The Construction of Sacredness of the Votive *Phlaeng Khorat*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the construction of social memory and local identity through practices of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. It is a folk performance that is adapted from *Phlaeng Kom* and 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* to become a performance for the reverence of the spirit of Thao Suranari in Nakhon Ratchasima province. Historical studies, such as Saipin Kaew-ngarmprasert (1995) and Chatri Prakitnonthakan (2007), explain that the performance is controlled by the state. However, anthropological studies, for example, Charles F. Keyes (2002), point out that the meaning system from locality-based construction depicts a resistance to the state. Here I argue against those two studies by applying Clifford Geertz's concept of interpretation of cultures. I also present a review from documentary research that is related to the development of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. The finding is that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* has been developed in the context of social development for it to make its own way into modern society. In the context, the local people juxtapose the feelings of uncertainty and the multiple signs of modernity. The identity presentation of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is included with nationalism signs constructed by elite and the localism signs formed with social memory of the local.

Keywords

Votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, Local Identity, Sacredness, Sign Healing

Introduction

Firstly, I would like to present some characteristics of *Phlaeng Kom* that has been recognized as the root of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* and votive *Phlaeng Khorat*[1]. The source is from a research study of *Phlaeng Khorat* written by a group of researchers from Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College and published in 1979. Here is the translation of a singing battle between two *Maw Phlaeng* (singers).

Boon: *You girl from uptown, aren't you, Miss Fire-Pussy Fueang?!*

Fueang: *You ask me if I'm from uptown, and you call me Miss Fire-Pussy Fueang. Hey guy, if you have some cigarette, come light it at my pussy and let's see if it's lit!*

Boon: *I've got only foreign cigarette, I'm afraid that it'll burn your clitoris to death.*

Fueang: *But after lighting it at my pussy, how can your lips bear with it?!*

Boon: *Hey Fueang, may I ask you directly, how can your vagina get erected?!*

Fueang: *It's like when you see a nose of horse, when it is chewing grass, and its lips are puckering up and down.*

Boon: *A girl like you can't turn me on. Even if I walk with you as far as a few blocks of field; my dick is not getting hard-on.*

Fueang: *Hey guy, let me take you to the woods. I'll let you see my pussy there. I assure you if your dick is not greatly erected, I let you '8 Baht' me twice!* (I let you fuck me twice)[2]. (Subongkotch, et al., 1979: appendices 25; parentheses by author)

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[1] A rough differentiation between *Phlaeng Kom*, ·traditional· *Phlaeng Khorat*, and votive *Phlaeng Khorat* can be stated in this way; (1) *Phlaeng Kom* is a performance of singing in battle dialogue with short sentences like in conversation. It is full of rude words and sexually explicit content for entertaining the audience. (2) ·Traditional· *Phlaeng Khorat* is a performance developed from *Phlaeng Kom* by keeping the part of sexual amusement. However, its verse is extended melodically. (3) *Votive Phlaeng Khorat* is a performance mostly in the same way as ·traditional· *Phlaeng Khorat*. However, the traditional part of rude words and sexually explicit content are omitted because it is for the votive ritual in blessing the client and for the paying reverence to the spirit of Thao Suranari.

[2] The excerpt of *Phlaeng Khorat* in Thai:

หมอเพลงชายชื่อบุญ "ไหนมึงมาแต่ในเมืองนี อีเฟืองหีไฟ"

หมอเพลงหญิงชื่อเฟือง "หาว่ากูมาจากเมือง นีอีเฟืองหีไฟ ไอ้บุญเอย ถ้ามึงมีบุหรี่ มาจุดกะหีกูเป็นไร"

หมอเพลงชายชื่อบุญ "กูมีแต่ยากะแรด กูกลัวไหมแดดมึงตาย"

หมอเพลงหญิงชื่อเฟือง "มึงเอาบุหรี่จุดหีกู ปากมึงจะอยู่ยังไง"

หมอเพลงชายชื่อบุญ "เฟืองเอย อยากขอถามกรงๆ ว่าหีมันงง (น่าจะเป็น โงง ซึ่งหมายถึงยกตั้งขึ้น) ยังไง"

หมอเพลงหญิงชื่อเฟือง "ให้สังเกตดู จมูกม้า เวลามันกินหญ้า มันยังบุ้ยมาบุ้ย ไป"

หมอเพลงชายชื่อบุญ "อย่างมึงนี่ กูเดินตาม สองท่งสามท่ง (ทุ่ง) กะดอไม่ งง (น่าจะเป็น โงง) ซักที

The example is *Phlaeng[3] Kom* or short versed song that local people both male and female used to sing back and forth as a style of dialogue between them. It was usually performed during their time of working in rice field or in ceremonial events (Ooytrakool, 1993:15). It expressed the use of those rude words between *Boon*, a male *Maw Phlaeng*, and *Fueang*, a female *Maw Phlaeng*. Thaworn Subongkotch and others (1979) explained that normally *Maw Phlaeng* in the past dialogued with his female partner with his 'dirty talk' and 'rude words' in an invitation song at the beginning of the show. Meanwhile, the female *Maw Phlaeng* also fought back with 'rudeness' in her next singing or in a refusal of the invitation.

The basic characteristic of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* was adapted from *Phlaeng Kom* (Subongkotch, et al., 1979:124). Each *Phlaeng Kom* had two verses while 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* was composed out of more *Phlaeng Kom* compiled in a longer and longer trail of verses. The remarkable features of *Phlaeng Kom* and 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* were 'scolding,' using sexual symbols, tactics, using metaphor from characters in literature, and flirting (ibid., 14). So, *Maw Phlaeng* usually dialogued with dirty talk or rude words, especially words referring to sexual organs or sexual behaviors. Playing with those kinds of words could easily get the other embarrassingly cornered. Whichever side was unable to

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หมอเพลงหญิงชื่อเฟื่อง "มายังงั้น กูจะพาเข้าป่า เลิกผ่า (ผ้า) ดูหี ถ้าไม่งงคาดลาด (น่าจะเป็น โงงอาดหลาด ซึ่งหมายถึงยกตั้งขึ้นอย่างเปิดเผยโดดเด่น) จะให่แปดบาท สองที(จะให้ร่วม เพศสองครั้ง)"

Transcription:
Boon: *Nai Mueng Ma Tae Nai Mueang nee, E Fueang Hee Fai*
Fueang: *Haa Waa Koo Maa Jaak Mueang, Nee E Fueang Hee Fai, Tha Mueng Mee Buree*
            Maa Jood Ka Hee Koo Pen Rai
Boon: *Koo Mee Tae Ya Karat, Koo Klouaw Mai Taed Mueng Tai*
Fueang: *Mueng Aow Buree Jood Hee Koo, Paak Mueng Ja Yoo Yung-ngai*
Boon: *Fueang Aye Yaak Kor Thaam Krong Krong Waa Hee Mun Ngong Yung-ngai*
Fueang: *Hai Sung Khet Doo Jamook Maa, Wehla Mun Kin Yaah Mun Yung Booy Ma Booy Pai*
Boon: *Yaang Mueng Nee Koo Dearn Taam Song Tong Saam Tong, Ka Dore Mai Ngong*
            Suk Tee
Fueang: *Maa Yung Ngunn Koo Ja Paa Khao Paa Leauk Paa Doo Hee, Tha Mai Ngong Kaad*
            Laad Ja Hai Paed Baht Song Tee

[3] Here I prefer stylizing some of Thai technical terms in a transcription form, such as Phlaeng Kom, Phlaeng Khorat, and Maw Phlaeng, to translating them into Kom song, Khorat song, and singers, respectively. This is because I would rather choose to keep their connotation in their own specific local culture. Here "Phlaeng" should be differed from "songs" because it has characteristics of telling stories in the local language. The meaning of Maw Phlaeng is generally "singer" in both singular and plural senses, and I would like to use it that way without adding –s in its plural form even in the context of "singers".

keep the dialogue going would be considered defeated, but to the audience that situation was rather amusing (Ooytrakool, 1993:15-16).

Culture, according to Clifford Geertz (1973), is symbolic structure and webs of significance. Therefore, human action or behavior is symbolic action which is socially established (Geertz, 1973:5-12). In the study of Balinese cockfights, Geertz suggests that deep cockfight is the transition of the Balinese status hierarchy into the body of the cockfight. It is a dramatization of status, kin group, and village concerns (ibid., 436-437). The symbolic structure of interpretation allows Balinese play with such power within the cockfight context. Geertz takes this interpretation as 'seeing things' from the actor's point of view (ibid., 14); and takes the symbolic action as 'saying' about the role of culture in human life (ibid., 27).

Brian Fay (1996) considers the "Deep Play" idea of Clifford Geertz a form of rationalism. He explains that a 'thick description' would consist of intentional concept which portrayed the intentions and rules expressed through the physical movement. There can be degrees of thickness while some descriptions can be extraordinarily thick – a fully realized portrait of some act in all its complexity and depth. Therefore, actions are always something an agent does, something performed for a purpose, that some act will have some particular meaning. It means that intentional actions require reason-explanations. But agents come to have a reason to act as a result of engaging in a practical reasoning process. Thus, a practical reasoning process is one in which agents' antecedent beliefs and desires are modified and brought together to form the basis for their actions (Fay, 1996:92-110).

To interpret from Clifford Geertz's idea, people's rational act and thought must belong to their experiences. His idea shows that an action of a subject is capable emerging with 'multiple reasons' and 'differed reasons' which are created by each individual subject. These subjects cannot create their livelihood and experience without social context. However, I consider that the institutions of modern thinking, such as of the central state and the media, try to occupy 'truths' of rationalization. The institutions can powerfully construct much significance, and can also construct its webs. Their influence is on an individual who has to pay attention to the truth which they produce. That is why 'a rationalized truth' must be described by the modern institutions. However, there is no guarantee that the modern institutions can dominate all human, space, and time. That is why magical thought has sometime been used for solving some crises. The domination covered the people up in an unequal power relationship between the rationalized subject and the subclass of the rationalized subject.

I consider the contested condition of human experiences of truths a feature of modernity. In this way, a sign and a web of significance have never existed before the appearing of human experience. Hence, the actors of that sign at the moment may not act from their spontaneous cognition of sign. But they must have passed that moment. It is

therefore not always true that those who have understood the meaning of sign must be the owners of that culture at that spatio-temporal point. Each of them is an outsider of that culture immediately after the spatio-temporal point of their experience has passed. Culture is performed with an action of individual. It is possible that the emergence of multiple reasons are locally and globally created by each individual. However, the individual cannot create a thick description of culture without social context. Thus, while the people are recognizing the existence of the world, they have not interpreted it suddenly. But they will interpret it after they have socially experienced it already. The interpretation of culture can be understood within the webs of significances that individuals selectively intend to point out to some part of the world in which their experiences are lived.

I would like to interpret the culture of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* which had been transformed to votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, and I will interpret it as I am a member of Thai modernity. My interpretation can be an alternative rationalization of its truths.

The web of significance of *Phlaeng Kom* was established within the peasant social context. Power hierarchy of society was at least compiled from the power of nature, laborers, as well as material progress and consumerism. Hence, when they mentioned those things such as vagina, penis, town, woods, money, and fire, they were communicating about the signs of fecundity from sexual intercourse and also the signs of destruction from fire in the relationship between farmers and their environment. Moreover, there was a sign of different genders in a competition for power within the relationship of male and female labors, and there was a sign of inequality in the progress and opportunity of consuming products in a relationship between urban and rural societies.

Although some other content in 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* reflected Buddhist discipline and moral teaching, it was rather in a funny way of mimicking the monks as well as keeping on offering values of Karma, telling about their career related to the local places, or telling about Thao Suranari together with folktales, proverbs, customs and traditions (Subongkotch, et. al., 1979: 69-70; ibid., 76; ibid., 80). Lumduan Jakkaraj, a female *Maw Phlaeng*, suggested that for *Maw Phlaeng* to win or lose in the battle was involved with their audience concerning which side of the bet from the audience had been poured more money (cited in Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College, 1993:21).

In modern Thai society, the truth and the reasonability of morality were commanded by Buddhist monks and the central state. But the place of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* was dominantly constructed by telling about sexual organs, sexual intercourse, gambling, cravings, and fighting between two sexes. It can be defined as a connotation of a fantasy of the secular world. It was the stage of singing dialogue where there was a little show of moral resistance from peasant *Maw Phlaeng*.

Table 1 of comparison between lines of Phlaeng Kom and lines of traditional Phlaeng Khorat

Phlaeng Kom	'Traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat*
Woman: Did you take shortcuts or cut the road, to get here? *Man*: None of them. I took a straight road, I did not get lost. *Woman*: Did you jump off of the window or break out the wall, to get here? *Man*: None of them. I made my exit out of the door[4] (Suwanaphachana, 2000: 49).	*Woman*: "Don't get mad at me! May I persuade you to buy a farm? May I test your feelings? Do you want to go to my place? Carry me on your hip! We… may have scorned each other, or may have desire for Pia doughnut. When you go to bed nets with your wife, Nil, she may feed you some milk. But if you get with the girl like me, she will go to a chair for sleeping. Please don't hate me, I beg you, husband of Nil !![5] (Mrs. *Jieaw*'s parlance, cited in Subongkotch, et. al., 1979: Appendix 44).

Transformation of 'Traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* to Votive *Phlaeng Khorat*

According to Puangkhaimuk Kunaratanapruk (1978), the first railway from Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima was finished in 1900 (B.E. 2443) by the central state, and the railway became strategic for planning for advantages both in politics and economics. Under the influential context of French colonialism, Nakhon Ratchasima could be considered by the central state as the main area for economic and political strategies guarding against the influence from French forces. A trade area was set outside of the town where there was a railway station that was the main connection from the west side of the city (Kunaratanapruk, 1978: 135). However, after Thao Suranari monument was built in 1934, there was a great contribution to the location nearby as a trade area of the city. While in the decades of 1920s to 1950s, (B.E. 2460's to 2490's), the bustling commercial area was at Nakhon Ratchasima train station where there was a Church of Christ and a Western medical clinic (Liptapunlop, 2009B: 71-72). But during World War II, the train station was a target of strategic attack. Some wealthy businessman moved to the area in front of the monument (Poonpirom Liptapunlop, 2009A: 71-72). Poonpirom Liptapunlop (2009C) described that during the decade of 1960s, (B.E. 2500's), on the area in front of the monument, there was a

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[4] หญิง: พี่เดินทางลัด หรือพี่ตัดทางมา
   ชาย: คือพี่เดินทางตรงดอก ไม่ได้หลงทางมา
   หญิง: พี่โดดออกหน้าต่าง หรือพี่ฟังฝามา
   ชาย: พี่ไม่ได้ฟังฝาดอก คือพี่ออกประตูมา
[5] หญิง "อย่าเคืองอย่าเคียด(โกรธ) ให้ชวนซื้อนาไร่ ลองใจกันประเดี๋ยว อยากไปบ้านแม่หนูเจียว จะใส่เอวกระเดียด...เรา ด่ากันกลมปาก หิวอยาก ขนมเปีย พอเข้ามุ้งนอนกะเมีย จะบีบนมป้อนนม ถ้าได้ไปอยู่กะเจียว นางจะโห่เก้าอี้นอน อย่าเกลียดน้องไปเลย นะผัวอีนิล"

two-storey cement building that sold products from China. It was later built into a three-storey building with five arched spaces, and became a bank office with a shop for silk and local products (Poonpirom Liptapunlop, 2009C: 69-70). The growth of a new area of commerce around the Thao Suranari monument had had an effect on how to manage '*Phlaeng Khorat*' groups.

Thaworn Subongkotch and others (1979) described that just a little time before 1960s, there was a new form of organization of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat*. *Maw Phlaeng* had lived separately from each other, and some *Maw Phlaeng* who were skillful had received respect as masters from other *Maw Phlaeng* and their neighbors (Subongkotch, et al., 1979: 64). After establishing the monument of the Thao Suranari and moving the trade area, the organization of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* became a part of economic growth in the city. However, there was a consequence after forming *Maw Phlaeng* in groups. The host had less authority in choosing *Maw Phlaeng*. This was because the host could only choose a group for the performance. Who was to choose which *Maw Phlaeng* to fit in the performance was the head of that chosen group. The duty of the head was that he or she had to compile the members and allocate jobs to them. If the head was a popular *Maw Phlaeng*, his or her name was usually chosen to be the title of the group. The membership in that group was not rigid because the head could hire or borrow *Maw Phlaeng* in another group to join the performance depending on personal relationship. There was an advantage of management in groups and establishing an office in town. It was more convenient for the host to find *Maw Phlaeng* than to waste too much more time travelling from village to village to find them. But there was also a disadvantageous consequence. It was that *Maw Phlaeng* were acquainted with each other and became close friends who knew well about each other's tactic, and had empathic consideration for each other. Finally, the result was that their battle could not be spicily entertaining the audience (ibid., 64-65). It was because *Maw Phlaeng*' conversation should be slashing by the use of rude words coming out from his or her own wit to overcome the opponent. It appeared that the closer relationship between *Maw Phlaeng* could lessen the harshness of the singing battle.

Another disadvantage was that the identity of each *Maw Phlaeng* associated with the name of their own local village was transferred to the group's names of which he or she was a member. For example, the name *Somwang Polkrang*, who was a *Maw Phlaeng* and lived at *Polkrang* village, was later changed to be under the authority of *Sompong Baandong* when performing with his new group. Hence, after *Maw Phlaeng* became a part of economic activity in the city, their own localities that used to be based on community and village as appeared in their names were transformed into a form of fusing and overlapping between being a *Maw Phlaeng* in itself and being under the title of his or her group. This situation reflected dissolution of identity that used to be bordered by or dependent on the locality of the village where they lived, and reflected that the relationship between *Maw Phlaeng* and the host was affected by the group head and was later similar to a representative system under a political relation after the absolute monarchy.

Moreover, the social structure in the city changed the *Maw Phlaeng's* identity and their value. Before they moved to the city, they had been in a structure of peasant society where they had lived a life of freedom based on agricultural production and natural resources of the local community. They had been in a high status in that society, such as a status of master or an authority of local wisdom. The relationship between *Maw Phlaeng* had centered on a status of teacher and student. But when they moved to groups in the city, they were defined only as general contractors or employees for an occupation. Their village-based identity was transformed into normal workers. They were employed for performance, and their cultural status was changed from being highly respected masters to being general workers in economic activity. The status of being masters had been sacred only in the ceremony of *Wai Kruu* or paying respect to the masters. The adaptation due to the economic circumstance, therefore, had a consequence of degrading their higher status to lower status of being economic units like any other people.

However, 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* in pre-modernity was sung by young people for entertaining and flirting during parties and festivals, particularly in *Songkran* Days and Chinese New Year festivals. In addition, this performance and play were further popularized in rural areas (Subongkotch, et al., 1979: appendices 1). *Maw Phlaeng* did usually not form into groups; they would rather choose to live separately in their own community or village. Their income was dependent on their local agriculture. The opportunity for them to get to see each other was when they were separately invited by a host who want to see them perform in a singing battle. It could be said that the decision was mainly from the host who had criteria of selection depending on the popularity and creditability of *Maw Phlaeng*'s masters. Moreover, the 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* was full of 'rude' and explicit words that were used in a spicy battle between male and female *Maw Phlaeng* (ibid., appendices 2).

In addition, in the time of 1925-1927, the tone of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* had been advanced to a melodic tone by playing with different scales of articulating verses. It was because of a new invention of style by Mrs. *Jieaw* who was then a popular *Maw Phlaeng.* She invented a new method of lengthening the lyric in a verse with more words, a method of expanding its rhythm by drawing out the note. This new invention from Mrs. *Jieaw* had been popularly imitated by many *Maw Phlaeng* until now (ibid., appendices 2-3).

On November 17th 1933, a news article from *Prachachart* Newspaper mentioned that *Maw Phlaeng* of '*Phlaeng Khorat*' was performed in the ceremony of worship of the town spirit (Keaw-ngarmprasert, 1995:66).

"Is it true that the form of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* in the present time has been invented since the time of the 1920s (B.E.2460)?"

Nate Ottamang, a local non-academic historiographer, claimed that the word '*Phlaeng Khorat*' had been used since 1940.

"To sing *Phlaeng Khorat* then was called by another name. It was called "*Wah Phlaeng*" (to speak the song). But if a group of four singers was on the stage, it was called "*Len Phlaeng*" (to play the song). Doing it in a one-man show was called "*Wah Phlaeng*". The name *Phlaeng Khorat* was a substitute for those words in 1940 when Field Marshal *Plaek Piboonsongkram* gave his support for *Phlaeng Rumwong* and his wife Madame *La-Eard Piboonsongkram* gave her support for *Phlaeng Thai Derm* (old Thai music)" (cited in Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College, 1993:32).

In the present time, it is acknowledged that *Khorat* people learn that 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat*'s beginning was in the decades of 1770s – 1850s (B.E. 2310's – 2390's). It was when Thao Suranari or Lady *Mo* fought against *Chao Anuwong*'s army. She had been memorialzed as the national heroine locally. Nevertheless, my opinion is that before the decade of the 1930s (B.E. 2470's), it could be that *Khorat* people were not aware of the existence of the so-called "*Phlaeng Khorat*", or it could be that they were aware of the same performance which was called by another names such as *"Phlaeng Kom"*, *"Wah Phlaeng"*, and "*Len Phlaeng*". Additionally, from an interview with a *Maw Phlaeng,* Mr. Yai Wisespolkrang, by Phodchara Suwanaphachana (2001), there was an explanation of *Phlaeng Khorat's* sources that were from talk, greeting, or flirting. They were melodically played in a style of verses, and they are called *Phlaeng Kom*, not *Phlaeng Khorat* (Suwanaphachana, 2001:50). According to Nate Ottamang and Yai Wisespolkrang, "*Phlaeng Khorat*" was not called such by local people during the 1930s.

After the political transformation from Absolute Monarchy to Constitutional Monarchy in 1932, the use of the word "*Phlaeng Khorat*" could be from Bangkokians. It represented in accordance with the construction of *Khorat* identity from the Thao Suranari monument. According to Saipin Keaw-ngarmprasert (1995), because the Thao Suranari monument was built after the unsuccessful coup d'état by Prince *Bovaradej* who was then on the side of royalist regime under Absolute Monarchy opposing the People's Party government *(Khana Raas)* which was on the side of Siamese Revolution for democracy. The main part of the rebellion army were soldiers from Nakhon Ratchasima. The defeat of the *Bovaradej* Rebellion brought many deaths to the soldiers, and the image of Nakhon Ratchasima's people was branded an army of rebellion against the *People's Party*. This monument had therefore been a symbol of *People's Party* power that stemmed from the common people (Keaw-ngarmprasert, 1995:58-155).

In addition, the word "*Phlaeng Khorat*" could be used as the signifier of Nakhon Ratchasima. The performance expressed a local action or a symbolic action for being an interaction with the appropriation of the central state. In Thailand during the 1930s-1940s, according to Saichol Sattayanurak (2002), the government created Thainess, or Thai culture, along with adopting the Western theory of evolution. After the 1932 revolution, there had been a growth of middle class people both inside and outside the bureaucracy. However, the government

wanted to maintain values, morals, and the relationship of unequal 'class relations'. Luang Wichitwathakan promoted a new Thai culture tied with nationalism. It meant that people had to be loyal to the nation and accept the State and leaders as managers of public/national resources. He considered that the traditional institutions such as the ruling by the king, religious worship, ideals and customary way of lives were valuable for his anti-communism. He emphasized these meanings of institutions in a genre of the collective memory in national history - all classes have the same ancestor. Thus, they had to sacrifice to the public and nation. This meant that people have to obey the government (Sattayanurak, 2002:30-82). Particularly, the government praised the Thai language as the key representation of Thainess. This was because the government's focus on homogenization of Thainess was relying mainly on the standards of the central culture rather than local cultures. There were differences within Thainess, a hierarchy of cultural classification, the North and Northeast cultures, because local dialects predominantly belonged to lower status (ibid., 120-133). "*Phlaeng Khorat*" was greatly influenced by these radical cultural transformations of the central state's policy around that time of cultural homogenization.

I think that it not only reflected the domination of Bangkok language but also reflected citizen consciousness of the local. If Nate Ottamang's and Yai Wisespolkrang's direct experiences were right about the historical emergence of the term of "*Phlaeng Khorat*", then this so-called "*Phlaeng Khorat*" should be considered as a construction of local identity, being a response to the construction of Thainess from the central state. The identity of this local performance completely unrooted out of its old origin. To endorse the name "*Phlaeng Khorat*" and to stop calling it "*Phlaeng Kom*" or "*Wah Phlaeng*" or "*Len Phlaeng*" might be a new way of showing its localization from the above regime of the central state. And it might be the way of showing that its engagement into Thai culture in the era of the Constitutional Politics had begun. The significance of the so-called "*Phlaeng Khorat*" did not directly express a hierarchy of cultures between *Khorat*-ness and Thainess, but it had a mix or a juxtaposition between 'Thaization' and localization through the expression of this 'rude' traditional performance. Meanwhile, the extinction of the terms *"Phlaeng Kom" or "Wah Phlaeng"* or *"Len Phlaeng'* reflected that there was an influence of the cultural process of becoming Thai. In addition, the forming groups for, and changing the identity of, *Maw Phlaeng* was showing that they had to adapt themselves to the economic growth in the city. These changes reflected that 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* was not involved with the worship of Thao Suranari or any belief in sacredness.

The appealing aspect of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* could be in the 1970's after the 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* was clearly decreasing in popularity. According to Charles F. Keyes (2002), the worship activity around Thao Suranari monument had been scarcely noticed by most people who passed in front of it in 1963. But after that, it was an area of cult activities (Keyes, 2002:125). It could be assumed that votive *Phlaeng Khorat*'s beginning was after that time.

According to Thaworn Subongkotch and others (1979), the problem of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* might be a result from the degradation of *Maw Phlaeng* from their former status of local arts masters to the later status of 'contractors'. On the other side, there was more influential power from new media entertainment such as *Like*, film, boxing, *Lukthung, Rum Wong*, etc. The new entertainment could lessen the popularity of *Phlaeng Khorat*. Even though *Phlaeng Khorat* was broadcast on Radio Thailand, the 'rude' words of explicit content were forbidden (Subongkotch, et al., 1979:64). Ladda Panuthai, a lecturer at Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College, pointed to the transformation of *Phlaeng Khorat* into radio and television programs, but it was limited to be under sponsorship and advertising opportunities (cited in Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College, 1993:40). For *Maw Phlaeng* to make for their living in the city and in the space of mass media there was a restriction in showing its entertaining value from its performance of battling with 'rude' words and explicit content that could arouse its audience in countryside. In sum, its aesthetic value was controlled by the organizations of urban space and media. These problems of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* had lasted long until the decade of 1980's.

During 1970s and 1980s, the 'rude' expression of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* was transformed into a more polite language by the mass media, and its popularity was severely reduced in the audience with 'traditional' taste. Some consequences of *Maw Phlaeng*'s adaptation to economic development in the city was that the special status of those *Maw Phlaeng* was reduced to career workers. After the Thao Suranari cult clearly appeared around the 1970s (Kitiarsa, 1999:97), some adaptation of 'traditional' *Maw Phlaeng* was to perform for the spirit cult. Moreover, the audience in the rural areas from the younger generation turned to other modern entertainments from mass media and Bangkok. All of these consequences could lead 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* to be replaced by *Like* and *Lukthung*, as well as drama in radio stations, television programs, and movies.

Since the 1970s, it was known by *Maw Phlaeng* that "popular *Phlaeng Khorat*" or "*Phlaeng Khorat Cing*" was invented for serving the new generation of the rural audience. Particularly in the 1990s, Nakhon Ratchasima was developed through the industrialization of Suranaree Industrial Park and the rapid growth of land business. The popular *Phlaeng Khorat* could be a response to audience from the younger generation who were mostly in the industrial sector. It could contemporize the 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* and make its rhythm faster. Sometimes there was a new remix of the verse structure of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* with fast tempo of other modern performances such as *Lukthung* and *Like*. Singing with the Electone could be found in the new form of the popular *Phlaeng Khorat*. Sometimes the program of performance on stage was set in an alternation of *Phlaeng Khorat* and other performances. The audience was more interested by the new style of popular *Phlaeng Khorat* that was inventive and rhythmically entertaining, full of teen-aged dancers, and good for industrial profit.

Contrastively, another adaptation was votive *Phlaeng Khorat* that was developed to belong to the Thao Suranari cult. It had not been affected by the need to adapt itself to those modern entertainments for the audience. Instead of providing entertainment for rural audiences , it turned to the public space of the city, particularly at the monument of Thao Suranari. The votive performance was designed to pay respect to the 'traditional' form, except for using 'rude' words and explicit content which had been considered the most indispensable part of the 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat*. So, it had been claimed as a representation of an 'authentic' *Khorat*-ness and a root of the local identity.

However, another reason for this polite style was that it was used for votive activity paid for worshipping the sacred spirit of Thao Suranari. There was another aspect that differentiated the votive performance from 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* and popular *Phlaeng Khorat*. It was about an intention behind the votive act. When the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was used in the activity of people, they usually asked Thao Suranari for improvement in their agriculture. But the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was requested by clients who asked for help in solving problems in their daily lives in urban society. When this votive performance started, the client was already pleased. But they walked away without being an attentive audience for the performance because they already had a belief that only Thao Suranari was the appropriate one to watch the votive performance. After the votive act, they would be better off soon because they believed that Thao Suranari was already pleased from watching the performance.

Therefore, the invention of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* gave more income stability to votive *Maw Phlaeng* while the entertainment of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat* faced a declining audience. It was adapted into Thai modernity by juxtaposing with the 'modern' sacredness of the Thao Suranari monument. Its new meaning and its newly constructed identity could heal the 'symptom' of insecurity of modern life. Therefore the performers of the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* could survive even without investing much money like the invention of popular *Phlaeng Khorat*. The emergence of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* could represent a strategy of *Maw Phlaeng* who were once obstructed by modern entertainment. It pointed out that the monument of Thao Suranari was exploited by the "marginal people", and the monument could be considered a political apparatus of the central state.

Localism, Nationalism, and Sacredness

Here I would like to present my argument from the case of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* against findings from historical studies that rely so much on the importance of the role of the central state in the appropriation of *Khorat* people through the Thao Suranari monument such as Saipin Kaew-ngarmprasert (1995) and Chatri Prakitnonthakan (2007). I disagree with findings from anthropological studies which suggest that the meaning system from a locality-base depicts a

resistance to the state such as the study of Charles F. Keyes (2002). I will suggest that the practice of the invention of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is a juxtaposition among localism, nationalism, and the belief in sacred spirits.

When votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is juxtaposed with signs of Thao Suranari involved with the sign of nationalism, it is defined more as localism of the 'proper local identity'. It is believed that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is in a higher status for the sacred spirit. It should not be performed with 'rude' words or any rhythmic musical instrument. Its sacredness is involved with the triumphant faith over people's obstacles in working in modernity, not with the desire of people for being harshly entertained. Therefore, its locality is in the web of sacred meaning of Thao Suranari throughout localism, nationalism, and economic gain. It also reflects that the classification of reasons in the web is constructed by the 'marginal' *Maw Phlaeng*.

Saipin Kaew-ngarmprasert (1995) points out that since 1934 Thao Suranari has had the status of a national heroine and the ancestor spirit of local people (Keaw-ngarmprasert, 1995: 76-77). It is a symbol of nationalism, a symbol of a heroine from the common people (ibid., 8; ibid., 98). In the two decades 1940s – 1960s, (B.E. 2480s-2500s), it reflects that the central state controls the idea of a good citizen who respected the King alongside with the nation and religion (ibid., 98; ibid., 107).

Chatri Prakitnonthakan (2007) claims that the monument reflects the idea of being common people, and the idea of the eligibility of the People's Party government who made the revolution and modernized the country (Prakitnonthakan, 2007: 303-311).

However Charles F. Keyes (2002) points out that Thao Suranari "is not a personage of the past, but a potent spirit who acts in the present". The monument and the being of Thao Suranari have been remembered by local people as a powerful local spirit rather than a national heroine that is "far more threatening to the proponents of a Bangkok-centered nationalism". The cult of her represents polyphony of interpretation opposing and negotiating the aim of the central state (Keyes, 2002: 117, 130).

For *Maw Phlaeng* and the client, Thao Suranari represents the female patriot who can defeat enemies of the central state. She is also the representative of a brave and wise woman who defeated obstacles in working and business (Suchada Sitthithanyakam, interviewed, 2012; Naamphueng Saengkratoke, interviewed, 2013). People in Nakhon Ratchasima usually share the same memory of Thao Suranari, and it reflects a nationalistic character of hers. The social memory is that Thao Suranari will not fulfill one's hope of not being drafted into military service. Every year there is a ceremony of celebrating her triumph over the enemies of the nation. When this triumphant faith is interpreted in daily life, it would be a hope of triumphant success over the obstacles in living that people usually ask her to fulfill. After fulfilling their desire, they would come back to pay respect to Thao Suranari with votive *Phlaeng Khorat* that is believed to be her most favored votive token.

According to Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (2002), a social memory is appropriation of a struggle for a dominant discourse associated with the politics of identities (Tanabe & Keyes, 2002: 24). The social memory of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is that it is the favored token of Thao Suaranari. It emphasizes the belief in the sacred spirit who has supernatural power for fulfilling prayers. Hence, it is the juxtaposition of a problem in daily life and sacredness that supports both votive *Phlaeng Khorat* and Thao Suranari. It also supports local people to globally interpret and to locally act about their identity; they worship the local spirit in order to struggle with any problems in the global economic sphere. They present the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* for perceiving their own local identity and for realizing their self-consciousness, related to Thainess of the central state and the global economy. This Thainess from localism is still dominated by Bangkok through the nationalism signs of the Thao Suranari monument. While *Khorat* people are being influenced by economic development planned by Bangkok, they construct their local identity of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. They share the memories of Thao Suranari and votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in order to interpret the appropriation of local identity in Thai modernity. The interpretation reflects the flexible hierarchy of significances in the context of global economic instability. It is the juxtaposition of the memories of the sacred spirit and votive *Phlaeng Khorat* that can re-organize the hierarchy between the local sign and the sign of the central state. These different signs are then juxtaposed at the same level of 'reasonability'.

However Saipin Kaew-ngarmprasert (1995) and Saichol Sattayanurak (2002) offer a different interpretation. Saipin Keaw-ngarmprasert emphasizes the localism of Thao Suranari in its aspect of the politics of the central state. Saichol claims that Thainess from the central state has influence over local culture. Their focus points are different from Charles F. Keyes (2002). Keyes emphasizes the localism from social memory that local people believe in Thao Suranari as a sacred spirit. In the localism of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, the recognition about its existence reflects that it has been interpreted from the crisis of economic and cultural activity of local people. Its existence is a process of juxtaposition that is gradually faded from modernity. The 'traditional' mode of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is juxtaposed with modernity of the nationalist monument and economic development.

They are a set of localism, nationalism, sacred spirit, and also livelihood strategy. They reflect a re-organization of rationality and "irrationality" that can place a business objective and a political interest to co-exist with the sacred spirit. This re-organization reflects that local people who pray to Thao Suranari with the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* rationally interpret the set of performances for fulfilling their hopes. It may not reflect an opposite voice of resistance and negotiation with modernity. It may not seriously reflect nostalgia of the locality because the clients usually do not pay attention to its aesthetics. In addition, these clients usually classify it as the favored entertainment of the spirit. It may also not reflect the politics of identity from the shared memory of local people because those clients usually ignore the identity presentation of *Maw Phlaeng*. The

clients only use it for praying. What is its possibility is the practice of identity as the result of the juxtaposition process of rational and "irrational" signs: 'outdated' entertainment, progress, locality, national heroine, and sacredness, for self-consciousness and for livelihood in a confused modernity. Although the monument of Thao Suranari is an apparatus of the central state, the local people can exploit it in their own way constructively. It can also heal people who were being affected with an insecure society. In contrast, it can represent that the central state still authorizing its stronger power throughout the signs of Thao Suranari.

The Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* and the Sign Healing

The 1990s was an era of identity crisis. It was also a period of rapid economic change and saw the democratic crisis in May 1992. The cultural movements highlighted village culture or culture of communities (Mukdawijitra, 1995); and reinvented a local culture for tourism and consumerism of the middle class (Pakdeenarong, 2005). At that time, a movement of subaltern writers showed irrational religious practices and a spirit cults (Kitiarsa, 1999). In December 1993, the topic of the problem of 'traditional' *Phlaeng Khorat*'s changes was set in a seminar in Nakhon Ratchasima Teacher College. The participants of this seminar were academics, members of the media, bureaucrats, popular intellectual singers, and elder performers. In the seminar, the popular *Phlaeng Khorat* was severely criticized; the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was questioned about its aspect of artistic value. It was expressed that they attempted to balance and negotiate among the actors' different voices in order to present "*Phlaeng Khorat*" as local identity. The votive *Phlaeng Khorat* could authorize the authenticity of the local identity rather than the popular *Phlaeng Khorat*. Particularly, it was also related to the sacred spirit and the self-awareness of the local people.

The votive *Phlaeng Khorat* preserves the performance which is close to the traditional form. It presents a mundane life related with the sacredness of Thao Suranari. For instance, the performers tell that their clients have a lot of debts but little money under the government's policies. It signifies a new social structure encountered by the clients when leaving their community-based village and coming into urban sphere where the information of media and the global economy flies rapidly by. It can be the result of globalization that both the *Maw Phlaeng* and their clients have been engaged in the global changes. It is the cultural practice of those who are concerned with unstable economic and political progress. Nowadays, the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* has mostly not functioned in the realm of entertainment because it has been ignored by the audience who usually act as clients. It may not verbally communicate with the clients. But it can be interpreted as the sign communication of votive acts.

This sign communication of Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* occurs in the rapid change of the global economy. In the context of goods exchange, when a client buys a product from a seller, money is a trust in relationship between them. But in the context of votive exchange, when a client

wants to buy a healing factor for a cure of insecurities from Thao Suranari, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is a trust in the good relationship between them. The money may be used in the shop without any conversation between the client and the seller because it is recognized as the symbol of trust in their worthy exchange. The votive act can be considered in this same line of analogy. What the client does to the spirit is only pay money to the *Maw Phlaeng*. The client's payment is to buy the votive performance for the spirit. But the real trust here is not money; it is the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* itself because it is already believed as the payment to the spirit. The client does not have to be in the direct communication with the spirit. The client moves the trust from money to the votive performance. Therefore, the votive *performance* is being recognized as the representation of trust in the exchange between the client and the spirit. This situation can be understood as the reason why votive *Phlaeng Khorat* must be maintained in its 'outdated' mode. It is confirming the inter-firm trust in the client-Thao Suranari relationship that should not be changed at all.

This inter-firm trust is sign communication that supports anyone to survive a crisis. In the doubtful condition of modernity, the future seems increasingly unstable but many social institutions rationalize it to make people believe in it. According to Ulrich Beck (1994), industrial societies can control their people within the grip of instrumental rationality. On the other hand, the control can lead to insecurities and uncertainties in their lives. He states that "Individuals are constructed through a complex discursive interplay which is much more open-ended than the functionalist role model would assume…" (Beck, 1994: 16). "Individuals still communicate in and play along with the old forms and institutions, but they also withdraw from them in at least part of their existence, their identity, their commitment and their courage…" (ibid., 20). He views that the inconsistent society can push individuals to do new activities and to belong to new identities with one foot stepping into the new order of identity while the other foot is still firmly placed in the old social order (Beck, 1994).

According to Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (2002), modernity had been generated through four distinct processes – (1) the use of rationalized and secularized knowledge in place of understandings derived from religion and magic; (2) orientation of economic action with reference to demands generated in a globalized market instead of to subsistence needs; (3) acceptance of the political authority of those representing a nation-state rather than of those whose status is determined by a hierarchy of personal relationships; and (4) construction of one's identity as a person with reference to diverse messages and images transmitted through mass media, in contrast to the highly redundant meanings ascribed to the ancestors transmitted primarily through ritual. However, modernity always had a distinctive character depending on the specific social and historical contexts in which it develops (Tanabe & Keyes, 2002: 7).

The specific context for the local identity of the votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is involved with the global economy and the social memories of sacred Thao Suranari. Some characteristics of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* are the exceptions of its main emotional structure of the 'traditional' *Phlaeng*

Khorat, especially its emotional structure of 'rudeness'. Contrastively, some of its other characteristics are the presentations of its rational structure with polite lyrics and performances. The votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is not only involved with sacred signs but also many signs of mundane life, country development, and triumphant spirit against obstacles especially from tensions of modernity. It is a socially memorized symbol to confirm the local identity that includes the existence of Thao Suranari who is claimed as an ancestor and as "goddess" who gives all goodness and benevolence to her people. In the context of votive acts, the sacredness of Thao Suranari is not about the central state appropriation as Saipin Keaw-ngarmprasert (1995) focused on, and it is not in the status of local spirit created by social memory and the spirit medium ritual of local people as Charles F. Keyes (2002) emphasized. Nevertheless, the trust depends on how often people fulfill their vow to her. The people connect to her through signs in votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, and the more often the performances are, the more sacred and more successfully the request is affirmed.

It seems that the sacredness of Thao Suranari should in the first place support the existence of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, but it turns out later that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* instead promotes the sacredness of Thao Suranari in the modern world. Meanwhile, the success and progress of clients is a supporter of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*'s existence. In other words, the economic improvement of clients promotes old-fashioned acts of Thao Suranari worship because the sacred status is not against the profane world of modernity. However, both mutually support each other on the base of global and individual economic progress. Hence, the votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, which is old-fashioned and irrational but maintains a local identity meaning, is determined and treated by progressively developed human beings to stay with their prosperity.

Moreover, these developed human beings of votive clients serve the social memory of Thao Suranari and collective practice of votive worship. But instead of creating the social bond between themselves and *Maw Phlaeng*, they use them to support their individual life. Most votive clients do not pay attention to communicate with *Maw Phlaeng*. They are in successful business and professional statuses and demonstrate the sign of progress through payment and the engagement to fulfill the vows while *Maw Phlaeng* show the sign of underdeveloped local identity. Vow fulfillment does not mean the relief of instability of modern society, but it represents the meanings of the individual success and progress. Unsurprisingly, they will not talk and communicate to votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. They simply let *Maw Phlaeng* show signs of the underdeveloped alone as if they leave Maw Phlaeng with the underdeveloped and the outdated in their irrational realm. This referent may reflect the character of the developing society of Thailand, including its urban society and rural society with an access to benefits of urbanization, that still wants to keep its obsolete part. In the case of votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, it may not be romanticism and nostalgia that are important, but it is about the sign of underdevelopment which is emotionally exploited by individuals to promote their economic success. These progressed human beings use

the sign of underdevelopment of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to connect to the spirit. They are not skillful in the act of votive fulfillment and they do not even feel stable to make the irrational request to the spirit. However, they are convinced to trust in the sacredness and in their irrational acts that it is sensible to do so because they have seen that votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is frequently performed and solicited by other clients. This is considered a confirmation of trust.

Furthermore, they are convinced to trust in the signs of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* as a local identity and social memory from their experience of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* frequently shown for a long time. Besides, these signs are about showing respect to nationalism. The votive *Phlaeng Khorat*, therefore, becomes a social process of multi-power relationships. It involves any appropriated signs for practical living and for local identity even if it has been covered by nationalism. It is also a social process where an individual trust in the signs that they will be an honest exchange between the payment and the satisfaction of the spirit. The votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is an individual social interpretation. Hence, on the level of signified, it is an interpretation to classify progression, modernity, rationality/irrationality, underdevelopment, local identity and nationalism. That is, rational and irrational acts for progression, and worshipping sacredness as a symbol of localism and nationalism. The money paid for *Maw Phlaeng* for their antique performance shows their feeling of lingering in the past, while the payment from the clients is showing their progress in the modern world. In other words, the performance is to classify oppositeness of things juxtaposed.

If classification is a power system, the classification of signs will demonstrate the classification of the power system of the signs of each individual who is in the webs of significances. In the condition of modernity, if someone is sick because of the instability of modernity, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* will be a treatment using several signs. Although sometimes they seem to be opposite signs, they are juxtaposed the same place. Instead of cancelling one another, one will support the presence and the existence of one another. Although the nationalism sign of Thao Suranari was constructed by government, local people insert other signs in it. The people are interested in the interpretation of these signs for livelihood at the present time rather than interested in these signs as politics of memory which is institutionalized by the elite.

Conclusion

The monument and history of Thao Suranari were built by modern government. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* was created by marginal people of public interests who were in the media and public space in the city. Traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* encountered a modernity controlled by the government and media for appropriateness. It is therefore impossible to use rude words and talk about sexual issues. Even though these issues are an important emotional structure, traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* is modified because a dialogical relationship between the audience and media is

popular. It is modified into two ways. The first one is *Phlaeng Khorat Cing* or popular *Phlaeng Khorat* which talks to the audience by stimulating stronger emotion, and the second one is votive *Phlaeng Khorat* which emphasizes traditional performance. The votive performance is not exciting for a new generation, but it involves the root of local identity and the sacredness of the local spirit. It is not for entertaining but for maintaining and changing conditions of unstable consciousness into economic success.

Maw Phlaeng invented votive *Phlaeng Khorat* after traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* was blocked from public areas of mass media and the preferences of entertainment of a new generation changed. They use the public space of the sacred monument ground to perform the show. This helps them to preserve the characteristic of traditional *Phlaeng Khorat* and they do not need to invest much money into modern shows. The limit of public space is that although government can create various signs to communicate and dominate the citizen, it cannot eliminate other adulterated signs. The monument, therefore, is the sacred sign of nationalism and localism, the sign of progressive and non-progressive aspects. Votive *Maw Phlaeng* are not contemporarily performed in this place by individuals like general passers-by, but they are permanently settled down in this area by sharing the meaning and memory of locality as the offspring of sacred Thao Suranari.

According to Joel S. Khan (2001), modernity is based on people's incomplete conception of how to be modern. He considers modernity an epochal attack on tradition by 'self-creating' human subjects based on some notion of universal human reason. Thus he explains that modernity is used in an objective sense to refer to the result of a process of modernization, by which the social world comes under the domination of individual asceticism, secularization, and the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality (Khan, 2001:6-9). Firstly, modernity becomes as much a state of mind as a set of objective historical processes. Secondly, modernity should be seen as a product of contradictory or conflicting cultural processes, which heralds a significant break with classical narratives of modernization. Most such narratives construct modernity instead as a single cultural movement – of rationalization, instrumentalization, alienation, commodification or such like (ibid: 11).

Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is performed to affirm the authentic local identity and clients' success concerning economic action in a globalized economy. It still exists due to economic actions of the clients, and because it accepts political power of government through the nationalism sign of Thao Suranari. In the meantime, it is still present because it shares social memory with other local people who define themselves as offspring of Thao Suranari. The identity of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is changed from rudeness to politeness since local people make Thao Suranari sacred. Hence, its existence is the weave product of local and national signs, in global economic tension. For the weave of the sign of sacredness of Thao Suranari, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* does not only help *Maw Phlaeng* get the significance of symbolic equality (as they are

offspring of Thao Suranari like others), but it also helps its clients, who are being beaten by economic development, come back to the business battle field and weave various signs of Thao Suranari worship until they accomplish what they want and return their gratitude toward the signs by offering votive *Phlaeng Khorat*. The existence of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is related to clients' weaving wheels of signs running on the road of progression. Remarkably, the construction and existence of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* represents the process of class de-territorialization by the marginal people who were/are being excluded by modernization from the public spaces and the economic progresses.

Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* in modernity is a dialogue between *Maw Phlaeng* and the client. It is not the product of hybrid identity process like other applied traditional performances such as *Maw Lum Cing* in Suriya Smutkupt and others (2001) and *Phlaeng Lukthung Kam Mueang* in Kriangsak Chetpatanavanich (2007). It attempts to keep its traditional style while telling modern life stories. Its pattern is going back to the past and using it in forms of performance by using the signs of Thao Suranari as a historical personage and spiritual ancestor. Consequently, it needs to abandon the structure of the show presenting rudeness of mundane living which belonged to skillful senior *Maw Phlaeng*. Although, it does not meet the emotional and entertainment preference of new clients, it may meet the emotional needs of clients who are unhappy when they pray to Thao Suranari for help. Besides, it may satisfy the emotional needs of clients who are happy and show themselves as successful persons in business when they hire votive *Phlaeng Khorat* to fulfill their vow. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* is in a flexible status of modernity which helps people who had experienced difficulties return their rewards, both emotional and financial. Votive *Phlaeng Khorat* helps *Maw Phlaeng* and clients to connect to webs of significances of Thao Suranari. If they are sick and weakened by modernity, votive *Phlaeng Khorat* can be a sign of treatment because it is weaved from multiple signs for survival. They interpret modernity with their experiences about the nationalist history, the sacred local spirit, and the mundane livelihood though government and mass media try to impose the truth of modernity in the public space and the person's consciousness.

In Michael Herzfeld (1991), local people are aware of history in monumental and social time terms. This social time is defined by both formal relationships and daily interaction of residents. The state encages the people with the 'national-sentiment' to preserve the monuments of a glorious past. Then citizens have become unequal individuals within a cultural hierarchy. Their local taste replaces and contests the rationality of national institutions. They are confronting an ambiguous boundary between the private sphere and the public sphere. They try to memorialize their own old life-style in terms that would give it value in a modern world for nostalgia (Herzfeld, 1991).

In Pattana Kitiarsa (1999), the urban spirit-medium cults are portrayed as an "outlawed religion" by Thai official authorities and the Sangha order. They are represented by the Thai press

and media as those of a deceiver, an irrational spirit mentor, or an unreliable public representative. But they represent the religious practices of the subaltern class. The people seem to search for a "religion" that is meaningful and relevant to their disoriented and uncertain lives, and that institutionalized, state-sponsored religions cannot provide. The cults can be marked by the return of the pre-modern and religious past into the present cultural setting. This form of religious return has been shaped and reshaped by capitalist forces and communication technologies in conjunction with people's lust for material wealth, which is symbolized by their dying wishes for luck and money. Pattana asserts that the cults as the multi-voice of popular religions and state-sponsored religion are juxtaposed. The cult represented a system of multi-vocal and complex signs as primarily expressed by the marginal or subaltern segment (Pattana Kitiarsa, 1999).

In Kriangsak Chetpatanavanich (2007), the modernity of new genre song in Northern Thailand, *Phlaeng Lukthung Kam Mueang*, represented hybridization between traditional character and modern character. It is the most popular entertainment of the new rural people who live in their social structure composed from both agricultural income and service industrial income. This identity differs from the identity constructed by the state and the elite that highlights order and polity. The content of the songs usually represented 'irrational subjectivity' of powerless people that overcome the rationality of officials (Chetpatanavanich, 2007).

Herzfeld, Pattana, and Kriangsak show how modernity is differentiated and is built up by people and by the state. Therefore, rationality from each side is in competition. The individual struggling for a living is finally the result of rationality chosen in the public sphere. Individuals can find ways to deal with their insecurities by establishing their own way of belief in the past to communicate with the relationship of power that controls them. The power is mostly from the process of modernization by the governments and mass media.

Votive *Maw Phlaeng* is here defined as a group of people who have missed the modernization process. They are at the edge of the culture of modern entertainment and modernization, but they can create the identity since they also use the signs on public spaces of the signs and memory of Thao Suranari. They signally perform by keeping the traditional style of *Phlaeng Khorat* whose significance in modern society is being gradually destroyed. Partaking in the sign of Thao Suranari as local spirit, they reverse the situation by keeping the style of an outdated show, but using its meaning as a root of their strong local identity. They do not only reasonably communicate by linking social memory and the tradition of *Phlaeng Khorat*, but they are also helping clients share this social memory to be stronger in the aspects of local identity and economic progress.

The votive ceremony itself does not signify the possession of the spirit through the medium's body. The outdated style of votive *Phlaeng Khorat* does not involve the construction of its hybrid identity. It is not the show of the multi-voice of popular religious practices to resist the discourses and rationality of institutions. Nevertheless, it is the juxtaposition of the signs in the

context of local modernization. Both *Maw Phlaeng* and votive clients, therefore, can interpret those signs and create webs of significance for appropriate sets of meaning corresponding to their identity and economic life. Even though the government tries to control "the truth" of modernity by controlling history and public spaces, the local people try to control "the truth" of their local modernity by creating social memory and ritual practice into these historical and public spaces. *Maw Phlaeng* and votive clients design their "truth" in accordance with mundane life in the context of members of local society, members of the nation-state and members of the global economy. Consequently, these multi-contexts of modernity are chaotically interpreted by these people, so it is complicated to classify the hierarchy of sign dominations.

Acknowledgements

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