อุกกาสานวารวิชิต

อัคคีภัยไมค์

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และส่งผ่านในสมัยที่ว่าการต่างตลอดหมด

ข้อพิจารณา

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ที่ป่าดง

สมัยที่ 4,000 ม. ถ้าทุกวัน ในสมัย 4,000 ม. ถ้าทุกวัน
เพื่อเตรียมตัวช่วยเหลือและส่งผ่านในสมัยที่ว่าการต่างตลอดหมด

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The coproduction of ecologies with more than human animals.

Playing with beetles, birds and fish in Thailand

Stéphane Rennesson, LESC-CNRS
Actually, Thailand is the scene of numerous games that build on uncanny cooperations between human beings and various other animal species. The competitions, very well institutionalized and organized, fall into two categories:

- First of all there are a lot of fights: beside rhinoceros beetles, one can witness duels of crickets, fishes like wrestling halfbeaks and Siamese fighting fish, cocks off course, but also bulls and water buffaloes, etc.
- Next we have signing contests for birds the kind of zebra doves and red whiskered bulbuls.

Beyond the great diversity of species involved what is remarkable is that each of these playful device is very popular and well institutionalized, even if at a different extent (cock>birds>fish>beetles)
Halbeaks & Siamese Fighting Fish
All the interspecies game I am going to tell you about build on the uncanny cooperation between human players and various non human animals! The first thing that I have been told in each case was how much the game do speak in favor of a local wisdom in the terms of a harmonious relationship built by human populations with their natural environment (in opposition to a more predator like relation of the western model of development).

Yet each and every competitions show some distinctive features, notably because of the central piece of the game, the different species and the specific challenge they impose to human players because of their own physiology and ethology! Each species pose a specific problem of communication. It’s not the same thing to try to coordinate one’s action with a beetle and a bull for example! Players look for a kind of estrangement and I am prone to conceive the playful devices they crafted year after year with their champions as genuine experimental devices the kind of experimental psychologist like to set up.

So interestingly, in each case it isn’t so much a matter of animal symbolism as a question of what happen in the development of an elaborated relation between human beings and other animals and how these special relationships resonate the ecological disposition of Thai communities.
Khun Prawat, who is the chairman of an International association of kwaang fighting he founded himself at the beginning of the 90’ likes to say that only people of Northern Thailand know the true and deep nature of the rhinoceros beetle!

He also says that this long-established knowledge advocates the ability of traditional communities to nurture harmonious relations with their “natural environment” (สิ่งแวดล้อม  singwetlom) and to embody sustainable development politics.

This is the argument of a “museum of life” (phiphithaphan chiwit) built in Chiang Rai Rajaphat University and that celebrate this local wisdom. To do so they choose to put the emphasis on the traditional fishing of the famous “Mekong giant catfish” (plaa bük, ปลาบึก, pangasianodon gigas) in the Mekong River and on the passion for beetle fighting!
Museum of life (phiphitaphan chiwit)
In order to shed the light on that uncanny passion I would suggest going deeper in the intimate relationship built across species. I actually follow Khun Prawat footsteps. He also likes to say that Kwaang remain a very mysterious animal. Actually, a kind of thorough ambiguity pervades in the network of kwaang fighting, from their collect up to the fights and through endless training and assessment sessions. One can never be sure when beetles are to appear, where, if they’ll be good at fighting, if they’ll be evenly aggressive throughout their 3 months’ career, if they will answer the players commands. Is it really what it means to know the true nature of kwaang?
The observation of the game shows that it’s neither a natural nor a pure human balance of power device:
The kwaang fight set-up can actually appear rudimentary at first glance. Two male beetles are placed on a “wooden log” (mai kön, ไม้คอน) that serves as the combat area.
“notched stylus” (mai phan, ไม้ผิ้น)/the hole through which the female pheromones reach the 2 males!
Players can influence the behavior of their insects in three ways:

- 1 – Through direct contact.

- Players can touch their beetles with their fingers.

- By means of a notched stylus that can be operated in two different ways. Players can stimulate the beetle by touching it directly with the stylus.
– 2 – Through indirect contact by pressing the stylus against the log and nimbly rolling it between their thumb and middle finger so as to produce vibrations.
- 3 – By turning the log around its longitudinal axis—the player’s goal being to help his beetle find the best position in which to grab its opponent or escape its opponent’s grip
A *khaam* (คำ), grabbing, represents a unit of action when the two beetles really engage in a physical balance of power. It starts when the beetles grab each other and stops when they separate.
1 - We cannot limit ourselves to an “etho-naturalistic” understanding of the process. A “mono-specific” setup that would only involve releasing two males onto a log would not provide the same quality of spectacle as an “interspecific” setup in which players pit their skills against one another, as is the present case, stimulating their protégés, sustaining their combativeness.

2 - If it is not a so called « natural » set up, similarly the game cannot be reduced to a pure technical device that would see human players confronting one another through insects that would answer to player’s commands with high fidelity. It’s is not a remote-control relation.

➔ At no point can kwaang fighting be reduced to a mechanical system, to a remote-control or string-puppet apparatus.
• The same ambiguity pervades in bird signing contests but here it’s modelized by building on the contrast between two species.

• Bulbuls are passerines that are supposed to learn throughout their life, to be social and exchange signing patterns, difficult to breed (specimen born in the wild are favored). It is also thought to be very responsive to human communication tentatives.

• On the opposite, Zebra doves are considered as non able to learn, it’s as if they were born with their signing skills and qualities once and for all. Here we favor breded animals over many generations. It’s said that it takes 20 years of attentive breeding, as many generations or so, to get genuine competitors. The idea being transforming gradually their cooing from something like « ku kuu kuku » to « woaaaaow ku ku ku kuuuuu »! Once their born the idea is essentially to take good care of them so they can one day or an other speak out their potential that is genetically set. It’s a very fragile and fearful animal with whom it’s quite diffult to interact contrary to the bulbul.
• Thus the competition devices are quite different. Like the beetles fights, the bulbul signing contests build on the ambiguous perception of animal performances and of the control relation. Players are as a matter of fact authorized to try to influence their champions, a few meters away yet! One can wonder how players and referees can agree on how many words and sentences each bird is signing every 30 second round.

• In the case of Zebra doves, the black boxes are the birds themselves as we have just seen, and also the refereeing system. Only the judges are authorized to enter the pitch when players are parked around almost enable to compare the performance of the 300 to 600 specimens cooing more or less at the same time. The listening of doves is more religious all the more since the birds are supposed to be the instrument of a divine principle, may you call it Tao or Divine breath following the influence of both chinese and muslim cultures on the game.
Interestingly, when dove’s contests are quite elitist and results greatly depend on breeders’ own reputation and network, bulbul competitions are based on a metric and transparent assessment of the performances, let’s say more democratic!
Different ontologies of the kwaang do confront themselves among players. Interestingly when it comes to interpret the result of such fight the ponderation in between natural characteristics (either genetics and or morphology), psychology, training, player’s technicity on the log etc. vary a lot from one player to another.

For example, while some player would attribute victory to animal characteristics for 20%; insect brave heart 10 %; training 40% and player’s technicity 30%; others would rather explain it at 40% by animal characteristics; 30 % insect brave heart; 20% training and 10% player’s technicity. Behind these different rationales we find alternative ways of considering beetle’s ontology.
Some will see them as very reactive sensible animal, as sensible machines ...

When others at the very other end of the spectrum will not only attribute a brain but also a will and a heart (jit jai จิตใจ), some feelings, moods and even souls (khwan ขวัญ and winjan วิญญาณ when it comes to special champions).
This is the strength of these games, I mean to enable the cohabitation between different species but also between very various conceptions of continuities and discontinuities between these species. The devices upholds a kind of vast network of analogic correspondence between diverse dimensions: connections, meaning full analogic links can be done and undone endlessly, can be tested infinitely between the insect physicality, its interiority, its behavior, the result of the contests.

In this context, at what point can it be said that players communicate with their *animals*? The latter ultimately impose their specific sensory universe while leaving humans the possibility of appending code, meaning, and technique.
All players agree on one thing, *beetles like birds* cannot be really tamed, a good player build assurance along with the animals he selected and patiently take care of on a daily basis. They call it a “co habituation process” (คือ คุ้น กัน koei chin kan), a reciprocal move where both parties have to learn to mutually acknowledge the other as accurately as possible.
CONCLUSION REMARKS

-> When Prawat says that “we Thai know the true and deep nature of the kwaang” I see from the close observation of practice a co-production of a culture of negotiation where continuities and discontinuities between human beings and beetles are being constantly investigated. Both parties accept to be affected by the other and to experience as a consequence a kind of transformation, always open to new possibilities, potencies. I assume that this is an attitude that take us to the very root of how these people think and act the “harmonious” relations they foster not with but from within their environment.

-> I don’t know if Thai people know the true nature of kwaang and of the other species but it seems like they accept that human kind doesn’t have a control over an objectified nature and that fostering uncertainty in relationships can prove to be virtuous. Interestingly they have selected and chose species with which they share a certain tendency for playfulness and reflect upon what it takes to make common worlds with others.
Thank you!