ภาควิชาการ/ภาษาอังกฤษ



VERSIFICATION IN THE ISAN MAHACHAT SUNG-SERMON

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The sermon text can be regarded as a literary text that comprises of such pure literary elements as compositional form, art of using language and content. In this chapter we will analyse the poetic elements in the Isan version of the Mahachat Sermon as used in thet laeh or sung-sermon form. The Isan Mahachat Sermon has been composed by many sung-sermon practitioner monks, both in the lyric and prosaic forms. We have used the text "Phimpha Laeh Mahachat 13 Kantha (Isan version)" พิมพา แหล่มหาชาติ ๑๓ กัณฑ์ (สำนวน อีสาน) for analysis.

Each line of verse in the Mahachat text composed by the reputed sungsermon practitioner monk, venerable Phrakhru Sutasarapimol (Phramaha Phimpha Dhammadino) contains nine or eleven syllables or words – four, five or six words in the first half-line (hemistich) and five or six words in the second half-line. The half-lines on the page are written with space in between as seen in the following quote –

๑ กัณฑ์ทศพร (Section I. lines 1-13, p. 4-5)

บัดนี้เชิญฟังเรื่อง

มหาเวสน์ชาดก

ฉันสิบรรยายยก

เทศนาจาซ้อน

เป็นคำกลอนอีสานแหล่ กระแสเสียงสรรเสก

ฝากเป็นเอกลักษณ์ไว้ ผู้ฟังได้ฮิ่นตรอง

ขอเชิญพวกพี่น้อง พ่อและแม่สาธุชน

เหมิดสู่คนที่มาฟัง ให้จื่อจำเอาไว้

ตอนพระโพธิญาณไท้ ของเฮาเสวยชาติ

เป็นมหาเวสน์ท่าน ได้ทานสร้างแต่งกุศล

บารมีลื่นล้ม เต็มเปี่ยมได้บำเพ็ญ

นับว่าเป็นแนวทาง ได้ย่างตามงามล้น

จั่งว่าคนใดฮู้ กระทำตามครองฮีต

หวนรำลึกนึกไว้ คนนั้นประเสริฐหลาย

นี้หากเป็นชาติท้าย ที่ยิ่งใหญ่โพธิสัตว์

Section 1 Thosaphon

Welcome now to listen to Maha Vessandon Jataka

I will deliver the sermon

In Isan rhythmic lyric with insertion of spoken words

Preserve it as an identity for the listeners to reflect upon

Welcome all kith and kin father and mother devotees

All who have come to listen give it to you for remembering

When the divine Bodhisattva Phra Bodhiyana of ours was born

As Vessantara He gave donations for accruing good deeds

He had enormous perfections full of meritorious deeds

That can be reckoned as the wonderful way

If anyone knows follows this traditional path

Recalls and keeps it in mind then such a person is superb

This is the last birth of the great Bodhiyana

Sila Viravong (1970: 12-13) has illustrated the different types of conventional forms of rhyme patterns. He classifies rhyme into internal and external rhymes. Internal rhyme (samphat nai), or middle rhyme, is rhyme which occurs in a single line of verse. Internal rhyme refers to words which are in the same line, and which are harmonious or which rhyme with each other, particularly within that line. This type of rhyme is used profusely in the Mahachat text.

There are two kinds of internal rhyme, that is, vowel rhyme and consonant rhyme.

1. Vowel rhyme (samphat sara): Internal rhyme comprises of words that are connected or harmonious because they have the same vowel sounds and are in the same line. There are two kinds of vowel rhyme:

A. Paired-word rhyme (samphat thiam khuu) refers to words which have the same vowels and which are adjacent to each other with no other words separating them. Examples are tam, ngam doi, khoi laek, laen.

1. นับว่าเป็นแนวทาง ได้ย่าง**ตามงาม**ล้น (Sec. I. line 10, p. 4)

Nab-wa-pen-naeu-thang dai-yang-tam-ngam-lon

That can be reckoned as the wonderful way

2. แปลกประหลาดนาทไท้ บ่เห็นอ่อนบุตรา (Sec. IX. line 34, p. 82-83)

สู่วันมาคอยรับ อยู่ด่าน**ดอยคอย**จ้อง

Plaek-prahlad-nun-thai bo-hen-on-boot-ra

Su-wan-ma-khoi-rub yu-dan-doi-khoi-jong

േഉ

She wondered about her children where they could be

Every evening she goes to fetch them from their playing ground

3. ล่อก**แล่กแล่น** ลมลิ้นเลื่อนไหล (Sec. X. line 74, p. 85)

Lok-laek-laen lom-lin-luean-lai

Playfully deceive muttering flirtatious words

B. Yoked-word rhyme (samphat thiam eek) refers to two words comprising of the same vowels which have another word with a different vowel separating them.

1. นับว่าเป็นแนว**ทาง** ได้**ย่าง**ตามงามล้น (Sec. I. line 10. p. 4)

Nab-wa-pen-naeu-thung dai-yang-tam-ygam-lon

That can be reckoned as the wonderful way

2. ฟังเอา**เถิด**สิ**เกิด**ผล ประโยชน์มีพูนเพิ่ม (Sec. I. line 18, p. 5)

Fung-aou-therd-si-kerd-phon prayoj-mi-phun-pherm

Listen to gain benefit usefulness that will increase

- 2. Consonant rhyme (samphat phayanchana) refers to words which comprise of the same consonants or which have similar consonant sounds that are placed next to each other in a sequential order within one line, from two words on up, or there may be one word with a different consonant separating them. The characteristics are as follows:
- A. Continuous consonant rhyme (samphat lian akson) refers to words with the same consonant appearing in a row from two words on up, and having no other consonants intervening. Example:
 - 1. จังว่าคิ้วคาดโค้ง งามโก้กล่อมกัน (Sec. II. line 12, p. 12)

Jung-wa-kheu-khad-khong ngam-ko-klon-kan

Eyebrows so well arched splendidly proportionate all over

2. สม**ม**ะโน**ม**าตรแ**ม้**ง แฮง**ส**ร้าง**ส**วนผลา (*Sec. II. lines 41-42, p. 14*)

องค์พระเวสน์แ**ก่ก**ล้า **ค**วร**ค**รอบ**ค**รองปรางค์

Som-mano-matr(a)-maeng haeng-srung-suan-phla

Yong-phrawes-kae-kla khuan-khrob-khrong-phrang

Respect and show reverence to him one who has build up the garden of merits

Who has fulfilled all perfections deserves to reign over the kingdom

จวบ**ก**ับกรรมเก่ากิ้ องค์พระเวสน์กระทำมา (Sec. II. line 67, p. 15)
 Juob-kub-kaam-kao-ki ong-phrawes-kra-tham-ma

Conjoined with past volitional actions that Vesantara had ever acted upon

- B. Separated consonant rhyme (samphat khan akson) refers to two words with the same consonant or spelling, but which have another consonant or vowel separating them. This kind of consonant rhyme is rare in our material only the following few examples are found.
 - จุลพนเหมิดม้วน ม่วนบ่ม่วนกะจำใจ (Sec. VI. line 106, p. 55)
 Julaphon-merd-muan muan-bo-muan-k(a)-jamjai
 Julaphon comes to an end be it melodious or not do remember it
 - 2. ชาวสีพีทั้งค่าย มีหลายแต่หากหล่าย (Sec. VII. Lines 39-40, p. 60)

หลายกะหลายแต่ไม้ ลำสิใช้กะบ่มี

Chao-siphi-thung-khai mi-lai-tae-haak-lai

Lai-k(a)-lai-tae-mai lum-si-chai-k(a)-bo-mi

The denizens of Siphi

great in number but of little worth

Many a wooden trunks

but hard to find a stump

(The metaphorical meaning is that there is great quantity but no quality, for example, many people but no genius, many objects but none of any use.)

Viravong also presents the patterns for external rhyme or samphat nok.

External rhyme refers to the word in the first line of poetry which rhymes with a word in the second, third, or fourth line, with the following characteristics:

Characteristics in sung poetry (kon lam) – the last word of the first line rhymes with the first, second, or third word of the second line; the last word of the second line rhymes with the first, second, or third word of the third line; the last word of the third line rhymes with the first, second, or third word of the fourth line; the last word of the fourth line rhymes with the first, second, or third word of the first line of the next verse. (1970:16)

The following chart illustrates the external rhyme scheme for sung poetry or lam.

a)	0 0 0	0000
b)	0 0 0	0 0 0 0
c)	0 0 0	0 0 0 0
d)	0 0 0	0 0 0 0
a)	0 0 0	0 0 0 0

ถัดมาเป็นองค์พระ พุทธโคดม**เจ้า** (Sec. I. line 14-21, p. 4-6)

ฉันสินำมา**เว้า** จับสำเนาให้เห็น**ก่อน**

คติธรรมแทรก**ซ้อน** สิพอได้ไตร่**ตรอง**

ขอเชิญชวน**พี่น้อง** พ่อและแม่**สาธุชน**

ฟังเอาเถิดสิ**เกิดผล** ปรโยชน์มีพูน**เพิ่ม**

ทศพรกัณฑ์**เริ่ม** ประเดิมมาห็มัน**ม่วน**

พันคาถาตลอด**เกลี้ยง** สมบูรณ์แบบเทศนา

Emerged next as the Buddha The Gotama Buddha

This is what I brought to narrate the real story to make you behold at first

By inserting moral teachings that you can get to think over

Welcome all kinsfolk father and mother devotees

Listen to gain benefit usefulness that will increase

The Thasaphon Chapter begins brought forth for sweet appealing rendition

13 chapters in all end with vocal rendition

A thousand verse all through and through complete as a Sermon

Since Isan is basically a monosyllabic language, the rules for rhyming are primarily in relationship to this feature of its structure. The basic categories of rhyme in Isan are determined by phonological aspects of the monosyllable. Most Isan monosyllabic words have one of the following three shapes: CVC ดาบ, จั๋ง, แม่น, ทูล; CVVC โดด, เคือง, เพียง, เมื่ยน; and CVV ชั่ว, เที่ยว, กล่าว, เดี๋ยว. The main categories of rhyme are determined by the relationship of vowels to each

other and how the syllable ends. In Isan, a syllable may end in either a stop, a nasal, or a vowel.

Common Rhyme and Category Rhyme

Normally, two words which rhyme in Isan will have different initials, the same vowels, and, if there are final consonants, the same final consonants. The sets of rhymed words in the following Chart include each of the possible final consonants in Isan and many of the vowel combinations. All these sets were found in rhyme positions in the text composed by Ven. Phimpha.

Rhymed Sets Showing Possible Finals

Stops: words ending in /p/, /t/ and /k/ (rare in our material)

The major rhyme pattern for any two words in the preceding sets is the following: different initials, same vowels, and same final consonants. For example: /khon/ rhyming with /chon/. This pattern is called *common rhyme* since it is common to many languages. It is also the rhyme pattern used most frequently by sung-sermon monks.

There is another type of common rhyme found in our data in which same initials, same vowels but different consonants such as the words กล่อม - กลอง (klom-klong); หลาย- หลาก (lai-lak).

In Isan, rhyme is also permitted between words ending in different specific final consonants, but final consonants which come from the same category. This pattern is called *category rhyme*. It can be described as follows: different initials, same vowels, and different final consonants from the same category. For example: un (nung) rhyming with and (ngam).

เป็นมารดาของ**นาง** ประสูติมา**งาม**เยี่ยม (Sec. II. line 6, p. 12)

Paen-marda-khong-nung phrasuet-ma-ygam-yiem

Is the mother of Nung (Phusati) born with great beauty

งามดั่ง**เดือน**วันเพ็ญ เลิศวิไลในหล้า (Sec. II. lines 10-11, p.12)

สองดวงตางาม**เยี่ยม** องค์พระภูคาดโก่ง

Ngam-dung-dieun-wan-phen lers-wi-lai-nai-la

Song-duang-ta-ngam-yiam ong-phra-phu-khad-khong

Beautiful as the full moon superbly gorgeous in the entire world

Her two eyes full of glowing beauty eyelids well curved

In Isan, there are three categories based on phonological aspects of the possible finals. These categories are referred to as: 1) stopped rhyme; 2) nasal rhyme; and 3) open rhyme.

Although both nasal (words ending in /m/, /n/ and /K/ and open rhyme (words ending in vowel sounds) are abundantly used in the text, very little category rhyme of the stopped type (words ending in /p/, /t/ and /k/) occurs in our data.

The following examples of rhymed sets for each of the three categories were found in normal rhyme positions in an extract from the text by A. Phimpha. Tone is irrelevant in common and category rhyme. (Internal rhymes are in

italics, nasal rhymes are underlined and open rhymes are in **bold**, stopped rhymes in bold and **underlined**).

Stopped Rhyme:

baap – haak

Nasal Rhyme:

paan – naang

Open Rhyme:

see – mii

๘ กัณฑ์กุมาธ ๑๐๑ พระคาถา

บัดนี้ถึงบท**บั้น** กุมาร**กัณฑ์**เทศน์**ต่อ** (Sec VIII. lines 1-21, p.68-69)

ขอ*เรียนเชิญ***ทุก***ท่าน*

สดับข้อภาคแสดง

กุมารกัณฑ์นี้กล่าวแจ้ง

บ่อนนางนาทมัทรีฝัน

เนาว์อยู่บรรณศาลา

แปลกกะตาเผลอพลั้ง

นับแต่มาเนาว์ยั้ง

ภูมิพะนังถ้ำเลื่อน

ได้เจ็ดเดือนผ่าน**เข้า**

พระนาง*เจ้า*อยู่เกษิม

คืนนั้นนับว่าเริ่ม

ลางนิมิตสังหรณ์

นอนบ่หลับ*หนหวย*

*ฮ่วนฮน*ออกจน**ล้า**

บัดเดิ้ก**มา***จวนแจ้ง*

จั่งฝันเป็นประหลาดต่าง

ลางอีหยังกะบ่ฮู้

เห็น**หม่องปล่องไข**

ฝันว่าชายหนึ่ง**ได้**

ถือดาบคมแข็ง

ชบาแดงทงทัด

ใส่หูชูกล้าม

เป็นน่าขามเกรงย้าน

ส่ำผีมารอสูร**บาป**

แกว่ง**ดาบ**ฟันฟาด**ต้อง**

มัทรี*ฮอง*สั่น**สาย**

แสนสินบนอบ**ไหว้**

มันกะบ่หัว**ซา**

ตัดพา**หา**ของนาง

เลือดกระเซ็นเด็นฟัง

VERSIFICATION IN THE ISAN MAHACHAT SUNG-SERMON

ർ

มัทรีหลงละเมอฮ้อง ตกพระทัยสะดุ้ง**ตื่น**

ครองสติลุก**ขึ้น** ยังสะอื้นสั่น**สาย**

ต้องสิเป็นเหต**ุฮ้าย** จึงแปลกต่างคำฝัน

เลยไปหาจอมทัน พระเวสน์องค์อวน**อ้าย**

ให้ทำ**นาย**ดู*บ้าง* สิมี*ลาง*อีหยังแหน่

8 Kuman Section 101 verses

Now the introduction is reached I shall continue the Children's chapter

Welcome one and all pay attention to this performed part

This section retells where Masti had ever dreamt

When she resided in her forest dwelling strange in vision and sight

Until she came here to the wild place of cave

Seven months ago in the pavilion resided the queen

That night was the beginning the ominous dream presaging

Sleepless and fidgeted worried until fatigued

As the dawn crept in so errie a dream she dreamt

What was it she knew no way to solve it

Dreamt of a man who brandished a sword strong and sharp

Wearing the red China rose on his ears, his sinewy muscles all raised

So dreadfully terrific was it all as if the sinful evil sat beside

She begged for her life but cared he not the least

Severed her two hands off instead with blood splattering all over

She laid unconscious woke up terribly shocked

മ്രേറ

Resumed her presence of mind and stood up sobbing and shivering

It must be a terrible accident so eerie a dream

So she went to the king Vessantara her husband

To read her dream and predict what omens it presaged

Tone Variant Rhyme

Tone is an additional aspect of Isan syllable which can be used by the sung-sermon composer monk. Consequently, another type of rhyme is found in our data which is determined by differences in tone. We call this type *tone variant rhyme*. The following illustrates the relationship of two words having tone variant rhyme: different tones, same initials, same vowels, and same final consonants. For example: นอง rhyming with น้อง.

Tone rhyme requires a match of two syllables in all aspects but the tone. In terms of the written language, this means that the two words in question are either marked for tone by the use of *mai eek*, *mai thoo*, *jatawa* (markers). In actual speech, the two rhymed words have different tones.

A few sets of tone variant rhymes that are found in the text are -

Alliteration and Assonance

As noted by Carol J. Compton (1979:159) the Isan division of rhyme into categories is different than the divisions familiar to many Western readers. The position of the words as to whether they appear in the same line or between

lines is important. Rhyme between lines is referred to as *samphat nok* or external rhyme. The other major division of rhyme used is *samphat nai* or internal rhyme. Alliteration and assonance are contained in the latter category so they are included under the general heading of rhyme in this paper.

Alliteration (samphat akson) is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words ie. a series of words that begin with the same letter or sound alike. Alliteration is used to create emphasis, to add beauty to the writing style, and occasionally to aid in shaping the mood.

Alliteration is used frequently in the text by Ven. Ajam Phimpha. He often mixes identical initial consonants in a line, or verse, with other initials which are similar. This use of both same and similar initials in alliterative lines is part of the definition of alliteration provided by Viravong.

....words which use the same consonants or which have sounds which are very much alike placed next to each other in a row within one line [1970:13].

This definition as observed by Carol J. Compton specifically limits alliteration to position of occurrence. Yet alliteration can be found both within lines and across lines in our material.

Alliteration within a line:

เทียมดั่งปุ่นแปลงปั้น **ส**าว**ส**วรรค์**ก้ำเกิ่**ง (Sec. II. lines 7-8, p.12)

เปิงประเทศเขตแ**ค**ว้น แดนใต้กะ**ช**่าเซ็ง

Thiam-dung-poon-pleng-pun sao-sawan-kam-kaerng

Perng-phra-thaet-khaet-khwaen daen-tai-ka-cha-chaeng

Likened to the creation of celestial maidens

The entire country far and near ceaselessly talked about her

Buddhist Graduates' Dissertation

द्राग्न

จั่งว่า**คิ**้วคาดโค้ง งามโ**ก้ก**ล่อม**กั**น (Sec. II. line 12, p.12)

Jung-wa-khieu-khad-khong ngam-ko-klom-kan

Eyebrows so well arched splendidly proportionate all over

ล่อกแล่กแล่น ลมลิ้นเลื่อนไหล (Sec. X. line 74, p. 85)

Lok-laek-laen lom-lin-luean-lai

Furtively run about muttering flirtatious words

Alliteration across adjacent lines:

เทียมดั่งปุนแปลงปั้น สาวสวรรค์ก้ำเกิ่ง (Sec. II. lines 7-8, P.12)

เปิงประเทศเขตแคว้น แดนใต้กะชาเซ็ง

Thiam-dung-poon-pleng-pun sao-sawan-kam-kaerng

Perng-phra-thaet-khaet-khuean daen-tai-ka-cha-chaeng

Likened to the creation of celestial maidens

The entire country far and near ceaselessly talked about her

งามดั่ง**เดือน**วันเพ็ญ เลิศวิไลในหล้า (Sec. II. lines 10-11, P.12)

สองดวงตา**งามเยี่ยม อง**ค์พระภูคาด**โก่ง**

Ngam-dung-dieun-wan-phen lers-wi-lai-nai-la

Song-duang-ta-ngam-yiam ong-phra-phu-khad-khong

Beautiful as the full moon superbly gorgeous in the entire world

Her two eyes full of glowing beauty eyelids well curved

Alliteration is extensively used in the Mahachat text composed by Ven. Phimpha. Another form of Isan rhyme used is assonance. Assonance (samphat sala) – is the repetition of vowel sounds, most commonly within a short passage of verse.

For the most part, the assonance in our material is found within lines: occasionally it may also be found across adjacent lines. Some examples of assonance from the material are given below.

Assonance within lines:

บีนสลนเส**ลื**อกล้ม โซมโซโกงโกย (Sec. VII. line 67, p. 61)

Buen-salon-saluea-klom chom-cho-kong-koi

Push ahead in a vain attempt physically decrepit and tiring

(The metaphorical meaning is when something is done with force and slip-shod manner the outcome is of no good or just useless, for example, in a situation when one is tirelessly climbing a mountain heaving and panting without even reaching to the top or summit.)

ล่อกแล่กแล่น ลมลิ้นเลื่อนไหล (Sec. X. line 74, p. 85)

Lok-laek-laen lom-lin-luean-lai

Furtively run about muttering flirtatious words

Assonance and alliteration may not only be found in individual lines, but often they are used together within the same line.

เกาวัลย์เกี้ยว เกลียวยอยย้อยหย่อน (Sec. VII. line 84, p. 61-62)

เป็นมะหลิ่งติ่งต้อน ยวมยั้วทั่วแดน

Thawal-kiaew kliaew-yoi-yon

Pen-ma-ling-ting-tong yuom-yuao-thua-daen

The vine its strands and hanging branches swinging

Creeping up and down dangling all over

द्र छिद

ลัตว์ในดงแดนนี้ หมูมีชะนีป่า (Sec. VII. lines 110-111, p. 63)

ทั้งงัวควายช้างม้า หมาเม่นมั่งเมย

Sat-nai-dong-daen-nii moo-mii-cha-nii-paa

Thang-ngua-khuwai-chang-maa ma-men-mung-maeu

Animals in this territory swine, gibbon

Even cow, buffalo, elephant, horse, dog, porcupine, deer abound

Characteristic of versification

Isan poetry is marked by many different styles of versification – each poetic style having its distinct characteristic such as grouping, wording (syllable), rhyme, etc. The *Roi Krong* or poetic writing comprises of many types such as – *Krong, Chan, Kaap, Klon, Rai* etc. Sila Viravong (2485 : 2-56) has classified the form of Isan poetic writing of *Roi Krong* style into 5 types – *kaap, klon, krong, rai* and *sok*. Each of these forms of poetic composition can be further classified such as *klon* can be classified as *klon lam* (sung-klon), *klon aan* (read-klon), *klon phaya-yoi* (short proverbial klon); *krong* can be classified as 5 or *Wisachumalidan* – *krong suphap* (polite khlong) or *mahasinthumali*; *rai* classified as *rai wachirapanti*, *rai mahawachirapanti*, *rai yao* (long rai) etc. In the Vessantara Jtaka of the Isan version composed by Ven. Phimpha, *Rai Yoa* type of rhyme predominates almost the entire text with little variations.

Rai Yao Composition

According to Sila Viravong the *rai yao* composition of the Isan type has the following pattern.

- 1. The number of verse has no limit. The number of words in each verse varies from 5 to maximum 14.
- 2. The last word of each verse rhymes with any word in the following verse and follows this pattern until the end.

0 0 0 0 0	0 0 0 0 0
00000	00000
00000	00000
00000	0 0 0 0 0

In the Vessantara Jltaka of the Isan version composed by Ven. Phimpha this type of rhyme predominates almost the entire text with little variations.

๖ กัณฑ์จุลพน ๓๕ พระคาถา

โปรดสดับรับข้อ	ธรรมภาคกระแส เสียง
เป็น สำเนียง สำนวน	ภาคอีสานเสียง แหล ่
ชาดก แปล ประพันธ์เพิ่ม	โดยพิมพาผญา เอก
สรร เสก คัดเลือกเฟ้น	เอามาเล่นเอ่ย เสียง
บัดนี้ฟังต่อ เนื่อง	มหาชาติกัณฑ์ที่ หก
จุลพนสิยอ ยก	เทศนาจา ช้อน
กล่าวถึง ตอน พราหมณ์เขา	พนาเขาดั้นป่า

6 Julaphon Section 35 verses

Listen attentively to the applied-sermon

In the accent and idiom of Isan sung-sermon

Jataka in translation and new **composition** by Phimpha the expert in **versification**

Selective interpolation brought forth for sermonizing

Now listen in **sequencing** the sixth section of Mahachat **sermon**

I uphold the **Julaphon** sermon

Shall narrate till the **beginning** when in the forest the Bodhisat is **entering**

The pattern of rai composition is maintained all throughout the text even when parts of certain sections are presented in prosaic form to indicate discourses which are recited in a simple reading style without the fusion of any rhythm or sung-sermon (*laeh*) style as found in the *Chaksat* section when Vessantdorn is welcomed to the Cheung City known as "*Laeh Chakchat Ban Chem*" and in *Lakhon* section when Phusadee offers apparel to Masti to be worn known as "*Laeh Nakhon Taem Ta Fa*".

It can be concluded that rhythm and words are bound together in the Isan Mah chat sermon, and the meticulously arranged sermon wordings that are soothing to the ears are conducive to the development of *bhavana* or a meditative state in the listeners. Alliterative words and phrases abound in the text and receive reinforcement because of their phonological structure. Since the Isan language is tonal, word selection is based on particular sequences of tone that enhance the rhythmic scheme. At one level the thematic structure

guides the sung-sermon practitioner monks by providing the fixed format of thirteen sections of the Mah chat J taka within which they can create and improvise without altering the basic story. At another level the poetic structures such as the rhyme schemes and diction used do the same. It is the interaction of these two levels of structure which give the monks the freedom to create.

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