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**Book Report: Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuu Bunร๑t
That Woman, Her Name is Bunร๑t
An Exploration into Thai Popular Fiction and Social Values**

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Introduction

One aspect of Thai society that impressed me while living in the country was the vibrancy of the popular arts. From the giant billboards in Bangkok advertising the latest in Thai cinema, to the raunchy drag shows of Pattaya, to the voluminous examples of Thai popular fiction, I have always felt that these and other popular art forms constitute a field ripe for study. While ignored by most scholars until recently, the exploration of popular art forms can help the researcher to better understand the values that underlie any given society. I believe that the study of the "popular" arts as opposed to the "elite" arts is a better source of information for certain types of research because it can reflect the attitudes of the masses in society rather than the views of a small educated elite group. In a recent article entitled Individual and Society in Modern Thai Literature, Anthropologist Niels Mulder sums up some of the types of information that can be gained through the study of one of the most important popular art forms in Thailand today, Modern Thai Literature. Mulder writes:

There is especially much to be found in novels and stories that is of sociological relevance and can be used to discover and formulate hypotheses. Most fiction

appears to be very useful to exploit for its social typologies. Moreover, it often contains fine descriptions of cleavages in value systems between current and parental generations, strategies of conflict resolution, individual motivation, or ideas about ethically and practically right and wrong behavior. Often such questions are well formulated by the authors of simple novels who tend to write in a society confirming way." (Pg. 72)

Mulder also claims that the study of literature is one of the most objective research methods available to an antropologist or sociologist. He writes:

"While unavoidable it nevertheless remains bad policy to be one's own sounding-board in interpreting the life of others and it makes sense to seek other sources of inspiration that are beyond the normal fieldwork techniques. One of the most important of such sources is the unsolicited documents that any literate society produces. These are not there because of the presence of a researcher but have been produced by local people addressing other local people." (Pg 71)

Convinced there is still much that we can learn about Thailand through explorations into Thai popular fiction, I have chosen to analyze a comtemporary Thai novel to fulfil the requirement of my Master's thesis. The work that I chosen is a 350 page novel entitled Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuu Bunrot (That Woman, Her name is Bunrot), by renowned Thai author Botan. Botan is one of the most widely read novelists in Thailand today.

Her most famous work to date is Cotmaay caak Muang Thai (Letters from Thailand), which examines cultural differences between the Chinese and Thai in post World War II Thailand. The novel is now a part of the standard reading curriculum in Thai secondary schools and has been translated into English. Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuu Bunr was also well received by Thai readers. The novel was first published one chapter at a time in the Thai Women's monthly magazine Satrii San then released as a single bound volume. According to scholar Herbert Phillips in his latest book Modern Thai Literature:

Most Thai authors first publish their material in newspapers or in weekly and monthly magazines. Novels, novellas, and short stories are also serialized for publication in daily newspapers and in weekly magazines. In this format, they are read by thousands of readers. Only the most popular or valuable of these writings are later made available in the more integrated, durable, and prestigious form of a book. (Pg. 19)

Bunr t's popularity can be further evidenced by the fact that it was later made into a multi-part Thai TV mini-series that was widely viewed.

The bulk of Botan's reading audiences consists of educated upper and middle class woman. To label Botan's writings as "popular fiction" as it is commonly understood in the west is slightly misleading. Bob Ashley in a

new book entitled The Study of Popular Fiction: A Source Book states that the difference between 'popular' fiction and 'serious' fiction is more than the fact that 'popular' literature sells better. Ashely writes:

'good' literature is identified, 'canonised' and takes its place within high culture as serious art. What is left is part of popular culture and the best that can be said of it is that it provides harmless entertainment (many commentators, of course have disputed 'harmless'). More likely it will be ignored. (Pg. 27)

While Botan's novels could be considered best-sellers by Thai standards they may lose their status as works of 'popular' fiction by the fact that at least one of her writings, Letters to Thailand, has already been 'canonised' and can be considered a classic piece of modern Thai literature. It is still too early to tell if "Bunratt" will experience a similar fate. Also Bunratt might not be considered a work of "popular" fiction because it is definitely more than a piece of entertainment. The novel is a rich social document that is very critical of many aspects of Thai society.

This thesis is divided into four parts. First, It will provide a brief synopsis of the more important parts of the novel under study. Second, it will examine the feminine consciousness of Botan apparent in the novel. Third, it will explore themes relating to the family and social

responsibility in contemporary Thai society. Lastly, it will examine changing attitudes toward work and status due to processes of modernization in Thailand. The analysis is not so much an argument that builds upon itself in order to prove a larger point, but rather a collection of observations that loosely relate to each other and to the above themes.

Points of analysis were chosen either because they reflect what I believe are the major themes of the novel or because they represent important changes in Thai society. I was not interested in, nor am I qualified to conduct a critique of the novel on aesthetic grounds.

I realize that the opinions expressed in creative fiction are sociologically inconclusive and need to be substantiated by further research. Literature offers a view on authors' interpretations of experience and perception of society. Their answers are tentative and interpretive, opening alternative views of what it means to be a person in contemporary Thai society. However, I maintain that the study of Thai fiction is of major significance in understanding the lives of Thai persons, particularly the processes by which meanings are constructed and exchanged.

Story Synopsis

Cast of Characters

Bunรဲတ	Main Character; Heroine
Robert	Bunรဲတ's American Husband
Khruu ၁ranphin	Bunรဲတ's ex-teacher and patron
Jin	raphin's son
Jit	raphin's daughter
Wichuda	Cin's wife
Bunlam	Bunရဲတ's older sister; prostitute
Bunsin	Bunရဲတ's Younger brother; factory manager
Buntham	Bunရဲတ's Younger brother; less intelligent than Bunsin
Bunthing	Bunရဲတ's evil youngest brother
Mother	Bunရဲတ's mother
Suni	Bunရဲတ's nemesis; prostitute
May	Wealthy Chinese Girl who tempts Bunsin.

In order to understand the novel *Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuu Bunရဲတ* one must know one simple phrase that is widely used in Thai society *aw tua ရဲတ*. In our case this phrase translates as: to survive. Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuu Bunရဲတ is the story of a poor girl from rural Thailand named Bunရဲတ who leaves her village in order so that both herself and her family can survive economically. The name of our heroine Bunရဲတ relates directly to

this theme. *Bun* means 'to survive'; *bun* means 'meritoriously good.'

Therefore, *Bunbun* translates as someone who survives in a meritorious way.

Also necessary to the understanding of the novel is an explanation of the Thai term *mia chaw*. A *mia chaw* translates literally as a "wife for rent." It is similar in English to a "mistress." During the Vietnam Era in Thailand many Thai women became *mia chaw*. They might stay with a man for the duration of a man's stay in Thailand, sometimes many years or even a lifetime. A *mia chaw* is different from a prostitute in that a prostitute might have a different lover every night, whereas a *mia chaw* is committed to just one man for a greater length of time.

The novel begins at Don Muang International Airport in Bangkok sometime in the present. *Bunbun*, who always dresses in flashy, vividly colored clothes is waiting to leave the airport with Robert, her White-American husband and their two Amer-asian daughters. There she runs into her old teacher *Uraphin* and her two granddaughters. *Uraphin*'s granddaughters naturally assume that *Bunbun* is a *mia chaw* because of her clothes and her *farang* (western) husband. *Bunbun* and *Uraphin* exchange news then necessarily part. On the way home from the airport *Uraphin*

promises to tell the story of Bunratt to her grandchildren.

The rest of the novel takes place during the Vietnam era when thousands of American GI's are stationed in Thailand. Ugraphin's story begins as a teenage Bunratt enters her house in Bangkok upset. Bunratt had been working in the back of a restaurant washing dishes and cleaning. Her boss at the restaurant raped her and paid her next to nothing. Bunratt, seeking refuge, asks her old teacher if she can come to work for her instead. Ugraphin, out of compassion, hires Bunratt on.

Bunratt proves to be a hard worker at Ugraphin's house. Her primary responsibilities include taking care of Ugraphin's two children Jit and Jin, cleaning the house, washing everyone's clothes, and cooking. While living with Ugraphin's family, Bunratt takes a liking to Jin who is only a couple of years her younger. Bunratt and Ugraphin become so close during this time that eventually Ugraphin considers Bunratt as one of her own children. She pays for Bunratt to attend night school.

Bunratt sends the little extra money she earns home to her mother. However, on a visit back to her rural home she learns that her mother is less than satisfied. Bunratt's generosity has been outmatched by her older sister Bunlam who sends great sums of money back home from Bangkok.

Everyone except mother realizes that this money has come from Bunlam's employment as a prostitute.

On Bunlam's next visit home, Bunlam returns with two children of her own. One child is half-white while the other child is half-black. Both of the American soldiers who fathered these children have since left the country, leaving Bunlam fairly large sums of money and no forwarding addresses. Unfortunately, a Thai man has cheated Bunlam out of her money. Realizing the new financial pressures facing her family Bunlam decides to give up her job at Jraphin's and seek higher-paying employment elsewhere.

At this point in the novel Jraphin's son Jin runs away with his girl friend Wichuda for a seaside holiday. After days of searching Jraphin and her husband find the young couple with their friends staying at a sleazy bungalow near Pattaya high on marijuana. They soon end the illicit vacation and drag the couple back home, afraid of what the neighbors will think. Jin's renegade behavior does not end there, however. After a few months away from home studying at Chiangmai University he returns home with Wichuda and a child. Jraphin has no choice but to increase her financial assistance to her son since as a student he can not support

himself, let alone a family.

Bunrɔ̄t finds a new job managing a restaurant at an American Air Base in the Northeast of Thailand near Korat. The restaurant is often filled with flirting prostitutes and soldiers. Bunrɔ̄t invites her two younger brothers Bunsin and Buntham to live with her. She finds them both work in the area. Bunrɔ̄t tells Bunsin that if they work hard someday they will be their own boss, Bunsin is skeptical.

While working at the restaurant, Bunrɔ̄t meets Robert Harry, a chief mechanic at the airbase. Robert comes in to the restaurant to chat with Bunrɔ̄t at every meal. Their conversations begin innocently enough. Robert is very fond of Bunrɔ̄t's culinary skills, particularly her bread baking and he tells her so often. Later on, their conversations approach more intimate subject matter, such as the virtues of virginity and Robert's sexual history. Robert soon defends Bunrɔ̄t from the jeers of the other men in the restaurant who are convinced that she can be bought and sold like any Thai woman of similar status.

After working constantly for many months Bunrɔ̄t decides to take some time off and go and visit Jin and his wife Wichuda in Chiangmai. She soon realizes that Jin and Wichuda are not getting along well. Jin is angry with

Wichuda because she is a poor housekeeper. He blames Wichuda's failings on the fact that she comes from a rich family and was too spoiled to ever have lifted a finger at home. Wichuda is angry with Jin because he is shirking his responsibilities as a husband and father. He spends too much time away from home drinking and goofing-off with his friends. Jin and Wichuda's baby has been ill with a cold. Its care has been entrusted to the house servant who cannot read the label on the prescription bottle and gives the child too much medicine. Bunræt demands that Jin and Wichuda turn their attention away from their anger for one another to their deathly-ill child. But it's too late, the baby dies in the hospital that evening. Not surprisingly, this deepens the cleavage between Jin and Wichuda who blame each other for the child's death. Wichuda leaves Jin to live with his mother in Bangkok. Eventually, Jin and Wichuda's differences are reconciled under the guidance of Bunræt.

On the way home from Chiangmai Bunræt runs into Robert at the bus station. Robert is not alone however, but accompanied by an obnoxious prostitute named Suni. Robert invited Suni to spend the weekend with him in Bangkok. He offers Bunræt a ride home which she reluctantly accepts. When Robert drops Bunræt off at the restaurant her boss Khun Pɔ̀n is there

to greet her. She naturally assumes that Bunratt lied to her about Chiangmai and instead spent the weekend in Bangkok with Robert. Khun Pohn has always been afraid of Bunratt leaving the restaurant and becoming a prostitute. She will not listen to Bunratt's attempts to rectify the situation. Bunratt in a fit of anger decides to leave the restaurant and find a new place to live.

Bunratt finds a room in a slummy section of the city near the base. She decides to start her own business selling bread and desserts on the street. She bakes the bread while her younger brother Buntham sells it. She has already found a new job for her other brother, Bunsin, working for Robert as a mechanic's apprentice.

Robert, upset that Bunratt has left the restaurant, obtains her new address from Bunsin at the base. He soon makes a deal with Bunratt whereby he can come to her house and eat her delicious food in exchange for an oven for her business. One day, a shiny new refrigerator appears on Bunratt's doorstep courtesy of Robert. Bunratt is elated.

Robert and Bunratt's relationship soon takes a giant step forward when they go on a picnic together in the countryside. It is there that Robert proposes marriage to Bunratt. Praising Bunratt, Robert says "I like a woman

who is her own person, not someone who's always worried about what society thinks." Bunræt agrees to marry Robert, provided that her brothers can come with her and that she can continue to run her business. Robert agrees. It is clear that Bunræt chooses to marry Robert, not because he is a wealthy *farang*, but because she really does love and respect him.

Eventually, Bunræt makes enough money from her small bread and dessert business to buy some warehouse space. Later, she purchases two lathes and thus marks the beginning of her dream of a family factory.

Bunsin who has had much experience as a lathe operator is given the job of managing factory operations while Bunræt handles all financial matters.

Buntham is also hired on to help. At first, business is slow and Bunsin's morale begins to decline. But once again Bunræt comes to the rescue and convinces Bunsin to lower prices 5% below the competition to attract clients. Eventually, Bunræt's strategy pays-off and business blossoms.

Bunræt could not be prouder of her accomplishments.

Despite the success of the factory Bunræt does not live happily ever after just yet. The return of Bunthing, Bunræt's youngest brother, spells disaster. Bunthing, ends up on Bunræt's door step dead broke after months of trying to "make it" as a folk singer in Bangkok on money he stole from

his mother. Worse yet, he is accompanied by a 16 year old groupie-type girl who he expects Bunræt to take-in as well. Soon however this "groupie's" unknown husband comes to fetch her and shoots Bunthing in the leg as he trys to stop him.

After weeks of convalescence Bunræt gives Bunthing an ultimatum. He must either finish school (he is still semi-illiterate) or go to work.

Bunthing, still set on the unrealistic goal of becoming a famous singer finds this ultimatum impossible to accept. He instead choses to steal a large sum of money plus other valuables from Bunræt and Robert's house and skip-off with Suni, Robert's ex-lover-for-hire who has been shacking-up next door with some GI. Bunræt, needless to say is shocked and hurt. Fortunately her husband Robert is forgiving.

While all these changes have been going on in Bunræt's life no one has seen or heard from Bunlam, Bunræt's older sister, in years. Til one day, Bunsin recognizes that the as yet unidentified, mauled body of an accident victim pictured in the newspaper is Bunlam herself. Bunræt thus rushes to Bangkok to help her sister in the hospital. The sisters reunion is an emotionally charged scene. Bunræt repeatedly urges Bunlam to return home with her and work at the factory. Bunlam is reluctant to return to

the family and face her half-breed children she abandoned so long ago. Also Bunlam is scared to face her mother, who has moved from her village to live with Bunrɔt, and other people who would look down on her because she has been a prostitute. Bunrɔt argues to Bunlam that her return is important because it is the duty of both of them to support the family. All along it has been the daughters, not the sons, who have supported the others. Bunlam and Bunrɔt differ only because Bunlam was content to send money home indiscriminately, which went to feed her mother's gambling habits, while Bunrɔt only supports those who make an effort to support themselves. Eventually, Bunlam does return home and reintegrates herself into her new surroundings with relative ease.

Ever since she married Robert, Bunrɔt has known that within a few years Robert would be restationed in Indonesia and that she would be expected to follow. Bunrɔt had planned on giving complete control of the factory over to Bunsin when she left. Bunsin is considered the only person in the family capable of running the factory after Bunrɔt leaves. Bunrɔt had built the factory so that everyone in the family could have economic security. However, a crisis develops that involves Bunsin, the factory, and therefore the future survival of the family. Bunsin falls in love with

Maay, the daughter of his old Chinese boss; and she falls in love with him. Unfortunately, her family would not approve of her marriage to a man of common Thai origins such as Bunsin. Therefore, she suggests that she and Bunsin start a new factory together on money that she has inherited. Maay refuses to come and live with Bunsin's family because, according to the stories narrator, "She may love Bunsin but she does not love a single one of his relatives. His oldest sister is a prostitute. His second oldest sister married a *farang*. His youngest brother is a criminal and his mother is a stupid country woman (Pg 319)." Therefore Bunsin must choose between his family and business on the one hand and the beautiful wealthy Maay on the other. After days of anguished deliberation he chooses his family and business. The novel ends here with the future of the family looking very bright indeed.

The Feminine Consciousness of Botan

This section of the thesis will analyze the feminine consciousness of Botan. By feminine consciousness I refer to the attitudes a person might have about the role of women in any given society. I will examine how Botan both questions and neglects to question of some of the underlying social values and prejudices that relate to the behavior of woman in Thai society. I believe that an understanding of Botan's own feminine consciousness is useful because it may reflect many characteristics of the feminine consciousness of a substantial percentage of women in contemporary Thailand.

Bunr t, Women, Entrepreneurialism, and Negative Stereotypes.

As mentioned earlier a novel must sell well in order to obtain the dubious distinction of "a work of popular fiction." In order to sell well a book must satisfy the reader. Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chue Bunr t. has become a "best-seller" by Thai standards because it has satisfied perhaps the largest group of readers of fiction in Thailand, urban upper-class and

middle-class women. The appeal of Bunratt to this group must be because it reflects their own sentiments about women in Thailand. These sentiments include a desire for the greater emancipation of women in Thai society. We will now examine Botan's prescription for the emancipation as expressed in the novel.

One of the strongest "pro-women" messages in the novel is that a woman can be successful in the work world, all she needs is intelligence and determination. The rise of Botan's protagonist Bunratt from rags to riches exemplifies this. Although few women in Bunratt's position ever accomplish what she does, this is probably of less consequence to the reader than the inspiration her success provides. The fact that Bunratt, unlike the bulk of the reading audience, is from a rural peasant background may be encouraging to the reader because if Bunratt can "make it" anyone can. Since many Thai women work outside the home, success in business, is an important concern.

Not only is Botan a firm believer in women's ability to succeed in the working world, she also argues that work should not be divided on the basis of sex. This is apparent in one scene when Bunratt argues the following with her mother:

Women must find work outside of the house and men must learn how to do housework. They must help each other. So is preparing food, and washing clothes really *women's work*?" (Pg. 238)

Botan, also expresses her desire for the greater emancipation of women by questioning some the negative stereotypes associated with women in Thai society. These negative stereotypes are often wrongfully assigned to the protagonist Bunræt throughout the novel. In actuality, an intelligent woman that does nothing that Thai society would consider "wrong," Bunræt, because of her appearance, marriage to farang, poverty, and skin color, is often presumed to be an "unrespectable" woman. By questioning the stereotypes associated with Bunræt, Botan explores and sometimes challenges many of the underlying social values and prejudices in Thai society.

One of the strongest examples of social criticism in Bunræt regarding the behavior of women relates to the overimportance of physical appearance in Thai society. Niels Mulder in his book Everyday Life in Thailand states that:

Thai society literally tends to accept persons at their face value as conscientious actors of roles who take their manners and presentations seriously. (Pg. 64)

Botan's novel provides clear evidence of the reality of Mulder's theory. People in the novel are constantly judging Bunræt on the basis of her appearance rather than on her actions or inner intentions. In the first paragraph of the of the novel Botan describes Bunræt this way:

"At Don Muang the international terminal was filled with passengers and their relatives who had come to see them off during the noon departure. One woman wore a long brightly colored plaid skirt that clashed with her dark skin, and a tight T-shirt bright red like a fresh beetlenut in color. On her head was a light blue scarf and dark sun glasses that she wore with dark eye-shadow. Her lips were bright red and her skin was smoothed with a fleshy-brown colored make-up. Her walk was swaggering. Her dark sun glasses prevented anyone from seeing the look on her face. She enticed people to turn and look. (Pg. 9)

Though it may not be so obvious to an outsider, what Botan's is telling us is that Bunræt dresses like a women involved in some form of sex trade. Only such a woman would dare to dress in such flashy, brightly-colored clothes with so much make-up. Even Bunræt's mother is critical of Bunræt's scandalous appearance. She tells Bunræt:

You say you don't want to sell your body and help your mother and younger brothers but I look at the way you dress, so slutty, worse than most of the whores that I've seen. (Pg. 61)

Due to her appearance, Bunræt is constantly subject to the public

prejudice towards prostitutes even though she has refused such employment. The reason Bunrɔ̀t dresses the way she does, we are told, is due merely to her poor taste in fashion. Society's misinterpretation of Bunrɔ̀t's appearance limits Bunrɔ̀t's opportunities in employment. This is clear in the following passage when asked Bunrɔ̀t responds to her ex-teacher ɔ̀raphin's suggestion that she become a teacher:

"No thanks, to be a teacher one must be tidy and dress politely. That's not for me. I couldn't do that" said Bunrɔ̀t straightforwardly. She was dressed in her favorite color red like a fresh betelnut, bright, bright red, fluorescent green, and bright orange. The older she gets the more she likes to dress in an eye catching manner and walk the streets for others to see. (Pg 38)

Fortunately, Bunrɔ̀t is strong enough not to let the false assumptions of others bother her. However, most women in Thai society are not so bold. They are careful to dress in a polite manner that would not cause others to question their respectability. It is obvious that Botan is critical of the overimportance of appearance in Thai society and the way it affects women. I feel as though she is speaking directly through Bunrɔ̀t's teacher ɔ̀raphin in one scene when she writes:

We only look at the outside form and structure of one another. We never look inside. We're interested in whether or not someone's hair style is pretty but we're

not interested in whether there is a brain inside that head or not or what is someone's heart is like." (Pg. 16)

Another negative stereotype that Botan questions in the novel relates to women who marry *farang* (white, western) men. Bunratt's decision to marry Robert serves as further evidence to most people that she is a *mia chaw*. Although people were more likely to conclude that a woman married to a *farang* was a *mia chaw* at the time of the Vietnam War, when thousands of American soldiers were stationed there, such assumptions are still common today. In Bunratt we can see that part of the reason Thai people might assume that women who marry a *farang* are women for sale has to do with the Thai belief that western men are interested in exploiting the relative powerlessness of Thai women, which is often true. This belief manifests itself in two different ways in the novel. First of all, in the notion that western men view Thai women as little more than objects for sale. Will, another soldier who works with Robert at the base, exemplifies this attitude when he tells Robert:

I don't believe that there is a single Thai woman that cannot be bought with money even if they [Thai women] have a good education. (Pg. 68)

And secondly, in the notion that western men marry Thai woman primarily to procur a cheap servant. Bunratt expresses this sentiment in a

conversation with Robert just before they decide to marry:

"People from different countries who speak different languages like me and you can live together for how long, that I don't know. If we live together do you think we could go away together." He spoke Thai mixed with English. Bunrət understood him well. She shook her head a little.

"I don't know" Bunrət sighed. "I'm still not sure how you see me as different from Suni [the prostitute]"

"I still think that you misunderstand me. I said that I know that if *you* [as opposed to Suni] were ever to be happy with someone, it would be because you really loved them and not because they were wealthy." Robert stared at Bunrət's eyes as she sat with her legs crossed.

"That may be true but the real difference is you may think I'm stupid. You wouldn't have to waste money on me every month like you would with a prostitute. More than that you wouldn't have to worry about catching a disease either. I'm cheap and clean."

"Why do you think I like you Bunrət, to save money?" The tone of his voice showed that he was hurt "Do you really think I'm that kind of person?"

"I can't help but doubt you because I'm not pretty or charming, I have dark skin, little education, a sharp tongue, and I am no stranger to the world and its ways. I could never be considered the "ideal" world anywhere at any time. (Pg. 131)

Due to the negative stereotypes associated with western men as a result of their exploitative view of Thai women, any Thai women who associates herself with one is immediately suspect. This is apparent in the following passage when Khruu Jraphin urges Bunrət to consider that a

mixed-marriage will jeopardize Bunratt's already tarnished reputation:

"Bunratt think about this, aren't you scared that people will think your a wife for rent? I won't go against you. What's important is your own heart. Anywhere you go with him there will be people who will hold you in contempt because they will think your a whore. How will that make you feel? Humorous or angry? If it humors you than marry him. If it makes you feel angry or uncomfortable than don't marry him. Some people will pretend that they don't care but in their hearts they are uncomfortable and unhappy." (Pg. 89)

This quote also gives us an indication of how concerned Thai people can be of what people will think. Individual Thai behavior is severely regulated by the fear that if one does not conform they will be ostracized by Thai society.

Botan's uses Bunratt's example to show how unfair it is that Thai people always assume that a women who marries a farang is for sale. As stated earlier, Bunratt and Robert marry because they are compatible. There is no unusually exploitative element to their marriage. Botan obviously sees society's misinterpretation of Bunratt's relationship not only as an example of oppression toward women, since they are usually the more stigmatized by intermarriage than their husbands, but also as an example of the racist views and hypocrisy in Thai society. Botan cries racism, because if

Bunratt were married to a Thai or a Chinese man people would not raise such a fuss. Botan cries hypocrisy because a Thai woman who is a *mia nang* (minor wife) would never be as severely ostracized by society as Bunratt has been for marrying a *farang*. Minor wives in Thailand offer a variety of services including sex to men who are already married in exchange for financial support. Bunratt has never committed such an offense. Botan's views are relayed to the reader in Bunratt's following speech to her brothers who at time disagree with her marriage to Robert:

"I have a husband. If he was Thai or Chinese no one would get excited or be interested. When a red-haired *farang* enters my life everyone gets excited and scared that people are going to think I'm a *mia chaw*. However, there were the minor wives of *Sia Song* [*Sia* is a title given to a wealthy middle-aged Chinese businessman]. Why didn't anybody say anything when they'd go and serve for a year and a half and then return. I've never met one of them who served for more than year who made even one thousand baht but they sell their bodies just the same." (Pg. 112)

Bunratt, Oppression, and the Upholding of Traditional Values in Thai Society.

Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuee Bunratt shows us that Botan could not be considered a true "feminist" at least according to the western definition of the word. For while Botan does express an advocacy for the

entrepreneurial endeavours of woman and criticizes many of the negative stereotypes associated with the appearance and intermarriage of Thai woman, Botan not only neglects to challenge but sometimes upholds what some people might see as obvious examples of oppression toward woman in the text.

Botan's brand of feminism not does view the Thai patriarchy as a force that impedes the success of women in society. The unjust stereotyping that women are subject to in Thai society comes from everyone in society not just men. If a women wants to be successful all she needs to be is both determined and clever and if society views her unjustly she needs to be strong enough to calmly ignore it.

An example of what many people view as oppression towards women that Botan does not challenge in the text concerns the double standard in Thai society. It is a well known fact that in Thai society "respectable" woman are expected to remain chaste until marriage. In Bunrət, Botan challenges the reasons why people might falsely assume that a woman is not a virgin, instead of the importance of virginity itself. For example, we learn in the novel that no Thai or Sino-Thai man would marry Bunrət because she is no longer a virgin. As previously mentioned, she was raped

as a teenager by her former Chinese *thaw kee* (a wealthy, older Chinese business owner). This is expressed in the following scene when Bunræt is explaining to her mother one of the reasons why she married Robert:

"Mother did you know that I'm not very pure or clean"
Mother's eyes widened.

"Mother you're the one who gave me to that dammed *thaw kee*. He gave you a few measley hundred baht but he did whatever he wanted to with me. He treated me worse than he would a prostitute. I never told you this mother. I didn't want to druge up bad memories from a long time ago. This is the reason I escaped to live with Khruu ๓raphin. I told you only that the reason I left was because I didn't get my monthly salary. That was all I told you. You sent me into the mouth of a tiger for a long time did you know that? Thai men are very concerned about whether or not a women is pure. And I have an older sister who is a prostitute, and nephews with obviously black and red heads. What decent Thai man would want to marry me? When he gets bored with me he'd chase me out of the house and tell me that I'm not pure and clean enough for him!" (Pg 159)

This juicy little passage reveals alot of interesting information about the criteria a women must meet in order to marry a "respectable" Thai man.

What is so interesting about the passage is that we pity Bunræt because she could not marry a decent Thai man due to the fact that she lost her virginity by force. If Bunræt had lost her virginity willingly to a man that she was not married to, she would not earn our sympathy. In my opinion

this is reflective of Botan's unwillingness to oppose the social laws that forbid the practice of pre-marital sex among women. Botan's upholding of this traditional value can be further evidenced by the way she defends Bunrxt's purity when comparing her heroine with the prostitute Suni in the following scene:

Even though Bunrxt has had sex she remains wholly unfamiliar with the subject. Her past sexual experiences were unintentional. She didn't ask for it but was threatened and forced and it all happened so long ago. Bunrxt has lived for many years now in purity. Although she may discuss the subject that's all she does and not in a vulgar obscene way. (Pg. 116)

Of course when Robert is rumored to be sleeping around with the prostitute Suni, he is readily excused. The following conversation between Bunrxt and her brother Bunsin after Robert has volunteered to take Suni home, reveals that not only is pre-marital sex socially acceptable for men but so is participation in prostitution.

Bunsin stared at his big sister who stood against the door and asked

"Did you hear the boss [Robert] volunteer to take Suni home. I was here I heard it all"

"I heard, my ears aren't deaf yet idiot"

"I bet he's not only going to take her home They may comfort each other until the darkness returns." Bunsin smiled sarcastically at his sister.

"That's her business not mine jerk" Bunrxt yelled.
"Sun's occupation is selling her body. If the boss wants to buy her services he has the right to. That's not the type of thing that we can go and prevent him from doing. Just because he comes here doesn't mean he can't go to other places. or go out whoring. He never said he loved me." (Pgs. 117-118)

Botan also neglects to see prostitution as an act of oppression committed by men against women. This is apparent in the following conversation between Bunrxt and her teacher Xraphin:

"What type of work did you say Bunlam does"

"She exchanges her body certainly" said Bunrxt positively. Teacher Anphin was a little startled even though she was as certain as Bunrxt, but Anphin wasn't sure if Bunrxt knew.

"You should see that this isn't all bad, maybe Bunlam has had good luck and found good work"

"There's no need to try to console me. If she's not selling her body than she's either a massage palour girl or a mistress. I read the papers every day and your weekly magazines. I know what's going on. When I lived with my my old boss I was so stupid. I almost forgot how to read. But since I've come to live here I read every day and I've learned alot."

"What have you learned? How are you going to make a better life for yourself? You want to have money like Bunlam, and wear pretty clothes, and have fun, and not do heavy work, but when you get too old or sick you've lost your means of making a living."

"I don't want that. I told my mother that I have to be really clever and then I can be a means of support for her and my younger brothers. However, I won't use the same method as Bunlam. That's not permanent enough. I want to have a position that's certain like a teacher, or a

tailor, or a restaurateur, or I'll build a factory and be my own boss." (Pg. 31)

What I find so interesting about this passage is what Bunrūt and Jraphin, mention as the negative aspects of a career in prostitution. These aspects include the risk of disease and inability of older prostitutes to making a living because of their undesirability. I am curious as to why the violence toward women often associated with the profession was not mentioned. Perhaps the realities of a life in prostitution, which often includes acts of aggressive violence, was not widely realized in Thai society at that time.

Bunrot, *Aw Tua Rot* and the Family

"I may not be pretty, but if I can make a better life for myself I will be satisfied. I also believe that really clever people besides making a better life for themselves must be a support for others as well"
-Bunrot-(Pg. 35)

In my opinion the above quotation is the most important in the book.

The concept of *aw tua rot* or making a better life for oneself and one's family expressed in this quote is the primary objective of the heroine Bunrot throughout the novel. Indeed, the desire to *aw tua rot* is widespread throughout Thai society and the world.

An interesting characteristic of the Thai notion of *aw tua rot* as expressed by Botan is that it does not advocate a concern for the well being of all of Thai society. To *aw tua rot* is to help yourself and your family, that is considered socially responsible enough. For this reason the notion of *aw tua rot* is sometimes considered conservative and backward by certain Thai liberals and intellectuals who believe that people should broaden their concerns to include the economic well-being of all members of Thai society.

Perhaps this concept of *aw tua rot* is supported by the existence of what Niels Mulder calls the inner circle and the outer circle of Thai

experience. Mulder defines the relationship between these two circles this way:

A person lives two lives. The first and most important refers to an inner circle of trust and obligation, the second to an unreliable and threatening outer world of power that lies beyond the inner world of family and community. The inner world of family and community as it is initially presented is a good and gentle world, indulgent and reliable, stimulating attitudes of dependence most of all." (Pg 90)

This division between inner and outer worlds and their corresponding attitudes are clear in Botan's novel. The inner circle is represented by the certain members of the Bunræt's and Xraphin's families, the outer circle includes everyone else . The following conversation between Bunræt and Buntham comparing ghosts to people could represent the mistrust Bunræt has for Thai people or the outer circle, and may be exemplary of attitudes in all of Thai society:

"Peoples hearts are the most evil of all, but we can't escape them so we must fight them. But with ghosts so long as you aren't alone there's nothing to worry about. Do you know I'm a big coward?"

"People hearts are very evil huh? Does this include yours" Buntham replied

"Oh! It's evil! But believe me its better than most peoples' " said Bunræt confidently. "People who talk sweet can be evil too, you never know. It's very easy to meet evil people did you know that?" (Pg. 166)

By contrast, the following vision of the future through the eyes of Bunrət exemplifies the feelings of warmth, trust and most of all dependence that define Mulder's inner circle:

Bunrət pictures a vast factory encompassing an area greater than one *rai* [a unit of area measurement equivalent to 1,600 square meters]. Mother looks after her grandchildren. Bunsin, Buntham, and Bunthing control the work. Their wives are beautiful. They look after the house and the kitchen for the workers at the factory. Bunrət, controls the money. She spends the majority of time with her husband and the rest of her time inspecting the company's account books." (Pg. 177)

The qualities of dependence expressed in the above quote can lead us to theorize that sometimes Thai people regard their inner circle as an entrepreneurial unit. Traditionally, the production of rice required Thai families to work together in semi-autonomous entrepreneurial units. This quote shows how Thai families are still apt to find a way to make a living together despite relocation to a urban setting.

Mulder describes the factors that bond the members of the inner circle/entrepreneurial unit together in this way:

The underlying idea is the idea of mutual dependence and reciprocity, and the idea of being practically and morally indebted. It is the recognition that we need each other if we want to go on with the business of living, formulated in a system of mutual and unequal moral obligations,

with due respect for tradition and the wisdom of others.
(Pg. 91)

We can see the strength of these bonds during the conflict Bunsin faces at the end of the novel. Bunsin must decide whether to stay and run the factory after Bunræt leaves, as only he is qualified to do, or separate from the family in order to marry a wealthy Chinese woman. Bunsin chooses to stay with the family. There are two major factors behind his decision. First, he is morally indebted to his sister Bunræt for providing him with the opportunity to rise to the position of manager in the factory; something he could never have done on his own. Second, and more importantly he realizes that the family depends on him in order to survive.

The most poignant symbol of the division of Thai experience into two worlds occurs when the prostitute Suni moves next door to Bunræt and Robert's house to live with her GI benefactor. Suni could be said to symbolize the chaos and destructive potential of the outer world. A former mistress of Robert, she prances around her house half-naked for Bunsin and Buntham to see. Afraid that Suni might threaten the security of the family by attracting one of her younger brothers, Bunræt builds a wall between the two houses. One can interpret this wall as the boundary between the inner and outer worlds. Eventually, Suni gains the attention

of Bunthing, Bunrát's evil youngest brother. He violates the security and trust of Bunrát's inner world by stealing a great sum of money and crosses into the outer world of unpredictability to join Suni, never to be heard from again.

Botan's novel is a testament to the virtues of the unified family in Thai society. This comes at a time when the forces of change threaten the family more than ever before. The migration of Thai farmers from rural villages to urban centers in search of higher wages can result in the scattering of family members, whereby individuals are now more likely to work independent of their families in order to support only themselves. This breaking-down of the family is expressed by Bunrát in the following passage when she explains why she is not surprised by the possibility that her Bunsin might leave the family factory in order to marry the beautiful

May:

This is the era of individualism [*tua khray tua man*].
Enough families have been split apart. When you have a family you move out. You only glance back to help or to visit. Don't believe that someone is going to be around to support you forever, that's impossible.
(Pg. 323)

Given the different attitudes Thai people hold toward inner and outer

circles it's not surprising that the concept of *aw tua rət* does not extend beyond the family. Bearing these same distinctions in mind one can see that great social-psychological changes would have to occur if the Thai concept of social responsibility was expanded to include everyone in Thai society. By "great social-psychological changes" I refer to abolition of the division of Thai experience into two inner and outer circles whose existence has been shown consciously in the research of Niels Mulder and unconsciously in the writings of Botan.

Bunrɔt, Status, Work, and Modernization.

Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuu Bunrɔt is also a useful source for information on changing attitudes towards status and work in contemporary Thailand. These changing attitudes result from Thailand's rapid transformation from a rural, agricultural kingdom into a modern, industrial state with an increasingly powerful business sector. This final part of this thesis will explore issues relating to status and work present in the novel.

Botan's novel can help us to understand both what determines status in Thai society, and if these determinants are affected by processes of modernization. This understanding can be reached through an examination of the relationship between occupation, money, family, and status as depicted and sometimes questioned by Botan in the novel. Botan's understanding of these relationships may be representative of changes in Thai society as a whole.

In America we like to gloss over class differences and pretend we believe that we are of equal worth. For example, a stock boy at a wig store in the inner city is just as important and due the same amount of respect as the CEO of the enigmatic Beatrice® Corporation. Everybody who works hard for a living deserves equal respect so long as what they do is

considered legitimate. In Thailand, however, hierarchies are more rigidly defined. Every member of Thai society is aware of who is "above" and "below" himself in status. Thus *khon chai* or house servants are considered "below" the people they serve. Traditionally, the fact that people are "above" and "below" one another in Thai society was relatively unquestioned. The laws of karma in Buddhist doctrine were used to justify the inequalities in Thai society. However, in the novel, Botan questions the linkages between status and occupation in Thai society. Bunratt may show us that passive acceptance of inequality based on occupation in Thailand is changing at least among the middle class. Botan makes two important points regarding this subject. First, the work of the *khon chai*, primarily housework, is just as important as any other type of work. Second, people should not be judged as unequal on the basis of their work. In other words, a business owner should be equal in status to his employees. These points are apparent in the following dialogue between raphin and her daughter Jit:

"Is this the new servant mom?" Jit or *Prakanya* questioned when she saw Bunratt in the house. She didn't look at all like she used to.

"No This is your old nanny, Jit. You don't remember her?" Her mother answered. "It's Bunratt!"

"My old nanny, you mean servant don't you?"

"I never had a *khon chai* (servant). I only had *luuk caang* (employees) Ankanya! [Cit's formal name]" Khruu ᨧraphin answered in a cooler voice than before. She doesn't like it when her daughter reviles anyone as lower than herself. "Especially Bunᨧət she's not a servant at all. She used to live in this house with me and take care of you. And Bunᨧət graduated from *Matthayom* [secondary school] and knows English as well."

"How do employees and servants differ?" doubted ᨧrakanya.

"An employee is someone that we hire to come and help work. A servant is from ancient times where they were called *baw rap chai*. They ate and slept and did everything else at their master's estate. They weren't allowed to go anywhere, just like slaves. The only difference with *baw rap chai* is that they were unable to come and go unlike *khon chai* (servants) . Masters revile *khon chai* as lower but employees have status equal to their employers. They are inferior only in the sense that they receive money from their bosses just like any person who works for a company. Employers own the work and the money but they are no better than their masters. Do you understand? Employees do housework but some households treat them like servants unlike employees who work for a business who have more honor. But I think they're just the same. Housework and company work is work just the same. It all depends on the skills a person has. To be a housewife is an important profession a secretary is another one. A clothes cleaner or a typist they all have equal status in my eyes. Do you understand?"

Khruu ᨧraphin kept talking on and on unsure whether or not rakanya understood. She wants to explain this so that when Jit gets older she will have good relations with others.

"We can't do all our work by ourselves so we must hire others to help. Why do we look down on those that come

do help us with our work? Soon the word servant will disappear. There won't be anyone who wants to be one. We will hire them to be people who help the mother of the house or people that wash and iron clothes or cook." (Pg. 54-55)

While Botan would like people in Thailand to view one another as equals, this is obviously not going to happen anytime soon. The rigid status system is still an integral part of Thai society. Paradoxically, while Botan is professing these lofty humanitarian ideas in the novel, her protagonist Bunrøt is working to improve her status in life, as if a higher status is something worth struggling for.

The novel also shows that in addition to occupation wealth can determine status in Thai society. The more money one has in Thai society the more respect one can buy. This is obvious in the text when Bunsin, tries to convince his sister Bunlam the former prostitute to ignore the scorn of others, and return home. He tells her:

Why are you so busy worrying that the *chaaw baan* [common Thai people] are going to hate us. Nowadays, whoever has money they'll lift their hands to and *wai* [a traditional Thai gesture of respect] everytime. (Pg. 294)

It is clear from the above quote that money can buy respect in Thai society despite one's otherwise questionable behavior. While great wealth has always been an indication of high status in Thailand, it is only in this

century that common Thai citizens have had the means to obtain it.

The third factor that determines one's status in Thailand which Botan explores in the novel is the family. Bunsin's status in Thailand was elevated by his rise to the position of manager/partner in the family factory. If it wasn't for his new-found status the beautiful and wealthy May would never have taken an interest in Bunsin. However, Bunsin's status is limited by the common origins and scandalous behavior of his family. This is why May's parents would not approve of him and why May would not move in with Bunsin's family. Botan refers to the importance of family in the determination of status as evidence of a caste system in Thailand of which she is critical. Botan's caste system continues to exist despite the processes of modernization in Thailand. These issues are explored the following statement made by Bunrūt after Bunsin rejects May's marriage plan:

"Bunsin loves her [May]. He is infatuated, and gladdened by her beauty and high position. May is someone from a different class than him. He has been able to step up to a position comparable to hers but his former caste has stuck to him. Who says that Thailand doesn't have a caste system. It might not be as clear as the caste system in India but it hides itself in the occupations of our ancestors and one's status in society is a result of them." (Pg. 339)

Bunrət indicates that status in Thailand can be something that you show to others to earn their respect; not something you keep humbly to oneself. In the novel, Bunrət's desire to become like a *thaw kee* (her own boss) becomes an act of revenge. A way to prove to all those her misjudged her that they were wrong. This is apparent when she tells her brother Buntham:

"I'm not scared that people will think that I'm a *mia chaw* (wife for rent) or that I'm going to be a *mia chaw*. I'm just scared that a day may never come when people can see that I'm too good to be a whore or a coolie. We have to become better than that, right? Then we can laugh at and snub Khun Pəm [Bunrət's former boss who wrongly accused her of sleeping with Robert] some."
(Pg. 82)

One can also derive from the above quotation that a person's identity in Thailand is their rank. Or in other words, identity and status are one in the same. For example, what people thought Bunrət really *is*, is a *mia chaw*. However, people were wrong and what Bunrət really *is*, is something better than that, she *is* something like a *thaw kee*. (a wealthy Chinese patron). This ties in with the argument made earlier about the importance of appearance in Thai society. A person's identity is defined by his appearance, which reflects his status, not by his heart. The notion of a

truer-self, inside of us, that is a more accurate representation of identity is not necessarily a primary characteristic of the Thai perception of self.

The opportunities for an ordinary Thai person to lift his status in Thai society have never been greater. Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuee Bunratt reflects the awareness of the opportunities for greater social mobility among the lower class segments of Thai society, afforded by successes of capitalism in the country. This awareness contrasts with the traditional view of the chances for upward mobility in lower class Thai society that Niels Mulder expresses in the following passage:

The great masses who are differentiated among themselves in terms of ranked roles, spectacular social mobility among them is rare. Great ambition is rare. They take life as it comes and beyond the hope of minor improvement in their positions over time they have few other career expectations. (Pg. 111)

While I do not challenge the fact that the above may still be true for the majority of people in Thai society, the story of Bunratt's own rise from rags to riches is a reflection of growing entrepreneurial activity among the masses in Thai society. To this day, the business sector in Thailand is heavily dominated by the Sino-Thai community; however, commercial activity among the Thai is increasing. Born into a Sino-Thai family Botan

is believer in the merits of hard work. She instills into her heroine Bunræt all qualities that she would like to see more of in Thai people so that they can achieve her idea of success or economic security.

The novel also indicates that the preferred means for advancement in present-day Thailand is through the business sector and not through the civil service. In the past the native-Thai, in contrast to the Chinese Thai, have sought advancement by working for the government including the military. The Chinese-Thai, as mentioned earlier, have sought employment in the business sector. The solid, steady growth of the business sector in Thailand since the fifties, is certainly responsible for this change in attitude. Some of the common negative perceptions of men who work in the civil service are expressed by Bunræt in the following passage:

Since she was a child until she'd grown up Bunræt has hardly ever met a male teacher or a local government official [both civil servants] who was any good. In her eyes all she ever saw was their drinking and whoring from the beginning of the month until the end of the month until almost all their money had been spent." (pg. 164)

Bunræt's negative associations with men in the civil service may be part of the reason why she instead chooses a career in business. The

desirability of business over government work is also apparent in the actions of Khruu Jraphin and her husband who give up their jobs in the civil service to start a clothing business which soon flourishishes.

The incredible success of both Bunrɔ̄t's and Jraphin businesses in the novel suggests a rather naive understanding of the world of commerce on the part of Botan. Undoubtably, most small business in Thailand fail as they do here in the U.S. This naiveté must be due in part to the great attention that has been paid to the success of many businesses in Thailand in recent years and to Botan's own experiences as a member of Thailand's prosperous Chinese merchant class.

Bunrɔ̄t also may point to the breakdown of patron-client ties in Thai society. Traditionally, in order to get ahead in Thai society one had to attach him or her self to a more powerful patron. The patron and client formed a mutually beneficial bond that lasted as long as it was beneficial to both parties. What's so interesting about Bunrɔ̄t's rise to the top is that she did it virtually without the help of anybody else. Bunrɔ̄t accumulated the skills she needed working for Jraphin and the restaurant and then goes out on her own to build a business selling breads and desserts out on the street. After saving enough money she is able to purchase the space and

the equipment necessary to establish a family factory. She does not rely on her wealthy *farang* husband for financial assistance. All that Bunnāt needed to make a living for herself and her family was the determination to do so followed by the accumulation of marketable skills, and knowledge of how and where to use them.

Botan's intention is to show how necessary it is for a person to have skills that they can depend on to make a living. This theme is echoed repeatedly throughout the book. It reflects the realities of life in a modern urbanized Thailand which is unfamiliar to many Thai, who have depended on agriculture in order to survive. The acquisition of skills useful to the modern world is a theme that Botan stresses, in hopes that her advice will be heeded by those people struggling to get ahead in a rapidly developing society.

In addition to the accumulation of marketable skills, Botan suggests that Thai people ought to change some of the attitudes that have about work in order to succeed. The problem in Botan's eyes is that people are rarely devoted to the work they do. Mulder also picks up on this point when he writes:

Work [in Thai society] demonstrates position and

prestige rather than a task at hand and a challenge to achieve for its own sake. (Pg. 127)

What Botan's suggests to her readers is that people learn to put their hearts into what they do. They should be motivated by a love for their work instead of a pay check at the end of the week. These ideas are expressed by Robert in the following passage when he tells Bunræt that Bunsin is not yet ready to build and run his own factory:

"I think it would be better to wait a year before you join with Bunsin to make a factory."

"Bunsin still doesn't know the business?" Bunræt was suddenly worried.

"He's pretty good already but there's still some things he doesn't understand. He still doesn't know what the heart of work is. He still works day to day for his monthly salary. But he doesn't put his heart into his work. That's typical of people in this country they still don't see the future."

"Putting your heart into your work what do you mean by that?"

"I'll tell you. It's like when we raise a child . Good parents who really love their children are going to raise them well with their hearts and with love. When their child turns out good the parents have real happiness. When working, people who love their work will be happy when their work comes out well. Not only because their work is finished. It's like when your through making your desserts, when they come out soft and delicious you're happy, not only because you can sell them, that's not enough, your heart must be content as well. Do you understand me? Your heart is filled not only because you have made enough money to support yourself." (Pg. 180)

The fact that Robert is saying all this probably means that these ideas are strange to many members of Thai society.

Conclusion

Phuu Ying Khon Nan Cheu Bunrut is a fascinating social document that reflects many of the realities of life in contemporary Thailand. Released in 1981, the novel was one of the first ever written in Thailand that explored women's issues. As we have seen the novel expresses an advocacy for the greater emancipation of women in Thai society. It is a Thai version of the famous Horatio Alger myth, well known in the United States, that there is no limit to what a man can achieve so long as he works hard. The only difference is that in Botan's writings success through determination and diligence awaits women as well as men. Botan's prescription for the emancipation of women in Thai society also includes an end to many of the negative stereotypes linked to the appearance and intermarriage of women.

While Botan's ideas are in many respects quite progressive for Thailand and in fact could be said to reflect the attitudes of a broad-based feminist movement, Botan does not dare question the rules that regulate

the sexual behavior of women. As seen in the novel, Botan upholds the double standard in Thai society.

The novel also yields important information about the family and the definition of social responsibility in Thailand. I have shown how the perceived threat from the outer circle is part of the reason why social responsibility in Thailand is not expected to extend beyond the insular family unit. Botan's novel may also reveal that the Thai continue to regard the family as an entrepreneurial unit despite migration to urban areas.

The novel also reveals important information about the attitudes toward status and work in Thailand. We have seen how money, occupation, and family, are the key determinants of status in Thailand. We have also seen how Botan questions the rigid status system of Thailand and asserts that all people regardless of their occupation, or income level, should be regarded as equal. In my opinion these ideas are still uncommon in the whole of Thai society. We can also see how the tremendous economic growth in Thailand in the past few decades affects people attitudes toward work. The novel may reflect the fact that common Thai people are more aware than ever before of the opportunities in the business sector. Also Botan suggests that Thai people "put their hearts into their work."

These attitudes may still be more common in the Sino-Thai community, of which Botan is member, than in with the native Thai. However, one might assume that the processes of modernization now underway in Thailand are bound to affect the Thai work ethic.

One must bear in mind that Phuu Ying Khon Nan Chuu Bunrxt is first and foremost a fantasy. Very few women in Bunrxt's position ever achieve the success that she does and few people are so superhuman. Bunrxt always seems to know the best way to conquer the obstacles that face both herself and her family. She's just too *keng* (clever).

Part of the reason that I chose to read this novel was to improve my Thai reading skills. I am glad that I chose to analyze this novel because it is relatively easy to read due to the fact the Botan uses common everyday spoken Thai throughout the text. However, I am certain there are many subtleties in the story that I either misinterpreted or missed altogether. Though my Thai reading skills are better than ever I have always known that in order to achieve real fluency in the language I would need to live there for a few more years.

It is my hope that there will be more studies conducted in the area of Modern Thai Literature. I maintain that it is one the best ways that we

can learn about the both the social values and the changes taking place in contemporary Thailand.

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