Manomayiddhi: Power of Mind Meditation

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Abstract—This article discusses Manomayiddhi meditation as taught and popularized by Phra Ratchaphromyan (Wira Thāvaro) (1916–1992), or Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, the abbot of Wat Tha Sung, Uthai Thani province, Thailand. The method employs mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), various usages of the *mantras* "*na ma ba dha*" and "*namo buddhāya*," other traditional techniques and rituals for the practitioner to gain *manomayiddhi* and project a mind-made body of him/herself to heaven, hell, and other cosmological realms. Mind-made body or what Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam terms "*adissamāna-kāya*" (invisible body) is defined as the meditator's "inner" and "overlapping" body that changes according to his/her mental state and corresponds to the realms (*bhūmi*) of Buddhist cosmology. The article establishes a connection between Manomayiddhi meditation and the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* tradition, especially, the meditation manual of Supreme Patriarch Don (1761–1842) of Wat Mahathat, Bangkok. It also incorporates the author's interview with Phra Khru Phawana Thamnithet (Achin Dhammacitto) (1950–), the head of meditation at Wat Tha Sung and a direct pupil of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam.

Introduction

Manomayiddhi is a Pāli commentarial term variously translated as "power of the mind," "mind-made magical power," "power of mental creation", etc. It refers to the knowledge (*ñāṇa*) that leads to the attainment of a "mind-made body" (*manomaya-kāya*), a subtle body, drawn out of the mind of the meditator, which can perform supernormal powers and travel to the various realms of the cosmos. "Mind-made body" is mentioned in several discourses (*sutta*) of the Pāli canon (Tipiṭaka), the best known being the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, the second discourse of the Dīgha Nikāya (D i 77).[1] It is listed second in a set of eight supernormal knowledges and powers (*vijjā*), namely 1. insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*), 2. mind-made body, 3. supernormal powers (*iddhi-vidhā*), 4. divine ear (*dibba-sota*), 5. mind reading (*ceto-pariya-ñāṇa*), 6. recollection of past lives (*pubbe-nivāsānussati*), 7. divine eye (*dibba-cakkhu*), and 8. knowledge of the destruction of influxes or cankers that keep one bound to the world (*āsavakkhaya*),[2]

[1] For a translation of the *sutta* and its commentary, see Bodhi (2008). When I refer to the Pāli canon and the *Visuddhimagga*, I cite the volumes and page numbers of the Pali Text Society editions.

[2] The six (3-8), minus insight knowledge and mind-made body, are often grouped together as *chaḷabhiññā* and the last three (6-8) are grouped together as *tevijjā*, and are found in a number of discourses, for example,

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and is attributed to meditation practitioners who have mastered the four *jhānas*.[3] As the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* states:

> When his mind is thus concentrated, pure and bright, unblemished, free from defects, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to creating a mind-made body. From this body he creates another body having material form, mind-made, complete in all its parts, not lacking in any faculties (Bodhi 2008: 44).[4]

Elsewhere in the Pāli canon, the mind-made body is described as invisible to the ordinary eyes, not made up of the four great elements, and requiring no physical nutrients but only meditative rapture to sustain it.[5] The Buddha, in the *Ayoguḷa Sutta* (S v 282), is lauded as being able to use his mind-made and his physical bodies to visit the Brahma world. Two of his eminent disciples, Mahā Moggallāna and Cūla-Panthaka, are also said to be accomplished in the creation of mind-made bodies. The former is said to be able to assume various forms and frequent the heavens to converse with *devas* and Brahmas, and the latter, highly evolved mentally, is said to be able to create 1,000 mind-made bodies of himself.[6]

This article discusses a meditation method from Wat Tha Sung,[7] Uthai Thani province, Thailand, popularized by its late abbot, Phra Ratchaphromyan (Wira Thāvaro) (1916–1992), who employed various traditional techniques and rituals for the practitioner to gain *manomayiddhi* and project an invisible body of him/herself to heaven, hell and other cosmological realms. Phra Ratchaphromyan or Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam (Black Monkey Sage), as he was popularly called, was an influential figure among Thai Buddhists.[8] He was known not only for Manomayiddhi meditation, but also for having given Dhamma and meditation instructions to King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX, reigned 1946–2016) and other members of the royal family,[9] and for making

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Dasuttara Sutta (D iii 272), *Tevijja Sutta* (D i 235), *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* (M i 237), etc.

[3] *Jhānas*, translated as mental absorptions, are states of deep concentration in which the five hindrances are suppressed and awareness is fully absorbed in the object of meditation. The first *jhāna* consists of five factors: applied thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), joy (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*). The second *jhāna* consists of three factors: joy, happiness and one-pointedness of mind. The third *jhāna* consists of happiness and one-pointedness of mind. The fourth *jhāna* consists of one-pointedness of mind and equanimity (*upekkhā*). The five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) are sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), sluggishness (*thīna-middha*), agitation (*uddacca-kukkucca*) and doubt (*vicikicchā*).

[4] See also the *Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta* (M ii 1).

[5] For example, the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (D i 1), the *Poṭṭapāda Sutta* (D i 178) and Paṭis ii 209; the four great elements (*catu-dhātu*) are the foundation of *rūpa*, the physical reality, and consist of earth (solidity), water (liquidity), wind (air), and fire (heat).

[6] M i 251; A i 24; A iv 74; Th 557 and 1146. For further discussions regarding the term *manomaya-kāya*, see Peter Harvey (1993), Michael Radich (2007), Sumi Lee (2014) and Bryan De Notaris (2019).

[7] Also known as Wat Chantaram. For the romanization of Thai, I use the Royal Institute of Thailand's guidelines.

[8] Henceforth, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam.

[9] Another well-known student of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam who was a member of the Thai royal family was Princess Vibhavadi Rangsit (1920–1977).

several prophesies about the future of Thailand.[10] After becoming the abbot of Wat Tha Sung in 1968, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam developed the temple into the center of Manomayiddhi meditation, drawing practitioners from all over the country. Today it is practiced and taught at some six temples and centers affiliated with Wat Tha Sung in Thailand and Germany, including Ban Sailom (Bangkok), Wat Khao Wong (Saraburi), Wat Phutthachaiyo (Prachuap Khiri Khan), Wat Thai Buddhistisches (Nuremberg), and Wat Prarachaprommajan (Teublitz).[11]

Background and summary of Manomayiddhi meditation

The background and summary of Manomayiddhi meditation are taken from the direct teachings of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam in the following five books: *Kan fuek Manomayitthi (The training of Manomayiddhi)* (Tham Wimok 1984); *Kan fuek manomayitthi baep tem kamlang* (*The training of Manomayiddhi, full strength)* (Tham Wimok 2007); *Khumue patibat phra kammathan* (*Handbook for practicing kammaṭṭhāna)* (Wira Thāvaro n.d.), *Traiphum* (*Three Worlds*) (Wira Thāvaro 1975); and *Manomayitthi lae prawat khong chan* (*Manomayiddhi and my biography)* (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2011). The first two contain Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's explanations and advice on how to practice Manomayiddhi and dialogues between him and his pupils during meditation sessions. The third and fourth books provide explanations of the various types of mind-made bodies and mental states to be seen and experienced during meditation. The last book records Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's accounts of his discovery of the Manomayiddhi method as taught by Achan Suk, a lay meditation teacher in Ratchaburi province, and the reason why he chose to practice and teach it.

The Pāli commentarial term, *manomayiddhi*, which is also the name of the meditation method, is translated by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam as the "power (*iddhi*) of the mind" (*rit thang chai*) (ฤทธิ์ทางใจ) and is described as the foundational knowledge that prepares practitioners for the development of the remaining *vijjās* (Wira Thāvaro n.d.: 8). The aim of this method is to achieve a divine eye—an ability to perceive beyond what the physical human eyes can see—and the attainment of mind-made body. Instead of the term *manomaya-kāya*, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam opted to use another Pāli commentarial term, "*adissamāna-kāya*" (invisible body), to refer to this attainment and defines it as the meditator's "inner" and "overlapping body"[12] that cannot be seen with the ordinary eye (Wira Thāvaro 1975: 11 and 134).[13] Once these goals are achieved, the meditator will travel to see the various realms of the Buddhist cosmology, converse with their inhabitants, understand the law of *kamma*, the endless rising and falling of beings

[10] For biographical details of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, see Phra Ratchaphromyan (2011).

[11] Interview of Phra Khru Phawana Thamnithet (Achin Dhammacitto), the head of meditation at Wat Tha Sung, by the author on 11 November 2022.

[12] "*Kai nai kai"* (กายในกาย) and "*kai son kai*" (กายซ้อนกาย)

[13] The word *adissamāna-kāya* is found throughout the Pāli commentaries and sub-commentaries, but is not found in the oldest commentaries that are the work of Buddhaghosa. I would like to thank Rupert Gethin for his clarification regarding the terms *manomayiddhi* and *adissamāna-kāya.*

in the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*), and in doing aspire to gain the remaining *vijjās* and attain *nibbāna* in the present life.

In explaining the significance of these attainments, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam often refers to the *Udumbarika-sīhanāda Sutta* (D iii 36), in which various parts of a tree are identified with different levels of Buddhist practices and attainments.[14] For example, the outer bark is identified with the Fourfold Restraint[15] and meditation on four *brahma-vihāras*,[16] and the inner bark with the recollection of past lives. The final level associates the tree's heartwood with the seeing of beings passing away and being reborn in different realms according to their *kamma*. For practitioners who are unwilling to accept these realms on faith or are skeptical about the existence of *saṃsāra*, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam explains that Manomayiddhi meditation allows them to view and experience these realms firsthand and prevents them from falling prey to the false view of annihilationism (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*) (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2011: 2-3).

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam explains that Manomayiddhi meditation was adapted from the method of a lay meditation teacher named Achan Suk who was based in Ban Phaeo sub-district, Damnoen Saduak district, Ratchaburi province, twenty-three years after his ordination (1959 CE) (Phra Ratchaphromyan 2011: 4). No further detail is given regarding Achan Suk and the origin of this meditation, only that it has been handed down from many generations of teachers. According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, the prerequisite for *manomayiddhi* is the mastery over one type of *kasiṇa*[17] and the attainment of the fourth *jhāna*, which require many months or even years of intensive practice.[18] However, after witnessing Achan Suk, who was a layman, teaching another layperson to project an *adissamāna-kāya* and visit Yama, the god of death, in hell, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam realized that Achan Suk's method provides a short cut to achieving a mind-made body. With the aid of rituals, *mantras*, and other monastic devices, the practitioner can attain the fourth *jhāna* and *manomayiddhi* in a relatively short period of time. Instead of taking years, many students were successful even in their first sessions, while the slower ones took several days to achieve success. Another unique aspect of Achan Suk's method is that it allows practitioners to travel to other realms without losing consciousness of their physical bodies. This is crucial as students may be able

[14] See, for example, Tham Wimok (1984: 10) and Phra Ratchaphromyan (2011: 61-64).

[15] The Four Restraints are 1) not harming living beings; 2) not taking what is not given; 3) not telling lies; and 4) not craving for sense-pleasure.

[16] Translated as the four "divine abodes" or "immeasurables," they consist of 1) loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

[17] *Kasiṇa* or external device is an object of meditation aimed at developing concentration (*samādhi*). A list of ten *kasiṇas* (earth, water, fire, wind, blue, yellow, red, white, space and consciousness) is mentioned in the Pāli canon: for example, the *Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta* (M ii 1). In chapters four and five of the *Visuddhimagga* (Vism 118–177), the *kasiṇas* are included among the forty objects used for the development of *samatha* (calm) meditation.

[18] The mastery over *kasiṇas* and *jhānas* as a prerequisite for the attainment of *manomayiddhi* and other *vijjās* are also mentioned in the twelfth chapter of the *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification). However, the *Visuddhimagga* goes further to instruct that the practitioner should accomplish not just four, but all the eight *jhānas* (including the four formless *jhānas*), and not just one *kasiṇa*, but all the eight types of *kasiṇas* (earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red and white) as a prerequisite. See Vism (406); also Ñāṇamoli (2010: 399) and Gunaratana (1980: 143-145).

to discuss their experiences with the meditation teacher while still meditating. In the end, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam opted to teach Achan Suk's method as he found it most suitable for laypeople.[19]

The following is a summary of Manomayiddhi meditation based mainly on the instructions provided in *The training of Manomayiddhi, full strength*.[20] A typical session begins with a pre-meditation liturgy, during which the pupil receives the five or eight precepts, and the teacher plays a recording of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam inviting (*ārādhanā*) the following objects and attainments to dwell in the practitioner's body, speech and mind: the perfections (*pāramī*) of all the Buddhas, the *pacceka-buddhas*, the Dhamma, the noble disciples, and Luang Pho Pan Sonando (Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's preceptor and main teacher); the forty meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*); the five joys/raptures (*pīti*) that arise in meditation; and the nine insight knowledges (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*). The pupil pays respect to the teacher with three flowers of different colors, one candle, three incense sticks and one coin worth twenty-five *satangs* (a quarter of a baht). The pupil then sits crossed-legged while the teacher sprinkles the pupil with sacred water, which has been blessed by the monk(s) chanting the *iti pi so* formula.[21] This is to be done immediately before and after each meditation session to prevent the agitation of the mind and interference by unwanted spirits.

The pupil begins the meditation by performing *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing), reciting "*na ma*" when breathing in and "*ba dha*" while breathing out. According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, "*na ma ba dha*" is selected over other *mantras* because it enables practitioners to achieve *manomayiddhi* while still being aware of their physical bodies (Tham Wimok 1984: 16). The practitioner is told to abandon all fears and worries, ignore external disturbances and vow to give up his/her life to achieve meditation progress. While performing the exercises, several monastic devices are employed for the meditator to achieve mental clarity and the vision of brightness and to protect the pupil against external spiritual interference:

1. The teacher uses a sacred mace to bless the pupil's head.
2. The teacher shines a flashlight at the pupil's head and invokes the perfections of the Buddhas reciting "*namo buddhāya*, may brightness appear to this pupil."
3. The syllables "*na, mo, bud, dhā, ya*" in Khom script[22] are written on a rectangu-

[19] For further details on Achan Suk's teachings, see Phra Ratchaphromyan (2011: 1–9).

[20] Tham Wimok (2007: 93-97).

[21] The *iti pi so* is a Pāli formula found throughout the Pāli canon that describes the various qualities of the Buddha. *Iti pi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammāsaṃbuddho vijjācaraṇasaṃpanno sugato lokavidū anuttarapurisadammasārathī satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā ti.* "The Blessed One is an *arahant*, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One," translation by Bodhi (2000: 319).

[22] Khom script, which is derived from the round-shaped Khmer Mul script, has been used for writing Pāli from at least the 13th century. Apart from Buddhist texts, it is also in medical, astrological, numerological, and magical texts. In protective texts, it is commonly found written on *yantras*, amulets, images and tattooed on the various parts of the body. For further details regarding the script, see Jana Inguma (2013) and Javier Schnake (2022).

lar piece of paper and placed over the eyes of the pupil. The five syllables, which in Pāli means "homage to the Buddha", represent the names of the five Buddhas of this eon: Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, Gautama and Maitreya.[23]

4. An incense stick is lit and waved around the pupil's head while the teacher further invokes the Buddhas' perfections. This procedure continues until the pupil sees brightness.

The *nimitta*[24] (image manifestation) of brightness, which is sometimes accompanied by a *nimitta* of a Buddha image, the temporary shaking of the body and collapsing onto the ground, marks the first stage of the attainment of the fourth *jhāna* and *manomayiddhi*. It also indicates the actual presence of the Buddha who, according to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, helps protect and guide the meditator during the meditation session.[25] The pupil is told to project his/her *adissamāna-kāya* to that brightness while recollecting the perfections of the Buddha. Once this is accomplished and the pupil gains a clear vision of his/her *adissamāna-kāya*, the teacher asks the pupil where he/she would like to visit. The pupil chooses the realm and place, and the teacher gives the pupil permission to visit whichever place he/she prefers. The pupil is guided by the teacher around these realms and tells the teacher what he/she sees. The teacher then either verifies or rejects the pupil's experience. One of the most common places for beginners to visit is the Cuḷāmaṇī Cetiya, a *stūpa* in Tāvatiṃsa Heaven, where the hair and the collarbone relics of the Buddha are said to be kept. At the end of the meditation session, sacred water is sprinkled again to protect the pupil from spiritual interference.

In my interview with Phra Khru Phawana Thamnithet (Luang Pho Achin Dhammacitto) (1950–), the head of meditation at Wat Tha Sung and a direct pupil of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, he informed me that there are two Manomayiddhi methods currently taught.[26] The above method is known as "Manomayiddhi, full strength." It is practiced annually at Wat Tha Sung under his supervision. At other temples and centers affiliated with Wat Tha Sung, they are advised to practice a simplified version of the method, also taught by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, that dispenses with the monastic devices and requires only pre-*jhānic* access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) as a prerequisite for the attainment of *adissamāna-kāya*.[27] Practice sessions without these devices are called "Manomayiddhi, half strength." However, in half-strength sessions, the clarity of the visionary experience is much reduced. Half-strength sessions are particularly popular among lay practitioners.

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[23] Achan Suk's original practice was to set the paper on fire and swing it around the pupil's face. However, due to fire hazards, the practice of lighting paper has been replaced by using a flashlight.

[24] *Nimitta* (Thai: *nimit*) is a Pāli term variously translated as a sign of concentration, an image manifestation, an eidetic image or a mental image and refers to different kinds of visions that arise in meditation. The term is often associated with the practice of *kasiṇa* visualizations. For Pāli textual references, see, for example, *Bhikkhunupassaya Sutta* (S v 154), *Upakkilesa Sutta* (M ii 152), *Saṅgaṇikārāma Sutta* (A iii 422–423) and *Visudhimagga* (chapters four and eight).

[25] For a discussion regarding Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's understanding of *nibbāna*, see Potprecha (2019: 238–240)

[26] Interview of Luang Pho Achin Dhammacitto by the author on 11 November 2022.

[27] *Upacāra-samādhi* is a concentration level that approaches but does not reach the level of *jhāna*.

Figure 1. Practitioners paying respects to the teacher with three flowers of different colors, one candle, three incense sticks and one coin before a meditation session (Courtesy © Wat Tha Sung).

Figure 2. A meditator wearing a rectangular piece of paper with the syllables "*na, mo, bud, dhā, ya*" in Khom script printed on it (Courtesy © Wat Tha Sung).

The *adissamāna-kāyas* that the practitioners see vary in appearance according to their mental state. For example, if the practitioner, having entered *upacāra-samādhi*, reaches the state of a *deva*, his/her *adissamāna-kāya* will appear in the form of a *deva*. If the practitioner attains one of the *jhānas*, his/her *adissamāna-kāya* will appear in the form of a Brahma. If the practitioner achieves *āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa* and attains *nibbāna*, his/her *adissamāna-kāya* will appear translucent and clear, like it is made of glass (Wira Thāvaro n.d.: 18). Non-practitioners and other living beings also possess *adissamāna-*

Figure 3. A monk blessing the head of a meditator with a sacred mace (Courtesy © Wat Tha Sung).

kāyas, which change constantly according to their mental state and correspond to the different realms (*bhūmi*) of Buddhist cosmology. In the *Handbook for practicing kammaṭṭhāna* (Wira Thāvaro n.d.: 15–16), Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam identifies five kinds of *adissamāna-kāya* that practitioners can attain and see within themselves and others:

1. *Kai Abaiyaphum* [deprivation state body] has the form and characteristics of a beggar, appearing as dull, saddened, wearied, gaunt, and not radiant. They [those with a deprivation state body prior to death] will be reborn in the suffering realm [*apāya-bhūmi*].
2. *Kai Manut* [human body] has the form and characteristics that are quite radiant, appearing completely human. They differ in shape, skin color, complexion and beauty but all with clear characteristics of human beings. They will be reborn again as human beings.
3. *Kai Thip* [*deva* body] is the body of a *deva* in the sensual realm with a radiant and refined form. For tree-dwelling and heavenly *devas* or above, one also sees their crowns and very beautiful ornaments. They will be reborn as *devas* of the sensual realms.
4. *Kai Phrom* [Brahma body] has characteristics similar to a *deva*, but with more refined glass-like skin, and gold ornaments, glistening in yellow all over the body including the crown. The venerable ones will be reborn as Brahmas.
5. *Kai Kaeo* [glass body] or *Kaitham*, also called *dhammakāya*. This kind of body belongs to the *arahants*. One sees the entire body glistening, clearer and purer than *Kai Phrom*, and completely radiant. When the venerable ones die, they go to *nibbāna.* (Wira Thāvaro n.d.: 16; Potprecha 2019: 239)

According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, *adissamāna-kāya*, together with the mind, controls the physical body and is responsible for all *kammic* actions a person performs during his/her lifetime. Once a person dies, his/her *adissamāna-kāya* leaves the physical body and is reborn in a new realm and into a new body in accordance with his/her *kamma* (Wira Thāvaro 1975: 135).

Apart from seeing *adissamāna-kāyas* within themselves and others, practitioners also gain the vision of their own minds (*citta*) as spheres of various colors either at the navel or in the middle of the chest. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam explains that "the water that sustains the *citta*" (*namliang khong chit*) (น้ำเลี้ยงของจิต) constantly changes its color according to its nature, whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. For example, red indicates a fulfilled and happy mind; black reflects an angry and/or disappointed mind; the color of water after washing raw meat is a mind full of delusion and attachment; the color of water after boiling beans is a mind full of worry and agitation; a bright and radiant color is a mind that is non-attached and endowed with wisdom (Wira Thāvaro n.d.: 15). The purer the mind, the brighter and more radiant it becomes. An *arahant's* mind appears like "having a glistening star inside his/her chest" (Wira Thāvaro n.d.: 17). In order to maintain clear and radiant minds and the already-developed *vijjās*, practitioners are advised to consistently abandon their attachment to the five aggregates (*khandha*)[28] and visualize a clear and radiant *nimitta* of a Buddha image in the middle of their chests throughout the day (Sunisa and Parichat 2015: 410).

Origins and historical context

Although there is no record of this meditation method prior to Achan Suk, it is said to have been handed down from many generations of teachers and as this section shows, some of its practices can be found in traditional Theravāda meditation, also known as *borān kammaṭṭhāna*. *Borān kammaṭṭhāna* or *kammathan baep boran* in Thai (old/traditional meditation) is a term used by Kate Crosby, Andrew Skilton, Phibul Choompolpaisal, Pyi Phyo Kyaw, Woramat Malasart, and the author to refer to the longest traceable tradition of Theravāda meditation.[29] Before the modern era, many of its lineages were found throughout Thailand,[30] Cambodia, Laos, and Sri Lanka, advocated by influential figures of their courts and the sanghas, but was ignored and dismissed and some of its practices were suppressed during the monastic reforms of the 19th and 20th centuries.[31] Western academic studies of Buddhism were first made aware of its

[28] The five aggregates (*khandha*) are the constituents of a sentient being and consist of form (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), volition (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

[29] According to the latest findings, *borān kammaṭṭhāna* can be traced back to the beginning of the 16th century, whereas most contemporary meditation practices in Theravāda countries can be traced back to no earlier than the 19th-century reforms and revivals. The latter are based on textual models whose selection of canonical texts invokes the assumption of ancient roots and uninterrupted lineages from the time of the Buddha (Skilton and Phibul 2015: 207; and Crosby 2020: 100–104).

[30] Prior to 1939, the country was known as Siam.

[31] The phrase *borān kammaṭṭhāna* is derived from the Thai/Khmer word *borān* "old/traditional" and the Pāli word *kammaṭṭhāna*, a term found throughout the Pāli commentaries and is used as a standard term for "meditation" in Theravāda countries. See Crosby (2013, 2019 and 2020), Skilton and Phibul (2014 and 2015),

existence in 1896 through the publication of *Yogāvacara's manual of Indian mysticism* by T.W. Rhys Davids, and its living lineages in Cambodia first documented by François Bizot and his colleagues from the 1970s to the 2000s.[32]

The most notable characteristic that Manomayiddhi meditation shares with *borān kammaṭṭhāna* is its understanding and usage of the Pāli language. In this tradition, Pāli is considered a sacred language, and its syllables regarded as potent and able to represent concepts and teachings, as well as invoke and convey protection, meditative states, and qualities.[33] This understanding of Pāli combined with number symbolism informs the practice of *mantra* recitations and the creation of *yantra* diagrams,[34] which, over the course of the last two centuries, have been relegated to the domain of "superstition" and "popular religion," while meditation is increasingly spoken of as mind-science, not only within Theravāda countries, but also globally.[35] *Mantras* and *yantras*, however, as well as their visualization, are integral to *borān kammaṭṭhāna's* "technology of transformation" and are employed to harness the creative power of Pāli for both *lokiya* (mundane) goals, such as healing and protection, and for the *lokuttara* (supramundane) goal, that is, to achieve *jhānas* and insights into conditioned and unconditioned Dhammas.[36] The two *mantras* in Manomayiddhi meditation, "*na ma ba dha*" and "*namo buddhāya,*" which are among the most popular in Thailand, seek to achieve similar goals, namely to offer protection for and to induce brightness and the attainment of *adissamāna-kāya* within the meditator.

According to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam, reciting "*na ma ba dha*" while performing mindfulness of breathing enables practitioners to achieve *manomayiddhi* and allows them to be aware of their physical bodies while projecting their invisible bodies to other realms. These Pāli syllables are known among *borān kammaṭṭhāna* practitioners as representing the four great elements (*dhātu*) that make up the body and the physical world (*na*: water; *ma*: earth; *ba*: wind; and *dha*: fire), and are often referred to in traditional meditation texts; for example, in the largest published anthology of premodern meditation manuals, *Nangsue Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan wa duai samatha wipatsana kammathan si yuk* (*Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan book of samatha and vipassanā meditation of the four periods*) (หนังสือพุทธรังษีธฤษดีญาณว่าด้วยสมถแลวิปัสสนากัมมัฏ

Phibul (2019 and 2021), Skilton, Crosby and Kyaw (2019), Woramat (2021), Potprecha (2019, 2021 and 2022) and Kyaw and Crosby (2022).

[32] For example, Bizot (1976, 1988 and 1992), Bizot and von Hinüber (1994), Bizot and Lagirarde (1996), and Bernon (2000); this tradition is referred to as "*yogāvacara*" and "tantric Theravāda" in these publications.

[33] This ability of Pāli to bring things into existence, such as conjuring up authority, protection, etc. is coined by Alistair Gornell (2022: 51–53) as its "indexical power."

[34] *Mantras* are words, sounds, and syllables usually in Pāli or Sanskrit that are believed to be sacred and to have special magical and spiritual power when recited. *Yantras* are protective diagrams consisting of geometrical, animal and deity designs accompanied by Pāli phrases. They can come in different forms, such as an etching on a flat piece of metal, ink drawn on a piece of cloth, or as tattoos on different parts of the body.

[35] Regarding the modernization and internationalization of Theravāda meditation, see, for example, Lance Cousins (1994-1996), Eric Braun (2013), Robert Sharf (1995 and 2017), David McMahan and Braun (2017).

[36] For a detailed study of *borān kammaṭṭhāna's* understanding of Pāli and other "technologies of transformation," see Crosby (2013: chapter three; and 2020: chapter four).

ฐาน ๔ ยุค).[37] This book contains a text of unknown date and author and titled "*Baep doen that tham chit hai pen samathi*" (*Method of contemplating the elements for the mind to gain samādhi*) (แบบเดินธาตุ ทำจิตต์ให้เป็นสมาธิ), in which eight syllables "*na ma ba dha*" and "*ca ba ka sa*" in Khom script, each representing one of the four elements, are repeatedly recited and visualized in forward and reverse orders (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 297–298). After the initial *nimittas* of all the eight syllables are seen, the meditator is to visualize the syllable "*a*" as representing the space element (*ākāsa-dhātu*) before removing all the *nimittas* to gain a vision of a luminous sphere, which the manual equates with the meditator's consciousness elements (*viññāṇa-dhātu*). The eight syllables are described as "conventional forms" of the four elements having "*a*" as their "principal" in the same way as the four elements have space and consciousness elements as their principals (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 298).

Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam acknowledges the traditional equation of "*na ma ba dha*" with the four elements. However, he instructs the practitioner not to recollect the four elements while reciting the *mantra* as the goal of the exercise is not to contemplate them but "to raise the mind to the level of a *deva*" (Phra Ratchaphromyan 1991: 8-9). The treatment of "*na ma ba dha*" not as representing the four elements, but as a *mantra* to divinize the mind and induce meditative visions of beings in other realms is described in another manual in the *Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan* anthology, namely one belonging to Supreme Patriarch Don (1761–1842) of Wat Mahathat, Bangkok. Supreme Patriarch Don was the second son of King Ekkathat of Ayutthaya (reigned 1758–1767) who became the fifth Saṅgharāja of the Bangkok period during the reign of King Rama II (reigned 1809–1824). His residence prior to Wat Mahathat was Wat Hong Rattanaram, which during the Thonburi period (1767–1782) was one of the main centers of sangha administration and a depository of manuscripts.[38] Phibul Choompolpaisal's (2019: 20) "*Nimitta* and visual methods in Siamese and Lao meditation traditions from the 17th century to the present day," which discusses all the manuals in the *Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan* anthology, dates this text to the early 19th century. It begins with two *mantras* titled "*Khatha Phra Chao poetlok*," (คาถาพระเจ้าเปิดโลก) literally "*The verse of the Lord opening the world*," to be recited after pre-meditation liturgy for the meditator to gain "vision of every single thing that one wishes to see" (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 310). It instructs the meditator to provide an offering of seven candles, seven incense sticks and seven flowers of different colors and then repeatedly recite two *mantras*, the second of which is as follows: "*Na ma ba dha Buddho lokadīpaṃ ākāsakasiṇaṃ visodhayi, na ma ba dha Dhammo lokadīpaṃ ākāsakasiṇaṃ visodhayi, na ma ba dha saṅgho lokadīpaṃ ākāsakasiṇaṃ visodhayi*" (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 310–311).[39] If no vision appears after reciting the verses, the meditator is to wash his/her body with sacred water for three to seven days before repeating exercises again. The meditative vision

[37] Henceforth, *Phuttharangsi thritsadiyan* anthology. The anthology was compiled and edited by Phra Mahājotipañño (Chai Yasothonrat) of Wat Boromniwat, Bangkok, a Thammayut temple, under the supervision of the abbot, Phra Upāli Khunupamachan (Chan Siricando).

[38] For his biographical detail, see Pinit Chanthon (2022) and Phibul (2021: 238–246).

[39] This can be translated as "Buddha/Dhamma/sangha, light of the world, purified the space *kasiṇa* [of the meditator]."

mentioned here clearly refers to the attainment of the divine eye as later in the manual, in the section on developing *jhānas* and *brahma-vihāras*, the meditator is to gain visions of the Four Great Heavenly Kings (*catu-mahārāja*) who rule over the four cardinal directions of the Cātummahārājika Heaven, namely Vessavaṇa, Virūḷhaka, Dhataraṭṭha and Virūpakkha; then, he/she is to see the god Indra, the Cuḷāmaṇī Cetiya, and "hell creatures being tortured by hell guardians," and is instructed to extend his/her *brahma-vihāras* to them and to the inhabitants of the cosmos of all directions (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 322–323).

The offering of seven candles, seven incense sticks and seven flowers of different colors, the washing of the meditator's body with sacred water and the reference to the Cuḷāmaṇī Cetiya echo Manomayiddhi's practice of offering of three flowers of different colors, one candle, three incense sticks, and one coin, the sprinkling of sacred water before and after each session, and the Cuḷāmaṇī Cetiya as one of the recommended places for beginners to visit. However, in Supreme Patriarch Don's manual, there is no mention of *manomayiddhi* or mind-made body. The reciting of the *mantra* does not involve mindfulness of breathing, and monastic devices, such as the rectangular piece of paper with the Khom script, the flashlight and the sacred mace are not employed to aid the meditator's attainment.

The five syllables of *namo buddhāya*, which exoterically mean "homage to the Buddha," can esoterically represent many groups of five objects, including the names of the five Buddhas of this eon: Kakusandha (*na*), Koṇāgamana (*mo*), Kassapa (*bu*), Gautama (*ddhā*) and Maitreya (*ya*); the five aggregates (*khandha*); the four elements plus consciousness; the five bodily bases; the five colors of light; the five animals; the five types of joys arising in meditation (*pīti*), etc. This association of the syllables with the five Buddhas has been well documented by scholars of Buddhism and can be traced back to the 17th century and found in traditional texts from Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.[40] In Manomayiddhi meditation, the *mantra* in Khom script is written on a rectangular piece of paper, placed over the eyes of the pupil and recited by the teacher while he/she shines a flashlight at the pupil's head. Although not explicitly stated as such, the rectangular piece of paper functions like a *yantra* in offering protection and invoking and conveying the perfections of the five Buddhas to aid the practitioner's clarity of mind. The sacredness of the paper is emphasized by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam who often warns his pupils against calling it a mask and placing it on the floor.[41]

Another common characteristic of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, which Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam incorporated into Manomayiddhi meditation, is that the meditation objects, processes and states described in the Pāli canon and Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*) are usually experienced as *nimittas* appearing as spheres of light on and inside the meditator's body.[42] These luminous sphere *nimittas*, which, in some

[40] With regards to Thailand, see Mettanando (1998: 84–85), Justin McDaniel (2011: 104), and Potprecha (2019: 98–99 and 115–116); with regards to Cambodia, see Bizot (1976 and 1992), Bizot and von Hinüber (1994) Bizot and Lagirarde (1992), and Nicolas Revire (2022: 245–247); and with regards to Laos, see So Thamphakdi (n.d.).

[41] See, for example, Sunisa and Parichat (2015: 419).

[42] See Crosby (2013: 93; 2019: 141).

lineages, contain Pāli syllables in Khom script and/or arise simultaneously with visions of Buddha images, are regarded as the visual manifestations of the meditator's own mind (*citta*) that has attained the meditation objects, processes or states invoked. In Manomayiddhi meditation, the *nimitta* of brightness, accompanied by a vision of the Buddha, marks the first stage of the attainment of the fourth *jhāna* and *manomayiddhi*. Moreover, practitioners also see their minds as spheres of various colors either at the navel or in the middle of the chest. The purer the mind, the brighter and more radiant it appears. To maintain their *vijjās*, they are told to constantly visualize a clear and radiant *nimitta* of a Buddha image in the middle of their chests. These two aspects are not acknowledged by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam as deriving from Achan Suk or any other meditation teacher. It is assumed that it was a common teaching among his teachers who taught *borān kammaṭṭhāna*.

In the manual, "*Method of contemplating the elements for the mind to gain samādhi*" in the *Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan* anthology, the bright sphere *nimitta*, equated with the meditator's consciousness element (*viññāṇa-dhātu*), is described as "the sphere of the light of Dhamma" (*duang prathip tham*) (ดวงประทีปธรรม) that is achieved through the elements being correctly manipulated (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 298). If this light "shoots out" from the left eye, it is regarded as "the world element" (*loka-dhātu*); if it shoots out from the right eye, it is the "Dhamma element" (*dhamma-dhātu*). If it shoots out from the top of the head, it is "the light of the success of wisdom" (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 298). Supreme Patriarch Don's meditation manual also contains the vision of light spheres, and as the meditator progresses through each level of *samādhi*, similar to Manomayiddhi meditation, the spheres become brighter and more radiant. The initial concentration, according to Supreme Patriarch Don, is accompanied by the *uggaha-nimitta* (acquired sign)[43] of "the sun at dawn." Access concentration is accompanied by the *paṭibhāga-nimitta* (counterpart sign)[44] of "a polished conch shell." The first *jhāna* is seen as "a flower of the Perfume Flower Tree," the second *jhāna* as "a polished pearl," the third *jhāna* as "a polished iron," the fourth *jhāna* as "a full moon," and the fifth *jhāna* as "a radiant star" (Chai Yasothonrat 1935: 311).

The final aspect of Manomayiddhi meditation discussed in this article is the correspondence between the different kinds of *adissamāna-kāya* and the realms of Buddhist cosmology. This aspect is explicitly stated by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam as derived from two main meditation teachers, namely Luang Pho Niam Dhammajoti (1828–1909), Wat Noi, Suphanburi, and Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni or Luang Pho Sot Candasaro (1884–1959), Wat Paknam, Thonburi. Luang Pho Niam was a well-respected monk from Suphanburi province and a teacher of many established meditation masters such as Luang Pho Nong Indasuvaṇṇo (1865–1933), Wat Amphawan, Suphanburi; Luang Pho Pan Sonando (1875–1938), Wat Bang Khonom, Ayutthaya; and Luang Pho Sot Candasaro. The author's PhD thesis (Potprecha 2019: 63–85) identifies Luang

[43] *Uggaha-nimitta* (acquired sign) is an initial image that is acquired when the practitioner achieves a certain degree of concentration (*samādhi*), but is yet to reach the level of access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*).

[44] *Paṭibhāga-nimitta* is a clearer and more static mental image developed when the practitioner's concentration reaches access concentration or the threshold of mental absorption (*jhāṇa*).

Pho Niam's teaching as influential to the development of several meditation systems, including Manomayiddhi. The most significant aspect in Luang Pho Niam's teaching is his extension of the contemplation of the body (*kāyagatāsati*) to encompass not only the physical human body, but also the meditator's "inner body," that is, the spiritual body that exists within the meditator's mind. According to Luang Pho Niam, for the practitioner to understand *kāyagatāsati* in greater depth, he/she must be able to obtain the meditative visions of his/her own inner body and the bodies of *devas* and Brahmas, the inner bodies of stream enterers (*sotāpanna*), once returners (*sakadāgāmī*), non-returners (*anāgāmī*), and the bodies of *arahants* who have passed into *nibbāna* and compare his/her inner body with theirs (Potprecha 2019: 76–77). This aspect became a major influence on Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's understanding of the connection between a meditator's *adissamāna-kāya*, his/her mental state and the realm of Buddhist cosmology. Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's equation of *Kaitham* or *Dhammakāya* as the inner body of an *arahant* that appears glistening, radiant and glass-like is derived from another student of Luang Pho Niam, namely Luang Pho Sot Candasaro who also adopted Luang Pho Niam's and other teacher's teachings to establish Sammā Arahaṃ (Dhammakāya) meditation tradition.[45]

Conclusion

Manomayiddhi meditation as taught by Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam derived most of its practices from the teaching of Achan Suk, Damnoen Saduak district, Ratchaburi province, but also consists of practices that are attributed to Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's other teachers, including Luang Pho Niam, Wat Noi, and Luang Pho Sot Candasaro, Wat Paknam. Although there is no record of this method prior to Achan Suk, several aspects of it are the characteristics of the *borān kammatthāna* tradition. The manual of Supreme Patriarch Don of Wat Mahathat, for example, contains a similar practice of reciting the *mantra* "*na ma ba dha*" to divinize the mind and to induce meditative visions. When Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam discovered this method in 1959, it may have existed as a small and relatively unknown meditation lineage that was developed independently from the mainstream lineages of *borān kammatthāna* and perhaps associated with lay teachers.

The popularity of Manomayiddhi meditation since its establishment at Wat Tha Sung, in spite of its *borān kammaṭṭhāna* roots and affirmation of traditional Buddhist worldview, can be attributed to two main factors: Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam's reputation and the adaptability of the method for large groups of lay practitioners. As mentioned above, Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam is a nationally-known meditation master who taught King Rama IX and other members of the Thai royal family. This method was selected specifically by him as a traditional method that would appeal to laypeople due to its exoteric nature, the shortened length of time for practitioners to attain *manomayiddhi*, and the practitioners being able communicate with their teachers during meditation sessions. Luang Pho Achin Dhammacitto, the head of meditation at Wat Tha Sung,

[45] See Phra Ratchaphromyan (2011: 28–9); and Potprecha (2019: 238–240).

informed me that "Manomayiddhi, half strength," with the requirement of only access concentration to achieve *adissamāna-kāya*, and not the fourth *jhāna*, are popular among lay practitioners of both sexes. All current teachers at Ban Sailom, Bangkok, for example, are female lay practitioners, some of whom are direct pupils of Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam.[46] The establishment of this method at Wat Tha Sung coincides with the period that mass lay meditation movements advocating techniques of Burmese *vipassanā*, also known as "dry insight," were gaining popularity throughout Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and the rest of the world.

The two main lineages of Burmese *vipassanā*, which became bases for the internationalization of dry insight, are associated with the monks Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) and Mingun Sayadaw (1870–1955). Their uniqueness lies in their approach of employing the minimal amount of or even dispensing with *samatha* (calm) meditation while championing the basic momentary concentration (*khaṇika-samādhi*), without the requirement of *jhānas* or even access concentration, as the foundation for insight. According to Braun (2013: 139), Ledi Sayadaw was one of the first teachers in the modern era to offer this approach of dry insight as a viable, even a preferred technique. In skipping deeper levels of *samādhi* and its association with supernormal powers and cosmology, Ledi simplified the traditional practice and opened it up to a much wider audience. The dry insight method as developed by Mingun Sayadaw's student Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–1982) is known in Thailand as the "Yup No Phong No" (Rise and Fall) method, a name taken from its basic technique of observing the rising and falling of one's abdomen. It was first introduced in Thailand in 1952 at Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, and since then has become one of the most popular and widely practiced meditation methods in Thailand.

It is not a coincidence that Luang Pho Ruesi Lingdam chose to popularize a simplified traditional method that he viewed as suitable for large groups of lay practitioners while the Rise and Fall and other *vipassanā* techniques were being promoted throughout Thailand. Manomayiddhi meditation can be understood as a reaction and adaptation to these modernizing circumstances.

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[46] Interview of Luang Pho Achin Dhammacitto by the author on 11 November 2022.

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