

# **DORISEA WORKING PAPER**

ISSUE 14, 2014, ISSN: 2196-6893

---

**BOUNLEUTH SENGSOULIN**

---

**MANUSCRIPTS FOUND IN THE  
ABODE OF THE VENERABLE ABBOT  
PHRA KHAMCHAN VIRACHITTO  
VAT SAEN SUKHARAM,  
LUANG PRABANG, LAOS**

---



# **14**

## DORISEA WORKING PAPER SERIES

### EDITORS

Peter J. Bräunlein  
Michael Dickhardt  
Karin Klenke  
Andrea Lauser

### BMBF Competence Network “Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia” (DORISEA)

*The research network “Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia” (DORISEA) is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and coordinated by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Georg-August-University of Göttingen. Scholars from the Universities of Göttingen, Hamburg, Münster, Heidelberg and Berlin (Humboldt University) are involved in several projects that investigate the relationship between religion and modernity in Southeast Asia.*

**How to cite this paper:** Bounleuth Sengsoulin (2014): Manuscripts found in the abode of the Venerable Abbot Phra Khamchan Virachitto, Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, Laos. In: DORISEA Working Paper Series, No. 14.

Research Network DORISEA  
Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia

Project Office  
Georg-August-University Göttingen  
Institut für Ethnologie  
Berliner Str. 28  
D - 37073 Göttingen  
Germany  
+49 (0)551 39 20153

[dorisea@uni-goettingen.de](mailto:dorisea@uni-goettingen.de)  
[www.dorisea.net](http://www.dorisea.net)

**DORISEA**  
**Dynamics of Religion**  
in Southeast Asia 

FUNDED BY



Federal Ministry  
of Education  
and Research

BOUNLEUTH SENGSOULIN

**MANUSCRIPTS FOUND IN THE ABODE OF  
THE VENERABLE ABBOT  
PHRA KHAMCHAN VIRACHITTO,  
VAT SAEN SUKHARAM,  
LUANG PRABANG, LAOS**

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<sup>1</sup>) (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: *thet* – ທອດ), written as manuscripts, to laypeople. Thus, manuscripts are one of the main components<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, a monastery comprises at least four components: monks and novices (Lao: *phasong saman-nen* – ພະສິງສາມະເນນ), monastic buildings (Lao: *kuti vihan* – ກູຕິວິຫານ), Buddha images (Lao: *pha phuttha hup* – ພະພູດທະຮູບ), and manuscripts (Lao: *nangsü tham lam sut* – ນັງສຸທຳລາມສູດ).

## 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*–ລານຍາວ) (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 kòm*–ລານກອມ) (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	SHORT PALM-LEAF
<b>Size:</b> about 50–60 x 4–5,5 cm.	<b>Size:</b> about 30–40 x 4–5 cm.
Two holes for a string ( <i>sai sanòng</i> ), but generally only the left one is used.	One hole for a string ( <i>sai sanòng</i> ).
<b>Line:</b> 4–6 lines; only the top-line and the bottom-line are written in full length.	<b>Line:</b> 4–5 lines; only the top-line and the bottom-line are written in full length.
<b>Scripts:</b> Tham (Dhamma), Lao Buhan (old Lao), Lü, and Khòm.	<b>Scripts:</b> Tham (Dhamma), Lao Buhan (old Lao).
<b>Substance:</b> mostly religious texts.	<b>Substance:</b> mostly non-religious texts.
<b>Additional texts (paratexts):</b> introductory text and colophon.	<b>Additional texts (paratexts):</b> introductory text and colophon.

Table 1: some features of palm-leaf manuscripts<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 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: *nangsū kòm tang khon tang mi*–ນັ່ງສີກອມຕາງຄົນຕາງມີ).

### *Paper*

Three types of paper manuscripts were found in the abode of the eminent abbot Sathu Nyai Khamchan: mulberry paper, *khòì* paper, and modern paper (Lao: *phap sa*–ພັບສາ; *samut khòì*–ສະພຸດຂອຍ; *phap lan*–ພັບຫຼັ້ນ). 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* (ພັບຫຼັ້ນ) to refer to all of them (BAD-13-2-066/13-2-066: 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 *khòì* paper (Lao: *samut khòì* – ສະພຸດຂອຍ) 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*–ຜູກ), 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: *pha that*–ພະທາດ) on the top of Phu Si mountain

MULBERRY PAPER	KHÒI PAPER	MODERN PAPER
<b>Size:</b> various sizes/shapes.	<b>Size:</b> about 30–40 x 10–15 cm.	<b>Size:</b> two sizes/shapes, i.e., similar/close to that of <i>khòì</i> paper, and of palm-leaf.
Number of lines per page: depending on the size the manuscript ( <i>phap</i> ).	Number of lines per page: depending on the size the manuscript ( <i>phap</i> ).	Number of lines per page: depending on the size the manuscript ( <i>phap</i> ).
<b>Scripts:</b> Lü, Tham (Dhamma), and Lao Buhan (old Lao).	<b>Scripts:</b> Lü, Tham (Dhamma), and Lao Buhan (old Lao).	<b>Scripts:</b> Tham (Dhamma).
<b>Substance:</b> mostly non-religious texts.	<b>Substance:</b> mostly non-religious texts.	<b>Substance:</b> mostly religious texts.
<b>Additional texts:</b> (rarely) introductory text and colophon.	<b>Additional texts:</b> (rarely) introductory text and colophon.	<b>Additional texts:</b> introductory text and colophon.
<b>Table:</b> (rarely) depends on the substance.	Image and text (go/don't go together).	

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

(Lao: *chòm phu si*–ຈອມພູສີ) in Chunlasangkat in 1166 (AD 1804).

Interestingly, a message was inserted in the colophon of a fascicle of Dhutangavatti (Pāli: *dhutaṅga-vattī*, Lao: *thutangkhat*-ທູຕັງຄະວັດ). It is written at the end of the main text and reads ‘...*phoen khün müa soek siang tung nan tae lae na...*’ (... ເພິ່ນຂຶ້ນເມືອເສິກຂຽງຕຸງນັ້ນແທແລນາ...). 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*–ລານ). It must have taken a long time to finish them. Having successfully accomplished such a task must have made the copyist 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 *khòì* paper manuscripts (Lao: *phap sa*–ພັບສາ; *samut khòì*–ສະໝຸດຂອຍ). 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:

*hòng kam bualapha thevada khai patu lek chak phae khon thang lai hua pi fon bò lai la pi fon ching mi lai khao di thuk haeng lae hòng kam akhane thevada khai patu lom fon bò lai lom haeng nak khon thang lai chak pen thuk nak moeng chak pen soek thòva khao nyang di lae hòng kham thakkhin thevada khai patu fai pi nan chak laeng nak khon chak tai yak khao mak nak lae bò di lae [...].*

ຮ້ອງກ້າບົວລະພາ ເທວະດາໄຂປະຕູເຫຼັກ ຈັກແພ້ຄົນທັງຫຼາຍ ຫົວປີຝົນບໍ່ຫຼາຍ ຫຼາຍປີຝົນຈຶ່ງມີຫຼາຍ ເຂົ້າດີທຸກແຫ່ງແລ ຮ້ອງກ້າອາຄະເນ ເທວະດາໄຂປະຕູລົມ ຝົນບໍ່ຫຼາຍ ລົມແຮງນັກ ຄົນທັງຫຼາຍຈັກເປັນທຸກນັກ ເມືອງຈັກເປັນເສິກ ທໍ່ວາເຂົ້າຍັງດີແລ ຮ້ອງກ້າທັກຂົນ ເທວະດາໄຂປະຕູໄຟ ປີນັ້ນຈັກແລງນັກ ຄົນຈັກຕາຍຢາກເຂົ້າມາກນັກແລ ບໍ່ດີແລ [...].

[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: *nangsü ha mü hai mü di khòng hua chao phumma vat saen hua ni dai khian tae müa pi 1270*-ໜັງສືຫາມ້ຮ້າຍມ້ຮ້າຍມ້ຮ້າຍມ້ຮ້າຍ ເຈົ້າພູມມາວັດແສນ ຫົວນີ້ໄດ້ຂຽນແຕ່ເມື່ອປີ ໑໒໗໐)'. 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*-ການສ້າງໜັງສື) 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/ (ອະ), and where /n/, /m/, /ny/ (ນ, ມ, ຍ) 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/ (ອະ) 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 (๘). Sometimes a symbol similar to the shape of *maikan* (๘) in Lao is written above this shape (59-2/5; 60-6; 61-4; 62-1/4; ...).

### *Magic or khatha* (ຄາຖາ)

The Lao word *khatha* (ຄາຖາ), meaning magic or magic formula, refers to two categories of supernatural powers: black magic (Lao: *khatha man*-ຄາຖາມານ) and Buddhist magic (*khatha pha*-ຄາຖາພະ). 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 Ckamchan's abode. Some of them contain a number of sacred words from Buddhist teachings. Buddhist/Pāli 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*-ພະລັດຕະນະໂຕ) were incorporated with specific Lao words for the composition of *khatha*. One part of this *khatha* is as follows:

*phutthang at thammang at sangkhang at [...]*  
*phutthang tut thammang tut sangkhang tut [...]*  
*phutthang salanang at thammang salanang at [...]*  
*sangkhang salanang at [...]*.

ພຸດທັງອັດ ທໍາມັງອັດ ສັງຄັງອັດ [...] ພຸດທັງຕູດ ທໍາມັງຕູດ  
ສັງຄັງຕູດ [...] ພຸດທັງ ສະລະນັງອັດ ທໍາມັງ ສະລະນັງອັດ  
ສັງຄັງ ສະລະນັງອັດ [...]

[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* - ພະທຸດົງ) 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):

*ger, galangal, garlic and phai<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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



Figure 1

*ya thong sae sa duang kò di chep pum chep sae kò di thak ao khao khwai dòn sam kip ao khang fai hai hòn laeo ao phoeng kap khi sut huk khao khwai nan laeo ao tom laeo ao phik chet khing chet thiam chet phai chet fan tam sai suk laeo ao ma hai kin di lae [...].*

ຢາທອງແສສະດວງກໍດີ ເຈັບປູມເຈັບແສກໍດີ ຖາກເອົາເຂົ້າຄວາຍດອນສາມກີບ ເອົາຂາງໄຟໃຫ້ຮ້ອນ ເອົາເຜິ້ງກັບຂີ້ສູດຮູກເຂົ້າຄວາຍນັ້ນ ແລ້ວເອົາຕົ້ມແລ້ວເອົາພິກເຈັດ ຂຶງເຈັດ ທຽມເຈັດ ໄຟເຈັດ ຕໍາໃສ່ສຸກແລ້ວເອົາມາໃຫ້ກິນ ດີແລ [...].

[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, gin-*

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

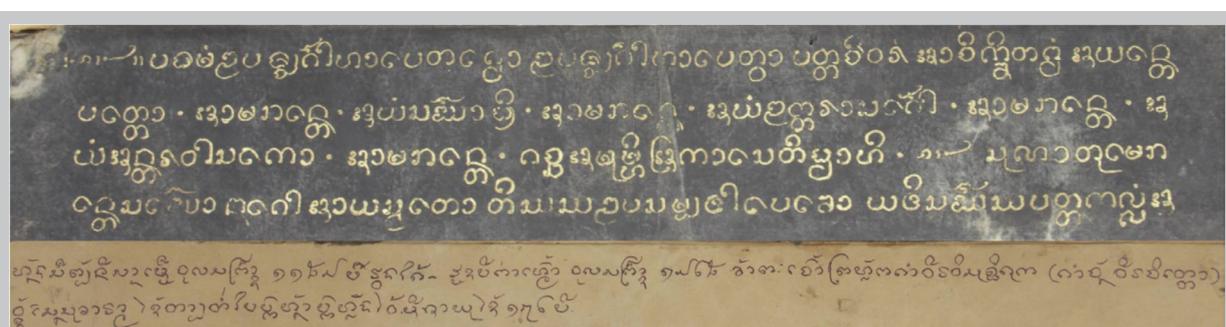
<sup>4</sup> *Zingiberaceae purpureum* Rosc., occasionally used as a cure for fainting and indigestion (Tomecko 2009, 112–3).  
<sup>5</sup> These believe might be connected to the belief in the sacredness of white elephants which is common in Southeast Asia.

sample of his privately-used manuscripts. The main characteristics of this manuscript are (fig. 2):

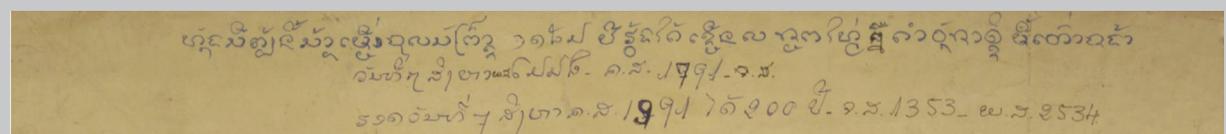
- Darkened paper, golden ink;
- Size and shape: 52,0 x 10,2 x 1,0 cm, similar to the shape of *samut khòì* (*khòì*-paper);
- Cover: hard cover with date, donor, and restorer;
- Language: Pāli;
- Script: Lan Na script (*tua müang*);
- Date: CS 1353 (AD 1791);
- Scribe/copyist: Luang Siang La (Maha Kesòn);
- 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 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 manuscript was written in Chunlasangkat 1153, a *huang khai* year, the ninth lunar month, the eighth day of the waxing moon, Sunday, the day of *tao sanga*, August 7, BE 2334, AD 1791. On August 7, AD 1991, Chunlasangkat 1353, BE 2534, [this book] has lasted for 200 years.

Figure 2

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.

ry, from the time he restored it to the time of his death (1963–2007). In fact, this book might have become his property even earlier. At first, it may have still been in good conditions, but over time its cover became torn. Knowing that this book was of considerable importance for Buddhism, he repaired both the front and the back cover of this favourite book of his, leaving interesting notes inside.

*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:

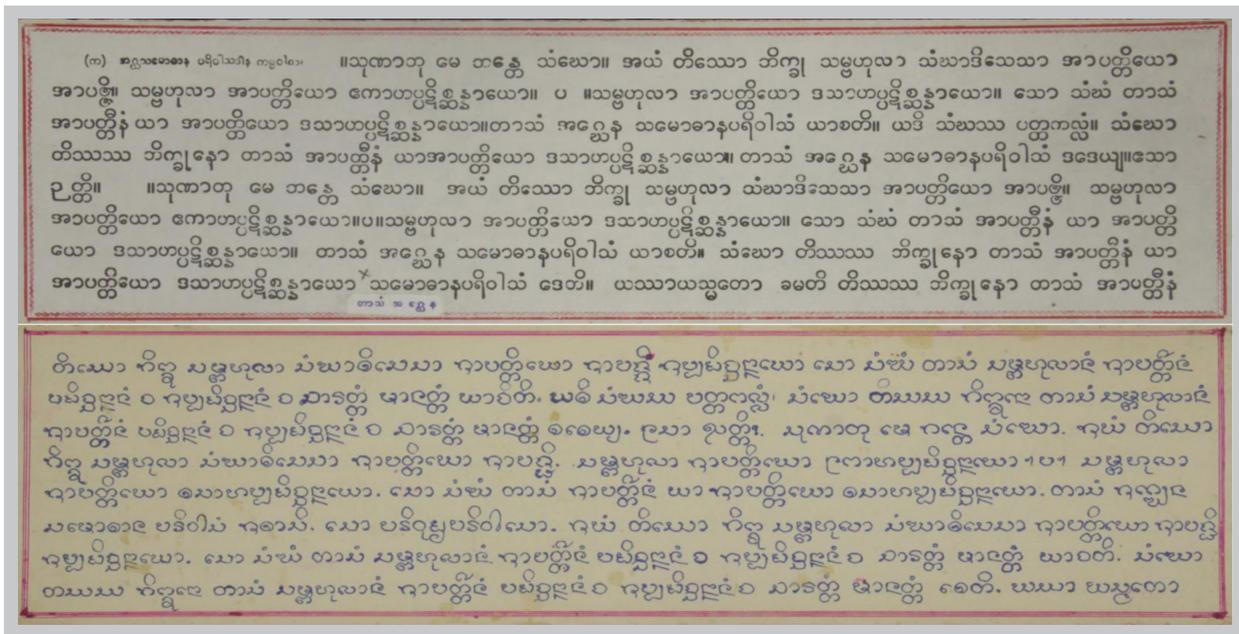


Figure 3: A fascicle of 19 *khan kammavācā*

- Normal paper, darkened ink;
- Size and shape: 48,7 x 12,5 x 1,5 cm, similar to the shape of *samut khòì* (*khòì* paper);
- Cover: hard cover with date and writer’s name;
- Language: Pāli;
- Script: Burmese script;
- Date: CS(?) 1295 (AD 1933);
- Scribe/copyist: *aggamahāpaṇḍita* [...];
- Editing works:
  - Person: Sathu Nyai Khamchan
  - Date: undated
  - Part: missing part was re-written.

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 NANGSŪ-ການສ້າງໜັງສື)**

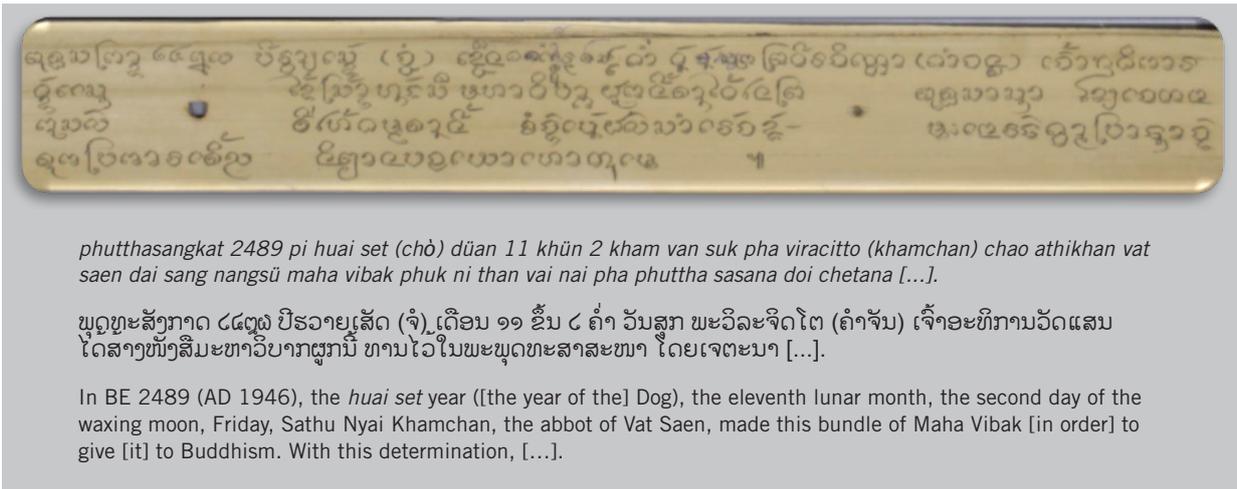
*Donor/sattha/chaosattha*

This Pāli text was written in Burmese script and deals with the set of questions and answers which is used in an ordination ceremony.<sup>6</sup> 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

In Lao language, the meaning of “making manuscripts” (Lao: *kan sang nangsū* -ການສ້າງໜັງສື) is somewhat multifarious. *Sang* (ສາງ) used in this context covers at least three meanings. It often refers to the act of *making*, of writing or copying (Lao: *litichana/khian* - ລິດຈະນາ/ຂຽນ) manuscripts. In other cases, it is applied in the sense of “to donate” (Lao: *bòlichak*-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 sasana*-ສ້າງໄວ້ໃນພູດທະສາສະໜາ).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, Burmese people consider the making of *kammavācā* manuscript a kind of merit-making, and this performance is popular during the time their sons’ ordaining ceremonies. Agrawal (1982, 16) states: “The *kammavācā* is a collection of extracts from the Pāli *vinaya*, the monastic code of disciplines, outlining rituals and observances of Buddhist order, principally concerned with ordination and bestowals of robes. It was customary for a Burmese family to commission a copy of the *kammavācā* on the occasion of their son entering the monkhood.”

<sup>7</sup> (BAD-13-1-0004, BAD-13-1-0005, BAD-13-1-0006, BAD-13-1-0007, BAD-13-1-0008, BAD-13-1-0009, BAD-13-1-0010, BAD-13-1-0011, BAD-13-1-0012, BAD-13-1-0013, BAD-13-1-0128, BAD-13-1-0156, BAD-13-1-0157, BAD-13-1-0160, BAD-13-1-0163, BAD-13-1-0164, BAD-13-1-0193,



*phutthasangkat 2489 pi huai set (chò) dūan 11 khün 2 kham van suk pha viracitto (khamchan) chao athikhan vat saen dai sang nangsū maha vibak phuk ni than vai nai pha phuttha sasana doi chetana [...].*

ພູດທະສັງກາດ ໒໔໘໙ ປີຮວຍເສັດ (ຈໍ) ເດືອນ ໑໑ ຂຶ້ນ ໒ ຄໍ່າ ວັນສຸກ ພະວິລະຈິດໂຕ (ຄໍ່າຈັນ) ເຈົ້າອະທິການວັດແສນ ໄດ້ສ້າງໜັງສືມະຫາວິບາກຜູກນີ້ ທານໄວ້ໃນພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ໂດຍເຈຕະນາ [...].

In BE 2489 (AD 1946), the *huai set* year ([the year of the] Dog), the eleventh lunar month, the second day of the waxing moon, Friday, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the abbot of Vat Saen, made this bundle of Maha Vibak [in order] to give [it] to Buddhism. With this determination, [...].

Figure 4

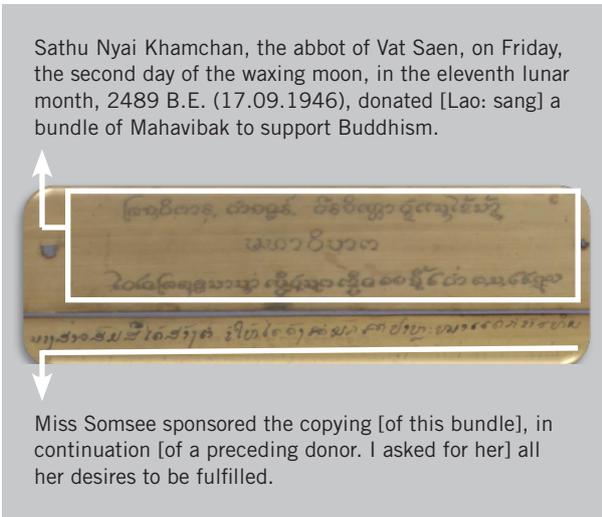
In this case, however, *sang* means that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had himself copied this manuscript. In other words, the donor (Lao: *sattha/chaosattha*–ສັດທາ/ເຈົ້າສັດທາ) and the copyist (Lao: *phu litchana*–ຜູ້ລິດຈະນາ) of the above mentioned manuscript are the same person. This holds true, as Koret (1999, 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 nangsū*–ວິທີການສ້າງໜັງສື) in Luang Pra-

bang 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/nangsū*–ຜ້າຫໍ່ຄໍ່າພິ/ໜັງສື). 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.



Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the abbot of Vat Saen, on Friday, the second day of the waxing moon, in the eleventh lunar month, 2489 B.E. (17.09.1946), donated [Lao: *sang*] a bundle of Mahavibak to support Buddhism.

Miss Somsee sponsored the copying [of this bundle], in continuation [of a preceding donor. I asked for her] all her desires to be fulfilled.

Figure 5

BAD-13-1-0195, BAD-13-1-0208, BAD-13-1-2030, BAD-13-1-0280, BAD-13-1-0300).

**PURPOSES/DESIRES**

*Generalities*

Traditionally, there are two main purposes for making manuscripts: to support Buddhism (Lao: *kham su sasana*–ຄໍ່າສູສາສະໜາ) and to make merit (Lao: *sang punnya palami*–ສ້າງປຸນຍາປາລະມີ). 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*– ພຸດທະທໍານາຍ). Merit-making is understood as the continuous development of goodness/perfection (Lao: *palami*-ປາລະມີ) until it is sufficient to gain enlightenment and reach *nibbāna* (Lao: *banlu òlahan lae thoeng pha nipphan*-ບັນລຸອໍລະທັນ ແລະເຖິງພະນິບພານ). 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* – ກໍາຈັດປັດເປົ້າບາບກໍາ/ໂລຄາພະຍາດ).

### Specifics

Interestingly, 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.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, his birthday ceremony was sometimes organized for him by other senior monks and laypeople who were his close disciples (B2435/Box B23, BAD-12-2-1987.010) (fig. 6).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's acts of making merit by producing manuscripts to commemorate an anniversary of his birthday were welcomed by laypeople as well. When they saw that the respected senior monk Sathu Nyai Khamchan made manuscripts to commemorate his birthday, laypeople may have considered this a good way to make merit and followed his example. Some of the manuscripts found have passages stating that they were made to commemorate a layperson's birthday. (BAD-1-13-0027, BAD-1-13-0139) (fig. 7).

### Rite/practice

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<sup>9</sup>. 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).

Sathu Nyai Kaenchan was a former abbot of Vat 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 nangsu* (ສ້າງທັງສີ), 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.<sup>10</sup> 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/ chao sattha*-ຜູ້ສ້າງ/ສັດທາ/ເຈົ້າສັດທາ): 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.<sup>11</sup>

Sathu Nyai Khamchan may have realized that Lao Buddhists prefer to organize a ceremony of merit-making to prolong their lives (Lao: *het bun süp/tò vanyu*-ເຮັດບຸນສືບ/ຕໍ່ອາຍຸ). Usually, there is no specific point in the life of a layperson to conduct this ceremony; it is performed when it seems convenient,

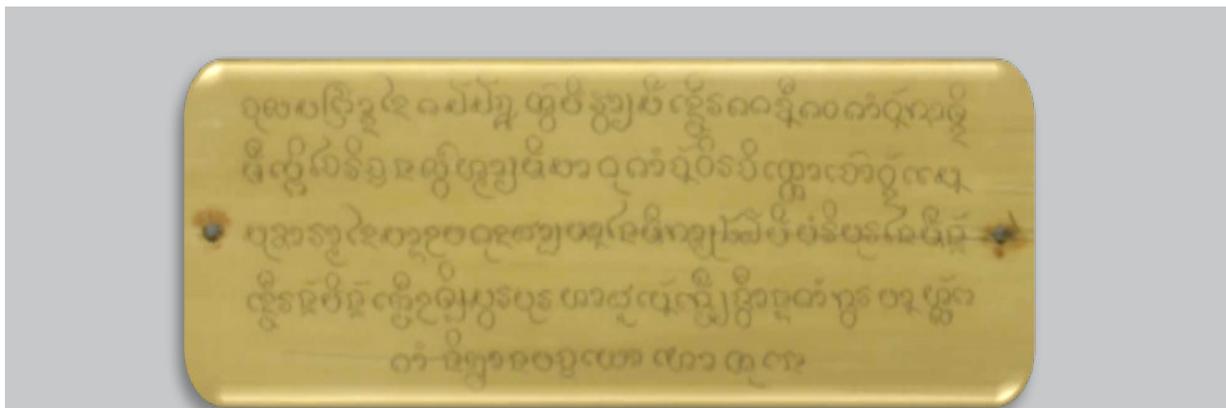
well. This probably reflects the rite of passage, being presented in Khamphun's work (2011, 11, 228), which comprises four important ceremonies to be performed in a person's lifetime: birth, ordination, marriage, and death. Traditionally, when any person dies his/her relatives must to make merit in the name of him/her. For more detail about death rite in Theravada Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia see Tambiah (1970, 191–4), Swearer (1981, 28–32), Berger (2000), and Terwiel (2012, 247–60).

<sup>10</sup> (BAD-13-1-0024, BAD-13-1-0090, BAD-13-1-0095, BAD-13-1-0096, BAD-13-1-0102, BAD-13-1-0106, BAD-13-1-0193, BAD-13-1-0195, BAD-13-1-0217, BAD-13-1-0263, BAD-13-1-0281, BAD-13-1-0297, BAD-13-1-0299, BAD-13-1-0310, BAD-13-1-0318, BAD-13-1-0319, BAD-13-1-0322)

<sup>11</sup> (BAD-13-1-0128, BAD-13-1-0139, BAD-13-1-0157, BAD-13-1-0163, BAD-13-1-0208, BAD-13-1-0280)

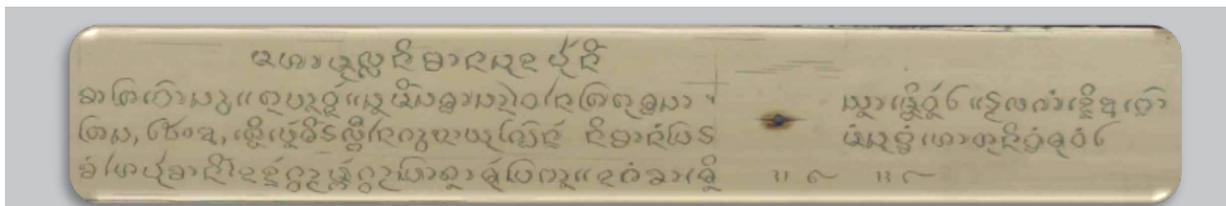
<sup>8</sup> (BAD-1-13-0120, BAD-1-13-0157, BAD-1-13-0163, BAD-1-13-0208, BAD-1-13-0230, BAD-1-13-0280; BAD-1-13-0222)

<sup>9</sup> Not only do Lao Buddhists believe that they can gain merit by their own merit-making, they have strong confidence in the truth that merit can be transferred to the deceased as



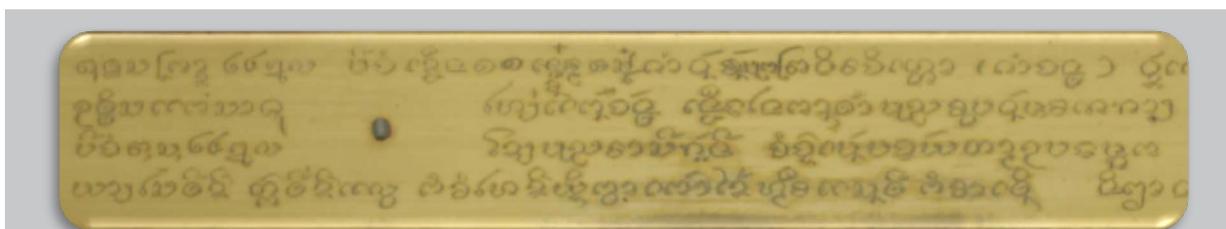
Chunlasangkat 1338 (AD 1976), a *huai si* year, the eleventh lunar month, the tenth day of the waxing moon, Sunday, the *poek chai* day, [this fascicle of manuscript was] copied completely. Sathu Nyai Khamchan, abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, made/donated [Lao: sang] [this fascicle of] Upakhut Phap Man (Upakhut defeated *māra*) just on the date [he] was fifty-six years old, in order to dedicate merit to [his] elder sister, Mrs. Kham Uan of Ban Lak Kham. *Nibbāna paccayo hotu no.*

Figure 6



This fascicle of *mahāmullānibbānasuta* 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 paramaṃ sukhaṃ hotu niccaṃ duvaṃ duvaṃ.* She asked for all her desires to be fulfilled.

Figure 7



*uthit kae sathu nyai kaenchan nūang nai kan tham bun khuap van mōlana phap*

ອຸທິດແກ່ສາທຸໄຫຍ່ແກ່ນຈັນເນື່ອງໃນການທຳບຸນຂວບວັນມໍລະນະພາບ

[...] dedicated to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan on the occasion of the anniversary of his death [...].

Figure 8

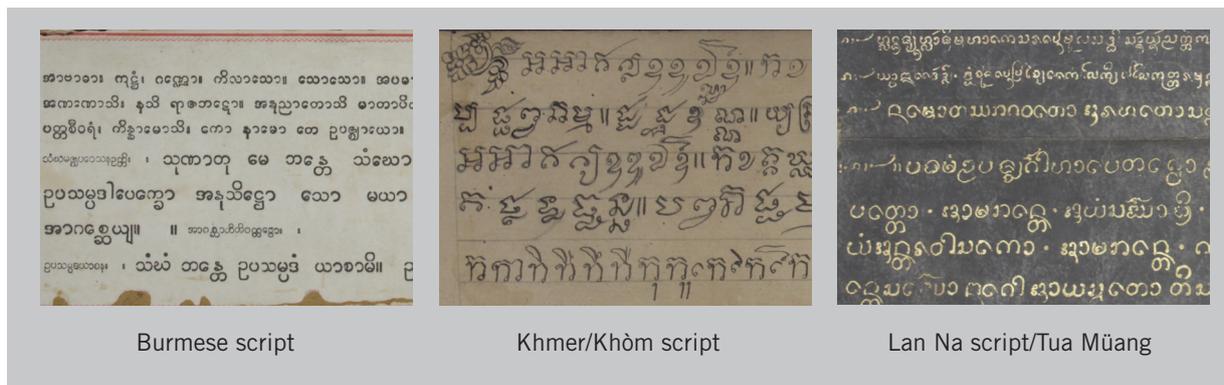


Figure 9

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.<sup>12</sup>

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*–ຕົວທໍາລື້), Lan Na Dhamma script/Tua Müang (Lao: *tua tham lan na/tua müang*–ຕົວທໍາລ້ານນາ/ຕົວເມືອງ), Burmese script (Lao: *tua mianma*–ຕົວມຽນມາ), Khò̃m script (Lao: *tua khò̃m*–ຕົວຂອມ), 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 tra-

ditional 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: *lüang diao mi lai phuk lai sabap*–ເລື່ອງດຽວມີຫຼາຍຜູກຫຼາຍສະບັບ). 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: *lüang sadok*–ເລື່ອງຊາດົກ), and most of them had a pair of protectors (Lao: *mai pa kap*–ໄມ້ປະກັບ) and two holding strings (Lao: *sai sanòng*– 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 paṭimokkha*, Lao: *phikkhu patimok*–ພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ), and the other one (B) is the process of the ordination (Pāli: *vidhi-pabbajjā-upasampada*, Lao: *vithi bapphasa upasombot*–ວິທີປັບພະຊາອຸປະສົມປິດ). Even though some parts of their contents are related to each other, these texts have some striking differences (table 3).

<sup>12</sup> 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).

	(A)	(B)
<b>TITLE</b>	Buddhist monastic code (Lao: <i>phikkhu patimok</i> – ພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ)	The process of the ordination (Lao: <i>vithi bapphasa upasombot</i> – ວິທີປັບພະຊາອຸປະສົມບົດ)
<b>TEXT</b>	Pāli	Mostly, <i>nissaya</i> (Lao: <i>nitsai</i> –ນິດໄສ)
<b>DATE</b>	BE 2499 (AD 1956)	BE 2490 (AD 1947)
<b>SCRIBE/COPYIST</b>	Sathu Phò Phan Phothipannyo (ສາທຸພໍ່ພັນ ໂພທິປັນໂຍ)	Sathu Nyai Khamchan (ສາທຸໂຫຍ ຄໍາຈັນ)
<b>DONOR</b> <b>LAO: SATTHA, ສັດທາ</b>	Sathu Nyai Khamchan (ສາທຸໂຫຍ ຄໍາຈັນ)	Sathu Nyai Khamchan (ສາທຸໂຫຍ ຄໍາຈັນ)
<b>AIM</b>	to remark the 36 <sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birthday;  to dedicate merit to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, and his senior relatives.	To support Buddhism.

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

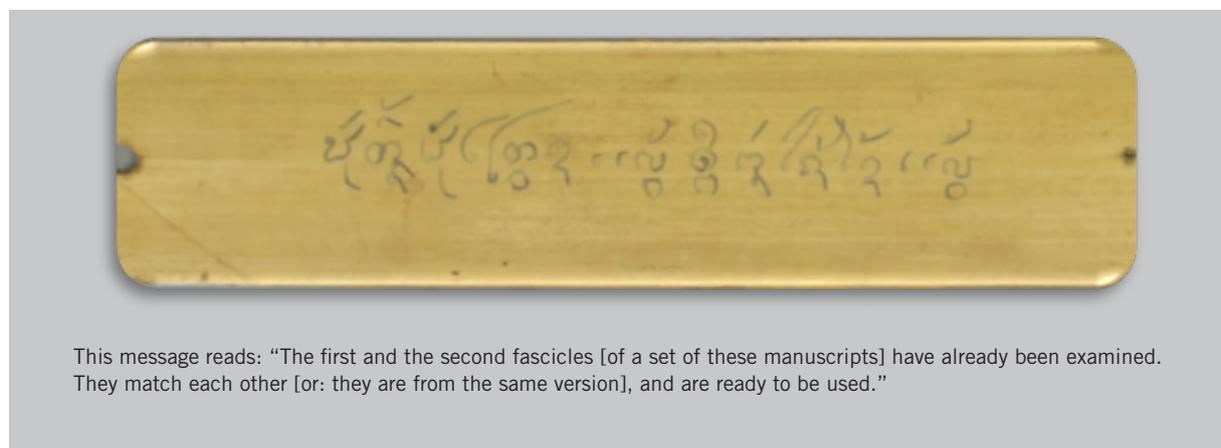


Figure 10



Figure 11

## 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 nyò* (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 nyò* with full words and writing tone marks has become popular in manuscript writing in Luang Prabang since the 1940s.<sup>13</sup> 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/compiler 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).

Old spelling		New spelling		Romanisation	Lao	Meaning
Shape	Number of Symbol	Shape	Number of Symbol			
ຮີ	2	ຮີວີ	5	an va	ອັນວ່າ	-
ຊຳ	4	ຊຳໂຍງ	7	thang lai	ທັງຫຼາຍ	all
ຮັ	2	ຮັດ/ຮັດ	3/3	chak	ຈັກ	will, shall
ຮົງ	3	ເຮົາ	4	ao	ເອົາ	to get, take
ເຮົາ	5	ເຮົາຮົງ	7	khao khòng	ເຂົ້າຂອງ	thing; material; property
ຮຳ	4	ດະຮຳ	5	katham	ກະທໍາ	to make, do
ຮີ	3	ດໍຂີ	4	kò di	ກໍດີ	and; or; can be done
ຮຳ	4	ດໍມາ	4	kò ma	ກໍມາ	(connector) + to come
ຮີ	3	ດໍມີ	4	kò mi	ກໍມີ	(connector) + to have
ຮາ/ຮາ	3/3	ດາລະ	4	kala	ກາລະ	time, a period of time
ຮີ	3	ດີດີ	4	khili	ຄີລີ	hill, mountain
ຮີ	3	ດີດີ/ດີດີ	4/5	di li	ດີຫຼື	(final particle); good
ຮີ	4	ດີວີ	4	sü va	ຊື່ວ່າ	to name

Table 4: sample of symbolic/indicative words

<sup>13</sup> (BAD-13-1-0007, BAD-13-1-0008, BAD-13-1-0009, BAD-13-1-0010, BAD-13-1-0011, BAD-13-1-0012, BAD-13-1-0013, BAD-13-1-0128, BAD-13-1-0157, BAD-13-1-0164, BAD-13-1-0193, BAD-13-1-0195, BAD-13-1-0208, BAD-13-1-0280)

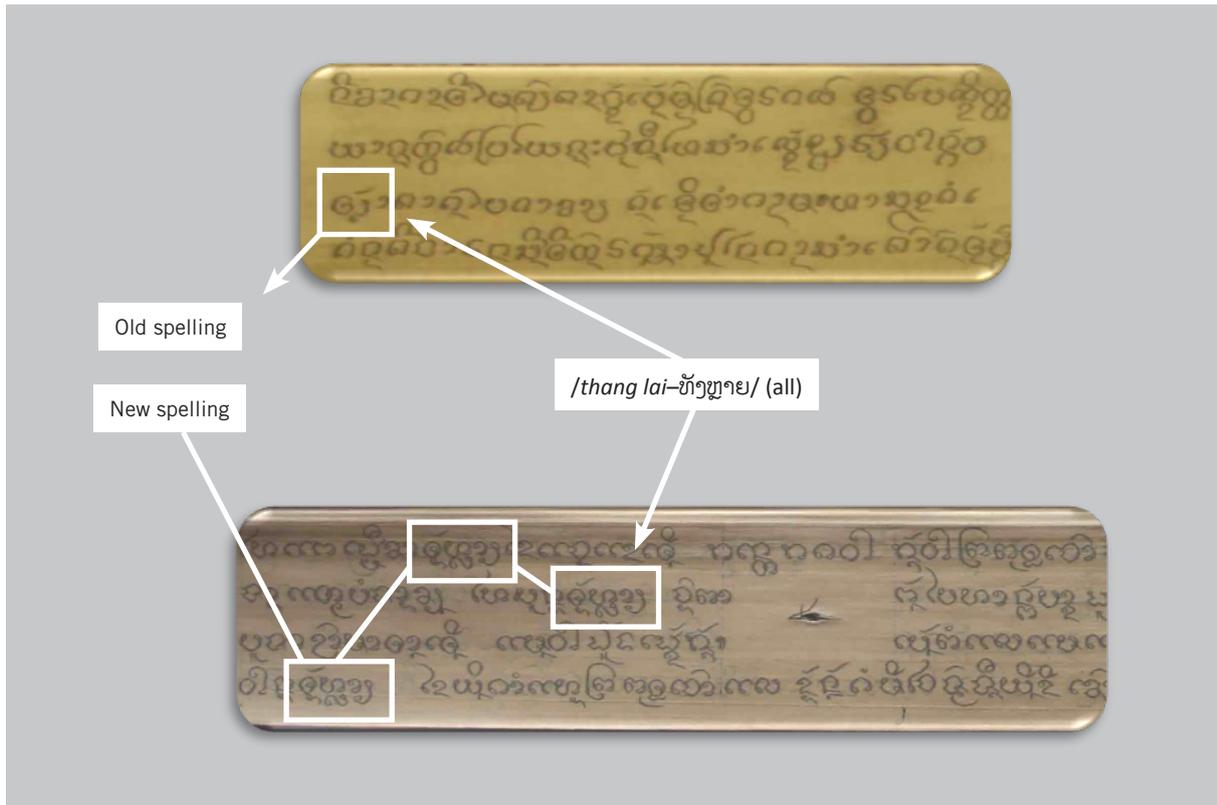


Figure 12

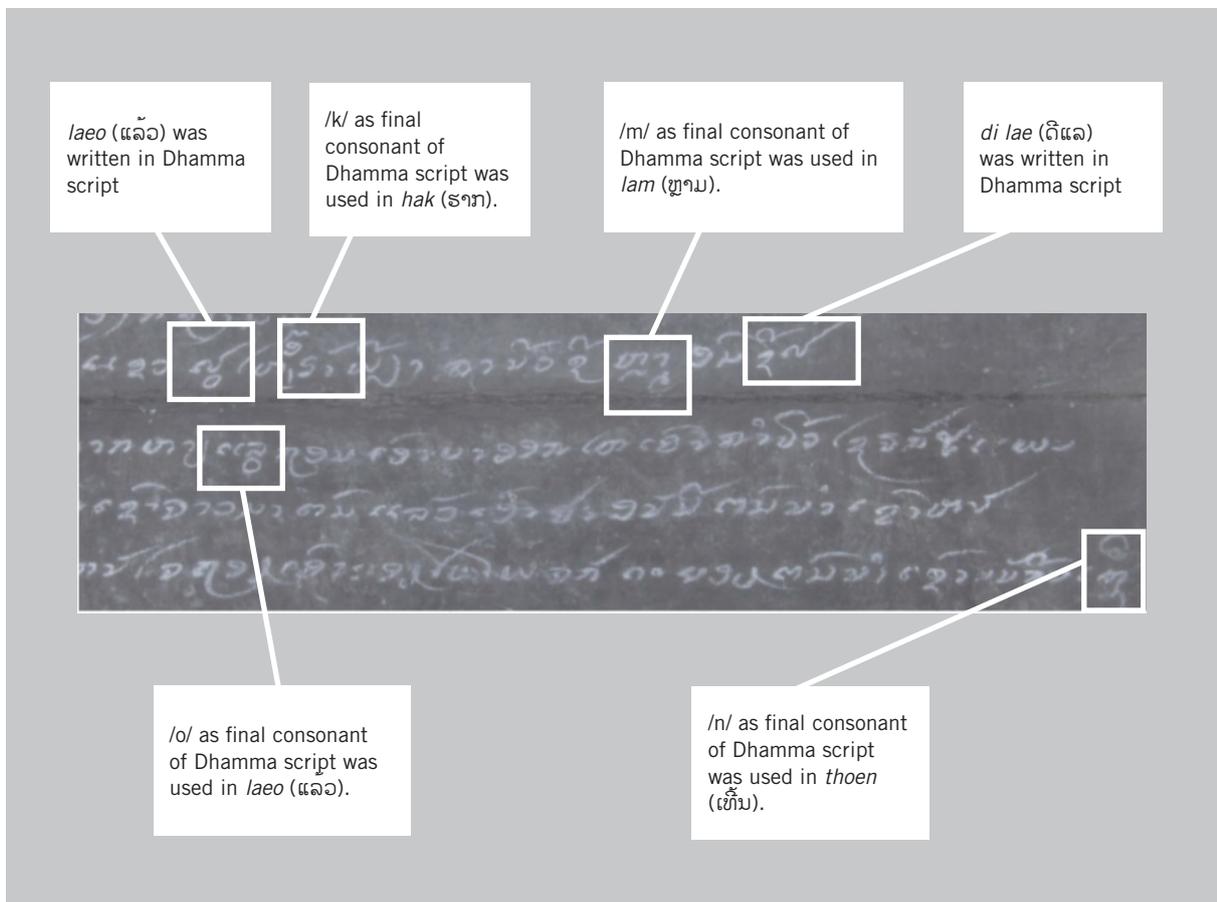


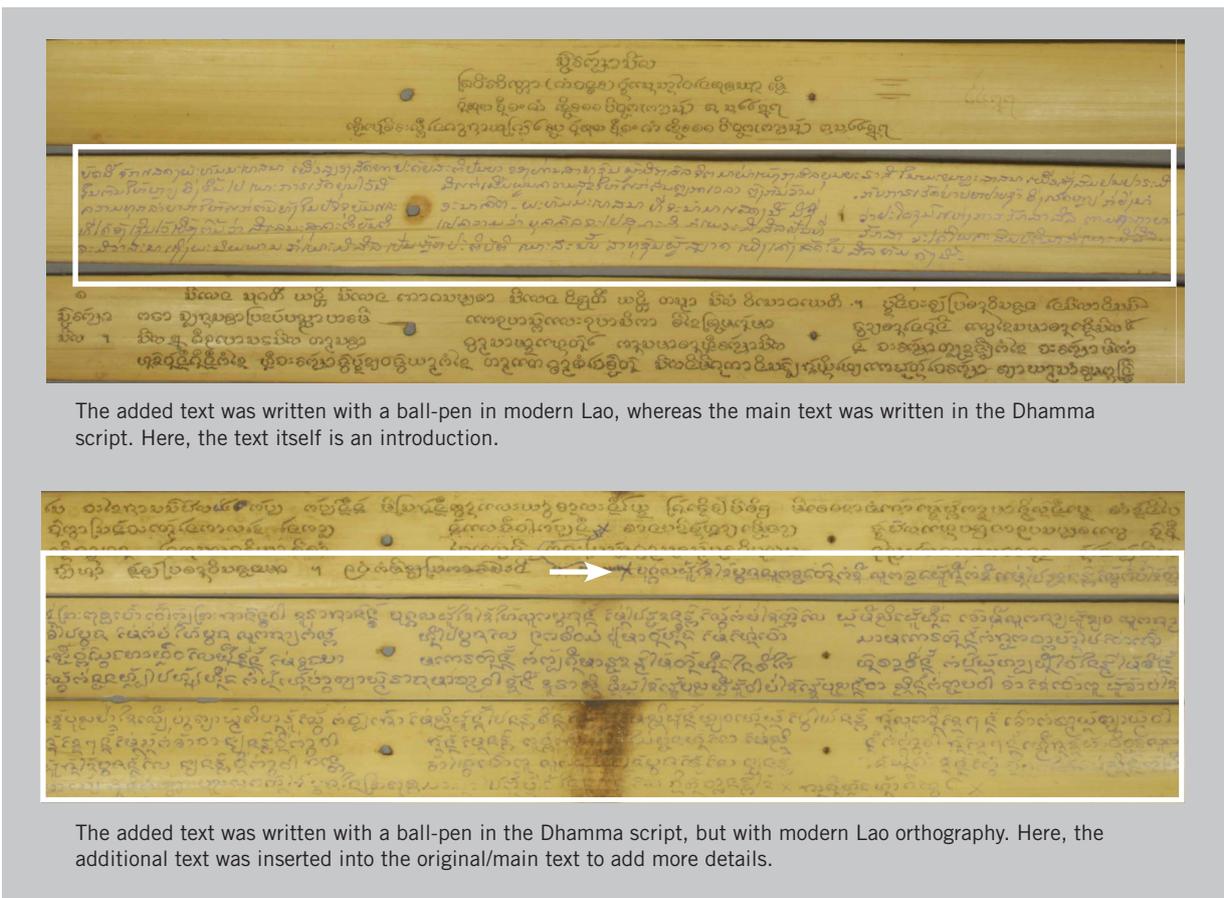
Figure 13

### 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.<sup>14</sup> 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. How-

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.<sup>15</sup> 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).



The added text was written with a ball-pen in modern Lao, whereas the main text was written in the Dhamma script. Here, the text itself is an introduction.

The added text was written with a ball-pen in the Dhamma script, but with modern Lao orthography. Here, the additional text was inserted into the original/main text to add more details.

Figure 14

ever, 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 were purified and passed on.

<sup>15</sup> BAD-13-1-0002, BAD-13-1-0014, BAD-13-1-0017, BAD-13-1-0023, BAD-13-1-0028, BAD-13-1-0029, BAD-13-1-0059, BAD-13-1-0065, BAD-13-1-0067, BAD-13-1-0070, BAD-13-1-0073, BAD-13-1-0075, BAD-13-1-0088, BAD-13-1-0104, BAD-13-1-0105, BAD-13-1-0113, BAD-13-1-0114, BAD-13-1-0139, BAD-13-1-0148, BAD-13-1-0149, BAD-13-1-0150, BAD-13-1-0153, BAD-13-1-0154\*, BAD-13-1-0155, BAD-13-1-0156, BAD-13-1-0157, BAD-13-1-0160, BAD-13-1-0163, BAD-13-1-0169\*, BAD-13-1-0176, BAD-13-1-0177, BAD-13-1-0178, BAD-13-1-0183, BAD-13-1-0186, BAD-13-1-0188\*, BAD-13-1-0191, BAD-13-1-0193, BAD-13-1-0195, BAD-13-1-0196, BAD-13-1-0200, BAD-13-1-0208, BAD-13-1-0218, BAD-13-1-0222, BAD-13-1-0223, BAD-13-1-0224, BAD-13-1-0225, BAD-13-1-0238, BAD-13-1-0246, BAD-13-1-0247, BAD-13-1-0248, BAD-13-1-0280, BAD-13-1-0287, BAD-13-1-0292, BAD-13-1-0296, BAD-13-1-0297, BAD-13-1-0302\*, BAD-13-1-0306, BAD-13-1-0307, BAD-13-1-0321.

<sup>14</sup> BAD-1-13-0004, BAD-1-13-0005, BAD-1-13-0157, BAD-1-13-0163, BAD-1-13-0175, BAD-1-13-0223.

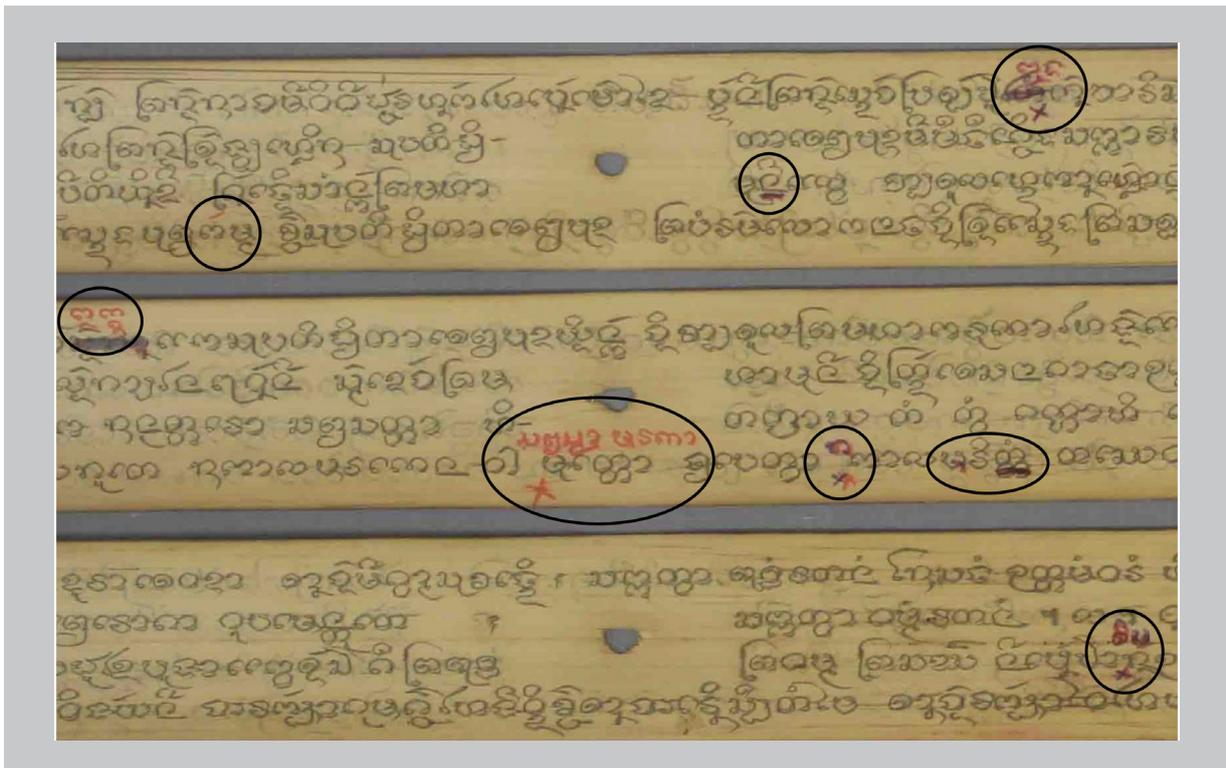


Figure 15: Palm-leaf manuscripts (BAD-13-1-0208)

**COPYING/WRITING 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.

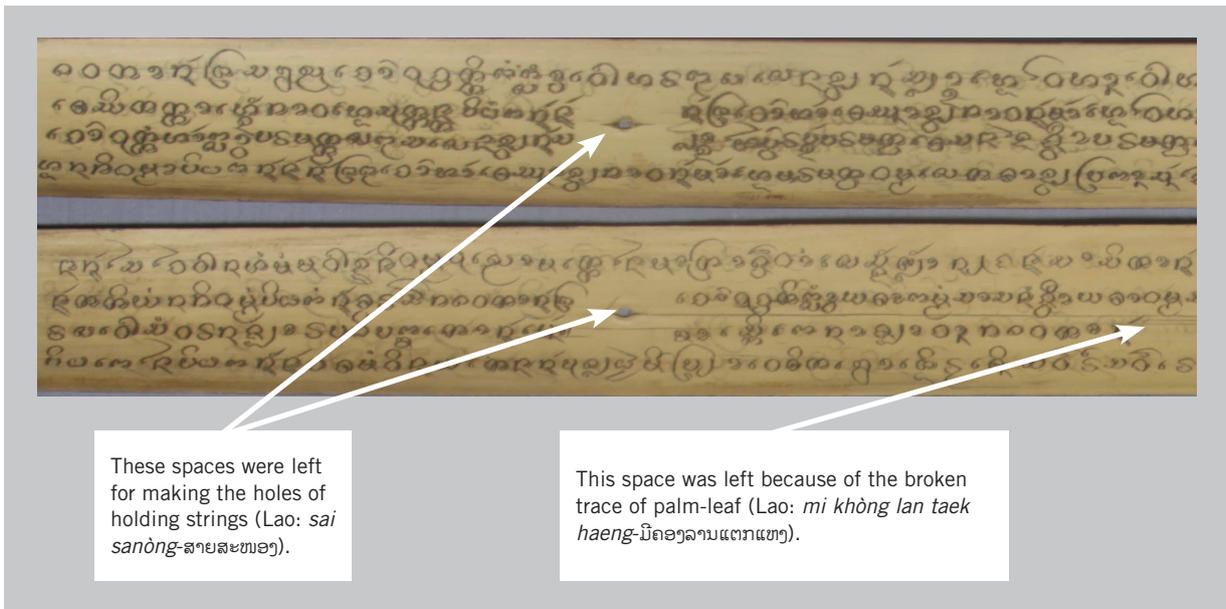
Sathu Nyai Khamchan should be recognized as a key figure and main supporter of the introduction of these techniques to the circle of manuscript writers in Luang Prabang (fig. 18).

*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.<sup>16</sup> In other words, palm leaf was suitable for writing not only with a stylus, but also with various modern tools (fig. 19).

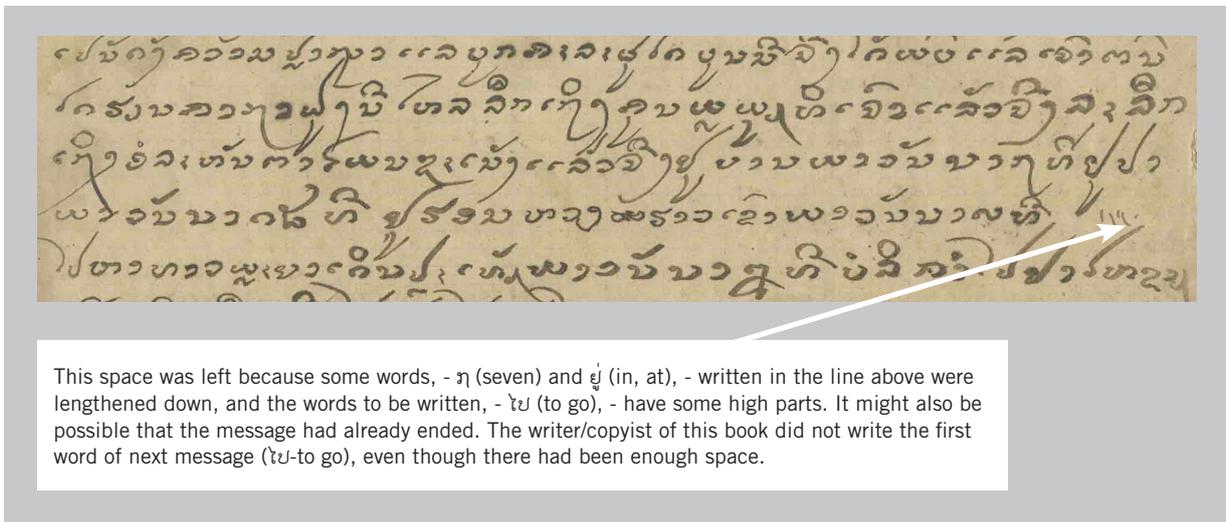
<sup>16</sup> For more information please see references which are listed in footnote 15.



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).

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



This space was left because some words, - ຯ (seven) and ັ (in, at), - written in the line above were lengthened down, and the words to be written, - ໄປ (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 (ໄປ-to go), even though there had been enough space.

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

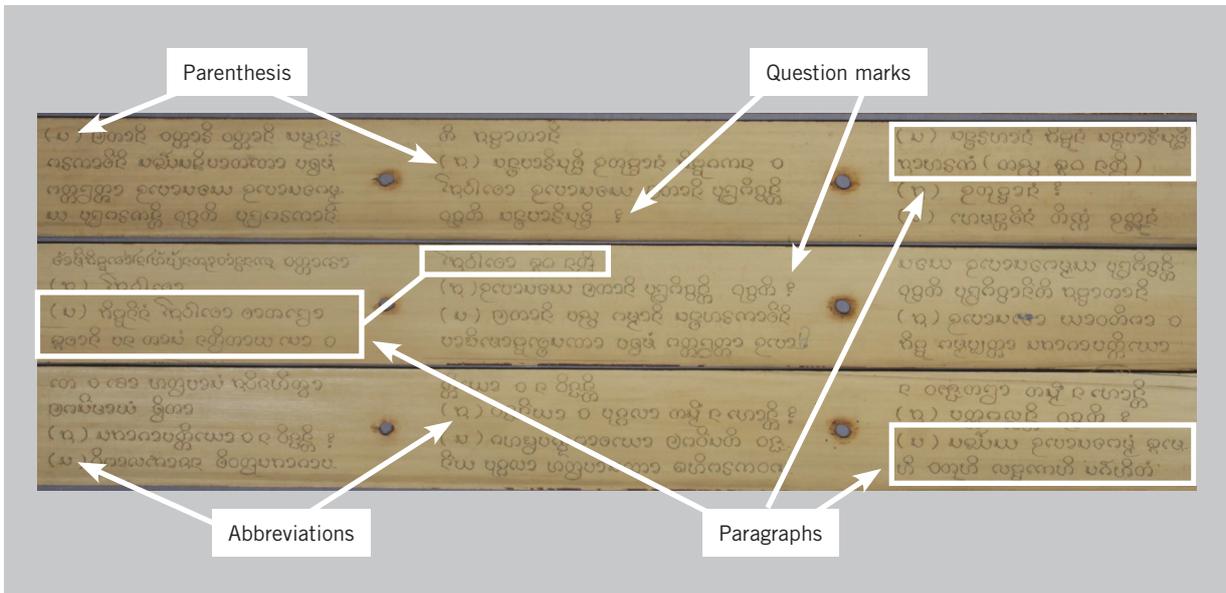


Figure 18: Texts written in three columns

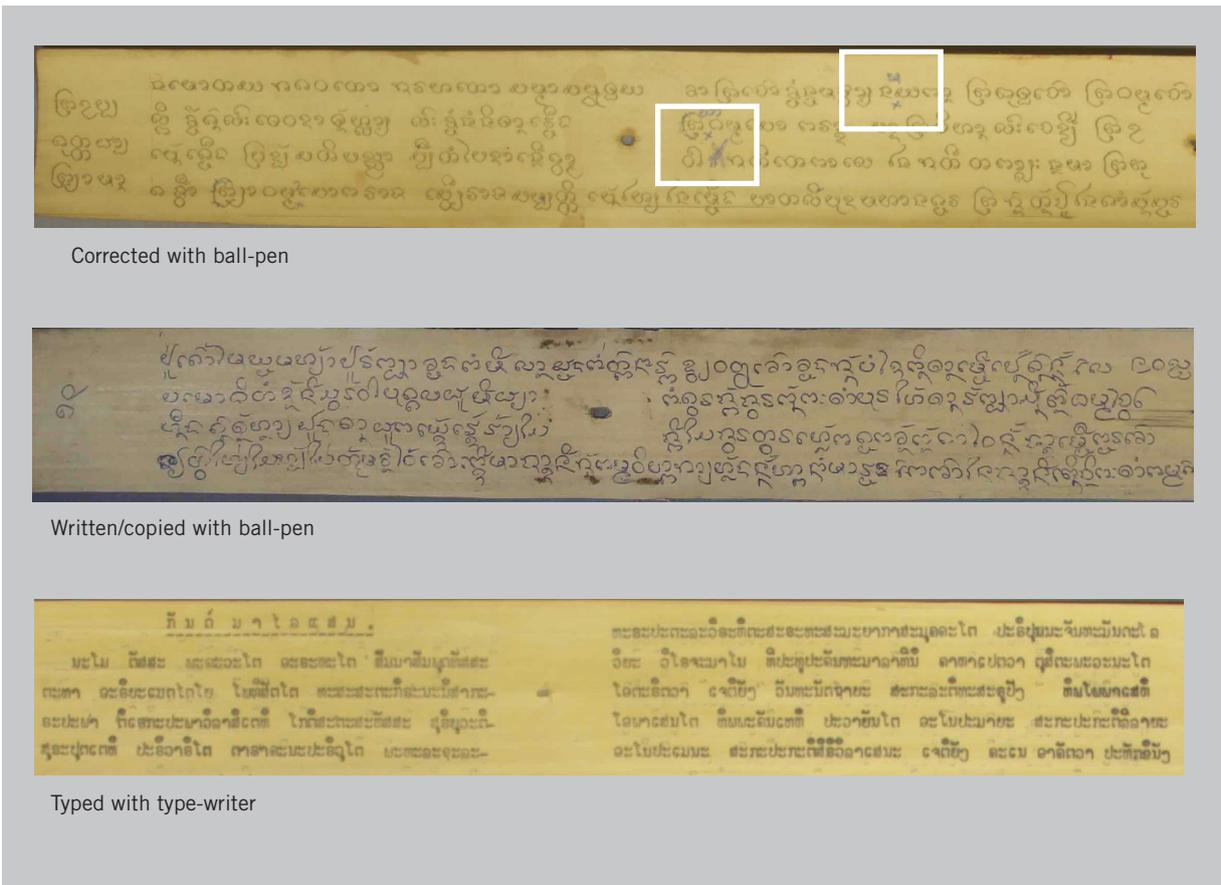


Figure 18

### 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*– ຮູ້ຄະດີໂລກຄະດີທຳ), 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*–ຄຳຫຍໍ້) – 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/editing, etc. – can undoubtedly be seen in a large number of manuscripts written during his lifetime.

**BOUNLEUTH SENGSOULIN** is a PhD candidate at the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg. Before he came to study in Germany he was a lecturer of Lao Language and Literature at the National University of Laos in Vientiane. He took part in many research teams, such as in a committee for researching and compiling a Lao Grammar for primary and secondary schools, or a research project on Lao literature of the 18th and 19th centuries. At present he is

a member of the research team in the DORISEA project “The Lao Sangha and Modernity: A Buddhist Archive in Luang Prabang”. He has been authored and co-authored numerous books. Moreover, he has been invited as a lecturer, researcher, and visiting scholar to various universities in China, Japan, the USA, and Thailand.

**CONTACT** [sengsulinh@yahoo.com](mailto:sengsulinh@yahoo.com)

## REFERENCES: ARCHIVAL SOURCES

BAD-13-1-0002, BAD-13-1-0004, BAD-13-1-0005, BAD-13-1-0006, BAD-13-1-0007, BAD-13-1-0008, BAD-13-1-0009, BAD-13-1-0010, BAD-13-1-0011, BAD-13-1-0012, BAD-13-1-0013, BAD-13-1-0014, BAD-13-1-0017, BAD-13-1-0019, BAD-13-1-0023, BAD-13-1-0024, BAD-13-1-0027, BAD-13-1-0028, BAD-13-1-0029, BAD-13-1-0056, BAD-13-1-0057, BAD-13-1-0058, BAD-13-1-0059, BAD-13-1-0061, BAD-13-1-0065, BAD-13-1-0067, BAD-13-1-0070, BAD-13-1-0073, BAD-13-1-0075, BAD-13-1-0082, BAD-13-1-0087, BAD-13-1-0088, BAD-13-1-0090, BAD-13-1-0095, BAD-13-1-0096, BAD-13-1-0102, BAD-13-1-0104, BAD-13-1-0105, BAD-13-1-0106, BAD-13-1-0113, BAD-13-1-0114, BAD-13-1-0120, BAD-13-1-0128, BAD-13-1-0139, BAD-13-1-0148, BAD-13-1-0149, BAD-13-1-0150, BAD-13-1-0151, BAD-13-1-0153, BAD-13-1-0154, BAD-13-1-0155, BAD-13-1-0156, BAD-13-1-0157, BAD-13-1-0160, BAD-13-1-0162, BAD-13-1-0163, BAD-13-1-0164, BAD-13-1-0169, BAD-13-1-0175, BAD-13-1-0176, BAD-13-1-0177, BAD-13-1-0178, BAD-13-1-0183, BAD-13-1-0186, BAD-13-1-0188, BAD-13-1-0191, BAD-13-1-0193, BAD-13-1-0195, BAD-13-1-0196, BAD-13-1-0200, BAD-13-1-0208, BAD-13-1-0217, BAD-13-1-0218, BAD-13-1-0219, BAD-13-1-0222, BAD-13-1-0223, BAD-13-1-0224, BAD-13-1-0225, BAD-13-1-0230, BAD-13-1-0238, BAD-13-1-0246, BAD-13-1-0247, BAD-13-1-0248, BAD-13-1-0280, BAD-13-1-0281, BAD-13-1-0287, BAD-13-1-0292, BAD-13-1-0296, BAD-13-1-0297, BAD-13-1-0300, BAD-13-1-0302, BAD-13-1-0306, BAD-13-1-0307, BAD-13-1-0310, BAD-13-1-0318, BAD-13-1-0319, BAD-13-1-0321, BAD-13-1-0322, BAD-13-1-0329.

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, BAD-13-2-018, BAD-13-2-020, BAD-13-2-042, BAD-13-2-043, BAD-13-2-054, BAD-13-2-059, BAD-13-2-066, BAD-13-2-086

B2435/Box B23;

BAD-12-2-1987.010.

## REFERENCES IN LAO

Khamphun Philavong, Maha ມະຫາ ຄຳຜຸນ ພິລາວົງ 2011, ວັດທະນະທຳ ແລະປະເພນີບູຮານລາວ. [The Culture and Tradition of Lao], second edition, Vientiane, Dugma Printing.

Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization ອົງການພຸດທະສາສະໜາສຳພັນລາວ 2007, ບົດລາຍງານສະພາບການເຄື່ອນ ໄຫວວຽກງານຂອງອົງການພຸດທະສາສະໜາສຳພັນລາວ ສົກປີ 2007-2008 [The Report of The Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization 2007-2008 (R-LBFO07-08)], Vientiane.

Sila Vilavong, Maha ມະຫາ ສິລາ ວິລະວົງ 2001, ປະຫວັດສາດລາວແຕ່ບູຮານເຖິງ 1946. [The Lao History from the Past to 1945], third edition, Vientiane: Dokket.

## REFERENCES IN WESTERN LANGUAGES

Agrawal, O.P. 1984. *Conservation of Manuscripts and Paintings of Southeast Asia*. London: Butterworths & Co. Publishers Ltd.

Agrawal, Om Prakesh. 1982. *Palm-leaf and Paper: Illustrate Manuscripts of India and Southeast Asia*. Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria.

Berger, Hans Georg. 2000. *Het bun dai bun: Laos – Laos Sacred Rituals of Luang Prabang*. London: Westzone.

Koret, Peter. 1999. “Book of Search: The Invention of Traditional Lao Literature as a Subject of Study”, In: Evans, Grant (ed.) *Laos Culture and Society*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 226–57.

McDaniel, Justin Thomas. 2008. “Manuscripts and Education in Northern Thailand and Laos”. *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Universities* Vol. 1, 109–19.

McDaniel, Justin. 2009. “Two Buddhist Librarians: the Proximate Mechanisms of Northern Thai Buddhist History”. In: Berkwitz et al (eds.) *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*. London: Routledge.

- Swearer, Donald K. 1995. *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Tambiah, Stanley. J. 1970. *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Terwiel, Barend Jan. 2012. *Monk and Magic: Revisiting a Classic Study of Religious Ceremonies in Thailand*. NIAS — Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press.
- Tomecko, Denise. 2009. *Buddhist Healing in Laos: Plants of the Fragrant Forest*. Bangkok: Orchid Press.