

Thai Love Thai: Financing Emotion
in Post-crash Thailand

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abstract Since the crash of the Thai baht in 1997, Buddhist mass rituals of money and passion in Thailand are addressing the emotional predicaments of globalization with technologies of community that refigure the nation – from a geo-spatial body into a monetary spirit. Buddhist donation ceremonies, intended to shore up the national currency reserves, as well as mass rites staged to aid the spirit of the nation's leader, represent emerging practices of money, love, and identity in Thailand. This might suggest that the study of emotion should shift emphasis from the interpretation of numerous cultural systems toward addressing a shared global situation of subjection to international financial integration and uncertainty.

keywords Money, emotion, globalization, Buddhism, Thailand

Today hundreds of thousands of Thais, in hundreds of mass Buddhist rituals, hold aloft 'trees' made out of us \$100 bills and give the us cash, in nationalistic spirit, over to a Buddhist forest saint who, in turn, gives them over to the national treasury. Almost as many have attended rallies, waving Buddhist flags, in moral support of a wildly successful entrepreneur — the richest man among the new rich in Thailand — who has become Prime Minister. As he teetered in 2001 on the verge of impeachment for economically related corruption, tens of thousands attended mass Buddhist rituals held to alter his fate.

In postcrash Thailand, passion and finance are intimately bound in rituals of public life, and may be beginning to reconstitute the dominant affective frames through which the nation is articulated under current global conditions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in new mass Buddhist observances that are aimed at the harder edges of globalization. At points where local currency falls to international markets of capital, as happened in the Thai

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currency crash of 1997, such a defining edge to the conflict between local and global forces exists powerfully in imagination, as well as in practice. This article will address the financing of emotion under globalized conditions in Thailand by assessing the form and possible political effects of rituals of money and passion since the crash.

As the dust settles, as debates over contending rational choice models to explain the massive capital flight from Thailand return, for the most part, to the academic circles that train our world's financial governors, the consequences of financial catastrophe settle with those who have little say in such matters. But the emotional dimensions of economic existence in Thailand after the crash of 1997 cannot be appreciated either by attending to the assumed psychological structure of the rational economic actor, nor to that of the 'primitive' in despair and fetishistic confusion. No less inadequate are assumptions about a dynamic global predicament or about its antagonists, essentially lasting hermetic cultural structures. All of which puts the analysis of emotion and money in Thailand after the crash of 1997 in a particularly engaging position in relation to the anthropology of emotion as it has been more typically explored through emphasis on first-person description of experience followed by analysis stressing the construction of emotion within discrete cultural systems. Such approaches have typically explicated emotions through contrast with and translation to a folk psychology and language of 'Western' self and feeling. Such work is best typified, perhaps, by what I would call a 'classic' line of work, a line that might be drawn through major points in its path, such as Clifford Geertz (1973), Michele Rosaldo (1980, 1984), and Catherine Lutz (1988). It might seem that such a path would no longer be navigable under current circumstances, and that the antidote to anthropological theories of emotional construction within discrete cultural units might be to turn anthropology's attention to patterns of globalizing systems that create commonalities and render discrete cultures no longer heuristically relevant. However, such a rationale would play equally into a similar zero-sum game (even if no longer that between the 'West/rest') that proposes a fundamental theoretical opposition between analysis of locality and translocality, where local difference can only appear, where it appears at all, as a figuring contrast that renders the ground of a global order into more clarity by virtue of its fundamental difference from that global order. Instead, one might follow the lead from twenty years ago of Michele Rosaldo (1984) in identifying the analysis of emotion as identical with an analysis of structured social relations, and so include global relations of power as part of the determining context. At the same time, it is necessary

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to consider the often overlooked fact that the identification of such relations of power can be fundamentally unstable, except when conceived in terms of a 'center' for which there can be no doubt or substitution (Derrida 1978). Without assuming either a center to a hermetic cultural structure, nor a center to 'globalization' that is the key to understanding it in the whole, it may become possible to see in the construction of emotion in certain localities neither the complete assertion nor rejection of translocal orders of control but complex formations that contain both play and order, that contain elements of both domination and liberation, simultaneous potentials for reproducing and extending the power of global capital power processes as well as disrupting and altering them.

Therefore, rather than debunk the classic approach to local construction of emotion, especially as anthropologists such as Rosaldo or Lutz, for instance, have tied it to the practice and consequences of power, I would argue that a shift in emphasis is more like what is in order: rather than translation between cultural 'worlds' a recognition of a shared and mutually constituted world is the first priority (Wolf 1983). A 'classic' approach is still useful to address an anthropology of emotion and globalization, but the critical energy needs to be focused not so much to understand the contingency of each particular cultural view, nor the general physics of how the things 'language,' 'culture,' and 'emotion' interact, so much as it is to understand the workings of a particular historical configuration: an economic, political, and cultural situation of global proportions. The partial knowledge and angle of leverage gained on this situation, through an analysis of particular localities, could create potentially critical understandings not only, or even primarily, of 'Western' theories and folk psychologies, but rather could create critical angles on understanding this shared, global predicament itself. The shift of interest in the importance of cultural difference, a shift in the relevance of analysis from solely local systems to a situation of global dimensions, provides knowledge, then, not simply about the variability possible in the emotional life of the human being, but instead can indicate the developing ways in which a shared situation of global dimensions becomes shared very differently and from multiple positions, and moreover that therefore there can be no unified field theory of globalization itself.

Passion for money is common globally, is attempting to universalize itself, but can never be universal. There is no emotional gold standard to the interest, fascination, glee, despair and desires — noble and less so — that exist through money, nor is there, as yet, even a commonly accepted world currency in

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such passions. Nevertheless, surely our global situation is being constituted by varying passionate relations that live in and through money that is exchanged in a global arena heavily influenced by certain limited folk psychologies of how money motivates behavior in ways that are said to be natural, and so must be respected and adapted to. And yet, there are in degrees of power and subjugation under global conditions of passion for money innumerable differences in position and understanding between and within various localities, differences that can matter and for which translation and emphasis on local construction can become a key mode of comprehension, a means to critical understanding of globalization, but not an end in itself.

With this in mind, I would turn the attention here toward some ritual contexts for the public definition of emotion in Thailand after the country's devastating defeat in global currency wars in 1997. Forms of political power and influence created through the public redefinition of certain emotions in Thailand can be neither completely understood through local categories and conceptions nor can be accounted for as simply an extension of globalization, nor likewise can they be understood as simply assertions of local resistance nor an enfoldment into the global order of things. Instead, these rituals of national sentiment and value embody the power, tensions, and unstable points of opportunity for liberation and domination that are inherent in the phenomena of globalization.

Saving the Nation with your Cash

The followers of Luangta Maha Bua, the most famous living 'forest saint' in the northeast Buddhist peripatetic tradition (Kamala 1997; Tambiah 1984), got together with their teacher to establish the Thai-Help-Thai campaign in 1997 shortly after the crash of the Thai baht. The movement's goal was to exchange the tremendous charismatic power of Luangta Maha Bua for u.s. currency, gold, and Thai baht, in the form of Buddhist donations to the famed monk, to be given over to the national reserves.

In the booming 1990s, international sources had flooded Thailand with loans, most of which were denominated in foreign currency and on shortterm. The Thai government had, for six decades, stuck to the equivalent of a fixed exchange rate regime where the Bank of Thailand would always buy back baht on the international market with its foreign currency reserves, to keep demand and the price of baht stable. Over the course of the first half of 1997, after declines in export earnings and with debt mounting in the private sector, the Bank of Thailand's ability to defend the currency on the world

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market was battered when international speculators organized to hit upon the weakness of foreign-denominated debt, a debt compounded by risky domestic financial distribution schemes. The reserves were depleted in a series of attempts to defend the Thai baht against speculators, eventually leading to a broader financial crisis that, in turn, led to an international monetary panic after the defeat of the Thai baht on July 2, 1997, when the government had no choice but to allow the baht to 'float' on its own on the world currency market.

In response, the famed forest Arahant (realized Buddhist) Luangta Maha Bua began his campaign to bolster the kingdom's central treasury fund, the *khlang luang*, and so save the nation. Stressing both valued Buddhist sentiments of 'kindness, compassion, and generosity' (*metta*), and nationalistic sentiments of 'love for the nation' (*khuam rak chaad*), Luangta and Thai-Help-Thai turned some traditional practices for generating Buddhist-oriented sentiments in merit-making toward new aims, creating a kind of voluntary taxation that was at the same time a religious observance.

The capstone ritual was held on Bangkok's central commons, Sanam Luang, on April 23, 2001. The campaign was in almost its fourth year, and Luangta was to ceremonially give over a ton of gold and over a million dollars that he had collected during the previous year to the government. This event was the culmination of ritual merit-making ceremonies held at hundreds of public venues, mostly temples all over the country, where after considerable advertising Luangta Maha Bua would appear in the flesh to receive alms gifts of

U.S. dollars, Thai baht, and gold jewelry, all for the sake of shoring up the national reserves.

In most cases, the ceremonies replaced the traditional *kathin*, or robesgiving ritual, which is held one day a year at each temple. Ordinarily, groups, families, villages, and individuals save up and pool their money for a *kathin* event, often attempting to outdo each other, and then put their money on *kathin* trees (*ton kathin*): 'trunks' of tightly bound straw on which money tied to sticks is attached to make symbolic 'money trees.' With the high-value cash attached at the top, the money tree is then held aloft, paraded through the streets, shown off in various ways and finally placed in full bloom at the feet of the monks.

At the mass donation ritual in Bangkok, a new version of *kathin* had assembled upwards of a hundred thousand participants in the money rite to save the nation. The crowd waited out a hot afternoon on the central commons of Bangkok's old city, and then finally the announcer proclaimed that Luangta Maha Bua was entering the scene, to give the bars of gold over to the govern

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ment. He had been on a campaign for almost four years straight, touring the country to collect gold and cash, making stops at temples everywhere to hold merit-making ceremonies to save the nation. With their money trees in hand, thousands of them, the crowd at the great Bangkok donation ritual eagerly awaited the chance to give it all away. As Luangta chanted a first blessing and began a two-hour sermon that moved, alternately, far from and close to the theme of sacrifice, restless donors continually dug cash out of their pockets or solicited from others, finding some way to keep adding, fussing, and primping over their merit making trees, most of which sported the added touches of a Thai national flag and a photo of Luangta with the Thai king on his knees.

As excitement mounted, as darkness fell, as Luangta began to wrap up his two-hour discourse and then finally settled to the end, the 100,000 plus merit makers were finally free to begin pressing anxiously toward the stage. A 30foot-wide column of bodies and money trees surged the length of the field and hove forward through the convection of others waiting in the wings. Somehow they managed not to turn it into a stampede, with the announcer nervously pleading with the crowd to remain peaceful and orderly, to not 'waste the merit' or 'spoil the merit' and lose it all by getting their hearts into a frenzy at the last-minute and rendering in an instant all their efforts at collecting money over the past months of time useless and futile.

Merit, puñña, is in the Thai Buddhist reckoning of the ritual organizers, ultimately an affair of the 'heart' (cai). In theory, the tool of money or other gift to the Sangha (order of monks) is the initiator or spark of feelings which are to be enhanced and amplified with good intentions and moral behavior, ultimately refining and developing the heart (cai) and improving one's spiritual condition. Of course, the particular Buddhist theories that the organizers subscribe to is not necessarily the 'reality of internal feelings,' however one understands access to such a reality (and my concern here will be solely with performative definition of emotions, not the description, nor interpretive deduction, of internal states). But Buddhist theory is of course relevant here since it is one frame through which emotion is understood by participants in Buddhist rites, and especially by the organizers of such rites, who are monastics and dedicated lay practitioners. According, again, to theory, the enhancement of one's spiritual condition is afforded, oftentimes, not only through one's individual concentration and effort, but through the communal presence of others sharing in the power of the rituals themselves as well as the degree to which the recipient of the gift already embodies a refined and meritorious character. Ostensibly, the act of merit-making connects emotion with the

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spiritual state of the individual donor, links that process together with others in a synergistic fashion, and connects those connections in turn to the state of merit of the recipient. One of the most common ritual symbols and practical tools in performing such connection is the use of actual string, held in the palms of monks, attached to Buddha statues, relics, and anything holy, wound round spaces in need of blessing or protecting, and physically attached to individuals in similar need. With or without the use of string (some rituals outstrip in size the quantity of string at hand), individuals, groups, and those that embody the highest spiritual values simultaneously share and generate puñña together.

In lay Thai Buddhism the primary technology for shaping one's character and destiny, the trajectory of lives of individuals and those they share with, has always been merit-making, the arena of Buddhist practice that stresses a language of sentiment more than any other. In this discourse, it is metta| — roughly speaking, loving-kindness, compassion, and generosity — that is the central sentimental value appealed to in eliciting participation in merit-making. At the same time, it should be no surprise that in the practice of such public rituals of generosity, of course metta| is mixed with the desire to show off to everyone one's own good merit, as well as one's disposable wealth. Merit-making is, then, one of the most performative of all Buddhist activities in Thailand. And kathin, its premiere ritual, has historically been extremely effective in varying political and economic contexts over the years, one resonant example being the campaign by Bangkok-based Thai banks to expand their reach in the provinces through sponsoring elaborate kathin rituals in the countryside, as studied by Christine Gray (1986).

While merit-making is the primary Buddhist arena that values sentiments of connection to others, in full public and ceremonial view, it is of course far from the only public validation of such sentiments of connection generally. 'Love,' rak, is another staple of Thai theories and practices of community, the word 'rak' itself carrying complex and contradictory meanings in Thai. Rak is of course a highly valued sentiment in family and romantic relationships (it is never used on favorite foods, etc.). But rak, in strict Buddhist theory, is also involved in tanha 'clinging/desire' and rag 'lust/passion.' In that sense it can be and often is referred to as a direct antagonist of metta|, loving-compassion, since metta|, which in its highest form is 'love' for all without discrimination, can be antagonized by love for particular people and especially those for whom one also has lust.

But rak certainly gets valued in wider realms of practice in Thai society,

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which is of course not oriented toward Buddhist enlightenment alone. The premier venues for valuing rak, now and in the past, include the exaltation of mother–child bonds, the realm of dramatized romance, and the insistence of nationalist propaganda, which encourages rak for the nation. Nationalist love has in the past been largely articulated in relationship to a fear of internal enemies or potential invaders, and such love has often been espoused in tandem with a hatred for others, especially communists. At times, right-wing extremist Buddhists have associated this hate with Buddhist merit, advocating the killing of communists as a Buddhist merit-making act (Keyes 1978). At the same time, and far more often, love for the nation has been more benignly encouraged as supporting the development of the nation as a distinct geo-political territory. Thongchai Winichakul (1994) has called the object of such love, and generator of such hate, the ‘geo-body,’ an entity which had to be brought into discursive existence for Thais by transforming their technologies of group self-consciousness, particularly through the technology of mapping.

But today, in spite of the fact that Thai citizens are occasionally kidnapped or killed by Burmese security forces in border areas, the border as a military marker of the national body does not command prominence in media attention. And after a dwindling half-life, the u.s.-Thai cooperatively-generated hatred of internal enemies has also passed to a large extent. The geo-spatial consciousness of national and cultural identity no longer looms as the only technology with great potential reality-effects, not in a world in which the movement of finance capital has instantaneous global transport and the entire country can be brought down by the speculative moves of those who bet on international currency exchange rates, or brought down by the ways in which all forms of economic practice within the country contribute to the relative weakness or strength of the position its national money has in that global market. With the sudden crash of the Thai baht, after months of a failed state effort to keep the market price of the national currency up by buying it back from the global market with the nation’s foreign currency reserves, and after the lasting, severe, and shared effects of that defeat across society, it is not geographical boundaries that are the first object of nationalistic focus anymore but the currency itself which is the new ‘territory’ to be developed and defended, and which transmits the feeling of being bound in a common identity and fate. But it is not as though, despite how recent the dominating equation of money and nation is, there are not already in place ample means by which to work with, and rework, these relations of money and love, and so alter the specific trajectory for growth of the new national money-spirit...

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One by one, in rapid succession and sprouting out from the bed of money trees, each bristling tree of cash was placed before the feet of Luangta Maha Bua, who sat impassively on the stage as followers bowed down before him. Big and small trees mixed in the gush forward, with the largest ones garnering oohs and ahhs and gasps, particularly those that were bristling with u.s. hundreds, or else the occasional tree of gold: actual large tree branches laced with gold chains, bracelets and jewelry destined to be melted down into gold bars but now flashing in an infinite succession of camera lights and flickering with traces of the persons who had inhabited them, before the gold's future liquidization and reformation into a stack of thick bricks of national security.

Bringing up the rear, and towering over all, was a 50-foot construction, a 'map' of Thailand made out of bright 500-baht purple bills. Giving away this nation made of money, and wedding the 'geo-body,' or the idea of the nation as circulated through mapping technology, to the national currency, perhaps nothing better embodied the exchange of one national imagination into another, borders for monetary integrity, garnering the rare remarkable glance from Luangta who for the most part seemed to take little interest in the amazing spectacle of a sea of money washing up on the shore of his stage.

As the money was whisked behind the stage, so too was behind the stage the next stop for the thousands of pilgrims for the nation. There, hundreds of volunteers proceeded to defoliate a forest of money trees, creating giant piles of cash. Cordoned back with ropes and under the eyes of police, the crowd watched aghast as almost all present had never been in the presence of so much physical cash. Smiling volunteers cheerfully plucked away at the trees, while some would play to the crowd, sinking their elbows deep in a pile of 20 baht notes and coming up with fistfuls, or wistfully holding up a beautifully manicured and densely foliated tree of u.s. hundreds, as though it were a shame to dismantle it.

After over an hour of sustained, climactic giving, Luangta gave the final blessing. The merit having been made, it was time to share and spread it out. Luangta gave the chant for merit and the crowd was as silent and still as it could manage, hands in a position of respect and reception in order to focus on the wish, or atitaan, that accompanies giving. A mix of personal and family desires with the wish to save the nation, each atitaan is thought to be in connection with the others, all connected in turn to the great merit of Luangta himself. With a blessing string between his palms, then wound past the stage and hooked up to a fleet of eighteen-wheel trucks of water bottles parked behind stage, Luangta made a mass blessing through the string and into the

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water. In finale, the crowd rushed on the trucks, sometimes violently pushing, to come away with cases of bottled water charged, through connective merit string, with Luangta's blessing.

More Strings Attached

In an astute move, the latest Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, made sure to be personally in attendance for this mass ritual, to receive the gold bars from Luangta Maha Bua on behalf of the nation. And his attendance at the event was no mere formality: as a media and telecom tycoon, turned politician, he had successfully trumped previous parties' media image fiascoes since the crash, one of the most prominent of which was the previous administration's diversion of Thai-Help-Thai funds from the khlung luang toward what seemed a more prudent use of government funds in the budget current at the time: corporate aid. Luangta Maha Bua complained loudly in the media, while the previous government's response, including reasonable economic arguments from certain perspectives, was that at the time there were pressing needs at hand, and once the government had been given the money all strings of possession of the money were detached. Though exonerated of a legal attack launched by Thai-Help-Thai, the government eventually succumbed to this damaging scandal (as well as others), which virtually insured that the government would not gain ground in the critical Northeast voting bloc, the region from which Luangta Maha Bua and the forest monk movement hail. By contrast with the previous government, the new mediawise Prime Minister Thaksin, when given the chance to speak at the mass donation rally, vowed dramatically that not one baht would be diverted from the reserves.

Thaksin Shinawatra's ability to play to a crowd had already been amply demonstrated. He had already achieved the first legitimate landslide in political history, using his image as a wildly successful entrepreneur to promise he could turn the Thai economy around. Of course he would certainly be there at the Thai-Help-Thai ritual, to personally associate himself with the revered monk, and augment his own image as savior to the nation, an image which he had so carefully cultivated in his campaign and which, it turned out, he needed then more than ever. This was not Thaksin's first time in political office. In 1994, before forming his own party in 1998, he had joined the anticorruption party 'Moral Force' (Palang Dhamma) of Chamlong Sri-Muang, the former Maj. Gen. turned celibate Buddhist politician who led the prodemocracy protests of 1992 which, while ending in brutality, ousted the last

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dominant military clique in Thailand (Klima 2002). Given anti-corruption laws demanded by the new constitution ratified in 1997, Thaksin was as a cabinet official required to submit assets reports, which later showed some fuzzy practices, including what appeared to be the hiding of billions of baht in assets by transferring them to maids and chauffeurs. The case was finally brought to the end of deliberations by the nation's top Constitutional Court in 2001, shortly after Thaksin's landslide election in January 2001. With evidence of fraud mounting, the man who was elected as a savior of the nation was on the verge of being cast out of office, pending the vote of the judiciary.

Various popular campaigns were launched to save the Prime Minister, many of which had a Buddhist tone and involved liberal use of Buddhist flag-waving demonstrations, while the lay leaders of Thai-Help-Thai came out actively in support of Thaksin as well. But in fact it was the very severity of the crisis that faced him, the strength of the evidence and clarity of the law, that propelled Thaksin's case even more fervently into realms of Buddhist urgency, and one prominent ritual was particularly stirring in this regard: a high-powered Buddhist blessing and mass ritual to alter what seemed an impending fate, and so save Thaksin days before the court's decision was due...

The ritual to 'draw in the spirit-forms' or 'call back one's spirits,' *suu khwan*, is a ritual involving merit and blessing string that is done when embarking on new, important or risky ventures or after a calamity has struck. A disease of the *khwan* involves an instability in one's 'spirit forms,' often coming after a fright or sudden shock. The *khwan* are generally said to be 32 in number (corresponding nominally but not identically with the traditional Buddhist conception of the various parts of a body) and must be assembled back into a coherent, integral composite. The individual's composite of spirited energies can, in states of fright or when subject to powerful spiritual forces, become dispersed and fragmented, rendering one vulnerable to malaise, sickness, misfortune, and death.

Suu khwan, the ritual to re-gather, call back, and draw in the *khwan*, is common across Thailand. Although perceived as a traditional rural practice, in fact it is also widely accessed by urban professionals and students in facing their difficulties and tests. While much of the political protests and Buddhist flag waving for Thaksin were directed at the center of Bangkok, where the support for idealistic democracy and anti-corruption laws runs the highest, the blessing of Thaksin was staged quite deliberately in the provinces, at the great Dhamma Chedi (conical tower erected over relics) that was built re

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cently in the heart of Khon Kaen, arguably something of a capital city of the Northeast region of Thailand, 'Isaan,' where the power of moneyed networks of politicians tied to the largest voting bloc in the country makes for the most important arena at national election time. The Northeast is also, per capita, the poorest region of Thailand and its population are among the hardest hit by the crash. Many of the most senior and influential monks in the Northeast were assembled to 'gather,' 'draw in,' and 'call back' the spirit forms (sua khwan) of Thaksin and get him through the trouble to come, as the court's decision was due in a matter of days. Or, at least, that was the understanding, as Buddhist monks are not supposed to come out expressly in favor of a single party or candidate. An individual like Thaksin always has a right to a private blessing from monks. But given the amount of media attention focused on the rite, attended by every network and national newspaper, and given the prominent monks who were there to represent the Buddhist establishment, the ritual organizers were careful to point out at every opportunity that this was a ritual to help the nation, not any particular individual.

A day of tens of thousands: this time almost exclusively Northerners, over 30,000 lay people, '108' senior monks, and over 1,000 other monks, all filling up the lavishly ornate interior of the Chedi tower and spilling out into the temple yard. Loudspeakers blast the proceedings out to those who assembled for the mass event. As the announcer went to pains to point out that this was a ritual to protect the nation from danger, imminent danger, and not a ritual for the sake of any particular individual, the crowd eagerly awaited Thaksin (who was in imminent danger) to arrive. When he did, the place lit up with excitement. Cameras began flashing and rolling, heads began turning and bodies cramming to get close to him. Thaksin was led to the nine monks who would channel the blessing, all assembled in a small circle, with statues of the Buddha inter-spaced between them. A blessing string of connection was unwound which they would hold between their respective palms, connect to the Buddha statues and to the holy relic said to be housed in the center of the Chedi, and run out to the sofa upon which Thaksin would sit.

Originally, the plan was to follow a more traditional form. Thaksin was to sit not outside the circle on a couch, but in the middle of the circle of monks, with the blessing string wound around his head and held in prayer hands. An individual with dispersed khwan who is not gathered is vulnerable to illness, death, and misfortune, and is also particularly susceptible to curses and magic. The ritual seeks to bind, or rebind, the khwan together, and ends with a blessing in which a portion of the connective string is cut off and tied around the

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wrist of the recipient, to lock in the effect. Such a blessing of string wound round the wrist is routinely given by monks, but also by any village ritual specialist, and, equally as often in many regions of the country, by any elderly person to anyone who is their junior. The tying of string locks in the blessing and symbolizes the compaction and discrete integrity of the person's spirit forms. At the same time, the blessing is itself an intersubjective sharing of merit: it is a gift, and especially in explicit Buddhist rites it is tied on the individual with the very string that just previously connected community members each to the other and that instantiates the sharing of merit at these and other important ritual moments.

But the prospect of an image of support for Thaksin by monks, who are supposed to be politically aloof, broadcast across the nation, was considered too problematic, and the normal ritual of *suu khwan* was changed and Thaksin was no longer the explicit focus of the ritual. Instead of getting bound in string in the center of the circle of string, the Prime Minister was relegated to an adjacent seat on a sofa and hooked up from there. On an explicit level this ritual may have been transformed, from one stressing the integrity of the person (in a blessing that is given through the community) to the safety and integrity, and so also unity, of the nation, but of course implicitly the ritual remained focused on one person, Thaksin and his court case. However, changing the explicit reference of the ritual from Thaksin to the nation was anything but unfortunate for him. That his fate and that of the nation are exchangeable, or equivalent, was the foundational argument of the entire campaign to save Thaksin: he was the nation's only hope and could not be impeached. And so the foundational message of his dominant political party, so successful in cornering the market in moral authority since the crash, was repeated here once again.

Before ascending his designated seat for the ritual, Thaksin passed through the crowd, who were adoring him in a way never seen before in Thai politics. With arms open wide he moved through the crowd which surged desperately to touch him, and to tie on his wrist strings of personal blessing. This took almost an hour. He was gently tossed through the crowd as they adoringly tied string after string around his wrist, until it was covered in hundreds of strings, and he, visibly overcome with what seemed a kind of ecstasy, passively smiled back through the showering, pouring rain of love directed to him.

Eventually freed from the crowd, he took to a microphone and began to speak. 'I don't want anything for myself.' Tears were running down his cheeks and eventually his voice cracked, only to further deteriorate into sobs. 'I have everything already. I only want to help our country.'

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Cheers, some sobbing, and some country yelps (a self-conscious assertion of Isaan identity) ensued as Thaksin characterized the dangers facing him and the nation. With his hand and arm covered in blessing strings, as representing the hope and fate of the nation, with his khwan becoming the khwan of the nation, the national spirit tied into his, and encircled by string, adoration, and an attentive horde from the entire spectrum of journalism, he became the central router through which this sentimental economy was consummated, broadcast, and received.

The final ceremony of blessing in the circle of monks eventually followed. Though with the climax already over, and while not exactly eclipsed by Thaksin's blessing and bodily sharing in the crowd, the blessings of the monks were as inexorably tied to the spirit of that walk through a shower of hopes, the spirit of a new khwan body to the nation, one in which finance and love participate in a new national money-spirit...

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When Thaksin first formed the splinter party from Moral Force, the splinter party that went on to become the dominant political mega-party today in Thailand with sweeping powers of Parliamentary majority, he named it Thai-Rak-Thai, 'Thai-Love-Thai.' He then set about his campaign with promises of cash giveaways for small enterprise to every village, promises of affordable health care, and promises to focus on domestic Thai-to-Thai trade (all subsequently delivered on, to some degree), as well as his campaign to heal the wound of the new world order with the salve of communal love and so seem to be able to save the nation from the calamity that had befallen it by what seemed a combination of hostile global forces and corrupt internal elites.

Cut to commercial: a child watching a nature program, where a pack of hyenas are killing and devouring a wildebeest. As the dirty hyenas viciously tear apart the carcass, the child asks grandma why this is happening and she says 'this is the way of the world today.' The voiceover cuts to an explanation of the virtues of Thai financial institutions and a particular bank. The commercial shows clean, space-age robots that are meant to represent the bank, robots that are revealed to have, glistening within their cold white metal exteriors, beating human hearts.

With the imagination of, as well as harsh effects dealt by, a technologically globalizing world of novel social commerce, the ascendance of a regime of money/love is becoming ever more compelling. There may be a style akin to this in what Roger Rouse (2002) has called the 'cuddly capitalism' of us poli

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tical leaders. In the us, cuddly capitalism legitimates merciless neoliberal policies through media fascination with leaders' bodily expressions of affection and sometimes, well ... desire. Meanwhile in Thailand, the dimensions of feeling that are opened up by the simultaneous integration of, and uncertainty in, international finance, the dimensions of feeling afforded by global arenas of money exchange, are engaged by Thai-Love-Thai in its own ways.

For now, Thaksin has passed through his ordeal in court and has won, whether because of the *suu khwan* ritual to save him or because (as has been alleged in the press) it turned out that one of his political allies had stacked the court in a way that is rather traditional in Thai politics. And, for now, the debt since the crash remains as unwieldy as ever, at least until Thaksin's Thai-Love-Thai finalizes his expression of Thais loving Thais by moving the 60 billion dollar debt, mostly corporate and banking debt, to the public sector, where it can be paid off through taxation of the general populace. In exchange for the common person taking on this burden, Thai-Love-Thai has implemented a village entrepreneurship scheme, having pledged at election time one million baht (us \$26,000) for every village, to be used as a loan-fund for communal micro-lending to jumpstart local economies. This resembles patronage and dependency politics that were previously constituted between local citizenry and their direct parliament representatives, now cast in a wider, less localized national realm of relationship. In return, the wider national community will take on the debt wracked up by a small coterie of financiers.

Meanwhile, as it turns out, and despite the long, vigorous, and well-supported efforts of Luangta's Thai-Help-Thai, the over two tons of gold and over 200 million baht (us\$ five million) generated in this nationally prominent campaign is no match for the sheer scale of the sums of money that move globally through international finance, and does not even come close to figuring 1 percent of the debt. There never was any real chance of this money immediately influencing the nation's financial position globally in the foreseeable future.

And so the question might naturally arise, in the same manner, perhaps, as questions of emotion and money always seem to arise among Western academic elites, of whether these particular demonstrations of the act of love are actually forming new or even progressive social relations under globalization, or are simply a super-structural accouterment — the fetishistic reaction of the globally disenfranchised to the ethereal and inconceivable realm of international money flows: their desperate, even superstitious, fetishism of money that creates secondary fantasy hopes that grease the wheels for a more primary and structurally real economic transformation that will dominate them. On

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the one hand, the mass Buddhist donation ceremonies of Luangta Maha Bua might be seen as collective effervescence in which physical cash gets imbued with the bubbling sentiments of the crowd, the money commodity fetish becoming, in turn, an actual so-called 'primitive' fetish, and so representing merely a reactive application of local practice and emotion to a hopeless global situation. Meanwhile, Thaksin's Thai-Love-Thai Party might be more simply the 'Thai-Love-Me' Party, where he is the 'spectral' form that consolidates a new and undesired era of late modernist capitalism through sleights of hand that do not register among an enthralled populace. The structural rationale of global capital plods along according to its unfeeling logic.

But if value cannot be fully apprehended without appreciating how imagination and passion participate in its creation, then the emotional dimensions of economic traumas may lend knowledge and insight into multiple, rather than singular, possibilities for the ways in which the 'logic' of money has potential to play itself out. For instance, the Buddhist merit-making rituals to save the nation are both performing and prescribing certain economic values, and spreading them widely and prominently throughout the country. They are anti-debt rituals. The *khlang luang*, or national treasury reserve, is seen as the productive center of power, the health of which will generate the health of everything to which it is connected. Short-term gain is discredited in relation to long-term and solid position. The ritual, in both its accompanying 'voiceover' on loudspeakers as well as in the bodily performance, says it is time to wake from the dream of the boom, its borrowing and its promises. While in terms of actual monetary value the entire movement cannot even begin to participate on a scale that is statistically significant in terms of global economic processes, culturally it can make statements about economic policy, values, and priorities that can begin to participate in the national consciousness of monetary matters on a scale that can actually rival that of the policy makers, and help bring down a government. Luangta Maha Bua can create a public controversy over a government's disbursing part of the national treasury reserves, claiming it is connected to, and so belongs to, the people rather than the government. Thaksin, in depending on love as well as money, has had to faithfully follow the command that the merit-making money for the nation remain connected to the people who gave it, and has in general become more subject than any other previous leader to the support of the populace, where before leaders were far more dependant on money alone (either that or guns and the us). The ideals that Thai-Love-Thai is pushing may exceed the political moment and its personages. In E.P. Thompson's sense, a moral economy,

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once established, brings contradictions of its values glaringly into view (1971). What are, for instance, the long-term effects of arguing that the State owes healthcare to everyone, for every disease, at the price of one us dollar? Even if the scheme fails, it will be difficult to erase its memory, as well as the ideals with which it was justified in the first place. Does all this performance of communal love, here and elsewhere, simply serve the hegemon of globalization, or does it instead show us instabilities as well as opportunities to form and reform community? Thaksin will always have the money, but the love may not always be his to control. And if Thai-Help-Thai has a string attached to less than 1 percent of the non-discretionary treasury reserve (khlung luang), it has a string attached to all of it, as there is no way to distinguish whether any money withdrawn from the khlung luang is the money given by the people, or different money which was there before (as has been explained to me by supporters of Thai-Help-Thai, with rakish smiles). To Thai-Help-Thai, the first baht removed from the khlung luang will always be the last baht the people had put in there themselves as collective merit.

The fact that money and nation are bound together is not going to go away. It is not simply an ideology, ritual, etc. that is foisted through propaganda on people. The way in which money, connected to the broader universe of international financial markets, in turn binds most Thais together in a shared social predicament (however differently dispersed) is an effect of identity and economic existence that goes far beyond anything a national propaganda machine can produce. It is not the only effect, but under conditions of currency crisis and depression, it is a most daunting and urgent one. The language of blood and death, sacrifice to the soil and land of the Thai, a conception of love that accompanies the nationalist passion associated with the geo-body under previous global conditions is not up to the task of forming, validating, valuing, propounding, and demanding sentiments that function powerfully under current situations of global financial integration and uncertainty. Recent developments, then, have only heightened the precision of Thongchai's argument about the historical particularity of the geo-body, its arising through certain technologies that are historically contingent and so subject to change (1994). Similarly, the national money-spirit is contingent on changing conditions. The fact that the battles over Thai currency in 1997 took place from abstract positions in a global network of computer trading, that positions were established not along a geo-spatial front-line but from multiple points across the globe, without territorial strategy, the fact that location within the attacked territory does not equal allegiance to it and that transnational elites, whatever

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their nationality, can always sell their fellows out, is a situation not lost on those who suffer the consequences of such wars, and so why would the language of blood and territory speak to them as powerfully as it once did? Similarly, the language and theory of 'global flows' to capital and finance, the hydraulic theory of global modernity, carries traces of geo-spatial reasoning that

may be more adequate for some phenomena (much — but not all — labor and refugee migration, for instance) than for others (much — but not all — international currency trade: the transactions are near instant between any two points

on the network and money does not 'flow' or even 'circulate' between those points). If global flow were an adequate metaphor, Thailand would certainly have been more than ready to embrace it. Given the long history of Thai irrigated farming, and the dependence on water for rice production, there is of course a highly elaborated language of watered flows, life, power, and production in Thailand but these metaphors of controlling flows are not the ones being currently chosen, are not the primary language used in nationalistic assertions on globalization. The reason for that could be because such water-metaphors are not the best, nor even adequate, ideas for the situation as it stands.

Money may not now resemble a blood that circulates or a water that flows within and without the national body. The geo-body may remain in place, but its spirit, its money-spirit, is dispersed from it, drawn out by international networks, over-extended, vulnerable to the influence of others, and with claims and strings tied upon it from beyond. The more un-gathered and disjointed it becomes the more difficult it is to gain any power over or access to it. Under conditions created in a world that is, in part at least, very much influenced by despatialized and deterritorialized forces, there are rites that understand this spiritual value to money, that attempt to call that value back and rebind it, to transmit their energy on another plane than that of the physical body and which link and bind and reclaim this power of money with a spiritual technology that strings new cables of transmission. And in the process, the understanding of what is at stake in passions for money around the world today is re-imagined, re-theorized, and re-instantiated.

In constructing an accounting of emotion that might address situations of globalization, it is necessary to adopt approaches to human community, sentiment, and value that have the flexibility and subtlety to orient the mind

toward refined senses of the connections between people when the basis of that connectivity is given its subtle figure in terms of something as elusive as the money form, especially where that form is imbricated in highly abstract and technologically refined means of global exchange. The ritual practices of

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merit-making and integrating spirit-matter suggest not only how some Thais might influence the significance of money by using particular performative means, but how these 'local' means are in fact some of the best means to understand a global situation in which money and identity are more powerfully equated than ever before.

And so, rather counter-intuitively, it is not a need to 'go beyond' local structures of feeling and understanding, beyond local terms and categories that the global situation demands of an anthropologist concerned with the workings of power today, but instead what is called for is to delve even further within these 'local' understandings for insights into new ways to conceive of and address globalization, as this article barely begins. The previous techniques of the anthropology of emotion are anything but outmoded, nor are they in direct, zero-sum tension with the demands of global phenomena. What is called for instead is that the shift in anthropological attention is changed from translation — from one cultural universe to another — toward translations between various positions and understandings of a shared global situation, a situation that is, in turn, shared quite differently. But even more than providing understanding, specific techniques of money and emotion can actually create in practice innovative forms of passionate engagement with community under conditions of global threats. Such definitive performances of acts of love — which are deep plays on globalization — reveal the ways in which emotion is a crucial dimension of the battles under globalization, and so the constructive power of culture must continue to be watched and formed mindfully, as it contains both the play of domination and of freedom, which ultimately may not be under the control of any central power.

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