

# The Stories of Sri Thanonchai, the Clever Trickster

**Sri Thanonchai** (in Thai: สฤษดิ์ธำรง) is a clever trickster who occurs in Thai folktales and is popular until today. The first printed version of these stories was published around 1890. This figure is known throughout Thailand but also in other Southeast Asian countries like Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. In Laos, this character is called '*Siengmieng*' (also '*Chieng Mieng*'), in Cambodia '*Thanon-Chai*' though his Khmer name is *Ah Thonchuy Prach*. In Myanmar, this figure is referred to as *Saga Dausa*. The Lao tales are similar to the Thai ones whereas the Cambodian versions differ from the Thai stories. There are also mural paintings of Sri Thanonchai tales at Wat Phrathum Wanaram in Bangkok, Thailand.

## Sri Thanonchai



Sri Thanonchai mural painting,  
Wat Pathum Wanaram  
Rajaworawihan (photo credit:  
culture.go.th)

He can be compared to the German Till Eulenspiegel who was also a great deceiver. Most of Sri Thanonchai stories are set in central Thailand where the figure probably originated from.

According to the tales, Sri Thanonchai was born near Ayutthaya as the son of a peasant. His mother bore him relatively late in her life. Hence, only after she turned to the God Indra, she became pregnant and bore a son. However, a short while after the trickster's birth, the mother bore another son and Sri Thanonchai was very jealous of his younger brother.



Scene from the film version 'Sri Thanonchai hahaha' (photo credit: adintrend.com)

Generally though, Sri Thanonchai was very witty, clever and enjoyed playing tricks on people. Sometimes his pranks were outrageous. Nevertheless, he was also appointed to the royal court where he annoyed and vexed everyone by his tricks. Nevertheless, he could always save his hide. Finally, he returned to the house of his parents. Sri Thanonchai is said to have died from a broken heart after he lost a bet against a court official.

The tales of the trickster provide psychological release for the frustrations of a peasantry subject to the power of the ruling aristocracy. Hence, the common people could identify with him since he is also born of peasantry but conquers officialdom through wit and deceit. Hence, Sri Thanonchai not only challenges and ridicules authority but he also emerges victorious in the fight with the establishment.

There are several movie versions of Sri Thanonchai tales. The most recent screening is 'Sri Thanonchai hahaha' from 2014.

The most famous tale is the one in which the trickster outwits the King. Summing up, the story relates how the trickster persuades the King to go into a pond. I have here a clip of the Lao version of this tale but it is identical with the Thai one.

There are also some Lao versions of Xieng Mieng available [here](#). The story of Sri Thanonchai was for many decades only verbally told and later written down in verse and in prose.

Finally, we may claim that the tales of Sri Thanonchai reflect the intellectual and creative power in the art of telling jokes in an entertaining way by using linguistic and psychological manipulation. I think the tales are still popular today because people can identify with the figures and situations presented.

Yours, Sirinya

(Reference, Supaporn Vathanaprida, Thai Tales. Folktales of Thailand, 1994)