

Reviews

Divination au Royaume de Siam: Le corps, la guerre, le destin translated from Siamese and introduced by Pattaratorn Chirapravati, translated into French by Nicolas Revire (Paris: Collection Sources, Presses Universitaires de France; Geneva: Fondation Martin Bodmer). ISBN 978-2-13-058854-2

This publication is not a book but a box. Inside the box is a book of 108 pages, and a mock-up of a *samut thai* accordion book with 78 folds, each fold measuring 36 x 12 cms, mostly printed on both sides, with end-covers printed to resemble wood. The book contains an introduction by ML Pattaratorn Chirapravati and a French translation of the text.

The manuscript has three parts: a tract on prediction from a warfare manual, occupying 51 folds; a manual of therapeutic massage, occupying 14 folds; and a manual of divination, occupying 58 folds. Finding three different categories of text in one manuscript is unusual, and Pattaratorn argues convincingly that it was probably compiled at the request of a foreigner, and was possibly unfinished, as several pages were left blank. On grounds of the calligraphy, orthography, and style of illustration, Pattaratorn dates the manuscript to the first half of the 19th century, and most probably the 1830s. The original is in the collection of the Fondation Martin Bodmer in Geneva, but this publication presents no details on its provenance.

The section from a warfare manual has illustrations of the sun, moon, clouds, stars, rainbows and fog with notes indicating what result is predicted. The illustrations and the predictions are similar to those found in a 1793 manual kept in the National Library and published in facsimile form a few years ago, but not exactly the same. In particular, the 1793 manuscript is inscribed in white on black *khoi* paper, whereas this is the reverse. Pattaratorn speculates that this extract might be based on a copy seen in 1825 by Adolf Bastian but since lost.

The manual of massage has diagrams of a male and female body, indicating pressure points for the fingers, with notes on the therapeutic value of each spot, but no instructions on the technique of massage. Pattaratorn notes the evident similarity with the medical manuals inscribed on the walls at Wat Pho in the 1830s, but makes no close comparison.

The manual of divination is clearly in the form known as *Phrommachat*. It contains various grids, diagrams, pictures, stories and lists to be used for various kinds of divination including: good and bad days for various enterprises; days for wearing new clothes; compatibility of marriage partners and outcome of the match in

terms of longevity, number of children, and order of death; and miscellaneous other systems of prediction. It covers various systems of prediction, including the Three-tiered Umbrella and *naga* methods, though unfortunately the associated diagrams are not included.

The facsimile of the *samut thai* is a thing of beauty and a work of art and ingenuity in itself. Unfolded, it is over 9 metres long, achieved by some neat gluing. All this comes at a cost. The price on Amazon UK is £34.10.

Publishing such works in facsimile form is very important, because it preserves the spelling, handwriting, and graphic style which have messages of their own. As noted, there are other versions of military and massage manuals that are more comprehensive and with better provenance. Possibly the *Phrommachat* section on general prediction is the most interesting part of this text because no similar manuscripts of equivalent age have been published, as far as I know. We know that the art of prediction was vital for kings (and probably others) as far back as records stretch, and remains a flourishing business today. Yet, there is very little study of the genre. Perhaps publications such as this will prompt further study.

The extract from a military manual is solely about predictions based on phenomena in the sky. The full manuals also have sections on recruitment, weaponry, battlefield formations and tactics. Even so, systems of prediction occupy a very large space in these manuals. What does that tell us? Also, the predictions are highly intricate. Even this extract lists around a hundred different appearances of the sun, around fifty of the moon, and over a hundred of cloud shapes, stars, shooting stars, rainbows, lightning bolts and thunderclaps. How did the adept look at the sun? How could he decide whether a cloud resembled a woman giving birth to a crocodile (meaning the enemy will win) rather than four goats in single file, or the Buddha in tears? Although the listings sometimes seem to have an arbitrary character, there are clearly some guiding principles. The sun and rainbows mostly predict what will befall the king. The moon predicts such matters as rain, rice output, and general happiness or unhappiness. And so on. There is a language and principle behind such prediction which is obscured by the style of presentation, which often recalls Jorge Luis Borges' famous list of animals.

The manual of general prediction is similar to modern *Phrommachat* volumes in presenting a bundle of different methods of prediction – based on birth time, coincidences of the calendar, numerology, planets, and other methods. Interestingly, this text is set out not as a catalogue (the usual form of old texts) or a do-it-yourself guide (the usual form of modern manuals), but as a teaching guide. By the 1830s, were there prediction schools, or a market for self-learning guides?

While the catalogue form resembles modern manuals, the subjects predicted are very different. Modern manuals do not start off with predictions about troop movements. Nor do they predict the good and bad days for starting a journey or wearing a new piece of clothing, since such events are now more everyday than

special. More significantly, modern manuals are largely taken up with predicting an individual's good or bad fortune based on birth date, selecting a good time for any action, and selecting a good name. They are very much geared to the individual and to a search for general good fortune. The early 19th century extract presented here is more geared to events of different kinds, and are rather more specific. For example, if you have some clothing made on the fifth day of the waxing moon, you will gain elephants, horses and cattle.

Over half of the extract on prediction is devoted to marriage. While modern manuals also cover this subject, the early 19th century text is striking for its complexity. Besides the usual systems for choosing partners based on age and animal year of birth, there are more complex systems for divining what will become of the match. For example, if the difference between the partner's ages is 1, 5, or 7 they will love one another passionately, but if 7, 8, or 10 they will kill each other. Multiplying and dividing the ages can predict the number of children, and combinations of birth years predict how much wealth and how many dependents the couple will accumulate, and even which of them will predecease the other. What does this tell us about marriage in early 19th century Siam?

The style chosen for rendering the French in parts seems a little odd. The sentence form is transposed and the vocabulary a little high-flown, such as "Quand ainsi le soleil apparaître, abondantes les pluies seront." Yet the Thai is strikingly plain and simple, with almost no Pali words, and in English would translate as "When the sun looks like this, it will rain heavily." The style is utilitarian rather than poetic.

This is a fascinating publication and we owe a great debt to all those involved. With luck, it will inspire more study of the topics covered, especially of systems of prediction and their importance in old Siam.

Chris Baker

Chronicle of Sipsòng Panna: History and Society of a Tai Lü Kingdom Twelfth to Twentieth Century by Liew-Herres Foon Ming, Volker Grabowsky and Renoo Wichasin (Chiang Mai, Mekong Press, 2012). ISBN 978-616-9053-3-9

The affairs of the Sipsòng Panna Kingdom in Southern Yunnan are entangled with those of other Tai polities in the Upper Mekong basin, particularly Lan Na, Lan Sang, Chiang Tung and Moeng Laem. By rendering into English for the first time four versions of Sipsòng Panna chronicles written in Tai Lü with the Dhamma script, this book has made a significant body of source materials accessible to historians.

It has not been an easy task, because these chronicles bear the imprint of Sipsòng Panna's location within the orbit of the Chinese state and demand from the translators proficiency in Chinese language, script and history in addition to the normal skills required for Tai studies. The situation is further complicated by the