

That Old White Magic

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Cover – Naga statue protecting the entrance to Thai Temple  
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## That Old White Magic.....

Sujin collected his hand baggage and made the short way to the back of the aircraft and the open rear door. It seemed that cargo had been stored in the front of the aircraft and the forward door would be used to off-load it. Sujin had flown on Bangkok Airways for supposed economy and had expected to fly on an Airbus A-319 and was disappointed. Instead the aircraft was a propeller driven ATR72. He was further disappointed to find that an air bridge had not been used and that the passengers would have to board a bus to take them to the terminal building.

Standing on the tarmac Sujin smelled the air. Apart from the kerosene smell of the various aircraft and other airport related mechanical odors, Sujin also smelt Thailand – flowers, a nearby town and people. Perhaps it was a good omen but still – Strasbourg and France, his adopted home, was a long way away and Kerala on the Malabar Coast of south-west India, his birth home, although closer – still far away.

Sujin was quite short and had some difficulty hopping onto the first step to board the bus. Eventually he succeeded, found a seat and retrieved his old baseball cap from his hand baggage to wear. Although he had to wait for a while for his checked bag to appear in the baggage hall – his passage through the airport was fairly quick. He had visited Thailand before and done a lot of research into Chiang Mai where he planned to stay. He arranged an airport taxi, which did not seem too expensive to take him to his guest house.

The taxi drove through the busy streets and crossed what looked like a moat. The driver pulled up and told Sujin that he could not drive up the Soi, where the guesthouse was located, as it was too

narrow. He pointed to a sign and indicated for Sujin to proceed on foot. Sujin paid the fare, collected his luggage, and walked the short distance through the winding soi to the guesthouse.

After check-in at the Guesthouse, Sujin found his room, which was basic but comfortable. He was quite hungry, as no food had been served on Bangkok Airways, only tea, coffee and water. He returned to the reception desk of the guest house.

“Excuse me – can you please tell me if there are any nice restaurants close to the guesthouse?”

The girl at reception looked Sujin up and down and redirected the fan, pointing his way. Sujin knew that she had seen his passport which it had been copied when he registered.

“Yes there are but they are all very expensive.”

Sujin knew from experience how cheap many of the restaurants were.

“Okay, no problem I will find something.”

He turned around and walked out of the guesthouse. Within one hundred metres there appeared a reasonable looking hole-in-the wall restaurant. He went in, sat down and ordered chicken stir-fried with basil leaves and sat reflecting while he drank a glass of water and waited for his meal.

The restaurant had bare wooden tables with sealed bottles of water at the end of each one next to a set of condiments – chili powder, pickled peppers, fish sauce and sugar. Just above the door to the kitchen were photos of the King and Queen and slightly above – a

small wooden platform with a Buddha Image in the resting position.

Sujin's life had been a series of mixed blessings. Out of all of the States in India he had been lucky enough to have been born in Kerala and was able to pursue education through to a degree in tourism. He had been even more fortunate in securing a visa into France and obtaining an apprenticeship at a hotel in Strasbourg. During the next thirty years he had worked in the various facilities and departments of the hotel and had learnt well.

Now at fifty years old he had retired. He had always been shy and perhaps being of Indian heritage had not helped him to assimilate into the social life of the hotel or Strasbourg. He was lonely and had always been too shy to approach women.

During his previous visits to Thailand he had watched many Thai women and dreamt of companionship. He had made advances but he had always seemed to be rebuffed. Sujin came to the opinion that it was because his skin was brown. Many Thai women with dark skin were looked upon as being lowly field workers and many more paid small fortunes on creams and potions to whiten their skin colour. In desperation Sujin had read many books on Buddhism and white magic and this journey was to be a quest to find a Monk and Temple which could help him find romance.

The waitress brought his food and placed it before him.

“May I have some fish sauce with chili?”

“You like spicy? Really?”

Sujin nodded and smiled. “Yes, I even know that the words fish sauce with chili in Thai is called Prik Nam Bplah.”

The waitress shook her head and returned to the kitchen.

When Sujin had finished his meal he counted out the correct change, left it on the table and returned to the guest house. Tomorrow he would start his search.

The next day Sujin found a large commercial shop which sold amulets.

“Good morning.” he said to the young man sitting at the reception desk in front of many glass cabinets of various Buddhist amulets.

“Sawsdee Khap. Can I help you?”

Sujin thought – ‘How to begin?’ “Well yes you can. So far I have been unlucky in love and romance. Perhaps I am too shy or maybe unattractive to women. I am looking for some ‘White Magic’ to help me.”

The young man smiled. “There is not need to be shy – all of us need some help at some time and in fact I have just the thing to help you.”

He disappeared for a moment and brought back a small teak box with him. Theatrically he opened the box. Inside was an erect gold penis. He removed the item and began polishing it with a jewelers cloth.

Sujin was speechless. Gradually he recovered and said “No, you do not understand – I do not wish it for my own purpose. I wish the White Magic to help me find romance.”

The salesman smiled. “Of course and that is just how this will help. It is called a Palad Khik. Apart from helping you to find love, the Palad Khik will deflect the evil eye, give you luck in business and

gambling, make you unbeatable in combat and make you very fertile. He gave Sujin a slow wink.

Sujin was totally confused and embarrassed. He mumbled some words and realized that he was in such a state he had spoken in French. He turned around and ran out of the shop.

Sujin thought that there must be a better way of conducting this search and caught a tuk-tuk to the Old City

Sujin found the American Library. The library was set in an attractive compound with a tidy car park, well maintained green grass lawn with dining tables and the main building was constructed of well-aged teak.

The librarian whispered “Good Morning.”

Sujin greeted her but due to his accent and the requirement for minimum noise – she had a job to understand him. Sujin wrongly interpreted this to yet another dislike of brown skinned men but he persevered. Finally she understood that Sujin wanted the names and locations of all of the Buddhist Temples in Chiang Mai and if any had healing Monks within their order Also if there were any Centres which practiced ‘White Magic’.

The librarian asked him to be seated and started to perform a search function on the library database.

Ten minutes later, she approached the table that Sujin was sitting at. She had a couple of printed sheets with a list of the various Temples in the city, a page detailing White Magic and Healing Monks and a map upon which she had circled the various locations of the Temples. She asked Sujin for five Baht.

Sujin queried what the charge was for. The librarian explained it was for the printed sheets. Sujin objected – The library should be free.

The librarian asked Sujin if he was a member. He shook his head. She then asked if he was an American.

“What has my nationality got to do with it?” Sujin demanded. “If you must know I am an Indian!”

The librarian simply said that it was an American library and walked back to her desk. Sujin was fuming, got up and stormed out of the library. Even though he only managed to exist on a pension – it wasn't the money, it was the principle. Yet another example of dislike of brown skin he thought.

Sujin walked down the cobble-stoned street and found an empty bench, shaded by a tree, overlooking the canal. He sat down and perused the information that the librarian had given him and cooled off somewhat. On reflection, perhaps he had been a little hasty in his dealing with the librarian and started to feel a little guilty.

He compared the list of Wats and Monks with the map and devised a plan. First stop would be The International Buddhist Centre at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. Perhaps he might gain some information on Healing Monks. Then on to Wat U-Mong, one of the oldest Wats in Chiang Mai, west of the city in the foot hills of Doi Suthep mountain. He had been reading a website on Chiang Mai and discovered something called Monk Chat. Perhaps this evening he would attend this at one of the Wats. Sujin considered his dilemma. He was on a budget and the various journeys, even by shared songtieow, would soon eat into his funds. Hiring a motorbike would be cheaper but he had grave concerns about driving one, especially in Thailand. It was either songtieow, tuk-tuk or walk.

At the end of the day Sujin was exhausted and discouraged.. He had received, more or less, the same answer from everywhere that he had visited. Yes, there were Healing Monks who might help with matters of health but nothing so frivolous as romance. Certainly none that they knew of performed White Magic.

Despite not finding the answer to his quest – one of the places that Sujin had been impressed with was Wat U-Mong. Initially he had roamed the garden looking at the fish pond. Then climbed up to see the ancient Chedi dating back to 1300 A.D. and explored all of the tunnels and small caves.

Eventually he made his way to the Buddhist Theatre where many paintings of ancient Buddhist Scriptures of India were stored. As he was looking at the paintings he was approached by two Monks who bid him welcome. One turned out to be the Abbott – Phra Khru Sukhandasilila and the other Phra Santittihito or Santi, A German Monk, and the resident Westerner at the Wat. They asked him if he was interested in Anapanassati Meditation, which was taught at the Wat School. Sujin replied that he had not been long in Chiang Mai and he was only discovering the many Wats and kinds of meditation.

The Abbott who, could only speak a little English, wished Sujin well and left to return to his office. Santi turned to Sujin and asked him his name. Sujin replied.

“Do you speak German?”

Sujin was astonished. “How did you know that? But yes I have worked in Strasbourg.”



Santi laughed. “You have a slight German accent!” Would you like a cup of tea. If you do - it will help me practice as I have not spoken German for a long time.”

Santi led Sujin to the dining sala and on the way explained a little more about Wat U-Mong.

“The name of Wat U-Mong means ‘Monastery with Tunnels’. Sometimes it called ‘The Garden of Buddha’s Teachings’.” We have many facilities here for students of meditation.”

The dining sala was a long raised wooden building with large openings where the windows would have been and mosquito screens fixed to the surrounds. At the end was a table with flasks of water, a water heater and pots of coffee and tea sachets. They entered the sala and Santi sat next to Sujin on a large woven mat on the floor.

“Now Sujin – why are you really in Chiang Mai, if not to study meditation or Buddhism?”

Sujin was completely honest and told Santi all about his quest and search for a Monk who could perform White Magic for him.

“Do you know Sujin, there are many Monks who have the power of healing but only one that I know of with supernatural powers – White Magic – Luang Phor Khun. The last that I heard was that he was very old and not in good health and most probably has gone on to his next life. He spent many of the last years in the forests of Laos and Cambodia.”

“I don’t think that you are going to find what you are looking for in Chiang Mai. My advice to you would be to make merit doing voluntary work, either teaching or helping young children perhaps

in an orphanage, before you return to Austria. Who knows what and who you will find if you do this.”

Perhaps it was the German language but Santi’s words had quite an influence on Sujin.

“Would you know of any needy orphanages that would need some help?”

Sujin, there are many. Some are provided for by the Thai government. Others, by Western donations and still more supported by the Christian Missionaries. Still, I know of one which is desperate for help. It is not too far from Chiang Mai, long the Mai Rim road and the public buses travel there from Chiang Mai every day.

Sujin memorized the details of the orphanage.

“May I return to Wat U-mong to see you?”

Santi smiled. “I am afraid that will not be possible. Tomorrow I am going to live in the forest dwellings of North-East Thailand. An Australian Monk will become resident here in my place. Still if you change your mind about learning Anapanassati Meditation – the school will always be here.”

Sujin was saddened as to how quickly he had made a friend and just as quick to be losing him. He waived Santi, wished him safe travels and peace and turned to walk down to the canal road and find a songtieow back to his guesthouse.

The following morning Sujin walked to the bus station and caught the bus to Mae Rim. The bus was very old with no air conditioning and all of the windows were open to catch what little breeze there was. The buses’ route ran parallel to an irrigation canal for many

kilometers. Following Santi's directions he looked out for the sports stadium and pressed the 'stop' buzzer when they had passed it.

There was a big sign for the orphanage which was located on the other side of the canal. A small footbridge and adjacent road bridge connected the orphanage to the main road. Outside there were many children playing in the playground with two women with farmer's straw hats watching them. Sujin walked up to them.

"Sawasdee Khap – can you please tell me where I might find the Principal?"

One of the women pointed to the front door of the orphanage and told Sujin to enter and then he would find the office on the right. The other woman was wearing sunglasses and by the way she instinctively moved, Sujin wondered if she might be blind. He thanked them and walked up the steps.

The office was virtually bare apart from an old desk with some various papers and files in a tray plus a telephone. Two children were sitting at the side of the desk and an elderly Thai lady wearing glasses, behind the desk. On the wall was a notice board with some children's drawings and what may have been some kind of staff roster.

Sijin bid good morning to the lady, who was called Aew and turned out to be the Administrator.

Aew smiled and asked the children to please move so that Sujin might take a seat. "Good morning. How can I help you?"

Sujin sat down and explained how Santi, at Wat U-Mong, had told him that the orphanage were looking for volunteers to help.

“That was very thoughtful of Santi. What is your name?”

Sujin told her.

“Have you ever worked with children?”

Sujin shook his head.

“Well that’s not so bad. Do you have any other skills that may help us?”

Sujin told Aew about his years at the hotel in Strasbourg, especially working in catering in the food and beverage department.

“That would be very helpful. Let me see – let me arrange for one of the employees to show you the orphanage and then you can come back and we will discuss it.”

Aew asked for one of the children to bring Sunni to the office.

Sunni turned out to be the lady with the sunglasses in the playground. Sujin could hear Sunni’s white cane tapping before she arrived. She came into the office and smiled. Aew explained to her that Sujin may be joining the orphanage as a volunteer and it would be useful if Sunni could show him the facilities. Sunni turned to Sujin – “Please come with me.”

“You speak excellent English.”

“Yes, thank you – I have learnt it from the many Westerners who come to help in the orphanage.”

The orphanage was built on two floors. On the ground floor, apart from the office, were two classrooms, a room which served as a

basic library with many children's books and comics and a small room which the staff used plus a toilet facility. On the first floor were the dormitories with adjoining shower and toilets. Each cot bed had just one pillow and a sheet.

“Does it get very cold here in the mountain when the cool season comes?”

“Yes, it does but we have a supply of blankets which the Red Cross gave to us.”

Although Sunni constantly used her white cane she was very familiar with the layout of the orphanage and did not hesitate once.

“How many children stay at the orphanage?”

“Oh – about fifty children of all ages”.

“Where does everyone eat?”

“There is a dining room right next door to the main building” Why are you hungry?”

Sujin smiled. “No, not yet and I have to see Aew again.”

Back in the office Aew gave Sujin a form with some questions on to complete. She said that it was now the orphanage's policy to provide a copy to the Thai Police.

“Will that cause any problems?”

Sujin shook his head. “Not at all.”

Aeaw told Sujin that perhaps the best place he that could start to help would be in the kitchen and the dining room. She told him that breakfast started at eight o'clock before it became too hot.

“Will you be able to come here before that time?”

Sujin nodded. “There are plenty of buses.”

“Good. If you still want to help us, can you come back tomorrow at seven o'clock and bring your passport with a copy with you?”

“Yes, of course.” He said goodbye to Aew and Sunni was waiting for him outside of the office door.

“Do you have a motorbike?”

Sujin explained his aversion to motorbikes and told Sunni that he would be catching the bus back to Chiang Mai. Sunni walked with him back over the little foot bridge, found some shade, under a tree, for him to wait and then said goodbye to him at the side of the road. Sujin watched as she walked back over the footbridge. Perhaps Santi had been right as to what and who he would meet if he decided to volunteer.

After Sujin returned to his guesthouse, he collected his passport and found a print shop which would make a copy of his passport. As the young man made the photocopies, he told Sujin that it price was five baht per page. Sujin started to react and then just shrugged his shoulders. Perhaps he was learning, and now he now felt very guilty about the verbal abuse that he had given the librarian.

Over his meal Sujin completed the form that Aew had given him and pondered about the next day and especially about Sunni. He felt compassion for her that she could not see but also felt happy

that she judged him as Sujin and not a brown-skinned man. He was curious about her and intended to find out more about her.

At Chang Puak Bus Station, the following morning, Sujin spotted a vendor selling Kanom Khai Hong -Thai Donuts and on impulse bought a few bags. The bus was quite full with many workers who were commuting to the various government offices and sports stadium to start their work day. Sujin found a seat next to a tidy little man dressed in some kind of uniform, not much taller than himself. He nodded to the man who nodded back and looked at Sujin's bags filled with kanom khai hong. Sujin smiled and mimed putting one of the donuts in his mouth and eating it.

The bus stopped at the orphanage and Sunni went straight into the administrator's office. "Sawasdee khap". He said to Aew and handed her the his passport, the copy and the completed form.

"Sawasdee Kah Khun Sujin. How are you today? Looking forward to seeing our kitchen?"

Sujin replied that he was. Sunni entered the room and escorted Sujin out of the main building block and to the wooded hut which was the dining area.

Sujin wished Sunni good morning and he gave her the bags of donuts. "For the children."

He asked her where the kitchen was.

"Oh Sujin – you are in Thailand now. We prepare the food outside at the back of the dining sala."

"What happens when it rains?"

Sunni laughed. "Don't worry there is a roof to keep the rain away."

At the kitchen was an old lady who was stirring a big saucepan on one of the burners of a gas hob. On the next table was a big bowl of eggs.

“What’s on the menu today?” Sujin asked.

“The children always have Khao Tom Moo – rice soup with pork.”

She reached out with her hand and found the bowl of eggs. “Today we are lucky that one of the farmers has given us some eggs for the children. Would you be able to boil them to make them hard?”

Sujin said that he would be happy to. Sunni said something in Thai to the old lady who produced another big sauce pan and lit the second burner. Sujin looked around the food preparation area and saw a hose pipe and a sink. He filled the saucepan with water and put the eggs inside.

“Sunni what time is it?”

“Nearly eight o’clock.”

“While the eggs are boiling we must go to the playground.”

Sujin was curious but followed Sunni. All of the children were standing in lines in the playground. At eight o’clock the loudspeakers around the orphanage came to life and then music played with a stirring song.

Sujin asked Sunni “What was that song?”

“It’s the Thai National Song called Phleng Chat. All over Thailand it is played at eight o’clock in the morning and six o’clock in the evening.”



She led Sujin to the back of the dining sala. “Now I must leave you with Yum, who will help you. I have to go and teach the children after they have had their breakfast.”

Once the eggs had hard boiled and Yum had finished the Khow Tom, Sujin helped her take the pots into the dining sala. The children all came in from the playground, took plate, spoon and fork and formed a line in front of Sujin and Yum who served the food directly onto their plates. There was much giggling by the children and chat about who the newcomer was. After breakfast a number of the children stayed behind to wash the dishes.

Just before noon Sunni reappeared. “Today the children will be eating chicken, vegetables and basil for lunch. Yum will show you how to make it but there will be many more vegetables than chicken!”

Once again Sujin stood by Yum as she cooked the Pad Kapow Gai and rice and helped her take it into the dining room. After the meal a different group of children cleaned the tables and washed the dishes.

Just before five o’clock Sunni once again led Sujin over the footbridge to the bus stop. In the food preparation area Yum and one other lady were preparing the evening meal for the children.

“Well Sujin how do you feel? Will you come back tomorrow?”

“Yes, and the days which will follow after that.”

Very quickly Sujin settled into a routine with one day overlapping the next. One day Sunni said ‘Sujin, would you like to come into the classroom with me today?’

Sujin smiled. “Oh no Sunni – I am not a teacher!”

“Don’t worry Sujin, I know that. But it would be very interesting for the children to hear all about Your life in Starsboug, the hotel and all of the things that happen with customers.”

Sujin had his doubts and concerns, primarily due to his shyness, but he agreed. They entered the classroom and all of the children were sitting at their little desks. At the front of the room was a large desk and a chalkboard and on another wall a large map of Thailand.

“Children, I am sure that you will all know Khun Sujin from the kitchen and dining room. Today he is going to talk to us about the country and town that he used to live in and of the hotel where he worked.”

She pulled one of the larger chairs out from the desk and indicated for Sujin to sit.

“Come on children gather around so that you may hear him better.”

Sujin sat down and all of the children sat cross-legged around him.

‘Where to begin?’ he thought. At first he mumbled but began –

“Well children I have come a long way from a town in the country of France called Strasbourg. It is many, many thousands of kilometers away and takes 14 hours to travel to Thailand on an airplane.”

Sunni translated for him as he progressed.

Sujin went on to tell them all about Strasbourg and France and how cold it could be and of his life at the hotel. The children sat wide-

eyed, hardly believing what they were hearing. Finally Sujin came to the end of his account. Sunni started clapping and all of the children joined in.

Sunni thanked Sujin and feeling ridiculously pleased with himself he returned to the kitchen.

A day came when Sunni said that there would be a surprise at lunchtime.

One of the other helpers at the orphanage came to the kitchen area to help Yum and Sujin made his way to the playground. Sunni and a group of children, all holding paper bags and mats, were waiting for him.

“Where are we going?”

“On a picnic!”

Sunni arranged the children into a single file all holding the hand of the child in front of them. Sunni held the hand of the first child and they crossed the footbridge and then the canal road.

Sujin was completely surprised as he had never looked in this direction. In front of them was a large man-made lake, with grassy banks and trees along side, and a big water spout in its centre.

Sunni and the children laid the mats on the grass and took the lunch from the bags. Sujin sat down next to Sunni.

After lunch, while the children played, Sujin had the opportunity to ask Sunni some questions.

“Sunni do you know what is that building is on the other side of the lake?”

I have never seen it Sujin but they tell me that is something to do with the government.”

Do you live close to the orphanage?

“Very close Sujin! I actually live at the orphanage.”

“Really? Don’t you have a family or a husband in Chiang Mai?”

“No longer, all of my family are dead. I suppose that I am an orphan now. What about you Sujin – don’t you have family at home? Where is home?”

Sujin hesitated before answering. Sujin and come to really like Sunni and felt that, in time, anything might be possible. He could lie and just say that he came from France but this was contrary to his nature and beliefs and if Aew ever told Sunni about the details on his form – he would be seen to be a liar and a cheat. But if he told her the truth would she be able to accept an Indian as a friend and maybe more. What to do?

Eventually he said –

“Sunni, I have worked in a hotel in France for thirty years and I am completely alone in the world. But my birthplace was in a state of India called Kerala. I have brown skin.”

“Good. I am glad that you have explained to me as Awe told me about the form that you filled in and I knew already. In any case I cannot see and would not know if your skin was white brown or orange.”

Sujin expressed a mental sigh of relief. Perhaps in some strange way White Magic did work after all.

Sunni stood up and brushed off some of the grains of rice, which had fallen in her lap when she was eating.

“Time to return to the orphanage.”

They reversed the order for the walk back with Sujin holding the hand of the first child and Sunni at the very back of the line.

Sujin waited until the traffic had cleared and started to lead the line across the canal road. At the other side he started across the footbridge. What he did not see or realize was the child whose hand Sunni was holding had tripped and fallen over in the road. Sunni was helping her get to her feet and comfort her when the early afternoon bus to Chiang Mai came speeding down the road.

Who knows if the driver was feeling sleepy or blinded by driving into the sunlight but the bus did not slow down or stop. Although Sunni could not see the bus she heard it and at the last minute. She realized what was about to happen. She orientated herself and pushed the child ahead of her with all of her strength in the direction of the side of the road.

The child now had the rest of its life to lead but it was too late for Sunni and too late for Sujin.

Sujin sat in the departure lounge at the airport between two policemen. His tourist visa had expired and despite his pleas, the labour department and immigration had found out about Sujin performing volunteer work without a work permit. His passport had been stamped ‘No Re-entry To Thailand’ and they had escorted him to the airport to ensure that he caught the flight to Singapore and onwards to Srasbourg.

As all of his documentation was handed to the purser of the aircraft all of Sujin's frustration about his colour returned.

“I know why you are doing this – because my skin is brown!”

The two policemen looked at each other and then at Sujin.

“Yes – the same as ours. Do you know you have been mumbling about white and black magic for an hour now. And here you start complaining about brown-skin!”

They were both on an exchange assignment in Chiang Mai as Khon Tai born in Yala in the very south of Thailand. They had dark skin and sharp features.

The two policemen reverted to Thai Language and laughed. One said, “I think that this guy is crazy! If only he realized that we were black Thais, from the South, with skin darker than his. If he were in Yala, they would consider him a ‘white boy!’” They both laughed again and started talking about their dream motorbikes that they were saving for.

*Sujin came to Thailand looking for skin pigmentation equality. The answer had been there all of the time. He saw but he didn't see. Perhaps the question is 'Do people seek new experiences to learn or to reinforce their own perceptions?'*