



Modern Thai Literature

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Overview with historical and cultural contexts

- Literature as expression/mirror of the society
- "modern" = late c. 19th , ~ reign of King Rama V (King Chulalongkorn) (1868-1910)
- westernization/modernization



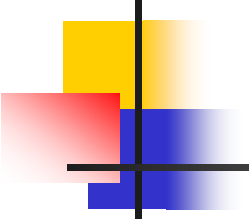
Changes in Modern Thai Literature

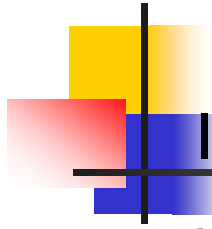
- genres
- purposes
- subject matter/content
- producers and consumers



Thai written "Classical" Literary Tradition

- Thai literary heritage dominated by oral tradition
- 1283 King Ramkhamhaeng Inscription (first appearance of Thai alphabets)
- purposes
 - glorify institutions (the monarchy and the religion (Buddhism))
 - teach and instill values and ideology
 - entertain (the royal family, the court and aristocrats)

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- genres : poetry as dominant form of court literature and creative expressions
 - emphasis on aesthetics of verse form, language and imagery
 - oral reading - "the music of poetry"
 - producers and consumers: the court
 - King as "patron of literature and arts"
 - Subject matter/content
 - Indic Epics : Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc.
 - Jataka tales
 - fantasy tales of magical kings and princes in exotic lands
 - travelogues



Shall I leave thee with
Indra would sweep thee high

Leave with the earth? Why,
Earth's Lord, O, my love

Leave with the waters?
Naga would I vow
'Tis fit, I allow,
Thee with thee-thy stake

the sky?

above

Nay,Nay!

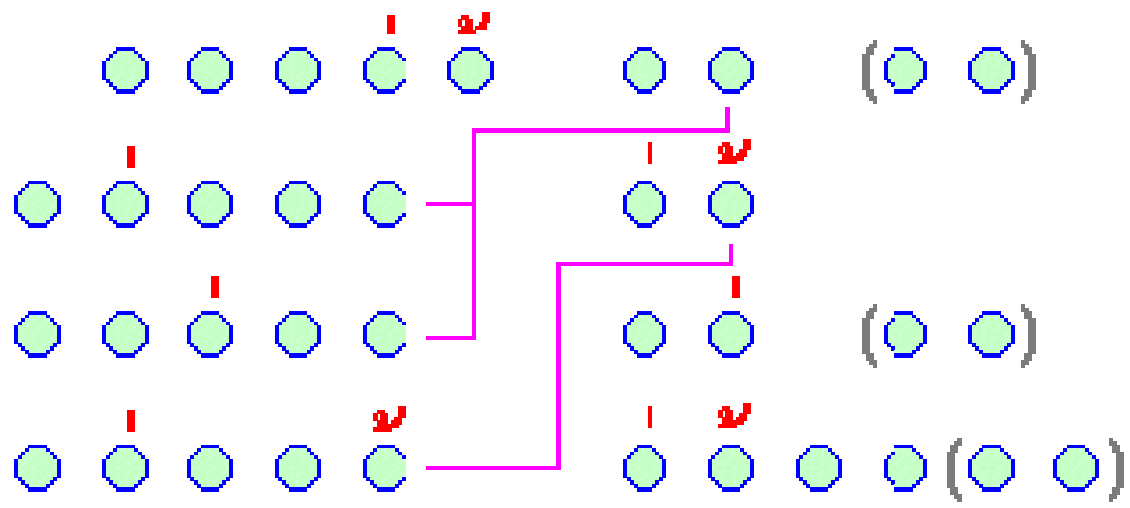
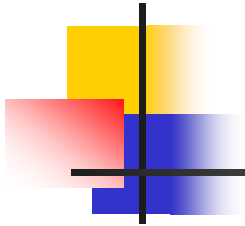
would thee seduce.

Enow!

thee take

to leave

thine own conscience



Khloong 4 versification pattern



Changes in Modern Thai Literature

- producers and consumers
 - literary society, journals and magazines replaced the court as center of literary activities
 - printing press
 - public access to literary works
 - public education: (the spread of literacy)
 - 1921 Compulsory Education Act



- genres

- prose as dominant form for creative expression
- new prose genres introduced from the West (via translated work)
 - short stories: (late 19th century) adopted well in Thai literary circles
 - novels: "realistic" fiction in real setting
 - slow growing acceptance of novels as serious literary genre in Thailand

- purposes

- raise social consciousness
- reflection, commentary on the society, self-criticism and philosophic questioning
- reflect complexity of modern Thai society: "Thailand is not a land of smiles"



- Buddhist values and beliefs

- a law of karma

- uncertainty and transiency of all things

- tolerance



Social, political contexts of modern Thai Literature

- 1932 : "revolution"- change to constitutional monarchy. (Rama VII)
 - political power transferred from aristocrats to "commoners" (military and civilians)
 - center of intellectual and creative activities shifted to the educated "middle class"
 - literary theme: redefine "nobility", denounce the old aristocrats- the rise of middle class, old social conventions/values vs. new freedom



- Post 1932

- conflict between military and civilian components of the "coup" group
 - the civilians (Pridi Bhanomyong): progressive minded, social reform, democratization
 - the military "Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkram": right wing, nationalist (1938-1944, 1948-1957)
- 1940's-1950's: military (authoritarian) govt.
 - "language reform" (spelling, simplification)
 - cultural mandates
 - censorship (literary works must be 'apolitical' and 'morally clean')



- late 1950's-early 1970's: "The American Era"

- military govt. continued

- national development (esp. rural development), with financial/economic and military aid from the US)

- growth of economic activity, spread of capitalists, development of powerful bureaucratic empire- raise the level of greed&corruption within the system

- social tension: urban-rural gap

- maldistributed income

- peasant insurgency in rural area esp. in impoverished northeast (Isan)

- "Cold War" in Asia: Anti- Communism

- Anti-Communism Act 1952

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- heavy press censorship (pretext: AntiComm.)

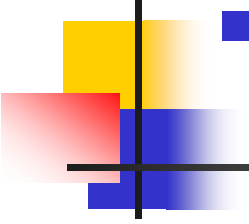
- progressive writers drawn to Marxist & Socialist View

- many radical intellectuals and writers jailed

- literature used to air dissatisfaction with social and political climate

- **October 14, 1973: student uprising**

- started as small movement for the restoration of constitutionalism
- mass demonstration
- the collapse of "dictatorship" regime

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- 1973-76: "exuberant democracy"
 - "literature for life" dominated the scene
 - raise social awareness
 - surge of short stories and poems (Literary prizes)
 - October 6, 1976: student protest
 - massacre of demonstrators
 - 1977 repression of freedom under right wing govt.



- Post 1977-now: Commercialism and Consumerism in literary works

- censorship lifted
- "mass produced" novels (serialized melodramas)
- New medium for "literary work": Television
 - (First Television broadcast in 1955)
 - soap opera series from melodrama novels (previously serialized)
 - Prof. Chetana Nagavajara: "The novels in Thailand are dead and gone. They are no longer written to be read, but to be seen."



- economic development:

- open conflicts of villagers & govt.

officialdom

- protests/demonstrations

- industrial pollution

- communities uprooted



Dates

- Sukhothai (C. 13th—15th)1231-1438
- Ayutthaya (1350-1767)
- Rattanakosin(Bangkok) (1782-present)
 - Rama IV (1851-1868)
 - Rama V (1868-1910)
 - Rama VI (1910-1925)
 - Rama VII (1925-1935)
 - Coup 1932
 - Phibun (1938-1944) (1948-1957)
 - Sarit (1957-1963)