



The Custom and Rite
of Paying Homage to Teachers
of Khōn, Lakhon and Piphat

THAI CULTURE, NEW SERIES No. 11

THE CUSTOM AND RITE OF PAYING HOMAGE TO TEACHERS OF KHÔN, LAKHON AND PIPHAT

BY
DHANIT YUPHO



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The Arrangements of Khôn for the Initiation Rite,
at Sala Dusidalai, Chitralada Palace,
on Thursday 25, October, 1984

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Preface

Thailand is very rich in precious arts and cultural heritage which represents a long-lasting independence, prosperity and stability of the country. These various fields of heritage have been preserved, accumulated and inherited throughout generations until the present. This legacy brings pride, dignity and prestige to Thai people. Therefore, it should be shared with the world so that Thai wisdom can be appreciated.

The Fine Arts Department is responsible for the preservation, promotion, transmission and dissemination of arts and culture of the Thai nation. As such it has compiled and published a book series of 25 volumes written by experts in their respective fields. Their areas of knowledge include artistic works, architecture, music and dramatic arts as well as language and literature. Each series has been reprinted from time to time. In this publication, there are no alterations to the contents although some illustrations have been added for the benefit of the readers.

The Department hopes that this series of books will be a resource among the international community to help them understand Thailand better through its unique arts and culture.

(Mr. Borvornvate Rungruje)
Director General
The Fine Arts Department

THE CUSTOM AND RITE OF PAYING HOMAGE TO TEACHERS OF KHÔN, LAKHON AND PIPHAT

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MR. DHANIT YUPHO

was Director General of the Fine Arts Department from 1956 to 1968. He was born in Nakhon Sawan Province, Thailand, in 1907, and learned Pali at Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, in 1918. He was also a graduate of the ecclesiastical doctorate of Thailand. He entered into the government service in 1934 and became Chief of the Research Section of the National Library in 1943. He was the Director of the Division of Music and Drama in the Fine Arts Department from 1946 to 1956. Mr. Yupho was also a lecturer in the history of Thai literature at Chulalongkorn University. He was the editor of Thai Culture, New Series and the author of the following publications:

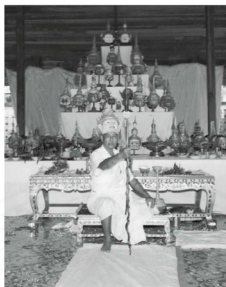
The Economic Conditions of India in the Buddha's Time;
The Khôn; The Classical Siamese Theatre; Artists of the Thai Dance-Dramas or Lakhon Vol. I; The Preliminary Course of Training in Thai Theatrical Art; Thai Musical Instruments; The Khôn and Lakhon Presented by the Department of Fine Arts, etc.



Annual rite of paying homage to teachers of general education at the School of Dramatic Art, Fine Arts Department.



Phrot, an ascetic



A senior teacher of Thai classical dance commencing the annual rite of paying homage to teachers of the dance and music.

THE CUSTOM AND RITE OF PAYING HOMAGE TO TEACHERS OF KHŌN, LAKHON AND PIPHAT

The custom and rite of “Paying Homage to Teachers” as prevalent among Khŏn-Lakhon (โขน-ละคร) dancers and Piphat musicians (ปี่พาทย์) demonstrate the profound reverence these artists have for their teachers. The guidance and instructions received from teachers play an important rôle in the formation of a pupil’s character and fit him for living in civilized society. At birth man is not unlike any other animal. A baby left alone in the forest, if it should survive, would become an animal of human appearance with a beast’s way of life. Generally speaking, a baby ceases to be animal-like because it lives in the society of other human beings who care about it. When young a child is reared and trained by his parents. When



The arrangements of Khŏn for the Initiation Rite.

he grows older he receives guidance and instructions from teachers. It is considered the bounden duty of a pupil to pay regular homage to his teachers. Artists have special homage rites which are usually rather elaborate. While Khōn, Lakhon and Piphat artists also add an “initiation rite” (พิธีการรับ) to this important ceremony. But both homage and initiation rites are usually referred to as “Wai Khru” (i.e. homage to teachers) by the artists concerned. Ancient masters made very wise regulations concerning these rites which have been observed to the present day. Some of the regulations will be mentioned here. During the homage rite the presiding teacher, either of drama or music, will initiate each pupil who has acquired a certain standard of skill or competence. Novice-dancers of Khōn and Lakhon will be granted initiation only after they have mastered the slow-tempo and fast-tempo dances and are considered competent to appear on the stage in such minor rôle as army officers or ladies-in-waiting. Similarly, novice-musicians of Piphat who can join in an overture from beginning to finish will be considered sufficiently competent. They are also able to join the Piphat ensemble at certain religious ceremonies e.g. the chanting in the evening by Bhikkhus and the offering of breakfast to Bhikkhus in the following morning.



A senior teacher of Thai classical dance with “a teacher’s head” beginning the dance to invite the spirits of departed teachers of the dance.



A senior teacher of Thai classical dance commencing the annual rite of paying homage to teachers of the dance and music.

From the Piphat tunes for the invitation of devas and spirits of teachers and the chanting of officiating teachers it can be observed that the ancient masters has prescribed the “Wai Khru” with so much thought and care that pupils who go through these rites would gain the highest possible efficiency and prestige due to full-fledged artists. In principle, the initiation of new artists is possible of comparison to the ordination of a new Bhikkhu.

However it is often said of old masters that most of them jealously guarded their manuscripts of these rituals and could not be easily persuaded to hand down these texts to deserving pupils. This might have been true in the case of some teachers. Yet after careful consideration we have to



H.M. the King presented the text of paying homage to teachers of the Khôn performers after the Royal Initiation Rite.

concede that it would be premature and rather unfair to blame them for withholding such important texts. This is because of the possibility that these texts might fall into the hands of unscrupulous pupils who would use them with dishonest intent. As a result the whole profession would be disgraced and, frequently, artists in general would also suffer ominous reverse. Hence the old masters had to be very careful about their choice of pupils to whom they would bequeath their priceless manuscripts. According to tradition the presiding teacher who leads in the homage and performs the actual initiation must be a man. It is believed that the female touch will not bring success to an initiation : only misfortune will befall either the initiated or the initiator or even both. Though tradition approves only male initiator, not all male teachers can perform the initiation rite. Only teachers who have been appointed by past senior teachers can do so, in the same way as Bhikkhus of old could perform

the ordination ceremony only on authority bequeathed them by elder Theras. This is the way how the old Theras of ancient time handed down their power or authority of ordination to their senior pupils. Similarly, the presiding teachers in the “Wai Khru” (ไหว้ครู) can initiate pupils on authority handed down by ancient masters through succeeding generations.

Artists not specially authorized, cannot conduct homage and initiation rites even though they have had bequeathed on them the ritual manuscripts. In this case their manuscripts become objects for reverence and study only. After having compiled a number of these texts on paying homage to teachers and the initiation rite of the Khôn and Lakhon, and made proper corrections the writer had one such text published in 1951 with the purpose of making the subject more widely known. It is hoped that those who obtain copies of this publication will make honest and prudent use of them.



The ritual offering sets for the Initiation Rite.





The ritual offering sets for the Initiation Rite.

Though the rite of paying homage to teachers arranged annually by the Fine Arts Department is an inside affair, boys and girls trained by other institutions are also admitted for initiation. Many senior artists outside this department also join in this annual rite as is customary with all artists. The following incident happened during an homage rite of long ago. While the presiding teacher was reciting incantations and the Piphat ensemble playing invitation tunes (i.e. to invite spirits of teachers to the assembly), a man in short pants, with mud-spattered body, danced absentmindedly into the ritual hall and joined in the rite. In the afternoon when the rite was over the man became aware of his pitiful condition. He told the others that he was working in his orchard until late in the morning when he felt dizzy and forgot himself. He did not know how he came to join

in this rite. It was said that this man was formerly an artist and that he lived quite far from where the above rite took place. But on the day fixed for the rite he came subconsciously to the place, though uninvited. The writer heard this story from an old and trustworthy acquaintance and retell it here for the benefit of later generations. Since old time the homage rite of artists has not been performed with such senseless frequency so as to make it hackneyed or trivial. Artists believe that homage day is their red-letter day, the observance of which is ethically and disciplinarily binding. Those who consciously stay away from this rite are sinning and drawing upon their heads the curses of their teachers. They also go to hell after death. Hence all artists who got news of an homage rite always manage to join in it joyfully even though they have not been invited. There



Varieties of weapons used in the performance, given to the enrolled performers in the rite, by H.M. the King.

is no “standing on ceremony” where this important event is concerned. This may be due to the fact that these artists consider themselves as belonging to the same profession so that petty personal dislikes are overlooked. This is in line with the practice of the Buddhist brotherhood. Bhikkhus from different residences and having different initiating teachers can join in the same ecclesiastic ceremony.

The homage as well as the initiation rite is always fixed to be performed on a Thursday which is regarded as Teacher’s Day. As certain Piphat tunes and dancing postures are considered (by teachers of dancing and music) as specially

efficacious or even consecrated, these tunes and postures are not taught until pupils have been duly initiated. Teachers dare not teach them to uninitiated pupils because it is believed that it might bring misfortune to both teachers and pupils. If any mishap should result from such practice, it is said to be due to “wronged teachers” (ผิดครู) or “power (of teachers)” (อำนาจ). For reasons above mentioned the School of Dramatic Art of the Fine Arts Department arranges each year the homage and initiation rites which are considered an important event. This takes place during the first school semester on the first Thursday of June.



The dramatic arts performers giving offerings in paying homage to the spirits of teachers.

The Ceremony includes the following procedures :-

1. Chanting by Bhikkhus, offering of food to Bhikkhus and blessings by Bhikkhus.
2. The rite of paying homage to (ordinary) school teachers
3. The rite of paying homage to teacher of the dance and music.
4. Initiation rite conducted by presiding teachers of the dance and music.

Both 1 & 2 are rather widely known and need no further description. For those who are interested in the homage and initiation rites a brief description will be given which might be sufficiently satisfactory for the general reader. Those who want more details are requested to read the writer's text book "Paying Homage to Khôn and Lakhon Teachers", which has been compiled and revised from old manuscripts on this subject.



Teachers of the dance of the Fine Arts Department holding vessels of offerings.



Preparation for the rite of paying homage to teachers and the rite of appointing the sacred word readers for paying homage to teachers of khôn-Lakhon, Thai classical music, and traditional Thai crafts in 2010.





A senior teacher of Thai classical dance marking an auspicious dot on the right hand of H.R.H. Princess Chulabhorn Walailak.



A senior teacher of Thai classical dance marking an auspicious dot on the forehead of each pupil.

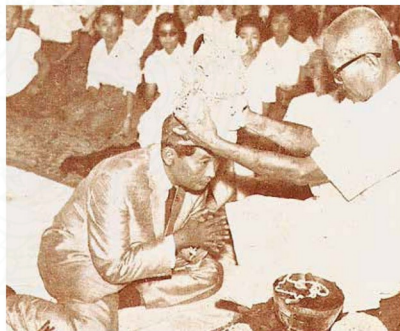
* Traditional articles of offerings, contained or wrapped in banana leaf.

For these rites artists of the Khôn and Lakhon procure a suitable table, serving as a sort of altar, on which are placed the mask of the Rishi Bharotmuni (the prime teacher of dramatic art) and other Khôn masks, together with Lakhon headgears such as crown, chadā, etc. which are collectively called “teachers’ heads”. On this table are also arranged certain important paraphernalia for Khôn and Lakhon performances. Then the musicians put on this table their “teachers’ heads”, i.e. those of Phra Naradamuni and Phra Panchasikhora Thebkhonthap (Pañcasikhara Devagandharva) together with various traditional musical instruments. Now all concerned bring offerings of baiśi,* liquor, rice, hog’s head, duck, chicken, etc. which are placed in front of the altar. The two presiding male teachers (one for Khôn and Lakhon dancers and another for Piphat musicians) are then requested to conduct this solemn rite. These two teachers are in the traditional ritual dress of all-white garments.



A senior teacher of
Thai classical dance initiating
H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri
Sirindhorn.

When making offerings to teachers of the drama the senior teacher of this art recites incantations inviting gods of the drama and spirits of departed teachers to come and accept these offerings. Simultaneously, the Piphat ensemble is called on to make "invitation" tunes (to gods and spirits) with are repeated at appropriate intervals. Artists who are senior pupils then lift up among them all versels containing offerings and perform the "dance of offering". After this dance the offerings are placed before the altar again. The rite up to this point must be finished before noon after which the pupils remove the offerings. This removal may be accompanied by another ceremonial dance. In some old Thai manuscripts the writer found descriptions of primary procedures and order of successive tunes used in this rite, as follows:-



A senior teacher of Thai classical dance initiating his student.
(M.R. Kukrit Pramoj)



A senior teacher of Thai classical music saying a prayer of invitation to their masters to the place of worship.

Prior to paying homage to teachers of Khōn and Lakhon and performing initiation, make obeisance to Phra Prakhonthap* i.e. the Taphon. Recite the Namo formula thrice then repeat the following incantations three times :-

Phra Prakhonthap Thewada imaṣṣim Disābhāge Santi Davā Mahidhikā. Tepi tumhe anurakkhantu paribhunjāntu.

Then the pupils are brought to pay their respects to the musical instruments on the altar table. The music ensemble plays Tra Prakhonthap tune then Kūkpāt tune. Pupils make

three traditional obeisances. The presiding teacher orders the scattering of popped rice which is then sprinkled thrice on the musical instruments on the table. Kūkpāt tune is repeated while pupils make three more obeisances. Each pupil then takes a sip of the wash-water from the Taphon which is also used to wet the pupil's hair by the presiding teacher. Then the homage rite to teachers of the Khōn and Lakhon is performed as has always been done before by preceding teacher. Before the initiation rite begins the Piphat ensemble is asked to play the Mahachai tune which is repeated till the end of the initiation.

* Phra Prakhonthap is the Rishi Naradamuni. In this case the Taphon is supposed to be Phra Prakhonthap.



Persons appointed as the sacred word readers for paying homage to teachers of Thai classical music.



A senior teacher of Thai classical music performed an initiation rite to his student (Mr. David Morton from the University of California, Los Angeles, U.S.A.).



Musicians of Piphat in the rite of paying homage to teachers.

There are many collections of the homage ritual tunes in which the presiding teacher has the free choice. But in accordance with formula set by His Majesty the King Rama IV (1851-1868) the collection of the appropriate tunes is as followed:-

1. Sathukan (สาธุการ) worshipping the Triple Gem and paying homage to teachers and recalling to mind their virtues.*
2. Choen (เชิญ) Inviting the god Siva.
3. Ho (พา) Inviting Narai (Vishnu) and other gods.
4. Tra Prakhonthap (ตระพระชนมพรพ) Inviting Phra Prakhonthap.
5. Homrong Phlengcha Phlengreo (to the end) (โหมโรงเพลงช้างเพลงเรือ) Paying homage to teachers of teachers of hero and heroines.

6. Phlae (แผละ) Inviting Phya Khрут.
7. Smoe (เสมอ) Gods entering the ritual hall.
8. Rua Samla (รัวสามลา) Paying homage to teachers of demon dancers.
9. Longsong Song Khruang (ลงสงทรงเครื่อง) Presiding teacher bathing deva-images.
10. Ramdāp (รำดาบ) Presiding teacher performing dance of slicing pieces from hog's head and other offerings.
11. Choen Twai Khruang (เชิญถวายเครื่อง) Piphat ensemble making "Choed" (เชิด) tune and every pupil lifting up a vessel contain offerings and performing a dance while holding the vessel.
12. Sangwoei Senlao (สังเวชนาลัย) Refers to the time the spirits of teachers are feasting on the food offerings.
13. Proi Khaotok (โปรยข้าวตอก) Teachers and pupils scattering popped rice as a symbol of good wish for success.
14. Wian Thian (เวียนเทียน) Teachers and pupils around the Khôn masks starting a circumambulation, with a lighted candle in the right hand, to celebrate this event.
15. Sāmtra (สามพระ) The significance of this tune is rather obscure. Perhaps it symbolizes the Rishi Bharot-muni's blessings on pupils after their initiating.
16. Kraoram (การรำ) Teachers and pupils performing the "Twai Mu" dance (รำถวายมือ)
17. Choed Klong (เชิดกลอง) Invited gods returning to their abodes.

*Explanatory notes by Mr.Montiri Tramote, Senior Artist of the Fine Arts Department.



The entering into the ritual place of the chairman.

End of tunes

When the worship and offering are over, the senior teacher of drama and his counterpart in music sprinkle holy water on each pupil whose brow they anoint and whose head they encircle with blessed strands of cotton.

Besides, these senior teachers must perform the initiation rite which, in the dramatic art, consists of putting Rishi's mask, Khōn masks, crown, chadā, etc. (collectively called "Teachers' heads" = ศิระษะ กุฎ) on each pupil for a short moment. These are the masks and headgears used in Khōn and Lakhon and have been put on the alter table. So that this ceremony is commonly known as "Pidhi Krob" (พิธีครอบ) i.e. covering or putting on (headgear) rite of the Khōn and Lakhon.

After this procedure the senior dramatic teacher leads the pupil in a ritual dance while the music ensemble plays the tune "Ram Twai Mu" (i.e. a command performance dedicated to gods and spirits of teachers). Pupils who have been trained as heroes and heroines dance to slow-and fast-tempo tunes (เพลงช้า เพลงเร็ว). Those trained as monkeys dance to Kraonok tune (เพลงกราวนोक), and demons to Kraonai tune (เพลงกราวไน).

Besides being the artists' way of showing their reverence for their teachers this ritual dance also gives senior instructors the opportunity to observe the result of their training. The ability to dance gracefully and correctly according to instructions becomes obvious on this occasion.





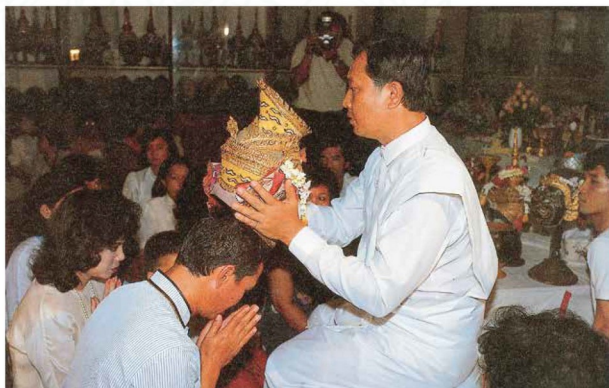
Thai classical dance “Ram Proi Khaotok”

The initiation for the music pupils follows a different procedure. The senior teacher of music must hold the hands of each pupil and guide them while they make “master tunes” (เพลง) on some instrument which is regarded as of principal importance, such as the Kong Wong Yai (big circle of gongs) and the Taphon. The “master tunes” (or Pleng khru) are graded according to the pupil’s ability. The initiating teacher guides each pupil’s hands through the first stanza of one tune thrice. If a large number of pupils is to be initiated the rite may last until late in the afternoon. When the rite is over the Piphat ensemble plays Kraoram tune and the dramatic artists dance and scatter popped rice to invite the teachers (divine or spirits) to return to their abodes. This is called “Songkhru” (สงขร) which brings this rite to the end.

The fact that all artists spontaneously join in this homage rite proves that in their hearts they are recalling with gratitude the benefits they have received from their teachers. Besides the gods who are supreme masters of the arts, teachers of teachers and deceased teachers of teachers should also receive the artists’ worship and homage because the present teachers got their instructions from the above mentioned. Teachers of teachers kindly trained pupils in the arts which are handed down from generation to generation to the present teachers who are thus able to carry on the tradition.



The Blessing and Initiation Rite performed by the children to performers.

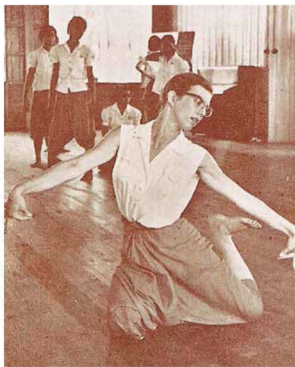


The Initiation Rite of Khôn and Lakhon.



Miss Beryl Grey of the British Royal Ballet while practising Thai classical dance at the School of Dramatic Art, Fine Arts Department. She was dancing in the posture of “Chang Prasān Ngā” - Elephants lock their tusks (in fight).

Therefore it is most proper to recall with gratitude the virtues of departed teachers and pay proper homage to them. Though these teachers can show neither approval nor displeasure concerning the behavior of a pupil who pays them homage or not, it is considered auspicious for the pupil himself to show them respect and gratitude. Besides being the mark of a good pupil, reverence for teachers also shows his affection for his teachers and his respect for their virtues. These traits in a pupil virtuous and endurable qualities which will make obvious the fact that, as a pupil, he is grateful to his teachers for all the good he received from them. This gratitude is shown by the deep homage and heart-felt dedication he makes on this occasion.



Miss Constance Couch, an American teacher in ballet being trained in Thai classical dance at the School of Dramatic Art, Fine Arts Department.

But in point of fact it is not enough for a pupil to pay homage to the memory of departed teachers on this ritual day only. A pupil must frequently think of their teachers, living as well as dead, and try to behave himself in line with their teachings. He must be indefatigable in his study of ethical principles. His behavior must also be in strict accord with moral principles. Only thus can he live up to the prestige he gains from being initiated as a full-fledged artist during homage and initiations rites.

Note : The School of Dramatic Art in Bangkok has been established as College of Dramatic Art since January 1, 1972.

Besides the Fine Arts Department has also founded for the first time another branch of the School of Dramatic Art in Northern part of Thailand of Chiang Mai since 1971.



The Blessing Ceremony of Khôn Masks.

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