



Sakol

The Three Buddhas of Kantarawichai

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO KANTARAWICHAI? IT IS A DISTRICT OF Mahasarakham Province. Kantarawichai also is a beautiful little town on the road to Kalasin. In it are some famous statues of the Buddha. The people of Kantarawichai tell this story about these holy statues.

Hundreds of years ago, the Northeast was ruled by the Cambodian kings. This was before the Thai people came here. Kantarawichai was a very important town, in those days. It had a ruling prince and princess. One of the princes was named Phranong Phratumman. He and his wife had a son named Tao Singh Toh. But Tao Singh Toh grew up to be a cruel young man. The prince and, the princess were afraid of their son. They thought he would be a very bad prince. They did not want him to become the prince when they died.

When Tao Singh Toh heard that his parents did not like him, he was very angry. So he ordered some soldiers to capture his father and put him in jail. The soldiers obeyed Tao Singh Toh. because they also were afraid of him. Soon the Prince of Kantarawichai was put in the jail. Then Tao Singh Toh said, "Now I am the Prince of Kantarawichai. The old Prince, my father, has been put in jail because he was very evil." But the people did not believe him because they knew the Prince was good. Tao Singh Toh wanted his father to die but he was afraid to kill him. So he said, "I will not give him any food, and then if he dies, it will not be my fault. I will not let anyone, except my mother visit him, so no one can bring him food." But when the Princess visited her husband in the jail she brought him food. Tao Singh Toh learned that his mother was bringing food with her. So he said, "You cannot visit the Prince for thirty days."

The Prince knew that he would soon die because he had no food to eat. He called his son to him and said, "Soon, I will die, and you will be the Prince of Kantarawichai. But everything that you do will, become evil." And three days later the Prince died. Now Tao Singh Toh was very happy. He was the Prince now. But he was still angry at his mother, so he ordered the soldiers to kill her. They had to obey him because he was the Prince. But everything that Tao Singh Toh did, turned to evil just as his father had warned him. He tried very hard to do good things, but everything he did was ruined. The people in Kantarawichai laughed at their Prince. They said, "Our Prince may be powerful, but he is foolish. He cannot do anything right."

This made Tao Singh Toh ashamed of himself. He was very sorry that he had been so cruel to his parents. He wondered what he could do that would be good. Finally, on the advice of his ministers, he sent for a famous wise man who told Tao Singh Toh, "You have been very evil, and you are being punished. You must build two statues of the Buddha. One will be for your father, and the other will be for your mother. The two statues should be very beautiful, and they should be built in different places. When you build these statues, you will show that you love your parents and your evil will go away. Tao Singh Toh believed the astrologer, and he built the two statues very carefully. He wanted to be sure that they were very beautiful. The statue Tao Singh Toh built for his father is

in the center of the town. And the statue he built for his mother is on the edge of the town right by the main road.

Still; Tao Singh Toh was not happy, for he knew that, he had been very evil. He told his people that when he died, they should bury him in the forest which is far from the town. Over his grave he asked them to build another statue of the Buddha. When he died,, the people buried him in the forest and they built a statue of a reclining Buddha over his grave. Today the forest is called Don Phra Non, which means "the Forest of the Reclining Buddha."

This story happened many years ago and if you go to Kantarawichai today, you can see:,the two statues of the standing Buddha. One is in the center of the town, and it is under a little pavilion. It is very holy, and many people worship it every year. The other Buddha is on the edge of the town. You might not see it because a big tree is growing up around the. statue.

But the statue of the reclining Buddha in the forest is lost. Some people say it is made of gold. But few have ever tried to find it, because people believe it has a curse. People say the spirit of Tao Singh Toh lives in the grave by that statue. The spirit is very evil, just like the Prince was so many years ago. If anyone sees the statue in the forest, they will die in the same day because of the evil spirit.

So the statue is lost. But the elders say, "Only a few years ago three or four men from Bangkok went into the forest to find the statue. That evening they returned, and they said, "We have found the statue, of the reclining; Buddha! It Is made of gold. We will take you to see it tomorrow.'" But. before they could take anyone there, they all died.

A POSTSCRIPT

When I lived in Mahasarakham, Kantarawichai was little more than a bump on the road to Kalasin. Oh, you always had to stop for the famous statues of the Buddha, but apart from them if you'd blinked, as they say, you'd have missed the entire town. Today it is a bustling place. Kantarawichai is the location of the now primary campus of Mahasarakham University. Tens of thousands of students are in residence there along with their teachers and all the other people necessary for the operation of one of Thailand's most important universities.

[The story of the statues of the Buddha in Kantarawichai and drawing of the statue build in honor of Prince Tao Singh Toh's mother are taken from Stories of the Northeast a reader developed by the English department of the Teachers Training College of Mahasarakham for first and second year students in that institution. While that institution has not existed. The purpose of the reader was to help students understand English could be used to tell their own stories, too. That institution has not existed for 40+ years, but its most recent successor institution is Mahasarakham University. Peace Corps Volunteers at the Teachers Training College of Mahasarakham handled much of the work in producing that reader. The artist of the drawing was a fourth year student at the College..]