

2. ปลุกใจ
plook-jai
wake-heart

To rouse, to hearten to action. R- and K-, both Thai, were running an informal, illicit school for refugee children in the area. Without pay, for two years. Attendance hovered near 100% every day.

Later, the District Office shut down the informal school. R- and K- surreptitiously got the kids into Thai schools. Now, they are social workers rather than teachers. Cleaning blood off benches, dealing in maxi pads, collecting first bras in the Wednesday market, distributing shoes and uniforms, procuring birth certificates from the District Office. The Officer retorts, “Did you know it is illegal to help someone who is not in your family?”

3. ឃើញ
seeu-jai
buy-heart

To influence via money. (My power here unsettling. A university degree, a couple of successful grant proposals, but mostly my passport. Discordant with how I look to the locals, so that they constantly point at my face and ask me where I'm from. Maybe I should work instead at "home," or in Latin America, where I first grew up, even if they thought that I looked like I was *actually* from... Where I can speak their language, perhaps navigate at least some social situations.)

R- and K- are getting restless, ready to move on, but still they work, partly because of the grants we raise. I am a heartless heart-buyer. They say that we make it "a real NGO"; they're the "normal workers helping the children."

4. เกรงใจ
gremg-jai
dread-heart

To be fearful in approach. I fear that my heart isn't petrified enough. Yet. To heed endless songs of praise for *gremg-jai* on pop radio, in shampoo commercials, in guidebooks, in my language textbooks. To hold everyday experiences in an ineffable politics of fear and wonder.

A friend of mine visited Isaan, northeastern Thailand. It wasn't until he left Isaan and arrived in Bangkok that he realized that he'd left his passport behind. The guesthouse owner took the 11 p.m. bus to arrive in Bangkok at 4 a.m. with his passport, then took the 5 a.m. bus to return to work.

Such awesome, dreadful hearts. From a murmured distance. When my friend visited Isaan again, months later, he learned that this guesthouse owner was abusive to her employees, especially the Cambodian refugee, and never paid her any wages. The employees plotted for months to help the refugee escape. Back to Cambodia. As they did so, they developed an ornate story about how she needed to leave in the middle of the night not to escape, but because of a convoluted "emergency," lest the guesthouse owner lose face in town. To grasp a poetry of prosaic subjection.

5. ใจเย็น
jai-yen
cool-heart

To be equanimous. To answer, when we ask whether they had any problems with Burmese soldiers, *No*. When we ask again. *Nah*. So long as, they paid half of their meager earnings to the *junta* as levied taxes. Provided that, they portered weapons for them every year. On the condition that rapes in neighboring villages haunted them only in their sleep.

To keep calm, to stay cool, to live without freezing. To have a say, to access, to share in one's crops. To slash-and-burn one's paradoxical haven. To suffer a tempered heart.

6. 𑄎𑄓𑄗𑄓𑄗𑄓
ken-jai
push-heart

To be stranded in an improvised life without resources. To stand up straight, to not have spots on your teeth, to keep all of your fingers, to live to be old, or just older. To learn to read, to think out loud, to storm one's brain. To be pulled as well as pushed.

To build a new hyper-flammable thatch hut each year and stay there, imbued by the sweet scent of defoliants, surrounded by fiery ants.

To walk farther each week, hunting rocks in the riverbed, carrying them to shore on your back, filling an entire truckbed every day. To pound them into powder, churn them into concrete, pour them into the foundation of a house for other people's children. To weigh your worth in stones.

7. ใจร้อน
jai-rawn
hot-heart

To be hot-tempered. Like me, graceless here, unable to read subtle social signals, unable to maneuver even slow-moving buses. Passing by, a baby, her father, her grandmother, and a dog atop a motorbike, whirling around the corner, a cartful of chickens clucking behind.

Two weeks after his hut burned down, we asked whether anything bad happened that year, and he could not think of anything. After his wife “found a new husband,” after she walked for 5 days through the jungle only to land in jail for working without a permit, only a foreigner would bristle at such inconsequentials with a boiling heart. Let it dwell, and the heart will fracture a fever pitch (มีไข้ใจ, mi-kai-jai, “have-fever-heart”). To shatter with feeling.

Tax Season

I am cultivating the fine art of pressed-for-time
dawdling. Twirling red tape around one's pinkie,
daydreaming of brackish water
and the moment before
myth makes a home in yours—

Did someone give you a cloak that infested the others?
Or have they lined your drawers for years?
Poised to flutter about,
dentists and banks and life savings—
a conversion of saving half-lives,
this financial purgatory so oddly American.
Teeth gleaming from these stiff uppers.
To wake up with the smell of enamel burning,
the grinding of whose toil insures these incisors, home salty home—

A social contract between state
& subject clenches a thousand-year-old alkalined egg,
translucent green artifice of what we thought
was pure, a tautological beginning.
To savor this urge and bury it—
an aporia of the no way in.

To ground myself, my otherwise dangling feet
rest on a hard, old-style rectangular suitcase,
with two clasps with large lock keyholes on the sides,
a worn, black leather handle in the middle. I store my old taxes
inside.

I try to sit taller, upright.

Engineers of my beloved spreadsheet
creating new weapons of planned obsolescence
like ad men walking down Madison:

Incontrovertible morality so easily convertible.

Pull the top down, wash my mouth with some bubbling detergent,
cleanse my oxymoron. My people forever a task
of the imminent. At your service.