Chapter Eight
Monuments, Mediums & the Municipality:
Constructing Chineseness and Sacred Space in Hat Yai

“No need to go to Phuket, no need to go to Trang.” A PA laden pickup repeatedly blared out this message as it followed a parade of palanquin-borne deities and spirit mediums through the streets of Hat Yai during the 2001 Vegetarian Festival, a ritual event which has long been practised by the Chinese of peninsular Southeast Asia but has in recent years been gaining wider popularity. The procession was organised by the Thep Na Ja shrine and run by a native of Phuket who had moved to Hat Yai several years before. It featured the kinds of spectacular self-mortification and other ‘superhuman’ feats performed by spirit mediums that have become the notorious hallmarks of the Vegetarian Festivals held in Phuket and Trang. Hat Yai, despite its overwhelmingly Chinese population and character, has no such long association with the Festival. In fact such spectacular public displays can only be traced back a few years. Nonetheless, the PA announcement listed the full gamut of ritual performances that would take place: bladed-bridge and ladder climbing, bathing in boiling oil, walking on hot coals, piercing and other forms of self-mortification. While such performances are inherently ‘theatrical’ in nature, they are also aspects of worship. This announcement thus promised more than an upcoming spectacle; it also announced a new location for the authentic worship of the Nine Emperor Gods, the deities at the centre of the Festival. Such activity set Hat Yai in direct competition with the established Festivals of Phuket and Trang, promising a complete and authentic transplantation of the Festival experience, both sensory and sacred, to this new location.
In recent years the Municipal Council (khana thesamontri) of Hat Yai has also embarked upon its own project of sacred production. Since the late 1980s it has commissioned the building of a number of statues in the city’s municipal park. Unlike the statues usually erected by secular councils, these are explicitly religious in nature. The Hindu god Brahma, the Chinese bodhisattva Kuan Im, and an enormous standing Buddha have been built on the steep, densely wooded hills of the park, which runs along one edge of the city. They command impressive views of the city and surrounding countryside and have become significant tourist attractions. Daily minibuses run by local tour companies ply the steep roads up to the statues, bringing small groups of usually Chinese Malaysians and Singaporeans. Typical of tourist attractions, the statues function as iconic markers of place, in front of which tourists can be photographed as evidence of having ‘been there and done that’. However, they have also been built as authentic sacred objects.

Both of these examples demonstrate the manner in which the sacred is being produced in Hat Yai. Both are instances of the intersection of local, national and transnational elements in the production of hybrid spaces. They are located in Hat Yai but blend a range of influences – discourses, flows, materials, technologies, capital, knowledges and practices – from much wider fields.267 They also cannot be understood solely in terms of the embeddedness of Hat Yai within the Thai nation-state as a peripheral centre, but rather must be viewed in terms of the city’s role as a node or junction linking streams of various kinds of transnational cultural flow. Central to both examples is the production of ‘Chineseness’, or at least that which

267 The focus of my study therefore differs somewhat from other studies the focus on similar questions at nearby locations. For example, Joel Kahn (1997) argues that restorations to the old city of Georgetown, Penang were not done primarily for the purpose of appealing to the tourist gaze.
appeals to particularly ‘Chinese’ tastes, and the manner in which this production is also tied to the positioning of Hat Yai as a particular kind of tourist destination. Various parties seek to draw upon the city’s peculiar qualities as ‘Chinese’ but also its pervasive permissiveness and openness to innovation.

Hat Yai: Frontier City

Only sixty kilometres from the border with Malaysia’s northern state of Kedah, Hat Yai is Thailand’s third largest city after Chiang Mai, and it is routinely labelled the commercial centre of southern Thailand. It is also a significant centre of education, due mainly to the presence of Prince of Songkhla University’s (PSU) largest campus. However, it is the commercial status of Hat Yai which is most significant for the city’s economy, and therefore character. The skyline is dominated by high-rise hotels, the streets in the centre of town are lined with vendors selling fake brand name products, Chinese restaurants, karaoke bars, night clubs, department stores, markets, shopping malls, ‘ancient’ massage parlours, gold shops and amulet dealers maintain a lively trade. Proximity to the border and the importance of cross-border trade have resulted in the city having a certain ‘frontier town’ quality, dependent to a significant degree on the informal sector: the sex trade, gambling, and smuggling. As one local expressed it to me: “hat yai pen müang thüan” (Hat Yai is a wild/illega smuggling town).268

Rosalind Morris (2000a) has characterised the northern Thai capital of Chiang Mai as an imagined “place of origins”, of significance not only for local inhabitants but also for the national imaginary. If Chiang Mai exists in

268 The expression müang thüan is something of an oxymoron, as the terms express a fundamental Thai distinction between civilised (ban müang) and uncivilised (pa thüan) space (see Darlington 2003:130-3). This oxymoron captures nicely the sense that Hat Yai is not ‘civilised’ spatially in a typical Thai sense.
the Thai imaginary through its fetishised pastness, as “the moral and historical antecedent to the Bangkokian capital” (R. C. Morris 2000a:6), Hat Yai would appear to be diametrically opposed, geographically, temporally, and symbolically. The city’s history has apparently generated very little interest from scholars or Hat Yai’s inhabitants itself. One of the few sources of historical information about Hat Yai, the *Encyclopaedia of Southern Thai Culture* appears to struggle to say anything of interest about the city in terms of distinctive landmarks etc which would attest to some sort of historical depth. For want of anything else to describe, the entry in the Encyclopaedia lists several of the more prominent department stores located in the city. Perhaps one reason for this overall lack of historiographic interest is because the city’s past is dominated by Chinese merchants rather than statesmen. These have given their names to the streets in central business district,269 or to establish centres of exchange, such as the Kim Yong markets. Only recently have the histories of Chinese merchant dynasties begun to interest local historians (examples include Suleeman 2002, Suthiwong 2001),270 and there have been some signs that historians are also beginning to take more of an interest in Hat Yai’s past.271

The city’s status as a commercial centre is mainly due to its proximity to the border with Malaysia, but more importantly its status as a junction. The fortunes of the city are intimately connected with those of the railway. From

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269 Even these generally only make use of Thai versions of names. Most important are the three Niphat Uthit streets, known locally as simply Sai 1-3. One could speculate that while Chinese names are acceptable for centres of trade, public infrastructure is quite another matter.

270 The most significant work done on southern Thai Chinese dynasties by a foreign historian is certainly that of Jennifer Cushman (especially 1991).

271 In fact, some of the more interesting and informative writing in English about the history of the city has been produced by amateur railway enthusiasts. Much of the more general information is more or less a by-product of their initial investigations into the fortunes of the railway (e.g. http://www.angkor.com/2bangkok/2bangkok/forum is a good source of such information.)
being a tiny village of no particular significance at the turn of the twentieth century, Hat Yai rose to prominence as a result of becoming the site of Thailand’s southernmost railway junction in 1922.\textsuperscript{272} Although the railway also originally ran to Songkhla city itself it was essentially a spur line due to its location at the end of the peninsular. Hat Yai became the junction along which most through traffic travelled. Eventually the line to Songkhla was closed. Hat Yai continued to expand as a commercial centre, while Songkhla’s primary function became that of an administrative and educational centre. The story of Hat Yai’s dominance also reflects the railways growing significance vis-à-vis the sea as a medium of trade.

This functional split between administrative and commercial centres has profoundly influenced Hat Yai’s character. It has developed almost exclusively as a commercial centre right from the beginning, with no overlaying of older political structures and ordering of space. Furthermore, the fact that Hat Yai is not a provincial capital means that there has been no imperative to produce this kind of spatial order, as was the case in cities like Yala when its city pillar was ‘refurbished’ in 1962.\textsuperscript{273} Bangkok’s symbolic centre is formed around the cluster of the city pillar (lak müang), Royal Palace, temple of the Emerald Buddha and provincial capitals tend to reproduce this centripetal ordering of space (see Tambiah 1976).\textsuperscript{274} Hat Yai has no such symbolic centre. There is no city pillar and commercial centres such as hotels and shopping centres become the de facto centres – with the street between the Central Sukhontha department store/hotel and Lee

\textsuperscript{272} Hat Yai became a district in 1935, was upgraded to a municipality (thesaban müang) in 1949, and to a city in 1995 (thesaban nakhon).

\textsuperscript{273} As outlined in chapter five.

\textsuperscript{274} As noted in chapter five, part of the renewed push towards state-building in the 1960s involved the refurbishment or construction of just such monuments in provincial capitals.
Gardens shopping centre/hotel serving as the de facto ‘town square’. The only area of truly public space is the Municipal Park, which is located at the periphery of the city rather than at its centre and celebrations of public festivals and holidays – Songkran, Loi Krathong, Royal birthdays etc – find their primary official expression there.

Given these factors it is not surprising that Hat Yai is a very Chinese city. Thais from other parts of the country who have visited Hat Yai for the first time have been known to comment that the city is more Chinese than Thai. However, Hat Yai’s Chineseness is not simply a reflection of the identity of its inhabitants. The city very literally trades on its Chineseness; it is something that is consciously produced to a certain extent. It is produced in the matrix of a particular tourist desire. It is therefore necessary briefly to consider some of the points made about tourism in the previous chapter.

**Hat Yai’s Tourism**

As outlined in the previous chapter, by far the largest group of foreign tourists who visit Hat Yai come from Malaysia, followed by Singapore (Appendix 1). The city is always flooded with activity at the end of each month, when salaries in Malaysia are paid. Malaysian and Singaporean tourists visit Hat Yai primarily for shopping – in particular for cheap brand-name clothing – and for the possibilities opened up by Thailand’s relative

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275 Alternatively, as mentioned in chapter six, Chinese foundations may also come to take on such centrality at particular times. Interestingly, there are many occasions on which Chinese firms take on a state- or government-like role in the management of Hat Yai. A telling example of this occurred in flooding that hit Hat Yai in 2000, during my fieldwork, in which businesses in the city provided many of the essential ‘public’ services necessary to deal with the flooding. At the time there were criticisms of the local council failing to act sufficiently in the crisis. I heard comments by local people that business was doing more to help victims than the council.

276 An observation made by Annette Hamilton (personal communication).
permissiveness in a number of domains, such commercial sex, gambling, and, I argue, religious expression (Askew and Cohen 2004).

It is a common local perception that the majority of foreign tourists to Hat Yai are ethnic Chinese. On several occasions I heard locals state that around ‘90%’ of tourists were Chinese and that relatively few Malays or Indians visited there. I would say that ethnic Malay tourism to Hat Yai is more significant than such assertions would suggest.277 However, the amount of Chinese tourism to the city is certainly disproportionately high given that ethnic Chinese only make up about 30% of Malaysia’s population. In any case, many of the policies undertaken by the Hat Yai municipality and the local Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) office reflect a desire to promote a particularly Chinese brand of tourism in the area. In an interview the Director of the local TAT office explained that they were attempting to expand the range of nationalities that visited Hat Yai to make the city less reliant on tourists from Malaysia due to the growing perception among the local business owners that the city’s economy depended too heavily on this single market.278 Interestingly, they were focussing their attentions specifically on Chinese tourists, especially those from Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China.279 When I questioned him about this he answered that Hat Yai has all the things that Chinese want: Chinese food, shopping, Chinese language and so on. He didn’t mention commercial sex, gambling

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277 This view was also expressed by anthropologists Andrew Cornish, who had also done fieldwork in the area (personal communication).

278 This followed an incident in 1998 when the Malaysian government suddenly limited the amount of Malaysian currency that could be legally taken out of the country to 1,000 Ringgit (about $A400). For an entire month business in Hat Yai was dead before things started to normalise. This made a lot of business owners realise that they had all their eggs in one basket and that diversifying would be a good idea.

279 As an example of this dominant mentality, following severe flooding in Hat Yai in 2000, a campaign to promote the damaged tourism industry focussed on Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan by promoting the Chinese New Year celebrations in the city (Bangkok Post 10 December 2000).
or access to an informal market of smuggled goods. However, he also displayed a certain amount of ambivalence about the role of religion and sacred sites in promoting tourism in Hat Yai and the region in general, preferring to draw attention to more secular or purely ‘cultural’ activities such as mountain bike competitions or food festivals. The Assistant Director, whom I also interviewed briefly, was not so reticent and readily admitted that a number of sites in the region were important tourist attractions, especially those associated with Luang Phò Thuat – Wat Pha Kho and Wat Chang Hai (though the latter was administered by a different branch of the TAT). While Hat Yai features as the primary base for tourists, day trips to such locations draw them away from the city and into other economies. The Municipal Council, much more fully invested in promoting the Hat Yai’s own economy, has been more concerned to hold tourists within the city’s bounds for as long as possible. Finding things for tourists to do locally increases the time, and therefore money, they spend in the city rather than elsewhere. It is in this context that the statue-building project in the Municipal Park has been undertaken.

I refer to this project of statue building, with a certain amount of irony, as ‘civic religion’ (c.f. F. E. Reynolds 1978a, 1978b, Taylor 2001). In this case the term denotes, not so much to denote a religious tradition that is formative of communal identity, but rather the strategic use of religious iconography and sacred objects by a municipal administration for a variety of purposes, the foremost of which is to rebrand the city in response to tourist desire. Although some appeals are made to national and civic identity to justify and promote the building of the statues (e.g. Figure 46), the primary motivation for the construction of these images has more to do with encouraging the flow of tourists and capital into Hat Yai than with affirming a collective local identity. However, the construction of such potent and prominent religious symbols does not occur within a dyadic relationship
between the municipality and foreign tourists. They represent the mobilisation of patriotic sentiments as well as the full legitimating function of the Thai Sangha, and partake of renewed interactions between Southeast Asia and Chinese and the homeland of China itself.

‘Civic Religion’ in Hat Yai

The Hat Yai Municipal Council began building religious statues in the Municipal Park in the late 1980s. The Brahma was the first to be built in 1989, followed by the statue of the Chinese bodhisattva Kuan Im, which was inaugurated and sanctified in 1997. The building of the Buddha has been delayed: he was planned to be completed by the end of 1999 – in celebration of the king’s 72nd birthday, but was only just nearing completion in June 2002.

Although not all the statues are Chinese in origin, the selection of images is designed to appeal to foreign Chinese tastes. The popularity of Brahma among Southeast Asian Chinese has already been discussed. Furthermore, there has been an ever-expanding proliferation of supplementary Chinese images in the vicinity of the Kuan Im statue that also point to the ‘Sinification’ of the Municipal Park’s landscape. Inside and the spacious pedestal on which the large statue was built are now situated colourful images of the Eight Immortals of Chinese mythology. There was also a three metre tall image of the Chinese hero and deity, Kuan U.280 Near the main pedestal is a shop selling all sorts of Chinese and Thai devotional objects, such as amulets, small statues, tapes of devotional music and monastic chants, mirrors with images of monks engraved on them, Chinese

280 Rendered as GuanYu or Kuan Yew in Mandarin, a hero from the famous Chinese folk tale, The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and is commonly worshipped at Chinese temples in the area. In China, he has been incorporated as a deity into both Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism and is particularly popular amongst the Cantonese.
and Thai souvenirs and so on. Inside this store is another smaller statue of Kuan Im, covered with a thick layer of gold leaf, which people also kneel before and pray at. Most recently, more prominent Chinese images have been constructed to ‘decorate’ a pathway which leads from the Kuan Im statue to the top of the same hill, where the standing Buddha has been built. These include an enormous golden dragon’s head, mouth open wide, that functions as a gateway to the path (Figure 49), as well as a colourful statue of Hotei, the Chinese version of Sri Ariya Mettraya (Figure 50).

Worship, albeit usually conducted in a jocular, light-hearted way, is an integral part of the visit. At the Brahma statue tourists offer incense on all four sides of the god, let off rolls of Chinese crackers, ring large bells and sometimes make offerings of elephants with their name and address engraved on them. At the Kuan Im statue tourists usually first make offerings of flowers, candles and incense at the main statue, and then come down, wander around underneath and finally visit the shop, where they kneel down and pray to the smaller image of Kuan Im, cast staves to tell their fortune and then browse about for souvenirs.

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281 As Weller (1994) notes is quite typical of Chinese folk religious practices and should not necessarily be read as the product of a superficial tourist experience.
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Figure 44. One of the hundreds of elephants surrounding the Brahma shrine donated by Malaysians and Singaporeans surrounding in the Municipal Park.

Figure 45. Concrete benches located inside the Kuan Im pavilion. These were donated to help pay for construction of the various statues within the Municipal Park. Most were donated by Malaysians and Singaporeans.
Figure 46. Cover of a booklet produced to promote a major ceremony in the construction of the standing Buddha in 2001. This ceremony involved the internment of Buddha relics inside the statue in addition to the final assembly of the image. The picture of the Buddha has been superimposed on the Hat Yai cityscape as viewed from the Municipal Park hilltop. This montage thus seeks to connect the building of the image with the city itself.

Figure 47. Municipal advertising placard featuring the main three statues at the Municipal Park. The text wishes travellers a pleasant journey. Note the composition of the montage, which places Kuan Im higher than the Buddha and also makes her appear larger. In reality, the Buddha statue is a great deal larger than the one of Kuan Im.
The statues do not merely remain in the park but form part of the council’s attempts to brand itself. In the year 2000, the above image (Figure 47) appeared on municipal signboards spread around the city. These boards usually contain civic announcements or advertisements. The image of the three figures is accompanied by a message wishing travellers a pleasant journey and the logo of the municipal council. They have been given glowing auras, suggestive of their transcendental power. The montage upsets the usual hierarchy of images in Thailand, which would normally require the Buddha to have the highest position. Instead, Kuan Im in the superior position and is presented as larger than the Buddha. The signboards message is also explicitly directed at travellers, although the fact that it is only written in Thai would suggest that it is the domestic tourists who are being addressed. Nevertheless, the presentation of these billboards in public by the Municipality clearly associates these statues with the city and its official image for all who view them.

The building of the Kuan Im statue provides a striking example of the strategies deployed in these constructions, which blend national sentiments with a concentration of spiritual energy and even nostalgic sentiments for the Chinese homeland that encompasses the transnational in the local.²⁸² At about 10 metres tall, the white statue of Kuan Im is said by Hat Yai municipal authorities to be the largest image of the bodhisattva in Thailand.²⁸³ Although a Chinese statue, the building of the statue is discursively framed as a patriotic gesture. The ostensible reason for building the statue was to honour the king of Thailand on the occasion of the 50th jubilee of his coronation. The full power of the Thai Sangha was also poured into the consecration of this

²⁸² Most of the information about the building of the statue is taken from the official booklet, which was printed by Hat Yai municipality (Hat Yai Municipal Council npd).
²⁸³ It should be noted that this claim is often made and is not necessarily true. The statue building scene is also changing so quickly that such claims also tend to become invalidated almost as they are made.
statue. The process of consecrating the main statue involved a wide array of monks from both the Thai Theravada and Chinese Mahayana traditions. In addition, sacred items were blessed or inscribed with mystic symbols by a range of nationally prominent monks, including the supreme patriarch of the Thai Sangha himself, other members of the Ecclesiastical Council (sangkharat), and a range of famous ‘magical monks’ (keji ajan) from around the country. All in all literally hundreds of monks performed chanting and other ceremonies in order to invest the image of Kuan Im with power and merit.

Explicit connections were also made back to the Chinese homeland. The Kuan Im statue was built with the cooperation of the Chinese consul, and therefore the Chinese government. The image is made from ‘white jade’ (yok khao), which was brought from Hupeih province in the PRC and was carved by Chinese artisans who were brought to Hat Yai for that express purpose. Local businesses and Chinese charitable foundations also supported the construction. The Siang Tueng Foundation (discussed in chapter six) was particularly prominent, providing the image of its principal deity for certain consecration ceremonies on the site of the statue.

Much of the funding for this project was derived from donations by mainly ethnic Chinese from Malaysia and Singapore. Although difficult to quantify, there is plenty of evidence of this support surrounding the statue. There are, for example, dozens, perhaps hundreds, of concrete benches both inside and outside the statue’s pedestal, and lining the sides of the pathway leading up to the hilltop Brahma shrine (Figure 45). Each of these bears the name of the individual or family who donated it. The vast majority of these bear Chinese or English characters and almost always refer to Malaysians or Singaporeans.

284 Although not Theravadin, the Mahayana monks still operate within the structure of the Thai Sangha.
Figure 48. ‘White jade’ statue of Kuan Im with attendants, located in the Hat Yai Municipal Park.

Figure 49. Dragon head gate at the beginning of the pathway leading from the Kuan Im statue up to the standing Buddha at the top of the hill.

Figure 50. Chinese-style, ‘Hotei’, usually considered to be a representation of Sri Ariya Mettraya, constructed above the dragon head, on the pathway leading up to the large standing Buddha.
In order to learn more about the statue building project, I interviewed the then Mayor of Hat Yai, Khreng Suwannawong, about the statue-building project. Nai Khreng spoke about his own faith in Jao Mae Kuan Im and he attributed her divine power to saving him from injury or death in a car accident. At least in part, he presented the building of the statue of Kuan Im was an act of personal devotion. He was, however, quite explicit about the reasons for building the statues in the park. Hat Yai lacks much Western tourism because it lacks the sea, beaches and beautiful nature of other locations, such as Phuket or Chiang Mai. Most tourists who come to Hat Yai are Asians, are interested in relaxation though don’t have the same attraction to nature for its own sake. His vision was to develop the Park in order that it would become a more relaxing place for tourists, and the primary way to enhance or amplify ‘nature’ was to build statues which were not only viewed as sacred, but more importantly seen to be efficacious. This is why Brahma was built first, because of the general perception – ‘since ancient times’ – that this god could bring about improvements in people’s lives. Visiting the gods is a strategy for relaxation and stress relief. Nai Khreng therefore presents a view of nature as something that needs a particular kind of amplification to provide the appropriate appeal to attract ‘Asian’ tourists.

This sense was reinforced during one of my visits to the Kuan Im statue when I met by chance a senior official from the municipality who was involved in the construction of the site. I introduced myself as a student who was collecting information about Buddhism in the area and he showed me around the site. He was keen to tell me about his work there. The official showed a clear awareness of the process by which a mundane material is transformed into fetishised object: “Look at concrete”, he said and kicked at the ground demonstratively. “It’s nothing. Nobody would respect that. But turn it into a statue, sprinkle it with holy water – and people come to pray to it.” For this official all the rituals were a necessary part of the process of
attracting the tourists. The sacredness of the statues was just another
drawcard, another feature among many – the view, the proximity to the city – which gave these statues a comparative advantage over other attractions – sacred or profane – in the area.285

During the course of the conversation he gestured towards the smaller Kuan Im statue and commented on the thick layer of gold leaf with which it was covered. The attaching of gold leaf to images is one Thai devotional practices that Chinese visitors have readily adopted.286 While the other offerings are either quickly consumed or cleared away by attendants, the gold leaf gradually accumulates on the surface of the image over a period of time, and over time provides a testimony to the popularity and efficacy of the image. In this gradual accretion over time, the accumulation of gold leaf historicises the object; “the whole process of … progressive empowerment of images through daily worship involves a continual burdening of the surface with traces of … devotion” (Pinney 2001:169). However, the official stated with unsettling frankness that one of the young labourers working there had been instructed to attach gold leaf to the statue in order to give the impression that many people had already made offerings to it – and by implication that their prayers had also been answered.

It would appear that the statues are a sort of religious \textit{prêt-a-porter}: objects without history, or with simulated histories that are made ready for immediate consumption. Rather than the sacredness of an object being produced as an accretion of historical relations, a gradual accumulation of interactions between humans and the object and accompanying discourses,

\textsuperscript{285} This would appear to be a concrete example (no pun intended) of Leong’s statement that “commodification obscures the gap between living ethnic traditions and the official versions of those traditions” (Leong 1997:85).

\textsuperscript{286} In Thailand, this is a common method of making vocational offerings to images considered to possess power (\textit{khuam saksit}). It is generally done in conjunction with making other votive offerings, such as offering flowers, candles and incense.
such as stories of miracles being performed and boons being granted, this process is simulated to give the object the appearance of sanctity before it has been exposed to the vicissitudes of history. The sacred object has become a function of a system of signs. Its possibilities have already been mapped out and, in premeditated fashion, predetermined, prearranged. Or, in other words, the ‘real’ process by which the sacredness of an object gradually accumulates has now been replaced by “its operational double … that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all of its vicissitudes” (Baudrillard 1994:2).

But this approach to the authenticity of the image, which focuses on signs and therefore promotes a semantic ‘reading’, in no way invalidates the ‘corporeal’ response to the images, the “poetics of materiality and corporeality around the images” (Pinney 2001:169) implied by the act of ‘clothing’ the image in gold leaf. In other words, the tourists who visit the statues in the park do not approach them (only) as aesthetic objects, although it is clear that there is an aesthetic component to their appeal, nor are they overly concerned with the authorship of the images. This reflects Pinney’s important point that it is not only the agency of the original ‘authors’ of an image that produces its sanctity, but also the agency of its everyday worshippers (Pinney 2001:171). That the origin is ‘simulated’ should not imply that all subsequent engagement is inauthentic.

I return now to the Vegetarian Festival in Hat Yai to explore further this ambiguity of authorship and authenticity, in which ritual objects and events are intentionally produced for tourists but also become validated in the process of worship.
The ‘Vegetarian Festival’

The Vegetarian Festival, or the ‘festival of eating je’,287 is a prominent example of folk Taoism that was brought to the Malay peninsular by migrants from south-eastern China. The festival can be traced back to temples in Fujian province associated with “secret Taoist magical practices … special dance movements, secret signs on the hand, and other esoteric meanings” (Hamilton 1999:9). It takes place during the first nine days of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar and represents a common tradition of the Hokkien Chinese along the Malay Peninsula. Thus it is widely practiced in Malaysia and Singapore, where it is known as the ‘Festival of the Nine Emperor Gods’ (Hokkien: kiu ong ia) (Cheu 1988, 1996, Heinze 1981).288 The name refers to high level Chinese deities associated with the seven visible and two invisible stars of the Big Dipper who are invited from the sea to oversee the ritual proceedings, and are seen off at the end of the festival.289

Generally considered to be too powerful to be represented in statue form, the presence of the Nine Emperor Gods at the festival is conveyed indirectly, for example through nine lanterns that are kept alight during the nine days of the festival. Their spirit is also said to be contained in the ashes kept in certain urns (and the transfer of ashes from shrine to shrine has created a lineage which stretches back to Fujian province via the oldest shrines on the Malay Peninsula). These gods are venerated in a variety of ways, and the festival features processions in which the gods are carried

287 Je is a local version of the Mandarin chai and refers to a particular mode of vegetarianism in which not only excludes the consumption of meat, fish, eggs and dairy products, but also five kinds of vegetables, including garlic and onions, which have a strong smell and are considered to be harmful to the body (Cohen 2001:28-9).

288 Heinze (1981) refers to this festival in Singapore as the ‘Festival of the Nine Imperial Gods’.

289 A fuller version of this discussion can be found in Maud (2005).
through the towns, hidden inside palanquins and accompanied by a wide range of devotees and spirit mediums possessed by lesser deities, in order to bring prosperity to the community as a whole. At these times, local residents set up altars in front of their homes and businesses in order to propitiate and receive blessings from the Emperor Gods and other deities.

The generally accepted points of origin of the Vegetarian Festival in Thailand are the provinces of Phuket and Trang, where it has been celebrated for at least a century by the Hokkien Chinese community (E. Cohen 2001a:1).290 Here the festival has historically been concerned with purification and renewal of both the individual participants and the local Chinese community as a whole (E. Cohen 2001a). Participants maintain ritual purity during the festival by wearing white, abstaining from eating meat, killing animals, having sex, and drinking alcohol, and they also make offerings to the Nine Emperor Gods throughout the duration of the festival. However, despite the importance of these practices of purification by abstinence, the festival in Phuket and Trang is probably most widely known for images of excess: the spectacular and often gruesome ritual practices performed by spirit mediums, who pierce their cheeks and other parts of the body with a wide range of objects, who beat themselves and cut their tongues with axes and swords, and who climb blade-ladders, bath in boiling oil and walk on red-hot coals.

Since the late 1980s, the festival’s visibility throughout Thailand has risen. This has involved the development of the festival in Phuket, and to a lesser extent Trang, into major tourist attractions, while at the same time the festival has greatly increased in prominence in other parts of the country,

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290 In the year 2000, the Festival in Phuket officially celebrated its centenary (Thai Farmers Research Center 2000). However, conventional opinion in Phuket generally states that the festival was first practised on the island in 1825 (E. Cohen 2001a:50).
most notably Bangkok. Although in the early stages of the Festival’s expansion, unofficial media such as video cassettes played a significant role in circulating images of the Festival beyond the control of the state-controlled broadcasters (Hamilton 2002), more recently the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has actively taken a role in promoting the festival, though images produced by official state bodies tend to differ markedly from informally produced ones (Figure 51) in that they tend to downplay the Festival’s more ‘atavistic’ elements. In the years 2000 and 2001 it has been estimated that the festival generated around 3 billion baht and 2.7 billion baht (US$66 million and US$60 million) respectively, eighty percent of which can be attributed to foreign, mostly Chinese, visitors (Thai Farmers Research Center 2000, 2001).

In Phuket, and to a lesser extent Trang, growing touristification and corporate sponsorship of the festival has led to criticisms that the festival is becoming commercialised and that shrines are placing too much emphasis on the astounding and spectacular practices, especially the processions and activities of spirit mediums, who are pierced with ever more ‘bizarre’ objects (see Cohen 2001 for a detailed discussion of these debates). By contrast, in Bangkok and elsewhere in Thailand the ‘extreme’ aspects of the festival have largely been rejected, while those that emphasise a level of personal asceticism on the part of the general participants have been taken up with great enthusiasm. Indeed, vegetarianism itself, rather than the worship of the Nine Emperor Gods, has become the primary mode by which people take part in the Vegetarian Festival, with hotels, restaurants, and now even fast food chains like Burger King and Chester’s Grill providing special vegetarian dishes that meet the appropriate dietary requirements of the festival. Cohen notes the trend toward eating je in Thai society, particularly Bangkok which

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“is not necessarily a consequence of a greater devotion to the Nine Emperor Gods” (E. Cohen 2001a:30). Rather, “vegetarianism became trendy even as the attendance at the shrines during the festival declined” (E. Cohen 2001a:30). He also notes that the trend towards eating je during the festival has spread well beyond the boundaries of those who identify as Chinese and into the general Thai population. Thus it would seem that, for the most part, the uptake of the festival in Bangkok has been divorced from its original cosmological significance, and unpalatable practices of mortification – and arguably its highly marked ‘Chineseness’. I would argue that this process reflects a general ambivalence among middle-class Thais towards the extreme practices associated with the festival as practised in Phuket and Trang.292

292 Such sentiments might be seen to be expressed in the widespread fascination with the case of the spirit medium Chuchad, who in 1997 revealed on national television that his more than twenty year career was based on charlatanry, and called on all mediums to renounce their own fakery (R. C. Morris 2000b:456).
Figure 51. Cover of a flyer produced by the Thep Na Ja shrine making use of photographs of its mediums taken during the 2001 Vegetarian Festival. The main purpose of this flyer was to promote, and attract donations for, the construction of the ‘largest copper Luang Phò Thuat statue in southern Thailand’ (see chapter six).
The Festival in Hat Yai

Although the Vegetarian Festival is not widely associated with Hat Yai, in recent years it has emerged as a highly visible ritual occasion which transforms the central districts of the city with spectacular displays of Chinese religiosity. At the same time as these spectacular performances are growing in visibility, the Hat Yai festival is also developing in a mode in which an emphasis is placed on vegetarianism and other forms of ‘personal asceticism’ of the lay participants in the festival. On the one hand, Mahayana Buddhist temples such as Wat Thawon represent the ‘moderate ascetic’ mode of practice which participates in emerging, nationally-bound constructions of Sino-Thai identity in which Chineseness can be expressed in a manner that can be reconciled with Theravada Buddhism. On the other hand, several Taoist shrines which emphasise spectacular performances of spirit mediums, are much more oriented towards a transnational audience.

There is no doubt that the second mode of practice – i.e. that which is based in Chinese shrines and places emphasis on the performances of spirit mediums – is on the rise in Hat Yai. All of the three Chinese shrines at which I conducted research – Thep Na Ja, Poi Sian and Chai Sing Ia – were expanding the scope of their operations. All the shrines had just moved, or were about to move, from tiny shop-front style residences in the centre of town to more ‘palatial’ settings on the outskirts. These new shrines had the space that would enable the performances such as fire-walking or blade-ladder climbing. This trend towards expansion appears to be quite recent. As an example, the Chai Sing Ia shrine had been operating in a tiny town house in a narrow lane for sixteen years. However, in 2001 the shrine was about to move into a newly-built temple construction on a large block of land. According to the owner, this would allow the shrine to perform larger rites, such as firewalking and blade-ladder climbing as a tourist attraction – something that space had not allowed up until then. In another case, the
principle medium and owner of the Poi Sian shrine had been practising for around twenty years from a small roadside shrine. One or two years earlier, patronage from his Malaysian supporters had allowed him to move his shrine to a large block of land on the outskirts of town. His shrine has also recently begun performing spectacular public rituals.

Clearly, shrine owners who are promoting the Vegetarian Festival in Hat Yai are attempting to tap into already existing dynamics and tourist flows. In particular they are tapping into long-standing dynamics which exist between southern Thailand and neighbouring countries in which ritual specialists and charismatic individuals, sites and objects from a number of traditions are sought out, visited and propitiated by ethnic Chinese with omnivorous spiritual tastes. Thus, I would argue that the growth of the Vegetarian Festival in Hat Yai, while it plays on the linkages and shared understandings that exist between ‘Chinese’ on both sides of the border must be viewed in the context of broader trends in which a wide variety of sources of sanctity are utilised to promote pilgrimage and ‘sacred tourism’ on the part of Chinese Malaysians and Singaporeans.

However, although trying to appeal to tourists and other foreign visitors, the mediums who run the shrines that are promoting the Vegetarian Festival are adamant about the authenticity of their practices. Shrines assert their authenticity through emphasising connections to the ‘original’ Nine Emperor Gods shrines in Phuket or Trang. The main symbol of this connection is ash (khi thup) which is taken from the incense urns of one of the ‘original’ shrines and installed at the new one, thereby legitimating the shrine as an appropriate place to worship the Nine Emperor Gods. Members of the shrines in Hat Yai were emphatic that this was necessary to perform a genuine ceremony worshipping the Nine Emperor Gods, asserting that only shrines that were within the lineage of Nine Emperor Gods shrines could claim authenticity. While there is no general consensus on the identity of the
‘original’ shrine in Thailand, all the Hat Yai shrines that I visited traced their lineages to shrines in either Phuket or Trang. The connection to the authentic ‘point of origin’ is not necessarily direct, however, and may pass from one shrine to another. For example, the Thep Na Ja traces its lineage through his shrine in Nakhon Sri Thammarat back to the Bang Niao shrine in Phuket, while the Chai Sing Ia traces its lineage back to Trang. None of the shrines that I encountered trace their lineages across national boundaries, back to temples in Malaysia or Singapore, in the way that some Singaporean shrines have traced their lineages to Penang (Heinze 1981:155-6).293

The fact that most of the shrines that worship the Nine Emperor Gods are moving or have moved to the outskirts of town means that the different modes of practice of the Vegetarian Festival can be spatially differentiated. The centre of town is dominated by the Mahayana temples, which emphasises personal asceticism and vegetarianism in their performance of Vegetarian Festival rites. The periphery is dominated by the shrines that worship the Nine Emperor Gods and cater for a transnational patronage. However, these shrines organise incursions into the centre of town for many of their ritual activities, including the procession of the Nine Emperor Gods through the streets of the city, and ritual activities such as blade-ladder climbing and hot oil bathing. Those responsible for organising these events were almost universal in their reasons for doing this: they wanted to hold these events in areas frequented by Chinese Malaysians and Singaporeans in order to increase the profile of the Vegetarian Festival in general and to generate patronage for their shrines.

293 This emphasis on lineage can be contrasted with Wat Thawòn, which as a Mahayana Buddhist temple does not participate in genealogical tradition of the Taoist shrines. There are also no links made to originary temples elsewhere in Thailand or in China through indexical symbols such as ashes. The tradition as it is found at Wat Thawòn is in this sense ‘despatialised’, not employing the concrete symbols that link place to place but instead making use of the universal teachings of the Buddha.
It is also the case that many shrine owners and committee members, themselves sometimes spirit mediums, temple employees and financial backers are often not local to Hat Yai. For example, the owner of the Thep Na Ja shrine, a spirit medium, recently moved from Nakhon Sri Thammarat, bringing many supporters with him. The Chai Sing Ja shrine is run by a spirit medium originally from Trang and large numbers of the people who celebrate the Vegetarian Festival at his shrine are originally from Trang or Phuket. When interviewed about their reasons for moving to Hat Yai, these shrine owners cited stated that as the Vegetarian Festival is not well-established in Hat Yai, the possibilities for expansion are greater than in Phuket and Trang, where the more established shrines dominate. Furthermore, the shrine owners believed that the opportunities for gaining support from Malaysian and Singaporean devotees in Hat Yai was high because of the tourist infrastructure which meant that a large number of Malaysian and Singaporean tourists were always available for ‘conversion’.

Public spectacles in the streets of Hat Yai

The Thep Na Ja shrine is one of the newest and most active participants in the Vegetarian Festival. The shrine owner and head spirit medium, who channels the spirit of Na Ja, is originally from Phuket, then moved location to Nakhon Sri Thammarat, where he continues to run a shrine and where he celebrated the Vegetarian Festival for several years. He too moved to Hat Yai because the opportunities for making connections with Malaysian and Singaporean devotees were much greater there. Initially residing in a small shopfront shrine, he was able to establish much larger premises on the

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294 Spirit mediums do not always run these shrines. But in the examples in Hat Yai where the shrines had a relatively small following, a medium was often also the head of the shrine, though made decisions in conjunction with one or more devotees/financial backers.
outskirts of the city next to the Municipal Park due to the financial support from one man from Kuala Lumpur, who donated 3 million Baht (300,000 ringgit; over US$65,000) to the temple in return for the Na Ja’s help in procuring winning lottery numbers.

Although 2001 was the first time this shrine took part in the festival in Hat Yai, photos in the shrine hall revealed that a well-rehearsed ‘show’ had already been developed in Nakhon Sri Thammarat, the most dramatic of which was a theatrical street procession. In this parade, the gods of the temple are taken out of the shrine and paraded around the town on the backs of pickup trucks, ostensibly to bring good fortune to the residents of the town. I say ostensibly here because unlike in Phuket and Trang, where such parades are well integrated into the community, the processions in Hat Yai received only passing public interest. It is worth contrasting these two very different ceremonial contexts. In Phuket and Trang crowds of locals and visitors await the parades of pierced and unpierced mediums, statues of deities, and especially the palanquins bearing the Nine Emperor Gods. Shop-owners and other residents set up altars bearing a variety of offerings for the gods in front of the shops and residences, and prepare enormous chains of Chinese crackers to be let off over passing deities. Such processions are therefore characterised by a great deal of community participation and interaction between lay participants, spirit mediums and other sources of sacred power. They affirm a sense of the town and local residents acting together as a collectivity, local businesses and homes are blessed, and thus it is not only individuals but the community as a whole that is subject to blessings, purification and renewal in these events.

However, this was not the case when I observed the Thep Na Ja procession in Hat Yai in 2001. On this occasion the majority of people there appeared to have no idea that the parade is coming and no preparations had been made to welcome or receive the gods. It was not possible to construe
that the community as a whole was in any sense participating in this event. Nevertheless, the spectacular nature of the parade successfully drew quite a crowd of onlookers – a mixture of locals and tourists. Thus, initially at least, residents and tourists alike act as spectators, not participating in the ritual event.295

The images on display were an eclectic mix of Taoist, Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist, and Hindu. They included Chinese gods such as Thep Na Ja and Jao Mae Kuan Im, the Hindu god Brahma, and interestingly the images of Luang Phò Thuat and Phò Than Khlai. Following these, there came a dozen or so spectacularly pierced mediums. Objects used to pierce parts of the mediums’ bodies were in some cases were bizarre and extreme. They included a bicycle, a bumper bar from a pickup, a 3-4 metre piece of PVC, two mediums with five plastic rings filled with different coloured liquids (making them look vaguely like the Olympic symbol), another had a teapot spout through his cheek, another an electric fan on a stand. There were other mediums with more ‘traditional’ piercings too, such as spears and ‘general’s heads’.296 In one case a medium had a long spear through his cheek which bore the logo of a soy milk manufacturer at both ends, turning the medium into a walking billboard (Figure 54). Not all the mediums were pierced, however. Some were merely in trance, and there were others who performed other acts of self-mortification such as tongue-cutting.297

295 It should be made clear that some residents of Hat Yai participate in the Festival in the sense that they wear white during the whole time and follow the ascetic regimes participation entails. However, on the outside the particular shrines celebrating the Festival or the narrow precincts surrounding the Mahayana Buddhist temples where vegetarian food is sold, the majority of Hat Yai residents and visitors are not involved more than casually in the proceedings.
296 General’s Head: A narrow spike with a small head attached at one end.
297 It is worth asking whether all individuals in trance should be called ‘mediums’. It is true that a number of participants enter trance states without obviously displaying the characteristics of a particular deity. Whether these individuals are considered to be possessed or merely in trance is a possible question for future research.
At the end of the procession there was a float upon which the chief spirit medium, who was also the owner of the shrine, rode dressed in an elaborate red and gold silk costume, complete with brightly feathered headpiece. He was accompanied by one middle-aged layman in white. Both of them were distributing saksit (magically charged) objects – yellow and red thread, small plastic statues of Na Ja in plastic cases, and pha yan (small pieces of cloth bearing arcane symbols) – to the onlookers (Figure 58). Spectators – Thai and foreign tourists – stood on the footpaths and stared. Some held hands with palms together to receive blessings from the passing deities (Figure 56 & Figure 57), while others were visibly disgusted by the piercings, with their hands over mouths, staring. Many moved up to the float of Thep Na Ja and tried to get their hands on some of the objects that were being given away. People often seemed delighted to receive these objects and would return to their companions brandishing their prizes and smiling broadly. At times there were literally crowds of keen onlookers competing for objects, and things got quite frenetic. At one point a female tourist was knocked to the ground and had to be helped up by her neighbours.

Shrine assistants circulated through the crowd and collected donations in red boxes. Their white T-shirts were stencilled with a colourful image of Na Ja on the front, and the symbol of their main sponsor, Coca-Cola, on the back. “Enjoy!” it admonished the spectators. The parade halted in front of the Central Department Store, opposite McDonald’s and Sizzler, and there, framed by American corporate logos, the show continued. The mediums lined up for the benefit of those who wanted to take photos, in stark contrast to the days in which mediums forbade photographs of themselves. In fact, it appeared that the temple assistants had been given instructions to encourage photography. On several occasions assistants gestured to me – one of the few Westerners there – that I should come in close and take photos. Earlier
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on, during the procession at least one medium posed for me to photograph him. He then had additional ‘general’s heads’ pushed through his arm, apparently adding to the spectacle for my benefit (Figure 53).

An altar was set up with the Chinese gods Kuan Im and Kuan U on it, as well as the remaining small sacred trinkets. The mediums then proceeded one by one to select objects from the table and throw them to the substantial crowd which had gathered on the steps of the Central department store. Some people approached the chief medium and asked for blessings, hands in prayer gesture. They received magical items. Most onlookers appeared to take the event seriously. Some Malaysian and Singaporean tourists reached for their wallets to make donations, others held their hands in prayer gesture in the hope of receiving a blessed object from the mediums (Figure 52).

The final part of the show involved the head medium, having distributed many of the magical items, removing the piercing objects from lesser mediums. This was a theatrical performance during which the head medium used a couple of hastily placed tables as a stage. He removed the piercing objects from the minor mediums with theatrical flair. Apparently exhausted, the lesser mediums gathered around the floats and waited to leave. They usually had a piece of yellow paper pressed against their cheeks. Some smoked cigarettes, with smoke escaping from the wound in the cheek. Several of the mediums appeared to be in shock, shivering quite severely despite the warm temperature. The performance finished, all participants were quickly whisked away back to the shrine on the backs of pickups, leaving the crowd to disperse back into the surrounding department stores, restaurants, hotels, karaoke clubs and massage parlours that dominate the area.

A couple of evenings later the Poi Sian (Eight Immortals) shrine, which has been celebrating the Vegetarian Festival in Hat Yai for just three years, organised a blade-ladder climbing ritual in front of the Odeon department...
store, just around the corner from where the Thep Na Ja mediums ended their procession. As with the Thep Na Ja procession, this event attracted large crowds of mostly Malaysian and Singaporean tourists, some of whom waited for hours for the performance to begin. In this case, the ritual equipment again became a framework on which corporate logos could be draped. A large banner and innumerable smaller cards advertising Ma Ma Noodles covered the ladder apparatus. Attendants with Ma Ma logos stencilled on their T-shirts prepared for the ritual, attaching the sharpened knife-blade rungs to the at least ten metre high ladder. Presumably this was because Ma Ma noodles were supporting the shrine financially.

This of course raises the issue of corporate sponsorship of the Vegetarian Festival and shrines that participate in it. During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to interview corporate representatives of companies like Ma Ma and Vitamilk, another prominent sponsor in Hat Yai (for example, see Figure 54). Annette Hamilton has also encountered Ma Ma logos in connection with the Festival in Trang (pers. comm.). In each case the representative himself was involved in a devotional relationship with the main spirit medium of the shrine in question. This was the case even for a multi-national corporation like Coca-Cola, whose local distributor, the Hat Thip company, often sponsored Chinese shrines and religious events. The nature of these relationships challenges some of the assumptions we might make about the nature of corporate sponsorship in such a religious domain. For one thing, corporate sponsorship and the devotional religious aspects do not necessarily exclude each other, and the specificity of the devotional relationship means that particular companies are bound to one shrine or another rather than being able to sponsor the Festival as a whole. It also suggests that the reasons companies end up sponsoring particular shrines might have as much to do with the faith of a particular well-positioned employee as with a broader corporate marketing strategy.
When all was ready, the mediums arrived from their shrine at the outskirts of town in a convoy of pickups, quickly entered trances at the temporary altar that had been set up, climbed the ladder, performed self mutilations with swords, axes and other objects, and walked over thorny branches. As in the Thep Na Ja procession the audience alternated between mere spectatorship and becoming involved in the action. Blessings were sought from mediums and, at the end ritual, objects such as flags and pha yan, which had been sacralised by being carried over the ladder, were sold for 99 baht a piece. A Malaysian devotee who was taking part commented to me that to purchase such flags at a similar ritual in Malaysia would certainly cost more than three times as much. By being there, he gained this experience of ritual at bargain rates.

Characteristics of Foreign Participation

The examples of the street processions and blade-ladder climbing displays above showed the spontaneous manner in which foreign Chinese onlookers easily slipped between the roles of spectator and participant, thus blurring the distinction between observer and devotee, tourist and pilgrim. Such a dynamic of participation already challenges the notion that such ritual performances in Hat Yai can be written off as mere examples of ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell 1989) that exist solely for the benefit of an objectifying ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990). However, this notion is further problematised by the fact that many of the shrine attendants, organisers, wealthy patrons and even some of the spirit mediums are in fact Chinese from Singapore and Malaysia. Thus the festival in Hat Yai differentiates itself significantly from Phuket and Trang; while the other festivals are best conceived of as local traditions that have attracted transnational interest in recent years, the festival in Hat Yai, or at least certain aspects of it, is emerging
precisely in a translocal and transnational nexus. The participation of Malaysians and Singaporeans is not just a recent addition to an already established event; their activities are crucial to the very existence of these events. In the case of the Thep Na Ja shrine, their celebrations in 2001 would not be possible if it hadn’t been for the huge donation from a Malaysian patron. The Poi Sian shrine, on the other hand, does not have one major patron but rather a large number of Malaysian devotee/patrons who participate in every aspect of the festival. According to the chief medium and owner, the shrine is actually devoted to the Eight Immortals and not the Nine Emperor Gods at all. However, the desire of the Malaysian devotees to celebrate the Vegetarian Festival was such that he acquiesced, even though performing an extra set of rituals was extremely exhausting for him, he explained.298

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298 This seems like quite an unusual innovation. However, more information would be required to get a better sense of how common or uncommon this sort of mixing of focus is.
Figure 52. Head medium of the Thep Na Ja shrine blesses a Thai child as the crowd looks on.

Figure 53. (above) A spirit medium poses in front of the anthropologist to have additional ‘general’s heads’ inserted by an assistant.

Figure 54. (left) Spirit medium from the Thep Na Ja shrine ‘advertising’ Vitamilk, a soy milk product. Other mediums have lined up in the background. Statues of Kuan U, Luang Phò Thuat and Phò Than Khlai are visible in the background.

Figure 55. Riding on the back of the pickup, a Singaporean medium of the monkey god, Heng Jia, accompanies an image of Brahma during the Thep Na Ja procession. Despite the presence of two gods on the vehicle the attitude of the lay devotees is decidedly casual.
Figure 56. Chinese tourists in front of one of the spectacularly pierced spirit mediums from the Thep Na Ja shrine. The man in blue on the left is holding ritual flags that he received from a medium.

Figure 57. Tourists observing the Thep Na Ja shrine procession.

Figure 58. Head medium of the Thep Na Ja shrine and a senior lay devotee distribute sacred trinkets from the back of a pickup.
Figure 59. Malaysian Chinese devotees of the Poi Sian shrine, dressed in white and observing ritual purity during the Festival, making preparations early on the morning of the street parade.

Figure 60. Malaysian Chinese devotees of the Poi Sian have the honour of carrying the palanquin of theNine Emperor Gods through the streets of Hat Yai.
Thus it is the Malaysian devotees who are the driving force behind the shrine’s participation in the festival of the Poi Sian shrine. The Malaysians run many aspects of the shrine’s business during the festival and are involved in virtually every aspect besides the spirit mediumship and menial tasks such as cooking and cleaning. They manned the temple and collected donations, doled out vegetarian food to visitors (although they didn’t cook it, Thais did this), and performed daily rites to venerate the Nine Emperor Gods and other deities (Figure 59). During the street procession that this shrine performed, it was Malaysian men exclusively who carried the palanquin containing the Nine Emperor Gods (Figure 60), and on the final evening of the festival they participated in the fire-walking (lui fai) rites, carrying various deities and other sacred objects across the red-hot coals in order to purify both the objects and themselves.

In many cases, the Malaysian supporters have very regular contact with the shrines in Hat Yai, travelling many times a year to visit, worship, make donations or help temple developments in one form or another. For example, one female devotee from Ipoh said she visited the Poi Sian shrine at least monthly, saying that it only took her four hours by car to make the journey. Such frequent and sustained patterns of visiting across national borders closely resembles border tourism (Askew 2002), though I found no examples of devotees who travelled across the border on a daily basis, as Askew did.

The business networks of some Malaysian devotees were also relevant to the manner in which the festival is evolving. One supporter of the Poi Sian shrine is a travel agent from KL and has thus been able to tap into the lucrative flow of tourists on their way to attend the Vegetarian Festival in Phuket and Trang. During the festival in 2001, more than fifty tour buses, direct from Kuala Lumpur or Ipoh, crept their way up the narrow dirt road to the Poi Sian shrine each morning and disgorged their occupants, who had
a vegetarian breakfast and propitiated the shrine’s various images before reboarding to be taken into Hat Yai, or on to Trang or Phuket. In such ways the Poi Sian shrine managed to ‘intercept’ tourists on their way to the more established centres of the festival.

For many of the foreign devotees I spoke to the financial differences between Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand provided a significant reason for patronising shrines in Hat Yai and taking part in the Vegetarian Festival there. The growing popularity of the Festival both in Malaysia and Thailand is also increasing the expense for participants. Informants told me that in Ampang, near Kuala Lumpur, where the festival is extremely popular with devotees, who are put up in hotel-like accommodation during their stay, the cost of taking part in the festival can be prohibitive. This appears to be one reason why many Malaysians find travelling to Hat Yai to perform rituals at the Vegetarian Festival a tempting alternative. Generally speaking, these participants were not rich in their own countries and it is likely they could achieve a higher level of relative prestige in Thailand than they could in their home countries. However, the relative wealth of Malaysia and Singapore also means that participants from these countries can obtain a higher status and more central role in the ritual proceedings than would otherwise be available to them. One woman from Ipoh, Malaysia who takes part in the Vegetarian Festival at the Poi Sian shrine proudly pointed to the donation of 163,000 baht (approximately AUD$6,250 at that time) on the donor list and said that her husband had made it. She explained that their participation is necessary: “Hat Yai people are poor, she said, so they cannot donate so much money”.

One participant, Mr Wong, a Chinese man from Kuala Lumpur, gave his reasons for why Malaysians and Singaporeans were interested in travelling to Thailand to participate in rituals. He said the Thai ceremony is inexpensive and has a sense of religious freedom in Thailand, while Chinese
crackers, extreme piercings, blade ladders, and so on are tightly controlled in Kuala Lumpur. In other words, in Thailand, the ‘same’ ritual experience was seen to be more ‘traditional’, more spectacular, and better value for money. Statements of this kind are quite common and support the notion that Thailand’s relative permissiveness in comparison to Muslim dominated Malaysia and authoritarian, highly-regulated Singapore, is a significant motivating factor in cross border tourism and pilgrimage.299

This sense of freedom can also be found in the openness to innovation of many of the shrines, and particularly the greater role given to women than is traditionally the case in Singapore and Malaysia. For example, while women in Malaysia are not allowed to take part in the fire-walking and some other rites in Malaysia because of their perceived ‘impurity’ (Cheu 1988), the Thep Na Ja and Poi Sian shrines were both willing to allow women to take part. For example, women were not excluded from firewalking and were instead ‘walked across’ the coals by mediums. In perhaps the most surprising innovation, the Thep Na Ja shrine actually gave its female devotees the privilege of removing the Nine Emperor Gods from their room at the end of the festival and bearing the palanquin onto the back of a pickup truck and thence to the sea.

This is not to say that women are routinely included in such aspects of Chinese rites in Thailand as a matter of course. On the contrary, established rites such as those at the Siang Tueng Foundation did not involve women in firewalking and other such purificatory rites, nor do I recall any women taking part in the famous firewalking of the Jao Mae Lim Ko Niao celebrations in Pattani. Rather, my argument is that certain religious entrepreneurs who are attempting to increase their patronage are more accommodating of such innovations.

299 For a discussion of this issue, see Askew (2002).
However, another common way transnational participants characterise their reasons for patronising shrines in Hat Yai and participating in the Vegetarian Festival does not involve affirming difference at all but simply vouching for the sacred power of the charismatic spirit medium who runs the shrine. One Singaporean man said he was guided to the Thep Na Ja shrine by a series of coincidences but when he saw the chief medium his eyes were filled with a brilliant light and he knew he was in the presence of a powerful figure. Or the generous donor from Malaysia who donated three million baht to the Thep Na Ja and became the major benefactor of the shrine, did so because of a lottery win which convinced him of the power of the head medium to bring him good luck. Other devotees cited help with financial, health and personal problems as bases of their devotion. Or, in Mr Wong’s words as he tried to put his feelings in terms I could understand, “It’s like the X-files, la. At first you don’t believe, then [you experience the power of the medium] and you have to believe”.

Given that such relationships are taking place in a transnational context, and one in which there is a widespread dynamic of ethnic Chinese seeking sources of sacred power on the other side of a national boundary, it is worth asking if the presence of the border itself, the concrete manifestation which produces disjunctures between states, has any role in this process. Louis Golomb has noted the powerful productive force that ethnic boundaries can produce, that allow members of one ethnic group to be perceived as powerful healers or ritual specialists by virtue of their otherness. In the case of Kelantan in northern Malaysia, he has shown how the ethnic Thais have been able to creatively adapt ethnic differences to create a niche as ‘brokers of morality’, providing ritual services for, in particular, the ethnic Chinese (Golomb 1978). In the case of southern Thailand, he has shown how ethnic

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300 An emphatic particle used in Singaporean and Malaysian English which expresses mood but does not necessarily convey any meaning.
boundaries help to enhance the power of ritual healers (Golomb 1984). These observations lead me to suggest that perhaps a national boundary can function in a similar way, so that the cross-cutting of an ostensibly singular ethnic group by a national boundary can also create a tantalising sense of power in otherness which can be exploited by a variety of actors. Thus, ironically perhaps, it is actually the ‘Thainess’ of the spirit mediums and the ritual proceedings they oversee, the fact that they emerge in a Thai context and make use of a particularly Thai way of managing ethnicity and the sacred, that allow transnational participants to experience these events as powerful, and inherently authentic.

In a further irony, however, that very ‘Thai’ mode of expressing Chineseness is itself somewhat at odds with the dominant mode of expressing Sino-Thai identity in contemporary Thai society. As the discussion of alternate modes of practice suggests, the manner in which Chineseness is expressed is further permutated by the distinction between an emergent Sino-Thai middle-class aesthetic and the production of a more spectacular aesthetic for international consumption. Thus, neither Thainess nor Chineseness, nor even Thai modes of expressing Chineseness, should be understood as unitary.

Conclusion: Translocality and Opportunity

The statue-building and Vegetarian Festival examples discussed above share a number of characteristics. They both involve forms of religious entrepreneurship, on the part of the Municipality on the one hand and individual shrines and their mediums on the other. They both demonstrate the importation or relocation of a number of materials, practices, expertise, etc from other locations, often designed to function as a substitute for the ‘original’ elsewhere. They are designed to draw potential devotees or
tourists to Hat Yai in preference to other locations and thus set themselves up in explicit or implicit competition with them. As the Thep Na Ja PA continually announced “No need to go to Phuket, no need to go to Trang”. Both examples involve connections made to mainland China as a place of ultimate origins, there was a physical transposition of materials – ash and ‘white jade’ – connecting them with this place of origins. And in both cases the crucial investment of capital, and in some cases labour too, was made by Chinese participants from Malaysia and Singapore.

In none of these cases were ‘origins’ from within Hat Yai itself brought into the equation. Instead, what Hat Yai provided was a quintessentially ‘translocal’ space characteristic of many tourist destinations (Appadurai 1996), which in some senses belonged to the nation-state in which they are located but, through a variety of connections, also extend beyond it. In southern Thailand, the building of religious buildings, icons and so on must also be thought of as translocal in this sense. Rather than simply standing in any straightforward sense for symbols for local communities.

Movement to an area of opportunity is coming from both sides; the ritual specialists see in Hat Yai a zone of greater opportunity compared to more established areas of ritual production (Wat Chang Hai, Phuket, etc) while at the same time relatively marginalised Chinese from Malaysia are able to take much more central roles as important patrons than they would otherwise be able to back home. Furthermore, Hat Yai functions as a site of possibility due to the ease with which activities can be organised, free from the constraints of local authoritarianisms and ethnic politics.

In the final chapter of this thesis I will consider another example of transnational religious interaction, this time to consider the dynamics at play when ethnic Chinese participants come to dominate a local Theravada Buddhist ceremony.
Chapter Nine
On the Limits of Hybridity: Foreign Chinese Participation in a Theravada Buddhist Ceremony in Songkhla

It is still very early in the morning when the first guests start to arrive. Cars with Malaysian number plates begin to pull into the temple grounds and park on the pavers between the bot and the main wihan (shrine hall) where the ceremonies are to take place. The visitors are almost all Chinese. They generally move into the hall to pay their respects to the monastery’s abbot, Luang Phò Phan, and do the rounds of the monastery’s main images – the Buddha set up on a shrine outside the hall, the two-metre-plus statue of Luang Phò Thuat, and the shrine outside with the images of Jao Mae Kuan Im, and the monastery’s former abbot, Luang Phò Liang. Their mode of worship gives them away as Chinese: straight-legged and stiff, they clasp their joss-sticks between their fingers in a sort of double fist, quite unlike the wai of the Thais; holding their arms out perpendicular from their bodies and bent at the elbows, and with repeated shallow bowing, hinged at the waist, they pay their respects. This done, the visitors generally move inside and purchase – or perhaps ‘rent’ is a better term – the monastic robes that they will later offer to the monks. An enterprising Thai woman, Daeng, a resident of the United States but former local and long-time devotee of Luang Phò Phan, and her family are doing a roaring trade in these. They have returned from the USA for the ceremony and are selling the robes for 500 baht a piece. The Chinese visitors write their names and addresses on labels on the front of the plastic-wrapped robes. For example: ‘Foo Mook Chin & Family, Singapore’. An impressive pile quickly forms on a large table to the side of the wihan.

Luang Phò Phan sits inside the wihan on his low dais with other senior monks who are visiting for the occasion. Included in their numbers is the head monk of the Thai Sangha in Kedah, Malaysia, and Dr Thawi, a monk from Phatthalung who has achieved something of a celebrity status south of the border. I am told he has written a book popular with Malaysian devotees called Have Bowl, Will Travel.301

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301 I was never able to find this book, however, despite a number of searches. The title references the classic TV program The Paladin’s catch phrase "have gun, will travel".
Outside a large tour bus, and then another, arrives. More Chinese devotees disembark and make their way through the various vendors who have set up their stalls directly to the wihan to pay their respects. By now there are several hundred foreign visitors present and already things are starting to get noisy. There is a festive air and young men have started letting off long chains of crackers over near the Kuan Im shrine hall. There are increasingly frequent eruptions of hideously loud sound and the visitors clutch their ears, smiling. Judging by their laughter and excitement, this seems to be a great novelty for many of them. Many of the locals clutch their ears too, but they tend to wince rather than smile.

This is an edited excerpt from a fieldnote, regarding the 1999 Kathina, or robe-offering, (thòt kathin) ceremonies at Wat Sai Khao, an outwardly unremarkable if prosperous, monastery set amid emerald rice paddies and rubber tree plantation covered hills in Songkhla province, about a half hour drive from either Hat Yai or Songkhla city. What does distinguish Wat Sai Khao from surrounding monasteries, however, is the construction of an elaborate meditation centre on a nearby hillside and the number of foreigners that come to visit the monastery’s head monk, Luang Phò Phan. There is a constant stream of such visitors throughout the year, and Luang Phò Phan is invited to perform ritual services in Malaysia and Singapore on a regular basis. It is during the Kathina ceremony, however, that the extent of his patronage network becomes apparent.

Kathina ceremonies are held at monasteries across Thailand in the lunar month following the end of the Buddhist lent (phansa). Wat Sai Khao is no exception. What is exceptional about this ceremony is the participation of patrons from Malaysia and Singapore, numbering in the hundreds, the overwhelming majority of whom are ethnic Chinese. The ever-increasing involvement of these foreign participants over the years has had a great impact on the form and character of the Kathina ceremony at Wat Sai Khao, which is now characterised by its apparent hybridity, combining ‘Thai’ and
‘Chinese’ ritual forms and aesthetics into a peculiar, and sometimes uneasy, cultural composite.

The first time I attended the Kathina ceremony I was very surprised by what I found. I had visited the monastery once before because I had been told that there was a Kuan Im shrine there and my initial research question was focused on Mahayana Buddhism and its interactions with Theravada Buddhism in the region. At that time I had met Luang Phò Phan and he had given me an invitation to the Kathina ceremony written in Thai, English, and Chinese. This was my first inkling that there would be some foreign participation at the ceremony and so I decided to attend, more out of curiosity than because I thought it would be a major feature of my research. The extent of foreign Chinese participation and its obvious influence on the ritual proceedings and very atmosphere of the event was therefore completely unexpected. This was also one of my earliest indications that an understanding of Chinese-Thai religious interactions would need to be broadened beyond a nation-state migrant group model.

My initial reactions to the event were mixed, hovering somewhere between fascination and dismay. At the time, the presence of the tour buses – signifiers of the package tour – had a great impact on my interpretation of the kind of event I was witnessing. I initially imagined these visitors as taking part in a sort of ‘Buddhist tourism’, with all the negative connotation of superficiality and commercialisation that this suggested to me. Likewise, I was disturbed by the manner in which the Chinese had completely taken over the event, imposing their own ritual sensibilities – the aesthetics of “heat and noise” (Weller 1994) that characterise popular Chinese religious events – and forms onto a Theravada Buddhist framework. In addition to the ubiquitous crackers were lion dances with their overpowering percussion accompaniment, Chinese deities to be worshipped, and Chinese food for lunch. Even the manner of arrival, circulating around all the monastery
shrines and making offerings of incense is quite typical of Chinese folk religious festivals (see Weller 1994). Furthermore, and adding to the sense of superficiality and commoditisation, was the apparent simulation of a ‘normal’ Thai Kathina for the sole benefit of the visitors.

However, after attending the same event again two years later I was able to develop a more nuanced sense of interethnic, and international, dynamics at work. As it turned out, the population and visitors, and their relationships to the monastery and motivations were not nearly as uniform as they at first seemed. Corresponding to this, the commoditisation and ‘touristification’ of the ceremony were also not as prevalent and thoroughgoing as I had at first thought. I was to discover that there is no tourist enterprise behind the coaches. They were instead chartered by groups of the devotees themselves, a number of whom had been attending for decades. The most active of the long-term devotees had spent months recruiting participants within their networks, organising groups of more than a hundred in some cases. Much smaller groups made up of families, pairs of friends and even individuals also attended. Many of those attending also brought proxy donations from friends and acquaintances who were unable to make the trip.

The unquestionable impact of the Chinese during the day’s proceedings raises the question of how it was accommodated or resisted, if at all, by the local participants. The second purpose of the following discussion is therefore to consider this dimension of the event. Has it meant that the event has lost significance for local people? Or have strategies been developed to cope with the influx of foreign participants?

Before discussing the specifics of the Kathina ceremony at Wat Sai Khao I will briefly outline its significance in Thai society and history more generally.
History and Structure of the Kathina Ceremony

The Kathina, or robe-offering, ritual has a long history. In Siam it is said to date back to at least the 13th century AD (Wells 1975), and ultimately to the time of the Buddha himself when new robes were offered to monks at the ends of the rains retreat. One of the most important events in the ritual calendar, the ceremony is performed only once per year at any given Thai monastery, during the lunar month following the end of the rains retreat (wan ók phansa). It thus officially marks the end of the period of heightened religiosity associated with the Lenten season (Terwiel 1994:163, 76). It is seen to be a happy and celebratory ceremony, associated with transgressive, carnivalesque behaviours such as cross-dressing and dancing. The royal Kathina are the most important such ceremonies in the country and the king himself, as the kingdom’s highest ranking layman, traditionally offers robes at nine royally sponsored temples each year. The royal Kathina are the highest profile rituals but virtually every temple in the country performs the ceremony. Sponsorship of a Kathina ceremony is considered one of the most potent means of making merit. Terwiel comments about village Kathina in central Thailand in the late 1960s:

The presentation of the kathin robes is a ceremony reputed to bring a great amount of beneficial karma to the donor and therefore it is not unusual to find laymen interested in becoming main sponsors, or ‘president’ [prathan] of such a ritual. One of the reasons why this ceremony carries great prestige and brings honour to the main sponsors is that it is extremely expensive. A private individual is expected to give, apart from the new robes, many useful goods and a great amount of money. It is not uncommon to find a rich farmer saving for more than ten years before he can become the main sponsor of a kathin ritual (Terwiel 1994:210).
Thus the prestige associated with the ceremony make the Kathina of high symbolic importance, providing a prime occasion on which status hierarchies are affirmed (on the symbolic importance of the Kathina rituals, see, Gray 1986, 1991, Phya Anuman Rajadhon 1986, Wijeyewardene 1986:138).

The main sponsors, or ‘presidents’, have the privilege of offering the kathin, or sets of monks’ robes, ornately decorated and placed upon special gilded bowls (phan) to the head monk of the temple. While the offering of the kathin forms the symbolic core of the ritual, the Kathina is often a temple’s main fundraising event of the year and donations of money or items which are useful to the monks make up an important component of the ritual. It should also be noted that the Kathina rituals are very inclusive, and traditionally temples welcome participation from outside their local areas. Within Thailand it is very common for people to travel to temples outside their local area for the Kathina ceremonies, or, failing this, to make donations to these temples.

Despite the pomp and seriousness of the ritual proceedings, and the role of the Kathina in affirming status hierarchies, the event also tends to have a somewhat carnivalesque feel, at least in the village ceremonies I attended in the South. Coming at the end of the heightened religious period of the Buddhist lent, there is a sense of playful celebration and relaxation of social mores. Villagers, accompanied by small musical troupes, will tend to dance into the temple precincts bearing their offerings to the monks, and music and dancing occur at different times throughout the day. Minor acts of light-hearted transgression are also common, with a number of both males and females cross-dressing. Also contributing to the carnival-like atmosphere, there will often be a variety of petty traders doing business on the temple precincts.
Kathina at Wat Sai Khao

The Kathina at Wat Sai Khao follows the same structure as other ceremonies around Thailand. However, the participation of foreign Chinese permeates virtually every aspect of the organisation of the event. The temple’s lay committee, responsible for organising the proceedings, is indicative of this. It is split along national lines, with three leaders, one each from Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, co-ordinating the event. These men organise participants from their own countries, collect donations and organise the travel and accommodation arrangements for a large number of the people taking part in the Kathina ceremonies. This is reflected in the performance of the ritual itself, with each of the three temple committee leaders presenting one of the kathin robes to the abbot at the climax of the ceremony. Thus rather than a single prathan, the Kathina at Wat Sai Khao has three.

Other aspects of the ceremony also follow the standard practice of Thai Buddhist monasteries but are fundamentally inflected by the participation of foreigners. This is most obvious in the procession, by far the most spectacular event of the day, in which a large proportion of the visitors took part. This was in fact a simulation of the usual Thai custom where groups of lay participants parade into the monastery grounds, often accompanied by musical troupes, often dancing, and carrying the offerings to be made later in the ceremonies such as ‘money trees’ and other items useful for the monks. As already mentioned, most of the visitors to Wat Sai Khao first arrived by
vehicle, paid their respects to Luang Phò Phan and various images, and then ‘bought’ their robes. Once all the guests had arrived they were bussed some distance from the monastery so that they could return in procession form. It was here that some of the most obvious ‘hybridity’ of the day’s events could be found. Another fieldnote entry illustrates the character of this procession:

At about nine, all the foreign participants have arrived and those that want to participate in the procession are instructed to find their robes and other offerings and place them in the back of several pickup trucks which have arrived outside. There is a scene of good-humoured pandemonium as scores of people attempt to do this at once. People crowd onto various vehicles and are slowly driven out to the intersection. Then follows more commotion as everyone tries to retrieve their robes and other offerings from the back of one of the pickups. People wait for the procession to begin. They line up to have their photographs taken in groups, many of which are obviously families. There is a lot of laughter as people pose with their offerings. One boy, maybe ten years old, is not that interested. He has his eyes glued on a Gameboy and does not look up for the photographs. People are carrying various offerings: robes, brooms, candles, and the money trees that are a traditional feature of the Kathina ceremonies. Unlike the money trees at typical Thai ceremonies, which are generally covered with small denomination notes – 20 baht, 50 baht, maybe a few 100 baht, these trees are extravagant. One large tree has nothing but thousand baht bills on it. A sign advertises that it is from a group of devotees from KL and bears seventy thousand baht.\footnote{At that time about AUD$2,800. In 2001, the same group of devotees presented a tree with 220,000 baht (AUD$8,800) in crisp, new 1,000 baht notes. It is hard to convey just how excessively generous such donations are in relationship to the offerings made by local people, even relatively well-off Thais.}

The three main sponsors are there with their \textit{kathina} on ornate bowls (\textit{phan}) and with a Thai-style parasol. There is also a Thai musical troupe present, with their ‘long drums’, cymbals, oboes, etc., but more surprisingly a Chinese group from Hat Yai also turns up, complete with large drum on wheels, cymbals and a pair of Chinese dancing lions. They take their place...
at the head of the procession while the Thai musical troupe is relegated to the rear.

The procession begins. There is a huge noise as the Chinese music kicks into action and various men start to hurl small bunches of crackers to both sides of the road. The Chinese lions and musicians lead the procession, followed by the 'presidents' with their kathin. Then comes the main body of devotees, generally laughing and joking with each other, meandering up the road, often using their robes to shield themselves from the already oppressive sunlight. The Thai musical troupe, with their slower, gentler rhythms, brings up the rear. It seems that it is they, and not the Chinese, who are somewhat out of place here.

Taking part in the procession is one man of Indian appearance. I single him out to find out his reasons for being there. He was invited by the Singaporean temple committee head. "Actually, I'm a Roman Catholic", he confesses. "I'm just here for the sake of my business. [All this] doesn't matter if you believe in God, right?"

The procession makes its way into the temple grounds and then circles the ordination hall three times, as is usually the case in Kathina rituals. The noise becomes deafening as large amounts of crackers are let off at the nearby Kuan Im shrine. Virtually all the participants in the procession are Chinese. Most of the local villagers stand around and watch. However, some Thai women join the Thai musicians and begin to dance. After the third round of the ordination hall the procession comes to an end at the wihan. There is an incident, of sorts, as the procession compresses, accordion-like, and the two musical troupes, both still playing, come into proximity with each other for the first time. There is a cacophony as the two incompatible musical styles clash. An apparent competition for dominance takes place, with both musical troupes refusing to give ground. The Thai women dance on in support of their musicians. Eventually, the Thai group give up, being unable to compete with the louder, frenetic Chinese beat and deafening crash of cymbals. Forced out of the competition, the Thai women resort to parody; they would look at home at a heavy metal concert as they violently and gracelessly shake their bodies to the Chinese percussion beat. They can't keep this up for long, though, and fade out of the contest, one by one.

But perhaps the musical styles were perhaps less accommodating than the ritual participants themselves. Any tensions that might have existed
between the two groups were muted, barely detectable (at least to me). And so while the brief outburst of parody described above revealed something of the underlying tensions that existed during this ceremony between local and foreign participants, for the most part foreigners appeared to be totally oblivious to it. Overall, the trope of hospitality ruled the day, as I will describe.

More ceremonies carried on through the morning, then there was a lunch break, followed by yet more ceremonies in the main wihan. Towards the end of the afternoon each of the prathan, representing the congregation from their respective countries, presented the primary robes to Luang Phò Phan. Each of them then made a short speech. The Thai prathan made his speech first – in faltering English and then in Thai. He took on the role of host. Expressing a high level of concern for the comfort of the foreign guests, he thanked them for coming, apologised for any inconveniences they might have suffered, and hoped very much that they had had a good time and would come back again next year.

Once the three prathan had presented their robes, the rest of the congregation then followed suit and LPP was inundated with robes and other offerings. This was the end of the ceremony and the different groups of people then began to disperse. Tour buses turned up from somewhere and large groups of tourists hopped on board and were whisked away.
Figure 62. Money tree presented to Luang Phò Phan by long-time devotee from KL, Graham. It is made up entirely of 1000 baht notes totalling 70,000 baht. The Nestlé ice cream man waits in the background.

Figure 63. An ethnic Chinese devotee taking part in the Kathina procession. He is carrying a gilded ceremonial bowl (phan) filled with 100 baht notes made to resemble a flower blossom. On his shoulder are some floor mats commonly used in monasteries.

Figure 64. A group of Kathina participants posing for photos (not just the author’s).
Figure 65. A Singaporean family posing with their money tree. The amount on the sign is 71,500 baht (at that time about $AUD2850).

Figure 66. A Malaysian or Singaporean participant in the Kathina procession. As these photos demonstrate, this was very much a family affair.
The popularity of the Kathin ceremonies at Wat Sai Khao is largely due to Luang Phò Phan: the majority of the Malaysian and Singaporean participants are attracted by his reputation as a monk of considerable spiritual power. A well-known and important monk in the local area, Luang Phò Phan is a medium-ranking monk in the local Sangha hierarchy, and head monk of his sub-district (jao tambon). More importantly for this study, he has become renowned as a ‘magical monk’ (keji ajan) able to transfer his accumulated ‘charisma’ (barami) to other individuals or objects. In southern Thailand he is in constant demand to perform such rites. During my fieldwork our paths were regularly crossing as he participated in rituals that I was observing. This renown as a source of sacred power, both locally and abroad, has produced sufficient “spiritual magnetism” (Preston 1992) to attract such a large number of guests to the annual robe-offering ceremony.

303 These included the sacralisation of the giant standing Buddha in the Hat Yai Municipal Park (mentioned in chapter seven), the opening ceremonies of the Thep Na Ja Chinese shrine in Hat Yai, and a fundraising ‘forest-robos’ ceremony held at Songkhla Zoo.
A prominent example of a class of charismatic Buddhist monks in southern Thailand who have successfully cultivated patronage networks beyond the border in Malaysia and Singapore Luang Phò Phan receives many invitations to perform ceremonies abroad. Indeed, I rarely found him in attendance when I went to visit him at his home monastery. Almost invariably, it seemed, when I asked the other monks where he was they would reply that he abroad, performing ritual services, often in Malaysia or Singapore. On the occasions that I did find him there my attempts at conversation were often interrupted by visiting Malaysian and Singaporean Chinese who had arrived either in small groups or individually, usually driving out from Hat Yai.

This wide-spread reputation is most certainly connected with perceptions about the purity of his practice. For example, several long-term devotees cited his virginity as indicative of his purity and power. This was a common trope Chinese used to explain their preference for a particular Thai master. However, another possible element of his appeal may be his connection with Luang Phò Thuat. Luang Phò Phan belongs to the lineage of monks closely connected to Luang Phò Thuat through ordination. Temple brochures for advertising the production of a batch of Luang Phò Thuat amulets list him as being among “nine magic monks in the lineage of Luang Pu Thuat” who would perform the sacralisation pluk sek rites. They also mention that Luang Phò Phan was taught by Jao Khun Nüang, of Wat Na Pradu, the master (phra ajan) of both Ajan Thim and Ajan Nòng. The clear implication made in this text is that Luang Phò Phan has a privileged access to sacred knowledge about Luang Phò Thuat through sharing in the teaching lineage of Luang Phò Thuat’s most famous avatars. The meditation centre

304 The discrepancies between monasteries in a particular geographical zone has been produced by the increasing mobility of both monks, their devotees and images and objects that circulate in connection with them, that has developed since the 1960s (Taylor 1999:164).
which Luang Phò Phan developed on a nearby hillside is also the site of what was until recently the largest statue of Luang Phò Thuat in the world. This was commissioned by a wealthy Sino-Thai businessman whom Luang Phò Phan had met while performing pluk sek rites at Wat Pha Kho and who had been so impressed by Luang Phò Phan that he collaborated with him on several batches of Luang Phò Thuat amulets. Luang Phò Phan used the large statue to make several claims to having a special connection with Luang Phò Thuat. The statue, which had been constructed in Bangkok was originally to be situated at a monastery in northern Thailand but ‘refused’ this journey, only acquiescing when a location in the South, and under the care of Luang Phò Phan was found. Luang Phò Phan also explained his reasons for constructing a large structure to house the giant image of Luang Phò Thuat. He had, he said, experienced a strange heat and realised that it was caused because the statue of Luang Phò Thuat was constantly exposed to the sunlight during the day. Once the housing structure had been commissioned and the roof completed, the feelings of heat subsided. Furthermore, at the Kathina ceremonies I attended, Luang Phò Phan distributed Luang Phò Thuat amulets to all devotees who paid respects to him.

The extent to which Luang Phò Phan’s spiritual magnetism for foreigners is authenticated and legitimised by his connection with Luang Phò Thuat is unclear. For the participants from Malaysia and Singapore his authenticity may be just as strongly connected with broader perceptions (and stereotypes) regarding the power of Thai spirituality. In his study of interethnic relations in Kelantan, Northern Malaysia, Louis Golomb reports that “[t]he Thai have a wide reputation in Malaysia as highly adept healers and sorcerers” (1978:97).

305 This story was discussed in chapter one (page 34).
Golomb proposes the thesis that ethnic Thais in this region sustain their ethnic identity through creatively manipulating certain cultural traits and specialisations. As “brokers of morality” (Golomb 1978), northern Malaysian Thais creatively use their ethnic difference to provide various services for the numerically and financially dominant ethnic groups. This includes taking on the role of ritual specialists, particularly for the benefit of relatively wealthy urban Chinese from the provincial capital, other parts of Malaysia and even Singapore. In his work Golomb emphasises the strategic use of ethnic difference, and even a creation of a sense of difference itself, which is simultaneously an accommodation of, and playing up to the expectations of, out-group members. In some senses it is the acceptance of prevalent stereotypes held by other ethnic groups, which has enabled ethnic Thai in northern Malaysia to carve out a distinctive niche for themselves. In his other work on inter-ethnic healing practices in southern Thailand and elsewhere, Golomb also emphasises the power of ethnic boundaries to produce a belief in the efficacy of traditional healers (Golomb 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1986, 1988). In all of his work, Golomb presents ritual specialists, such as curers, as ‘brokers’ and ‘intermediaries’, who act as privileged points of contact between ethnic groups. In this role Thai monks such as Luang Phò Phan creatively make use of the play of sameness and otherness to make their difference both exotic enough to be desirable and familiar enough to be intelligible. Prevailing tropes on ‘Thai hospitality’ help
to make these forms of cultural and moral brokerage more palatable to both
the ‘hosts’ and the ‘guests’.

Hosts and Guests

A common experience during my fieldwork was to have my questions
about why foreigners participated in Thai rituals to be met with the
evocation of sameness. For example, when I questioned Chinese participants
about why they were participating in this Theravada ritual, a common initial
response was that they were all, essentially, participating in the same
tradition. Differences between Theravada and Mahayana conceptualisations,
as well as national or ethnic differences, were overlooked as relatively minor,
peripheral concerns. “We are all Buddhists,” was the common refrain.

This discursive positioning was one that I encountered often during my
fieldwork in southern Thailand. For example, when I enquired about the
placing of Chinese images in Theravada Buddhist monasteries, or the use of
Theravada Buddhist images in Chinese shrines, I was often told that the
Chinese and Thai are “the same”. Thais would often invoke the nationally-
sanctioned platitude that all religions are essentially the same because they
teach people to do good and to avoid doing evil. This process was the
inverse of ‘othering’; a pervasive elision of difference that enabled certain
kinds of social and religious interaction.

As stated above, any underlying tensions between different groups of
participants at the Kathina tended to be muted and found their expression in
indirect, subtle ways. Instead it was the trope of hospitality which found its
expression in many ways during the rituals, in a situation where the
difference in status between locals and foreign visitors was clearly expressed.

The Chinese guests are well catered for. Each year the temple organises
a Chinese chef from Hat Yai to come and provide lunch for the guests. When
I inquired about the reason for separating the lunch, the most common response was that the Chinese cannot tolerate the spicy local Thai food. The Chineseness of the foreign participants is therefore being actively constructed by their Thai hosts – which is true regardless of whether this is usually the case. In trying to make their guests comfortable and ‘at home’ they automatically produce a clear cut distinction between the locals and their visitors.

Not only do the Chinese guests eat different food from the locals, their dining areas are also segregated. While the guests eat around large round tables under marquees that have been erected for the occasion and are waited on by locals, the Thais eat along the wooden benches attached to the temple school, their food prepared by local women and a group of maechi that have come from different temples around the province to help out with the organisation of the event. Thus while both Thai and foreign participants share the same space and perform the same ritual activities, lunch arrangements enforce a strict spatial segregation and lack of commensality, and incommensurability of cuisine.

The trope of hospitality was also expressed in the various attempts made to accommodate the visitors, who were for the most part quite ignorant of the ritual proceedings, their meaning, and modes of appropriate bodily comportment, especially in their dealings with the monks. The organisers deal with this general lack of familiarity and knowledge by employing a translator and guide. Each year this role is performed by Mr Lim, a Chinese Malaysian from Kedah, who is a long term devotee of the head monk of Kedah’s Sangha (who was also attending) and acted as MC at the rituals. Mr Lim speaks Hokkien, Malay, Thai and good English and is also quite knowledgeable about Theravada Buddhism and Buddhist rituals. His job is to officiate the rituals, translate and explain the significance of rituals to the Chinese Malaysian and Singaporean devotees and to instruct the guests
during each stage of the ritual proceedings. He explained to me that many people just go along with the ritual because everyone else is doing it even though they do not have the faintest idea about the significance of their actions. It is up to him to provide this knowledge, he said. Mr Lim therefore performs a role analogous to that of a tour guide. He is there as a relative insider, mediating between inside and outside, providing enough cultural guidance to make palatable what would otherwise be a bewildering experience for most foreign participants. This is not the only temple at which he performs this role. He is often contracted by temples in Thailand that attract a large number of Malaysians and I was to meet him on several such occasions at different monasteries in the area.

In spite of his efforts, there was still generally a great deal of confusion experienced by some guests during different aspects of the long ceremonial proceedings. An example of this was during the water-pouring ceremony (kruat nam), in which water is poured from a small brass bottle into a small brass bowl while monks chant and sacralise the water. This is another integral component of most Thai Buddhist rituals and is usually understood as transference of merit to ancestors. Participants are expected to touch the person in front of them, making a continuous chain to the person actually pouring the water. At Wat Sai Khao, however, many participants were unsure how to behave. Thus:

During the water pouring a woman near me touched the man in front of her and then gestured for her friend to do the same. The friend hesitated, got up on her knees to see what people in front were doing. She hesitated again, then touched the person in front of her, thought better of it, noticed someone else ‘wai-ing’ (inappropriately), and gestured to her friend to wai. Both of them began wai-ing alike while the water-pouring ritual continued.

Furthermore, despite Mr Lim’s best efforts, there was a generally weak sense of appropriate behaviour vis-à-vis Buddhist monks, including the highly venerated Luang Phò Phan.
At the end of the procession the participants file into the wihan, deposited their robes and other offerings at the same spot as they were before and go to Luang Phò Phan to collect their amulets and have their heads sprinkled with holy water by another monk. Watching this, I see many people who do not know the ‘appropriate’ mode of behaviour with monks. Many did not wai the monk upon receiving the amulet, some do not kneel when they received their amulets but merely reach down and took them. Luang Phò Phan continues to hand out the amulets with an impassive demeanour though, not betraying any hint that he is offended by the behaviour of his guests.

For a Thai to stand over any sitting monk, let alone a highly respected, senior and elderly monk, and receive a sacred object in such a casual manner would be a grave transgression of appropriate modes of interaction and would certainly invalidate the sacred nature of the exchange. In cases where I made similar transgressions early on in my fieldwork I was alerted to this fact in no uncertain terms. Having thus internalised these modes of deportment, I found myself inwardly cringing at the inappropriateness of the visitors’ behaviour. Luang Phò Phan, however, was being a good host and did not draw attention to the gauche behaviour of his guests.

Despite the pervasiveness of confusion, most of the foreign participants approached the day’s events in a generally light-hearted manner.

A family group I was sitting near were completely in the dark. Chinese Malaysians from KL, they came because one family member who had come several times before had invited them. They all seemed to be having a good time, were laughing and joking with each other and spoke good-naturedly with me, but they didn’t have much idea what was going on, nor did they know that much about Buddhism although they said they were interested in learning.

However, divisions within the foreign audience itself also became an issue and a hindrance to translation. Members of the family group just mentioned complained that they didn’t understand Mr Lim’s explanations as they did not understand Hokkien. They were thus forced to rely more
heavily on the knowledge of their more experienced relative for instructions on the meaning of what they were doing and how to behave.

Thus a number of the participants who were longer-term devotees of Luang Phò Phan and who had a better understanding of the ceremony would also perform the role of guides and hosts for their less experienced companions. Another family group from KL (with whom I shared lunch) consisted of a husband and wife who had attended the rites for four consecutive years running after they noticed an improvement to their business following their first visit; they had brought their niece to participate for the first time and joked that she was a ‘rookie’ and that they had to show her the ropes. The niece meanwhile admitted that she was more interested in doing some shopping in Hat Yai after the ceremony than in the ceremony itself, though she still found it ‘interesting’.

During the rituals, I found myself in the unorthodox position for an anthropologist of being the (relative) cultural insider compared to the people I was studying. On several occasions during the rituals, visitors, perplexed as to how they should sit, kneel, hold their hands, or bow, would look around at me and see what I was doing and then imitate me. Thus, in a sense, I too was transformed into a host of sorts.

Another response to this unfamiliarity was to present elements of the rites as pre-made ‘packages’ for the participation and consumption of guests. The procession into the monastery was one example of this. Another was the offering of rice to monks which occurred later in the morning. This is one of the most fundamental ways of making merit (tham bun). The symbolic centrality of rice in Thailand makes the offering of this staple a central element of sacred exchange between laity and monks and expresses the dependence of the latter of the former. At Wat Sai Khao this element of the rite was simulated for the benefit of the foreign participants. Two bowls were set up at the front of the wihan: a gilded rice serving bowl, and a monk’s
alms bowl. The guests were then asked to line up and transfer a spoonful of rice from the serving bowl to the alms bowl, which they all dutifully did. In this case the foreigners are provided with the rice and merely have to do the manual labour of moving a spoonful or rice a few centimetres. At the time this struck me as an empty parody of the ‘real thing’. I wondered what merit such an action can conceivably generate. It occurred to me that these rich foreigners were merely the consumers of a religious experience. The whole day’s events were put on for them, as a package, in exchange for which they make donations of money.

As this example also shows, the accommodation of visitors facilitates a certain “standardisation of facilities” (Erik Cohen, cited in Tomasi 2002:18). The various kinds of devotion usually practised at such ceremonies – the offering of rice, the offering of various objects to the monks, the pouring of water – are provided to the visitors in exchange for money. Many of the visitors may turn up with nothing but money and fully participate in the day’s events. Money, the “frictionless surface to history” (Graeber 2001:94) becomes the equivalent of all devotional acts that go to make up the Kathina ceremony. My sense of the centrality of money was strengthened when in the afternoon, during the speeches, another bowl was passed around the congregation soliciting yet more donations. However, this did not provoke any visible outrage and many individuals reached to their wallets to add donations. From a financial point of view the ceremony was a huge success. It was announced at the end of proceedings that an amount of roughly one and a half million baht (A$60,000) was raised. This was a huge amount to raise at a remote provincial monastery and was far in excess of the amounts raised at other Kathina ceremonies I attended in the South. Even Wat Chang Hai, the centre of the cult of Luang Phò Thuat and one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations in the South, did not raise anything like this amount in that year.
Differences in systems of valuation meant that many visitors saw the amount of money raised as quite modest. One long-term devotee of Luang Phò Phan from Singapore who had been attending these ceremonies since 1969 told me in an interview that the Kathina ceremonies raised over one million baht every year, which “wasn’t very much”.

The emphasis on hospitality as a national quality was clearly expressed to my by one Thai man, who helped officiate the ceremonies and was a regular attendant of the Wat Sai Khao Kathina. As we sat and talked in the monastery grounds he winced and looked fed up every time he was forced to pause and wait for yet another deafening fusillade of Chinese crackers to pass. I asked if he was sick of this (büa), and he admitted he was, but the trope of hospitality overrode any objection he might have. “It is our culture,” he told me, “We try to make our guests feel comfortable,” evoking a pragmatic sense of Thainess, adept at divesting itself of particularity and bending with the breeze. Such a comment is reminiscent of the manner in which state discourses are expressed in metaphors of intimacy, in this case by evoking the notion of the tourist as family guest (Herzfeld 1997:5).

The Limits of Hybridity

What do these observations allow us to say about such an apparently hybrid event? The concept of hybridity is sometimes celebrated because it implies resistance to the supposedly homogenising tendencies of globalisation (P. Jackson 1999).306 Similarly, in the case of writing on Thai religion, the concept has been deployed to convey the manner in which various ‘marginal’ religious forms, such as urban spirit mediums (Pattana 1999a, 1999b, 2005a, 2005b), or urban religious movements such as

306 Not to be confused with Peter A. Jackson.

However, the concept of hybridity has been subject to a great deal of critique over recent years (e.g. Dirlik 1997). One main point of contention is that the concept, as the negation of the notion of purity, does not acknowledge its simultaneous dependence on this very notion. This is one example of the general principle by which the “the conceptual act of negation always presupposes a position from which that negation takes place” (Butler 1997:38).

The concern with hybridity among anthropologists is itself integral to the shift from modernist to postmodernist theory.... The transgressive potential ascribed to hybridisation necessarily presupposes systems and categories to be subverted, that is, presupposes modernist notions of order. Simultaneously, postmodern and post-colonial scholars celebrate hybridity as routine and normal and as integral to all historical language- and culture-building, which defies modernist notions of cultural boundedness in terms of ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’ (Brendbekken 2003:58).

For Nederveen Pieterse, the historical ordinariness of hybridity renders it not as an endpoint for analysis but rather a starting point: “for in the end the real problem is not hybridity – which is common throughout history – but boundaries and the social proclivity to boundary fetishism. Hybridity is unremarkable and is noteworthy only from the point of view of boundaries that have been essentialised” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:220). He then reiterates this point: “The importance of hybridity is that it problematises boundaries” (Nederveen Pieterse 2001:220). The ordinariness of hybridity in history leads us to ask the more important and interesting question of how and why hybridisation fails or is limited in some way.
Similar arguments have been put forward to challenge the simplistic notion that globalisation involves the increasing overcoming of boundaries and cultural homogenisation. Anna Tsing (2000) has argued for the importance of considering the terrain which cultural flows must navigate, and to discern the features that channel, direct, and limit their possibilities. In a similar vein, Geschiere and Meyer have called attention to the “dialectics of flow and closure”, or “flux and fix” that characterise contemporary cultural traffic (Geschiere and Meyer 1998:601-2). It is necessary to move beyond the notion that represents globalisation as a purely homogenising force that can only either be resisted or succumbed to. Instead, it is important to be aware of the micro-dynamics of cultural flows, where flows themselves produce the assertion of boundaries, and revitalise claims to difference. It is in this spirit that this chapter seeks to investigate the apparent hybridity and cultural cross-over of the Kathina ceremony and to illuminate instead the play of both flow and closure that are apparent in the negotiations that take place in this context.

Such interactions require the complex interplay of boundary crossing and boundary maintenance, of recognition and incommensurability, and of sameness and difference. In the context of the robe-offering ceremony, as with other cross-border religious interactions in southern Thailand, it is the complex negotiation that takes place, where boundaries and differences are simultaneously elided and evoked, problematised and realised, and where essentialised notions of national difference find their expression in the trope of hospitality.

_The Sanctity of (National) Difference_

While all travel might be ‘sacred’ because it entails a structural departure from the ordinary and everyday, where “[f]undamental is the
contrast between the ordinary/compulsory work state spent ‘at home’ and
the nonordinary/voluntary ‘away from home’ sacred state” (Graburn
1989:25), the act of movement in itself can be viewed then as a form of
sacralisation. I would argue that the movement across national boundaries
enhances this sense. National boundaries produce powerful performative
effects as boundaries. They are tangible manifestations of the power of
nation-states to create zones of disjuncture and the potential for crossings.

The fact that Thailand itself, and not merely its monks, has developed
an aura of sacred power was clearly made by Graham.307 As a long-term
devotee, and ‘serious practitioner’, he has quite a low opinion of the usual
Malaysian and Singaporean devotees, who, he considers, are primarily
involved in a selfish search for personal power, rather than genuine spiritual
development. However, his statement also reveals the sanctity of national
difference:

Thailand has projected an image of supernatural power for years and
years and years to Malaysia and Singapore. And as a result of which,
you get a lot of devotees coming here due to their greed, anxiety, and
their own motives, because they’ve heard you’ve either got a superman
here or superman there. And, they feel that when they dawn on an
amulet, so to speak, they are protected from various factors. It might be
true, it might be not...

When I was young, when anybody talked about Thailand, they would
always say if you want to get things done, or you wish to have the bad
luck eradicated, go to Thailand. The monks are very powerful. So in
Southeast Asia, it has been established that Thailand is the place.

Heather, the wife of Mr Lim, also evoked ethnic and national difference
when describing her own motivations for patronising Thai monks. Like

307 The long-time Malaysian devotee of Thai Buddhism mentioned in previous chapters.
Graham, she has been coming to the Kathina at Wat Sai Khao for many years. She characterised her patronage of the ceremonies at Wat Sai Khao in terms of relative wealth between Malaysians and Thais; the Thai monks are quite poor and are in need of assistance, which Malaysians are able to provide. Therefore she comes up to donate money to them and thereby do a good deed. She was sceptical about the motives of some Thai monks. Many travel to Malaysia in search of money, she claimed. Indeed, as she told me, her own ‘master’,\textsuperscript{308} Luang Phò Phan, and Dr Thawi were all exceptions to this. Her master’s purity was testified to by the fact that he remains a virgin to this day.

In the context of the ceremony itself essentialised national categories were also deployed to produce a curious moment of solidarity-within-difference. During the speeches, much was made of the differences between the national groups, especially in terms of their material prosperity. The celebrity monk, Dr Thawi made a speech in English during the 1999 ceremony. At that time Thailand was still very much in the throes of the economic crisis of 1997. “We Thai are poor but we have faith,” he stated. And: “Malaysians and Singaporeans have prospered because they rejected the IMF solution”. This statement elicited a rousing round of applause from the audience, the only spontaneous outburst of this kind during the entire ceremony. This moment of cross-border solidarity was achieved precisely through the evoking the notion of the spiritually rich but materially poor, passive Thai succumbing to the will of foreigners. Through this manoeuvre he made use of this trope as a critique of Thai state policy as too ‘hospitable’ to the will of outsiders, while simultaneously performing the selfsame hospitality towards foreigners. National difference was paradoxically both evoked and elided – through common resentment towards the infantilising

\textsuperscript{308} Malaysians commonly use this word to refer to monks with whom they are in a devotional relationship.
pronouncements of the IMF. The Thai are constructed as inherently more spiritual compared to the Malaysians and Singaporeans, who are both seen to be more materialistic, and wealthy – and therefore inherently more modern (in the manner desired by the IMF). An attribute of this modernity, the implication seems to be, is the ability of the nation to manage its affairs as a fully mature member of the community of nations and to avoid the paternalistic, and patronising, intervention of the IMF.

Conclusions

While in this thesis I have talked of ‘religious tourism’, this characterisation should be understood as provisional at best. The rites at Wat Sai Khao defy categorisation as either (genuine) pilgrimage or (staged) tourism. Though not specifically organised by the tourism industry, the number of participants unfamiliar with the ritual proceedings necessitated many elements common to the tourism experience – tour buses, events provided in ‘packages’, an insider/outsider ‘tour guide’ to provide enough rudimentary information to allow visitors to take part in the ritual proceedings. In many ways the ‘bubble of home’ phenomenon common to much mass tourism was reproduced, for example allowing Chinese ritual forms such as crackers and lion dances within the framework of the Kathina or the provision of a Chinese lunch. However, while the assumption has been that this kind of accommodation on the part of the host culture can be the most detrimental (e.g. Graburn 1989:35) and can lead to an erosion of boundaries and ‘local culture’, I would suggest that, in this case at least, it is precisely this accommodation that allows a sense of difference and separation to be maintained.

It would be easy to view this event as an example of cultural hybridity. However, I argue that far from representing an erosion of boundaries
categorical distinctions, especially those that intertwine ethnic and national identities, are highly significant in both the motivations for participation and the negotiation of the ceremony itself between its composite groups. As a counterpoint to the notion of hybridity, popular in contemporary theorisations of Thai religion, I consider a specific example of negotiations of self and other, sameness and difference, which not only leave boundaries intact but actually reinforce them. Instead of emphasising the blurring or ‘overcoming’ of boundaries, I try to capture the manner in which totalising entities, such as nation-states, underpin and facilitate cultural flows, and how they are utilised to make sense of and negotiate interactions.

Thus, through this case study I sought to complicate further the picture of ‘religious tourism’ that I have been developing over the last two chapters. As in the case of the Vegetarian Festival, the lines between tourist, pilgrim and long-term devotee are certainly blurred and particular kinds of relationships transform over time, so that, for example, tourists may develop long-standing devotional relationships as a result of a telling first encounter with a ritual specialist. Such relationships may come to be sustained over decades and form the basis for further ‘recruiting’ and development of a ritual event such as the Kathina.

An easy characterisation as a staged tourist event is also challenged by the fact that the robe-offering was not merely simulated for the sake of foreigners. Local devotees of Luang Phò Phan – Thai villagers from around Songkhla province and further afield – also took part in the ceremony. While sharing the same ritual space it was as though (at least) two parallel but separate ceremonies were carried out with occasional moments of solidarity and exchange.

Even the distinction between host and guest should also be problematised in this context. Maechi devotees of Luang Phò Phan travelled from their own monasteries to help with the food preparation, and one
female follower of Luang Phò Phan even travelled from her home in the USA to sell robes to the foreign visitors. The event was thus the site of a number of ‘pilgrimages’ even on the part of many whom I have described as ‘hosts’. Thus, a simple distinction between a stable ‘host’ population versus a mobile ‘guest’ one cannot be made. Furthermore, the more experienced foreign participants in the ceremony, including myself, also came to behave as ‘hosts’, directing and guiding their less experienced companions.

Despite the fact that a stable distinction between insider and outsider, host and guest, cannot be maintained, and despite the apparent blending of ‘Thai’ and ‘Chinese’ religious forms, the event should not be thought of as simply ‘hybrid’. Differences that mattered were asserted through a variety of discursive and spatial practices, sometimes subtle, as in the Thai women parodying the Chinese music, and sometimes explicit, as in the spatial separation of the lunch banquets and the evocation of national differences to ‘explain’ the reasons their involvement in the ceremony. Instead of ending with the recognition of hybridity my approach in this paper has been to address directly the deployment of totalities, such as national entities and essentialised ethnic differences, and to recognise the play of ‘flux and fix’, the manner in which boundaries are both fetishised and elided to facilitate exchanges while simultaneously maintaining a sense of stable distinction.
Conclusion
The Bodhisattva and the Borderland

During the course of my fieldwork the amulet magazine Saksit ran a series of articles entitled “In the Footsteps of the Great Bodhisattva Somdet Luang Phò Thuat”. Written by a Buddhist monk Phra Sittha Chetawan, who had retraced the routes taken by the great bodhisattva, the articles showed him paying his respects at a number of the sacred sites associated with Luang Phò Thuat. As would be expected, Wat Chang Hai and Wat Pha Kho were featured prominently, as well as many other sites associated with Luang Phò Thuat’s journeys, such as the Sai Khao waterfalls in Pattani, the cave in Sabayoi in which he carved his name, the tree under which his umbilicus was buried, and so on. More surprisingly, some sites not associated with the dominant narrative of his life were also included. For example, Phra Sittha visited the “world’s largest Luang Phò Thuat” statue on the hill near Wat Sai Khao. The articles did not explicitly state that this was a site visited by Luang Phò Thuat, but the inclusion nevertheless affirmed it as a site of pilgrimage for those interested in ‘following in his footsteps’. This is just one example of the continuously emergent sacred geography associated with Luang Phò Thuat and the manner in which new locations are rendered part of his story through manifestations of his charisma.

In a sense, this thesis is founded on a similar act. As in the Saksit series, this thesis has also retraced Luang Phò Thuat’s footsteps. And like all such retracings, it does not merely reveal a stable, pre-existing reality but brings into view new elements of the (social and political) landscape. Like the

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309 The Thai title of this series is tam roi bat phra mahaphotisat jao phu prasoet luang pu thuat yiap nam thale jüt (which translates as something like. “In the footsteps of the great bodhisattva, the most excellent lord Luang Pu Thuat who treads saltwater fresh”. Examples of this column can be found in issues 412-419 from the year 2000. I am not sure exactly how many issues this series contained.
objects of this study, this work is also a “social activity whereby ‘givenness’ is produced and transformed” (M. Jackson 1996:11).

The scope of focus, geographically and thematically, has meant that this study has been exploratory in the sense that it deals with broad processes in both ethnographic and historical contexts. By necessity, my research and analysis has not been characterised by the level of intimacies developed in localised settings that are usually considered the hallmark of ethnography. However I would assert that this alternative methodology and approach – dictated in part by the material itself – has resulted in productive juxtapositions that open up new spaces for thinking about topics that are often separated by analytic and disciplinary subject specialities, for example religion, tourism, the state, “Chineseness”, and transnational flows.

The State Disaggregated, and Retained

This thesis has sought to reveal a particular vision, and version, of southern Thailand, over which Luang Phò Thuat presides as a patron saint of sorts, at least for some of the population. As I have indicated, he does not hold this position for Muslims and most minority members. The version of the South he sustains is therefore partial and politically charged. I have approached the construction of this vision through the framework of state formation, suggesting that this is a disaggregated and dispersed phenomenon. Making use of Tony Day’s (2002) arguments about this process, I have argued for the need to bring culture into an analysis of the state, and to emphasise continuities across time instead of creating a strict periodisation between ‘premodern’ and ‘modern’ eras. I have also argued that it is necessary to move beyond a mere study of state apparatuses, officials and policy to gain a fuller understanding of various “state effects” (Trouillot 2001). Emphasising the processual nature of state formation – a
project that is never finished – I have also drawn attention to the dimension of popular participation. I have tried to emphasise the manner in which peripheral actors produce the state, rather than viewing state formation in the periphery purely as an expansion of the power of the centre. As Kemper notes, “virtually all studies of nationalism concentrate on what the centre does to the periphery” (Kemper 1999:30). Such studies therefore assume an opposition between national and local. By contrast, this thesis focuses on “the dialectic of local and national interests that produced the boundaries of national territory” (Sahlins 1989:8). In other words, state power, or state formation, in the periphery is not just the result of impulses arising from the margins or from the Centre as dominant source of power and influence, but is expressed through network of alliances, especially economic ones, which develop between the centre and the periphery. These networks are complex and, as McCargo (2006, 2007) has argued, apparently ‘local’ issues, such as the eruption of ‘separatist’ violence since 2004, can actually be be product of machinations between networks of elites whose activities and influence are both ‘regional’ but also intimately connected to the centre.

This ethnographic, disaggregated approach to state formation means that it is unnecessary to oppose the institutions and apparatuses of the state to wider society. Following Gramsci (as related in Trouillot 2001), I do not try to oppose state and society, as has been the case in much discussion of ‘civil society’ in Thailand (e.g. Chatthip 1991). Instead, it is possible to consider how a range of activities at a number of levels contribute to a particular ‘state of being’. For example, instead of thinking of the process of ‘territorialisation’ purely in terms of state efforts to administer and control the population and resources of a particular geographical area, I consider the informal mechanisms by which a range of actors contribute to the process of state formation. By focussing on the stories, actions, rituals and sensibilities that attempt to make the Thai state ‘at home’ in the South I demonstrate that
this is a process of active participation at a number of levels. The production of territory involves the creation of roots and routine assumptions about the nature of the past and the relationship of a local population to location conceived within a wider national story. In other words, territorialisation not only involves the bureaucratic control of a region but the linking of its past to the past of the nation.

The historical genesis of a figure like Luang Phò Thuat demonstrates the importance of sites of potency in the landscape as they are connected and founded through the journeys of sacred ancestral figures. I have drawn attention to the visionary work of Buddhist monks and others who excavate, recycle and rearticulate details from the landscape and deploy local knowledge to tap its potency. Engaged in social poetics, they deploy “the debris of the past for all kinds of present purposes” (Herzfeld 1997:24). When successful, these skilled deployments underpin commonsense understandings of locality and belonging and, as it were, become a part of the landscape, the ground upon which one walks.

The charisma of locality and local figures contributes to the magic of the state (Taussig 1997). However, the presence of the state contributes in its own way to local sources of charisma. It is worth recalling here the teacher from Yala, who commented that the schools, hospital wings and other state institutions, constructed with the assistance of Wat Chang Hai and bearing Luang Phò Thuat’s name, allowed him to “see the charisma” (hen barami) of Luang Phò Thuat more clearly. In an endless feedback loop, the charisma of the local religious figure and the charisma of the state support each other simultaneously. Furthermore, as I have suggested, other ‘rational’ forms of knowledge, such as the use of historical texts (tamra) and the reproduction of images and myths in museum displays, support the ‘reality effect’ surrounding Luang Phò Thuat, bolstering his charisma by making it visible.
While this approach supports an understanding of the state which is much more diverse, decentred, and disaggregated than is often assumed, it is equally important to acknowledge that the state continues to lend itself to fetishisation (see Taussig 1997). Repeating Herzfeld’s (1997) admonishment that an awareness of stereotypes in the social sciences should not blind us to their power in social life, it is also necessary to take into account the ongoing monolithic appearance of the state, the ‘state idea’ (Abrams 1988). Thus I am not arguing that the state is ‘nothing more’ than networks of interaction, as some aspects of Day’s (2002) approach could imply. On the contrary it is also essential to consider the ‘something more’ these networks produce to truly grasp the performative dimension of the state. In short, demystifying the state is only half the work required. The ‘truth’ of the state lies somewhere in the interaction between its many disaggregated networks and the appearance of unity.

It is worth bearing in mind here Geertz’s argument that charisma draws on ‘centres’ of various kinds, even when apparently antagonistic towards those centres. For Geertz, charisma is “a sign of involvement with the animating centres of society” (1977:151). Thus while the efflorescence of popular religious forms has been interpreted as a form of fragmentation in discussions of Thai religion, my approach has been to consider the underlying unities inherent within this proliferation, the extent to which the production of religious charisma continues to participate in the animating centres of society.

310 For example, he states that all states are “culturally constructed repertoires of practices reticulating out into the world at large, saved only from total dissolution into the multiplicity of power networks that constitute them by the magical and illusory boundaries that define their ‘statehood’” (Day 2002:292). While I endorse the notion of networks, and the ‘magical’ qualities of states, Day’s argument would suggest that states can be unmasked to reveal them as illusory and ‘nothing more’ than networks.

311 As was discussed in chapter two.
In part this argument seeks to resist, or at least mediate, the impulse toward demystification. In contrast, I have tried to bear in mind Walter Benjamin’s injunction that “truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it” (cited in Taussig 1999:2). To this end, my method of argument has been more dialectical than empiricist, focussing on tensions within emergent processes rather than on trying to stabilise categories and analyse their properties.

This method applies not only to the question of state formation but other key terms focused on in this thesis, for example the value of ‘Chineseness’.

Chineseness, Commoditytisation and Transnational Networks

In keeping with a processual approach, this thesis has not involved focussing on ‘the Chinese’ or ‘the Thai’ as discrete ethnic groups. I have instead emphasised the manner in which signs and symbols, dispositions, and stereotypes are produced in different moments, for example within ritual contexts or the construction of spaces for tourist consumption. In these complex encounters, ‘Thainess’ and ‘Chineseness’ play central roles. Luang Phò Thuat has featured as a figure of such complex encounters as he embodies both ‘Thai’ and ‘Chinese’ qualities, providing a mechanism for their simultaneous expression.

By thinking about ‘Thainess’ and ‘Chineseness’ not as mutually exclusive qualities, but as identities that can be creatively deployed in different circumstances, I have considered the way they mediate relationships across difference. The ‘Chineseness’ that is expressed in the southern Thai borderland is not simply the expression of a local cultural identity of an ethnic minority. It is also produced as a quality in tourist and other commodity markets. Local businesses, religious specialists and
municipal governments deploy expressions of Chineseness to appeal to cross-border patrons. The Sinification of the landscape in Hat Yai and elsewhere is as much the product of tourism and pilgrimage across the border as an expression of the growing confidence and affluence of a local Sino-Thai population. But just as the production of Chineseness involves the production of ‘sameness’, it is also inflected by difference. Even in situations where local Sino-Thai produce Chinese rituals for Chinese patrons from Malaysia and Singapore, it is their ‘Thai’ qualities, or the changing hierarchies of value produced by crossing the border, which give the local events their attraction. Thus I have found that both ‘Chinese-Chinese’ and ‘Thai-Chinese’ religious interactions display a number of remarkably similar characteristics. In these interactions, nationall-based, as well as ethnically-based, distinctions and differences are evoked and utilised in negotiations of various kinds.

I have also suggested that transnational interactions should not be thought of as primarily destructive of national forms, despite the unorthodoxies that they often introduce. Recall the spirit medium in Hat Yai who said that if a monastery or shrine in southern Thailand appears to be prosperous it is due to Malaysian influence. As I have shown, Malaysian and Singaporean money is a primary mechanism allowing people to “see the charisma” of Buddhism in the borderland. These signs of prosperity, and appearances of charisma, generate further networks of patronage, investment and future development.

Dominant constructions of Thainess connect ‘proper’ Thai identity with orthodox Theravada Buddhism, properly reproduced through the institutions of the Sangha. A conventional Thai understanding would assume that transnational Chinese religious networks would tend towards unorthodoxy and fragmentation, especially those characterised by highly commoditised sites, objects and interactions. However, I am arguing the
opposite. In fact, tolerance of unorthodox Chinese forms is greater because they reproduce and support Buddhalogical space, albeit an unorthodox one. Throughout this thesis I have suggested that transnational factors and actors have had a constitutive role in the production of charisma in southern Thailand. It is my contention that transnational actors contribute to the production of a national self by means of various modes of participation. They help to perpetuate a certain version of the nation and so must therefore be considered agents of state formation in Day’s terms. This recognition accords with recent histories of Thailand (e.g. Baker and Pasuk 2005) which treat various Chinese actors as central in Thai history rather than “symbolic pollutants” (Herzfeld 1997).

The production of sacred sites linked to the process of state building intersects with the commoditisation of these sites as tourist attractions or places of pilgrimage. Likewise, local knowledge and magical objects are mass produced and circulated both within Thailand and abroad. These processes of production and circulation do not float free but are grounded in local and national hierarchies of value. Locality takes on new value as it is incorporated into novel flows, but the materiality and specificity of the local continue to play a role. Local sites, materials, and the knowledge thereof are crucial to the production of charisma that allows objects to be desired and to circulate. Thus the processes that have led to the emergence of figures like Luang Phò Thuat, which are thoroughly concerned with the production of place and the ‘grounding’ of a particular world view, feed into novel patterns of circulation. The sacred geography of the nation-state provides the sacred infrastructure for novel processes of circulation of images, objects and people.
The South Today, or the End for Luang Phò Thuat?

Like many tourism-based networks, the networks of patronage and pilgrimage that characterise cross-border religious interactions are volatile and subject to the vagaries of local political and economic conditions (Smith 1989). Furthermore, commoditised religious production is subject to unstable cycles which see massive charisma wax and wane according to the whim of the market. For example, the Phra Jatukam Ramathep amulets that recently exploded onto the amulet scene and seemed to be the ‘Next Big Thing’ of the amulet trade already appear to be on the wane. In a typical boom and bust cycle, amulets which inspired scenes of pandemonium which led to one person being trampled to death appear to be rapidly losing favour. Temples that have invested large amounts of money in the amulets are left with enormous debts and masses of now unwanted amulets (The Nation 22 October 2007). By contrast, one of the distinctive features of Luang Phò Thuat has been his endurance and stability. He has been a popular figure both locally and in the wider amulet trade since the 1960s. Notably, in the wake of the 1997 economic crash, when the amulet trade as a whole experienced a downturn, that this was one of the few amulets that retained its value. This durability suggests Luang Phò Thuat is grounded in more enduring social relations. I would suggest he is grounded in the particular vision of the South as a unified entity that I have argued he both performs and sustains.

Despite Luang Phò Thuat’s close connections to the production of the Buddhist nation-state in the South, I have argued that to view Luang Phò Thuat purely as a colonising figure misrepresents the tenor of his presence and the nature of the hopes that he embodies. He has undoubtedly been closely associated with the institutions and officials of the Thai state – the armed forces, the construction of schools and other state institutions – and he has both been instrumental in the production of Buddhalogical space and the
maintenance of both personal and political boundaries. However, the tenor of his presence is also one that embodies the possibility of rapprochement. His is the compassion of a bodhisattva which is capable, at least in theory, of creating a space of tolerance across difference.

This may offer a partial key to understanding the ubiquity of Luang Phò Thuat images, especially in the lower South. Images contain within themselves a world view and are therefore not neutral or objective (Morgan 2005). Is it in this infinite reproduction, in the omnipresence of the image in public (and private) life, that materialises an abstract authority. In a sense it is consumption which manifests that state, as the ubiquitous consumption of Luang Phò Thuat and other sacred images as commodities contributes to the process of state formation. And, as Kemper argues, “goods are put to new purposes. They allow people to think the nation” (1999:33).312

This is no simple matter of a state-authority imposing its vision on the population but rather a mass participation in state formation. The tension and violence in Patani (which is now out in the open) finds its symptom on the streets and in the shopping centres of Hat Yai and Songkhla in the mass-produced images of the local saint. Although not a part of the ‘deep South’, the border provinces in which the conflict is occurring, I would argue that there is a widespread investment in the notion of a unified South, even if this has never been a reality. However, if the violence continues and makes this notion of the South untenable, even to imagine, it may mean the end for Luang Phò Thuat.

If and when this comes to pass is uncertain. Until that time, the always-yet-to-come quality of the bodhisattva, continues represents the hope for unity. The bodhisattva represents a process of becoming and so is an apt metaphor for the ongoing process of state formation in the southern

312 It should be noted that Kemper only applies this argument to ‘Third World’ countries. I would argue though that this notion can be applied more broadly.
borderland. Perhaps then, Luang Phò Thuat’s ubiquity in the South better represents the longing for unity within the open-ended process of state formation, asserted precisely because it is not (yet) true.
Appendix 1
Guest Arrivals at Accommodation Establishments in Hat Yai. January-March 1999

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<td>Australia</td>
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<td>India</td>
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<td>Others</td>
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<td>342,409</td>
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<td>132,136</td>
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Source: TAT Statistics
Glossary of terms

Terms are Thai unless otherwise noted.

Ajan
Master, teacher, professor, learned monk

Anam nikai
“Vietnamese sect”; along with the Jin nikai, one of two Mahayana Buddhist orders officially recognised by the Thai Sangha

Aphinihan
“Miracle”

Arahant (Pali)
Enlightened disciple of the Buddha. The pinnacle of achievement within an orthodox Theravada Buddhist framework.

Phra arahant (Thai)

Bap
Demerit, negative karma. Opposite of “Bun”

Bodhisattva (Sanskrit)
Buddha-to-be. In Theravada tradition refers to earlier incarnations of Gotama Buddha and future Buddha, Sri Ariya Mettraya

Bodhisatta (Pali)

phra photisat (Thai)
Buddha-to-be. In Theravada tradition refers to earlier incarnations of Gotama Buddha and future Buddha, Sri Ariya Mettraya

Bot
Ordination hall

Bun
Merit, accumulated positive karma

(Bun) barami
Accumulated merit of certain extraordinary individuals, associated with religious and/or political excellence and legitimacy; often translated as “charisma”

Chao nam
“Water folk”; Sea Gypsies

Chedi
Reliquary stupa

Jin nikai
“Chinese sect”; along with the Anam nikai, one of two Mahayana Buddhist orders officially recognised by the Thai Sangha

Kamma (Pali)
Karma, or ‘action’; the principle of moral cause and effect

Kam (Thai)

Kathina (Pali)
Robe-offering ceremony

Thòt kathin (Thai)

Keji ajan
“Magic” monks; monks with a reputation for supra-normal powers.

Kris / keris (Malay)
Sacred knife in Malay traditions
Khatha  Sacred formula; mantra
Khaek    “Guest”. A derogatory term generally used for Muslims and people of South Asian origin.
Khon song (jao)  Spirit medium
Khon tai  Southerner
Khwam pen thai  “Thainess”
Kiao  Ritual palanquin for carrying statues of deities
Krap  Act of bowing, e.g. before sacred images
Kuti  Monk’s dwelling
Lak müang  City pillar
Luang Phò / Luang Pu  “Venerable father” / “Venerable grandfather”; colloquial title of respect given to respected, usually senior, monks
Luang phò thuat  Southern Thai title given to “ancestral” monks considered to have enduring spiritual presence
(Kan) lui fai  Firewalking (ceremony); carrying sacred objects over hot coals / fire
(Kan) lui nam  (Ceremony) of carrying sacred objects through water
Luk jin  Sino-Thai; lit. “Chinese children”
Luksit  Disciple
(Khon) Malayu  Malay (people)
Maechi  White-robed female ascetics; Buddhist “nuns”
Mahanikai  “Great sect”; majority sect of the Thai Buddhist Sangha
Manora (nora)  Southern Thai ritual dance/healing tradition
Metta  Compassion (e.g. of bodhisattva)
Mò du  Generic term for provider of sacred services, e.g. horoscope reading or other forms of divination
Müang  Premodern Tai political unit
Munnithi  Charitable foundation
Nam mon  Holy water
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nangtalung</td>
<td>Southern Thai shadow puppet tradition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nibbana (Pali)</td>
<td>The extinction of suffering that marks the end of the cycle of birth-death-rebirth or samsara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipphana (Thai)</td>
<td>Vision, often occurring during meditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimit</td>
<td>Sakai; negrito forest-dwellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patani</td>
<td>Former Malay Muslim kingdom. Territory roughly corresponding to contemporary Thai provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and part of Songkhla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pattani</td>
<td>The province of Pattani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phak tai</td>
<td>Southern region of Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pak tai</td>
<td>The South; the fourteen (provinces) of the South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phi</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phansa</td>
<td>Buddhist lent; rains retreat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phra</td>
<td>Monk, deity, Buddha, respected spirit; title of respect conveying sacred nature of being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phra khrūang</td>
<td>Amulet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phra Pa</td>
<td>Forest monk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phu Mi Bun</td>
<td>“Person with merit”. Associated with millennialism. Akin to bodhisattva.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phuttha phanit</td>
<td>“Commercial Buddhism”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pit thòng</td>
<td>To attach gold leaf to a sacred object as a devotional act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ple</td>
<td>Cradle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Kan) pluk sek / phuttaphisek</td>
<td>Ritual of sacralisation or enchantment of objects by Buddhist monks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rüang lao</td>
<td>Oral story; folk tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run</td>
<td>Batch of amulets or statues. Images produced in same batch are generally considered to have similar qualities and efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai sin</td>
<td>White cord used to conduct sacred power in certain ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sak yan</td>
<td>Tattooing of sacred symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saksit</td>
<td>“Magical” potency, efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samnak song</td>
<td>Buddhist sanctuary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San jao</td>
<td>Joss house; spirit medium’s residence / place of business; Brahmanical or animist shrine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangha (Pali)</td>
<td>Community of monks; monkhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satsana</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sema</td>
<td>Boundary stones, marking boundaries of sacralised Buddhist space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setthi</td>
<td>Rich man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Siang) siam si</td>
<td>(Casting) divining staves, a form of fortune telling of Chinese origin but widely practised in Thai temples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sing saksit</td>
<td>Sacred objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somdet</td>
<td>Royal title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somdet jao</td>
<td>“Royal Lord”. Title given to certain legendary monks in Satingphra region said to have been monastic landlords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Phitthi) song nam</td>
<td>Lustration (ceremony)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tai hong</td>
<td>To die a violent or inauspicious death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesakan (thü sin) kj</td>
<td>Chinese Vegetarian Festival, most commonly associated with cities of Phuket and Trang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamnak</td>
<td>Spirit medium’s residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamra</td>
<td>Authoritative texts; in this thesis the term primarily refers to royal decrees of land endowments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai Islam</td>
<td>Politically correct term for Thai Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thammajarik</td>
<td>“Wandering Dhamma”; 1960s project to use Buddhist monks in conversion of non-Buddhist hill people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhammaraja (Pali)</td>
<td>Righteous ruler in Theravada Buddhist tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thammarat (Thai)</td>
<td>“Envoys of Dhamma”; 1960s project to use Buddhist monks in domestication of national periphery and fight against communism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Thammathut           | “Adherents of the Dhamma”; minority, royal-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sponsored sect of the Thai Buddhist Sanhga</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tham bun</td>
<td>To make merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesaban</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesamontri</td>
<td>Municipal councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thòt pha pa</td>
<td>“Forest robes” ceremony, similar to Kathina but can be performed any time of year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thuat</td>
<td>Lit. “great grandfather”; ancestor; (in southern Thailand) ancestral spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thudong</td>
<td>Ascetic practice undertaken by wandering monks. Involves extended periods in remote areas and a strict ascetic regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wai</td>
<td>Act of respect, typically placing palms of hands together and bowing slightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wai khru</td>
<td>To pay respect or thanksgiving to teacher, master, and source of sacred power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wan</td>
<td>Forest plants used in production of powder to make amulets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wat</td>
<td>Combination of Buddhist monastery and temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wihan</td>
<td>Shrine hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinaya (Pali)</td>
<td>Buddhist discipline. The code of monastic conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winai (Thai)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Winyan</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan</td>
<td>Sacred writing / symbols</td>
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</table>
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