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## The Thai Popular Song and Its Literary Lineage

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### Abstract

Though Western-inspired, the Thai popular song represents a very successful effort on the part of Thai artists to appropriate, transcend and "thaïsize" a foreign medium. True to the indigeneous tradition of forging an intimate link between music and literature, the creators of Thai popular songs have shown imagination, resourcefulness and originality in anchoring the new genre in the noble lineage of Thai folk and classical literature, as may be witnessed from the work of the Suntharaporn Group whose 50th anniversary was commemorated in November 1989. More recent directions such as the "Phleng Luk Thung" and the "Song for Life" have contributed towards expanding the substance as well as the range of expression, thus reaching an ever-increasing public. The advent of rock music may have plunged the genre into a rather facile, self-imposed cultural servitude, but there are signs of a new beginning, marked also by literary preoccupations.

### Preamble : A Generational Conflict

Although Western-inspired, the Thai popular song has been so well acclimatized that many of its protagonists have claimed that the process of "Thaïsize" has been more than successful. In November 1989, the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Suntharaporn Band was celebrated with special performances, the publication of edited versions of musical scores and lyrics, as well as commemorative volumes containing learned articles. Government agencies such as the Fine Arts Department, the Public Relations Department and some institutions of higher learning were also involved in this event. Why has such an honour been accorded to the work of a group of "pop"

musicians? It might be worthwhile to look at the generic label which has been attached to the Thai popular song, namely, "phleng thai sakon" (เพลงไทยสากล), literally "song which is both Thai and universal." Culturally patriotic as they are, Thai music lovers will only savour music which has been "thaïsize" to suit their palates. On the other hand, they can be "cosmopolitan," naturally on their own terms, as may be witnessed from classical Thai music which abounds in melodies and songs echoing musical characteristics of neighbouring cultures, namely those bearing the epithets of "kaek" (แขก), "phma" (พม่า), "mon" (มอญ), "khmen" (เขมร), "lao" (ลาว), "chin" (จีน) and "farang" (ฝรั่ง). That the music of the Suntharaporn Group

has been adopted into the Thai musical pantheon is because it has followed the footsteps of Thai classical music in the art of appropriating and transcending foreign influences. In musical terms, it has succeeded in harmonizing the Thai and the Western traditions, and one of its notable achievements is its commitment to the literary tradition. Some literary scholars even go so far as to maintain that the best of modern Thai poetry is to be found in the Suntharaporn lyrics. In this respect, the Suntharaporn Group has established a literary standard that other Thai artists have striven to emulate.

However, it cannot be assumed that the supremacy of Suntharaporn and his type of popular music has always remained uncontested. Since the advent of the electric guitar, the electronic synthesizer, the cassette tape, the transistor radio, and above all, of rock music, a new generation of artists and audience has fed itself on a new wave of pop that has swept the entertainment world in Thailand. The change in public taste which has come about is a drastic one. Whereas some twenty years ago, parents and children might have been enjoying the same kind of music, listening to the same radio programme or going out to the same concert, a musical "apartheid" has set in, whereby mutual contempt and reciprocal accusation are often expressed. The younger generation, somehow or other, has not been as vocal as its elders, for in terms of "production" and "consumption" the new wave has already dealt a blow to the adherents of Suntharaporn and his clan. It has even been so benign to the old zealots as to help "jazz up" a number of old tunes and find a "market" for them. The young-

sters are more pragmatic, do not argue in artistic terms and cling more to a very basic hedonism. Their only criticism of the music revered by their parents is that it bores them. They do not question its musical or literary virtues. Let the classics rest in a pantheon, which to them is a mausoleum. They do not aim at longevity or permanency: music is produced for immediate consumption. The diatribes from the older generation are rhetorically more interesting: the new wave of rock and pop is raucous, lacking in refinement. The lyrics are devoid of any literary quality, and thus reflect illiteracy on the part of their originators. One of the hit songs of 1987, namely *Just One Word* (บอกมาคำเดียว) sung by Amphon Lumpun of the Micro Band, is often singled out as a testimony of decadence, a fall from the artistic and literary heights once occupied by Suntharaporn and his peers. This love song of the late eighties is sparse in words, and content-wise it posits a new love ethic that must prove an anathema to the older generation.

Tell me straight what you think,  
Whether you want to stay or to go.  
Tell me. Don't waste your time.  
Just tell me in one word.

[บอกมาเลขว่าคิดยังไง  
จะอยู่หรือไปก็บอกมา  
บอกมาเลขอย่าเสียเวลา  
บอกฉันมาคำเดียว]

What a contrast with the hit song of the early sixties *Just One Word* (เพียงคำเดียว), a composition by Suntharaporn's contemporary, Saman Kanchanaphalin, sung by the perennial Suthep Wongkhamhaeng

Just one word that I desire.  
 The word I wish to hear in order to  
 warm my heart.  
 I have been waiting for so long to  
 hear it.  
 This is the only word I hope to hear  
 from the lips of my beloved.

[เพียงคำเดียวที่ปรารถนา  
 อยากฟังให้ซึ่งอุราใจพะว้าพะวัง  
 นานเท่านั้นพักคอยจะฟัง  
 คำนี้คำเดียวที่หวังจะฟังจากปากดวงใจ]

This is very much in the classical vein which reminds one of the love poetry of the late Ayuthya and early Ratanakosin periods, although as far as singing is concerned, Suthep is more “modern” than Winai Chulabuspa, the leading singer of the Suntharaporn Group, whose famous love songs of the fifties are even more deeply anchored in the old literary tradition. One song in particular provides a sharp contrast to the aesthetics of directness of Amphon Lumpun: it is called *I Keep It in My Mind*.

I only think it in my mind.  
 I have not told it to anybody.  
 Really I keep it in my mind.  
 Only to think of giving expression to it  
 Already makes me utterly confused.  
 The more I think, the more inhibited  
 do I feel.

If I want to reveal my innermost secret,  
 How am I to begin,  
 So that you will have sympathy for me.

[ทีเพียงแต่คิดเอาไว้ในใจ  
 พังยังไม่เคยบอกใคร  
 พังคิดในใจเท่านั้น  
 ครั้นคิดจะเอ่ยไรเอ่ยบ่นมัน  
 ชังคิดชังหวุ่น  
 ชังคิดชังตันอุรา  
 หากพังจะเผยเฉลยความใน  
 พังควรขมต้นอย่างไร  
 เพื่อน้องจะได้เมตตา]

This is what our young music lovers would brand as “a song with too many words” or to be even more precise, “a song of those who talk too much” (เพลงของคนพูดมาก). Their songs are more in keeping with the order of the day, namely, “songs of those who economize on words” (เพลงของคนพูดน้อย). So the debate goes on and assumes an increasingly *literary* nature. There are indeed implications that bear upon more serious cultural issues. If the criticisms of the elderly group about the link between the un-literariness of the new wave of popular songs and the illiteracy or semi-illiteracy of the new generation were correct, then should the younger generation alone be blamed for this phenomenon of corruption of taste? One could even pose a further question as to whether a good *literary education* could work as a safeguard against the vagaries of public taste. I have elsewhere<sup>2</sup> tried to point out that the powers that be since the 1932 Revolution have had absolutely no notion about what literature could contribute to a democratic education. Perhaps one can even go so far as to say that the contemporary Thai society in general does not know what literary education is, let alone sees its importance. It might be too early to attempt to answer the ponderous questions posed above. All I want to bring home here is that the controversy over the Thai popular song has brought to the fore important issues concerning Thai culture that warrant serious attention. It would probably not be politic to brush aside the excesses of rock music as kindreds of uncontrolled sexual extravagances, as Allan Bloom has done in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987).<sup>3</sup> It could well be that the freedom from the *literary bondage*, much cherished

by the young adherents of the new rock and pop, has robbed them of a firm cultural footing and a resourceful ally and hence left them in an artistic vacuum through which they can only howl their way in a self-impooverishing lingo.

### East-West Encounter

The genre of "popular song" to which we are here addressing ourselves owes its origin to contact with Western music. This East-West encounter certainly goes beyond the adoption of Western instrumentation and orchestration. The protagonists of the Thai popular song often maintain that the best of Thai popular songs represent a happy marriage between East and West, whereby Western influence has been assimilated, internalized, transcended, and re-created, in other words, "thaisized." In this respect, the new wave of Thai pop and rock has been accused of servile imitation of Western models by simply changing the lyrics into Thai in utter disregard of copyright laws! It might be worthwhile to cast a look at the beginnings of the Thai popular song in order to see how the pioneers managed to stay clear of a cultural servitude.

Chroniclers of the Thai popular song usually ascribe the rise of this hybrid genre to the work of Prince Borihat, son of King Chulalongkorn, a German-trained Wagnerian, who was also at home in Thai classical music. Unfortunately, none of his "popular songs" are performed today, and he is better known as a composer of music for brass and marching bands. Another pioneer was Phranbun, whose songs from the twenties and thirties are now being revived. It must be admitted that Phranbun was working under obvious constraints. His knowledge of

Western music was minimal, and his compositions suffer from a mismatch between words and music, particularly from a discrepancy between the tones of the Thai language (วรรณยุกต์) and the musical register. Also worth mentioning are the work of Momluang Phuangroi, who has, intermittently since the early thirties, been composing popular songs of considerable merit, although it took her some time before she could solve the problem of tonal sounds of Thai in a Western-style music. But it was the Suntharaporn Group that made great strides with the development of the new genre. It is important that we pay attention to the musical background of this group. The original members of the group, seven in all, had been members of the Fine Arts Department Orchestra, having had a thorough training in Western classical music under the famous teacher Phra Chen Duriyang. They had played some jazz with visiting Western artists as well as on their own. They were also at home in Thai classical music--the leader of the group, Suntharaporn, being a native of Amphawa, that most artistic and musical province which is also the birthplace of King Rama II. Suntharaporn and some of his colleagues had also been involved in a project of transcribing Thai classical music into Western notation, a rare opportunity for them to become acquainted with a fairly large repertoire. As members of a symphony orchestra they also mastered a basic Western repertoire, and Suntharaporn himself spent 16 years as a first violinist in the Fine Arts Department Orchestra. This thorough background in both Thai and Western music is unfortunately lacking in the new generation of musicians, and some of their opponents have not hesitated to equate this musical

illiteracy with a musical bastardy. As far as classical Thai music is concerned, it has to be remembered that since the 19th century the Thai musical tradition has never accorded purely instrumental music the same privilege as the Western tradition, and that Thai music is intimately linked with the song and the dance. I have elsewhere<sup>4</sup> discussed the mutual illumination of the arts in Thai cultural life, particularly with regard to the Wagnerian notion of "total work of art." The conclusion we could draw from this distinctive characteristic of Thai performing arts is that anyone reared in the Thai musical tradition must already be sensitive and committed to *literature*.

In this sense, the new art form "phleng thai sakon" has since its early days strived to place itself in a *literary lineage*. Again, the Suntharaporn Group has set an example that other and later artists have followed and emulated. Suntharaporn and his colleagues were fortunate in being able to enlist the support of outstanding lyricists, some of whom were poets in their own right. Notable among the lyricists was Kaeo Achariyakun, a professional writer and poet who had received training in Western music. The perfect collaboration between composer and lyricist went on for about twenty years, yielding a corpus of over a thousand works that now rank as the "classics" of Thai popular songs and have inspired younger artists like Saman Kanchanaphalin, Sanga Aramphi and Payong Mukda to carry on with distinction the happy union between the Thai and the Western traditions.

#### Words and Music

In an interview given at Silpakorn University in 1980, Suntharaporn and Kaeo

Achariyakun described to the audience their unique way of collaboration. They actually sat together for hours when composing a song. Unlike in the Western tradition in which the lyrics or the libretto would normally come first, to be set to music by the composer, Thai artists face a problem peculiar to Thai music, namely, that of matching the tonal level of the words with the pitch of the music, since Thai is a tonal language. Thai classical songs allow room for a particular technique of singing known as the "uan" (เอื้อน) – the slurring of a word upward or downward in search of the right pitch as set by the music. This technique, essentially born out of a defect inherent in the Thai musical and linguistic system, was turned to advantage by masters of Thai music in the past as a means of embellishing a melodic line while at the same time serving as a vehicle of emotional intensity. Although this technique was carried over into the Western-style popular song, it did not enjoy the same measure of freedom since the latter was based on dance rhythms designed to be performed by a dance band. These circumstances forced the two artists to work out their own mode of collaboration: the words would be fitted into the music. It was certainly not an easy process, and certainly not for the lyricist who would have to possess extraordinary sensitivity, imagination and resourcefulness. This means that the *literary* component of a song enjoys a privilege comparable to, if not greater than, the musical component. No wonder the lyrics aspire to the status of *literature*, and are in many cases literary works of distinction. The lyricist then could not think only as a poet. The melody was there as a framework within which he had to work,

though in the case of Kaeo, things were much facilitated since he could read music. The task of the composer was in no way an easy one either. He knew he was not composing a “chant sans parole”, i.e. a “song without words”, but the words were yet to come and he had to convey the message to his colleague in such a way that the latter would be in the position not only to read his music, but also to read his mind. His music would have to express certain feelings, thoughts, moods and atmosphere that were only too ready to cross the boundary from music into words. It was not at all strange that the two masters did not leave to posterity their correspondence, as was the case with, say, Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. They had to be there together, agreeing on the basic concept, on the main idea, the composer at times thinking in words and the lyricist singing his way out of an impasse. It was fascinating, at the said interview, to hear Suntharaporn and Kaeo discourse on their wartime experience, when air-raids prevented them from going home and they spent whole nights composing those memorable songs. It would appear that the difficulty of their task, which was imposed upon them by the very nature of the Thai language, proved to be a spiritual and intellectual enrichment and spurred them on to great artistic heights.

We must not forget that we are dealing here with a Western-inspired art form, and in one way or another, the appropriation of a Western legacy must have required an unusually high degree of self-discipline as well as self-examination. The early works of the Suntharaporn Group betray a “classical” reticence, but at the same time reveal an unmistakable fascination with a new idiom

and an almost childlike awakening to new possibilities. In *Butterflies in Early Morn* (ผีเสื้อยามเช้า), one recognizes a joyous experiment with the waltz rhythm as well as Western instrumentation. An interplay between the human voice and the clarinet is introduced, whereby the “tremolo” played by the clarinetist (to represent the movement of a butterfly) is picked up by the singer through a prolonged “vibrato,” for which the lyricist has made ample provision by way of a long vowel sound. Other dance rhythms like the swing prove a real challenge, and both the composer and the lyricist respond to the challenge with a “tour de force” as in *Do you ever think of me?* (คิดถึงฉันไหม), which can very well serve as a test piece for singer and orchestra. The old technique used in classical Thai music known as “full text” (เนื้อเต็ม), whereby monosyllabic words are matched by single notes, is taken over into this Western-style song. The Westernization process takes the form of stresses dictated by the music, and the lyricist has seen to it that these stresses (uncommon in the Thai language) are syntactically and semantically appropriate. Needless to say, not many singers have attempted to sing this song, because the Thai language is here phonetically stretched to its extreme limits. Only a poet conscious of the potentialities of “the dialect of the tribe” (to borrow T.S. Eliots’ term) is capable of such a remarkable innovation. We are back in the literary realm again.

I am not saying that the pioneers of the Thai popular song were conservatives who lacked originality. What I am trying to emphasize here is that they did not start from scratch and that their thorough knowledge of both the Thai and the Western

traditions proved to be a real strength. A certain "classical" simplicity of form characterizes these early works. The basic structure follows the pattern of the "Lied" as practised by Western composers like Schubert and Schumann, namely, A A or A A A or A A B A (the last type being the most common)<sup>6</sup>. Recent research has established that musicians of the Suntharaporn Group did study German "Lieder" with their master Phra Chen Duriyang (whose father was German). It should be borne in mind that the German "Lied" was thoroughly committed to literature, being a testimony of the great German composers' faith in the genius of German poetry. Indirectly, through their all-round education in Western music, the pioneers of the Thai popular song did have access to a foreign musical tradition in which literature occupies a highly prestigious place. Alas, without knowledge of German, they could not very well claim to be part of that august Teutonic literary lineage! On the other hand, the little that they could learn from that master of the First Viennese School was put to good advantage. An early work of the Suntharaporn Band such as *Message of Love* (ส่งรัก) is a good example of how an emotionally charged content can be expressed with economy of form (see *Appendix 1*). Each stanza has a central theme. The first is a depiction of a nature scene, here a sunset, very much akin to the convention of "Natureingang" in German poetry and also adopted into the German "Lied." The second stanza concentrates on the theme of birds as messengers of love. The third becomes inward-looking: the lover describes her state of mind, her longing. The lyricist has taken great care in matching the words to the notes as to leave little room for slurring.

Only at the end of a line is the singer given full freedom to indulge in Thai-style "uan." This may appear a concession to the Western tradition, but in actual fact it is a way to obviate any possible mushiness. A Thai lady of good breeding would know how to contain her emotions, and coyness and reticence enhance dignity, a cultural trait most subtly expressed in this song. Simplicity is observed also in the vocabulary. The song rests mainly on monosyllabic words; very few Indianized words are used. As in a German "Lied", it harks back to folk poetry. *Sang Rak* represents the "classics" of Thai popular songs in that it achieves emotional profundity and serenity with utmost economy of form. Expressed in Western terms, this union of words and melody, of literature and music, is more in a Brahmsian rather than in a Wagnerian vein.

#### Tradition and Individual Talent

I am referring here to a seminal essay by T.S. Eliot, not with the intention of seeking an Anglo-American literary ancestry for the Thai popular song, but to substantiate Eliot's theory as to how an artistic tradition can serve as a basis for works of great originality. The love song *Sang Rak* mentioned above is very much in a literary lineage, marked by a number of literary conventions such as objects from the natural world reminding us of our loved ones. But it might be worthwhile to examine the process of transformation that a song has gone through, from its humble origin as a folk song through a sophisticated version of "third-degree" elaboration (เพลงสามชั้น) to its latest adaptation into a Thai "pop". We are dealing here with that well-known song *Nok Khamin*.

The folk version in the form of a lullaby provides a basis for further development and elaboration (see *Appendix 2*). There are a number of basic elements in this original folk version which will be retained in later transformations. First, the atmosphere is that of solitude and melancholy, as befitting its function of lulling a child to sleep. Secondly, mention is made of the approaching night. Thirdly, the bird "nok khamin" plays the role of a wanderer, and there is a hint here of its volatile, nomadic, way of life. Fourthly, a rhetorical question is posed, suggesting that its returning is but one of several options. Fifthly, the gentle breeze seems to be carrying the bird back home. There is no explicit indication whom or what the bird may represent. This is still a lullaby in its pristine form without extraneous elements encroaching upon its blissful innocence, as is the case with quite a number of lullabies.

The transformation of a lullaby into a "phleng sam chan" (*Appendix 3*) is musically a radical departure from the folk version. It is meant to be a virtuoso piece exhibiting the prowess of a singer. This is Thai classical music at its most sophisticated. But strangely enough, no startling innovation in terms of literary expression has taken place apart from the introduction of the conventional address to the flower, which does not change the general content of the song. The only change introduced is to divert the course of the bird away from home, thus turning it loose and committing it forever to a nomadic life. This "liberating act," insignificant as it may seem, is typical of the development of Thai art, particularly literature. It is worth noting that, in this case, a classical work pays due respect to

its folk antecedent and seeks for itself only a small exit. We are dealing here with "tradition and individual talent" à la *thailandaise*.

Posterity will see to it that this little exit serves as a gateway to a new world of experience. This is what happens in the "pop" version of *Nok Khamin* as adapted by Payong Mukda, who also performs the task of lyricist (*Appendix 4*). From the point of view of music, a great deal of freedom has been taken with the adaptation, but one must concede that the general atmosphere remains committed to the folk and the classical versions. It is the literary innovation that merits special attention, although the five elements from the lullaby are still there. The theme of perpetual wandering posited for the first time in the classical version is now taken up and expanded much further. The word "phanechon" (พเนจร) crops up twice, the first time as a noun (line 5) meaning a nomad, and the second time as a verb (line 8) meaning leading a nomad's life. The rhetorical question posed in the two earlier versions and carried over here can no longer remain unanswered. In violation of classical rhetorics, the modern man does not mince his words. The "I", the "persona" of the song, gives a response in the last line: "Here I sleep," and the song ends *unexpectedly* on a stoic, self-assertive note, which makes it very modern. There are many innovations in this "pop" version by Payong Mukda. This *Nok Khamin* is a love song. The fate of the bird and that of the suffering "I" are intertwined and in the end become identical. It is not that she loves the wandering life and does not wish to return home. The home that she desires has an



occupant who may not welcome her or who may already have a companion. The lyricist offers here exquisite poetry based again on the aesthetics of reticence, as was the case with *Sang Rak*. From a lullaby through a wanderer's song to a (Thai and non-militant) feminist love song, *Nok Khamin* has travelled a long way. When we trace back our literary lineage, we have no Periclean Golden Age to fall back on. Our ancestors were humble people who sang lullabies to their progeny.

### Pillaging the Classics?

Lest it be thought that the Thai popular song drew its strength exclusively from "popular" sources, it might be meaningful also to explore the "classicist" trend in the Thai popular song. Again we shall have to revert to Suntharaporn and his group, for it is through them that the strength of classical Thai literature has been inherited. Not that there have been no excesses in what in Western terms one would call "Alexandrian" extravagance. The lyrics of a song like *Petchburi* (เพชรบุรีแดนใจ) resorts to archaic language with a vocabulary that reminds one of the early Ayuthaya epic *Yuan Phai*, and no composer of the popular song, not even Suntharaporn himself, could create the kind of music that would match the austerity of the lyrics. The very popular *Phu Kradung* (ภูกระดึง) suffers occasionally from inappropriate hyperboles. But at its best, the Suntharaporn Group has used its knowledge of classical Thai literature with great skill and adroitness. It is fair to say that at their best, they know how to relive, rethink and re-create their classics. It is not just a matter of pillaging the classics.

The debt to the classics takes various forms. The easiest from is to adopt a

classical song with its original lyrics into the new medium and fit it into a new rhythm with Western orchestration. There have been a number of successful attempts both by Suntharaporn and by other groups. Many young people get to know the classical *Khamen Saiyok* through a modernized version in a tango rhythm. Another possibility is to put new lyrics into a classical tune, modernizing it to fit a Western rhythm. The tasks of the composer and lyricist become more difficult. They must be able to capture the spirit of the original composition before embarking upon the process of adaptation. (The Suntharaporn Group went a little far in this in having a Thai classical orchestra and a Western big band play together, a process that involved a re-tuning of the Thai traditional instruments.) The new lyrics would strive to respond to the melodic and rhythmic character of the original. In other words, the adaptation becomes a re-interpretation of the classical model. We have by way of example an exquisitely spirited and witty pop version of an old tune now simply called *Kratae* (กระต๊อ), in which the lyricist and the composer pretend to take the word "kratae" at its face value and produce a duet in the style of classical literature, whereby two lovers contemplate a nature scene (called in Thai "ชมดง") with the woman warning her beloved not to be as volatile as the animal "kratae" (*tupaia glis*). This category of adaptation, too, has yielded quite a number of successful works.

But it is in the category of literary "imitation"<sup>6</sup> that the Thai popular song has made great strides. As in Western literature, later poets would echo, quote, adapt or imitate poets of preceding ages and then go on to elaborate their own versions, sometimes

departing significantly from the original, thus demonstrating their own originality and prowess as poets. Students of Thai literature are familiar with how Nai Narin, a contemporary of Rama II, “imitates” Sripraj, a contemporary of King Narai in 17th century Ayuthya, or how our own contemporary poet Angkarn Kalayanapongse echoes Nai Narin. Lyricists of Thai popular songs have sought leave to place themselves in this august *literary lineage* and, in some cases, have proved themselves to be worthy heirs of this literary tradition. Kaeo Achariyakul, in particular, has produced remarkable works along this line, and in this respect, Suntharaporn was literarily literate enough to be able to match Kaeo’s literary innovations with musical compositions of the highest order. Let us consider a few specific examples.

There exists a poem in the form of a “khlong” in which the first two lines were the work of King Narai, and the last two, that of Sripraj (see *Appendix 5*). The story goes that the King left off at the second line in order to test the young Sripraj as to whether he would be able to complete it. Naturally, the child prodigy did it in no time. The poem expresses the protective feeling of a lover towards his beloved, whereby, in accordance with literary convention, the youthful innocence of the loved one is represented by her cheeks. The seventeenth-century poem plays with a slight hint that someone might have encroached upon that blissful innocence, since her cheeks seem to have “clouded” or “darkened” (ทมิฬ). In the “pop” version by Suntharaporn and Kaeo Achariyakul entitled *Her Cheeks Have Darkened* (ทมิฬหน้านาง), the ambiguity in the original has been cast aside

(see *Appendix 6*). In its stead has come a lamentation on lost innocence. It is fascinating to see how variations on the theme of “cheeks” develop in the modern adaptation. Perhaps adaptation is an understatement, for this is more of a re-creation which is a great deal more elaborate and more complex than its model. More startlingly innovative is the music: this lamentation does not run the risk of overflowing with sentimentality, for it is set in the rhythm of beguine. How a highly literary lamentation in the Thai language could be contained in a Latin-American dance rhythm remains a marvel.

The two artists are also capable of producing “imitations” of classical literature in a lighter vein. Another poem by Sripraj (see *Appendix 7*) proves irresistible, and they deliver their new version entitled *A Hunter Luring a Deer* (พรานล่อเนื้อ) (see *Appendix 8*). From a formal standpoint, the song is a highly disciplined “imitation” of Sripraj, for the lyricist strives to match his own version with the original on a point-by-point basis, that is to say, each line from Sripraj’s poem is taken up and expanded into one corresponding stanza of the new song, based on a Schubertian AABA structure. The first line/stanza deals with the lady’s coquettish ogling. The second constitutes the main theme of the song, namely, the hunter’s lure. The third represents a challenge to the hunter to cast his arrow. The fourth is a reproach to the hunter that he has let loose his victim against the latter’s own will. The music is highly spirited, set in the rhythm of the quickstep, and captures very well the essence of “Sripraj imitation.” That modern lyrics written in the style of classical Thai literature and modern Western-style dance music

conspire to create a work of great originality can be considered a testimony of the fact that West is not always West and East is not always East, and that the twain do meet.

### Literariness and Literary Tradition

It will have become apparent by now that the Thai popular song, especially in the pre-rock period, aspires towards literary virtues and consciously seeks a place in a literary tradition. No doubt, it has developed far beyond the genre of "imitation" and has come up with new compositions marked by great originality. Nevertheless, it would appear that the literariness of these new works, whatever be their innovations, remains committed to literary traditions. Sunthornphu is in your ears, so to speak; you hear his rhythms, his cadences, his mellifluous flow, even before you start thinking in words. Some Thai popular songs can even stand on their own as poetry, as worthy descendants of a literary lineage. There is a short song with music by Suntharaporn and words by Cha-um Panchaphan (ช่อม บัญจพรรค์), called *To You* (ถึงเธอ), that in its purity of form and expression could rival any classical poem. This is a literary and a musical manifesto, an ontological composition professing a faith in the song itself.

ถึงเธอ

จำเรียงถ้อย ร้อยคำ ทำเป็นเพลง

ให้วังเวง เสนาะจิต คิดดวล

ขอฝากเสียง ฝากเสียง แทนเสียงพิณ

คราใดยิน จงนึกถึง ตรึงจิตใจ

เธออยู่ไหน ฝากลมไป ให้ถึงเธอ

ประโลมใจ ไว้เสมอ ไม่ห่างหาย

ระรื่นจิต พิศวาส ไม่กาลดคลาย

ฝากเสียงไว้ ชื่นแทนกาย แนบใจเธอ

Characteristics of traditional Thai poetic language are to be found in Thai popular songs, and the above *Thung Thoe* may be a good illustration. This song is marked by a literariness that is a deviation from everyday language. Rich internal rhymes are prevalent, both in the form of alliteration and assonance, a Sunthornphu legacy that can go to excess in lesser hands and which some poets like Angkarn Kalayanapongse try hard to obviate. Tautology is another literary device that pervades the Thai popular song. This figure of speech seems to respond to the Thai poetic mentality (which tends to favour "songs with too many words" rather than "songs with too few words"), but it may also be linked to the interrelationship between dance, music and poetry. A tautology facilitates the completion of a certain dance movement. Be that as it may, the Thai popular song adopts it as an embellishment as well as a vehicle for intensifying the emotional content of a song. *Fragrance of the Night-Flower* (กลิ่นราตรี) may serve as a good example of how the various literary devices are put to good use to enhance the music (see *Appendix 9*). The lyricist Song Salitun (ทรง สาลิตุล) is also adept in word-plays and ambiguities, the entire song being based on a double meaning of the word "ratri" (ราตรี), which can either mean the night or the night-flower. Another exquisite play with ambiguity is the repetition of the word "kun" (กุน) in line 5: the first "kun" is a noun meaning the night, whereas the second "kun" is a verb meaning to disappear. But the most important feature of *Klin Ratri* goes beyond these technical devices: it represents an assertion of the value of the imagination. The final stanza is indicative of this attitude to life. In the

world of the imagination, the fragrance of the flower braves the wind (ลมพัดมา) to reach the person in love.

On the whole, we can say that classical Thai literature has left an indelible imprint on the Thai popular song, and not only on the works of the Suntharaporn Group. It has not, however, succeeded in modernizing the personal pronouns, and words like “พี่”, “น้อง” and “ฉัน”, “เธอ” still abound. When in a song by Saman Kanchanaphlin and Sunthariya Na Wiangkan called *I Stumble into Loving You* (รักคุณเข้านัว), made famous by Suthep Wongkamhaeng in 1955, the personal pronouns “ผม” and “คุณ” were introduced, this was considered as a startling novelty, though it has not caught on. We are still immersed in the traditional “chan-thoe” relationship even in the late eighties, in spite of all kinds of “jazzing up” and “rocking up.” Has the literary tradition become a bondage?

#### Away from the Literary Bondage?

The present paper has concentrated on the work of the Suntharaporn Band. It is deliberately restricted in scope, with a heavy “romantic” slant. It must nevertheless be admitted that it is in this domain that the *literary lineage* can best be discerned and analyzed. It does not mean that the Suntharaporn Group was not capable of creating other kinds of songs. They were in fact a rather versatile group, and in their capacity as staff members of the Public Relations Department they had to produce “commissioned” works in various categories, including patriotic songs, didactic songs, songs commemorating certain events, songs celebrating certain provinces and specific

places of interest, songs dedicated to educational institutions, and during the war years under the Phibunsongkhram Government, songs to persuade Thai citizens to wear hats or to compete with Chinese immigrants in selling noodles! Strange as it may seem, some of these compositions have survived their temporal functionality. The song about the hats can still be heard with great pleasure today, although the lyrics may mean very little to those not familiar with Thai history of that period. The group also composed “ramwong” songs which are still played and heard on a regular basis today. When all is said and done, it will always be those memorable songs in the romantic vein that will survive the test of time, a genre in which the literary heritage of the Thai people is most felt. The only little quarrel one may have with the Suntharaporn Group is that they have not ransacked the treasure house of Thai literature well enough. Thai literature has more to offer than just romantic musings. The harshest verdict that one can impose upon Suntharaporn, his artistic friends and his followers is: “Narrow but deep!”

Although this paper does not attempt to give a comprehensive account of the Thai popular song as such, it will be unfair to conclude our investigation without mentioning achievements of other trends and directions which will have to constitute the subject of other studies at a later stage. The most important trend is *Phleng Luk Thung*, (เพลงลูกทุ่ง), literally “songs of the rural people”. The distinction between “Phleng Luk Thung” and “Phleng Luk Krung” was suggested almost incidentally by Chamnong

Rungsikun, director of the first TV station in the early sixties, whereby the “song of the urban people” are those of the Suntharaporn type. There has, of course, been much overlap between the two genres. In a panel discussion at Chulalongkorn University in 1974 Payong Mukda, a composer and lyricist at home in both genres, maintained that the *Phleng Luk Thung* grew out of Suntharaporn songs sung by rural people deeply rooted in their own regional dialects, who could not catch the proper tones of the central Thai language as used by Suntharaporn. Tonal deviations often described as being “noe” (เหนือ) and different ways of phrasing characterize the new genre, which in the past 30 years has developed an identity of its own. Two literature-related aspects are to be considered here. First, as it is a musical and literary offspring of Suntharaporn, it naturally has literary pretensions. Some of the songs sung by Sonchai Mekwichian (สรชัย เมฆวิเชียร), for example, *The Girl from Pathumthani* (สาวเมืองปทุม) are virtuoso pieces of wordplay that remind one of classical “kolabot” (กลบท). Secondly, its roots in the rural community bring it into contact with the cultural riches of the various regions and localities, especially with the multifarious forms of folk songs, and in this particular respect it has definitely surpassed its master Suntharaporn, who left his native Amphawa as a child and immersed himself early in the classics of the First Viennese School. From the point of view of content, the “Luk Thung” genre reflects the vicissitudes of the life of the entire Thai population and represents a world of human experience richer than the urban Suntharaporn, an obedient servant of the Thai bureaucracy, though a genial one. Its public is large,

both rural and urban, and Luk Thung bands crisscross the country in interminable tours, coming into contact with people in all walks of life. But these autodidacts suffer from one serious short-coming : they lack a proper musical education, and their Western-style bands are for the most part too painful to listen to. Beyond that, they have developed an accompanying form of entertainment known as “hang kruang” (หางเครื่อง), a pale imitation of a Western-style “corps de ballet” forced into the pattern of, again, Western-style modern dance which they must have seen in Western films and in which they have had no training whatsoever. We are here remote from the Thai literary heritage. The Luk Thung falls flat as soon as it succumbs to a self-styled Westernization that turns out to be a tasteless mimicry.

Another direction in the Thai popular song which merits serious attention is *Phleng Phua Chivit* (เพลงเพื่อชีวิต), literally “songs for life”, a musical movement parallel to that of “literature for life.” This is a genre marked by reformatory tendencies, containing social criticism and a wish for a better, more egalitarian society. Musically, it goes to school with the Western folk singers and balladeers of the 1960’s and owes very little to Suntharaporn and his clan, who are despised as mere bourgeois entertainers. Its literary lineage goes back to the “revolutionary” verse of such progressive authors as Chit Phumisak and Asani Pholachan of the 1950’s. Crisp and terse, written in everyday language and simple verse forms, these “songs for life” express potent social messages without sentimentality, hoping to reach the vast majority of the people. It has reached, however, only a handful of progressive intellectuals and a fairly large

number of students. Particularly during the period of "democratic boom" between 1973 and 1976, it enjoyed considerable popularity with the young. Its chief protagonist, Surachai Chanthimathon, leader of the famous "Caravan Band," is a poet in his own right, and these "songs for life" possess unmistakable literary quality. Surachai made his comeback after the proclamation of the amnesty, (in connection with the 1976 political upheaval) and is still active as a band leader, composer, lyricist, singer, poet and writer. More mellow now with advancing years and hardened by experience, he is still looking for new expressions, but it would appear that a revolution will probably never come again, not even musically or literarily.

A new group has benefited from the pioneering efforts of the "songs for life" movement but has adroitly learned how to move with the time. The Carabao Band, now about eight years old and about to disband itself, has met with immense success by endearing itself both to the public, old and young, as well as to the Establishment. Adopting the style of rock music, and even the outer garb, of its musicians, the band always attracts a very large crowd through its lively rhythms and didactic messages. It sets out to be a mentor to Thai society, a voice of conscience, intent upon fighting the abuses of drugs, consumerism and delinquency. It introduces many "literary" innovations, mixing various verse forms, accelerating the pace of a song by injecting prose-like conversational language into a traditional verse. However, by pontificating too much, it has caught itself in a dilemma of having little or nothing more to preach. Musically too, it tends to repeat itself, and the lead singer, having overtaxed himself, rarely sings in tune.

### The Sense of an Ending or a New Beginning?

The death of Suntharaporn in 1981 has definitely left a vacuum in the Thai musical circle. He has left no musical heir, and no composer of his stature has yet appeared on the scene. All that his adherents and protagonists today can do is to keep alive his compositions through broadcasts, recordings and performances. His own band has since split up into two groups, neither of them reaching the high quality attained during the original band's heyday. Many of his star singers, now in their sixties, refuse to make way for younger artists, claiming that they alone can interpret the masterpieces in the way the master wanted them to be. Their criticism is always marked by *literary* considerations: the young singers, born and bred in an unliterary age, do not even know what the words mean. The die-hards among Suntharaporn listeners will admit to no new interpretation. The recent re-recording of Suntharaporn songs by a new group called *Yua Mai* (เยอไม) has put Suntharaporn back into currency and has even won over many young listeners otherwise at home with "songs of those who economize on words." The die-hards, of course, will have none of it. The fact remains that even though Suntharaporn's music might stage a comeback, it will only take the form of a revival or re-interpretation of the "classics." One feels here the sense of an ending more than a new beginning.

When we cast a look at one of the most successful groups of contemporary pop singers and musicians, namely, the Asani-Wasan (อัสนี-วสันต์) Brothers, we may be startled by their latest hit, a pop version of the official name of Bangkok, the length

of which has put many a school child to despair, knowing that he will have to reproduce it on his final examination. The new “rocked up” version is set to ultra-modern Western-style music, densely and briskly orchestrated and well sung by a chorus that repeats itself seven times. Of course, the school children will still be baffled by the meaning of all those Indianized

words, but at least they can enjoy *the sound and the rhythm* of it, and besides it can serve examination purposes. Does this represent a return to the “song of those who talk too much”? Is the Thai popular song seeking a re-marriage with literature? At least we can sense a new beginning. The sound is there in the service of the words which are still incomprehensible to many. We know it too well : literacy takes time.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Council on Thai Studies (COTS), University of Wisconsin, Madison, October 13–14, 1989.

2. Nagavajara, C. "Literary Historiography and Socio-Cultural Transformation: The Case of Thailand." *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 73 (1985), p. 68.

3. Bloom, A. *The Closing of the American Mind*. A Touchstone Book, 1987, pp. 68–81.

4. Nagavajara, C. "Literary Study and Higher Education" (ASAIHL Lecture of the Year 1982). In: *The Teaching of Literature in ASAIHL Universities, Proceedings of a Seminar of the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning*, held at the University of Hong Kong, December 13–15, 1982, p. xxiii.

5. Charanyanond, W. "Suntharaporn's Background in Western Classical Music." Paper presented at the Suntharaporn Seminar organized by the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University and the Fine Arts Department, June 16–17, 1978. In: *Suntharaporn Wichakan*, Bangkok: The National Library, 1989, pp. 17–35. (in Thai).

6. Used here in the sense of a literary work deliberately designed to reflect the style of an earlier poet.

7. The author wishes to thank Miss Jan Weisman, Lecturer in Thai, University of California, Berkeley, and Mrs. Charulin Musikaphong, Information Attachée, Royal Thai Embassy, Washington D.C., for their valuable suggestions.

## The Author

Chetana Nagavajara was born in Bangkok in 1937 and received his education up to the secondary level in Thailand. An awardee of a Thai Government scholarship, he graduated from Cambridge University, England, in 1961 with a B.A. Honours degree in Modern Languages and pursued his graduate studies at Tübingen University, West Germany, where he took a Dr. Phil. degree in Comparative Literature in 1965. He has held academic and administrative appointments at Silpakorn University at Sanam Chandra Palace where he is now Professor of German. He spent the academic year 1989–90 at the University of California, Berkeley, in the capacity of Fulbright Visiting Professor in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies. Mr. Chetana has published numerous books and articles in Thai, English, German and French in such fields as humanities, education, language, literature and fine arts and is also active as a literary, theatre and music critic. His latest book in Thai "For the Survival of the Humanities" was published in September 1989 by Chulalongkorn University Press.



## สังรัก

### Appendix 1

ทำนอง : เอื้อ สุนทรสนาน (สุนทราภรณ์)

คำร้อง : แก้ว อัจฉริยะกุล

ยามสายจันทร์แสงตะวันลับเลื่อนหายไปจากฟ้า  
 แต่ยังมีจับตาเมื่อคราพิศดูเห็นอยู่รำไร  
 หากแสงเดือนลาโลกหัวใจฉันโศกสुकวิโยคทรวงใน  
 แม้จะร้างห่างไปแล้วอีกเมื่อไหร่จะเห็นเจ้าส่งมา

คุณบินหลงเริงเหลิงลมโผบินไปไหน  
 เมื่อบินลับกลับจะไปจะไปหาใครนกเอ๋ยบอกมา  
 ไอนกเอ๋ยเซยคู่ฉันแลเห็นอยู่อยากถามคู่สักครา  
 ถามว่าเมื่อบินมาเห็นใครเขาว่าส่งนกมาว่าอย่างไร

โอช้าในหัวใจนกบินลับไปให้หลัง  
 แต่บินลับกลับรังไม่ฟังน้ำคำฉันพราห์หรือไร  
 ไอนกเอ๋ยฟังก่อนหัวใจร้อร้อนอ้อนระอาในใจ  
 ขออย่าเพิ่งจากไปขอฝากรักให้โปรดรับไปด้วยเถิดเอ๋ย

## นกขมิ้น (เพลงกล่อมเด็ก)

### Appendix 2

เจ้านกขมิ้นเหลืองอ่อน	ค่าแล้วจะนอนที่ตรงไหน
จะนอนไหนก็นอนได้	สุขุมพุ่มไม้ที่เคยนอน
ลมพระพายชายพัดมาอ่อน ๆ	เจ้าเคยจะมานอนรังเอ๋ย

## นกขมิ้น (สามชั้น)

### Appendix 3

เจ้านกขมิ้นเหลืองอ่อน	ค่าลงแล้วเจ้าจะนอนที่รังไหน
นอนไหนก็นอนได้	สุขุมพุ่มไม้ที่เคยนอน
ลมพัดมาอ่อนอ่อน	เจ้าก็ร่อนไปตามลมเอ๋ย
	คอกเอ๋ยคอกขจร
นกขมิ้นเหลืองอ่อน	ค่าแล้วจะนอนไหนเอ๋ย

## นกขมิ้น (แปลง)

Appendix 4

ทำนอง : แปลงจากนกขมิ้น

คำร้อง : พยงค์ มุกดา

คำคืนฉันยืนอยู่เดียวดาย เหลียวมองรอบกาย มีวายจะหวาดกลัว  
หมองนภาที่มีทมิฬ สลัวเย็นย่ำ คำคืนเอ๋ย

ยามนภาคลาไปไกลคำ ยินเสียงร่ำคำบอก เจ้าช่อไม้ดอกเอ๋ย  
เจ้าดอกขจร นกขมิ้นเหลืองอ่อน คำแล้วจะนอนไหนเอ๋ย เอ๋ยเล่านกเอ๋ย

ออกฉันทุกวันเผื่ออาวรณ์ เหมือนคนพเนจร ฉันนอนไม่หลับเลย  
หนาวพระพายพัดเซย ออกเอ๋ยหนาวสั่น สุกบันถอน

ยามนี้เราหลงทางกลางคำ ยินเสียงร่ำคำบอก เจ้าช่อไม้ดอกเอ๋ย  
เจ้าดอกขจร ฉันร้อนร่ำพเนจร ไม่รู้จะนอนไหนเอ๋ย เอ๋ยไอ้หัวอกเอ๋ย

บ้านใดหรือใครจะเอ็นดู รับรองอ้อมชู เลี้ยงดูให้หลับนอน  
นกขมิ้นเหลืองอ่อน คำไหนนอนนั้น ออกฉันหมอง

ทนระกำซ้ำใจยามคำ ยินเสียงร่ำน้ำตก ไอ้หัวอกเอ๋ย  
ไอ้ออกอาวรณ์ ฉันไว้คู่ร่วมคอน ต้องฝันนอนหนาวเอ๋ย เอ๋ยไอ้หัวอกเอ๋ย

เมื่อมองหมายปองก็แลเห็น หัวใจใจเต้น เหมือนเป็นเพียงแต่มอง  
เหมือนพบรังจะครอง แต่หมองเกรงที่ หวังจะมีเจ้าของ

ฟังสำเนียงเสียงเพลงกรวญคร่ำ ไกรหนอร่ำคำบอก เจ้าช่อไม้ดอกเอ๋ย  
เจ้าดอกขจร นกขมิ้นเหลืองอ่อน คำนี้จะนอนไหนเอ๋ย เอ๋ยนอนที่นี้เอ๋ย

## Appendix 5

(สมเด็จพระนารายณ์)	อันไถย้าแก้วแม่	หมองหมาย
	ยุ่งเหลือบหรือรินพราย	ลอบกล้า
(ศรีปราชญ์)	ผิวชนแต่จักกราย	ยังยาก
	ใครจะอาจให้ซ้ำ	ชอกเนื้อเรียมสงวน

## นวลปรางนางหมอง

## Appendix 6

ทำนอง : เอื้อ สุนทรสนาน

คำร้อง : แก้ว อัจฉริยะกุล

นวลปรางนางคู่ซ้ำใครทำให้หมอง  
 รัญจวนในนวลน้องฉันมองเศร้าใจ  
 ปรางนางเคยนวลยวนเย้าฤดีเสื่อมสิ้นราศรีเศร้าไป  
 พี่ปองแก้มนางหมองดวงใจหมองได้ไหนเล่า  
     เสียกายปรางทองค้อมกรมไกรลอบชมแล้วฤเจ้า  
     โตไครคงชมข่มเอา เหลือบจะเศร้าร้ายรัญจวน  
     เหลือบจะไต่หรือรินไรลอบทำหรือพรายย้าคนลอบทำกล้ากวน  
     โตทำเสียจนสิ้นนวลเรียมสู้สงวนซ้ำครวญตรมใจ  
 นวลปรางนางหมองพี่หวังปองค้อมหมองไหม้  
 ปรางทองหมองนวลไปพี่พลอยหม่นหมองดวงใจ พี่สุดแสนจะทนได้  
 ไอ้ชีวิตจะขาดแล้วเอย

## Appendix 7

(ศรีปราชญ์)

เจ้าย้าย้ายักวให้

เรียมเหงา

คุณนายพรานเขา

ล่อเนื้อ

จะยิงก็ยิงเอา

อกพี รามเ

เจ็บไปปานเจ้าเง

เงือกแล้วรอดอย

## พรานล่อเนื้อ

## Appendix 8

ทำนอง : เอื้อ สุนทรสนาน

คำร้อง : แก้ว อัจฉริยะกุล

เจ้ายักวให้พี

เจ้ายิ้มในที่เหมือนเจ้าจะมีรักอารมณ์

ยัวเรียมให้เหงามีไซ้เจ้าชื่นชม

อกเรียมก็ตรมตรมเพราะคมตาเจ้า

เรียมพะวักพะวง

เรียมคิดทะนงแล้วเรียมก็กงหลงตายเปล่า

ตั้งพรานล่อเนื้อเงแล้วเลงเฟ่งเอา

ยัวใจให้เมาเมาแล้วยิงนั่นแล

นำวศรเล็งเฟ่งเอาทุกสิ่ง

หากเจ้าหมายยิงก็ยิงสิแม่

ยิงอกเรียมสั๊กแผล

เงือกแล้วเมื่อย่าแปรอย่าเปลี่ยนใจ

เรียมเจ็บช้ำอร่า

เจ้าเงเจ้าง่าแล้วเจ้าก็ล่าถอยทันใด

เจ็บปวดทนก็ทนเงแล้วราเล็กไป

เจ็บยิ่งสิ่งใดโยมยิงพีเอย

## กลืนราตรี

## Appendix 9

ทำนอง : เอื้อ สุนทรสนาน

เนื้อร้อง : ทรง สาลิตุล

ลมพระพายชายขึ้นในคืนนี้

กลืนราตรีหอมรินขึ้นใจแสน

คอกไม้เอนคืนไปในคืนแค้น

จะเหมือนแม่น้ราตรีไม่มีเลย

เจ้าไซ้ยกลิ้นต่อเมื่อสิ้นแสงอาทิตย์

เหมือนให้คิดปริศนาราศรีเอ๋ย

คิดคำนึงถึงราตรีที่เราเคย

ได้ชมเชยชื่นชวนวันจวนใจ

พอสันคืนคืนสิ้นกลิ่นเสาวรส

ความช้อยชดสคขึ้นคืนไปไหน

ทั้งแต่รอยรันจวนบ่วนฤทัย

ฝากเอาไว้กับราตรีไม่มีเลื่อน

กลืนอายเจ้าเร้าใจให้ใฝ่ฝัน

ทุกคืนวันพรันใจใครจะเหมือน

ไอ้ราตรีเจ้าเอ๋ยที่เคยเยือน

ยังตามเตือนใจอยู่ไม่รู้วาย

มาคืนนี้กลืนราตรีที่ไหนหนอ

ลอยมาล่อล้อให้ใจคอยหาย

อกระที่กนกประหวั้นพรันใจกาย

หรือราตรีที่หมายชายกลืนมา

เพื่อทวนถามความในให้ประจักษ์

เหมือนถามทักทวนเล่ห์เสน่ห์หา

ไอ้ราตรีที่เคยขึ้นเรือนอร่า

ลอยทวนมาหรืออย่างไรใครรู้เอย