

## Introduction

### Buddhist Aesthetic Modernity

In his 1969 poem “Wela Khue Chiwa” (“Time Is Life”), modern Thai poet Angkarn Kallayanapong (1926–2012) presciently combines the cultural critique of a globalizing, commercializing, and art-averse era with a remedial vision. As a piece of modern Thai poetry, “Time Is Life” stands out in that it incorporates all at once a critique of the contemporary world, an expansive ontology that includes the cosmos, and a Buddhist-informed reparative vision:

Heaven has given us Time,  
 Like a lord of heavenly status.  
 Every single minute is life,  
 Destroying time is destroying oneself.

Does this existence have ideals,  
 Or is the heart evil, dissolute, without aim?  
 Worse yet, scores of lowly creatures,  
 Are carelessly enmeshed in the refuse of worldly entanglement.

One day, feel deeply about something,  
 Cut a newer gem of wisdom.  
 All over the earth there is no taste of divine efflorescence  
 As food for the soul.

The Wheel of Time will approach slowly,  
 Abducting life and executing it.

Should one merely eat, sleep, reproduce to one's heart's content  
Before the end of this life, before death?

Greedy, infatuated, insatiable, crazy for wealth,  
The spirit, sorrowful, disintegrates.  
The glow of life adverse diminishes,  
Lacking dignity, the glow of the heart is lost.

Awake, arise and seek value,  
Traces of the way of the great Bodhisattva.  
Render the value of your life to the world,  
Offer it for everlasting miraculous happiness.

Revolutionize the view of philosophy,  
So that the world be pure like heaven.  
Have loving kindness and pity, don't kill one another,  
Turn the flow of blood into the planting of flowers.

Salvage the heart to the height of the incomparable stars,  
Like glimpses of great dignity,  
Immortal, far above the turning of the Wheel of Transmigration,  
Sacred new power, brave knowledge of discursive thinking.

Clearly perceive the entire value of earth, water, sky,  
Long until the day of the *kalpa*'s end,  
For contentedness throughout time eternal,  
For the universe's calm, to erase suffering and peril.

In *Teardrops of Time*, I investigate how Angkarn Kallayanapong's poetry makes Buddhist concepts available to the creation of a modern Thai aesthetic and ethical imaginary. The poem "Time Is Life" represents an example of the ways in which Angkarn adapts Buddhist temporal frameworks to create scale for cultural critique, to inform modern ethical paradigms, and to invent a lexicon and poetology that adequately reflect the dilemmas of a transforming country and region.

In a primary oeuvre that spans the late 1940s–late 1980s, Angkarn inhabits scales of temporal enormity as his poetry simultaneously moves through a contemporary global world, through the universe, and through Buddhist eons—the *kalpa* that "Time" references. This immensity of time

serves to underline both the vehemence of the poet's critique of the present and the magnitude of the alternative worlds that he envisions. Angkarn works through questions of time in Buddhist philosophy, negotiates a literary historical legacy, and wrangles with subjectivity in the contemporary world. What is more, his work presents a diagnostic of an era in which US Cold War policy leaves an indelible mark on Thailand.

The use of imperatives in "Time Is Life" points to the fact that Angkarn's poetry aims to build modern, postcolonial ethical paradigms, taking seriously the question of cultural continuity and inquiring into what proper action for a postcolonial individual might look like. One of the important conceptual moves that the poet makes is that he resacralizes temporality and reenchants the modern world. The contemporary world that has become claustrophobic in his view is thus expanded to encompass the dimensions of an enchanted universe. In this universe, which the poet claims as distinctly Thai, it is possible to inhabit the same time as "the great Bodhisattva." What is more, this universe even offers the possibility of an existence that is "immortal, far above the turning of the Wheel of Transmigration"—a prospect that confers dignity upon and opens up opportunity within a dispiriting modern existence.

For those reading in Thai, "Time" exemplifies the ways in which Angkarn creates a novel poetic language that captures the problematics of globalization from the location of Southeast Asia: a poetry that wields the lexicon of a Buddhist universe with such facility that it manages to label the shortcomings of contemporary culture with precision, while outlining a redemptive scenario of artistic and ethical endeavor.

My analysis in *Teardrops of Time* further provides insight into the transformation of the cultural and political imaginary throughout the history of Thai authoritarian governance since the late 1950s and the exigencies of an increasingly globalized economy in the 1980s. During this entire period, Angkarn's work centrally debates Buddhist notions of time, refunctioning Buddhist ontologies and engaging pedagogies related to the Buddhist truth of impermanence.<sup>1</sup>

In five analytical chapters, I examine how Angkarn's poetry engages fundamental problems in Buddhist thought about temporality to propose desirable *ontologies* for the present; draws on the *historical* temporality of the Ayuthaya period (1350–1767) to furnish modern ethical and aesthetic standards; debates the status of the modern *subject* in time; introduces a novel poetic *language* to address the vicissitudes of Thai modernity; and how the poet's cultural critique and formal innovation produce a lyrical

postcolonial *politics* that engages global concerns. With the aid of these building blocks, Angkarn shapes a comprehensive poetic and philosophical framework for the Thai present.

As the formally most innovative Thai poet, Angkarn at the same time centrally mobilizes the literary, artistic, and intellectual pasts of Thailand. Thus, his poetic lexicon stems from Thai Buddhist cosmology and classical literary heritage and makes these available as aesthetic and ethical features for the present. Christian Bauer describes the seemingly incongruous features of the poet's work succinctly:

Formally it is consciously marked by the use of older meters, familiar from the canon of classical Siamese poetry.

...

His great innovation lies in his simultaneous systematic break with the conventions of traditional poetics: on the one hand, he explodes metrics through varying the number of syllables—but retains the 'correct,' that is, the expected, rhyme schemes—, on the other hand, he combines opposing expressions with each other, and includes even the use of obscenities. Readers were at first perplexed by this breaking of taboos: the literary dictate of 'euphony' (Thai *bayrauh*), or the expectation of the reader, is challenged by the content in this oeuvre.<sup>2</sup>

What I append to this widely held understanding of the character of Angkarn's work is the argument that, while his poetry is marked by strident critique of the hybridization of Thai culture that has taken place as a result of globalization, it advances a language that is itself exemplary of such hybridity. His work thereby combines an intentional content that conjures the image of an early modern Thai cosmopolitanism with a poetics highly reflective of present-day globalization. What results is an experiment in a Thai Buddhist cosmopolitan aesthetic modernity. As one of the globally most significant poets of the twentieth century, Angkarn thus not only pioneered much of Thai modern prosodic development, but his work also provides unique insight into a non-Western literary modernity and modern Buddhist aesthetics.

In its linguistic innovation, Angkarn's work aligns itself with contemporaneous trends in poetry across the globe. In chapter 5, I therefore

draw Angkarn's work in relation to Paul Celan's. The Thai poet even drew the attention of American Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, who proceeded to translate three of Angkarn's poems into English, a textual and personal encounter that chapter 6 explores.

In this book, I label Angkarn's concern a postcolonial one. Official versions of Thai history continually foreground the country's noncolonization, but critical historical work has persuasively detailed its semicolonial status.<sup>3</sup> I describe Angkarn's poetry as postcolonial not only in accordance with official or nonofficial designations of Thailand's colonial status, however, but due to this poetry's overriding focus on cultural survival and its very preoccupation with time. My analysis includes first-time translations of poetry and poetic prose from the poet's entire oeuvre.

## Temporality

In Angkarn's large-scale project of cultural recovery, Buddhist frameworks of temporality assume an especially important role in the critique as well as the remedial ontologies that he develops for Thai modernity. In 1969, the poet writes "Su Krasae Chara," a poem in the volume *Lamnam Phu Kradueng*, the title of which translates as "Against the Stream of Aging" or "Fighting the Process of Aging." The following three stanzas of the poem detail the immensity of time's power and the poet-narrator's efforts to transcend its destructive power.

The universe combats time's endlessness,  
 Brave for the timeless ages to come.  
 The human race may presently become extinct,  
 But Time will always be paired with the earth.

Why should the heart tremble in fear,  
 Leading the defiled world to utter sadness?  
 I, floating higher than the clouds fly,  
 Am used to grazing the spectrum of the stars.

Taking the mountains, streams, forests, and oceans,  
 As divine medicine, a tribute to heaven,  
 The manifold diverse precepts of all of eternal nature,  
 Come like magnets with the power of a miraculous, sacred heart.

“Against the Stream of Aging” moreover further elaborates the world that Angkarn’s poet-narrators inhabit. Rather than traverse merely the world of the social or of feeling, the poet inserts the speaker into a world in which the universe as a whole plays a role and natural phenomena appear as philosophical agents (“The manifold diverse precepts of all of eternal nature”). To build such a world for his readers, the poet draws on Thai Theravada Buddhist as well as Mahayana Buddhist—and Hindu—imagination of cosmology. These Buddhist and Hindu paradigms are marked by the vast dimensions of space and time that they delineate. Thus, the *kalpa*, or Buddhist eon, that the poet references in “Wela Khue Chiwa” (“Time Is Life,” 1969) above, designates the age of a world and spans billions of years—4,320,000,000 years, to be exact.

The majority of Angkarn’s publications stem from between 1964 and 1987. His first collection of poetry, *Kawiniphon Khong Angkarn Kallayanapong* (The Poetry of Angkarn Kallayanapong), was published in 1964. However, this collection also contains poems that were originally published in the 1950s—and the earliest even dates to 1947. Throughout his writing from the 1950s until the 1980s, the theme of time emerges as an overriding concern. This becomes evident throughout Angkarn’s first volume of poetry, *Kawiniphon*, as well as throughout the subsequent volumes, *Lamnam Phu Kradueng* (Kradueng Mountain Song, 1969), *Bangkok Kaeo Kamsuan Rue Nirat Nakhon Si Thammarat* (Lament for Beloved Bangkok or Nirat Nakhon Si Thammarat, 1978), *Panithan Kawi* (The Poet’s Testament, 1986), and *Yad Nam Khang Khue Namta Khong Wela* (Dew Drops Are the Tears of Time, 1987).

In these works, time becomes the trope that unifies the poet’s aesthetic, historical, and ethical concerns. The poet works through quandaries regarding time in the ontological sense of “What is time?” and in the sense of “How much time do I have in the face of time’s passing?” Angkarn begins his poem “Kala Khue Arai” (“What Is Time?,” *Lamnam Phu Kradueng*) as follows:

Time, a rapid powerful current, what is it?  
Why is it great, all over the skies?

That the title and beginning of the poem take the form of questions is apt, as the poet addresses issues of temporality in the format of a problematic, rather than as something already known. In particular, Angkarn’s work takes up the problem in Buddhist philosophy of whether time is to be

regarded as substantial or not. Thus, in the 1987 prose poem “Nimit Nai Sai Rung” (“*Nimitta* in the Rainbow”) the poet writes about the nature of time: “It is possible to say that it has a self and possible to say that it has not.”<sup>4</sup> I direct detailed attention to this question regarding time’s substantiality in chapter 2.

In addition to debating the substantiality of time, the poet experiments with temporal scale, setting vast cosmological temporalities and Buddhist temporalities of impermanence against the minuteness of human life. These inquiries into the nature of time then prompt the poet’s concern with the role and destiny of humanity in the present. In “Laeng Wanakhadi” (“Devoid of Literature,” *Kawiniphon*) the poet asserts:

Devoid of literature this life is  
 As though the auspicious spirit is no longer to be found.  
 Without the precious jeweled rainbow—  
 Light of the soul in the world.

Buying status and riches,  
 Flooding and feeding the charnel ground.

As early as in this 1964 poem, the notion of art’s essentiality to human life looms large. In a further step, the poet’s signature laments over cultural loss motivate reflection on the status of the art-producing individual and the endurance of the arts within time. It is in this context that his poetry also acutely grapples with ethical questions. One ethical path that could be pursued within a Buddhist system is that of striving toward the timeless state of nirvana. This individual soteriological solution does not entirely satisfy Angkarn, however, and he calibrates the possibilities of a Buddhist practice that is oriented toward a collective soteriology instead. It is here that the poet confronts one of the most difficult problems in the ontology that he attempts to design for the present. The notion of impermanence (Thai, *anijjang*; Pali, *anicca*) that is at the heart of Buddhist philosophy presents an obstacle to the meaningful life centered on the production of art and the striving for knowledge that the poet proclaims as humanity’s highest goal, a dilemma that has garnered much attention in Thai literary criticism. During the poet’s working through this ethics of artistic practice, both art and the artist acquire cosmological and soteriological significance. Angkarn’s poetry thus constantly oscillates between the injunction to adhere to Buddhist principles and heed the

law of impermanence—and his desire to transcend impermanence for the sake of producing lasting, ethical work. The problem is never entirely resolved, and this produces the tension that gives his poetry its contemporaneous and ethical-philosophical charge.

A poem in the 1986 volume *Panithan Kawi* presents some of the paradoxes of the ontology the poet seeks to build and illustrates the challenges for an individual who seeks to retain a culturally specific and Buddhist worldview in the present.

“Phutharom” (“Buddhist Spirit”)<sup>5</sup>

I would like to wrap myself in the wind, the sky, and the  
 great ocean,  
 In a second, a hundred years of human lifetime become  
 empty, nothing.  
 The coffin helps to let go, o soul,  
 When the world is in turmoil, heaven leaves us the cemetery  
 of the universe.

Taking sky and earth as a home,  
 The brilliant stars and the rays of the moon as torches,  
 Misty clouds drop down as a blanket,  
 Enveloping wisdom, singing to sleep the sky.

Crazy possessions all over the sky and universe,  
 Throw them away, bestow good fortune on the burial ground.  
 The soul abandons the remains of grief, that hidden cemetery,  
 Forgetting to wake up in the next existence, weary of  
 transmigration.

Ever since the sun illuminated the sky,  
 The golden clock was not time watching the world.  
 Slavelike humanity, don't be vile, be still.  
 Attain the core of brave heroic truth, sharp discursive thinking.

Assume a brave and miraculous attitude,  
 The heart sparkling with the strength of merit,  
 Buddhist *dhamma* illuminating the spirit.  
 Place the universe under the sole of voidness.



In a Buddhist spirit, for the instance that an elephant shakes  
 his ears,  
 A snake sticks out its tongue, contemplating this immense value,  
 Making merit to expel preposterous, shameful arrogance,  
 Contempt toward others that rots the soul.

In “Buddhist Spirit” the poet at first enjoins us to submit to the law of impermanence or the inexorable, all-annihilating progression of time. Here the poem seems to speak in accordance with Buddhist orthodoxy and its doctrine of *anattā*, or nonself. Already the second stanza, however, positions the speaker as an important cosmological actor, “taking sky and earth as a home.” In this stanza, the poem invokes a notion of individual possibility and even grandeur that seems to be at odds with the prior Buddhist exhortation. In the stanzas that follow, the reader is encouraged to discard possessions and instead to turn to the production of art as a proper ethical pursuit. At first this again seems to be a truly Buddhist injunction:

Buddhist *dhamma* illuminating the spirit.  
 Place the universe under the sole of voidness.

The poem further speaks of a weariness of existence and the desire to escape the cycle of transmigration—all proper Buddhist sentiments on the path of individual soteriology. However, all lines of the poem that speak of the individual’s actions also assume yet another dimension. Thus stanzas 4–5 exhort us to

Attain the core of brave heroic truth, sharp discursive thinking.

Assume a brave and miraculous attitude,  
 The heart sparkling with the strength of merit.

Although presented in the context of meritorious action, these lines may be read to stand in contrast to the Buddhist injunction to let go. The mandates that “Buddhist Spirit” sets forth also assume the symbolics of individualism, hinting at such characteristics of an individual as superior talent and training as well as diligence.

While others have designated Angkarn’s apotheosis of the artist a version of Bodhisattvahood, this poetic vision always also possesses qualities

that exceed Buddhist formulations.<sup>6</sup> As much as it may be oriented toward Buddhist action, this vision, as instantiated by “Buddhist Spirit,” underlines the individualist bent of Angkarn’s philosophy, a fact that Marc Weeks and Frederic Maurel presciently note and draw into comparison with writing on individual will by Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>7</sup>

As such, Angkarn’s poetry lends itself precisely to an inquiry into contradictory notions of the self under conditions of Thailand’s growing engagement with global capitalism in the period under consideration. I investigate the poet’s interrogation of modern Thai subjectivities through the lens of time in chapter 4. On a further level of analysis, we can understand the poet’s vision as also furnishing evidence for the confluence of Buddhist and individualist-capitalist delineations. Thus, Angkarn’s poetry is uniquely suited to an investigation of the paradoxes of life in a globalized, neoliberal world.

Rather than assume that Angkarn’s poetry presents only a coherent, purely Buddhist ethics for the present, consideration of the contradictory elements in his work allows us to ask what the particular challenges to the individual are in the Thailand of the 1950s–1980s. Thus, the strength of Angkarn’s poetry is not that it furnishes logical closure, but rather that it keeps open the question of how to live in a present in which cultural survival is constantly under threat.

My analysis of the coexistence of divergent temporalities in Angkarn’s work is informed by systematic critiques of the linear, rationalized time of clock and calendar undertaken by scholars such as Bliss Cua Lim, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Harry Harootunian, and Pheng Cheah. Thus, Chakrabarty’s critique of temporality aims to “situate the question of subaltern history within a postcolonial critique of modernity and history itself.”<sup>8</sup>

Lim argues that “modern homogeneous time has come to seem increasingly natural and incontrovertible, assuming the guise of a ready-made temporality.” This temporality “synchroniz[es] people, information, and markets in a simultaneous global present.” The problem that such a streamlining of time creates is the following:

Modern time consciousness is a means of exercising social, political, and economic control over periods of work and leisure; it obscures the ceaselessly changing plurality of our existence in time; and it underwrites a linear, developmental notion of progress that gives rise to ethical problems with regard to cultural and racial difference.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast to such forcible rationalizations of time, Lim calls attention to the ways in which heterotemporality persists in the present. Her remedial strategy is to highlight the critical, historically reparative perspective that the recognition of divergent temporal strata may engender.

In Angkarn's poetry, Buddhist temporal strata are called upon to perform the work of expanding the time of the present. I will argue that the function of Buddhist temporality in this work is not merely to represent an *other* dimension to a dispiriting present, however. Rather, Buddhist temporality is as much of the present and erupts from within it as it links to other temporal strata (such as the past).

I argue that the centrality of time in his oeuvre alone makes Angkarn's a postcolonial project. In this argument, I rely on the work of Pheng Cheah, who locates temporality at the center of a postcolonial reconceptualization of world and worlding. On the most basic level, the focus on time, rather than space, enables an intervention into colonial and neocolonial capitalist mappings of the world, according to this author. Cheah's framework understands "time [as] the original opening, the first and ongoing relation to exteriority" and "the world as an ongoing work."<sup>10</sup> It complicates both teleological models of the world as well as the facile championing of heterotemporality. Within this model of world and worlding that focuses on temporality, postcolonial literature holds a special place.<sup>11</sup> Two avenues for decolonization have been pursued in this literature and in postcolonial political projects more broadly—revolutionary decolonization and the championing of heterotemporality. Cultural survival occupies a central place within these endeavors: "One of the aims of revolutionary decolonization is the struggle against cultural genocide. It ushers a new temporality that reworlds and opens another world for a people in the face of colonial violence."<sup>12</sup>

The greatest intervention that Cheah makes into postcolonial models of worlding and deployments of time is to position heterotemporality—the existence of multiple temporalities that are distinct from the "homogeneous empty time" of modernity and colonial, capitalist expansion—not as extraneous but as situated within the temporalities of globalization, nation, and capital:

Multitemporality is not the interruption of the homogeneous empty time of capital by another, nonsecular temporality. It is instead the intensification of an already existing heterogeneity by the forces of hybridization generated by global capital flows.<sup>13</sup>

Seeking to show that this is precisely the move that Angkarn's oeuvre undertakes, I argue that he is at once the modern Thai poet who engages most directly with the global and thinks most stringently about how to make the temporalities of cosmology and Buddhist soteriology available for critique in the present.

Angkarn's poetry further engages historical temporalities by inquiring into the significance that one particular period in Thai history might have for the present. In particular, he consistently contrasts the Ayuthaya period (1350–1767), which he deems to have been the high point of Thai cultural achievement, with the present Bangkok period. I discuss the question of what kind of worldview emerges from this orientation toward Ayuthaya in chapter 3.

In other poems on time, Angkarn highlights poetological questions, focusing with great intensity on what modern Thai art should look like and what the role of the art-producing individual should be. In this debate, the poet inquires into the individual's status within the temporalities of modernity, setting these into relief against vast cosmological frameworks of time. What is noteworthy is not only the degree to which Buddhist thought enters into these debates, but also the extent to which the poet develops further Buddhist thought on time, the self, and the arts.

Although Angkarn's poetry and poetology are distinctly Thai and frequently bear cultural-nationalist overtones, this work is at the same time intricately connected with poetological concerns across the globe. Thus, like several of his contemporaries internationally, Angkarn is singularly absorbed in questions of cultural continuity, or rather, in an updating of Thai cultural resources for the present. Although he frequently declares his aversion to foreign cultures, Angkarn is also the first Thai poet presently to address issues of globalization in a concentrated manner.<sup>14</sup>

In his poetic critique of the present, especially where "Bangkok" is concerned, the poet's work at times appears xenophobic. He has further been said to eschew reading in foreign languages. His daughter, Ormkaew Kallayanapong, by contrast, describes Angkarn as a vivacious, cosmopolitan intellectual who enjoyed the exchange with foreign poets and read voraciously, attempting to do so even in languages of which he did not have extensive knowledge.<sup>15</sup> At an event in the 2000s, Angkarn himself affirmed, "I read everything like an ocean takes everything in; but mostly literature."<sup>16</sup> This biographical information will become important for understanding the cosmopolitan character and references of the poet's work.

## Subjectivity

At great length, Angkarn's work deliberates on impermanence as the base condition of subjectivity. The creator of art, especially, oscillates between sacrificing life and gaining ascendancy over impermanence. The poet moreover situates modern Thai subjectivity in a world of capitalist pressures, but also highlights aspects of personhood that supersede these. Rather than understanding the temporalities of the contemporary, Cold War world as diametrically opposed to those of Buddhism, I argue that they converge in Angkarn's poetry and the social fields that it addresses.

As a prescient poet of globalization, Angkarn grapples with the question of what a desirable modern Thai subjectivity might look like. Angkarn's preoccupation with a self that on the one hand possesses immense powers of agency, while it is on the other hand constantly subject to dissolution, is part of his philosophy of vocation, but must also be examined in relation to political change from the 1950s until the late 1980s. In the 1970s the poet's contemporaries were singularly concerned with creating poetics that they understood as aimed toward democratization, while Angkarn seemed oblivious to the political agendas of his leftist colleagues. At the same time, he set his sights on a broad philosophical horizon of cultural renewal early on, a postcolonial cultural politics. The poet's deliberations on subjectivity represent an important component of this agenda. What does a desirable modern Thai subjectivity look like? How is this subject positioned within time? What temporalities might be accessible to him?<sup>17</sup> What is a culturally postcolonial subject to do?

I argue that the new, multifaceted demands that persons in Thailand face in the constantly changing political, economic, and social environments of the 1950s–1980s vitally motivate Angkarn's focus on the ideal contours of ethical selfhood. The poet conceptualizes subjectivity along two main axes that I investigate in two chapters. Chapter 2 approaches Angkarn's concept of subjectivity by examining how he positions the self in relation to Buddhist doctrinal thinking about impermanence. Chapter 4 returns to this question with a focus on the role of the artist and an investigation into the social and economic factors that make increasingly contradictory demands on the individual in the 1950s–1980s.

While subjectivity is not merely a matter of historical cultural forces, but also of psychic economies and pleasure—all of which one could read from Angkarn's work—I restrict myself primarily to investigating the poet's

concept of subjectivity in relation to new stipulations for personhood in the decades under review and to analyzing the notions of subjectivity put forth in the manifestos drafted by Angkarn and other poets.

### Manifestos

Closely connected to questions of temporality, subjectivity, and Angkarn's deployment of Buddhism is the discussion of modern poets' artistic credos. My discussion of manifestos in chapter 4 is inspired by Suchitra Chongstitvatana's work on the modern manifesto and its literary predecessors.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Thai literary scholars pursued the question of an indigenous literary theory. Suchitra notes that there are few extant treatises on literary theory per se; therefore, scholars turn to the investigation of the literary theory inherent in treatises on versification and in thought about the role of literature expressed in the literary works themselves. In 1984 Suchitra pioneered this trend with an inquiry into the "formation of Thai poetical convention and Thai concepts of poets and poetry."<sup>18</sup> In chapter 3, I pursue a similar historically grounded analysis with regard to the poetics and politics of the *nirat* genre.

With respect to the modern period, scholars note the tendency of Thai poets to put forth manifestos declaring the aims of their work—as well as exhorting others to heed particular literary standards and ideological ideals. Investigating the predecessors of modern poets' manifestos, Suchitra asserts that statements of poetic purpose are not an entirely modern invention, but in some respects follow upon a tradition: "Thai poets in the Ayuthaya period demonstrated a 'convention' of expressing a high esteem for their own work and wishing it to remain forever."<sup>19</sup> She provides three examples: "This 'convention' can be seen from the early poetical works like *Lilit Yuan Phai*, *Thawathotsamat*, and *Lilit Phra Lo*."<sup>20</sup> Suchitra observes that modern poets follow in the traces of these classical dedications, but modify them to a great extent: "This 'convention' still survives in the works of modern poets like Angkhan and Naowarat. . . . Although these two modern poets seem to follow the 'convention' they extend it further to a deeper dimension of their own."<sup>21</sup>

Trisilpa Boonkhachorn relates modern poets' manifestos to the declining role of poets in society and considers the new relation to the social that modern poetry evinces:

In the “advanced” technological society, the status of poetry seems to lessen. However, an interesting phenomenon is that in contemporary Thai poetry some poets, e.g. Angkhaan Kalayaanaphong and Naowarat Phongphaibun express the philosophical themes of poetry by emphasizing the meaning, the status, and the function of poetry. For the first time in the history of Thai literature poets struggle with a declining role in society. Poets now declare their “Poetic Testaments” to restrengthen the power of poetry in creating a better society and world.<sup>22</sup>

What my analysis adds to this important conversation on modern poetics is the sociopolitical contextualization of modern literary manifestos and the investigation of changing notions of subjectivity in a neoliberalizing world.

### A Cultural History of the 1950s–1980s

*Teardrops* combines a methodology of close readings of Angkarn’s poems and poetic prose pieces with discourse analysis and thereby embeds its thematic analyses in the cultural history of the period in which the poet works. Most of Angkarn’s writing is published at the height of the Cold War, during a time of predominant US influence and, later, of Japanese economic engagement in Thailand. More specifically, the poet begins to write, with regularity, in the 1950s. The late 1950s marks the beginning of a period of authoritarian, developmentalist rule under Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat (1958–1963). This period proved foundational for structures of governance in subsequent decades. I thus examine how Angkarn’s poetry positions itself in relation to standards that emerged as the Thai state increasingly consolidated itself as a military polity and expanded government control over the provinces.<sup>23</sup> I further investigate how we might understand Angkarn’s poetic innovation and philosophical outlook in comparison with the left-wing Art for Life poets whose works dominate the tumultuous 1970s, the decade in which prodemocratic citizens rise up to challenge the military state and are ultimately brutally suppressed. Finally, I argue that we must view Angkarn’s work also in relation to the post-Cold War period of the 1980s when the Thai economy expands even further.

The historian Chris Baker and the economist Pasuk Pongpaichit provide a helpful account of the large-scale transitions that Thailand undergoes during the period that Angkarn's poetry addresses. What makes their presentation of the period from the 1950s until the 1980s especially valuable is that they investigate Thailand's history during these decades as always already transnational. Dating Thailand's "American era" to the 1940s–1960s as they do, these authors note that especially the 1950s and 1960s are marked by concerted US investment into establishing influence in Thailand—in the effort to make Thailand the primary ally of and a bulwark for the United States against the spread of communism in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Subsequent to Sarit Thanarat's military coup in 1958, the United States began its vigorous, long-term backing of anticommunist military regimes in the country.<sup>24</sup> Baker and Pasuk detail the far-reaching changes that US financial aid to Thailand effected in the country's bureaucracy and military.

Baker and Pasuk's history indicates the centrality that Thailand assumed for the US war in Vietnam in the years that followed: the first US airstrikes on Vietnam were flown from Thailand in 1964.<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, "three quarters of the bomb tonnage dropped on Northern Vietnam and Laos during 1965–1968 was flown out of seven bases in eastern Thailand."<sup>26</sup>

In close conjunction with consolidating Thailand's support of US geopolitical interests, these decades saw the introduction of the notion of *development*, which became the dominant paradigm of Thai economic, political, and cultural policy henceforth. In economic terms,

The US set out to develop a free-market economy to cement Thailand into the US camp of the Cold War.

President Truman introduced the word "development" in his inaugural speech in 1947. Sarit understood its role as a key concept of the US global mission, and as a new and powerful justification for the power of the nation-state—"progress" translated for the American era. His regime converted the new Thai coining, *phatthana*, into its watchword: "Our important task in this revolutionary era is development, which includes economic development, educational development, administrative development, and everything else."<sup>27</sup>

It is not difficult to see that the developmentalism of this era, with its tendencies toward standardization across educational, economic, adminis-



trative, and cultural fields, would provide a challenge to an artist concerned with cultural survival and Buddhist ethics and who possesses a keen sense for linguistic innovation.

The developmentalist period also set into motion a particular form of globalization of the Thai economy: “Sarit welcomed a World Bank mission to Thailand after his first coup. Its report was transformed into Thailand’s first five-year development plan, launched in 1961.” Importantly, this marked the transformation from state control of economic development to an emphasis on the private sector.<sup>28</sup> The shift to private enterprise brought with it whole new vocabularies of management and self-management, technology, and biopolitics as well as the development of coteries of professionals to support the new economic ventures that were to drive development forward.

Under US influence, Thailand undertook a far-reaching extension of the nation-state into the provinces. Although the “geo-body” of the Thai nation had been established earlier, the comprehensive administrative expansion of this geo-body only took hold in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> At this time, Buddhism also became more centrally associated with the expansion of state control.<sup>30</sup> The Sarit era further saw the establishment of the monarchy as central to the new model of governance, especially to policies of development.<sup>31</sup> These policies inaugurated a blueprint for governance that became foundational for the national political structure.

I argue that the Sarit era is strongly reflected in Angkarn’s writing. Even though his poetry may not feature this era by name, the extent to which the poet invests energy in inventing a countervision that eclipses the cultural, political, and economic paradigms of the Sarit regime stands out.

After the US defeat in Vietnam, the 1970s saw the US’s gradual withdrawal from the region and from Thailand; this included the withdrawal of financial resources: “The U.S. remained Thailand’s military patron, but at a much greater distance.”<sup>32</sup> It is in this decade that Baker and Pasuk locate the initial foothold of “globalization and mass society” in Thailand.<sup>33</sup> The 1970s saw the shift to Japanese investment in and domination of the Thai economy. This was also the era of widespread farmers’ and students’ protests against military governance as well as the decade of communist insurgency and harsh state suppression of oppositional politics.<sup>34</sup>

A further focus of this book is the contextualization of Angkarn’s work within a wider literary culture. Most relevant for comparison is the work of the left-leaning Art for Life poets of the 1970s, especially Naowarat Pongpaiboon’s. The Art for Life poets’ styles, thematic emphases, and stated

ideologies differ fundamentally from Angkarn's and become instructive for considering the singularity of his political and poetological stances.

I also contextualize Angkarn's work within a longer literary history and consider how the poet improvises on form and develops poetic lexis, metrics, and genre. Thus, in chapter 3, I pay close attention to how Angkarn improvises on the historical *nirat* genre, a genre of travel poetry that the poet adapts to his discussion of themes of cultural departure in the present.

Finally, I believe that we must consider Angkarn's poetry also in the context of Thailand's increased entry into global networks of trade, finance, and cultural production in the 1980s. Angkarn continues to write into this decade, a period in which Cold War divisions begin to morph into new regional and transnational financial interests and neoliberal politics. With regard to the imbrication of Angkarn's focus on time with the economic change occurring during this time, Weeks and Maurel write: "Angkarn has lived and created through a period of unprecedented political and economic movement in Thailand, culminating in the breathtaking 'bubble' of investment and growth which began in the mid-1980s and ruptured in 1997."<sup>35</sup>

In this period, both politics and cultural production take a significant turn that provides an important background for Angkarn's deepening engagement with Buddhism. It is in the mid- to late 1980s that the poet writes his last well-known volume of poetry, *Panithan Kawi*, for which he is awarded the 1986 S.E.A. Write Award. In terms of economic activity, the 1970s had been the decade in which Japanese dominance began, but they also marked the initial reestablishment of trade ties with the People's Republic of China and the expansion of the global connections of Thai trade and finance.

In the early to mid-1980s, "Thailand lurched into the 'Asian model' of export manufacturing."<sup>36</sup> This shift was accompanied by extensive social change that included "rapid demographic transition," economic restructuring, economic growth, and urbanization that transformed Thailand from a still predominantly agricultural society into an industrialized and mediatized "mass society."<sup>37</sup> As Baker and Pasuk write, "The liberalization of first trade and then finance accelerated the pace of industrialization and urbanization, and incorporated Thailand more firmly within a global economy."<sup>38</sup> The authors summarize the abiding, fundamental transformations of Thai society that begin in the 1970s as follows:

Over one generation during the last quarter of the 20th century, Thailand's society changed with unprecedented speed. Building on the foundations of urban capitalism laid in the American era, big-business families grew not only in wealth but also in social prominence. A new white-collar middle class embraced western-influenced consumer tastes and concepts of individualism. Capitalism drew into the city a much larger working class.<sup>39</sup>

What is more, during the last quarter of the twentieth century, the increased mobility that resulted from large-scale extension of the infrastructure and the expansion of print and electronic media had a significant social impact:

National mass media created a social mirror in which the society could begin to see itself. The reflection revealed the variety of the society's ethnic make-up, the complexity of its history, the diversity of religious practice, and the scale of social divisions.

The boom conferred by globalization and the emergence of a national society provided the background for challenges to the paternalist traditions of the nation's politics.<sup>40</sup>

Angkarn Kallayanapong's poetry keenly notes these massive transformations in governance and society. More than a critique of politics per se, Angkarn's poetry concentrates on cultural critique. What scandalizes the poet is not only the greed and despotism of military dictators; rather, he is concerned also with the emerging taste cultures, changing patterns of consumption, and cultural practices of modern Thais. A remarkable feature of this poetry, however, is that it does not only address these perceived social and political ills directly. While I will argue that Angkarn's work vitally revolves around the sociopolitical transformations of the 1950s–1980s, its focus lies on designing alternative artistic, philosophical, and political frameworks with distinctly Thai characteristics. In contrast to the Art for Life poets, who build socialist and social democratic poetic lexica, draw on popular poetic forms, and aim to integrate the rhythms of agricultural and working-class life into their poetry, Angkarn sets his vision on a wider poetic and philosophical horizon. The scope of his vision includes nothing less than the entire universe, and his interest lies in the redemption of all of humanity.

## New Perspectives on Buddhism

*Teardrops of Time* seeks to contribute to understandings of a Southeast Asian, postcolonial literary modernity and provide insight into how this literature develops a Buddhist-informed aesthetics. The idea that Buddhism might perform functions other than those of religious pedagogy or philosophy is still a novel one. While the scholarship has drawn Buddhism into relation with Southeast Asian notions of power, logics of statecraft, and constructions of modernity, much work remains to be done on the ways in which Buddhist concepts, stories, and images provide frameworks for fantasy and desire, furnish rhetorical tools, represent means of psychological support, and diversify notions of self and agency in the everyday.<sup>41</sup>

I align my analysis with other new efforts, in Asian studies and beyond, to shed light on the work that Buddhism performs outside of the sphere of religious instruction proper—that is, the role that Buddhist concepts and forms occupy in media, cultural psychology, political rhetoric, affective repertoires, and literary and cultural imaginaries. What unites much of this new work in Buddhist studies is a focus on counterdoctrinal qualities of Buddhist cultural objects and practices. A long history of examining Buddhist practices as not conforming to doctrinal maxims precedes these works. In the Anglophone context, authors such as Richard Gombrich and Donald Swearer inaugurated a shift from the study of Buddhism as a South Asian textual tradition, in the languages of Pali and Sanskrit, to the study of Buddhism in historical context, as an element of the political order and as lived praxis in Southeast Asia.<sup>42</sup> Subsequent scholarship paid increased attention to practices and ritual in Buddhism, rather than only to its textual instantiations.

Recent investigations into the relation of praxis to text take the examination of counterdoctrinality even further, opening to Buddhist studies inquiry new domains such as media, psychology, and the built environment. Such new work undertakes the explicit theorization of Buddhist counterdoctrinality and expands the domain of Buddhism to include many vernacular practices and even the supernatural. Pioneering work in this vein includes Justin McDaniel's study *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk*.<sup>43</sup> This monograph furnishes important insight into the counterdoctrinality of Thai Buddhist practices, as McDaniel makes clear that many practices, or indeed life goals, of Thai Buddhists are aimed toward attachment rather than detachment—a prime counterdoctrinal fact at the very heart of a living Buddhism.