

## So Long Loong Bow

By Thomas Pierkarski

When they celebrated John Lennon's birthday  
reprising *Imagine* in Central Park's Strawberry Fields,  
it was natural to contemplate his lunatic assassin.  
For an assassin gains nothing, trading his life  
for another more worthy... At the Beat and Jazz Festival  
on the Davis campus last week, I told Michael McClure  
I had a gift for him. "A check?" he inquired. No, just a poem  
I wrote, one I thought he'd appreciate. One that perhaps  
supports his conception of "painted dust," as he put it...

I wish there was a better interpretation for "pii," you say,  
the Thai ghost that is known to linger around the body  
of the living and infect it. There is no direct translation.  
But you observe that "Loong" directly translated is uncle.  
And Loong Bow was loved not only as an uncle  
but by everyone he touched, even his wife whom he  
regularly beat. He loved to help the vendors  
at the Saturday market at no charge. And he would ride  
past your house two or three times a day, always wearing  
a happy face--he had an absolutely great smile!

So his untimely death was a shock. But a non issue  
to the thousands of anti-government protesters in Bangkok,  
the Red Shirts. They ranted their respect for Sae Daeng,  
the major general who was assassinated there.  
Demonstrators piled into trucks and onto motorcycles  
as sniper fire rang out, leaving dead bodies, many more  
than at Kent State or Tiananmen. Such treachery!

Expecting nothing out of the ordinary, Loong Bow  
took a leisurely six mile ride from the village  
where a speeding truck smacked into and tossed him

almost fifty yards. They chucked his bloody remains into a pickup, and hauled them to the temple at his wife's insistence. At the funeral monks chanted. Self-important VIPs gave the usual speeches. Loong Bow's casket put into the oven at exactly 4 p.m., reduced to ash, Buddhist style. And yet no woe there in Ban Klong Kleang.

From their windows neighbors observed smoke curling from the tall chimney. The peasants loitered until smoke-cured gates of hell creaked open to admit Loong Bow. You fondled the miniature brass Buddha they gave you, sitting through the son's boring details of Loong Bow's life, delivered in a squeaky high-pitched voice. A lotus flower, a stick of incense. Chant over a robe placed on the coffin; chant over another robe placed on the coffin. And more robes. And all this for a wife beater! There was no hesitation involved—they wrestled Loong Bow's casket into the charcoal and paper-fired oven. The handlers lit him up, fanned the flames, slammed the door, hell his next stop.

Or was it heaven? What's the difference? Loong Bow wouldn't know. The monks salvaged the virgin robes placed on his coffin to recycle at the next death. No anxiety there. The Buddhists never in a hurry. They all filed downstairs to wash their hands and rid themselves of the dreaded "pii" ghost that would otherwise infect them. You simply shrugged, then shuffled home to grill chicken.

Now, I'm going to ask you to think back and remember that Mongoloid idiot Leroy. Mad Mad Leroy we called him back there in Oregon. I think it's possible the dreaded "pii" got to him that night you backed him against a brick wall in downtown Jacksonville, shined headlights into his eyes as I snapped his picture. Our intent was a bit sinister, although I'd be willing to bet that to him it had no observable effect. I hope he washed his hands after that,

because he was so innocent in his ignorance, and I hope that these many years he's avoided getting run over and killed as Loong Bow was, happily on his way.