

A Comparative Study of the Characteristics, Content and Meanings of Dreams in Classical and Modern Thai Literature with the Phrommachat

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Abstract

Background: Dreams are one of the oldest arts in the world and one that is cross-disciplinary in nature. In Thai culture, the beliefs in the interpretation of dreams have been passed down from the beginning of the Ayutthaya period. With regard to the dream vision texts, the Thais often treated the text as a bed-side consultant. The study is based on literary sources. The oldest Thai text on this subject is the "Phrommachat".

Objective: This research has three objectives: 1) To study about the characteristics of dreams; 2) To study the content and meanings of dreams; and 3) To compile the content, the interpretations, and the similarities of dreams.

Result: Dreams are a 'Macro philosophy' with five interdisciplinary groups that have dealt with dream concepts. As for the images and ideas occurring in the dreams and their interpretations, they can be categorized into six topics: 1) love affairs; 2) offspring and pregnancy; 3) wars and politics; 4) holy objects, faith and omen; 5) causes of dreams, the timing of dreams, and how to lessen or avoid disastrous events; and 6) Others. In reviewing 56 stories of classical and modern Thai literature, there are 25 dream stories in the classical texts and 31 in the modern texts. The analysis of these stories illustrates some similarities and contrasts between the dream contents and their interpretations, with some items having 100 percent similarities to the interpretations given by the "Phrommachat" text.

In six literary stories, the dream interpretations show both similarities and contrasts. These are the "Ramayana" of King Rama I, the "SamKok", the "Lilit Taleng Phai", the "Rajatiraj", the "Khun Chang, Khun Phaen" and the "Nee Lae Lok". The contents of the dreams are interpreted differently. They are about parents, gods and goddesses, fishing, as well as other objects. However, it was found that 22 dreams were not mentioned in the "Phrommachat" text.

Discussion and Conclusion: In modern times, the age of news and information has changed from the printed media to the social network. The spread of information on the interpretation of dreams has also expanded to the new media and the printed media. Due to fears of copyright infringement, a whole gamut of new interpretations has been conceived and thus it is difficult to conclude which path is correct and retains accuracy; even when some of the interpretation is made by some of the more famous dream interpreters in modern times.

Keywords: Characteristic, contents and meanings, dreams, Thai literature

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Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Human has an eternal and innate curiosity. In the past, there was no modern technology to respond to this need or that could aid in the forecasting of future events. The only recourse was to discover knowledge from the objects or phenomenon around them and the frequency of events were recorded as statistics in an attempt to forecast the future. There is evidence for this collection of facts from the prehistoric times to the modern times (Kanyawee Sathapong, 2009; Kirti Bunchua, 1992). From historical events and works of literature, it can be discovered that the interpretation of dreams was an important subject and one of the 50 disciplines that the Thai institution of the monarchy nurtured as a source of advice (Phra Soonthornwohan, 2529).

Thai beliefs in dreams have been passed on from ancient times. It was generally believed that dreams were auguries and omens of future events that human could discover while sleeping. Texts that dealt with the interpretation of dreams are among some of the oldest in the world, dating back thousands of years. Examples include the ancient Egyptian records of the dreams of Pharaoh Thutmose IV (c. 1419-1389 B.C.), which was recorded on papyrus (Thanik Muenkhamwang, 2554), the Atharva Veda, which was one of the first records of ancient India (c. 1500-1000 B.C.) and the scriptures of the philosopher monks of Lan Na, which referred to desires as the origin of man's dreams: that is greed, anger, and delusion, while dream visions came from four origins: a disturbance of the humors, a relapse into a past life, divine inspiration,

and early morning dreams. (Uravasri, 2554).

The research entitled "Thai culture in literature: from the Rattanakosin era to the 1932 Revolution" (Chermalya Rachapantharak and Phuangphet Surattanakawikul (2541) found from the studied literature that dreams were attributed to many reasons, such as a physiological imbalance, a subconscious urge, divine inspiration, and past and previous merit and karma. These, then, give rise to visions that tell of the future. Dreams could also come from desires that were not acted upon, and these desires find their outlet through dreams. (Sigmund Freud, 1999; Saleur, 2551).

Nevertheless, if dreams were analyzed using psychological principles, dreams are also important in boosting morale. But if dreams were considered in the cultural context, the study and passing down of dream interpretation texts are a form of supportive research and has a useful purpose in terms of preserving the way of life, customs and beliefs and are a concrete expression of principles and culture. In the post-modern sense, dreams expand the traditional bounds of knowledge.

Objectives

1. To study the characteristics of visionary dreams.
2. To study the content and meaning of visionary dreams.
3. To compile the content, interpretation, and similarities of visionary dreams which appear in classical and modern Thai literature.

Research Methods

The study of the phenomenon in general, research and gathering of information

from classical and modern Thai literature, the meaning and frequency of dreams, the selection of texts from the 5 periods of Thai literature (Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi, early Rattanakosin, and modern Rattanakosin periods) were conducted via questionnaire. Four hundred questionnaires, which were formulated by the researcher, were distributed. The researcher compared the list of Thai literature that appears in the academic text of Sukhothai Thammatirat Open University (2533), Ajarn Pleung na Nakhon's text on the history of Thai literature (2527), texts of the Literature and History Division of the Fine Arts Department (2539), so as to find common ground in terms of quality, reliability, and validity. The texts from modern Thai literature were selected by a panel of three literary experts.

As for the analysis of the content of the literary works, the researcher utilized texts from the Royal Institute and copies of the authentic texts compiled by the Literature and History Division of the Fine Arts Department. The texts are widely accepted in terms of the standard of textual accuracy. For comparisons of similarities in the content and meaning of dreams, the researcher referred to the oldest existing text on dream interpretation, that is, the "Phrommachat" (The Siam Bannakhom, 2554). The researcher gathered the data and information and used analytical description and qualitative research methods in the analyses.

Research Results

The analysis of the content, interpretation, and meaning of dreams from 80 works of classical literature and 80 works of modern literature (totaling 160 works) found content

that were related to dreams and their interpretation in 56 works. There were 239 dreams from classical literature and 124 dreams from modern literature, making a total of 363 dreams. The research work, therefore, fulfilled its objective in gathering the following information:

The Characteristics of Dreams

Dreams are the ultimate metaphysical philosophy and the study of dreams is a cross-disciplinary pursuit, spanning the sciences, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and psycho-analysis. In the past, however, the analysis of dreams has only come from select perspectives and mainly from 4 groups: 1) Psychologists; 2) Engineers; 3) Scientists and archaeologists; 4) Poets and writers; and 5) Academics and the philosophers, both Westerner and Thai.

From the study of the content of the literary texts, it can be seen that the content and interpretation of dreams can be categorized into 6 separate characteristics as follows:

1. Love and relationship between youths
2. Offspring and pregnancy
3. War, politics, and government
4. Holy objects, luck, omens and auguries
5. The occurrence and timing of dreams and ways to counteract negative dreams
6. Other subject matters (seeing parents, the dead, teachers, gods and goddesses, heaven, flying dreams, mountain-climbing dreams, fortresses, fountains, waterfalls, demons, hell, fallen teeth, weeping, clothing, distant people, beauty queens, the sea, rivers, swimming, necklaces, shoes, lotus-gathering, flowers and trees, vehicles, animals, dragons, naga, snakes, jade swans,

vultures, pigs, horses, crocodiles, white elephants and buffalos, tigers, elephants, bears, chickens, dogs, cats, rhinos, crows, large birds, and various insects).

The analysis of the dream content and the similarities in interpreted meanings can be characterized into 6 categories:

1. Love and relationship between youths In the classical texts, there were 11 dreams in this category, and the modern texts also had the same number. The interpretations of dreams in the literary texts were the same as the interpretation in the “Phrommachat” (100 percent similarities).

2. Offspring and pregnancy In the classical texts, there were 15 dreams in this category, while modern texts only had two dreams. The interpretations of dreams in the literary texts were the same as the interpretation in the “Phrommachat” (100 percent similarities).

3. War, politics, and government In the classical texts, there were 10 dreams in this category, while modern texts only had two dreams. The interpretations of dreams in the literary texts were the same as the interpretations in the “Phrommachat” (100 percent similarities).

4. Holy objects, luck, omens and auguries In the classical texts, there were 53 dreams in this category, while modern texts had six dreams. The interpretations of dreams in the literary texts were the same as the interpretations in the “Phrommachat” (100 percent similarities).

5. The occurrence and timing of dreams and ways to counteract negative dreams In the classical texts, there were 53

dreams in this category, while the modern texts had 13 dreams. The interpretations of dreams in the literary texts were the same as the interpretation in the “Phrommachat” (100 percent similarities).

6. Other subject matters In the classical texts, there were 107 dreams in this category, while modern texts had 90 dreams. As for the interpretations of the dreams in this category when compared with the “Phrommachat”, the research found the following results:

- Similarities in interpretations (in the literary texts and the “Phrommachat”)

The interpretations of dreams in the literary texts were the same as the interpretation in the “Phrommachat” (100 percent similarities) when the dreams involved seeing the dead, teachers, yogi, heaven, flying, fortresses, mountain-climbing, fountains, waterfalls, hell, demons, falling teeth, weeping, own death, clothing, distant people, beauty queens, the sea, rivers, swimming, necklaces, shoes, lotus-gathering, flowers and trees, vehicles, and other animals.

Dreams that involved seeing parents, gods, goddesses, and fishing had differing interpretations in the literature from the “Phrommachat”. Furthermore, there were also 22 dreams that do not appear in the “Phrommachat”.

The analysis of dreams in this miscellaneous category can be summarized in three ways, that is, dreams with different interpretations from the “Phrommachat”, dreams with similar interpretations in the literature, but differing from the interpretation of the “Phrommachat”, and dreams that do not appear in the “Phrommachat”.

- Dreams with different interpretations from the “Phrommachat”

Seeing parents, which was interpreted in the literature as imminent good luck had two instances (one in “Phra Aphaimanee”, (Phra SoonThorn Wohan, 2529) and the other in “Ubattihet”. (Dokmaisod, 2516) This interpretation is different from the “Phrommachat”, which interpreted the same dream as one that expressed the anxiety of the dreamer – an inauspicious dream.

Going fishing and catching a fish was interpreted in the literature as luck in love and had two instances [one each in “Ni lae Lok” (Dokmaisod, 2516) and “Chang Samran” (Duanwad pimwana, 2546)]. This interpretation is opposite to the “Phrommachat”, which interpreted the same dream as a love that is about to be lost.

- Dreams with similar and differing interpretations

Seeing parents, whether they are still alive or not, was interpreted in literature as an augury of luck in two instances (one each in “Phra Aphaimanee” [Phra SoonThorn Wohan, 2529] and “Ubattihet” [Dokmaisod, 2516]). However, other works of literature interpret the same dream as an expression of anxiety or as an inauspicious dream in three instances [one each in “Ubattihet” (Dokmaisod, 2516), “Game Rak Tong Mon” (Mae Chong, 2554), “Daed Chao Ron Koen Kwa Cha Nang Chib Ka Fae” (Jadej Khumjorndej, 2554), which is in accordance with the interpretation of the “Phrommachat”.

The fishing dream was interpreted in the literature as a lucky dream in two instances (one each in “Ni lae Lok” [Dokmaisod,

2516]) and “Chang Samran” [Duanwad pimwana, 2546]). However, in two other instances in other works of literature ([one each in “Busababan” [Dokmaisod, 2516]) and “Chang Samran” [Duanwad pimwana, 2546]), their interpretation is in accordance with the “Phrommachat” which interprets the dream as the imminent loss of love.

Seeing a god or goddess was interpreted in the literature as a lucky dream in 10 instances [one each in “Kham Chan Sansern Phra Kiat Somdet Phra Phutta Chaoluang Prasat Thong” (Phra Maha Raja Khru, 2181), King Rama I’s “Ramakien” (King Rama I, early Rattanakosin), “SamKok” (Chao Phraya Phra Klang Hon, early Rattanakosin), “Rachathirat” (Chao Phraya Phra Klang Hon, early Rattanakosin), “Lilit Sadet Pai Kat Tap Phama Meuang Kanchanaburi” (Klommalueng Maha-Sakdhiphollasepya, early Rattanakosin), “Phra Aphaimanee” (Phra SoonThorn Wohan, 2529), “Ngao” (Rose Laren, 2516) with “Khun Chang, Khun Paen” (King Rama II, early Rattanakosin) having three instances)]. In five instances, however, dreams involving gods or goddesses were not interpreted positively, which was in accordance with the interpretation of the “Phrommachat”. These instances can be found in “SamKok” (two instances), “Rachathirat” (one instance), “Phra Aphaimanee” (one instance), “Busababan” (one instance), “Ngao” (one instance) and “Sai Bor Yud Saneh Hai” (Suwannee Sukhontha, 2554) (one instance).

- Dreams and their interpretation, as they appear in the literature, have some similarities to each other but do not appear in the “Phrommachat” as follows:

In “SamKok”, Dragon wrapping itself

around the body means imminent death. Riding a dragon, means imminent promotion. Riding a dragon with a stunted tail means betrayal by subordinates. Swallowing a jade swan means a son will be born. Three horses eating from the same manger means serious illness and bad luck. Hearing Demons' voices means bad luck. demon inviting the dreamer to stay means bad luck. Seeing the wind gradually blowing a lamp out means bad luck, and being attacked by a big black pig but managing to use a weapon toward it off means imminent promotion and respect from the people.

In other literature; seeing a god riding a garuda pecking you to death has no interpretation ("Ramakien"). Seeing yourself as a giant bestriding two lands means imminent promotion and honor ("Rachathirat", Chao Phraya Phra Klang Hon, early Rattanakosin). Fighting with a crocodile means the appearance of an enemy ("Lilit Taleng Pai", Somdej Phra Maha Samana Chao Krom Phra Paramanujitajinorasa, early Rattanakosin). Being chased by a crocodile means the appearance of an enemy ("Phra Aphaimanee"). Seeing a cloud twist itself into a rainbow means a daughter is about to be born ("Phra Aphaimanee"). Seeing a Brahmin in white with a white conch shell in her hand means the end of bad luck and help from others ("Khun Chang, Khun Paen"). Being mauled to death by a rhino means bad luck and loss of life (Ngo Pa, King Rama V, early Rattanakosin). Seeing a nun giving advice means support from other people ("Busababan"), and seeing a chicken that is beaten to death means misfortune will come from bad karma ("Karma Mee Jing", Worawut Masenah, 2546).

Discussion of Results

Since time immemorial, it was not popular to "counteract" dreams by oneself, but to "counteract" it with others, namely astrologers, teachers, parents, relatives, elders, and nannies (Phra patom Sompothikhatha: 127, Phra Aphaimanee: 602). In the present day, dreams are also often interpreted into lottery numbers as a further way to exploit dreams. This practice is a departure from custom and is a direct result of the changes in Thai culture and the way of life.

The analysis of the occurrence and importance of dreams, as well as the time of day of the dream found that the dreams in literature conformed to the interpretations of the oldest texts, such as the ancient Egyptian records of the dreams of Pharaoh Thutmosis IV (c. 1419-1389 B.C.), which was recorded on papyrus (Thanik Muenkhamwang. 2554), the Atharva Veda (c. 1500-1000 B.C.), the scriptures of the philosopher monks of Lan Na (2000-2100 B.E.), the Mahapattawayna text on dream interpretation (written during the time of Siddhartha Buddha) and certain parts of the Al-Qu'ran, the Holy Bible, and the Tripitaka. The ancient Indian and Lan Na beliefs were also similar in their treatment of the origin of dreams.

With regard to the dream vision texts, it was found that Thais often treated the text as a bed-side consultant (as seen in certain parts of Phra Aphaimanee). The beliefs in the interpretation of dreams have been passed down from the beginning of the Ayutthaya period (Larp Klabcharoen, 2553: Foreword). The dream vision texts that have been passed down to the present day includes the "Phrom-

machat" which, originally, was written on palm leaves and later on appeared in printed form via the printing press of Dr. Bradley near the end of the reign of King Rama V. There were also further editions printed by the Panichsuphol Printing House (B.E. 2492), the Hong Hon Srimapho (B.E. 2553), and the Siam Bannakhom (B.E. 2554).

The study also found that dreams were a psychological mechanism, which is in accordance with the theory on dreams of Karl Jung (1983). Jung approached dreams from the psycho-analytical angle, with the conclusion that dreams were a manifestation of the subconscious and can appear as pictures or symbols that require interpretation. Dreams occur from a state of anxiety and fear of failure and are a way for the psyche to compensate. This conclusion is also in accordance with Sigmund Freud's (1999) and Karl Jung's (1983) theories, which state that dreams occur from desires that were not fulfilled, and the suppressed emotions find their outlet in dreams.

Psycho-analytic theories also concur with the perspectives of Thai philosophers on the origin of dreams and beliefs in omen and auguries (the "Phrommachat"). The idea of dreams as a metaphysical philosophy concurs with the ideas of Pong (2009) and Kirti Bunchua (1992), who stated that dreams have

symbolic meanings that need to be interpreted to be properly understood. The character and psychological characteristics of the dreamer should also be factored into interpretations since they are intrinsically linked. This idea also concurs with Alfred Muari's (1995) conclusions where nightmares originate from a failure in key dream mechanisms that usually help to maintain the psychological balance of the dreamer (Allan Hobson and Robert Mccarley, 1977). Furthermore, this idea also conforms with the idea of (Kittikorn Meesap, 2549) as well as the tenets of the Buddhist religion, which states that dreams are merely "psychological conditions where humans dream of things that appeared in waking life, but were kept in the subconscious memory" (Sujin Bori-harnruanket. (2544).

With regard to the interpretation in literature, it was found that interpretations concurred with the interpretations found in the "Phrommachat" and also theories in semiology as expressed by Solesur (2551). Patchanee Choechanya, Mettha Wiwatanakul, Thiranand Anawatchsiriwongse (2538) Rajitlak Saengurai (2548), where the symbols in dreams can have indirect as well as direct meanings.

The concurrence between the characteristics, content, and meanings of dreams in literature and the related theories on dreams can be summarized in the following diagram:

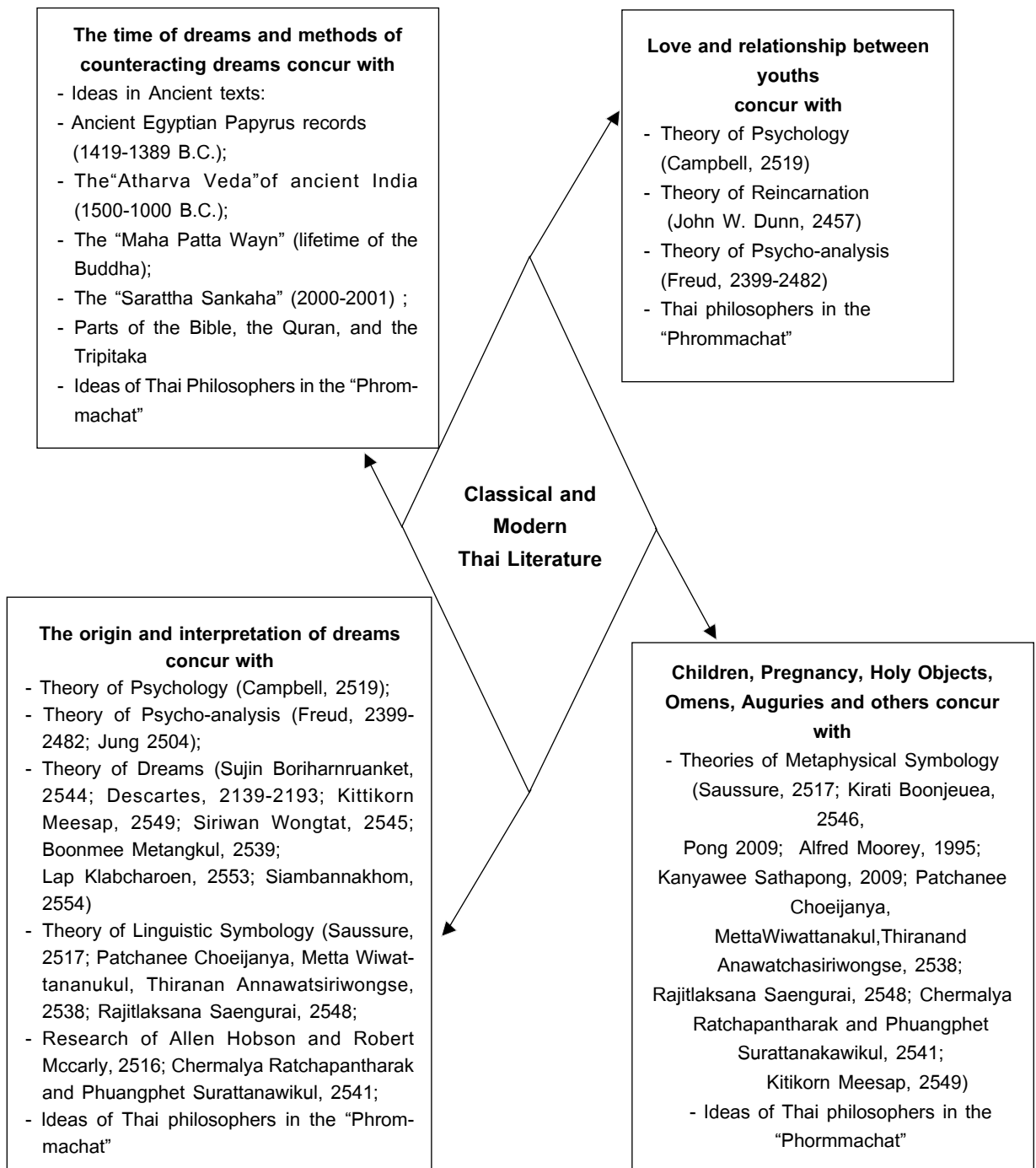


Diagram 1 Illustration of the relationship between the time of occurrence of dreams, methods of counteracting dreams, interpretations, theoretical frameworks, and other

From the diagram, there is clear evidence of the similarities and relationships between the theories and the documentary sources regarding dreams. The evidence supports the credibility in the dream interpretation texts that have been passed down through the generations as well as the ideas of Thai philosophers as they appear in the “Phrommachat”.

Conclusion

In studying the documentary evidence, it can be seen that the “Phrommachat” referred to the origin, the timing, and the interpretation of dreams. The contents were essentially the

same from the version inscribed on palm leaves to the ones being circulated in book form and the new media today (The Hong Holl Srimapho, 2553). Some of the content were also quite similar to ancient Egyptian texts, religious texts, and modern research works. The “Phrommachat” is the oldest extant Thai text on dreams that the researcher employed as the framework for the content analysis and as the basis for comparisons of dream interpretations as they appear in the classical and modern literature. The results of the study found similarities in the explanations for the origin, timing, and interpretation of dreams. The qualitative findings are illustrated in the following diagram:

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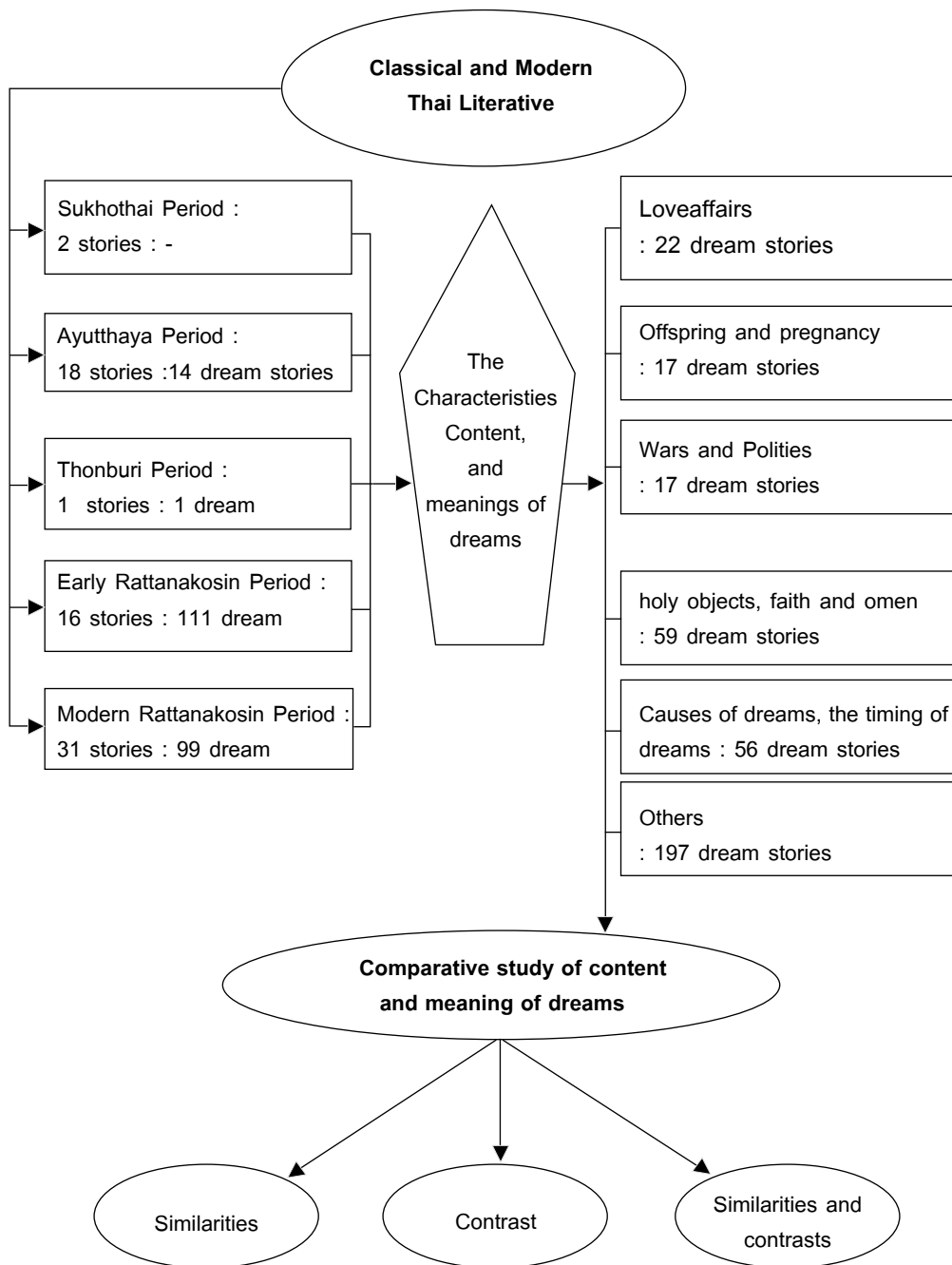


Diagram 2 Conclusion of The Characteristics, Content, and meanings of dreams in Classical and Modern Thai literature

Recommendations

Further Research

1. This research on the characteristics, content, and meaning of dreams through classical and modern Thai literature drew from sources from across Thai history from the Sukhothai period to the modern day. It compared the similarities and differences in meanings with historic texts that are legacies of the past. The research could be further expanded to include other social groups and texts, both from established sources as well as those that are more local so as to gain a wider base for analysis.

2. The next step of the research could utilize the conclusions of this work as a new guideline to study literature, other printed sources, as well as other media with dream interpretation contents so as to consolidate confidence in the Thai heritage in accordance

with Apirak Chaipanha (2548) who commented that "Literature is a lens into the social condition" and to come up with meaningful conclusions in the cultural context.

Policy

State agencies that are responsible for conserving and overseeing Thai culture and heritage should promote and support research funding at the national and local levels in order to develop, conserve, and pass on heritage in this area in a sustainable manner to be a legacy for future generations, as one of the oldest arts in the world that continues to exist to the present day.

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