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SELECTIVE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF *BUNKHUN*
FOR MINISTRY AMONG THE *KHON MUANG*

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SELECTIVE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF *BUNKHUN*
FOR MINISTRY AMONG THE *KHON MUANG*

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I dedicate this to my beloved bride, Susan. For more than twenty-four years, you have supported, encouraged, and served alongside me. Not only do I owe you for this wonderful blessing, but I can never repay the grace that your family showed to me by sharing with me the gospel in word and deed.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>DBL Hebrew</i>	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)</i>
<i>EMQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Missions Quarterly</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NAC	The New American Commentary
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
THSV11	Thai Standard Version 2011
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TLNT</i>	<i>The Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i>

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PREFACE

God is a missional God. For more than a century and a half, in Thailand, God has been calling individuals to himself through the work of faithful missionaries. While the evangelical population in Thailand is still dwarfed by the population of those who adhere to the majority religion, a growing and maturing church does exist among the Tai speaking peoples of Thailand. It is an honor and privilege to serve alongside my brothers and sisters in Christ in Thailand. I am humbled by the respect that many have shown to me during my time working on this project. Many *Khon Muang* friends trusted me with information about their culture, and I pray this dissertation accurately describes how *bunkhun* functions among the *Khon Muang*.

The words “thank you” are not a sufficient display of gratitude for all the assistance I received during my doctoral studies. It has been my privilege to interview multiple individuals for this project; I want to honor them and the time they gave to me. They taught me much about gratitude, how to understand their culture, and how to love the people of Thailand. All interviews were confidential. Thus, I withheld the names of those interviewed by agreement.

I must offer a particular word of appreciation to Dr. George Martin, my supervisor, for his coaching and support of me during this project. His thoughtful suggestions and feedback made this project much better.

Two men had a significant impact my love of culture and learning. First, serving under Dr. David Sills at the Great Commission Center and as his Garrett Fellow gave me many opportunities to learn not only formally, but informally from him. His teaching and example greatly influenced me. Second, Dr. Bryan Galloway was my first

supervisor as I arrived in Thailand, and I had the privilege to serve alongside Bryan for many years. He taught me how to do ethnographic research by modeling it for me.

I would not be completing this project had I not followed the encouragement of Dr. John Mark Terry. I am thankful his encouragement to apply for doctoral studies. His friendship and mentoring have been invaluable.

I must thank Dr. Kyle Faircloth. I can never repay his friendship and consistent availability to listen to my ideas. Finally, I want to thank Krista Martin for her assistance in reading this project and offering editorial assistance.

To my family, “thank you” does not even begin to express my gratitude for your support and encouragement. Susan, my dear bride, no words can adequately express how blessed I am to know you and serve our King together with you. You sacrificed much to grant me the opportunity to complete this project, and I look forward to spending the remainder of my life ministering together.

Tom Bohnert

Chiang Mai, Thailand

May 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most who venture into the realm of cross-cultural ministry might agree that the work is difficult, especially the work of building and maintaining healthy cross-cultural relationships. Building and maintaining relationships in one's heart language and culture is difficult enough, but relational challenges grow exponentially greater when one crosses socio-cultural and linguistic barriers. Marshall Sahlins' commonly quoted adage "If friends make gifts, gifts make friends" summarizes both the pitfalls and elations of my experiences building and maintaining relationships among the *Khon Muang* of Northern Thailand, a place where cultures and languages have clashed and merged.¹ Before the Tai speaking peoples migrated into the regions now known as Assam, Upper Burma, and Thailand, the region now known as Thailand was under the control of the Mon people of the Dravati kingdom (seventh century to mid-twelfth century).² Even though the historical presence of the Tai speaking peoples in Southeast Asia is known as early as the seventh century, much of the historical information about this period in the Tai speaking

¹Marshall Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," in *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock Publications, 1965), 139.

²To clarify and differentiate terms, the term "the Tai speaking peoples" will refer to the entire Tai subgroup of the broader Tai-Kadai language family. Also see "Tai," accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.ethnologue.com/subgroups/tai>. The Tai speaking peoples populate the river basins of the Shan State in Burma, the Southern China, Thailand, Laos, and Northern Vietnam. Additionally, the phrase *Tai peoples of Thailand* will represent a subset of the larger Tai speaking peoples. Thus, "the Tai peoples of Thailand" represents all the various Tai speaking peoples who reside in Thailand. Finally, a regional nomenclature for the Tai peoples of Thailand, like *Central Thai*, will be used when addressing topics specific to that one people group rather than the entirety of Tai peoples in Thailand. For example, the Central Thai are one people group within the Tai speaking people who populate the central plains of Thailand and are the majority people group in Thailand.

peoples' history is unclear and shrouded in myth and legend. By the thirteenth century, the Tai speaking peoples had established kingdoms along the major river basins of Southeast Asia, including the territory that is now the country of Thailand.³

Beyond the Dravavati period, one can summarize the history of the region known today as Thailand in three additional eras. The Sukhothai period of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries began when the Siamese, the Central Thai speakers of the Tai language family, emerged as a kingdom and drove the Khmer kings of Angkor back to the territory known today as Cambodia. During the Ayutthaya period, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the Siam Kingdom became a major power in Southeast Asia. The Bangkok period (late eighteenth century to present) arose as Siam gradually recovered from the devastation wrought by Burma on the city of Ayutthaya in 1767 and then moved the capital city from Ayutthaya to Bangkok. Contemporary Thailand, the heir of this story, is the only mainland Southeast Asian country never to have been colonized. Today, Thailand is becoming a major economic and political power in the region.⁴

While the Tai speaking peoples boast the majority of Thailand's population, Thailand is not a culturally homogeneous country. Linguistic and socio-cultural differences abound. Table 1 details the major ethnic divisions of Thailand, although, many other Tai speaking groups are present in Thailand besides these four major language groups: Central Thai, Northeastern Thai, Northern Thai, and Southern Thai.⁵

³Richard Davis, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual* (Bangkok: Pandora, 1984), 27-29.

⁴Chuachan Chongsatityoo and Sman Chatiyonondha, "Thailand," in *Education and Culture in Industrializing Asia*, ed. Willy Wielemans and Pauline Choi-Ping Chan (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1992), 379.

⁵SIL International's Ethnologue and the International Mission Board's CCPI list thirteen and fifteen ethno-linguistic groups living in Thailand from the Tai language family, respectively. See Ethnologue, "Thailand," accessed April 11, 2013, <http://www.ethnologue.com/country/TH/languages>; and

The Central Thai began to emerge as a dominant influence in Thailand during the Sukhothai period of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Since the end of the Ayutthaya period, the Central Thai have been the politically and socially dominant group in Thailand. The current Chakri dynasty arose from this Central Thai speaking people. The *Khon Muang*, also known as the Northern Thai people, Tai Yuan people, or Lan Na people, predominately live in the seven northern provinces of Northern Thailand with a population of slightly over seven million.⁶ The *Khon Muang* also reside in small population pockets in Burma, Laos, and the Yunnan province in southern China. Chiang Mai has been the capital of *Khon Muang* culture and society since its construction in 1296. The Northeastern Thai, or *Isaan*, are descendants of the Lao, and Marten Visser observed, “many still call themselves ‘Lao.’”⁷ The Southern Thai live in peninsular Thailand along with several Malay ethnic groups. The remaining Khmer of Thailand constitute a remnant of the great Khmer kingdom that ruled the Chao Phraya River basin before the emergence of the Ayutthaya kingdom. Most of the Khmer of Thailand live in the provinces bordering Cambodia. The listing *Other Ethnic Groups*, from Table 1, includes the ethnic groups commonly known in Thailand as the Hill Tribe peoples as well as many smaller Tai speaking peoples. The term *Hill Tribes* is an inclusive term for a wide variety of ethnic groups, to name a few: Karen, Lua, Mien, Hmong, and Palaung. Many of these Hill Tribe peoples have robust and vibrant Christian traditions.⁸

Global Research International Mission Board “Datasets,” accessed April 11, 2013, <http://public.imb.org/GLOBALRESEARCH/Pages/ResearchData.aspx>.

⁶Global Research, International Mission Board, “Datasets,” accessed April 11, 2013, <http://public.imb.org/GLOBALRESEARCH/Pages/ResearchData.aspx>.

⁷Marten Visser, *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2008), 19.

⁸From the perspective of some ethnic minority peoples in Thailand, the term *Hill Tribes* is a pejorative term commonly used to shame or ridicule these groups.

Marten Visser, in his recent study of Protestant Christianity in Thailand, demonstrated that while Thailand boasts a Christian population of over 323,000, most of the Christians are from the tribal ethnic groups. Approximately 137,000, or 12 percent, of the total tribal population adhere to Protestant Christianity, while only 185,000, or 0.30 percent, of the ethnically Tai population adhere to Protestant Christianity.⁹ Coupling this knowledge with the fact that Protestant missionaries arrived in Thailand in 1828 and continue to work unhindered has led many to ask why the gospel has not found wide acceptance in Thailand, especially among the Tai speaking ethnic groups. Several Christian scholars have investigated this question. One can summarize the conclusions from these evaluations under two categories. First, Protestant Christianity has not yet found a method for clearly communicating the gospel in the Tai speaking context. Consequently, missionaries must strive to develop contextualized tools for evangelism, discipleship, and leadership development for ministry among the Tai speaking peoples. Second, some Christian scholars have identified social barriers inherent in Tai speaking cultures as obstacles to the expansion of Christianity.¹⁰ Many Tai speaking peoples fear the potential of being ostracized by family when one of them becomes a follower of Christ. Many Tai speakers do not want to be perceived as joining that which is viewed as

⁹Visser, *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand*, 200. As a result of Visser's research and in conjunction with the major Christian denominations in Thailand, the eSTAR Foundation built and continues to maintain a database of the Protestant churches in Thailand along with relevant statistics. As of February 2018, the total Christian population of Thailand was 456,319 people, or 0.69 percent of the total population. See "Christian Presence Map," eSTAR Foundation, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://estar.ws/research-church-database/christian-presence-map.html>.

¹⁰See Herbert Swanson, "Khrischack Muang Nua: Chapter 9," accessed November 16, 2012 <http://www.herbswanson.com/get.php?postend=46#c9>. See also Steve Taylor, "A Study of the Relationship between Christian Education and the Belief System of Thai Christians" (DMin diss., International Theological Seminary, 1999), 5. See also Paul DeNeui, "String-tying Ritual as Christian Communication in Northeast Thailand" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2005), 95. Steve Bailey recognizes that the socio-cultural barriers are significant among the Lao as well. See Stephen Bailey, "Communication Strategies for Christian Witness among the Lowland Lao Informed by Worldview Themes in *Khwan* Rituals" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2002), 2.

a foreign religion. Converts to Christianity fear they will no longer be *Tai*.

Consequently, missionaries must consider this fear and other socio-cultural barriers to the gospel when forming their ministry strategy among the Tai peoples.

Table 1. Percentage of population per major ethnic group in Thailand¹¹

Major Ethnic Division	Percentage Population
Tai	77.5
Central Thai	32.6
Northeastern Thai (<i>Isaan</i>)	26.5
Northern Thai (<i>Khon Muang</i>)	10.6
Southern Thai	7.8
Chinese	10.4
Malay	4.9
Khmer	2.1
Other ethnic groups	4.9
Foreigners	0.2

In my introductory language classes, my language teacher introduced two terms that he claimed were essential for understanding the Tai peoples of Thailand: *krengjai* and *bunkhun*. He provided a basic definition of these words. The English essence of *krengjai* is “to be reluctant to impose or to be considerate of another.”¹² The

¹¹Todd Johnson, ed., “World Christian Database,” accessed April 15, 2013, <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org>. These percentages do not include illegal immigrants or temporary guest workers.

¹²Sittichok Sukramun, interview by author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, November 2007 and April 2012.

English meaning of *bunghun* is “favor or kindness given to another.” Initially, while I understood the vocabulary, I failed to grasp the complexity of these terms, their cultural significance, and their essential nature to building and maintaining healthy relationships among the Tai speaking peoples. As I gained linguistic and cultural aptitude, I began to understand how essential these terms and the associated cultural values are for cross-cultural ministry among the Tai speaking peoples. These terms have been the focus of discussions about the Tai speaking peoples of Thailand and their cultures. Additionally, I identified similar themes and terms as I visited and studied other Tai speaking cultures living elsewhere in Southeast Asia. I heard these words used during opportunities to share the gospel, during pastoral training seminars, and I read them during my academic research about the cultures of Tai speaking peoples. Both expatriate and Thailand national scholars agree on the importance of these terms.¹³

In their well-known book, written for expatriate managers working in Thailand, Henry Holmes and Suchada Tangtongtavy explained, “Perhaps the most fundamental value that has emerged out of the vertical nature of Thai society is the concept of *bunghun*. . . . One of the most important and intriguing of Thai concepts is the term, *kreng jai*.”¹⁴ These cultural themes are essential for understanding the cultures of

¹³Chongsatityoo and Chatiyanonhda, “Thailand,” in *Education and Culture in Industrializing Asia*, 379-412; Pranee Liamputtong, *The Journey of Becoming a Mother among Women in Northern Thailand* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 6-10; Chai Podhisita, “Buddhism and Thai World View,” in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, ed. Amara Pongsapich (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1998), 46-48; Suntaree Komin, “The World View Through Thai Value Systems,” in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, ed. Amara Pongsapich (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1998), 221-24; Suntaree Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* (Bangkok: National Institute of Development Administration, 1991), 139-61; Snit Smuckarn, “Thai Peasant World View,” in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, ed. Amara Pongsapich (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1998), 159-76; William Klausner, *Reflections on Thai Culture* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1993); Niels Mulder, *Inside Thai Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life*, 5th ed. (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1994); and Taylor, “A Study of the Relationship between Christian Education and the Belief System of Thai Christians.”

¹⁴Henry Holmes and Suchada Tangtongtavy, *Working with the Thais: A Guide to Managing in*

the Tai peoples of Thailand as well as for developing healthy business and managerial interactions among the people of Thailand.

Suntaree Komin, a Thailand national Fulbright scholar, in her seminal work on the Tai people's value system in Thailand, likewise highlights these two socio-cultural themes. The English significance of *krengjai* can be understood, she wrote, as “[to be] reluctant to impose upon; deferent to; is considerate of (another's feelings); respectful of (another's privacy, space, etc.); fearful to approach.”¹⁵ Komin stressed that the “*kreng jai* concept underlies a significant portion of everyday interpersonal behavioral patterns of the Thai.”¹⁶ William Klausner, a longtime resident of Northeastern Thailand and professor of sociology, explained that *krengjai* is one of the most difficult behavioral patterns for westerners to comprehend in Thailand:

It is true that no one English word adequately describes this attitude. Some have used the word ‘diffident,’ little used in English conversation but fairly expressive of one of the major elements of the *krengjai* syndrome. Others have explained *krengjai* as a combination of deference and consideration. Linguistically, the word is a compound composed of two separate words, *kreng*, meaning to be in awe of, to fear and *jai*, meaning heart. When made into the compound *krengjai*, the word has the meaning of being reluctant to impose upon, to have consideration for. It is important to realise that *krengjai* must refer to an attitude toward someone else. In Thai society, with its emphasis on ‘social place’ as expressed in elder-younger, subordinate-superior, patron-client relationships, *krengjai* is, most often, an attitude displayed towards one higher in the rank, social status or age scale. It is diffidence, deference and consideration merged with respect. It is also proper and appropriate behaviour. To the *farang* [foreigner] with his emphasis on equality, frankness, and directness, the tendency to show deference and avoid imposing upon someone often appears to indicate a lack of initiative, weakness and subservience.¹⁷

Intimately connected with this deference concept is the “pervasive syndrome in

Thailand (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995), 30-46.

¹⁵Glenn Slayden, “*Kreng jai*,” accessed April 11, 2013, <http://www.thai-language.com/id/134305#def3>.

¹⁶Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 136.

¹⁷Klausner, *Reflections on Thai Culture*, 258. The word *farang* is best translated as “foreigner from Westernized countries: America, England, Australia, etc.”

Thai social relationships”¹⁸ called *bunghun*. *Bunghun* refers to long-term intimate relationships based on the exchange of favors. Komin explained that *bunghun* relationships are the deepest and most psychologically invested relationships for the Tai peoples of Thailand: “*Bunghun* (indebted goodness) is a psychological bond between someone who, out of sheer kindness and sincerity, renders another person the needed helps and favors, and the latter’s remembering of the goodness done and his ever-readiness to reciprocate the kindness. The *Bunghun* relationship is thus based on the value of gratitude.”¹⁹

As a cultural system, *bunghun* reinforces appropriate and acceptable behavior. Simultaneously, *bunghun* regulates inappropriate or aberrant behavior. Paul G. Hiebert, world-renowned missiologist, reminded, “All cultures have ways to enforce their rules.”²⁰ While a cultural system does reinforce and regulate behavior, Louis J. Luzbetak, a Catholic missiologist, explained that cultural systems provide guidelines or a range of behavior, not necessarily a strict or rigid list of actions.²¹ An analysis of this range of behavior among the *Khon Muang* might reveal the underlying values guiding those behaviors. Understanding how these cultural values function might provide insight into the *Khon Muang* culture and might reveal important missiological implications.

Like culture, values are cognitive, affective, selective, and evaluative. However, values do not constitute a system. Values combine to form various cultural systems. Clyde Kluckhohn defined a value as “a conception, explicit or implicit,

¹⁸Klausner, *Reflections on Thai Culture*, 275.

¹⁹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 139.

²⁰Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 36.

²¹Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: An Applied Anthropology for the Religious Worker* (Techy, IL: Divine Word Publications, 1970), 111-14.

distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action.”²² One needs to understand the difference between values and traditional ideas. Kluckhohn explained this difference: “Values differ from ideas and beliefs by the feeling which attaches to values and by the commitment to action in situations involving possible alternatives.”²³ Ideas classify concepts that are true and false, while values guide choices of right and wrong. Furthermore, “value implies a code or a standard which has some persistence . . . which organizes a system of action. . . . Value places things, acts, ways of behaving, goals of action on the approval-disapproval continuum.”²⁴

Kluckhohn explained that both value and culture are not directly observable; one must make observations and extrapolate from individual behavior to understand the underlying values and culture. “Both values and culture are based upon what is said and done by individuals.”²⁵ Both the verbal and nonverbal aspects are important. Kluckhohn’s definition articulated that values are both explicit and implicit. Explicit values are values the actor can verbalize directly. However, implicit values remain abstract to the actor. Kluckhohn clarified, “implicit values remain ‘conceptions’ . . . generalized notions which can be put into words by the observer and then agreed to or dissented to by the actor. Verbalization is a necessary test of value.”²⁶ Observers may assume an understanding of implicit values. However, without verbal verification, these

²²Clyde Kluckhohn, “Values and Value Orientations in the Theory of Action. An Exploration in Definition and Classification,” in *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), 432.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*, 395.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 395-96.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 397.

assumptions often fail to explain the values and cultural system. Additionally, these assumptions often result from one's ethnocentrism and etic perspective.²⁷ One must strive to understand the emic description, verbal assent or dissent of the actors. Thus, implicit values may become explicit to the observer.

Values also influence the selection of actions. Florence R. Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodbeck, from their work with the Harvard Value Project in the 1960s, developed and field-tested their Value Orientations Survey and Value Orientations Model. Kluckhohn and Strodbeck grouped all cultural behaviors into three value-behavioral categories: dominant, variant, or deviant. Dominant values are held in agreement by the majority of a social group or by the cultural power brokers. Behaviors resulting from variant values are tolerated rather than punished. Finally, behavior patterns resulting from deviant values are disallowed and often punished. Kluckhohn and Strodbeck interestingly noted that deviant values could sometimes be agents of change within a culture.²⁸ Behaviors arising from the dominant value set provide logical consistency and meaningful congruence for actors in the cultural system.²⁹ Thus, actors may reasonably predict the social response to their behavior. Values direct actors towards behavior that *ought* or *should* happen.

Kluckhohn described three methods one can use in the study of values. First, one can study when an actor expresses explicit approval or disapproval by word or deed.

²⁷An etic perspective is the point of view held by an outsider to a given cultural scenario. Conversely, an emic perspective is the point of view held by an insider of a given cultural scenario.

²⁸Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodbeck, *Variations in Value Orientation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 37-39.

²⁹Kluckhohn, "Values and Value Orientations in the Theory of Action," 399. See also Clifford Geertz's discussion of how sacred symbols, especially religious belief and practice prove a group's worldview to be intellectually reasonable and emotionally convincing in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 88-89, 127.

Second, one can examine an actor's effort to preserve a traditional idea or verbalized value. Third, one can analyze the results of choice situations. A choice situation requires participants to choose between two assumed open pathways.³⁰ As neither the interviews nor the survey in this study utilized choice situations, analysis for this project was limited to explicit approval or disapproval and the effort exerted to preserve a traditional idea or value.

Marcel Mauss, a French sociologist, and Bronislaw Malinowski, a British anthropologist in the early twentieth century, both recognized the importance of reciprocity for understanding primitive exchange systems. Each of these writers developed similar understandings without knowing about the other's work. Their work became the foundation for future sociological and anthropological endeavors related to economics, exchange, and reciprocity. *Bunghun* is a form of reciprocity. Initially, Malinowski argued that some gifts could be *pure* or *free gifts*. These gifts could be given without any obligation of return. However, upon further reflection, Malinowski modified his stance and agreed with Marcel Mauss, who argued no gift is free. Malinowski concluded all exchanges contain an obligation of return, and gift giving implies the existence of some form of relationship.³¹ Marshall Sahlins agreed, "A material transaction is usually a momentary episode in a continuous social relation."³²

³⁰Kluckhohn, "Values and Value Orientations in the Theory of Action," 404-5.

³¹Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926), 38-42. In these pages, Malinowski explains that in his original description of the Trobriand Islanders that he had fallen victim to describing the act of gift giving and the reciprocal obligation out of context. These mistakes led him to conclude incorrectly that *pure gifts* exist. However, three years later he recognized his mistake, reevaluated his work, and concluded that *gifts* imply relationship and thus require reciprocity of some form. His reevaluation was in part due to his study of Mauss' work. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).

³²Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," 139.

Sahlins also quoted E. E. Evans-Pritchard in support of this finding: “One cannot treat Nuer economic relations by themselves, for they always form part of direct social relations of a general kind . . . there is always between them a general social relationship of one kind or another, and their economic relations, if such they may be called, must conform to this general pattern of behavior.”³³ This form of gift giving is not the same as charitable giving. Charity or charitable gifts do not require a relationship between the giver and the gift; thus, no expectation or obligation is placed on the receiver of the gift. Mauss, Malinowski, and others observed that other forms of gift giving occur within a specific and definable relational context. Thus, when a relationship exists, no gift is a free gift, and the social context defines a general pattern of behavior. These defined behaviors govern how one should give the gift and how one should reciprocate the gift.

These scholars also recognized that some forms of exchange and the obligation of return were more structured than others were. Marshall Sahlins identified a continuum for the descriptions of the various types of exchange. Sahlins described the continuum of reciprocity using three points: general, balanced, and negative reciprocity. The central node on the continuum of reciprocity is called *balanced reciprocity*. Balanced reciprocity refers to the act of direct exchange. The obligation of return is precise, time defined, quantifiable, and no long-term relationship is implied. The exchange is balanced because the material granted is reciprocated with equivalent value and without delay. Buying and selling of material possessions are the most apparent forms of balanced reciprocity. Sahlins stipulated that balanced reciprocity is “less ‘personal’ than generalized reciprocity.”³⁴ Thus, balanced reciprocity rarely serves as a relationship

³³Edward Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 90-91. Also see Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” 139.

³⁴Sahlins, “On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange,” 139, 148.

starting mechanism.

The opposite extreme on Sahlin's continuum explanation is known as *negative reciprocity*. In this form of reciprocity, the giver attempts to take advantage of the receiver. "Negative reciprocity' is the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity."³⁵ Negative reciprocity often results in the receiver being placed into a subservient or inferior position of power in relation to the giver and can result in a patron-client system based on power or authority rather than friendship.

The final point on the author's reciprocity continuum is *general reciprocity*. General reciprocity refers to transactions classified as assistance given or favor granted. Other ethnographic descriptions include aid, benefit, help, assistance, hospitality, support, sharing, relief, and grace. The obligation of return in general reciprocity is not explicit; instead, the obligation is implicit. No official record of the transaction is kept, and the counter return has no stipulated time of return, nor quantity or quality associated with the return, i.e., "the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite."³⁶ The materials of general reciprocity are not limited to material possession. Gifts may include emotional support, labor, and materials. General reciprocity is commonly seen within the kinship structure, but not restricted to kin. The obligation of children to care for and assist aging parents falls into the category of general reciprocity. Claude Lévi-Strauss described the attitudes that are connected to the benefit given [prestation] of general reciprocity:

The system of basic attitudes comprises at least four terms: an attitude of affection, tenderness, and spontaneity; an attitude which results from the reciprocal exchange of prestations and counter-prestations; and, in addition to these bilateral relationships, two unilateral relationships, one which corresponds to the attitude of the creditor, the other to that of the debtor. In other words, there are mutuality (=), reciprocity (+/-), rights (+), and obligations (-). These four fundamental attitudes

³⁵Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange."

³⁶Ibid., 147.

are represented in their reciprocal relationships.³⁷

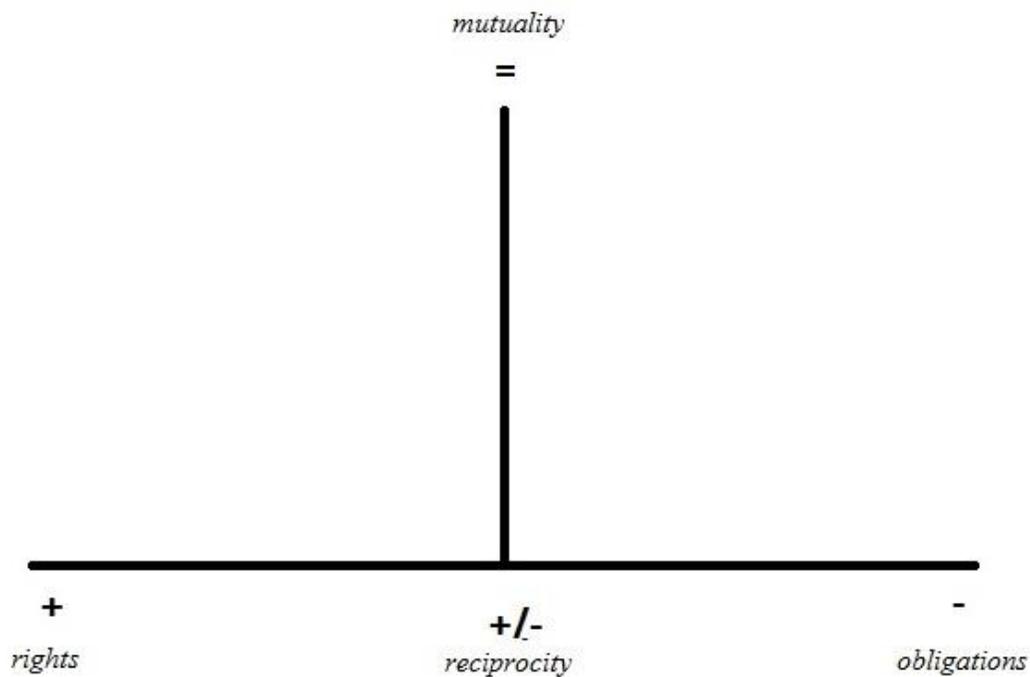


Figure 1. Attitudes associated with general reciprocity

Both parties in the reciprocal relationship work towards mutuality. Outside the kinship structure, general reciprocity serves as a starting mechanism for relationship building. As described by Lévi-Strauss, the attitudes of affection and tenderness function to build trust and rapport as favors are given and returned. Thus, general reciprocity “underwrites or initiates social relations.”³⁸ One moral theorist, Lawrence Becker, explained the unavoidable emotional binding influence of general reciprocity: “The mere recognition of a benefit seems to generate a sense of obligation to repay . . . it is a pervasive feature of

³⁷Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 701-3, Kindle. Lévi-Strauss’ graphic has been adapted for clarity in figure 1.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 140.

human social life. It will not go away.”³⁹

From the perspective that general reciprocity is an unavoidable aspect of all human social interaction, Becker argued that reciprocal ethical behavior is a morally virtuous requirement. Becker’s argument proceeds from these maxims:

1. Good received should be returned with good.
2. Evil received should not be returned with evil.
3. Evil received should be resisted.
4. Evil done should be made right.
5. Returns and restitution should be done by the ones who have received good or done evil, respectively.
6. Returns and restitution should be fitting and proportional.
7. Returns should be made for a favor received, not merely for good accepted or requested.
8. Reciprocation, as defined by 1-7, is a moral virtue.⁴⁰

In their recent study of trust and informal economies, Larissa Adler Lomnitz and Diana Sheinbaum explained that a secondary continuum exists. The continuum is interpreted by understanding the cultural concept of trust and power distance. Lomnitz and Sheinbaum explained, “Patron-client relations are a form of reciprocity, where [sic] benefits to subordinates are traded against loyalty and power.”⁴¹ In fact, they claimed that reciprocity exists on the lower end of the spectrum when trust is high and power distance is low, while market exchange arises on the high end of the spectrum when trust is low and power distance is high. In the middle of the continuum is the patron-client

³⁹Lawrence C. Becker, *Reciprocity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 73-74.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁴¹Larissa Adler Lomnitz and Diana Sheinbaum, “Trust, Social Networks and the Informal Economy: A Comparative Analysis,” *Review of Sociology* 10, no. 1 (2004): 12.

exchange. Additionally, “depending on the formality of the system . . . [the] modes of informal exchange may fluidly grade into: reciprocity, patron-client relations and market exchange.”⁴² At the beginning of this project, I assumed that the relationships built and maintained by *bunghun* were best described by informal general reciprocity, not by a formalized patron-client system. Upon further reflection and analysis, I realized the situation is much more complicated. Relationships characterized by *bunghun* are one type of patron-client system. Additionally, among the *Khon Muang* multiple forms of patron-client systems function. Some forms of patron-client connections are highly formalized; for example, the employee-employer relationship. Following cultural and social norms, the patron, who is the employer, provides specific forms of assistance, aid, and benefits to the client, who is the employee. To display his or her gratitude, the client returns the patron’s favors with loyalty, obedience, and deference to the ideas of the patron. This form of patron-client relationship might be a type of *bunghun* relationship depending on the virtue of the patron and behavior of the client. However, this form of patron-client relationship might not be a *bunghun* relationship if the patron-client relationship ends when the employment context or situation changes. *Bunghun* relationships remain unaffected by time and distance.⁴³ Additionally, some types of *bunghun* relationships are formed via negative reciprocity, when patrons utilize the *bunghun* system manipulatively to gain advantage and power over clients.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to discover missiological implications for ministry among the *Khon Muang* people of Northern Thailand through the study of *bunghun*. To accomplish this purpose, four questions will guide the research:

⁴²Lomnitz and Sheinbaum, “Trust, Social Networks and the Informal Economy,” 24.

⁴³Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 139.

1. Who are the *Khon Muang*?
2. In light of the *Khon Muang* identity, how does *bunghun* function?
3. Having considered the role of reciprocity among the *Khon Muang*, what does the Bible teach about reciprocity?
4. What missiological implications arise from *bunghun* among the *Khon Muang*?

Definitions

Precise definitions are essential when trying to understand cultural phenomena. Lack of clarity for essential terms leads both the ethnographer and those reading the ethnography to draw faulty conclusions. Additionally, proper definitions are necessary for theological dialogue. Faulty conclusions can be drawn when vital theological terms are left undefined. Since this study will address both cultural themes and theological elements, several terms must be defined to provide clarity and guidance.

Khon Muang. The *Khon Muang*, or people of the city-states, are also known as the Lan Na Tai, Northern Thai, or Tai Yuan.⁴⁴ Since its construction in 1296, Chiang Mai has served as the cultural, linguistic, and political center of *Khon Muang* society. At first, the Lan Na kingdom was a loose affiliation of city-states, *muang*, under autonomous ruling kings. King Mengrai united the separate *muang* under his rule in 1262 to form the Lan Na kingdom proper.⁴⁵ The *Khon Muang* inhabit the seven northern provinces of modern day Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nan, Phrae, Lampang, Lamphun, and Phayao and boast a population of approximately seven million. The Lan Na kingdom was not assimilated into the larger Central Thai social and political context until the late

⁴⁴Joachim Schliesinger, *Tai Groups of Thailand*, (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2001), 2:184.

⁴⁵Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 29. In Thai, King Mengrai's name and title may be spelled two ways, พ่อขุนเม็งราย (*King Mengrai*) or พงมั่งราย (*King Mangrai*). I will follow the first spelling unless citing from sources that use the latter spelling.

nineteenth century. In fact, the Northern Thai language was taught in the temple schools until 1902.⁴⁶ The Northern Thai language is still commonly used among the *Khon Muang*.

Culture. Edward B. Tylor, in 1871, published perhaps the first and most well-known definition of culture. Tylor published his definition in his classic work, *Primitive Culture*: “Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”⁴⁷

This often cited definition is a concise definition of the elements in culture but lacks clarity about how culture functions as a system. Eight decades later, in perhaps the most comprehensive survey of the definitions of culture, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn critically reviewed more than 160 definitions of culture.⁴⁸ The survey and examination began with Sir Edward Tylor’s definition and worked systematically forward to the definitions of culture written in the mid-twentieth century. Their resulting definition is a synthesis:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.⁴⁹

This definition has several strengths. First, the definition explains culture’s function as a

⁴⁶Sarassawadee Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005), 212.

⁴⁷Edward Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London: Bradbury, Evans, 1871), 1.

⁴⁸The survey includes both social scientist, physical scientist, as well as one political scientist and philosophers. See Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), 76-154.

⁴⁹Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture*, 357.

system. As a system, culture serves to guide the actions or behavior of its participants. The system, thus, provides an avenue for outside observers to learn about *how* and *why* cultural performers behave. Second, culture is cognitive. Culture is cognitive because culture is composed of historically derived and selected traditional ideas. Third, culture is affective. Culture is affective because the group or community forms and transmits traditional ideas derived from values. Fourth, culture is selective. Culture is selective as actors, directly and indirectly, express values in and through selected patterns of behavior. Finally, culture is evaluative. Culture is evaluative as the group or community conditions the actors' present and future conduct. Culture serves to regulate acceptable behavior and control deviant behavior.⁵⁰

Missiologists have also published definitions of culture. Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, in the classic presentation of cultural anthropology from a Christian perspective, followed Tylor and defined culture as “the learned and shared attitudes, values, and ways of behaving of a people; also the artifacts of the people.”⁵¹ While being a beneficial definition for understanding the various components of culture, this definition does not assist one to assess culture as a system.

Evangelical missiologists are not the only Christian scholars to formulate definitions of culture. Luzbetak contributed various phrases rather than focusing on a single unified definition that all converge upon the idea of culture as a system that explains how life works. He explained, “Culture is a way of *life*; culture is the *total* plan for *living*; it is functionally organized into a *system*; it is *acquired through learning*; it is

⁵⁰Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture*, 365-76.

⁵¹Stephen Grunlan and Marvin Mayers, *Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 278.

the way of life of a *social group*, not of an individual.”⁵² While I appreciate Luzbetak’s emphasis on culture as a system, unlike Kroeber and Kluckhohn, his definition does not expound on the importance of values as a key interpretative element of the scheme. In a subsequent chapter, Luzbetak explained the importance and influence of values upon the cultural system. However, his definition is not clear about the function of values and if values serve as a controlling mechanism for cultural systems.⁵³

Contemporary missiologists have continued to simplify and rephrase the various definitions of culture. Paul G. Hiebert defined culture as “the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do.”⁵⁴ Like Kroeber and Kluckhohn, Hiebert’s definition is cognitive, affective, evaluative, and selective.⁵⁵ While I like the brevity of Hiebert’s definition, Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s definition, which has more detail, serves this study better. Their definition is as follows:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.⁵⁶

Bunkhun. *Bunkhun* is an act of generosity performed by an individual who, in the ideal scenario, has no intention of receiving a favor in return and this initial gracious

⁵²Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 60 (emphasis in the original).

⁵³Ibid., 157-70.

⁵⁴Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 30.

⁵⁵Hiebert explains the cognitive, affective and evaluative elements of culture as dimensions and the selective element as manifestations and symbol systems. Ibid., 30-40.

⁵⁶Kroeber and Kluckhohn, *Culture*, 357.

act results in the receiver feeling grateful and continually remembering the goodness done resulting in a desire and willingness to reciprocate.

Bunkhun relationship. A *bunkhun* relationship is a mutually bonded, psychologically significant patron-client relationship. The relationship begins with an act of *bunkhun* and the receiver acknowledges the relationship through acts of gratitude. The patron and client maintain and strengthen this relationship via acts of mutual reciprocity.

Contextualization. Dean Gilliland, in his *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* article, "Contextualization," explained, "There is no single or broadly accepted definition of contextualization. The goal of contextualization perhaps best defines the word. That goal is to enable, insofar as possible, an understanding of what it means that Jesus Christ, the Word, is authentically experienced in each and every human situation."⁵⁷ David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, in *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*, agreed that contextualization has many possible definitions: "It has become clear that a wide variety of meanings, methods, and models attach to the word *contextualization*. Some of them are more consistent with Scripture and the historic Christian faith, and therefore are more authentic, than others."⁵⁸ These authors stressed,

Whatever its definition, contextualization involves knowledge of both a message and an audience. To be more explicit, it involves understanding a message revealed by God in Holy Scripture and respondents who have an inadequate or distorted understanding of God's revelation. The contextualizer must take into account the nature of biblical revelation and also the nature of the scriptures of the various religious traditions. . . .

To be valid and authentic Christian contextualization must conform to the kind of revelation God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-and the Bible writers claim for the written Word. And to be effective Christian contextualization must correct any

⁵⁷Dean Gilliland, "Contextualization," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 225.

⁵⁸David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), 199 (emphasis in original).

misunderstandings attached to the revelatory claims and products of other religions.

...

Contextualization must be consonant with the genre of the revelation it claims to possess and seeks to communicate to others.⁵⁹

Therefore, contextualization is the effort of etic personalities, or outsiders, to learn the host culture and to present a Christian witness using culturally appropriate and relevant means. As David Sills summarized, “contextualization is simply the process of making the gospel understood.”⁶⁰

Christian witness. In Acts 1:8, Jesus instructed his disciples, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (NASB, 1995). In his commentary on Acts, John Polhill explained the meaning of the Greek word *martu*, which translates as witness: “The apostles’ main role is depicted as witnessing to the earthly ministry of Jesus, above all to his resurrection (cf. 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41). As eyewitnesses only, they were in the position to be guarantors of the resurrection. But with its root meaning of testimony, ‘witness’ comes to have an almost legal sense of bearing one’s testimony to Christ.”⁶¹ Therefore, a verbal explanation of the ministry of Christ is a crucial and necessary element of Christian witness. However, Christian witness is not only limited to a verbal explanation of the life and ministry of Christ. Christian witness involves all three of the following aspects:

1. Christian presence;
2. “Dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand;”⁶² and

⁵⁹Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 128-29.

⁶⁰Michael David Sills, *Reaching and Teaching: A Call to Great Commission Obedience* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 195.

⁶¹John Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 86.

⁶²“The Lausanne Covenant” (1 August 1974), accessed April 26, 2016, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>. When I use the term *dialogue*, I agree with Timothy

3. Verbal proclamation/evangelism – “Proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God.”⁶³

Background of the Study

I have had the privilege to live and work in Northern Thailand since 2007.

When I arrived in Chiang Mai, my Central Thai language teacher introduced me to two crucial cultural terms, *krengjai* and *bunghun*. Because I was new to Thailand, I had little understanding of these concepts. As my language acquisition progressed, I interviewed Central Thai speaking Christians about their conversion experiences. During these informal discussions, I heard the term, *bunghun*, frequently. These Christians spoke of indebtedness to family, teachers, and friends. Sometimes, this indebtedness was a key factor involved in them hearing the gospel message. Conversely, sometimes the feeling of indebtedness kept them from accepting the gospel for several years. One person explained that her feeling of indebtedness even compelled her to continue attending a church that she knew taught unsound doctrine. She explained that leaving the church might be an act of ungratefulness and that was something she was unwilling to do. Informal discussions and conversations were not the only sources for my learning about *bunghun*.

Some expatriate scholars explained *bunghun* in terms of a patron-client system

Tennent who explained that dialogue should take each individual and his beliefs seriously, but as Christians, we have a responsibility in dialogue to share of the exclusive truth found in Christ. Tennent explained, “Kindness and humility should accompany all interactions along with an earnest attempt to listen attentively to what the other person is saying” and “it is disingenuous for any truly Christian community not to earnestly desire that all persons come to know Jesus Christ.” Tennent also stressed that dialogue should never be used as a tool to force one’s own beliefs on another. “After the dialogue is complete, a Buddhist, for example, is free to remain a committed Buddhist without being told our differences are only semantic.” Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 31-32.

⁶³“The Lausanne Covenant” (1 August 1974), accessed April 26, 2016, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>.

grounded in the formal aspects of the *sakdi na*⁶⁴ system instituted by King Boromma Trailokanat of Ayutthaya in the fifteenth century. King Boromma Trailokanat was more commonly known as King Trailok. David Wyatt explained the basics of the *sakdi na* system:

Ordinary peasant freemen were given a *sakdi na* of 25; slaves were ranked 5, craftsmen employed in government service, 50; and petty officials, from 50 to 400. At the *sakdi na* rank of 400 began the bureaucratic nobility, the *khunnang*, whose members ranged from the heads of minor departments at a *na* of 400 to the highest ministers of state, who enjoyed a rank of 10,000. The upper levels of nobility ranked with the junior members of the royal family, and most princes ranked above them, up to the heir-apparent, whose rank was 100,000. In the exhaustive laws of Trailok's reign, which read like a directory of the entire society, every possible position and status is ranked and assigned a designation of *sakdi na*, thus specifying everyone's relative position. Furthermore, *sakdi na* status was reinforced by the civil and criminal law. Fines and punishments were proportional to the status of the individual involved.⁶⁵

Sakdi na was a formal patron-client system. Four hundred years later, King Chulalongkorn, Rama V, abolished the formal *sakdi na* system.⁶⁶ Some scholars, such as Steve Taylor, focused on the power distance inherent in this system to explain *bunghun* and to examine the challenges facing the Central Thai speaking church.⁶⁷ While I agree with Taylor and others that many of the Tai speaking peoples' social systems are hierarchically structured, I disagree with their explanation that the patron-client systems, and in particular *bunghun*, are best described as a derivative of power and authority. However, I agree with Barend Terwiel, who concluded that it is best to examine "the

⁶⁴Literally translated *field power*, but most commonly means *dignity marks or rank*.

⁶⁵David Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 62.

⁶⁶Holmes and Tangtongtavy, *Working with the Thais*, 27.

⁶⁷Stephen Taylor, "Patron-Client Relationships and the Challenge for the Thai Church" (MA thesis, Discipleship Training Centre of Singapore, 1997). Also see Holmes and Tangtongtavy, *Working with the Thais*. Holmes and Tangtongtavy explanation of *bunghun*, in light of a formal patron-client system, makes sense as they wrote to assist business professionals and expatriate managers working in Thailand who will fill typical formal patron-client roles.

attitudes, shared behavior, values and symbols surrounding the phenomenon [patron-client system and *bunghun*]. Therefore, it seems necessary that patron and client relations be studied more deeply⁶⁸ rather than trying to explain modern Thailand society as a reflection of the formal historical patron-client system of *sakdi na*. In this study, I seek to understand these relations and attempt to discover the implications that can assist in missiological approaches among the *Khon Muang* people.

Delimitations

Several delimitations on this study narrow the focus and lead to a successful completion. First, not every aspect of reciprocity can be studied. I focused my attention on the implications of *bunghun* from the perspective of informal general reciprocity. I avoided looking at the sociological implications of reciprocity from other models, such as power distance (especially those between employer and employee) and transactional reciprocity (market exchange). While these models exist in Thailand, a focus on informal general reciprocity as a starting mechanism for building relationships demonstrates several implications for developing a good missiological strategy for ministry among the *Khon Muang*.

Second, because the *Khon Muang* reside in the seven northern provinces of Thailand, regional differences might be present in the understanding and function of *bunghun* among the *Khon Muang*. This study does not allow for a comprehensive study covering all seven provinces. Before I implemented my interviews and surveys, I planned to limit the study to the three provinces where the International Mission Board had teams: Chiang Mai, Phrae, and Nan provinces. However, due to structural and

⁶⁸Barend Terwiel, "Formal Structure and Informal Rules: An Historical Perspective on Hierarchy, Bondage and the Patron-client Relationship," in *Strategies and Structures in Thai Society*, ed. Han ten Brummelhuis and Jeremy Kemp (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1984), 35.

personnel changes within the International Mission Board, I focused the study upon Chiang Mai and Phrae provinces.⁶⁹ Because I serve alongside these teams, I have existing relationships with several *Khon Muang* families in these provinces, both Christians and non-Christians. These relationships provided the first round of the scheduled interviews. I added subsequent interviews by referral from these first round participants.

Third, I focused on missiological themes in the study. I want to assist cross-cultural workers, primarily those working in Northern Thailand, to bond better with their host culture and share the good news of Jesus Christ more effectively and relevantly to the *Khon Muang*. My intention is not to develop a contextual theology for the *Khon Muang* church, though implications from my study might need to be considered by local churches.

Methodology of the Study

This study embarked on a thorough examination of literary sources covering the *Khon Muang* and reciprocity. Southern Seminary's library does not contain many copies of literary sources on the *Khon Muang* or reciprocity. I obtained most of the available resources by interlibrary loan, and others I purchased. Relying on literary sources was inadequate to accomplish this study; anthropological fieldwork was required. Therefore, this study combined two qualitative research methods: ethnography and grounded theory methodology. John Creswell, a specialist in research methodology, defined ethnography as "a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and

⁶⁹During the project, the leader of the Nan province based team had to return to the USA for an extended leave. This change resulted in a restructuring and refocusing of the team's ministry away from *Khon Muang* work. In consultation with Southeast Asian Affinity leadership, I determined that I should not implement my study in Nan province. I did not burden this team additional stress.

interprets the shared and learned patterns . . . of a group.”⁷⁰ Using the ethnographic method assisted me in developing a description of the manner in which reciprocity functions among the *Khon Muang*. As David Fetterman, a professor of education, and Creswell stressed, description is not the final goal of ethnographic research. The final goal is interpretation, combining both etic and emic perspectives, of the cultural data. Fetterman rightly explained, “the job is not done until I step back and make sense of the situation from both emic and etic perspectives.”⁷¹ By utilizing this interpretative model, I sought to understand how reciprocity functions among the *Khon Muang*, the emic perspective; and draw forth several missiological implications for continued ministry among them, the etic perspective.

Grounded theory method and ethnography are techniques of qualitative research.⁷² According to James Spradley, an expert in ethnographic interviewing, the qualitative researcher must focus on what people say, how a people act, and the objects people use.⁷³ Thus, qualitative researchers are less concerned with subjecting numerical data to statistical formulas. They are more concerned with discovering and describing a phenomenon. Creswell provided the following technical definition of qualitative

⁷⁰John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 90, Kindle. David Fetterman provided a similar definition: “Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture.” David Fetterman, *Ethnography*, ed. Leonard Bickman and Debra Rog, 2nd ed. Applied Social Research Methods Series, vol. 17 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 1.

⁷¹Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 22.

⁷²All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

⁷³James Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979), 8. Spradley was an expert in the field of ethnographic research, before his death in 1982; he authored more than ten books in the field of anthropology, including three textbooks on how to use the ethnographic method, and three ethnographies. As artifacts were not a focal item in this study, the third source for data triangulation were written documents. Sharan Merriam et al., *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 13.

research: “[Qualitative research] is an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture; analyzes words, reports detailed views of participants; and conducts the study in a natural setting.”⁷⁴ This definition infers several things: researchers strive to understand meaning, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis, qualitative research is an inductive process, and the product is richly descriptive.⁷⁵ Further inferred in the definition is the understanding that qualitative researchers focus more on the process of studying a single phenomenon than striving to answer cause-and-effect questions about how individual variables are predictive of an outcome.⁷⁶ Finally, inferred in the definition is the need for fieldwork. The study should be conducted in a natural setting. Thus, qualitative research is a process that a researcher follows to gain understanding about what happened or how it happened.

As a culture and language learner, I have depended on the anthropological cornerstone research method, which is participant observation. Participant observation has assisted me in acquiring a growing, yet still limited, knowledge and understanding of the Central and Northern Thai social context and the Central Thai language. Because of my work responsibilities, I have had the privilege of investigating various cultural aspects of nearly a dozen Tai speaking people groups in Southeast Asia. The phrase “participant observation” is used widely in a variety of social science disciplines, but is difficult to define.⁷⁷ Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson suggested that all qualitative research

⁷⁴Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 300.

⁷⁵Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice*, 4-5.

⁷⁶Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 18.

⁷⁷Originally, anthropologists divided participant observation into categories based upon the researcher’s level of involvement: complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer, and

contains some form of participant observation because the researcher can never separate completely from the social environment under study.⁷⁸ Along with other qualitative methods, many disciplines use participant observation: sociology, psychology, anthropology, and criminology, to name a few. Each discipline provides a slightly different definition. Classically, anthropology understands participant observation as involving immersion into a culture.⁷⁹ One may be immersed in a culture without the use of participant observation, but as Spradley explained, participant observation is the science of intentionally studying a social situation through participation and observation in order to learn the implicit cultural themes.⁸⁰ He explained the concept of implicit cultural themes: “All human beings act as ordinary participants in many social situations. Once we learn the cultural rules, the rules become tacit and we hardly think about what we are doing.”⁸¹

The research method, participant observation, differs from regular participation in six ways. First, the researcher maintains the dual purpose of engaging in appropriate activities and observing the activities, people, and physical setting of the situation. The

complete participant. Raymond Gold, “Roles in Sociological Field Observations,” *Social Forces* 36 (1958): 217-23; and Bulford Junker, *Field Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). More recently, however, some have argued that rather than using a strict typology one should think of participant observation as a continuum describing activities in which the researcher will participate. On one extreme, the research participates in all the activities of the community and on the other extreme; the researcher participates in no activities. Thomas Schwandt, “Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry,” in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 118-37.

⁷⁸Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (London: Tavistock, 1983).

⁷⁹Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 35; and Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 90.

⁸⁰James Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980), 53-62.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 53.

ordinary participant has the single purpose of participating in the activities. Second, the researcher seeks to become explicitly aware of the tacit cultural rules involved in the situation. Third, the researcher seeks to observe the entire situation or develop a panoramic view. Fourth, the researcher seeks to balance etic and emic perspectives of the activities. Fifth, the researcher develops questions and assumptions through introspective analysis of the activities. Sixth, the researcher keeps notes concerning the social situation. These notes are used in the introspective analysis.⁸² Spradley argued that the implicit cultural rules, the tacit behaviors of the ordinary participant, become explicit to the researcher as he makes observations and seeks to understand a phenomenon.⁸³ As the researcher becomes aware of what he assumes to be implicit cultural rules, he develops questions, additional assumptions, and hypotheses about the context and its cultural rules. These questions, assumptions, and hypotheses must be verified.

Fetterman explained that researchers use participant observation in ethnographic research as a net to catch the big ideas and data. From this data, one develops questions for interviews. Without further data collection and verification, the researcher might become biased and fail to understand the emic perspective.⁸⁴

Living in Chiang Mai has afforded me many opportunities to observe *Khon Muang* communities. Additionally, my family and I attend a Central Thai speaking church. This church's membership is predominately *Khon Muang*. Observing the function of Christian fellowship, family dynamics, friendships, and business transactions in Chiang Mai, I became acutely aware of my need to understand how reciprocity functioned. Through ordinary involvement in *Khon Muang* society and specifically

⁸²Spradley, *Participant Observation*, 52-63.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 35.

through practicing participant observation, I developed several assumptions before I began the study. First, I assumed that *bunghun*, while a Central Thai phrase, is a major cultural theme of the *Khon Muang* worldview. Second, I assumed *bunghun* could play a significant role as a starting mechanism in relationship building for expatriate missionaries with the *Khon Muang*. Third, I assumed that elements of *bunghun* could have implications on the way one shares the gospel, disciples believers, and trains leaders. These assumptions needed to be tested, verified, and potentially modified.

To verify these assumptions and data, I utilized what Fetterman considered “the most important data gathering technique,” namely interviews.⁸⁵ I utilized a semi-structured interview type. I used open-ended questions, allowing informants to share their thoughts, emotions, and experiences on the topic of the interview. Anthropologists, like H. Russell Bernard and James Spradley, call unstructured or semi-structured interviews ethnographic interviews.⁸⁶ Ethnographic interviews seek to elicit the informant’s perspective of the social situation, rather than looking for the average or other statistical qualities.⁸⁷ The use of open-ended questions in ethnographic interviews allows the researcher to elicit the depth of description necessary for gaining an emic understanding. I do not discount the veracity or usefulness of closed-ended interview questions or that of structured interviews. These tools simply would not serve as the most effective methodology for the current study.

Participants do not all play the same role in reciprocity systems. Additionally, because I am investigating the missiological implications of *bunghun*, it was important

⁸⁵Fetterman, *Ethnography*, 37.

⁸⁶H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 3rd ed. (New York: AltaMira Press, 2002), 205; James Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979); and Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005).

⁸⁷Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*.

for my interviews to represent a cross-sectional sample of *Khon Muang* society. To ensure that a good cross-section of *Khon Muang* society was involved in the study, I needed to interview individuals from a variety of age categories and religions, such as Buddhism and Christianity. Additionally, because religious leaders, specifically Buddhist monks, play a significant role in *Khon Muang* society, I interviewed both laity and clergy. As Meredith Gall stressed, “In a cross-sectional design the data are obtained at one point in time, but from groups of different ages or at different stages of development.”⁸⁸ This cross sectioning provided a more comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon. Following a cross-sectional sampling provided the greatest opportunity for understanding *bunghun* and drawing forth related missiological implications. Gall also explained that cross-sectional sampling has limitations, namely, limiting the study’s ability to set forth broad generalizations beyond the scope of the sample set.⁸⁹ Thus, this study should describe the missiological implications of *bunghun* among the three generations of *Khon Muang* interviewed. However, this study will not be able to speak to the missiological implications for future generations of *Khon Muang* and will not be able to provide specific descriptors of *bunghun*’s impact on other Tai speaking peoples. Thus, a cross-section of several generations of *Khon Muang*, as well as a cross-section of laity and clergy from more than one religion, provided the best means for understanding *bunghun*.

I interviewed sixteen individuals.⁹⁰ Because ethnography and grounded theory research models do not require a set number of interviews in the sample size, my

⁸⁸Meredith Gall, Joyce Gall, and Walter Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002), 295.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰I interviewed sixteen individuals. One participant refused to be recorded, and later that participant requested that I not use his data in my research. I have complied and removed the transcript and notes from that interview.

interviewing continued until at least one of the following ending criteria was satisfied:

1. Source material exhaustion. Even though sources can be revisited and additional information may be explored, there comes a point when further interviewing will yield no more relevant material.
2. Category saturation. The moment when coding categories appear to have solidified, new data collected yields only small incremental improvements in understanding compared to the time and energy expended in data collection.
3. Regularity emerges. Regularity is similar to category saturation but refers to the frequency of occurrence of categories. Regularity emerges when new data collected yields a nominal incremental improvement in understanding compared to the resources expended in data collection.
4. Over-extension. While new data might still be coming in, the research might determine that this new information is far enough removed from the central theme that continued data collection is unwarranted.⁹¹

This study is composed of interviews from the following cross-sectional groupings. For clergy, I interviewed both former monks and evangelical pastors. For the laity, I interviewed three different generational groups, both male and female participants. The first generational group was comprised of individuals under the age of thirty-five years old and unmarried. The second group consisted of married individuals between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five years old. The final generational group consisted of individuals over the age of fifty-five years old. Within this group, I interviewed both married and widowed individuals. I utilized a semi-structured interview schedule (appendices 1 and 2) with all participants. Because modern technology is not a hindrance in Thailand, people are accustomed to digital recordings. I requested permission to record all the interviews. All interviews except one were recorded. I translated and transcribed the interviews. Then, I examined the transcripts following the grounded theory method and the constant comparative approach.

The grounded theory method examines a specific phenomenon and allows a theory to emerge from the data gathered and analyzed. Straus and Corbin defined the

⁹¹Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Press, 1985).

theory that emerges from the grounded theory method as “one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon.”⁹² The goal of the grounded theory method is to generate a theory to explain a cultural phenomenon and its controlling themes. One derives these controlling themes from the data using the constant comparative approach.

The constant comparative process examines data by comparing new data against previous datasets. Additionally, the new, potential themes are compared to previously identified categories to strengthen, modify, or correct existing hypotheses. To facilitate such comparison, I followed a principle called *coding*.

Coding is a process of evaluating data in order to determine salient information. Coding begins by transcribing observations and interviews so that one can read each entry and develop initial categories. This type of coding is called open coding. At the beginning of the study, I developed a preliminary set of categories that I utilized to begin open coding. I coded interviews using this preliminary coding tree (appendix 5). To facilitate the process of coding and analysis, I used the computer software Atlas.ti. Atlas.ti is a qualitative research software specifically designed for the constant comparative process.⁹³ Additional codes were added as new categories of description emerged. With each subsequent interview, I looked for and noticed terms, phrases, and themes that the participants commonly used. This repetition allowed me to identify and prioritize key themes.

⁹²Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 23.

⁹³ For over a decade, Atlas.ti has been the market leader in professional-grade QDA (Qualitative Data Analysis) software. “Atlas.ti - The QDA Software,” accessed December 20, 2006, <http://www.atlasti.com>.

In the second level of coding, called axial coding, the researcher investigates the data by comparing the categories derived from open coding and seeks to identify causal conditions or relationships. Strauss and Corbin explained that axial coding investigates the data to determine “the overall explanatory scheme.”⁹⁴ Axial coding allowed me to move beyond merely counting the occurrence of terms and phrases to examining the data for conditions and relationships that exist between those common terms. These conditions and relationships explain why actors in *bunghun* relationships behave as they do. In other words, the axial codes point to the cultural values that guide *bunghun* relationships among the *Khon Muang*.

Finally, in selective coding, the researcher investigates how all the categories integrate around a central theme. In this study, the central theme describes the function(s) of *bunghun* in *Khon Muang* society. In other words, the process of selective coding resulted in the definitions of *bunghun* and *bunghun* relationships above along with an understanding of the cultural values that reinforce and regulate the appropriate behavior of patrons and clients in *bunghun* relationships.

Following preliminary analysis of the interview data, I developed a short survey. I anticipated that during the interview and analysis process several themes would arise. These themes would describe several characteristics and functions of *bunghun*. From the emergent themes, I built a survey for verification of my understanding. One hundred and fifty surveys were distributed at random in Chiang Mai and Phrae. Eighty-nine surveys were returned. A six-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the participants’ agreement or disagreement with the descriptive themes and functions of *bunghun*. Participants were given an opportunity to provide an explanation for why they chose a specific response. However, such explanations were optional. Because an emic

⁹⁴Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 230.

understanding of *bunkhun* was desired, the survey provided an additional means for verifying a correct understanding of *bunkhun* and its function among the *Khon Muang*.

Understanding the function of *bunkhun* among the *Khon Muang* is not the end goal of this project. The end goal is to identify and discuss selective missiological implications of *bunkhun* on ministry among the *Khon Muang*. As I have reflected upon the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, I identified and inferred at least four stages of cross-cultural ministry from the passage: Going, which requires some form of missionary preparation and entry into a new context; Making disciples through evangelism and discipleship; Establishing the church through leadership development; and Calling the national church to join in the Great Commission.⁹⁵ *Bunkhun* has implications for all these stages. While I have highlighted and discussed implications from all four stages in this dissertation, I focused on the first stage: missionary preparation and entry. This dissertation provided insufficient space to allow an investigation into the implications of *bunkhun* for all four stages. Additionally, as the primary task of missionaries involves building and maintaining relationships with nationals, focusing on the entry stage provides the most benefits to International Mission Board personnel and other Great Commission Christian workers among the *Khon Muang*. Finally, I focused on the first stage because the implications that affect this stage are foundational for effective ministry in the subsequent areas.

Limitations of the Study

Several factors might have limited the effectiveness of my methodology. Below I describe these limitations and outline the plan I followed to overcome their impact upon the study. First, in Thailand, I am a foreigner. As an American, I was not

⁹⁵These four stages are an adaptation of Tom Steffen's five stages found in his book, *Passing the Baton*. Tom Steffen, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers* (La Habra, CA: Center for Organizational and Ministry Development, 1997).

raised in a *Khon Muang* community. Thus, I did not learn the unique and complex intricacies of the *bunghun* system from an emic perspective. My hope is that the interview structure and survey tool provided an adequate understanding of *bunghun*. Furthermore, as an outsider, my own worldview will influence my understanding of the themes. However, my worldview provided me a perspective different from the *Khon Muang*, a useful perspective for evaluating the collected data.

Second, I continue to face a language barrier. Most *Khon Muang* speak Central Thai. In 1902, Central Thai was formally introduced as the common language of Thailand.⁹⁶ Although I have spent several years studying, using, and learning Central Thai, my understanding of the language remains limited. Because I did not obtain collegiate-level language proficiency before completing this study, I consulted with a panel of Thai nationals living in Chiang Mai to aid me in understanding the interview and survey results. The panel consists of three Thai nationals: my Central Thai language teacher, a non-Christian female *Khon Muang* friend, and the *Khon Muang* pastor of the church my family attends. Along with the language limitations comes a limited grasp of the available literature written in Central Thai. While I can read and write Central Thai, my comprehension of academic level Central Thai remains limited. Thankfully, most of the materials that I found relevant to my study have been translated and published in English.

Third, my own worldview has been shaped by a specific theological stance. My theological stance is best summarized by the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.⁹⁷ This theological stance affects my interpretation of Scripture, views on the Christian life and my ministry. This theological framework also stands in stark contrast to the Buddhist

⁹⁶Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 212.

⁹⁷Adrian Rogers, "The 2000 Baptist Faith & Message," Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

worldview. Thai Buddhism is a mixture of Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism, and regional animistic beliefs. The stark difference between my theological framework and popular Northern Thai Buddhism can be illustrated by examining one Buddhist theological belief, *anātman*, “no Self.” The Buddha taught that belief in any form of enduring personal essence, or *ātman*, is false. This Buddhist doctrine creates multiple barriers for Christian witness and requires cross-cultural workers to consider many factors. One barrier can be identified by asking: How does a Christian witness explain eternal dwelling with Christ for the redeemed and eternal punishment in hell for the unrighteous? The Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* does not provide the necessary epistemological framework for understanding the scope of an eternal soul. Another barrier to Christian witness that arises from the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* can be identified by asking: How does one explain the one true and living God, infinite and eternal? Again, *anātman* does not provide the necessary framework for understanding the eternity of God because an eternal living God would require some form of an enduring personal essence. My Christian theological stance might have limited my ability to comprehend the understanding of the Buddhists whom I interviewed and might have hindered my understanding of the Christians as well. Again, my panel of Thai nationals aided my understanding. My non-Christian friend and my language teacher aided me in understanding Buddhism. My teacher was uniquely gifted to assist me in this area, as he was once a Buddhist monk. My language teacher and my Thai pastor assisted me in understanding the impact of Buddhism upon theology.

Finally, my study has limitations derived from the methodology I chose to implement. Both cross-sectional sampling and grounded theory methodology limit the ability of the findings to be widely generalized. These facts limited this study from drawing implications for future generations and for other contexts. Factors related to assimilation and cultural shift additionally limited this study’s findings. This study is limited to the generations studied and to the two provinces, Chiang Mai and Phrae, where

the participants live. Beyond these two factors, generalizations are offered, but all such generalizations need to be studied independently.

In qualitative research, triangulation of one's data is essential. Triangulation in this study came from combining three elements. The first leg is the literature review. The second leg is the participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The third and final leg of my triangulation came by collecting the surveys. I am aware that the research methodology described above limited my ability to draw implications and generalizations beyond this generation of *Khon Muang* and for other Tai speaking groups. However, this methodology provided the best opportunity for understanding *bunghun* and its missiological implications for ministry among the *Khon Muang* of Chiang Mai and Phrae provinces.

Goal of the Study

Building upon Marshall Sahlins' adage, "If friends make gifts, gifts make friends," this study aims to develop a theory describing *bunghun* and how it functions among the *Khon Muang*.⁹⁸ Furthermore, this study will discuss several missiological implications which arise from the theory describing *bunghun* for expatriates seeking to build and maintain healthy relationships among the *Khon Muang*. To begin, it is necessary to provide an ethnographic description that answers the question: "Who are the *Khon Muang*?"

⁹⁸Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," 139.

CHAPTER 2

KHON MUANG: AN ETHNOGRAPHY

Since the mid-twentieth century, Thailand has been the focus of attention of Western and Thai national anthropologists and sociologists. Many of the works produced by these researchers provide interpretative frameworks for explaining the Thai cultural system and values. This chapter reviews the prominent literature as it relates to understanding the Thai cultural system and values, Thai Popular Buddhism, and *Khon Muang* history. A summary of some of the significant *Khon Muang* cultural beliefs and values will conclude this chapter. The intent is to work from a general understanding of the Thai cultural system towards a more specific description of the *Khon Muang* cultural system and values.

***Khon Muang* History: The Lan Na Kingdom**

The preferred name for the Tai speaking people living in Northern Thailand is *Khon Muang*. The English translation of *Khon* is people and *muang* is city-state or territory. Thus, the *Khon Muang*, or Northern Thai, are the people of the city-states. As previously stated, the history of the Tai speaking peoples prior to the thirteenth century is unclear. At the apex of the Lan Na History, the territory under *muang* control reached as far north as Sip Song Panna, China; west to the Salween River in Myanmar; to the Mekong River in the east near, but not including Luang Prabang, Laos; and south to the northern boundary of the Sukhothai kingdom. Hans Pentz, a renowned historian of the Northern Thai kingdom of Lan Na, explained that the first known *Khon Muang* ruler was King Mengrai. Mengrai became king of *Muang Rao* at the age of twenty-two, in 1261,

after his father's death.¹ This was a time of great turmoil as Kublai Khan had pushed southward and conquered much of Southeastern China by the time of Mengrai's birth.² During the next thirty-five years, Mengrai worked hard to consolidate his power and expand his kingdom. The establishment of Chiang Mai in 1296 by King Mengrai marked the beginning of the Formative Period of the Lan Na Kingdom (1296-1335). Sarassawadee Ongsakul, a professor of Thai history, and Hans Penth separately detailed four additional eras of Lan Na history, namely, the Period of Prosperity (1335-1525), the Period of Decline (1525-1558), the Period of Fragmentation (1558-1775), and the Period of Integration into Siam (1775-Present).³ The general outline and content of this historical overview were drawn from Ongsakul's excellent scholarship of the Lan Na kingdom.⁴

Formative Period (1296-1335)

In 1996, Chiang Mai celebrated its seventh hundred-year anniversary as the central city of the Northern Thailand region and of the *Khon Muang*. The establishment of Chiang Mai marked a new beginning for the *Khon Muang*. Before the construction of Chiang Mai, the *Khon Muang* city-states were autonomous and bound to one another by agreements and friendship. King Mengrai changed this in 1296. For multiple reasons, Chiang Mai was in a prime location to serve as the capital city of the expanding Lan Na kingdom. First, it was centrally located to the region. Second, it was located on the

¹Hans Penth, *A Brief History of Lān Nā: Northern Thailand from Past to Present* (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2004), 34. Muang Rao is located in the general area of Ma Sai and Chiang San near the area of modern day Chiang Rai, Thailand.

²Ibid., 32.

³Penth, *A Brief History of Lān Nā*; and Sarassawadee Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, Chitraporn Tanratanakul, trans. (Bangkok: Silkworm Press, 2005).

⁴Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*.

ample River Ping, granting good access for trade. Third, it had abundant clean mountain water from *Doi Suthep* for drinking and irrigating the fertile valley. Ongsakul explained that the establishment of Chiang Mai assisted Mengrai to defend the Lan Na kingdom from the on-going advance of the Mongol horde. Slowly, over the next four decades, the Lan Na kingdom expanded and stabilized. While King Mengrai was an advocate of Buddhism, King Phayu (1336-1355) was the first Lan Na king to patronize Buddhism and sought to rule via the ten virtues of a Buddhist king: charity, morality, sacrifice, honesty, courtesy, perseverance, equanimity, justice, fortitude, and correct behavior.

Period of Prosperity (1335-1525)

The Lan Na kings were supreme rulers over the Lan Na kingdom. However, several differences between the Lan Na kings and their Siamese, or Central Thai, counterparts existed. First, the Lan Na kingdom never developed a royal language as the Siamese kings did. Second, commoners could approach the Lan Na kings and bring grievances to their attention, while in the Siamese kingdom commoners had to pass all correspondence to the king via emissaries. Third, the Lan Na kings did patronize Buddhism, but the development of Brahman rituals and titles developed much later than among the Siamese kings, where the use of the god-king title, *devaraja*, and status was common.⁵

Khon Muang scholarship, particularly Buddhist scholarship, excelled during this era to the point that Richard Davis, an expert on *Khon Muang* rituals, claimed the production of *Khon Muang* religious literature exceeded that even of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya.⁶ Despite the advance of Theravada Buddhism, old Tai animistic practices

⁵Penth, *A Brief History of Lān Nā*, 107.

⁶Richard Davis, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual* (Bangkok: Pandora, 1984), 30.

remained strong and viable. The Theravada Buddhist male dominant stance began to blend with the traditional maternal prominence. In the political and Buddhist realms, men emerged as dominant, while at home the matrilineal animistic practices remained strong.⁷ Under the support of King Tilokaraja, more commonly known as King Trilok (1441-1487), scholarship in law excelled. Trilok established a system of governance and administration. However, the system was flawed and it fragmented the king's authority by granting more power to the governing officials of crucial city-states. Over time, this dispersion of authority was one factor leading to the decline of the Lan Na kingdom.⁸

Period of Decline (1525-1558)

The weakened administrative system created by King Trilok began to threaten the Lan Na kingdom as the governors of key city-states sought ever-increasing authority and power. These key city-states also sought to develop independent foreign relations with the Burmese and Ayutthaya that further undermined the strength of the Lan Na kingdom. Repeated failed attempts to conquer Ayutthaya weakened the Lan Na kingdom's defenses resulting in the plundering of Chiang Mai by a coalition of smaller Shan area *muangs* in 1545. Ultimately, Chiang Mai collapsed to the Burmese after only three days of fighting in 1558.

Period of Fragmentation (1558-1775)

If the apex of the Lan Na kingdom was approximately two hundred years in length from 1335 to 1525, then the nadir was during the two hundred years that Lan Na fell under Burmese rule from 1558 to 1775. Few official records from this period in Lan Na history exist. The *Khon Muang* repeatedly revolted against their Burmese overlords

⁷Penth, *A Brief History of Lān Nā*, 56, 68-69.

⁸*Ibid.*, 123-26.

but failed because they lacked unity. This changed after the Burmese captured and sacked Ayutthaya in 1767. The few remaining Lan Na princes and military leaders joined forces with the Siam king, King Tak Sin and his two generals in 1774.

Though no protocol of the agreements is known, later events show to what the two sides consented: the major Lan Na princes, for instance the ruler of Chiang Mai, would become direct vassal kings of the king of Siam while keeping their own vassals; each vassal would be independent in their interior administration of his territory and his vassals; the vassal would guard Siam's northern borders; Siam would send military assistance if the vassal was attacked. . . . This new policy, and strategy, was soon successful.⁹

Period of Integration into Siam (1775-)

Indeed, the strategy was successful; this combined force recaptured Chiang Mai in 1775 and opened a new period of Lan Na history. At first, the new vassalage of Siam was not wholly committed to Siam. However, in 1788, all the Lan Na leaders swore complete allegiance to King Rama I, the first king of the Chakri dynasty. Siam continued to allow the Lan Na kings to rule in Chiang Mai for the next century. However, by the late nineteenth century, the capital of Siam, Bangkok, began sending officials to aid in the governance of the Lan Na kingdom. The first governor from Bangkok arrived in Chiang Mai in 1874 and served more as a counselor with little administrative authority. These counselors gradually gained authority and power. Prince Jao Kao Nowarat, the last Lan Na prince, took office in 1911. However, he was merely a figurehead and the governor from Bangkok held all administrative and governmental authority.¹⁰ While the *Khon Muang* have officially been part of the Siamese or Central Thai kingdom for over two centuries, their language, local attire, and customs persist. In fact, many of the twenty-eight Lan Na customary laws remained in practice until the mid-

⁹Penth, *A Brief History of Lān Nā*, 132.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 144.

twentieth century.¹¹ The *Khon Muang* are not immune to the impact of globalization and modernization, but a short trip off the main highways and byways leads one to a land where the language, food, and norms are not guided by what is popular in Bangkok.

Thai Popular Buddhism

One cannot overstate the impact of Buddhism on Thai society and everyday affairs. In fact, in Thailand, the adherents of Buddhism far outnumber adherents of all other religions combined.¹² Religion is one of the three pillars of Thai identity formulated by King Rama VI, who reigned from 1910 to 1925. The three pillars of Thai identity are the Nation, Religion, and King.¹³ By *Nation*, King Rama VI meant the country of Thailand and all her citizens. By *King*, King Rama VI meant the royal family of the Chakri dynasty. Thus, Thailand's strong *lèse majesté* laws are a direct implication of this element of the Thai identity.¹⁴ While Thailand has constitutional freedom of religion, *Religion* in this tri-part identity essentially means Buddhism. Mulder explained, "to most Thais to be a Thai is equated with being a Buddhist."¹⁵ Marten Visser explained, "Buddhism is recognized as the state religion and is supported by the

¹¹Customary laws, unlike statutory laws are enforced by social pressure rather than legal, juristic authority. Aroonrut Wichienkeo, "Lanna Customary Law," *Tai Culture* 6, no. 1 (1996): 217-29.

¹²According to the October 2015 dataset from the Global Research Department of the International Mission Board, Buddhists in Thailand comprise 85 percent of the total population. "2015-10 GSEC Listing of People Groups," accessed November 11, 2015 <http://public.imb.org/globalresearch/Pages/ResearchData.aspx>.

¹³Niels Mulder, *Inside Thai Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life*, 5th ed. (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1996), 113.

¹⁴Section 112 of the Thailand criminal law states, "Whoever, defames, insults or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years." Criminal Code B.E. 2499, "Articles," accessed October 28, 2015 <http://www.thailandlawonline.com/laws-in-thailand/thailand-criminal-law-text-translation#chapter-1>. Interestingly the criminal law articles do not define what constitutes an insult to the monarchy.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

government.”¹⁶ However, the Thai have not always been adherents of Buddhism.

Some scholars credit the arrival of Buddhism in Southeast Asia to King Asoka of the Mauryan dynasty, modern day India, in the third century BC.¹⁷ Asoka was the third king of the Mauryan dynasty and reigned from 270 to 232 BC. Known to be an astute warrior, Asoka experienced a dramatic change eight years after his coronation when “the aftermath of the war so horrified Asoka that it brought about a complete change in personality.”¹⁸ After this change, King Asoka embraced Buddhism completely and dispatched monks within the Mauryan dynasty and beyond. Archeologists have found tablets containing the edicts that Asoka issued in multiple languages.¹⁹ Asoka sent these tablets with his Buddhist missionary monks. Karuna Kusalasaya discussed that “Asoka sent missionaries headed by Buddhist elders to as many as nine territories. One of these territories was known as Suvarnabhumi.”²⁰ The exact boundaries for Suvarnabhumi are unclear. However, archaeological evidence from Nakhon Pathom, Thailand lead a Thai medieval art expert, Promsak Jermsawatdi, to conclude that the Suvarnabhumi region encompassed modern day Thailand and included much of Mainland Southeast Asia.²¹

A second wave of Hindu and Buddhist influence upon modern day Thailand

¹⁶Marten Visser, *Conversion Growth of Protestant Churches in Thailand* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2008), 24.

¹⁷Karuna Kusalasaya, *Buddhism in Thailand: Its Past and its Present* (Bangkok: Mental Health Publishing House, 2001).

¹⁸Buddhist Publication Society “The Edicts of King Asoka,” trans. Ven. S. Dhammika, accessed August 30, 2006, <http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/ashoka.html>.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Kusalasaya, *Buddhism in Thailand*, 6.

²¹Promsak Jermsawatdi, *Thai Art with Indian Influence* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1991).

came during the Draravati period. The Draravati period began in the seventh century and lasted until the eleventh century. The Mon people comprised the majority ethnic population of the Draravati kingdom. I agree with Barend Jan Terwiel, renowned social and cultural historian of Thailand, who claimed that depicting the Draravati period as staunchly Theravada Buddhism is a mistake. Evidence shows that the Draravati religion was influenced by the Indianized Funan dynasty resulting in a mixture of Theravada Buddhism with both Hinduism and the Mahayana provision of bodhisattvas.²² The Northern Thailand city of Lamphun, known by the name Hariphunchai during this period, was the northern boundary of the Draravati kingdom. Ongsakul explained that by the end of the Draravati period, Lamphun had become a regional center of Buddhist influence. Even during the reign of the first *Khon Muang* king, Mengrai, in 1292, this city remained an important religious center.²³

During the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, most of Central Thailand was under vassal rule by the Khmer Angkor kingdom. Terwiel stressed that while the Angkor kingdom included a heavy influence of Hinduism, Buddhism maintained religious predominance.²⁴ During the Angkor kingdom's reign over Central Thailand, the invading Tai speaking peoples entered Northern Thailand. By the thirteenth century, Buddhism was extremely influential among the ruling class. After the establishment of the Tai speaking kingdom of Sukhothai in the thirteenth century, Buddhist inscriptions are commonly found in both Pali and Thai.²⁵ Terwiel stressed, while the predominant

²²Barend Jan Terwiel, *Monks and Magic: Revisiting a Classic Study of Religious Ceremonies in Thailand*, 4th ed. (København, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2012), 6.

²³Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 35.

²⁴Terwiel, *Monks and Magic*, 7-8.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 9.

religion during the Sukhothai period was Theravada Buddhism, “that does not necessarily mean that this new religion stood in rivalry to other long-established indigenous beliefs.”²⁶

Buddhism gained acceptance in the royal courts throughout the Sukhothai period and into the Ayutthaya period. Terwiel explained why Buddhism gained influence during the fourteenth century and beyond.

Theravada Buddhism played a political role in that it allowed a rationale for accepting the ruler’s right to authority and at the same time prescribed a number of guidelines that safeguarded, at least in theory, against excesses of the crown on propagated values directed towards a harmonious social life. . . .

It is plausible that the great majority of those who considered themselves Buddhists adhered to a form of religion in which local magico-animist principles were dominant.²⁷

This syncretistic form of magico-animistic Buddhism is more commonly called Popular Buddhism.²⁸ Thus, most overviews of Popular Buddhism include aspects of Theravada Buddhism, animism, and Brahmanism. While Brahmin rituals are known to have existed in North Thailand, prominent scholarship on the *Khon Muang* downplays the influence of Brahmanism among the *Khon Muang*. Penth and Ongsakul both agreed that Brahmin rituals played a much smaller role than among the Khmer influenced Central Thai kings in Ayutthaya.²⁹ The adoption of Brahmin rituals, or lack thereof, had implications for the form of kingship established in Ayutthaya and Lan Na. Ongsakul explained that, originally, Lan Na kings, unlike their counterparts in Ayutthaya, did not adopt the Brahmin royal category for god-kings, *devarajas*. This formalism developed

²⁶Terwiel, *Monks and Magic*, 11.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 13-15.

²⁸Chasamone Saiysak, “A Study of the Belief Systems and Decision Making of the Isan People of Northeast Thailand with a View Towards Making Use of These Insights in Christian Evangelism” (PhD diss., Evangelical Theological Faculty of Heverlee, 2007), 38.

²⁹Penth, *A Brief History of Lān Nā*, 107; and Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 83.

slowly, and it was not until the mid-fifteenth century, more than one hundred-fifty years after the rise of the first Lan Na king, that the kings started promoting this link between Brahmin ritualism and the royal family.³⁰ Davis speculated further about the social implications of the inclusion or lack of inclusion of Brahmin rituals upon the Central and Northern Thai kingdoms:

It might not be far-fetched to relate the difference between the modern-day Siamese [Central Thai] and *Muang* [*Khon Muang*] in the quality of their social interaction to their different inheritance of these two models of kingship. The subservience to superiors, the status-consciousness, and the obsequiousness and formality characteristic of Siamese behavior may be considered an inheritance of the Ayudhyan [Ayutthayan] model, while the relative egalitarianism and ease of social interaction characteristic of the Muang might be in closer conformity to a truly Tai model of social behavior.³¹

Davis' description is still relevant today and extends to differences expressed in typical dress and what is considered appropriate attire for attending ceremonies. In Northern Thailand, one can attend a community ceremony or event adorned in an untucked button-up short sleeve cotton shirt, known as *paapunmuang* in Thai, and be considered appropriately dressed for the occasion. However, in Bangkok, one is expected to wear a long sleeve, button-up shirt that is tucked in neatly or ornate silk shirt. While this difference might seem minor from an expatriate perspective, it does demonstrate the existence of cultural differences between Central and Northern Thailand. This simple example is an indicator of a difference in ritual formality between the Central Thai and the Northern Thai peoples and alludes to more profound religious differences between Central and Northern Thai. The differences noted by Penth, Ongsakul, and Davis warrant a discussion of the particular religious elements of Northern Thai Popular Buddhism. Northern Thai Popular Buddhism is a syncretistic form of Theravada Buddhism with animism. To understand Northern Thai Popular Buddhism, one should first understand

³⁰Ongsakul, *History of Lan Na*, 83.

³¹Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 30.

the basic tenets of classic Theravada Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism is the form of Buddhism that was introduced in Thailand. Along with other forms of Buddhism, the Theravada school teaches the Four Noble Truths. The first Noble Truth simply taught that life entails suffering. The second Noble Truth explained the cause of suffering is the existence of desires or thirst for permanence. The *Vinaya Mahākhanda* is a collection of works about the life and teaching of the Buddha. In the *Vinaya Mahākhanda*, one finds the following description of the cause of suffering:

It is that craving which leads to continuation in existence, which is connected with enjoyment and passion, greatly enjoying this and that, as follows: craving for sense pleasures, craving for continuation, [and] craving for discontinuation.³²

All these conditions are impermanent, constantly changing and thus are the cause of suffering. For example, suffering arises because that which one enjoys is impermanent. While one enjoys pleasure, he or she experiences no suffering, but when the enjoyment ceases one suffers. Likewise, the desire for continuation causes suffering as one's life nears its end. Conversely, the desire for discontinuation causes suffering as the pain of a given situation may continue longer than one desires. The third Noble Truth is known as the cessation of suffering. Again, in the *Vinaya Mahākhanda*, one learns that the Buddha taught that the cessation of suffering “is the complete fading away and cessation without remainder of that craving – liberation, letting go, release, and non-adherence.”³³ Craving or thirst includes not only attachment to pleasure and wealth but also includes

³²*The Great Chapter: Vinaya Mahākhanda sections 1-4*, trans. Anandajoti Bhikkhu (2014), accessed January 23, 2017, <http://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/English-Texts/Great-Chapter/Great-Chapter.pdf>, 54.

³³*Ibid.*

attachment to ideals and beliefs. Walpola Sri Rahula, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk and a professor of religion, taught that according to “the Buddha’s analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world, from little personal quarrels in families to great wars between nations and countries, arise out of this selfish ‘thirst.’”³⁴ As long as one maintains these selfish desires, he or she will continue to suffer. This suffering has “within itself the nature of arising, the nature of coming into being.”³⁵ This arising or coming into being is also known as *samsara* or the cycle of continuity. The last Noble Truth is known as the middle way, more commonly referred to as the Noble Eightfold Path. This path described the correct pattern of life, which leads to the extinguishing of the selfish desires. An overview examining of the central elements of the Four Noble Truths will be discussed next.

Life is suffering, *Kwaamtuk*. All of life is suffering and all its conditions are suffering. Suffering is an unavoidable aspect of life, and desire, *tanha*, is the root of suffering. Suffering includes both getting what one dislikes as well as not getting what one wants. A professor of anthropology, Chai Podhisita explained, “the five aggregates of which life is made, namely, corporeality, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness which [sic] are the objects of attachment, are all suffering.”³⁶ Suffering and the five aggregates are not two different things. The five aggregates are suffering. All five aggregates are themselves impermanent and as Podhisita explained, “Attachment to them can only cause distress and suffering.”³⁷

³⁴Walpola Sri Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Bangkok: Wat Raja-o-Rasaram, 2006), 30.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 31.

³⁶Chai Podhisita, “Buddhism and Thai World View,” in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, ed. Amara Pongsapich, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1998), 33.

³⁷Podhisita, “Buddhism and Thai World View,” 34.

Impermanence, *Anitjang*. Desires, and thus suffering, arise from the ever-changing world. Thus, all things are impermanent. Podhisita expounded, “All things, material and immaterial, are liable to decay and transformation.”³⁸

No self, *Anatta*. Buddhist philosophy does not teach the doctrine of an eternal soul. What one perceives as existing is only the proper composition of the five aggregates. As Rahula explained, “there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered ‘Self’, or ‘Soul’, or ‘Ego’.”³⁹ Rahula further argued that the Buddha’s teaching of no-self should not be considered negative or annihilistic as both these ideas arise from a false notion of *I AM*. Accordingly, Rahula argued,

The correct position with regard to the question of *Anatta* is not to take hold of any opinions or views, but to see things objectively as they are without mental projections, to see that what we call ‘I’, or ‘being’, is only a combination of physical and mental aggregates, which are working together interdependently in a flux of momentary change within the law of cause and effect, and that there is nothing permanent, everlasting, unchanging, and eternal in the whole of existence.⁴⁰

In Buddhist doctrine, the teaching of no-self does not carry a negative connotation, but it is understood as a truth or a reality. Likewise, nirvana or *nippan* is “Truth, Reality; and Reality cannot be negative.”⁴¹

Escape, *Nippan*. The goal for all Buddhists is to escape suffering. One escapes suffering by attaining nirvana, the extinguishing of the fire of desire and attachment. Podhisita articulated that extinguishing the fire of desire requires the right perspective: “Nirvana (nibban) [nippan] is reached only when one achieves a right

³⁸Podhisita, “Buddhism and Thai World View.”

³⁹Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 23.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 66.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

understanding of the conditional world and, on the basis of that right understanding, disciplines one's behavior following the path laid down by the Buddha."⁴²

Noble Eightfold Path, *Makbpaet*. One is able to understand the true condition of the world by following the Noble Eightfold Path. The path consists of Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Podhisita's summary is helpful as it categorized the elements of the Noble Eightfold Path: "The first two are categorized as true wisdom (*panna*); the next four, morality (*sila*); and the last two, concentration (*samadhi*)."⁴³ All proper Buddhist instruction focuses on all three categories.

By the effort one puts forth in following the right path, one is able to attain nirvana and thus escape suffering. Podhisita clarified that the cessation of suffering is not merely temporal: "Those who reach this state can overcome suffering, that is, in the short run (present life) they no longer experience suffering resulting from attachment to the impermanence and impersonal nature . . . and, in the long run (next life) they are no longer subject to the round of rebirth or reincarnation."⁴⁴

These are several of the principal doctrines taught in Buddhism, but as one observes Northern Thai life and society, one might be left with the distinct impression that other religious structures are also at play.⁴⁵ The summary above described the essential elements of what Melford E. Spiro, an American anthropologist, termed

⁴²Podhisita, "Buddhism and Thai World View," 34.

⁴³Ibid., 55.

⁴⁴Ibid., 34.

⁴⁵ Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*; Jack M. Potter, *Thai Peasant Social Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); and Herbert Swanson, "Prelude to Irony: The Princeton Theology and the Practice of American Presbyterian Missions in Northern Siam, 1867-1880" (PhD diss., The Melbourne College of Divinity, 2003).

Nibbanic Buddhism. These matters dealt with transcendent issues, namely how one transcends the cycle of rebirth. What Spiro labeled *Kammatic Buddhism*, which deals with the imminent aspects of Buddhism, might be a better understanding of what one observes in the daily lives of the *Khon Muang*. These imminent aspects aid one in finding answers in the world here and now.⁴⁶

Kammatic Buddhism

Kammatic Buddhism describes the moral and ethical teaching of Buddhism for this present life. The primary element of the teaching is karma, *kamma*. Closely relating to and influencing karma are merit, *bun*, and demerit, *bap*.

Karma, *Kamma*. For the Buddhist, intention always precedes actions, whether physical, *kayakamma*, or verbal, *wajikamma*, or mental, *monakamma*. As Podhisita explained, “Karma always refers to volitional action.”⁴⁷ One can classify karma as good and meritorious, *bun*, if the result of the volitional action is morally good. Otherwise, the action is demeritorious, *bap*. In Buddhist philosophy, karma never means its effect. Rahula explained that karma’s “effect is known as the ‘fruit’ or the ‘result’ of karma.”⁴⁸ Thus, good karma produces good effects, while bad karma produces bad effects. Rahula summarized the theory of karma as “the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction. . . . Every volitional action produces its effect or results . . . [and] the effects of a volitional action may continue to manifest themselves even in a life after death.” This teaching leads many to believe that the “more merit one accumulates, the

⁴⁶Melford Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1982).

⁴⁷Podhisita, “Buddhism and Thai World View,” 35.

⁴⁸Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 32.

better future one can expect.”⁴⁹ Jack M. Potter, a professor of anthropology, lived among the *Khon Muang* in the early 1970s. His anthropological study describing village life among the *Khon Muang* provides assistance in understanding Northern Thailand Popular Buddhism. Potter explained that the *Khon Muang* believe religious merit, the doing of right volitional actions, determines one’s fate in the next world.⁵⁰ Therefore, one gains a better future status through doing good deeds and the converse results in the case of demerit. Kammatic Buddhism’s focus is on making merit to affect and raise one’s status in the next cycle of life.

Merit, *Bun*. Merit in karmic Buddhism is not about detachment and ending desires, but about harmony and satisfaction in this life and the next. Merit making is an essential and elaborate system among the *Khon Muang*. Additionally, merit making is both formal and informal. Formally, one makes merit by supporting the monks and the monastery and through participation in Buddhist rituals. Informally, any and every act of kindness and assistance is commonly referred to as merit, *bun*.⁵¹

Demerit, *Bap*. Demerit or sin is most commonly linked to the breaking of one of the five precepts, thus the commitment: “I refrain from killing, stealing, wrong sexual conduct, lying and alcohol.”⁵² However, *bap* implies more than the breaking of the five precepts. As *bun* is both social and religious, *bap* includes social demerit as well. Having the means to aid socially, but demonstrating a selfish or stingy attitude, is commonly understood as demerit.

⁴⁹Podhisita, “Buddhism and Thai World View,” 36.

⁵⁰Potter, *Thai Peasant Social Structure*, 36.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Terwiel, *Monks and Magic*, 183.

From this short summary of Kammatic Buddhism, one may begin to understand the common Thai belief that status in this life is a derivative of past cumulative karma. Lucien Hanks, a pioneer anthropologist among the Central Thai speaking people, explained: “As good Buddhists, the Thai perceive that all living beings stand in a hierarchy of varying ability to make actions effective and of varying degrees of freedom from suffering. . . . This hierarchy depends on a composite quality called “merit” (*bun*) or “virtue” (*kwaamdii*), or one may also speak of a graded series of penalties (*baap*).”⁵³ The understanding that all living things stand in a hierarchy complements the common Northern Thai understanding that a link exists between one’s current social status and the proper deeds performed in his or her previous lives. Additionally, these two concepts form an essential element for understanding patron-client relationships among the *Khon Muang*, especially *bunkhun*. A client looks for a patron of higher status because that patron must have been a virtuous person in a former life. The client hopes that the patron will continue to demonstrate the same virtue and merit. For in a *bunkhun* relationship, the virtuous character of the patron reinforces the client’s loyalty and involvement with the plans of his patron. These functional aspects of *bunkhun* relationships will be discussed in chapter 3. The understanding that all things exist in a hierarchical structure also applies to the *Khon Muang* understanding of the spirit realm.

Spirits and Things of Power

The interpretative schema of Niels Mulder (see below, pages 78-80) is quite helpful for understanding the hierarchy of the spirit realm and has many elements that are generalizable to other Tai speaking groups. As with the Central Thai, the *Khon Muang* also recognize two divisions within the spirit realm. One might appease and manipulate

⁵³Lucien Hanks, “Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order,” *American Anthropologist* 64, no. 6 (1962): 1247.

the spirits via the use of various sacred objects. These spirits are typically amoral and often benevolent unless provoked. Another class of spirits exists, evil spirits that are unpredictable and best avoided. These spirits are immoral and perceived as rarely benevolent. Most sacred objects associated with these evil spirits provide protection from rather than placation of the spirits. The hierarchy of spirits begins at one's home with the most benevolent and moves outward towards the most unpredictable and harmful.⁵⁴ Following Mulder's schema, the two divisions are domestic and nondomestic.⁵⁵

Domestic spirits. The basic social and economic unit of *Khon Muang* society is the family or household. As such, the most important domestic spirit for the *Khon Muang* is the house spirit, *phi huean*. In traditional *Khon Muang* households, this tutelary house spirit is matrilineally inherited and resides in the sleeping area of the house, *huean*.⁵⁶ As with the Central Thai, the *Khon Muang* also place small spirit shrines outside the home. These spirit houses have two varieties. The first and most common spirit house, *saan phra phuum*, has a single pillar with an ornate shrine or temple on top. The spirit protector of the land takes residence in this shrine. Local spirit doctors, *maw duu*, inform the family about the auspicious placement of the shrine before homes are constructed. The second spirit house is less common, but looks like the traditional Thai stilt house and is called *saan jawthii* in Thai. This house shrine is believed to be the residence of the family's ancestors. This pattern is repeated at each successive level of administration, first the individual family, then a village, and so forth up to regional and

⁵⁴Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 72-98.

⁵⁵Mulder, *Inside Thai Society*, 42-49.

⁵⁶Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 48-51.

national auspicious shrines. Additionally, each successive level has its own specialists to propitiate the spirits. Mulder, speaking of the spirits at the village level, explained, “These guardian spirits are basically local rulers who have no power outside of their respective territories; in other places one needs to deal with other local potentates. But their power, too, is very much confined to their respective shrines.”⁵⁷

The spirits are invoked, appeased, and manipulated by a transactional exchange. The supplicant opens the transaction by paying respect via the appropriate sacrificial offering, often flowers, food, and a shot glass or more of liquor. Then, the worshipper sets forth the terms of the contract; if the spirit fulfills the contract, the supplicant returns annually to make an additional offering and perhaps even to renew the contract. Most of these spirits have known preferences concerning what are acceptable offerings. As these localized domestic spirits are amoral in the Thai perspective, Mulder explained that insulting or refusing to redeem a vow with one of these spirits is not sinful, “but merely stupid.”⁵⁸ From the Thai perspective, sin is most commonly linked to the breaking of the five precepts of Buddhism. Therefore, for a Thai person, offending a domestic spirit is not classified as morally sinful, but foolish, as it might incur the wrath of the offended spirit.

Nondomestic spirits and powers. These spirits are unpredictable and not often localized like their counterparts, domestic spirits and powers. Individuals who die unexpectedly can often become ghosts. Ghosts are restless spirits and one sub-class of nondomestic spirit. Protective amulets, rings, tattoos, and other items of power, *sing saksit*, provide the mechanism for coping with these forces. Specialists beseech benevolent spirits to endow these protective items or tattoos with power. Mulder

⁵⁷Mulder, *Inside Thai Society*, 44.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 44-46.

summarized the system: “As a religious practice, Thai animism is essentially a system that deals with power, whether of the amoral . . . or the immoral. . . . Such power encountered during the course of everyday life should be dealt with according to its own laws – laws which do not raise moral questions of good and evil.”⁵⁹

In practice and application, Thai Popular Buddhism matches Titaya Suvanajata’s, a Thai sociologist, assertion that Thais value experiential evidence over ideological evidence: “I feel, therefore I am.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, “Northern Thai rarely use the word ‘believe,’ *chuea* (เชื่อ), in connection with their ritual and religious practices. The word they use is *thue* (ถือ), ‘to hold, abide by, respect,’ emphasizing the behavioral rather than the doctrinal or belief aspect of ritual.”⁶¹ These animistic practices are pervasive and affect every aspect of *Khon Muang* culture.

Schemata for Understanding the Thai Cultural System

Suntaree Komin, a Thailand national Fulbright scholar, summarized the anthropological and sociological studies of the Thai cultural system into several interpretative models.⁶² Komin included Buddhism as its own separate schema.⁶³ However, Buddhism is pervasive and interwoven into all schemata and, thus, Buddhism will be detailed as appropriate in each schema presented. Each schema explains *bunghun* differently. Likewise, each has its own strengths and weaknesses for explaining the Thai cultural system.

⁵⁹Mulder, *Inside Thai Society*, 48.

⁶⁰Titaya Suvanajata, “Is the Thai Social System Loosely Structured?” *Social Science Review* 1 (1976): 175.

⁶¹Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 17.

⁶²Komin Suntaree, *Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* (Bangkok: National Institute of Development Administration, 1991), 3-16.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 8-10.

Based on Kroeber's and Kluckhohn's definition of culture, found in the definitions section of chapter 1, I will use the following series of questions to assess several schemata for understanding the Thai cultural system. First, does the schema present Thai culture as a system? Second, does the schema describe the Thai culture based upon observed behavior? Third, if the behavior is observed, does the schema extrapolate values from that observed behavior? Fourth, does the schema verify an assumed understanding of values via emic description?

The Loose Structure Schema

An American anthropologist, John Embree, established the original schema for interpreting the Thai cultural system in 1950.⁶⁴ While Embree's work is not the first anthropological description of the Thai cultural system, his work is a seminal work that formed the foundation for many later anthropological studies.⁶⁵ From his observations of Thai individuals, and through comparisons with other cultural systems, Embree characterized the Thai cultural system as *loosely* structured. His conclusions arose from unverified observations and assumptions made while visiting Thailand on several occasions and during his short tour of duty with the U.S. State Department.⁶⁶ Embree developed his description of this loose social structure by comparing behaviors observed

⁶⁴John Embree, "Thailand – A Loosely Structured Social System," *American Anthropology* 52, no.2 (1950): 181-93. While Embree was an accomplished anthropologist the majority of his research and study focused upon Japan. Embree served as head of Japanese area studies for the War Department during the 1940s and 1950s.

⁶⁵William Clifton Dodd, *The Tai race, elder brother of the Chinese: results of experiences, exploration and research of William Clifton Dodd* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1923); and Ruth Benedict, *Thai Culture and Behavior: An Unpublished War-time Study Dated September, 1943* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University: Department of Far Eastern Studies, 1952).

⁶⁶The United States of America State Department stationed Embree in Bangkok for the year of 1947 where he served as a cultural affair officer. Hans-Dieter Evers, ed., *Loosely Structured Social Systems: Thailand in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1969), ix.

in Thailand to other social institutions and structures from other countries, such as China, Vietnam, and Japan. Embree perceived these other countries as having a more structured social system than Thailand. By *loosely structured*, Embree meant that Thai society, in comparison to others, permits a wide variety of individual behavior, demonstrates little concern for reciprocal rights and duties, exhibits no unifying sense of duty and obligation towards kin, and lacks consistent regularity and discipline.⁶⁷

Embree rightfully raised awareness of the fact that the Thai culture is different from other Asian societies and cultures. While Embree presented a system for understanding the Thai culture based on observed behavior, at least three critiques can be raised in opposition to his interpretative model. First, Embree's writing lacks a clear purpose statement and delimitations, thus leading to the problem of overgeneralization. Observations of a few individuals or a single village might not apply to the broader culture. Thai sociologist Boonsanong Punyodyana in his 1969 critique of Embree, called for sociologists and anthropologists to provide an institutional analysis of the Thai cultural system rather than relying only on interpersonal analysis. Punyodyana explained the difference between an institutional analysis and an interpersonal analysis:

The former [institutional analysis] deals with abstract and more general phenomena, the latter [interpersonal analysis] with concrete and more specific ones. . . .

In the Thai case, an emphasis on the cultural or moral norms (i.e. the interpersonal at the expense of institutional analysis) has, as already shown, (mis)led a number of observers to conceptualize much of Thai behavior which is unsanctioned of the Thai society as an indication of the looseness of the structure of the Thai social system. It is, therefore, our contention that at the level of social institutional analysis, an entirely different conception of Thai society and its structure is possible.⁶⁸

⁶⁷John Embree, "Thailand – A Loosely Structured Social System," in *Loosely Structured Social Systems: Thailand in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Hans-Dieter Evers (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1969), 3-15.

⁶⁸Boonsanong Punyodyana, "Social Structure, Social System, and Two Levels of Analysis: A Thai View," in *Loosely Structured Social Systems: Thailand in Comparison Perspective*, ed. Hans-Dieter Evers (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1969), 86-87.

Second, while Embree did reference several observed events, he provided no evidence that he sought an emic understanding of the phenomena. The individual cases Embree observed and cited cannot be denied, and similar events occur regularly in Thailand, but without proper verification, the conclusions drawn are too often guided by ethnocentric assumptions rather than by emic meaning. Alternative explanations abound for the individual behaviors that Embree described.⁶⁹

Third, Embree utilized a comparative approach rather than an interpretative approach. Rather than describing the Thai culture and then seeking to understand the meaning of the behaviors observed, Embree compared what he observed in Thailand against what he had come to understand from other Asian countries. One gets the distinct impression that Embree admired Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese cultures over the Thai culture and analyzed the Thai situation from unstated assumptions. Speaking of the individualistic behavior of the people of Thailand, Embree lamented, “The longer one resides in Thailand the more one is struck by the almost determined lack of regularity, discipline, and regimentation in Thai life. In contrast to Japan, Thailand lacks neatness and discipline.”⁷⁰ No verification or indigenous explanation was provided. A. Thomas Kirsch explained that Embree’s schema gained influence because, as of 1969, no ethnographic investigations of Thailand that contradicted Embree’s conclusions existed.⁷¹

⁶⁹Niels Mulder, “Origin, Development, and the Use of the Concept of ‘Loose Structure’ in the Literature about Thailand: An Evaluation,” in *Loosely Structured Social Systems: Thailand in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Hans-Dieter Evers (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1969), 16-24.

⁷⁰Embree, “Thailand,” 182.

⁷¹A. Thomas Kirsch, “Loose Structure: Theory or Description,” in *Loosely Structured Social Systems: Thailand in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Hans-Dieter Evers, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1969), 41.

The *Individualism* Schema

Komin claimed the *individualism* schema is similar to the *loose structure* interpretation, “with emphasis on the ‘individual personality’ as the core regulator of Thai social behavior.”⁷² Herbert Phillips is the key proponent of this schema as presented in his study of interpersonal behavior in Bang Chan village. Building on Embree’s observations that the Thai cultural system allows for a wide variation of individual behavior and the lack of strict obligation rules, Phillips explained that the two major dimensions of Thai relationships include the “profound sense of self-concern and freedom of choice.”⁷³ Individuals display outward cordiality towards others but with “little personal commitment or involvement.”⁷⁴ Phillips claimed that Thais fulfill each other’s expectations, not because of the demands of others, but simply because they desire to hide their intentions and feelings behind an elaborate system of *social cosmetics* of polite smiles and cordial interaction.⁷⁵

The lack of a clear definition for *individualism* in Phillips’ work is the most surprising omission. Thus, contemporary readers who are aware of the intercultural comparison work of Geert Hofstede, a renowned expert in intercultural studies, should be careful not to apply Hofstede’s definition of *individualism* to Phillips’ work.⁷⁶ Hofstede

⁷²Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 6.

⁷³Herbert Phillips, *Thai Peasant Personality: The Patterning of Interpersonal Behavior in the Village of Bang Chan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 206.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 66.

⁷⁶Geert Hofstede, “National Culture: Individualism versus Collectivism,” accessed September 24, 2015, <http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html>. Individualism can be defined as a preference for a loosely knit social framework with the expectation that individuals to take care of only themselves and their immediate families. Its opposite, collectivism, represents a preference for a tightly knit framework in society with the expectation that relatives or members of a particular in-group provide care in exchange for loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people’s self-image is defined in terms of *I* or *we*.

explained the individual versus collectivism category for Thailand as follows:

The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. It has to do with whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We." In Individualist societies people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family only. In Collectivist societies people belong to 'in groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty.

With a score of 20 Thailand is a highly collectivist country. This is manifest in a close long-term commitment to the member 'group' (a family, extended family, or extended relationships). Loyalty to the in-group in a collectivist culture is paramount, and over-rides most other societal rules and regulations. The society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group. In order to preserve the in-group, Thai are not confrontational and in their communication a "Yes" may not mean an acceptance or agreement. An offence leads to loss of face and Thai are very sensitive not to feel shamed in front of their group. Personal relationship is key to conducting business and it takes time to build such relations thus patience is necessary as well as not openly discuss business on first occasions.⁷⁷

Alan S. Waterman, a professor of psychology, defined the value system of individualism as having five characteristics:

1. A sense of personally identified goals, values, and beliefs;
2. Self-actualization directing efforts to fulfill personal goals;
3. An internal locus of control, or the perception that one's actions guides outcomes;
4. An intrinsic sense of self-worth and self-esteem; and
5. Principled moral reasoning.⁷⁸

Individualism for Waterman is more about what the individual actor can accomplish over the needs and desires of the community. Komin elaborated the manner in which the loosely structured and individualism schemas might be better understood. Thai individualism is similar to Hofstede and Waterman's individualism with its emphasis on intrinsic self-worth, but is dissimilar in expressing Waterman's four other

⁷⁷Hofstede, "National Culture: Individualism versus Collectivism," accessed September 24, 2015, <http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html>.

⁷⁸Alan S. Waterman, "Individualism & Interdependence," *American Psychologist* 36 (1981): 762-83.

characteristics of individualism: “There is a great difference with regard to relationships with others.”⁷⁹ While Thais highly value their intrinsic self-worth, their value for community and the opinion of others overrides the other four characteristics of individualism.

Potter stressed three additional difficulties that arise from generalizations drawn from the Bang Chan studies of Phillips and others. First, the Bang Chan community had a short history and a mixed ethnic background, including Chinese merchants, freed Bangkok slaves, and prisoners of war from Laos and the Muslim southern provinces of Thailand. While Bang Chan village had existed for a little over a century when Phillips did his study, neither this ethnic diversity nor the impact thereof is mentioned in his work. Second, Bang Chan is not a nucleated village like the majority of villages in Central Thailand. The dispersion of the community perhaps provides insight into what may appear to be the individualistic behavior observed by Phillips. Third, seven administrative districts further divide the vast distance covered by the Bang Chan community. Potter correctly stressed that the leadership of Bang Chan village encountered several administrative difficulties when trying to unite seven administrative districts.⁸⁰

Concerning *bunghun*, the individualistic schema limits its significance to kinship relationships.⁸¹ While *bunghun* plays a primary role in Tai kinship relationships, limiting the influence of *bunghun* to familial relationships might be a mistake. First, this limitation might be a mistake because the definition for *bunghun* does not limit its impact to only kinship relationships. Additionally, as will be soon in chapter 3, in practice

⁷⁹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 8.

⁸⁰Potter, *Thai Peasant Social Structure*, 2.

⁸¹Phillips, *Thai Peasant Personality*, 30, 157-59, 164-68.

bunghun impacts both familial and non-familial relationships. Finally, it might be a mistake as this limitation fails to explain how and why *bunghun* relationships exist outside the family. While this schema does present a system for understanding Thai culture and is based on observations, other schemas are more helpful for explaining the underlying values and richer emic descriptions. The remaining schemas describe the broader influence of reciprocal relationships among the Thai.

The *Entourage* Schema

The *entourage* schema is one of two schemas that focus on patron-client relationships as the essential element for understanding the Thai cultural system. An entourage is a network of relationships that are hierarchically structured with a set of less powerful individuals supporting a leader. Lucien Hanks combined this entourage schema with Buddhist doctrine to understand the Thai social order:

Each Thai regards every other person in the social order as higher or lower than himself. The elder, more literate, richer persons tend to be higher due to greater virtue or “merit,” as the Buddhist *bun* is usually translated. Based on these differences in social standing, a hierarchy arises which each person pays deference to all who stand above and is deferred to by all below. . . . In this society of unequals Buddhist doctrine urges each person to do what he can for the benefit of those who stand below him in the hierarchy. . . . This standard relationship of superior to inferior we have called the patron-client relationship.⁸²

For Hanks, Buddhist doctrine formed the basis for the Thai hierarchical system, in particular, the doctrines of merit, *bun* and sin, *baap*. Thais continuously evaluate others to determine where they fit in this unwritten hierarchy of people. Hanks asserted that they assume one has a higher or lower status in society based on the amount of merit one possesses. Thais assume merit carries over from past lives, affects every situation, and determines where one fits in the social order. Thus, Hanks argued outward politeness,

⁸²Lucien Hanks, “The Thai Social Order as Entourage and Circle,” in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society*, ed. George Skinner and A. Thomas Kirsch (London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 198-99.

harmony, and pleasantness are necessary when meeting others. These techniques to maintain smooth relationship are necessary until Thais determine the social ranks of others, and determine if more complex and intimate conversation may transpire.⁸³

Unlike the European feudal system, the inferior individual in Hanks' system can break off the relationship if the entourage network is no longer convenient, or when the superior individual breaks mutual trust.⁸⁴ Thus, Hanks expanded the older loose and individual schemas to explain the importance of patron-client systems for understanding the Thai social context.

Hanks, however, suggested that the Thai cultural system might have more than one patron-client relationship: "The particular relationship of patron and client varies with the degree of affection and trust. At its coolest . . . a piecework contract. . . . Yet more cordial relationships can develop from these beginnings. . . . So a patron may become the helper, protector, and symbol of confidence for his client, who in turns grows to become a corner post of the ménage."⁸⁵ Regrettably, Hanks does not elaborate or expand upon this possibility. Hanks rightly recognized that multiple categories of patron-client relationships function in the Thai cultural system. As a *bunghun* relationship does not diminish over time or distance between the participants, perhaps other cultural values explain *bunghun* better than the values associated with a convenience based entourage system.

Suvanajata likewise recognized that the Thai cultural system has more than one type of patron-client system. While Suvanajata is not an advocate of the entourage system, he described the multiple forms of patron-client systems in Thailand. He

⁸³Hanks, "Merit and Power in the Thai Social Order," 1255.

⁸⁴Ibid., 1250.

⁸⁵Hanks, "The Thai Social Order as Entourage and Circle," 199.

described a spectrum of relationships based on the corresponding amount of *bunghun* existing between the participants. On the low end of the spectrum, Suvanajata described exchange or transactional relationships. These relationships are informal and lack feelings, and create no psychological bond or moral obligation. These relationships are neither established nor maintained via *bunghun*. A deep sense of obligation and psychological investment characterizes the other extreme of the spectrum, resulting in enduring, predictable, and reliable relationships. These relationships are established and maintained via *bunghun*. *Bunghun* relationships are initiated by status: either via ascribed status or achieved status.⁸⁶ *Bunghun* relationships initiated via ascribed status are obligatory because of the status assigned to the patron by the community at large. Suvanajata explained: “[The] Thai recognizes his king, parents, and teachers as the one who has ‘*Bunghun*’ on him. Whoever is the incumbent of that position is entitle [sic] to have ‘*Bunghun*’ on the incumbent of counter position. The obligation under this relationship is [sic] lifelong obligation.”⁸⁷ *Bunghun* relationships via achieved status are formed by individual acts of generosity and are mutual relationships. Suvanajata explained that *bunghun* relationships which beginning from individual acts of generosity are mutual exchange relationships. By *mutual exchange relationships*, Suvanajata means both parties in the relationship voluntarily engage in giving and receiving favors. Moreover, this mutual exchange of favors results in a psychologically binding obligation to reciprocate.⁸⁸ The mutual exchange of favors builds and strengthens the *bunghun* relationship. This mutual interdependence and the value of reciprocity is a common

⁸⁶Suvanajata, “Thai Social System,” 176-84.

⁸⁷Ibid., 181.

⁸⁸Ibid., 181-82. Italicized text added to provide clarity.

theme of Thai proverbs and parables.⁸⁹ One proverb explains a person should “try to visit your [his or her] relatives often; otherwise the relation will certainly be lost sooner or later.”⁹⁰ This proverb provides instruction on maintaining important relationships. This proverb implies that reciprocal relationships, like *bunghun* relationships, are guided by such cultural themes as mutual dependence, common sharing, reciprocity, and selflessness. Another Thai proverb illustrates the pervasive nature of mutual sharing in Thai society: “Pigs go, chickens come.”⁹¹ This proverb explains that sharing what one possesses results in reciprocation. When a Thai family slaughters a pig, the household has more food than the members can eat. Thus, the family often divides and gives meat to its neighbors. As raising pigs is a costly endeavor, the slaughtering of a pig is not common. However, chickens are common and raising chickens is inexpensive. Therefore, one might not be surprised when chickens are given as reciprocity. Chickens are not as expensive as pigs, so the reciprocated gift is of lesser value. This proverb focuses on the value of gratitude, not on balanced reciprocity. The returned favor may not be of equal value. However, the focus is the fact that reciprocity and gratitude have been displayed, not on the value of the returned favor.

The Moral-Amoral Power Schema

Niels Mulder, in his classic study of Thai society, stressed the importance of mysticism in his interpretation of everyday Thai life, “Thai life can be imagined as a

⁸⁹Many local idioms and Thai proverbs are gathered in a Thai text: Pasuk Prichayan, *Phāsīt īsān lae nānāphāsīt* (Proverbs of the Northeast and Other Proverbs) (Bangkok: Watthanāphānit, 1957). The idioms and local sayings found on pages 57-69 deal with the value of reciprocity and interdependence.

⁹⁰Ibid., 61.

⁹¹J. Lindsay Falvey. “Some Examples of Thai Saying in English,” accessed August 15, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Prof_Dr_John_Lindsay_Falvey/publication/266795638_Some_Examples_of_Thai_Sayings_in_English/links/543c08360cf204cab1db648e/Some-Examples-of-Thai-Sayings-in-English.

continuum ranging from the extremes of chaos and disorder to the serenity of perfect order.”⁹² Mulder used the concept of moral and amoral power to describe the Thai cultural system. Moral power, or *Khuna*, is the dimension of goodness where gratitude, safety, love, and trust are the dominant traits. In this realm, insiders are the primary characters, such as parents, siblings, kin, friends, teachers, and the patrons who possess *bunkhun*. Amoral power, or *Decha*, is the dimension of chaos where fear, distrust, and insecurity dominate. Outsiders are the primary characters of this realm and include ghosts and members of the hierarchical society outside the kinsman system. Mulder detailed various means of appeasing these amoral spirits and powers. These means are primarily motivated by self-preservation of the *ego* or primary actor. Appendix 4 charts my adaptation of Mulder’s Moral-Amoral paradigm.

While Mulder disagreed with Embree and Phillips’ *loosely structured* Thai cultural system, he provided an alternative perspective to Phillips’ concept of *social cosmetics*. Unlike Phillips, who interpreted the pervasive use of smiles and heavy investment in proper social skills by Thais as a system to hide personal intent, Mulder explained these smiles and the heavy investment in proper social skills from the perspective of power and mysticism:

Among non-intimate persons the mutual determination of status hinges on the recognition of relative power. Respect naturally flows from power, and people like to be respected. As soon, therefore, as one enters into the Thai game of the display of power, one has entered into the game of rank, respect and honour, and concern for presentation of self. . . . In interactions with non-intimate persons, people most often perceive each other as potentially harmful, because real intentions are often kept hidden. Consequently, strangers and superiors need to be placated by polite and pleasant behavior. The ritual smile and appropriate presentation often hide insecurity and anxiety. Thus presentation becomes deeply important.⁹³

According to Mulder, power and mysticism permeate every aspect of Thai culture.

⁹²Mulder, *Inside Thai Society*, 15.

⁹³Ibid., 66-67.

For Mulder, *bunghun* describes relationships with the most moral good and value. Mulder elaborated that the “figures of moral goodness, however, obtain enduring *khun*, that is, pure *bunghun* vis-à-vis their charges; these wards do not need to plead but rather receive without asking.”⁹⁴ For Mulder, the figures of moral goodness are mothers. Mulder’s schema works well for describing the influence of *bunghun* on filial ties but is less helpful when used to interpret the influence of *bunghun* upon non-familial relationships.

I agree with Komin’s explanation that Mulder’s schema works well at describing organizational circles dominated by power distance and fearful interactions. However, I am not convinced that Mulder’s Moral-Amoral schema explains the strong psychological bond between peers and friends. Peer relationships lack the power distance and the fear necessary for Mulder’s explanation to work. Likewise, friendships maintained through power and fear lack the intimacy necessary for *bunghun* relationships to form. Komin further remarked that “one wonders the extent to which one can make generalizations to cover the majority others who are outside or not bound by the power realm. To which extent the analysis of fear behind the pleasant and smooth interaction is valid, is something to be empirically investigated and proved.”⁹⁵ Mulder’s schema is helpful when examining patron-client relationships between a leader who functions through the demonstration of power or influence over his or her clients.⁹⁶

The Cultural Theme Schema

One Thai anthropologist, Snit Smuckarn, provided a different perspective for

⁹⁴Mulder, *Inside Thai Society*, 32.

⁹⁵Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 14-16.

⁹⁶In the discussion of Quadrant II of the *Bunghun* Matrix in chap 3, I will again utilize Mulder’s schema.

interpreting the Thai cultural system. Smuckarn suggested that three cultural values or themes provide one with the best framework for understanding the Thai cultural system: *sanuk*, interdependence, and merit making.⁹⁷

Sanuk, which is often translated into English as fun and enjoyment, is carried over from the individualism schema and stresses the need for all things to be enjoyable, not strict, and not disciplined. *Sanuk* also involves the idea of generosity, so others may join in the fun.

The second cultural theme is the value of interdependence. This value explains who can be trusted. Smuckarn explained, “the most dependable ‘others’ for the Thai peasant (as well as other Thais to some degree) are kinsmen, friends, and neighbors.”⁹⁸ This value is a derivation of the loosely structured system with the addition of *bunghun* to explain who are the dependable others and what constitutes good character qualities, such as gratitude, remembering favors given, repaying favors, politeness, and respect. Smuckarn explained that the *bunghun* networks might be large or small, or “complex or simple depending on the pattern of social relations and the needs and capacities of the persons in contact.”⁹⁹ An individual’s behavior differs towards those who are not dependable others.

The final cultural value in this schema is the value of earning merit. This value stresses the popular Buddhist doctrine of karma. Smuckarn reminded: “Though Thailand is a Buddhist country, the influence of Hinduism is noticeable and surprisingly strong.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Snit Smuckarn, “Thai Peasant World View,” in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, ed. Amara Pongsapich, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1998), 159-76.

⁹⁸Ibid., 163.

⁹⁹Ibid., 166.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 167.

Popular Thai Buddhism is a complementary mix of Buddhism, Hindu Brahmanism, and animism all utilized to meet various religious needs of the Thai people. This complementary mix influences Buddhist doctrine, as Smuckarn explained: “Considering the ‘chain of life’ according to the ‘law of karma’, involving former lives, the present life and life after death, it is clear that spirits or souls play a significant part in making this process possible.”¹⁰¹ The accumulation of good karma or bad karma in this life and past lives affects the future state of the spirit. Thus, Thai popular Buddhism doctrine reinforces the animistic spiritual beliefs of the people. Various Buddhist rituals and merit making ceremonies help one accumulate good karma. Additionally, good karma comes from providing assistance to others in times of need while maintaining the attitude that no repayment is necessary.

At first glance, using these three cultural themes appears to be helpful. These three themes are easier to understand for outsiders, and most Thais will readily dialogue about these concepts. However, as Komin stressed, the themes of this schema need further empirical support.¹⁰²

The *Thai Values Schema*

Komin described nine values for understanding Thai social structure and behavior. Based on two sets of data obtained from surveys of over five thousand Thai citizens, Komin provided the most extensive statistical evaluation of the Thai value system. Her analysis is multi-faceted, including analysis of the datasets along generationally, educationally, geographically as well as religious comparisons. Komin rightly commented that many of the various sociological and anthropological interpretations on the Thai cultural system lack empirical data to support their claims:

¹⁰¹Smuckarn, “Thai Peasant World View,” 169-70.

¹⁰²Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 16.

“Some are speculations, others are observations based on limited sources, while still others are bound by theoretical perspectives, the scope of coverage and level of analysis. This is by no means to refute any interpretation, but rather that many still need empirical proof.”¹⁰³

Her findings, while dated, as the datasets were collected in 1978 and 1981, are the first to be empirically tested and evaluated. The consistency of her findings across both datasets strengthens the validity of her study. The nine cultural value clusters identified by Komin are as follows:

1. Ego orientation: the rule of dignity and saving face;
2. Grateful relationship orientation: the rule of *bunghun* or reciprocity of kindness;
3. Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation: the rule of individuals over task;
4. Flexibility and adjustment orientation: the rule of the situation is more important than the task;
5. Religio-psychical orientation: the rule that rituals are community activities and spirits interact with the present world;
6. Education and competence orientation: the rule that form is more important than content;
7. Interdependence orientation: the rule of communal cooperation, especially among kin, is more important than individual desires;
8. Fun and pleasure orientation: the rule that lighthearted attitudes are better than rigidity and strictness; and,
9. Achievement-task orientation: the rule that hard work leads to achievement and success.¹⁰⁴

Ego orientation. The first and most significant of Komin’s cultural value clusters details the importance of individual dignity, for “Thai people have a very big

¹⁰³Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 16.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 133.

ego, a deep sense of independence, pride, and dignity. They cannot tolerate any violation of the ‘ego’ self . . . they can be easily provoked to strong emotional reactions, if the ‘self’ or anyone close to the ‘self’ . . . is insulted.”¹⁰⁵ The other values included in this cluster are necessary for maintaining *self’s* dignity and honor. These values include face-saving, criticism-avoidance, and *krengjai*, which in English means to be considerate of another individual or to be hesitant to impose upon another person. The importance of this value cluster cannot be understated. In fact, several of the remaining eight value clusters serve an important function as “avoidance mechanism[s] to fend off unnecessary clashed [sic].”¹⁰⁶

Grateful relationship orientation. One should not be surprised that *bunghun* is the fundamental term for this value cluster. In fact, all the terms in this cluster are related to *bunghun*. As Komin stressed, displays of reciprocity “particularly the value of being Grateful [sic] is a highly valued characteristic in Thai society.”¹⁰⁷ The terms associated with this value cluster describe the ideal characteristics of a patron and a client. Thai parents socialize their children from an early age to value and respect people who display gratitude. Gratefulness implies two aspects: *ruu bunghun*, which in English means to acknowledge and to be mindful of a favor done; and *tob thaen bunghun*, which may be understood in English as meaning to reciprocate a favor whenever an opportunity arises. Unlike other forms of reciprocity, “*bunghun* must be returned, often on a continuous basis and in a variety of ways, because *Bunghun* should not and cannot be measured quantitatively in material terms.”¹⁰⁸ Komin pointed out that some people in

¹⁰⁵Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 133.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 134.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 139.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

Thai society will use the concepts of *krengjai* and *bunghun* to build entourages for the purpose of exploitation. The system has checks and balances, as Komin clearly explained: “In fact, the Thai have strong ‘ego,’ and when the grateful relationship turns into a ‘power’ dominated relationship, the relationship becomes a ‘transactional interaction’ relationship, where [sic] there is no deep psychological bond, the ‘ego’ is kept intact and independent, and the duration of the relationship has no meaning.”¹⁰⁹

Smooth interpersonal relationship orientation. This cluster consists of “other-directed social interaction values.”¹¹⁰ The quick and friendly smiles of the Thai people, which are recognized by most visitors to Thailand, originate from the Thai peoples’ desire for social harmony. This value is expressed through one’s outward appearance, manners, and interpersonal relationship skills. Eight values compose this cluster: caring consideration, kindness or helpfulness, responsiveness to situations and opportunities, self-control or restraint, politeness, calmness, contentment, and social relation.¹¹¹ Komin’s analysis showed that this cluster of values did not vary significantly when examined across religious classification. Thus, Komin warned against attributing these values to the Buddhist doctrine of detachment.¹¹² Komin stressed that being successful in the Thai context is less about capability and more about having “a soft and polite appearance, presentation and approach.”¹¹³ The missiological importance and implications for this value cluster abound.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 142.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 143.

¹¹¹Ibid., 143-45.

¹¹²Ibid., 145.

¹¹³Ibid., 146.

¹¹⁴While some of these implications will be discussed in chap 5, others are beyond the scope of

Flexibility and adjustment orientation. Komin's fourth cultural value clusters described how the "Thai are flexible and situation-oriented."¹¹⁵ According to Komin, many Western cultures value systems, principles, and ideology over situations and relationships. However, the Thai culture values the person and the situation over systems and ideology.¹¹⁶ This difference can cause difficulty for Westerners living and working in Thailand. Suvanajata explained that Americans follow "Descartes' 'Cognito ergo sum' (I think therefore I am). . . . But, in Thai culture, 'Sentio ergo sum' (I feel, therefore, I am) is the dominant theme."¹¹⁷ Therefore, the context surrounding a given situation guides Thai interaction more than cognitive truth claims guide the process. For example, Thais attempt to determine the status of an individual because knowing that individual's status determines how one should feel during the interaction. If the individual has a higher status, then one should feel and display submission and perhaps a little fear. However, if the individual has a lower status, feelings of superiority and authority might arise. This flexible and experiential orientation has direct implications on evangelistic methodology.

Religio-psychical orientation. Religion, in particular, Thai Popular Buddhism, is an important value for the Thai people. While Komin's report showed a high level of latitudinal consistency on this value, this value is less significant among

this project. Western trained missionaries might find it helpful to understand this adage, "they do not care what you know, until they know how much you care," as it has significant import for the Thai context. Hindrances to the gospel abound and most are controllable by learning and adapting to the host culture. To name a few: dress, presentation style, flexibility on timing, volume of speech, eating habits, and eye contact.

¹¹⁵Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 161.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Suvanajata, "Thai Social System," 175.

urban dwellers and those with college degrees.¹¹⁸

Education and competence orientation. Education is a mid-level value for the Thai, as Komin explained; “Knowledge-for-knowledge sake value does not receive high value cognition of the Thai in general.”¹¹⁹ Education is more about “a ‘means’ of climbing up the social ladder.”¹²⁰ Form, the ability to develop and maintain smooth interactions, is valued over content in education. Success is not about what you know, but having “a soft and polite appearance, presentation and approach.”¹²¹ When one considers the *ego* orientation of Thai cultural system it becomes clear why external labels, degrees, specialized certifications, and endorsements are important to the Thai as these elevate one’s status.

Interdependence orientation. When Komin completed her research, the population of Thailand was predominately rural.¹²² Thus, it might not be surprising to find that Komin identified a strong interdependent value cluster: “This value orientation reflects more of the community collaboration spirits, and in a sense the value of co-existence and interdependence.”¹²³ Komin determined that this value cluster was much stronger in rural communities and included the values of unity, or community, and

¹¹⁸Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 171.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 186.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 146.

¹²²The World Bank, “Urban population (% of total),” accessed October 15, 2016 <http://data.worldbank.org>.

¹²³Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 189. Further research is needed to determine if this value cluster is still relevant. More than two decades have passed since Komin completed her research and published her finds.

mutual helpfulness. Her findings remain valid in the rural communities, but how much urbanization has influenced this cultural value set is unclear. Regarding the loosely structured debate, Komin stressed, “Regardless of the dispute, what is clear is that collaborative behavior is a dominant behavioral pattern.”¹²⁴ While the population of Thailand continues to become more urban, in Northern Thailand and its rural communities this cultural value remains significant.

Fun and pleasure orientation. Thailand is known as the *Land of Smiles* and often characterized as the place of easy going and fun loving people who are continually looking for *sanuk*, fun, and fiercely avoiding *bua*, boredom. Komin called this characterization a myth: “Empirical data show that most of this myth are [sic] not true.”¹²⁵ The data showed that those from a lower economic class ranked hard work above fun and pleasure. In contrast, the data additionally revealed that those from a higher economic stratum, in particular, government officials, preferred fun and pleasure to hard work. Komin found “that this fun-pleasure value functions as the imperative mechanism, as means to support and maintain the more important interpersonal interaction value.”¹²⁶

Achievement-task orientation. This value cluster consistently ranked the lowest of all the values and was found below the groups of social relationship values. However, the Chinese Thai granted this value cluster an intermediate range. Values such as hard work and achievement are included in this clustering. Komin reminded her readers that it is incorrect to interpret the low ranking of hard work and the other

¹²⁴Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 190.

¹²⁵Ibid., 191-92.

¹²⁶Ibid., 192-93.

achievement-task values as “abhorrence of hard work, but that in the context of Thai social value systems, hardworking alone is not enough.”¹²⁷ Interpersonal relationships are necessary for success in the Thai cultural context. Komin elaborated by comparing America with Thailand. In 1968 and 1971, Americans placed achievement value in the second and third place, while Thailand placed it in twenty-third place in both surveys. American cross-cultural workers should strive to remember that while many “Americans having task itself and professionalism as achievement goals with self-assertive efforts as means, the Thai give prestige and social recognition as goals for success in life.”¹²⁸

The fact that achievement ranked below social relationship values in both of Komin’s sample populations ought to lead Western missiologists and cross-cultural workers to take notice. Westerners who typically rank achievement and task above social relationships must consider the social implications of sharing the gospel from an achievement or task orientation rather than from a social relationship orientation. The top three values in Komin’s list stress the importance of understanding the socio-cultural climate of Thailand for those involved in cross-cultural ministry. How does one build healthy vital relationships that lead to healthy discipleship and training opportunities? Which character qualities does a culture admire and how do these qualities relate to the Word of God and the character of God? These are only a few questions that will be addressed in chapter 5.

Although Komin’s work provided a much needed, helpful, and genuinely insightful examination of Thai cultural values, a few concerns need to be noted. First, Komin’s sample showed a bias towards more highly educated urban dwellers. In the 1978 sample, 70% of the respondent sample were government officials or university

¹²⁷Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 206.

¹²⁸Ibid., 208.

students. Likewise, the 1981 sample contained 38% of the respondents who were government officials.¹²⁹ In 1981, the World Bank showed the urban population of Thailand as only 27%. However, in 2014, the urban population of Thailand had grown to 49%.¹³⁰ Komin's original analysis showed that farmers, the smallest portion of her sample, placed values of mutual assistance, reciprocity, and self-control as more important to independence, responsibility, and education. One wonders how a more consistent re-sampling across both occupation and urban versus rural context might affect the results. The second concern is similar: Komin's datasets and analysis are now more than three decades old. While one may argue that core cultural values do not change rapidly, additional research is needed to determine how Komin's nine cultural values have shifted since 1981. Despite the need for a contemporary survey and analysis, Komin's work remains the most empirical analysis of Thai cultural values and is a helpful tool for explaining and understanding the function of *bunghun* in *Khon Muang* society. In the next chapter, Komin's summary of the Thai cultural value will be employed, especially the top three values, in assisting the understanding of the function of *bunghun* among the *Khon Muang*.

Khon Muang Cultural Themes

The *Khon Muang*, while being similar to the other Tai speaking people groups, have a few distinctive differences. As Boonsanong Punyodyana reminded us, examining one village does not allow for institutional level analysis.¹³¹ In other words, the following cultural themes are adhered to by many, but not necessarily all *Khon Muang*.

¹²⁹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 150-51.

¹³⁰The World Bank, "Urban population (% of total)," accessed October 9, 2015, [http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS).

¹³¹Punyodyana, "Social Structure, Social System," 77-105.

The themes presented are general rules for understanding *Khon Muang* culture, but not every individual *Khon Muang* accepts, believes, and follows them all.

As detailed above, the *Khon Muang* practice a religion that mixes Theravada Buddhism with animistic ritual and magic. The once dominant matrilineal domestic spirit cult of the *Khon Muang* is declining in practice in the major urban centers in Northern Thailand. While one can still find *Khon Muang* women gathering at their clan shrines during April, shortly after the Thai New Year celebration, the practice is not as prevalent as it was only a generation ago.¹³² While practice among *Khon Muang* women to follow the matrilineal domestic spirit cult might be on the decline due to urbanization and modernization, the male dominant ritual of merit transference does not appear to have been similarly affected by urbanization and modernization. The trend among *Khon Muang* boys and men being ordained as novice Buddhist monks for three days, weeks, or months to make merit for one's mother or at the passing of one's grandmother remains a common practice. The length of time a boy enters the *sangha* as a novice varies from family to family. Nevertheless, most have of the boys have the same reason for becoming monks: transference of merit for their mothers or grandmothers.¹³³

Another uniquely *Khon Muang* cultural theme is the consistent practice of uxorilocal residence.¹³⁴ While modernization is affecting this practice as young couples

¹³²Davis, *Muang Metaphysics*, 54-57.

¹³³Charles Keyes, "Merit-Transference in the Karmic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism," in *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry*, by Charles Keyes and Daniel Valentine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 261-86. Keyes analyzes a 200-year-old *Khon Muang* manuscript detailing the importance of boys being ordained as novice monks to make merit and transfer that merit to their mothers. Thus, the boy improves his mother's chance of being reborn in the next life as a male who may pursue Nirvana.

¹³⁴Uxorilocal residence exists when married offspring take up residence with or near the wife's parents. Charles Keyes explained: "Each child born into a nuclear family remains a member of it at least until it is time for him or her to marry. . . . On marriage, a son normally moves into his bride's household while a daughter is expected to continue living with her parents and unmarried siblings." Charles Keyes, "Kin Groups in a Thai-Lao Community," in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society*, ed. George Skinner

often move away from their villages of birth for employment opportunities, one can still find husbands of *Khon Muang* wives living with their in-laws for at least the first few years of marriage. Likewise, it remains common for the youngest daughter, upon her marriage, to remain living in her parent's house and to be joined in that residence by her husband. This youngest daughter thus inherits the family home after her parents die.¹³⁵ The social importance of women among the *Khon Muang* is also stressed in the Lan Na traditional laws. An expert of ancient Siamese and Lan Na traditional laws, Pitinai Chaisaengsukkul explained that by law *Khon Muang* women held a much higher social status than Siamese women, who were considered property.¹³⁶

Like the other Tai speaking peoples, the *Khon Muang* stress the importance of hierarchy. The *Khon Muang* rank everyone and all things on a continuum from high to low. High, *sung*, represents things and people who are to be respected and honored. Low, *tham*, represents disrespected things or people of lower status that should be avoided. Thus, one's head is *high* and should not be touched by others and one's feet are *low* and should not be used to point at others or be shown to others. Elders are *high* and deserve the most respect; children are *low* and should be the first to show respect. Every individual has his or her "own distinctive social status and is recognized by the public, accordingly."¹³⁷ The *Khon Muang* teach their children about the dichotomy between high and low from an early age.¹³⁸ Three cultural values guide the interaction between a

and A. Thomas Kirsch, (London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 282.

¹³⁵Potter, *Thai Peasant Social Structure*, 118-46.

¹³⁶Pitinai Chaisaengsukkul, "A Comparative Analysis of the Structures and Contents of the Lanna and Siamese Kingdoms' Ancient Legal Systems," *Tai Culture* 6, no. 2 (1996): 238.

¹³⁷Ratana Tosakul Boonmathya, "A Narrative of Contested Views of Development in Thai Society: Voices of Villagers in Rural Northeastern Thailand," *Southeast Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2003): 280.

¹³⁸Akin Rabibhadana, "Clientship and Class Structure in the Early Bangkok Period," in

person with a *lower status* and someone of a *higher status*: respect, *kaorop*, to obey or to comply, *chueafang*, and consideration, *krengjai*. Giving respect, *kaorop*, refers to the utilization of the appropriate pronouns, gestures, and social protocol to honor one of a higher status or position. *Chueafang* can be translated into English as either *to obey* or *to comply with the desires of another*. I agree with Akin Rabibhadana, who argued that *chueafang* is best understood in English as “to comply with the desires or wishes of a superior.”¹³⁹ Again, *krengjai* in English means to be considerate of another and avoid causing him or her distress or anxiety. Rabibhadana rightfully asserted, “*Chueafang* and *krengjai* together imposed an obligation on the inferior not to do anything against the wishes, expressed or implied, of his superior.”¹⁴⁰ Likewise, children are taught that those of higher status also have responsibilities towards those of lower status. The assumption is those of higher status are morally superior or have more *bun* than others have.¹⁴¹ Thus, those of higher status should behave in a manner worthy of the honor, respect, and deference given to them by those of lower status. The higher status individual “should be calm, kind, generous, and protective toward them [those of lower status].”¹⁴²

Conclusions

This chapter sought to summarize the various schemas for interpreting the Thai cultural system, to summarize and contrast Theravada Buddhism with Thai Popular Buddhism, to present a brief history of the Lan Na kingdom, and discuss the unique and

Change and Persistence in Thai Society, ed. George Skinner and A. Thomas Kirsch (London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 108.

¹³⁹Rabibhadana, “Clientship and Class Structure in the Early Bangkok Period,” 103

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, 109.

major cultural elements of the *Khon Muang*. From the surveyed materials, the following conclusions may be drawn for understanding *bunghun* and its importance in *Khon Muang* culture.

First, *bunghun* relationships are established by status: either by ascribed status, as in the case of familial relationships, or by achieved status through individual acts of favor. While it has been established that *bunghun* relationships are formed by status, a more detailed description about how the *Khon Muang* maintain *bunghun* relationships remains unclear and will be clarified in the next chapter.

Second, the individuals in *bunghun* relationships have a strong psychological bond. How the underlying values control and regulate the behavior of both the patron and client has yet to be described. The following chapter will provide these descriptions.

Third, while Komin has shown that a high level of consistency exists across all regions of Thailand for the top three Thai social values, it remains unclear how these values correlate to the expected character or virtues of both parties in *bunghun* relationships. The next chapter will provide an analysis of the major themes that arose from the interviews and survey to provide more clarity to these three conclusions.

CHAPTER 3
THE FUNCTION OF *BUNKHUN* AMONG THE *KHON*
MUANG

Relationships are essential to the human experience. In question twelve, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* provided a reminder that “he [God] entered into a covenant of life with him [man].”¹ God entered into a relationship with humanity. Joe W. Bruce, a forty-year veteran missionary, stressed the importance of relationships: “Human beings have an innate desire for a relationship with God and each other. We must relate to others or we will live an emotionally and spiritually-deformed life. . . . Relationships are not only important in the emotional and psychological aspects of life, but also in work and ministry. Without meaningful relationships, we might exist, but we do not prosper.”²

The process of building relationships with nationals is beneficial for multiple reasons. These relationships provide insight into life and language. Therefore, since most relationships are not singular connections, additional avenues for relationships may open to the cross-cultural worker. These avenues allow the minister to connect with an entire network of people.³ Bruce did not provide hints or tips on how to build these relationships, but he rightly reminded missionaries of the importance and benefits of good relationships with those from the host culture.

¹Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), 390.

²Joe Bruce, “The Critical Role of Relationships in Missions” *EMQ* 47, no. 3 (July 2011): 312-17, accessed April 1, 2017, <https://missionexus.org/the-critical-role-of-relationships-in-missions/>.

³*Ibid.*

The importance of relationships is evident, but navigating the path through the intricate cultural maze of building and maintaining relationships across cultures is not as easy. Among the *Khon Muang*, the cultural system of *bunghun* is one tool available to help traverse the maze.

This chapter will discuss the function of *bunghun* and the cultural values *bunghun* maintains or regulates. First, a discussion about the function of *bunghun* relationships among *Khon Muang* is necessary.

The Function of *Bunghun* among the *Khon Muang*

Bunghun is a cultural system and as such functions to regulate and reinforce cultural values that one can observe and verify. Additionally, *bunghun* functions as a relationship starting mechanism, in particular, for relationships that form the most durable psychological bond among the *Khon Muang*.

The Matrix of *Bunghun*

One might find it helpful to think of *bunghun* relationships on a two-dimensional matrix with an x-axis and a y-axis. The y-axis measures the status of the individual, who initiates the relationship, in relation to and from the perspective of the client. On the high end of the y-axis are individuals with ascribed status by birth or social standing in relation to the client, while at the lower end are individuals who have achieved status gained through individual acts of *bunghun* towards the client. The x-axis measures the motive directing the actions of the patron from the perspective of the client and the corresponding type of *bunghun* relationship, either altruistic or self-serving. The left half of the x-axis describes virtuous patrons and affectionate *bunghun* relationships, while the right half of this axis describes manipulative patrons and instrumental *bunghun* relationships. The matrix, thus, forms four quadrants (see Figure 2). Upon this foundation, a richer description of the axes of the matrix may be built.

Y-axis. *Bunghun* relationships among the *Khon Muang* are relationships initiated by either ascribed or achieved status.⁴ This axis measures the status of the potential patron before a *bunghun* relationship begins from the perspective of the potential client. Either the potential client ascribes to the potential patron a specific status due to his or her position, title, or social standing, or the potential patron achieves the opportunity to be considered a patron by doing good deeds, or favors for the potential client.

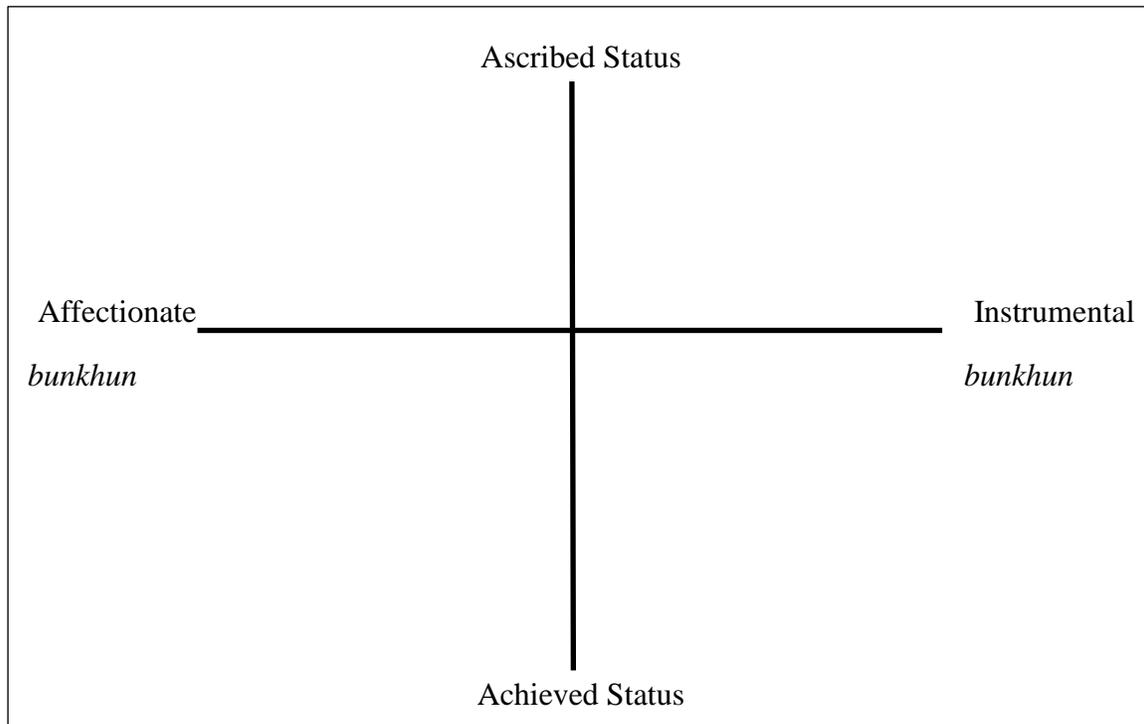


Figure 2. *Bunghun* matrix

According to a provincial director of cultural awareness and preservation:

Parents have the most and highest *bunghun*, *phrakhun* (grace) towards their children. There is no other *bunghun* that compares to the *bunghun* that we have

⁴Titaya Suvanajata, "Is the Thai Social System Loosely Structured?" *Social Science Review* 1 (1976): 181.

from our parents because they gave us life and have provided and cared for us since we were born. . . . Everyone has *bunghun* in his or her family and this is the first form of *bunghun*. After that, we live in a community with many people. . . . Concerning *bunghun*, there are many kinds. For example, if we assist others this is one form of *bunghun*. If we assist them to prosper and succeed this is *bunghun* towards the one who receives it. There must be two parts: the giver and the receiver.⁵

Bunghun relationships begin when a gift is given and, upon reception of that gift, a feeling of obligation or the need to display gratitude arises in the one who received the gift. In reality, once a *bunghun* relationship is formed the patron possesses both ascribed and achieved status.

Bunghun relationships formed from ascribed status include, but are not limited to, parents, teachers, monks, and the King of Thailand. Without exception, all those interviewed spoke of familial *bunghun*: the type of *bunghun* that all parents have toward their children. Repayment of familial *bunghun* is not limited to money, but often includes financial assistance provided to elderly family members. One may readily see the expression of gratitude of children toward their parents in Thailand.⁶ This does not mean that all children repay their parents' *bunghun* equally. The former president of a prestigious university in Thailand described this reality:

I can remember times when poor parents had sent their children to college, and when the time came for graduation, some of these students do not take pictures with their parents. They do not introduce their parents to their friends because these college students are ashamed of their parents' status. These people we call ungrateful.⁷

⁵P13, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, April 1, 2015. *Phrakhun* is the Thai word used in the Thai Bible for grace.

⁶In fact, one can commonly find newspaper articles and social media posting about children expressing their gratitude for their parents' *bunghun*. See Editorial, *Bangkok Post*, October 5, 2015, posted in Bangkok Post Facebook page, accessed November 15, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=bangkokpost+%23Thailand+%23Education+%23Father&opensearch=1>.

⁷P7, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 8, 2015. The term, "ungrateful" is an important concept and its implications will be discussed later in this chapter.

This familial *bunghun* is a lifelong obligation.⁸

Besides parents, teachers also have *bunghun* initiated via ascribed status. One such category of teacher that directly affects expatriate missionaries is the title of *ajahn*, meaning teacher, professor, or pastor. The social status of the *ajahn* usually grants him or her automatic *bunghun* from those in his or her circles of influence. Missionaries fall within this *ajahn* classification; therefore, missionaries have a social rank that should grant them *bunghun* toward their students or disciples. To garner a *bunghun* relationship, the *ajahn* should demonstrate the appropriate culturally obligated virtuous character qualities, such as generosity, kindness, and sympathy. Such virtues assist clients in recognizing an affectionate or benevolent patron, an incumbent suitable of indebtedness and gratitude.⁹ As with parents, the student or disciples cannot ever repay the benefit of knowledge, character development, and skills learned from the *ajahn*. Again, the former professor explained:

In my life, there have been so many college students that I cannot even remember them all. Sometimes they will come find me and say, “At one time, Professor you helped me.” I often say in response, “I do not remember that.” Nevertheless, they remember. I cannot remember and do not remember, but they remember.¹⁰

This continual relationship or intentionality to remember assistance provided might be confusing for some expatriates, especially when the student or disciple has reached the pinnacle of his or her professional career and surpassed the *ajahn*. William Klausner, a professor of sociology, expounded that students often continue to provide assistance, respect, and allegiance to their *ajahn* even if their actions could be misconstrued or even

⁸Suvanajata, “Thai Social System,” 181.

⁹Ibid., 180.

¹⁰P7, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 8, 2015.

detrimental to their career.¹¹

The bottom half of the y-axis represents those relationships originated through individual acts of favor or achieved status. These relationships, initially, are egalitarian in nature. Often, both parties in these relationships begin at, or near, one another in social status. The individuals might be peers, complete strangers, or opposites in social status. For example, the individual performing the favor might be younger, thus having a lower social status than the receiver. A key element of these *bunghun* relationships is the personal nature of the favor.¹² A bookstore owner in Phrae illustrated this point well:

I moved from Chiang Mai to Phrae in the year 2548 (2005). Phrae is the place of my birth, but I have lived in many places and done many things. So when I returned to Phrae, I thought to myself, “What should I do now?” Truly, I am the kind of person who likes to read books. One day I went to visit a local book rental store run by a young woman. She was quite young about 32 years old. I visited that shop often for one or so months. Then one day, the young woman asked me, “Old Sister, what do you do here in Phrae? Are you interested in opening a bookstore like this one?” I responded: “To open a bookstore uses a lot of money and I do not have that kind of money.” The young woman said: “That is no problem, I will help you.” That is what she did. She gave me books from her store so that I could rent them out while I bought and built my own inventory. We made an agreement, by her suggestion, that I would buy books from her as I had income and customers to do so. If I did not have customers for a little while, I would not buy more books from her and it was ok. In the first few months, things did not go well and I did not think I was able to make it work. During that time, she encouraged me and now I am able to have my own shop. Back then, I did not know many people in town and I had few customers, but now I know many people. This young woman is not a family member. She is not a relative. She is not someone I knew previously. However, she is someone who has *bunghun* towards me. She assisted me to build a new career, especially because the new career is something that I like also. She could have started a new shop and asked me to run it, but she assisted me to become a shop owner. Therefore, even today I think and remember her *bunghun* towards me.¹³

¹¹William Klausner, *Reflections on Thai Culture* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1993), 276.

¹²Suvanajata, “Thai Social System,” 181. Suntaree Komin uses terms like “sheer kindness and sincerity” to describe the personal nature of the *bunghun* given. Also see Suntaree Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* (Bangkok: National Institute of Development Administration, 1991), 139.

¹³P11a, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, March 31, 2015. At the time of the interview, this participant was 57 years old.

The young woman, who became the patron, began as a stranger. She did not have ascribed status in relation to the client. In fact, she had less social status because she was considerably younger than the client. This event is not an isolated testimony among those I interviewed. Complete strangers, those with less social status than even children, can build *bunghun* or give a favor that might result in a *bunghun* relationship forming. Once the client receives the favor and feels obligated to display acts of gratitude, the patron who began as a potential patron via achieved status becomes a patron with both achieved and ascribed status. All whom I interviewed claimed that anyone is capable of building *bunghun*. However, the most important factor is not the ability of the individual but his or her character and attitude:

Everyone can [build *bunghun*], but an adult who has many possessions, much time to give, and experience to share has more opportunities to build *bunghun*. However, these things are not as important as the perspective and attitude of the individual. The patron must be a generous and truthful person.¹⁴

This quote simultaneously stressed the potential for everyone to build *bunghun* relationships and exposed the need for our x-axis in order to plot the intent or motive of the patron.

X-axis. At times, when discussing *bunghun* with the *Khon Muang*, one can quickly become confused and think the entire system is built upon a logical inconsistency or fallacy. At times, the term *bunghun* is used to describe two sets of behaviors that appear utterly contradictory to one another while remaining within the realm of the system. For example, a mother of three described the two extremes of the x-axis within a few short sentences. Her description provides explanation and clearly shows her desire to help her children:

We will assist them [our children] and not think about how they are going to

¹⁴P7, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 8, 2015.

return the favor [*bunghun*]. We should not make a plan about how they will repay us and we should not talk to them and use our favors [*bunghun*] against them to cause them to do things for us. People who ask for repayment of *bunghun*, we call those people “Those who plant so that they may harvest *bunghun*.”¹⁵

Thus, it appears that more than one form of *bunghun* relationship exists. In one form of *bunghun* relationship, one should not ask or demand repayment, but another form of *bunghun* relationship exists between a patron who does a favor with the intent of gaining an advantage over the client. The *Khon Muang* use the term *bunghun* and its related vocabulary to describe a spectrum of patron-client relationships. Whether they are using the term *bunghun* in a technical manner or in a broader, more colloquial fashion is sometimes difficult to determine. When one observes Thai culture in general, one encounters and hears of *bunghun* relationships that seem righteous, redeeming, and even utopian in nature. At the same time, one might encounter and hear of other so-called *bunghun* relationships that seem manipulative, controlling, and self-serving for the patron. Both extremes are labeled *bunghun*. As with all cultural investigation, multiple perspectives may be accurate and often the reality is murky and difficult to understand. Thankfully, Larry Persons provides assistance in understanding the spectrum of intentions. In his excellent work on leadership in Thailand, Persons suggested that one think of this axis as a continuum with *pristine affectionate bunghun* on the far left side and *instrumental bunghun* on the far right side.¹⁶ Persons rightly contended: “Each approach is a fully indigenous form of patron-client behavior.”¹⁷ Affectionate or pristine *bunghun* relationships and instrumental *bunghun* relationships in their ideal expressions are the outer limits, and the motives guiding most acts of generosity fall between these

¹⁵P6, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, January 8, 2015.

¹⁶Larry Persons, *The Way Thais Lead: Face as Social Capital* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Press, 2016), 3001, Kindle.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

extremes. Persons explained, “most social exchange between patrons and clients is probably some blend of these two polar opposites.”¹⁸ Suntaree Komin additionally stressed, “Certainly, there are degrees of *bunghun* dependent largely on the subjective perspective of the obligated person, the degree of need, the amount of help, and the degree of concern of the person who renders help.”¹⁹

Movement along both axes is possible. However, before a discussion about how individuals move along an axis, a description of the character qualities and appropriate actions of the patron and client in each of the four quadrants is necessary.

Quadrant I: Affectionate *Bunghun* with an Individual of Ascribed Status

This quadrant describes the ideal, pristine form of *bunghun* with parents, teachers, and others of ascribed social status. Most discussions and conversations about *bunghun* begin by describing this quadrant. The *Khon Muang* whom I interviewed and surveyed provided ample information about this quadrant. The character qualities and behaviors expected from an ideal patron and client relationship were easily identifiable as respondents repeated the themes consistently. The patron is virtuous, and the client is grateful. At its extremities, the matrix here illustrates that which all *Khon Muang* desire in a patron and expect from a client.

The ideal affectionate patron is one with a good heart, virtuous character, and benevolent behavior. The term heart or *jai* in Thai is a vital root word for understanding personality and character qualities. When one joins other words to this word, *jai*, a multitude of character qualities emerge. For example, one who is generous has wide heart, *jaigwang*, or one who is kind has a heart of water, *naamjai*. In general, a good

¹⁸Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 3014.

¹⁹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 139.

person has a good heart, *khondii mii jaidii*. This description of character qualities is not limited to positive characteristics only. For example, one who is closed-minded or petty has a narrow heart, *jaikaep*. The affectionate patron has a generous, willing and compassionate heart.

The affectionate patron has a generous heart, as he or she does not consider the return on his or her investment. A small business owner described the character of a kindhearted patron:

Building *bunxhun* does not begin by making a plan to gain something in return. It begins in the heart; we do not think about having *bunxhun* towards that person, and that we will gain this or that. We will invest in their life, but we do not think about or plan for the return.²⁰

The generosity of the patron is such that he or she does not maintain a record of assistance provided. “They give and are satisfied,” said the provincial director of cultural awareness and preservation.²¹ Generosity is not limited to finances, for the favor or *bunxhun* given can include, but is not limited to, resource assistance, knowledge, referral, counsel, encouragement, and sacrificial use of one’s time. The words of the former university president serve as a reminder, “these things [money or possessions] are not as important as the perspective and attitude of the individual, they must be a generous and truthful person.”²²

The patron gives and provides assistance because he or she has a willing heart. His or her heart is fully prepared to aid as he or she is able. The director of the provincial office of economic advancement used Aesop’s fable of the lion and the mouse to illustrate how a truly affectionate patron should be willing to provide assistance as he or

²⁰P14b, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, April 1, 2015.

²¹P13, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, April 1, 2015.

²²P7, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 8, 2015.

she is able: “This folk story teaches us that we should be willing to help as we are able.”²³ The Thai Buddhist adage, “merit resides in the heart,” *bun yuu tii jai*, meaning merit and the desire to make merit, begins in the heart or intention of the individual and is often used by the *Khon Muang* to describe the patron who is willing and desires to assist others.²⁴ The genuinely affectionate patron notices the situations of others.

The kindhearted patron considers others and is compassionate. He is not just concerned with his own personal needs. The *bun khun* relationship begins when “one person demonstrates or gives concern and worry for the well-being of another.”²⁵ The desire of the affectionate patron, in most cases, is not simply to help once. Truly, she desires to see those whom she helps prosper and develop. This intimate concern or worry from the patron draws unfettered loyalty from his or her clients. Persons explained the truly *benevolent leader* desire for his followers to prosper and even surpass him, if possible: “leaders with moral strength consistently give honor to their associates. This extraordinary behavior demonstrates a commendable amount of trust in their associates, as well as a sense of security in their own treasures of social capital.”²⁶ This type of patron leads by showing deference and giving honor to those who are worthy. The affectionate patron with a generous, willing, and compassionate heart elicits the best from his or her clients.

The ideal client is mindful, observant, and ready to display his or her gratitude. Once a client feels indebted, he or she is careful to remember those who have provided

²³P15, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, April 2, 2015.

²⁴Among the *Khon Muang*, the word *merit* refers to all forms of good deeds, irrespective of the nature of the deed whether religious or social. All good deeds, virtuous acts make merit for the actor and are beneficial in the balance of karma.

²⁵P7, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 8, 2015.

²⁶Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 1972.

him or her with assistance. *Katanyuu*, or to be grateful, is an essential value among the *Khon Muang*. Komin explained; “The Thai have been socialized to value this Grateful (*Katanyuu*) quality in a person.”²⁷ Two aspects are involved in displaying gratitude. First, one must know and bear in mind the favor or goodness given to them; one must know, acknowledge and remember kindness given to them, *ruu bunkhun*. The wife of the local shop owner in Phrae explained: “It is kind of like historians. If historians do not write it down, we will forget about our history; but if they write it, we can remember. By this I mean that if we remember and remind ourselves about *bunkhun*, it will never end. Thus, as long as we have life, *bunkhun* will reside in our hearts.”²⁸ Clients must often think of their patron. In part, this remembrance is a means of honoring the patron, but it serves to ensure fidelity to the patron as well.

Additionally, the repeated remembering of *bunkhun* and the patron spurs the client to look for opportunities to repay or return the favor. The second aspect of *katanyuu* is to repay the favor, *tobthaen bunkhun*. At the minimum, clients will seek opportunities to demonstrate their gratitude during the Thai New Year celebration. Speaking of how remembering a patron is cyclical and enduring, an elderly woman in Phrae informed me:

[*Bunkhun* relationships exist] forever, especially if the one who gives does not think about any form of repayment, he or she thinks only about giving as a favor/merit only by helping another person. However, for the person who receives, he or she will think about and remember the giver always. During *Songkran* [Thai New Year], the receiver will come and pour out water to bless the giver. On the giver’s birthday, the receiver will come with a small gift to honor the giver and speak a blessing over the giver.²⁹

During the three-day *Songkran* celebration, most *Khon Muang* seek an opportunity to

²⁷Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 139.

²⁸P14a, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, April 1, 2015.

²⁹P12, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, March 30, 2015.

display gratitude to their patrons. Water is poured over the hands of the patron, blessings are spoken, and words of gratitude are given to demonstrate the client is mindful and remembers the *bunghun* of the patron. Repayment is not limited to *Songkran*; the *Khon Muang* will also think of their patrons and purchase small gifts and tokens of appreciation for them. When a client travels to another province, he or she will often purchase specialty products from that province as tokens of gratitude and appreciation for his or her patron. Looking for opportunities to serve is another means utilized to repay and display thankfulness. Remembering Suvanajata's assertion that Thais value experiential evidence, one should not be surprised to hear the former university president's explanation that "Thai people are often too shy to say, 'thank you.'" He further explained that they prefer to perform acts of gratitude. These acts of gratitude provide concrete evidence to the patron and encouragement for him or her to continue as a faithful, affectionate patron to the client.³⁰ Thus, a client's display of honor and thanksgiving serves to reinforce the affectionate patron's character qualities. As *bunghun* is not simply about financial assistance, observant clients build rapport and fidelity with their patrons through actively seeking opportunities to serve rather than waiting passively for a patron to request or demand assistance. This active participation allows the clients to maintain and demonstrate their *face* or endogenous worth to their patron. The individuality and self-worth of the client are protected. The *face* or individual self-worth of a Thai is an essential element of his or her value system and is strongly defended.³¹

Repayment of *bunghun* is never finished, especially affectionate *bunghun*. It is important to remember the relationship is forever. A language teacher in Chiang Mai explained: "But with *bunghun*, no matter how much we are able to provide in return, we

³⁰P7, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 8, 2015.

³¹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 133.

are unable to repay their *bunghun* in full. For Thai people, if a person has *bunghun* towards us we must remember this fact for our entire life.” This participant expounded and explained how the longevity of *bunghun* relationships extend to multiple generations, “We must remember even as far as grandchildren, everyone must remember the assistance they provided to us . . . we must tell our child and grandchildren that this person has *bunghun* towards us.”³² These reminders to the next generation are not merely about repaying the favor, but instilling cultural values. This teacher explained that the instruction to her children and grandchild included lessons about showing respect, deference to the ideas of the patron, and honoring the patron with loyalty and assistance when needed.

A persistent fear, likewise, reinforces the desire to repay *bunghun* and display appropriate gratitude among the *Khon Muang*. This fear is the fear of being labeled ungrateful, *naerakhun*. A mother of three in Chiang Mai described the following situation in her village and lamented the fact that she hears of such circumstances more and more often:

I have a situation currently in our village. I have a neighbor who has a daughter, and she is as old as my daughter. She does not respect her parents especially when her parents do not give her permission to do the things she wants to do. She swears at her parents and calls them bad names. She does this towards her grandparents as well. The other villages speak of this girl and say she is a child who is ungrateful (*naerakhun*); she does not have any gratitude or thankfulness towards others. This has caused her parents to be shamed in the sight of others in the village. This is not an uncommon thing nowadays.³³

The ungrateful person does not recognize when a favor has been given, nor does he or she acknowledge the favor. The *Khon Muang* express strong feelings of antagonism towards those who are ungrateful. An elder, from the city of Phrae,

³²P10, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 27, 2015.

³³P6, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, January 8, 2015.

explained the antagonism often felt towards an ungrateful person:

They [*Khon Muang*] will speak about how that person does not remember favors given and will say he or she will surely die because how can we helped him or her when he or she do not remember favors given? The *Khon Muang* will begin to describe that person like an animal because he or she does not act like a person. He or she is like a dog because if he or she were a person, he or she would at least remember a little bit of the help that was given.³⁴

While this fear is real, the *bunghun* system contains a mechanism for patrons to empower and encourage clients to avoid the label, *naerakhun*. All three generations surveyed displayed a tendency to agree that reminders from a patron about using a favor for its intended purpose resulted in clients feeling encouraged and having the desire to use the gift faithfully.³⁵ In this pristine affectionate *bunghun*, the patron is thinking about and seeking opportunities to empower the client. In Figure 3, the ideal patron and client have now classified.

Quadrant II: Instrument *Bunghun* with an Individual of Ascribed Status

Not all conversations about *bunghun* portray a pristine situation. Among those interviewed, some spoke of manipulation, dominance, and the use of power to control a client's behavior by some patrons. The potentially pristine relationship between a patron and his client became clouded and murky. Sometimes, the calm demeanor that characterizes most of the Tai speaking peoples becomes a thin veneer in the effort to

³⁴P12, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, March 30, 2015. During this interview the participant used two words for those who are ungrateful, *naerakhun* and *akatanyuu*. Both words carry very strong negative connotations for the *Khon Muang*. William Klausner claimed that "to be *akatanyuu*, or ungrateful, is considered one of the most reprehensible faults and sins one can be accused of." William Klausner, *Thai Culture in Transition: Collected Writings of William J Klausner* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1997), 26.

³⁵Generation 3, respondents older than 55 years old, had the strong agreement with this concept, 72 percent agreed. Generation 1, respondents younger than 35, agreed the least with only 58 percent in agreement. Generation 2, respondents ages 35 to 55, agreed only slightly higher than generation 1 at 61 percent. See appendices 11-13.

cover strong and stormy emotions. A pastor’s wife described the emotional impact for a client if he or she determines a patron has ulterior motives in giving: “[Having ulterior motives] causes the client to feel upset and not satisfied in the relationship. Perhaps even the feeling may be that our relationship is broken or changed greatly.”³⁶ The strong sense of endogenous worth among the *Khon Muang* motives both patron and client to evaluate the other’s character and motives as both strive to avoid conflict, any loss of face, or social standing.

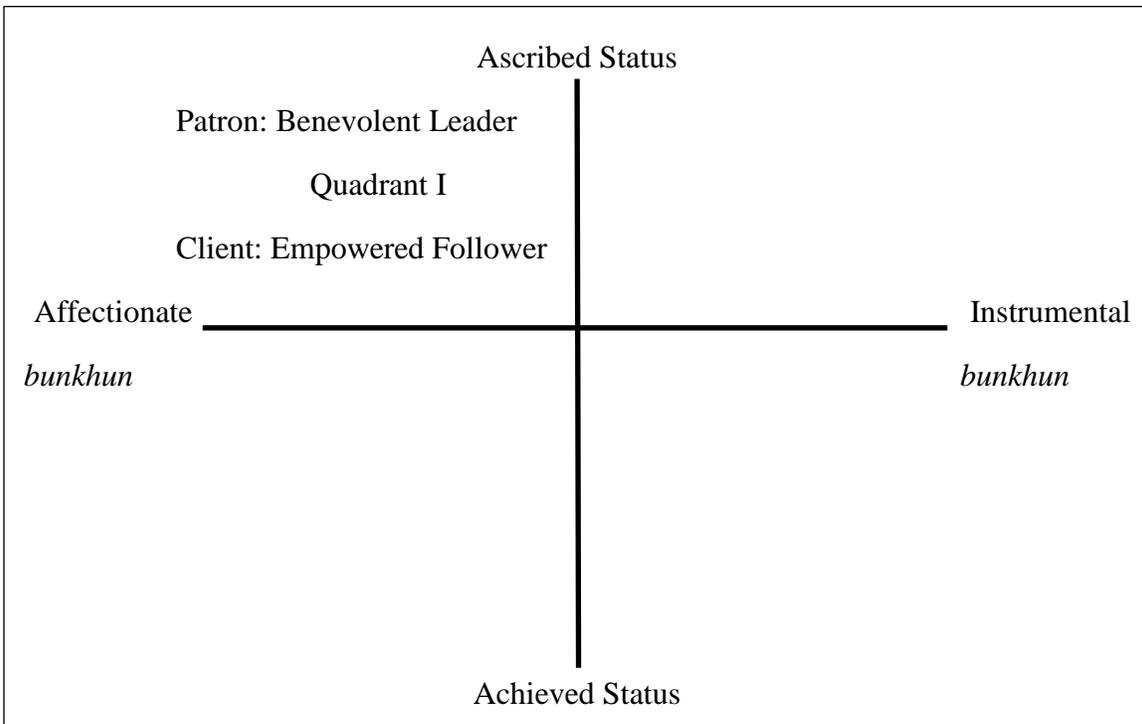


Figure 3. *Bunkhun* matrix: Quadrant I

Clients are aware that they must assess the character and virtue of potential patrons. They fear manipulation and control by an unaffectionate patron. Persons expounded that some contemporary Thai leaders “create frames of influence by

³⁶P11c, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, March 31, 2015.

manipulating the principles of *bunghun*. They draw people into their webs of control by providing assistance. Once followers become indebted to this type of ‘kindness,’ however, the leaders own them.”³⁷ Komin lamented the fact that some try to manipulate and exploit individuals through a distorted use of giving favors to build indebtedness to *bunghun*. *Ingroups*, as Komin labeled these manipulative groups, are formed and reinforced by the giving of monetary, political, or social assistance. Komin further explained that these *ingroups* are typical of gangs and are found even among some political groups. Komin quickly stressed the fact that her empirical evidence shows Thai people who are connected to an *ingroup* strive to either end the relationship or, at the least, not accrue further indebtedness. Komin’s explanation is important: “In fact, the Thai have strong ‘ego,’ and when the grateful relationship turns into a ‘power’ dominated relationship, the relationship becomes a ‘transactional interaction’ relationship, where [sic] there is no deep psychological bond, the ‘ego’ is kept intact and independent, and the duration of the relationship has no meaning.”³⁸ In other words, once a client determines that the motive of the patron is not altruistic, the client might no longer value the relationship as compared to his or her other *bunghun* relationships. All those interviewed explained that if ulterior motives became apparent, the relationship is adversely impacted.³⁹ Thus, the prudent client evaluates the virtue and character of potential patrons. The director of a provincial office of economic advancement

³⁷Persons, *The Way Thai Lead*, 3052.

³⁸Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 141-42.

³⁹Some participants explained they feel unhappy or dissatisfied in the relationship. A few explained the change in the relationship in terms of lost proximity or closeness. Yet others explained it in terms of feeling shame over because of the relationship. Some even described that the relationship might end or be broken. All participants explained that having ulterior motives was inappropriate in the concept of *bunghun* relationships. However, only one individual openly discussed that she had never encountered such a patron. These other individuals provided examples to illustrate a situation they have experienced personally or of which they were aware.

explained:

I look at the person who gives because I need to know what kind of assistance is being given and why are they giving. I look deep like this because we must know . . . will it really help or not. I look deep like this to see if it really is *bunghun* towards us or not. . . . For example, some rich people come and want to help. Many folks in town think these people are good people and have *bunghun* because they are rich and want to help. Nevertheless, some of them are not good. . . . Most people look and see that they are rich, but we do not know who they are. However, if we talk about folks in our village, everyone knows their character. However, others from outside our community, we do not know who they are, how they made their money, or why they help. This is the importance of character.⁴⁰

Besides assessing the character of potential patrons, clients might additionally examine the leadership style of potential patrons to determine if the benefactor is worthy of their gratitude and fidelity. Clients attempt to avoid authoritarian and dominating leaders. The *benevolent leader* is preferred. Finally, clients strive to avoid selfish and demanding patrons.

All patrons are leaders. Persons described the three main leadership styles found in Thai society: leadership by power and authority, leadership by influence, and leadership by meritorious and virtuous behavior. The third leadership style characterizes the patron in the first quadrant. The other two forms of leadership are characteristic of patrons in the second quadrant.⁴¹

The *power leader* has authority because of some ascribed social status, either from a rank, an office, or a title held by the leader. Persons reminded his readers that this type of leader is the easiest to envision because this leader has the authority to force compliance upon those under his power. In relationship to his clients, the Thai power or authority leader “operates from the premise that *authority alone* is enough to gain the cooperation of underlings.”⁴² This leader has instantaneous relationships because of

⁴⁰P15, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, April 2, 2015.

⁴¹Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 3052.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 1799 (emphasis in original).

position and instructional structure. In a strict hierarchal society, the entourages or *ingroups* formed around these *power leaders* are likewise impermanent. Persons stressed this impermanence: “As long as a leader maintains his position of authority, subordinates will show him respect and endure his self-centered or unreasonable behavior. But this honorific behavior can fade very quickly after he exits from the position.”⁴³ Without gracious virtue, the *power leader* lacks the ability to form stable psychological bonds and long-standing relationships with his subordinate clients.

Leadership by influence in the Thai context requires a bit of linguistic explanation. Influence, *itthiphon*, is a term that carries negative connotations in the Thai language and is often used in reference to criminals and gangs. Most *Khon Muang*, whom I know, avoid using this term. In a way, the images conjured up by thoughts of criminal masterminds and gangsters fit with Persons’ description of the influential leader because this leader controls access to resources needed or wanted by others.⁴⁴ Unlike the leader who leads by the exercise of power, and who has ascribed status from rank or position, the influential leader has built and maintained power through his own efforts. Similarly, unlike the *power leader* who has an automatic entourage, the influential leader must strive to have others join him and fall under his influence. These leaders have risen to the top and must work continually to sustain their power base. Persons described the two primary entourage building tactics of the leader by influence: “They woo them with kindness and promises of profit, and they restrain them with displays of power. In other words, these leaders want subordinates to both love and fear them at the same time.”⁴⁵ Initially, clients may rally behind these leaders because of their generosity but soon find

⁴³Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 3696-3705.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 3772.

themselves trapped by fear of the consequences of failing to comply and repay. Persons claimed that this leadership paradigm is the most prevalent form in Thailand.⁴⁶

Under both these forms of leadership, clients are compelled to express gratitude and show honorific behavior to the patron. Rather than being intrinsically motivated by the benevolent behavior of the patron, the patron extrinsically forces his or her clients to comply through fear of retribution. The extrinsic force put upon the clients often infringes upon other cultural values causing cultural value dissonance. This dissonance can cause relational conflict. First, the clients' *egos* or *faces* are damaged. The extrinsic pressure from the patron challenges the clients' endogenous worth and might result in relational conflict. Furthermore, *krengjai* and the caring and kindness values are often lacking within these leadership paradigms. The *power leader*, due to his or her position, may be less inclined to be considerate of others. These leaders set the rules and expect others to follow, without exception. The leader by influence does not *krengjai* others, instead he or she strives to manipulate and control the actions of others. Unlike the *benevolent leader*, the *power leader* and *influence leader* force compliance and may demand repayment. While the relationship between the subordinate and the leader remains, *bunghun* and its associated feelings of gratitude can vanish. In addition, over time, as the client no longer feels gratitude toward these leaders, the client might begin to search for patrons that are more appropriate. Leaders, those with ascribed status, should consider how he or she might blend a benevolent leadership paradigm with a power or influence paradigm. Better yet, a leader should consider how he or she might transform his or her leadership style to follow the *benevolent leader* model rather than following one of the other two forms of leadership in Thailand.

Inherent to both the power and influence leadership paradigms is a fear of

⁴⁶Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 3705.

subordinates gaining more power and influence than the leader. Thus, leaders have an intrinsic motivation to suppress and limit the development of their subordinates. The limitation and suppression by these leaders of their subordinates hinder the development of future leaders.⁴⁷ Thus, the client becomes a powerless follower, one fearful of crossing the domineering patron. Figure 4 now completes the descriptors for quadrant II of the *Bunghun* Matrix.

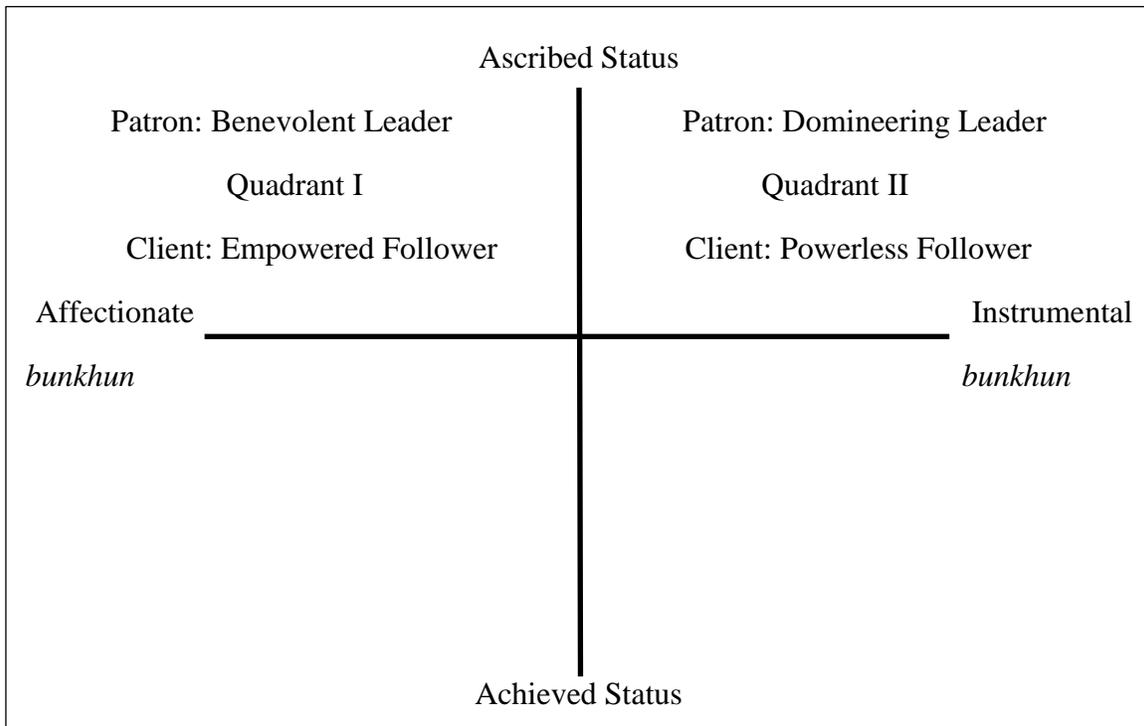


Figure 4. *Bunghun* matrix: Quadrant II

Quadrant III: Affectionate *Bunghun* via Individual Acts of Generosity

In quadrant III and IV, two essential factors guide the discussion. First, the *bunghun* relationships in these quadrants are *potential bunghun* relationships. The

⁴⁷Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 1781-91, 3763-72.

potential client must assess both the character of the potential patron and his or her own willingness to accrue the debt. Second, the character of the potential patron is assessed against the norms of quadrant I and the *benevolent leader*. While quadrant II leadership is perhaps the most prevalent leadership motif in Thai, all those interviewed spoke of the ideal patron, indicating their desire to be associated with a *benevolent leader* over a *domineering leader*.

When assistance is given or offered by a peer or a stranger, the recipient must assess the situation. When a stranger is involved, Thais are often more cautious and hesitant to accept a gift. While Niels Mulder's moral-amoral power schema best describes organizational circles dominated by power distance, it also provides insight for why potential clients assess the character of givers. Mulder explained:

Thailand is a society of rather conservative people who appreciate the predictability and quietness - the security - of a well-ordered (*riaproi*) social life to which they willingly conform; as long as people honour its rules, there is room for some tolerated individual deviation. In interaction with non-intimate persons, people most often perceive each other as potentially harmful, because real intentions are often kept hidden.⁴⁸

These hidden intentions are what potential clients fear and try to avoid, "Will this patron demand repayment?" Worse, the client must ask the question, "Will this patron try to manipulate and control my life?" Trust must be earned.⁴⁹

The *Khon Muang* know that once assistance is received, a relationship is established. The giver gains ascribed status in relation to the receiver. If the receiver feels indebted or obligated to display gratitude for the assistance provided, then the *bunghun* system is set; a *bunghun* relationship has formed. The giver becomes a patron

⁴⁸Niels Mulder, *Inside Thai Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life*, 5th ed. (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1994), 67.

⁴⁹Ulrich Kohler, "Impact of the Thai Worldview on Relationships within the Christian Church," accessed April 23, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/7771812/Impact_of_the_Thai_worldview_on_relationships_within_the_Christian_Church, 35.

and the receiver becomes his or her client. Stressing the importance of knowing what happens when one accepts *bunghun*, a noodle shop owner's wife said, "The client must think. . . . For he or she must know and understand that he or she will be indebted to that person."⁵⁰

In quadrant III, the potential client is hopeful that the giver will become a benevolent patron. The former university president shared the following story that illustrates this point:

I would like to share a story of God's *bunghun* towards me. When I went to study in the USA, I prepared to study in Stanford for my Bachelors and Masters. Stanford was prepared to give me a very large scholarship. However, I received a letter from one woman. The letter read, "My name is Helen Whilestone. My husband is Professor Frank Whilestone. In the past, Dr. Whilestone was the Fulbright scholarship director in Bangkok. I am dying of cancer and I heard that you and your wife are coming to the USA to study. I will not live much longer. I would like to invite you to come and live with my husband after I am gone." *Think about it, Khun Tom, what I am to do. This is very difficult because I did not really know them before this.* We prayed and I said, I think we should not go to Stanford and give up the scholarship and go to the University of Washington. We had no scholarship and do not know where the tuition would come from, but we must honor the woman who has written this letter. We flew to the University of Washington. We arrived in San Francisco, and my friend called to tell us that Mrs. Whilestone had passed away. After one week, we came and Dr. Whilestone received us and said, "Welcome home, son." We lived with him. After we got there, I received a scholarship, and my wife began to teach Thai language there. I received a teaching fellowship, and I took on an extra job as a janitor so we could support our relatives who wanted to come to study in the US. This is a story of God's *bunghun* towards us.⁵¹

As a young man, when he received the letter, he had no relationship with the Whilestone family. The tone of his voice revealed he still remembered the hesitation he once had about accepting the invitation. Perhaps he considered the offer carefully. In addition, perhaps he thought about questions such as: Would the acceptance of this offer and the subsequent relationship be benevolent or not? In subsequent informal dialogue with the university president, I learned that he maintains an ongoing relationship with Dr. and

⁵⁰P9b, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 9, 2015.

⁵¹P7, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 8, 2015 (emphasis added).

Helen Whilestone's children. In fact, he refers to them using the colloquial Thai pronouns for immediate family members. The *bunghun* relationship formed by Dr. and Helen Whilestone remains in place forty years after its inception. In fact, this university president regularly hosts members of the Whilestone family at his residence in Chiang Mai.

Likewise, the bookstore owner in Phrae continues to wonder why the young woman assisted her in building a new career:

This young woman is not a family member. She is not a relative. She is not someone I knew previously. However, she is someone who has *bunghun* towards me. She assisted me to build a new career, especially because the new career is something that I like also. *She could have started a new shop and asked me to run it, but she assisted me in becoming a shop owner.* Therefore, even today I think and remember her *bunghun* towards me. . . . She did not have to help me. She did not have to help me. That is her *bunghun* towards me. *Honestly, I think of her and wonder why she helped me, even when she did not know me.*⁵²

In both illustrations, the potential clients assessed the situation and determined that they were willing to accept the gift and willing to enter the *bunghun* relationship. The clients' expectation that the potential patron would, in fact, be a *benevolent leader* were well founded. The benefits of entering these relationships were positive. Moreover, the debt accrued was not beyond what they were capable of bearing. Figure 5 labels the potential patron and potential client in quadrant III.

Quadrant IV: Instrumental *Bunghun* via Individual Acts of Generosity

A small businessman in Chiang Mai shared the following hypothetical situation:

Suppose he or she (a patron) asks for assistance beyond what I am able. Sometimes he or she may ask me to come receive him or her at the airport at 3 AM, but my children are sick at the hospital. He or she may say to me, "So you cannot come, but I helped you in this or that manner." Therefore, I must have my wife

⁵²P11a, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, March 31, 2015 (emphasis added).

watch the kids and I should go receive him or her at the airport. I will do it, but I will do it without a full heart because he or she has reminded me of his or her assistance towards me. I will go, but not full-hearted. I must go because he or she has *bunghun*.⁵³

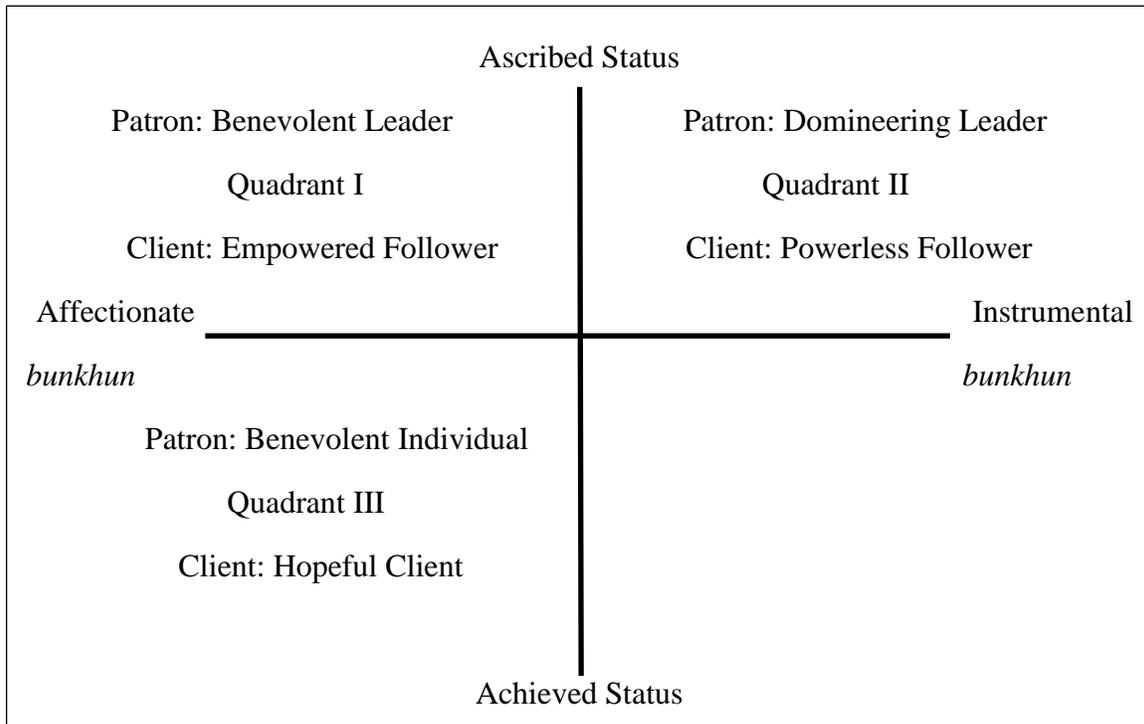


Figure 5. *Bunghun* matrix: Quadrant III

This situation illustrates a few key factors. First, the client in this situation failed to assess the character of the patron correctly. This patron twisted the principles of *bunghun* to control and manipulate the client. The patron demanded that the client repays his favor. He also lacked consideration, *krengjai*, for the client and his current predicament. The coercive individual, or potential patron, has been identified. This businessman explained he should be careful and try to avoid accepting future assistance offered by this kind of patron. The patron's true character had been revealed. Second, the client learned he was not capable of managing or repaying the patron with joy, happiness, and gratitude.

⁵³P9a, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 9, 2015.

This illustration also provides insight to the effect of challenging a client's *face* or endogenous worth. These kinds of challenges are considered unacceptable. The client in this proposed situation fulfills the obligation but might show little loyalty to this patron in the future. Persons explained: "If a certain patron does not show proper regard for the worth of a client, *saksi* [*face* or endogenous worth] can empower that client to turn on a dime and pursue a more favorable patron."⁵⁴ Perhaps Persons' vocabulary is too strong as "turn on a dime" implies that the relationship can be broken. As has been previously argued, once a *bunghun* relationship is established the relationship is rarely, if ever, broken completely. More often, the client may maintain old patron relationship with less vigor and loyalty while seeking new patrons. The relationship might remain intact, but the client feels less obligated and less loyal to the old patron. In Figure 6, the descriptors for the potential patron and client in quadrant IV have now been included.

Cultural Values *Bunghun* Maintains or Regulates

Now that the function of *bunghun* relationship has been described, a discussion about what cultural values *bunghun* maintains or regulates is necessary. The concept of being considerate, *krengjai*, is "a basic social rule" and an important cultural value that both the patron and client must demonstrate.⁵⁵ *Krengjai* influences all relational contexts in Thailand and even "cuts across all dimensions of superior-inferior, as well as intimate or familiarity-unfamiliarity relationship dimensions, even husband-wife, and close friends, observe some degree of *Kreng jai*."⁵⁶ *Krengjai* involves thinking of others and modifying one's actions accordingly. From the client's perspective, one is *krengjai* towards a patron by not imposing or causing the patron to experience troubles because of

⁵⁴Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 822.

⁵⁵Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 136.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 138.

one's behavior. A noodle shop owner in Chiang Mai explained that he might even *krengjai* his patron when certain decisions need to be made:

Yes, decisions are affected by *bunghun*, especially as I think about if my decision will cause trouble, hurt feelings, difficulties or dissatisfaction in the heart of the *phuu mii bunghun* [patron]. If he or she might be troubled, I may not make the decision, or I may go talk to him or her if I think the decision is important to my future and necessary part of my success in the future.⁵⁷

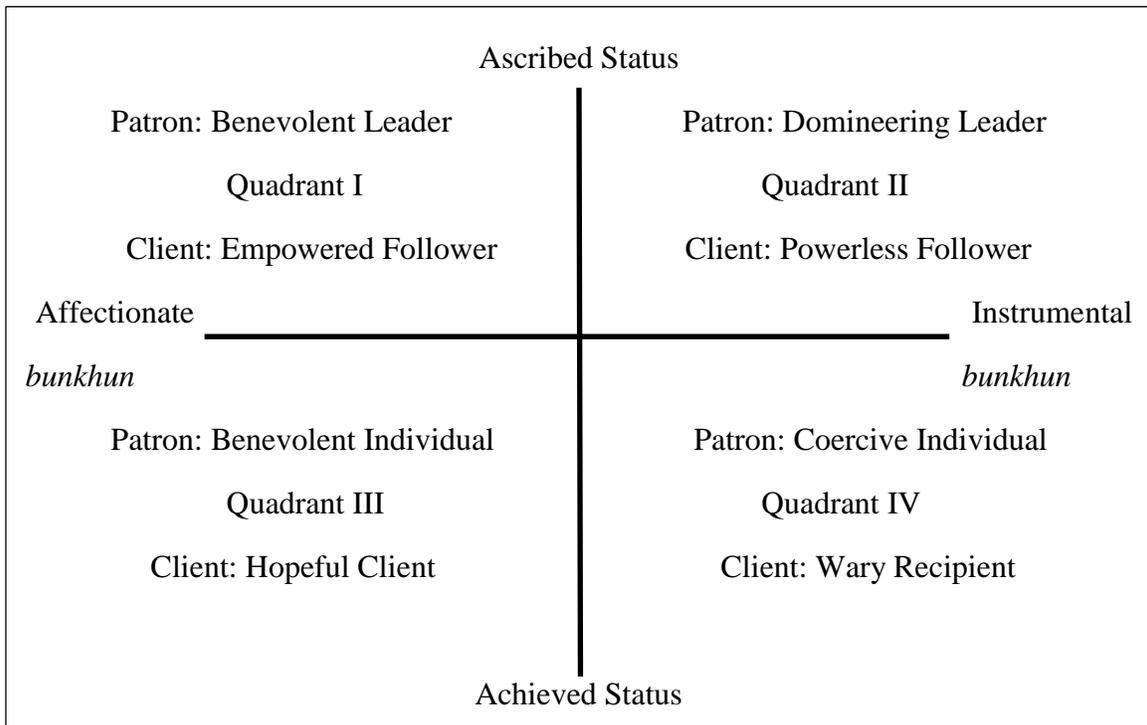


Figure 6. *Bunghun* matrix: Quadrant IV

Furthermore, some clients will *krengjai* their patrons to avoid conflict. Chanwit Yaowaritttha, in his master's thesis, argued that many Thai people rarely asked for an item or money to be returned if a patron had borrowed that item or money from

⁵⁷P17, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, November 16, 2015.

them. Participants responded that *krengjai* was the primary reason for not asking for the item or money to be returned. His study revealed that 40% of respondents would not ask for a return.⁵⁸ Among those I surveyed, 27% were unlikely to ask for money loaned to a patron to be returned. When the responses are analyzed generationally, the data reveals that the younger generation is more likely to ask for the money to be returned when compared to either of the two older generations, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Responses by age to situation 1: Demanding the return of an item from a patron

Age of Respondents	Everyone	less than 35	35 to 55	older than 55
Count of Respondents	89	37	28	18
Count of Respondents who disagree	24	6	11	6
Percentage (%)	27	16	39	33
Count of Respondents who agree	64	31	17	12
Percentage (%)	72	84	61	67

From the patron’s perspective, one is *krengjai* towards a client by encouraging the client. One means of encouragement that patrons may provide is a consistent reminder to the client of faithfulness in using the assistance appropriately. Situation 4 in the survey illustrates this fact. When a client is consistently reminded about a favor and his or her need to honor the purpose of the gift, clients tend to feel encouraged to be faithful in the use of that gift. Table 3 provides a summary of the data for this situation. Table 3 also shows that the older generation agrees more with this situation than the younger generation. Perhaps the stronger agreement to the situation by the older

⁵⁸Chanwit Yaowaritttha, “The Concept of ‘Bunkhun’ and Three Types of Speech Acts in Thai Society” (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2012), 147-48, in Thai, my translation. Yaowaritttha furthered explained if a respondent did ask for the item or money to be returned he or she selected the politest vocabulary and carefully construct his or her message to avoid conflict with his or her patron.

generation is because many of them are currently patrons. Likewise, the lower level of agreement by those in the younger generation could be an indicator of the young generation's status as clients.

Table 3. Responses by age to situation 4: Reminders from a patron

Age of Respondents	Everyone	less than 35	35 to 55	older than 55
Count of Respondents	89	38	28	18
Count of Respondents who disagree	36	16	11	5
Percentage (%)	40	42	39	28
Count of Respondents who agree	53	22	17	13
Percentage (%)	60	58	61	72

Komin summarized this basic social rule: “A Thai knows how far he should go in displaying the degree of *Kreng jai* in accordance with different persons, different degrees of familiarity, and different situations.”⁵⁹ Learning to express *krengjai* appropriately is one mechanism used by the *Khon Muang* to *save face*, or avoid conflict of *ego* or *endogenous worth*.⁶⁰ Komin explained, “Thai people have a very big ego, a deep sense of independence, pride, and dignity. They cannot tolerate any violation of the ‘ego’ self.”⁶¹ Both clients and patrons utilize the skill of *krengjai* to ensure they do not damage the ego or cause the loss of *face* of others. Likewise, Persons stressed the importance of protecting one’s face: “This keystone of face – endogenous worth – is the

⁵⁹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 138.

⁶⁰Komin uses the concept of *ego* to explain the highest cultural value, while Persons prefers the use *endogenous worth*. See Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 133-34; and Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 764-921.

⁶¹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 133.

reason many Thais strive to avoid the loss of face at almost any cost.”⁶² Persons quoted a common Thai saying and illustrated his point: “You can kill a real man, but he won’t let you despise his worth.”⁶³

Along with the skill of *krengjai*, the *Khon Muang* utilize other interpersonal skills to maintain smooth relational interaction and the associated values to maintain harmonious relations and avoid conflict and criticism. Komin listed the eight associated value sets:

1. Caring and considerate;
2. Kind and helpful;
3. Responsive to situations and opportunities;
4. Self-controlled, tolerant-restrained;
5. Polite and humble;
6. Calm and cautious;
7. Contented;
8. Social relation.⁶⁴

Commander Robert Mole, a Navy officer, summarized these values: “One of the basic tenets of Thai society is that all social relationships must be happy, pleasant, smooth, and not contain any overt conflict. Whether or not one likes another person, he is to treat that

⁶²Persons, *The Way Thai Lead*, 812.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 812-20.

⁶⁴Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 143-44. Komin explained that these values were significant for a few reasons. First, five of the eight values emerged on the Thai list, but did not appear on the American value list. Those values are numbers 1, 3, 6, 7, and 8. Second, she argued that this list has shown little variation across different social strata and over time. Third, these values are significant because Komin found no significant variation between the datasets from Thai-Buddhists and Thai-Muslims. Thus, Komin concluded that generalizing that Thai values such as *jai yen* (ใจเย็น), calmness and easy-going nature, and others are directly correlated to Buddhist doctrine of detachment, the Middle Way, and cessation of desires is unhelpful and incorrect.

individual courteously.”⁶⁵ For each of the cultural value sets, Komin provided additional words to explain and aid the understanding of the respondents. These words provide insight and clarity concerning the expected behavior between individuals in Thailand, especially between patrons and clients in *bunghun* relationships.

Caring and Considerate, *gaan raksa namjai gan*

Maintaining harmonious relationships requires caring and considerate behavior. A more literal translation of this value cluster could be “working together to maintain goodwill,” and this value implies the necessity of working together and interdependence. Komin included four additional phrases to aid her respondents to understand the value set. Those phrases are *mai chop gao rao phuu eun*, which means in English to not be offensive or aggressive towards others; *raksa namjai*, which is the English significance of to maintain kindness; *raksa kwaam samphan*, which means in English to maintain relationships; and *maithreejit*, which in the English signifies showing sympathy and unity. Each phrase describes specific behaviors both patrons and clients should practice or avoid.

Both patrons and clients should be individuals who do not like to be offensive or aggressive towards others, *mai chop gao rao phuu eun*. By not pressuring or demeaning the client for his or her form of repayment, the patron is not offensive towards his or her client. The client who remembers the favor given shows proper respect, gratitude, and thinks of his or her patron when making decisions and does not offend. Some *Khon Muang* will consider the feelings of his or her patron when making life decisions. A Thai language teacher explained:

⁶⁵Robert Mole, *Thai Values and Behavior Patterns* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1953), 54.

Yes, they [*Khon Muang* clients] think about how their decision will affect the *phuu mii bunkhun* [patron]. If the result of the decision will cause the *phuu mii bunkhun* to feel unsatisfied, upset or troubled in any manner the client will decide on the opposite side or if the decision is major, they will go talk with the *phuu mii bunkhun* to explain why they need to make the decision. . . . Normally, we will try to *krengjai* and not involve the *phuu mii bunkhun* in the decision, but we will think about them in the process of deciding.⁶⁶

Maintaining good relationships is essential to the *Khon Muang*. Thus, *raksa namjai*, and *raksa kwaam samphan* are important values. These words are built by adding descriptive words to the root word, *raksa*, which translates in English as to maintain. The first descriptive word may be translated as kindness, *namjai*; the second descriptive words may be translated as relationship, *kwaam samphan*. Thus, these phrases imply everyone should work to maintain kind, compassionate, and caring relationships.

Khon Muang society is what Duane Elmer, a professor of international studies, classified as a collectivistic culture.⁶⁷ As a collectivistic culture, maintaining unity and harmony within the social group is vital to the *Khon Muang*. Thus, showing sympathy and working to maintain unity and harmony are essential, *maithreejit*. A patron shows sympathy towards others by generously assisting others. Moreover, clients strive for unity and harmony with their patron by seeking opportunities to return the favor, displaying gratitude, and joining the projects or tasks of their patron.

Kind and Helpful, *kwaam mii namjai maetha arii*

Generosity, helpfulness, and sympathy towards others are values that are essential to *bunkhun* relationships. Included in this cultural value are three phrases: *mii jai eua feua peua pae*, which in English means to have a generous heart; *hen ok hen jai*,

⁶⁶P16, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, November 16, 2015.

⁶⁷Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting in Around the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 133-41.

which is the English significance of to have sympathy and compassion; and *prom tii ja hai kwaam chuay leua phuu eun*, which in English indicates one should be prepared to aid others.

Willingness to assist is essential for the *bunghun* system to work. Both patrons and clients need to understand the need for generosity and have a willingness to assist. The interviewees all said that a patron must have a heart willing to provide assistance; this is an appropriate understanding of *mii jai eua feua peua pae*. A client should be looking for opportunities to return the favor. Along with looking for opportunities, the client should have a heart always prepared to return the favor whenever an opportunity arises. The client must be one prepared to provide assistance to another; this is an acceptable explanation of *prom tii ja hai kwaam chuay leua phuu eun*.

Being generous and prepared to provide assistance are good character traits; these cultural values go beyond generosity for charity's sake and include an element of compassion or sympathy, *hen ok hen jai*. The benevolent patron shows concern and worry for his or her client and notices what the client truly needs. The client returns sympathy by carefully observing the patron and aiding in an area that the patron values. A young Thai Campus Crusade staff member explained: "I will most likely not take him or her to buy things, but whatever I see that is a value to him or her and I will help him or her with that. I will be watching to see and am ready to repay him or her."⁶⁸ Kindness, *namjai*, might easily be confused with *krengjai*. However, the two can be classified easily. One demonstrates *namjai* by taking the initiative to demonstrate consideration for another. One shows *krengjai* in just the opposite by restraining or restricting one's behavior or expressions.⁶⁹

⁶⁸P21, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, January 4, 2016.

⁶⁹Henry Holmes and Suchada Tangtongtavy, *Working with the Thais: A Guide to Managing in Thailand* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995), 53.

Responsive to Situations and Opportunities,
gaan brap tua kawgap jangwat lae
singwaetlawm

Flexibility and the ability to avoid rigidity in relationships are important to the ebb and flow of life in Northern Thailand. Komin described this cultural value with the following word phrases: *alum aluay*, *pawn nak pawn baw*, and *prom tii ja brap tua tham galataesa lea ogaat*. These three phrases all relate to the manner in which one should manage and deal with opportunities that arise in life.

First, *alum aluay* directly translates in English as to compromise. However, this word is used in situations where someone with authority to impose, or enforce a rule, compromises and gives in to the weaker individual. In *bunxhun* relationships, this word describes a situation in which a patron compromises by not demeaning or imposing upon the client. He or she bends a rule or elects not to enforce a sanction to aid or assist the client.

Second, *pawn nak pawn baw* is also translated in English as to compromise. However, this compromise is used in work circumstances. One should not work too hard or too lightly. The worker should find a middle way that allows the work to be accomplished without much stress or burden. A client must strive to find the middle ground of repaying the patron. The client should not repay in manners or via means that force himself or herself to be too heavily burdened; at the same time, he or she should do enough to display true gratitude. Too little is not good enough and too much is a burden no one wants to carry.

Finally, *prom tii ja brap tua tham galataesa lea ogaat* which in English has the meaning of to be prepared to change and follow the most appropriate situation. Both the patron and client display flexibility by being willing and able to make the most of the opportunities that arise. Clients apply this value when they watch for opportunities to aid their patrons and to provide them with unique gifts. The *Khon Muang* will often buy specialty items from a different province because their patron likes those items. This is

especially true when the *Khon Muang* travel. They will purchase small specialty items from that area to bring back as gifts. Making the most of unplanned for opportunities builds rapport, trust, and honor among patrons and clients.

**Self-controlled, Tolerant-restrained,
*gaan bangkhap tuaeng***

Self-control is highly valued among the *Khon Muang*; strong emotional outbursts are uncommon. Even small outbursts or reactions such as changes in facial expression or body language are quickly perceived and interpreted by the *Khon Muang*. Adults and leaders in *Khon Muang* society must learn the art of self-control by mastering the display of a relaxed and calm demeanor. Komin provided two descriptive phrases to aid her survey participants, *bang khap kaem nguat gap tua ang*, which in English means to strictly control oneself, and *mii kwaam oat ton tau tuk yang*, which has the English significance of having tolerance or patience in all circumstances. In all circumstances, the ideal patron should be patient and tolerant of how and when the client repays them. To ask or demand a favor to be repaid is intolerant and all interview participants agreed this was inappropriate behavior.

Polite and Humble, *kwaam suuphap*

Like the other Tai speaking peoples, the *Khon Muang* appreciate expressions of politeness. Politeness is not only shown in words, but also in dress and gestures. Learning to perform the quintessential Thai greeting, called the *wai*, correctly is essential if one desires to be polite and display appropriate humility.⁷⁰ Komin described politeness

⁷⁰The *wai* is a form of bow. The individual of lower status or age greets the superior by placing his or her hands together in a prayer like fashion. The tips of the index fingers typically rest just below the nose and then a smooth bow from the waist is performed. To show more honor, deference and respect to an individual one may bow deeper or place the tips of the index fingers higher on the face. Thais typically consider it rude and impolite to bow too quickly or not to face the other individual squarely when one bows.

with these three phrases: *niyom kwaam suphap onyon*, which in English means to appreciate polite behavior; *tom ton*, which translates in English as to act modestly; and *phuu mii maryat lae atchaasai dii*, which in English means a person who has good manners and politeness. Komin summarized: a “polite and humble approach is very important for the Thai, since it soothes one another’s ‘ego’ . . . a successful personality in the Thai cultural context, [sic] is often one of competence and substance, but most important of all, has to have a soft and polite appearance, presentation and approach.”⁷¹ Potential clients examine the character of potential patrons looking for this soft and polite approach to life.

Calm and Cautious, *gaan mii arom sa-ngop lae kwaamsamruam*

The calm demeanor or indifference to circumstances in Thai society most likely has some correlation to Buddhist doctrine. However, conclusions that oversimplify the situation by only using Buddhist doctrine fail to explain why Komin found consistency across religious groups in Thailand for the top eight value sets related to techniques used to maintain smooth relationships. Komin rightly warned against oversimplifying and generalizing, “It is true that Buddhist doctrines provide great appeal because of their simplicity and face validity. But to cite them to support any observed behavior should be done with great caution, lest it can be very misleading.”⁷² Likewise, if conclusions like these were valid, then one could assume that the Buddhist doctrine of detachment should additionally affect Thai society by moving away from a materialistic and status-driven society. The doctrine of detachment has not seemed to influence these other sociological categories. So, why do some conclude the calm demeanor of the Tai

⁷¹Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 146.

⁷²Ibid., 145.

speaking people of Thailand is the result of this doctrine?⁷³ If one explains the calm and controlled demeanor from the perspective of saving face, avoiding conflict, and maintaining smooth relationships, then this value explains a broader set of circumstances than when interpreted as a result of Buddhist doctrine.

Komin used three words to explain this value, and when this value set is applied to patron-client relationships one can gain a richer understanding of *bunghun* and smooth relational skills. The first word is *jaiyen*, which translates in English as to be calm or cool under pressure. Outward displays of impatience, frustration, and anxiety are behaviors that are the opposite of *jaiyen*. Patrons must not outwardly display dissatisfaction with clients, and clients should always seek not to burden their patrons. A burden might lead a patron to lose control, resulting in both parties losing *face*, or endogenous worth. The patron loses *face* for losing control of his or her temper, and the client loses faces for being the cause of the problem. The second phrase, *gep arom kwaam ruusuk nuek kit*, which has the meaning in English of maintaining control of one's feelings and emotions, identifies the manner in which one develops *jaiyen*. One must work at control, and its reward is a cool spirit or calm demeanor. The final phrase, *sukum ropkop*, is a pair of words that both translate to English as to be careful. Thus, when combined, these words are best understood as meaning to be extremely careful. The idea for this pair of words is that both patrons and clients must always be careful to avoid causing a burden, dissatisfaction, or loss of *face* in the relationship.

⁷³Juree Namsirichai and Vicharat Vichit-Vadakan argued that many foreign led research projects about Thai culture and values have failed to utilize indigenous terms and concepts to draw their conclusions. Thus, generalizations and poor methodology has resulted in inconsistent conclusions. Additionally, Namsirichai and Vichit-Vadakan argued that many expatriate scholars have applied a homogeneous perspective to Thailand rather than functioning from the reality that Thailand is quite heterogeneous culturally. This homogenous assumption has led some to conclude the Buddhist doctrine of detachment is the best explanation for the common Thai value of having a calm and control demeanor. Furthermore, these authors explained the irrationality of applying the Buddhist doctrine in some but not all facets of life. Juree Namsirichai and Vicharat Vichit-Vadakan "American Values and Research on Thailand," *Modern Thai Politics* (1979): 419-35.

Contented, *gaan bramanton law rak sandoot*

Contentment is another value that is sometimes attributed to Buddhist doctrine, in particular, the doctrine of *karma*. At times, Buddhists of Southeast Asia express belief in a form of fatalism. Sometimes *Khon Muang* speak of a wealthy, powerful, or famous person's status as being the result of his or her good *karma*. Likewise, the *Khon Muang* speak of the present state of poor people, disabled people, and others with low social standing as suffering the results of their bad *karma*. Whether this common verbiage is connected to the Buddhist doctrine or if it is an easily spoken euphemism, is unknown to the author and is beyond the scope of this study. Komin provided two terms that aid one in understanding this value set. First, the Thai value the ability to accept one's status or condition in life, which is the English significance for *yom rap sapap tii jing kong ton*. A small business owner in Chiang Mai spoke of the client's need to assess oneself and determine if the assistance of a patron is truly needed. His comments dealt directly with a client's ability to take on the responsibility of the indebtedness, as this is part of the self-assessment and knowing one's true condition.⁷⁴ Self-assessment is not limited to clients. A potential patron must assess if he or she is willing and able to provide the right type of favor or assistance to one in need. Additionally, a patron must assess if he or she has the capacity to aid a new client before assistance is offered. Second, contentment in the Thai context means being satisfied with the possession that one owns, which is the English meaning of *ruam tang po jai nai sing tii ton mii yu*. The cost involved in maintaining a *bunghun* relationship is high. Thus, people do not commonly seek new patrons or actively pursue assistance unless they are truly in need.⁷⁵

⁷⁴P9a, interview by the author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, January 9, 2015.

⁷⁵Financial debt from the banking industry is common and easy to obtain. Additionally, defaulting on a loan does not carry the social stigma of being ungrateful in Thailand.

Social Relation, *kwaamwangkhwang nai sangkhom*

At first glance, this value set might seem out of place as all the values are dealing with smooth relationship skills. This value set, however, is about having a good reputation and being well received by the broader social context. The two explanatory terms provided by Komin clarify this concept. The first explanatory phrase is *mii manut samphan tii dii* which has the English meaning of one who has good human relationships. Then, one should be known by many and well received in society, which is the English significance for *ruu jak khon maak ben tii yom rap nai sangkhom*. This value set relates directly to the concept of *face* as described by Larry Persons. Fame, or being well known, in Thai society is a helpful element for being an effective leader.⁷⁶

Komin expounded that the central theme of these Thai-culturally laden values is the concept of caring for and protecting the feelings and ego of another. She explained that when these values are coupled with *krengjai*, one can understand both the cognitive and practical aspects of *saving face*. Cognitively, *krengjai* provides the base concept for *saving face*. And practically, the interpersonal skills connected to the *social smoothing values* explain how one is to behave. For example, one knows that at all times he should not hurt another person's feelings or ego, the cognitive element of *krengjai*. Thus, he should not criticize, demean, or reject kindness or favors offered by another person: the practical *how-tos* of appropriate interpersonal skills. This avoidance of demeaning behavior extends and includes acceptance when one's own feelings are imposed upon by another. Thus, one should be caring, kind, self-controlled, and polite despite the imposition. Likewise, while he or she may disagree with the idea, solution, or is inconvenienced by the assistance of another, this disagreement does not give him or her the entitlement to hurt another's ego by rejecting or speaking harshly. Thus, he or she

⁷⁶Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 289-1109.

demonstrates the tolerant-restrained, humble, contented, and social relation values.⁷⁷ The strong interdependent nature of *Khon Muang* society additionally reinforces these behaviors and their associated values.

The Theory and Conclusions

Bunkhun is a cultural system that maintains social smoothing values and skills, reinforces traditional ideas about the ideal character qualities of both a patron and a client, and regulates the relationships between a patron and a client among the *Khon Muang*. In other words, *bunkhun* is a cultural system which functions to maintain, reinforce and regulate behaviors, traditional ideas, and the underlying cultural values. Utilizing the responses of the interviewees and participants of the survey, this chapter sought to describe how *bunkhun* functions among the *Khon Muang*. Additionally, this chapter sought to describe the cultural values *bunkhun* reinforces and regulates. From the analysis of the interviews, surveys, and the salient literature the following conclusions may be drawn.

First, while *bunkhun* relationships may form via ascribed status or individual acts of favor, the *Khon Muang* attempt to assess the character of the giver along with his or her motives for providing assistance. The *Khon Muang* desire to form *bunkhun* relationships with a benevolent and virtuous individual. Thus, identifying the character qualities the *Khon Muang* consider benevolent and virtuous is essential. Those characteristics include a willingness to sacrifice one's resources to benefit others. Resources are not limited to finances, but also includes time, knowledge, relational connections, advice, and encouragement. A benevolent and virtuous individual also looks for opportunities to utilize his or her resources to assist others. He or she does not wait for others to come asking for assistance, but actively seeks the improvement and

⁷⁷Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 145-46.

development of others. A virtuous person is a servant leader. Finally, the virtuous individual cares for the wellbeing of others. He or she is compassionate and is concerned about the wellbeing of others.

A second conclusion may be drawn from the theme of having virtuous character. Being an individual with virtuous character and behavior is not limited to the potential patron; clients are likewise to demonstrate certain virtuous character qualities. Clients are first and foremost to remember goodness and kindness given to them by their patrons. Honoring one's patron requires being mindful of grace given. Similarly, clients should actively seek opportunities to return the favor through involvement in projects and tasks of their patrons. Seizing such opportunities are not a means to escape the debt of *bunkhun*; rather, the involvement serves to strengthen the bond between client and patron. Finally, virtuous clients display gratitude to their patrons willingly, readily, and often. For the *Khon Muang* actions speak louder than words. Virtuous clients seek opportunities to honor their patrons, join the labors of their patrons, and display thanksgiving to their patrons. All these elements require more than words.

Third, understanding the primary leadership models in Thai society is very important. The cultural biases of expatriates living and working in Thailand need to be assessed. When I came to Thailand, I thought that gaining influence was an essential element of effective leadership. I believed building trust and rapport would open opportunities for me to influence the lives of those living in Southeast Asia. Building rapport and trust remain an essential element for ministry. However, I avoid speaking in terms of *influence*. Terms such as equipping, training, empowering and developing others are much more appropriate among the *Khon Muang*. All these concepts might be related to influence. However, as the Thai word for influence, *itthiphon*, carries such a negative connotation among the *Khon Muang*, I have learned to lead differently. Adaptation is essential. Cultural adaptation requires an intentional focus on language and cultural learning.

Another conclusion that may be drawn from the analysis of the interviews, surveys, and literature is the importance of smooth relational skills among the *Khon Muang*. If my language teacher and various authors who have argued that *bunghun* is perhaps an essential cultural theme for understanding how the Tai speaking people relate are correct, then learning the relational skills for maintaining smooth and harmonious relationships outlined in this chapter are essential.

Building and maintaining relationships in an intercultural context is difficult, much like navigating a maze. However, among the *Khon Muang*, the *bunghun* system and its related cultural values provide cultural outsiders several valuable points in which to learn and apply. Now, an investigation surveying what the Bible teaches about patronage follows.

CHAPTER 4
A SELECTIVE BIBLICAL SURVEY OF GOD AS
PATRON

The Bible has many passages that evoke imagery of God’s care, concern, compassion, governance, protection, and provision for his creation. One such passage is Psalm 146. In Psalm 146, the Psalmist described how blessed is the man whose help and hope are from God. As support for this declaration of blessedness, the Psalmist exalted several attributes of God: God as Creator, God as Savior, God as Benefactor, God as Sovereign Lord, God as Father, and God as King. While the ESV translated עֲזָרָה (*ezer*) as *help*, the THSV11 translated this word as ผู้อุปถัมภ์ (*phuuubatham*), which can be translated as *patron* in English.¹ The Thai translation of patronage in this passage enriches the imagery of God as a benevolent patron.

This Psalm alone provides ample description of God as the benevolent patron. God is the patron of creation. This Creator God made the heavens, the earth, and the seas along with all the creatures that dwell in the various eco-systems. This Creator is faithful to keep and maintain his promises (Psalm 146:6). This declaration of the patronage of God alone should be enough to dispel our fears, as John Calvin assured, “there is in this first ascription, then, a commendation of his power, which should swallow up all our fears.”² While Calvin’s declaration is true, the Psalmist goes on to expound upon the greatness of this God of patronage.

¹See James Swanson, *DBL Hebrew*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997) s.v. “6468 עֲזָרָה (*ā-zār*).”

²John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 5:288.

In verses 7 and 8, the Psalmist described God as Savior and Benefactor. God saves the oppressed from their persecutors, releases the prisoners and gives benefactions of food, support, and healing to the suffering. Calvin explained that these benefactions of God might go beyond the physical release from prison and opening of blind eyes to include aspects of release from anxiety, confusion, and gloom.³ The benevolent patron God cares for the entire person: in all physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects.

In verse 9, the Psalmist describes God as Father-like. Like a benevolent, loving father who protects his children, God stretches forth his arms to help those in distress. Most people might readily show favor to those known and near to them; however, God extends protection to those who are exposed to the wickedness and unrighteousness of others, particularly the sojourners, widows, and orphans.⁴

In verse 10, the Psalmist praised the eternal reign of God as King and Sovereign Lord. This verse encapsulates the entire pericope of verses 5-10. Whether in distress or peace, those who hope in the patronage of God are truly blessed. They shall be under the guard, protection, and provision of the Benevolent Patron God, who is the Creator, Savior, Benefactor, Sovereign, Father, and King.

A rich body of scholarly anthropological and historical studies on the patron-client systems in Greece and Rome already exists, and an examination of these studies is beyond the scope of this study.⁵ Jerome Neyrey provided an interesting framework for

³Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 5:288-90.

⁴Ibid., 5:290-91.

⁵See John Elliott, "Patronage and Clientage," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 142-56; Steffen Schmidt, et al., eds., *Friends, Followers and Factions. A Reader in Political Clientelism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Shmuel Eisenstadt and Lius Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends: Interpersonal Relations and the Structure of Trust in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury, eds., *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977); Richard Sailer, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (London:

exploring the titles assigned to a patron during the Greco-Roman era as an aid to understanding the character of God. Neyrey's investigation of Greco-Roman primary sources revealed six titles assigned to a patron, human or deity, that are also utilized in the New Testament as titles for God. From these sources, Neyrey described God as Patron using the following six titles: King, Father, Savior, Benefactor, Creator, and Sovereign/Lord. Neyrey argued that one gains a richer understanding of the relationship between God and humanity when the New Testament is read and understood through a socio-cultural lens of patron-client relationships.⁶ Neyrey did not extend the use of these titles to Old Testament passages as that would have been beyond the scope of his analysis and thesis.

When one turns his or her attention to Old Testament scholarship in the area of models of exchange, one finds that research exists, but the studies are not as abundant in comparison to the New Testament. However, several scholars have investigated the importance of patronage among ancient Near East cultures.⁷ Among these scholars, no consensus exists about what model of exchange best fits the ancient Near East and Israelite cultures. Professors of Old Testament Raymond Hobbs, Niels Lemche, and

Penguin, 1990); Frederick Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St Louis, MO: Clayton Publishing House, 1982); Bruce Malina, *The Social World of Jesus* (London: Routledge, 1996), 143-75; and David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁶Jerome Neyrey, "God, Benefactor and Patron: The Major Cultural Modal for Interpreting the Deity in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *JSNT* 27, no. 4 (2005): 465-92.

⁷T. Raymond Hobbs, "Reflections on Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations," *JBL* 116, no. 3 (1997): 501-3; Niels Peter Lemche, "Kings and Clients: On Loyalty between the Ruler and the Ruled in Ancient Israel," *Semeia* 66 (1995): 119-32; Niels Peter Lemche, "From Patronage Society to Patronage Society," *JSOTSup* 228 (1996): 106-20; Ronald Simkins, "Patronage and the Political Economy of Monarchic Israel," *Semeia* 87 (1996): 123-244; Zeba Crook, "Reciprocity – Covenantal Exchange as a Test Case," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. Philip Esler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 78-92; and Philip Esler, "2 Samuel – David and the Ammonite War: A Narrative and Social-Scientific Interpretation of 2 Samuel 10-12," in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context*, ed. Philip Esler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 177-91.

Ronald Simkins argued for the use of a patron-client exchange model for understanding social exchange in the Old Testament. However, Professor of Religious Studies Zebra Crook disagreed and contended that the best mode is a covenantal exchange model. Crook modified Sahlin's idea of generalized reciprocity and titled it asymmetrical reciprocity. Crook argued that all generalized reciprocity requires an asymmetric or unequal social status between the benefit giver and the receiver. Furthermore, Crook explained that patron-client exchange and covenantal exchange are both forms of asymmetrical reciprocity. The difference, according to Crook, is patron-client exchanges are voluntary.⁸ The parties are under no former or legal bond to maintain the exchange relationship. However, this is not true of covenantal exchanges. Crook explained the first characteristic of a covenantal exchange is "a formal and legally binding oath."⁹ Finally, Philip Esler, a professor of New Testament, provided a synthesis of the various models in an attempt to find a middle ground and argued that the use of patronage vocabulary remains helpful for understanding Israel's relationship with God.¹⁰

While none of the Old Testament scholars followed the same procedure as Neyrey, and an investigation of ancient Hebrew and Greek literature is outside the scope of this project, expanding and applying Neyrey's framework to the entire Bible may prove beneficial to understanding the patron-client relationship between God and humanity. First, this chapter will survey Old Testament and New Testament passages following the six titles provided by Neyrey. The biblical passages selected were chosen because the section exemplifies the six epithets of God, the frequency of occurrence of

⁸Crook, "Reciprocity – Covenantal Exchange as a Test Case," 82-84.

⁹Ibid., 84. While no formal or legal binding oath exists in *bunghun* relationships, Komin clearly demonstrated, a "psychological bond" maintaining and reinforcing the patron-client exchange exists. See Suntaree Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* (Bangkok: National Institute of Development Administration, 1991), 136.

¹⁰Esler, "2 Samuel – David and the Ammonite War," 177-91.

the appellation in the pericope, or the descriptive richness provided in the passage concerning the particular title. For example, while the epithet of King is ascribed to God more often in the book of Psalms, Jeremiah 10 was selected for the epithet of King in the Old Testament because this pericope provides perhaps the best description of God, the Patron King. Second, this chapter will describe the types of benefactions that God provides under each of the six titles. Finally, this chapter will explain some appropriate forms of response that clients should display toward their Patron God as implied in the passages surveyed.

God, the Patron King

The Kingdom of God is a significant theme in the Scriptures, particularly in the four Gospels.¹¹ However, God is rarely titled King in the Bible.¹² In Jeremiah 10, the prophet called the children of God away from idolatry toward faithfulness to their God. In his commentary, F. B. Huey explained that Jeremiah 10 “contains a stinging rebuke of the folly of idol worship alternating with contrasting words of praise for the incomparability of God.”¹³ This incomparable God is King of the nations (v. 7) and everlasting King (v.10). Jeremiah called Israel to avoid learning the customs and practices of the other nations, and not to fear them (vv. 1-5). Jeremiah based his plea for Israel to reject idolatry upon the character of God. Jeremiah anchored his plea on

¹¹Ps 45:6; Isa 37:6; Dan 6:26; Matt 6:33; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43; Mark 1:15; 4:11, 26, 30; 9:1, 47; 10:14-25; 12:34; 14:25; 15:43; Luke 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10; 9:2, 11, 27, 60, 62; 10:9-11; 11:20; 13:18-29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20-21; 18:16-29; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16-18; 23:51; John 3:3-5; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:32; 28:31; Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:24-25, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5 (of Christ also); 4:11; Col 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 1:5; and Rev 1:6; 5:10; and 12:10.

¹²Deut 33:5; 1 Sam 8:7; 12:12; Pss 5:2; 10:16; 24:7-10; 29:10; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; Isa 6:5; Jer 10:10; Matt 5:35; 21:5; 25:34, 40; Mark 1:15; John 1:49; Acts 17:7; Rev 15:3.

¹³F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC, vol. 16 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 124.

theology, that is, the identity, character, and works of God.¹⁴

Jeremiah described the power, uniqueness, and greatness of this everlasting King in verses 6-10. No one compares to this King of the nations: no human, no other deity, and no idol (vv. 7-8). Jeremiah spoke of these idols being crafted from the highest quality silver and gold and clothed with skillfully crafted violet and purple garments (v. 9). Huey explained that in ancient times “blue and purple were reserved only for the most expensive garments and usually for royalty.”¹⁵ However, in verses 10-11, Jeremiah described in elegant simplicity the contrast between the living God and the gilded idols. God is truth, while the idols are fabrications. God lives, while the idols are lifeless. God is the everlasting King, but the idols will perish.¹⁶ This Patron King is unique.

Jeremiah continued his critical assessment of idolatry in verses 12-16. In these verses, Jeremiah focused on the powerlessness of the idols and the absolute power of the everlasting King. By his voice, God controls all his creation (vv. 12-13). Indeed, those who worship anything other than this King are foolish and shameful (v. 14). The idols are worthless, but God is invaluable (vv. 15-16). Lastly, this King has taken a people for himself (v. 16), a portion and an inheritance (see also Deut 32:9; Deut 4:20; Ps 74:2).¹⁷

One may draw a few conclusions from the kingship of this Patron God in Jeremiah 10. First, God, the Patron, is unique, the everlasting King. Second, this everlasting King is King over all the nations for all eternity. God is no temporary king; his reign is eternal. Third, the realm of this everlasting King reaches beyond the nations to encompass a rule over all of the creation. The Patron King has given the benefaction

¹⁴Charles Oscar Hetzler, “Our Savior and King: Theology Proper in 1 Timothy” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 28.

¹⁵Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 126.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 128.

of community. He has made for himself a nation, a people (v. 16). Additionally, as the everlasting King, the King of the nations, God has given the gift of ruling over all nations (v. 7 and 10). Implied in his Kingship is the authority to guide and direct history. For those in his community, his oversight of history should provide comfort and peace. Demonstrations of loyalty and allegiance are appropriate responses of gratitude from those who are the recipients of the everlasting Patron King's benefactions.

The New Testament likewise ascribes the epithet of King to God. In fact, Paul ascribed two appellations of Kingship to God in 1 Timothy (1 Tim 1: 17 and 6:15-16).¹⁸ Hetzler explained that the appellations of Kingship in 1 Timothy are both found in doxologies. These doxologies additionally serve as bookends for the author's intent. Paul, the author, wrote this letter to charge Timothy, his disciple, to contend with false teachers.¹⁹

First Timothy 1:17 is a climactic doxology ending Paul's reflection upon and display of gratitude for the impact of the gospel upon his life. This passage, verses 12-17, is a form of personal testimony from the apostle. Verse 17 fits into the broader context of 1:3-20. The broader context is the first of two charges Paul gave to Timothy to work hard at his calling and oppose false teaching. As Jeremiah 10:10 served as a theological anchor for the broader context, so too does 1 Timothy 1:17. Verse 17

¹⁸The contemporary debate over the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus is beyond the scope of this project. The main proponent of the theory that these epistles were written by a pseudonymity was Percy Harrison in *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921). Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, Jr. in their commentary on the Pastoral Epistles analyzed the five typical arguments advanced to support the theory of pseudonymity and concluded: "The arguments against Pauline authorship of the Pastorals are unconvincing. The internal evidence from the Epistles indicates that Paul was the author of the writings. The external evidence from the orthodox church indicates a uniform tradition ascribing the Pastorals to Paul." Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 23-40. See also David Cook, "The Pastoral Fragments Reconsidered," *JTS* no. 35 (1984): 120-31; and Anthony Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10-1.

¹⁹Hetzler, "Our Savior and King," 60-61.

anchored Paul's charge to Timothy as a proper theological understanding of God, the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, and the only God.

Paul utilized four adjectives to describe God. First, God is eternal. God is the King of the ages who rules the past, the present, and the future.²⁰ Second, God is immortal and will never perish, unlike the idols (see Jeremiah 10). Third, while God is invisible, Thomas Lea and Hayne Griffin correctly stressed that "believers can view the splendid glory of God residing in the person of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6; John 1:14)."²¹ Finally, God is unique. He is the *only* God. This adjective reflects the monotheism taught in both Testaments (e.g., Deut 6:4; Rom 3:29; 1 Tim 2:1-6; and 1 Cor 8:4-5).²² This God has no rival.

First Timothy 6:15-16 is another doxology of praise to God and fits into the large context of 6:2b-21. In this pericope, Paul again charged Timothy to teach sound doctrine and warn against false teaching. As the first doxology in 1 Timothy 1:17 provided a theological mooring for Paul's charge to Timothy, this doxology also provides a theological mooring for Paul's exhortation to faithfully teach and warn about the agenda of false teachers.²³

Paul ascribed to God multiple titles and utilized adjectives similar to those found in chapter one of 1 Timothy. The three titles given to God in this doxology are Jewish phrases that praise the sovereignty of God and his "authority over all powers, both

²⁰Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 77; and George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 105.

²¹Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 77.

²²Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

²³I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 395.

human and divine.”²⁴ These titles emphasize the fact that God alone has authority to decide the time of Christ’s return. The sovereignty and kingship of God are guarantees to the certainty of Christ’s return. The adjectives in this doxology reinforce those in 1:17. God alone is immortal. God is not only invisible, but He is infinitely holy so no one may approach his presence. God is not seen by physical eyes, but may be understood by faith.²⁵

One may draw a few conclusions from these doxologies praising the kingship of this Patron God. First, the Patron King has authority over all his creation. He is in complete control of the timing of the return of Christ.²⁶ Second, the Patron King is unique and completely different from all authorities. Third, in both passages, Paul instructed Timothy to be faithful to teach others, implying one benefaction of the Patron King is the opportunity to join his purpose and plan. Fourth, Paul additionally spoke in both passages of the redemption of God found in Christ Jesus. Another benefaction of God is salvation for the sinner through Jesus Christ (1 Tim 1:15). Finally, these passages imply several appropriate responses one should return to this Patron King because of his work in the lives of His followers. As Paul has done, all believers should worship God by gratefully ascribing honor and authority to him (1 Tim 6:16b). Additionally, believers should display gratitude for the salvation brought into their lives by Christ Jesus (1 Tim 1:12-14). Those who have received the benefactions of God should strive to honor him by holding to sound teaching (1 Tim 1:19). Lastly, as Paul charged Timothy, clients of the Patron King should participate in the plan and will of God.

²⁴Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 174.

²⁵John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 168–9.

²⁶Hetzler, “Our Savior and King,” 63-64.

God, the Patron Father

The title of Father for God is readily seen and acknowledged in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of the Apostle John.²⁷ However, as Carl F. H. Henry pondered, “it is remarkable that evangelical expositions of the doctrine of God sometimes deal only hurriedly and briefly with the theme of divine paternity.”²⁸ Likewise, Willem A. VanGemeren, a professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages, contended that some scholars have “confounded the relation between the Testaments by teaching that Jesus’ unique contribution is the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God.”²⁹ While the New Testament teaches more about the Fatherhood of God than the Old Testament, to dismiss unilaterally the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God from the Old Testament is an oversimplification.

The references to God as Father in the Old Testament are limited. Typically, the Old Testament describes God the Father in terms of the relationship between God and the nation of Israel rather than in personal relationship terms.³⁰ One may categorize the Old Testament references to the Fatherhood of God into ethical, sociological, and spiritual groups. Each of these groups describes the benefactions given by God, the

²⁷Charles Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Dubuque, IA: ECS Ministries, 2005), 292-93; and Joel R. Beeke, “Our Glorious Adoption: Trinitarian Based and Transformed Relationships,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3, no. 2 (2011): 63-79.

²⁸Carl Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 6, *God Who Stands and Stays* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 314.

²⁹Willem VanGemeren, “‘ABBA’ in the Old Testament,” *JETS* 31 no. 5 (1988), 385. VanGemeren vied against J. I. Packer’s statement that the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament may be summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. See James Innell Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 182-84. Joachim Jeremias’ supported Packer and claimed that “Jesus came to reveal the Father.” See Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 68. An in-depth examination and attempt to resolve this debate is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

³⁰Tina Ostrander, “Our Father Who Art in Heaven,” *Priscilla Papers* 13, no. 1 (1999): 4. See Exod 4:22; Deut 1:31; 14:1; 32:6; 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13; 22:10; 28:6; Pss 68:5; 89:26; 103:13-14; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:14, 19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10.

Patron Father, to Israel and Israel's obligation of reciprocity.³¹

First, ethically, God the Father displays caring compassion for Israel (Deut 1:31; 14:1; Isa 1:2). God carries his children when they are weak and weary (Isa 40:28-31). As a father teaches his son, God instructed the nation of Israel by means of commandments, laws, correction, and reproof. As sons of God, Israel has the responsibility to be different from the other nations. They are to be faithful and loyal to their Patron Father, but far too often they fail (Deut 14:1; Isa 1:2, 4).³²

Second, sociologically, God granted Israel a particular position among all the nations (Exod 19:5-6; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 32:6; Ps 135:4). God the Father crafted Israel as a potter works clay (Isa 64:8). The benevolent Father God took in the fatherless and defended the widows (Pss 68:5; 146:9). The recipients of these gifts from the Patriarch should give to him obedience, respect, and honor. Israel was to serve the one who has called them to be his firstborn son (Exod 4:22-23).³³

Third, spiritually, God is Patron Father to those who love, serve, and obey him because he has circumcised their hearts (Deut 6:5; 8:5; 30:6, 20). The divine fatherly patronage of God does not imply tolerance of sinful behavior. In fact, God disciplines his sons (Prov 3:11-12, referenced in Heb 12:5-10). The prophets called Israel to repentance: "Isaiah reflects on the renewed spirit in God's people in the prayer of penitence (Isa 63:15-64:12)."³⁴ Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah called the people of God to repent and return to God their Father (Jer 3). God promises a new heart for those who return to him

³¹VanGemeeren, "'ABBA' in the Old Testament," 395.

³²Ibid., 395.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 396.

(Jer 31:31-34). Thus, repentance is the prerequisite of the new covenant.³⁵

One may draw a few conclusions from this examination of the Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament. First, as a good father, God compassionately gives the benefaction of providing for the needs of his children. Second, the Fatherhood of God in the Old Testament is chiefly associated with God's authority to instruct and lead Israel.³⁶ The Patron Father gives the gift of instruction. Finally, the children of the Patron Father rightfully should obey, display faithfulness towards, and serve the will of their Father.

One theologian, Charles C. Ryrie, rightly explained that the "idea of the fatherhood of God reaches its most complete development in the writings of John."³⁷ Unlike the Old Testament, John framed his discussion of the Fatherhood of God in personal relationship terms. John described a new relationship granted through the new birth in Christ and God's love for humanity (John 1:12-13; 3:16-18). In his Gospel, John described several blessings and a few requirements for those who become sons of God through a right relationship with his Son.³⁸

Those who are rightly related to God through his Son have the privilege of the indwelling of both the Father and the Son (John 14:23). Second, the Father hears the prayers of his sons and daughters (John 15:16). Then, those who have been reborn are

³⁵VanGemeren, "'ABBA' in the Old Testament," 396.

³⁶Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 292.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸In terms of patron-client relationships, Jesus Christ through his life, death and resurrection may be said to serve as the broker between sinful man and God the patron. While this was a common trait during the Greco-Roman, no broker agent operates in *bunghun* relationships among the *Khon Muang*. Thus, this specific topic will not be addressed in this dissertation. For further study of the socio-cultural importance of Jesus as broker, see Neyrey, "God, Benefactor and Patron," 475-76; deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*, 95-156; Eisenstadt and Roniger, *Patrons, Clients and Friends*, 228-45; and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge, 1990), 81-84.

loved as the Father has loved Jesus (John 17:23).³⁹ Truly, the benefactions given by the Patron Father are wonderful. The children of God have responsibilities as well. First, the Patron Father desires to be worshiped by his sons and daughters (John 4:24). While he hears our prayers, this implies he wants his children to pray (John 15:16). Finally, because of the indwelling presence of the Father and Son the lifestyle of believers is to be different: believers walk in the light (John 3:21), and believers are sent to fulfill the plan and purpose of God just as Jesus has been sent by the Father (John 20:21). President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Joel R. Beeke, explained, “this Father-son relationship will undergird our prayer, indeed, control our entire outlook on life.”⁴⁰

The Gospel of John is not the only source written by the apostle that addresses the Fatherhood of God. First John 3:1-3 is a passage about the doctrine of spiritual adoption. The apostle called his audience to give their attention to and to reflect upon the glory of this doctrine. When humanity reflects upon the love of the Father, one should have the same sense of awe, wonder, and amazement as John. Daniel Akin explained, “God’s love is foreign to humankind in that we cannot understand the magnitude of such love. It astonishes, amazes, and creates wonder within those who properly reflect upon it.”⁴¹ Once, before they knew God, the readers of John’s epistle were rebels, outcasts, and enemies of God. However, the Father called them to be sons and daughters of God (1 John 3:1). He adopted them as his children. God brought them into a new family. He gave them all the rights associated with being a member of his family, both the privileges and responsibilities.

Any reflection upon the wonders of the doctrine of adoption surely primes one

³⁹Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 292.

⁴⁰Beeke, “Our Glorious Adoption,” 64.

⁴¹Daniel Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, NAC, vol. 38 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 133.

to think of the gospel, for without the gospel adoption by the Patron Father is not possible. Only through Christ being the propitiation, the sacrifice, the substitute, and the atonement of God for the sins of humanity is it possible for one to become a child of God. Beeke explained:

We are not sons and daughters of God by nature. Many live under this false idea. They think that everyone is a child of God, coming from the same Father. It is true, of course, that we are all creatures of the one Creator, but the Bible nowhere tells us that we are all children of God by nature. Rather, it tells us that by nature we are children of wrath. We are the objects of God's wrath, anger, and judgment by nature. . . . God has only one Son by nature and that Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now God's amazing love to sinners lies in the way He makes children of wrath to become the sons of His love. His only begotten Son is the Son of His love. The Father loves the Son, but in the astonishing substitution that God made in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, the wrath of God which was directed to us, was now poured upon His only begotten Son who thereby became the propitiation for our sins. The way by which we who were sons of wrath became the sons of love, is that the Son of God's love and the Child of His glory became the Bearer of His wrath on the cross. All the judgment of God was poured out on Him in order that we, dear believers, might be made the children of God and sons of His love. This is the astonishing biblical doctrine of substitution. Jesus Christ who deserved eternal heaven, bore my eternal hell as an ungodly sinner (but now by grace a believer), so that the gates of hell may be eternally closed for me and the gates of heaven be eternally thrown open. Oh, what a price Christ had to pay to accomplish this task!⁴²

The spiritual adoption of believers is the divine initiative of the Patron Father.⁴³ With this new family comes hope (1 John 3:3), a hope for the future that transforms everyday life. John described three aspects of this hope: Christ's return, the changing of believers to be like him, and the children of God seeing him at his return. Akin rightfully announced, "the foundation for hope, now and forever, is Christ alone."⁴⁴

The implications of the doctrine of adoption are numerous. According to Beeke, one may infer at least five relational implications from the doctrine of adoption. The first relational implication elucidated one's relationship with God. The Fatherhood

⁴²Beeke, "Our Glorious Adoption," 67–8.

⁴³Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, 133.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

of God provides security, love, guidance and discipline. Despite one's failures, God grants hope to his children. The second implication addressed the believer's relationship to the world. The believer's relationship with the world is often a turbulent relationship (1 John 3:1b). Beeke explained that the "world is baffled by what happens to God's people for it cannot understand why they love what they love, and hate what they hate."⁴⁵ While believers and non-believers live in different kingdoms as adopted sons and daughters of God, we are called to love our neighbors (Matt 22:39) by being willing to walk in this world and show Jesus' love to them. Beeke's third implication described the adopted child of God's relationship to the future. For the adopted children of God, the future is bright. A great inheritance awaits (1 Pet 1:1-5). Today, we live by faith in Christ and hope for the future. The world is not capable of understanding the change in the believer, and the believer cannot fully understand what awaits to come from the Patron Father at the return of Christ, the time when the believer will be transformed to be like him (1 John 3:2). The fourth relational implication detailed the believer's relationship with himself or herself. Adoption into God's family has everyday implications for how the believer lives. Holiness has become the new normal for the believer (1 John 3:3). The believer now strives to be pure as God is pure. Purification involves the entire person: our mind, thoughts, will, attitude, and actions. Purification requires loving that which the Father loves and hating that which the Father hates. Beeke's final implication characterized the believer's relationship to the family of God. God has adopted the believer into a new family. The apostle explained that believers know that they have come into a new family if they love their new brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 3:14-18). Adoption is not about independence but dependence upon God

⁴⁵Beeke, "Our Glorious Adoption," 72.

and interdependence within the new family.⁴⁶

One may draw a few conclusions from the apostle John's writing about God, the Patron Father. First, the New Testament addresses the Fatherhood of God in personal relationship terms. The Patron Father desires a personal relationship. This is an amazing benefaction of the Patron Father. Second, the adoption of wayward, rebellious humankind is a benefaction that came with an unimaginable price, the death of Jesus Christ. Third, in response to God's tremendous gift of adoption, God's children should live differently from the world around them. Carl F. Henry explained,

The Christian concept of God's fatherhood requires both the good man and the good community; it summons all who through new birth share in the kingdom of God (John 3:5) to pray, work and look for the coming of that kingdom "on earth as in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). God the Father calls us to obedient sonship, not simply to intellectual understanding of his self-revelation. Without cognitive controls the notion of sonship will of course become lost in generalities.⁴⁷

The adopted sons and daughters of God should worship, honor, and obey him. Finally, this different lifestyle includes more than the adoptees' relationship with God it includes all their relationships. The adopted children of God should live differently in relation to God, themselves, and others.

God, the Patron Savior

In the LXX, the word *σωτήρ* (*soter*), savior, appears 22 times.⁴⁸ Only four occurrences refer to human deliverers, while the remaining eighteen are epithets for God.⁴⁹ The contexts surrounding these appellations of God as Savior typically reveal

⁴⁶Beeke, "Our Glorious Adoption," 71-75.

⁴⁷Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 319.

⁴⁸Deut 32:15; Judg 3:15; 12:3; 1 Sam 10:19; Neh 9:27; Pss 23:5; 24:5; 26:1; 26:9; 61:3, 7; 64:6; 78:9; 94:1; Isa 12:2; 17:10; 45:15, 21; 62:11; Mic 7:7; and Hab 3:18.

⁴⁹The occurrences referring to human deliverers are Judg 3:9, 15; 12:3; and Neh 9:27.

specific acts of God in saving an individual or a group. The book of Isaiah contains the second highest concentration of this epithet, five occurrences. Hetzler noted that salvation is a common theme in Isaiah's later chapters.⁵⁰

In Isaiah 45:14-25, the declaration that God is Savior is also associated with other designations that depict God's divinity, namely, Creator and Sovereign Lord (v. 18 and 19, 24-25, respectively). This pericope fits into the larger literary unit of 44:25-45:25 and continued the prophet's declaration that foreign nations will come to know God (45:6). The repeated phrase *there is no other* (Isa 45:5, 6,14, 18, 22) provides continuity in this passage.⁵¹ One may divide Isaiah 45:14-25 into two related and connected paragraphs, verses 14-17 and then verses 18-25. The second paragraph served to confirm and develop the first.

This portion of Isaiah's prophecy tells of a future era when the Gentile nations will turn to follow God. They will acknowledge that God is with Israel and that no other God exists (v. 14). Thus, the once hidden and unknown God is now known as the God who saves (v. 15). Along with a correct knowledge of God, one must hold a correct knowledge of idolatry and the fact that those false gods cannot provide deliverance (v. 16).⁵² Isaiah does not state how the nations will come to these acknowledgments but simply made the declaration. The nations will come to acknowledge God, the Savior. Gary V. Smith, a professor of Christian studies, made an interesting statement that reflects the scarcity of information given by Isaiah: "God is more interested in communicating to his people only a few basic points about the future and the key choices

⁵⁰Hetzler, "Our Savior and King," 77.

⁵¹Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, NAC, vol. 15B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), 267.

⁵²John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Isaiah* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 497.

every person and nation must make.”⁵³

In verses 18-25, Isaiah expanded the description of this future age when nations will turn to God. Although God was hidden from the sight of idol worshippers, God did not leave himself without testimony. God is the Creator who created the heavens, formed the earth and filled it (v. 18). God is also the Spokesman; God alone declares what is right (v. 19). Humanity’s rebellion leads one to understand “the reason some think that God appears to be hidden . . . they are blind and stubbornly refuse to listen to what God did say (Isa 6:9–10; 29:9; and 42:18–19).”⁵⁴ God called Israel to gather along with the foreign nations in vv. 20-21. When the nations examine the evidence, the nations have no choice but to acknowledge the God of Israel is the righteous God and the Savior (v. 21). The evidence demands a response. Verses 22-25 encouraged an appropriate response using a series of imperatives. The nations are to *turn and be saved*. Smith explained that the use of two consecutive imperatives could describe a causal relationship. The first imperative is the condition and the second describes the casual aspect if one meets the condition. When the nations repent and turn to God, God will save them (v. 22). Smith clarified:

The text communicates to the audience that when God calls, they should respond to the imperative encouragement to turn, because then God can respond to produce the consequence of salvation. Although God owes the nations nothing but judgment for their failure to follow him, he graciously invites these nations to join his people in experiencing God’s salvation.⁵⁵

No one is capable of nullifying this gracious invitation because the promise is based on the character, power, and authority of the Patron God (v. 23). Isaiah ended this declaration of the saving benefaction of God with words of worship, praise, and honor to

⁵³Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 272.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 275–6.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 278.

God (vv. 24-25).

One may draw a few conclusions from this cursory overview of God as Savior in Isaiah. First, Isaiah directly connected the epithet of God as Savior to the message of God's future salvific work. Second, the appellation of Isaiah addressed more than the salvific work of God. It included God's divine work in creation and implied God's sovereign control over the events of history to bring his promise to completion. Beyond the benefaction of salvation, this epithet implies the patronage of security. The Patron Savior is in control of all the events of history. Third, when one receives knowledge of God's gracious act of salvation, a response of repentance is necessary. Finally, this prophecy of Isaiah made "it clear that if believers want others to turn to God, those who follow God must live in such a way that unbelievers understand that God is with his people. . . . God's deed his character, his name, and his honor should not be hidden from others but should be declared openly."⁵⁶ Clients of the Patron Savior should obediently be involved in making his honor and glory known.

In the New Testament, the word *σωτήρ* (*soter*), savior, is used twenty-four times.⁵⁷ Unlike in the LXX, where four occurrences of *σωτήρ* (*soter*) refer to human deliverers, in the New Testament this word only refers to God or Jesus.⁵⁸ The highest concentration of the occurrences of this word in the New Testament is found in the Pastoral Epistles. In the Pastoral Epistles, *σωτήρ* (*soter*) is found six times in Titus, once in 2 Timothy, and three times in 1 Timothy. Of these ten instances, nine appear in

⁵⁶Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 281.

⁵⁷Luke 1:47; 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Eph 5:23; Php 3:20; 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6; 2 Pet 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18; 1 John 4:14; and Jude 25.

⁵⁸See "σωτήρ," *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1003-21.

conjunction with *ἡμῶν* (*hemon*), making *σωτήρ* (*soter*) a title.⁵⁹ Additionally, *σωτήρ* is used six times for God and four for Christ. Only in 1 Tim 4:10 is *σωτήρ* used predicatively.

Due to the high concentration of *σωτήρ* (*soter*) in Titus, this section will examine the meaning of God, the Patron Savior in Titus 3. The word, *σωτήρ* (*soter*), Savior, is recorded in verse 4. This verse fits into the larger passage of verses 3-8. Paul began by providing a vivid reminder for believers about what their lives were like before they received the gracious benefaction of God, the Patron Savior (v. 3). In addition, Paul ended this passage by emphasizing the theological truth that lives impacted by God's benefactions should be characteristically different (v. 8). In verses 4 through 7, Paul elaborated on the saving work of God through the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.

Paul described the unregenerate condition in verse 3 with eight descriptive characteristics: foolish, disobedient, led astray or deceived, slaves, malice, envy, hated by others, and hatred towards others. However, by God's grace, his loving kindness appeared. The verb *ἐπιφαίνω* (*epiphairo*) only occurs four times in the New Testament (Luke 1:79; Acts 27:20; Titus 2:11; and 3:4) and translates into English as *has appeared*. In Titus, both instances refer to the manifestation of God's benefactions.⁶⁰ In 2:11, the benefaction is specifically the grace of God, while in 3:4 the benefaction given by God is his loving kindness. God's loving kindness means that God loves humanity and includes his generosity and goodness towards humanity for humanity's benefit.⁶¹

One may read of the purpose of this loving, gracious kindness in verse 5. God

⁵⁹Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *TDNT*, 1016. For the former see 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; and 3:4 and for the latter see 2 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; and 3:6.

⁶⁰Lea and Griffin, *I, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 310.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 321.

saves. God, the Patron Savior, saves sinful, rebellious humanity, a humanity incapable of redeeming themselves. While the apostle mentioned all three persons of the Trinity in verses 4-7, the flow of the sentence indicates that God the Father *saved us* and *poured out* the Holy Spirit *through* Jesus Christ.⁶²

The pericope ends with Paul's explanation of the results of salvation and a charge for an appropriate response to God's benefactions in verse 7 and 8. Having been justified by God, Christians become heirs of their Patron Savior. Christians are those whom the Patron Father adopted and are possessors of a guaranteed hope, future, and eternal life.⁶³

Having succinctly encompassed the gospel in verses 3 through 7, Paul drew his audience's attention in verse 8 with the phrase *this saying is trustworthy*. Paul charged Titus to instruct the believers in the wonderful truths of the gospel of grace, so that right behavior, orthopraxis, may flow from orthodoxy.⁶⁴ Christians are not to do good things in order to garner God's favor; this is clearly impossible (v. 5). However, believers are to devote themselves to good works. Good works by Christians have a positive impact upon those who are outside the faith (Matt 5:16).⁶⁵

One may draw a few conclusions from this short investigation of Titus 3. First, God alone is the giver of the benefaction of saving grace. Humanity is separated from God and in dire need of his assistance. Second, an appropriate response to the

⁶²George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans; Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1992), 338.

⁶³Lea and Griffin, *I, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 325.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 9 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 385; and Lea and Griffin, *I, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 326.

Patron Savior is a life of good works. These good works should display the regenerative washing of God by the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ so others may profit by coming to know this benevolent patron.

God, the Patron Benefactor

The LXX typically does not use the Greek word that translates as a benefactor, *εὐεργέτης* (*euergetes*).⁶⁶ However, the Old Testament often described God's benevolent acts towards his creation. In the creation, God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone and made for him a helper (Gen 2:18-21). In the exodus, God beneficently aided his children, Israel, by mightily conquering Pharaoh and his army (Exod 14). The Psalmist rejoiced in the aid and protection provided by God (Pss 13:6; 121:2; 124:8; 146:5). In the prophets, God spoke of the coming Messiah who is the Savior (Isa 9:6 and Isa 53:4-6). Thus, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, God as Helper, who works beneficently for his children and all of the creation, may also be called Benefactor.

In the New Testament, *εὐεργέτης* (*euergetes*), or benefactor, is only found in Luke 22:25 and does not refer to God. However, as in the Old Testament, the New Testament described God's beneficent acts. Perhaps one of the most amazing passages to address these generous acts of God is Ephesians 1:3-6. The passage fits into the large section of verses 3 through 14. However, an examination of this shorter section will suffice to demonstrate the benevolent benefaction of God. Paul began the Epistle to the church in Ephesus by recounting many of the blessings that God had granted to his children through Christ Jesus. Both Paul, the writer, and his readers who are saved are direct recipients of God's generosity (v. 3).⁶⁷ The lofty, extolling language Paul used for

⁶⁶Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *TDNT*, 654. *εὐεργέτης* and its cognates can mean one who does good deeds or confers benefits. Also see Spiros Zodhiates, "2108-2010," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), Logos Bible Software.

⁶⁷Peter Gosnell, "Honor and Shame Rhetoric as a Unifying Motif in Ephesians," *BBR*, 16

divine goodness surely fills the hearts of God's children with gratitude.⁶⁸ The first divine assistance mentioned is God's *blessing* (v. 3). One should notice the play on words in this verse, the flow of blessing is two directional: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:3 ESV, 2001). As God pours out gracious benefits upon his children, his children, in turn, are to fill up his praise and celebrate his honor and extolled reputation. God has granted his children every spiritual blessing. These blessings are superior to any other.⁶⁹ A second divine goodness addressed is God's eternal election, the fact that God's children are *chosen* (v. 4). This election is not an afterthought, but an intentional forethought. Calvin explained that the timing, before the creation of the world, and the means, in Christ, of this election prove that this benefaction is free. No merit of humanity affects God's gracious election.⁷⁰ This election makes his children holy and blameless. God, the Patron Benefactor, planned from the foundation of the world to bestow honor upon those whom he redeems. Those who were once unholy become holy in Christ. A third benefit Paul declared is divine adoption (v. 5). In love, God adopted the wayward and made them full-fledged members of his family. God does all this in accordance with his will (v. 5b). God the Benefactor provided this adoption through the work of Jesus Christ, his Son, "motivated by his desire to be kind to us and by his desire to receive praise for his grace."⁷¹ The immediate response to God's

(2006): 115.

⁶⁸Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 196.

⁶⁹Richard Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 353.

⁷⁰Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 198.

⁷¹Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 92.

benefactions is the praise of his glorious grace (v. 6).

One may draw a few conclusions from the beneficent acts of God addressed in Ephesians 1:3-6. First, God alone is the provider of saving grace. No individual can influence a plan that was set in motion before the foundations of the world were set. Second, while a further study on the implications of Jesus as the broker among Southeast Asia cultures may provide valuable missiological insights, such an investigation is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Third, receipt of God's gracious benefactions obligates one to praise and honor God.⁷²

God, the Patron Creator

The instances of the specific title, *Creator*, are limited in both the Old Testament and New Testament.⁷³ However, occurrences of cognates of *create* in association with God's work of creation are abundant.⁷⁴ One may find other words that infer God's created action in both the Old Testament and New Testament, such as *made* in Psalm 121:2, to reference just one verse. The benefactions provided by the Creator are innumerable. One could discuss the benefits of God's common grace in creation, such as the hydrologic cycle.⁷⁵ One could speak at length on the benefactions from God in this and other ecological systems, not to mention similar discussions, which can be pursued, on botany, medicine, anatomy, or other scientific fields of study. These discussions

⁷²I agree with Peter Gosnell, a professor of religion at Muskingum University, that an in-depth study of patronage and benefactor issues in Ephesians could be beneficial. See footnote 45, Gosnell, "Honor and Shame Rhetoric as a Unifying Motif in Ephesians," 114.

⁷³See Eccl 12:1; Isa 40:28; Isa 43:15; Rom 1:25; Col 3:10; and 1 Pet 4:19.

⁷⁴*Create* and its cognates in association with *Lord* occur 26 times in 13 verses. *Create* and its cognates in association with *God* occur 38 times in 17 verses. *Create* and its cognates in association with *he*, implying God, occur 34 times in 12 verses.

⁷⁵Edward Linacre and Bart Geerts, *Climates and Weather Explained* (London: Routledge, 1997), 109-10.

could show how God has blessed humankind as the Patron Creator. The created order is amazing, and an analysis of how these scientific fields of study demonstrate the patronage of God as Creator is outside the scope of this dissertation.

This section, therefore, is limited to a presentation involving some of the verses in which the word *Creator* is used directly. The prophet Isaiah reminded his audience that the Creator God does not grow weary or faint (Isa 40:27-31). This fact is just one of several benefactions that the prophet mentioned in this passage.

Isaiah 40:27-31 fits into the large section of Isaiah 40-55 in which 40:1-11 gives the idea of an opening and 55:6-13 seems to be a conclusion.⁷⁶ The passage opened with a lamenting question by Israel. The exact nature of the trouble facing the people is unknown, but the lamenters inferred that God is unaware of their trouble and is unjust in his dealings towards Israel.⁷⁷ The answer to this lament follows a similar pattern presented earlier in this chapter of Isaiah (40:21-22). Isaiah asked two questions of the audience: *Have you not known? Have you not heard?* Smith explained that these questions were rhetorical: “Past experience, teachings from the *Torah*, and prophetic proclamations adequately explain who God is and how he deals with his people.”⁷⁸ Following these rhetorical questions, Isaiah provided reminders of orthodox teaching in verse 28. This verse is succinct but theologically rich, as will now be demonstrated.

First, God is eternal (v. 28b). God has no beginning and no end. Therefore, nothing past, present, or future is outside his knowledge. Second, God is Creator of the ends of the earth (v. 28c). In other words, God created everything that exists. Nothing is unknown to God. No nation, no people, and no place are outside his knowledge. Unlike

⁷⁶Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 24.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 121 (emphasis in original).

the other gods, the God of Israel is not limited to a specific territory. Thus, this passage implied two benefactions given by God: creation itself and the influence and control of the universe. Third, God never grows weary and does not faint (v. 28d). His administration of all his creation never makes him weary. The establishment of the steps of men, all people of earth (Prov 16:9), never makes God tired. God is always available. This is a genuinely astounding gift. Fourth, God's knowledge is beyond the comprehension of humanity (v. 28e). God is intimately involved in every era, every area, and every life on earth.⁷⁹

Isaiah next provided a word of encouragement in verse 29. God, the Benevolent Patron, gives strength to the needy. As Smith explained, God's gift of strength is not limited to the past or the future but is always available.⁸⁰ Finally, the prophet explained how one received this gift of strength (vv. 30-31). The idea of waiting on the Lord implies at least three necessary responses in order to receive this assistance from God. First, one should acknowledge his or her need. The person who is unwilling to admit his or her vulnerability and need is unable to place his or her hope in God. Second, a wise client holds fast to the theological truths of God's character. Hope without solid theological anchor quickly fades.⁸¹ Third, one should relinquish or exchange his or her strength for the strength of God and in so doing display honor to God for his gift. A godly person, thus, has patience derived from the character of God.⁸² The Preacher of Ecclesiastes was correct when he admonished his audience to remember their Creator in the days of their youth (Eccl 12:1).

⁷⁹Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 121.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 122.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 5:239.

Many do not follow the exhortation of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes; Romans 1:18-25 provides a grim picture of this reality. The Apostle Paul concluded this passage in verse 25 and claimed that sinful, fallen humanity had exchanged the truth about the Creator God for a lie. Thus, God's wrath is a present reality and being revealed.⁸³ This passage fits into the broader context of Romans 1:18-3:20 in which Paul described the sinful state of all people.⁸⁴

What ends in verse 25 as a willful exchange of the truth for a lie began as the unrighteous suppression of the truth in verse 18. Notice, the Apostle did not say the unrighteous men changed the truth. No, they suppressed and exchanged the truth because truth cannot be changed. The central theme, or truth, of this section is about worship. Although one may clearly see the Creator's invisible attributes in creation, humanity has failed to honor him as God and give him thanks (vv. 20-21). People fashion idols to worship, instead of worshipping God (v. 22).

The truth is this Creator is worthy of all people's worship. In verse 20, one learns that God has revealed "something of his eternal power and nature. Yet people refuse to believe."⁸⁵ They refuse to honor and give him thanks. They fail to worship him. God desires to be known and worshiped. God has shown himself. Although God has made it plain for all to see (v. 18), this specific passage and the broader context of

⁸³Robert Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 77.

⁸⁴Robert Mounce entitled this section "The Unrighteousness of All Humankind," in *Romans*, 74. John Murray entitled this section "The Universality of Sin and Condemnation," in *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 34. Leon Morris called it "Universal Sinfulness," in *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 73; and Frederick Bruce named it "Sin and Retribution: The Universal Need Diagnosed," in *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 81.

⁸⁵Mounce, *Romans*, 77.

Romans clearly explains that all people refuse their Creator. No one comes seeking after the Father (Rom 3:11-12). Robert Mounce, renowned Greek scholar, clarified:

“Although the created order cannot force a person to believe, it does leave the recipient responsible for not believing.”⁸⁶

All people are responsible and expected to know God, which leads to honoring him and giving him thanks. Sadly, by nature, all people are sinful and fail to worship the Creator. This passage may appear to be gloomy, but interesting characteristics about the benefactions given by the Patron Creator are evident. First, the Creator has revealed himself. The Patron Creator is a self-revealing God. Not only has the Creator revealed himself in creation (1:20-21), he has given the Bible. In the Bible, one may find God’s self-revelation of his character, his will, and his purpose. This leads to the second benefaction; The Creator desires to be known. The Patron Creator has granted an invitation to worship him: “all men and women have always known within that God exists. . . . This knowledge is so innate, so fundamental to human nature that when a person denies it, he is not merely denying something external to himself—he is also denying himself and his true nature.”⁸⁷ God created humankind to worship him, and all people know this to be true. The problem is the sin nature of all humanity that leads humanity to suppress and exchange this truth for a lie.

One may draw a few conclusions from this preliminary survey of God, the Patron Creator. First, God is the eternal, self-revealing Creator. God has made himself knowable. Second, humanity should worship God. True worship begins by acknowledging or giving honor to the Creator for who he is and what he has done. Then,

⁸⁶Mounce, *Romans*, 78.

⁸⁷Ronald Man, “False and True Worship in Romans 1:18–25,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (2000): 28.

true worship includes giving thanks to the Patron God for his patronages.

God, the Sovereign Patron

In the LXX, the word *δεσπότης* (*despotes*), master or lord, and its derivatives are recorded twenty-two times, and all but four instances refer directly to God.⁸⁸

Δεσπότης (*despotes*) is one who has power and authority and when referring to God serves as a title, the “one who has supreme power [sic] Master, Sovereign, Lord.”⁸⁹ One may find the largest concentration of incidents for *δεσπότης* (*despotes*) and its related terms in Daniel’s prayer of repentance in Daniel 9:1-19.

Daniel’s prayer gives excellent instruction about the character and work of the Sovereign Patron. Before examining these points, one should understand the general context surrounding the prayer. This context is found in verses 1 and 2. Daniel noted the time frame of his prayer as during the first year of Darius the Mede. Stephen Miller, an Old Testament professor, explained that Darius became king ca. 538 B.C. and Daniel “would have been over eighty years of age.”⁹⁰ During this first year of Darius’ reign, Daniel perceived an important fact while he searched the Scriptures. While reading the words of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, Daniel “realized that the seventy-year captivity was drawing to a close.”⁹¹ This realization drew Daniel to pray.

⁸⁸Gen 15:2, 8; Josh 5:14; Prov 6:7; 17:2; 22:7; 24:33; 29:25; Job 5:8; Isa 1:24; 3:1; 10:33; Jer 1:6; 4:10; 15:11; Dan 9:7, 8, 15, 16, 17, 19; and Jonah 4:3. Prov 6:7; 17:2; 22:7; and 24:33 may not be directly referring to God.

⁸⁹Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker’s Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 107.

⁹⁰Stephen Miller, *Daniel*, NAC, vol. 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 240.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 242. Miller additionally stressed the importance of these verses for the theory of verbal inspiration and literal interpretation. Both these elements of hermeneutics are vital and essential topics, but are outside the scope of this dissertation.

Daniel's prayer is an excellent example of one who truly worshiped God. Daniel knew God, honored him as Sovereign God, and displayed gratitude to God. One may learn several theological truths from Daniel's prayer to the Sovereign God. First, this Sovereign Patron is worthy of adoration. The Lord is the keeper of covenants and steadfast love (v. 4b). These attributes imply the unique relationship that exists between God and Israel: "they are reminders to God of his relationship to his people."⁹² Second, this Sovereign Patron is worthy to receive our repentance. While humanity is sinful, rebellious, and shameful, not listening to God nor his servants, God is righteous and pure (vv. 5-8). God graciously sent servants to exhort his people to repent. This fact demonstrates that this Sovereign God is self-revealing. He sent the servants to reveal his will and purpose, but Israel refused to listen. Third, the Sovereign Patron is the owner and authority of mercy and forgiveness (v. 9). Smith explained the Hebrew use of plurals in this verse serve to intensify and emphasize "God's great and manifold 'mercies' and his abundant forgiveness."⁹³ Despite the magnitude of sin, hope still exists. The Sovereign Patron is merciful. Fourth, the Sovereign God is a self-revealing Lord (vv. 10-13). God has spoken and given his law, "which he set before us by his servants the prophets" (v. 10). Nevertheless, all have refused to obey (v. 11). Therefore, this self-revealing Sovereign God has confirmed his words (v. 12). The exile during Daniel's life, which was previously predicted by Jeremiah (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10), has now been confirmed. Not only is the Sovereign Patron a self-revealing God, but a self-confirming God. He alone has authority to control all nations and all history to bring to completion what he has spoken to his servants. This implies a fifth characteristic of the Sovereign Patron. He has supreme power and authority. Finally, the Sovereign Patron is worthy to

⁹²Miller, *Daniel*, 244.

⁹³Ibid., 246.

hear the petition of his children (vv. 15-19). Again, in verse 15, one is reminded of the supreme authority of the Sovereign Patron. His authority was seen when God acted to bring his people out of Egypt. Daniel rightfully based his petitions on the character of God. Repeatedly, Israel had refused and rejected God, but God remains righteous and merciful (v. 18). God's character is the only basis by which one might make petitions.

One may draw a few conclusions from Daniel's confession and petition. First, the Sovereign Patron is faithful. By his authority, he maintains his covenant with Israel. Second, the Sovereign Patron is merciful. Despite a continual rebellion by his children, God remains steadfast in his love. He revealed himself, his will, and his plan. Additionally, God confirmed his commitment to his covenant promise by his supreme power and authority. Third, an appropriate response involves giving adoration to the Sovereign for who he is and what he has done. In other words, recipients of God's gifts should honor him as Lord. Fourth, petitions made of the Sovereign should be theologically driven, based on his character and self-revealed works found in Scripture. One honors the Sovereign Patron by basing his or her petitions on the character of God.

The New Testament records ten instances of the word *δεσπότης* (*despotes*); four of these occurrences do not relate to God.⁹⁴ One interesting communal instance of the word *δεσπότης* (*despotes*) can be found in Acts 4:24. The believing community in Jerusalem joined to rejoice and worship the Sovereign God for the benefaction given to Peter and John.

Acts 4:24 is the main verse in the prayer of the believers found in Acts 4:23-31 and fits into the large context of Acts 3:1-4:31. Before one can discuss the specifics of the prayer found in Acts 4:23-31, one should understand what transpired beforehand. In

⁹⁴Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 1 Tim 6:1, 2; 2 Tim 2:21; Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18; 2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4; and Rev 6:10. The instances of *δεσπότης* found in 1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter refer the household masters rather than God.

Acts 3:1-9, on the way to the temple to pray, Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from birth. In Acts 3:11-26, a crowd gathered and Peter proclaimed the gospel. Then, in Acts 4:1-22, the religious leaders arrested Peter and John and questioned them. After hearing Peter and John's defense and finding no way to justify punishment, the religious leaders threatened and released them.

Peter and John went to their friends and reported what happened (Acts 4:23).⁹⁵ Then, in Acts 4:24-31, those gathered worshiped and thanked the Sovereign God. Their prayer and praise teach a few interesting things about the Sovereign Patron. First, the Sovereign Patron is also the Creator (v. 24). His supreme power and authority include control over everything in creation. Second, the community quotes Psalm 2:1-2 as the Sovereign Patron revealing himself through his servant David and by the Holy Spirit. The believers claimed the original context and applied it to themselves. Psalm 2:1-2 initially told of God's triumphant victory over the enemies of Israel. Now, these first century Christians

came to see it as in a real sense prophetic of Christ. All the details of these first verses of the psalm were applicable to the passion of Christ, and the Christians did so in their prayer (v. 27). The raging nations represented the Gentile rulers and their cohorts, the soldiers who executed Jesus. The people of Israel were those who plotted in vain. Herod represented the "kings of the earth"; Pilate, the "rulers"; and Christ, the "anointed" of God.⁹⁶

Third, the self-revealing Sovereign will accomplish his will and plan (v. 28). All the plans of evil men against the Savior are "in vain because God has already predetermined the outcome."⁹⁷ Fourth, as the details of all events rest in the hands of the Sovereign, the

⁹⁵John Polhill contended that this verse is best interpreted to be inclusive of the whole community of faith in Jerusalem, while R. B. Rackham and E. F. Harrison claimed that this verse should be limited to include only the apostles. John Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 148; Richard Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Methuen, 1901), 60; and Everett Harrison, *Interpreting Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 95.

⁹⁶Polhill, *Acts*, 149.

⁹⁷Ibid.

community petitions their Patron to grant them continued opportunity to be involved in his plan (v.29). Fifth, the Sovereign Patron is the one who is able to give amazing benefactions of healing. It is interesting to note that the request for miracles assigns authorship of those miracles to the hand of the Sovereign Patron (v. 30). John Polhill rightly explained that the request for miracles is not a request for power, but a request for the confirmation of the gospel message of Jesus Christ's resurrection and salvation they will boldly preach.⁹⁸ Finally, an overtone of praise for the gifts of protection and guidance from the Sovereign Patron resound throughout the prayer.

One may draw a few conclusions from this cursory overview of Acts 4:23-31. First, only the Sovereign has the authority and power to accomplish his plan. His plan has been predestined and no one can thwart it. Second, the Sovereign Patron is the source for all benefactions. Third, participation in the plan of the Sovereign is an appropriate means of showing him honor, loyalty, and gratitude.

Grace – Same Same, but Different from *Bunkhun*

God is the source of grace and grace is not *bunkhun*. While benevolent or pristine *bunkhun* carries elements similar to the biblical concept of grace, the two concepts are not the same. The motivation to display gratitude in *bunkhun* relationships is typically extrinsic, answering questions about what one must do and not do. Conversely, the motivation to honor God for the grace he has given should be intrinsic, or a motivation empowered to obey by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Like *bunkhun*, “we love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Unlike *bunkhun*, the Patron God provides the intrinsic motivation as a benefaction to his children in order that they might display gratitude and join in his eternal purposes. The prophet Ezekiel provided a prophecy promising this indwelling: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be

⁹⁸Polhill, *Acts*, 150.

clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek. 36:25-27). God always acts first, and his children, empowered by him, respond.

Bunkhun instills a debt and an obligation that often leads to a debtor’s ethic lifestyle. Hopefully, the gratitude and response to the graces of God are grounded and derived from the nature, character, and empowering of God, rather than from a desire to repay, appease, or manipulate God. Maintaining the balance of living by grace and not following a debtor’s ethic, legalistic obedience, or some form of syncretized animistic practice are not problems exclusive to Northern Thailand. However, the concept of *bunkhun* and its associated obligation and indebtedness might be factors that can lead *Khon Muang* believers to focus on these faulty discipleship models. This section will briefly define and describe biblical grace and appropriate motivations for displaying gratitude and obedience to God for the benefactions he has bestowed.

In English, the word grace has both religious and secular connotations. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary provided eight definitions for grace. Three of these definitions are religious in nature. Two of these three are perhaps rooted in historical Christianity: “unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification” and “a short prayer at a meal asking a blessing or giving thanks.”⁹⁹ The final religious definition is from Greek mythology: “Graces: three sister goddesses in Greek mythology who are the givers of charm and beauty.”¹⁰⁰ One more of the eight

⁹⁹*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Grace,” accessed April 21, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grace>.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

definitions can be both religious or secular: “favor.”¹⁰¹ The remaining four are secular.¹⁰² Wayne Grudem, an evangelical theologian, defined grace as “God’s goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.”¹⁰³ As grace has many definitions in the English language, there are several different words with various meanings for the concept of grace in the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek.

Grace in the Old Testament

Four Hebrew words are used in the Old Testament that best communicate the concept of grace. First, the Hebrew word חֵן (*hen*) appears sixty-nine times in the Old Testament. The word generally is translated into English as favor or goodwill, but also is translated into English as kindness, beauty, or graceful.¹⁰⁴ Typically, the favor God gives to a person in the Old Testament carries with it a blessing or a benefaction.¹⁰⁵ Second, the Hebrew word חָנָן (*hanan*) appears seventy-eight times in the Old Testament. The general translation in English is to be gracious, merciful, or generous.¹⁰⁶ This word carries the meaning that God is gracious, merciful or generous towards humanity and is often found in prayers petitioning God to show grace, mercy, or generosity. Third, the Hebrew word רַחֵם (*raham*) is not translated into English as grace, but is translated as mercy and

¹⁰¹*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Grace,” accessed April 21, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grace>.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan, 2004), 1243.

¹⁰⁴Swanson, *DBL Hebrew*, s.v. “2834 I. חֵן (*hēn*).”

¹⁰⁵Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 427.

¹⁰⁶Swanson, *DBL Hebrew*, s.v. “2858 I. חָנָן (*hā-nān*).”

compassion and occurs forty-six times in the Old Testament.¹⁰⁷ This word perhaps communicates the emotional aspect of grace in the Old Testament. Verse 13 of Psalm 103 describes the compassion of God towards those who fear him as the same compassion and love that a father has for his children. In fact, Psalm 103 repeatedly describes the love, concern, and compassion of God towards his people. The fourth word is perhaps the most important Hebrew word in the Old Testament for understanding the grace of God, **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*). This word appears in the Old Testament over two hundred forty times and generally means unfailing kindness: “a love or affection that is steadfast based on a prior relationship.”¹⁰⁸ The titles of the Patron God, his benefactions, and these four Hebrews words clearly demonstrate that the concept of grace in the Old Testament is not captured in a concise definition or fully communicated through only one word. However, grace in the Old Testament is “an active, working principle, manifesting itself in beneficent acts. . . . The fundamental idea is, [sic] that the blessings graciously bestowed are *freely* given, and not in consideration of any claim or merit.”¹⁰⁹

Grace in the New Testament

Unlike the Old Testament, one Greek word, along with several of its cognates, defines and explains grace in the New Testament. **Χάρις** (*charis*) and several of its cognates appear over two hundred times in the New Testament. Ceslas Spicq, a French Dominican monk and biblical scholar, summarized the secular meanings of **χάρις** (*charis*) into four categories: First, **χάρις** (*charis*) can be used in the sense of beauty. Second, **χάρις** (*charis*) can describe a favor or love, and usually refers to a benevolent action which is given unconditionally. Third, **χάρις** (*charis*) can describe any form of

¹⁰⁷Swanson, *DBL Hebrew*, s.v. “8163 **חֶסֶד** (*rā·ḥām*).”

¹⁰⁸Swanson, *DBL Hebrew*, s.v. “2876 II. **חֶסֶד** (*ḥē·sēd*).”

¹⁰⁹Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 427 (emphasis in the original).

benefaction granted from the goodness and generosity of the giver. Finally, χάρις (*charis*) can describe a sense of gratitude or thanksgiving arising from the kindness shown by a benefactor. Often this gratitude is more than a feeling and includes an effort to repay the benefactor. According to Spicq, the usage of χάρις (*charis*) in the New Testament developed a unique theological meaning, but one well correlated to its common secular usage.¹¹⁰ Most of the occurrences of χάρις (*charis*) in the New Testament signify “the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit. While we sometimes speak of grace as an inherent quality, it is in reality the active communication of divine blessings.”¹¹¹ Grace in the Bible includes both pardoning grace, which justifies, and empowering grace, which sanctifies.¹¹²

Theologian Louis Berkhof challenged his readers to bear three distinctions in mind as one thinks about the grace of God as it relates to justification and sanctification. First, grace is one of the divine perfections or attributes of God; God is gracious. “It is God’s free, sovereign, undeserved favor or love to man, in his state of sin and guilt, which manifests itself in the forgiveness of sin and deliverance from its penalty.”¹¹³ The character of God includes pardoning or redemptive grace. Second, grace “is used as a designation of the objective provision which God made in Christ for the salvation of man . . . this term is applied not only to what Christ *is*, but also to what He *merited* for

¹¹⁰Ceslas Spicq, *TLNT*, trans. James Ernest (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 500-5.

¹¹¹Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 427.

¹¹²John Piper, *Future Grace*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2012), 565, Kindle.

¹¹³Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 427.

sinner.”¹¹⁴ Thus, grace is not only an objective gift but also expresses the means by which the gift works. Third, grace is a term used to designate the full and comprehensive set of favors or gifts of God upon the lives of the redeemed. Sanctifying graces are all “the spiritual graces which are wrought in the hearts and lives of believers through the operation of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁵ These graces are those gifts of God given to aid believers in the process of sanctification. These three distinctions are specific to the grace of God in salvation. One may describe grace under a fourth distinction, namely, common grace. Common grace is not an attribute of God, but rather describes the benefactions of God given to all humanity.¹¹⁶ Grudem defined common grace as follows: “*Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation. The word common here means something that is common to all people and is not restricted to believers or to the elect only.*”¹¹⁷ According to James Bratt, through common grace:

God, though not saving all people, does shed abroad for each and all a restraint of the full effects of sin, plus a capacity for everyone to come to a certain measure of ordinary (“civic”) virtue and perceptive truth. Common grace not only makes society possible but makes it possible for Christians usually to live in society alongside people who don’t know or outright reject Christian teaching.¹¹⁸

In other words, common grace includes the many natural blessings in the creation, the ability given to humanity to do civil justice, God’s sovereign preservation of any sense of

¹¹⁴Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 427.

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶It is beyond the scope of the dissertation to address the conflict between the Reformed doctrine of common grace and other theological systems perspectives on the doctrine of common grace. For a more detailed analysis see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 432-46; and Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 657-68.

¹¹⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 657 (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁸James Bratt, “Conscious Christianity: The Life and Legacy of Abraham Kuyper,” *The Banner* 149, no. 8 (2014): 19.

truth or morality, anything God may do to restrain sin, and the stay of execution granted by God so sinners may be afforded the opportunity to repent and believe.¹¹⁹ All four distinctions of grace can serve as a motivation for the Christian life.

Abiding in Grace – What are the Motivations for the Christian Life?

The grace of God is the sovereign work of God granted without consideration of the merit or qualifications of the recipient. It is the basis of knowing God and being able to live for the glory and honor of God. And this grace is not something that can be earned. It is a gift given by God.¹²⁰ After a gift is received, it is good and healthy to feel grateful and desire to show gratitude (Psalm 50:23; 100:4). Gratitude is a good thing, but as John Piper questioned, should gratitude be the primary motivation for obedience in the Christian life?¹²¹ Piper elsewhere elucidated his critique:

Have you ever tried to find a biblical text where gratitude or thankfulness is the explicit motive for obedience to God? Stories like the sinful women (in Luke 7:36-50) and the unforgiving servant (in Matt. 18:23-35) come to mind, but neither speaks *explicitly* of gratitude Why is this explicit motive for obedience—which in contemporary Christianity is probably the most commonly used motive for obedience to God—(almost?) totally lacking in the Bible? Could it be that a gratitude ethic so easily slips over into a debtor’s ethic that God chose to protect His people from this deadly motivation by *not* including gratitude as an explicit motive for obedience? . . . Should we then stop preaching gratitude as a motivation? I leave that for you to answer. But if we go on urging people to obey “out of gratitude,” we should at least show them the lurking dangers and describe *how* gratitude can motivate obedience without succumbing to a debtor’s mentality.¹²²

Piper contended that “the promises of future grace are the keys to Christlike Christian

¹¹⁹Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 442-43.

¹²⁰Eph 2:8-9; 2 Thess 1:12; 1 Pet 4:10-11

¹²¹Piper, *Future Grace*, 317.

¹²²John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 50-51.

living.”¹²³ Thus, according to Piper, the primary motivation for obedience in the Christian life is “*faith in future grace*.”¹²⁴ Piper did not reject the commands in Scripture for believers to show gratitude and express thanksgiving (Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18), but explained that the “Bible, rarely, if ever, explicitly makes gratitude the impulse for moral behavior, or ingratitude the explanation of immorality.”¹²⁵ In the Old Testament, the Bible sometimes explains the reason for the sin of the people of God not as ingratitude, but as lack of faith (Num 4:11; Deut 1:31-32; Ps 78:15, 17, 22). In the face of all God had done for the nation of Israel, the people failed to trust God.¹²⁶

Christian author Philip Yancey postulated an opposing perspective:

If I had to summarize the primary New Testament motivation for “being good” in one word, I would choose *gratitude*. Paul begins most of his letters with a summary of the riches we possess in Christ. If we comprehend what Christ has done for us, then surely out of gratitude we will strive to live “worthy” of such great love. We will strive for holiness not to make God love us but because he already does.¹²⁷

Yancey rightly contended that believers do not strive to be holy to make God love them more because God has already loved them. He then cites Titus 2:11 as textual support.¹²⁸ However, if one examines the broader context of Titus 2:11-14, one can see while the Christian’s motivation for pursuing holiness is undoubtedly grounded in gratitude, a wonderful supplementary motivation exists as well. Paul explained that the grace of past tense completed work of salvation is indeed a reason for actively pursuing holiness in

¹²³Piper, *Future Grace*, 341.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 350 (emphasis in original).

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 812.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 812-20.

¹²⁷Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2965-68, Kindle.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 2967.

verses 11 and 12. Additionally, in verse 13, Paul expounded on the expectation and anticipation of the return and appearing of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ in the future. This future-focused expectation certainly supplements the past tense gratitude.

Craig Blomberg, a New Testament scholar, wrote that the “proper Christian motivation for pleasing God should *stem* from a profound sense of gratitude for what Christ has already done for us. The *complete salvation* that he has already acquired for us leaves no room for further human merit.”¹²⁹ Douglas Bozung contended that Craig Blomberg’s perspective is the same as Yancey’s: gratitude is the primary motivation for living an obedient Christian life. Perhaps Bozung has misread and over simplified Blomberg’s statement when Bozung claims that “Blomberg asserts the idea of rewards is unnecessary.”¹³⁰ The two emphases added to Blomberg’s statement might provide clarity and aid one’s understanding of Blomberg’s perspective. Proper Christian motivation should *stem*, or be *anchored in and sprout*, from gratitude for the finished work of Christ upon the cross and his subsequent calling and saving the children of God. However, *complete salvation* in Christ includes three tenses: past, present, and future. First, the past completed work of Christ upon the cross and in the life of the believer to bring him or her to salvation anchors the Christian motivation to obey in gratitude. Second, the present working of the Holy Spirit to sanctify the believer actively motivates the Christian to obey. Finally, the promises for future on-going sanctification, and ultimately the glorification of the believer motivates the Christian to persevere to the end and obtain an eternal inheritance. While Blomberg and Bozung do not agree on the concept of eternal rewards in heaven, there seems to be more agreement between them about the

¹²⁹Craig Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” *JETS* 35, no. 2 (1992): 170 (emphasis added).

¹³⁰Douglas Bozung, “Degrees of Rewards in Eternity: Sanctification by Works?” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 24, no. 47 (2011): 44.

proper motivation for obedience in the Christian life.

Piper rightly warned that when gratitude for past graces serves as the primary motivator for obedience people may fall victim to what he calls a debtor's ethic:

Gratitude is a spontaneous response of joy to receiving something over and above what we paid for. When we forget this, what happens is that gratitude starts to be misused and distorted as an impulse to pay for the very thing that came to us "gratis." This terrible moment is the birthplace of the "debtor's ethic." The debtor's ethic says, "Because you have done something good for me, I feel indebted to do something good for you." This impulse is not what gratitude was designed to produce. God meant gratitude to be a spontaneous expression of pleasure in the gift and the good will of another. He did not mean it to be an impulse to return favors.¹³¹

Gratitude is the right response to receiving God's grace. However, when the debtor's ethic invades, the recipient may begin to feel an obligation to repay, or feel that something is owed in return. From this stance, the Christian life can turn into an effort to pay back the debt one believes he or she owes to God. Righteous deeds and religious acts can become the currency for repaying God. In other words, legalism or a works based Christian life emerges. Faith in the present sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and God's future graces when interwoven with gratitude for God's past graces, serves to balance and correctly guide believers away from the dangers of the debtor's ethic. As Piper summarized:

There is a sense in which gratitude and faith are interwoven joys that strengthen each other. As gratitude joyfully revels in the benefits of past grace, so faith joyfully relies on the benefits of future grace. Therefore when gratitude for God's past grace is strong, the message is sent that God is supremely trustworthy in the future because of what he has done in the past. In this way faith is strengthened by a lively gratitude for God's past trustworthiness.¹³²

In other words, gratitude has a past, present, and future orientation. Gratitude marvels at the favor granted, but should not result in a feeling of indebtedness. Rather, gratitude results in hope. Therefore, a mature motivation for living an obedient Christian life is

¹³¹Piper, *Future Grace*, 774-79.

¹³²Ibid., 1088-91.

anchored in thanksgiving for the past grace of the completed work of God, the Son; trusting in the present grace of the indwelling and empowering work of God, the Holy Spirit; and hoping in future grace, the fulfillment of all the promises of God, the Father.

Conclusions

God exemplifies all the character qualities of an ideal patron. As was shown in chapter 3, among the *Khon Muang*, an ideal patron is compassionate, one who has virtuous character, and one who performs benevolent acts.¹³³ Truly, the survey of the Old and New Testament above demonstrates that God epitomizes these three traits. Additionally, God never manipulates, unlike the Domineering Leader from Quadrant II.¹³⁴ The Patron God does not use his authority, power, or influence to manipulate humanity into showing him honor or to force them into serving him. God needs nothing from humanity, but it is right and just for all humanity to honor God as the Patron King, Father, Creator, Savior, Benefactor, and Sovereign Lord.

From the described function of *bunkhun* among the *Khon Muang* in chapter 3 and the biblical understanding of grace above, the debtor's ethic appears to be deeply ingrained in the lives of the *Khon Muang*. *Bunkhun* results from the feeling that one is indebted to another's grace or favor. The client owes an obligation and must repay the patron. Gratitude is said to be the primary motivation to repay *bunkhun*. However, genuine gratitude does not result in the feeling of indebtedness, but rather faith and hope. Chapter 5 will describe some of the implications for evangelism, discipleship, church formation, and leadership development that arise from this debtor's ethic within *bunkhun*.

Like the debtor's ethic, other forms of legalism can arise from the faulty understanding of grace. One troubling form of legalism among the *Khon Muang* is

¹³³See pp. 103-9.

¹³⁴See pp. 109-13.

directly linked to Thai Folk Buddhism. Multiple forms of magic to appease and manipulate the spirits exist among the *Khon Muang*. A faulty understanding of grace can result in *Khon Muang* believers thinking they can appease or manipulate God. Some may believe that one can force God into action or place some form of requirement upon God based on his or her behavior or ritualistic formula. Chapter 5 will further describe some of the implications for evangelism, discipleship, church formation, and leadership development that arise from these faulty understandings of grace.

CHAPTER 5
SELECTIVE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF
BUNKHUN ON MINISTRY AMONG
THE *KHON MUANG*

All four gospel writers include a version of the Great Commission. From a total of five Great Commission passages, one can conclude the need for missionary preparation.¹ In the Great Commission passage of Acts 1:8, one can infer from the words recorded by Luke that the Great Commission requires cross-cultural ministry. To be Jesus' witnesses to the end of the earth requires crossing cultures. Likewise, Matthew recorded Jesus' command to go make disciples of all nations, from which one can infer that cross-cultural ministry is required. Making disciples of all nations requires interacting with those who have different cultures and languages than those being sent. One can also deduce from Jesus' command to go into the entire world and proclaim the gospel in Mark that cross-cultural ministry is necessary. While perhaps less explicit, the Great Commission passage in John also implies cross-cultural ministry. One reads Jesus' explanation that as he was sent, so now he sends his disciples. This *sending*, while not explicit, implies cross-cultural ministry. Analyzed collectively, one might rightfully deduce that Jesus expects cross-cultural ministry as part of the Great Commission tasks. Obedience to the Great Commission requires some disciples to leave their home cultures to make disciples in other cultures. This act of going to another culture necessitates preparation and entry into the new cultural context. Beyond going to another culture, three additional stages for cross-cultural ministry are implied in the Great Commission

¹See Matt 18:18-20; Mark 16: 15; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8.

passages: making disciples through evangelism and discipleship, establishing churches through leadership development, and calling the local church to join in the Great Commission tasks. While *bunghun*'s function and related cultural values have implications relating to all four of these stages, this chapter focuses on the implications for the first stage: missionary preparation and entry. The focus on the preparation and entry stage does not imply that *bunghun* has fewer or less significant implications for the other stages. The focus was intentional since the primary task of missionaries involves building and maintaining relationships with nationals. The other three stages are built upon this foundational first stage. This chapter strives to assist those preparing to serve in Northern Thailand to understand the importance of this foundational first stage and prepare more effectively.

Missionary Preparation Stage

Missionary preparation requires instruction in multiple disciplines; a noncomprehensive list might include theology and history of missions, strategy development, anthropology, and intercultural communication. Perhaps the hardest part of missionary preparation is aiding candidates to realize the cultural differences they might encounter are significant, and to begin to prepare for them. No missionary preparation strategy can detail all the specific cultural differences. However, missionary preparation can and should provide candidates with general knowledge about these cultural differences, training in skills to aid them in developing a multicultural perspective, and skills to learn and appreciate the culture they will enter. Openness to new ideas is essential for effective cross-cultural ministry, but the attitude of openness is a difficult value to instill in others. Being open to new cultural ideas is perhaps one avenue used by cross-cultural workers for recognizing opportunities to be a witness and may reveal community and social needs. Renowned Christian anthropologist Eugene Nida prefaced his classic book, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions*, with these

words:

Good missionaries have always been good “anthropologists.” Not only have they been aware of human needs, whether stemming from [sic] the local way of life or from man’s universal need of salvation, but they have recognized that the various ways of life of different peoples are the channels by which their needs take form and through which the solution to such needs must pass. Effective missionaries have always sought to immerse themselves in a profound knowledge of the ways of life of the people to whom they have sought to minister, since only by such an understanding of the indigenous culture could they possibly communicate a new way of life.²

His statement was right when he penned it in 1975 and remains true today. Nida’s statement implies at least two critical factors affect missionary preparation and service. First, Nida’s words suggest the need for missionaries to learn and understand their own cultural biases. To identify accurately and be aware of human needs, one needs to understand his or her own cultural biases first. At times what one believes to be a need in another culture might arise from his or her own cultural bias. For example, one might hear expatriates complain about inefficiencies encountered at government offices in Thailand. Some of these expatriates perhaps assume that the Thai culture values efficiency as much as their home culture does. Often, these expatriates attempt to explain a faster way to process the paperwork to a junior staff member. The expatriates’ bias for efficiency, individualism, and egalitarianism perhaps has falsely led them to conclude that the junior staff member identifies the issue as inefficiency and desires to confront his or her supervisor to suggest a new method. All three of these assumptions would be false from a Thai perspective. First, in Thailand, completing a task efficiently is less important than maintaining a good relationship with one’s supervisor. Typically, there is no reward for completing a task quickly. In fact, the common Japanese proverb about the nail that sticks out shall be hammered down is applicable to Thailand as well. The Japanese proverb teaches the cultural value that conformity is better than individual rights. In

²Eugene Nida, *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions*, rev. ed. (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), xi.

Thailand, those who excel at the expense of others are often publicly shamed. In other words, those who excel are often hammered back into place. The cultural values of *krengjai*, *raksa namjai*, and *raksa kwaam samphan* help explain the situation. Maintaining harmonious and smooth relationships is a key to success in the Thai mind. Thus, a client will strive to protect his or her relationship with the patron. He or she will demonstrate *raksa namjai*, and *raksa kwaam samphan*. Second, saving *face* is more important than confrontation. Offering unsolicited suggestions for improvement might be interpreted as dishonoring one's supervisor or a challenge to the supervisor's *face*. In the workplace, the junior staff member is a client of his or her supervisor. Thus, the client must *krengjai* his or her supervisor. Offering unsolicited suggestions is not *krengjai*. Third, someone with a lower status should show deference to his or her supervisor and not suggest new methods. Making an unsolicited suggestion might be perceived as a challenge to the supervisor's authority and power. If the supervisor leads according to one of the two typical leadership forms as defined by Larry Persons, the client who offers unsolicited advice will most likely suffer harsh retribution.³ Acceptable cultural methods might be at the disposal of the junior staff member to aid him or her in making suggestions; however, these means may be uncommon or unknown to expatriates living in Thailand. The expatriates in the example above observed the situation and assessed the situation based on their home cultural context. The expatriates' assessment resulted in an evaluation of the situation resulting in "the normal emotional response people have when they confront other cultures for the first time."⁴ In other words, they displayed ethnocentrism. Paul Hiebert suggested empathy and an appropriate

³Larry Persons, *The Way Thais Lead: Face as Social Capital* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Press, 2016), 1762-1888 and 3696-3862, Kindle.

⁴Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 97.

appreciation for other cultures as solutions to ethnocentrism.⁵ In other words, cross-cultural workers need an openness to new ideas. This example illustrates the need for missionaries in training to understand their own cultural biases.

Second, Nida's words imply that learning the depth and breadth of a culture is vital to the process of making disciples and planting churches cross-culturally. The process of learning culture well is a difficult task and truly never ends. American anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher, best known for his groundbreaking development of the concept of proxemics, Edward Hall argued that language is one of ten primary message systems found in every culture.⁶ Illustrating the need for both self-assessment and deep and thorough learning of one's host culture, Hall wrote: "Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants."⁷ Hall's statement clarifies why it is difficult for our national friends and partners to explain clearly their own culture--many parts of the culture may be hidden from them. Likewise, the new missionary candidates' culture hides many elements from them. Thus, Hall's words imply missionary candidates and those in training need to do the hard work of evaluating their own culture. If culture hides things most effectively from its own participants, work is required by those participants to analyze and understand their own culture and the biases they have learned. Hall explained that one learns the most about his or her own culture while living in and learning about another culture.⁸ I agree with Hall. However, his statement does not mean that missionary candidates should not be exposed to some of the general cultural

⁵Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 98.

⁶Edward Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1954).

⁷*Ibid.*, 29.

⁸*Ibid.*, 30.

differences before they attempt entry into their new context. In fact, the process of learning about another culture can expose one to his or her own cultural biases. Additionally, exposure to basic anthropology and intercultural communication skills can be a further benefit to missionary candidates.

Missionary preparation in intercultural communication provides several benefits to those being trained. First, the candidates obtain new knowledge about their own culture and their new host culture. Second, the candidates are given the opportunity to begin understanding and valuing cultural themes, ideas, and methods that are different from their own. Finally, candidates can gain specific skills to help them learn the new language and culture. In other words, missionary preparation must include learning objectives that impact all three domains of learning: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.⁹ While preparation for international service requires more than learning about one's own culture and essential anthropological skills, these two elements are necessary for effective service in Northern Thailand and perhaps elsewhere. Before making recommendations about training, which may be applicable to all missionary candidates in the disciplines of anthropology and intercultural communication, the next section will describe a few cultural differences that exist between the *Khon Muang* culture and the general culture of the United States. Hopefully, exposure to these differences will assist missionary candidates seeking to serve among the *Khon Muang* in preparing for entry.

⁹Benjamin Bloom et al. were perhaps the first to identify the three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Bloom is perhaps best known for leading the team and developing *Bloom's Taxonomy* for the cognitive domain. While Bloom's team focused upon the cognitive and affective domains, his team does reference the psychomotor domain. Benjamin Bloom et al., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain* (New York: Longman, 1956), 19.

Implications Drawn from General Cultural Differences

Working with people who have different opinions, ideas, and values is difficult; however, if those differences include languages, religion, and customs the chances for conflict grow exponentially. Before one undertakes the serious task of cross-cultural ministry, he or she needs to realize people from different cultures “hold to different cultural values and use different rules to respond to conflict situations.”¹⁰

Below are three cultural differences that arose from the study of *bunkhun* among the *Khon Muang*. While many other differences exist, these three differences draw attention to the need for missionary candidates to prepare by assessing their own cultural biases.

Bunkhun is a form of a patron-client system, and most have some culturally conditioned response or evaluation concerning the virtue of such systems. David deSilva, a New Testament professor, in his excellent study of the cultural context of the New Testament, explained: “People in the United States and northern Europe may be culturally conditioned to find the concept of patronage distasteful. . . . It violates our conviction that everyone should have equal access to employment opportunities . . . or civil services.”¹¹ Perhaps the distaste for patronage by people in the United States and elsewhere is further compounded by a fallacy that patron-client systems are primarily about financial aid. In fact, financial assistance is only one aspect of the four forms of benefaction available for a patron to give. Financial aid is one aspect of the type of benefaction called inducement. The other three types of benefaction are power, commitment, and influence.¹² Cross-cultural workers are correct to be concerned about

¹⁰Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 178.

¹¹David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 95.

¹²For further study on these types of benefaction, see Bruce Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986); and

issues of dependency and paternalism. However, rejecting all forms of patronage for fear of inducing financial dependency is a mistake. Perhaps a better perspective is to remain open to the possibility that other forms of patronage exist. Additionally, missionary candidates need to have an openness to the possibility that their perspective is not the only viable perspective on patron-client systems. This openness encourages missionary candidates to enter the new culture as learners. Becoming a learner is an excellent step to take towards becoming a *viable missionary*.¹³ The fact that the *Khon Muang* society has various forms of patron-client systems is only one of several cultural differences that missionary candidates need to be aware of before entering Northern Thailand

Another difference between western cultures and *Khon Muang* culture is the hierarchical nature of *Khon Muang* society. Social status is the measure for determining the hierarchical rank among the *Khon Muang*. Individuals have either more social status or less social status in relation to one another. Determining a person's status in relation to oneself guides interaction between the two individuals. This variation in interaction is perhaps most readily seen in rich taxonomy of personal pronouns of the Thai language. Navavan Bandhmedha, a professor of linguistics, studied the usage of ten Thai pronouns to analyze elements of the Thai worldview. Bandhmedha explained that his list of ten pronouns was not exhaustive. He concluded that "the speaker must consider both personal characteristics and the relationship between himself and the other party in the conversation."¹⁴ First, the personal characteristics used to determine the pronoun of the

Shmuel Eisenstadt and Lius Roniger "Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, no. 1 (1980): 42-77.

¹³Don Larson, "The Viable Missionary: Learner, Trader, Story Teller," *Missiology: An International Review* 6, no. 2 (1978): 155-63.

¹⁴Navavan Bandhmedha, "Thai Views of Man as a Social Being," in *Traditional and Changing Thai World View*, ed. Amara Pongsapich, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1998), 104.

speaker include gender, age, and social position of the other individual in the conversation. Seniority, noble lineage, higher education level, income, and formal titles of position determine the social position and guide the selection of appropriate pronouns. Second, the relationships that determine the pronoun used by the speaker include the difference in social status and the level of intimacy between the speaker and the other individual in the conversation. While the level of intimacy between the referent and the speaker may be high, in public the speaker will often utilize a more honorific pronoun befitting the social status of the referent. A greater status difference, or the desire to give more honor or prestige to the referent, requires the speaker to utilize the higher level honorific pronouns. Steve Taylor, in his masters thesis, expanded Bandhmedha's list to twenty-five different pronouns. Taylor concluded that Thai seek to identify their relative position to one another socially by determining which pronoun and other linguistic markers should be used.¹⁵ Determining the most appropriate pronoun to use is a prerequisite social skill that must be learned. Missionaries preparing for service in Northern Thailand, or in most countries in Southeast Asia, need to be exposed to this cultural element before entering their place of service.

Like many other Asian cultures, in Thailand, honor is an important cultural value. In Thailand, honor is often discussed in terms of *face*. From a simplified and rudimentary perspective, gaining or losing *face* is equivalent to gaining or losing honor. The concept of *face* is much more complex than this rudimentary summation.¹⁶ *Face* or *ego* is the highest ranked cultural value in Thailand.¹⁷ As such, the culture has built an

¹⁵Stephen Taylor, "Patron-Client Relationships and the Challenge for the Thai Church" (MA Christian Studies thesis, Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore, 1997), 18-20.

¹⁶For a more thorough investigation about *face* and its missiological implications see Christopher Flanders, *About Face: Rethinking Face for 21st Century Mission*, American Society of Missiology Monograph Series, vol. 9 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

¹⁷Suntaree Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* (Bangkok:

extensive system of techniques to aid one in protecting, recovering, and gaining *face*. The importance of *face* among the *Khon Muang* makes it necessary for missionary candidates to learn and practice skills to maintain and develop smooth relationships. These techniques will help them avoid calling into question another's *face*. Duane Elmer suggested that rather than making direct statements, one should try indirect statements.¹⁸ A friend once recounted a story that illustrates this situation. Upon arrival to Thailand, the new missionary's supervisor gave him the authorization to study language three days per week. A local friend planned for this new missionary to visit a language school in town. During the discussion, the principal of the school suggested that the new missionary study four days a week. This new missionary simply stated that he would like to study only three days per week. The local friend was disappointed by this response. The local friend felt that the new missionary's refusal of the principal's offer had caused the principal to lose *face*. The situation could have been different had this new missionary simply stated that his supervisor authorized only three days of study. By referring to his supervisor, there would have been no direct refusal by the new missionary, and thus no loss of *face*. Beyond learning to utilize indirect statements, missionary candidates should also learn to use linguistic *downgraders*. Erin Meyer, a professor of cross-cultural management, explained, "indirect cultures use more *downgraders*, words that soften" criticism.¹⁹ The use of such *downgraders* is common in Thailand. Common *downgraders* include words such as *perhaps*, *maybe*, *almost*, and *slightly*. These words soften criticism and aid in maintaining smooth relationships. In

National Institute of Development Administration, 1991), 133.

¹⁸Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Connections*, 176-77.

¹⁹Erin Meyer, *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014), 65.

contrast, words that communicate absolutes may cause the emotional state of the conversation to become more intense. Meyer warned that these words make the emotional context of the communication stronger.²⁰ Becoming “hot-hearted” or losing a calm demeanor is culturally inappropriate among the *Khon Muang*; one should remain calm and maintain a “cool-heart” (*jaiyen*). The use of *downgraders* is not the only technique available for softening a conversation. Humor may also be used to “dilute the emotionally charged atmosphere.”²¹

Training in Anthropology and Intercultural Communication

While it is beyond the scope of this project to develop a comprehensive training system for missionary candidates, a few recommendations might be in order. First, training in the basics of intercultural communication can assist missionary candidates to see the world differently. Training in this academic discipline might help some candidates who have a monocultural viewpoint develop a multicultural perspective. Additionally, this discipline might help others build upon a good multicultural foundation. This does not mean that a monocultural viewpoint is wrong and the multicultural perspective is right. However, it is “to suggest that there are different ways of thinking and that such differences must be recognized and respected.”²² Thus, a person who has a multicultural perspective might be able to adjust to and handle the stress of living in a new cultural context better than one who is not aware of various perspectives. Finally, training in intercultural communication might equip missionary

²⁰Meyer, *The Culture Map*, 65.

²¹John Paul Fieg and Elizabeth Mortlock, *A Common Core: Thais and Americans* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1989), 42.

²²Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 2-3.

candidates with some of the skills necessary for leading multicultural teams.

Perhaps one of the most helpful tools for beginning to develop a multicultural perspective is the use of national cultural comparison charts or maps. Authors like Erin Meyer, Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov have provided excellent resources for comparing different national cultures. The focus of Meyer's work is aiding the reader in understanding some of the business communication challenges that arise because of cultural differences.²³ Her work is filled with insightful stories and illustrations. Her work is helpful, if not entertaining, at times. Geert Hofstede is well known for his decades of study in the field of national cultural comparisons. His latest book is perhaps the most comprehensive analysis available to date.²⁴ While other books exist, these two resources are representative of the work of others. Additionally, both works will be beneficial to missionary candidates preparing to serve, no matter if they are coming to Thailand or going to serve in another country.

A second discipline can assist missionary candidates in developing a multicultural perspective. That discipline is cultural anthropology, especially the research tools of participatory observation and ethnographic interviewing. These two tools are invaluable in the language learning process. Mike Griffis and Linda Mac, New Tribe Missionaries, in their practical guide for learning a language and culture, combined the two cultural anthropology research tools of participatory observation and ethnographic interviewing for developing a process for learning a language and culture. They recommended every lesson should include observing a cultural phenomenon, listening to the language involved in the cultural phenomenon, and responding to the

²³Meyer, *The Culture Map*, 6.

²⁴Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010).

cultural phenomenon.²⁵ They challenge language and culture learners to observe what is happening around them purposely.²⁶ As James Spradley explained, participant observation is the science of intentionally studying a social situation through participation and observation in order to learn the implicit cultural themes.²⁷ He explained the concept of implicit cultural themes: “All human beings act as ordinary participants in many social situations. Once we learn the cultural rules, the rules become tacit and we hardly think about what we are doing.”²⁸ Second, language and culture students should listen and strive for understanding. To guide these students towards cultural and linguistic competence, Griffis and Mac detailed more than two hundred lessons. These lessons begin with listening to understand individual words. Then, progress in complexity towards understanding sentence patterns and paragraphs. The goal of the lessons is equipping students to comprehend in-depth narratives about various cultural themes. Third, students should respond with appropriate questions about what was heard and observed.²⁹ In other words, the student should practice basic ethnographic interview skills. As the lessons progress in difficulty and complexity, the students are challenged to probe more deeply into a variety of cultural themes and message systems. These skills are important and helpful in the process of becoming an effective communicator. To this

²⁵Mike Griffis and Linda Mac, *BEC – Becoming Equipped to Communicate: A Practical Guide for Learning a Language and Culture* (Baulkham Hills, Australia: AccessTruth, 2015), 20.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷James P Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980), 53-62.

²⁸Ibid., 53.

²⁹Griffis and Mac, *BEC – Becoming Equipped to Communicate*, 20. Griffis and Mac suggested the use of appropriate questions about what, how, with what, when, where, and who as the student observes various cultural contexts. Additionally, students are encouraged to truly participate in the daily activities and routines. This involvement aids the learning process by making the learning multi-sensory in nature.

list a fourth skill is recommended, relating. Language and culture learners should strive to move beyond an emic understanding to relating the story of this new culture to their own story and ultimately to the story of the gospel. Language learners should endeavor to become storytellers, relating God's story to the new culture they are learning. Thus, it is recommended that missionary candidates learn the general differences between their home and their host cultures and begin practicing the skills recommended above before entering the Northern Thai context.³⁰

While one may be able to learn conceptual categories and some foundational elements about one's own culture before being exposed to cultural difference, true learning of both one's home culture and one's new host culture comes "when one lives through the shock of contrast and difference."³¹ Learning the conceptual categories above are essential and will aid missionary candidates greatly in the entry stage.

Entry Stage

The entry stage can be an emotional and stressful period in the life of new missionaries. New sights, sounds, smells, and tastes bombard the senses. At first, everything is an adventure, but most new missionaries quickly become aware of the stresses and difficulties of living in a new place. The stresses and difficulties are often associated with language learning. Many languages have sounds unfamiliar to those who speak English. In Thailand, this challenge is compounded by the tonal system and script for the Thai alphabet. While language learning can pose some of the most challenging times for new missionaries, it is the best avenue for learning about the new culture and its

³⁰Bible Storying is one useful tool for equipping both missionary candidates and short-term mission volunteers to relate God's story in both oral and literate contexts. J. O. Terry, "Bible Storying Handbook for Short-term Church Mission Teams and Mission Volunteers," accessed April 17, 2016, <https://orality.imb.org/files/1/409/Bible%20Storying%20Handb.pdf>.

³¹Hall, *The Silent Language*, 30.

people. Ultimately, language serves as the tool for learning with and from one's national friends and ministry partners. Don Larson, a professor of anthropology and linguistics, rightly encouraged new missionaries to exploit the role of the language learner.³² By exploitation, Larson meant new missionaries should make the most of their learner role because this role communicates a couple of essential factors to the local community. First, learners are dependent on others to assist them. Dependence also displays a willingness to listen and learn humility. Second, a learner conveys vulnerability. A learner must be vulnerable enough to accept other's input and suggestions. Both character traits are involved in the first skill suggested by Duane Elmer for becoming an appropriate and effective servant in a cross-cultural context, openness. Elmer detailed this skill and five others accordingly:

1. "Openness is *the ability to welcome people into your presence and make them feel safe.*"³³
2. "Acceptance is *the ability to communicate value, worth and esteem to another person.*"³⁴
3. "Trust is *the ability to build confidence in a relationship so that both parties believe the other will not intentionally hurt them but will act in their best interest.*"³⁵
4. "Learning is *the ability to glean relevant information about, from and with other people.*"³⁶

³²Larson, "The Viable Missionary," 163.

³³Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 39 (emphasis in original).

³⁴Ibid., 58 (emphasis in original).

³⁵Ibid., 77 (emphasis in original).

³⁶Ibid., 93 (emphasis in original).

5. “Understanding is *the ability to see patterns of behavior and values that reveal the integrity of a people.*”³⁷
6. “Serving is *the ability to relate to people in such a way that their dignity as human beings is affirmed and they are more empowered to live God-glorifying lives.*”³⁸

Elmer reminded his readers that being a servant is a culturally defined concept. Thus, we should “postpone naming ourselves ‘servants’ until the local people begin to use words about us that suggest they see servant attitudes and behaviors in us.”³⁹ The goal is to serve others, but one must first learn what is classified as service in the new cultural context. Then, one must wisely discern how this newly acquired understanding of service aligns with an orthodox biblical and theological understanding of service.

The first three skills detailed by Elmer, openness, acceptance, and trust, help new missionaries in building and maintaining new friendships. Learning to display the values and skills of *krengjai* and the other eight social smoothing values can aid new missionaries in building and maintaining relationships among the *Khon Muang*. The *Khon Muang* will feel safe and welcomed by new missionaries who seek to be considerate, *krengjai*, caring, and helpful. Trust among the *Khon Muang* can be built by demonstrating a flexibility when situations change or new opportunities appear. The *Khon Muang* are more focused on people and the event, rather than on the task or project. Being flexible to change plans and go with the flow of the event will earn new missionaries more trust than being rigid and fixed upon completing the task. For some new missionaries, this kind of flexibility might be difficult. Trust can be quickly lost if one is unable to control his or her temper during these periods of uncertainty. Staying calm and patient is an active demonstration of “loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:6, ESV, 2001). Perhaps the best means of fostering

³⁷Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, 125 (emphasis in original).

³⁸Ibid., 146 (emphasis in original).

³⁹Ibid., 37.

trust is spending time together. Time together has the added advantage of allowing the new missionaries to learn from and learn with their national friends.

Trust additionally may be built by tailoring any favors given to be personal and fitting the specific context of one's national friend. Remembering that a critical element of *bunghun* relationships is the personal nature of the favor is essential.⁴⁰ The bookstore owner in Phrae illustrated this point in her testimony about the individual who assisted her in opening a bookstore of her own.⁴¹ The favor given was specific and personal.

A third method for building trust involves giving honor to others, as Persons explained: "leaders with moral strength consistently give honor to their associates. This extraordinary behavior demonstrates a commendable amount of trust in their associates, as well as a sense of security in their own treasures of social capital."⁴² Honoring another person can be done by putting oneself in a vulnerable position and allowing a friend to come to one's aid or defense. Duane Elmer called this the "one-down position."⁴³ Taking the one-down position means making oneself vulnerable or showing that one needs assistance or lose *face*. Elmer suggested that this skill can be used as an alternative to direct confrontation to resolve a conflict. Moreover, this skill can also be utilized in encouraging and empowering others. The one-down position does not require asking for assistance, but can involve requesting assistance from others. Once assistance has been granted, a public display of gratitude and appreciate should be made. This public declaration of appreciation honors the individual who provided the assistance, thus giving

⁴⁰Suvanajata, "Thai Social System," 181. Suntaree Komin uses terms like "sheer kindness and sincerity" to describe the personal nature of the *bunghun* given. Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 139.

⁴¹P11a, interview by the author, Phrae, Thailand, March 31, 2015. At the time of the interview, this participant was 57 years old.

⁴²Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 1972.

⁴³Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict*, 80.

him or her *face* and raising his or her status among the group. Additionally, this method serves as an opportunity to learn from one's national friends and partners.

Understanding the cultural system of *bunghun* can be helpful in building relationships with, maintaining relationships with, and understanding the daily interaction of the *Khon Muang*. However, several implications are cause for concern and must be addressed. Suggestions for further research will also be provided alongside these concerns.

Missiological Concerns Related to *Bunghun*

Bunghun is a cultural system that maintains social smoothing values and skills, reinforces traditional ideas about the ideal character qualities of both a patron and a client, and regulates the relationships between a patron and a client among the *Khon Muang*. While most *Khon Muang* can describe the pristine *bunghun* detailed in Quadrant I of the *Bunghun* Matrix, they typically do not experience the genuinely benevolent patron free of any instrumental *bunghun* characteristics described by Quadrant II.⁴⁴ As with all acts of generosity, which are tainted by the power of sin, most acts of generosity among the *Khon Muang* contain elements of both pristine and instrumental *bunghun*. Therefore, while the *Khon Muang* can articulate and explain the ideal pristine elements, their experiences have provided a different interpretative model. This interpretative model guides the way they perceive and respond to all acts of grace. Thus, communication of the gospel and other biblical truths are perceived and interpreted via this framework. In the case of this project, the cultural system of *bunghun* is a central concept for that interpretative framework. It is not sufficient to say one will speak of, teach about, and provide instruction in a biblical understanding of grace; one must know and understand the interpretative framework of those with whom he or she is

⁴⁴See pp. 103-14.

communicating. At least four missiological concerns arise from this study of *bunghun*. First, a debtor's ethic is inherent to the cultural system of *bunghun* as experienced by the *Khon Muang*. The non-ideal system requires the recipient to self-impose an obligation to repay. In other words, the client should feel indebted to the patron and strive to pay off the debt. Careful, consistent, and creative means of communicating the grace of God are necessary. Second, this debtor's ethic has implications beyond discipleship and can impact the development of healthy fellowship between members of the body of Christ, the church. Third, another faulty motivation to repay *bunghun* can occur in relation to the *Khon Muang's* traditional religious beliefs. Thai Folk Buddhism teaches that a myriad of spirits exist and inhabit the earth. Rituals of appeasement and manipulation of the spirits are common. *Bunghun* is not a transaction of giving and receiving only one favor. In fact, *bunghun* is an on-going exchange of grace. Many of the rituals concerning spirits are similar. These ceremonies involve on-going exchanges of ritual performance to gain a blessing from the spirit, followed by a ritual of gratitude. These rituals become a type of dance of grace, giving and receiving. Perhaps some *Khon Muang* believers believe that one may appease, manipulate, or dance with God in a similar fashion, thus forcing God to bless or fulfill his obligation to the one who obeyed. In Thailand, a form of the prosperity gospel exists that promises God will return blessings in proportion to what is given.⁴⁵ Many Thai Christians are taught that if they do good and make merit, then God is obligated to bless them in return. Thus, Christian obedience becomes a syncretistic version of spirit appeasement. The prosperity gospel, which is no gospel at all, can only

⁴⁵Ulrich Kohler, "A Study of the Concept of 'Phrakhun Mae' Toward Communication Biblical Grace in the Thai Context" (DMin diss., International Theological Seminary, 2016), 222-23. The prosperity gospel may be defined as "a 'gospel' claiming freedom from sickness, poverty, and all suffering on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. Promising material, physical, and visible blessing for all who would embrace it, the prosperity gospel insists that God's will is for all his children to prosper here and now." Michael Otieno Maura et al., *Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel* (Nairobi: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2015), 3.

be countered by careful communication of the true gospel. Fourth, new models of leadership development are needed. The experiences that many *Khon Muang* have with non-pristine or instrumental *bunghun* and the related leadership models necessitate the development and instruction of an explicit theology of leadership for the Northern Thai context.

A Debtor's Ethic

The expectation of the *Khon Muang* is that gifts are to be given freely, *gratis*, with no plan or desire for repayment. Joy, thanksgiving, and gratitude are the appropriate spontaneous responses to receiving such favors. Gratitude celebrates grace. Sadly, sin often distorts true gratitude. True gratitude results in a spontaneous, joyful response, but the sinful heart of humanity imposes an impulse or desire to repay that which came freely. John Piper called this distortion a debtor's ethic and explained:

It's not wrong to feel gratitude when someone gives us a gift. The trouble starts with the impulse that now we owe a "gift." What this feeling does is turn gifts into legal currency. Subtly the gift is no longer a gift but a business transaction. And what was offered as free grace is nullified by distorted gratitude.⁴⁶

Bunghun can result in the strongest psychologically bonded relationships in *Khon Muang* society. Larry Persons explained that true or pristine *bunghun* "influences behavior as both parties remain alive, and sometimes even longer."⁴⁷ The result is an intrinsic motivation for the client. The client responds not because he or she must, but rather because he or she wants to display gratitude for the gift. However, most individuals experience a form of *bunghun* less benevolent.⁴⁸ Thus, an extrinsic motivation develops

⁴⁶John Piper, *Future Grace*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2012), 788-92, Kindle.

⁴⁷Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 3016-29.

⁴⁸Chaiyun Ukosakul, "A Study of the Patterns of Detachment in Interpersonal Relationship in a Local Thai Church" (EdD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1994), 288.

that results in a debtor's ethic. The client responds because he or she must. Joy and the desire to display gratitude is replaced by a desire to repay to be free of the debt. The relationship becomes transactional rather than based on a loving obligation. Gratitude is displayed in both cases, but the motivation changes. Christians who fall to the impulse to repay God for his grace experience the same shift in motivation. What one experiences shapes one's perspective on the world.

Experiences form an essential interpretative framework for the *Khon Muang*.⁴⁹ This experiential interpretative framework can cause difficulty for missionaries trained in the Western context. This framework can cause difficulty because many Western-trained missionaries receive highly systematic, abstract, and proportional based training. While this instructional form might be useful for educating missionaries from the Western context, it is perhaps not the most effective instructional model for use in Asia. Many of the cultures in Thailand, especially the Tai speaking cultures, value people and events over systems, ideologies, and propositional truth claims. Cognitive truth claims do not guide life choices, experiential evidence and relationships do.⁵⁰ While *Khon Muang* Christians indeed know the grace of God, the knowledge they possess is not the most influential element of their interpretative framework. Perhaps the instruction provided to the *Khon Muang* about the grace of God is too abstract or not abundant enough to efficiently communicate with their experiential interpretative framework.⁵¹ A different

⁴⁹Titaya Suvanajata, "Is the Thai Social System Loosely Structured?" *Social Science Review* 1 (1976): 175.

⁵⁰Ibid. Also, Komin, *Psychology of the Thai People*, 161.

⁵¹Ulrich Kohler, in his recent DMin diss., argued that among the Central Thai, teaching about the grace of God was too abstract and too infrequent to counter the cultural norms taught by the familial form of *bunkhun*. Kohler's project did not specifically investigate the amount of teaching that exists among *Khon Muang* churches concerning the grace of God. Thus, further research is needed to verify if Kohler's conclusions apply in the Northern Thai context. Despite the lack of specific investigation among the *Khon Muang*, there is no reason to doubt that many of Kohler's conclusions can be applied throughout all of

instructional model might be needed.

A few suggestions for improving the instructional mode of missionaries among the *Khon Muang* might be in order. N. T. Wright, renowned British New Testament scholar, wrote: “Stories are a basic constituent of human life; they are, in fact, one key element within the total construction of worldview. . . . The stories which characterize the worldview itself are thus located, on the map of human knowing, at a more fundamental level than explicitly formulated beliefs, including theological beliefs.”⁵² Stories, thus, provide a framework for understanding the world. Stories can be experiential, by allowing hearers to imagine themselves in the context. Thus, stories of God’s grace might better challenge the experiential framework of *bunghun* among the *Khon Muang*. Stories also inherently involve relationships. Stories also reveal the character of God. Additionally, rather than drawing abstract doctrinal truths from a Bible passage, missionaries can improve their instruction on the grace of God by utilizing a participatory approach. Questions about the character, work, and purpose of God might help *Khon Muang* believers to understand their relationship with God better and, in turn, understand the grace of God better. The hope is that more concrete and repetitive instruction on the grace of God will equip *Khon Muang* followers of Christ to live thankful, trusting, and hope-filled lives in the grace of God.

A debtor’s ethic can affect the depth of maturity in the disciple’s life. Additionally, a debtor’s ethic can negatively influence the fellowship between believers in the body of Christ, the church. The reserved nature of the Thai towards establishing intimate relationships, observed by some scholars, is perhaps partially caused by the

Thailand. Kohler, “A Study of the Concept of ‘*Phrakhun*’,” 240.

⁵²Nicholas Thomas Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1992), 38.

debtor's ethic inherent to *bunghun*.⁵³ The instrumental forms of *bunghun* and the extrinsic obligation to repay favors can result in relationships between members of the same church operating from the basis of duty and obligation instead of from a covenantal love commitment to one another. Instrumental forms of *bunghun* impose a duty to repay favors. Thus, it should not be surprising if *Khon Muang* believers respond to situations within the church out of duty as the broader social group does in situations outside the church. This duty is reinforced by the concept of *krenghai*. Again, *krenghai* is a social smoothing mechanic used by the *Khon Muang* to avoid imposing upon another and conflict. When these two factors are combined, the result is a strong cultural push to avoid accountability and a weakening of church discipline. In other words, *bunghun* and *krenghai* “can forcefully compel them [Thai believers] to act, as a duty, even against their will in return for good deeds they have received . . . the clients do not normally act according to their convictions or out of the sense of appreciation for good deeds, but only as a repayment of the ‘debt’ in fulfilling the obligation.”⁵⁴ A third external factor can push the *Khon Muang* believers away from developing strong biblical fellowship, the fear of losing *face*. Perhaps the fear of losing *face* leads some *Khon Muang* believers to hide personal sin, not share struggles, nor share their need for prayer. Biblical fellowship, a covenantal commitment to one another, thus, may never develop. The duty or obligation one feels towards another may fade once the debt has been repaid. However, duty or obligation to one another grounded in a loving covenantal commitment can develop into strong relationships. Relationships can be strengthened through duty and obligation, but as with the correct motivation for living an obedient Christian life duty, duty and

⁵³Niels Mulder, *Inside Thai Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life*, 5th ed. (Amsterdam: The Pepin Press, 1994), 67; and Chaiyun Ukosakul, “A Turn from the Wheel to the Cross: Crucial Considerations for Discipling New Thai Christians” (MTh thesis, Regent College, 1988), 158-160.

⁵⁴Ukosakul, “A Study of the Patterns of Detachment,” 289.

obligation should be anchored in solid doctrinal truth. The *Khon Muang* believers should not return a favor “out of mere obligation because that does not come out of the sense of appreciation and genuine love and care which could help lead to meaningful and committed relationships.”⁵⁵

Further research is needed to understand the extent of the impact of *bunghun*, *krengjai*, and the fear of losing *face* has upon the development of healthy church fellowship. Despite the need for further research in this area, perhaps a few suggestions are in order. These suggestions focus on needs in discipleship to help *Khon Muang* believers understand and model biblical fellowship. First, more teaching and training on the grace of God and its implications for fellowship would be helpful. Understanding that all believers are undeserving recipients of God’s grace provides a better motive for serving others in the body of Christ. Loving, serving, and assisting others becomes an act of gratitude for the love that Christ first gave us (1 John 4:19). Furthermore, 1 John 4 instructs there is direct and visible evidence that a believer loves God in the way he or she loves other Christians. Second, more teaching and training is needed to aid *Khon Muang* believers to have more accountability. *Krengjai* can hinder believers from investing and developing strong interpersonal relationships. *Krengjai* can assist believers to stop and consider how to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). However, *krengjai* should not be used by believers to absolutely avoid bothering other believers or not allowing others to bear their burdens. Exposition of the *one another* passages of the New Testament might provide an avenue for explaining biblical fellowship.

Spirit Appeasement/Manipulation

In 1985, Philip Hughes concluded that two significant factors guided Thai

⁵⁵Ukosakul, “A Study of the Patterns of Detachment,” 290.

Christians' understanding of Christianity. First, Christianity teaches one how to live. Second, Christianity involves seeking the power of God.⁵⁶ According to Hughes, as of 1985, the soteriological framework was still largely patterned after Thai Folk Buddhist concepts.⁵⁷ Over a decade later, Steve Taylor, a missionary with more than two decades of experience ministering in Thailand, came to similar conclusions.⁵⁸ Taylor concluded that Thai Christians continued to relate to God through a transactional relationship and God's grace and unconditional love remained generally misunderstood.⁵⁹ In 2016, Ulrich Kohler, a Swiss Mennonite missionary, reached similar conclusions, but wrote about them in terms of the growing influence of the prosperity gospel teaching. Kohler explained the primary motivation for Christian obedience is no different from the Thai Folk Buddhist's motivation: "the hope to gain profit, be blessed."⁶⁰ Certainly, there is nothing wrong with wanting to be blessed by God. The difficulty comes from how one defines blessing. The church in Northern Thailand does not need to shy away from teaching the blessings of God and of future rewards as defined in the Bible. In fact, the *Khon Muang* church must confront the gospel distortions of the prosperity gospel clearly.⁶¹ This project was delimited and did not include a complete investigation of this concern. However, further research is needed to investigate how the theological concepts

⁵⁶Philip Hughes, "Christianity and Buddhism in Thailand," *Journal of the Siam Society*, 73 (Jan 1985): 23-41.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁸Steve Taylor, "Gaps in Beliefs of Thai Christians," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2001):72-81.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁰Kohler, "A Study of the Concept of 'Phrakhun Mae'," 272.

⁶¹Those crucial distortions are the proclamation of a small God; the failure to correctly identify man's greatest need; the emptying of the gospel's true power; and the robbery of God's glory. See Maura et al., *Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel*, 3-13.

taught in the prosperity gospel correlate with Thai Folk Buddhism and the *bunghun* system.

Leadership Models

Larry Persons' book provides an excellent anthropological investigation into the traditional leadership models in Thailand. As described earlier in this dissertation, three leadership models are standard among the Thai: leadership by power and authority, leadership by influence, and leadership by meritorious and virtuous behavior.⁶² All patrons, including those within the *bunghun* system, must be aware of these three leadership models. Additionally, it is crucial for cross-cultural workers to lead in beneficial ways. Two leadership examples are worth describing and perhaps will stimulate further research into missiological leadership models in Northern Thailand and beyond. First, one might summarize a common leadership development process used in Thailand as having four steps. During step one potential leaders are trained. Then, in step 2, potential leaders are provided opportunities to serve, train others, or minister in a variety of contexts. During step 3, potential leaders are watched to see if they can perform as expected. Finally, the new leaders are assessed and evaluated before being released to serve. This basic model is common among secular and Christian organizations in Thailand.⁶³ However, this model can fail in step three based on the leadership style of the patron. A patron who leads by power or influence is often more concerned about their honor, face, and authority than about assisting those he or she trains in excelling and becoming successful. Thus, when a subordinate fails, the patron rather than drawing close to the client and providing protection from ridicule, he or she might ensure that all blame and responsibility fall on the client. The benevolent leader, in

⁶²Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 3052.

⁶³Sittichok Sukramun, interview by author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, April 2012. Pastor Tawat Yenjai, interview by author, Chiang Mai, Thailand, December 2017.

contrast, might provide a safety net allowing new leaders make mistakes and guide them through an assessment process to learn from those mistakes. It is important to remember that the benevolent patron seeks opportunities to give honor to their associates and provide them a sense of security.⁶⁴ While there is a personal responsibility that a client must claim when he or she fails, leaders should also remember that “on any team, in any organization, all responsibility for success and failure rests with the leader.”⁶⁵ Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, retired U.S. Navy Seal, call this the principle of *Extreme Ownership*. They argue that the best leaders do not seek to place blame on others, but strive to bear “full responsibility for explaining the strategic mission, developing the tactics, and securing the training and resources to enable the team to properly and successfully execute.”⁶⁶ Cross-cultural workers might find it helpful to consider how they will provide the sense of security. Additionally, it is crucial for cross-cultural workers to model taking responsibility for their failures. Modeling vulnerability and acceptance of what might be considered a loss of face due to a failure is vital for new leaders to experience. When the most common forms of leadership experienced by the Northern Thai are the leadership by power and influence models, it is vital for cross-cultural workers to demonstrate the benevolent patron leadership style by providing a secure and safe environment in which failure can become a useful learning tool. The Northern Thai cognitively understand and accept the benevolent model as the most effective approach, however, they lack the experiential evidence necessary for a paradigm shift to occur. Second, cross-cultural workers can serve as an intermediary between patrons providing opportunities and access to resources formerly unavailable to

⁶⁴Persons, *The Way Thais Lead*, 1972.

⁶⁵Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy Seals Lead and Win*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 30.

⁶⁶Ibid.

a client. The second leadership example relies on the fact that Northern Thai society is hierarchically structured.⁶⁷ As a result of this hierarchical characteristic, Northern Thai people have multiple patrons with whom they relate. Not all these relationships will be *bunghun* relationships. On occasion, two or more of these patrons may attend a meeting together. One patron might have provided benefactions to a village or group. The benefaction provided might have been the responsibility of another patron. Sometimes cross-cultural workers provide aids that are the responsibility or under the authority of a political leader, or another patron. By assisting, the group or village might perceive the cross-cultural worker as a patron for the group or the village. As news spreads of the support provided, complications can arise. Some political leaders might fear a loss of face because of the actions of the cross-cultural worker. Cross-cultural workers can unintentionally damage their ability to provide further assistance and even lose access to communities, if they are unaware of the patronage issues involved. However, if cross-cultural workers are aware of the associated patron-client issues, they might be able to serve as brokers between the community and political leaders or other patrons. Three characteristics are essential for serving as a broker in these circumstances. First, a wise broker protects other patrons from loss of face. While it might be true that one patron has not been faithful to fulfill their responsibility, often expatriate cross-cultural workers do not have the power or authority to confront these failures. One course of action might be to protect the other patron from losing face. Perhaps the best way to accomplish this goal is to provide an opportunity for both the other patron and the cross-cultural worker to win honor and favor in the community. The other patron might be unaware of the need or lack the capacity to fulfill his or her responsibilities. Thus, a wise broker should strive to

⁶⁷Taylor, "Patron-Client Relationships and the Challenge for the Thai Church;" Henry Holmes and Suchada Tangtongtavy, *Working with the Thais: A Guide to Managing in Thailand* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1995); and Lucien Hanks, "The Thai Social Order as Entourage and Circle," in *Change and Persistence in Thai Society*, ed. George Skinner and A. Thomas Kirsch, (London: Cornell University Press, 1975), 198-99.

create opportunities by which the other patron can discharge his or her responsibilities. The community receives the aid needed, the other patron gains honor for being involved in providing the need, and the expatriate work gains honor from both the community and perhaps a stronger relationship with the other patron. Finally, a wise broker should not seek to claim honor for any success in the accomplished task.⁶⁸

Persons' study and others have not yet been applied to the Christian churches, nor have those studies been examined theologically.⁶⁹ Thus, further research is needed to investigate how cross-cultural workers and Thai church leaders can utilize the benevolent leader style.

A Possible Help in Evangelism and Discipleship

Katanyuu involves the act of showing gratitude and the expected response to *bunghun*. Further research is needed to verify if the term *katanyuu* can be used to explain the proper motivation for the Christian life. Kohler elucidated that *katanyuu* should clearly communicate two concepts to Thai non-believers and new Christians: "1. When we talk about 'believing in Jesus' we are talking about an actual relationship and, 2. If there is such a relationship, then no response to that relationship is not an option."⁷⁰ Thus, it is possible that the use of this term might help articulate and emphasize that a real relationship with God is possible. The danger of reinforcing the cultural concept of earning merit from God by demonstrating *katanyuu* is possible as well. This danger

⁶⁸This example was derived from my personal experience working as Director of Projects for HandClasp Foundation, a Thai non-government organization that strives to provide reproducible community development projects in Northern Thailand. The points stressed in this example need further research to verify and validate them.

⁶⁹Kelly Hilderbrand, "A Literature Review of Thai Leadership Styles with Application to Christian Leadership Models and Church Governance in Thailand," *Global Missiology* 4, no. 3 (2016): 1, accessed October 13, 2016, <http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/view/1915>.

⁷⁰Kohler, "A Study of the Concept of 'Phrakhun Mae'," 266.

necessitates the need for more research studying the viability of using *katanyuu* to explain the grace of God.

Conclusion

The *bunghun* system is a wonderful blessing for aiding missionaries' understanding of how to build and maintain relationships among the *Khon Muang*. However, *bunghun* also presents several hurdles to effective ministry. While a pristine or empowering form of *bunghun* is known by the *Khon Muang*, the form of *bunghun* most often experienced is manipulative. Thus, the development of strong open and loving relationships is often hindered by a debtor's ethic and the fear of manipulation. Second, evangelistic and discipleship methods need to carefully and specifically explain biblical grace and the motivation for living an obedient Christian life. Third, evangelistic and discipleships methods need to carefully and specifically aid *Khon Muang* believers to understand that sanctification by works is not possible. Fourth, clear and careful instruction on biblical fellowship is needed to counter the effects of a debtor's ethic created among the *Khon Muang* so that healthy churches can be planted and developed. Finally, leadership development tools must equip current and future *Khon Muang* church leaders to utilize the best leadership forms available.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Bunghun is a complex and fascinating cultural system. Still, it is hoped that this project has helped to elucidate how *bunghun* functions among the *Khon Muang*. Additionally, it is hoped that this project provided a few helpful recommendations for how to build and maintain relationships for ministry among and alongside the *Khon Muang*. The interpersonal relationship skills maintained by the *bunghun* system are valuable tools for missionaries working among the *Khon Muang*. The ideal character qualities of a patron and client reinforced by the *bunghun* system provide helpful interpretive lenses for understanding interactions between members of the *Khon Muang* society. Finally, *bunghun* regulates the relationships between a patron and a client. Knowing some of the potential reasons for why people behave the way they do can serve missionaries by aiding them in responding and communicating more effectively. Marshall Sahlins was correct: giving and receiving gifts makes friends. And it is helpful to understand how a culture defines a gift and the related obligations attached to receiving that gift.

In chapter 1, a problem was set forth as a guide for this project: after more than a century and a half, evangelical Christianity has yet to establish a strong presence in Thailand, especially among the Tai speaking people groups. The lack of understanding by missionaries concerning social barriers that affect the acceptance of the gospel is perhaps one factor that has limited the expanse of the gospel. Asian cultures are different from Western cultures and as such much hard work is necessary to learn about these differences. *Bunghun* is one of those differences.

Chapter 2 examined the history and religion of the *Khon Muang* people. Additionally, this chapter examined the salient literature and analyzed the common schemata for interpreting the Thai cultural system. The *Khon Muang* are a distinct people group. They are proud of their heritage and language. Many cultural similarities exist between the *Khon Muang* and the other Tai speaking peoples of Thailand. Despite these similarities, it is appropriate to study and understand the differences that exist. These differences might perhaps require different missiological strategies. Thai Folk Buddhism is a complicated religion. Philosophical Buddhism does not guide the religious practices of the *Khon Muang*; instead, a pragmatic, syncretistic version of Buddhism and animism guides their religious beliefs. The examination of the salient literature revealed that *bunghun* relationships are established by two means: they are established either because a client recognizes the ascribed status of a patron, or because individual acts of graciousness overwhelm the client with gratitude.

Chapter 3 examined the function of *bunghun* among the *Khon Muang*. *Bunghun* relationships can be characterized four different ways: ideal *bunghun* relationships, coercive *bunghun* relationships, potentially beneficial *bunghun* relationships, and potentially manipulative *bunghun* relationships. Nine value sets serve to guide and regulate the interaction between the patron and the client in *bunghun* relationships. These value sets include associated behaviors or skills one can learn and utilize for building and maintaining relationships among the *Khon Muang*. The goal of this chapter included presenting a theory for *bunghun*: *Bunghun* is a cultural system that maintains social smoothing values and skills, reinforces traditional ideas about the ideal character qualities of both a patron and a client, and regulates the relationships between a patron and a client among the *Khon Muang*.

Chapter 4 surveyed the Bible to define and describe the patron titles of God. The six titles for a patron in the Greco-Roman world were applied to God, and Scripture demonstrated that God is the ideal patron, the one True Patron. The passages surveyed

also explained the obligations or duties of the client: to display gratitude, loyalty, and honor to the patron. Additionally, a good client joins in working to fulfill the patron's purpose. Finally, a short survey outlining the biblical concept of grace was detailed. *Bunkhun* has similarities to grace, but the two are different. *Bunkhun* is often motivated by a debtor's ethic, but the grace of God motivates believers to live an obedient Christian life because of gratitude for the past finished justifying grace of Christ on the cross, trust in the present indwelling and abiding power of sanctifying grace wrought by the Holy Spirit, and hope in the future glorifying grace of God's promises of future rewards.

Chapter 5 dealt with the missiological implications of *bunkhun*. Now that one has a better understanding of the culture, history, and religion of the *Khon Muang* people, how should this knowledge be applied to missionary preparation and entry into Northern Thailand? First, as *bunkhun* is a form of patron-client system, missionaries sent out from countries where patron-client systems are not common need to begin a process of becoming aware of the possibilities for how patronage may be used in a healthy manner. Outright rejection of patron-client systems or refusal to investigate the possibilities will result in relational conflict. One must remember that he or she is the guest in the new cultural context. As such, it is incumbent upon him or her to understand the cultural context so that clear communication occurs. Second, elements of honor and shame are embedded in *Khon Muang* culture and the *bunkhun* system. Learning to utilize skills such as the use of *downgraders* in communication will benefit missionaries in building and maintaining relationships among the *Khon Muang*. Trust is necessary if one desires to serve others with the gospel of Christ. This chapter outlined the manner in which the social smoothing cultural values and skills can assist new cross-cultural workers in building trust and gaining the right to serve the *Khon Muang*. Finally, several suggestions were offered to address implications related to evangelism, discipleship, fellowship and leadership development. These thoughts are all offered tentatively as more research is needed to verify their veracity.

Recommendations

This project arose from a personal need to understand how *bunghun* functions in Northern Thailand. This system is a form of patron-client system. Patron-client systems are prevalent in Asia; it is incumbent upon expatriate missionaries to study and think about the missiological implications of such systems. It is time for missionaries to partner with their national brothers and sisters to seek critically contextualized responses to questions about the patronage of God, how patronage impacts the development of church leaders, how patron-client systems affect the fellowship and interpersonal relationships of the body of Christ, and how the gospel can be communicated more effectively. Most Western trained missionaries are ill-equipped to answer these questions. Thus, we need our national brothers' and sisters' assistance. Developing the necessary partnerships with our national brothers and sisters requires humility, compassion, patience, and vulnerability. However, the rewards in one's personal life, ministry, and for the Kingdom of God are worth the effort. Well-trained dancers are beautiful to watch, but dancing well requires much effort and practice by the participants. The same is true in the dance of giving and receiving gifts. Friendships are formed and maintained through this dance of grace, but it takes effort and practice by both participants.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR NON-CHRISTIANS

1. Please explain the meaning of *bunghun*.
- 1.1 How does one build *bunghun*? (*kaan sang bunghun*)
2. What character qualities should one who has *bunghun* demonstrate? (*phu mii bunghun*)
- 2.1 What do *Khon Muang* people think of someone who does not demonstrate these qualities?
3. What character qualities should one who is indebted demonstrate? (*phu ben nii bunghun*)
- 3.1 What do *Khon Muang* people think of someone who does not demonstrate these qualities?
4. Who can be *phu mii bunghun*?
5. How does one repay *bunghun*?
- 5.1 How does a son repay *bunghun*?
- 5.2 How does a daughter repay *bunghun*?
- 5.3 How does a friend repay *bunghun*?
6. Can *bunghun* be repaid in full?
7. How can *bunghun* be used incorrectly? (*kaan sang bunghun*)
8. Please tell me a story, folklore, or myth about *bunghun*.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHRISTIANS

1. Please explain the meaning of *bunghun*.
- 1.1 How does one build *bunghun*? (*kaan sang bunghun*)
2. What character qualities should one who has *bunghun* demonstrate? (*phu mii bunghun*)
- 2.1 What do *Khon Muang* people think of someone who does not demonstrate these qualities?
3. What character qualities should one who is indebted demonstrate? (*phu ben nii bunghun*)
- 3.1 What do *Khon Muang* people think of someone who does not demonstrate these qualities?
4. Who can be *phu mii bunghun*?
5. How does one repay *bunghun*?
- 5.1 How does a son repay *bunghun*?
- 5.2 How does a daughter repay *bunghun*?
- 5.3 How does a friend repay *bunghun*?
6. Can *bunghun* be repaid in full?
7. How can *bunghun* be used incorrectly? (*kaan sang bunghun*)
8. Please tell me a story, folklore, or myth about *bunghun*.
9. Please tell me how you came to know Jesus Christ.
10. How does *bunghun* influence or guide Christian relationships with God and with man?

APPENDIX 3
INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHICS

Table A1. Demographics for interview participants

Gender	Total	Percent
Female	10	62.5
Male	6	37.5

Status	Total	Percent
Married	12	75
Single	3	18.8
Divorced	1	6.2

Highest Level of Education	Total	Percent
High School	6	37.5
Undergraduate	7	43.8
Graduate Level or Higher	3	18.8

APPENDIX 4

MORAL-AMORAL POWER THAI WORLDVIEW

Moral-amoral Power Thai Worldview				
Khuna (moral goodness)		Interpenetration/ Social Context	Decha (power)	
Order	Pure Order	Order of community	Tenuous order	Chaos
Symbol	The Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha	The "good leader," father	Saksit amoral power, spirits and <i>thewadaa</i> -	Bad spirits (death)
Quality	Pure virtue, compassion, wisdom, stillness, stability	Safety and Mutuality	Ambiguous, potentially protective, benevolent yet jealous and amoral	Entirely dangerous, whimsical, threatening and immoral
Reliability	Certainty	Stability defended	Instability	Capriciousness
Time	Cycle of rebirth	Life-long	Short time	Immediate
Religious complex	Doctrinal Buddhism, Eight-fold Path	Brahmanic ritual, ancestor cult, <i>khwan</i> ritual and civic rituals	Animistic rituals including popular Buddhism	Magic by mobilizing <i>saksit</i> power and death rituals to trick the spirits
Aim	Liberation; better rebirth	Auspiciousness, continuity, safety, and peace	To ensure protection and good fortune	To ward off danger
Means	Make merit as a moral pursuit	To be a dependable and reliable group member, to respect tradition	To show respect; to redeem the vow; to make merit as a protective measure	Protective amulets, Powerful magic, and making merit for the deceased
Infraction	Sin	Stupidity; activates	revenge, bad fortune and loss of face	activates danger
Direction	Ultimate refuge	Ego receives first	Ego/Mutual Reciprocity	Ego gives respect first
Domesticated Area of Existence				

APPENDIX 5
PRELIMINARY CODING TREE

1. meaning
2. character quality
3. patron
4. client
5. repayment
6. testimony
7. role
8. son
9. starting mechanism
10. God
11. man

APPENDIX 6

FINAL CODE NEIGHBORS LIST

Code: benevolent {35-2}

<is part of> patron
<is property of> PCharacter+

Code: breaking {50-4}

Result-ClAction- <is cause of>
Result-ClCharacter- <is cause of>
Result-PAction- <is cause of>
Result-PCharacter- <is cause of>

Code: character quality {4-0}

Code: ClAction- {37-2}

<contradicts> ClAction+
<is cause of> Result-ClAction-

Code: ClAction+ {116-5}

<is property of> client
<is cause of> repayment
<is cause of> Result-ClAction+
ClAction- <contradicts>
honor/allegiance <is property of>

Code: ClCharacter- {44-2}

<contradicts> ClCharacter+
<is cause of> Result-ClCharacter-

Code: ClCharacter+ {154-7}

<is property of> client
<is cause of> repayment
<is cause of> Result-ClCharacter+

CICharacter- <contradicts>
gratitude <is property of>
honor/allegiance <is property of>
involvement <is property of>

Code: client {22-10}

<is associated with> gift
<is associated with> patron
<is associated with> repayment
CIAction+ <is property of>
CICharacter+ <is property of>
daughter <is a>
gratitude <is part of>
honor/allegiance <is part of>
involvement <is part of>
son <is a>

Code: daughter {4-1}

<is a> client

Code: decision making {9-0}

Code: generous {44-2}

<is part of> patron
<is property of> PCharacter+

Code: gift {45-5}

client <is associated with>
PAction+ <is cause of>
patron <is associated with>
PCharacter+ <is cause of>
Result-CICharacter+ <is associated with>

Code: God {13-0}

Code: gratitude {64-3}

<is property of> CICharacter+
<is part of> client
<is part of> repayment

Code: honor/allegiance {75-5}

<is property of> CAction+
<is property of> CCharacter+
<is part of> client
<is part of> patron
<is part of> repayment

Code: involvement {35-3}

<is property of> CCharacter+
<is part of> client
<is part of> repayment

Code: meaning {56-0}

Code: new gen {12-0}

Code: PAction- {24-2}

<contradicts> PAction+
<is cause of> Result-PAction-

Code: PAction+ {90-4}

<is cause of> gift
<is property of> patron
<is cause of> Result-PAction+
PAction- <contradicts>

Code: patron {29-9}

<is associated with> gift
<is associated with> repayment
benevolent <is part of>
client <is associated with>
generous <is part of>
honor/allegiance <is part of>
PAction+ <is property of>
PCharacter+ <is property of>
virtuous <is part of>

Code: PCharacter- {23-2}

<contradicts> PCharacter+
<is cause of> Result-PCharacter-

Code: PCharacter+ {128-7}

<is cause of> gift
<is property of> patron
<is cause of> Result-PCharacter+
benevolent <is property of>
generous <is property of>
PCharacter- <contradicts>
virtuous <is property of>

Code: quality {8-0}

Code: repayment {130-10}

CIAction+ <is cause of>
CICharacter+ <is cause of>
client <is associated with>
gratitude <is part of>
honor/allegiance <is part of>
involvement <is part of>
patron <is associated with>
Result-CIAction+ <is a>
Result-PAction+ <is cause of>
Result-PCharacter+ <is cause of>

Code: Result-CIAction- {23-2}

<is cause of> breaking
CIAction- <is cause of>

Code: Result-CIAction+ {10-2}

<is a> repayment
CIAction+ <is cause of>

Code: Result-CICharacter- {23-2}

<is cause of> breaking
CICharacter- <is cause of>

Code: Result-CICharacter+ {16-2}

<is associated with> gift
CICharacter+ <is cause of>

Code: Result-PAction- {20-2}

<is cause of> breaking
PAction- <is cause of>

Code: Result-PAction+ {30-2}

<is cause of> repayment
PAction+ <is cause of>

Code: Result-PCharacter- {18-2}

<is cause of> breaking
PCharacter- <is cause of>

Code: Result-PCharacter+ {27-2}

<is cause of> repayment
PCharacter+ <is cause of>

Code: son {6-1}

<is a> client

Code: starting mechanism {41-0}

Code: testimony {7-0}

Code: type:performance {30-0}

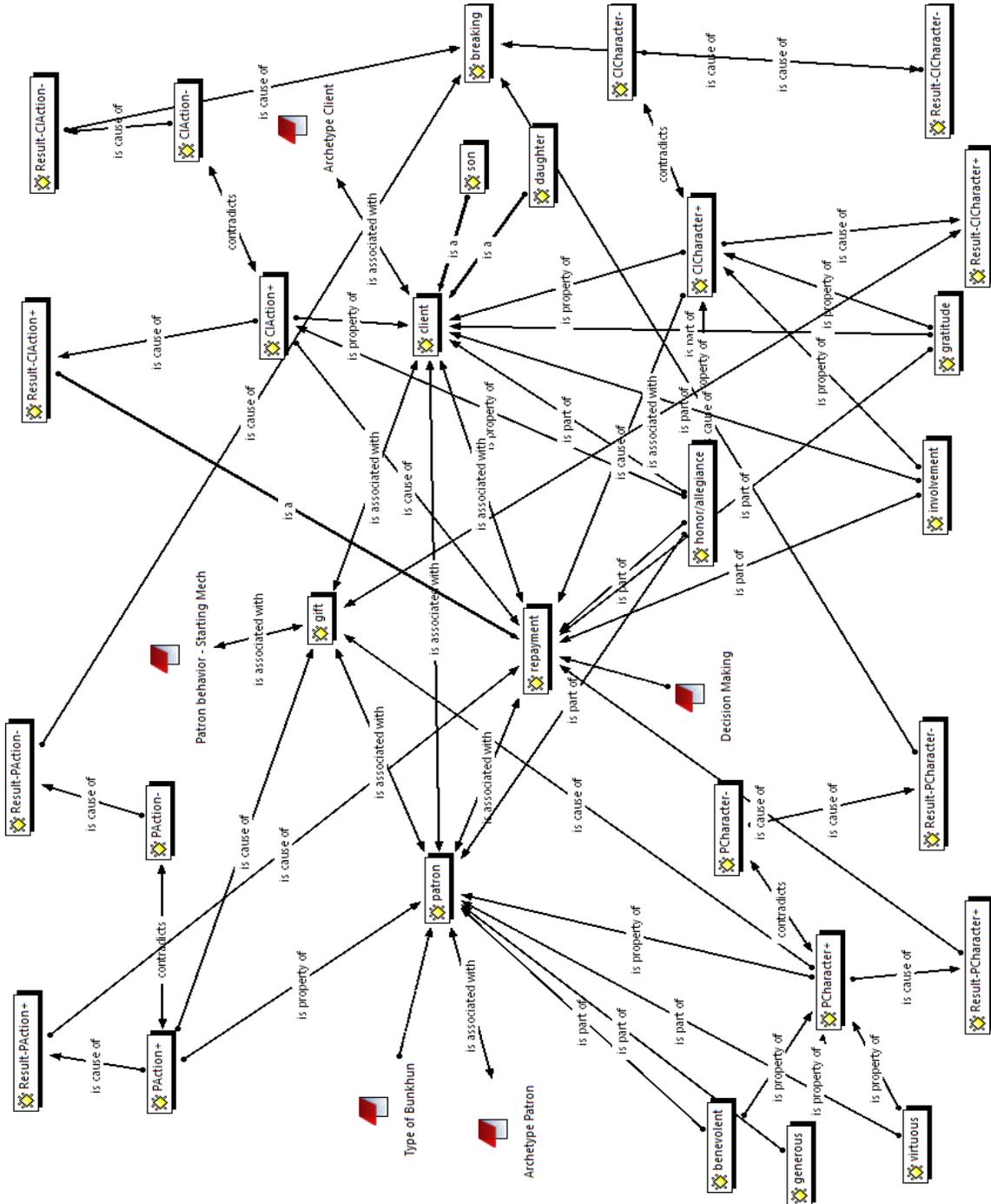
Code: type:status {19-0}

Code: virtuous {40-2}

<is part of> patron
<is property of> PCharacter+

APPENDIX 7

CODING NETWORKS



APPENDIX 8
SURVEY IN ENGLISH

Survey

This survey was designed to be used in the study of “*Bunghun*” in Northern Thai society and culture. The researcher is a doctoral student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY USA.

The different situations that are set forth in this survey are not taken from real life but are situation designed for the purpose of this study only.

This survey includes 10 situations (on 5 pages). In each situation, the participant is asked to select the only one response with a check in the box (✓ in the). The response should best reflect the participant’s thoughts on that situation. The participant is also asked to explain why they selected that option. The first 5 situations are designed to answer about the feelings of one who is indebted to *a person who has bunghun with you*. The second 5 situations are designed to answer about the feeling as if *you have bunghun with another*. The researcher is extremely thankful for your involvement, your grace and the time you gave to me in this survey.

Thomas L. Bohnert

Definitions for this survey

A person who has *bunghun* with you meaning a person who provides assistance or help to you during a time of your great need resulting in you feeling an obligation of gratitude towards the giver. Some examples include the following: a person who gives you a place to live during a time in your life where you were struggling financially; or, a person who provides immediate and significant assistance to you after you have had an accident; or, a

person who provides good and helpful advice to you which results in a major problem of yours is solved; or, a person who assists you in finding work you enjoy.

You have *bunghun* with another meaning you have provided assistance to another resulting in the other person feeling an obligation of gratitude towards you.

Situation 1:

If a person who has *bunghun* with you borrows approximately \$300 from you but after 3 months pass, you still have not received the money back from them. Do you demand that they repay you? (select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly
Disagree | Disagree | Slightly
Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 2:

You have been faithful and consistently assisting a person who has *bunghun* with you in a manner that you feel is sufficient and in a manner that you are able, but person who has *bunghun* with you complains about your return. Do you feel that you no longer need to repay them?

(select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly
Disagree | Disagree | Slightly
Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 3:

You have been faithful and consistently assisting *a person who has bunkhun with you* in a manner that you feel is sufficient and in a manner that you are able, but *person who has bunkhun with you* asks you to repay in a different manner. Do you feel ashamed? (select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 4:

If *a person who has bunkhun with you* meets you and they consistently remind you about the assistance they have provided and your need to honor that purpose for the gift. Do you feel encouraged to be faithful in using the gift correctly? (select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 5:

You move to Chiang Mai to study at University and know very few people. You meet a person who invites you often to join their group for coffee and to study English with a foreigner. You decide to attend and in the end, you develop new friends. Do you feel obligated to repay their kindness? (select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 6:

You provide assistance to one person, after several months pass they have not yet shown gratitude for your assistance. Nor have they repaid the favor. Do you feel dissatisfied with this person? (select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly
Disagree | Disagree | Slightly
Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 7:

A person whom you have assisted seems to be using the gift in a manner that you feel is not appropriate and others in your community are aware of the situation. Do you feel ashamed by their actions? (select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly
Disagree | Disagree | Slightly
Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 8:

A person whom you have assisted is consistently showing gratitude to you and repaying you as they are able, however, you would like them to repay in a different manner. Do you demand that they repay in a manner that you prefer? (select only 1 response)

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly
Disagree | Disagree | Slightly
Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

Please explain:

Situation 9:

A person whom you have assisted visits you often and brings small items for you to show their gratitude. Do you feel honored by their actions? (select only 1 response)

- Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain:

Situation 10:

You meet a foreigner who asks your assistance to learn Thai language and culture. After providing this assistance, the foreigner brings you a small gift and thanks you for all your help. Do you feel obligated to continue assisting this individual? (select only 1 response)

- Strongly Disagree Disagree Slightly Disagree Slightly Agree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain:

Demographic Information:

Name (Optional): _____

Gender (M or F): _____

Age (Select one):

Below 35 years old:

35 to 55 years old:

Older than 55 years:

Province of birth: _____

Highest level of Education (Optional):

Completed Primary School:

Completed Secondary School:

Completed University:

Completed Graduate School:

APPENDIX 9
SURVEY IN THAI

แบบสอบถาม

แบบสอบถามชุดนี้จัดทำขึ้นเพื่อใช้ในการศึกษา เรื่อง “ บุญคุณ ” ในหมู่สังคมและวัฒนธรรมของคนเมือง ผู้วิจัย เป็นนิสิตระดับปริญญาเอกของ The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Louisville, K Y USA สถานะการณ์ต่างๆ ที่กำหนดขึ้นในแบบสอบถามนี้เป็นสถานะการณ์ที่สมมุติขึ้นทั้งหมดเพื่อการศึกษา และข้อมูลที่ได้จากการตอบแบบสอบถามจะนำมาใช้ในการศึกษาเท่านั้น แบบสอบถามชุดนี้ประกอบด้วยสถานะการณ์ต่างๆ ทั้งหมด 10 สถานะการณ์) รวม 5 หน้า (ในแต่ละสถานะการณ์ให้ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามเลือกตอบเพียงข้อเดียว โดยทำเครื่องหมาย ในช่อง (√ ใน □) และให้ผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามเขียนอธิบายในส่วนท้ายของข้อที่เลือก

ในสถานะการณ์ จากข้อ 5-1 ให้ท่านตอบจากทัศนคติของท่านถึงความรู้สึกที่ท่านเป็นผู้ที่เป็นหนี้บุญคุณกับ บุคคลในสถานะการณ์นั้น

ในสถานะการณ์ จากข้อ 10-6 ให้ท่านตอบจากทัศนคติของท่านถึงความรู้สึกที่ท่านเป็นผู้มีบุญคุณกับ บุคคลในสถานะการณ์นั้น

ผู้วิจัยขอขอบพระคุณทุกท่านเป็นอย่างสูงที่ท่านได้กรุณาสละเวลาเพื่อตอบแบบสอบถาม และให้ข้อมูลที่เป็นประโยชน์อย่างยิ่งต่อการศึกษาวิจัย

ความหมายของคำในแบบสอบถาม

คนที่มีบุญคุณกับท่าน: หมายถึง คนที่ให้ความช่วยเหลือท่านในเรื่องต่างๆ จนท่านรู้สึก เป็นหนี้บุญคุณ ตัวอย่างเช่น คนที่ให้ที่พักอาศัยในยามที่ท่านเดือดร้อน คนที่ให้ความช่วยเหลือ เมื่อท่านได้รับอุบัติเหตุ คนที่ช่วยท่านทำงานที่สำคัญและเร่งด่วน คนที่ชี้แนะแนวทางในการแก้ไขปัญหาเมื่อท่านไม่สามารถหาทางออกได้ คนที่ฝากงานให้ท่าน ฯลฯ

ท่านมีบุญคุณกับบุคคลอื่น: หมายถึง ท่านให้ความช่วยเหลือบุคคลอื่นในเรื่องต่างๆ จนบุคคลนั้นรู้สึกเป็นหนี้บุญคุณกับท่าน

สถานการณ์ที่ 1 :

ถ้าคนที่มีบุญคุณกับคุณขอยืมเงินคุณไปจำนวน 10,000 บาท แต่หลังจาก 3 เดือนผ่านไปเขาก็ยังไม่ได้อำเงินจำนวนนั้นมาคืนให้คุณ

คุณยังต้องการที่จะให้เขาคืนเงินจำนวนนั้นให้กับคุณอยู่ใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก

อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 2 :

คุณได้ศรัทธาและให้การช่วยเหลืออย่างสม่ำเสมอให้กับคนที่มีบุญคุณกับคุณ และคุณรู้สึกว่า你能ได้ทำมันอย่างเต็มที่และเพียงพอแล้วตามที่你能ทำได้ แต่คนที่มีบุญคุณกับคุณยังบ่นว่าคุณเกี่ยวกับการตอบแทนนั้น

คุณรู้สึกที่ไม่อยากจะตอบแทนบุญคุณเขาอีกต่อไปใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก

อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 3 :

คุณได้ศรัทธาและให้การช่วยเหลืออย่างสม่ำเสมอให้กับคนที่มีบุญคุณกับคุณ และคุณรู้สึกว่า你能ได้ทำมันอย่างเต็มที่และเพียงพอแล้วตามที่你能ทำได้ แต่คนที่มีบุญคุณกับคุณบอกคุณให้ตอบแทนบุญคุณเขาโดยวิธีอื่นที่แตกต่างจากที่你能ทำ

คุณรู้สึกละอายใจใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก
อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 4:

ถ้าคนที่มีบุญคุณกับคุณพบคุณ และเขาได้เตือนคุณอย่างสม่ำเสมอเกี่ยวกับความช่วยเหลือที่เขาให้กับคุณ และคุณต้องทำตามเพื่อบรรลุในวัตถุประสงค์ของการช่วยเหลือนั้น คุณรู้สึกมีมันใจและอยากที่จะตอบแทนการช่วยเหลือนั้นอย่างถูกต้องใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก
อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 5:

คุณได้ย้ายมาเรียนที่มหาวิทยาลัยในเชียงใหม่ และคุณรู้จักคนไม่มาก คุณได้พบกับคนคนหนึ่ง เขาเป็นคนที่ชวนคุณบ่อยๆ ให้ไปเข้าร่วมกับกลุ่มกาแฟนของเขาและเรียนภาษาอังกฤษกับคนต่างชาติ ในที่สุดคุณก็ได้ตัดสินใจเข้าไปร่วมกลุ่มกับเขา คุณได้มีเพื่อนใหม่ๆ คุณรู้สึกเป็นหนี้บุญคุณที่จะต้องตอบแทนความมีน้ำใจของเขาใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก
อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 6:

คุณให้ความช่วยเหลือคนคนหนึ่ง เมื่อหลายเดือนผ่านไปเขายังไม่มีที่ท่าที่จะแสดงความกตัญญูต่อความช่วยเหลือของคุณเลย หรือไม่แม้แต่จะคิดที่จะตอบแทนบุญคุณของคุณเลย คุณรู้สึกไม่พอใจกับคนคนนั้นใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก

อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 7:

คนที่คุณได้ให้ความช่วยเหลือเขา เขาทำลักษณะเหมือนกับจะตอบแทนการช่วยเหลือของคุณไปในทางที่ไม่เหมาะสม และคนอื่นๆในกลุ่มของคุณก็ทราบถึงสถานการณ์นั้น

คุณรู้สึกละอายใจต่อการกระทำของเขาใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก

อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 8:

คนที่คุณให้การช่วยเหลือได้แสดงความกตัญญูอย่างสม่ำเสมอกับคุณ และตอบแทนบุญคุณของคุณเท่าที่เขาจะทำได้ อย่างไรก็ตาม คุณอยากจะให้เขาตอบแทนคุณในวิธีที่ต่างไปจากที่เขาทำอยู่

คุณต้องการที่จะให้เขาตอบแทนคุณ ในวิธีที่คุณชอบหรือพอใจใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ไม่เห็นด้วยเลย ไม่เห็นด้วย ไม่ค่อยเห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยบ้าง เห็นด้วย เห็นด้วยมาก

อธิบายเหตุผลว่าทำไมเลือกคำตอบนั้น :

สถานการณ์ที่ 9:

คนที่คุณได้ให้ความช่วยเหลือเขา มาเยี่ยมคุณบ่อยๆ และเอาสิ่งของเล็กๆน้อยๆมาให้คุณ เพื่อแสดงให้คุณเห็นถึงความกตัญญูของเขา

คุณรู้สึกนับถือต่อการกระทำของเขาใช่ไหม? (ให้คุณเลือกเพียง 1 คำตอบ)

ข้อมูลผู้กรอกแบบสอบถาม :

ชื่อ (กรอก หรือ ไม่กรอกก็ได้) :

เพศ (ชาย หรือ หญิง) :

อายุ (เลือก 1 ข้อ)

ต่ำกว่า 35 ปี :

55 – 35ปี :

มากกว่า 55 ปี :

จังหวัดที่เกิด :

ระดับการศึกษาขั้นสูงสุด (กรอก หรือ ไม่กรอกก็ได้) :

จบระดับประถม :

จบระดับมัธยม :

จบระดับปริญญาตรี :

จบระดับสูงกว่าปริญญาตรี :

APPENDIX 10

SURVEY RESULTS – DEMOGRAPHICS

Table A2. Demographics of survey participants

Gender	Total	Percent (%)
Female	52	58.4
Male	30	33.7
Unassigned	7	7.9

Age	Total	Percent (%)
Below 35	38	42.7
35 – 55	28	31.5
Above 55	18	20.2
Unassigned	5	5.6

Highest Level of Education	Total	Percent (%)
Grade 6	1	1.1
Grade 12	23	25.8
Undergraduate	36	40.5
Master Degree	1	1.1
Unassigned	28	31.5

APPENDIX 11

SURVEY RESULTS – AGE BELOW 35

Table A3. Survey results for participants younger than 35

	<i>S1</i>	<i>S2</i>	<i>S3</i>	<i>S4</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>S6</i>	<i>S7</i>	<i>S8</i>	<i>S9</i>	<i>S10</i>
Mean	4.38	3.41	3.00	3.66	4.16	2.32	4.16	2.24	4.87	2.82
Standard Error	0.19	0.20	0.23	0.21	0.22	0.23	0.21	0.19	0.15	0.20
Median	4	3	3	4	4	2	4	2	5	3
Mode	4	4	4	4	4	1	5	1	4	4
Standard Deviation	1.14	1.21	1.39	1.30	1.39	1.40	1.28	1.20	0.93	1.23
Sample Variance	1.30	1.47	1.94	1.69	1.92	1.95	1.65	1.43	0.87	1.51
Kurtosis	1.03	0.20	-1.26	0.03	-1.06	0.58	-0.24	-0.80	-1.12	-0.25
Skewness	-0.70	-0.06	-0.20	-0.48	-0.23	1.03	-0.55	0.62	-0.14	0.28
Range	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4	3	5
Minimum	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	1
Maximum	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	6	6
Sum	162	126	108	139	158	88	158	85	185	107
Count	37	37	36	38	38	38	38	38	38	38
Count of 1s	1	3	8	4	0	14	1	13	0	6
Count of 2s	1	4	5	1	7	10	4	12	0	10
Count of 3s	4	12	7	11	4	6	5	5	2	10
Percentage Disagree	16%	51%	56%	42%	29%	79%	26%	79%	5%	68%
Count of 4s	14	13	11	12	11	6	11	7	13	10
Count of 5s	11	3	5	8	8	0	12	1	11	1
Count of 6s	6	2	0	2	8	2	5	0	12	1
Percentage Agree	84%	49%	44%	58%	71%	21%	74%	21%	95%	32%
Blanks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX 12

SURVEY RESULTS – AGE 35-55

Table A4. Survey results for participants age 35 to 55

	<i>S1</i>	<i>S2</i>	<i>S3</i>	<i>S4</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>S6</i>	<i>S7</i>	<i>S8</i>	<i>S9</i>	<i>S10</i>
Mean	3.93	3.50	2.75	3.64	3.39	2.11	3.89	2.43	4.54	2.61
Standard Error	0.31	0.31	0.32	0.33	0.31	0.24	0.31	0.30	0.30	0.28
Median	4.5	3	2	4	4	2	4	2	5	2
Mode	5	5	2	5	4	1	5	1	6	1
Standard Deviation	1.63	1.62	1.67	1.73	1.62	1.29	1.62	1.60	1.60	1.50
Sample Variance	2.66	2.63	2.79	2.98	2.62	1.65	2.62	2.55	2.55	2.25
Kurtosis	-0.76	-1.16	-0.60	-1.30	-1.10	-0.73	-0.67	-0.74	-0.12	-0.78
Skewness	-0.59	-0.06	0.79	-0.38	-0.30	0.80	-0.61	0.76	-0.92	0.52
Range	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6
Sum	110	98	77	102	95	59	109	68	127	73
Count	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
Count of 1s	4	4	7	5	6	13	4	12	2	9
Count of 2s	1	4	10	4	3	6	2	5	2	6
Count of 3s	6	7	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	4
Percentage Disagree	39%	54%	68%	39%	39%	79%	32%	71%	21%	68%
Count of 4s	3	3	4	5	10	5	7	4	6	6
Count of 5s	10	7	2	9	5	1	8	3	5	2
Count of 6s	4	3	3	3	2	0	4	1	11	1
Percentage Agree	61%	46%	32%	61%	61%	21%	68%	29%	79%	32%
Blanks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX 13

SURVEY RESULTS – AGE ABOVE 55

Table A5. Survey results for participants older than 55

	<i>S1</i>	<i>S2</i>	<i>S3</i>	<i>S4</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>S6</i>	<i>S7</i>	<i>S8</i>	<i>S9</i>	<i>S10</i>
Mean	4.17	3.44	3.83	4.06	4.72	3.39	4.39	3.50	4.61	3.89
Standard Error	0.37	0.32	0.32	0.35	0.29	0.33	0.35	0.37	0.32	0.32
Median	4.5	3.5	4	4.5	5	4	5	4	5	4.5
Mode	5	4	5	5	6	2	5	2	5	5
Standard Deviation	1.58	1.34	1.34	1.47	1.23	1.42	1.50	1.58	1.38	1.37
Sample Variance	2.50	1.79	1.79	2.17	1.51	2.02	2.25	2.50	1.90	1.87
Kurtosis	-0.18	-0.63	-1.47	-0.49	-0.30	-1.09	0.43	-1.68	1.87	-0.67
Skewness	-0.71	0.05	-0.16	-0.73	-0.69	0.05	-1.35	-0.05	-1.32	-0.86
Range	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	4
Minimum	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
Sum	75	62	69	73	85	61	79	63	83	70
Count	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Count of 1s	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
Count of 2s	0	4	4	3	1	6	3	7	1	3
Count of 3s	4	4	4	1	2	1	0	0	0	2
Percentage Disagree	33%	50%	44%	28%	17%	44%	22%	44%	11%	33%
Count of 4s	3	5	2	4	4	6	0	3	5	3
Count of 5s	5	3	7	7	5	3	12	6	6	9
Count of 6s	4	1	1	2	6	1	2	1	5	0
Percentage Agree	67%	50%	56%	72%	83%	56%	78%	56%	89%	67%
Blanks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX 14
SURVEY RESULTS – FEMALE

Table A6. Survey results for female participants

	<i>S1</i>	<i>S2</i>	<i>S3</i>	<i>S4</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>S6</i>	<i>S7</i>	<i>S8</i>	<i>S9</i>	<i>S10</i>
Mean	4.18	3.33	2.86	3.63	3.87	2.23	4.29	2.42	4.67	2.75
Standard Error	0.19	0.21	0.21	0.22	0.21	0.18	0.19	0.20	0.19	0.18
Median	4	3	2	4	4	2	5	2	5	3
Mode	5	3	2	5	4	2	5	2	5	2
Standard Deviation	1.37	1.48	1.50	1.60	1.50	1.28	1.38	1.46	1.34	1.27
Sample Variance	1.87	2.19	2.24	2.55	2.24	1.63	1.90	2.13	1.79	1.60
Kurtosis	0.20	-0.76	-0.94	-1.04	-0.82	0.39	0.18	-0.18	0.88	-0.91
Skewness	-0.72	-0.03	0.47	-0.33	-0.38	1.01	-0.92	0.91	-1.15	0.31
Range	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
Sum	213	170	146	189	201	116	223	126	243	143
Count	51	51	51	52	52	52	52	52	52	52
Count of 1s	4	8	10	8	4	18	3	17	2	9
Count of 2s	0	6	16	5	8	18	4	17	3	16
Count of 3s	11	13	8	10	6	6	5	5	3	12
Percentage Disagree	29%	53%	67%	44%	35%	81%	23%	75%	15%	71%
Count of 4s	12	13	7	9	14	7	11	7	10	9
Count of 5s	16	7	8	15	13	2	21	4	18	6
Count of 6s	8	4	2	5	7	1	8	2	16	0
Percentage Agree	71%	47%	33%	56%	65%	19%	77%	25%	85%	29%
Blanks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

APPENDIX 15

SURVEY RESULTS – MALE

Table A7. Survey results for male participants

	<i>S1</i>	<i>S2</i>	<i>S3</i>	<i>S4</i>	<i>S5</i>	<i>S6</i>	<i>S7</i>	<i>S8</i>	<i>S9</i>	<i>S10</i>
Mean	4.17	3.57	3.53	3.87	4.20	2.90	3.97	2.80	4.77	3.37
Standard Error	0.28	0.22	0.27	0.24	0.28	0.30	0.27	0.27	0.22	0.29
Median	4.5	3	4	4	4	3	4	2.5	4.5	4
Mode	5	3	4	4	4	1	5	1	4	4
Standard Deviation	1.56	1.19	1.50	1.31	1.52	1.65	1.47	1.49	1.22	1.56
Sample Variance	2.42	1.43	2.26	1.71	2.30	2.71	2.17	2.23	1.50	2.45
Kurtosis	-0.27	-0.66	-0.68	-0.01	-0.38	-1.20	-0.68	-1.48	1.28	-0.98
Skewness	-0.77	0.42	-0.43	-0.63	-0.55	0.17	-0.63	0.17	-0.85	-0.26
Range	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5
Minimum	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	6
Sum	125	107	106	116	126	87	119	84	143	101
Count	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Count of 1s	3	0	5	2	2	10	2	8	1	6
Count of 2s	2	6	2	3	3	3	5	7	0	3
Count of 3s	3	10	5	4	2	3	2	3	1	4
Percentage Disagree	27%	53%	40%	30%	23%	53%	30%	60%	7%	43%
Count of 4s	7	7	10	11	11	10	7	7	13	10
Count of 5s	9	5	6	8	4	2	11	5	3	5
Count of 6s	6	2	2	2	8	2	3	0	12	2
Percentage Agree	73%	47%	60%	70%	77%	47%	70%	40%	93%	57%
Blanks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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ABSTRACT

SELECTIVE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF *BUNKHUN* FOR MINISTRY AMONG THE *KHON MUANG*

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine a socio-cultural barrier to the gospel among the *Khon Muang* of Northern Thailand. The thesis of this dissertation is that *bunkhun* is an essential cultural factor that missionaries must understand to build and maintain healthy relationships among the *Khon Muang*. Chapter 1 introduces the problem and the methodology for analyzing the problem was described.

Chapter 2 contains an ethnographic description of the *Khon Muang* people along with an examined of the salient literature about *bunkhun*. The examination of the salient literature revealed that *bunkhun* relationships are established by two means: they are established either because a client recognizes the ascribed status of a patron, or because individual acts of graciousness overwhelm the client with gratitude.

Chapter 3 examines the function of *bunkhun* among the *Khon Muang*. A matrix for characterizing *bunkhun* relationships was developed and presented. A theory for understanding *bunkhun* was described. *Bunkhun* is a cultural system that maintains social smoothing values and skills, reinforces traditional ideas about the ideal character qualities of both a patron and a client, and regulates the relationships between a patron and a client among the *Khon Muang*.

Chapter 4 surveys the Bible to define and describe the patron titles of God. The obligations of the client were also presented. Finally, a short survey outlining the biblical concept of grace was detailed. *Bunkhun* has similarities to grace, but the two are

different.

Chapter 5 deals with several missiological implications of *bunghun*. First, *bunghun* is a form of patron-client system thus, it is incumbent upon missionaries to understand the cultural context so that clear communication occurs. Second, honor and shame themes are embedded in the *bunghun* system. Learning to utilize skills good intercultural communications skills is necessary for missionaries serving in Northern Thailand. Finally, several suggestions were offered to address implications related to evangelism, discipleship, fellowship and leadership development. These thoughts are all offered tentatively as more research is needed to verify their veracity.

Chapter 6 provides an overall summary for the project.

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