

A Study Guide
 compiled by Roberta McNair



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Introduction

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About the Film

Buddha's Lost Children

Director Mark Verkerk

Producer Ton Okkerse

Cinematography Rene Heynen

Editors Helen Delachaux, Jos Driessen

A former Thai boxer turned Buddhist monk, Phra Khru Bah Neua Chai Kositto or Khru Bah (also known as the Tiger Monk), travels widely on horseback, fearlessly dispensing prayers, health care, education, and tough love to villagers far from the protection and support of governments or nongovernmental organizations (NGO).

Khru Bah devotes his life to helping the isolated communities there, and rescuing orphan children. With his Golden Horse Temple, he's built an orphanage, school, and clinic—a haven for the children of the region who see him as a shaman, father figure, and coach.



Phra Khru Bah with novices at the Golden Horse Temple

The film is a rare look at life way beyond the view of most, filmed on location among the hill tribes in the border regions of Burma and Thailand, called the Golden Triangle—infamous for its drug lords and violence.

Stunning cinematography, intimate filmmaking, and a compelling story make this film an extraordinary experience of a hidden realm. *Buddha's Lost Children* gives the term "grassroots Buddhism" new

meaning, and in the end it's the children's journey we share. Their transformation from neglected village boys to self-confident novices.

Director Mark Verkerk gained unprecedented access to film this intimate and dramatic story over the course of a year on location in Thailand. The film is available in Thai with English, Dutch, German, French, and Spanish subtitles.

Awards

Grand Jury Prize for Documentary AFI Festival

Official Dutch Entry for the Academy Awards®

Best Documentary Newport Beach Film Festival

City of Rome Prize Asiaticafilmmediale

Global Insight Film Jackson Hole Film Festival

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/phra-khru-bah-neua-chai>

Director's Vision

Buddha's Lost Children covers a year in the life of a small roving monastic community, as it travels between the villages of a remote section of Thailand's northern border with Burma. From the outset however, the film was to be more than just a portrait of a monk and his community, I wanted it to touch on larger, more universal themes.

A clue to what the film is about can be found in the opening quote: "Living is an art to be learned," so cogently put by Shin Yatomi. The Abbot's aim is to teach this art to the boys in his care. This encapsulates the main goal of the film—to explore one man's way of giving the boys under his care the basic skills needed for a decent start in life.

The film is also then a "coming of age" story. And looks to capture that struggle of youth coming to know itself. In fact in that little temple community, for many boys this is the first time in their lives they have been given the freedom to become children. And by doing so, they discover the key to

developing and maturing as individuals.

Buddha's Lost Children also explores the nature of compassion, and what it means to actually live by it. I wanted to find out how it worked, record the mechanics of it in action. In the West, compassion is often seen as a weakness, as something passive and debilitating. But to Khru Bah—a Rambo in robes who shattered for me the stereotype of the navel-gazing monk—it has become the basis for action.

This is not a film about Buddhism, though the story has the potential to change the way many people think about Buddhism in the West. Buddhism is still commonly seen as promoting a purely passive, contemplative attitude to life (the stereotype of the navel-staring monk). This is thought to lead ultimately to a detachment and even indifference to the problems of the material world, and is therefore not fit to tackle many of the complex, practical problems we face.

Yet Khru Bah's example clearly shows otherwise. He has translated the Buddhist ideal for infinite compassion and unconditional love into action. From his hilltop retreat he goes out into the surrounding hills where, often literally risking his life, he confronts the most serious problems facing his people. For many I think this dynamic view of Buddhism will be an eye-opener.



Khru Bah on his travels

The novices of the Golden Horse don't have MTV or the latest PlayStations, yet in many ways they find riches greater than those enjoyed by many children in the West. What struck me during filming was the self-discipline and sense of purpose of the boys. In this way the film is also about personal

transformation, both of the boys and of Khru Bah himself.

This is a story of courage, love and sacrifice. It explores a powerful example of the struggle between ancient spiritual wisdom and the materialism of the modern world. Through his work, Phra Khru Bah is not only helping the children of the Golden Triangle but he also provides the rest of us with an insight into how change can be brought about to release personal happiness in our lives.

We live in a globalized world, more interconnected than ever before, yet one in which the divisions between cultures and the differences between rich and poor are daily more evident. We often talk about how technology has made our world smaller, yet conflict throughout the world and within nations continues to escalate and over half of the children in the world are growing up hungry and unhealthy. The need today has never been greater to understand other cultures and become aware of the common humanity we all share.

Khru Bah is fond of saying, that to change the world you begin by just changing a single person. And in his remote corner of northern Thailand, by using his unique mix of physical and mental training, he's found a way of doing just that.

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/directors-vision>

Review of *Buddha's Lost Children*

The human emotion of compassion is a fascinating one to me. I struggle day in and day out with having compassion, especially driving amongst Buddha's lost drivers here in Seattle! So when a documentary such as *Buddha's Lost Children* drops into my life, I am quickly reminded why Buddhists consider this existence as one of suffering; not because of the extreme poverty of the subjects, but rather due to the fact that I have a long, long way to go to leave the wheel of Samsara!

Buddha's Lost Children is the story of Muay Thai fighter turned monk, Abbot Phra Khru Bah Neua Chai Kositto, and his Golden Horse Monastery in the remote northern province Chiang Rai in Thailand's infamous

Golden Triangle. Tending to over 120 horses (mostly rescued from slaughter houses), Khru Bah has dedicated the past 15 years of his life (as of the filming in 2006) to adopting the region's orphans and castaways, giving them education, medicine, and a solid father figure in a land rife with drug addiction and poverty.

"Living is an art to be learned." –Shin Yatomi

Khru Bah lives by Yatomi's credo. The majority of kids in his tender do not even have the basic understanding of proper hygiene, such as brushing their teeth or washing their scalp to prevent sores. Aided by Buddhist nun Khun Ead, Khru Bah dishes out tough love on his children teaching lessons where they present themselves, such as when a horse fell and nearly strangled itself in its reins. Khru Bah halted the caravan and made sure everyone had daily chores to help the ailing horse. Horses are a central character in the film as Khru Bah uses them not only for transportation, but also as a learning vehicle, "With child taking care of the horse, he learns in turn to take care of himself and others."

Nine months of the year Khru Bah travels the border towns visiting the hill tribes that are for the most part shut off from society. On a complete side note it was fascinating to me to observe the various cultures and ethnicities he ran into while visiting towns bordering Burma, Vietnam, and Laos. Anthropologically speaking [this is] a fascinating study within this context of this film.

The majority of the documentary is filmed on a 100 km trek to a remote village to rebuild the local Buddhist temple (Thailand is predominantly Buddhist). On this journey we are welcomed into the lives of several children at various stages of involvement with Khru Bah and his monastery, who is well known in the region!

Through work, travel, and play Khru Bah teaches life lessons, hard work, and dignity. He is accepting of all, but expects discipline and diligence in everything the kids do. What originally turned me on to this film is Khru Bah's use of Muay Thai as a part of the youths' learning experience. Explaining that

traveling in and out of the Golden Triangle is extremely dangerous even for monks, Bah uses his Thai boxing expertise to teach his novices how to protect themselves as well as stay in shape. Some of those in his care grow up to become professional fighters, one of the few promising careers for the poor of Thailand.

Buddha's Lost Children is a wonderfully uplifting documentary that one cannot help but walk away feeling a little bit more hope for the lost souls of humanity. Khru Bah gives everyone a chance to make their lives better, regardless of their past. The viewer sees the importance of what Bah is doing when a mother of several children decides that her eldest son Yee has to join the monastery because she does not have enough food to feed him any longer, and the only hope for an education and positive life is via Khru Bah.



Khru Bah teaches Muay Thai, Thai boxing

Those of us in the west often get very wrapped up in our luxuries quickly forgetting that the majority of the world is poverty stricken. I sometimes get down because I do not have health insurance, but then I think of Khru Bah and his novices who do not even understand the concept of health insurance! These lessons are important to keep in mind throughout our daily life, and documentaries such as *Buddha's Lost Children* serve as a beautiful vehicle for those lessons.

Posted by Jake

<http://threeharmonies.blogspot.com/2010/06/buddhas-lost-children-dvd-review.html>

About the Filmmakers

Mark Verkerk

As Director
2009 [Himalaya Alert](#) (documentary)
2006 [Buddha's Lost Children](#) (documentary)
As Director, Producer, Writer
1993-1994 [Great Castles of Europe](#) (TV series documentary)
As Director, Writer
1998 [Schätze der Welt—Erbe der Menschheit](#) (TV series documentary)
As Director, Editor
2009 [Buddha's Lost Children Revisited](#) (documentary)



Mark Verkerk and Ton Okkerse

For more than 30 years Mark Verkerk has been involved in all aspects of film and television production, from camerawork, to editing and directing. But one thing has remained constant—a passion for documentary in all its forms.

Mark was born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1956. He graduated from the London International Film School, and in 1980 joined the ABC in Sydney Australia as a film editor. He also ran Arafura Productions Pty. Ltd., a company specialized in producing low-cost videos highlighting environmental issues.

Since 1990 Mark has been Creative Director of EMS FILMS based in Hilversum, the Netherlands, where he written, directed and overseen a range of award winning documentaries for international broadcasters. *Buddha's Lost Children* is his first feature length theatrical documentary.

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/director-mark-verkerk>

Ton Okkerse

As Producer
2009 [Buddha's Lost Children Revisited](#) (documentary)
2009 [Himalaya Alert](#) (documentary)
2006 [Buddha's Lost Children](#) (documentary)
As Executive Producer
1993-1994 [Great Castles of Europe](#) (TV series documentary)

Ton Okkerse, founder and managing director of EMS FILMS has built up a unique combination of production, marketing and distribution experience in the international documentary television business.

With Ton's guidance and management, EMS FILMS has successfully completed a number of major projects in time, within budget. Highlights include:

Production of feature documentary *Bridging two Worlds*, charting the life of street child and adopted son, Motalib Weijters, a remarkable man, at home in two contrasting worlds, shot on location in Bangladesh and the Netherlands.

Production of initial 10-part series *Secret Worlds* (Discovery Comm. Travel Channel USA).

Production of "World's Heritage" series into initial 13 one-hour hour *Treasures of the World*, (for Discovery Communications, Travel Channel USA and Discovery Channel International).

Co-Production of the 13-part series *A Vision to Heal* (for La Cinquite, Tros, Marathon, INP).

Production and worldwide distribution of the three-part series *Treasures of the Earth* (partners: Discovery Communications Inc. USA., La Cinquite France).

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/producer-ton-okkerse>

About the People

Phra Khru Bah Neua Chai Kositto

Abbot Phra Khru Bah Neua Chai Kositto is a former soldier and Thai boxing champion. Today this transformed man has found inner peace and a new vocation as a Buddhist monk. Devoted, disciplined, and extremely resilient, Khru Bah has survived many physical attacks from gangs running drugs or illegal gambling operations.



Khru Bah

Operating on a special mandate from the Supreme Patriarch, the Abbot's focus lies on serving the most marginalized of the poor--the hill-tribe children--in Thailand's remote northern province of Chiang Rai.

In the serene Wat Maa Tong (Temple of the Golden Horse), Khru Bah has created a haven for these young boys, many of whom are orphaned or abandoned.

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/phra-khru-bah-neua-chai>

Sister Khun Mae Ead

Raised in a spiritual, well-to-do family in Chang Mai, Mae Ead went on to qualify as a medical doctor. But after suffering a heart attack and subsequent near death experience, she transformed her life by becoming a Buddhist nun.

Astute, firm, humorous, and extremely energetic, Mae Ead supervises the financial resources and the daily management of the monastery and teaches the boys life skills, such as reading, writing, washing, and cooking.



Mae Ead

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/sister-khun-mae-ead>

Nehn Suk

Nehn Suk was found by Phra Khru Bah in an Akha hill-tribe village, playing in the dirt with chickens and pigs.

His parents had disappeared, probably having re-crossed the border into Burma. He had no one to care for him apart from an old woman who fed him on occasions. Although Nehn Suk was famished and could not speak a word when he met the Abbot, he was fascinated with his tattoos and a bond slowly developed between the two. Nehn Suk came to live at the monastery and began speaking after a year.



Suk

He is very attached to and respectful of the Abbot, whom he considers his father. Although his ordeal in early life has left its mark, Nehn Suk became able to communicate well, meditate, write and speak in the Thai language, and accompanies the rest of the novices on their daily alms round.

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/nehn-suk>

Pan Saen (Yee)

Yee is a Shan village boy born to a poor family, whose parents migrated originally from Burma. His father died some years ago, leaving his mother alone to take care of seven children. Yee developed problems learning and speaking after having fallen on his head from a tree. After the accident, he barely communicated with his family and friends.



Pan Saen

After his mother got a job working for the temple, Yee became intrigued by the horses and novices there. After a trial period working with the horses, Yee was asked if he was interested in becoming a novice and learning to ride. Though unsure what to do, his mother urged him to take the step and eventually Yee was initiated into the monastery as a novice.

The film follows his slow transformation as he gains confidence as a young novice. His journey, combined with what we learn from the often-traumatized past lives of a number of other young novices, illustrates the transformative power of the work of Khru Bah and Mae Ead.

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/pan-saen>

Boontam

The youngest in a family of five, Boontam was growing up in the border village of Huay Yuak, some 80 km from the monastery. His parents own no land and so make a living as field workers for a wage of little more than two dollars a day. Because of poor nutrition, Boontam was suffering from rickets, a condition that if left untreated could leave him crippled for life.

His legs had become so weak that when Khru Bah first found him he could barely

walk. Through a vision that Khru Bah had while meditating, he became convinced that Boontam is a special boy destined to become a spiritual leader and help the hill-tribe people develop.



Boontam

Although too young to become a novice, Boontam was taken in for care at the monastery and through proper nutrition and medication began to regain strength in his legs. During the year of filming, Boontam went back and forth between the monastery and his village, growing in strength by the months. His mother expected Boontam to take the formal steps of becoming a novice when he turned seven.

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/boontam>

Pabo and Tookae

Tookae and Pabo are tribal boys from the Lahu Tribe, who one day walked into the monastery looking for food. Their families are extremely poor and their situation only worsened considerably when both sets of parents became ill with tuberculosis. Both families also have a history of drug addiction, which resulted in the boys' growing up seriously malnourished.



Tookae and Pabo

The boys became true friends and are

inseparable. Tookae, the smaller of the two, is a bit wild, quick-tempered, intelligent, and a keen horse rider. Pabo, on the other hand, is shy by nature, and lacks some of the courage of his smaller friend.

Although they made great progress over the year of filming and became much more confident and happy, they still could be found hoarding food—a habit picked up from their hungry years.

<http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/pabo-and-tookae>



Novices traveling the northern tribal region

About the Region and Its People

The Golden Triangle

The Golden Triangle is one of Asia's two main illicit opium-producing areas. It is an area of around 350,000 square kilometers that overlaps the mountains of three countries of mainland Southeast Asia: Burma (Myanmar), Laos, and Thailand. Along with Afghanistan in the Golden Crescent (together with Iran and Pakistan), it has been one of the most important opium-producing areas of Asia and of the world since the 1950s.

The term first appeared in 1971, referring to the shape of Burma, Laos, and Thailand when taken together. The gold of the triangle is most probably that which the first opium merchants of the region used in exchange for the crops. Although the opium production that exists in the Golden Triangle is frequently and erroneously thought to be an old traditional activity, in fact, opium production is an altogether recent phenomenon. It is only at the end of the nineteenth century that the poppy-growing tribal populations began their southernmost forced migration from China toward the highlands of mainland Southeast Asia. There they scattered and settled, having brought with them the practice and techniques of farming the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum* L.).



The Golden Triangle

As World War II drew to a close, this area

was producing less than eighty tons of opium per annum. All that changed when China clamped down on opium production and addiction, spurring Southeast Asia to take over production. The sudden suppression of opium production in Iran in 1955 further reinforced the transfer toward Southeast Asia.

Later, due mainly to the internal protracted Burmese conflicts and ethnic and communist rebellions, the Golden Triangle's opium production literally exploded, exceeding 3,000 tons in 1989, with Burma alone producing more than 2,500 tons in 1996 (U.S. State Department estimates). The narcotics trade linked a marginal and isolated Southeast Asian region with principal cities in the Western world. The United States became the main destination of the Golden Triangle's heroin, the so-called China White, or heroin No 4, renowned for its 98 percent purity.

At the end of the twentieth century, the Golden Triangle was clearly dominated by Burmese production (800 metric tons in 2002, according to the United Nations), Thailand had suppressed almost all its poppies, and Laos as still fighting the battle. But a new scourge had arrived in the region: an explosion in methamphetamine production in Burma and a large population of addicts in Thailand.

By Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy published in the "Encyclopedia of Modern Asia" (pp. 442-443, in Levinson D., Christensen K. (Ed.), 2002, Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, Chicago, Scribners, 3600 p.)

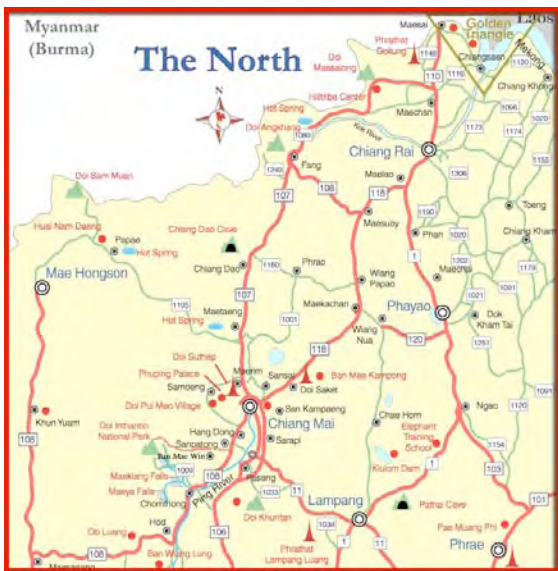
<http://www.geopium.org/drugtradeinasia.html#triangle>

The Northern Thai Mountains

A zone of refuge for many minority ethnicities

For centuries, the northern mountainous region of Thailand has served as a refuge for mountain minority peoples of neighboring countries. (We prefer the name "mountain peoples" to the more derogatory term "Hill Tribe.") Only 1.5% of Thailand's population consists of mountain minority tribal peoples.

Some, such as the Karen and Lawa, have lived there for centuries. Others, such as the Akha, Hmong, Htin, Khamu, Lahu, Lisu, and Yao/Mien, have migrated to the region because of various political problems, such as wars, economic, and other social pressures in their native lands. Such migrations began in the middle of the 19th century in great deal as a consequence of wars in Southern China, Burma, and then later Vietnam war related problems in recent times.



Hill region of Thailand

These groups are quite different in terms of language, culture, history, and psychology and those living in Thailand are but a part of their peoples, who are spread over Burma, Southern China, Laos, and Vietnam. The total number of these peoples in what formerly was known as the "Golden Triangle" and now is often called Mekong Quadrangle is estimated to be about 20 million people.

In 1991 there were between 530 and 600 thousand tribal mountain minority peoples living in some 2,200 villages and other locations dispersed throughout the remote highland areas of northern Thailand. In 2002 this number has increased substantially; demographics as given by the Tribal Research Institute of a census in 2000 report the existence of 10 "tribal groups" occupying 3,492 villages with 153,821 families and a population of 866,749 persons (see

demographics). Given the lack of nationality papers of many mountain peoples being refugees, besides strong urbanization and difficulties of counting in border areas, the real number of highlanders seems to be much higher.

These highland communities have posed political, administrative, economic, and social problems for the several subsequent Thai governments over the last 50 years. However, it is also recognized by many that highlanders make an important contribution to the region's economy, through tourism, cheap labour, environmental knowledge of medicinal and traditional color plants, extremely artful and intricate handicraft, and the cultivation of plants that only grow in temperate climates.

Political Issues: The Granting of Citizenship

In the Thai Government's view, before 1983, many political problems seemed to arise from the infiltration of insurgent elements in highland tribal communities. That is to say, the Hmong were thought—often incorrectly—to lean towards communism. This had led to the "Hmong war," from 1968-1972. In 1972 there was also a student revolt at the Thammasat University in Bangkok against the dictatorial rule of Marshall Sarit. This rebellion was repressed violently by the army and police. After this many students escaped to the mountains of the North, especially to Hmong villages in Nan Province. It was thought that they were schooled there by communist infiltrators from Vietnam. Many of them came back and received Royal Amnesty in 1983 (Bangkok Post, October 1986). However, for a long time, the lowland Thai population as well as the media have seen the highland people as "communists."

A constant and even worsening trend, reaching into the 2000s is that the highland minority peoples are still seen as inferior people whose language, economics, sociocultural customs, and religion are at a more primitive level than those of Thai lowlanders. Highlanders are therefore often supposed to have no sense of national belonging or national consciousness. They

are seen as separate, cohesive groups. Awareness of, and interest for, highland minority peoples amongst the Thai population is minimal and it seems that the gap between Thai and mountain peoples and Thai lowlanders is rather widening, than narrowing down, in the new millennium (Pannada 2002).

As a result, incorporation policies formulated in 1967, such as the formal granting of Thai citizenship, have been constantly behind in their implementation. In some provincial districts, the proportion of the population with Thai citizenship is as low as 10% (National Statistical Office 1986). In 1988 the following developments could be observed: The Government introduced—in that year—the so called "Blue Cards." These were intended to register as many highlanders as possible, but granting the card did not include the granting of citizenship. In fact: those possessing a "Blue Card" are forbidden to move from their village.

In 1992 the government issued a decree, indicating that all those who had entered the country before February 28, 1986 would—as a matter of principle—be able to obtain Thai citizenship. Temporary improvements could be observed in the 1990s, in the upper North of the Chiang Rai Province and particularly thanks to the Mae Fah Luang Foundation, named after the late Mother of His Majesty the King. As a result of this "Green cards with Red Border" were issued. These cards do not give a right to obtain an ID card either. The granting of the "real" ID cards indicating that citizenship is obtained stagnated again under the last (Thaksin) government. This has, for the first time, provoked a strong popular movement, called "The Assembly of Tribal and Indigenous Peoples," which linked itself with "The Assembly of Poor Northern Thai farmers." The problem for the many highlanders who have no ID cards, making up an average 40% or more than 350,000 people who don't have citizenship, are unable to possess motor bikes, do business, or go to schools. When traveling they are often arrested by the police. Of those 350,000 people more than a half are from mountain people families who have lived in Thailand for several

generations already. Others—in most cases—can be called refugees. The land rights of highlanders is another problem that remains unresolved.

Social Issues: Opium Growing and Addiction

The Opium Act of 1959 banned the sale and smoking of opium in Thailand, as requested by the UN and the USA. It took a very long time, however, before the ban of opium growing was implemented, as the interest of so many people of all layers of Thai society was involved. Officially however the mountain minority peoples were blamed and it was cited as one reason, besides deforestation, to relocate them. It was also often incorrectly suggested that mountain peoples were growing opium mainly for their own consumption.



Field of opium poppies

The often maintained thesis that opium growing is part of the traditional culture of Hmong or Akha is equally incorrect. Opium growing has entered the minority Burmese and Thai mountainous areas only gradually in the 20th century as a result of the British opium-wars with China between 1840-1854. The reason was that the British wanted to replace the paying for tea, silk, and other colonial products in silver with paying in opium and tried to impose this by force. As a result the Chinese started to encourage growing opium in the higher areas of Yunnan and Szechuan, from where it spread gradually (Opium War books). According to older Akha the opium Cultivation reached Burma in around 1910 and the higher border

areas of Thailand only in the 1930s.

The opium poppy grows best in a cool climate and at altitudes above 1,000 meters. As such, it has been an ideal cash crop for the impoverished mountain populations of Thailand, as its easy to transport and worth its weight in silver. Particularly during the Vietnam war the demand for opium and its derivate heroin increased enormously particularly from the side of the US GIs stationed in Thailand. (McCoy 1965; Chivit Bondoi 1991). Factually the French and the CIA in Laos, beside ethnic liberation armies and warlords, especially the defeated Kuomintang groups and the so called Haw Chinese, all started to depend financially on opium production by mountain minority villagers in higher border areas. The producers themselves often received only a small part of the profit. A result of opium growing was certainly opium addiction, being partly a result of increasing health problems, partly a result of impoverishment, depression and a lack of future prospects (because of lack of land rights; lack of nationality papers, etc.). Opium is an excellent painkiller and antidepressant. The Akha would say, that "Those who grow it don't smoke, but those who don't grow it smoke it."



Tending the poppy fields

Already in 1965, the United Nations Survey Team on Economic and Social Needs of the Opium-Producing Areas in Thailand set out to determine the extent of opium production. The Team pursued two methods in its survey: interviewing and aerial survey

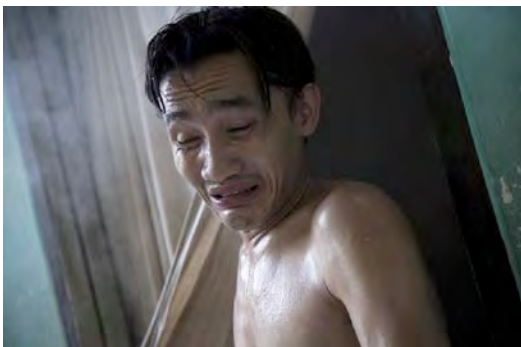
with ground inspection. However, only by the 1980s, the Thai government believed that it was able to reduce opium production through effective law enforcement, crop replacement, and education. Crop replacement, as it has been practiced by the "Royal Projects" contributed to this more than anything else. Many crops, such as coffee, tea, apples, pears, peaches, strawberries, flowers, macadamia nuts, carrots, and other vegetables able to grow in higher colder temperate climate were introduced. According to government sources a large drop in opium production was observed between 1984 and 1986. It was no secret, however, that combating opium production was not completely full hearted from the side of the government officials having jurisdiction in the mountains. It was only in the mid 1990s, when besides opium also heroin and other drugs, like the methamphetamine based "Yaba" (speed or ecstasy pills) started to penetrate all strata of Thai society, that it was tried to make a radical end to opium production on Thai territory. In how far this has succeeded is not clear.

Villages in located in lower areas, which had not been able to grow opium, were unable to profit from the "opium replacement" projects. However, a host of other development programs have been active in the mountains between the 1960s and 1980s. Several government agencies and functionaries and researchers have questioned the regional development impact of these programs on both opium-growing and non-opium-growing highland communities (Kampe); the latter (non-opium growing communities) accounting for about 80% of the highland population in Thailand between the 1960s and the 1990s. As for the opium growing villages, only a few families were able to profit from the opium and equally from the crops replacing them, as they required a lot of investment.

A net result of all these problems has been that since the 1990s a massive urbanization of mountain people to the cities started to take place, leaving those without ID cards and the elderly in the villages. This resulted in a quite substantial increase in addiction again, in spite of years

of de-addiction programs (Chivit Bondoi 1991).

Addiction to opium and other drugs did not stop in a large amount of mountain villages because the root causes of the problems: Lack of land rights, lack of nationality papers, equal access to education and in general "future prospects," were not tackled. Opium, heroin, and amphetamine-related drugs remain very much available in the mountains in the 2000s because of the opium and other drug production in border areas of Burma. Drug caravans and transportation have always passed the Northern mountains. In the 1980s and 1990s they were dominated by the famous warlord Kuhn Sa leading his "Shan United Army" or "Mong Tai Army." In the late 1990s and beginning 2000s, this was taken over by the so called United Wa State Army. In 2001-2002, the Third Army [was] controlling these areas politically, which also ... engaged in drug de-addiction activities. It cannot be said that they [were] completely unsuccessful.



Drug addict attempting detoxification

Drug abuse and trade

A [significant] phenomenon is the dramatic increase in drug abuse. Alcohol, opium, ganja, heroin, and methamphetamine (Yaba) addiction have been on the rise in most highland villages. Over the last 20 years, the number of addicts has doubled or even tripled in some villages, in spite of increased efforts of de-addiction. Villagers attribute this trend to deteriorating health conditions and an increased sense of "futurelessness." Another cause is the deterioration of family

relations, particularly between men and women. The role of the highland man has corroded more quickly than that of the woman. This has laid a heavy burden on the woman, resulting in marital friction and sometimes divorce.

In other cases poorer highlanders engage in small-scale drug trade, in most cases for others. They often get caught by the police. Northern Thai prisons are full of highlanders arrested for drug trade, lack of ID cards, or cutting trees for logging companies. Summary executions of small-time drug dealers are not exceptions any more. Nor are torture or "elimination" of imprisoned highlanders, taken to prison for de-addiction, an exception. In spite of some unfortunate cases of torture, the presence of well-trained military units of the Third Army is seen, by most villagers, as an improvement. The real culprits of drug trade, illegal logging, and related "trafficking in humans," called "Influential figures," generally remain unpunished.

<http://www.hani-akha.net/mpcd/hani-akha/Development.html>

Thai PM Vows to Slow Drug Trade

BANGKOK—Thailand's prime minister vowed Wednesday to reduce drug trafficking within six months but said he would avoid abuses that have marked previous government crackdowns.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva announced his plan after revealing that the number of addicts in the country has been steadily increasing.

Abhisit said the crackdown will be conducted lawfully and without violence.

A "war on drugs" conducted under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra led to about 2,300 killings. Human rights activists claim many were extrajudicial executions.

"If all sides work together, I am confident that the amount of drugs being trafficked will be reduced. The government has set up a six-month timeframe to produce concrete results," Abhisit said.

Despite the alleged abuses, the 2003 drug war under Thaksin was popular in some rural

areas and slums where a tide of methamphetamine from neighboring Myanmar led to soaring addiction and crime.

Thaksin's government claimed drug gangs carried out most of the killings to eliminate informers or rivals. Few if any people were tried or convicted in the slayings.

Abhisit, speaking at a meeting of high-ranking security officials about drug suppression, said official statistics showed 460,000 drug abusers in 2003, 570,000 in 2007—the year after Thaksin was ousted by a military coup—and 605,000 in 2008.

"A crackdown (on illegal drugs) has to be done decisively, but we also have to take the law into consideration," he said. "(We) do not want a policy that promotes a violent crackdown that will lead to other problems."

Separately, Dr. Boonreun Tiruenworarat of the Public Health Ministry said the number of teenage drug users has risen significantly in recent years, with addicts between the ages of 13 and 18 accounting for 40 percent of all abusers at the end of last year, up from about 20 percent in 2007.



Thai protester kicks a burning effigy of Thailand's Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva outside the Parliament during a no-confidence debate in Bangkok, Thailand, on March 19. Thailand's prime minister said his critics planted four small bombs in a southern province in an effort to discredit his administration before a parliamentary no-confidence debate that began Thursday. (Photo: AP)

March 20, 2009, *The Irrawaddy*
http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=15327

Illegal Drug Cultivation & Trafficking Increasing in Thailand

Thailand's Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), concerned over the recent increase in illegal drug trafficking and cultivation coming from border nations around the kingdom have moved to increase interaction and cooperation with their foreign counterparts. Second to this, border patrols and check points have been increased, however; without proper action taken by neighboring countries the problem will continue to worsen.

Bangkok, the 4th of February 2010 [PDN]: Following the recent seizure of approximately 3.6 million amphetamine (Ya-Ba) tablets in Bangkok, the ONCB released a statement to draw attention to the inaction over illegal cultivation, distribution and subsequent trafficking of drugs from border countries, namely Burma and Laos.

Director of the ONCB department in the Northern Thai City of Chiang Mai Mr. Pornthep Eamprapai stated: "We are worried. We think there will be more and more drugs coming into Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and the northern parts of the country." In conjunction with the increase in trafficking of illegal drugs across the border from Burma and Laos it has been reported that numerous Northern Thai hill-tribes are involved in the drug trade.

At present it has been reported that the Thai ONCB are attempting to increase cooperation and collaboration between themselves and the Burmese, Laotian and Chinese authorities in an attempt to stifle the drug traffickers efforts. Mr. Eamprapai explained: "We hope that by the middle of this year, the trafficking situation along the border areas will be improved due to a concerted effort to control drug trafficking in this country."

The ONCB also reported their figures for last year, which showed that although methamphetamine seizures were down to 14.3 million pills seized from 22.1 million in 2008, opium trafficking had increased eightfold from 5,708kg in 2008 to over 40,000kg in 2009. "The situation is getting worse. Now we are on the defensive,"

stated the Bangkok Deputy Director of ONCB's head office.



Poppy field and package of heroin (inset)

A report titled 'Poisoned Hills' devised by the Palaung Women's Organisation in Burma reported last month that they had been monitoring the drug problem in the Northern Shan State, specifically in the Palaung region and had observed that cultivation had increased fivefold between 2007-2009.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that the total area under opium poppy cultivation in Burma in 2008 was estimated at 28,500 hectares, representing an increase of 3 percent from the 27,700 hectares under cultivation in 2007. Significantly, the Northern Shan State contributes over 89% of Burma's total opium cultivation.

February 5, 2010, *Pattay Daily News*
<http://www.pattayadailynews.com/en/2010/02/05/illegal-drug-cultivation-trafficking-increasing-in-thailand/>

Vietnam-Thai Authorities Stage Anti-Narcotics Meeting

Officials of Vietnam and Thailand met in Ho Chi Minh City earlier this week seeking to step up measures in the respective nations fight against drug-related crimes.

Thailand, the 9th of September 2010: Representatives from Vietnam's General Criminal Prevention Police Department of the Ministry of Public Security and Thailand's Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) met to discuss cooperation in combating drug related crimes and trafficking between the two nations.

Sharing information pertaining to

narcotics-related crimes, Major General Cao Minh Nhan (Deputy General Director of the General Criminal Prevention Police) reaffirmed Vietnam's commitment in cooperating with Thailand over drug suppression operations, applauding the current success of ongoing measures between the two neighbors.



Vietnam-Thailand region

General Krisna Polananta (Secretary General of Thailand ONCB) concurred with his Vietnamese counterpart, stating that the continued close monitoring of drug related operations between the two nations was proving effective, while maintaining that further measures could still be implemented.

Gen. Polananta revealed the smuggling of 'cold & flu' medicines into Thailand was still a major issue, with Thai intelligence reports suggesting that the pharmaceuticals are being shipped into Vietnam before being trafficked into the Kingdom. He requested that Vietnamese agencies closely monitor suspect shipments and inform Thai authorities in an effort to jointly stamp out the trade.

The 'cold & flu' medicines being trafficked contain a key component, pseudoephedrine, in the making of the class-1 restricted drug crystal methamphetamine, commonly known as Ya-Ice or meth.

In conclusion, Gen. Polananta proposed that Vietnamese agencies update their records on African suspects, believed to be responsible for a large amount of cross border trade pertaining to illegal narcotics.

Vietnam and Thailand first signed a

cooperation agreement on drug control in 2001 and since then the two nations have organised numerous activities aimed at sharing drug suppression related information including management of offenders, addicts and relevant prevention programs.

September 9, 2010, *Pattay Daily News*
<http://www.pattayadailynews.com/en/2010/09/09/vietnam-thai-authorities-stage-anti-narcotics-meeting/>

School Education



Women from a mountain village

In spite of promises to upgrade mountain-based school education, only a relatively low amount of mountain villages has a well-functioning elementary schools and high schools are not or almost not existing in the mountains. Efforts to upgrade the mountain schools by introducing also "cultural" education in the so called "non formal education" and "adult education" systems failed, unfortunately. Most mountain schools are not able to give more than "alphabetization" in Thai, mostly for children. These systems in general don't follow the normal Thai curriculum, and also leave a great deal of the older villagers, especially women and children from poor villages, without the knowledge of Thai. It is difficult to find committed Thai teachers and local mountain people who are advanced enough. Salaries given by the government tend to be very low.

The unequal access to Thai education, especially for the women and the elderly, being [poorly] educated in ecological, agricultural, and moral matters, had many negative side effects, as they lacked the

skills needed in the cities. Another problem is that those not having ID cards are unable to go to the official government schools.

Health problems and lack of primary health care

Increased contact with the "outside" and lowland world has, over the last 50 years, resulted in an increase in new ... diseases such as small pox and measles, to which HIV/AIDS has been added since the late 1980s. Traditional medicines and also several traditional treatments are still used, but mainly by older [people]. Older herbalists, who have time to collect the medicinal herbs, are also still active in "traditional" villages, but the biodiversity is heavily threatened by deforestation and reforestation. Interest in traditional medicine is declining in the younger generation. Primary health care systems exist in the lowlands in the form of smaller clinics and health stations in smaller towns, besides hospitals in larger cities. These facilities mostly serve ethnic Thai people.

Just the transportation costs are too heavy for those from remote villages. Clinics and health stations in the lowlands have, moreover, have no out-patient services for mountain villages, because of language barriers and lack of information about mountain villages.



Village kids

In several mountain areas those not having ID cards cannot receive medical help. This still results in a relatively high mortality of mountain peoples. Average life expectancy is still about 43 years as compared with 60-65 years in the lowlands. Problems have also increased after the Thaksin Government introduced the "30Bt per treatment" policy. Even people with ID cards don't receive sufficient help, as local clinics and health stations cannot afford the expenses and often send people home with just a few cheap pills, even when in a very bad health situation (Bangkok Post).

<http://www.hani-akha.net/mpcd/hani-akha/Development.html>

Thai Buddhism

Theravada Buddhism has been the predominant religion in Thailand since early recorded history. The inscription of King Ramkhamhaeng the Great (1292) mentions that a monk from the southern province of Nakorn Sri Dhammaraja—who had studied the Pali Buddhist Canon (or Tipitaka) from beginning to end—lived at the Forest Temple in the kingdom of Sukhothai and was the Supreme Patriarch (Pali sangharaja) of the monkhood. This statement is one of the earliest statements used by a king to “legitimize” his right to rule in accordance with Buddhist righteousness.

Thai Buddhism, however, is not a mere reflection of the message found in the Pali canon. While some monks may be well versed in certain parts of the canon, most monks are engaged in a variety of creative practices that have become part of the unique nature of Thai Buddhism. Buddhism in Thailand reflects complex traditions of beliefs that have woven themselves into something scholars now generally refer to as a syncretic pattern. Over the years, with varying success, scholars have struggled to make sense of the so-called canonical tradition and the religious practices found at the village level. They have tried to rationalize the presence, persistence, and coexistence of “magical” practices, animistic belief, and Hindu influences found in the Thai landscape.

Buddhism in Thailand has flourished under patronage of the crown, with many members of the royalty entering the Order for a time. In the Sukhothai period, the Supreme Patriarch was appointed by the king and oversaw the monkhood or Sangha. The Sangha itself was hierarchically organized in rough correspondence to civil administration. In the early Thai Sangha, there appear to have been two main groups involved in different activities inherited from earlier Buddhist and Singhalese traditions, the gamavasi, or “city-dwelling” monks, and the arañnavasi, or “forest-dwelling” monks. The two groups have become known for being involved in two different tendencies in Buddhist practice, namely gantha dhura, the study of books,

and vipassana dhura, the practice of meditation.

Traditionally, ordination in the Sangha is considered a rite of passage for young Thai men, as an essential part of maturity or becoming “ripe” (suk). Ordination can be done on short notice and is not considered a lifetime commitment. Although this pattern of ordination becomes more distorted as one moves towards the urban areas, it is still largely intact in the countryside areas. Boys who are under the age of twenty years may be ordained as novices (Thai, nen; Pali, samanera) and those over this age may receive higher ordination as a full-fledged monk (phra, bhikkhu). The loss of the transmission of the full-fledged female order (bhikkhuni) is being reconsidered by some women in Thailand; this dialog and reconsideration of female roles in the order could be viewed as a modern form of Buddhist feminism.



Thai Buddha

Gotama Buddha stipulated that monks maintain contact with nearby laity. Contact is primarily made through monks making morning rounds for alms (binthabat) or by participating in ceremonies and rituals.

Different temples have their own activities, and the laity have varying amounts of access to monks who reside at each one.

Monks usually decide whether to enter a “forest” temple and study meditation or go to a more urban setting and take up the study of the Buddhist curriculum. Of the latter, even those who ordain temporarily for the traditional three-month “lent” or rainy-season retreat (phansa or vassa), are usually required to begin a program of more formal Buddhist studies (naktham). These studies are divided into three grades that not only teach Buddhist scriptures and doctrine but also the rules of the Sangha bureaucratic order. Aside from naktham studies, there are also nine levels of Pali language study (parian) for which annual examinations are given.

The Sangha education system exists as an alternative for those who wish to engage in religious studies or—for geographical or economic reasons—do not have access to the government system of higher education. Because the government system has not been wholly successful in offering education to the masses, ecclesiastical education still serves as a “path of mobility” for many Thai youth.

Starting with the biography of the Buddha, the spiritual quest has involved a search for the right teacher. Fortunately, many excellent teachers can still be found.

movements and reformers who continue to test the boundaries of practices and beliefs in order to keep Buddhism relevant for the current times.

<http://www.thaibuddhism.net/>



Offerings outside a rural temple

Although the Thai Sangha may be presented as or appear to be a monolithic institution, there is a history of Buddhist

Thai Boxing

Muay Thai, translated into English as Thai Boxing, is the national sport of Thailand and is a martial art with origins in the ancient battlefield tactics of the Siamese (or Thai) army. It evolved from Krabi-Krabong, literally sword and baton, the hand-to-hand tactics of the Thai army. The early Muay Thai bouts pitted different companies within the Siamese army against each other with few rules and no weight divisions or time limits. They became quite popular and eventually were shown in stadia across the country. In the early 20th century, time limits, boxing gloves as well as a uniform set of rules were introduced. During the latter half of the 20th century Muay Thai was exported to many countries and is now practiced by hundreds of thousands of people all over the world.



Muay Thai match

Muay Thai is known as "King of the Ring" in kickboxing circles. These fights feature punches, kicks, elbows, knees, standing grappling and head-butts to wear down and knock out their opponent. Thai training methods develop devastating power, speed and superb cardiovascular endurance as well as fighting spirit. Muay Thai training is also quite safe thanks to sophisticated pad training that evolved to keep fighters healthy between fights. Muay Thai has also proven very effective outside the ring and has been embraced enthusiastically by practitioners of a variety of self-defense, sporting, military and law enforcement activities.

<http://www.thaiboxing.com/>



Young Muay Thai boxer

Muay Thai (Thai: มวยไทย, RTGS: Muai Thai, IPA: [mūej tʰāj]) is a hard martial art from Thailand that uses stand-up striking along with various clinching techniques. It is similar to other Indochinese styles of kickboxing, namely pradal serey from Cambodia, tomoi from Malaysia, lethwei from Myanmar and Muay Lao from Laos. Descended from muay boran, Muay Thai is Thailand's national sport.

The word muay derives from the Sanskrit mavya and Thai comes from the word Tai. Muay Thai is referred to as the "Art of Eight Limbs" or the "Science Of Eight Limbs" because it makes use of punches, kicks, elbows and knee strikes, thus using eight "points of contact," as opposed to "two points" (fists) in Western boxing and "four points" (hands and feet) used in sport-oriented martial arts. A practitioner of Muay Thai is known as a nak muay. Western practitioners are sometimes called nak muay farang meaning foreign boxer.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muay_Thai

Questions for Discussion and Research

1. Three years after making *Buddha's Lost Children*, director Mark Verkerk and producer Ton Okkerse returned to Thailand to see Phra Khru Bah, Mae Ead, and the children at the Golden Horse Monastery. Suk was still at the monastery and planned to become a monk. Boontam—whom Khru Bah believes will be a great Buddhist teacher—still divided his time between the monastery and his home village, but he had not yet become a novice. Pan Saen's mother—now gainfully employed—had come to the monastery in the interim and had taken her son back home.

The filmmakers went to Pan Saen's village to see him, and they found the boy, who had suffered a head injury when very young that impeded his learning and speaking abilities, living and working with his family. He had reverted to his original name, Yee, instead of the name that Khru Bah had given him. He no longer received an education, because he could not receive one in his village.

While Yee was back with his family, he seemed subdued, instead of being the happy boy he was at the monastery with the novices. His opportunities are most certainly going to be much more limited than they would have been if he had stayed with Khru Bah, Mae Ead, and the novices.

Discuss the pluses and minuses of Suk, Boontam, and Yee's situations, based on what you learned about each boy in *Buddha's Lost Children*. How do you think their futures will play out?

2. What do you think of the relationship between the deep spirituality in being a Buddhist novice or monk and the physicality of being trained as Thai boxers? You have seen how Khru Bah lives with these possibly incompatible aspects to his life. Are they incompatible for people who may not have Khru Bah's depth of commitment to being a monk?

Is it only because of the very real danger the novices face in the hill region of Thailand from drug lords and their agents that Thai boxing is valuable for the boys to learn? What other benefits does it have, or is it too incompatible with spirituality as you understand it?

3. Although Mae Ead is not a central player in most of the film, her role in the monastery and in the boys' lives is crucial. She is the nurturing agent in their lives, but is that the only role that she fulfills?

Discuss what you have seen of a woman's place in rural Thai society and how Mae Ead fits—or doesn't fit—in that mold. Would Mae Ead fit better into an urban setting, such as where a woman can be a doctor? Are there other women in the film, especially in the villages, who are like Mae Ead?

Put yourself in Mae Ead's place and describe what it is that makes hers a fulfilling or incomplete life.

Resources

About the film

Buddha's Lost Children Website: <http://www.buddhaslostchildren.com/>

Internet Movie Database *Buddha's Lost Children*: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0829118/>

Buddhist Film Foundation Festival: <http://www.buddhistfilmfoundation.org/festival-media/buddhas-lost-children/>

Review of *Buddha's Lost Children* on martial arts blog: <http://threeharmonies.blogspot.com/2010/06/buddhas-lost-children-dvd-review.html>

Review of *Buddha's Lost Children* on Suite101.com: <http://www.suite101.com/content/buddhas-lost-children-a-remarkable-spiritual-portrait-a232077>

Review of *Buddha's Lost Children Revisited* on Buddhist Media.com: <http://www.buddhistmedia.com/uitzending.aspx?lntEntityId=1144&lntType=0&lntYear=2009>

About the Issues

History and description of the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Triangle_\(Southeast_Asia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Triangle_(Southeast_Asia))

Comprehensive history and data about opium growing, distribution, and use: <http://www.geopium.org/drugtradeinasia.html>

Chemistry and history of heroin, an opium derivative: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heroin>

Website on poppy cultivation for drugs and other uses: <http://www.poppies.org/>

Analysis of the issues around replacing opium poppy cultivation with non-drug crops: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opium_replacement

News story on Thailand's success in eradicating opium cultivation: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7899748.stm>

Analysis of opium cultivation in Burma: <http://www.gluckman.com/BurmaBorder.html>

"Life after Opium in the Hills of Thailand," by Richard A. Crooker in BioOne: [http://www.bioone.org/doi/pdf/10.1659/0276-4741\(2005\)025%5B0289%3ALAOITH%5D2.0.CO%3B2](http://www.bioone.org/doi/pdf/10.1659/0276-4741(2005)025%5B0289%3ALAOITH%5D2.0.CO%3B2)

"Notorious Golden Triangle loses sway in the opium trade," by Thomas Fuller in Transnational Institute journal: <http://www.tni.org/inthedia/notorious-golden-triangle-loses-sway-opium-trade>

"Withdrawal symptoms for Golden Triangle drug trade," by Martin Jelsma and Tom Kramer in Transnational Institute journal: http://www.tni.org/archives/jelsma_withdrawalsymptoms

Report on the negative effects of opium control for farmers and users in Transnational Institute journal: <http://www.tni.org/article/successful-opium-control-disaster-farmers-and-drug-users-finds-new-study>

