

Chapter 5

Politics after Death

Symbolic and social capital can be transferred from one generation to the next. Bourdieu (1986) has stated that only economic capital can be inherited, while all symbolic capital is limited by the biological capacity of its owner. Thus, symbolic capital is lost when a person dies. In this chapter, I will argue that that is not the case. Symbolic capital can be transferred to the next generation. This transfer is not automatic and involves the active labor of the bereaved. The transfer of capital is facilitated by the funeral and cremation of the deceased. If this transfer of capital should be unsuccessful, the whole political *trakun* could be in danger of collapse.

This chapter will explore the functions of the funeral of a member of a political *trakun*. First, the funeral of Pairot Suwanchawee will be described in detail. Although the funeral lasted seven days, only the first and the last day will be described. These days are of special importance, as they mark the beginning and the end of the event. The days in-between were a repetition of a condensed version of the first and the last day and, thus, do not need to be described in detail. The funeral will be used as a case study to explore how symbolic capital is created and transferred from one generation to the next. It will also be argued that the funerals of high-ranking people, like politicians, reinstate them as nobility, further adding to their and their children's symbolic capital. Social capital is transferred through the extensive networking activities that take place during the funeral. Finally, cremation volumes will be examined to show their function, which is crucial to the transfer of capital and the creation of a political *trakun*.¹

During the funeral, signs are used to demonstrate the deceased's symbolic capital and to allow the next generation to claim this capital as their own. According to Leach (1976: 14), a sign is when A and B have "an intrinsic prior relationship because they belong to the same cultural context". As a befitting example he gives the crown, which having been used by kings is a sign for sovereignty. Many such signs are used during the funeral of a high ranking member of Thai society. During the funerals of Thai politicians, these signs are used

¹ Cremation volumes are books of varying size that contain biographical data of and eulogies on the deceased. These books are distributed to the attendance of cremations.

and interpreted in various ways to increase the deceased's rank and transfer his symbolic capital to the next generation.

The funeral not only mediates the transfer of capital, it also helps to create the *trakun* itself. The death of a member of the political family or political *trakun* can mean not only the end of one life but could also be the end of the political aspiration of the whole family. However, it can also be the beginning of the political career of another member, which will eventually manifest a political family as a political *trakun*. Using the medium of cremation volumes, books that commemorate the life of the deceased, the membership in a political *trakun* is defined. Therefore, the funeral and cremation as events are a turning point of crucial importance.

The Funeral

Pairot Suwanchawee was a district chief officer (นายอำเภอ) in Nakhon Ratchasima, Phetchaburi and Saraburi provinces. Later he entered politics and was elected as a representative of Nakhon Ratchasima six times in the constituency in which his father-in-law had been MP before him. Pairot was an executive member of the Chat Thai Party and was among the politicians whose political rights were suspended for five years in 2006. Later he became a key Pheua Phaendin Party² supporter and, in 2007, his candidates won six of the 16 House seats available in Nakhon Ratchasima (*Matichon Online* 11 May 2011). After he was banned from politics, his wife and eldest son furthered his political ambitions. His wife, Ranongrak, first became a deputy minister and then Minister of Telecommunication; while the son, Polapee, became an MP. In early 2011, Pairot became one of the founding members of the Chat Thai Pattana Puea Phaendin Party. On 7 May 2011 Pairot passed away. He had been suffering from cancer for over two years and finally died of blood poisoning caused by the cancer treatment. His death was not made public until days later, on 11 May (*Matichon Online* 11 May 2011). His funeral was held from 16 May to 23 May 2011. He was finally cremated on the 24 November 2012, more than a year after his death (*Thairath Online* 25 November 2012).

² Pheua Phaendin Party (พรรคเพื่อแผ่นดิน) was a Thai political party founded on 11 September 2007. It merged with the Chat Pattana Party to form the Chat Pattana Puea Phaendin Party, shortly before the general elections in 2011.

Preparation of the Funeral

The preparations for Pairot Suwanchawee's funeral started immediately after his death.³ His family prepared an offering dish with floral decorations, a candle, and an incense stick.⁴ They also prepared a letter of taking leave (หนังสือกราบบังคมทูลลา or หนังสือลาตาย). This letter informs the king of the death of his official and leaves it to the king to determine how to proceed further. According to the Bureau of Royal Household (2007), the letter does not need to be signed. My informants, however, believed that the letter should ideally be written and signed by the deceased just before passing. In cases where it is not possible for the dying to write the letter, at least a fingerprint should be made instead of a signature. The relatives then take the flowers, the letter and documentation of the deceased's official rank and medals of honor to the Bureau of the Royal Household (hereafter referred to as the Bureau).⁵ Here officials will take the family's request and decide on the royally bestowed honors the deceased shall be given.

There are clear regulations about royally bestowed funerals and cremations, with some room for special treatment. The Bureau has published a detailed list which provides the information about which honors every holder of a certain official rank or medal of honor is given. Officials at the Bureau make their decision according to these regulations and inform the deceased's family in writing. This process is automatic and does not need any involvement from the King. If the King wishes, however, he can decree to give an official a higher status than set out by the guidelines. This can happen if an individual is closely related to the royal family or if the deceased as performed notable deeds for **the nation**.

The Bureau of the Royal Household is responsible for preparing all of the honorary decorations needed for a royally bestowed funeral. The Bureau prepares the royal water. The royal water is used on the first day of the funeral. My informants were uncertain about what differentiated the royal water from holy water used in Buddhist ceremonies. However, they ascertained that it was prepared in the palace and, thus, was special. Some also mentioned that it was likely to be scented with flowers. Most visible during the funeral will be the mortuary urn and the tiered umbrellas, which are also provided by the Bureau. When not in use, the urns are stored at the Bureau. They are not accessible for the public. When needed,

³ This part is reconstructed using information given by the Bureau of the Royal Household and through interviews with the family of the deceased and other informants. I did not witness the preparation of the funeral.

⁴ A traditional offering dish is used in various ceremonies in which subordinates pay their respects to superiors, mostly within the family but also from subjects to the king or other royals. The dish itself remotely resembles a cake stand. It is a dish with an attached stand. The offering dish can be silver, gold or an imitation of either. Flowers and leaves are arranged in an intricate structure that hold the candle and incense stick.

⁵ Medals of honor are awarded to both civilians and military personnel. Often they are given together with a position in the bureaucracy or military.

the urn is transported to and from the venue by the Bureau. It is not possible to get a mortuary urn without passing the Bureau. The majority of the cost for all these preparations is carried by the Bureau. The family of the bereaved has to pay only a set amount of 6000 Thai Baht (xxx).

The relatives of the deceased have to take care of all arrangements apart from the honorary decoration. This includes arranging the venue and organizing the flower decoration and the catering for the guests. In some cases, flowers and catering are sponsored by organizations or persons with whom the deceased had a relationship while still alive. In Pairot's case, the flower arrangements were provided by the local high school and the catering was provided by various sponsors. However, even with this support, funerals can be very costly.

The Timing of the Funeral

The timing of a funeral is crucial to ensure that the occasion will help to transfer symbolic capital from one generation to the next. Death is not something that can be scheduled, and there is not much space to move around the date of a funeral. It is Thai custom to hold the funeral as soon as possible following the death of a person (Sathirakoses/เสฐียรโกเศศ 2008: 203).⁶ If a deceased or his family, however, wishes to be granted permission to use a mortuary urn and to have royally bestowed water for the bathing ceremony, as well as other royally bestowed honors, they have to secure the permission of the Bureau, as mentioned above. This can slow down the process. The family has to apply for permission from the palace and even though the Bureau is open every day, the logistics of transporting the signs of rank, such as the mortuary urn, will take a day or two, especially if the funeral takes place outside of Bangkok. Close connection to the royal family can shorten this time, as was shown by the funeral of Chalermpphan Srivikorn,⁷ whose family was able to arrange for the commencement of the funeral within 24 hours after his death.

Pairot Suwanchawee's funeral was delayed by a week, due to personal and political reasons. He passed away on 7 May 2011. His death was officially announced on 11 May 2011. The family explained the delay was due to Pairot's son's approaching wedding, which was planned for 14 May. Pairot's wife, Ranongrak, related to the press that this was

⁶ There are various reasons for this custom. Firstly, in the tropical climate a corpse will quickly start to decay. Secondly, a swift funeral and subsequent cremation will ensure the easy rebirth of the deceased and limit the danger of him or her becoming a haunting spirit.

⁷ Chalermpphan Srivikorn was a leading business man and head of the Srivikorn *trakun*, which is a business *trakun*. In life, he served as deputy prime minister, industry minister and chairman of the board of President Hotel and Tower Co. Ltd. Chalermpphan passed away on 20 May 2011 in Bumrungrad Hospital, Bangkok.

Pairot's dying wish. He wanted his son's event to happen before his own (*Daily News Online*, 11 May 2011). Indeed, an earlier announcement of the death and an immediate arrangement of the funeral could have put the wedding at risk. As the bride's family believed that a wedding must not take place within three years after a funeral in the family; such a long postponement might have endangered the whole venture. However, besides these personal reasons, it is possible that political considerations also delayed the release of the news. As the leader of the Puea Pandin Party, his death might have endangered the recent merger with the Ruam Chart Pattana Party, as well as the pending announcement of electoral candidates for the upcoming election. At a press conference on 11 May 2011 such rumors were rejected and it was confirmed that the newly merged Chat Pattana Puea Phaendin Party would keep its Puea Phaendin element and that the Suwanchaweeks would stay with the party as Pairot wanted his two sons to inherit his political role.

The Location of the Funeral

Funerals can take place in either the home of the deceased or a temple. Funerals at the temple, which were a privilege of the rich in the past, have now become available to the masses, and a funeral at home has turned into a sign of wealth. Funerals at home face certain restrictions. First, it is custom to hold a funeral at home only when the deceased passed away there.⁸ Other constraints are of a more practical nature. A funeral at home is more expensive than one at the temple, as costs for the food and other necessities are higher. Also, especially in urban areas, homes that are spacious enough to accommodate big events, like funerals, are increasingly rare. Finally, it is considerably difficult to organize or employ enough manpower. Thus, people have increasingly used the service of temples, which have developed into funeral staging businesses (Panya/ปัญญา 2005). It is notable, however, that many funerals of prime ministers take place at their homes. This shows that prime ministers possess abundant economic capital, which manifests in large homes and the ability to compensate for the higher costs of the event. However, it also shows that they have the social and symbolic capital to mobilize the needed organization and manpower. In the case of Pairot, a funeral at home would have been impossible, because his home not could accommodate the number of people who participated in his funeral. It would also have inconvenienced guests coming from

⁸ This custom is not always followed closely. The original assumption was that if somebody did pass away outside the home it must have been an untimely or violent death, for example in an accident. Before hospitals became widespread, it was likely that natural death would occur at home. Today, natural deaths could take place in a hospital. In such cases the corpse is sometimes relocated to the home, and the funeral is performed there.

Bangkok, as Pairot's house is situated in an remote area and is more difficult to access than the town of Nakhorn Ratchasima.

The funeral of Pairot Suwanchawee took place at Suthjinda Temple (วัดสุทธจินดา), in Nakhorn Ratchasima. The temple is one of the biggest and most prestigious temples in the province where his constituency was located. This is a combination of political convenience and the Suwanchawees' need to create symbolic capital. Allthrough Pairot was born and raised in Bangkok, his political life centered in Nakhorn Ratchasima. Also, his current home was located there, so to opt for a funeral in Nakhorn Ratchasima seemed logical. However, neither his voters nor his house are close to the temple. His constituency, being rural, did not provide a temple big enough with the needed facilities and an appropriate level of prestige. Thus, the family chose one of the province's main temples located in the town of Nakhorn Ratchasima. This temple would cater to the needs of the high level guests as well as to the voters from the village, who could come in by car.

On the occasion of Pairot Suwanchawee's funeral, the Suthjinda Temple was organized in the following way. The temple has two large areas. The first one has a great pavilion, which is used for merit making rituals, the monks living quarters and a monastic education facility. The second part, which is the area we are concerned with here, is dedicated to funerals and cremations. Figure 32 shows the layout of this part of the temple. The *meru* (เมรุ)⁹ used for the cremation was situated in middle of this area. There are five pavilions of different sizes, which are used for funerals. The funeral of Pairot took place in the largest pavilion. After the funeral was completed, the coffin with his body was placed at a smaller pavilion in the back of the temple. Both of the pavilions used during the funeral were repainted by the family prior to the event. The deceased's wife said that it was done because: "He [Pairot] liked beautiful things" (Informal Conversation with Rarongrak Suwanchawee, 20 May 2011). However, newly painted pavilions for the funeral must also have been crucial in order to increase the prestige and, thus, the symbolic capital that could be gained by using this location. Thus, economic capital was invested to increase the family's symbolic capital. Simultaneously, the painting of the pavilions was an act of making merit, as well as a sign of patronage to the temple.

⁹ The *meru* is a building used for the cremation. Traditionally, it was a temporary wooden construction that was built for each individual cremation. This was very costly and took a long time. It was reserved for the elite of Thai society. Today, temporary *meru* are only constructed for close relatives of the king. More common now is the cremation at a permanent *meru*. This is available for large portions of society (Panya/ปัญญา 2005).

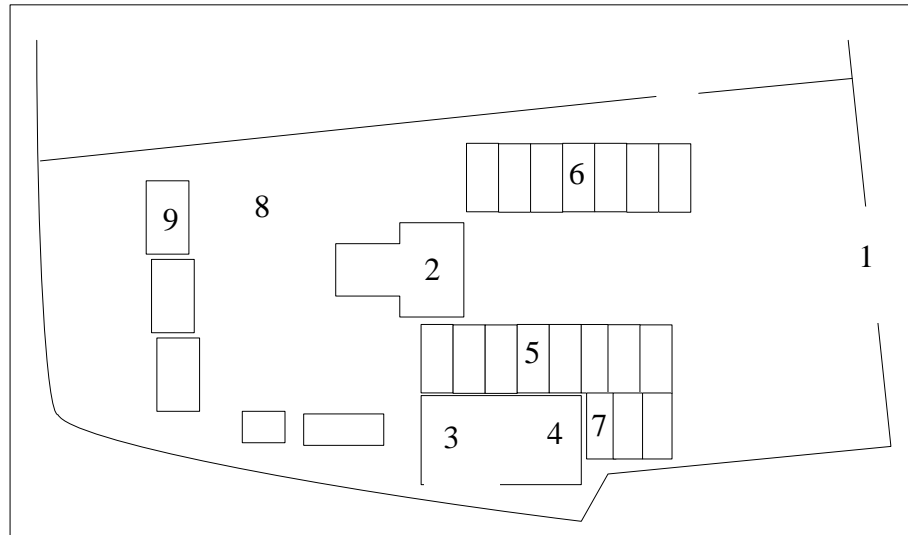


Figure 1: Plan of the temple (drawn based on field notes)

Key:

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|--|---|
| 1. Entrance | 6. Provisional tents for lower ranking guests |
| 2. <i>Meru</i> | 7. Food preparation |
| 3. Pavilion 1 | 8. Eating area for lower ranking guests |
| 4. Mortuary urn and coffin | 9. Pavilion 5; the corpse is stored here |
| 5. Provisional tents for higher ranking guests | |

The pavilion used during the funeral was not large enough to hold all the guests. Provisional tents were erected to create more space and accommodate as many people as possible. The guests of the highest ranks were accommodated in the pavilion itself. The mortuary urn was displayed there. It was the only place cooled down by an air conditioning system and offering comfortable seating. Guests with a somewhat lower, but still high rank, often coming from Bangkok, sat in the provisional tents just outside the pavilion. Guests of lower rank were hosted in provisional tents opposite the pavilion. Large flat screen televisions were used to transmit the events in the pavilion to those seated in the tents. Guests in the pavilion and the provisional tents adjoining it were catered to with food prepared in the provisional tents. They were served by an army of local students. Guests in the remaining tents had to use the service of a makeshift eating space in the back of the temple. They were not served and had to get their food themselves.

The Event

On 16 May 2011, the funeral began at noon with the reception of the corpse, which was transferred from a Bangkok Hospital to Nakon Ratchasrima. This corpse was yet to be placed in a coffin and, thus, was visible for the mourners who had already assembled in the hundreds at the Suthjinda Temple. There, guards of honor, consisting of local government officials, attired in their white dress uniforms, received the corpse. The corpse was brought into the

largest pavilion on the temple ground, in which high ranking military and civilian officials, MPs, ministers, former prime ministers and privy councilors were already seated. The corpse, attired in his dress uniform, was laid down on a table and was partly covered with a decorative blanket. He appeared to be merely sleeping. The pavilion had been decorated, as shown in Figure 33, with his medals of honor, the mortuary urn, which – until approximately half a century ago – would have contained his remains, and four five-tiered umbrellas. The meaning of each of these items will be examined in more detail below.



Figure 2: The large pavilion with the mortuary urn at Pairot's funeral

Key: 1: Mortuary Urn, 2: Tiered Umbrellas, 3: Medals of Honor, 4: Coffin

The next stage of the event commences: the washing of the corpse (อาบน้ำศพ). Traditionally, this ritual would prepare the corpse for the funeral. The whole body was cleaned by the relatives, who wanted to give the deceased this last honor. However, today the body is cleaned by professionals before the ritual begins. Thus, the family and guests only symbolically pour scented water over the hand of the deceased (Sathirakoses/เสฐียรโกเศศ 2008:). The deceased's family, consisting of his wife and three sons, were the first to perform

the ceremony, then positioning themselves beside the corpse. They prepared to receive condolences from the guests. First, the relatives and the guests of higher rank queued to perform the washing of the corpse. They were graciously greeted by the family. In the meantime, more guests arrived, of whom the high ranking and well-known were announced to the family and attendance by the editor of the local newspaper who had worked closely with the family for decades.

At approximately four o'clock a group of high ranking local officials arranged a guard of honor. They were awaiting the officials of the Bureau to bring the royally bestowed water for the next part of the ceremony.¹⁰ As time passed it became apparent that they were becoming more and more anxious to leave the hot afternoon sun. Finally, palace officials with royal water for the next part of the ceremony, the bathing ceremony, arrived. Passing through the guard of honor, the official went straight into the pavilion where the bathing ceremony was performed. The Bureau describes the ritual as follows:

The officiant in representation of the king faces in the direction in which the king resides to pay respects and then starts the ritual. He lifts the head of the corpse. The officiant in representation of the king pours the royally bestowed water onto the corpse's chest as if he was bathing it. Then he pours turmeric scented water and perfume. After he is finished he pays respects in the same direction as before. The ritual is completed (Bureau 2008).¹¹

The ceremony took only a few minutes, and the palace officials quickly returned to Bangkok.

When the bathing ceremony was completed, the washing of the corpse proceeded in the same order as the seating arrangements. First, the ones seated in the pavilion had their turn followed by those seated in the tents just outside the pavilion. After all the officials and politicians seated in the first two areas had poured the water, it was the villagers' turn. I was sitting with a group of villagers and accompanied them. We were orchestrated by announcements through loudspeakers; the villagers, tent by tent, queued under the hot afternoon sun. To avoid the sun, the group of villagers I had joined waited patiently for some time. However, as time passed, the orderly lines start to dissolve and the people chaotically pressed forwards as everybody wanted to go first. Now, there was no holding back and I was pushed in the direction of the pavilion. Finally, everybody was given the opportunity to pour water, but the graceful orderliness in which the higher ranks had proceeded had disappeared. While some of the guests stayed on, the group of villagers I had joined excused themselves and started their journey home.

¹⁰ Usually the washing of the corpse commences with royally bestowed water; however, in the case of Pairot that was not logistically possible.

¹¹ For Thai original see Appendix 1.36.



Figure 3: Palace officials arrive with the royal water for the ceremony



Figure 4: Bathing veremony
(Source: *Thairath Online* 16 May 2011)

After the washing of the corpse was concluded, the deceased's family said their tearful goodbyes, and the corpse was finally placed in a coffin. The coffin was placed behind the mortuary urn and the decoration and was then barely visible, creating the illusion that the corpse had actually been placed in the urn. By now the high ranking officials and politicians, as well as most of the villagers had departed on their journey home and a short break was made in the proceedings. At half past seven in the evening of the same day, four monks arrived and held the customary Buddhist funeral chanting.¹² During the chanting, the

¹² Initially, no one could answer my question: why at funerals is always the case that four (or a multitude of four) monks chant. Finally, I received my answer from a well studied monk. He explained that for auspicious events

guests, sitting in the pavilion and in the tents just outside it, were served drinks and rice congee. After the chanting concluded, guests went into the pavilion to talk to the family and presented them with envelopes containing a monetary contribution as well as to take a picture in front of the mortuary urn. These pictures were taken as a last picture with the deceased, as a type of souvenir. However, it could also serve as proof of who had attended the funeral.

All following days of the funeral started at around ten o'clock in the morning when villagers from the deceased's former constituency started to arrive. They came in larger groups of four to seven pick-ups, which were each carrying approximately ten to twenty people, as shown in Figure 36. Villagers who had just arrived were offered cold drinks and food in an area set apart for that purpose.¹³ The food served was a simple curry on rice. When they had eaten, the villagers sat down in the provisional tents and were shown a short biographical film of Pairot, which was continuously repeated on the television screens. The villagers sitting close to me were not attentive and spent most of the time chatting to each other. While the villagers were waiting, Pairot's son, who was about to run in his father's former constituency for the second time just after the funeral ended, intermingled with the villagers together with his wife, as shown in Figure 38. They were accompanied by the editor of the local newspaper, who announced over the loudspeaker that Ponlapee Suwanchawee was welcoming and thanking all brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers. The editor urged the villagers to have pity on Ponlapee, as he had just lost his father. He also asked the villagers to vote for Ponlapee. While going from tent to tent, Ponlapee leaned in to talk to some of the villagers more closely. An elderly woman sitting close to me burst into tears. Ponlapee bent down, almost hugging her, and said: "Granny, don't cry, or I will start, too." Ponlapee finished his round and, together with his entourage, returned to the large pavilion where food offerings were made to the monks. The villagers showed no interest in the offering to the monks.

an even number of monks is required, while inauspicious events need an uneven number. Thus, for funerals, four monks plus the statue of the Buddha, totaling five, are customary.

¹³ When I use the term 'villager' I refer to the Thai term *chao ban* (ชาวนบ้าน). This term has a different connotation than the English term 'villager'. It refers more to class than geographical origin. A *chao ban* is usually someone of the lower social classes. This often coincides with people living in villages but is not limited to them. In the particular case described here, however, the majority of *chao ban* actually came from villages.



Figure 5: Villagers in pick-up truck



Figure 6: Villagers in provisional tents

The villagers again queued up to enter the large pavilion and prostrate themselves in front of the mortuary urn in order to bid farewell to the deceased. Just as I did the day before, I joined a group of villagers. We were directed by the now familiar voice of the editor over the loudspeaker. However, the villagers made their own calculations about the estimated waiting time in the burning midday sun or the duration of the journey home. When they had finally decided to join the line, they were anxious to reach the pavilion fast. The villagers entered the pavilion in groups of approximately twenty people. Usually people

would be allowed to pay their respects to the deceased silently, but not in this case. A woman, who was Pairot's assistant, dictated over a microphone what we should say. We should express our gratitude for all his sacrifice and helpfulness to the people. In return we promised to vote for his son during the upcoming election. We silently prostrated ourselves and left the pavilion. The villagers departed for their home villages immediately; it was nearly two o'clock.



Figure 7: Ponglapee Suwanchawee making his round amongst the participating villagers

Starting from the first and up to the last day, people would send funeral wreaths to the temple, as can be seen in Figure 39. Every arriving wreath was carefully registered and counted by assistants of the family. Each of them carried a large sign with the name of the giver. The wreaths were hung up to decorate the venue. When a wreath wilted, it was replaced by a newly arrived one. A selection of the name signs was kept and hung up on a wall. On the final day of the funeral, I counted 195 name signs accumulated on the wall. This, however, represented only a fraction of the number of wreaths that had been sent, as on the first day alone over two hundred wreaths had arrived. These wreaths exhibit the social connections of the deceased and his family. Wreaths of influential people, such as former prime ministers or privy councilors, are showcased where they can be seen by everyone participating in the funeral. Thus, the wreaths can also convey symbolic capital.

Every evening at seven o'clock the funeral chanting started. The funeral chanting always had a host. On the first day, the family of the deceased and some other close families or organizations were the hosts. Subsequent evenings were hosted by high ranking figures, such as the former prime ministers Banharn Silapa-archa and Chuan Leekpai,

ministers or organizations of which the deceased had been a member or sponsor. The host would be responsible for the cost of that day's chanting. This included the food and beverages for the guests as well as the offerings to the monks. The hosts of each day were announced on large white boards, as shown in Figure 40. The practice of sponsoring a funeral is a way of transferring the social capital from one generation to the next. People or organizations who had dealt with the deceased while they were still alive, now initiate a relationship with the bereaved. They enter into a relationship of reciprocity that can later be used as social capital.



Figure 8: Funeral wreath with the name of the givers

Guests of higher rank did participate in the evening chanting but not in the day chanting. The whole atmosphere was a very different one. While in the daytime the villagers participated with a sense of lightness and disinterest, the people attending in the evening had a serious demeanor and followed the chanting attentively. They were served food and beverages by students from the local secondary school and technical college. While ordinary guests might stay on for a chat with some of the other guests, the host of the event, especially those of highest rank, would depart as soon as possible after the chanting was concluded. The chanting on the final day of the funeral was followed by a short ceremony in which the coffin was placed in a smaller pavilion at the back of the temple grounds, where it remained until the cremation. The procession with the coffin was led by the sons of the deceased and accompanied by guards of honor. The corpse is still lying there today, awaiting cremation.



Figure 9: Sign announcing the sponsor of a particular day of the funeral



Figure 10: The coffin is carried to the smaller pavilion on the last day of the funeral

The Delay of the Cremation

The Suwanchaweeks postponed not only the funeral but also the cremation. The cremation usually takes place on the third, seventh, fiftieth or hundredth day after the death or the start of the funeral. The most common days are the third and the seventh day after the death (Fishel 2005: 144). The family can, however, choose to postpone the cremation in order to allow relatives and friends who live far away or have other urgent business to participate in the cremation. To postpone the cremation beyond the 100 days, as happened in the case of Pairot

Suwanchawee, is uncommon. The reason for this postponement is that the family applied for a royally bestowed cremation fire with the presence of a member of the royal family. Though royally bestowed cremation fire is comparably easily granted, the presence of member of the royal family is not, and long waiting times are involved. The presence of a member of the royal family is a clear indicator of status, as only the very top of society can hope for such honor. As opposed to those of commoners, royalty's cremations always took place a long time after the death. Princes and princesses were kept until a number of corpses had accumulated, and then a joint ceremony with honors according to the individual ranks was performed. This would mean that the 100 day rites had passed for months and sometimes over a year before cremation took place. Kings always had individual cremations, which took place long after the 100 day rites: often a year or more later. Only Rama VI had a relatively short period of waiting between death and cremation. He was cremated only four months after he passed away, which is approximately one month after the 100 day rites. This was on special order by the king who wished to save the resources a lavish funeral would have necessitated (Wales 1931: 138). Thus, a politician postponing his cremation and putting it off to match the time frame of royal cremations makes a statement. It makes a comparison with royalty.

The postponement of the cremation also gives the deceased's family continued opportunities to rebuild their networks and to transfer the deceased's social capital to the living. The time between funeral and cremation is not wasted with idle waiting. Every Saturday, a merit making ceremony is arranged, which is an opportunity for the family to reconnect with their network. During this weekly merit making, local politicians, village leaders, officials and other people of influence come to participate. After the monks have been fed, the participants and the family sit down to eat. During the eating, people continued to come to the widow to report on developments on the ground. They came with requests for help but also ensuring their continued support. These moments were certainly important to secure a seat in parliament for the eldest son in the 2011 election. It also was very important to reinforce the relationships with these people and to reassure them that this family is still capable of acting as their patron. At the same time, by giving assistance as requested, the family gets the opportunity to reintegrate these people into a relationship of reciprocity, which fundamentally starts with the consumption of food together. The shared consumption of food and drinks is of great importance for the creation of a feeling of belonging, the belonging to a community or a family (Carsten 1997, Janowski and Kerlogue 2007), as mentioned in Chapter 3 and 7.

Various Functions of the Attendance at Funerals

The funeral of Pairot Suwanchawee was attended by a large number of people from all levels of society. The attendance can be divided into four categories: (1) the villagers who are Pairot's direct or indirect clients, (2) local officials and politicians who are Pairot's direct clients, (3) peers and (4) superiors who are Pairot's direct or indirect patrons or had either a personal or working relationship with him. Each of these groups has an important role to play. When people of all levels were asked why it is important to attend funerals, they said that this is the social norm. For people on a higher level the attendance at the funeral is also political. In Thai politics, friends can become enemies and enemies friends. Thus, it is important to not insult anybody in a way that would make future cooperation impossible. Not going to a funeral would be such an insult. A common saying in Thailand is, "Too angry to burn the ghost".¹⁴ Thus, not attending the funeral or the cremation means that one is extremely angry with each other. It in practice means one does not want to maintain any relationship with the deceased person or the bereaved.

Villagers attended in high numbers. Voters in Pairot's constituency would often express that they felt it to be their duty to attend. Others said that giving him the last honor would be the only way they could repay his kindness and their debt of gratitude. This notion is not only shared by the people who knew him personally but also by those that had never met him. Thousands of voters that live in Pairot's constituency and beyond paid their respects to their MP during the funeral. The exact number of voters that attended the seven day funeral is, however, difficult to estimate. The space in the provisional tents amounted to 1313 seats, however, occasionally not every seat was filled or more seats were added to accommodate more participants. I would make a conservative estimate that around ten thousand people participated during the seven day funeral rites. The family of the bereaved, however, claims a numbers of several thousand for the first day alone.

The moral obligation to attend funerals is high but the actual participation is ensured by the politician's family. In the case of Pairot's funeral, it was arranged by the family of the bereaved and their staff that villagers from different villages would come on different days, resulting in most villagers going only once. They are mobilized by community leaders, including village heads and other local politicians. Transportation was organized in the form of pick-ups, of which each could carry 15 to 20 people, as shown in Figure 36. Usually five to seven pick-ups would come from one village, amounting to a group of 75 to 140 people. The cost for transportation is carried by the host of the funeral; every group

¹⁴ For Thai original see Appendix 1.37.

leader receives money. This financial contribution to the villagers is called fuel money (ค่าน้ำมัน) and is supposed to merely cover the cost of fuel. Villagers acknowledge that they received money but refrain from giving numbers. It is possible that the amount of money given exceeded the actual cost of transport. Many of the villagers would not have been able to go on their own and thus felt thankful towards the organizer that they were able to fulfill their obligation. Thus, the host was not only able to ensure and increase the number of people participating but also to build up or strengthen the bond between the voters and Pairot's successors. Thus, the social capital of the father is transferred to the surviving members of the family, in particular to his wife and son, who played the most significant role in the funeral.

The ability to mobilize a high number of villagers to participate at the funeral demonstrates the *barami* of the politician. The high number of villagers who participate at the funeral demonstrates that he will be able to gain a high number of votes and, thus, has the potential to be re-elected. It also shows that he has enough *barami* to attract these people into his networks. Thus, the villagers function as important extras in the performance for peers and superior guests at the funeral. The same is true for community leaders, who have a strong motivation to bring as many people as possible to the funeral, as this will translate into bargaining power. A high number of people organized by the community leaders, who often double as vote canvassers, shows of their ability to mobilize a following and, thus, votes. Every politician is well advised to take a community leader with a large following seriously and treat him with due respect. This can translate into material or other benefits which will again enable the local leader to accumulate even more followers. The ability to mobilize a large following has been an essential part of a leader's power and authority for centuries (Geertz 1980: 116).

Community leaders, who are often also the vote canvassers, are of special importance, as they can determine if the *trakun* will remain in politics or not. Upon Pairot's death, these community leaders had to decide if they wanted to remain loyal to the Suwanchawee family or change their allegiance to a more promising candidate. Thus, the community leaders were given special attention by the Suwanchaweess. They are paid due respect and are especially warmly welcomed by the family. Local officials helped the family to identify community leaders participating at the funeral. When local officials spotted a local leader they would notify a member of the Suwanchawee family, who would then instantly hurry to greet the community leader. To ignore one of these leaders could result in a change of allegiance to another politician.

Local officials played a very important role. Both low and higher level government officials attended the first day of the funeral. Officials of lower rank were dressed in their working uniform,¹⁵ while those of higher rank wore their dress uniform, which is reserved for special occasions. The lower level officials did not carry out any special duties during the funeral and were treated not much differently than the villagers. The higher level officials did carry an important duty during the ceremony. They welcomed the palace officer who brought the royal water for the bathing ceremony. As guards of honor, they stood waiting under the hot afternoon sun for the palace officer to arrive. This gave the whole occasion a very formal atmosphere and made it resemble a state ceremony. As a result, the rank of the deceased and the occasion was raised. It should be noted that the officials had no formal or legal obligation to participate in this ritual. When asked why they participated, they related that they wanted to do it for their *nai* (นาย).¹⁶ It was with the same devotion that they received guests and led them to the family of the deceased to avoid the embarrassment that would be caused if important and influential people were overlooked.

Errington (1989: 159) describes how a high ranking person's honor would be protected by his entourage, which would ensure appropriate treatment; this works slightly differently in the context of Thai funerals. Errington observed that the large number of followers gathered around a high ranking individual functioned as a shield for the leader, both from physical assault and from a lack of deference. The high number of followers in itself was already an indicator of the leader's rank and, thus, prompted appropriate treatment. Beyond that, the followers were attentive of the treatment that the leader received and would protest any misbehavior. The leader could then exhibit his own potency by calming down his followers. In the Thai context, the appropriate treatment is likewise very important. However, it is a joint effort of many parties to ensure this treatment. High-ranking guests would usually arrange for someone from their entourage to call in beforehand to announce their pending arrival. At the funeral then one member of the family would always stand close to the entryway to the main pavilion to spot high-ranking or otherwise important guests. This member of the family would also be approached by local officials, who would guide important local leaders to them. In the pavilion itself, the editor of the local newspaper, who

¹⁵ This might have been a coincidence as government officials usually wear their working uniform on Mondays and the funeral commenced on a Monday.

¹⁶ *Nai* can be translated as master or boss; however, the word carries a slightly different meaning than these translations. The German word *Meister* is closer to the Thai term than the English master. A *nai* is a superior who is treated with the utmost respect of his subordinates, prompting the subordinates to fulfill the *nai*'s requests. The *nai* and his subordinate are connected by a relationship of reciprocity in which the *nai* provides the subordinate with protection and often financial benefits. The subordinate returns this with his respect and services as required by the *nai*. The relationship is voluntary and can be broken up if not satisfactory to either side.

had broad knowledge and who recognized both local people of rank and those from Bangkok, would make the appropriate announcement whenever a noteworthy person had arrived. This gave the opportunity for proper welcoming gestures from the Suwanchawee family as well as other people present.

High ranking officials from the national level participated in the funeral to re-establish their networks and demonstrate their patronage. Politicians at all levels of society regularly take part in funerals of people of all ranks. However, the funeral of a fellow politician is certainly more important, as they have to repair the loss of a link in their network and build up a relationship with the deceased's successor, who could potentially become a politician.

The Cremation Volume

Cremation volumes are a literary genre unique to Thailand. According to Olsen (1992: 281-282), it is speculated that the distribution of small volumes on the occasion of cremations goes back to the late 19th or early 20th century and represents an extension of the Thai custom of gift giving. Over the years the custom has spread. Due to the extraordinary amount of resources, both financial and in manpower, that flow into their production, however, cremation volumes are very much a sign of status and wealth. The format and size of cremation volumes vary greatly and, thus, are an indicator of wealth. Each book usually consists of a short biography of the deceased, including the mentioning of his or her family, eulogies and a reprint of literary or religious texts (Olson 1992).

Within this genre of the cremation volume, that of the politician stands out as a subtype. The reprints of literary or religious texts that make up the majority of the general cremation volume are often absent. Instead, it consists of an often extended biography including detailed reports of the deceased's achievements, the family history, a kinship record sometimes in the form of a chart, a photographic account of the obsequies and an extended collection of eulogies. These letters are organized according to seniority in age or official position of the writer and generally divided into two sections: (1) non-relatives and (2) relatives.

Also opposed to the general practice, prominent politicians often have more than just one volume. Usually, cremation volumes are prepared within a short period of time. This is between the death and the cremation, which can be between three and 100 days. The preparation is done or supervised by the family of the deceased, and then one single volume is

distributed for free amongst the attendants of the cremation. This does not apply to politicians. For politicians the period between death and cremation is often more than the customary three, five seven or even 100 days. The cremation for politician is often postponed and takes place more than a year after the death. This allows much more care and effort to go into the production of the volumes. It also allows other parties to produce their own volumes. Thus, high ranking politicians often have more than one large volume. It is difficult to determine how many volumes were dedicated to one politician. This is because they are not systematically registered, collected or stored. During my search for cremation volumes, I have encountered three volumes dedicated to Sarit Thanarath,¹⁷ four to Chatchai Choonhavan, and seven to Sanya Thamasak and his wife, who were cremated on the same day. I believe, however, that even more exist.

The distribution of cremation volumes for politicians also functions differently. In addition to the volume distributed directly on the day of the cremation, some volumes are produced after the cremation. These volumes include a photographic report of the cremation day in addition to the usual features. These volumes are given to the attendants of the cremation. They can also be given away to interested people or even distributed by the political party with which the deceased was affiliated. The postponed distribution of the volumes gives the persons involved the opportunity of interaction after the death of a person and thus allows them to foster their relationships and renegotiate their networks after an important alteration. This is an important part of the transfer of social capital to the survivors.

The cremation volume is crucial in determining how a person is represented to posterity. Cremation volumes of politicians often feature extended biographies of the deceased, which frequently put his or her sacrifice for the country at the core. The average biography in cremation volumes of non-politicians is a résumé of the deceased in the form of a personal data sheet between two and ten pages in length. In the case of politicians, this résumé is often followed by detailed biographies that can take up between twenty and a few hundred pages. In some cases, writings of the deceased are included, often historic documents or a collection of speeches which document their lives. In this fashion, a cremation volume aims to recreate a politician as somebody who has lived his or occasionally her life in the service of the country, a person who deserves to be honored and deserves to have been in power (Hanks 1962). The cremation volume is the first place to look up information about a deceased person. Often it is here that one can find the most detailed accounts of a person's life. This makes cremation volumes not only collectables, but also references for journalists,

¹⁷ I have, however, not yet found the main one.

authors and academics. Volumes are collected and read by many people. Accordingly, much care is put into their production.

Eulogies in the cremation volumes of politicians help to uphold the social capital of his family. Olsen (1992: 284) states that eulogies describe the deceased's character by applying a profession-specific vocabulary. In eulogies to politicians the descriptions of their character are generally quite standard. They are usually described as hard working, honest and dedicated to their service to the nation. When comparing the eulogies of two politicians to each other, it would indeed become quite difficult to realize that a different person is being described. In eulogies to politicians, it is not the character of the deceased person that is the focus but the kind of relationship the deceased had with the writer of the eulogies. The majority of the eulogy is taken up with a narration on how they met and how close their relationship was. Subordinates will usually end their eulogy with a statement of gratitude. Thus, eulogies function to reveal and maintain a politician's network. The eulogies let us know who had what kind of relationship with the deceased and more importantly preserve it for future generations.

The cremation volumes indicate the deceased's closeness to the royal family, which is an indicator of both symbolic and social capital. One of the first things to be included in the cremation volume are pictures of the royally bestowed funeral wreath (พวงมาลา) presented to the deceased, accompanied by a letter of gratitude to the royal giver, which is written by the deceased's family. This represents the connections of the deceased with the royal family. The wreath can be presented by the royal in person or by a representative. A personal presentation of the wreath to the deceased is, of course, of higher prestige than that by a representative. The rank of the representative indicates the status of the deceased and his closeness to the royal family. This is all manifested in the cremation volume. This shows how much social capital a person had. Any connection with the royal family, which remains the symbolic center of Thailand, is symbolic capital.

The *Trakun* Eternalized in the Cremation Volume

A cremation volume plays an important part in eternalizing a *trakun* for future generations and, thus, is crucial in creating the *trakun*. Kinship reports take a central place in cremation volumes. Kinship reports can differ in length and depth. The minimum length of these reports is three generations: (1) the parents, (2) the deceased and often his or her siblings and (3) the deceased's children with or without their spouses. Often, however, the report includes more generations. There is no uniform way of making these kinship reports. The editor of the

cremation volume can choose to include certain generations or individuals and exclude others. The kinship report that is finally published in the cremation volume will become the authority on membership in a *trakun*. As the volumes may survive for hundreds of years, this authority will be higher than an account by any living human being.

Kinship reports of people from prominent families tend to focus on the ancestor generations. Only few reports offer extensive family histories and go several generations deep into the past. One such report is that of Khuang Abhaiwongse, four-time prime minister and founder of the Democrat Party. Khuang comes from an old noble family, whose connection to the royal house goes back into the Thonburi Period. It is notable, though, that members of the royal family often do not give detailed accounts of their ancestry. Their kinship reports tend to be very short and are not the focal point of the volume. This is probably because their connection to the royal house is well known and already indicated by their royal title, whereas people like Khuang feel that they have to showcase their ancestry in order to make it known. They, thus, build up their kinship relations to the royal house or other prominent families to increase their symbolic capital.

More prominent among the cremation volumes of politicians is the focus of kinship reports on the nuclear families of the deceased. These are the family of his birth: his parents and siblings, as well as his own family: the married couple and their children. It is this part of the report that is most detailed and complete. Sometimes information on the date of birth and profession are given, however, that is not the general rule. It is notable that the deceased's siblings are named in most cases but their children (the deceased's nieces and nephews) are almost never reported. Grandchildren and great grandchildren are also often included in kinship reports. Figures 45 demonstrate which relations are reported in cremation volumes.

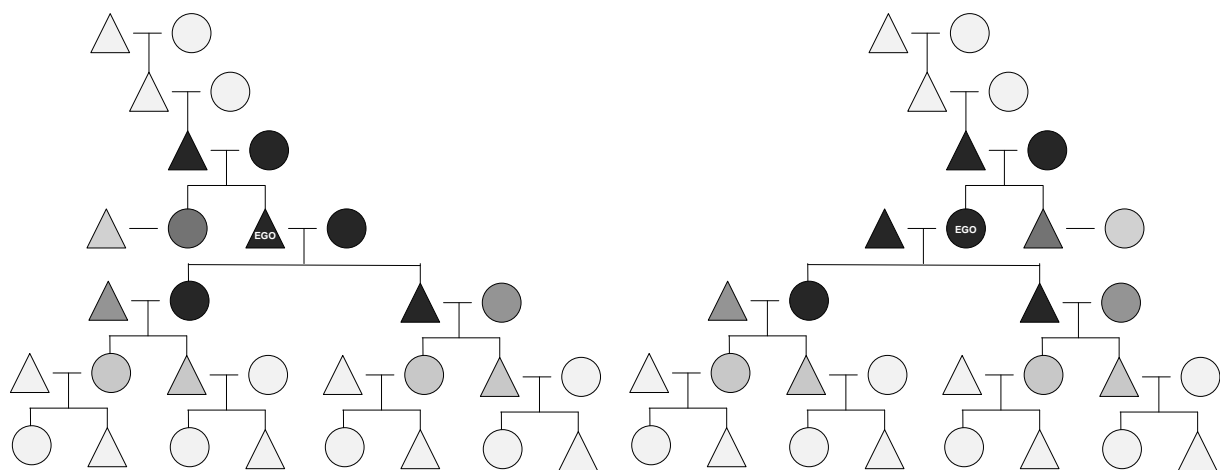


Figure 11: Kinship Report for Male (left) and Female (right) Deceased

The kinship reports in cremation volumes are unilateral. Within these reports it is always the line of the deceased which is reported. However, ancestors are given patrilineally. Usually, the paternal grandparents are reported. Only under very rare circumstances are female lines incorporated into the report. Not one of the cremation volumes of a politician employed in this work gives an example of such a case. However, I found one example in a Bunnag kinship chart in which the relationship to a female ancestor was highlighted because this created a relation to the royal house. Further, the spouses of the deceased are usually named; also, if applicable, their maiden names are given. The parents of the spouse, however, are not usually mentioned. This only happens in cases where the spouse's parents were prominent and would increase the symbolic capital of the deceased. One such example is the cremation volume of Praman Adireksan, which even includes a short biography of his father-in-law. This unilateral reporting of ancestors and links by marriage, combined with a focus on nuclear families, means that the networks created by marriage are not chronicled for future generations. The links created by marriage exist as long as the children of the people involved are still alive but are likely to increasingly fall into oblivion thereafter. Alliances are selectively emphasized and preserved, with special attention paid the younger generations.

Minor wives are not included in the kinship report. Kinship reports generally mention only the major wives of the deceased. In most cases that is one woman; in case of remarriage after a wife's death, however, a second wife might be mentioned. If that is the case, the details given about that second woman will be less than those of the first wife. I have found only one case in which more than one woman was noted simultaneously as the wife. In Utain Techaphaybun's cremation volume, three women are named as wife. All are called wife (ภรรยา), an expression usually reserved for major wives. These three wives appear to be equal.¹⁸ In this case it should be noted that Utain was born in China and represents the group of immigrants who came to Thailand with little to nothing and made riches in their new home country. The Chinese origin and the maintenance of contacts with the place of origin are highly emphasized throughout the whole volume. When asking my informant about the mentioning of several wives, they did not seem to be surprised and said that this is normal for Chinese men. Thus, having several major wives simultaneously was seen as a trait common to the Chinese ethnicity. Further, it is notable that according one of my informants Utain had not only three but six wives. Therefore, there had been some selection about which wives were acceptable and which were not.

¹⁸ The first wife might be exception as she is called the big grandmother, showing that she had a higher status.

Children of minor wives are equally excluded from kinship reports. The kinship reports only name the major wives and their offspring. One very interesting case is that of Poth Adireksan. According to his surname he was a member of the Adireksan family. However, he was not named in the kinship report of Praman Adireksan. There are different explanations as to why he was not in the report. Maybe he was a member of a different line of the family. This is not likely to be the case, as the Praman report is unusually detailed and includes his uncles, aunts and cousins. He could also have been member of a generation which was not included in the report. The report, however, goes down two generations to the grandchildren. Given Poth's age, he would have to have belonged to at least the grandchildren's generation. To get more information I searched through the pages of the cremation volume and found the eulogy which Poth had written to Praman. It was part of the eulogy written by relatives and Poth addresses Praman as father. The address was made in the same fashion a biological child would make and no adoption was mentioned. Furthermore, the father-son relationship was characterized as close. Poth claimed to have been present at Praman's deathbed. His presence at the deathbed and the publishing of his eulogy together with that of other relatives' shows that he was accepted as a member of the family. Thus Poth is likely to be Praman's biological son. However, he is missing from the kinship report. Therefore, the only conclusion possible is that he is the son of a minor wife.¹⁹ The Poth case demonstrates the ambiguous position of children of minor wives. They are accepted as members of the family. Often this acceptance is made in public. However, the concealment of minor wives' children for the kinship report represents an exclusion from the *trakun*. This will make it difficult for future generations to prove their relationship to the main branch of the lineage. The kinship reports in cremation volumes create the *trakun*. It is here that it is decided who is included and who is excluded. Not being part of the *trakun* here will lead to a disappearance of all traceable connection after only a few generations and, thus, effectively end the status of being relatives.

Minor wives and their children are not included in the cremation volumes, because they could diminish the deceased's symbolic capital. As discussed in Chapter 7, in Thai society, an intact nuclear family has been highly idealized. It is almost a prerequisite for a politician to maintain the image of a monogamous lifestyle in order to appeal to the electorate. This image has to be maintained even after his death. Therefore, minor wives are under no circumstances included in cremation volumes. Even in cases such as Chatchai Choonhavan and P. Phibunsongkram, where it was publicly known that minor wives existed,

¹⁹ No information about the mother is given at all.

they were not included in the volumes. The case of Utain Techaphaybun is an exception, because he is seen not as a full member of the Thai society and his having several wives is seen as a normative behavior for his ethnic background.

Transfer of Symbolic Capital

The funeral enables the transfer of symbolic capital from one generation to the next. Despite Bourdieu's (1986: 48) claims that symbolic capital is lost with the biological capacity of their owner, I have shown in this chapter that it can be transferred to the next generation. The funeral of a deceased member of a political family gives the survivors the opportunity to transfer his or her capital to themselves.

The funeral is accompanied by the ostentation of symbolic capital which gives the survivors the ability to claim then as their own. During the funeral, the symbolic capital of the deceased becomes visible as at no time during their life. Official ranks become tangible in the form of the mortuary urn. A relationship to the royal family is observable by the participation of members of the royal family in the funeral or by a royal funeral wreath. High ranking members of society participate at the funeral of politicians, which again shows the social capital of the deceased. Villagers are mobilized to participate in the funeral; their mere presence shows the social capital of the political family. Most of the symbolic capital showcased at the funeral belonged to the deceased. However, the display of this capital has been achieved by the survivors. It is a joint effort by the political family. Thus, the family has shown that they can still command the capital of their deceased member. By doing so, they claim the capital of the dead and it becomes transferred onto the living.

The transfer of social capital is further facilitated by the numerous networking activities that accompany funerals. As has been discussed in this chapter, the social pressure to participate in the funeral of a person with whom one has worked or whom one has known for a long time is very strong. This pressure translates into a high number of people participating in the funeral of a politician. These people include representatives of the palace, such as members of the royal family or privy councilors and high ranking politicians, such as (former) prime ministers and ministers. Apart from these high level personalities, funerals are attended by peers, local politicians, vote canvassers and community leaders. Last but not least, voters come to the funeral. All these participants, by attending the funeral, become immersed in a relationship of reciprocity with the host. This relationship is characterized by the exchange of gifts, such as envelopes with money given to the host, sponsorship of parts of the

funeral, the cremation volume and other mementos of the funeral as well as the food offered to the guests. The relationship between the participants and the host is further enforced by the sharing of food during the funeral. The postponement of the cremation prolongs the period in which such interaction can be repeated. This gives the survivors ample opportunity to create a relationship with the attendees of the funeral and, thus, to transfer the social capital from the deceased to the living.

The cremation volume is a tool to mediate and record the transfer of symbolic capital. The cremation volume minutely captures every display of symbolic capital, in word and picture. It further adds to the symbolic capital already exhibited, by narrating the life story of the deceased, making him or her into a selfless servant of the country with the highest moral standards. The social capital of the deceased is likewise eternalized, as an extensive collection of eulogies is incorporated into the volume. These eulogies make it possible to reconstruct with whom the deceased had what kind of relationship. The cremation volume also includes a kinship report, which creates the *trakun* as it will be known future generations. This practically limits the transfer of symbolic and social capital to the descendants who have been included into the kinship report of the cremation volume.

The quality of the transfer of symbolic and social capital and, thus, the future of a political family depends on the success of the funeral and cremation. The funeral and cremation are the main tools that can ensure the transfer of capital from one generation to the next. The success of the transfer depends on how well the next generation manages to claim the deceased's capital. The bereaved have to organize the funeral in a way that is conducive to the transfer of capital. Their ability to do this in turn depends on their own capital, in particular cultural, social and political capital. Do they know how to initiate the royal honors, so crucial to the transfer of symbolic capital? Do they correctly perform all of the rituals involved? Do they choose an appropriate venue? How do they manage the different sponsors? Can they behave appropriately towards the various participants at the funeral? The answers to all these questions will determine the success of the funeral, the amount of capital transferred to the next generation and ultimately the survival of the political *trakun*.