

Chapter 6

Description of Places and Spatial Relations

6.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the answer to the question *where?*, the fourth vital question to ask about narrative texts. The concepts of *place* and *space* are closely related and are defined in reference to each other. Every object occupies space. There is also space between two objects. A place is defined in relation to an object or people *within* it. If we talk about a family or a room in a house, the house is a place. A place is static. Space however refers to the distance between two separate objects or, in other words, the space *outside* a place. Space has a dynamic connotation. A movement from point A to point B is a movement in space. Certain verbs of motion like *to go*, *to come*, *to arrive*, *to leave*, *to return*, *to drive* etc. refer to the spatial relation between two points or objects. Static verbs like *to be*, *to live*, *to stay*, *to sit*, *to lie*, *to stand* etc. refer to places.

The description of places and spatial relations is, probably more than the other subjects of the present analysis, not only a matter of analysis of specific linguistic features or occurrences but also one of interpretation. The "spacialization" of time by the subsidiary verbs ไป (to go) and มา (to come) as well as the ability of certain words to refer collectively to places as well as human beings is an indication of the importance of places and space in Thai. In accordance with the realistic and historical character of the novel, descriptions of places and spatial relations in "Si Phaendin" can be expected to be frequent, detailed and accurate. Since the metaphorical value of places and their

description is such an obvious and prominent feature I thought it could not be disregarded as something purely accidental. Compared with the frequently ambiguous marking of time¹ the detailed descriptions of places suggest that they carry more importance than temporal statements. Time is not introduced independently but in connection with the description of a place:

ตึกนั้น จะพูดไปก็เป็นตึกทันสมัยสำหรับระยะเวลาระหว่าง พ.ศ. ๒๔๒๕ ถึง พ.ศ. ๒๔๓๕ อันเป็นเวลาในรัชสมัยของสมเด็จพระพุทธเจ้าหลวงมหาธาตุ (14) *(Speaking about it, the building was considered modern at the time between the years 2425 and 2435 B.E. [1882 - 1892], which fell into the Reign of King Chulalongkorn the Great.)*

The importance of places is further underlined by the fact that the house at the Bang Luang Canal is described in realistic detail at the beginning of the novel even before the members of the household are introduced.

It can be assumed that more than being atmospheric details, places and spatial relations have a fundamental structural function - hence the careful attention given to their description. In fact, places play an important role in the story. Their description provides a key to the interpretation of the text. The importance given to the description of places and spatial relations may even provide a clue to the role, places and space play within the Thai world view. Even the casual Thai greeting *ไปไหน* (*where do you go*) suggests that concepts of place and space are dominant.

6.2. The use of ไป (to go) and มา (to come)

The verbs ไป (to go) and มา (to come) are not only used as main verbs in Thai but also as auxiliary or, as Rangkupan (1992: 3) calls them, subsidiary verbs. As such they are combined with other verbs and have, in accordance with their lexical meaning

¹ see chapter 3 on the marking of historical time.

as main verbs, *spatial* meaning and express direction. Apart from that, they also frequently take on temporal meaning and express for instance continuous and perfect aspect or past tense. (RANGKUPAN, 1992: 78) In spatial as well as temporal expressions, the verb ไป (to go) expresses a motion *away* from the speaker's point of reference while มา (to come) expresses a motion *towards* the speaker's point of reference. (RANGKUPAN, 1992: 95, 97) The point of reference is the present location of the speaker.

6.2.1. ไป (to go) and มา (to come) as Main Verbs

The following two sentences are two examples for the use of ไป (to go) and มา (to come) as main verbs:

"พลอยไปกับแม่" (20)

("Ploi will go with me" - [Ploi will move together with mother, **away from** the present location / the present point of reference].)

"พลอย" [...] "มานี้!" (27)

("Ploi", [...], "come here!" - ["Ploi, move **towards** my location / the present point of reference."])

6.2.2. ไป (to go) and มา (to come) as Subsidiary Verbs

6.2.2.1. Spatial Meaning

Not only as main verbs but also as subsidiary verbs ไป (to go) and มา (to come) have spatial meaning. They are often combined with other verbs of spatial movement in order to denote direction either *away* from the speaker's point of reference or *towards* the speaker's point of reference.

ว่าแล้วคุณเชยก็พาพลอยเข้าไปนอนเหมือนกับเด็ก ๆ (1471)

(Having said this, Choey took Ploi with her inside [away from the present point of reference] to sleep like [when she was] a child.)

พลอย [...] ก็เรียกตาอันเบา ๆ ให้เข้ามานั่งใกล้ตัว (1482)

(Ploi called Un softly inside [towards the present point of reference] to sit close to her.)

6.2.2.2. Temporal Meaning

It is probably a universal phenomenon that durations of time are perceived as space. I have not heard of any language that cannot combine a predicate of motion with an agent of time as for instance in the following English sentences:

(1) *The time has come.*

(2) *The hours fly.*

(3) *The week drags on.*

The same, of course, is possible and frequently done in Thai:

วันที่ลูกจะกลับบ้านก็มาถึง (880)

(The day, when the children were supposed to come home, finally **arrived**.)

But in Thai, it is not only possible to combine predicates of motion with agents of time. As subsidiary verbs, ไป and มา can also refer to time. The present point of reference then takes on an additional temporal connotation. Time passed **away from the present** is denoted by ไป. On the other hand, time passing **towards the present** is denoted by มา. This spatial concept of time is quite elaborate since time passed away from the present moves in two directions, into the past or into the future while time passing towards the present comes from the past. RANGKUPAN explains the temporal

meaning of the subsidiaries ไป and มา from the point of view of the speaker who takes the place of the present point of reference. She says that "Pay1 is used to denote that the speaker focuses his view on a point other than the ending point of a situation. Maa1 is used to denote that the speaker focuses his view on the ending point of the situation." (RANGKUPAN, 1992: 96). Moving away in time means that the speaker "looses sight" of the ending point of a situation so that he cannot focus his view on it while moving towards the speaker automatically makes the present point of reference the ending point of a situation. In my opinion, however, not every instance of the use of ไป and มา as temporal subsidiaries is adequately described by the terms "situation" and "ending point" as will become clear in the following examination of examples.

6.2.2.2.1. Time passed Away from the Present Into the Future: ไป

The continuous form of the English verb *to go* is used to indicate the immediate future, for instance in sentences like

*It is **going** to rain.*

*The gardener is **going** to cut the trees tomorrow.*

In Thai, the verb ไป can also be used to indicate future. It is a movement in time away from the present. In these cases, ไป does not need to be combined with a verb of spatial movement (direction) as the following example shows:

"[...] อย่าไปได้ผัวเจ้าชู้เมียมาก [...]" (13)
 ("[...] *Don't get yourself the great lover who has many wives! [...]*")

6.2.2.2.2. Time Passed Away from the Present Into the Past: ไป

The movement away from the present is not only possible into the future but also into the past. There is no equivalent for this in English.

ดาอืดตายไปได้หลายเดือนแล้ว

(1453)

(*Oot had been dead for several month.*)

In a sentence like this, Rangkupan's (1992) explanation of the temporal subsidiaries ไป and มา in terms of the difference of a speaker's focus on a situation does not properly apply. Death is a state and not a situation and it is therefore difficult to talk about an ending point. In my opinion, the subsidiary ไป in this sentence simply means that death has removed the life of a person away from the present point of reference into the past.

6.2.2.2.3. Time Passed from the Past Towards the Present: มา

It is unusual for the Western reader that not only the spatial meaning of the verb ไป (to go) as movement away from the point of reference but also the spatial meaning of the verb มา (to come) as a movement towards the point of reference can be transformed into a temporal meaning. The English construction of the continuous aspect can be interpreted as a movement away from the present point of reference into the future:

I am going to stay for three weeks.

but there is no equivalent to express a movement of time from some point in the past towards the present point of reference. Certainly, *to be coming* cannot be used for that purpose. Trying to do so would result in an ungrammatical construction:

** I have been coming to stay here three weeks already.*

In Thai, however, this use of the verb มา (to come) is possible. It denotes a change over a period of time from a state of being away from the point of reference to a state of being at the point of reference. In the capacity of a temporal subsidiary, มา can be combined with static (motionless) verbs like อยู่ (to stay) or เป็น (to be). In the following sentences, the subsidiary verb มา establishes a temporal reference towards the point of reference.

พลอยมาอยู่ในวังได้หลายวัน (89)

[Ploi / come / being in palace / already / several days]

(Ploi had been in the palace for several days.)

The point of reference is the palace. The duration of time passed from Ploi's arrival up to the present is several days. Like ไป in the previous example (6.2.2.2: ตาอ้อจดตายไป ได้หลายเดือนแล้ว), มา is used together with the auxiliary ได้ and the indefinite pronoun หลาย (some).

In the next example, the present point of reference is Ploi's and Khun Prem's home. Khun Prem left the Royal Service some time ago. It was not only a spatial, but also a move in time towards home.

เมื่อออกจากราชการมาใหม่ ๆ คุณเปรมก็ยอมจะรู้สึกโล่งใจสิ้นกังวล (939)

[When / leave from Royal Service / come / new ...]

(When he had just left the Royal Service, Khun Prem gave in to the feeling of relief and of being free from worries.)

The following sentence is another example for time moving towards the present:

ระหว่างที่ลูก ๆ เดินทางไปปักชำได้ [...] คุณเชยและช้อย อยู่เป็นเพื่อนพลอย มาตลอด (1456)

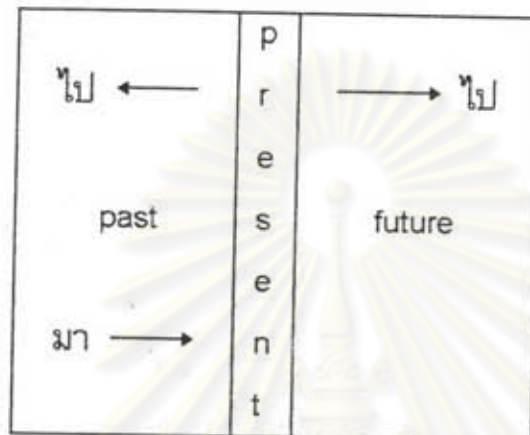
[Khun Choey and Choi / being / friends of Ploi / come / always.]

(Throughout the time her children were travelling to the South [...] Khun Choey and Choi kept Ploi company.)

This use of ไป and มา suggests that the perception of time as space is more elaborate in Thai than in Western languages. It also indicates that the importance paid to expressions of space and place is inherent in the language.

The following chart shows the different directions in temporal movement, symbolized by an arrow pointing away from the present either into the past or into the future.

Chart 6: Spatial Perception of time



6.3. Collective Reference Towards People and Places

An indicator that the importance of places is not only an individual feature of the novel "Si Phaendin" but a general characteristic of the Thai language is the fact that some words can be used to refer to places as well as to people. The general perception of places as social status becomes clear in the following passage. Khun Choey, discussing her sister Khun Oon with Ploi, thinks it would be good for Khun Oon to marry. This is meant by the phrase มีเรือน, literally meaning to have a household. (HAAS, 1964: 466)

"[...] คนอย่างคุณอ่อนนั้น ถ้าเธอมีเรือนเสียได้จะดีมากที่สุดทีเดียว บางทีเธอจะไม่เป็นอย่างนี้ ใจจริงฉันก็ว่าเธออยากมีกับเขาเหมือนกัน แต่..." (469)

("A person like Khun Oon, if she could have a family it would be very good. Sometimes she is not [annoying] as usual. If I am honest, I would say, she too would like to have someone. But ...")

The relative pronoun **ที่** which occurs frequently in Thai texts can be used in order to refer to places as well as to people. **ที่** usually means "place; space; room [...]". (HAAS, 1964: 241) In the following example, it is used to refer to a person:

คุณอู่นั้น จะต้องมีใครคนหนึ่งไว้เป็นที่รักสำหรับพะนอตามใจจึงจะมีความสุข
(800)

(Khun Oon needed someone whom she could love so she could spoil him which would give her happiness.)

In the following example of royal language, Ploi uses the question word **ไหน** (*where, which*) (HAAS, 1964: 599), which is frequently used to refer to places as in **ไปไหน** (*where do you go?*), in order to inquire into the identity of the mother of a royally born friend of her daughter.

"หม่อมไหนมั่งคะท่านชาย?" "หม่อมเอื้อนค่ะ" ท่านชายรับสั่งตอบ (1137)

("Who is your mother, Than Chai?" "Mom Euan" Than Chai answered.)

In everyday language, collective reference towards people and places occurs often. In colloquial Thai, the King is called **ในหลวง** (HAAS, 1964: 571), using the preposition of space **ใน** (*in*). (ibid.: 279) Husband and wife can be referred to as **ที่บ้าน** (*in the house*). (ibid.: 289)

6.4. Narrative Realism

Although the marking of time by means of historical dates and reference to historical events is rather vague, the historical and realistic character of "Si Phaendin" is evident from the very first line of the novel on account of the precise and historically correct descriptions of the different locations and scenes of the story. An examination of

these extensive descriptions of places shows that they are more than an accidental element of the novel. They reveal information that is essential for the correct understanding of the story. They also have a metaphorical value as they create an image of the social hierarchy. At its core is the traditional Thai house with its different levels of residence.

Most of the descriptions crucial for the understanding of the story are found within the exposition of the novel.² My examination of the use of proper place names, accurate descriptions of places and the status of some of the main participants of the story will therefore mostly deal with passages from the beginning of the novel.

6.4.1. The Use of Proper Place Names

The first sentence of the novel contains two references towards historical places: คลองบางหลวง (*the Bang Luang canal*) and ท่าพระ (*the Tha Phra landing pier*):

"พลอย" เสียงแม่เรียกขณะที่เรือกำลังพายหน้าออกจากคลองบางหลวง มุ่ง
ตรงไปยังท่าพระ (13)

(*"Ploi", her mother shouted as the boat sailed forward, leaving the **Bang Luang Canal** and heading straight towards the **Tha Phra landing pier.***)

The Bang Luang Canal and the Tha Phra landing pier are real sites that still exist. Thus the novel is, from the beginning, clearly marked as belonging to the realistic genre of narrative texts. This realism is more than an atmospheric detail. It is metaphorical of the journey of Ploi's life. The house at the Bang Luang Canal, the point of Ploi's departure, is Ploi's home. Her destination, the Tha Phra landing pier is, as the Thai reader will know, the landing pier of the palace which becomes the second most important place in Ploi's life. The names *Bang Luang Canal* and *Tha Phra landing pier* thus reveal the two centres of gravity around which Ploi's life is going to revolve: home and palace. They are

² It is the function of the exposition to introduce "the characters and their situation" (BALDICK, 1991: 78). The exposition therefore contains all the vital information for the understanding of the further proceedings of the story.

more than just a house and a palace. They stand for two institutions that are considered by virtually every Thai an essential part of Thai culture: the family and the monarchy. Ploi, the heroine of the story, is loyally devoted to both institutions and all the strength of her character is due to this unwavering loyalty. Thus, she represents the main characteristics of Thai culture and the Thai people.

In the course of the exposition, the representative character of the story and its protagonist is further confirmed by historical names. First, a period of historical time is named, the ten years from 2425 to 2435 in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn. Then, the city of Rattanakosin is mentioned as the surrounding area of Ploi's childhood home. Its inhabitants are thus clearly located in the centre of the Thai social universe.

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ในกรุงรัตนโกสินทร์นี้ตึกนั้นเป็นตึกก่ออิฐ [...] (14)

(Speaking about it, the building was considered modern at the time between the years 2425 and 2435 B.E. [1882 - 1892], which fell into the Reign of King Chulalongkorn the Great. This house was one of the brick buildings in the city of Rattanakosin. [...])

As I have mentioned already, time is introduced here as a statement about a place: The house of Ploi's father was considered modern at a certain historical period of time. Generally, proper place names occur much more frequent than exact markings of time. Chao Khun Father's official wife comes from the province of อัมพวา (*Amphawa*). (ตึกฤทธิ์, 2523: 15) On her trip from the Bang Luang canal to the Tha Phra landing pier, Ploi sees the ตำหนักแพ (*the Floating Palace*). (ibid.:30) Her mother mentions วัดดอกลูก (*the Dok Luk temple*). (ibid.) Ploi, her mother and their servant Pid are going to enter the palace through ประตูศรีสุดาวง (*the Srisudawong gate*). (ibid.) On their way through the palace area, they walk down แถวเต็ง (*Teng Row*). (ibid.:39) Khun Sai talks about boisterous rich people who import ice from สิงคโปร์ (*Singapore*). (ibid.:68) Ploi's mother

is leaving for ฉะเชิงเทรา (*Chachoengsao*) (ibid.:85) - and will be going to die there (ibid.: 192). Some of the residents of the Inner Palace come from เมืองเพชร (*Pechaburi*) (ibid.: 91) while the Princess Dara Rassami is from เชียงใหม่ (*Chiang Mai*). (ibid.) The city of Bangkok is mentioned again, this time with her common name กรุงเทพฯ (*Krungthep*). (ibid.:126) Ploi leaves the raft to join in the royal Loy Krathong celebrations at ท่าขุนนาง (*the Khunnang pier*) (ibid.:133) while His Majesty boards a royal ship with the name อนันตนาคราช (*Anandnagarach*). (ibid.:135) Choi's brother is going to be a soldier in นครสวรรค์ (*Nakhorn Sawan*). (ibid.:235) Shortly afterwards, the grand royal excursion to ยุโรป (*Europe*) (ibid.:245) takes place.

The use of proper place names can be observed throughout the whole novel, from Ploi's excursion to Ayuthaya, to Khun Prem's house at the Yom canal, to her son's studies in France, and finally the prison on Tarutao island.

6.4.2. Detailed and Accurate Descriptions of Places

The description of Ploi's home is of crucial significance for the understanding of the whole novel because it literally sets the stage and introduces Ploi, the main character, with all the necessary background information. The house at the Bang Luang canal appears as a miniature model of society in which everyone has his place. The passage starts with the following description of the house where Ploi spent the first ten years of her life:

บ้านพลอยอยู่ในคลองบางหลวง เรียกว่าเป็นบ้านใหญ่ มีกำแพงอิฐเสริม
 รั้วเหล็กกันตลอดริมน้ำ ที่ทำน้ำมีศาลาหลังใหญ่ทำด้วยไม้ ขึ้นจากกระได
 ทำน้ำ เดินผ่านลานกว้างก็ถึงตัวตึกเป็นที่อยู่ของเจ้าคุณพ่อ [...] ตึกนั้นเป็น
 ตึกก่ออิฐ ฉาบด้วยปูนขาว หลังคามุงกระเบื้องจีนเป็นลูกฟูก หน้าตึกเป็น
 บันไดขึ้นสองข้างมาบรรจบกัน ตรงกลางเป็นชਾਲาย่อม ๆ แล้วจากนั้นมี
 บันไดขึ้นตรงไปชั้นบนของตึก บนตึกมีเฉลียงเดินได้รอบ ลูกกรงมีลูก
 มะหวด กระเบื้องสีเขียวแก่ พ้นจากเฉลียงเข้าไปก็มีห้องใหญ่ ๆ สามห้อง
 เป็นที่อยู่เจ้าคุณพ่อ มีห้องเล็ก ๆ อีกห้องหนึ่ง สำหรับเจ้าคุณพ่อไว้พระและอิฐ
 เจ้าคุณปู่และคุณชวดทั้งหลาย (14)

(Ploi's home was situated at the Bang Luang Canal and could justly be called a big house with brick-complemented walls and an iron fence all along the riverside. At the landing pier was a large wooden sala. Coming up the stairs of the landing pier one would walk through a wide lawn towards the building which was the residence of Chao Khun Father. [...] It was a brick building, coated with lime. The roof was covered with Chinese tiles. In front of the building were a pair of "twin"-stairs leading from the right and from the left up to a small plateau in the middle from where a central stair went up to the upper floor of the building. This whole floor was surrounded by a balcony and a balustrade with decorated wooden pillars. The tiles were dark green. Three big rooms were opening onto the balcony. They were the residence of Chao Khun Father. There was also one small room. It was reserved for paying respect to the Lord Buddha, to Chao Khun Grandfather and other ancestors of the family.)

The size of the house (บ้านใหญ่ [a big house.]), the size of the property ([...] ลานกว้าง [a wide lawn]), the use of expensive and up-to-date construction material and its fine decorations show that its residents belong to the highest circles of society. The most important rooms, positioned on the highest level of the house and surrounded by a balcony are exclusively reserved for the owner of the house, Ploi's father. Three big rooms serve as his residency, one small room is reserved for his worship of the Lord Buddha and his ancestors, especially his father, Ploi's Chao Khun Grandfather. The height of the residence and the number and the size of the rooms clearly show that Ploi's father holds the highest and most important position in the household. The room used for ancestor worship as well as the use of Chinese tiles for the construction of the roof indicate that he is of Chinese descent. Thus the reader learns, solely through the description of the house, that its residents are members of Bangkok's Sino - Thai upper class which, at the time of the novel, was part of the high aristocracy, and that Ploi's father is the patron. This interpretation is later confirmed when Ploi's house is compared to Choi's house:

ส่วนบ้านของพลอยนั้น ใครก็ต้องรู้ทันทีว่าเป็นบ้านขุนนาง เจ้าของบ้านต้อง
อยู่ในสกุลสูงและมีอำนาจวาสนา (163/164)

*(As for Ploi's house, everyone would know immediately that it was the house
of a nobleman. Its owner was certainly from an upper class family and in a
position of authority.)*

What strikes Ploi most comparing her own home with Choi's home, is that the
house of Choi's parents seems not to be hierarchically structured. Everyone lives under
the same roof so that Ploi immediately assumes that everyone owns the house:

แต่ที่ผิดกันมากจนพลอยสังเกตเห็นได้ชัดนับตั้งแต่เวลาก้าวเข้ามาในบ้านก็คือ
ที่บ้านนี้ทุกคนเป็นเจ้าของบ้านร่วมกันอยู่ใต้หลังคาเดียวกัน (164)

*(But what was so obviously different that Ploi noticed it immediately when she
first entered the house was that in this house [Choi's house, M.S.] **everyone
was the owner - they all lived under one roof.**)*

Other places are also described in great detail: the palace, Sadech's residence
and Ploi's second home, the home of Ploi's friend Choi and Khun Prem's house which
becomes Ploi's own residence until its destruction. All these descriptions do not just add
atmospheric detail to the novel but establish the status of the people owning these
places and living in them. With one exception, only "upper class" places are described.
The house of Ploi's mother's second husband in Chachoengsao, the shophouse of
Khun Choey's husband or the home of Phrapai's husband Saywee are not described at
all. The house of Un's minor wife, however, is described affectionately - probably because
it is the place where Ploi's only grandchildren are born. The description, however, is
much shorter than that of the other places. It consists of two parts:

[...] แล้วตาอั้นก็เลี้ยวรถเข้าซอยเล็ก ๆ ซอยหนึ่ง ไปจอดลงที่หน้าบ้านหลังเล็ก ๆ มีรั้วสังกะสี และประตูบ้านปิดมิดชิด (1367)

([...] and then Un turned into a small Soi and stopped in front of a little house with a fence of corrugated iron. The doors were properly and neatly closed.)

บ้านนั้นมีเนื้อที่เล็กมาก เพราะเมื่อพ้นรั้วเข้าไปเพียงเล็กน้อยก็ถึงตัวเรือน ซึ่งเป็นเรือนไม้สองชั้นหลังเล็ก ๆ รักษาสะอาดสะอาดน่าอยู่ ตาอั้นชวนพลอยขึ้นไปไปที่เฉลียงเล็กหน้าเรือน (1368)

(That house was standing on a very small piece of property because after having passed the fence one had already arrived at the building. It was a small two-story wooden structure, neatly and invitingly kept in order. Un asked Ploi to go upstairs and sit on the small balcony in front of the house.)

6.5. The Metaphorical Value of the Description of Places

6.5.1. Status and Character According to the Location of the Living Quarters in the Household

One way of recognizing the social status of the characters of the story is to look at where they live in the house. It soon becomes clear that the different positions of living quarters in the household correspond to social status. Accordingly, change in social status can be shown through a change of living quarters. Neglect of a household stands for social decline.

People in a high social position live at high places. Their living quarters are usually marked by the word บน (on, up, upon) or compound words with บน such as ชั้นบน (upper floor). This is where Chao Khun Father lives at the house at the Bang Luang canal:

แล้วจากนั้นมีบันไดขึ้นตรงไปชั้นบนของตึก บนตึกมีเฉลียงเดินได้รอบ [...]
พ้นจากเฉลียงเข้าไปก็มีห้องใหญ่ ๆ สามห้อง เป็นที่อยู่เจ้าคุณพ่อ (14)

(From there a stair went up to the upper floor of the building. This whole floor was surrounded by a balcony. Three big rooms were opening onto the balcony. They were the residence of Chao Khun Father.)

Sadech lives on the top floor of her residence within the palace compound.

เสด็จประทับอยู่ชั้นบนของตำหนัก (51)

(Sadech resided on the upper floor of the palace.)

In conversation, Ploi refers to the palace by using the word ที่บน (literally: *up there*):

"หม่อมแม่ท่านเคยอยู่ที่บนไซ้ไหม?" (1137)

("Your mother used to live in the palace, is that right?")

The relationship of the other members of the household towards Ploi's father is described by the position of their living quarters in the house. Oon, Ploi's elder sister and the daughter of her father's official wife, lives on the same floor as her father.

คุณอุ้นพี่สาวคนใหญ่นั้น พลอยเห็นว่าเป็นผู้ใหญ่ที่น่าเกรงขาม เพราะเธอ
อยู่บนตึกร่วมกับเจ้าคุณพ่อ ในห้องใหญ่อีกห้องหนึ่งซึ่งเป็นห้องเก็บเครื่อง
เงินเครื่องทอง (16)

*(As for Khun Oon, her 'major' elder sister, Ploi thought of her as a grown-up and mature person that deserved deference and respect because she was living **on the top level** of the building like Chao Khun father, albeit in another room that was also big and contained the silver and the gold [of the household].)*

The sentence speaks for itself: Khun Oon deserves respect *because* she is living on the same level as her father. It makes her "untouchable" for the rest of the household. Not only her status but also her role in the house is revealed by the characterization of the room she is living in. The function of the room - to keep the family treasure - denotes the function of its inhabitant: to supervise the household's budget. This is confirmed later when the reader learns that Khun Chit, Khun Oon's younger brother, always comes to see her when he is in need of money.

The inferior position of Ploi's mother is conveyed by a description of where she lives in relation to the living quarters of her husband and Khun Oon, the daughter of his official wife:

ส่วนแม่ของพลอย ซึ่งคนทั้งบ้านเรียกว่า แม่แฉ่ม นั้น เจ้าคุณพ่อท่าน
ปลูกเรือนฟากกระดานห้าห้องให้อยู่อีกหลังหนึ่งใกล้ ๆ กับตัวตึกในบริเวณบ้าน
(16)

(Ploi's mother, who was called by everyone in the household Mae Chaem, lived in a wooden house with five rooms Chao Khun Father had built for her very close to his own building in the compound of his residence.)

Befitting her status as "first minor wife" - เป็นเอกภรรยาของพระยาพิพิธ ฯ แต่มี
ไซในฐานะคุณหญิง (15) *(She was Phraya Phiphit's Major Wife but not in the official position of Khunying)* - Ploi's mother does not live in the same building and on the same level as Ploi's father. Not only her husband, but also Khun Oon, the daughter of the official wife, have a higher status. The description of the living arrangements thus hints at the conflict that leads to the decision of Ploi's mother's to leave for good. Not only the status and the role of people is pointed out by their different living quarters but also the principal and unresolvable conflict which initiates the dynamics of the plot.³

³ This very skilful exposition of "Si Phaendin" - remember also the two essential proper name places *Bang Luang canal* and *Tha Phra landing pier* in the very first sentence of the story - raises doubts about the author's claim that the novel was written on a day by day basis without prior knowledge of the plot. (จิตภา, 2535: 137)

In the palace, Ploi lives below Sadech on the ground floor together with Khun Sai, Sadech's most trusted servant, and her niece Choi. The different levels on which people live are conveyed through the verb *ลงมา* (to descend):

พอกลับจากเฝ้าลงมาถึงห้องคุณสาย [...] (62)

(When they had returned from the audience and descended to Khun Sai's room, [...].)

A person's place of residence is not only used to define social status but also to characterize behaviour unbecoming this status. Ploi's elder brother Chit, for instance, deserves to live at a high place in the household because, like Khun Oon, he is a child of Chao Khun Father's official wife. Instead, he is found in the house of the male servants, an embarrassingly low position:

อีกครั้งหนึ่งพลอยเห็นคุณชิตเจ็บผอมแห้ง นอนแบบอยู่ที่เรือนที่เธออยู่กับ
บ่าวหนุ่ม ๆ รุ่นเดียวกัน (17)

(Another time, Ploi saw Khun Chit lying sick and worn out in the house where he lived with the male servants of his age.)

6.5.2. Rise and Fall of Social Position Reflected in the Change of Residence

People live within their households according to their social position. Changes in these positions become evident through changes in the location where they live. This also demonstrates the flexibility of the Thai social structure. Accumulated merit from a former life may give people a good starting position but meritorious behavior is necessary to keep it or even improve it. On the other hand, demeritorious behavior will cause one's social decline no matter how high one's initial position might have been.

Ploi's journey of life moves in a circle. The novel starts with her leaving the house of her father but in the end she will come back and live there again. In the meantime, her life evolves around the palace, first as a member of the Inner Court of King Rama V.,

then as the wife of a devoted courtier of King Rama VI. The house at Bang Luang Canal, the Palace, the house at Khlong Yom and finally the house at Bang Luang Canal again mark the stations of Ploi's life. The location of her living quarters within these households demonstrates the continuous rise of her social position.

Ploi starts as the ลูกเมียน้อย (*the daughter of a minor wife*) living in a separate house on the compound of her home at Bang Khlong Luang. From there she moves to the Palace where she lives on the ground floor of Sadech's residence. The house at Khlong Yom is, like the house at Khlong Bang Luang, a large compound with a main residence for the head of the household and adjacent houses for people of lower ranks from children, to minor wives and their children to servants of different ranks. There, Ploi lives on the top floor of the main house as the wife of Khun Prem. At the same time, she becomes the owner of the house at Khlong Bang Luang.

Ploi's social rise within the microcosmic Thai universe is contrasted with the fall of Khun Oon. As the daughter of the Khunying, she starts living on the top floor of the residence together with her father. After her father's death, she even becomes the head of the household. But since she is unable to control her brother Khun Chit, the household in fact comes under the control of Khun Chit who ruins it. As a consequence, Khun Oon takes refuge at Ploi's residence at Khlong Yom where she is allocated a bungalow which used to accommodate Khun Prem's premarital lover and his son from that liaison. It is a vivid illustration of the decline of Khun Oon's status. Ploi's and Khun Oon's social positions are thus effectively switched around: Ploi starts from a house built for a minor wife and her children. From there she moves up to the top floor of the residence while Khun Oon starts from the top floor and moves down to a house built for a former lover and her son. Without any further explanation, the Thai reader will understand this reversal of Khun Oon's and Ploi's position of residence as a karmic act of compensating justice.

The two other high born children of Chao Khun Father have also descended to a lower position at the end of the novel. Khun Choey's move down the social ladder, however, is not as embarrassing as that of her elder sister Khun Oon. Her change of position from the house of a nobleman into the shophouse of a medical doctor is not

shown as disrespectable (which probably reflects a high regard for the medical profession). Choey's social decline appears inevitable as part of the general decline of the traditional Thai society. Her decision to live and work as the wife of a doctor is a case of making the best of a difficult situation. Comparing Ploi's and Khun Choey's position at the beginning of the story, moving out of the aristocracy into the money-making middle class would be more likely the scenario for Ploi's life than for Khun Choey's.

Khun Chit is the only "high-born" character who appears to be a hopeless case from the very beginning. He moves from bad to worse, spending most of his time at the servant's quarters. In the end, he has to leave the house at Bang Khlong Luang altogether but not in order to build a respectable existence for himself like Khun Choey but in total disgrace. He disappears into obscurity, chased out by a gang of rascals hired by his half-brother Perm.

6.5.3. Dilapidation as Metaphor for Social Decline and Social Change

All three important places of Ploi's life, the house at the Bang Luang Canal, the palace and the house at Khlong Yom do not only provide the scenes for the development of the plot, but also serve as metaphors for the social rise and decline of their inhabitants. These places have a life of their own and are shown not only in their splendour, but also in various states of decay and destruction.

Of all the places, the house at Khlong Bang Luang is described most frequently. Its fate is tied to the fate of Khun Oon and Ploi. It decays under the influence of Khun Oon, especially after the death of Chao Khun Father, when Khun Oon becomes the head of the household and completely succumbs to the bad influence of Khun Chit. The description of its decay is more than just an atmospheric detail. On the metaphorical level of the novel, the house stands for the family. Its decay is symbolic of the disintegration of the traditional family and the reader is well aware that the restoration under Ploi's ownership towards the end of the novel is only a temporary one, solely due to Ploi's accumulated merit.

The palace is Ploi's second center of gravitation. As the home stands for the family, the palace stands for the monarchy. At the beginning of the novel, the palace is

buzzing with life. At the end, it is empty and deserted. The decay of the palace points to the disintegration of the traditional Thai society just as the decay of the house at Khlong Bang Luang stands for the disintegration of the traditional family. Ploi's home is a microcosm that faithfully mirrors the macrocosm of traditional Thai society.

Although Ploi's rise to the ownership of the house at Bang Khlong Luang can be seen as an act of karmic justice and reward for her integrity and meritorious behavior, Ploi cannot escape the general law of impermanence. She can restore her place of birth but she can do nothing to stop the decay of her second home, the palace. And she is helpless as far as the destruction of her residence at Khlong Yom is concerned.

The house at Khlong Yom is not shown in its decay. It is suddenly and completely destroyed by a bomb. It is drastic testimony to the effectiveness and validity of the law of impermanence.

6.6. Conclusion

It is conspicuous that much attention is paid to the proper and accurate description of places in "Si Phaendin". Among the four questions behind the linguistic analysis (*when* in the chapter on *time*-marking, *why* in the chapter on marking of *causality*, *who* in the chapter on the characterization of *people* and *where* in the chapter on the description of *places* and *space*), the question *where* is answered first in the novel. The reader knows exactly where he is before he knows who else is there. Time is a secondary category that mainly functions to identify the place more closely.

Many linguistic features confirm the importance of place, for instance the elaborate perception of space by means of the subsidiary verbs ไป (*to go*) and มา (*to come*), the practice to refer to people by means of words that normally refer to places and the common analogy between status within the social hierarchy and the position of the living quarters of a person in the house.