BOUNLEUTH SENGSOULIN

MANUSCRIPTS FOUND IN THE
ABODE OF THE VENERABLE ABBOT
PHRA KHAMCHAN VIRACHITTO
VAT SAEN SUKHARAM,
LUANG PRABANG, LAOS
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For Laos, like for other countries of Buddhist Southeast Asia, manuscripts can be considered as an important primary source for the reconstruction of the intellectual history of this culturally rich region. Manuscripts with texts pertaining to Buddhist teachings have been stored in monastic libraries or in the abodes of eminent abbots for centuries. One of the most influential abbots who took a very personal interest in manuscripts was Venerable Phra Khamchan Virachitto (Sathu Nyai Khamchan) (1920–2007). After his death, a variety of manuscripts were found in his abode (Pāli: kuti). A great number of these manuscripts state that he had written or scribed them himself to commemorate important events in his life. He kept some of these manuscripts for his private use.

These manuscripts also reflect the relationship between Lao Buddhism and manuscripts. First of all, a monastery functions as a centre of knowledge, which is recorded in various types of manuscripts. Monks, novices and unordained Buddhist scholars have access to these manuscripts. In various religious ceremonies, monks and novices read the Buddhist texts (Lao: ûth – ຜ້າທໍາ), written as manuscripts, to laypeople. Thus, manuscripts are one of the main components of a monastery.

Regarding the materials used for scribing and writing, the above mentioned manuscripts can be divided into two main groups: palm leaf and paper manuscripts (see below the section ‘Materials used for scribing/copying’). Sathu Nyai Khamchan preferred to use the first for scribing, while his collection of manuscripts for his private use consisted mainly of the second type. This paper seeks to shed new light on Lao manuscript culture by analysing the process of copying and preserving manuscripts in a unique monastic environment, as well as examining the contents of some of these manuscripts.

1 According to the tradition of the people of Luang Prabang, sathu – from Pāli sadhu (good; virtuous; profitable) – is used as a title prefixed to the name of a royalty or a monk. While sathu is placed before the name of a monk who has already received an anointment, the other word, mòm, is used for the newly-ordained monk, or for the one who has not yet received an anointment. In other words, the Buddhists of Luang Prabang do not prefer phra to place before the monk’s name, they have adopted sathu instead. When the monk lives in a monastery for more than twenty Buddhist years, or phansa, sathu can – traditionally – be followed by nyai. The word nyai itself means 'big; senior; important'. The traditional rule is that to be called sathu nyai the monk is not only required to remain in monkhood for at least twenty years, he must also be good in following the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, sathu nyai literally means senior monk. In this paper, Sathu Nyai Khamchan is used to represent Venerable Phra Khamchan Virachitto. In practice, both sathu and mòm can be used as personal pronouns. They represent the first personal pronoun (I/me) if the speakers are monks; they are used as the second personal pronoun (you) if a monk is spoken to; and they function as the third personal pronoun (he/him) if a monk is being referred to. This should be considered, in the sense that the Buddhists of Luang Prabang have their own tradition of addressing themselves and others.

2 Traditionally, a monastery comprises at least four components: monks and novices (Lao: phasong sama-nen-ພະສາມະເນນ), monastic buildings (Lao: kuti vihan-ກຸຕິວິຫານ), Buddha images (Lao: pha phuttha hup-ພະພຸດທະຮູບ), and manuscripts (Lao: nangsü tham lam sut-ໜັງສືທໍາລ�ສູດ).
MATERIALS USED FOR SCRIBING/COPYING

Palm-leaf

Traditionally, most monasteries in Laos have enough space in their vicinity for forestry and horticulture. Especially fruit trees and various plants used for medicinal purposes are often planted (R-LBFO07-08: 14). In addition, numerous monasteries put a great emphasis on the cultivation of palm trees, because they provide the Lao monks with sufficient materials for scribing/copying manuscripts.

In order to make palm-leaves fit for writing, they had to be processed in a special manner (Agrawal 1984: 27). In practice, several steps are necessary before palm leaves can be used as material for scribing/copying. The three main steps shall be presented here. First, the palm leaves are cut from the tree, and their twigs are sliced off. Next, all leaves are boiled and dried to make them soft and durable. Finally, they are cut in shapes and sizes according to the purpose of usage. Such leaves are made in two sizes, long palm leaves (Lao: lan nyao– Lao Buhan) (BAD-13-1-0019, BAD-13-1-0023, BAD-13-1-0162, BAD-13-1-0223, BAD-13-1-0230) and short ones (Lao: lan kôm– Khôm) (BAD-13-1-0059, BAD-13-1-0061, BAD-13-1-0113, BAD-13-1-0322, BAD-13-1-0329). These two types of palm leaves are used for different purposes, and greatly differ in their features.

LONG PALM-LEAF

Size: about 50–60 x 4–5,5 cm.
Two holes for a string (saï sanông), but generally only the left one is used.
Line: 4–6 lines; only the top-line and the bottom-line are written in full length.
Scripts: Tham (Dhamma), Lao Buhan (old Lao), Lû, and Khôm.
Substance: mostly religious texts.
Additional texts (paratexts): introductory text and colophon.

SHORT PALM-LEAF

Size: about 30–40 x 4–5 cm.
One hole for a string (saï sanông).
Line: 4–5 lines; only the top-line and the bottom-line are written in full length.
Scripts: Tham (Dhamma), Lao Buhan (old Lao).
Substance: mostly non-religious texts.
Additional texts (paratexts): introductory text and colophon.

Table 1: some features of palm-leaf manuscripts

Paper

Three types of paper manuscripts were found in the abode of the eminent abbot Sathu Nyai Khamchan: mulberry paper, khôi paper, and modern paper (Lao: phap sa– samut khoi– phap lan). The first two types are handmade products which are produced occasionally, whereas the last one is an industrial product. However, Sathu Nyai Khamchan used the word phap lan to refer to all of them (BAD-13-2-066: 080).

Paper is more convenient for scribing/copying manuscripts than palm leaf, because it can be shaped, sized and coloured according to the user’s requirements. As Agrawal (1984: 127) stated “Furthermore, manuscripts on paper could be bound in the modern book form, which was not possible for palm-leaf manuscripts.” A number of paper manuscripts made of khoi paper (Lao: samut khoi) are black in colour (BAD-13-2-001, BAD-13-2-002, BAD-13-2-003, BAD-13-2-004, BAD-13-2-005, BAD-13-2-006, BAD-13-2-007). These manuscripts were usually written with white chalk, and sometimes with golden or yellow ink. Usually, the choice of the paper type depends on the content of the text (see table 2).

SAMPLES OF TEXTS

Non-religious texts

Traditionally, a monastery serves as a knowledge centre for the Buddhist community, and is therefore the place where Buddhist texts – i.e., texts related to the Pāli canon – can be found. However, nowadays the lay community demands more from the monasteries than just spiritual guidance. Consequently, monks may ever been asked to give advice in quarrels and dispute (Terwiel 2012: 243), and most monasteries do not only keep the Buddhist texts but also various types of secular texts. Thus, it is not surprising that numerous manuscripts with non-religious content were found after Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s death in his abode.

History

Some manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode deal with historical events. These manuscripts were not written as a fascicle (Lao: phuk–), but as a folio which could be attached to any fascicle, or kept together with other fascicles in a bundle. An example is the folio (BAD-13-1-0188) which tells us that Chao Anurut built a stupa (Lao: phap lan–). Another manuscript (BAD-13-1-0223) refers to all of them (BAD-13-2-066: 080)

עולם קנייה

Phap lan– ( BDS) to

Traditionally, short palm-leaves are used for scribing/copying non-religious texts, i.e., traditional medicine, astrology, magic, fortune-telling, etc. Apart from these, a number of Buddhist texts have also been written on short palm-leaves. Any text could be written on this kind of palm-leaves (Lao: nangssû kôm tang khon tang mi– Lao Buhan).
### MULBERRY PAPER

- **Size**: various sizes/shapes.
- **Number of lines per page**: depending on the size the manuscript (phap).
- **Scripts**: Lų, Tham (Dhamma), and Lao Buhan (old Lao).
- **Substance**: mostly non-religious texts.
- **Additional texts**: (rarely) introductory text and colophon.
- **Table**: (rarely) depends on the substance.

### KHǿI PAPER

- **Size**: about 30–40 x 10–15 cm.
- **Number of lines per page**: depending on the size the manuscript (phap).
- **Scripts**: Lų, Tham (Dhamma), and Lao Buhan (old Lao).
- **Substance**: mostly non-religious texts.
- **Additional texts**: (rarely) introductory text and colophon.
- **Table**: (rarely) go/don’t go together.

### MODERN PAPER

- **Size**: two sizes/shapes, i.e., similar/close to that of khǿi paper, and of palm-leaf.
- **Number of lines per page**: depending on the size the manuscript (phap).
- **Scripts**: Tham (Dhamma).
- **Substance**: mostly religious texts.
- **Additional texts**: introductory text and colophon.

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**Table 2: some features of mulberry, khǿi and modern paper manuscripts**

(Lao: .colorbar si–lompthe) in Chunlasangkat in 1166 (AD 1804).

Interestingly, a message was inserted in the colophon of a fascicle of Dhatangavatti (Pāli: dhutangavatti; Lao: thutangkhavat-สุนนีชีลี). It is written at the end of the main text and reads ‘...phoen khŭn miă soek siang tung nan tae lae na...' (‘...we have noted (important) information...’). Literal translation: “[at the time] they went up for the war in Siang (Chiang) Tung, indeed…” (BAD-13-1-0058/13-1-0058: 054). This indicates that the circumstances during the time when this manuscript was written might have been rather inconvenient for such a task. The story comprises six fascicles, which include one hundred and eighty-four folios (Lao: lan–ет). It has taken a long time to finish them. Having successfully accomplished such a task must have made the copyst proud; thus, he made a note of the challenge he had overcome.

**Astrology**

Nearly all paper manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode deal with astrological topics. They are either mulberry or khǿi paper manuscripts (Lao: phap sa–lompthe; samut khǿi–lompthe). Furthermore, some palm leaf manuscripts also found in his place, especially the short ones, deal with the same subject (BAD-13-1-0057, BAD-13-1-0082, BAD-13-1-0330, BAD-13-2-003, BAD-13-2-007, BAD-13-2-042, BAD-13-2-043, BAD-13-2-054, BAD-13-2-059). It is remarkable that manuscripts dealing with this matter were kept in the eminent abbot’s abode. No concrete evidence indicates whether the abbot used these manuscripts while he was alive.

One of the above mentioned manuscripts deals with the first annual thunder, a natural phenomenon allegedly affecting people’s lives, especially their cultivation efforts. A part of this manuscript reads:

> hông kam bualapha thevada khai patu lek chak phae khon thang lai hua pi fon bô lai la pi fon ching mi lai khoao di thuk haeng lae hông kam akhane thevada khai patu lom fon bô lai lom hae ng nak khon thang lai chak pen thuk nak moeng chak pen soek thova khoao nyang di lae hông kham thakhir thevada khai patu fai pi nan chak laeng nak khon chak tai yak khoao mak nae bô di lae [...].

Astrology

If it begins to [thunder in the East, the God [will] open a steel door. [This] will affect all people seriously. Not much rain [will fall] at the beginning of the year, much more rain [will fall] at the end of the year. [People in all] locations [will have a] fruitful harvest of rice. [If it begins to] thunder in the Southeast, the God [will] open a wind door. Not much rain [will fall], but extremely strong wind [will blow]. All people will suffer [from such a phenomenon], [and] warfare will break out in the müang. However, [the people can still get a] fruitful harvest of rice. [If it begins to] thunder in the South, the God [will] open a fire door. There will be a severe drought in that year. A number of people will be famine-stricken and die. It is an undesirable year [...].

Interestingly, the statements made in this manuscript may not have been based just on imagination, but rather on personal observations of the first an-
nual thunders and their consequences, over a long period of time. People may have experienced that a thunder from a specific direction at the beginning of a year was followed by certain phenomena, and thus tried to use this information for predictions. Even more remarkable is that this message warned people to prepare for the challenges that may arise. In other words, the ancient people prepared themselves for and fought against such natural disasters in order to survive.

Another interesting point is the changing ownership of this manuscript. A colophon on the second page reads, '[This] book of the calculation of auspicious/inauspicious days belongs to Hua Chao Phumma of Vat Saen. This book was written in [Chunlasangkat] 1270 (AD. 1908) (Lao: nangsi hai mû di không hua chao phumma vat saen hua ni dai khian tae mu pi 1270-สังคีตินี้จึงได้ถูกประทับ
เขียนมาในสมัยที่มีอายุยิ่งขึ้นสี่ศตวรรษ거래). This might indicate that the owner had written this book himself, and he should therefore be recognized as one of the local scholars. However, the reason why this book came into Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s personal possession shall also be presented. It was not given to Sathu Nyai according to the custom of ‘making manuscripts’ (Lao: kan sang nangsü-กานสังนั้นสุ) to foster charity, but for other reasons. Otherwise, there would have been a colophon stating so. One possibility is that the former owner knew the contents of this book very well, maybe even remembering it by heart, and then gave it away. Another possibility is that after the former owner’s death, his relatives might not have known how to use this book and therefore gave it to others or handed it to Sathu Nyai Khamchan directly.

Of philological interest is that this book was written in the form of poetical composition, which was very popular in ancient times. In other words, this text is valuable for the study of Lao philology, since the shortening of two alphabets is a distinctive feature used in ancient writing style. This means that the initial consonants in some two-syllable words, the first syllables of which include /a/ (_avail), and where /n/, /m/, /ny/ (u, u, v) function as the initial consonants of the second syllables, are combined to a single form/shape (30-2; 59-2; 65-2; ...). Furthermore, the shortening of two syllables/words is also used in writing: two syllables/words located next to each other, which have the same initial consonants, are combined through a single initial consonant (30-4; 31-1; 59-4; ...). Apart from these items, the substitution of the initial consonants between the so-called high and low group consonants, and between short and long vowels, can easily be seen. The shape of the vowel /a/ (_avail) used in this text is also remarkable, as it is similar to that of the last part – the so-called ‘tail’ – of the figure of eight in Lao ( propósito). Sometimes a symbol similar to the shape of maikan (') in Lao is written above this shape (59-2/5; 60-6; 61-4; 62-1/4; ...).

**Magic or khatha (_strategy)**

The Lao word khatha (strategy), meaning magic or magic formula, refers to two categories of supernatural powers: black magic (Lao: khatha man-คำบาน) and Buddhist magic (khatha pha-คำบฟ้า). It is believed that the use of the former causes harm and destruction to all beings, whereas the latter is used to protect beings and things from various kinds of danger. The former is forbidden for Buddhist monks, but the latter is said to be appropriate for monks to practice. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a number of paper manuscripts dealing with magical matters were found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode. Some of them contain a number of sacred words from Buddhist teachings. Buddhist/Pâli words were combined with Lao words, and used as a magic formula. In the manuscript BAD-13-2-007, the Triple Gems (Lao: pha lattana tai-พระล้าน้ำตา) were incorporated with specific Lao words for the composition of khatha. One part of this khatha is as follows:

**phutthhang at thammang at sangkhang at […]**

**phutthhang tut thammang tut sangkhang tut […]**

**phutthhang salanang at thammang salanang at sangkhang salanang at […]**

[I pray that the] **Buddha [helps me to]** close [my mind to the unmeritorious] [I pray that the] **Dhamma [helps me to]** close [my mind to the unmeritorious] [I pray that the] **Saṅgha [helps me to]** close [my mind to the unmeritorious] [I pray that the] **Buddha [helps me to]** stop [my mind from the unmeritorious] [I pray that the] **Dhamma [helps me to]** stop [my mind from the unmeritorious] [I pray that the] **Saṅgha [helps me to]** stop [my mind from the unmeritorious] [I hold the] **Buddha as my refuge** [to help me to] close [my mind to the unmeritorious] [I hold the] **Dhamma as my refuge** [to help me] close [my mind to the unmeritorious] [I hold the] **Saṅgha as my refuge** [to help me to] close [my mind to the unmeritorious] […]

The words and expressions used in this khatha reflect the writer’s/ compiler’s high competence in the use of language, especially with regards to words derived from Pāli/Sanskrit. In this khatha, he has combined Pāli words with suitable Lao words. He may indeed be considered as an expert in composing khatha. There is no indication what effect this khatha has and how it can be used. The substance of the khatha hints to the possibility that it is used to protect human beings from various dangers. Forest monks (Lao: pha thudong – พระผู้ดอง) may
use this *khatha* to protect themselves from any kind of danger, and to keep their mind concentrated.

**Pharmacopeia or tamla ya (ຕໍາລາຢາ)**

Up to now, Lao Buddhist monks and novices have been recognized not only as the propagators of Buddhism, but also as experts in healing and treatment. They know how to use parts of various plants for medicinal substances. Furthermore, some of them have recorded the knowledge of traditional therapy on manuscripts made of palm leaf, mulberry paper and other materials. Some of these manuscripts were found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's *kuti* after his death.

Palm leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0056, one of the manuscripts mentioned above, shall be presented here. This manuscript comprises twenty-four folios of 29 cm in length and 5 cm in width. It deals with various kinds of illness and traditional medicine. See a sample below (fig. 1):

![Figure 1](image)

[A set of substances of] medicine for stomach problems: three chips of a horn of a white water buffalo; make them warm by roasting [them], rub beeswax and stingless bees wax on them and boil them [in a pot]. Then, seven pieces of chilli, ginger, galangal, garlic and phai need to be mixed by pounding, and put in the pot. After it is well cooked, give it to [the sick person][...].

Most ingredients used for this medicinal substance were taken from plants and can also be eaten as food. These plants are popular and easy to get, whereas the horn of a water buffalo is somewhat more difficult to get hold of. Here, a white buffalo was required, not a black one. The white buffalo is believed to have certain special powers which the black one does not have. This assumption is further supported by the fact that, according to local beliefs, a sick person should abstain from eating the meat of a white buffalo.

**PRIVATELY-USED RELIGIOUS MANUSCRIPTS**

In general, senior monks keep a number of manuscripts in their rooms for their private use, which cover both religious and non-religious knowledge. Numerous religious texts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's abode show that they were apparently used by him. The following fascicles are two of them.

*A fascicle of yattikammavācā (BAD-13-2-018)*

Apart from the manuscripts thought to be written and/or corrected by Sathu Nyai Khamcham as mentioned above, a fascicle of yatti kammavācā, i.e. a series of questions and answers used in ordination ceremonies – should be mentioned as a good example of these religious manuscripts.


[5] These beliefs might be connected to the belief in the sacredness of white elephants which is common in Southeast Asia.
sample of his privately-used manuscripts. The main characteristics of this manuscript are (fig. 2):
• Darkened paper; golden ink;
• Size and shape: 52.0 x 10.2 x 1.0 cm, similar to the shape of samut khòi (khòi-paper);
• Cover: hard cover with date, donor; and restorer;
• Language: Pāli;
• Script: Lan Na script (tua müang);
• Date: CS 1353 (AD 1791);
• Scribe/copyist: Luang Siang La (Maha Kes-òn);
• Restoration works:
  Person: Sathu Nyai Khamchan
  Date: CS 1325 (AD 1963)
  Part: both front and back covers.

In AD 1963, 172 years after the book was written, Sathu Nyai Khamchan repaired its cover and left a note. Even though we do not know his intentions for doing so, the note provides us with very important information on the connection between him and this fascicle of yattikammavācā. Later on, in AD 1991 or twenty-eight years after he repaired it, he also noted and confirmed that this book was written in AD 1791 and had lasted 200 years from the year of its writing/copying until 1991.

The information mentioned above indicates that Sathu Nyai Khamchan intended to keep this book in good condition in order to have it survive long periods of usage. In other words, the book can undoubtedly be recognized as his privately-used book. It was in his hands for almost half a centu-

This book recorded an important Buddhist text, the kammavācā, the text used in the ordination ceremony. The use of Lan Na script indicates that the scribe/copyist might have tried to purify the texts of the Pāli canon which came from Chiang Mai, at that time the capital of the Lan Na kingdom, to Lan Xang. We can make this conclusion because this book was written about two and a half centuries after the Lao Buddhist circle of the Lan Xang kingdom received a number of Buddhist texts from Chiang Mai in AD 1523 (Sila, 2001: 63). From this year onwards, there were a number of Buddhist scholars who had knowledge of Pāli texts and were proficient in Lan Na script, who preferred to scribe/copy texts related to Buddhist teachings. This might be the reason why Sathu Nyai Khamchan paid much attention to this book.

A fascicle of 19 khan kammavācā (BAD-13-2-020)

A fascicle of 19 khan kammavācā (fig. 3) should be mentioned as another example of his privately-used manuscripts. The main characteristics of this manuscript are:

Figure 2

This manuscript was written in Chunlasangkat 1153, a huang khai year. [Later,] in the ka mao year, Chunlasangkat 1325, I, Phra Lakkham Viravisutthikhun (Sathu Nyai Khamchan) of Vat Saen Sukharam repaired [its] front and back covers. [This book] lasted 172 years.
This Pāli text was written in Burmese script and deals with the set of questions and answers which is used in an ordination ceremony. The Buddhist Sangha in all Theravada countries use the same text for this ceremony. Any senior monk who, like Sathu Nyai Khamchan, would preside over such a ceremony, can remember this text well. Therefore, when this text was incomplete, Sathu Nyai Khamchan could clearly identify the missing parts and complete them. The newly-written text uses Dhamma script, not Burmese script like the original. From that we can conclude that both the Burmese and the Dhamma script were considered appropriate scripts for writing Pāli texts thought to be the words of Lord Buddha. Furthermore, a monk who can recite Pāli texts is honoured highly. McDaniel (2008, 117) also stated that the mere knowledge of Pāli terms and ability to memorize, translate, and explain Pāli words is considered of great prestige in Laos and Northern Thai.

MANUSCRIPT MAKING (LAO: KAN SANG NANGSŬ-ການສ້າງໜັງສື)

Donor/sattha/chaosattha

In Lao language, the meaning of “making manuscripts” (Lao: kan sang nangsŭ - ຂຽນສ້າງໜັງສື) is somewhat multifarious. Sang (ຂຽນ) used in this context covers at least three meanings. It often refers to the act of making, of writing or copying (Lao: litchana/khian - ລິດຈະນາ/ຂຽນ) manuscripts. In other cases, it is applied in the sense of “to donate” (Lao: bõlichak-ບໍລິຈາກ). Finally, the word sang can mean that a monk gives a manuscript which he previously used only privately to the whole Sangha. It is said that Sathu Nyai Khamchan was one of the senior monks of Luang Prabang who loved to sang manuscripts. Even though he himself also wrote a number of manuscripts, the word sang utilized in the colophons usually means that he gave the manuscript to the Sangha – in order to follow the traditional ideal of ‘manuscript-making’, an act of both ‘making and giving to Buddhism’ (Lao: sang vai nai phuttha susana-ສ້າງໄວ້ໃນພຸດທະສາສະໜາ).

Figure 3: A fascicle of 19 khan kammavācā
In this case, however, sang means that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had himself copied this manuscript. In other words, the donor (Lao: sattha/chaosattha – ກັບທາ/ເຈົ້າກັບທາ) and the copyist (Lao: phu litchana – ທິດຈະນາ) of the above mentioned manuscript are the same person. This holds true, as Koret (1999, 229) could demonstrated: "The monks at the temples are not expected to write literature but they are expected to copy it. Classes are taught in religious script that is used to record the stories.

In other cases, some manuscripts have numerous donors who are related by marriage or kinship. They can be grouped as follows: 1) main donor and his/her spouse; 2) main donor, his/her spouse, and their children; 3) main donor, his/her spouse, their children, and their parents; and 4) main donor, his/her spouse, their children, their parents, and other relatives. This shows that people who perform acts of merit-making together are relatives or close friends.

The religious practices which surround the formal sponsoring of the copying of a manuscript (Lao: vithikan sang nangsü – ທິດຈະນາເຈົ້າສັດທາ) in Luang Prabang are remarkable. When a manuscript has been made and already donated to the Sangha, other people can get the chance to "re-donate" the same manuscript again. After a manuscript is donated, it is considered part of the property of the Sangha. However, a layperson can ask to be allowed to donate the same manuscript again. The manuscript is then given to the layperson, after he or she has made a small donation, usually worth less than the manuscript. The manuscript is now formally the property of the layperson. If the manuscript is damaged, the layperson repairs it – usually, the manuscript is cleaned and enclosed in a new wrapping cloth (Lao: pha hò khamphi/nangsü – ນີ່ຫໍ່ຄໍາພີ/ເຈົ້າສັດທາ). Finally, the layperson donates the manuscript in a ceremony back to the Sangha. The manuscript has then become the property of the Sangha once again (fig. 5).

This passage indicates that Miss Somsee’s need to make merit might have been so urgent that copying a new bundle would have required too much time. Miss Somsee might, for example, have encountered misfortune, and believed that one of the best ways to overcome her bad luck would be the donation of a manuscript (BAD-13-1-0087, BAD-13-1-0155, BAD-13-1-0219). Since she had to do so in a hurry, one possibility was to re-donate a finished bundle of manuscripts that had already been donated by another person. This practice is common in Lao Buddhism and is also practised with other religious objects like Buddha images or monk robes.

PURPOSES/DESires

Generalities

Traditionally, there are two main purposes for making manuscripts: to support Buddhism (Lao: kham su sasana – ກັບທາສາສະໜາ) and to make merit (Lao: sang punnya palami – ທັງພັນຍາປາລະມີ). It is generally believed that one way to support Buddhism
is to contribute to the promotion of Buddhism by writing/copying Buddhist texts in order to have Buddhism flourishing for five thousand years, as predicted by Lord Buddha (Lao: phuttha thamnai– ວັນທະນາ[,] Merit-making is understood as the continuous development of goodness/perfection (Lao: palami–ປະລາມ) until it is sufficient to gain enlightenment and reach nibbana (Lao: banlu olahan lae thoeng pha nipphan–ບັນລາຊ່ວຍລາຄາ ມະຫຸດຄະຕິ) However, these are not the only purposes for making manuscripts; others which should be recognized are the following:

- to dedicate the donor’s acquired merits to a deceased person;
- to obtain happiness (including good health and personal fame and gain);
- to abolish/remove evil/diseases from the donor’s body (Lao: kamchat pat pao bap-kam/lokha phanyat – ເຂົ້າຫມັດປາລະມີ/ລຸກາພາຍະ)Indeed, a number of manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode have passages indicating that he made these manuscripts to commemorate the anniversary of his birthday. Some colophons have passages stating that he made manuscripts for this purpose at least three times, at the ages of 24, 36, and 56. Moreover, his birthday ceremony was sometimes organized for him by other senior monks and laypeople who were his close disciples. Sathu Nyai Khamchan may have realized that Lao Buddhists believe that organizing a ceremony of merit-making by writing (or sponsoring) manuscripts. This assumption is based on a large number of manuscripts found in his abode with colophons referring to this practice. These manuscripts were made in the name of the deceased teachers and loved ones. The merit is made in the name of the deceased; however, it is believed that the living who made the manuscript in their name also received merit from it.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan is one of the senior monks of Luang Prabang who used to make merit in order to commemorate a specific event in his life (Lao: phu sang/sattha/chaosattha–ຜົ້ນສຸດ/ຜູ້ສາທິດ/ຜ່າທ໌ໜູ້): the anniversary of his birthday. On this occasion, he used to make manuscripts. These efforts were appreciated very much by the Buddhists of all occupations of Luang Prabang. Sathu Nyai Khamchan has four important ceremonies to be performed in a person’s lifetime: birth, ordination, marriage, and death. Traditionally, when any person dies his/her relatives must to make merit away, their children, relatives and other grateful people still take their goodness to heart and express their appreciation with an annual act of making merit. Sometimes, followers of a monk make merit to commemorate the anniversary of their senior’s death. By doing so, they acknowledge their superiors, and, in turn, their superiors’ goodness and worthiness will live on in their hearts. Colophons of some manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode strongly suggest that this was the main reason for making them (BAD-13-1-0007, BAD-13-1-0164) (fig. 8).

Sathu Nyai Kaenchan was a former abbot of Wat Saen Sukharam, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan carried on this position after he passed away. The above mentioned message indicates that Sathu Nyai Khamchan, as a successor, made manuscripts sang nangsů (ສັງນ້າງສຸງ), in order to dedicate merit to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan. According to the colophon of this fascicle, this event took place in BE 2489 (AD 1946). It is possible that the laypeople of Luang Prabang may have followed Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s example of making merit by writing (or sponsoring) manuscripts. This assumption is based on a large number of manuscripts found in his abode with colophons referring to this practice. These manuscripts were made in the name of the deceased teachers and loved ones. The merit is made in the name of the deceased; however, it is believed that the living who made the manuscript in their name also received merit from it.

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Traditionally, Lao Buddhists believe that organizing a ceremony of merit-making in the name of a deceased is a way of showing gratitude to their benefactors. Even many years after they have passed away, their children, relatives and other grateful people still take their goodness to heart and express their appreciation with an annual act of making merit. Sometimes, followers of a monk make merit to commemorate the anniversary of their senior’s death. By doing so, they acknowledge their superiors, and, in turn, their superiors’ goodness and worthiness will live on in their hearts. Colophons of some manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode strongly suggest that this was the main reason for making them (BAD-13-1-0007, BAD-13-1-0164) (fig. 8).

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This fascicle of *mahāmullanibbānasuta* was donated [Lao: sang] by Miss Phaeng of Ban Vat Saen, in order to support Buddhism, on Monday, the ninth day of the waning moon, in the eighteenth lunar month, BE 2508 (AD 1965) to remark the time of [her] birthday celebration. *Nibbānaṃ paccayo hotu niccaṃ duvāṃ*. She asked for all her desires to be fulfilled.

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*Uthit kae satthu nyai kaenchan niu pang nai kan tham khuap van molana phap*

[...] dedicated to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan on the occasion of the anniversary of his death [...].
or when the layperson faces misfortune and quickly needs to get rid of bad luck. The ceremony has three main parts, i.e., receiving the five precepts, listening to a specific sermon, and offering alms.

**PRESERVATION**

Together with manuscript-making, the conservation of manuscripts was supported by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, too. In other words, Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself was a manuscript maker, collector, and conservator. He regularly examined all types of manuscripts under his control to make sure they were in good condition, and the folios were put in the correct order. Moreover, they were wrapped in cloth (Lao: *pha hò nangsü/khamphi–ຜ້າຫໍ່ໜັງສື/ຄໍາພີ*) and kept in various cabinets in his abode. This probably was the task of Sathu Nyai Khamchan working on various types of manuscripts, when he was alive. This task was similar to that of a modern librarian.12 To check the spelling and content of manuscripts, great effort and knowledge of many subjects – i.e., Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts – are certainly required. Furthermore, knowledge of various scripts and languages is also necessary. Sathu Nyai Khamchan had learnt to read a number of scripts, such as Old Lao script (Lao: *tua lao buhan/lao doem–ຕົວລາວບູຮານ/ລາວເດີມ*), Lao Dhamma script (Lao: *tua tham lao–ຕົວທໍາລາວ*), Lü Dhamma script (Lao: *tua tham lü–ຕົວທໍາລ້າ*), Lan Na Dhamma script/Tua Müang (Lao: *tua tham lan na/tua müang–ຕົວທໍາລ້ານນາ/ຕົວເມືອງ*), Burmese script (Lao: *tua mianma–ລານມຽນມາ*), Khmer/Khòm script (Lao: *tua khôm–ຂອມ*), and others. We can assume this because passages and texts written in various types of scripts believed to be used by him can be seen in a large number of the folios of various manuscripts which were found in his abode. Most scripts used for writing the manuscripts are related to the traditional ideal of the sacred script, the scripts for recording Lord Buddha’s teachings (fig. 9).

Apart from the above mentioned aspect, Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly checked if his longer manuscripts were arranged correctly. Manuscripts containing different versions of the same text posed a challenge to the reader if they were too long for a single fascicle (Lao: *liang diao mi lai phuk lai sabap–ລາງຕຽວມີຫຼາຍຜູກຫຼາຍສະບັບ*). When the different versions were not easy to distinguish, the fascicles might have gotten mixed up. Therefore, when using text written on more than one fascicle it was necessary to make sure that they were from the same version (fig. 10).

In fact, some long texts/stories were written on a single fascicle in order to avoid the problem mentioned above, even if they comprised more than a hundred folios (Lao: *lan–ລານ*). These stories were *jātaka* stories (Lao: *liang sadok–ລາງສາດົກ*), and most of them had a pair of protectors (Lao: *mai pa kap–ໄມ້ປະກັບ*), and two holding strings (Lao: *sai sanong–ສາຍສະໜອງ*).

Numerous palm leaf manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode are multi-text manuscripts (MTMS). Seemingly, some of them had not been made as an MTMS, but were created by threading many fascicles of manuscripts together. Usually, these different manuscripts were made by different people in different times. Later on, a collector who found out that they dealt with similar topics threaded them together as a single fascicle. An example is BAD-13-1-0280 (fig. 11).

This manuscript is comprised of two texts/stories: the first one (A) is the Buddhist monastic code (Pāli: *bhikkhu patimokkha*, Lao: *phikkhu patimok–ພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ*), and the other one (B) is the process of the ordination (Pāli: *vidhi-pab bajjā-upasampada*, Lao: *vithi bapphasa upasombot–ວິທີບັບພາບພານຊາຊາໂສມພອດ*). Even though some parts of their contents are related to each other, these texts have some striking differences (table 3).

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12 For further details about the manuscript collection of the great monk see McDaniel (2009, 124–39); and about care and conservation of palm-leaf manuscript see Agrawal (1982, 84–6).
This message reads: “The first and the second fascicles [of a set of these manuscripts] have already been examined. They match each other [or: they are from the same version], and are ready to be used.”

**Table 3: differences between (A) and (B)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TITLE</strong></td>
<td>Buddhist monastic code (Lao: <strong>phikkhu patimok</strong> – ຈັກຈັກຈັກໃຊ້ນີ້)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEXT</strong></td>
<td>Pāli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATE</strong></td>
<td>BE 2499 (AD 1956)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SCRIBE/COPYIST</strong></td>
<td>Sathu Pho Phan Photipannya (ສາທຸພໍ່ພັນ ທໍດິສົມາໂຍ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sathu Nyai Khamchan (ສາທຸໃຫຍ່ ຄໍາຈັນ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DONOR</strong></td>
<td>Lao: SATTHA, ບີນຫານ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIM</strong></td>
<td>to remark the 36th anniversary of his birthday; to dedicate merit to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, and his senior relatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To support Buddhism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEXT</strong></td>
<td>Mostly, <strong>nissaya</strong> (Lao: <strong>nitsa</strong>–ນິດໄສ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DATE</strong></td>
<td>BE 2490 (AD 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SCRIBE/COPYIST</strong></td>
<td>Sathu Nyai Khamchan (ສາທຸໃຫຍ່ ຄໍາຈັນ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DONOR</strong></td>
<td>Lao: SATTHA, ບີນຫານ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIM</strong></td>
<td>To support Buddhism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LANGUAGE/LINGUISTICS/PHILOLOGY

The orthography of some words written in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s manuscripts differs from that of former times. In other words, we can observe a partial change in the orthographic system used in writing/copying manuscripts. It is possible that some words written in line with old spelling systems may have led to misunderstandings.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was one of several monks who contributed to the preservation and development of Lao philology and orthography. Most texts in palm leaf and paper manuscripts found in his abode contain words written in multiple orthographic variations. Outstanding examples are symbolic/indicative words, the so-called kham nyô (ຄໍາຫຍໍ້), and tone marks (Lao: hup vannanyut–ຮູບວັນນະຍຸດ). In ancient times, the former were always used in writing the manuscripts, but the latter not at all. However, during Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s life, their usage changed: the former was not frequently used anymore, while the latter was applied in texts. In fact, replacing kham nyô with full words and writing tone marks has become popular in manuscript writing in Luang Prabang since the 1940s.13 This decade can be considered as an important turning point in the development of the orthographic system used in manuscript writing in Luang Prabang (table 4; fig. 12).

Furthermore, final consonants of Dhamma scripts (Lao: tua tham–ຕົວທໍາ) sometimes got mixed in the ancient Lao scripts (Lao: tua lao buhan/lao doem–ຕົວລາວບູຮານ/ລາວເດີມ). Some copyists/compilers just replaced the final consonants of the ancient Lao scripts with final consonants of the Dhamma scripts. Even some words written in the Dhamma script were inserted into the main texts written in ancient Lao scripts. These features are not unusual for the ancient writing style and should be considered as an orthographic change. Both palm leaf and paper manuscripts contain such features (fig. 13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old spelling</th>
<th>Number of Symbol</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>New spelling</th>
<th>Number of Symbol</th>
<th>Romanisation</th>
<th>Lao</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ນຸ</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>ເນັ່ນ</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>an va</td>
<td>ແມ່ນ່ວຍ</td>
<td>'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ນຸ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ແພວລາຍ</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>thang lai</td>
<td>ທ້າງລາຍ</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>ລາຍ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>chak</td>
<td>ລາຍ</td>
<td>will, shall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ລາຍ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ao</td>
<td>ລາຍ</td>
<td>to get, take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ນຸ</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>ຖ້າງ</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>khao không</td>
<td>ເຂາຂອງ</td>
<td>thing; material; property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>ກາຍ</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>katham</td>
<td>ກາຍ</td>
<td>to make, do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ກໍ້່</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>kò di</td>
<td>ກໍ້່</td>
<td>and; or; can be done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ກໍ້້າ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>kò ma</td>
<td>ກໍ້້າ</td>
<td>(connector) + to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ກໍ້່ຟ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>kò mi</td>
<td>ກໍ້່ຟ</td>
<td>(connector) + to have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ນຸ</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ກາລາ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>kala</td>
<td>ກາລາ</td>
<td>time, a period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ລໍັ້ນ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>khili</td>
<td>ລໍັ້ນ</td>
<td>hill, mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ນຸ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>ຕັຕາ</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>di li</td>
<td>ຕັຕາ</td>
<td>(final particle); good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ເໝ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>ເຊີວາ</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>sú va</td>
<td>ເຊີວາ</td>
<td>to name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: sample of symbolic/indicative words

Figure 12

Old spelling

New spelling

/thang lae–thang lae/ (all)

Figure 13

lao (ລາໜ່=$_[order]) was written in Dhamma script

/k/ as final consonant of Dhamma script was used in hak (ຮາໝ).

/im/ as final consonant of Dhamma script was used in lam (ລາມ).

di lae (ຫລາໝ) was written in Dhamma script

/i/ as final consonant of Dhamma script was used in laeo (ລາໝ).
IMPROVEMENTS/CORRECTIONS

Newly added texts

Some manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode have newly added texts. These texts were composed as introductions to the main texts/stories, and to explain or to add/insert more details to the body of the main texts. This shows that Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself had looked over most manuscripts kept in his abode, especially over frequently used manuscripts. These manuscripts should be considered his privately-used manuscripts. However, some manuscripts found in his abode have no corrections or newly added texts. They may have constituted his private collection (fig. 14).

Corrections

Particularly interesting is the fact that a number of manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode have various types of corrections. This aspect may be recognized as an obvious sign of a change in the way Buddhist texts where purified and passed on. According to ancient beliefs, all types of manuscripts should not be touched disrespectfully or kept in a low place. Any person who breaks this rule would not be respected by devout Buddhists. Reaching the time of Sathu Nyai Khamchan (1920–2007), however, manuscripts were no longer regarded as sacred but as utilitarian objects, allowed to be studied scientifically. In former times, in contrast, the correctness of spelling was considered less important than the sacredness of the Dhamma scripts. In other words, the senior monks of Luang Prabang, who were concerned about the purity of the Buddhist texts, paid much more attention to the variations of texts written on palm leaf and paper (fig. 15).

COPYING/WRITEING STYLE

Traditional style

Traditionally, manuscripts were written without blank spaces between the words. If there was any space, it might have been due to other reasons, not related to any writing norms. Furthermore, punctuation marks, such as a commas, question marks, and similar markings used in present-day writing, were not used (see two samples in fig. 16, 17).

Modern style

Some manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode may have been influenced by modern texts and their layout. Numerous texts written on palm leaf and paper contained various types of punctuation marks, and were written in a form similar to that of present-day techniques (see sample below). This indicated that some writers/copyists might have had access to different types of modern publications, and considered texts written in the modern style more convenient for reading. Furthermore, they may have also been fascinated by the formats/forms of such texts. Therefore, they used similar styles in their manuscripts. This should also be understood as an important turning point in the writing/copying of manuscripts in Luang Prabang.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan should be recognized as a key figure and main supporter of the introduction of these techniques to the circle of manuscript writers in Luang Prabang (fig. 18).

Tools

Writing on a palm leaf requires a different technique than writing on a sheet of paper. A necessary tool for writing on a palm leaf is a stylus (Lao: lek chan–ເຫຼັກຈານ). After writing with a stylus, a fascicle of a manuscript is not finished yet. After writing, all scripts have to be darkened (Lao: long mük–ລົງມຶກ). Both writing and darkening require effort and time. Therefore, various types of manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode after his death should be recognized as great literary efforts of his life.

However, some manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode were not written with any type of styli, but various types of ball-pens. Most importantly, ball-pens were used much more in the correction than in the writing/copying of works. In other words, palm leaf was suitable for writing not only with a stylus, but also with various modern tools (fig. 19).

For more information please see references which are listed in footnote 15.
These spaces were left for making the holes of holding strings (Lao: sai sanòng-ສາຍສະໜອງ).

This space was left because of the broken trace of palm-leaf (Lao: mi khòng lan taek haeng-ມີຄອງລານແຕກແຫງ).

This space was left because some words, - ອ (seven) and ອ (in, at), - written in the line above were lengthened down, and the words to be written, - ສ (to go), - have some high parts. It might also be possible that the message had already ended. The writer/copyist of this book did not write the first word of next message (ສ-to go), even though there had been enough space.

Figure 16: Palm-leaf manuscripts (BAD-13-1-0296)

Figure 17: Paper manuscripts (BAD-13-2-086)

Figure 18: Texts written in three columns
CONCLUSION

From ancient times to the present day, a number of educated Buddhists – i.e., monks and novices, as well as former monks and novices – have scribed/copied various types of manuscripts. Some fascicles of manuscripts were made a long time ago. But they have been preserved, copied, and passed on from one generation to the next.

In addition to the Pāli canon, monks and novices always used to study a number of secular subjects as well (Lao: hu khadi lok khadi tham – ຫັ້ຄະດີໂລກຄະດີທໍາ), and, nowadays, knowledge of modern technology is additionally required from them. This shows that although the monks’ and novices’ ways of life are different from that of laypeople, the monastic community was never separated from the rest of the Buddhist society.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan should be recognized as one of the senior monks of Luang Prabang who decisively advanced the dissemination of the Dhamma and the propagation of Buddhism. During his lifetime, he devoted himself to many works related to the monastic order and the Buddhist community, including the writing, collecting and preserving of manuscripts. His regular efforts to make merit by making manuscripts in commemoration of his birthday was welcomed and adopted by the laypeople of Luang Prabang.

Concerning the production of manuscripts, Sathu Nyai Khamchan patiently tried to find ways to improve his own writing skills. He might have understood that various traditional techniques and ways of making manuscripts indeed needed to be revived. Furthermore, the traditional stylus and handmade palm leaf – in former times the main tools for this work – needed to be improved or replaced. Therefore, a number of manuscripts found in his abode reflect the usage of various modern tools and materials like ball-pens and typewriters, as well as manufactured palm leaves.

From a linguistic standpoint, it should be considered that Sathu Nyai Khamchan showed a keen interest in the orthographic system of Dhamma script. In former times, a number of words – especially the so-called abbreviation (Lao: kham nyò – ເກເກ) – could be written in different shapes. During his life, kham nyò was seldom used and frequently replaced with full words. Moreover, modern techniques used in writing/printing – such as columns, paragraphs, punctuation marks, format, correction/edition, etc. – can undoubtedly be seen in a large number of manuscripts written during his lifetime.

Figure 18

Corrected with ball-pen

Written/copied with ball-pen

Typed with type-writer
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