

Pattana Kittiarasa (1968-2013)

It is with great sadness that I write to say that Dr. Pattana Kittiarasa, an extraordinary scholar, passed away this morning. Pattana was in Singapore where he was an associate professor in Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.

Pattana was born in 1968 in the northeastern Thai province of Nong Khai and he maintained his roots in this Lao-speaking region. As a child he was attracted to muai Thai (Thai kick-boxing), but although he did not pursue a career in it, he would go on as a scholar to produce a fascinating monograph, *The Lives of Hunting Dogs*, about the significance of kick-boxing for understanding male gender identity of Thai (especially rural Thai). In the introduction to his latest book, *Mediums, Monks & Amulets*, a book that grew out of his UW dissertation, he describes in moving detail his experience as a temporary monk in his home province. He ordained, following Thai custom, to 'make merit' for his late mother. In his account he tells how he met her again during meditation.

He began his anthropological career as a student at Khon Kaen University, also in northeastern Thailand. At Khon Kaen he became a *luksit* of Ajarn Suriya Smutkupt. The term *luksit* combines the term for child and the term for a student-disciple. The relationship he forged with Suriya (also a graduate of UW anthropology) became truly kin-like and Pattana considered him to be as close a relative as any in his own family. Suriya, now retired and living in Chiang Mai, went to Singapore when Pattana was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and he has almost commuted there on a regular basis over the past year and a half. Late last year he accompanied Pattana when he went to Germany and Denmark to give what would prove to be his final public presentations. Suriya was in Singapore with Pattana when he passed away. At Khon Kaen, Pattana met and subsequently married Rungnapa (Tukta). They would have two children, Nan and Nonthan. Tukta became a lecturer in Thai at NUS. I know from emails that she and the children, have been sources of strength and inspiration to Pattana during his illness.

After Pattana graduated from Singapore, he went to the Philippines where he took an MA in anthropology at the Ateneo de Manila University. He then was enrolled in a PhD program at the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan, but left in order to complete his PhD at the University of Washington. After Pattana completed his PhD in 1999, he first took up a position as a lecturer at Suranaree University in Nakhon Ratchasima, northeastern Thailand. As Suriya had himself previously joined Suranaree, he and Pattana became co-researchers as well as colleagues. Over the next few years they produced an extraordinary number of monographs in Thai on Thai rituals, material culture, gender, and popular culture. Some of this work became the basis for Pattana's many articles and books in English. His works in English have included not only ones with the subjects of those in Thai, but also a number with more theoretical themes such as religion and modernity, narrative, and transnationalism. He had recently finished a new book based on research among Thai workers in Singapore.

I feel greatly honored to have had Pattana as my luksit, but I also see myself as his luksit as well since I have learned as much from him as I know he has learned from me. I also have come to feel a deep sense of kinship with him that goes well beyond our academic relationship. His death is a great personal loss, but I take some solace in knowing his karmic legacy will continue for a long time to come.

In sadness,

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(Source)

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