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THE SENSE OF PLACE IN KAMPOON BOONTAWEE'S NOVEL
A CHILD OF THE NORTHEAST

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สรือน สเตอร์ลอกคอตตีร์: สำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานในนวนิยายเรื่องลูกอีสานของคำพูน บุญทวี (THE SENSE OF PLACE IN KAMPOON BOONTAWEE'S NOVEL A CHILD OF THE NORTHEAST) อ. ที่ปรึกษา
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งานวิจัยนี้เป็นการศึกษาเกี่ยวกับสำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานในวรรณกรรมโดยใช้นวนิยายกึ่งอัตชีวประวัติเรื่อง ลูกอีสานของคำพูน บุญทวี เป็นตัวอย่างในการศึกษา นวนิยายเรื่องนี้ได้รับการตีพิมพ์ครั้งแรกเป็นภาษาไทยในปี พ.ศ. 2519 โดยเนื้อเรื่องเป็นเหตุการณ์ที่เกิดขึ้นในภาคอีสาน ในช่วงปี พ.ศ. 2473

จากการศึกษาพบว่า สำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานปรากฏในนวนิยายเรื่องนี้ตลอดทั้งเรื่อง อย่างไรก็ตามส่วนมาก จะถูกกล่าวถึงเพียงแค่อากหลังและไม่ได้รับการศึกษาในบริบทของวรรณกรรม เนื่องจากไม่มีการให้คำจำกัดความ ของคำว่าสำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานอย่างชัดเจน การวิจัยครั้งนี้จึงสร้างกรอบของการจำกัดความของสำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานโดยใช้บริบททางมานุษยวิทยา ภูมิศาสตร์ และสังคมศาสตร์

ในวิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ สำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานถูกมองในฐานะทัศนคติของแต่ละบุคคลซึ่งเกิดจากความผูกพันลักษณะต่างๆ ในการใช้ชีวิตประจำวัน สังคมผ่านกาลเวลาและสะท้อนออกมาในรูปแบบของนวนิยาย

จุดมุ่งหมายของการศึกษาวิจัยครั้งนี้มีสองประการ คือ เพื่อที่จะแสดงให้เห็นถึงการตีความของสำนัก เรื่องถิ่นฐานด้วยการวิเคราะห์ผ่านนวนิยาย โดยเน้นวิถีชีวิตในชุมชนและครอบครัว วิถีเกี่ยวกับอาหารและงานหัตถกรรมพื้นถิ่น เพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับประเด็นที่ตัวบทนำเสนอ และเพื่อศึกษาทฤษฎีต่างๆ ที่ผู้เขียนใช้ในการสะท้อนประเด็นเกี่ยวกับสำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานในนวนิยาย ซึ่งวิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้ได้เน้นให้เห็นว่า สำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานถือเป็นสาระสำคัญของนวนิยายเรื่องนี้

จากการศึกษาพบว่า คำพูน บุญทวีสามารถวิเคราะห์และคัดเลือกสิ่งที่เฉพาะเจาะจงในเหตุการณ์ต่างๆ แล้วนำมาประกอบเป็นฉากชีวิตประจำวันในนวนิยาย ดังจะเห็นได้จากการแสดงความเห็นอกเห็นใจของชาวบ้าน ความผูกพันในระบบเครือญาติที่เข้มแข็ง ผนวกกับความรักในถิ่นฐานของตนเอง ความสัมพันธ์ทางชาติพันธุ์ การผสมผสานของศาสนาและความเชื่อต่างๆ ความรู้สึกซึ่งเกี่ยวกับพืชและสัตว์ ภูมิปัญญาชาวบ้าน อาหารการกินดั้งเดิมวิธีการล่าสัตว์จนถึงรสชาติของอาหาร รวมไปถึงความคิดสร้างสรรค์และมีมือทางศิลปะดังที่เห็นได้ในงานหัตถกรรมต่างๆ สิ่งเหล่านี้ล้วนเป็นส่วนส่งเสริมสำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานในนวนิยายเรื่องดังกล่าวโดยสื่อผ่านแก่นเรื่องที่เป็นสากลและวิธีการเล่าเรื่องที่ตรงไปตรงมา แต่เต็มไปด้วยรายละเอียดของเด็กชายที่เป็นตัวละครเอก คำพูน บุญทวีได้ทำให้ภาพของชีวิตประจำวันกลายเป็นเรื่องราวน่าฟัง นอกจากนั้นเขายังได้นำเสนอประเด็นเรื่องสำนักเรื่องถิ่นฐานอันซับซ้อนผ่านรายละเอียดที่งดงามด้วยชั้นเชิงทางศิลปะของนวนิยายแนวสำนึกถึงชีวิตประจำวันเรื่องลูกอีสาน

สาขาวิชา ไทยศึกษา

ปีการศึกษา 2553

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต

ลายมือชื่ออ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก

From Kurlanglatker

น้ำผึ้ง ปัทมะกลางคุล

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KEYWORDS: SENSE OF PLACE / LITERATURE / A CHILD OF THE
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HRÖNN STURLAUGSDÓTTIR: THE SENSE OF PLACE IN KAMPOON
BOONTAWEE'S NOVEL *A CHILD OF THE NORTHEAST*. THESIS
ADVISOR: NAMPHUENG PADAMALANGULA Ph.D., PP. 192

This study explores the semi-autobiographical and realistic novel *A Child of the Northeast* (1987) by Kampon Boontawee (1928-2003) as an excellent example of sense of place in literature. The novel was first published in the Thai language in 1976 the story however takes place in Isan during the 1930s.

Sense of place is found in all fiction however most often regarded as a mere background and left unexplored in literary studies.

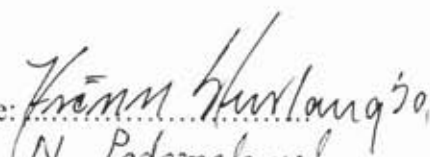
In this study sense of place is viewed as an individual perspective of a place only gained through attachment over time constructed of particulars perceived through ordinary daily life and evoked and revealed through literary artistry.

The objective of this study is twofold, to illustrate the construction of sense of place through an analysis of the novel. The focus taken on community and family ways local food ways and handicrafts is in accordance with issues emphasized in the text. Secondly, this study examines the different literary techniques the writer employs to evoke and reveal the significance of sense of place in the novel. This study argues that sense of place is a fundamental feature in the construction of the novel.

According to the finding of this study it is seen how Kampon Boontawee through, his eye for perceiving the particular in the ordinary, has selectively assembled together particulars that make the ordinary daily life. Seen in aspects such as the villagers compassion and *sanuk* outlook on life, strong kinship bonds and topophilic affection, ethnic relations, the mixture of religion and beliefs, extensive knowledge of flora and fauna, local wisdom, food ways involving everything from particular hunting ways to specific tastes, as well as the inventiveness and the artistry seen in handicrafts are among the many great contributions to the making of the novel's rich and complex sense of place. These particulars are made representative of Isan life through universal and timeless themes. Through artistic use of different literary techniques priority is given to the world of the senses in a simple and straightforward narrative that is yet rich and detailed in its faithfulness to the child protagonist. Kampon Boontawee, while making the survival of everyday remarkable, evokes and reveals the complexity of sense of place through details exquisitely and artfully played out in the realistic and semi-autobiographical novel *A Child of the Northeast*.

Field of Studies Thai Studies

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Student's Signature: 

Advisor's Signature: 

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I was drawn into the world of literature through my countries rich literary heritage and the many visits to the Reykjavik city library with my father as a young girl.

My fascination with Thai literature began some twenty three years ago when my husband and I first visited Thailand. A year later, Thailand became our home away from home as we traveled Southeast Asia for one year with our five years old daughter. Since then Thailand has charmed us back again and again over the years. However, it can truly be said that my sincere interest in Thailand has been most rewarded through my Thai Studies at Chulalongkorn University.

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ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร
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*. . . novel that fails is a novel in which there is no sense of place,
and in which feeling is, by that much, diminished.
Its action occurs in an abstracted setting that could be anywhere or nowhere.
This reduces its dimensions drastically and cuts down on those tensions
that keep fiction from being facile and slick.*

(O'Connor, 2000: 199)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*“Long ago, more than half a century ago,
a small wooden house stood on round wooden stilts,
baking in the sun. A tall coconut palm grew beside it”
(Kamphoon Boontawee, 1987: 17)¹*

These opening lines from the novel *A Child of the Northeast* (1987)² speak of the novel’s strong sense of place, with distinct reference to past times³ and location through particulars seen in the architecture of the wooden house, sensed in the heat evoked through the metaphor and in the coconut palm that speaks of particular flora. This cherished novel by Kamphoon Boontawee (1928-2003) National Artist 2001 (Chintana Bhaigasuyee, 2002: Online) and Thailand’s first winner of the Southeast Asian write award (1979) was first serialized in *Faa Muang Thai* magazine 1975 (Kepner 1996: 92). The novel *Luk Isan* was published 1976 and chosen Thailand’s best novel that year (Keyes, 1987: 192). In conducting the study the novel is read and analyzed in an English literary translation (1987) by Susan Fulop Kepner⁴. The novel has been translated into other languages such as Japanese (Southeast Asian Modern Novels translated into the Japanese, [no year]: Online) and French (Barang, 1994: 17f).

Film adoption released in 1982 was directed by Vichit Kounavudhi.⁵ The film, in documentary style, was shot in Lao language with Thai subtitles which caused

¹ Further quotations from the novel in this study, will be referred to with pagination.

² *A Child of the Northeast* is the English title of the novel *Luk Isan* (1975) by Kamphoon Boontawee translated by Susan Fulop Kepner.

³ In view of the novel’s time reference it is necessary to consider the novel’s writing time in the 1970s.

⁴ Regarding the translation Kepner states that her translation is a literary translation emphasizing on the tone of the original novel in conveying the world of the tale (Kepner, 2006: Online).

⁵ These information’s are from Kamphoon’s Boontawee forewords in the Thai version of *A Child of the Northeast* or *Luk Isan* 1999 (Kamphoon Boontawee, 2009: 7).

⁶ Vichit Kounavudhi (1922-1997) is a rewarded film director and screenwriter, *Look Isan* or *Son of the Northeast* is regarded as his best film (Wikipedia, 2011d: Online).

according to Charles F. Keyes, “a furor in official circles” (Keyes, 1987: 192) while being an award winner in international film festivals (Kepner, 1987: 8).

Although Thailand has a long history of written literature dating back to the thirteenth century (Barang, 1994: 37) most major works of classic Thai literature are fundamentally religious and written in various classical Thai poetic forms (Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 15-16). For centuries literature was an exclusively aristocratic activity and male dominant creativity highly appreciated and participated in by the Thai kings.

The realistic novel *A Child of the Northeast* is written by a rural man, born in Isan and about ordinary rural people. Emphasizing further this novel’s particularities is the novel’s semi-autobiographical⁶ nature. Regarding *A Child of the Northeast* Kampon Boontawee states in a prologue written in 1999 to the Thai edition (2009)⁷ that the origin of the text recounts fictionalization of real life stories⁸ from his childhood, of his family, friends and neighbors in times of drought and lack of food (Kampon Boontawee, 2009: 7). The overall structure of the novel, written from this distinct realistic and semi-autobiographical approach, is interesting in connection with Yi-Fu Tuan’s writings about the difficulties of expressing “intimate experiences” (Tuan, 1977: 137). However, in Tuan’s view images of place can be evoked by “the imagination of perceptive writers” (Tuan, 1977: 148). In view of this Ryden states “the notion of sense of place impossible without memory, the recollection of personal history grounded in particular landscapes . . . and things” (Ryden, 1993: 75) since deep seated knowledge of a place, is only established over a long time (Ryden, 1993: 185). Ryden further states that “anything that awakens such memories or keeps them alive can be understood as an expression of the sense of place” (Ryden, 1993: 75). Tuan agrees with this since he sees “attachment whether to a person or locality seldom acquired in passing” (Tuan, 1977: 184). Further interesting in relation with the semi-autobiographical nature of *A Child of the Northeast* is how Tuan observes childhood memories as the most sensational and intimate experiences of life (Tuan, 1977: 185). The child protagonist and the novel’s

⁶ Semi-autobiographical novel is defined as loosely based on the experience of the author’s own life. Many novels about private experiences are written in the semi-autobiographical form to attain emotional distance and keep privacy. This transformation of life into art is for example seen in the novel *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain (1835-1910) and in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) (Enotes, 2010: Online). Reference to the autobiographical nature of the novel is for example seen in (Keyes, 1987: 192) and in (Kepner, 2006: Online).

⁷ This reference is taken from Kampon’s Boontawee foreword to the Thai educational edition of *Luk Isan* published in 2009 (Kampon Boontawee, 2009: 7).

⁸ Ibid.

story time “more than half a century ago” (p. 17) refers to the writing time in the 1970s emphasizes deep rooted knowledge and a broad perspective where a childhood past is reflected on by an aging man.

The characteristic of the novel and the setting have established the novel as rural-regional literature, however the novel also speaks of ethnic⁹ heritage that contributes greatly to the novel’s sense of place. Due to forced resettlement by the Siamese in past times as well as migration majority of the Isan people is culturally related to the Lao people (Mayoury Ngaosyvathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvathn, 1994: 48).

Topophilia¹⁰ can be strongly sensed in the narrative and in the writer’s intention to communicate Isan ways and knowledge to the outside world. The meaning of topophilia is love of place used to describe strong sense of place or identity. Tuan’s broad definition of topophilia including all ties between people and place (Tuan, 1974: 93) is applied in this study.

Tuan states how topophilia is often missing in discussions about livelihood whereas location is not only a question of survival and resources but also a source of contentment and joy as well as attachment and love (Tuan, 1974: xii). In this connection topophilia is strongly sensed as an aspect of sense of place in *A Child of the Northeast*. Accordingly, Kampon Boontawee has named himself an ambassador of the remote and isolated Isan (Kepner, 1996: 92).

According to Phraya Anuman Rajadhon it is often stated that the Thai farmers, constituting the largest part of Thailand’s population are “the backbone of the country, but that is usually the end of the discussion. No one is interested in knowing about country people except to have them farm much and produce much rice” (Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 329). This is a common view regarding peasants worldwide and reflected in lack of interest in rural literature (Parkinson, 1979: 261). In this respect Kampon Boontawee is however established as one of Thailand’s contemporary writers who give a voice to the peasants of Thailand within Thai literature.

⁹ It should be notice that ethnic and ethnicity is defined here as cultural differences in accordance with most recent and common meanings (Franco, 2006: 18).

¹⁰ The word Topophilia is derived from two Greek word *topo-* or *top-*, meaning place, with the ending *-philia*, meaning love of/for. Although Topophilia is usually considered a creation of Yi-Fu Tuan because of his book *Topophilia: A Study of Enviornmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (1974) topophilia has been used in writings before (Wikipedia, 2011c: Online).

In this regard *A Child of the Northeast* can be seen recounting traditional rural life in the 1930s in a compassionate way. In the novel, life is primarily seen through some of the most basic but treasured physical and emotional needs of human life contributing greatly to the understanding of Isan way of life while at the same time addressing the most universal themes.

Interestingly, Herbert P. Phillips emphasizes the “intercultural nature” of literature since it is written by natives for natives it communicates an inner view of culture with “unimpeachable source of indigenous meanings, assumptions, and purposes” (Phillips, 1987: 61). In view of the sense of place Phillips observation speaks of how this “intercultural nature” of literature is essential in evoking and revealing sense of place as a representative of the way of life in particular place. In this connection Tuan argues how human experiences made of unique circumstances and individual attachments nevertheless hold shared characteristics (Tuan, 1977: 147) as reflected in the collective sense of place found within Isan and through the novel’s universal themes.

The novel *A Child of the Northeast* is chosen primarily out of the desire to bring more attention to sense of place in literature, the novel seen as an excellent example of sense of place in literature. However, the novel is also chosen out of personal preference as a realistic novel from the colorful and interesting rural and ethnic world of Thailand. As such, the novel draws the focus of attention from much discussed urban way of life or urban versus rural way of life and brings the focus to traditional rural society and its sensual world often idealized and romanticized without real knowledge of way of life. The novel also captures interesting times just after the end of absolute monarchy when Siam becomes a constitutional monarch and before social modernization and industrialization. However the novel is written with knowledge of the enormous social and cultural changes to come since the writing time is in the 1979s.

In this study the reader’s familiarity with the storyline of *A Child of the Northeast* is assumed. Furthermore, the scope of this study is restricted by material obtainable in the English language.

According to literary review sense of place seems to be largely unexplored in Thai literature as a main analytical purpose and unexplored in relation with the novel *A Child of the Northeast*, a fact that makes this study even more fascinating.

1.1 Literary Sense of Place

Sense of place is a major subject in writing and literature (Tuan, 1974: 5) written about by poets and novelist whereas feelings for place and nature appeared in poetry long before they did in visual arts, and evoked the mood of specific places (Tuan, 1974: 126).

Since sense of place in literature has not been greatly explored and in many ways ignored as a field of study it is interesting to observe some of the writings in anthropology geography, and sociology this study benefits from. Tuan draws attention to how relatively few works attempt to understand how people feel about place and take into account different experience of a place (Tuan, 1977: 7). Shared by several scholars such as Demko 2007, Ryden 1993, Salter 1981, Tuan 1977 and Basso 1996 is the opinion that through literary art and strong sense of place the invisible emotional side of place that is hard to express, can be conveyed. Tuan clarifies this opinion by drawing attention to how sculpture can create sense of place by its presence (Tuan, 1977: 164).

However, Knox and Marston see sense of place only evoked if local landmarks and way of life are distinctive enough to evoke a significant and common meaning (Knox and Marston, 2004: 34). In this regard Kampon Boontawee can be seen deliberately and consciously evoking sense of place.

Even though all places factual or fictional hold sense of place, although of different importance, there is no universal definition of the elusive sense of place. However, sense of place has a long history descending from the Roman *genius loci*¹¹ although the meaning has changed over time. During the eighteenth century sense of place was however usually referred to as “influence” of a place. In present times sense of place is most often referred to as the atmosphere of a place and in view of its environmental quality. Therefore the old meaning still lingers on regarding sense of place being partly something invisible and felt. Jackson argues however, that sense of place as heavily used phrase that holds very little meaning. He observes sense of place as “ambiguous” and “awkward” modern translation of *genius loci* that in past times

¹¹ The sociologist E.V.Walker (Walker, 1988: 15 cited in Inge, 2003: 78) explains the meaning of the term „*genius loci*” as a spirit that the Romans show as the owner of a place. First it appeared as a snake but later in human form. Above all it symbolized the energy of place and specific personal spiritual presences that animated and protected a place.

focused more on the guardian divinity of a particular place rather than the place itself (Jackson, 1994: 157-158).

Tuan speaks of the immense knowledge of a place perceived through all the senses but at the same time emphasizes how small part of the experience is actually brought to use (Tuan, 1974: 11). Accordingly sense of place makes endless possibilities of close examination interwoven in all aspects human life.

In Basso's view the vital question for any sense of place is what sense of place is made with seen as components, not where it comes from, or even how it gets formed (Basso, 1996: 144-145) together the components reveal sense of place. Most often the components are seen as unremarkable and rarely studied (Basso, 1996: 159) "simple facts of life" (Basso, 1996: 144). Furthermore Basso speaks of how everything or almost everything regarding sense of place "hinges on the particulars" (Basso, 1996: 145). Basso observes novelists often more successful than academic writers in conveying an unfamiliar sense of place in the way writers seek to evoke sense of place by presenting multiple of local details and take note of their own response and others' to them rather than attempt to characterize or describe sense of place (Basso, 1996: 159).

The evoking of sense of place through multiple of local details is exquisitely played out in Kampon Boontawee's *A Child of the Northeast* recounting real life stories from his childhood, family, friends and neighbors, taking in that way notice of his own and others response to a place. In consideration of the resemblance with Basso's view it would be gratifying if this study of the sense of place in the novel *A Child of the Northeast* could to be seen as an attempt to respond to Basso's writings on sense of place.

Doreen Massey connects a place to places beyond in her view of sense of place stating how specificity of a place "is not some long internalized history but . . . constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus" (Massey, 1994: 154). To be more specific Massey speaks of a distinct mixture of social relations in one place that may construct effects otherwise not happening (Massey, 1994: 156). It is seen how Massey just like Tuan and Basso speaks about the particulars making sense of place.

Therefore, the novel is a long way from Barang's reference to the novel as mediocre, boring and trite novel (Barang, 1994: 17f, 20f) because it can be seen in view of sense of place how there is much more to *A Child of the Northeast* than rural poverty and drought.

1.2 Sense of Place Defined

In this study sense of place is defined as an individual perspective¹² of a place only obtained through attachment over time and constructed with particulars¹³ perceived through ordinary life. Sense of place entails not only selected elements of specific location, social and cultural relations but also physical and emotional response to a place. Artistically brought together by use of various literary techniques sense of place is effectively evoked¹⁴ and revealed¹⁵.

While sense of place is concerned with the particular in the most ordinary experiences of human life familiarity is awoken through universal themes.

1.3 Research Methodology

This documentary study will, as a framework for the analytical research methodology, draw primarily on studies taken from anthropology, human geography and sociology as a way to explore sense of place in the novel. By taking a closer look at these studies it is revealed not only how strongly they intermingle, but also how important contribution they can be in the study of literary sense of place. In addition, literary studies with reference to sense of place are explored in the study. Parallel is the study into the literary techniques that the author employs to evoke and reveal the significance of the sense of place in the novel.

Using such a broad perspective in the study of the sense of place may be seen as a complication but considering the narrator's interest in practically everything concerning the villager's daily life it is considered as advantage for the study to use the broadest perspective. However, there are certainly some restrictions to the study in the attempt to bring forth and focus on the subjects most emphasized in the novel.

¹² To notice something especially something that escapes the notice of others.

¹³ The particular is defined as something special and worth mentioning. Morris's definition of particular fits here perfectly as "thing, person or set of things opposed to any other". As opposite of universals particulars entail the indication of groups or classes (Morris, 2003: 168).

¹⁴ Calling to mind feeling or a memory especially from the past such as evoke childhood memories.

¹⁵ Make something known that was unknown.

Beside the pleasure of extensive reading of Thai literature available in English special focus on other Isan writers has provide valuable insight into contemporary Thai literature from Isan. Furthermore, the opportunity and the great pleasure of travelling extensively in Isan, among the many places to Yashoton province and Roi Et with a visit to the Roi Et National Museum has enhanced my knowledge of Isan and my own sense of Isan sense of place.

1.4 Hypothesis

In this study, the sense of place is viewed as an individual's complex perspective of place gradually created by inhabiting a particular landscape over time. The sense of place entails not only a specific geographical location but also social relations among those living in that place as well as their cultures which are reflected in their ways of life. By applying anthropological and literary theories, this study will try to argue that through his artistic use of literary techniques, Kampon Boontawe effectively presents the complex sense of place and incorporates it in the construction of the novel *A Child of the Northeast*.

1.5 Objectives

This thesis explores two objectives. First, to illustrate the construction of the sense of place through an analysis of the geographical, ethnical and social aspects of Isan culture as reflected in the novel *A Child of the Northeast*.

The second objective of this thesis is to analyze the literary techniques the author employs to reveal the significance of sense of place in *A Child of the Northeast*.

1.6 Significance

The significance of this study is to provide another understanding of the expression of Isan identity and culture as well as to inspire other researchers on the significance of the sense of place in various Thai literary texts.



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CHAPTER II

THE NOVEL'S BACKGROUND AND AN OVERVIEW OF FORM AND STRUCTURE, LOCATION AND TIME

There can never be too much of background

(Steinbeck, 1938: Online)

Chapter II is divided into three sub-chapters which examine briefly the ethnic and social history of Isan, the novel's origin and in an overview the novel's form and structure, as well as location and time, seen as relevant in the analytical approach to the study of sense of place.

A strong sense of history is observed in *A Child of the Northeast* through stories of ancestors and events contributing to the novel's sense of place. Calling attention to how Tuan observes history made visible by monuments in the landscape and in stories told of past times conflicts (Tuan, 1974: 99) history is deeply and repeatedly sensed in *A Child of the Northeast*. Strong sense of the past is for example evoked through the worshiping of ancestor agreeing with how Tuan sees the worshiping of ancestors contribute to continuity in a place and the security of the people (Tuan, 1977: 153). Topophilia¹ is also closely connected to history since knowledge of the past is an essential element in the love of a place (Tuan, 1974: 99).

A Child of the Northeast as a realistic novel of semi-autobiographical nature can be viewed as a novel contributing to social and ethnic history of the 1930s as stated by David Wyatt how sees *A Child of the Northeast* as historical novel (Wyatt, 2002: 115). In this connection Brody states interestingly how the overpowering Lao element of Isan remains unexplored as well as the region's ethnic past (Brody, 2005: 3). However the novel, seen as an historical novel recounts a part of Thai traditional way of life in interesting times just after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy 1932 and the

¹ The term topophilia is explained in detail in chapter I.

adoption of constitutional monarchy in the mist of the Great Depression (1929-1939)². However history concerning ordinary rural people is most often far from official history and therefore contributes to the recounting of hidden and often unrecorded social history³ such as ethnic history. Most often in the distinction between history and memory the latter is seen as less reliable factually than recorded history although official history can be manipulated.

In analyzing old novels as well as historical novels the novel's origin involving issues such as writer's memoirs, sources and reference, characteristic of the time and the writer's tendencies are usually examined. In view of the aim of this study to explore sense of place and also in view of the novel's realistic and semi-autobiographical nature information on the origin of the novel are considered relevant in analyzing the construction of sense of place in the novel.

The sub-chapter focusing on the novel's form and structure, location and time explores in an overview the narrative (plot), character building, theme and writing style, in view of their great importance in the analysis of the novel. Special section is devoted to location and time seen as essential components in the construction of the novel's sense of place.

The past is never dead. It's not even past
(Faulkner, 1951: 92)

2.1 An Overview of Isan Ethnic and Social History

Although the history of Isan is not fully known Isan holds more information about Thailand's pre-historical times, than any other place in Thailand known so far. The famous Ban Chiang village 3600 years old is believed to be the first developed civilization of the area with evidence of rice cultivation (Rogers, 1996: 7). Prove of

² According to Kislenco the Great Depression caused dramatic effects on the Siamese economy (Kislenco, 2004: xxvi).

³ Social history is a distinct part of history that involves history of ordinary people and their way of coping with life (Wikipedia, 2011a: Online) and therefore for example interactions of different social groups.

copper and bronze working in Isan ca. 5000 B.C.E. have raised questions about the location of the world's first Bronze Age (Kislenko, 2004: xxiii).

Among cultural influences on Isan region in the past is the Khmer⁴ civilization based at Ankor. The Khmer ruled in the south while Dvaravati ruled the remaining area of Isan (Rogers, 1996: 71-72) and throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries the majority of the population all over Isan consisted of Khmer's (Rogers, 1996: 121). Rogers names the spread of Theravada Buddhism and the increase of ethnic Lao influences in Isan as the two main reasons for the decline of Khmer power in Isan (Rogers, 1996: 129). After Khmer rule Isan is believed to have been built up by "a multitude of small, self-governing units" (Rogers, 1996: 151).

It can be assumed that Isan was of little or no interest to the Kingdom of Sukhothai⁵ where modern Thai history, language and literature claims its origin as seen in the famous *Stone Inscription One*⁶ of Sukhothai and the classic literature *Traiphum Ruang*⁷. In view of geography Sukhothai is believed to have ruled over most of present day Thailand and even beyond and is therefore considered the first capital of Siam (Thongchai Winichakul, 1994: 163). Lack of interest in Isan seems to continue in the over 400 years of Ayutthaya⁸ rule despite being a political and cultural foundation especially for the *sakdi na*⁹ system. However, in Ayutthaya times Lanna kingdom emerged in Northern Siam and the kingdom of Lan Xhang¹⁰ in the northeast area bringing together small Lao states around Luang Prabang and Vientiane. Although

⁴ Khmer civilization was from the 9th to the 13th century (Kislenko, 2004: xxiv).

⁵ Sukhothai rule was from 1239-1377 (*Women in Thai Literature* 1992: 7). The name translated from the Sanskrit means dawn of happiness (Ringis, 1990: 9).

⁶ In this connection Nagavajara interestingly speaks of the Thai literary historian's broad view. Whereas the 13th century *Stone Inscription One* by King Ramkhamhaeng (Phraya Anuman Rajadhorn, 2009: 51) portraying life in Sukhothai Kingdom is commonly considered literature (Chetana Nagavajara, 1996: 23). Furthermore Rutnin states interestingly that the *Stone Inscription One* can be seen as the beginning of prose writing in Thailand (Mattani Moj dara Rutnin, 1976: 10).

⁷ The Buddhist cosmology *Traibhumikatha* or the *Sermon on the Three Worlds According to King Ruang* later became the well known *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* was written in 1345 by Phaya Lithai in the Thai script invented by his grandfather King Ramkhamhaeng. *Traiphum* is considered the first Thai literary work and the first book written in Thai (Ivarson, 1995: 58). The original text was based on the Pali Canon and its commentaries (Sumalai Ganwiboon, 2007: Online). Therefore *Traiphum* is considered Thailand's first piece of research writing drawn from over thirty Buddhist doctrines (Namphueng Padamalangula, 2008: 73) of holy teachings and arranged with the help of learned monks (*Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, 1982: 349-50).

⁸ Ayutthaya rule was from 1350-1767 (Kislenko, 2004: xxiv).

⁹ *Sakdi na* (power of fields) in theory is a numerical figure indicating how much land each citizen had been assigned to control but in fact it is an indication of person's assigned social rank (Neher, 2000: 164). Every Thai, with the exception of the king was given a number of *sakdi na*. The lowest level comprised all those with dignity marks lower than twenty five including farmers, fishermen, miners and their families. They were the workers of the society (Sumalee Bunroongsook, 1995: 24).

¹⁰ Lan Xhang kingdom was in reign from 1354-1709 (Simms and Simms, 2001: 217-219).

Korat was the limit of Ayutthaya's real authority (Rogers, 1996: 157-58) the small *muangs*¹¹ situated beyond Korat were considered no threat to Ayutthaya. However the influences of Ayutthaya on Isan were extensive by consenting to the first Lao expansion into Isan (Rogers, 1996: 162). In that way the Lan Xhang culture¹² spread throughout Isan (Suparb Boonchai, 2002: 13) and linked together the royalty of Lao and Siam by marriage and dynastic bonds (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 4).

Lan Xhang kingdom became a powerful kingdom centered in Luang Phrabang ruling the area of present Laos as well as the present Isan (Rogers, 1996: 167-8). Due to turmoil in Lan Xhang there was however an extensive resettlement of people from the Vientiane plain into the Isan area of Roi Et and Champassak. In the end the kingdom of Lan Xhang ended up divided into three separate states Luang Phrabang, Vientiane and Champassak (Rogers, 1996: 174-76) with centers in them all.

Within few years of Taksin's¹³ accession to the throne and the creation of the Chakri dynasty in Bangkok Taksin started to expand Siamese territory (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 4) and within few years Taksin succeeded in restoring the power of Siam. He conquered Lanna Kingdom and brought the Lao people of Vientiane and Champassak again under the rule of Siam (Rogers, 1996: 187). The main motivation of the enslavement of the Lao people is said to be the depopulation of Siam following many decades of ruthless Thai-Burma wars, including the destruction of Ayutthaya 1767 (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 48).

The decision of Rama III¹⁴ to prohibit the Lao families, removed from Vientiane and Champassak in the reign of Taksin, to return home caused among other issues the outbreak of the Lao-Thai war (1827-28) greatly influencing both the Lao and the Isan people (Rogers 1996: 191-94). The Isan people showed their first and foremost loyalty to Laos not Siam by joining hands with the military from Vientiane on the way to Bangkok (Buarin Wungkeeree, 2008: 96). However, Vientiane ended up conquered by Siam and Lao people from Vientiane were by forced settlement moved into Siam

¹¹ *Muang* is a township or an area under a protection of a lord (Thongchai Winichakul, 1994: 81).

¹² Lan Xhang is now the Lao people,s Democratic Republic (Suparb Boonchai, 2002: 13).

¹³ Taksin reigned from 1776-1782 (Keyes, 1987: 39-40).

¹⁴ Rama III reigned from 1824-1851(Kepner, 1996: 293).

(Rogers, 1996: 194-5). Recounts are of Lao prisoners of war settling in Isan's forest areas for fear of being assaulted by the Thais (Pranee Wongthet, 1987: 48).

The foundations of modern Thailand laid by King Mongkut¹⁵ and continued by his son King Chulalongkorn¹⁶ involved almost every aspect of life in the country also in Isan. Siamese authorities for the first time began to take a closer interest in this "corner" of Siam when the old *muang* system of substantial independence (Thongchai Winichakul, 1994: 81) was brought to an end. The political system of centralization starting in the 1890s can be seen as a turning point in Isan social history.

When Laos and Burma were colonized by the French and the British the primary concern of the Thai kings became to hold on to independence and the area of Isan became a buffer-zone between Laos and Siam (Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2007: 24-25) making every bit of land desirable in mapping the Siamese national state. As a result the hardly existing areas of Isan became extremely important geographically for Siam. In fact, Siamese's independences can be seen threatened because of Isan territory when the French in 1893 blocked the Chao Phraya River. In the end King Chulalongkorn aware of Siam's fragile independence gave up all rights over the left bank of the Mekong River (Thongchai Winichakul, 1996: 141). The people there remained Lao while they who lived on the west side of the Mekong River became Thai. Among other justification the colonial powers used for their expansion was the reason that people sharing the same cultural heritage should be under the same policy. King Chulalongkorn was faced with both external threats from the colonial powers whereas cultural diversity was obvious and internal threats coming from resistance of centralization that was nowhere as strong as in Isan (Rogers, 1996: 201). In fact indications of dissatisfaction and bitterness among the Isan people can at least be dated back to the end of the seventeenth century when the first farmer's rebellion of many began. King Chulalongkorn saw the urgent need to create a common cultural heritage to the outside world as well as a national identification among the former Lao captivities who had to be "regarded as Thai" (Rogers, 1996: 206).

King Vachiravudh¹⁷ made a new notion of Thai-ness official with the Nationality Act 1911 claiming that anyone born within the national boundaries was to be classified as a Thai. His influences on Isan can also be seen in his law on making

¹⁵ Rama IV reigned from 1851-1868 (Kepner, 1996: 293).

¹⁶ Rama V reigned from 1868-1910 Ibid.

¹⁷ Rama VI reign was from 1910-1925 Ibid.

primary education compulsory (1920) opening doors of education for all. In Isan education had mostly been limited to children from middle and upper class families (Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2007: 34-36). It is generally agreed that language differentiates ethnic groups the most (Stavenhagen, 1990: 2) and the most effective way for the progress of Thai-ness can be seen in the banning of non-Thai schools where standard Thai becomes “a medium through which conceptions of true, order and reality become established” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989: 7) and one culture acquires authority over all others and puts them so to speak in order (Bhabha, 2004: 3). In this regard it has been stated that the main causes of dissatisfaction in Isan has been the destruction of cultural identity while the authority’s emphasis on providing identity.

To further de-emphasize the Lao origins of the people „Thai-ization“¹⁸ urged the incorporation of Isan¹⁹ as vital part of Thailand. In 1939, the ethnic groups of the northeast of Thailand were given the name Isan²⁰ (Van Esterik, 2000: 101). Using the name Isan the government strengthen the area,s identity as the northeastern part of Thailand. Through time the people had simply been referred to as Lao people as seen in *A Child of the Northeast*.

The political change in 1932 with the overthrow of the absolute monarchy and the establishment of a constitutional monarch was the end of the old aristocratic power (Kislenko, 2004: xxvi). Although the *sakdi na* was officially abolished in 1932 and every citizen legally considered equal the three levels of social stratification lived on (Sumalee Bunroongsook, 1995: 24). The transition however brought about new times politically and culturally and in the first elections 1933 Isan people became active in politics and members of the Thai parliament (Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2007: 37-38).

However, the new Siam experienced years of countless military rule and dictatorship. Field Marshal Plaek Pibulsonggram²¹ emphasized radical nationalism through the Thai race which caused exclusion or subordination of ethnic groups (Reynolds, 1991: 17) other than the Thais. Under Pibul’s governance Thailand took its

¹⁸ Referring to the act of establishing hegemony of the Thai state (Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2007: 36) using the identity of the Central region.

¹⁹ The word Isan means northeast (Kepner, 1987: 6).

²⁰ According to the first Cultural Mandate of twelve released in 1939-1942 (Van Esterik, 2000: 101).

²¹ Pibul was one of the main leaders in the revolution 1932, his governance was from 1938-1944 and from 1948-1957 (Keyes, 1987: 218).

present name officially in 1939 (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Nagosyathn, 1994: 61).

In Sarit²² reign although identifying himself as *khon Isan* through his mother (Rogers, 1996: 214) Isan was notably identified as the “Isan problem” by officials because of growing resistance and danger of assumed separation. While strengthening the „Thai-ization“ of the Isan people, through religion and monarchy, Sarit’s propaganda programs of government development projects from the late 1950s were structured to raise quality of life such as access to water, food, health and education (Somchai Phatharathananunth 2007: 43-44). However more often than not they became plans of exploitation. While Sarit was in power the northeastern problem became “potential danger to the continued existence of the government and of Thailand” (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 54).

In the 1960s-70s The Communist Party in Thailand (CPT) gained its support largely among Isan peasants and became the way of Isan struggle with the Thai state. The aim of the CPT on the behalf of the Isan people was however not an ethnic separation, but to be recognized as Thais and to gain a saying in the matters of Isan. In the wake of the student uprising 1976 the jungles of Isan and Laos controlled by the CPT became a refuge to many who also joined the CPT that reached its peak in 1979 (Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2007: 49-50). However, when amnesty was offered to CPT members the party collapsed (Rogers, 1996: 219-20).

The publishing time of *A Child of the Northeast* in the 1970s was in the mist of profound socio-political and psychological changes in Thailand. During decades of development, economic growth and urbanization traditional life was under threat and regarded as “underdevelopment” that should be eliminated. Some people rejected their supposed „Isan-ness“ and distanced themselves from their Lao origin while others emphasized on being *khon Isan* in a growing sense of ethnic identity (Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2007: 45). Isan, the largest ethnic Lao settlement in Asia (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 48) is still seen by many as the most backward “corner” of Thailand, and more Lao than Thai. However it can be seen how the Isan people have identified themselves with the Thai’s through the ages as the villagers in *A Child of the Northeast* who are truly patriotic in spite of a complicated past.

²² Sarit was in power from 1958-1963 (Keyes, 1987: 220).

2.2 The Novel's Origin

The writer Kampon Boontawee (1928-2003) was born into an Isan peasant family in the village Saimoon in Yasothon province the eldest son of seven siblings (Chintana Bhaigasuyee, 2002: Online). Kampon is therefore born during the reign of King Prachatipok²³ and in times of economic disaster caused by the Great Depression and growing doubts about the absolute monarchy (Kislenko, 2004: xxvi) earlier mentioned.

Kampon's formal education finished after mathayom 6,²⁴ he left home young and for the next twenty years Kampon worked in various fields. He was a band leader of a Ramwong troupe,²⁵ day laborer, tricycle driver, and a teacher before he made a career as a prison guard working in various parts of Thailand (Chintana Bhaigasuyee, 2002: Online). At that time Kampon began to write short stories with great success (Kepner, 1996: 92). Following growth in newspapers and magazines in the beginning of the 1920s (Smyth, 2000: 172) magazines and newspapers began to publish serialized translations and adaptations of Western and Chinese fiction (Mattani Moj dara Rutnin, 1976: 30) and many Thai writer's got the opportunity to publish their writings (Smyth, 2000: 172). In 1972, during times of great political and social changes and literary creativity, Kampon left his prison guard occupation and began his fulltime career as a writer. As earlier mentioned *A Child of the Northeast* was first published in Thai language as a serial in the magazine *Faa Muang Thai* (1975) like his short stories (Kepner, 1996: 92).

Regarding the origin of *A Child of the Northeast* the novel is as earlier discussed observed as a realistic and semi-autobiographical novel. It can be seen how Kampon Boontawee's construction of sense of place has origin in his rootedness, memory and topophilic affection of Isan. Kampon knows the area as home which is in an agreement with Tuan's writings seen as completely different experience from having a cultivated "sense of place" (Tuan, 1977: 198). In his dedication to give a voice and a place to the Isan people within Thai society and within Thai literature Kampon Boontawee named himself an ambassador of the remote and isolated Isan (Kepner, 1996: 92). Kampon's intentions can furthermore be through Tuan's writings stating how the "effort to evoke

²³ Rama VII reigned from 1925-1935 (Kepner, 1996: 293).

²⁴ According to Bhaigasuyee mathayom 6 is 12th grade (Chintana Bhaigasuyee, 2002: Online) seventeen to eighteen years old.

²⁵ Ramwong is a traditional Thai folk dance troupe (Chintana Bhaigasuyee, 2002: Online).

sense of place of the past is often deliberated and conscious” (Tuan, 1977: 198) as very much sensed in the novels semi-autobiographical narrative.

Kampon Boontawee has been regarded as a local scholar as well as a great contributor to modern Thai literature. Kampon’s authorial work includes more than 200 titles of various writings such as non-fiction, dictionaries, short stories and novels but *A Child of the Northeast* is one of his most widely known writings. Among Kampon’s other involvements, he set up in the year 2000 the first Kampon Boontawee Library which provides, among other activities, the service of lending books (Chintana Bhaigasuyee, 2000: Online).

Just like all Thai writer’s Kampon Boontawee was influenced by the political situation in Thailand whether in times of censorship and oppression or liberation and freedom of speech. After the end of World War II changes in Thai literature became obvious, influenced by socialist thoughts and various other writings. Some writers became more conscious of their roles as representatives for social change sharing feelings of shame and bitterness towards social conditions (Harrison, 1994: 16-17).

During the student activist groups in the 1970’s there was a literary genre called “literature for life” emphasizing social justice. Ruenruthai Sujjapun sees this genre in two periods the first period from 1947 to 1957 and the second period from 1973 - 1976 when “literature for life” became again the mainstream of Thai contemporary literature. Interest in literature grew after decades of dictatorship and cultural oppression in an era of new found freedom of expression but ended with the coup of October 1976 (Ruenruthai Sujjapun, 1999: 2-9).

It can be seen how Kampon Boontawee’s placement in Thai literature is colored by the time whereas in the early 1970s nationalism and various social issues such as ethnicity were topics of widespread debate. Creative writing was also increasingly powerful when *A Child of the Northeast* is first published as a novel in 1976 and chosen the best novel of the year 1976 in Thailand as earlier stated.

In view of Thai literary history, realism and sense of place strong sense of place can also be found in different contemporary novels such as the epic novel *Four Reign* (1982)²⁶ by M.R. Kurkrit Pramoj (1911-1995) and in the epistolary novel *Letters from*

²⁶ The novel *Si Phaendin* was first published in Thai 1953. English translation was made by Tulachandra.

Thailand (2002)²⁷ by Botan.²⁸ Noteworthy regarding sense of place is how the dual identity of the Isan people²⁹ and its negative identification is reflected in contemporary Thai literature, found for example in *Letters from Thailand*. As an interesting and noticeable part of Thai literature, Isan literature³⁰ can be seen holding strong sense of place. The focus is on location, community and cultural issues through narratives often of semi-autobiographical nature conveying a unique Isan voice within Thai literature. Kampon Boontawee is in the company of other significant and awarded contemporary Isan writer's such as Pira Sudham nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature³¹ and one of the few Thai novelists that writes in English language. Khammaan Khonkhai³², Khamsing Srinawk³³ who was selected National Artist in Literature 1992 (Phillips, 2001: ix) and Jape Trawler³⁴ one of the few contemporary women writer's from Isan whose writing is available in English language.

Writing *A Child of the Northeast* in the 1970s Kampon Boontawee looks back almost fifty years to the 1930s with an understanding and a deep concern for not just Isan but for Thai society. Kampon can be seen dedicated to the task of promoting cultural goodwill and understanding for Isan through ethnic and rural literature using his insight knowledge, or his "intracultural nature" spoken of by Herbert P. Phillips and earlier mentioned, of the land and the people. Kampon Boontawee's tendencies are strong and his intentions are obviously meant to influence directly by calling attention to what is most often unnoticed regarding way of life and the knowledge found in Isan.

²⁷ The novel *Chot mai chak muang* was first published in Thai 1969. English translation was made by Susan F. Kepner.

²⁸ The pseudonym of Supa Sirisingh (Kepner, 2002: v). This novel is one of few Thai novels which explore the life and the experience of the Chinese immigrants in Bangkok and like *A Child of the Northeast* a semi-autobiographical nature. She received the 1969 SEATO Prize for Literature (Anderson 1985: 10).

²⁹ This quotation from the novel *Letters from Thailand* speaks of how "[e]verybody looks down on the Northeasterners-they say they aren't real Thais," but Laotians" (Botan, 2002: 365) strongly reflecting the factual negative identification of Isan.

³⁰ In this connection Dhawat Poonotoke view that Isan literature is descended from literature tradition of the Kingdom of Lan Xhang (1354-1709) is very interesting (Dhawat Poonotoke, 1995: 250-51).

³¹ He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1990 for the novel *Monsoon Country* (1988) (Mahoney [no year]: Online).

³² English translation made by Gehan Wijeyewarnede. The novel *Khru Barn Nork* (1978) or *The Teachers of Mad Dog Swamp* (1992) according to Anderson was "a popular hit made into even more popular film" (Anderson, 1985: 10) where the writer portrays a life in Isan through a school teacher using his own experience.

³³ In his writings such as the short-story collection *Fa Bo Kan* (1958) *The Politician and Other Stories* (2001) he states his views of social injustices from the perspective of the rural people. After the uprising in 1976 he spent two years as political refugees in Sweden (Phillips, 2001: ix).

³⁴ Tawylert writes about Isan village life reflecting her own growing up in the 1970s in a semi-autobiographical novel *Mai Kan Lom* or *Wall against the wind A Thai Woman's True Story* (2009).

Kampon Boontawee's part in the development of the Thai novel and Thai literature is significant. In a list published in 1998 entitled *One Hundred Books Thais Should Read*³⁵ from 1867 – 1976 *A Child of the Northeast* is among thirty-one other highly acclaimed novels (Smyth, 2000: 182) emphasizing the importance of the novel as a key novel in contemporary Thai literature. Anderson has named the contemporary short story woman writer Sri Daorung Flaubert³⁶ of Thailand for her powerful use of realism (Anderson, 1985: 61). Interestingly Nagavajara has referred to *A Child of the Northeast* as “the novel Gustave Flaubert would have loved to write but never did” referring to Kampon's Boontawee artistic objectivity³⁷ (Chetana Nagavajara, 2004: 214-15) writing the novel.

As a proclaimed national artist Kampon Boontawee has gained a seat among Thailand's prestigious novelists. Because of his unique emphasize on sense of place Kampon Boontawee can also be seen among writers of world literature such as John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty. Isan of Kampon Boontawee can be seen in the company of Paris of Proust and Prague of Kafka in the way sense of place is evoked through Isan of the past.

As a significant novel in Thai literature *A Child of the Northeast* has gained a permanent place among the Thai people because *A Child of the Northeast* reveals “something profoundly important” (Wyatt, 2002: 117) about way of life in Isan worthy of study through sense of place.

2.3 An overview of the Novel's Form and Structure

The story line is in pure sequences of action that are chronologically ordered. The plot on the other hand conveys events as they unfold in the story divided into outer-plot and inner-plot. The outer-plot of the novel is in 36 named chapters which call attention to the main subject of each chapter. In its raw material the novel is about one year in the life of a poor boy. The inner-plot however speaks of one year in the life of Koon eight year old village boy in Northeast Thailand during the 1930s who goes on

³⁵ The list entitled in Thai *Nangsu"di 100 lem thi khon thai na cha an* (Smyth 2000: 179).

³⁶ The French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821-80) is best known for his contribution to French realism and his novel *Madame Bovary* (1857).

³⁷ The artistic objectivity of Flaubert is also spoken of by Morris as one of the two new qualities Flaubert brings to realist writing. Relevant here is the commitment to artistic objectivity but sense of artistic dedication was the other quality Flaubert brought into realistic writing (Morris, 2003: 64-65).

fishing caravan because of terrible drought however in the end rain comes with new hope. The journey not only contributes extensively to the novel's plot but can be observed as a detour or suspense of the novel with the uncertainty of its outcome.

It is suggested in this study that the theme of the novel is knowledge in view of the novel's profound emphasize on knowledge and its importance. Kampon Boontawee's tendencies are strong and his detailed and informative writing is obviously meant to enlighten directly by calling attention to the particular knowledge to be found in Isan.

In view of the novel's generic form it is interesting to take a closer look at how the novel is not only realistic³⁸ and semi-autobiographical novel but also a rural regional novel³⁹ and an ethnic novel. The characteristic of a regional novel is strong sense of local topography⁴⁰ whether referring to urban or rural novel with detailed description of a place, setting or region which bears likeness to a real place (Snell, 1998: 1). *A Child of the Northeast* answers perfectly to this definition already established as a regional rural novel.

In view of the child protagonist and in view of the novel's influential fishing caravan journey which the child protagonist describes as "so long, so momentous that he could not even imagine the end of it" (p. 225) the novel can be seen as a *bildungsroman* (educational novel)⁴¹. Although Koon is just a child and the time span of the novel just one year the child protagonist not only gains extensive knowledge but his sense of place also grows.

The novel also speaks of ethnic heritage which is a great contribution to the creation of the novel's literary sense of place. Ethnic literature involves writers who use particular language (Grice, 2001: 134) and conveys experience regarded as outside the literary mainstream through cultural, historical and political issues in a struggle for cultural identity (Lauret, 2001: 2-3). In this regard Snell writes that sense of place in ethnic literature is most often influenced by memory, culture and tradition (Snell, 1998: 32). Further interesting similarities can for example be seen between *A Child of the*

³⁸ In close relation with the art form of realism are the terms mimesis as a close artistic imitation of social reality and verisimilitude defined as the appearance of being real or true (Morris, 2003: 5).

³⁹ The regional novel, whether urban or rural, is usually seen as one of the many sub-genres of realism.

⁴⁰ Topography is precise and detailed study of the surface features of a region, character and configuration of the land. The regional novel conveys strong connection between the writer and the land as well as the influence of region on literature (Cssuto, 2002: 470).

⁴¹ *Bildungsroman* (educational novel) describes the development from innocence to knowledge (Quinn, 2004: 36).

Northeast and ethnic literature by writers of Asian descent either born in US or that have immigrated to the US. The generic form is most often seen as fictionalized autobiography in the way these ethnic writings most often recount childhood and detailed family life with a historical or sociological reference (Grice, 2001: 140). Further characteristics in view of issues is the reference to religion and other cultural practices such as food often entailing detailed descriptions of cooking ways (Grice, 2001: 136-137). By defining ethnic fiction as literature of cultural difference (Lauret, 2001: 3) *A Child of the Northeast* is not only an example of Thai rural/regional literature in its realist and semi-autobiographical nature but as well an excellent example of Thai ethnic literature by *khon Isan* writer.

In connection with the novel's realism it is interesting to take notice of Morris's observations about realism as a form of representation. In this regard Morris calls attention to how literary realism can never be identical with what it represents because writing is always about selection and ordering (Morris, 2003: 4). In view of this it is interesting to observe how Kampon Boontawee sees, through his selective eye, most important to bring forth the basic and often the less noticed experiences of human life. By focusing on the smallest unit of society the family and a child protagonist he evokes and reveals the novel's sense of place through particulars in ordinary life that make the everyday interesting. In this regard Kampon can be seen calling attention to what Tuan calls "humble events" that "in time build up a strong sentiment for place" (Tuan, 1977: 143) profoundly reflected in Kampon's emphasize on ordinary life.

In a true to life narration the novel's point of view is a third person limited viewpoint that conveys inner life thoughts, feelings opinions etc. of just one character (Bickham, 1993: 97), in the case of *A Child of the Northeast*, it is Koon, the child protagonist.

Of primary interest regarding the protagonist is the child perspective and how everything is seen through his eyes and the eyes of the narrator, the man Koon will become, nothing is conveyed that Koon doesn't hear or see (Kepner, 2006: Online). As the aging narrator recalls the past it is observed how the child protagonist gradually gains his sense of place and knowledge of his village. The narrative is in harmony with child's interests of examining the daily life around him and information given to him seen for example in how funeral rites remain obscure in otherwise detailed and informative narrative. The narrative can therefore be seen true to the protagonist age. Occasionally the narrator however brings forth knowledge of the little boy's future.

Furthermore, as a child “old enough to know a few things” (p. 18), Koon gains universal appeal while he also provides invaluable insight into the world of children. Regarding sense of place the child protagonist is of special interest in connection with Tuan’s writings about how a child from around the protagonist’s age to early teen’s is most open to the world and lives in a world of sense impressions that are lost to the adult (Tuan, 1974: 56). In light of these studies it can be seen, through the priority that is given to the world of the senses in the narrative, how the novel’s literary techniques answer to the child’s protagonist lively sense impressions.

Other characters are presented depending on their participation in the story. Noteworthy is the absence of physical appearance⁴² that is most often not described or hardly described in otherwise detailed narrative. This is observed as an indication of the importance of personality and conduct rather than looks. E.M. Foster⁴³ speaks of flat and round characters, flat characters refer most often to minor figures that don’t change throughout the story. A minor character in the novel that is never described physically Mrs. Stinky Pla Ra can be seen as a flat character with the main role of shredding a light to the character of Koon’s mother and evoking particular village sense of place. Koon’s father on the other hand is an example of a complex round character. Koon can be observed as an archetype for Isan boys, just as his parents can be seen as archetypes of Isan peasants of all times. One form of character description can be seen in character names however Koon’s father⁴⁴ and mother are never referred to by name. Koon’s name is however symbolic in its reference to the characteristic of the Isan people. His father named him after the *koon* tree “because it is tough and strong. It can live in the forest or the field, and in [the] hottest sun or heaviest rains” (p. 24).

The writer uses various literary techniques and expressions to both evoke and reveal the significance of the sensed place. Priority is given to the world of the senses but other literary techniques applied are for example an influential back-story, metaphors, and symbolism. The writer also makes use of irony, figure of speech, antithesis and comparisons, sayings with a specific rural ring to them, future knowledge,

⁴² This dispense with the physical description of the character can be seen in many modern and post-modern novels (Quinn, 2004: 51).

⁴³ E.M. Foster (1879-1970) was a British novelist. His views on flat and round characters are cited from (Quinn, 2004: 51).

⁴⁴ Using father and mother in addressing people who are parents, not only by their children is a true to life setting (Kepner, 1996: 84).

onomatopoeia⁴⁵ and humor. Sense of humor is for example most often conveyed in the way some of the villagers are made fun of by others in a delicate and most often cheerful and friendly way. However, as stated by Riffaterre good natured humor can also be seen as very truth-creating especially if it is on the edge of mockery (Riffaterre, 1990: 41).

In view of sense of place, Mikhail Bakhtin's⁴⁶ idea of the social nature of dialogue and his heteroglossia⁴⁷ brings attention to the many different voices of *A Child of the Northeast*. This feature of the novel is perhaps best seen in the way the child protagonist uses different language when he is for example teasing Tid-hod the village drunkard, speaking to the abbot or his father implying a particular relationship between the speaker and the listeners. Such true to life conversations not only state the novel's realistic nature but can in fact be seen as one of Kampon's literary device.

Although the story line of the novel is simple and straightforward the richness of the text evokes and reveals sense of place through countless components of the particularities in the ordinary village life. Referring to Kepner, the novel is in such a detailed narrative that there is no need for explanatory on the behalf of the translator (Kepner, 2006: Online).

The novel's form and structure, faithfulness to time and place and the child protagonist is therefore most profoundly seen in the simple and straightforward style which is at the same time rich of detailed and accurate narrative. Through amazing eye for the particular in the ordinary and artistic use of various literary techniques Kampon Boontawee evokes and reveals sense of place and incorporates it in the construction of the novel.

ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

⁴⁵ A term used for a word whose sounds hints at its meaning (Quinn, 2004: 240).

⁴⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) a Russian critic and philosopher of the novel.

⁴⁷ Heteroglossia is explained as the idea of a multiplicity of languages all in operation in a culture called by Bakhtin socio-ideological languages (Bakhtin, 2004: 271-273). Cobley speaks of how the „heteroglossic“ form of the novel is made up of many different voices (Cobley, 2001: 104). Klages emphasizes how the diversity of voices is the fundamental characteristic of prose writing and of the novel as a genre (Klages, 2001: Online).

*It is by the nature of itself that fiction is all bound up in the local.
The internal reason for that is surely that feelings are bound up in place.
The truth is, fiction depends for its life on place.
Location is the crossroads of circumstance
(Welty, 1978: 118)*

2.3.1 Location and Time

Literature can hold an interesting and close bond with geography. Although in modern times geographical maps don't give an idea about feelings as some old maps did stating what kind of experience could be expected in a place (Ryden, 1993: 13).

In the opening lines of *A Child of the Northeast* the text draws right away attention to the realistic location and time "more than half a century ago" . . . in the northeastern corner of Thailand . . . called Isan (p. 17-18) while evoking marginality and isolation through the emphasize on the „corner“ as a fate of location the attention in drawn to traditional times. Although the region of Isan is almost one third of the country (Kermel-Torrès, 2004: 186) the geographical position speaks of corner placement and enclosure whereas Isan is geographically closed off by the Mekong river and mountains ranges as well as being one of Thailand's peripheral regions (Kermel-Torrès, 2004: 161). To sense the isolation even deeper if a villager wants to go to Bangkok he has to "walk to Korat thirteen days, then take a train⁴⁸ all the way to Bangkok" (p. 158).

Further into the novel the text reveals more precisely the realistic location of the novel in the province of Ubon "the biggest in the whole of Siam. Before . . . called "Red Ant Hill" (p. 224). Although the village is not mentioned by name it may be assumed that it is Kamphoon's Boontawee birthplace in Yasothon province because of the novel's semi-autobiographical nature. On the other hand the village can very well refer to one of the many small Isan villages in the 1930s. The novel however familiarizes the landscape by naming it "Isan" (p. 18) emphasizing the location. However names are not simply marker of place. The use of place names has most often greater meanings

⁴⁸ The railway line came to Korat (Nakhon Ratchasima) by 1900 (Barang, 1994: 67f). According to Kermel-Torrès the completion in of railways linking Isan with Bangkok was in 1939 (Kermel-Torrès, 2004: 70).

attached to them (Frake, 1996: 238) as seen in such a powerful way in the novel regarding the Isan name.

Regarding time in the novel there are three time frames to consider. The story time unfolds over one year and the calendar time of the story is during the 1930s but can be placed after 1932 according to events in the novel. However, Kampon Boontawee writes the novel in the 1970s communicating way of life in the 1930s. The writer's present at the time of writing the novel is therefore a past in present times.

The novel's realistic location and the landscape are seen as vital importance in the novel's construction of the sense of place and in establishing the literary location of the novel. In the construction of the sense of place topography, descriptions of nature, atmosphere and aspects of society such as politics, education, economics and morals are all vital components of the novel's location. It is seen how location matters greatly and has a profound influence on the creation of sense of place. In view of this Massey's statement about how geography matters regarding social issues (Massey, 1994: 131) can be found in an advice given by the village *maw lam* to Boon-awn a young girl. He tells her to take under consideration geographical location in looking for husband and "[l]ook in a village next to a nice stream, one with deep water full of fat fishes" (p. 161) evoking, in a roundabout way, the local poverty.

Location and time introduced on the first pages of the novel are equally important in the writers aim to set the stages of the novel and evoke sense of place. Particular location is evoked with the "small wooden house . . . on round wooden stilts, baking in the sun and looking further

"beyond the village were rice fields, and a lagoon which was usually dry. Beyond the dry lagoon was a knoll the villages called Kok Ee-laew, where they hunted whatever small animals they could find" (p. 18).

In this scene the physical landscape is evoked visually and in view of this small example it can be seen how the connection between fiction and real geographical location found in the rice fields, the dry lagoon and in the hunting of anything eatable makes particular location extremely important in relation with sense of place.

Location in fiction can usually be seen through physical and cultural environment. The physical environment is divided into human created environments

such as the village *wat* and natural environments such as climate and weather (Demko, 2007: Online) condition causing the drought. It is obvious how weather greatly influences local condition such as landscape, flora and fauna, and therefore way of life. As a significant component in the construction of the novel's sense of place its influences are often evoked in the novel through people's daily circumstances such as

“[o]n days when the sun was very hot, no child played in the lanes between the village houses, for the earth was mostly sand. When people had to leave their houses in the heat of the day, they scampered quickly on bare feet, for no one had shoes” (p. 18).

This excerpt evokes simultaneously the sense of extremely severe condition caused by the ongoing drought, seen as one of the major features in the novel. The utter poverty caused by the drought, sensed in the absence of shoes is in a symbolic way illustrated through the people's way of walking.

However, in spite of poor and sandy soil and dry years Koon's father values his land. Even though people are moving from the village they don't sell their land. The farmers intimate relations and topophilic affection for their land is sensed in how the thought of being landless is brushed aside even in the most difficult times.

Rurality, an important aspect of the novel's sense of place, is a complicated concept. However Cloke brings attention to how much has been written about rural idyll where people working together in harmony achieve both prosperity and satisfaction (Cloke, 2006: 380). In this connection Tickamyer also calls attention to how the often romanticized and highly nostalgic view of rural landscapes and communities “say nothing about rural reality” (Tickamyer, 2006: 413) most often making all rural area the same while rural areas are in fact dramatically “*different*” (Cloke, 2006: 380). In Thai literature the rural idyll is profoundly stated in the *Stone Inscription One* of Sukhothai.

“In the time of King Ram Khamhaeng this land of Sukhothai is thriving. There is fish in the water and rice in the fields . . . The people of this muang of Sukhothai praise him. They plant areca groves and betel groves all over the muang; coconut groves and jackfruit groves are planted in abundance in this muang, mango groves and tamarind groves are

planted in abundance in this muang. Anyone who plants them gets them for himself and keeps them. Inside this city there is a marvelous pond of water . . .” (Mukhom Wongthes, 2003: 106-107).

This excerpt can be a symbol of the rural idyll seen in Thai literature emphasizing the abundance of rural farming as well as the peace and tranquility of rural life lived in traditional way. Noteworthy here is however that this description of the rural world is written by a king, during a golden age.

However location involves not just people. Animals have most often very significant and sometimes highly visible roles in rural areas (Jones, 2006: 189) whether they are domestic animals, wildlife and prey or companion animals. Through rural animal studies⁴⁹ Jones also brings attention to working animals which are present in the novel’s village and can be seen in the dog’s participation in hunting calling attention to specific human-animal interactions (Jones, 2006: 190-193). Work contribution of animals is also seen in heavy work of the oxen carrying the villagers to the River Chi and bringing the heavily loaded carts back home again. In accordance with the novel’s down to earth focus, the animals in the village can be seen as a great component to the making of sense of place.

Although shaped by severe natural conditions, lacking strong visibility, sensational scenery, landmarks, unique architecture as well as the basic needs of a community the small village in *A Child of the Northeast* evokes profound sense of place whereas “places are [also] significant because they are the focus of personal feeling” (Rose, 1995: 88) that are also seen as representative of sense of place.

The findings of this chapter shown how social and ethnic history, the novels origin, form and structure, location and time are all profoundly important subjects to consider in illustrating the construction of the novel’s sense of place and identify the literary techniques that the author employs to evoke and reveal the significance of the novel’s sense of place.

⁴⁹ It is interesting in connection with *A Child of the Northeast* that rural animal studies opened studies into issues such as childhood, ethnicity and poverty making the scope of rural studies wider (Jones 2006: 190).

Strong sense of both ethnic and social history is evoked and revealed in the novel through Isan history partly made elsewhere and most often opposed to official history. Knowledge of the past is seen as an essential element through subjects such as ancient prejudices and in the evoking of topophilic affection.

In view of the realistic and semi-autobiographical nature of the novel and how sense of place is referred to as an individual perspective of a place it is seen how the novel's origin matters in view of sense of place.

It is observed how Kampon Boontawee's deliberate and conscious construction of the novel has origin in his rootedness and love for Isan. His tendencies are strong and through his selective eye it can be seen how his intentions are obviously meant to influence directly by calling attention the particular way of life and knowledge to be found in Isan. Colored by liberating times in the 1970s Kampon describes traditional rural life during the 1930s in a compassionate but nevertheless critical way through the most basic but treasured physical and emotional needs in human life.

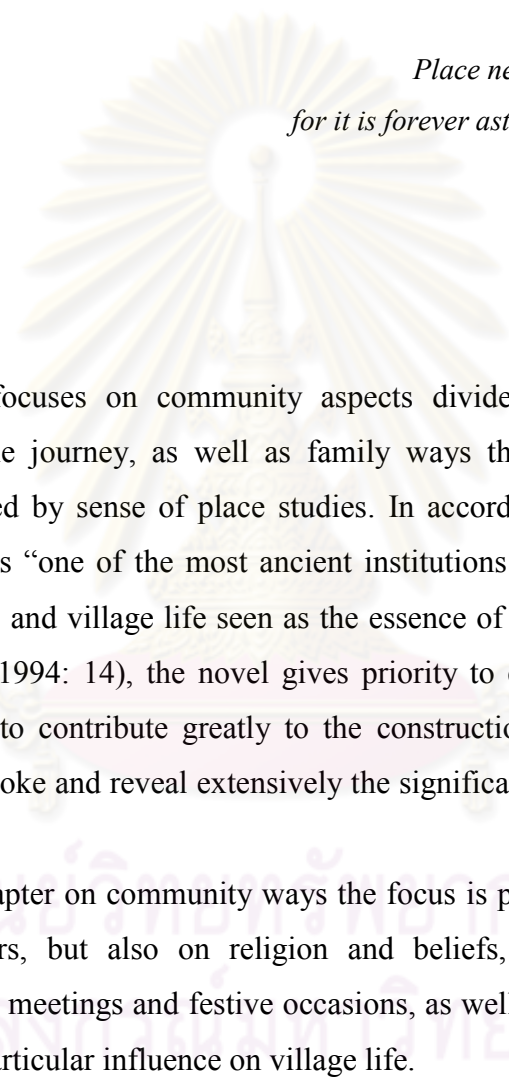
The novel through its realistic rural-regional, ethnic and semi-autobiographical genre speaks of true to life narration regarding way of life and characters. Through the smallest unit of society, the family and a child protagonist, the novel's sense of place is evoked and revealed through particulars in daily life that make the everyday interesting.

The story line is simple and straightforward yet the richness of the detailed and informative narrative evokes and reveals sense of place through countless particulars in ordinary rural life by artistic use of literary techniques. Seen for example through the fascinating and effortless way the child protagonist simultaneously gains sense of Isan sense of place as the aging narrator recalls the past. However, the narrative can be seen true to the protagonist age, in view of the novel's detailed narrative it is interesting to observe how some things remain obscured or not explained to the child protagonist. The narrative is also in harmony with the child's interest most interested in examining the daily life around him.

The special attention drawn to the novel's location and time brings attention to how the geographical location influences all aspects of life from the building style of a house to the building of strong and resilient people as well as wildlife and domestic working animals. It can be seen how location and time is much more than a mere background to the novel not only seen in its significant contribution to the novel's plot, but in its extensive influences on all aspects of way of life and therefore the construction of sense of place throughout the novel.

CHAPTER III

SENSE OF PLACE IN COMMUNITY AND FAMILY WAYS



*Place never really stops informing us,
for it is forever astir, alive, changing, reflecting,
like the mind of man itself
(Welty, 1978: 128)*

Chapter III focuses on community aspects divided into three sub-chapters community ways, the journey, as well as family ways that are explored in textual analysis supplemented by sense of place studies. In accordance with how the village community is seen as “one of the most ancient institutions of Thai society” (Chetana Nartsupha, 1996: 69) and village life seen as the essence of Thai traditions and society (Sanitsuda Ekachai, 1994: 14), the novel gives priority to community ways. As such they are considered to contribute greatly to the construction of the novel’s sense of place as well as to evoke and reveal extensively the significance of sense of place in the novel.

In the sub-chapter on community ways the focus is primarily on the village and the village characters, but also on religion and beliefs, healing remedies, ethnic relations, community meetings and festive occasions, as well as the village sky through its noteworthy and particular influence on village life.

The remarkable journey of the fishing caravan is viewed here and focused on as an interesting aspect of community ways contributing greatly to the making of the novel’s sense of place through its extensive and influential role in the novel. Divided into three, departure, by the river and on the way home, the sub-chapter primarily emphasizes the community aspect of the journey in view of sense of place since the fishing caravan involves a group of villagers traveling together. Furthermore, the attention is brought to collective sense of place brought forth during the journey. In

view of literary construction the journey not only contributes to the novel's plot but is also observed as a detour or the novel's suspense with the uncertainty if its outcome will answer to the people's expectations.

The sub-chapter devoted to family ways focuses on sense of place through childhood of knowledge gaining, the house and the home, kinship and the wisdom of the elders. The family and the child protagonist brought to the center of the novel are considered vital in evoking and revealing a particular sense of place while at the same time evoking human familiarities through universal literary themes.

The chapter's subjects are seen corresponding to Basso's statement of how sense of place can be seen as "a commonplace occurrence, as an ordinary way of engaging one's surroundings and finding them significant" (Basso, 1996a: 143). Although community ways, the journey and family ways can all be seen as "commonplace occurrences" they are of great importance in the construction of sense of place in the novel.

3.1 Community Ways

The novel's small rural village that has "been poor and dry for a long time" (p. 452) is not a village of any particular fame. However, by examine sense of place through its visual¹ meaning and through its subjective meaning hearing, smell and touch (Tuan, 1979: 410) community sense of place gradually unfolds throughout the novel. The opening chapter of the novel speaks of small unnamed rural village situated in Ubon province as earlier stated during the 1930s, decades before the modernization of Thailand.

In spite of being small this is a village of two roads. Picture of unremarkable sameness is evoked through the text whereas

"every house in the village was like every other, built on stilts with a ladder from the porch to the yard below. There was a pen for water buffaloes beneath the house, and a rice silo in on the corner of the yard" (p. 18)

¹ Bickham writes that sight has repeatedly been stated by psychologists the dominance of the five senses (Bickham, 1993: 9).

Taking a closer look at this small scene from the novel it can be seen how the particular is stated in the ordinary for example in the particular building style² and in the way the space beneath the house is made useful. The house ladder can be seen as symbol of informal communication between the villagers since the ladder is just drawn up to the porch at night and when people go away. Furthermore, through the particular object mentioned the “rice silo” (p. 18) in the corner of the yard a component accompanying the reality of a small rice village is brought forth.

Sense of place is also revealed through detailed description of the village precious water resources whereas “[t]he nearest [village] well the one at the temple was so dry that there was only enough for Luang Paw and the *nane*” (p. 69). However there is another well at the “foot of Kilake Knoll” (p. 69) and one well at “Ee-Laew Knoll” (p. 77) but outside the village. Further emphasizing mundane things of daily life, through the most basic living conditions sense of place is revealed in the most basic down to earth conditions like the villager’s privy situated “in the privacy of the woods” (p. 43).

As a village of no electricity the novel speaks of kerosene lamps “lit in all houses” (p. 133) at night “[throwing] shadows everywhere” (p. 197). Dark nights and shadows are further evoked through a small dependent sentences when Koon goes with his father “through the moonlit village” (p. 145) in a hurry to visit his sick grandmother late one night. Although just speaking of one of the simple facts of life in the village strong sense of dark nights is evoked through this small component contributing to the construction of a village sense of place as one of the particular aspects of ordinary life in the village.

In contradiction to the village family houses the *wat* being the center of life in most Thai villages (Kislenko, 2004: 103) serves the villagers religious as well as social needs. The *wat* can be seen as one of the man-made landscapes Ryden speaks of that create and evoke sense of place (Ryden, 1993: 75). The village *wat* as described in *A Child of the Northeast* is said to be “rather small” (p. 110) but “entirely made of wood even the roof which was made not of thatch like people,s house but of overlapping red and black wooden shingles” (p. 110) and “within the *wat* the image of the Buddha stayed” (p. 110). Although, every small Thai village has a *wat* this particular *wat* is

² As stated by Jackson house-types are meaningful characteristic of a landscape (Jackson, 1994: 30).

unique in its own existence and contributes profoundly to the making of the novel's sense of place while speaking of the village religion.

Another building contributing extensively to the making of the village sense of place is the school building calling attention to formal education. The school building is the largest building in the village "raised off the ground so high that Koon could almost walk beneath it, and it too had been made entirely of wood like the *wat* and the monks' house, with no bamboo or thatch" (p. 111).

Although the village *wat* corresponds to the modesty of the village, a *wat* answer to what Demko calls highly notable human creation (Demko, 2007: Online). In a village that speaks of architectural sameness the village *wat* is without doubt the most magnificence and stunning architecture.

Tuan's observation earlier mentioned, referring to how sculptures can create sense of place through the way they are molded (Tuan, 1977: 162) can very well be transferred to the village architecture. Whether speaking of the *wat*, the image of Buddha, the school building or the shrine of the ancestors in the woods by the village, these man-made landscapes reveal community and spiritual affairs of the village while bringing forth components in the making of the novel's sense of place.

There are two stores in the village and where the two roads of the village joined Jek Oo had his store but "the Vietnamese store . . . open again" (p. 51) is not far away. The storekeepers are usually better off because "they farm indoors without risk from drought or flood" (Snit Smuckarn, 1998: 162). Therefore, although a relatively homogeneous village, particulars in ordinary life are made of ethnic diversity seen in different lifestyle of the Chinese and the Vietnamese coloring the village life such as the Vietnamese "billowy pants and long-sleeved blouses both made of shiny black silk" (p. 49). The outside world seen in the village responds to Massey's view of how a place does not remain unique because of some undisturbed history and locality but rather because of uncontrolled flows of global interactions and intersections (Massey, 1994: 155-56) that are seen contribute to the creation of the particulars of a place.

However, there are few visitors seen in the village except for the "Vietnamese peddlers who [trot] through the village with baskets hug on shoulder poles" (p. 19) and the Gula who come by and stay for a while in the *wat* offering tattoo service to the villagers. Although providing glimpses of the outside world these few visitors mentioned during the span of a one year evoke profound sense of remoteness and isolation.

Although small and remote there is a “small village” (p. 216) within the village where “eight or nine families had built their houses” (p. 216). However this village within the village is “not quite far enough away from Koon’s village or large enough, to [be] warrant a name of its own” (p. 216). Within its premises is the forge of the village blacksmith Uncle Luy. Attention is drawn to the particular in the ordinary because although Uncle Luy’s rice silo is just like the others its smaller size is a sign of how the blacksmith had “not worked in a rice field . . . because his father had been blacksmith before him and his grandfather, and his ancestors” (p. 216). The rice silo holds further meaningful connotations in view of sense of place revealed through its size. It can be seen how the rice silo viewed as the particular in the ordinary corresponds to how Knox and Marston see sense of place “only evoked . . . if way of life is unique enough to evoke a significant and common meaning for people who have no direct experience of them” (Knox and Marston, 2004: 34). The significant meaning is seen in the rice silo’s function as a container for rice but the common meaning is revealed in how they who just store rice for their own don’t need large rice silo.

Although the blacksmith answers to the few exceptions in the village of not farming he speaks of the villager’s way of doing business. He asks Koon’s father to “bring [him] one good, big, salted fish. That is what he need[s]” (p. 217) for the job of sharpening Koon’s father bamboo knife and spade before the fishing caravan journey. The quote does not only speak of his contentment but also of a particular self sufficient economic way of life (Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 33-34) in the small village of the 1930s. Beside the blacksmith, it is revealed that the village also has a butcher and a barber.

Sense of rural poverty is evoked visually through the absences of buffaloes and oxen. However in some houses the place beneath the house was still used “for water buffaloes, not for people to sit on benches and work, or for children to play in the shade” (p. 82) as seen in the *phuyaiban*’s house which “was bigger . . . its roof was wooden, like the roof of the temple” (p. 197). Although livestock is disappearing from the village just like people some oxen, chickens, cats and dogs contribute to the village scene. The village poverty is also seen in the absence of the important *wat* bell. The village has “just a small bell that Luang Paw keeps in his room” (p. 109). However, the villager’s optimistic outlook on life is sensed in the words that “someday, when the village is prosperous again, [they] will have a real bell too” (p. 109).

The village poverty is also revealed in the detailed description of how “the rickety fence that encircled the wat . . . was broken down in many places” (p. 109). By mentioning the fence the text not only reveals a visual component in the making of the village sense of place, the broken fence a thorn in the eyes of Koon’s father also evokes feelings of frustration. The village poverty can further be seen in empty lanes between the houses because on “days when the sun was very hot no child played in the lanes . . . for the earth was mostly sand” (p. 18) and if the villagers had to errand “in the heat of the day” (p. 18) they “scampered quickly on bare feet” (p. 18) because “no one had shoes” (p. 18). The poverty seen through the manner of walking can be observed as “felt effort” or a strain (Tuan, 1977: 129) of a place. This scene can also be viewed as an “intimate experiences” of a particular place that easily escapes attention if not “dressed up” (Tuan, 1977: 143) to be noticed.

The village is an early rising village. According to Koon’s father “man should rise with the crows and sleep like a dog” (p. 215) explaining the simile to his son it means “to sleep soundly, but to have ears that even in sleep are aware of any sound that is strange, however faint it might be” (p. 215). Sense of the villager’s vulnerability is evoked towards unfriendly intrusion whether by humans or animals. The simile brings forth the close relations between the people and the animals in the village and how people can benefit from taken after animal behavior such as the dogs, although not with flexible ears like dog’s (Tuan, 1977: 14).

Speaking of early morning scenes that call attention to the particular in the ordinary village life and evoke sense of place is for example the monk’s “walk through the village with rice bowls at dawn” (p. 102), bare-bottomed boys driving water buffaloes with “dry bamboo cylinders tied about their necks rattling pleasantly in the morning breeze” (p. 216).

However, there is also more dramatic and disturbing morning scene in the village life through families who are leaving the village for good. Although almost too poor and too isolated to try a new life the drought forces the people to move, arousing deep emotional reactions. A detailed narrative set in the early morning symbolic chill describes the sense of sorrow lingering in the air. Through sight expression people’s faces reveal the seriousness of the moment “they were leaving the village and not coming back” (p. 26). Sorrow is seen in eyes that are “wiped” (p. 27), careful looks into faces, the grasping of hands, and in sad smiles that evoke the pain of necessary departure caused by drought “for three years” (p. 43).

Inevitable the villages talk is in correspondence with the situation whether at village meetings or on the villages lanes people speak of how “the rice in their silo [is] nearly gone” (p. 156) and how “they [will] be eating taro root and yams instead of rice” (p. 156). Koon’s father who tries to make good out of bad states that “steamed yams are as good as rice” (p. 156) the people “won’t die of them” (p. 156). The scene is one of many throughout the novel where the *sanuk*³ attitude towards life is evoked even through the most serious circumstances.

An interesting way of revealing great sense of topophilic⁴ (Tuan, 1974: 247) affection is how Koon and Jundi see their own village from the outside on the way home from the River Chi. Jundi wonders while at the River Chi “why [they] have to go back to that stinking village and eat dried-up pla ra” (p. 364) when the village by the river “is the place” (p. 364) with abundance of food. In a highly symbolic way Jundi gets his answer. The fishing caravan stops in a village to trade fish for rice “it was a poor village they entered, without many people, very like their own” (p. 425) village. Without actually realizing how the comparison emphasizes the situation of their home village Jundi asks a monk the boy’s meet at the village *wat* why he doesn’t go someplace else “every place has a wat, a monk could go anywhere” (p. 427). When the monk throws the question right back Jundi stammered “[i]t is our village” (p. 427-428) the talkative boy becomes wordless and unable to express himself. This episode evokes the sense of how there is much more to Jundi’s “stinking village” (p. 364) as sensed in his hesitation. This scene can very well be seen as an example of how literary art is capable of drawing attention to affection and intimate experience that otherwise might not be perceived (Tuan, 1977: 162). Further emphasized in a reference to the village

“[w]hat was it, after all, but a small village, scattered over a few acres of dry earth, baking under a pitiless sun? It was all of those things yet how dear it was to them” (p. 383).

The quote not only responds profoundly to Tuan’s observation that although lacking in almost every aspect a village is an intimate place (Tuan, 1977: 144-45). The

³ Rutnin explains *sanuk* as “to have fun, be fun-loving, enjoy fun” (Mattani Moj dara Rutnin, 1976: 96f).

⁴ As explained in the introduction topophilia literary means love of place (Tuan, 1974: 247).

quote speaking of deep emotional bonds reveals also the narrative's profound simplicity. At the same time the quote reflects Basso's views on the writer's capability of evoking sense of place (Basso, 1996: 159) by presenting local details such as the small village dry earth and baking pitiless sun that are components in the making of sense of place.

Besides viewing the village through sight community ways are also evoked through the senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch, senses that are most of the time not noticed (Tuan, 1977: 21). According to Tuan these senses require close contact and long association with place (Tuan, 1979: 410) answering to how individual perspective of a place is only obtained through attachment over time.

In view of the village many sounds, greatly enrich sense of place, it is interesting to bear in mind how people are usually more touched by what they hear than what they see (Tuan, 1974: 8). One of the many particular village sounds is coming from Tid-hod the village drunkard "stagger[ing] through the village, waking everybody up" (p. 57). Another particular sound hardly heard but very much sensed is the sound coming from Auntie Kampa's knife as she chops fish making "[s]uch a tiny noise" (p. 38) in the hope that nobody will hear and "come to ask for some" (p. 38) of her *pla ra*. While she tries not to bring attention to herself everyone knows about her behavior. Tid-hod and Auntie Kampa call attention to how people's routes and positions are different (Massey 1994: 153) although they live in a small and isolated community.

It is assumed that various meaningful sounds of wild nature can be heard in a rural village such as the "soft calling of an owl" (p. 100). In addition to the sound of domestic animals and barking village dog's meaningful village sounds are also found in the sound of the wind, the promising sound of a thunder and the extremely disappointing sound of a thunder fading away. In a symbolic way the sound of religion is heard in Luang Paw Ken's new *wat* bell which also states new times in the village at the end of the novel.

Strongly calling attention to the particular in the ordinary everyday life voiced in the village is the issue of mate selection seen as a significant component in the making of the novel's sense of place. The importance of mate selection to the future life of the village and the families is profoundly revealed in how mate selection even becomes the matter for young boys like Koon and Jundi seen on the fishing caravan journey later discussed. However, an example of casual and straightforward mate selection talk in the village occurs at the grandmother's sick-bed. Boon-awn almost grown daughter of

Koon's Auntie Ploy is asked by Uncle Kem when she will become a bride. The girl, in an openly manner asks back if he knows of a bridegroom for her. However, while she does not "know a loom from a fish trap, or a live silkworm from a sleeper" (p. 151) she should not, according to the *maw ya* overhearing the conversation, be thinking about marriage. The narrative's informative mode is seen in how Kamgong explains to Koon that since Boon-awn "didn't know how to spin silk yet, or raise silkworms on mulberry leaves . . . she shouldn't be thinking about husbands" (p. 151). The distinct and detailed description contributed with explanations about important knowledge that should accompany a bride in the village reveals however the expected roles of a young woman in the village and are also significant components in the novel's construction of sense of place.

Another particular aspect of ordinary life is voiced through polygamy. For example in the way it is suggested that Koon should become a *maw lam*, "they are the ones who get all the pretty wives!" (p. 161) and they also have "[l]ots of money. Lots of wives" (p. 443). However, the village polygamy is most deeply revealed in Uncle Kem's statement that he just wants "one more wife, before it's all over..." (p. 386) profoundly revealing the aging man's deep seated way of thinking regarding polygamy.

Although, the "village had been poor and dry for a long time" (p. 452) and not answering to many of the basic needs, village's sounds of cheerfulness and lively laughter strongly evoke the village's sense of place. Deep sense of *sanuk*⁵ as a way of life is strongly evoked through the antithesis of the village poverty and hardship while the villager's contentment and happiness in daily life is deeply sensed. In this connection Phillips speaks of how *sanuk* is such a key characteristic of Thai life and interwoven in almost every activity (Phillips, 1987: 10-11). When a new roof is put on Koon's house *sanuk* in form of village humor is present. Tid-hod is proven to have spoiled himself with "one of those hotel women" (p. 191) while visiting the *amphur* town with the *phuyaiban*. Tid-joon suddenly "stuck two fingers up Tid-hod's nose" (p. 191) and got prove, there it was "soot...from a kerosene lamp. Like the kind some women have next to their beds-eh, Tid-hod?" (p. 191). "Smoke up the nose!" (p. 191) and "all the people roared with laughter" (p. 191). The episode reveals a good natured

⁵ Phillips writes about how *sanuk* not only appears in such issues as the content of messages and in names but also in addressing social issues, corruption and peasant revolutions (Phillips, 1987: 10-11) calling attention to how *sanuk* is greatly interwoven in Thai society and culture.

village teasing between the people in a down to earth way during a moment of rest although it is also sensed how there is a hit of mockery in the truth-revealing humor.

However, profound sense of place is the way poverty and hardship does not drive the villagers apart but brings them closer together in confronting poverty and difficulties with compassion and humor as well as cooperation and solidarity. A village virtue that Koon's father had told him repeatedly emphasizing its importance is how

"[a] man with a good heart feels sad for people when bad things happen to them, and helps them. If he does not have money or things to give, then he gives the strength of his body" (p. 450).

In that way "good hearts had built the new roof for Koon's family" (p. 450). Koon's father further emphasizes

"a man with a good heart does not choose the people he helps. They choose him, by needing him. No matter where they come from, or who they are, it is a man's duty to give help when he can see that it is needed" (p. 450)

A villager's "good heart" and compassion is revealed in the small but significant gesture made by Aunti Bua-Si when she brings Koon's little sisters one of two *matoom* fruits the village abbot Luang Paw Ken had given her.

The village sense of place is also evoked through touch which is emphasized through repetition in the way children's "feet were burning off" (p. 52) although walking through the village "on all the grassy places" (p. 52). Although belonging to the smallest of details this scene contributes greatly to the making sense of place. While the scene corresponds to how Tuan sees a place not just as something seen but also something felt (Tuan, 1977: 129) the scene calls attention to what it really entails to live in the novel's small village.

As an example of particular village smell evoked through the narrative is the scene when Koon visits the *phuyaiban*'s house for a community meeting. The narrative describes in detail how "strong, sweet smell of water buffalo dung wafted up through the floor from the pen beneath the house where the animals dozed, and mingled with the smoke from the kerosene lamps" (p. 197). In this way the narrative not only speaks of

what Koon observes through sight but evokes particular smells found within the rural village.

Another example of how the narrative evokes village smell is through Auntie Kampa activities. Although she earns her nickname as Mrs. Stinking Pla Ra because of her softly pounded *pla ra* her activities are even more sensed through smell impression or “sniffing information” than sound impression. Because “every time she opened a crock of *pla ra*” (p. 38) it could be smelled all over the village” (p. 38) assaulting the nostrils of the villagers. By gossiping about Auntie Kampa improper behavior Koon’s mother can be seen releasing her “socially negative feelings” (Klausner, 2002: 5) since she finds herself obligated to share with Mrs. Stinking Pla Ra “two pieces of the precious *ngu sing*” (p. 37) Koon and his father bring home from hunting because “she is [their] neighbor” (p. 37). Through Auntie Kampa’s and Koon’s mother behavior this scene also brings attention to what is considered proper behavior in the village.

Sense of community is profoundly evoked at the birth of the twins which is “a wonderful day” (p. 471) for Koon’s family in the way the whole village celebrates. Even the Chinese storekeeper, states the birth of the twins “good luck to [them] all” (p. 474), villager unity and shared joy that goes way beyond conflicts and ethnic diversity is evoked. The gentle image of the villagers symbolically celebrating new beginning through new born life and rain at the end of the novel is even reflected in nature because “the banana palms that grew in every yard thrust fat green fingers into the sky . . . filled with fruit” (p. 471). Nature can in this symbolically way also be seen celebrating new beginning for the village in a human gesture evoked by one of the most fascinating and localized metaphor in the novel.

*It is what people say and what they do
and the way in which they say and do it
that tells us the most about them*
(Welty, 1978: 11)

3.1.1 Village Characters

It may be observed how sense of place is made and illustrated through the different characters of the novel, in their various roles and their relations with each

other. The characters behavior is colored by location (Bickham, 1993: 71) village way of life and tradition. The construction of sense of place through different characters is therefore a very important part in bringing forth the village sense of place. Koon's family is inevitable most often the focus of attention and specially emphasized in the chapter about family life. Therefore it is chosen here to take a closer look at other villagers in view of sense of place to give the broadest possible spectrum of the different village characters. Massey states that a place has a character of its own but there is no single sense of place which everyone shares because of different gender, age and different positions in a community (Massey, 1994: 153). This is for example seen very well in the totally different experience and roles of Koon's father and Koon's mother.

Physical appearance of the characters cannot be seen as the main focus of attention in the novel barely unfolding throughout the novel but often hardly described. Sense of place through character is perhaps best described by Koon's father stating to his son that "it is what is in our hearts that is important. Not how we look" (p. 112). However, the novel portrays realistic characters through their daily life's making profound components in the construction of the village sense of place while presenting the personality of the villagers.

Koon's physical appearance is first spoken of by Luang Paw Ken the abbot of the village *wat* who sees an "honest little face . . . with the same expression in his eyes as the maw lam's horse" (p. 105). This troubles Koon who asks his father repeatedly about the meaning of Luang's Paw simile. Koon's father explains it as Luang Paw way of saying that Koon has "an honest, kindly look. Everyone thinks the maw lam's horse is too good natured . . . maybe a little too thin" (p. 111-112) as Koon with his "big eyes" (p. 111- 12) therefore Luang Paw sees Koon as "an honest and puny boy" (p. 132). The rural location can be sensed in the comparison between the boy and the animal, but the simile nevertheless gives an idea of Koon's appearance.

In accordance with the location it is deeply sensed how it is a great character quality to be strong and tough in the way Koon is delighted when his father explains that he named him Koon after the *koon* tree "it is tough and strong. It can live in the forest or the field, and in hottest sun or heaviest rains, Koon is a good name for a boy" (p. 24) referring to both physical and mental strength. Koon's response to being "tough and strong" (p. 24) is visualized in the description of how he [clap's] his hands and [slap's] his armpits" (p. 24) in a childish joy. Through Koon's character it can be sensed

how he is a happy child in harmony with the deep seated village feeling of contentment and cheerful outlook on life.

Although an individual with his own character such as his eagerness to learn and his respect for tradition Koon's is first and foremost born and bred child of the northeast molded by his village location, community life, family upbringing, and culture.

It is interesting to take a closer look at Koon and Jundi his best friend again "after a lot of fights" (p. 66). Jundi's physical appearance is only described by referring to how he "was exactly [Koon's] age" (p. 62). However in character the boys are total antithesis which states a strong feeling of individual sense of place in spite of being the same age, and born and bred in the same village. In this way the attention is brought to how sense of place is an individual perspective. Although the boys are just children, molded by shared social and cultural ways, they are individuals raised by different families that have shaped their individual personality.

Through extensive use of contrasts Jundi's character brings exquisitely forth Koon's personality, such as his good nature, modesty, and obedience. Koon's good nature is for example revealed through his consideration of dropping the talk about his new shirt thinking Jundi is not going to get anything new for school. However, when Jundi gets the smartest airplane pants and brags about the attention called to Jundi's behavior in fact highlights Koon's personality. Koon knows how Jundi hated not being the best, he even hated it when anybody in his family was not the best and Jundi's way of stating that is to criticize others in a bold and impolite manner such as "[w]hat a sound. Like a frog in a jar, ha-ha!" (p. 391) when Koon's mother sings on the way home from the River Chi, the simile refers to well known local sound.

The boy's different personality is closely illustrated through the first day at school. Jundi acts like a born leader and accordingly he offers himself as a candidate to be a head boy of the class because he picture himself as "the boss" (p. 123) something that even does not occur to Koon. However most profoundly seen are the boy's different personalities in their completely diverse approaches to the assignment of the drawing of a picture of rice fields. In the first place Jundi doesn't want "to draw any stupid dry cracked-up rice fields" (p. 124) but his way of participate is to go beyond the instruction and draw a rice field with "a termite mound" (p. 124) just as his family rice field showing his determinacy not to obey orders. Meanwhile "Koon held his ruler firmly on the slate, and worked very slowly, trying to make his picture look exactly like Kru Tong's" (p. 124) the teacher's because Koon wants to be an obedient boy. This

scene, symbolizing the boy's future attitudes and conduct in life, is a good example of how the boy's characters being molded by particular sense of place through education respond differently because of their individuality while they both at the same time contribute to the making of the specific village sense of place.

Jundi's daring manner can also be seen in his questions to the strange Gula visiting the village while "Koon could scarcely believe that Jundi had the courage to ask all these questions" (p. 204). However, Jundi's daring manner is also colored by ambition and rivalry contradicting the villager's overall conduct. His competing manner is for example brought forth through particular activity as at the River Chi where Jundi "called out that their frogs had more eggs than anybody's" (p. 352). Jundi's mother responds by stating how Jundi has "to brag about *everything* . . . even the eggs in a frog's belly (p. 352). Jundi character is further revealed in how he does not hesitate to use lies if useful as when he speaks of an imaginary visit to Luang Prabang to girls by the River Chi as a way to praise himself. Although just eight years old Jundi measures the importance of education in context with girls interest and the girls at the River Chi came to talk to them although they "hardly know anything" (p. 366) referring to himself and Koon.

When Koon who loves school and is eager to learn everything, speaks of his dream of going to Bangkok Jundi states "to Bangkok-you? Hah! You would have to be better in school even than me to go to Bangkok. You think anybody can go to Bangkok?" (p. 382). In this scene Jundi in fact reveals his arrogance towards his friend that is not responded to by Koon.

There are however moments of closeness seen between the two boys, but interestingly these moments are most often in connection with the uncontrollable force of nature where not even Jundi has a saying. For example seen when the boy's for the first time in their lives share the experience of seeing a "real river" (p. 258) and "Jundi seized [Koon's] hand and held him back for a moment" (p. 258) the closeness is revealed in a touch.

However, Jundi's character maybe best described by an old woman the fishing caravan meets on the way home from the River Chi. She sees "a boy who is vain, stubborn and naughty-and a man who will be vain, stubborn, naughty-and rich" (p. 432). Not realizing the irony "Jundi cries leaping about and flapping his arms like a bird" (p. 432) the simile visualizes and emphasizes his enjoyment. When Koon however cries because he is "happy" Jundi asks him if he is "dumb" (p. 476). By the extensive

use of antithesis the boy's individuality is strongly emphasized mostly regarding their attitude to life and people although born and bred in the same village their paths are made to be totally different.

In connection with different paths in life are the less fortunate individuals. In accordance with the novel's way of calling attention to not only the less noticed but also the particulars the village drunkard Tid-hod can be seen as a component in constructing the novel's sense of place. Although publicly declared the drunkard of the village he is nevertheless a notable character participating extensively in the village life. In view of sense of place it is interesting to take a closer look at his place and role in the community and observe how the community treats one of its unfortunate members.

To get some picture of Tid-hod, although his appearance is not described, his former monkhood is revealed in the *Tid*⁶ part of his name. It is revealed in an indirect way that Tid-hod has a house but no dogs through Koon father mocking humor who states that "no dogs sleep under Tid hod's house . . . just bottles." (p. 57). It can also be assumed that Tid-hod has a rice field because while the people were away fishing at the River Chi Tid-hod planted "one plot rice" (p. 444).

Tid-hod is first presented in the story where he is seen working for the Vietnamese storekeepers. He is often the laughing stock of the village through humorous but truth revealing allegations. Such humor is even coming from the good natured Koon, taking after the elders, who states that the only reason for Tid-hod's helping hand digging the garden is that "the Vietnamese people gives [him] liquor" (p. 56). It is interesting to see how the narrative speaks of heteroglossia⁷ through Koon's use of totally different dialogue speaking to Tid-hod than for example when he speaks to his father or Luang Paw the village abbot as earlier mentioned. In view of Tid-hod's position in the village Koon can allow himself to use this teasing language and in a way mocking tone when speaking to Tid-hod. Symbolically, the different language the villagers use in speaking to Tid-hod can in a way be seen as the villager's buffer and release. Just like Koon's mother laughing states how all the village "know[s] what his best thing is" (p. 184) referring to Tid-hod's drinking speaking her mind in a teasing way without worry about the right conduct.

⁶ According to Wijeyewardence the word *thit* or *Tid* as referred to in the novel is used in Isan in front of a name as an indication of ordination to monkhood (Gehan Wijeyewardence, 1992: xlv).

⁷ Heteroglossia refers to Bakhtin's idea of the multiplicity of languages all in operation in a culture, called by Bakhtin socio-ideological languages (Bakhtin, 2004: 271-273).

However, it is noteworthy how the village's talk about Tid-hod shows goodwill and even compassion. Sense of place can be seen in how the villagers look out for one another and are not judgmental since after all they are all exposed to the law of karma (Klausner, 2002: 6). In that respect Tid-hod is not an outcast in the village community because if something is happening in the village Tid-hod is there participating just as any other villager. As a matter of fact Tid-hod knows best of all what goes on in the village because he goes everywhere and mingles with everyone. He is therefore seen nearby death bed ceremony, a ceremony to drive out sickness as well as celebrating birth of new villagers. Tid-hod even manages to be the focus of attention while not present as on the fishing caravan. He had asked for "salted doves" (p. 300) and on the way home Tid-joon responds to Tid-hod wishes by hunting birds to bring Tid-hod "[l]ittle ones . . . that he can eat when he drinks whiskey" (p. 418). Sense of place can be seen evoked in compassion and caring feeling as well as in the joy of giving pleasure to others.

In this view the attention is brought to Tid-hod's resourcefulness and cleverness of getting celebration food from the village stores and anywhere possible. This is seen in his participation in getting food and drinks for Kamgong's and Tid-joon's wedding where Tid-hod can be seen "struggling up the house ladder with a chicken under one arm" (p. 85). When the twins are born Tid-hod is again seen in a ladder handing up four bottles from the Vietnamese and four more from . . . Chinaman!" (p. 474). Tid-hod's emphasized resourcefulness however also states the village profound poverty.

Tid-hod's cleverness is remarked by Uncle Mek with envy of how he manages "to be at the Vietnamese store eating good food with the owner every day" (p. 175-176). Tid-hod however brings attention to his problems by correcting Uncle Mek stating how he "drinks" (p. 177) what the Vietnamese pays him for his work bringing attention to his problems. However, when Koon's father gives all the men a new flint after the work on the new roof it is for Tid-hod "the best gift he could think of, because he had been without one for two month" (p. 194) revealing how he is lacking in necessities like other villagers.

Bringing forth the way Tid-hod's character speaks of sense of place is for example seen in how Koon notices that "Tid-hod can do many things" (p. 184). At the day of the new roof on Koon's house some of Tid-hod's particular capabilities in the ordinary village life are revealed. As the village "best climber" (p. 184) Koon's mother asks Tid-hod to climb for one coconut. Tid-hod knowledge of climbing trees is revealed

in how he uses twine around his legs because “[i]t gives his legs more strength to grab the trunk” (p. 187). However, while getting the coconut Tid-hod captures also two *took-geh*⁸ and he demonstrates his cooking skills of lizards by making *gaeng* his own way “chopping the lizards” into little pieces, bones and all” (p. 189) thinking about that there “will be enough for all” (p. 189). Sense of place is evoked through the notion of having enough for everyone with the knowledge of how “[f]ood like [the lizards] is hard to come by” (p. 189) while Tid-hod’s capabilities are revealed through particular food ways. Tid-hod’s particular cooking skills are further revealed in how he is chosen of the entire villager’s to make blood *lop* for the “important people” (p. 90) at Kamgong’s and Tid-joon’s wedding when a calf is slaughtered because “he makes the best lop” (p. 90).

Through the various detailed descriptions of Tid-hod it is seen how his characteristics are strongly reflected by location. His character speaks of sense of place for example through his particular knowledge of climbing coconut palms and through his specific relationship with the Vietnamese and the Chinese shopkeepers, although his actions are colored by his longing for a drink his actions are also profoundly colored by location.

Uncle Gah is an interesting example of character in the novel that can in a way be seen reflecting sense of place made elsewhere because, as a young man, he had travelled all the way to Luang Prabang where he “studied fighting and secret arts with a master” (p. 138) that greatly influenced him. It is seen how his conduct and appearance has also influenced the small village significantly. There is more detailed and telling description of Uncle Gah physical appearance in the narrative than many of the characters which can very well be because of how everything about him speaks of difference in the child’s protagonist eyes who sees

“[a] strange, wild-looking man . . . who seemed always . . . grouchy. He looked old-or perhaps it was just his long, messy hair that made him look old, and scary” (p. 138).

Although he was a small man “the look in his eyes was terrifying” (p. 140). Uncle Gah “wore a very short pakomah, and Koon could see that his things were covered with intricate tattoos, the kind of magical designs” (p. 140).

⁸ *Took-geh* is a lizard named after the sound it makes (Kepner, 1987: 187f).

Koon takes special notice of the astounding appearance of Uncle Gah at departure for River Chi speaking of his character.

“He wore long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, both horse-turd green. Around his waist was a leather belt half as wide as the span of a grown man’s hand. When he picked up his wide-brimmed hat and put it on his head, completing the outfit Kru Tong said that if he had shoes, too, it would be worth borrowing Jek Oo’s camera to take a picture” (p. 228).

The detailed clothing imagery is emphasized artistically in one of the novel’s most telling description of outfit. It profoundly reveals sense of place from elsewhere seen in how the stunning outfit is almost worth borrowing a camera to preserve the moment. However it is also sensed how the absence of shoes makes the borrowing of Jek Oo’s camera not worthwhile only bringing forth the poverty of their own village. It can be seen how Uncle Gah’s character answers to Massey writings of how a place does not remain unique because of some undisturbed history but because of global flows (Massey, 1994: 155-56) in the way Uncle Gah brings back with him ideas, knowledge, attitude even appearance that in fact influence the village sense of place.

Uncle Gah characteristics are revealed in how he prevents greediness on the behalf of the villages by the River Chi as a way of caring about the reputation of their village (p. 302). However, his character is also seen through his conduct such as how he expresses his anger by "hopp[ing] up and down" (p. 324) when his ox suffers an injury. In the way he shows his eagerness and also his recklessness in bad weather at the River Chi when others want to wait. Uncle Gah character is also revealed in how he is a gourmand, seen in his preference of quality over quantity.

Sense of place through local circumstances is very much evoked through the character of Uncle Mek who loses his control⁹ because of the grim facts of life while on a mongoose hunt. The scarcity of food becomes even more devastating and the pressure greater of an accomplished hunt when the grandmother is sick and there is hardly any food for her to eat. Tid-joon and his father Uncle Mek with their two dogs, Koon’s

⁹ Uncle Mek does not maintain his cool heart (*chi yen*) as Klausner names the avoidance of showing emotion or any kind of confrontation (Klausner, 2002: 210) considered the ideal social behavior.

father and Koon also with their two dogs therefore go on mongoose hunting. Uncle Mek loses his self control when things don't go as hoped for and "raised his great knife, and . . . brought it down on Toob's head-whack! whack!" (p. 164) and shouted, "Let vultures eat your brain, you cursed dog! You let the mongoose get away!" (p. 165). Koon had never seen his father look so angry "You killed this poor dog for your own failure? Shame!" (p. 165). However, on the way home sense of place is evoked through compassion as Koon's father refers to Uncle Mek with sympathy "[p]oor Uncle Mek. Perhaps we can find something in the store for his family, too" (p. 167). When Koon asks Tid-joon later in the day if he is still angry with his father Tid-joon answer is just "Nah" (p. 169) because the people's collective sense of place is partly made of the feeling of frustrations. Although, a detailed and emotional description, this scene is without the use of big adjectives and the focus is more on sensing the underlying reason for Uncle's Mek outburst.

Interesting in this connection Klausner writes about how there are countless indirect techniques to release socially negative feelings. One of the Thai ways is according to Klausner called *prachot* or projected vilification wherein for example a cat or a dog may be berated and abused to send a message of criticism in a society where confrontation is avoided at all costs (Klausner, 2002: 5). In that way Uncle Mek's outburst can be seen as a component in deep-rooted sense of place.

To mention the function of the characters of Kamgong and Tid-joon the focus is on their actions not on their looks. According to Koon Kamgong is dark skinned "but . . . pretty" (p. 68) and Koon sees Tid-joon as a "swaggering young man" (p. 83). In view of sense of place Kamgong and Tid-joon are therefore primarily seen as the exemplary role models of village young people through their conduct and actions such as courtship, getting married and starting a family in their obedience and willingness to please traditions and the older people.

Kamgong and Tid-joon just married bring exquisitely forward particular village characteristic revealed in humor which can be seen as collective sense of place. For example the blacksmith Uncle Luy comments about how it is "better not let Tid-joon lead the fishing caravan after dark because the caravan would be "lost in the woods, following their oxen that [would] walk anywhere they please, while the bride and the groom-?" (p. 221). This was an insinuation which made everyone laugh "heartily" (p. 221) also Koon. Also hinting at the sexual activeness of the young Uncle Gah tells Kamgong to watch out that Tid-joon doesn't eat much of *lop bung* "[f]or a newly

married man, bung are like those firecrackers they sell in Roi Et-boom! boom!” (p. 236). The people laugh, always saying silly things like that to Pi Kamgong, Koon thought, but she didn’t seem to mind very much” (p. 236). The people’s good natured humor and teasing using matters that bring about cheerfulness, laughter and smiles is completely made of local knowledge. Seen in the reference to the lost oxen if there is no one to lead them and how sexual activeness is not only related to particular local food but with further references to particulars activities taken place within Isan.

As seen the novel calls great attention to the fact that the villager’s are not colorless peasants in a remote and isolated village situated in the northeastern corner of Thailand. They are colorful and complicated individuals occupying different positions within the community constructing unique sense of place although molded collectively as born and bred children of the Northeast.

3.1.2 Religion and local beliefs

The colorful mixture of religion and beliefs, in the small village speak of how Buddhism as a “religion of culture” (Reynolds and Hallisey 1989: 15) has shaped and has been sharpened by its surrounding culture through the ages in a “peaceful co-existence” (Suwanna Satha-Anand, 2003: 198) with ancient beliefs. Before Buddhism Brahmanism mixed with Hinduism flourish but prior to contact with Indian culture ancestor worship and animism prospered among the people.

Taking a closer look at religion and beliefs presented in the novel it is seen how sense of place is profoundly evoked. The Buddhist *wat* is not only a religious center but also a community center in the novel’s village, as in every Thai village of that time. Although a landmark in every Thai village the *wat* in the novel is nevertheless unique in its own existence in this particular place and in that way it contributes profoundly to the construction of the village sense of place through its presence and extensive function in both religious and worldly ways.

As consequence the small village takes pride in its shrine of ancestors and the magnificent *wat* with the Buddha image. Although it is revealed how the *wat* has “no bell to hang in the tower” (p. 109) and “the rickety fence that encircled the *wat* . . . was broken down in many places” (p. 109). The scene reveals particular sense of place

through the absent bell and the broken fence in the way the village poverty reflects the condition of the *wat* and its surroundings.

However, in spite of poverty sense of place through Buddhist way of life can be seen strongly present in a religious debate when Koon and Jundi are hunting frogs while at the River Chi. Religion comes into discussion between the boy's in connection with Jundi's statement that "whoever kills the most, gets the most sins"¹⁰ (p. 244) that's what Jundi has learned from the abbot of the *wat* Luang Paw Ken. Koon however responds quickly that although he hunted the frogs he did not kill them, it was the salt used in their preparation that killed the frogs. In that way it can be seen how the handling of the frogs is made in concurrence with religions morals. The scene also calls attention to the worldly influences of the abbot as a representative of religion in the construction of sense of place.

In view of sense of place it is worth noticing how the narrative's discussion about religion and beliefs is taken from the people's perspective in concurrence with the child protagonist. Particular village sense of place is evoked and revealed through for example religious morals and traditional spirit ceremonies that answer to the villager's worldly needs and worries including everything from sickness to the auspicious day to put on a new house roof.

In this regard and in view of the *wat*'s extensive influences on the worldly side of village life through the ages (Ishii, 1986: 48) it is interesting to take a closer look at the worldly activities of the village abbot, the representative of religion, seen through Koon's eyes. An example is how every village child has to be presented to Luang Paw Ken before starting school. The importance of this particular presentation for a child is evoked in how "Koon tossed on his sleeping mat, [the night before] trying not to think about Luang Paw" (p. 100). Deeply contributing to the making of collective sense of place among the village children is how Luang Paw Ken becomes the talk among the children. By most of them he is described as an old frightening monk, Jundi had told Koon many times how "the big boys had said [Luang Paw] talked in a loud and scary voice and hit the children on their bottoms, all the children.... (p. 62). Further evoking Koon's anxiety is the fact that the school has only two teachers and therefore "Luang Paw must help teach the children" (p. 63). Sense of place is evoked in how the rural boy, on the big day of his presentation, puts on a new shirt in accordance with the

¹⁰ Not to kill is one of the Buddhist five moral values „Panca Sila“ or the Five Precepts people are supposed to conduct their lives by (Mattani Mojdera Rutnin, 1976: 71).

importance of the occasion. In the *wat* with his father they confront the abbot by crawling forward touching their foreheads to the floor. This act speaks of the mighty of the abbot, how highly he is respected and in fact viewed as the symbol of the “sacred world” (Snit Smuckarn, 1998: 167) in the community. The way both Koon’s father and Koon address the abbot in a specific and respectful way is a good example of the heteroglossic¹¹ form seen in the novel.

One aspect of the abbots influence greatly revealing the villagers collective sense of place is how the abbot, in his highly respected age, almost “eighty-five years old” (p. 103-104) is believed to hold great wisdom and knowledge (Phraya Anuman Rajadhan, 2009: 35). Particular sense of place is greatly evoked in the *wat* where Luang Paw facing “a group of women with crying babies” (p. 103) is seen as a healer leaning over one of the babies “blew[ing] gently on the child’s forehead” (p. 103). Answering to the abbots eagerly sought after counseling regarding the most different things. Luang Paw himself speaks of how the people come to him “for everything” (p. 103). Collective sense of place is profoundly revealed in Luang’s Paw recitation of how

“everybody whose baby is sick, everybody who is building a new house....everyone whom wants to get married....Everyone who wants to name a child, or who has the red eye disease, they all come” (p. 104)

to Luang Paw. This scene evokes sense of place through the particular connection between the religious *wat* and the worldly village life seen in the way the people depend on the *wat* for the most different things. Luang Paw, well aware of the village poverty and hardship asks the women to listen to him “[w]hen [they] have something decent to eat, don’t bring it to the *wat*. Eat it” (p. 104). It is revealed how troubled the old monk is about the situation in the village seeing the “people hungry every day and needing many things” (p. 103) he profoundly reveals the particular traditional function of the *wat* as a „security net“ in past times.

The profound and particular connection between the religious and the worldly aspect of life can also be seen in the *wat* fair held in the village to celebrate Luang

¹¹ Heteroglossia refers to Bakhtin’s idea of a multiplicity of languages all in operation in a culture, called by Bakhtin socio-ideological languages (Bakhtin, 2004: 271-273).

Paw's new *wat* bell which had "been set up at one end of the large, open schoolroom" and (p. 455) "polished to [such] a splendid gleam" (p. 455) that Koon could see his own reflection in the bell. Sense of place is not only evoked through the change of scenery in the village but also in the way a religious celebrating and worldly entertainment merge together and reveal a profound component in the making of the village sense of place. There is a "mood of excitement" (p. 455) in the morning of the *wat* fair and "the great drum [had] signaled the time for villagers to prepare the morning food they would offer to the monks" (p. 455) speaking of the villager's religious and worldly activities.

The religious side of the *wat* fair is revealed "[w]hen Koon and Jundi walked over to the school building [and] saw the monks inside, sitting against one wall. The room was full of old people, sitting in contented and reverent silence, listening to the monks' low chanting" (p. 460).

The worldly side of the *wat* fair with music and singing will however not start until the after the monks' sermon is over (p. 461). However, eagerly enthusiastic about the worldly side of the fair "Luang Paw Ken and the rest of the monks over in the school" (p. 466) complain about too much noise so that they "can't hear the [worldly] singing" (p. 466). The Buddhist "peaceful co-existence" is not just seen regarding other beliefs but includes also worldly entertainment.

Peaceful co-existence of religion and beliefs is also revealed in tattooing which calls attention to both beliefs and religious activities seen in the visiting Gula's, "drawing tattoos on people, as the Gula have always done" (p. 198), staying in the *wat*¹². The connection between the *wat* and the tradition of tattoo drawing is revealed in how Luang Paw emphasizes the tradition of tattooing when he meets Koon and Jundi at the Gula's and is pleased to they are "learning something" (p. 206) about Isan ways. The abbot reveals collective Isan sense of place by stating how "Isan men have always done this. It is part of our life. And the Isan girls have always liked young men with tattoos-lots of tattoos!" (p. 206-207).

In that way the village *phuyaiban* challenges the men of the village by saying that "[maybe] some of you will get so brave from your tattoos¹³ that no thieves will dare to thing about our animals" (p. 198). In a strong verbal irony that evokes nevertheless

¹² According to Sparkes the *wat* is by tradition the foundation of tattooing (Sparkes, 2005: 132).

¹³ Tattooing the body was according to Phongphi and Hewison very usual among young village men. It was a sign of their adulthood, bravery and strongness (Seri Phongphi and Hewison, 1990: 53). Rajadhon speaks of how tattoos were believed to be protection on travels from people, animals and evil spirits (Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 294).

laughter among the men they state that “[t]he drought has protected their animals by sending them to Korat” (p. 198) referring to the slaughterhouse. The village barber Tid-jampa however shows his manhood and goes to the Gula’s for a tattoo but states that “one Hanuman¹⁴ would be enough” (p. 205) for him. Tid-jampa “clasped his hands above his head, pale and sweating, as Hanuman came to life on his chest” (p. 207) drawn artistically by freehand. For village boys such as Koon and Jundi the tradition of tattooing as such not only contributes greatly to the making of their sense of place, through the notions of for example braveness and protection, but also in the way it is intermingled with both the people’s religion and their beliefs.

In this way, through intermingle of religion and beliefs, the attention can also be drawn to Luang Paw’s answer to the women’s question why it has “been dry for so long. In an indirect way the abbot refers to that “some people say . . . that it is because the women of this village are doing wrong” (p. 104). This causes a stir among the women, but Luang Paw states that even though he has told them to stop “[a]ll of you grown women, with husbands and children . . . piss standing up. Such a thing is against nature, and you know it. But you do it anyway” (p. 104-105). Koon is “stupefied” (p. 105) but Koon’s father tells his son that he has forbidden his mother to “do this thing” (p. 105). This scene, in view of sense of place, not only speaks of the abbot’s powerful influence on the villager’s conduct through his religious superiority but it also reveals in a profound way how superstition is a strong component in the making of the novel’s sense of place.

In this way the attention is drawn to the spirit world¹⁵, although intermingled with religion as seen in the novel, the spirit world in its own might is seen as a profound and colorful component in the making of the novels sense of place. By taking a closer look at some aspects of the spirit world focused on in the novel, it can be seen how the world of the spirits is as real as the human world to the villagers who dedicate much of their daily activities and time to be in peace with the spirits. The reality of the spirit world is for example revealed in the way Uncle Gah “shoots his gun to bid farewell to [their] ancestor” (p. 228) spirits at the fishing caravan departure on behalf of the people, while the auspicious day of departure had been chosen by Luang Paw. Sense of place is

¹⁴ Hanuman is a reference to Thai literature. He is the monkey chief from the *Ramakian* based on *Ramayana* the famous India epic. Rama I wrote and edited the *Ramakian* (Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 57) in its most complete and famous version in 1807 (Manich Jumsai, ML 2002: 1).

¹⁵ According to Sparkes the spirit world involves ancestors, spirits of the house as well as spirits of nature (Sparkes, 2005: 173).

profoundly evoked in the way the villager's precautions are taken according to both religion and beliefs.

A discussion reflecting different beliefs can be seen between some of the villages in the fishing caravan about the origin of the rain. Koon's mother states how "the seven nagas have not taken pity on them at all" (p. 249) in view of the drought. Uncle Kem however states that "[r]ain comes down from the Himmapan Forest" (p. 249). Tid-joon agreeing with Koon's mother also has the answer to Uncle Kem's speculation about how the rain can be unsalted if it comes from the sea and explains that "[f]irst the nagas swallow it, and then they spit it out!" (p. 250). Uncle Gah who however holds the third view states that the others know nothing because "it is the *phyatan*¹⁶ that sends the rain" (p. 250). Uncle Gah believes "a boon bong fair"¹⁷ (p. 250) he has been talking about for two years, without anyone listening to him, would have made all the difference regarding the rain.

It is seen through this scene how the local beliefs contribute extensively to the village sense of place in more than one way. This scene not only reveals the richness of the people's beliefs regarding the origin of the rain but at the same time the richness speaks of how local beliefs are greatly colored by local conditions and the utter importance of the rain in this particular location.

Profoundly evoking sense of place through the close cohabitation with the spirits is how the ancestors spirits are believed to be capable of ruin families by making the "whole family starve and get sick" (p. 84) if they are angry, Koon's mother tells his son. In this regard it was a luck that it was Tid-joon who is found in Kamgong bed at the time of their courtship otherwise "the spirits of the ancestors [would have been] far more angry" (p. 84). However, the spirits have to be pampered and Koon's grandmother is seen

"ladling chicken lop into a tiny bowl. She put this bowl onto a tray with some betel leaves, prettily folded and sprinkled with water, and the three bahts from Tid-joon's family. She carried the tray from the kitchen, and called Tid-joon and Kamgong to follow her into Kamgong's bedroom, where she made them kneel down and ask forgiveness of Kamgong's

¹⁶ In Isan tradition "the supreme spirit, the creator" was called *Then*. This god, placed in heaven, was for example in charge of the rain (Seri Phongphit and Hewison, 1990: 149).

¹⁷ This is a reference to the rocket festival, a ceremony to guarantee sufficient rain but also according to Klausner to guarantee the villager's welfare (Klausner, 2002: 36).

ancestors, so that they could have a happy life together” (p. 86)

In that way particular sense of place is evoked in the way the spirits can be seen acting like the legislator making rules of behavior within the community. Referring to Sparke’s writings there is nothing free in dealing with the spirits and decorations, coins (Sparkes, 2005: 37) and forgiveness is used to make certain the spirits friendliness. Interestingly on this occasion the people also bring food to the *wat* attending to both the official religion and the ancient belief.

Even accident such as when Tid-joon is injured by a catfish spine brings about the notion if he “did something to make the spirits of the place angry” (p. 281).

Taking a closer look at how the spirit world contributes to the needs of the people can be observed through Koon’s experiences of the particular *sadow-kraw*¹⁸ ceremony held when his grandmother is sick. Although highly formal and traditional, to Koon the ceremony is like a “party” (p. 175) but there is one particular part of the ceremony that grabs Koon’s complete attention. Tid-joon comes with the *maw ya* carrying a *kratong* called “seven colors of rice, with red and white flags” (p. 178) which was placed before Koon’s grandmother. Answering to the spirit belief the *kratong* had inside

“two boiled eggs, two lumps of rice that had been dyed, one red and one yellow, flowers and joss sticks. Around the edge were flags, which had been made from small bamboo sticks with red and white tree-part banners attached to them” (p. 177).

In bringing forth the particular of this ceremony the attention is drawn to further details where Koon’s grandmother “opened her betel box and took out two one-baht bills, which she put into the [kratong]” (p. 177). The way Tid-hod, present as most of the villagers, gets worked up about the money Koon’s grandmother puts in the *kratong* further reveals components in the making of sense of place thought the *maw lam* response to Tid-hod. The *maw lam* states that *ka yoke kru* or the honorary fee “has always been two baht . . . If anybody is sick, or needs to have a bad spirit chased away, it is always the same” (p. 177-178). The money is however just used in a symbolic way

¹⁸ A term used for different kinds of ceremonies to drive out illness, through the use of offering to the spirits and the use of spells (Kepner, 1987: 169f).

and given back in the end of the ceremony. The *maw lam* also explains to Koon how the eggs and rice in the kratong are “to invite the spirits down here to have something to eat” (p. 178) then they are asked to take away “[the] grandmother’s illness” (p. 178) so she will be cured. The ceremony continues and Koon’s grandmother “kneel[s] with her palms together before her face, in a wai” (p. 178). The *maw lam* “lit the candles and the joss sticks . . . [and] began to mumble prayers” (p. 178). Koon understands parts of the ceremony like the

“calling upon spirits to come down from the heavens, down into this house, to accept these gifts. To come down into this place, and take the pain from this old woman . . . bless her with more years of life” (p. 178).

In a further detailed narrative the *maw lam* after praying “attached the other end of the long string to the *kratong*, then gave it to the grandmother and indicated that she was to hold it up high, even with her forehead” (p. 179). The grandmother following traditions was to “repeat the *maw ya* words and then the *maw ya* took the *kratong* from her and set it down” (p. 179).

The scene describing the *sadow-kraw* ceremony in such an extensive and detailed narrative calls attention to the smallest details perceived. The *kratong* not only speaks of particular location but also of the villager’s particular way of associating with and attracting the spirits. The ceremony brought to life, through the way it is explained to the child protagonist, holds in this way profound components in the making of the village sense of place as a belief that belongs to the villagers and is brought forth in need. The detailed narrative of the *sadow-kraw* ceremony also draws attention to how the spirit world is called upon at the time of sickness just as the religious world through Luang Paw. However these different ways evoke totally different aspect of the village sense of place.

However, particular sense of place is deeply evoked in the cohabitation of religion and beliefs. This is stated in the way Koon’s grandmother, after the ceremony of driving the bad spirit away causing her sickness, wishes Koon’s family “to live a long time, and be born into their next life in a place where the earth was black with rain, and where their grandfather had also been reborn, so that they might see him again” (p. 97) referring to the Buddhist cycle of birth and death.

After the *sadow-kraw* ceremony Tid-joon and Koon are asked to take the *kratong* to the shrine of the ancestors, and leave it there in accordance with cultural tradition. The frightening shrine of the village ancestors is situated “near the maw ya’s house” (p. 155). Tuan observation of how local beliefs are capable of binding people tightly to particular place whereas they don’t have any power beyond the locality (Tuan 1977: 152) is strongly evoked in the shrine of the ancestors.

Koon had been there before with his mother when “she was making an offering to the spirits of their ancestors” (p. 155). He had

“refused to go all the way up to the shrine with her. She hadn’t made him do it, but she did tell him that every year, every villager, every grownup at least, must pay respects to the ancestors, to all the grandmothers and grandfathers who had died. If people did not do that she said, they could not expect to have a good life” (p. 156).

Koon’s unease is evoked through the mystery of the place and its power but when going with Tid-joon Koon “thought that he might be braver about the place by now . . . but he wasn’t He was still afraid of that place” (p. 179) and when Tid-joon takes the eggs from the *kratong* Koon is really upset. Koon molded by his beliefs and upbringing thinks it “a big sin” (p. 180) and the cause of “ringworm[s]” (p. 180) as his mother had told him. Tid-joon has however straightforward explanations for his actions whereas

“Indra is King of the Farmers, up in heaven. We are farmers here on earth, right? Indra makes thunderstorms and rain. So if we share the eggs with him and those other spirits, maybe they’ll like us even better, and good things will happen” (p. 180).

Koon was not convinced although Tid-joon told him that “the spirits already ate as much as they wanted. You can’t tell, but they did” (p. 180). The scene not only evokes very well the presence of the unseen world, in the real world, but also how the spirits although seen as inhumanly powerful, are made human in the way the people associates with them as for example seen in the strong notion of sharing accompanying Tid-joon’s behavior towards the spirits. However, his conduct is most certainly colored by the food

shortages. The boys ate the eggs, but aware of their dubious doing they had to find water “so nobody [would] see any egg sticking to [their] teeth” (p. 180).

Another ceremony revealing sense of place through the spirit world, although of contrasting nature emphasized in the novel, is revealed through a very detailed description when Uncle Gah is asked to drive out a *pi bawb* from a man in the village by the River Chi. The people believed the man to be possessed because he had being sick with a fever for three days and two locals had already been defeated by the *pi bawb*. Uncle Gah with his education from Luang Prabang states how he can “defeat any pi bawb” (p. 369). To Koon and Jundi going with Uncle Gah to the man’s house he reveals that

“when a person is possessed by a pi bawb, usually it is because someone in that person’s village knows something about spirits, and has called the pi bawb-it is no great thing to call a pi bawb. But, getting rid of a pi bawb, hah!-there is the difficulty. If the man how called the pi baws has not studied such things deeply or paid attention to his master . . . the pi baws rushes about full of mischief and evil, and when it finds someone who is sick or weak, why, it rushes right into him . . . chews on their liver, and it gnaws on their kidney, and when it has chewed up everything inside, the person dies. And then, then the pi bawb is willing to fly back to the one who called it, and willing to go back where it came from” (p. 368-369).

The detailed and utterly grotesque description of the *pi bawb* behavior emphasized in the way the *pi bawb* is supposed to attack the weak, in his chewing and though death strongly evokes sense of place through way of thinking. This particular view of the *pi bawb* explains the villagers’ great fear of the spirits evilness that colors the village life. Uncle Gah’s knowledge and methods also profoundly evoke deep seated and traditional sense of place. Through the narrative’s detailed description a particular ritual of driving out a *pi bawb* begins where Uncle Gah

“stood quite still and with eyes half-closed, began to mutter incantations. As he muttered, he bent over, pulled up the hem of his pakomah, and tucked it into his waist . . . the villagers gasped when

they saw the magnificent tattoos that covered his things. He continued to chant in low, rumbling voice, and then he began to stamp his feet rhythmically on the hard-packed dirt, like an angry ox pawing the earth” (p. 369-370).

This scene evokes great sight and sound impressions through Uncle Gah’s breathtaking tattoos, through his physical movement compared with an “angry ox” and the sound of his chanting. However, it is the sight and sound impression coming of the possessed man

“lying on the floor propped up on one elbow-smiling! He smiled and smiled, he grinned and grimaced, and then he burst out laughing, and it was a horrible laugh, a crazy man’s laugh “(p. 370)

that made Koon astonished. Through eyesight the man’s odd facial impressions are further enriched by the strange sound impression evoked through the man’s laughter emphasized in repetition further evoking the man’s weird state. Noteworthy here, in light of a “crazy man’s laugh” (p. 370), is how tonality of a sound can be crucial regarding hearing impression (Bickham, 1993: 10) in view of the influence of the man’s laughter on Koon. However, in a struggle Uncle Gah drives the *pi bawb* out of the man who “sat up groggily, shaking his head and looking about as if he had no idea why half the village was standing in his house, cheering” (p. 371). Village sense of place is further revealed in the way the presence of a *pi bawb*, in the village, is the concern of all the villagers.

In this regard the attention is drawn to the co-habitation of religion and beliefs sense of mixed beliefs can however been seen in Koon’s experience when his grandfather was dying of malaria. “[A] man with a switch was beating his grandfather” (p. 25) but “[n]one of the people tried to stop him from beating Koon’s grandfather or from throwing the water and shouting at him” (p.25) although his grandfather stated “[t]here is no *pi bawb* eating my liver, you fool” (p. 26), since he had jungle fever.

The molding of religion and beliefs is very well revealed in how Uncle Gah answers to both when the villagers enter their home village after the fishing caravan journey. The spirits of their ancestors are saluted with appropriate respect by “fir[ing] a shot as [they] enter the village” (p. 434). However religious sense of place is revealed in

Uncle Gah's last announcement as a leader of the fishing caravan stating that the people "will all go to the wat at pen after [they] have unpacked the carts. Then [they] will be able to take [to] Luang Paw Ken and the other monks the best things to eat" (p. 435) while at the same time earning the people some merit.

It is seen how sense of place through religion and beliefs is profoundly evoked through extensive participation of the abbot, as representative of the official religion and the spirits of the ancient beliefs, in the villager's worldly matters. As well as in the way religion and beliefs intermingle in a peaceful cooperation in the village daily life.

3.1.3 Healing Remedies

Sense of place in the novel is manifested through the most different ways that bring forth countless aspects of everyday life. Amongst the many particular components contributing to the making of the novel's sense of place are the various particular healing remedies the community uses of knowledge to respond to sickness and injuries among the people and the animals.

Interestingly, the villagers healing remedies such as their use of plant leaves calls attention to how most often the very small of a plant like the individual leaf is hardly ever noticed in everyday life (Tuan, 1974: 14). Through the villager's healing remedies the focus is however actually on individual leaves. This can be seen in the way Koon's father emphasize how "the tough jik leaves make strong blood so you can stay out in the sun, and in the rain" (p. 60) although the remark is in a way brought about because the "jik leaves [at supper] were not fresh and would be hard to chew" (p. 60). However, Koon not only taking notice of his father but also longing to be strong "took one of the jik leaves, rolled it, dipped it into the lop, and chewed hard" (p. 60)

When Koon scratches his chest from climbing a tree his mother efficiently and of knowledge "stripped leaves from the stem of a special plant" (p. 79) a plant she of forethought grew for its "healing power" (p. 79) and on the spot she "mash[ed] the leaves to a pulp" (p. 79) and "patted the wet, cool, mass of leaf pulp onto Koon's chest" (p. 79). Koon's mother healing mixture made from local wisdom and expertise "felt good" (p. 79). This small scene not only calls attention to the individual leaf but also brings forth practical way of life in the small village. In addition, the sensation of touch

is also evoked in the way Koon felt the cold and the softness of the healing texture on his skin.

However, the scene when Koon's grandmother gets sick and the local *maw ya*¹⁹ is called to the old woman sickbed brings forth the particular in the ordinary village life as well as the villager's total faith in traditional medicine and its healing power. Sense of place is profoundly revealed in the way the *maw ya*, referring to the spirit belief, declares that the cause of the grandmother's illness is not because the "pi bawb are angry" (p. 146) about Kamgong and Tid-joon behavior but because of the old woman's weakness. The attention is brought to how the spirits are believed to play extensive part in sickness and health.

Further revealing the mysteries of traditional healing the *maw ya* had in a cloth bag "little twigs and sticks, bits and chunks of things" (p. 147). Koon's father explains to Koon, eager to know, that these things are "herbs, and roots, shells from the sea or from great rivers, fragments of horn from wild animals, pieces of bone from tigers and elephants" (p. 147) as he reveals the content of the bag to Koon. Sense of place through particular traditional medicine is revealed in the way the *maw ya* continues his preparation

"filled a brass bowl with water . . . picked up a piece of root and a small, flat stone. He held the stone under water, and rubbed the root against it briskly until a little mound of finely ground root floated to the surface. He took a different root, and did the same. Then he scraped any fragments of root that clung to the stone off into the water, stirred it quickly" (p. 147).

By the use of particular ways and specific formula the *maw ya* makes medicine mixture for the grandmother's at her sick bed. However the *maw ya* states with the confidence of an experienced traditional healer that "quail medicine" (p. 148) would be of more help to the grandmother.

Luang Paw also seen as a healer in the village makes homemade medicine from *matoom* fruit by picking the fruit while unripe, slicing it and letting it dry in the sun. Koon's father tells Koon how Lunang's Paw medicine just like the *jik* leaves "makes you strong-just look at Luang Paw" (p. 62). Sense of place is evoked in the importance

¹⁹ *Maw ya* is a traditional healer who uses herbal medicine and other natural remedies along with supernatural elements (Kepner, 1987: 145f).

and the desire to be strong, in the making of the particular *matoon* fruit medicine as well as in the way the drought influences the making of medicines just as all other activity in the village because “this year [being] so dry” (p. 62) the abbot let the fruit ripe so it could be used as food.

When Yee-soon gets sick with fever and headache in the fishing journey, using his learned healing methods “Uncle Gah sat down inside the cart and lifted Yee-soon onto his lap” (p. 266). Then he “began to mumble in a low voice . . . rocked back and forth with her, he blew on the crown of Yee-soon’s head-once, twice, three times” (p. 266). Sense of place is not only revealed in the way Uncle Gah uses spells on Yee-soon but also evoked in the absolute conviction of Uncle Gah’s traditional healing. As stated by Koon’s father when Yee-soon is well again that if his daughter “were a little older, [her parents] would send her to Uncle Gah to pour water” (p. 274) thanking Uncle Gah for curing her.

The particular in the village ordinary healing remedies is also brought forth through accidents that happen. An example is the “catfish spine” injury Tid-joon got fishing at the River Chi responded to by Uncle Gah. First he makes Tid-joon “suck blood from his hand where the spine had stabbed him” (p. 280). However, when Tid-joon started moaning again Uncle Gah “took Tid-joon’s hand in his, and mumbled his chanting prayers, and blew on the sore place a few times” (p. 281). Further revealing particular healing remedy is how Uncle Gah advises Kamgong to “take the brain” (p. 282) from roasted catfish and smear it on the wound. The scene not only reveals the many particular ways of curing injury but also the knowledge it entails to bring to use available resources as healing remedies such as the use of catfish brain as a balm on a wound.

It is revealed when Uncle Gaew who cured Koon of the red-eye disease moves from the village how the practice of folk medicine and the knowledge of using spell and chanting is a knowledge passed on from one generation to the next. When Koon worries who will cure him if he gets the red-eye disease again his father puts his worries to sleep by telling him how “Uncle Gaew has taught other men how to do these things” (p. 42) and how “Luang Paw Ken surely can” (p. 42) cure such a disease.

However, modern medicine, in the form of pills, are seen in the village, for example in the way the Vietnamese storekeeper challenging local tradition introduces “some pills for new mothers” (p. 196) that could perhaps bring an end to the tradition of

“lying by the fire”²⁰ (p. 196-197) after birth. “Hr-r!” (p. 197) is a sound of offend on the behalf of the traditional ways of healing uttered by Uncle Kem. He makes a fuss about how “there are pills for everything now” (p. 197) hinting at how modern medicine are more and more seen in the village.

Sense of place in the rural is also evoked through healing remedies for sick or injured animals. After an ox fight at the River Chi Uncle Gah’s Aye-Tak²¹ is badly hurt. The need to cover the wound is urgent or else “flies could make maggots in it and Aye-Tak could get real sick” (p. 323). Tid-joon’s statement about how a sick ox “can’t pull a cart . . . especially one that is loaded” reveals the seriousness of the situation and the utter importance of resourceful cure for the animal. Uncle Gah shows the sick animal his affection as he

“stroked the animal’s nose, then his ears, then his back, all the way down to his tail. My good Aye-Tak, good old Aye-Tak he repeated as he stroked him . . . while stroking his side [he] spread a thin dark ointment over the gash ” (p. 323).

This excerpt not only shows deep affection between a man and his animal but brings also attention to how happenings in the rural world, as remarked by Jones, are not just caused by people but also human-animal interaction as well as interaction between animals (Jones, 2006: 186). These interactions such as in the scene above are components in the making of the novel’s sense of place. Uncle Gah uses indigo to keep the flies away from the wound because coal tar, which is the best, is not to be found in the village by the river. Tid-joon however brings “a piece of root” (p. 325) from the village’s *phuyaiban* who states it something powerful and very old that has “been in [his] family for longer than anybody can remember” (p. 325). Interestingly, in Uncle Gah’s eyes the root is only a “miserable piece of root” (p. 325) however, fasten around Aye-Tak’s neck “the ox was not collecting flies” (p. 331). In a symbolic way it can be sensed how Uncle Gah’s judgment of the unknown makes him drop to a conclusion about healing remedies coming from elsewhere.

²⁰ To lie by the fire for eleven to twenty-one days to recover after childbirth is a tradition common in Southeast Asia (Sparkes, 2005: 93).

²¹ According to Kepner *Aye* is a familiar prefix in front of male name used when speaking to animals, children and people of lower class (Kepner, 1987: 321f).

3.1.4 Community Meetings and Festive Occasions

Community practices and events are great components in the making of the novel's sense of place. Through important aspects of village life such as community meetings and festive occasions the village community activities are brought to life. Although impoverished and lacking in all the necessities of life *sanuk*, such a central feature in the novel, is never far away whether in daily life or when there is a festive occasion evoking distinctive sense of place.

In connection with this discussion it is interesting to see how Jackson calls attention to locals such as school, family celebrations and country fairs as places that can be seen as extensions of the dwelling or the neighborhood and therefore they can be seen as fundamental examples of sense of place. In Jackson's opinion these place extensions have qualities that can be related to as a sense of place, through shared experience, companionship, familiar environment, ritual recurrence and something that people look forward to or remember. These qualities make the event more significant than the place itself. In view of this Jackson observes how special days on a traditional calendar are days when the local sense of place is most vivid (Jackson, 1974: 158-60). Reading into special days in the village calendar *songgran*, the Buddhist New Year celebrated in the peak of the dry season, combines a village celebration as well as a great family celebration.

However in the novel's declining village *Songgran* "would be a quiet holiday as it had been the year before" (p. 94). This reference to time outside the story time evokes a deeper understanding of the village situation and the endurance of the people. Koon's father states however through his *sanuk* outlook on life that "he for one is not going to have a heavy heart" (p. 94). He is going hunting to "find something good to eat for Songgran" (p. 94). It is brought forth how despite of the village situation some traditions during Songgran don't change. The children play games this Songgran and "go to the temple and pour water on the image of Buddha" (p. 94) just as in "a good year" (p. 94). Therefore according to Koon's father "[i]t was up to everyone to make a good Songgran" (p. 94) and evoke a change in the ordinary life.

Sense of place is exquisitely revealed through the particular traditional customs of *Songgran* such as in the way "the rice must be hulled before the first day of Songgran and how starting fire is forbidden so it is kept burning during the holidays" (p. 99).

Sense of place is deeply evoked through the significant tradition on the first morning of *Songgran* when the family goes according to tradition to grandmother's house dressed in their best clothes to pour water.

*“Koon’s father knelt and crawled toward [the grandmother]
With the brass pitcher, then gently sprinkled some of the
scented water on her shoulder” (p. 97).*

One after another the whole family, except the too young Boonlai, pours water in the same way as Koon's father as a way of paying respect to the elders. In return they receive wishes for good luck and prosperity.

Picturing the village on *Songgran* where people “dressed in their nicest clothes” (p. 98) strolled through the lanes. Playful “boys “raced about, shouting and bouncing huge round, *sabab*²² seeds on their knees, and knocking them back and forth to each other” (p. 98). Young couples “tossed water although there was not much water to toss this year, they didn't enjoy themselves any the less” (p. 98). Koon's enjoyment is sensed in how he thought “the day flew by” (p. 98). *Songgran* entails also going to the *wat*, “the image of the Lord Buddha” (p. 98) had been carried outside the *wat* and “stood on a special platform that had been made for it” (p. 98). Children sense of place is revealed in the way the village children crawled under the platform “letting the water splash over them” (p. 98) each time someone poured scented water over the image.

*“The scented water was redolent of turmeric and so was [Koon].
Sometimes he turned his face up and opened his mouth, and let
the water run down his throat . . . it tasted wonderful” (p. 98).*

Songgran is very much an example of Jackson's special days where the event becomes more significant than the place itself and local sense of place through festivity can be most vividly (Jackson, 1974: 159-160) sensed.

I view of sense of place the extensive attention brought to village meetings not only speak of the particular in their own existence but call attention to present village issues. Such a meeting is held in the *phuyaiban*'s house one night. Sense of place is not

²² According to Kepner this is a traditional *Songgran* toy, *sabab* is a creeper with very large seeds (Kepner, 1987: 98f).

only revealed in the absence of women at the meeting but also in the fact that this is the first time Koon and Jundi get to go to such a meeting with their fathers. According to the *phuyaiban* there has not been anything important to talk about in the village for a long time. It is however interesting to observe how the reason for calling the meeting is that the *phuyaiban* “has not seen the men together for such a long time” (p. 198) stressing the importance of how the men “need to talk to each other. If there are problems . . . [they] need to talk about them” (p. 198). In this quote the attention is drawn to the particular in ordinary village life where the *phuyaiban*’s deep concern can be sensed through his repetition.

The *phuyaiban* then informs the men about the three Gula tattoo specialists staying in the *wat* otherwise the men talk about “what they always talked about—the lack of rain and the lack of food in the village” (p. 198). Sense of irony over the situation in the village is clearly revealed in the words of one of the meeting guests “that the only families that had anything good to eat were the ones who had left” (p. 198). The seriousness of the village situation is also marked in the *phuyaiban*’s discussion about how the people moving away will influence the life of they who stay behind for example “if there are too few children” (p. 198) the school might be closed.

On the meeting’s agenda is however a delicate matter concerning one of the villagers, a newly drafted young man by the name of Kun, who has been accused of annoying a young girl. The girl’s father wants Kun to be forbidden to cross the path his daughter walks. The girl’s father had warned the boy he would go to the *phuyaiban* with this matter. Kun is not present at the meeting but his father states his son not a bad boy although he is a fool.

Interestingly the drunkard Tid-hod, who has a voice in the meeting like everyone else, knows best of all present at the meeting the details of the matter. He knows how all the young women in the village complain about Kun and how they speak of him as a lazy fool, “doing stupid things that made no sense to anyone” (p. 200). As an example

“the stupidest think Buk-kun did, was to hide under the houses of villagers who had grown daughters . . . with a dried palm leaf, waiting for the girl to squat over the pee hole in the floor” (p. 201).

The excerpt not only reveals a young’s man strange behavior but evokes sense of place through the rural boy’s particular way of scaring the village girls. His act is colored by

local conditions and habits seen in the way he can hide under the house, the girls habit of squatting over the pee hole, and how the boy uses the easy obtainable dried palm leaf to make the noise that “scares the girl half to death” (p. 201). After contemplating on the matter the *phuyaiban* asks the boy’s father

“not to allow the boy to do these things anymore. Life can be very difficult for a boy of his age . . . And . . . you cannot watch him every moment. But promise . . . that you will do whatever your can” (p. 201).

Significant sense of place is seen in the *phuyaiban*’s concern and compassion “Kun’s father promised to try his best” (p. 201) in controlling the behavior of his son.

Another village meeting draws strong attention to Massey’s statement about the influences of the outside (Massey, 1994: 154) in the form of the authorities “because it was the time of the year when men were chosen for the Army” (p. 93). Deep sense of place is uttered in the *phuyaiban*’s words that the eight men called to the district town this year “were not big or strong, and perhaps none of them would be chosen” (p. 93). Koon’s father, in his explanation to Koon, emphasizes that the *phuyaiban*

“would like men from . . . the village to be soldiers in the Army. It is a good thing. But sometimes when men from the village are chosen, they run away or they go to be soldiers, but then they run away afterwards. When that happens, it spoils the phuyaiban’s name, and the name of our village, and that makes him feel bad. Koon’s father also emphasizes that the men don’t run away because they don’t want to be soldiers. They come home, because they are worried about their old mothers and fathers. But if they are caught, then they have to go to jail, and that is very bad (p. 93-94).

The quote reveals sense of place through the way those patriotic men are confronted with difficult dilemma of priorities. Fatherly advice to Koon is that if Koon will be “chosen to be a soldier, than . . . be a soldier, and never think of anything else” (p. 94). Although a nation is far too large to be comprehended it can be observed how a nation evokes particular topophilic feelings of loyalty just as powerful as feelings towards a

village and a home (Tuan, 1974: 101-102). These observations can very well be sensed in Koon's father's discussion with his son.

After the fishing caravan and the rain in the village Koon and his father find themselves again in a meeting at the *phuyaiban*'s house. The atmosphere is totally different and on the meeting's agenda is a discussion about a *wat* fair to be held on the ground of the *wat* because Luang Paw Ken finally got the new bell for the *wat*.

While the men present at the meeting contemplate on the food for the fair the *phuyaiban* states that "food is not the main thing" (p. 449) and therefore there is no need to spend a "lot of money on fancy food to feed the guests" (p. 450). The child protagonist does not quite understand "the difference between eating pigs and chickens at the *wat* fair, and eating frogs" (p. 450) which reveals sense of place through the grown-ups' vanity and the question of confrontation. The *phuyaiban* however emphasizes that "the face of [the] village has nothing to do with pigs and chickens . . . but with the good heart of the people" (p. 450).

The meeting concludes however that if the villagers take notice of the *phuyaiban* the village will lose its face in the eyes of monks and relatives coming from other places. "[T]he village had been poor and dry for a long time, and now that there was to be an occasion of importance at the *wat*, it seemed right to make special things" (p. 452). To the *maw ya* however the important thing is "*who would they get to come and sing?*" (p. 451). The meeting decides on both a man and a woman singer's as stated by Uncle Gah the acting between the male singer grabbing and pinching the female singer evoking her anger is "the whole *thing*" (p. 451). Uncle Gah's remark calls attention to an particular aspect of music entertainment where the performance plays a significant role in creating a *sanuk* atmosphere.

Particular sense of place is revealed in the way such a remote and isolated rural area like the small village uses "a rare and special occasion" (p. 460) like the *wat* fair as an ideal way of "looking for someone to marry" (p. 458). Attention is again brought to mate selection earlier discussed in the way Koon's Auntie Ploy might find herself a son-in-law because of "Luang Paw Ken's new bell, and [the] *wat* fair" (p. 458). Traditional custom of the parents or elder's influence in mate selection (Sumalee Bumroongsok, 1995: 8) is revealed at the *wat* fair. This sense of fuss and seriousness is noticed by Koon and Jundi surprised to see how "the village was full of young men" (p. 456) and "many of the young men were playing the *kan*" (p. 456). The women many of them Koon and Jundi had never seen before wore

“flowers behind their ears”, and most of them, including the girls from their own village, wore new blouses over horse-halter²³ underwear” (p. 456-457).

Sense of place is revealed in how the girls bring attention to themselves by using both the traditional and rural ornament the flower and new fashion seen in the western bra. Koon just “wondered how anyone could keep his eyes off these miraculous pointed breasts, or talk to any girl who had them” (p. 457). The excerpt shows also very well how the smallest details appearing unworthy can be such a sight sensation as remarked by Koon.

Even more astonished is Koon when he gets home and sees “six or seven strange young men in his own house” (p. 457). Those men were visiting his cousin Boon Awn and as a custom they “were served something with meat, and something sweet to eat, and something good to drink” (p. 457). Koon’s sense of utter amazement is detailed in the episode where his Auntie Ploy not only

“filled a bowl with chicken gaeng and placed it in the center of a tray. On the left side of it, she put a platter of kanom jin; to its right, she began to arrange pieces of dog fart candy, and by the time she was finished Koon counted twenty pieces” (p. 457).

For Koon this is a sigh of extravagance contradicting everything he is used to regarding food. As a child Koon notice especially the quantity of *kanom* placed in the tray but the scene evokes an aspect of the villager’s hospitality and the way of greeting visitors. The extravagance visualized in the excerpt speaks also strongly of the importance of the occasion.

Antithesis in the *wat* fair are seen in how a room in the school building is full of old people listening to monks chanting while the *wat* grounds are filled with people, talking in loud voices, and laughing. On a real stage built by several of the village men,

²³ At this time according to Kepner the western bra became a fashion sensation and was most often worn as outerwear (Kepner, 1987: 462f).

the singers from Roi Et perform with a *kan* player. “Carnivalistic²⁴” atmosphere can be sensed, the girl’s voice was “sweet and high” (p. 365) and she was such a visual sensation with “her neck . . . pale and smooth” (p. 464) with a silk scarf and “fashionable gerl²⁵ style” (p. 464) hair. A man’s voice from the crowd calls out “girl, you are so *beautiful*” you can shit in my field anytime!” (p. 464). Koon is astonished about the man’s offer but Jundi knows quite well the meaning that “if a girl that beautiful shits in [man’s] field, think what the rice will be like” (p. 464). The reference to the rural milieu and the importance of rice is profoundly evoked through this particular component contributing to the making of the sense of place. “Koon felt as though he were not breathing at all, and didn’t need to; her song breathed for him” (p. 465).

The way sense of place can have “a powerful, even magical, impact on people” (Phillips, 1996: 452) can be sensed in the way Koon felt his “throat begin to ache” (p. 466) not just by the music but because of “the joy he felt” (p. 467) evoked through multiple stimulation of seeing smiling faces, hearing laughter and the smell and taste of delicious food in a particular festive occasion held because of the new *wat* bell.

3.1.5 Ethnic Relations

Even in the novel’s small and isolated village sense of place is partly made of ethnic diversity. Ethnic relations in the village community take place between the Chinese and the Vietnamese also living in the village and the “plain Lao people” (p. 451) as the Thai-Lao villagers refer to themselves in the novel. Not only is that a statement of their dual Thai-Lao²⁶ identity (Amara Pongsapich, 1999: 18) but their ethnic connections with the Lao people also brings the outside world strongly into play. These ethnic connections with Laos call attention to how Massey sees sense of place only constructed by “linking . . . place to places beyond (Massey, 1994: 154) emphasizing further in this connection how the global is in fact a part of the local since

²⁴ Term used by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) to study the subversion of the authorities and the official culture creating impulse of freedom in popular entertainment and festivals according to Bakhtin reflected best in the novel cited in (Quinn, 2004: 48).

²⁵ The meaning of gerl is curly hair (Kepner, 1987: 464f).

²⁶ Pongsapich states that the Lao speaking people living in Northeast Thailand has been living there from ancient times (Amara Pongsapich, 1999: 23).

a place is never a closure (Massey, 1994: 5) not even a small and profoundly remote village in Isan of the 1930s.

Interestingly, Isajiw speaks of ethnicity as “something that is being negotiated and constructed in everyday life in close connection with the needs of daily survival such as feeding, clothing and education” (Isajiw, 1993: Online). In relation with Isajiw views are Karner’s views on ethnicity as the most familiar experiences and practices in everyday life. Karner mentions for example sights, sounds and surrounding smells and tastes. Furthermore he speaks of issues such as rituals and life-cycle events, family life and the often taken-for-granted issues in daily life (Karner, 2007: 34-36). In this view and bearing in mind the cultural definition of ethnic and ethnicity earlier stated, it can be seen how the exploration of ethnicity and the novel’s sense of place, both made of the most basic issues of daily life go hand in hand.

Ethnicity is profoundly stated in the opening chapter of the novel emphasizing the significance of ethnicity within the novel and its substantial part in the construction of the novel’s sense of place. The significant family story, of the grandfather’s journey to Bangkok, told by Koon’s father as a bedtime story to Koon and his sisters is without a doubt the novel’s most reflective illustration of ethnicity besides being perhaps the most powerful construction of sense of place in the novel. In addition the grandfather’s story reveals an aspect of the dynamic oral tradition.

Although, the events of the grandfather’s story as a back story preceding events in the novel the grandfather’s story adds deeper meaning to the novel’s sense of place carrying its powerful message. Even though the messages speak of inferiority and discrimination they at the same time call attention to the particulars that contribute to the specific Isan sense of place.

The extremely difficult journey taken by Koon,s grandfather as a young man just to be refused as a student of the *Dhamma* in the Bangkok *wat* for the reason that he was an eater of “raw and dirty food, like all Isan people”²⁷ (p. 21) and because of “the tattoos” (p. 21) is very influential. The monks strongly state ethnic differences whereas they “did not know what [his] tattoos meant” (p. 21) nor did they “know about Isan people” (p. 21) calling attention the isolation of Isan. However, as a component in the

²⁷ Interesting in this connection is the historical account that some fifty years ago the ethnic Lao of Thailand’s Northeast were called by the ruling Bangkok elite “eaters of sticky rice and of pa dek (raw fish paste), khene players (bamboo pan pipes) having “tattooed legs” (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 17).

making of the novel's sense of place the grandfather's story most profoundly speaks of deeply sensed grotesque and superficial prejudice. They can be caused by ignorance and lack of interest calling attention to the novel's main theme, knowledge and the immense important of knowledge. In addition, the grandfather's story also shows in a powerful way how the outside world strongly influences the creation of the small village sense of place creating unseen but strict borders of ethnicity.

Benedict Anderson's statement that "a nation is an imagined community"²⁸ can very well be related to Isan's situation of isolation and remoteness within Thailand. Supported by not sharing a language or historical memory with the Thais these are all the more bonds that can only be imaged. However, great paradoxes are stated because according to the novel the villagers consider themselves primarily Thai.

It is seen how the grandfather's story although involving individual experience and therefore individual sense of place is a concern of the whole community in its profound reflection of ethnic differences and ethnic relations. In agreement is Johnstone argument regarding how "stories of personal experience are stories of social experience" since they are told in social interaction between individual experiences and norms shared communally (Johnstone, 1990: 129) as a part of collective sense of place.

The grandfather's experiences of the outside world influences in other relations because the grandfather is robbed by some Vietnamese of all the money he had earned, working in a rice harvest, on his way home. Strongly influenced by his father's experience Koon's father tells his son how his grandfather from that day on "hated the Vietnamese the same as a person hates *pi bawb*" (p. 22). This simile not only evokes the emotional depth of the grandfather's hatred through the spirit world but calls attention to particular sense of place through ethnic. Koon understands how his grandfather's hatred influences his father's attitude towards the Vietnamese when he states the Vietnamese as "clever, tricky people" (p. 20). However, Koon fails to see what the story has to do with the Vietnamese peddlers selling firecrackers and the Vietnamese living in the village. In fact Koon "loved the Vietnamese peddlers" (p. 20) and he even wants to become "Vietnamese, and carry baskets of things to sell on a pole over his shoulders" (p. 23). It was "the best job" (p. 23) the young rural boy had ever seen. In view of

²⁸ As stated by Anderson nation is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion . . . is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1991: 6-7).

ethnicity it is noticed how the child protagonist does not make a distinction between ethnic and sees no hindrance in becoming a Vietnamese. But at the same time as an obedient boy he hated the Vietnamese “because his Papa had told him to” (p. 20). This conflict illustrates very clearly, through the world of innocent childhood, the absence of man-made and political ethnic division (Calhoun, 1993: 229).

In this regard it is interesting to observe Koon’s mother contrasting views of the Vietnamese in her statement that if “we Isan people were more like the Vietnamese, maybe we wouldn’t be hungry so often” (p. 20) revealing her individual opinions in spite of ethnic conflicts. Koon’s mother observes, for example the unity among the Vietnamese, even beyond borders, in the way they “never sell their store” (p. 51) when they go away. “They leave it for the next Vietnamese people” (p. 51) who want to continue the business.

Further in connection with Koon’s mother observation it is interesting to notice how the Chinese and the Vietnamese, although a minor groups in the village, are sensed as substantially better off than most of the Thai-Lao villagers. This is a fact that undoubtedly makes the ethnic relations in the village somewhat awkward, calling attention to how the dominant ethnic group in a place usually occupies higher position (Stavenhagen, 1990: 36).

Strongly contradicted by Koon’s mother as “stupid, foolish talk” (p. 20) is influential and grotesque tale, full of prejudices and ignorance, told by the Thai-Lao people about the Vietnamese “stealing children to eat their liver, the same as they would eat a dog’s liver, and then throwing the children’s bodies into the river” (p. 20). This terrifying story makes the village children run away whenever they see a Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese, who are distinguished by the use of the word *Gew*, are outsiders and in a way seen as intruders in the small village. Their primary mission is doing business with the Isan people. The Chinese, even though born in the village are also distinguished and referred to with the word *Jek* in front of their name stating their Chinese-ness. Both the Vietnamese and the Chinese unconsciously loyal to their culture “refer[ing] to loyalty of a way of life including its values, ideas, system of meaning” (Parekh, 2002: 159) have, just as the Thai-Lao people did in the past, brought their own cultural luggage with them such as language, behavior, clothing, food culture, values and beliefs. There are mentioned some minor similarities between the ethnic groups living in the village such as the fact that the Vietnamese are also afraid of the *pi bawb* and their teeth are black as the teeth of Isan women from “chew[ing] betel until all their

teeth are black” (p. 50) to make them “pretty?”²⁹ (p. 50). However, most striking is the similarity seen in superficial knowledge and prejudices. By drawing attention to the Chinese and the Vietnamese people living in the village collective village sense of place partly made of dangerous ethnic discrimination is revealed. The novel’s theme emphasizing the importance of knowledge is strongly evoked.

However, the minority ethnic groups in the village reveal unknown experiences and impressions in their contribution to the making of the village sense of place. For Koon to visit the new Vietnamese store with his mother and sisters is for example such a particular and major event that he had to “put on an old shirt” (p. 52) although a bit worried about his father’s reaction to the visit.

Entering the store is for Koon like stepping into another world, a world of unknown experiences and impressions although very much a part of the village sense of place. There is an atmosphere of hustle and bustle and the store is packed with people. The Auntie to whom Koon’s mother had sold eggs was “passing out candies” (p. 53). Through the smallest things such as the smell of a chicken soup for sale, the taste of candy, and the remarkable sight of a real spoon, a tin spoon different from the seashells spoons Koon’s family uses all of Koon’s senses are aroused. Even though Koon’s mother states that the “food is the same” (p. 54) from a tin spoon the sight of a real spoon evokes such a strong reaction that Koon makes a promise to himself that when grown up “he would eat chicken soup with a real spoon” (p. 56). In reference to Tuan the store can be seen as a place where an insightful writer draws attention to and evokes intimate experiences (Tuan, 1977: 147-48) emphasized in Koon’s encounter with the tin spoon.

The observant and curious eyes of a child also capture differences in the landscape³⁰ around the Vietnamese store that makes a change in the village outlook. Whereas “the earth had been newly paved over with hard clay, all the way from the road’s edge to the door” (p. 53) and the “planting of a kitchen garden” (p. 55) for eggplants and peppers (p. 55) was on the way. These innovations, although not extensive, can be observed in agreement with how a place is constantly changing (Massey 1994: 155) even the most traditional ones.

²⁹ In past times the chewing of Areca catechu and pan leaf was frequent because of its mild stimulation (Baker, and Pasuk Phoncpaichit, 2010: 8).

³⁰ Worth mentioning here are Ryden’s observations on the sense of what looks right and therefore feels right in landscape (Ryden, 1993: 76) and seen in the Vietnamese alteration of the landscape.

Sense of place is revealed through a particular way of doing business. On a phonograph at the Vietnamese store the store keeper's son "play[s] a song for a satang" (p. 221). Koon's hearing sensation is aroused through modern technology as "he closed his eyes for a few moments he felt as if he were all alone and the song was just for him" (p. 223). Bearing in mind Koon's childhood sensitivity the music evokes his strong emotional impression while contributing to the making of his individual sense of place.

Relationships with the "other" and taboos are revealed through conversation between the Vietnamese woman and some of the villagers where the Vietnamese woman announces that she wants her son-in-law to be a Lao³¹ man but a rich one, richer than the Chinese Jek Oo. Her statement causes both sense of bitterness and resentment among the villagers since the men are sure of that she would just take the money to Vietnam. Further Uncle Kem states in irony that in his whole life he "never saw a Lao man's arms around the daughter of a Vietnamese" (p. 195) indicating how highly inappropriate and out of place behavior it would be in the conservative village. Interestingly in this regard there are taboos going in all directions because when the Chinese Jek Oo second son is suggested to the Vietnamese woman it is obviously not to her liking.

It is interesting besides boys doing boy's pranks such as peeping on girls how Jundi and Koon happen to go in a symbolic way on an expedition watching the behavior of the Chinese and the Vietnamese as some strange creature. Peering through holes the boys observe the Chinese „strange“ habits in the way they just "leave all the dirty dishes" (p. 134) after eating their supper. They also observe Wandam, the Vietnamese daughter, counting things in a "strange language" (p. 135) and her parents who are

"sitting on their heels in the center of the room eating their supper. Each held a bowl of rice in one hand, chopsticks in the other, and shoveled the food into their mouths rapidly. On the low, square wooden table before them was a plate of huge, whole dried fish that they shared" (p. 135).

³¹ Interesting here is to notice how the Vietnamese woman refers to the Isan men as Lao men.

This prying into “other”³² people’s business or secret affairs reveals not only ethnic ways of the Chinese and the Vietnamese within the village, although the boy’s are colored by their own cultural glasses, but also bottomless curiosity of growing children about the unknown. However, in spite of all ethnic taboos, Wandam’s beauty stirs both the boys emotionally.

The village sense of place, also made up of conflicts, resentment and competition between the Chinese and the Vietnamese, answers perfectly to Massey’s statement how a place is full of “internal conflicts” with no single identity (Massey 1994: 155).³³ In that way the Chinese state their difference from the Vietnamese who “send the money to Vietnam” (p. 53) and how “that damned ugly Vietnamese . . . will go and die in Vietnam like they all do, in her own graveyard” (p. 444-446) but the Chinese born in the village will also die in the village.

At odds the Chinese and the Vietnamese women almost end in a fight, about desirable fish-egg *mum* Koon’s mother brings home from the fishing caravan trip. However, this ethnic dispute, that takes place in Koon’s yard, ends with Koon’s father statement that “nobody is getting any fish-egg mum” (p. 447).

On festive occasions all ethnic barriers are however put down and the better of Chinese and Vietnamese are treated as part of the village community according to their contribution to the festivities. Although the friendly Vietnamese correspond to the needs of the people at all hours, their generous contribution on festive occasions is for example nothing less than a calf at the wedding of Pi Kamgong and Tid-joon.

In this way village unity regardless of ethnicity can be sensed among all the villages when the twins are born. The Vietnamese give four bottles to the celebration and surprisingly to the villagers the Chinaman was glad to give four bottles “because [their] village never had twins before and it is good luck to [them] all” (p. 474). The words of the Chinese not only speak of particular sense of place molded in this particular village but shared human joy over new life regardless of ethnicity, location and time.

³² Interestingly in this connection is Edward Said’s argument that the discourse, particular on the oriental, has been a part of Europeans power relations that constitute the presence of the other with the aim of confirming identification and more often than not identification of superiority rather than evidentiary of what the oriental stands for (Thongchai Winichakul, 1994: 7).

³³ In this connection Massey also interestingly refers to how many places are defined by struggle and disagreement (Massey, 1994: 155).

It is established how ethnicity, viewed as the most familiar experiences and practices of life, is a great contribution to the village particular sense of place that is not only made in the village but also in connection with the outside world. That makes the small village, although isolated and remote, a place linked to places beyond (Massey, 1994: 156). It has been stated that one of the intentions of ethnic literature is to tell the other side of the official history and in view of that *A Child of the Northeast* can be seen as novel with an ethnic purpose while revealing particular sense of place through ethnicity.

3.1.6 The Village Sky

Particular component in the making of the novel's sense of place is revealed in how community life is greatly influenced by the rural sky such an influential natural element in the life of the villagers. Koon, although just a child, adopts the custom of watching and listening to the sky, in his longing for rain answering to how "almost all the years of Koon's life had been dry years" (p. 64) in the village.

In a village where life revolves around planting and harvesting rice sense of place is repeatedly evoked in how the villagers of all ages are seen watching the sky and even chasing clouds in the great hope of rain in a place that has be "dry for three years" (p. 43).

Sense of place is revealed in the way Koon looks up to the sky in order to mark the time of the day by the sun just like other villagers. However most of the time Koon watches the sky for rain that never comes and therefore most often Koon is "mad at the sky" (p. 65) which "bring[s] about thunder and lightning that just fade away and disappear" (p. 65).

According to Tuan almost universally people distinguish two types of space, the land and the sky (Tuan, 1977: 119) as is so profoundly seen in *A Child of the Northeast*. Calling attention to the particular, the earth around the village was "nothing but pale, hard stubble, and the earth between the dikes was dusty gray, with streaks of reddish sand" (p. 70).

The particular in the ordinary life is evoked one night when Koon tries to make use of “Tid-hod the drunk’s lone procession³⁴ for rain” (p. 64), the only one he knew, and sang “Oh, rainwater . . . stand long in our rice fields-with rainwater let my pants be soaked” (p. 64) a song that “had become part of “ (p. 54) Koon. However, as always in his village the spirits have to be associated with utter carefulness and Koon’s mother tells her son not to sing the song because if he acts happy before anything happens “the spirits above . . . might not like it” (p. 64) and “get mad” (p. 64). Sense of place is not only revealed in the child’s concern and great wish for rain but in the way the child has to learn to take notice of the spirit world in his daily life.

Another scene from the novel draws a detailed picture of Koon and his parents “straining their eyes to see the first drops fall in the darkness. The three of them sat together in the doorway for a long time, perfectly still” (p. 65) however “[g]radually, the thunder faded away. The streaks of lightning grew faint, and then, disappeared” (p. 65) evoking profound sense of disappointment and hopelessness.

However, Koon and his friend Jundi become friends again after a fighting period because of “a big black cloud [that] floated across the whole sky” (p. 67) that they both hoped would bring the rain. However the hope ended in utter disappointment when the cloud disappeared teaching the boys in a ruthless way about the impermanence³⁵ of all things

“[e]specially of clouds, tremendous dark clouds that march up the sky to smother the sun, only to abandon it. There was no cool wind now, not so much as tremble in the air. As the great, black cloud floated off it pulled them along after it. It pulled Koon and Jundi down the lanes between the houses and out of the village, and away into the fields that bordered it” (p. 67).

The scene of the unpredictable sky strongly evokes the feeling of impermanence in the way the boys ran after the cloud that in a figurative way seems to aim at overwhelming

³⁴ Kepner speaks of rain making procession using a yowling and screeching cat along with musical instruments and whatever other noisemakers available to attract the attention of celestial beings (Kepner, 1987: 25). In this connection Sparkes writes about how a cat that hates becoming wet, is therefore seen as a symbol of dryness, and will bring rain (Sparkes, 2005: 181-82) clarifying the use of the cat.

³⁵ Impermanence or *anicca* referece to the fact that reality is never static but dynamic which is the very core of the Buddha's teaching. Impermanence is also the basis for the other two characteristics of existence, suffering and no-self (Buddhist Publication Society, 2010: Online).

the sun but in the end becomes nothing. In relation with Tuan's writings of how mood can be affected by place (Tuan 1977: 129) it can be seen how Jundi experiences the sky through his mood. Jundi's swelling frustration is perfectly sensed through his comment about "that dirty shit of a sky" (p. 67) in a dramatization that also profoundly reflects emotional outburst of a child's character disappointment. But the two boys unite in their great disappointment and profound wish for rain that had awoken the possibility of fathers being "able to plough the fields!" (p. 66) but as the "great, black cloud floated off" (p. 67) Jundi stuck out his hand, and Koon grasped it" (p. 67).

Particular sense of place is evoked through a child's sincere involvement and concern in the way Koon

"although . . . [h is] mother had told him that the night thunder they often heard, and the heat lightning that streaked through the sky, were only signs of more drought, Koon liked to hear them, because secretly he hoped that she might be wrong, and that some night the teasing thunder and lightning might be followed by the precious rain for which they all longed" (p. 92).

Through Koon's unspoken hope that the metaphorically "teasing" thunder might in spite of all carry rain deeply evokes the particular and vital role of the sky in the life of a village child. However "Songgran passed and the sixth month began, but in the sky there was nothing but emptiness from morning until night" (p. 100). These lines reveal a fact but also the child's frustration of what seems to be a purposeless wait although hope is never dismissed.

However, because of the sky Koon not only gets his friend back but is also confronted with a profound philosophy of life. When Koon is presented to Luang Paw before starting school he is astonished and unprepared for Luang's Paw question about what he hates the most. Koon looks out the window in a search for an answer and "all he could see was the sky, the pure, indigo blue sky, with the red-gold sun burning in its midst" (p. 106) and he answered "I hate the sky sir . . . The sky. It never gives us any rain. It only gives dryness" (p. 106).

Luang Paw reactions are severe and for his answer Koon had to "bed over and hug [himself]" (p. 106).

"[t]he old monk's switch flashed through the air, just once, and Koon's

bottom smarted. Then it was over. Tears sprang from his eyes, but he did not cry out “(p. 106).

Then Luang Paw said:

“[b]oy Koon . . . remember this forever: From this day forward, you must never, ever say that you hate the sky, or blame the sky for anything. Because the sky never punished anybody” (p. 107)

Koon had to repeat this after the monk, who emphasized his words by repeating further stating “[r]emember, young Koon . . . that the sky never hurt anybody. Only people can really hurt people” (p. 107). While individual sense of place obtained through attachment over time is evoked through the old monk’s philosophy of life his close connection with nature and deep seated knowledge of human nature in a particular place also evokes in a symbolic way universal sense of place.

Further revealing sense of place through the village sky’s unpredictability is the scene at the end of the novel when the twins are born

“the sky over the northern settlement of the village was illuminated by a shower of lights that rained down over the houses and trees. “Woy!” Koon shouted, pointing at the sky with one hand and clutching his father’s arm with the other” (p. 468-469).

Koon’s astonishment is sensed through his exclamation while his scare is revealed through touch in the way Koon clings to his father’s arm. Koon knew about the traditional explanation of a spirit that flies down from the sky, with a big light on its tail, and eats people. Koon’s father however refers to modern science, a knowledge which people in past times had no idea about, when he states that “those lights come from a big stone that floats in the sky. If the stone falls down the air rushing by it makes it so hot that it burns, and sparks fly” (p. 469).

In a symbolic way the unpredictable sky above Koon’s village contributes also profoundly to the novel’s closure because Koon, through the knowledge he had gained,

“knew then that there would be other years when the sun would blaze in a cloudless sky, and when the rain would not fall” (p. 476). He knew too

that he would meet those years, and he would survive . . . descended from a thousand ancestors who had never blamed the sky” (p. 477).

Sense of place is deeply evoked in the way the influential village sky has contributed to Koon’s understanding of what it entails to be from Isan.

3.2 The Journey

The remarkable journey of the fishing caravan is viewed here and focused on as an interesting aspect of community life contributing greatly to the making of the novel’s sense of place through its extensive and influential role in the novel. The journey speaks of issues such as collective sense of place, particular local knowledge and primarily the villager profound resourcefulness in surviving in times of drought. In view of the novel’s construction the journey is not only seen as a great contribution to the novel’s plot but also as the novel’s detour or suspense with the uncertainty if the journey’s outcome will answer to the people’s expectations of finding food.

The sub-chapter on the journey is divided into three, departure, by the river and on the way home emphasizing the community aspect of the journey in view of sense of place since the fishing caravan involves a group of people from the village traveling together.

The pantry of Koon’s family almost empty with only “about two-hundred mun” (p. 183) or twelve kilograms of rice left and “[a]s for pla ra, they had about enough to fill ten coconut shells, but all of it was bottom –old . . . from the bottoms of jars” (p. 183) mirrors other villages pantries. When there is not “even pla ra to eat” (p. 183) the rivers carry the only hope of survival.

The journey in its realistic geographical mapping taken on ox-cart³⁶ from Ubon to the River Chi³⁷ in Roi Et province, undertaken in the name of food, carries countless symbolic meanings. Such as a journey to utopian³⁸ place “where the earth is

³⁶ According to Phongphit and Hewison forest covered sixty percent of the Isan region in 1937. It can be sensed how difficult communication between villages must have been usually made by cart, horses or on foot. In view of this, as sensed in the novel migration was not a decision taken lightly (Seri Phongphit, and Hewison, 1990: 5).

black with rain, and the fishes strike the water like crocodiles' tails," (p. 27) as stated by Koon's mother. In view of the novels semi-autobiographical nature the journey can also be viewed as the writer's symbolic journey down memory line.

Although the fishing caravan is a very special event in the life of the child protagonist fishing caravans were commonplace occurrences in times of drought as well as way of doing business in those times (Seri Phongphit, and Hewison, 1990: 7; Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 332).

With reference to *bildungsroman* the journey can be viewed as an extensive part of Koon's growing up seen in how Koon "knew that he would be different" (p. 225) coming home again. In the novel the journey is a particular happening in the ordinary life and as such the journey entails the building of Koon's individual sense of place in connection with the outside world while contributing to deepening his sense of home.

3.2.1 Departure

Strong sense of departure is revealed from the beginning of the novel because

"when the people in the village had used up all of their fish, some of them would go in a caravan of oxcarts to a place where the rain still fell, and fish still swam in the ponds and streams" (p. 18)

In the eyes of a child it is a "great event, for it meant a journey of twenty days, and exciting things" (p. 18). Many had already gone and in a landlocked area most of them had gone to the River Chi, in Roi Et province for freshwater fish and river fish. Koon's parents decide to go with one of the fishing caravans because "carts were returning with so many crocks of *pla daek* and *pla som* that there was barely room for the people" (p. 23) a sight making the difficult journey promising.

However, there are even more serious departures taking place in the village because some villagers don't just take a short trip to "utopia" but are migrating from the

³⁷ The River Chi and River Mun are the major rivers that flow through central Isan (Boonchai 2002: 8).

³⁸ Thomas More created the word utopia from playing with Greek words, utopia means good place that is no place (Walter, 1988: 24-25). Utopia has been used as a term in literature for works that describe ideal community or society (Quinn, 2004: 350). The village by the river can very well be viewed in such a way.

village as earlier mentioned. Koon could easily tell the difference between departure of a fishing caravan and the ones who were going away for good because “[p]eople didn’t not take water buffaloes on a fishing trip” (p. 40) and children losing their home “looked cross and gloomy” (p. 40). He as a child also observed how “children going on a fishing caravan were full of anticipation, expecting an adventure” (p. 40) going to an utopian

“place where the earth is black with rain, and fishes strike the water like crocodiles’ tails,” (p. 27) . . . meaning any place where people can plant rice every year . . . Where the fishes in the water are big, so that when they jump, it makes you think of crocodiles crashing their big tails on the water” (p. 27).

There is a noteworthy simile made within the world of animals in this scene where the size of the fishes is sensed by comparing the fishes with crocodiles.

Sense of place is revealed in the preparation for the journey for example the inspection and the mending of nets, even the smallest rip although some of the nets had “scarcely been used” (p. 210), a fact that speaks of the situation in the village. Koon’s father has to pay the blacksmith a visit to sharpening his bamboo knife and his spade and Koon’s parents also need to borrow the cart from Koon’s grandmother and the oxen Dam and Dahng from Auntie Ploy to be able to undertake the journey.

In the text’s thorough and vivid description sense of place is profoundly evoked through particulars that can be visualized when the fishing caravan moves out of the village on the “auspicious day chosen by Luang Paw Ken” (p. 221). There are thirteen people with “four carts and two oxen hitched to each” (p. 225) totally eight oxen. Although on a journey there is a sense of community order and

- First in the row is the leader of the group Uncle Geh who “used to be a soldier” (p. 210) accompanying him are his wife and his son Buk-Gad.
- Second in the row are Uncle Kem, Auntie Bua-si his wife and their son Buk-Jundi.
- Third in the row are the newly married Tid-joon, his wife Kamgong and a dog.

- Fourth and last in the row is Koon’s father, his mother, his two younger sisters Yee-soon and Boonlai, the two dogs Mawin and Dang and a cat.

The fishing caravan is expected back home after twenty days which is also according to Luang Paw Kem “the auspicious day to turn [the] carts for home” (p. 229).

The sensation of the departure can be observed in the detailed and vivid sight and sound impression describing Uncle Gah’s oxen with bells around their necks symbolically sounding “delightful” (p. 226) in accordance with the atmosphere. The other oxen had “hollow bamboo tubes strung to their neck, and made a pleasant rattling music of their own” (p. 226). Adding profoundly to the sound sensation and revealing *sanuk* feeling of departure Koon’s father plays his *kan*. The people begin to clap their hands in the rhythm of the music adding to the thrill of the moment. In the wake of the music Uncle Gah’s gun resounds through the village, announcing their departure and bidding farewell to people and spirits. Sense of place in the departure is exquisitely evoked through the sense of hearing, in the sound from the oxen particular ornaments, the music coming from the *kan* instrument and the way the people bid farewell to the spirits of home. The text concurrently evokes feeling of how the people are accompanied by their deep *sanuk* enjoyment of life, courage and a great sense of hope.

For Koon the sensation of the “glorious day” (p. 230) of departure is revealed through tears of joy and excitement. However, in the mist of all the childhood excitement and thrill of going away the text emphasizes how Koon senses that he will not be the same after “a journey so long, so momentous that he could not even imagine the end of it” (p. 225). Although he is just going to another province the significance of the journey is greatly sensed because for him the journey is such a particular happening in ordinary life.

3.2.2 By the River

“Each cart was two-wheeled, covered with a great rounded top. It had room for one family, its supplies, and the crocks for the pla daek, pla som and other things they would make at the river’s edge, before turning the carts for home” (p. 23).

The scene evokes significant components in making the novel's sense of place during the journey through the conditions of the people's living space during the twenty days of the journey. Koon's further inspection gives a sense of "an awfully crowded" (p. 232) cart. Koon observes how "hanging jars and baskets filled the space in back to the very top. Knives, and tools and fishnets hung from pegs to the left and right" (p. 232) all objects regarded as particular components in making sense of place. In addition the space was also a sleeping area for Koon's mother and her three children. Koon's father slept "beneath the cart, with the dogs, to watch for thieves" (p. 232).

Profoundly evoking sense of place is how Koon by himself

"longed for the sight of lightning in the sky, and for the sound of thunder-not the kind that had teased them, back in the village, but the kind of lightning and thunder that brought a real storm. And yet, the memory of Luang Paw Ken's switch had discouraged Koon from talk of weather, and more especially from talk of its failures"
(p. 237).

Although used to a teasing sound of a thunder Koon becomes hopeful right on the first night of the journey that the rain will come. He remarks the coming of the rain in particular way through the dog's behavior "chas[ing] each other about the cart" (p. 238) because Koon knew that dogs sensed such things as rain "before people did" (p. 238). However this time his mother also senses the rain because "there is not a star in the sky" (p. 238). Thunder and lightning flashed and "Jundi call[s] out, oh, ho! Oh, ho! It's rain for sure this time!" (p. 238) and at the same moment "Koon felt a fine sprinkling of rain on his bare shoulders" (p. 239), the scene evokes what Tuan calls direct experience (Tuan, 1974: 8) through the pleasurable and intimate feeling of wet touch on bare skin. It is however Jundi's strong emotional reaction to the rain, evoked through his outburst and emphasized in his repeated exclamation, which draws everyone's attention to the rain. The boy's multiple sensational experiences through sight, sound, touch and even taste caused by the falling rain is profoundly colored by the simple fact that "[a]lmost all the years of Koon's [and Jundi's] life had been dry years (p. 64).

However, it is sensed through the narrative how the patience of both adults and children is put to a test in the “heat, dust, noise and the boredom” (p. 256) of the journey as the days go by. Not only the tiredness but also the profound endurance of the people is evoked by calling attention to animal behavior seen in the change in the movement of the animals. Koon sees how the oxen are too tired to make music by swinging and shaking their heads and the dogs Dam and Dahng with “their heads lowered wearily” (p. 248) had stopped “flick[ing] their tails energetically to keep away the flies . . . Koon’s father had to do it for them with his switch” (p. 248). As for the humans Yee-soon is already “sick of sitting in [the] cart” (p. 249) and just wishes for home. Jundi evokes subjective sense of place through hearing impression as he utters how he is going “deaf listening to those stupid carts going *„creak-creak“* all day” (p. 254). Jundi’s growing sensitivity to the sound of the carts answers to Tuan’s writings of the way people are usually more touch by what they hear than what they see (Tuan, 1974: 8).

The first sense of the river is a “sound of water flowing” (p. 256) and the sight is a poetic sensation where

“the sun shone down on the slowly flowing River Chi, and sparkled on its gentle, silver waves. A boy . . . was paddling a small boat from the opposite shore, and as the boys watched him, he began to sing in a high, clear voice” (p. 258).

Koon’s hearing sensation that can be seen deepen and enriching his visual impression is explained physically in the way his “chest felt full, and his throat hurt” (p. 258). Sense of place is deeply revealed in how Koon and Jundi are “struck breathless” (p. 257) by the sight of a river with either a beginning or an end and by the hearing sensation of “listening to the music of the River Chi” (p. 257) whereas the metaphor emphasizes the hearing sensation of the flowing water.

The evoking of such a profound moment in the young boy’s life’s is further emphasized in the text by the way of simple but significant touch when Jundi seizes Koon’s hand to share the great moment of “[f]inally, for the first time . . . seeing a real river” (p. 258) and listening to a river. Recalling Koon’s anticipations about the journey he sensed how the “world was changing before his eyes” (p. 257) through the wonders of nature. However the boys are awoken from the magical spell of the river whereas there is “a lot of work to do before dark” (p. 258) in the camp.

The emphasis on the *phuyaiban* in the village Nam Sai by the River Chi and his conduct can be seen as an interesting component in constructing a collective or regional sense of place revealing shared Isan characteristic in the way the two villages reflect each other. Collective sense of place can be seen in ways of relations and presentations for example how Uncle Gah and Koon's father go to "see the *phuyaiban*" (p. 259) when the fishing caravan arrives at the river. Collective sense of place is also seen in the way the *phuyaiban*'s primary concern is the reputation of his village just as Uncle Gah in the role of a leader is very concerned about the right conduct of his people.

Collective sense of place is revealed in various ways, through friendly gestures and hospitality such as how the fishing caravan is advised to go just a bit further along the river, where they "will have much better luck" (p. 262) and in the assurance of how "nobody needs to be afraid of thieves or ruffians . . . because there aren't any" (p. 262).

Sense of ease is established through similarities such as hearing and smelling sensations that are just like the sounds and smells of home. Sounds such as "the *boke-boke-boke*" sound of stone pestles and the "*sup-sup-sup*" [sound] of chopping blocks" (p. 261) evoke Koon's collective sense of place through familiarities. In that way the aroma of the specific "warm, sharp scent" (p. 261) of *lop* being made filled Koon's mouth of saliva evoking senses of home although not at home. Through sight collective sense of place is for example seen in how Koon observes the house of the *phuyaiban* "not so different from that of the *phuyaiban* in Koon's own village" (p. 261). However, Koon, as a rural boy, sensed through hearing impression that this *phuyaiban* family "owned more animals, because he heard a great jingling and clacking of bells and bamboo from beneath the house" (p. 261) when visiting the *phuyaiban*. These similarities call attention to Massey's writings how communities can exist without being in the same place. Massey refers for example to ethnic or political communities as well as people's relations (Massey, 1994: 153) bringing forth collective sense of place.

Jundi characterizes the people of Roi Et as people with "good hearts" (p. 360) which corresponds very well to the "good hearts" of their own village earlier discussed.

A milestone in Koon's growing, and a profound example of collective sense of place through the use of the senses in bringing forth sense of place, is how Koon finds himself for the first time in the situation of asking for rice, a sight he had often seen in his own village when

"at dusk, . . . people from [some] caravan would walk through

the village asking for cooked rice at each household; his mother always gave rice to these people” (p. 263).

Koon therefore knew the procedure of asking for rice but he had never experienced it on his “own skin”. In this connection it is sensed how sight, although the dominant sense for most people does not entail the deep emotional feelings Koon senses in the difference of belonging to those “who were asking” (p. 254). Tuan writings of how deep emotional feeling is not gained by an uninvolved observer (Tuan, 1974: 8-10) can very well be applied here. However, deep-rooted and collective sense of place can be seen revealed in the words of Koon’s father that it is “nothing to be ashamed of . . . it is the custom of [their] people, whenever [they] travel to another village” (p. 264). By calling “[f]athers and mothers! Brothers and Sisters! We are travelers, and ask you for rice for our supper.” (p. 264) Koon and his father . . . collected rice in ten house [*sic*]” (p. 264).

Significant and collective sense of place is revealed in the strong presence of the issue of mate selection. Jundi, Koon and the girls they meet by the river consciously contemplate on the possibilities of future wives and husbands in accordance with particular ways of life. However, Yee-soon does not see the benefit of Koon having a wife when he grows up because “she would just eat [their] food” (p. 358) are words spoken of the childhood honesty often brought forth in the novel.

Collective sense of place is also brought forth in the invitation the fishing caravan gets to a ceremony and a celebration in the village to honor the bones³⁹ of the *phuyaiban*’s father. However, going to the bone ceremony is almost off along with the good relationship established between the people, because of the serious ox fight incident between one of Uncle Gah’s oxen and one of the oxen from the village.

In view of the construction of the sense of place the imprecise references to the particular funeral rite, the bone ceremony, can be seen as one example of the narrative’s faithfulness to the child protagonist age although further details would make a strong component in revealing particularities in collective sense of place.

Uncle Gah decides that “[a]ll the men of their camp should go, and also the boys” (p. 326) to the bone ceremony. In showing honor and respect to the bones “a boxing ring has been set up” (p. 326) in the village. Without hesitation or asking his son

³⁹ Funeral rites are not only held following death but with various following ceremonies over a period of months or even years (Kepner, 1987: 319f).

Uncle Gah offers his boy up for a fight with the boy involved in the ox fighting. The fight, that ends in “a tie” (p. 320) can in a symbolic way be seen as one of the indirect ways Klausner speaks of to “release socially negative feelings” (Klausner, 2002: 5) and frustration because of the injured animals. The *sanuk* feeling however takes over when the two fighting boys embraced and when even the boy’s fathers “hugged each other’s necks, the people went wild” (p. 330). However, “the biggest cheer of all was for the *phuyaiban*” (p. 330), who settled things. Sensing however the strong influence of the boxing on Koon and Jundi the boys went with Uncle Gad and “shadow boxed . . . until it was too dark” (p. 332).

Sense of place is revealed through arrangement within the fishing caravan whereas the first night and the first day of the fishing it is agreed that all the fishing is divided into four parts but after that “each family will catch its own fish” (p. 282). Childhood sense of place is revealed in how eager Koon is to help his parents with the fishing so they can sell fish and buy other things that they need but Koon is also thinking about specialties such as “shoes and a Boy Scout belt” (p. 282) revealing his particular longings.

Sense of place through arrangement is also strongly evoked when the fishing caravan is invited to join the villagers in a fishing trip to a lagoon not far away. In detailed narrative it is stated how a village meeting had decided to invite the fishing caravan to the villagers “special place” (p. 298) for fishing. The villagers by the River Chi felt that the “name of their village would be spoiled” (p. 298) unless the carts were going home “heavy with fish” (p. 298). Answering to the invitation in a proper way Uncle Gah just as concerned about his village reputation “decides that just the men go” (p. 299) and with “only one net for each man” (p. 301) because they would spoil the name of their village if they would just “grab all [they] can” (p. 299).

The *phuyaiban* states the fishing rules of his village as “whoever gets a lot of fish . . . that is his good luck; whoever doesn’t, no one can help.” (p. 301). Although everything revolves around proper conduct, right arrangement and hard work there is *sanuk* sensed in the air and the villagers ask the visitors for songs but with good storytellers as Koon’s father the fishing caravan offers “stories of Vientiane and Luang Prabang” (p. 301) the people’s collective past. However Uncle Gah decided just to stay half a day at the villagers „special place“ so they don’t join the villagers in their *sanuk*. However, finally through handshake and smiles there is a compromise and an “understanding of goodwill” (p. 329) between the *phuyaiban* and Uncle Gah. On the behalf of

the fishing caravan Uncle Gah agrees to “go back, to the special place and “get all the fish they can carry home” (p. 319). In a good natured humor Uncle Gah states that the fishing caravan is not going to “leave so much as a minnow” (p. 319) in the lagoon.

It is noteworthy in view of sense of place that within the close fishing caravan community there is hardly a disagreement, besides how Uncle Gah and Tid-joon always disagree. When Tid-joon however complains about how he gets all the worst jobs that nobody else wants to do he is silenced at once by Uncle Gah who explains that these jobs require the strongest man and Tid-joon being his “first soldier” is bound to get “the hardest work” (p. 274-275). Koon notices that the older women always tell Pi Kamgong what to do but she just obeys. The biggest disagreement of the journey is between the newlyweds, Tid-joon and Kamgong, when the young wife catches her husband watching girls with Jundi and Koon. They fight until Uncle Gah and Uncle Kem step in and advice the young couple. Sense of place in therefore profoundly evoked in the people’s solidarity, cooperation, consideration as well as closeness.

Most of the time, in spite of all the hard work, there is therefore contentment and joy in the air and in fact Koon had “never seen his father’s face look so happy” (p. 275). There are evenings of storytelling and music. Koon’s father plays his *kan* making “beautiful and pure” (p. 317) sound. With words the text draws a picture of such an evening where Koon’s father is “sitting cross-legged with the *kan* raised to his mouth and Uncle Kem and Tid-joon [are] softly clapping their hands in time to the music” (p. 317). On the spur of the moment Uncle Gah began to sing a song of “times long gone, but not forgotten of ancient places and ancient battles” (p. 316-17) bringing forth particular history. For Koon

“The music of the kan went straight to his heart as it never had done before, there was magic in the kan, that night. The music, the singing, and the clapping went on and on, until at last the tip of the sun appeared at the horizon, blurred and pale, and it was another day” (p. 318).

This excerpt truly evokes the nourishing influences of the music answering to Tuan’s writings of how music is for most people a stronger emotional experience than sight (Tuan, 1974: 8). In spite of the people’s tiredness the magic hearing sensation moves

the people and makes them forget themselves in the *sanuk* feeling evoked by the music lasting until the rising of a new day.

Rural sense of place is profoundly evoked through the animals when the people moves the caravan “to the edge of the lagoon so that they might fish there through the last night” (p. 355) as Koon observes the behavior of the animals. The oxen “stamped their feet and snuffled happily” (p. 355) seeing the yokes which make Koon sure that the oxen „happy snuffle“ is because they think they are

“going home . . . [p]erhaps just like people, they were eager to get back to their own village, to their own friends and relatives. After all, oxen had mother and fathers and even cousins, like everybody else” (p. 356).

In this delightful comparison and closeness with the world of animals Koon senses the animals just like people and therefore the animals must be just as eager to get home as the people. The same excitement is sensed in the dog’s behavior that “leaped into the air, barking joyously, they are glad too, [Koon] thought; glad to be going home” (p. 356). The detailed simile profoundly reveals Koon’s own longings.

In a symbolic way Koon’s father spent the last morning at the river

“gathering and cutting wood and building . . . extra platform on the back of their cart. Without it, they would not be able to carry all . . . baskets of roasted, smoked, and sun-dried fish; the brimming crocks and jars of pla ra, pla daek, and som pla noi; and the fat bundles of roasted frogs on bamboo spits” (p. 377).

The quote of the inventory not only speaks of the particular gifts of nature but also evokes sense of place through the tremendous work accomplished by the people through particular preservation ways. In this view it is no wonder that Uncle Gah, as the leader of the group, reminds the people to have all the “crocks of pla daek and som pla noi fastened to the cart frame with twine” (p. 378) in accordance with their precious content. In a down to earth manner and as a part of her preparation for departure it is revealed how Koon’s mother

“picked up two nets that had dried in the sun and deftly twisted each

into a great knot. She wrapped each net [in] a piece of old cloth, and tied the ends together securely. To keep out insects, she said, as she hung them inside the cart” (p. 377).

The scene speaks of sense of place through this particular knowledge of the world of insects and the method used to keep the insects out and away from food.

At the departure of the fishing caravan the *phuyiban*’s wish is fulfilled, his village reputation is unblemished “[e]veryone in [the] caravan has much to take home” (p. 379) but the *phuyiban* emphasis how the caravan is welcome back “if the earth in [the fishing caravan] village is still dry” (p. 380).

The people’s sense of place is very much evoked when Uncle Gah gunshot announces the fishing caravan’s departure and on the behalf of the people he bids the spirits of the ancestors of the lagoon and the village goodbye with the remark that next year they might come back reminding the spirits of how they the people in the fishing caravan, are also the spirits “children” (p. 287) since they are Isan people.

3.2.3 The Journey Home

On the way home sense of place is strongly evoked through the unpleasant incident when a cart breaks down, through food exchange and the different people the fishing caravan people come across on the way home.

In the morning of the first day home the women take charge of the carts and the men walk. Sense of place is evoked through sense of cheerfulness and humor lingering in the air when Tid-joon remarks that they have eaten so much fish that they are all beginning to look like fish although Uncle Gah “always did look like a catfish” (p. 389). The simile evoking laughter among the people is an example of their good-natured sense of humor still accompanying them mixed with the delight of being on the way home. Furthermore, accompanying the people on the way home is the great hope that “[p]erhaps all of Isan would be blessed with rain this year, after the long drought” (p. 417).

The major incident on the way home is when the cart borrowed from Koon’s grandmother breaks down. Hostile nature, the weather with pouring rain, lightning and storm are great components in making sense of place as well as in dramatizing the

physical and emotional task of making a new axle under these circumstances. Man's vulnerability is emphasized in the most detailed description and symbolically the specific setting of the forest evokes even more the sense of an entrapment and man's defenselessness against the force of nature. Further evoking sense of place is the sensed strength and the solidarity of the people profoundly evoked in the way Uncle Gah sends Koon's father, Tid-joon and Gah into the dark forest in the pouring rain to find wood. The spirit of the people is also evoked in the way

"[a]lmost everyone in the camp . . . found a place along the length of the blackwood log, working to help create the new axle from this gift that had been cut and then left in the forest, as if waiting for a broken cart on a rainy night" (p. 405).

In the weather force, Koon's father and Tid-joon, concerned about the animals use the local wisdom of their ancestors to make "a fire with nothing but bamboo" (p. 410) like the ancestor who "had no matches" (p. 410). The oxen appreciation of the fire is sensed through how they "snuffled and jostled each other" (p. 410). However in these circumstances Koon wanted more than anything else to cry long and loud. But as he "tried to make a brave face" (p. 410) he fell asleep from "the low, murmuring voices of this father, Tid-joon, Uncle Kem and Gad working together into the night" (p. 411) and in the morning a whole new axle had been cut by the „good hearts“ of the village "from a log in a thunder storm" (p. 450) strongly revealing sense of place through the remarkable skill and knowledge as well as the people's sheer teamwork working under such horrible conditions.

Among the people the fishing caravan group encounters on the way home Koon is most interested in the five men they meet. Two of them carried confiscated *sato* (homemade wine) in great jugs on their shoulders, the jugs heaviness is made visible through the narrative by revealing how bent the men were. However, the mighty and authority of the other three men is stated in their clothing of "khaki shirts and pants, and hats with designs on the front that gleamed in the sunlight" (p. 392) stating their authority as policemen. The child protagonist who had just seen policemen in *pakomahs* is "seized suddenly and entirely, with the desire to be a policeman" (p. 393). At the same time Uncle Gah gets worked up "police-bah! [Spitting] on the ground. Confiscated by the Government"-bah! They're all the same" (p. 393). Sense of place is evoked

through authority and superiority but also through Uncle Gah's negative attitude revealed in the way he spits and in his exclamation which is a clear expression of his contempt regarding this act of the authorities. When Koon wonders why he has not seen this kind of policemen in their village Koon's mother, utterly sure of her own village characteristic, informs her son that "bad people who do things that are against the law" (p. 394) are not to be found in their own village.

The travel home is also colored by the particular business ways of those times involving food exchange and travel trading contributing to the making of the novel's sense of place for example seen in women trading pots for salt⁴⁰. When Uncle Gah however trades precious bird's meat for pots stating how there is "no more having to . . . tearing up leaves" (p. 424) revealing his frustration over the making of a pot every time before cooking a meal. Jundi's usually high sounding and demanding voice reveals the people's sense of misery uttering "[y]ou traded our birds..." (p. 424) in a "trailing off" (p. 424) voice revealing the people's astonishment over such an unbelievable trade

The fishing caravan trades goods with people in poor villages, "very like their own" (p. 425) calling further attention to collective sense of place. Particular hearing sensation revealing sense of place is brought forth in the way trading people advertise their goods by shouting on the way through a village. Jundi, who has absorbed and adopted the yelling voice technique of the Vietnamese who "sell a lot of things" (p. 426) scolds Koon for his "pitiful" (p. 426) voice "Koon tried harder and did better" (p. 426).

Koon has however a great time helping his mother "making packets with the banana leaves and spearing them with the bamboo sticks" (p. 430) which draws the attention to particular ways of wrapping food. Of particular interest to Koon is

"a very little old lady, all bent over. She hobbled painfully down the path carrying a handful of greens . . . tamlung leaves, which [Koon's] father had often brought home with him from a hunting trip" (p. 431).

⁴⁰ Civitello writes how salt or the "white gold" has been one of the most valuable trade items in the world from earliest times (Civitello, 2004: 9). The vital importance of salt for preservation, preparation of food and in cooking is seen throughout the novel.

Sense of place is strongly evoked through the old woman's appearance and her pitifully story. Her grandson had borrowed money from the village *phuyaiban* to buy piglets but on the way home they all died and ashamed the grandson ran away to Bangkok. Although the old lady speaks of two granddaughters who occasionally pay her a visit Koon's mother collects "some pla deek, two large pieces of pla som and two whole salted whitefish" (p. 432) and gives the old lady making both Koon and old lady, who showed her emotional response by "blinked rapidly" (p. 432), completely astound. The detailed narrative reveals the struggle of daily life, broken dreams in hardship but also the great sense of endurance, as well as compassion and helpfulness seen in Koon's mother conduct.

When the fishing caravan enters the fields of home Koon's mother wakes her son. The dogs "sniffing the air" (p. 436) break into a mad run into the village sensing home as the people. Announcing the fishing caravan arrival Uncle Gah fires the gun "for the spirits of the ancestors" (p. 436) as the fishing caravan enters its home village.

The journey's contribution to the *bildungsroman* can be sensed through the remark of two old villagers Uncle Yai and Uncle Mak to whom Koon pays his respect entering the village. They state that Koon has grown up," he goes to take a bath in the River Chi, and he comes home knowing how to show respect to old men" (p. 437) in the traditional manner. Highly pictorial description is how

"Koon knelt down, placed his palms together before his face in a wai, and bent forward three times, touching his hands and forehead to the ground each time . . . the he quickly crawled over to Uncle Mek, and repeated the whole performance" (p. 437).

While the old men respond to Koon's feeling at departure, of how different he would be after the journey to the River Chi "so long . . . [and] so momentous" (p. 225), while the quote also reveals particular component in the making of the novel's sense of place through local conduct of greeting elders and showing appropriate respect.

*Indeed, great fiction shows us not how
to conduct our behavior but how to feel
(Welty, 1978: 154)*

3.3 Family Ways

This sub-chapter exploring sense of place through traditional family ways is divided into four parts. The first part focus on family ways, the second part discusses knowledge gained in childhood. The third part explores the importance of the house and the home emphasized in the novel. The fourth part takes a closer look at sense of place through kinship.

Bringing the family to the center of the novel with an insightful literary focus on the many mundane of family life not only brings forth the novel's universality but also evokes and reveals countless particular components in the making of the novel's sense of place.

Family, childhood and the home that are recurring and well-known motives in literature as well as family relations can be seen as the basis of all other relations. The extensive emphasis on the novel's traditional rural and ethnic family and domestic life is seen as an indication of its great importance in the construction of the novel's sense of place.

Koon's family can be seen as an archetype family, influential in their easy manner and way of conduct within the village. The family sense of place can be illustrated through Koon nuclear family tree which is made of

Koon,s mother ♀ and Koon,s father ♂

*Koon ♂ Yee-soon ♀ Boonlai ♀
8 years 5 years 2 years*

The family tree speaks of the closest family attachments and sense of belonging. While the bonds of family and locality are woven tightly every family has its own character and the fundamental outlook on life is most often made in the family.

Sense of place is evoked in the way the family, as a family of peasants, has two cherished dogs Mawin and Dang “the best hunting dogs in the village” (p. 30). Yee-soon has self-imposed custody over a cat and the family has also some chickens.

However, the family buffalo referred to as Old Wet “because his eyes watered all the time” (p. 197) and whose back Koon had rode on had been sold two years ago. Old Wet absence speaks of the family poverty since the water buffalo is commonly considered an icon of the rice fields and a symbol of wealth, status and security. Among the people the water-buffalo is considered to have a soul which answers very well to the close bond sensed through the text between the family and the sold animal and the way such an important beast is kept close to human living quarters under the house (Piper 1993: 49). Therefore sense of place is not only evoked through the animal’s specific role in the survival of the family but also in close emotional bonds and specific interaction between people and animals.

It can be sensed how Koon’s family life is made of love and affection and strong family attachment, reflecting Smuckarn’s writing of how children are considered the heart of the peasant family (Snit Smuckarn, 1998: 163). Sense of place is evoked as Koon, through the smallest of acts, senses the love and the affection between his parents such as seen in his mother’s gesture of packing her husband’s tobacco with the things he used for rolling and lighting his cigarettes, into “a small metal box” (p. 333) while at the river so that his “tobacco won’t get wet if it rains hard” (p. 333).

Further evoking sense of place is the family way of showing affection seen for example through a gentle touch in the way Koon’s father “laid his cheek next Yee-soon, then did the same to Boonlai” (p. 365). Koon takes after his father and “rubbed his face against the sleeping Boonlai’s soft round cheek” (p. 209) and Koon’s mother treats Koon with the same affection. In this way the narrative reveals particular sense of place through moments of intimacy in Koon’s family everyday life.

Particular sense of place through affection is profoundly evoked in the way Koon had never gone hunting in the forest because his “mother loved him. That is what she said, that she loved him and was afraid of what might happen to him” (p. 29). However motherly worries of how Koon is going fishing with his father without a “farmer’s hat” (p. 241) are responded to by Koon’s father stating that Koon “could get a cold with or without the “farmer’s hat” (p. 241). Certain universality can be sensed in the gender’s different views.

Sense of place through intimacy is however profoundly evoked between Koon’s parents one morning when Koon’s father gives his wife a loving look where she goes into the woods bare breasted wearing “only a pasin” (p. 171). Koon’s father tells her to “keep an eye out for wasps, and watch out for the little flowers! (p. 171). This

picturesque scene evokes not only sense of place through rural informality and closeness to nature but the vivid metaphor further deepens the closeness of nature whereas the flower in a symbolic way connotes both beauty and gentleness.

Everyday family life is also sensed through the many ordinary and usually regarded insignificant daily practices. However these daily practices are in fact the particular components that contribute to the making of sense of place through family life. In that way sense of place is revealed through a sight of “Koon and his father [standing] side by side washing their faces and rubbing their teeth with salt” (p. 65) or in the more detailed version of the act Koon “rub[s] a pinch of salt all around the inside of his mouth” (p. 28). Sense of place is seen in how precious time is used as a remedy for both father and son in the way Koon walks “up and down on his father’s back, while his father teaches him his times two’s” (p. 136) because “[s]itting . . . weaving thatch all day, [makes] his [father’s] back . . . stiff” (p. 136). In this way it can be seen how the most ordinary and trifle activities of daily life, most often not noticed, can bring forth significant particularities of everyday family life and what it entails.

In times of drought sense of place is not only evoked through the family economical hardship but also seen in the tension between Koon’s parents because of their different views on leaving the village. Koon’s family is a land owning family and the importance of owning land is seen in how the people moving away are not selling their land. To Koon’s father that “means they will be back” (p. 28). It is seen how Koon’s father is the head of the family, going by his own father’s advise the family is staying in the village. At the River Chi Koon’s father meets two strangers to whom he speaks frankly about how he is “not ready, not yet. [His] friends and [he] have decided to do battle with this drought another two or three years, if [they] must. After that, [he] don’t know[s]” (p. 343). This statement not only reveals Koon’s father deep attachment to the land and the extended family but it also reveals sense of the family’s future insecurity.

However, in spite of the drought Koon’s mother states that even though “this miserable year....” (p. 170) with no rain to plant rice, Koon’s father is “busier than [he has] ever been” (p. 170). This remark draws attention to how there is more involved in the work of the farmer than the activity around the farming of rice. Such as the making of a new house roof which Koon’s mother sees “fall[ing] apart” (p. 59). Koon’s father also sees the making of a new roof as a way for him to settle the conflict between them by pleasing his wife.

Although the physical appearance of Koon's parents is hardly described their characters illustrated in profound way contribute extensively to the evoking of sense of place. In view of sense of place, Koon's father as an individual, can be seen as an example of the best men in the village. He faces his hardship and poverty with bravery while preserving his ethics. Through his sense of self-respect and beliefs he states that he is a man how has "never told a lie, and . . . never sworn a false oath" (p. 400). Besides being a loving and caring father he is truly a placed individual born and bred child of the northeast. The novel's sense of place is profoundly evoked through his conduct and revealed through his knowledge, skills and efficiency as well as his uttermost sense of duty. His good sense is not only known within the family but also among the villagers as seen for example in the way he brought not just extra knife but also extra handles on the fishing journey to the River Chi. His cautiousness is remarked by Uncle Kem whose handle is broken "as always Koon's papa . . . has thought ahead" (p. 357). It is seen how Koon's father's character is not only revealed through his actions and conduct but also through the way other's speak of him and see him. In this way Koon's mother speaks affectionately with Koon about his father during the fishing caravan in the way he "never complains, no matter what happens" (p. 347) and if he has a free moment "[h]e goes into the cart and plays the *kan*"⁴¹ for Yee-soon and Boonlai" (p. 347). When she states how she wishes that Koon "will be like his papa" (p. 347) Koon's "chest swell[s] with pride" (p. 347) because most of all he wants "to be just like [his father]" (p. 347).

Koon's respect and admiration for his father is profoundly emphasized when he finds out that his father had worked at with the village blacksmith. Koon thinks of "how clever his papa was. He could do anything, and he knew so many things" (p. 220) his artistic talents are for example revealed in how he plays the *kan* occasionally. However, Koon's eagerness to please and obey his father is colored by the fact that he is also a bit afraid of him as sensed when he hurts himself climbing a tall tree and fears his father's disapproval⁴² of him.

Koon's mother is like her husband an example of the best women in the village, her character also contributes greatly to the making of sense of place. She can be

⁴¹ The *kan* musical instrument not only speaks of specific location in Thailand but also of its Lao origin.

⁴² According to Bumroongssok it was expected of children to be both thankful and obedient to their parents and conduct themselves as told (Sumalee Bumroongssok, 1995: 27).

observed as an earthbound character who speaks her strong individual opinions. Her act of expressing herself and criticize the community is revealed in how she for example states her opinion of the Vietnamese earlier mentioned although knowing her husband's feelings for them. The components Massey speaks of making individual sense of place, such as gender and different social position (Massey, 1994: 153-54) can very well be attributed to Koon's mother in the making of her individual sense of place. Koon's admiration of his mother is perhaps best sensed through how he knows "she can weave anything" (p. 344) a quality of utter importance in the traditional village.

Bringing attention to how the particular *sanuk* side of life influences the family life is for example seen on the way home from the River Chi where Koon notices his mother's beauty. However in accordance with the narrative's lesser weight on physical appearance the narrative only arouses the notion of her beauty and describes how she "had put two or three white blossoms [with a soft scent] behind each ear" (p. 390) in a symbolic way emphasizing her beauty. Koon's sisters had "pink and red blossoms in their hair" (p. 390). In the simplest of ways the feeling of *sanuk* is evoked through nature's beauty whereas the flowers are used as a beautiful ornament while their scent can in symbolic way answer to perfume.

The way Koon's father responds to his wife statement how *Songgran* would be "a quiet holiday, as it had been the year before" (p. 94) speaks of how Koon's father in a *sanuk* way tries to make the best out of everything even in the most serious circumstances because it is according to him "up to everyone" (p. 94) to make the best out of the worst situations even in life of poverty and hardship stating in a profound way sense of place through Koon's family life.

3.3.1 Knowledge Gained in Childhood

Sense of place is strongly evoked in the way Koon is first introduced to the novel as a boy "old enough to know a few things" (p. 18) calling attention to how knowledge is gained with age and consequently feeling for a place (Tuan, 1977: 32) or sense of place.

Although childhood memories speak of distance and therefore spoil closeness of direct experiences Tuan states that by reflection the most indescribable moments of the past "draw near . . . and gain a measure of permanence" (Tuan, 1977: 148). In this

aspect Tuan's writings answers perfectly to *A Child of the Northeast* partly made of intimate childhood memories as a realistic semi-autobiographical novel. It is also interesting to bear in mind Tuan's view on childhood experiences as considered the most sensational experiences of life (Tuan, 1977: 185) which further calls attention to the novel's semi-autobiographical nature where sense of place is emphasized through childhood experiences. Such experience is profoundly evoked through Koon "jumping and dancing over the burning parts" (p. 52) of the ground "biting his lip" (p. 52) because he is determined not to cry "no matter how much it hurt[s]" (p. 52) walking on the hot ground on his bare feet. This childhood experience can be seen as an example of what Tuan calls "experiences that would otherwise have faded beyond recall" (Tuan, 1977: 148) but speak deeply of the sense of place through particulars in daily life. For Koon's little sister's daily life also entails

that most of the time they didn't wear a pasin. On special occasions, their father would scoop them up and wrap each one in a proper little pasin, and they would go off happily to whatever event was so grand as to require clothing even on small children" (p. 19)

Sense of place is not only revealed through the traditional clothing but how the occasion has to be of the greatest importance to require clothes on such small children.

Besides the child protagonist children's centrality in the novel is seen in how children are first thought of regarding food for example on the way to the River Chi when food is scarce the priority is to "make something . . . for the little ones to eat . . . grown-ups can eat anything" (p. 252). In this regard Koon is however treated "like a big boy" (p. 62). The quote brings about the notion of how the children are early in childhood treated like grown-ups because of local situations.

In view of the informative writing style and how the importance of knowledge is deeply emphasized throughout the narrative, knowledge is seen as the novel's main theme, drawing frequent attention to how ignorance can flourish in the absence of knowledge. It is therefore interesting to focus on the sense of place revealed through Koon's two ways of knowledge gaining by taking a closer look at what the local

knowledge outside standard school setting entails and what is involved in his formal school education⁴³.

In this way Koon's father states that he can teach Koon and Jundi "a thing or two your teachers may not know" (p. 223) because he has "a belly full of knowledge, from studying with the monks"⁴⁴ (p. 223). This quote not only reveals Koon's father's monkhood, unknown because his name is never revealed, but also evokes sense of place through the differences between local knowledge and compulsory education.

The teachers of informal education are first and foremost the parents but also the extended family and the community as a whole. What Koon likes the most is listening to stories it was "just the sort of time he liked the best" (p. 304). It can be seen how the past comes to the children through the oral tradition, spellbound they enjoy listening to stories which contribute to the expanding of the small village world. As a part of informal education it can be seen how stories consisting moral teaching are told and retold (Seri Phongphit, and Hewison, 1990: 59). For example through the story of the grandfather's journey to Bangkok and his experience the past is sensed as well as the prejudices lingering over Isan. Through old stories and legends from Luang Prabang and Vientiane told by Koon's father a sense of history and tradition made elsewhere evokes strong bonds and cultural ties.

The importance of gaining traditional knowledge as well as official knowledge is emphasized through a discussion about the origin of the rain. On one hand there are the old stories about *nagas* and the *phya tan* bringing the rain "people believe, and have believed since ancient times" (p. 250). But Koon's father also speaks of how Koon will learn "other things about the rain, and the thunder and lightning-things our ancestors would have thought fantastic" (p. 250).

Due to its importance Koon growing up involves the knowledge of how everything depends on rain. His father tells him that "if the rain falls and the rice crop is good" (p. 24) they will have a cart and a team of oxen and "if [Koon is] a good student, that will help" (p. 24). This is a context Koon does not understand but his father explains to his son his philosophy of life that "[g]ood things happen to people who work hard" (p. 24) while he raises his son in particular values.

⁴³ In view of the storytime primary education became compulsory in 1920, however, the law did not reach Isan until in early 1930s (Somchai Phatharathananunth, 2007: 34-36).

⁴⁴ Since the name of Koon's father is never revealed the indication of his ordination to monkhood marked by the word *Tid* in front of his name has been obscured (Gehan Wijeyewardene, 1992: xliv).

Among the countless examples of how Koon gains knowledge in the most different ways can be observed in the scene where Koon asks his father in his childhood innocence about the three baths and the chicken offered on a tray at Kamgong's and Tid-joon's wedding. Koon thinks it is Tid-joon's payment for Kamgong but with a broad smile Koon's father explains to his son that "[t]hose things are for the spirits of the ancestors. What makes Tid-joon and Kamgong married is not the three baths, or the chicken, but the feelings in their hearts" (p. 87). While revealing traditional ways Koon's father contributes to his son fundamental guidance for life.

Sense of place through Koon's knowledge gaining is also revealed through child labor illustrated for example in how "Koon was kept running all morning, turning the newly salted fish over and over so that the sun would dry it evenly on all sides" (p. 377). This quote not only brings attention to sense of place made of child labor but explains how children were often seen as "precious property" (Smukarn 1998: 164) due to their valuable contribution to work. The scene draws attention to Jones studies of how rural idylls that often emphasize ideal and innocent childhood life in play and total freedom (Jones 1997: 162) can be drastically different. In this respect, besides the thrill, poverty can also be seen the cause of Koon's and Jundi's particular bug wax project of getting fresh "bug wax from trees and trade it for clothes" (p. 125). Although caught in action the boys are not punished for trying to earn some money. However, regarding the act of working sense of place is very much evoked in the way Koon notices repeatedly the enjoyment over work well done. Koon senses this work spirit for example when his father and Tid-joon "smiled at each other from time to time" (p. 188) while working on the new roof of the family house, Koon "knew that they felt happy" (p. 188).

Koon's local knowledge is further expanded by going to village meetings with his father where the boy gains extensive knowledge about his community and the village affairs.

However most of all Koon gains his extensive local knowledge through the need to look for food where the focus is on even the smallest creatures in the world of animals. An example of such scene is where Koon's father, looking for *bung* which looks like a big spider, trains Koon and Jundi in knowing the difference between spider holes since some holes are "too clean there won't be any bung in there" (p. 233) however in identifying the right holes "[t]here should be a lot of little grassy fibers covering it over" (p. 234). This local knowledge is of the greatest importance because if the boys

“see one [bung] with less than ten legs that is a bung ma. A man who eats a bung ma will go crazy, and nothing can cure him. But this . . . plain old bung, [they] can eat”(p. 234).

This scene is an excellent example of the particular in the ordinary revealing remarkable knowledge of the world of insects, such as distinguishing between the eatables and the harmful ones as well as local expertise and skills in capturing such small creatures.

When Koon is finally allowed to go hunting with his father for the first time, in accordance with age he “flapped his arms like wings and danced about the room” (p. 58) his enjoyment is shown in the most figurative simile with a reference to the world of animals.

On the hunt Koon,^s father educates his son about how cicadas can be hunted at night.

“You don,^t have to see them. It is easy to know a tree that is full of cicadas, because when you walk beneath that tree you feel cooler. They are all up in that tree, pissing, and it makes a fine cool mist. When I come to a tree that is cool to walk under, I cut it down” (p. 32).

Koon’s father holds the knowledge of how the cicadas are unable to see in the dark and therefore they don,^t fly away so he can just light his torch and pick them up. The detailed and informative explanation of the way to hunt cicadas, though touch in a manner of speaking, reveals extraordinary sense of place. The dark night emphasizes how sight is not used on this particular hunt but the sense of touch evoked through the sensation of wetness and coolness.

Knowledge is gained through common practices and one morning Koon’s mother wakes her son early when she is going out to “get crickets to roast” (p. 171). Koon holds “a wicker basket with a shoulder strap, and each of them took a small hand spade” (p. 171). Sense of place through time of drought involves a change in the environment and Koon’s mother tells Koon how crickets are now hard to find.

“After a rice harvest, it was easy to find them among the stooks and

fresh straw but when the fields were dry, the crickets went into the woods to live beneath bushes. And when even the woods became dry, the crickets stayed in their holes underground” (p. 171).

Koon observes his mother as she “picked up a strong, thin branch, broke it in two to make a stick for each of them” (p. 172) and showed Koon how to “[scratch] energetically at the dirt, if there is a cricket down there you will soon know because it will fly out” (p. 172). And “a cricket with black wings flew up from the dirt Koon grabbed it excitedly and pinched off its head” (p. 172). Koon’s mother however reveals the specific knowledge of handling crickets by telling her son that the head is not pinched off until just before roasting. To be able to make cricket *pone* Koon and his mother need to hunt fifteen crickets.

The gaining of rural knowledge also entails to learn to dig for earthworms at the right spot. Revealing where it is best to find earthworms “Koon’s father dug four or five times into the rich earth beneath [a] palm” (p. 310) and there where “monstrous, marvelous earthworms squirming and climbing over each other” (p. 310). It can be seen how sense of place through informal knowledge gaining is also made of extensive zoology knowledge revealed throughout the novel for example in the way Koon’s father tells him how “worms are both male and female, in one body” (p. 310). It inspires Koon how his “father knew the most amazing things” (p. 310) which undoubtedly influences Koon’s excitement of going to school.

In accordance with the rural location sense of place is repeatedly evoked in the way Koon constantly compares human behavior with what he observes in the animal world through his knowledge gaining of both worlds. Koon sees these resemblances for example in the way Tid-joon’s and Kamgong courtship reminds him of the way the family dogs Mawin and Dang on a hunt had “grabbed the ngu sing’s tail, so fast that you could hardly see it happen” (p. 73). Likewise on a quail hunting, the female quails “who ran into nets, were looking for husbands, like [the young girl] Pi Boon-awn” (p. 154). Sense of place in this way reveals how Koon as a boy of this particular rural area senses strongly the many similarities between animal and humans.

Koon also gains knowledge of the animal behavior as he learns to be aware of the dangers of nature. Revealing sense of place is how Koon’s mother states for example “[w]here there are frogs, there are snakes too, looking for food“. His father had also told him not to “grab the frog until you look to see if a snake wants to grab it, too”

(p. 348) because the snake,,s errand is the same as the human,,s looking for food. In this way Koon learns how to conduct himself according to the behavior of the animals.

It is seen in the novel how hunting is an extensive part of life and most of all Koon wants to go mongoose hunting but “he was not big enough for that. Maybe sometime, if there was a daytime hunt Koon could maybe go” (p. 38) speaking of the dangers involved in hunting. Koon’s father states that “for now the most important thing for you is to go to school [a]nd . . . become a good student” (p. 39). Koon senses his parents interest in his future education in the way his father states that “a man can grow up to be something, even if he has known dry years in his childhood” (p. 250). Further revealing similar views is Uncle Gah’s statement that Koon “is more likely to grow up to be something, for the dry years in his childhood” (p. 250) because the dry years may already have build a strong and knowledgeable character. Koon inspired

“smiled, and thought to himself [sic] that he would learn, and he would grow up to be something. Perhaps when he grew up he would go far away, like his grand-father who had gone to Bangkok to study with the monks. But of one thing he was certain; if he made up his mind to do such a thing, he would not be turned away” (p. 250-251)

because through his informal education Koon had already gained his sense of righteousness.

Koon’s enthusiasm in gaining local knowledge is profoundly stated in the narrative. His eagerness to participate and understand and remember as well as to follow work procedure is revealed on countless of occasions. In this connection Tuan observations regarding childhood experiences earlier mentioned being the most sensational experiences are worth noticing as well as his further statement that a child from around Koon’s age has already much of the adult’s conceptual ability but unburdened by life the child is much more open to the world (Tuan, 1974: 56). However in his exploration of things and happenings Koon doesn’t always understand what is going on around him therefore, in concurrence with the detailed narrative, things are explained to him. Koon also emphasize on learning by the way of repeating and reciting to himself.

Although it is seen how local knowledge is of utter importance to survive in the village and profoundly contributing to the making of sense of place the importance of formal education is also strongly sensed in the way Koon's parents see formal education as of vital importance. Koon's grandmother presenting the older generation states that "[w]hatever the boy wants to learn, whatever job he wants to do, he should do it with his whole heart" (p. 157) speaking her worldly wisdom.

The scene where Koon begs his father to allow him to go on daytime mongoose hunt planned early one morning symbolically equalizes local and formal education in the way Koon's father's decides that if Koon can "recite [his] times two's to [his] mother without making any mistakes" (p. 161) Koon could go on mongoose hunt.

In a symbolic way the importance of formal education is perhaps most profoundly revealed in the fact that "[e]very new child had to be presented to Luang Paw before the school term began" (p. 100) as earlier mentioned. This close connection between the school and the *wat* also calls attention how the *wat* used to be the formal educational center in every village and the only way to gain education (Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 36).

Koon showed his thrill of going to school by "hopping up and down with excitement" (p. 23) expressing his excitement in the most similar way as when he was going on an informal educational hunting trip for the first time. First day of school

"[i]t was a strange feeling. The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was a slate lying on the floor next to his sleeping mat. There was a big piece of chalk on top of it" (p. 113).

Noteworthy here in view of sense of place is the fact that "Koon had never practiced writing letters or numbers. Until [that] morning, he had never held a piece of chalk, or made marks on a slate" (p. 113). While this quote can be viewed as a landmark in Koon's life components in the making of the novel's sense of place are also evoked through Koon's particular school things.

On the morning of the first day of school Koon and Jundi go together accompanied by their fathers. When the older students showed respect to the flag and sung "Prathet Siam Nam Pratuang Wah Muang Thong . . . Koon felt his heart beating with pride" (p. 116). The school was divided into five classes "Prathon One through Four, and the running noses" (p. 116). Jundi and Koon belong to "the running noses" (p.

117). Koon's father explains that formal education in the class of running noses entails to learn to read and write . . . and count to five hundred" (p. 117).

Sense of place is revealed through picturesque scene of the classroom where the children are expected to "sit on the floor, three to a table" (p. 118). The scene evokes not just sense of poverty but also how the way of sharing is exercised everywhere in the community and taught from early age. In view of the semi-autobiographical nature of *A Child of the Northeast* the detailed narrative evoked of Koon's first school day can be seen as what Tuan calls "highly charged moments from the past" (Tuan, 1977: 19-20) recalling the immediacy of past experience.

Knowledge is profoundly emphasized when the village celebrates the birth of the twins and Koon sings the song he had learned from his teacher and practiced with his father "[k]nowledge is a fine possession valued far and valued wide...." (p. 476). Not only does this quote reveal the novel's main theme in a profound way but in a symbolic way the scene brings together the two aspects of Koon's knowledge gaining.

Knowledge is further emphasized in the novel's closing lines in a very special way where the aging narrator and Koon become one in the assurance that "[m]ost of all, [Koon] would never forget all that he had learned from his own dear Papa. And he never did" (p. 477) stated by the narrator who knows the future of the little boy emphasizing profoundly local knowledge obtained in childhood.

Fiction has, and must keep, a private address.

For life is lived in a private place

(Welty, 1978: 154)

3.3.2 The House and the Home

Although sense of place can be seen interwoven in all aspects of the narrative the notion of sense of place is perhaps most intimate in connection with "a place called home" (Massey, 1994: 1) where sense of place is portrayed through home as the most "intimate place" (Tuan, 1977: 144) while the house and the home at the same time stand for the most commonplace reality.

The humble family house of Koon's family stands beside "a tall coconut palm" (p. 18) and as a part of the village landscape it can be pictured from the outside as "a small wooden house . . . on round wooden stilts" (p. 17) with "a thatch roof which had grown brittle and dry under the sun" (p. 17). Interestingly, Gaston Bachelard speaks of the house as people's corner of the world (Bachelard 1994: 4) seen as a positive connotation where the house is seen as a place of intimacy and privacy. However, speaking of the „geographical corner“ association of the village located "in the northeastern corner of Thailand" (p. 18) the corner evokes controversial notion of marginal situation.

Koon's family house is a single family house and the house is a symbolic statement of the family membership in the community. The sense of property that arises out of the need for assurance of own worth and for a sense of status among peers (Tuan, 1977: 32) can be applied here.

To Koon the importance of the house can be seen when he comes back from the fishing journey "there it was-his own house! He felt a huge lump in his throat as he jumped from the cart" (p. 438). Koon's emotions regarding the house answer to Tuan's writings earlier discussed of how an individual will never know things in more sensuous way than as a child (Tuan, 1977: 185).

The specific style of the small family house speaks of particularities and as such the house reveals significances in the making of the novel's sense of place. As stated by Moran house is meaningful as a part of the routine tasks of daily life where people spend most of their ordinary lives, doing the basic tasks of maintenance and sustenance such as taking care of children, cooking, eating, washing, and sleeping (Moran, 2005: 129-132).

The attention is brought to the weak roof of the house which needs maintenance but for the making of "a new, and stronger roof that would not go "so-o-o-o sa-a-a-a" in the night wind" (p. 19) Koon's father has to go to the forest for "fresh thatch grasses and green banana leaves" (p. 19) but in the meantime the father had

"told his children that if ever the wind should blow hard while they were inside the house, they must quickly climb down the house ladder and run away. For if that coconut palm should crack in the wind, and its heavy top fly off. . . it might come crashing down through the thatch roof, which had grown brittle and dry under the sun. They were most

afraid at night, when all was still and they could hear the wind begin to rise. They would lie side by side, their eyes wide, staring at the ceiling and listening to the “soooo-saaaa” sound the wind made as it whispered through the dry leaves” (p. 17-18).

Sense of place is profoundly evoked through the particular local setting where the scary coconut palm plays the main role, as well as through the condition of the house with the thatch roof and the emphasized sound of nature attributed to the rising wind. Sense of place is also evoked through insecurity, atmosphere of unease and vulnerability against nature’s hostility bringing the exterior world closer through sound (Bachelard 1994: 57). This scene can be seen provoking what Bachelard calls “the simple virtues of shelter” so deeply rooted in people’s unconsciousness that they may be recaptured through mere mentioning (Bachelard, 1994: 12). The shelter notion of the house is also emphasized by Tuan who speaks of a house as a provider of shelter (Tuan, 1977: 164).

The urgent maintenance task around the house, the making of a new roof, evokes sense of place through particular work procedure, working spirit and the helping hands of the “good hearts” of the village. This is a process even for a small house. First there is the gathering of all the thatch grass needed and secondly is the weaving seen in the repeated mentioning of Koon’s father “boring work” (p. 76) of weaving, a work that lasts for days bringing attention to endurance and efficiency.

Although the new roof is just a small event, Luang Paw Ken has chosen the auspicious⁴⁵ day for “putting on the new roof” (p. 181). The importance of the new roof for Koon is however seen in how glad he was that the day chosen by Luang Paw Ken was Saturday so he was not going to “miss any part of putting on the new roof” (p. 184-185) because of school. Present are the helping hands of other villagers, Tid-joon, his father Uncle Mek, Uncle Kem Jundi’s father and Tid-hod.

Everything has to be carried out of the house, a scene which reveals the modest belongings of the home consisting of pots and bowls, clothing and blankets, all “neatly stacked under the sleeping mats, which would keep them clean while the men worked” (p. 185). “Koon’s father and Tid-joon worked faster as the sun rose” (p. 188), a visual sensation of them working is seen in how the “[s]unlight was reflected from the men’s gleaming arms and legs as they crawled over the roof, and [how] the white smiles in

⁴⁵ According to Rajadhon the auspicious day chosen refers to the cautions taken so everything will go well (Phraya Anuman Rajadhon, 2009: 36).

their dark faces looked like crescent moons” (p. 188). The smiling faces speak of their working spirit and the metaphor corresponds to the rural sense of place. After the new roof is up “no wind or dirt will get into [the] house” (p. 190). Koon’s mother delight, seen in her smiling face, is emphasized in the text by repetition. In the food break all the people gather in a circle to eat rice and *kanom*. The text not just evokes the tobacco fragrance in the air but also a profound sense of ease when the “men leaned back on their elbows . . . smoked and rested (p. 191).

Taking a closer look at Koon’s simple traditional family house described in the novel it evokes sense of plainness and in a way harsh beauty with no mentioning of decoration. In that way the architecture symbolically speaks of domestic hardship and the hot and dry climate is seen in the brittle and dry thatch. In view of sense of place it is interesting to see how the architecture answers perfectly to local conditions and way of life. The house, with one main room and a kitchen with a window and fire stones is raised high above the ground to cope with floods while it makes the house cooler and keeps out insects and dangerous animals. To open the house the door has to be “unbarred” (p. 144) and the house ladder lowered. Furthermore the open space beneath the house is an area for extensive use, such as for resting, for weaving, and as a convenient place for keeping the rice silo, the water jar as well as being a place for domestic animals such as chickens and buffalos (Viboon Lessuwan, 1989: 15). Koon’s family house answers to Tuan’s observation of a house as a building of relatively simple architecture seeking to give rational form to the moods, feelings, and rhythms of life, build with the intention of satisfying useful need (Tuan, 1977: 165-166). In this way a home is sensed as much more than a house.

In view of sense of place and the semi-autobiographical nature of the novel it is interesting to note Tuan’s writings about “enchanted images of the past” that are even more evoked by the many ordinary objects of the home rather than the whole house. These objects that “can be touched and smelled” most often become almost a part of people and are therefore too close to be seen (Tuan, 1977: 144- 45).

In this regard sense of place through an object is very much evoked in the mortar and pestle that can be seen as one of the many bits and pieces of the family house. It can be seen how the mortar and pestle evokes sense of place through all the five senses. There is a sight sensation of a beautifully shape, surface that calls attention to touch sensation and enchanting hearing sensation is conveyed through the most familiar “*boke-boke-boke*” (p. 175) kitchen sound revealed through an exquisite example of

onomatopoeia⁴⁶. Further regarding the hearing sensation it is stated how Koon just “loved the familiar “*boke-boke-boke* sound of mortar and pestle” (p. 175) when used by his mother, the pounding bringing about familiar kitchen smells and sensed feeling of familiar taste.

In this connection Bachelard interestingly speaks of how writers often find “little to describe in the humble home” (Bachelard, 1994: 4) therefore they “describe it as it actually is, without really experiencing the primitiveness, a primitiveness which belongs to all, rich and poor alike” (Bachelard, 1994: 4). It can however be said that through sense of place the novel focus is on the experience of the primitiveness.

In view of the influential fishing caravan journey it is interesting to take notice of Casey’s writings that bring attention to the common and often taken-for-granted aspect of place, the situation of going and coming (Casey, 1996: 10). This aspect of a place is emphasized in Koon’s excitement of going away on the fishing caravan but also in the way he is just as “eager to be home” (p. 380) again. Koon eagerness of coming home responds to Tuan’s writings about how a home becomes meaningful through a journey (Tuan, 1974: 102). In that way

“Koon could not have found words to explain how he felt, hopping along in the soaked grass at the side of the road, felling the mud ooze deliciously between his toes as he looked up into the mild sky. He stood still for a moment as the deep red sun cleared the horizon, floated upwards, and begin its work, warming the belly of the land” (p. 436-437).

The strongly felt touch impression of the grass and “the mud of home” reveal deep feelings of rootedness and the sense of being totally at home in a place. While metaphorically the “belly of the land” can very well state the centrality of the home as a place that people identify themselves with (Tuan, 1977: 194). Koon’s profound sensitivity and intimate touch sensation feeling the mud between his toes answers to

⁴⁶ Onomatopoeia is a word that sounds the same as, or similar to what the word means (Quinn, 2004: 240). Wannan Anderson speaks of the “scintillating interplay of language and culture lies in the onomatopoeia“. Wannan Anderson describes Thai onomatopoeia as “playfully cultural-specific” and “ear - specifics” (Wannan Anderson, 2009: 214).

Tuan's writings of how "practice improves the sensitivity" (Tuan, 1974: 7). Koon being without shoes all his life, in a symbolic way, knows how the mud of home feels.

The intimacy of home is evoked through a feeling of relief since

"[b]ack home from the fishing caravan Koon "fell fast asleep. When he awoke, he was startled at first to find himself [sic] in his own house . . . The sun had risen halfway up the side of the sky-he knew that at once, because he could see the sky through the dried walls and ceiling of his house. A warm breeze blew through the cracks, inviting him to sleep on" (p. 445).

The house evokes affection from within, although a simple house and a home of modest interior the shelter feeling of the house is aroused and the feeling of the home as a resting place is visualized in the way Koon sleeps soundly on his own sleeping mat. Not only evoking the simplicity of the house, but also a particular feeling of home, is how the attention is drawn to the familiar view of the sky through the walls and the roof of the house and how the gentle wind metaphorically invites him to sleep on. However Koon, perfectly at home, sleeps soundly with his fist under his head just like his mother and father. The text not only evokes Koon's sense of familiarity and intimacy but the universal feeling of "being at home" in one particular place.

3.3.3 Kinship and the Wisdom of the Elders

Strong traditional bonds of treasured kinship and its importance for the community can be sensed throughout the novel *A Child of the Northeast*. These bonds are evoked and revealed in various ways and connections but maybe most profoundly visualized in the "shrine of the village ancestors" (p. 155).

In view of the situation in the village sense of place through kinship revealed in the novel can be seen as one of the key significances in binding the people to the village. The village can be seen stimulating topophilic feelings which are only capable of developing through rootedness. As Tuan states in his writings people identify themselves with "a particular locality" with the feeling of that it is their home as well as

the home of their ancestors (Tuan, 1977: 194). In traditional Thai society family bonds also involve friends and neighbors (Mattani Mojdara Rutnin, 1976: 72).

Kinship is emphasized in the text through traditional kinship terms (Gehan Wijeyewardene, 1992: xli-xliii) applied when the villagers address each other. This is for example seen in how Koon's parents are just Koon's father and Koon's mother, how the villagers are called Uncle and Auntie although not blood related, and in the way Koon calls his cousin Kamgong Phi Kamgong in referring to her as elder sister. These traditional ways of kinship terms are noteworthy components in revealing the villagers down to earth sense of place. In a broader perspective the Lao people of Isan, as the villagers call themselves, can be seen as kin as revealed in how the Isan people must live together in peace because they are . . . brothers, after all (p. 380) stated by the *phuyaiban* in the village by the River Chi.

One of the small but significant example of sense of place through kinship lies in the people's community aid seen in how Koon's father has an access to the cart from the grandmother's house and the oxen from Auntie Ploy" (p. 210) when the family journeys to the River Chi, evoking helpfulness and strong kinship ties. As stated by Smuckarn it is seen how the family is the most dependable although as earlier stated family bonds include most often also friends and neighbors (Snit Smuckarn, 1998: 163). In this connection Kepner speaks of how in Isan there has always been a strong moral responsibility among the people to feel and care for each other (Kepner, 1987: 11). This belief is sensed repeatedly in the construction of the novel's sense of place and seen as a significant conduct in the village life through "the good hearts" earlier spoken of.

This caring feeling is for example evoked in a trifle gesture one night when supper was not enough through "a smiling face [that] appeared in the doorway. It was Auntie Bua-Si their mother's good friend, holding out a ripe yellow matoom fruit as big as a man's fist" (p. 61), she had been thinking about Koon's little sisters. The sensation of the moment is conveyed in a sound of delight textualized in how the "lucky girls" (p. 61) "slurped their unexpected treat with relish" (p. 62) while Koon unable to close his ears "knew his father was treating him like a big boy" (p. 62). The attention is drawn to how Koon is more vulnerable to the "slurpe" sound than the sight of his sister's eating, answering to Tuan's writings about how people are most often more vulnerable to sound than sight (Tuan, 1974: 8-9). In view of Basso the scene can however be seen as "a neat sense of place and accepted as a simple fact of life, a regular aspect of how things are" (Basso 1996a: 144) in this small village. With a reference to what Tuan calls

“a humble event” that can in time create a strong feeling for place (Tuan, 1977: 143) and pass on to the younger generation the village way of showing compassion and warmth.

Deep family kinship is sensed through Koon’s father persistence not to move from the declining village “grandfather told us to stay in this place” . . . and we will stay” (p. 27). Koon’s father speaks of „topophilic“ relations established over a long time creating rootedness in the soil and feeling for the land of his ancestors⁴⁷ that affectively ties him to the small village and its people through strong kinship bonds to the place.

Sense of the people’s shared history is evoked through Koon’s father stories which speak of how the founders of Ubon came from Vientiane, as in shared symbols such as the sacred That Phanom and the origin of Emerald Buddha mentioned in the novel calling attention to common identity and strong sense of belonging.

In this way there is sensed certainty among the villagers that they are walking in the footsteps of their ancestors which contributes to the depth of their feeling for the place. With a strong sense of who they are and where they are it can be seen how the villagers in *A Child of the Northeast* go after what Tuan in his writings calls “trodden paths and signposts” (Tuan, 1977: 54) in their deep respect for the past.

It is suggested that the novel’s sense of place, through kinship, is evoked the most through the story of the grandfather. The story is told in the most down to earth manner as a bedtime story to children eager to hear about their grandfather. However, the story is not simply told to entertain the children with a tale of adventurous grandfather how was “willing to walk barefoot all the way to Bangkok” (p. 21) to fulfill his dream of “study[ing] in a great temple with learned monks” (p. 21). The story can be seen as a way of teaching the children serious facts of life through such issues as discrimination and righteousness.

In that way sense of place is also profoundly evoked through the unchangeable cycle of human life expressed deeply in the death of Koon’s grandfather. Koon has fond memories of the grandfather whom “he had loved, and whose waist he had hung about with both his arms when he was a very little boy, so little that his legs didn’t even reach the ground” (p. 26). The scene evokes not only sense of particular relationship between a grandfather and a grandchild but also a universal notion of such a relationship. Through Koon’s sense of loss when his grandfather dies it is revealed how places are

⁴⁷ Keeping in mind how according to Pongsapich the Lao speaking people living in Isan have been living there from ancient times (Amara Pongsapich, 1999: 23).

most of all made of people. Koon has a vision of his grandfather striding from the village, because “[h]is grandfather had been just like his father: always working hard, never complaining” (p. 375) and

“[e]very morning of his life, Koon’s grandfather had risen before the rooster, climbed down his house ladder with a basket over his shoulder, and gone off into the fields” (p. 375)

and in a while he had returned back home with breakfast “it was the same, every morning of his life, until the day he left Koon’s grandmother, and all of them, forever” (p. 375). For a eight years old boy the importance of kinship bonds is therefore perhaps best stated in how Koon tells Jundi that his grandmother comes first “after that we can play” (p. 447) when they were home from the fishing caravan.

The passing of time through kinship is not only seen through the death of the grandfather but also in the way Koon witnesses the growing up of his favorite cousin, Kamgong. When “[s]he is too old to play with a little boy” (p. 68) Koon’s knows “a young man will come and love her” (p. 68) that is the usual way of life and through her courtship, marriage and motherhood at the end of the story life cycle events are sensed by Koon.

Sense of place is strongly revealed in the way kinship is a “safety net” just like the village *wat*. Happenings within the family are most often taken care of by family members. This sense of safety is brought forth in the novel in the way kin responds to the incident when Koon’s grandmother gets sick. The episode is portrayed in a detailed and dramatic visualization when Kamgong in tears “late at night” calls at Koon’s house “sounding very distressed” (p. 144) and in a short while the whole family has gathered around the old woman’s sickbed. Tid-joon goes after the *maw ya* and Auntie Ploy but “[h]er father had been the elder brother of Koon’s mother” (p. 145). The importance of kinship and attachment is stated in the fact that “when anything important happened in Koon’s family, his mother sent for Auntie Ploy” (p. 145).

The sight by the sickbed is textualized in how “Koon fell asleep besides his grandmother, listening to the soft murmurs of the aunts and uncles,” (p. 151). It is emphasized how the sensation of the murmurs has reassurance and calming influences on Koon. The next morning he wakes up happy to hear his grandmother ask Kamgong “to roll a betel chew for her, because if she wanted to chew betel she must be feeling

like her old self” (p. 151). Particular sense of place through kinship is profoundly evoked in the grandmother’s wish that before she dies see is going to see all [her] grandchildren walking in the rain, and planting crops in the fields” (p. 151). Her wishes deeply emphasize what is lacking in the village.

Seniority⁴⁸ which plays significant role in the Thai kinship system (Snit Smuckarn, 1998: 165) is profoundly portrayed through the grandmother’s particular and honorable role in the novel. Smuckarn mentions how the oldest or the most senior members of a family are considered as advisors to the younger relatives who accordingly are expected to show them not just respect but also obedience and gratitude (Snit Smuckarn, 1998: 165).

Strongly reflecting the grandmother’s place of honor within the family as an older kin is how she together with the honorable abbot Luang Paw Ken is getting all the precious “fish-egg mum” (p. 447) when Koon’s family comes back from the River Chi. Koon’s father “[doesn’t] care if people are willing to pay “hundred bath, nobody is getting any fish-egg mum” (p. 447). It is seen how this issue is not a question of money symbolized in the large amount of money but honor and respect.

Sense of place unfolds in the novel’s emphasize on seniority, honor and ancient wisdom⁴⁹ profoundly important in the village life creating sense of continuity and strength among the people. In this way the conflict caused by Kamgong and Tid-joon’s behavior when the young man spends a whole night in Kamgong’s bedroom is put in the hands of Koon’s grandmother. By the villagers Tid-joon act is referred to by using a particular picturesque saying with a rural ring to it stating that “the water Buffalo has gotten into the garden” (p. 80) responded to by Koon’s parents when they are called upon early the morning of the happening. It is seen how the incident concerns not only the families but the whole village because before sunrise “four or five of the oldest people in the village were up on the porch, chatting quietly with Koon’s grandmother” (p. 83) and Koon could see “the dim shapes of many people clustered in the yard” (p. 83) taking an interest in the happening. It is revealed how the grandmother plays a

⁴⁸ Klausner states that the elderly are revered and looked up to because of their seniority (Klausner, 2002: 92).

⁴⁹ Popular wisdom according to Phonghit and Hewison is a set of values that have been fundamental basis of people’s lives through the generations. Popular wisdom consists of knowledge about life, its origin, meaning and goals (Seri Phonghit, and Hewison, 1990: 148) made visible in daily life as well as on particular occasions (Seri Phonghit, and Hewison, 1990: 169). It also consists of “know-how “seen as ways and means that take from knowledge of life (Seri Phonghit, and Hewison, 1990: 148).

central role in finding solution to the incident because “[a]ll turned towards the old woman, and waited respectfully [*sic*] for her to speak” (p. 83).

“A man and woman become husband and wife in one of three ways. One, the man asks for her, and there is a wedding ceremony. Two, they run away together. Three, Chu sao...” If it is the third way, and the woman goes to the house of the man, that is very bad. In the case, if they do not sacrifice one white buffalo and one black buffalo, then that woman's family will be ruined. The spirits of the ancestors will be far more angry than if the man had gone to the house of the woman” (p. 84)

It is sensed how relieved the people are that the *Chu sao* involved Tid-joon spending the night at Kamgong. But to settle the matter Koon's grandmother states that if Tid-joon asks the family and the ancestors spirits forgiveness that should be enough, “everybody in the village knows that Tid-joon doesn't have a thing to offer but his apology, so that will have to be enough!” (p. 84). It is noteworthy how the solution is in accordance with Tid-joon's means. With a tray of “one folded pakomah, some flowers, and the family's three baht” (p. 85) Tid-joon bows before the elders but “touched his head to the floor” (p. 85) before Koon's grandmother revealing his great respect. The emotional side of this happening is evoked in how the grandmother “smiled down at him” but at the same time “dabbed at her eyes with a square of red and black cloth” (p. 85). The old woman knows that he “will be a good husband and father until he is an old man” (p. 85). In this way sense of place is revealed through local traditions that have been the fundamental way of life through generations (Seri Phongphit, and Hewison, 1990: 148) and passed on to the younger generation by the elders.

Koon's grandmother happiness on the day of the birth of Kamgong's and Tid-joon's twins is emphasized in her exclamation at the end of the novel “Oh Koon!” (p. 471) his grandmother cried. “What a wonderful day this is for our family!” (p. 471). In visualizing the atmosphere at the birth of the twins the strong kinship bonds among the villagers are profoundly evoked and revealed in the crowd of villagers how gather by the house when two new children of the Northeast are born.

It can be seen how the findings of this chapter answer perfectly to how sense of place is seen as made of particulars most often considered too close and too ordinary to be notice. However as distinctive features of ordinary community ways, the journey and family ways are of great importance in the construction of the novel's sense of place since day to day basic activities and mundane are the focus of the novel and a profound way of evoking and revealing village sense of place. The significance of sense of place is as much evoked through subjective meanings such as hearing smell and touch as through the visual meaning.

Village sameness and isolation is evoked while at the same time the narrative reveals ethnic influences. In the same way the village poverty is both evoked and revealed through the many village sights, sounds and disturbing departure of people moving away from the village and in touch evoking intimate experiences for example of hot ground in the absence of shoes. However, sights, sounds and touch are also revealed in cheerful chats, laughter and village humor bringing attention to the deeply sensed *sanuk* way of life.

The attention is drawn to the novel's construction of sense of place through colorful characters that are seen as very important in bringing forth the community sense of place. Physical appearance is most often not described however antithesis through comparisons between characters is greatly used to identify characteristics. In emphasizing on the particular the village drunkard Tid-hod is an interesting component in the making of the novel's sense of place. However the characters are first and foremost born and bred children of the northeast molded by location, community and family ways.

In that way religion and beliefs can be seen interwoven in the narrative itself as seen in how much of the villager's daily activities and time is dedicated to religion and beliefs. Viewing religion and beliefs from the child's protagonist perspective from their extensive intervention into the worldly side of life particular sense of place is evoked and revealed. For example through religious morals and traditional spirit ceremonies as well as through their extensive intermingle answering to the villager's worldly needs and worries including everything from sickness to the auspicious day to put on a new house roof.

Amongst the many particulars in daily life are the various healing remedies the community uses of knowledge to respond to sickness and injuries that occur among humans and animals.

The attention is brought to further important aspects of village life contributing to sense of place such as religious or worldly festivities that break up the struggle of everyday life. *Songgran* and the *wat* fair is an example of special days where the event becomes more significant than the place itself and local sense of place through festivity can be most vividly sensed.

Even in the novel's small and isolated village sense of place is partly made of ethnic diversity bringing the outside world strongly into play. The most reflective illustration of ethnicity is stated through the influential back-story of the grandfather's journey to Bangkok. As a story that precedes the events in the novel it nevertheless adds profound meanings of the sense of place to the novel's circumstances and as such the back-story can in fact be seen as one of the most powerful construction of the novel's sense of place with its influential and unrecorded attitudes.

The remarkable fishing caravan journey to the River Chi, occupying sixteen of the thirty-six chapters, speaks of an interesting aspect of community life contributing greatly to the making of the novel's sense of place through its extensive and influential role in the novel. In that way the journey contributes not only to the revealing of the story's plot but also to the evoking of an Isan collective sense of place. Further in view of the novel's structure the journey can be observed as a detour or the novel's suspense with the uncertainty of its outcome. With reference to *bildungsroman* the journey can be viewed as an extensive part of Koon's growing up seen in how Koon "knew that he would be different" (p. 225) coming home again. The journey is a particular happening in the ordinary life and as such the journey entails the building of Koon's individual sense of place in connection with the outside world while contributing to deepening his sense of home.

Sense of place is revealed in how villagers life is deeply influenced by the rural sky seen in the fact that even children are most of the time "mad at the sky" (p. 65) for not bringing rain. In relation with the sky one of the novel's most profound philosophies on human nature is revealed in the way "the sky never hurt anybody. Only people can really hurt people" (p. 80).

The rural and ethnic family brought to the center of the novel with an insightful literary focus on the many mundane of family life corresponds to the novel's universality while countless components in the making of the novel's sense of place are evoked and revealed. Traditional way of life is perhaps nowhere as visible as in family and domestic life where Koon's family can be seen as an archetype family, influential in

its easy manner and way of conduct within the village. Sense of place through family life is revealed through ordinary and usually regarded insignificant daily practices and artistic talents such as weaving, storytelling and *kan* music playing as well as affection and intimate relations. The family outlook on life, in accordance with the village, is made of the *sanuk* way of life which entails making the best out of the worst situations.

A Child of the Northeast can be seen as a comprehensive insight into childhood sense of place in Isan through the protagonist just eight years old. Sense of place is strongly evoked in the way the child is first introduced to the novel not through his physical appearance but as a boy “old enough to know a few things” (p. 18). This statement calls attention to the novel’s main theme, knowledge. The child’s eagerness to understand and remember is profoundly evoked through visualized participation, through repetition and reciting textually evoked. Through countless ways of how knowledge is gained, knowledge is not only seen as the novel’s theme, in artistic way the attention is drawn to the importance of knowledge through the acknowledgement of particular knowledge.

The notion of sense of place is perhaps most intimate in connection with a “place called home” where sense of place is portrayed through the house and the home although it is at the same the most universal notions and commonplace reality. Strong traditional kinship bonds and its social importance can be sensed throughout the novel evoked and revealed in various ways and connections but maybe most profoundly visualized in “the shrine of the village ancestors” (p. 155). Sense of place is also revealed through particular kinship terms applied when the villagers address each other and through seniority of the elders revealed through the grandmother’s central role such as in finding solution to a village conflict.

Through this brief compilation it can be seen how Kampon Boontawee’s eyes for perceiving the particular in the ordinary and artistic use of various literary techniques evoke and reveal the complex sense of place through community ways, the journey, and the family ways and incorporates it in the construction of the novel.

CHAPTER IV

SENSE OF PLACE IN LOCAL FOOD WAYS AND HANDICRAFTS

*Sense of place,
is not just something that people
know and feel, it is something people do
(Camus, 1955: 88)¹*

This chapter is divided into two sub-chapters related in their focus on traditional activities. The chapters are local food ways and local handicrafts. In exploring local food ways and handicrafts in the novel's village it can be seen how they are closely connected and most important for "self-sustaining life" (Apichai Punataseen, 1996: 76) in the village whereas handicrafts are most often made to answer the need of a hunting gear or a household object in connection with cooking.

This chapter begins with discussion about the act of looking for food, in the woods and in the waters, seen as a vital aspect of everyday life in the village and a particular component in constructing the novel's sense of place. Through *pla daek* and sticky rice food culture sense of place is revealed in particular ways of preservation, preparation and cooking. Sense of place found in aroma, taste and texture and the greater meanings of food is also discussed.

The second sub-chapter focuses on particular sense of place through handicrafts taking a special look at things folded and carved such as ordinary utensils and things woven such as hunting equipments all objects that speak of sense of place through their creation.

¹ This quotation by Albert Camus was cited in (Basso, 1996: 143).

4.1 LOCAL FOOD WAYS

Food and food ways, such a down to earth part of everyday life and experience is an important topic in most literature and a powerful symbol. Through the novel it is revealed repeatedly how local conditions affect the way people meet their needs of food, how they obtain food as well as how they process and serve their food. Although the village food ways are severely reflected by continuing drought and poverty, local food ways are seen as a central element in *A Child of the Northeast* in view of the extensive focus on food ways in countless detailed discussions on everything regarding food ways throughout the novel.

The realistic narrative mode is an excellent way to evoke sense of place through the many village practices regarding food ways. Perhaps the novel's focus on the world of all the five senses sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch are most aroused in the issues discussed regarding food ways.

Although the novel describes the village as cultivating community the villagers in their self-sufficient way of life, during times of drought, can in fact be seen as hunter-gatherers as before the cultivation of rice (Piper, 1993: 12) since they have to rely on resources from wild nature for survival and go looking for food.

*This land of Sukhothai is thriving.
There is fish in the water and rice in the fields.”
Inscription One of Sukhothai²
(Mukhom Wongthes, 2003: 106)*

4.1.1 Looking for Food

In looking for food sense of place is evoked through aspects such as profound and detailed knowledge of local flora and fauna as well as through particular experience and skillfulness in exploiting available sources where even the smallest creature in the animal world are not spared. Sense of place is also deeply evoked through the people's sincere topophilic affection for the land in spite of extremely severe conditions.

² This quotation comes from the famous Ram Khamhaeng *Inscription One of Sukhothai* from the 13th century believed to be the oldest writing in Thai language (Mukhom Wongthes, 2003: xiii).

At nature's doorstep the novel narrates how the staple food of the village is fish and rice. However the village lagoon is usually dry and the rice silo gets emptier every day calling attention to life in poverty and hardship that evokes totally different rural sense of place than brought forth in the famous *Inscription One of Sukhothai* by King Ramkhamhaeng³ quoted above, emphasizing thriving rural past of golden age.

A part of the villager's sense of place is revealed through sense of loss and change when some animals disappear or change their behavior as a result of the continuing drought. For example "when the fields are dry the crickets go into the woods to live beneath bushes" (p. 171-172). In this view it can be seen how the drought has extensive influences on nature and can even call for new hunting ways and the making of different equipments in looking for food.

By bringing attention to Tuan's writings about how nature is known through the need to gain a living (Tuan, 1974: 96) it can be seen in countless ways how the villagers have acquired profound knowledge of the land and its resources looking for food. The novel speaks of the villager's most extensive knowledge of nature which is appreciated through the senses and through movement.

The particular skills and knowledge the villager's use in exploiting available local sources answers to what nature offers and the profound resourcefulness of the people in obtaining food from their nearest surroundings. It is seen how the skills are learned and passed down from one generation to the next and become part of everyday life in the interplay of primarily the sense of sight, hearing and smell.

The villager's awareness in looking for food involves the land, the soil, the sky, the flora and the fauna, the wind and the drought, making these influential elements components that contribute to the novel's sense of place.

Tuan's observation of how often the focus regarding place is on the issue of survival and adaptation's regarding the environment when people are usually more aspired toward contentment and joy (Tuan, 1974: xii) of a place answers profoundly to the villager's particular view of the environment. In this connection Tuan brings forth topophilic⁴ notions earlier mentioned and the different ways people can develop a love

³ According to Charles F. Keyes King Ramkhamhaeng the Great reigned from 1279-1299 (Keyes, 1987: 219).

⁴ Tuan sees topophilia as the "affective bond between people and place or setting, "diffuse as concept, vivid and concrete as personal experience" (Tuan, 1974: 4).

of place (Tuan, 1974: xii). Koon's deep sense of topophilia can be seen through a scene where he trying to catch grasshoppers, senses the land the

“[f]ields and dikes between the rows, there was nothing but pale, hard stubble, and the earth between the dikes was dusty gray, with streaks of reddish sand. Most of the khoi trees had lost their leaves. But, as barren as it was, the land seemed to sparkle under the sun” (p. 70).

In spite of the condition Koon's topophilic affection is evoked in the dryness and lifeless land emphasized in the quotation through his rootedness in the soil and loyal feeling towards the land that Tuan speaks of as natural to farmers (Tuan, 1977: 156).

Sense of place is also evoked in Tid-joon song

“a song about hunger in a dry season, about a man who goes into the barren fields to find food, and then into a town to earn money to buy rice for his family, because there is no rice to harvest. And on the way to town, the man sees pretty girls, but he never talks to them, because he is too poor, too poor...” (p. 385).

Although this scene brings attention to alternative in looking for food Tid-joon while enjoying a feast at the River Chi is very well aware of how rice is both livelihood and the stable food of his village. He also knows how the villagers will continue to struggle with unpredictable nature and poor soil in an inhospitable land.

4.1.2 From the Woods

In picturing the woods around the village during the 1930's, at the time of the story, sense of place through wilderness and wildlife is evoked not only through visual impression but also in close encounter with the senses of smell, sound and touch.

With nature at the doorstep hunting takes not only place out in the woods as revealed one night when Koon going to sleep “heard the soft calling of an owl” (p. 100). Koon's father responds quickly to the sound and before Koon knew he “heard the faint creak of his father's crossbow and then a resounding snap, followed by a soft plopping

sound beneath” (p. 100). For Koon his father’s hunting of the owl is first and foremost sensed through hearing where the different sounds contribute to his father’s actions. However the hearing impression is confirmed by sight and touch sensation when his father put the owl with “a spot of red blood on the top of one wing” (p. 100) into Koon’s hands little later.

Sense of place through hunting is however mostly evoked and revealed in the way the woods play an important role in the villagers survival where they “[hunt] whatever small animals they [can] find” (p. 18) as a part of everyday activity. The novel, in vivid details presents the resourcefulness and the skillfulness used in finding food by hunting down even the smallest insects that are usually outside range of view. The detailed and informative narrative in fact answers to the precision needed in the art of hunting and as a rural boy Koon “had heard plenty of stories” (p. 30) about everything regarding hunting. Although living in close contact with nature and maybe more because of it the forest is sensed as a dangerous place with looming threats for children making the hunting trips dangerous (p. 38). Therefore

“Koon had never gone to hunt in the forest or at Nog Yai Knoll beyond the village, because his mother loved him. That was what she said, that she loved him and was afraid of what might happen to him out there. She said that there was plenty of time for such things. But Koon wanted more than anything in the world to go hunting with his father. He was not afraid at all” (p. 29).

Sensing Koon’s thrill when finally, one morning “he succeeded in persuading [his parents] that he was old enough . . . and in fact could do many things to help his father (p. 29) is illustrated in the comparison between the dogs which “yapped furiously” (p. 30) going hunting and Koon’s excitement of beginning his hunting adventures. Sense of place is illustrated in how Koon’s father brought with him

“his crossbow and the bamboo cylinder of arrows . . . slung them over his right shoulder, and slipped a wicker cicada basket over his left shoulder” (p. 30).

Because of the unpredictability of a hunt they brought with them a crossbow and arrows in case they would be lucky to “see game” (p. 30) although they were after

cicadas. Koon was the carrier of the gum tube “[a] bamboo tube filled with gum and bullocks’ hair” (p. 30) used to catch the cicadas.

There is a sense of threat revealed when Koon and his father encounter a big cobra spreading its hood and making its terrible f-f-a-a-a-w! f-f-a-a-a-w!” (p. 33) noise textualized through onomatopoeia. Out of terror and the joy of watching the dogs kill the cobra “so fiercely he could hardly follow with his eyes” (p. 33) Koon utters a sound of scream. However, Koon father states that they “can’t eat this snake . . . [i]t is too bad” (p. 33). Sense of place is evoked in the urgent need of food and the disappointment can be sensed in how sorry Koon’s father is of the snake’s complete uselessness. The disappointment is further evoked in the way Koon’s father pictures the scene if the cobra had been eatable in the way they would have taken it home to Koon’s mother “to cook with a little vinegar...” (p. 33). Koon’s father talks “as if he could see the cooked, succulent meat” (p. 33-34) but then he “kicked at the dead, useless snake” (p. 34).

For Koon, particular sense of place is evoked on the hunt in the way he becomes aware of the animals alertness such as through a flying squirrel that “seemed to sense danger, and skittered frantically from one branch to another, as if it knew very well that someone was trying to kill it” (p. 34). Then it “sat rigidly still, but the arrow skimmed by the little body . . . then another arrow and another” (p. 34). In that way Koon’s father gave not up on the squirrel until he had just one arrow left. But they did not stop looking for anything they could eat because “[f]ather and son both dreaded going home to Mother with empty hands” (p. 35) which evokes the absolute importance of the catch of the day.

Sense of place is further brought forth in the disappointing side of a hunt. Seen and sensed in how “Koon felt miserable” when the sun had reached the center of the sky and boys passed them with “their baskets filled with roaring cicadas. Perhaps all the cicadas had been caught already!” (p. 31) and “Koon and his father caught only ten cicadas that whole day” (p. 31). They were too late, and the dogs ran before them barking and silencing the cicadas that had escaped the other hunters making Koon feel “hot, hungry, thirsty and discouraged” (p. 31). The weight given to Koon’s physical condition in a symbolic way deepens his discourage feelings.

Koon is also an eyewitness to how a hunt can turn into a frustration and an ordeal when the urgent need to find food is not accomplished. In that way a mongoose hunt becomes a tragedy when Uncle Mek kills his dog for not catching the mongoose they were after.

However, a hunt is also a thrill seen in how Koon's father hunts down a snake that is eatable. Familiar with the behavior of a snake called *ngu sing* Koon's father knows how the snake likes "to hide in the trees beside [particular] field" (p. 35) but he also knows how the snake "likes to come out and bath itself in the warm sun" (p. 35). When Koon and his father spot a "a red and white belly of a snake gleaming among the sparse leaves" (p. 35) Koon's father acts by "slowly pulling a silken thread from this tobacco pouch and tying it to one of the thin strips of bamboo they used for catching cicadas" (p. 35). Answering to the detailed and informative narrative is how Koon's father in a skillful way

"raised the stick with the silken loop, and by the time Koon had even seen which end of the snake the head was on, his father had slipped the loop around it and jerked the snake down from the tree branch. The instant it hit the ground, it streaked forward toward the termite mound, but in that instant Dang pounced, grabbed the snake's tail, and thrashed it against his flanks" (p. 35-36).

This scene not just reveals Koon father's particular way of hunting the snake, involving his quick movements that speak of developed hunting skills, but also the cooperation between man and animal. In a detailed description it is seen how Koon's father in equally skillful way

"tied a piece of vine tightly about the snake's neck and fastened the body to a thin branch. With his short knife, he carefully cut all around the neck, down the belly to the tail, cutting and peeling the skin carefully until the naked, pale muscle was revealed. The he untied the snake and chopped it into pieces, cut three skewers of wood, and threaded the pieces of snake onto them" (p. 36).

In a detailed way it is revealed how the meat has to be scorched otherwise "the blood would stain the pakomah when carried home, and that stain would never come out" (p. 36). The worth of things can be sensed, not only in the way a piece of cloth is precious, but also in the skillful and knowledgeable way the snake is carefully gutted immediately.

Sense of place is revealed through the way business is practiced in the woods. Koon and his father come across “two big boys carrying quail traps with baskets over their shoulders” (p. 36) with seven quails. They do business by exchanging two pieces of snake meat for two quails coming with a advises of how *lop* from the quail would taste the best by putting “in some young banana leaf stems . . .because they taste good- and because it makes more lop” (p. 37). The scene evokes not only the enjoyment of eating tasty food through the contemplation about taste but at the same time the scarcity of food in the mentioning of quantity.

It is an experience for Koon to go for the first time in his life trapping quail with his father. Because of the pale fibers the nets were made of they were hardly visible and “more like delicate spider webs than they were like the nets that were used for fishing” (p. 152-153). This scene reveals particular sense of place in the way the villagers take after nature creations in the making of these hunting equipments. The sense of inventiveness is greatly evoked through the nets invisibility and fragility while at the same time stating amazing efficiency. Koon’s father

“set the nets. First he carefully made a bare place, sweeping away any dried leaves. Then he stuck the bamboo sticks into the hard ground and spread the nets. Now we go over there and lie down, and . . . call the quail” (p. 153).

The hunting procedure is then carry out by imitating the bird and Koon’s father

“softly called, ooot-ooot....ooot-ooot”“ If there’s a quail out there, it will think we are a friend, it will be running very fast, and when it hits the back of the net it will pull the net shut on itself” (p. 153).

Showing the patience needed hunting a quail Koon’s father goes on imitating the bird for an hour but as his “ ,ooot-ooot“ ” (p. 153) sound became softer Koon took a turn calling the quail and suddenly

“[t]here it was in the net fluttering helplessly under the pile of netting that had looked so fragile, but that now held the quail fast. The quail had pulled the net shut, miraculously, just as his father had said it would”(p. 153).

This profoundly detailed scene answers to the preciseness of the hunt and reveals particular knowledge of hunting a quail. By knowing the bird's behavior and its sound the bird is misled by the use of its own sound which is in that way made an important part of the hunt technique of attracting the bird.

Attention is strongly drawn to the particular in the villager's ordinary life through their extensive knowledge of visual appearance of even the smallest of animals and the uttermost importance in determining whether a animal is eatable or not. In a place where food is made out of the smallest creatures from the fields or the forest, such as insects, it can be seen how the hunter must be extremely observant. As earlier stated the hunt of the right spider reveals how deep knowledge and great alertness is needed because the "one with less than ten legs . . . is a *bung ma*. A man who eats a „bung ma“ will go crazy, and nothing can cure him" (p. 234) revealing the particular knowledge and alertness need for hunting this specific type of insect.

Calling further attention to particular ways of obtaining food, the people, while at the River Chi, talk about how they would love a treat like *gaeng* of red ants' eggs but the question is how to get the eggs. "Usually, they would fill a water basket with clean water, then plunge the ants' nests into it until the eggs settled to the bottom" (p. 395). However through resourcefulness the men

"quickly dug a hole one kub deep and one sawk wide. They sent the boys to the stream bank for handfuls of wet clay which Koon's father and Tid-joon quickly smoothed over the sides and bottom of the hole . . . [n]ow we take off our pakomahs and soak them in the stream then wring them out over the hole until it is filled up" (p. 395-396).

Contributing to sense of place is how the resourcefulness of the men is revealed in how they so to speak make a container of particular size into the ground and use their clothes as baskets to carry water. Jundi and Koon without *pakomahs* use their pants. It is interesting to make notice of the particular measurements of *swak*⁵ and *kup*⁶ measurements⁷ that contributes as components in the making of the novel's sense of place. When the hole was filled to the top

⁵ *Sawk* according to Kepner "is the distance between a man's elbow and the tip of his middle finger" (Kepner, 1987: 395f).

⁶ *Kub* refers to the "span of a hand" (Kepner, 1987: 263f).

⁷ Although measures of length divided from parts of the body is widely used (Tuan, 1977: 45).

“Koon’s father Tid-joon and Gad climbed the tress, holding their shout knives in their teeth. Koon watched his father chop a nest out of the tree, drop it to Uncle Kem then grip the trunk with his legs and beat at himself with both arms, trying to brush off the ants. Uncle Kem ran with the nest to the water hole .Koon and Jundi stared down at it, fascinated to see the eggs sink to the bottom” (p. 396).

Particular sense of place is revealed through the notion of sharing in the way the men “chopped down three more nests” (p. 396) until it was enough to make *gaeng* for everybody. Sense of place is also revealed in the way the men’s handle the difficult working procedure of obtaining the red ants’ eggs and the awkward and uncomfortable labor it requires. In that way this procedure evokes sense of knowledge and inventiveness as well as sense of the men’s strength and physical fitness which calls attention to how Tuan sees the farmer’s feeling of a place recorded in his muscles and bones (Tuan, 1977: 184).

In relation with physical strength and fitness it can be seen how a tool like a bow or a gun is as a direct extension of physical powers (Tuan, 1977: 53) while on a hunt. Uncle Gah has a gun he uses for hunting bird such as a jungle fowl. Through the informative narrative it is revealed how a jungle fowl is known for its good sense of smell and good hearing, aware of people the bird goes into hiding. However by the use of his extensive knowledge of the jungle fowl behavior and hunter’s skill Uncle Gah “kept upwind” (p. 413) of the jungle fowl and with a keen eyesight he notice how the bird is preoccupied “trying to get some lady jungle fowl interested” (p. 413-414) so Uncle Gah see his chance to act.

Sense of place through hunting is profoundly revealed in the many particular hunting techniques, in extensive knowledge of animal world even the world of insects. However in a symbolic way the village custom how a boy makes his own hunting bow “in the fourth grade” (p. 213) strongly reveals how nature is first and foremost deeply known through the need of finding food.

4.1.3 From the Waters

Sense of the symbolic “utopian” place by the River Chi is profoundly evoked on the night of the first catch by the river “the moon is floating high in the sky” (p. 267) Uncle Gah had “found a small cove . . . full of weeds and even some branches, but it was also full of fishes” (p. 267) near the camp. Koon and Jundi were just “awestruck to see moonlight shining on the surface, which was boiling with small fishes” (p. 268). The way Uncle Gah is fishing “bare-butt” (p. 268) grabs Jundi’s attention and he remarks with an exclamation “Ha, ha! Better watch out for biting fish” (p. 268) in a good natured but teasing way. Koon’s father however acts differently and “pulled his pakomah up between his legs and knotted it at the back, making short, tight pants” (p. 268). Koon and Jundi get the important job of being listeners and listen for sound of trouble from the camp. Koon, as he watches his father in the water, senses the rising rural moon in how

“the men were easier to see. Wherever Koon’s father went, his fish basket, which he had fastened to his waist with a piece of twine, floated along behind him” (p. 269).

The fish baskets can in this way be seen as an extension of the man’s body just like a bow or a gun.

A laughing matter for Koon and his father is an issue about earthworms and forest worms to use as bait for fishing. Koon’s father decides to dig for earthworms knowing how “catfishes love these fat worms better than anything” (p. 312). Armed with a “digging trowel and a bamboo container” (p. 310) Koon and his father take off. Uncle Gah and the others however go to the forest for worms. Koon and his father stop by “a house surrounded by banana palms” (p. 310) and get a permission to dig and they find these “monstrous, marvelous earthworms squirming and climbing over each other” (p. 310). When they have enough earthworms in their *grabawk* they “pack the top with dirt” (p. 310) ready to go fishing.

At the river Koon watches his father fasten hooks to the lines, one every two meters or so, and “it seemed to him that his father’s fingers moved with magical swiftness in the way the “knots seemed to tie themselves” (p. 313). After instructions,

emphasizing the fish's delicate sense of touch feeling the hook if it sticks out, Koon's father trusts his son to bait the hooks with bits of worm.

It can be sensed through sound impression that their catch was a "good catch" (p. 316) in the way the catfishes "thrashed about in his basket" (p. 316). However, all of the other men "were in a bad mood" (p. 316) because they were "not catching anything" (p. 316). Koon and his father burst into laughter, knowing that the men's "bad catch" was because of forest worms.

When the fishing caravan is later invited to fish with the villagers by the River Chi at their "favorite fishing place" (p. 298) Koon although just a child,

"noticed with satisfaction that [his father's net] made a perfect, graceful circle as it dropped over the surface of the lagoon. A moment later, his father bent over, reached under the net and held up a good-sized snake headed fish, which he tossed into the basket that floated behind him" (p. 302).

Every time Koon's father caught a fish, "he held it up for Koon to see and Koon "clapped his hands" (p. 302). Sense of place is not just revealed through the physical gestures of father and son but also reveals deeply the utter importance of each and every fish.

On the "biggest fishing day of the whole trip" (p. 332) weather plays a huge part in the fishing because the

"cold, gray sky streaked with restless clouds that threatened rain. Yet no one thought of giving up the last and greatest fishing day of the journey" (p. 332).

Sense of place is strongly evoked through the continuing weather report and how the men going fishing go first into the forest and chop long straight branches which Uncle Gah

"quickly whittled one end of each into a sharp point so they will go down in the mud good and deep. The men went into the river with the sharpened net poles over their shoulders and drove them into the bottom, forming the great square to which they would attach the bag nets" (p. 333-334).

This scene calls attention to particular work procedure in fishing with nets. Speaking of efficiency a piece of the fishing equipment is made on the spot from material obtainable by the river. Drawing on ideas from Ryden who speaks of a stick of wood “whittled and manipulated with until meanings are released that can be understood as an expression of the sense of place” (Ryden, 1993: 75) corresponds very well to the „straight branches“ whittled with by Uncle Gah until they, in their own existence as a part of fishing equipment, speak of sense of place.

Sense of place is profoundly evoked in the way the weather can play a part in the fishing. By the river Koon notice that the sky “had grown much darker than it had been when they set out. The air was colder too” (p. 334) and the waves were higher. Tid-joon’s concerned about the weather is answered by Uncle Gah that they “could wait all day for rain” (p. 334). While the men “beat the surface to drive fishes into the nets” (p. 335) the weather continues to get worse and “the wind blew up around them, the clouds opened, and rain poured down” (p. 335). The still worsening weather is sensed through the text in the way “the men bent their heads and hunched their shoulders” (p. 335) fighting the rain and the wind while “grabbing fishes out of the nets and tossing them into their baskets as fast as they could” (p. 335).

In spite of the weather condition the thrill of a good catch is sensed in how Koon’s father smiled and held up a huge fish. Tid-joon just as thrilled shouts that there are just “whitefish and featherbacks” as he “laughed excitedly” (p. 335). However, danger was approaching the men in the river in the form of “a great raft of logs and twisted branches [that] was bearing down upon the square of bag nets” (p. 336). To save the nets Koon’s father “swimming strongly toward the net poles” (p. 337) was followed by Jundi’s father, Tid-joon and Gad.

“Koon saw his father grasp one corner of a net and begin swimming toward the next corner, and then it looked as if a giant hand scooped him up and flung him down-river [Koon], seized with panic, ran down the bank, staying even with his father” (p. 337).

The other men were also caught up in the force of nature and “Jundi ran beside [Koon] gripping his hand for dear life, and, for once in his life, saying nothing” (p. 337). The silence of Jundi the talkative boy emphasizes the anxiety of the moment perhaps the most. However, this time the men conquered nature “Koon’s father swam with all his

might, and at last, he crawled out of the water, and before long all of them were safe on shore” (p. 337). Responding to Gad’s suggestion about saving one of the nets the men agree that one bag net is not worth a life. Sense of place is deeply evoked in the way Koon’s father emphasizes that the young man must learn to value his life because although the nets are dear to them “[they] can always make new ones” (p. 337) and their “families need [them] more” (p. 337). The men

“sat together, holding their knees to their chests and staring at the river. It had promised much, and it had given much. Now it had turned on them, taking the nets they had laboriously woven on long afternoons in their own village; and they knew that the river had been willing to take their lives as well” (p. 337-338).

This occurrence can not only be observed as the most life threatening event in the novel but it also demonstrates the most profound antithesis, the grand gifts of nature and its hostility and force where man’s vulnerability is most profoundly sensed.

However, once again Koon was off fishing with his father but the water at the lagoon is “two cloudy to see fish” (p. 349). It is revealed how the use of torches although bringing the fish to them would not make difference because eyesight is needed to “know where to drop the traps” (p. 349). However, there are “plenty of frogs” (p. 349) to hunt and through an odd “da-rat-dat, da-rat-dat” (p. 349) sound impression Koon gets acquainted with red frogs he had never seen before because “there are none around their village” (p. 350). However these frogs are just as eatable as the frogs at home.

“Koon reached out and picked one up. It had three or four stripes at the top of its legs, and it was littler than the frogs he was used to. Otherwise, it looked like an ordinary frog, the kind that had whitish stripes from its head all the way down to its bottom” (p. 350).

Sense of place is revealed in Koon’s precise inspection of the particular frogs of this particular area. The narrative states in a detail that when Koon had

“picked up eight or nine redfrogs[sic], and an equal number of ordinary ones, his father said they had got enough big ones and should go into

the rice field, after smaller frogs and soon both their baskets were half full” (p. 350).

Koon’s father speaks of specific knowledge of frogs hunting when he suggests that they try again “just before dawn, when the frogs would be colder and slower” (p. 350). Koon notices how the ordinary frogs were bigger than the kind they had at home. And instead of the “*gope-gope-gope*” sound he was used to, these frogs went “*awt-awt-awt*” (p. 350-351). In that way Koon makes distinctions between the frogs through sound impression. The visual impression of seeing and hearing frogs Koon had never experienced before reveals how everyday life of the villagers doesn’t just revolve around survival but also new experiences because looking for food weather in the woods or by the river is inspired by various sense impressions, experiences, satisfaction and joy of nature.

In that way Koon experiences a smell impression after the fishing when his father

“unwound the pakomah from around his head, took out a cigarette, and lit it. Koon sniffed hungrily at the mingled aromas of tobacco and the lagoon mud that clung to his father’s legs” (p. 304).

The river in this way is not just a sight and hearing sensation, but in a close encounter the river evokes also senses of smell and touch and even taste.

However sense of place is perhaps most profoundly evoked for Koon when “[f]ishing with his father . . . forgot all about the heat, all about everything except the net, the water, the fish and the baskets” (p. 290) in his eagerness to make use of nature’s generosity.

*Food is a reliable way
to approach people and its culture
(Paz, 1997: 85)*

4.2 *Pla Daek* and Sticky Rice Food Culture

It can be stated the *pla daek*⁸ and sticky rice⁹ food culture answers excellently to the above quotation. The extensive reference to the food culture in *A Child of the Northeast* not only speaks of nourishment but distinct geographical setting and particular way of life (Noor, 2000: iii). In this light the novel's food ways are seen as a powerful literature symbol and a great contribution to sense of place in the novel interwoven in both the rural and the ethnic way of life.

Interestingly Piper writes about how all depends on rice and bananas that have nourished people since ancient times (Piper, 1993: vii). *A Child of the Northeast* speaks of how the people ate rice (*kin khao*)¹⁰ "every day, at every meal" (p. 18) and of banana palms "that grew in every yard" (p. 471).

Food plays a central role in *A Child of the Northeast* as David Wyatt so rightly states it "seems like the whole book takes us from one meal to another" (Wyatt, 2002: 117) profoundly stating particular sense of place through ordinary life. In so doing food and handling of food mentioned in the beginning of the novel echoes throughout the novel in countless realistic and detailed representations. Some chapters of the novel are devoted to food preservation, an important aspect of the *pla daek* food culture while other chapters of the novel speak of preparation, every day cooking and eating emphasizing repeatedly the aromas, tastes and textures of delicious food that evoke sense of place through the taste buds.

Distinctive food ways and every day practice of cooking can be viewed in terms of rurality and ethnicity answering to the many greater meanings of food while also contributing to the making of sense of place. The most reflective greater meaning of

⁸ *Pla daek* in Isan or *pla ra* in central Thai is fermented fish with salt and rice (Suparb Boonchai, 2002: 13) referring to a way of food preservation and its indispensability as a seasoning for rice.

⁹ Sticky rice is glutinous rice, a distinctive characteristic of Isan food culture.

¹⁰ The central role of rice and the importance of rice meal are sensed in the way the word *khao* means either rice or meal whereas *kin khao* means both to eat rice and to have a meal (Janowski 2007: 6-7). This distinct double meaning in Thai language regarding rice points towards much deeper meaning where rice is as important to the soul as it is to the body (Nguyen, 2001: 121).

food in the novel can be seen in how the *pla daek* and sticky rice culture is referred to with the grotesque connotations of being “raw and dirty” (p. 21) by Bangkok monk’s.

However, stated by Van Liere¹¹ the *pla daek* and sticky rice culture is the oldest material and cultural civilization known in Southeast Asia. Through the ages sticky rice and *pla daek* has become an ethnic symbol known as “the best and the favorite food of every Isan person” (p. 379) and savored by the villagers as stated in *A Child of the Northeast*.

According to Montanari food becomes culture when it is produced (Montanari 2006: xi) by man and in that sense serves to mark the difference between nature and culture.

4.2.1 Preservation

The village food ways reflect the harshness of the climate, the poor soil and the drought. The various creatures caught with great effort in the woods and in the waters make preservation of food significant aspect of the village food ways and an example of most down to earth sense of place.

The preservation of fish by making *pla daek* calls for great quantity of fish, the use of salt and extensive knowledge of food preservation. In view of nourishment Boonchai speaks of how the *pla daek* liquid holds all the five groups of food substances (Boonchai 2002: 14) as well as protein from the fish fat. Referring to taste preferences “[m]any say food is not delicious without *pla daek*” (Boonchai 2002: 15) which states its importance as a flavor in most Isan cooking.

Beside the great quantity of fish needed to make *pla daek* it can be seen how its making requires both skills and technique. Koon observes his mother handling the fish, while on the fishing caravan trip, after a day of a great catch. She just cuts open the bigger fishes and cleans them and leaves the smaller ones as they are. After that she sprinkles two coconut shells of salt over the fish and mixes the fish and the salt together. Koon knew from the expression on her face that she was

“[feeling] the mixture, slowly rubbing it between her fingers,

¹¹ In (Van Liere, 1982: 112-116 cited in Mayoury Nagaosyvatn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyvatn, 1994: 17).

then [she] added one more measure of salt, and vigorously worked it into the fish” (p. 305).

Only one more thing is added, that is rice bran which keeps the *pla ra* from rotting. After that the mixture is pounded in the mortar

“a little at a time, and pound[ed] it until the fish is nice and soft. If we were at home, we could use the stamp mill; that would be a lot faster. But here, we will have to do it the slow way” (p. 306).

Koon’s mother refers to the circumstances of working at the river edge and how the absence of the stamp mill at home makes the work heavier. Further sensed though the emphasize made on the action of pounding where she

“pounded and turned the fish, pounded and turned, and when she was satisfied with it she packed it into crocks, up to the top, then sealed them with charcoal and cloth plugs” (p. 306).

Sense of place is emphasized through the text’s repetition of the words pounded and turned evoking sense of the works routine and monotony. In the detailed and informative narrative it is also revealed how the food has to be preserved for a month before eating. There is however also the sensed feeling of deep knowledge in the way Koon’s mother uses her sense of touch to feel when the mixture is perfectly right. Particular knowledge in a place is also revealed in the way Koon’s mother puts handful of charcoal wrapped in a rag as a seal for the *pla ra* jar “because the flies are afraid of charcoal. They hate it” (p. 45).

The detailed narrative further reveals Koon’s mother measurements for *pla ra* as “one part salt to two parts chopped fish” (p. 305) and after mixing she adds the rice bran measured “[f]ive parts salted fish to one part rice bran” (p. 305). However, speaking of knowledge Koon’s mother while stating that if using “one part salt to one part fish” the *pla ra* will never get spoiled “just get better and better” (p. 306) she reveals the quality of different preservation ways. In that way Koon’s mother brings attention to how everyone has their specific family way of making *pla ra*, for example “some people let the fish stand overnight before they put in the rice bran . . . that way, the pieces of fish stay harder” (p. 306) speaking of texture preference in preservation. However, Koon’s

mother makes *pla ra* just the way her mother did emphasizing clearly how specific skills and preferences continue to live within families passed down from generation to the next.

Although *pla daek* seen as “the best and the favorite food of every Isan person” (p. 379) contributes deeply to the making of sense of place mixed feelings regarding *pla daek* are sensed in the novel. This is for example revealed in how Koon’s little sisters are “sick of lop *pla ra* and rice” (p. 61) and Jundi wonders, while at the River Chi, why they have to go back to the eating of “dried up *pla ra*” (p. 364). An irony is sensed in Uncle Mek’s words, when Tid-hod states how “Isan people could always eat *pla ran* and rice” (p. 176) since Uncle Mek is aware of how Tid-hod is more often than not seen “at the Vietnamese store eating good food” (p. 177). However in form of gratitude when the man who had be possessed by *pi bawb* brings Uncle Gah “only [a] jar of *pla daek*” Uncle Gah response is

“[c]an there be anything wrong with a jar of pla daek? Would anyone refuse a jar of pla daek? Pla daek is the best and the favorite food of every Isan person” (p. 379).

Deep community influences of *pla ra* are revealed in the way Auntie Kampa has gotten her nickname as Mrs. Stinking Pla Ra. The humorous side of the matter is however that while trying to cover up the quantity of her precious *pla ra* by using unsuitable works procedures she in fact reminds all the village of her possession of *pla ra* through an awful smell impression every time she opens a jar.

With plenty of little fishes and shrimps the people of the fishing caravan goes about making *pla som*, “some people say *pla som*, some people call it „*som pla noi*” or „*som pla bom*” or „*pla jawm*” but it’s all the same thing” (p. 271) revealing the many names of the same preservation way. The fish and the shrimps are put in a large flat basket to make “four crocks of *pla som* . . . [o]ne for each of the families” (p. 270). Koon helped the women pick out all the trash and then Kamgong

“poured a coconut shell full of salt over the fish, and the others mixed it in thoroughly with their hands. Soon, the little fishes and shrimps stopped squirming around on the flat basket and lay still, coated with salt” (p. 270)

that had killed them.

It is revealed how Kamgong, Koon's mother and Auntie Bua-si work together as a team and prepare the ingredients of pounded dried garlic and minced lemon grass that is sprinkled on the fish with "a good handful of ground, roasted raw rice . . . and some cooked rice too" (p. 270) which gives according to the women the specific sour flavor they are aiming for because "otherwise it would be a little flat" (p. 271). In further detail the narrative states how the rice is then broken into fragments over the fish, the salt, the garlic and the lemon grass. Then the mixture is turned once again. When mixed enough the *pla som* is divided it into four crocks making sure the tops are on tight and the *pla som* will be eatable in three days.

Significant components of sense of place are revealed through the detailed descriptions of preservation ways and how one of the utter importance's in the preservation is thorough mixing of the ingredients. The text not only reveals flavor preference regarding preservation in the use of cooked rice but also the effective cooperation seen in how the women divide the work between themselves. The visual illustration of the people going off to their carts, carrying crocks of precious fish from the caravan's first catch is deepened in the description of how Koon, trusted by his mother, "held (the crock] with both arms, close to his chest" (p. 272).

As an aspect of preservation is the scene where Koon and his parents, during the fishing caravan are "just the three of them, silently scaling and gutting their fishes, and watching the pile of eggs grow..." (p. 292). Not only is sense of place evoked through the act of scaling whitefish but as much through the team spirit and the closeness sensed by Koon as "so pleasant" (p. 292) time with his parents worth calling attention to.

Other traditional preservation ways are revealed as Koon's mother considers how they should preserve their fish. Koon's father response is to "[r]oast some, boil some, and hang some out to dry" (p. 292). If the fish is big enough he is preserved by letting it dry in the sun but "first the fish has to lie in salt for a day" (p. 293) otherwise the birds would have a feast.

The whitefish gives enough eggs to make fish egg *mum* for preservation. Koon watched his mother where she beats the eggs a little in a bowl then she added

- *roasted raw rice*
- *three seashells of salt*
- *green onions and garlic*

then she pounded again and to finish she added a

- *ball of cooked rice*

the size of a half of a matchbox and “pinched off bits of it into the bowl, beating the whole mixture again” (p. 293).

The interesting measurement stated in the form of a matchbox strongly states in a symbolic way how little rice is used in the *mum*. The seashells used as unit of measurement can also be seen as one of the smaller particular components perceived in making sense of place.

The importance of taste is revealed in how Koon’s mother tasted the *mum* and “pronounced it just right . . . [n]ot too salty, but salty enough” (p. 293). It is revealed how the „fish egg“ *mum* has to be preserved for seven days before eating.

Taking a closer look at the preservation recipes it can be seen how the ingredients used in the fish egg *mum* are almost the same as in the *pla som* except the lemon grass.

Sense of place through preservation reveals the constant fight with climate conditions when Uncle Gah with the role of the observant caravan leader senses the necessity “to take out all the fish they roasted before, and roast it again. Otherwise, in this damp weather, with no sun, it will start to stink” (p. 345). This makes the preservation work twofold but reveals how the people have no other choice than to work in harmony with the unpredictable nature.

*If the food is the same every where
the notion of sense of place is lost,
everything is the same*

(Ray, 2004: 132)

4.2.2 Preparations and Cooking Ways

Preparation of food, cooking ways and eating connotes a universal appeal but yet states such a unique local characteristic. These aspects of food ways capture particular

everyday activities in the village that can be seen as essential features in constructing sense of place in the novel.

However the countless and detailed descriptions of preparations and cooking in the novel can be seen as contradictory in view of the shortage of food but can also state its utter importance when scarce.

An example of particular preparation way is seen through preparation of frogs that have been captured in the fishing caravan journey. The frogs are put into a crock where Kamgong “sprinkles two handfuls of salt over them, then [she] put a heavy cover over the top” (p. 245). Usefulness of salt is seen in how it “takes away their slipperiness . . . and it kills them, too” (p. 246). Skillfully, Tid-joon with a pile of bamboo, took out his “chopping knife and in a minute [he] had cut spits the proper length for roasting frogs, each with a forked end” (p. 245). Through this way of preparation there is not only revealed specific knowledge in the treatment of frog meat by using salt but also how the method answers to religious conduct by letting the salt kill the frogs. In addition, the skill reveals the villager’s inventiveness seen in the making of useful utensils from nature’s resources when needed. The frogs are hanged on the spits, “[i]nto each fork, they wedged two or three frogs, depending on their size; then they tied the open ends together” (p. 245) revealing sense of place through unique preparation way before cooking.

Bringing attention to sweets (*kanom*) *khao lam* is “practically the only sweet Koon and his sisters ever got, and certainly the only one they were allowed to eat until they were full” (p. 19). To make *khao lam* coconut cream is needed making the scary coconut palm by the house ever so important. However, on the day of the new roof when Koon’s mother is going to make sweets she can’t make *khao lam* because it must be baked in bamboo tubes. The influence of the continuing drought is everywhere to be found and “[b]amboo is too scarce” (p. 182) around the village to use for making sweets. However, whereas “Koon had not eaten sweets since his grandfather’s funeral” (p. 182), revealing how *kanom* is just made for special occasions, Koon was “grateful to get whatever she made” (p. 182). Although “he like *khao bad* better than dog fart candy, which was named for the leaves they used in making it” (p. 182) stating his preferences.

Through the many steps in the preparation of *khao bad*, “rice must be hulled and sifted. Then it must be soaked overnight” (p. 184). When the rice is ready, Koon’s mother adds coconut milk and sugar to the rice and cooks the mixture. At last “the *khao bad* would be spread over the surface of a very large, flat basket” (p. 184). There is a

picturesque scene of Koon's mother and Kamgong preparing the dough by lifting "the dough into a large pot over the firestones . . . chipping away at a block of sugar" (p. 188) into the dough. The work goes on and

"the dough softened as they added the coconut milk and sugar, and before long they were able to stir it. They stirred and stirred, and the confection began to bubble. Each woman grasped a sturdy piece of bamboo, and they stirred . . . pushing the sticks round and round with a slow, steady motion" (p. 188-189).

The effort of the work is sensed through the repetition of stirring. The dough is then "spread out on a big, flat basket" (p. 189) when it begins to get stiff again. The work load calls attention to how preparation, just as preservation, is often a communal activity.

Sense of place through cooking way is revealed in specific cooking ways such as dry cooking seen in the sun cooked eggs Koon's mother fetches eggs into "a pile of sand" (p. 22) in their yard. However, most often the kitchen (*krua*) is the place of cooking with its symbolic and universal references as the heart of the home and the place where from the family or *krob krua*¹² seeks nourishment of both physically and emotionally nature.

The detailed description of a cooking way revealed when Tid-joon brings *pla som* to the family is like stepping into the family kitchen with Koon. His mother unfolds the leaf of the *pla som* and there is "a pale fish half the size of Koon,s palm" (p. 168). Koon,s mother

"bent over blew on the smoldering charcoal under the fire stones, then split end of a thin piece of bamboo. She closed the banana leaf and re-fastened it, gently wedged it between the ends of the bamboo, and held it over the fire until the leaf turned crisp and brown around the edges. She unwrapped the fish and put it into a heavy bowl" (p. 168).

¹² Emphasizing the importance of the kitchen in Thai family life in view of sense of place there is a interesting and delightful link between family and kitchen in Thai language worth noticing where the words kitchen and family come together and create the word family or *krob krua*.

Then she “took a woven bamboo tray from a shelf, put the *pla som* and a pot of *pla ra* on it, and let Koon carry it out into the main room” (p. 168) where the family dines. Sense of place is profoundly evoked in the sharing of the tiny fish served three grownups since Tid-joon was joining the family. It is revealed how the fish is just meant to flavor the rice bringing attention how rice is the indispensable main part of the meal. Particular sense of place is revealed through the specific way Koon’s mother adjusts the fire, how she arranges the food and how her utensils are made of material from the surrounding nature.

Drawing from Basso’s ideas regarding sense of place, sense of the village sense of place, (Basso, 1996a: 145) is profoundly evoked in *A Child of the Northeast* through an everyday recipe revealing an aspect of what sense of place is made with (Basso 1996a: 145) through particulars in ordinary food ways.

Taking a closer look at the particular way of raw cooking one of the best-known Isan dishes sense of place is profoundly illustrated through a detailed description of how to make *lop*. Making *lop* Koon’s mother mixes

- 4-5 pieces of *pla ra*
- 2 stalks of lemon grass,
- slices of fresh young galangal¹³
- dried green onions,
- fresh chili peppers,
- handful of finely ground rice

Koon helps his mother by chopping the fish carefully, the lemon grass and the galangal as well as handful of dried green onions, fresh chili peppers and by the time she added “a handful of parched, finely ground rice” (p. 45) Koon’s was getting very tired chopping. Then the mixture had to be turned over with a knife “every few chops” (p. 45). Koon’s mother shows her son the working procedure when

“she slid the flat blade under the mixture, and deftly flipped it over. Chop-chop-flip...chop-chop-flip....Koon took the knife back and did the same, concentrating on doing it just right” (p. 45).

The repetition of the work is sensed in the way Koon

¹³ Galangal is Thai ginger (*kha*).

“chopped and flipped, chopped and flipped, and at last his mother took the knife from him. Sliding it under the lop, she laid one half of the fragrant mound onto a piece of fresh banana leaf, heated it over the fire, and expertly folded the leaf into . . . packet which she tied into a scrap of cloth. The rest of the lop she put into a small clay pot” (p. 46).

The recipe brings attention to the main ingredients used in this particular dish. It is noticed how precise quantity is just referred to regarding lemon grass. In that way the recipe reveals clearly how Koon’s mother has a sense for how much of the other ingredients is needed to make the best *lop*. The right work procedure is emphasized by Koon’s mother and Koon’s tiredness of chopping speaks of the manual labor. The repeated sound sensations brought into words further emphasizes the sense of an endless work of chopping.

Similarities in cooking are awoken in the way the recipe for *jaew bong* fish mixture is almost the same as for *lop* Koon’s mother “only [puts] in dried roasted peppers, not fresh ones, and roasted onions too” (p. 46). However *jaew bong* goes by this name “only because they pack it into a bong-a bamboo tube-for going on a long trip. *Jaew* packed in a bong will stay good for many months, even a whole year” (p. 46). However, in her precautions way Koon’s mother states that she would “heat it again, just to be sure” (p. 46) before eating. Sense of place through cooking and deeply sensed culinary importance is clearly stated by Koon’s mother in her words that “[e]very human being should be able to make *lop pla ra* and *jaew bong*” (p. 46).

Profound sense of place components through comparison can be noticed in the way the text brings forth striking differences of morning rice before the journey to the River Chi and during the fishing caravan.

A scene reveals morning rice at home one morning where the mother and her three children gather around

“woven bamboo box of rice, the little pot of lop that Koon had helped to make, and two hard-boiled eggs cut into halves. Their mother gave one half to each child, and put the extra half onto a shelf” (p. 47) . . . for “[w]hoever feels hungry later” (p. 47).

Comparing the above scene to morning rice at Koon's wagon one morning of the fishing journey which consisted of

“roasted dried catfish, dripping with fat, and som pla noi. Yee-soon could not get enough of the fresh . . . she would tear off a little piece of crispy skin and pop it into her mouth” (p. 299).

the sense of feast is evoked through the enjoyment of fresh fish and the crispy texture but most of all the sensed feeling of a full stomach.

Another example of delicious morning rice by the river is also the preparation and cooking of a jungle fowl. The jungle fowl shot by Uncle Gah is plucked by Koon's father how also “held [it] over the fire, slowly passing it through the flames to singe off the pinfeathers” (p. 414). At the same time

“Uncle Gah's wife and Auntie Bua-si sat together tearing strips of leaf to make the kratongs in which they would cook the gaeng, while Koon's mother chopped dried lemon grass. When she had chopped it very fine, she scraped it into a mortar, and Kamgong began to pound it” (p. 414).

The novel's detailed description emphasizes not just how Koon's mother cuts the lemon grass but how she chops it very fine. It is seen as a preferred way while also evoking the feeling how it is much more difficult and time consuming to cut something into fine pieces than into larger pieces. The children are also involved in the preparation whereas Jundi and Gad are sent to find some “sweet greens” (p. 413). Koon's father continues the preparation and “chopped the fowl into small pieces. By the time he was done the kratongs were ready, and he divided the meat between them” (p. 414). Noteworthy is not only the cooking but also how the working rhythm of one person answers to the rhythm of other person's work in the making of jungle fowl *gaeng* revealing an excellent example of the fishing caravan cooperation.

The making a *lop bung* however requires the use of mortar and pestle and with two spiders compared to the size of matchbox

“Tid-joon dropped the two wriggling bung into the mortar and quickly pounded them. In a moment there is a clear liquid in the bottom of the mortar, and the bok-bok-bok sound became a squishy

chook-chook-chook sound instead” (p. 234).

The pounding goes on and then Tid-joon began to “sprinkle in the same ingredients as for any other kind of lop: chili peppers and ground roasted rice and herbs, a little at a time” (p. 234). The wriggling of the *bung*’s states that they are alive when the pounding begins which calls attention to Tuan’s observations that emotional bonds between man and animal below a certain size are hardly found (Tuan, 1974: 15). The changing sound coming from the mortar and pestle evokes the feeling of change of texture when the bungs changes from solid substance to the form of liquid.

It is interesting to observe, although commonly in patriarchal society food preparations and cooking is the matter of women (Surapeepan Chatraporn, 2005: 67), how everything concerning food as well as cooking is in fact of common interest. From the hunting of food to the preservation, preparation and cooking is in fact contributed to by young and old of both genders.

Detailed description is of how Koon’s mother makes cricket *pong* for the grandmother’s *sadow-kraw* ceremony when she is sick. She

*“blew on the[kitchen] fire and set an earthen pot onto the stones.
She took one dried pepper, pierced it with a sharp stick, and
roasted it while she waited for the pot to become hot” (p. 174).*

Then she began pulling crickets out of the baskets, snapping of their heads and tossing them into the pot and “in a moment they were popping and sizzling” (p. 174). Koon got the preparation job of pulling wings and legs and squeezing bodies while his mother put roasted scallions and peppers into a small stone mortar and

*“[w]hen she had mashed the peppers and scallions together, she
added the roasted crickets, one or two at a time, and continued
pounding until the peppers, scallions and crickets hand turned
into a paste” (p. 175).*

To finish the cooking “she turned the finished paste into a large bowl, boiled a cupful of water with a little pla ra, and added it slowly as she stirred” (p. 175) stating it “crick pone” (p. 175). Koon’s mother comments about if they had a few more crickets they could have eaten them with rice, “just as they are. But we have enough to mix with pla

ra and make pone, for everyone to share. The other will bring something to share” (p. 174).

Sense of place in preparation and cooking is not only profoundly evoked through the concern about quantity but also in the great capability and emotional strength sensed in Koon’s mother statement that “there will be enough. There always is, somehow” (p. 174).

4.2.3 Aroma Taste and Texture

Considering the scarcity of food in the village it is remarkable how the novel *A Child of the Northeast* is filled with countless detailed description of tempting aromas, tastes and textures impressions of delicious food. Sense of place in the novel is therefore evoked in close connection with impressions descriptions and cultural preferences. Noteworthy here is Tuan statement of how the senses taste, smell, and touch create the environment but are most often not noticed (Tuan, 1977: 21). However, in view of the priority given to the world of senses in the novel it can very well be sensed that when food is scarce the aroma taste and texture of every bite becomes particularly relevant.

Common classification for taste is sweet, salty sour and bitter (Conner and Armitage, 2002: 13) which answers to the flavors emphasized in the novel that most often come from chilies, lemon grass, galangal, dried green onions and a lot of fresh chili peppers. The attention brought to the enjoyment over fresh spices is seen in Koon’s mother delight over “five fresh peppers” (p. 353) given to her by the *phuyaiban*’s wife by the River Chi and the way she did “[watch] them constantly” (p. 353) while roasting the peppers over the fire.

The indispensable mortar and pestle used to grind food (Somjai Wichaidit, 2000: 132) can be seen as the household utensil that most of all contributes to creation of the authentic aromas, taste and texture of dishes prepared by the villagers and therefore every home has such household equipment.

Although taste, smell and textures preferences may be seen as highly individual sense of place preferred taste, aromas, and texture are culturally taught and like particular food habits rooted deep in a place. It can be strongly sensed through the story of the grandfather who according to the Bangkok monks “ate raw and dirty food, like all

Isan people” (p. 21) how the taste, the texture and the smell of Isan food was far from being appreciated by the Bangkok monks.

According to Birch most food preferences seem to be learned in the way people come to prefer what they are used (Birch, 1999: 42) to and through the child protagonist the narrative in an uncomplicated and natural way illustrates the unspoken rules of cultural preferences. Koon’s preferences can in this sense be seen as representative of the villager’s preferences and therefore evoke and contribute to the making of particular sense of place. In this way, as Ray states “there is no way of escaping home and its flavors” (Ray, 2004: 145-46), that have been shaped from early childhood.

Taking a closer look at some of the many aroma, taste and texture impressions it can for example be seen how taste preferences shaped through food contributes also to the shaping of a boyhood. One day at morning rice when Koon pulled a chunk of rice, dunked it into the *lop* and up to his mouth the food exploited on the tongue and Koon’s lips “burned from the hot, fresh chillis [sic] . . . [so] he pursed his lips and drew in his breath to cool them” (p. 47). Koon’s mother in a surprised way states “[i]t isn’t that hot” (p. 47) and in the air lingers the expectation that “a boy child should be able to eat *lop* with five chillis [sic]!” (p. 47) when even Yee-soon, his younger sister, can eat *lop* with five chilies¹⁴.

Further revealing taste preference is Uncle Gah’s remark when tasting featherback *lop*. He “stuck his finger in, tasted it, and smacked his lips “stating that “it is good, and it is strong...like all of [the] people” (p. 341). Particular sense of place is evoked with the simile stating how the people are strong like their food also explaining the connection between chilies and boys. However Yee-soon’s reason for eating food with five chilies is because her father had told her that she would be “smart” (p. 47) if she ate “lots of chillis [sic]” (p. 47) since usually Koon’s mother pointed out to her little girls what dish was “for children, with only a little chilli [sic] pepper” (p. 190). It is revealed how the little girls were thought to be too young to be fully educated in cultural preferences.

Taste sensations are revealed on countless of occasions as through the mentioning of “eggs roasted in the sand” (p. 22) Koon’s father states that eggs “never taste so good when they are boiled” (p. 22). While revealing his cultural preference Koon’s father also states that what is mouth-watering comes from specific food ways.

¹⁴ Isan food is considered not just spicy but very hot, with more heavy use of chilli peppers than in other regions (Somjai Wichaidit, 2000: 135).

Sense of food texture is evoked with the earlier mentioned left over's of *jik* leaves showing up at supper the day after. Knowing the leaves would be "hard to chew" (p. 60) since they were not fresh Koon's father emphasizes that the "tough ones that are good for your blood. By relating the negative toughness of the leaves to the issue of gaining strength Koon's father makes the old *jik* leaves worth eating.

On *songgran* Koon's father brings however fresh *jik* leaves and cicada eggs from hunting which they all loved.

"They smelled even better than cooked chicken eggs. [Koon's mother] took a ball of cooked rice she had prepared the day before and mashed it flat, then sprinkled some cicada eggs on top and gently pressed them into the rice cake until it turned pale yellow. Koon made a rice cake for himself just like it, and ate it. It was delicious" (p. 99).

Bearing in mind the child protagonist and how Tuan speaks of childhood as the most sensational experiences of life (Tuan, 1977: 185) often just a smell is profoundly sensed.

Koon finds culinary wonder in such delicacy as roasted frogs and just when the "smoke rose up from the fire . . . Koon's mouth watered" (p. 246). Koon slowly ate the first frog, from its head all the way down to its feet. Then he ate the other one" (p. 245) and "[k]ickin at the ground with his bare toes, looking into the fire" (p. 245) Koon got the third appetizing roasted frog and "from their heads down to their feet . . . they were delicious" (p. 247) all of them. The frog's deliciousness is profoundly sensed through the narrative description of mouth watering taste buds, and the slow eating sensation.

Since the protagonist is just eight years old *kanom* treats can be seen of a special interest as well as a contribution to particulars in ordinary life. As earlier mentioned Koon "liked khao bad better than dog fart candy" (p. 182) although Koon knows that the leaves used to make dog fart candy smelled terrible

"after they had been pounded and their juice squeezed out and mixed with rice flour, the dough steamed, the confection that resulted was fragrant and delicious" (p. 182).

The excerpt reveals knowledge regarding how a smell of one ingredient in a mixture does not always answer to the taste after preparation and can in fact alter the taste completely.

Sense of place is also evoked through a smell sensation of roasting whitefish and catfish fish being roasted “dripping with fat” (p. 293) and the “luscious smell of fish eggs, onions and garlic” (p. 293) that filled the camp saw to that “every face wore a smile” (p. 293) answering profoundly to collective sense of place and the enjoyment of food.

Another time there is also a “tantalizing fragrance” in the air by the river (p. 353) when Koon’s mother chooses

“the biggest and fattest frogs . . . lodged them firmly into one large fork, she folded their legs and tucked them in alongside their bodies” (p. 353).

When Koon’s mother “laid the fork next to the hottest part of the fire. . . . instantly they sizzled, sending out their tantalizing fragrance” (p. 353). It is interesting to observe, in a place where food is a scarcity, how Koon’s father through his gourmet contemplation about the way food hits the taste buds tells his son that the *goi* will bite him back a little when he bites it. In this way the narrative evokes the sense of rich and colorful food ways. Koon’s father goes off to find some *jik* leaves to mix with the *goi* and meanwhile his mother roasted five fresh peppers and added them to the mortar.

“A little at a time she added pla ra that she had thinned with water When she was satisfied with the mixture she turned it into a bowl and set it next to the goi his father had made. It was clear to Koon that this would be a feast” . . . as he “knelt before the fire, turning the fish and sizzling frogs” (p. 354)

It can also be seen how the appearance of fresh fish and big “sizzling frogs” (p. 354) sending fragrance into the air plays a big part in evoking Koon’s appetite for the food as “[t]he family gathered beneath the cart, sniffing happily at the bowls of special things” (p. 354). Their appetite for the food is further emphasized in the way they

“[e]agerly . . . reached for the rice, forming it into balls with their fingers, and then dipping the fragrant balls into the goi, delicious goi with red ants” (p. 354).

In a place where the quest for food is a question of survival or hunger the persistent question of quantity over quality, by adding water to make more, is aroused more than once. When Tid-joon makes such a delicious and oily *lop bung* at the fishing caravan that Koon’s mouth watered there are speculation about adding water. Uncle Gah states through is worldly wisdom that “[y]ou don’t need to have a lot of something good. Just dip your rice into it carefully, and chew for a long time” (p. 235). This quote not only states his personal view as a gourmet but corresponds to the villager’s particular interest and enjoyment of delicious food that is meant to satisfy the taste buds just as much as being essential nourishment.

Although Koon mother adds water to the *pong pla* when they had company Koon has his way of getting to the best stuff by waiting while his “relatives sat around dipping their rice into a bowl of watery pong pla . . . [he] got the best stuff from the bottom of the pot” (p. 131) when “the grownups had finished eating” (p. 131).

Sometimes the aroma speaks of the flavor of the food as Uncle Gah states when asked to taste the ant’s egg *gaeng* he states that “[n]obody has to taste it . . . the smell went up my nose, and my mouth is full of saliva already” (p. 398). Koon agreed with Uncle Gah because “[t]he smell was enough to tell anyone how good it would taste” (p. 398). This scene speaks of how profoundly the aroma¹⁵ of food can determine the taste before the food is in the mouth.

Aroma, taste and texture through sound sensation, moment of anticipation for the most delicious part, the experience, the *sanuk* and the sensation brought on the taste buds is profoundly evoked in how

“[i]t was a noisy meal [eating the red ant’s gaeng] everyone slurping juice from their shells. And at last they did reach the wonderful eggs. When Koon swallowed his first spoonful of ant eggs, he thought that he had never tasted anything as sweet, and oily, and as perfect in his life” (p. 399).

¹⁵ Conner and Armitage state that aroma and taste are the most important sensory factors in deciding choice of food (Cooner and Armitage, 2002: 13).

With these words Koon most profoundly evokes the connection between food and emotions and the gourmet characteristic of the villagers sensed through aroma taste and texture. The scene is not just an example of how unique aroma, taste and texture circumstances can be shared (Tuan, 1977: 148) but also how sense of place can be shared.

4.2.4 Greater Meanings of Food

In its countless presentation food in *A Child of the Northeast* is not just a simple presentation of physical nourishment but a remarkable literary symbol carrying significant information and meanings way beyond the issue of nourishment alone. More often than not food creates temptations and atmosphere that drives poverty and hardship away.

By taking a closer look at few of the countless greater meanings of food in the novel significant components in the making of the novel's sense of place are evoked. For example through the novel's rurality and ethnicity it can truly be seen how food locates the people as well as through issues such as the notion of sharing food and the greatly sensed enjoyment of food evoked throughout the novel.

Greater meanings of food can be of emotional nature as observed when

“Koon and Jundi scarcely heard the grownups” conversation. They Where interest in only one thing. They dipped balls of rice into the gaeng, carefully nipping chunks of fowl between rice and thumb. How delicious, on this gloriously fresh morning, after the frightening events of the night before when the cart axle broken down on the way from the fishing journey” (p. 416).

Besides the great pleasure of particular and delicious food, the excerpt reveals the soul nurturing part of familiar taste of food as a source to reveal emotional stress after a frightening night. Sense of place is also conveyed through the boy's way of eating.

Taking further look at the village consumption culture¹⁶ particulars in ordinary life are illustrated perfectly in the way Koon's family prefers to share a meal seated on a mat on the floor in a circle and eat in a fork-free way with their fingers. Sticky rice (*khao niao*) is used to scoop up a little food from the dishes in the way

"Koon pulled a chunk of rice out of the woven bamboo box quickly rolled it into a ball with his fingers and dunked it into the delicious tasting lop" (p. 47).

Not just sense of family intimacy and togetherness is evoked through this scene but the cultural way of eating. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that when preparing food it is most often in pieces of bite-size and eaten from the same pot (Somjai Wichaidit, 2000: 135) which answers perfectly to the sharing notion accompanying the village food. The culture of eating rice is emphasized in the novel in the way rice is eaten "every day, at every meal" (p. 18) whether breakfast, lunch or dinner and by telling the children "to eat lots of rice and only little pieces of the other food" (p. 48). The quote points to the scarcity of food and the way cultural habits are profoundly shaped by location and what is available.

The thorough narrative of how to eat red ant's *gaeng* reveals various components regarding sense of place through greater meanings of food. People are "supposed to sip the fragrant juices first . . . [t]hen, when all the juices are gone, and you are not so hungry, you eat the eggs" (p. 398). The way of reserving the most delicious part of the red ant's *gaeng* until at the end of the meal when people are not as hungry can be seen brought about through the effort of obtaining food and its scarcity. However, the way of sensing food not just as nourishment but as an enjoyment can be deepened by prolonging the most sensational moments of the enjoyment of delicious food. In this connection Koon contemplates on "the spoons he had seen at the Vietnamese people's store, real spoons made of tin, with real handles" (p. 398) not "the short spoon made of a shell" (p. 398) they all had. However, molded by his local ways of life Koon, through his honest childhood observation, sees a real benefit in the shell spoons on this occasion while sipping the fragrant juices of the red ant's *gaeng* because

¹⁶ Consumption culture is defined here as the culture of eating and drinking.

if they had the more efficient “real spoons” (p. 398) “all the gaeng would be gone in a minute” (p. 398).

Sense of place is evoked in the sharing and the enjoyment of eating together in an intimate circle during the fishing journey when “they had far more food to eat than on any previous evening of the journey. The smell of roasting fish filled the camp, and every face wore a smile” (p. 293). Uncle Gah laughed and Kamgong and Tid-joon kissed and made up after their fight because of Tid-joon’s girl watching. The dogs lay close to the people “their tails thumping happily” (p. 294) where “they gnawed on the fish heads people tossed to them” (p. 294). In this scene it can be observed how food is powerful in communicating states of mind (Ray, 2004: 146). The enjoyment of sharing is evoked in the episode through smiling faces and thumping tails of dogs.

However there is no need for special occasion, food can call for sorrow and happiness through just an ordinary and trifle happening. In that way happiness through food is evoked when Auntie Bua-Si changes a sorrowful and meager supper for Koon’s sisters with just one matoom fruit. Sense of place is not only evoked in the act of sharing food but in the special way Koon’s father prepares the fruit for his sisters.

“There were never any extra marks from the knife when he cut up a fruit, or odd little pieces left over. He split the matoomin half and set aside the rubbery pit. Holding one half, he carefully loosened the pulp from its shell and, using the shell as a bowl, finely chopped the fruit. He took a „ball of rice from the box, mashed it into the fruit, and handed the little bowl of rice and fruit to the delighted Yee-soon” (p. 62).

Boonlai got the other half prepared in the same caring way. It can be seen how one matoom fruit does not just speak of physical nourishment but specific sense of place is evoked in the way the fruit is prepared as a treat.

It is seen how sense of place through greater meanings of food brings people together. Seen for example in the way food is used as a magnet in the village community function at the day of the *wat* fair when young men are invited to Koon’s house for a treat with the sole purpose of being Auntie Ploy’s possible future son-in-laws.

In that way food is also capable of bridging cultural gaps between people. This is revealed in the novel when the Vietnamese woman asks Koon's mother for eggs. Food brings about communication and understanding between the women although of different ethnicity through the Vietnamese woman's "need [of] fresh food" (p. 53) a need that is perfectly understood by Koon's mother.

However sense of place through the greater meanings of food found in the novel are most profoundly revealed through the grotesque aspect of the grandfather's story where local food culture is made a tool of ethnic categorizing and used to establish identity (Montanari, 2006: 133). By viewing food culture as a part of ethnicity and therefore including aspects such as the taste of familiar food (Karner, 2007: 34) the notion of sense of place through the greater meanings of food is evoked.

In historical agreement with the novel is how the ruling Bangkok elite¹⁷ in the past is said to have called the Isan people "eaters of sticky rice and of padek" (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 17). As earlier has been stated one of the main reasons for making Koon's grandfather an outcast from the Bangkok wat was that "he ate raw and dirty food like all Isan people" (p. 21).

This issue calls attention to the cooked and the raw which Claude Lévi Strauss¹⁸ devoted a famous essay *Le Cru et le Cuit* (1964) where he argues how cooking separated humans from the rest of the living world (Jones, 2007: 1). The raw is associated with nature and the cooked with culture. On the issue of raw or cooked Boonchai writings however reveal how the *pla daek* is in fact chemically heated in the jar (Boonchai 2002: 15) although not cooked in the ordinary manner.

However as earlier stated *pla daek* and sticky has become an ethnic symbol, known as "the best and the favorite food of every Isan person" (p. 379) while speaking of meanings going way beyond the issue of nourishment alone distinguishing them who eat *pla daek* and sticky rice both ethnically and socially (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 18).

Differences in food ways not only evokes sense of place but can also bring about humor as seen when Tid-hod on the day of the new roof can't resist a good nature

¹⁷ To the elite in Bangkok the *pla daek* culture of pickled rotten fish was strongly disapproved of (Mayoury Ngaosyathn, and Pheuiphanh Ngaosyathn, 1994: 17).

¹⁸ Claude Lévi Strauss (1908-2009) was a French anthropologist. The essay *Le Cru et le Cuit* 1964 is from *Mythologiques* 1 – iv. In English *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969). However *cuit* in French means "done" not necessarily cooked, therefore *cuit* implies what culture does to the raw to make it done, not necessarily by the way of cooking (Wikipedia, 2011b: Online).

teasing when the Vietnamese woman living in the village walks by the house. He knows that the Vietnamese “don’t eat lizards” (p. 196) but states nevertheless that if she had walked by a little earlier she “could have eaten gaeng took-geh” (p. 196) with them. As the Vietnamese woman turns down the offer Tid-hod can’t resist in a ironic way to state how the “Vietnamese people never have to eat lizards, not as long as there are any dogs left in the world” (p.196). At the same time Tid-joon however reveals religious eating taboos of their own stating how it is really “a sin to eat took-geh” (p. 191) when Koon’s mother contemplates on bringing the left over’s of the *took-geh* to the *wat*. It is not only seen how learned habits control peoples food ways but also how greater meanings contributed to food are powerful in deciding what are appropriate food ways.

A significant aspect of sense of place through greater meanings of food is the sharing of food in connection with religion and beliefs. For example seen in food offered to the ancestors “with two boiled eggs, two lumps of rice that had been dyed, one red and one yellow” (p. 177) which draws attention to the display of food in rites.

In relation with religion sense of place is also evoked through merit making (*dtak badb*) offering rice or any food to the monks on their daily rounds each morning. The sharing notion of food is profoundly stated in the way the people coming home from the fishing journey

*“will all go to the wat at pen after [they] have unpacked the carts.
Then [they] will be able to take [to] Luang Paw Ken and the other
monks the best things to eat” (p. 435).*

The quote emphasizes how the sense of sharing through religious conduct is a component contributing to the greater meanings of food in the village. However the greater meanings interwoven in the village food ways speak most profoundly of cultural identity that contributes extensively to the making of the novel’s sense of place.

4.3 Local Handicrafts

As observed in the novel the making and the use of handicrafts is such a great part of daily life. In that way handicrafts can very well answer to the particular among the most ordinary since many of them are vital objects in a traditional agricultural community such as the novel’s small village. Handicrafts viewed as such corresponds

very well to Raymond's Williams famous statement that "culture is ordinary" (Williams, 1993: 6)¹⁹.

In connection with William's statement it is also interesting to take notice of how Lippard sees local handicrafts as "a way of reading a place" (Lippard, 1997: 116) which brings attention to how particular local handicrafts that can be seen as a aspect of "community art" (Knox and Marston, 2004: 34) can as artifacts be viewed as important components in the making of the sense of place.

Further bringing forth the importance of handicrafts in view of sense of place it is interesting to observe how understanding of the past can be gained through the world of objects that have survived (Tuan, 1974: 121-122) through the ages. In this regard Van Estrik has brought attention to how the objects from Ban Chiang have become "closely identified with Thai national identity" (Van Estrik, 2000: 19)

In that way Fuengfusakul defines handicrafts as objects made by hand connected to nature in their use of material and connected to social history in their tie to past ways (Apinya Fuengfusakul, 2008: 131). As exquisitely seen in *A Child of the Northeast* sense of place is revealed in the techniques used in the making of an object, its shape and size, its texture felt by handling and its laborious and artistic creation by hand. Their most often long lasting existence and rootedness speaks of their practical needs and usefulness.

Although the focus on the particular in the ordinary is seen extensively throughout *A Child of the Northeast* it is maybe most obvious in connection with sense of place through the ordinary local handicrafts seen as trivial objects although passed down from one generation to the next because of their vital importance in a particular place.

4.3.1 Things Folded and Carved

Sense of place through community objects²⁰ is revealed through the novel's distinct way as a part of the narrative's vivid and detailed descriptions of the most

¹⁹ According to (Williams, 1993: 6 cited by Mitchell, 2000: 43-44) in order to understand the culture of a place it is not just the high culture that needs to be explored but rather the everyday and ordinary culture as a valid part of life in a place.

²⁰ Community object is a reference to the making of handicrafts and their use.

casual daily practices in the village. However it is suggested that it is within the family, where handicrafts speak most profoundly of sense of place through their usefulness.

In *A Child of Northeast* commonplace household and farm equipments are the focuses of attention evoking endless hours of spent labor of mending old ones and making new. Handicrafts such a part of people's daily lives and surroundings, can answer to Tuan's writings about things that are usually too close to be fully noticed as significances in revealing sense of place (Tuan, 1977: 144). However focusing on the particular in the ordinary the novel speaks of how handicrafts are primarily invented to serve the most basic needs while at the same time they truly speak of specific location and place.

Taking a closer look at the ordinary banana leaf it can be seen how its importance in the village community states also its significances in revealing the village sense of place. Reflecting its extensive use, *kratong* is a handicraft often spoken of in the novel as an indispensable household item. In that way sense of place can be seen in the tradition of "[cutting] banana leaves for kratong" (p. 176) to use for wrapping food such as Koon's school meal of rice balls "wrapped in leaves" (p. 137), the making of *kratong*²¹ as a food container and as a cooking pot speaks of local ways of making use of leaves. In the form of a cooking parcel the banana leaf is for example held over the fire with thin piece of bamboo "until the leaf turns crisp and brown around the edges" (p. 168). The importance of the *kratong* is furthermore emphasized on the villager's way home after the fishing caravan journey. In a detailed narrative it is stated how *kratongs* are made before a meal, not too thin so they don't leak or "burn before the meal cooks thick" (p. 397) revealing particulars about handling the *kratong*. Uncle Gah suggests "trading some fish for a pot to cook gang" (p. 30) so they don't have to make the pot, so to speak, every time before cooking as earlier has been mentioned. In a general protest it is stated how food "cooked in a kratong has a much nicer smell, and . . . tastes better too" (p. 414) revealing how the traditional pots are not only containers but also hold the ability to contribute to the taste of the food.

Although *kratong*'s are objects of daily use in the novel they are maybe nowhere seen as such a visual impression as when put on display on festive and ceremonial occasions. By viewing the *kratong* made for the ceremony to drive out Koon's

²¹ *Kratong* is a small basket that is made from banana leaves and stitch together with bamboo skewers (Kepner, 1987: 176f).

grandmother illness earlier spoken of is as a piece of handicraft that is an eye-ful for Koon

“the largest and surely the most magnificent kratong [he] had ever seen. Inside it were two boiled eggs, two lumps of rice that had been dyed, one red and one yellow, flowers and joss sticks. [A]round the edge were flags, which had been made from small bamboo sticks with red and white tree-part banners attached to them” (p. 177)

Each and every part of this handicraft surely speaks of particular sense of place revealed though a vivid and detailed description of different things colors and shapes. In exploring the *kratong* as an excellent example of literary sense of place it is suggested that the *kratong* answers perfectly to the novels emphasize on the most ordinary and trifle things. Nevertheless it is a thing that grabs the attention of the child protagonist as one of the remarkable components in making his world, in such a profound and particular way, that it contributes extensively to the construction of the sense of place.

Another particular but at the same time common and useful handicraft is the water dipper which is made from small young coconut attached to a wooden handle (Tanistha Dansil, and Freeman, 2002: 113). Pointing towards the importance of the ordinary water dipper is how the narrative, departs from its description of the *wat*'s and the school premises and with an insertion, goes into a detailed description of how Koon's father makes a water dipper. Although revealing his craftsmanship and artistic talents the ordinariness of the water dipper and its making is established in the way “Koon has watched his father make dippers many times” (p. 109). In a detailed accuracy it is nevertheless stated how Koon's father

“took half a dried coconut shell, and smoothed it all over, inside and out. Then he took the point of his knife and punched two neat holes in the shell, across from each other. He took a smooth stick about twice the length of the space between a man's thumb and middle finger when his hand was spread out, and struck it through those holes to make a handle. If the handle was too loose, he cut slivers of wood and wedged them into the holes to make it fit tightly ” (p. 109)

and a half a coconut shell became a water dipper creating in a symbolic way sense of place through its own physical appearance. The narrative of the water dipper furthermore reveals the people's specific knowledge in using natural resources in making a household object.

It can be observed how handicrafts within the village speak of different social status. Seen for example in how Koon notices that the water dippers on the premises of the school and the *wat* have "pictures of naga²² the sacred animal unlike the ones at home which were plain" (p. 108). Through difference between the plain water dipper at Koon's house and the carved water dipper in the *wat* the superiority and the respect for the *wat* within the community is sensed.

A glimpse of the outside material world can be seen in Koon's longing for the "yellow kind of ruler" (p. 122) at the Vietnamese people's store although his father has made him a ruler made of heartwood. His father tells him proudly that he had "gone from Prathom One to Four without ever using a store-bought ruler" (p. 122). Koon however, fully learns to appreciate the ruler made of wood when he learns that it is made of the same Isan pradoo-wood as the king's bed and food table which is so strong that "white ants could never eat it" (p. 212) speaking proudly of the quality of a particular Isan wood.

In the small village craftsmanship as a livelihood is made clear at the blacksmith in the way he has not "worked in a rice field" (p. 216) coming from ancestors of blacksmiths.

Sense of place through handicrafts is also revealed in the way arrows and crossbows are made by hand but according to Koon's father "no one else can make a man's bow for him" (p. 213) which reflects a deep seated knowledge of the link between a hunter and his bow. One day Koon's father will therefore hand over to his son the knowledge and the skill of making a bow as a particular part of boyhood in the village.

²² Naga is a mythical serpent from Hindu mythology that lives in the oceans (Kepner, 1987: 108f).

4.3.2 Things Woven

Sense of place seen through skillfully woven things, in a broad sense of the word, includes variety of different things, such as utensils, containers, clothing and fishing gear. These things are usually made of bamboo, straw, leaves, and other natural materials as seen in the novel. In accordance with the novel's focus on daily life and its less noticed aspects these things are focused on as components in the making of the novel's senses of place.

As stated by Kislenko basketry has been used in almost every daily activity through the ages as seen in the remarkable variety of woven utensils (Kislenko, 2004: 89) of all shapes and sizes. Basketry spoken of in the novel answers to uniqueness while at the same it speaks of profound village commonness as for example seen in the most ordinary "bamboo box of rice" (p. 47) used at all mealtimes and in the remarkable bamboo *grabawk*²³ used to carry water.

The novel's sense of place is in this way captured in one of the rural ways of life the village weaving tradition²⁴ where Koon often sees his mother sitting weaving. Koon's mother emphasizes how extensive part of life in rural village weaving is, seen in the way the villager's have to "weave everything-nets, and more nets; and baskets for everything, even water" (p. 344). Noteworthy is the accuracy and the carefulness in making a specific type of basket called *da-kra mun* which is used to weight rice from the silo. One *mun* of rice is twelve kilos and the basket takes exactly one *mun* of rice. Sense of place is evoked through the specific way of making the basket. Koon's father states that the number of bamboo strips used to weave the basket is the same every time answering to the importance of accurate measurement of rice while it is revealed how "every man knows how to weave such baskets" (p. 183-84). Further Koon's father states that

"[i]f a man wants to make a da-kra to hold other things, he can use any number of bamboo strips, but for a da-kra mun, he must count [the bamboo strips] exactly" (p. 184).

²³ According to Tanistha Dansil and Freeman the water basket unusually made from bamboo is caulked with resin in order to make it waterproof (Tanistha Dansil, and Freeman, 2002: 112).

²⁴ According to Schiliesinger Lao-Isan women are considered talented and skilful weavers (Schiliesinger, 2001: 28).

By viewing the *da-kra mun* not only as any other object but as an artifact it is interesting to notice how Lippard states that the real meaning of artifacts is to be found in their relationship to each other and the place they belong to (Lippard 1997: 116). This is an understanding that not only clearly speaks of sense of place but can also very well be applied to the handicrafts spoken of in the novel such as the *da-kra mun* that profoundly relates to specific location as well as other basketry making through its own existence.

However, basketry such as the *da-kra mun* and the *grabawk* Koon's father makes on the way to River Chi are an example of profound expertise and knowledge in the weaving of a bamboo container capable of holding "anything from water to worms" (p. 309). *Kratongs* are also woven as seen when Koon's mother splits "an annatto leaf into strips" (p. 398) and Kamgong and Auntie Bua-si wove the leaf strips into two *kratongs*" (p. 398) for delicious *gaeng*. Through an eye for the particular and informative writing these trifle objects but utterly useful are brought forth and acknowledged as worthy components in the making of the novel's sense of place.

To increase the family income, Koon's mother also weaves, silk, baskets, fishnets or other handicrafts. The narrative reveals how the village head teacher is also seen "weaving quail nets" (p. 63) to increase his income.

However, it is seen how the drought even influence weaving because "the young bamboo shoots . . . had been cut for food" (p. 170) so there is no more bamboo left for basket weaving. The attention is drawn to how handicrafts truly speak of geographical location and available resources but also how material for basketry becomes food in hard times.

Calling attention to different aspects of weaving Koon and his father look for spits to make so called "lean-to for roasting and smoking fish" (p. 344). According to Koon's father they could use "thin sticks or bamboo . . . but he would prefer to use the strong steam of a tan palm" (p. 342- 343). Koon's father brings his son's attention to how "those weaving strips [his] mama made from the tan leaf are all exactly the same size" (p. 344) emphasizing the difficulty of the procedure where Koon's mother had "almost finished building a small lean-to" (p. 344). There is deep sense of pride and sense of place evoked in Koon's opinion that his mother "can weave anything" (p. 344).

Although Koon's mother also weaves textiles they are primarily made for selling therefore textiles are rarity in the village as seen in the descriptions of the women's *pasins* which are so old that the design in the fabric can't be seen anymore, the same

pasin and *pakomah* worn day after day. Accordingly Koon only sees his mother wearing her silk *pasin* “woven when she was a girl” (p. 96) on special occasions such as *songgran*. The indication made to Auntie Ploy daughter Boon-awn that while she doesn’t yet know how “to spin silk . . . nor raise silkworms on mulberry leaves . . . she shouldn’t be thinking about husbands” (p. 151) speaks profoundly of the importance of knowing how to weave in the village.

In connection with hunting and hunting ways the novels sense of place is illustrated through various realistic descriptions of handmade traps and snares used for catching different kinds of birds and fish. All these equipments are hand-woven labor mostly from bamboo into various shapes and sizes serving the strategy used to hunt down different creatures. In that way Koon’s mother weaves the remarkable quail nets

*“from ramie grass, twisting and pulling the thin, strong strands
[and] [h]is father always finished the nets, fastening them to sticks
of young bamboo that looked like pencils. These would be
stuck into the ground to make the traps . . . you could hardly see
them, because the pale fibers and the bamboo were more like
delicate spider webs than they were like the nets that were used
for fishing” (p. 152).*

Sense of place is evoked through the amazing skill and the inventiveness in the making of the nets almost transparent and resembling a spider web. They speak of how people use their extensive knowledge and take after nature’s creations in making their equipments. The sense of teamwork repeatedly evoked in the novel is seen here in how Koon’s parents divide the work of making the nets between themselves.

There are also cast nets, dip nets and bag nets which Koon’s mother weaves with very strong fine thread. The size of the holes on the fishing nets is different depending on what kind of fish they are made to catch. Individual style in the making of nets is revealed in the way Koon marks how Uncle Gah’s nets and Uncle Kem’s nets are different from his father’s nets. It is “[b]ecause they made them. And also because there are many kinds of nets, and many sizes, too-one-finger nets, three-finger nets, thumb nets” (p. 287) depending on how many fingers can be put through one hole. The particular way of measuring things according to parts of the body is seen in the making of the nets.

To strengthen the fibers of the nets Koon's father uses bark from the Samet tree almost as good for soaking nets as water buffalo blood usually used but in these hard times "the water buffalo cannot afford to give up any blood" (p. 211). Of knowledge and wisdom gained from bygone generations Koon's father dumps the bark in a barrel "with just enough of their "precious water" (p. 211). The bark is left in the water for seven days, then the nets are put in and soaked for another seven days making the fiber strong.

Weaving is also seen in the making of the new roof earlier spoken of which is a process for even a small house. First there is the cutting of vines by gathering "fresh thatch grasses and green banana leaves" (p. 19) in the woods. Then there is the "boring work" (p. 76) of endless weaving as stated by Koon's father that can last for days, made known through the narrative in the way Koon frequently notices his father preparing the "thatch for the new roof" (p. 131).

*"Koon's mother could tie the thatch almost as fast as his father
He watched them tie one thatch panel, then a second, then a
third, and then he ran off" (p. 184)*

The repetition of the work reveals the routine of the work, the labor and the endurance needed to make a new roof.

Through Koon, although just a child, the preciousness of the handicrafts is revealed in his response to how his parents give away "a quail net, and . . . a dip net for fishing" (p. 41) to Uncle Gaew and his family when they move from the village. Observant Koon knows that this is regarded as "much" (p. 41) but the explanation is that these valuable gifts speak of gratefulness and an "obligatory repayment" (Klausner, 2002: 7) since Uncle Gaew had cured Koon of red-eye disease when he was a baby.

Through the novel it can be seen how handicrafts speak of knowledge gained through the ages. The handicrafts not only speak of local inventiveness and expertise but also of usefulness and necessity corresponding closely to the village way of life, in addition to speaking of aesthetics in everyday life answering to the many ways handicrafts can be seen as profound components in the construction of the novel's sense of place.

This chapter should have shown how sense of place through local food culture and handicrafts, such a down to earth part of everyday life and experience, brings forth colorful components in the construction in the novel's sense of place.

The realistic and informative narrative mode, amazing eye for the particular in the ordinary sensed through all the five senses sight, hearing, smell taste and touch are perhaps most aroused through food culture and handicrafts.

The significance of food and the presentation of food emphasize the novel's rural location as well as being a noticeable way of portraying an ethnic way of life. While food ways speak of unique characteristic in a particular place, that involve looking for food, particular preservation ways as well as specific preparation cooking and serving ways, food emphasizes something very fundamental human.

Although the village food ways are severely reflected by continuing drought and poverty, food can be seen as central element in *A Child of the Northeast*. The novel's emphasize on the food culture, reveals not only the practical aspect of food ways but also reveals the characteristics of the people through contentment, compassion and true enjoyment of food.

Looking for food involves the art of hunting and sense of place is evoked through specific flora and fauna as well as the thrill and the unpredictability of going hunting, in the most vivid details presenting the resourcefulness and the expertise used in finding food by hunting down the smallest creatures most often outside range of view. However sense of place is also revealed in the disappointing side of a hunt when going home "with empty hands" (p. 35) is not an opinion.

Sense of place through river fishing is seen in fishing equipments partly made on the spot. However, also in the thrill of fishing profoundly evoked through Koon when he forgets everything "except the net, the water, the fish and baskets (p. 290).

It can be stated that the *pla daek* and sticky rice culture not only speaks of nourishment but distinct geographical location and rural milieu known as "the best and the favorite food of every Isan person" (p. 379) as stated in *A Child of the Northeast*. The village food ways reflect the harshness of the climate; the poor soil and the drought that makes preservation of food a significant aspect of the food culture and an example of the most „down to earth“ sense of place. Although countless significant components in the making of sense of place are revealed through preservation ways in constant fight with climate conditions the importance of *pla daek* is made obvious in the novel.

Preparation of food, cooking ways and eating connotes such a universal appeal but at the same time states unique local characteristic capturing everyday activities that are seen as essential features in the creation of sense of place. Although countless detailed descriptions of preparations and cooking in the novel can be seen as contradictory in view of the shortage of food these descriptions speak of the utter importance of food when it is scarce.

Bearing in mind the scarcity of food it is remarkable how the novel is filled with countless detailed description of tempting aromas, tastes and texture impressions of delicious food contributing to the making of sense of place. Although speaking of highly individualized sense of place these preferences are culturally thought and like food habits they are rooted deep in the culture. However in a place where the quest for food is a question of survival or hunger the persistent question of quantity over quality, by adding water to make more, is aroused more than once.

In its countless presentation food in *A Child of the Northeast* is not just a simple presentation of physical nourishment but a remarkable literary symbol carrying significant information's and meanings way beyond the issue of nourishment alone. More often than not, food creates temptations that drive poverty and hardship away. Sense of place through the sharing notion of food is evoked within the family as well as in connection with religion and beliefs seen in food offerings. The novel's most profound greater meaning of food is however evoked through the grotesque aspect of the grandfather's story where local food culture is made a tool of ethnic categorizing speaking of meanings going way beyond the nourishment alone making distinctions both ethnically and socially.

Local handicrafts represented in the novel speak of vitality in the traditional rural village, specific location as well as knowledge gathered through the ages answering to people's needs. As the most trivial objects handicrafts answer strongly to the novel's way of contributing sense of place. Handicrafts speak of sense of place revealed in the material used whether banana leaf or bamboo, in the technique used in the making of an object, its special shape and size, its texture felt by handling and even in its superiority evoked for example through extensive carving. The way of handing over to next generation traditional knowledge and skill is evoked in symbolic way of how "no one else as make a man's bow for him" (p. 213).

Sense of place through handicrafts is also seen through skillfully woven things such as utensils, containers, clothing, fishing gear from the weaving of a house roof to

the weaving of a basket that holds water. Through an eye for the particular and informative writing trifle objects are brought forth and acknowledged as components in the making of the novel's sense of place.

It can be seen how comprehensive construction of sense of place is made through countless particular aspects of food ways and ordinary handicrafts. Through the use of the various literary techniques profound significance of the sense of place is evoked and revealed.



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Chapter V

Conclusion

This study has explored the realistic and semi-autobiographical novel *A Child of the Northeast* by the national artist Kampon Boontawee as an excellent example of the sense of place in literature.

According to the findings, this analytical study reveals how Kampon Boontawee brings forth the novel's rich and complex sense of place. Through the novel's construction and artistic use of literary techniques, that give priority to the world of the senses, Kampon Boontawee presents the novel's sense of place and incorporates it into the construction of the novel.

This study, in an agreement with Basso's writings on sense of place, considers the particular components that are chosen to present sense of place the fundamental issue regarding sense of place. It is seen how Kampon Boontawee brings forth, as components, countless of particulars found in all aspects of the ordinary village life. Sampled together these components construct the novel's sense of place. In addition, this study shows how these particular components, most often too close and too ordinary to be preserved, are also representative of Isan community and cultural life.

Kampon Boontawee therefore not only presents the complex sense of place through his literary artistry. Through the novel's rich sense of place Kampon Boontawee also sets forth another understanding of Isan way of life, identity and culture by bringing the attention to the most ordinary community tasks and cultural activities in addition to the various experiences life in Isan entails.

The novel's realistic narrative is constructed of informative, detailed and straightforward text that is seen as an excellent way to reveal complex sense of place. However, in view of the realistic and semi-autobiographical nature of the novel it is also seen how the novel's construction has origin in Kampon's rootedness, memory and topophilic affection for Isan. Accordingly this study considers sense of place partly made of past history contradicting Basso's lesser weight on the origin of the sense of place. Significance of past history, seen in the construction of sense of place, is for example revealed through the novel's greatly sensed topophilic notion that can only be

established through knowledge of the past. Influences of the past are also greatly sensed through the novel's back-side story where outside involvement is brought into play in the construction of the novel's sense of place through complicated history greatly influencing community ways.

The attention is drawn to particular geographical location and time in the way sense of place is to a great extent made of various local conditions at a given time since location influences in fact all aspects of life in a place. Therefore, the attention through sense of place is not only drawn to the geographical "corner" location, with its extremely hard natural conditions, but also to the vast knowledge and experience of a place perceived by giving priority to the senses. In that way, deeply felt topophilic affection for the land is revealed by calling attention to how location entails not only the question of resources and survival but also brings forth contentment, joy as well as affection through emotional bonds to a place. The attention is for example drawn to how community ways are colored by location in the way village children adopt the particular custom of watching and listening to the sky in a place where the sky plays an extremely important role. Topophilic affection, in view of community ways, is also contributed to through the villager's strong traditional bonds of kinship that include friends and neighbors. Location viewed through sense of place therefore also calls attention to emotional response to a place that is seen as an important contribution in bringing forth another perspective of Isan community ways and cultural activities.

Way of life and culture, colored by the novel's rural location is also emphasized through artistic use of literary techniques such as extensive use of similes, metaphors and sayings, that most often are made between human and animal world and call attention to the close human-animal interaction found in a rural area. While it is established how location is much more than mere background in view of sense of place, from the building style of a house to the building of strong and resilient people, it is seen how location and time play an extensive part in connection with community and cultural ways.

In view of the novel's overall construction Kampon Boontawe's consistency is remarkable and brings attention to the novel's childhood perspective. The consistency is seen in the way the child protagonist knowledge of life and sense of place grows as the narrator recalls the past. Also seen in the way priority given to the world of the senses is in accordance with how childhood memories and experiences are considered the most sensational and intimate experiences of life. Furthermore, the narrative is seen in

harmony with child's interests most focused on examine the surrounding daily life. Harmony is also seen regarding age since, in the otherwise realistic and detailed narrative, some things remain obscured or are not explained to the child protagonist such as traditional rituals regarding birth and funeral rites although a part of the narrative. It is not only observed how the subjects, most emphasized in the novel, are in accordance with the child's growing knowledge and evoked sense of place but also in the way they are brought forth through participations, detailed explanations, repetitions as well as recitation and incorporated into the novel's construction.

The construction of the sense of place, viewed through an analysis of the geographical, ethnic and social aspects of Isan culture shows how the novel's construction is made to bring forth the most often overlooked particular ways of life and the extensive knowledge in Isan. In doing so Kampon Boontawee chooses to call attention to the most ordinary and less observed experiences of life through the smallest social group, the family and a child protagonist. However, as an insightful writer, Kampon Boontawee, makes the everyday interesting by calling attention to particulars in community and cultural life. While speaking of what it really entails to live in an Isan village during the 1930s Kampon Boontawee makes noticed intimate areas of experiences and situations in a place that are usually not brought forth. It is observed how significance of sense of place is as much evoked through hearing, taste, smell and touch as through visual meaning.

Artistic use of the senses is for example brought forth and emphasized in the particular and intimate experience of the difference of actually being in the particular situation of asking for rice or just being an uninvolved observer of others asking for rice. Calling attention to intimate experience, but of different kind, is for example brought forth through the touch experience of tiptoeing over the hot village lanes without shoes.

In this way, Kampon Boontawee calls attention to different situations and experiences in Isan. At the same time it is seen how Kampon Boontawee employs, in an artistic way, the senses to reveal the significance of the novel's rich sense of place. This kind of intimate experience In this way the village is not only revealed through the many picturesque village sights but by drawing the attention to intimate areas of experience through informative and detailed sense impressions. Although experiences of this kind are most often considered trifle, and usually not brought forth in connection with discussions regarding social and cultural ways in a place, the novel's countless

close encounters with the senses makes noticed intimate areas of local experience and knowledge otherwise obscured. Therefore these “trifle” matters are not only seen as important components in the making of sense of place but also seen as valuable contributions in bringing forth another understanding of life in Isan.

In view of this, the rural and ethnic family brought to the center of the novel is seen as a way to draw near, through close encounters with the senses, the particulars in ordinary domestic life. As such the family can be viewed as an archetype of the Isan family through way of conduct, daily practice as well as through the deeply sensed *sanuk* outlook on life which entails making the best out of the worst situations. It is also seen how the family, through its universal theme, calls attention to situations in human life, such as poverty and hardship as well as love and affection, regardless of location and place.

Through the novel’s construction of sense of place and the richness of the text the attention is brought to ordinary rural people but nonetheless colorful individuals who are very much born and bred in Isan. Since physical appearance is not emphasized in the novel the attention is drawn to local characteristic through ways of conduct, people’s daily tasks and cultural activities. The attention is brought to courage and resourcefulness seen through the people’s endurance, extensive knowledge, techniques and skills. In addition to artistic creativity brought forth for example through food ways and local handicrafts as well as through traditional music and storytelling. Through sense of place, the novel speaks of tough and strong people that manage to survive through severe poverty and hardship. Yet it is observed how the people maintain characteristics of contentment and joy of life, greatly emphasized through the earlier mentioned *sanuk* attitude towards life.

While speaking of colorful individuals the novel’s attention is also drawn to Isan identity in general through collective sense of place artistically revealed in the novel’s remarkable fishing caravan journey to another province within Isan. The journey not only speaks of particular community ways, through extensive comparisons, collective characteristic made of hospitality, generosity and compassion as well as the great concern about community reputation are also brought forth.

Among the many literary techniques Kampon Boontawee employs to reveal the significance of the sense of place in the novel is the way ethnic relations are brought forth. Isolation and homogeneity, of the small and remote Isan village, retreats not only for ethnic diversity established through community life, but also for ethnic

discrimination recognized through village tales and the novel's influential back-story viewed as an artistic construction of sense of place. In this way, one of the novel's fundamental antitheses is brought into play through sameness versus diversity due to outside influences. Through sense of place and the child protagonist innocent perspective ethnic conflicts are exquisitely brought forth. This is observed in the way the child does not make ethnic distinction although confronted with ethnic discrimination within the village and from the world outside Isan.

Kamphoon Boontawee's artistic use of all the senses is greatly aroused through the focus on food ways and local handicrafts. The novel's countless food discussions bring forth such a distinctive ethnic and cultural characteristic although at the same time food ways speak of the most down to earth aspect of everyday life. Despite food ways severely reflected by constant fight with climate conditions the *pla daek* food culture, profoundly emphasized through close encounter with all the senses, speaks of cultural richness. In addition, the *pla daek* food culture calls attention to particular ethnic and rural food ways that are characteristic of Isan and contribute to a great extent to reveal the significance of the novel's sense of place. The attention is for example drawn to characteristics, through the *sanuk* attitude towards life, which brings forth the people's true enjoyment of food. The soul nurturing aspect of food is also repeatedly revealed through remarkable and detailed descriptions of tempting aromas, tastes and texture impressions of delicious and mouth-watering food and *kanom* that drive poverty and hardship away on countless occasions.

The attention brought to local handicrafts, as particulars in ordinary village life, strongly answers to the novel's way of contributing sense of place. Handicrafts are brought forth and acknowledged as significant components in the making of the novel's sense of place through their vitality in a traditional village. Viewed through sense of place, handicrafts not only bring forth trifle and less noticed particulars in ordinary rural life, but contribute to another understanding of Isan community and cultural ways. This is seen in the way the attention is not only drawn to the mere existence of handicrafts. Through the novel's vivid and detailed descriptions, the attention is also drawn to particular expertise and knowledge involved in the making of local handicrafts. The attention is brought to materials and techniques used in their making, as well as how shapes and sizes answer to particular needs and ways of use. In this view handicrafts, seen through sense of place, contribute not only extensively to revealing knowledge of

local skills and techniques, through detailed narrative, but it is seen how local handicrafts also speak of particular aspects of Isan way of life, local culture and artistry.

In this way, the utter importance of local knowledge is emphasized through the acknowledgment of particular knowledge that is passed on from one generation to the next artistically brought forth through the child's protagonist growing knowledge.

In light of the above it is seen how the novel's construction answers perfectly to how Basso sees novelists seek to evoke sense of place through multiple of local details brought forth while they take notice of their own response to a place as well as others. It is established how Kampon Boontawee, through his eye for perceiving the particular in the ordinary, has carefully and selectively gathered together countless of fundamental local components, as he recounts real life stories of his childhood, family, friends and neighbors. Together these components construct the novel's rich and complex sense of place uniquely individual but nevertheless representative of Isan life and people through universal and timeless themes.

Though exquisite and artistic use of literary techniques, where priority is given to the senses, Kampon Boontawee not only makes the everyday remarkable but he also effectively presents the complex sense of place that includes physical and emotional response to a place and incorporates it into the construction of the realistic and semi-autobiographical novel. Through the many fundamental local components that make the novel's sense of place, only known through rootedness, memory and topophilic affection for Isan, Kampon Boontawee also brings forth, in unique and artistic way, another perspective of Isan traditional way of life.

In view of this study, Barang's reference to the novel as mediocre, boring and trite is strongly contradicted. The subjects and the literary techniques Kampon Boontawee applies to the writing of *A Child of the Northeast* not only speak of the novel's complexity and richness but also of a distinct artistic way contributed to evoke and reveal the novel's particular sense of place artfully played out in the novel.

The significance of the sense of place, in the novel, is profoundly evoked in the way the villagers, although living in the shadow of hardship and poverty, hold the greatest topophilic affection for their land, flora and fauna. They also value highly their traditional way of life and cultural heritage passed down from one generation to the next with pride.

Finally, in emphasizing sense of place and the significance of the novel in view of Isan culture it is seen how Kampon Boontawee, through the novel's construction

and artistic use of literary techniques, not only makes the novel *A Child of the Northeast* an excellent example of the sense of place in literature but also brings forth, through sense of place, another understanding of Isan identity, community and cultural ways emphasizing what it really entails to be a child of the Northeast during the 1930s.



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Recommendations for Further Studies

It is hoped that this research will awake further interest in sense of place in literature and inspire other researchers on the significance of the sense of place in various Thai literary texts.

Further studies can for example be contributed to the analysis of the sense of place in Thai literary texts from the other three regions of Thailand separately or in a comparative study.



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