

THE RED CAT OF CHIANG MAI

Story of a Thai village near Chiang Mai

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The Red Cat Of Chiang Mai
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Cast of Characters

7 actors. Colorblind casting is recommended.

AJAAN:	F	the teacher/announcer
PRATUANG:	M	the farmer
SOMSEE:	F	the farmer's wife
MR. CHOW:	M	a tall Chinese businessman from Bangkok
TAM RUAT:	M	the policeman, a proud man
SEE DANG:	M/F	a black cat with a red bow around his neck
SEE FAH:	M/F	double cast SEE DANG but with a blue bow
RED CAT:	M/F	a red cat who replaces the original cat

THAI WORDS

The Thai language has five tones: low, middle, high, rising, and falling. Since these tones take time to master, you may not be able to pronounce these Thai words correctly, but give it your best effort and have fun trying.

Thai is spelled in Sanskrit. Although there is now an official system using Roman letters, you will still find words spelled in several different ways.

CHIANG MAI or CHIANGMAI	city in northern Thailand
BAHT	unit of Thai money
SEE or SII	color
DANG	red
FAH or FAA	light blue
CHOMPHOO	pink
MUANG	purple
WAI	bow with palms together in prayerlike fashion
SAWATDII	hello

SAWATDII KHA	greeting from a woman
SAWATDII KHRAP	greeting from a man
TAM RUAT	policeman
AJAN	teacher, especially of older students
PASIN	a traditional Thai skirt or sarong
PRATUANG	a male name
SOMSEE	a female name

IMPORTANT THAI CUSTOMS FOR ACTORS

Bangkok is almost a separate country from rural Thailand and old customs are followed more stringently in Thai villages. For example, in the village, you would take off your shoes when you enter a house.

Do not point to anything (especially people) with your foot. Do not point at someone with your finger. Do not pat someone on the head. These actions are considered offensive.

Give people things with your right hand. This is especially true with gifts and money. The right hand holds the gift and the left hand rests on the right arm. The other person receives the money with their right hand.

Thais eat with a tablespoon and fork, pushing the food into the spoon with their fork. They use chopsticks to eat some types of foods, like noodles.

A younger person will wai (greet) before an older person returns the greeting. Put your palms together to wai and keep your elbows close to your body. A person of less status often bends their knees lower or holds their hands higher when they wai to a person of higher status. Click on the video at www.sriwittayapaknam.ac.th to see some examples of Thai greetings. (Look under English Homepage, Virtual Tour, and Video.)

To squat Thai style put your feet slightly apart and squat down with both feet flat on the ground. Thais can move around in this position. This contrasts with Americans who usually put one knee down when they squat, and then crawl on hands and knees.

Thais are taught to not react with anger in public.

If someone superior (like a grandmother or teacher) is sitting down, a child would approach them on their knees. It would be impolite to stand over their head.

Women sit on the floor resting on one thigh with their legs together and bent behind them. Their knees are forward but their feet are away from the person they are facing. Soles are upward.

WARMUPS

Fun daily warmups might include language practice, cat improv, and acting out some of the customs previously described. Moving while in a Thai squatting position, for example, is typically difficult for Americans. You might also include learning to use chopsticks.

COSTUMES

To see traditional and historical costumes look at www.thailandlife.com/thaiclothes.html and www.thaiwave.com.

Most Thais wear traditional costumes only for a holiday celebration. These beautiful holiday costumes are often made of silk. Different regions or tribes have distinctive styles. Some are historical styles.

For this story, the farmer's wife would wear an everyday Thai costume consisting of a cotton pasin (sarong) and a blouse or T-shirt. A Thai pasin is a tube of material folded over at the waist to hold it up. You might put up a sign at the Senior Center or a Thai restaurant to see if anyone bought a pasin on a trip to Thailand and they are willing to donate it for your play.

The farmer and his wife wear sandals or flip flops. The farmer wears long shorts, preferably black, and a T-shirt.

The teacher wears a western dress or a below-the-knee skirt and a blouse with sleeves. It is not necessary for her to wear hose with her dress shoes because Thailand is very hot and humid.

The policeman wears a khaki colored uniform.

Mr. Chow wears a business suit.

SET AND PROPS

THE RED CAT OF CHIANG MAI takes place in a village near Chiang Mai in the northern part of Thailand. The set consists of a house and some vegetation around the stage.

A raised wooden platform would be ideal to represent a traditional Thai house on stilts. If you put steps on two or three sides, it will be easier for the director to block. A back wall is optional. Pictures on the wall are often of the royal family or Buddha. The King's picture is always higher than other pictures.

The house does not need much furniture, maybe a small shelf along the back wall. The family eats sitting on the floor. The food would be on a mat or you can make a small round table on short legs to hold the serving bowls.

Props might include coconuts, mangoes, bananas, oranges, grapes, papaya, pineapples, or garlic. Baskets are good props. The teapot would probably be a Chinese style pot with small cups, smaller than Japanese cups. Put some fruit and crackers on the tea tray.

You can use a painted backdrop of Thai vegetation including bamboo, banana and mango trees. Evergreen and deciduous trees and ferns are everywhere in Thailand. Longan and lychee trees also grow in the Chiang Mai region. Potted orchids are a common hanging plant in Thailand. Flowers would include chrysanthemums, roses, jasmine, lilies, asters, carnations, marigolds, or gladiolas, but the yard would have no grass. Marigolds and carnations are used in funeral arrangements and would not be in the vase of flowers given to the teacher.

The large brown urns seen in pictures of Thai village houses are used to collect water. Rain runs off of the corrugated roof and falls into the urns. Although the urns are too heavy and expensive for a stage prop, they could be painted onto a backdrop.

There could be a row of umbrellas painted on the backdrop or on to a flat so that the cat can disappear and come back covered with red dye.

The farmer hoes a row of vegetables to one side of the house. These may be silk plants or a short foam cutout of plants.

THE RED CAT OF CHIANG MAI

AT RISE: SOMSEE sits on the floor painting a red umbrella while observing a vase of flowers. SEE DANG lounges near her purring. SOMSEE's sandals sit on the step at the entrance to her house. AJAN, the teacher, lectures the audience downstage.

AJAN: Chiang Mai is a city of 400,000 people in northwestern Thailand. This bustling metropolis boasts a university and an international airport. The area is surrounded by mountains, rivers and forests.

In small villages outside of town, farmers grow rice and vegetables. Many are wood carvers and make other crafts like lacquerware, silver bowls and trays, and pottery. The villager you are visiting today paints paper umbrellas. Her small wooden house is surrounded by the flowers she grows, and they are the subject she most likes to paint. Somsee has not been blessed with children and often talks to her cat as she paints. (*THE TEACHER wais audience and exits.*)

(*PRATUANG enters and hoes a row of vegetables. He chops several times with his hoe before he suddenly stops his hoe halfway in the air. He peers down and sees a mouse. He moves a little further down the row to hoe again. He stops short again and squats down beside the plant. Being a good Buddhist, he does not want to kill the mouse. He shakes his head and moves down the row for one last try. He gives up and walks towards the house.*)

(*PRATUANG listens as his wife SOMSEE talks to SEE DANG who purrs and stretches.*)

SOMSEE: Do you think I need one more small flower here?
No? Perhaps just a decorative line.

PRATUANG: (*Slips off his shoes and enters the house.*) The cat is giving you painting lessons again?

SOMSEE: Husband, I didn't hear you arrive. Would you like some tea?

PRATUANG: (*She watching his wife paint.*) Finish your painting. I will wait to drink tea with you. I am a little early. I was hoeing weeds when a little mouse ran from behind a plant.

(*SEE DANG perks up at this news.*)

PRATUANG: (*Continues.*) He saw me and ran back into the row I was weeding. I moved down the row a little and started to hoe again. Suddenly, there he was looking up at me and trembling.

SOMSEE: Did he run away?

PRATUANG: He seemed to be under my hoe each time I struck. I had a terrible time not killing him, so I decided it was time for a break.

SOMSEE: So the mouse is still there?

(*SEE DANG runs out the door in the direction of the vegetable garden. He sits near the vegetables, not moving.*)

PRATUANG: Not for long.

SOMSEE: It is almost as though the cat could understand us.

PRATUANG: Of course he can. You talk to him all the time. Why wouldn't he understand us? He is like your child.

SOMSEE: You are teasing me.

PRATUANG: Not at all. One day I expect he will pick up the hoe and march out to the field to help me, his father.

SOMSEE: If he became a farmer, then he could not eat a mouse.

PRATUANG: (*Laughs.*) That is true. He could never give up mice.

SOMSEE: He will have to remain an ordinary cat.

SPOTLIGHT ON SEE DANG

(SEE DANG runs up and down the row of vegetables hunting the mouse. He finally chases the mouse offstage.)

SPOTLIGHT OFF

(SOMSEE approaches her husband on her knees bringing the tea tray and pours them each a cup of tea.)

PRATUANG: Sesame biscuits. My favorite.

(AJAN walks across the stage carrying some books.)

SOMSEE: There goes the teacher. I want to give her the vase of flowers for her desk. *(SOMSEE takes the flowers, puts on her shoes, and follows the teacher. She wais as she hands the teacher the vase with her right hand.)*
Sawatdii kha, AJAN.

(SOMSEE and TEACHER exit.)

(SEE DANG enters licking his paws and patting his tummy.)

PRATUANG: *(To himself.)* And I will continue to weed. I have a feeling that my mouse is gone. *(PRATUANG puts on his shoes and grabs his hoe. When he is near SEE DANG, he walks around the cat examining him. SEE DANG purrs and rubs against PRATUANG:)* No, he is an ordinary cat.

(The black cat SEE DANG runs behind the house or bush or painting of red umbrellas where we cannot see him.)

(PRATUANG weeds for a moment and then exits.)

SOUND: A LARGE SPLASH.

(SEE DANG, the black cat, stays behind the screen, and the RED CAT enters. We hear him before we see him. The RED CAT runs this way and

that around the stage. He almost runs into a businessman coming to the house. THE RED CAT exits screeching.)

RED CAT: MEOW! MEOW! MEOW!

MR. CHOW: *(The astonished businessman watches the cat run away.)* A red cat! I must buy this cat! Hello! Hello in the house! *(He peers in the doorway.)* They must be home because the tea things are still on the floor. *(He goes off to look for them, calling out.)* Hello! Is anyone home?

PRATUANG: *(Enters talking to himself.)* What scared the cat? He is acting crazy. He ran down the road screeching.

MR. CHOW: *(Wais to the farmer.)* Sawatdii khrap! My name is Chow. I am a businessman from Bangkok.

PRATUANG: *(Wais.)* Sawatdii khrap! Do you want to buy fruit?

MR. CHOW: No, I buy animals. I am interested in buying your cat.

PRATUANG: Why would you want to buy my cat?

MR. CHOW: He is very unusual.

PRATUANG: My cat? He is an ordinary cat.

MR. CHOW: I have been looking for a cat like this one.

PRATUANG: SEE DANG is a very ordinary cat.

MR. CHOW: Your cat is named Red? What an appropriate name for a rare cat.

PRATUANG: He is not rare. He is not even a Siamese cat.

MR. CHOW: Exactly. I must have him. I will give you 100 baht for him.

PRATUANG: I am sorry. My cat is not for sale.

MR. CHOW: 200 baht.

PRATUANG: He is like a member of the family.

MR. CHOW: How much do you want for your cat?

PRATUANG: I could not sell my cat even for a thousand baht.

MR. CHOW: 2,000 baht.

PRATUANG: You don't understand.

MR. CHOW: Yes, I do. He is exceptional. 10,000 baht.

PRATUANG: 10,000 baht? Are you crazy? (*Sees that Mr. Chow is serious and considers the offer momentarily.*) No, my wife would never sell her cat.

MR. CHOW: 20,000 baht.

PRATUANG: I am a poor farmer, and that is a lot of money.

MR. CHOW: 30,000 baht.

PRATUANG: 30,000? That is more money than I make in a year selling rice.

MR. CHOW: All right. I will buy all your rice and the cat for 50,000 baht.

PRATUANG: You might as well buy the farm for that kind of money.

MR. CHOW: Very well. I will buy your farm and the cat for 100,000 baht.

PRATUANG: I am sorry but I cannot sell my farm. How would I live?

MR. CHOW: That is as high as I can go.

PRATUANG: Your offer is very generous, but my wife would never sell her cat.

MR. CHOW: May I speak to your wife?

PRATUANG: She is not home. Perhaps you could come back tomorrow.

MR. CHOW: I will be back later.

(PRATUANG watches the businessman walk away.)

SOMSEE: *(Enters.)* Who was that man?

PRATUANG: A businessman from Bangkok.

SOMSEE: Did he come to buy vegetables or umbrellas?

PRATUANG: He wants to buy our cat.

SOMSEE: You did not sell him the cat, did you?

PRATUANG: No, I told him you would never sell your cat.

SOMSEE: Good. Then that is the end of it.

PRATUANG: He said that he would come back later.

SOMSEE: The cat is like my child. I would never sell him.

(THE RED CAT returns.)

SOMSEE: You naughty cat, you have been swimming in the red dye again. Do not rub against me!

(THE RED CAT slouches away giving sad little mews. He falls asleep as the farmer and his wife talk.)

PRATUANG: I cannot understand why a businessman from Bangkok would want to buy such a dumb cat.

SOMSEE: Dumb? Only this morning you told me how intelligent See Dang was.

PRATUANG: Do you think that Mr. Chow heard that See Dang could understand us? Maybe that is why he wants to buy him.

SOMSEE: I did not tell anyone.

PRATUANG: Neither did I, but why would he want to buy a cat for 100,000 baht?

SOMSEE: What!! Is he crazy? Who would want to buy a cat for 100,000 baht? We had better report him to the hospital.

PRATUANG: Not just the cat. Mr. Chow said that he wanted to buy the farm and the cat for 100,000 baht.

SOMSEE: This is still a puzzle. A cat and a farm? I could understand if it were a water buffalo and a farm, or even pigs and a farm; but why a cat? I am suspicious of this businessman.

PRATUANG: Perhaps we should ask the police about this stranger.

(TAM RUAT enters.)

SOMSEE: Look. Here comes the policeman.

PRATUANG: How lucky! Good day, TAM RUAT.

(SOMSEE and PRATUANG wai to the policeman.)

TAM RUAT: Good day. *(He nods.)*

PRATUANG: May we ask you a question?

To Read The Rest, Please Purchase The Script