

*An Analytic of Smuggling Conduct in Royal Writing of Ngo-Pa*

Natrada Somsith, Prince of Songkla University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2015  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This research was conducted to study the meaning of the sign in the writing after the author defined the concept of selfness and otherness to its characters. It was studied via signs of being Ngo-Pa. It is found that to be barbarians in the royal writing of Ngo-Pa was floating and amplified from being only remote people to becoming more barbarism reflected from their untrustworthiness, violence, unrestraint, and social deviant; also, those were interpreted from various characters' intended and unintended smuggling conduct especially peeking and ambushing.

To be the signified barbarians in the royal writing of Ngo-Pa is accordance with the concept of the sign which needs distinction or opposition to complete obvious signification. In the work, the signification needed the concept of selfness and otherness to support clarifying being barbarians. As a matter of fact, it is clearly found that the author defined "us" as a burgher and barbarians as "others" which finally affected their status and shifted them to be marginalized people; yet, it may not be conducted intently. However, the signification using the concept of dichotomy binary opposition plays an important role to identify what the barbarians were.

Keywords: barbarians, smuggling conduct, free-floating signifier

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

“Ngo-Pa”, the royal writing composed by His Majesty the King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), is a classical romance about barbarian’s life (“Ngo-pa” or “Sagai” is the name representing people who live in remote areas in the south of Thailand). This royal writing is different from other traditional styles of royal writings in Thailand, which frequently mention royal life. This story is based on a tragic love triangle, and its plot takes place in the forest where the protagonist is a barbarian (Ngo-Pa). This prominent character has made this royal writing famous among Thai people.

According to the behaviors of characters in this royal writing, there is an assumption about how Ngo-Pa reacted toward various matters happening in the Thai society, surrounding events and the places where they lived. The use of some language and idioms in this royal writing is obviously seen as a representative of savage culture. The protagonist and antagonist’s behaviors such as fighting between humans versus animal, humans versus humans, chasings and revenges identified how Ngo-Pa lived their life. Those behaviors created another meaning of signs, and it could imply as a more complicated identification of being barbarians.

## **Involved Theory**

Ferdinand de Saussure’s concept about “the Meaning of Sign” is used in the study. From the concept, it said that language is a semiotic system (sign) or a form of interpretation that conveys the idea and meaning to make communication possible (as cited in Chairath Charoensinolan, 2012). "Signifier" and "signified" are main terms used in a branch to describe the components of a sign: the signifier, to put it simply, is the sound or word, and the signified is the thing or idea it represents. Another concept that inspired the researcher to study about the meaning of sign in this royal writing is the concept of “Free - Floating signifier” or “Free Play” by Jacques Derrida (as cited in Chairath Charoensinolan, 2012). It said the notion of a direct relationship between signifier and signified which is no longer tenable, and instead we have infinite shifts in meaning relayed from one signifier to another.

## **Study Method**

The researcher thoroughly studies the royal writing “Ngo-Pa” and then finds matched relation between the studies of literature (Literature Review) and the concepts compared with Saussure and Derrida’s opposite ideas, finally presented as a descriptive analysis.

## **Study Result**

Reinelt and Roach (2005) explained Ferdinand de Saussure’s the meaning of sign - sign are divided into signifiers and signifieds. The signifier is the sound, mark or word that stands in for the signified, which is the concept, or meaning. Together signifiers and signifieds point to the referent, which is the actuality reference. And “to create the meaning of signs. Signifiers establish their meaning by reference to what they are not.”(Ibid 110-111). To be the signified barbarians in the royal writing Ngo-Pa is accordance with the concept of the sign which needs distinction or opposition to complete obvious signification too.

The meaning of sign comes from personal social perception and concept of each society. It's obviously shown that all-involved and related, but unstable depending on social surrounding context in that moment. So, it's Derrida who is interested to study on the unstableness of "Signifier" that the relationship between is arbitrary, metaphysically happening towards social concepts, called as the "Free-Floating Signifier." (as cited in Chairath Charoensinolan, 2012) Consequently, to study the Royal writing "Ngo-Pa, there has been found a floating signifier, which is not much difficult to guessed that it's "the Barbarian" (the protagonist's tribe themselves as a representative)'s life style depicted as a focus.

The assumption notices how "Ngo-Pa" as a "Signifier" plays the role to signify the concept of being "Barbarian," which has been shifted by the smuggling wild behaviors taken place in the story.

### **The definition of being "Barbarian" from the author's narrating**

His Majesty the King Chulalongkorn's attitude towards the uncivilized appears through his writing. It's said that

"To compose the story about the barbarians living in the basaltic isolated place seems like there's no any euphemistic civilized composition in the narrating, but it turns out to be like a well-balanced writing in the end. It is due to the plain composition and mundane living narration that make this story smooth and attractive."

(Ngo-Pa: The Introduction of the Royal Writing)

This also helps to emphasize that the meaning of the being just only an ordinary barbarians has been shifted from its own point. It's an attitude towards the place where they live and actions they response to the situations that change. Generally, Ngo-Pa is a people who live in the remote area and forest mean a far living and unknown place. But, the narrating infers to the different attitude of the author between the civilized and uncivilized measured by his own living culture (society, custom and place he owns), that the uncivilized was placed as inferior than people who live in the city, thus, there presents the meaning of "selfness and otherness" determined by the different ways of life.

The civilized concentrates power, extending human control over both nature and over other human beings that has more densely populated settlements divided into social classes with ruling elite and subordinate urban and rural populations. In contrast with "Uncivilized," people are not advanced, uncultured and undeveloped, as the place where they live is backward state.

### **The Description of "Ngo-Pa"s smuggling conduct**

On the study, Ngo Pa's behaviors are the main focus which shifts the barbarians' meaning from being only remote people to be untrustworthy and uncivilized people determined by their actions of outlaw strike and crime called a smuggling conduct which is obviously shown through the story. There divides two kinds of these illegal actions found in this royal writing — the intentional and unintentional smuggling conducts.

## 1. The Intentional Smuggling Conducts of Ngo-Pa Characters

1.1 “Sompla” the male protagonist who secretly tries to send a love letter to “Lumhub” - the female protagonist. Sompla’s action reflects to his ignorance towards the terms of social acceptance. Though he knows that Lumhub has already had a fiancé- Hanao, he tries to flirt with Lumhub by befriending with Lumhab’s younger brother. Sompla satisfies his desire without the realization of his own social norm that it’s fault to unintentionally committing adultery.

1.2. “Hanao”- Lumhab’s fiancé who chases after Sompla when learning that his fiancée was kidnapped. When finding Sompla in the forest during an escape, he ambushes Sompla immediately with an angry mood. Sompla who is totally vulnerable to attack taunts Hanao’s acts as a backbiting brutalization. Sompla’s utterance of Hanao’s savage manners reflects that an attack by surprise is unacceptable because there’s no dignity of this ashamed act amount social acceptance.

1.3. “Rumkaew” – Hanao’s older brother, is another character reflecting to a smuggled attacking of the barbarian. He helps Hanao chasing after Sompla. During the battle between Hanao and Sompla, with love for his blood brother, Rumkaew secretly blows the darts hurting Sompla caused to death. This helps to emphasize the shifted meaning of a barbarian to become a cruel and untrustworthy even more.

Through the civilized people’s eyes, surreptitious behavior, self-assertion, kidnapping and smuggling conduct in the story caused from the intention of the characters are dishonest and cruel. In addition, those emphasize the signifier of being a barbarian to looking more untrustworthy, violence and unrestraint. Though those characters do it for the love, in terms of involvement and concern for fellow clan, all still was convicted as a wild and uncivilized manner.

## 2 The Unintentional Smuggling Conducts of Ngo-Pa Characters

Besides the intentional smuggling conducts of characters, there’re also unintentional conducts mentioned through the antagonist characters’ actions too.

### 2.1. An illicit love affair between grandpa “Wangsong” and grandma “Ting”

Although, this is the sub plot of the royal writing but there are an unaccepted behavior from the antagonist too. Grandma “Ting” tells a lie to grandpa “Wangsong” that her husband has been passed way and she is a widow. Those lie from grandma Ting makes him misunderstand and innocently have a secret sexual relation with her. In the end, Granma Ting’s husband comeback and granpa Wangsong’s behavior becoming an illegal act against the conventions of society without an intentional will in the end. This part of story show an unintentional smuggling conducts and give another sign to the reader that even an old female barbarian still cannot be trust.

2.2 “Maipai” and “Kanang” as naughty kids, they accidently stake out how “grandpa Wangsong” passionately philander with grandma “Ting.” It’s true that they are just a kid, but this kidding behavior affects to gain more the untrustworthy image towards the barbarian.

The above mentioned smuggling behaviors are contrary to the civilized, defining themselves as a person who has straightforwardness of conducts, along with the

absence of lying, cheating, and theft. An open expression through the civilized's attitude, is the way to show one's honesty. Accordingly, the smuggling behaviors in "Ngo Pa" become to the sign of untrustworthy represented through every generation characters in the story. Furthermore, the barbarian attack conveys to the more brutal image shaped towards the uncivilized, so the signifier of being the barbarian has been floated that the old meaning shifts and the definition has to be found deeper.

However, the story is narrated from attitudes of the civilized. Ideal, living pattern and expressions are the raw materials combined with creative imagination. An attitude towards the barbarian may be adopted from oversimplified concept of characters and ways of doing things to make the story featuring in the more intensely fun. These thoughts or beliefs may or may not accurately reflect reality. However, this is only a fundamental psychological definition of a stereotype causing people to shape the barbarian image as a far uncivilized and brutal by default.

## **Conclusion**

The descriptive of characters in the story has shifted the meaning of Ngo-Pa from being just only people who live in remote area without civilizing influences to a person who is perceived to be uncivilized, either viewed as inferior, untrustworthiness, violence, unrestraint, and social deviant person as well. This floating signifier causes the concept of "Selfness and Otherness" which the author has fitted the "Selfness" definition to the civilized using "us" as a burgher who having socialized and honorable living. In contrast, pushing the "Otherness" to "Nag Pa" categorized their living style as barbarians; those who cannot resist their demands were not respected conservative cruel and untrustworthy.

Moreover, the characteristic shaped descriptions have made the recognition of Ngo-Pa towards the public eyes, both in positive and negative way. People are aware of an existence of their living in the South of Thailand by the words of the author. Meanwhile, the floating meaning has defined them to become the barbarians and untrustworthiness people ; the minority group marginalized to be different and unequal to people who live in the city. As a matter of fact, no one is better than others in society. No society any better than other societies.

## References

King Chulalongkorn, His Majesty. (2553). *Ngo-Pa*. Bangkok: Prapansarn.

Reinelt, J & Roach, R (Eds.), (2005). *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press,

Chairath Charoensinolan. (2012). *Semiotics, Structuralism and Education Political Science*. 2nd edition. Bangkok: Wipasa.