



The Meaning and Contribution of the *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู) for the Preservation of Thai Traditional Medicine Wisdom in Modern Times

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Abstract

Since the modernization of the world, Thai traditional medical knowledge has undergone vast changes that may compromise its authenticity. However, this paper identifies that a modern version of a traditional Thai rite called *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู), can be the key to preserve the legitimacy of the Thai traditional medical wisdom. The *Wai Khru* is a tradition of paying respect and honor to teachers in Thailand, and this research shows that it is a way to link individuals to teacher of many forms, physical and spirituals, allowing the preservation of the relationship in traditional wisdom lineage. Some Thai traditionalists assert that *Wai Khru* is the most important element in the traditional knowledge itself. Therefore, in order to investigate the meaning and the function of the *Wai Khru* in Thai traditional medicine, this paper will ask: what is traditional knowledge? Why is it transmitted through a specific manner? How does traditional knowledge differ from the knowledge of scientific or religious order? Why do Thai practitioners of traditional arts pay respect to those who have gone before? Lastly, what are the challenges and changes to traditional knowledge in modern times and its future? To answer these questions, this paper uses works by the perennial philosopher René Guénon, and field research into the *Wai Khru* ceremonies, as well as interviews with Thai traditional doctors, teachers and experts about the *Wai Khru* in Thai tradition, which explains why the *Wai Khru* rituals allow the preservation of the Thai traditional medicine wisdom in modern times.

Key words: *Wai Khru*, Thai traditional knowledge, Thai traditional medicine, Thai tradition, Thai wisdom

ประเพณีไหว้ครู: ความหมายและการมีส่วนร่วมสนับสนุนการอนุรักษ์ การแพทย์แผนโบราณของไทยในยุคสมัยใหม่

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยนี้ศึกษาถึงความหมายและหน้าที่ของการไหว้ครูในการแพทย์แผนไทย การไหว้ครูมีความสำคัญในการถ่ายทอดความรู้แบบดั้งเดิมและถือว่าเป็นแนวคิดดั้งเดิมของชาวไทยที่เป็นองค์ประกอบที่สำคัญที่สุดสำหรับการรับการถ่ายทอดความรู้แบบดั้งเดิม อย่างไรก็ตามเนื่องจากความกดดันของโลกสมัยใหม่ แพทย์แผนไทยจึงต้องปรับตัวให้เข้ากับรูปแบบการฝึกอบรมและกฎหมายที่ทันสมัย ซึ่งอาจส่งผลกระทบต่อความสมบูรณ์ของภูมิปัญญาการแพทย์แผนไทย เพื่อวิเคราะห์ปัญหา บทความนี้ตั้งคำถามว่าความรู้แบบดั้งเดิมคืออะไร? ความรู้แบบดั้งเดิมแตกต่างจากความรู้ทางวิทยาศาสตร์หรือศาสนาอย่างไร? ทำไมการสืบทอดศิลปะแบบดั้งเดิมถึงต้องให้ความสำคัญกับผู้ล่วงลับไปแล้ว? และสิ่งที่ทำทลายและการเปลี่ยนแปลงของความรู้แบบดั้งเดิม ณ ปัจจุบันและอนาคตคืออะไร? เพื่อตอบคำถามเหล่านี้ บทความนี้ใช้ผลงานของนักปราชญ์ René Guénon และการวิจัยภาคสนามที่เกี่ยวกับพิธีไหว้ครู ตลอดจนการสัมภาษณ์หมอไทยและครูหมอไทยที่มีความเกี่ยวข้องกับประเพณีไหว้ครู ข้อเสนอของการศึกษานี้แสดงให้เห็นว่า ทำไมพิธีไหว้ครูจึงสามารถรักษารูปแบบภูมิปัญญาการแพทย์แผนไทยไว้ได้ในโลกสมัยใหม่

คำสำคัญ: ไหว้ครู, ความรู้ไทยดั้งเดิม, การแพทย์แผนไทย, ภูมิปัญญาไทย

Introduction

In the current world, where modern science and advanced technologies measure the validity of knowledge based on a scientific method, to consider the importance of traditional knowledge is audacious, however it is important. Accounting on the increase of modern mentality, and the influence of Western thought on Eastern civilizations, tradition is frequently associated as a transmission of customs and beliefs, where 'belief' is understood in a religious sense of the word, from a monotheistic perspective - as defined

in the Dictionary of Oxford, "tradition: a doctrine believed to have divine authority though not in the scriptures. (in Christianity) doctrine not explicit in the Bible but held to derive from the oral teaching of Christ and the Apostles"^[1]. However, tradition as it is studied in this paper, is not religious from the Western point of view, and neither limited to any whatsoever definition, as many scholars interested in older traditions have attempted to catalogue and rationalize them in a larger philosophical framework.

Tradition is based on knowledge of a

highest rank: the metaphysical knowledge; and it is through the writings of René Guénon, a French perennial philosopher who was born in 1886, that this paper bases its metaphysical source. On his writings, Guénon attempted to show how traditional wisdom differs from rational scientific thought, and from religious thought as it is understood especially in the West. He attempted to show the dignity of traditional thought on its own terms and show the poverty of rational thinking that abandons its traditional wisdom.

Accordingly, using a thesis research “René Guénon on the Realization of Traditional Knowledge: an Application to the *Wai Khru* in the Thai Tradition of Modern Times”, the purpose of this study is to show the challenges that Thai traditional medical knowledge is facing since the modernization of the world; and through the perspectives of Guénon, to understand how the *Wai Khru* rituals contribute for the preservation of Thai traditional medical wisdom. Because when these rituals are forgotten or diminished, the integrity of the traditional knowledge is under threat.

Methodology

To approach the meaning and contribution of the *Wai Khru* for the preservation of the wisdom within Thai traditional medicine, it is first necessary to study traditional knowl-

edge from the perspectives of Guénon and why it is transmitted through a specific manner; followed by the differentiation of traditional knowledge from religion and scientific knowledge; to finally, comprehend why Thai practitioners of traditional arts pay respect to those who have gone before - the *Wai Khru*.

The philosophical analysis requires both primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the first book written by René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, together with his *Perspectives on Initiation*. Even though the title of the book says ‘Hindu Doctrines’, this book is suitable to any traditional doctrine, as Guénon, in the forward, writes “this book might just as well as serve as a key to the understanding of any of the traditional doctrines, or of them all”^[2]. The secondary sources include works from other philosophers and scholars that contribute to the understanding of Guénon’s point of view, such as Frithjof Schuon and Philip Sherrard.

Considering that this paper applies Guénon’s perspectives to the *Wai Khru* in Thai tradition and the researcher is not Thai, to complete the study, this paper is based on the knowledge earned from field researches, which the researcher attended *Wai Khru* events in different educational fields in Thailand, throughout the years of 2015-2017. Interviews with traditional doctors, teachers,

and experts on the subject it is also considered as data. Sources collected from books, newspapers and journals, in English and Thai languages, are also used in this research.

From the several *Wai Khru* events that the researcher has attended, it was chosen as case study, the *wai khru* ceremony organized by the Federation of Thai Traditional Medicine Associations of Thailand (FTTMAT) held at the Ministry of Public Health in Thailand. The researcher understood that since the ceremony is held under the consent of the Ministry of Public Health, it is a trustful source for academic study purposes. Regarding to the interviewees cited in this paper, the researcher has taken into consideration the advice from members of FTTMAT who had suggested to interview some of the mentioned interviewees, who are said to play great importance to the Thai traditional medicine. Other interviewees were suggested by Thai colleagues who know experts in Thai tradition.

Result

1. Traditional Knowledge

The word tradition comes from the Latin word *traditium*, which means “to deliver, to hand down”^[3]. Based on this very meaning, for Guénon, tradition is what is transmitted, which can be oral or written. “For us tradi-

tion, taken in a much more general sense, may be written as well as oral, though it must usually, if not always, have been oral originally”^[2]. Guénon emphasizes on oral transmission, because this is one of the characteristics that makes a civilization traditional.

To study traditional knowledge from the perspective of Guénon, is necessary, first of all, to understand his viewpoint on metaphysics. Because although he was French, his line of thought was not linear from the Western way of thinking.

For Guénon, metaphysics is not a branch of philosophy, it is beyond it. Looking at the etymology of the word ‘metaphysics’ itself, it stands for whatever lies ‘beyond physics’. According to Guénon, ‘physics’ does not stand for one of the sciences in particular, instead, it denotes the natural sciences viewed as a whole - “the word ‘physics’ must here be taken to denote the natural sciences viewed as a whole and considered in quite a general manner, as they always were by the ancients”^[2]. In this sense, metaphysics is the Whole, and “the Whole cannot form a part of something”^[2].

The ‘ancients’, cited by Guénon, are what he calls ‘traditional civilizations’, those who sustain knowledge as metaphysical. A civilization to be considered traditional must have the ‘esoteric’ and ‘initiatic’ aspects, explains Guénon; “Tradition as we have under-

stood it, and even ordinarily its strictly esoteric and initiatic aspect, that is, what is most 'inward' and elevated in that tradition and thus what constitutes its very spirit as it were"^[4]. The first aspect mentioned by Guénon, the 'esoteric', means something wholly interior, a knowledge derived from the pure intellect - a faculty of thought that each person conceives by himself, penetrating into the very nature of things. Guénon explains 'pure intellect' as a kind of 'intuition', "pure intellect may be called 'intuitive'^[2]; not as a 'hunch', but as an intellect, which is more immediate than sensory intuition. On account of this perspective, Frithjof Schuon explains that Guénon's thought is intellectual, because "it concerns knowledge and because it envisages this in conformity with its nature, namely in the light of the intellect, which is essential supra-rational"^[5].

The second aspect that makes a civilization traditional, the 'initiatic' aspect, stands for the preparation of the individual to receive the transmission of the knowledge, which is going to be explained on subheading 3 Transmission of Traditional Knowledge.

For a better understanding of Guénon's thought on tradition, Philip Sherrard adds, "for Guénon tradition must cater for the two main aspects of human life, the first being intellectual - knowledge, and the second being the active aspect - action or practice,

and which may be described as man's capacity for art in all its form"^[6]. This 'knowledge' and 'action', cited by Sherrard, can be understood as 'theory' (assuming as the initiatic aspect) and 'practice' (assuming as the esoteric aspect).

Analyzing 'theory' through the perspective of Guénon, "theory should normally be looked upon as nothing more than a preparation"^[2]. In a more developed explanation, 'theory' is the transmission of knowledge, where "on the one hand, transmission of a spiritual influence, and on the other, transmission of a traditional teaching"^[4]. Both transmissions begin with an initiation, which is the 'opening doors' for the 'chain', from where the traditional knowledge comes through. "The word 'chain' translated the Hebrew *shelsheth*, and the Arabic *silsilah*, and the Sanskrit *parampara*, all of which express essentially the notion of a regular and uninterrupted transmission"^[4]. The researcher prefers to call 'chain' as the 'family of traditional wisdom', that is to say the lineage tree of which the traditional knowledge is continuously transmitted.

The transmission of spiritual influence begins with initiation, which must be given by a master or a teacher, who works as a 'transmitter' or 'supporter' for the traditional knowledge. According to Guénon, "initiation must have a 'non-human' origin, for without

this it can never attain its final end, which extends beyond the domain of individual possibilities"^[4]. The 'non-human' is what Guénon calls as 'spiritual influence', an influence of a 'supra-human order', that comes from a vertical sphere. Being 'beyond physics', spiritual influences are, by the very fact, from above traveling downward. Such spiritual influence works as a kind of 'communication', but "communication with the superior states cannot be regarded as an end but only as a point of departure"^[4]. Therefore, such spiritual influence shall not be interpreted as 'clairvoyance' nor as 'psychic-powers'. In this sense, spiritual influence serves only as a support towards the end, which is the realization of traditional wisdom.

The transmission of a traditional teaching, asserted by Guénon, stands for the relationship between teacher and student, where the transmission of knowledge must be accomplished orally, because oral transmission is considered unlimited - there is no limitation in time or space. Whereas books or scriptures are considered limited - "traditional text is no more than a recording, at a relatively recent date, of a teaching that was originally transmitted by word of mouth and to which an author can rarely be assigned"^[2]. In traditional teaching, Guénon explains that there is a "deep and indissoluble bond which unites the disciple to his master, [...] a relationship

that has no parallel in the modern West"^[2]. The relationship between master and pupil is very important, not only by the fact that the teacher instructs students to the traditional knowledge, but also because the teacher, as the initiator, links the student to the chain, where spiritual influences are received in order to assist the individual towards realization of knowledge.

Turning the analysis to the 'practice', which is the second aspect that constitutes tradition as understood by Sherrard on Guénon, the 'practice' develops the pure intellect on the traditional man. Practice is man's art in its all form, or in another words, what the moderns often call as 'art of ancient people', such as traditional medicine, astrology, music and martial art. Integrated to man's art, there are performances of rites and the use of symbols, which plays a fundamental importance on his arts. "In addition of theoretical preparation and subsequent to it, [...] playing the part of 'aids' only, however important they may be in actual practice, is indeed the reason for the existence of rites possessing a genuinely metaphysical character"^[2]. Guénon explains that a rite is made of a group of symbols, "every rite is literally made up of a group of symbols which include not only objects used or the figures represented, [...] but also the gestures effected and the words pronounced"^[4]. The words pro-

nounced, mentioned by Guénon, are not 'prayers' from the religious sense, but recitations of words, called 'auditory symbols', such as *mantras* of Hindu tradition or *chants* in Thai tradition. According to Guénon, "a *mantra* learned otherwise than from the mouth of an authorized *guru* is without effect, because it is not 'vivified' by the presence of the spiritual influence whose vehicle it is uniquely destined to be"^[4].

Rite, for Guénon, is metaphysical in essence, because it is natural. "In a traditional civilization, rites are something altogether natural and in no way exceptional. [...] If one goes back to its origins, a rite is nothing other than 'what conforms to order', it is this alone, therefore, that is really 'normal'"^[4]. This 'normality' means that rites are something habitual, accomplished as a routine, it does not require any artifice or organization. Once a rite is metaphysical in essence, it is not rationalized and therefore, it cannot be standardized or fully explained how it is performed. In contrast, if a 'ceremony' is taken into consideration, Guénon asserts to be unnatural and out of the metaphysical scope, because is a wholly human production, "ceremony always and inevitably gives the impression of something more or less abnormal, outside of the habitual and regular course of the events that fill the rest of the existence. [...] It is artificial, even conventional, a wholly human

production"^[4]. Ceremony is a human production and out of the metaphysical scope because it is rationalized and it calls standardization or organization.

Based on the explanation given about tradition, in our modern society, it has become usual to oppose theory and practice. But for a tradition of a metaphysical essence, they are integrated, or sympathetic, as Ernst Cassirer explains, "we are in the habit of dividing our life into the two spheres of practical and theoretical activity. [...] Primitive man's view of nature is neither merely theoretical nor merely practical, it is sympathetic"^[7].

In conclusion, traditional knowledge is metaphysical because is a knowledge derived from 'pure intellect', where 'theory' and 'practice' must be sympathetic in order to allow the individual to conceive this faculty of thought. Initiation, oral transmission, relationship with teachers, performance of rites and use of symbols, are necessary conditions for those who are instructed in a knowledge of this kind.

2. Traditional Knowledge Differentiated from Religion and Scientific Knowledge

Religion comes from the Latin word *religare* - 'to bond'. Latin was the language spoken by the ancient Greco-Roman, and at that time, according to Guénon's view, religion used to be metaphysical, because it had

a genuinely traditional character. However, due to historical circumstances, ‘religion’ turned into a mere social concern, based on laws and regulations created by man. It became a kind of legislation, or moral, ruled by man’s institutions, that in order to control people, they use elementary psychological observations of sentimental order, which opposes to the metaphysical certitude. Based on that, religion as it is understood mainly in the West, sustains that there is a ‘supreme Being’ governing a kind of ‘legislation’ over the beings. This ‘Ruler’ is absent in traditional civilizations of a metaphysical character. Therefore, as religion has a sentimental and moralistic character, it is out of the metaphysical scope.

Scientific knowledge is a knowledge derived from reason, it is rational, and therefore accidental, because it is limited to an individual scope. According to Guénon, “science is rational, discursive knowledge, always indirect, a knowledge by reflection; metaphysic is a supra-rational, intuitive and unmediated knowledge”^[8]. Modern science is considered a scientific knowledge because it depends upon experimentation, whereas traditional knowledge has no external investigation; “The domain of metaphysic is essentially constituted by that of which no external investigation is possible: being ‘beyond physics’ it is also, by that very fact, beyond

experiment”^[2]. In this sense, scientific knowledge is variable and therefore, accidental.

3. Transmission of Traditional Knowledge

Traditional knowledge cannot be completely defined, if it could be so, it would not be considered metaphysical. However, it can be transmitted, and such transmission has to be accurate it. Thus, in order to maintain the most accurate transmission of knowledge, three points cited below shall be considered:

(1) Initiation: it is a rite, performed by a master/teacher to link the individual to the ‘chain’, that is to say to the lineage of the traditional wisdom on which they belong to. It cannot be fully determined or explained how it happens, if it could be so, it would be a limitation, which opposes to the metaphysical sphere. Thus, here it may include blessings, recitation of words (*mantras*), use of totems or other things considered important by the initiator. Guénon explained that “initiation must have a ‘non-human’ origin”^[4], this ‘non-human’ stands for the ‘spiritual influences’. An initiation process is considered as a ‘second birth’ for those who receive it, and for this reason the relationship between teacher and student is similar as a father and son, and teachers are considered one of the most important figures in traditional civilizations. “The function of a teacher is in fact a true ‘spiritual fatherhood’, and the

ritual and symbolic act of initiation constitutes a 'second birth' for the man who is to receive the teaching through a regular transmission"^[2]. It shall be explained that the term 'spiritual fatherhood' used by Guénon, stands for 'ancestor', " 'spiritual fatherhood' which is the name given to a teacher by the Hindus and which also bears the secondary meaning of 'ancestor' "^[2].

(2) Traditional teaching: it is the relationship between teacher and student, where the transmission of knowledge is accomplished orally. Oral transmission does not only apply 'vocal' transmission, it implies things from day-by-day, things that are not found in books or scriptures, based on the experience of the teacher. Books or scriptures are considered limited knowledge, because they are records of the knowledge that used to be transmitted orally. Therefore, oral transmission guarantees the perpetuation of a knowledge not structure by modern science. The relationship between master and pupil is very important for those who learn traditional knowledge; not only by the fact that the teacher instructs the student on the traditional knowledge, but also because the relationship is spiritual, similar as parent and child, and teacher is considered as a 'second father/mother'.

(3) Performance of rites and the use of symbols: rites and symbols are used as ve-

hicle of spiritual influences, as well as means of teaching. They serve as support to achieve realization of traditional knowledge. Through performance of rites and the use of symbols, the individual is able to maintain the link to the chain, which was made on the day of his initiation.

The combination of these three points composes the most accurate transmission of traditional knowledge, which guarantees the perpetuation of a knowledge that cannot be structured in a standard and scientific way, because this knowledge of metaphysical order is indefinable.

Since traditional knowledge was discussed, the study may move to the analysis of Thai traditional medicine wisdom, in which the *Wai Khru* participates considerably to the transmission and dissemination of the Thai wisdom.

4. Thai Traditional medicine as metaphysical

At this stage the reader has already a clear understanding on tradition of a metaphysical order, and how the traditional knowledge should be transmitted in order to maintain its accuracy. Through the next analyses, and applying the viewpoint of Guénon to the Thai traditional medical knowledge, the study will show that this traditional knowledge is metaphysical, because 'theory' and 'practice'

are sympathetic, derived from the pure intellect. Let's observe it.

Theory: Thai traditional medical knowledge can be said to be based on an immediate knowledge, because it was derived from the 'pure intellect' of great masters, who had transmitted the medical knowledge orally for generations. It has the *'initiatic'* aspect, because in order to protect the traditional medical wisdom, these masters used to confer initiation to their students, linking the apprentice to the 'family of traditional wisdom', that is to say to the lineage of whom the teacher in question belongs to. The translator of Guénon's book, *Perspectives on Initiation*, uses the term *'initiatic aspect'* to regard the implication of initiation. "Tradition as we have understood it, and even ordinarily its strictly esoteric and *initiatic aspect*, that is, what is most 'inward' and elevated in that tradition and thus what constitutes its very spirit as it were"^[4].

Practice: The performance of the Thai traditional medicine itself, which also involves the performance of rites and the use of symbols. It has the esoteric aspect, because it is something wholly interior. These rites and symbols stand for the chants (mantras) performed by traditional Thais, and the *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู) rituals - that are going to be discussed in this paper.

Those who are familiar to the Thai tra-

ditional medicine wisdom can already identify these ideas, but those who are not yet aware of it, through the explanation given below, it will be able to verify such tradition as metaphysical.

First of all, it shall be said that the information given below cannot be limited to a complete form, because it is only given in order to analyze Thai traditional medicine wisdom as metaphysical. Since metaphysics is unlimited, a limitation on this case is inappropriate.

(1) Initiation: In the past, Thai traditional medicine used to be only transmitted to members of the family of traditional doctors, and passed on from generation to generation. However, due to the changes of Thai society, the knowledge became available to people in general, coming from different families, and free of charge. But in order to safeguard the traditional medical wisdom, the teachers used to perform a rite of initiation, linking the student to the 'family of traditional wisdom', that is to say, to the lineage tree that they belong to. Traditionally, the student should ask permission to become the apprentice of the teacher, by giving an offer, made by the student himself, named as *khan khru* (ขันครู) or *kruai dok* (กรวยดอก). These offerings could contain flowers, incenses, candles, betel nut, betel leaf, some rice and other things as well as money. The purpose and significance of

the offering is to give merits to the teacher and to the teacher's lineage, as well as to pay respect to them. The offering represents the student's willingness and commitments towards the traditional medical wisdom. Every single item containing in the offering, has a meaning. For example, if it contains *ya phraek* (หญ้าแพรก), a kind of grass that can survive in any condition, even during the dry season, it symbolizes that the student is patient and will stand in any condition. Another example is *dok makhuea* (ดอกมะเขือ), the eggplant flower; when this flower grows up, the head of the flower faces down; it represents the characteristic of the student towards teacher, it shows politeness and mutual respect.

In the initiation, the teacher takes the offering and places over the head of the student. According to Supak Pinyosuoak, a specialist in merit making for Buddhist monks, as well as an expert in Thai traditional items for rituals, the offering is placed over the head because the *khru* lives in the head:

"For Thai people, *khru* lives in the head, head stands for North, North is enlightenment of the knowledge, that is the reason why in Thai culture, touching or crossing the head of people is disrespectful, because head stands for *khru*, *achan*, master. Thais believe that *khru* lives in the head and protect themselves, for this reason if there is

no mutual respect between people, at least they should respect the head, where *khru* lives".^[9]

Looking at the statement of Supak in a metaphysical perspective, the fact that '*khru* lives in the head' and the teacher places the offering over the head, it means that the teacher connects the student with ancient *khru(s)* - the 'family of traditional wisdom' of Thai traditional medicine. In another words, the teacher links the student with ancient masters who are not physically present, but whose consciousness remains in a sphere not structured in a scientific way. The consciousness of these *khru(s)* is the 'spiritual influence' asserted before. It was explained that the knowledge received from spiritual influences comes from a vertical sphere, therefore, the statement of Supak agrees with Guénon when she explains that '*khru* lives in the head and head stands for North'.

(2) Traditional teaching: the relationship between teacher and student and oral transmission. The initiation of the student works as a 'second birth', where *khru* is considered a 'spiritual father/mother'. The relationship between teacher and student in Thailand, is in fact, a true 'spiritual fatherhood', where a deep and indissoluble bond unites the disciple to his master. In agreement, Debora Wong on the Thai tradition, asserts "when a student finds a teacher and forms a close

relationship, the bond can become one of the most important in his or her life. [...] Teacher and disciple are ideally as close as, or sometimes closer than, father and son"^[10]. The task of the *khru* is to train the students' mind from where parents left off, and take them to higher level of knowledge, cultivating spiritual awareness in their mind.

Traditionally, the Thai medical knowledge used to remain only on teachers' and practitioners' mind, and passed on orally, from master to pupil. Due to historical circumstances, such as the fall of Ayutthaya, and the progress of Thai society, the knowledge begun to be transcript in format of scriptures. However, even though Thai traditional medical knowledge was compiled, the oral transmission was preserved.

(3) Performance of rites and the use of symbols: The performance of rites and the use of symbols in Thai traditional medicine can be summarized in only one term: *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู). The *Wai Khru* is commonly associated to rituals performed to pay respect and homage to teachers in any educational field in Thailand, from elementary school to university, including fields of Thai traditional art such as music, dance, traditional medicine and boxing. Different educational fields have different ways to perform the rituals, but all of them have the same purpose: to honor and to remember teachers. However,

looking at the *Wai Khru* in a metaphysical perspective, it is more than a ritual to pay respect to teachers, the *Wai Khru* is a necessary condition for the 'practice' of the Thai traditional medical knowledge itself, which is now discussed.

Translating the term *Wai Khru* into English, it literally means "pay respect to the teachers", however considering other aspects in Thai tradition, such as the Thai quality *katanyu-katawacti* (กตัญญูกตเวทิตี), which stands for those who are grateful and manifest gratitude to benefactors, the better translation of the term would be "pay grateful respect to the teachers". Respecting teachers is a common value shared in most of the Asian countries, however in Thailand, the *Wai Khru* represents more than a respect. This research shows that the *Wai Khru* rituals contribute for the preservation of the Thai traditional knowledge, maintaining the link between individuals and teachers of any kind. In order to understand that, lets first observe the analysis of the words *wai* and *khru*, which contributes to the metaphysical understanding of the *Wai Khru* itself.

Wai (ไหว้) is a Thai verb, translating to English meaning 'pay respect' or 'show respect'. When this verb is manifested, it transforms to a physical gesture of joining the palms in front of the chest or face, with a slight bow. It is used to leave greetings,

thanks, apology, and the most important, to show respect to someone or something. *Wai* to 'something' must also be describe here because very often Thai traditionalists *wai* to inanimate objects, such as things in nature, images and statues. But this action has a symbolic purpose - it represents something. When inanimate objects are 'wai-ed' (respected) in Thai tradition, it is because the objects have a meaning regarding to knowledge. It may symbolize a type of transmission of knowledge that is not structured by science. In agreement, Guénon asserts, "symbols are essentially a means of teaching, and not only of outward teaching but of something more in so far as they serve above all as 'supports' for meditation, which is at the very least the beginning of inner work"^[4]. In conclusion of this thought, the *wai* is metaphysical in essence, and it symbolizes the respect and gratefulness of people (*katanyukatawacti*) towards knowledge, in which acknowledging the debts to benefactors, either physical or spiritual, people pay respect to someone or something.

Analyzing the word *khru*, there are two words in Thai language which translates to the English meaning 'teacher'. One is *khru* (ครู) and another is *achan* (อาจารย์). *Khru* stands for elementary school teachers, as well as teachers of Thai traditional art such as traditional medicine, astrology, music, dance

and boxing. *Achan* stands for teachers of adults, university professors, those who educates undergraduate and graduate students. *Khru* comes from the Pali word *garu*, which as an adjective, means "heavy, weight, important, venerable"; and as a noun, "a parent, a teacher, a religious preceptor"^[11]. *Achan* comes from the Sanskrit word *acharya* which means "a spiritual guide or teacher; he who invests the student with the sacrificial thread and instruct him in the Vedas, etc. [...], a family priest"^[12]. Looking at the English translation of the two words, *khru* and *achan* seem very similar, but when applicable to the Thai language, both have different meanings. In this case, a question must be asked, why the tradition of paying grateful respect to teachers is called *Wai Khru* and not *Wai Achan*? For the analysis of the researcher, based on the perspectives of Guénon, *khru* is understood as the transmitter of the traditional knowledge, which involves physical teachers as well as spiritual influences. *Khru* is the one who confers initiation, who acts as a link to the 'family of traditional wisdom', ensuring that the knowledge is passed on accurately. In another hand, the word *achan* stands for teachers of scientific knowledge - professors, from the Latin word *professor*, "a person who professes to be an expert in some art or science; teacher of highest rank"^[13]. In this sense, *achan* stands for professors or teachers of

regular school, college and university, who transmit the scientific knowledge under the domain of reason.

It is due to the meaning and the applicability of the words *khru* and *achan* in Thai tradition that the rituals for paying grateful respect to teachers in Thailand is called *Wai Khru* and not *Wai Achan*. Thus, using the perspectives of Guénon, *khru* belongs to the metaphysical sense of the word, where metaphysic is 'beyond physics', *khru* is, by the very fact, beyond *achan*. Therefore, the Thai tradition of paying grateful respect to teachers in Thailand must be called *Wai Khru* and not *Wai Achan*.

It shall be said that the researcher in no ways attempts to fully define and clarify the Thai words, because 'only something that is limited is capable of limitation'. Some exceptions are found in Thai society, such as calling a teacher of Thai traditional knowledge as *achan*, or calling teachers of elementary school, who could be considered as a teachers of scientific knowledge, as *khru*. Thus, the researcher's assumptions on these two Thai words were given only in a purpose of this study, but not limited to that.

5. The *wai khru* (พิธีไหว้ครู) and the *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู)

On the *Wai Khru* in Thai tradition, the researcher has identified two types of rituals,

one that it relates to the 'rite' as defined by Guénon, and another that follows Guénon's definition on 'ceremony'. Since for Guénon 'ceremony' is not considered metaphysical, in order to safeguard the metaphysical aspect of the traditional *Wai Khru*, the researcher differentiated these rituals into two terms, *wai khru* (พิธีไหว้ครู) in lowercase, and *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู) in uppercase.

The *wai khru* (พิธีไหว้ครู) in lowercase letters, or *phithi wai khru*, is the annual ceremony organized by schools or institutions that once a year gather people to respect and remember those who have gone before. Taking the example of the *wai khru* ceremony organized by the Federation of Thai Traditional Medicine Associations of Thailand (FTTMAT), held at the Ministry of Public Health, the ceremony happens on the last Sunday of March, because it is a convenient date for the community. The FTTMAT organizes and performs the *wai khru* ceremony following a book titled *The Manual for Traditional Thai Wai Khru* (คู่มือการประกอบพิธีไหว้ครูแพทย์แผนไทย), written in Thai, and edited by the Health & Development Foundation. This book was written in order to protect and preserve the *Wai Khru* in Thai tradition, sharing information about the meaning and significance of the ceremony:

"This *wai khru* ceremony is performed in the applied form suitable for the present



The annual *wai khru* ceremony, held by the Federation of Thai Traditional Medicine Associations of Thailand, at the Ministry of Public Health, in 2016.

time. The reason for using the applied form is that we are the healers who graduated from different schools and institutes, and different teachers, however, we have the same great teachers as the afore-mentioned, we work together, we know each other, we got more good friends at the same time. By doing so, we can help to preserve the *Wai Khru* culture, we establish the intellectual relationship between teachers and students, between students and students from the same and different institutions”.^[14]

In a very short description, at the annual *wai khru* ceremony, a table is prepared with various items. Every item has a meaning, and of all them are connected to the traditional wisdom. The ceremony is opened by an orator, who gives a speech about the importance of that day. An elder teacher (a *khru*) is invited to lead the ceremony. He invites the participants to recite, after him, the

Wai Khru chants (*mantras*), as well as the Oath Word of Thai Traditional Medicine Healer. Close to the end of the ceremony, Buddhist monks are invited to give blessings to the participants. And at the end, senior *khru(s)* are invited to sit side by side, where they give blessings to the participants, anointing three spots on the individual's forehead. The left spot is known as *aloka* (อาโลกา), which means brightness, where the mind is mindfulness; the right spot is *mahapurisa* (มหาปुरुสีสะ), that stands for the person who follows the five Buddhist precepts (to refrain from: destroying creatures, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, incorrect speech, intoxicating drinks and drugs); and the upper spot is *udom panya* (อุดมปัญญา), which means consciousness, knowledge.

With the example of the *wai khru* ceremony organized by the FTTMAT, it is in no doubt a human production, and therefore out

of the metaphysical scope as Guénon asserts. However, in the conclusion of this study, the researcher gives a different point of view, because based on the pressures and changes caused by the modern world, the ‘ceremony’ is a way to preserve the identity of the metaphysical ‘rite’.

The *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู) in uppercase letters, stands for the ‘rite’ as Guénon asserts, which is metaphysical, because is natural, it does not demand any formal organization or standardization. Every practitioner performs the rite in his own way. The *Wai Khru* represents the profound respect of practitioners to the attributes of teachers, which it is shown in a format of a rite. In the case of Thai traditional medicine, it is generally performed every day or working day, or before every treatment. It works as a kind of pyramid, by honoring and respecting the teachers, sincerely, the practitioner is respecting the traditional knowledge itself, connecting himself to the chain.

Tawin Apainikom, although no longer with us, was 90 years old when interviewed by the researcher. During the interview, Tawin explained that through his *Wai Khru*, he was able to receive a kind of ‘energy’ that was transferred to his patients, “when I think on my teachers, and on the highest one, the Buddha, I receive a kind of energy that I am able to transfer to my patient, in order to

increase his health condition. The energy does not come from me; it comes from my teachers”^[15]. The statement of Tawin represents the connection and ‘communication’ of the practitioner with the spiritual influences.

Komson Dinakara na Ayudhaya, a reputed Thai traditional doctor as well as teacher of Thai traditional medicine in Bangkok, on his *Wai Khru*, he explains, “before I read, I pray first. Before I work, I pray. Before I treat a patient, I pray. We believe that if we don’t have teacher, we don’t know anything, we don’t know knowledge, we don’t know about life”^[16]. The ‘prayer’, mentioned by Komson, stands for the *mantra* explained as an ‘auditory symbol’, which represents a receptacle of spiritual influences. The *Wai Khru* depends from each individual, but it is a rite performed without any rationalization, it is natural as a habit. It cannot be defined, because it is metaphysical. The individual who *Wai Khru*, pays respect and thanks his teachers for the knowledge; he asks for blessings and protections - for himself and for his patients. When the *Wai Khru* is performed, the practitioner is connected to the chain, where he is able to enter into ‘communication’ with supra human states, that is to say with spiritual influences. This ‘communication’ is made by the ‘pure intellect’ explained by Guénon.

However, due to the pressures of the

modern world, Thai traditional medicine knowledge was forced to adapt to new modern forms of codification, trainings and laws, which can impact the integrity of Thai traditional medicine wisdom; Also, it results in a disconnection of practitioners to the 'chain', that is to say to the 'family of traditional wisdom' that they belong to. Thus, in order to analyze the impacts that the modernization of the world has caused to the Thai traditional medicine, in the next section, it is investigated the changes that took place in the transmission of knowledge in Thailand, and what it has affected since then.

Discussion

Modernization is the process of adopting new ideas and new ways of thinking to the needs of society. The prevalent knowledge in the modern world is the scientific knowledge, a type of knowledge under the domain of reason, where the rational thought is considered superior than the 'pure intellect'. In this sense, traditional knowledge, a knowledge of metaphysical order, is subordinated to the sphere of reason and substituted by the 'advanced' modern science. Thus, to survive from the pressures of the modern world, traditional knowledge has to adapt to the new, and it has to conform its traditional aspect to the rational thought.

With the advancements of the world, the

rational thought has impacted traditional civilizations, affecting mainly, the transmission of traditional knowledge. Thus, in this section it is going to be analyzed the positives and negatives impacts of the changes on the transmission of Thai traditional knowledge since the modernization process in Thailand. Four main changes are presented, based on the history of Thailand and the current situation of the modern world. The positive and negative points are presented based on the analysis of the researcher, which may agree or disagree with Guéron.

Change 1: In the past, Thai traditional medicine knowledge used to be safeguarded only on teachers' memory, and passed on only to members of family. But due to historical circumstances and the progress of Thai society, the knowledge begun to be recorded in format of scriptures, and available to people in general, and not limited to families of traditional doctors.

The fall of Ayutthaya, the capital of the ancient Siam, in a war against Burma in 1767, marks the development of the transmission of Thai traditional medicine knowledge, because during the war many ancient and holy scriptures were destroyed, including medical scriptures.

After the fall of Ayutthaya, King Rama I (1782-1809) commanded the restoration of *Wat Pho*, where according to Chaithavuthi &

Muang Siri, “the temple functioned as a repository of medical knowledge that had been salvaged after the destruction of Ayutthaya”^[17]. King Rama II (1809-1824) has also left a great contribution to the revival of Thai traditional medicine; during his reign, the worst cholera epidemic led the King to restore “healing methods and medicinal prescriptions that had been lost during the Ayutthaya war with Burma”^[17]. The restoration remains inscribed on the walls of Wat Ratchaorot. King Rama III (1824-1851) continued the work started by the King Rama I at *Wat Pho*, and the medical knowledge collected was inscribed in the walls of *Wat Pho*. These revival projects turned as an important and historical moment for the preservation of Thai traditional medicine. But, even though the knowledge was compiled, the oral teaching was still important for the transmission of knowledge. Scriptures were only used as a support of transmission of knowledge.

Positive impacts on change 1: With this development, the Thai traditional medical knowledge became available to other families, not limited to a family of traditional doctors. The tradition is still preserved, because in order to protect the Thai traditional knowledge, the teacher used to choose his students, based on the precepts of Buddhism: refraining from harming living things, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, lying

or gossip and taking intoxicating substances. At this stage, the transmission of knowledge was free of charge. The student used to live with his teacher, the relationship was similar as father and son. **Negative impacts on change 1:** from the point of view of researcher, none.

Change 2: Thai society developed more, and with the concern for the preservation of Thai traditional medical wisdom, the ‘first open university’ was established, by King Rama III at the *Wat Pho*. “Rare medicinal herbs were planted so that the people could study and use for self-care without confining them for use only in any particular family. The *Wat* is thus considered as the “first open university” in Thailand”^[18].

Positive impacts on change 2: At this stage, with an ‘open university’, the transmission of knowledge changed again. The knowledge became available to people in general, free of charge. Teachers no longer could choose their students, but they could still preserve their transmission of knowledge by selecting those who want to study. In this sense, the student-to-be should ask permission to study with the teacher, and it was up to the teacher to decide whether the individual could become his apprentice or not, which an initiation, asserted before, would be necessary. Here, the knowledge may be still free of charge, the student may live with

the teacher, and the relationship between teacher and student is still preserved, as a father and son, and the oral teachings are still being used as a way to transmit the traditional knowledge. **Negative impacts on change 2:** The teacher and student may not live together, which may compromise the fully oral transmission. The knowledge maybe transmitted on charge, which limits the transmission only to certain people.

Change 3: It was during the reign of Chulalongkorn (1867-1910), that the knowledge inscribed on stones and walls in temples, as well as, the ancient scriptures and manuscripts kept with traditional doctors, were collected, edited and transcribed into textbooks that were implemented into the Thai medicine educational system. At the time of reign of Chulalongkorn, the government used to give a salary to encourage students to study the three-years curriculum of the first traditional medical school. With the advancements of the world, in a more recent time, new schools and universities of Thai traditional medicine were established.

Positive impacts on change 3: At this stage, the traditional medicine knowledge became available in wide proportions. On the use of texts for transmission of traditional knowledge, Guénon's asserts, "where traditional teachings are more of less completely available in written form, they still continue

to be transmitted orally, for this is indispensable for their full effect and also guarantees the perpetuation of the 'chain' to which the very life of tradition is linked"^[4]. Thus for the researcher, textbooks help the preservation of Thai traditional medicine knowledge, and when accompanied by oral teachings, textbooks serve only as support of transmission of traditional knowledge, and not as a main source of it. Therefore, oral teachings are still prevalent in this stage. Giving a salary to persuade students to study the Thai traditional medicine, it contributed to the preservation of the medical knowledge, increasing the numbers of doctors and practitioners of the Thai traditional medicine. **Negative impacts on change 3:** Maybe the initiation is no longer accomplished. With the advancement of the world, and the increase of numbers of universities and schools in Thailand, students no longer choose the teacher; they choose the school or university. Teachers no longer 'accept' the student; they are 'employees' of school/university, therefore, initiation is not accomplished. Thai medical knowledge becomes to be commercialized, as a source of income. Teachers are employees, and students, customers. As a customer, students choose the most appropriated school, and not the teacher. Students pays the fee to the school, the teacher receives salary from the school. The relationship between teacher and

student becomes vastly different from the earlier spiritual relationship as a father and son. The transmission of knowledge from humanized oriented turned to be commercialize oriented.

Change 4: The last, but not least, which may be the future of Thai traditional medicine, is the actual era of ‘online informatization’, where most information is shared electronically (virtually), the so called e-learning. The e-learning is an online education, where virtual classes, video lessons and self-study are gaining space in universities and colleges around the world. Many examples can be cited here, such as the College of Medicine at the University of Florida that offers two Graduate Certificate programs. [...] Both programs are 100% online^[19]. Another example is the College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine at the University of Edinburgh, which offers online degrees for scientists, medical or veterinary practitioners^[20]. In Thailand, the e-learning has not yet become popular, but Assumption University of Thailand, an international university, is already pursuing an online educational system, named the Graduate School of E-learning, which offers five graduate programs, promoting what they call “Life-long learning for anyone, in any course from anywhere and at anytime”^[21]. Thai traditional medicine, among Thais, is still conservative in applying technology to

the education of TTM. However, foreigners with a modern mentality, interested in the Thai traditional medicine knowledge, have already started to disseminate the knowledge of Thai massage through online courses. The *Thai Healing Massage Academy* is an example, they offer resources for Thai massage through online training, where the school asserts to provide advanced online Thai massage education and certification. “All the training courses and certification programs can be conveniently completed right from home, and from anywhere in the world”^[22].

Positive impact on change 4: In a traditional perspective, none. **Negative impacts on change 4:** From the time of Guénon, such technological advancement was inexistent, but if he assumed that writings are considered limited, the researcher asserts that a traditional knowledge transmitted virtually (e-learning), without any accurate transmission, has no meaning. It is empty of content and would never promote the transmission that is accomplished by the traditional way. In another words, those who learn the knowledge virtually, without any connection or relationship with the teacher, would never be able to gain a knowledge of a metaphysical order. The knowledge that is transmitted virtually is considered a scientific knowledge, based on reason and therefore out of the metaphysical scope.

The four main changes on the transmission of Thai traditional medicine knowledge has shown that in one hand, they have contributed to the preservation of Thai traditional medicine knowledge, which was compromised after the fall of Ayutthaya. It has also shown that transcriptions of traditional knowledge, into written forms, do not necessarily implies the end of oral teachings, instead, it supports the traditional teaching. However, in another hand, it has shown that in more recent times, since the establishment of schools and universities, an inward disconnection is happening - the break of the 'chain', that is to say, the break of the regular and uninterrupted transmission of traditional knowledge. Because a knowledge, to be considered traditional, must imply 'theory' and 'practice' as sympathetic, involving initiation, traditional teaching (relationship between teacher and student + oral transmission) and accomplishment of the man's art followed by the performance of rite and use of symbols. With this break in the chain, the individual is no longer aware of the inward aspects of traditional knowledge, and therefore, traditional knowledge is turned into a mere scientific knowledge, under the domain of reason.

It is important to add that, it is not the changes in Thai history that has impacted Thai traditional medical knowledge, but the

modernization of the world in general, which has led Thailand to a far more untraditional civilization. The modernization of the world brings social changes, which mold as instance the traditional values and relationship between teacher and student, resulting in a complete disconnection to the 'chain' that would sustain the traditionalism of Thai traditional knowledge. Adding to the risk caused by the modernization of the world, in the case of traditional medicine, the danger of biopiracy exists, as well as the piracy of the knowledge itself. Thus, Thai authorities aware of such risks has established a law to protect and preserve the Thai medical wisdom, protecting their medicinal herbs as well as the intellect property of *khrus*, which since then, have become a property of the nation. The law was established in November 1999 by the late King Rama IX, Bhumibhol Adulyadej, called *The Protection and Promotion of Traditional Thai Medicine Wisdom Act, B.E. 2542/1999*. This law states that a committee shall exist, in order to:

"Give advices or consultations to the Minister; [...] to promote and develop the wisdom of Thai traditional medicine; [...] to determine measures in order to protect the wisdom; [...] to give approval in case of revocation of the registration of Thai traditional medicine wisdom; [...] to consider or decide appeals against the order or deci-

sion of the Registrar or the Licensor; to lay down regulations; [...] to perform other tasks as assigned by the Minister”,^[23]

It is a fact that laws and regulations are necessarily important for the preservation of traditional knowledge. But in Thailand, more important than laws and regulations, it is the *Wai Khru* in Thai tradition, which through the annual *wai khru* ceremony, organized under the domain of reason, allows the preservation of important characteristics of the traditional knowledge: the initiation, the relationship between teacher and student, and the rite.

Therefore, in order to give the final consideration of the researcher, in the next part, the conclusion of this study is based on the annual *wai khru* ceremony.

Conclusion

This study shows that according to Guénon, traditional knowledge is metaphysical, and only an individual who receives an accurate transmission is able to conceive it. The transmission of traditional knowledge implies a sympathy between theory and practice, which stands for initiation, traditional teaching and performance of rites and use of symbols. The combination of these three, guarantees what Guénon affirms as the ‘perpetuation of the chain to which the very life of tradition is linked’.

Taking the study case of Thai traditional medicine, the perspectives of Guénon was applied to the Thai tradition. It was observed that since the modernization of the world and the changes that took place in Thailand, Thai traditional medical knowledge is under threat. The transmission of the traditional medical knowledge, which used to be humanize oriented, turned to be a mere commercialization... Affecting, above of all, the relationship between teacher and student - something fundamental for the dissemination of traditional wisdom. As a result of this change, the value of knowledge has also changed, impacting the relationship of people with the traditional knowledge itself.

It was observed that in Thai traditional medical knowledge of nowadays, an initiation is no longer taken into consideration; traditional teaching is far from a close relationship between teacher and student, it has become a mere service supply. However, it was identified that the performance of rites and the use of symbols are still being preserved in Thailand - called the *Wai Khru* (ไหว้ครู), a rite of paying grateful respect to teachers (of any educational field).

The *Wai Khru* is highly important among the old practitioners of Thai traditional medicine, but perhaps less relevant among the young (or modern) generation. With the modernization of the world, the young generation

may not be attached to the traditional rites and the importance that these rites plays on traditional knowledge. However, it was identified that a standard version of the traditional *Wai Khru*, called in Thai *phithi wai khru* (พิธีไหว้ครู), or ‘ceremony’ as Guénon’s would define, could be a way to preserve and safeguard the traditional aspects of the *Wai Khru*, as well as the other two points (initiation and traditional teaching) that have been compromised since the modernization of the world. But the question to be answered is how can this ceremony preserve the traditional medical knowledge? This question is answered by the following thought.

Even though a ceremony is considered by Guénon a human production and artificial, based on the analysis of this research, thanks to this human creation, and all its standardization, some aspects of Thai traditional medical knowledge could be preserved it. Some *wai khru* ceremonies, might be staged as a kind of “event” to satisfy the demands of the modern world, others might be completely standardized, but, they all remain as a way to once a year, gather teachers, practitioners and students, to pay grateful respect to masters and teachers of the Thai traditional medicine wisdom.

Taking the given example of the *wai khru* ceremony held at the Ministry of Public Health, it was asserted that the elder teacher

recites the *Wai Khru* chants. These chants stand for auditory symbols - considered as very important for the transmission of traditional knowledge. Similar as the ‘*mantras*’ explained by Guénon, these chants are ‘vivified’ by the presence of spiritual influences whose vehicle it is uniquely destined to be. Those who did not know the chants, or who were not able to learn it, have the chance to get to know it and to pronounce the words correctly. In agreement, Komson states that “the spelling of the words in the chants are very important, and in many cases the chants are very long, which makes difficult to remember all the words correctly”^[16].

Another important moment at the ceremony, is when the senior *khru(s)* give blessings to participants and anoint the three spots on the individual’s forehead. Analyzing these three spots in a metaphysical perspective, this might be considered as the initiation of the student to the traditional wisdom, because it leads to the path of the realization of traditional knowledge.

Therefore, at the modern times, granting the annual *wai khru* ceremony, those who were not initiated, or who had not experienced the traditional teaching, have the opportunity to be initiated and experience the relationship between teacher and student, as well as receive the traditional transmission of knowledge. The *wai khru* ceremony is a



The senior *khru(s)*, seating side by side, giving blessings to students and practitioners.

way to encourage young practitioners to perform the *Wai Khru* regularly; it teaches that teachers are recipients of traditional wisdom, and the relationship with them is very important to those who aspire to learn the traditional wisdom. And finally, during the *wai khru* ceremony, those who were not able to be initiated into the Thai traditional medicine, may have the opportunity to be linked to the traditional chain, to where the knowledge will come through. Therefore, even though the *wai khru* ceremony is out of the metaphysical scope, it is a way to connect individuals to the truest essence of Thai traditional medical wisdom, allowing therefore, a harmony between the modern and traditional.

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