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**New Routes for the Venerable Ancestor:  
Growth Triangles, Tourism, and the Emergence of  
a Sacred Landscape  
in the Thai-Malay Borderland**

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**New Routes for the Venerable Ancestor: Growth Triangles, Tourism, and an Emergent Sacred Landscape in the Thai-Malay Borderland**

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## Introduction

*Cultural connections between Thailand and Malaysia that stretch back long into the past have traveled along many pathways. Some routes may continue to be travelled up to the present day. But the way across the border at Ban Prakop, Nathawi district, Songkhla province, has long since fallen into disuse. Until two years ago, both Thailand and Malaysia formally began to develop the area of the Dan Prakob in order to open another route connecting the two countries. However, development on the Thai side has not yet been taken up strongly because of the financial crisis. But we can foresee that it won't be long until both countries open the gates of this border crossing, coinciding with the revival of the historical knowledge of the death, and the pathway along which his corpse was transported, of Luang Pho Thuat, whom people from both countries have long respected and worshipped.*

- Retracing the "locations associated with the death of Luang Pho Thuat who treads saltwater fresh": Investigating pathways of Thai-Malaysian civilization', (Institute of Southern Thai Studies, 2005).<sup>1</sup>

This is the opening paragraph of a text produced by the Institute of Southern Thai Studies. It summarises research conducted by one of its historians, Chaiwut Phiyakul, into locations in the Malaysian states of Perak and Kedah said to be connected with the passing away and subsequent transportation of the body of Luang Pho Thuat, a Buddhist monk who is said to have lived and wandered in the region three to four hundred years ago. Now widely regarded as a "saint" (*ariya-song*) and even a *bodhisattva*, a Buddha-to-be, who is credited with countless miracles, this monk has become the most important and widely imaged popular religious figure in southern Thailand. He is also intimately connected to the landscape and various sites associated with aspects of his life marked by his sacred (*saksit*) qualities, particularly in southern Thailand, have developed into prominent sites of pilgrimage and religious tourism. However, far from being static or fixed, this sacred geography associated with Luang Pho Thuat has been constantly emerging over time as new sites are discovered and the hidden traces of the saint which have been forgotten are revealed or "remembered" (Gesick, 2002). Over the years, knowledge of Luang Pho Thuat has been excavated through scholarly study, as in the above quote, but also by means of dreams, visions and communication with spiritual beings. Through these processes a previously undifferentiated landscape becomes loaded with significance; it becomes legible in new ways.

The above quote also suggests that these elaborations of the sacred geography do not occur in a vacuum but are tied to other developments within the political, social and economic environment. In this case the unlocking of new geographical knowledge of the saint is tied to the prospect of a new border crossing and the opening up of an until previously relatively inaccessible part of the Thai-Malaysia borderland region. Fortuitously, it would seem, this crossing coincides with an ancient route that Luang Pho Thuat was supposed to have wandered during the later years of his life between the polities of

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by the author.

Kedah (known by the Thai as Saiburi) and Patani.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, according to widespread belief, Luang Pho Thuat passed away in Saiburi, and this same route was used by his followers to transport his corpse to Wat Chang Hai in Pattani, where it was cremated. It is particularly the route followed in death, and the sacred traces left in the landscape by his body, that form the basis of this new extension of his sacred geography.

The border crossing in question, which was not finally opened until January 2010 due to continuing delays on the Thai side, is largely the product of a push towards transnational development and cooperation in the guise of the Indonesia Malaysia Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), a sub-regional organization founded in 1993 which has sought to connect the peripheries of southern Thailand, northern Malaysia and Sumatra, a trans-border area whose physical proximity and cultural affinities it hoped to utilize to generate trade, exports and other forms of development. The development of the border crossing was one of its infrastructural projects, part of an effort to create “corridors” connecting the sub-region and reducing the barriers to the free flow of goods, resources and people. At the same time the IMT-GT has also become a central framework for efforts to develop a cross-border tourist “thematic route” based around the sacred landscape of Luang Pho Thuat. That is, the Growth Triangle has not just created the conditions that make this new development possible; it is actively involved in producing and promoting these developments in its efforts to stimulate cross-border tourism.

In the paper I want to show three main things. First, Sacred geography of Luang Pho Thuat is dynamic and emergent, not static or fixed. Throughout the history of his cult, his sacred presence has always been intimately tied to the landscape and mediated through knowledge of this landscape. This accords with Donald Swearer’s observation that, “Buddhism’s imprint throughout Asia is as much one of Buddha images and other material signs as monks teaching the Buddha’s dhamma” (Swearer, 2004, p. 211) and to consider the way Buddhist charisma involves the production of a religious geography and the sacralisation of space (c.f. Pnina Werbner, 1996).

In this I am trying to develop historian Lorraine Gesick’s arguments about what she calls historical sensibilities in southern Thailand, which she sees as intimately connected to the landscape:

*the landscape is marked by deposits of “Power” [saksit] from the passage of “Powerful” ancestor figures. The power of these saksit sites can be tapped by those who remember the history of the site as preserved in the stories about it. ... Thus, in this historical sensibility, even when the past was forgotten, the power of places lay latent, waiting to be reactivated fully by someone who “remembered”. (Gesick, 2002, pp. 1–2).*

For Gesick, the historical sensibility of place in southern Thailand is constantly in flux, as the stories associated with locations may float, shift and merge with one another. Most importantly, for Gesick the sense of the pastness of place is intimately connected to the ability of particular individuals to “remember”, in as sense to possess the ability of “excavate” the past in an archaeological fashion. Such

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Patani’ with one ‘t’ refers to the historical sultanate that was finally fully incorporated into the Siamese/Thai nation-state in 1909, while ‘Pattani’ is the name of the Thai province which, along with the provinces of Yala and Narathiwat, make up the area that roughly corresponds with the historical territory of ‘Patani’.

rememberings might take place in dreams and visions. The ability for these forms of remembering depend on different modes of authorisation, raising the issue how this authority is produced.

This leads to my second main point, I consider the development of the new geography in terms of the confluence of authoritative discourses, some of these scholarly, other, as in the quote that begins this paper, but others have emerged through dreams, visions, communications with spiritual beings and other “magical” means. In addition, state and inter-state discourses of rational development also come into play. Usually these domains of discourse would be considered to be separate, even opposed. However, in this case I argue that the development of this new geography is characterised by mutual reinforcement of diverse authoritative discourses and practices that combine to produce a convincing “reality effect”.

Third, the paper sets out to demonstrate the connections between the development of this landscape and the Thai national imaginary. Luang Pho Thuat is a figure connected in multiple ways with the idea of the nation state, and particularly the idea of southern Thailand as a Buddhist space. But his legendary wandering also traverses the borderland region, connecting southern Thailand and northern Malaysia. However, while the rhetoric of the Growth Triangle would appear to promote an undoing of the nation-state as container and to promote a post-national model of development, I would argue that the development of Luang Pho Thuat’s transnational presence, rather than destabilising the national imaginary, contributes in to an imaginary beyond the current borders of the nation-state, the imagination of a much wider Siamese influence before the modern era. The Growth Triangle, therefore, in a subtle way facilitates the projection of a nostalgic vision of past national greatness.

### **The emergent landscape of Luang Pho Thuat**

Today Luang Pho Thuat is one of the most prominent popular Buddhist figures in Thailand. Supposed to have lived some three to four centuries ago, during the Siamese Ayutthayan era, Luang Pho Thuat is possibly the oldest and most senior figure in the contemporary pantheon of “magic monks” (*keji ajan*). He is among the most popular and most imaged religious figures throughout the country and has in this sense become a true “national saint” (Taylor, 1988). Not only are amulets in his image among the most popular in the thriving trade in sacred objects, his visible presence in the landscape is characterised by a proliferation of giant statues which themselves become prominent tourism/pilgrimage attractions. These include a gigantic statue of the monk, dedicated to the Queen, in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, not far from Hua Hin, built around 2006. More recently there has been an even larger golden statue of the saint built in Ang Thong province, just north of Bangkok, while there is another standing statue under construction in Chiang Mai in the north of the country that, it is claimed, will be the tallest in the world.

Despite these developments, he is most prominently associated with southern Thailand, the area in which he is said to have been born and spent most of his life. Indeed, he has come to be seen as something of a patron saint of the South. As such he features as a prominent symbol of southern Thai, Buddhist, identity. He is by far the most imaged figure in the South and is almost ubiquitous in Buddhist contexts, appearing on household shrines, in personally worn amulets, as a portrait on shop or restaurant walls, mounted on the dashboards of cars and so on.

A young friend of mine from Hat Yai expressed the special connection felt between Luang Pho Thuat and the South well, telling me “in every house in southern Thailand you find two images, the king and Luang Pho Thuat”.

Luang Pho Thuat’s connection to the South is very much expressed through his connection to the landscape. His presence attributed to places where he was said to have stayed -- a cave in which he meditated, a temple at which he resided. In other cases it is locations where he performed miracles, the most famous being when he dipped his foot into seawater and made it fresh, earning him the moniker by which he is commonly known “Luang Pho Thuat Yiap Nam Thale Juet”: Venerable Father Ancestor (who) trod on sea water, (making it) fresh”. Or finally, there are locations where he left physical remains, such as the tree under which his placenta is said to be buried, or the stupas in which his ashes are interned, or even the sites at which his corporeal fluids are said to have dripped as his body was transported from the site of his death to its final resting place.<sup>3</sup> This is an embodied charisma that leaves traces in the landscape (c.f. P. Werbner & Basu, 1998).

This presence is naturally expressed in his biography. It is usually presented as a complete and coherent narrative. However, as different historians who have dealt with the figure of Luang Pho Thuat have noted (Gesick, 1985, 1995, 2002; Jory, 2008), this coherent, singular narrative, conceals a multiplicity of voices and a process of historical accretion through which this story has developed.

Up until the early twentieth century, knowledge of this monk seemed to be confined to the Satingphra Peninsular, now in Songkhla Province. There is some documentary evidence connecting Luang Pho Thuat with the Satingphra Peninsula. There are certain manuscripts detailing donations of monastic lands from the seventeenth century which mention a local boy who would grow up to be the monk “Jao Sami Ram”. These manuscripts relate the story of a locally-born boy, around whose birth certain miraculous events occurred. He later became a monk, continuing his training in Nakhon Sri Thammarat and Ayutthaya, on the sea journey to which he performed his miracle of turning salt water fresh. Later, after winning the favour of the Ayutthayan king through a combination of knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures and supranormal powers, he returned to Satingphra to renovate the ancient temple of Wat Pha Kho where he ruled as a sort of monastic landlord. In the local oral traditions he was subsequently known as the “Royal Lord of Pha Kho”.

Significantly, according to the local legend, Somdet Jao Pha Kho did not die but disappeared in the form of a ball of fire.

This ambiguous ending left the door open for further elaborations to the life story. It wasn’t until the 1950s that a monk from Pattani, located in the Malay-Muslim dominated region further South, continued the story. This monk, Ajan Thim Thammatharo, became the abbot of an obscure village temple called Wat Chang Hai in 1940. When he first became abbot the temple was all but ruined but for a small wooden stupa. Sometime afterwards Ajan Thim began having visions of several elderly monks who emerged from the stupa and whom he identified as former abbots of the monastery. The oldest was

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<sup>3</sup> The importance of the landscape for the presence of Luang Pho Thuat is dealt with in detail by Lorraine Gesick (1985, 2002).

identified by Thim as “the one who turned seawater fresh”, thus linking this local spirit to Lord of Pha Kho. In the early 1950s Thim began producing amulets that he decided to call “Luang Pho Thuat”.

Another key figure was Anan Khananurak, a member of a prominent local Hokkien Chinese dynasty who had established itself as a key player in local politics. Anan himself had been a long-time councillor and mayor of Pattani. Not only did Anan have dreams about Luang Pho Thuat that convinced him to financially support Ajan Thim, he researched and wrote a history that was published by Wat Chang Hai. This has formed the basis of the authoritative version of the Luang Pho Thuat biography.

Importantly for this paper, Ajan Thim connected the story of Luang Pho Thuat with legends of a monk locally known as Than Lanka. This monk was said to have wandered between Patani and Kedah, known by the Thais as Saiburi. Indeed, Anan’s history of Luang Pho Thuat connects the monk with the legend of the founding of the city of Pattani. According to Jory:

*According to this legend it was the Lord of Kedah, Phraya Kaem Dam, who established the city of Pattani and at the same time founded the temple of Wat Chang Hai, which he handed over to Luang Pho Thuat to be abbot. The monk divided his time between the two. Luang Pho Thuat gave explicit instructions that after his death he should be cremated at Wat Chang Hai, with a portion of his ashes to be kept at the temple in Kedah (Jory, 2008, p. \*\*\*).*

This story also goes on to state that over the days that the body was being transported, some of the corporeal fluids from the decaying body began to drip on the ground, thus charging the land with Luang Pho Thuat’s *saksit* power. At the locations where this took place, the followers were said to have erected wooden pillars to mark them as sacred sites. These have then become the apparent basis for the later development of at least some of the sites.

During the early 1950s Ajan Thim is said to have wandered along the route between Pattani and Kedah, literally following in the footsteps of Luang Pho Thuat. During this time he is said to have located sites associated with the ancient monk, presumably through his own capacity for connecting with his spirit. He is also said to have collected soil from these sites, which went into the making of some of the earliest amulets. In a very real sense, the sacred borderland itself became a part of these famed protective devices.

## **The contested borderland**

It is important to reflect on the context of the development of the Luang Pho Thuat cult in Pattani in the 1950s. The borderland itself was in a sense created in 1909, according to the Anglo-Siamese agreement which formalised the border between Siam and British Malaya. The Malay states of Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Trengganu, to which Siam claimed suzerainty, were formally ceded to Britain, while retaining Patani and Satun. This ended the much more fluid and ambiguous historical relationships that existed between the polities on the Malay Peninsula and Siam.

The region roughly corresponding to the former Malay Sultanate of Patani (now largely corresponding to Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and parts of Songkhla province), has historically resisted full incorporation by

the Siamese/Thai nation-state. Throughout this history there have been periods of armed resistance. Since 2004 a new round of violent resistance accompanied by state oppression has to the time of writing claimed around 5,500 lives.

The Luang Pho Thuat cult emerged in another period of fierce contestation of the borderland region, with resurgent Muslim resistance to incorporation into the Thai nation state combined with an active communist insurgency of the mainly Chinese Malayan Communist Party who used the forests of the borderland as a base. Luang Pho Thuat amulets quickly developed a reputation for protection against violent death and almost immediately became very popular among the Thai armed forces in the southern borderland region. This association between Luang Pho Thuat and the armed forces has continued to today.

Since the emergence of the Luang Pho Thuat cult in the 1950s, he has always had a strong nationalist character. He has also been connected in multiple ways with the monarchy, and especially with the Queen.

It should also be noted that during the 1950s and 60s, as the Luang Pho Thuat cult was emerging, the Malaysian side of the border was also considered to be a wild and lawless zone, and it was the site of communist insurgency and sometimes brutal crackdowns on local populations there. In this context it was often the Siamese minorities in these zones that were suspected of supporting insurgents, reflecting the often close relationships between Siamese villagers and ethnic Chinese in the region (Golomb, 1978). This suspicion even led Malaysian soldiers to torch several temples in the state of Kedah, including the region's oldest temple, Wat Lamdin (Kuroda, 2002). The desire to combat connections between potential Thai supporters of the insurgency was the very reason that the border crossing at Ban Prakob / Durian Burung, the very same border crossing that would be reopened under the auspices of the IMT-GT.

## **The IMT-GT**

The Indonesia Malaysia Thailand Growth Triangle is one of several sub-regional trade initiatives that emerged in the 1990s under the auspices of ASEAN. It symbolised a new post-Cold War era of transnational cooperation and came into existence only a couple of years after the Communist Party of Malaya finally agreed to lay down arms. As with other such sub-regional structures the IMT-GT set out to make use of local advantages, as well as the combination of economic disparities and physical, as well as "cultural and linguistic affinities", for the purposes of developing trade (Yue, 1997). So-called Sub Regional Economic Zones (SREZ), which are sometimes tellingly referred to as "natural economic territories" (Yue, 1997, p. 298). Accordingly the 2007 Road Map produced by the IMT-GT Secretariat in collaboration with the ADB states that: "The IMT-GT subregion is a classic growth triangle, characterized by many economic complementarities, geographical proximity, and close historical, cultural and linguistic ties." (IMT-GT Secretariat and Asian Development Bank, 2007, p. v).

Earlier rhetoric was filled with images of movement over frictionless borders and an apparent movement away from thinking of the primary role of nation states as cultural and political containers. This also included more openness within Thailand to the notion of expressions of common Malay identity (King,



2005). These hopes for However, the renewed outbreak of violence in Thailand's "deep South" in 2004 and the increasing conflict over the region's identity also point to potential conflicts in taking developing such routes, particularly those that might help to sustain the sense of a pan-Malay identity across the border. Thus they note that the development of "Malay cultural routes" could run up against "the aspiration of Thailand's approach to cultural development" (Rahim et al., 2005, p. 20) to use their euphemistic phrase. Nevertheless they go on to propose cultural routes that they identify tend to be split among the three major ethnic groups in the region — Thai, Malay and Chinese — with the assumption that members will only want to explore their own cultural heritages.

It seems that through the 2000s the notion of developing these common cultural elements into new tourist destinations began to gain more currency. In 2005 a team of researchers identified the potential for development of so-called "cultural routes" within the subregion.

Rahim et al. argue that:

*... the trans-border regional economic zone is still drawn together in part because of long historical and cultural ties. Undeniably, this historical and cultural linked is crucial and the basis for the formation of the IMT-GT conceived earlier... This cultural factor could be the basis for establishing the regional economy that could foster trans-border economic linkages both in the sphere of production and consumption (Rahim et al., 2005, p. 20).*

However, when the 2012-2016 Implementation Blueprint was released earlier this year, there was only one thematic route foregrounded: the so-called "Magic Journey along the Traversed Route by Luang Pu Tuad". To quote the Blueprint:

*A novel thematic tourism product that has been identified for promotion is the Magic Journey along the Traversed Route by Luang Pu Tuad (Thailand) based on a cultural/religious theme aimed at attracting Buddhists from the IMT-GT subregion as well as outside the region. Tourist activities will involve not only paying homage to Luang Pu Tuad, one of the most revered monks in the history of Thailand and Malaysia, but will also involve awareness and experience of local culture and lifestyles along the journey. The Magic Journey by Luang Pu Tuad will also connect and integrate with nearby tourism destinations in Songkhla, Pattani, and Nakhon Si Thammarat in Thailand; and Kedah and Perak States in Malaysia (IMT-GT, 2012).*

This packaging of the "magical" tour could easily be interpreted as a rendering of the premodern past in an amenable form for tourist consumption. This is certainly true. But what is noteworthy is that this process does not involve a desacralisation. Instead, the sacred -- magical -- power of the sites in question is reinforced. This project is clearly aimed at a combination of Thai and regional ethnic Chinese tourism. It is one example of the growing importance of inter-Asian tourism in the region, which clearly does not necessarily follow models of tourism based on the model of the white Western tourist. Clearly here a distinction between tourism and pilgrimage is difficult to make, where part of the tourist experience is expected to be an authentic communing with a source of sacred power.

Why has the cultural route of Luang Pho Thuat emerged at this time?

### **“Filling the gaps”**

I’m still getting to the bottom of the process by which the “death sites” of Luang Pho Thuat have been determined. What is clear though is that there is a pre-existing geography within Malaysia associated with Luang Pho Thuat. Since the time of Ajan Thim there have been speculations about the site of Luang Pho Thuat’s death, and the locations at which the convoy conveying his body stopped on its way to Wat Chang Hai. What is emerging however is an authoritative version of events unified in the cartographic form of the map. Following Thongchai Winichakul (1994), we can view cartography not only as a description of a landscape but as a performative act, in which a new geographic imagination is produced.

It is also clear that there are a number of actors involved, whose activities are loosely connected but have converged to produce the authoritative version.

### ***The scholar***

As mentioned at the outset of the paper, Thai historian Chaiwut Phiyakul has conducted a survey of sites in Perak and Kedah, in an effort to provide a survey of the sites associated with Luang Pho Thuat. He produced a list of 18 sites, 15 of which are located in present day Malaysia along which Luang Pho Thuat’s body was said to have been moved by his supporters. These were sometimes located in Thai temples, sometimes in rubber plantations or rice fields. At some he found wooden pillars in the shapes of lotus blossoms, at others there were other features that locals considered to be *saksit*, such as giant termite mounds. He compiled local stories and noted the existence of existing worship of Luang Pho Thuat. At some locations there were already images of the monk installed.

He is careful to note that he is only investigating local stories, and legends, that the truth of the matter cannot be determined. Nevertheless, I would argue that the research indeed produces a unified objective character to the landscape. For example, the article I cited begins by noting that previously there had been much speculation about the actual site of Luang Pho Thuat’s death, with various different stories circulating. However, his research essentially determines this site to be in Gerik, Perak state, at a site called “Sami Mati”. He notes that this is Malay for “monk dies”.

Whatever the case may be, the performative effect of the research has been to create an objectivity to a particular version of the landscape. It is worth noting that his research has been reproduced in other sources, such as the Songkhla Today newspaper, whence it has been taken up and circulated with enthusiasm in various forums dedicated to Luang Pho Thuat. And the maps that I show here have also been reproduced in at least one southern Thai temple -- at which resides the head monk of the southern district, and the site of yet another giant statue of Luang Pho Thuat.

### ***The hotelier***

However, Ajan Chaiwut has not been alone in the process of discovery of the “death sites” of Luang Pho Thuat. Another key individual is Khun Krit, a Hat Yai hotelier and member of one of one of Songkhla’s wealthiest Sino-Thai families. He is the driving force behind the development of the “thematic route”, mainly because he is the head of the Working Group for the promotion of tourism within the IMT-GT.

In August 2011 I interviewed Khun Krit, who explained in detail his motivations and the process of discovery from his point of view. In my discussions with him Khun Krit was quick to emphasise the reason for his involvement in the project is his own faith (*satha*) in Luang Pho Thuat. In contrast to Ajan Chaiwut, Khun Krit's explanations are full of mystical overtones and miraculous events. He explained that about eight years previously he had joined a group dedicated to "closing the gaps" or "finding the missing links" in Luang Pho Thuat's biography. As he explained it:

*1952, Phra Ajan Thim, Wat Chang Hai. He set of and went to Kedah, which used to be called Saiburi. He went to collect the soil from many places in Perak and Kedah and they come to make the amulet of Luang Pu Thuat in two years later, in 1954, which have become very popular. And we later know that Luang Pu Thuat was cremated in Wat Chang Hai. So after Luang Pu Thuat was cremated ... so ... there's a missing link between Wat Pha Kho and Wat Chang Hai . So at Wat Pha Kho Luang Pu Thuat is disappeared, vanished. But Wat Chang Hai says Luang Pu Thuat was cremated.*

I believe this was connected to the research conducted by Ajan Chaiwut, though I don't yet understand the connection. Khun Krit didn't mention him, instead saying that the search was undertaken by a friend of his, Khun M. and that they also enlisted the help of an elderly monk called Luang Pho Phrom, who had apparently travelled with Ajan Thim on the journeys looking for soil in Kedah and Perak. Already there were certain miraculous happenings that accompanied their search. Khun Krit noted that the sites were always discovered around six in the evening.

The group *also* discovered that Luang Pho Thuat passed away at a place called "Sami Mati". But here he said that strangely, although his group discovered it, it was also "discovered" by Malaysian and Indonesian Chinese. Indeed, at that site, which was previously part of a plantation, has now been converted into a place called Rachamuni Samiramo Park. Khun Krit said that the Chinese "communicated" with Luang Pho Thuat to ask permission to build the park.<sup>4</sup> As I was later to determine, these two founders of the "Sami Mati" park are cooperating with Khun Krit in the development and promotion of the "thematic route". Together they represent the three nations of the IMT-GT.

The spiritual dimension of the discovery process was reinforced when Khun Krit told me that he was being assisted by a friend from Bangkok, Khun Somsak, who had the ability to speak to "angels" (*thewada*) and other spirits, including the god Brahma (*tha mahaphrom*). Through his conversations with the spirits Khun Somsak was able to fill in the missing details about the landscape that would otherwise have remained hidden. This led to the surprising discovery that the very site of the Ban Prakob border crossing was itself a site at which Luang Pho Thuat's body had rested. As Khun Krit explained:

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<sup>4</sup> Other stories circulating online tell a similar stories. For example, one website states that "It was discovered together by Indonesian and a Malaysian on 10th December 2006 after blissful permission from Luang Phor Tuad." He goes on to state that "After had a communication (permission)with LP Tuad, He agreed and appointed PhraKru (LP Kheaw) of Wat Hui Gok, Pattani Thailand, to lay the first stone of Sala on 18 March 2007 at 9.30 pm." <http://dhammapath.blogspot.de/2009/04/luang-phor-tuad-sala-in-kg-sawa-gerik.html> It should be noted that Luang Pho Khiao is now probably the most well-known monk in the lineage of makers of Luang Pho Thuat amulets, who received his knowledge about the process directly from Ajan Thim.

*KK: ... Brahma told him [Khun Somsak] the story, that ... how the body was carried back. And this place was, but ... and you see, we went there many times but we never saw this water. And, he would say that the convoy came with 12 elephants. These 12 elephants ... the lead elephant tried to inhale the vapour from the body ... like the methane? Because this elephant is trying to inhale this gas that's produced by the decomposition of this body so that everyone in the convoy would not be ill.*

*JM: So it was like a sacrifice?*

*KK: Yes. To protect other people. And this leader itself, was ill, and has to stop here for 12 days. And the lymphatic liquid ... has dripped onto the ground more than in other places. After 12 days, after having a rest, the elephants regained the energy and continued on to Wat Chang Hai.*

Khun Krit went on to explain that he planned to organise the building of a new shrine (*mondop*) to Luang Pho Thuat next to the body of water at the border crossing. It would feature the monk at the centre, he said, and would be surrounded by statues of twelve elephants. Here we see a literal sanctification of the border crossing. This location, at which more lymphatic fluid than any of the other sites fell to the ground, is infused with Luang Pho Thuat's *saksit* qualities. It is as though Luang Pho Thuat marked the boundary of the nation-state *avant la lettre*. The newly opened border crossing, complete with all the instruments of control at the CIQ, is also literally conjoined with the sacred landscape of Luang Pho Thuat, forming an assemblage of sacred power and state rationality.

The development of the "thematic route" was for Khun Krit a type of devotional activity, borne out of faith in Luang Pho Thuat and a desire complete his story. He was therefore energetic in his efforts as chairman of the tourism working group to see the thematic route receive recognition within the IMT-GT. He told me he would be heading to Medan the following October to pitch his notion of the Luang Pho Thuat thematic route to the upcoming Senior Officers' Meeting (SOM). He was confident, as chairman of the working group, that his idea would have some sway. Judging by the fact that the only thematic route to be featured in the 2012-2016 Implementation Blueprint was the "Magic Journey along the Traversed Route by Luang Pu Tuad" suggests he might just have been successful.

## Conclusions

As Peleggi notes, "there is no heritage as such"; all heritage "is the result of the process of selection and authentication of the material past operated by scholarly discourses" (Peleggi, 1996, p. 445). In this case, I want to emphasise that it is not only scholarly discourses that are at play in the authorisation of the sacred landscape of Luang Pho Thuat. There is a dialectical interplay between scholarly representations and more "magical" forms of authentication. Importantly, while these are often treated as opposites — the former enlighten while the latter mystify — the net effect, I would argue, is of mutual reinforcement. This process is not new, but can be seen throughout the gradual development of Luang Pho Thuat as a religious figure. In this process scholarly investigations report on "local beliefs", oral histories or other forms of evidence, such as manuscripts, which are then taken up by promoters. These

representations in turn become part of the “beliefs” that scholars report on, which once again become the authorizing material for the promoters. And so the process carries on.

Although being fashioned within the transnational logic of the IMT-GT, I would argue that the emergent sacred cross-border landscape serves to perpetuate a largely national imaginary. As Thongchai Winichakul (1994) has argued, Thailand's historical imaginary is based on the notion of various “losses” of territory. According to the dominant narrative taught in Thai schools, Siam/Thailand “lost” various territories to encroaching colonial powers as part of the price it paid to maintain its independence. The northern Malaysian states -- former sultanates to which Siam claimed suzerainty -- belong to this imaginary. Thongchai has also famously characterised the nation state as a “geo-body”, drawing attention to the way that the Thai nation-state is imagined in the metaphor of a body, a body whose boundaries are under threat and must be shored up and protected. If the current territory can be equated with the “geo-body”, then regions like the Malay polities ceded to Britain are like its phantom limbs; they are no longer a part of the official body but their presence is still felt.

Intimately tied to the imaginary of the geo-body is the body of the saint, a spirit who has long been associated with both the shoring up of boundaries of individual bodies and those of the nation state. Now, with this new border crossing, this new opening of the geo-body has allowed for the “rediscovery” of a sacred presence which does not undermine the nation-state but bolsters its sense of historical presence, and therefore legitimacy. In the context of the ongoing violence in the “three southernmost provinces” of Thailand, that this transnational development might also be serving national goals.

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