

## TEACHER'S HEADS

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ได้สืบสาวพิธีการไหว้ครูในประเทศไทยและกัมพูชา ซึ่งต่างก็ยกย่องให้เกียรติ “ครู” และยังได้สืบสาวไปถึงต้นกำเนิดของพิธีการนี้ในอินเดีย ทั้งยังตรวจสอบงานเขียนต่างๆ ที่เชื่อมโยงกับนาฏยศาสตร์ บทความนี้แสดงให้เห็นถึงแนวปฏิบัติดั้งเดิมของความรู้ในเชิงพิธีกรรมและดำเนินไปอย่างต่อเนื่องกับประเพณี อีกทั้งยังเปรียบเทียบให้เห็นถึงความแตกต่างจากความเข้าใจความรู้ของตะวันตกสมัยใหม่และความเข้าใจความรู้ร่วมสมัยที่มองว่าความรู้เป็นแต่เพียงสารสนเทศและข้อมูลแต่เพียงเท่านั้น

### Abstract

This paper investigates the Wai Khru ceremony in Thailand and Cambodia which gives honor to the “teacher”. It traces this ceremony from its origins in India and the writings connected to the *Natya Sastra*. It shows the traditional practice of knowledge as ritualistic and continuous with one’s tradition. It contrasts this to the modern Western and contemporary understanding of knowledge as information and data.

### INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by acknowledging that I am already un-grounded. And while I am a professor, I have periods of doubt concerning just what it is I profess. While my mind flutters from object to object, idea to idea, and theory to theory, it seems that there is still some density I am barely aware of. The



Mask of Phra Pharot Rishi which once belonged to Arkom Sayakhom



Mask representing Arkom Sayakhom by his student Phra Siriphong Kharuphankit

movement and gravity of my thoughts as they connect with my body, my moods, my life. My encounter with dusty books in libraries, with the unblinking computer screen, with people I meet, with events, and finally with those who taught me.

Is there some thin capillary of movement which provides some continuity to my thoughts? Some mechanical reflex which informs their habitual repetition and reflexes? Surely a biological explanation would address such issues although in the process of its materialist explanation, would extinguish the life of thoughts like a flame.

But if my thoughts seem to be detached from my situation perhaps it is due to their gaze merely being directed outward. But for the sake of this paper, let us turn our gaze back to the living generation of thought.

## THE TEACHER

Academics in South East Asian universities often discuss the difficulties in developing a critical spirit among their students. Students tend to be passive and reluctant to challenge their teachers or the topics presented. And certainly this is a problem. Yet it is rooted in something far deeper and begging our consideration. That is, the traditional and ritualistic approach to knowledge and the teacher-student relationship still operative in South East Asia.

There is a curious tradition in Thailand. A great teacher of a particular type of wisdom or art will seek the ideal student to pass on their knowledge. If the teacher cannot find the appropriate student, he or she will allow their knowledge to die with them and disappear into obscurity. That is, the transmission of knowledge is taken very seriously. Knowledge is something with sacred overtones. One must be a pure receptacle to preserve it and one must find the proper receptacle to pass it on.

There is a deep responsibility to the very act of teaching and being a student. This is rooted partly in the ancient Indian traditions for honoring one's teacher such as the *Guru Puja*, the *Guru Dakshana*, and the *Upanayana*. the ceremony of the sacred thread [upavita]. In fact, most ceremonies involving the teacher / student relationship are symbolized by various types of threads. These represent binding, protection, control and connection.

The student teacher relationship can be also be demonstrated within

the stories of the *Seven Rishis* [*Eysei*] [*Rsis*]. In some of these stories, a student after studying many years prepares to depart after his years as an apprentice and asks his teacher what gift they can offer in exchange. The teacher replies that the student's service has been gift enough. But the student insists, whereupon the teacher sets an impossible task, which the student miraculously fulfills.

These stories illustrate the power of this organic continuity of knowledge. Although the discipline of the teacher and student is extremely important, yet knowledge itself is something that possesses a weight that transcends the roles of those who transmit it. When one considers the debt and responsibility, it is almost impossible to repay, one can only participate in its flow.

And yet there is a *need* to repay and acknowledge. And this is nowhere so evident as in the Wai Khru [*Tway Kru*] rituals found in Thailand and Cambodia. The Wai Khru is a ceremony that is conducted before a dramatic performance, or as an initiation to the study of an art. It is designed to honor the spirits invoked in the performance or art, the chain of teachers who have passed on this knowledge, and finally the gods who created these artistic forms.

The form of the Wai Khru is based upon the ancient Indian text of drama, the *Natya Sastra*. This work is a manual and codification of all the dance moves and expressions of drama [*natya*]. It also provides the rationale and rituals for honoring the gods and teachers.

In the first book, the great teacher or rishi – Bharat Muni (Bharata) – is asked by his disciples to explain the origins of the *Natya Sastra*.

‘Long, long, very long ago’, said Bharata, ‘people of this world of pain and pleasure, goaded by greed and avarice, and jealousy and anger, took to uncivilized (lit.: *gramya* = vulgar) ways of life. It (the world) was then inhabited by gods, demons, yaksa-s, raksasa-s, naga-s and gandharva-s. Various lords were ruling. It was the gods among them who, led by Mahendra, approached God Brahma and requested him (thus): Please give us something which would not only teach us but be pleasing both to eyes and ears [the term *Kridaniyaka* means a ‘toy’]. (True) the Vedas are there but (some like) the Sudras are prohibited from listening to (learning from) them.

Why not create for us a fifth Veda which would be accessible to all the varna-s (castes)?' (Rangacharya, p. 1)

Brahma had difficulty expressing this knowledge in a form accessible to the people, so he asked the hermit Bharat Muni to record the information in a more accessible form. He was chosen because of his intelligence, his analytical skill, his moral courage, and his bodily control. That is, he was chosen for being the proper receptacle and medium for this knowledge.

So the *Natya* was created to communicate a kind of wisdom [*Veda*] and make it accessible to ordinary people.

So Brahma teaches the dance forms created by Shiva and passes them to Bharat Muni who records them. Bharat Muni then stages the dramas with the aid of his 100 sons. The 100 sons are sometimes taken to represent the variety of people and character types used in drama.

The first staging of a drama by Bharat Muni was a failure. It was a depiction of the famous story of the "Churning of the Ocean of Milk", which depicts the victory of the gods against the demons [*asuras*]. Offended by this, the first performance was disrupted by the demons until Indra intervened.

This resulted in the seeking of the services of the architect Visnawakarm who constructed a special stage for the drama. Before the next performance, Brahma calls a meeting of all the gods and demons and explains the purpose of drama. In one version he placates the demons by explaining: "you are as much the creator of us as of the gods. So, you should not have done it" (N, p. 4) Brahma continues:

If that is all, then there is no need for you to feel angry or aggrieved. I have created the Natyaveda to show good and bad actions and feelings of both the gods and yourselves. It is the representation of (the ways of) the entire three worlds and not only of the gods or of yourselves. (Rangacharya, p. 4)

So before the performance the deities, the teachers and even the stage itself is worshiped. The worship of the stage is considered as a sacrifice. Gods and demons are then invited to be spectators. And the performance itself is not propaganda, but an accurate depiction of the ways of the world. It is a space which allows a certain kind of truth to appear. Brahma explains that this

expression of the various emotions [*bhava*] of the ways of the world brings knowledge and wisdom to people engaged in all the various pursuits.

In the Thai Wai Khru ceremony, the Wai Khru begins by invoking the *Triple Gem* of Buddhism. It then involves with the use of music, addressing the deities and inviting their presence. First the lower deities are called and requested to invite the higher deities. Finally when all deities and spirits are assembled, the conductor of the ceremony is inhabited by the spirit of Phra Pharot Rishi (Bharat Muni). He performs the dance and he bestows blessings on the spectators and initiates.

The teacher as Rishi is a manifestation of Shiva who represents world knowledge (this is also the case in the Tengger ritual in East Java). Deborah Wong, in her excellent study of music in the Wai Khru ritual, provides the explanation of Thongchai Phothayarom concerning the spirit possession of the officiant in the Wai Khru ritual.

It's not like the teacher just enters you – no! You invite him to come and bestow himself on you, invite him to come into you and make you a deity, invite him to come and imprint himself upon you as a deity – invite him to come and be an officiant through you. At that time, you are the deity. But if you're going to invite him down into you, you have to use special knowledge [*withayaa kaun*], which involves receiving magical verses [*khaathaa*] and the right to use them. You don't just walk out and he suddenly comes into you. Being in the ceremony means that you sit and invite him to enter you. You invite him to come into you. There are those who believe that you are him. (Wong, p. 11)

So this encapsulates the process of transmission in a very succinct way. The teacher of a certain wisdom is a receptacle for it, he is possessed by it. One also has to demonstrate the right to transmit this wisdom and to receive it. This shows a certain lineage of authority, and lineage of knowledge.

This is also demonstrated in the belief that the spirits of the deities, of the teachers inhabit the masks, inhabit the performers, and inhabit the performance.

Cambodia of course also possesses this Tway Kru or Sampeah Kru

ceremony [*pithi sampeah kru lokhon krop*]. This involves similar sacrifices and rites to the Thai ceremony. It even involves an eye opening ceremony for the masks (similar to the *boek phra net*).

This can also be found in the Khmer *lakhon khol* performance. The officiating *Rup* becomes a channel for the spirit of the teachers or *kru*. While the *rup* do not take part in the dancing, they can control or disrupt the dance if it departs from the wishes of the spirit *kru*.

The *rup* were not performers in *lakhon khol* in the sense of being trained in the dance movements. Nonetheless, if a *kru* was unhappy with any aspect of the performance, he could possess the *rup*, who – following a general pattern – would speak, dance, enter into a trance state, and then collapse, always in the same manner. The performance could be totally disrupted if the wishes of the *kru* were not fulfilled. Consequently the role of *rup* was central to the *lakhon khol* performance and its ritual effectiveness. (Cravath, p. 593)

In this case we see the *kru* or *eysei* directing this from the spirit world, insuring their accuracy.

We also see adaptation of older forms to new religions. The Wai Khru in Thailand is often framed by Buddhism. The Katha which is recited to invoke the very powerful deity Phra Phirap [*Rap*], a form of Bhairava Shiva, is mollified by the invocation of the *Triple Gem*. The famous mask-maker and Buddhist monk – Phra Siriphong Kharuphankit – explains it as follows:

The first Katha begins with the word “Buddha”, ... It asks for the presence of Phra Phirap. The second begins with the word “Dhamma” and the third with “Sangha”. These three names constitute the Triple Gem of Buddhism. This invocation of the Triple Gem is not to worship Phra Phirap, because Phra Phirap is a deity of Brahmanism. But it is included because the person who composed the Katha is a Buddhist who believes in the Triple Gem. When we observe the history of Phra Phirap we find he is a Bhairava form of Phra Isuan [*Shiva*], he is a deity of war and death, and he is the deity



who can cure sickness. His form is that of an asura. It is the tendency of human beings to guard against powers that bring calamity and danger, powers which are hidden and beyond their imagination. For this reason the person who composed the *Katha* of Phra Phirap initiates each *Katha* with the worship of the Triple Gem, in order to bring purity and calmness of heart, and to mollify Phra Phirap's violent power. (Siriphong Kharuphankit. *Phra Phirap*.)

This same process can also be seen in the tracing of lineages of authority in Javanese Islam.

In her study of the music in the Wai Khru ceremony, Deborah Wong discusses what is distinct about the Thai conception of knowledge. Based upon her conversations with a Buddhist monk, she shows a distinction between the more common conception of *Ruu*, *Wichaa* (a knowledge that comes from study) and *Panyaa*. The latter can be divided into three types.

*Sutamayapanna* comes from listening to others, reading, and asking questions. It comes from outside yourself and thus constitutes worldly wisdom. *Cintamayapanna*, which comes from thinking, also comes from outside, but you make decisions yourself, based on what you have read and heard. *Bhavanamayapanna*, however, comes from inside and arises from practice – in other words from meditation and contemplation. (p. 78)

Notice the categories on *Panyaa* emphasize the receptivity toward something outside, and the developing control of what is inside. To use the language of the thread, it represents both a connection and a binding.

Wong then goes on to explain what characterizes Thai epistemology in general.

Even closer to the heart of Thai epistemology are its many verbs detailing the passage or transmission of knowledge from a knower to other people. Their sheer number suggests that a high value is placed on the knowledge that flows from learned

people. Expressed in its simplest form, teacher *hai*, “give”, their knowledge to student. They are also said to *phoei phrae*, “propagate, spread out”, their knowledge; *phoei* means “to reveal, make known, uncover, expose, open”, implying the revelation of contained knowledge. Teachers *prasisit prasaat*, “confer, transmit, bestow”, their fund of knowledge on their students; the pleasing alliteration of this compound word as well as its component meanings (*prasisit*, “success”; *prasaat*, “to confer, to take pleasure in giving”) make it common in writings about teachers and students. Teachers also *thaai thaut*, “transmit, hand down (as to the next generation)”, their knowledge; *thaai* means to let something flow or to transfer something from one thing to another, and *thaut* means to cast, lay down, or (a vivid image) for a plant to send forth roots. Put together, the compound word strongly conveys a sense of knowledge as a physical substance that can be sent out from the holder. (p. 79)

I think we are not in danger in emphasizing these organic metaphors with regard to traditional knowledge. In general, the rituals around the Wai Khru demonstrate the idea that culture, even as it changes and evolves, is something rooted in the authority of the past. It is something that must be traced back even as it moves forward. That knowledge is something rooted in life.

## THE INFORMATION AGE

We can, perhaps at some considerable risk, *jump ahead* and consider the way information works from our technical and secular age. The more organic and continuous process that we have been discussing is seemingly under threat from the “global” situation.

Zygmunt Bauman has dealt with the shift in our understanding of *culture* with reference to the present age. In his book, *Does Ethics have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*, he points towards a more original concept of culture:

The term “culture” was conceived within the semantic family of concepts that included terms like “cultivation”, “husbandry”, “breeding”, “grooming”—all denoting improvement, prevention of impairment, arresting deterioration. (Bauman, p. 195)

In his work, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, he further connects this concept with the enlightenment project of refinement, and Bildung.

According to its original concept, ‘culture’ was to be an agent for change rather than for preservation of the status quo; or more precisely, it was to be a navigation tool to steer social evolution towards a universal human condition. (p. 6)

This was in the service of the building of society. It involved the creation “of a nation, a state, and a nation-state — at the same time entrusting that tool to the hands of the educated class”. (p. 8) And this process is also intertwined with the process of globalization. He goes on to say:

The prospect of colonization of farflung dominions proved a powerful stimulus to culture’s enlightenment idea and gave the proselytizing mission an altogether new, potentially worldwide dimension. (p. 9)

Bauman condemns Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of culture in his work *Distinction*. This corruption of the idea of culture is contemporaneous with the twilight of the enlightenment ideal, the shift from solid to what he calls “liquid modernity”.

In short, ‘culture’ was transformed from a stimulant into a tranquilizer; from the arsenal of a modern revolution into a repository of conservation products. ... Bourdieu’s report did not escape the timing of Minerva’s proverbial owl, that goddess of all knowledge: Bourdieu was observing a landscape illuminated by the setting sun, which momentarily sharpened contours which were soon to dissolve in the approaching

twilight. He therefore captured culture at its homeostatic stage: culture at the service of the status quo, of the monotonous reproduction of society and maintenance of system equilibrium, just before the inevitable and fast approaching loss of its position. That loss of position was the result of a number of processes constituting the transformation of modernity from its 'solid' to its 'liquid' phase. (pp. 10-11)

Culture shifted from the responsibility of an enlightened elite to the responsibility of the individual. And yet these individuals are seduced by the "managers" of culture.

"Culture" appeared in the vocabulary less than a hundred years after another crucial modern concept – that of "managing", which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, meant "to cause (persons, animals, etc.) to submit to one's control", "to operate upon", "to succeed in accomplishing" – and more than one hundred years *earlier* than another, synthesizing sense of "management": "to contrive to get along or pull through". To manage, in a nutshell, meant to get things done in a way in which they would not move on their own; to redirect events according to one's design and will. To put it in a yet another way: to manage (to get control over the flow of events) came to mean to *manipulate probabilities* – to make certain conduct (openings or responses) of "persons, animals, etc.", more likely to take place than it would otherwise be, while making some other kinds of conduct less likely or utterly unlikely to happen. In the last account, to manage means to *limit the freedom of the managed*. (Bauman, pp. 195-196)

Adorno had already pointed to this phenomenon in what he called the "Culture Industry".

The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above... Culture, in the true sense, did not simply

accommodate itself to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honoring them. In so far as culture becomes wholly assimilated to and integrated in those petrified relations, human beings are once more debased. (Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered")

*Notice here the metaphors concerning control or integration from above.*

Bauman raises some important issues. What is most important for us are the *contradictions* in his argument. On one hand "culture" in its more authentic sense is "identified with Europeanization, whatever that may have meant" (p. 53). And as such is related to a process of expansion and domination. If this process has expired, if culture has become static (following Bourdieu's definitions), then this is just the twilight of a particular interpretation of culture. The momentum of the Western enlightenment and its more oppressive aspects have achieved their high tide and are now retreating, countered by the flow of other cultural traditions. The static nature of multiculturalism may be a problem for Bauman or for the West, but perhaps not so much a problem for the rest of the world.

Outside the West, the decline of the enlightenment project and its myths of *development*, refinement, and progress, open up new avenues of expression, new understanding of politics and democracy, new understandings of the place of technology separated from its more dominating aspects. People hold on to their cultural traditions while simultaneously operating within the fluid and fragmentary global situation. Bauman's thinking cannot go beyond his crude oppositions of *solid* and *liquid* Modernity. But outside of the West, people pass freely between solid tradition and liquid media technologies. They embrace the contradictions. They are simultaneously rooted and uprooted.

We can in fact return to the permeable conception of the individual we observed in the Wai Khru ceremony. There the individual is connected to their teacher, their students, their culture, even if they function according to imported modalities of information and media culture.

The insights by Adorno and Bauman, although now limited in their explanatory power, do make us aware that there are various kinds of control.

There are the distant mechanisms of control related to politics, economics, intellectual property and marketing. And there are the local forms of elite *control* that rely on the organic continuity of knowledge we have been highlighting.

We see that knowledge in the information age is often fragmented into discrete units which are manipulated from afar. The source of local elite control is effaced. There is a loss of the organic concept of connection to tradition. This is captured well by the concept of the “meme”. The meme is a term coined by Richard Dawkins in his work *The Selfish Gene*, to consider the transmission of knowledge in a manner inspired by the mechanisms of genetics. This concept has naturally become ubiquitous in the information age.

So what is a “meme”? It seems appropriate for once to quote from Wikipedia:

Dawkins used the term to refer to any cultural entity that an observer might consider a replicator. He hypothesized that one could view many cultural entities as replicators, and pointed to melodies, fashions and learned skills as examples. Memes generally replicate through exposure to humans, who have evolved as efficient copiers of information and behaviour. Because humans do not always copy memes perfectly, and because they may refine, combine or otherwise modify them with other memes to create new memes, they can change over time. Dawkins likened the process by which memes survive and change through the evolution of culture to the natural selection of genes in biological evolution. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme>)

With the emergence of *Google*, *Bing* and other search engines on the web, information is organized based upon popular use. It is this utility aspect of knowledge that continues to be amplified by the technologies behind information, economics, and politics.

And notice here that control and freedom go hand in hand, and is submitted to a process of natural selection. But just as in biology where the introduction of foreign species creates disruptions in the local ecosystem, a kind of knowledge based upon units of information, which are in free compe-

tion, is disruptive of local knowledge and favors the producers and *managers* of knowledge.

We can see this disruptive aspect of knowledge in a more positive light in the writings of the German writer Walter Benjamin. In his essays he distinguished between the role of the *storyteller* and the information one finds in a *newspaper*. The newspaper is presented in such a way that its information can be instantly forgotten. But he also speaks of the possibilities of this “debasement of the word” in a 1934 text *The Newspaper*. I quote this short piece in its entirety.

In our writing, opposites that in happier ages fertilized one another have become insoluble antinomies. Thus, science and belles lettres, criticism and literary production, culture and politics, fall apart in disorder and lose all connection with one another. The scene of this literary confusion is the newspaper; its content, “subject matter” that denies itself any other form of organization than that imposed on it by the reader’s impatience. For impatience is the state of mind of the newspaper reader. And this impatience is not just that of the politician expecting information, or of the speculator looking for a stock tip; behind it smolders the impatience of people who are excluded and who think they have the right to see their own interests expressed. The fact that nothing binds the reader more tightly to his paper than this all-consuming impatience, his longing for daily nourishment, has long been exploited by publishers, who are constantly inaugurating new columns to address the reader’s questions, opinions, and protests. Hand in hand, therefore, with the indiscriminate assimilation of facts goes the equally indiscriminate assimilation of readers, who are instantly elevated to collaborators. Here, however, a dialectical moment lies concealed: the decline of writing in this press turns out to be the formula for its restoration in a different one. For since writing gains in breadth what it loses in depth, the conventional distinction between author and public that the press has maintained (although it is tending to loosen it through routine) is disappearing in a socially desirable way.

The reader is at all time ready to become a writer – that is, a describer or even a prescriber. As an expert – not perhaps in a disciple, but perhaps in a post that he holds – he gains access to authorship. Work itself has its turn to speak. And its representation in words becomes a part of the ability that is needed for its exercise. Literary competence is no longer founded on specialized training but is now based on polytechnical education, and thus becomes public property. It is, in a word, the literalization of the conditions of living that masters the otherwise insoluble antinomies. And it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word – the newspaper, in short – that its salvation is being prepared. (Benjamin, pp. 741-742)

Now Benjamin, when he speaks of the “restoration of writing” and the “mastering of antinomies” means this in what Bauman would align with *solid* modernity. That is, a modernist sense that sees *salvation* in the ability of living labor to express itself through social mechanisms.

And like Adorno and Bauman it seems to be a slightly flawed approach in terms of its desire to *master antinomies*, but it does help us in understanding the character of the information age. On one hand, the information age is challenging to traditional aspects of writing and its “depth”, but on the other, it has positive aspects in that it transforms the reader into a producer. It develops their critical power. And it collapses oppressive *elite* structures arbitrarily based on class or rank – let us say: *illegitimate* forms of authority (which can also be seen in the Buddha’s critique of Brahmanism). The individual at their computer interacting with information through cyberspace is far from the ritualistic aspects of knowledge we see in the Wai Khru ceremony.

So we can see the power of the information age and its possibilities for a kind of critical thought that can complement traditional knowledge, but we also see its uprootedness and destructiveness as well. Likewise traditional thought is powerful in its abilities to provide us a sense of place and responsibility to the past, or to direct ourselves towards something greater than our individual desires, but it can also weaken our ability to see our problems with a critical spirit and allow for the suppleness of the intellect necessary to deal



with the increasingly fast pace of change. It is the ambivalence of both of these types of knowledge that lead us to consider a solution in a phenomenon common to South East Asia. This solution is already present within its tradition. It has often been called *syncreticism* but might more accurately be called *eclecticism*.

## REPOSITIONING

In Southeast Asia, not only are there layers of Animism, Brahmanism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Mahayana and Therawada Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, and today there are additional layers of Western capitalist, secular and scientific cosmologies. This would be a kind of Syncretism, or *Eclecticism*, which would involve a passage between traditional rituals, myths and symbols, and the imported images and information, and yet tolerate the lack of a common logic.

This is also evident in the Wai Khru ceremony where all gods, angels, demons and mortals are invited to gather peacefully to watch the staging of a drama. As well as in the practice of couching this Brahmanist ceremony within the Triple Gem of Buddhism which protects the participants from the powerful forces they awaken.

This tolerance of contradiction allows a special dynamic to religious experience outside of the West. It allows non-Western cultures to preserve traditions and beliefs in the onslaught of the imported rationalities of globalization. These gaps, imperfections and tensions prevent one logic from cannibalizing another. The practices and rituals connected to knowledge and the teacher student relationship, the belief in *powers* and spirits, still very much alive, are considered irrational from global rational utilitarian perspectives (this also includes most philosophical and theological perspectives). Yet these practices represent a kind of pre-reflective intimacy with the earth and the sacred not present within capitalism and the more dominant Western systems of thought. We can here see that this eclecticism is different than the kind discussed by Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*. There eclecticism was linked to a failure of the autonomous function of art. It represented a fragmentation, a paradoxology, a paralogy, which is understandable only within the framework of the static nature of the end of Western modernism, or Bauman's conception

of a static multiculturalism.

We might also here dispense with the post-structuralist idea of the subject as a *screen*, animated through objects of desire. The subject which begins to emerge into focus here is rather a complex series of threads which link us to various responsibilities, various authorities. Each thread requires its own logic, and its own rituals. It cannot be conceived of as a fragmentary surface because there was never a surface unity, and therefore nothing to fragment. More like a *switchboard*, but not in Baudrillard's vapid post-modern sense.

These threads both connect and bind. They act as symbolic transmission lines and also act as a symbolism of control. As in the Upanaya:

It symbolizes submission to sensory discipline, to what is called 'vratabandha' or voluntary acceptance of a life which may ensure and lead to learning good conduct, robustness and sagacity. (*Upanayana*, p. 115)

Ganesh (Phrapikanet), who is considered the patron god of the arts, also holds a lasso which symbolizes this control as well.

The Buddhist monk and artist Phra Siriphong Tissapharano points out that he gives out magical amulets he creates, not merely for the purpose of the magic. To receive an amulet is also to dedicate oneself to a community, and it is also to assume the responsibility to live one's life correctly. Just as Bharat Muni was chosen by the gods for his wisdom and his character, so everyone dedicated to the arts in their sacred form must strive to be of good character. It is a kind of effacement of one's own ego which allows oneself to be a receptacle for the wisdom of the past. It is in this way that wisdom is passed, and also what allows wisdom to reflect back upon its source. It is this ability for special kinds of knowledge to embed themselves within the swirl and confusion of contemporary information that provides some kind of hope for the future. We can be implanted with both the wisdom of the past and also develop a critical spirit. These two functions of knowledge can be held in a fragile eclectic constellation.

And me?

I have a responsibility to acknowledge my debts. I am indebted to my mentor at Duquesne University, Wilhelm Wurzer, and his entrancing impres-

sionistic lectures which gave me a feel for where thinking can go and how philosophy can be done. To my professor Andre Schuwer who showed me the importance of a sense of passion and sincerity to thinking; the ability to roll an idea in one's head for days and to savor an idea. And to my professor Tom Rockmore who taught me the sense of rigor and seriousness needed to be a scholar. And also a sense of tolerance, that no matter how often one disagrees, one can have deep respect for another thinker. I have a responsibility to acknowledge how their ideas have affected me, however unconsciously, even if I often spend my time resisting them.

I have a responsibility to Phra Ajarn Siriphong Tissapharano who kindly taught me about the making of Hua Khon masks, the Wai Khru ceremony, and the responsibility of all who are apprenticed in some way to the traditional Thai arts.

And I must acknowledge my students who seem, for unknown reasons, to appeal to my perceived authority. I have the responsibility to respond to them as their former professor. I must always carefully explain my own ideas and help them to develop their own, and help them even to break free from my influence. I am grateful to my colleague and former student, Phatsara Phongpit who accompanied me in my study of the Wai Khru. And I am especially grateful to my student Preciosa Regina de Joya for her efforts to keep me honest and on the right path as a teacher and her encouragement – through email – to more carefully rework this essay for publication.

Our passing ships with their communications back and forth, their occasional shots over each other bows, often ignore the deep water we are moving on.

Mere information merely serves those who manipulate it from afar. The up-rootedness is potentially destructive. Yet seeds of connection can always be found, even carried by the flows of capitalism and the contemporary media. These seeds can allow for the re-growth of organic structures of wisdom and connection in such a way to mollify the more destructive aspects of the information age.

I think that what I am doing is gesturing toward something which is unfolding in time. To suggest how these tensions will play themselves out seems far beyond me.

But I think that the task of the philosopher – especially in the context of South East Asia – is to act as an arbiter between the onward momentum of

our globally innervated culture, and the wisdom of local culture. Not through the synthetic violence of grand philosophical theories, not through the passive resignation or abstract resistance of postmodernism and deconstruction, but through the cautious switching back and forth between an eclectic series of conflicting rationalities, myths, and cosmologies.

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