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# **Caring for Stray Cats: An Ethnographic Exploration of Animal Caregiving in Urban Thailand**

**Lila Warawutsunthon**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an ethnographic description of animal caregiving in urban Thailand with a focus on caring for stray cats. The main setting in which I explored this human-animal relationship is Bangkok, locally known as Krung Thep, the capital of Thailand. My aims are to detail the way Thai people carry out caregiving work for stray cats in this highly urbanised environment and to explore this from three key perspectives: (1) a means of trans-species communication; (2) an ethics governing the caregiving work of Thai caregivers for their community animals; and (3) a way of thinking about welfare for humans and animals. I argue that animal caregiving is a practice of trans-species communication that forms a human-animal relationship, and houses are one of the sites to witness how it actualises. As social relationships entail ethical implications, animal caregiving is also considered an ethical project for animal caregivers to collectively achieve an ideal form of trans-species bonds. Because of this social and moral significance, welfare is increasingly perceived as a necessity to support these human-animal bonds.

**Caring for Stray Cats: An Ethnographic Exploration of Animal Caregiving in Urban  
Thailand**

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**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology**

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**Supervised by Dr Hannah Brown and Prof Bob Simpson**

**2021**

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## **Caring for Stray Cats: An Ethnographic Exploration of Animal Caregiving in Urban Thailand**

This dissertation is an ethnographic description of animal caregiving in urban Thailand with a focus on caring for stray cats. The main setting in which I explored this human-animal relationship is Bangkok, locally known as Krung Thep, the capital of Thailand and one of the most populous cities in Southeast Asia. This city is host to a significant biotic diversity in which trans-human relations are forged on a daily basis. My aims are to detail the way Thai people carry out caregiving work for stray cats in this highly urbanised environment and to explore this from three key perspectives: (1) a means of trans-species communication; (2) an ethics governing the caregiving work of Thai caregivers for their community animals; and (3) a way of thinking about welfare for humans and animals.

The recent trend in contemporary Thailand signifies the increasing impatience of the governmental and public bodies regarding the tradition of caring for stray animals. Even though stray animals have been a common part of Thai communities, their unowned bodies have been increasingly associated with the prevalence of zoonotic diseases, notably portrayed as “walking rabies” (Coconuts Bangkok, 2015). Their feral or territorial behaviours are also argued to be a public disturbance, such as public fouling, trespassing on private properties, and animal attacks. Thailand had approximately 1.2 million stray cats and dogs with considerable clusters of strays living in urban areas throughout the country. This number was predicted to increase every year because of animal caregivers’ not practicing sterilisation and vaccination. A 2016 survey of the population of stray dogs and cats conducted by the Bureau of Disease Control and Veterinary Service (BDCVS) stated at least 785,446 unowned dogs and 474,142 unowned cats lived in Thailand, and almost half of the population was fertile females (Matichon Weekly, 2018). It was predicted that the number of stray dog and cat populations could increase to 1.92 million in 2024, and 5 million in the next 20 years (Thai PBS, 2020). The anticipation of this upward

trend has caused alarm for the government because it poses a major risk to public health. Rabies, for instance, is present serious and prolonged health problems in Thailand, which experiences annual outbreaks in the summer. Although domestic feline rabies was underexplored in Thailand (Mitmoonpitak et al., 1998) and cats accounted for less than 10% of animal bites compared to dogs (86%) (Sriaroon et al., 2006), they are grouped together as the reservoirs of the rabies virus and are the target of stray population control. Stray cats are seen as figures of public disturbance. The statistic of their attacks on people may be less prevalent than dogs, but they are unwelcome in some neighbourhoods because of their trespassing, noise, and fouling. Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence of problems associated with stray bodies of animals, attempts to remove these “unowned” animals have been met with resistance from local communities.

In 2017, the Department of Livestock Development (DLD) in Thailand initiated a plan to sterilise stray cats in the Lumpini Park located in Krung Thep and relocate them to the city’s state-funded shelter (Matichon Online, 2017). The disappearance of the cats, however, upset local caregivers who had seen and fed the cats every day. Joining with a volunteering community of animal-loving people ( *gloom kon rak sat*; กลุ่มคนรักสัตว์), the Lumpini caregivers campaigned on social media for support and donations to repatriate the cats and successfully made the district authorities yield to their request as some of the cats were returned to the park. The bodies of stray animals do not exist in a social vacuum. Through caregiving practices of the park caregivers, the bodies of the cats became one with the cultural, historical, social, and ecological landscape of the city. These cats might not have been owned, but they belonged. Without taking into account this social reality, the government’s animal management caused ripples to these trans-species relationships in the park, so they were met with resistance from the community. Managing stray animals is an important task of modern cities to improve the livelihoods of people and animals. However, for the policies and implementations to

succeed, we must be aware of the complexities of trans-species bonds in the context, and animal caregiving as a practice of creating these bonds is a key to understanding them.

I chose Krung Thep as my main field site because this capital is the exemplary model of Thai metropolises. Regarded as a city of multicultural diversity, Krung Thep is a space for congregations of people, animals, ideas, and practices of animal care, making it a strategically good location for capturing a variety of ethnographic accounts of pet-keeping. Animal care for cats is a prominent feature of my thesis. When I was developing my proposal to conduct an ethnography on urban trans-species relationships in Krung Thep, I asked myself why I selected a human-cat relationship as my central focus. Certainly, all free-roaming urban animals, particularly dogs, which contribute to the majority of urban stray populations, can be interesting subjects for this investigation. However, in this emerging field of trans-species relations in urban spheres, there is a larger number of studies on domestic dogs than on cats. One of the significant reasons is that the Euro-American academia has contributed significantly to its body of knowledge, and their academic interests mirror that of their society in which dogs have established their social and symbolic significance more prominently than cats. There is also the reason of practicality in which dogs, due to their coevolution with humans and intense selective breeding, are easier study subjects, such as in scientific and social experiments. There is not enough research into domestic housecats, particularly in non-Western cultures. My research was thus designed to address this shortage in the field. I also decided to focus on cats because they occupy a culturally and socially significant space in Thai culture. They are popular pets adored by Thai people. I like cats too. I believe that the key to successful field research lies also in acknowledging one's own motivations even if they are sometimes personal and simple. Furthermore, my familiarity with the animal is a significant facilitating factor of my ethnographic conduct, equal to being a native anthropologist who has a good command of language and cultural appropriateness.

Although my fieldwork was mainly based in Krung Thep, I got several opportunities to travel to Thai cities and towns in the Northeast, East, and Central Thailand and became acquainted with the other forms of trans-species relations, such as between humans and stray dogs. My field experiences outside the capital highlighted the dense environment of trans-species relations across Thai society. These human-animal bonds are everywhere. I spent my time with stray animals and their caregivers in varying places: shelters, catteries, temples, pet hospitals and clinics, shopping malls, alleyways, and houses. Over the course of my 1 year of fieldwork, I worked closely with a community of animal-loving, urban-dwelling people. They were business owners, salaried workers, civil servants, veterinary surgeons, veterinary assistants and students, monks, dog catchers, cat-show organisers, and unskilled workers, 15 of whom I formally interviewed for this dissertation. Despite coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds, the social and moral identities of these people were interdependently grounded in their caregiving work for stray animals.

## **The Outline of the Contents**

This dissertation consists of an introduction and three parts. In the introductory chapter, “The Landscape of Krung Thep”, I provide a description of Krung Thep where I carried out my fieldwork from 2018–2019. I focus more broadly on the changing religious, political, and socio-economic contexts of the city that have created a particular landscape of human-animal relations, which is the focus of my dissertation. In general, Thai society is known for its endorsement of Theravada Buddhism. As its capital, Krung Thep exhibits a strong Buddhist culture that is a key aspect of cohabitation between Thai people and urban-dwelling animals. However, in the political and socio-economic shifts at the global and regional scales between the 19th and 20th centuries, Krung Thep emerged as a multifaceted metropolis in which

tradition and modernity are often in tension. Within this city of contrasts and contradictions, people and animals move around between its religiously sacred and ultra-modern spaces grounded in distinct kinds of animal care. Some people and animals find trans-species relations as a means to live and thrive in the gentrified city which, on the one hand, is the source of their nourishment, and on the other, puts them under immense pressure to survive.

The first part is about conceptualizing animal caregiving as a practice of trans-species communication. The differences in bodies between humans and animals create both epistemological and methodological challenges for an anthropology of human-animal relations to make sense of and account for social personhood and bonds outside the human-human context. But I argue that the notion of trans-species communication is a key to these issues. Chapter 1 of this part, “Anthropology of Human-Animal Relations”, outlines the theoretical engagements of anthropology with the interdisciplinary studies of human-animal relations, its ethnographic contributions to this emerging field of trans-species sociality, and the fruitfulness of the human-animal discussions in broadening the anthropological understanding of human life situated within the more-than-human world. Significantly, anthropology habitually borrows from the disciplines of natural sciences, such as in the 20th century, the scientific era of social sciences in which the concept of fieldwork was introduced from zoology to anthropology (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). This interdisciplinary exchange of theoretical perspectives is a way of enhancing anthropology’s existing frameworks to examine the emergence of a new societal occurrence that has become its object of interest. Drawing from anthropological literature of new kinship and multispecies relations, I conceptualise animal caregiving as an intersubjective activity. The process of caregiving enables humans and animals to practice a wide range of communicative forms and eventually develop a sense of relatedness from living in the other’s presence. To ethnographically account animal actions in this bonding process, I seek examples of multispecies studies across natural sciences and

animal activism, such as the concept of “umwelt” in zoosemiotics, to examine the entanglement among bodies, social relationships, and ecological environments. The significance of these ecological concepts is emphasised for their epistemological potential in tackling the nature/culture dichotomy that dominates the anthropological understanding and writing of human sociality. Significantly, this dissertation uses the ecosystem approach to conceptualise society as an ecosystem constructed by trans-species relations to build up an ethnographic investigation for the complexity of trans-species connections on how the environment enables lived bodies to bond. I argue that Krung Thep should be perceived as an ecosystem in which trans-species bonds shape its environmental landscape, institutional organisation, and social arrangements between humans and humans and between humans and animals.

“Researching Volunteerism and Cats” details a collection of methodologies that I used to navigate the field and to bring my ethnographic experiences into conversation with the theoretical concepts to portray the social reality of the people living with animals. In this chapter, I introduce a group of caregivers volunteering for a charity for stray cats who became my informants and whose lives demonstrated the inseparability of trans-species bonds to Thai society. Their accounts are fully explored later in Part II regarding animal caregiving as an expression of morality and ethical practice for caregivers to attain their ideal of trans-species relationships.

The second part of this thesis investigates how animal caregiving is moralised. In Chapter 3, “Finding the Cats”, I provide an historical perspective on cats’ becoming an integral part of Thai communities. The Thai perception of cats characterises forms of pet-keeping that administer the distribution of caregiving work to individuals and institutions in Thai society. This chapter will describe two different forms of pet-keeping: outdoor pet-keeping grounded in Buddhist ideas and agrarian culture and science-based indoor pet-keeping recently introduced by the influence of “Western” culture. Because of the socioeconomic influences,

people's understanding of cats' behaviours and bodies has changed. In effect, the ideas of animal caregiving have shifted in relation to society's changing sensibility. Depending on how the cat's body and its position in society are perceived in a different system of care, it determines what the proper ways of caring for cats are and who should carry out this care work. The other four chapters in this part give descriptions of types of caregivers stratified by their socio-economic groups. They examine caregiving activities in terms of self, social arrangements, and the professionalism of these animal caregivers in relation to their trans-species bonds with stray cats and their relationships with the other caregivers.

Chapter 4 explores animal welfare volunteerism among the middle-class Thais who lived in Krung Thep and other Thai cities. It introduces the charitable community of animal volunteers (*asa*; อาสา) who rescue, shelter, and find a home for stray cats. The Asas' ideal of indoor pet-keeping featured prominently the notion of "good houses", which intertwines caregiving work for animals with household chores. I trace this historical shift in the perception of pet-keeping practices back to Thailand's socio-economic transformations that started in the 1970s, which, in effect, gave birth to middle-class suburbs and their citified ideals of the home. It was this indoor pet-keeping on which the Asas had modelled their volunteer work for stray cats. I describe how Thailand's animal management and welfare systems were widely believed by the Asas to be inefficient and apathetic towards the animals' well-being, consequently necessitating the network of animal caregiving run by animal-loving volunteers. This volunteer network of animal care was founded on partnerships among the Asas, as well as between the Asas and the other two kinds of caregivers from different socio-economic groups despite the fact that their agendas did not always align and sometimes were in conflict.

Drawing on the ethnographic description of caregivers from a more economically disadvantaged background, Chapter 5, "Shelters by the Poor", investigates how the trans-species bond between working-class caregivers and their stray cats survived in the contexts of

economic struggles. Surrounding this human-animal relationship were the social constraints in which communities and municipal authorities pressured the working-class caregivers into giving up on their bonds with the cats. These cases underlined the transitional trend in complex urbanised societies in which trans-species relationships were increasingly being monitored and conditioned by multi-level social and healthcare agents. This chapter builds on Chapter 4 by describing the charitable identities of these caregivers, which, although distinctive from that of the wealthier Asas, were nonetheless built on similar conceptualisations of animal care ethics. I describe how the caregivers of these two economic classes were attracted to each other and how they formed a kind of patron-client relationship in which the middle-class Asas played the role of benefactors to the caregivers of the working class. This reciprocity of charitable goods and volunteer labour supported the continuity of the human-cat relationship in the working-class households while solidifying the middle class's collective identity of philanthropy.

In Chapter 6, "The Veterinary Surgeons", I discuss the role of the veterinary profession in animal volunteerism. The chapter follows veterinary surgeons who worked for mobile sterilisation clinics, providing medical care of sterilisation and vaccination against rabies outside the conventionally clinical context of animal healthcare systems. The participation of vet practitioners in this domain of animal volunteering underlines the differences in ethical practice between vet and nonvet caregivers. While the chapters about the nonvet caregivers emphasise how caregiving is a foundation of genuine intimacy, the notion of paid caregiving in the ethnographies of veterinary surgeons, who worked for self-interest gains even in the domain of volunteering, enquires into the complexities of trans-species bonds situated in contexts of commercialised care. This chapter also demonstrates a morally ambitious area of animal healthcare where the boundary of veterinary responsibilities between professionals and non-professionals has become blurred. The nonvet caregivers involved themselves in the medical procedures both under and against veterinary consultations, accessing animal

medication, and undertaking veterinary responsibilities under several circumstances. This ethnographic case connects to the trend of non-government collaboration of bodies becoming the key welfare provider for communities in the domain of animal healthcare.

Building on the ethnographic descriptions of animal caregiving practiced by the three kinds of caregivers, Chapter 7, “The Ethics of Animal Care”, emphasises that care practices carry ethical implications of what is good and bad for human-animal relationships. Krung Thep as a city of myriad forms of animal caregiving is a site of ethical dilemmas. Animal caregiving in this sense is an ethical project practiced by caregivers to achieve what they perceive as an ideal human-animal cohabitation. In this chapter, I discuss what I refer to as the ethics of animal care, a collection of moral directives and ethical practices that shape the perception of ideal human-animal relationships and constructs the moral world of Thai caregivers. This chapter also discusses how this particular set of morals might be situated within the broader debate about the place of ethics in human society, considering the ethical practice as a continual process of self-bricolage. The moral identity of the caregivers is formed with animals through choosing how to care for them and through observing the caregiving work of other caregivers.

The last part of this dissertation is an observation of the cooperative efforts of local caregivers, veterinary professionals, charitable and business bodies in managing healthcare resources and distributing them to communities struggling to keep up with human-animal cohabitation in a gentrified landscape. Their care service, I argue, resembled welfare. I refer to this care service provided by the collaboration of nongovernmental healthcare sectors as “niche welfare” because it caters to the healthcare demands of specific demographics that have not received government support or general welfare. I propose that this concept of niche welfare is a window for examining the importance of welfare by placing it in a focus of human-animal connections and for thinking about the role of the state-sponsored healthcare body in this

emerging demand for welfare that takes into account the entanglement of human and animal health.

## Introduction

### The Landscape of Krung Thep

Foreign travellers know Krung Thep as “Bangkok”, a name that dates back to the 15th century. The name Bangkok has been globally recognised since the age of commerce (1450–1680 A.D.) when the city was a trading post between the pre-modern Siam kingdom, Ayutthaya, and the foreign vessels coming from the Gulf of Thailand. Bangkok is still Krung Thep’s official English name today; however, the Thai official name for the capital was changed to Krung Thep in 1972. Although Bangkok and Krung Thep are used interchangeably to refer to the capital of Thailand, the former appears more in contexts of transcultural communication between Thais and foreigners. Among themselves, the Thai refer to their city as Krung Thep, “the city of angels”. This locally preferred name is more appropriate for my research into trans-species relations because Krung Thep, by its meaning, suggests an orientation towards the more-than-human world. Bestowed by the Hindu god of architecture, Vishvakarman, under the order of the heavenly Lord Indra, Krung Thep is a place of Buddha, ghosts, and gods; the earthly palace of the demigod kings; the home (*baan*; บ้าน) of humans and of animals. This city, in which live myriad forms of social existence, was where I began my ethnographic journey. One of the friends whom I had met along the way was an animal caregiver named Viriya who lived in a temple-centric suburb near my residence. She was one of the animal volunteers whom I interviewed for this dissertation. The life of Viriya and her free-roaming cats is a good place to begin grasping the character of trans-species bonds in this urban context that forms the subject of my thesis.

## The Life of Viriya

Viriya led the life of a typical Thai middle-class woman, being educated and a vital participant in the workforce as a consequence of the 1970s' improvement of women's education and rights (Costa, 1997). Because of these economic and educational factors, such women are economically independent of their husbands and can support their families by themselves without necessarily entering married life. Viriya was one of these unmarried women with a stable career and independence. Aged 46, she had worked for the civil service for many years and rose to the rank of a senior officer. This enabled her to live in a modern-style house with a backyard garden with her family, her mother and sister, and pet dogs and cats. She drove to work, enjoyed photography as a hobby, travelled to provincial cities on her holidays, and ate out at restaurants in a shopping mall. In many ways, Viriya's lifestyle was shared among many middle-class Thais; she was a face among the crowd in Krung Thep. However, for a decade, Viriya had worked as a volunteer (*asa*; อาสา: a local term that refers to individuals or groups of animal caregivers who volunteer themselves for improving the livelihood of the stray animals in their neighbourhoods and all over the capital). Viriya's volunteering life was poised in the world of trans-species connections, and this side of her life is a significant window into the social world of Thai urban dwellers. It sheds light on the Thai concepts of class-based hierarchy, charities, and patronage, the tension of keeping up with the pace of modern life, and how caring for the stray cats can bridge these exhausting gaps and bring harmony into the lives of the people navigating the city of contrasts.

In June 2018, while I was waiting to introduce myself to a foundation for stray cats, my first entry to the field, I searched for a place to stay in the capital. I found myself a small rental en suite accommodation in the Pinklao area, which is part of Thonburi, the old town of Krung Thep. The main reason why I chose this accommodation was for financial and logistic reasons.

Pinklao is a junction of Krung Thep and Nonthaburi, the capital's adjacent city. Because of its location, Pinklao had many low-cost apartments for rent. The monthly rental cost of my accommodation was around 3,400 baht (£85<sup>1</sup>). Compared to the average wage of 15,580 baht (£389.5) per month per person in 2019 (National Statistical Office, 2020), my accommodation was affordable for several socio-economic groups in Krung Thep. Moreover, its bus stop served as a hub for various bus lines for commuters to transfer between routes, which lessened the constraints of long-distance travelling, making Pinklao an ideal option for both salaried workers and labourers looking for rental housing. In my apartment complex, I saw both employees and their families, Burmese migrant workers, and university students. Their socio-economic backgrounds differed from each other, but they all lived here as their livelihoods were similarly intertwined with the city centre, motivating them to live as close to its vicinity as they were economically able to. When I first settled into my apartment, I did not realise that Viriya, who was a senior member of the cat foundation, also lived in another temple-centric community close to my residence, less than 30 minutes by bus. Thinking back, it was not a coincidence why we were drawn to this suburb. Viriya had to travel to the inner city for work and desired a quieter suburban neighbourhood to call home. At that time, I did not know yet which areas of this city would be my field site; therefore, my best bet was to stay in a financially affordable place with access to public transport. Pinklao met both of our motivations.

I began visiting Viriya's house after I had volunteered to work in the cat foundation's neutering program for 2 months. The full details of the foundation's programs and its volunteers will appear in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Nonetheless, by way of a brief introduction, this cat foundation had its own mobile sterilisation clinic that travelled to different communities in Krung Thep and occasionally provincial cities during weekends to neuter stray and owned cats and occasionally dogs whose caregivers could not afford the paid service.

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<sup>1</sup> British pound to Thai baht exchange rate used for this thesis is 1GBP = 40 THB.

Because it was a small-scale charity, the foundation did not have its own headquarters. Its medical and administrative supplies for its neutering program had to be kept in the senior members' houses. Viriya's house served as a storage space for the foundation's equipment. After I built my rapport with the foundation's senior members, I started visiting Viriya's house to help with the preparation and transportation processes of the volunteers' activities. This was how I became familiar with Viriya's caregiving work and her navigation around and beyond her temple-centric neighbourhood.

Temples have long been a major feature in the life of Buddhist Thais, and Viriya's family was no exception. Buddhist Thais have temples which they favour and frequent. Viriya's family occasionally travelled to pay respect to famous temples located in other provinces, but their day-to-day lives were centred on their neighbourhood temple located within a 10-minute walk from Viriya's home. Communities grow and revolve around temples. Built next to Viriya's temple were the school and the community's marketplace, while alleyways connected these local landmarks together. There were no sidewalks for pedestrians as all vehicles and local people shared the same narrow streets. Viriya's mother walked to the temple to listen to the monk's teachings and give alms.<sup>2</sup> Because of her day-time job, Viriya only accompanied her mother during weekends and the Buddhist holidays. However, as an animal caregiver, her life had become even more tightly intertwined with the monasteries which were regarded as traditional sanctuaries for stray animals.

Like any Thai monastery, Viriya's temple had colonies of unneutered strays, such as dogs, cats, and chickens, which fed on leftovers given by the monks and the laypeople. This traditional way of caring for stray animals is less endorsed by educated middle-class caregivers these days. Because of her educational and economic profiles, Viriya was able to acquire and communicate with her fellow volunteers in a digital environment about the veterinary ideas of

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<sup>2</sup> An offering dedicated to monks to cultivate good merit. Commonly, the offering is a plastic bucket consists of candles, incense, toiletries, medicine, and other consumer goods that can be used by the monks.

animal care, such as neutering and indoor pet-keeping, and began changing the living conditions of her community animals by herself. As a senior member of a cat welfare foundation, she organised a neutering service for stray and owned cats in her community. For some young and recently abandoned cats, after being neutered, Viriya would try to find them permanent homes through her connection with the foundation. However, most of the neutered cats would be released back to their territories in temples and schools. Viriya's duty for the cats did not end after the sterilisation. On the contrary, it was the beginning of her caregiving work that would continue until the natural death of the cats.

Every day, before traveling to work, Viriya had to visit the temple to feed her neutered free-roaming cats. In the morning, Viriya would walk to the marketplace to purchase ingredients for making food for the cats. She also used this opportunity to run errands for her household, buying oblations such as flowers and garlands for her Buddha statue at home, vegetables, fruits, and freshly cooked food for her family, and grilled chicken livers as a treat for her pet dogs. The main ingredients of the food for the temple's cats were rice and steamed Thai mackerel (*pla too*; ปลาทู). The fish was caught from seaport cities in the Gulf of Thailand, steamed with salt for preservation, and distributed to Krung Thep and other provinces. It was good for human consumption and a traditional and popular homemade food given to cats by Thai households. Recently, the community of middle-class animal caregivers found this kind of food a cause of health issues in cats because of its high level of sodium. Viriya, who was part of this community, was aware of it and fed her own cats with quality pet food. However, she fed the stray cats in a traditional way because, she argued, feeding strays had to take into consideration the cats' preferences. On several occasions, caregivers had to compromise their standards because an abrupt change forced onto the stray's lifestyle might do more harm than good to the animal's well-being. Viriya's temple cats were already used to a diet of fish and rice.

After mixing rice with fish, Viriya divided the food into portions and wrapped them in plastic bags. The cats and Viriya established their feeding activity together with the cats expecting their food at their regular feeding spots. Some waited for Viriya on the roof behind the temple's shed and on the school's wall. Viriya always delivered the food despite some of the feeding spots' being less physically accessible than the others. There was a time when she had to throw the plastic bag of food on the roof of the temple building so it could bite the bag open and consume its daily meal because the cat refused to come down. On weekend mornings, Viriya's temple was more bustling than usual because there was a market fair in which the monastery's ground was occupied with stalls selling fresh vegetables, fruits, meat, poultry, seafood, cooked food, and desserts (see Figure 1.1). One of Viriya's feeding spots was on the wall behind a fish vendor's stall, Viriya walked past the stall and gave food to the waiting cat while the vendor, unfazed by the interaction between the cat and its caregiver, continued to work (see Figure 1.2). In the temple, Viriya also found joy in interacting with people and other species of stray animals on the monastery grounds, such as chickens and roosters. She did not perceive this care work as a burden in her busy working life; she found it as a means to enjoy the more-than-human surroundings and to connect to the community of people sharing her caregiving experiences.

**Figure 1.1**

*Sunday's Market Fair Held in the Community Temple*



Source: Lila Warawutsunthon

**Figure 1.2**

*Viriya Delivering Food to One of Her Stray Cats at the Feeding Spot in the School*



Source: Lila Warawutsunthon

Viriya engaged with local caregivers in a kind of patron-client relationship. She shared the caregiving work with a middle-aged caregiver from a working-class group who frequented the temple to feed stray dogs. Viriya would visit to take care of the cats in the morning, and the other caregiver would visit in the evening. With her socio-economic status and her charitable work for the community's animals, Viriya became a recognised figure in her local community. As such, she was expected to give patronage to caregivers who were economically poorer, such as by providing medical and neutering services and a monetary donation. Viriya willingly played her role and became the person whom the neighbours would consult if they encountered

a stray or a stray-related problem. These ideas of charitable giving and improvement are part of the society's cultural landscape that Thai people are obliged to practice.

After finishing the morning's caregiving work, Viriya went home to get ready for work. She owned a car, so she did not have to deal with the unpredictable timetables of Krung Thep's notorious public transport, although she still had to be mindful of traffic jams during the rush hours. While manoeuvring through the busy streets and stopping on the way for gas and food, Viriya chanced encountering strays living outside of her neighbourhood such as at a gas station or abandoned on a motorway. She gave them some dry pet food she always kept in her car and started planning to bring them home to nurse them to health before finding the cats a new home. After the work was done for the day, Viriya arrived home to take the role of a caregiver for her cats, feeding and cleaning their litterboxes. Then she spent time on the digital platform where she virtually connected with her fellow caregivers and carried out her online volunteering work, such as promoting the charitable programs of her foundation. Technology, vehicles, and social media greatly featured in Viriya's volunteering life as it enhanced her sensory perception of human-animal relations beyond her temple community, expanded her ability to help animals and support caregivers of these animals in other places.

The characteristics of Viriya's relationship with her stray cats and the community of caregivers are habitually in relation to the city she lived in. Her caregiving work for animals and her patronage of economically disadvantaged caregivers are jointly grounded in the Thai class-based hierarchy influenced by Theravada Buddhism and urbanism. The next sections will describe in more detail the historical, religious, and socio-economic landscapes of Krung Thep.

## From Bangkok to Krung Thep: Given by the Gods, the Home for All

“City of angels, the great city of immortals, magnificent city of the nine gems, the seat of the king, city of royal palaces, home of gods incarnate, erected by Vishvakarman at Indra’s behest”,<sup>3</sup> is how Krung Thep was described by King Mongkut, the fourth king of the Kingdom of Rattanakosin.

The earliest settlement that became the foundation for Thailand’s capital city was built on the west bank of Chao Phraya River in central Thailand in the 15th century. There was evidence of the olive-like fruit trees of the species of *Elaeocarpus hygrophilous* Kurz (*ma kok*; มะกอกลง), growing along this village’s many canals (*klongs*; คลอง), which supported one of the theories that the city’s name “Bangkok” might be derived from two words: village (*bang*; บาง) and the olive-like fruit tree (*kok*; กอกลง) (see Wongthes, 2005). Because of its logistical advantage, situated on the trade route between Ayutthaya, the capital of the Ayutthaya kingdom (1351–1767), and vessels coming from the Gulf of Thailand, this settlement on the Chao Phraya River delta expanded into a trading post city. Its economy flourished, with a growing number of populations and the custom outpost-forts built on both sides of the river. Bangkok’s commercial and political significances continued to grow after the fall of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767. In the same year, a former servant of the last monarch of Ayutthaya, Taksin, led a Siamese liberation against the conquest of the Burmese empire and crowned himself a king of the Thonburi dynasty. He took the west bank of the Chao Phraya River as a base for building his new kingdom. Ensnarled in the mainland wars, the newly crowned king envisioned

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<sup>3</sup> A translation of “*Krungthepmahanakhon Amonrattanakosin Mahintharayutthaya Mahadilokphop Noppharatchathaniburirom Udomratchaniwetmahasathan Amonphimanawatansathit Sakkathattiyawitsanukamprasit*” (กรุงเทพมหานคร อมรรัตนโกสินทร์ มหินทรายุธยา มหาดิลกภพ นพรัตนราชธานีบุรีรมย์ อุดมราชนิเวศน์มหาสถาน อมรพิมาน อวตารสถิต สักกะทัตติยวิษณุกรรมประสิทธิ์), which the capital’s full official name, which is recorded as the world’s longest name for a city by Guinness World Records, a 168-letter long.

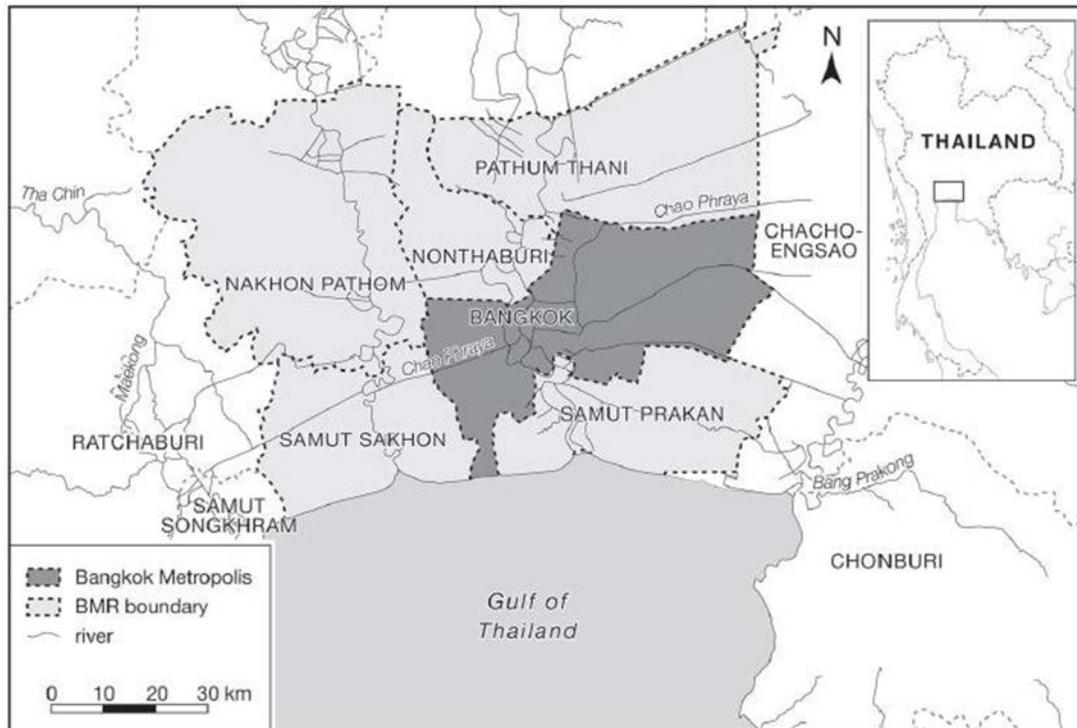
prosperity brought by seaborne trade when he renamed Bangkok to Thonburi Si Mahasamut (*กรุงธนบุรีศรีมหาสมุทร*), or “the city of treasures gracing the ocean”. He demonstrated attempts to rebuild diplomatic and commercial relationships with foreign merchants through sending his vessels to the overseas kingdoms, primarily China. Nevertheless, the Thonburi kingdom’s future was as short-lived as his dynasty. In 1782, Taksin was dethroned by his long-time friend, Maha Ksatriyaseuk, who after the execution of the Thonburi’s monarch crowned himself King Rama the first of the Chakri dynasty. With the intention of establishing the succession of this new kingdom, “Rattanakosin”, to Ayutthaya, Bangkok again was renamed, being regarded in the official documents and treaties as Krung Thep Thawarawadi Si Ayutthaya and Krung Thep Maha Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, which both mean the “Divine City of Ayutthaya”. King Rama I also moved his new capital from the west to the east of the river and built a moat to fortify the city. On his new artificial island, the king commanded his city to be constructed with the image of the fallen Ayutthaya in its golden age. This area is nowadays known as Rattanakosin Island. From this small artificial island bordered by the Chao Phraya River, Krung Thep had undergone social, economic, and cultural changes to become a multifaceted conurbation called the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR), which comprises the capital city and five other industrially developed provinces, namely, Nakhon Pathom, Pathum Thani, Nonthaburi, Samut Prakan, and Samut Sakhon (see Figure 1.3). Throughout the history of the emergence of Krung Thep, the shape of the city is assembled through the collective efforts of diverse ethnic groups: the Thai, the Mon, Laos, the Chinese, and so on, who settled down and made this place their home. However, Krung Thep is also a city with a high tolerance of other than human-human relationships.

Many biotic species of animals find their way to Krung Thep. Rats lurk in sewage systems, marketplaces, and modern and traditional Thai houses. They feed on rubbish wherever they find it. Pigeons and house sparrows are the common urban wild birds found in Krung

Thep, nesting in every nook and cranny of houses, skyscrapers, electricity poles, and trees. The city's tropical climate of humid and hot air also makes it an ideal place for insect populations. Within every house, battles continue between its human owner and mosquitos, termites, ants, and cockroaches that also live there. Some households may find helpers to keep invading insect species under control such as bug-eating spiders and geckos, but they too are occasionally seen as pests. Fish, amphibians, turtles, snakes, and water monitors swim in canals, moats, temple ponds, and parks. Some of this wildlife has lived in urban habitats for many generations and is familiar with human activity. Nonetheless, the animals most closely in tune with the city are cats and dogs. These owned and unowned animals roam Krung Thep, occupying every single district of the capital. They can be seen in parks and on wastelands, in temples and schools, and around construction sites and housing estates. The animals also loiter in alleys (*soi*; ซอย) of the densely populated communities, in streets, and in properties that legally prohibit their entry. On a hot day, stray dogs might take a rest outside of a convenience store, taking advantage of the cool air seeping through the automatic doors. Cats are more elusive in the daylight, but they are always there if one looks carefully, under the shade of trees, bushes, and vehicles or in the eaves of buildings. These animals are versatile in the way they navigate the city. Because of this, their social status is characterised by ambivalence, not fully pets or entirely feral. Nevertheless, for many human dwellers, stray animals are not merely temporary occupants of Krung Thep, they also breathe a certain kind of life into the city. Given by the gods, Krung Thep has become a home for all.

**Figure 1.3**

*Map of Krung Thep and Its Five Adjacent Cities That Comprise the Bangkok Metropolis Region (BMR)*



Source: Shobhakar Dhakal & Ashish Shrestha

### **The Continuation of Buddhist Faith: Trans-species Connection and Separation**

The majority of the Siamese populations that formed the Ayutthaya Kingdom were the Tai, an ethnolinguistic group speaking the Kra-Dai languages that migrated from South China. In the 6th century, they escaped the cultural and political pressures from the Chinese empire, settled in the Chao Phraya delta, and followed the faithful Buddhist of the Theravada tradition, the Indic religion that they accepted from the Mon, one of the native ethnic groups living in Southeast Asia. Since then, throughout the rises and ruins of their ancient kingdoms, Buddhism had become an important part of Thai life (see Poolsuwan, 2016).

After he crowned himself the king of his new kingdom, Maha Ksatriyaseuk set out to rebuild temples. He specifically addressed the importance of restoring the Buddhist faith by commissioning Bangkok's old temples to be rebuilt and the new ones constructed on Rattanakosin Island. The process of building temples in the capital of the Rattanakosin Kingdom had continued to the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV). During his reign (1851–1868), Mongkut who spent 27 years of his life in monkhood, initiated a reform of Buddhism that gave birth to a new branch of Thai Buddhism, the Thammayut order, which further reinforced the bond between the royal family and the Thai Buddhist order that has continued to the present day(see Saenkum & Sangkachan, 2019). King Mongkut also encouraged his court officials and merchants to build monasteries in their neighbourhoods, and the monarch granted the title of a royal monastery to any temple if it met the standard of a royal monastery built by or for the king or his royal family. The king's encouragement led to Krung Thep's having 454 monasteries over its 50 districts today, according to the September report of the Urban Planning Department of Bangkok in 2012. This was part of the royal patronage of Buddhism in which the monarchy had a responsibility to provide material support for maintenance and development of the Buddhist order in Thailand (*sangha*; สังฆ).

This link was important because, Jory argues, the royal legitimacy of Thai kingship was not so much grounded in blood relations as on the Buddhist notion of power-charisma (*barami*; บารมี) (Jory, 2002). In his exploration of the Vessantara Jataka, Jory demonstrates how Thai kings wove folktales about Buddha's previous reincarnations (*jataka*; จataka) into their life histories to justify their claim to the throne. The Jataka tales tell of Buddha in his earlier incarnations as Bodhisattas endeavouring to become future Buddhas. Thai monarchs paralleled their life histories with that of the Bodhisattas to build up their legitimacy. The moral efforts of the Bodhistavas were linked to the power-charisma exercised by kings. Patronage of the Sangha was a powerful demonstration of this connection. In effect, the Sangha

became an instrument to connect subjects to the new dynasty whilst reinforcing a Buddhist-influenced social order (Mabry, 1979). Scholars of Thai Buddhist literature, such as Jory (2002, 2016), Tambiah (1976) and Jackson (2003), all demonstrate the adaptability of Theravada Buddhism in maintaining a strong influence on Thai society throughout periods of change. As demonstrated in this thesis, it has continued to undergo significant modernist transformations to further embed itself in Thailand's social, political, and moral hierarchy.

Stanley Tambiah's work is also relevant in understanding the relationship between Buddhism and Thai polity (Tambiah 1976). In his "World conqueror and world renouncer: Study of Buddhism and polity in Thailand against a historical background," he gives an ethnographic description of the modernizing process of Thailand's Sangha. He discusses the state's involvement in modernizing the Thai monastic order. For example, he documents the modelling of the Sangha's organizational structure to resemble the bureaucratic body alongside monitoring monks' administrative court and education, in order to align it more closely with the political and socio-economic schemes of the state.

Similarly, Peter Jackson (2003) investigated the modernisation of Thai Theravada Buddhism by focusing on philosophical shifts in Thai Buddhist scholarship. He studied the life work of Buddhadasara, a monk who was regarded as one of the most influential Buddhist philosophers in modern Thailand. Jackson argues that Buddhadasara's significant contribution to Theravada scholarship was to bring Zen doctrines, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism widely practised in Japan and Vietnam, into a dialogue with Thai Theravada traditions. Buddhadasara's interpretation re-situated Thai Theravada Buddhism in the context of the global Buddhist world. His Zen-influenced Buddhist teachings promoted modern qualities, such as industriousness and politeness which encouraged the growth of the market economy as well as strengthened the religion's relationship with the ruling powers of Thailand, the

monarchy and the state which have also depended on religion to keep people faithful to the moral and social structures.

Through these reforms and reinterpretations, Theravada Buddhism became the foundation of Thai society. Its concepts of reincarnation and spiritual stratification and the influence of the well-established Buddhist monastic order (*sangha*; สังฆ) were the keys to maintaining Thailand's social structures by instructing varied moral obligations that Thai Buddhists have towards others of different statuses and different species.

### ***Reborn to Rebond: The Buddhist Ideas of Reincarnation and Trans-Species Connections***

In the life of a Buddhist Thai, their status and relationships are governed by the cyclical laws of Karma, the duality of good and bad merit (*bab boon*; บาปบุญ).

Thai Theravada Buddhism views types of social relationships in the temporary world as continuations of past-life bonds. The Buddhist scriptures (*tripitaka*; ไตรปิฎก) interpret real-life occurrences, including bond-making, with reference to the Buddhist concept of good and bad merit. This karmic law governs the form, the place, and the time of the rebirth that the soul (*vinyan*; วิญญาณ) may take (see Keyes, 1983). Good and bad merit shape the physical appearances, man or woman, healthy or disabled, and so on, and designate the status of a person whether they would be born as the rich or the poor, the human or the animal. Humans are perceived as having superior form and status to animals because human bodies have a better aptitude for making merit, doing good deeds for some, and refraining from bad deeds to others. The two kinds of merit are harnessed from social engagements between beings. In this sense, the merit from the relationships in the past life assigned the soul its place in the present life. The likelihood of meeting people with previous deeds with each other again is very high. For example, many animal caregivers I met believed that their cats were their servants or kin reincarnated. From this Buddhist perspective, there is no new connection as people are reborn

to re-bond. Furthermore, the physical or social differences do not deter Thai Buddhists from perceiving other beings, animals, or supernatural entities, as social people. They all possess the same spiritual essence. These motivate the Buddhists to care for other beings regardless of their forms or statuses because they could have had meaningful bonds with each other in the past.

Influenced by Theravada Buddhism, the Thai cosmological world conceives meaningful relationships between humans and nonhumans as an integral part of people's social life and spiritual growth. Biotic or astral, benevolent or vengeful, animate or inanimate, living in the woods or in the cities, inside or outside of the household, Thai people constantly cross paths with the nonhuman. The idea of karmic reincarnation also emphasises the sociability of the nonhuman as a person capable of initiating social contact with humans. There are numerous accounts about laypeople and monks who bond with nonhuman beings. One of the popular cautionary tales of these supernatural encounters features a man who urinates on an anthill or a tree where a temperamental spirit resides, causing the latter to curse him. Historic forest monks were known to encounter wildlife and supernatural entities while seeking solitude outside the realm of civilisations (Tambiah, 1984). These descriptions have been retold in contemporary society as factual truth, signifying the acceptance of the more-than-human world among Thai people where they could never be socially isolated from the nonhuman world. The question asked by the Thai is not whether nonhuman connections are real, but what appropriate responses are there to these connections: continue or dissolve the bonds? In the first story of the man cursed by the spirit for his misdeed, he decides to ask for its forgiveness by dedicating his good merit to the spirit. Satisfied, the spirit forgives him; the two mutually terminate the connection. However, in many cases, Thai people keep their connections to the nonhuman world as part of the Buddhist practice of ascending to higher karmic stages of existence. Caring for animals is in this category.

The Buddhist perception of rebirth and social relations laid a foundation for the Thai understanding of social life in which caregiving and merit-making are closely intertwined. Caregiving is regarded as an act of good merit that advances the caregiver to higher levels of spiritual and social status. Because of this embedment of Buddhist teachings in their life, Thai people are sympathetic towards those occupying inferior statuses to themselves: the rich to the poor, the elder to the young, men to women, and humans to animals. Thai people feed and allow stray animals to seek shelter within their communities and their temples. They do not kill animals, except for consumption or other essential reasons, such as medical and veterinary conduct. Even then, killing animals is seen to generate bad merit (*bab*; บารมี). The people who conduct this action, such as slaughterhouse workers or veterinary surgeons, have to make good merit (*boon*; บุญ) to prevent bad merit from causing illnesses or bad fortune in their lives. Hence, Thai society is highly tolerant of animals, making trans-species cohabitation a common sight.

Despite motivating people to bond with those who are different from themselves, these Buddhist concepts also establish a merit-based hierarchy that stratifies social beings in terms of merit harvest. As merit harvest manifests in material appearances and social statuses, these ideas in practice serve to strengthen other existing forms of stratification, such as class, age, gender, and species in Thai society.

In her “Meeting of masks: Status, power and hierarchy in Bangkok” (2017), Sophorntavy Vorng elaborates on the ways that “the cosmic hierarchy translate into a social order” (p. 148). Through her ethnographic investigation of the middle class in Bangkok, Vorng explored Thailand’s social hierarchy and its relation to the concept of karma. She argues that, because places in Thai cities produced different dynamics of power, status and class, her middle-class informant built what she called status-appropriate behaviours. These behaviours enabled people to position themselves in accordance with wider spatial power relations. Vorng

demonstrates how middle class concerns with keeping the appearance of status was a practice of moral hierarchic maintenance which reaffirms the positions of people who are higher and lower than themselves and inform an etiquette of “knowing of time and place” (*kalathesa*; กาละเทศะ). With this knowledge, they can properly navigate the city, that is, without disrespecting the social norms prevailing in each place. Her observations are helpful in that that they parallel how, in some neighbourhoods I visited, people perceived animals and the act of caring for them as a violation of the order of time and place.

The presence of the animals is seen as a kind of violation of the social hierarchy in some spaces, and the practice of spatial partition is deployed to reinforce the species-based boundary. The urban planning of the royal neighbourhood, Phra Nakon District, where Rattanakosin Island is located, is an example of the strong separations in terms of species and class.

At the heart of Rattanakosin Island is the Grand Palace, a vernacular building complex serving as a symbolic residence of the King of Thailand (see Figure 1.4). The architecture of the Grand Palace resembles the artistic style of the age of Ayutthaya, rectangular-shaped with and multi-tiered and brightly coloured roofs that glimmer in the sunlight. The building complex with its gardens and pavilions is surrounded by the exterior white walls, concealing from the public this sacred residence reserved for the monarch and his family. Moreover, significantly, the Grand Palace houses the Emerald Buddha, one of the most important Buddha statues in Thailand, which plays a central role in the Thai royal rituals, such as a ceremony of seasonal decoration in which the king performs a ritual of changing the Emerald Buddha’s decorations at the changing of the three seasons: summer, rainy, and winter. This demonstrates the interdependence of the Thai monarchy and the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand. The palace materialises the two cultural and religious symbols of the society; therefore, the design and management of this sacred neighbourhood are much more special than in other districts.

The thoroughfare in Phra Nakon District is well built and smooth. Along the roads are decorative street lights and well-trimmed trees. The scenery is clear of telephone lines, rubbish, and street graffiti that can pollute the place incarnated as the Thai ideal society of the divine. There must be no animals here. The urban planning of Rattanakosin Island demonstrates the strict hierarchical relationships between the divines and the humans, the kings and their subjects, and the humans and the animals. Despite that, the royal monasteries at the heart of the city such as Wat Pho or the Temple of the Reclining Buddha where the sacred Buddha statues are enshrined cannot avoid having their clusters of cats. This trespassing of the species boundary might be allowed by the monks and the authorities because of the Buddhist morality. However, during the important royal rituals in which the king's entourage parades through the streets or along the river to visit the royal monasteries in this historic area, the presence of the bestial existence must be completely erased. The municipal officers arrive days before the rituals to capture and relocate the stray cats from their homes, much to the anguish of their caregivers, both monks and laypeople. The separation of the profane and the divine commands a separation of trans-species relations.

**Figure 1.4**

*The Grand Palace Located on Rattanakosin Island*



Source: Matichon Online

More evidence of Thai social stratification can be found in the mural paintings of the monasteries in this royal district and elsewhere in Thailand. Wat Pho, a 300 year-old temple, depicts the Buddhist life in its interior walls. All social beings are situated in accordance with the cycle of Karma. The depictions of kings, the Buddha, and angels are adorned in beautiful garments. Their golden decorations and halos symbolise their spiritual advancement and socially superior status to the commoners, who are illustrated with less-glamorous clothes. Residences of the charismatic and the ordinary are also represented differently (see Figure 1.5). A house is a domain of humans, whereas the mystical and common beasts reside outside. Thai traditional stilt houses are a good example of humans' dividing the space in terms of the stratified social existence where the domestic domain is reserved for humans. Angels, on the other hand, move between the realms of the living and the supernatural, residing both inside

and outside the house. The house designs and urban planning are forms of physical modifications of the environment in which Thai people are carrying on in parallel with their perception of their place in the Buddhist universe. Temples, from the monks' teachings to their arts and architecture, are the central institution of the Buddhist society, serving as an enforcer for Buddhist Thais of their moral obligations in the present life and the boundaries they should not cross.

The possibilities for the lives humans and animals are shaped by social stratifications they find themselves subject to (see Govindrajan, 2021). The multispecies cosmology of Thai Theravada Buddhism also provides a model for transspecies hierarchical relations. The case of Wat Pho's cats demonstrates how the making of a transspecies relationship is made to conform to the prevailing karmic and class dispositions. Arguably, practicing care for animals also continues a long-established Buddhist-influenced moral hierarchy that keeps people and animals in their places.

**Figure 5**

*The life of Buddhist Thais is stratified in the merit-based hierarchy.*



Source: Phromwiharn Bumroongthin

Thai monasteries also fostered community life. Settlements of people grew organically around the monastery's grounds. In the present day, temples still nurture the local economy and social activities, such as schools, marketplaces, and festivities. These Buddhist communities are the platform of patron-client relationships such as between caregivers and temple animals, laypeople and monks, and the rich and poor. These opposites offer the opportunity to do meritorious deeds towards others. It can be said that Buddhist communities are built through charitable giving.

### *Thai Culture of Charitable Giving*

Thai people are charitable, and donation is a significant element of Thai culture (Kanchanachitra, 2014). According to a study conducted by Siam Commercial Bank's Economic Intelligence Center (EIC) analysed the National Statistical Office's data of Thai households' spending between 2009 and 2017 and found that 96% of Thai households of all economic classes donated for charitable causes. Thai people's collective identity has been configured to have Theravada Buddhism as its fundamental component. They are proud of their Buddhist identity and wholeheartedly believe in enlightenment (*nibbanna*; นิพพาน), the absolute state of peace and liberation. It is the highest stage of karmic ascension in which beings have emancipated themselves from the subjugation of the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*; สังสารวัฏ). To attain Nibbanna, Thai Buddhists are taught to follow three behavioural principles: to perform good deeds, to commit no bad deeds, and to purify one's mind (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2009). To realise the three behavioural principles, which are rather abstract, there are three sets of disciplinal practices: giving (*dana*; ทาน), observance of the precepts (*sila*; ศีล), and meditation (*bhavana*; ภavana). Each set consists of practices with varying levels of difficulty. Lay people may choose to observe and practice these principal practices in relation to their life circumstances and their spiritual capacity. For example, Sila for laypeople consists of five precepts, whereas monks must strictly observe 227 precepts to retain their monkhood. Significantly, all practices under the three categories are believed to transform good deeds into good merit which people need to ascend to higher karmic stages of existence and reach Nibbanna.

While still in the cycle of rebirth, good merit relieves Buddhists from carnal discomforts, such as poverty or illness, to give them the opportunity to observe the three behavioural principles. This makes merit harvest a crucial resource of the Buddhists both for their long spiritual journey to Nibbanna and for a comfortable present life. The beneficial

effects of good merit vary in terms of forms, ranges, duration, and timing. Its benefits are unpredictable and subjective. Nevertheless, Thai Buddhists interpret their life consequences and attribute them to the results of good and bad merit (Kirsch, 1977). Buddhist Thais will rely on their intuition to make a connection between merit attributions and causes of behaviour and events in their life. For example, animal caregivers often associated their fortune with animal caregiving. This form of self-validation has safeguarded the belief in merit-making. Although there are numerous ways in which people can perform meritorious deeds, donations are the most widely practiced. It also plays a fundamental role in keeping other charitable activities that demand a higher level of commitment, specialisation, and manpower to continue functioning. As my thesis concerns animal caregiving, I will focus mainly on Dana, a practice of Buddhist giving significantly featured in the caregiving work of animal caregivers. This concept laid a foundation for the Thai culture of charitable reciprocity (*tamboon-tamtan*; ทํานบุญทําทาน) governing how people of different classes act charitably towards others in donation exchanges.

Goods that are given and received in merit-making will transform into donations (*kong borijak*; ของบริจาค) that give back good merit to the giver. Donations are self-sacrificial items; *kong* is a Thai word that means objects, whereas *bori jak* is a borrowed word, derived from *parijaka* in the Pali language, the sacred language of Theravada Buddhism. It means “to let go of the self”. An act of donation (*bori jak*; บริจาค) is therefore a religion-oriented practice to let go of attachments to worldly desires by giving away goods with no regard for the recipient’s affiliations to one’s self. The intertwined connection between donations and devotion to Theravada Buddhism is very apparent. The significance of donations in the Thai culture can be better understood when compared to another altruistic item, a gift (*kong kwan*; ของขวัญ). It literally translated as “objects of Kwan”. Kwan is a Thai animist belief in the spiritual essence that resides in humans and nonhumans, such as rice fields. Kwan has its own personhood and

is capable of feeling emotions. It can be frightened by traumatic experiences that its human encounters and escapes from the body. The absence of Kwan from the body is believed to cause illness or death to its owner. A ritual has to be made to call the scared Kwan back to its body. Because of Kwan's importance to a person's life, for the givers to be willing to give a part of their spirit, or Kong Kwan, to the recipients, it underlines a high degree of intimacy. The belief in Kwan is as old as the Thai culture. Kwan is a regional animist religion also shared among agricultural cultures in Southeast Asia before the arrival of Theravada Buddhism in the 1st-3rd centuries. It has ceremonial and social functions to unite farmer families through rice rituals and gift-giving. Although the belief in Kwan has found its way into contemporary Thailand, its ritual significance to the life of urban dwellers has been diminished. While the notion of Kwan still prevails among rural communities in the forms of the rice field ritual, folklore stories, and a vocabulary in the Thai language, it is the Indic religion from South Asia that has steadily spread its influences on Thai society. Throughout hundreds of years, with the efforts of Buddhist intellectuals and political elites, particularly during the European imperial era and the foundation of the modern state of Thailand during the 18th and 19th centuries, a reformed version of Theravada Buddhism has successfully established itself as part of the Thais' religious-nationalist identity (Winichakul, 2015). The difference between donations and gifts in the Buddhist-charitable exchanges is marked. Gifts do not yield good merit as much as donations because they are exchanged between close relatives or friends and thus are laced with passion (*kiles*; กิเลส). In effect, they further fuel the carnal attachment of a person and delay their stay in the cycle of rebirth. Meanwhile, with donations, the goods are given with Buddhist compassion seeking to let go of desires with the aim to relieve the other's suffering or to rejoice in the other's happiness. Hence, Thai society places a greater emphasis on donation. Thai people form a relationship with others through this charitable giving. Donations from laypeople of high social statuses are distributed to the poorer folks, creating a patron-

client relationship in which benefactors are morally obligated to provide, and recipients return with labour and loyalty. The case of Viriya and her working-class fellows followed this ritualised economy of gift-giving.

Most donations are given to temples because the most marked reciprocal pair is between laypeople and monks. A monk is seen as the most proper recipient of donations because he normally has no close relationships with the giver; therefore, the latter could practice giving unconditionally to cultivate good merit. A widespread belief among Buddhist Thais is that the spiritual status of the recipient to whom the giver donates could determine the amount of good merit that the giver could receive in return. For example, a donation made to the poor layman is believed to generate less good merit than offering it to the monk who religiously disciplines himself. The monk is referred to as “fields of merit” (Salguero, 2013), compared to a fertile and ploughed field that yields fruits more than the other less cultivated fields. The motivation to donate to monasteries is also more than merit cultivation. In pre-modern times, Buddhist temples used to provide care services to the communities that were more than spiritual guidance. Before the foundation of the state-nation of Thailand in the 19th century, monasteries were the centre of community life. Monastery grounds were used for business transactions, meetings, festivities, and animal sanctuaries. The temples played the role of a welfare provider, giving education, although exclusively for men and boys, healthcare in the forms of traditional medicine, and social rehabilitation.<sup>4</sup> In some ways, donations made for the temple were for preserving the traditional institution of welfare giving to humans and animals in the community.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, if a man commits a wrongdoing to the other but is ordained for a period of time, the community will feel comfortable to accept him back when he becomes a layman again. Entering monkhood functions as a process of socialisation and a reassurance for the community that the man has repented his wrongdoing. The Thai Sangha prohibits an ordination to be made for a woman. If a woman commits a wrongdoing, she may seek redemption through becoming a nun (staying in a temple for a period of time and observing the 10 precepts).

Thai people are culturally, economically, and religiously driven to act charitably, and merit is the main driving force. In pre-industrialised times, Thai charitable giving leaned in favour of donation exchanges between humans. Animals were not prioritised as the primary recipient of donations, but they indirectly benefited from charitable giving. Laypeople who visited temples to give alms to monks would also go to the monastery grounds to give leftovers to temple animals. Buddhist patrons gave greater efforts to donate to people, monks specifically. It was widely believed that feeding animals harvested less merit than giving to humans. However, from the 1970s onward, there have been significant changes in Thais' charitable behaviours.

Theravada Buddhism underwent modernist reforms (see Tambiah, 1976; Jackson, 2003; and Jory, 2016) in which its modern reinterpretations became more appealing to the people participating in a market economy. Specifically, this kind of thinking allowed philosophical and individualistic thoughts to be woven into an individual's experience of being a Buddhist. This allows Theravada Buddhism to continue shaping people's relationships by governing how they practice charitable giving, and to an extent, how they care for those in relationship with them. Contemporary society presents new recipient candidates that are not necessarily religious such as animal charities. Donating to nonreligious organisations has become a method to satisfy urban-dwelling people's drive to make merit because these charities have specific objectives catering to the experiences of their targeted audiences, thus making them more relatable to the donors. Furthermore, because of the rise of the capitalist market during this period of rapid urbanisation, commodities have come in a variety and abundance that has changed the way people donate in significant ways. For example, they no longer had to prepare food for monks but could purchase freshly made food from the market or manufactured food from convenient stores or shopping malls to make merit. This was also the case of giving to animals.

Having discussed the religious landscape of Krung Thep and the ways it influences trans-species relationships and the traditional way of animal caregiving, I will describe the political and economic changes in the next sections. I will explain the emergence of modern temple-based neighbourhoods that became a home for a new middle-class population and the stray animals in the city in recent years. From the 19th to mid-20th century, the expansion of the urban landscape shook off some old social structures and brought people of different classes to live close to each other. It also means that the spatially trans-species separation would narrow as well. Particularly, in the period of rapid industrial developments in the 1970s, the population growth influenced a dynamic shift in the landscape of ideas and led to the redrawing of the boundary between humans and animals to be less accommodating to trans-species relations. Trans-species conflicts have become frequently underlined under this new order of the high-priced city, but trans-species bonds have also been enhanced by the arrival of the market economy where commoditised goods and commercial services from cars to smartphones to high-end pet products can be purchased and assembled at home to aid the charitable life of animal-loving Buddhists.

### **Urbanisation: New Pressures on and New Opportunities for Trans-Species Relations**

I am now going to look more widely on the changing political and economic contexts that have led to new pressures and opportunities for living with and caring for animals with a focus on the problems of traditional outdoor pet-keeping and how the communication technologies have enhanced animal caregiving in urban landscapes.

As the capital of the kingdom of Rattanakosin (1782–1932), Bangkok had become the kingdom's centre of political and socio-economic changes. In the 19th century, it witnessed

the looming threat of imperialism and the nation-building process of Siam during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, or Rama V (1868–1910). During this period, the Siamese monarchy attained its peak of absolute power through the centralisation of bureaucratic and military powers. King Chulalongkorn's Western-inspired reforms successfully modernised Siam, which helped the new nation evade being colonised by the Europeans. Bangkok became the king's exhibition of his authority and charisma to his subjects and the foreign nations. The urban expansion of the city spread from Rattanakosin Island to the east of Bangkok, giving birth to business districts, while the old town on the other side of the river, Thonburi, subsequently became the suburbs. The transitions during this period of modernisation used premodern structures as the basis for the modern government system. For example, civilian schools were built on the monastery grounds throughout Bangkok and provincial cities. A number of foreigners were employed in the newly established educational institutions to lay the foundation for modern disciplines, such as veterinary medicine. The abolition of corvée and slave labour by 1905 also released the people from their noble owners to enter the new economy of paid labour as farmers and merchants. These free men and women would pave the way for their descendants to start climbing the social ladder and becoming the urban middle class when the market became freer during the country's economic capitalisation period in the mid-20th century. Regarding the architecture in this modernisation period, modern institutions were built with the Imperial-style influence, while the newly constructed road and tram networks connected these commercial and political landmarks together, establishing Bangkok as one of the modern cities in Asia in the 19th century. Because of his successful reforms, Chulalongkorn was so beloved that after his death, he was deified and became one of the gods worshipped by the Thai people. Nevertheless, after his death, there was a drastic decline in the popularity of the monarchy that led to the abolition of absolute monarchy by the people's party in 1932. Under the new system of constitutional monarchy, Siam gradually became a

significant nation-state player in global and regional politics. In the following years, Siam underwent nationalist programs to be on par with “the civilised nations”, including changing the name of the country from Siam to Thailand in 1939.

However, the major socio-economic transformation of Thailand occurred in the political climate of the Cold War. The state’s decision to ally itself with the neoliberal countries of the West transformed Thailand into a foreign investment hub in South-East Asia. With the attempt at limiting the influence of communism that had taken its neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, such as Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, the global and regional power players, the United States, Europe, and Japan, strategically relocated their factories, such as electronics and automobiles in Thailand. Despite these neoliberal policies, the country did not have full-fledged democracy. Yet it was politically stable and fully embraced the capitalist market. Industrial estates were built around Bangkok’s neighbouring adjacent provinces. This global phenomenon subsequently stimulated the country's rapid urbanisation in the 1970s.

The major transformations that sculpted the shape of the capital as it is today began about the same time that Bangkok changed its name to Krung Thep in municipal reforms in 1972. Throughout the period of urbanisation (the 1960s–1980s), Krung Thep grew organically. Its expansion was rapid and unregulated (Mega, 1998). There were no functional divisions of the city’s neighbourhoods or land usage. The implementation of urban planning policies for transportation, infrastructure improvements, and zoning regulations did not begin until 1992 after Krung Thep had already formed itself as a dense and chaotic metropolis (see Yokohari et al., 2000). From the inner city surrounding Rattanakosin Island, the vertical sprawl such as high rises and shopping complexes began in the commercial areas. There are currently 135 shopping malls in the districts of Krung Thep. This marks the significance of this facility in the social life of urban Thais. Mall goers visit shopping malls not only to get groceries but also to entertain themselves with social activities. An average shopping mall provides a movie theatre,

beauty clinics, banks, supermarkets, food vendors, and restaurants that cater to the many demographic groups. It is also equipped with air conditioning and parking lots, which makes it a popular platform for social gatherings for individuals and families during weekends. The close proximity between the grandiose and sacredness of the Grand Palace and royal monasteries and the ultramodern and high-tech landscapes can be seen in the same frame of the dweller's life.

The period between the 1970s and 1980s marked Thailand's hope of becoming a powerful political figure in South-East Asia and Asia with its miraculous economic growth and the birth of the educated, suburban, white-collar middle class whose virtues were growing through their consumerist power in the market. The economic developments also furthered the growth of suburbia into the northern and southern neighbouring provinces of Krung Thep. Some of these provinces' major cities, such as Pak Kret, Rangsit, and Samut Prakan, became locations for residential areas of the white-collar middle class as well as industrial estates. Significantly, the birth of the middle class occurred in parallel with the migration of the working class from provincial and rural Thailand. The latter group was employed in the factories and lived in construction camps and low-cost rental houses in the vicinity of the middle-class housing estates and condominiums. The flow of migrants to Krung Thep led to the skyrocketing of living costs and city problems such as poverty, crime, traffic congestion, and social inequalities. Nonetheless, the rental housing business enables low-income households to navigate their lives within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) (see Mega, 1998). These low-cost apartments and houses are distributed all over the city but congregate in the districts that link the capital to the adjacent cities. Pinklao Area, where Viriya lived, is an example. The temple-centric communities also provide support for the locals and provincial migrants. The street-food culture thrives in these communities. Convenience stores, food shops, and stalls owned by people can be found in every alleyway and street of Krung Thep

and have since provided low-price but fulfilling meals to the working people of various socio-economic groups. More important, the faith in Theravada Buddhism connects both labourers and salaried workers to the same moral economy, which obligates them to support each other through charitable giving. Living in this metropolis is harsh but manageable enough for people to bring animals into their lives.

The high density of the urban environment creates intense human-animal intimacies as animals are drawn to the source of food, people. Every community has alleyways, usually with no sidewalks, in which the pedestrians share the streets with cars, motorcycles, and community animals that roam the territories. Living with the working-class workers in impoverished areas of these neighbourhoods are dogs and cats. Workers in a semi-public space, such as shop vendors, taxi drivers, construction workers, and security guards are commonly seen with stray animals that wander into their workplaces. These animals feed on leftovers or low-cost manufactured pet food that their caregivers spare some money to buy for them.

Krung Thep's urban planning does not segregate communities of the rich and the poor. Hence, the city has brought people of different classes together, living close to each other in densely populated neighbourhoods. Slums and construction sites are located within a short distance of the business districts with their shopping malls and air-conditioned buildings. White-collar and blue-collar workers share the same streets, commute via public transport, visit the same shopping malls, and eat out at the same popular food stalls that illegally occupy the pedestrian walks. For Thai urban dwellers, it is impossible not to be aware of the presence of the others who live and struggle alongside them. Their behaviours, lifestyles, and social relationships are visible for other fellow residents to observe in the public spaces of streets, parks, marketplaces, and monasteries as well as inside a house. Even when they relax in their homes, the sound, the smell, and the glimpse of the others' private life can always reach their ears and eyes. Living practices that uphold the valued relationships will be noticed,

complimented, and supported, while the ones that contradict societal morals will be scrutinised, punished, and shamed. This applies to animal caregiving as well.

***“Baan-Baan” Pet-Keeping: The Problems of Animal Bodies in the City***

The practice of animal care keeps animals thriving in the capital. Thailand has diverse types of animal-caring practices because its Buddhist culture encourages people to care for animals. Thai Theravada Buddhism believes that animals have souls that give them the capacities to feel or think. Because of the idea of universal suffering, Thai Buddhists perceive that humans and animals have the similitude of the experiential world. They rely on their experience to provide care for animals. For example, they feed rice to cats because they eat rice so rice is good for cats as well. Oftentimes, Thai people give care to animals based on their perceived relationships with the animals, and not on the science-based concepts of animal welfare.

In her description of elder care in northern Thailand, Felicity Aulino’s “Rituals of care: Karmic politics in an aging Thailand” (2019) argues that care is not just a biomedical practice but also highly ritualistic. The work of caregivers that she describes is geared to maintaining the social body and not just the physical bodies of older people. It also aims to keep their social relations with the community meaningful. Aulino identifies care as a “parcel of living a good life” (p.85), in which participation of healthcare agents extends beyond families, and crucially involves a ritualistic enactment of providing for others. In his ethnography of palliative care in Thailand, Scott Stonington (2020) also provides a similar argument. His study shows how for people dying care practices are ‘choreographed’ in ways that enable people to reach a good death. He describes how people in the final stages of life underwent painful experiences both physically and mentally in the process of care, such as resuscitation, given by their families

which wished for them to die at home. However, these care practices were arranged in accordance with a Buddhist ethic of care which encompasses the need to provide peace for the spirit of the dying person. Dying at home is an important part of this and the moral labour of the caregiver is key to making it happen. Both Aulino and Stonington show that caregiving is a relational practice in which a distinctively Buddhist ethic is in evidence. Their ethnographies resonate with my investigation into animal caregiving in Krung Thep where Buddhist teachings ritualize caring for animals as a moral routinized work.

I will give two examples of these religion-oriented practices of animal care. The first one is about caring for wildlife and the second for domestic strays. Although my thesis does not primarily focus on caring for wildlife species, this kind of animal caregiving practiced in the Thai context will demonstrate that Thai society understands animal care as a meritorious deed. Whether the animals are feral or domestic, Thai Buddhists perceive that they can become their caregivers if they have bonds with the animals. Taken together, caring for wildlife or strays depicts Buddhist animal caregiving as recognisably similar despite the differences in species of animals.

Wild animals also live in Thai cities and towns. Turtles, monitor lizards, fish, and birds inhabit green areas by themselves, and some large wild animals can be kept by the people in private menageries, farms, and temples. In 1999 and 2000, a temple in the west of Thailand adopted tiger cubs that local hunters presented to it and started breeding them in its compound. As the tiger population grew, the temple became known as a Buddhist sanctuary for tigers and attracted tourists from around the world. The tiger temple used this opportunity to promote the idea of Buddhist compassion as a nonviolent method to tame the tigers, advocating that Buddha's teachings (*dhamma*; ธรรมะ) could soothe the animal's ferocious nature and allow it to be reborn in a higher state of being (Cohen, 2013). This narrative was widely believed. Thai people are accustomed to the idea of bonding with wildlife, in fact, all animals. Even though

many international organisations condemned what they described as the mistreatment of the tigers, there was no attempt to investigate the sanctuary by the Thai authorities. Moreover, the Wildlife and Plant Department of the Thai Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment even granted the legal status of a zoo to the temple. The case of the Tiger Temple is one of the numerous accounts of wildlife's being in contact with people in the human-dominated habitat. While urban households might not come across large wildlife, Thai Buddhists have a habit of rescuing water animals from the wet market and releasing them back into the wild or temple sanctuaries.

These accounts raise concerns among environmental and animal activists, scientists, and the urban-educated middle class. They argue against this caregiving practice because it leads to environmental damage or harm to wild animals. For example, the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (2017) said more than 40,000 land turtles were released back into deep ponds in temples, which caused them to drown. Many local species of fish were reported to suffer from a similar religious practice of care in releasing alien fish bred for consumption into rivers and ponds, which can lead to the extinction of the local fish species. Urban-educated middle-class groups began campaigning to stop this harmful religious practice, arguing it is not a meritorious deed because it hurts animals. This trend implies that humans who are not scientifically specialised should not meddle with wildlife. The decentralizing character of traditional animal care in which everyone can arbitrarily give care to animals is increasingly regarded as problematic in the urban landscape.

Significantly, the most notable example of daily basis trans-species relationships in the city is between humans and stray animals in a form of outdoor pet-keeping.

In "Semi-Ownership and Sterilisation of Cats and Dogs in Thailand", Toukhsati et al. (2012) disclosed that the combination of the Thais' agricultural background and their faith in Buddhism made the animal become a tolerated feature in Thai communities. However, it also

resulted in the underdevelopment of stray population control in Thailand because caregivers who engaged in relationships with “unowned” cats and dogs practiced feeding but failed to sterilise the animals. The majority of people interviewed by the researchers reasoned that they were not the main caregiver who looked after the animals. This form of pet-keeping that results in animal semi-ownership is referred to by the educated urban middle class as *baan-baan* (บ้านบ้าน), a derogatory term meaning “peasant-like” because it is widely practiced among poorer folks. Outdoor and ambiguous ownership characterised Baan-Baan pet-keeping. It enables caregivers to form and dissolve bonds with any animal at any time. This also makes animal abandonment a common feature of this human-animal relation as people move in and out of the neighbourhoods while animals usually remain in their territories. However, Baan-Baan pet-keeping normalises unrestricted collaboration of animal caregiving in which responsibilities of providing nourishment, shelters, or medical care for animals can be readily distributed to new caregivers. For example, during my period of fieldwork, many parks in Krung Thep had clusters of stray cats that were kept well-fed and medicated by different groups of caregivers. Normally, working-class caregivers, such as gardeners, park cleaners, or housekeepers working in nearby buildings, would feed the animals, while people who were responsible for getting them medicated and neutered came from the middle class who frequented the park for exercise in the evenings. These two groups of people seldom planned together on how to provide care but independently carried out work appropriate and available for them. In many neighbourhoods of Krung Thep, it is common to witness this traditional collaboration of animal caregiving. This Baan-Baan arrangement is beneficial not only for the survival of stray animals in urban spheres but also for humans whose social existence is constructed on trans-species connections.

Although these stray animals are cared for, they are still “unowned”. And this notion of unowned animal bodies has been problematized by the government and bureaucratic

authorities as an obstacle to their health management for human well-being. Thailand has attempted to control the numbers of stray populations through pet registration, relocation to state-funded shelters, and even considering animal culling as its solution to stray-related problems. These control-led policies are seen as apathetic to animal well-being and have not been successfully employed by its bureaucratic and local bodies as they contradict the Buddhist morality and Thai people's perception of trans-species connections. The stray problem remains as Thailand's prolonged concern. Meanwhile, the public increasingly grows aware of problems related to strays (Bansomdej Poll, 2018). Particularly in urban crowded communities, tensions can erupt among neighbours living in close proximity with each other. However, with their faith in Buddhist teachings, even people who dislike having strays in their community wish them no harm; thus, the government's control-led management still is seen as insufficient and immoral. The unreliability of the government has influenced individual caregivers and nongovernment bodies to build their own animal management system, using veterinary medicine to properly manage and care for stray bodies in urban spheres. Hence, a new model of caring for animals has been gaining popularity among Thai middle-class households correlating to their shifting sensibility towards animals, something I will fully explore in Part II of this thesis. For the purpose of this section, indoor pet-keeping inspired by the Western concept of veterinary medicine is changing the landscape of the city socially and geographically. Indoor pet-keeping is advocated as a form more fitting to an urban landscape than Baan-Baan. Popping up throughout the city are pet hospitals and clinics to cater to the demand of animal caregivers. Moreover, shopping malls, which are the social platform of the middle-class population, started to lessen their strict regulations on animal entry and allow animal-related events, such as pet fairs, adoption programs, and mobile sterilisation clinics to appear on their premises. These changes allow the representation of the trans-species bond to appear more in the urban sphere. The appearance of indoor pet-keeping, as of now, has not

dominated the Thai culturally rooted Baan-Baan pet-keeping, but it helps lessen the tensions faced by stray animals and caregivers. It allows them to access new medical care such as neutering and rabies vaccination through volunteering, which solves some of the communities' concerns about stray populations and rabies outbreaks. All of these ensure that the presence of the animals in Krung Thep will not go away anytime soon.

This animal caregiving work keeps the moral world of transspecies relations within a wider Buddhist cosmology that encompasses both animals and humans. However, as I go on to demonstrate in chapter 7 this model of how relationships, care and morality are brought together in practice is being brought increasingly under pressure to be integrated with the global norms of animal welfare ethics.

Up to this point, I have demonstrated how urbanism shaped how caregivers like Viriya develop an understanding of trans-species bonds and caregiving within their communities. As the city is expanding, caregiving work is no longer limited to one's own neighbourhood but expanding as far as people can travel. Transport infrastructures facilitate the transformation of not only the city's landscape but also the character of animal care moving through its streets. The next section will explore how actual and virtual communication enables caregivers to create their caregiving landmarks where they connect with other caregivers and animals beyond their houses and neighbourhoods.

### ***The Car-Dominant City***

The story of Viriya's caregiving life shows that transport structures shape the way she came into contact with the animals. Hence, a detailed understanding of this urban landscape and the ways that people move in it is essential for grasping multispecies encounters and the volunteering practice of animal care in Krung Thep.

Until the late 19th century, the primary mode of transport in Bangkok was the waterway network. The city used to be referred to as Venice of the East for its canal traffic (Bodry, 2012). Today, public water transport is still available for the routes along the Chao Phraya River and the other significant canals, but the majority of commuters travel by road-based transport. Modern roads were built on paddy fields and canals to accommodate the city's traffic needs. The road-building process was accelerated during the rapid expansion in the 1970s, connecting Krung Thep to the rest of the country via the national highway. At the same time, Thailand became a regional hub of automotive industries. These factories have made private cars affordable and appealing to the Thai middle class, who are tired of the unpredictability of public land transport. Available and frequently used services in Bangkok include buses, Bangkok Mass Transit System (commonly known as BTS or Skytrain), and Metropolitan Rapid Transit (MRT, or the underground train), which are provided by several government and private agencies. These traffic operators independently expand their routes without necessarily collaborating with the other modes of transport. The disconnection of the city's traffic management stimulates its commuters to escape the crowded public service by selecting modes of transport provided by small-scale traffic operators such as taxis, motorcycle taxis, minibus vans, and trucks (*songthaew*; เสาธงแดง), which operate as shared taxis for local routes in the neighbourhoods not accessible by bus. The vehicles sharing the same streets causes traffic congestions and environmental pollutions, rapidly transforming Krung Thep into a car-dominant city.

Thai commuters are expected to adjust their timetables and develop tactics of travelling in a city ruled by automobiles. Experienced travellers are careful when crossing the streets in Krung Thep. The metropolis's drivers do not have a driving etiquette of stopping at crossroads. Instead, the city built skywalks for commuters to avoid walking on the streets. Minibus vans and motorcycle taxis are the quicker options of transport for passengers with no private

vehicles. However, vans and motorcycles are not designated for public transport and pose some safety risks. They are unregulated and sometimes controlled by organised crime groups prioritising profit over the safety of passengers. There are reports of the violence between rival gangs of drivers engaging in “taxi turf wars” over best pickup locations (Fullerton & Jirenuwatin, 2019). Bus drivers in Krung Thep are also notorious for unsafe driving behaviours, and Thai taxis often overcharge their passengers and tourists. The economic and social constraints exhaust both people who provide and use the transport services. Quarrels and complaints are part of the draining and risky life of a commuter. Regardless of the modes of transport, car-caused injuries and fatalities are woven into traffic life. Urban animals also struggle to adjust to this new terrain full of fast-moving vehicles. There are numerous accounts of animals stranded on motorways and losing limbs and lives. Many animal caregivers empathise on this similitude of their struggles as all of them experience the same danger when navigating on these unkind roads.

Nevertheless, in this public space, lives and relationships flourish. Krung Thep’s private vehicles are becoming the major feature in the charitable life of middle-class caregivers, giving them the possibility of extending their caregiving beyond their households and neighbourhoods. Somehow, these unfortunate situations have become the new opportunity for a new trans-species relationship. Plants grow through cracks of the pedestrian walks and rubbish, and the faeces of birds and dogs are all part of the street scenery. The underdeveloped pedestrian walks and utility cycling are occupied by street-food stalls and hubs of motorcycle taxis. Animals and homeless people find shade in the underpasses and around the bus stops. They survive on the street-food scraps given by charitable vendors, commuters, and drivers. More important, road transport is a necessity to travel from residences in suburbia to workplaces at the heart of the city. Relationships are created along the way between humans and animals.

### *The Caregiving World Assembled by Communication Technologies*

Communication technologies have helped Thai animal caregiving. The capitalist market introduced new facilities in the domain of animal caregiving: veterinary healthcare and the pet-care market. Animal care is commoditised and can be purchased and assembled at home. Manufactured pet food, for example, changed the way people provide food for animals. There are more options for local caregivers to select than leftovers or a homemade rice and fish diet to feed stray animals. Pet food comes in various grades. They are affordable and convenient for urban-dwelling people with busy working lives. Furthermore, as the virtual world has increasingly featured in the life of Thai people, some tasks of animal caregiving can also be performed through electronic exchanges.

The technologies of the communication device, such as portable computers and smartphones to access the internet, have also become financially affordable for a wide range of socioeconomic groups. Vast, indeed, almost limitless, this digital platform provides the means for carrying out caregiving work. Commodities can be purchased via electronic commerce and delivered at home. Caregivers who participate in animal volunteering have embraced digitally technological and monetary innovations as the means to realise their charitable causes. The arrival of online payment facilitates transactions of goods and money beyond their local communities, which makes charitable giving become easier and leads to a rise of small-scale charities because any individual or small group of people can access digital technologies to advocate and raise funds for their causes. Donating is not limited to monasteries and expands to new kinds of recipients, both humans and animals, across spatial boundaries. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter provide platforms for recruiting like-minded people into charitable networks, which can lead to the development of patron-client relationships and the assembly volunteering work. I noticed in my fieldwork (which included browsing my

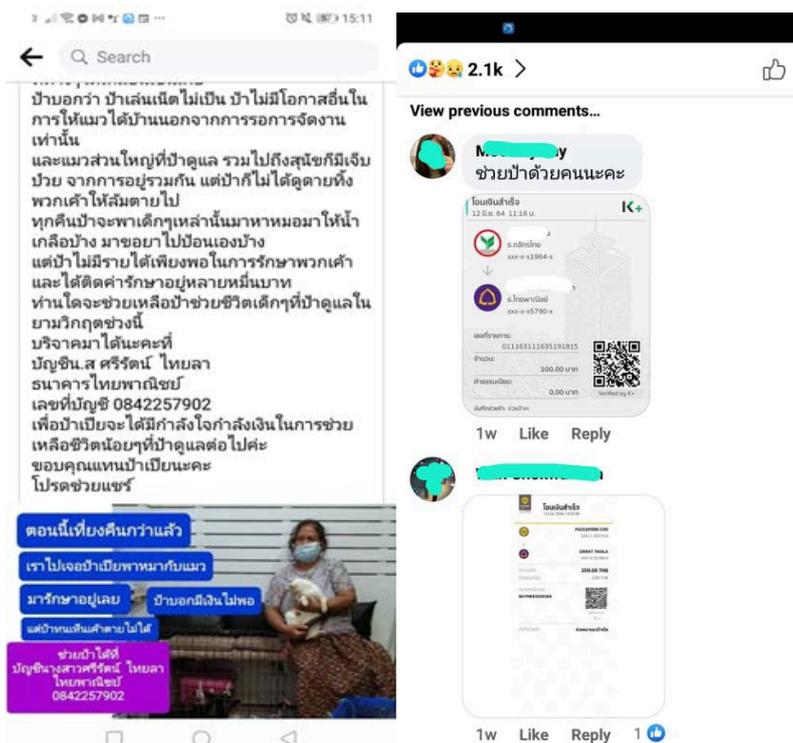
informants' social media accounts) that donors have a tendency to inform recipients when they donate for the latter by posting a captioned photo of their monetary transactions or by leaving written messages, while recipients would reciprocate gratitude in text and emoticons, depending on their relationships with the donors. For example, in Figure 1.6, a cat charity asked on its Facebook page for followers to donate for poor caregivers:

Her cats and dogs are sick, but she has tried her best to prevent them from dying. Every night, she will take her children to the vet to get a check or ask for a medicine to nurse them by herself. She does not have enough income to support their medical treatment, and she is in debt to the vet more than 10,000 Baht (£250). If you could please help her take care of the children in this trying time, donate to [the caregiver's bank account]. Please help sharing this post.

Then the donors posted their transaction slips in the comment section under the post that they had already donated and gave encouraging words, such as “allowed me to help”.

**Figure 1.6**

*Example of Facebook Exchanges Between a Cat Foundation Seeking Donations and Donors*



The virtual world is a site of robust animal caregiving activities. Animals, Buddhism, and volunteerism—the three pillars of Thai animal caregiving—find their way to the modern screens of caregivers’ smartphones. The bodies of animals in the virtual world are as apparent as in the actual world and, in some sense, sometimes more apparent. Photographic and textual contents about animals are produced and circulated at high speed. The adorableness and suffering of animals are tied to Buddhist teachings and resurface on the internet, constantly reminding people of their obligations and their desire for trans-species connections. Caregiving takes a bricolage form transcending the boundaries of the traditional and modern and the virtual and the actual.

### **A More-Than-Human City**

Krung Thep is the centre of all important things in Thailand. New values and practices brought to Thailand are usually first seen in the capital. The consequences of these economic and political struggles illustrate the gentrification of the city in which the tradition of pet-keeping is in conflict with the new ideas of animal care imported from the West. As Krung Thep became highly urbanised, confrontations between human and animal dwellers intensified as animal’s efforts of carving their place in this city might conflict with humans’ interests. Although there are tensions, Krung Thep is still vast enough for many forms of relations and care practices. Trans-species relationships animate Krung Thep with a variety of pet-keeping practices. Baan-Baan pet-keeping in which people feed stray animals in the communities’ alleyways and monastery grounds is one of the Thai traditions that make Krung Thep unique in its own way.

As argued in this introduction chapter, Theravada Buddhism is a prominent religious, social and political institution which plays a fundamental role in shaping the landscape of care

in Krung Thep. Theravada Buddhism brings into Thai people's consciousness myriad forms of social existence and instigates a variety of ritualized care practices. Embedded in animal caregiving is the notion of hierarchical differences, both within and across species, which govern how care should be understood and carried out. Furthermore, care actions of caregivers can be seen as key of maintaining the social structures which stratify them in their unequal and disadvantaged positions. This makes scholars of both human and animal care argue that care labour can further inequalities and oppression (Aulino, 2016, 2019) and even lead to violence (Govindrajan, 2021). Nevertheless, animal caregiving is also a practice for caregivers to search for companionship, communicate their experiences of affliction and resilience, and negotiate their class situations and care collaboration. The next chapters will demonstrate this multifaceted nature of animal caregiving.

From forts and moats that facilitated the ancient city's trade route to bustling roads of the ultramodern metropolis, Krung Thep is a city of many contrasts between the old and the new, religious devotion and material indulgence, and care and control. On the one hand, Thai Buddhism is held in deep respect and devotion where the ideology of social life manifested into multi-layered stratification. On the other hand, the city is known for its robust economy where people can find worldly entertainment and all sort of commodities from shopping complexes to businesses where the mobility of new people and ideas can shake the old social structure. However, even in these secularised business districts, religious buildings of all faiths are ever-present alongside modern architectures. This disorganised urban planning is a product of the collective effort of the people. Their desire to carve their own place in the city materialises in their constructions and changes made to the natural landscape. Generations of human residents who have occupied this river delta have left their manmade marks that symbolise their resilience and resistance, their ambition, and creativity. To complete the picture, the endeavour of the animals is needed to be taken into account. Their presence has

already become an inseparable part of urban life. Thai urban dwellers who become animal caregivers, like Viriya, attribute their care effort to ensuring the continuity of urban-dwelling animals because these animals' homes are not just in Krung Thep, they are the home. Their lives and their bonds with humans are continuing to change Krung Thep, giving the city its familiar shape, smell, and soul.

## **Part I: Animal Caregiving as a Means of Trans-Species Communication**

### **Chapter 1: Anthropology of Human-Animal Relations**

The life of my friend, Viriya, demonstrates that the presence of cats and other urban-dwelling animals are in all spaces that humans can settle whether the environments are urban or rural and actual or virtual. Her caregiving work underlines the human effort in forming trans-species relationships.

But how about the cats' efforts? Cultural anthropology knows how to study human endeavours in building social relationships. However, the struggle of its scholars interested in trans-species relations has always been about incorporating the actions of animals into the anthropological analysis. My primary challenge in conducting fieldwork and writing was the issue of nonhuman representation (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010) as I tried to rediscover the "voice" of animals. Multispecies studies, widely regarded as the "animal turn", began as early as the 1970s. But it took almost 2 decades for it to gain recognition as a subdiscipline in anthropology. Because of its recent emergence, anthropologists noted limited anthropological theories and methods in observing the animal side of these relationships. For example, Mullin (1990) suggested that given this shortage, more attempts should be put into redefining anthropological methodology.

Since its earliest emergence in the 1970s to now, human-animal studies cover a large area of disciplinary collaboration across natural sciences and humanities. Owing to the invigoration of the 3-decade-old crossdisciplinary investigations, I am fortunate to join the field at this point of time. There are now a considerable number of ethnographies that I can take as examples of how to conduct fieldwork with both humans and animals. However, Mullin's suggestion is still relevant. As contexts of human-animal relations in which the anthropology of human-animal relations is interested are getting more complicated, the anthropological methodology must also be in the process of infinite redefining to account for the specificity

and complexities of the field. This chapter will draw together the insights of recent literature on human-animal relations and older work on the classification of animals to develop a theoretical perspective to account for the social relevance of animals' actions. It also considers ideas in the disciplines of natural sciences in relation to the influence of different ways of engaging with and knowing animals found within ideology and practice in the urban settings of Thailand.

To dive into these interdisciplinary discussions of theories and methodologies, I wish to begin with a story of a cat named Boonphong, which lovingly means “meritorious grace”, who taught me how to bring theories and methodology into conversation with lived experiences about the animal's participation in animal caregiving. Boonphong's story resonates prominently with the anthropological concept of new kinship that caregiving work can form a relatedness outside of blood relation and, in Boonphong's story, across species. Her actions in the caregiving process had me examine the notions of communication, sociality, and environments. These notions are keys to recognizing that animals act socially; thus, human-animal relationships are as socially significant as human-human ones. We anthropologists can ethnographically account for it.

### **Boonphong the Cat**

Boonphong was a female grey cat who roamed a housing estate in one of Krung Thep's suburbs. She was a stray who lived by hunting rodents and birds and visiting houses for leftovers. In this housing estate also lived the middle-class family of Jennie, who became Boonphong's main caregiver. Jennie was a 30-year-old unmarried working woman who lived with her parents, both aged 65 and retired from civil service. From 2013–2018, Jennie noticed Boonphong spending time in the garden of Jennie's mother. The family called her “the grey

cat” and gave her food. As the cat became a regular presence in Jennie’s household, slowly exploring and loitering inside of the house, the family warmed up to the cat enough to name her. Jennie’s father named the cat “Boonphong” after a fictional character in a Thai melodrama that he had watched.

Jennie’s family was sympathetic towards animals, but the family was indecisive as to whether they could fully take responsibility for Boonphong. Jennie felt that if she chose to keep Boonphong, she had to provide the cat with more than food. She also suspected that as a stray, Boonphong was likely to be unneutered. In the first year of Boonphong’s visiting Jennie’s house, the issue of Boonphong’s fertile body worried Jennie significantly because Boonphong could get pregnant, and the family would have to take care of her offspring while they still did not know if they wanted to keep Boonphong as a pet cat. Neutering Boonphong was the best option to solve this concern. However, for 5 years, this plan had been postponed despite Jennie’s having the ability to pay for Boonphong’s neutering. The inability of Jennie to actualise her plan of getting Boonphong fixed stemmed from the cat’s actions. Although Boonphong was friendly enough to greet and rub herself on the humans’ legs, she did not like being carried and never hesitated to bite or scratch to avoid being petted in places she did not like, such as her soft stomach. The family witnessed how Boonphong patrolled her territory vigorously and fended off rival cats. They saw her teeth and claws and occasionally endured Boonphong’s bites and scratches. Jennie had to visit a clinic to get vaccinated against rabies once after Boonphong bit her hand for rubbing her furry stomach. These actions made Jennie’s family wary of physical engagements with her. They were anxious that they could get injured if they tried to force her into a carrier and take her to the vet. Therefore, they decided to just give Boonphong food and occasional pets and allow her to explore the house when she wanted. Boonphong’s actions shaped the human-cat cohabitation in Jennie’s house.

The central idea of indoor pet-keeping advocated by the urban-educated Thai middle class was to keep pet animals indoors. This did not work for Jennie's household. Boonphong did not like staying inside of Jennie's house. If the family closed the door while she was still inside, Boonphong would demand to go out by meowing and standing in front of the door and would run out as soon as someone opened it. Boonphong's actions left no doubt to Jennie that the cat liked to come and go as she pleased. A small benefit of Boonphong's outdoor lifestyle was that the family did not have to spend time and money on her litterbox. Jennie used to wonder where Boonphong did her business and once caught Boonphong urinating on her house's rooftop, which solved one of Boonphong's outdoor-life mysteries. For years, Jennie's family never knew what Boonphong did outdoors. One day, Jennie's mother became curious and tried to follow the cat. Boonphong noticed that she was being followed and hurried away from her caregiver. Later, Jennie's mother discovered that Boonphong was fed by their neighbour who referred to the cat as Noomnim (fluffy). After a talk, they realised they had been taking care of the same cat, much to everyone's amusement.

Boonphong and Jennie's family decided on activities to do together through the process of caregiving. As an educated middle-class woman who consumed articles about indoor pet-keeping and adorable cats on social media, Jennie wanted to have indoor activities with Boonphong. She had a desire to adorn Boonphong with pet accessories and buy her cat toys. Boonphong, however, was not much interested in the toys. She sniffed and tried some toys that Jennie kept bringing to the house; some she played with occasionally, but she ignored most of them. Boonphong was more eager to hunt live prey in the garden (see Figure 2.1).

Jennie's mother enjoyed gardening. Her garden, blossoming with potted flowers and plants, had become Boonphong's hunting spot, where she would wait for birds or eat mice she caught from other places. Boonphong frequently left dead mice by the door. The family did not want to encourage this behaviour, so they disposed of them, but Boonphong always brought

back new ones. There was also a time in which Jennie and her mother tried to dress Boonphong in cat-tailored kimono clothes she bought from Japan. They attempted unsuccessfully to put the cat in the little kimono. Fearing that Boonphong might bite them out of annoyance, they resorted to just placing it on her back and took a video of Boonphong walking awkwardly, trying to get the kimono off her back. The cat and her humans put each other into their preferred activities even though the others were not so thrilled. Neither could change the others' preferences for activities entirely, but they had to find the rhythm that allowed them to be with each other while letting them do things they did not like with them.

**Figure 2.1**

*Boonphong Relaxing in Jennie's Mother's Garden.*



Source: Jennie's Family

Boonphong had her needs that would never be satisfied by toys and the smaller territory of Jennie's house. However, her living conditions never conflicted with Jennie's. Jennie herself also had her issues. She was allergic to cat dander and had to wear a mask or wash her hands regularly if she touched cats. However, because of her outdoor lifestyle, Boonphong left little dander inside the house. Her presence did not cause Jennie's severe allergic reactions, allowing Jennie to keep caring for her. In the process of caregiving, they communicated with one another about likes and dislikes of their shared activities and to what extent they could alter their behaviours to stay in this relationship. Boonphong tolerated a cat-sized dress, while Jennie endured small allergic inconveniences. Thus, forms of pet-keeping were not determined by the human but constructed by inputs from both. Boonphong was not an ideal pet cat; she was aloof, instinctual, and not openly affectionate, and she would likely not get adopted to a house that wanted to keep her strictly indoors. Even Jennie's parents disliked these personality traits of Boonphong at the beginning of their association. However, through the years of caregiving, she had come to fit perfectly in Jennie's house and the family's lives.

In September 2018, Boonphong got sick for the first time. Jennie's father noticed that Boonphong became inactive and refused food. The family decided it was time to take her to the vet. Their concern for her health outweighed their fear of being bitten by her. At that point, Boonphong was very weak, so the family felt less anxious about putting her in a basket and driving to a vet's clinic in their town. She was diagnosed with feline leukaemia and pyometra, diseases commonly found in stray, unneutered cats. The pyometra caused Boonphong to lose her appetite as her infected uterus was swollen with pus. The veterinary surgeon observed that Boonphong's uterus must have been infected for a while, which explained why she never got pregnant when living with Jennie's family. The infected organ was successfully removed, and Boonphong quickly recovered. After this incident, visiting the vet became a new routine activity for Boonphong and Jennie's family. Jennie researched how to care for cats with feline

leukaemia in hopes that she could extend Boonphong's lifespan. Boonphong got vaccinated, and her food changed to a diet for ill cats. During this time, Jennie's family developed a good friendship with the vet who allowed the family to bring Boonphong for a check even after their working hours if there was an emergency. Boonphong's sickness became a part of the household's conversation and caregiving practice.

Boonphong became ill again in the same year. In November, she was diagnosed with cancer. Jennie's family contemplated chemotherapy and surgical operation as their choices of helping Boonphong but eventually decided against it as Boonphong's cancerous tumours had already spread all over her small body. Jennie's family was devastated by her impending death. As she was getting severely sick, Boonphong needed constant veterinary care. The family admitted her to the vet clinic, visited her every day, and paid for all medical treatment until the day she died. The vet called the family to come to say goodbye before Boonphong passed away. Their tears and grieving affected people in the clinic. The vet cried with the family. Another client who happened to be in the clinic sympathetically offered to open a video of Buddhist monks' prayers for Boonphong to listen to while she was dying so that Boonphong's soul would be uplifted by the Buddha's wisdom and have a better rebirth. Boonphong's body was buried in Jennie's garden in her favourite spot where she was often seen relaxing.

The family eventually had new cats, Mali and Pooky. Mali was a female cat who arrived at Jennie's doorstep 2 months after Boonphong's death and gave birth to Pooky. Learning from their bond with Boonphong, Jennie's family tried to make certain that their new cats would live longer and be healthier than Boonphong. Jennie's parents got the cats medically checked with Boonphong's vet, with whom the family still had a good relationship. They decided to keep the cats inside the house. Unlike Boonphong, Mali did not show discomfort staying indoors. In fact, when she first arrived, she attempted to break in and stay in Jennie's house. Jennie's mother discovered later that Mali used to have two owners who lived in the same housing estate

not far from their house, which might explain Mali's familiarity with some indoor activities. Pooky, meanwhile, grew up inside of the house and was fully domestic. The two cats ate manufactured high-quality food and knew how to use litterboxes. They did not have a strong drive to travel outside of the house like Boonphong had. They could stay and play with cat toys inside all day. They particularly liked to sleep on a cat condo Jennie's mother commissioned a local pet-furniture maker to build for them (see Figure 2.2). What was left to address to this new human-cat arrangement was Jennie's cat allergy. The family figured out a solution; they decided to build a separate room for the cats. This led to significant changes in Jennie's house organisation. A new cat room was equipped with litterboxes, toys, and scratching posts to keep the cats physically and mentally healthy because they were not allowed outside. This resulted in new house chores, which were distributed among the family members. Jennie's mother was responsible for cleaning the cats' litterboxes, while her father would feed the cats. Buying cat food and cat-related products became Jennie's and her mother's work. Jennie also had to wear masks and gloves and wash her hands regularly when she interacted with the cats or the furniture that they might climb or sit on while letting them out to explore the other parts of the house. After Boonphong's death, Jennie, who perceived herself as a modern and nonreligious person, found a new angle from which to appreciate Theravada Buddhism's teaching about how to think of death and the dead. Jennie found reassurance in the idea of an afterlife where the spirit of Boonphong was still around and there was something she could do in the present life for the dead cat. She developed a charitable habit of donating cat food to animal charities and dedicating good merit to Boonphong every year. Boonphong's actions, still remembered by her caregivers, continued to alter the perception of her humans about pet-keeping and transformed their house.

Boonphong and Jennie's account demonstrates forms of trans-species communication in which animals and humans display their expressions and alter their behaviours through the

caregiving process. A house, therefore, is a site of trans-species activity that can become robust as the number of animals in the house increases. I will explore this type of household with robust trans-species activities in the later chapters about the caregivers involved in animal volunteering. For the purpose of demonstrating why caregiving is a means of trans-species communication, Boonphong and Jennie's one-cat house offers a window to follow their communicative forms and the changes in the house resulting from these trans-species interactions.

Feeding, medicating, cleaning, playing, and all imaginable practices within the sphere of caregiving are forms of communication that can transcend species boundaries. These caregiving activities enable a wide array of bodily expressions in which humans and animals can communicate their conditions and alter their behaviours to live in the house and in the other's presence. Houses are one of the sites to observe these forms of trans-species communication. If the house is clean and organised, it could mean that human actions overwhelm that of animals. But if a house has a stench, perhaps this trans-species communication may lean in the animal's favour. This is a theme that will appear later in the ethnographic chapters about middle-class and working-class caregivers. However, for now, I want to establish why understanding caregiving activity as a form of trans-species communication is crucial for building anthropological knowledge of human-animal bonds. In the next sections, I am going to explore anthropological approaches to human-animal relations with a focus on three fundamental notions of a social relationship: (a) bonding, (b) communication, and (c) environments. To make sense of a bond in which one of the parties is nonhuman, I will dive into anthropological literature on caregiving and kinship. Next, I will explore multispecies studies of communication and social actions to see what anthropology can learn from these interdisciplinary discussions. Lastly, I will make a case for how environmental settings are the factor that enables communication and bonding across species to be possible.

## Figure 2.2

*Pooky (Top) and Mali (Bottom) Sleeping on the Cat Condo in the Cat Room*



Source: Jennie's Family

### **Animal Caregiving in the Studies of Human-Animal Kinship**

Since the discipline was established, anthropology has been interested in animals but not so much in animals' social relationships with their human counterparts (Mullin, 1999; Nadasdy, 2007; Russel, 2010). Although animals appear in ethnographies, their actions and interactions with humans are largely excluded from anthropological analysis. Shanklin observed that the anthropological literature on animals is divided into two genres of writing:

the ecological functionalist approach and Levi-Strauss's model of symbolic analysis (qtd. in Nadasdy, 2007, p. 29). The approaches have a common ground in perceiving animals as passive figures; the functionalist approach studying animals for their usefulness, and the symbolic analysis transforming animals as living beings into a metaphor for human use and expression of abstract ideas about self and society. The absence of anthropological insight into human-animal lives stems from our ontological and methodological reluctance to recognize that animals might have "social relationships" with humans.

In parallel with the 1970s' movements of animal rights and welfare in Western societies, Western academia embarked on a novel field of multispecies scholarship referred to as the "animal turn" (Wilkie, 2015). The field had been primarily pioneered by scholars associated with animal activism. Significant work, such as Regan & Singer (1976), helped de-individualize animal issues and build a moral cause for animal issues as public concerns. Their contributions shaped the philosophical, ethical, and social terrains of multispecies studies from which anthropology of human-animal relations would later draw inspiration. The animal turn was also part of the trend to enquire about the intrinsic nature of natural facts, such as kinship and nature, which constructed the anthropological understanding and writing of human social life. In the 1980s, anthropologists critically commented on our own tendency of viewing animals as either food or "food for thought". Many scholars demonstrated that this theoretical inclination is a consequence of a broader anthropological concern with the boundary between nature and culture (Ingold, 1983, 1988; Mullin, 1999; Russel, 2010). Growing recognition in the anthropological literature of the fluidity of the nature-culture boundary has coincided with increased attention among anthropologists to questions of human-animal sociality. A major source of anthropological work on this topic is studies of hunters and hunting societies (e.g. Bird-David, 1990; Descola, 1994; Kohn, 2013; Nadasdy, 2007).

From the 1990s onwards saw a rise of multispecies ethnography, a genre of anthropological writing interested in capturing the intersubjectivity between humans and nonhuman organisms. Perhaps, as the academic and wider communities have increasingly recognized human activity as a force so powerful to geologically transform the planet, it further develops our awareness of environmental surroundings, bio-organisms, and quasi-life forms that are sharing the human-marked world in a period widely regarded as the Anthropocene epoch (Brown & Nading, 2019; Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Fuentes, 2019; Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). The human-animal nexus is not restricted to natural habitats and includes industrialized societies in farms, laboratories, veterinary clinics, houses, and streets. The investigation of human-animal relations also shifted to modern-state contexts. Scholars who work in this academic conjunction come from different disciplines including philosophy, sociology, and psychology. Some of the most noteworthy works include Haraway (2003, 2008), Irvine (2004), Keck (2015a, 2015b), Sander (1995), and Tipper (2011), which serve as examples for anthropologists who have increasingly joined the field of human-animal relations in industrialized societies. Anthropological research into human-animal relations in urban settings, particularly outside Euro-American culture, although it remains underexplored, has increasingly received attention, with Shir-Vertesh's (2012) study of the human-dog relationship in Israel and Nadal's ethnography of rabies and dogs in urban India as marked ethnographies that are not conducted in a Western context (e.g. Mullin, 2007; Nadal, 2020; Power, 2008; Rock & Babinec, 2008; Shir-Vertesh, 2012). Perhaps because of how it emerged, the anthropology of human-animal relations is grounded in disciplinary collaboration. It is almost obligatory for fieldworkers to have conversations across natural sciences and social sciences, developing theoretical and methodological frameworks for their trans-species contexts by brings ideas from the other disciplinary fields to converse with the well-established

discussions in social anthropology, such as how to conceptualize human-animal relationships from a kinship framework and whether kinship concepts encompass this trans-species bond.

The conventional concept of kinship has been examined and reinvented to take into account other forms of relations based on wider understandings of “relatedness” (Carten, 1995) to think about modes of kinship in which social relationships are not built on biological proximity. The notion of relatedness has shifted attention in kinship studies to modes of sharing bodily substance and the practice of feeding, caring, and living together. This approach is beginning to be taken up in terms of human-animal relations, with further potential for reconceptualising kinship. For example, Haraway (2008) significantly elaborates the implications of care in the process of human-animal bonding and how it has constructed what she referred to as the “hybrid identity” in which the boundary between humanness and animality is blurred.

Studies in the field of new kinship establish how caregiving is a means to form a bond and, to make strangers become kin. These investigations into human-human bonding assume caregiving activities carry social implications because humans are broadly sharing the similitude in bodily expressions and internal states. It is plausible to recognize that another human stranger has social personhood and the capability to socialize like us and that an action made by a human body will have a social meaning. Meanwhile, in the studies of human-animal bonding, it always comes to the question of the difference in the body. Haraway (2008) believed in the human nature of trans-species interdependence and that despite the physical difference, humans and animals are connected in some ways, which is why she emphasises rediscovering a way to connect to animals. Wilkie (2015) also discussed how human-animal intersubjectivity, a physical and mental terrain where animals and humans alter their selfhood to meet in the middle, can be achieved through the process of behavioural adaption to the presence of the other. Furthermore, the idea of intercorporeality, widely used in medical

anthropology, is also used as a framework to demonstrate the transformation of bodies and subjectivities between humans and animals (e.g. Porter, 2018). Lived bodies that are biologically different can become socially related akin to the family through engagements across species despite limited and unequal bodily interactions. These works underline the importance of communication as the step into forming a relationship across species. Provided that the bodily difference is a significant epistemological concern, it is fruitful to draw in the notion of trans-species communication, and the ideas of ecological surroundings. These ideas are keys to shed light on how people, including the ethnographer, can develop the visceral certainty of their human-animal relationship. Yes, my cat is a person, and she acts socially.

### **The Notion of Trans-Species Communication**

I am primarily interested here in the actions of animals that contribute to the development of human-animal relationships. I argue that the notion of communication is one of the important features of these actions. Anthropology has long discussed the importance of languages as the key to building rapport and to understanding people of a different culture and the meanings of their actions. However, communicative forms of animals are different from that of humans, which makes the language barrier at a species level a significant challenge in both epistemological and methodological terms in the studies of trans-species relations. The most important questions that must be addressed are, what kind of animals' actions are meaningful signals, and how do they move forward a trans-species relationships forward? Additionally, how can anthropologists understand them? There are several important theoretical frameworks that are widely used in the work of zoosemiotics and animal-welfare philosophy. I will explore the potential and limitations of these concepts and discuss how

learning from these studies can help anthropology build a methodology for deciphering the social value in the animal's communicative actions.

### ***Humans and Animals as Semiotic Beings***

First, one must understand the idea of communication. According to Maran et al. (2011), communication is one of the stages in the process of semiosis, or message exchanges, which involves three principal processes: production, communication, and the interpretation of signs. These are objects of knowledge among semioticians. To understand how communication works in the context of trans-species relations, I turn to some fundamental concepts in zoosemiotics that primarily study sign actions within and across animal species. It suggests that human languages are just one among many communicative forms in the animal kingdom. The work and interests of zoosemioticians also overlap with that of ethologists. In ethology, communication is understood as the transmission of influence rather than the process of information transmitting because the latter definition places an emphasis on “information”, a concept established on anthropocentric qualities (Liebal et al., 2014). I find this argument important because the human language has long been seized as the reason to maintain the culture-nature boundary, to establish the uniqueness of mankind, and to justify a sense of superiority. This dichotomy between humanities and social sciences creates the ontological block that hinders the exploration and understanding of trans-species relations. Approaching communication as a practice shared among all life forms (Kohn, 2013) and that humans and animals are semiotic are the first steps to making trans-species communication analytically relevant to anthropology.

The process of sign exchanges influences living beings' behaviours and organization of relationships with their sign-maker community and beyond. Communication across different

organisms can become behaviourally meaningful because of the environment in which signals are transmitted and received. This notion features the “umwelt” concept. Coined by Baltic German semiotician, Sebeok (1976), the theory of umwelt, which means “surroundings” in German, establishes a connection between the physical and the perceptual environments of organisms. The concept has gained popularity in the zoosemiotic literature over the gradualist approach influenced by the Darwinian theory of evolution, which assumes that there is a hierarchical order in communication systems in which mankind occupies a superior status to the animal. For example, birdsongs used to be considered as proto-musical to human’s music (Maran et al., 2011, p. 10). On the contrary, umwelt argues in favour of pluralism of modes of communication in shared environments. The animal has developed a communication system based on its relationship with the environment, so their sign actions can be comprehended within the community of species that shares the similitude of the experiential world. The emphasis on bodies in umwelt is somewhat familiar to the concept of habitat in social sciences in which experience is embodied. Kull & Torop (2011) studied two distinct bird species cohabitating in an environment. When birds of the first group fled away after seeing a cat, the other species could interpret the action as a warning sign of danger and escaped too. Characteristic signals understood within one species might not be recognized as representative features by others. However, because their umwelts are partially connected, animals differing in species could, to certain degrees, receive and display behavioural reactions in response to actions beyond their signal-making community. Umwelt is helpful for understanding interactive exchanges of signs between actors of different bodies and whose umwelts differ.

Differences in bodies between living organisms also highlight that the deduction is necessary in trans-species communication and, consequently, trans-species relationships. Several studies speculated that humans can deduct meanings from a wide range of communicative forms, such as vocalization, facial expression, paralinguistic features, and

kinaesthetic movements that animals, particularly terrestrial mammals, make (see Bateson, 2010). Cohabitation and interdependence throughout the history of mankind have influenced humans to develop what Shapiro called “kinaesthetic empathy” (qtd. in Warkentin, 2012, p. 132), a capacity to recognize nonlinguistic gestures of other animals, to empathize their experience, and to make guesses to engage with them in a meaningful way. Even though the gap in perceptual understanding might result in varying degrees of efficiency in trans-species communication, success or failures in communication, nonetheless, leads to the modification of behaviours and relationships. Hence, zoosemiotic concepts establish the significant point that the animals’ display of behaviours is not determined by the process of stimulus-reaction but instead carries meaningful aspects of social significance (Maran et al., 2011). These ideas of trans-species communication are my theoretical foundation on which I build how they can become socially significant in human-animal bonding.

The zoosemiotic literature demonstrated that the primary aim of communication is about relationships (Bateson, 2011). If sharing the *umwelt*, trans-species communication can lead to changes in behaviours and the development of relationships. The concept of *umwelt* underlines that trans-species communication is enabled by its environmental surroundings. Despite the differences, human bodies have been moulded physiologically, historically, socially, and culturally with animal bodies in a shared specific environment. Boonphong’s actions became semiosis and social to Jennie’s family because of where they lived. Jennie’s family in bonding with Boonphong readily believed in the genuineness of their bond as nothing less than socially meaningful. The challenge now was placed upon me, an ethnographer, to understand this transspecies sociality. How do I comprehend Boonphong’s actions?

There is an ontological hierarchy in ways that science and social science disciplines conceptualize sociality. The perception of how we have understood what is social and what is not needs to be addressed. A prominent ontological block is the presumption of human

exceptionalism. It is the foundation of all theoretical and methodological challenges faced by scholars studying trans-human phenomena (see Latimer, 2013). The way anthropologists carry out fieldwork and write ethnographies is also based on this ontological ground of the culture-nature divide that society is composed exclusively of humans. Anthropologists are trained to see that only human action is considered social and of import to anthropological research. Even if we want to include animals, we struggle to find a way to write about them as more than a decorative feature in our analyses.

### ***The Ethnographer's Challenge***

The asymmetrical presence of the human species in modern disciplines traces back to the scientific classification of organisms in the 19th century. Before the emergence of taxonomic classification, the classifications of animals in Europe were preliminarily shaped by Christian belief (Thomas, 1983). Three main criteria for categorizing animals were edibility, usefulness, and wildness, which are human-centric interests. Taxonomic classification, by contrast, categorizes animals in relation to their intrinsic characteristics. Modern taxonomy is also inspired by the Aristotelian classification of vegetation and animals in terms of physiological structure, habitat, and mode of reproduction. Nonetheless, this model of classifying organisms has become an ontological template for creating knowledge in the sciences. Implicit in this taxonomy is a hierarchical order based on the concept of human exceptionalism, a notion that has since played a significant role in scientific discussions in contemporary natural-science society. It is an ontological perspective to keep humans away from nature to preserve the latter in an uncontaminated state as the scientists' figure of knowledge. Industrialisation furthers the separation of the city from nature, thus strengthening the academic mentality that perceives urban life as unnatural and natural life as asocial. The

classical ethnographies on classification of animals could not overcome this anthropocentric emphasis rooted deeply in the scientific concept from which they borrowed, and it showed in the asymmetrical presentation between humans and animals portrayed in their work. Even zoosemiotics which studies communication across animal species was also less interested in the human-animal communication.

This parallel of the disciplinary interests between anthropology and natural sciences is rooted in the nature-culture boundary and further segregates academic labour in natural sciences from culture studies (Wilkie, 2015). It is less dubious for anthropology to study “culture” and natural sciences to study “nature”. Because of this influence of the culture-nature divide on the modern disciplines, both the natural sciences and humanities pay less attention to trans-species or trans-human phenomena as they are considered an ambiguous disciplinary that fits under neither of their academic jurisdictions. Plenty of scholars have addressed this issue, but we have to address this continually and find new angles and new frameworks to keep deconstructing it, or we will never catch up with the people we study. My way is to learn how to accept that members of different species are equally relevant units of analysis. In this case, I took an example from ecology. Ecology, itself, is stuck like anthropology, in which its approach has exempted *Homo sapiens* or analysed it as a separate unit.

### ***The Ecosystem Approach***

Ecology is a branch of biology that studies the interdependence of organisms with each other and their biophysical environments. Its functionalist concepts influenced some classical ethnographies, such as in Rappaport (1968), who saw animals as a ritualistic measure of regulating the biotic community within the human domain. Ecological analogies also prominently feature in anthropological studies in which ethnographers attempted to raise an

awareness of the pluralism of ecological classifications. Symbolic anthropologists demonstrated that Linnaean taxonomy is not absolute and that each culture has its own system of categorizing and connecting to the natural world, which is closely tied to the indigenous people's perception of self and their organization of relations within and beyond immediate communities. One of the classic ethnographies is Evans-Pritchard's (1940) portrait of the Nuer and their cattle which gave descriptions of the importance of animals. Tambiah (1969) is also noteworthy for the author's elaboration of how Thai people at Baan Praan Muan village classified animals on the basis of social proximity, where pet animals were thought of as close relatives and the prohibition of eating their meat could be symbolically compared to an incest taboo among human siblings. The influence of Levi-Straussian structuralism that appears in Tambiah's account can also be found Willis's (1975) comparative analysis of three African communities and their respective totem animals. This trend of symbolic anthropology argues that cultures are the self-determining schemes of humans on which their social actions are based. At the peak of Levi-Straussian influence in anthropology, criticisms were made against the classical work because of its emphasis on environmental determinism, which reduces the particularities of cultural practices to just the means for survival. These debates deepened the distinction between nature and culture, dividing them into two different factors of understanding human actions. Amid this debate, ecological anthropologists, such as Rappaport (1984), proposed ecological thinking as a key argument to bring together the two disciplinary frameworks in which human life is situated on multiple and irreducible orders from nature and culture. Thus, ecology is still a good device for discovering human-nature relations. This helped to pave the way for ecological anthropologists (e.g. Biersack, 1999) as well as medical anthropologists (e.g. Brown & Nading, 2019) to continue working with the ecological concepts, such as the new ecologies frameworks that are generally grounded in the idea of space-building, including that cultural or political spaces are created through the process of

living. These studies helped anthropology to build their analyses of the relationship between social and health inequalities and environmental usage as well as criticisms of the perceived intrinsic aspects of nature.

One of ecology's key theories proposes that dynamic interactions of organisms adapting to their shared habitat bring into existence a community with biotic and abiotic properties called an "ecosystem", on which the continuity of the species sharing the similitude of the experiential world greatly depends. This theory of ecosystems was translated into an anthropological framework by environmental anthropologists in an attempt to understand urban developments and to build nature conservation efforts. For instance, the World Resources Institute (2000) proposed that urban regions could be perceived as ecosystems where humans are the keystone species. Another example is the attempts in the later 1950s by the Chicago School's scholars to conceptualize subcultures using ecological concepts as "econiches". These studies see the ecological framework as an important methodology for designing healthy urban areas in which industrial developments could promote sustainability and quality of life for all species. Still, this genre of anthropological writing is more interested in applying the ecological frameworks on societies that are still considered as a domain of humans. The objectives of these studies are to push forward large-scale changes in policy and legal systems to conserve the rural ecosystems eroded by industrial activities, such as building efforts to preserve biodiversity, protect wildlife, and raise concerns on climate changes and resource erosion. They are less concerned about the use of the ecosystem approach in understanding detailed trans-species sociality on a local scale. Nonetheless, I find this ecosystem approach helpful for my thesis into trans-species relationships, particularly in how it can build a new perspective into "nature" and "culture".

But first, I will briefly describe the conception of the term "ecosystem", and its limitation and potential which I plan to develop into my thesis's framework.

The ecosystem concept was proposed by British botanist Arthur Tansley (1935). The theory drew inspiration from the hard sciences, such as physics and engineering. When Tansley introduced these cybernetic ideas to the study of vegetation and conceptualized the term “ecosystem”, he made a connection between plant organisms and their environments based on the concept of energy equilibrium. This theory suggested that the universe was composed of levels of systems, each functioning like a self-organizing machine moving towards the natural state of equilibrium. By applying this concept to his field of ecology, Tansley systematized the organic world in which vegetation-oriented changes in a particular environment always conformed with the universal law of equilibrium (p.300 ). All activities in the plantation were to stabilize its “eco” system. Hence, the term “ecosystem” had originated. Tansley’s theory of ecosystems also carried hierarchical implications. He segregated humans from animals and plants and societies from natural environments, arguing that because of their stark differences in terms of intelligence and behaviours, humans and nonhumans should be analysed in relation to their own homologous communities. Tansley’s misconception was later disclaimed by later generations of scientists who experimented with his theory and discovered that the natural world does not exhibit the machinery properties described by the late botanist. However, at that point, the term “ecosystem” had already become a household name that cannot easily be abolished. The ecosystem approach has been redefined to account for physical evidence of trans-species interactions and relations. Nonetheless, the ecosystem approach that I have just described was not primarily invented for the purpose of accounting for human-animal relationships. There is an unexplored potential of the ecosystem approach that is a key instrument to decentralize the humans from their magnified focus on trans-species relations. The strength of this approach is that it sees activities of multi-organisms as equally relevant for understanding spatial and behavioural changes within the shared environment.

To rediscover the social relevance of trans-species relations in the manmade domain, human societies must be conceptualized as ecosystems with humans as the keystone species. This reinterpretation can be achieved by considering a well-known example in the ecological studies of ecosystems: beaver dams. Beavers are considered one of the keystone animals because their existence is significantly connected to the survival of many organisms. This animal also has an interesting connection with American anthropology as one of the founding fathers, Lewis H. Morgan, was very fond of the animal. Morgan wrote *The American Beaver and His Works* (1868) to praise beavers' intelligence. As part of their lives, the beavers modify and maintain their habitat using their biological specialization. Their dams are highly recognizable forms of physical modification, which earn the beavers a title of "ecosystem engineers". These dams and lodges become habitual niches for species of wildlife such as fish, mammals, insects, birds, amphibians, and plants. In this sense, the beavers create an organic community full of trans-species interactions. The construction of beaver dams is arguably comparable to a man-made ecosystem carved by cultural tools. Humans construct an ecological niche based on their self-interest, but they also do not have full entry control over which nonhuman kinds can live in their society. Like the beavers' home, the man-made ecosystem is inhabited by other nonhuman kinds, domestic and wild organisms whose life cycles have become intertwined with the humans and their man-made habitats. Human societies have both domestic and wildlife organisms and much more living with and alongside them. It is their existence, their endeavour to live and thrive in the so-called human society, that which gives life and shape to our experiential world.

There is no monospecific world where the habitat is made of one species. My introductory chapter demonstrates that people and animals are living and moving within the same environment. All spaces are for the multispecies' usages. There is no line at which society

ends and nature begins. Following this line of reasoning, animals' actions are as social as humans in how they build our society.

### ***The Developing of Social Actions Between Animals and Humans***

Relationships are developed from interactions between social entities, which results in the transformation of their emotions, behaviours, and identities. In disciplines grounded in the culture-nature divide, the capability for social actions is hierarchized with humans at the top. The socialness of animals is not recognized because their action does not manifest in the way humans do. This leads to the absence of the animals' actions in an anthropological analyses of society as we think humans' social actions are sufficient in grasping the complexities of trans-species phenomenon. To make the animal's action become relevant to anthropology is to perceive these actions as social.

The common perception of the animals' social actions is grounded in the idea of in-built biological qualities, such as intelligence or sentience (see Ogden et al., 2013). Following this line of reasoning, the social significance of an action is due to being acted by a person who is sentient, intelligent, or agentic in some way. The use of these concepts is prominently found in the studies of animal welfare activists arguing for animal rights or animal liberation (see Fraser, 1999). From intelligence to sentience, the fundamental criterion has been broadened by the advancement of scientific studies of animal biology. Consequently, new biological properties have been included in giving protection and rights to a wider range of animal species. For example, over the years, intelligence is increasingly considered insufficient to understand animals' behaviours and feelings. Many kinds of animals may not exhibit conventional intelligence that humans recognise but are still capable of feeling pain and suffering, which entitles them to rights to humane treatment from humans.

However, this kind of concept that connects biological capacity with socialness also cannot explain why in contexts in which the biologically sentient properties of an entity are absent, bonding processes still continue, such as relationships between the human and the dead or humans and inanimate objects. These relationships continue to shape identity, social organization, and the environment, even though the parties are not recognized as social in a conventional sense. Take the idea of environmental personhood in which natural entities, such as forests and rivers, are culturally and legally personified to have rights because they act on people (e.g. Morris & Ruru, 2010).

Nadasdy (2007) argued for a “literal truth” approach, which values the relevance of the indigenous knowledge of animals. For Nadasdy, taking seriously the local knowledge of animals is a fruitful way to recognise animals as “sentient and intelligent” able to form social bonds with villagers without referring to the science-based knowledge of animals (Nadasdy, 2007). However, this kind of literal truth methodology might have some limitations. Because it still places a great emphasis on the concepts of sentience and intelligence, the framework implies that regardless of the scientific or indigenous perspectives, social meanings of the animal’s actions are grounded in the intentional or conscious properties. To take something seriously, an ethnographer must be able to feel a visceral sense of the informant’s truth. My concern is that this methodology might not sufficiently acknowledge the sensory differences of ethnographers in how they proceed with the truths in the field. The ethnographer who shares a similar perception of the world with locals, such as being a Buddhist, is likely to find it easier to take seriously the words of their informant compared to the others who might find this piece of information unintelligible, and thus dismissible. For example, from a Buddhist perspective, animals have souls; therefore, they are capable of social actions. As a Buddhist ethnographer, I could empathise with Buddhist caregivers. However, what if I were not? This truth processing in the field and in the writing will inevitably affect the ethnographic portrait of the animals and

their relationship with the humans. There should be a middle ground for anthropologists to get in touch with the local world.

What, in short, makes actions social?

My proposal is that a social meaning of action must be defined in relation to its surroundings. If an action occurs in surroundings where humans and animals have been living and adapting to each other, it spontaneously gains social significance for its communicative ability to influence the existing social relations without requiring intention. This framework will enable anthropological writing to rely on the human's narrative and to observe the animal's actions in the process of trans-species bonding. The effectiveness of the animal's social action lies in its transformative ability "in producing, reproducing, or changing the structures within which people act" (Laidlaw, 2002, p. 315).

I cannot know if Boonphong had agentic or intentional purposes in what she did with Jennie's family. Clearly, it might be scientifically fruitful to find if cats' actions are moved by sentient or intelligent properties, what their intrinsic intentions of doing something are. Fortunately, from the 2000s onward, the archaeological and scientific academia has increasingly explored cats' ability to communicate with humans (e.g. Poole, 2015; and Saito et al., 2019). However, it is out of the scope of this thesis. From my perspective, Boonphong acted socially for two reasons. First, her actions were semiotic as they were made in a city ecosystem bustling with human-animal relations. In her territory, there were humans who could react to Boonphong's signals. Secondly, Boonphong's actions changed the behaviours, emotions, identities, and livelihood of Jennie's family. After her death, her previous actions evidently still continued to incite changes in the lives of her former family and the landscape of the house she used to roam in.

The complexity in navigating a trans-species relationship cannot be fully grasped by singly focusing on human effort. Through the process of back-and-forth interactions, the

animal's actions help to crystalize the idea of home organization and social relations within and beyond the household. Jennie's house had been transformed into a trans-species space correlating to the family's relationship with Boonphong. After 5 years of living with Boonphong and with the new cats, Jennie's house got a cat room, new housekeeping chores, and a friendship with the vet. Boonphong was not a passive figure whose body was acted on to reflect Jennie and her family's perception of ideal human-cat cohabitation. In fact, this bond began precisely because Boonphong acted first. Jennie's house was in Boonphong's territory of action. If she had not visited her house or if she chose to spend more time in the other house, their trans-species relationship would not have been born. Her feral personality and outdoor activities contributed greatly to why she did not receive a medical check in the early years of staying with Jennie's family despite Jennie's having the ability to do so. Boonphong's responses to care given by Jennie's family shaped what the family could do with or for the cat and introduced them to new activities and new social relations, such as how they came to know the vet. Caregiving enables the development of the human-animal intersubjectivity where humans and cats learn to be in the other presence within the space of the house.

Porter (2018) described a caregiving process in her ethnography on training dogs in the United States. Caregiving for rescued dogs came in forms of communicative training that aimed to attune canine and human thoughts. They learned the other's body postures, facial expressions, breathing patterns, and vocalizations. Because dogs and humans have different bodily expressions and internal states, training was required to establish a corporeal understanding of the dog's well-being. The process of caregiving in Jennie's house was not as intensive as in Porter's dog training. Jennie was an untrained keeper, and Boonphong was the only cat in the house. They did not need intense management that could be considered training to cohabit with each other. Theirs was almost like a gradual alternation towards the intersubjective state in trans-species cohabitation. Nonetheless, Porter's work will resonate

well in my other chapters where caregivers kept many stray cats; thus, animal caregiving in these houses would resemble closely animal training for humans to cohabit with a cluster of cats in a house.

### **Krung Thep as an Ecosystem**

Krung Thep is a city flourishing with and shaped by trans-species relations. This raises the importance of reconsidering the nature-culture divide because this ontological perception of society does not reflect the reality of trans-species sociality in this metropolis. Thai people's understanding of the "social person" encompasses nonhumans, both spirits and animals. The modifications of Krung Thep's physical and social landscapes, from its urban planning and laws to its cultures of animal care, mirrors their cosmological perception in which having a connection to the more-than-human world is the key to being human and being social.

To ethnographically account for trans-species relations in Krung Thep, I explored the combined use of the ecological and anthropological frameworks. I argue that Krung Thep, in a sense, is an ecosystem with humans being the keystone species and living with nonhuman "social" others. Conceptualizing a city as an ecosystem is a way to discover the social relevance of animal activities and to thus better understand the development of the human-animal relationship. Animals' actions are socially meaningful because they are semiotic. In both natural and man-made ecosystems, trans-species communication happens organically. Furthermore, communicative forms, from vocal languages to kinetic movements, play an equally significant role in the processes of bonding between humans and animals, and they can be found in animals' and humans' daily activities. Particularly, animal caregiving is arguably the domain of this trans-species communicative activity because it influences humans' identities and social arrangements to accommodate trans-species cohabitation. Caring for

animals is widely practised by Thai people, allowing both domestic and wild animals to thrive in the city, and humans fulfilling their social life through trans-species bonds. This practice of animal caregiving preserves the city-ecosystem of trans-species relations.

Nonetheless, the processes of urbanisation have stimulated the institutionalization of the care work for animals. The domain of animal care and the world of consumption are connected through the centralized government and the market economy. Animal caregiving is secularized by veterinary science and commoditized by capitalism. With the business body increasingly involving itself in the trans-species relationships, practices of animal care have been outsourced, not to local caregivers like in the pre-urbanization period, but to professional care providers, such as animal hospitals and pet-product manufacturers. A wide variety of commodities and services make care purchasable and able to be quickly assembled at home. The assistance of these consumerist innovations in animal caregiving liberates the wealthier caregivers from their routine preparations of animal care that can be time-consuming, laborious, or disturbing to the community. Consider manufactured pet food. There is a case of a middle-class caregiver who recommended her working-class caregiver fellow to give dry food to temple cats instead of leftovers because it lasted longer in an open environment than homemade food and was easier to clean up after. This illustrates well the conveniences brought by paid goods and services. The arrival of purchasable care for animals is welcomed by the middle class. Their sense of self and morality is becoming influential as the urban landscapes continue to expand. This leads to the emergence of indoor pet-keeping that desires to contain the trans-species bonds in the household domain. This model of pet-keeping aligns better with city life as it elevates the city morality favouring economic productivity and orderliness. The modern city of Krung Thep is less tolerant of trans-species relationships that cannot conform to its morals in which urban spaces are reserved for economically productive and mostly human-human relations.

The emphasis on financial capacity in occupying a place in a city ostracizes economically disadvantaged people, the old and the uneducated, as well as urban animals to the economically outer edges of its centre, such as run-down neighbourhoods. However, in these peripheral areas grow the bonds between caregivers and their animals. Because of living in close proximity with each other, caregivers from the low-income household keep animals in a larger number. The trans-species relationships in these households are perceived as a disturbance of the morality of city life. Even among wealthier households of the middle class, the city puts a great constraint on their human-animal relationships. Indoor pet-keeping is costly. Thai animal caregivers are aware of the pressure in which the city's current ecosystem puts on the trans-species bonds, but they are determined to preserve their relationships with the animals. What I witnessed in the field was that the caregivers assembled a community of animal-oriented volunteering to share care resources with fellow caregivers through a network of charitable giving. This demonstrates the collective efforts of people using the practice of animal care to make the city ecosystem hospitable to their needs for trans-species connections. Significantly, their endeavour resulted in a new ethical form of animal care which enabled care work to be shared through the network of volunteering consisting of caregivers, local and small-scale charitable, and business bodies. This new ethics of animal care practiced by Thai urban caregivers is one of the central foci of my thesis. To observe how this form of animal caregiving operates is to follow the charitable network of animal caregivers who advocated for the wellbeing of stray animals. In the next chapter, I will describe how I explored this field of animal volunteering and what my methodologies for collecting this ethnographic information were.

## Chapter 2: Researching Volunteerism and Cats

In a human-animal relationship, the effectiveness of actions typically leans in favour of humans. Although both humans and animals exhibit their efforts to live in the other's presence, it is apparent that human effort can impact their relationship more than that of the animal in significant ways. I discussed in the previous chapter how Boonphong's actions delayed Jennie's plan of neutering her and shaped what kinds of indoor activities they could do together. However, eventually, Boonphong had to participate, albeit involuntarily, in the activities in which her human caregivers chose, such as undergoing medical treatment. In the domain of animal volunteering, my field site, this type of asymmetrical interaction is particularly stressed. Households of animal volunteers, which feature in this thesis, kept large numbers of animals in their houses. Hence, caregiving activities in this volunteering site were more intensive than what I observed in nonvolunteer households, such as Jennie's. I noticed that the effectiveness of animal actions on humans in both kinds of households produced similar results. For example, they all resisted going to the vet in varying degrees, but if humans decided they needed medical treatment, they would get it. The human effort was distinguished from household to household, leading to different outcomes of their human-animal relationships. A household that did not get its animal treatment might result in the animal's sickness or death, consequently shortening or terminating the bond, whereas a household that did might be able to keep its animal for a longer time. This does not diminish what I established in the previous chapter: animals are social. However, being social does not necessarily mean that social persons will engage symmetrically in a relationship. Selecting methods to account for it, therefore, should also reflect the reality of power dynamics in which activities are not weighed equally, especially in the urbanized human-dominant context. The human side of these activities is an important ethnographic material for my thesis; my methodological approaches lean towards capturing the human effort, but I tried my best to be aware of animal participation throughout the process.

Ethnographic material lives in the experience of humans, including the ethnographer whose presence and experience in the field are key to producing ethnographic knowledge. There is no guideline on how to conduct an ethnography, but the idea of fieldwork is that the ethnographer must select methods and sites of observation to collect, curate, and analyse evidence for a better understanding of a topic. However, one method can have more than one application. For instance, participant observation has a procedural function that can be used to enable the ethnographer to settle in the field. Activities in this category include, but are not limited to, getting acquainted with the local people and learning from them to use local public transport and commuting routes. Such “know-who” and “know-how” information is vital for anthropological analysis; however, it also serves as practical knowledge for the ethnographer in the field, so she could avoid traffic jams and not miss her appointments with her key informants. More important, the primary reason for the ethnographer to select research methods is to uncover people’s experiences. It is important that their stories are explored from different methodological angles because each method has its strengths and shortcomings in curating the field experiences for the analysis. Methodologies have an impact on the direction of the research in stratifying forms of experience. It could influence the ethnographer to prioritize some form of knowledge more than the others, which may reduce the complexities of the phenomena. For instance, interview methods may imply the importance of speech over kinaesthetic experiences in building an understanding of social life. Speech-based methods can significantly filter out valuable accounts of humans and animals’ bonding through other forms of communication.

Theories and methods are inseparable in my fieldwork. Perhaps because of how it emerged, the anthropology of human-animal relations is grounded in disciplinary collaborations. It is almost obligatory for fieldworkers to make conversations across natural sciences and social sciences to develop and amass theoretical and methodological frameworks

to capture particularities of their field. I entered my field site with somewhat hybrid and makeshift theories and methods, borrowing from the scientific disciplines and some from well-developed discussions in social anthropology. My fieldwork was full of methodological experiments. I felt like they were part of the disciplinary advancement in a way. My discoveries and mistakes are not just mine to learn; they can also benefit fellow researchers in some ways, so we all can be better prepared for future investigations. This is the purpose of my methodology chapter: to share my experiences of conducting and experimenting with methods. In the next sections, I will go through the steps of my decision-making process around fieldwork in Krung Thep. The methods I used to carry out my 1-year ethnography are insider research, participant observation, multi-sited ethnography, semistructured interviews, and online fieldwork. I will discuss favourable and unfavourable outcomes of these decisions in detail.

### **Anthropology at Home**

When I arrived in Krung Thep, the first group of people I met in the field was the animal-welfare volunteers, or Asa, from the Cat for Cats Foundation (CFCF), who introduced me to their world of animal-welfare volunteers. My first impression of this world was during Bangkok's annual pet expo in June 2018. The foundation suggested I travel to the event and meet its volunteers who went to promote its adoption program and sold the foundation's merchandises there. The pet fair was held in Queen Sirikit Conventional Centre, a building accessible by car or Bangkok's mass rapid transit system (Metropolitan Rapid Transit; MRT). Bangkok's pet expo was a middle-class-targeted event. I never realized before attending that almost every practice of pet-keeping could be merchandised. Some booths advertised pet-friendly packages for travel and vacation. Several veterinary clinics and hospitals offered free

health checks for animals of fairgoers and promoted their paid medical treatment. I witnessed a wide variety of commodities for pets, ranging from manufactured and gourmet food tailored to the dietary needs of animals to toys and accessories, such as collars, scarfs, and cat-size clothes. The foundation's volunteers lived in this pet-keeping world where consumption enabled their bonds with animals.

I grew up in a provincial city in North Thailand in a house with cats. My parents adored all our cats. We bought them manufactured dry food but not gourmet grades like some brands displayed on their shelves at the pet fair. My parents never bought our cats toys. They believed the cats could find ways to entertain themselves, which, indeed, they did. My parents' cats played with live prey; their favourites were mice and house sparrows. If they found ropes, plastic bags, or cardboard boxes that my parents did not put away, these free toys never failed to keep them occupied. Visiting the pet fair was the first time I learned how high maintenance keeping a cat could be. Still, I recognized some lifestyles that I shared with the CFCF's Asas: how we commuted, how we ate out at restaurants in shopping malls, and so on. The volunteers' world was undoubtedly fascinating but also resonated with my own middle-class experience. This was a challenge for me, as a native ethnographer, to come to terms with conducting fieldwork at my "home".

Fieldwork has been an indispensable part of the anthropological discipline because of its practical and ritual significance. Over the years, generations of anthropologists have reflected and reinvented the tradition of fieldwork (e.g. Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). My research is considered a part of this redefining trend for native anthropologists conducting an ethnographic account at their "home" (see Fernea, 1989). Although fieldwork carried out in one's society has become more common for contemporary anthropologists and obsession over the "purity" of field sites based on a criterion of "otherness" is less pronounced today, my inner world of a fieldworker struggled with the perceived loss of otherness and novelty. At the

beginning of my fieldwork, my strategy was to quickly move forward to the less wealthy group of caregivers who were absent from the pet fair, whom I believed would make my project more interesting ethnographically.

I was driven to find animal-keeping communities that were radically different from me. Grounded in the discipline-rooted prejudice for finding the “other”, my expectation was one of the common shortcomings that native anthropologists encounter and must make peace with. Interestingly, it was the unpredictable nature of the field that taught me this lesson. Despite my motivation, I could not randomly visit a low-income household without gatekeepers to introduce me to their community. I knew from the middle-class volunteers that some of them had engaged in a patron-client relationship with the working-class caregivers, and if I built rapport with the Asas, they could introduce me to the community of the economically poor caregivers. Conditioned by the field to spend my time with the volunteers, I learned that although I defined myself as middle class like them, how the volunteers and I consumed categorized us into different socio-economic groups. More important, they had stories far more interesting than my prejudicial and short-sighted assumption could anticipate. To avoid these presumptions, I practised making evidence-led decisions in which I would pursue my investigation into different sites only when the circumstances suggested, not just because I wanted to. Furthermore, spending time with the middle-class volunteers helped me better understand the community of animal volunteering, which was my significant point of entry into the world of Thailand’s animal care. As the implementation of research methods depends significantly on the vagaries of the field, my fieldwork techniques were also shaped by the character of a Thai volunteering domain of animal welfare. Hence, the concept of insider research became my main methodological framework for collecting field experiences. I obtained ethnographic accounts by working as an animal volunteer.

## **Insider Research**

Insider research is a methodology in which a researcher transitions into an insider working alongside key informants to build rapport and to gain in-depth understanding of the community. In this context, active participation is required to get access to the people and their knowledge. Some communities are more reclusive to outsider researcher. Fieldworkers must already be part of the community or transition to be part of the community and be accepted as an insider with whom which the locals feel comfortable to sharing their experience with. Thai animal volunteering is one of these communities as it permitted the outsider a place to observe its people on the condition that the outsider worked for its cause. This method could raise some issues about the navigation between the status of researcher and insider. In my case, I was an outsider researcher who transitioned into an insider through volunteering in a charitable organization.

### ***Charity Entry Point***

The advantages of making a connection with local charities lie in their philanthropic character. Charitable organizations have to recruit volunteers to work for them. With these inclusive protocols for volunteering, the ethnographer can negotiate access to settings with volunteering organizations. Furthermore, charities will habitually prepare new workers with basic training in their operations, which helps familiarize the ethnographer with the spatial and social landscapes of their field.

Charitable organizations were an important point of entry into the field for me because I had no correspondence with people in the field prior to the fieldwork. The Thai community of animal volunteering was a tight-knit community. Its active figures in the volunteering

community that volunteers knew and trusted were not known by the public. There was no information about them that I could access virtually. This underlined the importance of contacting organizational gatekeepers, such as charities, as arranging a meeting with them could be managed remotely while it would be more efficient and culturally appropriate to make face-to-face contact with local gatekeepers after entering the field. Furthermore, by volunteering for an animal-welfare foundation, I could explore the charitable landscape of Krung Thep and use the foundation's connection with its local communities to build a rapport with local people who otherwise would not cooperate with a complete outsider. In January 2018, while I was based in the United Kingdom, I began researching Thai animal-welfare charities to volunteer for my fieldwork. Because my thesis focused on animal caregiving, I was looking for a charity to be my platform to observe Thailand's animal healthcare system.

In urban Thailand, mobile veterinary clinic programs are popular among animal caregivers of various socio-economic groups. These kinds of projects have been organized by a government body or animal charity to eliminate the spread of zoonotic disease and prevent unwelcome reproduction of pets by providing some basic medical treatment. This is a potential platform for observing how actors of different agendas interact with each other on animal bodies. I used this project as a criterion to determine my first entry point. In early March 2018, I contacted the CFCF, a nongovernment charity located in Krung Thep. This foundation for stray felines had been working to rescue, shelter, and find a permanent home for stray cats. Arguably, it was the best known charity that mainly provided medical care for stray cats. With assistance from its partnership veterinary clinics, the charity had visited communities within Krung Thep and nearby provinces to provide sterilization treatment for cats whose owners could not afford it. I sought permission from this charity to participate in its mobile clinic project as a volunteer and to interview and participate with the foundation's volunteers, clients, and veterinary surgeons. After a few email exchanges, I was subsequently granted permission.

My application proceeded within a day before the permission was granted, which was almost immediately. When in the field, I finally discovered that the CFC Foundation's quick operation was a result of the Thai culture of small-scale and local volunteering.

### ***Care for Cats Foundation: The Example of Small-Scale and Local Volunteering***

Thai animal volunteers preferred to participate in small-scale local projects organized on a digital platform. The strength of this kind of charitable assembly is grounded in the flexibility with which animal caregivers can conveniently fundraise for their projects in their online community, such as via Facebook and Twitter. Some of these activities trespass on a legally ambiguous area of Thailand's Charity Act B.E. 2487 in which a person must apply for a street collection licence and be granted permission before collecting money on public spaces. However, this act is frequently dismissed because of the Thai culture of charitable giving, in which donations are part of the practice of being a Buddhist (Revenue Department of Thailand, 2020). In daily life, people practiced giving to those they have trusted and known locally, not necessarily licensed ones.

Because Thai animal welfare volunteering is a tight-knit community, animal volunteers and benefactors are more comfortable supporting unlicensed small projects of the people whom they trust. The other attributions of these projects are quick response and adjustable work arrangements. Local and unlicensed projects are short-term and noncontinuous and so do not require a legally serious commitment. Volunteers can assemble to carry out charitable work when there is an immediate cause and dissolve within a short period of volunteering. For example, a group of veterinary surgeons might raise funds for their mobile clinic to travel to a remote community and neuter pets, but they might not organise the trip the next year. These characteristics of small-scale projects make them a popular option for charitable giving.

Nonetheless, some unlicensed local projects can extend a decade in operation and eventually become legally established. Care for Cats was one of these projects. The CFC Foundation played an important role in my research. The life of its vet and nonvet volunteers feature significantly in my ethnographic chapters. For this chapter, I will describe how its operation provided a window for understanding the volunteering culture of a small-scale and local charitable body in Krung Thep and its influence on my fieldwork conduct.

From a legal perspective, the CFC Foundation, established in 2018, might be considered a newly formed organisation; however, its volunteering activities began in 2006 when it was a charitable project run by a group of caregivers who met in the virtual world. The CFCF's poster introduced itself:

Our story began in 2006 when a humble group of cat lovers decided to come together to help injured cats on the Thai streets to access medical care and to find these stray felines permanent homes. For 12 years, CFC Project had successfully found homes for 11,698 rescued cats. More than 18,261 street cats and dogs have received sterilisation from our veterinary mobile clinic. As our project grew, we decided to take a significant step towards becoming more efficient in our work for the cats. Thus, in 2018, the CFC Foundation was legally established as a charitable organisation with the same unwavering dream: to improve the lives of street cats in Thailand.

The CFC Project began with a small group of middle-class online users who exchanged their knowledge of cat care and helped out their fellow members on a Thai digital platform called the Cat Room. During the late 1990s and early 2000s before the popularity of social media technology, internet sites called "webboards", were the early platform of an online community in which online users bonded over their shared interests and participated in virtual activities, such as creating and commenting on online content. Conversations between the users

in the Cat Room could be accessed by all passer-by online readers. However, engaging in the community required a free registration of membership, called “login accounts”. The Cat Room’s users engaged in the community under pseudonyms that protected their anonymity. However, frequent online interactions led some of the regular members to share their actual names and personal information and to meet in the actual world.

In 2005, Ree, the current CFCF’s president, found 60 cats abandoned in a flower shop near her residence. Seeing the cats suffering from malnutrition and poor hygiene encouraged her to participate in the Cat Room to seek advice from experienced cat keepers. With her online friends’ encouragement and guidance, Ree began to rescue and neuter the cats. She regularly kept her online friends updated about the cats. Ree’s dedication to the cats earned her trust from the regular users in the Cat Room. When she needed financial help, the users would donate to her charitable work. Ree explained:

A female black cat named Susa broke her legs in a car accident. I sought advice on financing the cat’s medical treatment from the “Cat Room”, a popular online community of cat keepers. The members of the community donated 10,000 Baht (£250) for Susa’s operation. Susa, unfortunately, passed away. I contacted my donors to return the money but they asked me to keep it for other cases of injured and sick cats. Hence, this donation began the CFC Project.

The assembly of the animal-loving people in the Cat Room to support Ree’s charitable activities became the first spark of the formation of Ree’s charitable project in the real-life domain. In its early days, CFC volunteers attempted to find new homes for their rescued cats by posting photographic and textual information of the cats in the Cat Room. They shortly discovered a limitation of online animal welfare volunteering. The CFC volunteers noticed that black cats were adopted less often than felines with brighter coat colouration and concluded that strong characteristics of black cats, such as their intelligence and adorableness, did not

translate well into photographs. Hence, a new platform had to be arranged for potential adopters to interact with the cats. In 2006, CFC launched its first adoption program. The volunteers assembled on weekends and rented a space in Krung Thep's popular market. They found permanent homes for a hundred cats and kittens. More animal-loving people were intrigued by this pilot program and later joined the CFC Project as volunteers.

As the CFC Project was formed by the middle class, middle-class pet-keeping morals were embedded in its objectives. Four years after the initiative, the CFC Project had branched its service to the domain of veterinary care. It believed that neutering was the most effective way of controlling the cat population on the streets and encouraged its associated caregivers to make an appointment for their animals at Bangkok's Department of Livestock Development (DLD) for free neutering. The CFC project supported poor and elderly caregivers with appointment booking and transporting cats to DLD, though it did not provide sterilisation itself. However, the number of animals queuing for DLD's free neutering was overwhelming. During that time, there already were local projects focusing on mobile veterinary clinics to fill in this gap in demand.

Ree decided to volunteer in one of these mobile clinics and learned from the project's organizer how to arrange a neutering session, from the inventory of medical supplies to building a network with the veterinary practitioners working in the Thai animal welfare community. Thus, in 2010, the CFC Project started its own mobile-clinic program. Since then, its free sterilisation, medical support, and adoption program had become the three main features that shaped the project's position in Thai animal welfare volunteering. The CFC Project had built its partnership with key animal care providers in the volunteering community, such as veterinary surgeons and pet-related businesses, which enabled them to access many public spaces such as shopping malls to promote its programs to its targeted middle-class audiences. The CFC Project depended on the donations of middle-class benefactors to continue its

programs as evidenced by its three funding strategies aimed to appeal to the middle class: donation, charity auction, and merchandise. The project advertised their programs, sold merchandise such as calendars, and asked for donations on platforms frequented by middle-class groups, such as shopping malls and social media.

By 2018, the CFC Project had firmly gained its status in the animal-welfare community which unavoidably made its online fundraising and donations attract the attention of the Revenue Department of Thailand. Because the project did not have a money collection license and used Ree's personal bank accounts to receive donations, the department ruled that Ree had to pay a tax evasion penalty. This greatly affected the morale of the CFC volunteers and donors. They perceived that the laws contradicted their morality of volunteering. In one of the conversations between the volunteers and the Revenue Department, the tax officer argued that the project must pay taxes before using the donations for its charitable causes. The volunteers, however, thought it was the other way around. Ree explained that the benefactors entrusted the project with their donations with an expectation that they would be used for cats; therefore, they were obligated to save the cats first, not to pay taxes to the government body.

There was a notable tension between the animal welfare community and the government because of their moral conflicts about animal welfare. The government prioritised human well-being; hence, it placed a great emphasis on animal control policies that mistreated animals by inhumanely capturing strays with strong drugs and putting them in small and unhygienic shelters. The government's mistreatment of animals violated the moral code of animal welfare shared among the volunteers, leading to a strong sense of distrust towards the government. Hence, the volunteers not only found the governmental interventions obstructive and incompetent, they also saw the authority figure as immoral for its apathy. Understandably, the CFC volunteers' moral commitment was to their animal welfare community, and the tax officer's suggestion sounded unethical to them. This moral distinction between the

government's human-centric politics and the charity's interests in helping animals was core to the emergence of animal volunteering, as I will describe later in Chapters 7 and 8.

Nevertheless, this incident encouraged the project to become legally established. In 2018, the CFC Foundation was created as a charity with the objectives to improve the livelihood of stray cats and to promote a healthy and responsible cohabitation between humans and cats. Their three pillars of missions were:

- 1) Financial support for cats with medication needs;
- 2) Adoption program to give rescued and formerly stray cats a chance to find their permanent homes; and,
- 3) Feline neutering for communities, temples, and private shelters encountering financial difficulties.

Despite becoming a legitimate foundation, the CFCF, in terms of size and procedures, remained small and local. The charity had run entirely on voluntary labour and without a clear organisational structure. It also did not have any headquarters. Administrative and medical supplies for its programs were kept in the houses of the regular members. There were fewer than 10 regular members in the foundation; all of them had known each other since the early days of the Cat Room and the CFC Project. Because it did not hire full-time workers, the foundation's volunteers frequently recruited their family members to help with the charitable work when they experienced a labour shortage. Hence, their organisational hierarchy resembled a kinship structure. The members addressed each other with kin terms, such as older siblings (*phi*; พี่), younger siblings (*nong*; น้อง), and aunts (*pha*; ป้า). These age-specific pronouns defined their dynamics and responsibilities in the foundation. The Thai culture of age-based seniority had extended to public life. This idea helped the volunteers to negotiate their position in the foundation. The senior members who were older assumed a leadership role while young or new members awaited orders and showed respect to the seniors. Hence, even

without a clear division of labour, the foundation could operate sufficiently by relying on the culturally rooted kin structure.

The reluctance of the foundation in establishing an organisational structure, such as labour division and volunteer expenses, could be attributed to the deep-seated belief among the volunteers that voluntariness and self-reliance were the important characteristics of charitable giving. As I established in the introduction's sections about Buddhism, charitable giving is a practice of bonding. Unpaid volunteering labour is perceived as the genuineness of the bonds; the person volunteers their labour because they care for people and animals in this volunteering community and not for monetary compensation. This notion of money and care will reappear in Chapter 6 regarding veterinary care as a central focus of my argument about the differences between volunteers and veterinary professionals who asked for payment in exchange for their caregiving work. It will address a highly commercialised context in which money is an inseparable part of animal caregiving.

Nevertheless, all volunteers had to exhibit their abilities to support themselves as an expression of genuineness. Having a full-time occupation was one of the defining features that the person entered the volunteering community with the good intention to be helpful and not to take advantage of the other members' generosity. This perception had been embedded in the animal welfare community. On the one hand, it prevented the foundation from exploring its potential. Relying on voluntary work made it impossible to expand its operation to a global scale. Some of the CFCF's members revealed to me that international benefactors could be important sources of donations if the foundation tried to communicate more to global audiences. On the other hand, staying local kept the foundation as a tight-knit community, which helped strengthen its connections with the local communities. Its small size also made it highly manoeuvrable so that charitable and administrative actions could be carried out promptly.

Consider the case of my volunteer application, which was processed within a day. The CFCF's identity, morals, and work for its local communities astonished me. These caused me to reconsider my plan and make the organisation one of my main areas of research interest. However, to accomplish my objectives, to access their knowledge and their connections with the local communities, I had to undergo a rite of passage and become a legitimate volunteer.

### ***Volunteer Researcher***

The CFC Foundation operated with shortages of resources and depended greatly on donations and voluntary labour. In this volunteering domain, only people who worked could gain access to cooperation with the knowledge of the volunteers. Active participation was obligatory.

There were two kinds of volunteers working for the foundation, passers-by and regular volunteers. The first group was non-member people who helped out in the foundation's adoption and sterilisation a few times. When the foundation decided to visit a community, it would announce its program on its website and social media to draw the attention of these non-member volunteers to the programs. For example, during one of the mobile clinics in the temple, some local cat owners queuing for their pets' appointments volunteered to help with administrative work, such as registering cats, and the foundation permitted them to so their regular volunteers could focus on other work. However, the volunteers in this category were mostly locals who lived close to the community the foundation visited. They were not part of the animal welfare community. The participation of passer-by volunteers was circumstantial and unpredictable. For example, some of the foundation's events in large shopping malls attracted more passer-by volunteers than the foundation needed, but in some events held in remote areas, such as a temple-based community, the foundation experienced a shortage of

voluntary labour. Because their involvement was non-continuous and lacked intensiveness, the foundation perceived their labour as nonessential to the operation and kept volunteers in this category at distance.

Contrary to the passer-by volunteers, regular members of the foundation were seen as indispensable. This group consisted of volunteers who exhibited their dedication to charitable work for cats. Their participation with the foundation's programs was consistent and constant. The commitment to hard work was the primary character of the regular volunteers. A regular member of the CFC Foundation taught me the importance of hard work by recalling her early career in volunteering in which she worked in an international foundation for stray cats. During that time, she was unfamiliar with the world of animal volunteering and was afraid of blood and cat scratches. Her hesitancy was noticed by the foundation's senior volunteer, who told her to leave if she could not carry out their work. These words drove her to overcome her fears. She jumped into action and helped the other volunteers capture feral cats, consequently earning her place as a recognised volunteer. This signified that the culture of animal welfare volunteering accepted only people who made particular kinds of contributions to the community. Furthermore, to become a regular volunteer was to mingle with the other members outside of the foundation's programs, such as visiting each other's houses and eating out together. Socializing demonstrated the earnestness to be part of the community of volunteers. And because the CFC Foundation's organisational structure resembled a kinship structure in which the members tended to recruit people they personally knew, rapport became an indicator of the new volunteer's trustworthiness as the foundation's human resource.

The difference between the regular and the passer-by volunteers manifested in how the foundation treated them. The foundation's members were more reserved while engaging with the passer-by volunteers but treated the regular ones in a friendlier manner. The foundation's members would talk to passer-by volunteers and invite them to come again as a sort of

recruitment tactic but with no expectation that the latter would show up. The CFCF had developed a certain perception that passer-by volunteers were unreliable labour and always planned its operations with only the consideration of the regular ones. Consequently, it invested its time in training regular volunteers. For example, positions in the CFCF's mobile clinic program required volunteers who were trained to assist the vets in taking care of cats. Habitually, the spots were reserved for the regular volunteers. Becoming a regular volunteer, hence, was my only means to gain access to an in-depth understanding of the foundation's programs and its volunteers.

Although I introduced myself as a researcher, I was not exempt from being evaluated by the foundation's standard of committing to hard work. I began from a position of a passer-by volunteer. At this stage, I travelled to the locations of the foundation's appointments by myself through public transport. I helped with administrative, manual, and grime work, such as disposing of animal excretion, cleaning medical equipment, transporting belongings from the volunteers' vehicles, and assisting the regular volunteers. I carried out all the tasks the volunteers gave to me to familiarise myself with the work and get a visceral understanding of being a volunteer. More important, I wanted the regular members to recognise that I was reliable and keen to work. I also helped the foundation with its other programs, such as adoption and merchandise selling events, and stayed with the volunteers after the work finished to build conversations with them. After several weeks of my volunteering, the regular members began to train me to carry out veterinary work, such as assisting the vets and veterinary assistants. The sign that let me know I had reached my rite of passage occurred when the CFCF's mobile clinic had to travel to a shelter in a provincial city outside Krung Thep. The CFCF's mobile clinic consisted of two teams, the vet and volunteer team. The latter group usually had at least two regular volunteers to perform administrative work, and I was invited to join them. It was the first mobile clinic I did not have to travel to by myself because the team offered to drive

me to the site. They also said to me that at first, they thought they would have to contact the other volunteer, but because they had me, they put me in this position, which meant I was included in their organisation planning of activities. Significantly, they invited me to their houses, offered to drive me to the foundation's appointments, and added me to their personal telephone contacts and social media accounts. Being invited to the volunteers' domestic domain, such as their houses, their vehicles, and their virtual community, marked a significant improvement in my attempt to build a rapport with them. In many ways, my rapport with the volunteers was maintained through hard work. Their positive impression of my performance greatly facilitated my interviews with them.

Being accepted into the volunteer community was crucial to gain insight into their lives. The regular volunteers were reluctant to tell outsiders about their volunteering activities. They would insist that their volunteering locations, such as their shelters or temples where they fed stray animals, must not be revealed in interviews or publications because of their wariness about undesirable attention from the wider community and concern that if their volunteering life were too well-known, their responsibilities would increase. The volunteers had seen people abandon animals outside of their houses or their frequented temples knowing that they would take care of the animals. Furthermore, their serious commitment to animal welfare could sometimes be portrayed in a negative light. For instance, the term "angels of the cat room", was used in a derogatory way to describe the volunteers, implying that they cared for animals more than for fellow humans. The volunteers, therefore, preferred to be interviewed by sources they could trust to give them a just portrait of their dedication to animals. There was a time in which I planned to interview animal caregivers associated with the foundation who were not eager to talk to researchers. However, after the foundation's volunteer vouched for me that I was trustworthy because I worked for the CFCF, the caregiver agreed to an interview. She even

asked her fellow caregiver to join the interview. The main reason why they were this accommodating was that I got the foundation's recommendation.

On my last trip with the CFCF's mobile clinic before I returned to the UK, the volunteers apologised to me for misjudging my dedication to hard work when I first met them, saying that they thought I would disappear like other passer-by volunteers. Taking people who were the subject of the thesis seriously by working as one of them was strategically fruitful in many ways. This rapport enabled me to complete my fieldwork with good ethnographic accounts and good memories.

However, despite the advantages, the status of an insider researcher can also generate ethical dilemmas (O'Neil, 2001).

Due to the blurry boundary between the volunteer and researcher, I regularly found myself with contradictory commitments. My position as the foundation's volunteer offered me an insider perspective and embodied understanding of the animal-welfare activities. However, it also affected my mobility in the field in some ways. For example, in the foundation's mobile clinic, I was assigned to work in its non-vet stations such as the pre-neutering preparation and the post-care recovery. Care work in these stations required serious commitment on my part as I was to be responsible for the wellbeing of cat patients. I had to learn how to handle the bodies of the cats and some veterinary techniques, such as how to carry and secure their bodies, how to shape their hair in preparation for their surgeries, how to observe their respiratory systems, etc. To understand how the volunteer acquired their knowledge of animal care, I had to put my identity as a researcher in the background, which sometimes prevented me from observing and engaging with other people in the clinical setting, such as the cat owners who waited outside the clinic. More important, there were ethical issues concerning the fieldworker with high involvement in the activities of the locals. Watts (2011) noted the issue of the dual identity of the researcher who switches between the role of researcher and volunteer. While volunteering

in cancer drop-in sessions, she observed that her presence as a researcher seemed to not be acknowledged by the participants and developed a concern over whether she had become a covert researcher. Although the people in the clinic were aware of my identity as a researcher, I was still considered by them as their fellow volunteer. Therefore, I was taught and asked to carry out vaccine administration.

In the Thai animal welfare community, there was a morally ambiguous area of animal care that allowed the nonvet volunteers to carry out veterinary work, such as administering vaccinations and injectable antibiotics. Under normal circumstances, I would never commit to this type of activity directly involving the health of animals as it could potentially be an ethical compromise of my integrity as a researcher. However, I found myself struggling to make ethical decisions in these real-time situations. The clinic setting of my field site resembled that of a closed community with only like-minded people congregating. The vet and nonvet volunteers worked together in a space concealed from the public, leading to the fabrication of a reality in which a code of conduct was different from the wider community. It created a new sense of normalcy that emboldened the nonvet volunteers in their capacity and their actions and permitted them to carry out veterinary work. I noticed that whenever I assisted the nonvet volunteers in their veterinary performance, I never felt coerced by peer pressure or that the activities were against my conscience. Rather, it made sense to me in that context. It was only when I travelled back to my residence that I could reflect and realise that I was unconsciously in the flow. It is the fieldworker's inclination to make oneself fit into the field because having the locals' rapport was key to making a successful ethnography. Nonetheless, it is important for a fieldworker not to dwell overmuch in the field. Otherwise, the fieldworker might become isolated from the outside world. Going native could affect our judgments on our course of actions.

In the context of my fieldwork, ethical dilemmas were unavoidable. CFCF's mobile clinic had no place for an observer; only volunteers who could carry out work could stay inside. I had to participate in veterinary work, which prompted me to carefully reflect on my actions. The death of animals was somewhat common in this clinical setting. The volunteers speculated that it happened just a few times per year. During my time volunteering for the foundation, it happened once. In this case, a cat died while waiting at a preneutering station in which I worked along with other volunteers. I was the one who first noticed that its tongue turned blue, which signalled that its heart had stopped beating, and called for the vet to try to resuscitate it. However, it was pronounced dead shortly after that. No one assumed liability for the case, and the cat owner was understanding. Despite that, the incident made me reconsider my action of how much I was responsible for the cat's death because my action in the clinic was that of a volunteer. It was fortunate that there were always people who could carry out the work I was not confident in doing. Unable to perform veterinary work did not necessarily make me lose my position as a regular volunteer because I could still find a way to contribute by doing general and administrative work. Hard work was still a key to foster rapport with the foundation. Despite not mastering the ability to vaccinate or give medicine to the cats, I was still accepted as part of the mobile clinic's team to travel to different locations of Krung Thep and other provinces and explore the charitable network of Thai animal welfare. This also made my thesis a multi-site ethnography.

### **Multisite Ethnography**

Multisited fieldwork is a suitable method for researching in a large city such as Krung Thep where people and animals are constantly moving between locations. The idea of multisited fieldwork emerged during the mid-1980s; this method examines phenomena in

which people, objects, and ideas from different locations are increasingly connected through the process of globalisation (Marcus, 1995). Contrary to conventional ethnography in which the researcher embeds themselves in a single-site location for an extended time to develop a well-rounded understanding of a community, multiple sites of participation and observation can reveal the mobility of people and goods and the dynamics of ideologies across geographical or social spaces. Although in-depth experiences that can be gained from continual fieldwork in a single location might be compromised with the researcher travelling from site to site, multi-sited ethnography is effective in tracing movements of people, animals, material items, and ideas and observing the manifestation of ontological engagement where human and nonhuman agents meet in various conjunctions.

From my perspective, multisite fieldwork addressed not only the issue of the scale but also the local diversity of the city. Krung Thep has 50 districts, each consisting of small neighbourhoods with their local cultures governing the relations and movements of people and animals in their spaces. Consider the difference in the prohibition of animal entry between shopping malls in the inner and suburban areas. The CFCF preferred to arrange its mobile clinic and adoption event in shopping malls, but it never went to shopping malls in the inner zone. Large shopping mall complexes in this area developed their trademark value in the reflection of the affluent neighbourhoods; spaces in these shopping malls were to represent the interests of the mall-goers in their areas. In wealthy business districts, shopping malls tended to restrict the representation of animal bodies in their compounds through the policy of animal prohibition and renting rates a small-scale animal charity could not afford. This also meant that animal-related events contributed less monetarily to these locations. However, shopping malls in suburban neighbourhoods found animal-related events attracted local mall-goers to their compounds. Hence, different locations shaped different ways the business body perceived the animal body and animal charity.

As multisite ethnography entails travelling between sites, transportation shapes the ethnographer's experience in and of the field. Building a rapport with people is influenced or governed by modes of transport and traffic circumstances. In the field, people whom I frequently met were those who lived near to my residence or within a short distance of commuting. As I described in the chapter on the landscape of Krung Thep, I chose to live in a suburb called Pinklao because it was logistically close to the transport hub, and I could travel to meet my informants by bus. Because I did not drive, my life as an ethnographer depended on carefully selecting options for public transport to get me to my destination in a reasonable length of time. My middle-class caregivers lived across the metropolis, but they would assemble in inner Krung Thep to carry out their volunteering work in public spaces, such as participating in the cat adoption events in shopping malls. In the first few weeks of my fieldwork, I observed and participated in their activities in this public domain. However, this type of charitable work was just the tip of an iceberg in which a much larger part of the volunteers' caregiving work for animals was located in their domestic domain. If I wanted to have an in-depth understanding of their volunteering life, I had to visit their houses. Because some of them lived on the outskirts of Krung Thep or in its adjacent cities, I had to travel long distances to meet with them. This nature of multisite fieldwork enabled me to empathise deeply with the experience of Thai commuters.

On one of these trips, I travelled to a cat shelter at a temple in Rangsit, a city of Pathum Thani in one of Krung Thep's adjacent provinces to the north. This shelter was managed by a middle-class caregiver named Nara, aged 49, whom I had met in the CFCF's adoption event. We arranged a meeting at 4 p.m., which was Nara's time of visiting her cats after she got off from work. Public transport in the capital's outskirts and provincial areas was not as developed as in Krung Thep. By car, travelling from Krung Thep to Rangsit took approximately 30 minutes outside of rush hour. There was an extended bus line from Krung Thep to Rangsit that

I could take from my residence. However, to prepare for delays that Thai public transport was infamous for, I decided to start my journey to Rangsit at 12.30 p.m. By 3.30 p.m., I arrived at a shopping mall complex in Rangsit. Shopping mall complexes were normally the transport hubs, being popular destinations for many Thai commuters. This shopping mall's bus stop was the closest to the temple. To travel to community areas, such as temples, marketplaces, and residential zones, local commuters used motorcycle taxis. These local motorcyclists were recognised by Thai commuters for their knowledge of local routes and preference for speedy driving. They would manoeuvre through narrow alleyways and sidewalks to take the shortest route when driving even though it might compromise some safety procedures. Around 4 p.m., I arrived at the temple. Three hours on the bus and about 20 minutes on the motorcycle had exhausted me. Nonetheless, I spent the next 2 hours in the shelter. Nara kindly gave me a ride to the temple gate where the taxi motorcyclists congregated outside waiting to take passengers from the monastery's weekend market fair to their local destinations. I took a motorcycle taxi to the shopping mall. The sky had darkened as it was already 6 p.m., the peak hour for vehicles crowding the roads. Because of my travel fatigue, I decided to travel home by minivan taxi to avoid traffic congestion. A minivan taxi is a shared taxi for passengers with the same destination such as the commercial areas or the bus terminals. Hence, it was relatively faster than a bus and cheaper than a taxicab. Overall, I spent approximately 100 Baht (£2.5) and 5 hours on travelling. In a city in which the average wage was 300 Baht (£7.5) per day, this put a financial constraint on the lives of the economically disadvantaged groups who also had to spend more than half a day in traffic.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I had to calculate what would be the most time-cost-efficient mode of transport for me to take not to miss my appointments with the foundation. I was time-obsessed. However, after I built a rapport with my volunteers, they allowed me to travel with them via their cars. The quality of my life in the city improved vastly. I would take

a bus to their houses and help them with loading their medical supplies and equipment onto their cars. Sometimes, the cats with neutering appointments also travelled with us in the baskets and cried throughout the trip, but I would prefer listening to the cats' loud company than the traffic any day. More important, I started noticing how modes of transport shaped the identity of these caregivers, who performed their activities on the stationary sites, such as temples or houses, and along the way in vehicles while travelling. Some important conversations from techniques of feeding newborn kittens to feuds within the community were talked through more in a car than on-site. The volunteers usually gathered in the public domain where their performances, conversations, and behaviours could be observed by each other, leading them to act with a certain reserve. Mobility characterised my field of animal welfare volunteering. Because of this, multisite ethnography with its emphasis on following the field helps to flesh out these details of the people whose lives are constantly moving.

Nevertheless, the stationary sites were important for building the map of the field site by filling in the gaps of what people did between point locations if they did not travel and how these places connected the people to their perception of animal welfare volunteering. I saw how they perceived and interacted with animals in their houses and in public spaces. Whether it were a stationary or moving site, participant observation remained the significant method to account for these activities.

## **Participant Observation**

Participant observation has been heralded as the passage of time that any fieldworker has to fulfil to be accepted as an anthropologist. Nevertheless, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) observed that participant observation is significantly less fetishized than in the past because of the re-examination of anthropology in the 1980s. Instead of using the method as simply part of

a long-established tradition, the usefulness of participant observation should be justified because of the suitability of its use to the character of research. Participant observation is crucial to my study because it is one of the best tools for exploring human-animal interactions. Because of my research foci on both human and animal participants, the character of participant observation which places balanced importance on both verbal and nonverbal domains of interactions will help capture and incorporate actions of nonhuman animals into my analysis.

Asymmetrical participation between nonanimal and human actors in analyses is a challenging issue for researchers studying human-animal interactions. To not marginalise the animal's voice, some researchers such as Warkentin (2012) chose to observe only nonlinguistic interactions between humans and whales and abandon entirely practices of interviews, arguing that this would mean human speech would likely dominate the analysis. My project needed the interview method to access human understandings of animals. I conducted in-depth interviews with human participants and paid attention to nonverbalised communication through the employment of participant observation. I actively engaged in activities in which humans and stray animals interact with each other and observed communicating methods that they use, for example, verbalisation, paralinguistic features, and kinaesthetic movements.

Interestingly, I observed that trans-species activities in the form of animal caregiving can be hard to notice, especially in a city-ecosystem where human-human interactions were louder and more evident. I once had the pleasure to have a monk walk me through a temple to introduce me to his cats. The monk's temple did not like the animal presence and to keep his cats, the monk had to make his caregiving activities subtle. He cleverly did by placing the cats' litterboxes and food and water bowls behind potted plants or gardens so the cats could use them while temple visitors would not notice unless they watched carefully. Admittedly, I also did not notice this little evidence of the cat's existence until the monk told me where to look. My observation skill needed training to be aware of small and subtle trans-species activities.

Although social anthropologists have been using participant observation in the context of human-human interactions, participant observation may help researchers to transcend the species boundary and gain rich new experiences. As beautifully described in her influential work, Haraway (2008) offered a way to reconnect with the animal. She argued that the nature of humans is already one of interspecies interdependence, and we can get back to this game of response by being curious. For Haraway, curiosity is obligatory to empathise with what the animal thinks, feels, and does and to respond to the animal. This is not that different from what anthropologists have done in human-human interactions. With curiosity, we begin to learn from other people about their culture, and gradually a sense of empathy for them grows in our minds. Participant observation is in many respects the exercise of empathy.

I did not use participant observation to understand the intention of animals, or why they acted the way they did. My argument is that instead of defining the social capabilities of the animals in forming a bond, it is more practical to focus on the observable in the field: action. My argument is that actions do not have to necessarily be intentional or intelligent to be the catalyst of social relations. Hence, what I aimed to account for was observable interactions between humans and animals that fostered trans-species sociality. Participant observation enabled me to collect ethnographic information of trans-species relations that I used to develop my theoretical framework for understanding trans-species communication and the social action of animals in anthropology.

### **Semistructured Interviews**

A semistructured interview delves into the personal thoughts and feelings of interviewees with predetermined but open-ended questions. It featured significantly in my fieldwork as I explored aspects of the lives of the volunteers that shaped their volunteering

careers. There were aspects of life that did not commonly surface in casual conversations, such as political ideology, religious faith, and thoughts about sensitive issues. For example, the CFCF volunteers had different moral perspectives on how donations should be collected. One group of the volunteers wanted to make it mandatory when the foundation offered service to the local communities, whereas another saw that donations should be collected voluntarily. This was a sensitive issue among the volunteers working for the CFCF; they would not speak straightforwardly with each other. They were more comfortable speaking about this issue in a private setting with their identity anonymised. The semistructured interview set a comfortable and confidential environment that allowed volunteers to articulate their perception of self, their relations with the animal welfare community, and more.

I interviewed the volunteers after I successfully established my place in the foundation. Semistructured interviews could be lengthy and ideally should be conducted in a place where the volunteers feel most comfortable. The most ideal location for the interview was when they were alone so they would be more expressive about their relations with people. The interviewees were more relaxed in their personal spaces such as homes or vehicles. Hence, I had to foster rapport with them for them to allow me to enter their home and interview them. Moreover, I thought it would be more effective to observe relationships and casual information in the volunteer's life to develop predetermined questions to uncover their other identity which did not appear in the volunteering setting, such as their understanding of themselves as a working woman or a mother. Notably, the majority of my interviewees were women, which signified the dominance of feminine narratives. I found this analytically significant because it shed light on gender dynamics in the domain of care. My thesis addresses the culture of animal caregiving, and it seemed that the role of women as caregivers extended to this domain, as evidenced by the feminine narrative.

Furthermore, I noticed how participant observation could enhance semistructured interviews. Ree was one of my middle-class informants with whom I had a well-established friendship throughout my fieldwork. Ree invited me to her three houses. One was her residential home with her family. The second was her shop, and the last one served as her warehouse. Ree was a working woman who had a full-time salaried career as well as a small business. When I interviewed Ree, I knew her work life in detail. Hence, I was puzzled when we sat down for a formal interview. I asked her a background question regarding her occupation, and her reply was “housewife”. Ree never demonstrated any behaviours suggesting that she tried to conceal her work activities from me. She even articulated her plan for her business after her retirement.

What happened is that Ree, being an active figure in the animal welfare community, was used to being interviewed by researchers and journalists. During one of the foundation’s sterilisation sessions in a shopping mall, a small group of Thai journalists from a local magazine approached her for an interview. I was in the same room when the interview was conducted, and Ree’s answer to the journalist group’s inquiry into her work life was the same answer she gave to me: “housewife”. Moreover, her answers to other questions asked by the journalists were similar to those for me. Informants highly familiar with giving an interview, such as Ree, tended to develop their script for predictable research questions they often encountered. Moreover, interviewees who are also activists in their field are strategically selective about which aspects of their life can get publicised. This selection of their information shapes the narrative of research in a significant way. In my reading, Ree’s answer about her occupation was not deliberately deceitful. Rather, it was an automatic reply tailored to the structured conversation that she had practiced to the point that it became somewhat a behaviour of spontaneity.

This example elaborates the importance of participant observation in uncovering aspects of the interviewee's life. Although they do not intend to conceal some information from the researcher, they will not think of offering because of the time-constrained nature of a structured interview. If I had approached Ree for an interview without joining her volunteering activities, I would have known her as just a housewife. These methodologies complement each other and give a better-rounded insight into the life of an interviewee as a dynamic agent who adapts to live alongside the world of a researcher.

### **Online Fieldwork**

Communication technologies were an integral part of my fieldwork because of their central feature in the life of my informants. Communication technologies such as smartphones and digital platforms change the way fieldwork is perceived and conducted. Because of their instantaneity and high precision, they have become the means of implementing social arrangements among people and between people and the ethnographer. They featured in my fieldwork in three ways: (a) arranging appointments for interviewing and meeting my informants, (b) accessing their personal life, and (c) my ethnographic writing.

I used electronic exchanges and phone calls to arrange my first entry and to negotiate my way into the field. The process of communicating and connecting with people was immediate; in a way it made me develop an expectation of speedy fieldwork. It meant that I could gather a lot of information within a short amount of time. For example, when I had questions about certain things, I could contact my key informant via the messenger application on Facebook and expect their answers within an hour without having to travel to meet them in person. This speedy virtual world operation was such a stark contrast to the actual world of Krung Thep when I had to travel to meet the informant, which took more time than arranging

a meeting itself. Notably, it created a massive rupture in experience because the virtual arrangement altered my sense of time. I personally favoured the virtual platform that communication technologies offered, and I found that virtual arrangement was good at automatically achieving virtual experiences of my interactions with people in the field.

As well as planning meetings, social activities were conducted in the virtual world such as the volunteers' engaging in online transactions of donations. The enhancement of virtual technologies regarding the charitable life of the caregivers was evident. This made the virtual world a significant field site. To observe the volunteering activities, I had to acquire a technological device and permission to access the informant's online personality and platform. The latter could be acquired after building rapport with them as I discussed in the previous sections. After I was accepted as a regular volunteer, the volunteers shared with me not only their home address but also their virtual home address of the platforms on which they participated. To participate in online platforms, participants had to create their online profiles. It was like creating an online identity resembling the real person, and the platform was a community. This sometimes gave me an emotional dissonance about my informants because there was something slightly different in their expressions when they were online from in the actual world. Although networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter provide platforms for people to connect to their groups, their differences in design govern different ways in which people can express their ideas and emotions and how they form online identities. For example, Twitter imposed a count limitation on its users which influenced how online communication was conducted (Boot et al., 2019). From my experience of using Twitter and Facebook, I noticed that people on the two platforms developed different cultures of online communication in which Facebook was perceived to be a platform to connect with families and colleagues who knew the user in real life, whereas Twitter users engaged in anonymity. I did not discover my informants' Twitter use, but they had Facebook to connect with their fellow animal caregivers,

and it encouraged me to understand them through their online identity. The volunteers acted on Facebook as they acted in the real world, and they were reserved about sharing their virtual addresses with other people. Facebook allowed people to change their accounts with pseudonyms. It meant people in their social circle would know it was them, but the outsiders could not find them using search engines unless they gave their names. This semi-anonymity was like an entry to the online field, which I had to earn through rapport. To receive this invitation to enter their personal online world was also a milestone of trust.

I used my account to contact them, and this led to the process of post fieldwork ethnography. I was physically in the field for 1 year to collect field experiences, but I continued to observe and engage with them in the virtual world after I left the physical field. I still talked to them and drew some information from the virtual platform to use for my thesis.

This became an ethical issue. Scholars who conducted online research noted about this issue of informed consent the dilemma in which researchers have to decide if they need informed consent to collect information from public-type forums (Mknono, 2012). However, the boundary between public and private online forums is blurry. For example, Facebook had three levels of privacy: (a) a public option that could be seen by anyone with a Facebook account, (b) a friend option with which the user could select the number of people who could view their information to those in the category of “friends”, and (c) the me option when the user was the only one who could view their information. As I was my participants’ Facebook friend, I could access their information after I left the field. Some of my participants even posted their intimate and personal content on Facebook’s public option. This information was in a public space from which I could collect without a requirement for informed consent (Mknono, 2012). Yet I still felt concerned as to whether my post fieldwork online information collecting could be considered soliciting information because it was highly personal and

sensitive information, and the volunteers were not informed that I still could draw information from their digital platform.

There are also challenges regarding the use of ethnographic information gained from the online space. Intimate, self-reflecting, and personal thoughts that rarely make an appearance in face-to-face interactions or daily conversations can be found in electronic messages written by the informants. The virtual platforms capture the emotions of a composer at the moment and then record and store it in a digital archive where it can be accessed from anywhere by almost everyone. However, this type of information is not arranged in a clear and organised order; it is fragmented and scattered on different platforms. In this sense, online data can be very useful for ethnographic research, but it might also be fruitful to invest in finding online archaeological tools to excavate the data properly as the boundary between the actual and the virtual worlds has become complicated.

Anthropological methodologies and writing are shaped by the field. My field is that of animal caregiving, which is located in both the actual and the virtual worlds. The virtual world discloses the possibility of collecting ethnographic experiences after fieldwork because it can be accessed elsewhere. My access to the volunteers' virtual platforms enabled me to keep observing their volunteering activities. Even though social media is a public platform where personal information can be accessed by the members of the community, it raises an ethical concern about consent. There must be a clear boundary between the consent to access the information and the consent to use the information. In my case, I used ethnographic information collected after fieldwork primarily for drawing the virtual landscape of animal care. I asked the volunteer's permission before using their information post fieldwork. The method uncovers that the world where trans-species relationships lived is both in the physical plane and in virtual reality and that their activities in the virtual world shaped how care work was done. It is

important that fieldwork keeps up with people whose lives move between the actual and virtual conjunctions.

## Part II: Animal Caregiving as an Expression of Morality

### Chapter 3: Finding the Cats

In this chapter, I deliberate about cats in Thailand. I trace the history of how the domestic species of small felines, *Felis catus*, originated in North Africa and has carved a place for itself in the area of mainland Southeast Asia that would become known as Thailand. I consider how its existence has prevailed and successfully been ingrained into Thai people's symbolic systems, rituals, cultural phenomena, and social relations. Although my thesis focuses on contemporary human-cat relationships, trans-species cohabitation is a continuous process. This calls for a historical perspective to gauge the depth of its impacts on culture.

To give a sense of how cats became a significant element in the life of Thai people, I will explore and examine changes in the status of the cat throughout the periods of Thai society. I will discuss the Thai classification of cats and how the good and bad characters of cats, and implicitly humans, display the Thai perception of social life found in its rice cultivation and how the ideal and taboo of human-cat relationships are stratified in terms of class. In the transitional stages of Thailand, from an agrarian to an industrial society, cat-keeping has been divided into two branches: traditional outdoor and modern indoor cat-keeping. These two forms of cat-keeping not only shape how contemporary human-cat relationships are forged but also impact the city ecosystem as a whole. For example, Thai people have practiced outdoor cat-keeping, which lets the animal roam around the community and, to an extent, normalises animal negligence as it could find food and shelter from other households or monasteries. This has created an environment in which human-cat interactions occur commonly, disregarding the public-domestic boundary of modern society.

Tracking down the distribution of domestic cats in Thailand is difficult as the archaeological and historical evidence relating to the animal is scarce. The oldest records of cats found in Thailand are Tamra Maew (the Treatise on Cats; ตำราแมว), the poem books

about cat classification written by several authors during the 19th century. All editions of these cat-poem books claim to originate from an original manuscript dating back to the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1351–1761 AD). However, researchers have not discovered this Ayutthaya text or older records preceding the period of this ancient kingdom. This means the larger part of the history of cats in Thailand is still shrouded in mystery. What underlines the difficulty of building the timeline of the distribution of cats is the shortage of zooarchaeological research into domestic animals in Thailand (A. Wattanapituksakul, personal communication, December 10, 2018). Because this field is fairly young in the Thai archaeological community, it hinders the advancement of our understanding of cats and other pet species. For instance, dogs, being the oldest domesticated animals, are arguably the most prominent figures in studies of the commensal processes between animals and humans, but they also receive just slightly more attention in the Thai zooarchaeological community. One of the few studies focusing on dogs is Higham’s historical linguistic research into rice cultivation in Southeast Asia in which dogs featured in the society’s transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture (Higham, 1984; Higham et al., 1980). In 2012, archaeologists also excavated the 3,000-year-old remains of an aged dog, nicknamed “archaic gold” (*thong boran*; ทองโบราณ), in a Ban Chiang prehistoric, village which is a significant archaeological Metal-Age site in north-eastern Thailand. Although the connection between this ancient dog and modern canines in Thailand remains unknown because of the limit in genetic and anatomical research, archaeologists speculated that prehistoric dogs in Thailand likely came from China (Kijngam, 2009). Considering the influence of Chinese and Indian cultures on the pre-modern societies in Southeast Asia, the speculation of domestic animals’ migrating to Southeast Asia from China or India is likely. Because the ancient evidence is few and far between at my time of writing, I speculate the timeline of the distribution of cats in Thailand from the concrete sources of migrations of and socio-economic exchanges between groups of people who could bring cats to ancient Thailand.

Our timeline started when the species of domesticated cats emerged in northern Africa around 9,000 years ago. This small-size feline that preyed upon rodents was favoured by the early agrarian societies. In ancient Egypt, cats were sacrificial animals associated with the deities of fertility. The Egyptian practice of cat-keeping had spread to Hellenistic Greece, where cats also established themselves as pet animals. During the expansion period, the Roman Empire, which inherited cats from the cultural exchange with the Greeks, helped distribute cats around the globe through trade and travel. Around 200 BCE, the flourishing overseas and inland trade routes between the Mediterranean metropolises and kingdoms in the Far East enabled cats to travel to India and China. These commercial relations between the Roman Empire and the East continued until 500 AD. For example, during the Augustus era, Rome's voyage of 120 vessels journeyed across the Indian Ocean "to obtain spices, silks, precious stones, exotic animals and other products from South and Southeast Asia". (Engels, 1999. p. 136). Interestingly, the profile of local coinage found around the area of ancient ports in Khlong Thom Peninsular Thailand, had both Indianite inscriptions and Greco-Roman designs, indicating its intentions to imitate Roman imperial coins to use in trade transactions. This signified Khlong Thom's role as a hub of maritime trade across the Gulf of Thailand to India, then, to the Roman Empire in the first century BCE (Borell, 2017). Perhaps, a long time ago, some bold ship cats might have disembarked in these tropical ports along the maritime trade route before settling in a foreign land that would become modern-day Thailand. Trying not to get carried away with wishful thinking, I find the more plausible scenarios might be that the cat population in today's Thailand descended from those that migrated alongside peoples from China or India to the ancient chiefdoms of Thailand.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact period when cats were first introduced in Southeast Asia. There is strong archaeological evidence of Indic and Chinese influences in this region dating from the 7th–10th centuries. So, if the migration of cats followed that of people, they

could have arrived in Thailand during this period at the latest. Around 700 AD, on the western parts of Chao Phraya River, emerged an Indian culture called Mon Dvaravati that practiced Theravada Buddhism and whose arts and sculptures revealed a resemblance to those of Sri Lanka and the Gupta Empire of India. Close to the 10th century, there was already a strong establishment of the cultural exchanges between India and the indigenous peoples in Central Thailand, where the major populations were the Mon, Laos, Khmer, and Chinese. These findings suggest that the chiefdoms to the East of Chao Phraya River were subjected to the Khmer-Hindu influence (Kirsch, 1977). However, one of the significant migrations in the history of ancient Thailand happened in the last years of the Mon Dvaravati period when the Tai ethnic group migrated from the southern region of China in an attempt to avoid the political and cultural pressures from the Chinese kingdom and settled in the Chao Praya Delta. They assimilated with the local people, taking in their cultures both Theravada Buddhism and Khmer-Hindu social affairs to found their own chiefdom. Their society was characterised by ethnic diversity and religious pluralism in which different ethnic groups, such as the Khmer, Lao, Chinese, and Indian, and religious believers like the Animist, Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim could live under their rule. It is reasonable to assume that cats arrived in this region as part of these intercultural exchanges of people and goods. Human settlements are a significant factor in the distribution of cats. Hence, the period of migrations followed by periods of ancient kingdoms in Southeast Asia was a suitable condition for the cat to become a widespread species in this region.

The foundation of the Ayutthaya Kingdom in 1351 registered the Tai, known as Siam by the neighbouring Khmer Empire, as one of the leading political forces of Southeast Asia. This opulent and metropolitan kingdom broke new ground by developing a literary tradition. Although only a few privileged classes, such as monks and royal courtiers, could write and the oral literature was more influential among the illiterate majority, the Ayutthaya period

produced rich literature on historical chronicles, diplomatic and legal affairs, religious manuscripts, and poetry. They were written on two kinds of paper. The paper for religious writing was produced from palm leaves, and secular and legal matters were inscribed on one made from the pulps of trees in the family of *Urticaceae*, called *khoi* (ขี้กบ). They were naturally fragile and required preservation efforts. Therefore, many invaluable records were destroyed when the kingdom was purged by the invasion of the neighbouring Burmese Kingdom in 1767. Fortunately, oral literature preserved some of the knowledge during the following period of warfare. When the literary culture was restored in the new kingdom of Rattanakosin (1782–1932), they were translated back into a written format. Tamra Maew, this chapter's object of interest, is believed to be from the Ayutthaya period that survived to the modern-day in this manner.

There are 16 books of Tamra Maew in the National Library of Thailand; 15 are kept in the collection of ancient manuscripts on zoology and one on astrology. Six are composed in prose form, and the rest are poetry. Although they claim to refer to the older Ayutthaya sources, most of the books were written during the Rattanakosin period. If the descriptions of cat classification in these extant records are historically genuine, it suggests that the status of cats as the valued pet of Siamese people was established as early as in the Ayutthaya period. However, because the books were produced around the 18–20th centuries, the Ayutthaya hypothesis remains as an educated guess. Despite that, the hypothesis is widely endorsed by contemporary Thai society because oral literature compensates for the lack of written evidence. It is regarded as a trusted source of knowledge; stories for which written records are not found are not necessarily untrue.

Local conservationists of Thai cat breeds, such as Preecha, the late conservationist who founded the Thai Cat Conservation Centre (*baan maew thai*; บ้านแมวไทย), believe that cats were treasured by people in ancient Ayutthaya. The Ayutthaya narrative also follows that the

cats fled into the forests before being persuaded by the surviving monks to come back to civilisation when the new city was built. The discoveries of the cat poem-books from the Rattanakosin period gives historical insight into the development of the cat's position in the Siamese society during the 18th century. In any event, their rich descriptions of cats inspire people to bridge the historically missing gap with their imagination, and all serve as a foundation to the Thai culture.

In the next sections, I will describe one of the most recognised cat-poem books and demonstrate how the knowledge of cat classification in the Tamra Maew books reflects key ideas of Thai perception of social life.

### ***Tamra Maew: The Auspicious and Inauspicious Cats***

The Tamra Maew were written by different authors, mostly monks and aristocrats, who passed down the books to their monastic or noble communities. The edition I decided to use for my thesis belonged to the Wat Anongkaram temple composed by Somdej Phra Buddhacharn Buddhasarmahathera, an abbot who lived between 1864 and 1956. He was known as a cat fancier who let his favourite female cat stay with him when he was hospitalised.<sup>5</sup> Somdej Phra Buddhacharn Buddhasarmahathera commissioned a Tamra Maew to be re-inscribed with coloured illustrations. After he died in 1956, his version of Tamra Maew got published and distributed at his funeral. It shows similarities with three other versions in the National Library of Thailand. Thai authors preserved traditional literature through replication, and they would make additions to the poetic verses and illustrations in their own artistic styles. For example, Somdej Phra Maha Samanachao Kromphraya Pavares Variyalongkorn, the Eighth Supreme Patriarch of Thailand (1809–1892), added his verses in the Bihari language

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<sup>5</sup> It is documented that the cat also gave birth to kittens in the hospital.

while making his Tamra Maew, in his words, “I translate from Thai to Bihari to practise my sacramental language and to fix my boredom”.<sup>6</sup> This resulted in a unique alliteration in each edition. The reason I decided to use the Wat Anongkaram edition despite its recent composition is because of its public recognition. Its modern and coloured illustrations have captured the interest of the public more than other older versions. Nonetheless, as I examine the Tamra Maew of Wat Anongkaram, I will include also the other significant interpretations, such as one by Somdej Phra Maha Samanachao Kromphraya Pavares Variyalongkorn.

### Figure 3.1

*Two Versions of Tamra Maew; (Left to Right), Written by Somdej Phra Buddhacharn Buddhasarmahathera, and another by Somdej Phra Maha Samanachao Kromphraya Pavares Variyalongkorn*



Source: Lila Warawutsunthon

The Tamra Maew, written by Somdej Phra Buddhacharn Buddhasarmahathera, consists of three chapters: the classification of cats, the rice-stirring ceremony, and the rain-making ritual. The arrangement of the contents signified the ritual importance of cats on par with rice and rain, the symbols of fertility and sacredness in the Thai agrarian culture. In older versions

<sup>6</sup> Translated from “ข้าแปลภาษาไทยกลับเป็นภาษามคร ก็เพื่อทำความแคล้วคล่องในคาถาพันธ์ หรือว่าเพื่อแก้ความรำคาญ”

of the Tamra Maew, cat classification was also structured in the category of fortune-bringing rituals. Cats were thus desirable and valued pets because of their ritual function in society. One of the cat-poem books believed to be written by a Rattanakosin aristocrat circa 1824–1868, articulated the worth of a cat as much as the length of one Buddhist aeon (*asankya*; อสงไขย), which is about  $10^{140}$  years. To put it simply, the value of a cat was innumerable and invaluable. Nonetheless, not all cats were good. Cats like all animate and inanimate entities in the Thai cosmology symbolised the supernatural force capable of benevolence and malevolence. It depended on the human to distinguish between the good and the bad cats and harness their power for human use.

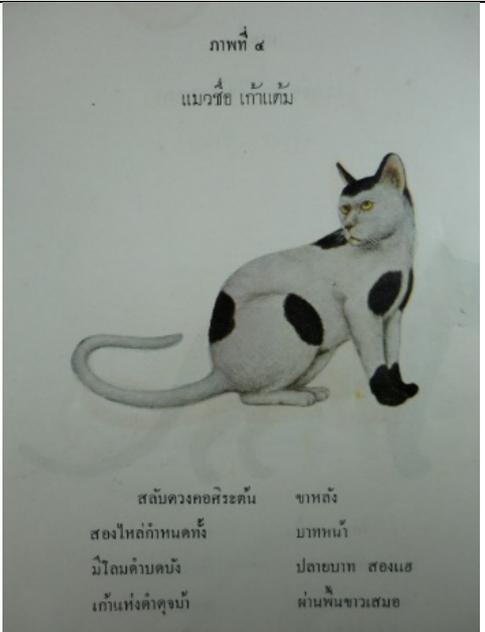
There were 17 good kinds of cats and six bad ones. The book gives detailed descriptions of their physical characteristics, such as coat colouration and conditions (e.g. the roughness of hair) and tail shape. It also paid great attention to cat behaviours and supernatural properties. To briefly summarise the poetic verses of the good cats, they had beautiful physiques with long straight tails; most of their colouring was of the white and black schemes. Cat keepers were encouraged to keep these cats for prosperity, health, fame, and power. The book, however, strongly dissuaded the keeper from raising the inauspicious cats characterised by their disfigurements and aggression, which were against the moral values that made up Thai society.

The next sections contain the verses of the auspicious and inauspicious cats, following by the analysis of this cat classification.

*The 17 Kinds of Auspicious Cats*

The translations of the poetic verses of the good cats is by Ianthe Cormack (n.d.), who was a cat fancier.

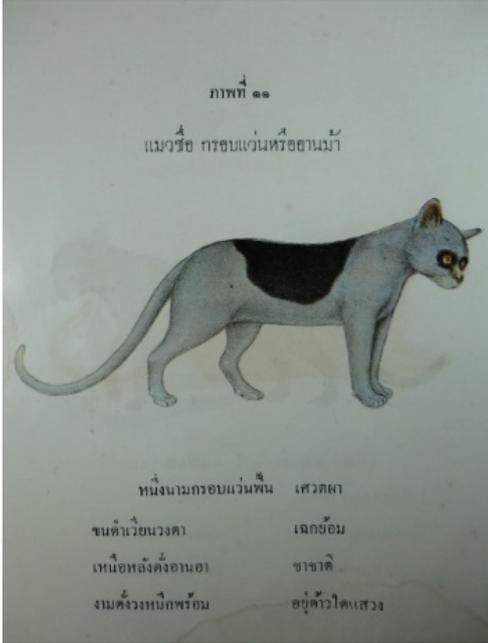
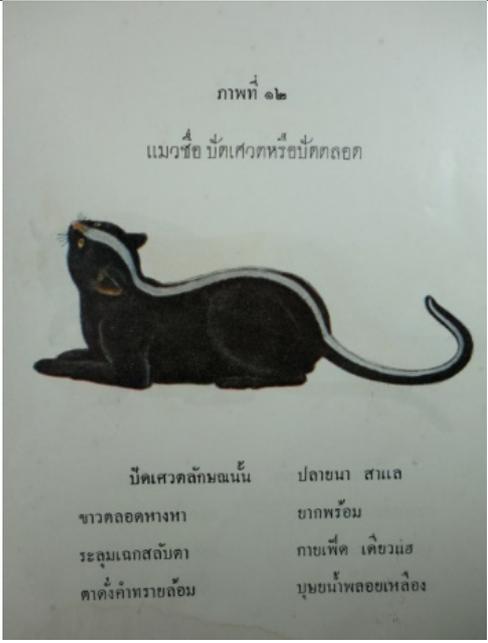
<p>1.</p>	<p>Ninrad (black jet of the jewel)</p> <p>A cat of jet black pedigree has a black body; Teeth, eyes, claws, tongue, all are black Her tail is so long That it will touch her head</p>	
<p>2.</p>	<p>Wilas (beauty)</p> <p>Her neck, stomach, ears and tail Are as white as the cotton flower Her paws are white (and) her eyes are green. Her name is "beautiful" (and) her body is black</p>	

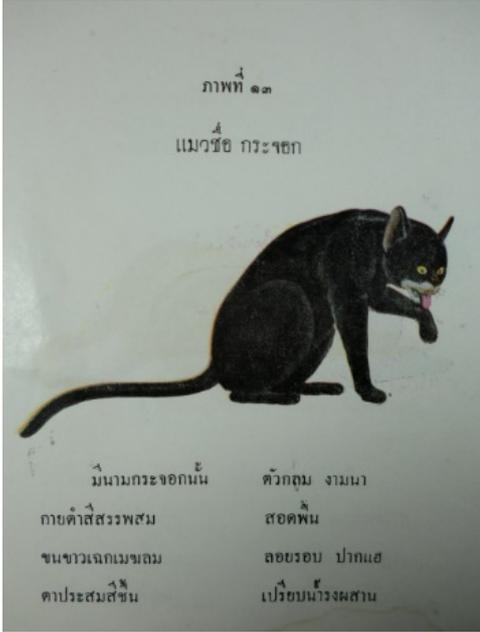
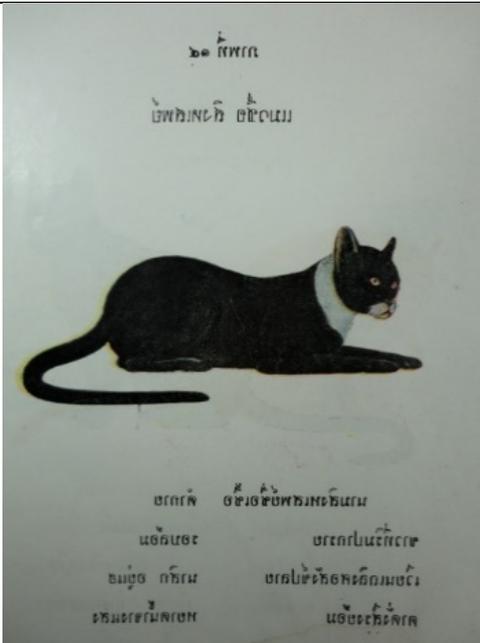
<p>3.</p>	<p>Supalak (Copper)</p> <p>Of magnificent appearance with shape the best, Coloured like copper this cat is beautiful: The light of her eyes is as shining ray She protects you from all danger, saves you from all evil, And brings you happiness</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Gow Them (Nine Marks)</p> <p>She has on her neck, her head (and) her rump a spot Two on the tips of her shoulders two on the front of her thighs: The whole of her front paws must be covered with black: In nine places she must be black the rest of her body An even, sleek white</p>	

<p>5.</p>	<p>Ma-Laid or Dok-Lao (Silver Blue)</p> <p>The cat Ma-Laid is of an even colour: Her coat is as the flower of the pampas grass smooth and orderly: The base of each hair is the colour of a cloud And her eyes are like the dew when dropped on the leaf of the lotus" The cat Ma-Laid has a body colour like "Doklao" The hairs are smooth with roots like clouds and tips like silver The eyes shine like dewdrops on a lotus leaf</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๕ แมวสี มาเลศหรือดอกเกตุ</p> <p>วิธามาเลศหิน      พรหมกอย ขนคิ่งดอกเกตุราช      เวียงร้อย โคนขนนุ่มมอปลาย      ปัดลมเสวศ ตาคิ่งน้ำค้างหยอ      หยคคองสัตว์บง</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Sam-Sart (Blue Roan)</p> <p>All over the body the hairs are paired black with white: The body is slight the shape fluid: The tail is tapered the effect is of great beauty: Her eyes are like the light of the firefly picked out with liquid gold</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๖ แมวสี แซมเสวศ</p> <p>ขนดำแซมเสวศหิน      สรรพางค์ ขนคู่โถมกขบาง      แบบน้อย ทรงระแปงแปงระบส้าง      เวียงรุ่น งามนา ตาคิ่งแสงหิ่งห้อย      แปรงบนเท้าองศา</p>

<p>7.</p>	<p>Ratana-Gam-Phon (Crystal, also wool cloth and flannel)</p> <p>Fittingly named this cat has a coat the colour of a conch shell          She is called Ratane Gamphon.          She is girdled with black around the breast and back          And her eyes are like gold</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>Wichian-Maad (Moon Diamond)</p> <p>The upper part of the mouth, the tail, all four feet, and the ears, These eight places are black          The eyes are reddish-gold in colour          The cat called <i>Wichianmaad</i> has white fur</p>	

<p>9.</p>	<p>Nila-Chak (Jet Circlet)</p> <p>Her name describes her beautiful appearance:  Her coat is black as the crow's wing:  Around her neck she wears a band of purest white.  Great care should be taken of this cat.</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๘ แมวชื่อ นิลจก</p> <p>นิลจกกรอบคอช้อย      ลักษณะ  ท่ายคุงกลบักกา      เทียบแท้  เสวตรอบรัดกักรู      โดยที่  เนาประเทศไค้แม่      ตั้งนควรวถนอม</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Mulila( Golden-Eyed)</p> <p>This cat is called Mulilaa  Her ears are like white embroidery  Her eyes are the colour of the yellow chrysanthemum  And her tail and legs, body and head are all black</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๑๐ แมวชื่อ มุลิลา</p> <p>มุลิลาปรากฏแจ้ง      นามสมาน  ใบสอดสองเสวตปาน      บักถ้วน  สีตาผกานาน      เบญมาส เหลืองนา  หางสุดโถมดำถ้วน      บาทพนกายเศียร</p>

<p>11.</p>	<p>Grob-Wen (Eyeglasses Rim)</p> <p>The cat called Grob-wen has a white coat  The fur around her eyes is black as if it has been dyed  Upon her back she has the appearance of a saddle  It looks beautiful as if encircled in ink</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๑๑  แมวชื่อ กรอบแว่นหรือตาน้ำ</p> <p>หนังนมกรอบแว่นหิน สีวดตา  ขนดำเวียงวงตา      เดกข้อม  เหนือหลังคองานอา      ขาวชาติ  งามคองหนักพร้อม      อยู่ตัวโตเสวง</p>
<p>12.</p>	<p><i>But-Ta-Lon</i> (White Ridge).</p> <p>Butse-weis has white fur  From the end of her nose to the tip of her tail.  This cat is rare.  Her eyes are like gold dust set with topaz.</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๑๒  แมวชื่อ บิตเสวกหรือบิตกลดข</p> <p>บิตเสวกถักมณัน      ปลาขนา สานเล  ขาวกลดขทางหา      ขากพร้อม  ระลุมแกสลับคา      กายเพ็ด เคขวนส  คางค้ำทวยลอม      บุษขนาพลอยเหล่ง</p>

<p>13.</p>	<p><b>Kra-Jork (Cloud Mouth)</b></p> <p>The cat called Kra-jork has a rounded body:  The coat is black:  She has white fur around her mouth: it looks like a floating cloud.  Her eyes are the colour of golden sap</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๑๓  แมวชื่อ กระจอก</p> <p>มนามกระจอกนั้น      ตัวกลม งามมา  กายดำสี่สรวพสม      สอดพัน  ขนขาวเจกเมจลอม      ลอยรอบ ปากแอส  ตาประสมสีซัน      เปรียบนารงพसान</p>
<p>14.</p>	<p><b>Singha-Sep (Lion Eater)</b></p> <p>Singh-hasep has a black coat  With white around the mouth:  White fur encircles his neck and  white on the end of his nose.  His eyes are the colour of gamboge</p>	 <p>๑๔ สิงหน  สิงหนเสป      สิงหน</p> <p>สิงหน      สิงหนเสปสิงหน  แอดนอ      สิงหนในันคิเส  ซมชอ      สิงหนเสปสิงหนเสป  สิงหนเสป      สิงหนเสปสิงหนเสป</p>

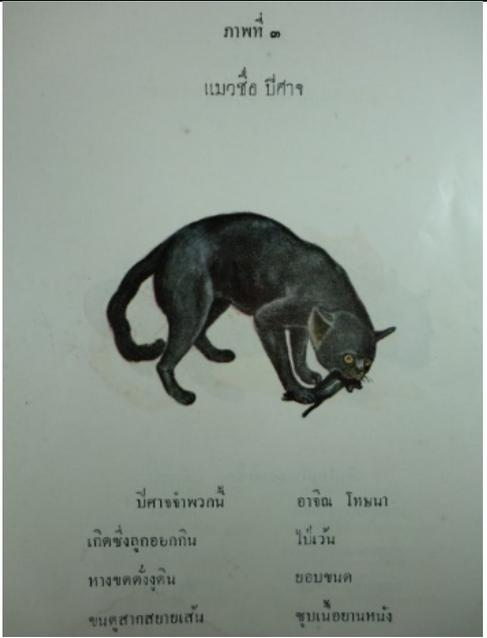
<p>15.</p>	<p>Garn-Waek (White-Nosed)</p> <p>Black-coated is the cat called Garn-waek Her eyes are the colour of bright gold. On her nose is a ridge of white So precise as to have been painted by an artist</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๑๕ แมวชื่อ การเวก</p> <p>มีนมการเวกพิน      ภายดำ ศรตัวถักมณณา      นนะไว้ สองนศรเลื่อมแสงคำ      ค้อมมาศ สันจมูกสีเสวคไซรี      คุจแนบแนบเจียน</p>
<p>16.</p>	<p>Ja-too-Bot (Four Legged)</p> <p>Ja-too-bot has short fur. The hairs of her body are black as thought smeared with ink: Her legs are white. Her eyes are yellow - yellow as the yellowest flower</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๑๖ แมวชื่อ จตุบาท</p> <p>จตุบาทหมดเพ็ดคณ้อม      นนมแสง ไวंना โถมสกถกขแสง      หมักลัย สี่บาทพิศเล่ห์แฝง      ถายเสวค ตาเลื่อมสีเหลืองคล้าย      เช่นแนบคอกโสน</p>

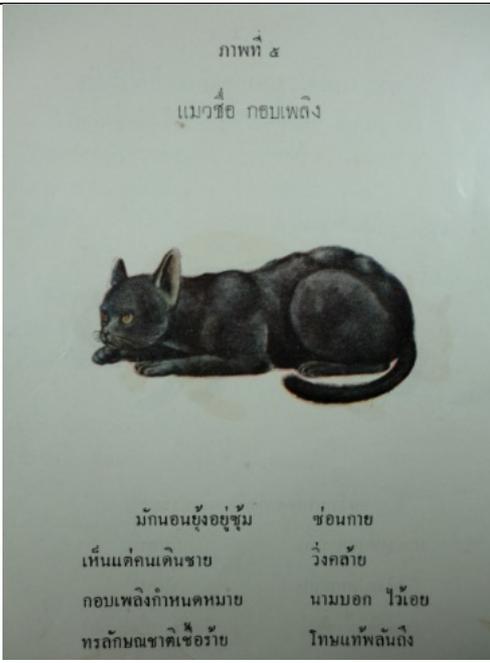
<p>17.</p>	<p><b>Kornya-Ja (Black Lion)</b></p> <p>With fine black fur all over her body from neck, stomach, legs, And eyes the colour of the budding yellow flower This cat is called Kornyajaja. Her mouth and tail are sharply tapered and her legs are as graceful as those of the lion</p>	
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**The 6 Kinds of Inauspicious Cats**

The translations of the poetic verses of the bad cats by Martin Clutterbuck, who was also a cat fancier.

<p>1</p>	<p><b>Tuphalaphet (Weakness)</b></p> <p>A white body, the eyes like chewed betel As if applied with blood Will make off with a fish every night This cat of weakness is trouble and waste</p>	
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<p>2.</p>	<p>Phan Phayak or Lai Seua (Tiger Breed)</p> <p>The tiger breed has a body of tiger stripes  Fur as dipped sald water and rice husks  The eyes and ears like mixed buddling slime  The voice like a ghost shriek, calling the land to destruction</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๒  แมวชื่อ พรพรรณพยัคฆ์หรือลายเสือ</p> <p>มพรรณพยัคฆ์เพศพน ลายเสือ  ขนคั่งซูปควาเกลื้อ มกอบกลอง  สตาไสตแสงเจือ เจิมเปลือก ตมแธ  เสียงคั่งฝึไปร่อง เรยกแควนพงไสต</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Pisaat (Fiend)</p> <p>These fiends bring evil  Gives birth, and eats its kittens with no exception  Kinked tail like a hearth snake, twisted  Rough looking fur, wasted flesh, only skin</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๓  แมวชื่อ ปีสาก</p> <p>ปีสากจำพวกนี้ อาจิต โทษนา  เกิดซิงอุกอกกิน ไ้เว่น  หางซตคั่งงคิน ขอบขนค  ขนคุดสากสยชเส็น ซูปเนือขานพนัง</p>

<p>4.</p>	<p><b>Hin Thot (Bad Stone)</b></p> <p>Cruel bad stone, of these features  Gives birth, and the kittens are dead  from the womb  Its habits appear evil  Dangers corrupt, bad things come to  stay</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๔  แมวชื่อ หินโทษ</p> <p>หินโทษโทษชาติเชื้อ ลักษณะ  เกิดลูกตายออกมา แต่ท้อง  สันดานเพศกายปราว กฏโทษ อยู่แสบ  ภัยพิบัติพาดต้อง สั่งร้ายมาสถาน</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p><b>Korp Phlerng (Fire Raiser)</b></p> <p>He lies in barns and hides in  outhouses  See people avoid it and run away  The Fire Raiser name tells  Its malevolent character, true evil  strikes</p>	 <p>ภาพที่ ๕  แมวชื่อ กอบเพลิง</p> <p>มักนอนขู่อยู่ซุ่ม ซ่อนกาย  เห็นแต่คนเดินชาย วังคล้าย  กอบเพลิงกำหนดหมาย นามบอก ไว้อภัย  ทรลัทภัยชาติเชื้อร้าย โทษแก่พาลันถึง</p>

<p>6.</p>	<p>Nep Satian (Danger)</p> <p>With its evil cutting name, happy at hardship  Marks on its tail show evil  Bizarre forms of five kinds  Do not raise this cat—your house will lose</p>	
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In all versions of Tamra Maew, the classification of cats was based on three criteria: physical characteristics, personality traits, and fulfilment of human desire.

Although Thai preference for cats' coat colours was for the white-black schemes, the criteria of the good and bad cats were not merely based on their coat colouration. The good cats could share the same colour patterns as the bad cats. It was the other physical characteristics that distinguished them from each other. The good cats possessed elegant appearances, such as a fine coat and a long, straight tail. These body parts were compared to gemstones or the majestic beast (i.e. a lion). Meanwhile, the bad cats were characterised with visible deformities such as crooked tails (“Kinked tail like a hearth snake, twisted”) and recurrent miscarriage. Even though Tamra Maew does not elaborate on the physical characteristics of the inauspicious cats as descriptively as it praises the beautiful features of the good cats, it emphasise their unpleasant personality traits. Filial cannibalism, sterility, and anti-social behaviours (fish theft, nightly shrieks, and human avoidance); these are the characters symbolically posing dangers to the society.

Rice agriculture had long been the centre of Thai society. Thailand became an industrial state just in the 20th century. Hence, for hundreds of years, people in this land lived in an agrarian community where the importance of a community was tremendous. Communities distributed resources and welfare to their members, managing the labour to cultivate and harvest rice; providing forms of education, medicine, and entertainment; and creating a hospitable and safe atmosphere for familial and reciprocal bonding. Community temples were the centre of morality in which monks and elder people preserved the traditional knowledge essential for maintaining the social normalcy of their people, such as a rain-making ritual to secure seasonal rain for rice cultivation. The survival of families was tied to the existence of their community. Therefore, behaviours towards collaboration and bonds were ritualised as the characters of virtue and prosperity. Both humans and nonhumans who lived in this community had to have sociability traits. For Thai people, a good cat was not a solitary but a social animal. It was welcome in the human settlement only on the condition that it cohabitated and worked with humans.

In contemporary Thailand, farmers in the northeast still practiced a rain-making ritual from April to June. A cat with grey fur resembling rain clouds would be selected for the ritual and was called “the cat of the rain” (Thai PBS, 2020). It was put in a decorated basket. The ritual performers who would carry the basket had to observe the five Khandas (ขันธุ์ 5) in which they would put five bundles of white flowers, five candles, and five bundles of two incense sticks in a bowl. After that, one of the ritual performers would light another nine incense sticks to invite the angels, say prayers to make blessed water, and sprinkle it on the cat three times. The cat would be carried around the village for villagers to sprinkle water at it to make rainfall while the ritual participants would visit houses, play musical instruments, dance, and sing. Some of the folk songs tested the strength of the community in which the performers would sing asking for rice wine (*sato*; ส้าโท) when visiting houses. If denied, they would sing

about the misfortune that would befall the stingy household, such as the performers would haunt this household when they died, or they would reincarnate as squirrels to ruin the family's orchards, as rats to destroy their tools, or as children to pester for milk. This signified the strong association between cats, fortune, and community life. Living in the community, people had to be involved with communal affairs and be generous to their fellow villagers.

Cats also symbolised a good home. They were part of the marriage ritual in which the newlyweds would be gifted with an old tomcat (*maew crown*; แมวครว). This kind of old cat was known to always stay at home, symbolised domesticity. The family would have a firm settlement, and the husband would always return home. This ritual of housewarming was shared by both commoners and the royal family. In the ceremony of the assumption of the residence, conducted after the coronation, the king and the queen would travel to the bed chamber, accompanied by 16 young noble ladies bearing 16 auspicious relics; one is a cat fitting the description in Tamra Maew (Pokmontri, 2004).

Both the rain-making and housewarming rituals are grounded on the agrarian belief that associates cats with rain and coolness (*rom yen*; ร่มเย็น). In several cultures, cats were thought to be able to detect changes in atmospheric pressure, such as thunderstorms. Thai farmers in the past might have similar observations that after the cat sought shelter in their house, rain followed shortly, and created a rainmaking ritual around the animal. Thailand has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons. Rain keeps paddy fields fertile and cools down the land and people in the heat of the blazing sunlight. Thai households dislike hot weather, as evidenced by their stilted houses with many open spaces and sheds to welcome the cool breeze. Coolness symbolises the Thai's idea of a good home in the same way warmth from the hearth is epitomised in the northern hemisphere. Cats were seen as cool animals. Rain followed the animal's visit, bringing life and coolness to the community.

Besides its ritual function, the cat also had pragmatic duties which were to be affectionate, obedient, and dutiful. Thad Parian, who served as a civil officer at the ministry of education during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1853-1910), wrote a proverbial poem (*klon dok soi*; กลอนดอกสร้อย) about the cat's duties for children, which has been taught to elementary school students from 1976 to the present day as a recitation lesson. The poem goes as:

O the cat is mewling  
Its body swiftly moving  
It comes for cuddles as called  
And watches out for mice  
Its affectionate gratitude is known by all  
Thus, we shall well memorise.<sup>7</sup>

แมวเอ๋ยแมวเหมียว  
รูปร่างประเปรียวเป็นนักหนา  
ร้องเรียกเหมียวเหมียวเดี๋ยวก็มา  
เคล้าแข้งเคล้าขาน่าเอ็นดู  
รู้จักเอารักเข้าต่อตั้ง  
คำคำข้านั่งระวังหนู  
ควรนับว่ามั่นคงบุญ พอดูอย่างไรใส่ใจเอ๋ย

(Department of Academic Affairs, Ministry of Education, 1995)

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<sup>7</sup> A humble translation by me.

A cat that was ill-tuned to the rhythm of community life was excommunicated because its being manifested taboos against the community. Filial cannibalism and sterility were good examples of the antisocial traits that unsettled the moral cores of the Thai agricultural community. Motherhood and fertility were regarded as the fundamental forms of production and socialisation. If they went wrong, understandably, the community perceived them as bad omens. Notably, other characteristics of bad cats were feral and untameable behaviours, such as thievery, aggression, and human avoidance, which had a strong association with the wilderness. Interestingly, Thais also classified orange tabby cats in this inauspicious category because they resembled the big cats of the forest, or tigers. Meanwhile, lions were associated with good fortune and majesty. Hence, two auspicious kinds of cats were described with the lion's qualities. The difference in perception of the two species of big cats stemmed from the fact that lions were a foreign breed and thought to be a mythic beast. Tigers, however, are an indigenous species living in Thai rainforests, and their encounters with villagers were portrayed with fear. Agricultural communities had a strong recollection of the danger of nature, including untameable creatures residing in its realm. The classification of cats strengthened the boundary between culture and nature to caution the people that their orderly pattern of community life could be disturbed by the cross-boundary interactions whether it was in terms of species or class.

The association between cats and auspiciousness was also stratified in terms of class. The classification of cats reproduced a class-based hierarchy in which the social status of a person determined the kind of cats he could or could not keep. Another version of *Tamra Maew*, written in 1838 by Somdej Phra Maha Samanachao Kromphraya Pavares Variyalongkorn, the Eighth Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, showed another method of classifying cats that detailed how keeping a good cat could enhance one's life and the drawbacks of disobeying the societal order by having a bad breed in one's house. In this version, cats were categorised into 26 kinds

of good and 12 kinds of bad breeds. Some characteristics of these cats overlapped with those of the book I already discussed and elaborated human-centric interests. The aspect of wish fulfilment in this classification of cats provides significant insight into how Thai people's perception of the good life was shaped by class. Thai feudalism divided people into five social classes: royal family, nobility, monks, commoners, and slaves. This social structure dictated what economic and social needs that people could or could not want for themselves and how to obtain them properly. Wealth seemed to be the most desirable property among Thai people across classes. All kinds of good cats were believed to make the keeper become a man of wealth, enriching him with living and inanimate properties, such as servants and slaves, wives, livestock, paddy fields, orchards, treasure troves, gemstones, and good businesses. People could move the class ladder by keeping cats appropriate to their social status, such as being promoted from an aristocrat to a noble or from a low-rank monk to a high-rank monk. If people played their role in the social structure, they were entitled to rewards. Interestingly, prosperity and wellness could extend to the keeper's family, relatives, and friends. This also applied to the effects of bad fortune from keeping a bad cat in the community. Benefits for family and community were always part of the keeper's wish package, to share their fortune, and to congratulate their success. Some cats were believed to make the keeper adored by their community. These elaborate on the interconnected social lives in which social acceptance was part of the good life and individual actions bore collective consequences. Moving up the class ladder must be done in accordance with the social structure, which commanded the lower class to respect the higher class and its rules. Disobeying the rule would result in misfortune described in the bad-cat category. People who decided to keep a bad breed against the cat classification's warning could experience being demoted to lower classes, as from the commoner to the servant. With the exception of the royal family, all classes could fall into slave hood.

Below is a description of the 26 good cats and 12 bad cats and their influences on the life of a keeper I translated from the book. These supernatural qualities of the cats informed the relational morality of the human they lived with. Auspiciousness materialised as the good cats, in this context, is a reward of the meritorious deed that the human was entitled to after fulfilling his obligations towards his superiors and inferiors. Fortune, in this context, was rewarded for a person for his obedience to the societal order and its effectiveness encompass not only himself but his family and community. On the contrary, misfortune came to the household that ignored the karmic and societal hierarchy.

No.	Description of the cats	Wish Fulfilment
<b>Good Cats</b>		
1.	A cat with white ears and feet, eyes as yellow as the moon	bestow everything desirable It must be buried when dead, and dig out its stony eyes and bones. If it couldn't be found, make a ritual on the bones and keep it for prosperity. Its keeper will be a man of wealth.
2.	A cat with black eyes, tongue, coat, and claws is a cat of opulence	Its rewards would be treasure troves, slaves, and servants. [Its keeper will] be a man of wealth
3.	A cat with nine marks is a good cat	With benefits as described in the second kind. Its keeper will get valuables all but the land itself.* *Note: the land belonged only to the king which implied that this was the property the other classes couldn't be wanting, and it couldn't be granted
4.	A cat with nine marks is a cat of fortune	It makes its keeper be unassailable from dangers, prosper with businesses and fields.
5.	A cat with nine white spots and a black body is a cat of power	Whoever keeps this cat will be a man of title and honour.
6.	A cat with a slightly red coat is a cat of power and auspice	Whoever clever shall keep this cat for honour, slaves and servants, and gold
7.	A cat with the coat colour of the flower of the pampas grass, crystal eyes	Its keeper will be admired by the people, prosperous and his wishes fulfilled. It shall be buried when it dies as described in the first kind of good cats. It is for a man of great virtue.

	like dewdrops is a cat of might	
8.	A cat with a white body, quicksilver for the colour of its eyes	Whose house it stays, wealth will never diminish. The house owner will be a man of title and contentment.
9.	A black cat with eyes brightly shines, white feet and a long white strip from the tip of its nose to tail	Even its keeper, humble in origin, will become a man of wealth, get slaves and servants, houses and fields. If he is a civil servant, he will become a viceroy.* Note: moving through the class ladder was permitted through following the hierarchy and getting a cat that he was supposed to have.
10.	A cat with marks in its back and shoulders	A proper cat of power and luck
11.	A cat with its back and under tail marked	A proper cat of power and luck
12.	A cat with a mark on its neck	A bringer of wealth
13.	A cat with a mark on its forehead between the eyes is a cat of power and luck	Whoever keeps it will become a powerful man
14.	A cat with a mark on its head is a high-esteem cat	No description needed, as a wise person shall have already known of its benefits.
15.	A cat with marks on its head and back	Its value can be compared to a golden basket
16-17-18	A cat with five marks, one with white body, one with mark from tip of the nose to tail have similar benefits	He will become a man of wealth, get living gifts, get wives, get four-footed and bipedal animals, and many inanimate gifts, get fields, and jewels. His family, too, shall prosper
19.	A cat with four white feet	A cat befit the noble royal families
20.	A cat with a mark on its belly button	For sailor who sail across the sea. His wealth will swell
21.	A cat with a mark on its neck	Its keeper will get treasure troves, and be granted a title.
22.	A cat with a mark on its nose	Whoever is clever shall keep it for a life blessed with properties, such as horses and elephants.
23.	A cat which its back, tail and ears black	Its keeper will become a nobleman, blessed with honour and adoration.
24.	A cat with its hip, shoulders and the tip of its tail black	Its keeper will prosper and become the patron of the poor
25.	A cat with marks on its ears is reserved for a monk	A monk will be granted with followers and will become a reverent teacher.* Note: this is one of a few cats specific for a certain class
26.	A cat with a mark on its chin	Whoever keeps it if he is a servant will become a nobleman. If he shall please the king, he will govern the king's land.

<b>Bad Cats</b>		
27.	A yellow cat with red strips (like a tiger), must not be kept	It would bring chaos and quarrelling. The family would have few children.
28.	A cat who shrieks, has a callous heart, likes to fight and bite	Whoever keeps it is forever doomed with disasters and dangers.
29.	A cat with a body of black hairs pairing with white (grey) must not be kept	It brings distress to its keeper. His adversary would impute, and many disasters would follow
30.	A cat with a spotted tail belongs to an inhuman	Whoever keeps it, dangers follows, fire will devour his house. He will die an untimely death. Release it from the house, do not play with or keep it.
31.	A cat with a crooked (kinked) tail like a pot-rest	This cat brings misfortune of a jaded diamond. Chase it away or promptly release it from the house.
32.	A black cat with white eyes	Whoever keeps it will suffer. Property destroyed, livestock dying, his servants and slaves would leave. Their relatives and friends meet death. He will get sick and die untimely death.
33.	A cat with a mark on its waist, eyes red as the flower from the flame of the forest (palais), hide itself in day light in a granary and runs away from humans	Whoever keeps it will meet disaster. Flame devours his house. Whoever is wise must release it out of his house.
34.	A white cat with red eyes like a rabbit	Whoever keeps it, disputes erupt. Servants and slaves leave. His beloved, such as his mother, will pass away. The keeper will fall into poverty and become a slave himself.
35.	A cat which miscarries is the lowest life of a cat	It will bring notoriety. Whoever is wise shall release it out of his house. Whoever keeps it will meet great dangers
36.	A cat which eats its own offspring is an inauspicious cat	Whoever keeps it, is cursed with misfortune. His wives and children will die. He will be attacked by animals. His slaves and servant will leave the house. Cattle and buffalo will die. He will become gravely ill, or imprisoned.
37.	A cat with its body spotted like a leopard	Whoever keeps it will face countless dangers. Nothing shall prosper. Servants and slaves will leave. He, too, will die.
38.	A cat with its body striped like a tiger	A house where it stays will be struck with lightning. Properties and treasures lost. Contentment and prosperity depleted of his life.

After the abolition of corvée and slavery in 1905, this feudal form of social stratification was discontinued. However, the class-based hierarchy remains influential, adapting into a new export-oriented market economy and governing political dynamics between the elite, middle class, and working class. This might be one of the reasons why Tamra Maew still resonates with cat keepers in contemporary Thailand. The superstition of cats prevails. In the field, I came across several cats named Moneybag (*thung ngoen*; ถุงเงิน). Popular names for cats revolve around the concept of wealth and auspice. People still desire cats for both functional and ritual capabilities; they hunt vermin and beckon good fortune. For example, some caregivers believe that taking care of a cat would increase their chance of winning the lottery. From the desire to own paddy fields and livestock animals to earn money, Thai people still dream of being people of wealth and wish for prosperity to people they care about. The classification of cats demonstrates the continuity of social stratification in Thailand that continues to shape the human-cat relationships.

As a valuable living possession, Tamra Maew instructs that the good cats should be taken care of with compassion, feeding them with fish. When the cat dies, the manuscript suggests a proper burial. Although the funeral ritual is primarily to make the cat become a wish-granting and protection relic, it shows that Thai culture placed great importance on showing compassion to animals both in life and death. Even the bad cats believed to bring bad fortune to the house are not to be harmed. It advises releasing them back into the wild and not playing with them. The idea of killing bad cats is never mentioned in Tamra Maew because of the strong faith in Theravada Buddhism.

### **Monastic Community as a Traditional Institution of Animal Caregiving**

Theravada Buddhism has been influential in Southeast Asia since the 7th century, playing a prominent role in shaping the landscape of trans-species relations in Thailand. It also

created a strong monastic community that has functioned as an institution of animal care, providing care for free-roaming animals in the community long before the establishment of the governmental body in the 19th century. Cats have an interesting relationship with monasteries. They are allowed in the monastic areas where women and other animals are forbidden, such as monk houses and the Tripitaka halls, a repository where the important scriptures are kept, to keep vermin off the sacred texts. Other species of domestic and wild animals (e.g. dogs, pigs, boars, chickens, fowls, cattle, water buffalos, bears, tigers, turtles) can be found in the monastery ground. Monasteries are sanctuaries where animal lives are protected (Harvey, 2000).

However, as Buddhist-based animal sanctuaries, temples struggle to manage clusters of stray animals living in their compounds, mostly unneutered. Temples are the traditional institution to which Thai people turn when they want to dissolve their trans-species relationships. Benevolent actions towards animals generate good merit, which rewards the practitioner, whereas bad merit produces negative impacts both in the present and future life. Thai people find it important to terminate their trans-species relationship in a moral manner that does not endanger animals. Unwanted animals are abandoned in temples because the morality of Buddhist compassion obligates the monasteries to provide basic care for them such as feeding and sheltering. Animals living on the monastery grounds have a chance to be adopted by other charitable Buddhists. In this sense, temples function as an intermediary that distributes animal caregiving work from one household to another. However, temple animals are unneutered and reproduce uncontrollably, resulting in temples that struggle with managing stray populations.

Like all institutions in Thailand, temples are stratified by class. The association with the royal patronage defines their ranks in the monastery hierarchy. This affects their policies regarding animal care. A provincial and low-rank temple tends to have smaller resources to

take care of strays in its compound; the quality of food is poor, and animals live on leftovers and scraps without veterinary care, such as neutering or vaccination against rabies. Meanwhile, a high-ranked monastery may have a financial capacity, but because of its high status, it tends to have a strict policy on stray animals to preserve the sacredness of its domain. For instance, Wat Pho has clusters of stray cats that are well-fed and given medical care by their monks, but because it is a royal monastery that hosts national Buddhist rituals and welcomes royal patrons, the existence of stray cats cannot be recognised. Because of these dilemmas, in 2018, the Secretariat of the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand explicitly prohibited people from abandoning animals in monasteries. However, it has not dissuaded animal abandonment in temples because this practice has long been part of the Thai traditional way of caring for animals. Although Thailand became urbanised, there are no government institutions that can assume the temple's place. Government-run shelters have a bad reputation for inhumane treatment of stray animals that does not align with the Buddhist morality of loving-kindness (*metta*; เมตตา). Therefore, people would rather abandon animals in temples where they have a higher chance of survival.

The monastery is one of the fundamental institutions in the moral system of Thai animal care that perceives caring for animals as a communal responsibility. The best-known form of this concept is Baan-Baan pet-keeping, in which the animal bodies and their mobility are not restricted to the private domain. This creates ambiguity in the ownership of the animal as it allows any caregiver to participate in caring for the animal. Care work for the animal is distributed within the community. This practice of animal care helps trans-species relations to thrive in both rural and urban landscapes. However, in the cities, it increasingly clashes with the morality of modern life that implements a strict distinction between the public and the private. Under this modern morality, trans-species relationships are perceived as a household responsibility and should be kept indoors. The concept of indoor pet-keeping arriving in the

Thai context through globalisation emphasises the importance of managing the animal body and its mobility through veterinary medicine. The cultural exchanges between Thai and Western societies have changed the ecosystem of trans-species relations that used to be dominated by the Baan-Baan tradition in significant ways. This can be seen in the change of Thai perception of cats.

### **Cat Craze: Capitalism and the Monetisation of Pet Cats**

Thailand is a cat-adoring society. Throughout the period, cats have been the object of people's fascination and delight. Thai people are benevolent towards animals in general, but cats occupy quite a special position in the classification of animals. The cosmological order of Thai life is shaped by both Theravada Buddhism and agrarian influence. In this karmic hierarchy, humans hold a higher position than animals. A house is viewed as the sacred domain of humans. This belief is manifested in the architectural design of vernacular Thai houses. The space directly under and around the house is where livestock such as cows, water buffalos, chickens, and pigs are kept, whereas other domestic animals like dogs and cats roam freely to hunt and scavenge on their own. The house is raised on stilts to avoid floods during the wet season and elevates in-house activities from those of the animals which happen on the ground below. The boundary is strictly maintained by the prohibition against animals' entering the human domain. One of the illustrations of this perceived natural order is the 300-year-old mural paintings dating back to the 1800s at Wat Pho monastery in Krung Thep. They depict real and mystical animals surrounding human habitats while most of the beasts stay out of the human domain (see Figure 3.2).

Cats were, perhaps, the only kind of animals the Thai allowed inside of the house during ancient times. The mural paintings at Wat Pho Monastery illustrate cats in various postures

inside Thai stilt houses, such as playing with each other, catching a mouse, and relaxing in the human presence (see Figure.3.3). This also correlated to historical and folkloric accounts that Thai farmers let cats inside their houses for vermin control and because of the superstitious belief in cats as rain and fortune bringers. Although Thais showed high tolerance for cats in their home, the traditional practices of keeping cats never signified a full-time cohabitation under the same roof between people and cats. The cat's body was unowned, and its position was quite ambiguous. Thai people categorised animals into groups in terms of wildness and their use. Cats were neither edible nor sacrificial animals. They were not considered as harmful animals like termites, snakes, rats, or mosquitos, pests to the house and livestock. They had some ritual and pragmatic functions but were not constantly needed, which was why they were roaming freely in the community. Furthermore, cats were not economic animals like livestock until recently, when Western influence brought new ideas, such as veterinary medicine and consumerism, into the Thai context and gave pets economic value in the market economy. Consequently, new economic institutions influenced the morality of animal care to start dividing into two branches, the Buddhist-based outdoor pet-keeping and the modern indoor pet-keeping. I will demonstrate specifically this modern idea of indoor pet-keeping centric around the cat phenomenon called "the cat craze".

**Figure 3.2**

*Mural Paintings at Wat Pho Monastery Depicting Real and Mythical Animals*



Source: Phromwiharn Bumrongthin

**Figure 3.3**

*Mural Paintings at Wat Pho Monastery Depicting Thai Stilt Houses With Cats in the Human Domain*



Source: Lila Warawutsunthon

The cat craze is a phenomenon of cats' gaining popularity among wide demographics that are primarily not their audience demonstrated by an increasing representation on mainstream and alternative media, a new niche market for commodities and service, and new

cat-focused organisations. One example in the Western cat craze is the foundation of a Siamese cat fancier club in Britain in the 19th century. When a British diplomat introduced a pair of Wichianmas cats gifted from King Chulalongkorn to the British fanciers, they won the British contest of cat breeds and became the sensation of the competition. The introduction of the cats led to changes in the history of the cat-fancier organisation in the UK and United States. The pair of Wichianmas changed the Western perception of cat breeding. Because of the Thai practice of selecting sociability traits in cats, mixed and pure breeds of Thai cats have social characteristics, docile and affectionate, that bewildered Western society. Today, Wichianmas cats are known as Siamese, the term popularised by Western breeders. Their genes have been bred into European cat breeds to make them less aggressive, creating new breeds of pet cats (e.g. Ocicat, Himalayan, and Savannah) that fuel the pet-cat economy globally. The cat craze in the 19th century happened in the early stage of globalisation in which the popularity of cats was spread through a few intermediaries, such as associations of fanciers.

Social media technology enhances the spread of cat popularity as the cat-related content to be produced, shared, and consumed at a national and global scale. Through digital technology, new ideas have flowed into Thai society. For example, the popularity of European and American breeds in Thailand is a significant result of this interconnection in which cat fancier organisations in Thailand adopted the American and British model of cat-fancier associations. The alliance between Thai fancier organisations and pet industries makes the market of cat breeds, particularly the foreign and purebred, grow significantly. This popularity of cats influences changes in social arrangements and the perception of people about cats, such as the ideas of pet care and pet ownership. Cat breeds are now monetised, owned, and exchanged.

### ***Infantilisation of Cats and Indoor Pet-Keeping***

The portrait of cats in contemporary Thailand is strongly infantilised. Both domestic and wild animals are increasingly addressed with kinship terms that underline their inferiority in terms of age, such as *nong* (gender-neutral; younger siblings; น้อง) and *luk* (gender-neutral; children; ลูก). They accentuate not only the adorableness of the animal but also its helplessness in the world of humans. Nong and Luk are used interchangeably, although the former is frequently used as a third-person pronoun, such as in a veterinary clinic in which the vet and the owner address the pet as Nong. Similarly, in the context of adult-child relations, Nong is an appropriate word for addressing infants and young children. Evidently, the popularity of the terms is illustrative of Thai society's reconfiguring the cat's position in its cultural landscape. The infantilising process makes the cat gain economic value. Cat caregiving has changed in relation to this perception of infant-like cats. The place where the animal, a perpetually helpless infant, should live is restricted to the domain of a house. The kind of caregiving appropriate to it also has to be constant and caregivers must be with it full-time. This is the reason why indoor pet-keeping is seen by urban animal-loving people as the moral way of caring for cats. Moreover, interventions from professionals are needed to provide care for indoor animals. The infantilisation is also enhanced by the market economy that makes commercial caregiving services and products purchasable. Because these practices in the domain of indoor pet-keeping are paid, it also makes the idea of pet ownership become the focus of this type of animal caregiving because the owner has to pay. Paying, in this sense, is a form of caregiving and an expression of the owner's adoration for the animal whom they love like their own kin. The epitome of this phenomenon is a rise in cattery businesses in Krung Thep. A cattery houses cats commercially in the absence of its owners. This business model underlines the idea that cats need constant and professional care.

### *Nida's Cattery*

One of my informants named Nida had a cattery that could house a maximum of 80 cats. Her cattery was a four-storey townhouse located in a residential suburb in Nonthaburi, an adjacent city to Krung Thep. Every floor was divided into rooms and cubicles for cats to stay; each room or cubicle was equipped with a litterbox, a water bowl, toys, a scratching post, and a cat condo. Nida's cattery divided its housing service into two grades: electric fan-equipped room and air-conditioned room. The air-conditioned ones came with a camera the cat owner could access via an application installed on their phone to remotely turn on the camera and watch their cat whenever they wanted. Food and litterboxes were not included but could be purchased from the cattery. The owner could bring their own if their cats had special needs. For example, one family rented a whole air-conditioned room for their purebred Maine Coon cats (Each cost around 50,000 Baht, or £1,250.), which needed to drink mineral water. The owner could also choose to pay for a daily or monthly service for their cats. Nida's cattery charged a monthly service of 3,000 Baht (£75), which was just a little lower than my en suite accommodation (3,400 Baht, or £85) just 400 Baht (£10). I was surprised that people were willing to pay a monthly rent for their cats, but Nida told me that some of her clients even paid for a year. One astonishing story was about Jasmine, a calico cat who had stayed for years in Nida's cattery paid for by her owner. Jasmine's owner had to travel abroad and decided to rent a room for Jasmine to stay for a year. However, when she returned, Jasmine had already adjusted to life in the cattery, and she was distressed to move back to her owner's house. Because of Jasmine's stress, the owner decided to continue to pay for the cattery to take full-time care of Jasmine, while her owner regularly visited or watched Jasmine from the cattery's camera.

Nida's cattery was a family business managed by Nida and a hired cattery keeper named Noi, with Nida's mother helping during the peak seasons such as holidays. The cattery could earn around 30,000 Baht (£750) per month, which from Nida's perspective was just slightly profitable because she spent a lot of money on improving her cattery and salaries for Noi. Nida and Noi were close. In October 2018, Nida decided to take her family and Noi on a 3-day vacation in northern Thailand. Nida asked me if I wanted to try taking care of her cattery, which I eagerly accepted. At that time, I was working as a volunteer for the CFCF's mobile clinic. I thought I could use a short break from the grime work of blood and excretion and explore the other side of this animal-caregiving world where cats were not in a grotesque, depressingly sick, or aggressive state. Working in a cattery with rich cats could be a relatively relaxing job, provided that I already handled the mobile clinic's work—or so I thought.

First of all, the jobs were detail-demanding. Noi gave me instructions to sweep and clean every floor two times a day and feed and clean the cats' rooms two times a day. There were 46 cats staying in the cattery with me, and they had specific dietary needs and social dynamics that I had to memorise to care for them. Needless to say, the cats did not let me catch my breath.

This also brought back my discussion of cat actions and the human-animal intersubjectivity in which humans and cats alter each other and their shared environment through forms of trans-species communication. In a cattery with 1 human and 46 cats, I felt quite overwhelmed by the volume of their actions, and I had to put in a great amount of effort to keep the cattery from descending to a messier state from the cats' activities. The cats dirtied the floors I had just cleaned with their vomit. They tipped over the litterbox I just changed; they ate messily, and they ran away from their rooms when I opened the doors to clean them. The cats also developed dynamics and relationships with the others. If they were friendly with each other, Noi instructed me to let them out to play together while I cleaned their cubicles or

rooms. However, there was one time that I forgot and let out two cats who hated each other at the same time, resulting in their fighting and bite marks on my hands as I tried to separate them. I thought that I could have time to play and cuddle them if I took care of the cleaning duties quickly, but at the end of the day, I always felt too exhausted and could not wait to go to bed. This commercialised world of animal caregiving not only turned some lucky cats into Luk or Nong but also transformed me into what the Western society referred to as the cat's "staff".

The Western portrait of the human-cat relationship as a staff-master dynamic is adopted by Thai middle-class caregivers who are exposed the most to the Western ideas of indoor pet-keeping. Caregivers are influenced to play a good servant by pampering their cat masters with quality products and medical care. Many professions are paid to service the cats from veterinary clinics to cattery keepers to manufacturers and cat fanciers. This idea and the new market of cat-related commodities reinforce each other. In this sense, the cat craze introduces a new morality of animal care. However, it also introduces ideas that could affect the livelihood of cats. For example, there is a shift in attitude towards black cats in Thailand. Once seen as auspicious, black cats are demonised because of the influence of Western media. This stigma affects the chance of black-coated cats' getting adopted. The cat craze also brings a trend of localism in which Thai cat fanciers try to preserve and advocate for Thai cats both pure and mixed breeds.<sup>8</sup> *Tamra Maew* have been seized as a reference to give Thai people a sense of nationalist pride for being a Thai and keeping a Thai cat. Some fancier organisations host cat-show events for mixed-breed cats, such as black cats, and grey tabby cats (see Figure 3.4). These are common colour-coated cats that contribute significantly to the stray cat population.

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<sup>8</sup> There are only four traditional purebreds from the 23 kinds described in *Tamra Maew* that survive to the modern-day. These breeds are Supalak, Wichian-Maad, Kornya-Ja, and Ma-Laid (today, known as Korat, which is also a name of the city of its origin). Khao Manee (white gem; ขาวมณี), a new white breed discovered in the Rattanakosin kingdom, was also added to this modern list of the auspicious cats.

**Figure 3.4**

*Posters Promoting a Cat Fancier Association’s Cat Contests for Black and Tabby Mixed Breeds (Left to right: “The chonkiest stripped cat in town!”; “Black don’t bleach; did you see me?”)*



Source: Lila Warawutsunthon

Cats have been living alongside Thai people for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, the early history of the distribution of cats in Thailand before the 18th century is still mysterious. We do not know much about cat-human cohabitation during these periods when the animal was first introduced and how it was treated by the people of that time. More research needs to be done to shed archaeological light on how cats have become such a prominent animal figure in Thai culture. However, Tamra Maew, the oldest Thai record of cats, gives us a glimpse of what the relationships between the cats and Thai people looked like a few hundred years ago. Thai society has steadily been a cat-adoring culture. Thai agrarian communities perceived cats as the animal of coolness, bringing fortune and fertility to the land. Despite having no economic value, cats occupied a better cultural position in Thai society than did other domestic and wild animals. Farmers, aristocrats, and monks favoured the animal for its skills in protecting their grains and Buddhist manuscripts from vermin. Cats were also seen as creatures with supernatural influences that could bestow prosperity as well as misfortune upon their keepers.

Compared to the Christian perception of cats as bad omens, Thai people embraced the duality of supernatural powers. Instead of demonizing and banishing from society, they developed a classification of cats and a religious-based practice of care to help humans keep and breed good cats while avoiding the inauspicious ones. This enabled Thai society to enjoy the company of cats in their community and inside the house. The status of cats varies through the periods. With the influence of Western ideas, cats today are strongly infantilised and monetised. They are perceived as pet animals that good owners should keep indoors and care for. However, indoor pet-keeping is not a practice of animal care most Thai people are familiar with, and this creates tension in the urban sphere between the practitioners of the traditional and modern pet-keeping. My thesis will explore this in the next chapters which will introduce the three kinds of caregivers representing these forms of pet-keeping.

## Chapter 4: The Asa

The first group of people I met in my field site, Krung Thep, were the animal welfare volunteers from the CFCF called “Asa”. Generally, *asa* is a Thai term that describes groups of charity-oriented people who volunteer services for their communities. This dissertation focuses on the kind of Asas who rescue, shelter, and find a home for stray cats; they are part of a community of animal-loving people (*gloom-kon-rug-sat*; กลุ่มคนรักสัตว์), which advocates for animal rights and welfare. From June 2018 to May 2019, the Asas of the cat foundation had become my reliable acquaintances and good friends, who invited me to their houses, let me play with their cats, and shared with me their knowledge of cat-keeping as well as insights into urban life in which animals are an integral part. This chapter is about them.

The Asas are characterised by their practices of pet-keeping which take place in the house. Having a house and keeping it in a certain way are the material and symbolic cores of the Asas’ identity as urban pet keepers in which housekeeping and animal caregiving have become indistinguishable. In essence, volunteering activities for stray animals is the extension of their practices of home and pet care outside of the household domain. In the following sections, I will build on the ethnographic description of their pet-keeping and volunteering activities to analyse the emergence of animal welfare Asas in Thai urban spheres in which their form of pet-keeping is part of the rising trend of trans-species relationships’ becoming a collaborative healthcare project.

### Finding Spiritual and Material Consonance

Research into the political economies of South-East Asian countries has noted the contemporaneous emergence of the “middle class” as part of the rise of neoliberal ideology in global politics in the late 1980s (King, 2008). This period marked a significant shift in Thailand

in which Thai society had undergone marked transformations from an agricultural to an industrial economy relying on foreign markets for its economic growth. New infrastructures such as transportation, electric systems, and communications were built. Modern-style houses and office buildings appeared. Metropolitan cities could not be completed without people; however, the economic transition had already released labourers from the traditional agricultural sector to join the workforce in urban cities and towns. In the years since, the rise of middle-class urban-dwelling populations, such as civil servants, business owners, and salary-men has started to show its impact on society. Thailand's economy has greatly depended on the global market and foreign investment and has been shaped by the international politics of the post-WWII and Cold War periods that promoted the political interdependence of neoliberal nations. In this way, Thai urban dwellers have been exposed to Euro-American cultures, and they have gradually developed their own sensitivities and morality that distinguish them from other Thai communities, particularly economically poor and rural dwelling people.

The term "middle class" belongs to the categorisation of individuals based on their economic statuses and that their social, political, and cultural characteristics are constructed from their economic participation. In the politico-economic climate where processes of globalisation have diligently been working to connect nation-states' economies under the same capitalist market, this transcultural implication makes the class-based classification one of the powerful analytical tools for the comparative studies of international economies. Nevertheless, the term carries several conceptual problems, and scholars have experienced the struggles of applying the definition in a non-Western context (e.g. Englehart, 2003; Huges & Woldekidan, 1994; King, 2008). Who is considered as a middle-class person varies from society to society and is ever-changing; there are no intrinsic qualities of the middle class. Furthermore, within the same society, the middle class is not a homogenous group. There are factions of people whose middle-class identities are differently formulated, tailored to their access to material and

social resources, personal motives, interactions between socio-economic groups, and so on. These factors result in a wide spectrum of middle-class agendas and behavioural patterns.

Still, it is impossible to avoid this categorical term of class, especially in a full-fledged capitalist society like Thailand in which the animal caregivers self-identify themselves by class stratification. I strive here to use it carefully with the awareness of its definitional limitations. For the purpose of analytical manageability, class-based classification is used here as a guideline for sorting varying backgrounds of the animal caregivers into fewer categories. The term “middle-class” and its categorical counterpart “working-class” are treated as the referential diving rope as the chapter dives deeper into the formation of their pet-keeping morality.

The middle-class identities of Thai caregivers are largely oriented to the idea of “people who work” (*kon tham ngan*; คนทำงาน). It is commonly used in daily life more than the term “*kon chan klang*” (คนชั้นกลาง), an official translation corresponding to the English definition of the middle class, which appears frequently in academic and political conversations. The former term is a preferred self-identification by several groups of the middle class for its implication of political neutrality.

Throughout Thailand’s bumpy journey to democracy, middle-class power has been seized from both the democratic and the royalist wings to overthrow the government. In the political climate of the post-2006 coup d’etat, Thailand has been gripped by a series of internal class conflicts between the democratic grassroots and the alliance of royalists, military elites, and business magnates (Satitniramai, 2017). The royalist alliance, by controlling the nationalist discourse that paints the electoral system in a negative light, has successfully recruited many groups of the middle class for their side to fight against the democratic processes in the name of patriotism and anti-corruption. This mobilisation was only possible because, historically,

middle-class Thais already have had a complicated relationship with democracy (Albritton & Bureekul, 2001).

In many ways, the Thai middle class enjoys materialist culture and openly admires a high quality of life in developed countries, such as cleanliness, orderliness, and welfare, which are consequences of capitalist developments. At the same time, some neoliberal innovations like democratic governance are seen as something imported and impure. This is greatly influenced by the nationalist discourse that establishes faith in Theravada Buddhism as the foundation of the Thais' national identity. This reproduction of the concept of Karmic hierarchy normalises inequalities as consequences of an individual's past-life misdeeds. For Buddhist Thais, the improvement of their material conditions must reflect their spiritual status. Yet participation in a democratic system is perceived to have the potential to promote discord between spiritual and the material statuses because of its encouragement of cross-class political quarrels. Buddhist concepts are propagated by the wealthier and powerful groups to condition the people's choices and means of improving livelihood to individual efforts rather than structural changes. The middle class's psychological conflict between the spiritual and material prosperity results in political withdrawal. Some groups of the middle class build their life around nonconfrontational activities to cultivate their integration of spiritual and material desires for prosperity, imbuing themselves in professional and charitable careers which emphasise their politically neutral but effectual identity of *Kon Tham Ngan*.

The nonveterinary and veterinary caregivers are part of this middle-class *Kon Tham Ngan* but belong to the different subgroups. These two groups of caregivers demonstrate similarities of interest in social activities and lifestyles, such as going to cinemas, eating out at restaurants, and almsgiving. The barrier of class-based sensitivities is not high for them to communicate and cooperate with each other in the animal welfare community. However, it is the notion of professionalism that classifies them into the different middle-class subgroups.

From self-perception, expressions, and performative manners to the social treatment they receive while providing care in the charitable field, it would be preferable to assume the distinction between nonvet and vet caregivers with each deserving their own chapter of discussion. Here, I discuss the nonvet Asas.

### **Characteristics of the Asas**

One of the features of the animal welfare Asa community is that it consists mainly of women 40–70 years old. The figure seems common as many modern societies have created sociocultural environments that influence women and other marginalised groups to care for families and household animals. Many studies in several societies suggested that women were also likely to donate for a wide variety of charities and to imbue themselves in small-scale, local charitable activities (e.g. Andreoni & Vesterlund, 2001; Piper & Schnepf, 2008; and Ranganathan & Sen 2012). The majority of care work happens in the household domain. And with its idealised association with altruistic motives, such as sympathy or compassion, this type of work is unsalaried. Age is thus a significant contributor to the involvement of individuals in the unpaid care profession. The character of urban life puts great pressure on individuals with financial responsibility. In this sense, young populations in the workforce are less economically motivated to volunteer their labour in this domain of care. Ranganathan & Sen (2012) suggested that the distribution of care work is not a matter of gender but of inequalities in which the societal structure places more responsibilities of care onto marginalised groups such as women and poor people and without a just system of welfare.

Buddhists are the majority of Asa people, mirroring wider Thai society. At the societal level with more than 94.6% of the population believing in Theravada Buddhism. This school of Buddhism has had widespread cultural influences on public life from the governmental body

to individuals' understanding of charitableness. The concept of compassion in Buddhism encompasses showing pity for animals as it is understood that providing care to animals will benefit humans in the present life and beyond. Buddhist teachings of karmic consequences, including the duality of good and bad merit, also have influenced charitable expressions among Thai people. It also establishes a strong culture of charitable giving through a religion-rooted exchange system of goods between benefactors and clients. In turn, this system of charitable transactions contributes to the continuity of volunteering communities that heavily rely on donations.

The Asas I worked with were urban dwellers. Most of them lived in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, which consists of Krung Thep and the five adjacent provinces, but some stayed in other regions such as northeast Thailand. Nonetheless, they all chose to reside in the urbanised zones of the regional provinces. Their educational and occupational profiles, such as salary workers and business owners, further categorised them into the status of the middle class (see Table 1). Their houses and pet-keeping practices were similarly influenced by urbanism. This character of city life and metropolitan landscapes consequently shaped their spatial perception of where pet animals should be kept (i.e. indoors).

**Table 4.1***Demographic Characteristics of Animal Welfare Asas Who Participated in This Study*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Pani	F	67	Buddhist	Lower secondary	Bangkok	Retired business owner
Som	F	64	Buddhist	Lower secondary	Bangkok	Retired business owner
Ree	F	46	Buddhist	Bachelor's	Bangkok	Full-time employee/ business owner
Moon	F	55	Buddhist	N/A	Bangkok	Unemployed
May	F	48	Buddhist	N/A	Korat	Self-employed/business owner
Jinna	F	61	Buddhist	Bachelor's	Bangkok	Retired civil servant
Mina	F	44	Buddhist	Lower secondary	Bangkok	Taxi driver
Toon	F	49	Buddhist	Bachelor's	Bangkok	Full-time employee
Chai	M	32	Buddhist	Bachelor's	Bangkok	Self-employed/business owner
Nara	F	49	Buddhist	Bachelor's	Pathum Thani	Full-time employee
Christine	F	45	Christian	Secondary	Nonthaburi	Dog Catcher

Indoor pet-keeping began to appear in conversations of urban middle-class people from the 2000s onward. It is a particularly visible demonstration of their new model of thinking about the home and pet animals that distinguishes the middle-class Thais from older generations and working-class people.

Today, outdoor pet-keeping can still be seen in many rural and urban areas of Thailand in which households let cats and dogs venture outside of the house without their keepers' supervision. The Asas called this model Baan-Baan, a derogatory term meaning "peasant-like" because it is widely practiced among poorer folks. This form of pet-keeping minimises the keeper's responsibilities for pet animals to just a few, notably sheltering and feeding. The food is normally leftovers rather than an animal-specific diet. Baan-Baan pet-keeping does not restrain the body or mobility of animals. The social and physical activities of unneutered animals, such as hunting, scavenging, mating, and defecation, occur in lands owned by nonkeeper humans. In highly urbanised areas, this traditional kind of pet-keeping has caused trans-species confrontations between urban animals and human dwellers, resulting in animal abandonment and abuse. Even if direct human-inflicted violence could be avoided, the lives of outdoor animals may be shortened by accidents and contagious diseases. The middle-class Asas imagined their city-bound problems through the life of outdoor animals. Indoor pet-keeping is their attempt to rectify the situation.

The mobility of indoor pets is more confined than for their outdoor counterparts. They also have to interact more frequently with humans. Contrary to Baan-Baan pet-keeping, the amount of time and effort demanded from the owner for indoor trans-species cohabitation increases to compensate for territorial losses of the animal. This takes various kinds of biosocial management on animal bodies to adjust the pets' life cycles, which were once independent of human interferences, to be fulfilled in a house. Neutering, vaccinations, and litter training, for instance, are the most important practices for disciplining animals' bodies. Furthermore, for the caregiver who employs these biosocial instruments, the trans-species cohabitation also conditions human bodies and behaviours. I saw the biosocial management on caregivers in the pet-keeping and volunteering activities of the Asas in which their physical mobility, sensory, and emotional perception were altered by their animals' actions.

## **Caring for Animals Is Caring for the Home**

This section describes how houses come to be a central focus of the Asas' volunteering activities. From the perspective of the Asas, animal welfare responsibilities are recognised as a continuous process of rescuing, sheltering, and finding a permanent home for strays. Two third of the activities are conducted in the household domain.

Perhaps one of the most recognisable features that a person would notice on entering an Asa's house would be a large number of cats in the house. The minimum number of cats per house of each Asa is around 20, but that could rise to over 100. This transforms houses into small-scale animal shelters where human families have to cohabit with the many cats that the Asas have rescued. The number of cats per house varies throughout their volunteering life. Life circumstances have a great influence on the number of cats in the Asa's home. For example, a decline in the cat population in houses is expected in houses of Asas aged over 60 as they are concerned over their age and that they might pass away before the cats and leave the burden to their families. Meanwhile, Asas aged under 50 would likely take in new cats despite having told the other Asa how they did not want more responsibilities.

Having this many cats is undeniably impressive, but it is hardly the key characteristic of the Asas. Other animal caregivers shelter even larger numbers of animals in their houses than the Asas. These people are the poor caregivers whom I will discuss in Chapter 5. Here, the point is that Asas are distinguished from the other kind of animal caregivers by their practices that combine household maintenance with pet care.

The Asas' residential preferences were similar to that of urban dwellers. They lived in modern-style townhouses, detached houses, apartments, and housing estates in suburb neighbourhoods. From the outside, their houses did not look any different from other modern-styled buildings; however, the interior space had been renovated in varying degrees to

accommodate the needs of both humans and cats. According to the Asas' narratives, the house of humans and the shelter of animals are one and the same and are called "Baan" (บ้าน; home). To avoid overcrowding and other inconveniences, some of the Asas sheltered cats outside of their houses such as in temples, veterinary clinics, and other public spaces. However, regardless of in-house or out-house sheltering methods, the methodical level of care and attentiveness in their pet-keeping performances was the same. It is these two qualities that differentiate their small-scale homes for animals from the other kinds of shelters.

The shrinkage of urban families encourages the expansion of the Asas' pet-keeping activities outside the household domain. The Asa activities can take place both in the public domain and the non-Asa household. There are Asas who were willing to work at odd hours or travel to peripheral areas if they see their assistance is needed. In this sense, volunteering for animals is just an extension of their indoor pet-keeping that takes place outside.

**Table 4.2**

*Profiles of the Asas' Household Members, Animals in Care, and Animal-Related Expenditures*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Other Family Member (excluding the asa)</b>	<b>Animal in Care</b>	<b>Expenditures for the animal (Baht/per month)</b>	<b>In Pound Sterling<sup>9</sup></b>
<b>Pani</b>	2 (husband, grow-up child)	20	n/a	n/a
<b>Som</b>	3 (husband, 2 grown-up children)	52	n/a	n/a
<b>Ree</b>	4 (mother, husband, younger sister-in-law, teenage daughter)	20	10,000	250
<b>Moon</b>	4 (older brother, older sister-in-law, grand children)	41	8,000-9,000	200-225
<b>May</b>	none (relatives mentioned)	30*	50,000	1,250
<b>Jinna</b>	2 (grown-up children)	30	25,000	625
<b>Mina</b>	2 (father and mother)	14	3,000	75
<b>Toon</b>	3 (mother, younger sister, younger brother)	35	5,000-6,000	125-150
<b>Chai</b>	1 (wife)	30	n/a	n/a
<b>Nara</b>	1 (grown-up daughter)	90*	28,000	700
<b>Christine</b>	2 (husband, teenage son)	25	31,500	775

### *Jinna's House*

Jinna was a retired civil servant aged 61 years who lived in a suburban neighbourhood in Krung Thep. She was a regular participant in the CFCF's adoption program. Because of her 10-year volunteer experience and her seniority, Jinna was respected by younger Asas. Her house was praised as a model of a good house, and Jinna took pride in her housekeeping skills. Her house is a good example to demonstrate how an Asa keeps a house with many cats.

Jinna was born into a Muslim family in south Thailand and received an Islamic education in her formative years. Her parents were faithful believers, but Jinna was uncomfortable with her Islamic upbringing. She said it "put a lot of pressure" on her interview.

<sup>9</sup> 1 GBP = 40 Baht

\*counted the cats staying in their out-of-house shelters

Her conversations with her female friends when they entered adolescence regarding how menstruation could affect their education made Jinna realise her educational goal. Jinna also described how she disliked living in a house with many siblings. Hence, when the family had to temporarily move into their relative's house because of seasonal floods, Jinna, an elementary-grade student at that time, chose to remain with the relative's family to finish her study at a lower-secondary level. After that, Jinna moved to Krung Thep in pursuit of higher education and obtained a bachelor's degree.

Jinna worked in the civil-service sector until her retirement. During the years, she rarely visited her parent's home because of her conversion from Islam to Buddhism. However, a large part of Jinna's life still revolved around Muslim communities. She married a Muslim-Indian Thai and had a daughter and son with him. The two divorced about 10 years previous to my meeting her. The children stayed with their mother. Jinna had Muslim colleagues and subordinates at work who still recognised her former Muslim identity. They warned Jinna about her pork diet and religious conversion and that she would be prohibited from attending her parents' funerals. Jinna countered the well-intentioned colleagues that their consumption of alcohol was way worse than eating pork. She further argued that she had always supported her parents financially as a good daughter, and she would yell at local Imams if they dared to oppose her participation in her parents' funerals. The Imams never took offense at her conversion and invited Jinna to her parents' funerals when they passed away. Jinna's daughter had moved out to stay in a condominium, but her son still stayed with Jinna and her 30 cats.<sup>10</sup>

Jinna lived in a housing estate. Her house was a modern-style, two-storey with a front yard. Other identical houses were built next to hers with concrete fences dividing their properties. The first time I entered her house, some cats came to greet me by rubbing on me in a friendly gesture. Jinna allowed a few of her favourite cats to roam the house freely. If I had

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<sup>10</sup> The highest number of cats that her house could receive was about 45.

not already known Jinna's Asa activities, I could not have guessed that there were about 30 cats living in the house because of Jinna's housekeeping. When she was still employed, her chores began as early as 3 a.m. The schedule changed slightly after her retirement. Currently, she woke up from 3–4 a.m. to take care of the house and the cats.

The house was divided into three sections: downstairs, upstairs, and the front yard. The ground floor had a living room, a restroom, a cat room, a kitchen, and the front yard where she kept some cats in cages. The upstairs was considered the human zone as it had two bedrooms occupied by Jinna and her son. However, cats with severe medical conditions were sometimes allowed to stay upstairs to quarantine them from the healthy adult cats living in the cat room. In the cat room, the cats lived in two-storey cages with most of them staying in pairs or small groups. The cages were equipped with water, dry food, and litterboxes. Jinna reasoned that two-storey cages were humane and safe for keeping cats as they had enough space to exercise their hind legs. Some kittens and disabled cats stayed in their individual cages in the living room and hallways. Jinna kept food supplies and cooking equipment for both humans and cats in the kitchen.

The first thing Jinna did when she visited the cat room in the morning was to change and refill water and dry-food bowls. Meanwhile, she cooked chicken fillets on the gas stove in the kitchen connected to the cat room. Jinna would mash boiled chicken until well-mixed before giving it to the cats along with their normal diet of canned and dry food. Jinna believed her extensive food preparation was necessary for increasing survival for the vulnerable cats such as kittens.

She cleaned litterboxes while the chicken cooked on the stove. The disposal of cat waste should be done as early as possible before it starts to smell. After the two major tasks were finished, Jinna gave medicine to the sick cats. Wet-food bowls were washed and left to dry on the kitchen sink. At 6 a.m., about 3 hours later since her morning chores started, Jinna got ready

for her day. When she was still a civil servant, she would prepare herself for work, ironing clothes for herself and her son. When I was there, Jinna spent most of her time in her house and occasionally travelled by her private car for both personal and volunteering reasons. Food, water, and new litterboxes were prepared for the cats to live by themselves in the house while Jinna and her son were away. In the evening, when she returned home, the same pattern of cleaning and preparing food for the cats repeated again. It was about midnight when Jinna decided to rest.

Generally, the Asas' daily practices are similar to Jinna's. They start off in the morning with the activities that take place in the household domain; feeding and maintaining the house's hygiene are the most prioritised work. The activities usually occur in the morning and the evening times during weekdays because of their full-time occupations. During weekends, Asas would spend time taking thorough care of houses and cats, with the same pattern of feeding and cleaning and additional labour-intensive activities, such as cage cleaning, floor mopping, and car washing.

When it comes to medical treatments, the Asas are attentive and methodical. Traveling to veterinary clinics and hospitals is a common feature of the life of Asas. Before taking in a new cat, Jinna would visit her regular veterinary clinic to get the cat neutered and vaccinated, even though the Asas exhibited impressive accumulations of veterinary skills and knowledge of their own, such as administering vaccination, calculating doses, and caring for animals with disabilities. Although the Asas receive guidance from veterinary surgeons and the Asa community, their mastery in animal caregiving is largely grounded in their experience of caring for the animals. To safeguard their home from contagious diseases and to reduce monthly veterinary bills, the Asas are driven to be observant of animal behaviours and personalities as well as the condition of the house. Does it smell?

## **The Smell of the House Is All About Class**

Many cultures employ olfactory expressions as means of identifying cultural identity and difference (Classen, 1992). The smell in the house signifies managerial failures of Asa shelters. The ideal house of Asas must have no smell. Saying that their house smells is considered by Asas as an insult. Jinna recalled that when a married couple looking for adopting cats visited her home, the wife pinched her nose upon entering her house. It was apparent that the wife disliked the smell of the house. In the end, the couple failed Jinna's expectation for a different reason, but Jinna said she already knew from the start by the wife's reaction that they could not take care of her cats. Another example is the time when I helped out in a cattery run by an Asa. After checking in their cat, the cattery's client asked the cattery's keeper if she cleaned the cattery because it smelled. The keeper told the Asa about the client's comment. Both of them agreed that the house did not smell and treated the comment as the client's finicky nature. The Asa and her keeper tried to confirm their olfactory perception of the cattery by asking my opinion. I carefully answered that I did not smell anything. I had visited this cattery several times throughout my fieldwork and gradually got used to its smell as time passed. The cattery was regularly cleansed twice a day, but the odour persisted. Realistically, the house with no smell does not exist. There was always a feline odour that announces the presence of cats regardless of its potency. However, for the cattery's keeper and the Asa, their olfactory sense perceived it as a background odour, one that was part of the house and did not signal danger. That might be the reason for the Asas' defensive reactions when receiving feedback about the smell of their homes from non-Asa people like visitors and clients. From the Asa's perspective, pungency is associated with harmful or inadequate management often found in the homes of the working class.

Getting rid of feline odour was never part of the Asas' vision of a good home. Rather, they thought of the good home as the house that did not disturb neighbours with its odours. The Asa's sensitivity to smell was grounded in their urban lifestyles in which households live in close proximity (Classen et al., 1994). Extensive hygiene maintenance of bodies and houses becomes essential for keeping good relationships with neighbourhood houses. Bathing animals, for example, emphasised the Asa's olfactory perception that associates odours with poor hygiene and sickness. Outbreaks of contagious diseases, such as common flu or panleukopenia,<sup>11</sup> are unavoidable for caregivers who shelter a large number of cats, but the homes with poor hygiene that constantly get cats sick from preventable illnesses could not avoid being criticised for poor management.

Regarding relations between household members, the majority of the Asas had families of fewer than five members. In some families, household members did not stay in the same house, and they were less involved in the Asas' activities. Household members who stayed with the Asas were either neutral or occasionally supported the Asa with some minor responsibilities because pet-keeping and housekeeping chores in the Asas' houses were inseparable. For example, tidying the house would not be completed until the cat's mess was cleaned. The Asas acknowledged that their families were unlikely to participate or inherit their animal welfare responsibilities. Jinna remarked that if she died, it would be her fellow Asas who looked after her cats. With this type of mind-set, the Asas managed their houses with little to no assistance from household members.

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<sup>11</sup> A highly contagious and virulent disease in cats.

## **Out-House Sheltering and Feeding**

There is also a kind of Asas who shelters animals outside of the house or travels out of their daily commuting routes to take care of cats. This avoids overcrowding and helps those cats whose mental and physical health would be affected by being indoors, such as feral felines. With these limitations, either their household conditions or the cats' well-being, these Asas have to perform pet-keeping activities in the public domain such as marketplaces, temples, alleys, and other places where their street cats choose to live.

### ***A Cat Shelter in a Monastery***

Located by the temple's pond was Nara's shelter. Nara, age 49, was an Asa caregiver who had taken care of stray cats in her neighbourhood temple for a decade. Her house could only shelter 23–30 cats, so she decided to commission a shelter to be built in the temple with the monk's permission. It was a two-storey shelter, built from concrete, wood, and closely spaced wires to protect the cats from mosquitos. The shelter had electricity with fluorescent lamps and electric fans installed. There were about 30 cats living in the shelter. The first floor housed the full-grown cats, and the kittens and their mothers occupied the second floor, all neutered and vaccinated. These cats stayed full-time inside of the shelter unless they were sick, and then Nara would bring them back to her house to take care of them.

Caring for the cats in the shelter started by refilling their water bowls with clean water. Nara prepared food in a large bowl for the kittens on the second floor first. Nara strongly disagreed with feeding cats with a rice-based diet because it would cause diarrhoea. She fed them manufactured cat food. Nara mixed Tesco's wet food, which her benefactors donated to her shelter, with better-quality canned food she bought herself. Tesco's wet food had a strong

smell the cats liked, and the canned food had small bites of chicken cubes or shredded tuna the shelter's cats were not familiar with. Nara mixed them together for the best benefit of the cats' health. Nara diligently mashed them until it was well combined.

After they finished feeding the cats, Nara cleaned the shelter, changing litter boxes, sweeping, and scrubbing the floor. The empty food bowls were collected to be washed with dish soap. Nara cleaned the cats' litterboxes every day because if they were soiled, the cats would not use them. She said that cats were clean animals and like humans who needed a clean house, they needed a clean litterbox. Nara spent about 2 hours daily in the shelter. After feeding and cleaning, Nara gave medical care to the sick and young cats. Because the shelter was situated outside, changes in weather could affect the health of the cats with low immunity. During the rainy season, some of the kittens got their skin infected with dermatophytosis or fungal infections. Nara had to spray their skin and give them medicinal eye drops. The shelter cats received Nara's attention to their well-being as much as the cats living in her house.

Pani, age 67, and Som, age 64, were also part of this Asa category who specialised in rescuing stray cats. After completing their morning household activities, the two retired women would offer their assistance to their neighbourhood communities. They would carry fishing nets and humane box traps to capture unneutered cats for sterilisation before releasing them back to their location. The process of taking captured cats to the clinic took half a day. Booking an appointment for free sterilisation from clinics either funded by Bangkok's municipal government or nonprofit charities was difficult. It also required them to get ready to travel to the clinic as early as possible to avoid traffic jams and the veterinary staff's lunch break. If the animals still lived near their houses, Pani and Som would continue to provide food for them. Their dedication and expertise earned them a reputation, which led to more people seeking their advice and services.

These ethnographic observations of the Asas' pet-keeping activities show that being an Asa caregiver entails taking great care of the house, household, and neighbour relations. The Asas actively offer their assistance and advice on indoor pet-keeping to other households, especially those who practice peasant-like pet-keeping. For example, Toon, age 49, an Asa who was unmarried and lived with her mother, 32 cats, and the dogs, frequently visited construction sites in her neighbourhood after work to care for construction workers' dogs by taking them to a veterinary clinic and getting them neutered. She also offered financial and material support to a working-class housekeeper at her workplace. Toon recalled one of her successes in changing the mind of this working-class caregiver who used to feed rice mixed with fish to cats, which resulted in the cats' having diarrhoea. The housekeeper sought Toon's support for medication and travel expenses. Toon decided to correct the caregiver's feeding practice, using several methods of persuasion, including withdrawing her financial support. Toon instructed the caregiver to change the cats' diet to manufactured dry food. When the well-being of the cats improved, it reinforced Toon's moral justification of involving herself in other households. In this case, the patron-client relationship between middle-class and working-class caregivers was used by the former as the instrument to re-organise the latter's household's relations with the cats. The Asas' volunteering activities further underline that both the public-domestic boundary and distinction between individual households is blurry concerning pet-keeping.

The notion of the house as the domain of intimacy and relaxation is expressed in the Asa's pet-keeping. Animals that receive care and nourishment from Asas represent and carry the sentimental and symbolic element of their house, thus always being the Asas' responsibilities. The Asas feel ethically obligated to be part of the animal's new relationship in a new household even if the animal is no longer under their care. This leads to the re-arrangements of non-Asa household relations.

## **Animal Volunteering: The Redefined Distribution of Care Work and Affection**

Adoption is part of indoor pet-keeping ideas that the Asas strongly endorse. Finding a permanent home for stray animals is one of their three responsibilities. Adoption events are held in public domains, so it was one of a few activities I could observe the Asas' participation outside of their houses and the virtual world. The arrival of the internet has enhanced the Asas' volunteering life greatly. As networking, financial transactions, advertising shelters, and conducting adoption processes could be done by themselves on the online platform, face-to-face interactions have become less crucial for running Asa shelters. Nevertheless, an adoption event arranged by charitable organisations is still relevant. Direct interactions provided by the adoption platform were perceived by the Asas to increase the chance for the cats to get a new home.

The CFCF was run by a group of Asas who met in the online space and found their common interest in animal welfare. At the beginning of their volunteer life, these Asas used the online platform to find homes for their rescued cats by posting textual and photographed profiles of the cats. However, they soon noticed that black cats were less likely to get adopted by this method because they were not photogenic. One of the foundation's regular Asas described the unattractiveness of black cats in a photograph: The black cats "look like little Gollums<sup>12</sup> when being photographed". The founder of the charity also noted the limitation of online advertisements and emphasised the importance of face-to-face interactions between cats and adopters. "They could see how friendly and cute [black cats] really are in actions".

The foundation's adoption events were held mainly in shopping malls during weekends. This was only possible because of the increasing popularity in pet-animal industries that influenced shopping malls to reconsider their policies on animal prohibition and to take

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<sup>12</sup> One of the antagonists from *The Lord of the Ring*.

advantage of the purchasing power of middle-class animal keepers. The Asas who registered their cats for adoption would arrive at the opening time of the shopping malls at about 10–11 a.m. and return home before they closed at 10–11 p.m. For over 10 hours Asas would stay at their designated table where they presented their cats in cages. The cats were brought to the shopping mall in large picnic baskets or cat carriers, along with food, toys, and accessories such as scarfs, shirts, and hats, to make them look attractive in the eye of potential middle-class adopters (see Figure 4.1). This kind of venue worked well for Asas as shopping malls were equipped with facilities with parking lots, elevators, and air-conditioned halls, naturally attracting various groups of middle-class mall-goers.

**Figure 4.1**

*Cats Available for Adoption Adorned with Pet Accessories*



Source: CFCF

Not every cat was eligible for adoption. Unfamiliar environments of shopping malls might potentially induce anxieties and aggression in cats. The Asas would carefully select cats from their houses based on their potential to get adopted, such as young age and tame personalities. At the same time, not every interested adopter could adopt their cats.

When engaging with the potential adopter, the Asa would initiate casual conversation to collect information on the adopter's attitude and body language. This informal interaction was the most important part of the interview process. There was no established code of conduct for interviews. The foundation mainly arranged for venues and provided adoption papers for

the parties to sign up if the interview was successful. Interview etiquettes and follow-up protocols were fully in the Asa's control, leading to a variety of adoption criteria among the Asas.

Experienced Asas had a high standard and were likely to be assertive and strict in the interview process. Some of the interview questions were mandatory and appeared in the foundation's adoption form which in itself, was already detailed. It required a wide range of information (e.g. economic and educational backgrounds, social media accounts, household members) including a set of questions on cat keeping to examine the adopter's level of preparedness. Experienced Asas would also ask for information like photographed images of the adopter's house and their history of keeping animals. Each Asa developed their individual adoption criteria tailored to their experience of interacting with adopters. Some Asas strictly rejected applications from teenagers and students because of their financial dependence on their parents. Foreigners and temporary residents were also unlikely to pass the interviews. Some adopters found the interview process intimidating and harsh. There was an incident when an interested adopter left a negative review on the foundation's Facebook Fanpage that their pet-keeping was insulted by an Asa interviewer. When the adopter revealed a commercial brand of cat food they normally fed their cat, the Asa interviewer commented on its low nutritional quality and compared it to feeding the cat "rubbish".

Fundamentally, the interview process is to examine the compatibility between the adopter and the Asa and whether the new keeper could provide a similar or better quality of life for the cat. As the cat's body is an embodiment of the Asa's notion of house, in this symbolic sense, it means that some part of the Asa's house now resides in the new keeper's household. This leads to the redistribution of pet-keeping responsibilities between the Asa and the new keeper. According to the adoption contract, the two caregivers had a 2-year shared ownership of the cat in which the new keeper was obligated to update the Asa on the cat's well-

being. The Asa also had the rights to visit or ask for the cat to be returned if the former failed to fulfil the obligations. Moreover, the Asa would prefer to be part of the cat's new life after the shared-ownership period was over. Some expressed their disappointment when the new keeper ceased to update them with photographed images or videos of their cat. This triadic relationship made up of the cat, the adopter, and the Asa could escalate to tensions between the two caregivers who have different expectations of pet-keeping responsibilities.

My first ethnographic account was from an Asa perspective named Toon. She believed that the good owner must take full responsibility for the pet without relying on their family, which contributed to her reasons for rejecting young people. There was a time when a student responded to her interview question about treating sick cats that they would ask their mother to take it to the vet. In Toon's opinion, this kind of attitude expressed a lack of consideration for household members and the animal. Toon recalled saying, "You came to adopt a cat, not your mother", to the young adopter before rejecting her application.

Another clash of ethical expectations between Toon and another young adopter happened in the stage of shared ownership. Toon described what happened as:

There was a case at Major Rangsit shopping mall with a university kid from a quite wealthy family who runs a cold-storage business. In the adoption paper, the foundation gave details on everything; she broke the contract because she gave the cat to her older brother, and she did not inform us. When I first talked to her, she said her boyfriend and she liked to take the cat to visit her aunt who lives not far from them. They went there frequently and the aunt loved the cat. Then, she had to travel abroad to study the language, and she did not inform us. It had been three months since the adoption, she seemed very displeased, did not speak well to me, [she] said, "the cat from the foundation cannot disappear, cannot die, right?" I said to her, "it is of flesh and blood like you. What do you

think? That thing that ‘cannot disappear, cannot die’ bleeds red right? I was worried. But you weren’t worried”. I did not raise my voice [talking to the owner]. And she said, “I will ask about it”. It turned out the cat died from panleukopenia, but her family treated it well. But truth must be spoken; if the cat dies, it dies. If it disappears, we must search. One life has its worth; when given, you must take good care of it. So, the true story was that the cat died, but it was treated as the best. That was how the story ends.

Toon’s account underlines her expectations of interdependence and transparency between the Asa and the new keeper in which information relating to the cat had to be shared. Their mismatched expectation of obligations towards each other could create discomfort among the non-Asa keepers whose household relations are affected by the adoption.

Kwan was a 28-year-old civil servant whose cat died of cancer. She decided to adopt a cat from an Asa. She searched Facebook accounts of Asas whose cats were available for adoption. She contacted two Asa houses to ask about adopting a cat. The first house wanted Kwan to adopt a pair because the cat she was interested in had a social personality and might be depressed to be alone, which made Kwan decline their offer. She had Facebook exchanges and passed an online interview with the second house. The Asa delivered the cat to Kwan’s hometown. Kwan signed an adoption contract that obligated her to keep the cat indoors and to regularly update the Asa of its well-being.

Kwan remarked that the Asa frequently emphasised her close bond with the cat that now belonged to Kwan. For example, Kwan changed the cat’s name, but the Asa still referred to the cat with its old name. When Kwan sent video clips of the cat to her, the Asa would describe that it looked pitiful living and playing alone, whereas Kwan thought the cat had fun. It adjusted well to the house and was adored by Kwan’s mother. These comments served as a constant reminder of their shared ownership. Kwan also discovered that full-time indoor pet-

keeping worsened her allergies. Her former cat was kept outdoor because of its free-roaming habits. Outdoor pet-keeping minimised Kwan's contact with its hair and made cohabitation possible. The strict contractual obligations restricted the relationship development between Kwan and the new cat. In the end, Kwan decided to return the cat to the Asa. Later, Kwan's household found a stray cat and decided to keep it. The cat lived indoors but was occasionally allowed to wander outside. Kwan was still allergic to cat hair, but she believed this inconvenience could be tolerated as the cat was her full responsibility. Kwan summarised her time of engaging with the Asa as:

Agony. I am not a talkative person, and the adoption process could be quite personal. It is not like paying and taking a product home. It is a trust-building process. Talking like we are the second mother while the Asa is the cat's first mother. Frankly, it is annoying. The old method is the best: just take in a stray.

Although there were indeed stray cats everywhere, the Asas' adoption events still attracted urban, educated people, particularly those who were inexperienced about animal caregiving. The Asas' cats were trained to use litterboxes and eat pet food, medicated, and vaccinated; they were selected by the Asas to be in the adoption programs, which signified that they were qualified to be indoor cats. In a commercialised context where modern keepers purchase products and pet animals from trustworthy brands, the Asas' cats appealed to modern keepers because they knew what to expect compared to stray animals whose personality and behaviours were totally unknown until living together. The trend of trans-species relationships is mirroring other forms of human-human relationships where care responsibilities are liberated from an individual household and are redistributed to the other social institutions. The stronger the emphasis of the human-animal relationship to be kept indoors, the higher the involvement of nonhousehold members is in the relationship. Because this trend is relatively new in Thai

society, my ethnography is able to capture the emotional and moral transitions among the middle-class keepers regarding indoor pet-keeping from the Asas' endorsement to the non-Asa keeper's discomfort. Distribution of animal-care responsibilities has long been carried out in the past in a Baan-Baan practice of pet-keeping. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how Baan-Baan caregivers exercise their freedom in navigating their relationships with the animals and the consequences of the emerging middle-class model of pet-keeping on their households.

## Chapter 5: Shelters by the Poor

In the previous chapter, I established the classification criterion for animal welfare for Asas is that indoor pet-keeping is the fundamental principle of their volunteer morals. The other type of animal caregivers seems the counterpart of the Asas; they are working-class caregivers. The identities of these two kinds of caregivers for stray cats are both distinct from and intertwined with each other to such a degree that a well-rounded picture of the trans-species relationships in urban Thailand can only be acquired by addressing them together. Thus, Chapters 4 and 5 are inseparable. This chapter will provide ethnographic accounts of the poor caregivers from their standpoint, but it will also heavily refer back to the definition of Asa as it is critical for understanding how the poor caregivers differ from and are similar to their middle-class counterparts.

Economic struggles are the common feature of working-class caregivers' lives as well as their relationships with animals that they have rescued and sheltered in their homes. Animal shelters run by these caregivers struggle daily to afford necessities, such as food and medical care for the animals. The working-class caregivers attempt to do miscellaneous and odd jobs to make ends meet. However, their characteristics of old age and low levels of education are disadvantages for living in the urban context. Survival of their shelters has to rely heavily on donations and charitable support from middle-class philanthropists. Furthermore, working-class caregivers face social scrutiny from local communities and authorities that accuse their "peasant-like" pet-keeping as forms of animal abuse and public disturbance. This underlines the transitional trend of trans-species bonds and how they are increasingly being conditioned in the urban context. Despite the constraints surrounding their shelters, the motivation of the working-class caregivers to keep their stray animals had not diminished. Their struggle to not give up on their relationship with the animals had the support from their middle-class

counterparts through charitable giving. This collaboration between the middle class and working class helped trans-species bonds within the low-income households survive in cities.

### **Time-Consuming World of Poor Caregivers**

This section describes the characteristics of the working-class caregivers. Unlike Asa which is a well-established description of animal welfare volunteers and is also recognised by the volunteers themselves, there is no specific term that is collectively agreed on to describe the working-class caregivers.

Individually, the poor caregivers refer to themselves as older aunts (*pha*; ภาริ), a kinship term generally used as a personal pronoun by middle-aged women and older. The Asas also called the poor caregivers, to their face and behind their back, by the same pronoun. This is also because the majority of the poor caregivers I met were female elders. Certainly, there exist male caregivers, but they are few, and, unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to meet one in the field. The lack of a locally specific word to describe their caregiving work for stray animals demonstrates the underdevelopment of the poor caregivers' collective identity. Their time is occupied by daily activities centred on sheltering and providing food for animals which consequently prevents the caregivers from having enough time to assemble like the community of Asas. Hence, the majority of animal welfare charities in Thailand are middle-class-based organisations.

The notion of time is underlined in both the narratives of the Asas and the Phas. These caregivers perceive themselves as busy people. The difference between the two kinds of caregivers in their perception of busyness is that hard work is the Asas' choice; however, for the working-class caregivers, it is their life condition. Busyness, by definition, is a psychological state influenced by self-awareness of an inverse relationship between time and

activity. For example, if a person performs several activities in a short span of time, they might perceive themselves as an incredibly busy person. Busyness also carries moral and emotional implications that differ in terms of class. For the Asas, time is manageable. With the assistance of technological and manufactured commodities, once-laborious household and pet-keeping chores are eased. In the previous chapter, we read the daily routine of Jinna's household where she chose high-quality dry and canned food as a staple diet for her cats. It saved time for her from food preparations every day, but Jinna chose to spend this free time cooking tender chicken to increase the quality of the cats' lives. In this fashion, busyness is demonstrated by the Asas as successful management of animal caregiving in which laborious household activity is transformed into a form of relaxation by the use of commercial products. But time is still an uncontrollable factor in shelters of poor caregivers.

### *Dara's House*

Dara was a 58-year-old caregiver who had spent the whole morning of each day preparing food for hundreds of dogs and cats by hand. Dara used to live in a house near a public alleyway in Northeast Thailand where she had turned the house and a local alleyway into her shelter, housing a hundred dogs and cats (see Figure 5.1). Dara did not live in the house anymore because the new landowner disliked her shelter. They had disputes in the past that made Dara start living in her tricycle truck with her several small dogs. Every night, she would park her truck in a gas station to rest. However, she came to the alleyway to take care of her shelter every day.

Dara had two hired workers and sometimes had a volunteer. Together they would cook rice and chicken carcasses in a large frying pan on a gas stove early in the morning. It took time for rice and chicken of this large quantity to properly cook, and after the food had cooled

off, the workers would use their hands to separate meat scraps from the chicken bones. During the time, Dara cleaned the animals' waste using a hose. The waste flew to the bush on both sides of the alleyway. If an animal died, she would start digging in a nearby bush and bury it. The animals got to feed in the late afternoon. It was the only meal they would get until the next day. Meanwhile, the Asas' animals usually ate two times a day.

### **Figure 5.1**

*Dara's Animal Shelter Built From Wood and Covered With Rain Tarps Occupying a Public Alleyway*



Source: CFCF

The difference in the animals' feeding frequency lies in their caregivers' ability to economise time which is closely related to access to time-saving care resources. The Asas who visited Dara's shelter and witnessed the older caregiver's food preparation believed that a small meat grinder could reduce the workers' workload of scrapping meat from the bone, and their manpower could be used for other things such as cleaning the shelter. However, Dara preferred to work in the way she had been doing for decades. The Asas called her stubborn. Nevertheless, Dara's refusal of the Asas' suggestion showed how impactful material scarcity is in limiting the perception of people's choices. The poor caregivers could not afford household commodities that were a common feature in the life of the middle class and had to do things

from scratch. Furthermore, the impoverished conditions prevented them from familiarizing themselves with time-saving technologies that could facilitate their care work for animals. In the cases of the Asas, their volunteering activities were enhanced by social media platforms for gathering resources from their fellow caregivers. Technological illiteracy is common among poor caregivers, which isolates them from other caregivers of the same socio-economic group and binds them to effortful patterns of daily life activities.

To a degree, the poor caregivers accept their busy life because animals occupy a lower karmic position than they do; being sympathetic towards them is necessary for being a good person. Still, their perception of busyness always carries the sense of emergency. For example, Ludda, aged 59, a caregiver in Krung Thep, summarised her care work as, “I’m not tired. What could I do? I have to do this. If I do not, they will be starving”.

### **Living Alongside the Urban Wildlife**

Houses are not the priority of the poor caregivers in keeping animals. None of the poor caregivers whom I interviewed had ever owned a house. Their residences were either given to them or rented out by their middle-class philanthropists. The type of land in which the poor caregivers are allowed to reside in often is unsuitable for economic developments because of its location, size, or shape. The poor caregivers live a life with no permanent abode and develop a sense of preparedness to relocate their shelters. These are consequences of having no ownership of a house as well as their Baan-Baan pet-keeping, which puts them into conflicts with local communities and authorities.

### *Ludda's Houses*

In her interview, Ludda recalled the four times that she was pressured to relocate her dogs and cats and move out of her houses. Ludda was an unmarried woman whose family and relatives lived in a different province. She came to Krung Thep to work and start caring for stray dogs in her neighbourhood about 30 years ago. The first time that she received a warning from a district's authority not to feed animals on public spaces, Ludda decided to find a new place for herself and the dogs. Fortunately, she got a piece of land in a city adjacent to Krung Thep from a philanthropist. Ludda stayed in this land for a decade before it had to be transferred back to the Thai government to build a college for monks.

Ludda found a new place in a fish-farming village. With the support of her friend, she rented a house in the village. However, sheltering the animals in this village was difficult because of the fish farmers' dislike of her dogs. She told me, "They accused my dogs of jumping into their fish ponds". Subsequently, Ludda's friend stopped providing financial support to her shelter, and she could not keep her second house.

Ludda had to ask other caregivers to shelter her dogs on her behalf while she was finding a new place for the animals and herself for the third time. Ludda eventually found a new house for herself in Krung Thep which an old landlady rented out. This was the house in which Ludda was currently living. She had stayed here for two decades and formed a good relationship with the landlady and her nephew. Ludda took care of the landlady and the landlady's nephew sometimes drove Ludda to an animal clinic or the cat foundation's adoption event to which Ludda took her cats to find new adopters. For the animals, Ludda talked to an abbot of a temple located not far from her current home who was compassionate towards dogs. The abbot allowed Ludda to move her dogs into his temple if she promised to take care of them. Ludda then took care of her dogs as well as the temple's dogs and cats, which people abandon

on the monastery grounds. A group of volunteers and philanthropists helped Ludda build an animal shelter at the temple, and the cat foundation sometimes came to neuter Ludda's animals.

However, the death of the abbot in 2018 affected her shelter drastically. The new abbot saw the presence of animals as disturbing the activities of monks and laypeople and ordered Ludda's animals to be relocated. Ludda looked distraught when she recalled this new abbot's decision. However, this was not the first time that people had disapproved of her caregiving. Ludda seemed to already have a plan, which was to temporarily move the dogs from the temple to shelters of other caregivers within the vicinity of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region before moving to a new home in another province. This was organised by her philanthropists.

Ludda was not the only caregiver whose general and charitable life depended on the assistance of philanthropists. Thida, age 50, was granted permission to stay on a landlocked plot of land in a housing estate; it is surrounded by wasteland and has no access to a public street. Until the landowner could sell it to a buyer, Thida could stay on this land.

The poor caregivers' pet-keeping practices are not centred on caring for the house. Thida lived in an unfurnished house. Ludda never fixed her broken or malfunctioning household facilities such as a leaking water pipeline because the house was not hers. Their detachment from their current residence can also be seen from their reduced concern for the cleanliness of the house and their animals, which is notably different from the Asas, who are methodical about their house conditions. One of the Asa caregivers was upset when seeing the signs of a termite invasion on the house. Thida let animal faeces litter the ground. Her animals could roam freely and do what they wanted within the house and the nature surrounding their land.

The poor caregiver develops a relationship with the surrounding environment in a different manner from the Asas. Their houses are always connected to nature and urban wildlife. The peripheral areas which the poor households occupy are often engulfed by nature.

They are situated close to wastelands, ponds, or groves where nonhuman activities of plants and animals are flourishing. Thus, a human residence that is built close to the realm of nature will experience nature-led activities that can cross the boundary of the house's threshold and flow inside the human's household. Instead of trying to take control of the house, the poor caregivers tend to adjust themselves to the flow of nature. They find urban wildlife tolerable and even empathetic.

### *Manee's House*

Manee and her husband were an elderly couple around 60. They built a house on a wasteland behind a temple. This land was the legal property of the temple, but the previous landowner was Manee's philanthropist and asked the monastery to let Manee's family remain on the land. Manee's house was a Thai stilt house with the ground floor transformed into a shelter for cats. Bushes and trees surrounded her house; Manee made use of available areas to put some cages for cats to stay to avoid overcrowding the house. Her dogs lived outside or on the monastery grounds.

Manee's shelter depended on private patronage from several philanthropists. One of them was a senior member of the foundation who occasionally arranged a neutering session for her cats. When the mobile clinic arrived during the rainy season, Manee's house was flooded (see Figure 5.2). The rainy season caused water from the pond near her house to overflow, which cut the footpath to her house. Manee had to wear waterproof boots while carrying baskets of her cats from the house to the temple where the mobile clinic was set up. A middle-class volunteer and I helped Manee with transporting the cats, but we could not venture deep in the still water because Manee casually informed us that there were leeches lurking. The dogs followed Manee loyally and played in the water. Manee also told the foundation's Asas about

nightly visits of snakes that came to prey upon the cats living outside in the cages, which upset the Asas.

The volunteers discussed Manee's management of her shelter, such as how she let unneutered male and female cats live in the same cage and how she did not attempt to protect the cats from wildlife predators. They planned to donate fishing nets to Manee's shelter so she could make the cages snake-proof. However, the volunteer also planned to take strict measures such as withdrawing their support if Manee did not listen to their advice regarding the cages.

**Figure 5.2**

*Flooded House and Outhouse Shelter of Manee*



Source: Lila Warawutsunthon

The poor caregivers did not alter the living conditions of their homes or restrict animal activities. Occupying a socially peripheral position in the city themselves, they are familiar with the urban nature and invasions of urban wildlife in their homes. Krung Thep is not an orderly city, and in impoverished neighbourhoods, household waste, graffiti, cracked pedestrian walks where plants grow, and stray animals are common. Households of poor caregivers live in accordance with this trans-species cohabitation and all of its dirtiness. They do not discipline the bodies of stray animals as many of their animals are unneutered. In some

ways, their houses are led by the animals as the animal-centric activities transform the house and their human keeper.

As they are busy catering to their animals' basic needs, the state of their houses is not tidy. In their houses, one can always find faeces littering around, along with leftovers, rubbish, and broken and old pieces of furniture. The stench of the animal urine lingers in the air. The bodies of the poor caregivers reek the same smell as their animals' odour which is noticeable to people of a different class such as Asas. Significantly, poor caregivers are self-conscious of their houses and have caution towards outsiders. Because of their encounters with local communities and authorities regarding their shelter management that resulted in feuds, the working-class caregivers developed a strategy to avoid interactions with unsolicited parties.

The presence of unknown animal charities can cause distrust and anxiety among the caregivers of impoverished households. The difference in pet-keeping practices between the middle and working classes can lead to a clash in which working-class caregivers perceive themselves as being misunderstood and bullied. Dara had an experience in which a local charity tried to shut down her shelter and relocate her animals. Ludda also never let volunteers visit her home after an incident in which some animal welfare volunteers visited and recorded her shelter before criticizing her management as a form of animal abuse in an online platform where she could not defend herself because of her digital illiteracy. Because of this encounter, Ludda minimised her time in the house to avoid potential confrontations with outsiders, including her neighbours who accused her of noise and smell disturbances. Ludda finished her household chores and feeding animals at home in the morning and left in the afternoon for the temple where she would stay to feed the strays until dark before returning home to rest.

The caregivers' subtle and discreet manner is their strategy to preserve their bonds with the animals. Because of their socio-economic status, they feel threatened by the community of outsiders which misunderstands their trans-species relationship because this community has

access to legal or social measures which can discontinue their shelters. However, the poor caregivers also engage with a small group of middle-class Asas whom they trust.

### **Patron-Client Relationship**

The poor caregivers maintain client-patron relationships with the Asas. Often, it is the latter who initiate contact with the poor as part of their volunteering morals to improve the livelihood of animals in households with less awareness of animal welfare. Communicative technology features significantly in facilitating interaction between the Asas and the working-class households with poorly managed shelters. Accounts of these shelters with a large number of animals exceeding their care capacity are reported and circulated on the online platforms frequented by the Asa community, such as Facebook. The Asas will gather resources and help the shelters of these poor caregivers.

The poor caregivers call the Asas “Miss/Mrs/Mr” (*khun*; คุณ), which is an honorific to address people of equal or superior status. However, from their interactions, it was apparent that the poor caregivers were aware of their inferior status in the client-patron relationship’s dynamic. The charitable reciprocity between the two kinds of animal carers can lead to a long-term relationship in which the Asa was committed to supporting the poor’s shelter with material and financial donations as well as to arrange other kinds of service for the shelter, such as the animals’ medical care and legal proceedings. For example, in Dara’s case, her prolonged dispute with the local community and authorities over her shelter’s occupying a public alleyway and the stench of her shelter forced her to relocate. The Asas handled the processes of construction and legal registration of a new shelter for Dara. Besides the verbal expression, the poor caregivers would press their palms together and slightly bow their heads to show their

gratefulness for the Asa's generosity; this gesture is called Wai greeting (wai; ไหว้), which the inferior initiates (see Figure 5.3).

**Figure 5.3**

*Poor Caregiver Shows Gratitude in Form of Wai After Receiving Donations*



Source: CFCF

The Thai language is stratified in a term of age hierarchy. Thai speakers are conscious of the age difference between themselves and the addressee and must decide on appropriate kinship terms when engaging in a conversation or a relationship. Thai kinship terms are used to address both people with and without blood relations. I observe that this kind of kinship honorific helps to preserve the society's hierarchical structure between the superior and the inferior by psychologically disguising it as the kin-like proximity between elder kin and the young kin which the younger/inferior feels emotionally inclined to be grateful for the elder/superior while the latter is also motivated to be charitable towards the former.

Middle-class patronage is beneficial to the poor caregivers and the livelihood of their animals. There was an improvement in her cats' health after Ludda joined the middle-class foundation. Ludda was the only working-class caregiver who participated in the CFCF's adoption program. She brought cats from her shelters to find them a home. The Asas remarked that in the earlier days when she brought her cats, the animals' condition was poor; they were sick and not appealing to middle-class adopters. However, currently, Ludda's cats looked closer to the Asas' cats. Ludda also gained support and protection from the foundation. When her shelter was slandered on social media platforms, the foundation's Asas spoke up on her behalf. The middle-class Asas also taught Ludda how to manage her social media account to gain public sympathy and donations. The motivation of the Asas to help the shelters of the poor is founded on the notion of pity (*songsan*; สงสาร), which is an emotion grounded in the Buddhist idea of loving-kindness (*metta*; เมตตา), which is projected in the forms of their care philanthropy. Although the Asa caregivers disapprove of how the working-class shelters are managed, they still decided to support these poor caregivers to keep the animals rather than be on the side of the wider middle-class community which desires to prohibit the poor from sheltering animals. Despite seeing the poor's Baan-Baan pet-keeping to be below standard, the Asa has an empathic understanding of the genuineness of the trans-species bonds between the

poor and their animals. One of the Asas referred to this type of trans-species bonds as “a dwarf carrying a hunchback”, a Thai proverb which has a similar meaning to an English proverb, “drown not thyself to save a drowning man”. In this context, the Asa meant that the poor are not in a position to help the animals and helping each other would not improve their livelihoods and even worsen their situation. However, the Asa still admire the poor caregiver’s endeavour to care for the animal. These two kinds of caregivers both live in a context in which stray animals are part of their social life. Being situated closely with animals, both spatially and socially, it is impossible for the caregivers to dismiss the struggle of stray animals trying to live in the city. Hence, the Asa develops a sense of moral obligation towards the poor and their animals in which they must be supportive these economically disadvantaged people so they can keep and live with their animals in this city ecosystem.

### **Houses as Trans-Species Spaces and Commercial Care**

Before moving on to the next chapter about the vet caregivers whose care work takes place in a clinical setting, I wish to summarise the theme of keeping trans-species relationships in a domestic setting in Chapters 4 and 5. In the city ecosystem, commercial animal care has increasingly been involved in the urban caregivers’ caregiving effort to cohabit with their animals. Manufactured products are used for keeping trans-species relationships in a house. To return to my discussion about caregiving as a means of trans-species communication, a house is a trans-species space where its conditions, such as cleanliness, reflected the interactions between humans and animals through caregiving. Commercial products play a significant role in shaping the dynamics between humans and animals within the household. In the middle-class house, Asa caregivers successfully kept their house in their preferred state of cleanliness by using commercial animal care to restrict animal bodies and their actions. Meanwhile, the

house of poor caregivers was overwhelmed by animal actions. They allowed both cats and wildlife around the house to move and act within the household. Their material struggles prevented them from acquiring commercial care, so that unrestrained animal activities overflowed from their house.

Houses characterise the varying degrees of involvement of commercial animal care at home. If it is highly used, the trans-species relationship is seen as less problematic by society. If it is not used enough, such as in the cases of the working-class, society sees disturbances. A relationship between the middle-class and the working-class then was forged through charitable giving to transfer commercial care resources from the wealthier group to the poorer to safeguard the trans-species relationships of people who shared the same compassion for animals. Having underlined this commercialised context of animal caregiving, the next chapter will further discuss veterinary care which is one of the important healthcare pillars in this commercialised ecosystem of human-animal relations. Veterinary surgeons have relationships with the middle-class and the working-class caregivers, providing medical forms of animal caregiving that the nonvet caregivers need to keep their animals in this modern society.

## Chapter 6: The Veterinary Surgeons

This chapter follows veterinary surgeons who went to nonclinical environments through the medium of mobile clinics to provide medical care of sterilisation and vaccination against rabies for animals that had no access to paid healthcare and explores how the vet caregivers negotiated their identity and find their place in the conjunction of theoretical and pragmatic grounds in defining ethical practices for animal care.

Veterinary surgeons in the community of animal volunteering were paid labour. Although there were a few volunteer veterinary surgeons, they tended to be recent graduates or veterinary students wanting experience. Nevertheless, they were an important resource for volunteering projects and charities advocating for animal welfare. Their professional presence brings into focus the notion of monetary compensation. The issue of paid labour in animal caregiving causes dilemmas in the community of animal volunteering where its identity is grounded in charitableness. Furthermore, in the context of conventional animal-care systems such as animal hospitals and clinics, veterinary surgeons comprise the triadic relationship in which they and pet owners engage in medical decision-making for animal patients. However, within the sphere of animal volunteering, veterinary surgeons working for animal welfare have to engage with multiple collaborators of the healthcare domain to determine medical treatment for stray animals, which blurs boundary between vet and nonvet responsibilities. This setting is also a good platform to explore the conflicts and cooperation between government and nongovernment sectors of animal healthcare.

I will begin this chapter with a broad historical description of veterinary medicine in the Western and Thai contexts. The veterinary practice has been intertwined with the nation-building processes of modern Siam, enabling this newly formed state to participate economically at a global level and laying an economic foundation for contemporary Thailand to industrialise its livestock production. In this context, veterinary professions are highly valued

because they comprise the country's system of biosecurity to safeguard its economic prosperity from animal diseases and zoonotic outbreaks. Because of the process of urbanisation, bodies of animals are increasingly perceived not just as a food source or a diseased vessel but as worthy of affection. This leads to the growing market for pet businesses to cater to demands for care services for animal companions. In turn, it shapes the landscape of the veterinary profession, leading to the rise in the trend of small-animal practice among veterinary surgeons who are joining in this new area of animal healthcare dominated by nongovernment and volunteering sectors.

### **History of Veterinary Medicine**

Originating in 18th-century Europe, veterinary medicine has become a prominent presence in contemporary societies. Before its conception, agrarian societies handled sick animals by themselves or sought the service of farriers. However, after European nations encountered episodes of severe animal plagues, including the devastation of rinderpest, these damages to national economies highlighted the urgency of developing a better body of knowledge for understanding and managing animal diseases. In the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, traditional treatments were argued to consist of superstition, cruelty, and incompetency (Swabe, 1999). Against this backdrop, a new brand of animal doctor came into existence to whom the society could entrust its valuable livestock. The first formal institution of veterinary education was established in Lyon in 1762 with other European countries soon following in France's footsteps. From the mid-18th century onward, veterinary schools were founded around Europe in response to a growing demand for scientifically trained animal doctors. This, together with the advance of scientific methods and the development of

pharmaceutical technology, began the “Golden Age” of veterinary medicine (Bones & Yeates, 2012; Swabe, 1999).

Early veterinary medicine had a very close relationship with the military, as instructions of veterinary colleges focused on equine medicine. However, the use of veterinary surgeons in the armies declined during European industrialisation, the period characterised by the changes in food production, particularly for meat industries. The veterinary profession found its new purpose in the agricultural sector where veterinary surgeons worked alongside the government and farmers to satisfy the appetites of growing populations. The intensification of agriculture and the arrival of the era of global connections underlined the importance of veterinary medicine in countering pandemics of animal disease. Veterinary surgeons became the frontline workers in safeguarding food productivity as they administer vaccines and antibiotics, monitor the health of livestock, and inspect imports of live animals and their products. Today, they are a necessary part of the government’s biosecurity system to protect human health through veterinary forms of assessment, actions, and intervention (Collier et.al, 2004).

Because of the socio-economic changes during the mid-20th century, veterinary interests have also included pets as people increasingly kept animals for companionship rather than economic benefits. The small-animal practice within veterinary medicine, hence, grew in response to an increase in demand for medical treatment for pet animals. In developed countries, the veterinary surgeon has become an indispensable part in the triadic relationship of the vet, the owner, and the pet patient (Coombes, 2005; Sanders, 1995).

The development of veterinary medicine in Thailand follows the European pattern. The modernisation of Siam began around the late 19th century. Its nation-building process was accelerated by the presence of colonialism in South-east Asia. Having witnessed their neighbourhood kingdoms, the monarchy of Siam saw that modernising its kingdom was the only way to evade being colonised by the Europeans. Throughout his reign (1868–1910), King

Chulalongkorn employed diplomatic and governmental strategies to make Siam accepted as one among the “civilised” European nations. He initiated reforms that institutionalised the kingdom’s military, centralised its bureaucratic regime, and founded its first higher educational institution, Chulalongkorn University, to prepare Siamese elites to work for his building nation. The foundation of veterinary medicine began in the early 20th century after these modern institutions were established. The two branches of veterinary profession in Siam, military and civilian, began about the same time.

Chulalongkorn University’s Faculty of Veterinary Science (n.d.) noted the difficulty in archiving historical documents about veterinary medicine in Thailand. During the modernisation period, any bureaucratic department could open its own veterinary program to train its officers if needed. Veterinary medicine training for civil officers began in 1904. The Siamese Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock hired a European veterinarian named H.S. Leonard as the government’s official consultant on animal disease control and stock inspection. In 1909, the first school of equine medicine was established to look after horse breeds imported from Europe as part of the modernisation of the Siamese military. The training programme for civil officers was cancelled after 2 years of operation but reopened in 1922. As Siam’s economy had depended on the export of live animals and agricultural products to Singapore and Hong Kong under the rule of the British Empire, the newly founded nation saw the necessity to modernise its bureaucratic units with modern veterinary knowledge to meet the British standards of animal-disease control and to produce their own stock inspectors. Hence, the minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock at the time decided to hire two British veterinary surgeons, H. S. L. Woods and R. P. Jones, to administer the instruction which laid the foundation for the first veterinary school to be found in 1935 as a faculty in Chulalongkorn University.

The advancement of veterinary medicine in Thailand has been driven by economic concerns. Research into farm-animal practices was more important than small-animal practices. Hence, veterinary service for companion animals was poorly developed until the 21st century when the pet economy flourished in urbanised cities, and the veterinary profession in Thailand began to notice the growing niche market for pet animals. Even now, Thailand's animal management system is still centred on livestock industries, concerning zoonotic diseases that could affect the country's economic growth. The state's perception of the bodies of stray animals is largely unchanged as it considers them subjects of control. However, at a local scale, urban caregivers' sensibility towards these animals has changed more rapidly than that of their government. Although Thai people always care for animals because of the society's endorsement of Theravada Buddhism, their exposure to veterinary medicine has shifted their perspective on how to care for the animals. In urban areas, caregivers find veterinary professionals to be an inseparable part of their caregiving work.

Having explored the establishment of veterinary medicine and its importance in modern societies, I will discuss veterinary medicine as an emerging object of anthropological investigation into trans-species relations and human-animal health in an industrialised context.

### **Veterinary Medicine in Anthropology**

Researching human medicine and new forms of global health politics makes anthropology aware of the importance of medicine in the construction of self and the organisation of relations, so it is clear why the investigation of veterinary medicine would also be fruitful. Veterinary medicine has been underexplored by anthropology. However, from the 2000s onward, anthropological scholars, particularly those who study human-animal relations in industrialised contexts, increasingly recognise importance in broadening their academic

area. Ethnographies on veterinary medicine emerged as a sub-genre that overlaps between medical anthropology and human-animal relations because of the connection between relationships and health. It has amassed good literature. Some of the noteworthy works include Keck (2015a, 2015b) and Porter (2013a, 2013b, 2018). As animal healthcare is grounded in the notions of care and control, scholars working in this field also have keen interests in political relations in veterinary settings. Methodological experiments are anticipated in this relatively young field as scholars turned to political frameworks widely used for examining human medicines and appropriate them for a human-animal context.

Consider bio-power. Foucault himself never addressed explicitly animal bodies in his works (Palmer, 2001; Taylor, 2013). However, the Foucauldian concept of power is highly applicable, particularly, in industrialised contexts in which studies of human-animal relations are increasingly taking place. Human-animal scholars reconceptualised bio-power as a multispecies framework to examine human-animal relations in animal agriculture, wildlife menageries, and the domestic sector. Foucault categorised power into two kinds: sovereign power and bio-power. Sovereign power is the right to kill. A good example of its manifestation on animals can be found in an agricultural sector where livestock is slaughtered prematurely for human pleasure as food or is destroyed for the safety of human health (Taylor, 2013; Keck, 2015). Bio-power or pastoral power, conversely, is the right to let live. It operates at the two levels of populations and individuals. Bio-power has two sets of technology, regulatory and disciplinary, which aim to foster, manage, and protect a healthy and productive body of a docile subject. Bio-power cannot be monopolised and manifests in engagements between individuals, groups, or institutions in which these groups wield it to modify, use, consume, destroy, or alter the other's behaviours.

Situated in urbanised contexts, caregiving is a practice of bio-power that controls animal actions and care for animal bodies. More important, the body of human caregivers is

also managed collectively with their animals. Consider the idea of pet ownership. In many modern societies, the body of a pet animal is governed by strict laws on pet registration and ownership that regulate the owner's caregiving practices. The owner works to care for their pet: housing it, getting it microchipped, vaccinated, and medicated in ways that are approved by the legal and moral directives of the state. In this caregiving process, the body of the owner is also transformed. Another example is bathing animals, which makes the owner's body and house have to conform to the idea of hygiene. If the animal is registered, the human caregiver is also becoming lawful. If the animal needs to have medical treatment, its owner also must come into contact with veterinary care. Veterinary medicine is a foundation of modern animal healthcare in which bio-power strongly operates. Veterinary authorities, such as veterinary surgeons and government and bureaucratic bodies of animal management, are prominent figures in this domain. Therefore, the life and work of veterinary professionals are a good window to examine the intertwined and blurred line between care and control, and how veterinary care play roles in animal caregiving in this industrialised ecosystem of human-animal relations.

### **Notion of “Mor” in Making of Thai Veterinary Surgeons**

Thai society perceives medical professions, including veterinary medicine, as a distinguished social group that is to be treated with respect. Veterinary surgeons are referred to by an honorific “mor” (doctor; หมอ), the title used for addressing practitioners of human medicine. Another honorific for doctors of human medicine is “phaet” (M.D; แพทย์), borrowed from Sanskrit and seen mostly in official documents and formal discussions. As it is rooted in Thai culture long before the introduction of modern medicine in 1889, mor is a term more widely used among Thai people. Significantly, this term is for both professionals of

science-based medicine and practitioners with the traditional or alternative knowledge of body and mind. To name a few, midwives (*mor tam yae*; หมอตำแย), masseuses (*mor nuat*; หมอนวด), folk doctors (*mor ya*; หมอยา), and even witchcraft users (*mor phi*; หมอผี) are some of the recognised medical careers who can use this title. Their ability to change a course of life entitled them to a higher social position in communities. All of these various usages of the term suggest that *mor* is a social status that has been ingrained into the medical practitioners' identity. Moreover, it also implies that the domain of indigenous and local medicine are acknowledged as legitimate healthcare options by Thai society.

Veterinary surgeons working in animal volunteering were addressed by their professional title first, then, their nicknames. For example, Yai was a 43-year-old veterinary surgeon of the CFCF's mobile clinic called Mor Yai. In Thai context, people who have personal relationships would address each other by their nicknames to emphasise the bonds or to display friendliness. Although the nonvet volunteers in the CFCF were on a nickname basis with him, they still felt obligated to refer to him with the honorific as an acknowledgment to his status. His *mor* identity followed him and other veterinary surgeons off work. Even in the domain of nonworkplace life, people would still refer to them with the honorific if they know of their occupation.

This honorific also underlined a distance in terms of social proximity between the veterinary practitioners and the nonvet caregivers in animal volunteering. The vets interacted preferably among themselves or with the middle-class volunteers who had a certain degree of knowledge in animal medicine while direct interactions with local animal keepers were few and far between. Furthermore, the veterinary surgeons were aware of their highly acclaimed status. One of them, Wichai, age 36, said, "We are at the top of the food chain, second only to human doctors". This perception of medical professions has been reproduced and reinforced by societal institutions from home to school. Thai students, especially those who have excellent

academic performances, are urged to pursue careers in medical and other privileged professions to upgrade themselves to a higher social position in which wealth and privilege are guaranteed. Most of the veterinary surgeons whom I interviewed have similar educational backgrounds in which they performed well academically and aspired to enrol in these selective choices of the programs in medicine and applied science, such as pharmacy and engineering.

I was good at studying. My family members urged me to become a doctor. But, I loved animals. [My] house had dogs and cats. When they were sick, we took them to see the vet. [The experience] left an impression on my mind.

—Namtan, 30 years old

Despite its relatively recent introduction, the veterinary profession has increasingly become part of the social, cultural, and economic landscapes of industrialised Thailand. Since the first introduction of veterinary medicine, the notion of veterinary professionalism has always been intertwined with the interests of the state. Veterinary medicine plays roles in the processes of nation building. The association between veterinary medicine and national developments can still be found in modern-day veterinary schools. The oldest veterinary school for civilians, Chulalongkorn University's faculty of veterinary medicine, established in 1935, has two interesting anthems, "The Veterinarian's March" and "Dark Blue Sky", about veterinary ethics and duties that are closely tied to the developmental processes of the nation. For example, "to strive for the eradication of plagues", and "to preserve the backbone of the nation [the farmers]" in "The Veterinarian's March"; "to serve the homeland", and "to create food source . . . help large and small animals for the people", in "Dark Blue Sky." These missions are of human-oriented interest.

The historical constitution of veterinary medicine in Thailand contributes significantly to the veterinary surgeon's perception of their professional identity and their sensibility towards contemporary issues relating to the veterinary field. Bones & Yeates's (2012) analysis of the

variation in veterinary oaths in the United States, Canada, the UK, and Brazil also suggested that historical and social contexts of each society shape the perception of veterinary surgeons about their contemporary responsibility. Thai veterinary practitioners interviewed for my dissertation displayed their interpretation of their ethical codes in which they encompassed public service as part of their professional responsibilities. Namtan, age 30, expressed her shame about the prevalence of rabies in Thailand. In her opinion, her country fell behind other developed nations which successfully eliminated the disease. She also displayed her dissatisfaction with negligent pet keepers who contributed to the prolonged societal problems such as stray populations. A number of veterinary surgeons found their place outside of convention clinical settings where they fulfilled their public responsibility through collaborating with other providers in the domain of animal care, one of which is animal volunteering.

In the volunteering setting, veterinary surgeons were perceived and treated as benefactors in a patron-client relationship. Instead of donating goods, they provided veterinary service highly appreciated by nonvet caregivers. The latter displayed gratitude frequently as clients in the Thai culture of patronage. The status of veterinary surgeons is grounded in professionalism with strong reference to the Thai class-based hierarchy. This modern profession has been localised into Thai culture. The notion of Mor reinforced the existing forms of social stratifications and dynamics between people with veterinary surgeons and other groups of people. Mor is seen as the superior who works for the nation and poor communities to safeguard them from plagues and poverty. Although the vet asked for monetary compensation in exchanges for their labour, their mor identity still earned them social privileges and obligations as the benefactor in the domain of modern animal healthcare.

## Self-Interested Motives to Work in Animal Volunteering

The major motivation of veterinary surgeons to work for nongovernmental bodies is self-interest. Before the year 2000, the branch of farm animal practice had long been the popular major among veterinary students because of the high demand for veterinary practitioners in the livestock industries that are one of the major contributors to Thailand's export-oriented economy. However, in recent years, the popularity of indoor pet-keeping among the middle class has paved the way for small-animal-practice businesses to flourish. Thai society has seen a steady growth of pet-animal industries that reached its peak in the mid-2000s, marked by the popularity of celebrity pets on social media.<sup>13</sup> One of my vet informants, Yai, age 43, specialised in the care of pigs, and he expected his career to be in the livestock industries; however, because of a health condition in his early life, he found himself in the pet-animal businesses where he has remained until today. He was working in the small-animal-practice business before it became popular. He commented on the trend that "more people are coming to this industry".

I discussed the infantilisation of cats in Chapter 3 as cats are increasingly seen as young kin and caregiving work is becoming commercialised. Some business companies see an opportunity to explore a new market niche and start forming partnerships with animal charities. For example, some shopping-mall businesses made a contract with the CFCF to rent out a venue for its mobile clinic. The foundation had a platform to promote its programs to the middle-class audience, while the shopping malls gained good publicity. The CFCF's adoption event was also sponsored by animal fancier organisations and pet food companies. These partnerships between charities and businesses help to strengthen the demand in the pet market

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<sup>13</sup> Pet animals of noncelebrity owners have become famous on the internet, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They play influential roles in advertising consumerism of pet goods and service.

for veterinary surgeons of small-animal practice. Some of the veterinary surgeons see opportunities to promote their businesses to the animal-loving community by participating in these events. In pet fairs or charity-organised events of animal adoption, it is common to see booths of animal hospitals providing free medical checks and advice on pet care to fairgoers while advertising their medical treatment courses and products.

Besides financial incentives, veterinary practitioners also volunteer for charitable organisations for animal welfare to cultivate techniques of small-animal practice. In Thailand, a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine is a 6-year academic program, and veterinary schools across the country share similar programs. However, some veterinary students underlined a lack of practice on real animals in veterinary education which drove them to seek working experience outside of educational institutions. Namtan, gave an interview about her educational life at a veterinary school in North Thailand:

In the first year, general education courses in which we studied with students from other faculties. One elective course; I chose psychology. Two compulsory courses: comparative zoology - veterinary and medical students studied together- and chemistry. English [general education].

In the second year, we studied the "in-department" courses, and "out-department" core courses with the medical students at the [human] hospital.

In the third year, we studied in-department courses. We studied like medical students. Like pathology but for veterinary medicine.

In the fourth and fifth years, we studied really hard. Laboratory and theory courses, focusing on pharmacy. It was a block-subject module; we had a test every month. We studied from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. We studied at small-animal and equine hospitals. We had to know every species that veterinary surgeons should know regardless of kinds of animals we would work with [in the future].

In the sixth year, we studied at six stationary clinics. We [40 students] studied cattle for a month and a half. We had a community clinic in a village that had a lot of milk cows. [The school would] send “little kids” to learn from vets. After that, pigs, aquatic animals, horses, fowls, and small-animal stations. We also studied veterinary public health, epidemiology, and veterinary research.

Namtan’s account demonstrated the significance of real specimens in veterinary education. She also elaborated that carcasses of deceased animals (*sak*; ၁၂၇၈) were crucial for her study of animal anatomy that silicon-modelled animals could not replicate. Namtan’s veterinary school had different ways of obtaining these specimens. They had an agreement with the university-owned animal hospital, a zoo, and a night-safari park in the province to acquire carcasses. The school also bred animals like guinea pigs and rabbits in its laboratories for educational purposes. Namtan said the school “does not buy because it is easy to breed them”. There was also a carcass of an unknown source. Namtan said they had a lot of practices on a species of spade-nosed sharks,<sup>14</sup> which still made her curious how her professors managed to obtain them for classes every year. Namtan suspected that it was from farms somewhere. She was confident that if they could not be bred, the students would not be able to study them.

When it comes down to neutering pets, veterinary students’ opportunity to practice surgical handiwork at school was limited by the scarcity of live specimens. Live pets could not be acquired with the same methods of obtaining farm animals. Namtan recalled that the school would contact temples for stray animals, but there were not enough for everyone. Her class of 40 veterinary students had to be divided into groups of five students to learn about neutering. Namtan said, “Each had a different role. Two nurses, one anaesthetist, one assistant, and one surgeon. Everyone fought to be the surgeon”.

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<sup>14</sup> Species of small sharks described by Namtan as “salmon-like”.

In classrooms, veterinary students had a chance to practice neutering techniques in fifth year. Several veterinary students who volunteered for the CFC Foundation explained that their academic years were full of studying theories. They only had one or two opportunities to practice with live animals, which was not enough. This motivated them to seek out settings of unconventional animal healthcare, such as an animal charity's mobile clinic, to master their veterinary craft.

The community of animal welfare comprised of volunteering and business sectors has a higher level of activeness in small-animal industries, which is the main reason why many veterinary practitioners invest themselves in this domain. They see animal volunteering as a platform that provides good opportunities for skill development outside the clinical setting of conventional institutions. The interest of the vet meets the demand of animal charities for veterinary labour and unfold into charitable medical services. Mobile sterilisation clinics are the significant example of collaborations between vet and nonvet caregivers.

### **The Mobile Sterilisation Clinic**

The participation of veterinary professionals is key to the successful running of mobile clinics. It is in this activity that veterinary surgeons take a more active role outside of the hospital where they work together with the nonvet volunteers in providing medical care for animals in local communities. Little is known about when the concept of mobile veterinary clinics was introduced to Thai society. Thai veterinary surgeons have been volunteering for mobile clinics run by governmental or charitable organisations for at least a decade. However, Ree, the president of CFC Foundation, who observed and volunteered in other neutering projects before establishing her own mobile clinic in 2010, thought the history of the mobile clinic can be traced back even further. Regardless of its introduction, the concept of mobile

clinics has grown in the Thai context in which household and community animals have limited access to animal healthcare.

After I introduced myself to the CFCF's volunteers at Bangkok's annual pet fair in May, I got my first chance to participate in the CFC Foundation's mobile clinic on Sunday, the 16th June 2018. The foundation informed me via email exchanges that it would be providing free sterilisation at 8.30 a.m. at a monastery in Chom Thong District. From my accommodation in Pinklao, it would take about 40 minutes by bus. I decided to travel to the temple earlier than the meeting time to avoid traffic and any bus delay. Arriving earlier than the foundation also gave me a chance to observe the process from the beginning to the end. I never saw a mobile clinic before. It was difficult for me to imagine how it provided neutering outside a clinical setting of conventional animal healthcare.

When I arrived at 7.30 a.m., the temple was quiet. I found a monk sweeping the monastery's pavilion in preparation for the cat foundation's mobile clinic. The pavilion is a one-storey building with an open hall in which Buddhist monks and laypeople participate in religious activities such as religious education, and funerals. However, for today, it was scheduled for the whole-day session of animal sterilisation. I helped the monk with sweeping the dusty floor and arranging chairs for local people who began arriving with their cats in baskets and cages. The monk ordered his temple workers to fill a tank with ice and bottled water for the neutering team and people to keep themselves hydrated in the hot weather. I still could not imagine how this pavilion could be transform into a clinic. It was nothing like the air-conditioned, sterilised room of an animal clinic that I was familiar with. At 8.40 a.m., the team of nonvet female volunteers arrived in their private car. They were the CFCF's senior members with 10 years of volunteering experience. I learned that the CFCF's mobile clinic consisted of the two teams: the nonvet and the vet. Investigating and preparing venues for the mobile clinic were a responsibility of the nonvet team, which would always arrive first. After

an examination of the venue was finished, the volunteers transported boxes of administrative and medical equipment from their car, put up their foundation's posters about cat care around the pavilion, rearranged tables and chairs according to their set-up procedure. At 9.30 a.m., when the second team of veterinary surgeons and technicians arrived, the clinic was ready to open. It took just 50 minutes for the foundation to set up a neutering clinic.

Throughout my fieldwork, the foundation kept surprising me with how quick and adaptable it was in assembling and disassembling the clinic regardless of locations and venues. The next sections will describe the procedure for sterilisation of a mobile clinic, how the CFCF volunteers organised the clinic, and how responsibilities were distributed among the vet and nonvet caregivers.

### ***Mobile Clinic's Five Stations***

In essence, the nonvet caregivers performed clerical, administrative, and primary-care duties to assist the veterinary operation. These volunteers investigated venues provided by local communities, such as pavilions, sheds, shelters, or rental spaces in shopping malls before dividing the space into five stations: (1) registration, (2) anaesthesia, (3) preneutering preparation, (4) neutering, and (5) post-care monitoring (see Table 6.1).

First, the registration station would be set significantly further away from the other four animal-care stations. It normally had one table for placing registration papers, stationery equipment, and chairs for animal keepers to wait in a queue (see Figure 6.1). Responsibilities of the nonvet volunteers appointed for this station were to register cat patients, to prescribe to animal keepers the instructions of post-neutering care upon discharge, and to check for the safety of animal carriers. Unsafe carriers, the small, dirty, or made of low-quality materials, could potentially compromise the recovery process of post-neutering cats (see Figure 6.2). For

a hygienic reason, dirty carriers had to be cleansed before placing a neutered cat inside. Plastic ropes were provided at the registration station for the cat keepers to strengthen their carriers as part of the foundation's safety protocol, which was to make certain that carriers can withstand the strength of distressed or disoriented cats trying to break out of and escape from their container both before and after neutering. The registration volunteers were particularly strict about small carriers. If they found a carrier to be too small, they would ask its owner to change it for a new one. For the cat's safe recovery, a good carrier should have enough space for a cat to lie down with its body in a side-resting position to minimise the pressure on their head and neck areas.

After the registration procedure was completed, animal keepers would receive two kinds of identification tags: the big ones for their carriers and the small ones to be tied around their cats' necks in the next station. The tags required similar sets of information: animal sexes, queue numbers, animals' names, and contact information of keepers which were names and telephone numbers to be used for identifying post-neutering animals and return them to their rightful owners. On the smaller tags, the animal keepers were also asked to give consent by ticking yes/no for their animals to be vaccinated against rabies and to receive ear-tipping/tattooing which was a form of animal identification commonly employed by mobile veterinary clinics to verify the number of outdoor and stray animals that they had neutered in the area.

**Figure 6.1**

*The Registration Station of the CFCF's Mobile Clinic in a Shopping Mall*



Source: CFCF

**Figure 6.2**

*Example of a Cute but Unsafe Carrier According to the Registration's Standard*



Source: CFCF

The next stage was to anaesthetise the animals. This second station marked the beginning of the veterinary team's domain. Cat carriers were transported from registration to the veterinary technician stationed at this stage. The technician used a curved blunt hook to restrain a cat inside of its container before sedating it with tranquilisers and anaesthetics to induce unconsciousness. The foundation's vet team normally appointed one technician to the anaesthesia station. However, if the mobile clinic were experiencing a high number of animal patients, particularly during Sundays, nonvet volunteers would be sent to help with assistance work, such as delivering cat carriers and other heavy-lifting jobs. The carriers with already unconscious animals inside were transported to the station of preneutering preparations, often dubbed as "the shaving station", located not far from the anaesthesia station.

At this third station, one veterinary technician and nonvet volunteers removed the cats from their carriers and conducted preneutering preparations on their bodies. They tied the small tags of identification to the animals' necks and adjusted their bodies to lie down on the table to observe their respiratory system. The team would check the animals' mouths for visible food or liquid that could obstruct their breathing and removed them accordingly. Later, they applied eye moisturizer gel on the cats' eyes to prevent dryness. The technician and nonvet volunteers would administer antibiotic drugs and vaccinations against rabies before beginning the process of shaving the animals. There were slight differences in the shaving procedures between the female and the male, and between cats and dogs, depending on which kinds of neutering surgery they would undergo. Abdominal surgery was performed on female felines; so, the team shaved female cats' lower abdomens and emptied their bladders of urine. Male cats were shaved around their genitalia for incisions over their scrotal sacs, even though female and male dogs were both neutered by abdominal surgery. So, their abdomens and scrotums were shaved in a similar manner. Shaving was a significant preparation work. The area that the vet made an

incision had to be clear of hair because it could get inside the animal's body during neutering and compromise its health.

Neutering was performed at the fourth stage by veterinary surgeons with the support of veterinary assistants. Veterinary students were allowed to perform sterilisation under the supervision of the senior veterinary surgeons. At this station, tables were covered in training pads, serving as operating tables for the vet team. Bodies of the animals were spread out on these tables with their limbs secured by plastic ropes (see Figure 6.3). Nevertheless, castrating male cats could proceed without abdominal surgery, therefore, male cats could be castrated without their limbs being tied, and the incision could be carried out on any available surface. The vet team was responsible for preparing veterinary surgical instruments. However, most of the one-time-use medical supplies in the neutering process, such as disinfectants, antibiotics, sutures, surgical masks, and gloves, were provided by the nonvet team. The vet and nonvet teams managed the inventory of medical supplies, such as the purchase of prescription animal medicine, such as rabies vaccine, together.

### Figure 6.3

*Female Dog With Legs Secured by Plastic Ropes and Stomach Shaved, Ready for an Abdominal Surgery at the Neutering Station*



Source: Lila Warawutsunthon

After neutering operations were successful, the animals would be sent to the postcare monitoring station which was fully run by the nonvet volunteers (see Figure 6.4). This stage had at least one experienced volunteer in the station who would monitor the recovery of the animals as well as supervise inexperienced volunteers. The station consisted of portable recovery beds for the animals to rest until they regained consciousness. They were assembled from PVC pipes, waterproof sheets, wire grilles, and training pads. First, the waterproof sheets were laid on the floor, followed by the disposable training pads. Then, the PVC pipes were put together to construct square-grid frames for the beds. The volunteers placed the grilles on top of the frames to complete the assembling process. During the recovery process, it was common for the animals to excrete body fluids; hence, the recovery beds were designed to have a small gap between the beds and the training pads to avoid contact between the animals and their

excrement. Besides the training pads, the other items were reusable after being disinfected with detergents. The neutered animal spent on average from 1–2 hours to regain consciousness. During this time, the nonvet volunteers would treat their surgical wounds, tattoo one side of their ears, and closely monitor their breathing. They would alert the vet team if abnormalities were detected. The nonvet volunteers also had the authority to discharge animals. The recovering animals would be placed in their carriers and sent to the registration station which would contact their owners to come and retrieve their pets.

**Figure 6.4**

*Neutered Cats Lying on the Recovering Beds at the Post-Care Monitoring Station*



Source: CFCF

**Table 6.1***The Five Stages of the Neutering Process Performed by the Charity's Mobile Clinic*

<b>Station</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Staff</b>
Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registering animal patients</li> <li>• Examining the safety of animal carriers</li> <li>• Prescribing post-care instructions/antibiotic drugs to carers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonvet volunteer(s)</li> </ul>
Anaesthesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administering tranquiliser and anaesthetic drugs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veterinary technician</li> <li>• Nonvet volunteer(s)</li> </ul>
Preneutering preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tying identification tags on animal-patients</li> <li>• Examining respiratory systems</li> <li>• Administering antibiotic drugs/vaccination against rabies</li> <li>• Preneutering preparation procedures (e.g. shaving)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veterinary technician</li> <li>• Nonvet volunteer(s)</li> </ul>
Neutering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abdominal surgery</li> <li>• Scrotal incision</li> <li>• Others (e.g. orchiopexy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veterinary surgeon(s)</li> <li>• Veterinary assistant(s)</li> <li>• Veterinary students(s)</li> </ul>
Post-care monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring post-neutering recovery</li> <li>• Treating surgical wounds/others</li> <li>• Tattooing identification</li> <li>• Discharging animals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonvet volunteer(s)</li> </ul>

The foundation's mobile clinic operated during weekends to accommodate the working schedules of both vet and nonvet caregivers with day jobs. Depending on the number of volunteer veterinary surgeons in a day, the mobile clinic could provide a neutering service to 80–120 cats per day. As part of their assistance work, the nonvet volunteers played an intermediary role between the vet team and animal keepers, such as providing an explanation to people's inquiries or mediating a conflict, so the vet team could concentrate on their veterinary duties. Significantly, the nonvet team would attempt to imitate a clinic-like environment for the vet team by making use of resources they have in their vehicles or find in the field. Protecting the privacy of the vet team was high on their list of priorities, especially if

the mobile clinic had to work in open public places like shopping malls or temples. With the exception of the registration station, the rest of the stations would be covered with cloth sheets or large posters to prevent animal keepers or passer-by locals to see or take a photograph of the veterinary professionals. This was because mobile sterilisation did not strictly follow standard precautions of veterinary operation because of the nature of charitable care work. Hence, it could potentially have legal and ethical consequences in the veterinary surgeons' professional life.

The two major practical concerns of charitable clinics were financial sustainability and mobility. The budget per trip of the foundation's mobile clinic was around 50,000 Baht (£1,250), including payment for the hired vet team, medication, and other expenses. Thus, to carry out the activity of a long term, the mobile clinic focused exclusively on providing low-cost sterilisation and vaccination against rabies and employed several measures of financial economisation.

Because of their collaborative inventory of medical supplies, the mobile clinic could acquire prescription medicines at wholesale prices. From time to time, the foundation purchased animal medication from their partnership veterinary clinics. This kind of arrangement vastly reduced the cost of medical supplies used for neutering and vaccination. For example, the cost of rabies vaccines to the CFCF was just 20 Baht (£0.5) per animal, which enabled them to vaccinate animals freely. The gap in the medical costs between the mobile clinic and the conventional animal healthcare was evident in the case of neutering (see Table 6.2). According to my vet informants, the average neutering fee at a hospital could be as high as 4,300 Baht (£107.5) because the strict veterinary protocols required the involvement of highly skilled human resources and medical technology in all stages of the procedure. The mobile clinic could provide neutering at the cost of 300 Baht (£7.5), mainly because it simplified the veterinary procedures. It recruited nonvet volunteers to substitute for the

shortage of manpower. Experienced volunteers were even permitted to administer vaccination and antibiotic drugs under the vet's supervision. Moreover, because of its objective to reach out to communities with high numbers of stray populations, the mobile clinic had to be manoeuvrable. Not only were the kinds of technological devices used in the hospital, such as anaesthetic operating machines, tubes, and saline stands, not financially affordable for the foundation that provided an economical service, but they could immobilise its clinic by their sheer size and weight. Thus, some modifications were made to simplify the neutering procedures for veterinary surgery in which the vet caregivers could safely perform their tasks without stationary equipment. For example, the mobile clinic removed preneutering assessments of animal health such as blood tests from its procedures. The keepers had to sign a consent document that they understood the surgical risks and that no lawsuit would be filed against the mobile clinic. Interestingly, the foundation decided to acquire two refillable oxygen tanks that would be used only in emergency situations. The nonvet team sometimes remarked that the oxygen tanks were heavy and too advanced for their economical service, but they were still proud of having this hospital-level equipment. Although neutering services given by private veterinary clinics were not as expensive as in the pet hospital and even charge for the fee about the same cost of the mobile clinic's service, it still is a paid service, while the mobile clinic, bound by its charitable constitution, asked for voluntary donations.

Because of the vagaries of the field, the mobile clinic's teams had to be prepared to work in variable healthcare settings from a dusty shed to an unventilated shelter and with locals of different perceptions of animal care. These factors drove the vet team to be ingenious and versatile. The senior veterinary surgeons, for example, decided to forgo wearing surgical masks because of the humidity of the open field and the duration of their duty in which they had to perform neutering for an average of 6 hours. Procedures which were designed for working in a clinical setting with environmental controls, thus, became impractical in the field of charitable

animal care. However, their strategies of adapting to the field could be seen as a violation of the professional code of conduct for veterinary surgeons because this economical service might endanger the health of stray animals. Therefore, the foundation attempted the aforementioned strategies to safeguard its vets to continue providing veterinary care to people unable to access commercialised services from the conventional healthcare sectors.

**Table 6.2**

*Comparison of Neutering Procedures in Mobile Clinic and Average Animal Hospital*

Procedures in a mobile clinic	Procedures in hospital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anaesthesia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preneutering health assessments</li> <li>- Blood tests</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preneutering preparations</li> <li>- Shaving &amp; others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anaesthesia</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neutering <u>without</u> anaesthesia machine operation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endotracheal tube procedure</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-care monitoring by nonvet volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preneutering preparations</li> <li>- Shaving &amp; others</li> <li>- Saline administration</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neutering <u>with</u> anaesthesia machine operation</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-care monitoring by veterinary practitioners</li> </ul>
Cost= 300 Baht (£7.5)	Cost = 4,300 Baht (£107.5)

## **Dilemmas in Animal Volunteering: Vet Caregivers' Ethical Decisions**

### ***Monetary Compensation***

The perception of veterinary surgeons on public service was grounded on service-service mutualism in which they had to gain something from their work, whether it were monetary compensation or skill development. Wichai was a veterinary surgeon with his own clinic but still volunteered with CFCF's neutering program to realise his perceived public service. Although he volunteered his labour, he asked the foundation for permission to invite

junior veterinary students from his university who sought to master the small-animal practice. He also recalled one of his volunteering trips to a far-away Muslim village in Southern Thailand. He said that the well-being of stray dogs and cats in this village had been improved because the human doctor who loved animals decided to organise a free sterilisation service for stray and owned pet animals in the community. The other human doctors in the village also volunteered in this clinic because they wanted to practice their suturing techniques on animal bodies. Gradually, the situation of stray populations in the village improved.

Their openness on self-interest motivations distinguished the veterinary surgeons from nonvet volunteers. The veterinary surgeons saw it was practical and ethical to monetise animal caregiving even in the volunteer setting. In Chapter 4, I discussed how the Asas were concerned about the notion of salaried volunteering. One of the volunteers revealed that they paid for their own travel and food expenses even if it was acceptable for the foundation to compensate for the costs. Financial independence was seized to avoid being stigmatised as “the flea” (*hep*; เหน็บ), a term of great insult in the community of animal volunteering. It compared caregivers who were perceived taking advantages of the animals and using donations for their own gain as the parasitic insects feeding on the blood of the animal. Meanwhile, the mobile clinic organised by the vets readily used donations to cover their travel and food expenses.

During the time I volunteered in the CFCF, there were several occasions when the issue of donations became a debate among the nonvet volunteers resulting in one of its senior volunteer’s resignation. The nonvet volunteers had ideologically split into two sides: one argued for and one argued against mandatory donations in which animal keepers who sought the mobile clinic’s neutering service were required to donate 200–300 Baht (£5-7.5). This was because the mobile clinic was seeing the tendency of caregivers who had a financial ability to pay for service at a clinic, such as keepers of purebred cats, taking advantage of the foundation’s charitable service. The group against mandatory donations argued that charging

a fee for its charitable service would tarnish the foundation's fundamental principle of altruism, while the other was more concerned with pragmatism as the continuity of the foundation's mission depended on donations as well. The vet team did not actively participate in the dispute, but they silently took the latter's side that it was all right to financially charge for medical service.

The veterinary surgeons did not experience a moral dilemma in this regard. They did not have to prove themselves with hard work like the nonvet volunteers as their veterinary labour was highly valued. Indeed, the veterinary code of conduct governs the vet's actions in a major way. Thai veterinary surgeons were instructed to constantly learn and update their veterinary knowledge and skills. Their license and title had to be renewed every five years when they had to pass examinations and attend required seminars. Meeting this ethical standard was important for the vet to keep their license as well as their Mor title. Hence, their rationalisation of their veterinary interventions was always grounded in their veterinary professionalism, which justified their right to monetise their service.

This moral dilemma of having a financial motive was situated in a commercialised context. In the market economy, commodified healthcare resources and labour are crucial in the practice of animal volunteering. To realise altruistic causes, medication and veterinary services have to be acquired through monetary exchanges. However, the notion of money can complicate the idea of caregiving as a practice of bonding. As I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the caregivers saw animal caregiving as a moral foundation of their relationships with animals and with other caregivers. Voluntary caregiving is moralised because it demonstrates the genuineness of the trans-species bond and the moral character of the caregivers which makes them trusted to be part of the volunteer community. On the other hand, paid caregiving is perceived as having less sympathy because the bond is grounded in monetary compensation. Commercial relationships are seen as apathetic because people work for money rather than

genuinely caring for animals. For example, people who are employed in government-run animal shelters are seen working for salaries and not giving their best effort to save animals.

### ***Animal Management: Control Led or Care Based***

The notion of financial motive also emphasises control-based practices over care-led ones. As the aim is to work for money, the means to achieve the task can be less sympathetic to the animal. For example, volunteers who collaborated with district authorities in Krung Thep for neutering stray animals complained that these local authorities were apathetic to both animals and caregivers. They never worked beyond their working hours but often arrived late, making local caregivers wait for hours. Furthermore, Krung Thep's animal catchers were known by the volunteer community for their mistreatment of stray animals, both by negligence and violence. They used strong sedative drugs to capture stray animals on the streets or communities, which endangered the animals' health. For example, a cat could lose consciousness and fall from a height while hiding on the wall or a tree after getting darted. Captured animals were put in small cages and left in open areas, which caused them to dehydrate, suffocate, or die. These shelters were also underfunded because the purpose of these buildings was to relocate stray animals from public areas not to care for or find them home like the volunteers' private shelters. Animals in the state-run shelters faced malnourishment, starvation, and illnesses that came from unhygienic environments. Monetary compensations were thus closely tied to control-led management that treated animals as bodies of threats more than social persons.

Veterinary surgeons working in the volunteer domain were not morally alienated from the idea of control. Part of their veterinary practices is to train to be part of the biosecurity. To protect the well-being of animals and humans, control is a necessary element of caregiving.

However, they also recognise the ineffectiveness of the government's control-based management that is top-down, bureaucratically delaying, and seeking to remove the animal bodies. Many decide to join nongovernment healthcare sectors, such as charities and healthcare businesses, which practice what I refer to as care-led animal management. This form is characterised by its decentralised cooperative efforts between multiple healthcare providers with the purpose of making animal bodies stay. It is quick and empathically responsive. Compared to the government's control-led management that keeps stray animals inside its shelters without effective adoption policies to help them relocate to a house, private shelters managed by caregivers trains animal bodies with caregiving to make them adaptable to a house. The former sees animals as disturbances, whereas the latter recognises animals as individuals who could and should bond with humans. The difference between the care-led and control-led forms of animal management will be fully explored in Chapter 8 when I discuss animal caregiving from a welfare framework and how these two forms of animal management can lead to different expectations between the state and the community about how welfare should be given.

Nonetheless, the care-based form of animal management that the charitable body practice is widely welcomed by local communities because it morally resonates with their religious, cultural, and social identities grounded in trans-species connections. The vets also preferred care-based management as they, like other Thai people, were construed to be animal-loving people. Sometimes, veterinary surgeons encounter dissonance between their Buddhist belief and their veterinary code of conduct. Their professional obligations contradict their personal beliefs and feelings in a way that they could not dissociate their religious identity from their work. Take, for example, the account of two Buddhist veterinary surgeons working in a poultry-farming industry. They had to collect a blood sample from a chick. Because of its small size, one of the most humane methods of taking the blood was to euthanize the animal by

beheading it with a scissor. One of the vets chose the first method. However, the other vet chose an alternative. She decided not to perform the procedure on Buddhist holy days and would rather try other methods to collect the blood while preserving the chick's life. The first vet saw that her colleague's effort to not kill the chick would cause more pain than simply killing it, but she also thought that her colleague's action did not breach the code of conduct. In addition, there was a case briefly mentioned in Mitmoonpitak et al. (1998) that the influence of Buddhist principle resulted in the staff at the rabies Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute diagnostic centre deciding to keep rabid dogs and cats alive until they succumbed to the disease rather than euthanizing them immediately. Because of their Buddhist perspective, Thai veterinary surgeons are inclined to be cooperative with healthcare sectors that seek to make trans-species cohabitation conform to urban spheres, not just making them disappear. I discussed with my veterinary interviewees about animal culling, which in Thailand was called "set zero". The idea was proposed by the government to eliminate problems associated with stray animals because of rabies outbreaks in 2018. The vets disagreed with it. They were not appalled by the idea of culling, but they also saw it was not a sustainable solution and should be used as the last resort. The veterinary surgeons did not always choose a control-based practice to animal problems if they could find alternative solutions. More important, whether it is care-based or control-based, from the vet's perspective, those practices have to conform to veterinary knowledge.

In a sense, although veterinary surgeons engaged in commercial transactions with their clients, whether individual caregivers or the charitable body, the relationships were more than commercial because of their support of care-based management. In animal caregiving, veterinary surgeons and animal volunteers tended to have a long-term and well-established relationship because of sharing goals of giving care to stray animals. Some veterinary surgeons gave advice, trained, prescribed medication, or even housed stray animals at a cheaper price

for their volunteers. One of the examples of this cooperation between the vet and nonvet is to educate caregivers about misconceived practices of Baan-Baan animal caregiving.

### ***Blurred Line Between Vet and Nonvet Responsibility***

The CFCF's mobile clinic not only provided medical care for local communities to prevent the problems of stray populations but also tried to counter what it perceived as veterinary misconception among local people. This collaboration between the vet and nonvet targets both animals and humans to make them conform to the science-based model of animal caregiving. I emphasise in this thesis that Thailand has a myriad of forms of animal caregiving; most of them are unregulated by the government. Medical treatment is an area in which traditional animal care conflicts the most with veterinary medicine.

Thailand has not strictly regulated urban trans-species relationships between humans and domestic pet animals. There was no legal implementation of the responsibilities of pet ownership or penalties of animal abuse and negligence until 2014 when parliament passed the Prevention of Cruelty and Animal Welfare Provision Act, B.E. 2557. However, regarding the implementation regulations of the act, society has been contentious, and it is still under discussion. At the time of writing, there are no significant changes, which could be attributed to this recent Animal Welfare Act in Thai caregivers' practices of pet-keeping concerning medical care for pet animals. For instance, it is not obligatory for animal keepers to provide medical care for pet animals. Hence, the majority of cat and dog populations with or without ownership in Thailand do not receive rabies and other core vaccines and live unneutered. Moreover, the available options of veterinary treatment in Thailand are paid services provided by private healthcare providers such as animal hospitals and clinics. Many animal caregivers, particularly working-class households, find it discouraging to travel to clinics as time, travel

costs, and carriers, which need to be purchased, are needed. Another concern mentioned by animal volunteers who worked with communities is also about the inconvenience of transporting animals from their territorial areas to get medical treatment from the healthcare systems. The animal's cooperation contributes greatly to the success of neutering. Feral cats are elusive, intelligent, and quick to avoid being captured. For example, I observed the CFCF volunteers set a can of food inside a humane cat trap to lure a stray cat. This trap had a trip plate, and when a cat stepped on it, it would close the trap. However, the stray cat they tried to trap avoided stepping on this plate and carefully ate the food before walking away. Even docile cats can be aggressive when taking them to unfamiliar environments. Taking animals to the vet can be a difficult task for many households. These factors encourage the continuity of what can be referred to as self-reliant healthcare.

A large number of Thai caregivers, regardless of their socio-economic group, have a perception of self-reliant healthcare in which paid veterinary service is considered as the last resort in caring for animals. Pet animals are expected to take care of their well-being by relying on their own self-healing to recover from injuries or illnesses. If the animal's condition does not improve, a caregiver might attempt to provide medical care by themselves such as with traditional herbal remedies. Furthermore, because of the leniency of healthcare regulatory authorities, nonvet caregivers also have easy access to animal medications. This encourages drug-giving without consulting veterinary practitioners. This pattern has created veterinary misconceptions in society. The veterinary professionals and animal welfare volunteers are concerned with the spread of harmful practices of animal care and its effects on the livelihood of animals. Take, for example, the case of an injectable contraceptive drug and paracetamol abuses in cats.

Since its establishment, the CFCF's slogan has always been, "Love cats, no giving paracetamols. Neutering, no using contraceptive drugs". The foundation had targeted two of

the widespread misconceived practices of animal care. Caregivers of these two categories can be found in both rural and urban peripheries in working-class communities. In the case of the abuse of contraceptive drugs, the major perceptions of caregivers believe this practice would fatten up animals. Fat animals are seen as healthy and adorable, which represents good pet-keeping. More important, the practice is seen as more economical than a paid neutering service. Injectable contraceptive drugs are highly accessible. Caregivers can purchase them from local drug stores and pet shops. This medicine is used exclusively on unneutered female animals to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Contraception is given to animals by injection a number of times. However, unsupervised administration of a contraceptive injection has major side effects such as uterine inflammation in which the uteruses become enlarged with pus, known as pyometra. Speaking from my field experience, the sight of this disease was disturbing. A healthy cat's uterus is smaller and thinner than a human's finger joint, but an inflamed one can grow as large as a human's hand. If it ruptures, the pus will enter the bloodstream and cause a lethal infection.

The CFCF's mobile clinic also had seen cases of uterine infection on every trip. One of the most severe cases occurred prior to my fieldwork, but it was recorded because of its severity. In this case, a female cat received injectable contraceptive drugs from its owner when it was already impregnated, leading to its miscarriage. The owner was unaware of its health condition, thinking the cat's enlarged stomach was because of its fatness. Nevertheless, the owner decided to register the cat for free neutering when the mobile clinic visited their community. The cat's uterus was full of pus and brownish substances the vet later discovered as its unborn foetuses that had decomposed inside its uterus. The volunteer recalled the event that the whole clinic smelled badly like rotten flesh. Fortunately, the cat survived, but it was a hairsbreadth away from death.

Similarly, paracetamols are a kind of painkiller used by animal caregivers as a primary-care treatment for animals that experience a fever or injuries. However, the medication can cause acetaminophen toxicity in animals. If overdosed, they can die. Hence, veterinary surgeons strongly prohibit this dangerous and misconceived treatment. However, via word-of-mouth, these practices prevail as part of the ingenious knowledge of animal care within the community of animal keepers who practice Baan-Baan pet-keeping.

Asas also practiced drug giving, which involved the use of human medicine to treat the animals. The Asas differentiated themselves from Baan-Baan caregivers in that their self-taught medical specialisation was acceptable because they learned it from veterinary professionals. They practiced at home what they learned from observing veterinary surgeons: how they diagnosed symptoms, prescribed medications, and administered vaccines. For example, the seasonal flu in cats was regarded as a common sickness that Asas could handle by themselves. They would purchase medicine to treat their animals by referring to what their vets prescribed for their animals. This was considered also as a strategy to economise their shelters' expenses. The volunteers still sought assistance from the vets if they were unsure of their drug-using knowledge or if the animal's illness was beyond their experiences. Nevertheless, they had confidence in their medical knowledge and even developed criticisms of the handiworks of veterinary students or newly graduated veterinary surgeons whom they saw as less experienced than their trusted veterinary surgeons or themselves. One of the nonvet caregivers was proud of her ability to calculate doses of medicine and told me that her skill was acknowledged by her veterinary surgeon.

The domain of charitable animal care is ethically ambiguous. On the one hand, vet and nonvet caregivers are concerned about Baan-Baan caregivers' practicing independent forms of medical care. For example, one of the volunteers recalled how a villager visited their mobile clinic to ask only for rabies vaccines. The villager said they could perform the vaccinations by

themselves and had equipment at home because they also practiced contraceptive-drug injection on their animals. However, the volunteer declined their request and persuaded them to take the animal to the clinic. Asa households were also equipped with animal and human medical supplies. Regardless of their experience in animal care, both kinds of caregivers were not veterinary professionals. However, animal volunteering emphasises the interdependence between the vet and the nonvet caregivers. In some circumstances, the veterinary activities of the nonvets are normalised out of necessity. The mobile clinic is one of these platforms where some veterinary procedures are distributed to nonvet caregivers.

The mobile clinic's preneutering preparation station, for example, was run by the nonvet volunteers who performed veterinary duties like administration of antibiotics and vaccination against rabies. These duties required a high level of scrupulousness. If given incorrectly, the animal could experience inflammation at the injection site. Normally, it was the experienced volunteers who performed this task, but they could also be assigned to less-experienced volunteers. Within a year, there were multiple occasions where I was assigned by the mobile clinic to vaccinate or administrate antibiotic drugs to animal patients. I always asked for assistance from the station's technician. However, the veterinary technicians themselves did not have a degree in veterinary technology, although they were trained personally by the veterinary surgeons. The technician at the preneutering station, for example, used to work as a van chauffeur before the vet employed him both as the vet team's personal driver and technician. Nevertheless, this type of veterinary technician was recognised as a legitimate workforce in Thailand's veterinary domain. The nonvet Asas could be considered part of this category as well.

Historically, Thai veterinary professionals depend on nonvet health workers. During the outbreaks of rinderpest in Thailand in 1970s, the government passed a regulation to produce and employ veterinary technicians. Particularly, in the volunteering community where there is

a shortage of both nonvet and vet labour, this domain of animal healthcare makes space for nonvet professionals to participate in jobs of veterinary assistance. One of the professions working closely with the veterinary surgeons and the Asas were dog catchers. They captured stray dogs, cats, and wildlife unapproachable by other means. People hired dog catchers to transport feral animals in their community to other locations. However, in this domain of animal welfare, dog catchers assisted mobile clinics in capturing strays for neutering. Their work was situated in an ambiguous area both in ethical and legal terms. The procedure of capturing stray or feral animals involved sedation, which should be conducted by veterinary surgeons and technicians with a degree. One of the dog catchers, Mala, had tranquilizer darts and anaesthetic drugs that were restricted prescription medications. Mala acquired these drugs through her connection with her trusted clinic. She revealed that in reality, veterinary surgeons could not go to the field and sedate animals by themselves because they had their day jobs. Even in the context of animal volunteering, animal-catching activity consumed both time and energy to search, chase, wait, and carry a drugged animal back to the clinic. Because veterinary surgeons were a valuable resource in the animal welfare community and they should better focus on neutering, animal-catching responsibilities, as well as others, were distributed to nonvet caregivers.

Nevertheless, the familiarity of nonvet caregivers with medical activities raised questions regarding the medical decision-making of nonvet caregivers. In the Thai context, some medical practices with levels of complexity were normalised as part of the household activities, such as having injecting equipment like syringes and needles at home. There are cultural and social explanations behind the distribution of medical responsibilities. Thai culture validates the existence of traditional medicine alongside the science-based one, in effect, justifying a number of Baan-Baan self-reliant practices and encouraging caregivers to exercise their judgment on medical treatment for their animals.

## **Animal Caregiving as a Healthcare Collaborative Project**

In the context of contemporary Thailand, caring for animals has increasingly involved healthcare collaborations. The veterinary profession is one among many modern institutions that entered the field of animal welfare volunteering. This chapter demonstrated that the work of veterinary surgeons cannot be actualised without the assistance of other professions. Dog catchers and vet assistants who carry out grime and laborious work. Nonvet volunteers who fill out administrative and sometimes veterinary roles when needed. Then, there were shopping mall managers, cat-fancier organizers, village leaders, monks, pet food manufacturers, and animal-loving benefactors who provide venues, sponsors, and donate healthcare resources. All of these nongovernment cooperative efforts tackle healthcare issues on human-animal cohabitation in urban spheres which the government and its control-based animal management have not yet addressed. Animal caregiving has become a healthcare collaborative project among nongovernment sectors.

Furthermore, all cultural inventions carry ethical implications (Faubion, 2001), caregiving practices included. In the life of a stray cat, there are healthcare providers engaging with it through the different practices of care: a local caregiver who gives it food and affection; a volunteer who books its neutering service in a charity's program and transports it to the mobile clinic; a vet who gives it medical treatment; a charity who funds the program; and other animal-loving benefactors who donate. Then, there are government healthcare sectors, the municipal body of animal control which may agree or disagree with its presence in the community, and with the other humans' involvement in its stray life. They all practice what they think is morally right. Ethical implications in these cooperative efforts in animal caregiving prompt the development of a new kind of ethics. To understand why caregiving

work is distributed the way it is, an investigation into the ethics of animal care is needed. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate why animal caregiving is an ethical collective project.

## Chapter 7: The Ethics of Animal Care

The city ecosystem of Krung Thep is continually transformed by changes in social relations, including human-animal relationships. This more-than-human society is preserved in part by animal caregiving, a collection of caregiving principles and practices governing trans-species relations. I have established that caregiving work for animals involves forms of trans-species communication that enable humans to acknowledge animals as social beings whose relationships with humans build our shared experiential world. My exploration of nonvet and vet caregivers also shows that this trans-species caregiving is moralised. From the perspective of these different caregivers, there is bad caregiving and good caregiving. Therefore, this chapter explores animal caregiving as an expression of morality in Thai society. I also consider the wider implications for understanding the enactment of moral behaviour in ecosystems in which humans are the keystone species.

Morality is a gargantuan concept which has been investigated across a variety of disciplines. Anthropology also has investigated the moral life of people, therefore, research into morality and ethics are always part of the discipline (Laidlaw, 2017). Morality is a set of social sanctions, but where it is derived from has been a debate among moral philosophers. Kant's explanation is that moral directives are grounded in rationality while Durkheim believes it is from society in which "god" is just a symbolic expression of social collectivities (Laidlaw, 2002). Both Kant's rationality and Durkheim's society conceptualise an anthropocentric morality that governs exclusively human-human relations. Nevertheless, because morality is a product of change, it is inevitably reconfiguring itself when new things arrive in the context. I argue that changing relationships cause morality to remodel. Moral principles without relations are ungrounded, incomprehensible and fictitious. Conversely, when new forms of relation emerge so does the morality that is supposed to govern them. Take for example Asimov's three laws of robotics which were first invented in one of his science fiction short stories and which

explored some of the moral questions relating to new forms of artificial intelligence (e.g. Asimov, 1950).

The incorporation of intelligent machines into human households has driven societies to develop new moral doctrines of the kind Asimov imagined. Asimov's pioneering thought experiments crucially provided a blueprint for artificial intelligence ethics and are now taken seriously by academic communities and governmental bodies, as the idea of human life assisted by AI and robotics is no longer a far-fetched reality (see Sawyer, 2007). One example of AI ethics is South Korea's preliminary draft of Robot Ethics Charter in 2007 which was inspired by Asimov's ideas (Young Lim et al., 2019). Social relations are not simply governed by morality, but the awareness of new social connections changes the way that ideas of morality develop. Thus, the relationship between morality and social relations is bidirectional. I would suggest that trans-species relations and the morality of animal care follow a similar pattern. For urban dwellers there is a perception of transspecies relationships as inseparable from their moral life, which prompts reflection on what it is to be moral.

Before I discuss the emergence of what I call the ethics of animal caregiving I observed in Krung Thep, I wish to clarify how this thesis defines morality and ethics. Durkheim (1957) categorised morality in terms of scale and group. If the group has strength in number and structure, it would have numerous moral rules and strong authority over its members (Durkheim, 1957, p.7). However, at a local operating level, these moral directives are constantly negotiated and transformed by people. People do not simply follow but choose how to respond to these moral impositions according to their circumstance and prior experience. This exercise of freedom to practice moral directives is defined by Laidlaw as ethics (Laidlaw, 2002).

Rabinow discussed people's ethical practice as a process of continual self-bricolage in which they fashion themselves into a certain kind of person within their social group and in

their shared environment. This notion builds on Foucault's ethical stance that humans are capable of freedom. Fabion (2001) further elaborated these ideas and ethics is a domain of elective aspirations. It is a project to not just individual particularity but also as a collective and performative project to achieve the moral ideal shared within social groups.

Building on the insights of the theorists above suggests also that to understand ethical practice, our investigations must move toward the world of ordinary life where moral decisions are made in real-life situations. My ethnographic findings resonate with studies of situational ethics that argue for the complexity of moral life in which moral codes are not absolute but are appropriate to the particularity of contexts (e.g. de Burgh, 1930). I further comment that in a sense, the ethics of animal care reveals ideal models of human-animal relations which fine-tune their ecosystems.

To put it simply, I will refer to animal caregiving as morality when I discuss moral directives that sanction behaviours on a large scale, such as the Buddhist prohibition of killing or the government's legal orders of which people are well informed. Ethics describes the way people act in response to these directives by way of their own ethical projects. These ethical projects are vary not only from culture to culture but also within societies. For caregivers in urban Thailand, caregiving as ethical practice is to strive towards an ideal human-animal relationship.

### **Animal Caregiving as an Ethical Project**

My dissertation characterises the ethics of animal care as a set of principles and practices governing caregiving work for animals. If a person bonds with an animal, who will be responsible for this trans-species relationship? What kinds of care work is appropriate for this relationship, and what are healthcare resources which the caregiver can use to carry out the

work? Significantly, the ethics of animal care does not pertain to animals. From the perspective of the caregivers, although animals are perceived as social persons, they are not moral agents due to their infantile state of social existence. However, their social actions significantly shape the moral duties of animal caregivers. Cats' activities such as house soiling, can create unhygienic conditions of a house which can cause infection and affect the cat's livelihood. This makes practices of housekeeping a moral duty of a caregiver.

Moral expectations and obligations which contribute to the caregivers' ethics of animal care is constructed from two influential moral systems of animal care. One is a Buddhist-influenced tradition of animal care that has long governed trans-species relations in Thailand. Baan-Baan pet-keeping is oriented in this morality. However, in the 19th century, a new moral system of social relations was introduced into the Thai context through the waves of industrial developments. By establishing secularised institutions, urbanisation familiarised Thai society with a new moral system of animal care originating from the European and American cultures.

The competition for dominance of these two moral systems creates a convergent ecosystem in which the principles and institutions of both "traditional" and "modern" animal care coexist within the same environment, allowing people to endorse both moral orders at the same time. For example, a veterinary surgeon who endorses science-based animal care can express their Buddhist identity at their workplace, for example by refusing to euthanize animals based on their religious belief. Some major principles of traditional and modern animal care contradict each other such as the dissension between the Buddhist prohibition against killing animals and the veterinary concept of animal euthanasia. The moral conflicts of these systems of animal care can cause a moral dissonance in people's sense of self and perception of social life. However, moral conflicts can also inspire ethical responses. To preserve their moral identity while living in this morally convergent ecosystem, the animal caregivers build an

ethical bricolage to navigate their transspecies relationships through the practice of ethical decision making.

Modernisation introduced new institutions and relationships to Thai society, such as the government and the market. In caring for animals, caregivers are expected to rely on these modern institutions of animal care instead of seeking support from temples. A good example is a public-private dichotomy, one of the principles grounded in capitalism. It rearranges social relations in accordance with the difference between public and domestic responsibilities. Caring for pet animals is considered a household chore which must be practised inside of a house. It can be carried on in public under restricted circumstances. For example, in dog walking, the pet owner must supervise the activity of the dog in the public. If people arbitrarily keep stray animals in public spaces, the action is recognised as irresponsible. Irresponsibility is immoral in a sense of defying the urban order and is punishable by fines. However, Thai caregivers find government-run bodies of animal management morally problematic which leads to many continuing to practice caregiving activities on the monastery ground. Monasteries are still perceived as the centre of the animal-care network, largely playing the role of the healthcare provider for stray animals. Nonetheless, the quality of care provided by temples is generally poor because of limited access to veterinary healthcare which leads to temple animals living in poor health. What the caregivers do is facilitate the transfer of veterinary healthcare resources from the science-based moral system to support temples representing the Buddhist-based system of animal care through volunteering. What is significant is that veterinary healthcare for pet animals is principally a for-profit institution to promote the modern concepts of animal caregiving, such as pet ownership. However, the caregivers manage to use its service, not for its intended use, as they do not pay for the service with their own money for their owned pets but with donations collected through the Buddhist

network of charitable giving for strays. This practice, in effect, promotes ambiguous pet ownership but for the caregivers, it is still considered an ethical act.

This phenomenon symbolises the resourcefulness and resilience of local caregivers whose meaningful trans-species bonds and sense of self are under immense pressure because of the morally convergent ecosystem. Their ethical work enables them to re-interpret moral dilemmas, weaving “immoral” actions into a “moral” narrative, and to make a connection to their cultural, religious, and global identities while always keeping animals by their side. In the next sections, I elaborate in detail on how the two forms of morality, traditional and modern animal care, shape trans-species relations and how the practice of ethical decision-making of animal caregivers empowers them to navigate their trans-species relationships between the different moral systems of animal care.

### ***Songshan as the Emotional Foundation of Thai Animal Caregiving***

In Thailand, animal caregiving is distributed in terms of class and expertise which means caregivers of different economic status and caregivers of vet and nonvet backgrounds are disciplined by different principles, have different kinds of caregiving responsibilities, and different access to healthcare resources. However, despite their differences, caregivers of all backgrounds have a similar perception of animals. They perceive animals as individuals capable of personalities and feelings that overlap with those of humans. The animals are described to live under the universal laws of Buddhist karmic reincarnation and have the same spiritual essence as humans. This perception influences caregivers to care for animals. Moreover, significantly, animals are also seen as lesser beings because of their dependency on humans and their lack of self-control which obliges humans to be sympathetic with them.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the portrait of the animals in the Thai animal welfare community is strongly infantilised. From the caregiver's perspective, the animal is the human's dependant, specifically the domestic urban kinds. When asked how they became animal caregivers, my informants often described finding stray cats in helpless situations, such as being abandoned in unlikely and dangerous places such as gas stations, controlled-access highways, or feral-dog territories. The animal was also depicted living with underlying conditions, such as malnourished, physically or mentally abused, diseased, and so forth. These narratives emphasise the animal's naivety in the human-dominant world, breaching societal orders such as trespassing, property damaging, or fouling, and consequently being abused by humans. Caregivers find these sorts of mistreatment and punishment to be immoral and cruel as the animal's misbehaviours are conditioned by their harsh livelihood and built-in psychological limitations. On the other hand, to be moral in this situation is to be sympathetic towards them which has to be done through caregiving.

The life of a Thai caregiver constantly encounters both domestic and wild animals struggling in urban spheres. This reality becomes well-established for two reasons. First of all, their volunteering activities for stray animals have brought their way of living close to areas where animals are vulnerable. Furthermore, the virtual world helps strengthen their embraced truth of the animal's dependency on humans as it provides a platform for narratives to be produced, circulated, and consumed by animal-loving people. From the perspective of the caregiver, the plight of the animals is indisputable and appropriate expressions should be grounded on the individual's innate sense of pity.

Pity (*songshan*; สงสาร) has been a prominent emotional feature of Thai Buddhist culture governing patron-client relationships. In the Thai context, pity and the Buddhist notion of loving-kindness (*metta*; เมตตา) are used interchangeably. From my reading, pity has a strong association with hierarchy and how to express kindness to inferior persons. This term

encompasses a wide range of relationships that can be more-than-human. The concept of Songshan implies that humans already have the innate capacities to commit a moral obligation with nonhuman others. Humans and nonhuman beings, such as animals and spirits, can take the roles of either benefactor or dependant depending on their statuses. Occupying a superior position in the karmic hierarchy means the person has to support the lesser being such as animals. In the community of animal welfare, Songshan is seen as the key emotion in the Thai perception of human decency. People who fail to act on Songshan towards animals are perceived as dangerous, selfish, or mad. On the contrary, people who display pity are seen as moral persons. All ethical practices towards the animals in the animal welfare community are grounded on this very emotion. To maintain the ideal human-animal relationships, pity-based practices of caregiving are woven into all stages of the animal's life.

### **Bonding and Dissolving of a Trans-Species Relationship**

The ethics of animal care is a collection of abstract principles and institutions for governing the cycle of trans-species relations in and with the ecosystem. Often, moral principles are not elaborative; they are subtly imbued here and there, in daily routines, emotional expressions, small conversations, and gestures throughout the person's social life. However, there are two significant stages of social relations that always concern morality – that is, how a relationship starts and how it ends. I experienced in the field that the gravitation of moral subjugation on trans-species relationships is arguably more intense than other in-between stages. And, this is also the areas in which traditional and modern animal care clash with each other the most.

Societies have interests in controlling trans-species bonding. This process induces a redistribution of care resources, such as time, energy, and materials, which can be used in other

human-human relationships. For example, dedication or negligence to animals can cause tensions between animal caregivers and their families, communities or workplace. An unrestricted entry to a trans-species relationship can result in stray populations, zoonotic outbreaks, and public disturbances that the society has to take responsibility for. On the other hand, making it difficult for people to connect to animals could go against their perception of social life. Thai caregivers see trans-species relationships as a way of being a good Buddhist, fulfilling their desire to make merit and to play a benefactor. Nonetheless, both traditional and modern forms of animal care develop different sets of moral principles to manage trans-species bonding.

Thai traditional animal care is grounded in the Buddhist teachings of loving-kindness which perceive animals as persons occupying a status lower than humans in the Karmic hierarchy. Because their personhood is connected to that of humans, actions between humans and animals are considered socially meaningful, and human life could be affected by their good or bad behaviours towards animals according to the duality of good and bad merit. Perceiving human-animal relations as a way to cultivate good merit, Buddhist principles prohibit humans from killing animals and encourage people to care for them. The economically disadvantaged groups, such as working-class caregivers, are not reprehended for keeping animals although their bonds with the animals could aggravate their economic situation or affect the health of both humans and animals. Their caregiving practice is considered moral and praiseworthy. This makes an entry to a trans-species connection highly accessible for people of all backgrounds.

On the contrary, the modern morality of animal care does not recognise the economically strained households keeping animals as a moral action. Its principles push forward the concept of responsibility, such as pet ownership in which people are expected to achieve economic and social stability before entering a trans-species relationship. Modern animal care values the concepts of a private-public dichotomy and individualism as the

foundation of modernity. This moral system designates animal care as the household's work. Under this system, care work increases in volume and cost. Animal caregiving has to be practiced in accordance with the principles of animal rights and veterinary medicine. Animals have to be registered, housed, vaccinated, and monitored for their physical and mental well-being. While these concepts strongly advocate for animal welfare and protection, they also underline the dangers of unrestricted animal bodies as carriers of diseases. And, with the purpose of reducing potential problems relating to the mismanagement of trans-species bonds, modern animal care attempts to condition individuals to bond under restricted circumstances. Not everyone should keep animals, only the ones who can be economically responsible. This idea is actualised in the Thai government's proposal of pet registration in 2018 in which the animal keeper had to pay 450 Baht (£11.25) for a pet license or they would be liable for a fine of 25,000 Baht (£625) (Matichon Weekly, 2018).

In conjunction with their principles, these two moral systems of animal care employ different ways of governing trans-species bonding. Take for example, how the practice of nourishing animals is differently defined.

***Nourishment is the key practice of entering a trans-species relationship***

Feeding others is perhaps one of mankind's oldest moral acts that essentially binds a society together. It has branched out into many complex forms of giving as society has advanced. From food to electronic money, items of what people give as well as methods of giving are expanding, but in essence, they convey the similar moral implications of nourishment, to give other lifeforms a means to live. Unexceptionally, feeding others is a moral act crucial for establishing trans-species sociality.

In Thai society, feeding animals is a major activity featuring in their relationships with owned and stray animals. My caregivers disclosed that they travelled a long distance from their neighbourhoods to feed stray animals residing in other areas. In cases of the caregivers who drove, they stored wet and dry manufactured pet food in their vehicles to give to animals on their commuting routes. Caregivers from the working class did not travel outside their neighbourhoods as frequently as the middle class, but they displayed a practice of giving food to animals whenever they found them. This suggests that in the mind of those with established trans-species bonds, the human habitation is full of animals, some living in parks, streets, alley corners, on the temple walls, or taking a nap underneath a car. Their existence is the potential of a new bond as well as a reminder of their obligation as the benefactor. Hence, having some food with them ready to give is considered to be moral.

Feeding animals uncovers class stratification. The kind of food given to animals, how it is given, and how the caregiver finances this practice are heavily intertwined with their socio-economic statuses. The moral character of caregivers is determined in connection with their inter-class and intra-class interactions within the community of animal welfare as well as the wider society. As I described in Chapter 5, the general public has a tendency to reprimand the working class's practice of animal care. Because of their material struggles, caregivers from economically disadvantaged backgrounds keep unhygienic shelters and feed animals with lower-quality food, particularly a traditional cat diet of fish and rice which can cause diarrhoea and kidney disease in cats. The caregiver's Baan-Baan practice of feeding animals in public is also considered as an urban disturbance because fresh ingredients in the food can pollute public spaces when it spoils. Moreover, they rely on donations from their patrons to provide food for animals. As Thai society became urbanised, this tradition of feeding has increasingly become ill-tuned to the urban landscape.

Modernisation introduced new institutions in the domain of animal caregiving: veterinary healthcare and the market for pet care which make animal care purchasable. In this commercialised world, the traditional way of providing care by hard labour is increasingly associated with negative connotations. The ability to purchase is becoming a criterion of the moral character of good caregivers. Modern animal care set higher standards than ever before for Thai caregivers. Giving food to animals has to follow the nutrient requirements of animals. A good example is a case of a middle-class caregiver who suggested her working-class fellow change a diet of stray cats from fish and rice to manufactured dry food because the latter is good for the animal's health, highly preservable in the hot climate, and easy to clean. Moreover, the good way of feeding animals in this moral system is at home. Pet-keeping should be relocated outdoors to indoors so the public spaces can be used for economic productivity. Indoor pet-keeping of the middle class is strongly favoured by the urban ecosystem because it reinforces the importance of these new social arrangements between individuals, the state, and the market.

However, a moral judgment on a caregiver is not absolute but is structured on circumstances surrounding the caregiver. Within the community of animal welfare, the middle-class caregivers who endorse indoor pet-keeping, do not find the caregiving practice of their working-class counterparts unpardonably immoral. The notion of class partakes in shaping what people of different economic groups can or cannot do in their trans-species relationships. For instance, cleanliness features prominently in the middle class's caregiving practices. In the process of feeding animals, the Asas developed a habit of cleaning food bowls and feeding grounds regularly. However, they saw that the unhygienic conditions of working-class people's houses were how they lived their own lives. Working-class caregivers did not subject their animals to poor livelihoods with intentional purposes but their practice of animal caregiving was a consequence of the material struggle which the middle class should not condemn. One

of the Asa stood up for her working-class caregiver that she did her best. The Asa's statement also reveals the importance of intentionality in ethical decision-making. Her statement also strongly resonated with de Burgh's significant argument that moral agents carry moral duties always in imperfect manners due to their life circumstances, he wrote, "I can only will it as this duty of mine, here and now, envisaged and willed under empirical conditions of my particular selfhood and of the particular situation in which I find myself." (de Burgh, 1930, p.587).. In this sense, moral actions for the Asa are to display admiration for the poor's perseverance as well as to elevate impoverished households. Therefore, when their working-class clients faced pressures from the wider community and local authorities who wanted to shut down their below-standard shelters, the middle-class patrons worked together to help them keep their trans-species relationships.

On the contrary, middle-class Asas subject themselves to a stricter ethical assessment. The middle class is expected to not only ensure the survival of animals but to provide them with a quality of life. The enrichment of pet animals includes not only good-quality food but also good houses, toys, accessories, medical healthcare, and recreation, which are to help them live happy and healthy. Moreover, middle-class caregivers are expected to fulfil this moral expectation by their own finances. This modern morality of animal care does not prohibit caregivers from seeking assistance, but it restricts their options to for-profit facilities. The involvement of capitalism in providing care for animals could influence the perception of people on morals. Feeding stray animals with manufactured food is incorporated into the ideal of good caregivers. Another interesting case is an increase in the popularity of catteries, a kind of business that takes advantage of the niche market for pet care. It promotes the idea that pet animals should continuously be in human care. If owners have to leave their houses, their cats should be placed under the care of professional caregivers. This trend is relatively new in Thailand and is still seen as a pleasurable preference more than a moral expectation. However,

healthcare providers of modern animal care like this play a significant role in shaping the landscape of trans-species relations, in which sensible options for assistance should come from payable and professional services. As I already discussed, keeping a trans-species relationship in this urbanised environment is challenging for caregivers regardless of their socio-economic statuses. Even middle-class caregivers grapple with living up to their high-priced moral expectations. They, too, seek financial support in the form of donations.

Donation is a morally ambiguous area in which people of different classes are expected to behave differently. Animal shelters run by the working class are allowed to openly seek donations, such as pet food, medication, and money because of the caregiver's economically disadvantaged status. Although it is not taboo for middle-class caregivers to accept donations, their actions are more restricted by their intra-class morals. Self-reliance is a quality valued among the Asas. This is because social relations in Thailand are structured in terms of age and class. All socioeconomic groups have their own courses of action; older and wealthier people have to play the role of benefactors, not dependants. Failures to play their expected part in this patron-client relationship can result in social scrutiny. In this narrative, Asas expect those of their middle-class group who join their community of animal volunteering to make contributions as benefactors. An Asa who takes monetary compensation has to display to the community that their dedication to animals is genuine. For example, if they frequently ask for donations, they have to show a financial statement or photographic evidence that the money is used for animals. The manner in which they ask for money also factors into the perception of the community towards their moral character. An explicit request for donations could be seen as an act of selfishness where they make a profit from helping animals. Even a charity, such as CFCF was wary of being seen as a business by asking for donations from people it helped. Caregivers who fail to live up to these expectations would be stigmatised as “fleas” (*heb*; เห็บ),

which is a form of social punishment for people who are believed to exploit their animal's well-being and their fellow caregivers' Songshan for selfish gain.

The practice of nourishment has been shaped by traditional and modern forms of animal care. Through situational decision-making, animal caregivers build their ethics from the principles of these moral systems. They do not completely follow one form of animal care but practice both and even ones that are considered immoral in the moral system that they endorse. For instance, middle-class caregivers see the importance of modern animal care in the practice of feeding, but not all principles in this moral system are equally crucial to their moral identity; thus, they can be omitted in favour of a more suitable principle from a different moral system. In the introduction, Viriya, who was a middle-class caregiver, endorsed modern animal care, but she still fed rice and fish to stray cats because her cats liked it better. In the caregiver's way of thinking, the weights of these principles are varied. Not practising some moral actions does not necessarily mean being immoral because the practitioners do not restrict themselves in one moral system but rotate their caregiver identities between the two moral worlds.

The process of bonding cannot be thought inseparable from the process of dissolving relationships. The discontinuity of trans-species relationships is a process filled with dilemmas that greatly test the moral identity of caregivers.

### ***Abandonment and euthanasia: how to morally dissolve a trans-species relationship***

In the section on nourishment, I discussed how moral principles are factored differently in the caregivers' ethical decision-making. Some of the morals are perceived by caregivers as dispensable for the core of their moral life. The quality of food is part of the modern animal care that middle-class caregivers endorse, but some of them still gave rice and fish to stray cats. Not giving manufactured food does not compromise their integrity. In contrast to choosing the

diet for cats, some practices in the process of dissolving bonds can evoke a stronger sense of ethical uneasiness. Take the practice of killing animals for example. What would caregivers do if they are forced by circumstances to take actions they themselves find immoral? How do they make sense of their identities in morally problematic situations? This section will address these questions.

There are several ways to discontinue a trans-species relationship but the ethical acceptability of these practices depends on how the moral systems of animal care perceive the value of animal lives.

Both the traditional and the modern systems of animal care unanimously accept the natural death of pet animals as an ethical exit from a trans-species relationship. The faith in Theravada Buddhism which is the foundation of traditional pet-keeping instructs that animals should be left alive to fulfil their karmic responsibilities. Meanwhile, the foundation of modern animal care is the concepts of animal rights and welfare, in which animals deserve to live because of their capacities of sentience. Despite their differences in moral reasoning, the two moral systems give people a similar moral order that they should not harm animals to dissolve a relationship. Violence against animals is considered a prosecutable offence and an act of bad merit. Caregivers whose animals pass away naturally do not experience a moral unease from their death, but they may express grief. Depending on the closeness of their bonds with the dead animals, forms of grieving vary. For some Buddhist households, deceased animals receive religious funerals in which their bodies are cremated. However, because funeral services provided by monasteries can be costly, only a few animals to which the caregivers feel emotionally attached get a religious ritual. In my observations, the management of the death of animals is carried out in practical ways. Some caregivers buried dead animals in gardens, but some who did not have a garden or whose yards were paved with concrete came up with creative ideas of animal burial. One of these caregivers decided to use her workplace's garden

as a place to bury her dead animals while the other purchased a large garden plot to bury animals and let them decompose naturally. I also met caregivers who managed dead animals in a simpler way by placing them in cardboard boxes and putting them beside a dumpster. They did not find it disrespectful to the animals as they had already taken care of them when they were alive. These examples demonstrate that caregivers retain their freedom in managing the dead bodies of animals. In this regard, the management of animal cadavers is a demonstration of personal sentiments. The measure of one's sense of morality is that one fulfils one's caregiving role by staying in the relationship until it reaches its conclusion.

In numerous circumstances, trans-species relationships are discontinued intermediately. Animal abandonment and euthanasia are two notable practices of dissolving an undesired trans-species relationship. What is intriguing about animal abandonment is that it is a morally reprehensible but widely practiced Baan-Baan tradition in Thailand. However, it is considered immoral and illegal in modern animal care because it displays irresponsibility. The Thai government classifies abandoning animals as an act of cruelty which is punishable by fines. It is also a taboo among animal caregivers in the community of animal volunteering not only because it is illegal, but it also shows the lack of Songshan. Nevertheless, widespread animal abandonment is a significant consequence of the Thai people's strong faith in Buddhism. The first principle of the five precepts instructs, "Do not kill", governs people's behaviours through their fear of karmic retaliation. Social punishment also falls upon people who kill animals without a justifiable reason. Although killing for consumption is legally permitted, Buddhist Thais still feel obligated to amend for the act of killing by praying, giving tributes to monks, and dedicating good merit from their good deeds to animals they have killed. The act of killing is fundamentally uncompromising to the Buddhist caregivers' sense of morality. Despite not wanting animals in their lives anymore, many people do not wish harm to their former pets. What they want is for animals to move on with their new lives as humans

do. Therefore, compared to killing, animal abandonment is a relatively humane way to terminate an unwanted trans-species relationship. There is a case of animal abandonment in construction sites in which construction workers keep dogs on site but leave them when the contract is over because they have to move to new jobs where keeping these dogs does not fit in their next chapter of life. So, they leave the dogs at the construction site because they know there will be other caregivers to take over their care for the dogs. The practice of animal abandonment is also grounded in the idea of unambiguous pet ownership in which care work is distributed within the community. Traditional institutions such as monasteries and communities are parts of this caregiving network which distributes care to unowned and abandoned animals. Besides monasteries, public spaces such as marketplaces and private spaces such as caregivers' shelters are places where people choose to abandon animals in hopes that their former pets will bond with new caregivers and live. Hence, animal abandonment is not just a personal preference but a systemic ethical practice with specific rules and institutions to make it work properly. Clearly, this practice does not completely eradicate the stigma of people who abandon animals, but it helps them avoid a more severe karmic and social punishment for violating the Buddhist teachings of no killing.

In contemporary societies, particularly in the developed world, killing pet animals can be morally acceptable under restricted circumstances (see Hurn & badman-King, 2019). This practice is called "animal euthanasia", a clinical method of ending animal lives performed by veterinary practitioners. In a like manner of animal abandonment, euthanasia is a systemic ethical practice that involves specific regulations and institutions of modern animal care. The veterinary knowledge of animals underlines the importance of micromanaging animal bodies and restricting trans-species relations. Modern animal care is designed to realise two concepts. The first is that owned animals are entitled to animal rights and welfare. It permits killing if it is used to end the suffering of animals with deteriorating health with a morally approved

method to ensure that the transitioning process to death is as humane as possible. Secondly, it is to eliminate dangers associated with unowned animals. This moral system of animal care is quite concerned with stray populations which it sees as threatening the urban order. Public disturbances and zoonotic outbreaks are connected to unowned bodies of animals. Hence, it justifies individual caregivers and institutional bodies, such as government shelters, in euthanizing animals. Although euthanasia is not an absolute taboo, it is one of the least popular options of Thai households. The community of animal volunteering advocates scientific-led practices of pet-keeping, so euthanasia being part of veterinary medicine is not condemned. Nonetheless, the majority of nonvet caregivers rarely consider it a legitimate option for ending a trans-species relationship. In Thailand, euthanasia is generally practiced in veterinary training and livestock work, not for putting down pet animals which caregivers can keep no longer. People who wish for euthanasia to end the suffering of their beloved pet are discouraged to do so by monks because, even if it is done with good intentions, it is still an act of killing that generates bad merit. Phra Paisal Visalo (2017), a respected Thai monk, elaborated further that bad merit from killing with good intention may have less severe effects than bad merit from cruel killing, but caregivers should still seek ways to relieve the pain of dying animals other than ending their lives. Even some Thai veterinary practitioners avoid euthanizing animals if there are alternative options to fulfil their professional responsibilities without compromising their Buddhist identity. The avoidance of euthanasia among the caregivers is notable when compared to other veterinary practices that manipulate the reproductive bodies of animals: sterilisation.

## *Neutering and Abortion*

Neutering is a clinical practice for controlling animal reproduction. It is considered a precautionary measure to prevent the problem of stray populations in society. I described methods of sterilisation used by veterinary surgeons in Chapter 6. Neutering can also involve abortion in cases of stray pregnant cats, so I will discuss them together in this section.

Both sterilisation and abortion are grounded in the morality of modern animal care. From the perspective of Baan-Baan caregivers, these two veterinary practices of animal birth control are considered immoral. Buddhist teachings say that animals are forms that low-level spirits take to repay their bad deeds and to make good merit to advance into higher states of beings. Animal birth control is seen as a human intervention within the cycle of reincarnation. By preventing souls from rebirth, practitioners essentially prolong the spiritual suffering of animals. Moreover, neutering is also seen as inflicting pain on the animal's body. These actions, therefore, generate bad merit which would affect the health of practitioners in a similar manner to animals'. For example, it is a widespread belief in Buddhist communities that neutering animals would cause people involved in the process to become infertile. In one case, the CFCF's mobile clinic travelled to a community temple in a provincial area to provide free sterilisation for temple cats. The mobile clinic set its stations in the temple's sermon hall which was accessible to villagers. The foundation wanted to encourage rural villagers to take their animals to the clinic, so it permitted people to lounge in the sermon hall and observe the clinic's activities. While one of the CFCF volunteers was working in a preneutering preparation station, a middle-aged female villager approached and began expressing her feeling that she felt pity for the cats because they would undergo pain from neutering and that she thought neutering made bad merit. This perception is not only true among local people, even the CFCF's vet and nonvet caregivers who advocated animal birth control perceive it as making bad merit. The

Asas speculated that female volunteers tended to develop reproductive health problems, such as ovarian cysts or cancer, which resulted in a hysterectomy or the removal of a uterus, making them infertile.

However, despite believing in the negative karmic consequences of neutering animals, caregivers continue to endorse this veterinary practice. One of the CFCF volunteers corrected the villager about her misunderstanding of neutering by explaining how it scientifically improved the lives of stray animals. Some of Asas countered the Buddhist argument against neutering that they would accept the fate of being infertile if it prevented animals from the pains of overbreeding. Although the Buddhist teachings oppose neutering, this practice is widely accepted by many Buddhist communities. The CFCF's mobile sterilisation program received positive responses from Buddhist monks and villagers, and it often returned to these Buddhist communities whenever invited. This correlated Toukhsati et al. (2015), who interviewed Buddhist caregivers of cats and dogs and found they would let animals be neutered. The study concluded, "Most guardians of cats and dogs who were sterilised or intact did not think that this practice had been consistent with their religious beliefs . . . Our findings suggest that a perceived lack of religious endorsement may not necessarily preclude guardians from sterilizing their animals" (p.18).

What is significant is that these caregivers endorse sterilisation while rejecting euthanasia. The difference in their attitude towards these two veterinary practices is an example of situational ethics. The ecosystem of social relations in which people live factors greatly in their endorsement or resistance to moral principles. Who do people have meaningful relationships with? In what culture and communities do they live?

In the Thai context of trans-species relationships, neutering benefits animals that caregivers care about. Hence, under this specific circumstance, neutering becomes ethical. From the perspective of Asa caregivers, the fertility of stray animals is the root of stray

populations and zoonotic outbreaks. Neutering is perceived as a sustainable method in which its benefits the livelihood of animals as well as society. These benefits outweigh Buddhist doctrines that support uncontrolled animal reproduction. In this sense, they can come to terms with forfeiting the Buddhist principle of rebirth for a science-based principle of animal birth control. Endorsing or practicing sterilisation does not disrupt the moral identity of the caregivers because Asa caregivers can weave this religiously immoral action into a morally coherent narrative of caring for animals. The Asa community is grounded in the idea of charitableness which expects strong dedication for animals from its members. To be a good Asa is to volunteer their resources for animals, whether it is their money, time, or health. Following this line of reasoning, enduring karmic consequences from endorsing sterilisation reinforces the perception of a good Asa, allowing the caregivers to be accepted in their volunteering community. The volunteers recalled the pain that they believed resulted from the karmic effects without guilt or fear because these pains were a display of their dedication to animals in which people in their community shared their experience, creating a strong sense of belonging.

Moreover, the perception of doing immoral actions for a moral cause allows the caregivers to negotiate with the Buddhist-based moral system for leniency on their karmic effects. For example, a veterinary surgeon aborted stray pregnant cats as part of neutering. His practice was perceived by himself and the community of animal welfare to result in negative consequences on his life because not only did he intervene with the cycle of rebirth, he killed lives in the womb. These could have severe negative impacts on his life, such as terminal illnesses, accidents, or death. However, because he acted for a good cause, his bad merit could be negotiated with Buddhist rituals of merit-making. On Buddhist days, he would make merit by donating money or food to temples or inviting monks to eat and pray in his house and dedicating his good merit from these rituals to dead animals that he had wronged or killed in

his veterinary conduct. Many vet and nonvet caregivers employ similar strategies to ask animal spirits to forgive them. If they practice merit-making frequently, their good merit could negate bad consequences and even bring good fortune to them, such as winning the lottery. Through these negotiations at personal and social levels, caregivers reinterpret the perceived immoral aspects of neutering to be ethical and forgivable. As long as they practiced merit-making, they would not experience serious karmic consequences.

Euthanasia, however, is believed to have severe negative impacts, and many caregivers find euthanizing animals exhausts their sense of morality. Unlike neutering, which people can argue is a way of caring for animals and society, euthanasia is largely perceived as immoral. The majority of caregivers, vet and nonvet, do not think it is a sustainable solution to the problem of stray populations. They argue that even if they culled animals in one community, a new group of animals would quickly replace it. The act of killing would have to repeat endlessly without significant improvements to animal lives or society. Because of this line of reasoning, euthanasia cannot be woven into a morally coherent narrative of animal caregiving. Caregivers are also anxious to go through this practice without a strong case to negotiate with the Buddhist karmic system. Although euthanasia has a science-based moral system to facilitate the practice, the practitioners live in the religious-based system where their meaningful bonds are formed, and they need a certain justification from Buddhist doctrines that what they do is pardonable. Support or practicing euthanasia could result in severe karmic retaliations, and making good merit might not be sufficient to negate the bad effect.

Neutering or euthanasia occurs under restricted circumstances where people have to make decisions that put them between the two moral systems of which they are a part. In general, veterinary interventions that bring death forward are discouraged. It is a moral expectation among animal caregivers that animals should be cared for throughout their natural lifespans. In contemporary Thailand, veterinary medicine is increasingly sought as a means to

carry out this responsibility of improving the livelihood of animals and extending their lifespans. However, this domain has its fair share of moral dilemmas.

## **Animal Healthcare**

In a way, animal healthcare is conjoined with the idea of nourishment. However, when it comes to medical care, the difference in moral expectations between vet and nonvet caregivers has to be highlighted. Hence, I decided to discuss this topic in its own section. Vet and nonvet caregivers are expected to practice different forms of healthcare work. Professionalism plays a role in dividing the caregiving responsibilities of these two kinds of caregivers. For example, nonvets are restricted from performing the care work of vets. In reality, the domain of practical veterinary care is adjoined, allowing the care work of the vet caregivers to be carried out by the nonvet caregivers. This creates morally ambiguous issues, and these caregivers have to come to terms with their moral identities. These moral dilemmas in the domain of animal healthcare are the focus of this section.

### ***Paying the Medical Bill***

Before the establishment of science-based animal healthcare in the 20th century, Thai households practiced Baan-Baan pet-keeping, relied primarily on the animal's self-recovery processes, and consequently leading to preventable illness and injuries being the causes of untimely death in animals. Veterinary treatment for pet animals became more accessible just in the 21st century when small-animal clinics began opening in urbanised areas. Seeking veterinary treatment for animals has gradually become a new norm among the middle class because it is seen a solution to improving the livelihood of animals. Hence, this moral

expectation can be notably observed in the community of animal volunteering where middle-class caregivers actively participate. Volunteers and veterinary surgeons put great emphasis on the pursuit of veterinary care for animals. There are cases of cat patients' dying in the mobile sterilisation clinic from their unknown underlying health conditions. When the veterinary surgeons assessed that the animals were unrecoverable and they stopped trying to retrieve their lives, the Asas requested them to continue the lifesaving procedures such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation and oxygen therapy. Some Asas described that the untimely death of the animal gave them a sense of foreboding, and they felt sympathetic towards both the animal and its keeper. There also are cases of animals' experiencing difficulties from old age and underlying conditions that were allowed to pass away naturally. All of these accounts demonstrate that caregivers are motivated to give their effort and resources to provide medical treatment to their animals. Because veterinary care is acquired by the market economy, monetary spending is used as a criterion of selflessness by how much money caregivers are willing to spend on their animals' health. There is inside humour regarding spending money on cats' treatment which was told to me by my Asa informant. It was an analogy between veterinary care and a holiday trip:

First Caregiver: My cat has visited Japan.

Second Caregiver: Then my cat has gone to Europe.

The cats did not take a vacation in a literal sense. What it actually meant is that the first caregiver paid about 50,000 Baht (around £1,250) for her cat's medical treatment. This large sum of money could have granted her a trip to Japan. As the money already went to the medical bill, she decided to make a joke that her cat travelled metaphorically to Japan in her stead. Similarly, the second caregiver paid 100,000 Baht (around £2,500) which was equivalent to a trip to Europe. However, both of them decided to sacrifice their nice vacations for their cats' well-being.

Asa caregivers also act as the gatekeeper to the household domain of human-animal relationships by instructing others, particularly new pet keepers, to follow their ethical code of providing medical care to animals. In Chapter 4, I described the cat adoption interviews between the Asas and adopters in which the latter were asked several questions regarding their knowledge of primary care and common sickness in cats and their perception of their obligations in this area. The adopters were expected to financially support medical care for animals by themselves. Financing medical treatment for animals is a significant trait of a good caregiver.

Nevertheless, despite this moral expectation of paying medical bills for animals, Thailand's animal healthcare system is largely operated by private-sector businesses which make conventional health services inaccessible for all households, particularly poor caregivers. The domain of paid animal healthcare is insufficient to safeguard the well-being of stray animals. Caregivers who manage shelters for rescued stray animals, in particular, encounter a financial challenge in providing veterinary care for a large number of animals in their care. Shelters run by the working class cannot provide basic care for animals, such as neutering and vaccination against rabies, as they struggle to even finance the animals' food. These pressures threaten trans-species bonds, and influence caregivers to develop strategies to finance medical treatment, such as collaborations between the middle class and working class and between vet and nonvet caregivers. I discussed these caregiving collaborations in Chapters 5 and 6. Because of them, the animal healthcare sector became one of the areas where morals around care practices are very detailed and dilemmatic. I wish to bring up the notion of charitable giving in this section to underline how people use ethical reasoning to practice seeking donations.

First, veterinary care is tied to the market economy. This morally implies that caregivers should attain financial stability before taking care of animals so they would not depend on public resources. This moral system of modern animal care worries about the financial

mismanagement of economically disadvantaged households that would burden the public. The stray population problem in Thailand is perceived as the consequence of poor households' being unable to pay for neutering for their animals. In this strict sense, caregivers can be disqualified from caring for animals if they are unable to pursue adequate veterinary care by themselves. Because of this pressure, caregivers practice charitable giving. The reciprocal exchanges between patrons and clients distribute care resources from the wealthier to the poorer. In this context, a donation is normalised as an ethical means to finance medical treatment for animals. However, asking for donations for animal care expenses has become a morally ambiguous subject among nonvet caregivers. There is a difference in how middle-class and working-class caregivers ask and receive donations. Because of the culture of patronage, the working class plays the role of the client, which culturally justifies their material needs, qualifying them to ask for support. Hence, working-class caregivers are open about their struggles and desires to be supported. However, middle-class caregivers may receive donations if they exhibit efforts. The Asas have to show a reason why a middle-class person needs donations. The power dynamics between the middle class and the working class indicates that the former is to play the role of the patron. However, if they are to become a client to another person, they have to defend their position. The middle-class Asas who ask for donations have to display that they work to help stray animals for altruistic causes. Yet the manner in which they ask for donations has to be subtle because otherwise it would make them look like a fraud who takes advantage of people's Songshan and break the trust.

### ***The Distribution of Veterinary Responsibilities to the Nonvet***

Another ethical argument in the domain of animal healthcare is collaborations between vet and nonvet caregivers. In Chapter 6, I discussed that the domain of animal volunteering

experiences a shortage of veterinary manpower and has to distribute veterinary responsibilities to nonvet caregivers to carry out sterilisations and rabies vaccination for stray animals. This demonstrates an ethical ambiguity in the veterinary code of conduct. When the veterinary procedures are restricted to veterinary practitioners in the context where professional animal healthcare services are unaffordable by poorer communities, it creates a dilemma because disadvantaged people and animals will suffer from inaccessibility to veterinary care. Thus, both vet and nonvet caregivers who work with communities have to negotiate the boundary of veterinary care work. What is ethically acceptable in this particular situation?

Situational ethics is about the circumstance surrounding the process of making decisions. In the context of Thai animal healthcare, conventional practice is unable to safeguard lives, particularly stray animals whose populations overwhelm limited healthcare resources. The local authorities in provincial areas lack the equipment to capture and neuter strays, and neutering services provided by the government are not enough. This could lead to discontinuing trans-species bonds, stray animals dying from preventable diseases, and society being endangered by zoonotic outbreaks. In this situation, a negotiation between vet and nonvet has been made to involve each other in the process of providing veterinary care. This leads to some adjustments in the veterinary procedures which I described in detail in Chapter 6 about the mobile clinic. In the context of mobile clinics, the veterinary procedures were simplified to allow the CFCF's vet and nonvet caregivers to work together. This decision was seen as an ethical action appropriate to the shortages of resources they both faced in neutering animals outside conventional healthcare.

### *Transformation of an Animal From Person to Body in a Clinic*

Although vet and nonvet caregivers cooperate in animal caregiving, their moral characters are distinguished by how they perceive animal bodies and what they can or cannot do with them. What nonvet caregivers feel is always resonant with what they do. For example, pity leads to the practice of nourishment. Nonvet caregivers perceive animals as persons, and they treat them as such even in the clinical context. It is straightforward and less dilemmatic. However, it works differently among veterinary professionals.

Veterinary medicine is one of the domains in which killing animals is morally accepted as the practice of care. In veterinary schools, veterinary students spend 6 years during which they familiarise themselves with the death of animals. They are assigned to work with healthy and sick animals of various species where they witness different kinds of death, including euthanising animals by themselves as part of their education. Then they learn from these animals' carcasses: how tissues and organs work and how bones are structured. All of this training is to transform a student into a professional whose career will be filled with many more dilemmas. Wichai, a veterinary surgeon, aged 36, told me:

Since I was a 6-year veterinary student, I have seen the death of dogs and cats.

I studied cases in [the animal hospitals] the ICU and ER. On [an animal was] the dead, [performed] CPR; [it was] revived and knocked out, revived, then, knocked out. I even euthanatised dogs and cats.

The surgeon also laughed during the part of the interview regarding the death and killing of animals he had witnessed and administered. His sense of humour was a kind of emotion that I never saw in the interviews with the nonvet caregivers, who commonly reacted to the death of animals with straightforward sympathy or equanimity. How a veterinary surgeon channels their inner life into an emotional expression is rather complicated.

What distinguishes vets from nonvet caregivers is their dual perceptions of animals: one as individual and the other as bodies. When off work, veterinary practitioners expressed their affection and sympathy towards animals. Their family backgrounds are of pet keepers. One of the vet interviewees said that her upbringing with pet animals was a crucial factor that inspired her to become a vet. These veterinary surgeons also practice Buddhist alms giving in which they dedicate their good merit for the animals that died under their care. These practices strongly suggest that veterinary surgeons perceive animals in a similar manner to their nonvet counterparts. Animals are seen as individuals whose spiritual essence connects to that of humans through the karmic cycle. However, in the clinical setting, animals are de-individualised and treated as bodies in veterinary operations. In the CFCF's mobile sterilisation clinic, cat patients were regarded by the veterinary practitioners simply as "cat" (*maew*; แมว). One of the veterinary surgeons who supervised the veterinary students would ask his juniors whether they wanted more cats to practice on or whether they preferred to neuter male or female cats. The sex of a cat is the most determining factor recognised by these veterinary practitioners because it is important to neutering surgery. Throughout the neutering procedures, the perception of animal patients as living individuals had been pushed into the background. Only a few body parts of the animal became the veterinary surgeon's central focus, such as reproductive organs for neutering and respiratory systems for keeping it alive. This process of de-individualisation of the cat enabled the vet to display actions and emotional expressions that were rarely seen in the nonvet caregivers.

There was a difference in how the body of a cat was handled by three groups of caregivers working in the mobile sterilisation clinic: the vets, veterinary students, and nonvet volunteers. The manner in which the experienced veterinary practitioners carried a cat's body can be described as rough handling. For instance, they sometimes carried the unconscious cat by pulling its hind legs or its scruff, which allowed them to carry more than one cat at the same

time. This was considered a kind of clinical humour as well because the veterinary surgeons did this to startle the veterinary students and the nonvet volunteers who tended to cradle the animal in a baby-holding manner.

Different levels of familiarity with the idea of the animal as a body between the vet and nonvet caregivers can also be seen in how they do clinical humour. The CFCF's mobile clinic never lacked humour and laughter. However, there was one kind of humour that was mostly seen among the vets, one that was related to the life and death of animals. The nonvet caregivers' sense of humour relating to animals was grounded in the animal's actions. In the clinical setting, the nonvet caregivers were careful with handling the animal's conscious body and their jokes were often about what the cat reacted or acted towards something that they found endearing and hilarious. For example, they laughed at the anaesthesia-induced cat who tried to escape even though it could not walk straight. The vets created jokes about what they did to the animal's unconscious body. Their practice of humour strongly suggested self-satisfaction. Take, for example, the case of a cat with rectal prolapse admitted to the sterilisation clinic. Part of the rectal surgery was to push the cat's displaced rectum back inside its body through its anus. In this process, the vet asked me to apply table sugar on the protruding rectum to reduce its swelling. The vet humorously compared the process of applying sugar to the making of a Thai dessert called roti, which is a rolled fried dough sprinkled with lots of sugar. Furthermore, he intentionally shocked his assistants, the Asa who was filming the operation and me, by abruptly pushing the protruding rectum back inside the cat's body and laughed at our surprised gasp.

Not all body parts of the animal require equal treatment of care. The way that the veterinary surgeons handled a cat may seem less gentle, but it did not endanger the animal. They had years of work experience to optimise their attention on the animal's body when in the clinic and knew which parts of the body were safe to handle with less care. This allowed

them to work more efficiently with the parts that needed to be treated. Meanwhile, the nonvet Asas and veterinary students tended to resort to their perception of animals as a person and to care for them as a whole rather than parts, including through the practice of touch.

Another example of the difference between vets and nonvet caregivers was how they treated animals when they died in the clinic. The CFCF's mobile clinic saw a few cases per year in which animals died under their care. Although the death of an animal was somewhat common, even expected, the nonvet volunteers were still saddened and stressed by its death because of their perception which always connected the cat to its personhood and its relationship with its owner. During my fieldwork, there was one case when the cat died in the clinic. The nonvet volunteers informed its owner about this grim news. As soon as the vet proclaimed the cat dead, the senior vet bundled it in a towel and presented it to his juniors calling it "the mummy cat", to which the veterinary students reacted with laughter. Shortly after that, the animal was placed in its basket for its owner to retrieve, and the vets resumed their work. The emotional expression of the vets facing the death of the animal was indifferent compared to that of the nonvets. However, the vet who played the "mummy cat" joke was also a faithful Buddhist who frequently dedicated his good merit to the cats that died under his care. In this sense, the vet's humour was one of several strategies that they employed to dissociate their mind from their clinical work, allowing them to fulfil their professional responsibility first and compensate for their personal feeling later.

Levels of familiarity with the perception of the animal as a body can be advanced by education in veterinary medicine. The veterinary students are in this transitioning phase in which they learn a new morality grounded in veterinary science and what kinds of actions they are permitted to do to the animal. For example, the veterinary students' surgical handiwork often was less refined than the experienced vets. With their limited experience, it was very common for the veterinary student to accidentally cut small blood vessels of cats and make

them bleed. This type of injury did not endanger the animal, but the blood made the area around the wound look grotesque. However, the veterinary students had a habit of not cleaning the blood. After they sterilised the surgical wound, they immediately sent the animal to the postcare station. During this time, the excessive blood on the cat's body would dry and become difficult to clean. The nonvet volunteers working in the postcare station had to request them to clean the animal's wound before the blood dried off because the animal's owner could be disturbed by it. This example demonstrates the transforming sensibility of veterinary students in which blood on the animal's body became the new normal of their vet life.

Nonvet caregivers can experience the process of desensitisation similar to the vet caregivers. Some of the experienced Asas who worked in the shaving station sometimes cut a female cat's teats by accident and the shaving team regarded the accident as normal because "the cat would no longer need it anyway". I observed this change in my own sensibility towards the animal. When I began volunteering at the shaving station, I remembered feeling overwhelmingly guilty and worried about their well-being when I made accidental cuts on their bodies. I often avoided the bodies of cats that looked difficult to shave, like the male cat that needed to be shaved around its scrotum or the pregnant cat because of its round and uneven abdomen. When I made an accidental cut, the Asas and vet assistants at the station would encourage me, saying that I just helped cut open the cat for neutering. Words and actions of colleagues played an important role in dismissing emotional responsiveness towards this type of injury. As I continued to work, I noticed that I was able to detach from some accidental cuts that I had learned by experience would not harm the cat. I began to look forward to the tricky shaving cases as I saw them as my opportunity to improve my shaving skill. My 1 year of fieldwork in the sterilisation clinic showed how easy it is for a new normality to grow in the mind of people.

## **Ethics of Animal Care and Well-Being of Humans**

The ethics of animal care govern the form of animal healthcare that recognises the connection between trans-species relationships and public health. In this ethical context, animal caregiving is grounded in the perception of human-animal health. Both the well-being of humans and animals are constructed on trans-species relationships. Animal bodies are not perceived as threats to human health and are to be removed from the ecosystem with control-based practices of care. I have shown that animal bodies are social persons who Thai caregivers care for in order to achieve a good, ethical livelihood. Thus, they build their ethics of animal care to ensure that animals are protected, fed, and medicated through practices of animal caregiving. Caring for animals also always entails caring for humans. My ethnographic materials about the patron-client relationships between the middle-class and working-class caregivers and the collaborative relationships between the vet and the nonvet underline this ethical key. These caregivers' ethics of animal care emphasise also the importance of healthcare support from the nongovernment body, such as animal charities, in helping them keep trans-species relationships. These charitable organisations become key providers in this animal healthcare and are trusted more than the government and its control-led management. The way people perceive welfare is changing.

## Part III: Animal Caregiving as Welfare

### Chapter 8: Niche Welfare

This chapter is about my observation of the difference between the government and non-government organisations in how they provide healthcare support to communities.

Welfare is one of the most important care resources for social relations, and the role of the government in providing welfare is one of the significant expressions of public morality in modern societies. When a human establishes a bond with an animal, it raises the question of whether the government should support this trans-species relationship and to what degree these trans-species relations might fall within the domain of welfare. In pre-modernised Thailand, caregiving work was shared because the Buddhist-based moral system of animal care placed the responsibility animal caregiving on the community, not individuals, and healthcare resources were distributed through traditional institutions such as temples and patron-client relationships. However, the establishment of the modern nation-state came with a new morality and a new system of distributing healthcare resources. Consider child welfare. It is now a law that children have the right to care and education. Households cannot just keep children at home for agricultural labour but are required to give them specified levels of care and education. However, the state also attempts to relieve the burden of parents with welfare support, such as free education, to motivate its citizens to participate in a modern and democratic state. This is because the state conceives the well-being of children as a public concern, and what is considered a public concern can receive government support in a form of welfare

In the case of a human-animal relationship, the modern form of Thai animal care that I have described aims to bring trans-species relationships into line with this public-private distinction. Animal caregiving in this form is considered household work and in some respects considered private. As I discussed in Part II, this notion puts pressure on caregivers of all

backgrounds because the caregiving work for animals increases in volume and cost. Caregivers are morally expected to be financially independent in order to carry out caregiving work in the home. Arbitrarily seeking support from the community or using public spaces to perform caregiving work has become increasingly stigmatised. The market economy provides monetised services but not all caregivers can afford them. What caregivers wish is to have support from the government in a form of state-funded welfare. However, the government's animal management is grounded in the idea of control not care. For example, in 2014, Thailand's Animal Welfare Act, B.E. 2557, first introduced tough penalties for animal negligence, with fines of up to 40,000 Baht (£1000). This was a significant attempt from the government to implement personalised forms of pet ownership by making traditional pet-keeping practices a punishable crime. These legal actions have not made welfare for animals accessible. Rather, it makes the city ecosystem of human-animal relations financially harsh for those who keep animals. In 2018, when the government proposed to make animal caregivers pay for a license to own animals (Matichon Weekly, 2018), it angered animal caregivers with animal shelters who felt that the government should relieve their burden, rather than penalise them through fines or taxes because did the right thing to help animals and communities. In this way, the government's policies are considered immoral and its support insufficient. For example, Krung Thep giving free neutering at the DLD but it neuter animals within Krung Thep, at a small number, around 20-40 cats per day while the CFCF's mobile clinic could do more than 80 cats per day. This was because the bureaucratic procedures demand the DLD's vet to spend time on paperwork, reducing time for neutering. The procedures from booking to transporting animals to their offices were also considered inconvenient to working-class or older caregivers who were restricted by health or work to take their animals to DLD. On DLD's official website, which listed its work, I noticed that controlling rabies is still its singular aim for its neutering programs. This is an example of a control-led animal management that

underemphasises the importance of trans-species relationships to communities. As I demonstrated in my previous ethnographic chapters, neutering is a multi-faceted practice with strong social and moral implications. As the government's conceptualisation of what communities need is mismatched to what communities want, it results in different ways of how healthcare support is given.

### **Phone Calls From the Monk**

Consider the case of a monk who had a bad experience with the government's way of handling stray cats at his temple and decided to contact a charitable body for its help instead.

Royal monasteries along the Chao Phraya River in Phra Nakon District, Krung Thep had the role of receiving visits from the Thai royal families, welcoming international political guests and hosting important rituals. They were also famous attractions for tourists appreciating architectural and artistic beauty, contributing significantly to Krung Thep's tourist industry. Because of these symbolic and economic significances, these monasteries had strict policies on stray animals because their presence can symbolically and literally tarnish the sacredness of these monasteries. As I discussed throughout this thesis, animals are everywhere in Thailand, including at the most divine district of Krung Thep. Pinklao District, where I stayed during the fieldwork, was very close to this royal district. I could cross the Pinklao Bridge connecting the old town of Thonburi to Krung Thep and take a bus to visit these temples. While I visited one of the temples, which I will refer to as Wat Phra, to look at its mural paintings of animals, I saw clusters of well-fed cats (see Figure 7.1). I talked to the temple's gate watcher who explained to me that these cats were cared for by a high-ranked monk named Phra Ajarn Chang. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I thought that royal monasteries would not allow animal presences, so this new information intrigued me. However, after my visit to the temple, I had

become imbued in my volunteering work for the CFCF. I almost forgot about Phra Ajarn Chang and his cats. One day, I was having a meal with the mobile clinic's volunteer team. We had just finished work and prepared to go home when Jeed, one of the volunteers, told me about a phone call from a monk who needed her help.

Phra Ajarn Chang supervised the monastic landscape maintenance of Wat Phra. He was responsible for making certain that the monastery grounds, public restrooms, gardens, trees, and potted plants were well-tended. He also made free drinking water and primary care service accessible for visitors. Because of this managerial duty, he came into contact with stray cats living in his temple and became aware of problems caused by their presence, such as public fouling and attacks on tourists like biting and scratching. Wat Phra frequently held Buddhist ceremonies for the Thai royal family. During the preparations for these events, Krung Thep's district authority would send out its animal-control unit to capture animals in Wat Phra as part of the preparing process. In the beginning, Pra Ajarn Chang was indifferent towards the animals and would not mind their being removed from his temple. However, after seeing them all the time, he became fond of them and began taking care of them.

Pra Ajarn Chang named all of his cats. He knew their favourite spots to sleep. During the daytime, the cats disappeared from the public eye, sleeping in gardens and under the shades of trees, but they would wake up and come to greet him when they heard his voice. He would cuddle them and tell them how adorable they were. Because the temple was rich, Phra Ajarn Chang never had a problem paying to have his cats neutered. He assigned his temple workers to take them to the vet and the gardeners to place their litterboxes, food, and water bowls behinds potted plants so the cats could use them. This subtle evidence of the cats being cared for was hardly noticed by visitors unless they looked carefully behind the potted plants and well-trimmed trees. Admittedly, I also did not notice this until Phra Ajarn Chang told me where to look. The primary care unit in the temple also took care of cases of cat bites, so the news

about animal attacking tourists would not catch the attention of the district and monastic authorities who disliked having cats in Wat Phra.

However, despite his efforts to make the cats stay on the monastery grounds without disturbing monastic activities, the animal-control unit would always come to take his cats away during the important ceremonies. He and his animal-loving fellow monks sometimes tried to hide the cats in their monk houses, but their attempts were not always successful. In 2012, then-U.S. President Barack Obama visited Wat Phra. To welcome the important guests, the animal unit came to relocate Phra Ajarn Chang's cats. The captured cats were sent to one of Krung Thep's government-run shelters, which had an infamous reputation for mistreating animals. Phra Ajarn Chang, his fellow monk, and their followers had to travel to this shelter to retrieve their cats after the ceremonies were over. He described the experience. He was appalled to see how dark and dirty the shelter was. There were a large number of ill-shaped cats living in this small place. He almost could not find his personal cat. His fellow monk brought the wrong cat home. He let the cat stay but went back to the shelter to get the old one back. Fortunately, the cat responded to his call, and they finally reunited. Phra Ajarn Chang was shocked that in just a few weeks, his well-fed cats became sick and skeletal at the managerial hand of this state-run shelter. In 2019, he finally decided to plan in advance to relocate his cats before they were taken to the state-run shelter. As a high-ranking monk, he knew the schedules of the important ceremonies and visits and contacted animal volunteers. Phra Ajarn Chang got Jeed's phone number from one of the temple tour guides who also cared for stray animals in the area.

Jeed was a CFCF volunteer, ran a cat shelter, and was willing to house Phra Ajarn's cats for a month. Although her shelter was located quite far from the royal neighbourhood, about 1 hour by car, Jeed had a car that allowed her to travel to Wat Phra and provide support to Phra Ajarn Chang. Besides Phra Ajarn Chang's cats, which were docile, there were feral cats living in the monastery grounds. As a volunteer, Jeed wanted to capture these cats, neuter

them, and find them homes. She and Phra Ajarn Chang began a collaboration to help the feral cats. They organised to capture these cats at night to avoid attention from tourists. Phra Ajarn Chang instructed security officers to open the temple gate for Jeed's team to enter Wat Phra. Jeed's team consisted of her husband, a couple of friends, and me. We arrived at the temple around 11 p.m. with fishing nets, cat traps, and wet food for bait. The captured cats were brought to the CFCF's mobile clinic to be neutered. Jeed would take care of them and try to find them homes. After the first phone call, whenever the Phra Ajarn Chang had problems relating to cats, whether he found newly abandoned kittens that needed caregivers to bottle-feed them or learned that animal control would make a visit and he needed a temporary shelter for his cats, he would contact Jeed. Even Jeed could not house the cats all by herself; she would use her volunteering network to find caregivers who would take care of them. Even as his cats were being sheltered in the volunteers' houses, Phra Ajarn Chang did not look worried. He missed them and looked forward to their return, but he could trust that they would come back to him safe and healthy.

**Figure 7.1**

*Monk Petting Mamiew, a Cat Living in Wat Phra*



Source: Jeed

This case underlines a rise in recognition of small-scale charitable bodies as the community's trustworthy welfare providers whose public service was preferred over government support. The next sections explore this rising demand for public service targeting trans-species relationships and how this can be a window for examining the state's existing welfare.

### **The Importance of Small-Scale Charities**

The anthropological literature on development and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) explores the importance of charities and their relationship with the government. Scholars who have studied the rise of NGOs in contemporary societies tends to perceive this phenomenon in relations to trends of neoliberal governance (McGuirk, 2019). For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, leading neoliberal countries such as the United States and the UK, practiced the

withdrawal of government services with the belief that the market economy would aid a fair distribution of resources through economic investments and developments. This declining presence of the welfare state create an environment for nongovernment organizations to undertake work that was formerly ignored or left to government agencies (Fisher, 1997). However, in the Thai context, the expansion of NGOs is only partly influenced by the neoliberal economic policies seen in the Global North. The growth of the NGO sector in Thailand is also shaped by the Buddhist-influenced development discourse called “sufficiency economy” (*sethakit por piang*; เศรษฐกิจพอเพียง).

The theory of sufficiency economy was first proposed in 1998 by King Bhumipol after the 1997 Asian economic crisis. The term was intended to redefine globalised understandings of sustainable development based on Buddhist notions of moderation (see Elinoff, 2014). It was earnestly endorsed by Thai governmental and nongovernmental agencies. For example, Elinoff (2014), discussed the implementation of sufficiency economy policies by the government as attempts to promote practices of self-sufficiency and mutual cooperation between communities. In these models of development, the government urged people to take care of themselves by practicing moderation and by depending on the community. In this sense, the Thai state takes advantage of “the community”, which is envisaged as including nongovernmental organizations such as charities, as “a buttress to the existing structure of the society” (Nelson, 1968, p. 305). In this sense, the Thai model contains parallels with analyses found in classic work on charity such as Nelson (1968) and Waldron (1986), who suggested that state welfare often has the same orientation as the goals private charity, however the state does not see charities as competitors, rather they let charities perform the role of removing problems from public consciousness while the structural causes of said problems remain unaddressed.

In recent years, Thai people have increasingly become discontent with the relationship between the government's authority and its services, in which the former seems to be increasing while the latter in decline. Particularly, after the 2014 coup d'etat, Thai people have shown growing discontent of the strong presence of the government's authority and impacts of its sanctions while services appear to be reducing in quality and distancing from the interest of people. This context helps explain why some caregivers expressed their dissatisfaction in relation to the government's proposal of taxation on animal caregiving, as they knew their taxes were unlikely to return to them in a form of welfare they needed. In Thailand, state-sponsored welfare is something taxpayers have little direct control over. This means that the government's management of the money and the delivery of services can also be disappointing from the perspective of citizens. Take Phra Ajarn Chang's story for example. He expressed his opinion that the cats who he looked after in the temple where he lived never caused any problem during ceremonies, therefore, the precautionary measures to remove them were unnecessary. Furthermore, Phra Ajarn Chang was not against the cats being temporarily relocated but he expected the district authority to not harshly manhandle his beloved cats and believed that the state-run shelter had a moral duty to house them in a humane way.

Nonetheless, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, Thai people are culturally and socially familiar with practices of self-government, therefore, the concept of sufficiency economy promoted by the government often acted like a mirror that reflected back onto people what they had already been doing, that is to take the matter into their own hands. Because of the particular form that the Thai welfare state has taken, Thai people have begun to develop a dependency on NGOs to deliver services they want. For example, because the perception of duties of animal management between Phra Ajarn Chang and the government authorities was in conflict, he turned to a non-governmental charitable body to provide a care service for him and his cats. In Thailand, charitable organisations in the welfare field frequently receive praise

from local communities. The positive impression that the charities gain from the public can be attributed to three features that they exhibit: they are seen as voluntary, immediate, and sympathetic. Local-scale, small charities are perceived by the local people to be working with and for communities. They act quickly and are highly responsive to people's plights in terms of material and emotional support, such as the case of Jeed who travelled to Wat Phra as soon as she got a phone call from Phra Ajarn Chang and offered him to care for not only his cats but other feral cats. Volunteers like Jeed are seen as reliable and sympathetic and people are willing to support their work with donations. Phra Ajarn Chang's story thereby resonates with public criticisms laid upon the government for being slow, less efficient, and apathetic to people's plights and in particular, their demands for welfare responses which encompass transspecies relationships.

### **Niche Welfare**

Trans-species relationships have carved a new niche in the healthcare sector. Caregivers and communities expect forms of care service that help them better manage stray animals, such as free sterilisation, humane shelters, or a better animal adoption system that does not aim to eliminate the animals' presence from the community but to care for their bodies. However, these demands are not seen as legitimate public concerns by the government. While people want care support that acknowledges the significance of human-animal cohabitation in urban areas, the government's concerns about stray animals is limited to zoonotic diseases and public disturbances. The state's perception of how to manage animals fails to understand what the community actually wants for welfare. In effect, people's welfare needs fall outside the government's mechanisms of welfare support. I refer to this situation as "niche welfare".

Trans-species relationships are a good example of niche welfare. As trans-species relationships have gained social and moral significance; people develop a welfare-related need to have the government support their bonds with animals. For example, caregivers want both stray and owned cats to get access to animal healthcare. Nevertheless, these demands for welfare can be trivialised and neglected by conventional systems of welfare. Niche welfare normally receives less attention from the bureaucratic and political processes of the state. Animal healthcare is still largely perceived as a market-influenced and morally underdeveloped case by the government. Hence, the government's support in this domain remains oriented to control-led animal management which leaves people unsatisfied. It is small-scale charities that come to cater to these untended niches.

The CFC Foundation had provided free sterilisation service to stray cats since 2010. Neutering had become part of the foundation's objectives and its identity because of the constant demand from local communities and a lack of state-funded providers for animal healthcare in this area. Below is a part of an interview given by Ree, the president of the foundation regarding the charity's reason for providing free sterilisation to local communities. She recalled the time when she inquired of one of the Krung Thep Council's members about the possibility to include free vaccinations and neutering for stray animals in the municipal policies, but they declined. Ree told me:

I once wondered why MPs [Member of Parliament] or the members at Krung Thep Council did not sell these policies when they knew that every temple has stray animals. Free neutering could have been their accomplishment. I once talked to them and they said to me, "if we have a budget, helping people will be a better accomplishment than helping the animals". They saw that they could use these [policies] to campaign for people's support for the next election - that they had helped the poor, the elder, and children. I felt sad and I thought that

the opportunity was wasted. When something goes wrong, they tend to “cut it” than solve it. For example, if a dog bites someone, they kill it or remove it from the area.

The government’s animal management and policies were not addressed in a way that animal caregivers expected. So, local communities decided to seek and support small-scale charitable organisations that advocated their niche welfare. Caregivers perceive their relationships with cats as essential to their social and moral life. Their actions demonstrate their conviction. Good evidence of the genuineness of a relationship is when people ask for welfare for those they care about. Ree’s foundation became one of the recognised providers in its field because it fulfilled communities’ niche welfare.

### **State-Sponsored Welfare in Flourishing Transspecies Connections**

Admittedly, I did not have an opportunity to participate in the government’s animal management so my accounts do lack the perspective of people working for the government. However, I collected documents and reports from the government’s websites, such as DLD to gain insight in how the government body perceives its work in this domain. I also interacted with local people who received both healthcare support from the government and the charity and asked them about their perceptions of the charitable sector vs the government sector. In short, they liked healthcare support from the charitable body more. In my estimation, this could have significant implications for the government of any societies with stray populations. What should it do when its welfare has increasingly been considered insufficient by its people?

Nongovernment collaborations among caregivers and charitable and business bodies have provided its care-based animal management with less or no government support. These small healthcare providers assemble through sharing the same ethics of animal care and use

Thai culture of charitable giving to gather healthcare resources and distribute them in a form of niche welfare. Although their cooperative efforts are incredible, animal charities and volunteers act independently without coordinating their work with the different groups. This led to care resources' not being used efficiently. For example, the CFCF's mobile clinic travelled to a provincial village of orchard farmers in Eastern Thailand to neuter local cats and dogs living in the orchards. These animals were not familiar with people, so the CFCF hired a team of dog catchers to capture them with sedative shots. However, when preparing to shave their bodies for neutering, the preneutering preparation team discovered that some of the cats were already neutered by a different charitable group. They found surgical scars on their abdomens and faint tattooed marks around their ears. Although the animals were marked, it was difficult to identify neutered feral animals when they were conscious as they did not let people approach them. Because of this, the foundation wasted its medication resources on the animals that did not need its service. There are several cases that the foundation's vets performed abdominal surgeries just to discover that animals were already neutered. This puts a burden on the animal's health as well.

Lacking in this case of nongovernment management of animal care is the centralised coordinating ability which is a managerial instrument the government has. Not only does it have a large number of monetary and human resources, the government also has a bureaucratic network at every level of society that can be used to distribute work and resources to needed communities. The assistance of the government could enhance this care-led management in organising animal care more effectively. However, the problem that obstructs its doing so is its perception as animal management that is still rigidly oriented towards control. My ethnographic accounts suggest that the government has to adapt to its people's ethics of animal care and work with nongovernment healthcare providers because the niche welfare created by the trans-species relationships is becoming more established among urban dwellers. Sooner or later, it is

becoming general welfare and also an expression of public morality. Modern society needs its government to become a healthcare coordinator that is able to acknowledge animal caregiving as public health and manage across human and animal health sectors to create an ecosystem that human-animal relations can flourish and, in turn, enrich its people's social lives.

## Conclusion

### A Key to Healthy Society

In this dissertation, I have explored animal caregiving in urban Thailand. I have argued that animal caregiving is a practice of trans-species communication that forms a human-animal relationship, and houses are one of the sites to witness how it actualises. As social relationships entail ethical implications, animal caregiving is also considered an ethical project for animal caregivers to collectively achieve an ideal form of trans-species bonds. I have shown how, in preserving the more-than-human world of the Thai, these urban animal caregivers shape the ecosystem of human-human and human-animal sociality. My ethnographic descriptions demonstrate how animal caregivers build a distinctive set of ethics from two lineages of morality: traditional and modern animal care. These lineages enable them to navigate their social, cultural, and moral identities in gentrified urban landscapes through caring for animals. Because of this social and moral significance, welfare is increasingly perceived as a necessity to support these human-animal bonds.

I began this dissertation by wondering why public spaces in Krung Thep, the capital and most urbanised city of Thailand, are occupied by large populations of stray cats. I discovered that there is a community of animal caregivers volunteering to care for these animals. Essentially, the life of Thai people is grounded in what I refer to as a trans-species sociality. From a Thai Buddhist perspective, humans and animals are stratified in a karmic hierarchy that brings about a similitude of the world in spatial, social, and spiritual senses. Thais are aware that nonhuman contacts are present in all places whether it is a human settlement or the wilderness. They are taught to observe nonhuman activities with their physical senses and intuition and to cultivate and mitigate the impacts of trans-species bonds with merit-making and caregiving. Their perception of social connectedness transcends the nature-culture boundary. Thai people live among social nonhumans in the more-than-human world where

trans-species relations construct their understanding of social and moral identities. These findings resonate with a growing anthropological literature that argues against an anthropocentric epistemology that conceptualises society as a primarily human domain. I further comment that this culture-nature concept adulterates the complexities of social life as it filters out numerous accounts of socially meaningful bonds between humans and animals or human and natural entities which contribute to the shape, odour, and soul of society. To understand what happens between Thai caregivers and animals is to capture activities and endeavours of nonhuman animals in society. This calls for a reinterpretation of anthropological methodologies. Because of their empathic capability, some of the anthropological methods, such as participant observation, have the potential to account for beyond human-human interactions and can be construed to take trans-species phenomena seriously. I also argue for the importance of ecological concepts in developing a methodology for anthropologists to approach societies as ecosystems constructed from the collective efforts of humans and nonhuman animals so ethnographies can incorporate trans-species relations into their analyses of social arrangements, morality, and identities.

In Part II, I discussed the ways in which the practice of animal caregiving is moralised. Trans-species relationships are perceived as a key to being a good person. I described three kinds of animal caregivers who participated in animal volunteering in terms of class and animal expertise. The nonvet category consists of middle-class and working-class caregivers called the Asa and Pha respectively whereas vet practitioners are their own category of Mor. The differences in the practice of animal caregiving among these different caregivers were a result of the clashes and convergence between two moral systems of animal care that have come into prominence with the processes of urbanisation. To quickly summarise these two moral systems, the first is the Thai tradition of caring for animals. Sometimes known as “Baan-Baan”, or peasant-like pet-keeping, it is largely practiced by rural and economically poor people such as

Pha caregivers. Baan-Baan is established on Theravada Buddhism and agrarian ideas of caregiving work. These attitudes were crystallised in the pre-modern context of ambiguous pet ownership when animals wandered between many households that cared for them and the lack of institutionalised animal healthcare. Baan-Baan pet-keeping accommodates a long-established social arrangement in which animal care is shared within the community with no government interventions in human-animal relations. This distribution of care work is managed by traditional institutions, such as monasteries and charities, resulting in diverse faith-based forms of caregiving activities. These enable caregivers to move in and out of trans-species relationships easily while still maintaining their Buddhist integrity. Baan-Baan pet-keeping still dominates impoverished and Buddhist-centric neighbourhoods which leads to its confrontation with the new norms of urbanised societies.

Since the 19th century, Thai society has undergone socioeconomic shifts as a result of Western dominance in global politics. Its ecosystem of social connections has changed in significant ways. Waves of Western influence have spurred the processes of urbanisation, erecting a new ecosystem marked by modern infrastructures, politically centralised institutions, and social relations tied to the market economy. The traditional practice of animal caregiving is problematized, including the perception of what is moral actions towards animals. The new morality of animal care arriving with the Western influence is grounded in the scientific knowledge of veterinary medicine and the capitalist form of social relations that emphasises the public-private divide. This science-based modern moral system of animal care disciplines trans-species relations by rearranging the distribution of care work. Thai households are conditioned by the urbanised environment and its moral expectations. They are expected to carry out care work for their owned animals. Instead of relying upon the traditional network of communal support in the past, it has become a new norm to purchase commodities and paid professional assistance from animal healthcare institutions. The ability to purchase care is

becoming a moral criterion of good animal caregivers. These moral expectations put tremendous pressure on people and animals in gentrified landscapes, particularly impoverished working-class caregivers who are morally stigmatised for keeping animals without financial independence. Even middle-class caregivers, who endorse the modern morality of animal care, struggle with the financial burden to preserve their connection with animals. Meanwhile, veterinary practitioners also face dilemmas as their code of professional conduct conflicts with their religious and cultural identities. These caregivers experience moral dissonance from navigating in the convergent ecosystem. The clashes between the traditional and western systems of animal care sever their way of connecting to the more-than-human world by making care work for animals high-priced and morally unfulfilling.

Driven by these moral and economic tensions, the animal caregivers build their own ethics of animal care, a moral bricolage developed from the traditional and modern forms of animal care, which enables them to find harmony in caring for animals. Chapter 7 elaborated in detail the ethics of animal care. Grounded in situational ethics, this ethics defines what is ethical in terms of context and social relations and justifies actions to preserve the ecosystems of trans-species relations. In this ethics, care work for animals is interpreted as a communal responsibility in which to live a moral life is to help others keep their relationships with animals. It significantly challenges the norms grounded in the private-public distinction that restricts pet-keeping to the household. It also encourages trans-species bonds to flourish in a public domain dominated by human-human relations. My ethnographic accounts show the resilience and resourcefulness of ordinary caregivers who choose to endorse the moral principles of the different moral systems to their advantage. Thai caregivers embrace the market economy and make use of its capitalist goods, from manufactured commodities to animal healthcare institutions, to enhance their practice of animal caregiving and to establish their places in the local and global landscapes. At the same time, they participate in the

economy of charitable reciprocity to maintain their cultural and religious identities. The bricolage of animal care enables the animal caregivers to make decisions that are considered “immoral”, in either of the two moral systems of animal care. Such are the cases of vet caregivers’ giving permission for nonvet caregivers to carry out part of veterinary work in the mobile clinic, which is illegal in a strict sense but is seen as an ethical action by the vet and nonvet caregivers because their collaboration is to improve the livelihood of stray animals. Although this ethics of animal care has principles that fundamentally collide with each other, the employment of this ethics allows immoral actions to be woven into a morally coherent narrative that resonates with the caregivers’ perception of moral life. This ethics is the key to safeguarding bonds between humans and animals in urbanised areas because it establishes care-led management of animals as a welfare option for people.

Care-led management of animals underlines the importance of local and small-scale charitable bodies in the landscape of animal healthcare. Medical treatments for animals have become the moral centre of good pet-keeping among Thai animal caregivers. Increasing demands for assured access to animal healthcare created niche welfare that has not sufficiently been responded to by state-funded health institutions. This leads to the collaboration between caregivers, small-scale charitable, as well as for-profit organisations filling in the role of healthcare providers for households with no access to conventional animal healthcare. This collaboration uses the Buddhist-rooted culture of charitable giving in distributing healthcare resources from wealthier to underprivileged communities of caregivers. The self-reliance of a nongovernment body in providing animal care highlights a lack of government involvement in this emerging domain of welfare. Thailand’s underdeveloped system of animal welfare is a result of a human-centric government that regards animal healthcare as an individual’s responsibility, not a state obligation. The Thai government prioritises animal control over welfare because it perceives the human-animal nexus as the source of danger to human health,

such as zoonotic outbreaks and public disturbances. This perception manifests in the lack of policies covering human-animal health, under-resourced governmental departments of animal rights and welfare, and weak legislation governing trans-species relationships.

Industrial developments and urban expansions have brought issues of trans-species relations into the focus of modern societies. My exploration of how stray animals are cared for in Thailand could have policy implications for the government of any societies with stray populations. It is important for us to acknowledge that many nonhuman species live in society, and we should seriously think about our society with them in it. A better understanding of the significance of animal caregiving is crucial in determining whether societies are heading towards cohabitation or confrontation when it comes to human-animal relations. My dissertation reveals how social arrangements and institutions are adapting to the growing importance of trans-species relationships. Animal caregiving is still considered niche welfare as of the time of writing; it will become the general welfare that states are morally obligated to provide, following the footsteps of other niche welfare of the past such as child welfare. The ethics of animal care and its care-based animal management that is culturally sensitive to what local people need can be the key to designing a healthy and multispecies-inclusive society where rights to keeping trans-species connections are protected and not restricted by social stratifications.

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