Appendix: Biographies of Khun Phan

In the wake of Khun Phan’s death in 2006, biographers rushed to produce accounts of his life, and several appeared in 2007 after his cremation in February of that year. Owing to Khun Phan’s role in identifying the Jatukham-Ramathep deity (described in Chapter 5), the value of the amulet spiked between his death in July 2006 and his cremation, and books about the deity never fail to include him in the story.

In 1983, the policeman began to give interviews about his career and, while the stories he told to various authors overlap with one another, the biographies have different emphases and, in a few cases, unique details. His recalling of his provincial postings and outlaw captures conveys a ring of truth, although numerous retellings of the stories have burnished the accounts to the point where they are difficult to corroborate for lack of external evidence. His fluent storytelling suggests that he had a remarkable memory and he had told the stories many times (see Samphan 1996 below).


Anat lists at the end of his book the biographies he used, including Samphan (1996) and Wira (2001). This small book has copious illustrations that appear in other biographies except for a rare photograph in which Khun Phan is shown performing a sword dance, on 4 August 1987, to celebrate the consecration of the city pillar shrine in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Chalong, born in Phatthalung in 1966 and raised in Bangkok, was a Buddhist novice and monk for 10 years. A law graduate of Ramkhamhaeng University, he first met Khun Phan in 1986 and spoke with him over 15 days. In my conversation with Chalong, on 31 January 2012, he referred to Wat Khao Or as ‘an academy for men’ at which some of the outlaws had been disciples. He agreed with me that Khun Phan was ‘a Brahman in his practices’. This book contains little new information and skips around chronologically, but it is written in a lively style. A Thai colleague thought it the best of the biographies of the policeman she had read. According to internal evidence, it was published in 2007, the year of Khun Phan’s cremation.


Chanthip (b. 1952), the second eldest of Khun Phan’s surviving sons, inherited the knowledge his father acquired from the master teachers at Wat Khao Or and from other teachers during his long career. In these pages of the cremation biography, he classifies this ‘Vedic’ knowledge into four parts and lists the teachers who taught his father and their fields of expertise.

Chanthip and his older brother, Nasan, went through Khao Or’s ritual of initiation, including immersion in the prophylactic herbal bath (p. 135). Chanthip attended the Sirisinlapa Muslim kindergarten; the family home at the time was near the Muslim market. In his primary and secondary years, he attended the AMC Christian School because it was in the neighbourhood, and on weekends he went to a Buddhist school. From a young age, he accompanied his father everywhere. A physically fit man with a ready sense of humour when I spoke with him in September 2012, Chanthip had aspired to be a policeman but struggled with the studies required and baulked at paying a bribe to join the force.
‘Kon Hoi’ [Chanthip Phantharakratchadet]. 2007. ‘Phonngan nai thana
nai tamruat [Accomplishments as a police officer]’, in Chintapati (2007:
84–132).

Chanthip Phantharakratchadet here relates highlights of his father's life,
including many of the outlaw episodes. Chanthip spoke with several
of Khun Phan’s biographers, including Samphan Kongsamut, in 2001
(Samphan 2007: 368–92).

Okha Buri [Supharuek Khachonklin]. 2007. Thot rabat khun
phantarakratchadet mue prap khamang wet [Unlocking the Secrets of
Khun Phantharakratchadet: The lawman with the Vedic magic]. Bangkok:
Utthayan Khwamru.

The author, whose real name is Supharuek Khachonklin, is a native of
Phichit in north-central Thailand, where Khun Phan was posted from
1943 to 1945 during the Japanese occupation after he closed the Ivory
Bamboo Casino in Surat Thani. The Yom and Nan rivers flow through
the province, and Supharuek’s pen name means ‘River Town’. A prolific
writer with degrees in education management and Thai studies, ‘Okha
Buri’ offers episodes of and insights into the policeman’s life unavailable
in other biographies, including Khun Phan’s friendship with a couple of
Chinese brothers from Hainan who provided him with local knowledge
and resources for his crime suppression in Phichit. Supharuek heard many
Khun Phan tales from Ko Yueang, the elder of the Chinese brothers; Ko
Yang, the younger brother, was the author’s paternal grandfather (p. 32).
While stationed in Phichit, Khun Phan acquired the Red Sword that he
kept to the end of his days from the noble family in Uttaradit.

Phantharakratchadet, Khun. n.d. Prawat phi phroi pantharak [The life

This cremation eulogy by Khun Phan, of uncertain date, for one of his
relatives sets out the southern policeman’s family tree without dates.
A history of the relations between Nakhon Si Thammarat and Kedah as
well as between Nakhon Si Thammarat and Ayutthaya in the seventeenth
and eighteenth centuries is also included. I extracted a few nuggets from
this fascinating document, which I think is based on oral history, but the
dates do not jibe with modern scholarship.
Phantharakratchadet, Khun. 1986. Recording of interview with Chatthip Nartsupha held at the National Archives of Thailand. Personal copy.

This interview with Khun Phan, conducted by Professor Chatthip Nartsupha during a meal, is barely audible in places through the clatter of dishware and background conversation. Chatthip, an economic historian, solicited information from the policeman for a book he was co-authoring on the southern Thai economy (Chatthip and Phunsak 1997). He was interested not in Khun Phan’s exploits capturing bandits, but in the economic life of southern peoples, so rather than interrogating Khun Phan about crime and banditry, Chatthip asked about the price of bananas and pineapples and the cost of boat transportation through the Songkhla lakes.


Published by Songklanakarin University in Patani, where Praphon was a lecturer, Rutsamilae Journal specialised in the life and culture of people in the country’s four southern provinces. This interview is one of the first Khun Phan gave and covers his early life and exploits in Phatthalung, Narathiwat and provinces in the central plains. The author, known eponymously as Rutsamilae, is identified by Wira (2001: 19) and Okha (2007: 239–49). Another excerpt of Praphon’s interview with Khun Phan was published as ‘Khui kap naiphon tamruat tri khunphantarak ratchdet [In conversation with Police Major General Khunphantarak Ratchadet]’ in Sinlapa Watthanatham (5[2][December 1983]: 14–18). The accounts in these interviews are corroborated to an extent in Samphan Kongsamut’s books, but the details do not jibe in all respects.

Praphon, a native of Trang, was born in 1942. His father was an agricultural official whose duties took him to many southern provinces, and Praphon lived in Surat Thani, Trang and Narathiwat. A man of letters from an early age, who attended teachers’ college in Songkhla, he has worked in publication and marketing. A short memoir is in Ajin et al. (2009: 245–304).

*Niranam* means ‘anonymous’, raising the question of why the author of this book about Wat Khao Or and Khun Phan, its most famous disciple, wished to keep his identity private. The author eventually revealed himself to be Samphan Kongsamut, a writer and publisher now based in Bangkok and the most prolific of Khun Phan’s biographers. Samphan comes from Ko Samui, an island in the Gulf of Thailand, and his family had connections with Khao Or through his maternal great-grandfather, who had acquired the *saiyasat* knowledge taught at the cave monastery.

Samphan is a disciple of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–93), a revered Thai monk and Buddhist philosopher of international repute who came from Chaiya in Surat Thani. Many of the beliefs and practices of the monks at the cave monastery that mixed Buddhism and Brahmanism were outside the ken of Buddhadasa’s Buddhism, and Samphan did not want to use his real name out of respect for the philosopher’s reformist teachings and reinterpretations of Buddhist texts. Although Ran’s book is repetitive and disjointed in places, it has rare data on the Khao Or medicinal therapies and the monastery’s lineage of master teachers that are unavailable in other documents. Samphan published an informative memoir in Ajin et al. (2009: 161–243).


The title ‘Little Raja’ was bestowed by Muslim people in the deep south to honour Khun Phan’s capture in 1938 of a Malay separatist in Narathiwat. In the reprint of *Little Raja* (2016), Samphan added a paragraph noting Khun Phan’s death in July 2006 and his cremation in February 2007, and identified himself as Ran Niranam (2007). In *Little Raja* and his other books, Samphan concentrates on Khun Phan’s exploits pursuing and capturing bandits; some material in this book is not to be found in his larger biography of Khun Phan (Samphan 2007 [2001]). Samphan began interviewing Khun Phan in March 1992 for a series of articles on the Thai mafia for a crime magazine. Much to Samphan’s dissatisfaction—to say the least—instalments in the magazine were pirated and published.
anonymously under the title *Khon tai nang niaw [The Man with the Tough Hide]* (p. 11). Interviewing Khun Phan was easy. He spoke in complete sentences with such fluency it was as though he had a tape running in his head, and Samphan had little to do except transcribe the policeman’s words.


This edition of Samphan’s most comprehensive biography was published after Khun Phan’s death and contains an interview with Khun Phan’s younger son, Chanthip, who has continued his father’s interest in *saïyasat*. The last of the four appendices is Khun Phan’s essay ‘Saïyasat beliefs of the southern Thais’ (Phantharakratchadet 2007). The 2001 edition of this book has six appendices, including several excerpts from Wira (2001).


This book, with footnotes and full academic citations, was reworked from an MA thesis supervised by Professor Paritta Chalermpow-Koanantakool and the late Professor Suthiwong Pongpaiboon, among others. Based on extensive research and interviews with Khun Phan and local people, the book includes a detailed local map and a list of the men fatally shot as a result of operations by the southern policeman and his team. Wira places Khun Phan in the culture, society and history of the mid south and shows how he exploited local knowledge and belief systems to develop his skills as a lawman. When I spoke with Wira in 2008, he was teaching in a Songkhla district school.
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