CHAPTER 3

THE WORLD

Place for modernization in Thailand is often associated with the city and the country, the former being the post condition and the latter being the pre condition of the process. Philip Hirsch describes the process within paradigms of time and space in his 1989 discussion of "development" that provides useful frameworks for looking at conceptions of these settings for cultural change:

> This process has both temporal and spatial dimensions. The temporal dimension is commonly referred to in terms such as 'modernization,' 'movement from a backward to an advanced state,' and even 'catching up.' The spatial dimension of this aspect of development is spoken of as 'integration,' 'linkage' or 'incorporation.' More often, these dimensions are combined so that physical isolation implies backwardness, while proximity to the metropolitan core represents, for the community, an implicit modernity. (9)

These two contexts for ideology—the city and the country—in Nikom Rayawa's fiction similarly have less to do with physical appearances than with imaginative understandings about them. Physical mappings, therefore, have full significance only through psychological ones. Images of the city and the country appear in Nikom's stories as the setting of cultural change but they do not always follow stereotypical characteristics of linear progression of development as in from a backward to an advanced state. Their relationship to each other as post and pre stages of modernization do not always make sense because, as with portrayals of the inhabitants of the world, depictions of "the world" itself deny simple polarity.

The City: Lights, Frights, and Community

From an economic point of view "the city was also a frontier" that expands in response to increasing trade (Pasuk and Baker 91). This is the city as a geographical location. But ideologically speaking, the city also exists beyond its geographical limits. In many more geo-political spaces, the city exists as an idea, myth, and network of people and economic resources. William Klausner remarks in his report on village contact with the city in 1956:

> ... villagers come into 'contact' with Bangkok through the innumerable store-bought goods.... Such articles as dishes, combs, wire, mirrors, fountain pens, cigarette lighters, are shipped up from Bangkok. Of course, the connection is perhaps more dramatic in the case of such expensive merchandise as a sewing machine for the village tailor, a set of curlers for the village hairdresser, or a pressure lamp for the priests. All of the above items are in stock in Ubon, but the villager connects them in his mind with Bangkok. (1)

The city as ideas and sites of luxury, danger, and convenience will be explored further in this and the next section.

In High Banks, Heavy Logs, Ma-chan works as a clerk in a "large shop in the city" (31). Its spaciousness, with several sections or rooms (47), is a physical sign of wealth and high status. Excess becomes a desired quality for everybody and self-sufficiency is no longer sufficient. Money becomes the great leveler (Harvey 166) and class boundaries shifts as new members enter the strata through newly gained material possessions.

Air-conditioned rooms are similarly a luxury that bespeaks material wealth (High Banks 46). At the same time the rooms are a sign of human separation from nature or the outside world. They signal human power and control over, among other things, natural forces that were once vast, untouchable and unquestioningly accepted, as climate. The ability to control temperature of the air becomes not only a sign of

technological and cultural advancement according to an imported ideology, but also a gesture of growing heedlessness of nature because suddenly it seems humans can live independently of it.

The glass walls of the shop are symbolic partitions of this growing division. Their transparency gives the illusion of allowing people inside and outside of the walls to see what there is to see and know of the world on the other side without becoming a part of it if they choose not to. Glass walls are signs of false understanding and clarity through segregation and categorization. They also indicate a foregrounding of the visual faculty. Seeing becomes privileged among the senses and surrogate for other ways of perceiving. Along with other aspects of the industrial capitalist economy that increasingly permeate society, sight becomes the new symbol of viewing the world. To have seen much overtakes concepts of having lived long, experienced variously, listened carefully, thought deeply, and looked critically as a gauge of worldly wisdom. "Much" is a privileging of *quantity*, in addition to sight, characterizing an ideology of the value of mass production, that disregards other *qualities* describing human life and mentality.

Glass walls are showy. They are there to block yet to invite, creating a safe space from which to reveal. Displaying "many stuffed and carved animals" behind the glass walls as in the boss's grand shop is an example of a consumer culture and idea of trade no longer based on equality and fair play (High Banks 31, 46). Goods enclosed in a private space where customers must enter in order to make a purchase signifies exchange made on the seller's terms when compared to the symbolically public open air market where buyers and venders bargain and trade on almost barter-like terms in a communal setting. An immediacy and equality is lost when transportation is moved indoors into the large, air-conditioned space behind glass

walls established with personal funds that seem less intended for sharing than for gaining profit.

Trade and transportation are often seen as linking different communities, connecting the city and the country, bringing closer to each other supply and demand (Medhi 4). Nikom's novels and short stories, however, reveal the details of this traffic which illustrate an ideological map that gives a different meaning to these ideals of transaction and communication in the modern economy.

In "U-mang," the boat is a vehicle, much like the truck in High Banks and cars and motorcycles in other stories, that brings the city and country into contact where otherwise they would be separate worlds (Man in the Tree 142). Transportation would seem to be the network that links the country and city and their people. The relationship, like the glass-walled shop discussed above, however, is not so balanced and free. How do people commute? Why? The hospital in "U-mang" is situated in the city. It is a facility provided by the government as a public service for the benefit of the people along with other signs of development in national economic plans mentioned earlier. Viewed from this perspective, the government reaches out to the community (Public Development 155). In Nikom's narratives, however, when the locals are sick, they have to come to the city often as a last resort ("U-mang," Lizard); the government does not reach out to the community. This portrayal of hypocritical development is supported by Pitak Panyayudh's article on public service distribution:

> Schools, hospitals, agricultural stations are often large establishments located in cities or at least in [main] districts instead of small units spread out in villages [...] the result is that the people living far away who are poorer cannot make use of the services though they may be more in need of them than people in the city. (101)

The traffic in Nikom's fiction comments on the picture painted by economic plans and development policies. Transportation and trade do provide networks for

inhabitants of the world but the connection that occurs is neither neutral nor free. On one hand we see Bangkok hunters going into the countryside to shoot wild animals for pleasure (High Banks 45, 128). On the other we see Sanong taking his wife who is in extreme labor pain to the city hospital (Lizard 324). The nurse in "U-mang" goes out of the city for a holiday while the fisher patient goes into the city for the first time in his adult life because he is desperately sick (Man in the Tree 143-44). Roads and vehicles take the city to the country out of excess, and the country to the city out of necessity (Wong).[17] On one hand we see countless logs, stuffed animals and wooden carvings flowing out of the forests to city stores. On the other we see workers streaming into the forests to work. People working in the city have an "easy" life while those working in rural conditions leave within three months (High Banks 100-101). The meaning of the city and signs of modernization as portrayed in Nikom Rayawa's fiction is culturally specific in a way unaccounted for by popular progress narratives. The same roadways do not equally link the city and the country and integration does not automatically follow the reaches of paved concrete or the availability of automobiles. This transportation map that Nikom draws, contrary to modern propaganda, shows roads benefiting the already privileged more than facilitating life for the village folk.

Nikom further complicates the issue. The nurse in "U-mang" goes to the sea on holiday, but as a refuge, a retreat, and escape without which she may be sick (144). And for the boss's Bangkokian friends in High Banks, the forest provides an almost necessary hobby (128-30). When portrayed as a resource, the countryside or nature provides something economic models rarely accommodate. Here, nature is an

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[17] William Klausner discusses the country-city contact in detail in the case of Nong Khon Village in his 1956 field work progress report. He observes the communication and traffic between this village and Bangkok.

obscure kind of capital, providing an even more obscure kind of profit. The city that is built on the model of Western modernity does not seem able to offer this "necessity" (rather than the usual "extravagance") that the country readily offers.

Apart from extracting rural means of sustenance and acting as a showy storehouse for modified "raw" products, the city is also the site for competition. In "U-mang," the nurse's boyfriend Samruay's work in finance consists of "poring over the numbers of buying and selling all day" (Man in the Tree 149). He does not want to go anywhere because "it's a waste of working time. My boss doesn't like it, and another thing, I don't want to be out of work. I have to find money to pay bank interest and pay for the car. I won't let them take away my car." Concepts of easy or comfortable working conditions are shown in their highly subjective and arbitrary light. The cutthroat atmosphere of a financial firm where employees cannot afford to take a break because it will displease the boss and risk the employee's getting fired is deemed "comfortable" and desirable. Office work is better than field work (High Banks 61, 63). Internalization of modernity legitimizes a certain lifestyle while discrediting others. It creates an individualistic and ethnocentric attitude rather than fostering a sharing one. Contrary to physical appearances of connection and integration, modernization as described here seems to bring about separation and disintegration.

The city, as a locus of modernity, hosts a vanity and lifestyle suitable for it: "Apart from loving his [Samruay's] car, he was also very cleanly dressed. His hair was neatly trimmed, oiled to sticky stiffness and combed smooth. His shirt and pants without a wrinkle, fashionable tie, gleaming shoes" (Man in the Tree 149). It is a lifestyle that more easily accommodates someone who is afraid of poisonous jellyfish, gnats, mosquitoes, sea wind, sharks, deep water, high waves, drowning, and skin

cancer. Nikom is careful to point out that Samruay's fears, though expressed through a very concrete list, are psychological constructions. Although abstract and unseen, these ideological barriers prevent groups belonging to different communities from effectively communicating with each other despite better highways and faster vehicles.

Such ideas of othering not eliminated through facilitated trade and transport is perhaps even made more pronounced with competition as in Samruay's workplace. In another case, the short story "Change" explores the dynamics of competition when members are on the same side. One would assume a goal and intense rivalry will foster solidarity and increased productivity which are advantages of a market economy, but the result as portrayed in the short story is less than ideal:

> Wit walked dully back home. He threw the bird into the cage without caring to close the door. It was bruised and traumatized from being chased and caught. The leg with the ring was broken and was useless. It lay inert from the wound for several days, unable to flap its wings and fly.
>
> Throughout that week, it was abandoned without care. There were no food and water for it in the cage. (Man in the Tree 55-56)

This is after a failed flying competition. Before the tournament, the pigeon was treated as a fragile object (50). Wit, the owner, showed tears "when he saw it try to hop with one leg" after being bitten by a dog (51). "He spent about a month nursing and caring for it until the wound healed." Friendship, solidarity, or identification formed through competition is viewed cynically in this story. The bond developed through competition is suspected of selfishness rather than true kinship because Wit's and the bird's relationship turns negative after the lost competition. Wit's drastic change in behavior and feelings toward the pigeon makes both the physical and emotional aspects of identity susceptible to alterations on the same basis. Bangkok as the destination city of the bird race from Pitsanulok Province becomes symbolic as

the ultimate location for the effects of social transition and cultural negotiation (52). The capital's urban space is imagined as host to both the physical results of modernization and the mental condition that accompanies it.

As the imaginative center of all things new and popular, the city is also a place associated with excitement. Life in the country is viewed as routine and boring while life in the city is seen as full of activity and excitement: "How can you live?" asks one of Ma-chan's city friends on a visit to the Yom river home. "Aren't you lonely?" (High Banks 63). These city friends are convinced that work and life in a bustling town is more "fun" (139). "Living there was comfortable and fun. There were crowds of people, walking in and out, laughing and joking." The rural province is the antithesis of this lifestyle according to this viewpoint: "Wait and see and you will know," warns a friend as Ma-chan leaves the department store shop, "how difficult it is outside." Construction of the city as a protected environment gives the impression of being sealed off from the rest of the world and estranges urban inhabitants from non-urban.

As a place in which to live, the city is the more exciting space while the country is suitable for entertainment only as a temporary diversion: "Sometimes the boss's friends who lived in Bangkok would come out to hunt. They divided into groups of four or five. They held strange-looking rifles, wore smart clean clothes, and drove in jeeps, leaving trails of dust behind. They brought in several animals at a time for the stuffing factory" (High Banks 45). As is previously mentioned in the chapter on farmers, local villagers in Nikom's stories do not always conform to stereotypes. Though perhaps for a different reason, here, both villagers and city folk are involved in poaching. The rich Bangkok hunters may see their jungle excursions as a game and fashion show, and the locals may see them as a lucrative activity, but together they are

involved in constructing a landscape that delineates new conceptual spaces for value, work, and life. Again, although many groups of people share the same space and similarly contribute to its transformation, their roles give varying significance to the action and different meaning to the symbols.

Ma-chan's transformation from city clerk to village housewife is a move in the opposite direction from the boss's urban friends. She adopts the rural space as home and workplace and the city becomes occasional digressive flights of imagination. Seen in retrospect, her days in the air-conditioned shop are like the Bangkok hunters' dressed up outings to the provinces:

> Ma-chan listened and chuckled. "How was my face then?"
> "Painted smooth, red and green. In the middle of all those stuffed animals, it was great camouflage."
> Ma-chan said she remembered him [Kham-ngai] as well. "Unkempt hair, bashful face, unshaven, shaky voice."
> "Well I was shy." (48)

Looks and the right attire are focused upon in association with the city, and make-up and clothing become metaphors for an ideology preoccupied with form rather than with content, criticized for its superficiality and threat to the inner and foundational core of society. Nikom suggests that this threat is particularly significant considering the city's role as source of technological and social know-how: "The boss hired a man from the city to teach Kham-ngai about taxidermy" (44). The scenario presented here is that of local art being indebted to city sources. Urban capitals emerge as twentieth-century cradles of civilization and city culture becomes the standard by which other local cultures are measured. Juxtaposition of the city girl Ma-chan and the villager Kham-ngai through their physical appearances and their observations of the same world reveal the tension of this contrast.

The growing city develops out of ideologies whose recurring themes are domination, power, control, violence and conquest:

> One group of the boss's clients stopped by the stuffing factory many times. They came from Bangkok, went into the jungle always as a group, and hunted many days at a time.
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> "What a pity about that bull," one client said when they got to the stuffing factory. They had just come out of the woods. "It was very fast. Couldn't shoot in time."
>
> "Try again next time," one of his friends said.
>
> "Its horns were beautiful. Got to come back and get it." (High Banks 128-29).

Bangkok is a name that hovers at the edges of the text but whose impact permeates every story. The capital city and focal point of modern conveniences and narratives brings such a group of people who spreads an internalized hierarchy beyond Darwinism into the country. The centrality of humans in this ideology is incontestable and insisted. The pleasure and extravagance associated with these Bangkokians' hunting trips contrast them with Kham-ngai and Bun-haam's rafting trips down south with the logs which are done for a living. The thrill of adventure in this latter case is immediate fight for survival and not a long distance attack from a safe range. For the city hunters, jungle excursions are a different kind of game that is at once a test of power, reflex, and pride. It is a game in which humans feel less identification with animals and see that shooting an almost defenseless creature from behind the safety of their rifle barrels is enough for pride.

Nikom Rayawa, however, refuses simple stereotypes, especially binary oppositions of city people versus villagers and past ideologies versus present beliefs. Tradition, villagers, and the countryside are not aligned and placed neatly in a column that ideologically opposes another with modernity, urbanites, and the city. Hunting, as is previously mentioned, though seemingly symbolic of a material culture's superficiality, does not implicate only city people. It does not divide human beings into good guys and bad guys, evil characters and innocent, or humans and animals, but joins them in complicitous relationship (High Banks 45).

Similarly, the character of landscape is not absolute. As ideas of the city are found in the country, characteristics of the country landscape are found in the city. In the short story "Diver," physical descriptions of the city and country as well as imaginative ones do not stay within their categorical borders:

> A two-story wooden house sitting next to a large pond. In the pond were water hyacinths, and many kinds of water plants and water lilies. In front of the house was a vegetable garden. At one end of the garden was a ladder leading into the pond. Around the steps were water morning glories in floats with young fresh green new shoots. People passing by around Meenburi will be familiar with this picture. It makes one forget one is still in the Bangkok municipality. (Man in the Tree 65)

Suburban Bangkok is depicted here like the provinces. Though one may want to see the city and country as separate worlds, polar ends on a scale of development, Nikom's treatment of these ideas make them microcosms of the world community that embody several negotiating traditions. He explores the image of the city as imbued with a utopian desirability in people's imagination but also points out its symbolic quality as the locus of modern vices. In its role as the setting for change, the city also changes. As a construction of changing ideology and as a micro community of cultures, the city in all its array of variety appears in dynamic form where inside and outside are not easily distinguishable and where difference and similarity between it and the country are equally implied.

The Province: Simplified City?[18]

"From the 1960s, the countryside was dragged into a closer relationship with the city" (Pasuk and Baker 380). Though it may be convenient to think of the city and

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[18] I use province here to mean Thai provinces in general other than Bangkok. The Thai expression "tang changwat" or "other provinces" and "outside provinces," with Bangkok as the implied center, is frequently used as a synonym for upcountry, the countryside, or rural regions. All these terms will be used somewhat interchangeably in this paper.

the country as two distinct categories and separate from each other, part of the modern narrative and agenda is to see them as gradually merging. To be more exact, it is the country that is becoming a city. The change is a one-way transformation and not a half-way meeting. Pasuk and Baker's statement is also significant in its use of "dragged," indicating that a sense of coercion accompanies modernization in Thailand. Implied in the one-way transformation is the belief that urbanization is desirable, an ideal goal to be achieved. Positivistic development narratives would have it that once all communities have been "developed," we would have modernized cities all over the country and little, if any, difference in quality of life among Thais. Yet, this narrative is undermined by the underlying negative tone of tyranny. If modernization will in fact make people's lives better, why would there be intimations of resistance? Why would there be need of force? What is being resisted? Why?

Modernization is viewed as successful when certain signs of development are in place. As expressed in Philip Hirsch's quotation earlier, these signs have spatial and temporal meanings. "Integration" is evidenced by roadways and telecommunication facilities and stands for spatial connection. Once this is achieved, it is as if the community is fast-forwarded in time and reaches an "advanced" state according to what is popularized as "universal" standards. Pasuk and Baker observe that "from the 1950s, the relative separation of the village was rapidly broken down. Roads and electronic media connected the city to the countryside" (397). Integration, therefore, has more to do with perception than with any lessening of physical distance or actual transportation and communication that takes place between any two points. If the facilities are there, their use and successful communication are automatically implied.

In High Banks, Heavy Logs, Kham-ngai's house is described as being far from the temple where he recovers from his foot injury: "if you are walking or riding on the elephant it would take three whole days" (38). According to the modern spatial and temporal paradigm, his village is highly unintegrated and backward in time. In another description, however, a place immediately "outside the city" (60) and well connected to roads maintains uncharacteristic distance from the "world" is given. This is the misty hill Kham-ngai and Ma-chan go to on Kham-ngai's visits to the city shop:

> "It's like another world," she said when Kham-ngai asked how it was. "Like a dream. All so pretty."
> "It's been like this a long time."
> "I don't get to see it much."
> "Maybe you've been in the shop too long," Kham-ngai said. "Are you ever bored?"
> "No," she shook her head. "It's fine in the shop. Don't have to think about anything." (61)

Despite her proximity to the fog laden hills, Ma-chan feels "it's like another world." Popular signs of development are not sufficient for integration. Roads do not always bring two communities closer together. Experience determines familiarity. Ideology determines distance.

Similarly, the excitement associated with the city discussed in the previous chapter, when viewed from Kham-ngai's perspective becomes the opposite. The scene with city friends is described thus:

> When they married Ma-chan left work and went to live with Kham-ngai at the house on the Yom River. Friends who used to work together went to visit her. They were surprised when they saw the quiet atmosphere on both sides of the bank. Nothing like the shop in the department store where they worked at all.
> "How can you live?" one friend asked. "Aren't you lonely?"
> Ma-chan laughed. Her face was fresh and bright, "lonely how?"
> The friend looked at her face a while then said "I don't understand you at all." (63)

While Ma-chan's friends wonder at her loneliness in the countryside, Kham-ngai asks about her boredom in the city: "Are you ever bored?" In this exchange, the city and the square boxes of shops, seen as places of convenience and entertainment by the urban group (139), becomes a site of monotony and boredom. In The Lizard and the Rotten Branch, a visitor from the city remarks about the village: "So quiet, not like the city" (105). This view from both sides makes one more conscious of the subjectivity of urban concepts and the meaning of signs.

Another aspect of Ma-chan's case is that, contrary to the one-way movement from country to city regularly publicized with regards to modernization, Ma-chan makes the transition from the city to the country: "Actually Ma-chan had to adjust in many things. At first she often thought about life in the city and friends she knew, but later she grew used to it" (64). This is a relationship between the city and country not usually addressed in accounts of modernization where cultural encounters inevitably take place. Here, Ma-chan adapts to Kham-ngai. She changes her city ways to life in the province, not vice versa. This reversal of usual reality also significantly comments on development narratives in that it is voluntary, and carries undertones of commitment and willingness instead of forced compliance.

The provinces, being non-city and imaginatively "distant," evoke images of nature and peace. The nurse in "U-mang" seeks this quality, seen by Ma-chan's friends in *High Banks* as boring:

> When she [the young nurse] has many days off she would go to the sea with her friends [...] rest for a day or two with the waves and sun, swim around until she forgot the stress and then return to work. Sometimes when she feels oppressed she would switch shifts with a friend and head out to sea before the holidays. (Man in the Tree 144)

Nature here is solace, a refuge, escape, and a place of rest. This portrayal compliments Ma-chan's case in its comment on perceptions of the country and city.

This is not quite a reverse of the one-way development traffic from a non-urban to urban stage, but it does reverse mental connections about these two ideological spaces. In its description of the sea as a place to seek comfort and healing, the passage gives the image of the city as a place of unrest and sickness. What is seen by city characters in High Banks as excitement in the city is given a negative quality rather than a positive one. The cosmopolitan bustle becomes cause for stress. Crowded facilities that denote "integration" become oppressive. The nurse, working in a hospital that supposedly heals, finds herself desperately running away from this urban health center on occasion for a different kind of cure.

Beung, the Bangkok student in The Lizard and the Rotten Branch, similarly calls the provinces his place of refuge:

> "There were problems in Bangkok then. A lot of students were killed."
> "I might know him."
> "Really? At first he lived with Uncle Teng, helped him out with the rubber plantation, then went back to college. When he graduated, he worked there for a year, then came back to Uncle Teng again, this time to start a plantation himself."
> "Diligent," Prawing said.
> "Yes. At first people rumored Beung was one of those students running into the forest." (57)

This southern province to which Beung flees is introduced in this exchange as a kind of "forest." Not only does this non-urban space evoke nature, it also evokes a curative oblivion attributed to nature. In the same way that the nurse in "U-mang" goes to the sea to forget stress (Man in the Tree 144), Beung in The Lizard escapes to the south to forget an event, or even to be forgotten. Again, the city is negatively portrayed. Bangkok, the ultimate city, is a site of "problems," of killing and deaths, and of threatening danger. But again, the city is a site for knowledge, for education, and for work. The small southern village, by contrast, should be a place of safety, anonymity, and leisure. As the conversation above reveals, it is not. Perhaps the

illusion that it may be can fool non-locals like the Bangkok hunters in High Banks, but for Beung who eventually stays in the countryside to live and work, the village has more in common with the city than he wishes.

The safety Beung may have hoped for is destroyed very early in the story when Somkid, following a monitor lizard, finds a dead body on the beach (11). Beung's anonymity is shaken when Prawing muses "I might know him" (57). Though the city, with its dense population, is understood to be ideal for hiding or for committing crime in a faceless mass (Engels), in The Lizard, Nikom shows how the village too can be a dangerous setting despite intimacy among its inhabitants. Leisure activity in the novel is minimal. People, village-folk and town-folk alike, are seen hard at work.

Through this contrastive and non-absolute depiction of the country, Nikom engages in a reinterpretation of the rural as a symbol within modern discourse. Ideological associations of suburban or rural landscapes with a primitive backwardness in time or an ideal unfallen state does not explain the position of the provincial "forests" in Thai mentality and political and cultural history. Developmental economic models alone are inadequate in mapping and understanding movement in Thai society in the latter half of the 20th century, and especially in the last thirty years. Temporal interpretations of the province, if taking into account the situation of Beung in *The Lizard*, must consider Bangkok the city as representing the past and not the future, while acknowledging rural jungles as places of the present and future generations of Thais both politically and economically. "Students running into

the forest" (57) is a loaded phrase in Thai history. It not only demands a rethinking of the city-country relationship, but also a rethinking of movement within it.[19]

Beung's flight from Bangkok is symbolic of his and a significant number of his generation's running away from a terrible past. The city holds dark memories, embodies economic advancement as increased stakes for corruption, wields technology as weapons against the people, and makes young citizens helpless and useless as students and as people. The implications of time for non-urban settings in this instance are that they become recuperative sites, and therefore, forward-looking places. Country to city migration also reinforces the provinces' image as locations that prepare for the future, feeding a growing but dependent economy.

Against this reconceptualization of the province, we see Beung's seemingly stereotypical perception of the country as simplistic. He explains to Uncle Teng why he prefers to practice painting in the provinces: "'I'd like to study something simple, uncomplicated. Here, there are many things to look at: evil is evil, good is good, no shell or covering. In Bangkok, it's hard to tell. Can't see the real thing. The shell is thick'" (149-50). But how straightforward or simple is this view? Beung's comment aligns the country and city in a framework that looks like Western evolutionary models where the former is a more rudimentary, a simpler, form of the latter. The framework, however, can also be seen as paradigmatic in a practical rather than in a temporal sense. Beung's choice in studying the province as a clearer and easier to understand version of the city makes the focus more synchronic than diachronic. In this sense then, the country and city are aligned because of their contemporaneous

[19] One town-to-country movement during this period that precedes the two October events is initiated by learning projects in which university students go into villages to live with local families and learn from them. This trend, which reflects a wave of ideological change regarding forests and rural communities, is further discussed in Chatthip Nartsupha's article on "The Community Culture School of Thought" (132-33).

similarity rather than their difference. The line between the city and country is blurred further when characters in the novel are confused about the inherent goodness or badness of the monitor lizard and about each other, undermining Beung's observation that the countryside is easier to read and less complex than the capital city.

While Meenburi, a suburb of Bangkok, is described in "Diver" as country-like, the busy touristic scene near the Nan River in Northern Thailand is depicted in "Freeing Birds" as city-like. The crowded atmosphere is described aurally: "There were sounds of shouting, calling to each other, sounds of laughter and mirth, sounds of walking, running, sounds of the engine (Man in the Tree 61-62). This bustle of "young men and women in colorful clothes" in front of a temple and surrounded by diverse hawkers, vendors, street musicians, and beggars can as easily take place at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha of the Grand Palace in Bangkok. Interchangeability of scenes in the capital and in the other provinces indicates identifiability between events or ideas associated with each. As the physical and mental landscape of the city and provinces change through modernization, meaning and function of images associated with them shift. There is no timeless and homogeneous cultural history. What we believe to be one is a reconstruction of our own imagination and nostalgia. In the end, it seems the province is neither a simplification nor an extreme degree of the city. Beung's view emphasizes the synecdochic role of both capital and village as microcosms or representations of another, larger entity—Thailand the country. And Nikom's reproduction of these symbolic units as often contradictory and inconsistent, shows his insistence in conveying non-static communities coping in their own various ways with new elements and ideologies that have entered their lives.