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UNDER ROYAL PATRONAGE

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COVER: The Buddhist disciple or Fat Monk Gavampati, also known as (Mahā-)Kaccāyana or Phra Sangkachai; 17th–18th century, Thailand; bronze with traces of gilt, eyes inlaid with shell and garnet; H. 36.8 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.27 © MET

*For a discussion of Gavampati, see the Special Edition

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With many thanks for your continuing support and interest.

Editorial

In Memoriam dedicated to Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother and former Vice-Patron of The Siam Society, opens this issue of the *Journal of the Siam Society* (JSS). The short tribute by ML Pattaratorn Chirapravati & Arthid Sheravanichkul reflects on Her Majesty's enduring commitment to the preservation and promotion of Thailand's artistic and cultural heritage.

The central feature of this volume is a *Special Edition* on the legend and cult of Gavampati, bringing together four studies that explore the textual traditions, historical development, and artistic representations associated with this intriguing disciple of the Buddha, popularly known as the Fat Monk. Contributions by John S. Strong, Donald M. Stadtner, Gregory Kourilsky, and Javier Schnake examine Gavampati from complementary perspectives—ranging from textual and narrative traditions and art and archeological evidence to intertextual analysis of Pali, Thai, and Lao Buddhist literature—offering new insights into the regional circulation and significance of this Buddhist figure in mainland Southeast Asia.

Beyond this thematic dossier, the issue presents a wide range of contributions reflecting the diversity of current research in Thai and Southeast Asian studies. In *Manuscript Study*, Trent Walker proposes a unified transliteration system designed to facilitate the study and comparison of manuscript traditions across mainland Southeast Asia.

Research Highlights includes a study by Natchapol Sirisawad on Siamese wooden panels depicting the Buddha's miracles at Sāvatthī; followed by Witinan Watanasap & ML Chittawadi Chitrabongs on polygyny and royal palace spaces in late 19th-century Siam. Karandeep Singh explores the interplay of memory, power, and gender in Siamese cremation volumes, highlighting their role as vehicles of commemoration and social identity. The section concludes with a historiographical journey by Sébastien Tayac on Silpa Bhirasri (born Corrado Feroci), revisiting the legacy of the Italian-born sculptor and educator who played a pivotal role in the development of Thailand's modern artistic institutions.

Research Notes presents shorter contributions that draw attention to newly identified sources, linguistic questions, and regional case studies. These include Pittayawat Pittayaporn's discussion of the Vietnamese origin of the 12-year calendrical cycle names in the Saek language; Olivier de Bernon's presentation of the rare collection of papers of the French jurist Georges Padoux, recently acquired by Chulalongkorn University; Ian G. Baird's report on the continuing impact of land mines on the Mlabri community of northern Thailand; and a short study by Patcharee Chunthong & Thanasin Chutintaranond on Lap mueang gastronomic traditions and regional identity in Nan province.

The issue also includes two *Events & Exhibitions* reports. Sophie Biard reviews the exhibition *Bronzes royaux d'Angkor, un art du divin*, first held at the Musée Guimet in Paris before traveling to the United States, which brought together an exceptional selection of Khmer bronzes. Meanwhile, Ian G. Baird outlines the conference *Decolonizing Southeast Asia Studies*, recently held at Chiang Mai University, which addressed ongoing debates concerning the future directions and methodological frameworks of the field.

As always, the issue concludes with *Book Reviews*, featuring a robust selection of recent publications in fields ranging from art and archeology to history, linguistics, anthropology, and contemporary social and political issues relevant to the study of Thailand and Southeast Asia.

The JSS warmly welcomes submissions from scholars working on all aspects of Thai and Southeast Asian studies. Now widely recognized internationally, it has recently reached a significant milestone: according to the latest SCImago Journal Rank for 2025, the JSS is rated in the top quartile (Q1) in Cultural Studies and Q2 in Anthropology and Arts and Humanities. This marks a substantial rise from previous rankings and confirms its emergence as a leading venue in these fields, with growing global visibility and impact.

As an independent learned society, the continued publication of the journal depends on the generous support of its members and friends. Readers who wish to further support the Society's activities and publications are invited to make a donation by scanning the QR code or by following the instructions provided on the previous page.

This volume is offered to our esteemed members and readers in the hope that its diverse contributions will inform, enrich, and inspire further study.

Nicolas Revire
Managing editor
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Journal of the Siam Society

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In Memoriam: Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother (1932–2025)



Figure 1: HM Queen Sirikit; portrait painted by Piriya Krairiksh (original in color), 1964 © The Siam Society

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Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother, born Mom Rajawongse Sirikit Kitiyakara (ม.ร.ว. สิริกิติ์ กิติยากร), passed away on 24 October 2025 at the age of 93, at Chulalongkorn Hospital. His Majesty King Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X) graciously presided over the royal arrangements, having Her Majesty's royal urn enshrined at the Dusit Mahaprasat Throne Hall in the Grand Palace beneath a nine-tiered umbrella, in accordance with the highest royal funerary honors.

Throughout her life, HM Queen Sirikit dedicated herself wholeheartedly to the Thai people. During the reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1950–2016), she accompanied him on numerous visits to remote areas across the kingdom. HM Queen Sirikit provided assistance that enabled people to improve their livelihoods and quality of life. She founded the Sinlapachip Foundation (มูลนิธิส่งเสริมศิลปาชีพ)—*The Foundation for the Promotion of Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit, the Queen Mother* (SUPPORT)—which promotes regional arts and crafts. Through this initiative, people earn supplementary income to support themselves. HM Queen Sirikit also played a vital role in stimulating interest in Thai traditional culture and performance, notably by modernizing the classical *khon* (โขน) performance to make it more accessible and appealing to younger generations.

HM Queen Sirikit was a strong advocate for the conservation of natural resources, particularly trees and forests. These efforts contributed to the preservation of waterways and their tributaries and helped enhance the fertility of the land.

In recognition of her lifelong dedication to projects essential to Thailand's development, HM Queen Sirikit received numerous international honors and awards. In 1979, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) awarded her the Ceres Medal in recognition of her tireless efforts to improve the lives of her subjects, especially her work in rural development and in supporting Thai women. The Queen also received honorary degrees from many universities and academic institutions.

HM Queen Sirikit served as Vice-Patron of the Siam Society Under Royal Patronage and accompanied HM King Bhumibol to the Society on several occasions. To commemorate HM Queen Sirikit's 60th birthday anniversary in 1992,[1] the Siam Society commissioned a gold Buddha footprint, which was later installed at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace.

Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's kindness and compassion will forever remain in the hearts of the Thai people.

ML Pattaratorn Chirapravati[2] &
Arthid Sheravanichkul[3]

[1] See Bonnie Davis, "Her Majesty Queen Sirikit", *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 80, Pt. 1, pp. 10–12. **Figure 1** illustrated the cover of that issue. It is here reprinted in black and white with permission.

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The Legend and Cult of Gavampati: Its Roots in Pali and Sanskrit Sources

John S. Strong[1]

Abstract—This article examines the legend and cult of Gavampati through Pali and Sanskrit sources, tracing the textual roots of a figure who later became prominent in Southeast Asian Buddhist traditions as the "Fat Monk". Although briefly mentioned in early canonical texts, Gavampati appears in a wide range of later narratives that portray him variously as an arhat, miracle-worker, forest meditator, and missionary to frontier regions. By analyzing his shifting presence in lists of disciples, his association with the First Buddhist Council, his bovine etymology, and his role in missionary and relic traditions, the study highlights the fluid and multifaceted character of Gavampati and the processes of "syncretism" that shaped his evolving cult.

Keywords: Buddhist Disciples; Gavampati (Fat Monk); Pali Literature; Sanskrit Buddhist Texts; Southeast Asian Buddhism

Introduction

In the Pali *Vinaya*, Gavampati[2] is said to be one of the four friends of Yasa, the well-to-do young man who was the first person to be converted by the historical Buddha after the group of five ascetics who were present at the First Sermon (Vin I 18–19; trans. Horner 1938–52: IV, 26–27). The text, however, tells us almost nothing about him except that, inspired by Yasa's example, he along with his companions (Vimala, Subāhu, and Puṇṇaji) asks the Buddha for ordination as a monk and almost immediately attains arhatship.

When he translated this story, André Bareau (1963: 225) wondered why the *Vinaya* even bothered to say this much about these four individuals since, according to him, they "are practically unknown in canonical sources [...] and never played any important role in the Buddhist Community".[3] This may be so for the first three of these "friends of Yasa" (who apparently are mentioned nowhere else in the Canon), but it is hardly the case for Gavampati who, as we shall see, appears in a host of Pali and Sanskrit texts, both early and late.

In mainland Southeast Asia, he becomes credited with the spread of Buddhism to Thaton (and other places) in lower Myanmar (Guillon 1983). He is said to bring the Buddha's tooth relic there shortly after the Blessed One's parinirvana or final extinction

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[2] For practical purposes, in this article I shall use the Pali form of Gavampati's name rather than the Sanskrit (Gavāṁpati), even when the latter would be more contextually appropriate. Similarly, I generally adopt Pali forms for terms and personal names unless referring specifically to a Sanskrit source.

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are my own.

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(Shorto 1963: 1970) and he achieves fame as the object of a popular cult in Bagan and then in Thaton (Stadtner 2005: 39–40; see also Donald Stadtner, this Special Edition). Today, in Thailand, he is commonly known as the "Fat Monk" and is represented as a pot-bellied figure seated in meditation **[Figure 1]**, sometimes with his eyes and other orifices covered (Lagirarde 2003). He comes to be conflated with Mahākaccāyana or Phra Sangkachai (พระสังกัจจายน์) in later Thai tradition and is part of the group of the 80 Great Disciples (*asīti mahāsāvaka*s) of the Buddha (Lagirarde 2000, 2001, 2005). Primarily because of his big belly, he has, over the years, been likened to other figures as well: the ventripotent Jambhala, well-known in tantric art (Luce 1969–70: I, 207); Budai, the so-called "fat" or "laughing Buddha" of Chinese tradition (Lagirarde 2019: 193); and even the Buddha's disciple Moggallāna (Skt, Maudgalyāyana) at the moment of suffering from a belly ache caused by Māra who flew into his stomach and made it swell (Duroiselle 1933: 110).[4] In other words, over the years, Gavampati has had a chameleonic personality—something that has enriched both his legend and his cult and led to his having multiple identities and roles (Lagirarde 2003).

In this article, I want to focus primarily on Pali and Sanskrit traditions about Gavampati. These too, as we shall see, are multifarious and sometimes rather fluid, but in their unstable quality and ambiguities they may help provide a background to many of the multiple facets of this important Buddhist arhat. In what follows, I shall touch on seven interrelated topics: (1) Gavampati's presence or absence from various listings of the Buddha's enlightened disciples; (2) Gavampati and the First Buddhist Council; (3) Gavampati as Cattle-Lord; (4) Gavampati and the Serīsaka Celestial Mansion; (5) Gavampati as meditator and miracle-maker; (6) Gavampati as a borderland missionary; and finally, (7) Gavampati and Gotama Buddha.

Lists of Arhats

In many of his biographies, after attaining his Awakening at Bodhgayā, the Buddha decides to start preaching the Dharma to others. He briefly considers sharing his new-found doctrine with his former teachers, Āḷāra and Uddaka (Skt, Ārāḍa and Udraka), but he realizes they have both passed away. So, he decides to go to the Deer Park at Sarnath to find his erstwhile companions with whom he had practiced austerities (the so-called "Group of Five"). His sermon to them, the "Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dharma", is so effective that they are quickly converted, request ordination as monks, and soon thereafter attain full enlightenment. At that point, the Pali *Vinaya* (Vin I 14; trans. Horner 1938–52: IV, 21) tells us, "there were six arhats in the world" (the Buddha and the five former ascetics).

This begins a series of stories which, whatever their inherent interest, have the function of tabulating the growth of the *ariyasaṅgha* (the community of "noble" [i.e., enlightened] ones). The

[4] This story may be found in M I 332 (trans. Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995: 431); it is also retold in the *Lokapaññatti* (Denis 1977: II, 138–139).



Figure 1: The Buddhist disciple or Fat Monk Gavampati, also known as Mahākaccāyana or Phra Sangkachai; 17th–18th century or later, Wat Chedi Luang, Chiang Mai © Nicolas Revire

pattern continues when the Buddha converts Yasa (Skt, Yaśas), a young man from a prominent merchant family in Benares: he is ordained, becomes enlightened, and "then there were seven arhats" (Vin I 18; trans. Horner 1938–52: IV, 26). Then he meets four of Yasa's companions, one of whom, as noted above, is Gavampati. Hearing that their good friend Yasa had become a monk, they all decide to follow his example: after receiving instruction and ordination from the Buddha, they too are enlightened and so bring the number of arhats in the world to eleven (Vin I 19; trans. Horner 1938–52: IV, 27).

This same pattern of keeping track of the number of enlightened disciples in the very early Saṅgha is found in several other *vinaya*s,[5] so it is not uniquely

[5] See the *Mahīśāsakavinaya* (T. 1421, 22: 105c–106a; trans. Bareau 1963: 224); the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T. 1428, 22: 790b; trans. Bareau 1963: 224–225); and the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya* (Sanghbhv I: 146–147; trans. of Tib., Feer 1883: 28–29). See also Kloppenborg 1973: 40–41.

a Theravada tradition. It is clear that in these episodes we find the start of a pan-Buddhist tradition of making lists of Buddhist arhats. Indeed, the tabulation continues in the very next passage of the *vinaya*s. Yasa, it turns out, has 50 other acquaintances, young men of slightly lesser status. They too decide to go to the Buddha and become ordained and soon, we are told, "there were sixty-one arhats in the world" (Vin I 20; trans. Horner 1938–52: IV, 28). The members of this last group of 50 are not named, however; after the Buddha tells all of his disciples to go their own ways and individually spread the teaching of the Dharma, the 50 anonymous friends of Yasa pretty much drop out of the picture.

Their eclipse, however, does not mean the end of the tabulation of arhats. In the Pali commentarial tradition, we find mention of a group of the Buddha's 80 Great Disciples whose names may or may not be listed. When they are, as in the *Theragāthā Commentary* (Th-a III 205–206), the first ten disciple-arhats (the five ascetics, Yasa, and his four friends including Gavampati) are named at the head of a list, which is then filled out with names of other enlightened disciples, many of whom (e.g., Sāriputta, Mahākassapa, Mahāmoggallāna) are quite famous. Gavampati's early presence among the 80 Great Disciples is important for, as Lagirarde (2000: 58, 72, fig. 1) makes clear, he goes on to occupy a prominent position in iconography and in various Pali and vernacular reiterations of the list in Southeast Asia.[6]

The origins of the tradition of the 80 disciples are, to me, obscure. Pali commentator Buddhaghosa (fl. 5th c.), in his *Visuddhimagga*, refers to the number without enumerating the names (Vism 98; trans. Pe Maung Tin 1923: 115). The *Dhammapada Commentary* assumes the tradition of the 80 disciples in figuring out the total number of monks going to visit the novice Tissa (Dhp-a II 93; trans. Burlingame 1921: II, 156–157).[7] But perhaps the most noteworthy Pali commentarial reference occurs in the story of Mahākassapa and Ajātasattu building a great underground stupa for the Buddha about 20 years after his parinirvana. This involves collecting all the relics from the eight original stupas in which they had been distributed right after the Buddha's death and centralizing them in a single underground chamber. Before re-enshrinement, eight nesting urns are prepared for each of the eight shares of relics. Because of a somewhat mysterious purported need for secrecy, however, an elaborate pretense is made that these relics are not those of the Buddha but of his 80 Great Disciples (Sv II 611–613).[8] No enumeration of these disciples is made thus there is no mention of Gavampati, but the association of the 80 disciples with relics is nonetheless noteworthy, given Gavampati's later association with the same.[9]

[6] For an orthodoxly established Thai list of the disciples, see, e.g., Vajirañāṇavarorasa 1974: II, 69 (where he appears as disciple no. 10). For a Burmese list, see Mingun 1990–98: VI, Part 1, xiv (where he appears as no. 12 of the Buddha's right hand side disciples, those flanking Sāriputta). See also Schnake 2024: 133.

[7] 40,000 monks, we are told, went to visit Tissa in groups of 500, each led by one of the Buddha's major disciples (40,000/500 = 80).

[8] The story is repeated in Thūp 181–183 (trans. Jayawickrama 1971: 44–46) and is well known in the Burmese tradition (Strong 2004: 127–131).

[9] One is tempted to think that the 80 disciples were

In looking at lists of great disciples, we should not neglect the enumerations that appear in the introductory paragraphs of some Mahayana texts. Typically these begin with an opening scene in which the Buddha is surrounded by a large number of "great disciples" who are arhats, some of whom, usually a few dozen, are then named. Although they are truncated, these lists bear a close—though not exact—resemblance to the start of the Pali lists of the 80 Great Disciples. Invariably, just as in the *Theragāthā Commentary*, they begin with the names of the Buddha's first disciples (the "Group of Five") and often follow that with the group of Yasa and his four friends including Gavampati. But even when this order is not strictly adhered to, Gavampati is still mentioned apart from his "group".[10]

Lagirarde (2000: 60) has pointed out that, on some lists of the 80 disciples, Gavampati is curiously missing. This is the case, for instance, in a 15th-century inscription on a *buddhapāda* from Sukhothai—perhaps the earliest mention of the 80 disciples in Thailand. There, Yasa and his first three companions are mentioned, but not Gavampati. Curiously, exactly the same thing is true in the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha* where Gavampati is likewise skipped in the listing and no mention of him is made.[11]

More generally, I might add that he also does not figure on the well-known list of disciples in the *Anguttaranikāya* (A I 23–26; trans. Bodhi 2012: 109–113) which was so important to Theravada hagiography, specifying the quality in which each major disciple—including nuns and laypersons—was "most preeminent". The *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya*, however, does refer to him, in a different context, as the "most preeminent of the disciples who dwell in frontier regions".[12] Nor is Gavampati included in the usual lists of the 16 or 18 arhats (Ch., *luohan* 罗汉), although he does figure on one list of eight arhats which Étienne Lamotte (1988: 694) claims was a building block towards the longer list of 16.[13] And he is likewise included among the arhat-disciples in the so-called "cult of the nine gods" and in related *paritta* rites found in various parts of Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia. In this tradition, Gavampati is one of eight disciples who are arranged in the four cardinal and four intermediate points of the compass around the Buddha who is in the center.[14]

The first thing to be noted about Gavampati, then, is that he is an arhat who comes and goes. In both Pali and

divided into eight groups of ten and each associated with one share of the Buddha's relics.

[10] For example, see the *Lotus Sutra* (Sad 3; trans. Kern 1884: 2); the *Smaller Sukhāvatīvūha* (ed. Müller & Nanjio 1883: 92; trans. Gómez 1996: 15); the *Lalitavistara* (Lal 1.2; trans. Foucaux 1884: 3); the *Karunāpuṇḍarīka* (Kp 2.2; trans. Weiler 1956: 118–119).

[11] See ed. Müller & Nanjio 1883: 2. In his translation, Gómez (1996: 62) has added him back in without explaining why, but seemingly on the basis of the Chinese text which does include him. See T. 360, 12: 265c; trans. Inagaki 1995: 21.

[12] T. 1451, 24: 228a (trans. Guillon 1983: 55). See also Lamotte 1949–80: 629n.; Przyluski 1926: 243; and Panglung 1981: 171.

[13] In general, on the 16 arhats, see Lévi & Chavannes 1916.

[14] Htin Aung 1978: 7–11. In Myanmar, the disciples are each associated not only with a direction, but with a planet, a day of the week, an animal, etc. In Gavampati's case, he is connected to the Northwest, Wednesday afternoon, Rāhu, and the tuskless elephant. The origin of the rite seems to lie in the notion of using the arhats to form a kind of protective cage around the Buddha that can be used to ward of malignant forces. See Guillon 1987: 149; also Strong 1992: 238–241.

Sanskrit sources, he is sometimes listed as present among the Buddha's enlightened disciples and he is sometimes absent.

The First Council

The same thing may be reflected in Sanskrit traditions relative to the First Buddhist Council held at Rājagṛha (today in Bihar, India) shortly after the death of the Buddha, usually dated to around the 5th century BCE. It is noteworthy that several of the listings of the great disciples at the start of Mahayana texts, in which Gavampati is included, end with the name of the Buddha's disciple Ānanda, who is specified in the lists as "still a learner", i.e., not yet an arhat (e.g., Sad 3; trans. Kern 1884: 3).

I take this mention of such a prominent disciple at the tail end of the listing and the recall of his not-yet-enlightened status as a reference to the story of the First Council to which 500 arhats were invited but from which Ānanda was initially excluded because he was still a "learner". Thus, Gavampati's inclusion on these lists is all the more noteworthy given the contradictory Sanskrit tradition that he did not attend the First Council. The story, studied long ago by Jean Przyluski (1926: 239–256), is well known. The Buddha's disciple Mahākāśyapa (P., Mahākassapa), having assembled the elders for the recitation of the sutras and the *Vinaya*, realizes that one arhat—Gavampati—is missing, absent because he is dwelling in a celestial abode (about which see below). Accordingly, a young monk is sent up to fetch him. However, when Gavampati realizes that the Buddha has died, he refuses. "What is the use of remaining in a buddhaless world?" he asks and, declaring that he wishes to follow the Buddha into extinction, just as a baby elephant follows its mother, he flies up into the air, autocremates himself, and is no more.[15]

The story in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra* is even more dramatic. When Mahākāśyapa realizes that Ānanda will not be able to recite all the Buddha's teaching because he is not qualified to participate in the First Council due to his lack of arhatship, he asks who can do it in his stead. Aniruddha suggests Gavampati who, he says was Śāriputra (P., Sāriputta)'s best disciple and fully knows the *Vinaya*- and *Sūtrapiṭaka*s. He is now in retreat in a celestial abode. Thus, a messenger monk is sent flying to heaven to request Gavampati's presence for this important task. However, when Gavampati finds out that not only has the Buddha passed away, but so have Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana, that Ānanda is dysfunctionally depressed from mourning, and Rāhula does nothing but contemplate impermanence, he concludes the situation is hopeless and goes into extinction himself (T. 1509, 25: 68b–69a; trans. Lamotte 1949–80: 97–99). One might have expected him to step up to the occasion, but he chooses not to.

In this particular story, then, Gavampati has opted for the path of the

[15] T. 2043, 50: 150b–151a (trans. Li 1993: 94–97); T. 2042, 50: 112a–c (trans. Przyluski 1923: 314–316); T. 2027, 49 : 4c–5c (trans. Przyluski 1926: 6–11). For the Mūlasarvātivāda version, see Obermiller 1931–32: II, 73–76.

antisocial meditator who cares little about Sangha politics or, apparently, the laity. His devotion is more to the Buddha than to the monastic community. Paul Lévy (1957: 86) calls him "the most faithful of the Buddha's disciples" and compares his autocremation to an act of *satī*—throwing himself on his lord's funeral pyre. Mahākāśyapa realizes such an act is potentially problematic for the ongoing existence of the established monastic community: when he is told of Gavampati's refusal to come to the Council and his opting for extinction, Mahākāśyapa issues an injunction forbidding all monks from entering nirvana until the basket of Dharma has been collected (Przyluski 1926: 32).

And yet the tale gives us a more mixed picture of Gavampati. It makes it clear that he was seen as someone who was a master of the Dharma and potentially a leader of the Sangha. His refusal to attend the First Council ends up having a happy ending, for it causes Ānanda to redouble his efforts to attain arhatship. Fortunately that night Ānanda does and so can recite the sutras in Gavampati's stead (T. 1509, 25: 69a; trans. Lamotte 1949–80: 100). At another level, then, in the words of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962), Gavampati's story is *bon à penser* (good to think). The choice Gavampati is presented with epitomizes a tension that is broadly characteristic of much of Buddhism: between the poles of aloofness from the world and involvement in it. And in some ways, as Lagirarde (2003: 167) points out, this tension between "strict monk" and "bodhisattva" may still be found in Gavampati's cult in modern Thailand.

Cattle-Lord

This pattern of inclusion/exclusion also occurs in a series of Pali and Sanskrit legends connected to Gavampati's karmic history. The name "Gavampati" literally means "Lord of the Cattle";[16] thus it is not surprising to find, in various Pali Commentaries, the assertion that he was, in a previous life, an oxherder.[17] This bovine connection is found even more explicitly in a Chinese commentary on the first chapters of the *Ekottara-āgama*, where Gavampati's name is rendered as "Ox-foot" (Ch. *niujiao* 牛脚) which, according to Przyluski (1926: 240) suggests an original Sanskrit of *gavāṁpādī*. The Commentary then explains that this monk was so called because his feet resembled the hooves of an ox;[18] moreover, after Gavāṁpādī finished eating, he chewed (or appeared to chew) his cud.[19] This was a problem because it risked causing heretics to critically point out that here was a Buddhist monk who was eating after noon, a clear violation of the *Vinaya*. So as to avoid such embarrassment, the Buddha exiled Gavampati to heaven where he could ruminate alone (T. 1507, 24: 40c; trans. Przyluski 1926: 115). Much the same

[16] In Sanskrit, *gavāṁ* is genitive plural of *go* ("cow, cattle") and *pati* means "lord, master, owner".

[17] Sv III 814; and Vv-a 331–332 (trans. Masefield 1989: 505–506). For an alternative interpretation of Gavampati's name, meaning "Lord of Speech", see Javier Schnake, this Special Edition.

[18] The term *pāda* means "foot", and the suffix *-ī* forms a possessive or adjectival derivative. The compound *gavāṁpādī* would therefore mean "having the feet of cattle" or "cow/ox-footed".

[19] A demythologizer might suggest that Gavampati was suffering from oromandibular dystonia or Meige syndrome.

story is found in the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya* which asserts that because, long ago at the time of Kāśyapa Buddha, Gavampati insulted his teacher by calling him an old ox and thus was reborn 500 times as an ox himself. In the last of these bovine rebirths, he happened, one day, to get stuck in a bog. He was rescued by Śāriputra who preached the Dharma to him, ox though he was. A bit later he was killed by a jackal and reborn in the womb of the wife of a brahmin. Śāriputra, who frequented that brahmin's house, got him to promise that he would give his son—then still *in utero*—to the Buddhist Sangha. When the child was born, he was named Gavampati who soon became a monk and attained arhatship. Due to his bovine past, however, he was inclined to gastral reflexes and rechewing his food in the evenings. He was given permission to reswallow it by the Buddha but sent to the borderlands because of his habit (Panglung 1981: 170–171).

Przyluski (1926: 250–256) has sought to make much out of these stories, connecting Gavampati to Śiva and Śiva's bull Nandi, on the one hand, and to various accounts of the sacrifice of the buffalo in "Monsoon Asia", on the other. His argument is that Gavampati represents an indigenous "God of the Dry Season", who has become Buddhicized as an arhat, but who should be associated with an ancient Southeast Asian cult in which a bull or buffalo, representing the deity of drought, was sacrificed at the start of the rainy season. Przyluski implies that Gavampati's extinction in parinirvana (which makes possible the First Council held during the rainy season) is a Buddhist reworking in legend of an old pre-Buddhist ritual tradition involving the killing or expelling of a bovine victim.

These imaginative leaps have been vigorously criticized by others. For instance, after citing Przyluski, Éveline Porée-Maspero (1962–69: II, 308) wonders why the ox—a crucial animal for plowing and planting—would be expelled, even in effigy, at the very time when it is most needed. More devastatingly, Harry Shorto (1970: 24–25) has found Przyluski's interpretation is based on a too-easy acceptance of a misreading of a misleading report on the dubious discovery of an amulet near Bagan in Myanmar that can only questionably be associated with someone who might perhaps be called Gavampati. He concludes that Pryluski's "excursus", as he calls it, is "irrelevant".

What, then, are we to make of Gavampati's ox-like nature? A different line of interpretation would seem possible. The texts cited above make it clear that Gavampati's chief bovine feature is that he "chews the cud": that he has a habit of masticating even when not eating. In itself, this was not against monastic discipline; we are told in the Pali *Vinaya* (Vin II 132; trans. Horner 1938–52: V, 183) about an unnamed monk resembling Gavampati who had been a cow in a previous life and so now chewed the cud. The story makes it clear that this is fine—the Buddha "allows rumination for a ruminator (*romanthaka*)" —but the episode goes on to specify that this habit caused problems because it made lay devotees suspect him of eating after hours.

Like many stories, however, this one may have contextual overtones.

As François Bizot (1976: 6) and others have shown, in Southeast Asia, the practice of monks eating after noon, specifically of their taking an evening meal, was commonplace among certain unreformed forest monks (Than Tun 1959: 107). What we would seem to have in Gavampati, then, is a figure who appears, from one perspective (that of Sri Lankan Theravada orthodoxy), as a violator of the *Vinaya* rules, but who actually, from another perspective (that of the "unreformed tradition"), is innocent of wrongdoing and who, moreover, is portrayed as being persecuted despite his innocence.[20]

The Serīsaka Celestial Mansion

This theme of Gavampati as an arhat who wants to, or has to, eat alone is also found in traditions that know nothing about his chewing the cud. In the *Dīghanikāya* (D II 356–357; trans. Walshe 1987: 368), for example, he is in the habit of taking his meals and spending his noonday rest in an empty celestial mansion known as the Serīsaka Vimāna ("The Celestial Mansion Made of Acacia Wood") in the Heaven of the Four Great Kings. There, one day, he is suddenly burst in upon by Pāyāsi, a heretic turned devout layman whose time for rebirth in heaven happens to have arrived and whose karma has apparently assigned him the Serīsaka mansion. Gavampati remembers Pāyāsi from his former life and, somewhat peeved at having his siesta space and meditative retreat invaded, he asks him: "Brother, aren't you the one who used to say there was no other world, [...] and no karmic rewards for good or bad deeds?". Pāyāsi explains that he was, but that he got converted by the elder Kumara Kassapa and was reborn here as a result of his merit. The commentary on this passage (Sv III 814), as well as a parallel text in the *Vimānavatthu Commentary* (Vv-a 331–332; trans. Masefield 1989: 505–506), tell the origin of this Divine Mansion. Once upon a time, in the era of the previous Kassapa Buddha, there was an arhat who, after going on his alms round, was in the habit of taking his bowl out to a field and sitting down to eat and rest there. A local cowherd, worried that the elder would suffer from the heat of the noonday sun, undertook to build him a shelter. Using four posts of acacia wood, he made a pavilion which he covered with acacia leaves, in front of which he planted an acacia tree. As a result of this good deed, the cowherd was reborn in the Heaven of the Four Great Kings, in a *vimāna* in front of which there grew a great acacia tree. It was consequently known as the Serīsaka (Acacian) Vimāna. Eventually, the cowherd's time in heaven was up and he was reborn as the Buddha's disciple Gavampati. Because of Gavampati's past familiarity with that heavenly mansion, he used to visit it on a daily basis for his noonday meal and rest.

Meditator, Miracle-Worker, and Protector

In some texts, however, the Serīsaka Vimāna is presented very much as though it were a forest hermitage (e.g.,

[20] The arhat Upagupta too, in Southeast Asia, was suspected of eating after noon, though his solution is rather more assertive than Gavampati's: he uses his magical powers to stop the sun in its course so that he can continue eating (Strong 1992).

T. 2027, 49: 5a; trans. Przyluski 1926: 7). In the *Dīvyāvadāna* (Div 399; trans. Strong 1983: 259), for instance, though still called a celestial mansion, the Vimāna is paired with other retreats such as Kashmir, Mahāvana, Revataka, Lake Anavatapta, and Mount Gandhamādana, which, though remote, were nonetheless considered to be in our world. In the *Theragāthā Commentary* (Th-a I 110), rather than dwell in heaven, Gavampati chooses to reside in the Añjana forest in Sāketa. Thus, in the polarity between forest-monks and city-monks that has characterized Buddhism pretty much everywhere it has gone, Gavampati is a figure who embodies the ideals of the former pole. It comes as no surprise, then, to find forest monks worshiping an image of Gavampati in a 15th-century controversy in northern Thailand (Mangrai 1981: 135).

But whether in a forest hermitage or in heaven, he is said to spend much of his time in a trance of *samādhi*. This is a theme that also was developed in various ways in Southeast Asia. For example, in the Thai and Lao *Gavampatisutta* studied by Lagirarde (2000), he is presented as a saint who guards the doors of his senses.[21] Small images or amulets, in fact, often represent him as a figure covering his eyes (*phra pit ta*; พระปิดตา) **[Figure 2]** and sometimes other orifices with an extra pair of arms. Alternatively, his head may be covered by his robe—a sign of being in a trance.[22]

Like many saints of the forest, Gavampati also has developed supernatural powers—abilities that are the outcome of his meditational prowess, but which draw him back into involvement in the world. Many examples of use of his powers to help others could be given from Southeast Asian materials, starting with his cult long ago in Bagan as a protector of palaces or monasteries, or, in more modern times, as a protector of the Buddha in the cult of the "Nine Gods" (see above), or as a bringer of worldly benefits to his possessors and devotees.[23] One possible root of this theme of using his superpowers for the benefit of people may be found in the Pali Canon in a specific story. In the *Theragāthā*, the Buddha praises Gavampati for his detachment and for his *iddhi* (supernormal powers) which he applies to holding back the flood waters of the Sarabhū River. As K.R. Norman (1969: 5; Pali text in Th 6) translates the verse: "Gavampati, who by his supernormal power made the river Sarabhū stand fast, is unfettered and unmoved. The devas revere that great sage who has surpassed all attachments and reached the far shore of existence". The Commentary on the text explains that once, when Gavampati was residing and meditating in the Añjanavana forest, the Buddha came to visit him together with a great following of monks. As there were not enough accommodations for all of them, some of the *bhikkhu*s slept

[21] Given the affinities between Gavampati and Mahākaccāyana, it is interesting to note that the latter was also praised by the Buddha for "keeping the doors of his senses guarded" (*indriyesu guttadvārā*) and therefore beloved by both humans and gods (Dhp-a II 177; trans. Burlingame 1921: II, 203).

[22] Przyluski (1926: 250) contests the interpretation that covering the eyes indicates a trance. Comparing Gavampati to Śiva, he argues instead that the eyes are covered so as to shield devotees from the potentially destructive power of Gavampati's glance.

[23] See *inter alia* Shorto 1970: 21–22; Guillon 1983: 52–53; Luce 1969–70: I, 208; Mangrai 1981: 135, 177, n. 140.



Figure 2: Miniature metallic image of Gavampati depicted closing his eyes; Wat Huay Duan, Nakhon Sawan; special edition, May 2022 © www.thailandamulet.net

on the sand of the Sarabhū River. In the middle of the night, however, the waters suddenly began to rise and the monks were in danger of drowning or being swept away.[24] The Buddha, worried about the situation, ordered Gavampati to stop the water from rising, which he did: using his superpowers, he stays the flow of the stream so that the whole river rears up like a great mountain (Th-a I 109–111; partial trans. Davids 1986: 2: 42–43).[25] Przyluski (1926: 246–247) invokes this as yet more evidence of Gavampati's opposition to the rainy season. The holding back of the waters of the river, however, has less to do with Gavampati as a "God of the Dry Season" (*dieu de la sécheresse*) than with his position as a powerful arhat endowed with supernatural powers which he uses for the well-being of the community.

Borderland Arhat, Missionary, and Patron Saint

Gavampati's combination of withdrawal from the world—whether in Serīsaka or in *samādhi*, or in a forest hermitage—with involvement in the world may be behind another theme prominent to his legend and cult: his specialization in spreading the Buddha's teaching to the borderlands. In the Pali *Saṁyuttanikāya*

[24] This was apparently a perennial problem in the forest of Añjana, at the start of the rainy season when flash floods were apt to occur. For another instance, see the story of the elder Añjanavaniya who put his bed on top of four big stones so that the waters would pass underneath him (Th-a I 136–137).

[25] The Buddha performs a similar feat shortly after his Awakening, when he holds back the waters of the Nairañjana River, a miracle that helps finally convert the Brahmanical ascetic Uruvelā Kassapa. See Vin I 31; trans. Horner 1938–52: IV, 42.

(S V 436–437; trans. Bodhi 2000: 1857), there is a short sutra attributed to Gavampati. Nothing is doctrinally remarkable about it, but it is noteworthy that his sermon—which Gavampati says repeats what he heard from the Buddha—is addressed to the Cetiyan people who are variously thought to have dwelt in present-day Nepal or in settlements in the region of the upper Ganges or Yamuna River (Malalasekera 1974: I, 911). The picture that emerges, then, is that of Gavampati transmitting the Dharma in a remote region to persons who may never have seen the Buddha.

The theme also appears in the Sanskrit tradition. For instance, in the *Mūla-sarvāstivādavinaya,* the Buddha tells Gavampati that, henceforth, he should no longer remain in Madhyadeśa ("the Central Region") but go and reside beyond its borders. The Buddha thereby proclaims Gavampati "the foremost of his disciples who dwell in frontier-lands".[26] The *Mahākarmavibhaṅga* (Mkv 124–125; trans. Lévi 1932: 131) is more specific. It states that Gavampati converted the inhabitants of Suvarṇabhūmi, the "Land of Gold", often identified with the Mon regions of lower Myanmar or central Thailand (Revire 2018). If this Gavampati is indeed the Buddha's disciple, the account would imply that he was still active more than two centuries after the death of Gotama Buddha, a chronological difficulty already noted by modern scholars (Lagirarde 2005). In this respect, the Sanskrit text differs from the Pali chronicles, which attribute the mission to the same region (Suvaṇṇabhūmi in Pali) to the monks Soṇa and Uttara, said to have been dispatched there under King Asoka (e.g., Mhv 94; trans. Geiger 1960: 82).

This same overlap with Soṇa and Uttara may be reflected in an intriguing archeological find, made in the Tilominlo Temple in Bagan in 1928, not of one but of two images of the Fat Monk. They were found in a relic chamber flanking a statue of the past Buddha Vessabhū, identified by inscription. Immediately above the relic chamber was a brick pedestal on which an identical image of the Buddha (presumably Gotama) resided, flanked by two disciples identified as Sāriputta and Moggallāna (Duroiselle 1933: 110–111). An implicit parallelism is present here: just as Sāriputta and Moggallāna were the two *aggasāvaka*s (chief disciples) of Gotama, so the two fat monks (presumably two images of Gavampati) appear to have been the two chief disciples of Vessabhū. This is noteworthy since, according to orthodox Theravada tradition (Bv 84; trans. Horner 1975: 82), the two chief disciples of Vessabhū were called Soṇa and Uttara and thus were namesakes of the two missionaries who in the Pali chronicles are sent to convert Suvaṇṇabhūmi.

A number of Southeast Asian texts (both chronicles and inscriptions) work this identification of Gavampati as the converter of Suvaṇṇabhūmi into a full-blown legend. The story in the Pali *Sāsanavaṁsa* may be summarized as follows.

[26] See T. 1451, 24: 228a (trans. Guillon 1983: 55); also Przyluski 1926: 243; Lamotte 1949–80: 629n.; and Panglung 1981: 171. Like Gavampati, Mahākaccāyana is also associated with borderlands; he is from Avanti, in the West, a region paradigmatic of the periphery in early Buddhist literature, since it is with regard to Avanti that the Buddha is asked to make special allowances to the *Vinaya* rules for monks living outside the "Central Region" (Vin I 194–195; trans. Horner 1938–52: IV, 263).

Once upon a time, a wizard (*vijjādhara*) had sexual relations with a *nāgī* who, in due time, lays two eggs, which she then abandons out of embarrassment.[27] A prince finds the eggs and keeps one, giving the other to his younger brother. Eventually two humans are born from the eggs. At age ten, the boy from the younger brother's egg dies and is reborn as a prince named Gavampati in Mithilā, in India. There, he meets the Buddha, joins the order, and soon becomes our arhat. A bit later, the god Indra takes the boy from the older brother's egg and installs him as a king named Sīharāja in the city of Sudhammapura (Thaton) in lower Myanmar.

In time, Gavampati, who has followed the Buddha in his wanderings, conceives a desire to see his mother again and sets out for his hometown of Mithilā. By virtue of his divine eye, however, he perceives that she has died and been reborn in lower Myanmar, a country inhabited by many hunters and fishermen. Worried that, in such an environment, his mother will grow up a sinner, he resolves to go there and preach to her. Flying through the air, he quickly arrives in the city of Thaton where he meets King Sīharāja, his former brother, and his mother, reborn as a little girl.[28] In order to convince his brother of the truth of karmic connections, he arranges for milk to spurt forth into his mouth from the breast of the young girl, his former mother. Impressed by this miracle, King Sīharāja tells Gavampati that he is the most fantastic being in the world, to which he replies that is not true, for the Buddha is much greater. Sīharāja thereupon expresses a desire to see this Buddha and Gavampati agrees to invite him to come. The Buddha accepts, flies through the air in the eighth year after his enlightenment, and lands in lower Myanmar together with 500 monks. There, he preaches to King Sīharāja and the whole population and establishes them in the three refuges and five precepts. Upon his departure, he leaves six hair relics behind for the establishment of his cult and promises that, after his parinirvana, Gavampati will be able to take one of his tooth relics which he will posthumously transform into 33 tooth relics, one for each of the provinces of the kingdom. And indeed, that is what happens 37 years later. Learning of the Buddha's demise, Gavampati—who apparently has remained in Thaton—flies to Kusinārā, takes a tooth relic from the still burning pyre of the Buddha and conveys it to lower Myanmar where it is miraculously cloned and enshrined all over the kingdom.[29]

Gavampati's connection with relics in this story is noteworthy. On the one hand, the relics come to legitimize the rule of the king and are used to establish and reinforce the very organization of the state (Shorto 1963). On the other hand, the association with relics would seem to be confirmed by archeology; as Gordon Luce (1969–70: I, 206) points out, images of Gavampati have "frequently [been] found in old relic-chambers—at Śrīkṣetra, Yangon, Pegu, Mandalay, Pagan, etc.".[30]

[27] This is a common initial scenario in Southeast Asian culture-founder myths.

[28] The meeting with his mother is not recounted in the *Sāsanavaṁsa* but is found in the Mon chronicles. See Guillon 1983: 56.

[29] Sās 35–37 (trans. Law 1952: 40–42). See also Shorto 1970: 16–17; and Bigandet 1979: II, 144–145.

[30] We know, from Sri Lankan examples, that those

In this way, Gavampati becomes a kind of patron saint of the Mon people, credited with introducing them to Buddhism and enabling them to lay claim to possessing the very first tooth relic from the Buddha's funeral pyre. As such, he is often portrayed as a founder figure of Thaton. Inscriptions, however, indicate that he was also associated with other cities and regions, and the primacy of his Mon connections in lower Myanmar has thus been challenged by some scholars. Michael Aung-Thwin, rereading the epigraphical record, goes so far as to state: "The earliest evidence we have regarding the Gavampati tradition is found in and concerned with *Upper, not Lower Burma*, and is concerned with the 'establishment' of Śrī Kṣetra and Pagán, the 'quintessential' capitals of the Pyū and Burmese speakers respectively, *not with Thatôn and Mon speakers*" (2005: 85; his emphasis). Yet the earliest inscriptions related to Gavampati in Myanmar, found at Bagan during the reign of Kyanzittha (1084–1113 CE), are all in Mon, thus underscoring the continued centrality of Mon cultural agency in the material articulation of his cult (see also Donald Stadtner, this Special Edition).

Gavampati and the Buddha

It is commonplace to say that the Buddha's disciples, in so far as they preach the same Dharma, act for the Buddha in his absence. As a missionary monk and frequenter of borderlands, Gavampati was often called to do this. For this reason, perhaps, Paul Lévy (1957: 87) called him the Buddha's "understudy". Even today in Thailand, as Lagirarde (2003: 155) has shown, there are iconographic settings that have an image of the Fat Monk/Gavampati/Sangkachai sharing a place of honor with the Blessed One.

Gavampati, of course, is not the Buddha. Yet the tradition took pains to make that point. One of the ways it did this was by portraying him iconographically as a small, squat, and obese figure. Luce (1969–70: I, 208) worried that he knew of "no text which says that Gavampati was abnormally fat", but a series of Pali, Thai, and Lao manuscripts studied by Lagirarde (2000: 76) explain the reason for this obesity and go on to give a quite different final life story of the arhat which may be summarized as follows:

At the time of the Buddha, a monk named Brahmaputta lived in a forest monastery in Hemabhūmi (i.e., Suvaṇṇabhūmi, the Land of Gold). He was very, very handsome, so much so that he was often confused with the Buddha. This caused problems because, when he went out on his alms round, people would get excited thinking the Buddha had come to town and then would be disappointed. So as to put an end to such confusions, Brahmaputta used his supernatural powers to change his appearance: he shrunk the size of his body and made himself quite ugly and fat. At the same time, he changed his name, calling himself Gavampati. Years pass and Gavampati, thinking he will enter parinirvana, flies to the Jetavana

responsible for bringing the Buddha and/or his relics to the land—such as the Elder Mahinda—were often represented inside stupas; somewhat the same thing seems to have happened here. See Thūp 235; trans. Jayawickrama 1971: 118.

monastery to take leave of the Buddha. Upon his return to Hemabhūmi, however, he remembers that he had not yet converted a man named Sambala whom he must convert.[31] Accordingly, he decides to delay his parinirvana, assembles a crowd of disciples and laypersons and preaches a lengthy sermon to them, not unlike the Buddha from his deathbed. This does the trick for Sambala—who is in the audience—and who promptly takes refuge in the Triple Gem. Gavampati then enters into parinirvana, which the text likens to a city of crystal called Nibbāna (Lagirarde 2000: 64–68; see also Gregory Kourilsky and Javier Schnake, this Special Edition).

There then follows an account of Gavampati's funeral, lasting a whole week, the bier and the platform being provided by the gods. Most extraordinary is that the Buddha himself comes all the way from India to officiate at the ceremony and that he stays right through to the end. He lights the funeral pyre in person and then gathers Gavampati's relics which he asks his disciples to take back to India where they are enshrined in the Ghositārāma monastery in Vesāli. He also preaches a sermon that results in the recently converted Sambala attaining arhatship (Ibid., 69–71).

Lagirarde does not mention this, but what we appear to have here is a striking reversal of the Mon tradition in which Gavampati attends the funeral of Gotama Buddha and brings a tooth relic back with him. It is almost as though the two figures have traded positions. At the same time, this narrative further glorifies Gavampati by portraying him as if he were treated by the Buddha as the Buddha himself. Perhaps the story also serves to counter the Sanskritic tradition in which he survives the Blessed One only to refuse to attend the First Council.

Concluding Remarks

It need hardly be pointed out that traditions about Gavampati are multifarious and diverse. It is also clear that they grew and evolved in a variety of directions. Rather than try to reduce their diversity to a single theme, without addressing the question of whether there were or are many Gavampatis, I would like to respect their multiplicity which strikes me as already present in Sanskrit texts and the Pali Canon.

Instead of attempting to review them, I would like to end with a brief note of my own. At one point in his important article on the "Gavampati Tradition in Burma", H.L. Shorto (1970: 25) asks "what were the sources in Indian tradition from which the Burmese Gavampati legends sprang?" His immediate answer is "they are hardly to be sought in the Pali Canon", and his final conclusion is "I believe that the ultimate source of our legend is to be found in Northern [Sanskrit] Buddhist tradition". More carefully, Emmanuel Guillon (1983: 55) and François Lagirarde (2000: 75), in their invaluable analyses of the present Southeast Asian legends and cult of Gavampati, end up pointing to non-Sinhalese, "non-orthodox" traditions as a primary source of Gavampati lore in the region. In this, they reflect current scholarly trends to complexify the

[31] This theme of converting "one last person" that one is due to convert is also found in the Buddha's biography, in the story of his preaching to Subhadra from his deathbed. See Strong 2001: 181–182.

picture of Buddhism in northern, or mainland, Southeast Asia as having roots other than Sri Lankan Theravada.[32]

Over 30 years ago, in a book on the arhat Upagupta (Strong 1992: 4), I noted that one of the extraordinary things about him—and indeed one of the appealing things for some devotees—was that there was no mention of him in the Pali Canon or in the standard Sri Lankan commentaries. As we have seen, this is not the case with Gavampati. For him, the seeds of later Southeast Asian traditions may be found in both Sanskrit traditions and the Pali Canon and Commentaries. Thus, a final account of his polymorphic personality seems more a matter of ongoing "syncretism" rather than one of confrontation and survival. But it is a syncretism of a particular sort—one that reinterprets and expands upon the Pali and Sanskrit traditions in order to transform Gavampati into a major figure in the Southeast Asian Buddhist pantheon.

Acknowledgments

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[32] François Bizot (e.g., 2000) and others have dedicated themselves to recovering still extant elements of this "lost", and persecuted tradition.

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Tracing Gavampati in Burma

Donald M. Stadtner[1]

Abstract—The monk Gavampati, a disciple of the Buddha often known in Southeast Asia as the "Fat Monk", is examined at two locations: Pagan (Bagan) between the 11th and 13th centuries, and in the southern region known as Rāmaññadesa in 15th-century Mon traditions. Epigraphy, Mon, Burmese, and Pali chronicles, and archeological evidence indicate his diverse roles, from associations with kingship at Pagan to later traditions concerning the introduction of Buddhism and tooth relics in the south. Earlier scholarship maintained that this legendary figure arose in Burma (Myanmar) during the first millennium, but a re-examination of a stone image discovered in Rangoon (Yangon) in 1948 challenges this conventional view of the monk's historical trajectory.

Keywords: Buddhist Relics; Gavampati (Fat Monk); Lower Burma (Rāmaññadesa); Mon Buddhism; Myanmar Archeology

Background and Sources

Both Mon and Burmese traditions in Burma (Myanmar)[2] drew upon a wide corpus of Pali literature, including the Canon itself, together with its commentaries and related Sri Lankan texts. Although the two traditions had access to the same external sources, they highlighted different narratives. In most cases, the Pali origins of myths circulating in Burma can be readily identified, yet the reasons why one tradition favored certain legends over others remain unclear. From the beginning, narratives adopted from Pali literature were subject to continuous indigenous accretions (Stadtner 2015a); this helps explain why Gavampati's career in Burma bears little or no relationship to the occasional biographical notices found in traditional Pali and Sanskrit literature (see John Strong, this Special Edition).

Gavampati, an early Buddhist monk known in Pali sources as a disciple of the Buddha and often associated with miraculous powers, became in Burma the focus of vernacular legends and traditions that developed independently of these canonical references. For example, Gavampati's native place is named Bārāṇasī (Banaras) in the Pali *Vinaya,* but Mon inscriptions and chronicles cast him as a resident of Mithilā, or, in Mon, "Mituiw".[3] Some local inscriptions and chronicles touching on Gavampati are dated while others are not; thus, charting

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[2] Older place names, such as Burma, Pagan, and Pegu, are preferred by the author; the official modern forms, such as Myanmar, Bagan and Bago, are used only in the contemporary context—*Editor's note*.

[3] It appears that only a single Burmese chronicle lists Gavampati's hometown as Banaras, the late 18th-century *Vaṁsadīpanī*, completed in 1794 by Jinalankaradhaja, the orthodox "*Vinaya* jurist" (Pranke 2004: 130).

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a reliable chronology for the monk's multiple personae throughout the second millennium in Burma is similar to a jigsaw puzzle with an unknown number of missing pieces. Myths resemble mighty rivers drawing upon innumerable tributaries, large and small, making tracing origins and permutations difficult. For instance, Gavampati's key role in salvaging a tooth-relic from the Buddha's funeral pyre was almost certainly derived from an earlier 13th-century Sri Lankan Pali work, the *Dāthavaṁsa,* or *The Chronicle of the Tooth* (trans. Law 1925). This work stated that a monk named Khema recovered a tooth from the pyre **[Figure 1]**; this tooth-relic, according to modern Sri Lankan belief, came eventually from Kaliṅga (modern Odisha) in India to be worshipped in Kandy.

Gavampati rose to official prominence in only two moments in Burma's history: first, during the reign of Kyanzittha (1084–1112) at Pagan (Bagan) and, second, in the 15th century in the Mon kingdom whose center was Pegu (Bago), or Haṁsavatī. Many of the sparse episodes relating to Gavampati in 15th-century Mon epigraphs became scaffolds for vastly embellished narratives in subsequent Mon chronicles compiled in local monasteries. Despite his former importance, however, Gavampati is largely forgotten in Myanmar today. By contrast, images of the so-called "Fat Monk", poetically described as "bulging belly built" (Baker & Pasuk 2024: 45), are prominent in Thailand and Laos, where they are often identified with (Mahā-) Kaccāyana (Lagirarde 2001; see also Gregory Kourilsky, this Special Edition).

Gavampati's many diverse roles during the second millennium cloud any clear unitary trajectory. For example, earlier Pagan-period inscriptions make no reference to his later contribution in acquiring the tooth-relics (see below). Moreover, even the same episode witnessed enormous variation. For instance, 15th-century Mon inscriptions spotlight only a single tooth-relic that multiplied itself 33 times at the Buddha's funeral pyre in India.[4] Yet a later Mon chronicle claims that the monk recovered not one but all four eyeteeth in India, which were then miraculously transformed into 32 relics at Thaton by a miracle jointly effected by Gavampati and his brother, the king of Thaton (Tun Aung Chain 2010: 11). Such examples, along with many others, highlight the malleability of Gavampati's persona and suggest that it is wiser to speak of many Gavampatis across the ages rather than to seek a single historical figure, as H.L. Shorto (1970) urged long ago. These variations also illustrate how different versions of the same legends commonly coexist—for instance, in the contradictory explanations offered for the symbolism of particular Buddhist relics or how different miracles are ascribed to the same Christian saint.

Although Gavampati appears to have been important during the two

[4] The best complete published source for Mon inscriptions, translated into Burmese, is Chit Thein 1965. The key Mon inscriptions are listed in H.L. Shorto *A Dictionary of Mon Inscriptions* (pp. xxvii–xxxii), but the most comprehensive up-to-date list was compiled by Christian Bauer, "Preliminary Inventory of Mon Inscriptions" (http://sealang.net/oldmon/). Few of the 15th-century inscriptions have been translated, but the late government epigraphist, Nai Pan Hla (1923–2010), translated into English the most important examples for me. Inscriptions referred to in this article are cited by the page numbers in Shorto's *Dictionary* (1971: xxxi-xxxii) and Nai Pan Hla's *Buddhist Narratives* (1987: 26, 29, 40).



Figure 1: The monk Gavampati in Burma was modeled on the flying monk Khema depicted here; Kaunghmudaw Pagoda, Sagaing; painting on a metal panel by Maung Ba Thein, 1960s © Donald Stadtner

aforementioned periods, depictions of him are rare in Burma. This paradox may be explained by the fact that the monk played no decisive role in the two subjects most favored by artists, namely the major life stories of the Buddha and the Jatakas. Even Gavampati's far more famous canonical companion, the arhat Yasa, is rarely depicted in later illustrated manuscripts, where he sometimes appears with his fellow arhats in identical monastic garb (Herbert 1993: 47; San San May & Igunma 2001: 134). Murals from the Konbaung period (1752–1885) depict Gavampati only in the context of the 80 Great Disciples (*asīti mahāsāvaka*s), each identified by ink captions. Importantly, Gavampati is portrayed like the others —as the 12th disciple to the right of the Buddha—kneeling as a monk, and never as the Fat Monk. Examples occur at the Sulamani temple, Pagan **[Figure 2]**[5] and at Anaint village in Chaung-U Township, where each monk—named in Burmese—is drawn from a list preserved in the commentarial tradition, notably in the *Theragāthā Commentary* (Tha-a III 205–206).

Hence, written records constitute our primary sources. One of the most likely sources for Gavampati, the disciple of the Buddha (treated concisely by John Strong in this Special Edition) has long been recognized as the Sanskrit *Mahākarmavibhaṅga*, or *The Great Classification of Acts*, composed in the first millennium CE. This text lists six individually named monks sent to missionize six foreign lands in Jambudvīpa, among which was Gavampati, assigned to convert Suvarṇabhūmi, the "Land of Gold" (Lamotte 1988: 268). The monk's

[5] Julian Wheatley (pers. comm.) reads this caption: "*u.rū ve ḷa kassapa thar || gavaṁpati thar 'arhaṅ || puṇṇa ji thar 'arhaṅ* || viz., "Thera Uruvela Kassapa; Thera Ashin Gavampati; Thera Ashin Puṇṇaji".



Figure 2: Gavampati (center) in a row of the 80 Great Disciples, each identified by an ink inscription; south corridor, Sulamani temple, Pagan, 1775–1800 © Donald Stadtner

missionary role in the *Mahākarma-vibhaṅga*, however, was never invoked in Pagan-era inscriptions and appears only much later in the 15th-century inscriptions from Lower Burma. The Mon homeland was identified as the Land of Gold, and this congruence likely helped explain the Mon preference for Gavampati. Moreover, because Gavampati's biography in early Pali literature was neither as extensive nor as celebrated as that of other disciples —such as Sāriputta, Moggallāna, or Upāli—the Mon adoption of Gavampati may have offered a relatively blank slate for new myth-making. Many modern summaries of Gavampati's career conflate episodes from 15th-century Mon inscriptions with later material from chronicles, but this approach obscures the resulting chronological layering and its cultural implications, shaped by the Burmanization of the Mon region in Lower Burma beginning in the 16th century.

Gavampati in Upper Burma

Kyanzittha's Inscriptions

The earliest conclusive evidence for Gavampati's worship in Burma consists of seven Mon inscriptions issued by King Kyanzittha at Pagan in the 11th–12th century (ed. Duroiselle 1919, 1923). The précis below is based on these

inscriptions. First, it begins with the Buddha's prophecy to Ānanda at the Jetavana Monastery, foretelling that Viṣṇu (*Bisnū*), assuming the appearance of a sage (*risi*), would construct the city of Śrīkṣetra (*Śrī Kṣet*) together with "my son, Gavampati" (*kon ey Gawaṁpati*), King Indra (*smiṅ In*), Vissakamma (*Bissukarmmadewaput*), and a *nāgarāja* named Katakarman (*Katakarmmanāgarāja*) (ed. Duroiselle 1919: 114). The Buddha then deputed Gavampati to the Tāvatiṁsa heaven (*Tāwatiṅ*) to inform King Indra of the prophecy regarding the founding of Śrīkṣetra (Ibid., 114–115). Indra then descended from heaven to earth and informed Viṣṇu that Gavampati, Vissakamma, and Katakarman would found the city of Śrīkṣetra (Ibid., 127).

The Buddha further prophesied to Ānanda that Śrīkṣetra would come into existence "in the year when [he would] achieve *nirvāṇa*" (Ibid., 141). This prediction emphasized the Buddha's stake in the formation of the city at Śrīkṣetra and underscored the role that both the Buddha and Viṣṇu would play in the birth of Kyanzittha at Pagan. This principal narrative in the Pagan inscriptions finds a direct parallel with Sri Lanka's 5th-century *Mahāvaṁsa*, in which the nation's founder, Prince Vijaya, was foretold by the Buddha to reach Sri Lanka's shores at the time of the Buddha's death, thus echoing a nearly identical notion in the Pagan inscription. Moreover, not only do both the Mon and Sri Lankan versions accord Viṣṇu a key role, but both also describe him as a hermit. Such compelling affinities suggest that the version recorded at Pagan likely adapted the basic narrative from the earlier *Mahāvaṁsa* (Pranke & Stadtner 2015). The *Mahāvaṁsa* never included Gavampati, but the chronicle itself was well known at Pagan during Kyanzittha's time, when large sections of the text were illustrated among the murals of Kyanzittha's own Kubyaukgyi temple, dated to *circa* 1112, whose captions are translations into Mon from the Pali *Mahāvaṁsa* (Luce 1969–70: I, 380).

Second, although Gavampati was grouped together with several deities in these Pagan-period inscriptions, he was singled out for special significance insofar as the Buddha himself requested only him to visit the Tāvatiṁsa heaven to inform Indra of the prophecy regarding Śrīkṣetra. The text then skips immediately to the Buddha's death in Kusinārā (*Kusinār*), stating that Gavampati ascended for a second time to the Tāvatiṁsa heaven to inform Indra of a second prophecy: that a sage named Viṣṇu would be reborn 1,630 years after the Buddha's death as Kyanzittha in Arimaddanapūra, Pagan's formal name (ed. Duroiselle 1919: 115). Another inscription adds that the hermit Viṣṇu had previously been a wealthy merchant in Banaras at the time of Kassapa Buddha; this merchant was later born into the royal line at Pāṭaliputra (*Pātaliputtanagara*), King Aśoka's capital. He was subsequently reborn in the family of King Rāma of Ayodhya (*Ayodhapūr*). During the lifetime of the Buddha, Viṣṇu was reborn as the sage (*risi Bisnū*), living on a "silver mountain" named Kelasa (*Kelāsaparwata*) (Ibid., 139).

Third, one of Kyanzittha's inscriptions commemorated the consecration of a palace at Pagan in which "a golden statue of the Buddha, statue of the Lord Gawaṁpati, [and] with books of the

Vinaya, *Sutta*, (and) *Abhidhamma*" (ed. Duroiselle 1923: 37–38) was established. This sculpture of Gavampati therefore stood for the entire Sangha in this triad of objects that comprised the Three Jewels. This inscription is additional confirmation of Gavampati's key position during Kyanzittha's reign. How the artists at Pagan depicted Gavampati is uncertain, but he was probably represented as the Fat Monk, judging from a small number of such images found in Pagan and in Upper Burma (see below). There appear to be no textual explanations in Burma for the monk's corpulent appearance, unlike in Thailand and Laos, as François Lagirarde (2001) pointed out (see also John Strong and Gregory Kourilsky, this Special Edition).

The above-mentioned inscription describes in detail the consecration rituals of wooden pillars in a palace sacred to Nārāyaṇa (*Nār*), a common Sanskrit epithet for Viṣṇu (ed. Duroiselle 1923: 35). Nothing remains of this palace, but the belief that Viṣṇu was reborn as Kyanzittha is likely the background for the only extant Vaiṣṇava temple at Pagan, the Nathlaungkyaung, situated prominently within the ancient walled city (Pichard 1995: 236–239). No inscriptions date this temple, but it was probably planned to memorialize Kyanzittha's own descent from the deity Viṣṇu. The temple's outer walls and entrance hall collapsed centuries ago, but it was originally far larger and comparable in size to its neighbor, the Pahtothamya temple. The sanctum's outer walls still retain six original stone sculptures of Viṣṇu's major *avatāra*s: Varāha, Narasiṁha, Vāmana, Balarāma, Rāma, and Paraśurāma (clockwise from the entrance), all august deities that a king claiming ancestry from Viṣṇu would be only too glad for the association (Luce 1969–70: I, 221).

The Fat Monk Images

Despite Gavampati's importance during Kyanzittha's time, no extant depictions of the figure belonging to his reign have been recorded. Nevertheless, Gordon Luce and others identified small stone images at Pagan and elsewhere in Upper Burma as Gavampati, the Fat Monk (Luce 1969–70: I, 204–205; Lagirarde 2001: 101–134; Hudson 2011). These images, numbering some two or three dozen, differ slightly from each other, but the majority are under a foot in height (30 cm) and always show the corpulent monk seated **[Figures 3a–b]**. Some are clothed in a monk's robe, recognized by a hem, while the majority are bare-chested. The position of the hands varies: some with one hand on the other, resembling the meditation gesture, while others show both hands, splayed open, placed above the waist. Most were made of stone; a few are in terracotta or wood, and a single crude example in bronze exists. The poor craftsmanship of this small group contrasts with many large Pagan-age stone sculptures. Little uniformity marks these images, apart from the monk's seated position and corpulence.

The dates for these objects are difficult to fix, but they appear to fall mostly toward the end of the Pagan period or later (pers. comm., Samerchai Poolsuwan). Although some published images were found within ruinous stupas, the majority have no confirmed findspots (Luce 1969–70: II, pls. 90–91). Apart from being deposited within a



Figures 3a–b: Small stone images depicting the seated Fat Monk; Pagan period or later; approx. 30 cm, Bagan Archeological Museum © Thein Lwin

stupa, the function of these small stone figures is unknown. Were these crafted in ateliers for personal devotion by laymen or monks, or made to deposit inside stupas? Why are there so few? And why are the examples generally so crude in appearance? No major large stone images of Gavampati have been found at Pagan, nor is the monk depicted among the site's extensive mural art during this period. In addition, the numerous stone inscriptions at Pagan, following Kyanzittha's reign, no longer spoke of Gavampati, strengthening the conjecture that Gavampati's popularity faded soon after Kyanzittha's rule. However, the existence of these later small images indicates that the memory of Gavampati was never completely forgotten at Pagan and in Upper Burma during the late medieval period.

Why Gavampati's stature diminished at Pagan after Kyanzittha's time invites speculation. Perhaps a negative reaction emerged following his reign, both at court and in the Sangha, in protest against undue and unwelcome Mon cultural and political influence. It may also be no coincidence that Gavampati's decline in importance coincided with the replacement of the Mon language by Burmese in inscriptions and mural captions after the reign of Kyanzittha. That the deity Viṣṇu never again achieved importance at Pagan after Kyanzittha's time can perhaps also be attributed to this conjectured negative reaction to earlier Mon influence.

The real explanations behind Gavampati's decline at Pagan will probably never be known, but the memory of the monk endured in Lower Burma, where his significance expanded dramatically in the 15th century.

Gavampati in Lower Burma

There are two major historical sources for Gavampati during the second millennium in Lower Burma. The earlier consists of a large group of Mon inscriptions from the second half of the 15th century, while the latter comprises Mon, Burmese, and Pali chronicles composed in monasteries after the conquest of the Mon country (Rāmaññadesa) in 1538.[6] Some 50 or more stone inscriptions survive in Mon from the second half of the 15th century in Lower Burma and fully seven accord Gavampati a principal role. Only two of the seven retain their dates, both from 1486; most can be attributed to the reign of the famous Mon king Dhammaceti/Dhammazedi (1470–1492; Shorto 1971: xxx–xxxi).

Dhammaceti's Pali and Mon inscriptions at Pegu's Kalyani Monastery do not attribute the conversion of Rāmaññadesa to Gavampati but rather to two arhats, Soṇa and Uttara, who were dispatched from India at the time of King Asoka, centuries after the lifetime of the Buddha. This account in the Kalyani text borrows from Sri Lankan traditions beginning with the *Dīpavaṁsa* and *Mahāvaṁsa*. The other 15th-century Mon inscriptions, by contrast, generally champion Gavampati's role in the conversion of Rāmaññadesa. Paradoxically, the contemporaneous Kalyani inscriptions exclude him altogether. Perhaps the authors of the Kalyani text felt constrained by the weight of Sri Lankan orthodoxy, leaving no place for a competing version of the conversion of Lower Burma engineered by Gavampati during the lifetime of the Buddha.

In the Mon inscriptions, however, the roles attributed to the two arhats, Soṇa and Uttara, differ completely from those in the *Mahāvaṁsa* and the Kalyani inscriptions. In the later texts they were sent to missionize the "Land of Gold" (Suvaṇṇabhūmi), whereas in the earlier Mon inscriptions their task was to discover and restore lost and ruinous stupas rather than to conduct missionary activity (Shorto 1971: xxxi; Nai Pan Hla 1987: 20, 27, 30, 38). Sri Lanka likewise received visits from the Buddha, but accounts depict him chiefly occupied with chasing demons off the island and settling a quarrel among contentious snake-kings, thereby setting the stage for the island's celebrated conversion centuries later through the arrival of Asoka's son Mahinda.

The composite image of Gavampati that emerged from these Mon inscriptions later provided platforms for elaborate myths in subsequent chronicles. For example, the inscriptions never address Gavampati's parentage, but later chronicles added miraculous episodes concerning his mother. In one story, when she was seven years old, milk

[6] The best introduction to Mon chronicles is Tun Aung Chain 2010, a Burmese translation of a Mon chronicle whose narrative begins in the late 16th or early 17th century. The most relevant Mon histories are discussed by Shorto (1963, 1970). Another important work is the *Slapat rajawan datow smin ron* (သုပတ်ရာဇာဝင်ဒဟောဝ်သ္ဒီရောင်; Halliday 2000). Many of the basic legends involving Gavampati are summarized in the *Sāsanavaṁsa* (trans. Law 1952) and in the Burmese *Vaṁsadīpanī* (Pranke 2004).



Figure 4: Two hermits raised the offspring of two snake eggs, one became Gavampati and the other the king of Thaton; Daw Pwint's Pavilion, Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon, painted panel, 1930s © Donald Stadtner

flowed from her breasts into the monk's mouth in Thaton, thereby publicly demonstrating their kinship in previous lives. This episode appears in at least two late Mon chronicles: the undated *Uppanna sudhammawati rajawaṁsakatha* (ဥပ္ပန္နသုဓမ္မဝတီရာဇဝံသ) and a chronicle titled *Gawampati* (ဂဝမ္ပတိ), *circa* 1710 (Shorto 1970: 18; pers. comm., Mathias Jenny). The Pali *Sāsanavaṁsa*, written in Burma in 1861, omits this "milk-flowing" episode but states that Gavampati journeyed to Suvaṇṇabhūmi to save his mother from "demerit leading to hell", since she was living among "hunters and fisherman" (trans. Law 1952: 41).

Another example concerns the monk's family. The 15th-century inscriptions are silent on this subject, apart from noting that Gavampati and the king of Thaton were "kinsmen" (Shorto 1970: xxxi; Nai Pan Hla 1987: 8). Later chronicles, however, claim that Gavampati and the future king of Thaton were in fact brothers hatched from two eggs abandoned by a snake-goddess (*nāga-ma*) who had coupled with a wizard (*weizka*) **[Figure 4]**. The chronicles further relate that the wife of the Thaton king and her sister were also born from two snake eggs, the king's wife eventually becoming a major *nat* goddess known

today in Burma as Shwe Nan Kyin (Stadtner 2015a: 164). These examples, among many others, illustrate how episodes in Gavampati's biography were stretched in multiple directions. A key unresolved question is to what degree, if any, such colorful mythological material was already current in the 15th century but remained unrecorded in inscriptions. These later embellishments might be classified as folklore, perhaps intended for an illiterate peasantry, but these narratives were taken up in Burmese, Mon, and Pali historical and religious chronicles that were composed by the elite.

Three core myths appear in the Mon inscriptions of the 15th century. Dating their origins is impossible, but they may have arisen as early as the 14th century, perhaps during the reign of the celebrated Mon king Rājādhiraja (r. 1384–1420) (Shorto 1963: 574). The most famous of the three underpinned the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon and centers on hair relics brought to Burma from Bodhgayā by two merchant brothers. The second concerns six hermits who received hair relics from the Buddha in Thaton. Only one of the three myths includes Gavampati, whose dual roles involved inviting the Buddha to convert Rāmaññadesa, at the request of the king of Thaton, and obtaining a tooth relic from the Buddha's funeral pyre **[Fig. 1]**. This tooth multiplied itself 33 times in India, each relic being enshrined in a stone stupa—*cela ceti* (P., *selacetiya*)—by the king of Thaton, Gavampati's "kinsman" (Shorto 1971: xxx; Nai Pan Hla 1987: 8).[7]

As mentioned earlier, Gavampati's retrieval of a tooth relic was modeled on the monk Khema in the medieval Sri Lankan Pali work *Dāthavaṁsa*. In that text Khema likewise removes a tooth from the embers at Kusinārā. A replica of this tooth, eventually worshipped in Kandy, was later sent to Burma and enshrined near Mandalay at the Kaunghmudaw Pagoda in the 17th century (Stadtner 2015a: 239). But how did artists depict Gavampati during the peak of his importance in Lower Burma in the 15th century? To answer this question, we must revisit an image of Gavampati discovered at the Botataung Pagoda in colonial Rangoon at the end of World War II, together with another sculpture unearthed at Pegu in 2000.

Gavampati in Rangoon and Pegu

On 8 November 1944, Royal Air Force bombers flattened the Botataung Pagoda, situated a stone's throw from the bank of the Hlaing River and about a mile (1.6 km) south of the famous Strand Hotel in Rangoon (modern Yangon). The rebuilding of the stupa began when five lay notables drove gold stakes into the ground to inaugurate the stupa's reconstruction on Independence Day, 4 January 1948. As the brick rubble was

[7] The dispersal of the 33 tooth relics throughout Lower Burma by Soṇa and Uttara is recounted as a *fait accompli* in the late Mon chronicles (Shorto 1963), but this dispersal legend does not appear in the 15th-century Mon inscriptions. The distribution of the 33 tooth relics is treated in at least one chronicle, the *Shwemawdaw thamaing* (ရွှေမော်ဒေါသမိုင်း), edited by Thet Tin, and possibly also in a Pali inscription at the Shwemawdaw Pagoda (pers. comm., Jason Carbine). Apart from the Shwemawdaw, no other stupas can be positively associated with the dispersed tooth relics (Stadtner 2011). Shorto connected the distribution of these relics to the wider Mon polity symbolized by the 32 Mon principalities, or *myo*s (1963).



Figure 5: Stone reliquary once *in situ* at the center of the relic chamber, Botataung Pagoda; containing an image of Gavampati and a miniature gold stupa, 15th century; photo dated 1948, Rangoon © *The Light of Dhamma*

cleared, few members of the Botataung Rehabilitation Committee could foresee the enormity of what lay below the surface. An eyewitness, the Australian David Maurice (1899–1981), whose pen name was Maung Ohn Ghine, recorded the discovery in *The Light of the Dhamma* (1953; hereafter *The Light*). At a depth of seven feet (approx. 2 m) a relic chamber was exposed measuring 20 feet square (approx. 6.1 × 6.1 m) containing some 700 objects scattered within the chamber. The objects, "precious stones, ornaments, jewelry, terracotta plaques, and images of gold, silver, brass, and stone", were never properly catalogued, but dozens are now displayed in glass cases within the hollow shell Botataung Pagoda, whose completion coincided with the opening of the 6th Great Buddhist Council that Prime Minister U Nu convened at the Kaba Aye Pagoda in 1954 (*The Light*: 8).

In the center of the relic chamber, protruding from the floor, was a laterite cone, 27 inches in height (approx. 68 cm), that enclosed a small stone stupa-shaped reliquary, standing 15½ inches tall (approx. 39 cm), composed of a circular base capped by a separate tapered top, now on display at the Botataung Pagoda. The only known photograph of this stone reliquary *in situ* was published by Maung Ohn Ghine (*The Light*: 10) **[Figure 5]**. Its basic shape and its two-part design conform broadly to a

small number of stone examples from Pagan that cannot be firmly dated (Luce 1969–70: II, pl. 414.c).

Leading monks concurred that "as an act prompted by good motives and religious faith it would be quite meritorious to open the casket" in the presence of worshippers (*The Light*: 8). The top was then removed to reveal two objects: a stone image of Gavampati and a hollow repoussé gold stupa-shaped object **[Figures 6a–b]**. The gold stupa measured 4½ inches in height (approx. 11 cm) and featured four seated buddhas on the base, each with its hands in the meditation gesture. The miniature stupa was made from a single sheet of hammered gold with a visible vertical seam and was supported by an octagonal base fashioned from a small sheet of silver. Inside the gold stupa was a "gold cylinder of three-quarter-inch length [about 1.9 cm, ...] that contained two small body relics, each the size of a mustard seed, and a sacred Hair of the Buddha [...] coiled round and fastened with a little lacquer on which there were traces of gold plaster" (*The Light*: 11). The single hair inside the miniature gold stupa created a sensation that quickly changed the mythic foundation of the Botataung Pagoda, told below. The crude stone figure of Gavampati, however, was immediately overshadowed by the hair relic, but the sculpture captured the attention of Luce, who illustrated the image in his major study of Pagan (1969–70: II, pl. 91a–c). However, Luce misattributed the object to the 7th century.

Very quickly a fresh myth arose that incorporated the newly discovered hair relic into the emerging national narrative based on the Shwedagon Pagoda. The hair relic, with no evidence, was thought to have been gifted to the Botataung Pagoda by the same two merchant brothers who returned from Bodhgayā to Rangoon with hair relics intended for the Shwedagon. In this new retelling, this strand of hair was actually enshrined prior to the relics that were interred within the Shwedagon. The sign above the entrance proclaims that the Botataung Pagoda is "The Buddha's First Sacred Hair Relic Pagoda". The hair relic is the chief object of worship today and is placed beside a modern sunken shaft whose location marks the center of the ancient stupa. The pagoda's two earlier Mon myths, centered on tooth relics from Thaton, were soon jettisoned and are no longer remembered, providing a case study in how myths can drift in and out of history even within a generation or two (Stadtner 2015a: 115). At the beginning, the bone relics were woven into the earlier Mon myths by Maung Ohn Ghine, but this narrative was soon dropped in favor of an episode connected to the Shwedagon. The newly built Botataung Pagoda symbolized the spiritual and physical renewal that the new Buddhist nation embarked upon at independence.

The hundreds of terracotta tablets recovered from the relic chamber exhibit a wide chronological distribution but furnish an approximate date for the stone Gavampati. The earliest tablets belong to the second half of the first millennium and are similar to those commonly associated with the Pyus at Śrīkṣetra and the Mons of Lower Burma (Luce 1985: pl. 73a, d). Later tablets show affinities with those from the



a



b

Figures 6a–b: The miniature gold stupa, the stone reliquary top, and the stone image of Gavampati (a); the two objects originally placed within the stone reliquary (b); 15th century, Botataung Pagoda Museum, Yangon © Donald Stadtner

Pagan period (Luce 1969–70: II, pl. 175; Luce 1985: pl. 73b). The latest tablets are probably from the 15th century. Such a broad range of tablets found in the same relic chamber indicates multiple interments occasioned by repeated rebuilding of the stupa over many centuries. One group of tablets included the "earth goddess", depicted wringing out her hair at Bodhgayā and washing away the demons of Māra and his army. This specific Buddhist theme never appeared during the Pagan period and probably arose in Burma by the 14th or 15th century. This group, together with the interred stone reliquary, probably signals the final construction phase of the stupa until its exposure in modern times. No written records exist, but the relic chamber was likely sealed before the collapse of Mon rule in Lower Burma in 1538.

The Botataung Pagoda was one of a number of laterite stupas from the same period in Rangoon, such as the Sule and the Kyaikkasan. The most spectacular of these Mon-period stupas was found near the Shwedagon in 1860 and contained an early 15th-century gold sheet inscribed in Pali, gold and silver objects, and bone relics from Rājādhiraja's reign. The key finds, including the bone relics, long ago entered the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (Stadtner 2015b).

As stated above, the stone Gavampati image and miniature gold stupa from the Botataung Pagoda were misattributed by Luce to the 7th century, a conclusion that led directly to the misleading notion that the worship of Gavampati in Burma began at that time or before (Luce 1969–70: II, pl. 75). Luce's error was understandable since he incorrectly thought that the small stone reliquary contained a third object, a clay tablet with its reverse side bearing the well-known *ye dhammā* formula "inscribed in a 7th-century hand", an error repeated in a publication after his death (Luce 1985: II, pls. 75, 162). The only published eyewitness account stated clearly that the reliquary contained only two objects and that the inscribed clay tablet was found not in the stone reliquary but within the relic chamber (*The Light*: 8, 11). Yet the 7th-century proposed date for the Botataung's stone Fat Monk, first suggested by Luce, is highly unlikely, since decades of archeological exploration at scores of sites throughout Burma have failed to yield a single image of Gavampati that can be securely attributed to the first millennium.[8] Luce's misattribution, however, was accepted by Lagirarde (2001) and is still generally accepted by scholars of Burma (e.g., Saw Tun Lin 2018: 190).

Key evidence for dating the Gavampati image, 4½ inches in height (approx. 11 cm), are traces of gilded lacquer on the base **[Figure 7]**. Lacquer was also "coiled around" the hair relic found in

[8] Similar claims have been advanced for small terracotta images of the "Fat Monk" discovered in Thailand, including one found by Pierre Dupont in 1940 at Chedi Chula Prathon in Nakhon Pathom, and a small "hunchback" piece now in the Walters Art Museum (25.57) in Baltimore. The latter lacks archeological context and its date therefore remains uncertain. The example from Chedi Chula Prathon was reportedly recovered as a surface find atop the monument, providing no stratigraphic basis for assigning it to the 7th or 8th centuries. Another small bronze image, interred together with three bronze buddhas (now on display at the Ramkhamhaeng National Museum), was discovered within a small stupa in the compound of Wat Mahathat, Sukhothai. This context instead suggests veneration of the figure in the 13th–14th centuries or later—*Editor's note.*



Figure 7: Miniature stone image of Gavampati, found within the stone reliquary, with traces of gilded lacquer on the base; 15th century, approx. 11 cm, Botataung Pagoda Museum, Yangon © Donald Stadtner

the gold stupa (*The Light*: 11). The image of Gavampati was certainly once completely coated in gilded lacquer, and the large loss of its gilded surface probably reflects repeated offerings made by worshippers. That this image was included in the stone reliquary signifies its once highly venerated position, despite its small size and crude execution. Its placement in the reliquary, probably during the 15th century, not only confirms the importance of Gavampati for the Mons at that time but also helps demonstrate that Gavampati was depicted as the Fat Monk. It also adds weight to Luce's assumption that these images found in later Pagan and elsewhere in Upper Burma (see above)

should indeed be identified as Gavampati. Although lacquer is closely associated with Burma, it was not until after the Pagan period that its use became widespread, therefore establishing a mid-second-millennium date for the gilded lacquer Botataung image (Isaacs & Blurton 2000: 22).

Also, the gold repoussé stupa placed inside the stone reliquary shares the tapered contour of a small stone stupa found in a relic chamber belonging to a ruined stupa in Pathein in the western reaches of the Irrawaddy Delta, a major Mon principality of the Haṁsavatī kingdom. This example can probably be dated by a Mon stone inscription to 1524, found in the ruins (Shorto 1971: xxxii). Inside the relic chamber were discovered over a hundred small monk-like stone figures in a kneeling position, labelled arhats in the archeological report. One is possibly Gavampati, described only as "with a protuberant belly with the hands pressing against it" (Maung Mya 1936: I, 206; II, pl. 118d). There are too many figures to associate them with the 80 Great Disciples, but if the aforementioned figure is Gavampati, then this indicates that the monk was known, unsurprisingly, to artists in the Western Delta in the 1520s and included among arhats.

Another stone image of Gavampati was discovered more recently in Pegu (modern Bago) when an enormous reclining brick Buddha image was cleared of jungle in 2000 and rebuilt the following year. It is located only a stone's throw west of Pegu's famous recumbent Buddha, the Shwethalyaung, which was also cleared of jungle and rebuilt in the 1880s. Scattered about the base of the recently recovered Buddha, now called Myathalyaung, were hundreds of small stone buddha figures displayed in an adjacent pavilion. All the figures were seated buddhas, with hands in the earth-touching gesture. However, a single image of Gavampati was recovered, shown with one open hand placed on his crossed legs and another against his belly **[Figure 8]**. There is no certainty that the head now attached to this Gavampati is the original, since the heads of most of the images broke off long ago and were recently joined with headless buddha images recovered in the rubble. These images probably date to the 15th century, since nearly a dozen glazed tiles showing the demons of Māra datable to Dhammaceti's reign were recovered at the base of the reclining image (Stadtner 2015a: 146).

These small stone images were likely donated by individuals. While there was an overwhelming preference for standard buddha images, this sculpture makes clear that Gavampati was a subject familiar to Pegu sculptors. However, it seems true that no large and impressive images of Gavampati appear to have been created during the very period when contemporaneous Mon inscriptions attest to the monk's importance. This situation in Burma can be contrasted with northern Thailand where, for example, a large image of Gavampati (there known as Kaccāyana) was possibly on view within the compound of Wat Phra That in Haripunchai (modern Lamphun) by *circa* 1517 (Baker & Pasuk 2024: 45).

Whither Gavampati?

The reasons behind Gavampati's eclipse are not altogether clear, but the monk



Figure 8: Stone image of Gavampati discovered at the base of an enormous reclining Buddha; 15th century, approx. 30 cm, open pavilion, Myathalyaung Pagoda, Bago © Donald Stadtner

is largely unknown today in Myanmar, playing only an unspoken tangential role at the Golden Rock, or Kyaikhtiyo. There, Gavampati is merely reckoned as the brother of the "Thaton king", who himself is remembered only as the first patron of the hair relics enshrined in the Golden Rock. A handful of recent sculptures at the Golden Rock depict the Thaton king and his queen, the venerated *nat*-goddess Shwe Nan Kyin, but images of Gavampati are nowhere in sight. In truth, Gavampati was never associated with hair relics, but only with tooth relics, a category gradually supplanted by hair relics throughout Lower Burma. Indeed, although a few major stupas today still commemorate tooth relics,

such as the Shwezigon at Pagan/Bagan and the Kaunghmudaw near Sagaing, these are not associated with Gavampati but with Sri Lanka (Stadtner 2015a: 230, 237). With no longer any important tooth-relic stupas associated with Gavampati, the Fat Monk, inevitably receded in importance in the country following the Mon demise in the 16th century.

Perhaps a more important reason for Gavampati's diminished importance was the rise of an alternative myth accounting for the conversion of Burma. This legend originated in Inwa, or Ava, the capital of Upper Burma, and was first recorded in a Burmese text, the *Yazawinkyaw* (မဟာသမ္မတဝံသ), compiled *circa* 1520. The narrative stemmed directly from a Pali commentary, the *Puṇṇovādanasutta-aṭṭhakathā*. The location of the legendary events was transposed to Upper Burma, where the historical Buddha converted the nation's inhabitants at the legendary Sandalwood Monastery, a site identified near the Irrawaddy River between Pagan and Prome (modern Pyay) and now memorialized by a large stupa. This myth was also tied directly to two stone footprints that the Buddha is believed to have made on a nearby tributary of the Irrawaddy, today a major annual pilgrimage destination known as the Golden Footprint, or Shwesettaw (Pranke & Stadtner 2015).

This legend grew in popularity and eventually overshadowed the Mon traditions that highlighted Gavampati, beginning when the former Mon country was gradually Burmanized following the fall of Pegu in 1538. For example, even Gavampati's role in the foundation of Śrīkṣetra (see above) was omitted in the *Yazawin kyaw* and replaced by a legendary king named Duttabaung, who had no connection to traditional Buddhist sources. Gavampati was included in the early 19th-century *Glass Palace Chronicle*, or *Hmannan mahayazawindawgyi* (မှန်နန်းမဟာရာဇဝင်တော်ကြီး), but only in a subordinate role vis-à-vis Duttabaung. The once-celebrated monk was merely lumped together with a *nāga*, a *garuḍa*, and others who conferred with Sakka (Indra) "about the founding of the city [Śrīkṣetra]", prophesied by the Buddha and brought to fruition by Duttabaung. Burmese today associate Śrīkṣetra not with Gavampati and Kyanzittha but solely with Duttabaung, basing their views on the account expressed in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (Stadtner 2015a: 210). The focus in the later Burmese chronicles was therefore squarely on Duttabaung, leaving Gavampati only a minor supporting role. The compilers of the *Glass Palace Chronicle* also noted that two late chronicles even omitted Gavampati altogether in the formation of Śrīkṣetra (Pe Maung Tin & Luce 1923: 14–15). In sum, by the Konbaung period the introduction of Buddhism to Burma became largely associated with the Buddha's visit to the Sandalwood Monastery in Upper Burma, thus casting Gavampati's role into the shadows.

However, perhaps the most relevant reason for Gavampati's eclipse was that Rāmaññadesa was inexorably settled by Burmese speakers for whom Gavampati was virtually unknown or associated with the defeated Mons. Although the triumphant Burmese eagerly embraced certain major former Mon hair-relic sacred sites—such as the Shwedagon, the Kyaikkhauk Pagoda near Syriam, and the Golden Rock—there was little enthusiasm for tooth-relic stupas. That

there are today no major stupas in Lower Burma commemorating tooth relics speaks to this. One instructive example was Pegu's towering Shwemawdaw Pagoda, a major pilgrimage site for all of modern Burma/Myanmar. In Dhammaceti's day the Shwemawdaw was revered for one of the 33 tooth relics dispersed by Soṇa and Uttara but, beginning in the 16th century, this myth was replaced by a legend associated with two merchant brothers and two hair relics conveyed from India to Burma, a narrative that clearly piggybacked on the Shwedagon myth in nearby Yangon (Stadtner 2011).

Perhaps Gavampati, so closely associated with the Mons, had become too tainted by his connection with the *ancien régime* and a need was felt for fresh myths, especially those modeled on the popular Shwedagon foundation legend based on hair relics. A senior Burmese historian, Tun Aung Chain, once jested to me that the Burmese perhaps furnished Pegu's Shwemawdaw Pagoda "with a legend à la Shwedagon which gave prominence to down-to-earth traveling merchants rather than to sky-flying Gavampati". Perhaps there is some truth to this whimsical observation.

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Intertextuality in Thai–Lao Buddhism: The *Gavampatisutta*

Gregory Kourilsky[1]

Abstract—Reflecting his prominence in Thai–Lao Buddhism, the Buddha's disciple Gavampati is the subject of a corpus of texts recounting the religious career of the "Fat Monk" and culminating in his final extinction (*parinibbāna*). Although these narratives have received some scholarly attention, closer study of their manuscript transmission and textual features invites a reassessment of their structure, intertextual relationships, and circulation. This article examines the *Gavampatisutta* within the broader context of Tai Buddhist literary production, highlighting its links with Pali canonical and post-canonical traditions, the role of *nissaya* literature in vernacular transmission, and the articulation of themes such as merit-making and filial piety across Thai–Lao communities.

Keywords: Filial Piety; *Gavampatisutta*; Manuscript Transmission; Pali *Nissaya* Literature; Thai–Lao Buddhism

Introduction

The *Khavampattisut* (ຄະວັມປັດຕິສູດ; "the *sutta* of Gavampati") is a Pali–Lao text recounting the teachings of the Buddha's disciple Gavampati. It is preserved in two extant manuscripts from Laos (formerly the kingdom of Lan Xang) and exists in numerous related versions circulating in Thailand under various Siamese and Pali titles. Although it shares its name with a Pali canonical discourse in the *Saṁyuttanikāya* (S V 436–37), these texts differ significantly in content, structure, and narrative scope. This contrast reflects the broader divergence between Gavampati's marginal role in early Pali tradition and his far greater prominence in later Thai–Lao Buddhism.

In the Pali scriptures, Gavampati appears among the early converts of the Buddha (Vin I 15–20; see also John Strong, this Special Edition), but he remains a secondary figure within the Sinhalese textual corpus. By contrast, Southeast Asian traditions—especially those associated with Mon–Burmese historiography—credit him with introducing Buddhism to Thaton (Sudhammapura) in the Mon country (Rāmaññadesa), thereby elevating him to a foundational role in the religious history of the region (Lagirarde 2005; see also Donald Stadtner, this Special Edition). This expanded status is also reflected in the visual and ritual traditions of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, where Gavampati enjoys widespread popularity and is depicted in distinctive forms, most often with a protuberant belly, seated in meditation. His corpulent appearance—which led Western observers to refer to him as the "Fat Monk"[2]—

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[2] This colloquial designation, first coined by Gordon H. Luce (1969–70: I, 208), is not used in vernacular languages and does not occur in Buddhist texts.

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Figure 1: Hybrid representation of Gavampati–Qieci; 20th or 21st century, Wat Phan Tong, Chiang Mai © Gregory Kourilsky

is not attested in India or Sri Lanka. As Lagirarde (2005: 131) points out, this distinctive iconography has often given rise in Thailand to confusion between "Phra Khawam" (พระควัม) and the corpulent Chinese "Laughing Monk" Qieci 契此 (also known as Budai 布袋), who is frequently identified as an incarnation of the future Buddha Maitreya and whose image is commonly installed in both Buddhist monasteries and Daoist temples. It is not always possible to determine whether the confusion arising from the resemblance between these two figures is intentional **[Figure 1]**.

In Thailand and Laos, Gavampati has also been popularly known as Phra Sangkachai (พระสังกัจจายน์) or Phra Kachai (พธะภะจาย). The origin of this appellation, which is not attested in Myanmar, remains unclear, but it suggests an identification with (Mahā-)Kaccāyana, another eminent disciple of the Buddha.[3] François Lagirarde (2004: 98) dates this association to the Rattanakosin period in Siam and to an earlier period in Lan Na. An inscription on a bronze statue of the "Fat Monk" from Laos attests that he was already identified as Phra Kachai in Lan Xang by the mid-17th century **[Figure 2a]**.[4] Other inscribed images from Laos indicate that the monk

[3] Mahākaccāyana of the canonical tradition is also well represented in the vernacular corpus, where several texts are specifically devoted to him. See Lagirarde 2001.

[4] The inscription states, in a stereotypical formulation, that the sponsor "had this image of Phra Kachai made with the aim of ensuring that the [Buddhist] doctrine would endure for 5,000 years [after the Buddha's Great Extinction]". It gives the exact date of the statue's consecration as year [100]9 of the Little Era (CS = *cūḷasakarāja*), corresponding to 17 March 1648 CE.



Figures 2a–b: Two bronze images of Phra Kachai; bearing donative inscriptions, dated 1648 CE (a) and 1845 CE (b); Ho Pha Keo Museum, H. 35 cm, inv. no. 230 & 333, Vientiane © Catherine Raymond

continued to be known by this name in the mid-19th century Laos **[Figure 2b]**.[5]

This article focuses on the Lao *Khavampattisut* as a textual artifact, examining its manuscript transmission, variant titles, and intertextual connections within the broader corpus of Tai Buddhist literature. By situating it within this regional and textual network, the study aims to clarify how local traditions reworked canonical and post-canonical materials to produce new narratives centered on Gavampati, thereby contributing to his enduring prominence in Thailand and Laos.

Gavampati in the Thai–Lao Manuscript Tradition

Louis Finot (1917: 66) first mentioned a vernacular "*Gavaṃpati-sutta*" (i.e., *Khavampattisut*) in his monumental study of Lao literature.[6] He provides a summary of what he describes as a "hagiographic legend", emphasizing the central place occupied in the narrative by Gavampati's final extinction (*parinibbāna*). Finot detected an inspiration from the canonical *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (D II 72–168) and noted the existence in Laos of similar accounts relating the *parinibbāna* of other eminent disciples such as Ānanda, Sāriputta, and Mahākassapa.

[5] An inscription likewise dedicated to "Phra Kachai," very similar to the previous one, is engraved on the base of a statue of the Fat Monk, dated 22 March 1845 (also indicated in the Little Era). I am grateful to Michel Lorrillard for providing the dates and transcriptions of these two inscriptions.

[6] Finot in fact first mentions this text—described as an "apocryphal Jātaka"—as early as 1914, in a letter addressed to the Commissioner General in Luang Prabang (Lagirarde 2001: 313).

This parallel is particularly relevant since, as Lagirarde (2000) later demonstrated, (*pari*)*nibbāna* narratives constitute a literary genre in their own right within the Thai–Lao Buddhist corpus, especially in Siam (central Thailand).[7]

This genre, attested in both monolingual Pali and vernacular compositions, may be regarded as a subcategory of sutra (*sutta*), as some titles clearly suggest (see below). The *Khavampattisut* is composed in vernacular Lao, more precisely in the form of a *nissaya*: the main text, written in Lao, is interspersed with Pali terms or passages that are glossed or explained in the vernacular.[8] Such bilingual Pali–vernacular compositions, or "bitexts"—a term coined by Trent Walker (2022a: 271)—constitute a major component of the Buddhist manuscript corpus not only in Laos, but also in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

Lagirarde was the first to offer a study and French translation of the *Khavampattisut* (2001: 321–443), more than 80 years after its initial mention by Finot. He also compared this Lao *nissaya* with related versions of the Gavampati narrative from central Thailand, where the text exists both in monolingual Pali and in Siamese translation. No Pali–Siamese *nissaya*, however, was identified in his survey.

The titles of these Pali and Siamese manuscripts reflect the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the Fat Monk, referring at times, as explained above, to Gavampati and at others to (Mahā-)Kaccāyana—although this confusion does not appear in the texts themselves, which consistently refer to Gavampati.[9] This ambiguity, combined with that of the literary genres to which these works belong, results in considerable variation in the titles—for example, *Gavampatisutta*, *Gavampatinibbāna*, *Braḥ Gavampatinibbānasutta*, *Kaccāyananibbāna* in Pali and their Thai equivalents (Lagirarde 2000: 76).

Such diversity contrasts with the situation in Laos, where this narrative is known only through two manuscript copies identified to date. Both are Pali–Lao *nissaya* and uniformly entitled *Khavampattisut*. The first (Khs1), lacking a few folios, is preserved at the National Library of Laos or NLL **[Figure 3a]**. It likely corresponds to manuscript no. E 210 listed in the "Liste générale des manuscrits laotiens" appended to Finot (1917: 184). This classification number refers to the EFEO library collection, then located in Hanoi, which was transferred to the NLL following the country's independence in 1954. Although its exact provenance is unknown, the manuscript was probably among the texts collected by Finot during his first mission to Luang Prabang in 1900, when he was appointed director of the newly established École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO).[10] The manuscript served as the basis for the later edition and French translation by Lagirarde.

[7] These hagiographic accounts seem to have first been written and circulated independently before compilation as the *Nibbāna of the 80 Great Disciples* (*Asītimahāsāvakanibbāna*). See Lagirarde 2000: 59–61, and 2006; also Schnake 2024.

[8] Word-for-word translation or gloss (*namsap*, ນາມສັບ; Skt, *nāmaśabda*) and the translation or explanation of extended quoted Pali passages (*vohan*, ໂວຫານ; P., *vohāra*) are comparable to *nissaya* (McDaniel 2008).

[9] A Pali manuscript from the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) illustrates this well: the title folio gives *Kaccāyanasutta*, while the colophon states "the *Gavampatinibbānasutta* is finished" (*Gavampatinibbānasuttaṁ niṭṭhitaṁ*). See Filliozat 2020: 46–47.

[10] "Laos" in *BEFEO* 21: 308–312.



Figure 3a: First folios of the *Khavampattisut* manuscript in Pali–Lao, dated 1697/8 CE, National Library of Laos, Vientiane © NLL

This palm-leaf manuscript originally consisted of two fascicles totaling 49 folios, with an additional cover folio. It is written in Lao Tham (*dhamma*) script, in four lines on both sides. Three colophons—one on the verso of the first folio and two at the end—state that Khs1 was copied in [10]59 CS, that is, of the Little Era **[Figure 3b]**, corresponding to 1697/8 CE.[11] The craftsmanship and condition of the folios, as well as the spelling and style of the colophons, are characteristic of 17th- and 18th-century manuscripts. The colophons further indicate that the copying of the manuscript was commissioned or sponsored by a dignitary holding the rank of *saen* (ແສນ; "ruler of one hundred"), named Mongkhun (ມຸງຄຸນ), together with his wife, who express the conventional wish for the Buddha's teaching to endure for 5,000 years and for them to attain nirvana. Trent Walker (pers. comm.) has identified this dignitary as an active sponsor of other Lao manuscripts in the late 17th century.

The second manuscript of the *Khavampattisut* (Khs2) is preserved in the collection of the Luang Prabang Museum, formerly the Royal Library. This collection was established at the instigation of Government Commissioner Meillier, who, noting the dilapidated state of the city's monastic libraries, persuaded the monarch of Luang Prabang, Sisavang Vong (r. 1904–1945), to found the "Bibliothèque royale" in 1914 (Finot 1917: 2). Khs2 consists of three fascicles totaling 74 folios and is complete. It likely corresponds to the

[11] A handwritten note in modern Lao script was added to the manuscript's cover folio, apparently in the 20th century, incorrectly giving the date 2459 BE (= 1916 CE) as that of the copy. The error likely arises from a fine scratch at the end of the word *sangkalat* (ສັງກຣາດ, "era") in one of the colophons, which could be misread as the numeral 4—thus [2]459 BE. This misreading also misled Lagirarde (2000: 76; 2001: 400) who interpreted it as 1902 CE.



Figure 3b: Detail of the colophons, bearing the date [10]59 CS = 1697/8 CE © NLL

manuscript in three fascicles labeled R 466 in Finot's inventory, formerly kept in the Royal Library. Like Khs1, it is a Pali–Lao *nissaya*, written in Tham Lao script,[12] dated 1216 CS (= 1854/5 CE). The text contains numerous errors in the Pali passages, a feature often observed in relatively late manuscript copies in Laos.[13] Khs1 and Khs2 are very similar in content but differ in some details, suggesting that they were copied from different exemplar manuscripts.

The dates recorded in the colophons of these two manuscripts are particularly valuable, as none of the available examples from central Thailand provide a date of copying, let alone composition. In their case, only codicological features —such as craftsmanship, layout, and possibly handwriting—offer approximate indications. On this basis, Jacqueline Filliozat has tentatively dated a Siamese manuscript of the *Mahākaccāyananibbāna*, preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF PALI 409), to the 18th century.[14] The date 1059 CS (1697/8 CE) recorded for Khs1 therefore provides a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of this narrative. This date broadly coincides with the earliest securely dated image of the Fat Monk in Laos, which, as we have seen, bears a donative inscription giving the year [100]9 CS (= 1648 CE) **[Fig. 2a]**. This period shortly precedes the fragmentation of the Lan Xang kingdom (1707 CE) into the principalities of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Champassak. The date of Khs2, in turn, shows that the *Khavam-*

[12] The title appearing in the margins of the first folio of each fascicle is respectively *Khavampattisut nisai* (ຄะวัมปัดติสูดนิไส) and *Nisai Khavampatti* (นิไสคะวัมปัดติ), that is, "The *Nissaya* of the *Gavampati*[*-sutta*]".

[13] Lagirarde (2001: 314) correctly identified this copy in Finot's list but was unable to locate it at the time of his doctoral research. Thanks to the extensive inventorying and digitization work initiated in 1992 by Harald Hundius and later continued by David Wharton, these Lao manuscripts are now readily accessible online at: https://iiif.crossasia.org/s/dllm.

[14] Cited in Lagirarde 2000: 58, n. 3. According to Lagirarde, this palm-leaf manuscript is probably among those sent to France from Ayutthaya by the MEP Missionaries before the city's destruction in 1767.

pattisut continued to be copied in Luang Prabang as late as the eve of the French colonial period, a fact also consistent with the presence of the Fat Monk in the statuary of that time **[Fig. 2b]**.

Finot (1917: 177) compiled his "general list" of Lao manuscripts on the basis of a small number of monastic library inventories. One might expect that more extensive surveys would yield additional copies of the *Khavampattisut* or related texts. However, this does not appear to be the case. The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, which catalogs more than 12,000 items, does not list any other copy under this title or a related one. The text also appears to be absent from catalogs in northeast Thailand, despite the predominantly Lao-speaking population of the region. While the existence of additional, as yet unidentified copies cannot be excluded, the available evidence suggests that the text did not enjoy the same level of popularity in the Lao sphere as it did in Siam or central Thailand.

Even more strikingly, no text related to Gavampati has yet been identified in the manuscript collections of northern Thailand, despite the close affinities between the religious corpora of Lan Xang and the former Lan Na kingdom.[15] Nor does it appear in Burmese collections, notwithstanding the popularity of the Fat Monk in Myanmar, as attested by both late chronicles and popular imagery—a situation paralleled in northern Thailand, where his statues abound in temples and monasteries. Finally, in Cambodia, no similar text has been identified to date.[16]

Gavampatisutta and *Khavampattisut*: A Comparison

The relationship between the Pali *Gavampatisutta* preserved in Siamese manuscript collections and the Lao *Khavampattisut*—a vernacular *nissaya* version of the same narrative—can be clarified through a close comparison of their structure, language, and textual features.

Considering the various extant versions of the narrative of Gavampati in Siam and Laos, the question arises as to which served as the basis for the others. The most straightforward assumption is that the Pali version preceded the vernacular ones, which would then represent translations or adaptations. Some caution is nevertheless required, since in mainland Southeast Asia it is not uncommon for Pali texts to have been reconstructed from vernacular compositions.[17] Only a close comparison between the Pali and vernacular versions can shed light on this issue. Such a comparison is now possible thanks to the available critical edition of the monolingual Pali *Gavam-*

[15] Some Lan Na manuscripts belonging to the so-called *nibbāna* genre have been recorded in various online databases, but none seem to concern Gavampati or (Mahā-)Kaccāyana (see also Cœdès 1966: 94–95). Further research is needed to determine whether the *Khavampattisut* is attested in the manuscript traditions of other Tai-speaking Buddhist groups, such as the Tai Lue or Tai Khuen.

[16] I would like to thank Olivier de Bernon and Trent Walker for checking whether this was indeed the case in the available catalogs of Cambodian manuscripts.

[17] This is the case, for instance, with the *Jinakālamālī* (Jkm), a Pali chronicle that was compiled in part from various earlier chronicles written in Tai (Penth 1994: 48). It is also known that some Burmese legal codes in Pali are translations from vernacular models—the latter themselves possibly derived from earlier Pali compositions. See, for example, Huxley 1996: 84; also Lammerts & Kieffer-Pülz 2025.

patisutta and its vernacular edition in Lao of the *Khavampattisut*.[18]

All versions present a hagiographic account of Gavampati, from the circumstances of his "transformation" to his nirvana. The narrative structure is broadly consistent across versions, with only minor variations. It may be divided into three main parts:

1. The story of the monk Brahmaputta, one of the 80 Great Disciples of the Buddha (*asīti mahāsāvakās*), living in the "city of the Golden Land" (*Hemabhūminagara*),[19] renowned for his religious fervor and physical beauty. To avoid being mistaken for the Buddha, he transforms himself into a potbellied, hunchbacked dwarf, and takes the name Gavampati.[20]
2. An account of Gavampati's monastic life as an arhat, culminating in his successful conversion of a householder named Sambala through an extended sermon—his last before entering final extinction. In this sense, the title *Gavampatisutta*/*Khavampattisut* may refer either to this sermon or to the narrative as a whole.
3. The final episode recounting Gavampati's death and attainment of *parinibbāna*, envisioned as a great city made of crystal.

Despite their titles, the *Gavampatisutta* and the *Khavampattisut* do not conform to the structure of a classical sutra. They do not begin with the standard Pali formula *evaṁ me sutaṁ ekaṁ samayaṁ bhagavā* [...] *viharati* ("Thus I have heard: at one time the Blessed One was residing [...]"), which traditionally signals that the discourse was "heard" (*suta*) by an auditor—often identified as the disciple Ānanda—from the Buddha himself. Whereas canonical sutras typically depict the Dhamma as spoken by the Buddha, often in verse (*gāthās*), the Thai–Lao narratives place such teachings in the mouth of Gavampati (Lagirarde 2001: 328).

Both the monolingual Pali and the Siamese-language versions begin directly with the story of Brahmaputta, alias Gavampati: *ekasmiṁ kira samaye eko mahāthero Brahmaputto nāma* [...] ("At one time, there was a great elder named Brahmaputta [...]"). The Lao *Khavampattisut* retains this opening but precedes it with an incipit in Pali verse, loosely following the *anuṭṭhubha* (Skt, *anuṣṭubh*) meter. Although not identical, the incipits in Khs1 and Khs2 are closely related. Both take the form of an exhortation addressed to an implied audience by an unidentified narrator, followed by a Lao translation or gloss in *nissaya* style, which is rendered here in English.

[18] For the Pali edition, see Javier Schnake, this Special Edition; for the Lao text, see Lagirarde 2001: 476–506.

[19] This may be a reference to Suvaṇṇabhūmi, possibly a region of Southeast Asia.

[20] Javier Schnake (this Special Edition) is likely correct in interpreting the Pali compound *gavaṁ-pati* as "Lord of Speech", rather than "Lord of Cattle". While the latter, more literal interpretation (*go* = "ox, cow") may appear more straightforward, it makes little sense in the canonical context. By contrast, all versions agree that the monk acquires the name Gavampati because of his ability to convert beings to the Dhamma through the harmonious recitation of the teachings and the use of appropriate speech (Khs1 [2B]).

Khs1:

Namo tass' atthu
yo sāvakānaṁ pavaro |
seṭṭho thero ñātīnaṁ |
damakusalo karissāmi | taṁ
parinibbānaṁ taṁ sunātha[21]
samāhitaṁ ||

[Homage to Him.]
[***sādhavo***:] O Everyone!
yo thero: The Elder who, ***pavaro***: was more excellent, ***sāvakānaṁ***: than [all the other] disciples, ***seṭṭho***: the best [among them], ***damakusalo***: and skilled in training, ***ñātīnaṁ***: his family and relatives, [***ahaṁ***:] I, ***kathesāmi***:[22] will speak about, ***taṁ***: that Elder, ***parinibbānaṁ***: who has already reached final extinction.
[***tumhe***:] O all of you!
samāhitā:[23] who have already established your mindfulness, ***sunātha***: listen, [***taṁ vacanaṁ***:] to the words I am about to utter as follows.

Khs2:

Namo tass' atthu
vanditvā sirasā buddhaṁ |
sasaddhammagaṇuttamaṁ |
upaṭṭhākānañ ca
ovādādinna-|gavampattissa
ekatherassa ||
nidānaṁ bhāsissaṁ |
sādhavo sukham icchantā |
dvisotaṁ odahitvāna | taṁ
suṇātha samāhitā ||

[Homage to Him.]
[***sādhavo***:] O Everyone!
[***ahaṁ***: I,] ***vanditvā***: having paid homage, ***buddhaṁ***: to the Buddha—the Enlightened One who understood the entire Dhamma by himself perfectly, ***sasa***[***d***]***dhammagaṇuttamaṁ***: who is complete with his teaching for good people and his noble assembly (*saṅgha*) that is excellent—***sirasā***: with my head, [***bhā***]***sissaṁ***: I shall speak, ***nidānaṁ***: the story of the past,[24] ***ekatherassa***: of one great Elder, ***uppaṭṭhākānañ ca ovādā***[***di***]***nnaṁ Gavampattissa***: whose name is Gavampati, and who [f. 2] instructed families devoted to the service [of the Saṅgha].[25]
sādhavo: O Everyone!
tumhe: you, ***sukha***[***m***] ***icchantā***: who surely seek happiness for yourselves, ***odahitvāna***: please keep, ***dvisotaṁ***: your two ears wide open, ***samāhitvā***:[26] establish mindfulness, ***suṇātha***: and listen to, ***taṁ nidānaṁ***: this story!

For both versions, this introductory speech functions as a sermon, intended to be read aloud or recited in a liturgical setting rather than studied in solitude. In this respect, the *Khavampattisut* has

[21] Lagirarde (2001: 373) reads *tasmiṁ kathesi*.
[22] *karissāmi* in the verses.
[23] *samāhitaṁ* in the verses.
[24] Literally, *tamnan nithan* (ตำนานนิทาน).
[25] *takun upatthak* (ตะภูธอุปัดถาก; P., *kūla upaṭṭhāka*)—although *kūla* is omitted in the Pali section.
[26] *samāhitā* in the verses.

more in common with texts of the *anisong* (ອານິສົງ; P., *ānisaṁsa*, "advantage") or *salong* (ສະຫຼອງ, "celebration") genre than with a sutra, as understood in the canonical tradition.[27] Indeed, the excerpt from Khs2 reproduced above explicitly refers to the "advantage" that listeners to this narrative are certain to obtain, possibly including the attainment of nirvana.

Additionally, the Lao *Khavampattisut* differs from its Pali counterpart not only in its homiletic form but also in its use of Pali terms, which are not primarily intended to convey meaning, but rather to legitimize the act of preaching and, potentially, to serve an educational function.

From a formal point of view, these excerpts exemplify a principle underlying many Southeast Asian "bitexts", in which Pali terms, isolated from their original context, are immediately followed by a literal translation or vernacular gloss. The *Khavampattisut* alternates Pali verses, delivered by Gavampati in direct speech, with narrative developments recounted in indirect discourse by an anonymous narrator. The monolingual Pali version from Siam follows the same structure; however, the prose passages are, by definition, entirely in Pali.

An illustrative excerpt from the *Khavampattisut* is given below,[28] in which Gavampati preaches to Sambala in order to convert him to the Dhamma:

[Folio 19B] He [Gavampati] then uttered the following verses (*gāthā*):
mātāpitā disapubbā | ācariyā dakkhiṇadisā |
ñātivaggā[29] **pacchādisā |**
bhariyāputtā ca uttarādisā |
dāsakammakarā heṭṭhā |
uddhaṁ samaṇabrāhmaṇā |

[***mātāpitā***: Fathers and mothers, ***disapubbā***: are called "the eastern direction"; ***ācariyā***: teachers, ***dakkhiṇadisā***: are called "the southern direction"; ***ñātivaggā***: family members, ***pacchādisā***: are called "the western direction"; ***bhariyāputtā***: children and wives, ***uttarādisā***: are called "the northern direction"; ***dāsakammakarā***: works and servants—male and female—***heṭṭhādisā***: are "the nadir"; ***samaṇabrāhmaṇā***: leaders in religious life, ***uddhaṁdisā***: are called "the zenith". ***thero***: The Elder Mahā-Gavampati, ***ahā***: continued:][30]
tātā: Listen, O Everyone!
mātāpitāro: Mother and father, ***mayā***: I, ***vuccati***: call them, ***pubbādisā***:[31] "the direction of the east". ***kasmā***: Why is that? ***vis***[***s***]***ajjanā***: The answer [is as follows]:

[27] On this literary genre, see Kourilsky 2007: 43–44.

[28] To avoid repetition and undue heaviness, only passages in Lao are translated into English; Pali passages (in bold) are left untranslated in the body of the text. This approach also reflects how Lao listeners—most of whom do not understand Pali—are likely to perceive the sermon.

[29] *ñātivatta* in the *Gavampatisutta* (see Javier Schnake, this Special Edition).

[30] This extended bracketed passage is absent from Khs1 and has been supplied here from Khs2.

[31] *disapubbā* in the verses.

hi: In truth, ***mātāpitāro***: fathers and mothers are called, ***pubbādisā***: "eastern direction", ***pubbapakāratāya***: because they were the first among all to show kindness[32] [toward us]. ***mātāpitaro***: [Indeed,] fathers and mothers, ***katvā***: having accomplished, ***puññaṁ***: meritorious deeds in the past first, ***akaṁsu***: then made, ***pa***[***t***]***thanaṁ***: a vow, thinking, "***mayaṁ***: we both, [***la***]***bhissāma***: wish to obtain, ***puttaṁ***: a son,[33] ***manāpaṁ eva***: exactly as desired [f. 20A], ***iminā puññena***: by means of our meritorious deeds!"

mātāpitāro: The mother and the father, ***mayā vuccati***: I therefore call them, ***pubbādisā iti***: "the eastern direction". ***putte***: As soon as the child, ***pajjāyamāne***: came out [of its mother's womb], ***mātāpitaro***: his parents, ***rakkhanti***: protected, ***posenti***: and raised, ***puttaṁ***: this very child. ***mātāpitaro***: Mother and father, ***niyojenti***: provided [***puttaṁ*** their child],[34] ***atthe***: with everything he needed, ***pubbe***: right from the beginning.[35] ***mātāpitaro***: Mother and father, ***das***[***s***]***enti***: then advised, [***y***]***uttakammaṁ***: on what was appropriate, ***putta***[***ṁ***]: for their child [to do]. ***pubbe***: From the earliest days, ***denti***: they provided, ***vatthālaṅkāraṁ***: cloths and adornments, ***puttassa***: to their child, ***puna***: afterward. ***mayā vuccati***: That is why I say that, ***mātāpitaro***: parents are, ***pubbadisā' ti***: "the eastern direction".

As Lagirarde (2001: 328) points out, this passage—particularly the opening Pali verses—is inspired by the *Sigālovādasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* (D III 191–192), in which the Buddha teaches a brahmin named Siṅgala how a "noble disciple" (*ariyasāvaka*) honors the six cardinal directions (*chaddisā*). However, several important differences should be noted. As mentioned above, the *gāthā* is presented in both *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* as Gavampati's own teaching, rather than as a discourse delivered by the Buddha, as in the canonical sutra. Although a minor detail, the recipient of the teaching is not the brahmin Siṅgala, but a certain Sambala, a lay follower (*upāsaka*) "of wrong views" (*micchādiṭṭhiko*) who had hitherto remained unmoved by the Dhamma (folios 18B–19A).

In fact, at the literal level, the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* borrow from the sutra only a couple of verses. Moreover, these Pali verses are not reproduced verbatim; in addition to variations in wording, the correspondence

[32] *khunopakan* (ຄຸໂນປะกาม; P., *guṇopakāra*). See explanation on this word below.

[33] Here, the Lao author translates *putta* as "son" (*sai*, ຊาย), in keeping with its original meaning in Pali. In other instances, however, he leaves the child's gender unspecified by using the term *luk* (ลูก).

[34] Found only in Khs2.

[35] The translation given here is based on the Lao gloss, which sometimes differs significantly from the strict meaning of the Pali term to which it refers. The same applies to the other excerpts below.

Table 1: The Six Directions and Their Social Referents in D III and *Gavampatisutta/Khavampattisut*

Directions	D III	*Gavampatisutta/Khavampattisut*
East	Parents (*mātāpitā*)	Parents (*mātāpitā*)
South	Teachers (*ācariyā*)	Teachers (*ācariyā*)
West	Wife and children (*puttadāra*)	Family members (*ñātivagga*)
North	Friends and colleagues (*mittāmaccā*)	Wives and children (*bhariyāputtā*)
Nadir	Servants and workers (*dāsakammakarā*)	Servants and workers (*dāsakammakarā*)
Zenith	Ascetics and brahmins (*samaṇabrahmaṇā*)	Ascetics and brahmins (*samaṇabrahmaṇā*)

between the cardinal directions and the categories of persons to be venerated does not exactly match that of the canonical text.

Table 1 shows that the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* have, on the one hand, added "family members" (*ñātivagga*) and, on the other, omitted "friends and colleagues" (*mittāmaccā*) found in the canonical list. "Wives and children", here expressed as the compound *bhariyāputtā* rather than *puttadāra*, are associated with the north rather than the west, as in the canonical sutra, the latter direction being reassigned to "family members".

The addition of *ñātivagga* is significant, given the importance of family and forebears in the religious life of Thai–Lao Buddhist communities (see below). The reassignment of the cardinal directions—specifically, the attribution of the west to "family members" rather than to "wives and children", now associated with the north—may be explained by the traditional association of the west with death and, by extension, with ancestor worship.

Apart from the word-for-word translation that immediately follows the *gāthā*, the *nissaya* does not appear to be based on any text from the *Tipiṭaka* or its authorized commentaries or sub-commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*s or *ṭīkā*s). A close comparison between the *Gavampatisutta* and the *Khavampattisut* shows that the Pali words glossed in the latter text correspond precisely to those that constitute the body of the former. In other words, the *Khavampattisut* appear to function as a vernacular adaptation of the Pali version—though not of the entire text, but of selected passages. Exceptions may be attributed to a few minor additions or adjustments introduced by the Lao compiler, presumably for the sake of clarity.

As is the case for most *nissaya*s, the Pali terms are, moreover, rearranged from their original syntactic order to conform to Lao, which follows very different grammatical rules. This "syntactical rearrangement" (Walker 2022a: 274) renders the Pali scarcely intelligible to anyone unfamiliar with this method of composition, to the point that one might even question the existence of an original Pali text (Lagirarde 2001: 325).

The following passage from the Pali version (see also Javier Schnake, this

Special Edition) corresponds to the excerpt from the *Khavampattisut* cited above. The index numbers, given as subscripts below each word, indicate the order in which the Pali terms appear in the Lao *nissaya*; the absence of a number indicates that the word is omitted in the Lao text:[36]

thero āha:
"tātā$_{1}$ kasmā$_{5}$ mātāpitā$_{2}$[37]
'pubbadisā$_{4}$' ti vuccanti$_{3}$.[38]
pubbapakāratthāya$_{3}$[39] mātāpitaro$_{2}$
hi$_{1}$ pubbe puññaṁ$_{5}$ katvā$_{4}$ "iminā$_{11}$[40]
pamāṇena$_{10}$[41] puttaṁ$_{9}$ labhissāmā$_{8}$"[42] ti
patthanaṁ$_{7}$ akaṁsu$_{6}$ tasmā mātāpitaro$_{1}$
'pubbadisā' ti$_{3}$ vuccanti$_{2}$.[43]
pajāyamāne$_{2}$ putte$_{1}$ puttaṁ$_{6}$
rakkhanti$_{4}$ posenti$_{5}$ mātāpitaro$_{3}$.
pubbe$_{4}$ atthe$_{3}$ puttaṁ$_{2}$ niyojenti$_{1}$.[44]
pubbe yuttāyuttakamme$_{2}$[45] puttaṁ$_{3}$
dassenti$_{1}$.[46] pubbe$_{1}$ vatthālaṅkāraṁ$_{3}$
puna$_{5}$ puttassa$_{4}$ denti$_{2}$. tasmā
mātāpitaro$_{2}$ 'pubbadisā' ti$_{3}$ vuccanti$_{1}$.[47]

In summary, the Lao *Khavampattisut* evidently derives from the *Gavampatisutta* in Pali, for which numerous manuscripts are preserved in central Thailand. The question remains whether the former represents a direct translation from the latter by a Lao scholar, or an adaptation, rendered in Tham script and the Lao vernacular, of an earlier bilingual Pali–Siamese version circulating in Khom script, that is, a form of Khmer script commonly used for Buddhist texts in the central region. Although no such intermediary version has yet been identified in northern Thai collections, the possibility of a transmission through Lan Na, already adapted into a northern Thai–Lao milieu and transcribed in Tham script, cannot be totally excluded.[48]

Gavampati and Filial Piety

The sutra dedicated to Gavampati sheds light on how Thai–Lao scholars composed texts that, while drawing inspiration from canonical or post-canonical writings, nonetheless constitute original works.

While taking, as we have seen, a passage from the *Sigālovādasutta* as their model, the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* differ from it—without ever explicitly referring to that source—in placing particular emphasis on the theme of filial piety. In the canonical sutra, the Buddha's instruction concerning obligations toward parents occupies only a few lines (see D III 189). In the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut*, however, Gavampati develops this argument in much greater depth. In fact, filial piety constitutes the most important part of the sermon that

[36] Significant variations in the *nissaya* in comparison with the Pali *Gavampatisutta* are indicated in the footnotes below.

[37] Khs1: *mātāpitaro.*

[38] Khs1: *mayā vuccati.*

[39] Khs1: *pubbādisā* [...] *pubbapakāratthāya.*

[40] Khs1: *iminā puññena.*

[41] Khs1: *mānapam eva*.

[42] Khs1: *mayaṁ* [...] *labhissāma.*

[43] Khs1: *mayā vuccati.*

[44] Khs1: *mātāpitaro niyojenti.*

[45] Khs1: *yuttakammaṁ.*

[46] Khs1: *mātāpitaro dassenti.*

[47] Khs1: *mayā vuccati.*

[48] Although they differ slightly in graphic form, "Tham Lao" and "Tham Lan Na" should be regarded as two closely related variants of the same script, just as the variants used by the Tai Lue of the former Sipsongpanna kingdom (Xishuangbanna 西双版纳) and the Tai Khuen of the Chiang Tung (Kengtung) region in Myanmar.

Gavampati delivers to Sambala; moreover, this sermon contains certain archetypal themes found in other texts from Thailand and Laos.[49]

For instance, the texts explain that, if parents are called the "eastern direction" (*pubbādisā*), it is because they are "the first among all to show kindness (*pubbapakāratāya*) [toward their child]". This interpretation of parents as the first benefactors in one's life does not occur in the canonical *Sigālovādasutta*. Here, the author seems to play on the double meaning of *pubba*, namely "before" and "east".

A similar vision of parents as the first benefactors in one's life can, on the other hand, be found in the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* (Maṅg-d), a Pali work composed in 1524 CE in Chiang Mai and one of the most widely disseminated Buddhist texts in Thai–Lao Buddhist communities (Kourilsky 2021: 69). Drawing both on the canonical *Sigālovādasutta* and on a passage from the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, the Maṅg-d states that, through their efforts and sacrifices for the well-being of their children, parents are their "first benefactors" (*pubbakārī*, lit., "those who have done [good] first"; Kourilsky 2015: 464, 474). Conversely, children are "[those] who must show them gratitude" (*kataññūkatavedī*). Gavampati speaks in similar terms of filial piety in the sermon he delivers at Sambala:

> [Folio 23B] ***putte vaḍhite ca mātāpitaro rakkhitabbā kathaṁ:***[50] How do parents take care of their children when they grow up?
>
> ***mātāpitaro***: Parents, ***putte niyojenti***: raise their children, ***kusalesu***: by having them perform meritorious deeds, encouraging them by saying: "***amma tātā tumhe***: Listen to us, children [f. 24A], ***tumhe***: you, ***rakkhatha***: must hold, ***sīlaṁ***: the precepts, ***tumhe***: [and] you, ***detha***: must practice, ***dānaṁ***: giving [toward the Community of monks]!"
>
> On the other hand, ***mātāpitaro***: mothers and fathers, ***nivārenti***: ought to prevent, ***putte***: their children, ***pāpeti***: from committing wrongful acts. ***taṁ putta-dhammarakkhaṇaṁ nāma***: This is what is referred to as "raising children in a righteous manner".
>
> ***pana***: In return, ***puttā***: children, ***rakkhanti***: [must] protect, ***mātāpitaraṁ***: their parents, ***dhammena***: in a righteous manner. ***mātāpitaro***: Just as parents, ***bahūpakārā***: have made many good deeds, ***puttānaṁ***: for their children, ***puttā***: children in turn,

[49] This topic is even more prominent in Khs1, which emphasizes in its incipit that Gavampati's merit came about because he "intelligently delivered the teachings [of the Dhamma] to his family and relatives (*ñātīnaṁ*)" (see above). Moreover, this echoes a passage from the *Sāsanavaṁsa*, the famous 19th-century Pali chronicle written by the Burmese monk Paññāsāmi, in which Gavampati travels to Sudhammapura (Thaton) in the Mon kingdom (Rāmaññaraṭṭha) to teach the Dhamma, with the particular aim of saving his mother from rebirth in hell (Sās 36).

[50] In some cases, strictly following the word order of the Pali text makes translation difficult—especially where the Pali itself is irregular or incorrect. In such instances, as here, words have been regrouped for the sake of clarity.

> ***anuppatikāraṇā***: must repay the kindness, ***mātāpitunaṁ***: to their parents. It is only right and proper!

This relation of reciprocity gives rise to the notion of debt—expressed in the Thai–Lao tradition by the concept of *khun* (ຄຸນ, "legacy"; P., *guṇa*, "virtue", "benefit", or "merit")—which makes parents creditors who must be repaid by caring for them, encouraging them to follow the path of the Dhamma, and performing rites for them after their death (Kourilsky 2022: 165–166). This is why the *Khavampattisut* glosses the Pali word *bahūpakārā* (lit., "of great help") with *khunopakan* (P., *guṇopakāra*), referring to the support provided by parents to their child. In this example, we can see how a "vernacular" gloss of a Pali word may be formed using a term that is itself borrowed from Pali but to which a slightly different meaning is applied. Here, the substitution of the term *guṇa* for *bahu* in the compound introduces the notion of a "debt" that children incur toward their parents from birth and that they must "repay" once they become adults. These archetypal themes are also found in Maṅg-d (Kourilsky 2015: 474–475), as well as in other texts from Thailand and Laos.[51] Gavampati then elaborates on this same theme:

> [Folio 27A] [To repay one's debt (*paṭigunaṁ*) to one's parents] ***puttā***: children, ***sampaṭicchiṁsu***: must agree, ***pāde pāde mātāpitunaṁ attano sisena***: to place their own head at their feet, ***sacce atthi mātāpitusu***: as long as their parents, ***jivamānesu***: are alive.[52]
>
> ***puttā***: All children, ***posenti***: [must] support, ***rakkhanti***: and protect, ***mātāpitare***: their parents, ***annenā vā pāṇena vā vatthena vā senāsanādīhi sabbupakārehi***: by providing them with basic necessities, such as food, drink, clothes, a dwelling-place, ***veyyāvaccakammehi ca***: or anything that may be useful [to them].
>
> ***puttā***: Children, ***mātāpitaraṁ bhāvanti***: make also their parents [f. 27B], ***bhāvanaṁ***: develop mind-cultivation on kindliness [towards all living beings] (*mettābhāvanā*), ***payojenti***: and encourage them, ***sabbakusalesu***: [to perform], merits of all kinds; ***mātāpitaro sace***: if their parents, ***gahaṇti***: hold, ***micchādiṭṭhiṁ***: wrong views, ***puttā***: then their children, ***patiṭṭhapesuṁ***: must reestablish them, ***sammādiṭṭhisu***: in the right understanding of things.
>
> ***sace hoti mātāpitusu***: When parents, ***avijjivamānesu***: are no longer alive—when they are departed—, ***puttā***: their children, ***sacce rakkhanti***: may observe, ***silaṁ***: the precepts, ***denti***: and make, ***dānaṁ***: offerings, ***sayaṁ***: themselves;

[51] An illustrative example is the Lao *Salong manda bida* (ສຫອງຄຸນມາຣດາບິດາ, "Celebration of Parents' Legacies"). See Kourilsky 2007.

[52] Here again, the Pali and Lao terms have been significantly rearranged in order to produce a more intelligible translation.

karonti: [they also may] commission, ***buddharūpaṁ***: the erection of an image of the Lord [Buddha]; ***sace ropenti***: they may plant, ***bodhirukkhaṁ***: a Bodhi tree; ***sace karenti***: [f. 28A] they may [order to] build, ***thūpa***: a stupa, ***vihāraṁ vā***: or a temple; ***sabbakusalakamma***: they may make any other meritorious act as well; ***gahetvā phalaṁ denti***: then they may give the fruit (*phala*) collected from these good deeds, ***tesaṁ mātāpitūnaṁ***: to their father and mother; ***puttā***: if the children, ***sace katvā sabbakusalakammaṁ udissa-puñña***: dedicate the merit obtained by all these good deeds to their father and mother, ***evaṁ mātāpitunaṁ dhammarakkha***[***na***]***ṁ nāma hoti***: the children are thus worthy of being called "those who have cared for their father and mother in a righteous manner".

The instructions addressed by Gavampati **[Figure 4]** to Sambala closely reflect the devotional practices of Lao Buddhists toward their parents, as well as those associated with funeral and post-funeral rites: participating in the construction of a temple or other religious building, planting a Bodhi tree, or erecting a stupa are all meritorious acts that can be dedicated to deceased parents (Kourilsky 2015: 181).

The theme of parents' immeasurable good deeds—understood as "legacies" that children must "repay" (*thaen khun*, ແທນຄຸນ; P., *paṭiguṇa*)—appears in several Thai–Lao Buddhist texts in a variety of forms: as a narrative, as in the *Gavampatisutta*; as an edifying sermon, as in the *Khavampattisut*; or as a recitation in dedicated rituals.[53] This trope also appears in the Buddhist literature of neighboring communities, especially in Cambodia (Kourilsky 2007). A particularly common motif related to this theme is the suffering experienced by mothers during childbirth, which Gavampati's sermon does not fail to evoke:

> ***putte***: When [her] child, ***kucchigate***: enters the womb, ***mātā***: this very mother, ***dassati***: starts making, ***dānaṁ atirekataraṁ***: larger donations that in the past.
>
> ***putte***: When [her] child, ***bandhabandhe***: has settled in the womb, ***mātā***: this very woman who consequently became a mother, ***anubhavanti***: begins to endure, ***mahāntaṁ dukkhaṁ***: great suffering, ***puttajitthāya mātā***: for her child's sake.
>
> ***kadāci***: Periodically, ***mātā***: the mother, ***kiḷantakāyā***: experiences pain in her body; ***duvaṇṇā***: on some days, ***kīsā***: she finds herself thinner, her complexion yellow; ***sakalasarīrā***: her whole body, ***rujanti***: is in a lot of pain.

[53] Besides the aforementioned *Salong manda bida* ("Celebration of Parents' Legacies"), another example is a Pali–Lao *nissaya* entitled *Thaen nam nom mae* (ແທນນ້ຳນົມແມ່; lit., "[The Buddha] repays [the price of] his mother's breast milk"), which recounts the journey the Enlightened One makes to Tāvatiṁsa heaven in order to repay the debt of gratitude to his mother Mahāmāyā, who died during childbirth. See Kourilsky 2015: 543–555.



Figure 4: Image of Gavampati depicted reading a palm-leaf manuscript, possibly reading instructions or preaching to Sambala; probably 19th century, Wat Ket Karam, Chiang Mai © Nicolas Revire

pajāyamāne kāle: When the time comes [f. 25A] to give birth to her child, ***mātā***: the mother, ***pāpuṇāti***: ends up, ***atirekataraṁ dukkhaṁ***: experiencing such intense pain, ***maraṇāpannaṁ eva***: that it feels like dying.

kadāci: Sometimes, ***mātā***: the mother, ***visaññī hutvā***: may lose consciousness, ***vinassanti***: and can be lost forever.

putte: When the child, ***pajāyamāne***:[54] is born, ***mātā***: his mother, ***lohita***[***makkhita***] ***sarīrā***: finds herself covered in blood; ***anubhavati***:[55] she then endures *evarūpaṁ dukkhaṁ*: such great suffering.

mātā: The mother [who has just given birth], ***āha***: asks, ***puttassa***: about her child, saying: "***kuhaṁ putto me*** [Where is my child]?". ***puttasinehena***: It is with great love for her child that she asks, "***putto*** [***me***] ***gato kuhaṁ***: Where has my child gone?". ***gahetvā***: She then takes, ***puttaṁ lohitimakkhitaṁ***: her child in her arms, even though he is covered in blood, ***nipajjāpetvā uro***: so that she can hold it against her breast, ***pāpesi khīraṁ***: and nurse him, ***aho***: indeed!

[Folio 25B] ***mātā***: The mother, ***bahupakārā***: thus does great good, ***puttānaṁ***: for her children.

[54] *pajāyakāle* in the *Gavampatisutta*.

[55] *anubhavitvā* in the *Gavampatisutta*. The change from the absolutive in the Pali version to the indicative in the Lao *nissaya* is one example among many of the adjustments made by its author to make the text more accessible to readers or reciters.

kadāci: At times, ***putto***: the child, ***vissajjesi***: makes, ***kirisaṁ***: his feces, ***muttaṁ vā***: or urine, ***bhājane***: fall into the food, ***bhojanakāle***: while [her mother] is eating; ***mātā***: the mother, however, ***na jigucchati***: is not disgusted by this, ***puttasinehena***: because of her love for the child.

kadāci: At times, ***putto***: the child, ***visajesi khelaṁ***: drools, ***millaṁ***: or defecates, ***bhājane***: into the food; ***mātā***: [his] mother, ***n'eva jigucchati***: is nevertheless not disgusted, ***bhojeti***: and still eats, ***muttak***[***a***]***rīsaṁ malaṁ makkhita***[***bhat***]***taṁ***: the rice soiled with saliva, urine, excrement, and vomit of her child.

mātusariraṁ: Although her body, ***puttassa malamuttasemhādi samissaṁ*** [f. 26A] ***sabbadā ahosi***: is constantly covered in her child's feces and urine, ***mātā***: the mother, ***na jigucchati***: shows no signs of rejection or disgust, ***āhāraṁ***: toward the food, ***puttassa tehi malamuttehi samissaṁ***: of her child, soiled with his feces and urine; ***aho***: really, ***mātā***: the mother, ***bahuppakārā***: is of great merit (*guṇopakāra*).

The suffering endured by the mother during gestation and childbirth is addressed in several canonical and post-canonical works—e.g., M I 266, Ja 532, Vism 305. However, this theme is particularly developed in Buddhist literature composed in mainland Southeast Asia.[56] It appears, for instance, in the Maṅg-d, which explicitly draws on the *Soṇandajātaka* (Ja 532). Vernacular meditation manuals—such as the *Mul preah kammatthan* (មូលព្រះកម្មដ្ឋាន) in Cambodia and the *Bualaphantha* (ບົວຣະພັນທະ) in Laos and Lan Na—remind the practitioner (*yogāvacara*) of the suffering their mother endure for their children (Lagirarde 1994: 68). Some exercises even require the *yogāvacara* to reproduce these sufferings through a series of ascetic practices: sleeping only in a sitting position represents the discomfort experienced during pregnancy; not sheltering from the sun evokes the pain endured when "being on fire" after childbirth, etc. (Bernon 2000: 475). The torments of the mother also feature in the Khmer "Prayer of Repentance" (*sma lia*, ស្មារឮ; see Bernon 2000: 748, 757; also Walker 2022b: 71–79) and in certain Lao formulas for "recalling the vital spirits" (*su khwan*, ສູ່ຂວັນ).[57]

The teachings on filial piety delivered by Gavampati certainly find echoes in canonical sources but, more importantly, form part of a hermeneutic tradition common to the entire region, transmitted over the centuries either through the circulation of texts or through oral transmission from master to disciple. A number of archetypal teachings—concerning parents' "legacies", the

[56] This theme is also often present in Chinese Buddhist texts (e.g., Cole 1998).

[57] Among these "formulas for recalling the vital spirits" that evoke the suffering of the mother, we may cite those for the "woman in labor" (*su khwan mae ok kam*, ສູ່ຂວັນແມ່ອອກກັ້ມ), the "candidate for ordination" (*su khwan nak*, ສູ່ຂວັນນາກ), or that recited for the bride and groom before the wedding (*su khwan noi kon taeng dong*, ສູ່ຂວັນນ້ອຍກ່ອນແຕ່ງດອງ). See Kourilsky 2015: 485.

filial duty to "repay" them, and the suffering of mothers during childbirth and breastfeeding—circulated widely, sometimes detached from their original sources, across Buddhist communities in mainland Southeast Asia. While certain passages in the Lao *Khavampattisut* relating to filial piety echo those found, for instance, in the Maṅg-d, this does not necessarily imply direct borrowing from the Lan Na text. Rather, as shown above, the former clearly derives from a Pali version of the same narrative that most likely originated in Siam. Far from being constrained by the *Gavampatisutta/Khavampattisut*, the phenomenon of intertextuality is fundamental to literary production in Thai–Lao Buddhist circles.

Concluding Remarks

Beyond its philological implications, the present case study offers broader insights into the historical circulation of texts and the dynamics of Buddhist literary production in mainland Southeast Asia. It highlights the role of regional centers in shaping both the transmission and transformation of Pali and vernacular traditions.

Close philological and comparative examination of the Thai–Lao Gavampati narratives indeed confirms our initial hypothesis that the Pali version predates the *nissaya* and other vernacular adaptations. Given the *terminus ante quem* provided by the dated copy of the Lao *Khavampattisut* (1697/8 CE), the composition of the Pali *Gavampatisutta* must go back, at the latest, to the end of the 17th century. The wide diffusion of this narrative—attested in both Pali and Siamese versions preserved in collections from central Thailand—and its relative absence in northern regions suggest that it was most likely composed in Ayutthaya, then the capital of Siam, where the composition of original Pali texts is well documented (Skilling & Santi 2002).

The story of Gavampati had thus already circulated well beyond the borders of the Ayutthaya kingdom prior to its destruction by the Burmese in 1767. It was evidently present in Lan Xang before the fragmentation of the Lao kingdom into several principalities (ca. 1707 CE). This pattern likely extends to other texts belonging to the so-called *nibbāna* genre, which are abundant in Siam but comparatively rare in present-day Laos. For instance, only a small number of manuscripts of the *Mahākassapanibbāna* have been recorded in Lao collections, whereas numerous copies—both in monolingual Pali and in Pali–Siamese *nissaya*—are preserved in central Thai collections (Lagirarde 2006: 108–110).[58] As in the case of the Lao *Khavampattisut*, the Lao *Mahakatsapaniphan* (ມະຫາກັດສະປະນິບພານ; "the *nibbāna* of Mahākassapa") appears to be a *nissaya* derived from a monolingual Pali version (*Mahākassapanibbānasutta*) that most likely originated in Siam.[59]

This textual relationship is particularly significant. While the close connections between the Buddhist

[58] Unlike the (*pari*)*nibbāna* narratives of Gavampati, those of Mahākassapa, Sāriputta, and Mahāmoggallāna are sporadically attested in Lan Na (Cœdès 1966: 94–95), but they are far less widespread than in the central plains of the Chao Phraya.

[59] This becomes apparent when comparing the respective editions and translations of the two texts produced by Lagirarde (2006), based on the Siamese version, and Schnake (2024), based on the Pali.

traditions of Lan Xang and Lan Na—evident in shared scripts as well as historical and political ties—have long been emphasized,[60] the role of Ayutthaya in shaping Lao Buddhism remains insufficiently explored. Between the 15th century and the first half of the 16th century, Lan Na functioned as a major regional center for Pali scholarship and textual production (Penth 1997). The Burmese conquest of 1558 disrupted this dynamic, and Ayutthaya appears gradually to have assumed a leading role in the production and transmission of Buddhist literature. Learned monks from Lan Na likely took refuge in Siam, bringing texts with them. Siamese collections, for example, preserve numerous copies of the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, along with many other Pali works originally composed in Lan Na.[61] These monks may also have continued to produce new texts in Pali while in Siam. It is also reasonable to assume that monks from Laos traveled to Ayutthaya for pilgrimage or study, from where they could have brought back texts to transcribe into local forms.

From this period onward, contacts between Lan Xang and Ayutthaya are indeed well attested in contemporary sources.[62] This was also the time when the royal capital of Lan Xang was moved from Luang Prabang to Vientiane, partly in response to Burmese pressure (Lorrillard 1995: 126). By the 17th century, at the height of Lan Xang's power, trade routes linking Ayutthaya with Vientiane—and even Luang Prabang—are known to have been active (Lorrillard 2014: 204–205). There is little doubt that Siamese and Lao monks traveled along these routes, carrying manuscripts with them. Even if attested only rarely, the presence of the *Gavampatisutta* in Lao manuscript collections stands as concrete evidence of the religious and textual networks that connected Ayutthaya and Lan Xang in the early modern period.

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[60] For evidence of Lan Na's religious influence on Lan Xang in the 16th century, see Lorrillard 2021.

[61] Pali chronicles composed in Lan Na, such as the *Jinakālamālī* and the *Mūlasāsanā*, recount exchanges of visits between monks from the northern regions and those of the Chao Phraya plain.

[62] An illustrative example is the two-sided inscription recording a treaty of demarcation between the two kingdoms, dated 1562/3 CE (Griswold & Prasert 1979). The *Aḍḍhabhāgabuddharūpanidāna*, a Pali chronicle composed in Laos around 1570, also refers to Ayutthaya as bordering the kingdom of the Million Elephants (Schnake 2025: 141, 153).

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The Great Disciple Gavampati and His *Parinibbāna*

Javier Schnake[1]

Abstract—This article presents the first critical edition and English translation of a Pali narrative recounting the final days of Gavampati—traditionally counted among the 80 Great Disciples of the Buddha—until his final extinction (*parinibbāna*). Although Gavampati, popularly known as the "Fat Monk", occupies only a minor place in canonical literature, later traditions in mainland Southeast Asia granted him a more prominent role in literary, ritual, and devotional contexts. Based on manuscripts preserved in Thai and French collections, this study reconstructs the text and examines its relationship to vernacular versions, highlighting the transmission and reinterpretation of Pali materials in regional Buddhist hagiography.

Keywords: Gavampati; 80 Great Disciples (*Asīti Mahāsāvakas*); Pali and Siamese Literature; *Parinibbāna*; Southeast Asian Buddhism

Introducing Gavampati

Recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the 80 Great Disciples (*asīti mahāsāvakas*) of the Buddha as key figures in Southeast Asian Buddhism, particularly through narratives of their final days until their final extinction (*parinibbāna*). François Lagirarde has played a pioneering role in this field, identifying and analyzing Thai, Lao, and Pali sources that preserve literary elaborations of these figures across languages (Lagirarde 2000, 2001, 2006, and 2019). His research highlights both the ritual importance of these disciples and the textual plurality that sustains their veneration. More recently, I contributed to this journal a critical edition and translation of the *parinibbāna* of Mahākassapa the Elder, illustrating how Pali materials have been transmitted and adapted within local traditions (Schnake 2024).

The present article continues this line of research and contributes to its growing corpus by focusing on the Thera (Elder) Gavampati. It offers, for the first time, a critical edition and English translation of a Pali account of his *parinibbāna*, complementing the vernacular Siamese translation and Lao *nissaya* version previously examined by Lagirarde (2001: 399–441, 470–496) and Gregory Kourilsky (2015; see also, this Special Edition). While the life and later reception of Gavampati have already been discussed by several scholars, including John Strong and Donald Stadtner in this Special Edition, a brief overview of his place in canonical and later traditions will help frame the significance of the Pali narrative presented here.

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Gavampati is counted among the early disciples of the Buddha and is traditionally included in the list of the *asīti mahāsāvaka*s (Th-a III 205, 27–206, 6). Although he appears in several canonical and commentarial passages (Malalasekera 1974, s.v. Gavampati), the biographical information preserved about him is relatively sparse. According to the *Mahāvagga* (Vin I 18, 35–19, 15), he was one of four companions of Yasa, the first lay follower to be ordained, who approached the Buddha, received ordination, and soon attained arhatship. He is also mentioned in the *Theragāthā* (Th 38), where his miraculous ability to halt the floodwaters of the Sarabhū River is celebrated, highlighting his supernatural abilities and spiritual distinction. The *Theragāthā Commentary* (Th-a I 109, 10–111, 10) further elaborates his spiritual biography by recounting meritorious deeds performed in previous lives and linking him to the Serissaka (Serīsaka) heavenly mansion (*vimāna*). Across these sources, Gavampati is portrayed as an accomplished arhat, praised for his purity, wisdom, and compassion. Though a relatively minor figure, his name recurs in a variety of later Pali texts, including commentaries, grammatical treatises, and chronicles.[2]

In post-canonical and Southeast Asian traditions, however, Gavampati's figure undergoes a notable transformation, evolving from an early arhat into a regional cultic figure. Certain sources in Sanskrit already associate him with the missionary expansion of Buddhism to the "Land of Gold", often identified with parts of mainland Southeast Asia. Later Burmese historiographical works, such as the Pali *Sāsanavaṁsa*, further develop this theme by presenting Gavampati as an early agent in the establishment of Buddhism in regions such as Thaton and Śrīkṣetra. This expanded role is also reflected in iconography and popular devotion, where Gavampati is frequently represented as a grotesque, dwarf-like figure embodying humility and spiritual power and sometimes conflated with figures such as (Mahā-)Kaccāyana in Thailand and Laos. Across mainland Southeast Asia, such images of the Fat Monk have been widely venerated and incorporated into local ritual traditions.

Though only marginally represented in canonical literature, Gavampati thus came to occupy a prominent place in Southeast Asian historiography, iconography, and ritual practice. The Pali narrative examined here helps illuminate this development by preserving a literary account of the disciple's final days. More broadly, it contributes to our understanding of the Great Disciples genre as a body of literature that evolved across canonical, commentarial, and vernacular contexts.

Critical Edition and Translation

Preserved in Thai and French libraries, the *Gavampatisutta* is an anonymous and undated Pali narrative which appears to have circulated only in Siam.[3] Extant manuscripts bear different titles,

[2] For instance, the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana database (https://www.tipitaka.org/chattha) shows various occurrences of the name Gavampati, viz., in the *Visuddhimagga* and its commentary, the *Saddanīti*, the *Moggallāna*, the *Rūpasiddhi*, the *Samantakūṭavaṇṇanā*, and so on.

[3] On the basis of a philological and comparative analysis of the Lao Gavampati narratives, Gregory Kourilsky (this Special Edition) dates the original composition of this Pali text to no later than 1697 CE and tentatively locates it in Ayutthaya, then the capital of Siam.

as mentioned below, but all refer to the same narrative and evoke the name of the main protagonist, Gavampati.

This Pali story has already been the subject of earlier editorial attempts, though none reached completion or publication. The first was undertaken by Lagirarde as part of his doctoral research (2001: 511–545), based on three manuscripts housed in Bangkok and Paris:

(1) MS A: *Gavampatinibbānasutta* (ព្រះគវម្បតិនិព្វានសុត្ត) and *Khawampatitheraniphan* (ควัมปติเถรนิพพาน), inv. no. 11398/ḍh/1, Khom script, 30 folios, National Library of Thailand, Bangkok.
(2) MS B: *Gavampatinibbāna* (គវម្បតិនិព្វាន), *Khawampatiniphan* (ควัมปตินิพพาน) and *Bra Kaccāya* (ព្រកច្ចាយ), inv. no. 6952/ḍh/1, Khom script, 30 folios, National Library of Thailand, Bangkok.
(3) MS EFEO PALI 64: no title, included in the *Pāḷisāvakanibbāna* (ចាឍ្បិសាវកនិព្វាន), Khom script, 16 folios, from *ka* to *khī*, EFEO Library, Paris.

His preliminary work laid the foundation for a more extensive editorial effort carried out by Jacqueline Filliozat and the late Peter Masefield in 2007, titled *Le Gavampati/Kaccāyananibbānasutta pāli. Editio princeps*. They added five further manuscripts to this corpus (C, D, F, G, and H), renaming the previous EFEO manuscript as E while retaining A as the base text:

(4) MS C: *Mahākaccāyanatheranibbāna* (មហាកច្ចាយនត្ថេរនិព្វាន), included in a collection of texts, Vat Phra Jetuphon Bangkok 4/152, Khom script, *ka* to *khā*, 29 folios, Wat Pho library, Bangkok.
(5) MS D: *Kaccāyananibbāna* (កច្ចាយននិព្វាន), included in a collection of texts, BNF PALI 298, Khom script, 48 folios, from *go* to *ghai*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
(6) MS E = EFEO PALI 64 **[Figure 1; see also Online Appendix]**
(7) MS F: no title, included in the *Pāḷisāvakanibbāna* (ចាឍ្បិសាវកនិព្វាន), Vat Phra Jetuphon Bangkok 6/ta.3, Khom script, 21 folios, from *ka* to *ñaḥ*, Wat Pho library, Bangkok.
(8) MS G: *Kaccāyananibbānasutta* (កច្ចាយននិព្វានសុត្ត), BNF PALI 409, Khom script, 24 folios, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
(9) MS H: *Kaccāyanasutta* (កច្ចាយនសុត្ត), MEP PALI 25, Khom script, 17 folios, Missions étrangères de Paris Library.



Figure 1: Folio *ka* recto of MS EFEO PALI 64, Khom script, EFEO Library, Paris © Javier Schnake

Unfortunately, Filliozat & Masefield's draft critical edition, held at the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) library in Paris, remains unfinished and unpublished. The edition presented here is based on their collation, whose work provides a valuable foundation. However, I undertook a systematic restructuring of both the Pali text and the accompanying apparatus. The transmission of the text is characterized by numerous irregularities, scribal errors, inconsistent variants, and interpolations or omissions across manuscripts, making the reconstruction of a stable version difficult. Accordingly, I reorganized the text as a whole, including adjustments to compounds, selections among variant readings, and the restructuring of verse passages, in order to produce a more coherent and readable edition. Wherever possible, references were added to clarify portions of the text and their structure. The critical apparatus has been deliberately streamlined, retaining only the most relevant information for readers. At the same time, some orthographic inconsistencies, phonetic variations, and fluctuations in vowel length or consonant doubling were preserved, as much of the manuscript material remains philologically valuable.

Regarding the translation, I sought to adhere closely to the meaning and syntax of the text. Some adjustments, however, proved necessary to improve readability and avoid monotony. For instance, I reduced the frequent use of absolutive constructions, shortened certain sentences, and limited the systematic repetition of words—particularly verbs indicating actions that have just occurred (e.g., "having said", "having thought", etc.)—as well as coordinating particles such as *tadā*, *atha*, and *pana*.

While the overall narrative structure remains broadly comparable across manuscripts, certain verse sections present considerable difficulties of interpretation and structure, as the text is often distorted in transmission. These passages required careful reconstruction through comparison and inference: first, with the Lao *nissaya*, whose Pali passages glossed in Lao provided essential support for understanding the structure and meaning of the text; and second, with literary parallels that helped clarify several ambiguities. It should be noted that these stanzas, whose metrical structure generally consists of four lines of eight *pāda*s (metrical units or "feet"), sometimes five or six, are not always complete or fully intelligible and the Lao *nissaya* does not always provide the expected clarification. In such cases, I chose to leave the verses largely as transmitted.

Synopsis

The story of Gavampati is a text that combines prose and verse, the latter containing numerous borrowings from classical sources such as the *Jātaka*s, *Dīghanikāya*, *Aṅguttaranikāya*, and *Visuddhimagga*. Yet the narrative itself appears original, presenting an account of the Great Disciple Gavampati—originally named Brahmaputta—not attested elsewhere in canonical or post-canonical Pali sources. It recounts his final days, during which, despite his renowned spiritual achievements and remarkable appearance, he chose to assume the form of a corpulent

and ungainly monk in order to avoid confusion with the Buddha.

As his life drew to a close, Gavampati requested the Buddha's permission to attain nirvana and returned to his forest monastery. There, surrounded by disciples and lay followers, he witnessed their grief and lamentation, which moved him to deliver final sermons on themes such as impermanence and the foulness of the body. He also addressed a lay follower named Sambala, known for his resistance to the Dhamma, offering him a final opportunity to reform. This episode leads to a detailed exposition on household conduct based on the veneration of the six directions (*chaddisā*). The passage closely follows the doctrinal framework of the *Sigālovādasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* (D III 188, 23–192, 4),[4] which organizes ethical relationships through spatial metaphors: east (*pubbā*) for parents, south (*dakkhiṇā*) for teachers, west (*pacchimā*) for spouses and family, north (*uttarā*) for friends, nadir (*heṭṭhā*) for workers and subordinates, and zenith (*upari*) for ascetics and monastics.

Moved by the Thera's sermon, Sambala experiences spiritual joy and repents, taking the triple refuge and completing his conversion. Having extinguished the aggregates of existence, Gavampati prepares for his final passing. Before doing so, he delivers a doctrinal exposition using the well-known allegory of Nibbāna as the Great City (*mahānagara*), a passage borrowed from the *Nibbānasutta* (Nibbāna-s; Hallisey 1993). The narrative concludes with Gavampati's entry into parinirvana, marking the fulfilment of his spiritual path.

Philological and Literary Features

The text focuses on several notable elements. In particular, it elaborates on the term Gavampati, the etymology of which has often been linked to a bovine dimension, "the Cattle-Lord", based on a Sanskrit reading (Skt, *gavaṁ* = bovine + *pati* = lord; see Lagirarde 2000: 66, n. 13; also John Strong, this Special Edition). The Pali version, however, offers an alternative interpretation emphasizing Gavampati's ability to articulate the Dhamma effectively (§1). The connection to *gavaṁ*—the genitive plural of *go*—sometimes understood as related to "cow" or "bovine" is linguistically tenuous in Pali and does not adequately explain this exceptional association with speech.

However, the syllable *go* carries a range of additional meanings in Sanskrit as well as in Pali, as attested in specialized lexicons devoted to monosyllabic terms, such as the *Ekakkharakosa* (Ekakkh; ed. Schnake 2024), where it may also signify "speech" (Ekakkh, s.v. *go*). In this reading, Gavampati could therefore be interpreted as "Lord of speech". Such an etymological construction suggests the influence of a learned milieu familiar with lexical traditions shaped by Sanskritic scholastic resources. Moreover, stanza 12 of the present Pali text shows a borrowing from *Jātaka* verses combined with a passage adapted from the Sanskrit *Udānavarga*, suggesting the discreet literary influence of non-Mahāvihāra traditions within the broader Theravada environment.

[4] See Gregory Kourilsky (this Special Edition) for more details concerning the main differences with the *Sigālovādasutta*.

Finally, Lagirarde (2001) underlined the difficulty of establishing a relative chronology among the different versions of the narrative known to us: the Pali text, the Siamese version, and the Lao *nissaya*. Comparing the Lao and Siamese versions, he identified a shared basic narrative structure, though the Siamese version adds several episodes absent from the Lao *nissaya*. I would further argue that a high degree of structural and thematic similarity exists between the Pali text and the Lao *nissaya*. Both share a comparable narrative framework, alternating between prose and verse passages that develop similar themes. Despite heavy corruption, imperfect grammar, and missing verses, the Pali lemmas embedded in the Lao *nissaya* remain particularly revealing and help preserve the core meaning of the original text.

The Siamese version, by contrast, is composed entirely in prose. While it clearly belongs to the same hagiographic family, it diverges in significant ways. It embellishes and expands certain sections and occasionally introduces stylistic and narrative flourishes absent from the Pali version. Interestingly, structural traces of the verse forms found in the Pali text can still be recognized within the Siamese prose, often reformulated into flowing narrative while remaining thematically aligned. This suggests that the Siamese text is not an independent parallel but rather a later redactional elaboration inspired by the Pali source and that the Lao *nissaya* may derive, directly or indirectly, from the Pali text edited here (for a similar conclusion, see also Gregory Kourilsky, this Special Edition).

Pali Edition

namatthu.[5]

[§1] ekasmiṁ[6] kira samaye eko mahāthero Brahmaputto nāma sīlasamādhipaññāsamannāgato[7] Hemabhūmiṁ nāma nagaraṁ upanissāya Pajjalitapabbate Sundaravanāvāse viharanto dhammagaruko kalyāṇadhammo mahāsāvako asītimahātheresu[8] supākaṭo devamanussehi pūjito mahāsāvakānaṁ sakkāraṁ adhigato sabbasiddhi mahāpaññō iddhibaladharo sabbasattānaṁ dayāya sampanno abhirūpo hoti.[9] sabbaññūbuddhaṁ thapetvā aññō sāvako[10] therena[11] sadiso nāma natthi. yattha yattha padese thero anupatto devamanussā theraṁ disvā pasīditvā[12] tattha tattha padese "amhākaṁ satthā āgato" ti pasaṁsanti.

[5] Only in A and C.

[6] G *ath' ekasmiṁ.*

[7] D, G, H *sīlasamādhipaññāya samannāgato.*

[8] D *asītimahātherehi.*

[9] Only in C.

[10] B *mahāsāvako.*

[11] B *mahātherena.*

[12] A, B, C, D, E, F *passitvā.*

thero tesaṁ vacanaṁ sutvā cintesi[13] "mahājano maṁ pasaṁsati. idāni ahaṁ asappurisabhūmiṁ mocessāmi. handa attānaṁ virūpaṁ katvā aññaṁ vesaṁ nimmissāmī" ti. tasmā therassa yāvajjatanā sabbasiddhiyā[14] bhavati. pubbe thero Brahmaputto nāma.[15] idāni kathaṁ "Gavampatī" ti vuccati.[16] sattānaṁ therassa vacanaṁ adhigato "Gavampatī" ti vuccati. thero sabbesaṁ sattānaṁ dhammaṁ[17] desetvā Buddhena sadiso, athavā thero sattānaṁ visesena madhuravacanena dhammaṁ deseti.[18] tasmā "Gavampatī" ti vuccati.

aparabhāge thero āyusaṁkhāraṁ olokento parihīnabhāvaṁ ñatvā "ahaṁ satthāraṁ āpucchitvā[19] parinibbāyissāmī" ti cintetvā.[20] pattacīvaraṁ gahetvā pañcasatabhikkhuparivārehi saddhiṁ[21] Sundaravanāvāsato nikkhamitvā anukammena Jetavanaṁ patto satthāraṁ vanditvā "bhante āyusaṁkhāro me ojahāyi. ahaṁ bhante[22] tumhākaṁ āpucchāmī" ti. bhagavā theraṁ anujānāti.[23]

[§2] thero puna Sundaravanāvāsam eva gantvā[24] sissānañ ca upāsakānañ ca nānānayapaṭimaṇḍitena madhuradhammena[25] ovaditvā sabbanissitake[26] ca upāsake ca apaloketvā puna cintento[27] "mama[28] upāsakānaṁ upaṭṭhākānaṁ eko mama upāsako Sambalo nāma[29] thaddho macchero dubbaco micchādiṭṭhiko. mayā[30] anusiṭṭho ca desito ca anādayitvā. mam' accayena ko[31] taṁ Sambalaṁ dametuṁ samattho?[32] idāni me[33] sāsanaṁ[34] na labbhati. maṁ pana thapetvā pacchā bhagavā Sambalaṁ upāsakaṁ damento bhaveyya.[35] manussānāṁ ca ñātisahajādīnaṁ ācariyupajjhāyānaṁ maraṇāsannam eva sabbadā anusaranti maṁ. tasmā idāni[36] upāsake ovadituṁ vaṭṭatī" ti.

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[13] A, B, D, E, F, G, H *cintetvā.*

[14] All the manuscripts (hereafter, mss) indicate *siddhi.*

[15] H *ti.*

[16] C, F *vuccate.*

[17] A, B, E, F, G not mentioned (hereafter, n.m.).

[18] A, B, C, G, H *daseti.* E, F *gopeti.*

[19] G, H *āpuchissāmi.*

[20] A, B, C n.m.

[21] F n.m.

[22] B, C, D, E, F n.m.

[23] H *anujāni.*

[24] A, B, C, E *gantvā.*

[25] D *madhurasadhammena.*

[26] E, F *sabbe nissitake.*

[27] C *cintesi.* H *cintetvā.*

[28] A n.m.

[29] H *nāma so.*

[30] All mss mention *mahā* except D.

[31] C *koci.*

[32] B, C, D, E, F, H *samattho nāma.*

[33] A, E, F n.m.

[34] A, B, C, D, G *sāsane.*

[35] C, H *ca pana. pana.*

[36] E, F *dāni.*

upāsake pakkosāpetvā “bhonto upāsakā[37] ye keci janā tumhe[38] sace saccaṁ[39] mayhaṁ hotha[40] mama vacanaṁ tumhe manasikarotha. mam’ accayena chadise[41] vandatha. ahaṁ pana[42] tumhākaṁ āpucchāmī”[43] ti.

sabbe sissā ca upāsakā ca[44] theraṁ[45] “bhante kuhiṁ gacchathā” ti pucchiṁsu.[46] thero āha: “tātā ahaṁ[47] maraṇassa mukhaṁ[48] gato. idāni parinibbāyissāmī” ti. sabbe nissitakā ca[49] upāsakā ca therassa vacanaṁ sutvā visaññī hutvā[50] satasahassamasanivijitakāle viya Sundaravanāvāsesu sakalapariveṇaṁ therassa yugantavātapahata-Sālavanaṁ[51] viya[52] paridevaṁ paridevanti. tena vuttaṁ:

[1] sālā va sampamathitā mālutena pamadditā [cf. Ja VI 189, 20–21*/300,
senti sissā c’ upaṭṭhākā[53] therassa tattha assame.[54] 31–32*/502, 7–8*]

[2] sabbā itthi-upaṭṭhākā[55] [56]devaccharasamānakā[57]
bāhā paggayha pakkanduṁ: kasmā no vijahissatha. [bc≠ Ja VI 301, 8*/10*]

[3] dāsīgaṇā gāmavāsā devakaññā va Nandane
bāhā paggayha pakkanduṁ: kasmā no vijahissatha. [bc≠ Ja VI 301, 8*/10*]

[4] gāmavāsā puttadhītā[58] devaputtā[59] va Nandane
bāhā paggayha pakkanduṁ: kasmā no vijahissatha. [bc≠ Ja VI 301, 8*/10*]

[5] samāgatā parivārā[60] sissā therassa ādayo
bāhā paggayha pakkanduṁ: kasmā no vijahissatha.[61] [bc≠ Ja VI 301, 8*/10*]

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[37] A, B, C, D, G, H *upāsake.*

[38] Only in E and F.

[39] D *sace saccaṁ* is *sabbe sacce.*

[40] Only in E, F. The other mss indicate *upāsakā honti.*

[41] E, F, H *dise.*

[42] A n.m.

[43] B, C, D *apuchissāmi.*

[44] E n.m.

[45] A, B, G *therassa.*

[46] D *pucchisuṁ.*

[47] A, B n.m.

[48] *maraṇassa mukhaṁ* is G *maraṇamukhaṁ.*
D, H *maraṇaṁ mukhaṁ.*

[49] H n.m.

[50] *visaññī hutvā* is only in E and F.

[51] C, E, F, H *yugantavātapahataṁ Sālavanaṁ.*

[52] B, C, D, F *viya ahosi.*

[53] E, F *c’ upaṭṭhākā* is *v’ upaṭṭhākā.*

[54] A, F, G *assame ti.*

[55] A, B, E, F *itthi-upāsakā.*

[56] A, B, D, E add *ca.*

[57] A, B, E, H add *devaputtā nandane.*

[58] B n.m.

[59] B *devakaññā.*

[60] A, B, C, F *parivārā ca.*

[61] I propose to add this *pāda* to maintain the pattern of the preceding verses.

[6] ther' assa tattha assame dhammikodhammavādi ca
dhammagāravagāravo dhammacārī dhammarato,
[7] dhammasañcaraṁ kovido dhammanudhammapaggaho
dhammacārīsu dhammiko dhammarasavissattho.[62]

[§3] "kasmā no vijahissathā" ti thero tesaṁ upaṭṭhākānaṁ antevāsikānañ ca[63] vilāpaṁ sutvā upāsake aniccakathāya nivārento gātham[64] āha:

[8] "mā vo[65] socittha rodatha dukkhabhāvā pi kevalā
natthi koci mato hutvā rodentena punāgato.
[9] [66]sattānaṁ maraṇābhāvo na ekasmiñ ca[67] gāme[68] vā
na ekasmiñ ca[69] ghare pi ca na ekasmiñ ca raṭṭhe ca.[70]
[10] aniccā sabbasaṁkhārā[71] sabbabuddhehi desitā
uppajjitvā nirujjhanti evaṁ dhammo ca pāṇīnaṁ.
[11][72] yathā khittaṁ nabhe leḍḍu bhūmiyaṁ patitaṁ dhuvaṁ [≠ Bv II 111[abc]; tath'eva[73] sabbasattānaṁ[74] jīvitaṁ maraṇaṁ dhuvaṁ. Ja I 19, 22–23*]
[12] yathā nadī pabbateyyā gacchaṁ[75] na paṭivattati
evam āyu manussānaṁ gacchaṁ na paṭivattati.[76] [cf. Ja VI 26, 19–20*; Uv 1.15]
[13] daharā pi ca ye vuḍḍhā ye bālā ye ca[77] paṇḍitā
aḍḍhā c' eva daḷiddā ca[78] sabbe maccuparāyanā. [= D II 120, note 4]
[14] brāhmaṇe khattiye vesse sudde caṇḍālapukkuse
na kiñci parivajeyya sabbam evābhimaddati.
na tattha hatthīnaṁ bhūmi na rathānaṁ na pattiyā [≠ S I 102, 22–25;
na cāpi mantayuddhena[79] sakkā jetuṁ dhanena vā. = Vism 232, 20–23]

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[62] A, D, F, H *dhammesurasavisaṭṭho*.
B *dhammesarasavisaṭṭho*. C *dhammesurassavisaṭṭho*.
E *dhammesuvisaṭṭho*.

[63] D *imaṁ*.

[64] One would have expected *gāthāyo*, as elsewhere throughout the text.

[65] F n.m.

[66] This verse is only in E and F.

[67] F n.m.

[68] F *game pi*.

[69] C, E, F n.m.

[70] B, E, F, H *vā*.

[71] A, D, E, F, G *sabbe saṁkhārā*.

[72] The *pāda* d is here lacking.

[73] E, F *that' eva* is *tad' eva*.

[74] E, F *lokassa*.

[75] D *gacchā*.

[76] The stanza is closer to Uv 1.15 (*yathā nadī pārvatīyā gacchate na nivartate | evam āyur manuṣyāṇām gacchate na nivartate*) than to Ja, where only verses b, c, and d are shared (*yathā vārivaho pūro gacchan nūpanivattati | evam āyu manussānaṁ gacchan nūpanivattati*).

[77] A, G *pi*.

[78] A, G *ceva*.

[79] A, C, G *mantayuddhena*.

[15] maccuno saṅgaro natthi sabbe maccuparāyanā
Jotiko Jatilo Uggo Meṇḍako atha Puṇṇako
ete pañc' eva ye loke mahāpuññā ti vissutā [[ab]cf. Ja V 109, 10–11*;
sabbe maraṇam āpannā kathaṁ aññe na pāpuṇā. [c-h]cf. Vism 233, 8–10]

[16] [a]Vāsudevo Baladevo [b]Bhīmaseno Yudhiṭṭhilo
caturo[80] pi mahāmaccā[81] mahātejā ti vissutā. [[ab]= Vism 233, 13;
[e]sabbe maraṇam āpannā. kathaṁ aññe pamuñcitā[82] [e]cf. Vism 233, 10]

[17] sakalam mediniṁ bhutvā datvā koṭisataṁ sukhaṁ.
aḍḍhāmalamattassa ante issarataṁ gato
ten' eva devo[83] Nandane puññamhi khayam[84] āgate[85]
maraṇābhimukho so pi asoko sokaṁ āgato" ti. [≠ Vism 232, 8–11]

evaṁ thero[86] maraṇadhammena upāsake[87] ovaditvā puna imassa[88] kāyassa nirattha-bhāvena ovadanto imā[89] gāthāyo[90] āha:

[18] dubbalo vatāyaṁ kāyo bahusādhāraṇo pi ca
[c]jātibhayabahutrāso [d]jarācorāvilumpito. [[cd]≠ Sot 41; Schnake, forthcoming]

[19] [a]byādhibyagghakulāvāso [b]sokamaccupamaddano
[c]rogasantāpabahulo [d]paridevabahupaddavo
[e]mohabhūtagaṇākiṇṇo [f]kodharakkhasasevito[91] [[abcd]≠ Sot 42; [ef]= Sot 44[bc]]

[20] allacammapaṭicchanno navadvāro mahāvaṇo.
samantato paggharati asuci pūtigandhiyo. [= Vism 196, 19–20]

[21] dugandho asucikāyo kuṇāpo ukkarūpamo
nindito cakkhubhūtehi kāyo bālābhinandito. [= Vism 196, 17–18]

[22] sace imassa kāyassa anto bāhirato siyā
nūna daṇḍaṁ gahetvāna kāke soṇe nivāreyya.[92] [= Vism 196, 21–22]

[80] C, E, F *cattāro.*
[81] C, E, F *mahamallā.*
[82] H *pamuccitā.*
[83] A, B, C, D *devā.*
[84] Only in D. The other mss indicate *khiyaṁ.*
[85] D *āgato.*
[86] H *evaṁ thero* is *thero evaṁ*.
[87] E, F *upāsakānaṁ.*
[88] C *puna imassa* is *pun' imassa.*
[89] C *ime.* D, H *imaṁ.*
[90] D, H *gathaṁ.*
[91] A, E, F *kopa°.*
[92] D, H *nivāraye*.

[23] mā passatha[93] imaṁ kāyaṁ asāraṁ subhāvajitaṁ[94]
yo ca imaṁ kāyaṁ[95] nissāya puggalo[96] pāpakaṁ katvā[97]
accantaṁ niriyaṁ vaje sace mayi[98] sineho ca

[24] mā paridevatha gāḷhaṁ sīladānaṁ[99] sucikammaṁ
karitvā gārave sadā samaṇabrāhmaṇānañ ca.

[25] mā ca sattaṁ[100] vihiṁseyyātha kisaṁ thulaṁ mahantaṁ
rassaṁ tanuṁ tathā[101] sadā mettaṁ vadeyyātha.

[26] karotha[102] vacanaṁ mama yathā piyaṁ sakattānaṁ
parattānaṁ tathā piyaṁ parapāṇassa hiṁseyya.

[27] mahādukkhaṁ anubhūyate piyehi sampayogo ca
vippayogo ca piyehi sampayogo sukhadukkhā.

[28] hoti yathā bījaṁ[103] tathā phalaṁ bhavissati[104]
tasmā tumhe[105] mā karotha[106] kiñci sattaṁ vihaññanaṁ.

[29] paradhanaṁ na gaṇheyya appaṁ vā yadi vā bahuṁ
paradhanaṁ pi passatha kaṇhasappaṁ va mañňetha.

[30] paradhanaṁ gaṇhitvāna kim atthaṁ kiṁ payojanaṁ?
dhanaṁ pi sāmino katvā[107] paribhogaṁ niriyaṁ vaje
pacchā ca sāmino dāso anekajātisate va.

[31] paradāraṁ[108] na gaccheyya[109] visarukkhaṁ va dissati
paradāraṁ pi na iccheyya[110] ubhayattha bhayaṁ labhe.
idha loke paramhi ca[111] sarīraṁ cāpi nassati[112]
pacchā ca[113] niriye ghore uppajjati na saṁsaye.

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[93] *mā passatha* is B, C *evañ ca.* D, H *piyañ ca*.

[94] *asāraṁ subhāvajitaṁ* is B *asāraṁ subhāvijjitaṁ nissaya pāpakaṁ katvā*, C *asāraṅ ca vibhajjitaṁ*, D *asāravajjhitaṁ*.

[95] B, C, D, H *yo ca imaṁ kāyaṁ* is n.m.

[96] B, C, D, H n.m.

[97] All mss read *karohi* except C and G.

[98] C, D, E, F, H n.m.

[99] C, D *sīlaṁ dānaṁ*.

[100] C *satte*.

[101] C *tadā.* H *tattha.*

[102] A, C, E, F, G, H *karontu.* D *karonta.*

[103] A, E, F, G, H add *piyaṁ parapāṇassa bhavissati.*

[104] C, D, H n.m.

[105] B, C, D, H *tumhe ca.*

[106] B, C, D, H *katvā.*

[107] A, E, G *katvā asārino katvā.* F *katvā asāmino katvā.*

[108] G, H *paradhanaṁ.*

[109] G, H *gaṇheyya.*

[110] *na iccheyya* is B, H *gacheyya*. C *iccheyya*. D, E, F *na gaccheyya*. D *iccheyya visarukkhaṁ va disati paradārapi gaccheyya*. G *paraṁ pi gaccheyya.*

[111] *paramhi ca* is B *dhanañ cāpi.* D *paraṁ cāpi.* H *dhanaṁ vā pi.*

[112] Only in B, C, D. The other mss indicate *vā vinassati*.

[113] Only in C, H., n.m. in the other mss.

[32] musāvādaṁ na vāceyya yena kenaci[114] sabbadā
dubbalaṁ[115] vañcanaṁ[116] katvā dhanahetuñ[117] c' akāraṇā[118]
dubbalañ ca vihiṁsitvā[119] accantaṁ niriyaṁ[120] vaje.

[33] pacchā[121] pi sabbajātīsu[122] dubbalo hoti sabbadā
sace satte vihiṁseyya[123] mahādukkhaṁ[124] anubhūyate.

[34] [a]surāmerayapānañ ca [b]yo naro ca pamajjati
pañcajātisataṁ yakkho pañcajātisataṁ suṇo
ummattako andho pi ca[125] surāpānassa dosakā ti. [[ab]cf. Dhp 247]

evaṁ thero pañcasilādivasena upaṭṭhāke[126] antevāsikādayo[127] ovaditvā puna[128] lokacārittavasena[129] ovadanto gāthāyo[130] āha:

[35] tumhe dhammena[131] vāṇijjaṁ[132] kasikammaṁ karotha[133] sadā
mā karotha adhammena accantaṁ nirayaṁ[134] vaje.

[36] māsakuṭaṁ mānakuṭaṁ tulakuṭaṁ pi ce kare
sabbaṁ corakammaṁ nāma accantaṁ niriyaṁ vaje.

[37] kasikammaṁ adhammena gomahisaṁ naraṁ pi vā[135]
dāsaṁ dāsiṁ ca pīḷetvā accantaṁ niriyaṁ vaje.

[38] pacchā te[136] evaṁ jāyantā taṁ[137] evaṁ pīḷanaṁ labhe
tasmā ca[138] mā karotha va labhittha[139] sukham uttaman ti.

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[114] A, E *kena*.
[115] D *dubbalañ ca.*
[116] C *vacanaṁ*.
[117] H *dhanaṁ hetuñ.*
[118] *c' akāraṇā* is H *hetupakaraṇā.*
[119] *dubbalañ ca vihiṁsitvā* is E *dubbalaṁ sattaṁ vihi*[*ṁ*]*sitvā*. F *dubbalaṁ sattaṁ vihiṁsitvā.*
[120] H *niriye*.
[121] G *pacchā kale*.
[122] F *sabbasatajātīsu*.
[123] A, G *vihīseyyaṁ.* D *vihiseyyuṁ*. E H *vihīseyya*.
[124] E, F *mahantaṁ dukkhaṁ.*
[125] *andho pi ca* is only in E, F. Other mss read A, E, F *anatā*, B *anantā ca*, C, D *anantā.*
[126] E, F *upatthākānaṁ.*
[127] E, F *antevāsikādīnaṁ*.
[128] E, F *pana.*
[129] B, C, K *lokaparittavasena.* D *lokaparidevatavasena.* E, F *lokacarittavasena.*
[130] C, H *gāthaṁ.*
[131] A, B, C, D, E, F *dhammesu.*
[132] A, B *bānijaṁ*. C, D *bānijjaṁ.* E, F *vānijjaṁ.* G, H *subānijjaṁ.*
[133] A, E, F *karo.* B, C, D, G, H *karā.*
[134] All mss *niriyaṁ.*
[135] B *pi vā* is *vā pi.*
[136] F *te sattā.* G *kāle.*
[137] A, B, E, F n.m.
[138] F *tumhe.*
[139] A, B, E, G, H *labhita*°.

evaṁ so[140] thero[141] upāsake[142] ovaditvā rājacārittacaraṇavasena[143] upaṭṭhāke[144] ovadanto gāthāyo abhāsi:[145]

[39] ye ca[146] loke sukham icchā narā ca atha nāriyo
rājānaṁ suddhacittena sadā sevanti bhattiyā.
[40] mā karotha kiñci kammaṁ pamādena rājakicce
raññho hitaṁ sukhaṁ raññho sadā vaḍḍhanti[147] bhattiyā.
[41] rājā pi devo pavaro sabbakāmadado[148] sadā
sabbadukkhaṁ[149] vimocento sabbecchā[150] yeva dāyako.
[42] māvamaññettha sabbattha mahānāsaṁ[151] labhissatha[152]
yathā pi aggijalito vanarukkhaṁ[153] pi dayhati.
[43] puna bījaṁ pi[154] uppajji khandhaṁ pupphaṁ phalaṁ pi vā
ye raññho avamaññanti rājakicce na gāravā.
raññe kodhe[155] vinassanti pun' aruyha na sambhave.[156]
[44] rājā devo mahātejo sabbecchā yeva dāyako.
devādhiko pi bhavati sabbalokesu pākaṭo
ye keci sukham icchantā[157] devārādhaṁ[158] kārā sadā.
[45] balikammehi sabbehi [159]yadā labhi tadā nami
rājārādhaṁ pi ye loke mahābhogaṁ mahaddhanaṁ
sabbecchā[160] yeva labhanti [161]yadicchaṁ pi nisaṁsayo.

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[140] A, C, G, H n.m.

[141] H *thero evaṁ.*

[142] E, F *upāsakānaṁ.*

[143] A, C, G, H *rājaparitacaraṇavasena.* B *rājaparittaṁ.* E *rājaparittacaraṇavasena.* F *rājacarittacaraṇavasena.*

[144] E, F *upatthakānaṁ.* H *upāsakānaṁ.*

[145] A, G *ajjhabhāsi.* H *gāthāyo abhāsi* is *gātham āha.*

[146] *ye ca* is A, G *ye idha.* E, F *yeva.*

[147] F *sevanti.*

[148] F *sampattiṁ dadāti.*

[149] F *sabbadukkhā.*

[150] A *sabbe cā.* B, C, D *sabbecchā.* E *pacchā sabbe paccāye va dāyakā tumhe pi.* H *sabbechā.*

[151] E *mahāvināsaṁ.*

[152] H *labhissati.*

[153] B *vanaṁ rukkhaṁ.*

[154] H *va.*

[155] A *kucche.* B, D, E, F, G *kudhe.* C, H *kudde.* Emended.

[156] B, C, E, F *labhare.*

[157] A, B, C D *icchanto.* E, F *icchanti.*

[158] C, E *devārādhaṁ.* D *devārādhakarā.* F *yevārāddhaṁ.* H *devārādayo.*

[159] Verse is A, C *yadā nami tadā nami*, B *yadā labbhi nami*, D, H *sadā labbhaṃ tadā nami*, E *taṃ labhanti sadā labhanti*, F *labhanti sadā labhanti.*

[160] A *sabbe cā.* B, C *sabbecchā*, D *labbheccha.* E, F *pacchā.*

[161] Verse is A *yadicchaṃ pi nisayo*, B *yadicchāmi nasaṃsayo*, C *yadicchaṃ pi nasaṃsayo*, D *yathicchaṃ pi nasaṃsaye*, E *yathicchaṃ pi nasaṃsayo*, F *yathicchaṃ nisaṃsayo*, H *yathichaṃ nisaṃsayo.*

[46] tasmā ca tumhe[162] sabbattha rājāsevanā[163] sabbadā
karotha[164] suddhacittena yathā mayhaṁ 'nusāsanaṁ
sāmibhattiphalaṁ loke pecca sagge pamodatī ti.

[§4] evaṁ thero upaṭṭhāke[165] ovaditvā puna cintesi "idāni imaṁ[166] Sambalaṁ upāsakaṁ vinayaṁ tāta chadise[167] may' ācikkhante vandathā"[168] ti. "katamaṁ disaṁ? tāta[169] pubbadisaṁ dakkhiṇadisaṁ pacchimadisaṁ uttaradisaṁ heṭṭhimadisaṁ uparimadisan" ti. tasmā[170] thero cintesi "ayaṁ me[171] Sambalo upāsako micchādiṭṭhiko[172] micchācāro hotī" ti. puna Gavampati thero sakaṁ[173] ugghāṭitamukhavivaragalitakamalagandhikaṁ[174] aṭṭhaṅgasahitaṁ madhurasaraṁ nicchāranto gātham āha:

[47] mātāpitādisā pubbā ācariyā dakkhiṇādisā
ñātivattā pacchā[175]disā bhariyā puttā ca uttarā[176]
dāsakammakarā[177] heṭṭhā uddhaṁ samaṇabrāhmaṇā ti. [cf. D III 191, 28–192, 6]

thero āha "tātā[178] kasmā mātāpitā 'pubbadisā' ti vuccanti. pubbapakāratthāya.[179] mātāpitaro hi pubbe[180] puññaṁ katvā 'iminā pamāṇena puttaṁ labhissāmā'[181] ti patthanaṁ akaṁsu. tasmā[182] mātāpitaro 'pubbadisā' ti vuccanti. pajāyamāne[183] putte puttaṁ[184] rakkhanti[185] posenti.[186] pubbe atthe puttaṁ niyojenti. pubbe yuttāyutta-

[162] H *ca tumhe* is *tumhe ca.*
[163] E, F *rājāsevanāsu.*
[164] All mss *karontu* except D.
[165] E, D *upatthākānaṁ.*
[166] A, G, H *mama.* B, C, D *maṁ.*
[167] A, F *dise.* B *cchadise.* E, G *sadise.*
[168] All mss except D read *vandatū.*
[169] D *tātā.*
[170] A, C, D, E, F *kasmā.*
[171] E, F n.m.
[172] A, C, D, G, H *micchādiṭṭhi°.* B n.m.
[173] B, E, F n.m.
[174] Various variants in Filliozat & Masefield's edition (2007).
[175] E F H *pacchimā.* G *pacchima.*
[176] G, H *uttaradisā.*
[177] F G H °*karo.*
[178] All mss *tata* except D.
[179] C, E, F *pakāratāya.* D *pakāratāyaṁ.*
[180] D *pubbaṁ.*
[181] A, B, C, D *labhissāmi.*
[182] A, B, E, H *kasmā.*
[183] Mss propose various unsatisfactory solutions: A, B, G *paṭṭhāyamāne.* C *pajāmane.* D *vijāyamāne.* E, F *jāyamāno.* H *jāyamānaṁ.*
[184] A, B,F, H n.m.
[185] H n.m.
[186] H *posenti mātāpitaro.*

kamme puttaṁ[187] dassenti. pubbe vatthālaṅkāraṁ pana[188] puttassa[189] denti[190]. tasmā mātāpitaro 'pubbadisā' ti vuccanti.

kasmā ācariyā[191] 'dakkhiṇādisā' ti vuccanti. dakkhiṇāya tāya ācariyānaṁ adakkhaṁ kusalākusalaṁ dakkhati.[192] adakkhaṁ gambhīratthaṁ ācariyo dakkheti. adakkhaṁ sīlakhandhaṁ dasseti. adakkhaṁ vimuttiñāṇaṁ.[193] dasseti adakkhaṁ nibbānakiccaṁ dasseti. tasmā ācariyā[194] 'dakkhiṇadisā' ti vuccanti.[195]

kasmā ñātivaggā 'pacchimadisā' ti vuccanti.[196] mātujanitā[197] pacchā ñātivaggā anukampanti posenti rakkhanti. tasmā ñātivaggā 'pacchimadisā' ti vuccanti.[198]

kasmā[199] puttabhariyā 'uttaradisā' ti vuccanti.[200] puttabhariyāhetu[201] uttaradhammaṁ paṭilabhati.[202] kathaṁ? bodhisattā[203] pana[204] pāramiyo puretvā yācakānaṁ puttabhāriyadānaṁ datvā[205] puttabhariyāhi pāramiyo pūrenti.[206] bodhisattā[207] hi puttabhariyāhi sabbaññutañāṇaṁ patilabhanti. tasmā puttabhariyā 'uttaradisā' ti vuccanti.[208]

kasmā[209] dāsakammakārā 'heṭṭhādisā'[210] ti vuccanti.[211] heṭṭhimato nisīditabbā heṭṭhimato bhuñjitabbā. athavā sāmikā dāsahetuṁ[212] dhanaṁ paṭilabhanti.[213] dāsahetum anuttaradhammaṁ[214] paṭilabhanti. bodhisattā[215] pana satasattaka-mahādānaṁ datvā sattadāsīsatasattadāsāsatā datvā dāsidāsaṁ vinā na paripurenti.

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[187] H n.m.

[188] A, B, C *manaso.* E *puna.*

[189] H *puttaṁ.*

[190] A, B, E, F, G, H *dassanti.* C, D *dassenti.*

[191] A, B, C, D, H *ācariyā kasmā.*

[192] All mss *dakkheti* except H.

[193] H *vimuttiñāṇaṁ ācariyo.*

[194] A, B, C, G, H *ācariyo.*

[195] A, B, H *vuccati.*

[196] A, B, D, F, G, H *vuccati.*

[197] E, F *mātujanikā.*

[198] C, E, F *vuccati.*

[199] N.m. in all mss except F.

[200] A, B, C D, G *vuccati.*

[201] The expected form here would be *hetunā.*

[202] All mss *patilabhanti.*

[203] H *bodhisatta.*

[204] C n.m.

[205] *puttabhāriyadānaṁ datvā* is only in C, E, F.

[206] F *paripurenti.*

[207] H *bodhisatta.*

[208] A, B, E, H *vuccati.*

[209] Only in C, H. The other mss indicate *kathaṁ.*

[210] C, D, E, F *hetthimadisā.* G, H *heṭṭhimadisā.*

[211] A, B, G *vuccati.*

[212] A, B, C, E, F *dāsahetu°.*

[213] A, B *labhanti.*

[214] D, F, H *ut(t)aradhammaṁ.*

[215] A, B, E, F *bodhisatto.*

dāsahetu uttaradhammaṁ paṭilabhanti. tasmā dāsakammakārā[216] 'heṭṭhimadisā' ti vuccanti.[217]

kathaṁ samaṇabrahmaṇā[218] 'uparidisā'[219] ti vuccanti. upari devalokasampattiyā samaṇabrāhmaṇā[220] dassanattā upari brahmasampattiyā[221] upari nibbānasampattiyā[222] dassanattā tasmā samaṇabrahmaṇā 'uparidisā'[223] ti vuccantī ti.[224]

[§5] Gavampati thero upāsakānaṁ dhammaṁ desento puna[225] evam āha: "bhonto upāsakā putte vaḍḍhite mātāpitūhi dhammena puttā rakkhitabbā. puttehi pana[226] mātāpitaro dhammena rakkhitabbā.[227] kathaṁ mātāpitaro putte vaḍḍhite rakkhanti[228] 'amma tāta tumhe sīlaṁ rakkhatha dānaṁ dethā' ti putte[229] kusalesu niyojenti pāpehi nivārenti. puttadhammarakkhaṁ[230] nāma.

kathaṁ[231] puttā pana dhammena mātāpitaro rakkhanti? mātāpitaro nāma puttānaṁ bahūpakārā punappatikārakā mātāpitūnaṁ. hi mātāpitaro[232] putticchāpaṭṭhāya balikammena vā suvaṇṇena vā rajaṭena vatthena vā aññena[233] vā devatārādhena putte patthenti. attano kucchigate putte atirekataraṁ dhanaṁ dassanti puttajīvatthāya baddhagabbhe mahādukkhaṁ anubhavanti. mātā[234] pi[235] kilantakāyā duvaṇṇā kisasakalasarīrā rujanti.[236] pajāyanakāle atirekataraṁ dukkhaṁ pāpuṇanti. maraṇāsannam eva kadāci[237] mātā visaññī kadāci vinassanti lohitamakkhitasarīro[238] evarūpaṁ dukkhaṁ anubhavitvā puttasinehena[239] 'kahaṁ putto me' ti lohitamakkhitaputtaṁ[240] gahetvā ure[241] nipajjāpetvā pāyeti.[242]

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[216] H *dāsakammakāro.*

[217] A, B, D *vuccati.*

[218] G, H add *kasmā.*

[219] C, D, H *uparimadisā.*

[220] C, D, E, E, F, H *samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṁ.*

[221] All mss *brahmasampattī* except H *brahmasampatti.*

[222] All mss *nibbānasampattī* except H *nibbānasampattiṁ.*

[223] All mss *uparimadisā* except C.

[224] All mss *vuccati* except F *vuccanti*. Corrupt transmission; passage should conclude with *iti*. Emended.

[225] H *pana.*

[226] All mss read *puna* except D.

[227] A B F *rakkhitañ ca*; C E *rakkhitabbā ti*. D replaces *dhammena rakkhitañ ca* with *rakkhitabbā.*

[228] Only in F.

[229] H *mātāpitaro putte.*

[230] A, B, C, E, G, H *puttaṁ dhammarakkhaṁ.*

[231] Only in F.

[232] Only in C.

[233] D, H *aññehi.*

[234] E, F *kadāci mātā.*

[235] Only in C.

[236] A, B, D, E *rujjhanti.*

[237] A, B *pi.*

[238] G, H *lohitena makkhitasarirā.*

[239] A, B, G n.m. E, F *sinehena putassa mātā.*

[240] C, D, E, F, H *lohitaṁ makkhitaputtaṁ.*

[241] E, F *puttaṁ ure.*

[242] E *pāleti khiraṁ.*

aho bahūpakārā puttānaṁ. mātā[243] bhojanakāle[244] putte karīsaṁ vā muttaṁ vā bhājane vissajjeti. mātā na jigucchati puttasinehena. kadāci khelaṁ vā mīlhaṁ vā bhojane vissajjeti. mātā n' eva[245] jigucchati. muttakarīsamīlhamakkhitabhattaṁ bhojeti.[246] mātusarīraṁ sabbadā puttassa malamuttasemhādi sāmisaṁ[247] ahosi, mātā āhāraṁ puttassa tehi malamuttehi[248] sāmisaṁ[249] na jigucchati.

yeva aho[250] bahūpakārā mātā puttānaṁ. sace puttassa roge uppanne sati[251] mātā sattadhā bhijjamānahadayā viya devatā namassamānā suvaṇṇena vā rajataṇa vā ratanena vā dhanena vā[252] balikammādinā vā pūjenti. vuḍḍhe vuḍḍhe atirekataraṁ puttaṁ[253] anukampanti. aho[254] bahūpakārā mātā[255] puttānaṁ. tasmā bahūpakāraṁ puttaṁ vadāmi.

yo koci mahiddhiko mahānubhāvo sakalamahāpathavīmaṇḍale[256] gahetvā mātāpitūnaṁ sampattiṁ dadeyya. na tv eva[257] tesaṁ mātāpitūnaṁ paṭikāraṁ karoti.

sace mātāpitūsu sujīvamānesu[258] attano sīsena mātāpitūnaṁ[259] pade[260] pade sampaṭicchiṁsu. annapānena vā[261] vatthena vā senāsanādīhi sabbupakārehi vā[262] veyyāvaccakammehi posenti pālenti[263] rakkhanti. puttā mātāpitaro bhāvanaṁ bhāvāpenti. sabbakusalesu[264] payojenti mātāpitaro puttā.

sace mātāpitaro micchādiṭṭhiṁ gaṇhanti sammādiṭṭhisu patiṭṭhapesuṁ. sace mātāpitūsu avijjamānesu puttā sayaṁ sīlaṁ rakkhanti dānaṁ denti buddharūpaṁ karonti[265] bodhirukkhaṁ vā ropenti. thūpaṁ vā vihāraṁ vā kuṭiṁ vā sabbakusalaṁ[266]

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[243] E, F *matu kadāci.*

[244] H *bhojanakāle pi.*

[245] E, F *na.*

[246] A, B, H *bhojesi.*

[247] All mss *samissaṁ.*

[248] E *milhamuttehi.*

[249] All mss *samissaṁ.*

[250] A, B n.m.

[251] A, B, C, D, H n.m.

[252] *dhanena vā* is n.m. in A, B, C, D, H.

[253] D, H n.m.

[254] Only in H.

[255] H *mātāpitaro.*

[256] A, B, C, H *sakalapathavīmaṇḍale.*

[257] D *nattheva.*

[258] C, E *jīvamānesu.* A B, F, G *sajīvamānesu.*

[259] C, D *mātāpitūnaṁ puttā.*

[260] C n.m.

[261] *annapānena vā* is C, E, F, H *annena vā pāṇena vā.* D *anena vā pānena vā.*

[262] Only in G.

[263] E, H n.m.

[264] H *sabbakusalesu kammesu.*

[265] Only in E.

[266] A, B, C, D *sabbakusalāni.*

vā katvā[267] phalaṁ gahetvā tesaṁ mātāpitūnaṁ denti. sace sabbakusalaṁ kammaṁ[268] evaṁ katvā[269] mātāpitūnaṁ dhammarakkhaṁ[270] nāma.[271] tena vuttaṁ:

[48] ye ca mātāpitūnañ ca dhammena patikārakā [e.g., A I 31, 16–17;
idh' eva te pasaṁsanti pecca sagge pamodare. J V 331, 9–10*; S I 182, 4–5]

[49] ākāsaṭṭhā ca bhūmmaṭṭhā devā sāgaraṭṭhā pi vā
sabbe te abhirakkhanti mātāpettibharaṁ naraṁ.

[50] Inda-Brahmādayo devā devasaṁghā surālayā
sabbe te[272] abhirakkhanti mātāpettibharaṁ naraṁ.

[51] yo pi icchati sampattiṁ idha loke paramhi ca
mātāpettibharo loke yathicchaṁ labhate dhuvan[273] ti.

[§6] kathaṁ ācariyupajjhāyo[274] dhammena saddhivihārikaṁ[275] rakkheyya.[276] sīlesu upajjhāyo saddhiṁ vihārikaṁ patitthapeti. puññaṁ sikkhāpeti. kammaṭṭhānaṁ ācikkhati. pāpehi nivāreti. upajjhāyo saddhivihārikaṁ asikkhaṁ dhammavinayaṁ sikkhāpeti. saddhivihārikaṁ dhammaṁ gambhīratthaṁ adakkhaṁ attano[277] dakkhāpeti. adakkhaṁ nibbānaṁ saddhivihārikaṁ dakkhāpeti. puttaṁ viya sabbupakārehi sissaṁ rakkheyya.[278] aho upajjhāyo sissānaṁ bahūpakāro. taṁ sissadhammarakkhaṁ nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[52] ācariyo dhammena rakkhe[279] sadā saddhivihārikaṁ
buddhādayo pasaṁsanti pacchā te amataṁ dadantī[280] ti.

[§7] kathaṁ saddhivihāriko dhammena ācariyaṁ rakkheyya.[281] kāyaveyyāvaccena vā bhesajjena vā sabbupakārena vā pituṭṭhāne thapetvā sammā paricāreyya. sace ācariyupajjhāye vuḍḍhe[282] sisso sayaṁ payojeyya. sace upajjhāyo kammaṭṭhānaṁ[283] na vaḍḍhati, sisso attano[284] vaḍḍhāpeyya. sace upajjhāyo jiṇṇo sisso sappuriso upajjhāyassa sukhadukkhaṁ vilokento 'idāni mayhaṁ upajjhāyo me bahūpakāro jiṇṇo dubbalo mahallako' ti. annapānavatthasenāsanena paricāreyya.[285] sabba-

[267] E, F *karonti.*

[268] *sabbakusamaṁ kammaṁ* is only in E, F.

[269] C *vatvā.*

[270] E, F *dhammena rakkhaṁ.* C, D *dhammarakkhā.*

[271] E, F *nāma hoti.*

[272] E *sabbe te* is *te devā.*

[273] F verse is *yathicchitaṁ labhissatī.*

[274] All mss *ācariyupajjhāyā* except D, H.

[275] All mss consider *saddhi*° separately as *saddhiṁ* here and after.

[276] C *rakkheyan ti.* D, E, F *rakkheyyuṁ.*

[277] All mss *attanā* except C.

[278] E, F *rakkheyyuṁ.*

[279] A, G *dhammarakkhā.* B, C, D, H *rakkhena.*

[280] A, B, C, H *padan.*

[281] C *rakkheyyā ti.*

[282] None of the mss propose something understandable: A, B, G, H *muṭṭhe.* C *pamuṭṭhe.* D *maṭṭhe.* E *vutthe.* F *vuṭṭhe.*

[283] A *kammaṭṭhāne.*

[284] After *attano* all mss include *upajjhāyaṁ.*

[285] H *paricareyyuṁ.*

kammaṁ[286] upajjhāyassa attano bhāraṁ gahetvā[287] karoti.[288] sace upajjhāye avijjamāne sisso sayaṁ sīlaṁ rakkhati. dānaṁ deti buddhabimbaṁ karoti thūpaṁ vā bohirukkhaṁ vā kuṭiṁ vā[289] vihāraṁ vā. sabbakusalaṁ katvā[290] upajjhāyassa paṭideti. taṁ upajjhāyadhammarakkhaṁ[291] nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[53] ye ācariyaṁ dhammena sadā rakkhanti mettiyā
sabbe devā[292] pasaṁsanti pacchā dibbasukhaṁ labhantī[293] ti.

[§8] kathaṁ ñātiyo dhammena rakkheyya.[294] puggalo[295] annena vā pānena vā kusalesu niyojeyya[296] pāpehi akusalehi dhammehi[297] nivāreyya[298] ti ñātidhammarakkhaṁ nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[54] ye ñātivagge dhammena mettacittena rakkhitā[299]
idh' eva te[300] sukhaṁ laddhā pacchā sagge pamodare ti.

[§9] kathaṁ sāmiko attano bhariyaṁ dhammena rakkheyya. vatthena vā ābharaṇena vā annapānādīhi vā saṅgaṇheyya.[301] parapurise[302] vā[303] nivāreyya. ācārena[304] sabba-itthisippe niyojeyya. sīladānādīsu[305] kusalesu niyojeyya sakamātu[306] viya sakabhāginī sodariyā ekamātukā viya. taṁ bhariyaṁ dhammarakkhaṁ nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[55] ye gahaṭṭhā[307] puññakarā[308] sīlavanto upāsakā
dhammena dāraṁ posenti te namassāmi Mātali. [= S I 234, 28–29]

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[286] E, F *sabbaṁ kammaṁ.*

[287] *attano bhāraṁ gahetvā* is in A, G n.m. B, D, E *upajjhāyassa attano bhāvaṁ.*

[288] E *karetvā.*

[289] *bodhirukkhaṁ vā kuṭiṁ vā* is only in B, C, H.

[290] All mss read *gahetvā* except H.

[291] The word upajjhāya° in missing in all the mss. I add it to make sense of the passage.

[292] E, F *devā idha loke.*

[293] All mss *labbhan* except E, F.

[294] C *rakkheyyā ti.* D *rakkheyyuṁ.*

[295] Only in E, F.

[296] D *niyojeyyuṁ.*

[297] *pāpehi akusalehi dhammehi* is only in E, F.

[298] D *nivāreyyuṁ.*

[299] E, F *rakkhanti.*

[300] B *taṁ.*

[301] This word is not in the mss. The Lao *nissaya* proposes *saṁgaheyya* on which I rely so that the sentence makes sense.

[302] All mss *parapurise* except F, H.

[303] C, E n.m.

[304] A E, F, H *āharena.* B *ācariyena.* C *ākārena.*

[305] A, G *dānādīsu.*

[306] H *sakamātā.*

[307] E, F *bahu°.*

[308] E, F *karontā manussaloke.*

[56][309] ye gahaṭṭhā puññaṁ katvā sīlavante uposathe
puttadārañ ca posenti te namassāmi Mātali.
[310]sabbe ariyā pasaṁsanti pacchā te sugatiṁ vaje ti.

[§10] kathaṁ bhariyā sāmikaṁ dhammena rakkheyya. bhariyā[311] sāmikaṁ sammā paricareyya pubbuṭṭhāyinī[312] pacchānipātinī manāpacārinī piyavādinī anukūlavacanena parikareyya. sāmikaṁ manasā pana[313] parapurise na pattheti. sakapitu viya sakajeṭṭhabhātu viya sadā sā sāmikassa gāravaṁ kareyya sāmikassa vacanaṁ nātikkammati. annapānavatthādīhi sabbupakārehi paricareyya. sace sāmiko adhammiko hoti dhammesu[314] pana[315] niyojeyya. sīlaṁ rakkhāpeti sabbāni kusalāni kāreti.[316] taṁ sāmikassa dhammarakkhaṁ[317] nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[57] sāmivācāpiyā[318] loke mahābhogaṁ[319] mahaddhanaṁ[320]
sabbecchā yeva labhati[321] yathiccham pi nisaṁsayo.
[58] tasmā tumhe va[322] sabbattha sāmikabhattiyā[323] sadā
karotha[324] suddhacittena yathā mayhaṁ anusāsanaṁ.
sāmibhattiphalaṁ loke pecca sagge pamodare[325] ti.

[§11] sāmiko kathaṁ dāsaṁ dhammena rakkheyya. sāmiko dāsaṁ akāle kammaṁ mā kāreti.[326] mā bhāriyaṁ kammaṁ[327] kāreti.[328] sukhadukkhaṁ[329] cinteyya.[330] annena vā pānena vā vatthādīhi vā puttaṁ viya sakadāsaṁ[331] sammā careyya. taṁ dāsadhammarakkhaṁ nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

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[309] A adds a strophe just before: *tvahi seṭṭho tilokasma tvaha deve mahiddhiko alo?sise kaḍḍhitvāna kassa kassa namassati.*

[310] Verse in B *sabbacariyā pasamsanti.* E *ariyā pasamsanti pacchā upāsakā sugatim gacchare vā ti.*

[311] Only in B under the form *bhiriyā.*

[312] B *bhariyā pubbuṭṭhāyinī.*

[313] Only in D.

[314] F *bhariyā dhammesu.*

[315] A, C *puna.*

[316] B, C, D, E, F, H *kāresi.*

[317] All mss treat *sāmikassadhammarakkhaṁ* as a single compound.

[318] B, C *rājapiyo.* D *rādhāpiyā.*

[319] E *mahābhogaṁ sabbasampattiṁ.*

[320] B, C *mahādhanaṁ.*

[321] A, G *labhanti.*

[322] A, C, D, H *ca.* B n.m.

[323] A, C, D *bhattiyaṁ.* B, C, H *bhattiyā.* C *sāmikaṁ bhattiyaṁ.*

[324] A, B *karotu.* H *karontu.*

[325] B, C, E, F, H *pamodatī.*

[326] B, C, D, E, F *kāresi.*

[327] Only in E and F.

[328] B, C, D, G, H *kāresi.*

[329] D *sukhaṁ dukkhaṁ.*

[330] A, G *cittena.*

[331] E, F *sakadāsaṁ sāmiko.*

[59] dāsakammakare loke ye ca rakkhanti sabbadā
sabbe ariyā[332] pasaṁsanti pacchā te sugatiṁ vaje ti.[333]

[§12] kathaṁ[334] dāsakammakarā sāmikaṁ dhammena rakkheyyuṁ. sāmikaṁ anukampanti. sāmino dhanaṁ karontā uppādenti sammāvacanaṁ kathenti.[335] mātāpitaro viya anukampanti sāmikaṁ. taṁ sāmidhammarakkhaṁ[336] nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[60] dāsakammakarā loke sadā rakkhanti sāmike
karonti suddhacittena yathā mayhaṁ 'nusāsanaṁ.
sāmibhattiphalaṁ loke pecca sagge pamodare[337] ti.

[§13] kathaṁ samaṇabrahmaṇā sabbalokaṁ[338] dhammena rakkheyyuṁ? sabbadā mettacittaṁ bhāvetvā phalaṁ lokassa[339] dadeyyuṁ. bhāvanaṁ vaḍḍhetvā[340] puññaṁ lokānaṁ dadeyyuṁ samaṇabrāhmaṇā. asutaṁ[341] dhammaṁ suṇāpeyyuṁ sutaṁ dhammaṁ pariyāpeyyuṁ. kusalesu niyojeyyuṁ. pāpehi nivāreyyuṁ. agatigamanaṁ nivāreyyuṁ. sabbasatte attano pāṇaṁ[342] sāmeyyuṁ.[343] taṁ dhammalokarakkhaṁ nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[61] brāhmaṇā samaṇā[344] ceva[345] loke dhammena sabbadā
sammā have sadā rakkhā pacchā gacchanti nibbutin ti.

[§14] manussā kathaṁ samaṇabrāhmaṇe dhammena rakkheyyuṁ.[346] samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṁ sukhadukkhaṁ[347] cinteyyuṁ. ovādaṁ gaṇheyyuṁ. gāravaṁ[348] kareyyuṁ. samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṁ[349] kāyena vā vācāya vā manasā vā evaṁ katvā taṁ samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṁ dhammarakkhaṁ[350] nāma. tena vuttaṁ:

[62] [a]samaṇabrāhmaṇe cāpi [b]sīlavante bahussutte [[ab]≠ Ja VI 286,
ye ca dhammena rakkhanti sadā labhanti te sukhaṁ. 16/18/20/22*]

[63] māvamaññetha[351] te sabbe sīlavante kudācanaṁ
brahmacārīdhammacare gacchanti nirayabhusaṁ.[352]

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[332] *sabbe ariyā* is in B *sabbācariyā.* C, D *sabbe acariyā.*

[333] C *vaje ti* is *labhati.*

[334] *kathaṁ* is n.m. in A, E, F, G, and replace *sāmikaṁ* in B, C, D, H. I follow the structure of the text.

[335] A, H *karonti.*

[336] Only in C. All the mss write *dhammasāmirakkhaṁ.*

[337] A, D, E, F *pamodati.* C, H *pamodatī ti.*

[338] F *sabbaloke.*

[339] F *lokānaṁ.*

[340] F *bhāvetvā.*

[341] A, B, C, G, H *asuttaṁ.* D, E, F *sutaṁ.*

[342] All mss *pāṇa*° except D.

[343] A *samayyuṁ.* B °*sammaṁ sameyyuṁ.* C *samaṁ sameyyuṁ.* D *sameyyuṁ.* E, F, H °*same rakkheyyuṁ.*

[344] Verse is in E *ye brāhmaṇā ye samaṇā.* F *ye brāhmaṇā ca ye samaṇā*

[345] E, F *ca rakkheyyuṁ.*

[346] C, D, E, F *rakkheyyun ti.*

[347] All mss read *sukkha*°, except D *sukhaṁ dukkhaṁ.*

[348] A, C, D, E, F *garukataṁ.*

[349] B *samā cajeyyuṁ.* D °*brāhmaṇesu samā pajeyyuṁ kāyena.* H n.m.

[350] C, D *samaṇabrāhmaṇarakkhaṁ.*

[351] A, B *māvamañethapetvā.*

[352] C, D, H *niriyaṁ bhusaṁ.*

[64] samaṇā nāma nidosā mettacittasamaṅgino
mā nidose 'vamaññetha doso āgacchate dhuvaṁ.
[65] yathā[353] rajo paṭikhitto paṭivātaṁ upari[354]
tass' eva nipatant' ettha tathā[355] cakkhuṁ vihaññare.[356]
[66] evam eva ca nidose ca duṭṭhe dosapāpite
sabbe dosā punāgacchuṁ idha loke paramhi ca.
[67] māpamaññetha[357] pāpassa na m' antaṁ[358] āgamissati
udabindunipātena udakumbho pi pūrati
pūrati bālo pāpassa thokaṁ thokam pi ācinaṁ. [≠ Dhp 121]
[68] madhu va maññati bālo yāva pāpaṁ na paccati
yadā ca paccati pāpaṁ mahāghoraṁ pi gacchati.[359] [cf. Dhp 69]
[69] na mātā na pitā bhātā na mittakulabandhavā
antakenādhipannassa natthi ñātīsu tāṇatā.[360] [cf. Dhp 288]
[70] [a]attanā va kataṁ pāpaṁ attanā vānubhūyate
attanā kusalaṁ kataṁ[361] attanā labbhate sukhaṁ. [[a] = Dhp 161[a]]
[71] dhammañ care sucaritaṁ na taṁ duccaritaṁ care
dhammacārī sukhaṁ seti idha loke paramhi ca. [≠ Dhp 169]
[72] dhammadharo dhammarato dhammaṁ yo vābhirakkhati
dhammo taṁ abhirakkhati mahantaṁ dhārachattaṁ va[362]
pacchā lokantakaṁ vaje"[363] ti.

[§15] so Sambalupāsako[364] bahalagambhīruttānaṁ taṁ[365] sakalovādavinodanasamatthaṁ Gavampatitherassa vacanaṁ[366] pavaradhammaṁ[367] sutvā pītipharitahadayo hadayabbhantaragata micchāvigato theraṁ khamāpetvā. therassa pāde sakasirasā sādarena vanditvā "accayo maṁ bhante accagamā taṁ khamatha. bhante yo 'haṁ[368] timirandhakāramicchājālapaticchādito[369] tumhākaṁ

[353] E, F *yathā hinena.*
[354] C, D *c' upari.* H *v' upari.*
[355] A, B, C, D *tattha.* E *tatha.*
[356] E, F *vihaññare tejanā mañanti.*
[357] The mss read *māvamaññetha*; however, this appears to be a confusion with *māpamaññetha*, which is the correct reading in the Dhp. Emended accordingly.
[358] A, B, C, E, F, G *mattaṁ.* D *mataṁ.* H *matthaṁ.* Emended following the PTS edition.
[359] E *pāpaṁ mahāgoraṁ pi gacchati* is *mahādukkhaṁ ghoraṁ va gacchati.*
[360] The mss do not provide a coherent reading for *ñātīsu tāṇatā* (B, F: *casu ttānathā*; C: *casu ttānathā*; D: *casu tānattā*; E: *ca puttānattā*; H: *ca puttānaṁ ttā*). I suggest the reading of the Dhp.
[361] A, B, C, D, F *katvā.*
[362] *dhārachattaṁ va* is A, B, D, H *dhārachattaṁ vā.* E *vārasattaṁ ca.* F *vārasataṁ ca.*
[363] The *pāda* is E *so nibbānaṁ pacchāttacche.* F *so nibbānaṁ pacchā gacchati.*
[364] G, H *sambala-upāsako.*
[365] C, D, H n.m.
[366] H n.m.
[367] Only in B, C, E.
[368] C *haṁ pi.*
[369] *timirandhakāramicchājālapaticchādito* is A, B, D, E, F, H *timirandhakāramicchājālaṁ paticchādito.* D *timirandhakāramicchāya paticchādito.*

guṇamahantaṁ[370] ajānanto, ajjatagge pāṇupetaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi buddhaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi, dhammaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi saṁghaṁ"[371] ti.

uṭṭhāya añjaliṁ paggahetvā nisīdi. Gavampati Brahmaputtathero upāsake ca sisse apaloketvā parinibbāyi.

[§16] kenatthena "nibbānan" ti vuccate.[372] "sītalatthena nibbānaṁ cando viya. kilesasussanatthena[373] suriyo viya nibbānaṁ. patiṭṭhānatthena nibbānaṁ pathavī viya. [374]acalanatthena selo viya nibbānaṁ. ratanānaṁ sambhūtatthena sāgaro[375] viya nibbānaṁ. samodhānatthena nibbānaṁ devānaṁ sudhammā viya. pathavī natthi āpo natthi vāyo natthi tejo natthi sītaṁ natthi uṇhaṁ natthi khudā[376] natthi taṇhā natthi.[377] yasmā[378] ajāti-ajarā-abyādhimaraṇaṁ khemaṁ santaṁ paramaṁ[379] sukhaṁ[380] evaṁ[381] mahānagaraṁ nibbānaṁ. tañ ca mahānagaraṁ nibbānaṁ sapākāraṁ sadvāraṁ saṭṭālakaṁ saparikhaṁ savīthī sa-antarāpanaṁ sathambhaṁ sagabbhaṁ sasayanaṁ sapallaṅkaṁ sapadīpajalitaṁ sapokkharaṇiṁ sītajalaparipuṇṇaṁ savālukaṁ sapadumupalaṁ[382] bhamaragaṇasevitaṁ haṁsasacakkavākabalākajīvajīvakakokilamayurakoñcagaṇasevitaṁ evaṁ māhānagaranibbānaṁ [cf. Nibbāna-s 121, 10–122, 8].

antarāpaṇaṁ dasakusalakammapathaṁ. [viriya]thambaṁ. abhidhammapakaraṇagabbhaṁ.[383] nekkhammasayanaṁ. vimuttiñāṇaṁ pallaṅkaṁ. padīpajalitaṁ nibbāne va[384] bhavaṁ.[385] pokkharaṇī saccaparami mālāgandhavilepanaṁ viriyaṁ.[386] [karuṇā]jalaparipuṇṇaṁ. aṭṭhārasabuddhañāṇaṁ bālukaṁ. khiṇāsavaṁ bhamaragaṇasevitaṁ.[387] arahantagaṇānidosaṁ[388] haṁsasacakkavākabalākajīvajīvakakokilamayurakoñcagaṇasevitaṁ nibbāne.[389] evaṁ nibbānaṁ mahānagaran"[390] [cf. Nibbāna-s 122, 12–123, 9] ti. tena vuttaṁ:

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[370] A, B, C *guṇaṁ mahantaṁ.*

[371] All mss add *saraṇaṁ gacchāmī.*

[372] G *vuccati.*

[373] The mss do not provide a satisfactory reading: A: *susanatthena*; B: *susanatthe*; C, H: *sussanatthena*; D: *sulanatthena*; E, F: *surisanatthena*. I rely here on the Nibbāna-*s*.

[374] H *pathavī viya* is n.m.

[375] E, F *sāro.*

[376] The mss do not provide a satisfactory reading: A, B, D, G, H: *khiddhā*; C: *khandā*; E, F: *niddhā*. I suggest *khudā* instead.

[377] *taṇhā natthi* is n.m. in A, B, G.

[378] Only in H.

[379] A, B, C *santaṁ paramaṁ* is *santaparamaṁ.*

[380] A, B, C, G *padaṁ.*

[381] B, D, G, H *eva.*

[382] A, B, C, E, F n.m.

[383] H *abhidhammapakaraṇaṁ gabbhaṁ.*

[384] B, C, D n.m.

[385] D *bhāvanā.*

[386] B *vividhaviriyaṁ.*

[387] A, B, E, F *khiṇāsavaṁ bhamaragaṇasevitaṁ* is *khiṇāsavabhamaragaṇasevitaṁ*.

[388] A, E, F *arahantagaṇānidosa°*. B *arahattagaṇānidosa°*. H *arahantaṁ gaṇānidosaṁ*.

[389] E adds *arahanti niradāsakilesaṁ.* F adds *arahanti niradosakilesaṁ.*

[390] *nibbānaṁ mahānagaran* is A, B, D, E *nibbānanaṁ nagaran.* C *nibbānanagaran.*

[74] padam accutam accantaṁ asaṁkhatam anuttaraṁ
nibbānam iti bhāsanti vānamuttā mahesayo ti. [= Nāmac 299]

[§17] Gavampati thero nibbāne pāturahosi. tasmiṁ khaṇe sakalajambūdipavāsino khattiyabrāhmaṇavessasuddādayo[391] upāsaka-upāsikā ca[392] sannipatitvā sattarattindivaṁ therassa pūjaṁ[393] kurumānā sabbe khiṇāsavā sabbarattindivaṁ sattapakaraṇābhidhammaṁ gaṇasajjhāyaṁ akaṁsu. punadivase Vissukammo sattaratanakhacittā anekakuṭāgārā nisajjetvā sobhanāni sobhiyamāno ahosi. tasmiṁ khaṇe Sakko[394] sattaratanakhacitaṁ[395] suvaṇṇamañjūsaṁ karoti.

āḷāhane[396] therassa bhagavā anekasahassakhiṇāsavaparivuto āgantvā therassa sarīrakiccaṁ niṭṭhapesi. surāsuranāgasupaṇṇagandhabbayakkhasiddhavijjādharakinnarakinnarī pavarā therassa dayhante byāvattā[397] ahesuṁ.

tadā[398] heṭṭhā pathavitalato yāva brahmalokā ekakolāhalaṁ ahosi. aññe devasaṁghā iddhimantā mahānubhāvā sarīraṁ[399] therassa dassanatthāya āgantvā[400] ekacakkavāḷaṁ[401] yeva purāyiṁsu. atha[402] "anukammena devānam[403] antare yakkhā tiṭṭhanti, yakkhānam antare[404] gandhabbā tiṭṭhanti, gandhabbānam, antare venateyyā tiṭṭhanti, venatayyānam antare kinnarā tiṭṭhanti, kinnārānam antare kiṁpurisā tiṭṭhanti, kiṁpurisānam antare chattā tiṭṭhanti, chattānam antare suvaṇṇacāmarā tiṭṭhanti, suvaṇṇacāmarānam antare dhajā tiṭṭhanti, dhajānam antare paṭākā tiṭṭhanti, paṭākānam antare kalasā tiṭṭhantī [Ja-a (ChS) 10, 5–8]" ti.

[§18] atha kho[405] bhagavā therassa sarīranikkhepāvasāne[406] dhātuṁ gaṇhāpetvā[407] Vesālimahānagaram eva gantvā Ghositārāme dhātuṁ[408] thapesi. sabbe rājāno ca[409] nagaravāsino ca[410] sakalajambudīpavāsino ca manussā ca therassa dhātuṁ

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[391] A *khattiyaṁ vesabrāhmaṇasuddhādayo.* B *khattiyaṁ brāhmaṇavesasuddhādayo.* D *khattiyabrāhmaṇaṁ vesasuddhādayo.* H *khattiyavesabrāhmaṇavesasudā.*

[392] Only in B, C, F, H.

[393] B, E, F, *pūjitaṁ.*

[394] B *sako devarājā.*

[395] F *sattaratanaṁ.*

[396] E, F *āropetvā kallale.*

[397] All mss read *byāvattā*. I suggest this is a scribal error for *vyāvaṭā*.

[398] D *tathā*.

[399] B, C, D H n.m.

[400] A, C *vandanatthāya . B, D, H vandanatthāya pūjanatthāya.*

[401] B, C, D, F, G *ekacakkavāḷe*. E *ekacakkavāḷo*. I suggest *ekacakkavāḷaṁ*.

[402] B, D, H n.m.

[403] B *devānaṁ*.

[404] Only in H.

[405] Only in C.

[406] D *nikhepāvasane.* E, F *sarīranikkhepāvasāne bikkhusaṁghaṁ*. H *sarīranikkhepāvasāne therassa*.

[407] *gāhāpetvā.*

[408] E, F *therassa dhātuṁ.*

[409] E, F n.m.

[410] A, C, F, H n.m.

mahāthūpaṁ suvaṇṇaratanakhacitaṁ[411] Ghositārāme kariṁsu. atha[412] sissā ca upāsakā ca[413] therassa guṇaṁ anussaritvā[414] rodantā paridevantā "aho amhākaṁ upajjhāyo attano paññāya amhesu[415] anuttaradhammesu[416] sampayojesī"[417] ti cintesuṁ.[418]

sāyaṇhasamaye dīpadhūpādi-anekasakkārani[419] gāhāpetvā[420] parivārā[421] vihāraṁ gacchanti. Bhagavā[422] pana[423] sāyaṇhasamaye sattaratanarañjita-pavaradhammāsane[424] nisinno madhuradhammaṁ desesi.[425] desanāpariyosāne[426] sabbe janā[427] sotāpattiphalādīni pāpuṇiṁsu.[428]

tato paṭṭhāya Sambalopāsako[429] anekakoṭidhanaṁ buddhasāsane[430] vikiritvā[431] atirekataraṁ puññaṁ katvā sāsane[432] pabbajitvā samathañ ca vipassanañ ca bhāvetvā[433] pana[434] arahattaṁ patvā[435] nibbānadhātuyā kammajarūpakkhanda-vipākavasena[436] parinibbāyati.[437]

Gavampatisuttaṁ samattaṁ.[438]

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[411] B *suvaṇṇarājaṭakhacittaṁ*.

[412] H n.m.

[413] H n.m.

[414] A, B, C, G *saritvā*.

[415] B, C, D H *amhe*.

[416] D *anuttaradhamme*.

[417] A, B *payojesi*. C, E, F, H *payojetī*.

[418] All mss read *cintetvā* except E, F.

[419] D *dipadhūpāni sakkārāni*.

[420] E, F *gaṇhāpetvā*.

[421] A, B, C, D, G *saparivārā*.

[422] B *atha Bhagavā*.

[423] Only in E, F.

[424] F °*varadhammāsane*.

[425] B, D, E, F *pavattesi*. H *pavatesi*.

[426] B, C, D *desanāvasāne*.

[427] H *janā bahū*.

[428] F, H *saṁpāpuṇiṁsu*.

[429] B, E, F, H *sambalo upāsako*.

[430] H *buddhassa sāsane*.

[431] D *karitvā*. E, F *vikiritvā visajjitvā*.

[432] Only in E and F.

[433] E, F *bhāvetvā sambalo upāsako*.

[434] *samathañ ca vipassanañ ca bhāvetvā pana* is only in E, F.

[435] *arahattaṁ patvā* is B, H *arahattapatto*. C, D *arahattaṁ patto*.

[436] *nibbānadhātuyā kammajarūpakkhandavipākavasena* is only in E, F.

[437] B, C, D, G, H *parinibbāyi*.

[438] C *gavampati niṭṭhitaṁ bra mahākaccāyanatheranibbānasut(t)aṁ niṭṭhitaṁ, paripuṇṇo*. D *mahākaccāya(na) nibbānaṁ niṭṭhitaṁ*. E *gavampattisuttaṁ nitthitaṁ*. G *bra kacāy nibānasuttaṁ niṭṭhitaṁ nibbānapaccayo hoti*. H *gavampatinibbānasuttaṁ niṭṭhitaṁ nibbāṇapaccayo ti*.

English Translation

[§1] At one time, a Mahāthera (i.e., Great Elder) named Brahmaputta, endowed with wisdom, concentration, and discipline, resided in the Sundara forest monastery at Mount Pajjalita, near the city of Hemabhūmi. He was devoted to the Dhamma, virtuous, a great disciple, renowned among the 80 disciples. Revered by gods and men, he had obtained the worship of the great disciples due to his supernatural abilities. He was very wise, possessed supernatural powers, and was kind to all beings, with a beautiful appearance. Except for the Omniscient One, the Buddha, there was no other disciple comparable to the Thera. Wherever he went, men and gods, seeing him, were pleased, and in every place they praised [him]: "Our Teacher has come!"

The Thera, upon hearing their words thought, "People praise me. Now, I will deliver myself from the ground of unworthy persons. Well then, after making myself appear ugly, I will adopt another form!" From that moment on, the Thera possessed all supernatural powers. [People thought,] "Formerly, the Thera was named Brahmaputta, [but] now, why is he called 'Gavampati'?" The words of the Thera were understood by [all] beings; [therefore] he is called "Gavampati". The Thera taught the Dhamma to all beings, as did the Buddha. Or he preached the Dhamma with sweet words to beings, therefore, he is called "Gavampati".[439]

Later, when the Thera examined his life-force, he realized it was declining. He reflected, "After seeking the Master's permission, I shall attain final release". Taking his robe and bowl, he departed from the Sundara forest monastery with a suite of 500 monks and gradually reached the Jetavana. He paid homage to the Master [i.e., the Buddha, and said]:

"Venerable Sir, my life-force has now abandoned me. Venerable Sir, I ask for your permission".

The Blessed One granted his consent to the Thera.

[§2] The Thera then returned to the Sundara forest monastery and adorned with many methods [of exposition],[440] exhorted his lay followers and disciples with the sweet Dhamma. He took leave of his lay followers and all those who depended on him, reflecting once more:

"Among my lay followers and supporters, there is one named Sambala. He is obstinate, selfish, hard to instruct, and holds wrong views. Though I have exhorted and advised him, he does not heed me. After my death, who will be able to discipline Sambala? Currently, he does not grasp my teachings, but, apart from me, [only] the Blessed One could convert him. Moreover only as my death approaches do men and relatives, beginning with brothers, masters, and spiritual teachers, remember [my teachings].[441] Therefore,

[439] See *supra* for the explanation of Gavampati as meaning "Lord of speech".

[440] This probably refers to the ninefold classification (*navaṅga*) of the Buddha's teaching: (1) discourse (*sutta*); (2) that which is to be chanted (*geyya*); (3) exposition (*veyyākaraṇa*); (4) verse (*gāthā*); (5) inspired utterance (*udāna*); (6) "thus it was said" (*itivuttaka*); (7) birth story (*jātaka*); (8) marvellous phenomena (*abbhutadhamma*); (9) analytical discourse (*vedalla*).

[441] The grammatical construction of this sentence

it is fitting to instruct my lay followers now". He sent for the lay followers [and said]:

"Dear lay followers, whoever you are, if you are truly [loyal] to me, keep my words in mind! After my death, honor the six directions! And [now], I will take my leave from you". All the disciples and lay followers asked: "Venerable, where are you going?" The Thera said:

"My sons, I am going to the face of death. Now, I will attain final release". Upon hearing the Thera's word, all the supporters and lay followers became dismayed. It was as if 100,000 thunderbolts had struck the Sundara forest monastery and they lamented as violently as a forest of Sāla trees caught in a storm at the end of an age. Hence it was said:

[1] Like Sāla trees shattered, crushed by a powerful wind,
Disciples and lay followers lay overwhelmed in the Thera's hermitage.
[2] All the women lay followers, similar to divine Apsaras,
Lamented with outstretched arms:
"Why will you abandon us?"
[3] In Nandana, servant girls, villagers, and heavenly maidens
Lamented with outstretched arms:
"Why will you abandon us?"
[4] In Nandana, villagers, [their] sons and daughters, and sons of the gods
Lamented with outstretched arms:
"Why will you abandon us?"
[5] Gathered together, the followers and disciples of the Thera
Lamented with outstretched arms:
"Why will you abandon us?"
[6] There, in his hermitage, the Thera was righteous—speaking in accordance with the Dhamma, revering the Dhamma, living by the Dhamma, delighting in the Dhamma.
[7] Making his mind dwell in the Dhamma, he was an expert, a supporter in conformity with the Dhamma, practicing Dhamma among Dhamma-practitioners and confident in the essence of the Dhamma.

[§3] When he heard the wailing—"Why will you abandon us?"—from his followers and disciples, the Thera, restraining his lay followers with a discourse on impermanence, spoke these verses:

[8] Do not sorrow and lament! All existence [is marked by] suffering.
Whoever is dead has never come back with laments!
[9] For people, death is not only in [this] village,
Nor in [this] house, nor in [this] kingdom.
[10] That all formations are impermanent, [this] all the buddhas have proclaimed.
Having arisen, they cease: this is the law for [all] beings.
[11] As a clod of earth thrown into the sky surely falls to the ground,
So it is for all beings, life [ends] surely in death.
[12] As the river flows from the mountain and never turns back,

poses some difficulties. Furthermore, it appears that in the Lao *nissaya*, as well as in the Siamese translation, there is uncertainty regarding *anusaranti*/*anussaranti*, resulting in two interpretations of the overall meaning. The Lao *nissaya* relies on *anusaranti* ("they follow"), "Mais tous les gens qui avaient des parents ou des amis susceptibles de recevoir l'enseignement me font confiance comme Précepteur" (trans. Lagirarde 2001: 405); while the Thai translation supports *anussaranti* (" they remember"), as in the Pali text, "[...] et comme les leçons données à l'article de la mort sont éminentes elles doivent s'inscrire dans la mémoire et demeurer inoubliable" (trans. Ibid., 472).

So the life of men flows and never turns back.
[13] The young and the old, the foolish and the wise,
And the rich and the poor—all end in death.
[14] Brahmins, khattiyas, vessas, suddas, outcastes, and scavengers,
It spares none along the way but comes crushing everything.
There is no ground there for elephant troops, for chariot troops and infantry.
One cannot defeat it by a magic spell or with wealth.
[15] No pact exists with death; all end in death.
Jotika, Jatila, Ugga, Meṇḍaka, and Puṇṇaka,
These five, renowned for their great merits in this world, all came to death.
How [would] others not meet with it?
[16] Vāsudeva, Baladeva, Bhīmasena, Yudhiṭṭhila,
These four great mortals renowned of great strength,
All succumbed to death. How were others freed from it?
[17] He joyfully gave a hundred million after conquering all the earth,
Yet in the end, his realm was diminished to less than half an āmalaka fruit's worth.
Even the king in Nandana,
when his merit was exhausted,
Face to face with death,
he too, though called Asoka [lit., "without sorrow"], felt sorrow.

Thus, having exhorted the lay followers about the nature of death, the Thera further exhorted them about the worthlessness of the body and spoke these verses:

[18] Truly, this body is weak, and although it is common to all,
It is full of terrors from birth and plundered by the thief of aging.
[19] It is the dwelling place of a tiger family—disease—crushed by sorrow and death, full of torment from illness, afflicted by many griefs,
Crowded with the ghosts of delusion, haunted by the demon of wrath.
[20] Covered with clammy skin, with nine openings, a great wound;
From all sides oozes impurity, with foul smells.
[21] This foul-smelling, impure body, a corpse, is like excrement;
Those with vision condemn this body [in which] the fool delights.
[22] If the inside of this body were [visible] from the outside,
Surely, one having taken a stick, would drive away the crows and dogs.
[23] Do not gaze upon this body! It is worthless and lacks beauty.
The person who relies upon this body, committing evil, [Will] surely go to hell. If [you] have affection for me,[442]
[24] Do not lament! Having practiced firmly pure actions such as virtue and giving alms,
Always be respectful towards ascetics and brahmins.
[25] And do not harm living beings—be they lean, fat, big, small, or frail!
You always should speak with loving-kindness!
[26] Follow my words! Just as one is dear to oneself, so are others dear to themselves.
One should [not] harm another living being!

[442] I rely on the Lao *nissaya* for the understanding of this verse (Lagirarde 2001: 411).

[27] One experiences great suffering from union with and separation from what is dear.
With union with what is dear [arises] happiness and suffering.
[28] As is the seed, so will be the fruit.
Therefore, do not cause harm to any living being!
[29] You should not take another person's wealth—whether it is small or large.
Even if you consider another person's wealth, you should consider it like a poisonous snake!
[30] What is the use, the benefit in taking someone else's wealth?
After using the owner's wealth and things,
Later, one [will] go to hell for the next hundred rebirths [and] also [become] the servant of the owner.
[31] One should not go after another's wife; she is like a poisonous tree;
One should not even desire another's spouse. In both cases lies danger.
In this world and in the next, the body is also destroyed; And after, one arises in the terrifying hell, [of this] there is no doubt.
[32] One should never speak a lie under any circumstances.
For having deceived the weak for the sake of wealth and without cause,
And causing him harm, one surely [will] go to hell.
[33] Later, in every rebirth, one is always weak.
If one harms living beings, one experiences great suffering.
[34] The man intoxicated by alcohol and spirits
Becomes a yakkha for 500 births, a dog for 500 births,
Mad, and blind: these are the faults of drinking alcohol.

Thus, the Thera, having exhorted lay followers, pupils, and others with the five precepts and other [teachings], began exhorting on how to behave in the world and spoke these verses:

[35] Always devote yourself to agriculture and trade in accordance with the Dhamma,
Do not act contrary to the Dhamma, [for] you [will] surely go to hell!
[36] If one makes false coin, false measuring, false weighing,
It is all called theft and he [will] surely go to hell!
[37] [If some]one, [practices] agriculture contrary to the Dhamma,
Having exploited buffaloes and cows, or even a man, a male or female servant, he [will] surely go to hell!
[38] Later, they [will] be born in such a way that they [will] be exploited in the same way.
Therefore, do not act [thusly and] you [will] attain supreme happiness!

The Thera, having exhorted the lay followers in this way, exhorted them about conduct and behavior towards the king and illuminated [them] with these verses:

[39] Those who wish happiness in this world—men and also women—
Always serve the king with a pure heart and devotion.
[40] Do not perform carelessly any royal duties!
With devotion, [women and men] always increase the king's happiness and welfare.

[41] The king is like a god, a supreme granter of all wishes, always,
Liberating from all suffering, he is indeed the giver of all desires.
[42] Do not disregard [the importance of this, or] you will obtain great loss everywhere!
Just as the blazing fire consumes even a tree in the forest.
[43] Even if a seed, trunk, flower, or fruit arise;
Those who disrespect the king's duties have no respect,
They are destroyed by the king's wrath and they will not rise again.
[44] The king is [like] a god, of great majesty, a giver of all desires,
He even surpasses the gods, renowned throughout all the worlds.
Whoever desires happiness [should] always pay homage to the king-god.
[45] When one has obtained through all offerings, [...]
Those who honor the king, [source of] great enjoyment and vast wealth,
Obtain all desires according to their wishes—there is no doubt.
[46] Therefore, in every case, always serve the king with a pure heart, in accordance with my instruction.
One rejoices in this world in the fruit of his devotion to the ruler and after death in heaven.

[§4] Having exhorted the lay followers in this way, the Thera reflected again:

"Now, I shall discipline this lay follower Sambala".[443]

[And said:]

"Dear ones, when I point out the six directions, pay reverence! Which directions? Dear ones, they are the eastern direction, the southern direction, the western direction, the northern direction, the nadir, and the zenith".

The Thera then thought: "This lay follower Sambala holds wrong views and behaves wrongly". Uttering his sweet voice, which flowed from his open mouth like the fragrance of a lotus and was endowed with eight qualities, the Thera Gavampati spoke these verses:

[47] Mothers and fathers are the eastern direction, teachers are the southern direction,
Relatives are the western direction, wives and children are the northern direction,
Servants and workpeople are the nadir, ascetics and brahmins are the zenith.

The Thera said:

"Dear ones, why are parents called the eastern (*pubba*°) direction? It is because of their previous (*pubba*°) service. Indeed, the parents, having performed merit in the past (*pubbe*), made the resolution: 'Thanks to this amount [of merits,] we will have a child'. Therefore, parents are called the eastern direction. When a child is born, they protect and care for him. In the beginning, they provided their child [with] what is beneficial. In the beginning, they showed their child what is proper and what is improper. And in the beginning, they provided him with clothes and ornaments. Therefore, parents are called the eastern direction.

Why are the teachers called the southern (*dakkhiṇā*) direction? Because of the gift (*dakkhiṇāya*) of the teachers, one sees what is unseen, what is wholesome and unwholesome. The teacher

[443] The Lao *nissaya* is clearer in this passage, as Gavampati brings Sambala before him to attend the sermon (Lagirarde 2001: 416–417).

shows deep meaning that was unseen. He shows the essence of discipline that was unseen. He shows the knowledge of liberation that was unseen. He shows what should be done [to reach] nirvana that was unseen. Therefore, teachers are called the southern direction.

Why are relatives called the western (*pacchima°*) direction? Since his birth[444] and [even] after (*pacchā*), relatives have pity, they take care, they protect [the individual]. Therefore, relatives are called the western direction.

Why are wives and children called the northern (*uttara°*) direction? Because through wives and children, one attains the ultimate (*uttara°*) Dhamma. How so? The Bodhisatta fulfilled the perfections when he offered [his] wife and children to beggars,[445] he fulfilled the perfections through them. Indeed, the Bodhisatta obtained omniscience and knowledge through his wife and children. Therefore, wife and children are called the northern direction.

Why are servants and workers called the nadir (*heṭṭhā°*)? Because they should be seated below (*heṭṭhimato*) [their master], they should eat below [their master]. Moreover, the owners gain wealth on account of the servants. They gain the supreme Dhamma on account of the servants. Bodhisattas, having made the great gift of the 700,[446] 700 female servants and 700 male servants, cannot fulfil [the perfections] without female and male servants. They attain the ultimate Dhamma thanks to the servants. Therefore, servants and workers are called the nadir.

Why are ascetics and brahmins called the zenith (*upari°*)? Because ascetics and brahmins show the attainment of the world of gods which is above (*upari*), the attainment of the [world of] Brahma, which is above (*upari*), and the attainment of nirvana, which is above (*upari*). Therefore, ascetics and brahmins are said to be the zenith".

[§5] Teaching the Dhamma to the lay followers, the Thera Gavampati continued:

"Dear lay followers, once children have grown, children should be protected by parents in accordance with the Dhamma. And parents should be protected by their children in accordance with the Dhamma. How do parents protect their grown children? [They say], 'Dear daughter, dear son, observe virtue, give alms!' They encourage their children toward meritorious deeds and keep them away from unmeritorious deeds. This is called the protection of children in accordance with the Dhamma.

And how do children protect parents with the Dhamma? Parents are of great help towards their children and, in return, [children] towards their parents. Indeed, from the moment they desire children, parents make the wish for children with offerings or with gold, silver, garments, or other [items] in homage to the gods. When the child is in the womb of his [mother], they will give even more wealth. For the child's life, when he is in the womb, they endure great suffering. Mothers also feel pain in the whole body, become pale, become thin all over, are unwell.

[444] I rely on the Lao *nissaya* for the understanding of this compound (Lagirarde 2001: 419).

[445] This refers to distinct episodes in the *Vessantarajātaka*, in which the Bodhisatta gives his children to Jūjaka (an old brahmin) and, separately, his wife to Sakka in disguise.

[446] Reference is to the great gift of 700 (*sattasatakaṁ mahādānaṁ*) in the *Vessantarajātaka* (Ja VI 494, 1–9), made of 700 elephants, horses, chariots, women, cows, and servants, 700 male and 700 female.

At the time of childbirth, they experience even greater suffering. At times, mothers are close to death, they are unconscious, sometimes they perish. Their body smeared with blood, having endured such pain they suffer, out of love for their child, they say: 'Where is my child?' and taking the blood-smeared child, hold [him] to their breast and nurse him.

For sure! How greatly helpful are [mothers] to their children! When feeding their child, or cleaning him, the mother gets rid of feces or urine into a bowl. The mother feels no disgust, out of love for her child. At times, the child may drool or urinate into the food. Still, the mother feels no disgust. She feeds him the food[447] which has been soiled with urine and feces [and cleaned by her]. The mother's body always receives the child's waste, urine, phlegm, and others. She feels no disgust when her food is contaminated with child's waste.

Truly! Mothers are greatly helpful to their children! When the child becomes ill, mothers—their heart broken into seven pieces—worship deities with gold, silver, jewels, wealth, food, and other offerings. The more they grow, the more mothers show compassion to them. Truly! Mothers are greatly helpful to their children. That is why I say [that a mother] is very helpful to her child.

Even if someone, with great power and magnificence, were to seize the entire surface of the great earth and give his fortune to his parents, he [would] still not have repaid his debt to them.

When parents are still alive, [children should] accept [to bow] their head at their feet. They support, guard, and protect [them] with food, drink, clothing, beds, and chairs and so on and all forms of care. Children make their parents develop the cultivation of mind. Children engage them in all meritorious deeds.

If parents hold wrong views, they make them established in right views. When parents have passed away, children protect their virtue by themselves, give alms, make a buddha image, or plant a Bodhi tree. Having built a stupa, a monastery, or a monk's cell (*kuṭi*), or done all meritorious deeds, they reap the fruits and offer them to their parents. If they perform all meritorious deeds and actions in this way, this is called the protection of parents in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

> [48] Those who are grateful towards parents according to the Dhamma,
> [Gods] praise them here, and after death they will rejoice in heaven.
> [49] The gods who dwell in the sky, on earth, or even in the oceans,
> All of them protect the man who supports his parents.
> [50] The gods—starting with Indra and Brahma—, the assembly of gods, the abodes of gods,
> All of them protect the man who supports his parents.
> [51] He who desires success in this world and the next,
> Supporting his parents here, always obtains what he desires.

[§6] How should a teacher or preceptor protect a pupil in accordance with the Dhamma? The preceptor establishes the disciple in moral discipline. He instructs him in meritorious deeds. He teaches

[447] The Lao *nissaya* understands the passage as referring to the mother eating food soiled with impurities. However, *bhojeti* has a causative value, which I retain here.

him the subject of meditation. He prevents him from unwholesome actions. The preceptor teaches the untrained disciple the Dhamma and *Vinaya*. He shows his pupil the deep meaning of the Dhamma that is unseen by him. He shows his pupil nirvana, that is unseen. He should protect his pupil with all supports, as if he were his son. For sure! The preceptor is greatly beneficial to his pupils. This is called the pupil's protection in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[52] The master should always protect his pupil in accordance with the Dhamma.
The Buddha and others praise [him], later they grant [him] the deathless.

[§7] How should a pupil protect his teacher in accordance with the Dhamma? He should serve him properly, as if he were his son, through physical assistance, medicine, or all [kind of] support. If the teacher or preceptor is elderly, the pupil should personally act on his behalf. If the spiritual teacher does not progress in meditation, the pupil should cultivate his own development. If the spiritual teacher is elderly, the good pupil, observing his teacher's comfort and suffering, thinks: 'Now, my teacher, who was so helpful, is old, weak, and aged'. He [then] should serve him with food, drink, clothing, requisites for sleeping, and sitting. He takes all the duties of his preceptor as his own responsibility and carries them out. If the preceptor has passed away, the disciple protects his virtue by himself, gives alms, makes an image of the Buddha, or builds a stupa, plants a Bodhi tree, constructs a monk's cell or monastery. After performing all these meritorious deeds, he dedicates [them] to his preceptor. This is called the protection of the preceptor in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[53] Those who always protect their teacher with loving-kindness in accordance with the Dhamma,
All the gods praise [them]; afterwards they attain divine happiness.

[§8] How should one protect relatives in accordance with the Dhamma? A person should invite them to perform meritorious deeds with food or drink, he should restrain them from unwholesome and wrong kinds of conduct. This is called the protection of the relatives in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[54] Those who protect their relatives with a mind of loving-kindness, in accordance with the Dhamma,
They obtain happiness in this world and later they rejoice in heaven.

[§9] How should a husband protect his wife in accordance with the Dhamma? He should treat her kindly with clothing, ornaments, food, drink, and other [things]". Or he should keep away other men. He should encourage her in all the arts and skills [appropriate] for women. He should encourage [her] in virtue, in giving, and in meritorious deeds, as if she were his own mother, or his sister born from the same mother. This is called the protection of one's wife in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[55] I worship, O Mātali, those householders who make meritorious deeds,
The virtuous lay followers who maintain their wife in accordance with the Dhamma.

[56] I worship, O Mātali, those householders who, having made meritorious deeds,
Are virtuous during the Uposatha (i.e., Observance Day) and who maintain children and wife.
All noble men praise [them], after death they go to a good destiny.

[§10] How should a wife protect her husband in accordance with the Dhamma? A wife should properly serve her husband. Rising early and retiring late, she should serve with agreeable words, undertaking whatever needs to be done, agreeable in her conduct, and pleasing in speech. And she [should] not desire, even by thought, men other than her husband. She should always respect her husband like her own father, like her elder brother. She does not go against her husband's word. She should serve him with food, drink, clothing, and all [kind of] support. If her husband behaves unrighteously, she should nevertheless guide him toward the Dhamma. She causes him to protect virtue and causes him to make all meritorious deeds. This is called the protection of the husband in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[57] In this world, a [wife] who speaks with affection to her husband,
Obtains great enjoyment and vast wealth, all desires—whatever she may desire, there is no doubt.
[58] Therefore, always and everywhere, be devoted to your husband with a pure heart, in accordance with my instruction.
In this world, you will rejoice in the fruit of devotion to your husband and, after death, in heaven.

[§11] How should an owner protect a servant in accordance with the Dhamma? The owner does not make a servant work at inappropriate times. He does not make him do a burdensome task. He should consider what is pleasant and painful [for him]. He should behave properly with his servant, with food, drink, or clothing, and so on, as if he were his son. This is called the protection of the servant in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[59] In this world, those who always protect servants and workers,
All the noble ones praise [them]; after, they [will] go to a good destiny.

[§12] How should servants or workers protect their owner in accordance with the Dhamma? They have sympathy for the owner. They generate wealth for him. They tell [him] right speech. They have sympathy [for him] as they do for their parents. This is called the protection of the owner in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[60] In this world, servants and workers always protect their owners,
They work with a pure heart, in accordance with my instruction.
In this world, they [will] rejoice in the fruit of devotion to their owner and, after death, in heaven.

[§13] How should ascetics and brahmins protect the whole world in accordance with the Dhamma? Having developed a benevolent heart, they always should offer its fruit to the world. By cultivating meditation, ascetics and brahmins should offer [their] merits to the people. They should make [others] hear the Dhamma which they have not heard. They should make [others] master the Dhamma which they have heard. They should encourage [others] in meritorious deeds. They should prevent [others from] bad actions. They should prevent [others

from] going astray. They should appease all beings [as if with] their own life. This is called the protection of the world in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[61] In the world, brahmins and ascetics always [live] in accordance with the Dhamma;
Indeed, rightly and always protected, they go after to nirvana.

[§14] How should men protect ascetics and brahmins in accordance with the Dhamma? They should consider what is pleasant and painful for ascetics and brahmins. They should take advice. They should show them respect. Treating ascetics and brahmins in this way—through body, speech, and mind—is called the protection of ascetics and brahmins in accordance with the Dhamma. For this was said:

[62] The ascetics and brahmins, who are virtuous and learned,
Who protect [others] in accordance with the Dhamma, always attain happiness.
[63] Do not disregard all these virtuous ones who practice the religious life at any time!
[Those disregarding them] go to the great hell.
[64] Ascetics are said to be unblemished, endowed with a mind of loving-kindness.
Do not disregard the unblemished one! Or surely fault [will] result.
[65] Just as dust thrown upward against the wind falls back on him [i.e., the thrower],
So the eye is here afflicted.
[66] In the same way, in the unblemished one [or] the wicked one with faults or sins,
All faults come back, in this world and the next.
[67] Do not underestimate evil [thinking] "That will not come to me".
Even a waterpot fills through the falling of water drops.
A fool fills with evil, even accumulating little by little.
[68] A fool thinks it is like honey, as long as evil does not ripen.
But when evil ripens, he goes to the Mahāghora [hell].
[69] There is neither mother, nor father, brother, relatives, friends, nor clan,
For one who is overcome by the end-maker. There is no protection among kinsmen.
[70] By oneself only is evil done; by oneself only it is experienced;
By oneself is good done; by oneself is happiness obtained.
[71] One should practice the Dhamma with good conduct; one should not practice it with bad conduct.
One who practices the Dhamma sleeps happily, in this world and the next.
[72] He who holds the Dhamma, delights in the Dhamma, protects the Dhamma.
The Dhamma protects him, like a great parasol [shelters a king]; later he goes to the end of the world".

[§15] Sambala the lay follower listened to the excellent Dhamma in the words of the Thera Gavampati, the exposition of which was profound and dense, able to dispel [impurities] through a complete instruction. His heart suffused with joy and without untruth gone inside it, he asked the Thera forgiveness. He [i.e., Sambala] paid homage reverently with his head at his feet and said:

"Venerable Sir, I committed a fault, may you forgive that! Venerable Sir, I was obscured because of the net of wrong

actions which blinded me like darkness; I was ignorant of your great virtues. From today, for the rest of my life I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dhamma, I take refuge in the Saṅgha".

He held up an *añjali* and sat. The Thera Gavampati Brahmaputta took leave of lay followers and pupils and reached final release.

[§16] In what sense is nirvana (*nibbāna*) spoken of? Nibbāna is like the moon since it is cool. Nibbāna is like the sun since it dries up defilements. Nibbāna is like the earth since it is a support. Nibbāna is like a mountain since it is unmoving. Nibbāna is like the ocean since it is the treasury of jewels. Nibbāna is like the Sudhamma Hall of the gods since it is a gathering [place].

There is no earth, no water, no light, no wind, no cold, no heat, no hunger, and no craving. Thus, Nibbāna is a Great City because it is not subject to birth, decay, disease, and death—it is calm, peaceful, and the supreme [place] of happiness.

And the Great City that is Nibbāna has a wall, a gate, a watch-tower, a moat, streets, a marketplace, a pillar, an interior [place], a bed, a couch, a light burning, a pond filled with cool water and sand, with lotuses and water-lilies, frequented by swarms of bees, by swans, Cakkavāka birds, egrets, Jīvajīvaka birds, cuckoos, peacocks, and herons. Such is Nibbāna—the Great City".

The inner marketplace is the ten paths of wholesome karma. The pillar is [effort].[448] The inner chamber is the *Abhidhamma* texts. The bed is renunciation. The seat is the knowledge of liberation. The burning lamp is like existence in Nibbāna. The lotus-pond is the perfection of truth; the garlands and perfumes are energy. It is filled with the water [of compassion];[449] the sand is the 18 types of Buddha-knowledge. Frequented by swarms of bees that are the arhats [lit., those with "influences" (*āsavas*) destroyed]. Frequented by swans, Cakkavāka birds, egrets, Jīvajīvaka birds, cuckoos, peacocks, and herons that are the perfect assembly of arhats in Nibbāna. Such is Nibbāna—the Great City. For this was said:

> [74] The great lords, free from craving, declared that nirvana is:
> A changeless state, the absolute, the unconditioned, the unsurpassed.

[§17] The Thera Gavampati appeared in Nibbāna. At that moment, the inhabitants of the entire Jambu island—khattiyas, brahmins, vessas, suddas, and others, laymen and laywomen—gathered. For seven days and nights, all those with *āsava*s destroyed worshipped the Thera and, during seven days and nights, they collectively recited the seven books of the *Abhidhamma*. The next day, Vissukamma [i.e., the Celestial Architect] was busy beautifying the many pinnacle buildings adorned with seven jewels he had put at disposal. At that moment, Sakka [i.e., Indra] created a golden box embellished with seven [types of] jewels.

On the Thera's funeral ground, the Blessed One, surrounded by many thousands of those with *āsavas* destroyed, arrived and accomplished the duties for the Thera's body. During the cremation, noble suras, asuras, nāgas, supaṇṇas, gandhabbas, yakkhas, mystics,

[448] Cp. trans. Nibbāna-s 128.

[449] Ibid.

sorcerers, kinnaras, and kinnarīs[450] [gathered] around.

At that moment, an uproar [resonated] from the surface of the earth up to the Brahma worlds. Having come to view the Thera's body, other divine assemblies endowed with magical powers and great prowesses filled even this world-system. Then, respectively, yakkhas stood mingled together with the gods, gandhabbas stood mingled together with the yakkhas, venateyyas stood mingled together with gandhabbas, kinnaras stood mingled together with venateyyas, kiṁpurisas[451] stood mingled together with kinnaras, parasols stood mingled together with kiṁpurisas, golden fly-whisks stood mingled together with parasols, flags stood mingled with golden fly-whisks, banners stood mingled with flags, and jars stood mingled with banners.

[§18] After the laying down [i.e., cremation] of the Thera's body, the Blessed One collected the relics, went to the great city of Vesāli, and enshrined [them] at the Ghosita monastery. All the kings, citizens, inhabitants from all over the Jambu island, and men constructed a great stupa, adorned with gold and jewels, for the Thera's relics at the Ghosita monastery.

Then, disciples and lay followers remembered the Thera's virtues, crying and lamenting. So they reflected: "Alas! Our preceptor, by his wisdom, has connected us with the excellent Dhamma!"

In the evening, carrying lamps, incense, and other offerings, the followers went to the monastery. The Blessed One, seated on the excellent Dhamma-seat, glowing with seven [kinds of] jewels, preached the sweet Dhamma in the evening. At the conclusion of the discourse, all the people attained the fruit of stream-entry and beyond.

From that time onward, the lay follower Sambala, having scattered countless wealth in the Buddha's dispensation, made even greater merit. Having gone forth into the dispensation, he developed concentration and insight, attained arhatship, and reached the final release of existence in the nirvana-element, as the result of [the cessation of] aggregates and materiality produced by karma.

The discourse on Gavampati is complete.

[450] These terms designate various classes of supernatural beings in Buddhist cosmology, including gods (*suras*), antigods or titans (*asuras*), serpent spirits (*nāgas*), *garuḍa*-like celestial birds (*supaṇṇas*), heavenly musicians (*gandhabbas*), nature spirits or ogres (*yakkhas*), and mythical celestial beings, often depicted as part human and part bird, male and female (*kinnaras* and *kinnarīs*)—*Editor's note.*

[451] Venateyyas are *garuḍa*-like celestial birds, traditionally regarded as the descendants of Vinatā; kiṁpurisas are mythical semi-human beings whose name literally means "what sort of men?", reflecting their hybrid nature in Indian cosmology—*Editor's note.*

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A Unified Transliteration System for Mainland Southeast Asian Scripts: Principles, Inventory, and Examples

Trent Walker[1]

Abstract—This article proposes a unified Roman-script transliteration system for Indic and vernacular scripts used in the Theravada cultural sphere of mainland Southeast Asia, including Khmer, Khom, Thai, Lao, Tham, Lue, Shan, Mon, and Burmese. Designed for researchers working with inscriptions and manuscripts from the second millennium CE, the system provides a consistent, one-way reversible protocol applicable across multiple languages and scripts. The full scheme—comprising 25 transliteration tables with 401 consonants, vowels, diacritics, and other signs—is presented in an online appendix, along with a user guide. The article outlines the system's principles, inventories its symbols, and illustrates its application through 17 examples drawn from inscriptions, manuscripts, and early printed books.

Keywords: Inscriptions; Manuscripts; Philology; Southeast Asian Scripts; Transliteration

Introduction

Transliteration—the act of converting text from one script to another—has long been an essential tool for Southeast Asian studies. Though Unicode representations are improving for even the rarest writing systems in the region, there are still specific applications where researchers need to accurately record orthographic features within and across different scripts and languages. This article proposes a new, unified Roman-script transliteration system for the various Brahmi-based scripts used for recording texts in Pali, Sanskrit, and local vernacular languages across most of mainland Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand, along with parts of China and Vietnam. The scripts include:

- two from Cambodia and Khmer-speaking communities in Thailand and Vietnam (Khmer Mul and Chrieng); two from central and southern Thailand (Thai and Khom);
- three from Laos and northeast Thailand (modern Lao, Lao Buhan/Tai Noi, and Tham Lao);
- one from northern Thailand (Tham Lanna; support for Fak Kham, Thai Nithet, and other related scripts follows the protocols for Thai and Lao);
- two from Yunnan province, China (new Tai Lue and the traditional Tham Lue);
- and four used primarily in Myanmar (Burmese, Mon, Tham Khuen, and traditional and reformed versions of Shan).

The system also provides provisional support for the transliteration of a distinctive group of scripts closely related to Shan, known collectively as Lik Tai,

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whose variants are used by different Tai groups in select regions of southwest China, northeast India, northern Laos, and northern Myanmar.

Separate transliteration systems already exist for many of these scripts, so why bother with a new system? A unified system is superior for four reasons: (1) it underscores the close relationships between the various scripts of the region and the languages they record; (2) it allows for rapid, script-neutral comparison between the many words and texts that are shared across the region; (3) it supports precision in the philological work of textual criticism, including the editing, proofreading, translation, analysis, and comparisons of handwritten documents; and (4) it provides a potential basis for the technical work of refining automated script conversion, multilingual databases, and other digital tools for representing Southeast Asian writing systems.

My aim in creating this unified system is to make the transliteration of these scripts as user-friendly as possible. The scripts involved, especially those in the Khmer/Khom and Tham families, are among the most complex non-logographic writing systems in the world. The method offered here, while providing support for the abundance of different characters required, aims to organize these many possible forms in a logical way. Since the field's knowledge of Southeast Asian manuscript traditions is still developing, the modular approach of the system is crafted to be open for expansion as new forms are studied and documented in academic publications.

Transliteration is a tool for representing the way a document is written. The historical phonology of mainland Southeast Asian languages is complex; the way vernacular languages such as Burmese, Khmer, Lao, or Thai are pronounced today is often markedly different from the way they were pronounced when the scripts used to write them first took shape (for Khmer as a paradigmatic example, see Antelme 2002: 6–11). For many applications, phonemic and phonetic transcription—both of which aim to record how words in a language are pronounced at a given time, with varying degrees of precision—are much more useful tools than the form of graphic transliteration presented here.

At the same time, transcription systems—whether broad (phonemic) or narrow (phonetic) in approach—obscure how words are spelled in Southeast Asian scripts and are not easily reversible from the romanization back to the original. For many applications, such reversibility is not necessary. Anthropologists and other social scientists today generally prefer to use simplified transcription systems that render phonemes in a very broad way. For Thai, these include the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS, as adopted by this journal),[2] the romanization of Thai promulgated by the Asien-Afrika-Institut, University of Hamburg (Peera 2018: 186–187), and the somewhat more complex system proposed by the Library of Congress.[3] These systems are easy to use and appropriate for a wide range of applications,

[2] Available at: https://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2542/D/037/11.PDF.

[3] Available at: https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/thai.pdf.

both academic and popular. In some fields of linguistics, narrow phonetic transcriptions, made with recourse to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), are required; no widely used system allows for finer calibration of phonemic or phonetic precision than IPA.

The system I present here is crafted with different intellectual aims in mind. For many humanistic disciplines, including the domains of textual studies, paleography, and historical linguistics, the precision afforded by transliteration remains indispensable. This system was devised with the current needs of these researchers in mind, with a secondary goal of supporting future projects to build searchable corpora, automated script converters, and other digital tools. In short, the present system is in no way intended as a replacement for RTGS, IPA, or other standard systems of transcription; it is a transliteration scheme specifically designed for philologists, codicologists, epigraphers, and others who require a rigorous approach to written texts across multiple languages in Southeast Asia.

Context and General Principles

Whenever possible, the present unified system is intended to match existing standards of transliteration for the languages and scripts involved. First, it follows the currently accepted Indic standard of ISO 15919:2001 for the applicable graphemes in Pali and Sanskrit,[4] though to the exclusion of ISO's conventions for other South Asian languages, which only rarely feature in Southeast Asian manuscripts and inscriptions. Second, it draws on systems for the Indic-based transliteration of Southeast Asian scripts, especially the systems developed by Francophone scholars such as Saveros Pou (Lewitz 1969), Louis Gabaude (1979: [81]–[96]), François Bizot (1988: 124–127), and Anatole-Roger Peltier (1987: 613–619). Aspects of these systems, long promulgated in publications from the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), have been refined in recent years by Olivier de Bernon (Bernon et al. 2004: xliii–xlv; 2018: cvii–cviii) and Gregory Kourilsky (2015: 27–29), among others. Third, it attempts to model itself after influential systems focused on specific scripts, including those detailed by Harald Hundius (1990) for the Lanna variety of Tham script, Michel Antelme (2002, 2007) for Khmer and Khom, and Christian Lammerts & Arlo Griffiths (2016; see also Lammerts 2018: xi–xiii) for Burmese.

For various reasons, my proposed system varies in certain ways from those cited above, mainly for purposes of consistency across languages, but also for the sake of some broader principles, which I spell out in greater detail below. In concrete terms, the system is designed to closely follow Lammerts & Griffiths' system (2016) for Burmese and related standards for Mon; the principal difference lies in the treatment of independent vowels in general and the multivalent letter *a* in particular. It changes a few points for the standard transliteration of Khmer to supply additional support for the complex forms encountered in manuscript sources. Finally, while remaining close to various EFEO systems, it

[4] Documentation accessible at: https://www.iso.org/standard/28333.html.

aims to offer a more robust and consistent system for the scripts used to record various Tai languages, for which unified norms are not currently in practice. Therefore, the most significant innovations of the present system concern various details as well as some overarching principles in the transliteration of Khom, Lao, Thai, Tham, Lue, and Shan scripts. As mentioned above, the system's support for Lik Tai scripts beyond Shan is only provisional at this stage; more detailed research into the history and variety of forms found in this script family, along the lines conducted by David Wharton on Tai Nuea (2017), are needed before transliteration norms can be established.

Most transliteration systems strive to balance two aims: reversibility and readability. By the former, I mean the capability of a human or computer to seamlessly move in at least one direction between a given script and its romanization. By the latter, I mean the human potential to process semantic meaning from the romanization. Given the complexity of Southeast Asian scripts, fulfilling both aims is not always possible. For instance, no major transliteration system into Roman script attempts to reproduce the exact left-to-right sequence and top-to-bottom placement of vowels and consonants in Southeast Asian Brahmi-based scripts; to do so would create a chaotic system that would be extremely unwieldy for a human to read, input, and check for errors. I have tried to balance creating a system that is as reversible as possible with one that a human reader, particularly someone skilled in reading handwritten documents in one or more Southeast Asian languages, can understand and implement without undue difficulty. Secondary considerations concern relative ease of typing and fidelity to broader principles, such as avoiding the use of capital letters, prioritizing Roman-script glyphs with broad support across modern fonts, making Indic-language texts and terms as recognizable as possible, and matching historically related characters across scripts. The lattermost consideration is only partially achievable, given the still-evolving field of Southeast Asian paleography, but I have tried to ensure that visually and paleographically related markers are transliterated consistently throughout the system. Since transliteration is used far more often by researchers focusing on the past than the present, the system prioritizes older forms of scripts, particularly the orthographic practices for those scripts followed in traditional manuscripts and inscriptions. The system can still capture all the major reformed scripts of the region developed in the 20th century (e.g., contemporary versions of Lao, Lue, and Shan), but users should note that these often entail extra complications in transliteration.

In terms of reversibility, the system is designed to be reversible by a computer in one direction only, namely from the transliteration back to the original script. In the process of transliteration, human users of this system are expected to add additional editorial data, including by marking word divisions, disambiguating ambiguous forms, joining words separated by breaks, and eliding the inherent vowel as appropriate (notably for Tai languages and Middle/Modern Khmer, scripts in which the inherent vowel killer/syllable-suppression

marker [*virāma*] is not deployed consistently). A computer algorithm, if not trained through machine learning models on a vast dataset, would not be able to accurately replicate such transliterations from the original script alone. Transliterations performed according to this system thus contain more data than the original documents they represent; transliterations are always interpretations, not perfect mirrors. That said, the system is designed to produce transliterations that can be unambiguously converted back to the original script, whether by a human or a computer.

The DHARMA system promulgated by Dániel Balogh & Arlo Griffiths (2020) —which focuses on Balinese, Cam (i.e., Cham), Javanese, Kannada, Khmer, Malay, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Sundanese, Tamil, and Telugu sources, especially but not exclusively those dating between the 6th and 13th centuries—is the closest model to what is proposed here. The present system differs from the DHARMA system in that it is focused squarely on mainland Southeast Asian Buddhist documents from the past 500 years, and therefore on a different range of languages and scripts. Many scripts for recording vernacular languages in the region have become increasingly intricate over the centuries. Pali requires just eight or eleven vowel signs, depending on how one counts; Sanskrit demands only a handful more. By contrast, the vowel forms listed in this system include some 230 different independent and dependent forms, along with an enriched consonant inventory and several dozen additional diacritics, numerals, tone marks, abbreviations, punctuation symbols, and other conventions of transliteration, for a total of 401 forms. I have excluded most single-character allographs and other variants that primarily matter for stylistic reasons. The system is not meant to be a complete inventory of all possible letter forms in the region, but rather to serve as a reasonably consistent and comprehensive tool for the transliteration of epigraphic and manuscript sources in the nominally "Theravada" regions of mainland Southeast Asia between the 15th and 20th centuries. That said, for students of one or more languages of the region, the abundance of different forms recorded in the tables should provide a fertile basis for comparison and further study.

The system follows five general principles:

1. Unlike a few other prominent systems, it is not case sensitive, meaning all transliterated text is normally in lowercase. Capitalization may then be applied, as desired, to proper names, the first member of text titles, and other situations that would be natural in English, French, and other languages that use Roman script.
2. To the extent that is practical, transliterations are selected for their graphic parallels to the original Southeast Asian graphemes they represent. My aim here is to make learning and using the system, particularly the vowel arrangements and diacritic and tone mark placements, as intuitive as possible for those already familiar with one or more Southeast Asian languages.
3. The system is designed to mirror the modular features of vowels and

diacritics in Southeast Asian scripts. A relatively small number of symbols may be combined to create many possible syllable structures. I have designed the transliteration of diacritics and vowels with this principle in mind. Every rendering of a particular vowel or set of stacking diacritics, no matter how complex, can be expressed as a sum of its parts. I have included simple equations to describe the logic behind each of the more complex renderings included in this system. For instance, select variations on the base vowel *æ* are described as follows: *ǣ* = *æ*+*į*, *ǣ* = *æ*+*ī*, *ǣy* = *ǣ*+*y*, *ǣ̄* = *æ*+*į̄*, *ǣ̄y* = *ǣ̄*+*y*.

4. I have tried to increase the readability and aesthetic appeal of the system by reducing as much visual clutter as possible. In comparison to other systems, this means using more stacking diacritics, replacing numerical tone marks with diacritics, and dividing the vast numbers of possible vowels into 17 easily recognizable groups—*a*, *ą*, *ā*, *i*, *į*, *u*, *ŗ*, *e*, *æ*, *ai*, *o*, *au*, *œ*, *œa*, *ia*, *ua*, and *ui*—that correspond to discrete orthographies and phonologies in mainland Southeast Asian languages.

5. I have worked to ensure that the system is simple and efficient to type within the frameworks of existing fonts, keyboards, and encoding systems.

The system is designed to be as consistent as possible across the different scripts and languages involved. At the same time, some special conventions need to be followed for certain scripts. For multilingual compositions, including Indic-vernacular bitexts (Walker 2020) that include whole phrases in Pali and Sanskrit (rather than just Indic loanwords) in Southeast Asian scripts, I recommend marking such Indic passages in bold. This helps in the case of Shan books and manuscripts, which sometimes employ Burmese script for the Pali portions. Marking the Pali with boldface allows the vernacular-language passages to follow the transliteration conventions for Shan script, while the Pali can match those for Burmese script.

Second, for Southeast Asian languages that do not regularly use a final inherent vowel suppressor or a syllable-final marker (i.e., Indic *virāma*, discussed further below), namely Middle/Modern Khmer, Khom, and most Tai languages apart from Shan and contemporary Lue, word-final inherent *a* should not be transliterated if it was not pronounced at the time the document was produced. This requires some contextual discernment (e.g., Thai *braḥ buddh* พระพุทธ / pʰra ˈpʰut/, “the Buddha” vs Thai *braḥ buddha có* พระพุทธเจ้า /pʰra ˌpʰut.tʰa ˈtɕaːw/, “Lord Buddha”) but ultimately produces a much more useful transliteration to a human reader and matches existing conventions for these languages. If there is doubt about whether a final *a* was pronounced, particularly in older documents, then it should be maintained in transliteration. This editorial convention of selectively dropping the final inherent *a* still maintains one-way reversibility (transliteration back to the original script). However, it is one of several conventions that make this system more complex, if not impossible, for a computer to algorithmically generate on the basis of the script alone.

Other conventions that prevent a computer from easily generating a

transliteration on the basis of the original script, if not inputted with zero-width spaces, include the salience of word division in the system. A human transliterating a Southeast Asian document is expected to add word divisions via placing spaces (and in certain cases, a few other marks) between words and to use hyphens to reunite words separated by breaks or unwanted forms of hiatus. Unlike some systems of romanization for Southeast Asian languages, which impose complex rules of word division (such as the Library of Congress system), the basic principle advocated here is that vernacular lexical items that can function on their own, or can be referenced as such in standard dictionaries, must be marked as separate words (e.g., Thai ความเป็นไทย *gvām ṗěn daiy*, "Thainess"). Reduplicative and/or elaborate expressions should likewise be split into their component parts, without hyphenation (e.g., Khmer *pāy ḷuk pāy ḷa* បាយឡុកបាយឡុ, "[the game of making] mud pies"). Indic-derived *samāsa* compounds should be kept intact in accordance with the conventions for Pali and Sanskrit (e.g., *catu-ariyasaccadhammā* ("the four Noble-Truth Dhammas"), with hyphen added to prevent vowel hiatus).

Finally, the system is designed to function slightly differently for the two major kinds of Brahmi-based scripts in the region, namely those that use a complete set of subscript consonants and independent vowels (Khmer, Khom, Tham, Mon, and Burmese) and those that generally write all consonants in their full form and lack a complete set of independent vowels (Thai, Lao, and reformed Lue, along with Shan and other related Lik Tai scripts). To maintain appropriate parallels across languages, consonant clusters and certain vowel combinations in the latter group of scripts need to be transliterated as if they functioned like the former group of scripts. In other words, the inherent vowel *a* should not be transliterated between members of a consonant cluster. For example, what is written in Khmer script as ព្រាយ (/priɜj/, "ghost") and in Thai script as พราย (/pʰraːj/, of the same meaning) are both transliterated as *brāy*. The Roman-script string *brāy*, when preceded and followed by a space, can be unambiguously converted back to the original forms in each script. This is straightforward for humans skilled in the languages at hand; a computer algorithm would simply need to follow a slightly different logic for Khmer (with subscript *ra*) vs Thai (with full-form *ra*), and therefore needs to be informed which script it should use for converting a given transliteration.

The chief advantage of following these additional script-based rules is that words with similar etymologies are much more readily compared across languages (Khmer and Thai *brāy* offering a case in point; for further examples, see Antelme 2002: 13). Moreover, vernacular words derived from Indic terms appear in transparently parallel ways in different scripts, despite their contrasting phonologies (e.g., Thai *braḥ buddh* พระพุทธ / pʰra ˈpʰut/ vs Khmer *braḥ buddh* ព្រះពុទ្ធ / prɛah ˈpʊt/). When whole phrases in Pali and Sanskrit are used in a document, these are transliterated in essentially the same way for the scripts traditionally used for Indic languages in the region (e.g., Khmer script ឥន្ទ្រិយំ *indriyaṁ*, "faculty"; Tham script ᩋᩥᨶ᩠ᨴ᩵ᩁᩥᨿᩴ *indriyaṁ*;

Burmese script ဣန္ဒြိယံ *indriyaṁ*). Variant systems for conveying Pali in Thai, Lao, Lue, and other scripts are transliterated in a way that makes those alternative conventions clear (e.g., modern Thai-script Pali *iṇḍriyaṁ* อินฺฑฺริยมฺ vs traditional Thai-script Pali *in•dr̄iyăṅ* อิน์ท์ริยัง; traditional Thai-script Pali *săṁghăṁ _ naḥmāmi* สังฆัง นะมามิ, "I pay homage to the Saṁgha" vs traditional Lao-script Pali *săṁgăṁ _ naḥmāmi* ສັງຄັງ ນະມາມິ, i.e., *saṁghaṁ namāmi*). The 17 transliteration examples presented at the end of this article cover these and many other common situations across a range of scripts and languages.

Inventory of Symbols

Inputting texts in this transliteration system is intended to be a straightforward process for users working with modern computers, software, and fonts. On macOS, for instance, almost all the symbols, including the stacking diacritics, can be typed with the built-in ABC Extended keyboard layout.[5] Since the system relies on stacking multiple diacritics on a single Roman letter, some older fonts will not display these features correctly. This is because the required combinations do not all exist as precomposed characters in Unicode (the string *ā*, for instance, exists as a precomposed character, but *à*, *á*, and *ǎ* do not). Fonts that are fully Unicode compliant on Mac, Windows, and other platforms—such as Gentium Plus (as used by this journal), Times New Roman, Arial Unicode MS, Brill, and many other modern fonts—have no issues with the stacking diacritics required; typing the full inventory of symbols, including the more obscure ones used for transliterating unusual forms of Southeast Asian punctuation, may require a few special characters borrowed from other fonts.

The specific symbols required in this system are as follows. Among the 26 Roman letters, all are used except for f, q, w, x, and z. These correspond to the 21 letters used in the ISO transliteration of Pali and Sanskrit. In ISO, the relevant additional single diacritics include:

- the macron above (◌̄) for marking long vowels (*ā*, *ī*, *ū* as opposed to short *a*, *i*, *u*);
- the ring below (◌̥) for vocalic consonants (*r̥*, *r̥̄*, *l̥*, *l̥̄*);
- the dot below (◌̣) for marking retroflex consonants (*ṭ*, *ḍ*, *ṇ*, *ḷ*, *ṣ*) and the *visarga* (*ḥ*);
- the dot above (◌̇) for marking selected nasals (*ṅ*, *ṁ*);
- the *candrabindu* sign (◌̐) for marking the eponymous special nasal (*m̐*);
- the tilde (◌̃) for the palatal nasal (*ñ*);
- the acute accent (◌́) for the palatal sibilant (*ś*);
- the apostrophe (' or ’ ; the present system prefers the former) for the *avagraha* (e.g., *cintyavigato 'cintyaḥ*, "the inconceivable [is that which is] departed from thought").

Single-graph Indic aspirates are marked with h (*kh*, *gh*, *ch*, *jh*, *ṭh*, *ḍh*, *th*, *dh*, *ph*, *bh*) and Indic compound vowels are presented as *e*, *o*, *ai*, and *au.* Numerals 0–9 are provided in their modern-day Hindu–Arabic equivalents. Multiple numeral systems within a single document

[5] A special macOS layout devised for this system, which allows for more efficient input, can be freely downloaded from www.trentwalker.org/tools. A similar custom layout would be possible to design for Windows or Linux.

can be distinguished via underlining; see **Online Appendix: Table 6** for details.

These ISO conventions continue unchanged in the current system. Two other common Indic symbols required for Sanskrit that are not explicitly represented in ISO are the *virāma* (inherent vowel killer/syllable-suppression marker) and the *repha* (diacritical medial *r*). The present system marks the former with the interpunct (·), for example: *sambuddhair anuvaṙṇitam·*, "praised by the buddhas"), and the latter with an *r* plus a dieresis (*r̈*) as in *mūr̈dhnā*, "with the head". Both symbols are common in various Southeast Asian scripts, including for non-Sanskrit usages.

Additional Modifiers as Diacritics

Sanskrit-derived conventions can only take us so far, however. For the transliteration of Southeast Asian languages as well as other textual conventions of manuscripts and inscriptions in the region, other symbols need to be added. For Southeast Asian consonants, in addition to the ISO norms for Pali and Sanskrit, a set of additional modifiers are used as diacritics. These include:

- the dot above (˙) for marking modified consonants, mostly in Tai scripts (*k̇h*, *ġ*, *ṫ*, *ṭ*, *ṗ*, *ṗh*, *ḃ*, plus *j̈* with a dieresis instead of the redundant single dot for *j*);
- the double acute accent above (˝) for Khmer consonants modified with the *musikadant* (*n̋*, *ñ̋*, *ń*, *p̋*, *m̋*, *y̋*, *r̋*, *v̋*, *l̋*);
- the circumflex accent above (ˆ) for Khmer consonants modified with the *trī săbd* (*p̂*, *ŝ*, *ĥ*, *ᵍâ*), for Lue consonants modified with a visually similar mark (*d̂*, *p̂*, *â*), and for a diacritical version of the medial nasal *ṁ* in several scripts (*n̂*);
- the dieresis (¨) for marking diacritical consonants on the model of the *repha*, including a few special diacritical consonants employed in Tham script (*k̈*, *v̈*, plus *n̈*, a variant form of *n̂*).

For a full inventory of consonants, including those covered by ISO for Pali and Sanskrit as well as those distinct to Southeast Asian languages, see **Online Appendix: Table 1**.

The Multivalent Letter a

The multivalent functions of the letter *a* (Burmese ဘ; Khmer អ; Tham ᩋ)—at once an independent vowel, an initial/medial consonant, a dependent vowel, and final glottal stop or tone marker—pose distinct challenges in transliteration. The present system requires one additional symbol to handle certain situations involving this letter in Burmese, Khmer, Khom, Mon, and Tham scripts, namely the feminine ordinal indicator (ª). This symbol, widely available in most Roman-script fonts because it is required in Romance-language typesetting, was selected in place of *q* or the apostrophe, as used in other systems. The feminine ordinal indicator has the advantage of retaining the appearance of *a* despite the distinct function taken by this letter in specific cases. The letter *q* works well in languages such as Khmer, which allows for initial and medial glottal stops, but is a more awkward fit for Burmese. The apostrophe, already taken

by the *avagraha* in ISO, has the distinct disadvantage of automatic conversion to specific right vs left and/or straight vs curly forms in many software programs, making consistent representation more challenging. Regarding the form of the feminine ordinal indicator, whether it appears as underlined (as in this Gentium Plus font) or not (as in Times New Roman and many other common fonts) depends solely on the font and does not affect transliteration.

For the scripts with a full set of independent vowels and consonantal subscripts (once again: Burmese, Khmer, Khom, Mon, and Tham), the letter *a* takes six different functions. Each function is transliterated with a variant of *a*, namely (1) as *a*, (2) as *ạ*, and (3a–3d) as ᵃ:

(1) the independent vowel *a* in word-initial position, transliterated as *a* in all scripts as in ISO: e.g., Pali *attha*, "goal; meaning"; Burmese *akyoṅ·ḥ* အခြောင်း, "line; reason"; Khmer *aṅrịṅ*, "hammock"; preceded by a hyphen when part of a longer compound, as in Pali *catu-ariyasaccadhammā*;

(2) the vowel-marker *a*, often representing the back vowels /ɔ/ or /ɑ/, transliterated as *ạ*, i.e., *a* with a dot below: e.g., Tham *rạḍ* ᩁᩮᨯ, "to arrive"; see **Online Appendix: Table 3.2** for an inventory of combinations with both full forms and subscripts; not relevant for Mon or Burmese scripts;

(3a) the vowel-support or glottal-stop (Burmese, Khmer, Khom, Mon, Tham) consonant *a*, used in initial position for dependent vowels of the *i*, *ị*, *u*, *e*, *æ*, *ai*, *o*, or *au* groups in place of the corresponding independent forms, transliterated with the feminine ordinal indicator: e.g., Khmer ᵃ*oy* អោយ vs *oy* ឱយ, *oy̲* ឱ្យ, or *o̲y* ឱ្យ, "to give"; Modern Burmese ᵃ*ip·* အိပ် vs the alternative older spelling *ip·* ဣပ်, "to sleep";

(3b) the glottal-stop (Khmer, Khom, Mon, Tham) consonant *a*, used as a subscript in medial position for any vowel except independent *i*, *ị*, *u*, *e*, *ai*, *o*, or *au*, likewise transliterated with the feminine ordinal indicator: e.g., Modern Khmer *k*ᵃ*aek* កែ្អក, "crow", vs the rare independent vowel form *kẹ̆k* ឦក; Modern Khmer *p*ᵃ*ūn* ប្អូន, "younger sibling", vs the older form *phụ̄n* ផ្ងន; Khmer *k*ᵃ*ak* ក្អក, "to cough"; Mon *s*ᵃ*aḥ* သ္အး, "to be clean";

(3c) the consonant-support letter *a* (Khmer, Khom, Mon, Tham), used in initial position when followed by a consonantal subscript, likewise transliterated with the feminine ordinal indicator: e.g., Khmer ᵃ*nak* អ្នក, "person"; Old Mon ᵃ*cim·* အ္စိမ်, "to feed"; Tham ᵃ*ẏṵ* ᨷᩪᩬ, "to live";

(3d) the final glottal-stop (Mon) or tone-marker (Burmese) letter *a*, used in final position either in full form following a dependent, independent, or inherent vowel, likewise transliterated with the feminine ordinal indicator; or as a subscript attached directly to a final consonant, transliterated with the feminine ordinal indicator modified with the macron below, a symbol I return to shortly: e.g., Old Mon *vo*ᵃ̱*·* ဝေါ အ်, "this"; Mon *gadui*ᵃ̱*·* ဂဒိုအ်, "ferry"; Old Burmese *e*ᵃ̱*·* ဧအ်, a particle [modern ၏ `e]; Old Burmese *ruy̲*ᵃ̱*·* ရုယ္အ်, a conjunction [modern ၍ `r].

Following the rules above obviates marking independent vowels differently when in word-initial position. This allows Indic-language texts and passages —as well as many of the Southeast Asian words of Indic origin that use indepen-

dent vowels in Burmese, Khmer, Khom, Mon, and Tham script—to be presented in the exact ISO standard, without the clutter of extra symbols or conventions, such as marking all independent vowels with capital letters or a particular sign such as the degree symbol. A complete listing of the relevant independent vowels appears in **Online Appendix: Table 2.**

For scripts without a full set of independent vowels and consonantal subscripts (Thai, Lao, Lue, Lik Tai, and Shan), only functions (1) and (2) are relevant for producing unambiguous transliterations; the feminine ordinal indicator (ª) is not required. The vowel-support/glottal-stop consonant *a*—whether in initial or medial position—is simply transcribed as inherent *a* or according to whatever dependent vowel is attached. Marking this vowel-support/glottal-stop consonant *a* with the feminine ordinal marker or any other symbol is unnecessary, as there is no possible ambiguity in initial position. When that same letter *a* serves as a dependent vowel, it is transliterated as *ạ* instead. For example: Shan *ắp·* ꩡꩬ်ꩫ, "to be suitable"; Lao *itdibận* ອິດທິພົນ, "influence"; Thai *ชฺฺ่̌ ḅชฺฺ่̌* เอื้อเฟื้อ, "to help"; *ṭạp* ตอบ, "to respond" (/tɔ:p/) vs *pha-ap* ผอบ, "casket" (/pʰa.ʔop/), with a hyphen added to avoid hiatus.

Southeast Asian Vowels

For the transliteration of Southeast Asian vowels not represented in ISO, three additional graphemes (*æ* [a digraph of a+e], *œ* [o+e], and *ø*, representing a modified *œ*) are added along with a series of diacritics. The added diacritics include:

- the breve (˘), used for the identically shaped *saṁyog saññā*, *mái hăn ākās*, and related marks to create short versions of *a* and *e* (*ă*, *ĕ*) in various scripts as well as a final *-k* (*ă*, *ŭ*) in Tham script;
- the inverted breve (̑), used for the identically shaped *aḍḍhacand* over *a*, *o*, and, more rarely, *ō* (*â, ô, ô̄*);
- the inverted circumflex or caret above (ˇ), used for the *lekh aṣṭā* or *mái ťài gứ* over *a* and *e* (*ǎ*, *ě*);
- the ring above (˚), used for the identically shaped symbol in Lao and Tham script to mark the back vowel /ɑ/ (*å*), and for *ṁ* in cases where it is used as a similar vowel marker in Mon script: e.g., Lao *kå* ກໍ, "clump"; Mon *kå* ကံ, "neck", vs Mon *kaṁ* ကံ, "karma";
- the double acute above (˝) or *musikadant*, which is used to modify consonants in Khmer, also appears over inherent *a* in older forms of Thai (*á*), sometimes with a similar function to the *aḍḍhacand*: e.g., *sắk* สัก, "year", and sometimes akin to the ring above: e.g., *cha* ฉ or *chấv* ฉ๋ว, "six".

In addition, a few Roman-script diacritics already described for use with consonants take on different functions when used to modify vowels. These include:

- the dot below (̣), typically placed under *i* to create variations of the back vowel /ɯ/ (*ị*);
- the dot above (̇), used for a special Tham diacritical form of the vowel mark usually notated as a ring above and for the similar Khmer/Khom usage of the *daṇḍaghāt* in place of the *lekh aṣṭā* (*ȧ*);
- the dieresis (̈), used for the *yugalabindu* in Khmer (*ä*) and dia-

critical versions of *e* and *æ* in Shan and Tham scripts (*ë*, *ӕ*).

The symbols above may be combined with each other and with existing ISO conventions to produce the full variety of dependent vowels; for a listing of 209 possible Southeast Asian forms, see **Online Appendix: Table 3**.

Tone Markers

While Khmer and Mon do not require tone markers apart from exceptional instances of loanwords, Burmese and the various Tai languages developed different systems for marking tone. For tone markers in Tai, a set of six symbols are used in transliteration. The first four correspond to the tone marks in Thai and Lao script, while the last two allow for the fifth and sixth tone markers in the most recently reformed versions of Shan script (note that the modern Shan tone markers, in contrast to most Tai systems, mark lexical tone directly, as in Vietnamese, rather than as one of several factors that determine tone, as in Thai, Lao, and Lue). Taking *kā* as a sample syllable, these symbols include:

1. the grave above (◌̀) for the first tone mark (Thai *mái ek*), as in *kà* (Lanna ᨠᩅ᩠ᩅ, "to protect"; Shan ၵ႑ှ, "to hinder");
2. the acute above (◌́) for the second tone mark (*mái dō*), as in *ká* (Lao ก้า, "to dare"; Shan ၵ႑ႇ, "price");
3. the tilde above (◌̃) for the third tone mark (*mái trī*), as in *kã* (Shan ၵ႑း, "car") or *kãt* (Thai ก๊าด, "kerosene");
4. the hook above (◌̉) for the fourth tone mark (*mái cătvā*), as in *kả* (Thai ก๋า, "to be bold");
5. the cedilla below (◌̧) for the fifth tone mark as in *kc̱* (Shan ၵ႑ေ, "to trade");
6. the hook below (◌̡), as in *kā̡* (Shan ၵ႑ꩻ, "money").

The representation of tone markers in Burmese continues the system articulated by Lammerts & Griffiths (2016) except for the treatment of final *a* as a tone marker, which is transliterated with the feminine ordinal indicator, as discussed above. A related set of tone markers, used for Shan script during the late 19th through mid-20th centuries, are transliterated according to the conventions for Burmese. For a full listing of the tone markers discussed above, see **Online Appendix: Table 4**.

Managing Consonant Clusters

Southeast Asian languages also require features in transliteration that do not neatly fall into the main categories of consonants, vowels, and tone markers. For these cases, a handful of additional Roman-script symbols are needed, namely the macron below, the tilde, the ampersand, the macron above, the bullet, and the interpunct. For a complete account of these and other related forms, see **Online Appendix: Table 5**. The macron below (◌̲) is perhaps the most complex of these symbols in terms of its deployment. The rules for its use are as follows.

For Burmese, Mon, Khmer, Khom, and Tham scripts, whenever two or three consonants appear together, without any intervening dependent or inherent vowel, the second (and third, when applicable) member of such clusters represent subscripts in the

original script and do not need to be marked with the macron below. However, when a subscript appears outside of an ordinary cluster, the macron below marks all such instances, whether they function as finals, medials, or even initials (e.g., Khmer *dāṁṇ̱* ទាំ, "all"; Tham *dăṇ̱* ᨴᩢ᩵, "all"; Tham *bra*y̱*ā* ᨻᩕᩭ, "lord"; Tham *ṉai* ᨿᩱ, "in"; Tham *jetavăṉna ārām̱* ᩁᨯᩅᩩᨶᩈᩣᨾ, "Jetavana monastery"). This usage is essential for preventing ambiguity, indicating the proper sequence for typing, and replicating traditional spelling conventions (for example, Khom *kāḻ* ការ, "time," follows a different Unicode sequence and final representation than Khom *klā* ក្លា, "to be brave"; it would be imprecise to render both as *klā*). Such usages are rare in modern Khmer, but common in older documents; they are pervasive in Khom and Tham scripts. Since well over half the words in any given Khom or Tham document may feature subscripts outside of clusters, the symbol for marking them must only affect the consonant in question while remaining unobstrusive to the reader. The macron below was selected for this reason. The macron below is not needed for documents in Burmese, but a similar usage appears in some Mon words (e.g., Mon *daḥ̱·* ဒ့ာ, "to be").

For Thai and Lao scripts, in which consonants are normally written in full form on the main line of text, the macron below is necessary to mark any and all subscripts. Older forms of Thai feature only a couple ligatures (*bṟ*, *jṉ̃*). Modern Lao texts use a handful regularly (*hṉ* ໜ, *hm̱* ໝ, *hḻ* ຫຼ), but traditional forms of Lao Buhan/Thai Noi employ a wide range of ligatures composed with subscripts, all of which must be marked with the macron below to prevent ambiguity with non-ligature spellings (e.g., Lao *hluaṁ* ຫລວ vs *hḻuaṁ* ຫຼວ, "great").

My usage of the macron below is related to two diacritics used in Thai script for marking consonant clusters. The Thai *bindu* or dot below appears under any consonant to make clear that the following consonant should be understood as a subscript (e.g., Pali *aṭṭhaṁ* อฏฺฐ); it is transliterated with the ring below (◌̥). A related Thai diacritic for marking such clusters is the *yāmăkkār*, notated with the macron above (the same symbol used to modify vowels such as long *ā* and the special Tai *ō*), placed on top of the consonant thus modified (e.g., Thai *h̄luaṁ* ห์ลวง; Pali *at̄rajō* อต์รโช, i.e., *atrajo*).

Repetition and Suppression Marks

Several Southeast Asian scripts feature repeater marks. The full tilde (~) stands for the Tham repeater mark known as *mái j̈ám*, which generally is used to repeat syllable-level text in special graphic compounds (e.g., Tham *pai~y̱ô* ᨻᩮᩬ, pronounced /baj bua/, "lotus leaf"). The ampersand (&) stands for a different repeater mark, known as *mái yamak* in Thai and *lekh do* in Khmer, which is more often used to repeat whole words or phrases (e.g., Khmer *nī muoy* & នីមួយៗ, pronounced /*nimuɜj nimuɜj*/, "each and all").

Finally, the bullet (•) is used to transliterate the syllable-suppression mark known as *daṇḍaghāt* in Khmer and *ra hám* in Tham, used to indicate when a medial or final letter or syllable should not be pronounced (e.g., Thai *kārănt•* การันต์, itself a term for *daṇḍaghāt*).

A related symbol, derived from the Indic *virāma* (transliterated by the interpunct [·], as discussed above) serves to suppress the inherent *a* vowel and/or mark the end of a syllable in Burmese, Lik Tai, Mon, Shan, Old Khmer, and the new Tai Lue script (e.g., Lue *kam·* ᦅᦟᦹ, Shan *kə̀m·* ၵၢမ်ႇ, "karma"). One crucial difference between *daṇḍaghāt* and *ra hắm*, on the one hand, and the *virāma*, on the other, is that the *virāma* only suppresses an inherent *a*, while *ra hắm* and especially *daṇḍaghāt* may suppress other vowels and indeed entire syllables, including medial syllables. Since the *virāma* and the *daṇḍaghāt*/*ra hắm* may occasionally occur in the same document (at least in Cambodia and Shan State, Myanmar), it is necessary to transliterate them with slightly different forms (interpunct vs bullet).

Abbreviation and Punctuation Marks

For abbreviation marks and native-language punctuation, a set of additional symbols are needed in transliteration:

- the "at" symbol (@) stands in for the abbreviated Tai nominative marker/topic marker *ăn và̀* in different scripts, likely derived from Old Khmer *ri*, itself possibly related to Old Javanese *ri*;
- the backtick (`) is used as a generic prefix to mark fixed abbreviated and/or logographic forms in Tham, Shan, and Burmese;
- the underscore (_) marks spaces in the original text;
- the forward slash (/) marks line breaks;
- the number sign or hash (#) stands in variations of the *visarga* (*ḥ*) when used as punctuation, most often as a space-filler prior to a line break;
- the circle symbol (○) marks string hole breaks;
- the division sign (÷) is used for the Khmer colon;
- the vertical line (|) marks the phrase- or sentence-final *daṇḍa* or *khaṇḍ* in various scripts;
- the bullseye symbol (◎) marks the *kukkuṭanetr* ("chicken's eye") for indicating the beginning of a new text or section in various scripts;
- the percentage sign (%) stands in for the *go mūtr*, typically appearing at the end of a passage in various scripts;
- the section mark (§) is used for a similar symbol in Tham script, along with two other symbols (⁜ and ⁕) that mimic section-dividing marks in various Southeast Asian scripts.

Bracketed lists are a common abbreviation device in Khmer and Thai manuscripts; the less-than or equal to symbol (≤) is used to notate each item of a bracketed list; the greater-than or equal to symbol (≥) serves to close such lists. The remaining common punctuation marks in Roman script, such as the period (.), the comma (,), the exclamation mark (!), the question mark (?), guillemets (« »), and single and double quotation marks (‘ ’ and “ ”) are reserved for notating those same symbols when borrowed directly into a Southeast Asian script, as is common in modern Khmer and Lao. For a complete list of abbreviated forms and punctuation marks in non-editorial contexts, see **Online Appendix: Table 7** and **Table 8**.

Word Division and Unification

All of the symbols listed above cover transliteration in the strict sense. The remaining symbols are technically editorial marks; they help interpret word shapes and boundaries, resolve potential ambiguities, and handle a range of scribal and editorial annotations. While these symbols do not have one-on-one correspondence to Southeast Asian graphemes, they are necessary for producing a readable, accurate transliteration that resolves all major ambiguities. For a comprehensive inventory of such editorial marks, see **Online Appendix: Table 9**.

The most prominent editorial symbol is the space ( ), used to mark word boundaries. Every word in transliteration should be preceded or followed by a space with the obvious exceptions of the first and last words in a passage or a single word cited on its own. Since all the scripts covered here are normally written in *scriptio continua*, any spaces or other breaks included in the original text must be marked with the underscore (_). Spacing is not only important for human readers, but also for one-way automated conversion from transliteration back to the original script. This is because of the special rules concerning the multivalent letter *a* in initial, medial, and final position, as well as the rules around independent vowels in the relevant scripts.

The hyphen (-) is closely related to the space in that any string that immediately follows a hyphen is transliterated as if it was in word-initial position. As an editorial mark, the hyphen allows for uniting words across line breaks, string-hole breaks, spacing breaks, and other situations in which unambiguous transliteration requires treating a portion of a word as if it were in word-initial position, especially for cases of vowel and consonant hiatus. For examples with a line break (/), consider Burmese *ta-* / *c·* [i.e., တစ်], "one" or Tham *pra-* ○ *dhāṉ* [i.e., ᨻᩕᩣᩉᩢᨶ], "chief". For examples with vowel hiatus, consider Pali *ma-* / *hā-ānandatthero*, "the great elder Ānanda", with one hyphen joining across a line break and another for vowel hiatus; Pali *uṇha-utuṁ*, "hot season", to avoid reading the medial string *a-u* as the Sanskrit diphthong *au*; the older Burmese form *a-u* အဥ, "egg" (Modern Burmese *u* ဥ), to avoid confusion with the independent vowel *au* ဪ or with *a* plus the dependent vowel *au*, i.e., *ªau* ဧော်. For an example with consonant hiatus, consider Tham *gur-ṇoprakāṉ* ᩁᩩᩁ ᩋᩮᩣᨻᩕᩣᩉᩢᨶ, "virtuous support", i.e., Pali *guṇopakāra*, to avoid confusion with the string *rṇo* when the inherent vowel *a* on the consonant *ra* is necessarily dropped. Finally, the hyphen may retain its ordinary, albeit optional, editorial function of linking compounds together. This is particularly helpful for Indic compounds spelled according to local conventions (e.g., Khmer *dvetriṅsa-maḥāparasalāk* ទ្វេត្រឹង្សម្ភាបរុសលាក, "the thirty-two marks of a great man", i.e., Pali *dvattiṁsa-mahāpurisalakkhaṇa*).

Closely connected to the space and the hyphen in terms of editorial function are the equal sign (=), the degree symbol (°), the double tilde or almost equal sign (≈), and the less-than (<) and greater-than (>) signs. All are concerned with notating peculiar ways that words might be joined, broken up, lengthened, or shortened in Southeast Asian documents; such complications

in word shape are especially prominent in manuscript sources.

The equal sign is used in place of the space when two or more words are joined via a subscript. It is used to visually separate each pair of words in transliteration and make clear that the second word begins as a subscript attached to the first (e.g., Tham *ăn=vā* ᨷᩢᩴ, nominative case marker; Tham *mă=vā* ᨾᩢᩣ, Indic gloss marker; Khmer *siaṅ=ta* ស្បង់, a relative construction, "those being ones which"; Mon *ma=nuṁ* မှံ, a relative construction, "which is"; Khom *hmāk=khām=poṃ* ហ្មាក្ខាមេ្ប, "Indian gooseberry", i.e., Modern Thai มะขาม ป้อม *maḥkhām ṗąm*). The equal sign is the opposite of a hyphen in that it divides words that are joined in the original instead of joining words that are separated. In passages written in Pali or Sanskrit, pairs of Indic words joined in this way (e.g., Pali *buddhañ=ca dhammañ=ca*, "the Buddha and the Dhamma"; Sanskrit *namaś=śivāya*, "Homage to Shiva") may follow this convention as well to avoid any ambiguity regarding the presence or absence of the *virāma*.

Editorial Abbreviation

The degree symbol (°) is used as a generic abbreviation marker, including for abbreviated Pali citations in manuscripts (e.g., Pali *ā°naṁ* for *ārammaṇānaṁ*) and Mon particles such as *°ṅ·* င် (for *yaṅ·* ယင်, nominative case marker) or *°n·* နှ် (for *huin·* ဟိုန်, accusative case marker). This symbol can be combined with the equal sign in cases where abbreviated syllables are part of two words joined together via a subscript (e.g., Tham *dă°=la°* ᨴᩣ, for *dăn̰ hlāy̰* ᨴᩢᩣ᩠ᩃᩣᩱ, plural number marker). None of the above abbreviations are explicitly marked in manuscripts; the degree symbol is an editorial intervention to clarify that abbreviation is taking place. In the case of Burmese, for which there are abundant abbreviated forms in manuscripts, it is not necessary—and often quite impossible—to use the degree symbol as described here. In these cases, the orthography of the abbreviation may simply be reproduced in transliteration (e.g., *lh·* လှ်, an abbreviation of *laññ·ḥ* လည်း, a particle).

The full tilde (~) was already addressed as a transliteration for the Tham repeater mark known as *mái ǰáṁ*. When the same phenomenon occurs without the *mái ǰám*, the double tilde or almost equal sign (≈) is used instead (e.g., Tham *sân̰≈ār̰* ᩈᩣᩢ᩶ᩁᩱ, pronounced / soŋ sa:n/, "*saṁsāra*"). Like the degree symbol, this is purely an editorial intervention, but is necessary for producing a readable transliteration for a wide range of multisyllabic Tham compounds abbreviated in this distinct way.

Hiatus Resolution

The less-than and greater-than signs come as a pair (<X>). They are only used in special instances of breaks—whether across lines, string holes, or other gaps in the original document—in which part of a dependent vowel sign is split across lines. The multiplicity of dependent vowel forms where such a situation could arise—notably in the *ā*, *e*, *æ*, *ai*, *o*, *au*, *æ*, *æa*, and *ia* groups—makes it nearly impossible to represent these broken forms comprehensively in trans-

literation. To avoid these complications, this system proposes using the less-than sign to mark the left edge of the portion of the syllable before the break and the greater-than sign to mark the right edge of the portion after the break. The syllable split across the break is placed wherever the principal consonant is written, either before or after the break depending on the case (e.g., Khmer <go / > ᨣᩮᩣ/ᩣ, "cow", where the *ga* and the *e* portion of the *o* vowel both appear before the line break vs Khmer < / go> ᨣᩮ/ᩣ, where only the *e* portion of the *o* vowel appears before the line break).

Other Editorial Marks

Other symbols required for editorial use include the asterisk (*X), the multiplication sign (×), parentheses ((X)), straight brackets ([X]), curly brackets ({X}), and guillemets («X»). The asterisk maintains its common use in historical linguistics as a marker for hypothetical or non-attested forms. It is only relevant for editorial notes and discussions, not raw passages of transliterated text. The multiplication sign, following a common practice in textual studies, indicates an illegible letter or syllable; multiple such signs may appear in a row, always separated by spaces (e.g., × × × × ×). If a syllable is partially legible, the same sign may be appended to other symbols to indicate the undecipherable portions (e.g. ×*e*, ×*n̲*, or *t*×*y̲*). Single parentheses ((X)) are set aside for generic editorial additions. When straight brackets and curly brackets are in their single form ([X], {X}), they mark the transliterator's own editorial restorations of illegible passages and deletions of erroneous passages, respectively. When they appear in their double form (((X)), [[X]], {{X}}), however, they mark instances of scribal addition, restoration, and deletion.

Interlinear Annotation

Another set of symbols are designated for transliterating scribal editorial marks, especially interlinear annotations. These include the circumflex accent (^X), the caret (ˬX), and the up (↑X) and down (↓X) arrows. The circumflex accent (which looks like a large caret above) is a scribal word isolation marker that appears above the main line of text; the standard caret (which looks like a small caret below) transliterates a related form that appears below the line. In transliteration, both are placed immediately before the word they modify. The up and down arrows mark interlinear annotations placed above or below the main line of text; the appropriate arrow is followed by a transliteration of the annotation, and each arrow plus annotation pairing is surrounded by double parentheses to mark it as a scribal addition (e.g., *phrase on main line of text ((↑ annotation above main line phrase))*). Such interlinear annotations are commonly found in Khmer- and Khom-script manuscripts (Walker 2020: 679–684); they are only rarely encountered in Mon- and Tham-script examples.

The up and down arrows may also be applied to special forms of encoded texts in Thai, Khom, Lanna, and other scripts. Among the numerous encoding methods found in Siamese manuscripts as documented by Peera Panarut (2022), only the relatively common codes of the

ăkṣar lekh อักษรเลข, *ṗhan sæn hà̀* ฝนแสนห่า, and *bạṅ hū jấṅ* ฟองหูช้าง varieties can be easily represented in this transliteration system (e.g., Thai *a((↑5))kṣar 3lakh _ caṁ933nak a3nak* for *ăkṣar lekh _ cāṁnæk anek* อักษรเลข จำแนกอเนก [*ăkṣar lekh* code from Peera 2022: 86]; Thai *4 ((↓0)) ((↓0)) 7 ((↓0)) ((↓0)) ((↓0)) 2 ((↓0)) ((↓0)) 4 ((↓0)) ((↓0)) ((↓0)) ((↓0)) 7 ((↓0)) ((↓0)) ((↓0)) ((↓0)) ((↓0)) 6 ((↓0)) ((↓0)) ((↓0))* for *dạṅ nạy*, i.e., *dậṅ náy* ห้องน้อย [*bạṅ hū jấṅ* code from Peera 2022: 100]). Since the *akṣar lekh, ṗhan sæn hà̀, and bạṅ hū jấṅ* occasionally appear in colophons and other paratexts (Peera 2022: 101–109), the ability to transliterate them may prove useful in some contexts. Other encodings, especially those that play with the left-right sequence of letters or transform their graphical appearance, cannot be so easily transliterated.

The remaining symbols used in this system are combinations of those listed above; such compound symbols are detailed in the transliteration tables as they are too numerous to list in paragraph form. The possibilities of combination are most pertinent for dependent vowels, which often require multiple component parts and tend to encompass a wide range of orthographic variants. The transliteration of abbreviations also depends on the combination of one or more marks in conjunction with whole words. In addition, several Southeast Asian scripts, including Khmer, Khom, and Tham, feature a proliferation of variant forms for punctuation marks. These symbols serve to indicate textual structure, particularly in folded bark-paper manuscripts, and can largely be depicted by appropriate combinations of the transliterated punctuation marks detailed above. **Online Appendix: Table 8** provides specific transliterations for the most common forms of such marks.

The separate **Online Appendix**[6] presents 25 tables, numbered 1 (consonants, 78 rows), 2 (independent vowels, 21 rows), 3.1–3.17 (dependent vowels, 209 rows total, divided into separate tables for each of the 17 vowel groups), 4 (tone marks, 12 rows), 5 (other diacritics, 10 rows), 6 (numbers, 10 rows), 7 (abbreviations, 19 rows), 8 (punctuation, 25 rows), and 9 (editorial marks, 17 rows). In this appendix, the tables themselves are preceded by a brief guide that details the logic of their construction, explains how to navigate them as tools for transliteration, and offers additional guidance on implementation.

Sample Texts and Transliterations

To demonstrate how the system works with authentic texts, this article concludes with 17 short sample transliterations of inscriptions, manuscripts, and books, complete with images for ready comparison. The examples are by no means comprehensive, but I have tried to represent most of the relevant scripts and styles. Since the system's coverage of the Lik Tai family of scripts is provisional, only Shan is included here.

The remaining scripts represented in the examples include four used for writing Thai (Thai Sukhothai, Thai Yo, Khom Thai, and a manuscript version

[6] Available at: https://doi.org/10.69486/114.1.2026.6b.

of 19th-century Thai), three for writing Lao (Tham Lao, Lao Buhan, and mid-20th-century Lao in printed form), two for writing Khmer (Mul and Chrieng), two for writing Lanna (Fak Kham and Tham Lanna), and one script each for Burmese, Khuen (Tham Khuen), Lue (Tham Lue), Mon (Thai Mon), and Shan (mid-20th-century Shan in printed form). Many of the examples selected include portions in Pali; these are set in bold. While the forms represented do not exhaust all of the symbols and their combinations present in the tables, the range of texts has been selected to show as many of the key features of the system as possible. Examples are arranged in chronological order, from the late 14th to late 20th centuries, rather than by script type, to emphasize how the system can be consistently applied across a wide range of eras, locations, and languages in mainland Southeast Asia.

Thai Sukhothai Script, Late 1300s CE

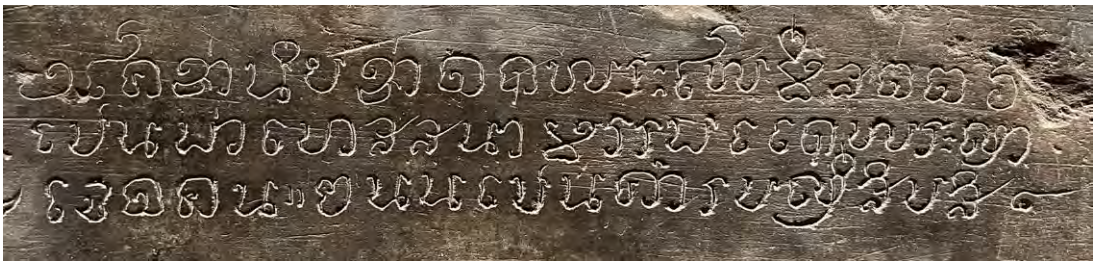


Figure 1: *Gojānīya-/Ājaññajātaka* inscription, stone plaque inscription, l. 1–3; Wat Si Chum, Sukhothai, Thailand, now in the National Museum, Bangkok © Trent Walker

◎ gōjàānīya-jàtak braḥ bōdhisaṫtv / ṗen mà̀ dessanā dharrm kæ braḥñā / cet gan || ann ṗen gāṁrap ñī sip si % /

Fak Kham/Thai Lanna Script, 1476 CE

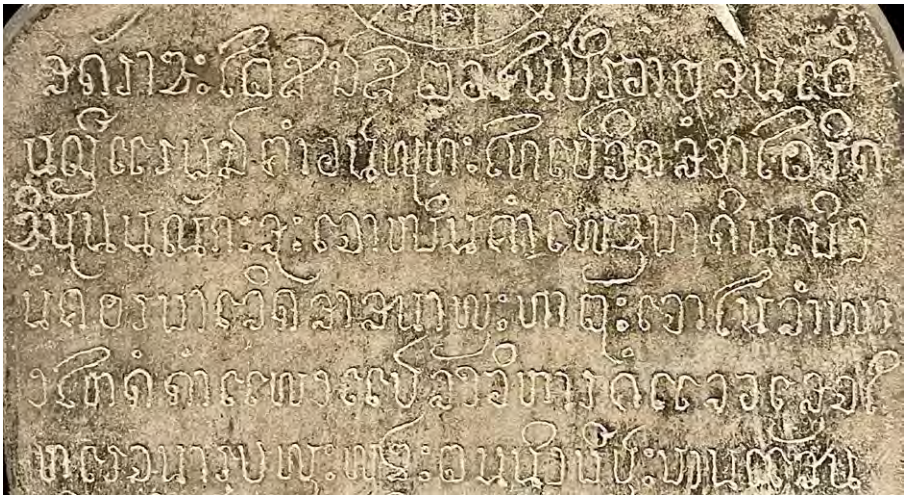


Figure 2: Lampang Inscription no. 1 of Chao Muen Khamphet, stone stele inscription, l. 1–6; Lampang, Thailand, now in the National Museum, Bangkok © Trent Walker

saǩarājaḥ tai 838 ṫŭa nai ṗ[ī] rvāy saň tœ- / n ñī ræm 3 ġāṁ vaň budaḥ dai ṗlœk sånā tai rik / j[ī] punnaňbhaḥsuḥ co hm̱īn gāṁ bejr̲ mā kin mœṅ / någạr mā lœk sāsanā br̲aḥ dāṫuḥ co nai lāṁbā- / ṅ hai kå kāṁbæṅ ṗlæṅ vihār gå læv sr̲ec < / hai> recanā rūp br̲aḥ budhạh ṫan niṅ mī ṗr̲aḥmān sæn /

Middle Khmer Script, 1566 CE

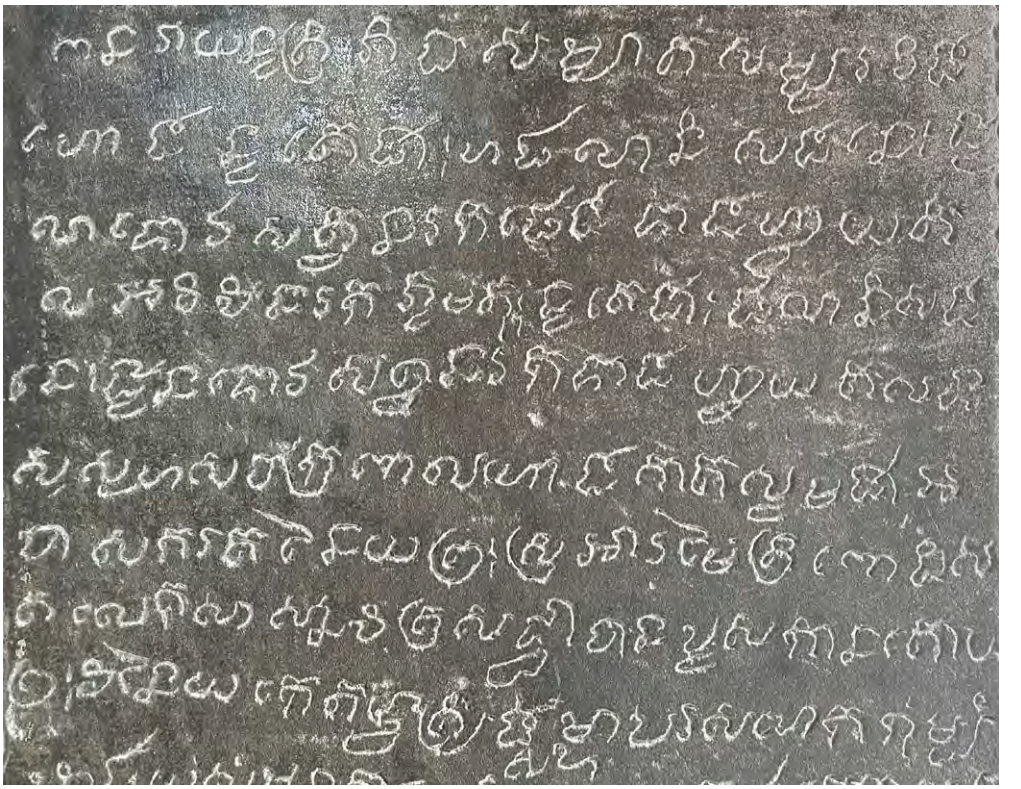
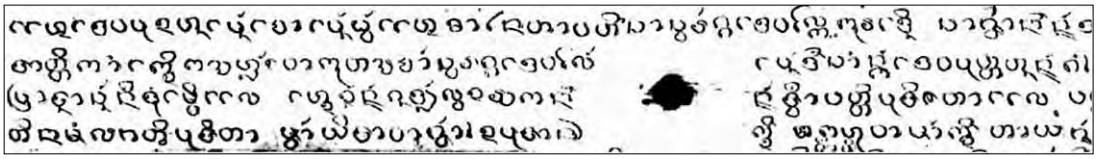


Figure 3: IMA 4, stone column inscription, Face C, l. 9–18; Angkor Wat, Siem Reap province, Cambodia © Trent Walker

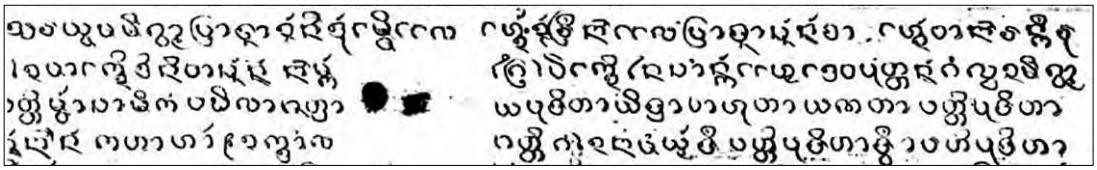
banarāy nū tribhidh saṁmpāt sampūr viṅ / hoṅ _ nū tejāḥh phalānisaṅ neḥ jū- / ṇ dov satv narak ph[o]ṅ dāṁṅ hlāy ta- / l avicinarakabhūm guḥ nū tejāḥ phalānisaṅ / neḥ jūn dov satv narak dāṅ hlāy tal da- / sasahasa-cakrabāl hoṅ _ gāt sūm jā a- / pāsakarat naiy braḥ sri ār maitri bodhisa- / t lek sāsan̲ā citr saŕddhā pān pūs kān toy / braḥ vinaiy ket dvetrịṅsa-maḥ̲āparasalāk kuṁmpi /

Tham Lao Script, 1606 CE

a



b



Figures 4a–b: Left (a) and right (b) images of *Niyāy rạm* (*Pattipujitādevakaññāvatthu* section), palm-leaf manuscript, PLMP 12040511001_03, f. *chī* v., l. 1–4; Vat Thatsisa-at Phosai, Khammuan province, Laos © Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts

hæṇ devapuḍ taṇ pĕṇ co pĕṇ phŭa hæṇ khā nai tāvatiṁsā svăr-gga devalōk̲ bur dœṇ _ **sā** ăn=vā nāñ năṇ diar yạm mī gvāṃ prāthaṇā ḍăṇ nī dŭ mœạ læ _ hĕḍ ḍăṇ rrī nāñ læ prāthaṇā săṇ năṇ cā _ hĕḍ vā nāñ raniḳ ru / jātti kāṁṇœḍ bāy̲ hlā̃ṅ vā ku tāy̲ cẵ svar-gga devalŏ̃ ○ pĕṇ dī sāṁnăk̲ devaputt taṇ năṇ gå ḍai mā kœḍ di ni vā săṇ năṇ _ nāñ măk̲ ○ graị ṗai kœḍ naị sāṁnăk̲ hæṇ devaputt năṇ gå luaḍ mī gvām / prāthaṇā săṇ ni dŭ mœạ læ _ heḍ ḍăṇ năṇ gaṇ dă°=la° luaḍ riak nāñ ○ năṇ jị=vā pattipujitā læ _ **patti** mă=vā **sāmikaṁ paṭilābhatthā-** ○ **ya pujitā yiṭṭhā vā hutāya katā pattipujitā / ti nāmaṁ labhati pujitā** _ mă=vā **yithā vā** ăn=vā ḍai pujā nay̲ ○ ka=ḍī _ **bahu vā** mẵ ka=ḍī _ **tāyaṁ** ăṇ nāñ năṇ _ **katā** hẵ ḍai kaḍāṁ **la-** ○ **bhatti** _ gå ciṇ ḍai **nāmaṁ** yăṇ jị _ **pattipujitā** jị=vā patipujitā /

Tham Lanna Script, 1664 CE

a



b



Figures 5a–b: Left (a) and right (b) images of *Bākulattheravatthu*, palm-leaf manuscript, PNTMP 080311015_01, f. *ghaḥ* r., l. 1–5; Wat Kittiwong, Mae Hong Son province, Thailand © David Wharton

| % **namo tassàtthu** _ % % _ **eva me suttaṁ ekaṁ samayaṁ bhagavā sāvàtthiyaṁ viharatti jetavanne** _ **anāthapiṇḍikassa ārāme** _ **atha kho aññataro bhikkhu satthāraṁ pucchati gate ca pathamayā-< / mæ> ekatise ito kappayaṁ dānaṁ madutadā** _ **duggatiṁ nābhijānā** _ **kathinadānasidaṁ phalaṁ** _ || _ **evam=me suttaṁ** _ suḍ ắṉ ni ṗeṉ gāṁ hæṉ̀ mahā-ānandathera có vissajanā nai dāṁ klāṁ arahantā có dă°=lāy̰ / prahmāṉ 5 ráy̰ bra âṉ _ mī mahākassappathera có ṗleṉ pra- ○ dhāṉ nai mœạ pathamasaṁgāyanadhamm hvâ dī văṉ nắṉ _ mahākassappathera có gå ○ kaḍāṁ mahā-upālīyathera có ṗeṉ pradhāṉ saṅ- / gāyanā vineyyapitakk læ _ mœạ lắv̰ vineyy ḍắṉ ắṉ _ gå mī cai măḳ grai saṅgāyanā dhammapitakk lô ḍắṉ ắṉ _ gå ciṉ cāracār có bhikkhu dă°=lāy̰ vā ḍắṉ nī _ rô ni că saṅgāyanā dhammapitakk lä că kaḍāṁ / bhikkhu tâṉ ḍái ṗler pradhāṉ ắṉ jà _ có bhikkhu dă°=lāy̰ gå răṗ au gāṁ ǰœṉ mahākassappathera vā _ **bhante** _ **kassappathera** _ khắ kæ̀ mahākassappathera có _ rô că saṁgāyanā dhammapitakk /

Thai Yo and Khom Yo Scripts, 1741–1755 CE



Figure 6: ***Nanthopananthasut kham luang*****,** ***khoi*****-paper leporello manuscript, verso, p. 84, l. 1–4; manuscript no. 120,** ***tamra*** **section,** ***tamra phap*** **subsection; National Library of Thailand, Bangkok © NLT**

ṗen braḥ jinedrōrasā _ ◎ _ **buddhasiri nāma** _ phữ jḭ̄ạ braḥ mahābuddhasiri ka sāṁtæṅ _ / ◎ _ **saṅgāyitaṁ** _ ṭæṅ ṭæ̀ silisṭhabacanamagadh _ ◎ _ **silitṭhaṁ** _ hài kl̄ieṅ klo nai pad braḥ / pāḷī _ ◎ _ **nandopanandavatthu** _ ăn mī nai nandōṗanandaṗraḥkaraṇăm _ ◎ _ **niṭṭhitaṁ** _ ka sāṁrĕc° / nai ṭāṁnān nidān _ ◎ _ **iti** moḥ **imināpakārena** _ túay ṗraḥkār tàṅṅ nī́ læ _ || ◎ || _ % /

Burmese Script, 1870 CE

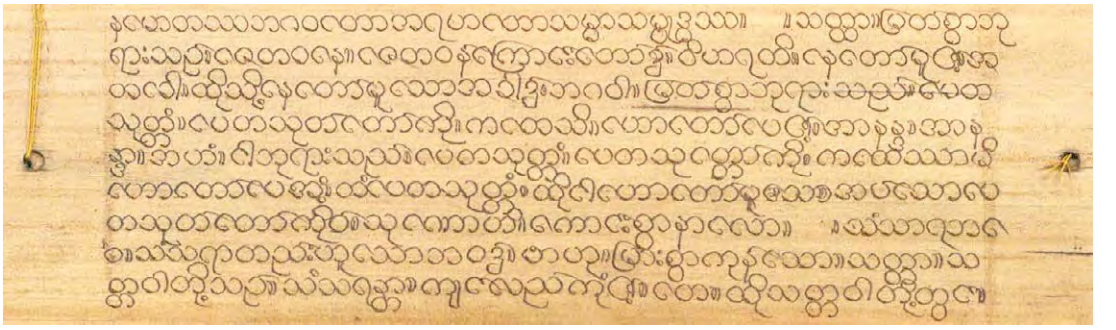


Figure 7: ***Petasutta*****, UCL 3894,** ***ñña*** **recto, l. 1–9; Universities' Central Library, Yangon, Myanmar © D. Christian Lammerts**

namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa || _ || **satthā** || mrat· cvā bhu-/ rāḥ sañ· || **jetavane** || jetavan· kroṅ·ḥ tau `n || **viharati** || ne tau mū `e || **a- / tha kho** || thui sui. ne tau mū so akhā `n || **bhagavā** || mrat· cvā bhurāḥ sañ̃· || **peta- / suttaṁ** || petasut· tau kui || **kathesi** || ho tau pe `e || **ānanda** || āna- / ndā || **ahaṁ** | ṅā bhurāḥ sañ̃· || **petasuttaṁ** || petasut=tau kui | **kathessāmi** / ho tau pe aṁ. || **taṁ petasuttaṁ** || thui ṅā ho tau mū sa{{o}} ap· so pe- / tasut· tau kuiv· || **suṇohi** || koṅ·ḥ cvā nā lo || _ || **saṁsārabha-</ ve>** || saṁsarā tañ̃·ḥ hū so bhava `n || **bāhu** || mrāḥ cvā kun· so || **satthā** || sa- / ttavā tui. sañ· || **saṁsarantā** || kyaṅ lañ̃· kuṁ `e || **te** || thui sattavā tui. tvaṅ· || /

Thai Script, 1874 CE

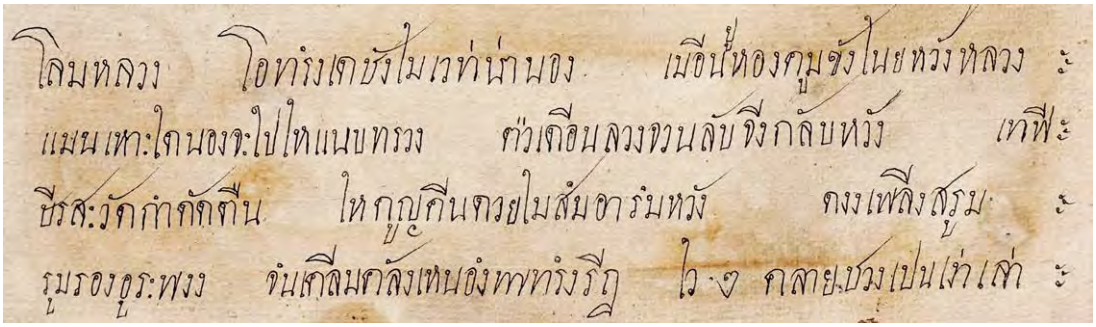


Figure 8: *Phra Darasuriyawong*, *khoi*-paper leporello manuscript, FEMC D.439.S, verso, p. 14, l. 1–4; Preah Vanarat Ken Vong Library, Wat Ounalom, Phnom Penh, Cambodia © Trent Walker

lōm hluaṅ _ ō draṅ tejăṅ maị vedànầ naṇ _mœ̄ạn ((↑yǔ)) haṇ gūm khăṅ naị hvăṅ hluaṅ _ # / mæn hoḥ taị naṇ caḥ ṗàị haị næp druaṅ _ ťấv tœ̄ạn luaṅ cuan lăp cīṅ klăp hvăṅ _ debī # / ṣrīsaḥvăt kāṁtăt ťīṇ _ haị gūñ gīn tuay maị sảm ārảm hvăṅ _ taṅṅ blœ̄ṅ srūm _ # / rūm raṇ ūraḥ baṅṅ _ cản glœ̄m glăṅ hen ảṅ bṛa draṅ rīṭ _ vaị _ & _ glāy juaṅ ṗen ṅò lò _ # /

Khmer Mul and Chrieng Scripts, 1880–1910 CE

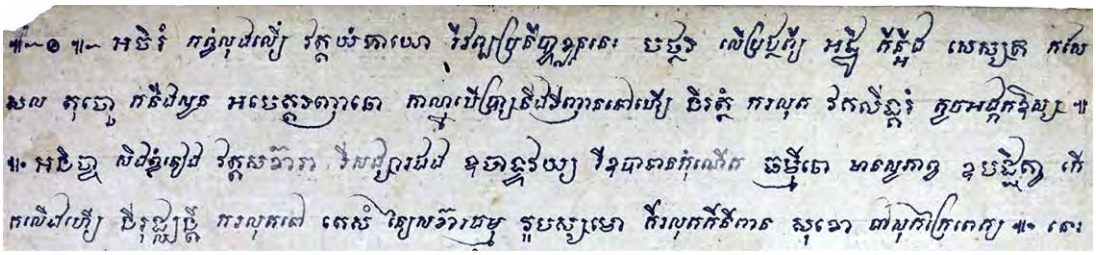
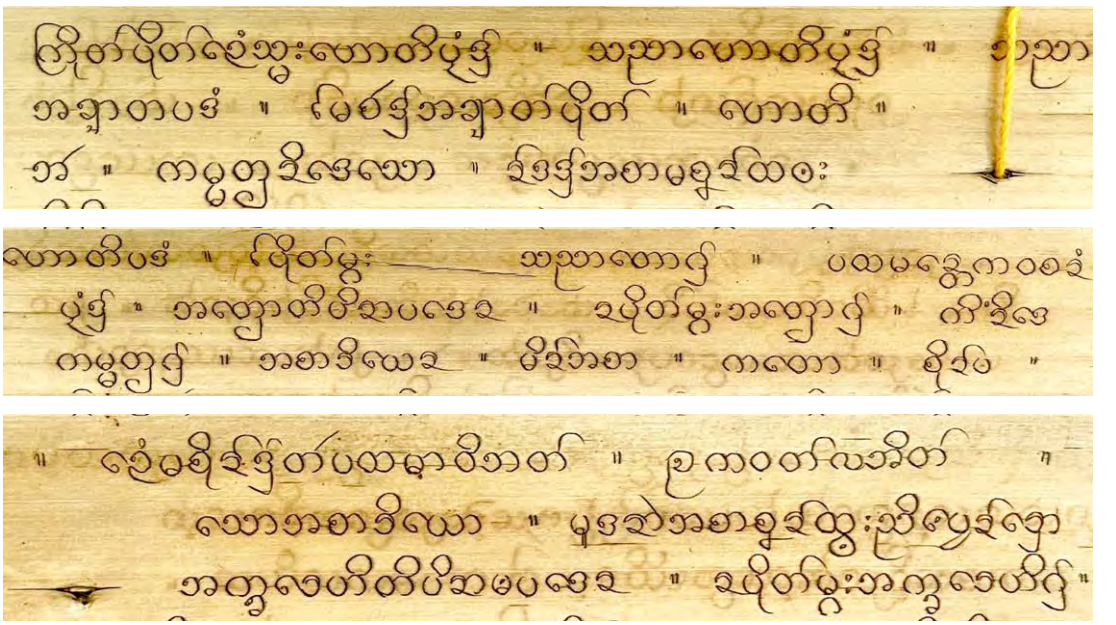


Figure 9: Khmer ritual manual, *khoi*-paper leporello manuscript, FEMC D.954.V1.6 [UB070], spread 2a, l. 1–4; Preah Vanarat Ken Vong Library, Wat Ounalom, Phnom Penh, Cambodia © Trent Walker

|| % ◎ _ || % _ **aciraṁ** _ ka bvaṁ luṅ lœ̄y̲ _ **vatta yaṁ kāyo** _ rī vaḍhapranīpāḍ khluon neḥ _ **paththavi** _ lœ̄ praththabīy̲ _ **aṭṭhi** _ gī chªīṅ _ **sessati** _ ka sae- / s≈al _ **tuccho** _ ka niṅ sūn _ **apettaviññāno** _ kāl=nā pœ̄ prāṣ̲ nīṅ vīññān dau hœ̄y̲ _ **niratthaṁ** _ ka ralut _ **va galīṅgaraṁ** _ tūc aṅkat oss _ || / || ◎ **aniccā** _ siṅ bvuṁ dieṅ _ **vatta saṅkhārā** _ rī saṅsār phaṅ _ **upāddavayya** _ rī upādān kuṁṇœ̄t _ **dhammīno** _ mān sūbhābv _ **upajjitvā** _ kœ̄- / t lœ̄ṅ hœ̄y̲ _ **nirujjhantī** _ ka ralut dau _ **tesaṁ** _ naiy̲ saṅkhāradhamm _ **vūpassamo** _ gī ralut gī nībān _ **sukho** _jā suk grai begy _ || ◎ neḥ

Mon Script, Late 19th or Early 20th Century CE



FIGURES 10a–c: Left (a), center (b) and right (c) images of *Sla pat· kārī*, palm-leaf manuscript, EAL Indic MS no. GM4121, *kā* recto l. 1–3; East Asian Library and the Gest Collection, Princeton University Library © Trent Walker

kruit· puit· ḍe̊ smaḥ **hoti** pḍå daḥ̲· _ || _ **saññā hoti** pḍå daḥ̲· _ || _ **saññā hoti padaṁ** _ || _ °ṅ puit· ma=gaḥ _ **saññāto** gaḥ̲· _ || _ **pathamantekavacanaṁ** _ || _ ḍe̊ ma cuin· daḥ̲· tau pathamāvibhat· _ || _ ekavat· laªit· _ || / **akhyātapadaṁ** _ || _ °ṅ ma cau daḥ̲· akhyāt· puit· _ || _ **hoti** _ || ◯ pḍå daḥ̲· _ || _ **atthoti[m]inā padena** _ || _ na puit· ma=gaḥ **attho** gaḥ̲· _ || _ **kiṁ nide-** ◯ **so acāriyo** _ || _ mū danāÿ acā cnan· thḃaḥ ñi pl{{e}} an· rho / au _ || _ **kammatthanideso** _ || _ °n· dadaḥ̲· acā cnan· th-ḃaḥ ◯ kammattha gaḥ̲· _ || _ **acāriyena** _ || _ min· acā _ || _ **kato** _ || _ cuin· pa _ || ◯ || **akkharehiti[m] inā{{ma}} padena** _ || _ na puit· ma=gaḥ **akkharehi** gaḥ̲· || /

Lao Buhan Script, 1897 CE



Figure 11: Detail of *Thao nyi*, palm-leaf manuscript, p. 5, recto, l. 1–4; Peter David Koret Collection # 40, South/Southeast Asia Library, University of California, Berkeley © Trent Walker

dœn sādu & khå ṗaḥkān 1 khå hai phu khā phu jị vā jāpai nī tai thœṅ saṉuk 3 ṗaḥkān gị / vā nīlaḥbān ṗĕn ○ dī læv ẏāk khāṣ gæv tăṅ ○ gāṁ măk gāṁ ṗā- / thaṉā su yœṅ su ṗaḥ[k]- ○ ān hl̲āy̲ & tæ kå khā dœn ○ **nībānaḥṗătcai- / yō hōt̆u** _ khå hai phu khā t[ai] thœṅ jăn bā mœaṇ bōm sōm[laḥjā] tæ dœn _ sādū & /

Tham Lue Script, 1900–1930 CE

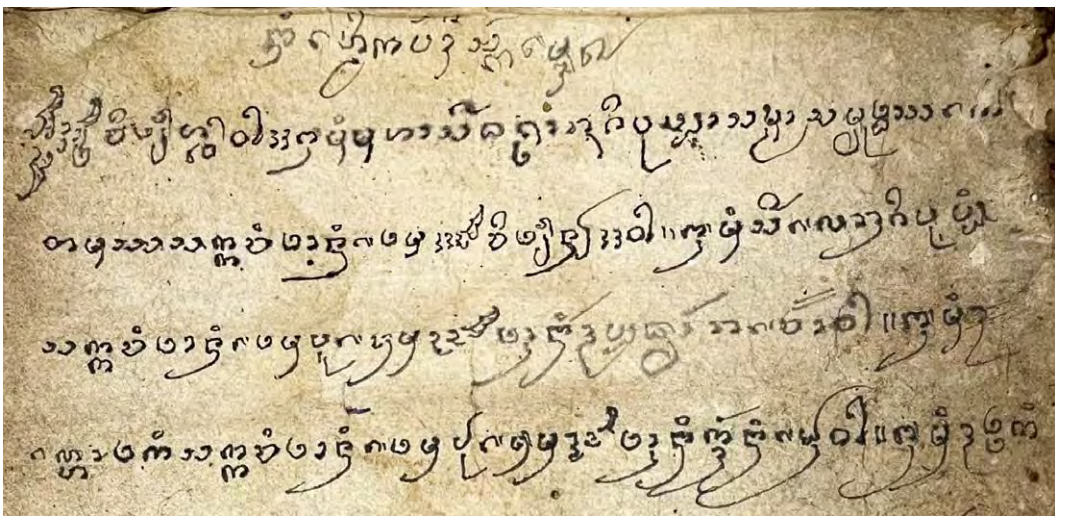
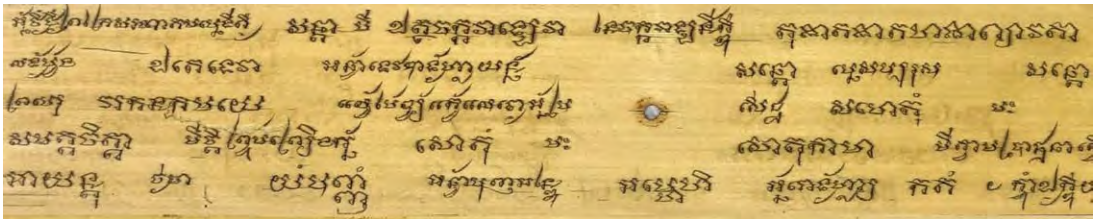


Figure 12: Tai Lue and Lao ritual and medical manual, *sa*-paper whirlwind-bound manuscript, p. 2, l. 1–5; private collection, Laos © Trent Walker

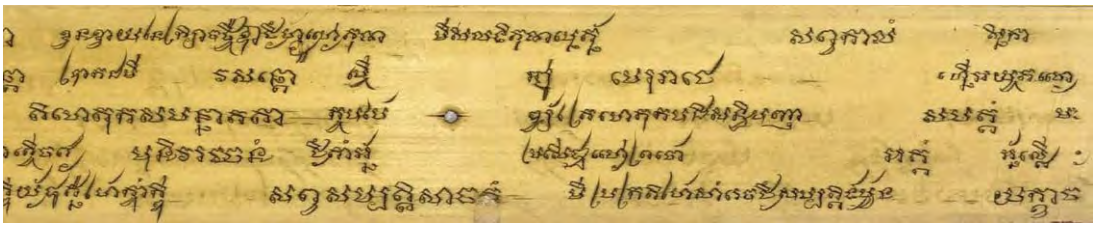
nāṁ hmœk pả ḍī săk̲ meḍ̲ lä / % | % ci diaï hluaṅ vā || **imaṁ mahāsīdhaḷā agipupphā sammāsambuddhassa go- / tamassa sakkacaṁ dānaṁ dema** || % ci diaï nay̲ || vā || **imaṁ sīle agipupphaṁ / sakkacaṁ dānaṁ dema pūjema** || % dān̲ nāṁ uppaththă bha cŏ́ vā || **imaṃ u- / ṇhodakaṁ sakkaccaṁ dānaṁ dema pujema** || % dān̲ nāṁ kăḍ̲ nāṁ ẏen̲ vā || **imaṁ uddakaṁ /**

Khom Script, 1925 CE

a



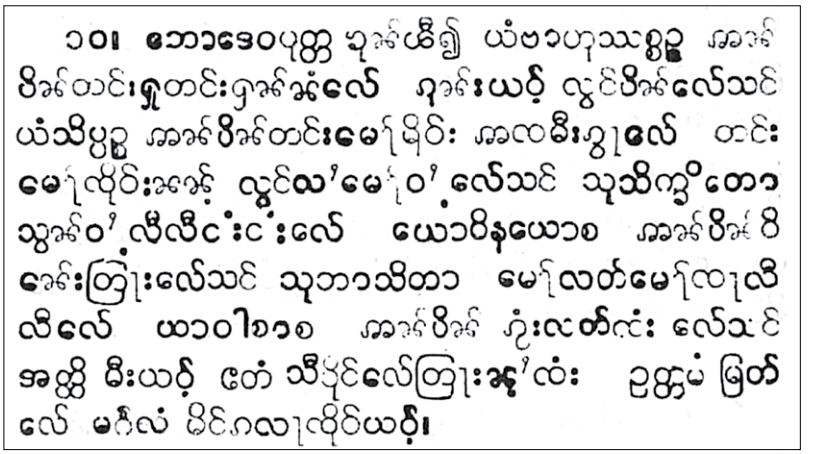
b



Figures 13a–b: Left (a) and right (b) images of *Sattaparitta*, palm-leaf manuscript, FEMC C.77.VII, *kā* recto, l. 1–5; Preah Vanarat Ken Vong Library, Wat Ounalom, Phnom Penh, Cambodia © Trent Walker

ăn̲ thiṇ̲ jiṇ̲ bra traisaraṇāgam peṇ dī biṇ̲ _ **santā** _ mī _ **ettha cakkavāḷe vā** _ nai cakkavāḷ nī ka=ḍī _ **guṇagaṇagahaṇabyāvatā** _ khuan khvāy nai kriy̲ā ca thīạ au jiṇ hmū hæ̀ṇ guṇ _ mī sīladiguṇ peṇ táṇ̲ _ **sabvakālaṁ** _ siṇ kā- / l dăṇ̲ ṗuaṅ _ **ete devā** _ ăn=vā devaḍā dăṇ̲ hlāy năṇ̲ ○ **santo** _ peṇ sappurus _ **santo** _ prākaṭ mī _ **vasanto** _ mōẹa ○ [a]yù̀ _ **merurāje** _ hnōea yạt hæ̀ṇ / bra meru _ **varakanakamaye** _ lǽv̲ ṗai ḍúay̲ kǽv̲ læ doṇ̲ ăṇ̲ pra- ○ sōṭṭh _ **sahetuṁ** _ maḥ _ **tihetukasamannāgatā** _ kạp ṗai ○ ḍúay̲ traihetukapaṭisandhipañā _ **samaggaṁ** _ maḥ / **samaggacittā** _ mī ciṭ brą́m brïeṅ kăṇ̲ _ **sotuṁ** _ maḥ ○ _ **sotukāmā** _ mī gvām prāthṭhanā bōẹa ca bằṇ̲ _ **munivaravacanaṁ** _ jiṇ̲ gāṁ ăṇ̲ ○ prasōṭṭh hæ̀ṇ bra có _ **aggaṁ** _ ăṇ̲ lœ́ṣ _ # / **āyantu** _ càṇ̀ mā _ **yaṁ puññaṁ** _ ăn=vā puñ an=ḍai _ **amhehi** _ ăṇ̲ ro dăṇ̲ hlāy̲ _ **kataṁ** _ kaḍāṁ eṅ ka=ḍī yằṇ̲ phū ṇ̄n hái kaḍāṁ ka=ḍī _ **sabvasampattisādhakaṁ** _ mī prakrati hái sāṁrec jiṇ̲ sampatti dăṇ̲ ṗuaṅ _ **yakkhā ca** /

Shan Script (with Pali in Burmese Script), 1956 CE



၁၀၊ ဘောဒေဝပုတ္တ ဒုဂ်ီဖြ်၍ ယံဗဝဟုသစ္စဉ္စ အာဂ်
ဒိန်ဝင်းရူတင်းဂျာဂ်ွန်လေ ဂုာဂ်းယဝ့် လွင်ဒိဂ်လေသင်
ယံသိပ္ပဉ္စ အာဂ်ဒိဂ်တင်းမေါ်ဒိဝ်း အာလဒိးဂွ၂လေ တင်း
မေါ်လိုဝ်းဂွန့် လွင်လ၊်မေ့ဝ၊်လေသင် သုသိက္ခိတော၁
သွဂ်ဝ၊်လိလိင်းင်းလေ ယော၁ဝိနယော၁စ အာဂ်ဒိဂ်ဝိ
ခေဂ်းတြေ့းလေသင် သုတာသိတာ မေါ်လတ်မေါ်လ၂လိ
လိလေ ယာ၁ဝါစာ၁စ အာဂ်ဒိဂ် ဟုံးလတ်ဂင်း လေသင်
အာထ္ထိ မိးယဝ့် ဇေါ် သိဒိုင်လေတြေ့းဂွ၊်လဲး ဥတ္တြမံ မြတ်
လေ မင်္ဂလံ ပိင်ဂလ၂လိုဝ်ယဝ့်၊

Figure 14: Detail of *Maṅgalasutta* in Pali and Shan © Paññābhoga 1956: 7

10 || **bho devaputta** _ khun· phī `r _ **yaṁ bāhussaccañ=ca** _ an· / pin· taṅ·ḥ hū taṅ·ḥ han· naṁ le· _ kun·ḥ yav·. _ laṇ· pin· le· saṅ· / **yaṁ sippañ=ca** _ an· pin· tan·ḥ mau muiv·ḥ _ acadhīḥ kvā le· _ taṅ·ḥ / mau cuiv·ḥ nan·. _ laṇ· laÿ mau vaÿ. le· saṅ· _ **susikkhito** / saṇ· vaÿ. lī lī ṅaṁḥ naṁḥ le· _ **yo vinayo ca** an· pin· vi- / ne·ḥ taṟāḥ le· saṅ· _ **subhāsitā** _ mau lat· mau cā lī / lī le· _ **yā vācā ca** _ an· pin· _ kvaṁḥ lat· caṁḥ le· saṅ· / **atthi** _ mīḥ yav·. _ **etaṁ** _ sī vuiṅ· le· taṟāḥ naÿ. caṁḥ _ **uttamaṁ** _ mrat· / le· _ **maṅgalaṁ** _ miṅ·kalā cuiv· yav·. || /

Lao Script, 1964 CE

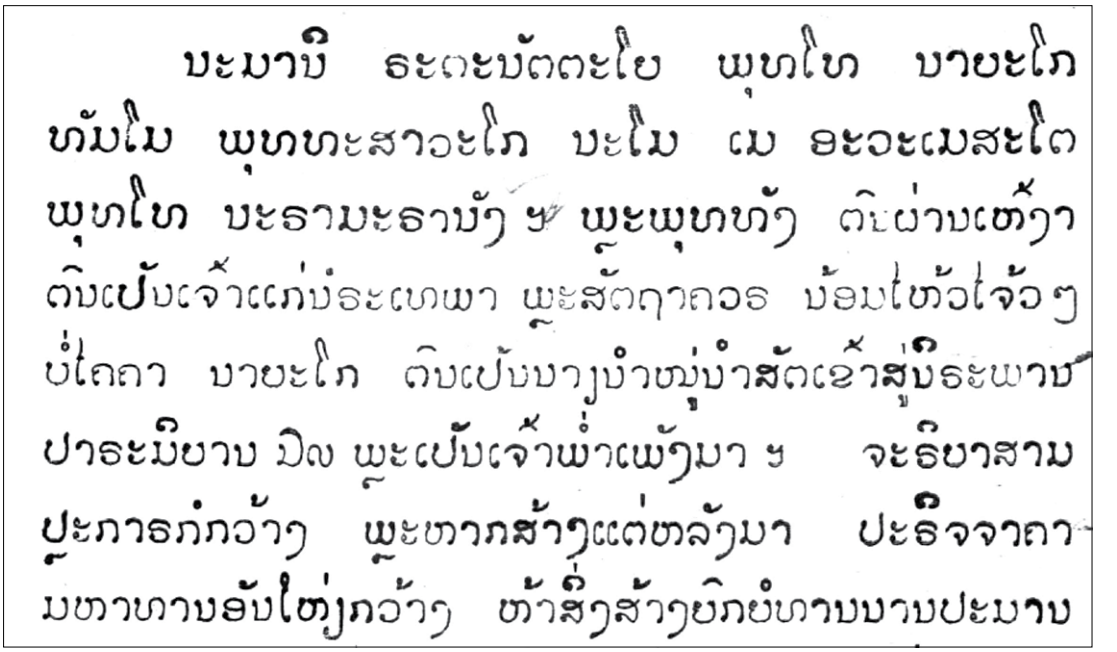


Figure 15: Detail of *Saṃās sâṅsār* in Pali and Lao © Thammanyana 1964: 1

_ **naṃmāmi** _ **raṭaṃnăṫṫaṃyō** _ **buddō** _ **nāyaḥkō** / **dămmō** _ **buddaḥsāvaḥkō** _**naṃmō** _ **me** _ **aṃvaḥ[s]esaḥto** / **buddō** _ **narāmaḥrānăṅ** _ | bḷaḥ buddăṅ _ ṫân phằn hṅố / ṫân p̀ěn cố kæ̀ nåraḥ debā _ bḷaḥ săṫthā guar _ nąm hvái cvái & / på gai gā _ **nāyaḥkō** _ ṫân p̀ěn nāy̱ nāṃ hm̥ù săt khố sù niraḥbān / p̀āraḥmiyān _ 39 _ bḷaḥ p̀ěn cố bằṁběṅ mā _ | _ caḥriyā sām / p̀laḥkār ka̋ kvấṅ _ bḷaḥ hāk sấṅ ṫæ̀ hlăṅ mā _ p̀ariccāgā / mahādān ăn hy̱ài kvấṅ _ há sìṅ sấṅ yâk yå dān nān p̀aḥmān /

Khmer Chrieng Script, 1991 CE

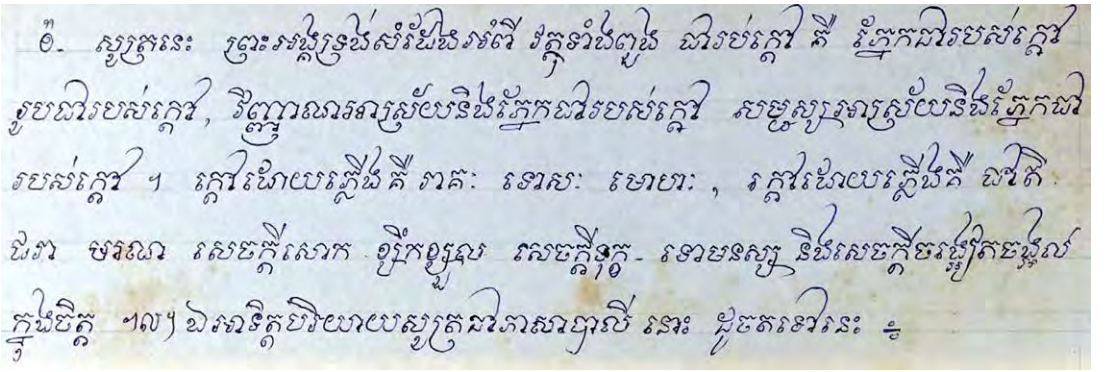


Figure 16: *Ādittapariyāyasutta* (introduction), industrial-paper leporello manuscript, UB045, spread 31a, l. 1–5; Wat Bo, Siem Reap province, Cambodia © Trent Walker

๏ - _ sūtr neḥ _ braḥ aṅg draṅ saṁṭaeṅ aṁbī _ vatthu dāṁṅ buoṅ _ jā rap(aà) ktau _ gī _ bhnaek jā rapaà ktau / rūp jā rapaà ktau _ , _ viññāṇ āsrăy niṅ bhnaek jā rapaà ktau _ samphass āsrăy niṅ bhnaek jā _ rapaà ktau _ | _ ktau ṭoy bhlœṅ gī _ rāgä _ dosä _ mohä _ , _ ktau ṭoy bhlœṅ gī _ jāti / jarā _ maraṇa _sec-ktī sok _ khsiḳ khsuol _ sec-ktī dukkh _ - _ domanass _ niṅ sec-ktī caṅ[a]iet caṅ[a]aì / knuṅ citt _ | la | _ e ādittapariyāyasūtr jā bhāsā pālī _ noḥ _ ṭūc ta dau neḥ _ ÷ _ /

Tai Khuen Script, 1994 CE

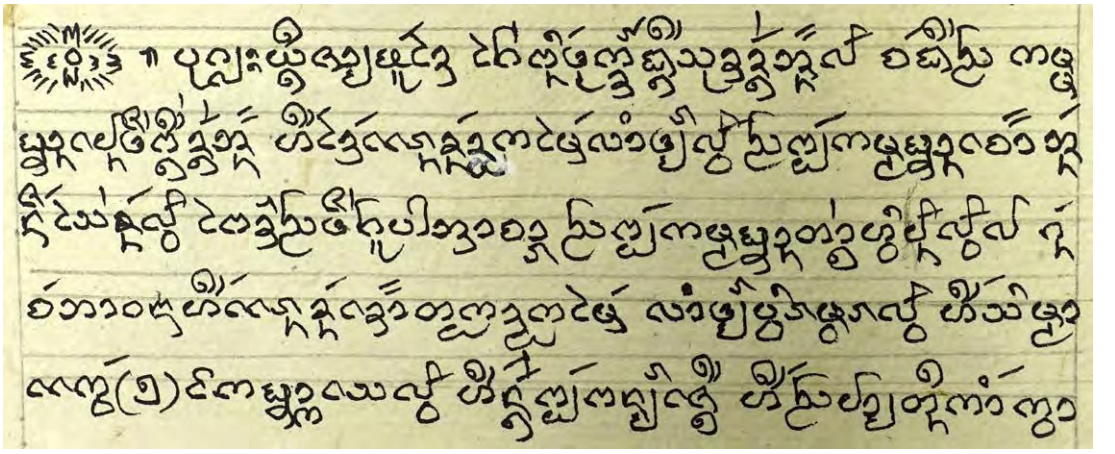


Figure 17: *Kammaṭṭhāṉ nạr văḍ*, *sa*-paper leporello manuscript, recto, p. 1, l. 1–5; Kengtung, Myanmar, now housed at Cornell University Library # 4256 © Trent Walker

⁎|| pugaḷaḥ yiṉ jāy̱ phŭ̄ ḍai _ ġrài bấn dukkh• thīṅ sukh ḍặ̀ṉ ắṉ lấ _ că thī au kamma- / ṭṭhāṉ ṗeṉ dī bīṅ dặ̀ṉ ăṉ _ hī́ ḍái ræṉ khăṉ ḍạk mái lāṁ diaï lấv̱ au băp̱ kammaṭṭhāṉ cố ăṉ / nī́ sài khăṉ lấv̱ _ bai khả au dì ġū pā ācār̲ au băp̱ kammaṭṭhāṉ tầṅ hvâ ṗặ̀ṉ lấv̱ lä _ găṉ / că bhāvanā hī́ ræṉ khăṉ khố tạk ḍạk mái _ lāṁ diaï pûaramuar lấv̱ _ hī́ sâmmā / kǽv̱ (5) kōṭṭhāk̲ se lấv̱ _ hī́ nằṅ băp̱ baniaï jœ̣̄ṉ _ hī́ au ṗāy tiṉ kấṁ kvā /

Acknowledgments

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The Sāvatthī Miracles on Painted Wooden Panels in Siam

Natchapol Sirisawad[1]

Abstract—The Great and Twin Miracles of Sāvatthī are among the Buddha's most renowned miraculous acts, providing key episodes to his biography. Widely transmitted in multilingual textual traditions, these narratives became illustrations across South and Southeast Asian Buddhism. This article examines seven painted wooden panels from Buddhist sites in central Siam dated to the late 19th to early 20th centuries, analyzing how artists translated these stories into visual form. Scenes of the Twin Miracle and related episodes generally reveal reliance on Pali sources while incorporating contemporary social imagery, demonstrating a localized reinterpretation of canonical narratives within Siamese artistic practice.

Keywords: Central Siam; Painted Wooden Panels; Sāvatthī Miracles; Theravada Literature; Twin Miracle

Introduction

The Śrāvastī (Pali, Sāvatthī) miracles constitute one of the most important miraculous episodes in the life of the historical Buddha—and, indeed, of all past and future buddhas—narrating his public display of supernatural powers to subdue the pride of non-Buddhist ascetics. These episodes hold a central position in Buddhist textual and visual traditions and are preserved in multiple languages and lineages. The earliest written account survives in the Kharoṣṭhī Split-Collection manuscripts, composed in Gāndhārī and dated to the 1st century CE (Falk & Steinbrückner 2020). The oldest Sanskrit versions are preserved in Gilgit manuscripts from the 6th to 8th centuries CE (Natchapol 2021). Additional accounts are known in Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, Mongolian, and Siamese sources, reflecting the wide geographical and doctrinal spread of the narrative.

From an early period, the Śrāvastī miracles were widely represented in Buddhist art across India, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. In India and Gandhāra, relief sculptures of the Twin Miracle (Skt, *yamakaprātihārya*), dating from the 1st to the 4th centuries CE, depict Śākyamuni Buddha levitating in the air while emitting flames and water from his body. Another miracle in which multiple buddhas appear instantaneously, known as the Great Miracle (Skt, *mahāprātihārya*), is often rendered in monumental compositions. By the Pāla period (8th to 12th c.), the miracles at Śrāvastī were incorporated into the *aṣṭamahāsthānāni* (Eight Great Sites), reflecting the eight great miracles as part of a recurring pattern that appears in the lives of all buddhas—past,

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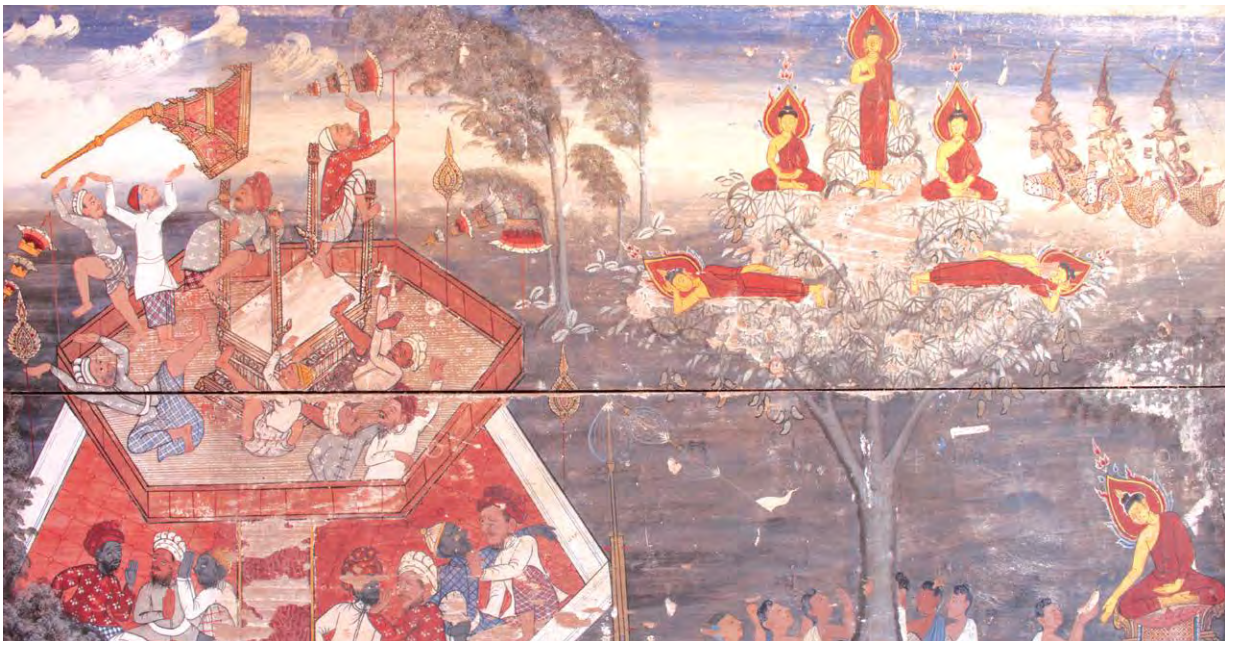


Figure 1: The Sāvatthī miracles, wooden panel dated 1887, Wat Pak Khlong, Phetchaburi © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

present, and future. These include the four major events: (1) the Birth at Lumbinī, (2) the Enlightenment at Bodhgayā, (3) the First Sermon at Sārnath, and (4) the Great Extinction at Kuśinagara, along with the four secondary miraculous events: (5) the Taming of the mad elephant Nālāgiri or Dhanapāla at Rājagṛha, (6) the Monkey's gift of honey at Vaiśālī, (7) the Performance of the miracles at Śrāvastī, and finally, (8) the Descent from Trāyastriṁśa heaven at Saṁkāśya (Strong 2001: 107ff). The narrative of the Śrāvastī miracles was transmitted northward along the Silk Road, as evidenced by mural paintings in Central Asian cave sites and southward into Southeast Asia, where it became an important subject of mural and relief art.

In Siam, the narrative emerged as a particularly popular theme in Buddhist visual culture from the Dvāravatī period, one of Siam's oldest artistic and religious cultures in the 7th to the 8th centuries CE, up to the Rattanakosin period (1782 CE to present), appearing in sculptures, reliefs, clay tablets, and especially mural paintings. Scholars have noted that regional artistic traditions sometimes combined elements from different textual lineages, resulting in iconographic innovations not explicitly described in surviving literary sources (Brown 1984: 79, 83; Natchapol 2022; Revire 2022). From the late Ayutthaya period, murals depicting the Buddha's life increasingly followed the narrative of the *Paṭhamasambodhi*, a trend that continued into the early Rattanakosin period. The earliest surviving Siamese mural illustrating the Buddha's Sāvatthī miracles dates to the late Ayutthaya period, around 1734 CE, found in the *ubosot* (ordination hall) of Wat Ko (วัดเกาะ) in Phetchaburi. From the early Rattanakosin, during the reigns of kings Rama I (1782–1809) to



Figure 2: The Sāvatthī miracles, wooden panel dated 1888 or later, Wat Ko, Phetchaburi © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

Rama III (r. 1824–1851), notable examples of these murals can be found in Bangkok in the Phutthaisawan chapel (พระที่นั่งพุทไธสวรรย์), the *ubosot* and *wihan* (Buddha hall) of Wat Suthat Thepwararam (วัดสุทัศนเทพวราราม), the *ubosot* of Wat Suwannaram (วัดสุวรรณาราม), and on various gilded lacquer cabinets. From the reign of King Rama IV, in the mid-19th century onwards, illustrations feature the life of the Buddha in both murals and wooden panel paintings in central Siam.[2]

This article examines representations of the Sāvatthī miracles painted on seven Siamese wooden panels (*phap kho song*; ภาพคอสอง) dating from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. The panels are named after the beams (*kho song*; คอสอง) that support the roof of wooden halls. The paintings were executed with natural pigments (*si fun*; สีฝุ่น) on elongated wooden panels made by joining two or three wide hardwood planks and subsequently mounted along the beams and rafters of monastic buildings such as teaching halls (*sala kan parian*; ศาลาการเปรียญ) or, occasionally, entrance and resting pavilions (*sala*; ศาลา) situated along canals. The paintings form part of the intricate craftsmanship and design traditions of Siam's premodern wooden architecture, which by the mid-20th century began to be replaced by the modern concrete style (Skilling 2022: 379). Donative inscriptions at Wat Chantharawat (วัดจันทราวาส), Phetchaburi, refer to them as *chak* (ฉาก), *chak phaen* (ฉากแผ่น), and *phaen* (แผ่น). In some cases, two or even three series of paintings are placed at different levels within the same building. Occasionally, the panels are positioned in locations that make them difficult to view.

This study focuses on examples from six temples in three central Thai provinces: Phetchaburi, Ratchaburi, Samut Songkhram, and one of uncertain provenance kept in the Folklore Museum in the southern province of Songkhla. Chronologically they are listed as follows: Wat Pak Khlong (วัดปากคลอง),

[2] See how these panels are positioned in some of the temples examined in Skilling 2022: 378, figs 1–6.



Figure 3a: The Sāvatthī miracles, wooden panel dated 1918, Wat Chantharawat, Phetchaburi © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

Phetchaburi, dated to 1887 CE **[Figure 1]**; Wat Ko, Phetchaburi, dated to 1888 CE or later **[Figure 2]**; Wat Chantharawat, Phetchaburi, dated to 1918 CE **[Figs 3a–b]**; Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang (วัดทุ่งหญ้าคมบาง), Ratchaburi, undated but probably from the Fifth or Sixth Reign **[Figure 4]**; Wat Chi Prasoet (วัดชีว์ประเสริฐ์), Phetchaburi, dated to 1930 CE **[Figure 5]**; the Folklore Museum, Thaksin Institute for Southern Studies (พิพิธภัณฑ์คติชนวิทยาสถาบันทักษิณคดีศึกษา), Songkhla, undated but probably from the Sixth or Seventh Reign **[Figure 6]**; and Wat Pradu (วัดประดู่), Samut Songkhram, undated but wood panel paintings probably from the Sixth Reign or later **[Figure 7]**. Although these panels form an important part of the premodern wooden architectural and pictorial tradition of Siam, they remain insufficiently studied. By situating them within the broader textual and visual history of the Sāvatthī miracles, this article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of late traditional Buddhist painting in central Siam.

The present article analyzes Siamese painted wooden panels depicting the Sāvatthī miracles by comparing their narrative elements with a selection of literary sources in Pali. The analysis is structured around three phases: events preceding the Twin Miracle, representations of the Twin Miracle itself, and other associated miraculous demonstrations.

Textual Sources

Accounts of the Gotama Buddha's miracles at Sāvatthī are preserved in several Pali commentarial sources. An early version appears in the *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā* as the "story of the present occasion" (*paccuppannavatthu*) of the *Sarabhamigajātaka* (no. 483). The narrative describes how the disciple Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja performs a miracle to obtain a sandalwood bowl, after which the

Buddha forbids *bhikkhus* from performing wonders, leading to a miracle contest with rival non-Buddhist ascetics (*titthikas*). As part of this competition the Buddha announces that he will perform the Twin Miracle (*yamakapāṭihāriya*) at the foot of a mango tree at Sāvatthī on the full moon of Āsāḷha. Despite the *titthikas*' attempt to prevent the event by destroying all mango trees, the Buddha causes one to grow instantly from a seed offered by Gaṇḍa, the royal gardener. A more detailed account is found in Buddhaghosa's *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, composed around the 5th century. This version elaborates on the disciples' request that the Buddha entrust the task to them, the creation of the jeweled walkway (*ratanacaṅkama*), the performance of the Twin Miracle, the Buddha's encounter with the *titthikas*, and Pūraṇa's flight and eventual suicide.

The account of the Buddha's Twin Miracle also appears in the *Paṭhamasambodhi* and closely follows the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*.[3] One notable variation is that King Ajātasattu, rather than Bimbisāra, is identified as the ruler of Magadha. Both versions, however, place the defeat of the *titthikas* and Pūraṇa's suicide before the Buddha's Twin Miracle. In these accounts, the miracle ultimately leads the audience to realize the meaning of the Dhamma rather than merely emphasizing the defeat of the ascetics (Natchapol 2019: 195–197).

[3] The *Paṭhamasambodhi* exists in Pali and in several vernacular languages of Southeast Asia. The Thai version, known as *Pathomsomphot* (ปฐมสมโพธิ), was compiled and translated in 1845 CE by Somdet Phra Maha Samanachao Krom Phra Poramanuchitchinorot (สมเด็จพระมหาสมณเจ้า กรมพระปรมานุชิตชิโนรส; 1790-1853) during the reign of King Rama III (1824–1851).



Figure 3b: The grove-keeper's mango offering to the Buddha, detail of Fig. 3a
© Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

Prelude

The Mango Offering

All three literary sources, the *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā* (J iv 264–265; trans. Cowell 1990: IV, 167–168), the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (Dhp-a III 207; trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 41) and the *Paṭhamasambodhi* (Poramanuchitchinorot, ed. 2551: 232–233; trans. 2016: 472) agree that Gaṇḍa, the royal grove-keeper of Sāvatthī, found ripe mangoes in the royal park and initially intended to offer them to the king, but instead, out of reverence, presented them to the Buddha.

On painted wooden panels, this episode typically depicts a male figure kneeling respectfully while offering a ripe mango to the Buddha, seated on a throne at a level higher than the



Figure 4: The Sāvatthī miracles, showing a deity bringing a storm to the pavilion and the ascetic leader Pūraṇa committing suicide, wooden panel, undated, Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang, Ratchaburi © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

kneeler, receiving the offering with his right hand. This scene appears on panels from Phetchaburi at Wat Pak Khlong **[Fig. 1]**, Wat Ko **[Fig. 2]**, Wat Chantharawat **[Fig. 3b]**, and Wat Chi Prasoet **[Fig. 5]**.

The Pavilion

According to the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (Dhp-a III 208; trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 42) and the *Paṭhamasambodhi* (Poramanuchitchinorot, ed. 2551: 233; trans. 2016: 473), the destruction of the non-Buddhist ascetics' pavilion is carried out through coordinated divine intervention: Sakka (Indra) commands the wind-cloud deity Vātavalāhaka and the sun deity Suriya to demolish the structure prior to the Buddha's performance of the Twin Miracle. These literary sources thus emphasize the participation of multiple deities, each fulfilling a distinct role in the narrative.

Visual representations, however, frequently simplify this sequence. Some panels depict a single deity flying among clouds and seemingly bringing a storm to destroy the pavilion, as seen in a wooden panel from the teaching hall of Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang, Ratchaburi **[Fig. 4]**. In other examples, divine figures are omitted altogether. Four wooden panels **[Figs 1, 2, 3a, 5]** instead focus on the physical collapse of the two-story pavilion: the roof caves in, ceremonial parasols and flags fall, and the ascetics scatter in confusion. By emphasizing the visible destruction and the disorder of the rival ascetics rather than the divine agents responsible for it, these murals transform the episode into a dramatic prelude to the Twin Miracle. The emphasis on chaos and humiliation suggests that the destruction of the pavilion functioned less as an independent miracle than as a narrative device



Figure 5: The Sāvatthī miracles, showing at the center the multiplication of buddhas atop the mango tree, wooden panel, dated 1930, Wat Chi Prasoet, Phetchaburi © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

highlighting the Buddha's impending triumph over rival teachers.

The Ascetics

According to the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (Dhp-a III 209; trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 42) and the *Paṭhamasambodhi* (Poramanuchitchinorot, ed. 2551: 233; trans. 2016: 474), following the destruction of the pavilion the defeated ascetics flee. Their leader, Pūraṇa, receives a waterpot and rope from a follower, hangs the pot around his neck, and drowns himself, resulting in rebirth in Avīci hell. Despite the dramatic nature of this episode, it is rarely represented in Siamese mural painting. It can be securely identified only on the wooden panel of the teaching hall at Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang, Ratchaburi, where it appears between the collapse of the pavilion and the Buddha touching the sun and the moon **[Fig. 4]**. The earliest known visual representation of this episode occurs much earlier in a 12th-century mural at Kubyaukgyi temple, Myinkaba, Bagan (Bopearachchi 2024: 328, fig. 2.9).

South Asian textual traditions themselves present notable variation. In Mūlasarvāstivāda sources, in Sanskrit, Pūraṇa drowns himself with a sand-filled pot and some disciples follow his example; the Tibetan *Vinayakṣudrakavastu* describes a collective suicide, while the Chinese version records only a single disciple drowning himself.

By contrast, the Sanskrit *Divyāvadāna* omits the suicide entirely (Natchapol 2019: 268).

The near absence of this episode in Siamese mural cycles suggests that painters and patrons did not consider it a central visual moment within the narrative sequence. Instead, mural programs typically emphasize scenes that directly highlight the Buddha's miraculous authority—such as the collapse of the ascetics' pavilion or the performance of the Twin Miracle itself. The suicide of Pūraṇa, although morally charged in textual sources as a demonstration of karmic retribution, shifts attention away from the Buddha toward the tragic fate of a rival teacher. For this reason, it appears to have been treated as a secondary narrative element in Siamese visual tradition, occasionally included but more often omitted in favor of scenes that more clearly celebrate the Buddha's triumph.

In several painted wooden panels, particularly at Wat Pak Khlong and Wat Ko **[Figs 1–2]**, Siamese artists depict non-Buddhist ascetics as foreign-looking figures wearing distinctive textiles and costumes. Their appearance —beards, head coverings, long garments, and fitted trousers—resembles visual types often associated with Arabs or Muslims in Siamese mural painting. Variations in complexion, with some figures rendered darker and others lighter, further distinguish these characters. Such features, however, should not be read as precise indicators of ethnicity or religion. Rather, they reflect conventional pictorial types used to represent the broader category of *khaek* (แขก), a term historically applied in Siam to a wide range of peoples from South Asia and the Islamic world.

The continued depiction of such foreign figures in early Rattanakosin-period paintings likely echoes cultural memories of the Ayutthaya court, where diverse foreign communities played visible roles. Although many had by then assimilated or adopted local forms of dress, artists continued to portray them according to established visual conventions. The representation of non-Buddhist ascetics in this manner can already be traced to Ayutthaya-period precedents, such as the earlier murals found in the *ubosot* of Wat Ko (Skilling & Santi 2010: 158, fig. 8). As Somlux (2550) notes, the inclusion of foreign figures in Siamese mural painting from the late 17th to 18th centuries formed part of a broader artistic strategy, adding visual variety while helping to convey Buddhist narratives more vividly.

The Twin Miracle

The *yamakapāṭihāriya*, or "Twin Miracle", originally refers to the miraculous emission of fire and water from the Buddha's body in opposing directions. As summarized elsewhere, the term *yamaka* denotes "twin" or "twofold", signifying the simultaneous production of fire and water from the upper and lower parts of the body (Natchapol 2019: 249).

The Twin Miracle as such appears primarily in the narratives of the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Theravāda (hereafter Theravada) schools. In Mūlasarvāstivāda sources, including the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu* and the

Divyāvadāna, the Buddha enacts a sequence of miraculous feats across the four directions: (a) displaying four bodily postures in the sky, (b) emitting a great light, and (c) producing fire and water from his body. The Tibetan translation of the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu* explicitly refers to this complex as the "Twin Miracle" (*zung gi cho 'phrul*; ཟུང་གི་ཆོ་འཕྲུལ), a term absent from the Chinese translation and Sanskrit versions (Ibid., 160 §14.6, 244–245).

Pali texts such as the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, and the *Madhuratthavilāsinī* expand the definition of the Twin Miracle beyond the familiar image of fire and water to include three distinct manifestations: (a) the simultaneous emission of fire and water from different parts of the Buddha's body, (b) the emission of radiant light, and (c) the appearance of a duplicate buddha performing the four bodily postures in the sky. These correspond closely to accounts preserved in the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya* tradition, although the sequence of the miracles varies across textual sources (Natchapol 2022: 18–19). Even within the Theravada tradition, textual treatments differ. Only the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* explicitly associates all three miracles with the event at Sāvatthī, whereas the *Sarabhamigajātaka* and the *Paṭhamasambodhi* describe the Twin Miracle more narrowly as the emission of fire and water. These differences are significant for the study of visual representation, as mural cycles often select and emphasize particular elements of the miracle rather than reproducing the full range of descriptions preserved in the literary tradition.

Fire, Water, and Light

The wooden panel at Wat Chantharawat, Phetchaburi **[Fig. 3a]**, depicts only the emission of light, selectively visualizing one aspect of the Twin Miracle. According to the *Yamakapāṭihāriyavatthu* of the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, the Buddha emits radiant light of various colors—blue, yellow, red, white, crimson, and crystal-like—from his body as part of the miracle (Dhp-a III 213–214; trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 45–46). Mūlasarvāstivāda sources attribute this phenomenon to the Buddha's entry into the fire-element concentration (*tejodhātu*), whereas Theravada texts do not associate the emission of light with a specific meditative technique (Natchapol 2019: 159).

In contrast, Pali sources such as the *Yamakapāṭihāriyavatthu* and the *Paṭhamasambodhi* emphasize the emission of fire and water from the Buddha's body, yet these elements are not specifically depicted on the wooden panels.

The Buddha Multiplied

One of the most striking features of the wooden panels is the depiction of the Buddha performing the miracle alongside a magically created double, resulting in multiple manifestations of the Buddha shown in different postures and activities. This motif dominates most visual representations of the Twin Miracle. An exception appears in the wooden panel at Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang, Ratchaburi **[Fig. 4]**, where other miraculous aspects are emphasized.

The textual tradition provides a useful point of comparison.



Figure 6: The multiplication of buddhas atop the mango tree at Sāvatthī, wooden panel, undated, Folklore Museum, Songkhla © Natchapol Sirisawad

In Pali sources, particularly the *Yamakapāṭihāriyavatthu*, the miracle is described as a didactic display in which the Buddha creates a duplicate (*nimmito*) who teaches the Dhamma while the Buddha simultaneously performs different bodily postures. Because both the Buddha and his magically created counterpart enact the miracle, it is designated a "Twin Miracle". The *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* (Dhp-a III 213–214; trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 45–46) explains that when the Buddha walks, stands, sits, or lies down, the duplicate performs a contrasting posture, and vice versa. In another passage (Dhp-a III 216; trans. Burlingame 1921: III, 47), the duplicate is said to engage the Buddha in dialogue, enabling the teaching of the Dhamma to a vast audience.

The paintings, however, seem to develop this idea differently. None of the principal textual sources—the *Yamakapāṭihāriyaniddesa* in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, or the *Paṭhamasambodhi*—specify the number of duplicates. The texts suggest only a single magically created counterpart performing actions distinct from those of the Buddha. In contrast, wooden panels frequently depict several duplicate buddhas, commonly four, arranged symmetrically around the central figure on the branches of a mango tree **[e.g., Fig. 5]**. This multiplication probably reflects an artistic convention rather than a literal transcription of textual descriptions.

Another difference concerns the miracle's setting. Pali sources vividly describe the mango tree at Sāvatthī, but do not specify the Buddha's exact position, noting only in the *Paṭhamasambodhi* that the miracle occurred "near the mango tree" (Poramanuchitchinorot, ed. 2551: 232; trans. 2016: 471), as echoed in the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*. In paintings, by contrast, the emanations of buddhas are typically placed directly on the branches, an adaptation that clarifies the scene visually.

The structure of the tree itself plays an important compositional role. In many murals and wooden panels, the mango tree is rendered with a broad, rounded base tapering to a pointed top. Two reclining buddha manifestations usually occupy the lower and widest part of the tree. Above these appear two

seated figures, while a standing buddha crowns the apex, as in the example from the Folklore Museum, Songkhla **[Fig. 6]**. This arrangement allows several postures to be displayed simultaneously while maintaining visual balance within a vertical composition.

Such images suggest that Siamese painters organized the scene according to pictorial logic rather than textual sequence. The number and placement of buddha figures clearly respond primarily to the shape of the tree and the vertical surface of the wall or panel. Multiple manifestations are arranged along the trunk and branches in a clear hierarchy, transforming the narrative into a visually coherent composition.

The earliest surviving painted examples of this arrangement appear in murals from the late Ayutthaya period, where reclining manifestations occupy the lower register, standing figures the middle, and seated buddhas the upper part of the tree (Skilling & Santi 2010: 157, fig. 7). Although the painted wooden panels display slight variations, the persistence of this vertical organization indicates that Siamese artists developed a stable visual convention for representing the Sāvatthī miracles.

Sun and Moon

Several painted wooden panels depict the Buddha reaching toward or touching the sun and the moon as part of the miracle scene. At Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang, Ratchaburi, the Buddha sits atop a mango tree with both hands raised, touching the sun with his right hand and the moon—presumably—with his left **[Fig. 4]**. A similar theme appears on certain gilded lacquer cabinets (Bunthoeun 2549: 211), where the Buddha stands on the tree and reaches toward the two celestial bodies. Another example occurs on a wooden panel at Wat Pradu, Amphawa, Samut Songkhram **[Fig. 7]**, where the Buddha stands touching the sun and the moon; an accompanying inscription, however, identifies the episode as a miracle at Kapilavatthu rather than at Sāvatthī.

This motif has earlier visual precedents. In Dvāravatī-period reliefs and molded tablets, multiplied buddhas placed at the top of compositions often display the gesture of touching circular forms on either side (Natchapol 2022: figs 1, 2, 4, 7; Revire 2022: fig. 5). These circles are commonly interpreted as the sun and the moon, although they have also been read as a double manifestation of the solar deity Sūrya (Brown 1984: 90).

Textual sources provide only partial parallels to these images. The gesture does not appear in the Pali or Mūlasarvāstivāda accounts of the Sāvatthī miracles but is described in the *Paṭhamasambodhi* (Poramanuchitchinorot, ed. 2551: 236; trans. 2016: 479). There, the Buddha enters the fourth *jhāna*—the foundation of supranormal powers—before creating a magical double (*nimmitabuddho*) and performing various feats, including extending his hand to touch the sun and the moon.

Comparable episodes occur in other Buddhist traditions. The Chinese translation of the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, for example, records a miracle demonstration in which the Buddha multiplies his body, reunites the forms, touches the sun and the moon, and extends his body to the Brahmā heaven (T. 1428: 949c23–29). Similar descriptions in Dharmaguptaka and related sources associate such feats



FIGURE 7: The Buddha performing the Twin Miracle, emitting light and touching the sun and moon, at Kapilavatthu, wooden panel, undated, Wat Pradu, Samut Songkhram © Thanaphat Limhasanaikul

with the psychic powers arising from the fourth level of meditative absorption (Natchapol 2019: 260–261). Miraculous displays in early Buddhist literature are often presented as extensions of meditative mastery, expressing the power of the mind over matter (Fiordalis 2008: 4). A related episode appears in the Sanskrit *Buddhacarita*, where the Buddha performs miracles to convince his father of his enlightenment. Among these feats he touches the chariot of the sun, multiplies his body, emits fire and water, and moves freely through earth, water, and air (trans. Johnston 1995: 138–139).

Taken together, these visual and textual parallels suggest that Siamese artists drew selectively on a wider repertoire of Buddhist miracle traditions. The wooden panels do not simply reproduce a single textual narrative but seem to incorporate motifs circulating across multiple literary and artistic traditions.

Narrative Inscriptions

The inscriptions on the painted wooden panels, all written in Thai script and language, function either as narrative captions or as donative records. The few narrative labels are presented here in modern Thai orthography, transcribed and translated into English by the author, with original spellings retained where relevant. Donative inscriptions belong to a different category of analysis and are therefore not treated here.

Wat Ko, Phetchaburi

The wooden panel kept in the teaching hall (*sala kan parian*; ศาลาการเปรียญ) depicts the Twin Miracle at Sāvatthī paired with the Buddha's visit to the Sakyas at Kapilavatthu **[FIG. 2]**. Although the Twin Miracle is not explicitly named, a four-line inscription—identical in content to that at Wat Chantharawat, with only minor orthographic variation—appears at the bottom center within an ornate scroll frame **[FIGURE 8]**:



Figure 8: Narrative caption, detail of Fig. 2 © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

ยามสักยราชก้อง ภากัน
ไปสู่พระภะคะวันต เคี่ยมไหว้
สรวมองค์พระทรงบรร พชาเพศให้แฮ
เปนภิกสุลุได้ ดับร้อนเบญจะมาร

All the Sakyas gathered,
To approach the Blessed One with reverence.
They were ordained into the monastic life by the Buddha,
Becoming monks, the fires of the Five Māras were extinguished.

The inscription thus identifies the scene through the narrative of the Sakyas' ordination rather than the miracle itself, suggesting that the panel participates in a broader biographical cycle in which the Sāvatthī miracles are visually paired with the episode at Kapilavatthu.

Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang, Ratchaburi

A short label inscription in Thai–Pali accompanies the scene and clearly identifies it as the Twin Miracle **[Figure 9]**. It reads:



Figure 9: Narrative caption, detail of Fig. 4 © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

กัณฑ์ ๑๙ ยะมกปาฏิหาร

Khan 19: *yamokapatihan*.

The label is written in Thai, employing Pali-derived vocabulary rather than a direct Pali transliteration. Here the term *khan* (Pali, *khaṇḍha*; "section" or "chapter") designates a numbered episode within a narrative cycle of the Buddha's life. Such numbering commonly appears in Thai vernacular sermon and illustrated traditions, where episodes are organized sequentially for didactic purposes. The inscription therefore identifies the scene as the 19th episode, corresponding to *yamokapatihan* or the Twin Miracle (Pali, *yamakapāṭihāriya*), presumably in Sāvatthī, although the numbering does not necessarily correspond to a specific canonical textual source.

Folklore Museum, Institute for Southern Thai Studies, Songkhla

A two-line inscription accompanying the scene of the multiplication of buddhas reads **[Figure 10]**:



Figure 10: Narrative caption, detail of Fig. 6 © Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation

ที่สิบเจ็ดเมื่อทรงกระทำปาฏิหาน
บนยอดไม้มะม่วง ฯ

Seventeenth: When the Buddha performed miracles
atop the mango tree.

The inscription also functions as a brief narrative label identifying the episode depicted. The phrase *thi sipchet* (ที่สิบเจ็ด; "seventeenth") again indicates the position of the scene within a sequential cycle of events from the Buddha's life. The expression *patihan* (ปาฏิหาน) refers here to the Buddha's performance of miracles atop the branches of the mango tree at Sāvatthī.

Similarly written in *khlong si suphap* (โคลงสี่สุภาพ), a structured poetic form in Siamese literature, the above inscriptions function as label texts that guide viewers' interpretation of the images. However, they extend beyond simple labeling by narrating and interpreting the visual scenes with literary richness, revealing a close intertextual relationship between verbal and visual storytelling. Their content is not strictly scriptural and often reflects localized Buddhist narrative traditions. For example, the explicit reference to the mango tree in the Folklore Museum inscription introduces a detail not consistently emphasized in canonical sources, indicating the integration of local folklore.

Concluding Remarks

This study has examined six painted wooden panels depicting the Sāvatthī miracles dating from the late 19th to the early 20th century. Although the number of surviving examples is limited, this situation reflects the broader condition of wooden architectural decoration in Siam, where earlier monastic structures and their painted elements have frequently been lost through renovation, replacement, or environmental deterioration. It is therefore likely that similar pictorial cycles once existed more widely, even if only a small number have survived.

These panels probably formed part of larger pictorial programs illustrating the broader biography of the historical Buddha, drawing on both Pali canonical texts and vernacular narrative traditions. Wooden panels offered considerable compositional flexibility and were commonly used to decorate the interiors of permanent monastic buildings. In the surviving examples, the Sāvatthī miracles rarely appear in isolation; rather, they are presented alongside other major episodes from the Buddha's life. Arranged in multi-panel series, such paintings integrate several key events into a coherent visual narrative that encourages viewers to recognize the broader biography of the Buddha rather than focusing on a single episode.

The relationship between Buddhist literary texts and Siamese painted panels reflects the differing constraints of each medium. Pali texts recount the Sāvatthī miracles in extended narrative detail, leaving much to the reader's imagination. Painted representations, by contrast, operate within a limited pictorial space and therefore condense the story by selecting a small number of visually effective moments. As a result, wooden panels tend to emphasize the most recognizable and doctrinally significant scenes rather than reproducing the full literary sequence, as summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Literary and Visual Traditions of the Sāvatthī Miracles

Narrative Elements	Wooden Panels					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prelude						
The mango offering	✔	✔	✔		✔	
The pavilion	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	
The ascetics				✔		
The Twin Miracle						
Emission of light			✔	✔		
The Buddha multiplied	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔
Sun and moon				✔		

1: Wat Pak Khlong; 2: Wat Ko; 3: Wat Chantharawat;
4: Wat Thung Ya Khom Bang; 5: Wat Chi Prasoet; 6: Folklore Museum

The table indicates that visual storytelling in these panels is selective, favoring scenes that can clearly structure the narrative within a confined pictorial field. For example, the grove-keeper's mango offering appears in four of the six examples, while both the destruction and collapse of the ascetics' pavilion and the multiplication of the Buddha occur in five. These episodes function as effective narrative anchors, enabling artists to evoke the broader story through a limited number of scenes. By contrast, other episodes—such as the suicide of the leader of the non-Buddhist ascetics—appear only once, likely because scenes centered on secondary developments or chaotic action were less suited to stable and legible compositions within the restricted space of a panel.

Variation also occurs in the depiction of miraculous phenomena. Although the emission of light forms part of the miracle textual narrative, it appears in only two panels. Other miraculous demonstrations, such as the Buddha touching the sun and the moon, are depicted only once among the examples studied here. A comparable motif appears in the panel from Wat Pradu, Samut Songkhram, but there the accompanying inscription identifies the episode as a miracle at Kapilavatthu rather than at Sāvatthī. This overlap suggests that certain miraculous motifs circulated relatively freely across different episodes of the Buddha's life and could occasionally lead to visual or narrative conflation between distinct miracle traditions. In practice, artists seem to have privileged the most immediately recognizable image associated with the Sāvatthī event: the multiplication of the Buddha upon the mango tree. This motif condenses the miracle into a single visual scheme while allowing painters to organize the composition vertically and hierarchically—an arrangement particularly well suited to mural and panel painting.

Other narrative elements described in textual sources appear rarely, if at all, in the paintings. A notable example is the emission of fire and water traditionally associated with the Twin Miracle. Although this phenomenon occupies a central place in several literary traditions, it is entirely absent from the panels examined here. This absence does not imply that the scene was impossible to represent—artists occasionally depicted the fire-and-water miracle elsewhere—but rather suggests that most painters favored motifs capable of structuring the composition more clearly within a limited pictorial field.

Differences in textual interpretation may also have contributed to this pattern. While the *Paṭhamasambodhi* defines the Twin Miracle primarily in terms of the emission of fire and water, other Pali works—such as the *Paṭisaṁbhidāmagga* and the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*—present a broader conception that includes the Buddha's multiplication. The prominence of this latter motif in Siamese wooden painting therefore reflects not only pictorial considerations but also the selective engagement of artists with multiple narrative traditions.

More broadly, the patterns observed in these painted panels correspond to strategies found in Siamese mural painting, where complex textual narratives were likewise condensed into visually legible scenes organized

around a limited number of emblematic moments. The Sāvatthī miracle panels thus illustrate how painters working in Siam transformed literary traditions into coherent visual narratives adapted to the constraints and possibilities of monumental painting.

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Abbreviations

Dhp-a *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*
J *Jātaka*

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Mapping Polygyny: Royal Palace Spaces in Late 19th-Century Siam

Witinan Watanasap[1] **& ML Chittawadi Chitrabongs**[2]

Abstract—Under King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, r. 1925–1935), Siam formally adopted the principle of "one husband, one wife", departing from the longstanding royal practice of polygyny. This earlier family structure had been inscribed in the spatial organization of the Inner Court of the Grand Palace and in the layout of Dusit Palace in Bangkok under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910). This article argues that changing marital policy and palace architecture were closely intertwined, revealing the tension between the projection of a "civilized" monogamous monarchy and the persistence of polygynous practice within the royal household.

Keywords: Gendered Space; History of Siam; Palace Architecture; Polygyny; Royal Household

Introduction

The enactment of the "one husband, one wife" marriage law in 1930 during the reign of King Prajadhipok (Rama VII, r. 1925–1935) marked a pivot in royal Siamese socio-architectural arrangements. Seemingly rooted in the adoption of Western monogamous ideals, this legal reform redefined the structure of elite Thai families, enforcing a "single standard of marriage rather than recognizing, as had been traditionally allowed, a broad range of relationships as 'marriage'" (Loos 2006: 9).

Legal marriage and extramarital sexual relations were more explicitly distinguished in statutory law in the 20th century. This development followed earlier debates over the definition of marriage that had already emerged before and during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, r. 1868–1910) in the context of Western colonial pressure. The Siamese royal practice of polygyny ("one husband, many wives"), distinct from broader marital customs in the kingdom, drew foreign criticism in the 1850s. This scrutiny reportedly led King Mongkut (Rama IV, r. 1851–1868) to "consider including a treaty clause that would abolish polygyny for Siam's monarchs in the 1856 agreement with the United States" (Loos 2006: 119). It is therefore essential to distinguish from the outset between the marital regulations of the sovereign and those applying to the wider population.

This article examines changes in the spatial planning of royal palaces to help understand why King Rama V of Siam did not embark upon changes of codes and laws concerning Siamese marriage, despite other contemporaneous policies of reform which were intended to "break

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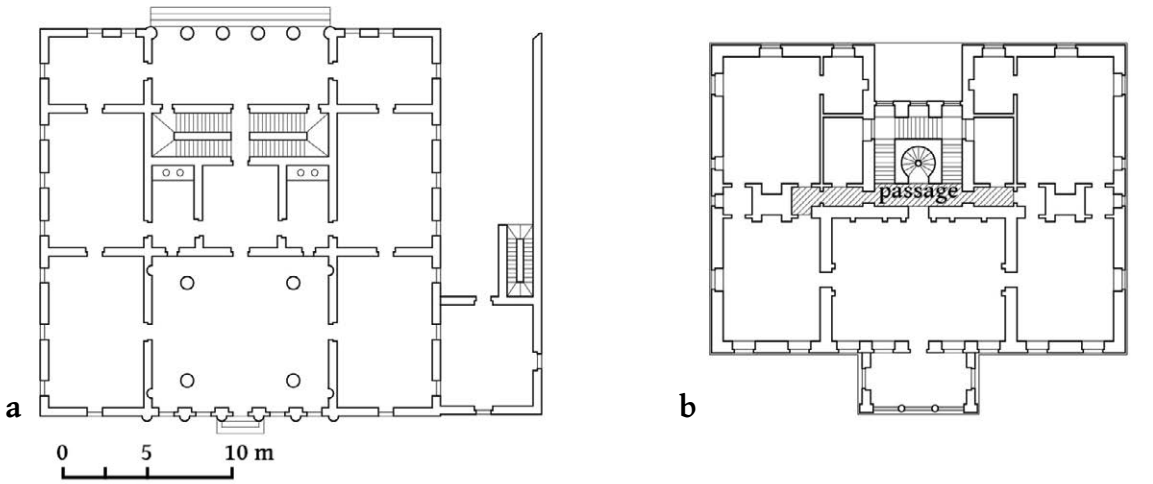
Siamese habits" (Chittawadi 2011: 179). Amongst this national change, the king's residence, the Inner Palace, was neither restructured nor disbanded. Instead, it continued to increase in size and complexity during the reign of King Rama V (Pirasri 2011: 200). The king's relocation to the newly built Dusit Palace did not represent a rush to modernize, but an inward struggle to maintain a large domestic family and an outward attempt to portray this marriage system as civilized and ordinary.

During his 1897 trip to Western Europe, King Rama V—who had more than 150 wives and consorts—commissioned Florentine artist Eduardo Gelli (1851–1933) to paint an oil portrait of himself, Queen Saovabha Phongsri, and their five progenies, to be hung on the wall of the royal drawing room at the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall (พระที่นั่งจักรีมหาปราสาท; Ibid., 201). Conventional wisdom often interprets this effort to present a monogamous image of his domestic life as part of a broader "process of modernization" (Ibid., 200). Such readings, however, may rely too heavily on mid-20th-century social science models of modernization, defined as the "adaptation of the secularization and rationalization characteristic of Western Europe and the USA" (Lerner 1958: 119). The reforms of late 19th-century Siam do not fully align with this framework. Rather than casting Rama V as a straightforward modernizer leading Siam toward democratic transformation, it may be more accurate to situate his policies within specific dynastic, diplomatic, and political concerns.

To examine resistance to change in this dimension of the king's family life, this article draws on Robin Evans's methodology, which investigates the relationship between architectural plans and the everyday lives of their inhabitants. It focuses on two royal residences of Rama V, analyzing plans, photographs, and written accounts of daily life to trace shifts in architectural planning in response to the complexities of a polygynous household. A close reading of spatial hierarchies, proximity between living units, and the division of functions reveals the political, diplomatic, sexual, and domestic tensions embedded in these environments. The article concludes by situating this spatial analysis within broader interpretations of Rama V's legacy, both as a monarch and as a domestic figure.

"Figures, Doors and Passages"

In an essay first published in *Architectural Design* in 1978, later included in his book, *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (1997; reprinted in 2003), the British architectural writer Robin Evans (1944–1993) proposed a way of linking architectural and social history—in particular, seeing how sanitation and morality shaped domestic spaces in the United Kingdom. Evans suggested that an early scheme for model family dwellings developed by British architect Henry Roberts (1803–1876), "was planted at the core of London's most disreputable rookery, in Streatham Street, St Giles" by no accident (2003: 94). The desire to see purity triumph over iniquity was put into constructed form by the architect Robert Kerr (1823–1904) in the first model housing estate of the Boundary Street scheme (1889–1900). Promiscuous sexual liaisons,



Figures 1a–b: Ground floor plans of Palazzo Antoni, Italy, 1556 (a); and Amesbury House, England, 1661 (b) © Witinan Watanasap

it seems, could be resolved by domestic legislation and the agency of architecture.

Principally through this project's architectural plans, Evans searched for the full extent to which this housing suggested privacy and comfort (as well as morality and civility). The schematic attempt that Evans pushed forwards, in an essay titled "Figures, Doors and Passages", is central to the methodology of this article. Evans uncovered household affairs through the reading of architectural elements, such as walls, doors, windows, and stairs, that divided and then reunited inhabited spaces. To Evans, the nature of human relationships is described by a plan. He shed the light on "signs of life" of human figures who occupied the building (Ibid., 57).

The process that Evans suggested is as follows: take the "portrayal of human figures and take house plans from a given time and place: look at them together as evidence of a way of life, and the coupling between everyday conduct and architectural organization may become more lucid" (Ibid.). Pairing is key to defining similarities and differences. Take, for example, a part of Evans's study and his choice of the ground floor plans of two houses **[Figures 1a–b]**. The first shows the matrix of rooms in Andrea Palladio's Palazzo Antoni in Udine, Italy, 1556, the second shows Amesbury House in England by John Webb, 1661.

The common features in Palladio's villa and palace are a set of connecting rooms, meaning that all rooms have more than one door—some have up to four. These features had been regarded as a fault in domestic buildings since the early 19th century because of, as Kerr put it, the wretched inconvenience of "thoroughfare rooms" (Ibid., 63). The peculiarity of Palazzo Antoni however is that "lavatories were brought within the main building. In pairs they flank the square anterooms at the very center of the plan (ventilated from above). They, too, could be used as thoroughfares" (Ibid.). The matrix of connecting rooms, Evans suggested, is appropriate for a "type of society which feeds on carnality [...] and in which gregariousness is habitual" (Ibid., 88).

The second plan, used as a comparison, Amesbury House, demonstrated a new device for removing human traffic from rooms: the corridor. Staircases began to be attached to the corridors instead of terminating in rooms. This architectural solution suggests the architect's viewpoint that all occupants of a house are a potential source of irritation to each other (Ibid., 73). But it is not really a suggestion of how to live but a restriction on living—this organization of spaces removes any possibility of living in the same way as in Palazzo Antoni. The social dynamics of the period continue in other parts of the plan. For example, a spiral stair sits within the main stair, for use by servants. The plan inscribes a division between upper and lower ranks in society, with direct, visible movement for the family circle and limited territory for servants, who were always at hand, but never present unless required (Ibid., 71).[3]

Prince Chulalongkorn's Inner Court

Royal palaces should be considered as both domestic affairs and potent emblems of the king's political and religious power. This dual role is part of the reason this architecture is so useful in gaining a better understanding of why King Rama V was silent about Western European criticisms of polygyny in Siam. It is also why Robin Evans's methodological framework, which bridges architecture and social reform, is useful to this study.

It is important briefly to point out the distinction between "royal palaces" and common "palaces". *Wang* (วัง) means palace, a residence of a king's descendants of three higher ranks, for example, *chao fa* (เจ้าฟ้า), a child of a king whose mother holds the rank of a queen. The Thai royal language distinguishes between the regular *wang* and *phra ratchawang* (พระราชวัง), meaning royal palace—the homes of the monarch himself (Sombat 2555: 5). Bangkok's long formal appellation includes the words "the Happy City abounding in great royal palaces which resemble the heavenly abode" (ราชธานีบุรีรมย์อุดมราชนิเวศน์มหาสถานอมรพิมาน; trans. Askew 2002: 2–3). The city is thus, in part, defined by the royal residences of the king (*ratchaniwet*; ราชนิเวศน์, here translated as "royal palaces"). As noted by the Office of the Prime Minister (2539: 12), these royal palaces encapsulate the integration of cultural symbolism and architectural expression, reflecting the deep interrelation between political authority and architectural organization. Central to this circle of power was King Rama V, whose childhood was spent at the Inner Court of the Grand Palace (เขตพระราชฐานชั้นในพระบรมมหาราชวัง). A description of the palace of his childhood will describe the domestic tradition and political situation which he inherited from his father, King Rama IV **[Figure 2]**.

The Inner Court of the Grand Palace is a walled city—complete within itself. It was a town of women—governed by women, served by female court servants —the only man who lived within this boundary was the king. The Inner

[3] Long before Evans (albeit from a somewhat different perspective), Umberto Eco argued that architectural objects function as expressions conveying both practical functions and social meanings. See especially Eco 1968—*Editor's note*.

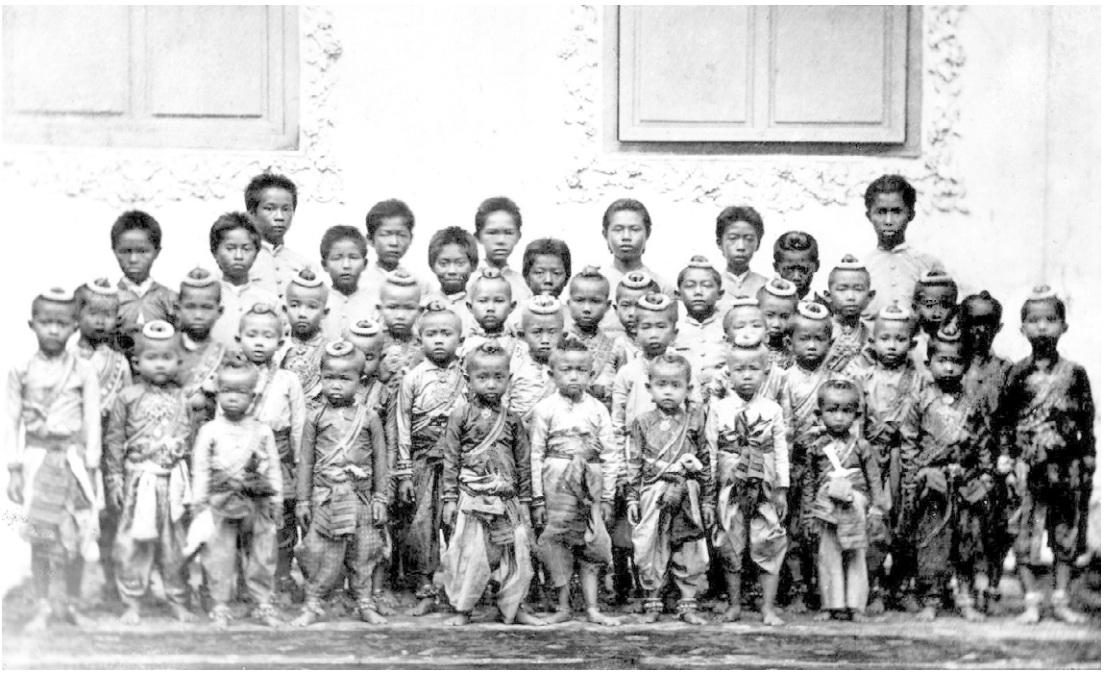


Figure 2: Children of King Mongkut, on the day of King Chulalongkorn's first coronation; Inner Court of the Grand Palace, Bangkok, 1868. Public Domain

Palace was strictly off-limits to men (Vanlee 2563: 2676). His sons, after reaching the age of puberty, thirteen, had to live elsewhere outside the Inner Palace (Chongchittanom 2552: 9).

In *Description of the Thai Kingdom or Siam* (1854), Monsignor Jean-Baptiste Pallegoix (1805–1862), French bishop who spent 24 years in Siam, described the Inner Palace: "The quarters in which the King lives are poorly lit and not very ornate. They are like warehouses in which are stacked a host of curious things, mirrors, center lights, crystal, watches of all kinds, porcelain vases, statues, musical boxes [...] precious furniture from Europe" (trans. 2000: 146). By contrast to King Mongkut's warehouse-like quarters, the Queen's palace, adjoining that of the king, was described as "consisting of several great elegant and well-decorated buildings" (Ibid., 147).

An elderly lady who had the confidence of the king took charge of "everything" that concerned the house of the Queen: some 100 ladies were under her orders, she exercised strict surveillance over the Queen and the king's concubines of various nations, and she commanded 2,000 girls employed in the service of the Palace. The king's daughters who could not marry, Pallegoix noted, "pass their lives in the triple enclosure of walls in which they are enclosed", and they could go out "only rarely to make a few purchases or to bring gifts to the temples" (Ibid.).

Most controversial among Western European observers was Anna H. Leonowens (1831–1915), a British governess of King Mongkut's children—including the young Crown Prince Chulalongkorn. Her experience was eventually portrayed in the stage musical premiered at Broadway's St. James Theater in 1951,

"The King and I". Leonowens's *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (1870) and *The Romance of the Harem* (1873) were regarded as the books to be read by missionaries, travelers, and wives of Western European personnel who were heading to work in Siam. The number of King Mongkut's "concubines" was used to condemn the king as sexually excessive. In his own account of the court of Siam, Sir John Bowring (1792–1872) describes an invitation to a performance in the Inner Palace; the principal actors were a king, a queen, and two concubines. The secondary actors were girls, whose ages did not exceed 16, selected from the king's concubines. He had, Bowring noted, "six hundred" of them in the Palace, who had "two-thousand four hundred other women in attendance on them" (Bowring 1857: 319).

It is true that King Mongkut had at least 82 children, including Crown Prince Chulalongkorn. Polygyny was important to the Siamese monarchy. It signified status, power, wealth, and the ability to provide. Most importantly, polygyny was a means to maintain political stability. The king married into other royal families to prevent competition for royal assets and to create alliances with the daughters and granddaughters of nobility, cultivating loyalty and establishing relationships. Marriages to princesses of foreign countries served as guarantees to protect rules. Queens were chosen for the foundation of economic and political cooperation (Chanan 2556: 4–5). This system of marriage was also true for the Siamese nobilities and filtered down to ordinary Siamese families who could pay the expenses.

However, King Mongkut might have seen an advantage to ending this polygynous tradition. The king issued two proclamations on either side of signing the Bowring Treaty in 1855. The first was in 1854, allowing women to leave the Inner Palace at "one's desire"; the king insisted that the Inner Palace was "not a confinement". His condition was that "living in the Inner Palace while searching for lovers or husbands is prohibited" (Chomklao 2397: 88). The second proclamation, announced in 1861, suggested a decline of "gifting" one's daughters to the Inner Palace which had increased in numbers during the past ten years, resulting in a financial problem. King Mongkut said "Two-thousand-*chang* [160,000 baht] was not enough" for women in the Inner Palace, which became very "congested" (Chomklao 2404: 451–452). These two problems, external criticism of the country's polygynous tradition and the internal struggle to maintain this domestic organization, were inherited by Crown Prince Chulalongkorn.

King Chulalongkorn's Inner Court

King Chulalongkorn neither destroyed the walls of the Inner Palace nor abolished the Siamese tradition of polygyny. Many of his consorts were of noble or royal lineage, thereby reinforcing political alliances. Several were also his half-sisters—such as Queen Savang Vadhana (สว่าง วัฒนา; 1862–1955), Queen Saovabha Phongsri (เสาวภา ผ่องศรี; 1864–1919), and Queen Sukhumala Marasri (สุขุมาล มารศรี; 1861–1927)—a common dynastic practice intended to preserve royal bloodlines (Chirawat 2546: 109). Their roles were not entirely subservient.

King Rama V
King Chulalongkorn (K)

Queens (Q)

Queen Saovabha Phongsri (Q1)
(Queen mother)
Queen Savang Vadhana (Q2)
(Queen grandmother)
Queen Sunandha Kumariratana
Queen Sukhumala Marasri (Q3)

Princess Consorts (PC)

Princess Daksinajar
Princess Piu Ladavalya
Princess Bua Ladavalya
Princess Sai Ladavalya
Princess Dara Rasmi of Chiang Mai

The Grand Concubines (Gc) and Concubines (c)

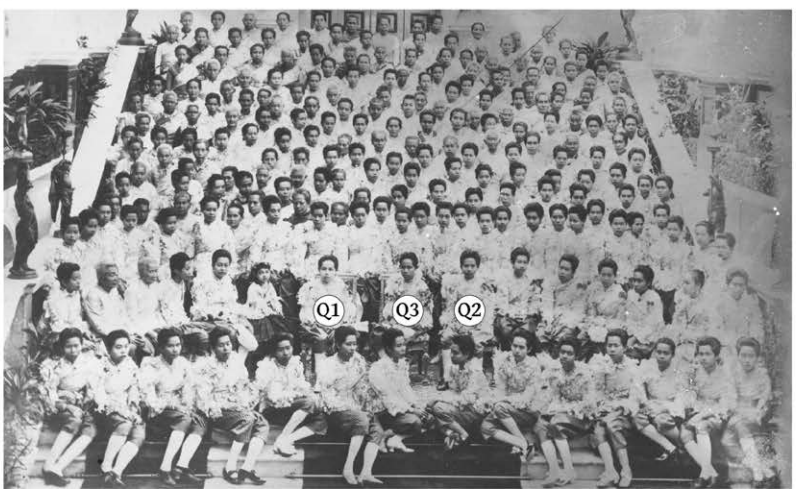
Mom Rajawongse Khae Phuengbun
Phae Bunnag
Saeng Kalyanamitra
Sut Sukumalachandra
Talap Ketudat
Morakot Phenkul
Mom Rajawongse Yoi Isarankura
Uam Bisalayabutra
Chaem Kalyanamitra
Thapthim Rojanadis
Bua
Mot Bunnag
Chan Sukumalachandra
Sai Sukumalachandra
Ruean Sundarasaradula
Wat Kalyanamitra
Chao Thipkeson na Chiangmai
Mom Rajawongse Nueang Snidvongs
On Bunnag
Phrom
Wong Netrayana
Sae Rojanadis
Mom Rajawongse Keson Snidvongs
Chum Krairoek
Luean Niyavananda
Mom Rajawongse Chiu Kapitatha
Hem Amatyakul
Khian Kalyanamitra
Mot Bunnag
Linchi
Nuan na Nakhon
Chan
Mom Luang Thanom Devahastin
Lamay Suwannathat
Jaem Krairoek
Savang na Nakhon
Pheam Ratnadasniya
Chin Bunnag
Nueang Boonyarattaphan
Pheam na Nakhon
Charoen
On Bunnag
Aem Bisalayabutra
Chuang Bisalayabutra
Yai Boonyarattaphan
Klep Devahastin na Ayudhya
Linchi Devahastin na Ayudhya
Phakleuang Devahastin na Ayudhya
Prakong Amatyakul
Sangvan Amatyakul
Ob Bunnag
Mom Rajawongse Paen Malaku
Perm Sucharitakul
Phis Bunnag
Thanom Pattaranavik
Thapthim
Yeuan
Im
Cheua
Iam Bunnag
Mom Rajawongse Chiad Ladavalya
Mom Rajawongse Pam Malakul
Konkaew Buranasiri
Cheng
Thanom Banjongjaren
Mom Rajawongse Kho Snidvongs
Nom Jotikasthira
Jean Jotikasthira
Yeam Jotikasthira
Kimrian Jotikasthira
Paem Malakul
Chuang
Ope Bunnag
Mom Rajawongse Paew Malakul
Leam Bunnag
Ap Bunnag
Uean Bunnag
Sae Bunnag
Sombun Manprasoet
Mom Rajawongse Sadab Ladavalya
Mom Rajawongse Lamai Singhara
Theam Bunnag
Aum Gurukura
Kimneaw
Klin
Keaw Bunnag
Ngen Sinsuk
Ngek
Mom Rajawongse Jaruai Pramoj
Chan
Jiew
Chem1
Chem2
Chem Sribenya
Cheam
Chamren
Chamren Jotikasavasi
Chamren Suwannathat
Cheng Phonkanit
Choei Bunnag
Chuea Phonkanit
Thanom Saeng
Thipmontha
Thip Palakavangsa na Ayudhya
Thip Sakunasing
Nuem
Nom
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Noei
Buye
Prayong Amatyakul
Puk Bunnag
Pui
Prem
Plean na Bangxang
Phad Thantanon
Phlap Pattanavejwong
Phin na Nakhon
Phiphat
Mom Rajawongse Manee Isarankura
Mon
Mi Chaturongakul
Mekhala
Yuean Bunnag
Yuean Saeng-chuto
Lamai Ahmadchula
Linchi Charuchinda
Lukchan Charuchinda
Lukchan Amasiri
Won Bunnag
Wong
Suan Boonyarattaphan
Savas Salak
Sawang
Sai
Salee Sribenya
Sam-ang Boonyarattaphan
Sin Sriben
Singhara
Suwan na Nakhon
Lean Bunnag
Im Jotikasthira
Im Gurukura
Chan Saeng-chuto
Mom Rajawongse Pradap Suriyakul



1



2



3

Figure 3: King Rama V's family tree. Photo 1: King Rama V's family portrait (the basis for a portrait by Eduardo Gelli), Photo 2: King Rama V's queens and princess consorts, Photo 3: King Rama V's wives © Witinan Watanasap

They could have political standings. For example, when King Rama V travelled to Western Europe in 1897, he appointed Queen Saovabha Phongsri as the regent of Siam. The king's multiple queens, consorts, and children formed part of an elaborate hierarchical structure that reflected Siamese court customs, and they all resided within the Inner Palace. It would have been virtually impossible for Eduardo Gelli to paint an oil-on-canvas portrait of King Chulalongkorn together with his 153 wives and all their progeny **[Figure 3]**.

The Grand Palace, as depicted in 1875, was structured into four primary zones: the Inner Court, the Middle Court, the Outer Court, and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha **[Figure 4]**. This complex functioned not only as the royal residence but also as the administrative and ceremonial center of the Siamese kingdom. Approximately one-third of the Grand Palace grounds were dedicated to the Inner Court, designated for the queens, consorts, female attendants, and daughters of the king. Beyond its function as a private royal residence, the Inner Court served as an institutional space for the education and training of young women destined to become members of the royal household (Naengnoi 2527: 18).

As noted above, the Inner Palace could become congested. King Chulalongkorn's solution was to renovate the existing Siamese houses, to increase the area by building vertically, and to replace some buildings with new ones (Ibid., 83). The Inner Palace in 1875 was composed of groups of five-room houses in the Siamese traditional style, with a veranda overlooking a central courtyard. It has row-houses of small rooms with a veranda in front of each room, and Western-style houses built with bricks and mortar, two-to-four-stories high, with storage, kitchen buildings, and ponds. The work of Thai architectural scholar MR Naengnoi Saksri describes changes between the houses built in the reigns of King Rama III (1824–1851) and King Rama V. These include comparisons between the courtyards of Siamese houses and those influenced by the West, as well as the symbolic meaning and function of exterior doors and windows. These will be analyzed in the next sections in relation to the king's marriage practices.

Courtyards and Gates

Courtyards are frequent features of the Grand Palace, a result of the layering of walls and enclosures in the complex. They are also main features of transition spaces in the Inner Palace. These courtyards changed in style and appearance between the reigns of Rama III and Rama V, showing the extent to which King Chulalongkorn was ready to make changes to his royal palace.

Courtyards could be enclosed as part of a house or bound by a single story-masonry wall, marked with a gate. While earlier examples are typical of local architecture, houses built during the Fifth Reign began to adopt Western styles. For example, one courtyard gate is surrounded by a pediment and stone rustication, built out of locally available bricks and mortar **[Figure 5]**. The fake rustication resembles the stone columns at the main facade of the Royal Saltworks at Arc-et-Senans, commissioned

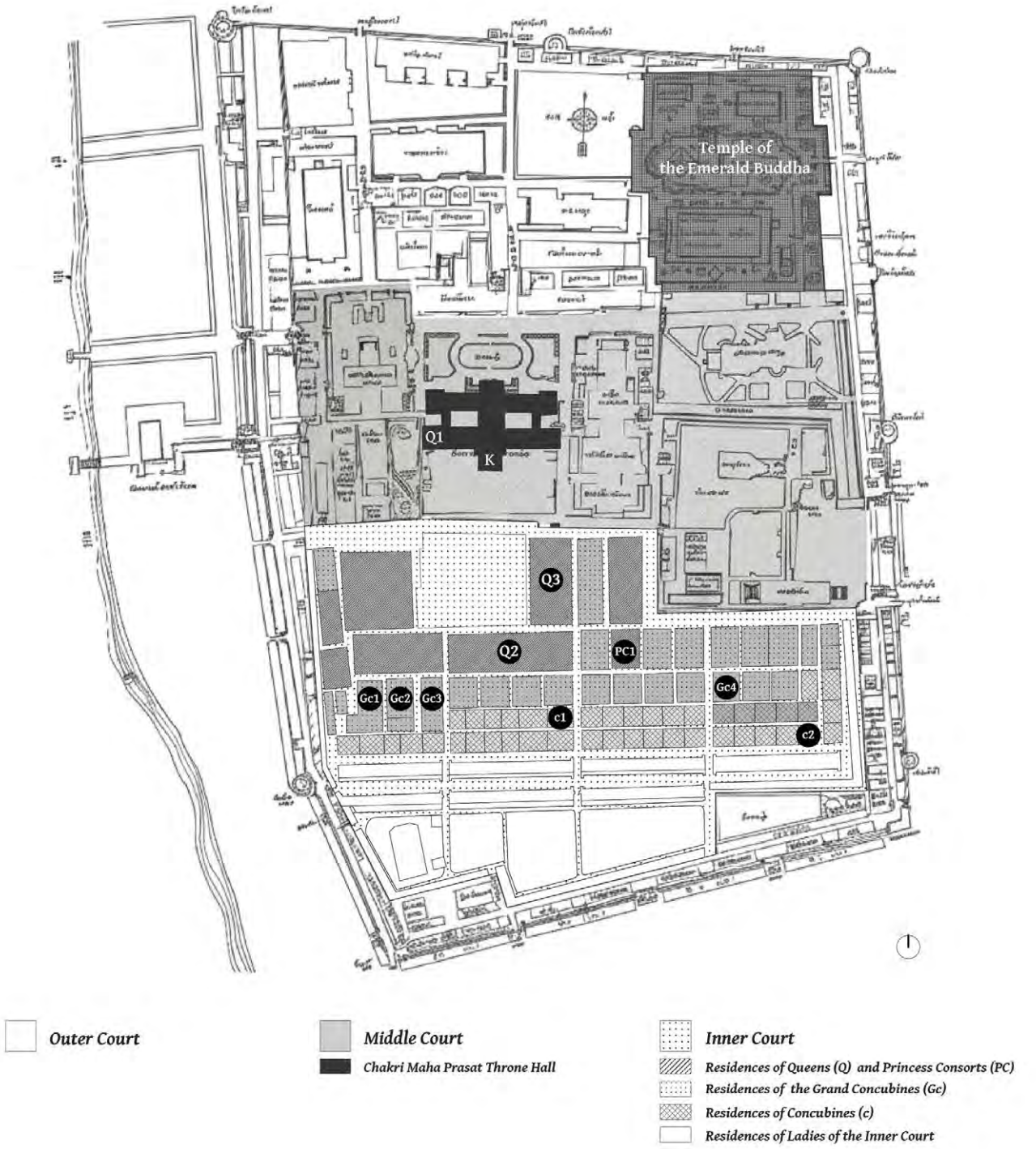


Figure 4: The layout of the Grand Palace in the Reign of King Rama V
© Witinan Watanasap



1



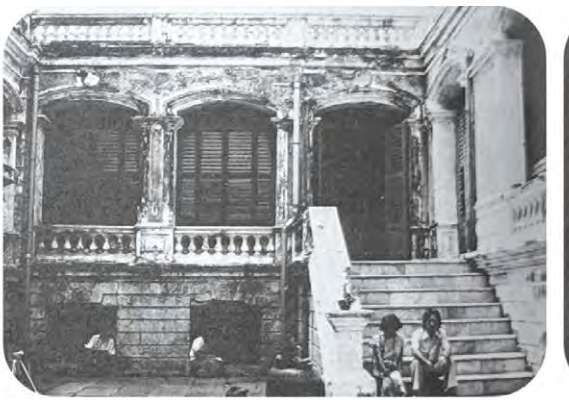
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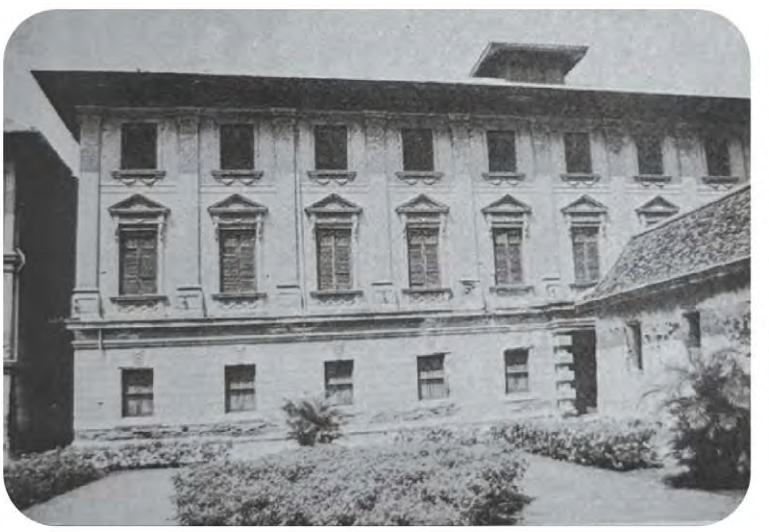
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8

1- Archway Entrance of the Inner Court in the early period
2 - Archway Entrance of the Inner Court from the Reign of King Rama V, featuring a Western pediment
3, 4 - Courtyard of a Royal Residence from the Reign of King Rama III
5, 6 - Courtyard of a Royal Residence from the Reign of King Rama V
7 - The façade of Phra Ong Chao On-Praphan Rambhai Residence is a three-story building constructed in a Western-influenced style.
8 - Archway with a Western Pediment

Figure 5: Archway entrances and courtyards of the Inner Court at the Grand Palace in the early Rattanakosin period, Bangkok © Witinan Watanasap

during the reign of Louis XVI (1774–1792) and designed by French architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806). King Chulalongkorn had a Western influence on the lifestyle and appearance of the Royal Palace.

Alexander Purves suggested that people's affinity for courtyards "make up an elusive web of conscious and unconscious needs, desires and associations" (1982: 138). He continues, they are "expressive of the need of human beings to group together" (Ibid., 142). In this sense, the change in style could be seen as an expression of how King Chulalongkorn wanted his queens and consorts to be perceived—perhaps as something closer to a Western family.

Doors, Corridors, and Stairs

A clear hierarchy in the organization of the Inner Palace conveyed the importance of King Chulalongkorn's wives and consorts. Size was relative, signifying preference and daily habits. **Figure 6** shows a series of these houses drawn to the same scale and orientation. The location of these houses in the Inner Palace, and their proximity to the King's residence, is shown above in **Figure 4**.

The location of the house of King Chulalongkorn's three queens **[Q2 in Fig. 4]** was primary, opposite the king's bed chamber in Chakri Throne Hall **[K in Fig. 4]**. These queens, sisters, were Queen Sunanda Kumariratana (สุนันทา กุมารีรัตน์; 1860–1880), Queen Saovabha Phongsri, and Queen Savang Vadhana. King Chulalongkorn designated a three-story house for them. The ground floor had space for guest reception, staff living quarters, and storage. The first and second floors served as living spaces for the three queens and their children. The plan for the house includes two main courtyards and five staircases, effectively dividing the space into three distinct living areas, one for each queen. The position of corridors, courtyards, and stairs suggests a level of privacy for each **[Q2 in Fig. 6]**. Following the untimely death of Queen Sunanda Kumariratana, Queen Saovabha Phongsri was relocated to the Chakri Maha Prasat complex **[Q1 in Fig. 4]**. Thus, the house became the sole abode of Queen Savang Vadhana and her royal children, standing as the largest and most distinct structure of its kind (Naengnoi 2527).

Houses for less important wives become gradually smaller but maintain similar organizations. The Royal Residence of Princess Oradaya Debkanya (อรไทย เทพกัญญา; 1859–1906) **[c1]** is more than three times as large as the Royal Residence of Chao Chom Mom Rajawongse Jiew (เจ้าจอมหม่อมราชวงศ์ จิ๋ว) **[c2]**—both princesses were ranked as royal concubines (*chao chom*; เจ้าจอม)—yet the plans are remarkably similar. In each a courtyard at the entrance is enclosed by the facade on one side. Each are entered through a double-height space, with primary rooms arranged in the four corners. Corridors with staircases at multiple ends connect upper and lower floors, creating different ways of moving through each room.

The staircases of these houses, built during King Chulalongkorn's reign **[Pc1, Q3, Gc1, Gc4 in Fig. 6]**, give clues to their daily use. In these plans doors are placed opposite each other along both sides of wide central corridors—glances

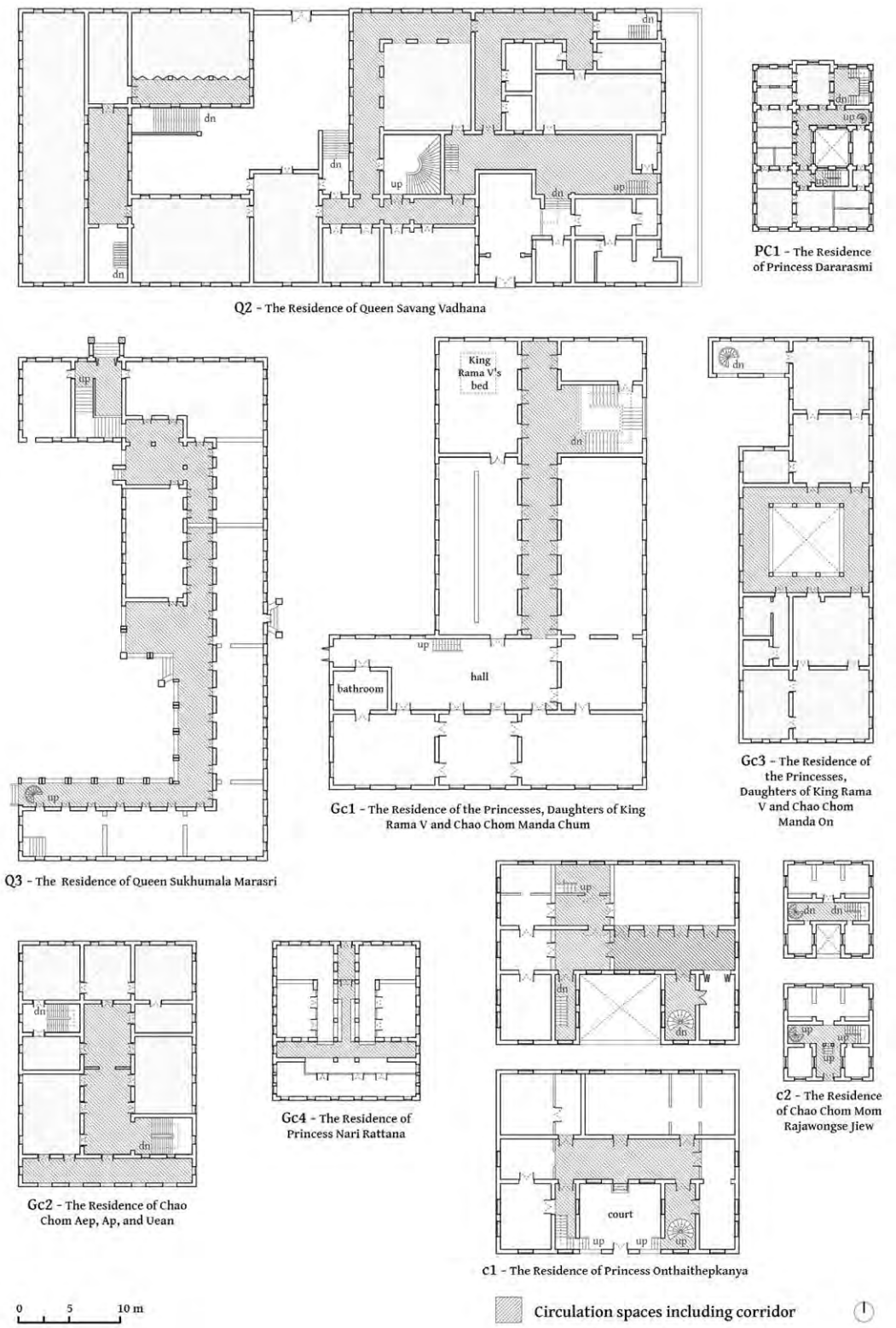


Figure 6: The plans of King Rama V wives's residences in the Inner Court of the Grand Palace [keyed to Fig. 4], Bangkok © Witinan Watanasap

into the opposite room were not problematic. Interconnecting doors are even placed between rooms alongside these corridors. These houses are meant for many people reflecting their specific roles in the Inner Palace. The Royal Residence of the princesses, daughters of King Rama V and Chao Chom Manda Chum Krairoek (เจ้าจอมมารดา ชุ่ม ไกรฤกษ์; 1869–1911) **[Gc1]**, for example, had a room designated for the king's bed, next to the main staircase, which suggested that the king could choose to stay in the residence if he wished. The proximity of this room to the staircase suggests someone coming and going easily and quickly, perhaps even discreetly. It is notable that this was one of the first houses to have Western style bathroom furniture inside the house (Naengnoi 2527: 117).

Other staircases suggest a similar level of privacy or discretion. The wooden spiral staircase at the end of a series of connected rooms in the residence of Chao Chom Manda On (เจ้าจอมมารดา อ่อน; 1868–1969) and her daughters **[Gc3]** was similar to one installed in many royal residences (Naengnoi 2527). These could be used as service stairs but also connect personal spaces.

Windows

The window (*phra banchon*; พระบัญชร) in King Chulalongkorn's bedchamber at the Chakri Throne Hall was an important tool in his polygynous lifestyle, as suggested in the memoir of Mom Chao Chongchitthanom Diskul (หม่อมเจ้า จงจิตรถนอม ดิศกุล; 1886–1978). The position of this window was carefully observed as part of the everyday activities of the women in the Inner Palace. An open window signified the "right time", no matter how late it was, for the wives to prepare themselves to see and to converse with King Chulalongkorn **[Figure 7]**. Close to the king's wake up time female court servants and the king's daughters would be waiting to perceive the moment when the king's window was open. They would "run" to report to their individual superiors, so that his wives would "come up" to meet the king (Chongchitthanom 2521: 15).

The bedchamber's window represents the agency of architecture to maintain the order of everyday life. Women in the Inner Palace who had already failed to attract the king's favor had a specific room to sit in and wait for the king to pass by. This room was called the "Yellow Room", following the color of gilded interior decoration (Sunsanee 2556: 195). At Chakri Throne Hall, as reported by Malcolm Smith, in *A Physician at the Court of Siam* (1947), King Chulalongkorn's bedroom had gilded decorations. Three beds arranged side by side were at the center of the room. The king's bed was the largest and the highest one, ornate with high level craftsmanship. The side beds were for the king's women waiting to serve him.

Latrines

Perhaps despite or because of King Chulalongkorn's attempts to increase the number of stories to the royal residences, sanitary conditions of the Inner Palace gradually became more threatening. In the Inner Palace, female court servants traditionally defecated in a building called the "tunnel"

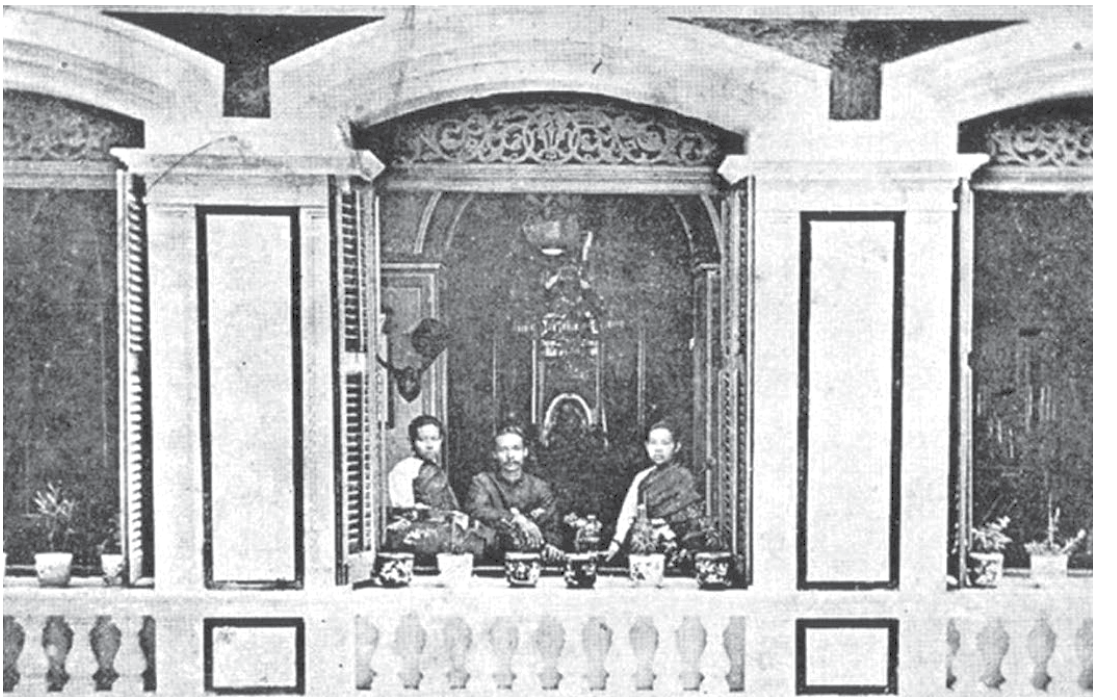


Figure 7: Group portrait of King Rama V (center), Queen Savang Vadhana (left), and Queen Saovabha Phongsri (right), taken at the window of the king's bedchamber, Chakri Throne Hall, Bangkok, 1880. Public Domain

(*oumong*; อุโมงค์), a one-story building with thick brick walls. Excretion was a collective activity. Court servants squatted between wooden partitions that went up to head height. The waste would be washed away to the river. Before King Chulalongkorn's sanitary reform, the waterways of Bangkok were the primary means of sewage disposal from the Inner Palace. This even included the king's feces. After he had defecated, his feces would be transferred from the chamber pot to a *krathong khut* (กระทงคูถ), i.e., "banana-leaf vessel for feces". The Royal Palace Police would guard the specific site for a trusted servant to float the *krathong khut* down the waterways.[4]

In truth, the Inner Palace was probably one of the filthiest habitats in Bangkok. The British Medical Officer of Health, Dr Hugh Campbell Highet (1866–1929), who was employed to work in Siam, submitted a report to the Siamese Deputy Minister of Local Sanitary Department. The issue was about the "filthy condition" of the southern and western side of the outer wall and the spaces between the outer wall and the inner wall of the Inner Palace. Highet noted that barrack rooms were clean. "Only three feet" (approx. 91 cm) away from the head of the beds where soldiers slept, the "buckets" were simply placed on the ground. There was no proper cement floor, no drains, and the ground was "stinking" from nightsoil

[4] See Damrong Rajanubhab, ทำท่อน้ำล้างเครื่องโสโครก (อย่างวิธีโชนสิดสเตม) [Installation of Sewage (Shone System)], 31 January 1906–13 May 1907, NA R5 LG 5.12 ก/3, National Archives of Thailand, Bangkok.

and urine. The latrine had no more than ten rooms for a population of "at least five hundred people". The inner portion of the Palace was not better than the outer portion. The Royal Palace did not have drains. Waste water could not really leave the Palace enclosure and simply soaked into the ground. Highet wrote: "I am not surprised at the fact of plague breaking out there owing to overcrowding of fifth".[5]

Western European residents in Bangkok were mostly worried about health, especially diseases transmitted through the water. *The Bangkok Times* bilingual newspaper, since the late 1890s, raised concerns about public health and personal hygiene.[6]

Dusit Palace

When King Chulalongkorn realized that his mode of living must be changed, in the late 1890s he moved from the Inner Court of the Grand Palace to live in a new palace outside the walled city of Bangkok. The Dusit Palace complex (พระราชวังดุสิต), whose name explicitly refers to the Tuṣita heaven—the celestial realm where future buddhas dwell before their final rebirth (from Sanskrit *tuṣita*, "contented" or "joyful")—was built at Suan Dusit or Dusit Park (สวนดุสิต) and served as a suburban residence of the king. Ratchadamnoen Avenue (ถนนราชดำเนิน), "the royal procession road", began its construction in 1899 from the Dusit Palace to Bangkok's city walls. The name, it was argued, was derived from Queen's Walk, an avenue in Green Park, London, whereas King Chulalongkorn compared his Avenue with the Mall, a ceremonial thoroughfare between Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square with St. James's Park and Marlborough House Gardens on its sides (Pirasri 2011: 191).

Dusit Palace adopted the customary spatial arrangement of the royal palaces: outer court, middle court, and inner court to house his many wives and daughters. However, the organization of these areas was more open than in the Grand Palace **[Figure 8]**. A network of canals, functioning like passageways, divided the Inner Court, separating the various plots of land bestowed upon the king's queens, consorts, and daughters for their privacy and security (Sutthion 2556: 82). In 1901, the king decided to relocate an unfinished teak building from Ko Sichang, in the Gulf of Siam, to Dusit Palace. In 1902, the mansion named Wimanmek (พระที่นั่งวิมานเมฆ) became King Chulalongkorn's residence, equipped with electricity and running water (Peleggi 2002: 85). Wimanmek Mansion was the first residence where King Chulalongkorn decided to break the Siamese tradition by allowing his queens, wives, and favorite consorts to live under the same roof (Pirasri 2011: 202).

King Chulalongkorn occupied the top floor of the octagonal shaped room of Wimanmek Mansion, which also had the living quarters of Queen Sukhumala Marasri **[Q3]**. The Queen and her

[5] See Campbell Highet, พระยาเทเวศร์ทูลเกล้าฯ ถวายรายงานแพทย์สุขาภิบาลประจำ ปี ร.ศ. 117 [Phraya Thewet submitted to the King the Annual Report of the Medical and Sanitation Department for 1898], NA R5 LG 5.5/2, 29 May 1895–20 August 1899, National Archives of Thailand, Bangkok.

[6] See *inter alia* "Precautions Against the Plague", *The Bangkok Times*, 1 May 1897, and "Personal Hygiene", *The Bangkok Times*, 17 June 1897.

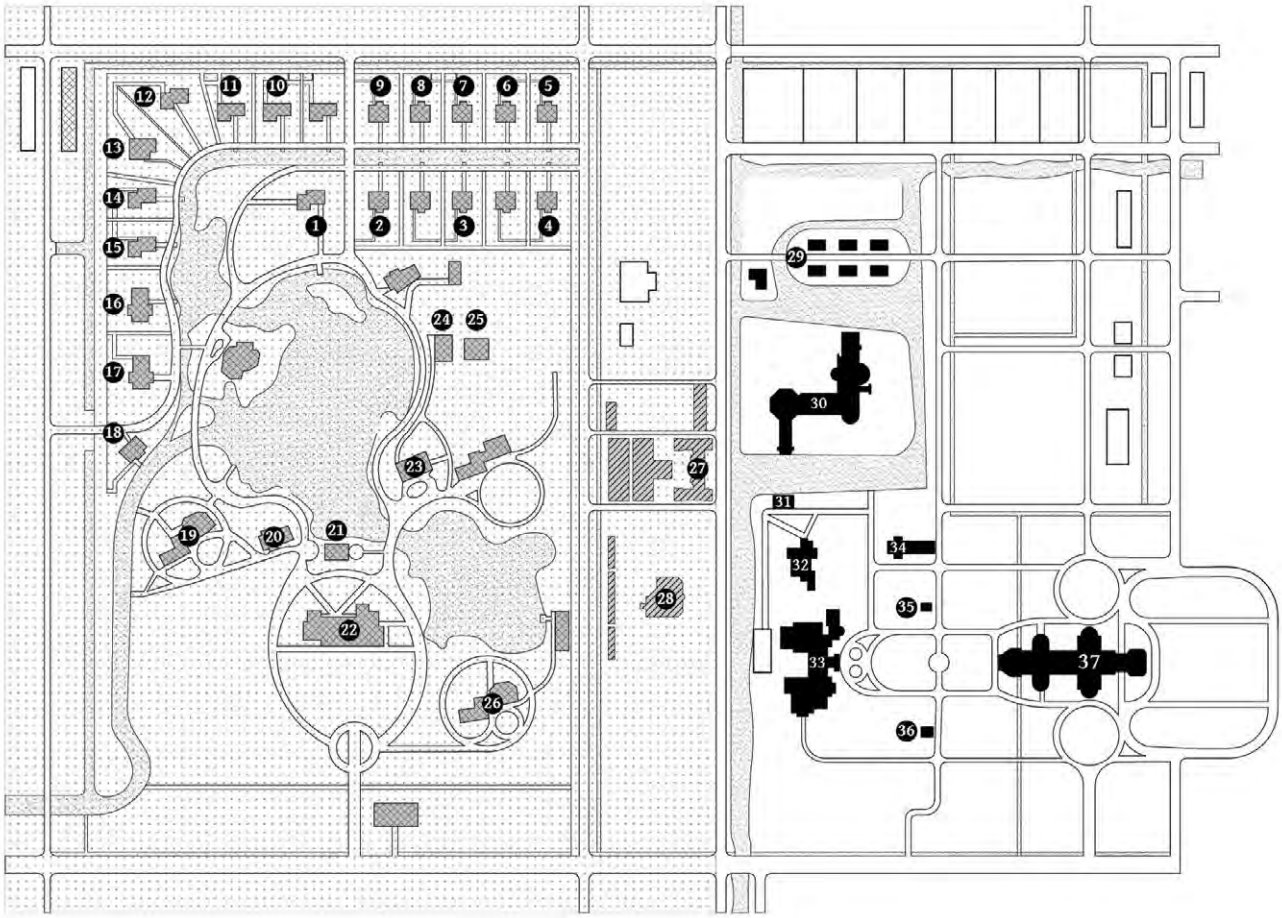


Figure 8: The layout of the Dusit Palace complex, Bangkok © Witinan Watanasap

retinue lived underneath the king's bedroom, suggesting her increasing power during the end of his reign. On the eastern side, at the far end of the corridor, was Queen Saovabha Phongsri **[Q1]**, the mother of the Crown Prince (previously living closest to the king at the Grand Palace), no longer his favorite. Between the king's bedroom and Queen Saovabha Phongsri were the grand concubines from the Bunnag family (ตระกูลบุนนาค) **[Gc1]:** Chao Chom Manda Chum **[Gc2]** and, at the northern end of the corridor, Princess Consort Saisavali Bhiromya (สายสวลี ภิรมย์; 1862–1929) **[C1]**, another favorite of the king (Pirasri 2011: 203, 260). The planning of this palace facilitated a dual aim: maintaining the king's large Inner Court which had been housed so problematically before and portraying an outward image of monogamy and progress when necessary. Crucially, when the king received guests at Wimanmek Mansion, members of the Inner Court could move to their own detached villas in Dusit Palace to avoid the eyes of foreigners.

Detached Villas

The Four Seasons Garden Residence (พระตำหนักสวนสี่ฤดู), home to Queen Saovabha Phongsri and Princess Valaya Alongkorn (วไล ยอลงกรณ์; 1884–1938), was designed to emphasize privileged privacy and elevated status. Its location on the secluded south edge of the compound, notably distant from other inner court residences, reinforced the queen's importance. The building's rectangular plan **[Figure 9]**, surrounded by a veranda, implied a domesticity reserved for a single royal family, featuring connected but separate upper-floor quarters for the queen and the princess (Sutthion 2556: 140–142).

In sharp contrast, the Phutthan Garden Royal Villa (พระตำหนักสวนพุดตาน) offered an efficient solution for housing multiple lower-ranking consorts such as Chao Chom Manda On, Chao Chom Aep (เจ้าจอม เอิบ; 1879–1944), Chao Chom Ap (เจ้าจอม อาบ; 1881–1961), Chao Chom Uean (เจ้าจอม เอื้อน; 1887–1927), and their children. Its compact, H-shaped plan **[Fig. 9]** included 32 bedrooms and prioritized the proper circulation of numerous occupants (Ibid., 145–146). Here the corridor is used for its efficiency as much as for the privacy it offers. The differences between the scale and grandeur of the various residences of the Inner Court's shows the continuation of hierarchy among queens and consorts.

Furniture and Bathroom Fixtures

King Rama V's drawing rooms and bedrooms were the center of public attention, clearly exhibiting his selective taste for Western culture. The main rooms were furnished with "very elegant" Louis XV-chairs and custom-designed pieces by Messrs. Hewetson, confirming his contemporary image as an "Anglomaniac" (*The Sketch* 1893). This selective adoption extended to personal hygiene: the king purchased water closets from Maple & Co. and even acquired a bidet as a gift, introducing the Western sitting posture to the palace.[7] Crucially, this acceptance of Western custom did not extend to public infrastructure. An

[7] See พระยาสุริยาส่งหม้อปัสสาวะผู้หญิงมาถวาย [Phraya Suriya sends a urinating pot for women (to King Rama V)], NA R5 RS 8.1 ฌ/17, 18 July–26 September 1899, National Archives of Thailand, Bangkok.

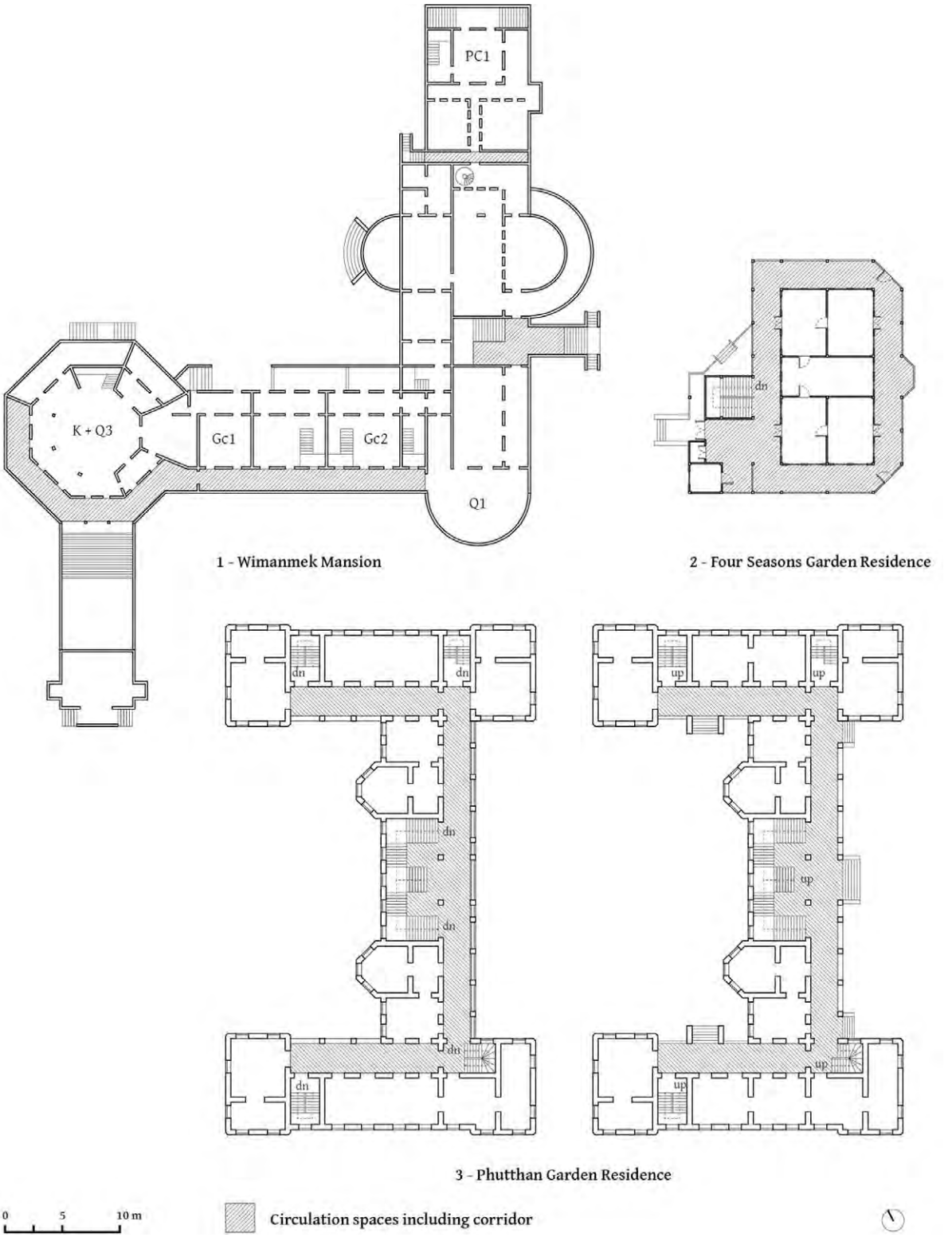


Figure 9: The plans of King Rama V and his wives' residences in Dusit Palace, Bangkok © Witinan Watanasap



Figure 10: King Chulalongkorn cooking a meal at his wooden residence, Dusit Park, 1904–1905. Public Domain

official minute records that Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943), supervising provincial reforms, refused to sanction the expense of an imported sewage system, prioritizing funds for road maintenance instead: "The best duty of the Sanitary Department is to maintain the roadways in good repair [...]. Besides, the expenses should best be preserved".[8]

This pattern of adopting Western consumer goods and education (for his son), but resisting fundamental utilitarian infrastructure, complicates the image of King Chulalongkorn as a straightforward modernizer, contrasting with the utilitarian trajectory customarily outlined (Wyatt 1994). Instead, his architectural pursuits, like Dusit Palace, can be interpreted as a form of "courtly consumption" focused on "self-fulfillment and self-realization" (Peleggi 2002: 91). The palace, modeled on the suburban villa ideal—a retreat from urban weariness—allowed the "working monarch" to pursue a rural fantasy, as captured in the famous photograph of him cooking a meal on the porch of the *ruean ton* (เรือนต้น), a traditional wooden residence within the Dusit Palace complex **[Figure 10]**. However, the failure of urban infrastructure undermined this aesthetic escape. The king wrote that the "faecal smell of sewage disposal carts" continued to haunt him even in the new palace, fearing the stench

[8] See Damrong Rajanubhab, "Installation of Sewage (Shone System)", cited in note 4 (our translation).

would cause a stomach ulcer and proving that personal modernization could not suppress the environmental realities of Bangkok.[9]

Polygyny in Siam

Polygyny in Siam was paradoxical. It was the result of both a sexual drive and a political one. Polygyny incurred expenses, such as monthly financial support for pregnancy and children of all ages, announced by King Mongkut in 1865 (Chomklao 2404: 226). The abandonment of this tradition lay in the logic of internal political reform within the country. King Mongkut gradually realized that he could not afford the growing number of Inner Palace inhabitants, but it remained for three reigns after him. Polygyny was defended by King Mongkut's Minister of Foreign Affairs as early as 1867, as a Buddhist practice for men, particularly on the ground that Buddhist custom did not explicitly forbid it (Thiphakorawong 2410: 153–158). Meanwhile, polyandry, "one wife, many husbands", was forbidden because women were predisposed to play favorites among their husbands and that might result in murder (Ibid.). King Chulalongkorn himself suggested taking a survey of men who practiced polygyny to help legal advisers determine whether monogamy or polygyny should constitute the legal standard, but no survey was taken (Loos 2006: 122). His Majesty King Vajiravudh (Rama VI; r. 1910–1925) responded to the Siamese Cabinet Council in 1912 that "our [Siamese] moral plane and that of the Europeans could not very well be compared with fairness, and it is most difficult to judge who is on the higher moral plane and who on the lower. Therefore, to drag the subject of Moral Planes into the drafting of Marriage Law appears to be rather inapt".[10] There was an obvious resistance to outside judgment of this way of family life, as well as a clear function of this system.

King Chulalongkorn's action to move out from the congested Inner Court of the Grand Palace to live in Dusit Palace was seemingly good for the king's health. This is not entirely true. Health was mental and physical. The fecal stench of Bangkok continued to haunt King Chulalongkorn even when he had already entered Dusit Palace. It is true that King Chulalongkorn had purchased various furniture including a water closet and bidet from Europe. However, he did not introduce the sewage system to Bangkok. His water closet and bidet were the introductions of sitting postures rather than the utility of a hygienic infrastructure. Even in the modernized bedroom of the king, the furniture betrayed the persistence of the old order. Three beds were arranged side-by-side: a central one for the king and side beds for the women. This arrangement is a microcosm of the "matrix" surviving within the "corridor". It acknowledged the polygynous reality even as the walls of the palace signaled monogamous privacy.

Despite Western criticism, polygyny remained essential for the Siamese

[9] See King Chulalongkorn, บริษัทสะอาด [*Clean Work Company*], NA R5 LG 12/9, 29 June 1899–13 October 1899, National Archives of Thailand, Bangkok.

[10] See Georges Padoux, "Memo to King Vajiravudh", 9 May 1913, quoted in Adul & Luang Chamroon 1968: 97.

monarchy. It was the mechanism through which the king integrated the powerful noble families of the kingdom into the royal household. Marrying the daughters of the Bunnag family, for instance, or the northern princesses, was a strategic act of statecraft. Yet it contrasted with the work which King Chulalongkorn did to make friends internationally, to protect Siam from colonial rule.

Concluding Remarks

This article attempts an understanding of the complex nature of the polygynous life of King Chulalongkorn during a most interesting period of Thai history: the era of Western colonization. Readings of architectural plans, old photographs, archival materials, and memoirs suggest the changes in spatial organization of the royal palaces to maintain the order of the king's daily life, relating to the women in the Inner Palace. Windows, doors, corridors, interconnecting rooms, and circular staircases facilitated a polygynous life while maintaining a level of privacy. These were among numerous other symbolic gestures of hierarchy in the palace and in the king's routines.

The reigns of King Rama VI and King Rama VII saw a decisive shift from the traditional Siamese practice of polygyny to monogamy, enforced through royal decrees, and inevitably mirrored by architectural changes. King Rama VI initiated this transition with the design of Mrigadayavan Palace (พระราชนิเวศน์มฤคทายวัน), located near Cha-am in Phetchaburi province and built in 1923–1924, which—although separating male and female quarters by a corridor approximately 40 m long—functionally grouped his small family under a single roof. The new scale of intimacy at the palace is illustrated by the *khao tai to* (เข้าใต้โต๊ะ) ritual, during which a lady-in-waiting of the Inner Court performed a specialized massage for King Vajiravudh during mealtimes in the Outer Court, thus blurring the conventional separation between the two domains (Chanan 2556: 29–30). King Vajiravudh further enforced a new social hierarchy by requiring his court ladies to seek royal permission to marry, thereby encouraging later marriage and monogamy. This evolution culminated under King Rama VII, who solidified the change by enacting the Marriage Act of 1930, which legally recognized a woman's status as a wife through registration. Architecturally, the shift is embodied in his gift to his only wife, Queen Rambai Barni (รำไพ พรรณี; 1904–1984), of the Klai Kangvol Palace (พระราชวังไกลกังวล), designed by a Western-educated Thai architect as a spacious, comfortable, Western-influenced house, abandoning the strict front/back separation and formality of traditional palaces. MR Naengnoi Saksri (2527) observes that this palace's resemblance to a large house is in part due to the king's monogamous family structure, with a design prioritizing comfort and informality as architectural evidence of the move away from polygamy. The image of Bangkok and the king's domestic life emphasized symbolic gestures over political motivations. Despite an awareness of the moral distinctions between monogamy and polygyny, deep-seated traditions were difficult to change.

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Memory, Power, and Gender in Siamese Cremation Volumes

Karandeep Singh[1]

Abstract—This article examines gender dynamics within the tradition of cremation volumes in early 20th-century Siam, shaped in part by the editorial direction of Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943). It argues that these commemorative texts functioned as instruments of patriarchal control and elite self-representation. Through an analysis of sponsorship patterns and biographical narratives, the study highlights how women's agency in shaping public memory emerged only conditionally, mediated through relationships with male kin and embedded within elite social networks. By situating cremation volumes as cultural artifacts, the article sheds light on the intersection of memory, power, and gender in elite Siamese society.

Keywords: Cremation Volumes; Gendered Agency; Gender Dynamics; Gendered Remembrance; Siamese Funeral Culture

Introduction

Cremation volumes, also known as *nangsue ngan sop* (หนังสืองานศพ), are a unique and historically rich genre of literature distributed as keepsakes at funerals in Siam.[2] Traditionally given as gifts to guests attending cremations, these volumes contain wide ranging content, including biographical sketches of the deceased, eulogies, religious teachings, and selected literary works. Originating among royalty and nobility in the late 19th century, they soon became a tradition adopted by wealthy commoners and, eventually, the broader middle class. Over time, cremation volumes evolved into critical cultural artifacts, offering a wealth of historical and social information about Siamese society. They contain crucial information about the personal lives of individuals as well as reflect broader political, cultural, and social dynamics, making them invaluable sources for historians, anthropologists, and scholars of Thai studies.

The primary sources for this article are the Wat Bowonniwet Vihara Cremation and Rare Book Collection and the Pridi Banomyong Library Cremation Collection from Thammasat University (TU)'s Digital Collection, which together house 19,558 cremation volumes.[3] This article studies these cremation volumes

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[2] They are also known as *nangsue anuson ngan sop* (หนังสืออนุสรณ์งานศพ), *nangsue thiraluek ngan sop* (หนังสือที่ระลึกงานศพ), and *nangsue chaek* (หนังสือแจก).

[3] The Wat Bowonniwet Vihara Cremation and Rare Book Collection houses 11,902 volumes, while the Pridi Banomyong Library Cremation Collection contains 7,656 volumes. These numbers continue to grow as the library adds newly digitized volumes to its collections. The TU Digital Collection is publicly accessible through the following link: https://digital.library.tu.ac.th/tu_dc/frontend/Search/index/collection:main_11.

https://doi.org/10.69486/114.1.2026.9 © The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage

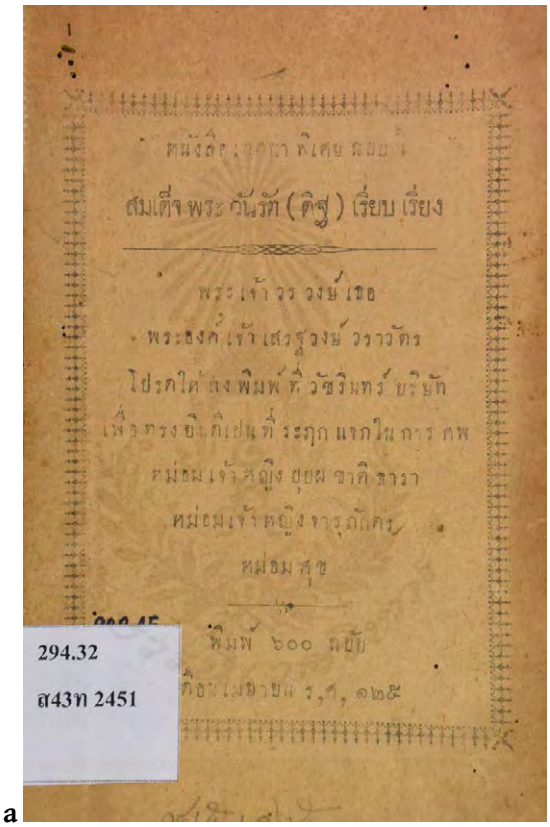
during King Vajiravudh or Rama VI's reign (1910–1925), specifically focusing on the prefaces (คำนำ) to analyze how these texts reflect elite identity, social hierarchies, and broader societal changes, offering insights into the cultural significance of cremation volumes during this pivotal period. For this article, a streamlined selection of 96 volumes was made: 19 from the Pridi Banomyong Library Cremation Collection and 77 from the Wat Bowonniwet Vihara Cremation and Rare Book Collection, both in Bangkok. This focused sample was chosen based on a key criterion: nearly all these volumes contain a preface written by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, who served as Chairman of the Watchirayan Library of Siam (the future National Library of Thailand). This selection represents an initial exploratory cut into an immense and largely understudied corpus, designed to allow a manageable and coherent analysis while still capturing meaningful patterns in how cremation volumes were produced and used.[4]

Prince Damrong's central role in shaping cremation volumes during this period cannot be overstated. During his tenure as chairman, he became the most prolific and influential author of these prefaces. His preambles not only highlight the rationale for selecting and reproducing particular texts but also reflect his broader intellectual project: to preserve classical Siamese literature and Buddhist scriptures from disappearing. He used cremation volumes strategically as tools of cultural preservation and public education by expanding the scope and introducing historical chronicles, legal texts, and literary works into what had previously been a more narrowly religious corpus.

This act of reproduction and redistribution through cremation books was in line with royalty's early 20th-century project of cultural institutionalization with particular stress on preserving and codifying a particular subset of Siamese knowledge in the face of modernizing pressures. Thus, while Damrong did not originate the tradition, his role was crucial in systematizing and popularizing it. His prefaces point to broader social and cultural dynamics and provide a rare and earliest first-hand perspective on how he made selections and how he meant texts to function in both memorial and pedagogical contexts.

The commissioning and donation of handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts containing Buddhist texts have long been a Siamese practice as a form of merit-making. Such donations were also sometimes made in memory of deceased individuals. This tradition reflects the sponsor's commitment to preserving Buddhist teachings and is rooted in the belief that the Gotama Buddha's religion would gradually decline over a span of 5,000 years. In response, devotees sought to safeguard the Dhamma (teachings) for future generations by producing and donating such manuscripts. Additionally, the practice of distributing gifts is an integral part of Siamese cultural life, often marking significant life events such as birthdays, promotions, and ordinations. Cremation volumes represent a tradition that builds on these longstanding religious

[4] Additional cremation volumes suspected to have been authored by Prince Damrong were excluded either due to the absence of a preface or lack of a definitive signature. Two further volumes were also excluded as it could not be confirmed whether they were indeed cremation volumes.



a



b

Figures 1a–b: Title page (a) and collage of the deceased (b) from a cremation volume for the triple cremation of Prince Sethawong's sister, wife, and daughter, 1906 © TU Digital Collection

and commemorative practices but retool them for print-centric modernity (Olson 1992: 280).

While the exact origin of cremation volumes remains debated, scholars have proposed different starting points. Some trace the first instance to 1880, with the double cremation of Queen Sunanda Kumariratana (พระนางเจ้าสุนันทา กุมารีรัตน์; 1860–1880) and Princess Kannabhorn Bejaratana (เจ้าฟ้า กรรณาภรณ์เพ็ชรรัตน์; 1878–1880), while others cite the 1901 cremation of Chaokhun Chom Manda Samli (เจ้าคุณจอมมารดา สำลี; 1835–1900).[5] The most widely accepted scholarly consensus, however, places the formalization of the tradition in the early 20th century. A 2014 newspaper article mentions the discovery of an even earlier example: a *Phra Aphaimani* volume supposedly published in 1869 for the cremation of King Mongkut or Rama IV (r. 1851–1868).[6] If accurate, this would

[5] For a discussion of differing scholarly views on the origins of cremation volumes, particularly the two primary schools of thought regarding their initial appearance, see Olson 1992: 281–283. Although Queen Sunanda Kumariratana and Princess Kannabhorn Bejaratana died in 1880, the royal cremation ceremony took place in 1881. In Thai funerary practice, cremations are generally conducted some time after death, ranging from several days in ordinary cases to many months or longer for royal funerals; this delay accounts for the chronological variation in the literature.

[6] See "Cremation Books Bring History to Life", *Bangkok Post*, 27 October 2014: https://www.bangkokpost.

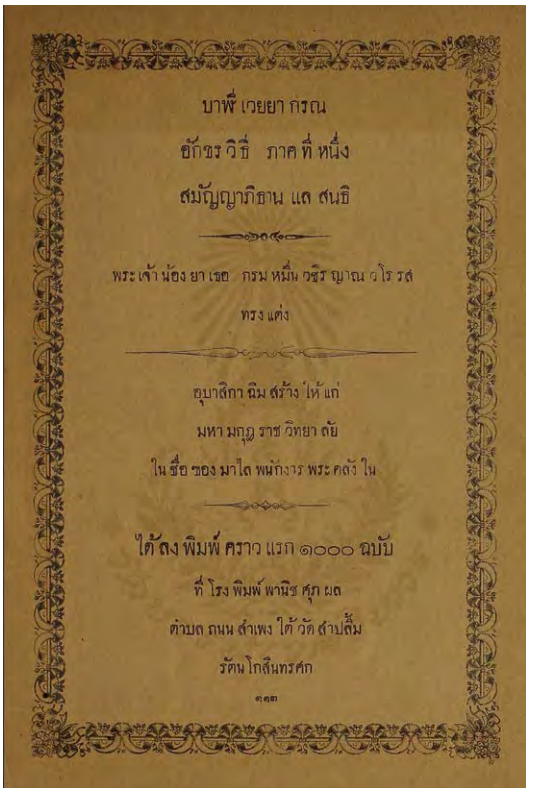

บาฬี เวยยา กรณ
อักขร วิธี ภาค ที่ หนึ่ง
สมัญญาภิธาน แล สนธิ
พระ เจ้า น้อง ยา เธอ กรม หมื่น วชิร ญาณ วโร รส
ทรง แต่ง
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Figure 2: Commemorative volume (1894) with a Pali grammar edited by Prince Patriarch Vajirananavarorasa; edition of 1,000 copies © TU Digital Collection

be the oldest known cremation volume, though no further details or corroborating evidence about the volume are currently available.

In the studied TU Digital Collection, the oldest volume that aligns with the modern cremation volume format dates back to 1906, for the triple cremation of Prince Sethawong Warawat's (พระองค์เจ้า เสรฐวงษ์ วราวัตร; 1878–1932) family. Notably, the prince himself authored the preface. The volume, titled *Special Sermon* (*thetsana phiset*; เทศนาพิเศษ), was edited by Somdet Phra Wanarat (สมเด็จพระวันรัต; 1837–1923), the former abbot of Wat Mahathat Yuwaratrangsarit in Bangkok and Supreme Ecclesiastical Head of the Southern Region **[Figs 1a–b]**. I have also identified an earlier commemorative volume from 1894, although its function as a cremation book is uncertain, as it does not specify whether it was distributed at the time of funeral. It contains a Pali grammar text edited by Prince Patriarch Vajirananavarorasa (สมเด็จพระมหาสมณเจ้ากรมพระยาวชิรญาณวโรรส; 1860–1921). The title page notes that the volume was sponsored by the laywoman Chim (ฉิม) for Mahamakut Royal College in the name of Malai (มาไล), a male official of the Royal Treasury. It was first printed in an edition of 1,000 copies **[Figure 2]**.

Sponsorship Disparity

Cremation volumes are historical artifacts that reflect the power structures and social hierarchies of their time. In early 20th-century Siam, these volumes were not merely records of the deceased but also instruments of elite self-representation, reinforcing familial prestige and patronage networks. Within this framework, gender played a decisive role in shaping who was remembered, how they were commemorated, and by whom.

The data on sponsorship of cremation volumes for male and female deceased reveals a profound gender disparity that reflects broader social, cultural, and political hierarchies within early 20th-century elite Siamese society. **Table 1** shows how cremation volumes served as cultural artifacts embodying and perpetuating patriarchal control.

Among the cremation volumes for deceased males, 40.4% were sponsored

com/life/social-and-lifestyle/439824/cremation-books-bring-history-to-life.

Table 1: Sponsorship Patterns in Cremation Volumes

Sponsors	Cremation Volumes for Male Deceased (Total 57 volumes)	Cremation Volumes for Female Deceased (Total 35 volumes)
Male Sponsor	23 volumes (40.4%)	19 volumes (54.3%)
***Chaophap*/Multiple Sponsors**	20 volumes (35.1%)	8 volumes (22.8%)
Female Sponsor	13 volumes (22.8%)	6 volumes (17.1%)
Unknown	1 volume (1.8%)	2 volumes (5.7%)

by male individuals, while only 22.8% were sponsored by female individuals, illustrating a clear pattern where men predominantly organized and financed these memorial publications for other men. By sponsoring cremation volumes, these men asserted control over familial narratives and, by extension, national memory, emphasizing their leadership within both the family and society. The commemoration of death thus becomes an arena where dominant male figures exercise social power to reinforce their authority over social memory.

This practice aligns with Connell & Messerschmidt's argument that hegemonic masculinity is not a self-perpetuating system, but one requiring active maintenance through the subordination of women and the policing of men. According to these authors, hegemonic masculinity operates in two forms: (1) external hegemony, the institutional dominance of men over women; and (2) internal hegemony, the dominance of one group of men over others (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005: 844). In this context, male sponsorship in elite cremation practices reflects both forms; men not only assert dominance over women but also establish hierarchies among themselves, with elite men gaining symbolic capital through such acts. In this way, sponsorship patterns in cremation volumes can be understood as symptoms of an already existing social order, reflecting the hegemonic gender relations that structured Siamese elite society and reaffirming male authority within both familial and broader social contexts.

In the case of female deceased, male individuals sponsored 54.3% of the volumes while only 17.1% of female deceased volumes had female sponsors; this reflects Deniz Kandiyoti's theory of the "patriarchal bargain". According to her, women's roles and societal positions are often negotiated through relationships with men, who maintain control over key aspects of family narratives, here related to commemoration. As a result, these patriarchal bargains are not merely conscious strategies but also shape the deeper unconscious aspects of women's identities, internalized through early socialization and adult cultural environments (Kandiyoti

1988: 278, 285). This reinforces a system where men, whether husbands, sons, or brothers, act as primary custodians of family legacies, and women's roles remain secondary, becoming prominent only when no male relative is available to assume this responsibility. This dynamic highlights the patriarchal expectation that male relatives oversee significant family events for both male and female deceased. "Such bargaining strategies may represent an adaptation to structural subordination rather than a form of empowering agency" (Charrad 2010: 519). While women participated alongside male relatives, their roles were often integrated into a broader familial effort, illustrating how women's visibility and agency were bargained through their relationships with men, reinforcing their subordinate position even in elite commemorative practices.

A distinct pattern is visible when it comes to the case of cremation volumes sponsored by female individuals for female deceased. With the sole exception of the cremation volume for Nang Yim (นาง ยิ้ม), which was sponsored by her daughter Khunying Intharamontri (คุณหญิง อินทรมนตรี), all female sponsors were senior princesses or queens. Furthermore, apart from Nang Yim, the remaining deceased individuals commemorated in these cremation volumes include Khrua Yai Arun (ขรัวยาย อรุ่น; 1842–1924), Chao Chom of Rama IV; Mom Chaoying Pao (หม่อมเจ้าหญิง เป้า; 1851–1920), granddaughter of Rama II (r. 1809–1824); Mom Chaoying Sunthorn Thararom (หม่อมเจ้าหญิง สุนทร ทรารมณ์; 1876–1922), granddaughter of Rama IV; Princess Suddha Dibyaratana (เจ้าฟ้า สุทธาทิพยรัตน; 1877–1923), daughter of Rama V (r. 1868–1910); and Thao Songkandan (ท้าว ทรงกันดาร; 1840–1924), Chao Chom Manda of Rama IV, all of whom held royal titles, were closely connected to the monarchy, and achieved their position through their relationships with men. This pattern suggests that the act of sponsoring a cremation volume for a female deceased by a woman was predominantly a privilege reserved for royal women. They had the means and authority to memorialize the deceased through these volumes, while non-royal elite women were seldom able to do so. Even in the case of Nang Yim, where the sponsor was not royal, her familial connection to an elite figure suggests that access to these commemorative practices was still deeply tied to elite status.

In cremation volumes sponsored by women for male deceased, a similarly exclusive pattern tied to male royal and elite connections emerges. Among the commemorated individuals are royal princes, relatives of concubines or royal consorts (*chao chom*; เจ้าจอม), senior nobles, privy councilors, senior officials such as former governors of Kanchanaburi and Phetchaburi, and notable businessmen. In the case of volumes for deceased women, the act of sponsoring cremation volumes by males was closely tied to the sponsor's elite or royal status. Women who undertook this act were typically situated within or had strong connections to the royal court. This disparity shows how commemorative practices were determined mainly by rank and status, with royal women exercising influence over the cultural and intellectual preservation of family legacies, while non-royal women had little opportunity to shape the narrative around the legacies of both male and

female deceased. Such internal hierarchies create inequalities among women: those marginalized by gender may still enjoy privilege over women who face multiple forms of disadvantage (Murray 2024: 497). The layered structure of this power illustrates how women's commemorative agency was both enabled and constrained by their embeddedness within elite patriarchal systems.

In 35.1% of the studied volumes for male deceased and 22.8% for female deceased, the *chaophap* (เจ้าภาพ) or multiple sponsors were responsible for commissioning the volume, often comprising multiple family members of either gender. These collective efforts reaffirmed elite social standing while the shared responsibility helped diffuse the symbolic weight of commemoration and saw higher sponsorship for male deceased than for female deceased.

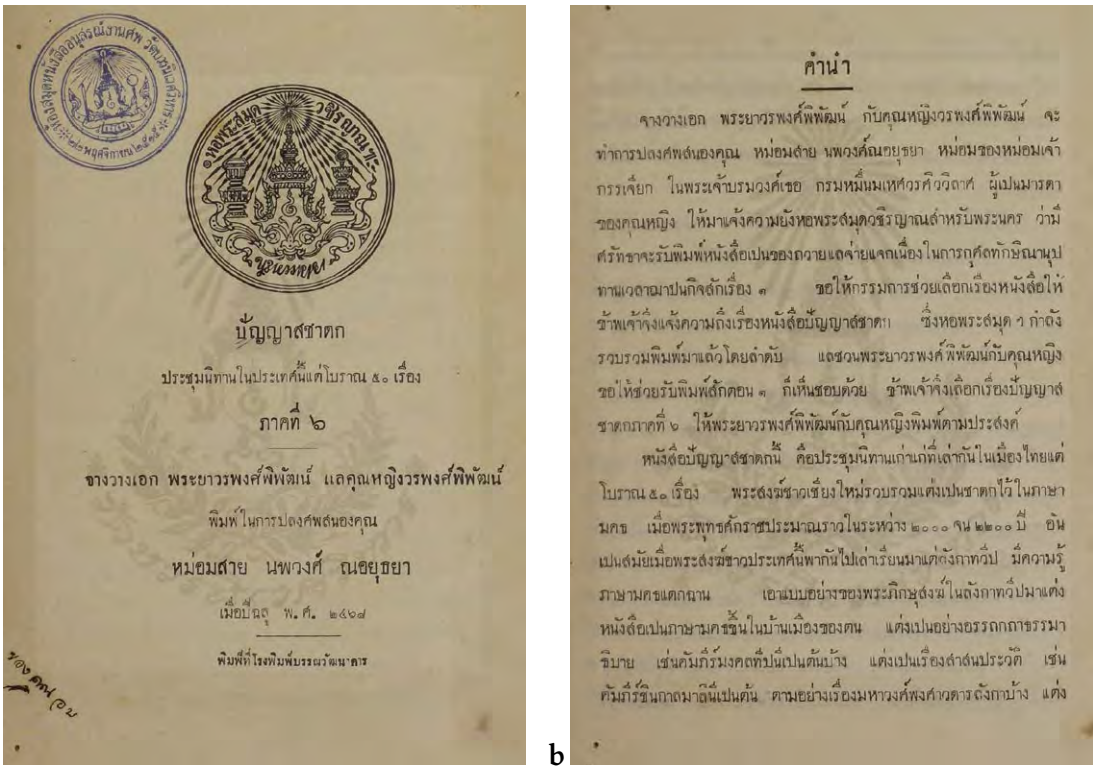
Male deceased often received institutional sponsorship for cremation volumes due to their eligibility to hold public office and serve in official capacities, a venue not available to women. Hence, there is an absence of government or institutional sponsorship for female deceased.[7] As a result, the preservation of women's legacies fell largely to private initiatives, usually undertaken by family members, most often male relatives. Men were seen as natural inheritors and protectors of family legacies, while women's roles often reinforced familial bonds rather than act independently, resulting in restricted opportunities for women to assert their individuality and contributions outside the confines of familial and marital affiliations.

Additionally, there are two instances where a son-in-law and daughter jointly sponsor a cremation volume, indicating the involvement of the extended family. The cremation volume for Chaophraya Bodindechanuchit (เจ้าพระยา บดินทรเดชานุชิต; 1856–1921) was sponsored by his widow and daughter, along with the son-in-law, while the volume for Mom Sai Navawongs Na Ayudhaya (หม่อมสาย นพวงศ์ ณ อยุธยา) was sponsored by her daughter and son-in-law (Damrong 2465; Phra Ratchaphirom 2468) **[Figures 3a–b]**. However, there are no recorded cases where sponsorship came from the deceased's daughter-in-law, suggesting a broader societal norm surrounding gender roles and familial obligation in which male relatives, either by blood or marriage, are more visibly responsible for these duties.

Biographical Representations

Biographies in cremation volumes are highly gendered, reflecting the broader social structures of elite Siamese society during the early 20th century. Among the 57 cremation volumes for the deceased males, almost 60% (33 volumes) include biographies, while out of the 35 volumes for the female deceased, only approximately 30% (11 volumes) contain biographies. More than half of the male volumes feature biographical accounts, compared to less than one-third of the female volumes. This discrepancy points to a larger pattern where male figures were more likely to be commemorated with detailed personal narratives compared to their female counterparts.

[7] Only concubines, royal consorts, or royal princesses received institutional sponsorship for cremation volumes, highlighting the restricted agency of women in the public sphere.



ปัญญาสชาดก

ประชุมนิทานในประเทศนี้แต่โบราณ ๕๐ เรื่อง

ภาคที่ ๖

ขางวางเอก พระยาวรพงศ์พิพัฒน์ แลคุณหญิงวรพงศ์พิพัฒน์

พิมพ์ในการปลงศพสนองคุณ

หม่อมสาย นพวงศ์ ณอยุธยา

เมื่อปีฉลู พ.ศ. ๒๔๖๘

พิมพ์ที่โรงพิมพ์บรรณาคาร

คำนำ

ขางวางเอก พระยาวรพงศ์พิพัฒน์ กับคุณหญิงวรพงศ์พิพัฒน์ จะทำการปลงศพสนองคุณ หม่อมสาย นพวงศ์ณอยุธยา หม่อมของหม่อมเจ้ากรรเจียก ในพระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ กรมหมื่นมหิศวรวิวิธาศ์ ผู้เปนมารดาของคุณหญิง ให้มาแจ้งความยังหอพระสมุดวชิรญาณสำหรับพระนคร ว่ามีศรัทธาจะรับพิมพ์หนังสือเปนของถวายแลจ่ายแจกเนื่องในการกุศลทักษิณานุปทานเวลามีปนกิจจักเรื่อง ๓ ขอให้กรรมการช่วยเลือกเรื่องหนังสือให้ ข้าพเจ้าจึงแจ้งความถึงเรื่องหนังสือปัญญาสชาดก ซึ่งหอพระสมุดฯ กำลังรวบรวมพิมพ์มาแล้วโดยลำดับ แลขอนพระยาวรพงศ์พิพัฒน์กับคุณหญิงขอให้ช่วยรับพิมพ์สักตอน ๓ ก็เห็นชอบด้วย ข้าพเจ้าจึงเลือกเรื่องปัญญาสชาดกภาคที่ ๖ ให้พระยาวรพงศ์พิพัฒน์กับคุณหญิงพิมพ์ตามประสงค์

หนังสือปัญญาสชาดกนี้ คือประชุมนิทานเก่าแก่ที่เล่ากันในเมืองไทยแต่โบราณ ๕๐ เรื่อง พระสงฆ์ชาวเชียงใหม่รวบรวมแต่งเปนชาดกไว้ในภาษามคธ เมื่อพระพุทธศักราชประมาณราวในระหว่าง ๒๐๐๐ จน ๒๒๐๐ ปี อันเปนสมัยเมื่อพระสงฆ์ชาวประเทศนี้พากันไปเล่าเรียนมาแต่ลังกาทวีป มีความรู้ภาษามคธแตกฉาน เอาแบบอย่างของพระภิกษุสงฆ์ในลังกาทวีปมาแต่งหนังสือเปนภาษามคธขึ้นในบ้านเมืองของตน แต่งเปนอย่างอรรถกถาธรรมาธิบาย เช่นคัมภีร์มงคลทีปนีเปนต้นบ้าง แต่งเปนเรื่องสำหรับประวัติ เช่นคัมภีร์ชินกาลมาลีเปนต้น ตามอย่างเรื่องมหาวงศ์พงศาวดารลังกาบ้าง แต่ง

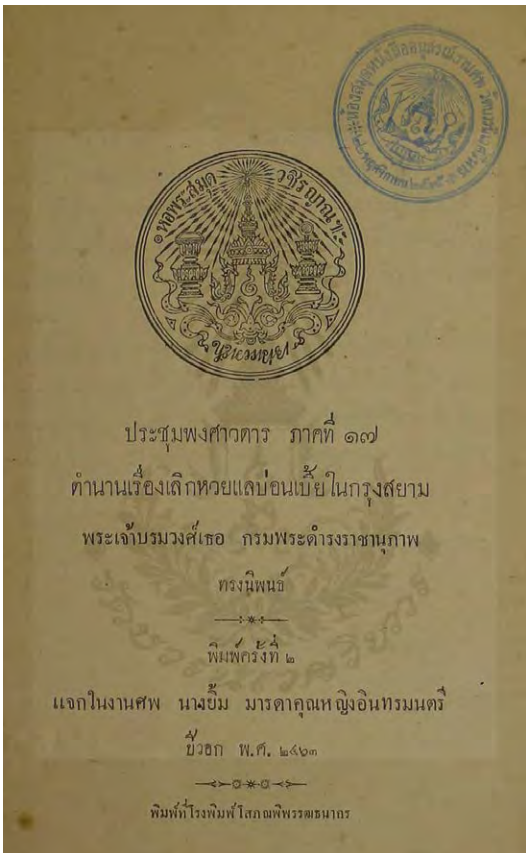
a b

Figures 3a–b: Title page (a) and preface page (b) from the cremation volume for Mom Sai Navawongs Na Ayudhaya sponsored by daughter and son-in-law, 1925 © TU Digital Collection

The inclusion of biographies for men often focuses on their public contributions, particularly their involvement in political, military, or administrative roles. In contrast, female biographies, when present, tend to highlight their roles as mothers, daughters, or grandmothers, and focus on their philanthropic efforts rather than any direct public or professional achievements. A recurring feature in many of these female biographies is the disproportionate focus on male relatives rather than their own lives and individuality. This may be because the editor or biographical authors were more familiar with and had greater access to the male kin of the deceased than to the women themselves, resulting in a curated and gendered representation shaped by male perspectives.

An important aspect of this gendered inequality is the absence of formal titles for women in Siamese society during this period. Men's titles and their public identities were tied to their professional achievements as well as their governmental positions. These were recorded in detail and celebrated in their biographies. In contrast, women's titles were essentially relational and tied to their roles as wives, daughters, or mothers of prominent male figures.

An interesting observation from this sample is that when the deceased holds a title or possesses significant social standing, they are typically addressed by their name and title. However, in


ประชุมพงศาวดาร ภาคที่ ๑๗

ตำนานเรื่องเลิกหวยแลบ่อนเบี้ยในกรุงสยาม

พระเจ้าบรมวงศ์เธอ กรมพระดำรงราชานุภาพ

ทรงนิพนธ์

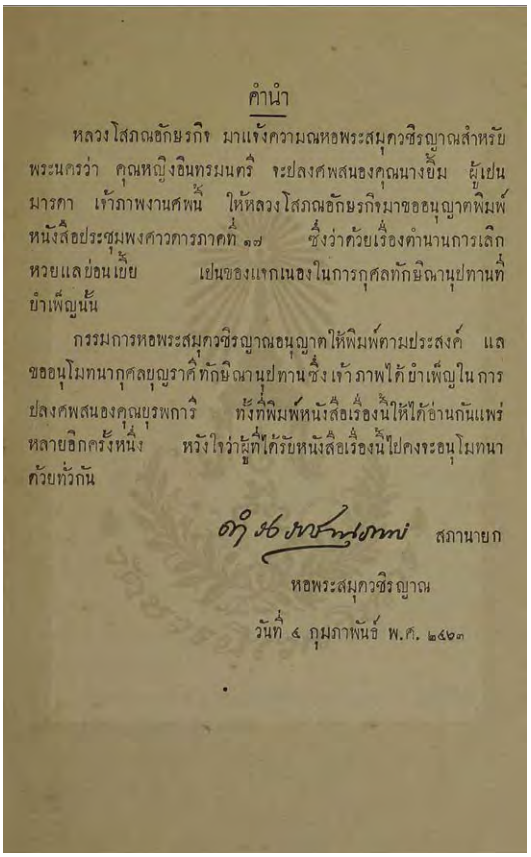
พิมพ์ครั้งที่ ๒

แจกในงานศพ นางยิ้ม มารดาคุณหญิงอินทรมนตรี

ปีวอก พ.ศ. ๒๔๖๓

พิมพ์ที่โรงพิมพ์โสภณพิพรรฒธนากร

a


ตำนำ

หลวงโสภณอักษรกิจ มาแจ้งความมายังหอพระสมุดวชิรญาณสำหรับพระนครว่า คุณหญิงอินทรมนตรี จะปลงศพสนองคุณนางยิ้ม ผู้เปนมารดา เจ้าภาพงานศพนี้ ให้หลวงโสภณอักษรกิจมาขออนุญาตพิมพ์หนังสือประชุมพงศาวดารภาคที่ ๑๗ ซึ่งว่าด้วยเรื่องตำนานการเลิกหวยแลบ่อนเบี้ย เปนของแจกในงานกุศลทักษิณานุปทานที่ยำเพ็ญนั้น

กรรมการหอพระสมุดวชิรญาณอนุญาตให้พิมพ์ตามประสงค์ แลขออนุโมทนากุศลบุญราศีทักษิณานุปทานซึ่งเจ้าภาพได้ยำเพ็ญในการปลงศพสนองคุณบุรพการี ทั้งพิมพ์หนังสือเรื่องนี้ให้ได้อ่านกันแพร่หลายอีกครั้งหนึ่ง หวังใจว่าผู้ที่ได้รับหนังสือเรื่องนี้ไปคงจะอนุโมทนาด้วยทั่วกัน

สภานายก

หอพระสมุดวชิรญาณ

วันที่ ๔ กุมภาพันธ์ พ.ศ. ๒๔๖๓

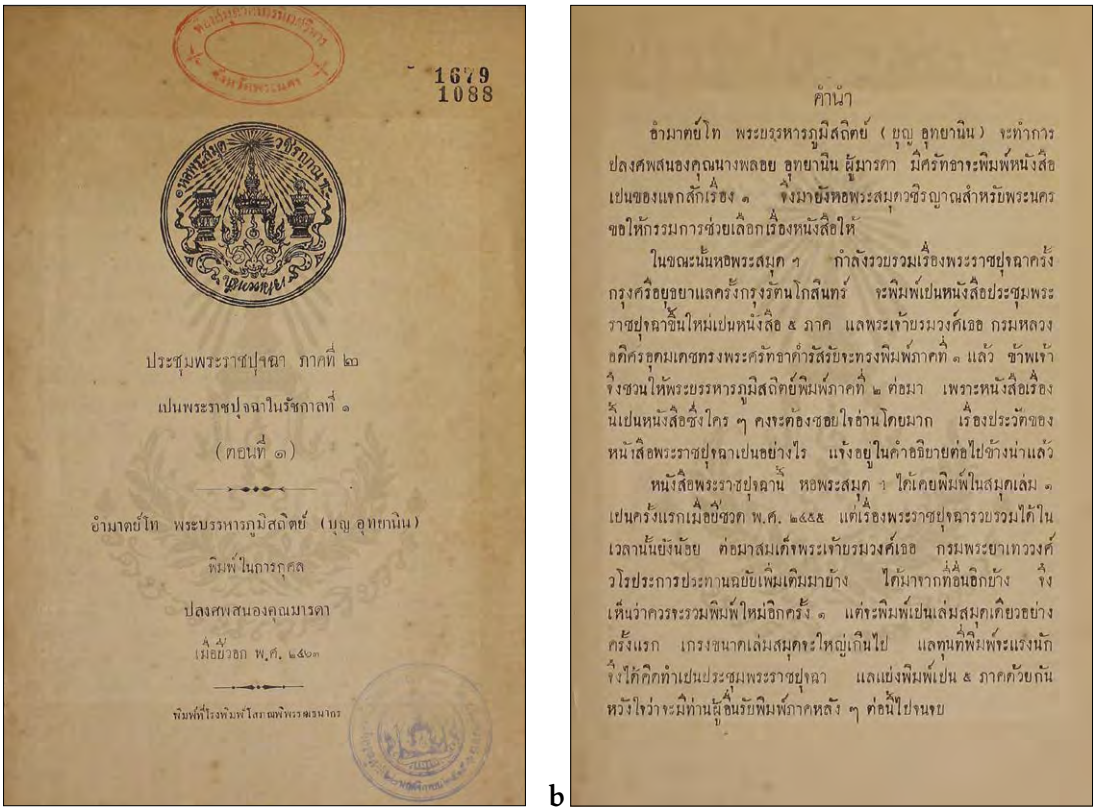
b

Figures 4a–b: Title page (a) and preface page (b) of a cremation volume sponsored by Khunying Intharamontri for her mother's funeral, 1920 © TU Digital Collection

cases where the deceased lacks a formal title, they are often identified by their relationship to the sponsor of the volume. For example, on the cover page of Nang Yim's cremation volume, the mother of Khunying Intharamontri, the deceased is identified through her relationship to her daughter rather than by her name, "พิมพ์แจกในงานศพนางยิ้ม มารดาคุณหญิงอินทรมนตรี" meaning "Printed for the funeral of Nang Yim, mother of Khunying Intharamontri" (Damrong 2463).

On the surface, this may appear to reflect the hierarchical logic of Siamese society, in which an individual's significance was often framed through their proximity to titled relatives. Yet this case is more telling. Khunying Intharamontri, by virtue of her own title, would have had connections to high-ranking male officials, possibly through marriage or kinship, highlighting how her access to print culture was facilitated by elite networks. She is recorded as having sent Luang Sophonpaksonkit (หลวง โสภณอักษรกิจ; 1871–1948), the founder of the Sophonphiphatthanakon printing press (โรงพิมพ์โสภณพิพัฒนากร), to request permission to reprint certain materials for her mother's funeral volume **[Figures 4a–b]**.[8] This detail underscores

[8] The reason for this was that the Watchirayan Library allowed individuals wishing to publish cremation volumes to reprint selected manuscripts from its



a b

Figures 5a–b: Title page (a) and preface page (b) of a cremation volume sponsored by Ammat Tho Phra Banhanphumsathit for his mother's funeral, 1920
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how women, even when socially powerful, often acted through male intermediaries when engaging public or institutional channels. The resulting volume, though centered on a woman without a formal title, was made possible by the daughter's position within a gendered hierarchy of influence, revealing how elite women negotiated access to public memory through the very patriarchal structures that constrained them.

A similar example comes from the cremation volume sponsored by Ammat Tho Phra Banhanphumsathit (Bun Uthayanin) for the funeral of his mother (Phutthayotfa 2463).[9] In this case, the name of the deceased, Nang Phloi Uthayanin (นาง พลอย อุทยานิน), does not even appear on the title page but is mentioned later in the preface **[Figures 5a–b]**. The title page reads only, "อำมาตย์โทพระบรรหารภูมิสถิตย์ (บุญอุทยานิน) พิมพ์ในการกุศลปลงศพสนองคุณมารดา", meaning that Ammat Tho Phra Banhanphumsathit (Bun Uthayanin) printed the volume as a meritorious act in honor of his mother's funeral.

collections. However, explicit permission was required for each subsequent reprinting (Olson 1992: 283).

[9] The text originates from the reign of Rama I (1782–1809) but was reprinted in a revised multi-part edition in 2463 BE (1920 CE) edited by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. Damrong notes that an earlier edition printed in 2455 BE (1912 CE) had been incomplete; the revised edition therefore reorganized the material into five parts covering different reigns, effectively forming a compendium of royal inquiries.

This narrative structure privileges the sponsor's identity over that of the deceased, casting the commemorative act as an extension of the sponsor's virtue and filial duty. The absence of the mother's name from the title page is not merely a formal omission but reflects a broader commemorative logic in which the deceased woman's identity is subsumed under the moral economy of male kinship. The woman's presence in the text is mediated through the sponsor's narrative frame, limiting her commemorative visibility to the relational value she holds. While similar patterns exist in cremation volumes for male deceased, in the corpus examined they appear more frequently when the deceased is a woman without formal rank.

The focus on religious topics in female cremation volumes further adds to this dynamic. While men's volumes often highlight professional achievements, in contrast, volumes for women frequently prioritize religious merit, devotion, and charity. This pattern reflects the cultural expectation that elite women should embody and perform moral virtue within the domestic and religious spheres. Female biographies frequently portray women as nurturers and moral guides, aligning with the idealized feminine roles in Siamese society. One volume describes the deceased Nang Phrom (นาง พร้อม; 1864–1917) in precisely these terms. It notes:

> Nang Phrom was a virtuous woman with deep faith in Buddhism. She enjoyed giving alms, observing precepts, practicing meditation, and regularly supporting the monastic community. On Visakha Bucha days, she liked to gather groups of women and laymen to chant in Pali and recite poetic translations of the sacred texts. She lived with her husband, dutifully fulfilling her role as a wife and homemaker, which brought them lasting happiness and harmony (Damrong 2462: Preface, 3–4).[10]

The cremation volume for Khunying Siphuripricha (คุณหญิง ศรีภูริปรีชา; 1864–1916) notes religious devotion as a natural extension of domestic virtue. Her biography presents her turn to Buddhist practice not as an autonomous spiritual pursuit but as one that becomes appropriate only after she has fulfilled her duties as a wife and mother. It notes:

> Khunying Siphuripricha had been steadfast in her faith in Buddhism since her youth. When she reached middle age and her children had grown enough to manage the household affairs on their own, she gradually withdrew from domestic responsibilities in order to observe the precepts and listen to sermons at various temples, including Wat Thepsirin, Wat Somanat, and Wat Suthat [Thepwararam, Bangkok]. She studied Dhamma

[10] Here and below, all translations from Thai are my own. In the original prefaces, the pages sometimes appear in Thai numerals (e.g., ๑, ๒) and at other times with Thai alphabetical markers (e.g., ก, ข). For clarity and consistency, all references in this article have been standardized using Arabic numerals.

> under Phra Panyaphisan Thera [พระปัญญาพิศาลเถร] of Wat Pathumwanaram and Phra Phrommuni [พระพรหมมุนี] of Wat Suthat Thepwararam and diligently pursued the path of spiritual cultivation and disciplined practice (Damrong 2460: Preface, 10–11).

Taken together, these cremation volumes illustrate a recurring narrative pattern of idealized feminine virtue structured around a moral trajectory that unfolds in distinct, sequential stages. The narrative arc frequently begins with the woman's dedication to her domestic responsibilities with her role as a wife, mother, and household manager and only later transitions into a deepened engagement with religious practice. This progression is not incidental; rather, it reflects a culturally sanctioned model of womanhood in which religious merit gains legitimacy only after the successful fulfillment of familial duties. In this schema, elite women's lives are framed as moral exemplars through the careful sequencing of private devotion and spiritual cultivation. The structure implies that ideal legacy-making depends on the harmonious integration of both spheres: first family, then faith. By emphasizing this moral continuum, these volumes quietly reinforce a gendered vision of virtue imposed on the female agency to roles anchored in familial and religious obligations, roles that are valorized precisely because they are seen as extensions of a patriarchal moral order.

Yet, possibly paradoxically, within this very structure, through the domesticated and religious themes, elite women found avenues for agency. These roles, while constrained, were not entirely passive. Women exercised influence in religious life, organized merit-making events, supported temples, and cultivated networks of moral and social reciprocity. In this way, cremation volumes also reveal how elite Siamese women, though excluded from official state recognition, actively shaped their legacies and societal contributions through culturally sanctioned channels of religious devotion and domestic virtue.

A parallel insight comes from the study of Shan women, where "unlike most other public occasions, ordination rituals are ones in which women are allowed to be seen on center stage where they have a prominent, even commanding, public presence" (Eberhardt 2006: 143). Similarly, these volumes offer a rare and public space in which women's roles, which are often tied to domestic and religious life, can find certain agency and representation, even if it is constrained and curated by male voices.

Gendered Authorship

Within the historical development of women's education in Siam, significant gender disparities shaped both access to literacy and participation in public intellectual life. Traditionally, access to formal education was limited for women, as the primary institutions of learning were monasteries, which excluded women from participation. Even the early educational reforms under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), which aimed to modernize Siam's education system, initially prioritized the education of boys. It was not until

the late 19th and early 20th centuries that systematic opportunities for girls began to emerge more widely, with the establishment of institutions such as the Sunanthalai Girls' School (สุนันทาลัย) in 1892 and the Rajini School (โรงเรียนราชินี) in 1904 (Natanaree 2015: 98, 111). These developments marked a turning point in expanding access to formal education for women, though they remained limited in scope and primarily served elite urban communities.

This educational disparity had lasting implications for women's participation in intellectual and literary life. While many male figures of the period are represented in the volumes through their own works or through writings commissioned in their memory, female-authored contributions are rare. In the entire corpus of cremation volumes from this period, only one female author is notable, Princess Malini Nobhadara (เจ้าฟ้า มาลินี นพดารา; 1885–1924), who served as the royal secretary to King Chulalongkorn and wrote the draft of his travels (Chulachomklao 2468).[11] However, her active role as a writer was subordinate to her father, the king, as she merely wrote the draft from his notes and travel diary, not her own work. These examples illustrate the marginal position of women in the intellectual and literary sphere of the time, where their writing was mediated mainly through or tied to male authority figures. Outside of these exceptions, women are entirely absent as authors in cremation volumes, reflecting the limited avenues available to them for expression in public, intellectual, or literary domains during this period.

Masculinities scholarship shows that the same privileges granting men access to power, such as education, wealth, and elite social connections, also determine how they wield that power, not only over women, but also over other men (Murray 2024: 498). In elite Siamese society, hegemonic masculinity often operated through cultural and intellectual dominance expressed through authorship, sponsorship, and the production of memory. The near-total absence of female authorship and substantive male sponsorship of cremation volumes reveals how public memory and legacy were curated through patriarchal control.[12] Men were positioned as both custodians of memory and architects of national history, while women's voices, when present, were mediated through male-dominated familial and institutional structures. This exclusion not only diminished women's visibility in the cultural archives but reinforced a hierarchy in which authority over memory was itself gendered.

[11] This volume contains a compilation of letters written by King Chulalongkorn and was first published posthumously in 2468 BE (1925 CE). In the preface, Prince Damrong notes that these royal letters had not previously been printed.

[12] For discussion on historical development of women's education in Thailand, see Costa 1997. The example of Khun Suwan (คุณ สุวรรณ; 1809–1875) illustrates the challenges faced by women in asserting their literary voice in this period. Khun Suwan was a lady at court in the late reign of Rama III (1824–1851) and early reign of Rama IV. Her work *Unarut roi rueang* (อุณรุทร้อยเรื่อง) was groundbreaking yet dismissed by Prince Damrong as the work of a woman deemed "insane" (Kepner 1996: 9–12). This disparagement reflects broader societal biases that undermined female authorship and reinforced the perception of women's creative contributions as inferior or anomalous.

However, in the absence of women's own literary output, female subjects were often commemorated through the writings of their male relatives. Unmarried women were typically remembered through the voices of their natal kin, while married women were memorialized through the works of their husbands or in-laws. While this practice is prominently observed among royal individuals, it is not exclusive to them, as three examples in this study sample can also be found in aristocratic and government official cremation volumes. The cremation volume of Khunying Seni Narongrit (คุณหญิง เสนี ณรงค์ฤทธิ์; 1891–1924), sponsored by her husband, Phraya Seni Narongrit (พระยา เสนี ณรงค์ฤทธิ์; 1885–1963), offers a compelling illustration of the motivation behind including works of her great-grandfather-in-law in such publications. The preface explains Prince Damrong's rationale behind the inclusion of that particular work. It says:

> This book was first introduced in the Thai language through the efforts of His Royal Highness Prince Wongsathiratsanit [กรมหลวง วงศาธิราชสนิท; 1808–1871], the great-grandfather of Phraya Seni Narongrit, who translated and adapted it into Thai. It is believed that the Sanitwongse family [สกุล สนิทวงศ์] has played a role in the creation of this book since its origin. It is appropriate that [Sanitwongse] family members print and distribute it widely to ensure it is preserved and not lost (Damrong 2468: Preface, 1).

Including such ancestral writings ties the deceased to a legacy of the family's intellectual or cultural contributions, enhancing its collective reputation. This practice highlights the interconnectedness of individual and familial identities while also exposing a gendered asymmetry within a patrilineal system: marriage absorbs a woman into her husband's lineage, but not the reverse. Women's cremation volumes often contain content that reinforces the prestige of their marital families, functioning as instruments of male lineage-building. In contrast, men's volumes rarely, if ever, incorporate material about their wives' families. This reflects gendered kinship dynamics in which men retain their natal lineage identity intact while women are symbolically relocated into that of their husbands.

This asymmetry reinforces a patriarchal model of descent and belonging, where commemorative identity is unidirectional and gendered. Natal ties are often erased in women's biographies, particularly when their families lacked elite status. While "kinship systems may function as descendant-leaving strategies aimed at maximizing ancestral fitness" (Palmer & Steadman 1997: 47–48), biological logic alone cannot account for the cultural and symbolic weight of commemorative practices. In this context, the symbolic relocation of women into their husband's lineage is not only about genetic continuity but also about maintaining collective social prestige. A married woman's commemorative identity becomes the "property" of her husband's lineage, which can be deployed as a curated asset to secure

the family's symbolic dominance in both spiritual and social registers. Such women are primarily remembered through their relationships with husbands and male kin, producing an archival silence that flattens the complexity of their multidirectional identities and reduces their presence to a function of male familial continuity.

Complex Agency of Elite Women

The cremation volume of Khunying Siphuripricha offers a revealing example of how women's lives were commemorated within elite Siamese society, highlighting the gendered nature of remembrance. When her husband, Phraya Siphuripricha (พระยา ศรีภูริปรีชา; 1861–1917), suggested that there was nothing significant in her life worth recording in a biography, Prince Damrong protested, offering a defense of her legacy that reflected the societal expectations placed upon women at the time. The preface states:

> Phraya Siphuripricha remarked that the biography of Khunying Phueng [Siphuripricha] held no significant content and need not be written. However, upon reflection, I realized there are several noteworthy aspects of Khunying Siphuripricha's life. Firstly, she shared the trials and successes of married life with Phraya Siphuripricha, akin to a partner who helped build a foundation for their family from their youth. Together, they upheld virtuous conduct, which steadily brought prosperity until they became grandparents and heads of a noble lineage. This alone is not a common achievement for most. Secondly, Khunying Phueng bore eleven children, eight of whom survived. Of these, those of an age suitable for royal service excelled, earning recognition through royal commissions and noble titles. Her daughters married into prominent families, enjoying happiness and fulfillment. This outcome reflects her exceptional ability in her role as matriarch, nurturing and educating her children, yielding results that brought great joy to their parents and deserving of praise. Lastly, I believe many who knew Khunying Phueng would agree on another point: she was generous and kind-hearted, possessing a temperament that endeared her to everyone across all ranks. It could even be said that she had no enemies and was universally admired by all who knew her. For this reason, when Khunying Phueng passed away, many mourned her loss and deeply sympathized with Phraya Siphuripricha (Damrong 2460: Preface, 7–9).

Phraya Siphuripricha's initial remark implies that there was nothing significant in his wife's life and she lacked accomplishments that were worthy of

documentation, which mirrors the broader societal view of women's roles naturally being limited to the domestic sphere with their philanthropy and nurturing roles taking center stage. Khunying Siphuripricha's biography, as defended by Prince Damrong, shows how women's legacies were shaped by societal expectations of virtue, motherhood, and family loyalty, highlighting the limited but significant ways in which women's lives were commemorated within the gendered framework. Damrong's acknowledgment of his personal connection to her, consistently referring to her by her name Phueng (พึ่ง) and mentioning her kindness toward him likely motivated his exceptional effort to honor her through this biography.

Cremation volumes also reveal significant ways in which Siamese women could navigate societal constraints in order to assert their agency and preserve their family's legacy. As widows, mothers, and patrons, through these volumes they at times navigated complex social structures to reinforce their family's social standing, managing wealth, and maintaining elite networks. A notable example is the cremation volume of Phra Phibun Phatthanakon (Yukui Tanthasetthi) (พระพิบูลย์ พัฒนากร [ยู่กุ่ย ตัณฑเศรษฐี]; 1875–1918), where the widow Nang Phoem (นาง เพิ่ม) sponsored the volume and publicly announced her inheritance of her husband's business. The preface notes:

> The property and assets inherited were bequeathed to Nang Phoem Phibun Phatthanakon through the will of Phra Phibun Phatthanakon. As for the debts arising from everyday commercial dealings, which are to be expected, Nang Phoem Phibun Phatthanakon duly managed the settlements and transactions accordingly.
>
> Given that Phra Phibun Phatthanakon had several children and wives, Nang Phoem Phibun Phatthanakon graciously allocated a special portion of the inheritance to his wives and children who were not her own while continuing to support them. She ensured that the operations of the Siang Ki [เซียง กี่] trading business proceeded harmoniously, with collaboration among relatives and friends on both sides; the business continues to flourish, enabling the Tanthasetthi lineage to remain permanently stable and progressive while maintaining their status as loyal subjects of His Majesty the King under the Siamese crown. Grateful for the royal grace bestowed upon them, they hoped for continued royal benevolence and pledged unwavering loyalty in return. Nang Phoem also expressed confidence that those who had cared for her family would extend their kindness and support to the Tanthasetthi lineage in the future (Prachakichakornchak 2462: Preface, 5–6).

The cremation volume of Phra Phibun Phatthanakon includes a striking example of curated emergent representation. This appears in a section describing his principal wife, Nang Phoem Phibun Phatthanakon. Unlike the other biographies, an unusual but significant assertion of agency emerges by inserting her new role in the biography of her deceased husband. It makes her new liminal role and adjusted power structure public knowledge. Her account outlines the just and strategic distribution of inheritance among her late husband's other wives and children and establishing her authority as the head of a polygynous household. More than a personal gesture, this public declaration functioned as a means of stabilizing kinship and business networks and legitimized her role in managing the family's commercial legacy. This further projected her as a mediator able to balance the needs of a complex family and business. Moreover, traits often coded as masculine, such as authority, financial acumen, and managerial competence, were effectively mobilized by women such as she, challenging a binary view of hegemonic masculinity (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 2017). Through stewardship and patronage of the cremation volume, she ensured the preservation of her family's symbolic capital and elite status by performing religious duties towards her late husband. The selection and celebration of such women in cremation volumes reinforced ideals of fairness, loyalty, and non-jealousy, projecting not only an ideal widow but an ideal woman within a hierarchical domestic order.

Yet this agency unfolded within the constraints of classic patriarchy, wherein major wives (*mia luang*; เมียหลวง) like Nang Phoem were recognized and voiced, while minor wives (*mia noi*; เมียน้อย) remained dependent and largely invisible (Kandiyoti 1988: 278). This reflected broader gendered hierarchies where not only do men dominate women, but women themselves are stratified on multiple levels. Intersectional modern feminist scholarship helps further contextualize this: while elite wives like Nang Phoem were subordinated within patriarchal structures, they simultaneously wielded power over less privileged women, including minor wives or female servants (Smooth 2011; Severs et al. 2016). Importantly, gendered power in such contexts is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon. Gender relations are shaped by contextually specific interpersonal dynamics, as not all power manifests as domination (Peters 1995). Nang Phoem's relationships with male kin, for instance children from other wives, were not reducible to patriarchal subordination. Hence, female agency and subordination were not mutually exclusive but operated at different levels and across different axes of identity. These intersecting identities produced multi-layered inequalities, highlighting that even within patriarchal systems, complex female agency was negotiated, relational, and uneven.

Concluding Remarks

This exploration of early 20th-century Siamese cremation volumes through the lenses of subordination and

intersectionality reveals a stratified and gendered commemorative landscape. Sponsorship patterns and biographical representations reflect an embedded patriarchal order wherein men, whether as sponsors or subjects, occupied central roles in shaping elite cultural memory. Women's contributions, though present, were always mediated through familial structures and constrained by normative ideals of femininity, making their commemorative presence highly conditional.

Yet this does not mean exclusion of women. Instead, it points to a pattern of conditional emergent representation, a form of visibility that arose only when specific socio-cultural expectations were met. As Cornwall (1997: 11) notes, each cultural context contains a range of available models of masculinity or femininity. Just as elite men were celebrated for public service and moral authority, elite women were represented as their complements as guardians of domestic order and moral integrity. The ideal man was incomplete without an ideal woman; his virtue was mirrored and stabilized by hers. Elite women could participate in the memorial sphere and become custodians of family legacy, but only if they embodied idealized virtues such as loyalty, discretion, moral uprightness, and relational self-effacement. Their inclusion was not grounded in autonomous merit but in their capacity to reinforce male status and lineage continuity. It shows that women's participation was not passive but negotiated within the boundaries of patriarchal expectations.

Gender and politics scholars have long argued that women's presence in public life is a necessary but not sufficient condition of representation: it also matters which women are visible (Smooth 2011; Celis & Childs 2020). Similarly, in cremation volumes, female voices may be present in form or content, but they are shaped and constrained by dominant gender norms. Women's commemorative agency was thus embedded in kinship hierarchies and elite ideals of propriety, which dictated not only who could be remembered but also how. Those women who conformed to these conditions found representation as moral exemplars whose lives lent symbolic weight to elite male virtue.

This stratification also created inequalities among women, as various factors further filtered representation. Royal or elite women could influence cultural and intellectual legacy-building in ways that non-elite women could not. In this way, the cremation volume becomes a mirror of broader power structures: intersectional hierarchies of gender, class, rank, status, and lineage that shaped not just lived realities but also memory. These were not one-dimensional power relations. As such, sweeping generalizations about gender fail to fully capture the complexity of women's commemorative roles.

In sum, women's commemorative identities in elite Siamese society were often shaped by male curatorship, whether as editors, sponsors, or husbands who determined whether their biographies would be included. Yet women were not entirely absent from these narratives; their representations emerged under specific conditions of conformity and relational positioning. Their visibility was rarely based on autonomous recognition but rather on the condition

of their portrayal as moralized figures who affirmed and reinforced elite male authority. Women retained a degree of commemorative power and participated in shaping memory, albeit largely through prescribed roles as matriarchs or moral exemplars. It is through this interplay of visibility and constraint, as well as authority and negotiation, that the concept of conditionally emergent representation takes analytical form.

It should be noted, however, that this study represents a preliminary analysis of the cremation volume genre, based on a limited corpus. The field itself is vast and vibrant, with a rich diversity of texts, contexts, and practices that remain largely understudied. The observations presented here are therefore introductory and intended to highlight preliminary patterns. A more comprehensive investigation, drawing on a larger and more varied corpus, is being undertaken as part of an ongoing doctoral project, allowing for a deeper understanding of how memory, gender, and authority intersected across Siamese funerary culture.

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Silpa Bhirasri and the Making of Thai Modern Art: A Historiographical Journey

Sébastien Tayac[1]

Abstract—Often described as the "Father of Thai modern art", Silpa Bhirasri (1892–1962; born Corrado Feroci) occupies a canonical place in Thai art history. This article adopts a historiographical approach to examine how his artistic production, pedagogical role, and public writings have been received and interpreted in Thai scholarship and how these readings have shaped his reputation and legacy since his death in 1962. Drawing on sources in Thai, French, Italian, and English, the study highlights both convergences and divergences in these discourses. It concludes by identifying avenues for future research on his role in the formation of Thai modern art.

Keywords: Historiography; Italian Artists in Siam; Silpa Bhirasri (Corrado Feroci); Silpakorn University; Thai Modern Art

Silpa Bhirasri Reconsidered

During the period between World Wars I and II, many Asian territories, colonized or independent, adopted European-style art academies to promote nation-building and modernization. In this context, curator Yu Jin Seng (b. 1979) notes, "Art was thought to somehow exhibit and manifest the nation and its identity, and national art exhibitions evidenced the 'national characteristics' of art" (2017: 217). While Siam was never officially colonized, it adopted this approach by pursuing its own modernization goals through two related strategies: introducing Western art education and redefining national artistic traditions. In Siam (Thailand after 1939), this transformation was personified by the Italian sculptor Corrado Feroci (1892–1962), who arrived in the kingdom in 1923 and was naturalized as Silpa Bhirasri (ศิลป์ พีระศรี) in 1944. Scholar Pandit Chanrochanakit (บัณฑิต จันทร์โรจนกิจ) encapsulates the complexity of his identity, portraying him as:

> an Italian sculptor who taught and protected Thai art and aesthetics, an alien who was confined in the Japanese concentration camp during World War II, an Italian who naturalized to become a Thai citizen to avoid further confinement by the Japanese, and lastly an artist who loved and protected Thai culture (2004: 45).

According to Pandit, Silpa Bhirasri's name change was linked to the wartime context; other narratives, however, remain less explicit, suggesting motivations such as devotion to art and attachment to Thailand. He remained in Thailand until his death in 1962, witnessing

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four successive reigns—from Rama VI (1910–1925) through Rama IX (1946–2016)—and experiencing the political shift from absolute monarchy to a constitutional regime following the 1932 revolution. He served under various governments, notably during the leadership of Field Marshall Plaek Phibunsongkhram (แปลก พิบูลสงคราม; in office 1938–1944 and 1948–1957) and Sarit Thanarat (สฤษดิ์ ธนะรัชต์; in office 1959–1963). Initially employed as a foreign court sculptor, Silpa gradually became a central institutional figure, ultimately serving as professor and founding dean of Thailand's first national School of Fine Arts, the future Silpakorn University in Bangkok.

Assistant Professor Thanavi Chotpradit (ธนาวิ โชติประดิษฐ; b. 1981) underscores Silpa's overwhelming presence in Thai modern art historiography, observing, "When knowledge of modern art history is insufficient [...] modern Thai art history is studied primarily through his biography" (2555: 36).[2] Influential scholar and curator Apinan Poshyananda (อภินันท์ โปษยานนท์; b. 1956) similarly emphasizes Silpa's formative influence as what he terms "Bhirasri-ism": "This generation of artists emerged as proponents of Silpa and his pedagogical approach. They continue to staunchly uphold 'Bhirasri-ism' long after his passing in 1962" (2007: 32). In parallel, Silpa has been widely framed as a heroic figure in both Thai and international scholarship. Italian scholar Maurizio Peleggi notes, "Feroci is memorialised in the national pantheon as 'the father of Thai modern art'" (2003: 100), while Justin McDaniel observes that he is regarded as "a national hero in Thailand" (2011: 161). Art historian Kessara Srinaka (เกษรา ศรีนาคา) similarly observes, "Writings about Silpa Bhirasri's art [...] narrate his life in the manner of a heroic or venerable figure who rendered virtuous service to the 'Thai nation'" (2558: 5). This heroic framing is echoed in the writings of two academics from Silpakorn University: Maneepin Phromsuthirak (มณีปิ่น พรหมสุทธิรักษ์), who depicts Silpa as "the soul-lighter of Thai artists" (2003: 39), and Pairoj Jamuni (ไพโรจน์ ชมุนี), who asserts, "If Professor Bhirasri had not founded an art institute nearly seventy years ago, Thailand would not have been given this pride in the modern artistic heritage" (2000: 20).

Previous academic work highlighting Silpa's impact frequently obscures the distinction between rigorous historical analysis and nationalistic reverence, resulting in accounts that are shaped predominantly by sentiment and ideology rather than critical evaluation. While Silpa Bhirasri's recognition differs from that of Victor Tardieu (1870–1937), founder of the École des beaux-arts de l'Indochine in Hanoi, and George Groslier (1887–1945), founder of the École des arts cambodgiens in Phnom Penh, both operating in colonial contexts, the exceptional scope of Silpa's influence nonetheless invites comparison with other early-modern Asian art histories. Junichi Shioda offers a pertinent parallel with Japan's early modern period, noting that Feroci's role in Thailand recalls that of the "'hired foreigners' Fontanesi and Ragusa, [... who] laid the foundations of modern Japanese art by teaching Japanese students the techniques of Western painting and sculpture at the Art School" (1995: 238). This comparison

[2] Here and below, all translations from Thai, French and Italian sources are mine.

is particularly relevant since Japan, as with Thailand, remained uncolonized while Western influence shaped these two nations. Shioda further observes, "it would be no exaggeration to say that the modern period in Thai art begins with Feroci [whose influence he considers] incomparably greater than that of Fontanesi and Ragusa in Japan" (Ibid.). These observations call for a more precise assessment of Silpa's singular prominence among foreign artists in Siam. He was neither the first Italian in Siam, nor the first sculptor, nor the first artist to adopt a Thai name. He followed a line of Italian artists already active in Siam, including architects Carlo Allegri (1862–1938), Annibale Rigotti (1870–1968), Mario Tamagno (1877–1941), and painters Galileo Chini (1873–1956) and Cesare Ferro (1880–1934). Other Italian sculptors were active in Siam, including Rodolfo Nolli (1888–1963) (Somporn 1995: 243–244). Nor was he unique in adopting a Thai name, as architect, painter, and sculptor Ercole Manfredi (1883–1973) became Ekarit Manfendi (เอกฤทธิ์ หมั่นเฟ้นดี).

Although Silpa's prominence is unmatched among his Italian predecessors, Peleggi nonetheless notes, "an exhaustive study of him is still waiting to be written" (2017: 217). One reason for this omission, as Thanavi (2017: 134) observes, is that Thai art history remains largely focused on premodern art. Thanavi also underscores "blind spots in Thai art historiography [... such as] the study of art produced during the People's Party (คณะราษฎร) era (1932–1947)" (2555: 36), including the under-researched artistic production of Silpa during this period. For Thanavi, this absence "is not solely due to the marginal and underdeveloped status of art history as a discipline" but reflects "the political dimension of art historiography itself, [...] deeply shaped by successive waves of royalist ideological restoration following the 1947 coup" (Ibid., 37). While Thanavi acknowledges the relative underdevelopment of art history in Thailand, she also emphasizes an ongoing process of rewriting within the discipline. This contrasts the field of history, where, as Thongchai Winichakul (ธงชัย วินิจจะกูล; b. 1957) notes, Professor Charnvit Kasetsiri (ชาญวิทย์ เกษตรศิริ; b. 1941) identified a more elaborate classificatory framework, comprising "those of Damrong [Rajanubhab] and Luang Wichit along with four additional categories which materialized after 1973: the nationalist revival, Marxist, Historicist, and Asiatic society of schools" (1995: 100). Thus, whereas history reveals a plurality of schools shaped by ideological conflict, art history—less institutionally developed—registers fewer internal divisions but remains marked by politically inflected processes of selection and rewriting. Professor Emeritus John Clark and artist Phaptawan Suwannakudt (ภาพตะวัน สุวรรณกูฏ; b. 1959) likewise highlight this tendency, noting,

> Thai modern art history has been reconstructed from a rapid run-through of accepted positions seen from a height which is peculiarly convenient to accepted viewpoints or prevalent ideologies, whether conservative or radical. Sometimes the art historical riders have been academics keen to reconstruct "Thainess", and the artists have only wanted to see self-confirming radicalisms

> or order-propagating conservatisms (2021: 2).

In these conditions, Silpa Bhirasri's legacy, as historian Pinyapan Potjanalawan (ภิญญพันธุ์ พจนะลาวัณย์) observes, has been celebrated to such an extent that it becomes "difficult to subject him to critique—despite his historically significant role" (2557: 180).

Rather than offering a biographical account, this study considers the representation of Silpa's role in Thai art historiography. It proposes neither an inquisition nor a hagiography, but a critical scholarly examination of the available literature to reveal the multiple dimensions of his persona as they emerge through academic and institutional narratives. In this sense, the analysis relies primarily on publications about Silpa rather than on Silpa's own writings. The study draws on primary sources, including testimonies and writings by Silpa's former students—many of whom later became Silpakorn lecturers or prominent artists—as well as on secondary sources by both Thai and international scholars, encompassing Thai scholars trained abroad, those educated locally, and those affiliated with other academic institutions within Thailand.

By the late 19th century, Italian artists and architects were already active in Siam: figures such as Tamagno and Rigotti were recruited to contribute to the modernization of royal and civic architecture, while painters such as Chini, whose work had drawn the attention of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V; r. 1868–1910) at the Venice Biennale, were invited to undertake prestigious royal commissions. Silpa Bhirasri's trajectory, however, followed a different pattern. Rather than arriving with an established artistic reputation, Feroci was selected through an administrative process; art historian Viboon Leesuwan (วิบูลย์ ลี้สุวรรณ; b. 1947) notes, "Feroci was chosen to work for the Fine Arts Department out of 200 Italian candidates whose portfolios were screened by King Rama VI" (1996: 69). He was subsequently appointed state sculptor under a three-year contract, indicating an initially technical and contractual role rather than a pedagogical one.

On this basis, the study initially considers Silpa as an artist to grasp the aesthetic foundations and transnational dialogues that underpinned his practice. This dimension contextualizes his subsequent position as professor and mentor, through which he formalized and transmitted his vision to successive generations of Thai artists, contributing to the shaping of a national modern artistic identity. Finally, the analysis turns to Silpa's role as a scholar, whose writings, curatorial initiatives, and cultural policies helped construct the very framework through which Thai modern art has been defined and historicized.

Artistic Legacy

From Florence to Bangkok

In their study of artists' biographies, Ernst Kris & Otto Kurz (1979) identify several recurring themes. In the case of Corrado Feroci/Silpa Bhirasri, the biographical discourse foregrounds the theme of departure and personal sacrifice, illustrated by two pivotal episodes: (1) his move to Siam with his



Figure 1: Corrado Feroci in Italy, 1918–1922 © Silpa Bhirasri Research Center

family in 1923, and (2) his return to Thailand in 1949, leaving his wife and child in Italy. Viboon interprets the 1923 departure as a major personal and professional sacrifice, observing, perhaps with a certain degree of hyperbole, that "had he remained at the Academy or begun creating artistic works in Italy, he would have definitely become one of the world's foremost sculptors, in the footsteps of Michelangelo, the artistic genius of Florence (1475–1564) or Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)" (1996: 21). Yet, as Viboon notes, concerning Feroci's early career, including his nine years of teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts of Florence (from which he graduated in sculpture in 1914), "there is no serious documentation of his works" (Ibid., 67). This absence nevertheless allows later narratives to construct an image of innate mastery. Viboon also observes that "the few photographs he brought with him to Siam endorsed Feroci as a sculptor of high quality in the realist school. It was believed Feroci was particularly accomplished in portraiture and religious sculptures" (Ibid.) **[Figure 1]**.

By framing Silpa as an artistic genius akin to Renaissance masters, Viboon places him within a conventional narrative of exceptional talent, echoing the description offered by Nipan Khamwilai (นิพนธ์ ขำวิไล; 1939–2014), editor of the commemorative volume: *Prof. Silpa Bhirasri and His Students* (อาจารย์ศิลป์กับลูกศิษย์), which compiles recollections by former students. Nipan describes him as "a saint of art, from the city of Florence, a devout believer in the glory of the Renaissance, who journeyed eastward and devoted his entire life to the land known as Siam" (cited in Thanavi 2555: 34). Drawing on former students' testimonies, Apinan similarly conveys the impression that Silpa "aroused fanatical loyalty in his admirers and students, many of whom credited him with almost superhuman powers" (1992: 93).

Collectively, these tropes illustrate the patterns described by Nathalie Heinich as a hagiographic regime of admiration. In her analysis of Van Gogh publications, Heinich argues that biographical narratives often cease

to function as historical accounts and instead become modes of veneration: "some of [their] forms are canonical in hagiographical terms. They repeat and perpetuate what has been said before", driven "less by information [...] than by celebration" (1996: 36). Such narratives obey a temporality "not that of historical research but that of collective celebration [...] with its commemorations, its exhibitions and its pilgrimages" (Ibid.). Thai narratives surrounding Silpa closely follow this pattern.

However, while hagiographic framing dominates earlier narratives, several scholars offer more historically grounded interpretations of his departure from Italy that challenge this saintly image. Massimo De Grassi suggests that the move ultimately worked in Feroci's favor: "What we do know for certain is that this decision [...] granted the Tuscan sculptor a degree of fame and prominence that he could hardly have achieved had he remained in his homeland" (2022: 138). De Grassi further notes that Feroci would have struggled to stand out in the crowded post–First World War Italian art scene, where he "would indeed have faced great difficulty in distinguishing himself among that multitude of 'workers of glory'—sculptors who, during the 1920s, were engaged in filling Italy with monumental memorials dedicated to the fallen of the Great War who, in the following decade, would become, with the necessary qualifications, the celebrants of the fascist regime's exploits" (Ibid.). Apinan, however, shifts the focus from missed opportunities to the alignment between Feroci's realist training and institutional patronage, "Having gained a reputation as a sculptor of war memorials [...]. If Feroci had remained in Florence, his status as an official artist working for the Fascist government would have assured his reputation" (1992: 34). In this sense, Apinan's remark complements De Grassi's contextualization: both suggest that Feroci's realist orientation tied him to forms of state patronage, whether in Italy or later Thailand. Viboon also addresses the stylistic dimension, citing the artist and former student of Silpa Bhirasri, Damrong Wong-Upparaj (ดำรง วงศ์อุปราช; 1936–2002), who observed, "While Feroci was teaching in Florence, Europe was rife with modernism movements. Siam, on the other hand, was a peaceful country far removed from modernism. Such a country would seem ideal for an artist of the classical school like Professor Feroci" (1996: 23). Viboon further notes, "One remembers that when Feroci completed his studies at the Academy in 1914, modernism was at its peak in Europe. This would have been alien to Feroci, whose whole education had been in the realist school. Opportunities to build a reputation through his realist creations would have been few and far between" (Ibid.). This stylistic conservatism is echoed by Gigi Salvagnini, who observed, "Throughout his Italian production, Feroci demonstrates a persistent fidelity to pre-20th-century stylistic conventions, entirely immune to avant-garde temptations—which he must have known, yet which had no discernible influence on his sculptural practice" (1998: 12). Salvagnini's analysis corroborates Viboon's assessment while providing a more detached art-historical perspective, demonstrating that Feroci remained firmly rooted in descriptive realism without engaging the formal innovations of the European avant-garde.

These interpretations are not merely variations on a theme but often point in opposite directions: while some accounts portray Feroci as a celebrated sculptor whose departure from Italy interrupted a promising trajectory, others argue that remaining in his home country would have offered limited prospects. Such divergence reflects not only the different evidentiary bases mobilized by each author, but also the distinct historiographical aims shaping their narratives. Viboon underscores Silpa's role as the foundational figure of Thai modern art, thereby cultivating a national myth; De Grassi and Apinan situate him within the Italian interwar and fascist artistic context, emphasizing how his realist style both constrained and enabled his career; and Salvagnini highlights his stylistic conservatism, framing his œuvre as aligned with enduring academic and classical values. Rather than revealing a single historical truth, the historiography of Feroci's move to Siam exposes a persistent tension between retrospective canonization and explanations rooted in the historical circumstances of the time.

Between Commission and Compromise

While Feroci's classical training in Italy partly explains his distance from the European avant-garde, state commissions further constrained his creative freedom. As influential Thai artist and scholar Piriya Krairiksh (พิริยะ ไกรฤกษ์; b. 1942) notes, "As a government employee, Feroci was not as free to work as he wanted and, on many occasions, had to compromise with the wishes of his superiors" (1982: 66). This view is echoed by German scholar Helen Michaelsen, who recalls, "because of his position as a civil servant he did not have much freedom to decide and had to go along with the visions of his commissioners" (1990: 34). Consequently, while Feroci's works in Siam may have fulfilled their official purposes, he did not necessarily regard them with high esteem. Michaelsen provides a concrete example: "The 'Democracy Monument' [อนุสาวรีย์ประชาธิปไตย] was done, like the 'Victory Monument' [อนุสาวรีย์ชัยสมรภูมิ in Bangkok], in the style of heroic realism. Although Feroci was a follower of the realistic style, these over-emphasized forms did not correspond with his ideas" (Ibid.). Piriya (Op. cit.) likewise observed that Feroci "was so unhappy with the alterations to his design of the figures ornamenting the Victory Monument, that he referred to it as the Monument to his embarrassment" (p. 66). Notably, scholars discussing Feroci's constrained creative freedom repeatedly cite this same example, raising questions about its emblematic status and the absence of alternative cases. Feroci thus functioned less as an autonomous artist than as a highly skilled artisan under state commission. As Apinan argues, "it took several years to establish his reputation as a sculptor in the Department of Fine Arts, where he was responsible for producing official sculptures" (1992: 34). These institutional constraints complicate the conventional portrayal of Silpa Bhirasri as an independent genius, indicating that his legacy cannot be understood solely through technical skill or aesthetic innovation but must be situated within the political and administrative conditions shaping both production and reception in Siam.

Art Under Debate

Continuing the Thai context, we may recall Annabelle Boissier's observation on modern art, in which the French social anthropologist of art notes that "it is often academic artists, rather than avant-gardists, who constitute the driving forces behind the emergence of modern art movements in non-European countries" (2008: 38). In the case of Thailand, the late artist, art critic, and lecturer Thanom Chapakdee (ถนอม ชาภักดี; 1958–2022) highlights that modern art was shaped by state patronage, marking a sharp divergence from European trajectories: "It can be seen that the foundation of modern knowledge of arts had been well established carefully by all forms of tools planned by the government. In contrast, the European way of modern arts had been originally created by thinkers, philosophers, rebel artists, not by the state" (2012: 279). This contrast, however, should be qualified, as many figures associated with European modernism were themselves trained in state art academies or worked within institutional frameworks. Within this state-supported context, curator and scholar David Teh (b. 1977) notes that Feroci/Silpa occupies a central yet contested position: "[He] was certainly no vanguardist—his 'new' was that of neoclassicism that in 1930s Europe was buffing Roman imperial heritage for the purpose of fascism" (2017: 127). Boissier (Op. cit.) adds: "It is his own ultra-conservative aesthetic choices that will be valued, while abstraction and the avant-gardes will consequently be rejected" (p. 38). Such assessments help explain why, despite Feroci/Silpa's institutional prominence, many scholars have remained critical of his artistic achievements. British historian Michael Smithies (1932–2019) frankly asserts, "He was not a great artist" (1978: 147); Piriya notes, "By Western standards, Feroci's works are not particularly distinguished. They are academic and unimaginative" (1982: 66); Peleggi even goes so far as to call him "a mediocre sculptor" (2017: 128).

At the same time, several scholars acknowledge Silpa's positive impact on Thai modern art. Piriya (Op. cit.) notes that "in the context of Thai art, [Silpa's works] are of great importance for the influence they exerted on generations of students" (p. 66). Similarly, Peleggi (Op. cit.) argues that Silpa's "localization of academicism not only exerted a huge influence over the subsequent development of modern art in Thailand but was more intellectually sophisticated than his critics tend to assume" (p. 128). Despite these acknowledgments, Peleggi calls for a more critical and nuanced approach: "The new breed of Thai revisionist art and architectural historians relish in challenging institutional memory of Corrado Feroci/Silpa Bhirasri as 'the father of modern Thai art'—a memory championed by Silpakorn University, where his life statue is the object of devotional care by students (see below), especially at the time of exams—by denouncing, somewhat simplistically, the fascist root of Feroci's aesthetic" (Ibid., 128). These positions expose a central tension: while his style was conservative, his institutional and pedagogical influence was decisive.

The "fascist root of Feroci's aesthetic", identified by Peleggi, is further elabo-

rated by Thanavi, who argues that Silpa's sculptural style evolved "from Neoclassicism to exhibit Nazi characteristics in the case of the Democracy Monument, reflecting both the aesthetic preferences of that era and the use of art as a vehicle for political propaganda—akin to the appropriation of fascist styles in Italy and Nazi styles in Germany" (2553: 108). Within the Siamese/Thai ideological context, the fascist doctrine promoted by Phibunsongkhram and Luang Wichit Wathakan (หลวง วิจิตร วาทการ; 1898–1962), the chief architect of modern Thai nationalism, shaped Feroci's institutional role; as Apinan notes, both "were interested in the use of art as propaganda, [through which] Feroci became an important link and his status correspondingly increased" (1992: 36).

Given his direct involvement in a politically instrumentalized visual culture, scholars have questioned whether Silpa himself endorsed fascist convictions. British-born writer Michael Wright (1940–2009), for instance, suggests, "Bhirasri may have decided to enter government service in Siam in order to flee the fascist ideology taking hold in his homeland", but immediately adds: "this assumption becomes difficult to sustain". Wright specifies: "his work—particularly the Democracy Monument—is imbued with characteristics commonly associated with fascist aesthetics, such as severity, historical distortion, uniformity, and a propagandistic use of monumental form to exert ideological influence" (2535: 178). This reasoning often rests on a reductive syllogism: since Silpa produced works aligned with fascist aesthetics in Italy and continued to do so after relocating to Siam/Thailand, some infer that he shared fascist political convictions. Such a conflation between aesthetic affiliation and ideological alignment risks oversimplifying the conditions of artistic production under authoritarian regimes. In light to these suppositions, Thanavi draws a clear distinction between stylistic production and personal conviction, noting: "[T]here is insufficient evidence to determine whether Silpa was a fascist. Conversely, there is also no conclusive evidence to affirm that he was not. His true political stance thus remains undetermined, as no writings or memoirs have surfaced that seriously articulate his political views" (2555: 40). Thus, in the absence of conclusive biographical evidence, Silpa's political orientation therefore remains open to interpretation.

From Sculptor to Master

Career and Teaching Philosophy

Corrado Feroci began his educational career at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, where he taught from 1914 to 1923. Upon arrival in Siam in January 1923, he signed a three-year contract as a state-employed sculptor. Pairoj retrospectively frames this phase as the beginning of "a far more important mission: to create an art institute to develop the nation's artistic resources" (2000: 20), an interpretation that appears premature given the gradual development of Silpa's institutional authority. In 1933, the Department of Fine Arts founded the School of Fine Arts, Pranit Sinlapakam School (โรงเรียนประณีตศิลปกรรม), renamed the Silpakorn

School of Fine Arts (โรงเรียนศิลปากร) in 1937 and elevated to Silpakorn University (มหาวิทยาลัยศิลปากร) in 1943. Feroci/Silpa taught there from 1934 until 1962. Despite its transition to university status in 1943, Silpakorn University "continued to teach an academic syllabus based on the European academy practice remarkably similar to that practiced before the Second World War in Tokyo" (Clark 1998: 162). This assessment is reinforced by distinguished scholar Soranat Tailanga (สรณัฐ ไตลังคะ), who asserted that "Students were not encouraged to practice modern art since the professor emphasized the Academy's teaching techniques. Students who painted in a modernist style usually received strong criticism and low grades from the professor" (2008: 128). While this indicates strict conservatism, it also demonstrates Silpa's active role in defining the aesthetic boundaries of Thai art education, reflecting both his academic training and his vision of a culturally, even perhaps politically grounded pedagogical model.

However, instead of emphasizing Silpa's rejection of modernism, educator and curator Somporn Rodboon (สมพร รอดบุญ; b. 1947) highlights his pedagogy's strong orientation toward Thai traditional art. She explains that Thailand appreciated Silpa because he "laid a strong foundation for Western academic training as well as encouraging his teaching staff and students to appreciate their own culture and to do more research on Thai traditional art. He successfully tutored them in assimilating Western and traditional styles in a way that has led Thai artists to create international art works without losing the essence of 'Thainess'" (2005: 278). Shioda similarly argues, "In performing his role of educating Thai students and introducing Western academic art and its techniques, Feroci issued a warning against the excesses of modernism and advised Thai artists to respect the traditions of their own country and seek their own kind of originality. In other words, he was an advocate of preserving traditions as well as being the promoter of a policy of modernization and Europeanization" (1995: 238).

If these interpretations are justified, one might ask why postcolonial theories or other analytical frameworks have not been more widely applied to theorize this phenomenon. In this regard, Homi K. Bhabha's notion of mimicry, developed in *The Location of Culture* (1994), can help us understand ambivalent imitation, producing a localized hybridity in which Thai traditions and European forms intersect. Shioda (Op. cit.) also draws comparisons with the development of art pedagogy in his own country, viz. Japan, notably through the figure of American art historian Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), "the ideologue who advocated a return to the past in modern Japanese art" (p. 238). He later highlights that "Fenollosa, together with his Japanese colleague Okakura Tenshin [1863–1913], encouraged the creation of a modern form of Japanese-style painting to be achieved by reforming the traditional painting schools, which were enervated by the influx of Western-style painting, and restoring tradition in modern context. The ideas of Feroci and Fenollosa are quite similar in many respects" (Ibid.). Silpa is frequently portrayed in Thai art history as an artist and educator with a distinctive approach. Yet the observation that



Figure 2: Silpa Bhirasri teaching at Silpakorn University, Wang Tha Phra Campus, 1950s © Silpa Bhirasri Research Center

Fenollosa employed comparable methods in Japan suggests either that Silpa's contributions were not entirely exceptional or, conversely, that they formed part of a broader intellectual and pedagogical current spreading across East Asia at the time, within a context shaped by Western cultural influence.

The Cult of the Teacher

Venerated in Thai art history as a devoted educator, Silpa's biography abounds in anecdotes drawn from former students. Viboon underscores this dimension in his biography, dedicating an entire chapter, "The Spirit of a Teacher", to Silpa's pedagogical role **[Figure 2]**. Viboon writes, "Professor Silpa was determined to be an exemplary teacher. He lived a life of 'giving', from educating his students to helping them financially. His undoubted spirit of a teacher served as a profound example for his students" (1996: 215). Viboon cites several testimonies from Silpa's former students to highlight this stance, revealing a semantic elevation from teacher to

paternal figure. Master sculptor and disciple Sanan Silakorn (สนั่น ศิลากรณ์; 1919–1986), for instance, recalls that Silpa "eventually became like another father to me" (Ibid.). Viboon concludes, asserting, "He did not teach because it was his job; he was sincere and dedicated to his students" (Ibid., 220–221). While Viboon convincingly foregrounds Silpa's human qualities, the repetition of these motifs gives the narrative a distinctly hagiographic tone. Even Smithies, who remained critical of certain aspects of his work, emphasizes Silpa's role as a catalyst for artistic inspiration: "He was something more important in the context of the art scene of the time, serving as a tremendous inspirer of individuals. Through his enthusiasm and personality, he ignited the imaginations of generations of young men and women alike" (1978: 147).

Other accounts deepen this idealized image, portraying Silpa as a man consumed by ascetic dedication, for whom "water was the only drink to quench his thirst" (Viboon 1996: 225). A star pupil of Silpa, Khien Yimsiri (เขียน ยิ้มศิริ; 1922–1971), recalls that Silpa "led a life of solitude, living for work rather than pleasure", and his "closest friend then was a Thai dog which accompanied him to and from school every day" (2545: 225–227). Another dimension shaping Silpa's constructed persona concerns language, as former students recalled his limited spoken Thai and heavy accent. Khien notes that Silpa "could speak some Thai, but his accent was very strong, even though he had lived in Thailand for many years" (Ibid., 13). This perception is echoed by Damrong Wong-Upparaj, who recalled that "we understood his Thai, but [...] his accent was terrible" (cited in Clark 1995: 52). Thanavi (2555) situates these anecdotes within the mythic construction of Silpa, observing that variation in portrayals lies in his idiosyncrasies: "If there is variation in portrayals of Silpa, it lies chiefly in anecdotes recounting his endearing idiosyncrasies—such as his mispronunciation of Thai. These are not intended as irreverent mockery, but function as a rhetorical strategy of respect in another form" (p. 34). This rhetorical strategy allows intimacy and reverence to coexist, culminating in Thanavi's description of Silpa: "Consequently, Bhirasri embodies both the untouchable saint and the touchable beloved father of his students—an ambivalent figure characteristic of many cultic personalities elevated for veneration" (Ibid.).

From a historiographical perspective, these testimonies, together with Thanavi's interpretation, contribute to the construction of an idealized narrative around Silpa Bhirasri. The emphasis on sacrifice, perseverance, and moral purpose transforms biographical detail into an uplifting narrative of vocation and destiny. Even minor traits—e.g., his accent, his solitary habits—serve to reinforce a dual image of Silpa as both revered and relatable, at once saintly and paternal. Such tensions suggest that idealized narratives simultaneously construct and obscure historical figures: Silpa emerges not as a flawless originator, but as a historically situated individual whose authority rested as much on symbolic capital and institutional reverence as on pedagogical and artistic merit. Consequently, his legacy functions



Figure 3: Cover of *Phuchatkan* Newspaper, 9–15 January 1995 © *Manager Weekly*

as a highly charged cultural reference, in which even minor gestures involving his image may provoke controversy.

A striking example occurred in January 1995, when Vishnu Chotikul (วิษณุ โชลิตกุล), editor of *Phuchatkan* (ผู้จัดการ) or *Manager Weekly*, featured on its cover a photograph of Silpa's statue at Silpakorn University with a sign at its base reading "Sale 50 %", **[Figure 3]** intended to criticize the "commercialism and inflated prices of the Bangkok art market" (Cate 2003: 44). This act challenged the boundaries of permissible critique, as the statue had become a sanctified symbol of national artistic

identity and provoked outrage among Silpakorn staff and students.

The symbolic significance of the statue derives from its creation by Sanan Silakorn in 1966 and its installation in 1969, marking Thailand's first monument dedicated to a foreigner **[Figure 4]**. As artist, writer, art critic, and art teacher Pishnu Supanimit (พิษณุ ศุภนิมิตร; b. 1948) notes, following Silpa's 1962 death, "his students found themselves without a spiritual anchor—lacking a symbolic representation that could stand in for the profound virtues he had embodied and contributed to the academic institution, the artistic community, and the nation" (2015: 19). Seen in this light, the portrait statue cemented Silpa's status as an untouchable figure, rendering his image prescriptive rather than merely depictive. Yet while monuments consolidated his symbolic authority, his influence was equally articulated through his writings on Thai art, archeology, and cultural heritage.

Writing Thai History

Any serious engagement with Silpa's writings must consider both their thematic breadth—from archeological reflections on Siam to critical essays on Western and contemporary art—and the mediating role of translation. As Pinyapan observed, "access to his ideas for the general Thai public has always depended on translation" (2557: 203). The translators—Phraya Anuman Rajadhon (พระยา อนุมาน ราชธน; 1888–1969), Khien Yimsiri, Dhanit Yupho (ธนิต อยู่โพธิ์; 1907–2004), MC Subhadradis Diskul (ม.จ. สุภัทรดิศ ดิศกุล; 1923–2003), and Sulak Sivaraksa (สุลักษณ์ ศิวรักษ์; b. 1933) brought diverse perspectives to this task, yet the implications of their editorial and interpretative choices have rarely been examined. Negotiating meaning, syntax, and conceptual frameworks, these translations shaped the reception of Silpa's thought and cultivated art-historical consciousness in Thailand. As Kessara notes, "Silpa Bhirasri's writings in the 1960s also played a crucial role in stimulating artists and scholars to develop an interest in and research Thai artworks from the past" (2558: 12). This success prompts reflection on Silpa's scholarly status, revealing a tension between the authority attributed to his erudition and the practice-oriented, pedagogical nature of his writings.

Scholar or Artist?

Silpa's significance in Thai art history derives not only from his institutional role, but also, equally, from his writings, which established a conceptual foundation for the field. Pishnu describes him as "an art scholar and an artist" (2012: 47), while artist, curator, and art historian Sutee Kunavichayanont (สุธี คุณาวิชยานนท์; b. 1965) emphasizes the enduring impact of his texts: "Some excerpts from his writings have become iconic and frequently cited, such as 'Tomorrow is already too late' and 'Art is long, life is short'. These phrases contributed to Silpa Bhirasri's status as a revered figure in the art community, deeply admired by his students. He became a central influential thinker, philosopher, and advocate for art in the country" (2546: 69). While Sutee presents both phrases together, only the first may be Silpa's



Figure 4: Statue of Silpa Bhirasri at Silpakorn University, Wang Tha Phra Campus, Bangkok © Sébastien Tayac

own; the second—the centuries-old aphorism *Ars longa, vita brevis* (Hippocrates; 4th c. BCE)—was cited by him rather than authored. Viboon acknowledges, "the written works of Professor Silpa Bhirasri, including his books and articles on contemporary art and culture, are of immense value" (2535: 149). He notes, "many articles and art textbooks, both in English and translated into Thai, are credited to him, representing his direct academic contributions and thoughts" (1996: 183). Even though Viboon (Ibid.) first notes that from these works "Professor Silpa's status as an 'Art Scholar' is securely confirmed" (p. 205), he complicates this view by emphasizing that Silpa's writings approach contemporary art "from the perspective of a sculptor or an artist, rather than that of an art scholar" (2535: 149) and that he "wrote his articles from the perspective of an artist and sculptor, not a scholar" (1996: 199). He also explains (Ibid.) why Silpa's writings contain few references, noting that they were "never meant for serious academic discussion; they aimed at creating understanding among his readers" (p. 183). This tension—between acknowledgment of Silpa's scholarly output and his orientation toward practical instruction—reveals a fundamental ambiguity: his writings are valued for their accessibility and scope, designed both for students and the wider public, but do not fully conform to conventional academic standards.

Despite these limitations, Yu Jin Seng highlights that from 1949 "until its 14th edition [of the National Exhibition of Art in 1964], Silpakorn University and Bhirasri were given the power to shape the direction of the exhibitions in line with the education curriculum of the University" (2017: 217). In this context, Silpa's writings became a key medium for transmitting his intellectual authority as they "had a significant influence on his students, many of whom played important roles in Thailand's art scene" (Kessara 2558: 25). This observation aligns with Clark's remark that "The study of Silpa Bhirasri's biography, works, ideas, and followers are four topics embroiled within a cult of personality or cult of 'great man' worship still prevalent in Thailand today" (2020: 80). Through this alignment, Silpa's students and institutional affiliates transformed his intellectual authority into a resource that legitimized their own positions and inscribed his discourse into artistic practice, cultural memory, and the historiography of Thai modern art. Operating as an art school from 1934 and a university from 1943, Silpakorn remained the sole university of fine arts until the 1980s, when, as Curtin notes, "the art departments at Chulalongkorn University and Chiang Mai University began to provide a counterbalance to its dominance" (2021: 48). Its authority over national exhibitions—including control over competitions, jury membership, and professors' role as "status-bearing consecrators of new work" (Clark 2010: 121)—often generated tensions within the Thai art world. This interplay between Silpa's writings, his students, and Silpakorn University raises important questions regarding critical engagement and invites a methodological reassessment of his legacy.

Public Discourse and Criticism

Beyond Silpakorn University, Silpa sought to reach a broader public through exhibitions. Recognizing that "the public, by and large, had not been sufficiently educated to appreciate modern art" (Piriya 1982: 71), he addressed this gap by including "a short note in each of the catalogues explaining art to the public and commenting on a few chosen works in the exhibitions" (Piriya 1986: 8). As Michaelsen notes, he nevertheless "constantly complained about the consequence of this lack" (1993: 66). Through these texts, Silpa mediated between contemporary artistic practices, which receive limited reception and institutional support, and the public

Despite these constraints, Silpa's writings influenced Thai art culture. Smithies acknowledges that he "was one of the first to write seriously about art in Thailand in the Thai Culture Series of pamphlets published by the Fine Arts Department, and his book *The Meaning of Art* was translated into Thai" (1978: 147). Viboon similarly notes that these writings "significantly contributed to the public's awareness and understanding of their own art and culture" (2535: 149); Somporn notes, "Bhirasri's publications have proven to be very accessible and beneficial for anyone interested in art [...] and have done much to revive appreciation for Thai traditional art" (2017: 159). Together, these assessments indicate that Silpa's writings shaped public perception and institutional approaches to Thai art, despite his recurring frustrations.

His legacy, however, was marked by contradictions. Apinan observes that his writing "reflects how his views of modern Thai art were transformed over the last decade of his career. Concerning the essence of modern Thai art, Bhirasri's writings seem inconsistent and contradictory at times" (1992: 57). Teh similarly notes that his veneration as the progenitor of Thai modern art "was not for commitment to any modernist doctrine, but because he proved so pliable in changing ideological wings" and "Feroci's knack for compromise has had profound and enduring effects on Thai modern art" (2017: 127). These critiques indicate that his influence rested as much on adaptability as on coherent aesthetic principles.

Silpa's public writings also include responses to criticism. A notable instance occurred during the second National Exhibition in 1950, when MR Kukrit Pramoj (ม.ร.ว. คึกฤทธิ์ ปราโมช; 1911–1995) published a critical article in the newspaper *Siam Rath* (สยามรัฐ). Referenced by both Piriya and Apinan, this episode serves as a case study of Silpa's dual role as educator and defender of artistic agency. Pramoj dismissed the works as imitative or rudimentary, arguing that many artists lacked personal style and clarity of expression and did not seem to know what meaning or emotion they wished to convey (Piriya 1982: 68–69; Apinan 1992: 56). Piriya notes, "Bhirasri was defensive of such criticisms" (1982: 69) and felt compelled to respond. Piriya asserted, "what and how contemporary artists express must be entirely left to the individual feeling and judgment of each artist. They are

Thai, and as such their art will be Thai as well, even though the laymen's eyes may not yet discern such characteristics" (Ibid.). This exchange, often cited for its combative tone, highlights Silpa's commitment to both education and artistic freedom.

While both Piriya and Apinan acknowledge Silpa's role, they do not explore the ideological implications of Pramoj's critique. Thanavi defines Pramoj as a "conservative royalist intellectual and politician" who dismissed the art associated with the People's Party as "alien to the basis of Thai society and even tasteless" (2017: 131). Pramoj reiterated this argument during the Bangkok seminar *Art since 1932* held at Thammasat University in 1983, when he claimed, "Thai art after 1932, frankly and patriotically speaking, is the most declining age because [the People's Party's] leading members came back from France and their taste of art is just from cafés along the streets of Paris" (cited in Ibid.). Such critiques contributed to a widespread perception of art from 1932–1947 as derivative or culturally alien. Thanavi further notes that in 2005, architectural historian Chatri Prakitnonthakan (ชาตรี ประกิตนนทการ; b. 1976) challenged Pramoj's criticism of revolutionary art as mere Western imitation, reintroducing the subject into academic debate (Ibid., 135). Although art associated with the People's Party was long regarded negatively, Silpa—despite playing a decisive role in its artistic production—was later canonized as the Father of Thai modern art, avoiding any lasting discredit. This apparent contradiction is not coincidental: it points to a historiographical process that selectively minimized his involvement in the revolutionary project.

This tension became evident in the academic field when Thanavi delivered a lecture entitled "The Hagiography of Silpa Bhirasri: Memory and Forgetting in Art History" at the Faculty of Archeology, Silpakorn University, in Bangkok on 23 March 2012.[3] She received criticism suggesting that her research addressed a topic "not worth knowing" and she "never seems to contribute anything worthwhile to the university" (cited in Thanavi 2555: 48). She later published an article based on this presentation, articulating her view of the university as "a space whose primary function is to generate and expand knowledge within each discipline. Challenging established arguments in order to introduce new perspectives is therefore essential, and engaging in scholarly debate through evidence and logic is entirely normal" (Ibid.). She contrasted this conception with the Thai academic context, suggesting that, through her topic and approach, she

> may have violated the conventions of Thai academic culture [...] where junior scholars are expected not to raise questions or express criticism, especially towards those who have been elevated to an almost sacred status. [...] In a pre-modern worldview, the university remains analogous

[3] This lecture derives from a section of her doctoral research project, *Reassessing Silapa Khana Ratsadon: The Neglected Movement in Thai Art History, Nationalism, and Collective Memory*, undertaken at Birkbeck, University of London, between 2011 and 2016.

> to a temple, and the teacher is seen as a monk or a saint. Within such a temple-like academic culture, the author's heterodox work is likely perceived as something *acintya* [อจินไตย; i.e., that which is unthinkable or beyond comprehension] (Ibid.).

Thanavi extends this analysis by situating the issue within broader cultural and ideological frameworks. She argues that the scarcity of critical perspectives on Silpa reflects "deeply rooted cultural values—gratitude, respect for elders, and the recognition of hierarchical status. These values are embedded in the long-standing conservative structure of Thai society. Such a conceptual framework permits no other mode of representation for Silpa beyond the sculpted image of idealization" (Ibid., 34).

By oscillating between explanatory essays and responses to critics, Silpa cultivated a public persona as both educator and advocate. This duality reflects his understanding that sustaining a distinctly Thai modernism required expanding art appreciation while defending artistic agency. His public texts thus form a dynamic archive that actively shaped Thai art historiography.

Concluding Remarks

In 2026, 64 years after his death, Silpa Bhirasri remains a revered figure in Thailand, commemorated by a statue, an annual day of remembrance held on his birthday (15 September), a research center (สำนักวิจัยศิลป์พีระศรี), a national museum (พิพิธภัณฑสถานแห่งชาติศิลป์พีระศรี), and numerous artistic initiatives bearing his name. His legacy remains influential among students and professors of fine arts, reflecting his role in shaping the country's artistic landscape. Silpa's multifaceted roles in art were marked by a syncretic blend of European influences and a commitment to preserving Siamese traditions, while fulfilling the propagandistic imperatives of both the absolute and constitutional monarchies. Within debates on "multiple modernities", Silpa provides a particularly instructive case. Although he rejected modernist tendencies in Italy in favor of classical approaches, relocating to Siam/Thailand allowed him to reshape the local art scene by merging European techniques with Siamese traditions.

Over time, he came to be celebrated as the "Father of modern art" in Thailand, illustrating how modernity is mediated through local contexts, pedagogical authority, and institutional power. Although scholarly debates have questioned Silpa's originality and artistic merit, especially regarding "fascist" aesthetics, his dedication as a teacher remains largely uncontested, with former students consistently emphasizing his selflessness, rigor, and personal investment in their academic development. His writings and teachings produced a dominant narrative of modern Thai art that still shapes contemporary understandings, even as historians critically examine its ideological and institutional underpinnings. Despite frequent citation, critically distanced scholarship on Silpa remains scarce, highlighting the persistence of hagiographic representations and the need to reassess his legacy.

The harsh reception of Thanavi's critical work demonstrates how Thai academic and cultural contexts may hinder reassessment of established figures through seniority norms and sacralized institutional memory. Moving beyond commemorative mythologies requires addressing unresolved contradictions: how did Silpa's state-aligned role as a national artisan constrain his artistic vision? Can his Eurocentric pedagogy coexist with contemporary decolonial approaches to Thai art history? Addressing these questions requires deeper archival research and critical effort to separate Silpa as a historical figure from ideological appropriations of his legacy. Only then can his contributions be assessed not as those of a singular "Father of Thai modern art", but as a historically situated figure embedded in ongoing global-local negotiations of modernity. To what extent might rewriting Silpa Bhirasri's biography reshape the narrative of Thai modern and contemporary art?

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The Vietnamese Origin of the 12-Year Names in Saek

Pittayawat Pittayaporn[1]

Abstract—This research note shows that all 12 zodiac names in Tai-language Saek derive from Vietnamese rather than directly from Chinese. Eight names can be securely identified as premodern Vietnamese loans based on regular sound changes, while the remaining four suggest Vietnamese origins. These results provide new evidence for Vietnamese–Saek contact in the 16th to 18th centuries and underscore the role of Vietnamese as an intermediary in the spread of Chinese calendrical systems in mainland Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Chinese Calendar; Earthly Branches; Saek; Vietnamese Loanwords; Zodiac Terms



Figure 1: Chinese zodiac disc showing names of the 12 years at Yunnan University, Kunming, China © Saengtawan Surakarn

Introduction

The traditional Chinese zodiac cycle assigns 12 animals to successive years—Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Cock, Dog, and Pig **[Figure 1]**. In mainland Southeast Asia, the terminology used to designate these 12 years varies across linguistic communities, reflecting different historical pathways of cultural transmission.

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The 12-Year Cycle in Mainland Southeast Asia and the Saek Anomaly

In the absence of historical documentation, the transmission of calendrical systems between languages in mainland Southeast Asia provides insights into prehistoric contact between language communities. George Cœdès (1935) systematically categorized ethnic groups into two types based on their 12-year zodiac nomenclature: (1) "Northern" groups, consisting exclusively of Tai languages such as Lao, Shan, Ahom, Dioi, who used special names derived from the 12 "Earthly Branches" (*dizhi* 地支) of the Chinese calendar; and (2) "Southern" groups, including Mon, Khmer, and Cham, who employed regular terms denoting animals. Central Thai, previously known as Siamese, originally belonged to the first category, but adopted the animal-based system from Khmer after the 14th century.

Cœdès diverged from Édouard Chavannes (1906: 61–62), who argued that the terms were partly Chinese names transcribed through Vietnamese and partly words of uncertain origin. Instead, Cœdès proposed that the Khmer names for the 12 years, subsequently adopted by Central Thai, originated from a Muong language. Later, Michel Ferlus (2010) convincingly demonstrated that these Khmer names actually derived from the hypothetical ancestor of Muong and Vietnamese dialects that existed before the 6th century CE. All 12 Khmer year names can be traced to reconstructed Viet–Muong animal names, suggesting that Viet–Muong-speaking people played a more central role in regional calendrical transmission than previously recognized.

Regarding Tai languages, Fang-kuei Li (1945), Søren Egerod (1957), and Barend Terwiel (1981), among others, confirmed Cœdès's claim that the 12-year names in Tai languages were imported from Chinese no later than the period of Middle Chinese (6th c. CE). More recently, Ferlus (2010) and Wilaiwan (2552) have reached similar conclusions. Most intriguing is the 12-year cycle in Saek. William Gedney (1993) documented this cycle, showing it consists mostly of forms bearing partial resemblances to their counterparts in other Tai languages, alongside some forms that are entirely different. He also raises the possibility that the Saek cycle is older than those of the Northern Tai languages, further reinforcing the perception of Saek as a coelacanth, a Tai living fossil. Interestingly, Gedney found only one elderly monk who knew this zodiacal nomenclature, making it impossible to assess its earlier prevalence among Saek speakers. By the time of his fieldwork, most Saek speakers had adopted Khmer terminology via Lao. This mirrors the dual usage in Lao and Lanna Tai, where the Earthly-Branches system coexists with the more recently adopted Khmer nomenclature (Kourilsky 2021).

Saek is a northern Tai language that has long fascinated historical linguists due to its archaic features (Haudricourt 1958, 1963; Gedney 1970); some scholars even consider it a close relative of Tai that split off from Tai proper before the Proto-Tai stage, rather than descending from it (Chamberlain 1998). More recently, I argued that the Saek language originated near Fusui county in southwestern Guangxi, China, before its speakers migrated southward to Vietnam where they acquired numerous

Table 1: Names of zodiac years in Saek, compared with Lue, Yay, Vietnamese, and Chinese

Year Year	Character	Saek	Lue	Yay	Vietnamese	MC	OC
Rat	子	/tiː^{B1}/	/caj^{C1}/	/sauɥ^{C1}/	*tử/tý*	*tsɨ'/tsi'*	**[ts]əʔ*
Ox	丑	/tʰriw^{C1}/	/paw^{C1}/	/pjaw^{C1}/	*sửu*	*trʰuw'*	**[n̥]ruʔ*
Tiger	寅	/ɤɯn^{A2}	/jiː^{A2}/	/ɲan^{A2}/	*dần*	*jin*	**[ɢ](r)ər*
Rabbit	卯	/mɛːw^{A2}/	/maw^{C1}/	/maw^{C1}/	*mẹo/mão*	*mɛːw'/maɨw'*	**mˤruʔ*
Dragon	辰	/sin^{A2}/	/siː^{A1}/	/si^{A2}/	*thìn/thần*	*dʑin*	**[d]ər*
Snake	巳	/tiː^{B2}/	/saj^{C1}/	/θɯ^{C1}/	*tị*	*zɨ'/zi'*	**s-[ɢ]əʔ*
Horse	午	/ŋɔː^{B2}/	/sa.ŋaː^{C2}/	/θa^{C2}/	*ngọ*	*ŋɔ'*	**[m].qʰˤaʔ*
Sheep	未	/muj^{A2}/	/met^{DS2}/	/fat^{DS2}/	*mùi/vị*	*mujʰ*	**m[ə]t-s*
Monkey	申	/tʰɤɯn^{A1}/	/san^{A1}/	/θan^{A1}/	*thân*	*ɕin*	**n̥i[n]*
Cock	酉	/raw^{C1}/	/law^{C2}/	/ru^{C2}/	*dậu*	*juw'*	**N.ruʔ*
Dog	戌	/tut^{DS1}/	/set^{DS1}/	/θɯt^{DS1}/	*tuất*	*swit*	**s.mi[t]*
Pig	亥	/hɤːj^{B2}/	/kaj^{C2}/	/kauɥ^{C2}/	*hợi*	*ɣəj'*	**[g]ˤəʔ*

Source: Adapted from Boltz 1991: 55

Vietnamese loanwords during the 16th–18th centuries (Kosaka 1997; Pittayawat 2024).

Table 1 compares Saek zodiacal names across relevant languages, revealing systematic correspondences that support the above conclusion. Though borrowed only after the 15th century, the cycle's Vietnamese origin, in turn, emphasizes Vietnamese speakers as an important transmission point for the Chinese calendar. The Middle Chinese (MC) and Old Chinese (OC) names are from Pulleyblank (1991) and Baxter & Sagart (2014), respectively. The Saek, Lue, and Yay are from Thomas Hudak (1991, 1993, 1996). Tones are marked etymologically for all Tai names, following Li's (1977) notation.

William Boltz (1991) argues that the Saek 12-year cycle was borrowed entirely from Chinese, though he acknowledges "Vietnamese flavors" in three terms: /tiː^{B1}/ 'rat' < *tý* (< 子 *zi*), /tiː^{B2}/ 'snake' < *tị* (< 巳 *si*), and /tut^{DS1}/ 'dog' < *tuất* (< 戌 *xu*). He contends that these cannot be direct Vietnamese borrowings because Saek lacks the phonological "complexities" found in Vietnamese. As evidence, he points to Saek /tʰriw^{C1}/ 'ox' (< 丑 *chou*), which retains a medial /-r-/ resembling OC **[n̥]ruʔ*,[2] rather than Vietnamese *sửu*. However, he does not consider sound changes that occurred in both Saek and

[2] Boltz cites Li's (1971) reconstructed form with initial *hnr-*, which became *hnthr-*, and finally *thr-*.

Vietnamese, which may obscure the historical connections between forms in the two languages.

Vietnamese Connections in Saek Zodiacal Names

To establish direct connections between Saek zodiac names and their Vietnamese counterparts, we must first identify tonal correspondences between the two languages. There are two distinct tonal patterns that align between Saek and Vietnamese forms. In open syllables, Saek A2 tone typically corresponds to the Vietnamese *huyền* tone (marked with the grave accent ◌̀), while in closed syllables ending in stops, Saek DS1 tone corresponds to the *sắc* tone (marked by the acute accent ◌́). For example, /ruun^{A2}/ 'Year of the Tiger', /sin^{A2}/ 'Year of the Dragon', and /muj^{A2}/ 'Year of the Sheep' correspond to Vietnamese *dần*, *thìn*, and *mùi,* respectively. Additionally, /tut^{DS1}/ 'Year of the Dog' corresponds to Vietnamese *tuất*.

These patterns are consistent with the general tendency observed in common loanwords, such as /vaːŋ^{A2}/ 'yellow' < *vàng* (Kosaka 1997). The only exception is /mɛːw^{A2}/ 'Year of the Rabbit', which reflects folk etymology involving Vietnamese *mèo* or 'cat'. It should be noted that 'cat' replaces 'rabbit' in the Vietnamese zodiac. Additionally, all items with the B2 tone in Saek correspond to the *nặng* tone (marked with a dot below ◌̣) in Vietnamese. Although this pattern cannot be robustly established for Vietnamese loanwords in general (Kosaka 1997), examples such as /ciən^{B2}/ 'story' < *chuyện* suggest that the correspondence is not unexpected.

Given the tonal correspondences, it can be observed that among the 12 names, half are identical in form to their corresponding Vietnamese equivalents, namely /tiː^{B1}/ 'Year of the Rat', /tiː^{B2}/ 'Year of the Snake', /ŋɔː^{B2}/ 'Year of the Horse', /muj^{A2}/ 'Year of the Sheep', /tut^{DS1}/ 'Year of the Dog', and /hɤːj^{B2}/ 'Year of the Pig'. These are unquestionably loanwords from Vietnamese. Noteworthy are /tiː^{B1}/, /tiː^{B2}/, and /tut^{DS1}/, which reflect the remarkable sound change /s/ > /t/ that occurred in Vietnamese sometime between the 15th and 17th centuries (Ferlus 1992; Shimizu 2020). In addition, two more names can be demonstrated to have been borrowed through Vietnamese. Although the onsets of these initially seem discrepant, an examination of sound changes in Saek and Vietnamese reveals their Vietnamese origins.

The first name, Saek /tʰriw^{C1}/ 'Year of the Ox', is thought by Boltz (1991: 59–60, 65) to have been directly borrowed from Chinese, possibly during the 3rd to 6th century CE, as it is closest to the MC form *trʰuw'*. He also suggests that the Vietnamese *sửu*, with its simple onset [ʂ-], is a separate and later borrowing, implying that the retroflex fricative reflects a Chinese source with a retroflex affricate. However, his analysis cannot be correct because [ʂ-] in Middle Vietnamese (Rhodes 1651) and Modern Vietnamese developed from Ancient Vietnamese /pʰr-/, /br-/, /kr-/, and /kʰr-/ (Ferlus 1992; Shimizu 2020), meaning that *sửu* most likely had a cluster with /-r-/.

From the Tai perspective, Saek /tʰr-/ can be traced back to an intermediate /kʰr-/. Many northern Tai languages preserve velar clusters, while Saek shows

/tʰr-/ onsets in forms like /tʰraŋ^{A1}/ ‘to imprison’ and /tʰrɛː^{C1}/ ‘small frog’. In contrast, Wuming typically has /kl-/ onsets, as seen in /klaŋ^{A1}/ and /klwe^{C1}/ (Hudak 2007), and Mashan Zhuang has /k(j)-/, as seen in /kjaŋ^{A1}/ and /kve^{C1}/ (Somsonge & Qin 2006). Therefore, the most likely scenario is that Saek /tʰriw^{C1}/ was borrowed from Vietnamese *sửu* before the sound change from /kʰr-/ to /ʂ-/ occurred in Vietnamese. Another possibility is that this item was borrowed through another Vietic language spoken in central Vietnam that still preserved the /kʰr-/ cluster. For example, the Cuối Chăm language of Nghệ An has /kʰr-/ in words that have initial s- in Modern Vietnamese, e.g., /kʰraːw^{1}/ ‘star’ and /kʰraːp^{7}/ ‘wax’, corresponding to Vietnamese *sao* and *sáp*, respectively (Ferlus 1994).

Another item that must have been borrowed from Vietnamese is /sin^{A2}/ ‘Year of the Dragon’. Boltz (1991: 62) directly links the initial /s-/ in Saek to MC *dʑ-* but does not recognize that the item may have been borrowed from the Vietnamese form *thìn*. Crucially, an important source of /tʰ-/ in Modern Vietnamese is Ancient Vietnamese /ɕ-/ (Ferlus 1992; Shimizu 2020), which is still preserved as a fricative in loanwords into Saek, such as /suə^{A1}/ ‘to lose’ and /suəŋ^{A1}/ ‘to love’, corresponding to Vietnamese *thua,* and *thương*. Therefore, Saek /sin^{A2}/ may have been borrowed from Vietnamese before the change /ɕ-/ > /tʰ-/ took place sometime between the 15th and 17th centuries. Given that more than half of Saek zodiac terms have been imported from Vietnamese, viewing Saek /sin^{A2}/ as having been borrowed through Vietnamese provides a simpler and more coherent analysis.

In addition to the eight items previously discussed, the remaining four zodiac names can potentially be attributed to borrowing through Vietnamese, though some speculation is required. For /rɯn^{A2}/ ‘Year of the Tiger’ and /raw^{C1}/ ‘Year of the Cock’, the initial /r-/ is unexpected given the Vietnamese *dần* and *dậu*, which suggest Middle Vietnamese /ð-/ (Rhodes 1651) rather than /r-/. Boltz (1991: 60–61, 63) views the initial liquid as preserving Old Chinese *r-, which has been lost elsewhere. If these items were borrowed through Vietnamese, there may have been older forms *rần* and *rầu* that were subsequently replaced by the currently attested Vietnamese forms.

The name /tʰrɯn^{A1}/ presents a phonological puzzle. The MC voiceless fricative *ɕ-*, corresponding to Vietnamese *th-*, should yield /s-/ in Saek, paralleling the MC voiced fricative *dʑ-* in /sin^{A2}/ ‘Year of the Dragon’. However, the aberrant /tʰr-/ cluster cannot be explained through either direct Chinese borrowing or indirect borrowing via Vietnamese. Since Saek /tʰr-/ likely derives from earlier /kʰr-/, this etymon should appear as /s-/ in Modern Vietnamese, not the observed /tʰ-/. An alternative hypothesis is that this item entered the language through contact with another Vietic variety rather than through direct borrowing from Vietnamese.

Finally, /mɛːw^{A2}/ likely involves folk etymology. In the Vietnamese calendar, the zodiac animal for the fourth year is the cat rather than the rabbit. The Vietnamese forms *mẹo* and *mão* for 卯 *mao*, if borrowed into Saek, would yield /mɛːw^{B2}/ and /maːw^{B2}/, respectively. The attested Saek forms

thus exhibit an unexpected tone. Notably, the Saek term /mɛːw^{A2}/ also means 'cat' and corresponds perfectly to Vietnamese *mèo* 'cat'. It is possible that Saek originally borrowed Vietnamese *mẹo* as /mɛːw^{B2}/, but later replaced it with /mɛːw^{A2}/ due to its association with the cat.

Saek-Vietnamese Contact and Diffusion of Chinese Calendrical System

In conclusion, this research note demonstrates that the duodecimal zodiac year nomenclature in Saek, previously assumed to have derived in antiquity directly from Chinese sources (Boltz 1991), was instead borrowed entirely from Vietnamese during a considerably more recent historical period. While the evidence points toward direct borrowing from Vietnamese, the possibility that another Vietic variety served as an intermediary language cannot be ruled out. These findings provide additional evidence of sustained Vietnamese–Saek linguistic contact from the 16th, possibly extending into the 18th, centuries (Pittayawat 2024), thereby challenging the prevailing characterization of Saek as an exceptionally archaic Tai or para-Tai language (Gedney 1970; Chamberlain 1998).

Moreover, these results have broader implications for understanding cultural transmission patterns in mainland Southeast Asia. The data reveal that speakers of Vietnamese served as crucial intermediaries in disseminating the Chinese calendar system in the region. Although Saek differs from other Tai languages in that it imported the Vietnamese versions of the Chinese Earthly Branches instead of the common Vietnamese words for the zodiac animals, the intermediary role of Vietnamese/Vietic varieties is a pattern shared across mainland Southeast Asia. This intermediary function highlights the complex multilingual networks that facilitated the spread of Chinese cultural innovations across Southeast Asia, with Vietnamese acting as a pivotal bridge.

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Le Fonds Georges Padoux à l'université Chulalongkorn

Olivier de Bernon[1]

Abstract—This notice presents and contextualizes the *Fonds Padoux*, a major archival collection held at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok containing the papers of Georges Padoux, principal author of the 1908 Penal Code of Siam and contributor to the drafting of the Civil and Commercial Code. The note briefly retraces the circumstances of Padoux's mission within the broader history of legal reform, judicial modernization, and the dismantling of extraterritorial jurisdictions in early 20th-century Siam. It describes the contents and structure of the collection—drafts, correspondence, and preparatory materials—and highlights its exceptional value for understanding processes of codification and the transition from traditional Siamese law to modern legal institutions in Thailand.

Keywords: Chulalongkorn University; Civil Code; Georges Padoux; Penal Code; Siamese Law

Introduction

En 2010, une partie des archives de Georges Padoux (1867–1961) étaient en vente chez un antiquaire parisien. Ạchan Kingkarn Thepkanjana (ศ. ดร. กิ่งกาญจน์ เทพกาญจนา), alors responsable des relations internationales de l'université Chulalongkorn, qui en fut informée, compris immédiatement l'intérêt historique de ces documents et l'urgence qu'ils fussent conservés à Bangkok. C'est donc grâce à elle que ce fonds fut acquis et récemment cédé à la Faculté des Lettres de l'université Chulalongkorn (คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย) où il se trouve désormais[2].

S'il n'est pas nécessaire de rappeler qui était le grand juriste Padoux — qui a présidé à la rédaction du Code pénal du royaume de Siam, promulgué en 1908, et qu'il a préparé celle du Code civil et de commerce —, il est peut-être utile de revenir sur certaines circonstances du travail qu'il a accompli au Siam afin de situer le contexte historique dans lequel les documents qui constituent le « Fonds Padoux » de l'université Chulalongkorn ont été produits[3].

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[2] Le fonds est conservé dans la collection des « ouvrages rares » du Humanities Information Center, Maha Vajiravudh Building, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University (ศูนย์สารนิเทศมนุษยศาสตร์ อาคารมหาวชิราวุธ คณะอักษรศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย). Nous remercions Nicolas Revire de s'être déplacé afin de consulter ces archives et de procéder aux vérifications nécessaires.

[3] Ce texte est la version révisée d'une présentation faite à l'Alliance française de Bangkok le 8 octobre 2025 dans le cadre de la *Semaine franco-thaïlandaise du droit et de la justice*, organisée par l'ambassade de France en Thaïlande, en collaboration avec l'EFEO (centre de Bangkok).

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Codification et modernisation du droit siamois

On se souvient que les dernières décennies du XIX[e] siècle ont été scandées par les épisodes, plus ou moins violents, de confrontation entre la France — par le biais de l'Indochine française — et le royaume de Siam, et que l'issue de chacun de ces épisodes a été actée par un traité ou par une convention.

Dans la plupart de ces textes — depuis le traité du 15 juillet 1867, qui entérine le Protectorat français sur le Cambodge, jusqu'à celui du 23 mars 1907, actant la rétrocession des provinces siamoises de Battambang et de Siem Reap à la couronne du Cambodge — le statut juridique ou judiciaire des sujets français au Siam et celui des Siamois dans l'Indochine française sont évoqués. S'il faut bien admettre que les stipulations de ces traités et de ces conventions sont dans l'ensemble rédigées de façon léonine au profit de la France, celles qui concernent strictement le droit des gens se veulent équilibrées en ce qu'elles s'efforcent de prévoir la réciprocité en matière juridique et judiciaire pour les sujets français résidant au Siam et pour les Siamois installés dans l'Indochine française.

Il est constant toutefois que cette réciprocité est fictive dans la mesure où, si l'Indochine française dispose de toutes les ressources matérielles et humaines pour installer autant de consulats qu'elle le désire dans plusieurs villes du royaume de Siam, la couronne siamoise n'a pas les mêmes moyens.

D'autre part et surtout, la pratique du droit est, au XIX[e] siècle, si divergente au Siam et en France que toute réciprocité est artificielle dès lors qu'on se meut dans deux univers complètement différents. Au Siam, par exemple, pour tout ce qui en Occident aurait relevé d'une « juridiction civile » et même pour les matières criminelles, la justice est rendue — en province à tout le moins — par des « mandarins » locaux, c'est-à-dire par des fonctionnaires de l'ordre administratifs chargés aussi bien du maintien de l'ordre public, que de la répartition de l'impôt et de la corvée.

À la disposition de ces mandarins locaux, les codes issus directement ou dérivés du « Code des Trois Sceaux » (*Kotmai tra sam duang* ; กฎหมายตราสามดวง) de 1805 répertorient le plus grand nombre de cas particuliers dans lesquels pullulent les détails accessoires. Presque nulle part, comme l'observe René Guyon (1919 : 10) — dernier collaborateur de Padoux — ne sont définis des « principes généraux » capables d'éclairer les juges et de les guider tout en leur laissant une libre appréciation des faits et de l'espèce[4].

Doit-on ajouter que, dans le vieux droit siamois, la peine varie, par exemple, en fonction du statut social de la victime et de celui du mis en cause. La peine est aggravée à raison de l'éminence de l'un et de l'autre : plus le mis en cause a un statut social élevé, plus la peine qu'il encourt est lourde ; plus la victime a un statut social élevé, plus la condamnation est sévère.

[4] Toutefois, des manuels ou guides d'application appelés *lak chai* (หลักไชย) ont été retrouvés à Ayutthaya et dans les régions méridionales, ce qui nuance quelque peu cette affirmation (Arunrat et al. 2531)—*Note de l'éditeur*.

De façon corollaire, la valeur d'un témoignage est-elle, dans le vieux droit siamois, évaluée non pas à l'aune de la situation objective du témoin au regard de l'événement qu'il rapporte — témoin occulaire ou auditif, témoin direct, etc. —, mais à celle de son statut social, jusqu'à être irrecevable si celui-ci appartient à une catégorie jugée inférieure — tels, par exemple, une prostituée, un mendiant, un infirme sans famille ou même un savetier. En bref, certaines modalités — sinon certains principes — du droit siamois traditionnel sont si éloignées des formes du droit occidental que leur application se heurte à l'incompréhension la plus grande des Français même les mieux disposés à des accommodements.

Dans le même temps, les causes de conflits se multiplient à mesure que le commerce du Siam s'ouvre sur le monde par le biais des grandes maisons de commerce occidentales, chinoises ou japonaises — en d'autres termes, alors que le Siam entre dans une modernité qui n'est pas la sienne.

Pour libérer son pays de la nécessité des tribunaux consulaires qui s'arrogent des prérogatives de plus en plus étendues, le roi Chulalongkorn (Rama V ; r. 1868–1910) entreprend de moderniser l'administration judiciaire du royaume à marche forcée. Le 29 mars 1892, le roi crée un « ministère de la Justice » (*krasuang yutthitham* ; กระทรวงยุติธรรม) chargé de superviser tous les tribunaux du royaume, notamment ceux qui étaient jusqu'alors placés sous l'autorité des fonctionnaires de l'Intérieur et ceux qui dépendaient, par la force des traités, des Affaires étrangères.

Ce n'est qu'un premier pas : en 1897, le roi instaure une « Commission de codification » dont il confie la présidence à son fils, Krom Luang Ratchaburi Direkrit (กรมหลวง ราชบุรี ดิเรกฤทธิ์ ; 1874–1920), mieux connu sous le nom de Prince Raphi Phatthanasak (รพี พัฒนศักดิ์), alors Ministre de la Justice, et la vice-présidence à un juriste belge, le Prof. Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns (1835–1902). Ce dernier, qui reçoit le titre de *Chaophraya aphai ratcha* (เจ้าพระยาอภัยราชา) est lui-même assisté d'un juriste japonais, le Dr Tōkichi Masao (1871–2921) qui reçoit, quant à lui, le titre de *Phraya mahithon manupakon kosonlakhun* (พระยามหิธรมนูปกรณ์โกศลคุณ)[5]. En outre, Rolin-Jaequemyns s'assure le concours de deux compatriotes : Richard-Jacques Kirkpatrick puis, après le décès prématuré de ce dernier, Corneille Schlesser.

Impatient de mettre fin à l'existence des cours consulaires qui exaspèrent la souveraineté siamoise, le roi Chulalongkorn, consent, bon gré mal gré, aux conditions drastiques imposées par l'Indochine française en échange du démantèlement des juridictions extraterritoriales.

En sus de la cession au Cambodge et au Laos de plusieurs provinces allogènes, la Convention du 13 février 1904, dans son article XI, et le Traité du 23 mars 1907, par l'article V, disposent que « la compétence des Cours Internationales sera transférée aux tribunaux siamois ordinaires, après la promulgation et la mise en vigueur des codes siamois (Code pénal, Code civil et de commerce, Code de procédure, Loi d'organisation judiciaire) ».

[5] Masao Tōkichi est l'auteur d'un article intéressant dans le JSS (1905).

Or, quelle que soit la qualité des membres étrangers de la première Commission de codification, engoncés peut-être dans les titres et les honneurs que le roi leur avait prodigués d'avance, le projet de Code pénal qu'ils étaient chargés d'élaborer ne voit pas le jour.

Balayant les réserves de ses conseillers belges résolument hostiles à la France, le roi Chulalongkorn crée, en 1905, une nouvelle commission, placée cette fois sous l'autorité d'un juriste français : Georges Padoux, Ministre plénipotentiaire en disponibilité mis à la disposition du roi de Siam.

Le Fonds Padoux

Les papiers de Georges Padoux conservés désormais à l'université Chulalongkorn se présentent sous la forme de quinze grands volumes de format in-folio magnifiquement reliés plein cuir **[Figure 1]**.



Figure 1 : Le Fonds Georges Padoux à l'université Chulalongkorn, Bangkok © Nicolas Revire

Chaque reliure réunit des documents différents par leur nature, par leur support, et par leurs tailles disparates : il s'agit de manuscrits, de tapuscrits, d'épreuves imprimées, de lettres manuscrites ou dactylographiées en anglais, français ou siamois. Le travail de reliure est exceptionnellement soigné : chaque document est fixé à un « onglet piqué ». Le soin pris par Padoux pour préserver de façon ordonnée les archives liées à son travail au Siam atteste la conscience qui était la sienne de leur importance historique et scientifique.

Le Code pénal du royaume de Siam

Le premier chantier engagé par Padoux est donc celui du Code pénal du royaume de Siam dont la rédaction est achevée à la fin de 1907. Le Code est

promulgué le 1er juin 1908 pour entrer en vigueur le 22 septembre de la même année. Les travaux préparatoires pour la rédaction de ce code peuvent être retracés, pas à pas, dans les cinq premiers volumes du Fonds Padoux dont quatre sont conservés à l'université Chulalongkorn : le Volume 4 est malheureusement perdu[6].

• Le Volume 1er de ces archives montre que Padoux ne part pas de zéro lorsqu'il débute sa mission et qu'il reprend le projet abandonné par Tōkichi Masao et Corneille Schlesser. On trouve ainsi le manuscrit du projet Masao-Schlesser dans son dernier état, et le premier tapuscrit de ce document est enrichi de très nombreuses annotations manuscrites de la main même de Padoux. L'analyse de ce document et les modifications suggérées par l'équipe française donnent lieu à un rapport imprimé de quelque 40 pages, signé de Padoux. Le même volume contient encore un « Avant-projet » de quelque 170 pages, imprimé en août 1906 (RS 125), du *Penal Code for the Kingdom of Siam*[7].

• Le Volume 2 est entièrement consacré à la révision de cet Avant-projet. Il comporte des documents manuscrits et tapuscrits en français, en anglais et en siamois, rédigés pendant une période qui court du 31 août 1906 à fin mars 1907.

• Le Volume 3 contient deux nouvelles versions révisées de l'Avant-projet de presque 170 pages, comportant chacune de très nombreuses annotations et corrections manuscrites de Padoux, datées de RS 124 (1905–1906 CE).

• Le Volume 4 est manquant, comme on l'a dit.

• Le Volume 5 contient toute la correspondance, entre 1907 et 1909, relative à la mise au point du texte définitif du Code pénal du royaume de Siam, ainsi que les documents manuscrits, tapuscrits et imprimés accompagnant sa promulgation et sa diffusion.

Le Code civil et de commerce

La deuxième série d'archives concerne le projet de Code civil et de commerce. Elle comporte huit volumes, numérotés de 1 à 9 — il faut en effet déplorer encore une fois la perte d'un volume, et trois volumes supplémentaires[8]. Elle se présente dans un format légèrement différent de reliure toujours extrêmement soignée, réunissant des documents fixés sur des « onglets piqués ». Les conditions matérielles dans lesquelles Padoux entreprend ce second travail ne sont pas les mêmes que celles dans lesquelles il avait supervisé la rédaction du Code pénal : Padoux partage désormais son temps entre la France et le Siam.

Intercalés entre les différents documents majeurs au sein de ces huit volumes, figurent quelques échanges manuscrits ou tapuscrits, en anglais, entre Georges Padoux et le Prince Raphi, Ministre de la Justice et président de la Commission de codification (voir ci-dessus). N'ayant plus le loisir de se rencontrer régulièrement pour des

[6] Cote d'appel : RB (Rare Books) KPT3794.31956 C669, vol. 1 à 5 (sauf le vol. 4).

[7] Pour une version numérisée, quasi identique mais datée de 1908 (RS 127), voir : https://ia801309.us.archive.org/15/items/cu31924080478187/cu31924080478187.pdf.

[8] Cotes d'appel : RB KPT68 C669, vol. 1 à 9 (sauf le vol. 5), KPT68 C669S, vol. 1–2, et RB KZ3405 C 669.

séances de travail, ils doivent en effet correspondre par écrit pour coordonner leurx travaux. Ces échanges attestent le grand degré de confiance mutuelle qu'ils ont su nouer mais, le Prince Raphi étant anglophone, la presque totalité des documents de cette seconde série d'archives sont rédigés en anglais.

Le document commandé à Padoux et à son équipe est, comme son titre en anglais l'indique (*Draft Civil and Commercial Code for the Kingdom of Siam*), un « projet » — de Code civil et de commerce, et l'essentiel de ces documents concernent principalement le droit commercial et notamment les règles concernant les « obligations » et les conditions de validité des contrats commerciaux.

Ce projet ne contient pas seulement les principes du droit et la formulation des articles du code. Pour presque chaque article, les rédacteurs choisissent un « exemple », qui doit permettre aux magistrats siamois appelés à rendre des jugements de se familiariser avec les nouveaux principes du droit et leur mise en pratique. Ce texte est donc à la fois un projet de code et un « manuel d'application ». Certains de ces « exemples » reprennent en effet délibérément et de façon pédagogique quelques cas décrits dans les anciens *kotmai* : le titre *Undue Enrichment*, par exemple, correspond aux vieux délits de *prabat sin* (ประบัดสิน, « dissimulation ») ou de *sin mak dai* (สินมากได้, « demande abusive ») tels qu'ils sont abordés, dans l'ancienne « Loi sur les dettes » (*Laksana ku ni* ; ลักษณะกู้หนี้, art. 53, 54, 57) ou dans les anciennes « Lois diverses » (*Laksana betset* ; ลักษณะเบ็ดเสร็จ, art. 112, 113, 115). Ces documents attestent surtout l'extraordinaire investissement direct et personnel de Padoux dans chaque phase de la rédaction de ce projet.

• Le Volume 1er de cette série d'archives contient le premier projet tapuscrit en anglais de presque 100 pages du Livre III sur les « obligations » du Code civil et de commerce établi à Paris d'octobre 1908 à avril 1909, et remis à Bangkok en mai 1909 ; puis une seconde copie de ce même projet révisé à Bangkok pendant l'été 1909.

• Le Volume 2, dans un format un peu plus grand, contient une version augmentée et imprimée du *Draft Civil and Commercial Code for the Kingdom of Siam, « Obligations »*, de quelque 288 pages et datée de Bangkok, octobre 1910.

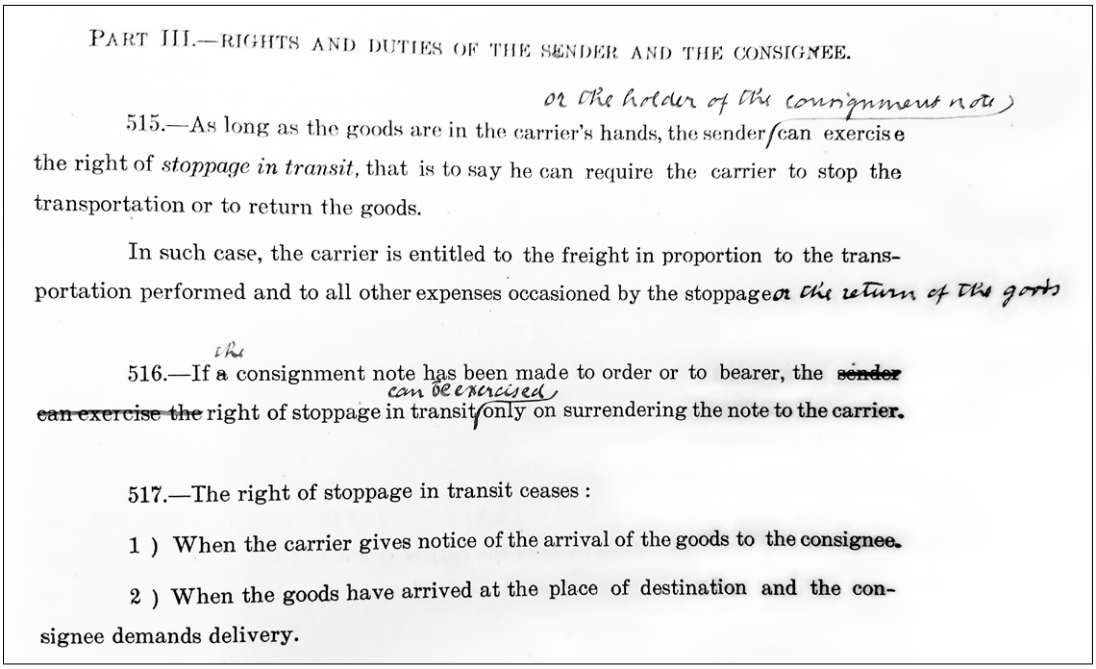
• Le Volume 3 contient une nouvelle version révisée du projet de 1910, sous la forme d'un tapuscrit en anglais et de nombreuses notes et lettres en français et en anglais relatives à ces révisions.

• Le Volume 4 contient une version imprimée du texte en anglais de 1910, tel qu'il est contenu dans le Volume 2, entièrement amendée à l'encre rouge de la main de Padoux.

• Le Volume 5 est manquant.

• Le Volume 6 contient une nouvelle révision du projet, datée de 1912, présente sous la forme de notes manuscrites et documents tapuscrits en français et en anglais de quelque 336 feuillets.

• Le Volume 7 contient une autre révision du projet de 1912, contenant des parties intitulées *Preliminary Title*, *General Provisions*, *Definitions*, *Periods of Time*, etc. Cette partie du Fonds Padoux contient de nombreuses observations faites par Henri Segnitz (1881–1915), assistant de Padoux entre 1912 et 1915 — décédé



PART III.—RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF THE SENDER AND THE CONSIGNEE.

515.—As long as the goods are in the carrier's hands, the sender (or the holder of the consignment note) can exercise the right of *stoppage in transit*, that is to say he can require the carrier to stop the transportation or to return the goods.

In such case, the carrier is entitled to the freight in proportion to the transportation performed and to all other expenses occasioned by the stoppage or the return of the goods.

516.—If a consignment note has been made to order or to bearer, the ~~sender can exercise the~~ right of stoppage in transit can be exercised only on surrendering the note to the carrier.

517.—The right of stoppage in transit ceases :

1) When the carrier gives notice of the arrival of the goods to the consignee.

2) When the goods have arrived at the place of destination and the consignee demands delivery.

Figure 2 : Extrait du *Draft Civil and Commercial Code for the Kingdom of Siam* de juin 1912, annoté et corrigé à la main par Georges Padoux © Nicolas Revire

prématurément le 22 août de cette même année — portant sur les états successifs du projet. Y sont joints les éléments d'une correspondance importante entre Padoux et le Prince Raphi, désormais ministre de l'Agriculture, le tout sous la forme de quelque 358 feuillets manuscrits et tapuscrits en français et en anglais.

• Le Volume 8 contient une nouvelle révision tapuscrite du projet de 1912 avec, cette fois, les annotations en anglais du Department of Legislative Redaction (« Commission de codification ») réuni entre 1er octobre 1913 et le 21 janvier 1914, formant un document tapuscrit de 396 feuillets.

• Le Volume 9 contient une ultime version imprimée du texte de juin 1912 intitulée *Draft Civil and Commercial Code for the Kingdom of Siam. Book I: Obligations*, annotée et corrigée, une fois encore, de la main de Padoux **[Figure 2]**.

• Deux tomes supplémentaires, d'environ 400 pages tapuscrites chacun, portent sur le droit des « Sociétés ». La rédaction des différents articles du premier tome remonte à 1905 ; celle du second s'échelonne de mai 1910 à novembre 1912.

• Un dernier volume indépendant, de plus de 400 pages, correspond à une version tapuscrite du Livre VI, consacré au « Droit international privé » du projet de Code civil et de commerce. Il est daté du 21 juillet 1913 et porte la mention « à insérer au Code des Obligations »[9].

[9] Pour une version numérisée complète de ce Code, datée de août 1914, voir : https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/34/Draft_Civil_Code_of_Siam_%28Daily_Mail%2C_1914%29.pdf.

Révisions et prolongements de l'œuvre de Padoux

En 1923, Padoux n'est plus concerné que de loin par les questions de codifications au Siam — à cette époque il est conseiller légiste du gouvernement chinois — et le Prince Raphi, qui avait démissionné du ministère de la Justice depuis longtemps, est décédé en 1920. La nouvelle Commission de codification siamoise est désormais dirigée par le français René Guyon (1876–1963), dernier collaborateur de Padoux. Elle fonctionne sans désemparer jusqu'à 1940 et, parmi les juristes prestigieux qui la rejoignent au fil des ans, elle compte Robert Lingat (1892–1972), auteur d'une *Histoire du droit thaï* (*Prawatisat kotmai thai* ; ประวัติศาสตร์กฎหมายไทย, 1935–1940) qui fait encore autorité aujourd'hui, et le savant Jean Burnay (1899–1982), tous deux membres correspondants de l'EFEO.

Les dispositions du Code civil et de commerce étant jugées « trop françaises » et, à quelques égards, trop éloignées de certains aspects de la société siamoise par les nouveaux membres de la Commission désignée par le roi Rama VI (r. 1910–1925), ces derniers entreprennent de reprendre la rédaction de certains articles laissés par la précédente « Commission mixte de codification ». Même les Livres I et II du projet — dont Padoux avait supervisé minutieusement la rédaction — doivent être amendés en sorte que la version définitive du Code civil et de commerce, qui aurait dû être publiée en 2467 BE (1924 CE) et promulguée en 2468 BE (1925 CE), ne le sera finalement que dix ans plus tard.

Pour conclure, il faut signaler l'existence d'un autre fonds d'archives de Georges Padoux conservé aux Archives diplomatiques de France sous la cote 394PA AP **[Annexe]**, où il a été déposé en 1999 par son fils, le grand indianiste André Padoux (1920–2017). Ce fonds vient utilement compléter celui qui est désormais conservé à l'université Chulalongkorn.

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Annexe

Extrait de l'introduction au catalogue du Fonds Georges Padoux aux Archives diplomatiques de France[10] :

> Si l'on ne trouve que très peu de documents officiels relatifs à son rôle au sein du gouvernement siamois, nous disposons d'une large correspondance qui offre un aperçu plus personnel de son action au Siam. C'est le cas des lettres envoyées par Georges Padoux lui-même, à son ami diplomate, Fernand Gaussen [1869–1929] (394PA AP/1). Au-delà de la description de son quotidien au Siam, on y découvre les différentes tensions qui existent entre la légation française et le gouvernement siamois mais également entre les puissances anglaise et française. En effet, alors que la Grande-Bretagne exerce son influence sur la Birmanie et que la France règne sur le Cambodge et la Cochinchine, le Siam garde son indépendance, représentant ainsi un enjeu pour ces deux puissances coloniales engagées dans une lutte d'influence dans la région.
>
> Cet enjeu est clairement exprimé à travers ces lettres et particulièrement lorsque se pose la question du recrutement de nouveaux assistants français au sein de la légation française.
>
> Parallèlement, Georges Padoux fait part à son ami des interrogations et problèmes auxquels il doit faire face durant le procédé de codification, livrant ainsi une partie du travail d'élaboration de ces divers codes législatifs. Diverses problématiques sont également évoquées à travers les lettres émanant de personnalités en poste au Siam qui écrivent à Georges Padoux principalement quand celui-ci est en congé en France (Pierre de Margerie[11], Charles l'Evesque[12], Jens Westengard[13]...). On peut souligner l'intérêt des questions soulevées dans la correspondance avec Jens Westengard, conseiller juridique, concernant les lois de naturalisation.

[10] Voir la notice complète : https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/394paap_cle055259__papiers_georges_padoux.pdf (consulté le 11 janvier 2026).

[11] Pierre de Margerie (1861–1942), Ministre de France au Siam de 1902 à 1909.

[12] Charles L'Evesque (dates inconnues), membre de la Commission de codification, auteur d'« Études sur le mariage dans le droit siamois moderne et sur l'ancienne loi successorale siamoise » (non publiée, vers 1920).

[13] Jens Iverson Westengard (1871–1918), juriste américain, conseiller légiste auprès du gouvernement siamois de 1903 à 1915.

The Mlabri and Land Mines in Northern Thailand

Ian G. Baird[1]

Abstract—The Mlabri are an Austroasiatic language-speaking Indigenous group who formerly lived as hunter-gatherers in the mountainous forests of northern Thailand and northwestern Laos. This research note examines how a Mlabri group in present-day Phayao province was forced to abandon forest life in the 1970s amid armed conflict between the Thai military and the military-wing of the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). The deployment of anti-personnel land mines by both sides generated pervasive fear, precipitating displacement, the collapse of mobile subsistence practices, and the eventual resettlement to permanent communities.

Keywords: Hmong; Indigenous Peoples; Land Mines; Mlabri; Northern Thailand

Introduction

One of the groups who formerly lived in the mountainous forests of northern Thailand were the Mlabri, an Austroasiatic-speaking Indigenous group who led nomadic lives and were found in small, scattered bands across the region and adjacent parts of northern Laos. There are presently about 400 Mlabri in northwestern Thailand and around 30 in northern Laos (Nakai & Ikeya 2016; Sakkarin 2016). They were known for constructing small lean-to shelters roofed with large green leaves, under which they slept until the leaves turned yellow after about a month—hence their nickname "Spirits of the Yellow Leaves" (*phi tong lueang*; ผีตองเหลือง)—before moving on.[2] The Mlabri have a long history of forest life, but those who once lived in Pong district, Phayao province, were forced to leave when land mines proliferated during the Cold War-era conflict between the Maoist Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the Royal Thai Government. This displacement profoundly altered Mlabri subsistence strategies, with effects that continue to shape their lives today.

The Mlabri and the Hmong

The Mlabri did not historically practice agriculture in the conventional sense, as they were primarily hunter-gatherers. They did, however, interact at times with nearby Hmong villages, whose inhabitants probably arrived in the area in the early 20th century. Hugo Bernatzik (1938) noted that the Mlabri exchanged forest products for rice and occasionally worked in Hmong swidden fields in return for food. Sakkarin Na Nan likewise reports that, from time to time, small groups of Mlabri would approach Hmong settlements to request salt and rice, even though rice was not a staple of their diet. The Hmong also hired Mlabri as short-term laborers in

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[2] Personal communication with Som Wang or Noi (สมหวัง หรือ หน่อย), Santisuk village, Pong district, Phayao province (ม. สันติสุข, อ. ปง, จ. พะเยา), 16 June 2018.

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Figure 1: Shy Mlabri women wearing Hmong clothing, Thailand, 1980 © Gene Long

swidden fields and during opium poppy harvests, often paying them with slaughtered pigs.[3]

In a few cases, such as at Don Praiwan village in Nan province (บ. ดอนไพรวัลย์ จ. น่าน), the Hmong reportedly supplied the Mlabri with opium to induce dependency and ensure their return as agricultural laborers (Sakkarin 2555: 84), reflecting the Mlabri's reputation as effective workers. These practices occurred mainly after the Mlabri had largely left the forest.[4] According to Ikeya & Nakai (2009), from the mid-1970s onward Hmong communities in northern Thailand increasingly employed Mlabri to cut trees and clear land for swidden cultivation.

According to an informant, a Hmong elder in Santisuk village, Pong district, Phayao province, who had earlier interacted with Mlabri groups living in the nearby forests, Hmong could understand a few Mlabri words and some Mlabri likewise learned a small amount of Hmong. A few also knew some local lowland *mueang* (Tai Yuan) vocabulary. He recalled that the Mlabri language sounded soft, with long, drawn-out words. Despite these limited shared vocabularies, the two groups could communicate at a basic level. The Mlabri were generally described as very timid and shy, with women reportedly especially fearful of outsiders **[Figure 1]**. Village dogs would often bark loudly whenever Mlabri approached the Hmong settlements.[5]

[3] Personal communication with Sakkarin Na Nan (ศักรินทร์ ณ น่าน), Nan City, 8 May 2021.

[4] Som Wang (Noi), pers. comm. (see *supra*, n. 2).

[5] Ibid.

Another anonymous elderly Hmong man from Santisuk village remembered seeing the Mlabri in the area when he was a child and recalled that they usually carried spears and bags. They sometimes used their spears for self-defense when threatened by others.[6] The Mlabri were also said to fear spells, which they believed the Hmong used to harm them.

Mlabri society is highly egalitarian, with individuals often feeling obliged to share their possessions with community members who have less.[7] A Hmong man from Huai Hom village (ม. ห้วยหอม), adjacent to Bunyuen village (ม. บุญยืน), where the Mlabri group discussed here now lives, described a long-standing relationship between the Hmong and the Mlabri, whom the Hmong call "forest people". However, a Hmong elder from Huai Hom noted that the Mlabri generally did not wish to marry Hmong,[8] although another informant from Santisuk village recalled a few notable exceptions.[9]

While Ikeya & Nakai (2009: 258) described the relationship between the Mlabri and the Hmong as "symbiotic", it seems likely that the power relations that developed between the employing Hmong and the laboring Mlabri were far from equal, with the Hmong holding more power. Indeed, Gene Long, an American missionary who has worked with the Mlabri community at Bunyuen village in Phrae province for decades and speaks Mlabri fluently, certainly believes that the Hmong have often taken advantage of their power as employers to exploit the Mlabri.[10] I personally have also observed other cases when Lao Hmong have used their better economic position to take advantage of poorer Austroasiatic language-speaking groups such as the Khmu.

The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT)

The CPT has a long history in Thailand. They first became active in the country during the late 1920s, as the Siam Communist Party. During its early period, the CPT mainly organized in urban areas among Chinese–Thai. However, their fundamental strategy changed around the time of the Third-Party Congress, in September 1961, when they decided that the CPT would focus its recruiting and political organizing activities on rural parts of the country, including upland areas occupied by people from various ethnic groups. The Hmong were one of the groups the CPT targeted, since the Government of Thailand had treated the Hmong poorly and most Hmong were not recognized as Thai citizens (Baird 2021). They had considerable grievances and soon many Hmong were recruited to support the CPT. During the 1960s, many Hmong teenagers were sent to receive military, medical, and political training in northern Laos, North Vietnam,

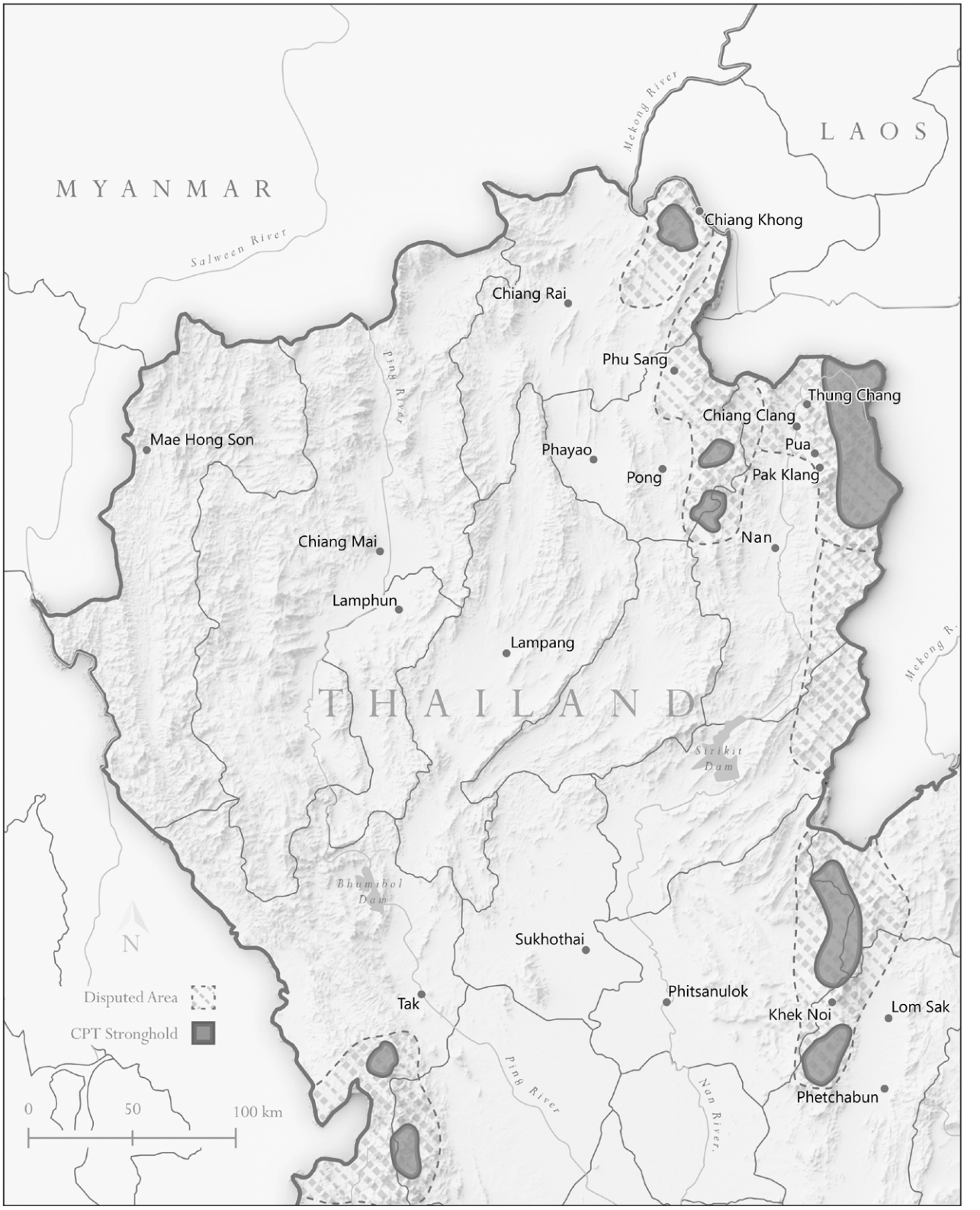
[6] Ibid.

[7] Personal communication with Gene Long, Bunyuen village, Rong Kwang district, Phrae province (ม. บุญยืน, อ. ร้องกวาง, จ. แพร่), 13 October 2016.

[8] Personal communication with Nai Mang Sae Kue (นายมังแซคือ), Huai Hom village, Rong Kwang district, Phrae province (ม. ห้วยหอม, อ. ร้องกวาง, จ. แพร่), 13 October 2016.

[9] Personal communication with Ja Va Sae Vang (จาวาแซ่ว่าง), Santisuk village, 19 October 2016.

[10] Gene Long, pers. comm. (see *supra*, n. 7).



Map 1: CPT Strongholds in Thailand in the 1970s © Ian Baird

and the People's Republic of China (PRC), the main political backer of the Maoist CPT (Baird 2021).

After fighting first broke out in northern Thailand on 8 May 1967, hostility between Hmong aligned with the CPT and Thai security forces erupted in northern Thailand's Thoeng district, Chiang Rai province (อ. เทิง, จ. เชียงราย). The Thai military responded with heavy bombing and other attacks, driving many ethnic Hmong and Lua people to join the CPT (Baird 2025). Soon, the fighting spread to other nearby areas in what is now Loei, Nan, Phayao, Phetchabun, and Phitsanulok provinces. The CPT decided to establish stronghold bases in remote and highly inaccessible mountainous forested areas, places that they effectively were able to fully govern between 1968–1969 and the early 1980s **[Map 1]** when almost all of those in the CPT surrendered following a government-offered amnesty (Baird 2021).

Beginning in the early 1970s, after establishing its stronghold bases in northern Thailand, the CPT started planting Chinese land mines they received as aid from the PRC in order to protect their strongholds. At the same time the Royal Thai Army also planted its own land mines at the edges of CPT stronghold areas. Neither side kept good maps of where the land mines were buried, nor was it unusual for people to step on mines planted by their own colleagues. Unexploded bombs and other unexploded ordnance were perennial threats in the forest. One Hmong informant who was formerly in the CPT told me that, over the approximately 15 years that the CPT stronghold in Chiang Rai province was established, 112 people died from stepping on land mines and unexploded bombs, with only about 20 from direct battle.[11] Another Hmong in the CPT also reported that, in Phetchabun province, CPT soldiers were rarely shot but more frequently died after stepping on land mines.[12] In Nan province, it was also recounted that few CPT died in battle, but that many more died due to stepping on land mines.[13] In addition, many wild animals, such as tigers and bears, were also killed by land mines.[14]

The Mlabri, the CPT, and Land Mines

The Mlabri did not become directly engaged with the Cold War conflict between the Maoist CPT and the US-backed Royal Thai Army. However, some of them lived inside or near CPT stronghold areas and, as a result, were dramatically affected by the conflict. In particular, a small group of Mlabri lived in the Pha Chi–Pha Chang mountain (ผาจี ผาช้าง) area in present-day Phayao province. According to a Hmong elder from Santisuk village who was previously with the CPT, the Mlabri continued contacting the Hmong who joined the CPT, since they knew them from before. Yet, according to one Mlabri man named Tarana **[Figure 2]**, who lived in the Pha Chi–Pha Chang range when he was

[11] Personal communication with No Daeng Sae Li (หน่อแดง แซ่ลี้), Sai Thong village, Wiang Kaen district, Chiang Rai province (ม. ทรายทอง, อ. เวียงแก่น, จ. เชียงราย), 3 June 2014.

[12] Personal communication with Phu Kong Chot (ผู้กองโชติ), Phop Phra district, Tak province (อ. พบพระ, จ. ตาก), 12 May 2017.

[13] Personal communication with Wieng Sae Sang (เวียงแซ่ซง), Pa Klang village, Pua district, Nan province (ม. ป่ากลาง อ. ปัว, จ. น่าน), 16 October 2016.

[14] Personal communication with Phu Kong Sou (ผู้กองสู้), Nam Tuang village, Mae Charim district, Nan province (ม. น้ำตวง, อ. แม่จริม, จ. น่าน), 4 July 2017.



Figure 2: Tarana (Mlabri man) in Bunyuen village, Rong Kwang district, Phrae province, 13 October 2016 © Ian Baird

young and now lives in Bunyuen village, his people decided to leave the area due to the threat of land mines that the two sides of the conflict had planted in the forests where the Mlabri had long resided. Hmong, formerly associated with the CPT who presently live in Santisuk village, later confirmed this to have been the case.[15]

According to Tarana, "When we were living in the Pha Chi–Pha Chang area, land mines were planted in the forest. Three people stepped on the mines and died: my father, my older sister, and another old man in the community. Therefore, we could not stay there and had to leave the forest." He claimed that there were enough natural resources for survival in the forest. He also explained that the Mlabri had a good relationship with both the communists and non-communists. He stated that the main problem for them were the land mines.[16]

Indeed, the Thai State did not view them as a threat (Nimonjiya 2013) and neither did my informants in the CPT. However, although Tarana, speaking as a Mlabri man, described harmonious relations with both sides in Pong district, Phayao province, fully unpacking the complexities of Mlabri interactions with non-Mlabri actors would require far more extensive ethnographic research than undertaken here. Previous studies suggest that these relationships were often complex, ambivalent, and at times contradictory (e.g., Sakkarin 2007; Ikeya & Nakai 2009).

[15] Som Wang (Noi), pers. comm. (see *supra*, n. 2).

[16] Personal communication with Tarana (ธาราณา), Bunyuen village, Rong Kwang district, Phrae province, 13 October 2016.

One Hmong man who joined the CPT in the late 1960s told me that many Mlabri people stepped on land mines and were killed during his time in the forest. He also reported that the Mlabri were also quite fearful of gunfire. He remembered one time when a Mlabri man came to inform him and others with the CPT that he had found an unexploded bomb in the forest. He dared not touch it or bring it with him, but he claimed that the bomb was dropped from an airplane. He was clearly quite worried about it. The Hmong man explained that the Mlabri were very sincere and honest about describing things that they found in the forest.[17]

The Cold War took a heavy toll on the Mlabri and by 1975 they had apparently all left the Pha Chi–Pha Chang area and moved into lowland settlements, due to fearing the conflict and especially the land mines.[18] Some of the Mlabri ended up in a settlement in 1981; in 1983–1984 some of those moved to Huai Hom village in Rong Kwang district, Phrae province, where they continue to reside. One Mlabri man said that they could not return to the Pha Chi–Pha Chang forest because the area is now part of Doi Pha Chang Wildlife Sanctuary (เขตรักษาพันธุ์สัตว์ป่า ดอยผาช้าง),[19] which was officially established in 1980.

The livelihoods of the Mlabri from the Pha Chi–Pha Chang area appear to have been profoundly transformed when the placing of land mines compelled them to abandon forests that had long sustained their way of life. The Mlabri now live in settled villages, where they often work as day laborers for neighboring Hmong. They also have their own rice and corn fields.[20] Some have become Christians. Some have reacted badly to alcohol consumption, since they did not have a history of making or consuming it before moving to a settled village. Many have not adapted well to the dramatic changes that they have experienced and there have been cases of suicides.[21]

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This brief note documents the impact of land mines on a single Mlabri community in northern Thailand, illustrating how anti-personnel land mines and armed conflict can profoundly alter the lives of nomadic, forest-dwelling Indigenous peoples. For the Mlabri now residing in Pong district, Phayao province, departure from the forest was not prompted by resource scarcity but by the pervasive threat of death posed by land mines planted by other actors in a conflict in which they were not directly involved.

This account does not suggest that all Mlabri in northern Thailand and northern Laos experienced similar displacement, nor does it imply that subsequent social challenges—such as alcoholism or suicide—can be attributed solely to land mines. Rather, it highlights land mines as one important factor among several shaping major transformations in the lives of this particular group. At a critical historical moment, land mines altered the meaning of the forest itself, prompting the Mlabri to abandon a place long understood as one of refuge and abundance.

[17] Ja Va Sae Vang, pers. comm.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Tarana, pers. comm. (see *supra*, n. 16).

[20] Gene Long, pers. comm. (see *supra*, n. 7).

[21] Ibid. See also, Long et al. 2013.

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Lap Mueang Nan and Regional Identity: A Culinary Competition

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Abstract—Lap mueang Nan is a key expression of Nan's regional food culture, distinguished by local ingredients such as native red cattle meat and *makhwaen* seeds. Drawing on participant observation and informal interviews conducted during the 2025 Cooking Competition in Nan, this short study shows that shared ingredients coexist with diverse household preparation techniques transmitted across generations. These variations highlight Lap mueang Nan's role as a lived marker of local identity and culinary knowledge.

Keywords: Cultural Identity Communication; Food Competition; Nan Culture; Thai Gastronomy

Introduction

To understand Nan culture is to enter an intricate and expansive field of inquiry. A region's cuisine serves as a medium of cultural communication reflecting values, traditions, social, and economic conditions, the relative abundance of natural resources, and local wisdom (e.g., Chineephen & Meena 2564). Such a study may examine categories of food, methods of preparation, choices of ingredients, the crafting of flavor, the ways meals are consumed, intergenerational recipe transmission, and the function of food as a representation of identity and culture.

This study approaches a culinary dish as a living cultural practice that evolved through time. The findings are drawn from fieldwork conducted through observation and informal interviews with participants at the Center of Learning for the Region (CLNR)'s 2025 Cooking Competition featuring beef dishes, including Lap mueang Nan, organized by the CLNR, in cooperation with the Nan Provincial Livestock Office at Chulalongkorn University, Wiang Sa district, Nan province, on 12 March 2025. The intention of this short notice is not to discuss historical origins or to evaluate the dish aesthetically. Instead, this modest account seeks to illuminate how Lap mueang Nan is perceived, enacted, and sustained in contemporary Thai society. In doing so, it records a cultural moment that may serve as a resource for future scholars interested in exploring Nan's gastronomy.

Nan's local foodways reveal several compelling features. Its culinary traditions offer a wide variety of dishes that reflect the region's richness such as Kaeng sanat (แกงสะนัด).[3] Each dish carries

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[3] The word *sanat* is phonological variation of the word *sai nak* (ใส่หนัก, to put in heavily), which corresponds to the cooking practice of emphasizing the generous

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this generous use of ingredients signaling Nan's natural abundance; methods of preparation create balanced and unmistakably local flavors. Among the many dishes embodied in this culinary identity, Lap mueang Nan (ลาบเมืองน่าน, "*lap* from the Nan country") stands out. It is the characteristic local form of a dish known as *lap* in various regions of northern and northeast Thailand, as well as in Laos.

The culinary tastes of northern Thai tend to favor moderately seasoned dishes with a slight saltiness and tangy acidity; sweetness is not highly valued. The preparation method of *lap*, along with its flavor profile, places it among the category of mixed salads dishes (*yam*; ยำ).[4] Lap mueang Nan is characterized by finely minced meat blended with blood, combined with a mixture of chiles and dried spices to produce a hot, spicy flavor, with an added note from bitter-tasting ingredients. It is commonly served accompanied by fresh vegetables. Some scholars have argued that the term *lap* derives from *lābha,* meaning "success" or "gain" in Pali. In this sense, although *lap* is now consumed in a wide range of occasions, it was, and in some locations still is, historically shared as symbolic expression of friendship and good fortune (Stringler 2011: 108). Reinforcing this understanding, a Thai linguistic comparison shows that *lap*/ลาบ is a homophone of *lap*/ลาภ, signifying auspiciousness (Thanes 2009: 167). Consequently, *lap* was in the past and currently is in the present often consumed on special occasions.

However, this local dish traditionally uses zebu beef from the native red cattle of Nan (*Bos indicus*), a breed long associated with the area, as its primary ingredient. The minced beef is seasoned with *Zanthoxylum limonella* or *makhwaen* (มะแขว่น), a local aromatic seed known for its fragrant scent and numbing spiciness. Through these ingredients and methods of preparation, Lap mueang Nan reveals a depth of local culinary knowledge and a cultural identity deeply tied to the land and resources of Nan **[Figure 1]**.

A Specific Identity

Lap mueang (ลาบเมือง), in its traditional form, has long been associated with the use of water buffalo meat. In many parts of northern and northeast Thailand, water buffalo are used as motive power to plow the extensive fields for the aqueous cultivation of paddy rice. Thus, water buffalo have traditionally been a readily available source of meat.

The preparation of *lap* involves finely chopping the meat until it becomes smooth and cohesive, then blending it with a mixture of spices that produce a sharp, heated flavor accompanied by the slight bitterness characteristic of certain local ingredients. For this reason, the dish is typically eaten with fresh local vegetables to complement and soften its strong taste. Traditionally, Lap

use of ingredients, particularly locally available vegetables that are commonly found in household kitchens as the main components of the dish.

[4] See s.v. อาหารไทย (Thai Food). In สารานุกรมไทยสำหรับเยาวชน โดยพระราชประสงค์ในพระบาทสมเด็จพระบรมชนกาธิเบศร มหาภูมิพลอดุลยเดชมหาราช บรมนาถบพิตร เล่มที่ 13 [*Thai Junior Encyclopedia Foundation by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej The Great*, Volume 13], 2532 BE (1989 CE), pp. 208–212.



Figure 1: Typical presentation of Lap mueang Nan © Patcharee Chunthong

mueang was eaten raw, but over time it has been adapted to suit a wider range of tastes, giving rise to cooked versions such as Lap khua (ลาบคั่ว), or dried-fried *lap* (Thanes 2552: 168; Adisak 2565; Chiranarong 2567).

When considering what gives Lap mueang Nan its specific character, the authors conducted an interview on 12 March 2025 with Mr Yan Songmueang-kaen (ญาณ สองเมืองแก่น), a Nan cultural expert who received the national award for Master Artist of the Land in 2015. He explained:

> Lap mueang Nan, if made with beef, is different from others because the spice mixture here has *makhwaen*, galangal, garlic, and dried chilies. These are what we use for the *lap* spices. The offal is boiled, and when we mix the *lap*, we rinse the mortar with the broth from the offal to create a rich and rounded flavor.[5] But if it is Lap mueang from Chiang Mai or Lampang, they add *mahlaep* (มะแหลบ; *Heracleum siamicum craib*), which is another kind of spice.

The dish is typically made with zebu beef or water buffalo meat and, when chopped, is mixed with fresh blood and worked until the texture becomes smooth, cohesive, and slightly

[5] Offal refers to the internal organs and entrails of an animal that are used as food. This includes parts like the liver, heart, kidneys, lungs, tripe (stomach), intestines, and sometimes the brain or tongue. In culinary contexts, offal is often distinguished from the "prime cuts" of meat (like muscle or steak) and is valued in many cuisines for its flavor, texture, and richness—*Editor's note.*

sticky against the chopping block. Some recipes incorporate cooked offal as an additional ingredient.

Household Secrets

A culinary process is a subcomponent of culture that is transmitted across generations through practice. Consequently, a process is not rapidly defined; it remains dynamic, evolving with the accumulation of communal knowledge and traditions (Aiswarya et al. 2021). In this sense, the preparation of Lap mueang among people living within the same province is never uniform. Each household carries its own small variations, shaped by memory, preference, and local experience. The 2025 Cooking Competition featuring beef dishes, including Lap mueang Nan, revealed not only the consistent use of local ingredients among the eight competing groups that applied to participate in the competition, but also vividly illustrated this cultural diversity in culinary practice.

Through fieldwork conducted during the event, the authors observed that each group prepared Lap mueang Nan in its own way, drawing upon family traditions, long held techniques, and personal interpretations of what the dish should be. The authors documented these methods through close observations combined with informal interviews, resulting in the dataset summarized below in **Table 1**.

Local Ingredients

The dataset below clearly shows, in empirical terms, that Lap mueang Nan is distinguished not only by its bold and vibrant flavors but also by the use of ingredients that embody the cultural identity and lifeways of the people of Nan. Most notably, the dish relies on meat from the native red cattle of Nan **[Figure 2]**. This breed is uniquely tied to the region, possessing physical characteristics and adaptive qualities suited to Nan's mountainous environmental conditions. The use of this locally raised cattle results in a *lap* with a balanced, rounded flavor and a tender yet slightly chewy texture that reflects the high quality of the meat. Today, the meat undergoes quality inspection before food preparation, ensuring that it can be safely consumed in accordance with traditional practices of raw or semi raw *lap*.

In terms of spices, the field data indicate that all eight participating groups emphasized the importance of *makhwaen* seeds in the *lap* spice mixture. *Zanthoxylum limonella* or *makhwaen* is native to Nan and thrives due to the region's ecological abundance. As a result, *makhwaen* harvested in Nan is particularly aromatic, releasing a distinctive fragrance and delivering a sharp, numbing heat on the tongue. Its presence in the spice blend underscores both the sensory identity of Lap mueang Nan and the broader relationship between local ecology and culinary practice.

Preparation

The preparation of Lap mueang Nan among the eight competing groups followed a broadly consistent process. Each cook began by finely chopping meat until it reached a smooth and cohesive texture. For the meat used



Figure 2: Native cattle of Nan province © Patcharee Chunthong

in this competition, each team was provided with an equal amount of meat, 1 kilogram a piece. The meat was supplied by the Nan Provincial Livestock Office, which ensured the quality and cleanliness of the meat as well as the correctness of the meat-preparation procedures.

During this stage, small amounts of fresh cow blood were gradually added, allowing the meat to bind and develop the dense, elastic quality characteristic of the dish. Once the meat achieved the desired texture, the cooks proceeded to the next stage by mixing the chopped beef with finely sliced boiled offal, *nam phia* (น้ำเพี้ย), and a pre-prepared *lap* spice mixture. The ingredients were thoroughly combined until they formed a uniform mixture.

Across all eight groups, the shared technique of chopping the meat until it became sticky and adhered to the chopping block was clearly evident. This defining texture is one of the reasons why Lap mueang Nan is sometimes referred to as Lap niao (ลาบเหนียว), or "sticky *lap*". The gradual incorporation

Table 1: Dataset of Lap Mueang Nan Preparation

Nos	Participating Groups	Distinctive Methods	Shared Practices
1	Siriwan	*Maikham* bark is mixed into the meat during chopping.	
2	Ngua mueang Ngua	Additional cow blood is added to create a slightly soupy consistency.	
3	Muan Chai	Pickled *makhwaen* is offered as a condiment for those who prefer enhanced aroma and numbing heat.	• Quality inspected meat from native red cattle of Nan is finely chopped while blood is gradually added.
4	Krua Nan View	*Maikham* bark is added during chopping to give the *lap* a thicker, stickier texture.	• Chopping continues until a smooth texture is achieved.
5	Headmen and Village Leaders Association	*Phak paeo*, galangal, *makhwaen*, and salt are added during chopping. Roasted pea eggplants are served as condiments.	• *Lap* spices are dissolved in *nam phia*, with *makhwaen* seeds as a key spice, then mixed with the chopped meat and boiled offal.
6	Beef Cattle Group	Lap preparation with emphasis on boiled cow offal served as a side component.	• Served with various local medicinal vegetables.
7	Administrative Organization	*Maikham* bark and *makhwaen* seeds are mixed into the meat during chopping. The dish is topped with dill.	
8	Nonthaburi Beef Cattle Cooperative	*Phlu khao* leaves are used among the vegetables for preparing *lap*.	

of blood during chopping was another common practice observed throughout the competition.

Despite these shared features, several groups demonstrated distinctive household techniques that set their preparations apart as observed in **Table 1**. For example, Group 5 infused the meat early with herbs, including *phak paeo* (ผักแพว; *Polygonum odoratum*) and salt, while Group 7 incorporated *maikham* (ไม้ค้ำ; *Garuga pinnata*) bark and *makhwaen* seeds during chopping and finished the dish simply with dill (*Anethum graveolens*). Differences also emerged in the timing and use of added vegetables. Most groups mixed chopped spring onions, coriander, mint, and *phak paeo* directly into the *lap* before serving. However, Group 8 included *phlu khao* (พลูคาว; *Houttuynia cordata*) leaves as part of the *lap* mixture itself, whereas other groups used the same leaf only as a side accompaniment. These variations highlight the interplay between Nan's shared regional culinary identity and the subtle differences that distinguish one household's *lap* from another.

Although Lap mueang Nan is anchored in cultural traditions, it thrives through the experiential knowledge and creativity embedded in each household's practice. Differences in preparation techniques naturally produce variations in flavor, even when all groups use the same locally sourced ingredients. The eight competing groups, representing households from across Nan province, each brought distinct household traditions to the event. These variations reveal the intimate, generational knowledge that shapes Nan's culinary culture, offering insight into how a single regional dish can encompass diverse interpretations while remaining rooted in a shared identity. In this way, the preparation of Lap mueang Nan provides an ethnographic window into the province's cultural plurality.

Sociocultural Reflections

This cooking event provided not only an opportunity for the authors to study the food culture of Nan province but also provided a window into the broader social and cultural landscape of the local community. Throughout the event, the atmosphere revealed patterns of social organization, a gendered division of labor, and communal relationships that are deeply embedded in Nan's cultural fabric.

Across all eight participating groups, the division of roles in preparing Lap mueang Nan was strikingly consistent. Men were responsible for chopping the beef—a task that required strength, precision, and control over the final flavor of the dish. They acted as the primary cooks, the ones who shaped the identity of the *lap*. Women, on the other hand, took on supporting roles: preparing the vegetables used in the dish, arranging the accompanying herbs, and handling side dishes such as Sa makhuea (ส่ามะเขือ), Yam makhuea (ยำมะเขือ), and boiled offal stews. This clear delineation of tasks in the production of *lap* reflects a gendered social structure in which men assume the position of leaders or decision makers, while women serve as assistants or supporters in the culinary process **[Figure 3]**.

At the same time, the observed atmosphere of the event revealed other important dimensions. The gathering displayed strong kinship ties, mutual support, and a sense of collective belonging. Each group brought numerous members to assist in the preparation process, demonstrating a spirit of cooperation and shared pride. The scene was lively and joyful: participants exchanged smiles, conversed enthusiastically across group boundaries, and engaged in friendly interactions throughout the preparation of the dish. The rhythmic sound of chopping, punctuated by laughter, created an environment that blended festivity, labor, and social bonding.

These observations suggest that preparing Lap mueang Nan is more than a culinary task; it is a social activity that deepens relationships within families and strengthens the interconnectedness of the community. Moreover, the cooking competition not only demonstrated sustaining cultural continuity while engaging in a collective expression of local heritage, but also within the



Figure 3: Atmosphere of the 2025 Cooking Competition featuring beef dishes including Lap mueang Nan © Patcharee Chunthong

context of the competition, the dedication of the contestants to preparing *lap* and presenting the dish to achieve the best possible plate for victory in this competition becomes evident. The event was adjudicated by a panel of judges and a cash prize along with a trophy was awarded to the winner.

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However, although this note presents the topic within the context of a competition, a retrospective view of *lap* preparation in the daily life of Nan inhabitants reveals that historical methods differ from contemporary practices. According to Thanes (2552: 165–178), the primary ingredient for *lap* is beef or buffalo meat; thus, each preparation required slaughtering a large animal, entailing substantial labor and time. Consequently, in the past *lap* was not easily accessible food and was typically prepared only during major festivals. In contrast, contemporary conditions have changed: meat can be readily sourced from markets, making *lap* a common dish that is readily available and widely ordered at local eateries. This claim aligns with data obtained from interviews with informants, who report similar observations.

Lap can be made for almost any occasion. It could be prepared as a regular meal whenever one feels like eating it. There is no need for a special event (Participant in the 2025 Lap mueang Nan Cooking Competition).

The preparation of *lap* in the competitive context and in everyday life exhibits consistency, particularly in the distribution of roles. In addition to

interviews and participant observations, Thanes (2552: 165–178) documents corroborating evidence, noting that *lap* production assigns male participants to lead the process. Moreover, Lap mueang Nan is a multi-step culinary practice that requires meticulous attention and the collaboration of many individuals. Consequently, the competitive setting magnifies collaborative labor across groups, illustrating how participants contribute collectively to the preparation of *lap*.

Food culture not only enables an understanding of local ways of life and the recognition of community identity, but also reflects the indigenous wisdom that shapes how people adapt and appear to live in harmony with their geographical environment. Lap mueang Nan represents a distinctive form of local culinary culture that embodies the identity and lived experience of the people of Nan.

Fieldwork conducted for this short-term study on 12 March 2025 at CLNR, Wiang Sa district, Nan province, revealed that Lap mueang Nan reflects the natural abundance of the province. The availability of high-quality local ingredients is evident in the use of meat from the native red cattle of Nan as the primary component of the dish as well as the incorporation of *makhwaen* seeds, an important local economic crop, which impart a uniquely aromatic and numbing heat. These ingredients contribute to the characteristic flavor and texture that set Lap mueang Nan apart.

However, the preparation of Lap mueang Nan is not governed by a single fixed recipe. Instead, it varies according to household specific techniques and family traditions passed down through generations. This diversity underscores that food culture cannot be evaluated solely in terms of rigid standards or fixed values. Rather, it is dynamic, flexible, and continually shaped by the lived practices of the community.

In this regard, in-depth ethnographic study becomes essential not only to document and preserve the culinary techniques of each group, but also to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage embedded in these practices. Such documentation allows this knowledge to be passed on across generations, fostering a continued sense of pride and belonging among the people of Nan.

Acknowledgments

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Bronzes royaux d'Angkor, un art du divin: An Exhibition at the Musée Guimet (30 April–8 September 2025, Paris)

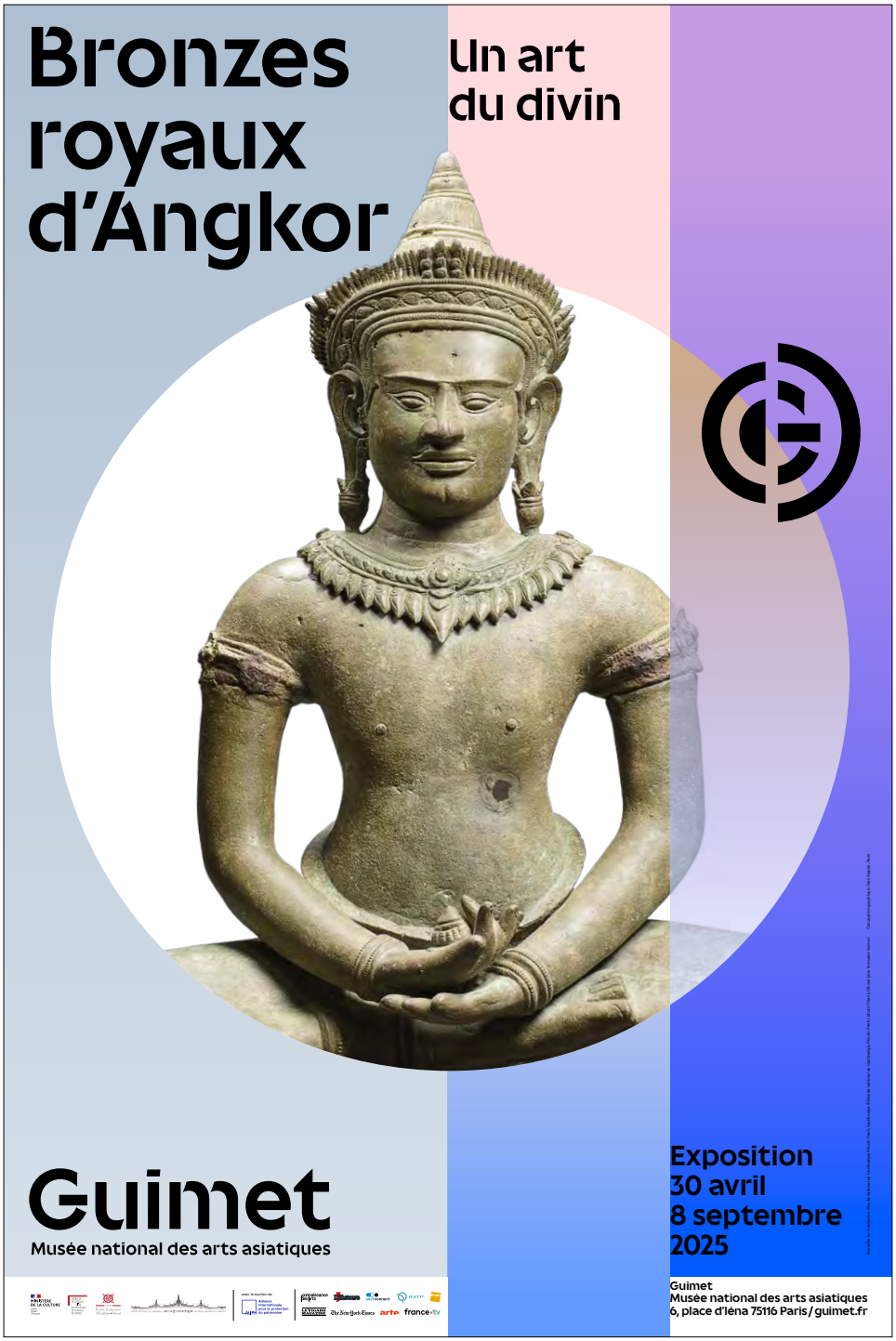


Figure 1: Exhibition Poster, Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris © MNAAG

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The exhibition *Bronzes royaux d'Angkor, un art du divin* presented more than 200 artifacts—including 126 loans from the National Museum of Cambodia—at the Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet (MNAAG) in Paris from 30 April to 8 September 2025.[1] Although Khmer art has been the subject of more than 20 major exhibitions worldwide over the past two decades, this exhibition stood out for its narrative approach, which drew on the findings of an ongoing scientific research project, a notably in-depth curatorial framework, and the complete study and restoration of its central masterpiece: the reclining Viṣṇu from the West Mebon temple at Angkor. The ambitious program involved four curators: art historians Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zéphir (MNAAG), archeologist Brice Vincent (École française d'Extrême-Orient, EFEO), and archeometry specialist David Bourgarit (Centre de recherche et de restauration des musées de France, C2RMF).

The exhibition formally opened on 29 April under the auspices of HE Phoeurng Sackona, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia, together with representatives of the French Ministry of Culture and the cultural institutions involved—notably the National Museum of Cambodia, the principal lender. The speeches delivered on this occasion also referred to the 20th Francophonie Summit (Sommet de la Francophonie), to be hosted by Cambodia in Fall 2026, underscoring the diplomatic dimension of the event. It is worth noting that the opening coincided with a period in France marked by several academic events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Khmer Rouge takeover (17 April 1975). On this occasion, several magazines simultaneously devoted special coverage to the history of Cambodia.

The exhibition itself received extensive publicity in France, both during its preparation and throughout its run, across a wide range of media, including podcasts, online videos,[2] radio programs devoted to Angkor and Cambodia,[3] and a television documentary featuring interviews with the curators and members of the scientific team.[4] This sustained media coverage—particularly during the exhibition's production phase—helped offset the more questionable color choices adopted for the final exhibition poster **[Figure 1]**.

A Thematic Exhibition Tracing Bronze Casting in Cambodia

The exhibition was divided into five thematic sections arranged along a chronological narrative thread. The visitor's path began with an introduction providing the archeological and technical context of bronze-casting practices in Cambodia. Ranging from examples of slag and furnace tuyere to models reconstructing the different phases of Hindu deity image-making, this section traced the long history of casting in Southeast Asia since protohistory. It

[1] See: https://www.guimet.fr/fr/expositions/bronzes-royaux-dangkor-un-art-du-divin. For the exhibition catalog, see Baptiste et al. 2025a.

[2] Available on MNAAG website (see note 1) and EFEO YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQuV4_iOZeBJolwUGohvLwtdzCCpg8Wzg.

[3] See: https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/serie-cambodge-des-histoires-khmeres.

[4] See Iliade productions–France télévisions, *Angkor, le mystère des temples de bronze*, 2025, 88 mn.



Figure 2: Second exhibition room, Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris © Mario Ciampi

presented field investigations that led to the discovery of ancient mines and to a better understanding of metallurgical craftsmanship, which contributed to the economic rise of Angkor. This introductory approach anchored the exhibition's discourse in an archeological perspective, setting it apart from Beaux-Arts–oriented exhibitions. Throughout the display, this perspective was reinforced by the use of X-ray images of the artifacts, highlighting the technical investigations carried out on the process of manufacture of the sculptures.

The next room was devoted to bronze divine images, displaying, among others, a large selection of masterpieces from the collection of the National Museum of Cambodia. It opened with a digital reconstruction of the sizeable Śiva image once installed in the Phnom Bayang temple, of which only the feet are preserved today. Although such a highly hypothetical reconstruction raises questions, it nevertheless allowed visitors to visualize how the artifacts were originally positioned within temple settings. This section also offered insights into the use of metal divine images in processions, as mentioned in epigraphic sources. This entry into the sacred world of ancient Cambodia was marked by the most striking scenographic atmosphere of the exhibition, designed by Guicciardini & Magni Architetti, supported by lighting developed by Studio Massimo Larussi **[Figure 2]**. Drawing inspiration from Khmer temple architecture, the scenography skillfully guided visitors through a dense array of sculptures, highlighting some of them through evocative shadow effects. One may regret, however, that the overall atmosphere was rather dark —making reading the captions challenging —and echoing the dramatic mode of illumination that has become increasingly standardized in exhibitions.



Figure 3: Bronze ornamental elements, Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris © Mario Ciampi

The corridor connecting the two largest exhibition spaces presented a succession of thematic showcases. This section highlighted other uses of copper-alloy craft production, such as cult vessels and ornamental copper and bronze elements used in architecture. This latter theme—crucial for shedding new light on the original appearance of Angkorian temples—was supported by a film and by the elegant graphic design of the showcases, which helped convey the original placement and function of bronze ornamental elements **[Figure 3]**. The section concluded with the display of an impressive boat figurehead in the form of Garuḍa, recovered from illicit trafficking networks, as well as a panel devoted to the monumental Khmer sculptures preserved at the Mahamuni temple in Mandalay, today Myanmar.

The following section was devoted to ruptures and continuities in artistic forms and in the uses of metalwork from the post-Angkor period to the present. The display of buddha sculptures in wall recesses recalled the scenography used, for instance, in the 1,000 Buddha Hall of the Angkor National Museum in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Beyond the development of Theravada Buddhist iconography, the exhibition also highlighted the renewed uses of bronze casting that accompanied technological and societal changes, such as the production of cannons and coins. Particular emphasis was placed on the organization of artistic craftsmanship promoted by the École des arts in Phnom Penh under the French protectorate. Concluding this section, the contemporary continuity of casting traditions was illustrated through a remarkable video documenting a ritual casting performed in Cambodia today.

The exhibition's final section was devoted to its masterpiece, the West Mebon Viṣṇu. Archival materials on display documented the investigations



Figure 4: Archival materials and analysis relating to the West Mebon Viṣṇu, Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris © Mario Ciampi

carried out from its discovery in 1936 through the most recent laboratory analyses, aimed at understanding the manufacture of this exceptional work and reconstructing its fragmented form **[Figure 4]**. The display employed a range of digital media tools, including a touchscreen and an immersive projection setting, which unfortunately suffered from several technical malfunctions throughout the exhibition's run.

Ultimately, the staircase leading out of the exhibition brought visitors to its central masterpiece. The exhibition's *chef-d'œuvre*, the West Mebon Viṣṇu, was unmistakably the highlight of the entire layout, positioned at the center of the MNAAG's *cour khmère*. Its base and an accompanying floor graphic evoked its original placement within the West Mebon temple, where it was once surrounded by water. This installation within the museum allowed the sculpture to function both as the starting point and the conclusion of the visitor's journey, making it the exhibition's climax and the primary focus of inquiry around which its rich narrative was developed **[Figure 5]**.

A Curatorship Supported by a Scientific Program

Drawing on a broad and diverse corpus, the curatorial selection extended well beyond the well-known divine images to include a wide range of lesser-known archeological materials, such as crucibles



Figure 5: The restored West Mebon Viṣṇu on display, Musée national des arts asiatiques–Guimet, Paris © Mario Ciampi

and casting molds, ingots, an archeological mercury droplet, and the ornamental fragments mentioned above. The inclusion of these artifacts was grounded in ongoing archeological investigations and reflected an approach that moved beyond purely stylistic or iconographic analysis to address broader questions of craftsmanship, technology, and cult organization in ancient Cambodia. Notably, this scientific perspective tended to move away from the classical terminology of stylistic periods in the object descriptions, suggesting a methodological revision in the field of art history. The exhibition captions also encouraged visitors to reconsider the generic term "bronze", offering instead a very precise characterization of the alloy compositions.

Several objects from the National Museum of Cambodia included in the exhibition derived from recent repatriations. Their integration into the thematic display underscored the importance of combating illicit trafficking for the advancement of historical and artistic knowledge.

The curatorial scope further extended to French private collections, with works shown from the Aziz Bassoul collection and the Philippe & Kéo Dumont collection. Research conducted by the exhibition's curators in collaboration with these private owners led to the restitution to Cambodia of a major

historical document: stela K. 1297, probably originating from Preah Khan of Kompong Svay, and bearing an important inscription relating to sacred Buddhist foundations established in the 12th century. The selection was further enriched by several works from other French public collections, including the Musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac and the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, as well as the Musée des arts asiatiques in Nice.

Among the sculptures presented, the West Mebon Viṣṇu received exceptional attention during the preparation of the exhibition. While the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts of Cambodia has been actively engaged in international exhibitions in recent years, the loan of such a masterpiece remains remarkable. This mark of trust was underpinned by the development of an ambitious parallel scientific program, which justified the sculpture's absence from the galleries of the National Museum of Cambodia for over two years.

An in-depth technological study was conducted by the French laboratory C2RMF,[5] with funding from the ALIPH Foundation (Alliance Internationale pour la Protection du Patrimoine). Coordinated by David Bourgarit, a broad range of analytical protocols was applied by a team of around 40 specialists to clarify the casting processes and assembly techniques used by Khmer craftsmen. These investigations also enabled a reconstruction of the sculpture's original appearance, based on evidence of mercury gilding and polychromy employing cinnabar, lead, and silver.

In advance of the exhibition, the reclining West Mebon Viṣṇu underwent a conservation campaign at the Arc' Antique laboratory in Nantes between November 2024 and March 2025.[6] This intervention was carried out in close collaboration with Von Noeun and Soun Sreyleak, specialists from the bronze conservation laboratory of the National Museum of Cambodia, who actively participated in the conservation procedures.

Finally, the mounting work undertaken by Emmanuel Bougenaux and Laurent Laly allowed fragments that had remained in storage for nearly a century to be reunited. Despite the inevitable losses, this new assembly offers a much clearer understanding of the original scale and length of this monumental composition.

A Momentum Within a Broader Scientific Framework

The scientific quality of the exhibition rested on the participation of a large research team, made visible through the collaborative catalog published in conjunction with the exhibition and featuring contributions from 28 authors. Issued in both French and English, the catalog brings together a series of concise thematic essays, supported by a rich iconography and distinguished by its high production quality (Baptiste et al. 2025a and b).

The exhibition's narrative was grounded in the results of archeometallurgical research conducted over the past decade by co-curators David Bourgarit

[5] See: https://c2rmf.fr/actualite/le-projet-vishnu.

[6] See: https://www.laboratoire-arc-antique.fr/44/nos-actualites/le-vishnou-couche-du-mebon-occidental/arc_6993.

and Brice Vincent, in collaboration with a broader scientific team, notably within the CAST:ING and Languau projects. Following excavations carried out since the 2010s at the royal foundry within the Angkor Thom Royal Palace (Polkinghorne et al. 2014) and the recent identification of a major archeological copper mine at Chhaep in Preah Vihear province, this research has expanded to investigate the circulation of materials across Southeast Asia. These investigations make a major contribution to understanding the economic foundations and societal organization of Angkor and are likely to lead to further significant discoveries in the years to come.

Conclusion

Despite the spatial constraints of the MNAAG's exhibition galleries, *Bronzes royaux d'Angkor, un art du divin* emerged as a quietly powerful and intellectually ambitious project. Far from a conventional display of masterpieces, the exhibition distinguished itself by placing scientific inquiry at the core of its curatorial vision, offering visitors a materially grounded and methodologically renewed understanding of Khmer bronze sculptures.

By integrating archeological evidence, technological analysis, and conservation research into its narrative, the exhibition successfully shifted the focus from stylistic typologies toward questions of production, circulation, and ritual use. In doing so, it not only enriched the interpretation of iconic works—most notably the West Mebon Viṣṇu—but also foregrounded the broader economic, social, and religious frameworks that underpinned Angkorian art. The accompanying catalog further reinforced this ambition, standing as a lasting scholarly contribution beyond the temporal limits of the exhibition itself.

The exhibition's subsequent presentation in the United States as *Royal Bronzes: Cambodian Art of the Divine* at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (25 October 2025–18 January 2026) attests to its international resonance. Ultimately, this project sets a compelling benchmark for future exhibitions of Southeast Asian art, demonstrating how curatorship, conservation, and scientific research can be productively interwoven to renew both public engagement and scholarly discourse.

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Decolonizing Southeast Asia Studies Conference (17–19 July 2025, Chiang Mai)



Figure 1: Poster announcing the conference © Chiang Mai University

Decolonizing Southeast Asia Studies, a conference held 17–19 July 2025 at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, was an important international academic gathering focused on exchanging ideas and different perspectives about the decolonization of Southeast Asian studies **[Figure 1]**.[1]

[1] The full conference schedule is available online at: https://decolonizing.rcsdcmu.com/schedule/.

https://doi.org/10.69486/114.1.2026.16 © The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage



Figure 2: Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Ian Baird during the conference introductory session © Chiang Mai University

In recent years, increased interest in various aspects of decolonizing Southeast Asian studies, whether in the United States, Europe, or in different parts of Southeast Asia has taken place. "Decolonization", however, does not mean the same thing to all, can take on many forms, and be imagined in an array of ways. In the U.S., for example, efforts to decolonize Southeast Asian studies have often been focused on putting more emphasis on increasing the number of Southeast Asian faculty and encouraging increased participation from Southeast Asian diasporic communities.

In Southeast Asia, however, more emphasis is put on other matters. For example, some programs advocate rethinking how territories and borders associated with Southeast Asia are imagined, defined, and dealt with in academic scholarship. Indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia also have varied ideas about regional decolonization and the directions it should take. They often advocate for taking the perspectives of their historically marginalized communities more seriously. Sometimes these perspectives focus on who is doing the research and writing it; in other cases the focus is more about ideas that are emphasized and which are marginalized, intentionally or not. Undoubtedly many perspectives and theoretical ways to think about decolonizing Southeast Asian studies exist, but issues related to knowledge production and the dissemination of knowledge are always central to discussions.

Although the original plan was to bring together between 30–40 scholars from various parts of Southeast Asia, as well as a few scholars from elsewhere, applicants responding to the call for papers surprised us with their overwhelming interest. Over 250 abstracts were submitted, mostly coming from



Figure 3: Attendees of the second plenary session © Chiang Mai University

Southeast Asia. After carefully considering all submissions, the most appropriate, dealing not only with Southeast Asian decolonization, but the decolonization of Southeast Asian studies, involving almost 100 scholars from all over Southeast Asia—as well as North America, Europe, and other parts of Asia outside of Southeast Asia—presented a diverse array of inspiring ideas related to this important topic. Indicating the level of interest, almost as many scholars and graduate students attended as observers.

The three-day conference was opened by Assistant Professor Dr Pitipong Yodmongkol, Vice-president of Chiang Mai University (CMU). The lead organizer, Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Director of RCSD at CMU, provided opening remarks **[Figure 2]**. As co-organizer representing the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), University of Wisconsin–Madison, Ian Baird introduced the topic of the conference with a brief paper, "Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies: Different Perspectives and Approaches".

The first keynote address, titled "Overcoming Marginality: The Decolonizing Force of Zo Studies", was delivered by Dr Willem van Schendel of the University of Amsterdam. During the afternoon of the first day, three parallel themed sessions of individual paper presentations took place. During the evening, three films, focusing on the modern nations of Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam, were screened.

The second day of the conference began with the second keynote address, "Can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies: Redux", presented by Dr Thiti Jamkajornkeiat of the University of Victoria **[Figure 3]**. The rest of the second day was devoted to three parallel themed sessions of individual paper presentations.

The third day, which concluded at noon, continued with three parallel themed sessions of individual paper presentations. The conference paper sessions included a diversity of excellent presentations followed by lively question



Figure 4: One of conference participants asking a question © Chiang Mai University

and discussion periods **[Figure 4]**. The conference ended after concluding remarks from Chayan Vatthanaphuti and Ian Baird.

Following the conference's success, the organizers are collaborating with presenters to publish a series of significant and thought-provoking papers. A special issue of *Asian Ethnicity* is planned. These volumes will be edited by Thiti Jamkajornkeiat, Sarena Abdullah (Universiti Sains Malaysia), and Ian Baird. The topic invites a wide range of important perspectives and analytical approaches and the forthcoming publications aim to reflect this richness.

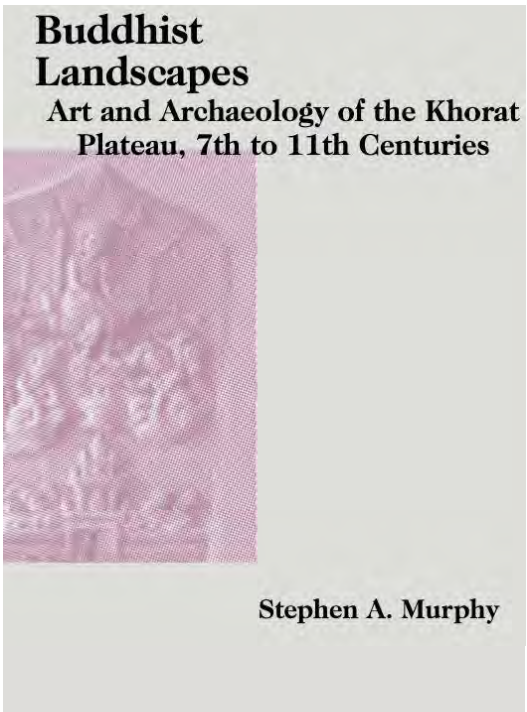
Ian G. Baird, UW-Madison[2]
& Chayan Vaddhanaphuti,
Chiang Mai University

Credits & Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Henry Luce Foundation for generously funding the conference. We are extremely grateful to all the people at the RCSD, Chiang Mai University, for their excellent support in organizing and implementing the conference. We are particularly indebted to Kanchana Kulpisithicharoen and Chanida Puranapun. Thanks also to Michael Cullinane and Mary-Jo Wilson from the CSEAS, UW–Madison, for their support in making the conference possible.

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Stephen A. Murphy, *Buddhist Landscapes: Art and Archaeology of the Khorat Plateau, 7th to 11th Centuries*, Singapore: National University of Singapore/SOAS University of London, 2024, 288 pages, SGD$78, ISBN 978–9813252134 (Hardback)



Religion, once viewed as an unattainable rung on Christopher Hawkes' (1954) famous ladder of interpretive inference, has become an increasingly important focus in global archeological discourse. In contrast with prehistoric belief systems, the recognizable imagery and monumentality associated with the world's "great" religions made it appear easier to study, but early efforts were typically limited to reification of events described in canonical literature. More recent efforts transitioned beyond the historical origins toward investigating how the core values of a religion manifest differently within the material record. The archeology of Buddhism, spearheaded by studies from its South Asian homeland, has witnessed a dynamic range of approaches over the past twenty years from excavation of sites associated with the historical Buddha to exploring colonial intervention and worship and regional surveys of monastic and lay evidence around Buddhist monuments. These latter studies set the stage for a new Buddhist archeology emphasizing the interconnection between different scales of data (from object to environment) and a specific interest in how the religion was practiced and evolved within its local cultural milieu. Stephen Murphy's book, an enhanced version of his 2010 dissertation, fits broadly within this discourse and represents an important milestone for Buddhist archeological investigation in mainland Southeast Asia. Through the 200-plus pages of this nicely illustrated text, the author provides a thorough review of the Buddhist remains in early historic northeast Thailand and central Laos. He is particularly commended for highlighting the unique ways the religion appeared in the Khorat Plateau, differentiating the region from the better-known contemporary polities of Dvāravatī in the central Thai plain and Zhenla/Angkor in Cambodia. Furthermore, his study is a welcome temporal shift away from the prehistoric narratives that dominate academic literature about the Khorat Plateau.

The six chapters of Murphy's treatise provides a comprehensive discussion of Buddhist materiality—sites, *sema* (boundary marker stones), statuary, and inscriptions—found within the

https://doi.org/10.69486/114.1.2026.17 © The Siam Society Under Royal Patronage

museums and landscape of the Khorat Plateau and middle Mekong. The text provides a detailed typological and scalar perspective on Buddhist religious media, particularly the decoration and content of the *sema* stones, linking their distribution to different patterns of Buddhist practice across the region. Unlike the surveys by Lars Fogelin (2006) and Julia Shaw (2007) for early Indian Buddhism, evidence of daily life such as ceramics and the plans and organizations of sites are not included as part of the discussion. This point is raised in the hope that local researchers in the future will attempt to link these important parts of the cultural system to get a more holistic view of how Buddhist monks fit within the broader lifeways of the region's lay communities.

Chapter 1 (pp. 1–40) frames the theoretical lenses of the project and introduces the reader to Buddhist art and archeology across northeast Thailand and parts of southern and central Laos. Ideas of historical ecology and landscape archeology are raised to justify the spatial inventorying of Buddhist remains, largely in relation to the main rivers and tributaries. More important to the discussion of how Buddhist practitioners organized themselves within the Khorat Plateau is the discussion of mandalas, a concept first modelled by O.W. Wolters. The second half of the chapter explains the importance of the Khorat Plateau and highlights the marginalization of this region in past research. The argument that we must think of the plateau as an important cultural setting in its own right (p. 15) and not only as a cultural thoroughfare for Dvāravatī and Angkor is incredibly salient and serves as the one of the most important takeaways in the book.

Chapter 2 (pp. 41–88) focusses on the heart of the Khorat Plateau's Buddhism in the Chi River and its relationship to the site of Mueang Fa Daet in Kalasin province. Discussions of the mandala concept and political authority here are linked to incredibly detailed narrative depictions of numerous jataka and other historical tales of the Buddha on *sema* stones. Murphy raises an important point from Peter Skilling and Robert Brown that we cannot treat jataka tales and other stories on the *sema* stones as didactic devices (p. 71), as it is uncertain whether the imagery is easily visible to monks or lay people. The significance of the images on the *sema*s are generally viewed as being imbued with the presence of the Buddha. Murphy also notes that the stylistic consistency and quality of the images is the product of an atelier or workshop. This idea of groups of skilled carvers creating specific pieces for religious centers is supported by similar studies of lintels found around Greater Angkor (Polkinghorne 2007). An issue that merits further consideration is that the kinds of stories invested in stone and the frequency and distribution of such stories are indicative of familiarity or choice. While *sema*s are transportable we must think that the craftspeople in the production centers identified are variably familiar with the Buddhist Canon. The depiction of a specific story is a choice that raises questions about whether it was chosen by the artist or commissioned by the donor. The critical issue becomes why were these stories

chosen over others? In Angkor, the rare depiction of jatakas on late 12th to 13th century-temples is dominated by the Vessantara or Viśvantara story (Tuy 2022). Was it selected specifically to enhance the munificence of the king or was it simply the most popular story at the time? Explaining the diversity of jatakas in this part of the Chi River offers a unique opportunity to explore and to address ideas of local education and donor demonstration.

Chapter 3 (pp. 89–122) moves us into the upper and lower Chi River Valley and focuses again on evidence of *semas*. Discussion here emphasizes the degree to which narrative imagery and iconic imagery predominate the assemblages in three different clusters. The jataka content and stylistic similarities with Mueang Fa Daet in Chapter 2 are seen as an indication of more direct connection with this important center. These areas show a smaller number of jatakas, decreased artistic skill, and the proliferation of stupa-*khumba* motifs, an iconic representation of the Buddhist burial mound. Murphy attributes these variations as indicating differences in belief structure and correlates this with their relative positions in the river valley. Numerous canonical interpretations are provided for the meaning of the stupa-*khumba*. A simpler answer not highlighted among them, yet possible, is that this image could demarcate a Buddhist sacred space to communities less versed in exact stories.

Chapter 4 (pp. 123–164) looks at the spatial nexus of Dvāravatī, Mueang Sema, and Khmer influences in the Mun River Valley and whether Mueang Sema, in today's Nakhon Ratchasima province, is the center of the Śrī Canāśa mandala. Here the archeological and epigraphic evidence allow for more dynamic discussions about Mueang Sema's history and its Buddhist and Hindu faiths. It also hints at marriage alliances and the site's political power in relation to Dvāravatī. Beyond Mueang Sema we see the appearance of Buddhist statuary —a form largely missing from the Chi River Valley—and a specific discussion of the famous Prakhon Chai/Plai Bat Hill bronze horde. The general lack of statues is curious and makes the reader consider if this is due to choice, technological skill, or later reuse of buddha images made in copper alloys. Regional connectivity is also indicated by the discovery of *sema* stones at Phnom Kulen in Cambodia. This *sema* tradition is used to indicate support for Buddhism by Khmer. While an intriguing connection, epigraphic records show that Buddhism was a persistent presence behind the Brahmanical veneer throughout the Angkor period (Estève 2023).

Chapter 5 (pp. 165–200) shifts northward into the Middle Mekong and again notes the coexistence of Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism along this important artery. The inventory of items is mixed into the question of pilgrimage and mountaintop retreats and intriguingly discusses examples of Buddhist use of animist rock shelters, most likely repurposing them as rainy season retreats. Interestingly, narrative representations are restricted to core sites and the jatakas here are made in a Khmer and not Mon style.

Chapter 6 (pp. 201–208) reviews the idea of Buddhist landscapes and seeks to outline how art shaped and in turn

became shaped by the cultures, societies, and environments that it encountered. The intent of asking this question is important, but the ability to answer it is, again, limited by the lack of evidence about the lay peoples and specific environmental contexts that supported these Buddhist communities. In a strange irony, the archeological record of the Khorat Plateau provides an inversion to Hawkes' ladder in that the only rung available is religion. While ideas of historical ecology and landscape were used to frame the argument at the start of the book, the ultimate connection to Buddhism imagery is proximity to rivers and their role as natural transportation corridors of ideas and people. Again, this does not diminish the impact of the volume's results but highlights the potential for generating more holistic and anthropologically oriented investigations of Buddhism in the region.

Several key takeaways of this final chapter reinforce the importance of Murphy's study. First, the Khorat Plateau has an undeniably unique Buddhist "aesthetic" centered around the ubiquitous *sema* stones. Second, the mandala concept appears to be an important organizational principle, specifically in relation to larger centers such as Mueang Fa Daet and Mueang Sema. Whether this directly relates to political or just religious structure remains to be tested. Finally, while the Khorat Plateau aesthetic is easily distinguishable from Dvāravatī and Zhenla/Angkor polities, it also shows considerable internal differentiation through the varying distribution of Buddhist imagery, workshops, and localized emphases on different types of religious media.

Like the innovative, contemporary studies in South Asia, the author successfully uses multi-scalar evidence to tease out traces of Buddhist practice and transcends traditional discussions of what type or where and how Buddhism arrived into the Khorat Plateau. The extensive descriptions of the jataka tales on *sema*s alone make this book an invaluable resource for future studies in Southeast Asia and beyond. From a production perspective, the book is beautifully illustrated with significant quantities of color images throughout. Where Murphy's work is unfortunately let down is in the labelling, content, and organization of maps and figures. Maps are labelled 1 to 8 consecutively through the book while figures are labelled according to chapter. Site references interchangeably shift from numbers to names, inconsistent spelling in Thai, and single to multiple colors, making it difficult for the reader to easily understand what they are looking at in the landscape. A similar issue can be made on the placement of figures relative to text, where some images appear pages before the reference yet there is clearly space for it on the actual page (e.g., Fig. 3.24). Minor technical issues aside, this volume is a must for anyone interested in Buddhism and a new narrative of an important, yet largely understudied region of mainland Southeast Asia.

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Eric C. Thompson, *The Story of Southeast Asia*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2024, 320 pages, SGD$28, ISBN 978–9813252349 (Paperback)



Eric C. Thompson, Associate Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the National University of Singapore, is known for his ethnographic and historical work on Malaysia, regionalism, and ASEAN. In this single, readable volume, he turns to the ambitious task of telling a long-term "story" of Southeast Asia, from the first arrival of *Homo sapiens* to the establishment of contemporary ASEAN. The stated aim is a historical anthropology of the region that keeps colonialism in view, but refuses to let it dominate the narrative, instead foregrounding longer processes of human movement, state-making, and social change through the agency of Southeast Asians.

Chapter 1, "Populating Land and Seas" (pp. 1–26), overviews how modern humans came to settle in Southeast Asia from as early as 50,000 years ago. Drawing on archeology, anthropology, and historical linguistics, Thompson sketches changing late Pleistocene and early Holocene landscapes (covering 50,000–10,000 BP) and, from 3,000 BP onwards, the spread of agriculture and the now-familiar "Out of Taiwan" model for Austronesian migrations. Individually, these mechanisms are well established in the specialist literature; the chapter's contribution places them in dialogue,

offering a clear, integrated account of early Southeast Asian lifeways for a general readership.

Chapter 2, "Hub of the World" (pp. 27–48), covers the period from roughly 500 BCE to 500 CE as an era of intensifying trade and exchange. Thompson introduces the transition into Bronze and Iron Age societies, with the appearance of more elaborate grave goods, increased indications of warfare, and the rise of entrepôts such as Funan (Oc Eo) in the Mekong Delta and Khao Sam Kaeo in the Thai–Malay Peninsula. The emphasis is less on dynastic detail than on how people, objects, and ideas circulated through maritime and overland networks, prefiguring later configurations of power.

In Chapter 3, "God Kings of the Golden Lands" (pp. 49–69), Thompson tackles the emergence of "classical" polities. The familiar mandala model provides a loose frame, but the author is careful not to let Angkor and Śrīvijaya monopolize the story. Major lowland kingdoms are set alongside smaller centers, such as Dvāravatī and various highland societies. The chapter showcases one of the book's main strengths: a thematic ordering of the Southeast Asian past that largely avoids a distracting oscillation between national histories, instead explaining shared political and cosmological frameworks across the region.

Later chapters extend this approach into the more recent past. "Power, Piety and Reformation" (Chapter 4, pp. 70–94), "Family and Gender in Flux" (Chapter 5, pp. 95–119), "Emergent Identities" (Chapter 6, pp. 120–148), and "Contesting Sovereignty" (Chapter 7, pp. 149–181) follow, respectively, religious transformations, shifts in social organization, and the formation of modern social groups, including nation-states and revolutionary movements. The final Chapter 8, "Modern Southeast Asia" (pp. 182–212), continues the thematic treatment for roughly the last two centuries, taking nationalism, education, media, urbanization, and social movements as lenses through which to view the making of our contemporary region. This culminates in a discussion of ASEAN and the ways in which regional institutions both reflect and attempt to manage Southeast Asia's diversity.

As an introductory reader on Southeast Asia, the volume succeeds admirably. Thompson's thematic chapters, each internally ordered chronologically, represent a considerable feat of brevity and breadth. He manages to compress an enormous temporal and spatial canvas into 320 pages without reducing the region to a simple sequence of dynasties or colonial interventions. The integration of archeological, textual, and ethnographic materials will be especially welcome to readers interested in bridging disciplinary divides. The long-term perspective, beginning with early humans and ending with ASEAN, usefully dislodges lingering Eurocentric habits that treat Southeast Asia as coming into focus only with European expansion.

The treatment of mainland polities and of Thailand's neighbors is particularly valuable. Thai, Khmer, Mon, and related cases recur throughout the chapters on state formation, religion, and modern politics, but are consciously set within a genuinely regional frame

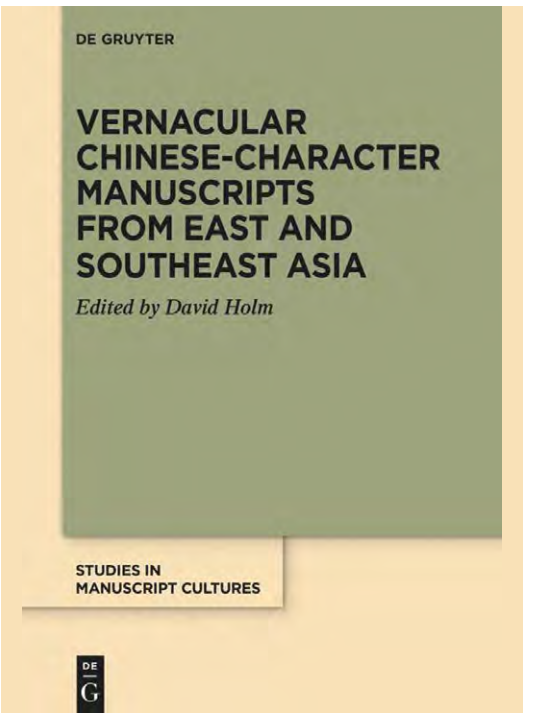
rather than isolated as self-contained national stories. The plentiful maps and figures, together with brief, up-to-date references, make the book suitable for use in undergraduate courses on Thai and Southeast Asian history or anthropology.

The very qualities that make the book so accessible, however, bring some limitations. Selectivity is inevitable: certain sub-regions, minority histories, and specialist debates receive only passing mention; some readers will no doubt find points of contention in particular summaries or emphases. Thompson himself identifies two such areas—biodiversity and medical history—that have rich histories but are not integrated into his *Story*.

These are trade-offs in an ambitious, single-volume synthesis. *The Story of Southeast Asia* offers a wide-ranging discussion and explanation of what Southeast Asia is and why the region has taken its present form. It will serve as an excellent starting point for students and non-specialists; even specialists will find much to appreciate—and to argue with—in Thompson's carefully crafted narrative.

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David Holm, ed, *Vernacular Chinese-Character Manuscripts from East and Southeast Asia*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024, 353 pages, €99.95, ISBN 978-3111382326 (Hardback)



Although manuscripts written with Chinese characters may at first seem a niche subject for scholars of Thailand and its neighboring countries, *Vernacular Chinese-Character Manuscripts from East and Southeast Asia* proves otherwise. This edited volume gathers a rich set of case studies that show how manuscripts in Chinese-derived scripts operate across multiple languages, cultures, and disciplines. Several of the eleven chapters (one introduction and ten research articles) focus on materials from Thailand, trace connections with Thai cultural and linguistic practices, or offer models that could inform future work on Thai and Tai manuscripts and other script traditions found in Thailand.[1]

The volume investigates both the shared features and the diversity of local manuscript traditions employing

[1] The digital version of the volume is freely available in open access: https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783111382746/html.

vernacular Chinese scripts—defined by David Holm in the Introduction (pp. 1–20) as adaptations of Chinese characters used to represent spoken varieties or ritual recitations distinct from standard literary Chinese. It demonstrates how communities across East and Southeast Asia, situated at different points along what Holm calls the Sino–Foreign spectrum, reshaped the writing system to meet specific ritual, social, and communicative needs.

Holm emphasizes (p. 1) that Chinese -character writing and manuscript production constitute social practices embedded in broader cultural configurations. The chapters collectively illustrate this perspective through case studies from southern China, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and the Philippines, revealing the many ways manuscript culture functions within local societies. Several contributions examine manuscripts preserved in Thailand or engage directly with Tai-speaking communities and their textual traditions.

A further strength of the volume is its sustained engagement with linguistic analysis. Three chapters, in particular, stand out for their close attention to language structure and usage. These manuscripts are not only historically significant and often preserve language varieties otherwise absent from written records; they also provide valuable methodological insights for studying languages across East and Southeast Asia and beyond.

Lien Chinfa's chapter (pp. 37–54) examines the *Folangji huaren huabu* 佛朗機化人話簿, a 17th-century collection of Spanish phrases and sentences compiled by the Hokkien diaspora in Luzon, Philippines. Following the tradition of *Sino–Foreign Glossaries* (*Huayi yiyu* 華夷譯語), this text comprises Spanish expressions and sentences including loanwords from Tagalog and Japanese, organized into eleven semantic categories. Through careful analysis of Hokkien character pronunciations, including both colloquial and literary readings, Lien convincingly demonstrates that Early Modern Spanish in the colonial Philippines retained three sibilant sounds, in contrast to the single sibilant in modern Andalusian and Latin American Spanish. This analysis exemplifies how vernacular Chinese-character manuscripts can illuminate the historical development of languages far beyond East and Southeast Asia.

Robert S. Bauer's chapter (pp. 55–96) explains the unique status of written Cantonese in Hong Kong, where it developed highly conventionalized forms without formal schooling. Meticulously analyzing the different layers of the Cantonese lexicon, the author shows how writers improvised solutions for representing colloquial speech, creating special characters for words without standard Chinese equivalents, including English loanwords. This process illuminates how other Sino–Xenic writing systems, such as Vietnamese and Japanese, developed from informal adaptations into standardized writing systems.

Shimizu Masaaki's excellent chapter (pp. 97–114) examines *the Foshuo tiandi bayang jing* 佛説天地八陽經, a Classical Chinese and Vietnamese Chữ Nôm manuscript now at Kyoto University. Through philological, grammatological, and phonological analyses, Shimizu

dates the text to the 19th century and locates its dialect in central or southern Vietnam. The grammatological evidence includes late-period Chữ Nôm character usage, while phonological features show distinctive central-southern consonant patterns. Lexical items trace southward from Nghệ An province. Beyond textual analysis, microscopic examination of the manuscript's paper composition reveals a high proportion of bamboo fiber typical of pre-20th-century materials. These multiple lines of evidence consistently date the manuscript to the 19th century and locate its dialect in central or southern Vietnam. This chapter skillfully weaves together linguistic, philological, and material analysis to illuminate the complex nature of vernacular Chinese-character manuscripts.

Another notable strength of the volume is its presentation of materials that have rarely been studied. Four chapters stand out in this respect. Though the manuscripts they examine come from different linguistic and cultural contexts, each contribution not only brings these little-known sources to light but also offers thoughtful analysis of their contents, enriched by careful phonological and grammatological discussion.

Henning Klöter's chapter (pp. 21–36) introduces Early Written Hokkien dictionaries and grammar guides compiled by Spanish missionaries in 16th and 17th-century Philippines. While examining how these sources reveal the spread and status of written Hokkien, the author speculates that semi-literate Chinese scribes wrote Min dialect characters following popular usage rather than scholarly conventions. The chapter opens new paths for future research into this invaluable diasporic material which is unique for the study of historical interactions between vernacular Chinese culture and the cultures of the host territories and the colonial presence.

Chen Meiwen's chapter (pp. 115–148) takes a sociological approach to Yao manuscripts in Western collections, examining their classification and circulation. She traces how these texts reached institutions worldwide through art dealers, researcher donations, and direct collection from Yao villages for digitization. Significantly, the author identifies three forms of textual transmission in Yao religious manuscripts: faithful copies of Daoist texts, indigenous content under Daoist frameworks, and incorporated folk songs. This analysis reveals how local elements influence Yao written traditions, particularly the intertextual relationships between folk songs and ritual texts. Her attention to variations in language, customs, and writing practices among different Yao groups is especially valuable given that many manuscripts in library and museum collections lack provenance information.

Next, Jacob Cawthorne (pp. 149–190) examines Kim Mun letters as valuable yet understudied primary sources for understanding history, politics, and religion in the China–Southeast Asia borderlands. As with religious manuscripts, these letters employ three languages written in Chinese script: vernacular, literary, and ritual languages, with the latter two being varieties of Chinese. The chapter offers clear com-

parisons between these three languages while documenting variations in literary language pronunciation across Yao communities. Through detailed analysis of manuscript passages, Cawthorne demonstrates how these letters provide rich insights into regional history, geography, economy, religion, and traditions. Beyond factual documentation, they capture individual and community perspectives shaped by lived experiences, revealing not just historical events but their emotional and social impact on communities.

Meng Yuanyao's chapter (pp. 243–280) introduces the manuscripts of "Song of the Brigands", a widely circulated Zhuang song text from west-central Guangxi in China. His richly detailed survey reveals remarkable variation across content, physical characteristics (appearance, size, materials, paper), calligraphic style, script usage, and performance practices. For analyzing and editing Zhuang traditional texts written in vernacular Chinese characters (*sawndip* or "raw characters"), he recommends a field linguistics approach, emphasizing close collaboration with manuscript owners and presenting translations in interlinear format. His first-hand experience offers practical guidance for researchers beginning work on Zhuang vernacular texts and manuscripts.

In addition, three compelling chapters examine cultural practices surrounding vernacular Chinese-character manuscripts. Though diverse in focus —ranging from intergenerational transmission of reading knowledge to traditional papermaking and the logic and ethnography of secret ritual language—they all underscore how these manuscripts are woven into their cultural traditions.

Joseba Estévez (pp. 191–242) analyzes how Lanten (Kim Mun) ritual masters in northern Laos use manuscripts containing "secret words" to fetch the *hon* (ธอน) or vital force of rice in their Daoist ceremonies. With rich ethnographic detail, the chapter meticulously documents how ritual masters employ these words to retrieve rice's wandering *hon*, guide it earthward, and install it in the fields. Understanding this process requires knowledge of oral traditions circulating through Lanten communities. Through careful translation and interpretation, Estévez unveils the metaphors, grammar, motifs, and themes of the ritual text, offering a window into the Lanten magical world. As he notes (p. 236), ritual experts' explanations were essential for decoding these living manuscripts. His systematic analysis of text and ritual context also reveals intriguing parallels between *hon* and the Tai concept of *khwan* (ขวัญ; Lao, *khouan,* ຂວັນ), which share the same religious and etymological root.

Meng Yuanyao's second chapter (pp. 281–300) documents traditional papermaking in Zhuang-speaking villages of central Guangxi, detailing how paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) is transformed into manuscript paper. His vivid documentation not only details the technical processes but also records local language terms for materials and techniques. This meticulous attention to both practice and terminology enables comparative insights: the process shows clear cultural and linguistic connections to *sa* (สา; Lao, *sa,* ສາ) paper traditions among Tai groups in upper mainland Southeast Asia, including northern

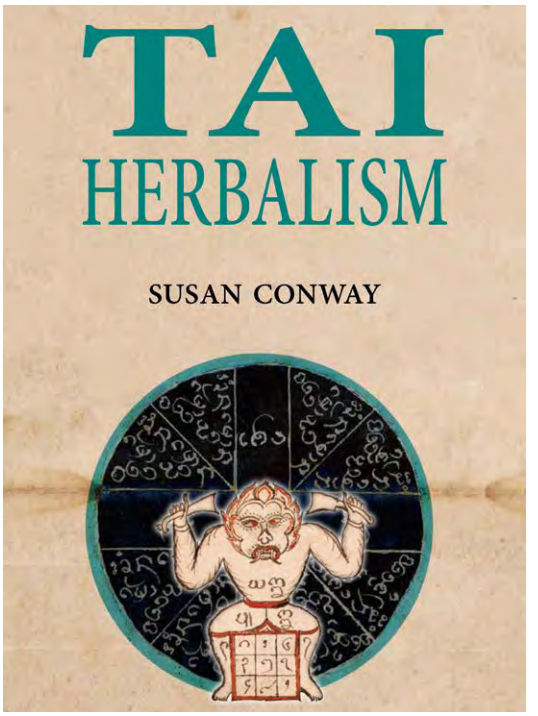
Thailand, suggesting the deep historical roots of papermaking among Tai-speaking peoples.

Finally, Holm's chapter (pp. 301–330) examines diverse literacy transmission practices among Tày, Nùng, and Zhuang communities in southwestern China and northern Vietnam. He identifies four distinct modes: performative literacy of vernacular priests (*mogong*), where recitation involves minimal reading; ritual masters' textual practices using mature vernacular script; literate traditions of Tày shamanic practitioners (*then*), featuring female priests' performative orality; and song text literacy transmitted through family or master–student relationships, using simplified characters for singing competitions. His rich fieldwork vividly documents how various text genres are transmitted across generations. Significantly, Holm presents a rigorous methodological approach that combines broad research with philological and linguistic analysis to understand manuscripts in their living social contexts. The author advocates moving beyond script-language relationships to document traditional recitation practices and cultural contexts, suggesting that digitized manuscripts can facilitate meaningful discussions with knowledgeable community members.

Collectively, these diverse chapters represent a significant advance in the study of vernacular Chinese-character manuscripts. While Thailand has a rich tradition of manuscript studies, the emergence of Tai manuscript culture as a distinct field is relatively recent. This volume stands out for the exceptional quality of its individual contributions and its remarkable integration of multiple disciplines. Notably, while linguistic analysis is often perceived as inaccessible and removed from humanities research, here it is seamlessly woven throughout most chapters, demonstrating how different methodological approaches can enrich one another. This successful interdisciplinary integration makes important contributions to Thai and Tai manuscript studies by introducing understudied materials, opening new research directions, offering methodological recommendations, and connecting this field to broader manuscript culture scholarship.

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Susan Conway, *Tai Herbalism*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2024, 104 pages, ฿625, ISBN 978–6162152054 (Paperback)



Tai Herbalism is based on a translation of an early 19th-century Shan manuscript used by specialist traditional medical practitioners. Because Tai medical traditions beyond those of central Thailand have received relatively little attention, this publication is a welcome addition, with the potential to shed light on Shan practice and, more broadly, on Tai traditional medicine.

Across present-day Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and China, Tai peoples maintain long-standing beliefs and practices related to health and healing. Their medical traditions draw on pills and herbal potions, massage, ritual and symbolic techniques, and spells, administered by lay and specialist healers. Texts recorded on palm leaves, *kradat khoi* or mulberry paper (กระดาษข่อย), and inscriptions—such as those at Wat Phra Chetuphon (Wat Pho)—circulate widely. While some explain theories of illness, most preserve recipes for medicinal compounds prepared from herbs, animal substances, and minerals.

Because these fragile materials had to be recopied, errors, omissions, and rearrangements inevitably occurred. Sections could be lost, detached, or inserted in the wrong place; intentional destruction, especially during warfare, also took its toll. Medical manuscripts were sometimes carried off as spoils, as after the sack of Ayutthaya in 1767. Surviving texts therefore often reflect a complex mélange, with uncertain provenance and unclear intellectual genealogy. Susan Conway's manuscript must be read within this broader history.

The manuscript used for *Tai Herbalism* is held at London's Horniman Museum and was collected by Frederick Horniman (1835–1906) in British Burma around 1860. In good condition, it comprises an accordion-style mulberry paper book of 174 pages, written mainly in old Shan with some Tai Yuan, Burmese, and Tai Khun letters, and appears to have been compiled for specialist practitioners. Today, very few people are able to read it. Its translation into modern Shan required the collaboration of three Shan supernatural experts or *saya* (ꩮꩡ), one of whom remains unnamed. This modern Shan version was then rendered into English by a professional Shan translator based in Chiang Mai, also left anonymous, rather than by Conway herself. Yet the published book presents

largely a summary, rather than a full critical edition and translation. In this respect, the question of authorship and scholarly responsibility becomes difficult to determine.

The original manuscript is mostly lists of ailments and prescriptions, with about ten pages of mystical diagrams (*yantra*s) accompanied by spells (*katha*s). Conway has organized these materials into thematic chapters. The presentation is clear, with photographs of selected pages and all the *yantra*s, a list of spells, a glossary, a brief bibliography, and an index of *materia medica* with Latin names. As the author notes, not every ingredient could be rendered into English.

The book will no doubt appeal to tourists and casual readers, but what additional scholarly value does it offer? One stated goal is to preserve connections to endangered languages and scripts. However, publication solely in English severely limits access for Shan readers. While the book raises awareness of Shan medical heritage, it cannot do much more without bilingual presentation and sustained annotation designed for contemporary audiences.

A second objective is to illuminate 19th-century Shan herbalism and magico-religious healing. Here the insights remain partial. The text shows what conditions were treated and what remedies prescribed, but it rarely explains why particular ingredients were chosen. A complex fever treatment, for example, mixes spices, opium, seeds, and bear bile (p. 17), yet no rationale—pharmacological, symbolic, or ritual—is discussed. Moreover, names appear only in English, without Shan transliteration, greatly limiting comparison with other Shan manuscripts or related Tai traditions (cf. Bamber 1998).

This points to a more general limitation: the book engages only lightly with existing research on Tai medicine. Beyond citing Brun & Schumacher's foundational study of northern Thai healing, it overlooks important works such as Jean Mulholland (1987)'s analyzes of central Thai *materia medica* and prescription practices. Such scholarship could have helped interpret the manuscript and situate Shan medicine within wider Tai conceptions of illness and therapy.

A third justification concerns biodiversity. The text records plants and animals once available to healers, from rhinoceros blood and pangolin liver to tiger and vulture gall bladders. Many of these species are now rare or gone. Yet the index lists only English and Latin plant names, complicating precise identification, and there is no guarantee the ingredients were locally sourced. Given historic links between the Shan States, Lan Na, and Ayutthaya, the prescriptions themselves may have circulated widely. At best, the manuscript offers a broad, indirect glimpse of past environments.

The absence of cross-references between the index and individual prescriptions further limits analysis. Without knowing which plants treat which disorders—and without Shan terminology—comparisons with work in Laos and southwest China on therapeutic efficacy, ethnobotany, and environmental relationships are difficult.

One of the most engaging sections of the book concerns magic, protection, and the supernatural. Here the author

draws on earlier publications (Conway 2014) and her informants to discuss *yantra*, *katha*s, and remedies against spirits, ghosts, and witches, themes also noted by Mulholland (1987: 113). Unfortunately, we learn little about how *yantra*s were actually used: tattooed on bodies, printed on cloth, or hung in homes and sickrooms?

Given the scarcity of sources and specialists, any study of Shan medicine is valuable. *Tai Herbalism* offers an evocative glimpse of a fragile tradition and the world from which it emerged. Yet its potential is constrained by summaries in place of full translations, opaque authorship, limited engagement with existing scholarship, and insufficient contextual discussion. The result is, at times, frustrating: a fascinating work that nevertheless feels like a missed opportunity to deepen our understanding of Shan—and more broadly Tai—medical knowledge.

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Thomas Baudinette, *Boys Love Media in Thailand: Celebrity, Fans, and Transnational Asian Queer Popular Culture*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023, 248 pages, £85, ISBN 978–1350330641 (Hardback)



Walk into any bookstore across Thailand and, more than likely, the most prominently displayed section will be devoted to "youth fiction": novels with cover illustrations of attractive young male couples. This genre, called "Boys Love" or simply "BL", is a form of pop cultural fiction representing romantic and sexual relationships between young men.

The genre began in 1970s Japan as illustrated manga novellas. BL first came to Thailand in the 1990s as pirate translations of Japanese BL manga. However, over the past two decades, the popularity of BL in Thailand has exploded, expanding from manga to novels and television series. Thomas Baudinette's *Boys Love Media in Thailand* is a meticulous study based on extensive research in Thailand and online. This highly accessible book is essential reading for anyone interested in learning what BL is about and how major Thai media corporations and state agencies have taken roles in its development.

Thai BL is not a minority or subaltern cultural form. After Thai cultural conservative criticisms in the early 2000s, in the 2010s and early 2020s, BL moved from the margins to the center of Thai youth cultures and commercial media production. The language of Thai BL has also moved from the world of its fans to become part of mainstream popular discourse. In Thai, BL novels are now widely known as *nawaniyai wai* (นวนิยาย-วาย) or "Y novels", while BL TV series are called *siri wai* (ซีรีส์วาย) "Y series" or *lakhon wai* (ละครวาย) "Y soap operas". *Wai* here denotes the letter "Y", refering to the first letter of the roman script spelling of *yaoi*, a popular Japanese word for BL.[1] Thai female fans of BL are called *sao wai* (สาววาย), "Y girls".

Boys Love Media in Thailand is the first book in Bloomsbury's new monograph series, *Asian Celebrity and Fandom Studies*. The inauguration of this series reflects the importance of media celebrities and their fans in the 21st century and the rise of scholarly analyses, theories,

[1] *Yaoi* is a humorous acronym formed from the first letters of a common early expression for BL manga among Japanese female fans, *yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* ("no climax, no point, no meaning") and which referred to how the genre emphasized sex more than romance. In Japan, fans and scholars write *yaoi* in several ways. Depending on the context, the word is written in Roman script or *romaji* as *yaoi*, in *Hiragana* as やおい, or as the numerical code 801, where the numbers respectively refer to the three Japanese phonemes *ya*, *o*, and *i*.

and university departments of media and cultural studies. Commercial mass media—including printed media of the press, manga, and books as well as visual media of cinema, television, and online digital platforms—are major cultural phenomena, the focus of rapidly expanding media industries, and of interest to government agencies keen to promote soft power.

The book's cover design includes a reverse or mirror image of the Thai word *chai* (ชาย), "man" or "male", effecting a visual queering of Thai discourses of masculinity resonating with the theoretical queering developed in the book's analyses. Queering is the analytical practice of challenging dominant notions of masculine and feminine gendering and heteronormative ideas of sexual "normalcy", pointing to the historical contingency of notions of gender and sexuality in cultural patterns rather than nature or biology.

Baudinette's academic training is in Japanese studies; his first book (Baudinette 2021), based on his doctoral dissertation, studied gay cultures in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ni-chōme nightlife district. His expertise in several Asian languages, including Japanese and Thai, and his background in Asian cultural studies enable him to draw on a wealth of sources and to place the origins and success of Thai BL in a broad setting. For the volume under review, Baudinette interviewed people working in the Thai media industry and actors in Thai BL series, attended organized fan events, and analyzed selected BL TV series, websites, and advertising. Combining these sources brings the dimensions of both the production and consumption of Thai BL alive.

The book's Introduction (pp. 13–41) summarizes the origins of BL in Japan and its spread across Asia, including a useful glossary of key terms used by fans and the rapidly expanding academic field of BL studies. Baudinette describes how in both Japan and Thailand, as well as across Asia and the rest of the world, the main audiences for BL manga, novels, and TV series are young women. Many Thai BL TV series are based on novels by female authors, which are often first distributed online before publication by commercial presses. While BL finds fans among some gay men, it is not usually understood as a genre of gay fiction. Rather, BL draws on accounts of romance between handsome young men to fashion imagined relationships that attract many female readers and audiences. The active role of fans' imagination in the success of BL is made clear from the fact that they often engage in "shipping", abbreviated from "relationshipping", which describes imagining male characters or actors in romantic relationships. In Thai, these imagined same-sex couples are called *khu–jin* (คู่จิ้น), from *khu* for "couple" and *jin* derived from *jintanakan* (จินตนาการ), "to imagine" or "imagination".

Chapter 1 (pp. 42–75) traces the origins of Thai BL TV series from underground pirated translations of Japanese BL manga in the 1990s to the impact of the highly popular 2007 Thai movie *Love of Siam* or *Rak haeng siam* (รักแห่งสยาม; director Chookiat Sakveerakul), depicting the romance of two teenage Bangkok schoolboys. Baudinette also documents early Thai BL TV series such as *Lovesick, the Series*, which was broadcast in 2014.[2] Many Thai BL TV

[2] The Thai name for this series was *Rak wun wairun*

series have been broadcast on digital channels or online via internet platforms such as YouTube. Online broadcasting means these series can be viewed almost anywhere in the world, allowing them to reach international audiences. The Covid-19 pandemic brought about an even larger audience. Many new fans serendipitously came across Thai BL as they scanned the internet in search of entertainment during lockdowns. Colleagues of mine teaching Thai studies in Europe have related that in recent years many undergraduate students enrolling in Thai language programs have been drawn to Thai because they are fans of Thai BL. In addition, Thai BL is nurturing an up-and-coming generation of *farang* scholars; indeed this genre of fiction may prove a seeding ground for the future of Thai area studies in Europe and elsewhere.

Chapter 2 (pp. 76–106) describes how Thai authors and production companies adapted the tropes of Japanese BL to the Thai context. Baudinette argues that Thai BL is a hybrid phenomenon merging Japanese forms of the genre with the aesthetics and commercial organization of Korean K-pop. To this blend, distinctively Thai elements have been added. Because of Thai BL's innovative development of the Japanese form of BL, which many fans saw as stereotypically repeating formulaic plots and reflecting conservative gender values, Baudinette contends that Thai BL took Asian youth cultures by storm and found new audiences in Europe and Latin America. Overall, the BL genre achieved transformative potential by adapting to settings outside Japan. While constrained by the commercial strictures of Thailand's media production companies, the involvement of large numbers of Thai LGBTQ+ people in the production of these TV series has given Thai BL an edgier tone attractive to audiences looking for more challenging representations and story lines. Finally, one of Baudinette's interviewees observed that Thai BL has proven to be more attractive to gay male audiences than Japanese BL given the latter's formulaic character. Thai BL has also expanded in a commercial setting where the economic potential of young female and queer consumers is recognized by the country's major media and marketing companies. Homoerotic images are no longer widely regarded as taboo but are mobilized to promote products and the careers of young male stars.

Chapter 3 (pp. 107–137) gives a behind-the-scenes view of how the media and marketing company GMM Grammy has produced Thai BL TV series and manufactured male actors as celebrity idols. Baudinette describes GMM Grammy as a "boys love machine" that produces celebrity male actors through carefully tailored schooling in acting, fan meetings, and product placement advertising in series episodes. Many male actors in Thai BL series have become multimedia stars whose faces adorn advertisements for cosmetics and lifestyle products and who engage in promotional events where they meet fans in Thailand and across East and Southeast Asia. The production of Thai BL series also built on media companies' well-honed skills in producing television soap opera melodramas, often called *lakhon TV* (ละครทีวี).

saep (รักวุ่น วัยรุ่นแสบ; "Confusing Love, Mischievous Teens"). Thai movies and TV series are often given different, unrelated Thai and English titles.

Baudinette observes, "GMM's business model has rested on the mainstreaming of queer romance due to a recognition of the market potential of *sao wai* [female fans] rather than a commitment to queer representation" (p. 104). He nonetheless argues that while the male actors in Thai BL series may not be gay, the significance of the genre has influenced the ways same-sex desire is depicted in Thai popular culture. While highly commercialized and intimately tied to marketing and advertising, Thai BL TV series contribute to debates on the status of queer people in Thailand. Some BL series actors publicly called for the legalization of same-sex marriage in the lead-up to the mid-2024 passing of the marriage equality law by the Thai parliament. Baudinette states that the influence of Thai BL in opening space for greater social acceptance of queer people shows that "Asia has the agency to narrate its own accounts of queer emancipation without relying on Western European or North American models" (p. 183).

Chapter 4 (pp. 138–165) details the highly successful marketing strategies of the GMM Grammy media production company in organizing ticketed events where the *khu–jin* stars of BL series perform live on stage, meet fans in person, and promote the sale of branded merchandise bearing the names and images of stars. Chapter 5 (pp. 166–193) traces how Thai BL began its global expansion beyond Thailand's borders among fan communities in China and the Philippines.

The adaptation of Japanese homoerotic manga by Thai female authors and fans, and the commercialization of this reformulated genre by Thai media production companies on the model of South Korean popular culture, has created a phenomenon that has proved tremendously attractive to young audiences across the world. Is it any wonder, as Baudinette notes in Chapter 6 (pp. 194–219), that Thai government agencies have taken note and attempted to capitalize on this phenomenon to promote Thailand as a tourist destination for BL fans? In this regard, Baudinette contends that existing theories of soft power have overlooked the potential of mid-ranking countries like Thailand to project cultural influence internationally. This is because these theories have assumed that soft power is only an adjunct to the political and economic power of globally dominant countries such as Japan or the United States.

The Thai BL wave shows no signs of receding. This was brought home to me by the large number of Thai publishers selling BL *nawaniyai wai* novels at recent Bangkok Book Fairs in 2023 and 2024. Increasing numbers of Thai and international scholars are also studying Thai BL and its influence beyond the country. In 2023, a special issue of the online journal *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* was dedicated to studies of Thai BL by Thai scholars. Perusal of the many new Thai academic journals that have blossomed over the past decade will also reveal articles on Thai BL.

A minor gripe, not with Baudinette but with his publisher, Bloomsbury Academic, is that his marvelous book is expensive. It is a pity that many Thai scholars, students, and fans of BL

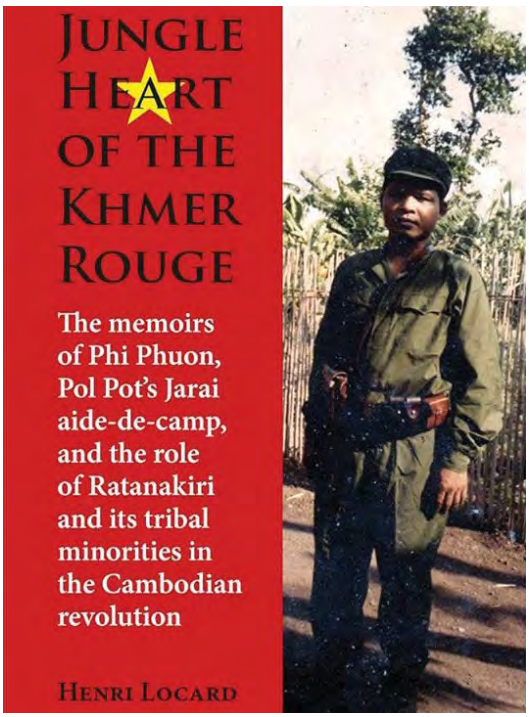
will not be able to afford this book and Baudinette's important findings may not have as much of an impact in the country's academy as they deserve. I hope that a more affordable edition and a translated Thai version are published soon. Nonetheless, this book provides an essential key to understanding the complex networks of Thai youth cultures in the 2020s, revealing the history, evolution, and trajectories of a major cultural phenomenon in contemporary Thailand.

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Henri Locard, *Jungle Heart of the Khmer Rouge: The Memoirs of Phi Phuon, Pol Pot's Jarai Aide-de-Camp, and the Role of Ratanakiri and Its Tribal Minorities in the Cambodian Revolution*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2023, 374 pages, €27.99, ISBN 978–8776943240 (Paperback)



Few academic books are fully dedicated to the Jarai; one of the most numerous and historically fascinating ethnic minority groups straddling the northeast of Cambodia and the central highlands of Vietnam. This book—focusing on arguably the most prominent Jarai individual who served in the Khmer Rouge regime—is a significant addition to the literature on ethnic minorities and the ways their history becomes intertwined in the darkest chapter of Cambodia's recent past.

The book has three main parts. Part I (pp. 3–54), Introduction, delves into the Khmer Rouge regime and the ways in which author, Henri Locard, came to Ratanakiri and, in 2001, met Phi Phuon, the former bodyguard to Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot (1925–1998). Part II (pp. 43–202), the largest section, centers on Phi Phuon's memoirs covering nearly four decades of his life, thirty of those years dedicated to the revolutionary cause alone.

The book's third part (pp. 203–310) brings additional materials from the

extraordinary chambers in the courts of Cambodia where Phi Phuon testified. This section also includes the author's analysis of Ratanakiri's role in shaping the Khmer Rouge's societal ideals. The book concludes with three vignettes in the Epilogue (pp. 311–325) bringing together a high-profile wedding in Phnom Malay where Phi Phuon had been appointed Deputy Governor in 1997, Phi Phuon's sudden death, and Ratanakiri's desolated social, cultural, and physical landscape.

Phi Phuon's memoirs tell the extraordinary life of a seemingly ordinary Jarai adolescent, who started as one of Pol Pot's servants but slowly climbed the ranks and was eventually entrusted with safety and logistics at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the height of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979). While in charge of security, he explained that he travelled to the provinces between 1977 and 1978 and reported to the "upper echelon".

Phi Phuon recounts how, in many cooperatives, people were given barely any food and that they were mistreated. Faithful to the cause and to Pol Pot himself, he attributed the fault to the local leaders of the cooperatives: "But what I saw was not really the same as what was agreed" (p. 225) for the Revolution. At the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, Phi Phuon, known for his frank and direct nature, testified that he reported what he saw to Pol Pot (Brother Number One) and Ieng Sary (third in command). Reflecting on his survival, he admitted "one could say that I managed to slip through the net" (p. 194).

Phi Phuon's memoirs provide the reader with one individual's personal experience, rendered at times in surprising levels of detail, on a particularly complex and bloody period half a century ago. Phi Phuon's proximity to a Khmer Rouge leadership that operated largely in the shadows offers a distinct and sometimes illuminating perspective. For the same reason, it inevitably has its limitations as an objective account of a regime whose appalling crimes with which no one wants to be associated.

Henri Locard extensively used the services of Suong Sikoeun (for French to Khmer and Khmer to French translations) to carry out all his interviews. This dependence raises serious issues concerning Phi Phuon's singular vantage point. Suong Sikoeun, a Paris educated Khmer Rouge intellectual who also worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1977–1979), was a former assistant to Pol Pot. As with other former Khmer Rouge officials, Sikoeun claimed that he was unaware of the scale of the executions and other crimes the party that he served perpetuated against the population. I once accompanied Henri Locard to one of his meetings with Phi Phuon, which took place at Suong Sikoeun's house and remember the host as a very charismatic man, who indulged himself in speaking, and particularly, in speaking in perfect French.

A related point is how Locard implies that all his visits to interview Phi Phuon were public events that attracted locals' attention: "During my investigation, I was always surrounded by a crowd,

and it was difficult to get biographical information from my interlocutors" (p. 299). It is perhaps not surprising that in a remote village of Banteay Meanchey near the Thai–Cambodian border, such interviews may have triggered the local curiosity and interest. Either way, that Phi Phuon may have done much of his reminiscing before an audience of neighbors (and possibly former subjects of his deputy governorship) raises further questions about whether one can take all his claims at face value.

The account of Phi Phuon's life provides an entry point for Henri Locard's exploration of ethnic minorities in Cambodia and Ratanakiri's privileged role in contributing to the Revolution. The author writes, "In a way, *Angkar* wanted to turn the country into a great Ratanakiri and return to what the Revolutionary Organization considered the pre-feudal and pre-capitalist era, annihilating 2,000 years of Khmer history [...]" (p. 299).

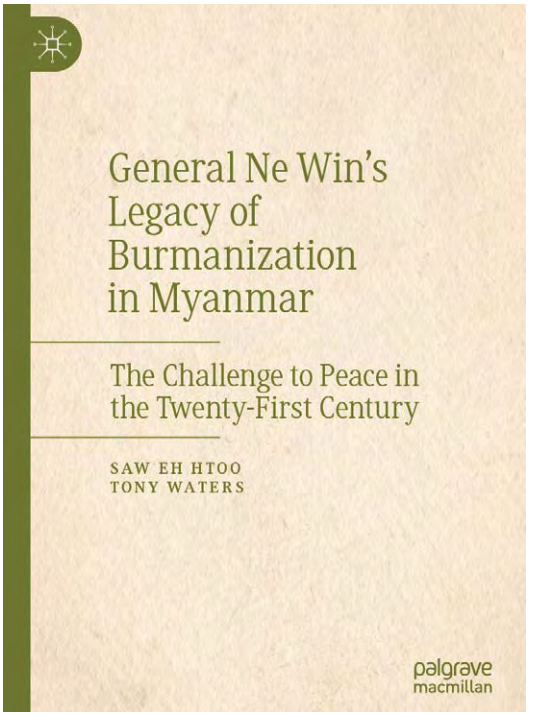
Although Pol Pot was, indeed, initially enthused by the loyalty, discipline, and physical strength of ethnic minorities, it is telling that none were given a decision-making position in shaping the Revolution. In stark contrast with the autonomy, vibrancy, and elevation of traditional rites and customs of Jarai communities, the Khmer Rouge regime was all about centralising control and erasing individual and communal expression and culture. The regime's signature policy was massive, forced collectivization in pursuit of a vision steeped in xenophobia. Its intention was to arrive at a form of Communist utopia far faster than other Marxist regimes. All forms of spirituality, religions, and languages were banned. It is hard to see much of this as a reflection of Ratanakiri. This is even true of the Ratanakiri of the early 1970s where the Khmer Rouge leadership first went to hide and subsequently came to exercise control and influence prior to their takeover of the whole country in April 1975.

Among the book's strengths is that it introduces an array of voices to illustrate the complex ways in which various ethnic groups were caught in the conflict. It also brings together some materials from the Extraordinary Chambers in the courts of Cambodia that take the reader straight into the heart of the tribunal.

Amidst the wealth of autobiographies and memoirs written about the Khmer Rouge regime, only a few have been written by former Khmer Rouge cadres or leaders. Khieu Samphan's *L'histoire récente du Cambodge et mes prises de position*, originally published in 2004, is one prominent example. Another is the book by Suong Sikoeun whose 2013 publication, *Itinéraire d'un intellectuel Khmer Rouge,* is also published in French. As the first such English account from a Khmer Rouge official from an Indigenous minority, Phi Phuon's memoirs are an intriguing addition.

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Saw Eh Htoo & Tony Waters, *General Ne Win's Legacy of Burmanization in Myanmar: The Challenge to Peace in the Twenty-First Century*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 225 pages, US$129.99, ISBN 978–9819712694 (Hardback)



What a story this book tells! It opens with an almost Hollywood-like plot: a boy from a repressed minority in the remote countryside manages to become a self-made man. He secures an education on his own in the challenging environment of the country's largest city (back then the capital), dominated by a majority ethnic group unfriendly to his. All of this occurs under a military dictatorship, failed rebellion, and unsuccessful protests. Against all odds, he becomes a sought-after contractor for international NGOs, taking him into no-go areas of his country. He survives the military dictatorship, the democratic transformation, another coup, and COVID. As an expert with a rich personal life, he decides to transform his insider knowledge into a PhD. Unfortunately, unlike Hollywood movies, there is no happy ending; he dies prematurely from cancer.

Luckily, there is a sort of redeeming sequel. Our hero's PhD supervisor, a distinguished visiting American professor in Germany who values his student's work, knows how underrepresented non-Western Burma-related voices are in the global academia. Believing that Eh Htoo's thesis is groundbreaking, the professor decides to resurrect the languishing dissertation. He edits the text from its rough drafts, finds a reputable publisher, and adds his (modest) contribution. In doing so, the professor does justice to Eh Htoo's ideas, saving them from oblivion. The protagonist described here is the late Saw Eh Htoo, a Karen from Yangon, Myanmar, the professor is Tony Waters, and the book is *General Ne Win's Legacy of Burmanization in Myanmar*.

Let us be honest—academic books are often dry and hermetic in style. Self-aware authors usually try to capture the reader's attention at the start, knowing that it may be difficult to hold it later. In contrast, Saw Eh Htoo and Tony Waters do not have this problem. Thanks to Eh Htoo's compelling story, the book secures a "wow" effect from its beginning. Once you start reading *Burmanization in Myanmar*, you want to continue—the reader's attention is instantly captured.

Naturally, as the book progresses, it shifts from personal memoir to an academic exploration of Burmanization —a brutal yet unsuccessful policy aimed

at assimilating all non-Bamars into a Bamar-centric nation. This policy, initiated during General Ne Win's rule (military dictator from 1962 to 1988), is the book's focus. Since Eh Htoo lived through this era—he was educated with propagandist school textbooks—and subsequent military and quasi-military regimes, he possessed something invaluable: insider knowledge. This is the book's strength. For example, Eh Htoo introduces the concept of "the armed royal state" (*le net nainggan taw*, လက်နက်နိုင်ငံတော်, p. 170), showing how military-ruled Myanmar continues the traditions of pre-modern Burmese kingdoms ruled by warrior kings. He also describes the military doctrine of "total elimination" (*a pyaut taik yey*, အပျောက်တိုက်ရေး, p. 96), rooted in the militarized need for security, alongside alternative policies such as "assimilation" (*taingyintha si long nyi nyunt yay*, တိုင်းရင်းသား စည်းလုံးညီညွတ်ရေး, p. 112) or "accommodation" (*nayyar pay thi ah mat phut chin*, နေရာပေးသိအမှတ်ပြုခြင်း, p. 115). His analysis of Bamar "chauvinism" (*maha lu myo*, မဟာလူမျိုး or "superior race", p. 137), also known as "Burmese [or rather Bamar] dominance" (*bamar baho phyu*, ဗမာဗဟိုပြု, p. 26), is equally insightful.

The merit of Eh Htoo's research does not exactly lie in the novelty of this information—it was already known in Burma studies, even if not universally—but rather that a Burmese person wrote it, using indigenous concepts and terms from a domestic perspective. This insider view carries more weight than even the most well-informed observations of foreign scholars.

A particularly good example of the value of Eh Htoo's approach is his analysis of the Burmese Way to Socialism (BWS), the official ideology of the Ne Win regime, usually written off in the West as window dressing for military rule. Eh Htoo notes that the regime inserted Buddhism into its philosophy as a way to distinguish itself from the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), the capitalist West, and Christian and Muslim communities. Seen from this angle, BWS appears less illogical and more reasonable. Tony Waters adds to this analysis with irony: "Ne Win's philosophers were not writing for a critical audience of comparative political scientists, but for the Burmese masses, who were susceptible to a righteous ideology that protected them against their enemies and fears" (p. 123).

Eh Htoo's sharp observation of politicized Buddhism after 1962 is another highlight. While Buddhism traditionally places obligations on both rulers and ruled, Eh Htoo points out that "under Ne Win's Burmanization program, the teachings of the Buddha for leaders have been somehow omitted; monks do not typically mention moral teaching for the monarch in their sermons in the post-1962 world" (p. 205).

Another strength of Eh Htoo's work is his ability to combine this insider's view with knowledge drawn from academic literature. He uses both Burmese and English sources, including military memoirs and other primary materials. Importantly, he does not just recount his personal experiences; he places them within the broader context. For example, inspired by Thongchai Winichakul's seminal *Siam Mapped* (1st ed., 1994), Eh Htoo theorizes that at the heart of Burmanization is the Tatmadaw's (Myanmar's army) "sanctity

of the borders inherited from the British" (p. 175). This distinction between precolonial kingdoms, relatively indifferent to borders (compare with the well-known concepts of "mandala system" or "galactic polity"), and the postcolonial state's focus on rigid boundaries reflects a colonial legacy.

I also enjoyed Eh Htoo's use of vivid expressions like "Ne Winism" (his proposed term for Ne Win's rule, p. 12) and "Machismo of ethnic militarism" (his description of the generals' style, p. 203). His humour shines through in lines such as, "I also enjoyed reading Moscow-published socialist novels which were widely available. The English translations were clear and concise, so some of my English education was based on Communist ideology!" (p. 7). These details make Eh Htoo someone you would love to converse with over tea—or something stronger! —in a Burmese teahouse.

To this rich personal narrative, Tony Waters adds academic rigor and theoretical depth. His sociological introduction to Part III (pp. 179–204) is probably the second-best part of the book (after Eh Htoo's memoir Introduction). It provides an academically sound overview of Myanmar's structural problems and proposes ways to resolve them through three interlinked narratives: de-Burmanization, de-militarization, and decentralization. Waters's Conclusion (pp. 209–218), summarizing the state of knowledge in Burma studies calling for more indigenous-centric research and asking vital questions, is equally noteworthy.

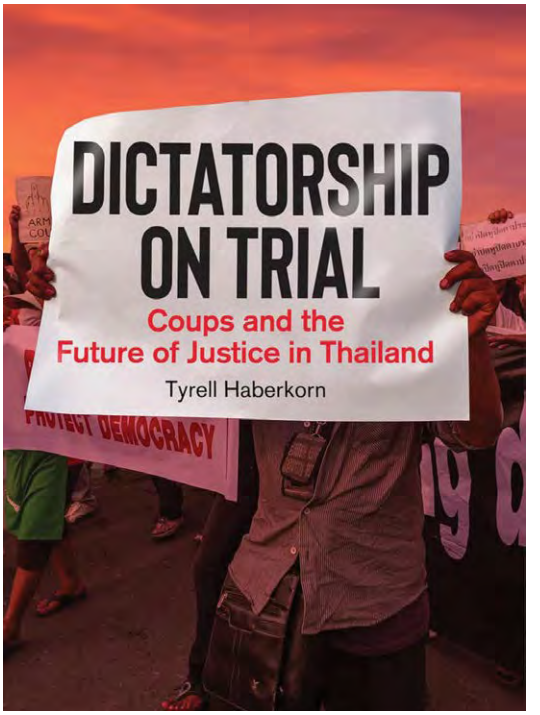
While the personal circumstances behind this book's creation evoke sympathy, this cannot excuse some serious flaws. The first and foremost handicap is the lack of fact-checking. For an academic monograph, the number of factual errors is troubling. For example, U Nu was not the President of independent, postcolonial Burma, but the Prime Minister in office intermittently between 1948 and 1962. Similarly, U Saw was not the President of colonial Burma—the title did not even exist—but the Prime Minister (in office, 1940–1942). Conversely, in 1988 Maung Maung was the President of the Socialist Union of Burma, not the Prime Minister. Aung San never was Prime Minister, even though he was popularly referred to as such (his official title was "Deputy Chairman of the Governor's Executive Council"); this irritating error is repeated throughout the volume, even appearing in a subchapter title: "Prime Minister Aung San 1946–1948", which is doubly wrong as Aung San was assassinated in 1947. The CPB collapsed in 1989, not 1990. Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in 2010, not 2011. Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008, not 2006. The First Anglo-Burmese War took place not only in Rakhine (Arakan); Yangon (Rangoon) and the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) Delta are hardly in Rakhine. The Taungoo dynasty (or the Second Burmese Empire) was not established by King Bayinnaung (r. 1550–1581), but by Mingyi Nyo (r. 1485–1530), the father of Bayinnaung's predecessor, Thabinshwehti (r. 1530–1550). The persistence of these inaccuracies raises concerns and falls well below the standards expected of a serious academic publication.

Another limitation is that Eh Htoo often moves from topic to topic—or from past to present—without sufficient contextualization, which can be confusing. At times, the discussion becomes diffuse, particularly in attempts to connect the National League for Democracy (NLD) period with the era of Ne Win. Finally, the narrative relies heavily on description while offering relatively little personal experience. Although the book originates from a PhD dissertation project—which may partly explain its conservative narrative style—it would have benefited from more of Eh Htoo's own reflections on life under military rule, rather than extended summaries of well-known works.

Despite its shortcomings, *Burmanization in Myanmar* remains a valuable and engaging read. As Tony Waters rightly observes, it is "truly an emic document, reflecting Eh Htoo's insider view of Myanmar's politics and society" (p. 209.); this perspective is its principal strength. Equally stimulating are Saw Eh Htoo's more provocative arguments, such as his conviction that "the Greater Burma (Maha Bama) ideology is so deep that no simple training program or peace curriculum, would change the hearts of the Burmese people" (Ibid.). His interpretation that the military under Ne Win preserved national independence only by producing an inward-looking country mired in protracted civil war is also compelling. For these insights—and the distinctive voice behind them—the book deserves serious attention.

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Tyrell Haberkorn, *Dictatorship on Trial: Coups and the Future of Justice in Thailand*, Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024, 287 pages, US$30, ISBN 978–1503639409 (Paperback)



22 May 2014 witnessed Thailand's latest military *coup d'État*, an event which submerged the country under both political repression for the next five years and under a legal system rationalizing authoritarianism. In this well-researched study about the 2014–2019 years under Thai military rule, Tyrell Haberkorn, an anthropology professor at University of Wisconsin–Madison, traces how Thai law was exploited in the service of the junta. She herself is well-known for writing about the history of Thai state violence. In this book, borrowing from feminist perspectives, she offers hope for the future, examining how junta-influenced judgements could have become more just (p. xvii).

In the Prologue, Haberkorn states the purpose of her book: to write a history of Thailand's 2014–2019 martial law under military rule. She adds that her study of this period came on the heels of a previous study in which she examined a history of "illegitimate violence" in Thailand since 1932. That research led her to the conclusion that "impunity is the foundation of [Thai] state formation rather than an aberration" (p. xv). In the Prologue, she then wondered to what extent support for human rights might be possible under existing Thai law: What if the judiciary ruled that arbitrary detention of dissidents was illegal and/or that peaceful demonstrations against the junta was not sedition? Haberkorn thus sought to rethink judicial decisions that favored the junta during this period, rewriting them with a more just interpretation. While she admits her effort might be utopian, she contends that, some 90+ years after the end of absolute monarchy in the kingdom, it is necessary to place the just needs of Thai people as the central focus of the law.

In the Introduction, "History and Jurisprudence" (pp. 1–24), Haberkorn stresses that the proliferation of coups in Thai history means that they have become the principal nexus between the Thai state and its people. Thus, Thais are subject to a history of dispossession (p. 3). The first lesson of dispossession is that the king holds everything while the people have no standing. The second lesson is that juntas have increasingly received legal protections. The third lesson is that in terms of coups,

courts have always sided against the people, giving coup-makers impunity. Finally, Haberkorn then reveals the organization of the book: to examine a series of court decisions (with no appeals allowed) rendered under the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO; คณะรักษาความสงบแห่งชาติ) to "trace the formation of the jurisdiction of impunity" (p. 17). Each chapter analyzes a particular kind of case—each a dimension of junta repression—followed by details of the case itself.

Chapter 1 (pp. 25–46) examines the case of the anti-group Resistant Citizen which in 2015 filed charges of rebellion and treason in the Criminal Court against the 2014 coup-makers, accusing them of being guilty of abrogating the 2007 Constitution and Articles 113 and 114 of the Criminal Code. In 2018 the Supreme Court dismissed the case. This was to be expected. As Haberkorn points out, a 1972 case against a 1971 putsch had met with a similar fate, that, according to then-coup maker Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn (ถนอม กิตติขจร; in office 1958, and 1963–1973), once a coup occurred, it became legal. Resistant Citizen's case in 2015 brought attention to the destruction of pluralism by the 2014 coup and the need to transform laws to force militaries to be accountable to the people. A detailed review of this case shows that the coup-makers did indeed violate the Criminal Code and the rights of Thai citizens.

Chapter 2 (pp. 53–72) looks at the case of Apichat Pongsawat (อภิชาติ พงษ์สวัสดิ์; b. 1989) who held up a sign on 23 May 2014, the day after the coup, stating that he did not accept "illegitimate power" (p. 53). Sent to prison for 32 days, his case was finally adjudicated in 2019 and he was found guilty of violating Head of NCPO Order no. 3/2558 because he had been part of an illegal assembly of five or more persons. In reality, he had stood up against the "coupocracy" of coup-makers who, backed by weapons, sought to intimidate Thais into submission. Haberkorn writes that a jurisprudence of accountability would have found that the criminals in this case were the coup-makers. The case had relied on a martial law order, not a royal proclamation: it abrogated the Constitution of 2007 which had guaranteed the "rights" and "liberty" of the people (p. 75). Finally Order no. 3 had already been revoked before Apichat was charged under it.

Chapter 3 (pp. 79–107) investigates the post-2014-coup NCPO Order, summoning 472 individuals to the Army Club to enter into detention. Some did not report, instead choosing civil disobedience. Worachet Pakeerut (วรเจตน์ ภาคีรัตน์; b. 1969) petitioned the Constitutional Court regarding the constitutionality of the summons. The court ruled the petition unconstitutional in 2020 and the case against him was dropped in 2021. Haberkorn criticized Articles 1, 37, and 41 because she sees them in clear contravention of the junta's own 2014 Interim Constitution which guaranteed all Thais the "right to security and liberty of person", with the arrested informed as to the reasons for the arrest and anyone arrested allowed to access to the court (p. 112).

Chapter 4 (pp. 114–138) scrutinizes the actions of Piyarat Chongthep (ปิยรัฐ จงเทพ; b. 1990) who, on 7 August 2016, at a referendum vote on a new Draft

Constitution, tore up his ballot rather than filling it out, yelling "Down with Dictatorship!" (p. 140). He and two other defendants were found guilty of violating the Draft Referendum Act. In this case, the NCPO-influenced court seems to have used judicial devices to intimidate anyone willing to oppose the junta-supported Constitution. The author argues that the tearing up of the ballot repressed freedom of expression under Article 34 of the 2017 Constitution.

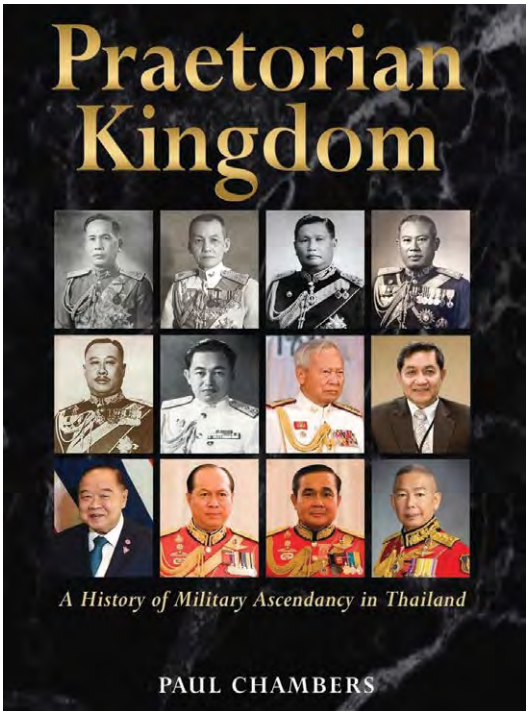
In Chapter 5 (pp. 143–161), the author looks at the case of Pansak Srithep (ปันศักดิ์ ศรีเทพ; b. 1967), a member of Resistant Citizen, who petitioned the Administrative Court against wrongful detention, challenging Ministry of Justice Order no. 314/2558. This law created a prison in Bangkok for civilians in "national security" cases. 47 people (including 45 civilians) had been detained in this prison. While imprisoned, two had died under mysterious circumstances, including Mo Yong (aka Suriyan Sucharitphalawong, สุริยัน สุจริตพลวงศ; 1962–2015), a famous fortune teller. Pansak himself had initially been charged with participating illegally in a protest. The author argues that the brevity and ambiguity of Order no. 314 gave too much leeway to the state regarding those detained. There must be much more clarity in such laws to protect people's rights.

In the book's Epilogue (pp. 167–173) Haberkorn discusses four demands of youths who demonstrated in 2020: (1) General Prayuth Chan-Ocha (ประยุทธ์ จันทร์โอชา; in office 2014–2023) must resign; (2) there must be a new, more progressive Constitution; (3) the state must stop threatening dissidents; and (4) the institution of monarchy must be reformed. These demonstrations continued well into 2021—though they were ultimately repressed. The author states that her book, in support of these protests, seeks to create a jurisprudence of accountability centered on the needs of the people rather than the monarchy. She ends her volume by pointing to the urgency of reforming Criminal Code Article 112 on *lèse-majesté*, which makes it illegal to defame, insult, or threaten the king, queen, heir to the throne, or regent of Thailand. Since the Thai judiciary is devoid of impartiality because it acts in the name of the king, it lacks legitimacy (of impartiality) to act on 112 issues (p. 173).

In sum, this work appeals to multiple scholars and policymakers who examine comparative jurisprudence as well as to scholars of Asian studies as an examination of civil–military relations and the politicization of courts. The book also appeals in its use of feminist approaches to examine marginalized Thais in court processes. The examination of legal rationales for previous coups in Thai history as a comparison with the 2014 putsch was innovative. Additionally, the book offers important detailed cases representing key dimensions of legal repression which might be repeated in the future. Finally, the author's attempt to bring hope to decisions overshadowed by the junta, by demonstrating how they might be reworked to benefit the people, was novel. Ultimately, as a work which looks at how law might be transformed in a democratizing country of Southeast Asia, this book is an essential tool.

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Paul Chambers, *Praetorian Kingdom: A History of Military Ascendancy in Thailand*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2024, 705 pages, SGD$50, ISBN 978–9815104240 (Paperback)



In *Praetorian Kingdom: A History of Military Ascendancy in Thailand*, Paul Chambers offers a path-breaking and expansive political history of Thailand through the lens of military–monarchy relations. Across 700 engaging pages, he constructs an incisive assessment of the military's role in shaping, and often dominating, domestic politics and international relations, particularly Thai–U.S. relations. Framed by an illuminating discussion of different theories of praetorianism, Chambers asks three urgent questions: "[1] Why did Thailand evolve to become a praetorian kingdom? [2] What is the detailed history of Thai praetorianism? And [3] why has Thai military influence across politics never been curtailed?" (p. 2). The chilling answer is one rooted in impunity: the military has never been held to account or subject to democratically-elected civilian control. Organized chronologically, the book begins with the end of absolute monarchy in 1932 and continues to 2023, covering 14 successful coups and many other forms of more insidious military interventions into Thai public life. Chambers pairs his theoretical elegance with rich evidence, combining interviews with Thai military sources and exhaustive use of government documents. Thai government documents pertaining to the military since 1932 are not readily available, so Chambers uses declassified U.S. government documents, including those from Foreign Relations of the United States, Wikileaks, and the Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act (CIA FOIA) Electronic Reading Room, to painstakingly unveil how the Thai military cemented its position in politics and public life.[1] Four appendices condense information about overt and silent coups, the presence of security forces in parliament and in the cabinet, and details of the annual military reshuffles. The sheer amount of information that Chambers has consolidated means that *Praetorian Kingdom* should be required reading for anyone interested in Thailand, defense and security studies, and how to use declassified documents.

The book's importance, however, goes far beyond making new data widely available. *Praetorian Kingdom*, by centering

[1] The Foreign Relations of the United States series can be accessed online via the U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian website here: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments. The CIA FOIA Electronic Reading Room can be accessed online here: https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/.

the military with its most significant partner, the monarchy, tells a new set of stories about Thai history. The very nature of these two institutions and the shifting form of the relationship means that the book becomes a history of state violence, corruption, capital accumulation, and the deferral of democracy. Two chapters—one focused on the prelude to the 6 October 1976 massacre and coup and the other on the long arc of the most recent coup regime, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO)—illuminate this history.

The 90-page Chapter 6 (pp. 259–349) on the 6 October 1976 massacre and coup draws on newly-available evidence to offer a month-by-month account of the breakdown of democracy between October 1973 and October 1976. Focusing on General Krit Sivara (พล.อ. กฤษณ์ สีวะรา), commander-in-chief of the army between 1973 and 1975, Chambers argues the general was "the most powerful person in Thailand" during this period and "was also more powerful than the king. Though Krit declared his loyalty to King Bhumibol, the General controlled the monopoly on state violence and the king's guards; moreover, he was wealthier than the palace" (p. 259). The chapter is at once a mini-biography of Krit and an analysis of the struggles over power that created the conditions for violence.

Krit used his spectacular wealth, gained from involvement in sugar, air travel, and other Thai industries, to support a range of pro-military and other candidates in the January 1975 election. But shortly after retiring from the military and appointment as defense minister, Krit died suddenly and mysteriously on 16 April 1976. Chambers queries the circumstances of his death, noting there were rumors that he was poisoned and an autopsy was never performed. This was significant because "with the king having become amenable to supporting a coup, Krit was the only person who seemed able and willing to preserve Thai democracy—and he conveniently died only hours after being named defense minister" (p. 303).

In the wake of Krit's death, the army broke into six cliques. Once this happened, "[...] other security forces were used to repress the NSCT [National Student Center of Thailand] and enable a coup [...] the strongest and easiest to manipulate was the BPP [Border Patrol Police]" (p. 322). The massacre that ensued was not an accident, but the violence at Thammasat University and the coup "appeared more as a long-conceived plan" (p. 322). Chambers argues that those behind the violence had likely planned to use the BPP while omitting Krit and the army. Accompanying the text, Chambers includes a staggering two-and-a-half page chart mapping key leaders across the security forces, palaces, government, (un)civil society—with their positions, units, and role vis-à-vis the massacre and coup. Alongside his careful analysis of Thai figures, he also draws on U.S. government documents to show the CIA's direct financial and propaganda support of Thai right-wing and para-state actors, as well as its indirect support of the massacre and coup. Chambers is particularly compelling when he explicates possible meanings of the both terse and wordy cables traveling between Bangkok and Washington, D.C. In particular,

a cable from Henry Kissinger (U.S. Secretary of State, 1973–1977) about a possible coup in late July 1976 suggests both foreknowledge and a profound willingness to act against democracy by the United States. No one's hands are clean.

Chambers marks 1980 and the General Prem Government (1980–1988) as a key transition point during which a reversal takes place and the "military became quite 'monarchized' in the sense that it functioned as the junior partner to the palace" (p. 6). The most recent iteration of this is the subject of the last chapter (Chapter 14, pp. 619–647) in the body of the book, on the regime of the NCPO that carried out the most recent coup on 22 May 2014, stayed in power for five years, and continues to exercise influence today. The junta leader, General Prayuth Chan-Ocha, claimed that the NCPO launched the coup to preserve the monarchy, foster happiness, and return the rule of law after years of Thaksin Shinawatra-induced lawlessness. Instead, Chambers parses the unstated but real goals of the coup: "[1] ensuring arch-royalist order amidst an impending monarchical succession; [2] re-asserting monarchical–military domination over Thailand amidst perceived threats from civilians (especially Thaksin and Yingluck Shinawatra); [3] consolidating the domination over the armed forces and police by the junta leaders' military faction; and [4] enhancing military corporate interests, particularly those of the senior brass" (p. 620). The effects for civilians, particularly those who dissented, were disastrous. During the five years (2014–2019) that the NCPO was in power, those critical of the monarchy and military were prosecuted, public speech was constricted, and a legislative order was put in place by the 2017 Constitution that created permanent obstacles to democracy. Despite a return to elections in 2019, the military remains highly influential in governance and public life. The military is able to do this because it became a "monarchized military", secondary only to the palace and essential as its protector.

Chambers concludes his comprehensive and chilling indictment of praetorianism in Thailand by noting that, "The military has overthrown governments when it has been unified under a military personality to do so, finds a rationale based around political pandemonium to usurp power, and is encouraged to act by the palace for all of these motives" (p. 649). He reiterates one of the questions with which he began: how might the Thai military be brought under civilian control? Providing answers may be beyond even the best scholarship, of which *Praetorian Kingdom* is an example, because doing so must rely on the will of the military, government, and other key figures in the Thai polity to change. The sheer lack of this will is witnessed with every intervention of the military into politics, every Article 112 prosecution for dissenting expression, and the general climate of fear that ensures silence around many key matters in the kingdom.

Assessing the contributions of this ground-breaking political history and analysis of Thailand's military would be incomplete without discussing the unjust legal proceedings the author faced in 2025. In early April 2025, police appeared at Naresuan University in

Phitsanulok, where Chambers was a Faculty member, with a warrant for his arrest for violation of Article 112 of the Criminal Code. Article 112 stipulates that, "Whoever defames, insults, or threatens the king, queen, heir-apparent, or regent shall be subject to three-to-fifteen years imprisonment". Present in the Criminal Code since its last major revision in 1957, Article 112 has been used extensively over the last two decades. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) reports that there were at least 169 cases during the five years of the NCPO's regime with at least 284 cases since the youth-led movement for democracy between late 2020 and August 2025.[2] The vast majority of these cases have been for peaceful expression, including questioning, or even merely analyzing, the institution of the monarchy. Article 112 cases are frequently characterized by procedural inconsistencies, the arbitrary exercise of power, and the presumption of guilt. Chambers' experience was no different.

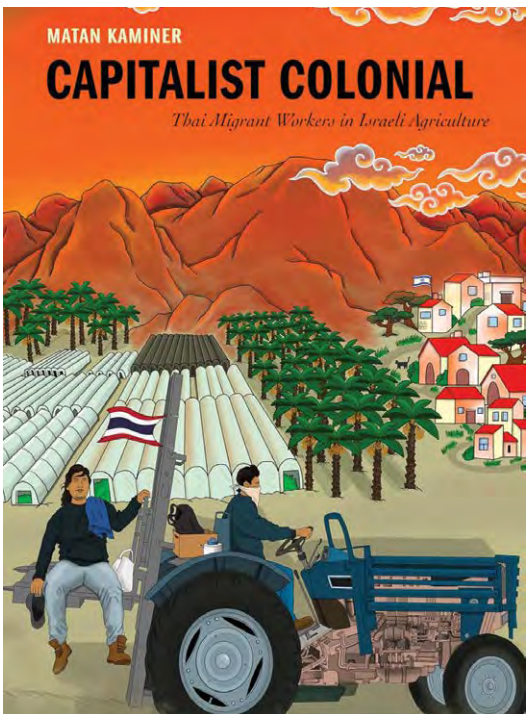
The case against him was brought by a military official and centered on the text of an advertisement—which Chambers did not write—for a talk on the military and monarchy he gave for the Institute for Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. When he reported to the police, he was initially denied bail and spent nearly two days behind bars at the Phitsanulok provincial prison. When he was released, he learned that he had been summarily dismissed from his longstanding Faculty position at Naresuan University and his visa revoked. His passport was seized and he was forced to wear an electronic monitoring anklet. His case prompted outrage and concern about implications for academic freedom. While the Office of the Attorney General ultimately decided not to prosecute the case, there was no assurance that the military would not try again; Chambers eventually left Thailand at the end of May 2025.

The attack on Paul Chambers is a very concerning development indicative of the declining climate of academic freedom and freedom of expression generally in Thailand. Naresuan University and Thailand lost a brilliant scholar and generous colleague. His work will continue and so must the work of all of us who are concerned with the unjust and arbitrary actions of the military, judiciary, and other key institutions of the Thai nation.

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[2] For information of Article 112 cases, see the TLHR website: http://www.tlhr2014.com.

Matan Kaminer, *Capitalist Colonial: Thai Migrant Workers in Israeli Agriculture*, Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2024, 298 pages, US$30, ISBN 978–1503641099 (Paperback)



"Don't try to change Thailand [...]. We want them like this [...]. Don't think we really want [the Frontier Settlement Project]. We are pretending" (p. 74). This quotation from Matan Kaminer's book is from an Israeli key informant directly involved in the Frontier Settlement Project training program—a cooperative enterprise between the Thai and Israeli governments since the late 1980s. In the end, this project turned out to involve the export of Thai (Isan) migrant workers to Israeli agricultural settlements along the Israeli–Jordanian border—the phenomenon under study in this book. The most interesting aspect of the quotation is that it comes from a direct conversation between an Israeli informant and a member of the Thai elite. It illustrates what the author refers to as the "structural hypocrisy" (p. 72) of the Thai state regarding the Frontier Settlement Project, in which it requested technical cooperation from the Israeli government from the outset. For the Thai government, this project—modeled after Israel's NAHAL (Fighting Pioneer Youths), a paramilitary Israel Defense Force program and mixed military–civilian settlement along disputed borders—seemingly aimed to "kill two troublesome birds with one stone": securing the border with neighbors, notably Laos and Cambodia, on the one hand, and promoting economic development in remote areas on the other (pp. 68–70).

As the title *Capitalist Colonial: Thai Migrant Workers in Israeli Agriculture* indicates, however, this book is not about bilateral cooperation between the Thai and Israeli governments. Rather, it is the story of Thai migrant workers in Israel. The request for technical assistance for the Frontier Settlement Project was only a pretext to facilitate the entry of Thai migrant workers into Israel. This coincided with Israel's increasing demand for farm labor following the Palestinian *intifada* in the late 1980s and its adoption of neoliberal economic policies. To increase global competitiveness in the agricultural sector, Israel could not rely solely on advanced technology but also needed cheap agrarian labor. Persistent conflicts with the Arab world, however, made importing workers from neighboring countries increasingly difficult. Since the late 1980s, Thai migrant workers have consistently been a major source

of labor for the Israeli agricultural sector, making this phenomenon worthy of study.

In the Introduction (pp. 1–21), the author discusses key concepts such as domination, difference, the capitalist-colonial world system, and the role of ideology. He critically examines Thai migrant farmworkers in Israel through the lens of domination and difference, posing his central research question: "How do domination and difference become interdependent in this way?" (p. 1). To address this, Kaminer employs the concept of "capitalist coloniality". It is "capitalist" in the sense that Israeli entrepreneurs are compelled to recruit cheap Thai labor to compete in the global market. It is "coloniality" in that it involves the Zionist assertion of sovereignty and rule over migrant workers. The logic of capitalism produces a particular form of domination and unequal relations between capitalists and workers. Yet domination does not manifest itself through simple economic exploitation alone—it is more complex. The author therefore introduces the role of culture and ideology. In this regard, the book is not only about Thai migrant workers in Israel but also about the cultural encounter between Jewish Israelis and Thai (specifically Isan) migrants. Ideology, intrinsically hegemonic, reproduces domination—but it is not one-sided. Rather, it is interactive.

Chapter 1 (pp. 23–52) traces the history of Israeli settlement in the Arabah (an ancient word meaning "desert") from Bedouin inhabitants to the colonial "redemption" of the land. The key challenge was the maintenance of Jewish cohesion while recruiting workers to make the desert arable. At the root of this recruitment was "exploitation anxiety"—a distrust of non-Jewish workers. With the Israeli government's turn to neoliberal policies and the outbreak of the Palestinian rebellion in the late 1980s, this challenge became even greater, paving the way for the importation of Thai migrant labor.

Chapter 2 (pp. 53–75) provides the Thai historical background, with a special focus on the Isan region. It examines the Siamese colonization of Isan and the establishment of paternalism as the leading ideology of hierarchical integration. During the Cold War and the struggle against Communist insurgency, the Thai government sought models to counter local Communist movements and contain neighboring Communist states. This is the context in which cooperation with Israel in the Frontier Settlement Project began.

Chapter 3 (pp. 76–98) narrates the arrival of Thai workers in the Arabah desert, which the author defines as the "Thai revolution". He sees this as a revolution for two reasons: (1) Thai workers came to outnumber the Israeli population, and (2) they overcame Israeli xenophobia. Here ideology played a crucial role. Because Isan workers neither demanded participation nor sought social integration, they did not trigger Jewish anxieties. Moreover, paternalism served as an ideological bridge between Israeli employers and Isan workers. For the latter, domination was acceptable due to another ideology: karmic reciprocity—the belief that meritorious actions are eventually rewarded or literally in Thai "*tham di dai di*" (ทำดีได้ดี; p. 13). The following

Chapters 4 and 5 (pp. 99–147) elaborate on the reproduction of domination, examining the spatio-temporal life cycles of Israeli employers and Isan workers. The key points highlighted are the separation of the public sphere and the differing rhythms of daily life.

Chapter 6 (pp. 148–166), "Social Reproduction and Karmic Reciprocity", moves beyond the spatial context of relations within the Arabah. The author delves into the life histories of Isan workers, with a focus on gender relations and marital problems. When workers faced family crises back home, they sometimes asked their Israeli employers to intervene. This reflects the transnational extension of paternalism, in which the patron's role extended beyond the farm. In the concluding Chapter 7 (pp. 167–175), after synthesizing the overall argument—especially the role of ideology in reproducing domination—the author expresses uneasiness about the exploitation of workers. He calls for transcending the colonial–capitalist structure in favor of a "decolonized, democratic, and socialist Arabah" (p. 175).

This work contributes to many fields, including Thai studies, migration, sociology, and development studies. Although the study of Thai migrant workers has long been and remains a popular topic, this book makes a distinctive contribution. Existing material tends to focus on Thai migrant workers in "3D" (dangerous, difficult, dirty) jobs—particularly in construction and industry (Pattana 2014) or the sex industry (Watanabe 1998)—with case studies mainly from Asia and Europe, such as Singapore (Pattana 2014), South Korea (Kanika & Penchan 2020), Japan (Watanabe 1998), and Germany (Supang et al. 2001). Although several studies have examined Thai migrant workers in Israel (e.g., Or & Shohamy 2020), this is the first book to apply anthropological methods and analyze the subject through the lens of capitalist coloniality and paternalism.

In the same vein, it would be fruitful to conduct further comparative research on Thai (Isan) migrant workers in other countries, to examine whether similar forms of domination or capitalist -colonial relations exist elsewhere. Some key informants in this book had experience working in other countries, such as South Korea and Sweden. It is worth asking whether patron–client relations emerge in those contexts as well. Furthermore, in Israel itself, there are also migrant workers from other countries, including the Philippines, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Can the concept of capitalist coloniality also be applied to these groups? As long as global labor migration shows no signs of diminishing, this book is well worth reading. It demonstrates how to combine a critical theoretical lens with ethnographic research to understand the complexities of contemporary labor migration.

Amidst the Israel-Hamas war which began on 7 October 2023, and tends to persist and develop into the "perpetual conflict", this book is a timely read. As the Thai workers have been direct or indirect victims of this war, they are unfortunately under a critical dilemma whether to live under conflict-ridden areas and make a good money or get back home and live under economically insecure life in Isan. The above dilemma

is perfectly encapsulated in an interview of one of the Isan worker who already evacuated to Thailand after the Israel –Hamas war that: "I want to go back (to Israel). In Isaan I can't make any money" (Neuman 2023). On the Israeli side, in order to secure the food security, which is equally important as the national security, the demand for migrant workers is still high or even higher considering the lower supply of workers. As such, the concept of "capitalist coloniality" seems to be applicable in that the Israeli entrepreneurs are even more compelled to find laborers not just to make profit in the global market but to secure the nation's food security and the Israeli government is eager to assert its sovereignty over the conflict-ridden areas and continues the hegemonic domination over the migrant workers.

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