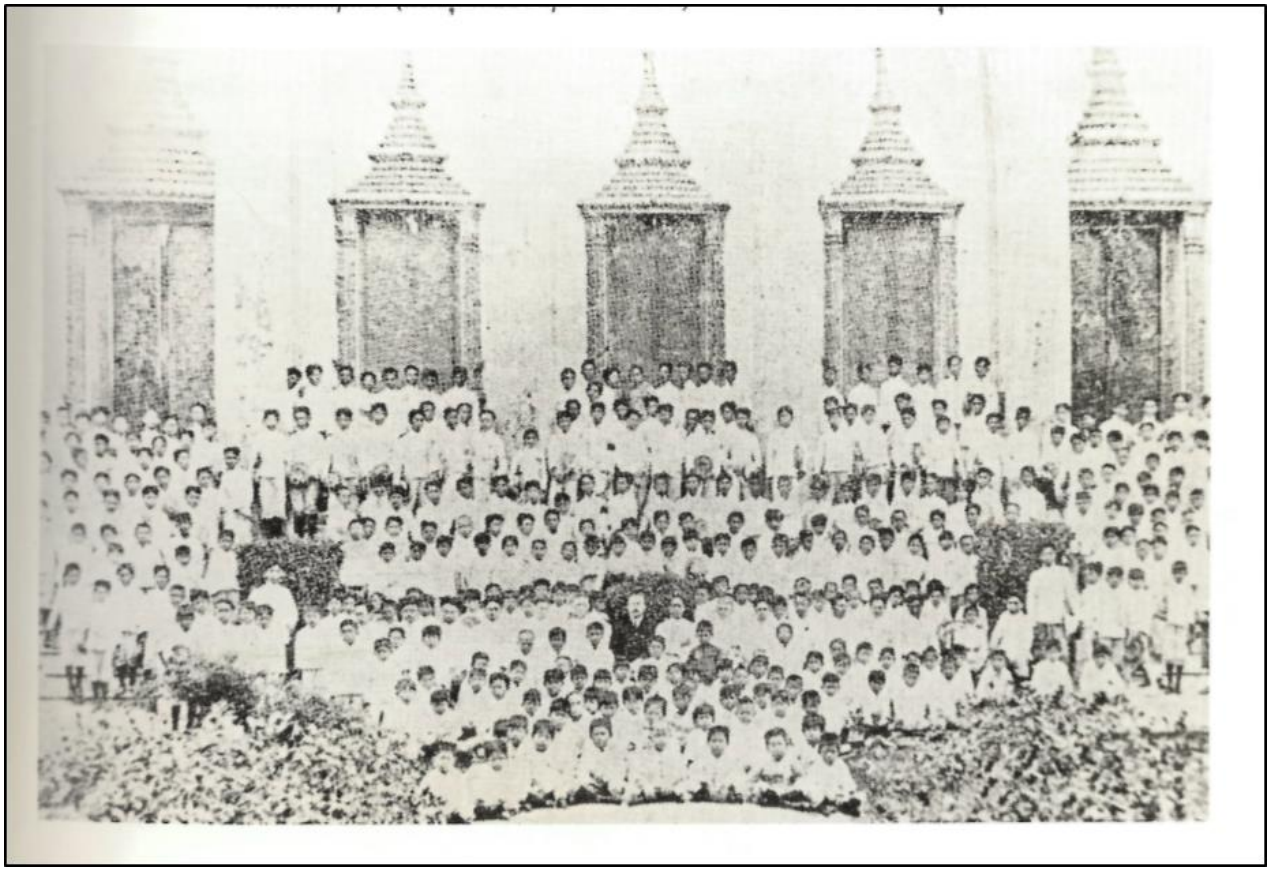


Figure 17: Principal Spivey and the student body of the Suan Kulap English School, 1909 (National Archives of Thailand)

He ensured his Borough Road collegemate Ernest J. Godfrey, a passionate naturalist, [60] was hired as the school's first headmaster of science, a role that required managing Siam's only dedicated science department, equipped with a lecture hall, demonstration room, and fully stocked laboratory (Sawasdisansataraput, 1965:51). As part of the role, Godfrey was tasked with developing a cutting-edge syllabus comprising the study of heat, light, and electro-magnets, that was used to teach both internal and external students, who were allowed to take advantage of the laboratory when it was not being used by Suan Kulap students. Spivey also constructed an impressive gymnasium that contained much of the equipment—climbing ropes, Indian clubs, a pommel horse— that he had used as a student in the Borough Road gym (Bartle, 1976:57). When not in use, the school allowed the nearby Teacher Training College to hire the gym for the purposes of training the first generation of physical education teachers (SKRC, 1995:163). Even the school's playing field was considered top-of-the-line and from 1912, began hosting the annual meeting of the *Look Sua* (ลูกเสือ) or 'Tiger Cubs' corps, a

[60] For a select bibliography of Godfrey's scientific publications, including his studies of Thailand's moths and butterflies see Sawasdisansataraput (1965:53).

nation-wide youth organization based upon Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts movement. Established by the recently crowned King Vajiravudh as a means to inculcate loyalty at a time of rising anti-monarchism, the *Look Sua* converged on the field every July to take part in war games, nationalistic historical plays, and flag-waving parades led by the schools newly-assembled marching band, the first such ensemble in the history of Siam (see Vella, 1978: 53-78; SKRC, 1995:180; Insee, 1985:90; Bunyoptham, 1956:57).

Creeping Anglicisation had also changed the principal language at Suan Kulap. By 1911, with no less than six Borough Roadians employed[61], English was the dominant language in social studies, geography, art, commerce, physical education, science, and gymnastics. Only grammar, drawing, and morality were conducted in Thai, the latter guided by a textbook by Borough Road graduate *Chao Phraya* Thammasakmontri (Pin, 1985:99; Insee, 1985: 92). In English language classes, older students were expected to achieve almost native fluency, with good grades in the subject a requisite to continue at the school. Above *matayom* three, students were taught exclusively by foreigners and were expected to be capable of comprehending literary texts, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and the plays of William Shakespeare (Insee, 1985:91). Even the Suan Kulap uniform was adapted to the

[61] Apart from Principal Spivey, the Borough Roadians present in 1911 were: Ernest Godfrey, F.H. Billingham, James Sedgewick, Phraya Suksasomboon, Norman Sutton, and Arthur Churchill.

Figure 18: The Suan Kulap Look Sua band, Siam's first marching band (Bunyoptham, 1956)

British aesthetic. During Spivey's time, the traditional *jong krapen,* which had once been given to students free of charge, was replaced by wide black shorts, a white raj pattern shirt, and a stiff straw boater trimmed with a yellow grosgrain ribbon.

Perhaps one of the most radical changes to occur during Spivey's era of Anglicisation was the introduction of corporal punishment, the earliest reference of which dates from around 1910, just before the school moved to its current site. According to Insee Chantarothit, future Minster of Agriculture and Cooperatives, several students were caned one day after deciding to skip classes to play football in the Dusit area of Khao Din, a then-common form of truancy known as a 'strike' (ไสตรค์) (Pin, 1985:99; SKRC, 1995:160). Though it is unclear whether this early example of caning represented a new standardized penalty at Suan Kulap, it seems unlikely that flogging was carried out with any regularity during the Spivey era. Insee recalls that four years later he was caught skipping classes in the Teacher's Association library, where he was caned by a *farang* teacher only after the master expressed much hesitancy (Insee, 1984:94).

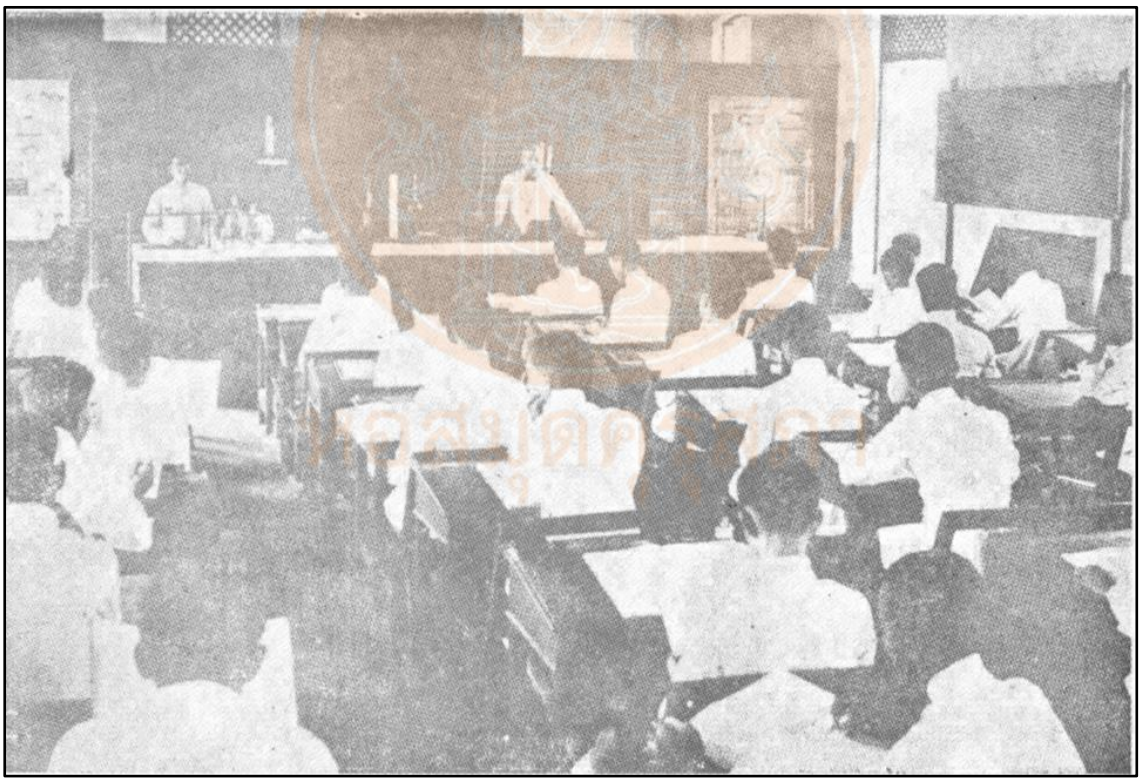


Figure 19: Mr. Godfrey teaching at the new scientific laboratory, Suan Kulap Withayalai (National Archives of Thailand)

Indeed, even into the twentieth century, students at Suan Kulap continued to exercise the type of autonomous mobility that had been tolerated in the monastic setting. Street gambling remained a popular diversion for schoolboys, despite recent legislation (Royal Gazette, 1891; Pradit, 1986:40). Somewhat ironically, it was often the attractions of the nearby monastery that drew the students away from the state's new classrooms. Some Suan Kulap boys spent entire afternoons at Wat Suan Pleum, a large neighbouring temple erected in the early nineteenth century, where a large blind crocodile called *ai bod* was believed to enjoy the heady vapours of the student's cannabis bongs. Some days, the temple held fantastical *sak yant* ceremonies where students crowded to see the city's virile young men receive protective tattoos and enter states of trance-like animation (Insee, 1984:94). In the face of such prevalent absenteeism, even strict teachers tended to forgo corporal punishment for the lesser offence of tardiness during this period. In 1915, during the final months of Spivey's tenure, the newly arrived Mr. A.G. Beaumont, a renowned taskmaster, required his students to arrive at school half an hour early so they could revise their study material before the morning bell at 8.30. According to the former student Chitra Dansuputra, if Beaumont's students arrived late for this session, Beaumont would make them stand at the front of the class 'with sheepish faces' (Chitra, 1966:24).

> *If you were repeatedly late, he would ask 'Where is your house? Why are you late?' The student would say 'Phra Ram 6. I have to take a boat against the current then board a tram at Bang Krabue that goes to the school. That's why I am late'. He would listen to their unclear English and say 'Only Phra Ram 6, this boy travels from Thonburi and still made it on time'.*

Other testimonies corroborate the notion that the school's attempts to implement stricter time-keeping were frustrated by the city's haphazard transportation infrastructure. With no roads leading into the city, many students had to wake before dawn to board one of the unreliable rowing boats that traversed the complicated canal system— one student claims that the oarsmen were usually asleep or else refused fares until they had finished smoking a

bong of marijuana (Insee, 1985:87). Once inside the city, automobiles were rare,[62] though wealthier students may have hired a horsecart or a pulled rickshaw. For six *satang*, they could ride the slightly cheaper electrified tramline that passed near the school, though this was not always a reliable conveyance; during the cool season, when the palace mahouts led the royal elephants to bathe at Tha Chang, larger bulls were known to charge the trolleys, sending frightened passengers scattering to escape (Insee, 1985:87). Generally, students completed their journey by foot, finding shortcuts through the network of backstreets and alleyways that forked off from the dusty thoroughfares. In addition, it should be noted that access to regular timepieces was still limited. An official inventory of the English School shows that by 1907 the institution had accumulated 'three clocks of various sizes' (SKRC, 1995:357), though such technology was unusual in domestic spaces, where timekeeping relied on the morning cannon sounding at four am and noon or, in rural settings, the ringing of the temple bells (Insee, 1985:87; Prajak, 1888). In such a system the synchronization of time routines—already hallmarks of industrialized England—were still challenging to fully implement in Siam.[63]

After twelve years in office, Henry Spivey died suddenly in 1915, leaving behind a school that was almost unrecognisable from the small English academy he had inherited in 1903. Several times larger than the English School, Suan Kulap Withayalai was now dominated by graduates of the Borough Road College and widely acknowledged as the benchmark of a modern Siamese education. Highly selective, the school offered students with little or no family connection access to lucrative career paths and noble titles that were once beyond the reach of all but a small minority. By 1910, a bright Suan Kulap graduate could comfortably enter the army or naval academy, swiftly ascend to the rank of a sub-lieutenant, and soon be earning a monthly salary of eighty baht (Insee, 1985:92). Academically minded graduates could join the civil service and secure legal training with the Ministry of Justice, qualifying them for a monthly salary of around two hundred and forty baht (Insee, 1985:92).[64] Under Spivey, Suan Kulap thus transmitted to students the requisite intellectual and cultural capacities that could

[62] The first registered car in the kingdom, with the license plate number one, belonged to Suan Kulap's former arithmetic teacher, *Phraya* Yomaratch, latterly Minister for Public Works (Torpin, 1985:107).

[63] See E.P Thompson (1967) for a history of how industrialization in England made time more precise and standardized, thereby displacing earlier perceptions of time and imposing new puritan habits of 'time-discipline'.

[64] For comparison, a provincial school teacher during this period might expect to take home a monthly salary of little more than four baht (Insee, 1985:92).

lift him high above the status of the peasant and admit him to the Thai elite, a stratum who looked to Imperial Britain for their model of ideal progress. Suan Kulap now followed a largely Anglophone curriculum, dressed its students in a British-style uniform, and instilled a culture of athleticism. Even Thai-language subjects such as morality were modelled around a local interpretation of Bourgeoise Victorian conventions. Each term, Spivey signed performance reports for each student that included separate assessments for non-academic categories, such as morality, manners, and cleanliness (Pin, 1985:99).

A nascent corporate identity— or '*esprit de corps',* to use Principal Young's expression— began to emerge.[65] As Suan Kulap developed, successive Borough Road graduates sought to cultivate communal sentiments by harnessing the unifying power of team sports, honour boards, and the glorification of community success— mechanisms of social cohesion that had emerged in the public schools of imperial Britain (see Mangan, 2000:68-99). After Spivey's death, the symbols and rituals of a Suan Kulap identity were consolidated and vitalized under the charismatic leadership of his successor and former colleague Norman Sutton, a thirty-one-year-old Yorkshireman who administered the school for fifteen celebrated years. In the next section, I examine Sutton's tenure as headmaster of Suan Kulap and the strong institutional culture he forged.

Principal Norman Sutton

Born on August 24th 1881 in the West Yorkshire town of Gomersal, Norman Sutton received his early education at a local grammar school before entering for a Queen's scholarship to study at Borough Road College at the age of eighteen (Sawat, 1959:107). His success in obtaining this coveted bursary suggests Sutton was not only a bright student— Queen's scholars were examined on reading, writing, history, geography, and arithmetic— but that he had demonstrated practical pedagogic skills that were likely to have been acquired during a four-year apprenticeship as a pupil-teacher (Bartle, 1976:27). For the next three years, Sutton studied and boarded at Isleworth, where he immersed himself in the college's new traditions and excelled as one of the establishment's most gifted all-round sportsmen.

[65] See de Miranda (2021) for a history of the term *esprit de corps*, including how the idiom became a signifier for a certain form of elitist ethos and political domination seen as a key factor for the success of the British Empire.

Upon graduation, he accepted a teaching position in Middlesex where he instructed in English, history, and mathematics for a period of two years. By 1905, at the age of twenty-four, Sutton left England and followed several of his fellow graduates to Siam where he was immediately hired by the ministry as a teacher at the Suan Kulap English School under the principalship of Henry Spivey.

Sutton's temperament and singular pedagogic style are captured vividly in a number of personal accounts authored by former colleagues and pupils. They invariably describe a fair and generous teacher with high standards and a punctilious, sometimes authoritative, temperament. As a teacher, Sutton's abiding dictum, reeled off in a thick Yorkshire accent, was: 'I am the teacher, and you are my student. You must obey me and act under my authority. If not, we cannot be teacher and student' (Sawat, 1959:107). Accordingly, Sutton was also a firm believer in the corrective properties of physical punishment and on one occasion, documented by former colleague Sawat Thamikrak (1959:113), caned an entire class after they refused to complete a difficult test. Between thrashes he remonstrated students on the importance of docility and deference to authority. 'If I tell you to do something, you do it. If I teach you something, you believe it. If I say one plus one is three, you believe it. If I tell you the Nile is in China, you believe it. Remember this and do not disobey me again'.

In many ways Sutton embodied the same Victorian ideals espoused in Pia Malakul's textbook *The Qualities of a Gentleperson*. He was a frugal man who eschewed a horse-drawn cart for the city tram, waiting each morning at the Ratchawong intersection in his cream Raj pattern shirt and white pith hat. One morning, during his daily commute, Sutton quizzed a student who had bought a ticket for the first-class carriage, asking the boy: 'Are not first and second-class the same streetcar? Do they not run at the same speed? A second-class ticket costs four *satang* less than a first, leaving enough money for rice and curry. I should buy a third-class ticket, if one existed'. For the most part, travelling students who found themselves in the same compartment as Principal Sutton would tip their straw hat, bid the master 'a very good morning, sir' and defer to another area of the carriage (Sawat, 1959: 112).

Figure 20: Norman Sutton (Sawat, 1959)

For many of his students, Sutton represented a stern patriarch they were loath to disappoint. When former Headmaster Ernest Smith died on a steamer boat to India in 1918, Principal Sutton acted as a surrogate father to his seven-year-old son Sanan, to whom he emphasised the importance of integrity and prudence in all personal interactions. When the English teacher Mr. Davis [66] became smitten with an American prohibitionist missionary and encouraged students to sign a contract of abstinence, Sutton called Sanan to his office and advised him not to acquiesce. He warned him; 'In the future, you will enter society, which will entail drinking and smoking. But if you sign this pledge, you shall be bound to its restrictions

[66] John Elwin Davis was employed as a *matayom* eight tutor from 1925-8 where he was responsible for preparing promising students (those who scored more than seventy five at *matayom* eight) for the King's Scholarship exam. Remembered by his pupil Wit Siwasriyanont, who won a scholarship to Oxford University, Davis was a dedicated and kindly teacher with a serious, and sometimes, strict demeanor; 'he enjoyed clean humour but anything risqué was distasteful to him' (Wit, 1986:194). In September 1928, he married missionary Sara Ann Waterson and shortly thereafter took up his role as Head of Modern Languages at Chulalongkhorn University. He died at the age of forty, following an appendicectomy in a Bangkok hospital.

throughout your life' (Sanan, 1985:124). Sanan reports similar instances in which Principal Sutton encouraged him to keep his promises, including when he tried to back out of a L*ook Sua* camping event that clashed with his exam study. Sanan recalls that Sutton could also be a severe mentor who would not accept substandard academic performance. He writes:

> *One day sir called me to his office and didn't say anything. He took a piece of paper and laid it in front of me.*
> *'What is this?'*
> *'This is the matayom four class C geometry test, sir'*
> *'How many marks are there?'*
> *'Seventy, sir'*
> *'Who does this belong to? How many marks?*
> *I told him the name of my friend who had scored nearly full marks and he flipped over another piece of paper. I said the names of the high scorers and then each name until I got past the fiftieth person.*
> *'Who is this'*
> *'Mr. Sanan, sir'*
> *'How many marks?'*
> *'Five marks'*
> *That instant, he stopped speaking in Thai and said only 'Go away'*
>
> (Sanan, 1985:123)

Following this brusque exchange, Sanan writes that Sutton contravened school protocols to place him in a maths class taught by the kindly and dedicated Mr. Choti. Sanan writes:

> *[Sutton] urged me: 'Let this be the last time. From here on in you need to fight against yourself'. And the thing I must tell you is this; at the end of the year, when the marks were in, Mr Sutton read out to the class the four best students and then said at number five 'I must offer a little praise here because I never at all expected that it would be Sanan'.*
>
> *This was the making of me.* (Sanan, 1985:123)

Sanan went on to secure a King's Scholarship to Trent College before studying for a BA in chemistry and physics at Cambridge, followed by an MA in education. He returned to Suan Kulap as a science teacher in 1934 before serving as the Director-General for the Department of General Education between 1962 and 1968 (Wisit, 1998).

As a manager, Sutton could be both charitable and demanding. At the end of the school term, he once offended the caretaker by requesting the remittance of two *satang,* which the employee had failed to return following an errand to buy a booklet of stamps. The old man, shocked by the miserly nature of the demand, relinquished the coins in silence. The following day, Sutton presented him with an annual bonus of twenty baht with the stipulation that the money be spent on milled rice for the man's family and kept far away from the fantan parlour. He continued to pay the caretaker's bonus every year, even after his return to the UK, from where he used an intermediary to send an annual one-pound note. The money, he told the intermediary, brought happiness to three men; he who gives, he who delivers, and he who receives. He continued to specify that the stipend was not to be frittered away or mounted in a frame but spent on food for the caretaker's family (Sawat, 1959: 114-5).

Today, Principal Sutton's administration between 1915 and 1930 is remembered by the school as a time of great institutional progress during which Suan Kulap dominated academic and sports tables. In Ajarn Sommay's *Suan Kulap in Twelve Decades* (SKRC, 1995:179), the Sutton era is referred to as the 'institutional great leap forward' (ยุคก้าวไกลสถาบัน) due to the extensive infrastructural and cultural changes that were implemented by the principal during this time.

One of Sutton's first major commitments as principal was to overhaul the school's extant symbolism and establish a new institutional iconography. In September 1916, Sutton's deputy wrote to the Director for Common Education requesting permission to replace the school's original insignia with a new design closer in form to the heraldic crests of the British public-school. Designed by staff at the adjacent Poh Chang Art Academy, the new device shared several features in common with the official blazon of Sutton's alma mater, including the image of two blossoming red roses and the inclusion of a newly-minted school motto; *The*

Knowledgeable Shall Prosper' (สุวิชา โน ภวฺ โหติ), rendered in Pali (Rawuthpiset, 1916). A few years later, Sutton introduced the use of school colours to Suan Kulap, another custom adopted by Borough Road following the innovation at Eton in the late nineteenth century (Mangan, 1996:33). Sutton selected the colours pink, as associated with King Chulalongkhorn, and sky-blue, the colour of his consort Queen Saovabha, thereby reinforcing the continuity between the current school and its palace-based predecessor.

Figure 20: Original Suan Kulap insignia, designed in 1882 (left) and the refashioned insignia of the Anglicisation era, in use from 1916-1932 (right).

The Borough Road model also influenced the school's curriculum and the kind of teaching practices Sutton advocated. As a student, Sutton had received weekly lectures from Mr. Buckle, the college 'Master of Method' who propounded on a range of pedagogic subjects including educational theory, ethics, mental science, and school management (Bartle, 1976:56). Sutton recreated these sessions at Suan Kulap where, each Monday afternoon, he gave the faculty a weekly demonstration class as a model of good pedagogical practice (Sawat, 1959:109-10). Similar extra-curricular presentations were given to pupils. Much like the special seminars organized by Principal Barnett at Borough Road, Sutton reserved Mondays and Tuesdays for the dissemination of advanced topics that wouldn't have looked out of place for the training of an imperial functionary. The schedule for December 1925 included *animal*

welfare (given by Mr. Davis), *the growth of towns* (Sutton), *conditions in China* (Foster), *what the industries of a country depend upon* (Sutton), *Siam's relations with France including the new treaty* (Sutton), and *influence of belief and climate in industries and commerce* (Sutton) (*Suan Kulap Withaya*, 1925a:498). Test papers from the Sutton period reflect this eclectic subject matter. In a *matayom* seven exam dated 1920, students were assessed on an almost encyclopaedic combination of advanced calculus, French translation, ancient Egypt, the merits of Zoroastrianism, the battle of Marathon, Japanese culture, and the teachings of Confucius (SKRC, 1995:523).

Another important innovation spearheaded by Sutton was the establishment of *Suan Kulap Withaya*, a regular student magazine for which the headmaster provided the first article. Similar in content to *The B's Hum,* a college periodical established at Borough Road the year Sutton enrolled, *Suan Kulap Withaya* was an ambitious miscellany of essays, short stories, and school news. Alongside articles on Lenin's Russia and the economic recession, the paper offered original adventure stories and detailed reports from the school team's latest sporting fixtures. More generally, *Suan Kulap Withaya* provided alumni and students with a communal literary space—what Anderson (1991:44) calls a 'unified field of exchange and interaction'—in which individuals were invited to think of themselves as members of a wider imagined community. Current students became gradually aware of an older generation of alumni who wrote into the paper to contribute memories of their time at the palace school (see Bidyalongkhorn, 1963). In 1926, Prince Damrong composed a feature called *The Legend of Suan Kulap* (ตำนานสวนกุหลาบ) that documented the historical origins of the school at the end of the nineteenth century. The text, which functions much like the community's foundation story, has been reprinted numerous times in the cremation volumes of alumni and faculty. More symbols of communitarian belonging emerged in the school magazine.

In 1929, *Suan Kulap Withaya* printed the lyrics to the new school song, a slow *thai derm* style ballad that implied members shared a set of commom values and overarching principles (*Suan Kulap Withaya*, 1929). Adhering closely to the Victorian school song's 'unique mixture of emotionalism, innocence, myopia and rigidity' (Mangan, 2000:xxv), students sang that 'all us Suan Kulap students rejoice, delight, are saved/ we love honour, reputation, goodness, and

the school'.[67] In one section of the magazine called 'school news and old students', the reader is made to feel he shared some ineffable bond and duty toward his fellow reader. When Second Lieutenant Aat Sucharitkul died during a routine training exercise at RAF Hawkinge in October 1931, the newspaper encouraged students to assemble at the Hua Lamphong Train station on the day his ashes were conveyed back to the city. 'Even though he has passed we will never forget him and praise him always', the article reads (*Suan Kulap Withaya*, 1931b:863). In other issues, the paper created short eulogies for prominent alumni who had recently passed.

Sutton's attempts to create a historically cohesive Suan Kulap identity were not always successful. When Sutton organized alumni events, such as an annual old boy's dinner or the creation of an alumni football team, an older generation of Palace School graduates were almost entirely absent. Many appeared to resent the conflation of two historically separate institutions. In 1930, as he was attempting to formalize the establishment of an official alumni association, Prince Bidyalongkhorn deplored the attitude of his elder peers, calling them 'highly unintelligent' for their stubborn belief that Suan Kulap Withayalai was a separate and less 'prestigious' institution than the palace school (Bidyalongkhorn, 1931:45). Such notions, he said, were comparable to 'the fussy old Englishman who grumbles that Punch magazine is not as good as it used to be' (Bidyalongkhorn, 1931:45). Hoping that this 'problem' will soon be resolved, Bidyalongkhorn spends the majority of an alumni dinner speech trying to convince those present that the two Suan Kulap institutions are one and the same, citing as evidence the fact that many British public schools have changed location, and that the name Suan Kulap was bestowed upon the school by King Chulalongkhorn himself.

The reticence of this older cohort did not deter Sutton, who etched the names of these graduates on rose-adorned alumni boards that lined the walls of the new library. There they were surrounded by portraits of Principals Smith and Spivey, images of the last three kings, and the various sporting trophies the school had accumulated over the preceding decade. Amongst the other objects Sutton had assembled in this room were new mechanisms of social

[67] The original lyrics read:
บรรดาเรา เหล่านักเรียน สวนกุหลาบ
ย่อมปลื้มปลาบ ปรีดิ์เปรม เกษมศรี
ล้วนรักเกียรติ รักนาม รักความดี
รักโรงเรียน

emulation and cohesion straight out of the Lancasterian playbook. The Suan Kulap Golden Scroll (แผ่นทอง) was a thick vellum parchment that recorded the names and deeds of students or alumni who had performed an act of civic heroism. On December 13th 1927, the school celebrated as numerous Suan Kulap students were honoured for tackling a large house fire that had broken out on the Charoen Road. A photograph from the scene, printed in the following edition of *Suan Kulap Withaya*, shows a squadron of young boys, so-called *Look Sua* firemen (ลูกเสือดับเพลิง), firing several hoses at a smoking façade without an adult in sight. According to the article, the incident was the first recorded use of a fire engine in Thai history (*Suan Kulap Withaya*, 1927:304).[68]

Alongside this rollcall of honour, the school library was also home to the infamous Dog's Skin Scroll (หนังหมา), a foot-long parchment of bleached leather upon whose coarse surface was written the name of any student who had brought shame to the school through some contravention of the community's moral standards. Hung on the outside of the door, where it could not pollute the objects inside, the Dog's Skin Scroll was more a deterrent than an active catalogue. I can find only one reference the scroll being used to record a dishonourable act. This occurred in February 1931, several months after Sutton's retirement. According to Pradit Phanichkan (1986:42-3), who became Director-General of Public Prosecution, sixteen Suan Kulap students were added to the scroll after they were caught in the grounds of Watanawithyala, an all-girls Christian School located to the North of the city. After scaling the fence and startling a young boarder in a premeditated morning raid, the boys were captured by the school's Indian guards. and interrogated by the infuriated Headmistress Madam Cole.

[68] See figure 22.

Figure 22: A squadron of Suan Kulap Look Sua extinguish a fire on the Charoen Road, December 19th 1927

Here they committed the crime that earned them a place on the *Dog's Skin Scroll*; they told the principal that they were students at Wat Bowornniwet and repeated the lie when they were taken to Phra Khanong police station. The resulting investigation, launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, was reported in several newspapers, though Pradit maintains that this exposure would not have occurred if the influential Principal Sutton was still in office, since he was known to protect his students from damaging public scandal. For their sentence, the boys each received ten flogs of the cane and an entry on the *Dog's Skin Scroll*.

Of all these innovations that Sutton introduced to Suan Kulap, it is perhaps his emphasis on games and a culture of athleticism that was his most significant contribution to the school's burgeoning sense of communal identity. He began by transforming the school's infrastructure. To facilitate a greater range of sports, he extended and re-turfed the school playing field so that it could accommodate the country's first international size football pitch. Along the Western flank, he constructed, an ornate royal pavilion from where the monarch, who became president of the Suan Kulap Sport Club, could enjoy fixtures and distribute prizes.[69] After his colleague Arthur Churchill introduced Queensbury Rules and padded gloves to the school in 1913, the field was also home to Siam's first permanent boxing ring, an area where the Borough Roadians re-created the annual boxing tournaments they had held at Isleworth (Chanchai et al. 2010:236; Bartle, 1976:58).[70] Sutton extended his prolific sporting legacy into the wider city. His colleague Sawat claims that Sutton was the first man to introduce rugby to the kingdom after establishing and captaining Siam's first team in 1909 (Sawat, 1959:110). This inaugural match was held at the prestigious Royal Bangkok Sports club where Sutton would later extend the famous golf course from nine holes to eighteen (Sawat, 1959:110).

Sports had been an important part of school life under former Borough Road principals, but under Sutton they became all-encompassing. Sangop Suansiri (1982:100), a future literary translator, writes that Sutton deliberately skewed the school's demographic to favour boys who displayed athletic potential.

> *Back then, there were no entrance exams. You put your name down and a teacher told you to form an orderly line facing the Long Building. Many of the students were very afraid, as they had heard Mr. Sutton was very strict. If you did anything wrong he would shout "bend down" and cane you… He came out of his office and began inspecting the boys. This boy could study, that boy could not and so on. I later found out that he was inspecting our*

[69] King Vajiravudh loved English games and would distribute even small prizes, such as pencils and notepads, at the school.

[70] The first public fight held at Suan Kulap was a well-attended grudge match of 1922 between an ageing pugilist and the son of a man he once defeated. According to Vail (2014:526) the event was of historical significance to Thai sport since it 'marks[…]the end of the pre-modern period of [Thai] boxing and the beginning of *muay* as a rationalized ring sport'.

calves. Those boys who entered were able to run fast and pay sports well. That was his selection process. I had muscular calves and could run fast so became a Suan Kulap student from that day. And I didn't let Mr Sutton down. I won running prizes from the King during both my years at Suan Kulap. (Sangop Suansiri,1982:100)

To compete with Suan Kulap, other elite boy's schools were forced to develop their own sporting culture. Debsirin, in particular, emerged as Suan Kulap's greatest institutional rival during this time, an enmity amplified by the schools' similarities. Both were founded by Chulalongkhorn within a few years of each other and, during the period in question, had a Yorkshire-born Borough Road graduate called Norman as principal— Mr. Normal Selley in the case of Debsirin.[71] As inter-school tournaments became popular attractions, an effusive piece printed in *The Bangkok Times* made the excessive claim that the sporting culture espoused by Norman Sutton at Suan Kualp was responsible for producing a new generation of healthy and athletic young Thais. According to the article:

The youth of Bangkok have stronger, larger and more resilient bodies these twenty years past. These days, a sporting fixture with a farang *squad will likely result in a Thai victory. This is a far cry from the past when the small and feeble stature of the local population assured perpetual defeat. Be in no doubt about it, this evolution of physicality and psyche is the result of the various sporting exercises spearheaded by Englishman and teacher, Mr Norman Sutton*.

(Quoted in Thai in Sawat, 1959:111-2)

As in the playing fields of Isleworth, it was the putative qualities engendered by games that were of interest to Principal Sutton. Bus Simasathian, a former student of Sutton, claims that it was during the intercourse of such football tournaments that he came to appreciate the qualities of 'generous sportsmanship' (Bus, 1959:42) and the British 'tradition' of fair play.[72]

[71] See figure 24

[72] Mangan (1996:30) notes that the British love of fair play was a rather novel convention born of imperial practicality. Prior to 1850, the more abrasive Georgian masculinity prevailed among England's

Figure 23: Football tournament at Suan Kulap, circa 1915 (courtesy of Jirat Chantasaen)

Bus describes how Sutton attempted to instil these values in his charges by organizing special football tournaments in which the students would be allowed to win. Such matches pitted the school team against a clearly superior opponent, such as the British expatriate employees of the Borneo Company or even the teaching faculty themselves (*Suan Kulap Withaya*, 1925b:312-3; *Suan Kulap Withaya*, 1925a:501). Initially elated by his team's miraculous triumph against the 'mythical giants' (Bus, 1959:42), Bus later came to regard these contests as object lessons in ethical conduct and self-control. He writes:

> *To this day I think about those games, and I want to rush and bow at the feet of those* farang *to thank them for preserving my legs, so that nothing in my little body was broken. The proud victory of that day, I am now inclined to think, belonged to the game's losers. For they overcame*

most preeminent school halls, which were often 'a world of hard-drinking, horse-racing, gambling, blood sports, prizefighting and sexual indulgence' (Mangan, 1996:30). As antidote to frequent uprisings, school like Eton and Harrow created expensive playing fields, arranged cup-ties and formed league tables. The Anglo-Saxon 'instinct' for 'fair play' dates no further back than 150 years.

their hearts to allow us to win when they could havea so easily overpowered us. [73] *I cannot but think it is my happy fate to have met adults with such generous sportsmanship. If not, my legs would have surely been broken and I would not have acquired sufficient consideration for others.*

(Bus, 1959:42)

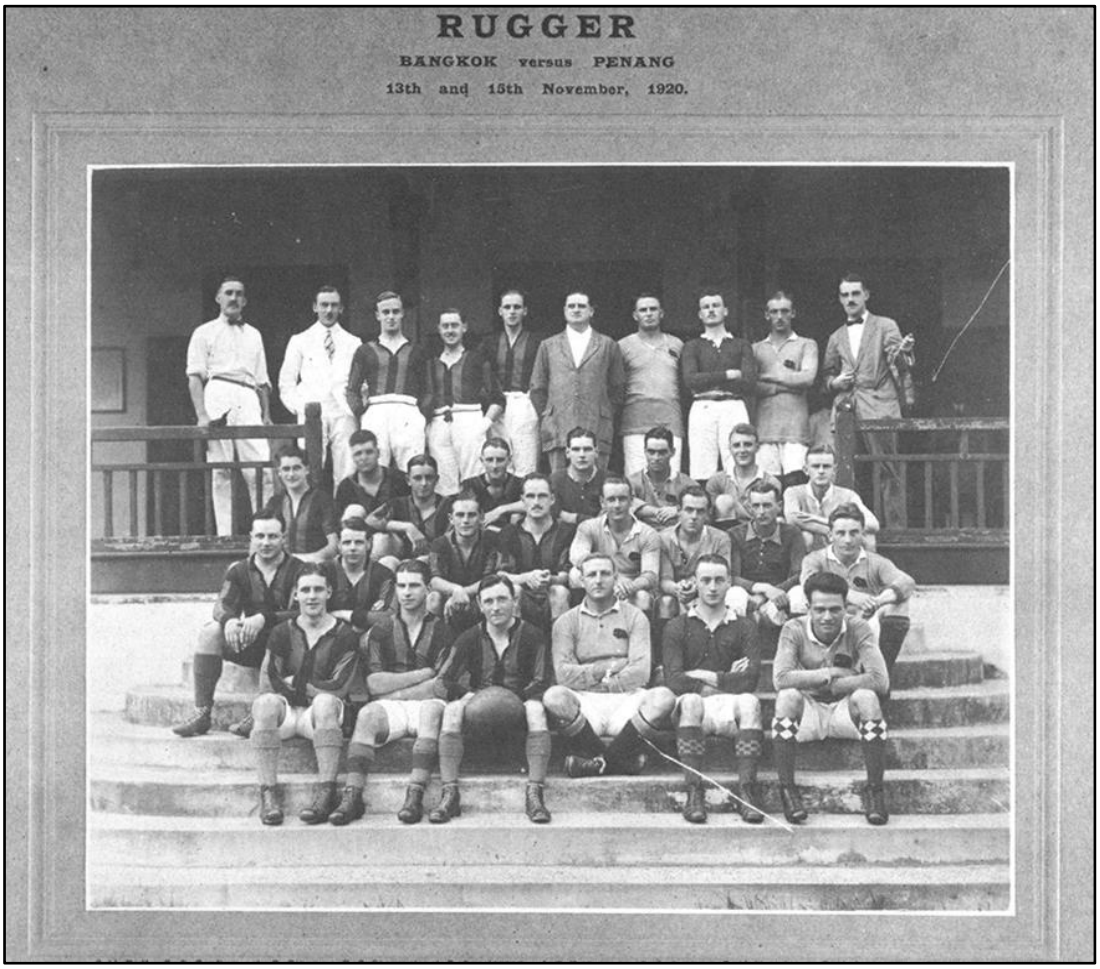


Figure 24: Bangkok and Penang rugby team photograph, November 1920. Principal Normal Sutton (captain) seated front row, fourth from left. Principal Norman Selley of Debsirin seated second row, sixth from left.

The end of the Sutton era came on August 20th 1930 when the former principal boarded a train at Hua Lamphong *en route* to the passenger ship that would take him back to England. *The Bangkok Times* reports that the crowd of well-wishers that greeted him at the platform

[73] Bus reports that most of the Suan Kulap team played barefoot, believing it granted superior ball control and striking accuracy. Wearing boots was perceived to be a threat that the player intended to use the studs as a weapon. During inter-school tournaments, when pupils wished to both intimidate the competition and retain maximum dexterity, players opted to wear a single boot (Bus, 1959:39).

was the second largest to have ever assembled at the station, beaten only by the large throng that welcomed the Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore three years prior (quoted in Sawat, 1959:118). He left behind him a complex and charismatic institutional identity now firmly rooted in the governing class. Capable of mobilising strong identification and corporate allegiance, this identity was often couched in the rhetoric of civic development and the needs of the modernising state. As British influence waned in subsequent decades and the kingdom suffered the paroxysms of revolution and war, Suan Kulap clung to the remnants of this ideology, constantly manipulating, and changing its configuration in response to the turbulent political landscape. In the final section of the chapter, I consider the end of Suan Kulap's Anglicized era and the political context in which its demise occurred.

The end of Anglicisation

Most of the Borough Road cohort who had worked at Suan Kulap were either retired or dead by the time of Sutton's departure in 1930. Principal Spivey's death had occurred suddenly in 1915 followed, three years later, by Ernest Smith's demise on the Indian-bound steamer he had boarded *en route* to convalesce from a recent accident (Sawasdisansataraput*,* 1958*:*24). Ernest Godfrey, Suan Kulap's headmaster of Science, retired the same year as Sutton but died three years later, on 25th June 1933, when he suffered a heart attack at the family home (Sawasdisansataraput, 1965:55) Buried in Bang Mai Protestant cemetery, Godfrey is credited with discovering 1,000 species of Siamese butterfly and was survived by his son, John Godfrey (aka Yol Thirakul) a judge in the Thai Court of Appeals and professor at Thammasat and Chulalongkhorn Universities (Sawasdisansataraput, 1965:54; *Cremation volume of Yol Thirakul*, 1963:ฆ-ช). Having returned to the United Kingdom in 1898, Ernest Young, Suan Kulap's first British headmaster, produced several popular geography textbooks including a monograph on the peoples and culture of Siam. Having served as Principal at The John Lyon School from 1902-1911 and latterly the Harrow Country School for Boys (Walford, 2001:88-89), he died in 1946 at the age of seventy-five. His successor, William Johnson, died the same year on 12th March, after succumbing to an oesophageal infection. Having retired three years before Sutton, Johnson lived to the age of 76 during which time, writes his son, his health faded and he contented himself thinking about the eminent men of state his old

students had become (Pathom, 1957:70). He was cremated in a Buddhist ceremony having lived in Thailand for fifty-one years.

No new generation of Borough Road scholars followed Sutton to Suan Kulap, and the disruption of the First World War broke the close affiliation these two institutions had once shared. Borough Road was taken over as a military transport depot in 1916, forcing the remaining ten students to be transferred to theological college in Richmond. Of the nearly 800 Borough Road students, former students, and tutors who served in the forces, 111 lost their lives to the horrors of the trenches (BFSS Archives, 2013:4). Meanwhile, Siam stopped sending students to the UK for fear of submarine attacks. Momentous national changes had also occurred in Siam. Two years after Sutton left Bangkok, the royalist political structure with whom the British had enjoyed smooth relations was overthrown by a small cadre of mid-level military officers and bureaucrats, many of whom were old Suan Kulap students who had met as scholarship students in Europe. Following the coup, Sutton's successor, Principal Arthur Churchill, Suan Kulap's final Borough Road headmaster, found himself operating in much less favourable political conditions than his predecessors. Subsequently, he devolved many of his prerogatives to Deputy Headmaster *Luang* Seksunthorn, whose dogmatic rule is the subject of chapter six. As the new government fractured along ideological lines, the ascendent military leadership aligned itself to the fascistic ideologies of Europe before assuming power in 1938 under the dictatorship of Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram.

The Borough Road cohort were not entirely blameless for some of the chauvinistic polices and cheap nationalism that followed. Skinner (1957:246) has shown that the anti-Chinese racism of the Thai elites following World War One was highly influenced by the 'Yellow Peril' xenophobia that raged in late nineteenth-century Britain. Sutton constantly warned his staff to stay away from Chinese dice, while Ernest Godfrey joined everyone else in referring to his lab assistant, an ethnic Mon, as *Ta Chek* (ตาเจ๊ก), or 'chink eye' (Sawat, 1965:52). Headmaster Ernest Smith even spent his leisure hours composing anti-Chinese ditties, such as his 1907 effort, *A.D. 1940*, which imagined a future Siam dominated by a population of economically dominant Chinese.

(Sung to the tune of Yankee Doodle)

Long-time John Chinaman

He went to school to learn-a

But now he just sings "pro per my"

And runs the whole concern-a

Deutscher and Britisher, French and Yankee-Doodle

Have quit the game without their chips

And John has scooped the boodle

Sugar, rice and opium

Coal and iron, too, sir

John will sell you anything from whiskey to a cruiser

Pig-tails and flapping breeks are now the only wear, sir

And not a head in all the East that has to part its hair, sir.

(Quoted in Sawasdisansataraput, 1965:22-3)

By the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, most of Suan Kulap's British faculty had already left Siam. Those that stayed suffered the consequences of a whipped-up xenophobia that extended to all foreigners but the Germans and Japanese, with whom Prime Minister Phibul had colluded (Reynolds, 2004:125-6). The last British teacher to remain at the school following the war was Herbert Silverthorn, a popular mathematics and English teacher whom students affectional called 'longan stone head' (หัวเม็ดลำไย), a reference to his pomaded black hair and its resemblance to the sleek seed of the lychee fruit (SKRC, 1995:219). One of three faculty charged with training scholarship applicants, Silverthorn was considered among the school's most capable instructors, even serving as private tutor to the young prince Bhumiphol during the future monarch's short residency in 1934. As an energetic young member of the faculty, Silverthorn was also tasked with casting and directing the end of year English play and worked closely alongside Principal Sutton during afterschool rehearsals (Pradit, 1986:44).

According to the testimony of Sombun Nanthapiwat, a former student who was interviewed for the school's 120th anniversary, Silverthorn was captured by Japanese soldiers following the invasion of 1941 and held in an internment camp at Thammasat University for the remainder of the war. Sombun claims that Silverthorn was one of the last prisoners to leave the camp following liberation as he volunteered his place to an elderly Western couple. Before his return to Britain, Silverthorn contacted Sombun and promised to send his former pupil a good quality English dictionary once he had resettled in his homeland. The dictionary arrived, but Sombun discovered that Silverthorn had committed suicide shortly after repatriation. Sombum claims that Silverthorn had been distressed following the revelation that his partner had re-married during his absence. He subsequently threw himself from a bridge over the Thames.[74] The last remaining photograph of Herbert Silverthorn shows him sitting outside the Long Building with his pomaded hair reflecting in the sun. Included in the photograph are Principal Churchill and *Luang* Seksunthorn, with twenty-eight khakhi-clad students arranged in rows in front and behind. The photo, taken before graduation, shows the *matayom* eight class of 1937, also known as the 49th class.[75] Prem Tinsulanont, slightly smaller than the other boys, stands at the back of the picture with his belt lifted high and his hair slicked black. The experiences of this class during their time at Suan Kulap will be the subject of chapter six.

Though retired to a village in West Yorkshire, Norman Sutton kept a close correspondence with many of his former pupils and closely minded any Suan Kulap scholarship students studying in the United Kingdom. In one letter, written to medical student Samarn Mantaporn, he expresses disappointment at the new administration. Dated June 2nd 1946, Sutton writes

> *My dear Smarn,*
>
> *I hear you are going back home on the 6th, so I feel that I must write to wish you a happy return to your native land.*

[74] Silverthorn's death certificate, obtained from the metropolitan archives, generally corroborates the account provided by Sombum. According to the document, the body of 39-year-old Herbert Somerset Silverthorn, described as a 'club secretary', was found on 29th March 1946 in a section of the Thames close to Prince's Wharf. Cause of death, signed by the coroner to Bermondsey, was 'asphyxia due to drowning' with the addendum that the 'deceased did take his own life whilst the balance of his mind was disturbed'.

[75] See figure 34

But first I must warn you that you will find persons or things vastly different from what you might expect and hope for, and you must be prepared to meet them; in fact, you must be ready for a hard fight, or you may sink into oblivion or be forgotten and passed over.

When you and I were in Siam, it was a first-class nation: now it has sunk to a third-class power! Siam toyed with the idea of cheaper civilization along Japanese lines, forsook her ancient friendship with Britain, and now is left with "a baby to hold".

When a conquering army parks its troops on a foreign city you know what happens to the girls and young women of that city. That has happened in Bangkok.

Some men whom you know, like Noble, Sutton, [76] *Porn Srichamorn and Boonyium, have strong characters and will fall not by the way. But the other end of the table holds it weaker brethren who fall to drink, women and vice in the many gay forms. You'll find a number of old friends and students who have slidden.*

Finally, you will be obstructed by bureaucrats; and thwarted by the envy of colleagues who lack your experience and academic qualifications. You may have to wait 8—10 years for the opportunity you long for— your first-class modern hospital with its medical school— and if you have to wait, be sure that your health is A1 when the chances comes….Lay your plans ready so that you can start right away when the opportunity offers. Keep abreast of modern thought!

Perhaps you'll think I a m a croaker, yet I learnt in that same hard school of bureaucrats and envious colleagues, and I saw brilliant Siamese students return, fall out and be forgotten, and never get their hopes realised.

[76] It is unclear if Sutton is referring to a son in this part of the letter. Sutton was married to a British woman who lived in the family home in Sathorn during his time in Siam. It is possible that he had a son who remained in Siam after his departure. However, there are no other references to a son in other sources.

Forewarned is forearmed. I think you can win and accomplish your heart's desire, get your hopes fulfilled and be of immense service to your native land. Do not be beaten by the forces of evil! May you have the best luck! Goodbye and God bless!

(Quoted in Saman, 1985 155-6)

Conclusion

In 1898 Principal Ernest Young (1898:56) declared 'there is no "esprit de corps" in any [Siamese] school unless it is cultivated by the master in charge'. During this chapter, I have traced how a series of British educationalists consciously manufacture a cohesive corporate identity at Suan Kulap using their alma mater and the imperialist British public school as an ideological blueprint. Once a novelty at the Palace School, the British master came to dominate the institutional culture of Suan Kulap Withayalai and establish a strong influence over the policies of the Department of Education. Under Principal Johnson, Suan Kulap English School's Anglicised curriculum become the preeminent training program for King's Scholars and thereafter the pedagogic benchmark for an aspirant middle class. Later, during the tenures of Principals Smith and Spivey, a culture of athleticism emerged at Suan Kulap, with the institute moving to a site consciously modelled upon the higher educational institutes of late nineteenth century England. Here students were submerged in the educational fashions of colonial Britain; they studied Victorian-inflected etiquette, read Shakespeare, wore boater hats, and hosted *Look Sua* jamborees. Physical punishment was tentatively introduced to curb the school's high rates of absenteeism, as were regular reports for behavior, manners, and cleanliness. Under Principal Sutton, the production of a Suan Kulap *esprit de corps* was accelerated further. The provision of a proper playing field, a new royal pavilion, and boxing ring promoted the imperial games ethic. Students were encouraged to subscribe to the notion that team games— and by extension the institutions to which they belonged—transmitted desirable qualities such as loyalty, self-control, perseverance, fairness, and courage. These qualities were further enforced by emulative mechanisms such as the Golden Scroll and the Dog's Skin Scroll.

During Principal Sutton's tenure, Suan Kulap gained a new symbolic and ritual language, a community magazine, and a nascent Old Boys Association that stimulated communal bonds

and psychological attachment. Communal symbols, colours, songs, honour boards, esoteric mottoes, and foundational stories catalysed the manufacture of a cohesive moral community. In England, these mechanisms of assimilation had been consciously applied to the raucous Georgian schoolboy so that he may become a more useful instrument of colonial purpose; a figure of dominance and self-reliance but also loyalty, deference and obedience. The school inculcated, in Mangan's memorable phrase (1998:18), 'the confidence to lead and the compulsion to follow'.

In Siam's post absolutists era, such close institutional affiliations provided the basis for important political networks. During this time, the state entered a period of profound instability and in response, the government sought to produce a different kind of political subject that could meet the political objectives of the centre. During this period, the qualities of a colonialist education became more pronounced and exaggerated. Along with deference to authoritative institutions, the political elite began to exhibit the pomposity, arrogance, and imperial enthusiasm that had prevailed in the Anglicised schoolhall. Chapter V is an analysis of the brief but intense period of militarization that occurred at Suan Kulap in the period following the end of Absolutism. Before that, the thesis returns to 2017, to an event at the school briefly referred to at the beginning of the thesis; The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentlemen.

Chapter IV

The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentlemen

In this chapter, I return to the public event with which I began this thesis, an annual ceremony known as The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentlemen. First performed in 2012, a year of great political turmoil in the kingdom, *The Wondrous Day* was the invention of Police Lieutenant General Nataphong Wathansukhol, an alumnus from the 81st generation who sought to 'strengthen Suan Kulap blood'. Using a template known as 'rap nong' or 'welcoming the juniors', Nataphong devised a new initiation ceremony at the school in which elder alumni would ritually induct first years into the Suan Kulap community. Already in its sixth year by the time of my fieldwork, *The Wondrous Day* has become an important date in the school's busy ceremonial calendar. In the first section of the chapter, I consider the wider political context in which this event was formulated, followed by a detailed account of the three activities that are performed as part of the day. Finally, I utilise the work of van Gennep (1960) and Turner (2008) to analyse the event as a *rite of passage* in which initiates are severed from their previous condition, entered into a state of interstitial liminality, before finding reincorporation into a new status. During this time, they experience a range of sensory modalities made possible through the dense symbolism of the rite. In the final section, I consider what these symbols seek to convey to adherents regarding the cosmology of the community for which they are being prepared.

Police Lieutenant General Nataphong Wathansukhol

Police Lieutenant General Nataphong Watansukhon, a senior figure in Prince Vajiralongkhorn's security retinue, has a passion for firearms and has cultivated an inimitable persona around the devices. Now in his late sixties, Nataphong is a curious amalgam of charismatic village elder, hard-boiled commando and cowboy of the Great Plains. Numerous photographs on alumni websites show him posing, pensively, with a silver revolver and a ten-gallon leather hat. He once designed and copyrighted his own personal logo in which the silhouette of a muscular peak-capped police officer can be seen in profile. Above him, written in English, are the words 'Order to Kill'. He reproduces the emblem on t-shirts, keyrings, and car stickers, which he distributes to close associates and members of the Suan Kulap shooting

club, another organisation he once served as president. At the bottom of the logo he scrawls the words *Nataphong 81*, a reference to the graduating cohort to which he belongs.

In 2016, Nataphong lent his machismo to a promotional video for Ajarn Sommay's Suan Kulap Studies program, in which he adopts the role of an enigmatic stranger who wanders into the campus to the redolent strains of Ennio Morricone's *My Name is Nobody*. The camera pans from his grey crew-cut and sober profile to the muscular arms that swell from the rolled-up sleeves of a tight black flak jacket. Beside his 'Order to Kill' logo, stitched into the jacket in conspicuous neon green, a gold amulet rubs against his bare chest as he looks beyond the camera and stares into the distance in sophic contemplation. Suddenly, the stranger's eye is caught by a group of young schoolboys playing football on the nearby field. They are kicking a pink and blue football around the school playing field and have accidently sent the ball into the vicinity of the stranger, who catches it and gently reprimands the group. 'Gently, younger brothers', he says and they bow in apology before gathering to find a seat around the man upon the steps of the Long Building colonnade.

The video proceeds with a stagey back-and-forth between Nataphong and the young schoolboys in which the impassive Lieutenant General quizzes the lads about the history of the school and its values. 'The pink and blue school colours, do you know where they come from, little brothers?' Nataphong asks, as the boys wave their hands and shout the answer. 'Calm down', he counsels, 'answer one at a time'. He selects a boy to respond. 'Pink is the colour of His Majesty King Chulalongkhorn, the founder of the school'. 'And blue?', asks Nataphong. 'That is the colour of Her Majesty the Queen Consort of King Chulalongkhorn, Sir', answers a second schoolboy. Nataphong nods. 'And how many years has Suan Kulap been established?' 'One hundred and thirty-four years', they answer in concert. 'Good, good', Nataphong nods. 'And what makes Suan Kulap good?' 'Leadership', offers one student. 'Scholarship', 'our activities', 'from the past until today', answer three more in rehearsed succession. 'Oh yes', the elder concurs, 'all our alumni are skilled and have a fine social reputation. We have had eight prime ministers, who can name them? 'Manopakorn Nititada, Sir', says a boy from the back raising his hand. 'Thawi Bunyaket, Sir', says another until the names are reeled off one by one. Nataphong pauses in contemplation. 'Us from Suan Kulap, we have our own identity (มีอัตลักษณ์เป็นของตัวเอง), what is that?' The students recite the normative characteristics attributed to Suan Kulapness in the same consecutive manner.

'Suan Kulap gentlemen are leaders, they love their friends, respect their elders, honour their teachers, are grateful to their parents and look after their juniors'. When they have concluded, Nataphong reminds them that they 'must not omit repaying the nation'. 'You must always remember that', he adds as the boys nod in unison.

Nataphong rises to stand, turning up his collar in preparation for his parting statement. 'You are very clever, little brothers, to answer all these questions. I want to tell you what unites Suan Kulap across its eleven institutions. It is the school colours, teachers, knowledge and friends. Suan Kulap Studies was established to seize and fasten the Suan Kulap subconscious so that we all travel in the same direction'. The movie ends with an image of the school crest and a voiceover provided by Nataphong: 'Suan Kulap gives academic knowledge and plants ideas that develop life'.

Four years earlier, in 2012, Nataphong had been recently elected president of the *Alumni Association for the 81st OSK Generation,* an organisation in the process of planning an event to commemorate fifty years since its members entered the school in 1962. Rather than arrange the usual black-tie gala, Nataphong imagined the creation of a new ceremonial gathering held within the grounds of the alma mater. In his plan, the 81st generation would welcome back former teachers and honour them with displays of obeisance. Young students would also be incorporated into the festivities so that important inter-generational bonds could be initiated and strengthened. In essence, Nataphong hoped that the celebration would allow him and his peers to relive memories from their beloved schooldays. He told me:

> *When I think about the past, I long to return to that old life. When I think about the school and my teachers at Suan Kulap, I just think how can I touch that life again? With the Old Teacher's Association, that vanished life returns. I can prostrate myself before my teachers, chat to them and care for them. We can spread the old stories of the school and its pupils. They must unite so they can pass on the identity and culture of Suan Kulap in the future.*[77]

In order to 'unite' the community and 'pass on the identity and culture of Suan Kulap', Nataphong and his committee determined to create *The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap*

[77] Personal communication

Gentlemen (มหัศจรรย์วันสุภาพบุรุษ สวนกุหลาบ), an event that would reconstruct the university tradition of *rap nong*, or 'receiving the juniors', within the context of Suan Kulap. In many Thai universities, *rap nong* refers to a period of one or two weeks in which senior students 'welcome' neophytes to their department by arranging a variety of games and activities, some of which can be unsafe or humiliating. The tradition, also known as SOTUS,[78] was reputedly introduced to Thailand in the 1940's or 1950's by students who had encountered the hazing practices then common in US colleges (Thongchai, 2015:3). Though the localized practice declined following the democratic uprisings of 1973, when students challenged many forms of institutionalised tradition, SOTUS and similar rituals of hierarchy became increasingly prevalent during the conservative royalism of the Prem era and is now widespread on university campuses (Thongchai, 2015:5). Supporters of the practice claim that SOTUS bolsters Thainess while providing proper preparation for social relations in the real world. Its detractors, such as Thongchai Winichakul (2015), claim that SOTUS is part of the strong conservative trend of the past few decades and aims at reinforcing patrimonial relations, obedience to power, and uncritical acceptance of tradition.

Nataphong had no desire to establish a practice of degradation at Suan Kulap, not least because an activity similar to SOTUS already exists at the school.[79] He wanted instead 'to create a warm bond between the generations' and 'strengthen Suan Kulap blood' (*Friends of Suan Kulap 81st Class*, 2017). He wanted to 'let the Suan Kulap world know we must be united'. With the aid of his peers, Nataphong assumed full responsibility for managing the program. He booked minibuses to transport elderly teachers to and from campus, invited monks to bless first year pupils with holy water and chants, rented loudspeakers, and purchased food,

[78] The English acronym SOTUS stands for 'Seniority Order Tradition Unity Spirit.

[79] Known as *wan la on* or 'the day of leaving weakness/immaturity', Suan Kulap's SOTUS tradition is limited to a single day near the beginning of term during which first year pupils must complete a series of physical activities prepared by senior students. At the *wan la on* I witnessed in 2018, initiates were required to crawl through a large labyrinth constructed on the playing field while older students threw water-filled balloons. At the end of the maze, initiates perform obeisance to a grotesquely masked student, a shaman of sorts, who squats ominously on a wooden chair. The day is jovial and knockabout, though imparted with an unmistakable sense of significance. Presiding over the activity, the school principal described the tradition as 'an important day in the Suan Kulap family' that all students must 'experience and endure' in the interests of 'strength, endurance, generosity, and respect for elder brothers'. Older students interrupt the slapstick proceedings to issue earnest declarations of inter-pupil affection. 'I loved you all before I met you, but now I have seen you, I love you even more', declared one elder. In recent years, *wan la on* activities at other schools in the Suan Kulap network have sparked controversy. In 2018, several newspapers printed disturbing images of bound and blindfolded 12-year-olds kneeling in the mud while kissing the ground (Prachachat, 2018).

alms, and flowers. At some point in the planning, it was decided that the returning alumni would wear the same uniform as their juniors, so a tailor was engaged to construct the necessary adult-sized shirts and shorts, with the letters SK stitched into the right breast.

On the morning of Wednesday 23rd May 2012, the first day of the new academic year, a group of around eighty sixty-four-year-old men from a graduating class of two hundred participated in the inaugural *Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentlemen.* Assembling on the playing field in the early morning, each dressed in a replica of the uniform they had had worn as twelve-year-old entrants, the 81st generation ritually welcome the school's new generation of first years. They made speeches, sang, danced, paraded, genuflected, and distributed gifts. At the end of the ceremony, they led the first-year boys to their classroom for the first time, where they described the values of the school and how one may find success as a student and citizen. When they left the campus at 9.30am, they visited a temple before enjoying a shared meal, while at the school normal classes commenced. During the proceedings, Nataphong made a speech before the densely packed playing field, addressing himself directly to the young boys sat on the grass before him. He told them 'from this day forward, from this hour on, from the minute you become the 136th Suan Kulap class, you receive a life purpose till far into the future. Do not forget until your death, young brothers, the tenets of Suan Kulapness'.

It has been noted by several analysts that times of conflict and upheaval within a social group are often accompanied by an increased production of demonstrative ceremonies or 'enactments' (Schwander-Sievers, 2001). Hobsbawm (2012:12) notes that the sudden appearance of 'invented traditions' are portentous symptoms of group anxiety and 'evidence…of problems which might not otherwise be recognised'. In 2012, the year Lieutenant General Nataphong began *The Wondrous Day*, Thailand's political situation appeared bleak. Academic observers described a 'slow-burn civil war' (Montesano, 2012:1), a 'deep crisis of authority (Charles Keyes, 2012:171) and 'fierce ideological debate' (Pasuk and Baker, 2012:226). Six years after OSK luminaries Prem and Surayuth orchestrated Thaksin's removal from power, Montesano (2012:1), an experienced analyst of the kingdom's politics, reflected that Thailand had become 'a sad example of rival social and economic elites selfishly tearing a society apart'. The country seemed locked into an interminable and accusatorial reciprocation of hostility. An anxious urban middle-class, once supportive of the ousted prime minister, had abhorred his lurch to populism and actively courted the interventions of older

institutions—namely the palace and the military— to remove him from power. Network monarchy, who had come to feel threatened by Thaksin's megalomania and electoral supremacy, duly obliged. This undemocratic denial of wider participation caused deep resentment among the neglected voters of the North and Northeast who openly challenged Thailand's entrenched power structures and the imperiousness of a privileged urban elite (Pasuk and Baker, 2012:223-6). Two years before the first *Wondrous Day*, in April and May 2010, the conflict turned truly violent when a military crackdown on pro-Thaksin rallies left 90 dead and nearly 2,000 injured (Haberkorn, 2012:43). Writing in the aftermath of this event, Montesano (2012:3) attributes the crisis to 'the pre-eminence of Thailand's royal institution [and] its emphasis on entrusting "good men"…rather than fostering the development of other institutions'.

In the midst of this upheaval, in the same year Nataphong began to plan *The Wondrous Day*, Ajarn Sommay established the Suan Kulap Studies program as a 'tool for fastening Suan Kulapness' during a 'crisis of low pupil quality' (Sommay, 2013:3-4). According to Sommay, it was 'necessary, in the middle of various educational problems, for the school to retain quality standards and the characteristics of "Suan Kulap gentleman" according to the wishes of HM King Chulalongkhorn' (Sommay, 2013:4). The committee she assembled, chaired by coup-maker and former Prime Minister Surayuth, was charged with introducing new 'activities' to the school and its eleven network institutions for the benefit of promoting certain conventions of behaviour and authority that had been identified as 'Suan Kulapness'. The invented tradition of Nataphong's *Wondrous Day* may be seen as an additional component of this wider institutional project, a new ritualistic mechanism to reinforce ideological coherence at a time when high-ranking state employees with a strong psychological investment in the current regime were 'anxious to defend their status and privileges' (McCargo, 2019:122). Speaking in 2017, following the death of King Bhumibol, Nataphong addressed the 81st generation at an alumni dinner and announced his satisfaction that *The Wondrous Day* had become a part of Suan Kulap 'legend' (ตำนาน) and an important event in the school's ceremonial calendar.

> *The thing that makes me proud is that it was our year that started this activity. Nowadays, more issues have come, so much more. This legend*

lets the Suan Kulap world know that no matter what is going on, we must be united.

(Friends of Suan Kulap 81st Class, 2017)

The Wondrous Day 2018

In 2018, *The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap gentlemen* is in its sixth year. I arrive early to the campus on a grey and humid dawn morning where a faint mist of incense has diffused from the school shrine and settled itself over the busy field. Over the next two hours, some three thousand pupils pack themselves into the large quad. Then, just before eight o'clock, a number of uniformed alumni from the 87th generation begin to issue logistical directives to the assembled mass, paying particular attention to the diffident first years, the 127th generation, whom they shepherd into a series of orderly lines facing the flag poles at the Western flank of the field. Each member of the 127th class can be identified by the large laminated sign that hangs around the neck and displays their nickname to the unfamiliar crowd.

The alumni then retire to the edge of the field and, following a brief pause, slowly re-enter the area in ceremonial fashion, following the percussive beat of several snare drums operated by members of the student band. The alumnus at the front of the cortege holds a large pink and blue flag emblazoned with the crest of the school which is saluted by a compliment of ten khaki-clad students as they progress. At this point, a teacher begins to holler clipped commands to the seated first years in a tone suggestive of military discipline. 'Students, stand!' the man shouts as the entrants rise in perfect, practiced synchronicity. 'Students, respect!' he continues as they perform a simultaneous *wai* to the elders who are now walking in broad formation down the centre of the field through a wide corridor that has been formed by the arrangement of bodies.

They are in high spirits. One of the men crosses his leg behind his body to trip his walking companion who stumbles slightly before recovering his balance and slapping the perpetrator good-humoredly. The students, who remain silent, watch as the procession makes it way towards the Western flank of the field and stops in front of the tallest flag pole. A period of

silence follows. The headmaster of the school ascends the stairs of the Long Building behind them and walks towards the middle of the upper gallery where a large brass bell is suspended over the balcony. This is the school's ceremonial bell, rung only on the first day of the school year. Shaking the blue and pink bell rope, the headmaster sends a vigorous tintinnabulation across the busy field which serves as the signal for the pullrope to hoist the tricolor Thai flag to the top of the mast. The school band plays the national anthem and the entire field sings.

Thailand is the unity of Thai blood and body.

The whole country belongs to the Thai people, maintaining thus far for the Thai.

All Thais intend to unite together.

Thais love peace, but do not fear to fight.

They will never let anyone threaten their independence.

They will sacrifice every drop of their blood to contribute to the nation,

will serve their country with pride and prestige,

full of victory. Chai Yo (Cheers)

At the conclusion of the anthem, the school band begin to play another song, a lilting and melancholic composition in the subdued register of *thai derm*, a more restrained musical genre than the triumphalist rally call of the European inspired national anthem. As the trumpets and symbols of the last number quieten, the xylophonic tremble of the *rantat ek* begins to sound throughout the field, followed by the mournful strain of the two-string *saw duang*. Everyone knows the song, and when the rows of uniformed boys and men begin to sing, they do so tenderly, producing a soft ballad of nostalgia and yearning. The song is called *Roses Return to the Garden.*

This is the place I knew before

In times now past

This is the place in youth I studied every day

Its name is Suan Kulap

That stirs my heart

And though those days are past

The roses now return

Figure 25: The 87th generation enter the playing field

Figure 26: The congregation sings *Roses Return to the Garden*

The land was once so close

and deep inside, my heart is full to burst

I return to the garden

I return to my mother's chest

With a heart fragranced like a blossoming rose

Warm with friendship

The roses scent links the hearts of our brothers

There never shall be a day it disappears

If the past could be once more

As is my wish

I'd praise those blossoms once again

and elevate the pink and blue

Until my life shall end

At the conclusion of the song, a small group of alumni ascend the slightly raised podium at the base of the flagpole and address the large crowd with the aid of a microphone. The 87th class, one of the men explains, wished to contribute something exceptional to this year's *Wondrous Day* and had been working hard over the last few months to write and produce a special musical tribute in dedication to the extraordinary occasion. The song they have created is called *Entrusting the Juniors* (ฝากน้อง) and they have invited a special guest to perform its world premiere. To the excitement of the crowd the elders introduce a popular actor and popstar who had won a televised singing competition several years earlier. He is introduced as a graduate of the 115th generation and is also wearing an adult-sized facsimile of the school uniform.

The composition of *Entrusting the Juniors* is a pastiche of musical styles. Composed entirely for instruments from the classical royal court ensemble, the gentle opening of the piece echoes the undulations of *phleang sathukarn* (เพลงสาธุการ), a musical genre traditionally played before sacred Buddhist ceremonies or during occasions characterized by obeisance. As the melody begins, the low and protracted notes of the *saw duang* create an atmosphere of melancholia redolent of the previous composition. The actor's voice is placid with the earnest pathos of his delivery. He sings:

'Entrust the juniors': these are the words from the elders to the juniors

And soon, as time goes by, proud they'll be they came

Here we build the bonds

That bind our precious hearts in love

Through heat and cold, through days and time

Stronger yet our pink-blue hearts

From this day on

We are brothers of the same blood.

During the song, the 87th class walk between the lines of first year boys and tie a small blue bracelet on each of their wrists. 'Every time I return here', announces the actor once he had completed his rendition, 'I think of it not as the place I studied. I think of it as home. It's the place you grow up to be a good adult and I want you all to remember every minute of all the good things'.

Figure 27: Elder secures a pink and blue bracelet around the wrist of a junior

The Boom

At any celebratory event involving a gathering of Suan Kulap students or alumni, it is likely that one will witness a choreographed chant and dance sequence known as 'Boom Suan' (บูมสวนฯ). It is performed at football matches, school assemblies, and even wedding receptions. I once witnessed a boisterous rendition in the car park of a closed night club where several of the excited participants had removed their shirts. Precisely when and how *Boom Suan* became part of the school's ritual practice is debated. The ethnomusicologist Lerson Bunthitsakda (2006:120-3) records similar chants appearing at Thammasat University around 1964, at a time when the government closely policed political activities on college campuses. Lerson writes that new students were expected to attend nightly rehearsals organized by seniors in order to learn these chants, which were designed to induce in neophytes 'a stirring of love, unity and arrogance (ฮึกเหิม)' as well as 'an ideological attachment to the institution' (Lerson, 2006:3). Performed at popular sporting fixtures such as the Chulalongkorn-Thammasat university football match, these chants likely filtered down to Suan Kulap, and several other elite high schools, over a number of years. Once transferred, institutions incorporated new movements and sounds to the performance and thus created a vernacular distinct to their school.

Boom Suan is fundamentally a vigorous circle dance, a widespread form of human expression in which the individual becomes part of a collective unit (da costa and Cox, 2016:198). A group of Suan Kulap students or alumni link arms around a neighbor's shoulder and invite a designated 'leader' to occupy the centre. The role of the leader is to conduct the dance, which is highly standardized, much like a conductor co-ordinates an orchestra. The passion with which he executes his role determines the overall intensity of the performance. Without the aid of music, the leader achieves synchronicity by utilizing a stylized choreography of gestures and postures that correlate to specific movements. For instance;

1. While the leader twists his outstretched hands back and forth, the circle must bend forward and utter a long and guttural scream towards the ground while rhythmically bouncing up and down.

2. When the leader raises both his hands and throws them down by his side, the circle shout ‘la’ while rapidly moving the head lower still.
3. When the leader leaps up and down, moving his arms in windmill fashion, the circle shout ‘hu lae’ in time to each jump.
4. When the leader brings his closed fists to the chest and jumps to one knee, the circle shout ‘Suan Kulap’
5. When the leader twists his hands from side to side the circle cease linking their arms and clap
6. When the leader shouts ‘3, 4’, and jumps to his knees with his arms parallel to his chest, the circle claps 12 123 12 12 1.

Within the confines of the playing field, it was just possible to accommodate an unbroken circuit of 3,000 bodies, though the operation requires superintendence. Several teachers and alumni organize the composition of the ring while an announcer motivates the crowd by issuing excited instructions in a microphone; ‘come on young ones, don’t let your elders lose their reputation’. Five or six pupils rush to the centre of the field to take up their position as ‘leaders’. These are all senior students who have undergone extended training in the dance and are known throughout the school as energetic conductors. The entire field links arms, waiting for the signal. The leaders raise their hands and the circle produce a thunderous wail that fills the field. This adenoidal drone, which lasts for half a minute or more, ends when the leaders began to jump wildly, throwing what appears to be chaotic gestures. Following each of these movements, the circle produces the corresponding lyrics in a bellowing register. Words are emitted more as belligerent cries and grunts than intelligible units of language.

AHHHHH.

LA

HULAE HULAE HULAE HA HA

HULA HULA HULA HE HE

SUANKULAP

SUANKULAAAAAAAAAAP!

The chant is performed several times, becoming rapturous with each fresh iteration. The loudest and most joyous participants are the senior pupils, to whose enthusiastic movements the elders look for guidance. *Boom Suan* had not been performed in the schooldays of the 87th class and the elders appear initially timid to match the fervour of the senior students. As they learned the grammar of the dance's gestures and cries, their performance grows bolder and more unison.

Figure 28: Leaders conduct *The Boom*

The exertion of prolonged screaming and jumping, combined with the close contact necessitated by *Boom Suan*, change the behaviour of the assembly. From boredom and stiff reverence, the group are now shouting, screaming, and hugging. From the sideline, I find myself involuntarily identifying with the atmosphere of affection and fellowship that has just been generated within the quad.

The Procession

One of the final elements of the *Wondrous Day* is a stylized procession in which the cohort of returned elders lead the first-year initiates through the side gates of the campus before returning them back to field via the school's main entrance. To do so, the 87th generation form a long row headed by two drummers and a piccolo player from the school's

marching band. Behind them, the one hundred or so elders arrange themselves in an orderly line four men wide. One of them carries a large pink and blue satin banner that he wafts above the heads of the cortege. The twelve-year-old first years are placed behind the elders, while the rest of the student body observes the parade from a seated position on the grass of the playing field.

After a brief pause, the first snare drum commences a staccato four-beat rhythm as the piccolo contributes a brisk *obbligato*. The effect is highly martial, and the train begins to progress at the pace of a gentle march. Following the musicians and the overhead banner, the group slowly files its way lengthways down the pitch passing parallel to the handsome façade of the Long Building. Continuing down the concrete path near the swimming pool, the parade passes through the blue iron gates of the side entrance and empties itself out onto the noisy pavement of the Chakkraphet road. From here the bannerman turns left, leading the procession toward the busy intersection with the Tri Petch Road. Turning left again, he marches down the exterior of the Long Building, passing the wooden-shutters and fence rail that run along the length of the structure. At the main entrance of the school, he passes under an elaborate fresh floral archway embellished with carnations—pink, white, and blue— and a verdant base of split-leaf philodendrons. The structure, which has been temporarily erected for the occasion, is generous in width and can comfortably accommodate three men travelling side by side. On the wall above the passage, is a permanent display carved in clay and painted in school colours that declares: *Welcome to the Suan Land* (ยินดีต้อนรับสู่แดนสวน).[80]

The elders pass under the archway, then file to either side, so that their bodies create a human corridor. As more bodies accumulate, this corridor extends as far the beginning of the playing field. As the initiates finally reach the floral archway, they are obliged to pass through the tunnel of alumni elders, which they do so keeping their heads bowed and hands to their chest in a *wai.* The elders pat their shoulders and offer encouraging remarks as they make their way through the corridor of bodies.

[80] See figure 30.

Figure 29: Elders lead the procession through the school's side gate

Figure 30: The procession re-enters the campus though a floral archway

Following the procession, the elders escort the first years to their classrooms on the upper floor of the Long Building where they convey 'beneficial' messages to the neophytes. This was a closed activity to which I, an uninitiated stranger, was not invited to observe. In subsequent interviews, several participants informed me that students are apprised of the community's values and the obligations during this section of the ceremony, with a clear link made between the future 'success' of neophytes and their adherence to the code of Suan Kulapness. There is much emphasis on the imperative 'to look after juniors' and 'respect elders' within the fraternal network to which they have been lately introduced. One of the elders explained that the objective of the tutorial was to 'instruct younger brothers' so that they felt 'bound to the institution for the rest of their lives'.

The Wondrous Day as 'public event'

In the preceding sections I refer to *The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentlemen* as a 'ritual' or 'ceremony', though the community who participate in this event rarely describe it using such terms. Rather than a *phithi* (พิธี), a term that commonly demarcates a bounded domain of ritual, the school refers to the occasion as a *kitchakam* (กิจกรรม), a non-sacral descriptor that is closer to the word 'activity', particularly one that relates to the acquisition of knowledge. The distinction is, perhaps, unimportant. It is not possible, Tambiah (198 5:125-8) warns, for the ethnographer to draw absolute distinctions between ritual and non-ritual behavior, and that only relative contrastive distinctions can help to distinguish between certain kinds of social activity. Nevertheless, it is necessary to propose a working theoretical definition for the assemblage of activities and performances that comprise *The Wondrous Day*, if only to avoid the kind of excessive empirical particularity that can leave local events isolated from a serviceable body of literature from which they may draw profitable comparison (Handelman, 1990:10-14). In the absence of any settled definition for the term 'ritual', I propose that *The Wondrous Day* satisfies Handelman's four-part criteria for a 'public event' (1990:9-12), a designation that benefits from the lucid specificity of single authorship. Following Handelman's rationale, *The Wondrous Day* conforms to the definition of a public event on the grounds that it:

(1) **Formalizes space, time and behavior**. The event is distinguished from mundane life by a programmatic structure enacted within the school premises on the first day of the academic year between the hours of 8.00 to 9.30.
(2) Incorporates a high degree of **replicability**. The event is re-enacted annually by similar characters passing through more-or-less similar sequences.
(3) The actions that make up the event are informed with **intention**. *The Wondrous Day* exists in order to 'do something' that is consequential to the social life of the institution. Informants report that the event; 'welcomes juniors'; strengthens Suan Kulap blood'; or 'passes on the characteristics and culture of Suan Kulap traditions'.
(4) An important role is given to the dense presence and high production of **symbols** which are expressed through material, verbal, melodic and kinetic media.

To Handelman (1990:9-12), public events are 'privileged points of penetration' in which cultural codes that are typically diffused or 'submerged in the mundane order of things' lie closer to the behavioral surface, often in the form of dense symbols and sensory modalities. Because such occasions are set up to impart cultural information to *participants,* the observing analyst is granted a similar empirical panorama. She is able to perceive the principles and prohibitions that structure the community—their cosmologies, words views, and values— when they are at their most systematic, demarcated and graspable (Handelman, 1990:9).

In the following section, I also draw from the theories of van Gennep and the symbolic anthropology of Turner to consider *The Wondrous Day* as a public event that shares organizational patterns with *rites of passage*, a theory of ceremonial activity concerned with moments of ritualised transition in the life of a social group. Though typically restricted to the study of ritual, I argue that the *rites of passage* model offers broad validity and can be profitably applied to the educative activity of The Wondrous Day.

According to van Gennep (1960), all moments of transition— whether birth, death, marriage, or the initiation of a new generation— have the capacity to disturb the fragile equilibrium of a collective and thereby cause members to question the moral sentiments upon which the group is organized. Such transitions involve an encounter between what a group considers sacred and what it considers profane. It is necessary, therefore, that such moments are

properly and securely regulated so that the interaction does not prove injurious to the community. Rites of passage act as ritual devices that work to secure social and cosmological equilibrium during moments of inevitable existential change.

Following van Gennep, it is possible to discern at least three separate transitions that are consummated on the occasion of *The Wondrous Day*. Firstly, there is the movement from one academic cycle to another. The event regulates the opening of Suan Kulap after a period of closure, a point at which sacred symbols may require 'regeneration' (see Kimball, 1960:viii). From this perspective *The Wondrous Day* is an operation to restore the potency of the institution's ancestral symbols and reaffirm the community's belief in them at a moment of flux in the cosmic rhythm. Secondly, the event facilitates and regulates a change in the social structure of the community as a group of profane outsiders transition to the new status of junior 'brothers'. The initiate is made sensible, during this metamorphosis, of the norms and ethical models of the social world he is entering— the community's cosmology— including the rights and obligations of its members. He emerges from the ceremonial space initiated and transformed. Lastly, we may view *The Wondrous Day* as a ritual cushion absorbing another status shift; the transition from employment and occupational identity to retired community elder. The two protagonists of this event, the 87th and 127th class, are both experiencing moments of life-crisis. As with the initiate, the alumnus is invested with a new status and symbolic power; he becomes a patrician elder with the cosmic capacity to guarantee the moral continuity of the community.

To safely incorporate these transitions, *The Wondrous Day* incorporates three distinct phases common to all rites of passage, as defined by van Gennep. The ritual subject first undergoes a number of symbolic actions that **sever** and **separate** him from his previous condition. He then enters a state of interstitial **liminality** before being safely **incorporated** back into society by the performance of certain actions. On entering the campus, initiates are subject to a number of practices that correspond to a 'rite of separation'. They are physically disunited from the guardians who accompanied them to campus. Parents are permitted to witness the event, though only from the Long Building colonnade, or some other area outside the ceremonial field. The initiate is then put before a group of monks who subject him to auspicious chants and flick reeds dipped in blessed water over his head, a benediction that confers luck or good fortune for the coming term. Rites of separation often feature similar

rites of purification in which the subject's previous affiliations, his fixed point in the social structure, must be symbolically cleansed so that he may be safely detached from the profane world.

When the purified initiate moves to the playing field, he enters a stage of liminality. Victor Turner (2008), whose symbolic analysis of ritual employs van Gennep's tripartite structure, notes that the liminal stage of a ceremony typically involves a dialectical process of structure and anti-structure that create successive experiences of inhabiting high and low status. This fluctuation, he observes, reaffirms the social world's hierarchical principle by implying that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and that he who is high must experience what it is like to be low. The first-year pupil is during this stage wholly submissive to instruction, being told when to sit, when to stand, and when to bow. He is first directed to form a line within a hierarchically differentiated space. Thus positioned, he is physically removed from the alumni and the concentration of iconic symbols at the centre of the field. Despite this humble positioning, he is, by turns, the recipient of gifts. A song and a bracelet tied onto the wrist by an elder who stoops and fawns over him.[81] The alumni, too, experience transitory humility, regressing from spiritual elders to a state of simulated pubescence before retired teachers. In a ceremony called *mutitachit khru khao* (งานพิธีมุทิตาจิตครูเก่า), or 'the rejoicing of the old teachers', the men perform an act of obeisance typically enacted by children. In their imitation uniform, they lead the elderly teachers to a red-carpeted dais and offer them gifts and garlands of jasmine flowers while kneeling before their feet.

Throughout the liminal period, the initiate is introduced to the sacred symbols of the community and the 'texts' that order its social world. Certain 'root metaphors' expressed in song and speech produce a dense 'Suan Kulap world' (Turner, 2008:25-6). Allusions to blood, birth, domesticity, horticulture, and maternal care underscore the moral and spiritual fecundity of the school. Suan Kulap is a 'garden' of fragrant roses and blossoms. It is the 'mother's chest' to which one must return. It is a 'home'. It is a site of construction where 'bonds' are built and the 'precious hearts of brothers' 'link' and 'bind'. As in all invocations of

[81] The use of belts, rings, bracelets, and crowns are widespread in rites of incorporation since they are analogous to the tying of a 'sacred bond' or 'knot' (van Gennep, 1960:166; Turner, 2008:98). Several university initiation ceremonies in Thailand feature a similar practice, in which senior students tie the wrists of the freshman to signify their belonging to the university.

life and birth, the symbolism of *The Wondrous Day* conveys faint intimations of death and sex. The maudlin lyrics of *The Roses Return* mourn times irreversible flow and the inevitability of expiration:

If the past could be once more
As is my wish
I'd praise those blossoms once again
and elevate the pink and blue
Until my life shall end

In the same song, the institution is likened to 'my mother's chest/With a heart fragranced like a blossoming rose', a clear allusion to maternal nurture, childish dependence, and shared kinship. There is, perhaps, eroticism here too. In printed Suan Kulap material, particularly annual yearbooks, it is not unusual for the alma mater to be described in obliquely sensual terms by the school's more lyrical students. In the 1968 yearbook, printed the same year the 87th class entered the school, student Suchat Nilawat (1968:32-3) wrote a poem called '*From Her Hand*' in which he compares his love for the school to that of the pilgrim Kamanita yearning for his departed lover Vasitthi. 'Our two hearts will forever be entwined', he promises. A few pages earlier, a student called Somrat provides a metaphorical short story called '*Only her…whom I love'* which features a fictional account of a young student meeting a beautiful older women 'in the middle of April's hot rays' (Somrat, 1968:29). A passionate love affair between the two ensues and before long the writer has 'forgotten all else, everything, and thinks only of her'. He writes of the woman:

> *I can still remember her slender body and sparkling eyes concealing purity…She stands at the end of a grass field and smiles at me and I unconsciously walk towards her, closer, closer and stop before her face. She meets my eyes and I see something beneath her purity. Can you guess. You may not imagine that, in fact, it is…love'*
>
> (Somrat, 1968:29)

Suddenly, the alternation between high and low status that characterises the liminal phase, is replaced by an interval of 'anti-structure' in which hierarchy and difference are temporarily collapsed. Marshalled lines of first years, second years, etc. are dismantled and replaced by a

great circle in which all indicators of rank and age are stripped. Shouting, dancing, touching, and the suspension of inhibition are common in this phase of liminality, which Turner sees as crucial to the transformative work of ritual (Turner, 2008: 94-130). The subject is released from structure and comes to accept the ideas, sentiments, and facts that are presented to him. He then returns to a stable state revitalized by this experience. [82]

The release from structure into what Turner calls *communitas* is necessarily transient. The subject, revitalized by his experience and still invested with the residual sacredness of liminality, must return to a secular state through rites of incorporation. During this period, he will undergo a symbolic death and rebirth. The old state must die and the other reborn by passing through what Turner (2008:27) calls 'apertures of death and life'. The initiate is first reintegrated into the social order by taking his place in a procession formed on the basis of horizontal hierarchy. Guided by alumni and the symbols of the school, the cortege leaves the ceremonial space through a side entrance, a portal van Gennep observes is generally associated with pollution and the passage of corpses (van Gennep, 1960:25)[83]. Elders then lead initiates down the Tri Petch Road until re-entering the alma mater through the passage of a vulvic floral archway lined with elder alumni who, assuming the role of midwife, assist the school in the symbolic delivery of the latest generation. They encourage and cheer initiates as they pass through the isthmus that conveys them to the sanctified world of the school. Thus reborn, the initiate is 'of the same (pink and blue) blood' and thereby sanctioned to participate in future ceremonial activities, including the subsequent revelation of privileged knowledge that ensues in the classrooms immediately after the ceremony.

The Garden as Cosmology

[82] There is a wide literature on the embodiment of ritual and the power of 'effervescent' assemblies (Durkhiem, 1915; see Olaveson, 2001 for comparative discussion of Turner and Durkheim in this regard), 'shared somatic states' (Blacking, 1977:10), 'mass participation' (Tambiah, 1985:127)and 'synchronized ritual behaviour' (Schüler, 2012). These works highlight how such experiences can be used to bind individuals to the ideals of the social group. According to Norris (2001:111-124), it is in such emotional states that the body receives communication directly from other bodies without the ambiguity of language. 'Outer' texts thus become internalized and imbued with feeling. We become more receptive subjects, Blacking (1977:5) notes, more amenable to fellow-feeling, body awareness, and educability.

[83] In the Thai context, bodily remains were traditionally carried through a side exit or the roof of a house, which was traditionally constructed from leaves or the grass of a local temple, to avoid crossing the front entrance. It was believed the spirit of the deceased would otherwise return to the domicile and thereafter wonder the earthly realm without hope of rebirth (Wichian, 2012:91).

Tambiah (1985:130) posits that all societies have cosmologies. That is to say that every cultural group possesses 'a body of conceptions that enumerate and classify…the universe as an ordered whole and the norms and processes that govern it' (Tambiah, 1985:130). Such constructs can be intuitive and highly complex, extended quite beyond the sum total of a subject's stated beliefs. They are, notes Tambiah (1985:129), 'richly embedded in myths, rituals, legal codes, constitutional charters, and other collective representations'. Ritual action, in particular, plays an important role in transmitting these ideological schemas and embedding them within the social life of the group. Through the 'heightened communication' of chants, songs, dance, music, verbal formulas, and material gifts, ritual works to 'enact and incarnate cosmological conceptions' (Tambiah, 1985:129) making them appear sacrosanct, permanent, and unquestionable (see also Myerhoff and Moore, 1977:20-21). They promise members a 'morally evaluated hierarchy of all creatures' and the experience of 'greater cosmic reality and truth if they will suspend doubt and simply follow prescribed practices' (Tambiah, 1985:131). In the previous section, I referred briefly to a number of 'root metaphors' that find expression through the semiotics of *The Wondrous Day*. These included allusions to fecundity, nourishment, maternity, birth, blood, and the symbolic creation of consanguineal bonds. In this section, I consider the use of ecological and horticultural symbolism throughout the public event and reflect on what it seeks to convey to adherents about the cosmological universe for which they are being prepared.

At various times throughout *The Wondrous Day,* Suan Kulap is likened to a garden that produces 'roses' or 'blossoms'. In the song *Roses Return to the Garden,* the metaphor is used to substantiate the community's social relations and kinship structures; it is 'the rose scent that links the hearts of our brothers'. Enacted almost entirely on a field, the event is replete with floral images, from the herbaceous archway under which all initiates must pass to the four roses protruding from a closed book in the flags of the school crest. At the end of the event initiates are declared *dek suan,* an equivoque that can mean both 'children of Suan Kulap school' and 'children of the garden'.

The image of the rose has been a part of the school's symbolic structure since its very inception, when it was founded on the site of the Grand Palace's former rose garden, a plot once overseen by the horticulturist Chao Khun Wang, a concubine of Rama I (Withaya, 2004). During the first three reigns, the garden provided flowers for royal ceremonies and was

harvested with such regularity that the poetess Phum Busubatharuachang once included a reference to the garden in her '*Twelve Implorations'*, asking for her penultimate request; 'please don't let me come back as one of Chao Khun Wang's flowers' (Withaya, 2004). By the time the palace school was established in 1881, the garden plot had been removed but the remaining structure was still widely known by its former name, which the school formally adopted when it converted to a civilian institution the following year. When the school relocated to its present plot, there was a more conscious effort to invoke the image of the rose as a totem of institutional identity and corporate representation. According to Samuna Amatyakul (1962:25), son of Headmaster Phraya Winitwithayakarn (1910-1915), Pia Malakul had been keen to establish roses around the newly constructed campus in 1911 and bade the gardener create generous borders where the flower might thrive. When the specimens quickly died it was determined that the soil on campus was unsuitable for the cultivation of roses and Phraya Winitwithayakarn opted to grow oleanders instead. Pia, who was intent on the success of the scheme, promised to 'find an expert on the planting of roses' (Samuna, 1962:25), but found no success. A few years later, Principal Sutton introduced the rose into the iconography of the school, by making it the dominant image on the school's redesigned crest.

By the time the 81st generation entered the school in 1968, community members regularly marshalled ecological metaphors to articulate a 'Suan Kulap cosmology'. According to Baker and Pasuk (2014:185) it was during this year that the growing population of Thai university students began to tentatively protest the Vietnam War and political corruption.[84] The Thai military, grown rich from US aid and investment, had become 'somewhat like a ruling caste, distinguished by its unique dress and rituals, vaunting its own purity, and claiming extensive privileges' (Baker and Pasuk, 2014:169). The old, colonial-style bureaucracy was expanded 'to loom much larger in the life of ordinary citizens' (Baker and Pasuk, 2014:171) and, with the approval of US patrons, the monarchy had been resacralized as a symbol of national unity against communism. Meanwhile, OSK Minister of Education Pin Malakul ensured school children were issued with textbooks encouraging them to 'buy Thai goods; love Thailand and love to be a Thai; live a Thai life, speak Thai, and esteem Thai culture' (Baker and Pasuk,

[84] At the behest of American advisors, the Thai government had begun to construct more schools and universities, taking the total number of undergraduates from 15,000 in 1961 to 100,000 by 1972 (Anderson, 1977:16).

2014:171). Within this context alumnus Sirichai Rasmeechan (1968:24-7), a future telecommunications executive, wrote a lengthy article in the 1968 yearbook in which he warns readers of the 'parasites' that may be lurking within the Suan Kulap garden. The composition begins with an allegory of the school as an ordered universe.

> *Ten years ago, I had the opportunity to acquaint myself with a garden in which were planted only roses. It was a plot of great vintage, attended by nearly one hundred gardeners from whom I made it my business to gain wisdom. Though my poor report may hardly do it justice, I must observe to you that upon the occasion of my first entering that great garden, I encountered all that was freshness and warmth. It was petals and buds, fragrance and beauty. In the dawn, fine dew clung to its petals and leaves, reflecting the twinkle of the sun like so many gleaming diamonds.*
>
> *In this garden, diligently attended by ceaseless cultivators, roses from the smallest bud to the largest blossom are arranged in four stages. By way of water, fertilizer and insecticide, the delicate seedlings are fostered until their fledgling roots sprout shoots and they may be transferred to a second plot for their better development. This pattern of transferal is repeated through a third and fourth plot, until a terminus plantation is reached in the fifth year. Progression is flexible, for if a plant is observed as insufficiently robust for transmission it will remain in its accustomed soil for one more year, and no more. If there occurs no improvement, the specimen will be uprooted and thrown from the garden for it is an undesirable specimen (and most likely ill-behaved). A flower that completes these five steps, however, is surely a most excellent sample that may now be sold to embellish the environment of any fine place in this country.*

Sirichai's garden specifies the mechanics of his cosmology. There is a morally evaluated hierarchy of all creatures that make up the cosmos, here comprised of cultivators and gradated flowers. This universe is just and accountable, promising cosmic rewards for members who adhere to its natural laws— they will be sold to 'embellish' the state— and punishment for those who transgress—'undesirable' plants are uprooted and discarded. Presented within the rationale of the scientific garden, the logic of Sirichai's cosmos appears

as reasonable and inevitable as the imperative rhythms of the biological realm. As an analogy, it is remarkably consistent with the notion of the 'gardening state' (1991:178) as elaborated in Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*. According to Bauman, modernist regimes are capable of rationalizing abhorrent acts when their intentions and prerogatives are patterned on the 'progressive' figure of the scientific gardener. Overwhelmed by the urge to replace 'chaos' with order, the gardening state gains the right to set apart 'useful' and 'useless' plants by his own 'model of harmony' (see also Schiel, 2005). 'This sets the standards for normality', writes Bauman (1991:178), 'and thus draws the borderline between the acceptable and the intolerable'. Because he knows best what is good or bad for his subjects, the gardener has a strong tendency toward autocratic technocracy, with an imperative to strengthening his biological stock through the elimination of 'bad weeds'

Indeed, Sirichai proceeds to make clear in his own piece the limits of acceptability in this 'model of harmony'. Cleaving to his horticultural allegory, he renounces the ingratitude of individual flowers and subordinates them to an inferior status in the moral hierarchy. He continues:

> *Gardeners must endure distress and tears. Third-stage flowers whom they have cherished and nurtured in the hope they will furnish the reputation of the garden become (imagine it!) beguiled by their own beauty. They fool themselves that the garden in which they grew is no longer worthy of their beauty or sacredness* (ความศักดิ์สิทธิ์). *Under such distortions of reason, they extract themselves from their original plots and travel to a larger garden (of which I have no desire to speak).*
>
> *Such a garden has its malevolent charms, its many species of fresh flora hot in their first bloom. They descend here from various botanical sources to jostle and parade their beauty with little thought or shame for their previous garden. They forsake those horticulturists who extended kindness and love with little thought for their own fatigue. They protected them and watered them, they ploughed for them tracks, and they gave them fertilizer so that they could become beautiful national flowers.*

> *Good friends, undesirable news has reached me. Four or five beautiful roses are ungrateful in the manner I have just described. They have fled from the bosom of the rose garden and into the admiration of that large garden. For what reason do they not stay and build the reputation of the rose garden? My conclusion is that they have no spirit... No one desires that such individuals be considered roses. They are not roses. They are parasites. They cling and feed on our flesh and blood until their wings are firm and their legs strong. Then they flee, without emotion, as is their instinct. Now you know the parasites.*[85]

The 'larger garden' to which Sirichai alludes is most likely a reference to Triam Udom Suksa, a newly established university preparatory school that was outperforming Suan Kulap in the examination results table. To increase their chances of gaining entry to a top-flight university, a smaller number of Suan Kulap students were opting to transfer to Triam Udom for the final two years of study, an act of parasitic hubris according to the author. Within a wider context of student political disobedience, Sirichai's cosmology also appears to delegitimize those who are 'beguiled by their own beauty' and would work against the imperatives of the gardening state. When OSK Colonel Narong Kittikachorn, whose father Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn had been appointed prime minster in 1963, decried undergraduate demonstrations in the early 1970s, he regularly referred to students protesters as 'larvae'. In 1972, the final year in which the 81st generation attended Suan Kulap, Narong provided his alma mater with a generous donation to begin a three day training camp for *matayom* three students that would 'train and adjust the personality of *matayom* pupils' and 'lead students away from the changing political situation' (SKRC, 1995:445).[86] Narong fled the country just four months after providing the donation— he was accused, though never charged, with firing on unarmed student protesters from a helicopter (Cook, 1997:195)— yet his camp continues to orientate Suan Kulap students towards a garden cosmology. When I attended the camp in 2018, one of the many activities first years were required to complete was a timed flower arrangement to be judged by a panel of teachers. After each group had completed their allotted five minutes, a teacher approached the plastic vase and offer a stern critique, most

[85] Sirichai ends his article with the disclaimer that his original submission that an editor forced him to bowdlerized the invective of his original submission.

[86] See Bowie's (1997) ethnography of a Village Scout initiation for a detailed analysis of similar re-education methods camps that emerged in Thailand during this period.

of which was concerned with a lack of consistent height in the arrangement. After watching the activity repeated several times, I noticed the teacher offer the same advice to each group. After judging the arrangement unsatisfactory, the teacher explained:

> *Each flower has its own uniqueness, its own beauty. But when the vase has many flowers someone must sacrifice and cut himself down to make the vase look good. They cannot be too high. This teaches you how you live in society. You can't be yourself all the time. You need to adapt yourself to get along well with others.*

The Wondrous Day of 2018 was deemed a great success. The planned activities were executed with precision and the participants left the field apparently energised by the morning's events. By 9.30 the students began their classes and the elders dispersed to eat a communal meal. There are signs, however, that not all students are satisfied with the increased influence that alumni hold over the school and its current students. During the protests of 2020, the Suan Kulap yearbook featured an interview with two student leaders who criticised the inaction of school management to condemn alumni who threaten and intimidate pupils who express contrary political views. In particular, they question the 'right' for alumni to subordinate pupils. In doing so, students challenge the cosmological hierarchy *The Wondrous Day* seeks to construct. In relation to recent protests, the students report:

> *It is not just pupils but their families who are being targeted [by alumni]. Some of them say "If I see you, I will destroy you". With this level of intimidation and bullying the school should not sit idle. But they do nothing, they remain uninterested, thinking they should leave it as an online issue. It's not right. There are many students being targeted. Alumni do not have the right. If someone retires or graduates from the school they become outsiders. This means they have no right to bully their juniors. They have no right to specify that their juniors must think in the same way they think. If a relative of yours was bullied in such a way, would you stand for it? And what if they inflicted violence and the school did nothing? Who is at fault? Both the alumni and the school are at fault. The school should tackle alumni and not allow them to simply refute the accusations for themselves.*

(*Pim Suan Online,* 2020)

Conclusions

In this chapter, I described and analysed the activities that comprise *The Wondrous Day of Suan Kulap Gentlemen*, an annual event held at the school at the opening of the school year. By employing the tools of symbolic anthropology, I postulated that the event can be viewed as a rite of passage ceremony in which both fledgling students and retiring alumni are transformed into initiated insiders and community elders, respectively. During this time the school constructs and affirms the myths, rituals, and symbols that confirm a hierarchical cosmology. As an invented tradition, *The Wondrous Day* emerged at a time of group anxiety characterised by organised attacks on the political centre and prominent OSK members. Though recent evidence suggests that some students reject the cosmological messages that the ceremony propagates. In the following chapter, the thesis explores a period of intense nationalism at the school which occurred during the years in which Prem and many of the future Suan Kulap network (built around the 54th class) attended the school. It was during this era that many of the institution's more conservative ideological tendencies began to take root.

Chapter V

Militarisation

This chapter is concerned with the development of a Suan Kulap ideology between the years 1932-1941. Beginning on the morning that the absolutist monarchy was abolished, it traces a nine-year period in which an increasingly nationalist state implemented a policy of militarization at Suan Kulap. I explore how this policy manifested and how it has been described by the people who were its subjects. The second section draws from narrative records to produce an extended account of *Luang* Seksunthorn, an educationalist whom the ministry promoted to the role of Deputy Headmaster shortly after the coup. I describe the punitive disciplinary regime that Seksunthorn established at the school and how it had been remembered with the institution's changing historiography. Finally, I consider the wider political implications of this short, violent era in the school's history and how it many have informed the important political networks that were forged at Suan Kulap during this period.

Coup

> *It was dark when I left my house to bicycle to school on the morning of 24th June 1932. I held in my hand a piece of paper with 10-20 English words that I was to memorise on the journey; my regular habit in those days…I turned left out of Setsiri Alley, following Rama V road until a right turn at the road behind Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall and on to the equestrian statue. I saw something there that wasn't right. Everywhere—the street, the field—were Army and Naval officers holding handguns and rifles. Machine guns circled the statue. Everyone wore faces fixed with resolve and brutality (เหี้ยมเกรียม). It seemed like chaos.*
>
> *A naval officer with a handgun made an urgent gesture in my direction. He shouted 'student, go quickly, or you'll catch a stray bullet'. I raced down the Rachadamnern Road. A tank passed me at full-tilt. Here and there more machine guns had been installed. At the intersection, another tank waited.*

Rumours spread; 'It is the beginning of the revolution to seize the monarch's power"; "The king resides at Klai Kangwon Palace at Hua Hin"; "They call themselves the People's Party"; "They want government in the hands of the people"; "They want to form a People's Assembly"; "They have captured the nobles and hold them for ransom".

When I reached school, everyone was talking excitedly in groups. Lessons had been cancelled and we hurried to any corner where we could see what was unfolding. Every now and then we heard the ear-splitting report of machine guns. Was there a lot of fighting? The nobles would surely not easily submit. There had been warning signs—many, in truth— but it was only now reality.

At 11am a tank entered the school and we heard the bell signalling a large assembly in the Teacher's Association building. The soldiers distributed pamphlets to each of us and their leader stood on the stage to read from a book. When the announcement was finished a civilian stepped on the stage and told us his name was Mr. Sa-nguan Tularak and that he was one of the revolutionaries. His voice was loud and echoed through the hall.

"Now the country's administration is under the power of the People's Party and we ask everyone to support one another. What we must do at this time, teachers and students, is march down to Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall in support of the administrative changes made by the People's Party…."

When he stopped speaking, the hall mumbled, unsure how to proceed after the volley of information. Then Mr. Sa-guan produced a black Browning pistol from his pocket and raised it in front of him as if to shoot. He declared; "If anyone disagrees with this march, say so and I will plug you straight away".

We all shouted, "We agree, we agree".

… After that around 2,000 of us marched to the Throne Hall carrying prepared signs that read 'We Support The People's Party'. We passed Wat Phra Kaew, the Ministry of Defence, and Sanam Luang until we convened at the equestrian statue. A soldier came out to thank us for showing support for their power grab…and we knew that soldier was an artilleryman captain Phibun Songkhram, who would one day become our prime minister

After that we dispersed and went home

(Prakep, 1970:125-136)

The school had only been open a month when the government changed in the dark of the morning. Later that day, a tank came in from the bridge side and called a meeting of students and teachers to tell us about the change. We were excited and skittish (ระทึกใจ) after hearing it all, though not entirely clear on what was happening. All their talking left little chance for enlightenment. When the assembly was quit and we had a rough idea of the situation, some students went to put on their Look Sua *uniforms and to help secure the Anand Samakhom Throne Hall… Many of them didn't return to school for months.*

(Pipat, 1984:95)

On the evening of June 24th 1932, a small coalition of mid-ranking officials and military officers calling themselves the *Khana Ratsadon*, or 'People's Party', seized the capital, overthrew the absolute monarchy, and announced their intention to establish a National Assembly. Years in the planning, the insurrection was largely bloodless. Most of the rebels belonged to a generation of young men who had entered a meritocratic educational system, secured scholarships abroad, and returned home to find their careers frustrated by ingrained feudal privilege (Thawee, 1972:64). Many were former students at Suan Kulap English School or Suan Kualp Withayalai who openly speculated that the royalist regime sought to keep its population ignorant and compliant by deliberately underfunding public education

(Copeland, 1993:177-8). These concerns were substantiated in 1926 when the crown replaced the self-made Suan Kulap graduate *Chao Phraya* Thammasak Montri with the ineffectual Prince Dhani Nivat as Minister of Public Instruction.

The expansion of public education contributed significantly to the success of the coup. At Anglicised centres of learning such as Suan Kulap, students were exposed to alternative political ideologies and encouraged to form tight communal networks that operated on the basis of institutional loyalty rather than obeisance to dynastic patronage. When these men were sent by the state to study in Europe, they sought out like-minded expatriates with whom they formed secret political syndicates. Together they planned the removal of a generation of older princes and nobles— many graduates of the old Suan Kulap Palace School— who represented the feudal regime upon which the modern bureaucratic state had been founded.

The formative experiences of Pridi Panomyong, the ideological leader of The People's Party, provides an illustrative case in point. Pridi briefly studied under Principal Sutton at Suan Kulap in 1915 before an early political awakening inspired him to leave the school to work on his father's farm. According to his memoirs, Pridi was in the process of studying Si Sunthorn's *mulabot banphakit* when he encountered in his textbook the fictitious kingdom of Sawatthi, a despotic and cheerless realm where 'all the ordinary people felt heavy in their hearts' and the nobles did little else but play musical instruments and 'enter rooms to engage in sex' (Pridi, 1978:64). Deeply impressed by the analogy, Pridi writes: 'it was the first time I was conscious of the decay of Absolute Monarchy and backward feudalism' (Pridi, 1978:64). Four years after leaving Suan Kualp, Pridi won a scholarship to study in Paris where he surreptitiously recruited young men of a similar background, including agricultural student Thawee Bunyaket, an OSK from the Spivey era (Thawee, 1972:64). Over several years the pair assembled a core group of seven overseas students who, once they had returned to the kingdom, began to quietly source political support from disgruntled colleagues and students. After a long campaign, Thawee finally convinced his Suan Kulap contemporary *Luang* Sindhu Songkhramchai, a rising officer studying in Denmark, to join the party and begin securing allies in the Navy (Thawee, 1972). By the hot season of 1932, Bangkok was rife with rumours that a group of law students would publicly petition King Prajadhipok for a constitution on April 6th, the day he was due to inaugurate the opening of Saphan Put Bridge, just a stone's

throw from the Suan Kulap campus (Phunphitsamai, 2016: 106). The day before, Suan Kulap had celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with a convivial arts fair organized by *Luang* Sindhu Songkhramchai, now returned from Denmark, and attended by the school's founder, Prince Damrong. On the day of the bridge opening, Suan Kulap students sold commemorative pins and photographs of the new structure to raise money for the Thai Red Cross (Prakep, 1970:118). But the whispered challenge to royal power did not materialize.

Three months later, on June 23rd, Prince Paribatra,[87] Minister of the Interior, received a call from his Director of Police regarding a group of Pridi Panomyong's law students who had been overheard discussing a military uprising whilst riding a local train. Seeing the name of his own nephew on the list of conspirators, Paribatra held off arrests and, later that evening, found his palace surrounding by a gunboat captained by *Luang* Sangworathakit[88] (Pridi, 1973:9-10). After a tense standoff, the prince was captured by the rebels and taken in his night clothes to the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall, where he was joined by forty other royalist prisoners, including Prince Damrong, who had just turned seventy years old (Suradet, 1978:89; Phunphitsmai, 2016:118). During the insurrection, the rebel Captain Khamnanyuthasin[89] gained command of a Cavalry division by running through the sleeping barracks shouting about a Chinese uprising that had to be suppressed as soon as the men could slip on their fatigues (Songsuradet, 1978:82; Prayoon, 1978:42). Though the coup makers planned to avoid bloodshed, a significant injury was sustained by *M.R.* Gen. *Phraya* Senasongkhram[90] who was shot in the stomach during his arrest. Only the Minister of Communications, Prince Purachatra,[91] managed to escape Bangkok by commandeering a train to the king's summer palace in Hua Hin (Stowe, 1991:18). The following morning the People's Party charged Lieutenant Commander *Luang* Suphchalasai[92] with informing the monarch of the coup and escorting him back to the capital in HTMS Sukhothai (Mahamontri, 1965: 21).

Pridi knew that the coup was an audacious political gamble and did not underestimate the power of institutional networks. Facing a vengeful nobility and a wavering military, he sent

[87] Graduated Suan Kulap Palace School in 1891

[88] Suan Kulap Withayalai student, 1914-1918

[89] Suan Kulap English School, 1905-1909

[90] Attended the Suan Kulap English and Thai School circa 1903.

[91] Attended Suan Kulap Palace School in 1894.

[92] Attended Suan Kulap English School 1908-12

his former student Sa-nguan Tularak to mobilize support for the new regime at Suan Kulap. Arriving in a tank, Sa-nguan immediately called an assembly of staff and older *matayom* seven and eight pupils. According to Somjit Khosawana, an eyewitness to the assembly, Sa-nguan threatened violence to any faculty member or student who demurred, shouting: 'You must not ask. If you require further details at this moment, I will answer with my gun. We have already captured the nobles' (Interview with Somjit quoted in SKRC, 1995:214). The decision to send Sa-gnuan paid off. Suan Kulap students provided an early, if coerced, demonstration of public support for the coup and became an important political ally. In the hope of finding good jobs in the new government many students contributed to the suppression of a subsequent royalist counter coup that took place the following year. During the uprising, as Prince Boworadet led royalist troops into the capital, Suan Kulap students carried provisions and ammunition to the government front lines at Bang Sue and Laksi (SKRC, 1996:215). In the north Bangkok district of Bang Khen, some of the boys exchanged gunfire with the rebels, apparently shouting 'Bring it on! Bring it on! Let the bullets drop from the sky', with little notion of fear or danger, likening the event to the showing of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, which had just opened at the Bang Krabue picturehouse a few days earlier (Prakep, 1970:137). Others were tasked with guarding the nearby prison house while the gaolers were away fighting. With the rebellion scuppered, Suan Kulap students were invited to lead a victorious government parade around the Northeast city of Rachasima during which every student met Gen. Phibul Songkhram who awarded them a 'Medal for the Safeguarding of the Constitution' (SKRC, 1995:215).[93]

Suan Kulap after the Coup

Following the coup, the new regime experienced an outburst of unprecedented political activism. With the termination of absolute monarchy, there emerged a new political space for organization and dissent alongside an entirely new civic vocabulary with which to articulate reformist ideals. Between June 1932 and early 1934, a spate of industrial strikes led by galvanized rickshaw drivers, rice mill operatives, and tram workers demanded safer

[93] For an analysis of the People Party's visual culture after the Boworadet Rebellion, see Thanavi (2018) and Peera (2022)

working conditions and higher salaries (Brown, 2004:39). Even high schoolers were caught up in the mutinous tide. In September 1932, *The Bangkok Daily Mail* (12/09/32) reported a 'mob of several hundred boys' from St. Gabriel's and Assumption College, two of the capitals most prestigious boy's schools, were on strike in demand of lower school fees, observance of Buddhist holidays and the reinstatement of expelled students. Invoking People's Party neologisms such as 'constitution' (รัฐธรรมนูณ) and 'committee' (กรรมการ), the students sought to restructure the administration of the school and exercise greater influence over the implementation of institutional policy. Two weeks later, they had begun to occupy a vacant palace that was scheduled to become a new secondary school and were calling for the promulgation of an Assumption College Constitution that would recognize student suffrage. In a written declaration, they wrote: 'The school belongs to the students. Each student will have a right to vote and to decide the policies of the school to select their executive committee, which will lead them to progress and advancement. The school will grant equality and justice to all students' (quoted in *Bangkok Daily Mail*, 29/09/32). Tellingly, the executive committee proposed by the students incorporated one headmaster and fourteen students, a composition that mirrored the fifteen member People's Committee of Siam established by the new government. On September 29th, the demonstrators capitulated and were expelled by the principal of Assumption, who insisted the entire campaign had been 'intended as a joke' (*Bangkok Daily Mail*, 30/09/32). Each was asked to sign agreements that they would never attempt to return to campus.

During these protests, government support for the schoolboys was notable by its absence. Despite the clear ideological congruence between the protests and the purported values of the new administration, officials were hesitant to encourage civic disorder. When a group of Assumption College students called upon the home of *Chao Phraya* Thammask Montri looking for his public endorsement, the former education minister sent them away (*Bangkok Daily Mail* 12/09/32). Senator Mangkorn Sam Sen, whose son Sakol was one of the students whose reinstatement was demanded, went as far as to banish his son to the countryside and denounced the strike in front of a large rally of protesters held at Lumpini Park (*Bangkok Daily Mail* 12/09/32). Such reticence was politic. The new regime was unstable, and exaggerated reports of agitation in hostile outlets such as *The Bangkok Daily Mail* threatened to undermine public trust (Ferrara, 2012:14). The defeat of the Boworadet Rebellion in 1933 had

been steadying, but it had also strengthened the government's military wing, particularly the position of Defence Minister General Phibun Songkhram, whose distaste for popular participation was evident. Taking the doctrine of European fascism as a model for Siamese development, Phibun pivoted away from democratic principles and towards the dissemination of charismatic nationalism with himself as strongman leader. He financed anachronistic nationalist plays, strengthened relations with a bellicose Japan, and supported the establishment of the *Yuwachon*, a youth organization based upon Germany's Hitler Youth (Surasak, 2006). When a leadership contest opened in 1938, Phibun's overwhelming military capacity gave The National Assembly little choice but to overlook the liberalist Pridi and hand the premiership to Phibun.

At Suan Kulap, Phibun's ideological campaign produced extraordinary consequences. The adventuresome *Look Sua* corps— whose activities had included canal swimming, tree climbing, and fire-making— were virtually disbanded in favour of *Yuwachon* training, which included marching, shooting, standing to attention, saluting, and running (SKRC, 1995:228). Led by the austere Maj. Gen. Pun Punyaruetseni, *Yuwachon* training was mandatory for all Suan Kulap students grade *matayom* four to six in 1936 (Chek, 1984:81), despite being a voluntary organsiation elsewhere in the country (Surasak, 2006:52). Accordingly, a culture of militarism permeated the school life. Students were encouraged to follow commands without question, including Maj Gen Pun's instructions to sprint to the end of the field and bring him back a single blade of grass (Suksuan, 1985:239). When disagreements occurred, students were invited to fight it out in the PE room, where Mr. Pian or Mr. Chalerm would lay out mats and watch (Chinwut, 1984:95). Sometimes students would meet by the ash heaps at the nearby Wat Liap power station, where a head boy would be nominated to act as referee to a confrontation (Duang Ya Dam, 1984:70).

New academic courses complemented the school's physical training. Students aged thirteen and above were required to take classes in which the *Yuwachon* were presented as 'the power of the nation' and the reinforcement of the military (Somkuan, 185:1984). Led by Mr. Nop, Mr. Prasert, and Mr. Sot, these presentations were deliberately stirring and provided students with some of their most formative political influences. Chinwut Sunthronsima (1984:89), a future Minister for the Office of the Prime Minister, writes that the classes left him 'transfixed with appreciation and national pride…We wanted to sacrifice everything for the nation and

society…This feeling has stayed with me to this day'. The expanding Empire of Japan and the Asiatic military super-state it sought to establish was an important focus of these classes. When the government announced four scholarships to attend a Japanese university, staff at Suan Kulap heavily encouraged many to apply, resulting in three of the awards going to Suan Kulap pupils (Thongnan, 1985:188). In 1934, Suan Kulap beat Debsarin 1-0 to secure the Japanese Ambassador's football trophy, a newly initiated award designed to cultivate a positive image of the country amongst Bangkok's elite boys' schools (*Siam Ratsadon*, 1934).[94]

The study of Thai language was also elevated, with students forced to repeat an entire year if they failed the Thai exam (SKRC, 1995:233). 'We were in the age of building Thailand into a superpower', remembers one anonymous alumnus (S.K. 8289, 1985:215). 'We followed the progress of Germany the great Western superpower. It was a very serious time'. During these years of heightened ideology, students report forming intimate lifelong bonds. In 1936, state education reforms reduced the number of *matayom* grades resulting in a dramatic shrinking of the school population, from around 1000 pupils to just under 500 in 1939. The remaining students were intensively trained and came to perceive their teachers as paternal figures (S.K. 8146, 1984: 189; Thanin, 1984:103; Duang Ya Dam, 1984:69). Chek Thanasiri (1984:81), a future member of OSK Kukrit Pramoj's National Legislative Assembly, writes that every one of his peers 'loved their teachers' and would meet up with them to drink and socialize long after leaving the school. Other students recall periods when the school's martial culture felt adversarial and oppressive. Somkuan Pichaikul (1984:181), later imprisoned as a communist, recalls that the school often felt as though it was 'every man for himself' during the 1930s.

Gradually, *Yuwachon* activities began to overtake nearly every aspect of school life. When mandatory training was initially established at the school in 1936, students were only required to wear regimental uniform when participating in scheduled drills. In 1937, as the population became subject to a more vehement nationalist propaganda (Barmé, 1993:104-137), the boater hat of the British era was removed completely for grade *matayom* four and above. The following year, hair longer than four inches was outlawed and students were told to salute one another whenever they met (Thanin, 1984:106). By 1939, the *Yuwachon* uniform was made standard uniform for every student (SK 8289, 213; Suksuan, 1985:239). Consisting

[94] See figure 31.

of a khaki shirt and shorts, black shoes, and long black socks, the *Yuwachon* uniform included a peaked military hat worn high on the head. At the front of the cap, stitched to a red cotton band, was the *Yuwachon* insignia comprising the coiled symbol of the unalome and the maxim; 'Love Your Country Over Your Life' (รักชาติยิ่งชีพ) (Chek, 1984:81). Each shirt had a personalized number sewn into the breast so that individual students could be identified and reported to the military police if they neglected to salute a passing soldier, or contravened some other regulations, when walking outside the school campus. If a report was filed against a boy, it could affect his ability to graduate.

Figure 31: Suan Kulap scoring the winning goal against Debsirin to win the Japanese Ambassador cup, 15th September, 1934 (*Siam Ratsadon*, 18/09/1934).

It wasn't long before the government's nationalist policies began to change the demography of the school. With the state's gaze falling on Germany and Japan, there seemed little need

for so many representatives of the declining British Empire at Suan Kulap. In 1937, the school stopped hiring foreign teachers altogether, leaving only Headmaster Churchill, Mr. Deagan, and Mr. Silverthorn as the remaining British faculty (Somkuan, 1985:185). The following year, Phibul's chief ideologue, *Luang* Wichit Wathakan, publicly suggested that Thailand should emulate Nazi policy towards Jews (Barmé, 1993:129). This prompted the school administration to expel staff of Chinese and Indian heritage. An ethnic Chinese food vendor who sold noodles on campus was evicted alongside the owner of the school's pork satay stall (SKRC, 1995:227). The latter went on to establish a new store in Thonburi that continues to trade under the name Suan Kulap. Mr. Si, the ethnic Indian bean vendor, was also expelled. A popular character on campus, Mr Si used to let poorer students eat for free and brought flower garlands for every football player on match days. He regularly travelled down to the docks to wave off scholarship students (SKRC, 1995:228). Subsequently the school removed all Asian ethnic minorities from the payroll including Uncle Jek, the school's smartly dressed caretaker, and his wife, who sold notebooks and stationery outside the cafeteria. Mr Rang, the school's half-blind guard, was told to leave his post and never return (S.K. 8146:89-90).

Far from protesting these purges, the majority of staff and students appear to have been thoroughly bewitched by the state's ethno-nationalist propaganda, and enthusiastically supported Phibul's irredentist fantasies. Following the fall of France in 1940, the school held a fundraiser for a military campaign to 'reclaim' the lost Thai peoples and territories of Laos. Visitors were invited to throw balls at the face of a student who wore a mask that read M. Pavie, the name of a former French consul general who had been involved in the annexation of Laos in 1893. Profits from the event were used to purchase gifts and machine guns for front line soldiers. 'Lots of money was raised through pain and anger', recalls Kamol Khemthong (1985:210), a student at the time. Days later, students attended a large *Yuwachon* rally at Sanam Luang in which the Bangkok Commander gave a rousing speech, announcing to the crowd: 'our ancestors gave their flesh and blood and endured hardship for nationhood…we must love the nation… we must preserve the nation…we must love the nation more than life' (quoted in Chinwut, 12:91). The rally ended with hundreds of impassioned students singing nationalist songs and chanting 'our ancestors gave their flesh and blood as an offering to the nation' (S.K. 8289: 216). Some Suan Kulap students were even called upon to teach members of the public how to shoot and handle firearms in the event of a Japanese invasion (Kamol,

1985:210). Once the invasion occurred, however, Phibul signed an alliance with the Japanese Empire and allowed its army to use the kingdom as a steppingstone to the Malaya Peninsular. Students write of being excited by the sight of so many Japanese soldiers in the streets (Anukit, 1984:172). During air raids, they lay on the school field to get a better view of the planes. By January 1942, it was deemed too dangerous to keep the school open and every student was graduated without examination. For the rest of their lives, this cohort were jokingly referred to as the 'Tojo class', since they it was said that they owed their graduation to the leader of the Japanese Army (SKRC, 1995:226). During a bombing raid in 1945, the empty Long Building was struck by an explosive that ripped out two classrooms.

Figure 32: Two Suan Kulap classrooms bombed near the Poh Chang Art Academy, 1945 (National Archives of Thailand).

Luang Seksunthorn

Shortly after the coup of 1932, when schools of similar stature to Suan Kulap were facing a newly politicized student body, the Ministry of Education promoted the half-German maths and French teacher Luang Seksunthorn to the position of Deputy Headmaster. During the

subsequent era of militarization, as the power of Headmaster Churchill waned, Luang Seksunthorn emerged as one of the most influential and formidable bureaucrats in the school's history; an educationalist who established an almost totalitarian disciplinary regime within the school. In this section, I draw from narrative records written by colleagues and former pupils to produce a descriptive account of this figure.

Born on 10th March 1894 near Wat Saket, Louis or Phum Boch[95] was the son of Herr E. Boch, a German national, and his Thai wife, Lek. As a young man, Boch received his education at Assumption College, a private boy's Catholic school, where he showed promising, though not extraordinary, academic potential. He particularly excelled at French, in which he gained a level four diploma in 1913 (Samretwannakit, 1960:201). Later that year, on the 18th November, Boch used this diploma to interview for the position of substitute French teacher at Suan Kulap, a thirty baht per month appointment for which the nineteen year old high school graduate was poorly qualified. By this period, untrained teachers with no university degree or teaching certification were eyed with suspicion by their more qualified peers (Samretwannakit, 1960:201). Principal Spivey, perhaps discerning some promise in the young applicant, offered Boch the position on the condition that he continued to study for an English language diploma.

The next two decades of Louis Boch's career at Suan Kulap are something of a mystery. Beyond the fact that he was made a homeroom teacher at some point during the Sutton era, very little information pertains to Seksunthorn's pre-coup career. He was, according to a former colleague, a man who 'truly loved his friends' (Samretwannakit, 1960:211) and cared little for rank and status. He was particularly doting towards his parents for whom he rushed home to dine with each evening at 7 o'clock. He once told his colleague; 'my mum and dad are old…so if I hold any feelings of anger or depression towards them, I must hide it away. I must not do anything that would let them know this, because they are old, and I fear they could not handle such things' (quoted in Samretwannakit, 1960:210). At times, Seksunthorn could also be 'overly-energetic' and inappropriate; 'impulsive and incautious to the point of hot-temperedness' (Samretwannakit, 1960:211). In a society where public confrontation is anathema, Seksunthorn was quarrelsome and excitable; 'if he thought to say something, he

[95] Luang Seksunthorn's original surname is rendered in Thai as บ๊อก (occasionally บ๊อกซ์), which I cautiously translate as Boch.

would say it there and then. If he desired an altercation, he would initiate it directly' (Samretwannakit, 1960:211). Seksunthorn's pedagogic approach was informed by this temperamental irascibility. Nevertheless, the maths and French teacher seems to have been a peripheral figure during the Sutton era, during which time the sheer force of the headmaster's personality tended to eclipse all other faculty members in

Figure 33: Luang Seksunthorn (Samretwannakit, 1960)

the historical record. After the instability of the post-coup era, however, Boch's position at the school rose significantly. In 1933, as the city was rocked by the Boworadet Rebellion and student strikes, Boch was promoted by the ministry to the post of deputy headmaster and began to take a leading role in all aspects of student life. From this point, *Luang* Seksunthorn— as Boch would later be styled— becomes one of the most documented figures in the school's archive. *Luang* Samretwannakit (1960:201), a junior colleague who worked with Seksunthorn

during the final eight years of his life, notes that the name Luang Seksunthorn 'is firmly burrowed in the memories of his surviving students'.

To give an insight into Seksunthorn's idiosyncratic regime, it is illustrative to consider the rigid daily schedule he followed during his time as deputy headmaster. Former pupils note that Seksunthorn's working day began at precisely seven o'clock each morning. At this time, *Luang* Seksunthorn stationed himself in front of the school gates from where he could inspect each student who passed by on their way to morning line up. Reflecting his Thai background, Seksunthorn usually wore a light blue *chong kraben*[96] and Raj-style jacket with white socks pulled high to the knee. His face, which was long and unsmiling, had a strong roman nose with thin lips, half-covered by a neatly trimmed moustache (Suksuan, 1985:240). As he waited, he smoked *saphan pho* cigarettes, a dense tobacco blend associated with local toughs and the shoeless urchins that loitered around Samphreng market (Samretwannakit, 1960:205; Sansanee, 2004:81). At five foot seven, he was taller than the average teacher. One student notes that he moved with urgent energy—'like a farang' (Prakep, 1970:108).

Throughout morning inspection, Seksunthorn held a 1.25m bamboo cane with three distinct marks etched near the tip. The first line, measuring precisely two centimeters, he used to gauge student hair length. According to new ministry regulations, a male student's hair must not exceed a length of four centimeters. Seksunthorn permitted nothing above two centimeters and issued a penalty of six canings for every child who violated this edict (Wira, 1985:344). Seskunthorn's caning method was thus: 'he bid the child bend forward and raise his shorts to expose the skin at the back of the legs… he then raised the cane as high and far back as his hands could extend before crashing it down with all his might on the exposed area. This method ensured the cane would not merely bounce off the leg but scourge it with two bleeding welts. Once the first strike he been administered, Seksunthorn began to lecture the student, pausing for the second strike, then the third, fourth as so on until he had completed the punishment' (Prakep, 1979:109). The second line of Seksunthron's cane, measuring exactly six centimeters, indicated the stipulated distance from which top of the student's knee must be separated from the hem of his shorts. If Seksunthorn was concerned that a child was

[96] A traditional Thai garment that wraps around the lower torso, with part of the fabric folded back between the legs and tucked behind the waist.

wearing a pair of shorts whose length fell outside this remit, whether because they were too short or too long, he would use to the cane as a standardized measurement. If the cane vindicated his suspicions, a punishment of six strokes would be immediately dispensed. Finally, Seksunthorn used the third indicative mark to measure the width of shorts. He particularly abhorred a recent fashion for folding additional pleats into the side of shorts so that they billowed untidily about the boy's upper legs (Wira, 1985: 344; Pichit, 1984:337). If he caught any students sporting wide-set shorts, the punishment was also six floggings.

After the morning bell rang at eight am, Seksunthorn was on the lookout for latecomers. He remained near the school gates but positioned himself behind one of the vestibule pillars from where he could conceal himself from tardy students (Chinwut, 1984:89). He like to leap out shouting 'come here you' (เธอมานี่) before he gave the straggler twelve strokes of the cane (Chinwut, 1984:89). He entertained no mitigations. One morning, a disheveled latecomer explained that had missed the morning bell because the tram he was riding had derailed from its tracks. Seksunthorn caned the boy and chastised him for not catching an earlier carriage (Choti, 1985:129). On another occasion, Seksunthorn himself arrived late and proceeded to immediately flog his son Maitri with whom he travelled each morning (Wira, 1984:345). I can find only one account, recorded in the memoirs of businessman Prakep Khlongtruatrok, in which Seksunthorn appears to have extended uncharacteristic leniency. Prakep writes:

> *On my way to school my bicycle tire went flat and it took an hour for the Chinaman to change it, so when I got to the school at nine the gates were already closed. That morning I was in Luang Sek's French class and was sure to receive twelve strokes. When I entered and told him that my tire had burst he said; 'No excuses, no exceptions. But you are a good and responsible pupil, not known to dawdle and skilled at the baritone horn, so you may crawl to your desk'*.
>
> *This was the most munificent pardon…When I reached my desk and resumed a vertical position, I clasped my hands and performed a deep wai to express my gratitude…I set out an hour earlier every day after that. If history were to repeat itself, I knew that I would not receive the*

same response…Luang Sek's regulation were as good as a divine law.

(Prakep, 1970:109-110)

Following morning inspections, Seksunthorn patrolled the grounds and corridors of the school, looking for signs of misbehavior. Six to twelve strokes of the cane were given for fighting, teasing, walking on the grass, throwing paper, or being somewhere without good reason (Prakep, 1970:106). Indeed, even witnessing an infraction could earn a beating. Niphon Punyaphukna, a future Major General, records that he was one day arguing with a friend who threw a coin in frustration and unintentionally struck another pupil. Seksunthorn, who had been patrolling the adjacent balcony, stormed in the classroom and demanded an explanation from those present. When none came, he decided to cane the entire class in succession, producing near identical marks on the thighs of each boy who marveled at the consistency of his stroke (Wira, 1985:344). Certain offences were particularly galling to the Deputy Headmaster. Seksunthorn expressed intense anger if he discovered any pupil looking out of an open window in a manner that made him visible to members of the public, since he believed this defamed the school and its students. He was also known to dispense a furious torrent of strikes on the spot if he caught a student communicating to passing girls, or attempting to fraternise with pupils from the adjoining girl's school (Wira, 1985:345; *Duang Yadam*, 1984:69-76). Additionally, if he saw any student leave the premises without permission, usually by scaling the iron-fenced perimeter, he was prepared to chase them through the streets until they were found. He once pursued twenty boys who had fled to the back of an ice shop on the Phahurat Road and caned them in the middle of the street in full view of passing tradesmen (Samretwannakit, 1960:209). Any student who truanted more than once was permanently expelled from the school. Additionally, if an offence was committed by older students— grade *matayom* five or above— Seksunthorn usually suspended birching until the following Saturday, when the punishment could performed in front of the entire school as cautionary spectacle for younger pupils (Pichit, 1985:337; SKRC, 1995:220).

During the Seksunthorn era, physical punishment was also dispensed for substandard academic performance. While most of the Deputy Headmaster's day was committed to the maintenance of institutional discipline, he was occasionally called upon to teach his old subjects of maths or French, the latter of which allowed him to utilize a pedagogic technique of his own device. According to the method, which Seksunthorn boasted could teach anyone

to read French in five minutes, students were directed to memorise a series of French words written on the blackboard, before standing up and reading aloud from a separate textbook. The pupil was then asked to recall a particular word from his original list. If he could not, he was made to sit on the floor with palms together in supplication. If the vocabulary continued to elude him, the boy was told to crawl to the back of the class on hand and knees, passing underneath every desk and bench on his route. Additionally, Seksuthorn kept close track of every classroom test that was given at the school. If any student gained less than fifty percent on a given paper, they received one thrash of the cane; if their score was less than forty, they earned two (Wira, 1985:344). Thus, after a particularly challenging exam, Seksunthorn was known to enter a classroom with a list of thirty boys who would each receive a caning (S.K. 2010, 1983:155). To increase student anxiety, Seksunthorn often waited days, or even weeks, before interrupting a class to execute this punishment.

Indeed, corrective violence was administered with such regularity, and for such trivial infractions during the seven years that Seksunthorn served as deputy headmaster, that students began to refer to his regime as *sai ti leum ti tok ti* (สายตี ลืมตี ตกตี): 'late: caned; forget: caned; fail: caned' (SKRC, 1995:443). When the English teacher Mr. Sawat once asked his pupils how many of them had been struck by Seksunthorn in the last month, the entire class raised their hands (Sawat, 1984:193). Another student notes: 'I remember the sound of his cane as his office was above our classroom. We could hear the thwack, thwack each morning; a disturbing sound that entered your bones' (Prakep, 1970:110). Some industrious students even began to mend two or three protective layers of fabric into their shorts with the aim of shielding themselves from the worst of Seksunthorn's blows (Pichit, 1984:338). When he discovered this strategy, Seksunthorn began to strike areas of the skin that were not covered by uniform, such as the hamstrings or the back of the knees. This left conspicuous welts that declared themselves to parents and neighbours. Some boys returned to school the following morning with twice as many wounds as those inflicted by their teacher (Duang Yadam, 1984:69-76). Even football practice included some element of corporal punishment. To encourage sprinting, Seksunthorn picked a boy who would be made to run from one end of the field to the other while he, Seksunthorn, stood waiting in the middle. Once the boy passed him, the deputy headmaster exploded into energetic pursuit, thrashing his cane at the air behind him (Wira, 1985:345). 'None of us studied out of natural dedication (ขยันประจำตัว)',

writes one anonymous student, 'but out of fear from "sinning"' (S.K. 2010, 1983:155). Another alumnus, a future oncologist, writes: 'School could be torment…there were so many rules. Far too many. And they were all absolute' (Suksuan, 1885:266-7). One student admits that the school's regime left him so terrified that he sometimes lost control over his bladder (Duang Yamdam, 1984:70-75). Even when Seksunthorn died, he was still associated with excessive corporal punishment. On the day of his cremation at Wat Makut Kasatriyaram, students brought one of his marked bamboo canes from the school and placed it inside his casket (Anukit, 1984:172). Suan Kulap was known, during these years, as the strictest school in the country (Prakep, 1970:110)

What ideology or personal philosophy propelled this uncompromising schedule? Alumni accounts contend that Seksunthorn was motivated by his concern to glorify the school's reputation (Wira, 1985:344) or else train his young charges to become 'good people' or 'good citizens' (Pichit, 1984:340; Suthin, 1985:183). Samretwannakit (1960:203-4), a friend and former colleague, alludes to something more idiosyncratic. One day, as Samretwannakit was walking across campus he passed Seksunthorn performing one of his regular patrols and jokingly asked the deputy head if had 'found any victims yet? Moving towards Samretwannakit, Seksunthorn responded with an unusual metaphor: "If we turn our back on the tiger' he said, 'the tiger pounces and we die. The tiger then returns to the jungle emboldened, ready to strike anew'. Some twenty years later, Samretwannakit (1960:204) reflects on this comment.

> *That was Seksunthorn's philosophy of teaching. Though I know not from what book... I've had the acquaintance of hundreds of teachers, both colleagues and students, of far superior and elaborate schooling than myself, though it would be challenging to seek out a stranger pedagogic aphorism than that of Seksunthorn.*

Yet Samretwannakit acknowledges the political expedience of this philosophy. The Thai state of the late 1930s had little time for teachers who inspired 'love but no fear' (Samretwannakit: 1960:206). They were, he writes, generally considered 'second-rate' and 'useless'. They were 'unwanted by the civil service'. Seksunthorn was not the only disciplinarian at Suan Kulap during this period. 'Nearly all the teachers scolded', remembers Suksuan (1985:267), an observation corroborated by Suthin (Suthin, 1985:183), who records that many other

teachers, such as Mr. Foo, Mr. Chalerm, and Mr. Pian, always carried canes. In a Teacher's Day ceremony following Seksunthorn's death, Mr. Pian likened himself to a pot-maker who must repeatedly beat his designs until they appear smooth and beautiful (Chinwut, 1984:90). Anecdotal evidence suggests that similar regimes were being established at other schools throughout the capital. At Thepsarin, Kumut Chandruang recalls being so frightened by the physical punishments dispensed by one teacher that he sought refuge in the city's billiard halls, where he gambled away his dead mother's jewelry (Kumut, 1940:164-6). North of Bangkok, in the province of Suphanburi, one student had become so enraged by the relentless beatings of his draconian schoolmaster that he hurled the man from a second-floor window. A former colleague of Seksunthorn claims that Headmaster Luang Bunpalitwichasat, Principal Churchill's replacement in 1938, frequently confided to colleagues his concern that Seksunthorn could inspire a similar revolt at Suan Kulap (Choti, 1984:117).

Yet even within the context of the militarized Thai state that was emerging from the remnants of absolute monarchy, Seksunthorn's regime at Suan Kulap was considered extreme. According to Samretwannakit (1960:202), Principal Churchill tolerated Seksunthorn's authoritarian tendencies on the presumption that such practices were necessary for students to 'grow to fear the law and the state'. Despite voicing his distaste at seeing Seksunthorn strike the students so fiercely, he declared that he would 'neither prohibit or protest' as 'no teacher achieves silence like Seksunthorn' (Samretwannakit, 1960:202). A similarly equivocal policy toward Seksunthorn was adopted by the Ministry of Education. In 1935, the coup-maker *Luang* Sindhu Songkhramchai— a former student of Seksuthorn— was appointed Minister of Education whereupon he sought to crack down on excessive corporal punishment in schools. This entailed promulgating new regulations that required teachers to obtain permission from the headmaster before administering physical penalties (Choti, 1984:123). In defiance of the edict, Seksunthorn held a staff assembly in which he told teachers that they should continue to cane disobedient students without seeking prior authorization. Soon after the law was passed, Seksunthorn even went so far as to cane Sindhu's child, prompting the minister to summon his former teacher to the ministry for a meeting. As Seksunthorn left that morning, pupils were told to line the corridors and stairways of the Long Building as a gesture of solidarity with the teacher.

When Luang Seksunthorn returned a few hours later, he called an school assembly and presented a large case of cigarettes which he explained had been a gift from the grateful minister in thanks for disciplining his child in the correct manner. 'Let this stand as a lesson to you all', he told the students 'that parents consider teachers to be the guardians (ผู้ปกครอง) of their children and give them leave to scold and punish in the hopes of creating good students' (quoted in SKRC, 1995:444). For his services to the nation, the state invested Louis Boch with the title *Luang* Seksunthorn and elevated him to the status of *rongamatek*, a civil service rank equivalent to a naval lieutenant or a police captain. He was also decorated with the Most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand and the rarely-conferred Order of the White Elephant. By his death in 1940, he earned a monthly salary of 240 baht, nearly ten times the wages he earned when he started his career at Suan Kulap (Samretwannakit, 1960:211).

Today, Luang Seksunthorn is celebrated as one of the most important teachers in the school's history. An exhibit in the Suan Kulap museum displays a number of his old canes with a placard reading 'Canes Build Ministers', an allusion to the large number of his former students who advanced to positions of power following graduation. The message in this exhibit is clear; were it not for the corporal punishment that Seksunthorn inflicted on his students, the country would have been deprived of a generation of disciplined and honourable leaders. Down the hall, are collected the images and artifacts of his most prominent student, Prem Tinsulanont, whom Seksunthorn interviewed for admission to the school on 18th May 1936 (Statesman Foundation, 2006: 49). According to Prem's contemporary, Thonguab Thaikhla (1984:201), at such meetings Seksunthorn would point to a thin bamboo cane propped against a wall and ask prospective students; 'do you want to study here? This is how we study'. Several decades later, during the height of the so-called 'Premocracy', many men who had spent their formative years under the regime of *sai ti leum ti tok ti* rose to positions of prominence under the patronage structure of 'network monarchy' (McCargo, 2005). Under the editorship of former Prime Minister Thanin Kraivichien this small group began to write about their strange schooldays and establish a provisional discourse that attributed their sudden political elevation to the disciplinary regime of Seksunthorn. Sawat Thamikrak, who graduated to become a professor of engineering at Chulalongkhorn University, writes; 'there are tears in my eyes contemplating the kindness of my old teacher… If he didn't love us, why would he hit us?' (1983:193-4). Chalong Pinkaew composes a poem dedicated to his former master:

Seksunthorn, a man of care, regulation, and discipline
corrected our manners for all to see
personal morality was his goal.
If insolent, he would chasten all evil
to build people who do good

(Chalong, 1985: 273)

In death, Seksuthorn was canonized into the new civic religion of the 'good men', a creed propounding that certain individuals hold the cosmic right to exert moral authority over others despite the results of this-worldly elections. Seksunthorn's canes—instruments of suffering placed on a golden plinth— became the charismatic relics of this political doctrine representing the processes by which his students were invested with the spirit of virtuous leadership. Following the cohort's decline in the 1990s and the political turmoil of the post-2006 era, Suan Kulap has strived to reinforce this doctrine through various curricular and extra-curricular activities. In the final section of this chapter, I consider an alternative legacy of the militarization era— a seditious history that has been silenced by the 'good men' doctrine. Focusing particularly on the actions of three former Seksunthorn students who were politically active during the 1970s, I consider the possibility that the consequences of this period may be discerned in the violent political landscape of the Communist counterinsurgency, when a number of prominent OSK were at the forefront of what Bowie calls a 'cultural elaboration of fear' (Bowie, 1997:3). These men— Thanin Kraivichien, Suraphon Chulaphram, Sutsai Hasadin— emerged as the most extreme agents of the far-right; rigid ideologues apt to support the use of physical violence on the bodies of 'disobedient' students.

The Legacy of the Cane

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the possibility of an alternative history of the Seksunthorn era; an account that restores the 'fragments that do not fit' (Reynolds, 2006:137) and challenges dominant narratives of the centre. I included records that deviate and detract from the official chronicle of this period including a narrative of barely suppressed violence at

the school. Seeking to avenge a humiliating punishment, the writer Somchai Asonchinda intended to shoot Seksunthorn with his father's handgun. Years later he discovers that the school friend who stayed his hand during this incident had gone on to inflict terrible violence on his own family in a tragic murder-suicide. In this section, I continue the elaboration of this incomplete alternative history, beginning with an excerpt from the autobiography of Prakep Klongtruat, a Seksunthorn era graduate, in his retelling of an incident that occurred in the early 1960s.

> *One day, toward the end of the year. The head teacher[97] a classmate of mine, called me at the company.*
>
> *'Prakep, can I talk to you? It's about your son.'*
>
> *He let out a sigh when he first spoke and we arranged to meet. 'Your boy does not show up for class and his grades are concerning. Why are you asking him to supervise construction projections in other provinces?'*
>
> *'He said that?', I puzzled. 'I have never sent him anywhere. His mother is in charge of getting him to school in the morning. How is he able to escape?*
>
> *'He probably doesn't actually come in, or else he sneaks over the Sowapaha fence. Nowadays we have lots of children belonging to 'big' people. The sons of gangsters are also difficult to govern. It is the age of democracy. It is not like it was. Do anything violent and you attract accusations of cruelty'.*
>
> *'Why don't you cane them like Luang Seksunthorn used to do to us? These kids wouldn't be able to do as they please. Only looking for fun, not studying and skipping school to go to the cinema.'*
>
> *But the headteacher said; 'the parents think its barbaric (ป่าเถื่อน). If you cane a child of the 'big men', they want the teacher fired. They say they don't cane their children in this way, so why should their teacher inflict such violence on them. It is a different era from when we were kids, Kep.'*
>
> *'Jeez. If it's alright by you, I will cane the boy myself. But I recommend you cane your pupils too. Look at the pupils of Luang Sek. They are all commendable'.*

[97] Prong Songsengterm, Suan Kualp Headmaster, 1960-1966.

'The world has changed', he insisted, 'we must train pupils by new psychological educational methods now. You can't hit anymore, you must train them gently.'

'I am really thinking about Luang Sek now. If you forgot your charcoal, you would get the cane; come late, the cane; skipped school, expelled. You cane them to scare them. If you want them to be good people, you cannot be kind. The kids will mutiny'.

'Oh Kep, your boy hasn't paid his tuition fees since the start of term and they won't let him sit his exams till they are cleared. But I was confused, a big merchant such as yourself should not be in arrears with tuition fees, so I invited you for this conference. I was concerned that he may be using the funds to go out'.

We agreed that I would pay the tuition fee and that we would keep a close eye on the boy, both at home and school, and that I would thrash him till I saw blood.

That evening I rushed home, quietly greeted my wife, and found a bamboo length of cane. Today I would honour the memory of Luang Sek. It was dark before my son returned home. I put his crimes to him; skipping school, lying, using money with no consideration for its value and the hardship of his parents endured to earn it, gallivanting with friends, drinking alcohol and gambling.

'I am a modern man', I said, 'I have never struck you and you are now in grade 8. But I was very wrong. So today you get 12 thrashes.'

I produced a length of rope, bound his wrists, threw the slack end over the beam of the garage and pulled it taut so that his arms were stretched high over his head. I pulled his shorts down and prepared to land the first strike in front of his mother and sisters, who stood around the spectacle with jaws slackened in bafflement and concern.

'Dad', my eldest daughter protested, 'this is from the age of the African savage. We don't hit anymore. Stop this.'

'Good. If you don't see savagery, how will you know modernity. Today I will let my children see the love a father has for his children. If they are wrong, they must be punished. If you love your cow, you leash it. If you love your child, you strike it'.

At that, I lifted the cane high, to the height of my arm, and struck it down on my son's leg. Two blood-red rows immediately marked the stricken skin.

'Why do you cane his bare skin? He is a person, yet you strike him as a buffalo'.

'We cannot spoil him, it will lead to his ruin. I have just started, there are 11 more to go till we reach the dozen. If we relent now it is the same as teaching our son to be a bandit (โจร).'

The audience bristled when the sound of the next strike reverberated throughout the garage. Now the skin was weeping and broken. His mother ran to the boy and hugged him, blocking my blows as tears bathed her face.

'That's enough, father, three blows is enough', she said. 'If you want to hit further, you must strike me too'.

No matter where I moved, my intention was frustrated by his mother, who maneuverer her body this way and that. We had argued many times about the training of the boy. She believed that indulging the boy was love. Her pity made her unable to witness any punishment of the child.

'I am warning you. To spare him punishment will ruin his future'.

My eldest daughter touched my arm and nestled her face into my shoulder. 'Dad, let's go for a walk in the field' she said and motioned her younger sister to leave.

The opposition was strong and I softened. Three strikes this time, but if this reoccurs, there will be no reprieve—twelve strokes. I took my eldest daughter's hand into my right hand and my youngest daughter's hand into my left and we strolled towards the fields while his mother tended my son's wounds with betadine

(Prakep, 1970:111-114)

Four years after the publication of this autobiography, Prakep's Suan Kulap junior, Supreme Court Judge Thanin Kraivichien, a graduate of the 'Tojo class', began a nightly television broadcast called *Democratic Conversations* (สนทนาประชาธิปไตย) in which he rallied an increasingly frightened middle class to expose and eradicate the 'inseparable trio of communism, student activism and progressive politics' (Thanin quoted in Baker and Phongphaisuk: 193).[98] Trained in psychological warfare by the CIA, Thanin was an outspoken and well-connected member of *Nawaphon,* a radical anti-communist civic group established to intimidate opponents and inflate the popularity of right-wing extremism. Regularly denouncing student activists as 'evil', 'un-Thai', 'traitors', and 'worms' (Prajak, 2006:20),

[98] See Anderson (1977) and Prajak (2006) for a lucid analysis of the Thai middle-class shift to the right during the mid-1970s.

Nawaphon claimed more than 150,000 members drawn from the bureaucracy, the monkhood, and the business world and received support from the Ministry of Interior and the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) (Bowie, 1997:2).

The activities of *Nawaphon* were ultimately administered by the Border Patrol Police (BPP), a state-backed paramilitary organization commanded by General Suraphon Chulaphram, another tenacious graduate of the Seksunthorn era. Known to attract subordinates 'dedicated to the same kind of performance ethic' (Lobe and Morell, 1978:170), Suraphon was a stalwart of the militant Thai right and an important promoter of psychological operations. From 1971 his organization facilitated mass programs such as the Village Scouts, a highly popular nationalist movement that held elaborate five-day training camps for Thailand's rural citizens. Using the processes of mass psychology, anachronistic history, and ritual, Village Scouts initiations stimulated an atmosphere of intense communal unity during which citizens were taught to become the 'eyes and ears' of the state and 'intimidate anyone critical of the government' (Bowie, 1997:2). [99] By 1978, more than two and a half million Thais— around five percent of the country—had participated in one of the BPP's Village Scout training programs (Muecke, 1980:407).

In addition to Thanin and Suraphon, another Seksunthorn alumnus who operated within this nationalist movement was Major-General Sudsai Hasadin, a notoriously volatile member of Suan Kulap's influential 54th generation known for reminding student activists that he was 'a dangerous man' (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1980). Sudsai, then a senior colonel, was founder and commander of the Red Gaurs, a thuggish offshoot from *Nawapho*n that used threats and violence to disperse student demonstrations. Promising 'high pay, abundant free liquor and brothel privileges' (Anderson, 1977:20), Sutsai recruited hundreds of disaffected technical college students who had once marched alongside their university peers. With tacit support from the regular police force, Sutsai ordered these foot soldiers to break up political demonstrations using bars, knives, and grenades (Puey, 1977:10). By the mid-1970s, as US troops withdrew from the region and neighbouring states established communist rule,

99 See Bowie (1997) for a detailed ethnography of Village Scout rituals.

Nawapon and the Red Gaurs were linked to the murder of more than forty labour and student activist leaders (Harris, 1976).

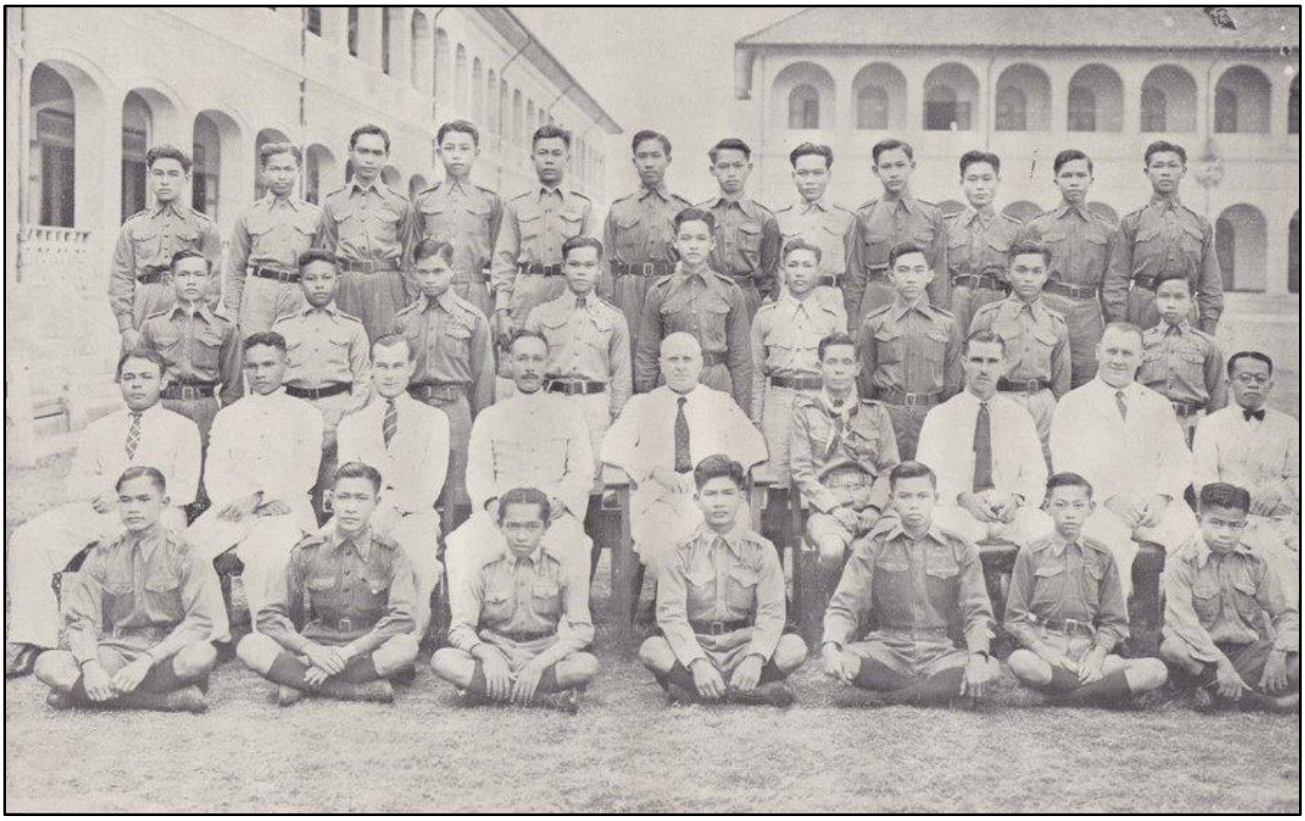


Figure 34: Matayom 8, Class ข, 1937. *Luang* Seksunthorn, seated second row fourth from left; Principal A.C. Churchill seated second row centre; Mr. H. Silverthorn seated second row third from right; Prem Tinsulanont stood back row second from left.

The effects of these violent operations culminated on October 6th 1976, a day whose gruesome events lie within 'the realm of the unsayable' in Thailand (Thongchai, 2002:245). That morning, over four thousand rightist supporters, many linked to the BPP, *Nawaphon* and the Village Scouts, charged a demonstration at Thammasat University and either participated in or witnessed the killing of unarmed student protesters (Bowie, 1997:28). The extreme violence of this massacre, which included lynching and the desecration of corpses, traumatised Thailand's collective memory, as did the apparent glee with which the frenzied mob went about their gruesome work (Puey, 1977).[100] Rather than stemming the violence,

[100] *Moments of Silence,* a recent study authored by Thongchai Winichakul (2020)— a Suan Kulap alumnus who managed to escape the violence of that day— offers a poignant study of this social act of 'unforgetting'. He also casts doubt on the common assumption that the Red Gaurs were heavily involved in the killings.

the police—whose Deputy Director-General was now Suraphon—actively facilitated the massacre (Thongchai, 2020:27).

Later that day, the army launched a coup against the government and installed Thanin as Prime Minister, apparently following a pre-devised 'master plan' the former judge had concocted some weeks earlier (Somsak, 2018). Described as 'the most repressive in Thai history' (Keyes, 1987:100), Thanin's administration crushed the student movement, causing around three thousand young people to flee into the jungle and join the more extreme Communist Party of Thailand. He announced a twelve-year hiatus from constitutional democracy and orchestrated a 'total deprivation of human rights' (Prajak, 2012:250), in which books were burned, publishers harassed, and political meetings outlawed. Despite support from Suan Kulap contemporaries,[101] Thanin's uncompromising autocratic tendencies, his 'dogmatic obsession with anti-Communism' (Newsweek quoted in Kamol, 1978:836), and poor ministerial appointments saw him politically isolated. His choice for Minister of Education, the supercilious OSK Pinyo Sathorn,[102] was spectacularly unpopular. Officials were said to have thrown a champagne party when Pinyo was removed from office and waited with firecrackers to chase him away if he dared to collect his personal belongings from the building (Montri, 1978:270). After a year of highly unstable rule, Thanin was forced to resign as prime minister and was immediately appointed to the King's Privy Council— a sign of royal favour—where he sat until October 2016.

As noted in the introduction of this thesis, Thanin began to address the subject of *Luang* Seksunthorn and pedagogic punishment during later life. In 2009, when the post-Thaksin 'crisis of morality' provoked renewed calls for flogging in schools, an eighty-four-year-old Thanin argued against the 'inhuman use of force' in favour of a 'a new value system' that would steer children away from corruption and 'incorrect morals (Thanin, 2009:1). He was

[101] Thanin appointed OSK school friends Suthi Natworathat and Insee Chantarasathit as his respective Minister of Commerce and Minister for Agriculture. Another 'beloved school friend' (Thanin, 1994:33) who 'truly helped' during this period was Air Marshall Sak Tharichatra who established a School for Psychological Warfare within the Air Force's Department for Military Operations that was charged with 'doing many things for national security…some that can be revealed and some that cannot' (*Cremation Volume of Air Marshall Sak Tharichat*, 1994:28). Thanin regularly consulted Sak on political matters and asked him to join his government, though Sak preferred to work behind the scenes, 'applying the gold leaf to the back of the Buddha' (*Cremation Volume of Air Marshall Sak Tharichat*, 1994:28)

[102] Attended Suan Kulap 1946-1948.

particularly critical of the widely held conviction that children required exposure to corporal punishment if they were to become good citizens. In a surprisingly candid account of *Luang* Seksunthorn's severe regime, he directly addressed those who saw flogging as a necessary corrective to political instability, writing; 'In some cases [corporal punishment] is immoral because its lashes conceal the foul temperament of the castigator' (Thanin, 2009:15). 'Violence breeds violence', he warns his reader as he notes that 'striking often contains within it the history of those who were themselves violently struck as children' (Thanin, 2009:15). Within the context of Thanin's own repressive regime, it is hard not to read this statement as a quiet acknowledgment that the former prime minister has come to perceive violence as a destructive cycle; that brutalized boys can so easily become brutal men.

In briefly reviewing the careers of Thanin, Suraphon and Sudsai— Suan Kulap graduates of this era who went on to become prominent right-wing actors— I do not seek to reduce the geo-political complexity of Thailand's Cold War polarization, nor draw a direct line between the militarization of Suan Kulap and the reactionary politics of the Seksunthorn generation. The legacy of hyper-nationalist messaging on a generation of young Thais in the 1930s and 1940s requires significantly more scholarly research. It is not the case, for instance, that Thanin's contemporaries at Suan Kulap represented a united ideological cohort. At least three of Thanin's classmates became leading figures of the Thai Left following graduation. Charoen Wangam, Somkuan Pichaikul, Ruam Wongphan became friends at Suan Kulap after bonding as rural students who struggled to identify with their affluent peers, such as Thanin who commuted to school by car (Murashima, 2009:23). Somkuan, who described the atmosphere at Suan Kulap as 'every man for himself' (Somkuan, 1984:181) became an active member of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) Central Committee in the 1960s. In his writings about the school, he recalls being made to 'stand in front of the flag-pole and chant, "everyone must love the nation, religion, the king and the constitutional system" (Somkuan, 1984:179). In 1967, he was jailed for five years by the Thanom administration. Six years earlier, his schoolfriend Ruam Wongphan had been executed without trial as a 'traitorous rebel' (Constitution Drafting Assembly, 1984:181) after joining the CPT to 'resist fascist dictatorship' (Ruam quoted in Murashima, 2009:16). This execution occurred in the same year that Ruam's classmate Charoen Wangnam became Secretary General of the CPT, a position he held until his death in 1979. Though these men endured the same disciplinary regime at Suan Kulap,

they found themselves in later decades diametrically opposed to the political doctrine of men like Thanin, Suraphon and Sudsai.

Figure 34: Somkuan Pichaikul (right), jailed as a Communist in 1967, pictured with his brother Thawee in *Yuwachon* uniform (courtesy of Songlod Bhichaikul).

In recent years, observers of Thai society have commentated upon the rise of what they call the 'New Right'; an emergent political force characterized by Pithaya (2019) as 'an odd mix of ultraconservatives, reactionaries, semi-fascists, pseudo-intellectuals, and even former leftists'. The journalist John Draper (2016) has even reported the resurgence of *Yuwachon*-

style disciplinary experiments in one Northeastern kindergarten school. According to the political anthropologist James Taylor (2021:256-261), the 'good people' doctrine has become the favoured ideology of this 'ultra-right', a means to justify political power and debase people holding different opinions. He claims that this group works to 'eradicate emerging liberal democracy by targeting the middle class with "semi-fascistic" propaganda' based around a 'Buddhist worldview articulated by…merit-order and moral action' (Taylor, 2021:256-7). This chapter provides an account of the means by which authoritarianism can rapidly take hold of an institution during times of political uncertainty, including the ways it effects can ripple through time and space. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I look to the future of a Suan Kulap ideology and how new forms of networks within the institution are now being used to undermine authoritarian ideologies and construct a new institutional history.

Chapter VI

Conclusion: The Suan Kulap Folk in a New Reign

On October 29th 2018, I was sat in the great hall of the Suan Kulap Memorial Building to attend a special welcome event for the school's incoming headmaster. The hall was decked in school colours with rows of single tables stretching to the back of the room. It could have been an examination, except the desks were covered by thick white tablecloths and pre-packaged refreshments in little pink boxes. But the same atmosphere of anticipation and disquiet hung over the hall. Apart from the school band, kitted out in brown shorts and red berets, no students were present.

The occasion was an opportunity for the school's newest administrator to officially meet what is commonly referred to as the Suan Kulap folk (ชาวสวนกุหลาบ), a diverse group of stakeholders that includes delegates from the Suan Kulap Foundation, various alumni groups, the Old Teacher's association, The Parent Teacher Association, and numerous other ancillary organisations. The familiar colours at such events were present: men in the dark green of the military uniform, government officials in light tan, pastel blue blazers for retired teachers.

The opinion of these stakeholders is important. Since 1992, when the last old boy headmaster retired from the school, Suan Kulap has had little input in selecting its chief administrator. The choice is made by the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC), an agency within the Ministry of Education that regulates primary and secondary education. Sometimes these appointments are given to 'insiders', such as Ajarn Sommay, who already had decades of experience working with Suan Kulap's complicated networks. The outgoing headmaster, Dr. Withaya, who took up his post in 2016, was one such insider, having previously served for two years as headmaster of Suan Kulap's branch school in Nonthaburi. Yet even Dr. Withaya admits that he had to 'adjust' to his role as headmaster at Suan Kulap Withayalai. In an email exchange that took place several months after Dr. Withaya had left his post, he told me : 'Suan Kulap Withiyalai alumni are more attached and intimate with the school than can be found in other institutions in the school network'. One has to 'negotiate' with various parties.

Such negotiations have not always been amicable. Since at least the end of the Thanin administration, Suan Kulap alumni have been known to become highly protective of the school's image, particularly when presented with any action it perceives to be disrespectful or disparaging to the institution. Prayun Thiraphong was the first director to fall foul of such hypervigilance. In 1977, students and alumni accused Director Prayun of accepting 'additional charges' from parents who wanted their child to study at Suan Kulap. More grievously, it was suggested that Director Prayun had also unfavourably compared the Suan Kulap football team to that of his erstwhile school, Udonpittayanukkon Secondary. 'I can't remember exactly what he was supposed to have said', an informant who was a student at the time told me, 'but it really upset the Suan Kulap folk'. Ajarn Sommay recalls that 'he made our school seem on an equal par with his old school, which is not permissible'. On the afternoon of June 21st 1979, as the school gathered to celebrate Teacher's Day on the playing field, a group of alumni began to loudly denounce Prayun in front of the seven hundred or so pupils and teachers in attendance. They then directed the crowd to the Prasadet Building, where they held an increasingly vexatious emergency meeting. As Prayun attempted to answer the accusations put to him, the alumni decided to hold a referendum to decide his fate. One month later, on the 2nd of August 1979, a group of alumni calling themselves The Allied Suan Kulap Front (แนวร่วมสวนกุหลาบ) announced a demonstration demanding Payun's immediate resignation. Ajarn Sommay, who was present during the confrontation that followed, recalled the resolution of the matter.

> *'The alumni took turns explaining their reasoning to the assembly and I noticed the negative tone escalate. No one was chairing the meeting or marshalling who spoke, which I thought was inappropriate, so I stood up and asked permission to chair. I asked that everyone respect the rules and act with the courtesy and honour befitting Suan Kulap, which was met with applause from the audience. The meeting proceeded with orderliness from there. Then the headmaster asked to address the hall. His words still echo in my ears. "I wish to declare that I will step down from my role as director of Suan Kulap from this day". These were the words of a Suan Kulap gentleman. In my role as chair, I thanked the gentleman for his courage in making a decision during the crisis. I will never forget his benevolence at that time. Everyone in the assembly stood up and applauded in respect'.*

Prayun appears as a blank space without a name or photograph in the 1977 yearbook.

Subsequent appointees faced similar scrutiny. In 1998, Ajarn Sommay's successor, Thani Somburana, was fired by the Ministry for publicly agreeing with a journalist that the quality of Suan Kulap would diminish if non-examined student intake was raised to 80%. Outraged by the dismissal, more than a thousand pupils and alumni, led by student president Pajorn Paksi, marched on the Ministry of Education who hurriedly installed Siri Sungkhasit as headmaster. It was hoped this posting would placate the protesters since Siri was familiar with the customs and procedures of Suan Kulap, having been employed as a PE teacher at the school in his early career. However, his short administration angered alumni. Siri made unpopular changes to the 1998 school budget and introduced aesthetic modifications— a new flagpole, earthenware flower jars, a decorative cart at the side of the football field— that were considered imitative of his last school. He was replaced the following year by Narong Rakdech whom many at the school perceived to be under the influence of Chat Thai, the party which had put Chatichai Choonhavan in power following the end of the Premocracy in 1988 (Yos, 1989). The previous year, Narong had made comments to the press that suggested Headmaster Thani's expulsion had been orchestrated by a displeased member of the faculty. At Narong's welcome party, an alumnus representative called Surat Chansakul took the microphone and said, 'I welcome you to your position in this school, but as an alumnus, I am immensely sorry that you came to be director of Suan Kulap'. An eruption of clapping and cheering followed. From that day, an alumni told me, 'Director Narong's every move was watched… No-one would *wai* him in greeting— just stare'.[103] During Samanmitr day, some students set up a game of darts with Director Narong's face as the target. Within a year, he was promoted out of his post to serve as Director-General for Public Education.

[103] It is a gesture of disrespect for a Thai pupil to neglect bringing their palms together at the chest to greet a member of faculty—particularly at Suan Kulap, a school that prides itself on its propensity to genuflect to elders. Writing in 1992, former OSK Headmaster Kamol Thisorpha (1976-1978) explains that:

> *Suan Kulap students wai every adult on campus as people of honour. If they are not the relatives of faculty then they must be the parents of a student. I recall an unusual occasion in which a resourceful thief, dressing himself in fine clothes, entered the school with the intention of stealing equipment from the audiovisual room. When he arrived, he was greeted by every passing student with such courtesy and respect that he abandoned his mission and walked out of the school without stealing anything. He later wrote a letter praising the students for their good manners and promising to change his ways (Organizing Committee for Mutitachit Event, 1992:27).*

Such incidents have earned Suan Kulap a reputation as a challenging posting for incoming headmasters— 'a lot of drama, a lot of headache', as one member of the alumni association conceded. During the years 1881-1992, when Suan Kulap was largely administered by alumni, the school received an average of one new headmaster every six years. Since then, the tenure for a Suan Kulap principal has shrunk to an average of two years.[104] The scrutiny of the Suan Kulap folk can begin before a principal has even taken office. When a new headteacher was announced two weeks before the welcome meeting in October 2018, alumni message boards and chat groups circulated negative newspaper articles that questioned the honesty of the incoming administrator. Some of the messages expressed anger that the school should be governed by anyone who was not an OSK. Despite this, the official welcome proceeded without incident and the new headmaster was gifted more bouquets of roses than could be accommodated on the large trestle table at the back of the stage.

Just as the production of a school newspaper facilitated the creation of a broadly imagined Suan Kulap community in the 1920's, the advent of digital platforms has fostered new forms of institutional relationship through which power, information and resources may circulate. Closed chat groups allow OSK police officers to exchange intelligence and opportunities. Access to an OSK doctors group allows alumni to receive preferential treatment at oversubscribed hospitals. There are similar groups for military personal, government officials, and OSK graduates of prestigious universities. Some groups are based around hobbies or personal interests. One chat group circulates theological material relating to the dhamma. Another is dedicated to recommendations relating to brothel houses and the similar services. Alumni are often members of multiple groups and utilize each for different purposes. It is considered very bad form to not assist a fellow OSK, even if such assistance does not accord with national laws.

Since 2016, one of the most influential alumni groups within the Suan Kulap community has been an anonymously administered Facebook page called *Nak Krian Suan Kulap*, a term that loosely translates as 'Suan Kulap cyber troll'. Followed by nearly 145,000 accounts, the page celebrates Suan Kulap and its culture while also seeking to challenge the 'exceptionalism' and

[104] Changes in bureaucratic procedures partly account for this brisk administrative turnover, but Suan Kulap headteachers still average shorter tenures than those in the so-called 'top four' most prestigious Thai boys' schools. Taking the twenty-seven years between 1992-2018, we see that Bangkok Christian College acquired a new headteacher an average of every 5.4 years, Assumption College every 6.7 years and Thepsarin every 3 years.

'hypocrisy' that pervade the school. In a surreptitious meeting, a member of the *Nak Krian* administrative staff told me that the page is designed to help Suan Kulap folk 'face reality' and help them become a better example to the rest of society. 'We want to tell people, "Don't let your love for the school permit you to violate others"'.[105] Mastering a new digital vernacular of popular culture and referential imagery, the group's avatar is a reproduction of the Guy Fawkes '*V for Vendetta'* mask worn by the incognito vigilante in his battle against an oppressive totalitarian regime. In 2016, *Nak Krian* uncovered and investigated a child sex abuse scandal at the school that culminated in what the Office of Basic Secondary Education Commission called a 'landmark trial in teaching ethics and computer crime' (*Matichon Online*, 2016). More recently, the group has been a vocal and influential champion for the ongoing student protests, a movement that appears to be 'primarily engaged in disrupting dominant narratives about the country's politics' (McCargo, 2021:175).

While it remains unclear if the concrete political demands of this protest movement will ever be met, the demonstrations of 2020-21 have already succeeded in undermining entrenched ideas about legitimacy and seniority in Thai society. Diligently orchestrated in ideological constructs such as the good men doctrine and Suan Kulapness, these stories are now being challenged from within by individuals seeking to create new networks that can redefine institutional identities. For the first time in the school's history, Suan Kulap Withayalai students have engaged with pupils from other 'Suan Kulap' institutions to mobilize direct criticism of the school and reimagine Suan Kulapness. In a printed interview with the *Suan Kulap Doesn't Want Dictatorship* coalition, two anonymous student protest leaders questioned the conservative historiography of the school that has been assembled in recent decades. Speaking in the 2020 school yearbook, they note that 'Suan Kulapness has been about politics and expressing political opinions for a long time…from the very beginning Suan Kulap students have had political thoughts' (*Pim Suan Online*, 2020). By re-examining what it means to be a good student, a moral citizen, and a legitimate leader these networks are challenging inherited ideologies.

Conversely, institutional networks remain a core technology of the Thai centre. Since the former king's death in 2016, the ruling administration has sought to consolidate and entrench

[105] For a written interview with the *Nak Krian Suan Kulap* administration see Nak Krian Suan Kulap, 2019.

military power further by reordering the political structure in a way that debilitates democratic institutions and civil society (Prajak and Veerayuth, 2018). Institutional networks remain integral to this work. After establishing a new state-appointed parliamentary body in 2014, General Prayut Chan-o-cha installed seventeen former classmates in the 250-seat assembly, in addition to thirty-six former subordinates (Prajak and Veerayuth, 2018:284). While some commentators (Thitinan, 2016) have observed that the military's tactics would take Thailand back to the old days of the Premocracy, others argue that concepts like 'network monarchy' are now 'inadequate for explaining this newly established regime' (Prajak and Veerayuth, 2018:280). Power structures are changing, but McCargo's (2005:499) initial observation remains valid. Thai politics *are* best understood in terms of political networks. It is yet to be seen which networks will predominate in the tenth reign, though it is likely that institutional links will remain an important structural component in the way that power is distributed throughout the kingdom

The central objective of this thesis has been to present institutions such as Suan Kulap as sites worthy of serious academic study. As the central bureaucracy emerged and an older feudal system declined, elite educational institutions became one of the primary mechanisms by which the shifting state sought to produce political subjects. Yet the customs and practices of these communities, not to mention the psycho-social affiliations they inspire, remain largely opaque. Dismissed as vehicles for ideological propaganda, studies that dwell on Thai schools have tended to reduce the complexity of these sites. State schools have been characterized as another ideological arm of the ruling administration, rather than a breathing social field of competing interests.

A secondary objective of this thesis has been to develop the critical device of ethnographic genealogy as a productive methodological approach in the study of Thai society and its institutions. Durkheim notes that a genealogical approach allows the reader to understand the 'inner life of an institution'. Through an excavation of its past, one can see the successive organisational forms that have 'progressively come to cluster together, to combine and form organic relationships' (Durkheim, 2013:15). An ethnographic genealogy goes one step further. By presenting the life histories and testimonies— the 'small local upsets'— that make up everyday life in such sites, this critical device can recover excluded voices and expunged narratives. It allows the reader to perceive certain moments in which some groups have

attempted to impose their definitions of reality on others. The result lays bare 'the messy cascade of contingent events' (Haberkorn, 2008:190) that have conspired to produce the configuration of current structures. Rather than the inevitable product of certain cultural-religious impulses, institutes such as Suan Kulap are palimpsests marked by the gradual accretion of seemingly insignificant events— a shout in a circle, the lustre of a relic; a caning in the classroom. At a time when young people are constructing alternative narratives of political participation in Thailand, it is worth interrogating these palimpsests and the traces they bear. In doing so we see how provisional these constructs are, and how susceptible to sudden change.

Appendix I

List of Suan Kulap Prime Ministers and Education Ministers

Prime Ministers

Name	PM number	Time in office
Phraya Manopakorn Nititada	1	28th June, 1932- 20th June, 1933
Thawi Bunyaket	5	31st August, 1945- 17th September, 1945
Seni Pramoj	6	17th September 1945- 31st January, 1946 15th February, 1975- 14th March, 1975 20th April 1976- 6 October, 1976
Pridi Panomyong	7	24th March, 1946- 23rd August, 1946
Kukrit Pramoj	13	14th March, 1975- 20th April, 1976
Thanin Kraivichien	14	8th October, 1976- 20th October, 1977
Prem Tinsulanont	16	3rd March, 1980- 4th August, 1988
Surayuth Chulanont	24	1st October 2006- 29th January, 2008

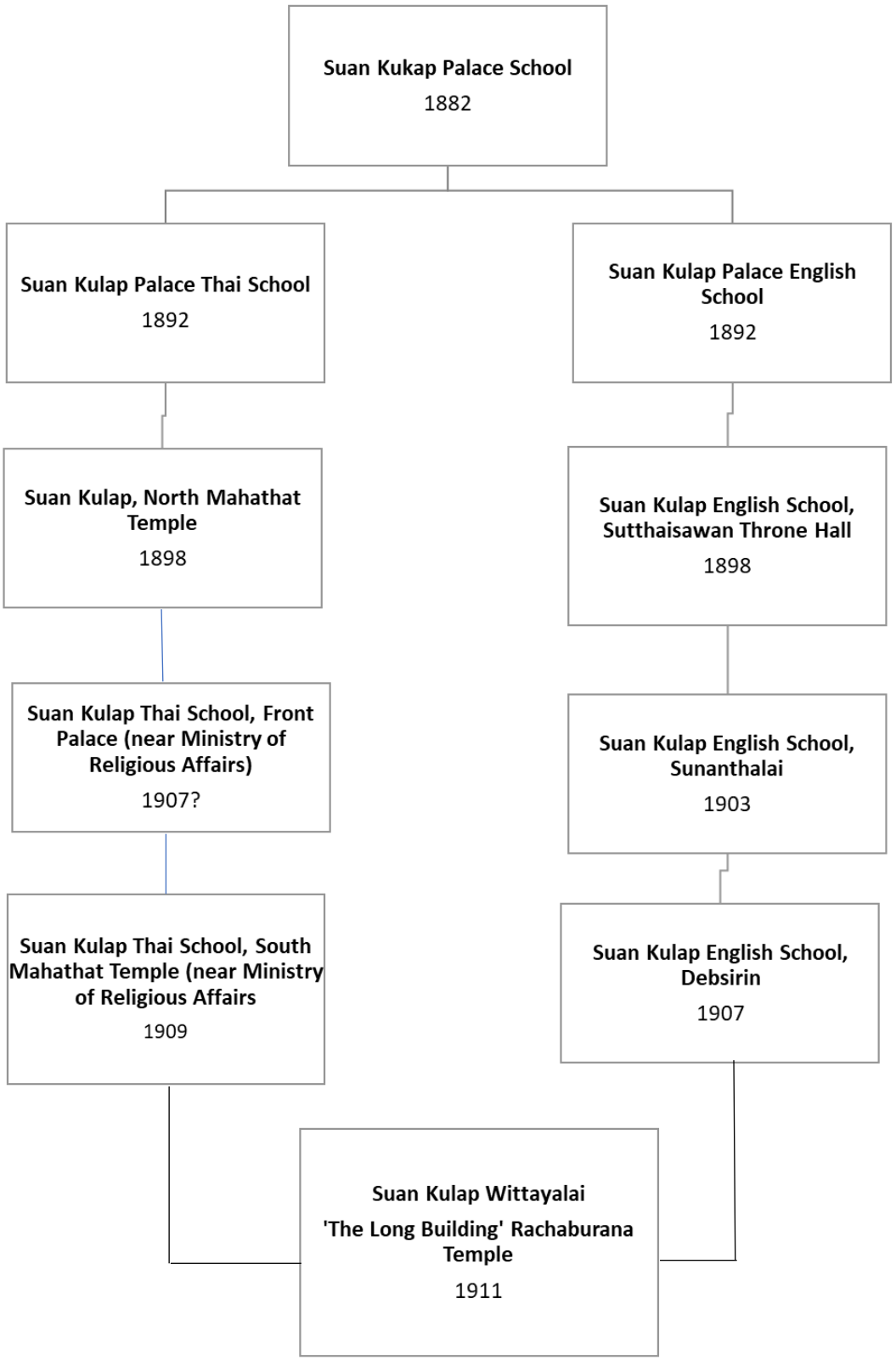
Education Ministers

Name	Minister number	Time in office
Pia Malakul	3	1912 – 16
Thammasak Montri	4/6	1916 – 26; 1932 – 3
Luang Sintusongkhramchai	9	1935 – 1941
Thawi Bunyaket	10	1944 – 1945
Phra Tri Ranasarnvichsawakham	11	1946
Tuan Bunnag	12	1946 – 1947
Seni Pramoj	14	1947

Gen. Mankorn Phromyothin	15	1948 – 1949
Air Marshall Mani Mahasantana	18	1951 – 1957
Pin Malakul	19	1957 – 1969
Apai Chantawimol	21	1972 – 1974
Chaturon Chaiseng	50/59	2005 – 6; 2013 – 2014
Wijit Srisa-arn	51	2006 – 2008

Appendix II

Suan Kualp Expansion Timeline (1882-2019)



Appendix III

Headmasters of Suan Kulap Royal Pages Academy, Suan Kulap Palace School, and Suan Kulap Withayalai 1882-2018.

Commander of Suan Kulap Palace School

Luang Surayuthyothahan	1882 – 1895
Khunwichit Sunthornkarn (acting commnader)	1895 – 1896
M.L. Watana (acting commander)	1896 – 1897

Key

SK = Graduate of Suan Kulap Palace School or Suan Kulap Withayalai

UK = Graduate of a British University (except Borough Road College)

US = Graduate of a US University

BR = Borough Road College graduate

Palace Thai School Headmaster

Luang Owatawornkit	1882 – 1898
Luang Prasitaksornsan	1898 – 1905

Front Palace School headmasters

Brigadier Phraya Upakharnsilpaset SK	1906 – 1907
Major General Phraya Suksasombun SK UK	1908 – 1909

Suan Kulap English School

Mr. Earnest Young BR	1894
Mr. W.G Johnson BR	1895 – 1897
Mr. Earnest.S. Smith BR	1897 – 1903
Mr. H.E Spivey BR	1903 – 1915

Suan Kulap Withayalai

Phraya Winitwithayakarn [US]	1910 – 1915
Mr. Norman Sutton [BR]	1915 – 1930
Phra Pawarowanwithaya [SK UK]	1930 – 1932
Mr. A.C. Churchill [BR]	1932 – 1938
Luang Bunpalitwichasat [SK US]	1938 – 1953
Mr. Nop Palokwong na Ayutthaya [SK US]	1955 – 1957
Mr. Samniang Tirawanich [SK UK]	1957 – 1958
Mr. Tawin Suriyon	1958 – 1960
Mr. Prong Songsengterm [SK]	1960 – 1966
Mr. Winay Kasemset	1966 – 1970
Mr. Suwan Chansom [SK US]	1970 – 1976
Mr. Kamol Thisopha	1976 – 1978
Mr. Prayun Tirawhong	1978 – 1979
Mr. Samreung Nilpradit [SK UK]	1979 –1983
Mr. Suthi Phengpan [SK]	1983 –1992
Mrs. Somay Wathanasiri	1992— 1995
Mr. Thani Somburana	1995 – 1998
Mr. Siri Sungkhasit	1998 – 1999
Mr. Narong Rakdech	1999 – 2000
Mr. Sompong Rujirawat	2000 – 2002
Mr. Sithirak Chansawang	2002- 2006
Mr. Montri Saenwiset	2006 – 2009
Mr. Phira Chaisiri	2009 – 2011
Dr. Cheutsak Suphasophon	2011-2015
Mr. Withun Wongin	2015 – 2016
Dr. Withaya Srichompu	2016 – 2018
Mr. Chinapat Phibulwithitamrong	2018 –

Appendix IV

Appendix: Results of 1995 'Suan Kulapness' Questionnaire Survey

Source: Suan Kulap Editorial Committee (1995:458-465)

Respondent category	Number	Percentage
Students	138	31.72
Teaching staff	82	21.15
Parents and guardians	37	8.51
Alumni	149	34.25
Retired teaching staff	19	4.37
Total	**425**	**100**

Response matrix

1- *Absolutely disagree*
2- *Somewhat disagree*
3- *Neither agree nor disagree*
4- *Strongly agree*
5- *Absolutely agree*

Table one: The reason for Suan Kulap's long-standing fame and honour

	$\bar{x}$	S.D
The success of alumni	**4.88**	**0.70**
Academic work	**4.58**	**0.49**
Participating in activities with society	**3.65**	**0.68**
The discipline of students	**3.24**	**0.60**
Sporting success	**3.15**	**0.56**

Table 2: The symbols of Suan Kulapness

	$\bar{x}$	S.D
School crest	**4.50**	**0.58**
School colours	**4.40**	**0.61**
The initials S.K.	**4.36**	**0.36**
School song	**4.14**	**0.77**
The school motto	**3.58**	**1.13**
Pink and blue roses	**3.22**	**0.85**

Table 3: Buildings that are symbols of Suan Kulapness

	$\bar{x}$	S.D
Long Building	**4.48**	**0.65**
Suan Kulap Memorial Building	**4.37**	**0.70**
The Teacher's Club Building	**4.35**	**0.70**
The Playing Field	**4.02**	**0.75**
Damrong Rajanubhab Building	**3.80**	**0.89**
The King Chulalongkhorn Memorial Building	**3.62**	**0.89**
The Prasadet Building	**3.38**	**0.93**

Table 4: **Activities that teach Suan Kulapness**

	$\bar{x}$	S.D
Samanmitr Day (Alumni Day)	**4.33**	**0.64**
Establishment Day	**4.14**	**0.75**
Jaturamitr Day	**3.89**	**0.83**
Cheer activities and card stunts	**3.71**	**0.79**
Teacher appreciation day	**3.46**	**0.74**
Leaving day	**3.25**	**0.71**
Fledgling initiation activities	**3.11**	**0.63**

Table 5: Moral characteristics that build Suan Kulapness

	$\bar{x}$	S.D.
Gratitude to the school and its teachers	**4.15**	**0.55**
Respect and trust between juniors and seniors	**3.94**	**0.56**
Love , unity and harmony	**3.88**	**0.54**
Leadership in society	**3.68**	**0.61**
Generosity, perseverance and sacrifice		
Creativity and inventiveness	**3.40**	**0.54**
Courtesy, good manners, orderliness	**3.32**	**0.51**

Appendix V

Ajarn's Sommay's Nine-point Policy, encated on hier first meeting as Principal, 8th October, 1992.

1. You must show love and loyalty to Suan Kulap
2. You will be honest to your duties and carry them out to your full ability
3. You will be punctual and consider both you professional and personal time as valuable
4. You will act in accordance with the school's regulations
5. You will build unity in the staff by maintaining the senior-junior system by respecting seniority
6. You will behave as though students were your nephews (เป็นลูกหลาน)and ensure they are happy at the school
7. You will perform your duties with sacrifice, seriousness, and sincerity
8. You will not reveal the school's secrets
9. You will perservere to ensure everyone in Suan Kulap developes the school and creates further beauty and prosperity going forward

Appendix VI

Suan Kulap Franchise Extension

Number	School name	Date of Establishment
1	Suan Kulap Withayalai	8th March, 1882
2	Suan Kulap Withyalai Nonthaburi	30 March, 1978
3	Nawamin Suan Kulap Withayalai Samut Prakan	8th April, 1991
4	Nawamintrachinutid Suan Kulap Withayalai Pathumthani	4th March, 1992
5	Suan Kulap Withayalai Rangsit	3rd March, 1993
6	Suan Kulap Withayalai Chonburi	5th March, 1999
7	Suan Kulap Withayalai Petchabun	24th June, 1999
8	Suan Kualp Withayalai Salaburi	6th February, 2006
9	Suan Kualp Withayalai (Jiraprawat) Nakhorn Sawan	27th December, 2007
10	Suan Kulap Withayalai Thonburi	8th August, 2008
11	Suan Kulap Withayalai Nakhorn Sri Thammarat	3rd March, 2011

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