

# Dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen" and Their Cultural Significance

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## ABSTRACT

"Khun Chang Khun Paen" is a treasure of Thai classical literature. It is known as the "Best of Flat Rhythm Glenn Poetry" in Thailand. It is a true portrayal of Thai society from the middle of the Ayutthaya Dynasty to the early Bangkok Dynasty. It is also the "encyclopedia" of society at that time. The love and hate of the characters and the comments on the events basically reflect the morality and values of the masses from the middle period of Ayutthaya Dynasty to the early period of Bangkok Dynasty. There are as many as 14 descriptions of dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen". The protagonists in the story dream of different types of dreams at different times and in different scenes, and these dreams finally come true in reality. Although these dreams are the predictions of reality by the characters in the novel, they are actually the products of Thais' long-term influence by religious thoughts. The religious belief concept presented in the dreams of "Khun Chang Khun Paen" shows the religious consciousness and ideology of Thais from multiple angles and levels.

**Keywords:** "Khun Chang Khun Paen", dreams, cultures, religions

## I. INTRODUCTION

The libretto of "Khun Chang Khun Paen" is known as the "Crown of Pinglv Gelun Poetry" in Thailand, and is a treasure of Thai classical literature. Born out of folk tales, this work is a true portrayal of Thai society from the middle of the Ayutthaya Dynasty to the early period of the Bangkok Dynasty. It is an "encyclopedia" of social life at that time and basically reflects the ethics and values of the people at that time [1]. There are as many as 14 descriptions of dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen". The protagonists in the story have different types of dreams at different times and in different scenes. They all use the form of dreams to foretell reality, approach psychics, and be fulfilled. What do dreams come from? They may be caused by physical discomfort, or some previous experience, or the instructions of the gods, or a sign. The creation and interpretation of the dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen" are the result of Thais' long-standing influences from various religions.

Religion constitutes the internal meaning of all cultures, religion is the essence of culture, culture is the external manifestation of religion [2], and dreams are a symbol of culture. Dreams are closely related to literature and religion. Dreams often give literary works rich imagination and unique dreamy charm. Through the ages, dreams and literature

have forged an indissoluble bond. The same is true for China and the West, and so is China and Thailand. As one of the most expressive artistic methods of literature, dreams also have rich forms of expression and important value in literary creation. The illusion and the quirkiness of dreams give the work a mysterious and strange color and strengthen the aesthetic connotation of literature. "Khun Chang Khun Paen" uses a large number of dream scenes to enrich the characters, create plots, and promote the development of the story, showing the religious consciousness and ideology of the Thais from the middle of the Ayutthaya Dynasty to the early years of the Bangkok Dynasty.

The religious belief concept presented in the dreams of "Khun Chang Khun Paen" shows the religious consciousness and ideology of Thais from multiple angles and levels. There are numerous studies on "Khun Chang Khun Paen" in China and foreign countries, mostly focusing on the character image analysis, character comparison and literary comparison in the works, while ignoring the cultural significance reflected by the dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen". The author intends to start with the dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen" as a starting point to explore the cultural meaning reflected by the dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen", that is, religious elements.

## II. THE BUDDHIST BELIEF ELEMENTS IN THE DREAMS OF "KHUN CHANG KHUN PAEN"

Around the 3rd century BC, Buddhism was introduced into Thailand from India. After Buddhism was introduced into Thailand, it was first spread and developed among the Mon people living in Thailand at that time. It can be said that the Mon people were the pioneers in the spread of Buddhism in Thailand and formed their own Buddhist culture [2], but the Mon people believed in Mahayana. It was not until 1238 that the Thais established the Sukhothai Dynasty and established Hinayana as the state religion, which has continued to this day. Thai literary works influenced by Buddhism include "Sankai Ky", "Lilit Phralo", "Khun Chang Khun Paen", etc. Born in the middle of the Ayutthaya Dynasty in Thailand to the early Bangkok Dynasty (early 17th century to early 19th century), "Khun Chang Khun Paen" is a model of the combination of Thai literature and Buddhist thought.

The Ph.D. from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand — Phramahamurad Surasako (พระมหาสุรเดช สุรศักดิ์) pointed out in his doctoral thesis "Research on the Influence of Buddhism on the Thai Literary Work 'Khun Chang Khun Paen'", through the study of "Khun Chang Khun Paen", it is found that dreams are produced by the protagonists in the story inadvertently, but dreams can be speculated, and dreams are predictions obtained during sleep [3]. In the story of "Khun Chang Khun Paen", the mothers of the three protagonists Khun Chang, Khun Paen and Wan Thong had different dreams when they were pregnant. Their interpretations of dreams are fulfilled one by one in the story, which illustrates the consequences of the various religions that have influenced Thais for so long. For example, Khun Chang's mother Tie Thong dreamed of a vulture flying towards her with a rotten male elephant in his mouth. Khun Chang's father explained the dream that Tie Thong was pregnant with a son. The son would be rich throughout his life, but he would be bald. The Thai scholar Chalia Songpasong (จริยา สมประสงค์) pointed out in the article "The Content and Meaning of Dreams Seen from Ancient and Modern Thai Literature" that dreams are the oldest science in the world. At present, the oldest book that can be traced back to the meaning of dreams is "Dream Interpretation and Divination" (called ตำราพราหมณาชาติ in Thai) [4], and dreaming of vultures represents children's baldness, dreaming of elephants represents wealth, and dreaming of male elephants represents son. And Khun Paen's mother Tombasi dreamed that Indra gave her a ring with huge gems, and the gems on the ring were very bright. Khun Paen's father explained the dream that the child she was pregnant with was like the reincarnation of Vishnu, who would fight bravely

and would become a senior general with outstanding merit in the future. The reason for interpreting dreams in this way is that Indra is the head god of all Buddhist gods, and the ring he gave is the protector god Vishnu. Wan Thong's mother Hiba Zhan dreamed that the god of craftsmanship gave her a ring, and she would have a pulchritudinous daughter. This interpretation of dreams is because Thais believe that the ring given by the god of craftsmanship represents a beautiful daughter.

Thais believe that dreams are a foreshadow of what will happen in the future. There are three dreams about "lotus" in "Khun Chang Khun Paen", all of which indicate that the dreamer will get his or her lover. Everyone knows that Thais like to hold one or several budding lotus flowers in their hands when they go to temples, and use them to pay homage to Buddha. This is not only because the lotus is a beautiful flower with a long flowering period, but also because the lotus represents the heart of the person who prays for Buddha, and the heart is the meaning of a sweetheart. For example, Niang Ping (later renamed Wan Thong) dreamed of lotus, and later, she met Palaego (later renamed Khun Paen) who had not seen her for many years at the temple. After Simara dreamed of lotus, she met Palaian and fell in love at first sight. Before meeting Simara, Palaian also dreamed of a beauty with towering breasts like a lotus. This beauty is his beloved Simara.

Thais believe that dreams can tell the dreamer a good or bad sign in advance. The Buddhist scriptures say: Everything has its own destiny. A person's life has its own destiny, the wealth and poverty of a person's life has its own destiny, the kind of people and things one can meet in his life has destiny, a person's birth has destiny, the time, place, and family of birth has destiny, and the time of death and the way of death also have destiny. Just like in the story of "Khun Chang Khun Paen", before Khun Paen's father Kunglepunla was executed by the King Papanvassa, Tombasi, Kunglepunla's wife, that was, Khun Paen's mother, dreamed about losing her teeth. Similarly, before Kunla Munin Tara was sent by the King of Chiang Mai to fight Khun Paen, Kunla Munin Tara's wife had the same dream, and Kunla Munin Tara was hacked to death on the back of an elephant by Khun Paen. In addition, the wife of the Chiang Mai general Kunpi Intara who went on the expedition with Kunla Munin Tara also dreamed that she was chopped in half. As a result, Kunpi Intara also died in battle.

In any case, the ancestors of the Thais believed that although dreams can't be proven by scientific principles, dreams have their own causes, whether it is a divine instruction or an omen. For example,

Wan Thong dreamed that she had lost her way in the forest before being executed by the King Papanvassa. When she found the exit, there was a tiger sitting in front of her. She wanted to come out, but the tiger jumped up and grabbed her back, not allowing her to leave the forest. The tiger in Wan Thong's dream alluded to the King Papanvassa. When the king asked Wan Thong to choose Khun Chang or Khun Paen, Wan Thong hesitated. In the end, Papanvassa judged that Wan Thong was a "bad woman" serving two husbands, and was ordered to be executed.

In the classical era, people believed that dreams had something to do with a supernatural world they believed in. Dreams brought inspiration from gods or demons. In addition, they also believe that for the dreamer, the dream is of great significance, usually to foretell an event that will happen [5]. Similarly, before Palai Chumphon left home, her grandmother Tombasi dreamed of a tiger biting her back violently, and she couldn't find Palai Chumphon when she woke up. The tiger in Tombasi's dream also alluded to the jealous Chiang Mai princess Safa, who was jealous of her husband Palaian's love for Simara beyond his love for her. So she asked a wizard to perform witchcraft to make Palaian hate Simara and beat Simara for no reason. When Palaian's younger brother Palai Chumphon tried to dissuade him, he was beaten by his brother Palaian. Therefore, Palai Chumphon chose to run away from home out of anger. For the dreamer, this dream is not only an omen that the gods inform the dreamer in advance, but it also conveys a Buddhist idea that everything has cause and effect.

### **III. PRIMITIVE BELIEF ELEMENTS IN THE DREAMS OF "KHUN CHANG KHUN PAEN"**

The primitive religion of Thais is a variety of god worship and primitive fetishism, mainly nature worship and supernatural beliefs [2]. In Thailand, not only rural farmers and mountain ethnic minorities, but also Thais in big cities such as Bangkok generally believe in ghosts and gods. Taylor, a well-known British anthropologist and religious scientist, believes that the ancestors of Southeast Asia had worshipped animism before ancestor worship, object worship and nature worship. Therefore, the worship of animism is the source of all religions. Thais' belief in ghosts and gods is derived from the belief of animism. People believe that the human world and the world of ghosts and gods are inseparable from each other. Ghosts and gods are everywhere, from homes and villages, to Meng (towns), and all the world, rivers, forests, and mountains, there are ghosts and gods [6].

During the Sukhothai period, Thais believed in souls, ghosts and gods, and believed that ghosts and gods were supernatural powers. Ghosts and gods were divided into "good gods", "bad gods", and "evil ghosts". People couldn't see their true features, only their epiphany. In the traditional concept of Thais, they believe that every place is protected by gods, and they worship and trust them, hoping to receive protection and help from gods, so that the place where they live is stable and peaceful, in order to realize the desire to live and work in peace and contentment, without disease and disaster [7]. The belief in ghosts and gods is one of the original beliefs of Thais. The evil spirit in "Khun Chang Khun Paen" was depicted as a kind of spiritual thing, which was kept by Khun Paen. Every time Khun Paen and his family were framed by a bad guy, the evil spirit would tell Khun Paen and his family at a critical moment that the bad guy had done bad things behind him. For example, when Khun Paen and Wan Thong's son Palaian was taken to the forest and was held down by tree branches to be killed by Khun Chang, as described in "Khun Chang Khun Paen", the evil spirit "ran into" Wan Thong's dream, and led Wan Thong to see this scene and know that Khun Chang was going to do harm to Palaian, so Wan Thong quietly sent Palaian away. The evil spirit appeared at critical times, told its owners the true image behind them, and played a role in protecting its owner and his family. Therefore, Thais worship ghosts and gods very much.

### **IV. ELEMENTS OF BRAHMANISM IN THE DREAMS OF "KHUN CHANG KHUN PAEN"**

The Thai ancestors' belief in Brahmanism has a long history, and Brahmanism was introduced to Thailand in the 3rd century BC. After the 5th century AD, Brahmanism reached its peak in Thailand, and gradually declined after the 13th century. After the establishment of the Sukhothai Dynasty in 1238, although Hinayana replaced Mahayana and Brahmanism as the state religion, it didn't abandon Brahmanism. Before the establishment of the Sukhothai Dynasty, the Thais had been under the rule of the Cambodian Khmer, and Cambodia was the first ethnic group to accept Brahmanism from India, so Brahmanism left a profound influence. During the Ayutthaya Dynasty, Thailand sent troops to Cambodia twice. After the capture of Angkor Thom, the Thai army looted a large number of Cambodian residents to Thailand, including many Brahmins and Brahmin priests in the Cambodian court. It made Brahmanism have a significant impact on Thai culture and the royal family [2]. The concept of "divine right of kings" of Brahmanism was completely accepted by the feudal rulers of Thailand. They used Brahman gods to name or title the royal family, and also changed the

royal language from Thai to Sanskrit used by Brahmanism. At the same time, Brahmanism also had a great influence on the Thais, and it had a major influence on the birth and marriage customs of Thai civilians. Therefore, in the long narrative poem "Khun Chang Khun Paen", the traces of the influence of Brahmanism on Thai society and the Thais are very obvious.

The foundation of ancient dream belief is the way that Reimu conveys oracles for gods to people, and the sender of dreams is god [8]. For example, in "Khun Chang Khun Paen", before Khun Paen prepared to go to the prison to free 35 of his fellow prisoners who were in the prison to join him in the battle against Chiang Mai, one of the inmates named Patella (พระทายนี่) had a strange dream the night before. He dreamed of a beautifully dressed Brahman god with a bun, baking-powder embellished between his brows, one hand holding a conch, seven necklaces around his neck, earrings on his ears, and wearing a dupatta and a yellow dhoti (also called Totti) on his lower part of the body, flew into the city, then opened the door of the prison where Patella was staying, walked towards him, and sprinkled the holy water on Patella's head. At this time, all the instruments of torture on Patella were automatically unraveled and disappeared. After that, the Brahman god sprinkled holy water on other Thailand's and Laos' inmates in the prison. All the instruments of torture on their bodies disappeared, and then, the Brahman god disappeared. The Brahman god described in this dream, judging from his costume and holding a conch, is Vishnu, the protector god of Thailand.

Vishnu, known as Narayana in Buddhism, is one of the Trimurti. Brahma is in charge of "creation", Shiva is in charge of "destruction", and Vishnu is the god of "maintenance". In the Veda era, it was originally one of the Vedic sun gods. In the Hinduism era, it was elevated to the main god of maintaining the order of the universe. In Hinduism statues, Vishnu usually wears royal dresses with dark purple skin color, a garland of precious stones and a thick holy thread, and four arms holding a horagai, a wheel of wonder, a magic hammer of gatha, a magic bow or a sword (his weapons sometimes appear in anthropomorphic images), and lotus flowers. Sometimes he sits on a lotus, sometimes lies on a thousand-headed snake, and sometimes rides on Garuda, a big bird. Thousand-headed Naga Shesha (or Anantaron) concealed it. Vishnu and Divine Eri Kisaki Lakshmi live in the highest heavenly palace. With a gentle personality, he shows favor to devout believers, and often turns into various images to save the world in distress. Vishnu is the incarnation of beneficence and kindness, with omnipotent power, protecting and maintaining the universe and the order of the universe [9]. In "Khun Chang Khun Paen", when

Khun Paen's mother was pregnant with him, she dreamed that Indra gave her a ring with bright diamonds. To explain the dream, Khun Paen was the reincarnation of Vishnu, which echoed with the dreamland of Patella's dream. Later, just as Patella's dreams foreshadowed, after Khun Paen made a request to the king, Patella and other 35 prisoners were released and went to Chiang Mai with Khun Paen.

## V. CONCLUSION

As a luxurious decoration, religious mystery has always been chosen by literary works. These religious thoughts reflect the thoughts and values of the author and the characters in his literary works. At the same time, the religious consciousness reflected in literary works also enriches the ideological connotation of literary works. In this ideal state of religion, people's doubts about life, fear of death, and worries and anxieties about life conditions will all disappear [10]. "Khun Chang Khun Paen" is immersed in religious colors and the religious sentiments of the kings of a country, literary masters, and famous writers from the Second King to the Fourth King of Bangkok, cleverly uses the form of dreams to promote religious thoughts and values, and makes these thoughts and values affects ordinary people in Thailand imperceptibly. The bizarre and illusory features of the dreams express religious beliefs and give the work extraordinary imagination. Dream is not only an information exchange, but also an aesthetic activity, a game of imagination, and this game itself is a kind of value [11]. The religious ideas contained in the dreams have a profound impact on the creation, aesthetic implication and value orientation of the works. The illusion of dreams, and the bizarre and illusion of dreamland, make the works have a mysterious and dreamy color, which is in line with the aesthetic consciousness of literature. Dreamland not only adds mystery and dreaminess, but also conforms to the aesthetic taste of literature. It is an indispensable embellishment in literary creation. This paper uses the dreams in "Khun Chang Khun Paen" to analyze the cultural meanings contained in dreams and the religious consciousness of Thais, and presents the lively and religious Thais in front of people, making people more deeply understand the spiritual world of the Thai nation. At the same time, it shows people the attitudes and beliefs from the middle Ayutthaya Dynasty to the early Bangkok Dynasty in Thailand, so that people have a deeper understanding of the religion and traditional beliefs from the middle Ayutthaya Dynasty to the early Bangkok Dynasty in Thailand.

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