



Thai Comics in the Twenty-First Century:
Identity and Diversity of a New Generation of Thai Cartoonists

คณะนิเทศศาสตร์

Research Project

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- In Memoriam of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej who saw—and promoted—the potential of Comics Art as an efficient communication tool in knowledge sharing -

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Terminology and Methodology

Terminology

In order to avoid any confusion, some terms—as used in the specialized terminology of Comics Studies, or within the Thai particular context—may need to be given specific meanings that may differ from normal usage.

Cartoon, paap lor, katun, manga, comics, comix and graphic novels

A *cartoon* will be considered for now as a stand-alone drawing usually intended for caricature, satire, or humour. *Comics* will be considered as series of pictures juxtaposed in sequences to form strips or longer narratives.¹ Duncan and Smith (2009) propose to consider that, “[a]s an art form, a comic book is a volume in which all aspects of the narrative are represented by pictorial and linguistic images encapsulated in a sequence of juxtaposed panels and pages” (p. 4). However, let’s note that satirical cartoons are named *Paap Lor* [parodic image] in Thailand (Karuchit, 2014) and the Thai word *katun*,² the Thai transcription of the English loanword *cartoon*, usually refers to the comics form. Hence, the Thai denomination *Katun Likay* [or *Cartoon Likay*] designates a *comics* genre established by Prayoon Chanyawongse (see *Chapter 2*) and not a stand-alone drawing. Apart from similar exceptions which will be pointed out for disambiguation, this paper will rely on the definitions of *cartoon* and *comics* provided at the beginning of the paragraph. Let’s also note that the noun *comics* is sometimes spelled *comix* with an “x” in order, “it is said, [to establish] the idea of comics as a form for adults (not “just” children) [...]” (Hatfield, 2005, p. 7). The particular spelling *comix* is usually associated with the “*underground comics*” which emerged within the countercultural movement at the end 1960s in North America and concentrated “on specifically adult themes — notably sex, drugs and radical politics” (Sabin, 1993, p. 36). These self-published *comix* were generally produced outside the commercial mainstream, serving as a spark and a model for the development of American *independent* and *alternative* comics in the 1970s and 1980s. The terms *independent* and *alternative* are discussed in detail in dedicated paragraphs.

¹ Like the term for any medium, comics requires a singular verb. As notes Chute (2008), “treating comics as a singular has become standard” (p. 462). The same rule applies for the term *manga* [Japanese comics].

² Thai Romanization according to the Royal Thai General System (Katun, n.d.).

The term *manga*, used only in the singular form, will be defined as comics originally produced by Japanese publishers, and usually created by Japanese cartoonists. The term *mangaka*, used only in the singular form, will be considered as a “professional [cartoonist] working in Japanese comics” (Duncan & Smith, 2009, p 318). Let’s note that Thai cartoonist Wisut Ponnimit [pen name: Tum, or Tam] worked as a *mangaka* in Japan, creating the collection of stories *everybodyeverything* in 2004 for the *Magazine Five* Japanese publication, *Tum Kun To Yiipun* [Thai version: *Tam Kap Yipun*, “Tam and Japan”] in 2006 for the Japanese publishing company Shinchosha, or the series *Blanco* [Thai version: *Ching Cha*, “Playground Swing”] first published in the late 2000s for the Japanese magazine *Gekkan Ikki* [*Monthly IKKI*] of the publishing company Shogakukan (“Wisut Ponnimit Profile,” n.d.). Produced by Japanese publishers, these comics will therefore be considered as *manga*. His collection of short stories *hesheit aqua* published in 2009 by the Japanese company Nanarokusha will be considered as a Thai comic book due to the fact that all the short stories were originally produced and published in Thailand for the local market.

According to Duncan and Smith (2009), the term *graphic novel* can be considered as “a label applied by creators and publishers to distinguish a comic book, which in practice is longer and perhaps self-contained, in contrast to the most periodical comic book” (p. 317). Hartfield (2005) also notes that, in industry parlance, *graphic novel* “means any book-length comics narrative or compendium of such narratives” (p. 4) yet argues that “[by] and large, graphic novels are created serially” (p.153), being published periodically in anticipation of the completed work. Hartfield (2005) considers that “serialization seems essential to underwriting of works in the long form, because it pays authors as they go [...]” (p. 161) and that it “remains the one economically proven means of getting book-length comics into print” (p. 161) for undercapitalized small publishers.³ Some graphic novels do not appear in successive installments but are simply

³ This information appears to be relevant in the particular context of the Thai comics industry. During a group discussion with Thai cartoonists Songsin Tiewsomboon, Songwit Seakitikul and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, the latter (personal communication, 2016) mentioned that the instability of the Thai comics market leads to the cancelation of many comics magazines. He states: “We need to develop our comics over a long period of time. But when we start a long story, the magazines are cancelled. And we start again. And we start... again... Many cartoonists in Thailand—like Puck and The Duang—only create short stories because they fit our industry.” This situation partly prevented the development of long-form comics and graphic novels in Thailand.

published in toto. Yet “despite recent gains, the prospects for such books [published in toto] are discouraging, due the financial constraints that weigh on both authors and publishers,” states Hatfield (2005, p. 161). The first public use of the term *graphic novel* was made in 1964 but became widespread when labelled by American cartoonist Will Eisner on the cover of his ambitious 1978 book *A Contract with God* (Chute, 2008, p. 453). Hatfield (2005) states that the term *graphic novel* “originally promised a way of promoting serious comics to the general book trade and a general readership: Eisner’s aim was to break into bookstores, not comic shops” (p. 29). The initial objective appears to have been met as “graphic novels have become a growth area for [general] bookstores” (Hatfield, 2005, p. 5), partly “thanks to the revival of interest among book publishers” (p. 31). As a final remark, let’s note that, in Thailand, the term *graphic novel* also encompasses long-form picture books aimed at an adult readership. I’ve observed during my discussions with Thai cartoonists that they consider lengthy *picture books*—or books “with at least one picture on each spread [and] in which both the visual and the verbal aspects are both essential for full communication” (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000, p. 226)—as graphic novels. Thai cartoonist Vic-Mon (Table 14.3; 14.4) considers for instance picture books by Tim Burton and the lengthy picture book *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007) by Brian Selznik as graphic novels. During a group conversation with cartoonists Songsin Tiewsomboon, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songwit Seakitikul, the latter (personal communication, 2016) considered that the adult-aimed lengthy picture book *Mu Bin Dai* [Pig Can Fly] by Thai artist Ong-Art [Chaicharncheep, or Toto] as one of the first Thai graphic novels.⁴ Songwit Seakitikul (personal communication, 2016) also insisted that *Walking II*,⁵ a collection of thematically-linked short comics by seven different Thai cartoonists, should be considered as a graphic novel.⁶ Apart from similar exceptions which will be pointed out for disambiguation, this paper will rely on the definition of *graphic novel* as a “book-length comics narrative.”

⁴ *Mu Bun Dai* was the first book published by P.T.K Studio [Pet Tao Khwai (Duck-Turtle- Buffalo)], an independent company launched by Ong-Art Chaicharncheep [or Toto] in 2001.

⁵ *Walking II* was published in 2007 by Fullstop Book. The seven graphic narratives were created by Togkarn, Ong-Art [Toto], Suttichart Sarapaiwanich [Chart], Songsin [Tiewsomboon], The Duang, Songwit Seakitikul [Seng] and Summer, based on a series of photographs by Fullstop Book editor Somkid Paimpiyachat.

⁶ Let’s note that Will Eisner’s *A Contract with God* (1978) comprises four thematically-linked short comics stories but is considered as one of the first American graphic novels.

Independent comics: definition and origin

As this research paper extensively discuss the origin of the Thai independent comics scene where Thai alternative comics first developed, the terms *independent comics* and *alternative comics* may deserve to be presented in their historical context.

With the development of a new readership in the blossoming market of comic book specialty shops in North America in the mid-1970s, new publishers seized the opportunity to compete on the shelves with the corporate giants DC Comics and Marvel Comics. Sabin (1993) states that these new publishers

were the so-called ‘independents’, generally set up by long-time fans specifically to compete with the duopoly [DC Comics and Marvel Comics] in direct sales (it was generally futile to try to challenge their power-base on the news-stands, but [within the market of comic book specialty shops] there were distinct opportunities). (p. 66)

If the majority of these new publishers competed with the two leading corporations in producing superhero and adolescent fantasy titles for an already-available market, some explored new genres and different subject-matter in order to carve a niche. If they explored science fiction and heroic fantasy genres at first, “increasingly, though, the independents came out with more personal and less fantastic work” (Sabin, 1993, p. 75). This undertaking led to more ambitious projects where “comics design and presentation now became important consideration [...] as the various companies competed for customers’ attentions” (Sabin, 1993, p. 66). According to Duncan and Smith (2009), the term *independent* ultimately “came to refer to any new publisher that attempted to compete with the established publishers by offering genre fiction comic books intended for a mainstream audience” (p. 65).

Alternative comics: definition and origin

Duncan and Smith (2009) define *alternative comics* as “non-mainstream comic books usually created by a single cartoonist and presenting a very personal vision” (p. 315). In North America, alternative comics emerged with the development of a new specialized market stimulated by the rapid growth of comic book specialty shops in the 1970s and 1980s. While inspired by the countercultural and liberating underground *comix* movement of the 1960s and

1970s which envisioned comics as a medium for self-expression, “many alternative comics cultivated a more considered approach to the art form, less dependent on the outrageous gouging of taboos [...] and more open to the possibility of extended and ambitious narratives” (Hatfield, 2005, p. x). A new generation of American cartoonists considered comics “first and above all an acutely personal means of literary expression” (Hatfield, 2005, p. xi). Hatfield (2005) states that crucial to this new movement were

the rejection of mainstream formulas; the exploration of (to comics) new genres [...]; a diversification of graphic style; a budding internationalism, as cartoonists learned from other cultures and other traditions; and, especially, the exploration of searchingly personal and at times boldly political themes. (p. x)

Hatfield (2005, p. 16-18) also mentions sporadic publication (broking with standard periodical publishing), the development of creator-ownership and the emphasis on the author rather than established commercial properties as other essential elements in the raise of alternative comics as long-form comics where unprecedented aesthetic freedom and diversity could develop.

According to Sabin (1993), some characteristic features of the early alternative [or *avant-garde*] magazines included “a willingness to experiment, a commitment to self-motivated work and often a ‘fine-arts’ orientation” (p. 79-80).

On differentiating *independent comics* from *alternative comics*, Hatfield (2005) states that today

the category “independent comics” may include, often does include, formula fiction inspired by the so-called mainstream, including much heroic fantasy; while the “alternative” more often denotes satirical, political, and autobiographical elements inherited from underground comix. (p. 26)

Yet he adds that drawing any hard distinction between them is difficult. This research paper will rely on the proposed definition of *independent comics* as “creator-centred and creator-owned comic books produced by a publisher not affiliated with any large corporation, and usually intended for a mainstream audience.” An *alternative comics* will be considered as “non-mainstream comics presenting its author’s personal vision with an aesthetic freedom that usually challenges the art form.” Let’s note that independent and mainstream comics publishers may

produce alternative comics. The independent comics magazine *Katch* launched in Thailand in 1998 aimed at a mainstream teenage readership yet started the publication of the alternative series *hesheit* by Wisut Ponnimit (see *Chapter 5.6: Katch magazine, Wisut Ponnimit and the "Freedom of Style"*). The mainstream Thai publishing group Banlue Publications produces the humour magazines *Kai Hua Roh* and *Maha Sanook* through its publishing house Banlue Sarn and alternative comics—such as the anthology *YAYYYAYAY* (2011) or the comic book *NOW* (2013) by Art Jeeno—through Banlue Publications' more trendy publishing house Salmon Books.

Methodology

With the notable exceptions of the scholarly books about South-East Asian comics and cartoons written and/or edited by John A. Lent (1997; 2014; 2015), a few articles (Gravett, 2016; Ponchamni, 2003; Randall, 2006) and academic publications (Baffie, 1989; 1995 [in French language]; Chutikamothan, 2014; Karuchit, 2010; Pravalpruk, 1990; Tojirakarn, 2016), the resources available in English on Thai comics are scarce. Therefore, this research first focused on gathering information about the history and aesthetics of Thai cartooning through a review of the existing literature in Thai language such as monographs on Thai comics (Armorvej, 2001; Kurathong, 2010; Palitpongpanim, 2013; Wechanukhroh, 1990a; 2005) or on specific Thai cartoonists (Nawigamune, 2002a; 2002b; Rajawej, 2002; Wechanukhroh, 1990b), Master of Arts thesis (Tanapoller, 1979), exhibition catalogue (Eawsakul, 2015), memorial cremation volume (Phlangkun, 1990), various newspaper articles, special features (Tongpan & Werusakwong, 2016), and interviews, online archives of Siamese newspapers published before and during the Second World War (Thai Newspaper Collection during the World War II [Thai Newspaper Collection], n.d.), and archives consulted at the National Library of Thailand. The translations in English of the relevant and quotable information were made predominately by the Translation Services Unit, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, and sometimes by my research assistants. As the evolution and nature of Thai comics are closely tied to Thai literature (adaptations of Thai folk tales, *Likay* plays, *Phra Ratchaniphon* [royal writings]...) and to a particular historical, social and cultural context, this research also led to the consultation of literature on Thai history and society (Baker & Phongpaichit; Copeland, 1993; Cornwel-Smith, 2005; Mulder, 2000; Porath, 2003; Wilson, 2004), Thai folklore (Chadchaidee, 2009; Nathalang,

2000a; 2000b; Rajadhon, 2009; Vathanaprida, 1994), Thai literature (Bee, Brown, Chitkasem & Herbert, 1989), Thai modern art and graphic design (Nawigamune, 2000; 2010; 2016; Piazzardi, 2010; Poshyananda, 1992) and *Likay* performing art (Bowers, 1956; Carkin, 1984; Possakrisana, 1995; Smithies, 1975; Sompiboon, 2012; Virulrak, 1980).

In July 2016, I sent a questionnaire via email to 25 Thai cartoonists which were selected as being representative of the contemporary Thai comics scene (see below for selection criteria). Sixteen cartoonists answered the survey consisting of 105 questions (Tables 0.1 to 24.0). Some questions were open-ended while others were of the “yes/no” type. All questions of the survey, and all the responses received, were written in Thai language. Most of the answers have been translated into English by the Translation Services Unit, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. A few answers have been translated into English by my research assistants. As I discussed with various Thai cartoonists during the development of this survey, some of them mentioned they were concerned about a series of sensitive issues that might be addressed in the questionnaire. In order to ensure a complete freedom of expression on these sensitive issues, answers to a limited series of questions remain anonymous. All the cartoonists who answered the survey formally agreed that their answers could be published in the present research project, and in resulting academic publications. The questionnaire is divided in six parts. Part one focuses on the curriculum of the cartoonists (Tables 0.1 to 0.6). Part two is composed of general questions and considerations on Thai comics (Tables 1.0 to 5.1). Part three focuses on the Thai comics industry and the professional situation of the respondents in the Thai comics market (Tables 6.0 to 12.9). Part four is composed of questions on the influence of Thai comics and Thai cartoonists on their own works and styles (Tables 9.0 to 12.9). Part five gathers questions on the influence of foreign comics, foreign cartoonists and other creators on their own works and styles (Tables 13.0 to 18.2). The sixth and final part of the questionnaire focuses on inquiries on miscellaneous topics (Tables 19.0 to 24.0). Under each question displayed in the tables, the related answers of all the cartoonists have been gathered in order to compare their responses and observe similar comments or differences among these comments. The answers are sorted in alphabetical order by author pen names (or by first name if the artist doesn’t use a pen name). The pen names—followed by the first name, last name, gender [‘M’ for male and ‘F’ for female], date and place of birth in Thailand—of the 16 Thai cartoonists who answered the questionnaire are as follows:

01. Art Jeeno: Piyaphach Jeeno (M). April 9, 1987. Chiang Mai.
02. Chart [or SS]: Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (M). June 30, 1972. Bangkok.
03. Eak: Eakasit Thairaat (M). May 25, 1973. Lopburi.
04. Jiew: Prawit Mongkolnowrut (M). February 21, 1965. Bangkok.
05. Jung: Supitcha Senarak (F). July 4, 1992. Bangkok.
06. Munin: Munin Saiprasart (F). April 12, 1988. Khon Kaen.
07. Note [or Note Piruck]: Piruck Moratop (M). October 8, 1986. Bangkok.
08. Nummon: Theerayu Srethapakdi (M). October 6, 1979. Bangkok.
09. Plariex: Patcharakan Pisansupong (F). March 31, 1986. Bangkok.
10. Preecha Raksorn [no pen name] (M). July, 5, 1985. Suphan Buri.
11. Puck: Tripuck Supawattana (M). November 7, 1984. Bangkok.
12. Sa-ard [or Sa-art]: Tanis Werasakwong (M). November 11, 1990. Nakhon Ratchasima.
13. Seng: Songwit Seakitikul (M). November 15, 1972. Hat Yai (Songkhla Prov.).
14. Toma: Chayanan Pakpol (F). March 14, 1992. Bangkok.
15. Tongkarn: Valaikorn Samathakorn (F). September 29, 1971. Bangkok.
16. Vic-Mon [or Mon]: Piengpitch Sartsasi (F). July 24, 1985. Bangkok.

These Thai cartoonists were selected to answer the survey for the following reasons. Prawit Mongkolnowrut [Jiew] is a long-time collaborator of the best-selling *Maha Sanook* and *Kai Hua Roh* humour magazines published by Banlue Sarn. His distinctive style evokes the art of European cartoonists and illustrators such as Jean-Jacques Sempé or Quentin Blake. Eakasit Thairaat [Eak] is a major Thai cartoonist whose art is representative of the manga-influenced mainstream Thai comics production of the 1990s and early 2000s. His original and singular stories inspired the first generation of Thai independent and alternative cartoonists. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich [Chart, or SS] and Songwit Seakitikul [Seng] are two remarkable artists from the first generation of Thai independent cartoonists; they participated actively—through the publication of fanzines and graphic novels—in the development of the Thai independent comics scene in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Valaikorn Samathakorn [Tongkarn], from the same generation as Chart and Seng, is a famous illustrator and cartoonist who started in the early issues of the inspirational magazine *A Day* in 2001. Piengpitch Sartsasi [Vic-Mon, or Mon] is a well-known pocket book cover artist and cartoonist whose art is representative of the Thai

mainstream production of the 2000s. She is from the same generation as Preecha Raksorn, an artist whose paintings—composed of experimental comics sequences—were published in the Thai alternative comics magazine *MUD*. Theerayu Srethapakdi [Nummon, cofounder with Tunyaluck Techasrisutee of *LET'S* magazines], Tripuck Supawattana [Puck], Piruck Moratop [Note] and Tanis Weresakwong [Sa-ard] are frequent and important collaborators to the *LET'S Comic* magazine, an independent publication which participated in the development of the second generation of Thai alternative cartoonists in the mid-2000s. After her debut in *LET'S Comic* magazine in 2009, Munin Saiprasart [Munin] gained fame with her best-selling comics series *I Sea U* published by To Share. She then launched her own independent publishing company named 10 Millimetres. She is from the same generation as Chayanan Pakpol [Toma], Patcharakan Pisansupong [Plariex] and Piyaphach Jeeno [Art Jeeno]. These three young artists are representative of the third generation of Thai alternative cartoonists whose works were usually first spotted on internet then published by Salmon Books, the trendy-oriented publishing house launched in 2010 by Banlue Publications. Each of these 16 cartoonists presents a singular art style, and personal voice, illustrating the development of Comics Art as a means of personal expression in Thailand since the late 1990s. The collection of their insights—mostly from within the independent Thai comics scene but also from the mainstream market—aims at a better understanding of the flourishing of diversity in Comics Art styles in Thailand during the last two decades.

Additional direct interviews and interviews via emails were also conducted during this research project. A direct interview with Tunyaluck Techasrisutee [nickname: Sonoson]—CEO of *LET'S Comic*—was conducted on September 7, 2016. A direct interview with Pimpicha Utsahajit—Executive Director of Banlue Group—was conducted in Bangkok on September 12, 2016. A group discussion with Thai cartoonists Songsin Tiewsomboon, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songwit Seakitikul was conducted in Bangkok on September 16, 2016. Interviews via emails were conducted in September 2016 with Thai cartoonist Munin, with Somkid Paimpiyachat, co-founder of Fullstop Book, and with Thai artist Eunjoo [pen name of Saritrong Turk]. This research project also relies on interviews I conducted via emails in 2014 with Natchanon Mahaittidon, editor in chief of Salmon Books, with Thai cartoonist Tuna Dunn [pen name of Tunlaya Dunnvatanachit], and with Prabda Yoon, founder of Typhoon Studio and vice-president of The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand [PUBAT].

This research project also relied widely on the selection and analysis of dozens of Thai comics. The purchase of these comics and of numerous reference books, the hiring of two student research assistants, the translations fees, and various other expenses have been financially supported by a funding of the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.



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Rationale, Objectives and Limitations

During the 20th National Book Expo Thailand held at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center in October 2015, a seminar called *Katun Thai Tai Laew?* [“Is Thai Cartoon Dead?”] was organized along an exhibition retracing the rich history of Thai comics by the Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand [PUBAT]. Pradba Yoon, cofounder of the Thai alternative comics bookazine *MUD* in 2008 and vice-president of PUBAT, declares in an article that the purpose of the seminar “isn't to definitively say one way or the other whether Thai comics are dead. Obviously, Thai comics aren't dead. However, this discussion's aim is to create a conversation about what Thai cartooning is in today's context” (as quoted in Srimaneekulroj, 2015, n.p.). In another interview, he states that “the Thai cartoon industry is not dead yet, but has actually become more active thanks to online cartoonists' new identity and diversity” (as quoted in Sankham, 2015, n.p.). In the same article, Thai comic book creator Piyaphach Jeeno [pen name: Art Jeeno] states that “local cartoonists were developing more unique drawing styles” and that while “they have become more independent and have the freedom to develop different styles, they still face financial instability as most of them work as freelancers and often need a second job” (as quoted in Sankham, 2015).

The *LET'S Comic* quarterly anthology—launched officially in 2008 by Tanyaluck Techasrisutee [nickname: Sonoson]—sets itself as a good example of the emergence a new generation of Thai cartoonists. Gathering six or seven Thai cartoonists in every thematic issue, it displays a wide range of personal drawing styles. If an influence of the mainstream manga style can be easily identified, the influence of alternative manga and Street Art can be observed in the art of Puck. Thai cartoonist The Duang, admirer of Spanish cartoonist Juanjo Guarnido and French cartoonist Nicolas de Crécy, proposes a dynamic line that seems to synthesize European, American and Japanese trends. The trendy publishing house Salmon Books, part of Banlue Publications, also offers a wide range of Thai comics with personal drawing styles such as *Dining by Incense Light* by young artist Jung who uses black pencils, a technique reminiscent of works by North-European alternative cartoonists such as Joanna Hellgren. The art of young female cartoonist Tuna Dunn (*I Like Like You, Missed, Best Before*), with its more minimal *clear line* style and its use of limited flat-colours, evokes American alternative graphic novels such as David Mazzucchelli's *Asterios Polyp*. We could also mention the comics of Art Jeeno (*Now, D-*

Day, Juice), Wisut Ponnimit (*hesheit*), Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (*Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*), Note (*A Day Story Comic*) and many other cartoonists to highlight the diversity of personal styles and voices in the contemporary Thai comics landscape. A wider diversity of genres and themes seems also to be explored in Thai comic books with the publication of travelogues and narratives focusing on “slice of life” stories and more intimate topics like those developed in European and American alternative comic books and graphic novels.

Yet, if the discussion about “what Thai cartooning is in today’s context” has been launched among Thai professionals, it remains widely unheard beyond the borders of Thailand. With the notable exceptions of a few articles and academic essays (as highlighted in the chapter *Methodology*), the presentation of the contemporary landscape of Thai comics to an international audience is yet to be undertaken. With the booming development of Comics Studies and Popular Culture Studies in universities around the world and with the raise of interest from European comics publishers in Asian productions,⁷ an in-depth exploration of the current situation and diversity of Thai comics might be welcomed and relevant. This research aims to define precisely how, and to what extent, various factors—such as the rise of graphic novels or foreign influences—participated in the mutation and resurgence of Thai cartooning during the past 20 years, providing it with a new identity and diversity. It aims at defining more clearly what is meant by “new identity and diversity” through surveys and interviews with Thai cartoonists and publishers in order to understand how these artists perceive themselves and their works in relation to their own national heritage and to the international scene of Comics Art.

As the Research Office (Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University) suggested a preliminary exploration of the early history and development of Thai cartooning to provide a context to the evolution of the art form in the Twenty-First Century, this research project proposes a first chapter titled *Emergence of Thai Comics: From 1907 to the Second World War*. It is followed by a second chapter titled *Prayoon Chanyawongse* and dedicated to this important Thai artist who is honourably considered in his homeland as the ‘King of Thai

⁷ As the competition for acquiring copyrights of Japanese titles is fierce, French publishers—such as Kana—try to find comic books originated in other Asian countries such as China, Taiwan or Singapore. Alternative publishers such as Cambourakis or Ça et Là are also scouting in Asia to find new talents with strong personal voices. I obtained this information through the direct contacts I share with these publishers and editors.

Cartoon’ and who is “perhaps the most celebrated cartoonist in the early period of Thai cartooning” (Karuchit, 2014, p. 79). The third chapter, titled *The Development of Thai Comics: From Italian Neo-Classicism to Manga*, consists of a short review of literature—with additional research and information—on the evolution of Thai comics from the Second World War to the late 1980s. These inaugural chapters will lead to a better understanding of the differences and similarities in Thai Comics Art before and after the establishment of the independent Thai comics scene in the late 1990s. Due to the in-depth and time-consuming additional investigations dedicated to the early period of Thai cartooning, this research project limits itself in answering these two initial questions:

- In which editorial and cultural context did a new generation of Thai cartoonists emerge during the first decade of the 21st century?

- Can we define an aesthetic and cultural identity specific to Thai comics? How does the new generation define its identity in relation to the previous generations of Thai cartoonists? Does it consider that its production preserve a Thai identity and specificity?

After the three inaugural chapters, this research project essentially devotes itself to the study of the development of a new generation of manga-influenced Thai cartoonists in the mid-1990s (see *Chapter 4*) which participated in the rise of the first generation of Thai alternative cartoonists in the late 1990s and early 2000s (see *Chapter 5*). This fifth chapter proposes a complete presentation of the creation of *Katch*, the first “indie” Thai comics magazine, and an in-depth analysis of the composite yet unique style of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* created by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich. Considered as the first “independent” comics series, *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* breaks with the tradition of Thai-centred comics and offers—through its composite and self-reflexive style—a comment on the modern and eclectic Thai way-of-life in Thailand’s ever-growing and globalizing cities. The fifth chapter also proposes further consideration on defining a “Thai style” in Thai comics, partly through a comparison of Prayoon Chanyawongse and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s works that questioned the Thai society of their respective times via eclectic aesthetics. This chapter ultimately presents the development of “the freedom of styles” in the Thai comics scene during the first decade of the Twenty-First Century, mostly sparked by the publication of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* and Wisut Ponnimit’s

hesheit in the pages of *Katch* magazine. The sixth and final chapter presents the rise of the second generation of Thai independent and alternative cartoonists with the *Katch*-inspired short-lived magazine *Cereal Comix* and the establishment of the influential publishing company LET'S Comic, as well as the establishment of the latest generation of Thai independent and alternative cartoonists who were first discovered through their online blogs and later published by Banlue Publications' trendy publishing house Salmon Books.

While this research project reduced its initial scope on contemporary Thai comics to include an exploration of the early history of Thai comics as well as original findings and observations on various borrowings by Siamese cartoonists of characters and other elements from early American comic strips, its focus on the works of Prayoon Chanyawongse and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, and on the historical and editorial context of the establishment of the independent Thai comics scene provides an original and essential foundation for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the aesthetic nature of Thai comics and the recent evolution of diverse styles in Thailand, both for Thai and foreign scholars.



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1. The Emergence of Thai Comics: From 1907 to the Second World War

1.1 Origins

According to Thai media historian Anake Nawigamune (2010, p.235; 2016, p.81), the first example of Siamese comics art was published around 1906 in an issue of *Samran Wittaya* [Enjoyable Knowledge], a publication founded by British-educated Kru Liam.⁸ The graphic sequence (see Fig. 1, left)—composed of two drawings depicting a conflict between a Chinese pork seller and a dog—illustrates a short “riddle in a form of a poem” (Karuchit, 2014, p. 76). Nawigamune (2000) also mentions the publication in *Chotmai Het Saeng Arun* [Chronicles of the Dawn] in 1907 of “a woodcut cartoon (strip) with accompanying verse” (p. 138). The first woodcut strip to appear in *Chotmai Het Saeng Arun* [volume 13, issue 5] is composed of four panels depicting a daring photographer ingeniously escaping the attack of a lion wearing a royal cloak with ermin-embroidered edge (see Fig. 1, right). The sequence is accompanied with a single sentence. Various other four-to-six-panel woodcut comic strips were printed later the same year in other issues of *Chotmai Het Saeng Arun* published by the Wattana Wittaya school [under the name *Maek Esian Wattana Wittaya*] (Nawigamune, 2010, p. 235). The identity of the artist (or artists) of these woodcut strips remains unknown and each short sequence of silent panels accompanies a poem. In volume 13 issue 6 (reproduced in Nawigamune, 2010, p. 240), a Chinese fisherman incidentally catches a fish with his pigtail. In volume 13 issue 10 (reproduced in Nawigamune, 2010, p. 242), hunters catch a crocodile with a trick comprising a bucket and a dog used as bait. In volume 13 issue 11 (reproduced in Nawigamune, 2016, p. 88-89), the form of the comic strip slightly evolves as the four panels are not accompanying a long poem but are simply accompanied by dialogues—between a kid and a crocodile—placed above each panel (see Fig. 2). If these woodcut strips are similar in their content with “exotic fantasy” strips published in French, British, English and American humoristic magazines at the same period,⁹ their particular relationship to poetry is remarkable and foreshadows the 1929 comic strip series *Pong Gab Priaw* by Chan Suwanabun. A satirical assemblage of football actions by Pleng Traipin published on October 15, 1915 in the book *Ajarn* [Teacher] might also be considered as

⁸ Nawigamune (2010, p. 235) notes that the exact year of publication is uncertain as the Siamese calendar system was modified at the time. The strip might have been published in 1906 or 1907.

⁹ Information provided by comics historian Thierry Smolderen (personal communication, August 2016).

an early attempt on the comics form (Nawigamune, 2002a). Having travelled for 20 years in Europe, Pleng Traipin not only brought back to Thailand a Western style of drawing which impressed readers and the King but also the metal block printing technique that “helped speed up the process of publishing cartoons in the newspapers” (Karuchit, 2014, p. 77). According to Copeland (1993), the considerable development of cartooning and caricature in the Siamese press in the early 1920s—“as a supplement for written opinion and as a form of independent editorial commentary in its own right” (p. 81)—was closely related to the increasing use of graphic advertising in newspapers. Published in the newspaper *Bangkok kanmuang* on the 13th of June 1923, a political cartoon (reproduced in Copeland, p. 92)—drawn by a young graphic artist named Sem Sumanan for a cartoon contest organized by the aforementioned newspaper—might display the first appearance of a speech balloon in a Thai cartoon. According to Copeland (1993), Sem Sumanan was apparently a self-taught cartoonist who worked for several newspapers at the time. In the issue of *Bangkok kanmuang* published on the fourth of October 1924, Sem Sumanan “advised would-be cartoonists to improve their skills by studying the drawings of *Punch* and reading Wright’s *History of Caricature* (London: 1865)” (p. 83). If “many [Asian] satirical periodicals of [the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century] were directly inspired by the British *Punch* magazine” (Harder & Mittler, p. vii), it therefore appears that the British weekly magazine also had a direct impact on the development of Thai cartooning. A two-panel strip with speech balloons published in *Bangkok kanmuang* on the 14th of July 1923 (see Fig. 3) might be considered as one of the first metal-block printed comics (or “two-panel cartoon” to be more accurate in regard of the editorial context).¹⁰ Copeland (1993) describes a four-panel political comic strip drawn by Sem Sumanan—and published in *Bangkok kanmuang* on the 17th of January 1924 (see Fig. 4)—as the “kingdom’s first comic strip” (p.87). As woodcut comic strips appeared as early as 1907 in the Kingdom of Siam (as noted earlier), it might be considered as the country’s first four-panel metal-block printed comic strip.

The series *Pong Gab Priaw* [Pong and Priaw] by Chan Suwanabun published in 1929 in the Thai language newspaper *Daily Mail* (Amornvej, 2001) appears to be the first regular Siamese comic strip using series of panels—seven to eight panels assigned on two tiers—and

¹⁰ That strip was reproduced in the exhibition *Humour Business* held in Bangkok at the Thailand Creative and Design Center [TCDC] from July 15 to October 2, 2016. The caption reads: “Political cartoons by khun Patiphakphimlikhit (Pleng Traipin).”

speech balloons. Each comic strip, relating a short misadventure of two boys named Pong and Priaw, serves to illustrate the moral of a proverbial poem from the *Khlong Lokanit* style introduced in the title banner above the strip. A panel of the exhibition *Humour Business*—held in Bangkok at the Thailand Creative and Design Center [TCDC] from July 15 to October 2, 2016—presented two pages from another comic strip series created by Chan Suwanabun and titled *Nai Pong Pongpang and Niyai Lokanit* (see Fig. 5). Like *Pong Gab Priaw*, the author reinterprets proverbial poems from the *Khlong Lokanit* style, and “effectively [depicts] ongoing events of the society in details [and informs the readers] of the truth of life in 1931” (“Humour Business,” 2016). These two comic strip series are the first of a long and dominant production of graphic narratives influenced in their format by Western comics—such as those published in British *Punch* magazine—but drawing their content from Thai traditional literature.

Figure 1 - Left: “riddle in a form of a poem,” published around 1906 in an issue of *Samran Wittaya*. Reproduced from Nawigamune, 2016, p. 82. Right: “a woodcut cartoon (strip) with accompanying verse,” published in 1907 in *Chotmai Het Saeng Arun* volume 13, issue 5. Reproduced from Nawigamune, 2010, p. 244.



Figure 2 - Woodcut comic strip, published around 1907 in *Chotmai Het Saeng Arun* volume 13, issue 11. Reproduced from Nawigamune, 2016, p. 88-89.



Figure 3 - “Two-panel cartoon” published in *Bangkok kanmuang* on the 14th of July 1923. Reproduced from Copeland, 1993, p. 103. Attributed to Pleng Traipin in the exhibition *Humour Business* held in Bangkok at the Thailand Creative and Design Center [TCDC] from July 15 to October 2, 2016.



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Figure 4 - Comic strip drawn by Sem Sumanan and published in *Bangkok kanmuang* on the 17th of January 1924. Reproduced from Copeland, 1993, p. 106.



Figure 5 - Two pages from the comic strip series *Nai Pong Pongpang and Niyai Lokanit* created by Chan Suwanabun and published in 1931. Photograph by the author at the exhibition *Humour Business*, held in Bangkok at the Thailand Creative and Design Center [TCDC] from July 15 to October 2, 2016.



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1.2 Popeye and Mickey Mouse; Borrowings and Hybridization

Humour cartoons (reproduced in Phlangkun, 1990, p. 92)—drawn around 1933 by Thai artist Wittamin [pen name of Witt Sutthasatien] and starring characters such as Mickey Mouse or Popeye and Wimpy from E. C. Segar’s *The Thimble Theatre*—confirm the presence and influence of these two American comic strip series in the Kingdom of Siam in the early 1930s (see Fig. 6, left). On the first page (reproduced in Phlangkun, 1990, p. 94) of his 1935 comic strip series *LingGee Phu Khayi Yak* [“LingGee who slayed the Giant”], Wittamin even merges the characters of Popeye and Mickey Mouse in a hybrid—and fascinating—character named LingGee (see Fig. 6, right). Furthermore, the first page of the series—the third Siamese long-form comics series but the first in colour in Siam (Phlangkun, 1990, p. 94)—also looked oddly familiar. With some research, I was able to establish that the first strip of Wittamin’s *LingGee Phu Khayi Yak* (published on September 8, 1935; see Fig. 7, right) mimics the first panels of the comic strip *Mickey Mouse: Ruplewatt the Giant* penciled by American artist Floyd Gottfredson and published in the United States on March 11, 1934 (see Fig. 7, left).

Moreover, Popeye inspired the popular and recurring character Khun Muen created by Sawas Jutharop in a series of adaptations of Thai traditional tales into long-story comics (Palitpongpanim, 2013). Published in 1932 and 1933 in the *Siam Rath* newspaper, *Sang Thong* is the first serialized long-story comics in Thailand (Karuchit, 2014, p. 77) and is based on “one of the most popular [Thai] folktales [and] perhaps the best-known among Thai people” (Nathalang, 2000a, p. 9). Throughout his graphic adaptation, Sawas Jutharop retells the story of prince Sang who was born in a conch shell and who will be later separated from his mother to be raised by a female giant. After stealing her magical artefacts and gaining a golden skin complexion, he flies away from the giant to reach another kingdom while keeping his face hidden under an ugly mask. Despite his hideous appearance, a princess chooses him as her future husband and provokes the anger of her father, King Samon. After overcoming various challenges set by his future father-in-law, prince Sang reveals his golden body and his royal origins to finally marry the princess, acquire the throne and ultimately find back his mother.

Sang Thong and other Thai folktales from the *Chakchak Wongwong* repertoire are stories “about adventurous and polygynous life of princely heroes” (Nathalang, 2000a, p. 1), stories of which forced exiles, separations, transformations, magical items, conflicts with in-laws and

happy endings are the basic components. Centred “around beings -- spirits, gods, or supermen -- who, according to legend, lived in an actual area of Thailand” (Carkin, 1984, p. 65), these tales are usually set during the Ayutthaya period [1350-1767] and the numerous wars between the Mon, Burmese and Siamese kingdoms (Smithies, 1975). Hence, even if he kept the closed-eye, the pipe and the jutting chin of Popeye, Khun Muen wore Thai period costume, “with ancient military headgear, and played the role of the clown in the cartoon literary works of [Sawas Jutharop]” (Nawigamune, 2000, p. 139). Other literary works adapted by Sawas Jutharop in the comics form are *Kraithong*, a folktale where a hero saves a princess kidnapped by the King of Crocodiles (Chadchaidee, 2009); *Phra Aphaimani*, a classic epic romance written by poet Sunthon Phu in the early eighteenth century (Bee, Brown, Chitkasem, Herbert, 1989); *Chu Chok*, a famous story arc from the *Vessantara Jataka* or Buddha’s penultimate rebirth (Rajadhon, 2009); and *Phra Samut*, an epic play in the *Lakhon* genre written by Siamese prince Wichaichan in the second half of the nineteenth century (Palitpongpanim, 2013); and [*Honwichai*] *Kawi* a Lakhon dance drama written by Rama II (r. 1809-1824) based on the dramatic poem *Suakho Khamchan* written by court poet Phramaharatchakru during the second part of the seventeenth century (Bee, P.J., Brown, L., Patricia Herbert, P., & Chitkasem, M., 1989).¹¹ In the latter comics adaptation, Sawas Jutharop didn’t only localize the character of Popeye in the Ayutthaya realm but also borrowed elements from another American comic strip in a remarkable way. In the title banner of a strip from his *Kawi* published on the seventh of November 1936 in the *Siam Rashdra Daily* newspaper (reproduced in the Thai Newspaper Collection, n.d.),¹² his Popeye-inspired character Khun Muen appears with the main character Kawi next to an army of robots (see Fig. 8). The presence of robots in an adaptation of a royal dance drama written in the early Nineteenth Century and set in the Ayutthaya period is puzzling, to say the least. In his book *Fascinating Folktales of Thailand*, Chadchaidee (2009) retells the story *Kawee Honwichai* and mentions that “[with] the help of a magic spell and his sacred knife, Kawee created a huge number of people for his army who were resistant to all types of weapons” (p. 199) in order to defeat Waiyathat’s troops. I assume—as only seven strips of this comics adaptation are accessible in the Thai Newspaper Collection—that Sawas Jutharop boldly used robots to embody the people created by

¹¹ More information on *Kawi* in *Chapter 2.5: Development of the Cartoon Likay Genre and of its Political Commentary*.

¹² The mentioned page can be accessed at <http://edb.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/exhibit/b78/image/076/b78s1216.html>

Kawi to serve him as soldiers “resistant to all types of weapons.” The particular design of the robots—with round eyes emitting light rays and with heads surmounted by spikes similar to the points on the *Pickelhaube* Prussian helmets—is quite puzzling and led me to look for an eventual and additional borrowing from an American comic strip. With some research, I was able to discover a similar design of robots in the now largely forgotten American Sunday strip series *Tiny Tim* that ran from 1933 to 1958. Created by American cartoonist Stanley Link and distributed by *The Chicago Tribune* (Markstein, 2007), these adventures will lead the main character Tiny Tim to face an army of Mechanical Men circa 1935. Dated of the 21st of July 1935,¹³ an original artwork from the series shows the robots with their heads surmounted by *Pickelhaube* spikes. Another original artwork,¹⁴ dated of the 2nd of June 1935, also reveals the ability of these robots to emit light rays from their tubular eyes (see Fig. 9).¹⁵ Based on the graphic similarities observed between Stanley Link’s and Sawas Jutharop’ robots, and with the apparition of these robots in the USA in 1935 and in the Kingdom of Siam in 1936, it seems reasonable to infer that Sawas Jutharop borrowed Link’s robot design for the magical soldiers raised by Kawi. The borrowing and localization of robots in a tale set in the Ayutthaya period demonstrates—like the fascinating hybridization of Popeye and Mickey Mouse by Wittamin—the freedom and boldness with which Siamese artists create eclectic and composite graphic works (this observation will be further discussed in *Chapter 5.4: Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and the ‘modern Thai comics’ style*). Filled with humour, action and adventure, localized in the fantasy realms of Siamese traditional literature and drawn with clear, gently curved and open lines evoking the style of American comic strips from the early 1930s—and particularly those of E. C. Segar—, Jutharop’s comic strips series became widely popular among children and adults (Chanyawongs, personal communication, July 27, 2016).

¹³ The original artwork is displayed on the webpage of the Cowan Collection and can be accessed at <http://cowancollectionanimation.blogspot.com/2009/05/selling-comic-art.html>.

¹⁴ The original artwork can be accessed on <http://rodrigobaeza.tumblr.com/post/97689637751/stanley-link-tiny-tim-sunday-page-original-art>.

¹⁵ This artwork is displayed on <http://www.comicartfans.com/gallerypiece.asp?piece=1114658>.

Figure 6 - Left: humour cartoon drawn around 1933 by Thai artist Wittamin and starring American characters Popeye and Mickey Mouse. Reproduced from Phlangkun, 1990, p. 92. Right: LingGee, a 1935 merging of Popeye and Mickey Mouse by Wittamin. Reproduced from Phlangkun, 1990, p. 94.

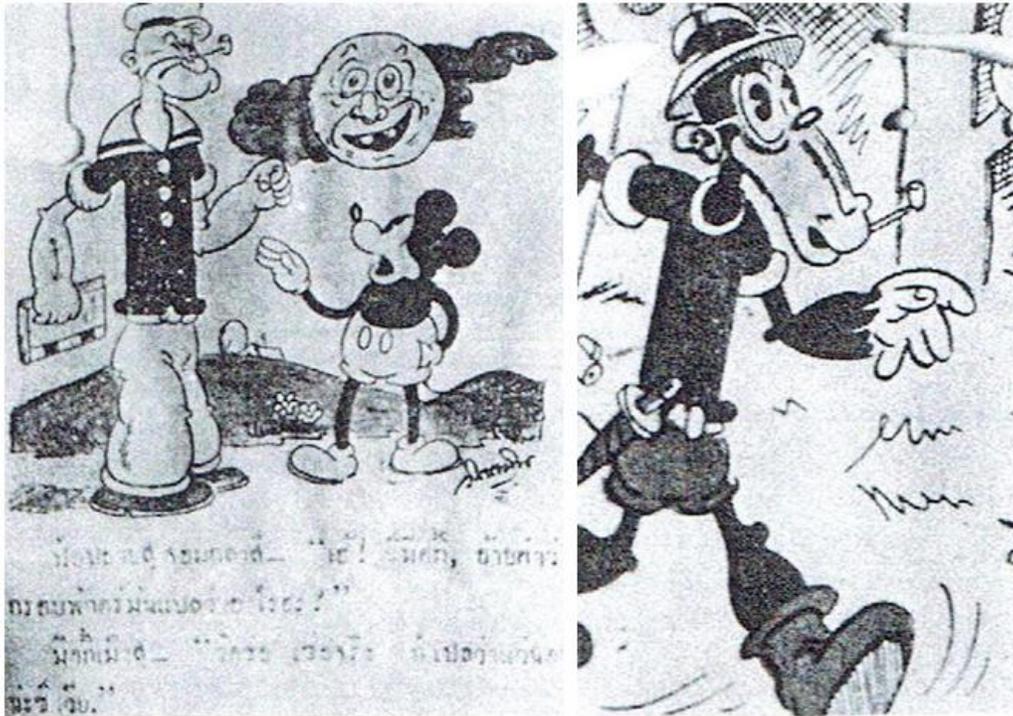


Figure 7 - Left: two panels from *Mickey Mouse: Rumplewatt the Giant* penciled by American artist Floyd Gottfredson and published in the USA on March 11, 1934. Reproduced from Gottfredson, 2013, p. 139. Right: first strip of Wittamin's *LingGee Phu Khayi Yak*, September 8, 1935. Reproduced from Phlangkun, 1990, p. 94.



Figure 8 - Title banner and upper tier of a strip from *Kawi* by Thai artist Sawas Jutharop published on the seventh of November 1936 in the *Siam Rashdra Daily* newspaper. Detail. Reproduced from the Kyoto University's online Thai Newspaper Collection, <http://edb.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/exhibit/b78/image/076/b78s1216.html>.

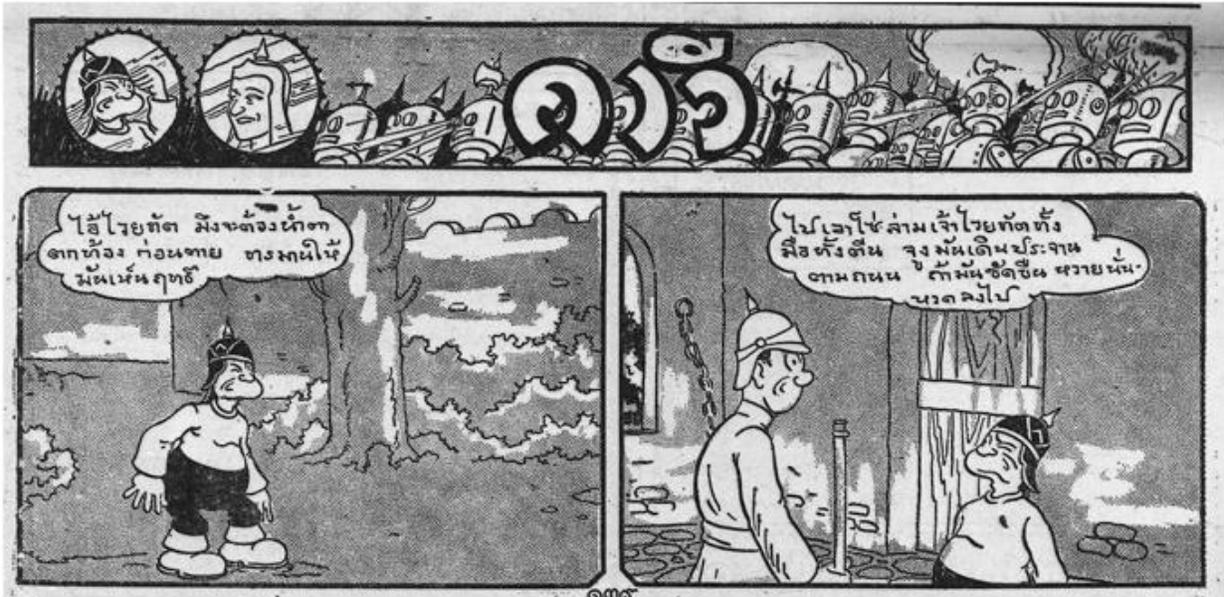


Figure 9 - Original artwork from *Tiny Tim* by American cartoonist Stanley Link, published on Sunday June 2, 1935. In the cave of the Boogaboo men, Tim follows a Mechanical Man emitting a ray of light. Reproduced from the Comic Art Fans website, <http://www.comicartfans.com/gallerypiece.asp?piece=1114658>.



2. Prayoon Chanyawongse

2.1 Prayoon Chanyawongse, the King of Thai Cartoon

If Prayoon Chanyawongse is honourably considered in his homeland as the ‘King of Thai Cartoon’ and is “perhaps the most celebrated cartoonist in the early period of Thai cartooning” (Karuchit, 2014, p. 79), the unique *Katun Likay* [*Cartoon Likay*] genre he established remains without any international scrutiny.¹⁶ With a brief presentation in two academic papers on Thai cartooning by John A. Lent (1997) and Warat Karuchit (2014) and a short yet valuable biographical vignette by Ruben G. Alabastro (2007), English language sources of information on Prayoon Chanyawongse are scarce and focus mainly on his production of political cartoons. The particular attention on his cartoon art is undoubtedly linked to its recognition outside the boundaries of Thailand. Indeed, Prayoon Chanyawongse won the first prize of the International Cartoon for Peace Competition in New York in 1960 for his editorial cartoon entitled *The Last Nuclear Test* (Alabastro, 2007), a depiction of Earth breaking apart under a gigantic mushroom cloud. Eleven years later, he also was granted with the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature and Creative Communication Arts in the Philippines for “his use of pictorial satire and humor for over three decades in unswerving defense of the public interest” (Alabastro, 2007, p. 244).

Starting his career of political cartoonist in 1946 (Karuchit, 2014; Tanapoller, 1979), Prayoon Chanyawongse addressed regularly the issue of poverty in Thailand and denounced the corruption and abuse of power of local officials. His concern for the welfare of his compatriots—expressed daily in numerous newspapers with wit and humour—resonated with a wide and diverse readership, and led to a following which “was said to be larger than the combined circulations of the big publications in Thailand” (Alabastro, 2007, p. 242) at the height of his popularity. His success also caught the attention of the Thai government and Prayoon faced censorship in 1968 when self-promoted Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn ordered him to bring an end to his series of cartoons criticizing the military dictatorship. As an act of resistance, Prayoon Chanyawongse chose to represent his popular and recurring drawn alter-ego named

¹⁶ The Thai denomination *Katun Likay* [or *Cartoon Likay*] designates a *comics* genre established by Prayoon Chanyawongse and not a stand-alone drawing. See the chapter titled *Terminology: Cartoon, paap lor, katun, manga, comics, comix and graphic novels*.

Sooklek with his mouth sewn shut in his daily cartoons (Karuchit, 2014; Lent, 1997). After another warning from the regime, Prayoon Chanyawongse abandoned the sewn lips but kept Sooklek's mouth hidden behind a thick moustache until the end of the Thanom martial law period in 1973.

According to Soodrak Chanyawongs (personal communication, 2016), daughter of Prayoon Chanyawongse and secretary of the Prayoon Chanyawongse Foundation, censorship also led him to avoid temporarily overt political criticism, and to create cartoons dedicated to the observation and celebration of nature. Gradually, part of his cartoon production took a new and unique form coined as 'verse editorial' and described as "a montage of drawings within one large panel, which campaigned or instructed in verse on subjects such as plants, gardening, nutrition [or] cooking" (Lent, 1997, p. 93). Entitled *Kabuan Karn Gae Jon* ["Anti-Poverty Club"], his highly popular cartoon series was not only a "treasure of local wisdom on food and agriculture" (Charan Homtienthong, as quoted in Srimaneeekulroj, 2015, para. 16) aimed at developing a self-sufficient living for the poorest but also unconventional "because of [its] poetic element and the mixture of numerous drawings inside one frame, as well as their sometimes *risqué* nature" (Lent, 1997, p. 93, italic in original). The particular form of the verse editorial didn't outlive its creator who passed away in 1992 and the *Cartoon Likay*—another singular genre established by Prayoon Chanyawongse—underwent the same fate.

Appearing with Chanyawongse's first long-story comic series titled *Chanthakorop* in 1938, the *Cartoon Likay* genre places the reader as a member of a fictional audience attending a performance of a local folk tale staged as a play of *Likay*, a highly popular Thai theatrical form at the time. Using the *Likay* performance as a frame for his graphic narratives where sequences performed on a *Likay* stage constantly alternate with sequences in more varied and naturalistic settings, Chanyawongse adapted dozens of works from Thai traditional literature in highly successful comics series from the late 1930s till the early 1970s. By introducing some specific *Likay* conventions within his graphic narratives, Prayoon Chanyawongse established a unique and highly eclectic form of comics where he could effectively address, alongside his production of cartoons, contemporary social and political concerns within epics and folktales set in former times.

2.2 Prayoon Chanyawongse: From Sawas Jutharop to the *Cartoon Likay*

As a child, Prayoon Chanyawongse discovered Sawas Jutharop's comic strips in the newspaper pages used to wrap goods on the market (Chanyawongs, personal communication, 2016). He subsequently developed a passion for the medium, spending most of his time drawing cartoons in school during his secondary years. Eager to improve his technique, "he would skip lunch at school and use his meal money to buy foreign comic books. To appease his hunger, he would drink large amounts of water," writes Alabastro (2007, p. 241). At age nineteen, after graduating secondary school and rejections from various newspapers, Prayoon saw his first cartoon published in the *Dao Nakorn* newspaper in 1934. Three years later, he is hired as a headline writer for the *Prachamit* newspaper (Alabastro, 2007), producing illustrations for various columns (Chanyawongs, personal communication, 2016). If his first comics series—an adaptation of Aesop's fable *The Lion and the Mouse* (according to his daughter Soodrak, personal communication, 2016)—was sold to the newspaper *Issara*, it remained unpublished (Wechanukhroh, 1990b). With the guidance of his former teacher Ob Jayavasut—an influential writer and humorist of the time—, Prayoon entered a circle of prominent Siamese journalists, poets, illustrators and cartoonists, including Sawas Jutharop and Jamnong Rodari. According to Soodrak Chanyawongs (personal communication, 2016), his mentor Ob Jayavasut recommended the young artist in 1938 to Malai Chupinit, editor of the newly founded *Suphaphurut* [Gentlemen] newspaper. Prayoon then started his first long-form comics, an adaptation of the local folk tale *Chanthakorop* serialized in *Suphaphurut* in late 1938 and early 1939 (Srimaneekulroj, 2015). If Prayoon adapts a popular tale in comics form on the model set by Sawas Jutharop a few years before, he wished to propose something different. As the *Likay* theatrical form was very popular at the time and *Chanthakorop* was a "favorite *Likay* story" (Virulrak, 1980:60), Prayoon decided to narrate the story of Prince Chanthakorop and his untrustworthy wife Mora as if the reader was part of an audience attending a *Likay* performance of the tale (Chanyawongs, personal communication, 2016). The strips of the series (reproduced in "Prayoon Chanyawongse Foundation [PCF]," 2015) were usually composed of two tiers; the first tier formed by three panels and the second tier by two panels. The first panel of the upper tier usually introduced the title *Chanthakorop* and, more interestingly, a member of the *Likay* troupe addressing directly the reader—and the fictional audience—to make a humoristic comment, replicating one of the most important conventions of the *Likay* theatrical form.

2.3 *Likay* Theater, a Thai Performing Art

Evolving over centuries from *Dikir*—a Muslim chant—to improvised sketches portraying foreign mannerisms under the name *Dikay* before reaching its maturity in the first half of the 20th century through a process of amalgamation with classical and folk elements of Thai dance-drama (Carkin, 1984), *Likay* is a “well-known folk (popular) theatre style in Thailand [whose] performance combines spoken text, dance, song, music, ornate costumes, and decorations” (Sompiboon, 2012, p. 13). A highly eclectic form of theatre, *Likay* is first and foremost “an improvisational theatre in which improvisation [...] permeates the various performance elements” (Virulnak, 1980, p. 210). The troupe or *khana*, usually composed of eight to ten actors, meet shortly before the performance begins with the stage manager, or a story teller, who will present them with the outline of the play and their assigned characters (Sompiboon, 2012). Drawing upon their specialization in standard role-type characters and upon plots usually based on famous folk tales from the *Chakchak Wongwong* repertoire, performers promptly compose their roles and their first lines of dialogue while putting on their make-up and glittering costumes. In the meantime on the left of the stage, a five piece orchestra—or *piphat* orchestra—plays a musical prelude to attract and welcome the audience to the theatrical performance commonly offered in connection with Thai traditional celebrations such as funerals, fairs, and special religious ceremonies (Carkin, 1984). Temporarily erected outdoor for a specific event or permanent in a theatre house, the stage is a standard floor plan on which the only necessary prop is a bench big enough for three people to sit on. The bench is always placed at stage centre, against a backdrop that usually depicts a throne hall (Virulnak, 1980). The stage being an empty space, pantomime also plays an important part in *Likay* performances (Virulnak, 1980). Hand props, such as the indispensable sword, are numerous and might serve a comical purpose like those “usually used by a clown [or *sehna*]; it may be, for example, an exaggerated chopping knife or a laser sword adapted from the Star Wars movies” (Sompiboon, 2012, p. 117).

When the performers are ready, the *ok khaek*—an introductory opening and a specific convention to *Likay*—is performed. An “actor dons a pseudo-Indian costume and uses hand gestures and movements similar to those used in Indian dance” (Sompiboon, 2012, p. 86). He sings in pseudo-Malay and pseudo-Indian languages, indicating the foreign origins of the form. The pseudo-Indian character—having a high nose, black hair, beard and moustache—is known

as the *khaek*. During the introductory opening, the troupe leader also “greet[s] his sponsor and the audience and advertises his troupe” (Virulnak, 1980, p. 297) over a backstage microphone. The play proper then begins. The performers of the first scene appear on the stage and sit on the couch after they had paid their respects to the spectators. Accompanied by the *piphat* orchestra, the actors introduce their characters; improvise the lyrics in verse based on the director’s guidance; and act out their song through dance (Possakrisana, 1995). Singing and rhyming *ad lib* at the same time, as well as thinking of what twist they can next give the plot (Smithies, 1975), the performers then repeat the information in simple speech in order to clarify “what may have been hurried or compressed [...] because of the poetic constraints of verse-making” (Carlin, 1984, p. 145). The play continues in a rapid succession of short and active scenes (Bowers, 1956, p. 157). The action of a *Likay* play can be interrupted at any time and in several ways; members of the audience can shout suggestions to actors about what they should do next in a scene; the *mae yok*, a matron sponsoring male stars, can interrupt a scene in order to present monetary rewards and garlands to her favourite performer; clown characters can make humoristic interruptions and “speak directly to audience, both following a script but also making asides on topics such as politics, economics, entertainment and miscellaneous issues in their locality” (Sompiboon, 2012, p. 62).

The constant interaction between the audience and the performers, or the ‘breaking of the fourth wall’, and the “dialog between established tradition and contemporary concerns” (Carlin, 1984, p. 144) are integral parts of a *Likay* performance. As Sompiboon (2012) points out, “[serious] social commentary, such as on politics, economics, sanitation and safe driving, can be made through the semi-improvised, humorous actions in *likay* performances” (p. 137). Sompiboon (2012) also mentions how, in the early 1950s, the Thai “government chose to use *likay* as a tool in its anti-communist campaign because of *likay*’s loose structure and subversiveness, which can be used to impart political messages, and because *likay* was commoners’ favourite form of entertainment” (p. 133, italic in original). The popularity of *Likay* in the mid-twentieth century, the constant back and forth between direct audience address and a more representational style, and between period adventurous folktales and serious contemporary social commentaries tackled with humour and subversiveness, also can be seen as key elements which likely appealed to the young Prayoon Chanyawongse. Hence, if *Likay* “allows many performances elements from various entertainments to co-exist” (Virulnak, 1980, p. 290), the

conventions of the eclectic theatrical form will soon be amalgamated into the comics hybrid form under Prayoon's pen to form the *Cartoon Likay* genre.

2.4 *Chanthakorop* and the Establishment of the *Cartoon Likay* Genre

Serialized in the *Suphaphurut* newspaper in late 1938 and 1939, Prayoon's first long-form comic narrative presents itself as a *Likay* performance of the local folk tale *Chanthakorop* to which the reader is invited to assist together with a larger intradiegetic audience. The inaugural strip (reproduced in Tanapoller, 1979, p. 83) is composed of two tiers. In the first panel, the *ok khaek* is performed next to an introductory caption. The *khaek*—a pseudo-Indian character with a black beard—swirls on stage while addressing his lines towards the reader, and the still invisible fictitious audience. Only later in the narrative will the intradiegetic audience be shown; a group of *mae yok* are portrayed crying over the fate of *Chanthakorop* (Chanyawongs, personal communication, 2016). In the third panel, the character of Sooklek appears, sitting on a bench in front of a tree. Introduced as the leader of the *Likay* troupe (Tanapoller, 1979, p. 190), Sooklek is a cartoony character with a slightly rounded belly, an oval face, and a large eggplant-shaped nose. With his lips and eyelashes apparently accentuated with make-up and wearing a *Likay* costume and a headband with feather, he introduces the play as an intradiegetic narrator, facing reader and audience. Shifting from presentational address to representational acting, Sooklek leaves his bench in the second tier and walks in a naturalistic rural landscape far too vast to fit on a stage; he enters the fantasy realms of the folktale. While walking in the direction of an isolated hermitage, he performs dance gestures as he starts to play his role of prince *Chanthakorop*.

The first part of the folktale tells the adventure of prince *Chanthakorop* who went to study under a hermit in order to become a wise king. His formation completed and before heading back home, *Chanthakorop* receives a casket from the sage who urges the prince to keep it closed till he reaches his palace. On his way home, *Chanthakorop* breaks his vow and opens the casket in the forest. A beautiful woman named *Mora* suddenly appears out of the box. The prince falls in love with her and asks *Mora* to marry him. Nearby, a bandit is struck by the beauty of *Mora* and decides to kill *Chanthakorop*. During the fight, the prince asks *Mora* to hand him his sword. Undecided as to who she prefers between the prince and the thief, she places the sword between them. With the handle pointing towards the robber, the latter grabs the sword with ease

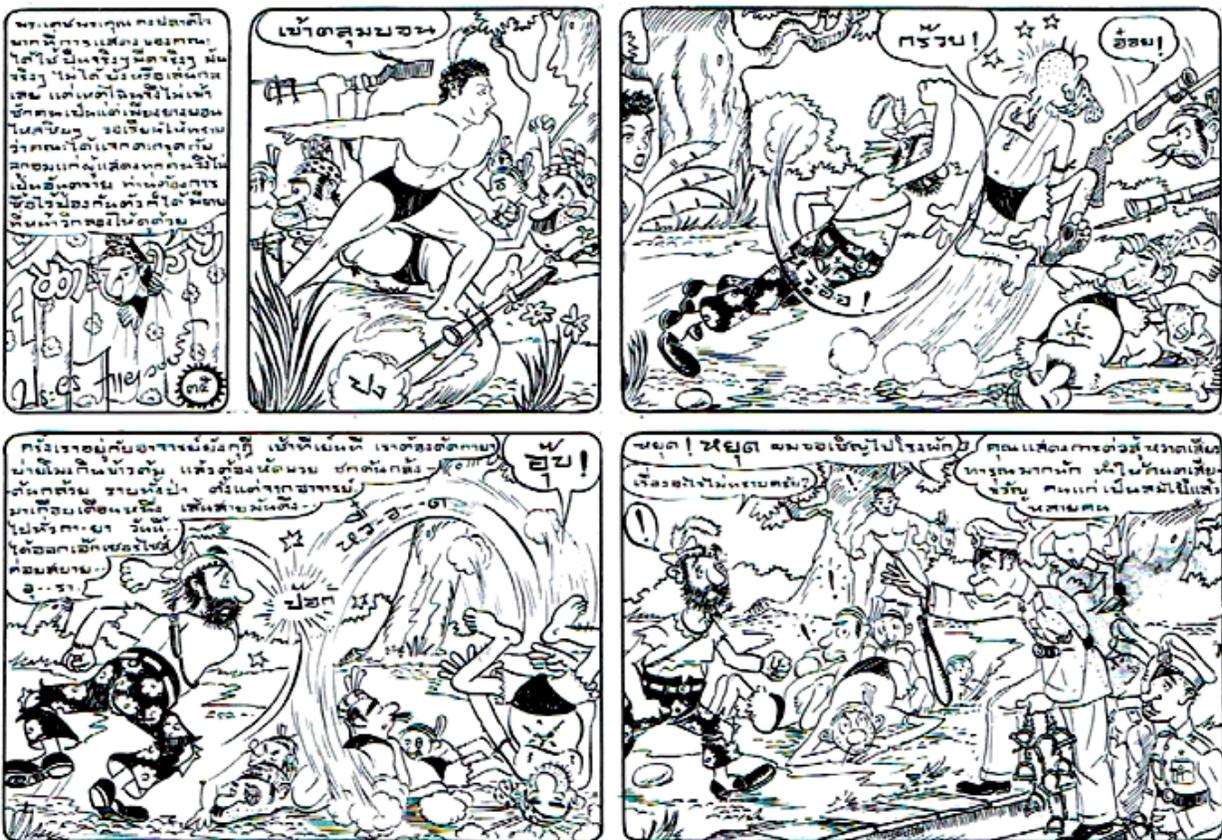
and kills Chanthakorop. Prayoon Chanyawongse faithfully adapts the storyline of the first part of the folktale, introducing many humoristic elements with the assistance of his former teacher Ob Jayavas (Wechanukhroh, 1990b) as well as *risqué* elements such as Mora appearing in what could be a modern ‘drop back bandeau swimsuit’ in the twelfth strip (reproduced in “PCF,” 2015, p. 17).¹⁷ The story is mostly displayed in the fictional world of the *Chanthakorop* folktale with various and illusionistic settings, as a framed story. Throughout the narrative, Prayoon Chanyawongse plays with important conventions of the *Likay*, constantly ‘breaking the (intradiegetic) fourth wall’. For instance, in the thirteenth strip (reproduced in “PCF,” 2015, p. 17), the first panel shows a presenter in front of a stage curtain, facing the reader, and announcing that “tonight the ticket costs 3 *satang* [a *satang* is one-hundredth of a Thai baht] and the electric fan will be turned on, free of charge.” The second panel of the strip brings us back to the meeting between Mora and Chanthakorop in the fictitious world of the folktale.

Apart from these presentational panels regularly reminding the audience—and reader—of the theatrical nature of the narrative, actors also can be interrupted during their performance by external characters. The twenty-fifth strip (reproduced in “PCF,” 2015, p. 12) depicts the violent fight between Chanthakorop and the bandit who, in Prayoon’s version, is assisted by half a dozen henchmen (see Fig. 10). Thanks to powerful punches evocative of Popeye’s blows, Chanthakorop dominates the struggle until the performance is suddenly interrupted by policemen in the last panel of the strip. In the bottom right of the panel, three policemen in 1930s uniforms climb on the exposed stage on which the fantasy realms of folktale—a deep forest with trees and bushes—seem to be laid. Sooklek and the other actors wonder why the policemen urge them to stop. An officer, holding numerous handcuffs, answers that the turmoil of the fight caused the fainting of elderly members of the audience. Constantly shifting from, if not blurring, presentational and representational styles, Prayoon offers a vivid and witty narrative where *Likay*’s convention of interruption and its structuring of “short and active scenes” are cleverly exploited in relation to the episodic publication of the tale in newspaper strips. According to

¹⁷ The book *Sooklek/Prayoon Chanyawongse* (2015) is edited as a tumble format. The first half of the book is dedicated to the character Sooklek and the second half, inverted, to its creator Prayoon Chanyawongse. The page numbers of the latter half are italicized while page numbers of the former are not. I will use the same system in this paper in order to locate the pages properly. Let’s note also that Prayoon Chanyawongse was numbering his strips, numbers I’m referring to when I mention “the twelfth strip.”

Soodrak Chanyawongs (personal communication, 2016), the comics adaptation of *Chanthakorop* quickly grew in popularity. Keeping the momentum going and establishing a genre where the comic narrative is structured by a *Likay* performance, Prayoon will adapt dozens of other works from Thai traditional literature (Tanapollerd, 1979)¹⁸ in *Cartoon Likay* series which “became hits, especially among people in the provinces” (Alabastro, 2007, p. 243).

Figure 10 - The twenty-fifth strip of the *Cartoon Likay* adaptation of *Chanthakorop* by Thai cartoonist Prayoon Chanyawongse, published in the late 1938 in *Suphaphburut* newspaper. Reproduced from Prayoon Chanyawongse Foundation, 2015, p. 12).



¹⁸ Tanapollerd notes that Prayoon created 34 long form comics from 1938 till 1977, most of these stories serialized in newspapers and written in the *Cartoon Likay* genre. Five long form comics were published before 1940 and 29 between 1946 and 1977. A hiatus of 6 years in his production of long form comics occurred due to the Asian-Pacific war and the related shortage of paper.

2.5 Development of the *Cartoon Likay* Genre and of its Political Commentary

On the model set by Sawas Jutharop with his character Khun Muen, Prayoon Chanyawongse uses Sooklek as a recurring intradiegetic narrator and *Likay* performer from one tale to the next, providing him with a rounder design along the way. The Peter Pan-like character—“with a feather shooting out of his headband and a sword in his hand” (Alabastro, 2007, p. 239)—became concurrently the central figure of his creator’s editorial cartoons. Prayoon Chanyawongse, like E. C. Segar in his pre-Popeye *Thimble Theatre*, also conserved a recurring cast of actors which perform in his various *Likay Cartoon* stories as the members of Mr. Sooklek’s troupe. Physical appearances and personality traits of the troupe’s members are based directly on Prayoon’s friends, most of them journalists (Wechanukhroh, 1990b). The character of Mae Jew—a *mae yok* sponsoring Sooklek with whom she fell in love—became a favourite recurring character (Tanapoller, 1979, p. 80). Member of the intradiegetic audience assisting the *Likay* performances by the troupe of Mr. Sooklek, Mae Jew will regularly interrupt the play to offer garlands to her beloved actor. The fictional audience also can interrupt the play when it is not pleased by the casting. For instance, in the *Cartoon Likay* titled *Honwichai Kawi Rua Rachini Nai Khlong Suek* [Honwichai Kawi or the Queen in the Wardrum]¹⁹ first serialized in the early 1950s and collected in 1985, the audience interrupts the performance because it considers that the actor playing the part of Honwichai doesn’t look ‘smart’ enough to portray the hero.²⁰ Sooklek, as the troupe leader, decides to dismiss the actor and present the audience with a line-up of male performers. A good-looking man is selected by the audience and the play resume from the scene it was stopped,²¹ going back in the fantasy realms of the folktale *Honwichai Kawi*. The dismissed actor will reappear later, playing the part of a terrifying giant.

Serialized in the newspaper *Pim’Thai* in 1950 and 1951 (Tanapoller, 1979, p. 192),²² the *Honwichai Kawi* comics narrative takes all the characteristics of the *Cartoon Likay* genre with the presence of a piphat orchestra in the first panel, the introduction of the *Likay* play by troupe

¹⁹ From now on, the name of the play will be shortened to *Honwichai Kawi*.

²⁰ Strip numbered 45, on page 24 of the 1985 collection of *Honwichai Kawi*.

²¹ Strip numbered 46, on page 24 of the 1985 collection of *Honwichai Kawi*.

²² Based on microfilms of the *Pim’Thai* newspaper conserved at the National Library of Thailand and accessed in July 2016, I noted that the *Cartoon Likay* of *Honwichai Kawi* wasn’t serialized on a daily basis. The strips appeared three times a week, usually on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, at the bottom of the eighth and final page of the *Pim’Thai* daily newspaper.

manager Sooklek, the *ok khaek* introductory opening (see Fig. 11), the constant shift from presentational and representational acting, the aesthetic of interruption, and the use of *bot rong likay* [*likay* rhymes] (Wechanukhroh, 1990b). Sixteenth long form comics of Prayoon Chanyawongse, it merges the *Suakho khamchan* dramatic poem written by court poet Phramaharatchakru during the second part of the seventeenth century (Bee, P.J., Brown, I., Patricia Herbert, P., & Chitkasem, M., 1989) with a later version written by Rama II (r. 1809-1824) as a *Lakhon* dance drama under the title *Honwichai Kawi*. The tale recounts the friendship between a tiger cub named Honwichai and a calf named Kawi. Transformed into humans by a hermit, the unlikely duo sets off on an adventure that will lead them to slay a giant, save a princess hidden in a drum, and ultimately kill an evil king and defeat the army of Waiyathat, the widowed queen's revengeful nephew. In the *Cartoon Likay* version drawn by Prayoon Chanyawongse, the cruel nephew Waiyathat is played by an Adolf Hitler look-a-like actor, if not by Adolf Hitler himself. Indeed, with themes of solidarity, bravery, integrity, morality and authoritarian power, the folktale *Chanthakorop* offers itself as a propitious metaphor of the dark years of Second World War.

In his introduction to the 1985 collection of *Honwichai Kawi* (p. 1), Prayoon

Chanyawongse writes that he wished to evoke events which occurred between 1935 and 1947 in this specific *Cartoon Likay* story. Prasert Palitpongpanim (2013, p. 37) notes that the *Cartoon Likay* adaptation of *Honwichai Kawi* provides a good picture of Thailand of the time by evoking the 1932 Siamese Revolution and the establishment of the parliamentary constitution, problems of corruption and censorship, political issues, and prices increase related to the Pacific War. For instance, in the sequence where the hermit shelters the starving cub and calf, the sage address the question of the corruption of politicians who take money from impoverished people. After another sequence where the calf and cub are portrayed in a pathetic condition (see Fig. 12), Sooklek interrupts the play to address concurrently reader and audience.²³ He mentions that the Ministry of Propaganda made the request for *Likay* troupes to avoid performances of sad stories during these troubled times. The Ministry suggests performing only light-hearted and funny plays with a moral content. After considering that the request of the Ministry of Propaganda should be followed, the performance resumes but at the hermit's hut. Starting with a more light-

²³ First panel, strip numbered 34, on page 13 of the 1985 collection of *Honwichai Kawi*.

hearted tone, the sequence will soon shift to an overtly melodramatic scene opposing—in a satirical way—the request made by the Ministry a dozen panels before. Later on, a similar satirical interruption occurs where Sooklek mentions that the play will now be performed as an anti-communist play under the request of the government.²⁴ Hence, the political and social commentaries not only refers to the 1935-1947 period but also to events contemporary to the creation and publication of the comic strip series as the use of *Likay* as a tool in Thai government anti-communist campaign was implemented in the early 1950s. If the Thai “government chose to use *likay* as a tool in its anti-communist campaign because of *likay*’s loose structure and subversiveness” (Sompiboon, 2012, p. 133), Prayoon Chanyawongse also used *Likay* in his comics to impart his personal political commentaries. In both his cartoon and *Katun Likay* productions, he addressed the issue of poverty in Thailand, expressed his concern for the welfare of his compatriots, and denounced the corruption and abuse of power of local officials. Moreover, he remained constantly “independent,” refusing “to be paid a salary for being a cartoonist, preferring to be freelancer” (Alabastro, 2007, p. 242). Prayoon Chanyawongse declared: “No one can give me orders under any circumstances. No one can change my idea” (as quoted in Alabastro, 2007, p. 242).

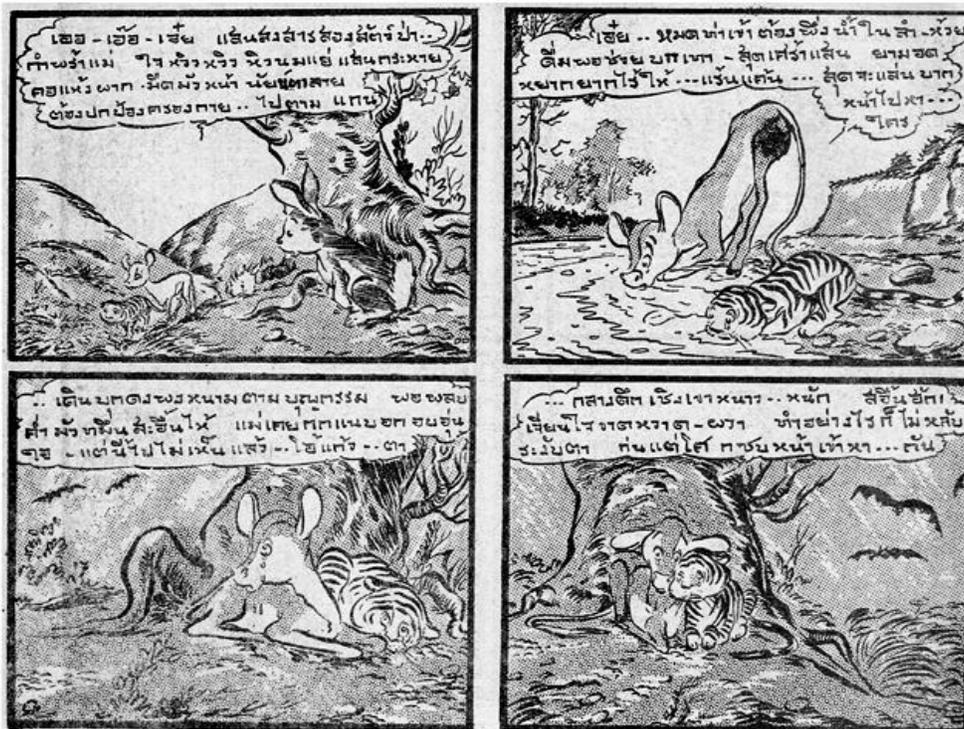
If the *Cartoon Likay* genre didn’t outlive its creator who passed away in 1992, Prayoon’s artistic “independence” makes him a forerunner of the *independent* scene which will develop in Thailand in the late 1990s. Furthermore, the highly eclectic nature of the *Cartoon Likay* genre shares interesting similarities with Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s composite art on *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*, the first *independent* Thai comics launched in 1998. These aspects are further discussed in *Chapter 5.4: Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and the “modern Thai comics’ style.*

²⁴ Fourth panel, strip numbered 62, on page 132 of the 1985 collection of *Honwichai Kawi*.

Figure 11 - Inaugural strip from the *Cartoon Likay* adaptation of *Honwichai Kawi* by Thai cartoonist Prayoon Chanyawongse, published in *Pim Thai* in 1950. Reproduced from the 1985 collection of *Honwichai Kawi*.



Figure 12 Thirty-third strip from the *Cartoon Likay* adaptation of *Honwichai Kawi* by Thai cartoonist Prayoon Chanyawongse, published in *Pim Thai* circa 1950. Reproduced from the 1985 collection of *Honwichai Kawi*.



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3. The Development of Thai Comics: From Italian Neo-Classicism to Manga

3.1 Italian Neo-Classicism and American Superheroes

Alongside the development of long-story comics stylistically inspired by Disney's or E. C. Segar's comic strips in the Kingdom of Siam in the 1930s (with Sawas Jutharop's *Sang Thong* in 1932, Wittamin's *LingGee Phu Khayi Yak* in 1935 or Prayoon Chanyawongse's *Katun Likay* comics *Chanthakorop* in 1938), a more realistic style is introduced in 1938 by influential artist Hem Vejakorn with the weekly serialized comics *Sri Thanonchai* (Nawigamune, 2002b; Rajawej, 2002). The realistic style of "Thailand's greatest illustrator" (Nawigamune, 2000, p. 122) has its origins in the Siamese-Italian artistic cultural link established during the first decade of the Twentieth Century as Italian artists were hired by King Chulalongkorn to work on projects in Bangkok (Poshyananda, 1992, p. 17). Working on wall and ceiling paintings blending Siamese and Italian styles under the supervision of Prince Naris who "incarnated the cultural awareness of a modernizing kingdom which acted as a barrier to European colonial expansion" (Piazzardi, 2010, p. 157), commissioned Italian painter Carlo Rigoli encouraged Siamese artisans to take an interest in Western representation and technique. Poshyananda (1992) states:

Trained by Italian court painter Carlo Rigoli, Hem had watched Rigoli paints the walls at Wat Rajathiwad in the 1920s. Later, [Hem Vejakorn] synthesized local expression of line illustration and mural painting with the Western academic technique. His own style became a trade mark; he introduced anatomy, chiaroscuro, and perspectival devices in his illustrations on traditional subjects. (p.49)

In 1938, Hem Vajakorn applied his Italian-influenced style to his line art comics adaptation of *Sri Thanonchai*, a popular local *Nithan Talok* ["tale of humour"] (Vathanaprida, 1994, p. 123) recounting the adventures of a trickster from his childhood till his tragic demise. With approximately 2000 to 3000 pictures (Amornvej, 2001), the graphic narrative of *Sri Thanonchai* is composed of six-panel pages without any speech balloons as captions—written in the *khlong si suphap* poetry style by Pho Na Pramuanmak [pen name of Mom Chao Chanchirayuwat Ratchani] (Rajawej, 2002, p.49)—are placed beneath each panel (see Fig. 13). Defining illustrator of numerous *Phi* [a Thai umbrella term for supernatural being, usually translated as "ghost"] stories since 1933 for Khana Ploenchit [Ploenchit Group] (Rajawej, 2002, p. 173), Hem

Vejakorn also illustrated many graphic narratives either composed of large fine art illustrations such as his adaptation of the aforementioned tale *Honwichai Kawi* in 1947, or resembling the comic strip works—with realistic art, and without speech balloons but only accompanying captions—of American artist Burne Hogarth on *Tarzan* (series launched in 1936) or Canadian-American artist Harold Foster on *Prince Valiant* (series created in 1937). An influence of *Tarzan* comic strips might be observed on Hem Vejakorn’s graphic adaptation of *Ngo Pa* [colloquially “Jungle Negrito”, or—less offensively—a member of the Sakai ethnic minority] (see Fig. 14), a play written in 1906 by King Chulalongkorn [King Rama V] (Porath, 2003, p. 104). According to Nawigamune (2000), “Hem produced an enormous volume of work, running in tens of thousands of illustrations before his death on 16 April 1969, aged 66” (p. 123), and he is “remembered primarily as a teacher of later generations of cartoonists” (Lent, 2015, p. 227). Among his students (Nawigamune, 2002b, p. 59), Payut Ngaokrachang perpetuated Hem’s realistic style in Thai comics during the 1950s and following decades before starting working in 1976 on *Sudsakhorn Adventure*, Thailand’s first long animated movie in colour (Nawigamune, 2002a, p. 148).

If comics were first published in newspapers and then collected in books before the Second World War (Amornvej, 2001, p. 27), they started to appear in children magazines [*Darun San*] from 1947. The same year, Samrit Chirathivat, son of Thiang Jeng, opened in Bangkok the first Central Trading store where numerous American and other foreign newspapers, magazines and pocketbooks were sold (Wilson, 2004, p. 44-45). According to Thai comics collector Saroach Kuphachaka (personal communication, 2016), American comic books were imported by—and available at—the Central department stores established by Samrit through the 1950s. The decade saw a fast increase of import of American comic books due to the good relationship established between Thailand and the United States. It also saw the rise of a new generation of Thai cartoonists thanks to an improvement of the economic situation (Eawsakul, 2015, 2490).²⁵ Founded in 1952, the magazine *Chao Krung* [“city folk”] devoted a column where new cartoonists could develop their skills (Eawsakul, 2015, 2490). According to Karuchit (2014), it

²⁵ The exhibition catalogue *Katun Thai Tai Laew?* [Is Thai Cartoon Dead?] by Eawsakul does not include page numbers. Yet, each page is dedicated to a specific decade from the Buddhist calendar. The italicized first year of the decade will be used as a reference all along this paper in order to locate the pages properly.

was “Pimon Kalasee (pen name, Tookkata), who, in 1952, published Thailand's first comic book for children *Tookkata* (his daughter's nickname, meaning “doll”)” (p. 79, italic in original). Eawsakul (2015) states that the magazine *Tookkata*, with its humoristic comics series about a Thai family, was launched in 1955 (2490) while Wechanukhroh indicates the year 1954 (2005, p. 37) for its first publication. The comics episode named *Hong Si Chompoo* [Pink Room] (Eawsakul, 2015, 2490) and the four main characters of *Tookkata* later became the basis for a television drama (Karuchit, 2014, p. 79). Let's note here that Thailand television broadcasting started on 24 June 1955 and that “in Thailand, television programs were first made of historical drama, literature, or folktales” (Nathalang, 2000b, p. 27). Thai comics had followed that trend since they first developed in the 1930s

In 1956, while Samrit Chirathivat opens its first major Central department store (Wilson, 2004, p. 53), the first issue of the educational children magazine *Wiratham* [chivalry] is launched by priests of the Saint Gabriel's College in Bangkok (Eawsakul, 2015, 2500). From its launch in 1956 till its last issue in 1974, the catholic magazine published numerous Belgian and other foreign comics translated in Thai language.²⁶ Many stories came from the Franco-Belgian comics magazine *Le Journal de Tintin*, with episodes from Hergé's *The Adventures of Tintin*, François Craenhals' *Pom et Teddy*, Jean Graton's *Michel Vaillant*, Édouard Aidans' *Tounga* or Tibet's *Chick Bill* (of which one cover was redrawn in an puzzling way by enigmatic Thai illustrator Chaai in 1962; see Fig. 15). *Wiratham* magazine also translated the aviation-centred adventures of *Buck Danny* by Charlier and Hubinon first serialized in the Belgian comics magazine *Le Journal de Spirou*. American comic strips—such as Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* or Harold Foster's *Prince Valiant*—and comics by Italian artists—such as Nevio Zeccara—were also published in the Thai magazine. Created around 1955 by Adirek Ariyamontri (Thairat, 2009, n.p.), the famous Thai comics series *Nu Lek Loong Krong* [Little Baby and Uncle Krong] found its place in the catholic publication produced by Bangkok Publishing. If Nu Lek [Little Baby] was inspired by the character Mickey Mouse and Loong Krong [Uncle Krong] by Goofy (Karuchit, 2014, p. 79), Adirek Ariyamontri boldly transformed Disney's anthropomorphic mouse and dog into fully human characters. Covers of the *Wiratham* magazine reveal the

²⁶ Information on the content of the magazine *Wiratham* presented in this paragraph were obtained by analyzing digitalized archives from Thai comics collector Saroach Kuphachaka, and through personal communication with khun Saroach from July till October 2016.

remarkable transformation as Uncle Scrooge [or Scrooge McDuck], Minnie Mouse, Mickey Mouse and Goofy are still recognizable under their human form (see Fig. 16). According to Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016), Executive Director of Banlue Group, Little Baby and Uncle Krong were so famous at the time that every Thai publisher created its own version of the characters under other names. She explains that Banlue Sarn—founded in 1955 by Banlue Utsahajit—“had its own version titled *Nhoo Toong Buak Loong Jo* [Little Toong and Uncle Jo].” Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016) mentions that

Banlue Sarn wasn't publishing a lot of comics at the time, but mostly song books and Thai drama books which were short stories or synopses of Thai drama with interviews of the actor and the actress. The first comic book published by Banlue Sarn was *Sing Shirt Dam*; it's a cowboy story similar to Robin Hood where they help people who are bullied by bad people. Banlue Sarn was already publishing other types of books but this was the first comic book. We also have other famous titles from the early years of Banlue Sarn. For instance, there was *Vitaycha Manuthoonlek* [Vitaycha, the Iron Human; around 1963; see Fig. 17].²⁷ It's a science-fiction story about robots [...]. Another famous story was *Koon Tanu Ngoo Hao* [The Archer Cobra]. All these stories were about a hero who helps other people. It was the same kind of hero than in fiction and novels, like the hero Insee Tong [“Golden Eagle”] which—I think—was inspired by Batman.

Along Banlue Sarn, several publishers—such as Bangkok Publishing, Padung Suksa, and Pramuanarn—“started the comic book business; several talented cartoonists burst onto the scene, who have since become famous and very influential to Thailand's cartooning” (Karuchit, 2014, p. 79). Among these cartoonists was Juk Biewsakul [pen name of Chulasak Amornwej] who created the highly popular series *Jao Chai Pom Thong* [“The Blond Prince”] in 1957, and also drew *Mangkorn Sam Hua*. According to Nawigamune (2000), the “year 1957 heralded a golden age era of children's cartoons, because of the large number of cartoons that appeared” (p.

²⁷ According to Thai comics collector Saroach Kuphachaka (personal communication, 2016), ChingCho [or Jing Jo, “kangaroo”; pen name of Satian Harnkuntula] was not the original artist of *Vitaycha Manuthoonlek* as he edited and adapted pages from the comics *Robot Archie* to create the Thai version (Fig. 17). He also produced new cover art for the Thai comic books. *Robot Archie*—writtend by E. George Cowan and drawn by Ted Kearon—was a comics series published in the weekly British boy magazine *Lion* produced from 1952 till 1974 by Fleetway Publications, a subsidiary of International Publishing Corporation [IPC].

140). Indeed, 1957 also saw the launch of the best-selling comic book series *Atsawin Sai Fa* [“The Thunder Knight”] created by Por Bangplee [pen name of Weerakul Thongnoi] (Karuchit, 2014, p. 79). Telling the story of a boy who lost a leg and fights for Thailand as a superhero (Wechanukhroh, 1990a, p. 72), the series was directly inspired by the American character *Captain Marvel Jr.* created by Ed Herron and Mac Raboy in December 1941 in *Whiz Comics* #25 (Fawcett Comics).²⁸ The original American character is also a crippled boy who is able to transform himself into a teenage superhero. Furthermore, Por Bangplee appropriated Captain Marvel Junior’s costume but localized the plot in Thailand. Interestingly, Por Bangplee didn’t set the superheroic action in large cities like in many American comics but in a more rural environment (see Fig 18).²⁹ He also appropriated other American superhero designs, creating for instance a Thai version of the Silver Surfer introduced by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1966 (see Fig. 18). Por Bangplee is also the creator of the famous comics character *Jao Chai Lindam* [“Prince Lindam”], and the author of an adaptation of the aforementioned popular tale of humour *Sri Thanonchai* in the early 1960s. Other cartoonists created their own superhero stories based on Western comics instead of traditional fables such as Lang Chak with *Jom Apinihan* [“Master of Marvel”] or Niwat Tarapan [pen name of Raj Lersuang] with *Singh Dam* [“Black Lion”] (Karuchit, 2014, p. 81). Karuchit (2014) states that

although these superhero cartoons were modeled after Western comics, the authors did not forget to include mysterious attributes, such as magic and miracles, common in traditional fables [...]. (p. 81)

Also launched in 1957, the magazine *Noo Ja* [“Little Baby”] was Banlue Sarn’s first comic magazine. Its chief cartoonist was Joomjin [or Jum Jin; pen name of Chamnoon Leksomthit], and “company founder Banlue Utsahajit launched the title to tap into the family-comic segment, which was gaining popularity among young readers” (“Humour Business,” 2016). Another famous Banlue Sarn’s humour publication of the time was *Baby* led by chief cartoonist Wattana [Wattana Petsuwan, or Petchsuwan]. Wattana was creating strips for the magazine and designed the new title’s content which had “to suit a target audience that was older

²⁸ Nawigamune (2000) defined *Asawin Sai Fa* as “a Thai-style Superman” (p. 140) while Eawsakul (2015, 2500) only mentions an American comics’ influence.

²⁹ More information on the representation of cities in American comics in *Chapter 5.3: Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and the origin of JOE the SEA-CRET Agent.*

than *Noo Ja*'s. To differentiate *Baby* from its sister, which featured only strip cartoons, graphic novels were added to [*Baby*'s] content line-up" ("Humour Business," 2016).

Figure 13 - Page from the comics adaptation of *Sri Thanonchai* by Hem Vejakorn. Sri Thanonchai's friends Aai Iang [the common myna, magpie bird] and Aai Klae [tufts of hair on the sides of a boy's shaven head] are portrayed at the bottom of the page. Reproduced from Rajawej, 2002, p. 56.



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Figure 14 - Comics adaptation of King Chulalongkorn's play *Ngo Pa* by Hem Vejakorn. No date. An influence of *Tarzan* comic strips might be observed. Reproduced from the 1984 edition of *Ngo Pa* published by Ong Gaan Kakong Kurutpa [former name of the Business Organization of the Office of the Welfare of the Promotion Commission for Teachers and Educational Personnel], Bangkok.



วันเดียวกันนั้นเอง ไม่นานมีชายคนเล็กของล้าหีบได้ชวนคิมมิ่งเพื่อน
เงาะที่อยู่ใกล้เคียงกันออกไปเที่ยวเล่นในป่า เมื่อดึงล้าหีบหนึ่ง
เด็กทั้งสองก็ชวนกันเล่นน้ำเป็นที่สนุกสนาน



ชมพลาเดินเที่ยวล่าสัตว์มานานมา ได้ยินเสียงเด็กทั้งสองเล่นน้ำอยู่
คิดจะเล่นกับเด็กทั้งสองให้จิตใจหายหมกมุ่น จึงปลดกระบอกใส่ลูก
ศอกออกซ่อนไว้ในซุ่มไม้ แล้วโหนเถาว์วัลยมุ่งตรงไปริมลำธาร



ครูเดียวชมพลาที่มีมายืนอยู่บนกิ่งไม้ใหญ่ มองลงไปเห็นคิมมิ่งกับไม้มิ่ง
ลอยคอเล่นน้ำกันอยู่ในลำธาร เมื่อเห็นไม้มิ่ง ชมพลาก็นึกถึงล้าหีบ
ผู้พี่สาวว่าขณะนี้ล้าหีบอยู่ที่ใด และกำลังทำอะไร



ชมพลาขึ้นดูอยู่ครู่หนึ่ง ก็ตะโกนเรียกลงไป เด็กทั้งสองจำได้ว่าเป็น
ชมพลาผู้ที่เคยหัดให้ตนยิงธนูและหน้าไม้ทีใดใจ ร้องเรียกให้ชมพลา
กระโดดลงไปเล่นน้ำด้วย



ชมพลาเข้าใจเด็กทั้งสองว่าต้องการจะเล่นกับตน จึงเถาว์วัลยได้ก็
ห้อยโหนโยนตัวไปกลางอากาศให้เด็กทั้งสองเห็นความสามารถ



เมื่อโหนตัวมาถึงกิ่งไม้ใหญ่ที่ทอดลงมาจากโศกเขาที่สูงชัน ชมพลา
ทรงตัวอยู่บนกิ่งไม้นั้นครู่หนึ่ง จึงพุ่งหลาวลงไปในน้ำอย่างคล่อง -
แฉ่ตัวและสวยงาม



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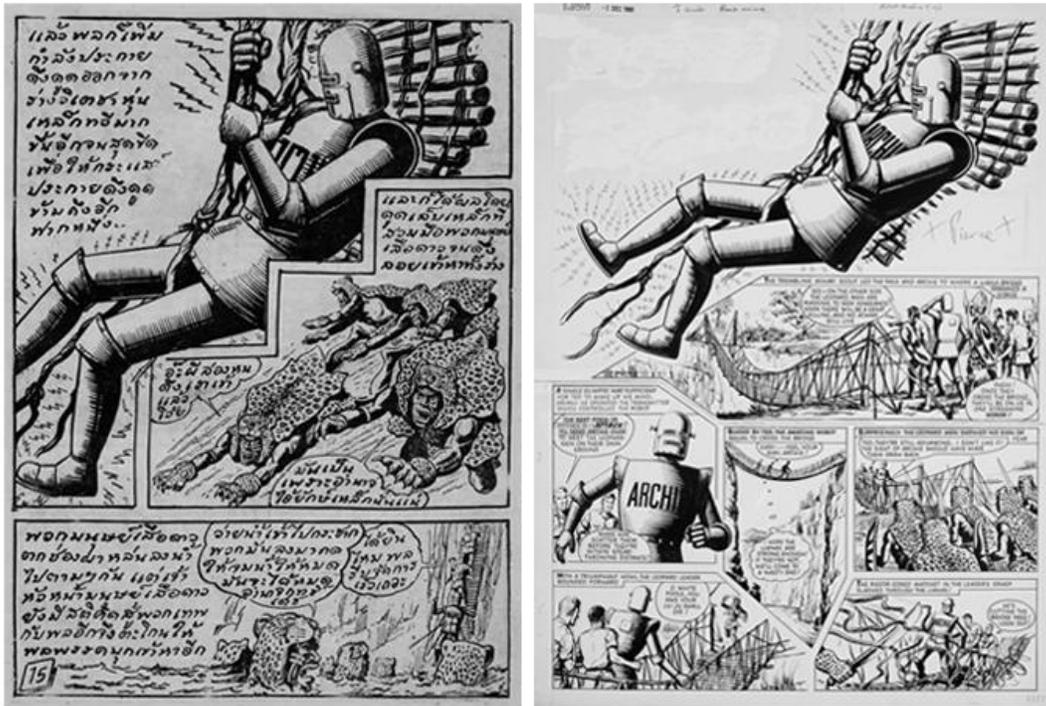
Figure 15 - Left: cover of the French edition of the comics magazine *Le Journal de Tintin*, issue 383, with an illustration of *Chick Bill* by French cartoonist Tibet. Published by Dargaud in 1956. Right: cover of the Thai magazine *Wiratham*, issue 282, with a reinterpretation of Tibet's illustration by Thai artist Chaai, 1962.



Figure 16 - Humanized version of Disney's Uncle Scrooge [or Scrooge McDuck], Minnie Mouse, Mickey Mouse and Goofy by Thai cartoonist Adirek Ariyamontri for his series *Nu Lek Loong Krong* on covers of the Thai magazine *Wiratham* (left: issue 138, 1959; right: issue 149, 1959). Bangkok Publishing.



Figure 17 - Top left: page 15 of the second issue of *Vitaycha Manuthoonlek* [Vitaycha, the Iron Human], published in 1963 [probably by Banlue Sarn]. Thai artist Chingcho edited two 1961 pages (top right and bottom) from the British comics *Robot Archie* to create a single page for the Thai version. Original artwork from *Robot Archie*, page 25 (top right), and detail from page 26 (bottom), from the episode *The Sabre-Toothed Lion* published in the British magazine *Lion* on December 2, 1961. Script by E. George Cowan and art by Ted Kearon. Fleetway Publications. Original artworks available on the *Robot Archie* website: <http://www.robotarchie.com/collectie.php#cat=09+The+Sabre+-+Toothed+Lion+>



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Figure 18 - Left: cover art by Mac Raboy for the 23rd issue of *Captain Marvel Jr.* (with crippled boy Freddy Freeman and his superhero alter ego), Fawcett Comics, September 1944. Right: cover art by Thai cartoonist Por Bangplee with a localized version of Captain Marvel Jr. (Atsawin Sai Fa) and the Silver Surfer (bottom left of the cover), for the Thai magazine *KhunNu - DekDi* [Little Rich Kid - Good Child], late 1960s.



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3.2 From Thai Knowledge Comics and One-Baht Comics to Manga

On September 1970 or a year after the start of the four-year Thanom martial law period, Thai knowledge comics emerged with the launch of the magazine *Chaiyapruerk Katun* [Chaiyapruerk Cartoon; Chaiyapruerk being the Thai name for the Java Cassia tree] gathering educational content and comics stories (Eawsakul, 2015, 2510), and promoting environmental protection (Eawsakul, 2015, 2530). Developed by Thai illustrator Rong Prasanobol, the comics magazine aimed at elementary school children and was inspired by European children's magazines discovered by Rong when sent by Thai Wattanapanich—a prominent publisher for academic textbooks—"to study design for children's books in England for two years" (Karuchit, 2010, p. 34). Karuchit (2010) states that *Chaiyapruerk Cartoon* not only introduced Rong's famous and humoristic version of Tarzan with his monkey companion Joon but also "became the ensemble project for several top tier cartoonists of the era, including Triam Chachumporn, Ittipol Rachawej, Supapol Pittayasakul, Somchai Panpracha, and others" (p. 34). Triam Chachumporn—who created the first Thai knowledge comic book with *Kampang Dek E-San* ["Kampang, the Boy from Isaan"] in 1981 on the model of Lat's 1979 Malaysian comics *Kampung Boy* (Karuchit, 2010, p. 36 and 38)—founded in the early 1980s the *Klum Benjarong* [Benjarong Group, or Five Colours Group] with four other prominent cartoonists; Ohm Rachawej, Somchai Panpracha, Surapol Pittayasakul [pen name: Pol Kaosod], and Chalerm Akkapoo (Karuchit, 2014, p. 84). Together they launched the short-lived *Phuean Katun* [Friends of Cartoon] comics magazine aimed at a child readership (Karuchit, 2014, p. 84), and produced various books such as a comics adaptation of *Mowgli* by Ohm Rachawej in 1982. Before his tragic passing in 1990, Triam also created rewarded long-form stories—defined as "graphic novels" by Karuchit (2014, p. 84)—which dealt with social problems and left-out citizens. His realistic—and sometimes bleak—style on these long-form narratives (see Fig. 19) reminds Hem Vejakorn's art style while his social concerns evoke Prayoon Chanyawongse's engaged *Likay Cartoon* stories. The last page drawn by Triam before he passed away (reproduced in Wechanukhroh, 1990a, p. 79) was part of a long-form comic book titled *Dek Ying Watsana* [A Girl Named Watsana; *watsana* meaning good fortune]. The story dealt with the difficult issue of child sexual abuse (Wechanukhroh, 1990a, p. 78; see Fig. 20). With a strong personal style, social-oriented stories and the incorporation of autobiographical elements (as in *Kampang Dek E-San*), Triam Chachumporn could be considered as a forerunner of the alternative scene which

will develop in Thailand in the early 2000s. Yet, his early death, the overwhelming spread of less expensive translated manga on the Thai market in the 1990s and the lack of reprints of pre-1990 works possibly prevented his legacy to reach and inspire directly the more recent generation of Thai cartoonists. In the survey conducted for the present research project, 13 out of 16 cartoonists consider that it is difficult to have an access to Thai comic books published before the 1980s (Table 11.6). Only two out of 16 cartoonists [Seng and Tongkarn] answered they read comic books from members of the *Klum Benjarong* (Table 11.0). Seng [Songwit Seakitikul] is the only cartoonist acknowledging an influence of Triam Chachumporn on his work, stating that he read short stories by Triam that told the lives of people in Thai society. It opened him to new considerations on storytelling and increased his interest in telling everyday life stories (Table 11.1).

For his part, *Klum Benjarong* member Ohm Rajawej pursued his career as an “elite cartoonist with several publications using Buddhist and Thai culture themes” (Karuchit, 2014, p. 84). He also worked as an assistant on the comics adaptations of two novels of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, drawn by Thai political cartoonist Chai Rachawat and produced at the request of the sovereign in order to make his message of wisdom resonate more broadly and clearly (His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 2014, preface p. 4). The first “cartoon [comics] edition” of *The Story of Mahâjanaka* was published in black and white in 1999 while the first “cartoon [comics] edition” of *The Story of Tongdeang*—with additional assistance of Salah Nakbumrung and Thi-wa-wat Pattaragulwanit—was published in 2004. The second edition of *The Story of Mahâjanaka* was printed in a full-colour version in 2000. The second to fifth editions of *The Story of Mahâjanaka* were printed to a total of 233,000 copies between 2000 and 2014 while the sixth edition—published in 2014—was printed to a total of 10,000 copies (His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 2014, preface p. 2). *The Story of Tongdeang* was reprinted 10 times between 2004 and 2011 to reach a total print run of 668,000 copies, with an additional reprint of 30,000 copies in November 2016 or a month after the monarch’s passing (His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, 2016, preface p. 2). These impressive print runs highlight the success of the comics adaptations of His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s novels. Through their royal endorsement, these comics adaptations might be considered as playing a significant support role for the comics art form in Thailand. In the survey conducted for the present research project, six out of 16 cartoonists consider that these comics adaptations had a positive influence

on the perception of comics in Thailand (Table 9.4). Two cartoonists mention that they increased the acceptance of the media in Thai society while another states that they made more people interested in that particular type of comics [or knowledge comics] (Table 9.5). Eleven out of 16 cartoonists consider that these comics adaptations participated in the development of knowledge comic books in Thailand (Table 9.6).

In 1973 or the same year as the ‘14 October’ student uprising and infamous military crackdown,³⁰ Banlue Sarn launched the best-selling gag and comics magazine *Kai Hua Ror* [“Laughter for Sale”] in order to break into the adult reader market. Editor Vithit Utsahajit brought *Noo Ja*’s chief cartoonist Joomjin and *Baby*’s chief cartoonist Wattana on board “to write for the title, which started out as a 68-page monthly with a 5-Baht cover price. The number of pages was subsequently reduced to 2 and the price rose to 6 Baht and later to 7 Baht” (“Humour Business,” 2016). Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016), Executive Director of Banlue Group, notes that “the slogan of *Kai Hua Ror* is ‘The Household Humour’; it means that every generation in the family and every family in Thailand can enjoy it.” In 1976 or the same year as the ‘6 October’ Thammasat University massacre, Banlue Sarn launched *Mahasanook* [“Super Fun”] as the publishing company was looking to diversify into other forms of comic. Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016) states that

Mahasanook aims at a younger target group because initially we only had *Kai Hua Ror*, and some gags—such as political gags, sarcastic gags, and gags about love affairs, and husband and wife gags—were too deep for kids. Parents complained to our publishing house and wanted a content they didn’t have to censor for their children. We saw a gap in the market and we published *Mahasanook* for younger target groups. [...] *Kai Hua Ror* and *Mahasanook* both focus on gag comics but *Mahasanook* has short comics (not present in *Kai Hua Ror*). *Kai Hua Ror* has gag comics but also conversational jokes [dialogue jokes], and short funny stories in the written form not present in *Mahasanook*.

Since its creation, the *Mahasanook* magazine features comic short stories as well as strip cartoons and—for the first time—the “cartoonists in the Banluesarn Publishing stable could try

³⁰ Some authors mention that *Kai Hua Roh* was launched in 1971 and not in 1973. Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016) states that “it was first published in 1973 but some people say 1971 because it was the year my dad [Vithit Utsahajit] started with the idea.”

their hands at writing longer-form comics” (“Humour Business,” 2016). Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016) notes that “at the time—when comics were very popular in Thailand—many short stories from *Mahasanook* were expanded into their own magazines. For instance, *Noo-Hin Inter* [by cartoonist Padung ‘Aoh’ Kraisri], *PangPond* [by cartoonist Tai] and *Sao Dokmai Ka Nai Kluaykhai* [by cartoonist Fane] expanded in their own monthly magazines and they still exist today.” The pocket book series *Noo-Hin in the City*—first serialized as *Noo-Hin Inter* in *Mahasanook* since 1994 and retelling the adventures of the Isaan-born domestic help Noo-Hin and her voluptuous boss *khun* Milk in Bangkok—has been so successful that a feature-film version was made in 2006 (“Humour Business,” 2016). Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016) considers *Noo-Hin* comic books experience success

all around Thailand because many people from Isaan [the Northeastern region of Thailand] went to work in urban areas. When they read *Noo-Hin*, it reminds them of their experience, their childhood memories in the Isaan areas. Yet, *Noo-Hin* doesn’t focus only on Isaan and people from all around Thailand can enjoy it. [...] There is also another [pocket book series of *Noo-Hin* titled] *Noo-Hin in Noune Hin Hae*, about her childhood memories in Isaan. This one is very local; it shows the lifestyle of Isaan people. I’ve heard that some of our fans read it and cry because they miss their hometown in Isaan. It also presents some Isaan local knowledge; like the food they eat, how to do the farming, which plants they chose to make the medicine. It’s very special and very valuable. People who are interested in cultural topics really love it. It makes people of the newer generation realize the assets from their ancestors, in terms of Isaan culture, and Isaan know-how and lifestyle.

The content of *Noo-Hin in Noune Hin Hae* somehow reminds of Prayoon Chanyawongse’s *Kabuan Karn Gae Jon* popular cartoon series dedicated to local wisdom on food and agriculture (see *Chapter 2.1: Prayoon Chanyawongse, The King of Thai Cartoon*). Banlue Sarn launched a pocket edition of *Kai Hua Ror* in 1986 and a pocket format of *Mahasanook* in 1989 for readers who wanted more convenience. According to Lent (1997), Vithit Utsahajit brought the books out in pocket-sized formats as children “supposedly prefer the pocket comics, and they are favourites of Bangkok drivers, who spend a great deal of time stuck in traffic gridlocks” (p. 106). Of all

Banlue Sarn titles, the pocket comics are the best-sellers with *Kai Hua Ror* comic magazine reaching “a weekly circulation of 1 million copies” (“Humour Business,” 2016).

If they are not as popular as before, *Katun Lem La Bat* [“one-baht comics”] were also highly successful in the late 1970s. Karuchit (2014) notes that, at the time,

a trend in Thai cartooning emerged with the publishing of thin, sixteen-page graphic novels, generally known as “cartoon lem [la] baht” (one-baht cartoon; one baht roughly converts to U.S. three cents), first published by Sakol Publishing.³¹ Because of its inexpensive price and simple moralistic and traditional values story plots, the one-baht cartoon was initially well received by both children and adults, and thus attracted several talented cartoonists. (p. 84)

Karuchit (2014) notes that, at its peak, the one-baht comics “exceeded a total of one million circulation, with almost one hundred artists and more than ten publishers” (pp. 84-85). For his part, Baffie (1989) states that it is estimated that

since 1979 at least five thousand one-baht comics have been published by about twenty-five publishers. Between 25,000 and 70,000 copies of each have been printed which means that perhaps two hundred million one-baht comics have been circulated through Thailand over the past eight years. (p. 394)

If he mentions that no survey reveals exactly who the readers of one-baht comic are, Baffie (1989) also states that “it is accepted that the readers are mainly children, but also vendors, workers, bus and *samlor* [“three-wheeler” taxi] drivers, fishermen, agricultural workers, masseuses and prostitutes” (p. 394, italic in original). He considers that perhaps 40% of the one-baht comics are *Phi* [a Thai umbrella term for supernatural being, usually translated as “ghost”] stories followed closely by gangs, crime and vendetta stories. Historical subjects, folk tales and many other topics are also used as central themes for some one-baht cartoons (Baffie, 1989, p. 395). One-baht comic books—states Baffie (1995, p. 22) in a French-language paper—reveal the experience, the failures and the world view of their folk and mass readership. Readers—made up

³¹ Baffie (1995, p. 21) states that the first *Katun Lem La Bat* was created in 1975 for Sakon [Sakol] Publishing by Mao Rienchaiwanit who reduced the format, the number of pages and the production costs of the comic books due to the publishing company’s modest financial means.

largely of people who came from the rural provinces to find work in Bangkok like Isaan-born character Noo-Hin—are warned about the violence of Bangkok depicted as a “city of danger, of fear, of hate and death” [“Ville du danger, de la peur, de la haine et de la mort,” Baffie, 1995, p. 28, my translation] in numerous one-baht comics. Moreover, Chitikamoltham (2014) proposes that cheap Thai comics [one-baht comics]

posses a cathartic function. They help let out the repressed emotions of readers; they catalyse the confrontation with the abject. They use abjection to disturb order, which helps readers to work through their own maladies and conflicts without acting them out. (pp. 55-56)

One-baht comics might catalyze Bangkok’s “own maladies and conflicts”, all the more after the ‘6 October 1976’ Thammasat University massacre. If Art Spiegelman (1999) see [late-1940s and early 1950s] “E.C.’s horror and science fiction [comics] titles as an unconscious post-war attempt to assimilate the atrocities of Auschwitz and Hiroshima respectively” (p. 80), it might be interesting to investigate further the possible relationship between one-baht comics and the troubled period which saw them blossomed. If one-baht comic books seem to have reach their peak of popularity in 1979, Baffie (1995, p. 21) states that as early as the beginning of the 1980s children from the Thai bourgeoisie had turned to Thai-translated Japanese comics [or manga].

According to Thai comics collector Saraoch Kuphachaka (personal communication, 2016), the first manga translated in Thai language for the Thai market appeared during the second part of the 1960s. Manga series from Osamu Tezuka—“pivotal figure in [the] postwar manga explosion, [occupying] a position in Japanese comics history analogous to Hergé in Europe and Jack Kirby in America, and [...] known in his homeland as ‘the god of comics’” (Sabin, 1993, p. 201)—were published in Thai language as early as 1967. His science-fiction series *Astro Boy*—also known as *Mighty Atom*, and in Thai as *ChaoNu Paramanu* (“Atomic Boy”)—was first published in Thailand in April 1967 in the inaugural issue of the magazine *Katun Dek* [“Child Cartoon”] edited by Paiboon Wongsri (Kurathong, 2010, p. 58). The thai-translated ninja series *Kaze no Ishimaru* [also known in English as *Samurai Kid* or *Ishimaru of the Wind*] by mangaka Sanpei Shirato started in the same issue under the name *ChaoNu LomKrot* [“Gale Boy”] (see Fig. 21). In a rare and little known column in the first issue of his Thai-

translated series *Jungle Emperor* (in Japanese: *Janguru Taitei*) published in 1968 under the *Top Boy* imprint owned by the publishing company Pra Cha Chon Co., Ltd. (see Fig. 23), Osamu Tezuka addressed his Thai readership and wrote:

Hello friends of Thailand. “Jungle Emperor” is a long run series of comics which I wrote for seven years since October 1950 for “Comics and Boy” [Manga Shōnen], one of Japanese popular magazines. This is a story of Leo, a white young lion who is brave and sincere. The vast nature in Africa as the stage, he plays a great role together with his animal comrades in building up a peaceful and civilized society. I believe that his activities in the comics would present all of you with a wonderful dream and hope. Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to state my heartfelt gratitude towards Messrs. Pra Cha Chon who has kindly realized my wish to introduce my “Jungle Emperor” to Thai friends. Osamu Tezuka. 1968.

It is interesting to note that, at the time, the Thai publisher was respecting a licensing agreement with the Japanese publisher as shows the printed copyright “Mushi Pro Shoji Ltd.” along the translated story. Indeed, Dr. Tasana Saladyanant (2008) reveals that, by the early 1980s, licensing agreements with Japanese publishers weren’t respected anymore in Thailand. She states that Fujiko F. Fujio’s manga and animated series *Doraemon* were made available for the Thai market in 1981 (see Fig. 22). She mentions that the success of the helpful robot cat from the future was so significant that within a year there were at least seven different versions of *Doraemon* published in Thailand under various names [*Doraemon, Doremon, Doramon...*] by publishers that weren’t respecting any copyright agreement (2008, para. 2). Tojirakarn (2016) states that at the beginning in the second half of the 1970s,

these pirated editions gradually became more popular than all other kinds. As a result, pirated editions of Japanese manga were created in massive amounts and distributed mainly in the capital city area. A new style of consumption was born as fans of Japanese manga followed the development of their favorite series “in real time”. Humour comics and one-baht comics spread into the countryside, further cementing the division of the market. (p. 3)

Toyoshima (2001) states that “from the 1980s until the early 1990s, pirated manga flooded the market in Thailand and translated versions of manga became very popular among Thai people” (p. 119). He also argues that “the reasons for the popularity of Japanese animation are not only the quantity that is available in Thailand but the *quality*” (p. 120, italic in original). If Chitikamoltham (2014) notes that the one-baht comics market declined because “many of the comics were of low quality as publishers opted to decrease the cost and time of production” (p. 47), he also mentions that they also came under criticism for their provocative visuals among other reasons. Manga faced the same fate in Thailand. In 1990, Pravalpruk stated:

More and more Japanese comic books and television programs are appearing in Thailand. [...] Japanese comic books or *manga* are available in the form of pocket books, which anyone can buy or even rent at low prices. For many studies done in Thailand, educators and newspaper columnists criticize these manga as trash. The quality of artwork is low. The humor often belongs to the category of dirty jokes. Violence abounds, with torture causing pain, while eroticism adding a further twist. But some manga perform useful social functions. (p. 18, italic in original)

Manga were perceived quite differently by their teenage Thai readership; Lent (2015) notes that Japanese comics— with their sophisticated plots, impressive artwork, and realistic stories— offered an alternative to Thai-style comics which “faded because of overrepetition of some themes (e.g., simple gags, royalty)” (p. 231). Another reason to the significant success of manga in Thailand at the time is to be found in their affordability; before the passing of a copyright bill in Thailand in 1995, Japanese comics were less expensive “as some Thai publishers and distributors had been violating copyright regulations” (Lent, 2015, p. 231). Relying on a survey made in 1983 by the Institute of East Asian Studies (Thammasat University),³² Pravalpruk (1990, p. 20) mentions that, by 1984 in Thailand, Japanese comics were already more popular than

³² The original source of the survey made in 1983 by the Institute of East Asian Studies (Thammasat University) as cited by Pravalpruk: “Oratai Srisantisuk ‘Japanese Comics and Thai Children’ (in Thai), *Nitayasarn Tawan* (Sun Magazine), May-July BE 2527 (1984), p. 16.”

Western or Thai comics. In the aforementioned survey, “about three-fourths of children chose Japanese comics as their favorites” (Pravalpruk, 1990, p. 20; Table, p. 31).³³

The popularity of Japanese comics in Thailand since the late 1970s inevitably had an impact on the sales volume of one-baht comics but also of Thai knowledge magazines such as *Chaiyapruerk Cartoon* (on which manga aesthetic had a visual impact as shown in Fig. 24). Karuchit (2010) states that, “however, Rong and his staff were able to keep the magazine running until February 1995, 25 years after the first issue” (p. 35). If the market of Thai-originated comics was quickly shattered by the flood of Thai-translated manga, some Thai cartoonists tried to adapt the Japanese comics aesthetic—and popular characters—as early as 1976. During that year, Taweewat Kongkasilp [known under the pen name Pat Studio]—a veteran pioneer of the Thai comic industry since 1967—created the series *Atsawin Sayam* [“Siam Knight”] with a Thai hero in the same vein as the Japanese character *Ultraman* (Tongpan & Werasakwong, 2016, p. 102).

With manga becoming the favourite comics reading matter of Thai children in the 1980s, the influence of manga will deeply affect Thai comics aesthetic in the following decade as shown in *Chapter 4: Development of a New Generation of Manga-Influenced Thai Cartoonists in the Mid-1990s*.

³³ With 71.36 % preferring Japanese comics, 14.56% preferring Western comics, 6,10% preferring Thai comics and 7.98% preferring others.

Figure 19 - First page of the short comics story *Luksao Hapre* [Daughter Street Hawker] by Thai cartoonist Triam Chachumporn. No date.

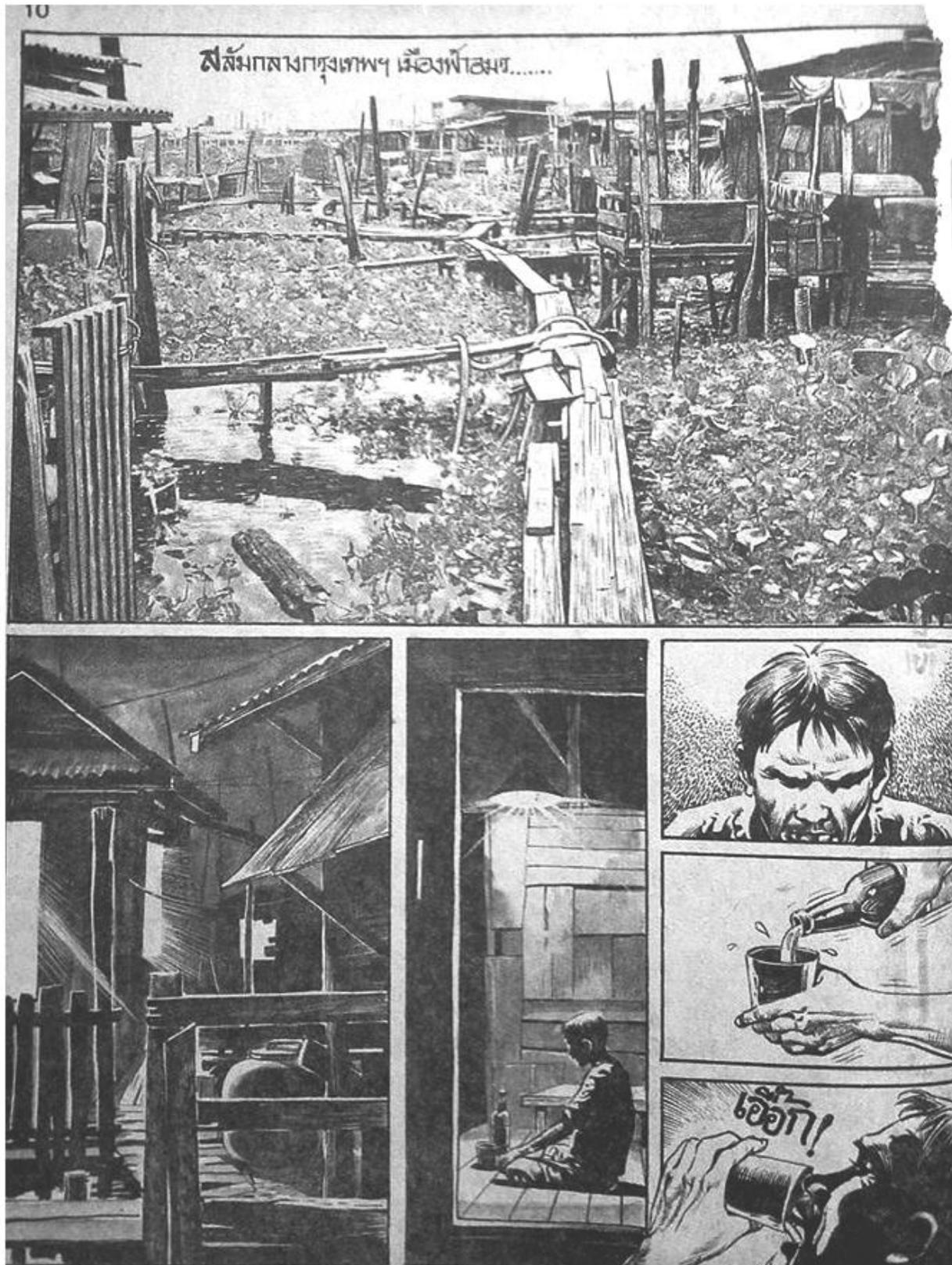


Figure 20 - Second page of *Dek Ying Watsana* [A Girl Named Watsana], a story dealing with the difficult issue of child sexual abuse. Last comics of Thai cartoonist Triam Chachumporn. Published in 1990.



Figure 21 - Left: Tezuka's *Astro Boy* and Shirato's *Kaze no Ishimaru* on the cover of the first issue of the Thai-translated manga magazine *Katun Dek* [Child Cartoon]. April 1967. Right: Tezuka's *Jungle Emperor* on the cover of its Thai-translated version published under the *Top Boy* imprint owned by the publishing company Pra Cha Chon Co., Ltd. 1968. Courtesy of Thai comics collector Saraoch Kuphachaka.

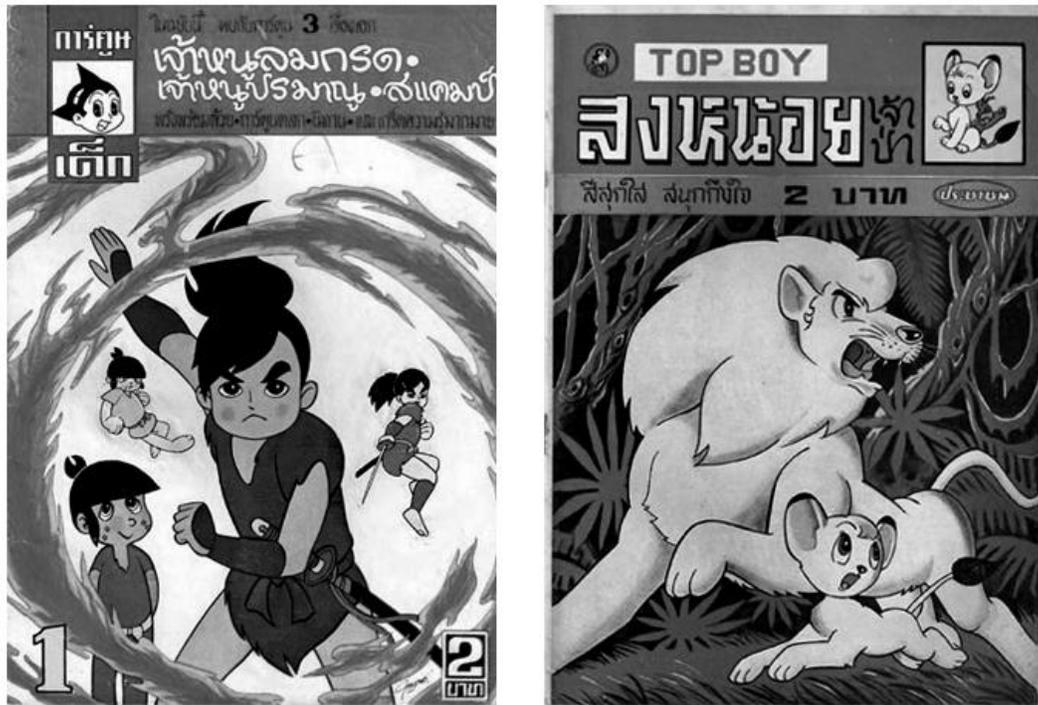


Figure 22 - A magazine stall in Bangkok around 1983. With a pile of *Kai Hua Roh*, one-baht comics, numerous Thai-translated *Doraemon* manga issues, and Thai translations of Akira Toriyama's *Dr. Slump* (bottom left) and [Fujiko Fujio] Motoo Abiko's *Ninja Hattori-kun*. Stall picture reproduced from the Thai magazine *Lok Nangsue* [Book World], year 6, issue 7, p. 44. Bangkok: Ruenkaew Printing. 1983. Courtesy of Songwit Seakitikul.



Figure 23 - Osamu Tezuka addresses his Thai readership in the first issue of his Thai-translated series *Jungle Emperor* published under the *Top Boy* imprint [owned by the publishing company Pra Cha Chon Co., Ltd.], 1968. Courtesy of Thai comics collector Saraoch Kuphachaka.

รู้จักกับศิลปิน

HELLO FRIENDS OF THAILAND

"Jungle Emperor" is a long run series of comics which I wrote for seven years since October 1950 for "Comics and Boy", one of Japanese popular magazines. This is a story of Leo, a white young lion who is brave and sincere. The vast nature in Africa as the stage, he plays a great role together with his animal comrades in building up a peaceful and civilized society.

I believe that his activities in the comics would present all of you with a wonderful dream and hope. Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to state my heartfelt gratitude towards Messrs. Pra Cha Chon who has kindly realized my wish to introduce my "Jungle Emperor" to Thai friends.

OSAMU TEZUKA

สวัสดี... เพื่อนๆ ชาวไทยที่รัก...

"สิงห์น้อยจ้าวป่า" เป็นการ์ตูนเรื่องยาวที่ผมเขียนลงพิมพ์ในนิตยสาร "Comics & Boy" อันลือชื่อของญี่ปุ่นเป็นเวลานานติดต่อกันถึง 7 ปี เป็นเรื่องของ "เรโอ" สิงห์โตหนุ่มผู้กล้าหาญเปี่ยมด้วยคุณธรรม ใช้วิชาอำนาจไพร่ในแอฟริกา เป็นฉากละครซึ่งสิ่งนี้ "เรโอ" กับสหายของเขามุ่งหมายที่จะช่วยในการขจัดความสงบสุขแก่บรรดาสัตว์ป่าทั้งปวงในแอฟริกา ผมหวังว่าทุก ๆ คนจะได้รับความสะดวกเพื่อน และผมต้องขอขอบคุณอย่างจริงใจต่อ บริษัท ประชาชน จำกัด ที่ช่วยให้ความตั้งใจของผมในอันที่จะเสนอการ์ตูนชุดนี้แก่เพื่อนชาวไทยบรรดาสตรีทั้งหลาย

โอซามุ เทซูกา

จุดเริ่มต้น

เกิดที่โอซากา, ญี่ปุ่น เหมือนจิตรกรทั่วไป คือเริ่มที่วาดการ์ตูนประกอบนิตยสารต่างๆ ตั้งแต่ยังเรียนชั้น ป. 3 ป. 4 และนี่เองที่เป็นจุดเริ่มต้นของนักเขียนการ์ตูนนามกระเดื่องแห่งแดนซากุระ "โอซามุ เทซูกา" ขณะนี้อยู่ 41 ปี

งานอดิเรก

สนใจเรื่องแมลงอย่างที่สุด ได้สะสมแมลงชนิดต่างๆ ไว้มากมายเมื่อยังเป็นเด็ก ๆ คลังใกล้กับตัวแมลงมาก ถึงขนาดอยากจะทำแปลงเพื่อเลี้ยงแมลงให้ เป็นชื่อแมลงอะไรสักตัวหนึ่งก็ได้

ข้อใจตึงตัง

ต้นปี 1946 เริ่มเขียนการ์ตูนเรื่อง "บันทึกของมาซึ" ลงพิมพ์เป็นครั้งแรกในนิตยสาร "โมเนจิ" สำหรับเยาวชนปรากฏว่า คุณหนู "ยุ่น" ติดกันจน เขาก็ตัดสินใจยึดการเขียนการ์ตูนเป็นอาชีพแต่นั้นมา และก็เวียนหมุนไปด้วยในเวลาเดียวกัน เมื่อสำเร็จวิชาแพทย์ในสามปีต่อมา แทนที่จะจับหูฟัง ก็ไปจับค้อน ใช้มือกระทุ้ง ฟุง "ปักๆ" ฟังการไข หมอกับเอาดีทาง "รักษา" ด้วยการ์ตูนแทน

ผลงาน

เรื่อง "สิงห์น้อยจ้าวป่า" ที่แฟนของ TOP-BOY กำลังอ่านอยู่นี้ พิมพ์เป็นครั้งแรกเมื่อเดือนตุลาคม 1950 ต่อจากนั้นอีกปีเศษ เขาก็ซื้อคังเหมือนพลัดตก เมื่อนำเรื่อง "ASTROBOY-เจ้าหนูปรมาณู" ลงพิมพ์ในหนังสือ "BOY" เขาได้รับรางวัลยอดเยี่ยมถึงสองรางวัล ในปี 1958 เขาก็ได้หยุดเขียนแต่เพียงนี้ ปี 1961 บริษัท มูชิ ก็กำเนิดขึ้น และตัวเขาเองก็ได้เป็นประธานฯ บริษัทนี้ ในเดือนกันยายนับนั้นเอง เขาก็สร้างหนังสือเป็นครั้งแรก อีกหนึ่งปีต่อมา (1962) "เจ้าหนูปรมาณู" ก็ถูกสร้างเป็นหนังการ์ตูนโทรทัศน์คนส่งไปฉายทั่วโลก ส่วนเรื่อง "สิงห์น้อยจ้าวป่า" สร้างในเดือนตุลาคม 1965

แถมสมุดพก

เกริ่นไว้แล้วในเล่มก่อนว่า "ข้าพหมด" จริงอย่างว่า ยังไม่ทันตั้งหลักดี ป้อป้ออาส เกือบเกลี้ยงตลาดในทวีปตา TOP-BOY ขอสนองไมตรีจิตด้วยการแถมสมุดพกแก่ผู้ซื้อฉบับนี้ทุกท่าน โดยไม่มีสิ่งแลกเปลี่ยนตอบแทนใด ๆ

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Figure 24 - Top: Cover of the Thai knowledge comics magazine *Chaiyapruet Katun* [Chaiyapruet Cartoon], issue 230, 1989. The cover merges the 1955 cover of Hergé's Belgian comics *Les Aventures de Tintin: Les Cigares du Pharaon* (bottom left) with a Hayao Miyazaki's illustration of Sheeta (bottom right), the female heroine of the 1986 Japanese animated adventure film *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*.



4. Development of a New Generation of Manga-Influenced Thai Cartoonists in the Mid-1990s

4.1 Establishment of Licensed and Thai-Translated Manga Magazines

According to Rop Pomchamni (2003), General Manager of Tomorrow Comix, it was “not until the early '90s that Thai publishers started to buy licenses from Japan legally” (para. 2). Mashima Tojirakarn (2016) also mentions that Thai publishers moved towards legal manga publications in the early 1990s and as a result, “only those large publishing houses that managed to conclude licensing agreements with Japanese publishers survived” (p. 4). Over just a couple of years, the manga market in Thailand was allocated among three major comics publishers, namely Vibulkij Publishing Group, Nation Egmont Edutainment [now renamed Nation Edutainment, or NED] and Siam Inter Comics. They were joined at the end of the 1990s by Bongkoch Publishing and in 2000 by Burapat Comics Publications and Tomorrow Comix (Ponchamni, 2002, para. 3). According to a report of the Japan External Trade Organization (cited in Toyoshima, 2001, p. 157), these companies were in 2007 the six major Thai-translated manga publishers in Thailand. They can be considered as being part of the entertainment-oriented Thai comics industry. If Lent (2015, p. 231) mentions the passing in 1995 of a copyright bill in Thailand, Thai publishers started signing license agreements with Japanese companies a few years before, as the next paragraphs will show.

Founded in 1951 as a printing company, Vibulkij evolved to become a publisher of books and magazines, and later of American comics and manga. In August 1988, the company launched the Thai-translated manga magazine *Weekly Special* with *Cobra*—a space opera series by Buichi Terasawa—on the cover of its first issue.³⁴ Starting from issue 49 published in December 1989, the manga *Niji-iro Tōgarashi* by Mitsuru Adachi was also serialized in *Weekly Special*. *Cobra* made a lasting impression on Thai alternative cartoonists Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (Table 13.1) and Songwit Seakitikul (Table 13.2) while *Niji-iro Tōgarashi* deeply marked Thai alternative cartoonist Wisut Ponnimit (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011). Yet, none of

³⁴ Information on the content, licensing mentions and publication dates of the magazines presented in this chapter were obtained by analyzing digitalized archives from Thai comics collectors Sakkadeth Ninlapun and Saroach Kuphachaka, and through personal communication with both of them from July till October 2016. I wish to convey here my sincere thanks to Sakkadeth Ninlapun and Saroach Kuphachaka for providing me with scans of the magazines.

these series were published under an agreement with the Japanese license holder. It is only in 1992 that Vibulkij concluded a licensing agreement—probably the first of the kind since the early 1980s—with the Japanese publishing company AkitaShoten. The Thai company then published series from the Japanese *Weekly Shōnen Champion* in the magazine *Friday* launched in December 1992, later renamed *Viva! Friday* and cancelled in 2015 with issue 1123. The cover of the first issue includes the mention “licenced from AkitaShoten Publishing.” In 1993, Vibulkij also launched the magazines *KC Weekly* and *Mr. Monthly*, offering series licensed from the Japanese publishing company Kodansha. In the early 2000s, Vibulkij launched the magazine *Neoz* containing manga series licensed from Japanese publishers Hakusensha and Shogakukan, both part of Hitotsubashi Group. Titles included highly successful series such as Kentaro Miura’s dark fantasy manga *Berserk*, Mitsuru Adashi’s sports-themed manga *Katsu!* and Gosho Aoyama’s mystery fiction *Detective Conan*.

Siam Inter Comics, founded in 1990 as a subcontractor for Siam Sport Printing, quickly became the second-largest copyright-owner of manga after Vibulkij (Lent, 2015, p. 231). In the weekly magazine *C-KiDs*, launched in 1994 (Kurathong, 2010, p. 82), Siam Inter Comic published series licensed from the Japanese publisher Shueisha and originally serialized in the Japanese magazine *Weekly Shōnen Jump* [*Shūkan Shōnen Jump*]. Series such as the manga adaptation of the video game *Dragon Quest*, Nobuhiro Watsuki’s samurai-themed series *Rurouni Kenshin* or Yōichi Takahashi’s sports-themed *Captain Tsubasa*, were released in the early issues of *C-KiDs* (see Fig. 25, left). The final issue of *C-KiDs* [*C-KiDs Extreme*] was published on October 3, 2016, putting an end to a 22-year publication run.

Like *C-KiDs* the magazine *BOOM* was launched in 1994 (Kurathong, 2010, p. 82) and offered licensed series originally serialized in the *Weekly Shōnen Jump* magazine from the Japanese publisher Shueisha. Yet, this Thai magazine was owned by Nation Edutainment (or NED), an affiliate of Nation Multimedia Group (Karuchit, 2014, p. 92). Best-selling manga series such as Akira Toriyama’s *Dragon Ball*, Hirohiko Araki’s supernatural *JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure* or Takehiko Inoue’s sports-themed *Slam Dunk* were released in the early issues of *BOOM* (see Fig. 25, right). The Annual Report 2015 of the group (Nation Multimedia Group, 2015) mentions that “the comic books and juvenile literature produced by the NED that has been highly popular among readers include ‘Naruto’, ‘Bleach’, ‘Bakuman’, ‘Blue Exorcist’, and Thai

comics [...]” (p. 54), and states that Nation Book is facing increasingly competition, as the “Japanese comic books compete directly with products from Vibulkit [Vibulkij] and Siam Sport Publishing [of which Siam Inter Comics is the subcontractor]” (p. 68).

According to Pomchamni (2003, para. 3), Burapat Comics Publications was responsible for making Hong Kong Comics popular in Thailand before obtaining licenses from South-Korean and Japanese companies. Karuchit (2011, p. 94) mentions that since 2000, the company also published eight Thai long series.

Bongkoch Publishing launched the manga magazine *Bom2* (or *Bom Bom*) on December 1997. The published series were usually related to Capcom video games such as *Street Fighter* and *Rocketman* [or *Megaman*] through a license agreement with Kodansha. Bongkosh also launched the magazine *Super Bom2* in January 2001. The company later specialized in the publication of manga for female readers with the monthly magazine *Comic Club* offering both Japanese and Thai comics (Karuchit, 2013, p. 94).

Figure 25 - Covers of the first issues of Thai-translated manga magazines *C-KiDs* (left) and *BOOM* (right).



4.2 Column Dedicated to Thai Cartoonists in Manga-Oriented Magazines

Karuchit (2013, p. 93) notes that some of the aforementioned manga-oriented magazines—such as Vibulkij’s *Neoz* and *Viva! Friday*, Siam Inter Comics’ *C-KiDs* and NED’s *BOOM*—included at least one series created by Thai cartoonists. According to Thai cartoonist Songwit Seakitikul (personal communication, 2016), the emergence of a new generation of Thai cartoonists was made possible thanks to the creation of these columns reserved to Thai artists. It appears that the initiative was required contractually by Japanese publishing companies. Tojirakarn (2016) mentions that “one condition of [the licensing agreements with Japanese publishers] was that Thai magazines serializing Japanese works had to publish Thai works as well” (p. 4). Relying on an interview of Thai artist Nop Vitoontong (Sonoson, *LET’S Comic* volume 3, 2009, p. 58, as quoted in Tojirakarn, 2016, p. 4), Tojirakarn reveals that Vitoontong’s works were frequently published in NED’s manga magazine *BOOM*. Nop Vitoontong describes in the following statement how he started his collaboration with the weekly anthology: “A friend who worked at *BOOM* invited me to publish there. The contract they had been given by Japan said that *BOOM* had to publish one Thai series as well, so they were looking for a Thai artist” (Sonoson, 2009, p. 58, as quoted in Tojirakarn, 2016, p. 4). Thanks to this clause, Thai-originated comics series were able to develop alongside the Japanese production, and Nop Vitoontong’s series *Meed Tee Sib Sam* (The 13th Dagger) in particular. *Meed Tee Sib Sam*—a never-ending quest for revenge of a martial artist (Karuchit, 2014, p. 91) drawn by Nop Vitoontong [as Whitecrow] and written by Booncherd Champrasert [as Ice Hornet]—enjoyed considerable success since its inception in 1994 in the newly-founded magazine *BOOM*. Tojirakarn (2016) mentions that *Meed Tee Sib Sam* “is said to be the first Thai comic whose popularity rivaled that of Japanese manga” (p. 4), and that Nop Vitoontong developed his style by borrowing and merging elements from American comics such as Marvel Comics’ publications and Todd McFarlane’s supernatural superhero series *Spawn*, with elements from Japanese manga such as *Dragon Ball* and *Doraemon*. Thai artist Nummon (Table 3.4) mentions that Nop Vitoontong and Booncherd Champrasert’s *Meed Tee Sib Sam* was “inspiring because it was a Japanese-style mainstream Thai comic.”

However, Karuchit (2014) provides a different explanation to the trend of including a column for Thai artists in manga magazines, arguing that with “the high license fees of Japan-

originated manga, many publishers of Japanese comics magazines tried to develop their own series, at least one in each issue” (p. 90).

4.3 Eakasit Thairaat and the Creation of *Thai Comic*, a Thai-Originated Comics Magazine

According to Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (personal communication, 2016), the emergence of a new generation of manga-influenced Thai cartoonists started in 1992 with the launch of the monthly magazine *Thai Comic* by Vibulkij Publishing Group. Karuchit (2014) states that—due to the fierce competition among numerous small publishers in the early 1990s—Vibulkij decided to distinguish itself by launching *Thai Comic*, “the first Thai produced non-humor comic book” (p. 90). The same year the company signed a licensing agreement with AkitaShoten and started the manga magazine *Friday*, Vibulkij then launched a monthly magazine “which showcased young Thai artists, among them Eakasit [Thairaat] (creator of *Death*, 1994)” (Lent, 2015, p. 231, italic in original). Influenced by mangaka Katsuhiro Otomo (Table 17) and *Thai Comic* cartoonist Rittee Santhimongkonpong (Table 12.7), Eakasit Thairaat created a series of thriller or horror short stories known under the broad title *Ruam Rueang San Chitlut* [also known under the English title *My Mania*]. Among them, the short story *The 13 Quiz Show* “was made into a critically acclaimed feature length film called ‘13 Beloved’ [in 2006]” (Karuchit, 2014, p. 103). The movie is also known under the title *13: Game of Death* and was remade in 2014 as an American movie by director Daniel Stamm under the title *13 Sins*³⁵ In the survey conducted with 16 Thai cartoonists for the present research project (Table 6.7), ten artists consider that this movie adaptation played a significant role in raising awareness of Thai comics in Thailand. Thai artist Vic-Mon and alternative cartoonists Songwit Seakitikul [Seng], Note Piruck, Puck and Sa-ard consider Eakasit Thairaat (Table 3.4) as one of the three most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades. Sa-ard explains Thairaat’s importance by stating that he showed that Thai comics have the potential to become Hollywood movies (Table 3.4). It is worth noting that Eakasit Thairaat holds a special place in the mainstream comics production of the 1990s. If he is usually not considered as an independent cartoonist, he is seen as the godfather of the Thai independent comics scene with his dark and twisted signature plots which he considers as satires of societal issues (Table 4.2). In the graphic novel *Almost All of Us* (Fullstop Books Publishing,

³⁵ Eakasit Thairaat wrote the screenplay of the movie adaptation of his short story *The 13 Quiz Show* with director Chookiat Sakveerakul.

Bangkok, 2015, n.p.) which sets itself as an account of the early years of the Thai independent comics scene, its author Songwit [Seng] Seakitikul devotes a chapter to Eakasit Thairaat along other chapters dedicated to pioneering independent and alternative cartoonists Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, Toto, Songsin Tiewsomboon, Nonworld, The Duang or Puck.

Taweesak Wiriyawaranont and Chaiyan Suyawej [also known under the pen name Tapone] are other cartoonists who created several hit series in the pages of *Thai Comic* (Karuchit, 2014, p.103) along with titles by Chumnan Julajaturasilart, Somran Jarukulvanit, Mangkorn Sarapol and Rattana Sathit. Lent (2015) states that “the style of some of these titles showed a Japanese influence” (p. 231) and that concerns raised because the presence of “manga in such large proportion adversely affects Thai comics, which, in an effort to compete in a limited market, feel compelled to imitate” (p. 232). The same observations can be made for titles published in *A-Comix*, a magazine launched in 1994 by Teerada Publishing on the model of Vibulkij’s *Thai Comic* (Kurathong, 2010, p. 170). If *A-Comix* stories are written and drawn by Thai cartoonists, the character designs, page layouts, narrative pacing, and extensive use of action lines,³⁶ screen tones and integrated sound effects appear as direct stylistic borrowings from the mainstream manga production.³⁷

Drawing upon Chulasak Amornvej (2001), Karuchit (2014) notes that “even though the drawings of many younger generation cartoonists were obviously influenced by the Japanese style, many have incorporated Thai culture into their stories” (p. 90). The work of aforementioned Thai cartoonist Tapone perfectly illustrates the statement of Karuchit. In the survey, Thai artist Preecha Raksorn (Table 3.4) points out that he perceives a Thainess in the atmosphere of Tapone’s works and in the author’s choice of stories. Raksorn states that Tapone conveys Thai lifestyle and beliefs, Buddhist doctrine and Thainess through his comics, such as *Takraw Look Mai*, *Kraithong* (see Fig. 26), *Han Suu* or *Phii Narok*. Furthermore, Raksorn adds

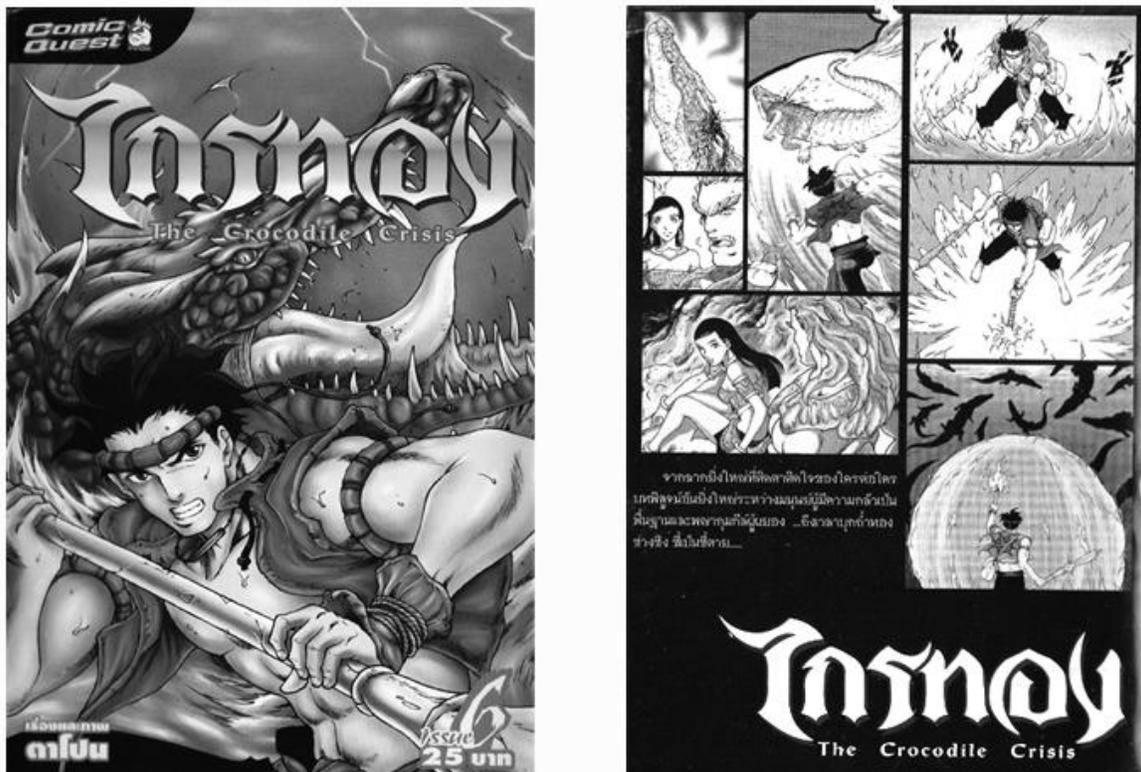
³⁶ Brenner (2007) describes manga-associated action lines as “lines of varying weight that angle across the background of a panel. [Action lines] replace the background and focus the reader’s attention on movement” (p. 142).

³⁷ Onomatopoeiae in manga are usually fully integrated into the composition of the panel, and sometimes of the page. More than simple sound effects, they are design elements adding emphasis to the action depicted through the alteration of their shapes and the use of adapted font. Brenner (2007) notes for instance that “the sound effects for weapons, hits, and injuries are specific and break through the panel structure in a violent swipe across the page” (p. 142).

that Tapone's artwork can be considered as being truly drawn in the Japanese manga style. Like the generations that precede them, manga-influenced Thai cartoonists in this period drew “inspiration from foreign influences as well as from Buddhism, local traditions, and folk culture.”

According to Songsin Tiewsomboon (personal communication, 2016), the resulting comics series cannot be considered as “independent” creations because most of them were implemented by the publishers and not by the artists themselves. Publishers had specific projects in mind and gathered artists to produce the stories they ordered. Songsin considers that the resulting works didn't show any original style and that the Thai ‘indie comics style’ started when Thai cartoonists didn't create their works based on publisher's orders. The indie comics style developed in Thailand “a little before I started my career”, states Songsin. He recalls that when he was still in school, “Suttichart [Sarapaiwanich] and Seng [Songwit Seakitikul] were already writing comics. I read them and I thought: ‘This is new! This is different from mass comics!’” (personal communication, 2016).

Figure 26 - Manga-style adaptation of *Kraithong*—a folktale where a hero saves a princess kidnapped by the King of Crocodiles (Chadchaidee, 2009)—by Thai cartoonist Tapone under the title *Kraithong: The Crocodile Crisis*. Issue 6. Published by Comic Quest. First issue published in 2002.



5. Development of the First Generation of Thai Independent Cartoonists in the Late 1990s

5.1 Thailand Goes “Indie”

The launch of a generation of Thai independent cartoonists at the end of the 1990s is to be linked with the development of the Thai indie music scene. Philip Cornwel-Smith (2005) states that:

[Thai] youth rebelled against dictatorship and forged not just political change, but creative pop subcultures. Protests in 1973 and 1976 rallied the Art For Life movement of earthly, communal idealism. The middle class that manned the barricades in 1992 pursued more individualist goals. From this emerged a generation with the urge to be *indy*. (245, *italic in original*)

The noun *indy* or *indie* is defined as “one that is independent; *especially*: an unaffiliated record or motion-picture production company” (*Indie*, n. d., *italic in original*). Inspired by the non-corporate—or independent—music scene which developed in the United Kingdom in the late 1980s, an *indie* scene thrived in Bangkok from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s (Quadri, 2012) with the establishment of numerous new music labels. Founded in 1994, Bakery Music is “regarded by some as Thailand’s first indie record label [launching] with their debut release [the] alt-rock act [Modern Dog]’s self-titled album” (Quadri, 2012, para. 3). Cornwel-Smith (2005) also notes that Bakery “championed alternative acts like rock siren Ornaree, bewitching Goth vamp Rik, funk jester Yokee Playboy and the founder of *rap thai*, Joey Boy” (p. 245, *italic in original*).

In 1997, the company launched the solo career of Kristin [Kristin Marie Newell], a Thai-American female pop singer who debuted as a supporting singer of Joey Boy. Previews pages of a comic book titled *Kristin* and starring the then 19-year-old singer as the main character appeared in issue 91 of Vibulkij’s *Thai Comic* magazine published in January 1997 (Kurathong, 2010, p. 153). According to Thai artist Too Natthapong (personal communication, 2016), *Kristin* comics was published in November 1997 as a pocket book by Vibulkij to coincide with the release of Kristin’s first album *Kristin Again* (Bakery Music) on November 7, 1997 (see Fig. 27, left). The front cover of the comic book shows Kristin drawn in a manga style reminiscent of the character design of mangaka Kenichi Sonoda on his crime-fighting series *Gunsmith Cats* (1991-

1997). Her skin-tight sci-fi suit and the cyberpunk city in the background evoke the visual universe of *Appleseed* and *Ghost in the Shell*—adapted into an anime in 1995—by Japanese cartoonist Masamune Shirow. Below the title *Kristin*, a text in English reads:

The Story. A dark cloud hangs over Joey Boy and his team of rappers. Even Bakery Music is under the black spell and cannot protect Joey from the mysterious evil forces. Who and what are these strange beings? Where do they come from? Help is needed...!
Kristin's pager. Tel: 6178080. Ext: 925925. (n.p.)

The credits on the cover mention “Produced & story: B. Boyd’s Character” and “Illust.: P. Santanaphanich.” Pakapong Santanaphanich is the former name of Thai cartoonist Too Natthapong (Kurathong, 2010, p. 98) who worked previously for Teerada Publishing’s Thai - originated and manga-influenced magazine *A-Comix*. Behind the nickname B. Boyd’s Character stands Boyd Kosiyabong, a famous Thai singer, songwriter, producer, and the co-founder of the indie music company Bakery Music. According to Kurathong (2010, p. 98), Boyd Kosiyabong said that he had grown up with many popular Japanese comics and animated cartoons and that he always dreamed of creating Thai animation, comics and characters which could gain fame. If the use of manga style is in line with the production of the period, the creation of a comic book as a marketing tool to promote Thai singers appears to be pioneering. It marks the launch of a series of remarkable comics-related projects undertaken by music producer Boyd Kosiyabong.

Figure 27 - Left: front cover of the *Kristin* pocket book comics written by Boyd Kosiyabong and drawn by Thai artist Too Natthapong. Vibulkij Publishing, November 1997. Right: page from *Kristin* published in the first issue of the Thai-originated comics magazine *Katch*, November 1998.



Arts
ศาสตร์

Figure 28 - Left: cover of an issue of the Japanese *Weekly Young Jump* manga magazine, July 1998. Right: cover of the first issue of the Thai-originated comics magazine *Katch*, November 1998.



5.2 Creation of the Thai-Originated Comics Magazine *Katch*

On his blog, Natthapong (2015) relates the establishment of the animation production and comics publishing company B.Boyd's Characters. After having worked together on the series *Kristin* till November 1997, Boyd Kosiyabong offered a new job to Natthapong; drawing comics at Bakery Music's office. Too Natthapong didn't take it seriously at the time. A couple of months later, he received a phone call from Boyd asking him why he never came to the office. On the first day of February 1998, Too Natthapong started drawing at Bakery Music, launching officially the B.Boyd's Characters imprint with the goal of pioneering Thai comics and animation for export (Kurathong, 2010, p. 98). Without any drawing board or office room, Too was invited by Boyd to share his own desk. The cartoonist will be joined in October 1998 by then 26-year-old graphic designer Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2016) also known under the nickname Chart and the pen name SS. Born in 1972, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich earned his Bachelor's degree in Communication Arts and Design from Silpakorn University in 1993 (Table 0.1). Suttichart (personal communication, 2016) recalls that when he was a child he and his friends wanted to become cartoonists. When they entered into working life, they didn't recognize themselves in the Thai comics production. They didn't want to be forced to draw or to write comics with an imposed style or plot. "I didn't try to enter the comics market because I thought at the time that people wouldn't like my style," he adds (personal communication, 2016). He preferred to embark on a career of graphic designer which will take him to work on animation projects for Bakery Music.

Joe the Sea-Cret agent, [Chart] Sarapaiwanich's first comics character, originated in the sketchbooks that the artist was filling with weird creatures at the Bakery Music office (Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2016). Boyd Kosiyabong noticed a sketch of a moustached creature wearing a trench coat. Boyd and Chart considered that the character could be developed and become the main hero of a longer narrative (Kurathong, 2010, p. 99). A publication to present Too and Chart's works was yet to be found, or created. Deciding to go on without the assistance of Vibulkij Publishing, Boyd Kosiyabong then launched Bakery Music's own Thai-originated monthly comics magazine. The first issue of *Katch* was published on November 1998 and, according to Kurathong (2010, p. 98), the magazine created an uproar that changed the way comics were presented to Thai readers as it made them aware of 'modern Thai

comics.’ *Katch* was, indeed, a singular magazine which promoted Bakery Music’s pop singers in a format reminiscent of Japanese weekly magazines while launching the first generation of Thai alternative cartoonists. The front cover of the first issue shows a picture of the female teen Pop duo *Niece* which signed at the time their debut self-titled EP record with Dojo City, a label of Bakery Music. Above the title *Katch*, a heading reads: “Dojo City Corporation - Gals, Comix, Fashion & Cool Stuff Magazine” (see Fig. 28, right). According to Sarapaiwanich (personal communication, 2016), the cover design and the content of *Katch* are based on the model of Japanese magazines of the time. They draw more directly upon the *Weekly Young Jump* manga magazine published by Shueisha with front covers usually displaying a picture of a lightly dressed female Pop idol, and with a content composed of manga series, photo-shoots of idols, and articles on fashion, music, and lifestyle addressed to male teenagers (see Fig. 28, left). A portrait of Kristin drawn in a manga style by Too Natthapong takes up all the back cover of *Katch*’s first issue. A ‘special’ short story of *Kristin* by Boyd and Too also appears in that issue, not without some product placement for Kristin’s debut album in a comic panel (see Fig. 27, right). The issue also introduces the basketball-themed series *Spin* by Thai cartoonist George-Watchara Songsomboon (Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2016) who left Siam Inter Comics’ *C-KiDs* to join Boyd Kosiyabong’s project (Kurathong, 2010, p. 103). Yet, the third and most noticeable comics story to appear in the first issue of *Katch* is the inaugural chapter of the series *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* by then debuting cartoonist Suttichart Sarapaiwanich.

5.3 Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and the Origin of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*

The *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* series is a satirical spy/detective thriller set in a post-apocalyptic future. Some aspects of the series also can be related to the social science fiction subgenre. The back cover of the collected edition published by NED Comics (Sarapaiwanich, 2010) reads in English:

Before the 20th Century, 3/4 of the Earth was composed of water. After the 20th Century, the water has drastically disappeared; most of the aquatic animals were forced to evolve to live on the Land! (n.p.)

With the level of the seas quickly lowering, cephalopods, fishes and other crustaceans grew a human body to live among the remnant human population which survived a large-scale atomic

war. Joe, a cyclopean squid-headed secret agent dressed in a large detective trench coat, resides in New York Atlantic City, a metropolis formerly known as New York City. The story focuses on the therianthrope agent, his female assistant Betty whose face and shape can change from one episode to the next (Kurathong, 2010, p. 100) and Jackpot the seahorse, Joe's Thai sidekick. They confront gangsters and mafia organizations such as Thailand's *Maeng Da Gang* [*Maeng Da* being a giant water bug served as a dish in Northeast Thailand], the *Pakarang Mafia* [or Coral Mafia] from Hong Kong, a crab-headed godfather or a secret organization led by a whale (Kurathong, 2010, p. 100). Kurathong (2010, p. 100) states that these wacky but cool characters combined with numerous brilliant ideas made the series highly popular in Thailand. Thai psychiatrist and comics specialist Prasert Palitpongpanim (2013, p. 124) considers the action-packed *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* series as one of the most admirable Thai comics, stating that it is well-known for its drawings, plot and unique main character. Palitpongpanim (2013, p. 125) also draws an interesting comparison between the character design of Joe the Squid and Joe Shimamura, the main character of Shotaro Ichinomori's science fiction manga *Cyborg 009* published in Japan from 1964 till 1981. Both characters wear a coat fitted with three large buttons and a large scarf, and have fuzzy hair [or tentacles] allowing only one eye to appear. Beyond this comparison, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's style was influenced by his readings of manga. Among his favorite manga readings as a child, Suttichart (Table 13.1) mentions *Cobra* by Buichi Terasawa, *Doraemon* by Fujiko F. Fujio and *Otokogumi* [or *Gallant Gang*] written by Tetsu Kariya and drawn by Ryoichi Ikegami. Among his favorite manga readings as a teenager, Suttichart (Table 13.2) mentions *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* by Hirohiko Araki, *Akira* by Katsuhiro Otomo, *Love Hina* by Ken Akamatsu, *Maison Ikkoku* by Rumiko Takahashi, and *Touch* by Mitsuru Adachi. His favourite manga are *Akira*, *Maison Ikkoku*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, *Touch* and *Cobra* (Table 16). He states that manga were influential because they made him want to create his own style as manga had its own distinctive, unique style (Table 13.3). He also enjoyed Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* but does not consider that this graphic novel, or any other American comics, had an influence on his work (Table 14.3). He admires French cartoonist Moebius' works, such as *The Airtight Garage* or *Arzach* [or *Arzak*] (Table 15.1; personal communication, 2016). Suttichart notes that the style of Moebius didn't influence him directly but indirectly as the French cartoonist influenced the early works of *Akira*'s author Katsuhiro Otomo (Table 15.2). Nevertheless, I consider that American comics

and the indirect influence of Moebius play an important role in the elaboration of Sarapaiwanich' unique and game-changing style.

After an inaugural page introducing the nuclear war prompting the evolution of marine animals, pages two and three of the first chapter of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* published in 1998 show—in a double-spread—a panorama of New York Atlantic City where the Statue of Liberty has been replaced by a Statue of Neptune (Sarapaiwanich, 2010, pp. 8-9; see Fig. 29).³⁸ On the fourth and fifth pages (Sarapaiwanich, 2010, pp. 10-11, see Fig. 30), a dozen of panels capture as snapshots various locations and particular features of the metropolis, with its NYC taxis, hot sausage carts, Wall Street Stock Exchange or Manhattan's Chinatown. In these panels, the anthropomorphic and formerly-aquatic fauna conducts its daily business in a city where familiar New York buildings and new sea-themed sculptures coexist. The two pages are built on aspect-to-aspect panel transitions which have been, according to McCloud (1994), “an integral part of *Japanese mainstream comics* almost from the *beginning*. Most of used to establish a *mood* or *sense of place*, time seems to *stand still* in these quiet contemplative combinations” (p. 79, emphasis in original). However, manga-associated panel-to-panel and moment-to-moment transitions (McCloud, 1994, p. 78) are rarely used in *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*. Sarapaiwanich' series relies mostly on action-to-action and subject-to-subject panel transitions as occurring in European and American comics. The sixth and seventh pages (Sarapaiwanich, 2010, pp. 12-13; see Fig. 31) present a dead-end lane with a NYC waste container from which squid-headed Joe will emerge, spilling McDonald's fast food trash on the ground. In those pages, Sarapaiwanich uses panel layouts, action lines, and screen tones reminiscent of mainstream manga. However, the graphic design of his characters doesn't appear to be manga-inspired regarding style, except for obvious homage. Yet, the importance attached to the diversity of his character designs might be. Scott McCloud (2006) considers that “a broad variety of character designs, featuring wildly different face and body types” (p. 216) could be considered as a storytelling technique particularly significant in manga. Suttichart's personal and easily identifiable style, made of slightly angular and sharp lines, ties in perfectly with his crustacean shell-bearing characters and their hostile urban environment. The regularly theatrical postures of his characters evoke the

³⁸ As the first issue of *Katch* is difficult to find and as the pages weren't numbered in the magazine, I'm using the page numbering of the collection *JOE the SEA-CRET agent Vol. 1* published by NED Comics in 2010.

exaggerated poses of full figures in action that McCloud (2006, p. 46; p. 225) associates with the American superhero genre. McCloud (2006, p. 243) also wonders if the primacy of the figure, the approach to backgrounds, the protagonist as a loner or the way characters play to the reader might also be considered as more specific American features in comics. As American comic book heroes—mostly in superhero comics—tend to act theatrically, let's note that they do so in multi-levelled cities set as stages, in chaotic metropolises mirroring the heroes' tormented psyches (Verstappen, 2010a, p. 17). The close connection between American comics characters and their home cities built of skyscrapers established itself throughout the history of American comics, from Winsor McKay's *Little Nemo* to Chris Ware's *Building Stories*, through Bob Kane and Bill Finger's *Batman*, Will Eisner's *The Spirit*, or Frank Miller's *Sin City* (Verstappen, 2010a; 2010b; 2010c). Hence, the first appearance of Joe emerging as a loner from a NYC waste container—from the bowels of his city—echoes the American comics' grand tradition in an interesting and remarkable way (see Fig. 32). The choice of New York [Atlantic] City rather than Bangkok or Tokyo as Joe's place of residence is also significant. However, Joe does not remain long in New York as he will travel to Hong Kong or Bangkok, and explore the world like Hergé's young Belgian reporter Tintin (see Fig. 34). First and foremost, *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* appears indeed as a *universe-lead* narrative rather than a character-lead series. As such, Suttichart's approach can be linked to the seminal impact of Belgian artist Hergé on world-building, an impact which influenced French cartoonist Moebius, who in turn influenced Japanese mangaka Katsuhiko Otomo cited as a reference by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich. McCloud (2006) states that:

[The] 20th century Belgian master *Hergé* constructed such detailed and rich environments in his famous *Tintin* series [that] the lion's share of artists that followed in his footsteps gave *world-building* a prominent role in their work and helped distinguish European comics from both the North American and Japanese varieties for many years. (p. 227, emphasis in original)

McCloud (2006) also notes that:

[Compared] to Japan and North America, world-building was a constant feature in the comics of artists from Hergé to Uderzo to Moebius to Tardi to Schuiten to Jansson. No

matter what the genre, European artists rarely skimmed on the creation of rich environments and the constant reiteration of those environments on every page. (p. 243)

The elaboration of a “detailed and rich environment” in Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* appears to be essential. Much detail is provided in the depiction of the urban environment, from cars to neon signs or waste on the sidewalks. It does so to an extent that Suttichart’s rendition of a street of Chinatown in the sixth panel of the fifth page (Sarapaiwanich, 2010, p. 11) surprisingly evokes the iconic panel of Tintin travelling on a rickshaw in a street of Shanghai in the 1946 edition of Hergé’s *The Blue Lotus* (Hergé, 1990, p. 6; see Fig. 33). Like Hergé who “created a kind of *democracy of form* in which no shape was any less important than any other” (McCloud, 1993, p. 190, emphasis in original) and by “the constant reiteration of [rich] environments on every page,” Suttichart Sarapaiwanich builds—to paraphrase a comment of American cartoonist Jason Lutes (Bengal, 2006) on Hergé’s work—a “convincing reality for his characters and readers to inhabit” (n.p.). The elaboration of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*’s rich and complex universe, revolving around American and other foreign metropolises instead of a Thai city or a Thai-related environment, appears to be highly pioneering in regards to the comics production of the time in Thailand.

Figure 29 - Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *JOE the SEA-CRET agent* Vol. 1, NED Comics, 2010, p. 8-9. First published in *Katch* magazine, November 1998.



Figure 30 - Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *JOE the SEA-CRET agent* Vol. 1, NED Comics, 2010, p. 10-11. First published in *Katch* magazine, November 1998.

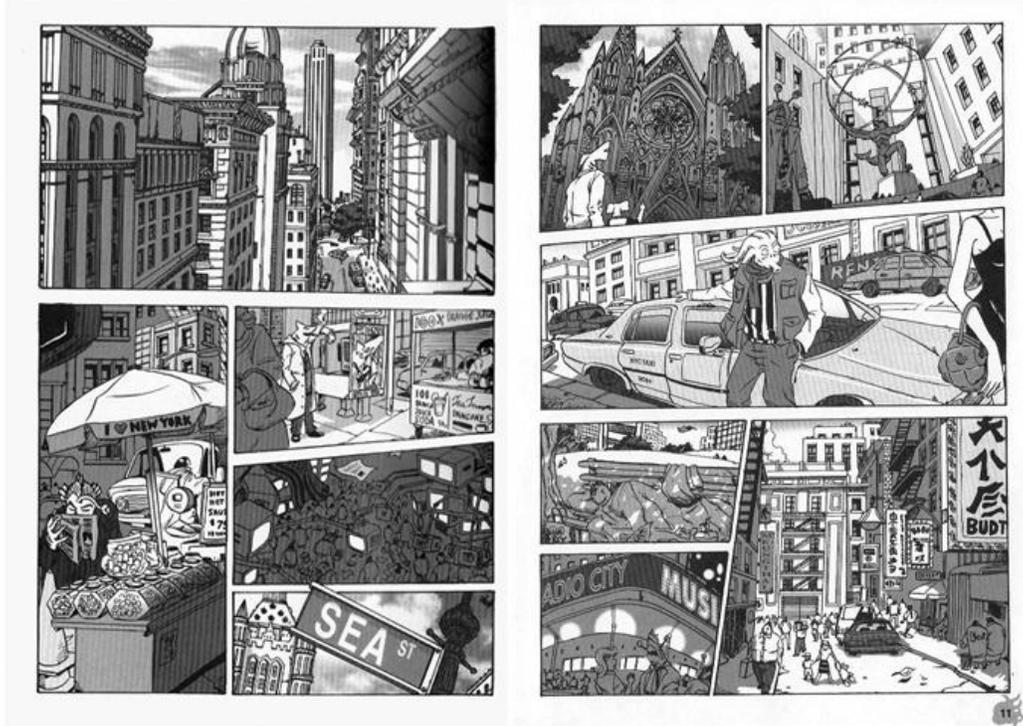


Figure 31 - Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *JOE the SEA-CRET agent* Vol. 1, NED Comics, 2010, p. 12-13. First published in *Katch* magazine, November 1998. Onomatopoeiae are written in Latin alphabet and evoke the English names of marine animals (“Crap” for crab, “slug”, “gull”...).

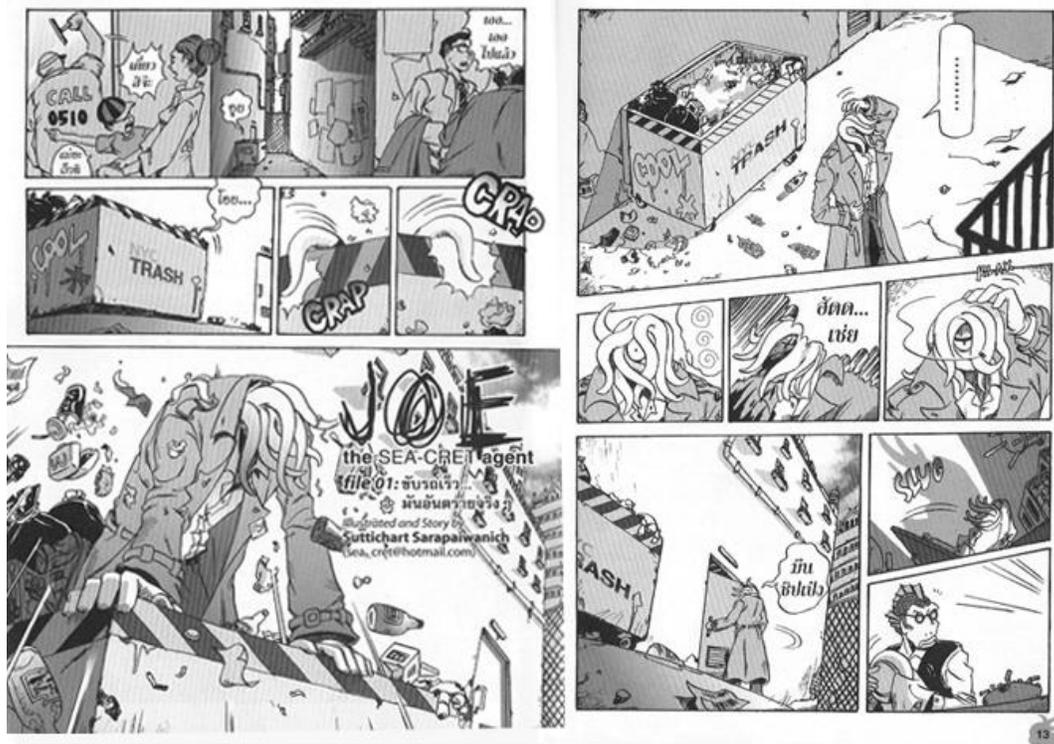


Figure 32 - New York City Trash, waste container, and protagonist as a loner. Left: Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *JOE the SEA-CRET agent* Vol. 1, NED Comics, Thailand, 2010, p. 12. First published in *Katch* magazine, November 1998. Right: Matt Murdock in *Daredevil* issue #229 (*Pariah!*) written by Frank Miller and drawn by David Mazzucchelli, Marvel Comics, USA, 1986.

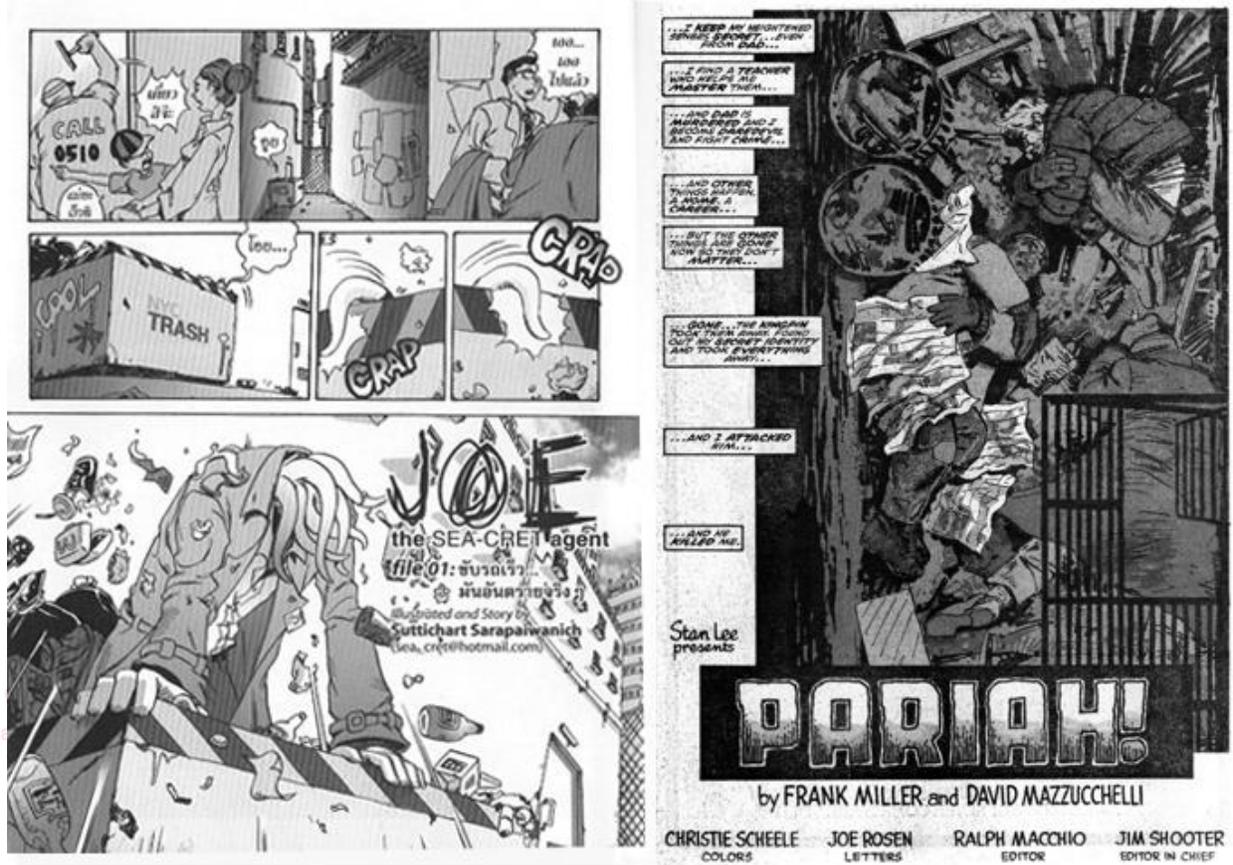


Figure 33 - Left: iconic panel of Tintin travelling on a rickshaw in a street of Shanghai in the 1946 edition of Hergé's *The Blue Lotus* (Hergé, 1990, p. 6). Right: panel from Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *JOE the SEA-CRET agent* Vol. 1, NED Comics, Thailand, 2010, p. 11. First published in *Katch* magazine, November 1998.



5.4 Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and the ‘Modern Thai Comics’ Style

The development of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*'s unique universe and Suttichart's signature style originate from a desire to propose comics narratives more in tune with the reality experienced by the Thai younger generation living in Bangkok. Baker and Phongpaichit (2014) stated that “over one generation during the last quarter of the twentieth century, Thailand's society changed with unprecedented speed” (p. 228) as a mass society emerged and a new white-collar middle class was exposed to, and embraced, global tastes and ideas. In 1992, Apinan Poshyananda described Bangkok as a rapidly expanding metropolis which welcomed modernity and modern urban culture like other Asian capitals such as Tokyo, Seoul, Singapore or Hong Kong. Poshyananda (1992) states that:

Since the 1970s, the influence of high-tech, computer, and satellite has had an enormous impact on Thai culture. Bangkok, in particular, has succumbed to the international ‘culture’ in which the same kinds of ice creams and fast food outlets have become as popular as in other city centers around the world. [...] Blue jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers can be spotted as frequently as Nintendo games. Eclecticism has been, and is, very much part of general culture: one listens to rap music and Thai folk songs through Walkmans and ghetto blasters, [...] eats McDonald's food for lunch and *som tam* (sliced green papaya) for dinner, wears fake Gucci and post-punk clothes to merit-making ceremonies [...]. (p. 190, italic in original)

During our group conversation with Songsin Tiewsomboon,³⁹ Songwit Seakitikul and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, the latter (personal communication, 2016) said that:

At *Thai Comic* magazine, they think that Thai comics must show Thai culture. But we don't understand that because we've grown in the city. We go to McDonald's more than we go the temple. I can't create my character like that. I have to create it in a Thai style but in a contemporary style, because I think it is also Thai style. I think style comes from the story and not from other reasons. We are not representatives of Thai culture but we represent the Thai way-of-life through our comics maybe much more than if we were using traditional settings or elements. My comics represent the Thai way-of-life even if

³⁹ The interview was conducted in English.

the story takes place in New York because my plot takes place everywhere in the world and that New York is the main city of the world.

To Suttichart's statement, Songsin Tiewsomboon adds that "sometimes Thai people who want to create Thai comics in Thai style consider that Thai style defines itself by the use of a Thai object." In order to illustrate Songsin's words, Songwit Seakitikul provides a few examples of 'Thai objects' such as farmers, elephants or buffalos to which Suttichart adds, not without humour, the character of Hanuman from the *Ramayana*-inspired Thai epic *Ramakien*. Returning to his point, Songsin states that—in those comics—"only the object can be linked to Thai style [because] the pictures are drawn in manga or western styles." Songwit Seakitikul notes that "Thai cartoonists from the previous generations considered they drew with the real Thai style but they learned from *Conan [the Barbarian]*, from *Superman*, from Marvel Comics, from Stan Lee. Our generation learned from manga." Suttichart then states that the question of style is the hardest question of their lives. Songsin however responds that, ultimately, "Thai cartoonists don't have a Thai style because Thai people absorb everything. By doing so, they are themselves." His two fellow cartoonists fully share Songsin's declaration, to which Songwit adds that "Thai style is not a drawing style but a way to think about how to tell a story." Suttichart concludes that "Thai style is the mix of everything in our own personal styles." Suttichart's declaration strikingly echoes two sentences written by Apinan Poshyananda in the conclusion of his book *Modern Art in Thailand*. Poshyananda (2002) states that, if Thai artists were obliged to pursue Western methods wholeheartedly, they "seemed to have a gift for synthesizing several styles into their own quintessential creations. Diversity and eclecticism thus became the hallmarks of modern Thai art" (p. 231). Not only Suttichart Sarapaiwanich synthesized Japanese, American and European influences into his own quintessential creation *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*, he also revealed by doing so the eclecticism of Thai modern urban culture while paving the way for the development of "diversity and eclecticism" as hallmarks of modern Thai comics.

If foreign influences served as catalysts in the development of styles in Thai modern art which finds its unique character in the main thread of eclecticism (Poshyananda, 2002, p. xxiii), foreign influences also served as catalysts in the elaboration of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's personal style. As mentioned in *Chapter 5.3*, Suttichart stated that the singularity of styles he perceived in the Japanese production inspired him to create his own distinctive and unique style.

With Western-inspired metropolises set as theatrical stages, the construction of rich urban environments and the use of manga idioms, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich synthesizes in his own style threads borrowed respectively from American, European and Japanese comics traditions. As Bangkok rapidly turned from a green tropical city into a concrete jungle (Mulder, 2000, p. 16), the Western-inspired metropolises depicted in *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* allow the artist to lift the curtain on this new urban stage across which Thai city dwellers are now moving. Their presence echoes Mulder' (2000) statement that “the skyscraping city-scape of Bangkok is emblematic of the social sea change of the past thirty or forty years” (p. 123) in Thailand. But even more importantly, the choice of New York City as the hometown of Joe breaks with the long-term Thai comics tradition of localizing the main action in Thailand and using ‘Thai objects’ or ‘Thai folk culture’ as focal points. As with the marine animals which were forced to leave their shrinking aquatic element after a large-scale atomic war to adapt to a new environment, Thai readers are invited to enter the complex and globalized world depicted by Suttichart one year after the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Named *Tom Yum Goong Crisis* in Thailand, the financial crash shattered Thai economy with two million people losing their jobs (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2014, p. 254). Chanokporn Chutikamoltham (2014) argued that the 1997 economic crash damaged national pride and that, as a result,

populist localism emerged as the reaction to this crisis. Nationalist sentiment expressed the disappointment with liberalization and market economics, while there was also a call for a return to rural, indigenous Thai roots. Hence, arguably, vernacular Thai culture, which is a part of localism, emerged as the reaction against neoliberal globalization. (p. 49)

Far from calling to a return to rural roots taking the shape of “farmers, elephants or buffalos” in Thai mainstream comics, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich yet questioned the impact of globalization on Thai culture but without discarding it. If the crisis led to the “reassessment of Thailand’s position in the context of globalization” (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2014, p. 257), so does the *Joe the Sea-Cret agent* series by displacing the gaze of the Thai reader in order to provide it with a new and different perspective. Among his numerous globe-trotting adventures à la *Tintin* (see Fig. 34), Joe visits Thailand in the fifth and sixth episodes (Sarapaiwanich, 2010, pp. 103-150) of the series published respectively in the fifth (March 1999) and sixth (April 1999)

issues of *Katch*. Accompanied by Thai guide Jackpot who'll soon become his sidekick, he discovers Thailand with a foreigner's point of view and through the visits of Bangkok's most popular tourist sites, such as the Grand Palace or the red light district of Patpong. The explored capital, similar to the actual city except for its therianthropic inhabitants, reveals itself through a collection of stereotypical snapshots; from Muay Thai fights to local food markets and ubiquitous convenience stores, and from a picturesque boat cruise on the Chao Phraya River to queues of tuk-tuks and taxis stuck in traffic jams under the blossoming construction sites of the BTS Skytrain. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (personal communication, 2016) states that he wrote these two episodes "to satirize the Thai way-of-life." "I wanted to write them as if I was a tourist visiting Thailand. And I think I would experience it in that way," he adds. Through a series of humoristic sequences based on culture shocks experienced by Joe, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich considers Thai traditions, customs and behaviours—as well as Thai identity in a globalized world—from an external point of view. He reveals—with a touch of sarcasm—how confusing the "Thai way-of-life" might appear to a foreigner discovering a society where one "eats McDonald's food for lunch and *som tam* [...] for dinner, wears fake Gucci and post-punk clothes to merit-making ceremonies" (Poshyananda, 1992, p. 190, italic in original). Yet by revealing how eclectic the modern urban Thai way-of-life is, he also unveils Thai people's ability to actually accommodate indigenous and foreign cultural elements and practices in a unique way; their "skill in pragmatic adaptation" to cite Mulder (2000, p. 14). And one might see in his therianthropic composite characters, with marine animal heads and human bodies, 'breathing examples' of a remarkable ability to adapt, or evolve; "wacky but cool" hybrid figures in an eclectic and globalizing world. As Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (Table 4.2) mentions in the survey, the main topics he addresses in his comics are "alienation and a search of a place for the character in society or various situations."

The gift of Thai artists "for synthesizing several styles into their own quintessential creations" is also acknowledged by making these borrowed influences apparent. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich indeed plays with the manga idioms he grew up with. The manga trope of nose-bleeding used to signal arousal (Brenner, 2007, p. 50) is reinterpreted with wit by Suttichart in a sequence (see Fig. 35, right) where Joe's squid head secretes "cephalopod ink" instead of blood while in a topless bar of Patpong district (Sarapaiwanich, 2010, p. 125). Humoristic referentiality and imaginative misuse of familiar manga idioms constantly reveal their source of origin while

being adapted with originality. Another borrowing made apparent is the use of onomatopoeiae—or “words whose sound suggests the sense” (Onomatopoeia, n.d.)—which are written in Latin alphabet instead of using Thai letters. If all the dialogues are written in Thai script and Thai language,⁴⁰ all the onomatopoeiae are written in Latin alphabet and evoke the English names of marine animals; for example “crap”, “slug”, “gull”, “sharkkk” or “whaleee” (see Fig. 31)

Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (2016) decided to use Latin alphabet and English nouns “to make [his] world more unique because the story was not taking place in our actual world. It also suited the fact that the narrative starts in New York” (personal communication). To the Thai reader these sound effects ultimately evoke the English-written onomatopoeiae of American comics, but with the addition of Suttichart’s personal and humoristic touch. Suttichart’s style on *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* can then be considered as being a *composite* relying on its definition as “a solid material which is composed of two or more substances having different physical characteristics and in which each substance retains its identity while contributing desirable properties to the whole” (Composite, n.d.). Suttichart’s borrowings from European, Japanese and American comics traditions retain their specific properties and, in doing so, contribute to a larger reflection on Thai way-of-life in relation to pragmatic adaptation, eclecticism and globalization. These borrowings remain visible, noticeable, providing self-reflection but also disruptiveness; the English-written onomatopoeiae constantly remind the Thai reader that the action starts abroad and breaks with the habit of localizing comics stories in Thailand. Disruptiveness is also implemented through recommended song titles to be listened to while reading some sequences. In almost every chapter, a song title is introduced between the panels as an extradiegetic element. In the first chapter of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* (Sarapaiwanich, 2010, p. 31), Suttichart Sarapaiwanich introduces the title of the song “*I’M FREE*” by Boyd Kosiyabong between panels of a sequence where prisoners escape from a police van. The witty and referential tribute to Boyd Kosiyabong, cofounder of Bakery Music and *Katch* magazine, participates to the disruptiveness of the narrative and stresses—whether intentionally or not—the “freedom” offered to the cartoonists by Boyd in *Katch* magazine. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (personal communication, 2016) states on this matter:

⁴⁰ Suttichart Sarapaiwanich stated that he decided to use onomatopoeiae written in Thai language instead of using Latin alphabet when the series was continued in *BOOM* magazine. Thai language was more convenient to communicate with the large readership of *BOOM* (Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2016).

Khun Boyd Kosiyapong told me that he liked my designs and that he wanted me to write a comic in my own style. So I started to draw comics because I thought his attitude towards comics was not to force artists to draw in the manga style or for mass production. He wanted me for me. I had the freedom to create everything I wanted after that.

Joe the Sea-Cret Agent thus appears as the first modern ‘Thai independent comics;’ its creator being allowed to fully express his own personal style without being forced to comply to the requirements of a Thai-themed and manga-influenced market. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (personal communication, 2016) mentions that artists at *Katch* were “almost free” and owned the copyright of their characters. “There was an editorial team following the cartoonists. The team provided some ideas but we were never forced to use them. It was up to the artist,” he adds. His series can also be considered as the first ‘Thai alternative comics’ as it deliberately puts itself at the fringes of—if not in opposition to—the Thai comics production of the time. For the first time in Thai comics history, a personal and composite style borrowing from American, European and Japanese comics traditions—rather than from manga only—reflects, embraces and questions the globalized and eclectic modern Thai way-of-life experienced by a younger generation living in large cities. It does so from a foreigner’s point of view, offering an external and satirical commentary on Thainess. This satirical commentary is embedded and enhanced by a constantly apparent composite self-reflexive style, and a regularly disrupted narrative.

It is then interesting to note the similarities between Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* and Prayoon Chanyawongse’s *Cartoon Likay* genre. As noted in *Chapter 2.4*, Prayoon Chanyawongse created a composite genre by merging the *Likay* theatrical form into his comics, using *Likay*’s ability to impart political messages through its loose structure and subversiveness. Is it the constant back and forth between theatrical performance and illusionistic settings, the address of serious contemporary social commentaries in period adventurous folktales, or the eclectic genre of *Cartoon Likay* in itself, all denote an appeal for an aesthetic of interruption and for a composite production in order to discuss the social, cultural or political situation of Thailand. Meanwhile Suttichart Sarapaiwanich addresses the issue of globalization and questions the Thai way-of-life through a story set in a distant future, and by creating a composite style borrowing from European, American and Japanese influences. Prayoon Chanyawongse relies on *Likay*, indigenous folktales and an insider’s point of view. Suttichart

Sarapaiwanich relies on social science fiction, foreign influences and an external point of view. In Chanyawongse’s *Chanthakorop* serialized in 1938 or in Sarapaiwanich’s *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* published exactly 60 years later, both Thai artists fully rely on their “gift for synthetizing several styles [or art forms] into their own quintessential creations.” Both do so as “independent” creators (see *Chapter 2.5*), and in order to question the Thai society of their respective times.

Figure 34 - World-building and globe-trotters. Left: page from Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *JOE the SEA-CRET agent* Vol. 1, NED Comics, Thailand, 2010, p. 125. First published in *Katch* magazine, issue 5, March 1999. Joe holds—upside down—a travel guide of Bangkok on the plane taking him from New York [Atlantic] City to Thailand. Top right: last tier from the thirtieth page of Hergé’s *Les Aventures de Tintin: Le Sceptre d’Ottokar* as published in the Belgian weekly youth supplement *Le Petit Vingtième*, issue 45, on November 17, 1938. Tintin holds a tourism brochure of the fictional Balkan nation of Syldavia. Bottom right: Panel from Hergé’s *Les Aventures de Tintin, reporter, en Extreme-Orient* [later retitled *Le Lotus Bleu*], published in *Le Petit Vingtième*, issue 36, on September 6, 1934. Tintin reads a book on China in a train taking him to the Middle Kingdom.

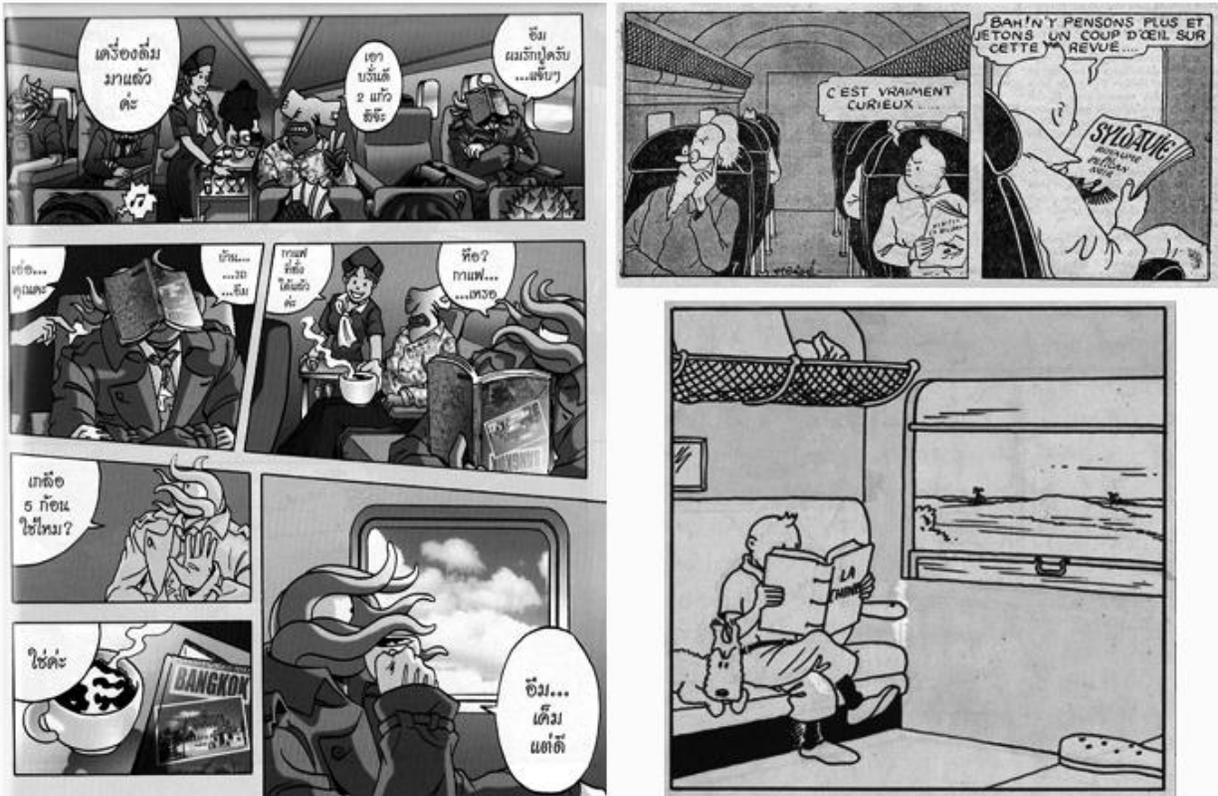


Figure 35 - The manga trope of nose-bleeding used to signal arousal—as depicted on a page of Akira Toriyama’s *Dragon Ball* (left)—is reinterpreted with wit by Suttichart in a sequence where Joe’s squid head secretes “cephalopod ink” instead of blood while in a topless bar of Patpong district (right). Page from Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *JOE the SEA-CRET agent* Vol. 1, NED Comics, Thailand, 2010, p. 125. First published in *Katch* magazine, issue 5, March 1999.



5.5 Impact of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*

In the survey conducted for the present research project, Thai cartoonist Note Piruck (Table 3.4) mentions Suttichart Sarapaiwanich as one of the three most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades. He states that Suttichart was part of a group of independent artists whose works were different and unique. “Reading them wasn’t like reading Japanese comics,” he states. Note Piruck (Table 12.7) also mentions that one Thai series of the 1990s he could remember clearly is *Joe Sea-cret Agent* because of “its outstanding artwork.” Thai cartoonist Puck (Table 3.4) cites Suttichart Sarapaiwanich at the first place of his list of the three most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades and mentions *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* as being the Thai comic book that would be the most representative of contemporary Thai comics (Table 3.5). For Thai cartoonist Toma (Table 3.4), Suttichart Sarapaiwanich is one of the most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades, alongside with Thai cartoonist Sa-ard, because their artwork and stories

are interesting, “changing the image that Thai comics have to be traditional.” Thai cartoonists Sa-ard (Table 12.7) mentions Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, alongside with Tapone, Wisut Ponnimit and Kamla [pen name of Jeerasak Chamnansree], as artists whose works inspired him in the way of thinking and drawing comics as enjoyable as theirs. Art Jeeno (Table 12.7) mentions *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*, along Kamla’s *Si-Gum (Sah)* and Wisut Ponnimit’s *hesheit*, as being influential because these series published in [*Manga*] *Katch* made him aware “that Thai comics weren’t similar to manga.” Thai cartoonist and pocket book cover artist Vic-Mon (Table 3.4) states that Suttichart Sarapaiwanich is “the true pioneer of [Thai] alternative comics” while Songsin Tiewsomboon made Thai graphic novels popular. As mentioned earlier (*Chapter 4.3*), Songsin Tiewsomboon (personal communication, 2016) recalled that when he was still in school, “Suttichart [Sarapaiwanich] and Seng [Songwit Seakitikul] were already writing comics. I read them and I thought: ‘This is new! This is different from mass comics!’” Thai cartoonist [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul (Table 3.4) also considers Suttichart Sarapaiwanich as the ‘originator’ of Thai alternative comics. He states that the works of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich made him want to write his own comics (Table 12.7). During our group conversation with Songsin Tiewsomboon, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songwit Seakitikul, the latter (personal communication, 2016) also stated that:

The first time I read *Katch*, I was still an architect. When I read *Katch* and when I discovered *Joe [the Sea-Cret Agent]*, I felt really excited. My dream was to make comics but like Chart [Suttichart Sarapaiwanich] I never had a style that could fit for the mainstream publishers. But when I read *Katch*, I thought “This is my style and I want to do it like this.” After the *Tom Yum Goong* crisis [see paragraph 5.4], I didn’t want to be an architect anymore. I wanted to be a cartoonist. I sent my storyboard to *Katch* magazine but it didn’t pass approval. I decided to practice during eight months without earning any money. I showed my storyboard and comics to the editor. When my stories got approved for publication, the magazine was cancelled [in December 2000]. Only some of my illustrations were published in the magazine.

LET’S Comic’s CEO Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee (personal communication, 2016) also states that Suttichart Sarapaiwanich is an important cartoonist because he created a new universe but mostly because he was experimenting with the page layouts (see also *Chapter 6.3*). The

graphic experimentations and personal style of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, and his series *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* along its new universe, can then be considered as being highly influential for many Thai independent cartoonists; the series and its artwork setting themselves apart from the Thai-centred and manga-influenced Thai mainstream production. Wisut Ponnimit's *hesheit*, another series originated in *Katch*, will soon cement the 'alternative' movement inaugurated by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich in Boyd Kosiyabong's short-lived yet game-changing magazine.

5.6 Wisut Ponnimit and the Freedom of Style: From *Katch* Magazine to *MUD*

As mentioned in *Chapter 5.4*, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich stated that Boyd Kosiyabong liked his designs, and that Boyd wanted Suttichart to write comics in his own style. Suttichart started to draw comics because he thought Boyd Kosiyabong's attitude towards comics was not to force artists to draw in the manga style or for mass production. Suttichart (personal communication, 2016) furthermore states that Wisut Ponnimit's comics series

hesheit also started in a similar way in *Katch*. *Khun* Wisut first sent *hesheit* as a storyboard [for an animation project]. He thought that Boyd Kosiyabong would help him improve his storyboard. But Boyd Kosiyabong said "This is for print! This is only for print!" That's Boyd's attitude and it's what started the freedom of style. It's the start of [Thai] indie comics.

The aforementioned roughly-sketched storyboard of Wisut Ponnimit was published in the eighth issue of *Katch* in June 1999 (Kurathong, 2010, p. 101), becoming, by extension, Wisut Ponnimit's first published comics. According to Kutathong (2010, p. 101), the then 22-year-old artist couldn't believe his story was published without any correction. At that time, he could not have imagined he would become one of Thailand's most celebrated cartoonists and, later on, a mangaka in Japan.

Born on the 15th of August 1976, Wisut Ponnimit considers that cartoons were his reality as a child (Srisirungsimakul, 2009, para. 2). When he was a kid, he would practice all the signature fighting moves he read in Akira Toriyama's manga *Dragon Ball* and Yôichi Takahashi' sports-themed *Captain Tsubasa*. If he watched *Mickey Mouse* and other Disney cartoons, what he loved growing up was Fujiko F. Fujio's *Doraemon* (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011). In the same interview, he also states:

[You] probably can't see it in my work, but at the foundation of my art is what I encountered as a child: Mickey Mouse, Pink Panther and Doraemon. The anime [animation movie] I make has no dialogue, and I noticed recently, neither did Pink Panther.

Alongside with the aforementioned mangaka Akira Toriyama, his favourite cartoonists are *Slam Dunk*'s author Takehiko Inoue and *Rough*'s creator Mitsuru Adachi (Srisirungsimakul, 2009). In high school, he particularly enjoyed Adachi's *Niji iro tōgarashi* ["Rainbow-Colored Chili Powder"] which was first serialized in Thai in Vibulkij's *Weekly Special* magazine (see *Chapter 4.1*) when Wisut Ponnimit was 13-year old. Wisut Ponnimit (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011) states that *Niji iro tōgarashi* "is so extraordinary. When you read it, everything comes out of the book, into this world. It's so expansive and beautiful!" (n.p.). Wisut Ponnimit's "genre-dynamiting manga" (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011)—such as *Blanco* [Thai version: *Ching Cha*, "Playground Swing"] mixing the humorous, the sensual, the playful and the fantastic—might be inspired by the model of *Niji iro tōgarashi* which starts as an Edo period action drama but also integrates science fiction, romantic and comedy elements. Adachi's round, simple and soft art might also be seen as highly influential on Wisut Ponnimit's art on his series *Blanco* first serialized in Japan around 2007. In college, Wisut Ponnimit discovered works of Osamu Tezuka, such as *Burakku Jakku* [Black Jack] and *Hi no Tori* [Phoenix]. He states that if Osamu Tezuka's art is not as beautiful as Adachi's art, his manga are dazzling (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011). He also mentions Rumiko Takahashi's art from the 1980s as one of his references (Schley, 2013).

During an interview for the Thai television program *The Idol* broadcasted on the 12th of August 2012 on Modernine TV, Wisut Ponnimit (Chainarongsingha, 2012) mentions that his passion for drawing started when he was in the third grade [Prathom 3] of elementary school.⁴¹ Due to the trend of sport-oriented manga at the time, he mostly drew sport-themed comics to entertain his classmates. The enthusiastic reception of his comics, his ability to communicate through them and to entertain his friends fueled his passion for the art form. Wisut Ponnimit then studied at the Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University. He failed his core subject twice and one of his professors advised him to quit studying arts considering Wisut didn't fit in; Wisut

⁴¹ The average age in the third grade of elementary school in Thailand is nine-year old.

was told his handwriting didn't even look like an artist's handwriting. However Wisut Ponnimit pursued his studies and decided that he wouldn't change his style to accommodate his professors. He returned to his teenage year style which he preferred. Wisut Ponnimit (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011) recalls the publication of his first comics in *Katch* magazine as follows:

I had drawn manga from the time I was a kid and would show my friends. Then, when I was in college, an alternative manga magazine just happened to start up. I sent off a comic as an experiment and, well, they published it. When I got paid I thought, "Wow, I can make money from this!" The thing is that in Thailand, there really weren't manga [comics] artists, so I didn't consider it a possibility. But when I actually made a profit, I realized, "I can do it!" (n.p.)

His recollection slightly differs from Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Nirawan Kurathong's statements presented above and mentioning a storyboard for an animation film. Nevertheless, the publication of Wisut Ponnimit's first graphic narrative in the eighth issue of *Katch* launched the career of the young artist through his series of short comics stories known under the broad title *hesheit*.⁴² Wisut Ponnimit explains that the title *hesheit* [he-she-it] comes from the main theme explored in the series; stories "about men and women and the things between them" (Schley, 2013, n.p.). Bill Randall (2006) describes Wisut Ponnimit's early short comics as follows:

The first few stories remind me of John Porcellino's early issues of *King-Cat*, when he had a discernible punk-scribble aesthetic. Ponnimit's first works in *Hesheit* follow suit in both style and subject, as he revels in accidental decapitations and conversations with cockroaches, the preoccupations of young artists looking for something to say. (p. 186, *italic in original*)

The comparison to John Porcellino's early issues is highly interesting as the Chicago-based American artist was part of the artists published by Highwater Books, an American indie press launched in 1997 by Tom Devlin. Danner and Mazur (2014) mention that

⁴² A collection of *hesheit* stories have been translated in English and published in a book titled *Him Her That* by Awai Books in 2013.

Highwater's defining sensibility has been referred to, somewhat ironically, as "Cute Brut," for its connection to *art brut* or outsider art, and an innocent, childlike quality sometimes compared to twee indie pop; this was the start of "indie" comics. (p. 244, italic in original)

The "punk-scribble aesthetic" and the "innocent and childlike quality" of Wisut Ponnimit's art undoubtedly evoke the *Cute Brut* movement, and similarly participated in the establishment of Thai "indie" comics scene. His raw art echoes the gruesomeness of his early stories. In the first volume of the collections of *hesheit* stories, the first story—dated 19th and 20th of December 1998 (Ponnimit, 2012a, pp. 4-6)⁴³—displays the discussion between a young man and his girlfriend (see Fig. 36). The young man wants to cut a watermelon with a "signature move" by using a butcher axe. His girlfriend wants to break up because she's bored of his boyfriend's weird ideas. He accepts the breakup, and cuts the watermelon with his axe. The watermelon splits in two and—at the same time—the girlfriend's head is unexpectedly cut in half. Her brain appears inside the watermelon while the watermelon's pulp and seeds appear inside the young woman's cranium. End of the story. In another story dated 8th of February 1999 (Ponnimit, 2012a, pp. 113-124), the lips of Wisut's recurring male character—which could be considered as the author's alter ego—and the lips of his girlfriend merge while they're kissing. Their lips now form a long skin tube uniting the lovers' mouths. Unable to speak, the young man writes 'whatever happens, we stay together.'⁴⁴ A fly lands on the young man's nose and he sneezes, sending nasal mucus on his girlfriend's face. They run to bathroom to wash her face but—disgusted by the dirtiness of the lavatories—she vomits in the skin tube uniting the lovers' mouths. As the vomit reaches the young boy's mouth, he throws up as well. The vomit-filled tube ultimately bursts, releasing the lovers. Free to talk again, the boyfriend says: 'I still love you anyway'. 'Stop saying that,' she answers, while vomiting again. The *Cute Brut* tone—with romantic and naive declarations awkwardly and ironically embedded in crude tales with punk-scribble art without corrections as the erroneous text is blacked out through scratching—was dominant in his early works. According to Prabda Yoon (personal communication, 2014), Wisut Ponnimit made his name in Thailand—"but more among the city hipsters than the general

⁴³ I'm using the page numbering of the second edition of the collection *HESHEIT 1+2+3* published by Typhoon Books in 2012.

⁴⁴ Citations translated from Thai language by the author's research assistants.

public” (n.p.)—with his “very crude, experimental comic series” *hesheit*. After working as a cartoonist in Thailand for five years and once he “got sort of famous there” (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011) partly through the serialization of *hesheit* in the “positive thinking” *A Day* magazine launched in 2000, he decided to leave for a study trip in Japan—from 2003 to 2005—where his work moved towards more subtlety, clarity and maturity. The Thai cartoonist (Srisirirungsimakul, 2009) states:

I have had enough of city life. Having musician friends and a fashion designer for a sister kinda messed with my perceptions. There was always that little voice in my head that told me to come up with things that were hip and cool. And I hated that. So when I decided to go work in Japan, I chose the relatively quiet city of Kobe instead of Tokyo to reset myself. I drew *everybodyeverything* there—the plots are simpler and the pace is slower. (para. 10)

Wisut Ponnimit (2015) also declares:

hesheit is derived from my own ego, it didn't try to put myself in other people's shoes, it came solely from me. Which is different from *everybodyeverything*, when I was 28, I started to pay more attention to my surroundings and not just to my own ego. I realized I didn't always need to use myself as a standing point. (p. 228)

First serialized in 2004 in the Japanese publication *Magazine 5* (Ponnimit, 2012b), *everybodyeverything* is the first comic book of a Thai cartoonist originally published in Japan, making Wisut Ponnimit the first Thai mangaka. After its publication as a collected edition in Japan, *everybodyeverything* also became the very first book published by the notable Thai indie publisher Typhoon Books. Thai novelist and translator, vice-president of The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand, founder as well as designer of Typhoon Studio, Prabda Yoon (personal communication, 2014) remembers:

Typhoon Books started in 2004 by Palida Pimpakorn and myself. The initial goal was to publish my own books (I had been publishing with various big publishers up to that point). But because we are good friends with Wisut Ponnimit, the famous comic book artist and animator, and he had just published his first book in Japan, so we thought it

would be nice to publish that book in Thai for him right away. For that reason, Wisut's *everybodyeverything* was Typhoon Books' first publication. It was soon followed by my own novel and a book of essays by another friend. Then, because of our strong relationship with Wisut, we published a bookazine for indie and underground comics called *MUD*. It attracted a lot of young comic enthusiasts, but unfortunately we managed to produce only 9 issues due to high costs and not enough demand. (n.p.)

Launched in February 2008 with its first issue and interrupted three years later, the collective bookazine *MUD* remains the only Thai publication which proposed alternative and experimental comics short stories in a format reminiscent of the American avant-garde comics anthology *RAW* edited by Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman. It proposed singular graphic narratives from artists such as Preecha Raksorn (*NakMuai*, or *Fighter*, in *MUD: Silence*, May 2011), Terawat Teankaprasith (*Infected*, in *MUD: Scary*, August 2009) or Thai indie comics pioneer Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (*The Sea-Cret Story*, in *MUD: Scary*, August 2009) along with short essays and fiction, and in-depth analysis of foreign graphic novels such as Jason Lutes' *Berlin: City of Stones* (in *MUD: Fallen Up*, Typhoon Books, 2010). After the cancelation of *Katch* in 2000 and the independent magazine *LET'S Comic* focusing more on genre fiction inspired by the mainstream, the bookazine *MUD* appeared as a unique place of personal expression for alternative cartoonists wanting to explore a broader variety of genres and styles. Young alternative cartoonist Tuna Dunn (personal communication, 2014)—whose first comic book *I Like Like You* was published by Salmon Books in 2013—recalls that she used to read *MUD* for a while; “it was the only comic magazine [...] where I could see my work in there but it was a while ago” (n.p.).

Despite the growing recognition of Wisut Ponnimit and his continuous collaboration with the bookazine through short stories and regular cover art, the publication was interrupted after its ninth issue [*MUD: Silence*] in May 2011. Concurrently, Wisut Ponnimit gained a popular success in Japan and Thailand with his cute and feel-good cartoon character *Mamuang* [“mango” in Thai language; the little girl's hair evoking the shape of a mango]. Created in 2003 while Wisut was residing in Kobe, the little girl made her first appearance in the comic book *everybodyeverything* in 2004 and developed into her own cartoon series in the Japanese magazine *The Big Issue* (Ponnimit, 2015, p. 234). She gained fame in Thailand through a series

of Line application digital stickers, and she appears regularly as a brand mascot of various Thai and Japanese products (Tongpan & Werasakwong, 2016, p. 100). Prabda Yoon (personal communication, 2014) states that

in terms of commercial success, Mamuang is a kind of phenomenon. She was first well known in Japan, where Wisut has a cult following. In any case, I would say that Wisut's work remains within the 'indie' realm, not the mainstream. (n.p.)

According to Karuchit (2014), Wisut Ponnimit's *hesheit* is exemplary of the alternative style of Thai cartooning, "incorporating untidy, childlike drawing styles and unstructured, little or no dialogue storytelling" (p. 95). Asked if they agreed with this statement in the survey conducted for the present research project (Table 2.0), 13 cartoonists answered they did, two disagreed while one cartoonist didn't answer. Providing additional comments and nuances (Table 2.1), Thai cartoonist Nummon notes that the style of Wisut Ponnimit is one of the various alternative styles of Thai comics. Thai cartoonist Sa-ard (Table 2.1) disagrees with the entire statement, considering that Thai alternative comics should be an area to express diversity in artwork and content; a diversity different from the mainstream. He states that Wisut Ponnimit's work has beautiful, proportionate, and standard artwork, and is influenced mainly by Japan in both artwork and storytelling with positive content. In the survey (Table 3.4), nine Thai cartoonists list Wisut Ponnimit as one the three most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades. Chart [Suttichart Sarapaiwanich] states that Wisut Ponnimit, The Duang and Songsin were able to create unique comics styles that were well-received and influential to later generations. Thai cartoonist Jung shares Chart's opinion, mentioning that Wisut Ponnimit, Songsin and The Duang created many works inspiring numerous people. Thai cartoonist Munin selected Wisut Ponnimit in her list because he pioneered alternative Thai comics and created a clear character for himself both in storytelling and artwork, inspiring Thai cartoonists. She adds that he improved to the point of being accepted in many countries, especially in Japan. Nummon considers that Wisut Ponnimit's *hesheit* opened up the diversity of drawing styles in Thailand while Preecha Raksorn states that Wisut Ponnimit's work stands out in many ways—both in storytelling and artwork—reaching the masses and becoming popular enough to draw Thai people into reading his work. Cartoonists Art Jeeno, Jung and Tongkarn selected *hesheit* as the Thai comic book that would be the most representative of contemporary Thai comics (Table 3.5).

Thai cartoonist Sa-ard notes that Wisut Ponnimit produced works that broke the mould of traditional aesthetics, created characters that were internationally accepted, and developed an artwork that can be blended with art exhibitions (Table 3.4). Wisut Ponnimit indeed developed his experimental comics work into art installations, such as the series of art installations named MELO which was first launched in Osaka in 2005. The MELO HOUSE art installation was displayed at Bangkok CityCity Gallery in 2015. The visitor was invited to enter a maze where Mamuang-related paintings—each working as a comics panel—are displayed on the walls. Each path followed by the visitor offered a new and different comics storyline, leading to 10 different endings. Wisut Ponnimit (2015) states:

For this exhibition you can still go back and see what happens if you make a different choice. [You] can walk backwards, or try again. You can always play again, like you are god. In this installation, you also have a bird's eye view of the maze that is projected on the front wall to see that this is the maze world that you were lost in. It helps to put things in perspective, to see that bigger picture. I think it helps people to see in different perspectives, which is a characteristic of my work. I like to help people see from many different perspectives. (p. 237)

Not only Wisut Ponnimit's work proposes and explores different perspectives but also explores different art forms. Musician, animator, cartoonist and illustrator, the multi-disciplinary artist Wisut Ponnimit continually and playfully pushes back the boundaries of various art forms by combining them through happenings, installations and creative collaborations. Inspired by his "average, everyday lifestyle" (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011, para. 9) and creating "stories that blur the borders between art and literature while offering humor, warmth and philosophical accessibility" (Chozick & Tsubono, 2011, para. 1), Ponnimit created a bridge between Japan and Thailand by successfully merging his cross-cultural experiences and influences in comics or other artworks showcased—for instance—at the *Tomyam Pladib* [literally: Tomyam Sashimi] art exhibition gathering Thai and Japanese artists exploring the coexistence of the traditional and the contemporary ("Tomyam Pladib," 2008).

Figure 36 - Pages 2 and 3 of the first short comics—dated 19th and 20th of December 1998 —to appear in the inaugural volume of the collections of *hesheit* stories. Reproduced from Ponnimit, 2012a, pp. 5-6.



6. Fullstop Book and LET'S Comic: From the First Generation to the Next

6.1 The End of *Katch* Magazine and the Start of TMCX, P.T.K Studio and Fullstop Book

One year after the launch of *Katch* magazine on November 1998, Boyd Kosiyabong—co-founder of the *indie* music company Bakery Music—launched a second Thai-originated comics magazine titled *Manga Katch*. On the cover of the first issue published on November 1999, the catch phrase in English reads: “A boy’s only magazine.” During a group conversation with cartoonists Songsin Tiewsomboon, Songwit Seakitikul and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, the latter (personal communication, 2016) stated that *Katch* and *Manga Katch* magazines aimed at a teenage male readership but that the comics and features published in *Manga Katch* were based on the model of the Japanese manga magazine *Shōnen Jump*. According to Kurathong (2010, p. 103), the content of *Manga Katch* focused more on comics and news from the comics circle than *Katch*. The magazine *Manga Katch* will have a defining impact on the development of the student magazines *BON* and *LET* published by Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee between 2002 and 2004, later leading to the establishment of the LET'S Comic publishing house (see *Chapter 6.3*). Notable comics series in *Manga Katch* included *Dracoolar Tok* [or *Dracula Tok*] by George-Watchara Songsomboon—who left Siam Inter Comics’ *C-KiDs* magazine to join Boyd Kosiyabong—, *Yak* [“Giant”, or “Demon”] by Sakapob Saobai—who previously created *Rama Suek Mahatsajan* for Vibulkij Publishing Group’s *Thai Comic* magazine and launched the short-lived *M Comic* magazine—and *Si-Gum (Sah)* by Jeerasak Chamnansree known by the pen name Kamla (Kurathong, 2010, p. 103).

Probably the first Thai comics to explore the everyday life of Thai university students, *Si-Gum (Sah)* presents itself as a series of slices of life about the relationships between a group of freshmen and their teachers and seniors at the Faculty of Arts of Burapha University. In the survey conducted for the present research project (Table 3.5), Suttichart Sarapaiwanich picked *Si-Gum (Sah)* as the Thai comics he considers the most representative of contemporary Thai comics. Suttichart (personal communication, 2016) states that Jeerasak Chamnansree’s style on *Si-Gum (Sah)* is the best way to mix the contemporary Thai comics style with the international style; his style being half Thai and half international. Young Thai alternative cartoonist Art Jeeno (Table 12.7) mentions *Si-Gum (Sah)* among the series published in *Katch* magazine that he considers as being influential on his own work; Art Jeeno’s first comic book *KlapLangHan: Be*

Right Back published in 2011 by Salmon Books—as a comics memoir on the experiences of a Thai student in upper-secondary—follows the path of *Si-Gum (Sah)*'s original take on students' everyday life. *Si-Gum (Sah)* was later published in three pocket books—respectively in 2001, 2002 and 2005 (“Tomorrow Comix,” n.d.)—by the manga and Thai comics publisher Tomorrow Comix [TMCX] founded in 2000 (see *Chapter 4.1: Establishment of Licensed and Thai-Translated Manga Magazines*).

According to Songwit Seakitikul [pen name: Seng] (personal communication, 2016), at the time TMCX was a partner of Bakery Music and B.Boyd's Characters because

Rop Ponchamni, the founder of TMCX, is the father of Nop Ponchamni who was a singer [from the band P.O.P., or Period of Party, with a first album released in 1998] from Bakery Music. Boyd Kosiyabong and Rop Ponchamni had a good relationship.

[Tomorrow Comix] published many pocket books, including *Joe [the Sea-Cret Agent]* by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich]. Now they are mostly publishing Japanese manga. My first book *World & Earth (Log Kong Rao)*, literally: “Our World”) was published by them [in 2002]. It wasn't previously serialized. It's a collection of short stories about Sci-Fi, Fantasy, and everything I like.

Collecting series previously published in the magazines *Katch* and *Manga Katch* in a pocket book format, Tomorrow Comix published—among a few other Thai comics and, later, numerous Japanese manga—a volume of George-Watchara Songsomboon's *Dracoolar Tok* [2000], three volumes of [Kamla] Jeerasak Chamnansree' *Si-Gum (Sah)*, three volumes of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* [in 2000 for the first two volumes and 2004 for the third volume] or three volumes of Suttichart's *The Sea-Cret Story* [respectively in 2002, 2005 and 2010], a spin-off series of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* first serialized in *Manga Katch* (“Tomorrow Comix,” n.d.). As indicated by Songwit Seakitikul, Tomorrow Comix also published in 2002 Seng's first book *World & Earth* which wasn't first serialized in Bakery Music's magazines due to their early cancelation.⁴⁵ Songwit Seakitikul (see *Chapter 5.5*) previously mentioned that—after a first storyboard rejected by B.Boyd's Characters—he decided

⁴⁵ Tomorrow Comix also published three volumes of Nonworld's [pen name of Vachira Petmaneeilsai] science-fiction series *2BQ* [in 2002 for the first volume, and 2003 for the second and third volumes] which wasn't serialized in *Katch* or *Manga Katch*.

to practice during eight months without earning any money. When Seng's comics stories got approved for publication in *Katch* magazine, the publication was cancelled [around December 2000, according to Suttichart Sarapaiwanich]. Kurathong (2010, p. 104) states that Bakery Music's magazines *Katch* and *Manga Katch* were canceled due to financial issues. Another reason is the gradual purchase of Bakery Music by BMG Music. On the fourth of March 2000, Steve McLure (2000) wrote that

BMG [Music] has bought a 15% stake in leading Thai independent label Bakery Music, the country's third-largest local label, with a market share of about 5%. [Bakery], which also publishes two magazines, produces TV programs, and has a significant Internet presence, will continue to operate autonomously under its existing management, led by CEO Kamol Sukosol Clapp. (p.66)

Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (personal communication, 2016) states that ultimately “Bakery Music was bought by BMG Music, and BMG was not interested in publishing magazines. *Katch* and *Manga Katch* were then cancelled around December 2010.” Songwit Seakitikul (personal communication, 2016) adds that—when the magazines closed—the studio B.Boyd's Characters changed its name into Beboydcg, and focused on producing animation. *Kristin's* cartoonist Natthapong (2015) notes that some cartoonists left the company and the remaining ones started to learn animation by themselves with the help of friends such as Ken and X. Boyd Kosiyabong named their self-taught method the “*Luk Thung* animation” [*Luk Thung*, literally “Child of the Field,” refers to a self-taught Thai folk music style]. Working for Beboydcg until 2005,⁴⁶ Suttichart Sarapaiwanich decided to create the magazine *Krash* in 2001. Suttichart (personal communication, 2016) states:

It was during the Hand-Made Book (ZINE) boom. There was a DIY [acronym of “Do It Yourself”] trend in Thailand. I made this magazine because my friends at the Beboydcg company had still many comics episodes that had not been published [in *Katch* or *Manga Katch*]. I thought it was a waste. So I collected these stories in a hand-made style magazine and sold them in [music] festivals. [It] was in 2001 and it was a B.Boyd's

⁴⁶ On the 31st of January 2015, Beboydcg closed permanently.

Characters production. They gave me a budget for publishing the magazine, and the complete freedom to manage it. There were only three issues [respectively published in September 2001, October/November 2001 and January/February 2002]. Later, there was also *Manga Sin* which is the continuity project of *Krash*. I like DIY magazines so I made them. It is an “event magazine” [so] we sell it in many events. The concept is a collectible item. I print it in limited edition. There are only 300 copies and no reprint. *Manga Sin* started the same year as digital printing.

Collecting stories from former *Katch* and *Manga Katch* artists such as [Kamla] Jeerasak Chamnansree’s *Si-Gum (Sah)*, Wisut Ponnimit’s *hesheit*, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *The Sea-Cret Story* or stories by Nonworld [pen name of Vachira Petmaneeilsai] and newcomer [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul, *Krash* looked like a more mature and alternative version of *Katch* and *Manga Katch* magazines as *Krash* didn’t display any features aimed a teenage male readership.⁴⁷ The first issue of *Krash* was published in September 2001 and was sold at the DIY market organised during the first edition of the FAT Festival ran by FAT Radio.

In the aftermath of the *Tom Yum Goong Crisis* (see Chapter 5.4), the first *Alternative Temple Fair* was organized as a way to react to a perceived erosion of traditions and community. According to Cornwel-Smith (2005), “Bangkok Governor Bhichit Rattakul then instigated the Walking Street to galvanise communities and promote local products” (p. 191). Cornwel-Smith (2005) further states that the “liberating Walking Street mood inspired *indy* youth to create truly alternative fairs with art, dance, music and handmade books” (p. 192, italic in original). The *indy* fairs sold fanzines, artworks, self-designed clothing and home-recorded music (Cornwel-Smith, 2005, p. 246). Launched in 2000, FAT Radio was “the only music station to play and support Bangkok’s indie music scene” (Quadri, 2012, para. 12) and soon organized its own annual independent music festival which gathered “dozens of hand-made book stalls” (Cornwel-Smith, 2005, p. 247). During the first edition of FAT Radio’s FAT Festival held on September 2001, then debuting cartoonist and illustrator Songsin Tiewsomboon met Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and

⁴⁷ Nonworld [pen name of Vachira Petmaneeilsai] is a Thai designer and illustrator who worked as a cartoonist on the science-fiction series *2BQ* for B.Boyd Characters. Songwit Seakitikul [Seng], Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, Songsin Tiewsomboon and Nonworld formed the “4B” artistic group [short for “FourBizarre”] whose artworks are displayed in collective exhibitions (Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2016).

Songwit Seakitikul who were selling the first issue of *Krash* magazine.⁴⁸ Songsin Tiewsomboon (personal communication, 2016) recalls:

I met [Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songwit Seakitikul] when I was studying at the [Silpakorn] University. Later, I brought my hand-made comics for sale at the FAT Festival. I had 20 hand-made comics. I didn't know how to sell them at the Festival and I asked help to Suttichart. He said "ok, fine" and he helped me. It was the first first time [I was selling my comics]. After, I cancelled my comics [production for a while] and I worked as an illustrator for one or two years. I was illustrating columns of other writers for *A Day* magazine.

Launched the same year as FAT Radio and emerging "out of the handmade book craze" (Cornwel-Smith, 2005, p. 247), the "positive thinking" and crowdfunded *A Day* magazine was cofounded by Wongthanong Chainarongsingha and other enthusiasts. Cornwel-Smith (2005) describes *A Day* as an "arts and issues magazine" depending less on advertising, than small investors and loyal readers. *A day's* circulation exceeds that of many glossy monthlies. Alternately whimsical and serious, it warps conventions, spots trends and profiled *indy* role models like Udom 'Nose' Taephanich and Prabda Yoon [...]." (p. 247, italic in original)

In its first issue published on September 2000, the magazine focuses on emerging local talents; the inaugural cover shows a picture gathering "the generation businessman Thanakorn Huntrakul, quirky actor/MC Ray Macdonald (half-Scot), model Florence Faivre (half-French) and Prabda Yoon, free-thinking author and winner of the SEA Write Award" (Cornwel-Smith, 2005, p. 249). *A Day's* first issue also devoted four pages to a super hero competition—under the title "Lose Out: Boyd's super hero competition"—where Boyd Kosiyabong was invited to

⁴⁸ The meeting of Songsin Tiewsomboon, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songwit Seakitikul at the first edition of the FAT Festival is depicted in the graphic novel *Almost All of Us* (Songwit "Seng" Seakitikul, Fullstop Publishing, Bangkok, 2015, n.p.), an account of the early years of the Thai independent comics scene. The graphic novel introduces, in dedicated chapters, the emergence of Thai cartoonists Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, Songwit Seakitikul, Toto, Songsin Tiewsomboon, Nonworld, Eakasit Thairaat, The Duang and Puck, as well as the creation of the first graphic novels produced by Fullstop Book.

compare and confront the strengths of various famous characters, including Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*.⁴⁹ *A Day* magazine became later the home of Wisut Ponnimit's serialized comics *hesheit*—starting with *A Day* issue 25 on September 2002 after the cancellation of *Katch* in 2000 (Zcongklod Bangyikhan, personal communication, 2017). The magazine also acted as the launching pad for new artists such as Songsin Tiewsomboon and organic-life-style advocate, cartoonist and illustrator Tongkarn [pen name of Valaikorn Samathakorn] who made her debut in *A Day* in 2001 (Table 20.0).

During a group conversation with cartoonists Songwit Seakitikul, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songsin Tiewsomboon, the latter (personal communication, 2016) stated:

At the time [of *A Day* magazine's debut], there was also [the cartoonist] Toto who writes the series *Watermelon Head* [in Thai: *HuaTaengmo*] and *Pandada*. He is self-publishing his work. His style is half comics and half graphic novel.⁵⁰ His books are sold in bookstores and not in comic shops, which are mostly selling manga. It's hard to sell Thai comics because for one Thai comic book there are 20 manga. There's a big competition. The business has changed little by little so that books, such as the ones of Toto, can stay longer on the shelves.

To that statement, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich adds: "Toto is very indie." Known under the nickname Toto, Thai artist Ong-Art Chaicharncheep started his comics production in the late 1990s but—bored to wait answers from publishers—he decided to launch a coffee shop with some friends (Atcharyabut, T. & Piamsuwansiri, K., 2014, p. 62). Following the closure of his coffee shop, he started drawing again and sent his stories to major publishers. Some short stories were published but Toto had in mind the publication of a longer and more ambitious graphic narrative. In 2001, he decided to self-publish his graphic novel *Mu Bin Dai* [Pig Can Fly] under the imprint P.T.K Studio [acronym of Pet Tao Khwai, "Duck, Turtle, Buffalo"] launched

⁴⁹ The four pages mentioned were provided to me as digital files on November 2016 by Zcongklod Bangyikhan, editor-in-chief for *A Day* magazine.

⁵⁰ "Graphic novel" is to be considered here according to the Thai definition of the term. Toto's graphic novels are usually lengthy picture books—or books "with at least one picture on each spread [and] in which both the visual and the verbal aspects are both essential for full communication." See the chapter *Terminology: Cartoon, paap lor, katun, manga, comics, comix and graphic novels* for more details.

specially for the occasion; Toto wasn't considering the establishment of a more perennial publishing structure at the time (Atchariyabut, T. & Piamsuwansiri, K., 2014, p. 65). *Mu Bin Dai* is an adult-aimed lengthy picture book, described as a “graphic novel” in the Thai editorial context (see Chapter *Terminology: Cartoon, paap lor, katun, manga, comics, comix and graphic novels*). It is also considered as one of the first Thai graphic novels by cartoonist [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul (personal communication, 2016). The graphic narrative—with at least one “clear line art” drawing on each spread—sets itself as a satire of contemporary society and social conformity. It tells the story of a pig born with wings. Told continuously by his fellow pigs that their species can't fly, he conforms to the idea and progressively loses his wings. He will later meet a pig who can fly and be in awe of his flying abilities, having forgotten that he sacrificed his own wings on the altar of social conformity. The positive feedback about *Mu Bin Dai* led Toto to establish P.T.K Studio as an independent publishing house for his own production—such as the comics series *Pandada*—and books from other artists, as well as travel guides (Atchariyabut, T. & Piamsuwansiri, K., 2014, p. 65). It is worth noting that the logo of P.T.K Studio [Pet Tao Khwai, “Duck, Turtle, Buffalo”] is a composite creature with the body and shell of a turtle, the neck and head of a duck, and the tail and horns of a buffalo. The hybrid figure echoes Wittamin's LingGee character merging Popeye and Mickey Mouse in 1935 (see Chapter 1.2: *Popeye and Mickey Mouse; borrowings and hybridization*) or Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's part squid part human therianthropic character Joe the Sea-Cret Agent created in 1998. So does Watermelon Head [in Thai: HuaTaengmo], Toto's composite comics character and alter ego.

The year 2001 also saw the launch of the Thai blog platform Exteen founded by Thepakon Wuttipittayamongkol, and the creation of other web boards which opened up new venues for a new breed of cartoonists (Tongpan & Werasakwong, 2016, p. 99). Furthermore, it saw the establishment of the publishing company Fullstop Book founded by the couple Somkid and Oranuj Paimpiyachat. Fullstop Book's origin is linked to *Summer*, a travel and “inspiration magazine” launched a year before *A Day* magazine. Cornwel-Smith (2005) states that, at the time, *indy* thinking had transformed visual design in Thailand and that “dowdy magazine layouts have been infused since the 1990s by a crop of stylish, more stimulating monthlies” (p. 246) with an *indy* attitude. Somkid Paimpiyachat was one of the founders—as well as director and photographic editor—of *Summer* magazine which ran for 35 issues from 1999 till 2003 (Somkid Paimpiyachat, personal communication, 2016). Architect for three years then reknwed

architectural photographer for ten years, Somkid Paimpiyachat decided in 2001 to launch—with his wife Oranuj—Fullstop Book which published “at first photo books, travel journals, travel guides and art books” (Somkid Paimpiyachat, personal communication, 2016). In 2006, Fullstop Book published *Walking Stories I* gathering seven different writers who wrote seven novellas, each developed around a “street photograph” taken by Somkid Paimpiyachat. One year later, the *Walking Stories* concept led to a second project. During a group conversation with cartoonists Songwit Seakitikul, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songsin Tiewsomboon, the latter (personal communication, 2016) recalls:

Fullstop Book, at first, published guide books for travellers. One day, Mister Somkid Paimpiyachat, who likes graphic novels, decided to gather artists to create a collective project around a common theme. We started at Fullstop Book with *Walking Stories II* [published in late 2007].

To Songsin’s declaration, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich adds with humour that “at the time, if you had one of us, you had all of us; it was like a package!” Like *Walking Stories I*, the second volume gathered seven short stories developed around “street photographs” taken by Somkid Paimpiyachat. However, the short stories weren’t novellas but full-colour graphic narratives by six independent cartoonists and Somkid Paimpiyachat himself; Tongkarn [Valaikorn Samathakorn], Toto [Ong-Art Chaicharncheep], SS [Suttichart Sarapaiwanich], Songsin [Tiewsomboon], The Duang [Weerachai Duangpla], Seng [Songwit Seakitikul] and Summer [pen name of Somkid Paimpiyachat, in reference to his cancelled magazine]. Somkid Paimpiyachat (personal communication, 2016) states that he selected the cartoonists according to his “personal liking at that time” and that he is interested in any kind of art book; “I love picture books, not just graphic novels.” He adds:

I wanted to mix many kinds of arts together. At first, *Walking Stories I* turned photographs into short stories. Then *Walking Stories II* turned photographs into comics or graphic novels. Then *Walking Melody I* and *II* mixed music, pictures and stories together. Then *Line Stories* mixed graphic, pictures and stories together. These are only examples. I like the variety of works, where pictures and stories bring inspiration. Someone described our books as “fusion books.”

On the issue of a distinctive Thai style in comics, Somkid Paimpiyachat (personal communication, 2016) also states:

I could not define Thainess exactly. I think that if Thai artists continue to work on Thai graphic novels—through sustainability and repetition—then their long continuous work would be defined as Thainess.

Not only experimenting on constrained graphic narratives developed around photographs or other art forms, Fullstop Books explored new comic book formats and designs; books folded in accordion fashion, books with cord bookbinding, or with very elongated or square shapes. The publishing house also paid particular attention to high printing quality in full colour. Somkid Paimpiyachat (personal communication, 2016) considers that most of his books were successful “because when the books were put together, they created a category and caught the attention.” Tongpan and Werasakwong (2016) consider that Fullstop Book is the most notable publisher amongst these specializing in Thai comics and Thai cartoonists’ sketchbooks (p. 103). Furthermore, they state that the distinctive line drawing and narrative styles of the cartoonists published by Fullstop Book are largely influenced by various sources; they are a blend of Japanese and European styles with graphic or street art designs of Western graphic novels” (p. 103). If we consider the term *alternative comics* as “non-mainstream comics presenting its author’s personal vision with an aesthetic freedom that usually challenges the art form” (see *Terminology*), Fullstop Book appears to be first notable publisher of Thai *alternative comics*, comics anthologies and graphic novels. Like P.T.K Studio, the company aims at the general book trade and a general readership. Publishing graphic narratives in toto, Fullstop Book also breaks with the tradition of prior serialization of long-form stories in magazines. The publishing company takes financial risks as “the prospects for such books [published in toto] are discouraging, due the financial constraints that weigh on both authors and publishers” (Hatfield, 2005, p. 161; see also *Terminology*). However, by doing so, the company stays away from the constant instability of the specialized Thai comics market which leads to the regular cancelation of comics magazines. During a group discussion with Thai cartoonists Songsin Tiewsomboon, Songwit Seakitikul and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, the latter (personal communication, 2016) stated:

We need to develop our comics over a long period of time. But when we start a long story, the magazines are cancelled. And we start again. And we start... again... Many cartoonists in Thailand—like Puck and The Duang—only create short stories because they fit our industry.

Tongpan and Werasakwong (2016) also consider that venues for the rise of new comic writers had been quite limited—despite the launching of many Thai comics magazines such as *Thai Comic*, *A Comix*, *CX*, *Cosmic*, *Dash*, *Manga Katch*—because most of these magazines tended to close down after a short period of publication with the exception of *Thai Comic* which managed to survive for over 20 years before closing down in 2013 (p. 98). This situation partly prevented the development of long-form comics and graphic novels in Thailand, and Fullstop Book is one of the only publishers daring to propose an “alternative.”

Unique venue for artistic exploration and self-expression in genres ranging from *slice of life* to science-fiction or dark fantasy, Fullstop Book will attract—and collaborate regularly with—B.Boyd’s Characters’ pioneering independent cartoonists Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (*Suttichart Invent Place*, 2010) and Songwit Seakitikul (*To Be Continued*, 2012; *Almost All of Us*, 2015), *A Day*’s cartoonists and illustrators Tongkarn (*Conversations Between Me and You*, 2010; *Organic 101*, 2015) and Songsin Tiewsomboon (*Midnight Opera*, 2013; *Letters to Yesterday*, 2014; *BeanSprout & Firehead* graphic novel/picture book series), and the leading representative of the second generation of Thai independent cartoonists; The Duang (in various comics anthologies such as *Khao Dam*, “White Black,” 2010).

6.2 Songsin’s Graphic Novels, The Duang, Puck & Cereal Comix: Second Generation

After selling his first fanzine with the help of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songwit Seakitikul at the inaugural edition of FAT Radio’s FAT Festival held on September 2001 (see *Chapter 6.1*), Songsin Tiewsomboon suspended his production of comics and worked as a column illustrator for *A Day* magazine. Songsin (personal communication, 2016) recalls:

At first, *A Day* didn’t give me a big chance. I was only earning 1,000 baht a month because *A Day* is a monthly magazine and I was doing one illustration per month. But I’m a musician too. I play music and have other works. Later, *A Day* started to publish young artists [under the A Book imprint], with a print run of 1,000 copies. These books

weren't sold in bookstores, only on book fairs or by mail order at the publishing company [...]. *A Day* was a start-up at the time. They had a little shop in book fairs. Many of my books were sold there. When we reached 7,000 sold copies—which was considered a success at the time—, they printed 7,000 copies for bookstores. Book fairs are very important for new writers. If you sell a lot in book fairs, it's good because you'll have a chance to get out. After 7,000 copies with a new cover, it sold out again fast. So I had the chance to publish other books.

Published in 2005 by A Book (Karuchit, 2014, p.99), Songsin's *ThuaNgok Lae HuaFai Nai KhwamBaKhleng AnMiRu SinSut (Beansprout & Firehead: In the Infinite Madness)* graphic novel—here a long-form and adult-aimed picture book slightly influenced by the style of Tim Burton's 1997 picture book *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*—is a milestone in the recent development of Thai graphic narratives. Thai psychiatrist and comics specialist Prasert Palitpongpanim (2013) describes the neo-gothic stories of anthropomorphized characters ThuaNgkok and HuaFai—set in a foreign [non-Thai] context as clothes and architecture show—as surrealistic but successful in making readers think more about orphans, stray children and their behaviour (p. 184). Karuchit (2014) states that the aforementioned graphic novel is “one of [A Book] first publications, and apparently its most successful” (p 99). By June 2008, it was already reprinted for the seventh time. Karuchit (2014) also mentions that the “Cartoonthai Institute calls Songsin ‘the idol of the new generation of Thai cartoonists’” (p. 93). In the survey conducted for the present research project (Table 3.4), Suttichart Sarapaiwanich considers Songsin, The Duang and Wisut Ponnimit as the three most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades because they were able to create unique comics styles that were well-received and influential for later generations. Debuting cartoonist Jung selected the same artists because they created many works inspiring numerous people. The author of *Improvise* is also selected by cartoonist Eakasit Thairaat because Songsin found new ways for Thai comics. Cartoonist Note Piruck selected Songsin, alongside with Eakasit Thairaat and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, for their works were different and unique. Songsin was also selected by female cartoonists Tongkarn—for his outstanding art—and Vic-Mon, who states that graphic novels became popular thanks to Songsin Tiewsomboon (Table 3.4).

In late 1996, Songsin Tiewsomboon also started to create short stories in comics form—starring his famous stock character and alter ego Bobby Swingers—for the short-lived Thai magazine *Cereal Comix*. Like *C-KiDs* (see *Chapter 4.1*), the magazine was launched by Siam Inter Comics but with a format and content inspired by B.Boyd’s Characters’ *Katch* magazine (Songwit Seakitikul, personal communication, 2016). The magazine was supervised by Cartoonthai Studio, a studio originally formed by three artists around the comics series *Highest Card* published in *C-KiDs* magazine (Kurathong, 2010, p. 94). The *Highest Card* series failed to be successful but the studio remained and took the role of an active editorial team for Siam Inter Comics since then. The first issue of *Cereal Comix* was published on September 1996 and the twelfth and last issue on August 2007. Songsin Tiewsomboon (personal communication, 2016) recalls:

They didn’t publish many issues. At the time, I was writing *Improvise* [in *Cereal Comix*].

It is called *Improvise* because my dream is to make a career as a musician. I tried many years to be a musician but it didn’t work. The musician within me likes to improvise. I used that method in my comics. Nothing was planned beforehand; just page by page. If it doesn’t work, I throw the pages away and start again. In that way, I can create a story for which I don’t know what’s going on. It’s fun. But I faced issues with Siam Inter Comics [...]. So I collected my stories and published them [with *A Book* in 2007] under the title *Improvise* [later reprinted by Fullstop Book]. It collects all the stories created [with that method].

Cereal Comix also serialized the comics series *I-Am* and *Shockolate* by The Duang [pen name of Weerachai Duangpla] (Suttichart Saporaiwanich, personal communication, 2016) and the series of short stories *Some Ting* by then debuting cartoonist Puck [pen name of Tripuck Supawattana]. Karuchit (2014) states that “some of the cartoonists who got their first publication with Cartoonthai have now published with other publishers. Among them are Ittiwat Suriyamart, Weerachai Duangpla (pen name, ‘The Duang’), and Tripuck Supawattana (pen name, Puck)” (p. 101). If The Duang gained more attention thanks to the publication of *Shockolate* in *Cereal Comix* edited by Cartoonthai Studio, he had begun his career years before. Born in 1987 [or 15 years after Tongkarn, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Songwit Seakitikul] and son of one-baht cartoonist Fuu [pen name of Ruangsak Duangpla], The Duang started writing comic strips for the

Talad Talok magazine at the age of 13 before evolving into a writer of dark comedy (Phosiwangchai, 2014, p. 58). The work of his father inspired him to start drawing. His other early sources of inspiration came from the comic books and movies he read and watched (Techasrisutee, 2014, p. 22) at the time. At first, he was only reading *AiMalaengSap* [“The Cockroach,” a long comics strip series by famous Thai cartoonist Tai Kai Hua Roh, published in Banlue Sarn’s *Kai Hua Roh* magazine] and Akira Toriyama’s manga *Dragon Ball*. The two series shaped his style. When he started to read more comic books, he copied his favorite styles from Nobuyuki Anzai’s ninja-themed manga *Flame of Recca*, Hiroyuki Takei’s manga *Shaman King*, where plots were all about fighting (Techasrisutee, 2014, p. 22). After studies in visual communication and design in college (International Manga Award, 2011), and deciding to work as a professional cartoonist, The Duang chose Eiichiro Oda’s manga *One Piece* as his model because the plot was more elaborate and made more sense. He later tried to escape from his manga influence. Appreciating Tim Burton’s art, The Duang chose to integrate Burton’s style into his own. He also decided to look more to the West, paying attention to the production of Marvel Comics. He mentions alternative author Nicolas de Crécy as his favourite French cartoonist (Techasrisutee, 2014, p. 22).⁵¹ His present work mixes all these influences together. The Duang states that he chose to take interesting things in all the aforementioned comic books—a nose from here, a mouth from there—and mix them together by working hard every day till it became his own style (Techasrisutee, 2014, n.p.). The Duang considers his style has two main characteristics; his own drawing lines and a narrative that looks cinematic because he loves watching movies (Techasrisutee, 2014, n.p.). According to Phosiwangchai (2014), The Duang is a notable example of the new breed of writers who made a name for themselves by blending western and Japanese comics into a uniquely personal style (p. 58). The role played by web blogs in that matter is worth mentioning. Danner and Mazur (2014) state that

cross-cultural inspiration continues to feed into the growth of new and interesting works—especially as broad international adoption of web publishing allows creators from nearly any country to join a global community of comics creators in which geographic boundaries cease to matter. (p. 279)

⁵¹ In 2014, LET’S Comic Publishing released The Duang’s comic book *Blackboy First Chapter: Kill’Em All* in an oversized hard cover format reminiscent of the format and binding of Nicolas de Crécy’s—and more broadly of Franco-Belgian—*bandes dessinées* [comic books].

On the matter, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich notes that, with the development of Internet, artists have access to works from around the world; there are more influences than before, when Thai cartoonists only had access to comics and manga (Table 3.2). Launched in 2001 and founded by Thepakon Wuttipittayamongkol, the Thai blog platform Exteen provided many artists with their chance at fame (Phosiwangchai, 2014, p.58). At one point, Exteen was a popular gathering place for artists and teens, and the platform started the trend for online collections of small but highly-viewed blogs. The Duang himself showcases his works on his own blog, and joined a global community where he would discover the works of European authors such as Nicolas de Crécy.

After various short stories published in Siam Inter Comic's *C-KiDs* since age 14, 18 year-old The Duang worked on a first comic book in 2006 for the Foundation For Children [in Thai: MunnithiDek]; *Clart Room* (Palitpongpanim, 2013, p. 103). In 2007 and along the publication of *I-Am* and *Shockolate* in a pocket book version by Siam Inter Comics and his participation to Fullstop Book's *Walking Stories II*, The Duang worked on two additional comic books for the Foundation For Children; *Dek Chai Tukkata* ["doll boy"]: *The Lesson of a Doll Boy* and *The Memo of Fullstop* with Fam (Palitpongpanim, 2013, p. 103). Palitpongpanim (2013) describes *Dek Chai Tukkata: The Lesson of a Doll Boy* as a story about a boy who is turned into a doll and has to face the difficult life of a doll while meeting other live dolls (p. 103). *Memo of Fullstop* is described as the story of an anthropomorphized dot [or "final point"] named Fullstop who starts a journey to search for the meaning of his life. On his journey, he meets many marks and signs, for example, a plus sign, a minus sign, a multiplication sign, a division sign, an equals sign, a greater-than sign, a less-than sign, a therefore sign, a question mark and an exclamation mark. Palitpongpanim (2013) describes *Clart Room* as the story of live stationery items that meet and enjoy themselves in different ways (p. 103). In the first story, an eraser finds that the more work it does—erasing and erasing and erasing, the smaller it becomes until it is no more. Palitpongpanim (2013) states that *Clart Room* can be viewed as a real *Dhamma* [or the teachings of the Buddha] book (p. 103). Palitpongpanim (2013) further argues that, in terms of psychology, The Duang tells stories of lifeless things that come to life, making a link with the notion of *animism* or the ability to see, to feel and to acknowledge that lifeless things can move and are charged with life (p. 104). On the topic of daily-life objects and style, The Duang states that—while Western comics focus on superheroes and Japanese comics focus on gaining excellence in a certain field—Thai comics are unique in their presentation of daily-life issues or objects.

However, he adds, there is no unique style of line drawings in Thai comics since each artist has his or her own style (Phosiwangchai, 2014, p. 58).

The Duang later participated to the comics anthology *ABC Comic Volume 1: Seven Deadly Sins* published by A Book in March 2008. Gathering seven graphic fiction works created by Songsin Tiewsomboon [who also drew the cover featuring his stock character and alter ego Bobby Swingers], Puck, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, The Duang, Nuut, Aliza and then debuting cartoonist Sa-ard who will later become an influential and notable figure of the second generation of Thai independent cartoonists. Karuchit (2014) writes that “with a circulation of ten thousand—relatively high for Thai [cartoons,] Poomchai Boonsinsook, A Book’s editor-in-chief, confirmed that it was ‘very well-received’ (Poomchai, interview, 2008)” (p. 100). Following the path opened by Fullstop Book with *Walking Stories II* in 2007, the *ABC Comic* anthology further established a point of articulation between the first generation of Thai independent cartoonists and the second and debuting wave.

First serialized in Banlue Sarn’s *Maha Sanook* magazine (Pimpicha Utsahajit, personal communication, 2016), The Duang’ series of short stories *Rueang MiYuWa* [“The Story Begins With...”] was published in a first pocket book volume in 1999 by Banlue Books. According to the International Manga Award (2011a) website,

this comical comic describing the interactions among young Tomtem, his family, and the surrounding characters will be accepted by all generations. The collection of short stories humorously takes up the random questions by kids, dialogues between parent and child, pranks pulled by kids and more in the ordinary days of the animated characters, while spiced up with social satires. This work introduces the legends and cultural customs of Thailand educationally.

Phosiwangchai (2014) states that *Rueang MiYuWa* was the comic that brought The Duang fame after it won a silver award at the fourth International Manga Award in Japan in January 2011. In March 2011 or a couple of months after being awarded, the first volume of *Rueang MiYuWa* was reprinted four times [from the sixth printing to the ninth]. Yet, Pimpicha Utsahajit—Executive Director of Banlue Group—tempers the impact of the award, stating that it was limited to a 10% increase in the sales (personal communication, 2016). This impression is widely shared by the

Thai cartoonists who responded to the survey conducted for the present research project (Table 13.5). However, it is worth noting that The Duang was able to develop his career both in the mainstream and independent Thai comics markets, becoming one of the most popular Thai cartoonists. In the survey conducted for the present research project (Table 3.4), Suttichart Sarapaiwanich considers Songsin, The Duang and Wisut Ponnimit as the three most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades because they were able to create unique comics styles that were well-received and influential for later generations. Debuting cartoonist Jung selected the same artists because they created many works inspiring numerous people. The author of *Rueang MiYuWa* is also selected by cartoonist Eakasit Thairaat because The Duang drew attention to Thai cartoonists. Female cartoonist Munin picked The Duang because he became a professional cartoonist at a young age; he is very skilled; and he never stops improving. She also mentions that he is stable and dedicated to his work. The Duang was also selected by young cartoonist Art Jeeno, along Wisut Ponnimit and Sa-ard. Nummon selected The Duang because he led Thai comics to their peak level. The Duang was also selected by female cartoonist Tongkarn—for his outstanding art—and by Puck (Table 3.4). Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee, CEO of LET'S Comic Publishing, considers The Duang as the “most popular Thai cartoonist today” (personal communication, 2014).

If The Duang introduces social satires in his mainstream and independent productions, Puck [pen name of Tripuck Supawattana] uses an even more subversive and satirical tone in his crude, “graphic” and mature comics. Usually focusing on societal issues, teenagers problems, and losers who try to survive in society (Table 4.2), his comic books are drawn with a Street-Art-influenced and highly recognizable signature style with flashy colours. Considering the longevity of Banlue Sarn’s magazine *Maha Sanook*, Puck states it made him believe that he could make a career out of comics (Table 12.2). Reading Akira Toriyama’s manga *Dragon Ball Z* as a child (Table 13.1) as well as Bongkoch Publishing’s translations of American comics such as *X-Men 6* and *Wolverine* (Table 14.3), he discovered Minoru Furuya’s alternative, surreal and disturbing manga *Boku to Issho* [“Together With Me,” a cynical tale of laughter and depression] as a teenager (Table 13.2). He further states that Minoru Furuya’s *Boku To Issho* was very influential on him in terms of genre, beat, and topic even though the artwork didn’t influence him much because the author drew in a realistic style (Table 13.3). Alongside the influence of alternative manga, Puck points out that he adapted European comics’ layout, character design

and use of colour into his own work (Table 15.2). He also considers that his work was influenced by the melancholy and charming sadness of Tim Burton's works (Table 18.1). Street artist himself, Puck states that Art Toy Design and Street Art are highly influential on his work because he likes the appearance of art toys and the colour and content of Street artists' works (Table 22.1). Thai influences are to be found in movies with director Kongdej Jaturanrasamee, and fine arts with painters Prateep Kochabua and Vasan Sitthiket (17.0). Moreover, Puck mentions that Thai-originated comics magazines—such as *CX* [*Cartoonthai Extreme*], *Katch*, *Manga Katch* and *Thai Comic*—inspired him to create his work and submit it to a contest (Table 12.7). After earning a Bachelor's Degree from the Faculty of Decorative Arts [Department Communication Art and Design] at the Silpakorn University (Table 0.1), Puck started his professional comics career in the pages of Siam Inter Comics' *Cereal Comix* in 1996 (Table 20.0). His first serialized short stories were collected as a pocket book under the title *Some Ting* in 1997 by Siam Inter Comics which also published his book *Memory–Me* in 2008. The same year, Puck participated to the A Book's comics anthology *ABC Comic Volume 1: Seven Deadly Sins* while his comic book *Dao Thueng Dao* ["From Star to Star"] was published by the Foundation For Children [in Thai: MunnithiDek]. The year 2008 also marks the publication of the first volume of Puck's *Nai Samong Kap Nu HuaChai* ["Mr. Samong with Mouse HuaChai," or "Mr. Brain and Mouse Heart"], one of the two first graphic novels published by newly founded company LET'S Comic (see *Chapter 6.3*). Since then and as for The Duang and Sa-ard, most of his graphic novels are published by LET'S Comic, including his voluminous art book *Trial Puck* in 2011.

Ten years after the debut of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* in the short-lived magazine *Katch*, the Thai independent comics scene reached a defining moment. With the publication of Fullstop Book's first "graphic novel" *Walking Stories II* in late 2007 (see *Chapter 6.1*), the collected editions in 2007 of The Duang's *Shockolate*, Puck's *Some Ting* [by Siam Inter Comics] and Songsin's *Improvise* [by A Book] after their serialization in *Katch*-inspired magazine *Cereal Comix*, the publication of the first issue of Typhoon Books' collective bookazine *MUD* in February 2008, the gathering of first and second generation independent cartoonists in the comics anthology *ABC Comic Volume 1: Seven Deadly Sins* published by A Book in March 2008 and the publication of the two first graphic novels [*Sun*, "Zero," by Thai independent comics pioneer Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and then alternative newcomer Puck's *Nai*

Samong Kap Nu HuaChai] by the newly founded company LET'S Comic Publishing, Thai independent and alternative comics seemed on the road to further development, success and recognition. Yet, their situation won't improve significantly in the next decade but only remain stable. LET'S Comic remains the only Thai publisher devoting his entire catalogue solely to the publication of independent—and sometimes alternative—Thai comics. The company's origin dates back to 2002 with the publication in upper-secondary school of the first issue of the student comics magazine *BON* by Tunyaluck Techasrisutee, also known under the nickname Sonoson. As the next chapter will show, the student magazine will soon develop into an important venue for the second and third generations of Thai independent cartoonists.

6.3 LET'S Comic, Munin and Sa-ard: Establishment of the Second Generation

Editor, fan page administrator, art director and CEO of LET'S Comic as well as the son of the founders of the movie magazine *Starpics* launched in 1965, Tunyaluck Techasrisutee studied at the Faculty of Communication Arts and Design, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang [KMITL] (Tunyaluck Techasrisutee, personal communication, 2016).⁵² While an upper-secondary student, he launched in 2002 with a friend the self-published student comics magazine *BON* ["Complaint," or "Grumble"] that he defines as an "indie comic." They wanted a one-syllable title and his friend came with the name *BON*; they were 16 year-old and always complaining. Yet many people called the magazine "*BIN*" because of the misleading vowel design on the cover. With an A5 format and a colour cover—paid by his father in order to keep the magazine affordable while gaining a professional look, the magazine proposed graphic narratives defined by Tunyaluck Techasrisutee as "free style" stories which were usually very short, different in styles, with comics and illustrated fiction as they wanted to try many things. Tunyaluck Techasrisutee states that they created *BON* during the height of the Thai "Alternative Era" [Tunyaluck Techasrisutee's words] marked by radio channels like FAT Radio or the FAT Festival (see also *Chapter 6.1*). *BON* was influenced by other magazines and mostly by the magazines *Manga Katch* and *A Day*. The artists of *BON* were students, usually from senior years but some of them were already attending Silpakorn University. The first issue was a success with

⁵² Unless noted otherwise, all information presented in this chapter were collected during a direct interview with Tunyaluck Techasrisutee at the office of LET'S Comic, Bangkok, on September 7, 2016. The interview was conducted in English, with additional Thai to English translation by research assistant Tanchanok Ruendhawil for some specialized terms or concepts.

500 copies printed and sold. The second wasn't so successful with 800 issues printed but some issues left unsold; the magazine was no longer a novelty. The third issue was successful again with 500 copies printed and sold. Its success was based on a misunderstanding; the cover used Chinese glyph characters and misled Chinese buyers. With the assistance of his roommate Narm [nickname of Patibut Preeyawongsakul], the fourth issue was published in 2003 when Tunyaluck Techasrisutee had entered university. The potential readership was larger; between 500 and 800 issues were printed and sold.

During their second year at KMITL [in 2004], Sonoson and Narm launched the first issue of *LET* under the publisher name *Let Gang*.⁵³ With a larger format than *BON* [A4 instead of A5], *LET* has a more professional look because, says Tunyaluck Techasrisutee, they studied book design and were even more influenced by B.Boyd's Characters' magazine *Manga Katch*. The first issue—published on July 2004 and sold 55 baht—includes interviews with Thai cartoonists conducted by Tunyaluck's sister. Amongst these was an interview with Thai independent comics pioneer Suttichart Sarapaiwanich who, states Tunyaluck Techasrisutee, was really famous at the time with the three first books of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* published by Tomorrow Comix [in 2000 for the first two volumes and 2004 for the third volume] (see also *Chapter 6.1*). Tunyaluck Techasrisutee states that Suttichart Sarapaiwanich is an important cartoonist because he created a new universe but mostly because he was experimenting with the page layouts; there was a “special issue” where he was experimenting on the different ways to tell a story. Three issues of *LET* were published, proposing more and longer comics—again under the influence of the Thai-originated magazine *Manga Katch*—and also a photo-novella because a student in Photography wanted to be part of the project. Tunyaluck Techasrisutee paid the artists from the Faculty with free meals, or trips to theme parks or to the sea.

Published in the third and final issue of *LET* in 2006 [pp.100-114], a 16-page short comics story titled *Sing Thi Rao Mai Khoei Jai* (“Things We Never Understand”) - *The Page Cannot be Displayed* by Thai cartoonist Eunjoo [pen name of Saritrong Turk] is remarkable in many respects (see Fig. 37). The story tells the bitter love relationship of a young woman and her seemingly cold and distant lover. She leaves on an emotional and inner journey that will take her through different forms of relationships, each drawn in a different style mimicking respectively

⁵³ The original website of *Let Gang* remains accessible at <http://www.letgang.co.nr/>

the American super hero comics style (see Fig. 38), the Shôjô [teenage female] manga style (see Fig. 39), the *Katun Lem La Bat* [one-baht comics] style (see Fig. 40) and the *Cute Brut* style (see Chapter 5.6) of Wisut Ponnimit during the early period of his series *hesheit* (see Fig. 41).⁵⁴ Saritrong Turk (personal communication, 2016) states that he wrote the story while studying for his Bachelor's Degree in Film. Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee invited him to draw a comics for *LET* and—as there are many genres and different styles in movies—Saritrong decided to explore various styles in comics form. Reading Fujiko F. Fujio's manga *Doreamon*, Akira Toriyama's *Dragon Ball Z* and Nation Edutainment's Thai-translated manga magazine *BOOM* while younger, he used an inking style inspired by Masakazu Katsura's manga *I's* for the overarching narrative of his framed story *Sing Thi Rao Mai Khoei Jai*. Not only playing with the constraint of iconic iteration [or the repetition of a single panel or a very limited set of panels, coined under the denomination *itération iconique* by French comics scholar Thierry Groensteen (1997)], Saritrong Turk explores—through the imitation of various styles—the issues of identity, belonging and alienation in a sentimental relationship but also in Thai comics. Like Suttichart Sarapaiwanich' series *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* (see Chapter 5.3 and Chapter 5.4), Saritrong Turk creates a composite graphic narrative where the main features of American, Japanese and Thai folk and alternative comics are made apparent and yet united in a single tale, echoing the statement of Poshyananda (2002) who argued that Thai artists “seemed to have a gift for synthesizing several styles into their own quintessential creations” (p. 231) leading to a “diversity and eclecticism” which became the hallmarks of modern Thai art.

In 2004, Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee sent the first issue of *LET* to *A Day* magazine in the hope of obtaining a positive review in the groundbreaking *indy* arts and issues launched in September 2000 by Wongthanong Chainarongsingha and other enthusiasts (see Chapter 6.1). Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee didn't get any feedback at first. It's only later that Wongthanong Chainarongsingha got back to him because *A Day*'s cofounder wanted an adaptation of the origin story of *A Day* in the form of a graphic novel. According to Karuchit (2014), after the first issue of *LET* was launched,

⁵⁴ The pages mimicking the style of Wisut Ponnimit haven't been drawn Saritrong Turk but by one of his friends who could render the childlike quality of Wisut Ponnimit's drawings (Saritrong Turk, personal communication, 2016).

Let's Gang was hired to draw the cartoon version of a best seller biography of Wongtanong Chainarongsingha, the founder of A Book Publishing (a major publisher of graphic novels). As a result, the name Let's Gang became known among cartoon readers (Tunyaluck, interview, 2008). (p. 102)

Tunyaluck Techasrisutee (personal communication, 2016) states that Let Gang developed the graphic novel based on a script, and additional information, provided by Wongthanong Chainarongsingha; the script retold the years preceding the creation of *A Day*, explained the system of crowdfunding, and focused on Wongthanong being the narrator of the tale. Titled *A Day Story Comic*, the graphic novel [in comics form] was published in 2005 by A Book, or the same year as Songsin's influential and highly successful graphic novel [long-form picture book] *ThuaNgok Lae HuaFai Nai KhwamBaKhleng AnMiRu SinSut (Beansprout & Firehead: In the Infinite Madness)* also published by A Book (see *Chapter 6.2*). Published by A Book and presented as a "Let Gang Production" with art mostly drawn by Kerrang, the *A Day Story Comic* graphic novel was reprinted in 2006 and in 2007, and published again in 2013 but in a 300-page new version completely redrawn by cartoonist Note who had made his debut in the first issue of *LET'S* in October 2007. Tunyaluck Techasrisutee (personal communication, 2016) states that the [first version of the] graphic novel took them a long time to create and taught him a lot about comic book production.

Strengthened by his experience on *A Day Story Book* and with the assistance of co-founder Nummon [pen name of Theerayu Srethapakdi], Tunyaluck Techasrisutee launched in October 2007 the first issue of the *LET'S* monthly magazines which he considers as his first professional publication. With an A4 magazine size and full-colour glossy covers, the *LET'S* magazines had a print run of 3,000 to 5,000 copies. The first issue gathered participations by Thai independent comics pioneer Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, Skan [as an illustrator and columnist], Badang, Nummon, Meisan, Moondog, Puck and The Duang [the last two cartoonists joining *LET'S* after the cancellation of Siam Inter Comic's magazine *Cereal Comix* in early 2007 (see *Chapter 6.2*)]. Tunyaluck Techasrisutee states that the cartoonists were then trying to leave the manga influence, keeping the manga storytelling but drawing with a more personal style. In an email interview, Tunyaluck (personal communication, 2014) wrote that "after the launch of *LET'S Comic*, the direction of the Thai comics scene changed to combine the Japanese manga

style with more art and design techniques. There were a lot of young illustrators rising and I think it pushed the Thai comics scene to explore more different styles than before.” On the issue of a distinctive Thai style in comics, Tunyaluck Techasrisutee (personal communication, 2016) also states:

It’s a tough question. I think there’s no Thainess [in the graphic style] now. Not yet. We are mixing cultures. Thai people mix cultures together. Each Thai cartoonist has his own style. There’s no Thai style like the manga style which uses a lot of panels. Thainess might be in the Thai language because there are many levels of meaning in the Thai language. In 10 or 20 years, the Thai [graphic] style will develop. We have to continue to work. Thai comics are not strong enough now; they have been through too many ups and downs during their history. I can see the style of manga, of *manwha* [South Korean comics], of American comics, of European comics. In Thailand, I don’t see it yet.

On the matter, LET’S co-founder Nummon (Table 3.2) states that Thai cartoonists study in arts-related faculties so their works have a unique personal style. He adds that comics in Thailand don’t have a clear [or definite] format, allowing people to create their own styles.

The *LET’S* monthly magazine lasted 16 issues and proposed serialized stories, including serialized stories by Puck and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich. Suttichart’s *Sun* [“Zero”] and Puck’s *Nai Samong Kap Nu HuaChai* [“Mr. Samong with Mouse HuaChai,” or “Mr. Brain and Mouse Heart”] were collected in 2008 under a pocket book format to become the two first graphic novels published by the company. These graphic novels [in comics form] were aiming at a target of 16-21 year-old readers, mostly Art and Design students in high schools and universities. They also aimed at the general bookstore trade rather than comics bookstores, and their distribution was made via the Amarin Printing and Publishing Company.

The pocket book format of Suttichart and Puck’s graphic novels led Tunyaluck Techasrisutee to adopt a bookazine format for *LET’S Comic*, the magazine replacing *LET’S* in 2009. From March 2009 till late 2013, the *LET’S Comic* magazine was published every two months, replacing long serialized stories by short stories and allowing more time for the publication of anthologies, art books and graphic novels. The first guest of *LET’S Comic* was Thai female cartoonist and illustrator Vic-Mon who studied Fashion Design in Milan (Italy) in

2012 and 2013 after graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Art, a Major of Visual Communication Design, and Minor of Illustration at Silpakorn University, Thailand (Table 0.1). The catchphrase on the cover of the first issue reads: “Samnakpim Katun Thai Naew Mai Rai Kit Jamgat” (or “Thai comics publisher with a new style without limitations”). Tunyaluck Techasrisutee states that they were indeed trying to do “comics in a new style” at the time, and that the “new style” has become “old” since then. In 2010, LET’S Comic Publishing released a voluminous monograph on the History of Thai Comics, written by Nirawan Kurathong and titled *Prawat Yor Cartoon Thai - A Brief History of Thai Comics and Graphic Novels*. Two years later, Tunyaluck Techasrisutee published a special issue titled *LET’S Comic: 5,137 The Experimental Space*.⁵⁵ The book is the result from the collaboration between Tunyaluck and a graphic designer. The thematic issue proposes 3D comics [by Formalin] and 3D glasses, paper models, photo-novellas, a “graphic novel” by Nambun printed with special “spot UV varnish,” a silent story [by Narm] and other experimental stories [by Sa-ard, Puck and The Duang amongst others]. The objective was to propose an “alternative concept and a unique approach in publishing.”

In January 2014, *LET’S Comic* became a quarterly bookazine, each issue built around a single unifying theme. As for September 2016, 28 issues of *LET’S Comic* were published, one being a special issue. The shift to thematic issues significantly increased the sales; during the first year [in 2014], the sales increased to 200%. Tunyaluck Techasrisutee explains the success by the greater ease in promoting and marketing the thematic concept on internet, and in promptly adapting to new trends. The first issue proposed a Zombie theme under the title *Let’s Comic of the Dead*, which could have become their best-selling issue if the blue print hadn’t been destroyed, preventing them from further reprints. Their best-selling *LET’S Comic* bookazine is the cat-themed issue. It is worth mentioning that another Thai-originated comics magazine played with the concept of issues centred on single unifying themes two years before *LET’S Comic*. In 2012 and 2013, the short-lived comics magazine *SOS Comics*—published by Nation Edutainment, [or NED] (Songwit Seakitikul, personal communication, 2016)—was an anthology gathering various cartoonists around a specific theme for each issue; *Love Never Dies* (February 2012), *Outlaw* (July 2012), *Manga Man* (October 2012) or *Mona Lisa* (2013). Contributors include Puck, [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and female cartoonist Vic-

⁵⁵ “5,137” is, in fact, the number appearing when reading the title “LET’S” upside down.

Mon who participated in three issues. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich and Vic-Mon also participated in 2010 to the second volume of the English-language anthology *Liquid City* gathering cartoonists from the Southeast Asian comics scene, and published by American independent publisher Image Comics.⁵⁶

Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee works full-time for LET'S Comic Publishing, assisted only by the graphic designer Paranat Supawantanakul. All the artists are paid for their stories which remain creator-owned. Tunyaluck wrote in an email interview (personal communication, 2014) that “there are three artists that must be in every issue;” cartoonists Puck, Sa-ard and The Duang. The sales of *LET'S Comic* “reach approximately 3,500 to 5,000 copies depending on the cover. Sometimes, when The Duang makes the cover art, we reach a print run of 10,000 copies. That’s the best-seller of our company.” Other regular artists—such as Davut, Note [Piruck], Nummon or Dio—take turns with stories drawn in their personal and recognizable styles. “We also have a column for a new face who will debut his [or her] first comics with us” writes Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee (personal communication, 2014). Not only proposing alternative and experimental issues, producing monograph and regular features on the History of Thai comics, establishing itself as an important venue for many contemporary Thai cartoonists (Tongpan & Weraskwong, 2016, p. 103), and considered by 15 out of the 16 of the cartoonists participating to this research project survey as playing a significant role in the recent development of Thai comics (Table 6.6), LET'S Comic Publishing also serves as a launching pad for many young creators. Note [Piruck] made his debut in the first issue of *LET'S* in October 2007 as the magazine’s first guest [Note considers that his first “professional” publication was *Egg Yolk* in *LET'S Comic* in 2012 (Table 20.0)]. Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee also mentions the debut of Nummon [pen name of Theerayu Srethapakdi] in *LET'S* (see also Table 20.0), Sa-ard’s professional debut with the graphic novel *Chai Phu OkDoenThang Tam Siang KhongTuaEng* (“The man who follows his own voice”) in 2011, and Munin’s debut in *LET'S Comic*.

⁵⁶ Contributions by Thai cartoonists Shari Chankhamma and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich were published in *Liquid City* Vol. 1, edited by Sonny Liew (Image Comics, 2008). Contributions by Thai cartoonists Vic-Mon, Shari Chankhamma and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich were published in *Liquid City* Vol. 2, edited by Sonny Liew & Lim Cheng Tju (Image Comics, 2010). Published in *Liquid City* Vol. 2 (pp. 58-74), Vic-Mon’s short comics *Red Balloon* deals with the topic of alienation and social conformity, and echoes thematically Toto’s graphic novel [long-form picture book] *Mu Bin Dai*.

Best-selling female cartoonist Munin [pen name of Munin Saiprasart] debuted in the column dedicated to new faces, in the first issue of [bookazine format] *LET'S Comic* published on February 2009 (Table 20.0). Writing and drawing psychological and sentimental “slice of life” stories about preserving and appreciating relationships (Table 4.1) with a fragile pencil-sketched line and muted watercolour,⁵⁷ her initial interest and motivation to draw comics was sparked by Banlue Sarn’s magazine *Kai Hua Roh* (Table 12.2). Born in 1988, she was reading Yoshito Usui’s manga *Crayon Shin-chan* and Fujiko F. Fujio’s *Doraemon* as a child (Table 13.1), and discovered Masami Nagata’s manga *Love Catalog*, Riku Kurita’s manga *Parent and Child of the Whale* and Miwa Ueda’s manga *Peach Girl* as a teenager (Table 13.2). She states that she was greatly influenced by *Love Catalog* and *Parent and Child of the Whale* which were manga telling stories of relationships between family, friends, and siblings (Table 13.3). They made her more sensitive to these topics and pay more attention to people around her, eventually leading her to write comics about family and relationships as well (Table 13.3). Munin also recognizes the influence of *hesheit*’s creator Wisut Ponnimit (Table 17.0), an artist renowned for his stories “about men and women and the things between them” (Schley, 2013, n.p.) and his feel-good character Mamuang. After earning a [Gold Medal] Graduate Degree in Architecture from Khon Kaen University (Table 0.1), she started her comics career in *LET'S Comic* and later published various works with To Share,⁵⁸ including her best-selling series *I Sea U* launched in 2012 and comprising five books and a special issue [as for October 2016] (Munin, personal communication, 2016). Due to its success, a television drama based on *I Sea U* is in development (Munin, personal communication, 2016). In January 2014, Munin launched her own independent publishing company named 10 Millimetres, because she believes in her dream and wants to make it bigger and more stable (Limp, 2016, p. 135). She also states that she wanted to propose stories that were rejected by other publishers, and to design the covers in her own style without modifying them for business reasons (Table 23.1). Sa-ard mentions that 10 Millimetres is now an inspirational publishing house—for lady-style comics with lots of emotion and extensive use of “white space”—offering new faces a place to collaborate (Tables 3.1 & 3.4). Today, he adds,

⁵⁷ Munin’s stories can be related to the genre of anime and manga called *nichijou-kei*. According to Toyoshima (2011), *nichijou-kei* “literally means ‘everyday life’ or ‘ordinary life’ [and is] often called the ‘slice of life’ by English-speaking manga/anime fans” (p. 341).

⁵⁸ Munin mentions she earned 6000 baht per chapter published in the bookazine *LET'S Comic* (Limp, 2016, p. 132).

there are a lot of people following this path. Munin's first book published by her own company is titled *Taeng Eng* ("self-made").

In 2011, LET'S Comic published Sa-ard [or Sa-art, pen name of Tanis Werusakwong] debut graphic novel [a collection of five thematically-linked short stories] *Chai Phu OkDoenThang Tam Siang KhongTuaEng* ("The man who follows his own voice"). Born in 1980, Sa-ard is seven years younger than Puck [born in 1984] and three years younger than The Duang [born in 1987]. Despite their difference in age, Sa-ard is part—with Puck and The Duang—of the dynamic artistic trio of LET'S Comic Publishing. His first short story was published in March 2008 in A Book's comics anthology *ABC Comic Volume 1: Seven Deadly Sins* (see Chapter 6.2),⁵⁹ five years before earning his Bachelor's Degree in Journalism and Mass Communication at Thammasat University (Table 0.1). In the meantime, he had begun studying Art but decided to drop from Communication Arts (Sa-ard, 2013, p. 48). Reading Takehiko Inoue's sports-themed manga *Slam Dunk*, Hiromu Arakawa's manga *Silver Spoon*, Osamu Tezuka's manga *Phoenix* [in Japanese: *Hi no Tori*], Mitsuru Adachi's manga *H2* (Table 13.2) and *Touch*, and Yusuke Murata's manga *Eyeshield 21* as a teenager (Gravett, 2016, p.112), he states that Japanese comics are his main source of inspiration for cartooning; they stimulated the imagination and made him want to be able to tell stories like Japanese cartoonists did (Table 13.3). He also used to trace the artwork and study the storytelling of various mangaka (Table 13.3), including Taiyô Matsumoto's artwork and camera angles which Sa-ard adapted to his own work (Table 13.7). He also read the Thai-originated comics magazines *CX [Cartoonthai Extreme]*, *Katch* and *Manga Katch*. He was inspired by works from Thai cartoonists Tapone [pen name of Chaiyan Suyawej, author of the manga-influenced version of *Kraithong*], Wisut Ponnimit [author of *hesheit*], SS [pen name of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, author of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*] and Kamla [pen name of Jeerasak Chamnansree, author of *Si-Gum (Sah)*]; they inspired him to conceive and draw comics as enjoyable (Table 12.7). Not particularly influenced by European comics apart from French cartoonist and illustrator Jean-Jacques Sempé (Sa-ard, 2013, p. 52; Table 15.1) and French cartoonist Nicolas de Crécy [also mentioned by The Duang], he is interested in their narrative and design elements, and adapts these to his own work where appropriate (Table 14.2).

⁵⁹ Even though, Sa-ard considers *Chai Phu OkDoenThang Tam Siang KhongTuaEng* ("The man who follows his own voice") as his first professional comics published (Table 20.0).

Persepolis—Iranian female cartoonist Marjane Satrapi’s graphic memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution—and *MAUS*—American cartoonist Art Spiegelman’s graphic memoir depicting his father’s experiences throughout the Holocaust—have had an important impact on Sa-ard. Sa-ard (Gravett, 2016) states that “it wasn’t until I discovered work like *Maus* or *Persepolis* that I understood the world of comics was much bigger than I imagined” (p. 132, italic in original). On Pulitzer prize-winning graphic novel, he also states that *MAUS* showed him how much power one comic book can have and how hard the comics writer has to work (Table 14.4). Gravett (2016) notes:

Sa-ard has combined his passion for nonfiction or documentary literature with cartooning in graphic reportages, or what he calls ‘Drawcumentaries.’ [Sa-ard states:] “The way I research these topics is similar to any documentarian. I read articles, conduct interviews, summarise key points, separate the facts, visit locations and conveys them on the basis of truth and accuracy. Comics have the power to make serious heavy topics more easily digestible.” He has work, for example, on with NGOs to cover issues like coal mining in the south of Thailand and the forced relocation of tribal people in the north. (p. 112)

Highly promising—and so far only—Thai voice in the blossoming international trend of comics journalism, Sa-ard was also rewarded for debut fiction *Chai Phu OkDoenThang Tam Siang KhongTuaEng* (“The man who follows his own voice”). The book earned the 2012 Bronze Manga Award during the fifth edition of the International Manga Award. The five short stories are described as “comedy dramas interwoven with lovable characters who are trying to make their innermost dreams come true while living their everyday lives” (International Manga Award, 2011b). The graphic novel—displaying Sa-ard’s recognizable and crispy G-Pen-drawn cross hatching line art—was selected by Thai independent comics’ godfather Eakasit Thairaat as the most representative of contemporary Thai comics (Table 3.5). Eakasit Thairaat also selected Sa-ard as one the most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades, stating that Sa-ard broke all the rules and is very fresh (Table 3.4). Sa-ard was also picked in the lists of Art Jeeno and Toma, two artists of the third generation of Thai independent cartoonists (Table 3.4). Travelling to Japan with his editor Tunyaluck Techasrisuttee to receive his award for *Chai Phu OkDoenThang Tam Siang KhongTuaEng*, Sa-ard addressed the audience during the ceremony. In his speech, he states that, in Thailand, Japanese manga is the goal to reach. He mentions that

Thai cartoonists could not find a unique style yet and were still discussing about what is Thainess. He adds that Thai cartoonists are working hard, and hopes that, one day, Thai comics will be as good as manga (Sa-ard, 2013, p. 63).

Like Munin, Sa-ard self-published his latest book (Gravett, 2016, p. 112). After serialization as a comic strip in the *Matichon* newspaper,⁶⁰ *Khropkhrua JengPeng* [“The JengPeng Family”] was collected in September 2016 by Kai3, an independent publishing company launched in 2014 by Sa-ard’s elder brother Pittaya [or Peataya] Werasakwong. Born in 1985 and graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Rangsit University (Werasakwong, 2014, p. 288), Pittaya Werasakwong launched the “Kai3 T-shirt-with-stories” brand of clothing in 2010, with t-shirts bearing the design of panda with “haunting-look” created in 2007 (Werasakwong, 2014, p. 6). Pittaya Werasakwong (2014) states: “I found that my work really sucked without any style of my own. Then I took Panda as my style” (p. 6). Self-published in January 2014,⁶¹ *Pandism: Virus Panda* is a voluminous English-language graphic novel [in comics form] with a style—and crude and “graphic” content—reminiscent of the *Cute Brut* artwork (see Chapter 5.6) of Wisut Ponnimit during the early period of his series *hesheit* (see Fig. 41). G-Pen-drawn and cartoony infected sexually overactive pandas take part in a biting satire of a society in which appearances and conformism dominate. In his foreword for his elder’s book, [Sa-ard] Tanis Werasakawong (Werasakwong, 2014, p. 6) writes:

My brother and I... [I think] we share something typically to be a comic writer. In other words, when we create a comic we barely think like those artists who care much about the aesthetics, but we think like those story-tellers who care most of how to recount a story beautifully.

Edited by Eakasit Thairaat—the godfather of the Thai independent comics scene—and co-edited by Sa-ard, Peetaya’s graphic novel was first sold on Kai3’s booth at the Jatujak Weekend Market

⁶⁰ Sa-ard is also the author of a comic strip series in *Giraffe*, a trendy free magazine published every two weeks by Banlue Group since early November 2014 (Pimpicha Utsahajit, personal communication, 2017). Female cartoonist Tuna Dunn has a comic strip series in the same magazine.

⁶¹ The eighth chapter of *Pandism* was previously published in Salmon Books’ first and only issue of the comics bookazine *YayYayYay* in 2011 (see Chapter 6.4). *Pandism: Virus Panda* also won the Bronze Manga Award at the seventh edition of the International Manga Award in 2014.

with the goal to give a chance for Kai3 T-shirt clients to read Peetaya's comics and for Peetaya's comic readers to discover and buy Kai3 t-shirts (Werasakwong, 2014, p. 283). The brand of clothing later developed with a second outlet opening in the Terminal 21 shopping mall, and by-products distributed in Central Group's B2S lifestyle stores. Other "panda-style" and alternative comics, and Sa-ard's *Khropkhrua JengPeng*, have subsequently been published by independent start-up Kai3.

Both Munin and Sa-ard also played an important role in the development of the popularity and visibility of Thai comics on internet. Prabda Yoon stated that "the Thai cartoon industry is not dead yet, but has actually become more active thanks to online cartoonists' new identity and diversity" (as quoted in Sankham, 2015, n.p.). According to debuting cartoonist Toma, Sa-ard can be counted amongst the online cartoonists who made the Thai comics industry more active (Table 3.1). Note [Piruck] states that creators such as The Duang, Puck, Munin and Sa-ard were able to meet their readers thanks to internet (Table 3.1). For his part, Sa-ard stresses out the impact of Munin, considering her as a cartoonist who grew up in the internet age and who was able to use blogs and Facebook to create a large fan club (Tables 3.1 & 3.4). According to Tongpan and Werasakwong (2016), the crucial milestone in the history of contemporary Thai comics came with the dawn of social medial communities (p. 99). In the beginning and with the Thai blog platform Exteen and web boards such as *Pocketonline*, Thai cartoonist artists hoped that their popularity or success through blogs would catch the eye of editors or publishers and lead to printed serialization of their works. However, note Tongpan and Werasakwong (2016), the breakthrough of new social network services—such as Facebook—in recent years has provided comic writers with new opportunities to achieve fame and recognition without having to rely on the support of editors or the need to have their work published any more (p. 99). On the matter, Norapoompipat (2016) states:

Thai graphic artists have carved out their share of fame, and new creators keep cropping up now that they can test the popularity of their craft online. Illustrators and witty individuals begin by showcasing their works, jokes and ideas on Facebook, achieving substantial commercial success in the process. Notable success stories of the past few years include Bear Girlfriend, Jay The Rabbit, Maa Jaa (Dog Please), Manee Mee Share

Figure 38 - Sixth page of the short comics story *Sing Thi Rao Mai Khoei Jai* ("Things We Never Understand") - *The Page Cannot be Displayed* by Thai cartoonist Eunjoo (pen name of Saritrong Turk), published in *LET 3*, p.105 (Bangkok: Let Gang, 2006). With layout and style, and English dialogs, mimicking American superhero comics.



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Figure 39 - Seventh page of the short comics story *Sing Thi Rao Mai Khoei Jai* (“Things We Never Understand”) - *The Page Cannot be Displayed* by Thai cartoonist Eunjoo (pen name of Saritrong Turk), published in *LET 3*, p.106 (Bangkok: Let Gang, 2006). With layout and style mimicking *Shōjo* [teenage female] manga.



Figure 40 - Ninth page of the short comics story *Sing Thi Rao Mai Khoei Jai* (“Things We Never Understand”) - *The Page Cannot be Displayed* by Thai cartoonist Eunjoo (pen name of Saritrong Turk), published in *LET 3*, p.108 (Bangkok: Let Gang, 2006). With layout and style mimicking *Katun Lem La Bat* [one-baht comics].



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Figure 41- Eleventh page of the short comics story *Sing Thi Rao Mai Khoei Jai* (“Things We Never Understand”) - *The Page Cannot be Displayed* by Thai cartoonist Eunjoo (pen name of Saritrong Turk), published in *LET 3*, p.110 (Bangkok: Let Gang, 2006). With layout and style mimicking Wisut Ponnimit’s *hesheit*.



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6.4 Salmon Books, Tuna Dunn and Art Jeeno: Third Generation Rising

Launched in late 2010 with the publication of a collection of 12 novellas by writer Jiraporn Wiwa, Salmon Books published its first comics-oriented book in June 2011. Titled *YayYayYay Vol. 1* with a subheading that reads in English “Another Comic Border,” the anthology bookazine reminds of the format of the quarterly publication *LET’S Comic* launched in February 2009, and of the content of Typhoon Books’ more radical and alternative anthology *MUD* launched in February 2008 (see *Chapter 5.6*). With a *Pandism* short story by Kai3 founder Pittaya Weraskwong (see *Chapter 6.3*) and participation by *LET’s Comic*’s regular contributors Note Piruck, Puck, and Pittaya’s younger brother Sa-ard, the first issue of *YayYayYay* also gathers nine other short stories by—mostly Exteen users and emerging—graphic designers and webcomics artists Wazin, Jiranarong, Thapat Kijrujipark, Champ, Error blog, Khom, dp, 3Land, as well as famed Thai *indy* illustrator Sahred Toy. Announcing on its back cover a quarterly frequency of publication with more “headhunted” debuting cartoonists to be discovered, *YayYayYay* was cancelled after its first issue published one month after the cancelation of *MUD* “due to high costs and not enough demand” (Prabda Yoon, personal communication, 2014). Founder of Salmon Books when she was 29 years of age and after gaining editorial experience at *A Day* magazine, Natchanon Mahaittidon (Pravattiyagul, 2014) remembers: “The first year our books were not even on the shelves! I think it has a lot to do with our ‘branding’” (n.p.). After a rocky start and according to Tongpan and Weraskwong (2016, p.103), the new generation of Banlue Sarn’s heirs eventually tackled the world of contemporary literature with resounding success through the establishment of Salmon Books.

One of the five subsidiary publishing houses of Banlue Publications with Banlue Sarn, Banlue Books, BunBooks and Natty,⁶² Salmon Books aims at high school and college students, as well as “teenagers and first-jobbers who need something that inspires them, something new; a content they have never experienced or got from other publishing houses,” states Pimpicha

⁶² Banlue Publications was officially registered for publication management in 2003. Launched in 2004, Banlue Books mainly focuses on pocket books of all types. Natty was established in 2009 as a publishing house specializing in Romance and Fantasy fictions. “To complement Salmon Books’ savory taste [...] for the trendy generations with sweeter flavors” (Utsahajit, 2014, p. 3), BunBooks was launched in 2013 and offers female-only illustrated romantic and lite books, and can be considered as “Salmon Books’ little sister” (Natchanon Mahaittidon, personal communication, 2014).

Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016). The Executive Director of Banlue Group (Utsahajit, personal communication, 2016) adds:

The development of Salmon Books is linked to the growth of a more trendy generation in Thailand. Some of our fans, when they grow up into teenagers, develop more areas of interest than just humour comics and comic books. So we thought we had to develop specific contents for them, broader than the area of comics, more specialized for the market of teenagers and first-jobbers. That's the origin of Salmon Books; we want our readers to keep coming back to us when they grow up. Whatever their age, they need to have our content around them. That's the organization of Salmon Books, Bun Books and Banlue Books; we want to expand our fan base.

Salmon Book editor-in-chief Natchanon Mahaittidon (personal communication, 2014) points out that Salmon Books isn't focusing on comics publishing as the company "actually offers less comics than other genres." Leading a publishing house "thriving for fast-paced outlooks on life and travels as well as unconventional, eye-catching artworks" (Pravattiyagul, 2014, n.p.), Natchanon Mahaittidon (personal communication, 2014) adds:

"Salmon," in my own view, means swimming against the main stream. It's good food for the brain (I want to make my reader grow up). Salmon is also the most popular fish (I want to make our publishing house popular and famous). I make all our books with that "salmon" idea.

Created to reach a "trendy generations with a thirst for creativity" (Utsahajit, 2014, p. 2) and "mostly sold in Bangkok and other urban areas of Thailand" (Pimpicha Utsahajit, personal communication, 2016), Salmon Books extensively relies on social medias for marketing because, states Natchanon Mahaittidon (personal communication, 2014), "we have no magazine, or TV channel, or radio station, or other media, that can convey our message and promote our books. Social medias are our main promotional channel because it has no cost, fast feedback, [...] and—as our readers live there—we can talk with them and know what they want, what they love, what they share." A little more than a year after the establishment of Salmon Books, Banlue Publications extended its strategic use of Internet, launching MiniMore [MiniMore.com] as a platform catered to the market of online contents, and on which independent publishing houses—

such as 10 Millimetres, Typhoon Studio, LET'S Comic Publishing or P.T.K Studio—propose their own contents. Pimpicha Utsahajit (personal communication, 2016) states:

I think it's the first web platform in Thailand where contents can be sold and bought. MiniMore allows you to upload your content and sell it online. The sellers can adjust the price by themselves. The format can be text, pictures, songs or others; all types of content can be published on that website. It's not like Ookbee Comics which focus on web cartoons.⁶³ Our target is different. The brand identity and design interface has to be very modern, and capture the new trends of the generation of first-jobbers, teenagers, designers. As far as I can see, webtoons in Thailand don't really focus on the style; they focus on the variety of content. [With MiniMore,] our position is different; we focus on branding. Some of our comic books, such as Jung's *Thai Saeng Thup: Dining by Incense Light* [first volume published in 2015], originated from MiniMore. [Jung] first published her work on our platform, chapter by chapter. Later, we gathered the chapters and published them as a book. There's also the function of redeeming extra-content for books, like for Tuna Dunn's comics.

Developed by MiniMore managing director Teepagorn Wuttipitayamongkol, the extra-content section allows readers to access features or chapters that are not printed in the books—due to several restrictions, including length, tone of content and other factors—by entering a code which appears on the back of the printed publications (Boonruang, 2015, para. 2). Readers can then get access to more content which is not available in the books they buy. Revealing the first encounter of two characters during a fanzine festival, an additional digital chapter to Tuna Dunn's comic book *Best Before*—published by Salmon Books in 2015 in English-language with Thai version in the page footers—is only available on MiniMore.com as a special feature to be redeemed after the purchase of the book provided with an access code. A digital chapter taking place in a festival of usually photocopied and hand-made publications might hold some irony.

As mentioned before (see *Chapter 6.3*), Tuna Dunn [pen name of Tunlaya Dunnvatanachit, born in 1993] was spotted through comics posted on her Facebook page.

⁶³ Ookbee, Thailand's largest online bookstore, founded Ookbee Comics as a web venue for new cartoonists to upload their works and earn income from a percentage of their work's total views (Tongpan & Werasakwong, 2016, p. 102).

Salmon Book editor-in-chief Natchanon Mahaittidon states that her company has two ways of selecting their authors. The first is to go through manuscripts that have been sent to Salmon Books. The other is to scout the internet “for well-versed bloggers and page administrators, and see if they want to work with us” (Natchanon Mahaittidon, as quoted in Pravattiyagul, 2014, n.p.). She further adds: “We don't take what [the authors] already put out on the internet; we develop new content with them.” Tuna Dunn (personal communication, 2014) confirms the development of new content for—and the involvement of Salmon Books’ editorial team on—her first book *I Like Like You* published in October 2013 when she was still 21-year-old:

I was not fully free to publish the pages how I wanted them to be. They let me draw the artwork and write the story but, in the end, it had to be scanned and tuned by the editors in order to be published. There were many restrictions like it had to be in Thai language and the title [in English language] must be easy to understand for Thai people.

Considering English language to be more satisfying for her stories (Tuna Dunn, personal communication, 2014; Norapoompipat, 2016, para. 2), her current style—evoking the *Ligne Frêle* style (“frail line style,” a contemporary style with disconnected “clear” strokes, derived from Hergé’s *Ligne Claire* style) used by French cartoonists François Avril, Dupuy & Berberian, and British cartoonist Andi Watson—came to her around her first year of college. On Belgian cartoonist Hergé and other Western influences, Tuna Dunn (personal communication, 2014) states:

Somebody once told me that my characters look like Tintin. I like Tintin. My brother owns a lot of *Tintin* comics so I read them as a child. [Yet] I'm not sure if Tintin influenced me or not but there's definitely a similarity in the face. The only source of international comics that I used to get are from my older brother. He lives in San Francisco and he usually sends me some graphic novels from time to time. The latest was *Asterios Polyp* by David Mazzucchelli as my birthday present. I really love it. I love the colors so much that I might try using more colors in my next book [which will be *Best Before*].

Her older brother also introduced her to Japanese comics through his collection of—mainly—action or comedy manga. The siblings also read mystery manga such as Shin Kibayashi

and Fumiya Satô's *The Kindaichi Case Files* [in Japanese: *Kindaichi Shônen no Jikenbo*]. Tuna Dunn (personal communication, 2014) states: "When I was younger I drew comics in manga style because it's probably the only style that I was aware of at that moment." As mentioned earlier, her "more Western style of narrative and jokes" (Norapoompipat, 2016, para. 2) came to her around her first year in college. While pursuing a major in Graphic Design in the Creative Arts Department at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, she introduced in her comics design elements learned during the courses; the use of white space, of colour, and of some elements of typography. Her work became more and more minimal as she tried "cutting down things and making everything simpler" (Tuna Dunn, personal communication, 2014), and evoked more and more the art of her favourite illustrator, French graphic designer Jean Jullien (Antalis Asia Pacific, 2016). Her stories are usually about relationships, exploring the subject of youth, nostalgia, and romance, with "unrequited love" as her most popular topic. Considering herself first and foremost as a graphic designer, Tuna Dunn has published three comic books so far; *I Like Like You* [2013], *Missed* [2014] and *Best Before* [2015], all published by Salmon Books and each respectively gaining a darker and more mature tone.

Like Tuna Dunn, Art Jeeno [pen name of Piyaphach Jeeno, born in 1987 in Chiang Mai] was discovered—and invited to publish a book—by a Salmon Book editor who was following his blog (Art Jeeno, personal communication, 2017). Graduated in 2009 with a Bachelor Degree from the Painting Division, Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University (Table 0.1), he started telling stories about youngsters' lives while he was still in high school. Art Jeeno (as quoted in Saengmanee, 2014) adds: "[I] kept it up in university - cartoons I shared on a blog - and I got a lot of good feedback. I use a lot of different techniques in drawing and watercolour, but my signature is in the way I let the readers decide for themselves how the stories should end" (n.p.). In the survey conducted for the present research project (Table 12.7), Art Jeeno mentions Kamla's *Si-Gum (Sah)* (see *Chapter 6.1*) among the series published in *Katch* magazine that he considers as being influential on his own work; Art Jeeno's first comic book *KlapLangHan: Be Right Back* published in 2011 by Salmon Books—as a comics memoir on the experiences of a Thai student in upper-secondary—follows the path of *Si-Gum (Sah)*'s original take on students' everyday life at the Faculty of Arts of Burapha University. Discovering *Manga Katch* and its series *Si-Gum (Sah)*, *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* [by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich] and *hesheit* [by Wisut Ponnimit], he

was surprised that Thai comics weren't similar to manga (Table 12.7). However, Art Jeeno's primary graphic influence was Takehiko Inoue's sports-themed manga *Slam Dunk* (Table 13.2); Art Jeeno states that he started drawing by imitating its art (Table 13.3). The alternation of heavily-detailed and dynamic sequences with scenes using watercolour or thick and messy brush strokes in Takehiko Inoue's manga *Vagabond* might also be considered as influential. On the matter, Salmon Bood editor-in-chief Natchanon Mahaittidon (personal communication, 2014) states that "Art Jeeno's work is realistic and looks like manga works such as Takehiko Inoue's *Slam Dunk* and *Vagabond*." Selecting the manga *Sunny* among his favourite comics (Table 16.1), Art Jeeno also mentions the impact of mangaka Taiyo Matsumoto. Art Jeeno states that Taiyo Matsumoto has a strange style of work and that, while reading more of Matsumoto's works, it led the style of his later works in new directions (Table 13.7).

After the publication of the first and only volume of *YayYayYay* in June 2011 and of the translation of Taiwanese illustrator Enzo's graphic novel [with two large panels and accompanying captions per page] *Discovery Love*, Art Jeeno's comic book *KlapLangHan: Be Right Back* was published in June 2011 by Salmon Books as the company's first "Memoir" (Jeeno, 2011, p. 288). The book, with expressive strokes and muted watercolours, recounts the experiences of a Thai student in upper-secondary and in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. A second volume was published in March 2012, followed in October by *D Day*, a comics fiction containing three short stories about different youngsters drawn with crispy and hatching lines reminiscent of Japanese mangaka Katsuya Terada. Granted a Bronze Manga Award in 2014 at the seventh edition of International Manga Award (Saengmanee, 2014), the book is followed in 2014 by the first volume of *Juice* which was also granted a Bronze Manga Award in 2015 at the eighth edition of International Manga Award. Fifth comic book by Art Jeeno published by Salmon Books, *NOW* appears to be the author's most *alternative* book. Published in 2013, the 112-page [11,4cm by 15cm] small format graphic narrative is completely silent and recounts the dream-like quest for belonging and purpose [with some reference to the door sequence in Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*] of a lonely young woman in a deserted and blank location. Art Jeeno's pencil-drawn art reminds here of the expressive lines of another of his graphic influence; Austrian artist Egon Schiele (Table 17.0). If Art Jeeno first considered the self-publication of *NOW* (Table 23.1), Salmon Books expressed the wish to publish it. Editor-in-chief Natchanon Mahaittidon (personal communication, 2014) states that the first printing of

NOW sold out [quickly] because the print run was low. *NOW* was so risky, and we didn't trust in its sales. Silent comics are not popular on the Thai book market. But eventually it sold out. [Even if the print run] was low, I think it's a good surprise and quite unusual in Thailand.

In 2013, Salmon Books also published Art Jeeno's travelogue *Tokiao Koe* ["wandering in Tokyo"] - *Drawdocumentary in Japan* recounting his trip to Japan with famed Thai *indy* illustrator Sahred Toy, and in 2014 Art Jeeno's non-fiction work diary *Out/Line* uncovering the cartoonist's creative process and professional routine.

Developing "fast-paced outlooks on life" with travelogues and other fiction or non-fiction books, Salmon Books also bet on the *comic essay* genre, or "the term used in Japan to describe autobiographical comic strips relating real-life anecdotes from their author's life" (Toonkamthornchai & Virojphan, 2014, chapeau). Plariex [pen name of Patcharakan Pisansupong, born in 1986 in Bangkok] describes *Chiwit 18-* ("Life under 18," or *18- Life*), the book which she sees as her first professional publication, as a pocket book that isn't really a comics but more of a Japanese style *comic essay* (Table 20.0). Published in 2012, *18- Life* recounts the anecdotes of her life under 18 while *Office Sista*—her second *comic essay* published in 2013 by Salmon Books—relates Plariex' life in the law firm from which she resigned to become a professional illustrator. Considered to be at the forefront of the *comic essay* genre in Thailand and with a Facebook following of nearly 300,000 fans (Toonkamthornchai & Virojphan, 2014, chapeau), Plariex also conquered foreign markets. Three of her books were translated in Taiwanese (Table 8.0) but not thanks to her popularity or the quality of her work, Plariex humbly states (Table 8.1); they were translated because they are *comic essays* and the market for this type of book is booming in Taiwan. Her art usually evokes the *Q-style* [standing for "cute style"] with colourful and *super deformed* [or SD] characters.

With a completely different style where hatching and expressive pencil-drawn lines play with numerous shades of grey, female cartoonist Jung [pen name of Supitcha Senarak, born in 1992 in Bangkok] uses a technique reminiscent of works by North-European alternative cartoonists such as Joanna Hellgren, Amanda Vähämäki or Joanna Lorho. As mentioned earlier, her first comic book originated from Banlue Publications' web platform MiniMore. The first

volume of *Thai Saeng Thup: Dining by Incense Light*—relating a romance between a young woman and the ghost of the previous tenant of her flat—was serialized chapter by chapter on MiniMore before being published as a book in 2015 by Salmon Books. Graduated in Communication Art and Design from the Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University (Table 0.1), Jung states that Internet allows cartoonists to find their own voice more easily and more quickly, providing more channels for self-expression and experimentation (Table 3.2). Forming an informal group with Plariex and Jung (Table 7.5), female cartoonist Toma [pen name of Chayanan Pakpol, born in 1992 in Bangkok] also owes her professional debut to Salmon Books which published her 416-page graphic novel [in comics form] *Magical Koen Nantaporn* (“super magical Nantaporn”) in March 2016 (Table 20.0). It is worth mentioning that her first short story was published in the alternative comics anthology *Paradox Dimension* published in 2014 by Rampan Publishing, along stories with Puck (see *Chapter 6.2*), Tapone (see *Chapter 4.3*), [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul (see *Chapter 5.5*) and Toma’s comics teacher Suttichart Sarapaiwanich.⁶⁴ Graduating in 2014 with a Bachelor Degree from the Faculty of Digital Arts, Rangsit University (Table 0.1), Toma followed the Graphic Novel course taught and created by the author of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*. Officially launched in 2013 but introduced since 2012 as part of a comics class (Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2017) in the Faculty of Digital Arts at Rangsit University, the course appears to be unique in undergraduate programs in Thailand, and may participate actively in the development of the next generation of Thai independent cartoonists. Edited by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul and Songsin Tiewsomboon, the self-published, free and short-lived *indy* magazine *Fukkarnann*—with two issues published respectively in August and December 2015—displayed the works of some students of the course (Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2017). Along with this editorial project which failed to find sponsors to support it, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul and Songsin Tiewsomboon launched the RadioMANGA online radio show in October 2015. The three cartoonists co-host the 2-hour monthly show which invites regularly other comics professionals—such as Puck, The Duang or Eakasit Thairaat—for interviews. In March 2016, they interviewed David Lloyd—British cartoonist and co-creator of the influential graphic novel *V for Vendetta*—who was in Bangkok to hold master classes and

⁶⁴ The comics anthology *Paradox Dimension* was produced in collaboration with the Thai alternative music band Paradox.

comics workshops with local comics professionals and students of the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University.⁶⁵

Salmon Books isn't the only venue for emerging Thai cartoonists with a strong personal voice. In August 2012, the Foundation For Children [in Thai: MunnithiDek] published the full-colour comic book *Bokbig* by female cartoonist Prema-Ja [pen name of Prema Jatukanyaprateep, born in 1983] in association with the Cartoonthai Institute. The Foundation For Children had already published the first comic book of The Duang in 2006 [*Clart Room*] and his comic books *Dek Chai Tukkata* ["doll boy"]: *The Lesson of a Doll Boy* and *The Memo of Fullstop* [with Fam] in 2007, as well as one of Puck's first comic books [*Dao Thueng Dao*, "From Star to Star"] in 2008 (see *Chapter 6.2*). Karuchit (2014) notes that in 2003

the Foundation For Children (FFC) established the Cartoonthai Institute to help create constructive cartoons for children, and develop Thai cartooning to become sustainable enough to serve the public [...]. The Cartoonthai Institute has since published several cartoon books that are successful both critically and financially. (p.91)

Karuchit (2014) further states that recently the Cartoonthai Institute "has published more cartoons that attract adolescents, many of which also won national awards" (p. 93). With regard to international awards, Prema-Ja's *Bokbig* won the Gold Manga Award at seventh edition of the International Manga Award in Japan in 2014.

A humorous series of "slice of life" stories about Prema-Ja's pet dog Bokbig, the content of the book developed out of the thesis Prema-Ja did while studying decorative art at Silpakorn University (Saengmanee, 2014, para. 9). The early stories appeared first on her Exteen blog and later published in a series of independent anthologies published by BlackDog Studio under the editorial lead of Thai graphic designer and cartoonist Satita (Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, personal communication, 2017). The two anthologies titled *Meow Meow*, with cat-related stories, were respectively published in October 2008 and March 2009, with a "special postcard" drawn by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich offered with the first volume. Regular guest on the project, the creator of *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* also provided special illustrations for the three volumes of

⁶⁵ The RadioMANGA interview of David Lloyd is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLVouBYI33s>

BlackDog Studio's anthologies *Doggy Doogy*, featuring Prema-Ja's *Bokbig* among other stories by emerging "Exteen" cartoonists. Respectively published in October 2007, March 2008 and March 2010, the "comic about doggy" anthologies featured illustrations or stories by special guests such as Puck, Nonworld [author of *2BQ*], Puck, Tongkarn, Wisut Ponnimit and Munin. After her debut in 2004 with illustrations for the children's book *Vera and Victor Discover Thailand* published by Sweden's Wirdheim Culture AB (Saengmanee, 2014, para. 12), Prema-Ja's professional breakthrough happened much later. Prema-Ja (Saengmanee, 2014) states:

Someone from the Cartoonthai Institute saw the [*Bokbig*] drawings in an exhibition and asked about them. I was planning to study animation techniques in France, though, so I had no time to turn it into a full comic book. (para. 9)

After graduating from the applied arts-centred Ecole Pivaut in France where she created a *Bokbig* animated short film as her end of studies project,⁶⁶ Prema-Ja returned in Bangkok in 2010 where she has since been an instructor at King Mongkut's University of Technology in Thonburi (Saengmanee, 2014, para. 13), and completed the awarded comic book *Bokbig* published by the Foundation For Children and the Cartoonthai Institute with a first and confident print run of 5,000 copies.

Also noteworthy are the independent productions of Thai-American and Bangkok-based cartoonist and free-lance illustrator Kathy McLeod—who writes a weekly autobiographical series titled *That's What She Said* for BK magazine, and self-published the *comic essay* books *A Field Guide to Bangkok* and *There's No One New Around You* (Sananvatananont, 2016)—and of more secretive Thai female cartoonist Shari Chankhamma. If an anthology of short stories of Wisut Ponnimit's *hesheit* was published in English language under the title *Him Her That* by the New York City and Tokyo-based publisher Awai Books, Shari Chankhamma appears to be the only Thai cartoonist to work directly for the North-American independent comics market. She contributed, alongside with Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, to the first volume of the English-language anthology *Liquid City* gathering cartoonists from the Southeast Asian, edited by Sonny Liew and published by American independent company Image Comics in 2008. Her short story *Flooded House, Flying House* (*Liquid City Vol. 2*, Image Comics, 2010, pp. 150-157), with Thai-related

⁶⁶ Animation film available at <http://www.ecole-pivaut.fr/projets/bokbig-2407.html>.

fantasy setting, dealt with the issues of alienation—through hybridity and adaptation—and of the divide between poor and rich. She also contributed to the second volume (*Liquid City Vol. 2*, Image Comics, 2010)—alongside with Thai cartoonists Vic-Mon and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich—where she is introduced as follows:

Shari Chankhamma (Thailand) is a sequential artist and illustrator. Her works have been published in Thailand, the UK and US, including several stories in *The Mammoth Book of Best New Manga: Vols. 1-3* and the graphic novel *The Clarence Principle*, released by Slave Labor Graphics. (p. 324, italic in original)

Colourist since 2012 [of the American comics series *The Fuse* and *Sheltered* for Image Comics, and *Kill Shakespeare* for IDW Publishing], Shari Chankhamma released her English-language and manga-influenced graphic novels *The Clarence Principle* [script by Fehed Said] in May 2007 and single-authored *The Sisters' Luck* in September 2010, both published by independent American comic book publisher Slave Labor Graphics Publishing.

As a final remark, let's note that Fullstop Book, in partnership with Bobby Swingers [who is none other than Songsin Tiewsomboon], published in early 2016 an anthology titled *In Your Sleep* and gathering 12 short stories [in comics form or in highly illustrated texts] by 12 different Thai artists. Almost 10 years after the publication of *Walking Stories II* which gathered six artists from the first generation of Thai independent artists [with Tongkarn, Toto, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, Songsin Tiewsomboon, Songwit Seakitikul and Somkid Paimpiyachat] and second-generation cartoonist The Duang (see *Chapter 6.2*), the dark fantasy-oriented anthology *In Your Sleep* reunites artists from the first *indy* generation—such as Eakasit Thairaat, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich, Songsin Tiewsomboon and [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul—with artists from the second *indy* generation—such as *LET'S Comic* first guest Vic-Mon and *MUD*'s regular collaborator Terawat Teankapasith—as well as cartoonists from the third *indy* generation discovered on blogs by Salmon Books—such as Jung and Art Jeeno—or brought to light by the Cartoonthai Institute with artist Prema-Ja. With contributions from Thai independent scene's godfather Eakasit Thairaat to emerging alternative female cartoonist Jung, the beautifully crafted book displays the ripening fruits obtained by the constant cross-pollination of Thai Comics Art and its regularly thwarted maturation as a medium for self-expression over the past 20 years.

7. Conclusion: A Matter of Style

When asked about what may differentiate Asian, and especially Southeast Asian, creators and their works as a whole from Japanese mangaka and other Western works, Malaysian-born cartoonist and *Liquid City* anthologies editor Sonny Liew (as quoted in Kean, 2008) replies:

I think the divisions are a little less clear these days, with comics from different regions influencing each other more and more. I think creators in Southeast Asia are part of that trend, absorbing a multitude of influences whilst trying to find their own voices. (n.p.)

In his foreword to the first volume of English-language anthology *Liquid City* gathering cartoonists from the Southeast Asian comics scene, Sonny Liew (Liew, 2008) also states:

Personally I'm not certain what being Southeast Asian really implies; some arbitrary demarcation of geography perhaps, or maybe a recognition of shared roots in culture and history. Whatever the case, the comics communities in the region have at least this in common: the search for self-identity, for sameness and difference, whilst caught in the cross current of influences from America, Japan, Europe and elsewhere. (p.5)

In the survey conducted for the present research project, the 16 participating cartoonists were asked if they considered that the Thai comics community, like other Southeast Asian comics communities, was “in search for self-identity, sameness and difference.” Thirteen out of 16 respondents agreed, two respondents [Eakasit Thairaat and Nummon] disagreed, and one cartoonist [Seng Songwit Seakitikul] didn't answer the question (Table 5.0). Disagreeing with Sonny Liew's statement, Eakasit Thairaat (Table 5.1) pragmatically argues that it is past the age of trying to find one's identity. Eakasit adds that in this day and age, you say what you think; you can see this online where anyone with any kind of artwork, pretty or not, draws what they want without caring. If people like it, then it becomes popular. And if not, that's that, states Eakasit before concluding: new kids, with high confidence, don't search for their identity because they know it from the start. Note Piruck (Table 5.1)—who agrees with Sonny Liew—states that the Thai comics identity is currently in the making because Thai comics are beginning to have their own space and system. He adds that the Thai comics community will never have a system like in Japan or America, and that it all depends on how much the comics market will grow. Note

Piruck' statement echoes an aforementioned declaration of Fullstop Book founder Somkid Paimpiyachat who could not define Thainess but stated that if Thai artists continue to work on Thai graphic novels—through sustainability and repetition—then their long continuous work would be defined as Thainess. LET'S Comic founder Tunyaluck Techasrisutee had a similar answer, stating that he don't see any distinctive Thai graphic style in comics; "In 10 or 20 years, the Thai [graphic] style will develop. We have to continue to work. Thai comics are not strong enough now; they have been through too many ups and downs during their history." Adding that Thainess might reside in the Thai language because the latter comprises many levels of meaning, he also stated that Thai people are mixing cultures together. On the matter and agreeing with Sonny Liew, [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul (Table 5.1) states that Southeast Asia is a melting pot of culture—in Thailand, Buddhism and Brahmanism are mixed—and that this is reflected in the cartoonists' works. However, he adds, the artwork is a mix of Japanese, American and European styles; "Thai style is not a drawing style but a way to think about how to tell a story." For his part, Thai artist Preecha Raksorn pointed out the Thainess he perceives in the atmosphere of Tapone's works and in the author's choice of stories; Tapone conveys Thai lifestyle and beliefs, Buddhist doctrine and Thainess through his comics, Preecha stated. The Duang declared that there is no unique style of line drawings in Thai comics since each artist has his [or her] own style. Yet he argued that—while Western comics focus on superheroes and Japanese comics focus on gaining excellence in a certain field—Thai comics are unique in their presentation of daily-life issues or objects. For Nummon (Table 5.1)—who disagrees with Sonny Liew—there's already a distinctive Thai style but we just can't see it, him included. During his speech addressed to the audience of the International Manga Award ceremony while in Japan, Sa-ard mentioned that, unlike Japanese mangaka, Thai cartoonists didn't find a unique style yet and were still discussing about what is Thainess in Thai comics. During our group interview with [Seng] Songwit Seakitikul and Songsin Tiewsomboon, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich ultimately declared: "The question of style is the hardest question of our lives."

During the aforementioned discussion, Songsin Tiewsomboon stated that "sometimes Thai people who want to create Thai comics in Thai style consider that Thai style defines itself by the use of a Thai object." Provided examples of "Thai objects" were farmers, elephants, buffalos, or the character of Hanuman from the *Ramayana*-inspired Thai epic *Ramakien*. Songsin then argued that—in those comics— "only the object can be linked to Thai style [because] the

pictures are drawn in manga or western styles.” Songsin however responded that, ultimately, “Thai cartoonists don’t have a Thai style because Thai people absorb everything. By doing so, they are themselves.” Suttichart then concluded that “Thai style is the mix of everything in our own personal styles.” As mentioned earlier, his final remark echoes two sentences written by Apinan Poshyananda stating that, if Thai artists were obliged to pursue Western methods wholeheartedly, they “seemed to have a gift for synthesizing several styles into their own quintessential creations. Diversity and eclecticism thus became the hallmarks of modern Thai art.” Poshyananda also argued that foreign influences served as catalysts in the development of styles in Thai modern art which finds its unique character in the main thread of eclecticism. Not confined to modern Thai art, eclecticism is also to be found in the Thai way-of-life; Poshyananda noted that the Thai way-of-life might appear confusing to a foreigner discovering a society where one “eats McDonald’s food for lunch and *som tam* [...] for dinner, wears fake Gucci and post-punk clothes to merit-making ceremonies”. For his part, Mulder evoked a “skill in pragmatic adaptation” or Thai people’s ability to actually accommodate indigenous and foreign cultural elements and practices in a unique way.

Can we perceive that “skill in pragmatic adaptation” in Thai comics? Have Thai cartoonists accommodated indigenous and foreign graphic and narrative elements in a unique way? A comparative study of drawing styles from other Southeast Asian comics scenes should be undertaken to obtain a clear answer. Let us note however that this research project revealed the freedom and boldness with which Siamese—and later Thai—cartoonists created eclectic and composite graphic works, and characters. The woodcut strips “with accompanying verse” published in 1907 in *Chotmai Het Saeng Arun* and Chan Suwanabun’s comic strips series *Pong and Priaw* (1929) and *Nai Pong Pongpang and Niyai Lokanit* (1931) illustrating the moral of *Khlong Lokanit* proverbial poems set themselves as the first examples of a long and dominant production of graphic narratives influenced in their format by Western comics but drawing their content from Thai traditional literature. In the long-form comics adaptation of the highly popular folktale *Sang Thong* published in 1932 and 1933, Sawas Jutharop appropriated the American character Popeye to create Khun Muen, a successful and localized alter ego who will play the role of the clown in numerous other graphic adaptations of Thai traditional tales set in the Ayutthaya period. Moreover, Sawas Jutharop introduced mechanical men—probably copied from 1935 strips of *Tiny Tim* by American cartoonist Stanly Link—to play the part of the

magical soldiers raised by Kawi in the 1936 comics adaptation of the *Lakhon* dance drama *Honwichai Kawi* set in former times. Also noteworthy was the fascinating anthropomorphic character LingGee resulting from the merging of the characters of Popeye and Mickey Mouse by Wittamin in his 1935 comic strip series *LingGee Phu Khayi Yak*. Equally captivating were the famous characters Nu Lek and Loong Krong created by Adirek Ariyamontri around 1955; inspired by Mickey Mouse, Goofy and other Disney anthropomorphic characters, Ariyamontri's versions were given fully human bodies. Furthermore, Por Bangplee appropriated the American superhero comics *Captain Marvel Jr.*—with its character and costume—to create a localized Thai alter ego named Atsawin Sai Fa in 1957. Por Bangplee also created a Thai version of the Silver Surfer yet didn't set the superheroic action in large cities—like in numerous American comics—but in a more rural environment evoking the Thai countryside. The “skill in pragmatic adaptation”—or the ability to actually accommodate indigenous and foreign cultural elements and practices in a unique way—finds here its full expression. It also does in the *Cartoon Likay* genre established and mastered by cartoonist extraordinaire Prayoon Chanyawongse from the late 1930s till the early 1970s. By amalgamating some specific conventions of *Likay*—a highly popular and eclectic Thai theatrical form well suited to impart political messages through its loose structure and subversiveness—with the hybrid comics medium, Prayoon Chanyawongse established a unique and composite comics genre where he could effectively address contemporary social and political concerns within epics and folktales set in former times.

As shown in this research project, there are interesting similarities between Prayoon Chanyawongse's *Cartoon Likay* genre and Suttichart Sarapaiwanich's *indy* comics *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*. Prayoon Chanyawongse's eclectic genre of *Cartoon Likay* revealed an appeal for an aesthetic of interruption and for a composite production in order to discuss the social, cultural or political situation of Thailand between the late 1930s and the early 1970s. Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the 1997 *Tom Yum Goong Crisis*, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich addressed the issue of globalization and questioned the Thai way-of-life through a story set in a distant future, and by creating a composite style borrowing from European, American and Japanese influences. Prayoon Chanyawongse relies on *Likay*, indigenous folktales and an insider's point of view. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich relies on social science fiction, foreign comics influences, and on an external [foreigner] point of view. In Chanyawongse's *Chanthakorop* serialized in 1938 or in Sarapaiwanich's *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* published exactly 60 years later, both Thai artists fully

rely on their “gift for synthetizing several styles [or art forms] into their own quintessential creations.” Both do so as “independent” creators, and in order to question the Thai society of their respective times. Moreover, Suttichart Sarapaiwanich didn’t simply synthesized Japanese, American and European influences into his own quintessential creation *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*; he also revealed by doing so the eclecticism of Thai modern urban culture while paving the way for the development of “diversity and eclecticism” as hallmarks of modern Thai comics.

The present research project reveals how Suttichart Sarapaiwanich’s *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent*—by breaking with the tradition of Thai-centred comics; by displaying a personal and self-reflexive style borrowing from American, European and Japanese comics traditions rather than from manga only; and by offering an external and satirical commentary on Thainess—sets itself as the first Thai *alternative* comics series. Created in the aftermath of the *Tom Yum Goong Crisis*, during the Thai *indie* craze in the mid-1990s, and along the path laid down by Eakasit Thairaat and, the series originated in the comics magazine *Katch*, a publication launched in November 1998 by Thai *indie* music producer Boyd Kosiyapong. The attitude of the latter towards comics—by not forcing artists to draw in the manga style or for mass production but by letting them express their own voices—ignited the “freedom of style” in the Thai comics scene. With *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* shortly followed by Wisut Ponnimit’s *Cute Brut* series *hesheit* and Kamla’ *Si-Gum (Sah)*, the short-lived magazine *Katch* and its derivative publication *Manga Katch* empowered the first generation of Thai independent artists such as Songwit Seakitikul and Songsin Tiewsomboon, and inspired new editorial projects—like *Cereal Comix* or the magazines *BON*, *LET*, *LET’S* and *LET’S Comic* by editor Tunyaluck Techasrisutee—whence a second generation soon emerged. Fuelled by new stimulating *indy* monthlies such as *Summer* and *A Day*, the second generation—composed of young rising illustrators and designers joining a global community of comics creators on the Internet—explored a broader range of topics and styles, combining the manga style with more art and design techniques. Developing comics styles of their own, they inspired, in turn, a third generation burgeoning on blogs—and thrived by a budding internationalism—in the early 2010s. If it fails to address their precarious financial and professional situations (Tables 6.0 to 8.1) and despite its title *Thai Comics in the Twenty-First Century: Identity and Diversity of a New Generation of Thai Cartoonists*, the present research project ultimately reveals the unique character and the regularly thwarted development of three generations of Thai independent and alternative cartoonists over the past 20 years.

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Appendices

In July 2016, I sent a survey via email to 25 Thai cartoonists which were selected as being representative of the contemporary Thai comics scene (see below for selection criteria). Sixteen cartoonists answered the questionnaire consisting of 105 questions (Tables 0.1 to 24.0). All the cartoonists who answered the survey formally agreed that their answers could be published in the present research project, and in resulting academic publications. At the request of the respondents and in order to ensure a complete freedom of expression on some sensitive issues, answers to a limited series of questions remain anonymous. Under each question displayed in the tables, the related answers of all the cartoonists have been gathered in order to compare their responses and observe similar comments or differences among these comments. The answers are sorted in alphabetical order by author pen names (or by first name if the artist doesn't use a pen name). The pen names—followed by the first name, last name, gender ['M' for male and 'F' for female], date and place of birth in Thailand—of the 16 Thai cartoonists who answered the questionnaire are as follows:

01. Art Jeeno: Piyaphach Jeeno (M). April 9, 1987. Chiang Mai.
02. Chart [or SS]: Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (M). June 30, 1972. Bangkok.
03. Eak: Eakasit Thairaat (M). May 25, 1973. Lopburi.
04. Jiew: Prawit Mongkolnowrut (M). February 21, 1965. Bangkok.
05. Jung: Supitcha Senarak (F). July 4, 1992. Bangkok.
06. Munin: Munin Saiprasart (F). April 12, 1988. Khon Kaen.
07. Note [or Note Piruck]: Piruck Moratop (M). October 8, 1986. Bangkok.
08. Nummon: Theerayu Srethapakdi (M). October 6, 1979. Bangkok.
09. Plariex: Patcharakan Pisansupong (F). March 31, 1986. Bangkok.
10. Preecha Raksorn [no pen name] (M). July, 5, 1985. Suphan Buri.
11. Puck: Tripuck Supawattana (M). November 7, 1984. Bangkok.
12. Sa-ard [or Sa-art]: Tanis Werasakwong (M). November 11, 1990. Nakhon Ratchasima.
13. Seng: Songwit Seakitikul (M). November 15, 1972. Hat Yai (Songkhla Prov.).
14. Toma: Chayanan Pakpol (F). March 14, 1992. Bangkok.
15. Tongkarn: Valaikorn Samathakorn (F). September 29, 1971. Bangkok.
16. Vic-Mon [or Mon]: Piengpitch Sartsasi (F). July 24, 1985. Bangkok.

Tables 0.1 to 0.6: Curriculum

Table 0.1 - Please describe below your complete education curriculum (formation, faculty, type of degrees). With years if possible.

Art Jeeno: Bachelor's Degree, Painting Division, Faculty of Fine Arts, Chiang Mai University.
Chart: Bachelor's Degree, Division Communication Art and Design, Silpakorn University. Academic year 2536/1993.
Eak: Bachelor's Degree, Liberal Arts, Communication Art and Design, Dhonburi Rajabhat University.
Jiew: Architecture, Silpakorn University. Academic year 2529/1986.
Jung: Communication Art and Design, Faculty of Decorative Arts, Silpakorn University.
Munin: First Class Honour, Gold Medal, Architecture Graduate, Khon Kaen University.
Note: Bachelor's Degree, Faculty of Decorative Arts, Department Communication Art and Design, Silpakorn University.
Nummon: Bachelor's Degree, Faculty of Architecture, Private Assumption University, Faculty of Architecture, Rangsit University.
Plariex: Bachelor's Degree, Communication Art, Thammasat University.
Preecha Raksorn: Fine Arts, Faculty of Painting Sculpture and Graphic Arts. Started in 2547/2004 and ended in 2551/2008.
Puck: Bachelor's Degree, Faculty of Decorative Arts, Department Communication Art and Design, Silpakorn University.
Sa-ard: Bachelor's Degree, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Thammasat University. Academic year 2556/2013.
Seng: Bachelor's Degree, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang KMITL. Last academic year 2537/1994.
Toma: Bachelor's Degree, Rangsit University, Faculty of Digital Arts. Last academic year 2014.
Tongkarn: Department of Interior Architecture, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang. Last academic year 2536/1993.
Vic-Mon: Bachelor of Fine Art, Major of Visual Communication Design, Minor of Illustration, Silpakorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. 2003-2007. Certificate of Fashion Design, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Milan, Italy. 2012-2013.

Table 0.2 - During your main studies, did you ever follow specific courses on cartooning?
 Yes/No?

Yes: Note, Puck, Toma

No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

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Table 0.3 - If yes, could you describe the content of this (these) course(s) and in which faculty/institution they were held?

Note: In my third year there was an elective that taught every step of cartooning from short stories to publishing the final work.

Puck: I learned cartooning directly from a cartoon artist (Suttichart Sarapaiwanich) who taught me about coming up with a story, panel layout, as well as techniques and tools.

Toma: There's a course about comics (manga) at the Faculty of Digital Arts, Rangsit University.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

Table 0.4 - Did you ever follow extra-curricular cartooning classes? Yes/No?

Yes: Sa-ard, Seng

No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eakasit, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha, Puck, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

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Table 0.5 - If yes, could you describe the content of this (these) course(s) and in which institution they were held?

Sa-ard: When I was younger, in middle school, I went to an arts cram school. They taught techniques like how to use speed lines, outlines, drawing human proportions, and various facial emotions. They didn't go into much detail about the story or story-telling.

Seng: I went to a short (5 day) training course run by the company I used to work at (B.Boyd's Characters). They taught us how to use our tools, story-telling, and we practiced writing for the instructors to comment.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

Table 0.6 - Which university/faculty or art schools would you recommend to an aspiring Thai cartoonist and why?

Chart: Department: Computer Arts, Faculty of Digital Arts at Rangsit University because they teach animation and there's a course dedicated to comics and graphic novels drawing.

Eak: I don't have enough info to make a suggestion.

Jung: I might suggest they further their studies abroad (Japan) because currently Thailand probably doesn't have any direct education routes.

Munin: The Faculty of Media Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi because from my experience most illustrators and people in the cartoon business graduated from there. They have a variety of teaching systems such as inviting alumni who are cartoonists to

share their experiences and offer advice.

Note: No specific suggestion. I think it depends on the individual.

Nummon: Any University with a Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Visual Arts/Visual Communication because it involves drawing and communication with pictures.

Plariex: Don't have any suggestion because there's no specific course.

Puck: I recommend Silpakorn University because I graduated there. And I think it's different in the way of teaching with a system in which seniors, who are cartoonists, are invited back to tell their experience, guideline (way to be a cartoonist).

Preecha Raksorn: Faculty of Communication Arts of any institution.

Sa-ard: Communication Arts at Silpakorn University because it should give them foundations in many arts that can be used in cartooning. Many graduates have become cartoonists. There is a specialized course in cartooning. Friends there should help introduce skills to one another.

Seng: Faculty of Communication Arts of Silpakorn University, Faculty of Digital Arts of Rangsit University because it has a specific course and a teacher working in the field.

Toma: No specific suggestion.

Tongkarn: Any institution might fit because the cartoonist doesn't need to learn a lot of theory. To draw a lot and have life experiences is better for a cartoonist.

Vic-Mon: No suggestion and I think there's any formation which focuses seriously on comics. There are some courses, more serious, about illustration.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Jiew

Tables 1.0 to 5.1: General Considerations on Thai Comics

Table 1.0 - Most of the contemporary Thai comic books tend to be composed of short stories or self-contained chapters. Do you consider it might be linked to a Thai tradition of short moral stories, folk tales and epics subdivided in episodes? Or linked to a Thai tradition of magazines and anthologies (*Wiratham, Puan Katun, Katch, SOS Comics, LET's Comic...*)? Or to something else?

Art Jeeno: No they aren't linked. It depends on the publisher and reader. With few readers it isn't possible to publish long stories or the publisher will become bankrupt.

Chart: I think it's linked to the business style that still isn't an industry, leaving little space for Thai cartoons. Writing long stories won't satisfy the domestic business issues. This is why there are more short stories that end in one volume. It's an easier decision for readers unlike long stories where it's unsure when the next volume will be released or where they can be purchased.

Eak: They aren't linked. The stories are short because long stories require greater dedication and demand which can be unstable, making it easier to write short stories that are easier to finish and easier to buy.

Jiew: Noted it before but didn't pay much attention.

Jung: No.

Munin: I think they are linked because most Thai cartoons or articles are usually short and end in one episode. Most comic books are cartoon anthologies. This is to make it more accessible, easy to read, and without a recurring obligation. This in part makes it more popular. It could also be because there aren't many writers that write long stories.

Note: I think it's more linked to working style. Working on a long story is harder. It's not linked to the system. Thai cartoons aren't yet an industry because most writers work alone or in a pair.

Nummon: I think there are short stories or one-shots because Thai cartoon magazines aren't released regularly enough to create a series.

Plariex: I don't think there's a link. I think it's a universal pattern.

Preecha Raksorn: No. I think it's because short stories use less energy than long stories. However, there are many Thai cartoons that are long stories based on classic literature or Thai things.

Puck: Personally I don't think they're linked. In fact, it's because the writing system where writers work alone and magazines are released once every three months or at best monthly. It's unlikely to write a long story because readers might not be able to follow the story. I think it's best to make short one-shot stories.

Sa-ard: I don't think they're linked. Cartoon artists or Thai cartoon publishers aren't likely to be influenced by local folklore than they are by Japanese cartoons. It's only because the short story format is easier to sell in the current book market.

Seng: I don't think it reflects traditions or fables but more the interests of the author. Or it could be more a restriction from the publisher. The reason why they are short stories is because there aren't opportunities to write long stories as they aren't supported by the publisher.

Toma: I think it's not related.

Tongkarn: I don't think so.

Vic-Mon: I don't think it's linked to Thai tradition but linked to the style and ideal of magazines like *Let's* and *SOS Comic* that don't run long stories anyway. So it's necessary to write short stories.

Table 2.0 - In *The Uphill Climb to Reach a Plateau* (2014), Dr. Warat Karuchit wrote that Wisut Ponnimit is “exemplary of the alternative style of Thai comics with his series *hesheit*, incorporating untidy, childlike drawing styles and unstructured, little or no dialogue storytelling.” Do you agree with his description of the style of alternative Thai comics? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Chart, Sa-ard

Blank: Jiew

Table 2.1 - If not, with which aspect(s) of his description do you disagree? In your own words, how would you describe the style of alternative Thai comics?

Chart: *hesheit* didn't present childlike innocence but presented images that reflected the writer's ideas. I didn't care about tidiness giving it a rawer and fresh feeling.

Nummon: The style of Wisut Ponnimit is one of the various alternative styles of Thai comics.

Puck: Personally if the artwork and topics brought up in the content mesh together, that's an alternative comic. If the artwork isn't unique and the content repetitive, like adventures and fighting, even if it's in an alternative magazine I would still consider it mainstream.

Sa-ard: I disagree with that entire statement. Thai alternative comics should be an area to express variety in artwork and content that is different from the mainstream. It has beautiful, proportionate, and standard artwork. It is influenced mainly by Japan in both artwork and storytelling with positive content.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Seng Songwit, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

Table 2.2 - If early Thai comic books (1930s to 1950s) tended to rely on accompanying texts and Thai poetry, contemporary Thai comic books rely less on text and have “little dialogue storytelling.” Do you consider it is due to the influence of the “story manga” technique developed by Osamu Tezuka where the narrative text was reduced to increase reading speed?

Art Jeeno: Related.

Chart: Modern Thai comics are influenced by manga that focuses on word balloon dialogue unlike older Thai comics that were influenced by Western picture books that use text boxes

rather than dialogue.

Eak: Yes.

Jiew: They shouldn't be related because it's like this in almost every story, not just comics.

Jung: Yes.

Munin: Personally I'm not familiar with that person's work so I can't conclude if there is an influence. However, as a writer that uses few words in their comic, letting the images tell the story, it's something that comes naturally to a writer that doesn't like to read a lot of characters, prefers cinematic story-telling over plays with lots of dialogue. Therefore, I think it's a matter of taste and personal perception.

Note: I think there was a time when Japanese comics were very influential in Thailand. The impression from reading those manga was that it had fast, powerful story-telling that impacted the reader.

Nummon: Yes.

Plariex: I never read the older comics but I think modern comics are influenced by the Japanese style.

Preecha Raksorn: I'm not sure about this. I think it depends on the individual writer and their point of view for their own work whether they use images or words. However, most writers also read comics so there might be some absorption or inspiration from that.

Puck: I think there's a part but it might not be directly linked to Osamu Tezuka because newer alternative comic writers are influenced by the media and many different comics writers.

Sa-ard: Yes.

Seng: I agree because Japanese comics by Tezuka Osamu are widely distributed. Especially hero comics *Masked Rider*, *Super Sentai* and reached the peak of popularity with *Doraemon* in around 1980-1981. It became a foundation of storyboarding, reading, technique, and writing for Thai comics.

Toma: Yes, because the later generation of writers are influenced by Japanese manga.

Tongkarn: I think it's true that manga is more influential on story-telling than older Thai comic writers.

Vic-Mon: I strongly agree.

Table 3.0 - In an interview (*The Sunday Nation*, 11/10/2015), Prabda Yoon, cofounder of the Thai comic anthology *MUD* and vice-president of PUBAT, declared that "the Thai cartoon industry is not dead yet, but has actually become more active thanks to online cartoonists' new identity and diversity". Do you agree with his statement? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Chart, Eak, Nummon, Puck, Seng

Blank: /

Table 3.1 - If yes, who would be the online Thai cartoonists playing a major role in that development?

<p>Art Jeeno: I think the media misunderstands online comics. In fact, I think Khun Prabda Yoon might be referring to cartoonists in general.</p> <p>Chart: I haven't seen anyone playing that role.</p> <p>Jiew: I don't know.</p> <p>Jung: Jod 8riew and Ratom.</p> <p>Munin: Munin (I'm referring to myself).</p> <p>Note: I don't have knowledge about business, but I know that online you can be famous and earn an income. It makes it possible for writers to meet their readers, for example The Duang, Munin, Puck, Sa-Ard.</p> <p>Nummon: I think it's lively because writers have more avenues. However, when talking about the Thai cartoon industry we have to talk about income. I think we are at a turning point and we need to see if and how much we can use this vigour to improve the industry.</p> <p>Plariex: I don't follow anyone in particular but when I think of online Thai cartoonists I think of the comics in the web/Facebook pages.</p> <p>Preecha Raksorn: I'm not sure because I don't follow online comics but I think there are many talented writers that aren't officially published.</p> <p>Sa-ard: Munin because apart from writing comics on their own page creating a large fan club, they also created a publishing house giving new faces a place to collaborate.</p> <p>Toma: Sa-ard (https://www.facebook.com/saartanis)</p> <p>Tongkarn: I'm not sure what you mean by online cartoonist so I can't answer that, but I think that printed comics (magazines, pocket books) are what keeps Thai comics alive.</p> <p>Vic-Mon: I think the popular pages nowadays use cartoons as just one component, such as Ee Jiab, Jay the rabbit, Fan Mee to attract people. There's an increase of cartoons with short captions and calling them comics. I personally wouldn't call them comics.</p> <p>No answer: Eak, Puck, Seng</p>
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Table 3.2 - In the same article, Thai cartoonist Art Jeeno stated that "local cartoonists were developing more unique drawing styles". According to you, why younger Thai cartoonists are developing more unique and personal styles?

<p>Art Jeeno: Because we don't have as strong a foundation as manga, this gives everyone the freedom to create their own style.</p> <p>Chart: Because of the advancement of the internet we can see more works from around the world. There are more influences. More than before when there were only comics and manga.</p> <p>Eak: Because they have seen more and are more courageous. Readers are also more open-minded than previous generations.</p> <p>Jiew: Because they have more opportunities on internet.</p> <p>Jung: The internet makes it easier and quicker to find one's self. There are more channels to</p>

express yourself from a younger age, enabling them to continue trying different things.

Munin: Writers must have a clear identity in terms of story and illustration. It is one value that will lead to acceptance. It is also a personal style that comes from repetition until proficient. They must also believe that their uniqueness can best communicate and convey the story they want to tell.

Note: It might come from the idea that we want to be unique to the point that we are afraid to be similar to others. Many might start drawing by using an artist's style because they like the artwork and use that as a model. Naturally one day when the time comes you want to move away from the model.

Nummon: The purpose of art has always been to affect the viewer through the artist's identity. Comics use artistic skill to tell a story. Thai cartoonists study in arts-related faculties as well so the works they create have a unique personal style. The need to create something different is also related to the creation of personal styles. Along with the fact that comics in Thailand don't have a clear format, allowing people to create their own styles. When readers see the work they absorb some of that and when they decide to become a cartoonist they create their own style. These are the overlapping factors.

Plariex: Because on internet they are more open to experimental works and have space to show their work.

Preecha Raksorn: I think that creating a unique identity is a means to leave a lasting impression and is an important part of making that cartoonist's work stand out. Fundamentally nobody wants to create something that doesn't stand out so they try to find a unique style.

Puck: It might be because we know that creating our own style is better than following someone else's. In the end people will remember the uniqueness more than just the fun.

Sa-ard: Cartoonists used to be influenced by either American or Japanese comics, but in the world of the internet there is access to more works. Cartoonists can now combine their preferences with wider works from around the world. Readers are also more receptive of different art styles too (different from when Wisut Ponnimit started writing *hesheit*).

Seng: It should be because when there are more writers and artists the comics that people remember are the ones that are clearly unique.

Toma: To make their work different from the others.

Tongkarn: I agree and disagree. It's true that famous Thai cartoonists all have their own unique artwork (which is part of why they are famous) but at the same time I've taught art at a private university for many years and found that more and more students want to be cartoonists. These students stick to the Japanese style to the point that I can't tell their works apart. Even when I advise them to find their own style they think that this is what they want to draw.

Vic-Mon: Because the modern trend only promotes the hipster style that looks cool and are well-received. Works that truly focus on story aren't promoted and don't interest Thai people because it doesn't represent the cool lifestyle.

Table 3.3 - Do you consider yourself as being part of a generation of Thai cartoonists forming a “new wave” on the Thai comics scene? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Munin, Puck, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Eak, Jiew, Jung, Nummon, Note, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Toma

Table 3.4 - According to you, who are the 3 most important Thai cartoonists of the last two decades? And why do you consider them as being important?

Art Jeeno: Wisut Ponnimit (Tam), Sa-ard, The Duang

Chart: The Duang, Wisut, Songsin. Because they were able to create unique comic styles that were well-received and influential to later generations.

Eak: Songsin who found new ways for Thai comics. The Duang who drew attention to Thai cartoonists. Sa-ard (from the new wave) who broke all the rules and is very fresh.

Jiew: Arun Watcharasawad.

Jung: Wisut, Songsin, The Duang are artists that were published in many volumes and created many works inspiring many people.

Munin: 1. Wisut because he pioneered alternative Thai comics, created a clear character for himself both in story-telling and artwork, inspiring Thai cartoonists. He improved to the point where he was accepted in many countries, especially in Japan. 2. The Duang because he became a professional cartoonist at a young age, very skilled and never stops improving. He’s stable and dedicated to his work. 3. Art Jeeno.

Note: Eakasit Thairaat [Eak], Suttichart [Sarapaiwanich] and Songsin. Actually there’s more like Wisut, Seng because this group of artists are independent. Their works were different and unique. Reading them wasn’t like reading Japanese comics. They created a new generation of writers like The Duang, Puck (Traipak), Sa-Ard and may others that were inspired by their seniors.

Nummon: Wisut Ponnimit; *hesheit* opened up drawing styles. Nop Witunthong and Buncherd Chaemprasert. *The 13th Dagger [Meed Tee Sib Sam or]* was inspiring because it was a Japanese-style mainstream Thai comic. The Duang who made Thai comics peak.

Plariex: Not interested in any particular individual.

Preecha Raksorn: For me, khun Taopone’s work had a Thainess to the atmosphere and choice of story. He managed to convey the lives, beliefs, Buddhist doctrine, and Thainess into many of his comics such as *Takraw Look Mai*, *Krai Thong*, *Han Suu* or *Phii Narok Krub*. Most importantly his work is truly Japanese manga style for me.

Khun Wisut’s work stands out in many ways both story and artwork reaching the masses and is popular enough to draw Thai people into reading his work. It could be said that his work isn’t self-defined and depends on how the reader values the work. Also, for me, reading his work is relaxing.

Khun Mangkorn Soraphon for personal reasons. I’ve liked his work since I was young and was

an inspiration showing me that there are Thai cartoonists that are as skilled as those from Japan. In fact, there are many more comics and cartoonists, but this is all I can remember off the top of my head.

Puck: 1. Suttichart Sarapaiwanich 2. The Duang 3. Eakasit Thairaat.

Sa-ard: Wisut / Eakasit / Munin – Khun Wisut created works that broke the mould of traditional aesthetics. His artwork can be blended with art exhibitions. He created characters that were internationally accepted. / Eakasit showed us that Thai comics have the potential to become Hollywood movies. / Munin reflects a cartoonist growing up in the internet age, using blogs and Facebook to create a fan base for ladies' comics. Then they created a publishing house for lady-style comics with lots of emotion and space. Today there are lot of people following this path.

Seng: Suttichart Sarapaiwanich (SS), originator of alternative works.

Eakasit who made comics that crossed over to other media (film, screen play, art design for sets and characters).

Wisut Ponnimit (Tam) who turned his work into merchandise for the general public.

Toma: Sa-ard, Suttichart (sorry I can only think of two) because their artwork and stories are interesting, changing the image that Thai comics have to be traditional.

Tongkarn: Songsin / The Duang / Wisut Ponnimit because of their outstanding artwork. Their works sold well and were widely popular.

Vic-Mon: Suttichart, author of *Joe [the Sea-Cret Agent]*, because I consider him the true pioneer of alternative comics. The graphic novel became popular because of Songsin. Eakasit brought comics to the film industry.

Table 3.5 - If you had to choose one Thai comic book that would be the most representative of contemporary Thai comics, which one would it be?

Art Jeeno: *hesheit* by Wisut Ponnimit.

Chart: *Si-Gum (Sah)* by Jeerasak Sammanasi [pen name: Kamla].

Eak: *The Man Who Follows His Own Voice* by Sa-ard.

Jiew: I don't have.

Jung: *hesheit* by Wisut Ponnimit.

Nummon: *Shockolate* by The Duang

Plariex: I don't have.

Preecha Raksorn: *Ogre King*.

Puck: *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* by Suttichart Sarapaiwanich.

Sa-ard: *5,137*, an anthology published by Let's Comic.

Seng: *My Mania* by Eakasit Thairaat.

Toma: No book in particular.

Tongkarn: *hesheit* by Wisut Ponnimit.

Vic-Mon: There are many sorts of comics in Thailand. I can't pick just one.

No answer: Munin, Note

Table 4.0 - With the transformation of Bangkok from “a green tropical city into a concrete jungle” (*Inside Thai Society*, Niels Anders, 2000), its ever-changing landscape and the tensions created between Thai tradition and modernity, do you consider that many contemporary Thai comics are dealing with the topic of angst generated by the modern city life? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Note, Plariex, Seng, Toma, Vic-Mon

No: Jiew, Jung, Puck, Sa-ard

Blank: Munin, Nummon

Additional comments:

Note: Stress causes problems and conflict, writers are also part of society that is trying to adapt and use these problems in their work.

Preecha Raksorn: Comics might be a small part in people’s relaxation.

Tongkarn: I think the answer to this is subjective. I think contemporary Thai comics might help release the aforementioned stress. It also represents the heart of the writer and the reader.

Table 4.1 - According to you, what are the main topics regularly addressed in contemporary alternative Thai comics?

Art Jeeno: Negative side of society.

Chart: Violence, crime and love because writers usually start when they’re teenagers.

Eak: Satire of society topics.

Jiew: Use of popular topics.

Jung: Thai society problems inside Thai society.

Munin: Happiness of Life and viewpoint about happiness.

Note: Social problems, teenagers, views about various aspects of existence.

Nummon: They take a side of opinion, not black or white, good or bad.

Plariex: Can’t really notice any specific topic.

Preecha Raksorn: I’m not sure because each writer has his own topics to communicate.

Puck: Stories of minority who are disregarded and the dark sides of Thai society.

Sa-ard: Seriously, there are many different topics, but majority will be stories about the way of life of city dwellers.

Seng: Story about everyday life and choose some topics that are interesting and mix some reality and fantasy together.

Toma: Status of the nation and society.

Tongkarn: Teenagers and imagined fantasy.

Vic-Mon: Comics are not present only under the book format, they participate with the audience on social network too. That makes the audience follow their work.

Table 4.2 - What are the main topics regularly addressed in your own comic books?

<p>Art Jeeno: Simple story close to my one experience.</p> <p>Chart: Alienation and a search of a place for the character in various situation or society.</p> <p>Eak: Satire of society and bring the reader together so we don't face the problem alone. And give power to the reader.</p> <p>Jiew: Deep story in the human heart.</p> <p>Jung: Life, family.</p> <p>Munin: Preserving and appreciating relationships.</p> <p>Note: Very simple stories that we disregard in life. And pay attention to them.</p> <p>Plariex: Stories about everyday life or specific topics about my own point of view.</p> <p>Preecha Raksorn: My story <i>Silence</i> is not about silence.</p> <p>Puck: Social problems, teenagers problems, and looser that try to survive in society.</p> <p>Sa-ard: It changes all the time.</p> <p>Seng: Questions or doubt about everyday life.</p> <p>Toma: State of the country/society.</p> <p>Tongkarn: Simple life, optimistic, and pay attention to little stories and about "organic" culture/food.</p> <p>Vic-Mon: About update the new episode every week.</p> <p>No answer: Nummon</p>

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Table 5.0 - In the Southeast Asian anthology *Liquid City* Vol. 1 (Image Comics, 2008), editor Sonny Liew stated: "Personally I'm not certain what being Southeast Asian really implies; some arbitrary demarcation of geography perhaps, or maybe a recognition of shared roots in culture and history. Whatever the case, the comics communities in the region have at least this in common: the search for self-identity, for sameness and difference, whilst caught in the cross current of influences from America, Japan, Europe and elsewhere." Do you agree with his statement that (Southeast Asian and) Thai comics are in search for self-identity, sameness and difference? Yes/No?

<p>Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon</p> <p>No: Eak, Nummon</p> <p>Blank: Seng</p>

Table 5.1 - If not, with which aspect(s) of this statement do you disagree?

<p>Eak: It's past the age of trying to find one's identity. In this day and age, you say what you think. You can see this online where anyone with any kind or artwork, pretty or not, draws what they want without caring. If people like it then it becomes popular. If not, that's that. New kids</p>

Tables 6.0 to 8.1: Situation of the Thai Comics Scene

Table 6.0 - In an interview (*The Sunday Nation*, 11/10/2015), Art Jeeno stated that while Thai cartoonists “have become more independent and have the freedom to develop different styles, they still face financial instability as most of them work as freelancers and often need a second job.” Do you agree with his statement? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: /

Blank: /

Table 6.1 - In the artbook *bake a cake*, Seng (Songwit Seakitikul) also mentions the fact that most of Thai cartoonists must rely on a second job because of the low income of in the Thai comics industry. He mentions Thai cartoonists working as teachers, illustrators, designers or in publishing companies. Are you working as a fulltime cartoonist or do you need to have a second job (and which one)?

Art Jeeno: Illustrator.

Chart: In the beginning it was my only primary job. Later on I had other related work to supplement that. These days I mainly teach. It wasn't a matter of the manuscript fee being too little to live on but because the space to distribute work in actual print has decreased. That and I don't think that distributing my work online is enough to make a living.

Eak: Apart from comics, I'm a full time creative at an advertisement agency and write screen plays for extra income. I also teach character design and sometimes direct commercials, short films, or full length features. Having many channels of income is most secure.

Jiew: Illustrator for magazine and pocket books.

Jung: Writer and artist/illustrator for various printed publications.

Munin: I have another job, printed publications.

Note: I'm freelance for design drawings.

Nummon: I have another job. Illustrator and architecture design.

Plariex: There was a time I did illustrations for magazines and wrote comics on topics I didn't want to in a monthly magazine just so I had an income each month. I sometimes illustrate product advertisements for agencies on my page.

Preecha Raksorn: I also have to work on another job, as a graphic designer.

Puck: I work on various jobs, I design shirts, do illustrations, work for hire and paint walls and create my own goods to sell.

Sa-ard: I have other work such as commissions, character design, shirts, posters, but all in comic style.

Seng: I have also another work, drawing illustration and character design.

Toma: I have another job, as a freelance.

Tongkarn: I have another jobs as well, illustrator, teacher, lecturer for workshop, event organizer.

Vic-Mon: Illustrator for Jemsai Publishing and draw storyboard for advertising but the income as a cartoonist is enough to make a living. But I have another job because I have a lot of connections and I don't want to turn them down).

Table 6.2 - If you have a second job (or more), could you tell what are the proportions of your different jobs incomes? [NOTE: for this question, responses will remain anonymous and answers will be randomly shuffled]

Cartoonist 1:

Income as cartoonist: 30 %

Income from all the other jobs: 70 %

Cartoonist 2:

Income as cartoonist: 60%

Income as illustrator: 40%

Cartoonist 3:

Income as cartoonist: 90-100% (because work is not regular, cartoon drawing and writing can be 90-100%) and sometimes 0%.

Cartoonist 4:

Income as cartoonist: 70%

Income as freelancer: 30%

Cartoonist 5:

Income as cartoonist: 40%

Income from shirt design: 30%

Income from illustrations and goods sales: 30%

Cartoonist 6:

Income as cartoonist: 65%

Income from illustrator for hire: 35%

Cartoonist 7:

Income from copyrights on illustrations: 50%

Income from drawing for ad agency and cartoons in magazines: 45% (but another artist was hired for the job)

Income from self-produced goods: 5%

Cartoonist 8:

Income as cartoonist: 10%

Income from graphic design, retouch/edit pictures, logo design, and all works related to arts: x%

Cartoonist 9:

Income as cartoonist: 20 %

Income in design company (animation): 80 %

Cartoonist 10:

Income as cartoonist: 10 %

Income as illustrator: 60%

Income in architecture design: 30%

Cartoonist 11:

Income as cartoonist: 50%

Income as illustrator for printed matter: 50%

Cartoonist 12:

Income as cartoonist: 80%

Income from design (sticker design and sales): 15%

Income as publisher and editor: 5%

Cartoonist 13:

Income as cartoonist: 50%

Income as illustrator: 35%

Income from various events: 15%

Cartoonist 14:

Income as cartoonist: 10%

Income as designer/illustrator: 20%

Other incomes (main activity): 70%

Cartoonist 15:

Income as cartoonist: 5 %

Income in company advertising: 70%

Income in writing 25 %

Cartoonist 16:

Income as cartoonist: 40%

Other incomes: 60%

Table 6.3 - Do you consider that the economic situation of professional cartoonists has improved, deteriorated or stabilized in Thailand during the last two decades?

Art Jeeno: Stable.**Chart:** Declining.**Eak:** It has improved only for those who are already famous. It's still difficult for most.**Jiew:** Declining.**Jung:** Improving.**Munin:** Improving.**Note:** Overall and from my experience, I think it's stable. There are few whose works are popular enough to earn a secure income from comics alone. Mostly they have extra jobs.**Nummon:** Declining.**Plariex:** I don't know but I've heard that older writers had less money. And that now there's

more money.

Preecha Raksorn: It has improved but not enough.

Puck: Got worse, it is still difficult to make a living solely as a cartoonist.

Sa-ard: Improving.

Seng: Only a little better but the problem is that the income is not regular.

Toma: Improving.

Tongkarn: Personally I think it's improved because there are opportunities to work in conjunction with other jobs such as product illustration, workshop instructor, and appearing in events as an artist.

Vic-Mon: It's improved. Both grounded artists with fame and amateur artists receive a variety of work. There are many cartoonists that were overlooked in this research that exported their works without a care for the Thai market. Many are now well off.

Table 6.4 - Depending on your previous answer, what are the factors that led your economic situation [to improve] or [to deteriorate] or [to stabilize]?

Eak: Thai comics boomed and quieted down due to the change in consumption by the media during the film age.

Chart: The security of carrier.

Jiew: Businesses monopolized the market and writers had no leverage.

Jung: Have many ways to present themselves.

Munin: The pay is not too low and supplemental income from other sources is available.

Note: I think the financial security of this job is bad to begin with so I think it's always been this way.

Nummon: Cartoon and printing in Thailand are not easy to sell.

Plariex: It's possibly because comics are more widespread with more readers resulting in more people taking up the profession. For instance, when my work gets made into a pocket book and I get a percentage it's a large sum of money. If compared to when I writing chapters, it used to be even more but in truth it isn't very much. Other jobs, such as illustrations for an agency, paid almost as much as the copyright for my first book.

Preecha Raksorn: Thai comic consumers are so few that you can't make a living out of it. The income is so little that some cartoonists have to find other jobs that pay better.

Puck: When people earn enough for a living and have some savings, when they have time to consume entertainment without having to worry about their livelihood, when everything goes well, then art will blossom.

Sa-ard: More people read and accept comics to the point where they can be used in a variety of ways in the age where communication through imagery is becoming more important. Especially online, whether it be product presenters, LINE stickers, or serious subject matter like the law.

Seng: I think today reading and media consumption (not only comics) is being led by Social Network causing reduction in other forms of reading.

Toma: Contemporary comics have artwork and stories that resonate more with the readers / more avenues to sell your work.

Tongkarn: I think because the options for artists have increased from before.

Vic-Mon: Being able to sell your work to any country without being tied to the Thai market.

No answer: Art Jeeno

Table 6.5 - Do you consider that the development of a more urban/wealthy/trendy young generation in Bangkok participates to the development of the Thai comics market? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Tongkarn

No: Chart, Note, Puck, Seng, Toma, Vic-Mon

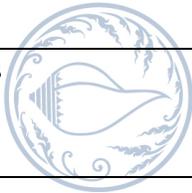
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Table 6.6 - Do you consider that the creation of LET'S Comic publishing played a significant role in the recent development of Thai comics? Yes/No? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Yes: 15 answers

No: 1 answer

Blank: /



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Table 6.7 - Do you consider that the movie adaptation of *My Mania* by Eak (Eakasit Thairaat) [under the title *13 Beloved* or *13: Game of Death*] in 2006 played a significant role in increasing Thai comics awareness to Thai people? Yes/No? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Yes: 10 answers

No: 5 answers

Blank: 1

Table 6.8 - Do you consider that the recent apparition of publishers such as Salmon Books, Fullstop Book or 10 Millimetres reveals a significant and positive development of the Thai comics market? Yes/No? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Yes: 12 answers

No: 3 answers

Blank: 1

Table 6.9 - Do you consider that the Thai comics market is still growing, is stabilized or is declining?

Art Jeeno: Stable.

Chart: It's still growing, but without any clear direction and sustainability. This is because there isn't a common goal. Everyone is just satisfying the businesses.

Eak: Declining.

Jiew: In the short term, because the owner of the market has a monopoly.

Jung: Growing.

Munin: Growing.

Note: Growing.

Nummon: Declining.

Plariex: Growing, but more online and easy to read. Many people new to comics have never read a comic book before but read these because it's free, or because some social network recommended it, or through comic web pages.

Preecha Raksorn: I think it should still be growing because I see many good Thai comics being released. Although I'm not sure whether they sell well.

Puck: Steady but starting to worry.

Sa-ard: On the publishing side it's about to stop growing as is the trend of print media. The online side is gradually getting better.

Seng: Growing slowly.

Toma: Still growing.

Tongkarn: I'm not sure but if you had asked me that question 5-10 years ago I would have told you it's growing.

Vic-Mon: Growing up but only for one group of cartoonists, that's why...

Table 6.10 - Do you consider that the space allowed to Thai comic books in bookstores has significantly increased in the last decade? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jiew, Jung, Eak, Munin, Note, Plariex, Preecha, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Nummon, Puck

Blank: /

Table 7.0 - Do you consider that associations such as Thai Cartoon Association and the Cartoonthai Institute (a project from The Foundation for Children project) are participating significantly to the improvement of the professional situation of Thai cartoonists? Yes/No? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Yes: 4 answers
No: 11 answers
Blank: 1

Table 7.1 - Are you (or were you) a member of one (or both) of these associations?

Art Jeeno: Never.
Chart: Never officially.
Eak: Yes.
Jiew: Never.
Jung: No.
Munin: Never but I have assisted meetings.
Note: No.
Nummon: No.
Plariex: I can't.
Preecha Raksorn: No.
Puck: No. I don't know what they do. I don't feel their impact.
Sa-ard: No.
Seng: Yes. I am a member of Cartoonthai Institute (but I think the Institute is part of the Thai Cartoon Association).
Toma: Never.
Tongkarn: Never.
Vic-Mon: Never.

Table 7.2 - According to you, what did these two associations brought to the Thai comics scene?

Eak: Just the same.
Jiew: Just the same.
Munin: Creative development for society, strengthening the image of comics.
Note: Not sure.
Plariex: I don't follow at all. I don't know.
Preecha Raksorn: I don't know because never got much information from these associations.
Puck: I don't feel the difference.
Sa-ard: No, I don't see the movement/change.
Seng: These two associations only support work that comes from the government. It doesn't

improve/promote diversity.

Toma: I don't know.

Tongkarn: The goal should be to gather a profession together and the creation of Thai Cartoon Association provides an identity.

Vic-Mon: I don't know.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jung, Nummon

Table 7.3 - Do you see other groups, associations or programs that significantly participated to the improvement of the professional situation of Thai cartoonists and in which ways?

Art Jeeno: I don't see any.

Eak: I've seen some but there wasn't much of a change afterwards. It might be because nobody picked up the torch or they lacked substantial financial support.

Jiew: I don't see any.

Munin: I don't see any.

Note: No.

Nummon: No.

Plariex: No.

Preecha Raksorn: I don't see any.

Puck: I don't see. Thai cartoonists have to take care about themselves.

Sa-ard: No.

Seng: I was once interviewed for a news scoop in a magazine that was unrelated to the comic business so I feel that my work has been spread to other circles.

Toma: I don't see.

Tongkarn: No official organization; just meeting, having casual discussion, in company of other cartoonists.

Vic-Mon: Never. A senior cartoonist introduced me to another cartoonist personally.

No answer: Chart, Jung

Table 7.4 - Did government bodies (Ministry of Culture, of Education, others...) significantly participated to the improvement of the professional situation of Thai cartoonists and in which ways? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Cartoonist 1: There is no government body (supporting the improvement of Thai comics).

Cartoonist 2: I don't know.

Cartoonist 3: No. I never thought the government helped with anything. This field of work goes unnoticed unless it's something very Thai, very patriotic, of which there are few.

Cartoonist 4: I don't think there is much or if there is they usually restrict the topic so much that sometimes writers can't use their skills or write what they want to write.

Cartoonist 5: Partly by Thai Health that organized activities related to reading and comics.

However, these events aren't continuous enough as if they organize them just to quickly use up the budget.

Cartoonist 6: There's the creation of the Thai Comics Room or cartooning workshops from time to time but they don't fix the situation of professionals much.

Answered "No" or "There's no help": 6 cartoonists

No answer: 4 cartoonists

Table 7.5 - Who are the other Thai cartoonists you meet on a regular basis and with whom you consider forming an informal group?

Art Jeeno: Sahred Toy, Plariex.

Chart: Songsin, Suttichart, Puck, The Duang.

Eakasit: Songsin, Suttichart "Squid Head", Seng, The Duang, Pak.

Jiew: Alone...

Jung: Plariex. And I gather with an informal group; Seng and Songsin.

Munin: Toto (Joe Hua Tang Mo), Summer, Puck (Moo/pig), The Duang, Jod 8riew

Note: I met artists from LET'S Comic group for a long time.

Nummon: I met with LET'S Comic group for a long time. No formal group (home alone).

Plariex: Vic-Mon, Tako, Jung, Sahred Toy, Art Jeeno. But most of the people I know are not cartoonists. I meet only other Thai cartoonists in book fairs.

Preecha: I don't have.

Puck: I meet with "Team LET'S Comic".

Sa-ard: LET'S comic.

Seng Songwit: Suttichart and Songsin.

Toma: Jung, Plariex.

Tongkarn: Other artists from Fullstop book.

Vic-Mon: With female artists Plariex, Nair and Tako. With male artists (Pi) Songsin, (Pi) Seng Songwit and (Pi) Suttichart.

Table 8.0 - If one or more of your stories have been published in languages other than Thai and/or for foreign publishers, could you mention in which language, under which title and by which publisher they have been edited?

Eak: *Tuk Prab Pai Tam* as an ebook in Japanese for Japan.

Jiew: Illustration for *Successful Living in Thailand* by Roger Welty for Asia Books in English and illustrated children book in Swedish.

Munin: *I Sea U* in Chinese, via Little Rainbow, HK.

Nummon: *Love on 20 pages*, online cartoon in Japanese.

Plariex: A publisher from Taiwan bought the rights from Salmon Publishing to translate into Taiwanese. It was a total of 5 volumes which are *18- Life*, *Office Sista*, and *Plants vs Plariex*. I

haven't seen the other two yet.

Preecha Raksorn: No.

Puck: There was one that was used as a graphics promotion on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL23EwNj-wQZ8Trc6AFESz427Ztt_xsmJP). That and an alternative comic jam in Mexico; *Latino Toons*.

Sa-ard: In English and Japanese but I don't know the publisher.

Seng: No.

Tongkarn: Never.

Vic-Mon: *Red Balloon* in *Liquid City* book vol.2, Singapore - *Hazel 100 good things* for COMIC BIRZ, Japan, 2007 - *3rd Time kiss* in the COMICO application was translated into Japanese and Korean. It was put on the COMICO application in their respective countries. It's not finished yet.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jung, Note, Toma

Table 8.1 - Only few Thai comics have been translated and published by foreign publishers. According to you, what are the reasons of this lack of foreign editions?

Art Jeeno: Work is not good enough.

Chart: The difference between culture and language. A unique identity is important on the international stage.

Eak: Not international and not enjoyable enough.

Jiew: Because Thai comics use a lot of slangs and don't focus on the art so it's not international.

Jung: There isn't a strong/active enough publishing scene for cartoonists.

Munin: Some specific content contains factual information or social patterns that are necessary for understanding making it hard for foreigners to access, unlike Japanese comics that are mostly hypothetical or imaginary fantasy.

Note: I think there's no plan or investment for opening foreign markets from neither publishers or writers. They might not see it as a profitable venture.

Nummon: It's an undertaking that's too much for Thai comics publishers to accomplish alone.

Plariex: Stories based on Thai culture (which isn't universal or known world-wide like western or Japanese) so people aren't very interested. Another thing is, from what I've read, stories are flat and ordinary when compared to Japanese comics. My work got translated because it was a "comic essay" and the market for this type of book is booming in Taiwan. I think it was by the virtue of the market rather than my popularity or the work.

Preecha Raksorn: I really don't know but I've heard news a long time ago that a Thai comic called *Apaimanee Saga* was published in French.

Puck: No one pays attention.

Sa-ard: No support organization or the overall quality of Thai comics makes it difficult to sell abroad.

Seng Songwit: Cartoonists don't know how to present their works abroad.

Toma: It still lack “universality”, the foreign comic market is already large and doesn’t need Thai comics.

Tongkarn: The content of Thai comics is not as enjoyable as Manga. And Thai comics don’t have the fine visual quality of Manga.

Vic-Mon: I had the experience of selling comics with popular artwork and alternative comics at the same time. I found that foreigners bought more of the ones with popular artwork (Japanese artwork). The Thai market is stuck on trying to find one’s identity when in fact readers don’t care about identity as much as the artist or people who work in the business. They care more about pretty aesthetics and story. In Thailand artists with unique artwork garner more interest while abroad they are a secondary market. Another thing is that famous Thai cartoonists often have works that focus on the story rather than beauty. In foreign markets where they don’t know the author they will look at the artwork first, so it’s no wonder we can’t compete. Another thing is that short works or comic essays don’t create a lasting bond with the reader unlike Japanese series that are longer, episodic affairs.



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Tables 9.0 to 12.9: Thai Comics Influences

Table 9 - As a child (or teenager), did you read *The Story of Mahâjanaka* written by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and illustrated by Chai Rachawat? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jung, Munin, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon
No: Eak, Jiew, Note, Nummon, Plariex
Blank: /

Table 9.1 - If yes, do you consider it had an influence on your work or your desire to become a cartoonist? And what kind of influence?

Art Jeeno: No. I just read it for enjoyment.
Chart: No.
Jung: No.
Munin: It influenced me in willing to create graphic novels.
Preecha Raksorn: No because I think the comic wasn't fun to read and the story of *Phra Mahajanaka* was too difficult for a child like me to understand back then.
Puck: I appreciate it but it had no effect on me as a cartoonist.
Sa-ard: No.
Seng: No influence.
Toma: It didn't affect my decision.
Tongkarn: No effect.
Vic-Mon: No.
No answer: Eak, Jiew, Note, Nummon, Plariex

Table 9.2 - As a child (or teenager), did you read *The Story of Tongdaeng* written by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej and illustrated by Chai Rachawat? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Jung, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma
No: Art Jeeno, Eak, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon
Blank: Jiew

Table 9.3 - If yes, do you consider it had an influence on your work or your desire to become a cartoonist? And what kind of influence?

Chart: No.
Jung: No.
Preecha Raksorn: No. I'm interested in another type of cartoon because I'm interested in

foreign cartoons which are more enjoyable.

Puck: I've read it before but I can't remember any of it.

Sa-ard: No.

Seng: No influence.

Toma: The visual storytelling.

Vic-Mon: No.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Tongkarn

Table 9.4 - Do you consider that the adaptation of these two stories in “cartoon/katun” [comics] version, at the direct request of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, had a positive influence on the perception of comics by a Thai audience and on the relaunch of the Thai comics scene? Yes/No? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Yes: 6 answers

No: 7 answers

Blank: 3

Table 9.5 - If yes, to what extent did help the relaunch of the Thai comics scene? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Cartoonist 1: Increased society's acceptance of this media.

Cartoonist 2: Comics can transform knowledge or stories that are hard to access into something accessible and interesting, worth following.

Cartoonist 3: I think I might not have such an impact as to relaunch it, but it was positive to have more of this type of work in comic form.

Cartoonist 4: At least they know that there is this form of media called ‘comics’ and since the King chose to use this medium, the image of comics was elevated.

Cartoonist 5: Helped make Thai comics more acceptable in Thai society.

Cartoonist 6: Made more people interested but only in work of that style.

Cartoonist 7: I think they are nice books but didn't help the industry.

Table 9.6 - Do you consider that the adaptation of these two stories in “cartoon/katun” [comics] version, at the direct request of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej participated in the development of Thai educational comic books? Yes/No? [NOTE: this information will remain anonymous]

Yes: 11 answers

No: 2 answers

Blank: 3

Table 9.7 - Do you consider that the Thai educational comics market is playing a significant role in introducing young readers to the comics medium? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon
No: Jung, Preecha Raksorn
Blank: Jiew

Table 10.0 - As a child (or teenager), did you read Thai educational comic books (comic books on science, language, biographies, Thai history...) on a regular basis? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Munin, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn
No: Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Note, Plariex, Puck, Seng, Vic-Mon
Blank: Nummon

Table 10.1 - If yes, do you consider it had an influence on your understanding of the comics form as an efficient media (to communicate ideas)? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Jiew, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon
No: /
Blank: Chart, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Seng

Table 10.2 - If yes, do you remember any particular Thai educational comic books (biographies, Thai history...) that made an impression on you?

Art Jeeno: I can't remember.
Plariex: I never read the Thai ones, only the translated versions because when I was young I don't remember there being any Thai comics of this sort. / As for the above that is an adaptation of the King's writing, I think that even if it wasn't a comic people would still buy because it's illustrated and easy to read, so I don't think it affected Thai comics much.
Preecha Raksorn: I remember pictures of the characters Manee, Mana, Chujai, Pitti from Thai Language Manuals from when I was young.
Sa-ard: I don't remember.
Toma: *Story of Rama* in the magazine *Maha Sanook* [published by Banlue Sarn]
Tongkarn: I don't remember.
No answer: Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Puck, Seng, Vic-Mon

Table 10.3 - Have you worked yourself for the Thai educational comics market as a cartoonist? Yes/No?

Yes: Jiew, Jung, Nummon, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn
No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Munin, Note, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Vic-Mon
Blank: /

Table 10.4 - Do you consider that the alternative Thai comics market and the Thai educational comics market are two separate markets? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon
No: Nummon, Plariex, Sa-ard
Blank: /

Table 10.5 - Is it easy for an independent cartoonist to work in both markets? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Eak, Jiew, Munin, Nummon, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon
No: Art Jeeno, Jung, Note, Preecha Raksorn, Puck
Blank: Plariex

Table 11.0 - As a child (or teenager), did you read children comic books from the Benjarong Group formed in 1981 by Triam Chahumporn, Ohm Rajawej, Somchai Panpracha, Pol Kaosod and Chalerm Akkapoo? Yes/No?

Yes: Seng, Tongkarn
No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Note, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Toma, Vic-Mon

Table 11.1 - If yes, do you consider one (or more) of these cartoonists had an influence on your work or your desire to become a cartoonist? And what kind of influence?

Sa-ard: No.
Seng: I've read short stories by Triam Chachumporn that told of the lives of people in Thai society. It opened me to new points of view for story-telling and made me notice and pay more interest to telling everyday stories.
Tongkarn: Maybe a little, because of the nice pictures and disturbing content.
Vic-Mon: No.
No answer: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Toma

Table 11.2 - Did you read, as a child, Thai comic books published before or during the 1980s by artists such as Sawas Jutharop (*Khun Muen* stories like *Sang Thong*), Prayoon Chanyawongse (*Sooklek* stories like *Chanta Korop*, *Honwichai Kawi*), Hem Vejakorn (*Sri Thanonchai*, *Phra Aphai Mani*, *Rachathirat*), Payut Ngaokrachang (*It happened... in the village of Phang Phon*), Adirek Ariyamontri (*Nu Lek Loong Krong*), Pimon Kalasee (*Tookata*), Por Bangplee (*Asawin Sai Fa*, *Prince Lindam*), Watana Petsuwan (*Baby*), Jum Jin (*Nuja*), Juk Biewsakul (*The Blond Prince*) or Raj Lersuang (*Black Lion*)? Yes/No?

Yes: Eak, Preecha Raksorn, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng

Blank: /

Table 11.3 - If yes, which of these stories did you read as child?

Eak: Watana Petsuwan for *Baby*, and Jum Jin for *Nuja*.

Preecha Raksorn: *Baby* and *Nuja*.

Toma: *Nuja*.

Tongkarn: *Tookata*, *Sooklek*, some books by Juk Biewsakul and by Payut Ngaokrachang.

Vic-Mon: I'm not sure because I can't remember the names of the cartoonists but I've read a story about *Nang Monto* and *Kwai Torapee*.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng

Table 11.4 - Did you discover these artists and read their stories for the first time as an adult?
Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Plariex, Puck, Tongkarn

No: Chart, Munin, Note, Nummon, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Vic-Mon

Blank: Jung

Table 11.5 - If yes, which of these stories did you discover and read for the first time as an adult?

Art Jeeno: *Baby*, *Nuja*.

Eakasit: Por Bangplee (*Asawin Sai Fa*, *Prince Lindam*).

Jiew: Watana Petsuwan, Jum Jin, Juk Biewsakul.

Plariex: Never read them but went to an exhibition of Raj Lersuang.

Puck: Raj Lersuang (*Black Lion*).

No answer: Chart, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

Table 11.6 - Do you consider that it is easy to have an access to Thai comic books published before the 1980s? Yes/No?

Yes: Munin

No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jiew, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

Blank: Jung

Table 12.0 - As a child (or teenager), did you read the magazine *Kai Hua Roh* on a regular basis? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Chart, Jiew, Seng

Blank: /

Table 12.1 - As a child (or teenager), did you read the magazine *Maha Sanook* on a regular basis? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Chart, Jiew, Seng

Blank: /

Table 12.2 - If yes, do you consider one or both of these magazines had an influence on your work or your desire to become a cartoonist? And what kind of influence?

Art Jeeno: No, just read for fun.

Eak: No.

Jung: It might be possible.

Munin: It sparked my initial interest and motivation to draw cartoons. I've improved and accumulated since then. Since *Kai Hua Roh* is still around I've never stopped drawing.

Note: It was a great inspiration. When I was young my image of a cartoonist was someone who was published in *Kai Hua Roh* and *Maha Sanook*.

Nummon: Seeing fun drawings made me want to make the same.

Plariex: It didn't influence me personally. I like reading comics and *Kai Hua Roh* and *Maha Sanook* were easy to get so I read them as well.

Preecha Raksorn: No, my inspiration comes from manga.

Puck: It feels good to have a comics magazine that has been around for a long time. It made me believe that I could make a career out of it.

Sa-ard: No.

Toma: Inspired me to create cartoon gag.

Tongkarn: Yes, but no influence to become a cartoonist.

Vic-Mon: No.

No answer: Chart, Jiew, Seng

Table 12.3 - Did the comics and characters of cartoonist Tai Kai Hua Roh, such as *PangPond*, had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence?

Art Jeeno: No.

Eak: No.

Munin: *Aitualek* cartoon gags by Nic.

Note: I think all gags and characters by (Pi) Tai are inspiring because they are easy to understand, optimistic and related to Thainess.

Plariex: Don't have. I like to read different type of cartoons, closer to my own.

Preecha Raksorn: Don't have. I've read them but they didn't inspire me.

Puck: I like (Pi) Tai's work because the jokes are funny and creative but I didn't favour any character in particular.

Sa-ard: It's more of a fondness. I like the works of Tai, Toh, Chuang, but they didn't inspire me.

Seng: I've read cartoon gag before. It's so funny.

Toma: *PangPond* is an inspiration in the creation of characters.

Tongkarn: No, but I like it.

Vic-Mon: No.

No answer: Chart, Jiew, Jung, Nummon

Table 12.4 - Did other Thai comics and characters from *Kai Hua Roh* or *Maha Sanook*, such as *Noo-hin Inter* or *Sam Kok* [The Funny Kingdoms], had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence?

Art Jeeno: No.

Eak: No.

Munin: Cartoon gags by Nic.

Note: *Sam Kok* and *Krabi Yam Yuthachak* by Moo Ninja. He has my favourite artwork. I consider the jokes by Pui as the funniest.

Nummon: Moo; *Krabi Yam Yuthaphop* was a sequel in *Maha Sanook* that I read and made me want to draw.

Plariex: No.

Preecha Raksorn: No.

Puck: I like the artwork of *Madeaw Sri Larn Yai Prik* and *Dump Dog Dag*.

Sa-ard: No.

Seng: I used to work as the colourist for the comics in *The Funny Kingdoms* when I was working on my first manuscripts.

Toma: Almost all of *Maha Sanook's* works was inspirational in story-telling through imagery.

Tongkarn: No.

Vic-Mon: No.

No answer: Chart, Jiew, Jung

Table 12.5 - Did other Thai cartoonists, such as Sakda Vimonchandra, Salah Nakbumrung, Ruangsak Duangpla, Sitthiporn Gulwarottama or others, had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence?

Nummon: I don't know older cartoonists. I like the new generation, for example; Art Jeeno, Munin, Tuna Dunn, Wisut Ponnimit or other such as these.

Plariex: Yes. Khun Sa-ard, Prema-Ja. Because they do narrative comics so I think they're enjoyable.

Seng: Triam Chachumporn because he told "simple" stories of people in society.

Answered "no": Art Jeeno, Eakasit, Munin, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No answer: Chart, Jiew, Jung, Note

Table 12.6 - As a child (or teenager), did you read Thai magazines such as *A Comix*, *CX - Cartoonthai Extreme*, *Katch*, *Manga Katch* and others on a regular basis? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jung, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Jiew, Munin, Toma

Table 12.7 - If yes, which magazines did you read on a regular basis and do you consider they (or some cartoonists) had an influence on your work or your desire to become a cartoonist? And what kind of influence?

Art Jeeno: *Manga Katch (Si-Gum (Sah), Joe the Sea-Cret Agent, hesheit)*. I was surprised that Thai comics weren't similar to manga.

Chart: No.

Eak: *Thai Comic* cartoonist Rittee Santhimongkonpong inspired me a lot.

Jung: *Katch* (Wisut Ponnimit)

Note: I don't read many books and rarely read comics. Most of it is what I see in passing. One that I can remember clearly is *Joe Sea-Cret Agent* by SS [Chart Sarapaiwanich] because of its outstanding artwork and *Ruang Sun Jit Lood [My Mania]* by Eakasit because it was fun and had twists.

Nummon: I like all of these stories and they inspired me in the way that comics can have many free styles.

Plariex: I read *Katch* because my brother bought it, and also Vibulkij's *Thai Comic*. It didn't affect my decision at the time because back then I only enjoyed reading and hadn't thought about becoming a cartoonist.

Preecha Raksorn: I read them all and everyone inspired me to know that there are many talented Thai cartoonists. However, the state of the Thai comic market means that there might be fewer people following their works making it difficult to survive within this profession.

Puck: *CX -Cartoonthai Extreme, Katch, Manga Katch* and *Thai Comic* inspired me to create my work and submit it to a contest.

Sa-ard: *CX -Cartoonthai, Katch, Manga Katch*. I was inspired by works from Tapone, Wisut, SS, Kamla in the way of thinking and drawing comics as enjoyable as those of the aforementioned cartoonists.

Seng: *Katch and Manga Katch*. With the works of Suttichart Sarapaiwanich [Chart] who wrote a similar style of comic making me interested in writing my own.

Vic-Mon: Yes, in the aspect that there is a space to present your work. However, there isn't a particular Thai cartoonist that's inspired me yet.

No answer: Jiew, Munin, Toma, Tongkarn

Table 12.8 - As a child (or teenager), did you read *katun lem la baht* [one-baht comics] on a regular basis? Yes/No?

Yes: Eak, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Sa-ard, Toma

Table 12.9 - If yes, did *katun lem la baht* [one-baht comics] have an influence on your work or your desire to become a cartoonist? And what kind of influence?

Chart: No.

Eak: Yes but I don't create a work similar to it.

Note: I already like this art style and have tried to use it many times. It's an art style that's a symbol of Thai comic roots.

Preecha Raksorn: No.

Puck: Just read it.

Seng: Not interesting. Because it's different from my style. And the income is really low.

Tongkarn: No. But I was impressed when I was a child.

Vic-Mon: No.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Sa-ard, Toma

Tables 13.0 to 18.2: Foreign Comics Influences

Table 13.0 - As a child (teenager), were you reading Japanese comics [manga]? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon
No: /
Blank: /

Table 13.1 - What were your favourite manga as a child (6-10 year old)? NOTE: additional information has been added between brackets by the author.

Art Jeeno: *Dragon Ball* [by Akira Toriyama].
Chart: *Cobra* [by Buichi Terasawa], *Doraemon* [by Fujiko F. Fujio], *Otokogumi* (“Gallant Gang”) written by Tetsu Kariya and drawn by Ryoichi Ikegami.
Eak: *Perman* [by Fujiko F. Fujio], *Doraemon* [by Fujiko F. Fujio].
Jiew: *Ultra Man*, *Mask Rider* [or *Masked Rider* or *Kamen Rider*].
Jung: *Doraemon* [by Fujiko F. Fujio].
Munin: *Crayon Shin-chan* [by Yoshito Usui], *Doraemon* [by Fujiko F. Fujio].
Note: I didn’t read cartoon as a child.
Nummon: *Doraemon* [by Fujiko F. Fujio].
Plariex: I can’t remember. But I know I was already reading cartoons [comics] at the time.
Preecha Raksorn: *Dragon Ball* [by Akira Toriyama].
Puck: *Dragonball Z* [by Akira Toriyama].
Sa-ard: *Yaiba* or *Legend of the Swordmaster Yaiba* [by Gosho Aoyama], *Magic Kaito* [by Gosho Aoyama], *One Piece* [by Eiichiro Oda].
Seng: *Doraemon* [by Fujiko F. Fujio], *Masked Rider* [or *Kamen Rider*], *Dr. Slump* [by Akira Toriyama].
Toma: *Detective Conan* [by Gosho Aoyama].
Tongkarn: *Glass Mask* [shôjô manga by Suzue Miuchi], *Doraemon* [by Fujiko F. Fujio].
Vic-Mon: *Sailor Moon* [shôjô manga by Naoko Takeuchi], *Ranma ½* [by Rumiko Takahashi].

Table 13.2 - What were your favourite manga as a teenager? NOTE: additional information has been added between brackets by the author.

Art Jeeno: *Slam Dunk* [sports-themed manga by Takehiko Inoue].
Chart: *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* [by Hirohiko Araki], *Akira* [by Katsuhiro Otomo], *Love Hina* [by Ken Akamatsu], *Maison Ikkoku* [by Rumiko Takahashi], *Touch* [by Mitsuru Adachi].
Eak: *Akira* by Otomo Katsuhiro, *Crying Freeman* [manga written by Kazuo Koike and

illustrated by Ryoichi Ikegami.], *Heat* [manga written by Yoshiyuki Okamura and illustrated by Ryoichi Ikegami], *City Hunter* [by Tsukasa Hojo].

Jiew: *Cobra* [by Buichi Terasawa].

Jung: *Shaman King* [by Hiroyuki Takei].

Munin: *Love Catalog* [by Masami Nagata], *Parent and Child of the Whale* [by Riku Kurita], *Peach Girl* [by Miwa Ueda].

Note: *BECK: Mongolian Chop Squad* [by Harold Sakuishi], *20th Century Boys* [by Naoki Urasawa], *One Piece* [by Eiichiro Oda], *Naruto* [by Masashi Kishimoto].

Nummon: *The Life of Genius Professor Yanagizawa* [or *Tensai Yanagisawa Kyoju no Seikatsu* by Kazumi Yamashita]

Plariex: *Twin Signal* [by Sachi Oshimizu], a story about a humanoid robot living with a family. It wasn't popular at all in Thailand but I liked it because it was a fun family story. I also like ghost comics like *Hell Teacher Nube* [by writer Sho Makura and artist Takeshi Okano], a *Gakko no Kaidan* (literally *School Ghost Stories*).

Preecha Raksorn: *Naruto* [by Masashi Kishimoto].

Puck: *Together With Me* [*Boku To Issho*] by Minoru Furuya.

Sa-ard: *Slam Dunk* [sports-themed manga by Takehiko Inoue], *Silver Spoon* [by Hiromu Arakawa], *Phoenix* [*Hi no Tori* by Osamu Tezuka], *H2* [by Mitsuru Adachi].

Seng: *Fist of the North Star* [written by Buronson and illustrated by Tetsuo Hara], *Cobra* [by Buichi Terasawa], *Touch* [by Mitsuru Adachi], *Miyuki* by Mitsuru Adachi.

Toma: *ARIA* [by Kozue Amano].

Tongkarn: *Crayon Shin-chan* [by Yoshito Usui], *Parasyte* [*Kiseijuu Sei no Kakuritsu* by Hitoshi Iwaaki].

Vic-Mon: *Monster* by Naoki Urasawa, *Rurouni Kenshin* by Nobuhiro Watsuki, *Deathnote* by Takeshi Obata and Tsugumi Ohba.

Table 13.3 - Do you consider they had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence? Which manga influenced you the most and in what way? NOTE: additional information has been added between brackets by the author.

Art Jeeno: I started drawing imitating the style of *Slam Dunk*.

Chart: Influential because it made me want to create my own style because manga has his own distinctive, unique style.

Eak: *Akira* by Katsuhiro Otomo.

Jiew: Only during my early career.

Jung: No.

Munin: It greatly influenced me because the first two stories (*Love Catalog & Parent and Child*) were comics that told the story of relationships between family, friends, and siblings. It made me more sensitive to these topics, and pay more attention to people around me. Eventually I wrote comics about family and relationships as well.

Note: *BECK*, a comic about a rock band, made me start learning music. It's a comic with a charming story and characters. What caught my attention the most was that his images could be 'heard'; music came out of it.

Nummon: How to create a story.

Plariex: A) I liked to read but it was a different genre than my current works. The one that had an indirect influence made me write a comic about someone who was scared of ghosts but liked reading ghost stories. B) *Chibimaruko* [*Chibi Maruko-chan*, a shôjô manga by Momoko Sakura], in the compilation I liked the *Maru Maru Style Play* arc; the author told a story of his childhood and adolescent years. It had a variety of emotions (not focusing only on comedy like the main Maruko comics) and was a genre I wanted to write.

Preecha Raksorn: Yes, it was influential and inspired me a lot. Every comic I read influenced me throughout the years. Many manga were my inspiration such as *Vagabond* [by Takehiko Inoue], *One Piece*, *Slam Dunk*, and *Berserk* [by Kentaro Miura]. It's mostly comics that are fun and easy to get into because the author wrote a story I can really follow.

Puck: Minoru Furuya's *Boku To Issho* [*Together With Me*] was very influential to me in terms of genre, beat, and topic (but the artwork didn't influence me much because the author drew in a realistic style).

Sa-ard: Japanese comics are my main inspiration for cartooning. It stimulated the imagination and made me want to be able to tell stories like they did. I also used to trace the artwork, story, and studied the story-telling of various authors.

Seng: *Doraemon*, a story that is fun, creative and imaginative.

Toma: It influenced me in drawing characters and story-telling. It was more intense than *Kai Hua Roh* or *Maha Sanook*. The most influential manga was *Inuyasha* [by Rumiko Takahashi] because the story was exciting.

Tongkarn: Drawing style and narrative.

Vic-Mon: It was very influential making me try to create more serious stories than short gags or short stories. It made me want to write a comic with a longer plot and build emotion using the artwork and images. It also influenced my detail and drawing skills and the use of characters that didn't have to be that unique; they didn't have to be monsters or have special powers, but be a normal-dressed person with a complicated story. In summary, it influenced me to want to create work with care put into the images and story.

Table 13.4 - Did you participate to one (or several) *International MANGA Award* annual contest?
Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Eak, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Tongkarn

No: Chart, Jiew, Jung, Note, Preecha Raksorn, Toma, Vic-Mon

Blank: /

Table 13.5 - Many Thai cartoonists were awarded by this international contest. It seems that the sales of the winning Thai comic books increased significantly when they won. Do you consider that Thai readers were suddenly interested because these Thai comics were recognized in Japan?

Art Jeeno: No. It's only known in a little circle among Thai people.

Chart: No. Because it's not publicized and has no impact.

Eak: Yes, there's a great impact because Thais tend to not believe in their own skills but trust in Japan and foreigners, so when we win a foreign award it says a lot.

Jiew: Yes.

Jung: No. Only the manga industry is interested in it.

Munin: It does have a part, but not much. When there's a logo on the cover or an announcement that the book won an award it catches people's interest.

Note: I think winning an award helps a lot. For most consumers when films or books receive an award it helps guarantee that consumers can make easier decisions with the limited amount of money they have or against other free media they can choose to consume.

Nummon: No impact.

Plariex: I don't know what's the opinion of the reader, but congratulation to the writer.

Preecha Raksorn: I don't know but the award-winning comics I've read are really fun. But even comics that don't win awards are fun as well.

Puck: A very small sales increase for the book which was awarded.

Sa-ard: It's possible, for instance the media will pay more attention to them and interview more cartoonists making society accept this profession more.

Seng: Just the same.

Toma: No because the Manga Award is little known to Thai readers. They buy mostly because of word-of-mouth and social networking.

Tongkarn: Not so much impact because I won the Bronze medal from the International manga award 2011. Thais knows very little about it. Even people who read comics in Thailand barely know it.

Vic-Mon: No, I don't think so.

Table 13.6 - Did you read Taiyô Matsumoto's manga *Tekkonkinkreet* (or seen the animated movie adaptation)? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jung, Note, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Toma

Blank: Jiew

Table 13.7 - If yes, do you consider it had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence?

Art Jeeno: Taiyo Matsumoto has a strange style of work. When I read more of his works it changed the style of my later works in new directions.
Chart: Not influenced but impressed by the beauty of his scenery/backgrounds.
Eak: It's so powerful.
Jung: It made me pay more attention to my own work.
Note: It opened my imaginary for design, pictures are so colourful and stylized.
Puck: I like his artwork even if the content is hard to understand, but his vision and artwork is unique making him stand out.
Sa-ard: I originally like this author's work already, I studied his artwork, camera angles, and adapted to my own work.
Seng: It's very exciting work in terms of vision, imagery, and story-telling, it's very unique. It showed me that this is the way to create interesting work.
Vic-Mon: It inspired me in terms of design and aesthetics of the background but it didn't influence me much.
No answer: Jiew, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Toma, Tongkarn

Table 13.8 - If yes, have you considered *Tekkonkreet's* city, with its ever-changing landscape and its more tropical setting (monitor lizards, coconut tree...), as sharing similarities with Bangkok? Yes/No?

Yes: Eak, Jung, Note, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Seng
No: Art Jeeno [who adds: "it looks like China"], Chart, Sa-ard, Vic-Mon
Blank: Jiew, Munin, Nummon, Plariex, Toma, Tongkarn

Table 14.0 - As a child (or teenager), were you reading American comics on a regular basis? Yes/No?

Yes: Jiew, Plariex, Toma, Vic-Mon
No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Tongkarn
Blank: /

Table 14.1 - Which were your favourite American comics as a child? NOTE: additional information has been added between brackets by the author.

Chart: *Watchmen* [by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons]
Jiew: *Mickey, Tom & Jerry*.

Nummon: I haven't read any American comics.
Plariex: *Garfield*.
Preecha Raksorn: Haven't read any.
Sa-ard: *Garfield, Calvin and Hobbes*. Do they count?
Seng: *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, *Hellboy* by Mike Mignola.
Toma: *Mickey Mouse*.
Tongkarn: Comic strips in the newspapers; *Close to Home* and *Garfield*.
Vic-Mon: *Mickey* and friends.
No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Puck

Table 14.2 - Do you consider they had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence? Which American comics influenced you the most and in what way?

Chart: No influence.
Jiew: Communication with pictures even though I didn't read English.
Note: The art from America was a model I used to escape from the Japanese style which is the mainstream style in Thailand.
Nummon: I haven't read American comics.
Plariex: A) It may have influenced me in terms of easy-to-read gag comics because sometimes when I can't think of a gag I reread them; but I mostly read Japanese ones. B) No but I like the web comics of Emily Carroll and Gemma Correll.
Preecha Raksorn: No impact.
Sa-ard: Didn't have a special influence but I'm interested in the narrative and picture design and adapt them to my work.
Seng: Interesting about creation.
Toma: No special influence.
Tongkarn: A little bit influenced in the way to create cartoons in 3 panels.
Vic-Mon: I think it's fun but has no real influence on my work.
No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Puck

Table 14.3 - Did you read American graphic novels and which ones were your favourites?

NOTE: additional information has been added between brackets by the author.

Art Jeeno: I didn't finish *Watchmen* yet because there's a lot of text and I try to translate it.
Chart: My favourite one is *Watchmen*.
Munin: Never.
Plariex: Never.
Preecha Raksorn: I haven't read American graphic novels except when they were adapted into movies. Then I read the comics (*300, Watchmen*).
Puck: I've read some when Bongkoch publishing was translating them. I love *X-Men 6* and

Wolverine.

Sa-ard: *MAUS* [by Art Spiegelman]. Why don't we talk about something more pleasant?

Seng: *Sin City* by Frank Miller.

Toma: Never.

Tongkarn: Never.

Vic-Mon: I'm not sure about the country of origin but I've read the works of Tim Burton and *Hugo Cabret* [or *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* written and illustrated by Brian Selznick].

No answer: Eak, Jiew, Jung, Note, Nummon

Table 14.4 - Do you consider they had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence? Which American graphic novels influenced you the most and in what way?

Chart: No influence.

Preecha Raksorn: Yes, but less than the Japanese comics.

Puck: What I like most are the western superhero comics. The proportions and inking for shadows is very well-done.

Sa-ard: *MAUS* showed me how much power one comic book can have and how hard the writer has to work.

Seng: Generate interest in the way of creation.

Vic-Mon: I think *Hugo Cabret* influenced me when I was working on graphic novels but not now as I work on comics. It also influenced me in telling stories using long text and images that are essential to following the story, not just an illustration to separate the text.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Toma, Tongkarn

Table 15.0 - Did you read European comics (like Hergé's *Tintin*, Moebius, Canales & Guarnido's *Blacksad*, Nicolas de Crécy...)? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Jiew, Nummon, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn

Table 15.1 - Which European comics did you read? NOTE: additional information has been added between brackets by the author.

Chart: *Airtight Garage*, *Arzack* [both by Moebius]

Jiew: *Tintin*.

Nummon: *Nikopol Trilogy* [by Enki Bilal]

Preecha Raksorn: Haven't read any.

Puck: Haven't read but bought a book to look at the drawing style.

Sa-ard: Studied the works of Nicolas de Crécy, Sempé and Quino but never read them.

Seng: *Blacksad*, *Tintin*.

Toma: *Tintin*.

Vic-Mon: *Tintin*.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Plariex, Tongkarn

Table 15.2 - Do you consider they had an influence on your own work and what kind of influence? Which European comics influenced you the most and in what way?

Chart: No influence but the style of Moebius influenced the early works of Katsuhiro Otomo.

Nummon: No influence but looks really nice.

Preecha Raksorn: No influence.

Puck: The layout, character design, use of colours are things that I've adapted into my work.

Sa-ard: European comics opened my understanding of comics to other things than ones from Japan or America. Many cartoonists from there have varied styles and presentations that are more like work of arts than a mass product.

Seng: Gives interest in the initiative.

Toma: No influence.

Vic-Mon: I don't think there's an influence.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Munin, Note, Plariex, Tongkarn

Table 16.0 - What would be your 5 favourite (Thai or non-Thai) comic books or graphic novels?
NOTE: additional information has been added between brackets by the author.

Art Jeeno: *Slam Dunk*, *Sunny* [by Taiyo Matsumoto], *Hikaru no Go*, *20th Century Boys*, *Solanin* [by Inio Asano].

Chart: 1. *Akira* 2. *Maison Ikkoku* 3. *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* 4. *Touch* [by Mitsuru Adachi] 5. *Cobra*.

Jiew: *Cobra*, *Dragonball*.

Jung: *Swweet* [by Kei Aoyama], *Below the Shade of Night* by Jordan Crane, *hesheit*, *Ki-Itchi*, *Hanada Shōnen Shi*.

Munin: 1. *Yotsubato!* - 2. *Urayasu Tekkin Kazoku* (or *Super Radical Gag Family*) - 3. *Home* (by Sasi Veerasethakul) - 4. *Glab Lang Han* (*Looking back* by Art Jeeno) - 5. *Nithan Lok* (*Tales of the World* by Sa-ard).

Note: *My Mania*, *BECK*, *Nine Life*, *The Man Who Follow His Own Voice* by Sa-Ard, *Slam Dunk*.

Nummon: 1. *The Life of Genius Professor Yanagizawa* [or *Tensai Yanagisawa Kyoju no Seikatsu* by Kazumi Yamashita] - 2. *A Wonder Boy* [by Kazumi Yamashita] - 3. *Doraemon* - 4. *Dek Len Gnao* (*Shadow Toys* by Narm) - 5. *Lost and Found*.

Plariex: *Dorohedoro*, a Japanese comic that felt contradictory because there was violence but the characters didn't look serious and I liked the fact that the author was female. I felt there was a woman's sense of humor but the art was very manly – *Kakanai mangaka*, it was a reflection on

me that if I didn't work then I would be no-good like the protagonist – *Yotsubato!* (manga) is a truly non-thinking comic about the character's lives without any serious problems – Khun Sa-ard's *Man Who Went to Japan with His Comic*, the story-telling was fun – *Hyakoshou Kisoku* told the story of a cartoonist that worked in agriculture with his family, it was fun.

Preecha Raksorn: *Vagabond, Slamdunk, Ogre King, Kraithong* by Tapone, 300 [by Miller]

Puck: 1. *Boku to Issho (The Same as Me)* - 2. *Joe the Sea-Cret Agent* - 3. *GON* [by Masashi Tanaka] - 4. *Bambi* [by Atsushi Kaneko] - 5. *Dragonball Z*

Sa-ard: 1. *Slam Dunk* - 2. *Hinotori [Phoenix]* by Osamu Tezuka] - 3. *MAUS* [by Art Spiegelman] - 4. *everybodyeverything* [by Wisut Ponnimit] - 5. *H2* [by Mitsuru Adachi]

Seng: *Doraemon* and short stories by Fujiko F Fujio. *A Wonder Boy* by Kazumi Yamashita. *Akira* by Otomo Katsuhiro. *Gunnm* by Yukito Kishiro. *Sunny* by Taiyo Matsumoto.

Toma: *Full Metal Alchemist, Silver Spoon, Aria, Inuyasha, Nausicaa.*

Tongkarn: *The Little Prince, Garfield, Glass Mask, Close to Home, Doraemon.*

Vic-Mon: *Monster* by Naoki Urusawa, *Rurouni Kenshin* by Nobuhiro Watsuki, *Deathnote* by Takeshi Obata and Tsugumi Ohba, *Hinotori (Phoenix)* by Tezuka Osamu, *Honey and Clover* by Chica Umino.

No answer: Eak

Table 17.0 - Which film director (or movies), writers (or novels), painters, illustrators or other artists do you consider as being influential on your own work?

Art Jeeno: Egon Schiele.

Chart: Quentin Tarantino, Stephen King.

Eak: James Cameron, Luc Besson, Katsuhiro Otomo.

Jiew: Sempé, Quentin Blake.

Munin: Wisut Ponnimit (Tam).

Note: Directors: David Fincher, Stephen Chow, Quentin Tarantino, Zack Snyder, Yuthlert Sippapak, Pen-Ek Ratanaruang.

Cartoonists, graphic novels, illustrations: Songsin, Suttichart, Eakasit, Wisut, Sa-ard, Puck, The Duang, Adachi Mitsuru, Takehiko Inoue, Urusawa Naoki, Harold Sakuichi, Tetsuka Osamu, Otomo Katsuhiro, Kim Jung Ki, Frank Miller, Alan Moore.

Nummon: Gustav Klimt. Actually, I don't like any specific artists, just some specific works.

Plariex: I don't have any specific influence.

Preecha Raksorn: Christopher Nolan, Dan-aran Saengthong, Rembrandt, Egon Schiele.

Puck: Director Kongdej Jaturanrasamee, painter Prateep Kochabua and painter Vasan Sitthiket.

Sa-ard: There's a lot of major movies and novels: Quentin Tarantino, Zhang Yimou, Darren Aronofsky, Hirokazu Koreeda, movies by Disney and Pixar. Writers: Narong Wongsawan, Seksan Prasertkul, Prabda Yoon, George Orwell, Douglas Adams.

Seng James Jean, Katsuya Terada, Moebius, Toriyama Akira, Santa Inoue, Takayuki Takeya.

Toma: Yes, I have.

Tongkarn: Iwasaki Chihiro.

Vic-Mon: Director Wong Kar-wai in terms of lighting and still images that managed to be emotional. Claude Monet an impressionism era artist influenced me to drop my brush skills in painting. Illustrator (Pi) Oh Theerawat was an inspiration in using illustrations in many media.

No answer: Jung

Table 18.0 - Did you read Tim Burton's *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories*? Yes/No?

Yes: Eak, Jung, Plariex, Puck, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Art Jeeno, Chart, Munin, Note, Nummon, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Toma

Blank: Jiew

Table 18.1 - Do you consider Tim Burton's or movies had an influence on you own work and what kind of influence?

Eak: Distortion.

Note: There was a time when Up (Songsin) lectured at the university. He was one person who was inspired by Tim Burton and we were introduced and absorbed it from him. Most of his work had a dark atmosphere that is very attractive.

Nummon: I've seen the drawings before and it made me want to create my own style.

Plariex: Reading it taught me that drawings that aren't very beautiful but has the right atmosphere for the story you are telling can be good work. I wasn't influenced in terms of content because it's a different style from what I do (but I like reading it).

Preecha Raksorn: No.

Puck: Melancholy and charming sadness.

Sa-ard: No.

Seng: I like *Beetlejuice*, *Edward Scissorhands* and *Batman*. Interesting in the creation of characters.

Toma: No influence.

Tongkarn: No.

Vic-Mon: No.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Chart, Jiew, Jung, Munin

Table 18.2 - Do you consider that Tim Burton's creepy and fantastic universe shares particular similarities with Thai fantastic folklore? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Jung, Munin, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng

No: Eak, Note, Plariex, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

Blank: Art Jeeno, Jiew, Nummon

Tables 19.0 to 24.0: Questions on Miscellaneous Topics

Table 19.0 - Do you or did you have comics series published regularly in non-comics Thai newspapers and/or magazines (such as a book...)? Yes/No?

YES: Chart, Jiew, Plariex, Sa-ard, Tongkarn

NO: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Seng, Toma, Vic-Mon (who adds: no long stories, only short stories).

BLANK: -

Table 19.1 - If yes, in which magazines and/or newspapers were/are your series published?

Chart: *DDT, FREEFORM, CG PLUS, Hobby Toys & Magazine*

Jiew: *Matichon Weekly*

Note: *LET'S Comic*

Plariex: In *I Like* magazine; magazine articles, horoscopes, fashion, when I was in Junior High school. Drawing a 2-page comics.

Preecha Raksorn: No.

Sa-ard: In *Matichon* newspaper; gags, series named *Family Jeng Ping*.

Tongkarn: *A Day* magazine, column in Sunday section of *Krunthep Turakij/Bangkok Biz*.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jung, Munin, Nummon, Puck, Seng, Toma, Vic-Mon

Table 20.0 - Where (anthology, magazine, book, publisher) and when was your first professional comics story published?

Art Jeeno: Salmon Books.

Chart: *JOE the SEA-CRET Agent* in *KATCH* (1999).

Eak: In *Thai Comic*.

Jiew: *Kai Hua Roh* and *Maha Sanook*, 1991.

Jung: *By Incense Light*, Salmon Books, 2015.

Munin: *LET'S Comic* #01, February 2009.

Note: *Egg Yolk, Let's Comic*, 2012.

Nummon: *LET'S Comic*.

Plariex: A pocket book called *18- Life* published by Salmon Books in 2012. It wasn't really a comics but more of a Japanese style *comic essay* which is telling one story under one topic using cartoon art. For example this book told the story of life under 18 years of age.

Preecha Raksorn: *Fighter* in magazine *MUD*, issue: *Silence*.

Puck: *Cereal Comics* for Siam Inter Comics around 2005.

Sa-ard: *The Man who followed his own path/voice...*, *Let's Comic*, 2011.

Seng: *World & Earth*, published by TMCX, 2002.

Toma: *Magical Girl Nantaporn*, Salmon Books, March 2016.

Tongkarn: In magazine *A DAY* in 2001.

Vic-Mon: *Restart* short story for newspaper *Nation* but I was already publishing color pages in the magazine *Candy14* (but it didn't feel like professional job).

Table 21.0 - Have you worked for particular brands (Nike, VRZO, Kraftka...) on specific projects related to your career as a cartoonist? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Munin, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Note, Nummon, Puck, Sa-ard, Toma

Blank: /

Table 21.1 - With which brands, and on what kind of projects, have you collaborated?

Chart: For NIKE in comics format.

Munin: AIA life insurance; a comic book about health and family relationships. Gift for the premium customers.

Plariex: Not really comic work but more illustrations for brands such as drawing stickers for Honda. Portraits for customers at Urban Studio. Designing original characters for Samsung products but they contacted me because I drew cartoon characters that they liked.

Puck: Nike, VRZO, Kraftka. Made illustrations for various media. Whether it's designing clothes or shoes and other designs.

Seng: Giordano Thailand (T-shirt design).

Vic-Mon: Denial Wellington (image for brand promotion).

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Note, Nummon, Preecha, Sa-ard, Toma, Tongkarn

Table 21.2 - Do you consider that these kinds of projects/collaborations are becoming more regular? Yes/No?

Yes: Art Jeeno, Chart, Eak, Jung, Munin, Note, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Toma

Blank: Jiew, Nummon

Table 22.0 - Are you interested in Art Toys (designer toys, urban vinyl or vinyl toys) that appeared in Hong Kong and Japan in the 1990s? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Jung, Munin, Note, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Sa-ard, Seng, Toma, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Art Jeeno, Eak, Nummon, Plariex

Blank: Jiew

Table 22.1 - If yes, do you consider the Art Toys designs (and Street Art) had an influence on your own drawing designs and what kind of influence?

Chart: No influence.

Munin: It made me want to develop my characters into something more interesting, memorable, and outstanding so it can be made into resin models.

Note: I already like Street Art a lot especially graffiti and stickers. I like the coolness, dirtiness, and rawness. I want works to have this cool, raw style.

Plariex: Partly in terms of some toy characters that are round, easy to draw, and have flat colors.

Preecha Raksorn: No influence.

Puck: Very influential. I like the appearance of TOY works and I like the color and content of Street Art workers.

Sa-ard: No but I like to look at them.

Seng: Interesting to see how to transform 2D into 3D.

Toma: Influential. It made me try to design characters that look cute when made into toys.

Tongkarn: No.

Vic-Mon: No.

No answer: Art Jeeno, Eak, Jiew, Jung, Nummon

Table 22.2 - Do you produce Art Toys yourself? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Puck, Seng, Tongkarn

No: Art Jeeno, Jung, Munin, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Preecha Raksorn, Sa-ard, Toma, Vic-Mon

Blank: Eak, Jiew

Table 23.0 - Did you ever produce self-published fanzines/books of your own work? Yes/No?

Yes: Chart, Munin, Preecha Raksorn, Puck, Seng, Tongkarn, Vic-Mon

No: Art Jeeno, Jiew, Jung, Note, Nummon, Plariex, Sa-ard, Toma

Blank: Eak

Table 23.1 - If yes, why did you decide to self-publish your work?

Art Jeeno: I wanted to self-publish *NOW* but a publisher asked for it.

Chart: I can control every step of the process.

Munin: I want to present stories that aren't passed by publishers. I want to design the cover in my own style without having to adapt for business reasons. Testing the income.

Nummon: Someone invited me to make hand-made books so I did it for fun.

Plariex: I've never done that yet but I plan to self-publish stories that publishers and I disagree on.

Preecha Raksorn: I wanted to. I wanted to so I just did it.

Puck: I wanted to experiment and sometimes we don't want to comply with publisher's requests.

Seng: Back then there wasn't a publishing format that was suitable for me.

Toma: My online followers wanted to buy my work in book form.

Vic-Mon: There's more freedom without having to worry about whether the content will sell, or sometimes the content is risky, or the style is so different from my old image that people don't recognize it, or for experimental works it's a good alternative.

No answer: Eak, Jiew, Jung, Note, Sa-ard, Tongkarn

Table 24.0 - Any additional comment about this survey?

Note: I want to tell a little story about myself. I think it's related to the attitude toward the Thai comics industry. I hope it will be useful. I'm one of those who started drawing earlier than most but I got published later than others and had fewer works. Compared to the people at LET'S Comic I always worked on drawing and design. I read comics less than I watch films. In my generation few people have never read *Dragon Ball* or *Doraemon* and I was one of those. I never thought I would draw cartoons for a living until the class I learned about comics in my third year at Silpakorn. It put me on the path of drawing and illustration but there was no financial security and I lost confidence in my writing. As the eldest child in a family that was not wealthy, I had to find other work to have a stable income from drawing storyboards for commercials to office work until I was 30. I just got married and my savings weren't much but I decided that I would mainly write comics and make it my main source of income. From what I've seen from my fellow cartoonists, if we believe and try hard enough, cartooning in Thailand can definitely be a career. Thai comics is a valuable art and can create value even if there isn't a system of industry like in other countries. There will still be a group of people who do this and I believe that there will always be people who follow their works.

Cartoonist who wished to remain anonymous: Because I came to work as a cartoonist, but not in the same way as others, there were some questions I couldn't answer and left blank. I think the main problem with Thai comics is money because the comics that I wrote, apart from pocket books, did not pay well (as for pocket books, I think you would get a higher copyright fee in other countries).



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