

Aspects of Hanumān in Thai Life*

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Introduction

The Rāmāyaṇa must have been known to the Thais since Sukhothai (Skt.-Sukhodaya) kingdom (1249-1438 A.D.) as the place-names and personal names of that period bearing affinity to those of the Rāmāyana are extensively referred to in early Thai inscriptions of the period (See:Charuek Samai Sukhothai 2527 BE: 8;17;19;36;43,50;67;75;120; 157;185; 188;etc.). The story of the Rāmāyaṇa must have exerted great impact on the Thai life so much so that one can find references to its characters in important Thai literature since the early times, just to name a few, Lilit Yuan Phai, Lilit Phra Law. It must have been very popular among the common people also. As a result, the Buddhist teachers found it necessary to Buddhistize the story by turning it into Buddhist Jātaka in the form of folk literature for the benefit of their teaching of Buddhism to the common folk. One example is Phrommachak (Skt.-Brahmacakra) in Northern Thai dialect and another is Phra Lak (Lakṣmaṇa) Phra Lam (Rāma) in Northeastern Thai dialect. The popularity of the Rāmāyaṇa is also reflected in the prohibitive notion found in the Maṅgalatthadīpanī, one of the most respected Buddhist texts composed by a Thai monk of Lanna Thai, the early northern kingdom of the Thais, where the story of Sītāharāṇa, the abduction of Sītā, is branded as one of bāhirakakathās or heretic stories (Maṅgalatthadīpanī 2539 BE: 2)so that the story be discouraged to read or to hear by the people. The fact that the story has been very popular among the Thai, it has become integrated into the Thai life so much so that its origin was not recognized until recently when King Rāma VI has revealed its origin in his famous book titled *Bo Kurd Ramakian* or the Origin of the Thai Rāmākīrti. Before that Thai people feel that Rāma kian (Skt.-Rāmākīrti) is the part and parcel of their life. They believe that the story has actually taken place in Thailand. This paper aims at discussing only various aspects of Hanumān in Thai Life which differ greatly from those of original Hanumān of Vālmīki and of Tulsī Dās. One example of the total transformation of original Hanumān is the fact that Thai Hanumān is a Don Juan whereas the original Hanumān is pure celibacy. Hanumān in Thai Rāmākian plays outstanding roles outweighing all the characters in the story. In Thai life, Hanumān has assumed various aspects, such as the eternal protector, the seducer, the entertaining, the immortal etc.

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The birth of Thai Hanumān

Hanumān in Thai Rāmākian is a white monkey who wears *Kuṇḍala* (Earring) and has diamond hairs and teeth of quartz crystals. Vāyu, god of wind, is his father and Savāha is his mother (Rāma I, Book II, 2527BE/1984: 21-22).

He was born on Tuesday, in the third lunar month, in the Year of the Tiger. While being given birth by Savāha, he rose up and came out from her mouth. Then he flew up to the sky, transformed himself into a huge body with 4 faces and 8 hands and yawned. As a result, the moon and stars appeared (Rāma I, Book 1: 88; Nāgapradīp 1972:174-175). The birth date assigned to Hanumān must have been intentional than real as it, according to Thai astrology, indicates that the person born in that zodiacal sign shall be an invincible personage in war.

Hua Khon or the mask representing Hanumān, is white, showing imaginary monkey with mouth open bearing its teeth like that of Javanese or Balinese Hanumān and without tall top that signifies ruling or princely position.

The weapon that Hanumān carries is usually a trident whereas Hanumān of the Indian epic usually carries a gadā or a mace. This reflects the Śaiva influence in the Thai Rāmākien. Interestingly the weapon entwined with the *cakra* or discus which is known as Chakrī become the royal emblem of the present Chakrī Dynasty of Thailand.

Hanumān in relation to Thai kings

Hanumān is incorporated in one of the royal standards designated as Thong Phra Krabi Dhuj, the red standard bearing the figure of white monkey chief. The word Krabi is the Thai adaptation of Sanskrit Kapi whereas Dhuj is the Thai adaptation of Sanskrit Dhvaja. The white monkey in the standard is, no doubt, Thai Hanumān in appearance. The standard was first created in 2453 BE/1910CE in the reign of King Vajiravudh, Rāma VI, after the plate of bronze, bearing figures of a monkey and a Garuda, which probably was the ancient royal standard of the past rulers. The object was unearthed by a citizen and it was presented to King Rāma VI by Phraya Sunthornburī (Skt.-Sundarapurī) when he presided over a celebration of the Phra Pathom Chedi, the great stupa of Nakhon Pathom (Skt.Nagara Prathama), and the palace buildings at Sanam Chan Palace, Nakhon Pathom Province (Somdet Krommaphraya Damrongrajanubhab 2500BE/1957:50-51).

The figure of Thai Hanumān, on account of his prowess and protective power entrusted to him, has been fitted to the prow of one of the royal barges named Krabī Prāb Muang Mār or the Mongkey General Conquering the Demon's Country, in the belief that Hanumān's spirit that resides in the figure would protect the king wherever he travels by water way in the procession of

royal barges. The older barge of the same name was built in the reign of King Rāma I whereas the present one was built in 2524BE/1981(Piamsuk Tanvibul 2000: 70-71).

The barges named Ang Ma and Surabimār (the correct spelling should be Surabimāna) each having the figure of Hanumān decorating the prow existed as early as the reign of King Narai (Skt.-Nārāyaṇa), the Great, of Ayudhya period (Royal Barge 1996: 35, 37). This is one of the evidences indicating the deep influence of the Rāmakīrti in Thai life even during Ayudhya period.

The present author was told by his late father who, in spite of his non-formal education of his days, knew complete story of the Thai Rāmākian partly through the shadow play which was very popular in olden days before the advent of movies, that two personages among others, namely Hanumān and Śrī Dhanañjaya, are to be paid respect to by Thai Kings at the time of their coronation, the former as protecting spirit and the latter as the Thai wisest man whose shrewdness is always reckoned with by the Thais in general. This reflects the belief that was current among the folk that the spirit of the two personages always protects Thailand from adversary elements.

The influence of the Thai Nītiśāstra or the statecraft on the story of Thai Rāmāyaṇa is also seen in the rewards conferred on the soldiers who successfully carried out their duties after the war with Lanka. Hanumān among others was conferred the title of Phraya Anuchit (Skt.-Anujita). He was given one haft of the kingdom of Ayudhya to rule. He was also given 5000 beautiful female attendants apart from other wealth. But when he sat on the throne he felt as if he was burn by the fire that causes the destruction of the whole universe. He realized that it was not proper to sit on the throne where Rāma, the Avatāra of Nārāyaṇa also sat. He asked Rāma to give him another city to rule. Agreed to his request, Rāma shot Brahmāstra arrow and asked Hanumān to follow it to find where it would fall. The arrow fell on a nine-peaked mountain. Rāma ordered Viśvakarman to build a city there for Hanumān and it was named Navaburī (Skt.Navapurī) after the mountain with nine peaks (Rāma I, Book 3, 1964:664-678). Hanumān ruled the city with all the enjoyments that deserved a ruler. It is believed by the Thais that Navaburi is the city of Lopburi today.

Hanumān as protective charm

It is believed that Hanumān is endowed with supernatural powers. As a result he was represented in a form of small figure on a tablet to be used as protective charm. Sometimes Hanumān is represented alone sometimes with the small figure of the Buddha. The following are the examples collected from current magazines:

Hanumān is depicted as holding aloft the Buddha image in meditative position. This tablet is designated as Luang Pho(father-monk) Pān of Wat (monastery) Bāng Nom Kho (Kho=go=cow), Ayutthaya(=Ayudhya) province (Atthaphum Bunyakiat.1991: 46).

Hanumān the general of Rāma has been made into an amulet by a number of celebrated Āchāryas like Luang Pho (Father-monk) Sun of Wat (monastery) Sālākhun, Nonthaburi, Luang Pu (Grandfather- monk) Thim of Wat La Hān Rai, Rayong Province and Luang Pho Kuay of Wat Ghositārām, Chainath Province.

Apart from this, various Achāryas and various monasteries are fond of making Yantra on Hamuman, such as Hanumān carrying a flag. Luang Pho Pool Attarakkho of Wat Phai Lom, Nakhon Pathom Province, a senior disciple of Luang Pho Ngoen of Wat Don Yai Hom, on the other hand, used to make the first generation of Hamuman as amulet in 2513 BE. This first generation of Hanumān is looked for by the believers, as it is effective from the experience of users. It is suitable for keeping it with oneself in the present situation. The second generation of Hanumān, of which there are two types. The first one made of metal containing sounding ball made of the magical powder prepared from stone known as Hin Khiao Hanumān (quartz crystals) is in flying position on top of a cloud holding aloft in one hand a flag and in another a trident. The second one is Hanumān in meditative position and is of four types, the first being made of bronze containing sounding ball made of the magical powder, the second being made of silver also containing sounding ball made of magical powder, the third being made of gold containing sounding ball made of magical powder and the fourth being made of green stone powder containing sounding ball made of the magical power . The magical powder is derived from Phra Ngām Hill in Lopburi Province. It is believed that Hanumān took water by his mount from the mountain to extinguish the fire that burnt Lopburi and during the process his tooth and hair dropped down and they became the so-called Hin Khiao Hanumān (Sawrapol Sopitkul 2543BE/2000: 31).

The best protective charm of Luang Pho Sun of Wat Sālākhun, Nonthaburi Province is Hanumān carved out from elephant tusk and from the root of Jasmine plant(Preecha Iamtham 2532.:54).

Hanumān of Luang Pu Thim is another protective charm. The price of this protective charm is about 10,000 Baht (=approx.US\$200). Hanumān of Luang Pho Pān is also about US\$200 (Nop Thaphrachan : 13-14).

Another Hanumān as protective charm was created by Luang Pho Ket of Wat Ko Lak in 2543 BE(1980) (Yai Thamai: 60). As protective charm, Hanumān figure with incantation formulas is also tatoed on the body. One of the most respected Buddhist monks who provide this kind of protective charm is Phra Udomprachanāth, better known as Luang Pho Pern. He belongs to Wat Bang Phra, Amphet (district) Nakhorn Chai Si, Nakhorn Pathom Province, about 40

km west of Bangkok. He is now, the present author was told by one of his devotees, prohibited by religious authorities to continue the practice. As a result, his pupils have to carry out the tattooing then he does the part of installing sacred incantations into the tattoo.

Mr. Vanchai Vatthanamonkhol (วันชัย วัฒนมงคล) is the disciple of Luang Pho Pern has strong belief in the power of Hanumān both as protector and as womanizer so much so that his entire body is covered with the tattoo of Hanumān's figure. Believe it or not, he is now living with 7 wives happily.

Magical protective devices are also associated with Hanumān. Here Hanumān is in the form of magical diagram. In one of these diagrams Hanumān is depicted as jumping spreading his raised arms on both sides. One of his hands holds Phra Khan (Skt. Khaḍga) or two-bladed knife. The syllables in Khmer (Cambodian) script, Ha, Nu, Ma and Na are written near his right foot, right hand, left hand and left foot respectively. Above him are the magical diagrams with syllables that read Na Cañ Nañ Dham Mo A . Bu. Nim . Nim A Ya. This particular diagram is called Na Cañ Nañ meaning the diagram that stupefies the enemy.

Hanumān as healer

In Thai Rāmayaṇa, Hanumān involves in healing when he brings the whole mountain where the herb known in Thai as Vān Sang Koranī Trī Javā to heal Lakṣmaṇa who was dying from the wound resulted from the Hok (spear) Mokka Sak, Kumbhakarṇa's Amoghaśakti.

The belief in Hanumān's power also permeates the area of herbal medicine. A kind of Thai herb having medicinal property is named after Hanumān, that is, Hanumān Prasān Kāi or Hanumān healing his body. Its scientific name is *Schefflera leucantha* Viguier. F. Araliaceae (Vit Thiang Buranatham: 818). Another kind of herb that is named after Hanumān is Kam Lang Hanumān or Hanumān's Strength (Sa-Ngiam Pong Bun Rawd :60)

Hanumān in sport.

The story of Hanumān also involves in one of the most popular sport in Thailand, that is, Thai boxing. Before the actual fighting, boxers are required to pay respect to their spiritual teachers by boxing dance. There are a number of forms in the boxing dance. One of them is termed Hanumān Thavai Vaen or Hanumān offering the ring. It relates to the episode in the Thai Rāmakiem when Hanuman offeres Rāma's ring to Sītā.

One form of Thai boxing offensives is termed *Hak Nguang Aiyarā* or breaking the trunk of Airāvata. It relates to the episode in the Thai Rāmakiem

when Indrajit transformed himself into Indra, rode on the Elephant Airāvata, created by his magical power and Hanumān broke the neck of the elephant.

Hanumān and the City of Lopburī

To award Human for his excellent service in the war with Laṅkā Rāma appointed him to rule Lopburī with another purpose also in mind, that is, to keep watch on a demon named Thao Kok Khanāk who in spite of being pierced by Rāma's arrow made of a plant known in Thai as Kok (a kind of reed) was still alive but was stuck to the ground by the arrow. The arrow would move out little by little when a fabulous rooster would crow on every 14th or 15th day of the dark fortnight. Hanumān would keep on driving it down again and again so that the demon may not get up and then devour the citizen of Lopburī. The arrow can also move up if someone pours the vinegar on it. It is believed that the demon's daughter named Vong Prachan keeps doing this. As a result, once the vinegar could not be found sold in the city of Lopburī (Phragru Prabhassarasutagun : 9). Vong Phrachan is actually the name of a mountain in Lopburī Province. It is believed that Thao Kok Khanāk is lying in one of the caves of this mountain, being stuck to the ground and being attended by his daughter. According to the Thai Rāmakien, the demon's actual name is Thao Unārāj (King Rāma I Book 4: 636-639).

There are a number of places in and near Lopburī believed to be associated with Hanumān. They are: 1) **Khao Samaw Khon** which is a hill in Amphur (district) Tha Vung, about 10 km northwest of Lopburī City. According to the myth, when Lakṣmaṇa was struck by Kumbhakarṇa's spear called Hok Mokkaṣak (Skt.-Amoghaśakti), Hanumān was assigned by Rāma to fetch the herb from a mountain called Sapphayā, now in Chainat Province, west of Lopburī to cure the wound of Lakṣmaṇa. He was sent there during the night and was supposed to bring the herb before sunrise. Since it was dark he could not see the herb he wanted he carried the whole mountain flying to the battlefield where Lakṣmaṇa was lying fatally wounded. While on the air, passing Lopburī, he saw the fire was burning. As a result, he could see the herb he wanted. He took the herb and dropped the mountain to the ground. Then the mountain was burn until it became totally white as one can see nowadays. Interestingly, a similar story was told to the present author by his teacher, Prof.A.N.Jani, when they traveled together to the Ashram of Rāman Maharshi, Tamil Nadu, South India, that Hanumān while carrying the mountain of herbs to the battlefield in Laṅkā dropped part of the mountain on the ground. It became the mountain that exists near Tiruvannamalai. 2) Tha Le Chup Sorn (The lake resulted from Rāma Brahmāstra arrow). According to the myth, once Hanumān as the ruler of Lopburī saw that Lopburī was dense with forest. Hence it was difficult to see the approaching enemy. He, then, used his tail to sweep the whole forest. As a result, the whole forest was on fire and Hanumān tried by all means to extinguish it but in vain. The soil of some part of Lopburī became white till today on account of

the fire, it is believed. Hanumān had to request Rāma to extinguish the fire. Rāma shot Brahmāstra and it fell where Tha Le Chup Sorn is situated today. The lake was the result of the arrow that fell there, it is believed.

Hanumān and Laṅkā

It is believed by the people of the author's father's generation that Laṅkā which was burnt by Hanumān is still burning till today. If one wants to hear the burning sound, they say, he just closes his both ears with fingers.

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