

26: The King of Chiang Mai seizes Nang Soi Thong

[II/193]

The King of Chiang Mai continued to think that the King of Lanchang's reply was not straightforward. He suspected some trickery.

'We sent to ask for Soi Thong's hand, but he didn't say whether he agreed or not. He only replied that his daughter was still a child. And he returned the tribute.

When someone asks for a lady's hand, the response should be clear. But replying in this misleading fashion suggests there's some kind of subterfuge.

Perhaps he's afraid we'll turn into an enemy, and he won't be able to resist if we attack with an army. So he's thought up some underhand plot. Sitting on this will achieve nothing.'

With these thoughts, he gave orders to Kwan Mahabat, 'You're clever and daring. Without delay, go under cover to Lanchang to investigate what's going on –

what are their thoughts on politics, how are things in the palace, and has anyone made contact to ask for the hand of their beautiful daughter.'

Kwan Mahabat took leave of the king immediately. He dressed, put some dried rice in a waist sack, harnessed a horse,

and left Chiang Mai at the break of dawn. He galloped through the forest without stopping, eating handfuls of rice on the way.

After traveling from morning until around midday, he rested the horse in the afternoon, then set off again in the moon-lit night. He struck a flint to smoke tobacco while still in the saddle.

When the horse tired, he gave it a rest and a drink of water. Once the tiredness lifted, he thundered ahead until the moon went down. Then he slept beside the way. At first light, he mounted and hurried onwards.

Slipping through the forest, he did not even meet hunters. He kept to the hills and the banks of streams, avoiding all the villages along the way. [194]

He entered the territory of Vientiane. Two days before reaching the river landing,¹ he learnt from a Lawa village that Ayutthayan

¹ Presumably Phan Phrao on the Mekong opposite Vientiane, as in the previous chapter.

people had come to the capital.

Mahabat stopped to think. 'I have to hear things close-up.' He dressed himself like a Thai, and went into Vientiane.

He walked along amid Lao and southerners, without fear of anyone in city. He listened to what officials were saying. He went to the inner court sala,

and saw a big pavilion, nineteen rooms long, with people and goods coming and going. The people spoke Thai and were obviously from Ayutthaya.

Also there were many Lanchang nobles and officials milling around, talking about the Thai coming to their capital

to collect the princess to go down to the southern city as queen of its ruler. Having got the news that she would leave in fifteen nights, Mahabat set off home.

In seven days, he galloped to Chiang Mai. He dismounted, entered the front audience hall, prostrated elegantly three times, and addressed the king. 'I have been to Vientiane.

I went into the sala and saw lords and nobles milling around busily. There were many Thai in the city, and rumors everywhere

that five hundred Ayutthayan soldiers had come. They are waiting to collect Soi Thong and escort her to Ayutthaya in fifteen days time.'

The King of Chiang Mai was as angry as if the sky was on fire. 'Mm! The King of Si Sattana is playing around, with no fear of me.

I asked for her hand properly. He did not grant her, and secretly contacted the Thai to come up. Fine! Never mind. We'll see. I'll not have an enemy show contempt for me.

Hey! Conscript an army immediately. Select about five hundred thousand brave troops. I'll take this army into their territory to take revenge on the King of Si Sattana. [195]

I'll attack the city of Lanchang at will and leave not even a blade of grass.' The king's rage echoed around the audience hall, alarming the lords in audience.

Two senior officials, Phraya Maen the Upahat, and Saentri Phetkla, promptly bowed and addressed the king. 'My liege, by your grace.

The way to Lanchang is very long. Organizing an army of conscripts to go and besiege the city of Lanchang will be too slow. It won't reach there before she leaves.

As Phya Mahabat said, they are about to leave for the southern city. If we want to bring the princess here, an army must go immediately,

intercept her along their route, and surround them there. We should be able to capture the Thai and Vientiane Lao people, and bring the princess to our city.’

The King of Chiang Mai greatly appreciated this response. ‘Organize an army immediately. Saentri Phetkla will be in command.

Intercept them and bring her here. Don’t kill their troops as it may upset Soi Thong. Go quickly.’

Tri Phetkla took the order, and made obeisance three times. They selected five thousand soldiers who were all brave, invulnerable, and equipped with knowledge.

They prepared weapons, guns, crossbows, spears, elephants, and horses. At the light of dawn, the army set off,

and quick-marched through the broad forest, skirting the big hills, to Phu Wiang.² Knowing for certain she would take this route avoiding the big hills,³ they halted the army and set up an ambush on the slope of a hill.

Tri Phet ordered the soldiers, ‘Don’t go around the villages looking for bananas and sugar. When the Thai army approaches, we’ll get wind of them. Wait to hear a gunshot as the signal.

Split up into detachments of eighty. Creep up to surround them. Capture them alive. Don’t chop them dead.’ They hid in the forest. [196]

Close to the day that his daughter would leave, the King of Lanchang could not stay still. He went to the audience hall to order all the preparations.

He arranged a volunteer brigade as escort under the command of Kueng Kamkong, a royal retainer. All the lords, chiefs, and heads of ministries arranged who would be in charge of what.

Consorts from the department of the palace, guards, doctors and masseurs in various posts, volunteer brigades for the front, rear, and interspersed in the column – all would be ready at dawn on the day of departure.

The king told the queen, ‘My dear, you take care of ordering the attendants from the inner palace to prepare the princess for her departure.’

² The circle of hills. Now an amphoe in the northwest of Khon Kaen province, with a circular ridge of hills enclosing an oval plain of around ten kilometers diameter with an exit to the east.

³ Alternative routes from Vientiane to Ayutthaya cross over the Phetchabun hills into the Pasak valley. See the early nineteenth century maps (*RSM*, ?????).

Queen Keson came to the residence of the princess with tears streaming from her eyes. She embraced her daughter and gave instructions.

‘Oh, my Soi Thong. Father is sending you to the southern city. You’ll leave in three days, my darling. Your mother’s heart feels like it’ll break from sadness.

Being parted from my precious daughter is like dying. From now on, I’ll be very miserable. Nobody is like one’s own beloved child. This is like gouging out a mother’s eye.

Oh dear! We’re used to seeing one another every morning and evening. Just seeing you lifts my spirits with love. Since your birth, we’ve never been separated. We’ve always shared both the good and the bad.

Since I carried you in my womb, I’ve cuddled and cared for you with love. I went without spicy food, kept to the precepts, and prayed all the time.

By the time I gave birth to my dear daughter, I’d already been carrying you, and had to cradle you from then on. You suckled your mother’s milk every day until you’d grown up many years.

From now on, I’ll be out of sight, as if both eyes had been struck blind. If I could go with you, I would.’ She grieved at her loss.

The beautiful Soi Thong embraced her mother’s feet, sobbing. ‘It’s a pity father does not care that I’ll be parted from your breast. [197]

Being forced to go is heart-rending. I’ll probably lose my life in the forest. How can I reach Ayutthaya when my heart feels so completely bruised?

Since birth, I’ve not been separated from you. Where can I find someone else? I’m just going to be hugely sad, and I’ll probably die.

Oh dear! I was born to have bad fortune, to suffer miserably. You and father cherish me like your own hearts, but it turns out we’re parted in the blink of an eye.

I hoped to make my parents happy, but it turns out I’ve been the cause of your suffering. The country seemed splendidly content, but I was born to be a demon of destruction.

The whole city is affected, and I’m the reason why things are messy and murky. Why should I stay alive?

Mother, please tell father to have me chopped dead to remove the cause of this trouble.’ She sobbed on and on.

Queen Keson put her arms round her daughter and consoled her. ‘Don’t be too upset, my dear child. It’s not that father doesn’t love you.

The King of Chiang Mai asked for your hand in a manner your father found high-handed and threatening, as if we were their vassal. He thought this damaged our honor, and so did not consent.

This means the King of Chiang Mai will be angry, and will bring an army to attack and destroy our city. Our city people are afraid that if war breaks out, we'll be defeated.

In that case we'll lose our beloved daughter, our honor, and our city. The people are worried that the city will fall and they'll become prisoners.

Politics can create this much trouble and strife, my darling. Were it not for this, we'd never let you be parted from us.

Only you can release your parents from this suffering, like a junk carrying us across an ocean. The people too will be freed from danger, all because of you, my beloved daughter. [198]

The King of Ayutthaya has the power to conquer all the three worlds.⁴ You're going to be his loyal servant. This is totally in line with our status and rank.

This king is considerate. He sent orders with his royal retainers that he'll look after you and make sure nobody encroaches on your status.

In addition, he won't allow anyone to mistreat Si Sattana. Go, my darling. Don't be reluctant. This is a way to repay your parents' kindness.

Your reputation will spread across the world. Worry will give way to joy. You should be happy every day and night. Don't grieve and feel wronged.'

She soothed away her child's worry, and arranged everything to go with her. She summoned the princess' four maids to help select what was needed:

a queen's regalia; glittering jewelry; a crown of shining crystal, diamonds and gold; earrings and necklaces; jeweled breast-chains sashes and accompanying *banpap*⁵ pendants;

diamond hairpins;⁶ bracelets; sparkling rings encrusted with gems; several sets of sapphire and **zircon**; every kind of jewelry.

Next they selected clothing: everything for nightwear; yok embroidered with gold; and various silks of good quality.

Then gold and silver vessels for dining; perfumery sets; golden

⁴ The traditional Thai cosmogony is organized into the three worlds of heavens, the terrestrial sphere, and hells. Here the phrase is used metaphorically.

⁵ บานพับ, an ornament that accompanies the *sangwan*, hanging at the waist. Perhaps a clasp.

⁶ **jukamani**, see Red:680.

bowls; betel caskets – everything which the queen liked, she gave to her beloved daughter.

Then female attendants were chosen from among those who had good appearance and status, who were already on intimate terms, and who were loyally committed to serve the princess.

In total, thirty-five ladies were selected, headed by the four maids, with royal retainers of the second rank below them, and several female guards and slaves.

Ladies-in-waiting from the department were summoned for several to be selected. A *jangwang*⁷ was placed in charge of a detachment of male attendants. [199]

The queen organized everything, including the distribution of gold and silver as allowances to everyone going, so that nobody should feel put out.

When the arrangements were complete, the queen returned to grieving over her dear daughter's departure. She summoned her and the maids to her inner room.

She hugged her daughter to her chest, and gave instructions. 'You're leaving the palace to go to the southern city. You'll be among the Thai. Don't be careless, my beloved child.

You must study and understand the customs of the southern country. The women you'll meet will be important people in the palace.

You must show your respect and make obeisance. You should get on their good side. Don't turn your back on them. Don't be heartless and make them all dislike you. But don't make the mistake of befriending worthless people.

Such people tend to poke their noses in one's affairs, and curry favor with various ruses. As soon as you fall for such a person, as they hope, they turn round and take your property by the thousands.

Bad people and good people are all mixed up together. Wherever there's one, there's the other. The Lao country and the Thai country are no different. Since this is so, remember this well, my darling.

Among ladies of beautiful appearance, there are both gentlefolk and commoners. The real difference lies in the heart, and how they have been brought up.

Queens are taken to be exemplary because of their solar lineage. They uphold the truth, the teachings, and morality, as well as speaking with politeness and elegance.

⁷ Mc:243: the head official of a palace, or one in charge of some governmental work. Pal:87: 'steward of the princes; head of public office; title of mandarin'

Their character is a result of lineage, and is continuously passed down by upbringing, so there are no exceptions among them. For this reason, they are generally praised.

The royalty of various languages and locations do not differ in morals. If you keep up the traditions of your own lineage, even the king of the Thai city should show you consideration.

But don't forget yourself and get over-confident. You are presented to him as a servant. Even though the king is kind, don't get puffed up and carried away. [200]

There's an ancient saying to instruct a woman who is married about the seven good and bad points of a wife's behavior.

One, harboring bad intentions towards the husband; two, becoming intoxicated with greed; three, being lazy over one's duties; these are what make a terrible wife.

As for a good wife, the text lays down four qualities: one, looking after one's husband with kindness; two, sharing hardship and happiness equally;

three, paying respects and obeisance to one's husband; and four, giving one's body for his use willingly. These will make for peace and content every night and day because the husband is confident of his wife.

But there's a difference between a queen and a commoner over having a husband. You must be loyal and deferent, as if you're a servant of the dust beneath the royal foot.

You must be committed to support him, so that he graciously returns the kindness. Though at times you may be disaffected and discontented, you should never anger him,

because if the king is badly disposed, it may give rise to danger of many kinds. If the king shows favor to you, he'll raise you to be happy and resplendent.

So! You will be happy all the time. Your kinsfolk will be able to depend on you. All the slaves and freemen will be happy too. My beauty, remember what I've told you.'

Then she turned to the four maids. 'You've helped to raise her with love, as if you were younger sisters of Soi Thong from the same womb. Now you'll be her friends-in-need in the difficult task of going to a faraway city.

Every day you'll see one another's faces. Whether she's bad or good, you four must take care of her. You've already raised her through many difficulties. Don't let her fail when she's passing out of your hands.

And Soi Thong, if you do well and become famous, you must always trust your four maids. Use them as consultants. They've been true, loyal, and caring for a long time.

Go with happiness and succeed. Don't get sick traveling through

the forest. Once you're at Ayutthaya, be happy every day and night.'
[201]

Soi Thong and the maids made obeisance and wai-ed in a row to receive the blessing of Queen Keson. Their distress gradually diminished.

At dusk, the queen took her daughter up to the main residence where the two grieved over the parting until they fell asleep in the bedchamber.

On an auspicious day, troops of both the left and right divisions formed up in columns all over the river bank opposite Vientiane on the Phan Phrao side.

There were volunteer groups carrying arms, some displaying green and white pennants, and officers and men both Thai and Lao. Long boats floated alongside the landing in front of the palace.

The front squadron, rear squadron, and royal barge were moored in line, with troops in readiness. Boats to carry the porters shuttled across noisily. Pavilions were built on both banks of the river.

Lao high officials and various nobles gathered to wait. Men and women from the city crowded the paths on both banks.

In the palace, ladies including court relatives gathered to send the princess off, some sadly lamenting the departure.

As the dawn sun streaked the sky, Queen Keson, still sad over the parting, had Soi Thong bathed.

She was anointed with rose water, and turmeric powder was applied to her skin. Then all dirt was scrubbed and rinsed away, and her fair skin powdered.

She was sprayed with perfumes and the fragrant scent of krajae and sandal. Her skin was powdered to be suitably fair, but not too much because she was crying and distracted.

Her hair was coiled in regal style, fastened with a brilliant diamond hairpin, and decorated with flowers. She put on valuable jeweled ear-rings,

a *sin* yok in a golden kanok pattern, and a soft-textured embroidered sabai covering her shoulder. She wore a delicate necklace, dazzling breast sash,⁸ gold bracelets on both upper arms,
[202]

and rings on both hands. Her waist was tightly cinched with a belt. She looked radiantly beautiful in every way, befitting a queen.

Once she was adorned with the royal regalia, the gracious Queen

⁸ *Sangwan*, still need a better translation

Keson took her darling daughter out of the sandalwood residence.

The royal kinsfolk, waiting to send her off, swallowed their sadness and gave blessings to the lovely princess. Then they all went to pay respects to the city's ruler.

Soi Thong went weeping to where her father was seated. She raised a tray with incense, candles, and flowers, and crawled to place it in front of the king.

She brought her hands to her chest in salute, prostrated at his feet, then buried her face on his lap, shaking, sighing, and sobbing. Then she bottled her feelings to bid farewell.

'I make my farewell to the royal foot. I'm going very far away. I hope to repay your goodness, by offering my life under the royal foot.

I don't know whether the future will be good or bad, whether I'll return or not. I beg only that my father and mother are blessed with eternal happiness.

Whatever mistakes I've carelessly made, and whatever annoyance I've caused you in the past, please grant me your pardon, father, so that the karma won't go with me when I leave.

Though I may go to face hardship, I'll not lose heart. But I'll be extremely concerned about mother.

She's used to seeing me morning and night, but now I have to be taken very far away. She'll be so distressed and unsettled that I fear she may soon become sick.

So I humbly request that you take it on yourself not to let her depart this life.' Sobbing sadly, she prostrated at his feet.

His daughter's farewell pierced the King of Si Sattana's heart like a powerful arrow. He trembled and sighed with enormous pity. [203]

His pent-up sorrow brimmed over in floods of tears. He tried to steel himself and swallow his sadness, stroking and consoling his beloved daughter.

'Oh, your father's beautiful heart, don't be distressed at leaving. It's now obvious that you were born to be governed by your fate, jewel of my eye.

I'm very concerned for you, but your marriage is at the will of fate. This current situation that means you have to be parted from me has arisen by chance.

It's not that you're leaving to face hardship. You're going to reside in a place of honor at Ayutthaya. You should be happy all the time.

Please suppress your feelings, my beloved child. Help to raise the honor of the solar lineage and strengthen the city of Si Sattana so that the people may be content.

Don't worry about your mother. I'll look after her. Please go safely to live in Ayutthaya.'

After giving his blessing, the king invited the queen to take their daughter out to the platform in front of the palace.

The three each entered a royal palanquin and went along, with masses of officials ahead and behind, down to the river landing. Many palace ladies followed although they were forbidden.

They stopped at steps on the riverbank, boarded the boat, and sat under its canopy. They crossed the river, followed by the water procession, and arrived at a pavilion on the beach.

Among groups of senior officials and masses of ordinary people, the three walked gracefully up to the victory pavilion.

A chaophraya brought Phra Thainam and the senior royal retainer Kamkong to bow, prostrate, and crawl in to pay their respects and take leave.

The King of Lanchang spoke. 'Go well, all of you. Phra Thainam, I entrust you with the task of addressing the King of Ayutthaya [204]

that we offer our obeisance to the great and righteous king, and beg to entrust our beloved daughter under the royal foot.

She is still young and inexperienced in duties. Please give her instruction and training. She is not acquainted with the customs of the southern city. Please pardon any error that may arise.

Now the city of Si Sattana and the great capital of Si Ayutthaya are joined as one magnificent sheet of gold, two kingdoms like a single territory.

We will protect the northern side. Should any enemy encroach on our joint territory, let us cooperate to mobilize our forces so we may deal with any city.

We offer wishes of victory with pleasure. May your fame spread, and may you eternally enjoy great happiness, free of any irritation and oppression.'

The king presented gifts of jewelry, silver, gold, and clothing. He gave orders for Phra Thainam to lead the vanguard column ahead of the princess' convoy.

Then he summoned Kueng Kamkong to receive his orders. 'Keep careful watch all around. Inspect and check the route. The large forest on the way to Phu Khieo⁹ is very remote.

⁹ Today both Phu Khieo and Phu Wiang are on the same route, with Phu Khieo further south. But in this chapter, the two names seem to be confused. In the early nineteenth century maps, the place labeled Phu Khieo is sketched with the distinctive circle of mountains which must be Phu Wiang (*RSM*: 131, 136).

There, the territories of the Thai, Lao, and Chiang Mai people meet. Keep a close guard at front and rear. When you halt at night to rest, prepare the main guns and light fires for security.

Proceed to the Chi River in the Khorat territory, then you're released from your duties.¹⁰ From there onwards, Thainam will lead the troops and place the surrounding guards.

Go well and return well. Overcome all troubles, thorns, injuries, and disease. When the princess is finally delivered to the Thai city, return to Vientiane without delay.'

Phra Thainam and Kueng Kamkong prostrated and went to take up their positions in the front and rear of the column, waiting for the drum to signal the march.

Robustly dressed Lao from the outpost of Nong Bua¹¹ village came at the front, followed by the Thai of Ayutthaya, and a volunteer brigade ahead of the elephants. [205]

Detachments of Lao volunteers walked in file on both the left and right. The princess' convoy was at the centre of the column, guarded by troops.

Kueng Kamkong kept a close watch over the princess at the rear, followed by the rearguard and the supply train, guarded at the tail by volunteer troops.

Troops, elephants, and horses were present in great numbers. The entourage of the princess, both servants and others, was distributed through all the units of the column.

At an auspicious time, the clouds parted and the sun's rays shone through. The astrologer promptly ordered the beating of the gong, and drums thundered out the signal.

The Lao King of Lanchang took his daughter to mount an elephant, and ordered the troop column to move.

Seeing their daughter depart, the king and queen were in a pitiful state, unable to swallow their sadness. When she disappeared from sight, they returned to the inner palace and wept uncontrollably.

Queen Keson beat her breast in lamentation. She remained gloomy and sad for many nights before the pain of parting eased.

The beautiful Soi Thong also could not stop weeping. Her maids caressed and consoled her by suggesting she enjoy looking at the

¹⁰ This suggests that the Chi River marked the boundary between the spheres of influence of the two capitals.

¹¹ Currently Nong Bua Lamphu. It is situated on their route, at a pass through the steep ridge which divides the Mekong plain from the valley of the Chi. It was perhaps at the border of Vientiane's territory, hence their role at the head of the column.

forest trees.

‘Please cheer up, mistress. Over there, look at the entrance to the forest with magnificent tall *yung* and *yang* trees. They say ahead is a thick forest,

so dense and overgrown that many tigers and wild elephants live there. If people go in small groups, they’ll be afraid. If they come across animals, they’re likely to be savaged.

But we’re going in there with lots of elephants, horses, and troops. The animals will all run away and hide away from us in the forest.

We’ll be able to enjoy the plants. There are endless numbers of them to see – those with fruits, sweet and sour, all lovely, and those with flowers whose fragrance floods the woods. [206]

Though there are trees in the royal garden, they’re not the same as those in the lofty forest. In a short time, we’ll reach the entry to the forest. Mistress, please wait to see the woods and hills.

Here at the edge of the forest there are still villages because it’s close to an outpost. Lawa come to do upland cropping. They plant bananas, sugarcane, custard apple, galangal, and lemongrass. See the house by that clump of bamboo,

with a gang of little kids standing looking, and a lot of old folks by the opening. They’ll draw water and bring it over without being asked. Living in the wilds, they’re very good-hearted.

That house is right at the edge of the fields. It looks like there are beautiful houses and gardens along here. They plant coconut, betel, mango, linchi, orange, and longan in sequence.

The betel garden looks so lush and dense. Along the fences, they’ve planted mulberry to raise silkworms. This is a forest village. They have to plant enough for their livelihood.’¹²

They reached a remote area with no inhabitants. The maids pointed out different birds. ‘On that sandalwood tree, there’s a mynah. Flying right over there is a black drongo.’¹³

That loud bok-bok noise is a coppersmith barbet.¹⁴ That clear cry is the sound of a coel. There’s some *nok kraden*¹⁵ dancing under the

¹² Although this chapter probably dates much earlier, this passage is uncannily similar to a famous entry in Prince Damrong’s journal on a visit to Udon: ‘Each village household has a house with enough space for living and a granary to store enough rice for one year. In the yard of the house they plant chilli, eggplant, galangal, and lemongrass for making curry. Outside the house they have a garden for fruits such as banana, sugarcane, betel, and coconut. And between the garden and the paddy field, there is a space to plant mulberry for raising silkworms.’ See the full quote translated in Charthip, *Village Economy*, 69-70.

¹³ *Saeng saew*, *dicurus macrocerus*, Bird:646.

¹⁴ *Khon thong*, ‘golden hammer’, sometimes crimson-breasted barbet. ‘Call: a hollow, resonant *took* or *tonk* repeated about 80 times a minute.’ (Bird:497)

¹⁵ Unidentified.

taeng taew,¹⁶ and that loud noise is a flock of parrots on the wing.

That cooing is a partridge looking for a mate, and there's an imperial pigeon nesting and about to lay eggs. There's a magpie robin¹⁷ flicking its tail among the trees, and that flapping is a wild cock flying off.

That koo-kuk-koo is a dove. There are hill mynas billing and cooing at the top of that *krathin*. That *nok kot*¹⁸ swooping around is looking for food, and the oriole has just flown down onto the *phobai*¹⁹ tree.'

Animals were all around, but they ran off shyly when they saw so many people coming. The young deer gamboled up the slopes. Moles and rabbits scurried off to hide in the thickets.

As soon as they caught a glimpse, the animals disappeared in a flash, and they were disappointed not to have a better look. Just as the sun began to beat down, they reached the entrance to the forest. A cool wind blew under the shade.

The tall and beautiful *yung* and *yang* formed a thick canopy which blocked out the sun. Dew still lay on the leaves, dripping down. The route was like a tunnel, just big enough to pass. [207]

Both sides were thick undergrowth. Even in the centre of the road, the dense foliage almost covered their heads in a tangle of vines. It looked frightening, and Soi Thong was afraid.

They heard only the plaintive sound of gibbons whooping in the big trees, and golden peacocks calling to one another. She felt lonesome and depressed.

They came to a stream where all kinds of butterflies of myriad colors fluttered in and out of the forest so attractively.

Everywhere around, trees were in bloom, including *sukrom*,²⁰ angelbreast, *yomdoi*,²¹ *phlap*, *phluang*,²² sandal, *sattaban*,²³ *taeng tuai*, orchids,

phikun, *kaeo*, *ket*, eaglewood, and *jampa* smothered with beautiful flowers. The maids beside here urged to cheer up by looking at

¹⁶ The *taew* is *cratoxylon formosum*, and the *taeng* is perhaps just alliterative.

¹⁷ *Kangkhen*, *copsychus saularis*, Bird: 879

¹⁸ This seems to be a literary word for a bird which nobody can identify. RI:6 cites a quotation from *Prapat than thong daeng* (Visiting the Thongdaeng stream).

¹⁹ *Sapium baccatum* (also known as *balakara baccata*).

²⁰ A large tree with red fruits used to make medicine (RI:1201). Unidentified.

²¹ *Lycopodium squarrosum*(T), need to search in flower reference.

²² *Dipterocarpus tuberculatus*, Tree:100, eng gurjin oil tree.

²³ *Alstonia scholaris* (T, Tree:594), also known as *tin pet*, duck's feet tree because of the shape of its leaves, notable less for its flowers than its thick bunches of long thin seed-pods.

them.

Soi Thong overcame her melancholy. They spent fifteen nights before they emerged from the deep forest and reached the village of Phu Wiang among the hills.

They released the elephants, and set up camp in a circle. The troops milled around noisily. The maids suggested Soi Thong go down to bathe.

The stream came from the foot of the mountains. Its cool water gushed down to a basin, and then flowed over an overhang in front of a cliff. The rocks were all dazzlingly impressive,

striated with the red of uncut ruby, and the green of clear emerald. The stream wound captivatingly through the hills.

A refreshing breeze blew the scent of mountain flowers. In the late afternoon, they walked up to a forest pavilion.

Saentri Phetkla assembled his troops in the deep forest. Scouts come to report that the Lao, Thai, and the princess were at Bang Kha.

At dusk he divided the troops equally under units heads. They split up and crawled forward. Saentri Phetkla chanted a mantra, [208]

held his breath, and blew seven times. The sky flashed. The moon disappeared. Storm rain fell. All around, the villages were cloaked in darkness. A strong wind buffeted

the tall *jung* and *yang* trees which splintered and fell all over the place. A dust storm darkened the sky. Thunder echoed around the forest as if the earth would overturn and collapse.

All the Thai and Lao were white-eyed and trembling with fear. Both officers and men lost their heads.

Kamkong took fright. Phra Thainam shook as if a ghost had dropped on him. 'What's happening in this forest?' The bonfires went out, plunging everything into darkness.

Saentri Phetkla fired his gun as a signal, and the troops immediately loosed a thundering volley.

They swarmed forward, hollering loudly, and surrounded the column. Phra Thainam saw the Lao coming in uproar, but was rooted to the spot with shock.

In the pitch dark, he could not see faces and was uncertain where the enemy was. Fighting back was useless because the enemy was almost upon them and the column was lost. Both officers and men took to their heels as best they could.

The Lao chased after to cut them off. The Thai fled in confusion,

falling down, scrambling up, crawling, and running. The Lao horde captured them and tied them up.

Tri Phet captured the commanders, Phra Thainam and Kueng Kamkong. The conscripts chased down the troops and got them all with no fatalities.

The beautiful Soi Thong and her entourage of ladies heard the sound of men shouting. They ran around screaming in confusion.

Everything was dark, both earth and sky. They could not see the faces of the enemy anywhere. In great distress, they cried loudly in the pavilion.

Once all the officers and men had been captured, leaving only Princess Soi Thong, the commander, Tri Phet, chanted and blew a formula [209]

to dispel the darkness. He had troops surround the pavilion, then went inside accompanied by a few trusted troops carrying torches.

Seeing Tri Phet, Soi Thong felt as if her head had been lopped off. She almost fainted with shock. The four maids hugged her,

and she gradually got herself under control. Tri Phet said promptly, 'Your Highness, don't be upset. We're not forest bandits come to ravage you.'

King Chiang In, king of kings, has sent me to invite your gracious self to possess the city of Chiang Mai at this time. There's no reason to be sad.'

He ordered horses and elephants to be harnessed, and escorted her to set off, along with all the other palace ladies. Soi Thong sobbed and cried.

The captured Thai and Lao, both officers and men were put in yokes.²⁴ Even Phra Thainam was put in a cangue. They trailed along behind through the forest.

Mortified at being imprisoned by the Lao, Phra Thainam dragged himself along in tears. In despair, he thought to himself, 'How could it have come to this?'

I was badly careless. It was remiss and inappropriate of me to trust the Lao. I thought that Kueng Kamkong was good. I utterly believed he was trustworthy,

and didn't take sufficient care of the princess. I didn't think there'd be a big incident. Our enemies took us by surprise. When

²⁴ โดงก, ตะโหนด, *ta-ngok*, a form of restraint with two pieces of wood clamped around the neck, a crude form of cangue. The word is also used for the yoke of a draught animal. (RI:448)

will I return to Ayutthaya?

I'm not unhappy if they kill me. It would be better to die. Now they've imprisoned me, even in a cage, where will I be able to hide my face?

On top, news will spread that they managed to capture Ayutthaya soldiers! The more I think about it, the more I'm livid.' Along the way he avoided looking into anyone's face.

Some of the conscripts were so upset they trembled and sighed, with their heads down. Others were boisterous, singing merrily and playing around, with no fear of anyone. [210]

The army quick-marched to Chiang Mai and entered the city. The local Lao people came out en masse to look.

Young women, old women, and widows scrambled over. Men and women crowded together in groups. 'What's this coming here, tied up like a crab?' They asked if anyone knew what had happened.

'They say they're southerners, Thai from Ayutthaya.' They called others to see. Word circulated. Ta-Lo gyrated to tease the Lao, so much the Lao girls turned away in embarrassment.

Old folks threw bananas at them. 'If any of you Thai guys are hungry, eat'em up!' Ta-Lo collected them, stuffed them in his shoulder-bag, and swaggered along in front, rolling his eyes.

'You want to see Thai or Lao, long or short?' Lao girls cried, 'That guy's a creep.' Ta-Rak pulled up his lower cloth and stuck his arse out. 'Here we are, the fierce tigers from the Thai country!

You've never seen us before. Dance up for a look. Do you want a cat or a mouse? I'll give it you.' Young Lao girls spat on the heads of the Thai. 'Can't look at them!' 'They're shameless.'

They arrived at the inner court sala where all the nobles had gathered. Kamkong and Phra Thainam entered in chains, followed by the volunteers tied up.

Princess Soi Thong remained on her elephant in front of the inner hall, awaiting orders from the king.

The senior nobles asked questions, and Tri Phet related the whole story. Then they interrogated Phra Thainam. 'How did this come about from the beginning?

Tell us why you went up to collect the princess. Was she presented to the King of Ayutthaya, or did he ask for her hand? Which?'

Phra Thainam was furious at being imprisoned. He reasoned with himself that telling them or not telling them would make no difference.

'They'll probably chop us dead anyway. I'm not afraid of death,

and it would be improper to beg for mercy.’ He remained quiet, saying nothing. [211]

The nobles were infuriated. ‘Why don’t you speak, you creep? These Ayutthayan Thai are so arrogant.’ In the evening, they all went,

to the front of the grand hall, taking Phra Thainam and Kueng Kamkong along to place under guard. All the nobles entered to attend on the King of Chiang Mai.

King Chiang In, peak of the world, ruler of Chiang Mai, saw Tri Phet, and then looked around to see Phra Thainam in chains.

He laughed loudly and clapped his hands. He leapt up, grasped his sword, and waved it around above his head. He asked Tri Phet, ‘Did you get Soi Thong?’

Tri Phet made obeisance and said, ‘My liege, oh great king. This man here is called Phra Thainam, commander of the Ayutthayan Thai army.

That is Kueng Kamkong, the commander from Lanchang. They were guarding the column bringing the princess through the forest. Soi Thong is here, in the inner court sala

with several hundred palace ladies and a great quantity of silver, gold, and jewels. Seven hundred troops, both Lao and Thai, are all imprisoned.’

King Chiang In did not wait for him to finish talking. Unable to see Soi Thong as he wanted, he impatiently scolded the palace officials.

He ignored Phra Thainam and Kueng Kamkong, showing no interest in questioning them. Instead he shouted, ‘Here, what are you doing, sir?’

What kind of custom is it to let conscripts gawp at a princess? Why didn’t you bring her in here? Wouldn’t that be right, or what do you say?

You know the princess is my love. All you officials are terrible. You’re interested only in face, the lot of you. You should be flogged to the point of death. Bring the cane!

Don’t we have a palace? Where is the lovely Soi Thong, huh? Why do you leave her in the sala? Who does the crystal palace belong to? [212]

Or are you of the opinion it’s not good enough, and hence the princess cannot live there? Why bring me this Thai rabble? Fling them in jail, the lot of them.’

Those in audience were shocked by the king's thunderous outburst. Officials from the department of the city escorted the Thai away at once. Officials from the department of the palace backed out in confusion.

They went to tell the palace governesses²⁵ that the king had ordered them to receive the princess out the front. 'He's very angry. Please don't delay.' The governesses were all alarmed.

All over the place, the palace guardswomen²⁶ talked to the equerries,²⁷ and everybody dashed around in confusion. The governesses come out to the inner assembling hall and prostrated.

They invited Princess Soi Thong to descend from the elephant, and enter a golden palanquin. They brought her to the front terrace of the audience hall.

The King of Chiang Mai saw the palanquin approaching, and flew into a rage. He stamped his foot and shouted, 'Why are you bringing her in here?

The place is full of oarsmen! You want them to gawp at her too? Why does everyone behave as if we have no palace? You mob should be flogged to the point of death.'

The governesses trembled with fear and despair. They all rushed into the palace and waited for the king's order to present Soi Thong.

King Chiang In smiled broadly at the achievement of his desire. His craving for her had not diminished a bit. He went up from the audience hall

to the golden palace bedchamber in an unbearable frenzy of anticipation. He whispered to the inner ladies. 'Where's Soi Thong? Bring her here.'

The inner ladies hurried to tell the governesses to bring her. They all helped to dress and prepare her, and then escorted her up to the golden palace.

They prostrated beside the screen at the entrance to the room, and **Jao Khrua Nai** made the formal announcement to present Princess Soi Thong. [213]

²⁵ ท้าวนาง, *thao nang*, generic term for those in charge of administering the inner palace. Often they were consorts from a prior reign. (Chattarapon, Ruam botkhwamprawatisat, 25, 2003, 156)

²⁶ โขลนจำ, *khlon-ja*, female guards for the gates of the inner palace.

²⁷ **ทนาย**, *thanai*.

Seeing her, King Chiang In, pinnacle of the city, fell madly in love. He could not take his eyes off her. Everything about her was beautiful,

except one. 'She still looks like a child.' Her figure was small. She was not ready for lovemaking.

He was embarrassed at what other consorts would think. But his craving remained, and he was torn both ways.

'Don't! You must restrain yourself. But it'll be a very long time. Meanwhile, the King of Ayutthaya will be furious over the matter of this princess. He'll send an army up here.

I must concentrate on this war first. By the time this irritation has been dealt with and the enemy finished off, the princess should be tractable and I can enjoy her as I crave.'

After debating with himself, he greeted her. 'My charming lady, don't be sad and gloomy. I'll keep you in state in a golden reuan as possessor of the royal property.

In the future, should you think of your father, our two cities are not so far apart. You may go to see him and return. My beauty, don't be afraid.'

He ordered that two golden residences be prepared along with furnishings, servants, and everything to please her and make her happy.

The fair Soi Thong was troubled and miserable. Every day without fail, she stayed in her room, crying morning and night.

'What a pity! I left mother to go to the southern city. We wept because we love one another so much. But I never reached Ayutthaya. I was captured mid-way and brought to Chiang Mai.

Mother and father will mistakenly think that I'm happy now. They expect I'll do well, and hope they can depend on me.

If they find out I've been captured and taken to Chiang Mai, they'll be furious. They should bring an army to attack and, with luck, to take me back.

I'm past thinking about it.' She sobbed buckets of tears. 'This is the result of karma.' Every night she was miserable.