

ad hoc title: Thai Masculinity: Positioning
Nakmuay Between Monkhood and
Nakleng

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Monks

Monks are generally described in sociological terms by their differences from lay people: they are category of religious specialists marked by differences in dress, residence, behavior, linguistic practice and other social interaction. They are ritually withdrawn from secular society, although as a field of religious merit they are also a crucial component of Thai life. But rather than highlight the differences between the role of monk and secular behavior, I wish to show some of the

similarities. There are, in other words, many behavioral characteristics exemplified by monks that carry over into daily behavior in the secular world, especially that of boxers, and which constitute key aspects of male prowess and behavior (cf. Keyes, 1986: 72).

In general, monks are all to be regarded with utmost respect simply by virtue of the fact that they are monks: the *Sangha* is one of the 'triple gems' of Buddhism, and it is clear in Thailand that this commands an enormous amount of respect. Certainly the dominant mode in which Thai behavior has been explained in anthropological works is by studying the social importance of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism is the overarching moral and cosmological paradigm informing Thai behavior and values--and widely cited by both Western and Thai analysts. The explanatory potential of Buddhism in Thailand is great, and no cultural analysis that ignored it would be considered 'complete'.

In actual practice, not all monks are regarded equally: there is more to many monks than the respect afforded them for their religious role. That is, those monks (or novices) for example, who are monks for a short period of time, are respected solely for their current role as monk, but not for individual achievements. They may be regarded as a "field of merit" and thus be fed and clothed and otherwise propitiated, but no one seeking

religious advice or ritual (or magical) assistance would seek out a 'temporary' monk. Very learned or skilled monks, on the other hand, are respected both for their role as monks and for their accomplishments while in the robes. This is especially true of the wandering forest monks (*thudong*), several of whom were regarded as *arahants*⁴², and on whom I will be focusing my attention momentarily.

Certain structural and practical characteristics of the monkhood are readily apparent in boxing praxis--although boxers themselves do not necessarily regard it that way. Like monks, camp boxers are withdrawn (for the most part) from society--they reside in exclusive camps designed to focus on training. They minimize contacts (distractions) with outside people, and the environment is an all-male one. (Why this is important will be discussed shortly.)

Boxing also requires a marked change in dress--at least during public performance--that unequivocally marks

⁴² An *arahant* is one "whose stains have been washed away, in whom the four great evils of lust, becoming, delusion, and ignorance have ceased, whose craving for future lives has been broken to pieces, who have reached the higher insight, and whose hearts are purified." They are a class of religious specialists one step down from complete Buddhahood. (Tambiah, 1984:14) They are, in other words, enlightened.

them as boxers, and like monks⁴³, they are further distinguished from society at large (and their "old" life) by assuming a different name while they are boxers. A boxer takes on the name of his camp as his last name (indicating where he is from and who his teacher is) while he resides at the camp; when he retires from boxing, he reverts back to his regular name. A boxer also gets a new first name, his boxing name, chosen by the master/owner (although the boxer may voice specific requests), and tend to reflect metaphorically or metonymically, some quality that the fighter is supposed to possess.

Monks are said to offer the laity a "field of merit": by performing good deeds for monks and the temple, lay devotees are able to accrue *bun*, religious merit. Without overly belaboring a tenuous point, I would point out that boxers, during a performance, offer something structurally similar: the opportunity for spectators to bet, which, as I've suggested in chapter four, may be related to notions of power and karma. Wagering on boxing does for bettors what making merit

⁴³ Upon ordaining as monks, men are given a Pali name. When they leave the monkhood, they revert back to their old names. Kamala (personal communication) has told me that *thudong* monks (and possibly others) are given names on the basis of some perceived personal characteristic; they are not simply randomly assigned.

does for lay practitioners: it provides them the opportunity to increase and test their power and merit.

Like monks being ordained by a preceptor (and in many teacher-student contexts in Thailand), boxers must undergo an initiation rite when they are taken on by an instructor. This generally requires them to bring candles, incense, and other small offerings to the instructor when they are inducted into the camp. Typically they take an oath to uphold the morality of the camp and of boxing in general, and a Buddha image may be brought out as a witness. Many camps, I should note, do not bother with this anymore. There is an ambivalence because although the camp owner might be the boxer's patron, he might not actually be the teacher--that being left up to the trainer. When asked, most owners and boxers simply responded that the necessary respects were paid during the *ram muai* anyway.

Boxers also have proscriptions against dealings with women, albeit not as stringent as those of monks. Boxers are expected to refrain from sexual relations during training--indeed, this is one of the primary reasons they live at the camp--because it is believed women (and attention to women) will weaken them physically and destroy their concentration.⁴⁴ A common sentiment is that

⁴⁴ This is true of boxing in the West as well. See for example, Wacquant (1995).

a boxer who has a girlfriend no longer has the edge needed to box: he becomes weak. There are a few exceptions however: Namkhabuan, for example, is married, as are several other champion boxers. But even married boxers must abstain from relations with women including their wives while they train for a fight--at least 20 or 21 days before a fight. Since boxers fight once a month, this leaves little actual time for them spend with their women. After fights boxers are given a bit of leeway in which they may go off to see a girlfriend or prostitute, or, for those few who are married, to have relations with their wives. Monks, of course, are never allowed contact with women while in still in the order. Moreover, boxers are not expected to restrict their social behavior towards women the way monks are: in fact very much the opposite. Boxers spend an inordinate amount of time flirting and trying to gain the attention of women--one of the attractions of boxing as a career, in fact, is the extra 'flirtation' capital being a boxer provides.

The prohibitions against women are very somatic in nature: women's genital excretions (especially menstrual blood) are believed to weaken male efficacy, and have the ability to destroy the power of amulets, tattoos, and other magical devices (Terweil, 1994: 78-79; Tannenbaum, 1995: 272-75). When *muai thai* was first being aired on television, a female reporter got into the ring at

Ratchadamnoen stadium to broadcast a story. That night, apparently, nearly every bout ended in a bloody technical knockout. People after the fights blamed it on the woman, saying that she had weakened the men and destroyed the efficacy of their *pha praiat* (a magical device worn on the upper arm) and *mongkon* headpiece. Since then, the major stadiums do not allow women to enter into the ring (Thawon, 1972c). At temporary stadiums, women may enter the ring after all the men have fought, since the ring itself will be ritually recharged when it is reconstructed the following night. In addition, thinking about sex and love destroys concentration, and with it, mindfulness. A boxer with a girlfriend or wife is generally regarded as weakened and lacking the fighting spirit necessary for boxing.

Magical devices

Boxing is also related to Buddhism through the use of magical devices. Boxers draw on the power of monks and Buddhism (as well as other religious powers) to help them

in the boxing ring.⁴⁵ This comes in the form of amulets, tattoos and other magical devices, which Tambiah (1984: 335) terms the "objectification of charisma":

What indeed escaped Weber, who was so alive to the routinization and objectification of charisma in institutional structures, was the objectification of charisma in talismans, amulets, charms, regalia, palladia, and so forth--a phenomenon as old as religion, indeed as old as all forms of leadership.

Monks develop their power through ascetic practices, which can then be 'transferred' to others through the use of consecrated amulets, and, in the case of Thailand, tattoos.

Amulets not only help individuals magically, but mark them in terms of social category. That is, there are certain magical devices specific to boxing which have been well publicized and which imbue *muai thai* with the aura of mystery and exoticism. Similarly, other kinds of

⁴⁵ *Nakleng*, I should point out, are also heavily dependent on magic and amulets. A *nakleng* is very concerned with potency and vulnerability, and as such seeks amulets and tattoos that will render him invulnerable to bullets and knives. He may also seek out a tattoo master to give him dangerous tattoos, usually on the lower part of his body (legs, for example), which may make him more fearless in the face of violence, and more aggressive in pursuit of sex. For a good general discussion of amulets and tattoos, see Terweil, 1994.

amulets (and especially tattoos) are indicative of a *nakleng*.

Logically, given the dangers of *muai thai*, one would expect boxers to also be avid collectors of amulets and tattoos, but surprisingly this is not the case. There are magical devices associated specifically with boxing, but not many. There is the *mongkon*, a ritual headpiece inlaid with small magical scrolls and cloths (*takrut* and *pha yan*), and, similarly, *pha praci*, worn on the upper half of the arm. It too contains *takrut* and possibly a *pha yan*. Frequently, however, fighters at *muai wat* competitions do not have a *mongkon*, and may not have a *pha praci* either.⁴⁶ They are important, but not essential. Boxers may also propitiate the *jao thi* of their camp, promising, perhaps, a pig's head in exchange for help with a victory. And many boxers, especially of champion status, may visit a monk for blessings before a fight, and most recite *katas* as they enter the ring.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A *mongkon* is required at Bangkok fights, primarily because *muai thai* authorities want to keep the cultural trappings of *muai thai* intact as it gains popularity overseas.

⁴⁷ *Katas*, like mantras, are magical incantations based on Buddhist or Brahmanistic texts. Boxers keep the *kata* they use secret, for fear that someone will employ a counterspell, or that it will lose its efficacy. Boxers get their *kata(s)* from monks, but may also get them from parents, trainers, camp owners, or other 'elders'.

One popular kata, for example, is the "four-faced Brahma". Popular belief holds that when reciting it, one's opponent will become confused, seeing four faces. Consequently, he will not know which one to hit! The monk who gave me this kata, however, said the real reason it works--along with all other katas--is because it increases a boxer's metta ("loving kindness", associated with religious practice) and as a result, no one has the power to hit him very hard (cf. the metta of Cakravartin kings in battle in Reynolds, 1982). Moreover, the practice of reciting katas, as well as carrying amulets, forces the mind to think of Buddhism, which calms it and enables one to achieve mindfulness and thus composure--as such it serves as a "reminder" of Buddhism.

I have given rather short shrift to magical devices in boxing for two reasons. When I started my research, I expected to find a heavy dependency on amulets, tattoos, and other magic. But instead I found very little. Few boxers had any tattoos, and none that I interviewed had those tattoos for help in boxing. Moreover, few boxers collected amulets, and those who did generally received them as gifts. They were not perceived as being helpful specifically for boxing.⁴⁸ Magical devices are important,

⁴⁸ Several boxers had amulets of Khun Phaen, but these, they said, were more to help them with women than boxing.

but the magic they thereby garner (as well as other magical practices--propitiating the *jao thi*, getting blessings from a monk, reciting *katas*) are not specific to boxing (cf. Amnat, 1994).⁴⁹

Moreover, I think the attention to magical devices, whether amongst boxers, *nakleng*, or others, has tended to overshadow discussion in other areas--notably behavior. It is easy to discuss amulets and relate them to Buddhism (and the "borrowing" of power and so forth) and thereby overlook how individuals live out masculine roles by virtue of their personal behavior and deportment--and what power can be found in it. Rather than see the connections between different male roles on the basis of material culture (although fully recognizing there are important meanings behind material these objects and an ontological "reality" of magic amongst its practitioners)

⁴⁹ In an interesting aside, there appeared in the *Nation* (circa 1994) an article about a boxer named Rattanaphon So Worapin, who, after he had won the championship belt, suggested he should have an amulet cast in his image for distribution. He was scoffed at by other members of the boxing community. Rattanaphon apparently wanted others to be able to draw from his charisma; others, however, thought he was full of himself. Few people command the respect necessary for being consecrated in an amulet--primarily only monks and kings. It is an important story, because it shows that the flow of power, in this sense, is a one way street. The charisma amulets encapsulate must stem from a very close association to Buddhist charisma, not simply power or "lay" charisma.

I have chosen instead to focus on how monks and boxers relate in terms of behavior.

Justifying manhood and monkhood

So aside from these rather structural similarities and material connections between the monkhood and boxing, I believe there are other, more profound, behavioral components that come into play as well. All concern personal development, and they are most readily seen in the practices of *thudong* monks. Much of this discussion relies on Kamala Tiyanich's (1997) work entitled Forest Recollections; what sets her work apart from others on the same topic is that she provides an enormous amount of detail regarding the personal lives and trials of forest monks, rather than relying on more "official" hagiographies (such as Tambiah, 1984). What Kamala uncovers is a fascinating connection between monkhood and manhood, and how such identities are cultivated.

For all of [the *thudong* monks], advancing along the path of dhamma meant developing the mind. Since fear discourages the aspirant and dissuades him from seeking seclusion, staying in the wild was a proven method for reducing and eventually eliminating *kilesa* (defilement). The deep forest and the forest cemetery were thus training grounds for the *thudong* monk, who saw himself as a 'warrior battling the

unwholesome forces inside' for the sake of spiritual liberation. (Kamala, 1997: 79)⁵⁰

Thudong monks would thus purposely put themselves in danger to test and develop mindfulness; the danger consisted of two types, facing jungle animals (especially tigers) and facing spirits (in cemeteries). Confronted by tigers in the forest (sometimes at night), the monk would have to quickly develop a state of mindfulness and "one-pointedness":

[Ajan Chaup] had not gone far when he came across tiger tracks and came across both fresh and old droppings everywhere. Noticing the spoor, he fixed his mind on his recitation while walking. ... Suddenly a tiger emerged on the trail walking toward him. Chaup stopped, turned, and saw another tiger approaching him from behind. ... Seeing no way out, Chaup stood motionless, his feet frozen, thinking this was to be the end of him. At that critical moment, mindfulness came to the rescue. Determined not to abandon sati [mindfulness] even though he might be killed by the tigers, his mind withdrew from the tigers, dwelt within, and became one-pointed. ... After emerging from his samadhi [concentration achieved through meditation], Chaup was surprised that he was still in one piece, untouched by the tigers. His mind was filled with courage and compassion. (1997: 86)

Dangerous confrontation, and the self control it necessitates, both psycho and somatic, was a crucial

⁵⁰ The "warrior" allusion was the monks, not Kamala's and is interesting in that it shows how the "warrior spirit" permeates the monkhood as well as lay life in Thailand.

method of developing mindfulness. It also forced the monks to be independent from their instructors. The key to surviving a confrontation with a tiger or a wild elephant was to maintain composure--a "cool heart" (*jai yen*). *Thudong* monks were thus pushed to actively seek out such confrontational situations: Ajan Man, for example, often sent disciples out to face their fears alone, and suggested that "living among tigers and hearing them roar nearby was the best thing that could happen to a *thudong* monk" (1997:84). Negotiating danger and fear was thus something of a rite of passage for forest monks, teaching them important lessons in meditation, self control, and independence.

There was also something of a social dimension to overcoming fear. Ajan Li, for example, was staying at a cemetery when

a large group of villagers came, bringing a corpse with them. The corpse hadn't been placed in a coffin, but was simply wrapped in a cloth. As soon as I saw it, I told myself, "You're in for it now." If I were to leave, I'd lose face with the villagers, but the idea of staying on didn't appeal to me either (Li, quoted in Kamala, 1994: 102).

Although withdrawn from society, Li is well aware of his importance as a role model, and he also is still sensitive to keeping 'face'. Apparently not even Buddhist

mendicants *par excellence* can avoid the implications of social interaction; although detached, a monk is still integral to social life in Thai culture, and "face", the presentation of self, still crucial to personal identity.

In addition to overcoming fear, *thudong* monks labored to overcome pain. Life in the forest was fraught with hardship and disease: many monks succumbed to malaria, infections and other ailments, and they often did not have access to any medicines or pain killers. Ajan Waen, for example, underwent surgery to cut away infected flesh from his leg: he had no anesthetic, using the power of meditation instead (Kamala, 1997: 122). As Kamala suggests, "Endurance or perseverance (*othon*) were qualities highly praised not only by *thudong* teachers but also by laypeople of the Northeast, who were proud of their ability to endure difficulties and respectful of those who faced hardship with courage."

Such endurance (*othon*) constitutes another key code in masculine behavior, especially in the northeast, and it is often counterpoised to "softer" or "weaker" variants of masculinity associated with city life. Thus Ajan Man, perhaps the most famous of all *thudong* monks, berated a city monk suffering from malaria:

You are called a maha... but where is the knowledge you studied from the scriptures, right now?... What a waste of time, your maha title! The purpose of learning is to make

knowledge available in time of an emergency. But what kind of knowledge is yours? It's practically useless. ... I am not a maha, I don't even have the lowest grade. But what I do have with me are the five basic meditation themes taught to me by my preceptor on ordination day. It seems the more you learn, the weaker you become, weaker even than an uneducated woman. You are a man and also a maha. How could you be such a weakling? During this illness you have done nothing to justify your manhood and monkhood (Man, cited in Kamala, 1997: 111).

The ability to negotiate confrontation, pain, sickness and fear leads to self-reliance (Kamala, 1997: 126), which in turn leads to the Buddhist goal of detachment. Nor is it accidental that such behavior is specifically associated with masculinity. Only men (human men, even) are in the religious position to achieve enlightenment. According to the *thudong* tradition, certain qualities necessary for achieving enlightenment--mindfulness, courage, endurance, perseverance and the "cool heart"--are thus necessarily masculine qualities. Furthermore--and this is the important part--the codes of masculine behavior exemplified by *thudong* monks are thus religiously sanctioned.

Nakleng

Nakleng in Thailand is a discrete social category, almost, even, an occupational one. But it is only the category which is discrete; who actually is a *nakleng* is

often a matter of interpretation and context. Thus *nakleng* is a distinct cultural role, but not in the same way as, for example, a monk or a police officer, whose roles are clearly and unambiguously marked in a variety of ways. *Nakleng* is more of a shifting category, and may overlap with others: policeman and soldiers, for example, are frequently regarded as *nakleng* (although not all are), but they are not regarded as such by all people all of the time.

Nakleng are, nowadays, perceived of as bad people, vicious and unstable. One thinks of assassination, extortion, racketeering, gambling, womanizing, gang violence--in short, a litany of social ills and organized (and disorganized) crime. *Nakleng* make the headlines when they kill a 'person of influence', when they commit what appears to be a senseless crime or pull off daring robberies. They make local gossip when someone gets attacked, threatened, or extorted. Perhaps the most popular image of *nakleng* nowadays is two men on a motorcycle, pulling up to a crowded public area, say a restaurant, pumping their human target full of bullets, and then vanishing into the ensuing commotion. The *nakleng* as gunman has been heavily romanticized in Thai popular culture: films, magazines and books regularly feature story lines about the gunman, a troubled loner, a

Thai James Dean.⁵¹ Male fashions often focus on looking slick, wearing all black with pilot sunglasses--the hallmark of the gunman--and maybe topped with a dark cap. The *nakleng* look is also derived, to some extent, from Hong Kong films, which frequently depict the cool, almost superhuman, gunman. Cold, calculating, and dangerous, he gambles (and wins), he has an eye for the women (and they for him), he is loyal to his friends (to the death of course), even as he struggles to advance in his syndicate.

Nakleng in English is (unsurprisingly) glossed as 'thug', 'ruffian' or even 'hitman', and thus equated in the Western imagination either with gang violence or the mafia (indeed, mafia is a very popular term in Thailand nowadays as well). Keyes (1986: 87) suggests that *nakleng* "contrasts sharply" with the role of monk, and goes on to argue how the monkhood can, in fact, lead one to develop a gender identity specifically distinct from that of *nakleng*. But like the mafia, there is more to *nakleng* than simply thuggery; there is a romance about them, a

⁵¹ The best of these stories are by Suriyan Sakthaisong, himself once a gunman turned writer after a stint in prison. His stories were serialized in *Matichon*, and are now available in books. They were, and continue to be, enormously popular: *Sen Thang Mafia*, for example, is in at least its fifth printing since it was first published in 1989.

dangerous allure, and an ambivalence even about their use of violence.

In many, especially rural, quarters in Thailand, *nakleng* carries the additional meanings of "a big-hearted person", "a loyal person", and even a "generous person", depending, of course, in what relations one stands to him. Moreover, *nakleng* is often used to describe aficionados of different sorts: a *nakleng nok* is an expert in birds; a *nakleng muai* (or *nakleng du muai*) is someone who knows everything there is to know about boxing. The role of *nakleng* in Thailand--at least in the past, although I suspect the same still holds in large part today--is not necessarily a bad one at all.

My discussion of *nakleng* here draws on three sources: Johnston's (1980) and Trocki's (1983) articles specifically on *nakleng*, and Ockey's (1992) dissertation on the structure of local politics. In addition, I draw from my own fieldnotes, in which I spoke at length with several *nakleng* (some declaring themselves "former" *nakleng*) about the changing nature of *naklenghood* in rural Thailand. Overall, this is a topic, however, which needs far more explication than can be provided here; indeed, it is to my mind one of the most pressing topics in Thai studies today.

Today *nakleng* are often regarded as illegitimate members of organized crime, employees of *chao pho*

('godfathers' of local syndicates) and sometimes perpetrators of sporadic and random violence. Certainly they are presented in most mainstream media this way, especially English language media. They operate outside the framework of the law, and often use threats and violence to achieve their ends--indeed, often their ends are threats and violence. They display radically anti-social behavior and, because they act against (or at least outside) the law, they are considered illegitimate and criminal.

But to discount *nakleng* as criminals, and to posit a model of "good citizen" vs. "nakleng" (or vs. *chao pho* for that matter) is naive at best. *Nakleng* play important functions in rural society and even national politics; they are not universally despised, and their violence and behavior is not unstructured or simply chaotic. Moreover, accounts of *nakleng* rarely consider the stance of *nakleng* themselves, seeking instead to posit them as violent actors outside societal framework--the normative mode is "good citizen"; the deviant is "nakleng". Perhaps the most important reason to take *nakleng* seriously is because is because they offer a behavioral pattern that is, to varying degrees, emulated by males all over Thailand.

Johnston (1980) makes a distinction between bandit and *nakleng*, arguing that bandits are full time members

of an organized criminal underworld (and often come from urban centers to loot amongst villagers), whereas *nakleng* are often villagers driven to crime out of poverty (or as defense against other *nakleng*/ bandits who would loot their village). Describing bandits (as opposed to *nakleng*) Johnston writes,

Such men could be city dwellers who conducted raids in rural areas, or they could be men in rural areas but had severed their ties with village society. Bandits such as these acted in and upon peasant society, but they were in no sense of that society.
(Johnston, 1980: 90)

The *nakleng*, on the other hand,

played an important role in rural society. He was often counted upon to provide his village with a degree of security. Most villages relied on their young men to provide this security and as they proved their ability to protect the village they acquired reputations as *nakleng*.
(Johnston, 1980: 91)

The important contribution Johnston makes here is to show that *nakleng* were (and are) important for village life-- that they are not necessarily opposed to it. Johnston also shows that *nakleng* are not truly 'loners' (although this is a crucial part of their *ethos*). Rather, *nakleng*, seemingly like everyone in Thai society, form hierarchies:

All *nakleng* were familiar with their counterparts in neighboring villages, and in any given area--a governmental district, a province, or an even larger area, depending on geographical conditions, density of settlement, and the strength of individual personalities--the hierarchy was capped by the most powerful of their number, known either as *naklengto* or *naklenghuana* (chief *nakleng*) ... Areas ruled over by such chiefs expanded and contracted with their personal power, but other *nakleng* and bandits seem to have been as aware of the boundaries between these territories as of those between differing units of governmental administration.

(Johnston, 1980: 93)

He also makes interesting points about the effects of Bangkok expansion into rural areas, showing how the government and local *nakleng* hierarchies got along, either by "collusion", "compromise", "evasion" or sometimes "open opposition".

But overall I find the distinction between bandit and *nakleng*, based on a perceived distinction between rural and urban life, somewhat dubious. Such a neat typology does not do justice to the nuanced and shifting nature of *nakleng*hood and the relations between urban and rural Thailand. City and village are not closed, immutable categories. In fact looking at the intersection of kinship and hierarchies of local/regional power is probably more fruitful than basing analysis on geographical units such as village or city. Hierarchies of people, many of which included *nakleng* (or were comprised entirely of *nakleng*) crossed village and city

lines; in fact they are an important mode of social cement between geographical units.⁵²

Trocki (1983) makes this sort of case about *naklengto* (chief *nakleng*) in southern Thailand. He sees the hierarchies of *nakleng* founded on patron-client relations explicated by Hanks (1975), and organized in groups he calls *phaakphuak*:

Although many have described the phaakphuak as a kinship group, it is more correctly understood as what Hanks would have called an entourage, and that the ethic which maintains within it is a kinship ethic. That is, the phaakphuak functions as a fictive kinship group.
(Trocki, 1983)

What holds a *phaakphuak* together is mutual bonds of obligation, reciprocity and loyalty. It is interesting to note that the expression *jai nakleng*, the "spirit" or "heart" of a *nakleng*, denotes utter loyalty, even unto death.

⁵² This is, for example, where I find O'Connor's (1990) notion of emboxement lacking. It relies heavily on what are supposed to be Tai categories of individual, household, village, and *müang*, but these categories do not allow for the hierarchies and syndicates that groups of men, in particular, form, and which have enormous amounts of political and social power in the countryside and in the cities. I think, for example, that O'Connor's model could not account for the data presented by Ockey (1994).

To this we might add Tannenbaum's (1995) notion of power/protection, in which social actors seek to gain power by interaction with more powerful others. Trocki describes the bonds this way:

The non-material cement of the phaakphuak is that charismatic element that we might term "influence" or what the Thai call ittiphol (Trocki, 1980).

In addition to *itthiphon*, Trocki describes the pivotal role of *itthirūt* (Itthiryū):

a miraculous faculty; a superhuman power. Haas adds that itthiryū has the connotation of violent and destructive power as in samdeeng itthiryū, to have a violent tantrum. Itthiphol is clearly distinguished from amnat, which is legitimate power, authority sanctioned by law, with reference to the state system. (Trocki, 1983)

Itthiphon is important to *nakleng* (and especially chief *nakleng*) because it constitutes the foundation of his social power, it

is one of the indispensable characteristics of the Big Man. The very nature of his status as Big Man presumes it as an inherent quality. It characterizes the Big Man's ability not only to attract and hold a phaakphuak, but his ability to deal with the world outside his home territory as well. ...Itthiphol is not, of its own nature, bad (Trocki, 1983).

If *itthiphon* underlies the social power of a *nakleng*, *itthirūt* forms the basis for his personal power and invulnerability:

...two of the teacher's *samak phaakphuak* (followers) were detailed to "put the abbot away" (*kep*): that is to kill him. The attack failed. The reports said that the men used jungle axes and ripped his robes to shreds, but that the revered priest himself remained unwounded. Their failure brings to light another quality of the Big Man, *itthiryū*, or magical power, in this case, the abbot's personal invulnerability...A *naklaeng* without *itthiryū* would not survive the attempts bound to be made on his life in the course of becoming a Big Man. Violence and murder are integral parts of a Big Man's existence. (Trocki, 1983)⁵³

Itthirūt can be developed independently, through ascetic practice (developing power through mindfulness and detachment, for example), or, as Tannenbaum points out above, through interaction with powerful others. *Itthirūt* can thus be transferred from powerful monks (or lay specialists in magic) through amulets and tattoos. But the amulets are not a substitute for individuals charisma or power, they are aids. A *nakleng* is successful chiefly on his own merits, quite often by how successful he is at confrontation and negotiating violence. In the

⁵³ The fact that the "big man" in question here is an abbot (thus a monk) is interesting: *naklenghood* may also impinge on monks--although this would be more true before the 1902 reforms when monks played a more prominent role in village and inter-village politics.

rush to make observational connections between powerful persons (via amulets etc), such individual development is often overlooked.

The violent deeds and potential of a *nakleng* were (and are) often measured in body counts. Trocki argues that a *nakleng*'s "personal 'body count' had to be public knowledge. ('Nai K. is a man of 6 corpses. He's clever at shooting people.'). Phya Anumon Ratchadon (cited in Trocki) mentions how *nakleng* would often face one another in one-on-one combat, reminiscent of the elephant duels of historical kings, and of course, of boxers today.

Trocki also points out that the relation between legitimate power and *nakleng*hood are by no means mutually exclusive. Far from it, in fact, it is often a preferred way to get into legitimate politics.

The step from naklaeng/bandit to naklaeng/kamnan or village head, was not an enormous one. This highlights a readiness to accept power as a de facto manifestation without demanding a credential of legitimacy. Legitimacy, if it came, was often after the fact. (Trocki, 1983)

The subsequent emergence of parliamentary government, and rule by political parties has given these influential figures, now become *chaopho*, [literally "godfather"] the opportunity to participate directly in the national political system, both by providing organization for candidates and by running for office themselves. (Ockey, cited in Trocki, 1983)

Trocki, Ockey, and Thak Chaloemtiarana have gone on to show how the figure of *nakleng/chao pho* reach all the way into the top echelons of national politics and power:

The figure of the naklaeng too has remained a powerful one in Thai popular culture at both the national and local level. The military strongman, Sarit Thanarat who ruled between 1957-1963, was seen by many as a naklaeng-type person. Thak Chaloemtiarana, in his important study of Sarit's rule commented:
...Sarit was also seen as a *naklaeng*, a person who was not afraid to take risks, a person who "lived dangerously", kind to his friends but cruel to his enemies, a compassionate person, a gambler, a heavy drinker, and a lady-killer. In short, the kind of person who represented one central model of Thai masculinity.
(Trocki, 1983)

Nakleng, then, was no marginal figure, acting upon innocent rural peasants, or tangential to the "normal" social scene. Rather, it describes a category of men who are completely engaged socially; they are politicking and powerful (or are trying to be), and often use violence instrumentally to further their ambitions. Their pursuit of power is often caught up with their sense of self: they are not simply rational economic or political operators (nor are they simply sociopaths). Their reputations and social face--their masculine ethos--is wrapped up in their politicking as well. Reputation and face has everything to do with it, and thus many *nakleng* quickly resort to violence when they feel they have been

insulted. Trocki mentions how a *naklengto* with whom he worked had to be, on several occasions, physically restrained from killing someone when they had insulted him. I was at a dinner table once with friends in Buriram (self declared "former" *nakleng*), when someone at another table insulted me. It took several people to restrain two of our number from using the chairs they had picked up to crush the skulls (or so they threatened) of those who had offended me. Those writers who suggest that Thais are peace loving and gentle do not seem to have spent much time at places like bars or other local establishments.

From nakleng to nakbun

In about the late 1960s or early 1970s, depending on where one lived, there appears to have been a considerable change in *nakleng*hood. My informants attribute the change specifically to the widespread proliferation of handguns. With a handgun, anyone could be a *nakleng*, it no longer relied on physical prowess. Fighting skills (like boxing) became marginalized. One informant (I'll call him Lek) describes how, late in the 1970s (he recalls it being 1978, but was unsure) he was involved in a brawl outside the train station in Buriram. Many people were fighting, wielding sticks and other weapons. Lek was faced off with a member of the rival group and threw a kick at him. But just as he launched

the kick, his opponent whipped out a handgun; Lek thus pulled his leg back, the action of which spun him around in a circle facing the opposite direction. He then took off running in that direction and "never looked back". That was the last time he engaged in any *nakleng* type activity, because, he says, he was now afraid for his life. In an analytical sense, we might say that it marks the transformation from *nakleng* as *nakmuai* (boxer) to *nakleng* as *nakbun* (gunman).

Like boxing and deep sea fishing, being a gunman has a certain masculine glamour, requires little skill, and it pays well. Even a cheap hit may earn the triggerman 10,000 baht; a professional may make several hundred thousand baht. The Nation newspaper reports that half of the murders committed in Thailand are by hired gunmen, thousands every year, and that some *naklengto* may have over a hundred such gunmen at their disposal. Despite supposed police efforts there is little chance that the gunman will be caught, although being pursued is apparently part of the excitement. Indeed, oftentimes it appears policemen and soldiers may moonlight as hitmen, enjoying the protection of their superiors and immunity from pursuit. In any case, if they are caught, gunmen are often killed by police (or rival gunmen) on the spot rather than arrested, and they may be tortured. One such torture, in an ironic association with the monkhood, is

referred to as "being ordained", in which the suspect has electrical shocks administered to his testicles. The Nation suggests this can "rob them of their sexual appetite for at least a month, if not permanently." (Nation, May 29, 1994).

I do not wish to stray too far into the culture of gunmen; this is a thesis about boxers after all, and boxers and gunmen are not the same thing. But there are certain components of masculine code that appears amongst gunmen pertinent to the discussion at hand. For example, there appears to be a sense of self development, in a perverse way, in being a gunman. In an interview in The Nation (May 29, 1994), an assassin, using the pseudonym Somchai, reported that after his first hit,

I was so excited, I didn't even know if the victim was dead. But I was relieved when I saw in the newspapers the next day that he was dead. I went back home upcountry and drank a lot of whiskey and slept for most of the week. After that I felt more confident and began spending the money I earned.
(Korkhet, 1994)

Subsequent hits allowed him to "[develop] an extraordinary sense of calm." and he (Somchai) admits "I began to enjoy the shooting. I paid more attention to the way I pulled the trigger, where I wanted to hit for

effectiveness." In other words, Somchai, in a rather violent idiom, achieved and practiced *mindfulness*.

Moreover, *nakbün* (or at least Somchai, although I suspect it is a widespread practice) rationalize their actions by suggesting they only kill bad people:

I made it a point not to kill innocent people, women and children. I would only kill bad people. I would spend about a week checking on the would-be victims' personal conduct before deciding whether to accept the assignment to kill them. I was hired to shoot the kind of people who cheated and those who eloped with other people's daughters. All of them are bad, one way or another. I never accepted jobs from influential people who tried to bully poor people into selling their land, or businessman who wanted to get rid of their partners in order to take over the business, or the lawful wives who wanted their husband's minor wives dead.

(Korkhet, 1994)

Such rationalization, distinguishing between good and bad violence, is common throughout the world (cf. Toch, 1993). Of interest here is that, in his presentation of self, Somchai makes himself out to be doing the right thing; killing "bad" people is justified. He does not see himself (or rather, present himself) as bad, and to prove

it he suggests that he does not shoot innocent people.⁵⁴ Moreover, he suggests that he takes the work on his own terms: he judges for himself whether the target is bad, and decides whether he will take the assignment. It is up to him to decide; he is, in that respect, independent. Righteousness and independence (despite the fact that one must answer to a higher boss, a *naklengto* who probably ordered the killing) are key elements in the *nakleng* ethos, as well as in Thai masculinity generally--witness the *thudong* monks described above.

In the old days, boxers crossed over from boxing into other occupations having to do with (potential) violence, whether palace guard, soldier, policeman, or employ in the entourage of a local lord--and many still do today.⁵⁵ The old rules of boxing, as described earlier in this chapter, were brutal, verging on no rules at all, and often fights were stopped by the attendant royalty or lord since the only other way fights ended were when one side was incapacitated. There were no timed rounds, one

⁵⁴ One suspects of course that this is more presentation of self than reality: after all, *someone* kills poor people who don't cooperate and *someone* kills mistresses for money. But in recounting the story, he presents himself as virtuous.

⁵⁵ The most desirable career many boxers cited, for when they retired from boxing, was policeman. Several boxers, in fact, were preparing for the entrance exam while at the time of my research, and all felt that their boxing career would help them get in to the academy.

could not be saved by the bell. Boxer and *nakleng* were, if not conflatable, at least heavily overlapping categories. Not all boxers were necessarily *nakleng* and not all *nakleng* were necessarily boxers, but boxing matches were likely an important way of demonstrating prowess and violence, and as such could serve as an avenue of mobility and as a way of making statements about power relations between *nakleng*, their *phaakphuak*, and other hierarchies/*phaakphuak*.

Nearly all the former boxers I spoke with, who had boxed in the 1970s (or before) participated in what they self-described as *nakleng*-type activities on a fairly regular basis. That is, they would help their patron (who was generally not the owner of their boxing camp or even related, necessarily, to their boxing careers) collect money from those who owed debts; they would rough up members of a competitor's entourage; they would participate in meleés and rumbles against rival groups; they would chase women, drink hard, and spend all the money they made as soon as they had made it. They lived a very carefree, manly life (according to them), and what's more, much of the violence in which they participated was not seen as all that dangerous--they considered it as rough, but never especially life threatening. They admitted, though, that deaths and maimings did occur, albeit infrequently. Thus *nakleng* seems to have been a

rather broad category of behavior (and a very common one), and many boxers seem to have been *nakleng*.

Since that time, though, there has been a growing disparity between boxer/*nakleng* and an increasing affinity between *nakleng/nakbün*. This is a disparity often highlighted by supporters of boxing as a sport. Decha Prakaranan (1976: 40-45) describes the death of an up-and-coming boxer well on his way to a flyweight championship. Bunthawi Hollywood was beaten and stabbed to death by a gang of *nakleng* while playing *takraw* on the street with his friends. The attack was reportedly vicious and unprovoked (although few details are provided), and the author uses the episode to highlight the difference between uncontrolled wanton violence, and the rules-proscribed, sportsmanship of the ring. Drawing a distinction between boxers, regarded by the author as athletes, and *nakleng*, as thugs, Decha's article marks the growing disassociation of the two.

Similar stories crop up today as well. The Bangkok Post printed this article on July 2, 1997:

Boxer seeks protection from gang
A boxer has asked police to put a stop to the activities of a gang of criminals at Ratchadamnoen Boxing Stadium. Singha Kamnorit, 19, told Pol Maj Surachart Maneechak, a CSD inspector, that the gang of over ten men attacked him beside the ring just after he won a bout last Thursday night. The incident took place before thousands of spectators, but none

of the guards dared interfere, he said. Mr. Singha said the gang followed him to his locker room where they attacked him again. He is left with a long cut on his left eyebrow. The gang allegedly threatened to kill Singha if he returned to box at the stadium. Mr. Singha said he had to lodge the complaint with the CSD after a similar complaint was filed in vain with Nang Lerng police station, under whose jurisdiction the stadium falls. The boxer identified the head of the gang as a military officer known as Thanit, who he said was involved in bribery at the stadium.

This article, like Decha's before it, shows that boxers and *nakleng* are not one and the same. Boxers themselves admit to being scared of *nakleng*, and they say they would never be able to fight one. The reason being that *nakleng* do not fight by any rules, and there is no agreed upon point at which one stops fighting. If someone dies, well then, so be it. Thus boxers--nowadays anyway--see themselves as quite distinct from *nakleng*.

I do not mean to suggest that boxers no longer become *nakleng* (although I believe far fewer do), but that boxing (as a physical activity; as an occupation) is no longer coterminous with *nakleng*hood. Connections between *nakleng*hood and boxing still exist especially the level of performance and personal behavior, as well as Thai notions of masculine prowess.

Summary of nakleng

Naklenghood, as I have described, is constructed in large part on violence and masculinity, but structured within a larger hierarchy of other *nakleng*, *naklengto*, and Thai society at large. It does not, as modern meanings and associations suggest, only refer to gunmen, although certainly gunman are a common type of *nakleng* (or a common role for *nakleng* to fill). And even gunmen ascribe to certain masculine codes found also in the monkhood and in boxing: control, discipline, mindfulness, and the development of personal efficacy.

Also, as the case of Somchai the gunman suggests, individualism is an important element of the *nakleng* ethos. Trocki discusses this in his work:

The Thai Constitution of 1932 (as amended in 1952) "clearly demonstrates a lack of interest in detailing any form of territorial administration..." This lack of interest resulted in, or perhaps more correctly, simply left untouched, political organization from beneath, which could be described as a system of self-help (*chuay tua eng*) which sometimes took on the aspect of vigilantism, going as far as lynch law and assassination. ... The system of *jat kan eng*, taking care of things oneself, or *chuay tua eng*, (self-help), usually took place through appeal to a Big Man, either of one's own territory or of a neighboring territory if the victim of the crime had a proper client relationship.
(Trocki, 1983)

Trocki seems to be referring to *chuai tua eng*, self-reliance, primarily in the context of not relying on "official" government. Thus normal political organization throughout what is now Thailand depended on (and still, for the most part, depends on) the ability to take care of things at a local level. But I believe the idea of self help is much broader than simply "legitimate government" vs. "local practice". The "things" one must take care of cover a wide range of economic and social relations, chiefly one's position in local relations and hierarchies. Mobility in such hierarchies depends heavily on personal manifestations of power and charisma, and one of the primary reasons to cultivate power and charisma is to 'protect' the interests of one's clients, subordinates, kinfolk, or friends.

Thus, to use Tannenbaum's (1995) terminology, one is constantly negotiating power and protection. Because power unregulated by Buddhist morality can be dangerous (thus *nakleng* are dangerous whereas monks are not), one must keep powerful others close enough to be protective, but far enough away to avoid the danger associated with unpredictable power. As a part of this overall process, men must also learn to cultivate their own power while still submitting to the wider sphere of hierarchy and social relations, and they must learn how to wield it properly:

As a man matures, his quest for power and autonomy becomes increasingly important. A search for autonomy and a recognition of dependency is not contradictory from a power-protection perspective. Some people are not endowed with power or the capacity for it and dependency is their only option so those that reject being a "boss" are recognizing their limits. (Tannenbaum, 1995: 284).

Local (and even national) power in Thailand is pursued by people who can be, to varying degrees, described as *nakleng*. (Or they could be, if it were not for increasingly compartmentalized meaning the word has taken on.) It may even be fair to say that *naklenghood* is a prerequisite for pursuing power in Thai culture--we might do well to understand the term as one who is seeking advancement in the political hierarchy, which in the Thai context, necessitates working within the limits of patron-client relations. One of the key differences, then, between monks and *nakleng*, is that *nakleng* are socially engaged, whereas monks are (presumably) not. *Nakleng* have to exercise their power and charisma in a wide range of social relations and hierarchy; they must be prepared to confront other people as they jockey for power.

Most men in Thailand are not gunmen, of course, and neither are they *nakleng*. But *nakleng* embody a set of masculine codes which all Thai males, at some level, must

negotiate. They may emulate it to certain degree (which is why nakleng is a relative, rather than absolute, term), or they may refuse to emulate it. In the former case, by emulating nakleng-like behavior (including jockeying for social power), men are competing in the same masculine economy, and are ranked as men, essentially, by a social "gaze" (as well as their peers) dependent on their relative successes or failures to garner the power they seek. If they refuse to engage the masculine codes embodied by nakleng, they are either fail as men (witness the *kateuy* (Jackson, 1995), or even simply the henpecked husband, the man who is "afraid of his wife" (*klua mia*) and will not confront her or assert himself) or they assert their manhood through other valued codes. Often this means detachment--thus there are men who are not interested in seeking worldly (social) power, but nevertheless still regarded as being masculine. The difference between the henpecked man and the detached man is that the latter chooses to be detached, and is generally perceived of someone who is detached but self-reliant and able to handle himself.

Boxers

Leaving Lumpini stadium, our camp owner was in a foul mood. One of his boxers had lost that night, and the owner was not at all pleased with his performance. The

owner's chief complaint was that he, the boxer, had been ahead on points going into the fourth round. But in the fourth, he suffered a nasty kick to the leg, and his ankle swelled up. After this injury, his fighting spirit left him; he did not engage his opponent, he threw few strikes and was overly evasive. He wound up losing the bout on points because of his poor performance in the fourth and fifth rounds. The owner hurled insults at him from every imaginable angle.³⁶ Most poignantly, he compared him to another boxer who fought that night who did not lose. This other boxer did not give up in the face of pain: he had fighting spirit; he was a man; he did not have "women's bones". The owner's message was clear: our losing boxer lost because he did not endure his pain. And he not only lost the bout: he became less of a man.

³⁶ Unlike many camp owners, however, this one did not subject his boxer to the infamous "6th round", in which the boxer is punished physically (generally beaten) by the owner. This may seem strange, in a way, that a professional boxer would be subject to a beating for losing (since that is, in effect, what already happened) and that the owner could mete out much in the way of physical brutality comparable to what the boxer had just undergone. As it was described to me, however, it was more an issue of face: beating a boxer for losing is a grave insult and utterly humiliating. The boxer would never even think of striking back: such an act would violate deeply engrained beliefs of piety and respect for elders and teachers. It would be akin to striking one's parents. There is, incidentally, a sign at Lumpini stadium expressly forbidding anyone to physically punish boxers on the premises.

The inculcation of masculine values begins early in a Thai boy's life. They are expected to be independent and removed from the domestic sphere:

Villagers feel that independence is a male quality and give boys free reign while young-- however, it must be added, not to the extent that older people are ignored or treated with disrespect ... Girls behavior is marked by attention, the boys' by the notion of operating outside or cultivating the potential to transcend bounds. (Lyttleton, 1998).

At the same time, however, there is a great emphasis on being in control of one's presentation of self; one needs to maintain a serene exterior. My own experiences in Thailand confirm this quite well: young boys, once they are old enough to be independent from the household (starting at around age 7 or 8, as far as I can tell) have a profound change in behavior. They rarely cry, they do not run wild around the house (although they do outside of the house), and they act, in a way that is hard to pin down, aloof from household concerns. They are often out with friends, and while in their company, they act as though they have (and are actually busy cultivating) a "cool heart" (*jai yen*). This is consistent with what Lyttleton (1998) reports:

Emotions are supposed to be kept in check and the gradual internalization of the Buddhist ideal of having a 'cool heart' or displaying

indifference (*khwamchoei*) is effected via parental (or elders) disciplining of children.

Except what he does not mention here is that boys develop this behavior not only from being treated that way by their parents (which is certainly also part of it), but because they need to impress their friends. There is something of an economy of "coolness" among boys, not unlike boys in America and other parts of the world: they cultivate a "cool heart" because that is considered normative behavior amongst other boys in their age set.

Cool heart, however, does not mean he is a paragon of obedience and virtue. Far from it, in fact. Boys are encouraged to be 'obstreperous and disobedient' (Lyttleton 1998, citing Hanks, 1965: 81): "A naughty boy grows up to be industrious, whereas a boy obedient as a child will become a lazy fellow".

It should come as no surprise, then, that boys, when quite young, get interested in boxing, even if only as a diversion. Emulating older males, and desiring to be tough and masculine (and famous) like the boxers they see or know about, many, if not most, rural boys undergo some sort of *muai thai* training. Often this consists simply of hanging a sack of rice and kicking it, or roughhousing with other boys. But for many, as I described in chapter four, this means going to fight at a local *muai wat*

competition--usually with the blessing (if not at the behest) of their fathers or other prominent agnatic kin.

I had the opportunity to interview many fathers bringing their sons to box at local fights. These boys were not necessarily affiliated with a professional camp, but were instead just competing locally for the experience. The fathers gave consistent answers as to why they wanted their son to box: it will make him tough, they said, able to take care of himself. They were proud their sons were going to box; most had boxed themselves when they were younger. The same was true of fathers who brought their sons to camps to learn boxing as a profession. The primary reason they brought their sons to box was "for the experience", an experience which inculcates the values I have been discussing: independence, composure, and the ability to cope with pain and confrontation. The same is true for boys who are brought to boxing camps. Boxing is deemed a career (or at least an experience, for non-professionals) that will build character (as well as earn cash--which is not unrelated).

The key lesson, especially for the non-professional boxers, appears to be independence or self-reliance. Like the lessons extolled by Ajan Man for his disciples, boxers--heavily dependent on their instructors--must break away when it is time to fight. They enter the ring

alone. To demonstrate their detachment, boxers circumambulate the inside of ring at the beginning of their *ram muai*, gliding one hand along the top rope. This was often described to me as "sealing the ring off against outside influences", and it became clear that it signified detachment and recognition of how this ordeal must be faced: alone.

Boxing, in this sense, constitutes a religious lesson, or at least, a behavioral lesson that is also a key feature of Buddhism development. This is often overshadowed by the more obvious ritual and religious devices found in boxing: the *ram muai* dance, the donning of the *mongkon*, the *pha praiat* tied to the boxers arms, and so forth. These devices help, and they appear to be the salient religious features of the performance, but the key lesson in boxing for the participants is one of self-reliance.

In addition to self reliance, boxers, like *thudong* monks and *nakleng*, must steel themselves for danger and pain; they must cultivate endurance (*othon*). In preparation for a bout, many boxers meditate for a short period of time before entering the ring, in an attempt to achieve mindfulness. The behavior and demeanor of a boxer about to enter the ring is indeed qualitatively different than his behavior in other contexts: before the fight, a boxer seems distant, but utterly focused: he is both

detached from the context around him and mindful. Surely he is nervous, and it is precisely this nervousness he must master, to ensure that he will be in control of his actions in the ring.

To demonstrate that he is in fact in control of himself (both physically and mentally), it is imperative that a boxer maintain good form throughout his match. If he deviates from the kinesic code of *muai thai*, including posture, stance, timing, as well as the techniques he employs, he will be docked points in the contest and likely be berated by his peers afterwards. Form is crucial to *muai thai* competition: certain techniques within the *muai thai* repertoire, for example, are no longer employed because the risk of losing form is too great. Thus the *jalake fat hang* ("the crocodile whips its tail"--i.e. a spinning heel kick)--the most highly regarded technique in *muai thai*--is so rare that the major stadiums offer a large cash reward to boxers who employ it successfully for knockout. The problem with the technique--and the reason no one ever attempts to use it anymore--is that it requires the boxer to turn his back for a moment while he spins into the technique. In that split second, there is every chance that one's opponent will fire a kick into the back or buttocks, causing one to lurch forward and severely lose form. The risks are thus too great, and no one attempts it. Out of all the

fights I have witnessed in Thailand, I have only seen a spinning heel kick thrown once (and that unsuccessfully).

As I mentioned also in chapter four, many younger boxers, in their first few bouts especially, often lose form and box wildly (*muai wai nam*). If they resort to such flailing, they are chastised afterwards, ridiculed even. In future fights, they will work hard to control their form in order to conform to their peers' standards of masculine deportment. Keeping boxing form demonstrates that one is in somatic control, and this is in turn also indicative that one is maintaining a "cool heart". Like monks facing danger in the forest, or a *nakleng* squaring off against another *nakleng*, boxers confront one another in the ring.

Thus young boys who are taught to box, whether professionally at a camp or informally at *muai wat* competitions, are actively being taught the lessons of *chuai tua eng* (self reliance), perseverance, independence, and mindfulness: how, essentially, to be a man in the *nakleng* mode, and which is also endorsed by Buddhism (and exemplified by monks). Many people would not think of it as *nakleng* mode, however, either not explicitly recognizing it as such, or because the term *nakleng* has acquired anti-social meanings. Nor do they think of it in terms of the monkhood, because the monkhood is such a discrete category, a religious

category, whereas boxing is secular. They are related, however, by the patterns of masculinity they encode. Boxing is a prime testing ground for courage (or even a context in which to develop courage), and thus, like facing tigers in the forest, a rite of passage for rural males.

Boxing

Is it axiomatic that social life precedes theatrical life? That is of course the Platonic-Aristotelian idea: art imitates life. But maybe the Hindu-Sanskrit view as expressed in the *Natyasastra* is more appropriate to these post modern, reflexive times. Theater and ordinary life are a Möbius strip, each turning into the other (Schechner, 1985: 14).

Although Erving Goffman (as well as Richard Schechner) tears down the qualitative difference between "life" and "performance", there is still something to be said about the fact that boxing is formally a performative event, a public spectacle. Boxers do not box in private, or if they do it is not really considered boxing. Since the number of people who consume the performance far out number those who perform it, it becomes important to ask what sort of meanings the performance carries.

To a large extent I have answered this by looking at the nature of the boxing frame and the masculine codes

operative amongst boxers. I have suggested, in short, that the explicit nature of the boxing frame is important because it highlights the control of violence, and that the behavior of the boxers (as part of that frame), celebrates the masculine composure with which they face their ordeal. This jibes well with Lyttleton's (1998) observations:

While Western modes of theorizing gender and sexuality cannot automatically be assumed to have explanatory power in non-western cultures, the notion of performativity has enormous resonance in Thai society. In most situations the specifics of face to face interaction are governed by a highly attuned sensitivity to the preservation of normative expectations. This, as I will describe, is a value learned at an early age. Keeping 'face' is all important and smoothness of interaction highly valued. Thus, appreciating the performativity of social practice, that is, the meanings conditioned by consistent reiteration, is of pronounced importance.

Lyttleton did not have in mind public spectacle so much as social practice. But boxing, as a spectacle, serves only to underline his point about the nature of face and performance. But by the same token I must disagree with him when he suggests:

... we can still detect in Thai society...the powerful tendencies to mark femaleness as the public focus of scrutiny. The social body thus becomes gendered and defined around the regulation directed through this gaze at the

female body/sexuality and its attributed meanings. At the same time, certain values associated with maleness are naturalized through avoidance of similar scrutiny.

Men, too, are under constant public scrutiny; there is great pressure on them to become detached and independent--not an easy task--and they are constantly having their self-reliance tested in the context of other men. Their masculinity is also judged by the "social gaze", or, more concretely, by other men who constitute their peer group, or even the "gaze" of men as an imagined community. As Peter Jackson (citing Buchbinder) points out, "A male is recognized as being a man when he is so regarded by other males who have already achieved the status of manhood." (1995: 224). He further points out that rites of passage are conducted in front of other men. In the case of Thailand, this would include drinking and visiting prostitutes, and I would add, joining the monkhood and boxing.

Boxing, like the monkhood and *nakleng*-hood, is a male environment, both amongst the spectatorship and amongst the participants. Thus boxers' behavior, their demonstration of masculine ideals, is validated and consumed by other men. In so far as boxers are performing publicly, their performance is being judged (mostly) by other men--whether friends and family locally, or whether by the king of Thailand himself (and the entire nation of

spectators) for a major title defense. What is on the line, in addition to money and championship belts and magazine interviews, is their manhood.

Moreover, the spectators orient their understanding of masculinity to the living models boxers provide: the model of tough, hypermasculine, cool-hearted athlete facing danger in the ring. In that sense, boxers and spectators co-constitute masculinity: both reaffirm the same model of masculinity on either side of the performative "stage".

Boxing as a performance of hypermasculinity makes it an attractive public performance for those people engaged in *naklenghood* and politics--which of course explains to a large extent why government and military leaders are such big patrons of boxing, and why *nakleng*, *jao pho*, and other men wanting to participate vicariously in the masculine ethos of *naklenghood* comprise the bulk of the spectatorship.

Anderson (1978) discusses how Thai sociopolitical structure can be described as "motion within a fixed setting": local *jao* and leaders come and go, living the fruit of their karma in the vicissitudes of everyday political life-but the overall pattern does not change much. It's all built around patrimonialism. Boxing is more than simply representative of this view: it is a cultural production of it, a *celebration*. Two boxers

struggle, fight, overcome. The scene is violent, the action fast. But it is also bound by social rules, and as soon as the contest is decided, two new contestants battle out the same set of rules. It is, in other words, motion in a fixed setting. Moreover, *muai thai* provides a sense of historical continuity with those who have fought before. They endured the same contest; they won, lost, bled, and bruised. And, by conflating boxing with a notion of Thai warriors, all boxers have suffered battle on behalf of the nation. And by proxy: so have all Thai males, since all can draw on the masculine ethos of boxing.

If the masculine values encoded in the monkhood, *naklenghood*, and boxing all overlap, if these roles constitute the definition of manhood in Thailand, then we need not ask worry about what the "primary frame" of boxing is. It does not matter whether it refers back to some unstructured aggression, to *naklenghood*, or to confrontations of tigers in the forest. If, as Schechner argues, life imitates art and art imitates life, then boxing can be both a "keyed activity (a "model of" behavior) and a primary frame (a "model for" behavior) at the same time.