

Article

The Manuscript Collection of Abbot Sathu Nyai Khamchan at the Monastery of Vat Saen Sukharam (Luang Prabang, Laos)*

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Introduction

In the case of Laos (and other countries in Buddhist South-east Asia as well), manuscripts (*nangsū*) can be considered an important primary source of information that can help us reconstruct the intellectual history of this culturally rich area. 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 of the twentieth century who took a personal interest in manuscripts was Sathu Nyai Khamchan (the Venerable Phra Khamchan Virachitto) (1920–2007 CE). After his death, 392 manuscript fascicles or volumes were found in his abode. These items in his collection have been stored in cabinets there up to now. Many of the manuscripts state that he wrote them himself to commemorate important events in his own life. He kept some of them for private use.¹

These manuscripts fulfilled different roles within the monastic culture. 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 all have access to the manuscripts. In various religious ceremonies, monks and novices read the Buddhist texts – mostly written as manuscripts – to laypeople. Buddha's teachings are generally supposed to be recorded on certain materials with specific forms, and such recorded materials have to be kept in sacred places. Thus, manuscripts that contain the teachings and are kept at a monastery become one of its main components.²

Regarding the materials used as writing support, the manuscripts in the aforementioned collection can be divided into two main groups: 280 palm-leaf fascicles and 112 paper manuscripts. Sathu Nyai Khamchan preferred to use the former while his collection of manuscripts for private use was mainly of the second type. The abbot seems to have followed the traditional Lao belief that Buddhist texts were supposed to be written on palm leaves. He first wrote, copied and collected manuscripts, then he donated some of them to the monastery. Lao Buddhists recognise these ritual acts as the 'making of a manuscript' (*kan sang nangsū*).

None of the paper manuscripts contain a note or passage saying they were made by him, but on two occasions, he left valuable information on the versos of the front and back covers of one paper manuscript in leporello format – no. BAD-13-2-018, entitled *Yattikammavācā* – which indicated that he had repaired its front and back covers and stated the length of time this manuscript had existed. He took good care of all the manuscripts in his responsibility, made from both palm leaf and paper, similar to a librarian.

* A preliminary version of this paper was published as *DORISEA Working Paper Series* no. 14 (2014) under the title 'Manuscripts Found in the Abode of the Venerable Abbot Phra Khamchan Virachitto, Vat Saensukharam, Luang Prabang, Laos'. The current research is being undertaken as part of research project EAP691: 'Rare manuscripts of great Buddhist thinkers of Laos: digitisation, translation and relocation at the Buddhist Archive of Luang Prabang' supported by the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library, sponsored by Arcadia. Its manuscripts and documents are registered as Buddhist Archive Documents (BAD) with specific shelf marks. I would like to thank the Federal Ministry of Education and Research that has supported my research within the frame of the Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia (DORISEA) during the years 2011–2015. Finally my gratitude is due to the editorial team and Agnieszka Helman-Ważny of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures for their help in reworking the article.

¹ Sathu Nyai Khamchan's personal collection was left undocumented by the Lao National Library's Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme in the 1990s (*Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts*, <http://www.laomanuscripts.net/en/index>) as it did not form part of the monastery's library, but remained restricted to the exclusive use of the late abbot himself.

² Traditionally, a monastery was supposed to have at least four components: monks and novices, monastic buildings, images of Buddha, and manuscripts, especially manuscripts written in any type of Tham (Dhamma) script, such as Tham Lao, Tham Lü or Tham Lan Na.

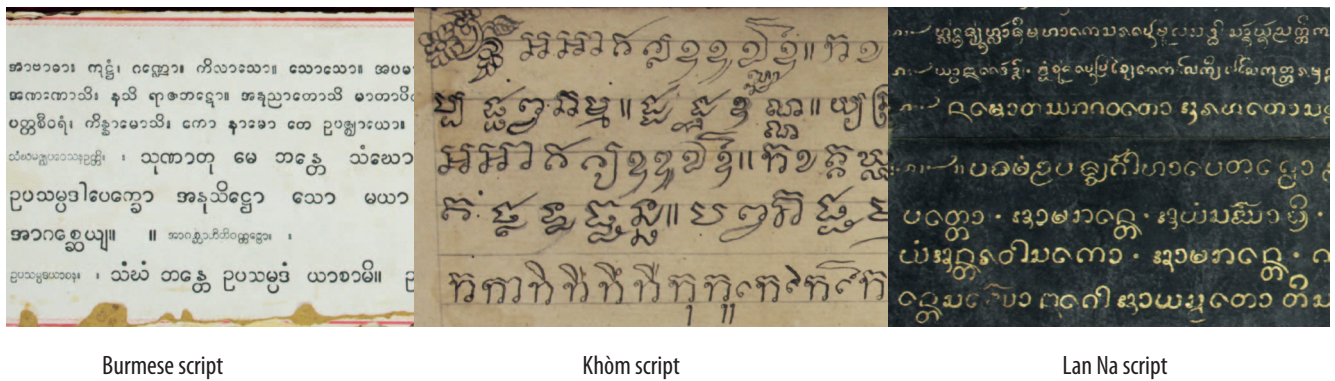


Fig. 1: Three types of scripts used for Buddhist texts.

With regard to scripts, a number of manuscripts in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's collection were written in Tham Lao (Dhamma)³ and Lao Buan (Old Lao) scripts. Apart from these, Tham Lü (Lü script used in northern Laos and southern China), Tham Lan Na (Lan Na script or *tua müang* used in northern Thailand), Khôm (an ancient Cambodian script), Burmese script, and modern Lao and Thai scripts also appear in some manuscripts. Most of the manuscripts written in Tham Lao and Lao Buan scripts are in Lao and Pali. However, other languages such as Lü, Khôm, Burmese and Thai can be found in certain manuscripts as well. Most of the scripts used for writing the manuscripts are related to the traditional ideal of the sacred script, i.e. the script for recording Lord Buddha's teachings (fig. 1).

Buddhism was officially introduced into Laos twice: in 1359 and 1523 CE. The first time, Buddhism was introduced into the Kingdom of Lan Xang (modern Laos) from Müang Nakhòn Luang (i. e. Angkor in modern Cambodia) and Buddhist texts from this country were written in Khôm script. Much later, in 1523 CE, King Phothisalalat (r. 1520–1550 CE) sent his envoys to Chiang Mai to ask for the *Tipitaka* or Buddhist Canon to be given to his kingdom. The *Tipitaka* was brought from Chiang Mai, the capital of Lan Na kingdom at that time (Chiang Mai in modern-day Thailand), to Lan Xang kingdom.⁴ It is said that the *Tipitaka* was written in Lan Na script on a number of fascicles of palm leaves. Later on, Tham

Lao script was created to write and copy Buddhist texts; this script might have been developed from Lan Na script.⁵

Furthermore, a number of manuscripts in this collection indicate that they were influenced by modern writing techniques: some were written in columns and paragraphs, and some contain punctuation marks such as question marks and full stops, partly including other marks (such as parentheses) and abbreviations as well. Some palm-leaf books were written using a ball-point pen or even a typewriter.

Besides examining the contents of some of these manuscripts, 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.

Materials used as writing support

Palm leaf

Traditionally, and as the Report of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization from 2007–2008 says (R-LBFO07-08), most monasteries in Laos have enough space in their vicinity for forestry and horticulture. Fruit trees and various plants used for medicinal purposes are often planted. In addition, numerous monasteries put great emphasis on the cultivation of palm trees (talipot palm, *Corypha umbraculifera*) because these provide the monks with sufficient material for producing manuscripts.

In order to make palm leaves (*bai lan*) fit for writing, the leaves have to be processed in a special manner.⁶ In practice, several steps are necessary before the leaves can be used as material for writing. There are three main steps: first, the palm leaves are cut from the tree and their twigs

³ The Pali term Dhamma refers to the teachings of Buddha and is therefore also used to denote the script in which these sacred teachings were written, hence Dhamma or Tham script. The earliest evidence for Dhamma script is an inscription from 1376CE; cf. Grabowsky 2011, 98f., and Veidlinger 2006, 15.

⁴ Sila 2001, 45–46, 63.

⁵ Pha Nya Luang Maha Sena undated, 47.

⁶ Agrawal 1984, 27.

Table 1: Some features of palm-leaf manuscripts.

Long palm leaf	Short palm leaf
- Size: about 50–60 × 4–5.5 cm	- Size: about 30–40 × 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>)
- No. of lines per Page: 4–6; only the top line and the bottom one are written in full length	- No. of lines per page: 4–5; only the top line and the bottom one are written in full length
- Scripts: Tham Lao (Dhamma), Lao Buhan (Old Lao), Tham Lü and Khòm	- Scripts: Tham Lao (Dhamma), Lao Buhan (Old Lao)
- Content: mostly religious texts	- Content: mostly non-religious texts ⁸
- Paratexts: introductory text and colophon	- Paratexts: introductory text and colophon

are sliced off; next, all the leaves are boiled and dried to make them soft and durable; and finally, they are cut into particular shapes and sizes, depending on what they are ultimately going to be used for. Leaves cut this way are processed in two sizes: long ones and short ones.⁷ These two types of palm leaves are used for different purposes and differ greatly in terms of their features (see table 1).

In the collection of manuscripts belonging to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, a short text was usually written on some leaves which were bound by a cord (*sai sanòng*) and called a fascicle (*phuk*). Some long stories and texts such as the *Story of Prince Vessantara* and the text of *Thutangkhavat* (Pali: *dhutaṅgavattī*; ‘The Thirteen Ascetic Practices’) were not written as a single fascicle of palm leaf; the former was, in fact, written on sixteen fascicles of long palm leaves (BAD-13-1-0114).

The number of fascicles of the latter text, *Thutangkhavat*, varies therefore, depending on the size of the leaves: if long leaves were used for writing, the text usually comprises two

fascicles, whereas using short leaves for writing the same text increases the fascicle numbers up to six (BAD-13-1-0058).

Generally speaking, numerous fascicles of palm-leaf manuscripts – containing a longer version of the same text – were fastened together to form a bundle (*sum*) which was frequently enclosed by two wooden boards for protection. Usually, the bundle was wrapped in a piece of cloth and tied up with a piece of string. A wrapped bundle of fascicles is called *mat* in Lao. In fact, not only does a *mat* comprise a single bundle and one text, it can also consist of many bundles with many fascicles and texts as well.

Paper

Three types of paper manuscripts were found in the abode of abbot Sathu Nyai Khamchan: manuscripts made from mulberry paper⁹ (*chia sa*), *khòì*¹⁰ paper (*chia khòì*) and modern paper (*chia utsahakam*) (see table 2). The first two types are handmade products which are only produced occasionally (normally made after the harvest) because the production of paper is not the main occupation of local people, whereas the last type is an industrial product. Sathu Nyai Khamchan used the word *phap lan* (book in concertina format) to refer to all of them, however (BAD 13-2-066: 080).

Paper (*chia*) is more convenient for writing than palm leaf because it can be shaped, sized and coloured according

⁷ For more details, see Buddhist Archive Documents (BAD), manuscript nos. BAD-13-1-0019, BAD-13-1-0023, BAD-13-1-0059, BAD-13-1-0061, BAD-13-1-0113, BAD-13-1-0162, BAD-13-1-0223, BAD-13-1-0230, BAD-13-1-0322, BAD-13-1-0329.

⁸ Generally speaking, short palm leaves are used for writing non-religious texts, e.g. on traditional medicine, astrology, magic or fortune-telling. In addition to these, a number of Buddhist texts have also been written on short palm leaves. Any text could be found in this kind of manuscript known as *nangsū kòm tang khon tang mi* in Lao – literally, ‘short palm-leaf manuscripts containing various texts according to their owners’ or users’ needs’.

⁹ Mulberry paper is made from the soft inner bark of a plant called *Broussonetia papyrifera*; see Hunter 1978, 56ff.

¹⁰ *Khòì* is a common name for trees whose bark is used for the making of paper. There are two types of *khòì* tree in Laos: a common and a thorny one. Its botanical name is *Streblus asper*. Cf. Huang 2006, 7, 13ff.

Table 2: Some features of mulberry, *khòì* and modern paper manuscripts.

Mulberry paper	<i>Khòì</i> paper	Industrially produced paper
- Size: various sizes/shapes Folded book format: generally 35–60 × 40–45 cm Concertina format: about 10–15 × 35–50 cm	- Size: about 30–40 × 10–15 cm	- Size: two sizes/shapes Similar to that of <i>khòì</i> paper (c. 40 × 15 cm) Similar to that of palm leaf (c. 4.5–5.5 × 40–45 cm)
- No. of lines per page: depends on the size of the manuscript	- No. of lines per page: about 4–10	- No. of lines per page: about 4–8
- Scripts: Tham Lü, Tham Lao (both Dhamma scripts) and Lao Buhan (Old Lao)	- Scripts: Tham Lü, Tham Lao (both Dhamma scripts) and Lao Buhan (Old Lao)	- Scripts: Tham Lao (Dhamma)
- Content: mostly non-religious texts	- Content: mostly non-religious texts	- Content: mostly religious texts
- Paratexts: introductory text and colophon (rarely)	- Paratexts: introductory text and colophon (rarely)	- Paratexts: introductory text and colophon
- Tables: rarely provided; depends on the text	- Images: some only contain texts, while others contain images as well	

to the user's requirements. As Agrawal states, 'manuscripts on paper could be bound in the modern book form, which was not possible for palm-leaf manuscripts'.¹¹ The various types of paper manuscripts were mostly written in black ink.¹² However, a number of them made of *khòì* paper were darkened with soot or black lacquer,¹³ so they were usually written on in white chalk and sometimes in gold or yellow ink. Which paper was employed usually depended on the content of the text that was to be written on it.

Preservation

Sathu Nyai Khamchan 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 put their folios in the correct order.

Moreover, they were wrapped in cloth and kept in various cabinets in his abode.¹⁴

To be able to check the spelling and content of manuscripts, a great deal of effort and knowledge of many subjects – i.e. those typically covered in Buddhist and non-Buddhist texts – is required. Furthermore, familiarity with various scripts and languages is also necessary. Sathu Nyai Khamchan had learnt to read a number of scripts: Old Lao script, Tham Lao script, Tham Lü script, Lan Na script, Burmese script, Khòm script and others as well. We can assume this because passages and texts written in various types of scripts believed to have been used by him can be seen in a large number of the folios of various manuscripts found in his abode.

Apart from the above-mentioned preservation 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. If these different versions were not easy to distinguish, the fascicles might have got mixed up.

¹¹ Agrawal 1984, 127.

¹² The ink used has not been investigated yet. It remains to be seen whether it is carbon ink, which seems probable; cf. Huang 2006, 10.

¹³ Cf. Igunma 2013, 631; for examples, see manuscripts nos. 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.

¹⁴ For more details about the manuscript collection of the great monk, see McDaniel 2009, 124–139; and for more about the care and conservation of palm-leaf manuscripts, see Agrawal 1982, 84–86.

Therefore, when using texts written on more than one fascicle, it was necessary to make sure that they were from the same version (fig. 2).

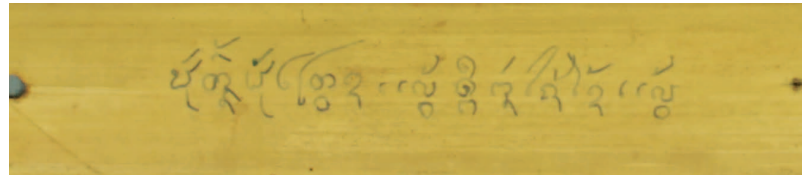


Fig. 2: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD 13-1-0321, fol. 25': This note reads: 'The first and the second fascicles [of a longer text] have already been examined. They match each other (or: they are from the same version) and are ready to be used.'

In fact, some long texts were written on a single fascicle in order to avoid the problem mentioned above, even if they comprised more than a hundred folios (*lan*). These texts were stories on the past lives of Lord Buddha or *jātaka* stories (*lüang sadok*), and most of them came with a pair of wooden covers (*mai pakap*) and a long holding string (*sai sanòng*).

Numerous palm-leaf manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's abode are multiple-text manuscripts (MTM). Others were not made as an MTM, but were created by

threading numerous fascicles of manuscripts together. They were usually made by different people at different times. Later on, a collector who found out that they dealt with similar topics threaded them together as a single fascicle. These are composite manuscripts. Manuscript BAD-13-1-0280 is an example (fig. 3 and table 3).

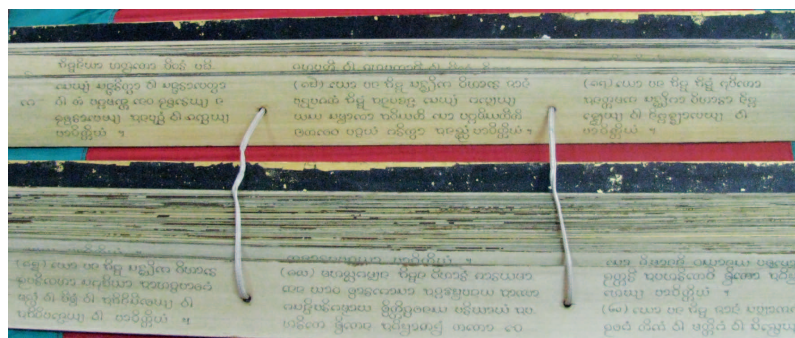


Fig. 3: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0280, fols. 32'/33'. This manuscript comprises two texts: the first one (A) contains the Buddhist monastic code (Pali: *Bhikkhu pātimokkha*, Lao: *Phikkhu patimok*) and the other one (B) is on the process of ordination (Pali: *Vidhi-pabbajjā-upasampada*, Lao: *Vithi bapphasa upasombot*). Even though some parts of their contents are related to each other, these texts have some striking differences (see table 3).

Table 3: Differences between texts (A) and (B) in manuscript BAD-13-1-0280.

	(A)	(B)
Title	'Buddhist monastic code' (<i>Phikkhu patimok</i>)	'The process of ordination' (<i>Vithi bapphasa upasombot</i>), mostly <i>Nissaya</i>
Language	Pali	Lao (contains variants of Pali and Sanskrit words)
Date	be 2499 (1956 ce)	be 2490 (1947 ce)
Scribe	Sathu Phò Phan Phothipannyo	Sathu Nyai Khamchan
Donor (<i>sattha</i>)	Sathu Nyai Khamchan	Sathu Nyai Khamchan
Aim	To remark his 36 th birthday To dedicate merit to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan and his senior relatives	To support Buddhism

Palaeography and philology

Writing system

The orthography of some words written in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's manuscripts differs from that of former times; we can observe a partial change in the orthographic system used in manuscripts over time. 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 phil-

Table 4: Sample of abbreviations and ligatures

Old spelling		New spelling		Romanisation	Lao	Meaning
Shape	Number of letters	Shape	Number of letters			
ຮິ	2	ຮິວີ	5	<i>an va</i>	ອັນວ່າ	-
ຮຸ້	4	ຮຸ້ໝູ່	7	<i>thang lai</i>	ທັງໝູ່	all
ຮັ	2	ຮັວ/ຮັງ	3/3	<i>chak</i>	ຈັກ	will, shall
ຮົ່ວ	3	ເຮົ່ວ	4	<i>ao</i>	ເອົາ	to get, take
ຮື່ວ	5	ເຮົ່ວຮື່	7	<i>khaò khòng</i>	ເຂົ້າຂອງ	thing; material; property
ຮຸ້ວ	4	ວະທ່າ	5	<i>katham</i>	ກະທ່າ	to make, do
ຮິວີ	3	ວໍຂີ	4	<i>kò di</i>	ກໍດີ	and; or; can be done
ຮົ່ວ	4	ວໍຜາ/ວໍຜາ	4/4	<i>kò ma</i>	ກໍມາ	(connector) + to come
ຮິວີ	3	ວໍຜີ/ວໍຜີ	4/4	<i>kò mi</i>	ກໍມີ	(connector) + to have
ຮຸ້ວ/ຮຸ້ວ	3/3	ວາລະ	4	<i>kala</i>	ກາລະ	time, a period of time
ຮິວີ	3	ຮິວີ	4	<i>khili</i>	ຄິລີ	hill, mountain
ຮິວີ	3	ຂີວີ/ຂີວີ	4/5	<i>di li</i>	ດີລີ	(final particle); good
ຮິວີ	4	ຮິວີ	4	<i>sü va</i>	ຮຸ້ວ່າ	to name

ology and orthography. Most texts in palm-leaf and paper manuscripts contain words written in different spellings, particularly ligatures (*kham nyò*) and tone marks (*hup vannanyut*) (see table 4). In the past, before the nineteenth century, the former were always used, but the latter were not

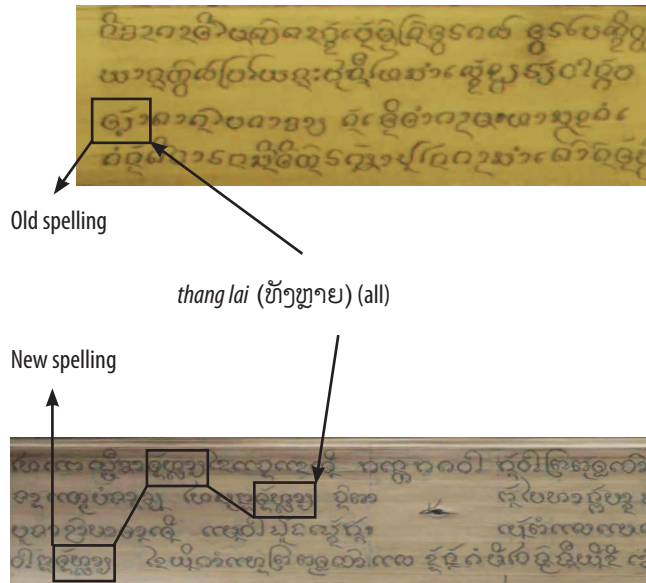


Fig. 4: Palm-leaf manuscripts BAD-13-1-0028, fol. 9^r; BAD-13-1-0100, fol. 2^r.

used at all. However, during Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s life, their usage changed: the former gradually stopped being employed, while the latter started being used in texts. In fact, replacing *kham nyò* with full words and writing tone marks have both become popular in manuscript-writing in Luang Prabang since the 1940s.¹⁵ This period can be considered an important turning point in the development of the orthographic system used in manuscript-writing in Luang Prabang (see fig. 4).

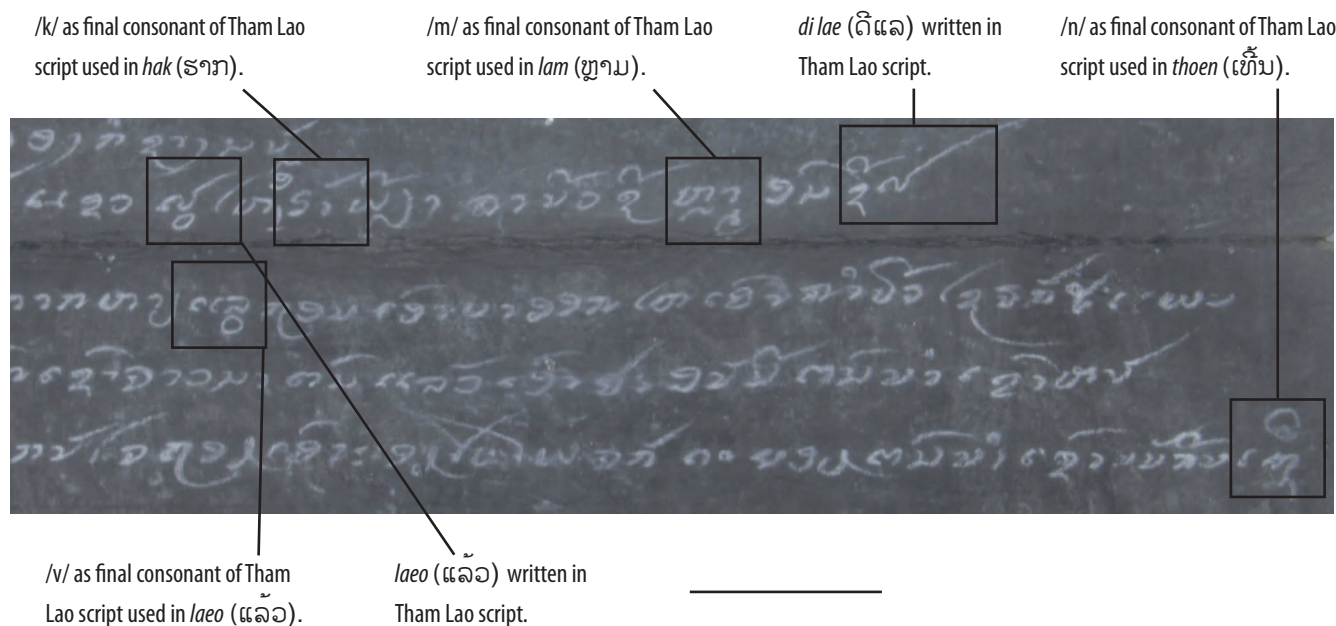


Fig. 5: Paper manuscript BAD-13-2-005, fols. 7^r/8^r.

¹⁵ For more details, see the colophons of manuscripts 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 and BAD-13-1-0280.

Furthermore, some scribes just replaced the final consonants of the Old Lao script (*tua lao buhan/lao doem*) with final consonants of the Tham Lao script (*tua tham lao*). Even some words written in Tham Lao script were included into the main texts written in Old Lao script. These features are not unusual for the ancient writing style and should be considered an orthographic change as well. Both palm-leaf and paper manuscripts, resp. religious and secular texts, contain such features (fig. 5).

A valuable manuscript for the study of Lao philology and orthography is the astrological manuscript BAD 13-2-042 (see chapter ‘Astrology’ below). It contains a poetical composition, which was very popular in the past, especially during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the apogee of the Lan Xang kingdom. Its ancient writing style is characterised by contractions of two letters. To take one example, the initial consonants in some two-syllable words, the first syllables of which include /a/ (ອຂ), and where /n/, /m/, /ny/ (ນ, ມ, ຍ) function as the

initial consonants of the second syllables, are combined to form a ligature (fol. 30^r, line 2; fol. 59^r, line 2; fol. 65^r, line 2 etc.).

ຄະນິງ /*kha-ning*/ (to imagine) is one such word. The verb *kha-ning* contains two syllables – the first one (ຄະ – *kha*) ends in the vowel ອຂ /a/, while the second one (ນິງ – *ning*) begins with a consonant, ນ /n/. According to the ancient orthography of Laos, the vowel ອຂ in ຄະ will be deleted and the second half of the consonant ນ will be combined with the consonant ຄ to form a ligature of the two consonants. See the image below (BAD-13-2-042, e.g. fol. 30^r, line 3):

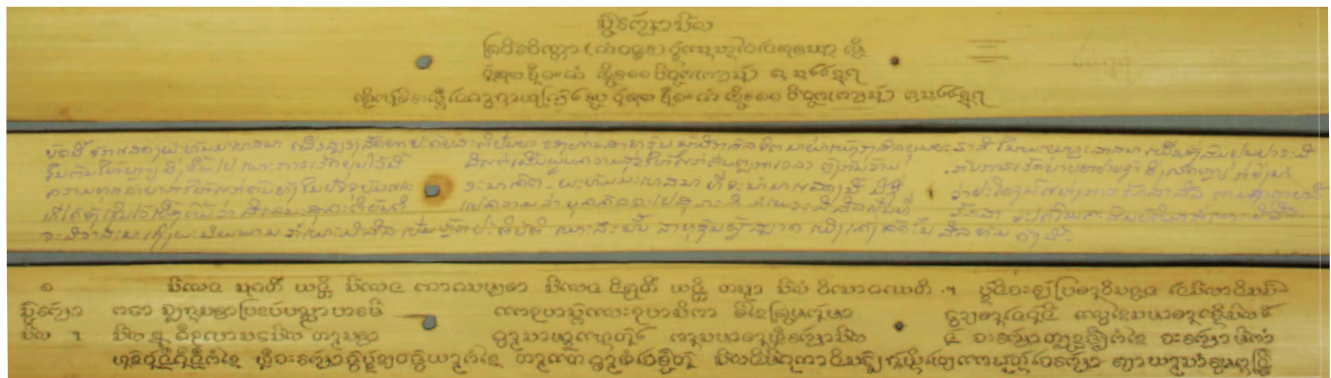
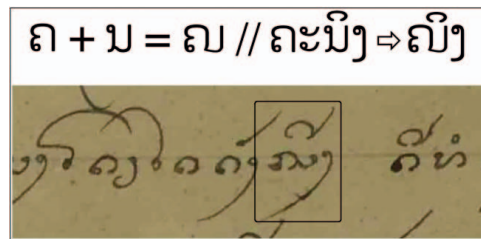


Fig. 6a: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0157, fols. 7/8/9^r. The added text was written with a ballpoint pen in modern Lao, whereas the main text was written in Tham Lao script. Here, the text itself is an introduction.

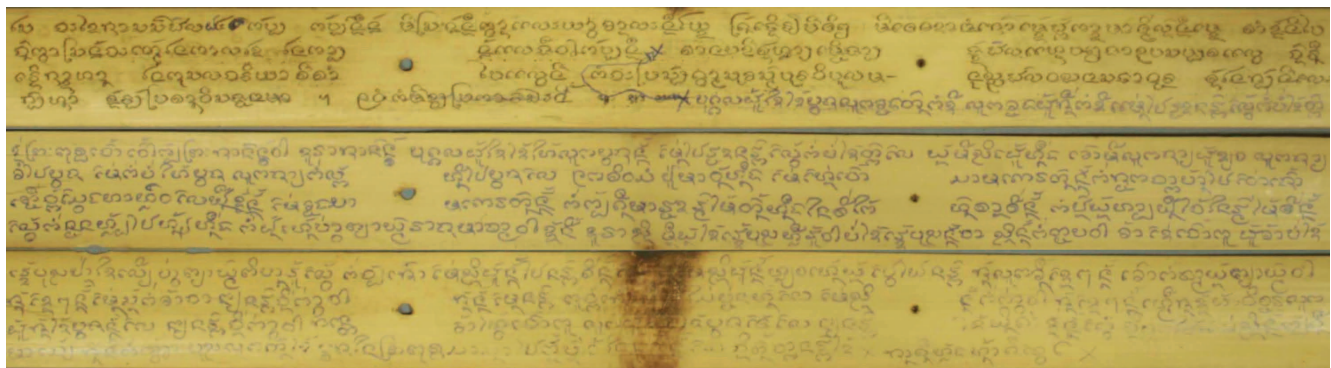


Fig. 6b: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0163, fols. 5/6/6^r. The added text was written with a ballpoint pen in Tham Lao script, but with modern Lao orthography. Here, the additional text was inserted into the main text.

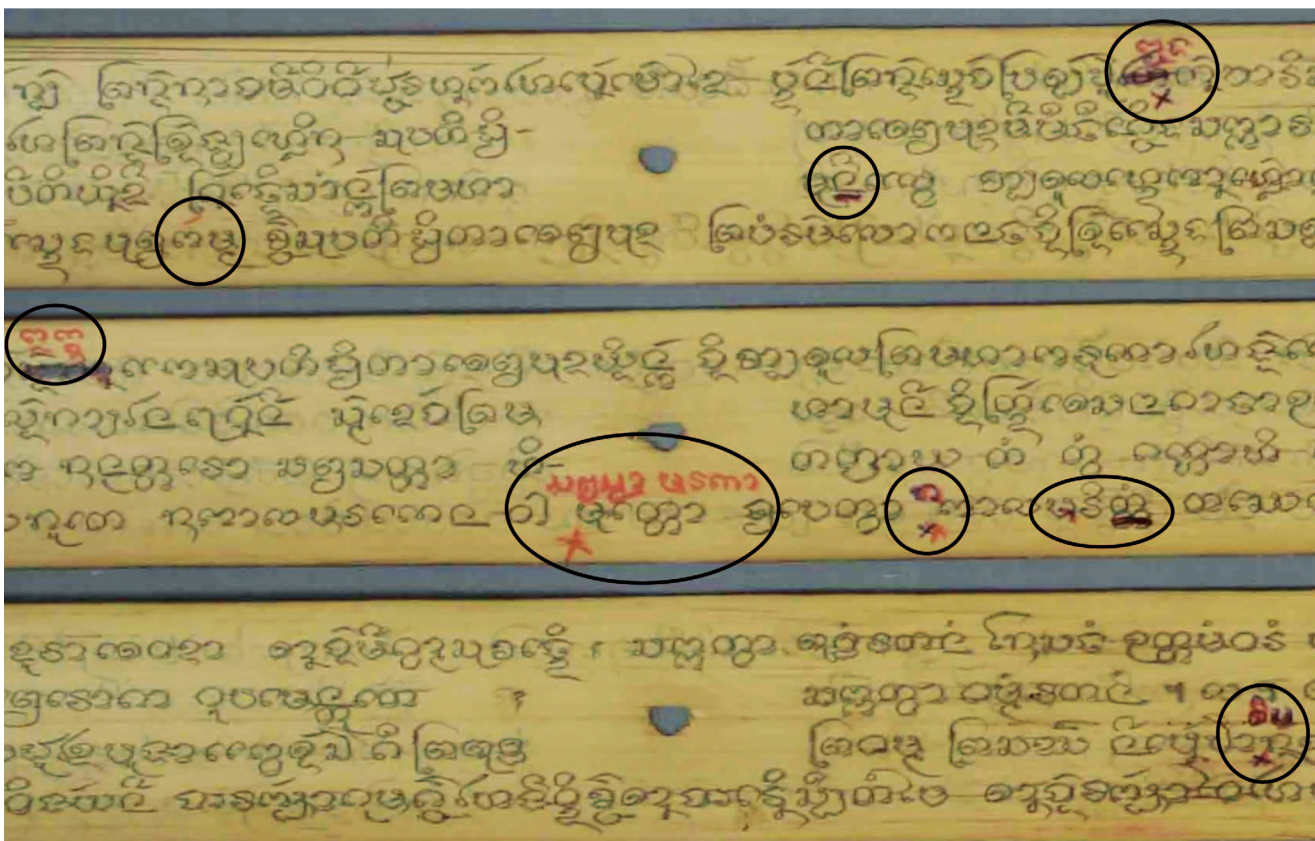
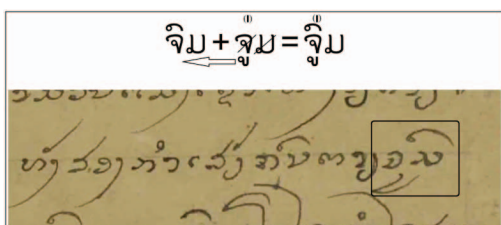


Fig. 7: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0208, fols. 2^r/3^r/4^r: Corrections marked.

Furthermore, two syllables or words located next to each other, which have the same initial consonants, may be combined by a single initial consonant (BAD-13-2-042, fol. 30^r, line 4; fol. 31^r, line 1; fol. 59^r, line 4 etc.).

The word ຈຸ່ມຈີມ /chum chom/ (to dip, sink; to die) may serve as an example. This compound contains two words, ຈີມ /chom/ and ຈຸ່ມ /chum/. Their initial consonants (ຈ – ch) and final consonants (ມ – m) are the same. Therefore, only one initial consonant and one final consonant are combined to form a ligature. See the image below (BAD-13-2-042, fol. 30^r, line 2):



Apart from these items, the substitution of the initial consonants can easily be seen between the high and low group consonants and between short and long vowels. The shape of the vowel /a/ used in this text is also remarkable, as it is similar to that of the last part – the ‘tail’ – of the numeral 8 in Lao. Sometimes, a symbol similar to the shape of *mai kan* (ံ)¹⁶ in Lao is written above this shape.

Paratexts

Besides colophons, some manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode contain additional texts, probably written by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself. These texts were composed as introductions to the main texts or to explain and elaborate the main texts.¹⁷ This shows that Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself had looked over most of the manuscripts kept in his abode, especially the frequently used

¹⁶ The vowel /a/ in Lao can be represented by two symbols in writing: ະ and ັ. The former is used for words following the structure consonant – vowel, the latter for the structure consonant – vowel – consonant.

¹⁷ See the colophons of manuscripts BAD-1-13-0004, BAD-1-13-0005, BAD-1-13-0157, BAD-1-13-0163, BAD-1-13-0175 and BAD-1-13-0223.

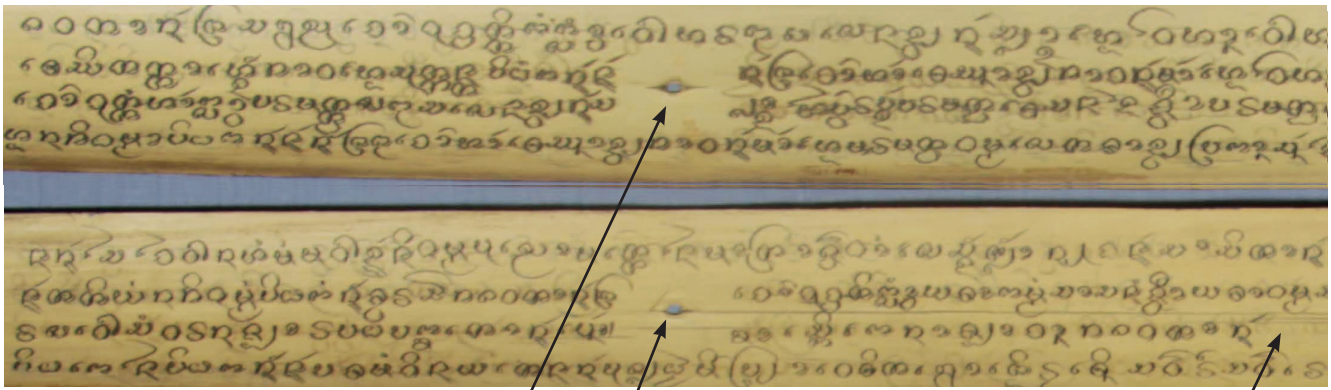


Fig. 8: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0296, fols. 1¹/₂. These spaces were left for making the holes for holding strings (*sai sanòng*). This space was left because of a crack in the palm-leaf (*lan taek haeng*).

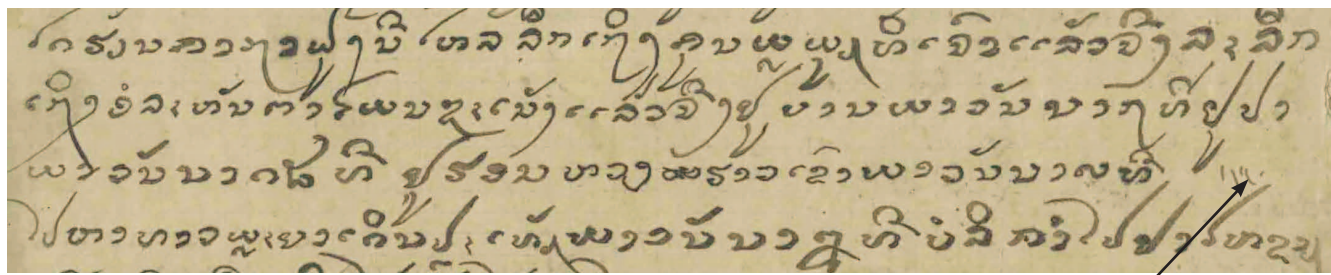


Fig. 9: Paper manuscript BAD-13-1-0296, fol. 1¹. The space was probably left because some words (၅၇ ‘seven’ and ဧ ‘in,’ ‘at’) written in the line above were occupying parts of the line below, and the beginning word of the next sentence (၇၉ ‘to go’) has two ascending letters.

ones, which should be considered his privately used manuscripts. Sathu Nyai Khamchan, while working with them had noted what should be added to the main text in order to help his readers understand its contents (see figs. 6a and b). A number of manuscripts found in his abode bear no signs of corrections or additional texts, however. Such manuscripts might have been given or donated by other people who wanted to perform meritable acts, and were only kept in his cabinets.

Textual criticism

It is particularly interesting that a number of manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode bear various types of corrections, such as crossed-out letters or words and additional words written above or beneath them, or crosses marking a place where a letter or word is thought to be missing, with the missing letter or word added above it. This must be regarded as an alteration of the way Buddhist texts were traditionally purified and passed on. The tool used in these emendations, however, was not the same one as that employed to write the original text, which was written with a stylus; writing any word on palm leaves with a stylus requires a considerable number of steps to be carried out

in order to make that word visible as the incisions do not become legible immediately. If a manuscript was needed urgently, though, people who corrected texts written on palm leaves used a ballpoint pen for their work rather than a stylus.

According to traditional Buddhist belief, no matter whether they were written carefully or not, manuscripts should not be treated disrespectfully or kept in a demeaning place. The texts that manuscripts contain, especially the ritual ones, should not have any insertions or other writing added to them. Any person who breaks this rule will lose the respect of devout Buddhists. Furthermore, laywomen are not supposed to touch religious manuscripts directly, even if they are the persons who donate them. In the manuscript-making ceremony (*phithi sang nangsü*), the manuscript has to be enclosed in a cloth and placed on a bowl or platter (see chapter ‘Manuscript making’ below). The female donor can then move the manuscript by lifting up the bowl with her arms.

During Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s life, even though manuscripts were still regarded as being sacred, they were permitted to be opened and studied scholarly. In the past, in contrast, the correctness of spelling was considered less

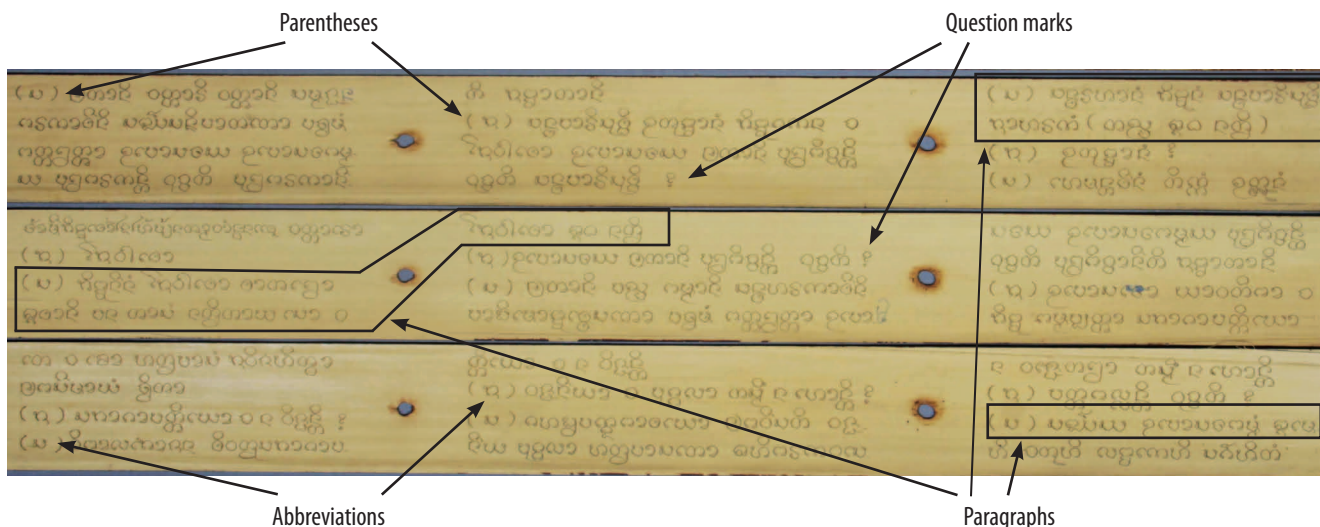


Fig. 10: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0280, fols. 3/4/5'. Texts written in three columns, influenced by a modern style of printing.

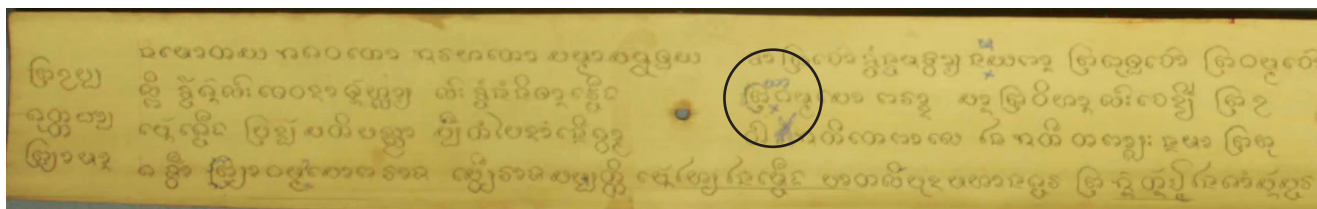


Fig. 11a: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0222, fol. 1'. Text corrected with ball-pen.

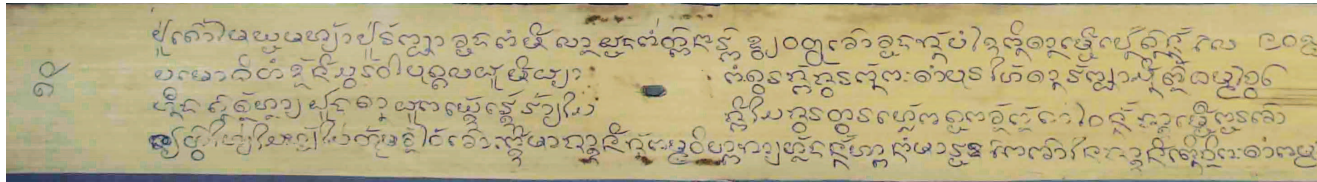


Fig. 11b: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0104, fol. 28'. Text written with ball-pen.

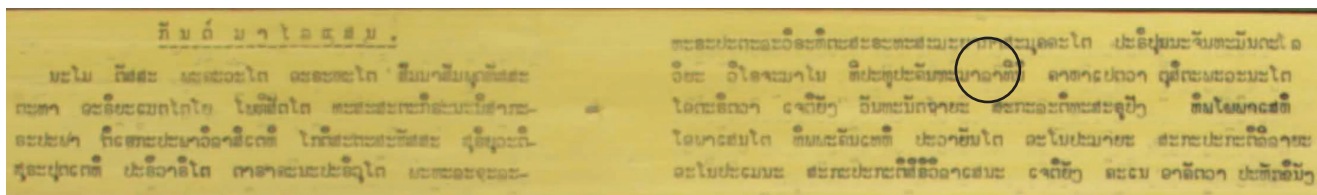


Fig. 11c: Palm-leaf book BAD-13-1-0111, fol. 1'. Text written with type-writer.

important than the sacredness of the Dhamma script.¹⁸ In other words, the senior monks of Luang Prabang, who were concerned about the purity of the Buddhist texts, paid now much more attention to the variations of texts written on palm leaf and paper (see fig. 7).

¹⁸ This phenomenon can be observed in at least sixty manuscripts, see e.g. BAD-13-1-0002, BAD-13-1-0014, BAD-13-1-0017, BAD-13-1-0023.

Punctuation and Layout

Traditional style

Traditionally, manuscripts were written without any 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 commas, question marks and similar markings used in present-day writing were not used (see figs. 8 and 9).

Modern style

Apart from manuscripts, a number of printed materials such as books, magazines and documents were also found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's abode. Some manuscripts found in the same place may have been influenced by modern media 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. This indicates that some scribes 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 layout of such texts and therefore used similar styles in their own manuscripts. This should be understood as an important turning point in the production of manuscripts in Luang Prabang. Sathu Nyai Khamchan should be regarded as a key figure and main supporter of the introduction of these techniques to the circle of scribes in Luang Prabang (see fig. 10).

Writing instruments

Writing on a palm leaf requires a different technique than writing on a sheet of paper. The tool necessary for writing on palm-leaf folios is a stylus (*lek can*). A fascicle of a manuscript is not finished once the stylus has been used, however; after writing, all the scripts then have to be darkened (*long mük*). Both writing and darkening require considerable time and effort. Agrawal states: 'As the incision with a stylus is not easily legible, it is made visible by applying lamp-black or charcoal powder mixed with oil. The excess is wiped off with a cloth.'¹⁹

In fact, various manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's abode after his death testify to his accomplishment in using this traditional instrument.

Some of the manuscripts found in the abbot's rooms were not written with any type of stylus, however, but with various ballpoint pens. These were much more frequently used for making corrections than for writing or copying works.²⁰ Various modern tools were employed to write on palm leaf, such as ball-pens or even a type-writer (see figs. 11a to c).

¹⁹ Agrawal 1984, 32.

²⁰ See the references listed in footnote 17.

Manuscripts for public usage

Secular texts

Traditionally, a monastery serves as a knowledge centre for the Buddhist community and is therefore the place where Buddhist texts — i.e. texts belonging to the Pali canon²¹ — can be found. Nowadays, however, the lay community demands more from the monasteries than just spiritual guidance. Consequently, monks may even be asked to give advice concerning quarrels and other such disputes, and most monasteries not only keep Buddhist texts, but also have various other types of secular texts at hand for this reason.²² Thus, it is not surprising that numerous manuscripts with non-religious content were found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's abode after his death.

History

Some of the manuscripts found in the abbot's abode deal with historical events (*pavatsat* ປະຫວັດສາດ). These manuscripts were not written as a fascicle (*phuk*), but as single folios that could be attached to any fascicle or kept together with other fascicles in a bundle (*sum*). One example of this is seen in folio 54 of BAD-13-1-0188, which tells us that Chao Anurut built a stupa (*pha that*) on the top of Mount Phu Si (*chòm phu si*) in CS²³ 1166 (1804 CE).

Interestingly, a note was inserted in the colophon of a fascicle of *Thutangkhavat*. It is written at the end of the main text and reads: '[...] *phoen khün müa soek siang tung nan tae lae na* [...]' (literally, '[...] [at the time] they went up for the war in Siang (Chiang) Tung, [...]').²⁴ This indicates that the circumstances at the time this manuscript was written might have been rather inconvenient for such a task. The manuscript comprises six fascicles, but only one text, and includes a hundred and eighty-four folios. It must

²¹ The Pali Canon comprises three parts of Lord Buddha's teachings, which are known by the term *Tipiṭaka*: the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Suttanta Piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. The first part contains all the rules for governing the order of monks and nuns, the second part contains the discourses, and the last one deals with an exposition of all realities in detail. For more information, see Gorkum 1975.

²² Terwiel 2012, 243.

²³ *Chunlasakkarat* (the 'Minor Era'; abbreviated CS; Pali: *cuḷāsakarāja*), which started in 638 CE in present-day Myanmar, was a calendar used in South-East Asian countries before the onset of European colonialism in the nineteenth century. In Laos, this calendar still appears in manuscripts made up to the twentieth century. For more details about the Minor Era, see Chao Phetsarat 2001, 34–42.

²⁴ Ms. BAD-13-1-0058, fol. 54. Cf. Techasiriwan (in print).

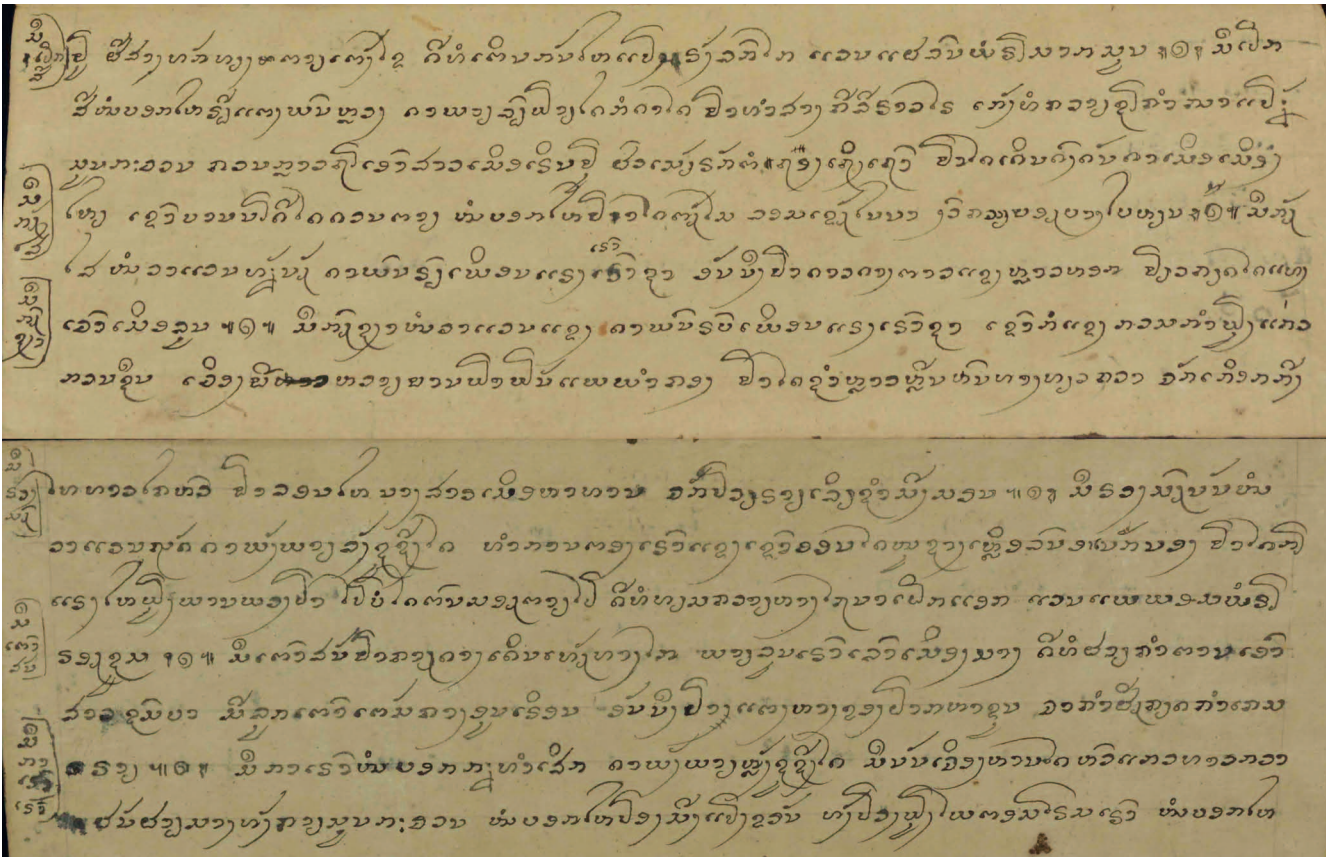


Fig. 12: BAD-13-2-042, fol. 27^v: Text on the calculation of auspicious and inauspicious days, written in CS 1270 (1908 CE).

have taken a long time to finish them. Having successfully accomplished such a task must have made the copyist proud of his work since he actually made a note of the challenge he had overcome.

Astrology

The majority of paper manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode deal with astrological topics (*holasat* ໂຫລາສາດ) and are made of mulberry or *khòì* paper. Furthermore, some of the palm-leaf manuscripts found at the abbot’s home – especially the short ones – deal with the same subject.²⁵ It is unexpected that manuscripts dealing with this matter were kept in the eminent abbot’s abode, because monks are thought to follow precepts and study Buddhist texts. All the paper manuscripts were kept together in the same cabinets along with the palm-leaf manuscripts. This fact demonstrates that Sathu Nyai Khamchan took care of all the manuscripts he kept in his abode. It is very likely he used

some of them regularly and read the rest of them through once in a while, although we have no firm evidence for this.

One of the above-mentioned manuscripts – BAD-13-2-042 entitled *Nangsü ha mü hai mü di*, meaning a manuscript containing texts for calculating auspicious and inauspicious days – deals with the first thunder of the year, a natural phenomenon allegedly affecting people’s lives, especially their efforts at cultivation. Part of this text reads as follows:

[...] ຮ້ອງກ້າບົວລະພາ ເທວະດາໄຂປະຕູເຫຼັກ ຈັກແພ່ຄົນທັງຫຼາຍ
ທົວບິດົນບໍ່ຫຼາຍ ຫຼ້າບິດົນຈຶ່ງມີຫຼາຍ ເຂົ້າດີທຸກແຫ່ງແລ
ຮ້ອງກ້າອາຄະເນ ເທວະດາໄຂປະຕູລົມ ຝົນບໍ່ຫຼາຍ ລົມແຮງນັກ
ຄົນທັງຫຼາຍຈັກເປັນທຸກນັກ ເມືອງຈັກເປັນເສິກ ທົ່ວເຂົ້າຍັງດີແລ
ຮ້ອງກ້າທັກຂົນ ເທວະດາໄຂປະຕູໄຟ ປີນັ້ນຈັກແລ້ງນັກ
ຄົນຈັກຕາຍຢາກເຂົ້າມາກນັກແລ ບໍ່ດີແລ [...]

[...] [If it begins to] thunder in the east, God [will] open a steel door. [This] will affect everyone seriously. Not much rain [will fall] at the beginning of the year, but 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 south-east, the God [will] open

²⁵ For more details, see manuscripts 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.

a wind door. Not much rain [will fall], but an extremely strong wind [will blow]. Everyone will suffer [from such a phenomenon], [and] warfare will break out in the *müang* (country). However, [people will still get a] bountiful harvest of rice. [If it begins to] thunder in the south, the deity [will] open a fire door. There will be a severe drought that year. A number of people will be famine-stricken and die. It will be a terrible year. [...]

Another interesting point is the changing ownership of this manuscript. A colophon on fol. 1^v reads: ‘[This] manuscript on the calculation of auspicious [and] inauspicious days belongs to Hua Chao Phumma from Vat Saen. This manuscript was written in [CS 1270 [1908 CE]’. This might indicate that the owner had written the manuscript himself, and he should therefore be recognised as one of the local scholars. It was not given to Sathu Nyai according to the custom of ‘making manuscripts’ to foster charity, i.e. of donating one’s manuscript as the property of a monastery, but for some other reasons; otherwise, there would have been a colophon stating so. Two possible reasons why this manuscript came into Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s personal possession should be mentioned. One possibility is that the former owner knew the contents of this manuscript very well, maybe even remembering them 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 the manuscript and therefore gave it to others or handed it directly to Sathu Nyai Khamchan.

Magic

The Lao word *khatha* (ຄຳຖາ), meaning ‘magic’ or ‘magic formula’, refers to two categories of supernatural powers: *khatha man* (ຄຳຖາມານ), which is believed to cause harm and destruction to all beings (similar to black magic), and *khatha pha* (ຄຳຖາພາ), which is believed to protect beings and things from various kinds of danger. The first category is forbidden for Buddhist monks, but the second one is said to be appropriate for monks to practise. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a number of mulberry and *khòì* 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. Those Pali words were combined with Lao words and used as a magic formula. Lao words are not felt to be sacred. Therefore, not only do Pali words serve to

make up for certain deficiencies in the Lao language, but they are also used for writing ritual texts.

In manuscript BAD-13-2-007, the *Triple Gems* (Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) were interspersed with specific Lao words for the composition of *khatha*. Part of this *khatha* goes as follows:

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

[...] [I pray that the] Buddha [will help me to] close [my mind to the unmeritorious], [I pray that the] Dhamma [will help me to] close [my mind to the unmeritorious], [I pray that the] Sangha [will help me to] close [my mind to the unmeritorious], [...] [I pray that the] Buddha [will help me to] keep [my mind from the unmeritorious] [I pray that the] Dhamma [will help me to] keep [my mind from the unmeritorious] [I pray that the] Sangha [will help me to] keep [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 to] close [my mind to the unmeritorious] [I hold the] Sangha 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 or the compiler’s high competence in the use of language, especially with regard to words derived from Pali and Sanskrit. In this *khatha*, he has combined Pali words with Lao words. He may certainly be considered an expert in composing *khatha*. There is no indication what effect this *khatha* has and how it can be used, however. The substance of the *khatha* hints at the possibility that it is used to protect human beings from various dangers. Monks, novices, nuns and possibly laypeople who practise meditation may use it as a prayer to protect themselves from any kind of danger and to keep their mind focused.

Pharmacopeia

Lao Buddhist monks and novices have long been recognised not only as propagators of Buddhism, but also as experts in healing and medical treatment (*tamla ya* ຕຳລາຢາ). They know how to use various plants to obtain medicinal substances. Furthermore, some of them have recorded the knowledge of traditional therapy in manuscripts. A number

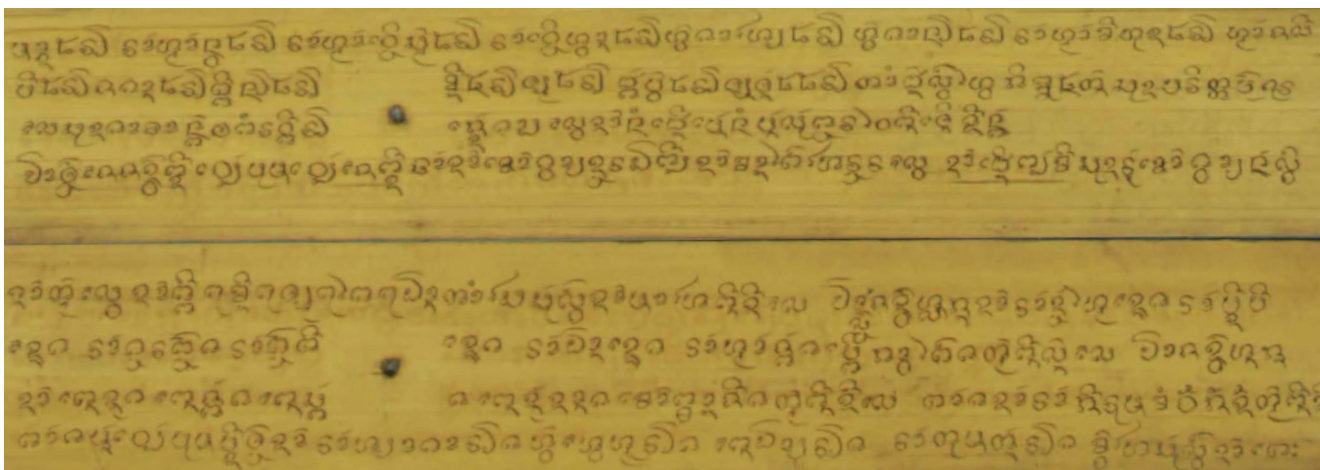


Fig. 13: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0056, fols. 19/ 19': Recipe for curing stomach ache.

of these manuscripts were found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode after his death.

Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0056, one of the manuscripts mentioned above, is a good example (fig. 13). This manuscript comprises twenty-four folios of 29 cm in length and 5 cm in width. It contains texts that deal with various kinds of illness and traditional medicine, as shown in the following excerpt:

[...] ຢາທ້ອງແສສະດວງກໍດີ ເຈັບປູມເຈັບແສກໍດີ ຖາກເອົາ ເຂົ້າຄວາຍດ່ອນສາມກິບ ເອົາຂາງໄພໃຫ້ຮ້ອນ ເອົາເຜິ້ງກັບຂີ້ສູດ ຮູກເຂົ້າຄວາຍນັ້ນ ແລ້ວເອົາຕົ້ມ ແລ້ວເອົາພິກເຈັດ ຂົງເຈັດ ທຽມເຈັດ ໄພເຈັດ ຕໍາໃສ່ ສຸກແລ້ວເອົາມາໃຫ້ກິນ ດີແລ [...]

[...] medicine for stomach problems: [take] three chips of a horn from a white water buffalo; heat them up by roasting [them], rub beeswax and stingless beeswax on them and boil them [in a pot]. Seven pieces of chilli, ginger, galangal, garlic and *phai*²⁶ need to be mixed by pounding them together and then put in the pot. After this has been cooked well, 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 obtain, whereas the horn of a water buffalo is somewhat more difficult to get hold of, particularly one from a white buffalo. This animal may have been thought to have some special power that the black one did not have. This assumption is further supported by the fact

that, according to local beliefs,²⁷ a sick person should abstain from eating meat from a white buffalo.

Manuscripts for private study

In general, senior monks keep a number of manuscripts in their rooms for their private use, which cover both religious and non-religious subjects. As mentioned above numerous manuscripts with religious texts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode indicate that they were used by him. The following manuscripts are two of them.

A manuscript of *Yattikammavācā*

Apart from the manuscripts thought to be written and/or corrected by Sathu Nyai Khamchan as mentioned above, a *Yattikammavācā* manuscript (BAD-13-2-018) – i.e. a series of questions and answers used in higher ordination ceremonies (monks’ ordination) – should be mentioned as a good example of his privately used manuscripts (fig. 14). Its main characteristics are as follows:

- darkened paper, golden ink
- size and shape: 52.0 x 10.2 x 1.0 cm, similar to the shape of *khò*i manuscripts (see table 2)
- cover: hard cover stating the date, names of the donor and restorer
- language: Pali
- script: Lan Na script (Tua Müang)

²⁶ *Zingiberaceae purpureum* Rosc., occasionally used as a cure for fainting and indigestion; see Tomecko 2009, 112–113.

²⁷ This belief might be connected to the belief in the sacredness of white elephants, which is common in South-East Asia. For more details, see Vincent, 1998, 65–73, and Pridi, 1990, 49–56.

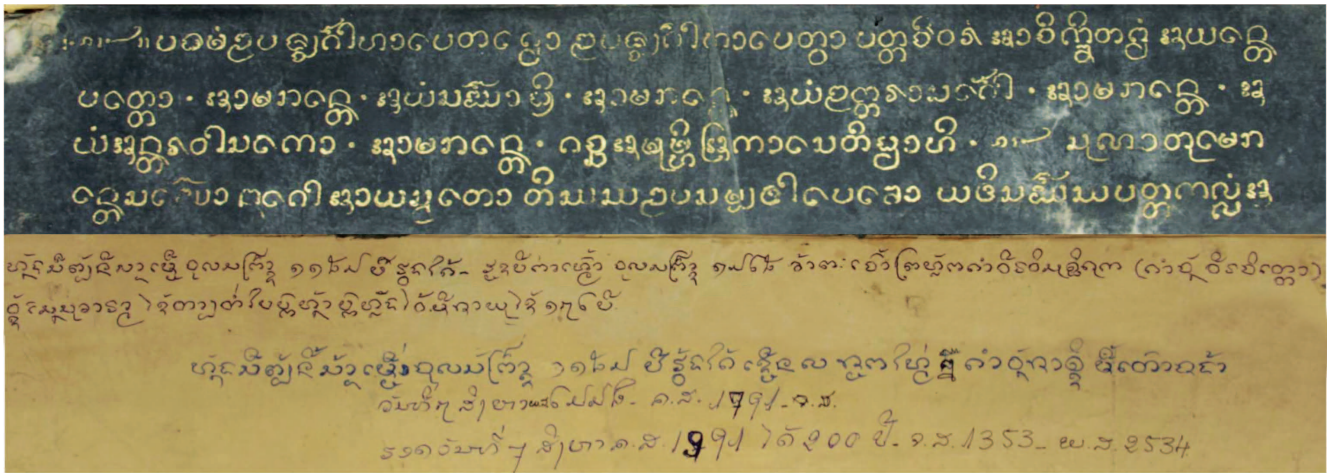


Fig. 14: Paper manuscript BAD-13-2-018, fols. 1^r/12^v: First folio of text and back cover with restoration note.

- date: CS 1153 (1791 CE)
- scribe: Luang Siang La (Maha Kesòṇ)
- restoration:
 - person: Sathu Nyai Khamchan
 - date: CS 1325 (1963 CE)
 - part: both front and back covers.

ວິລະຈິດໂຕ) ວັດແສນສຸຂາລາມ ໄດ້ຕາບຕໍ່ໃບປົກໜ້າປົກຫຼັງໄວ້ ມີອາຍຸໄດ້ ໑໗໒ ປີ.

This manuscript was written in CS 1153, a *huang khai* year. [Later.] in a *ka mao* year, CS 1325 [1791], I, Phra Lakkham Viravisutthikhun [Sathu Nyai Khamchan] of Vat Saen Sukharam repaired [its] front and back covers. [This manuscript] has an age of 172 years.

This manuscript records an important Buddhist text, the *Yattikammavācā*, the text used in the ordination ceremony. The use of Lan Na script indicates that the scribe might have tried to purify the texts, originally written in Pali, which came from Chiang Mai, at that time the capital of Lan Na kingdom, and were taken to Lan Xang. We can draw this conclusion because this manuscript was written about two and a half centuries after the Lao Buddhists from the Lan Xang kingdom received a number of Buddhist texts from Chiang Mai in 1523 CE.²⁸ From this year onwards, there were a number of Buddhist scholars who had knowledge of Pali texts and were proficient in Lan Na script. The manuscripts of *Yattikammavācā* might have been written in this context.

Later on, in 1991 CE, twenty-eight years after he repaired it, he also noted and confirmed that this manuscript was written in 1791 CE and had lasted 200 years – from the year of its writing resp. copying until 1991 CE.

In 1963 CE, 172 years after the manuscript 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*.

ໜັງສືພັບນີ້ສ້າງເມື່ອຈຸນລະສັງກາດ ໑໑໕໓ ປີຮວງໃຕ້ ເດືອນ ໙ ອອກໃໝ່ ຕູ້ ຄ່ຳ ວັນອາທິດ ມື້ເຕົ້າສະຫງ່າ ວັນທີ ໗ ສິງຫາ ພ.ສ. ໒໓໓໔ ຄ.ສ. 1791 ຮອດວັນທີ 7 ສິງຫາ ຄ.ສ. 1991 ໄດ້ 200 ປີ ຈ.ສ. 1353 ພ.ສ. 2534.

This manuscript was written in CS 1153, a *huang khai* year, the ninth lunar month, the eighth day of the waxing moon, Sunday, a *tao sang* day, 7 August, be 2334, 1791 CE. On 7 August 1991 CE, CS 1353, be 2534, [this manuscript] has lasted for 200 years.

ໜັງສືພັບນີ້ສ້າງເມື່ອຈຸນລະສັງກາດ ໑໑໕໓ ປີຮວງໃຕ້ ຮອດປົກເໝົ້າ ຈຸນລະສັງກາດ ໑໓໒໕ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ ພະຫຼັກຄຳວິລະວິສຸດທິຄຸນ (ຄຳຈັນ

The information mentioned above indicates that Sathu Nyai Khamchan intended to keep this manuscript in good condition to help it survive long periods of usage. In other words, the manuscript can undoubtedly be regarded as a manuscript he kept and used to follow his private intellectual and religious interests. It was in his hands for almost half a century, from the time he restored it to the time of his death

²⁸ Sila, 2001, 63.

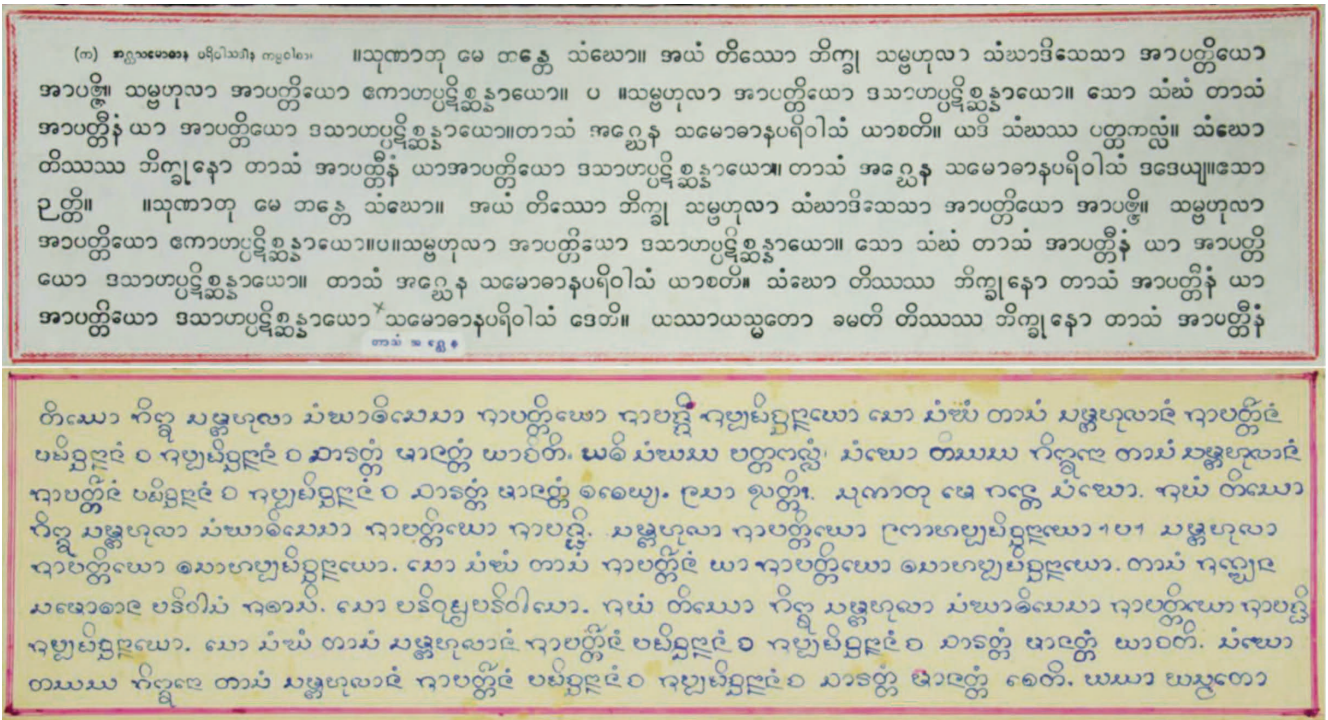


Fig. 15: Paper manuscript BAD-13-2-020, fols. 12^v/13^r: Showing the text *Sipkao Khan Kammavācā*.

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

A manuscript entitled Sipkao Khan Kammavācā
A Sipkao Khan Kammavācā (fig. 15) – a nineteen-section series of questions and answers used in higher ordination ceremonies – is another example of the abbot’s privately used manuscripts (BAD-13-2-020).²⁹ The main characteristics of this manuscript are the following:

- modern paper, black ink
- size and shape: 48.7 x 12.5 x 1.5 cm, similar to the shape of *khòì* manuscripts (see table 2)
- cover: hard cover with the date and scribe’s name

- language: Pali
- script: Burmese script
- date: CS (?) 1295 (1933 CE)
- scribe: *aggamahāpaṇḍita* [...] (only honorific title ‘Foremost Great and Wise One’ is legible)
- editing:
 - person: Sathu Nyai Khamchan
 - date: undated
 - part: missing part was re-written.

The Buddhist Sangha uses the same text for this ceremony in every Theravada country in South and South-East Asia.³⁰ Any senior monk who presides over such a ceremony, as Sathu Nyai Khamchan did, would be able to recite the text easily. If it was ever incomplete, Sathu Nyai Khamchan would have been able to identify the missing parts clearly and supplement them. The newly written text uses Tham Lao (Dhamma) script, not Burmese script like the original. This might indicate that Sathu Nyai Khamchan tried to substantiate the notion that Theravada Buddhist countries share the same ritual text in Pali. Furthermore, we can conclude from this

²⁹ Traditionally, Burmese people considered that the making of a book of *Kammavācā* was a way of earning merit, and this performance was popular during their sons’ ordaining ceremonies. Agrawal 1982, 19, 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.’

³⁰ Theravada is the name of a Buddhist tradition that uses the teachings of Buddha known by the term *Tiṭṭaka*, or Pali Canon. This tradition is followed by Buddhists in numerous countries in South and South-East Asia such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka and Thailand.

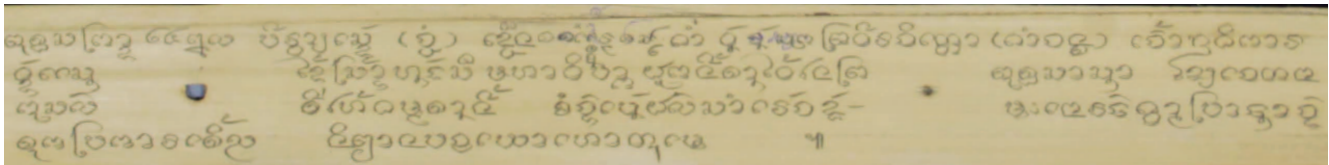


Fig. 16: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0300, fol. 24: Colophon with donation (*sang*) note.

that both Myanmar and Lao Tham scripts were considered appropriate scripts for writing Pali texts thought to be the word of Lord Buddha. Moreover, a monk who can recite Pali texts is highly honoured; McDaniel has stated that the mere knowledge of Pali terms and ability to memorise, translate and explain Pali words is a mark of great prestige in Laos and northern Thailand.³¹

Manuscript making

Donors

In the Lao language, the meaning of ‘making manuscripts’ (*kan sang nangsu*) is somewhat multifarious. *Sang* (ສ້າງ) used in this context covers at least three meanings. It often refers to the act of *making*, of writing (*litchana/khian*) or of copying (*kai/khat*) manuscripts. In other cases, it is applied in the sense of ‘to donate’ (*bòlichak*). Finally, the word *sang* can mean that a monk gives a manuscript which he previously used privately to the whole Sangha. It is reported that Sathu Nyai Khamchan was one of the senior monks of Luang Prabang who loved ‘to *sang*’ manuscripts. Even though he also wrote a number of manuscripts himself, the word *sang* used 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’ (*sang vai nai phuttha sasana*). The following example is taken from manuscript BAD-13-1-0300 (fig. 16).³²

ພຸດທະສັງກາດ ໒໔໘໙ ປີຮວຍເສັດ (ຈໍ) ເດືອນ ໑໑ ຂຶ້ນ ໒
ຄໍ້າ ວັນສຸກ ພະວິລະຈິດໂຕ (ຄໍ້າຈັນ) ເຈົ້າອະທິການວັດແສນ
ໄດ້ສ້າງໜັງສືມະຫາວິບາກຜູ້ນີ້ ທານໄວ້ໃນພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ
ໂດຍເຈຕະນາ [...]

³¹ McDaniel 2008, 117.

³² For more details, see the colophons of manuscripts 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, BAD-13-1-0195, BAD-13-1-0208, BAD-13-1-2030, BAD-13-1-0280 and BAD-13-1-0300.

In be 2489 (1946 CE), the *huai set* [year], the eleventh lunar month, the second day of the waxing moon, Friday, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the abbot of Vat Saen, made this bundle of *Mahavibak* (‘Result of Accumulated Merits and Sins’) [in order] to give [it] to Buddhism. With this determination [...]

In this case, however, *sang* means that Sathu Nyai Khamchan wrote this manuscript himself. In other words, the donor (*sattha/chaosattha*) and the scribe (*phu litchana*) of the above-mentioned manuscript are one and the same person. As Koret has put it: ‘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’.³³

In other cases, some manuscripts have numerous donors who are related by marriage or kinship. They can be grouped as follows: 1) the main donor and his or her spouse; 2) the main donor, his or her spouse and their children; 3) the main donor, his or her spouse, their children and their parents; and 4) the main donor, his or her spouse, their children, their parents and other relatives.

The religious practices which surround the formal sponsoring of the making of a manuscript (*vithikan sang nangsu*) in Luang Prabang are remarkable. Once a manuscript has been made and 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 may ask to be allowed to donate the same manuscript again. It is then given to that person after he or she has made a small donation, usually less than the manuscript’s value. The manuscript is now formally the property of the layperson. If it is damaged, the layperson repairs it – usually, it is cleaned and enclosed in a new protective cloth (*pha khamphi*). Finally, the layperson donates the manuscript back to the Sangha in a special ceremony, after which it is then the property of the Sangha again (fig. 17; BAD-13-1-0300):

³³ Koret 1999, 229.

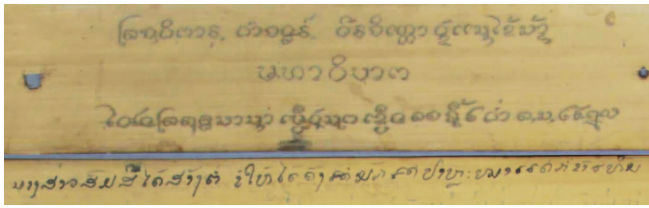


Fig. 17: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0300, fols. 1/1': Colophon with note of 're-donation' by layperson.

ພະອະທິການ ຄຳຈັນ ວິລະຈິດໂຕ ວັດແສນ ໄດ້ສ້າງມະຫາວິບາກ
ໄວ້ໃນພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ເມື່ອວັນສຸກ ເດືອນ ໑໑ ຂຶ້ນ ໒ ຄຳ ພ.ສ.
໒໔໘໙.

ນາງສາວ ສົມສີ ໄດ້ສ້າງຕໍ່ ຂໍໃຫ້ໄດ້ດັ່ງຄຳມັກຄຳປາຖະໜາ
ແຕ່ກໍຂ້າເທີ້ນ.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the abbot of Vat Saen, on Friday, the second day of the waxing moon, eleventh lunar month, 2489 be (17.9.1946 CE), made/donated (*sang*) a bundle of *Mahavibak* ('Result of Accumulated Merits and Sins') to support Buddhism.

[I,] Miss Somsu sponsored the making [of this bundle], following [a preceding donor. I asked for] all my desires to be fulfilled.

This passage indicates that Miss Somsu's need to achieve merit might have been so urgent that producing a new bundle would have required too much time. Miss Somsu might, for example, have encountered misfortune and believed that one of the best ways to overcome her bad luck would be to donate a manuscript.³⁴ 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 common practice is also conducted with other religious objects like Buddha images or a monk's robes.

Purposes of manuscript production

Traditionally, there are two main purposes for making manuscripts:

- to support Buddhism (*kham su sasana*)
- and to achieve merit (*sang punnya palami*).

It is generally believed that one way to support Buddhism is to contribute to the promotion of it by writing or copying Buddhist texts in order to help Buddhism flourish until the end of five

³⁴ Cf. manuscripts BAD-13-1-0087, BAD-13-1-0155, BAD-13-1-0219.

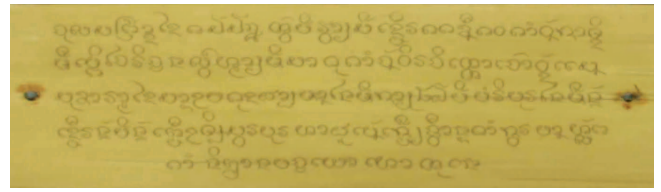


Fig. 18: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-1-13-0222, fol. 25': Colophon with donation note.

thousand years, as predicted by Buddha (*phuttha thamnai*). Achieving merit is understood as the continuous development of goodness or perfection (*palami*) until it is sufficient to gain enlightenment and reach nirvana (*banlu òlahan lae thoeng pha nipphan*). However, these are not the only purposes for making manuscripts; the following also exist:

- to achieve happiness (including good health and personal fame and gain),
- to transfer the donor's acquired merits to a deceased person,
- to remove evil and diseases from the donor's body.

Commemoration of birthdays

Interestingly, a number of manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's abode have passages in them indicating that he made them to commemorate his own birthday. On one's birthday anniversary, one can follow a common practice of merit-making to commemorate it by asking a monk for permission to organise a ritual ceremony. Popular ways of achieving merit are by receiving particular precepts, listening to a specific sermon, and offering alms.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan, in contrast, performed an act of merit-making to commemorate a specific event in his life: the anniversary of his birthday by making numerous manuscripts. Some of the colophons contain passages stating that he made manuscripts for this purpose at least three times, namely at the ages of 24, 36 and 56.³⁵ Moreover, his birthday ceremony was sometimes organised for him by other senior monks and laypeople who were his close disciples (fig. 18).³⁶

ຈຸນລະສັງກາດໄດ້ ໑໓໓໘ ຕົວ ປີຮວຍສີ ເດືອນ ໑໑ ຂຶ້ນ ໑໐
ຄຳ ວັນອາທິດ ມື້ເປີກໄຈ້ ລິດຈະນາແລ້ວ ໝາຍມີ ສາທຸ ຄຳຈັນ
ວິລະຈິດໂຕ ເຈົ້າວັດແສນສຸຂາລາມ ໄດ້ສ້າງອຸປະຊຸດຜາບມານ

³⁵ For more details see: BAD-1-13-0120, BAD-1-13-0128, BAD-1-13-0139, BAD-1-13-0157, BAD-1-13-0163, BAD-1-13-0208, BAD-1-13-0230, BAD-1-13-0280; BAD-1-13-0222.

³⁶ B2435/Box B23, BAD-12-2-1987.010.

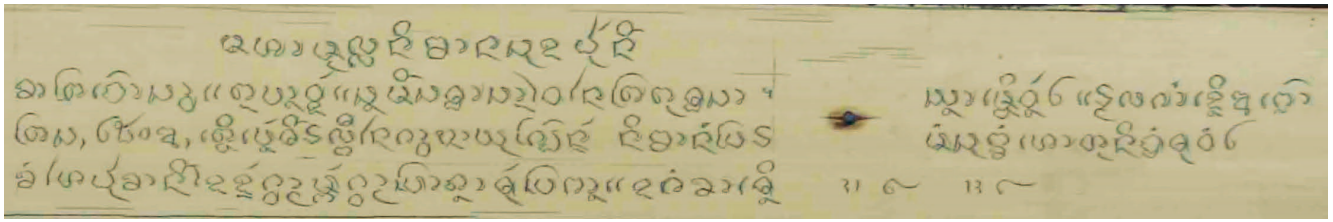


Fig. 19: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0139, fol. 31': Colophon with birthday commemoration.

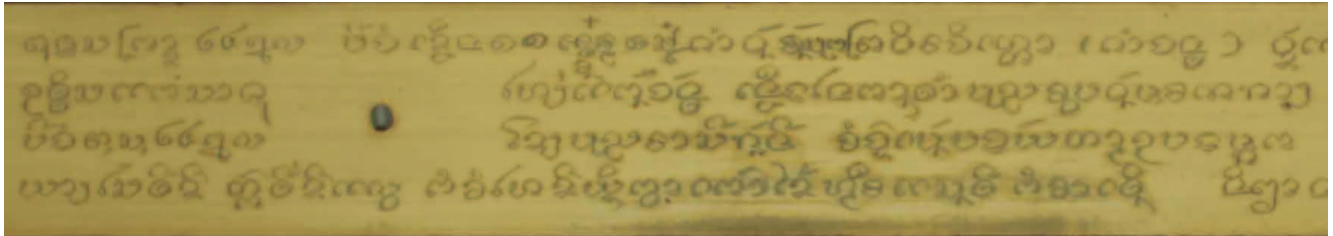


Fig. 20: Palm-leaf manuscript BAD-13-1-0027, fol. 18': Colophon with dedication.

ໃນມື້ອາຍຸ ໔໖ ປີບໍລິບູນ ໃນມື້ນັ້ນ ເດືອນນັ້ນ ປີນັ້ນ ເພື່ອອຸທິດສ່ວນບຸນທາຜູ້ເປັນເອື້ອຍຊື່ວ່າ ນາງ ຄຳອວນ ບ້ານຫຼັກຄຳ ນິບພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕຸ ໂນ.

In CS 1338, the *huai si* year, the eleventh lunar month, the tenth day of the waxing moon, Sunday, the *poek chai* day (20.09.1976 CE), the writing of [this fascicle of manuscripts was] finished. Sathu Nyai Khamchan, abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, made [this fascicle of] *Upakhut Phap Man* ('Upakhut defeated *Māra*') on the day [I] was fifty-six years old in order to dedicate merit to [my] elder sister, Mrs Kham Uan of Ban Lak Kham. [May this merit be] a condition for the attainment of nirvana for us (*Nibbāna paccayo hotu no*).

When laypeople saw that the respected senior monk made manuscripts to commemorate his birthday, they may have considered this a good way to achieve merit and followed his example. For instance, the colophons of manuscript nos. BAD-13-1-0027 and BAD-13-1-0139 demonstrate that a layperson, namely Miss Phaeng from the village of Vat Saen, also 'made' these fascicles to commemorate her birthday anniversary in be 2508 (1965 CE) (fig. 19):

ມະຫາມູລະນິບພານະສູດຜູກນີ້ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ ສາວແພງ ບ້ານວັດແສນ ມີສັດທາສ້າງໄວ້ໃນພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ເມື່ອວັນ ໒ ແຮມ ໙ ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ໘ ເກົ້າ ພ.ສ. ໒໔໐໘ ເພື່ອເປັນທີ່ລະສຶກໃນຄາວອາຍຸຄົບນັ້ນ ນິບພານັງ ປະລະມັງ ສຸຂັງ ໂຫຕຸ ນິດຈັງ ທຸວັງ ໒ ຂໍໃຫ້ຜູ້ຂ້ານີ້ໄດ້ດັ່ງຄວາມມັກຄວາມປາຖະໜາທຸກປະການ ແດ່ກໍຂ້າເທີ້ນ.

This fascicle of *Mahāmullanibbānasuta* was made by [myself, namely] Miss Phaeng of Ban Vat Saen in order to support Buddhism, on Monday, the ninth day of the waning moon, the eighth lunar month, be 2508 to mark the time of [my] birthday celebration. Nirvana that is the ultimate happiness is [my] perpetual and constant [desire]. (*Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ hotu niccaṃ duvaṃ duvaṃ*.) I ask for all my desires to be fulfilled.

Commemoration of obits

Traditionally, Lao Buddhists believe that organising a ceremony of merit-making in the name of a deceased person is a way of showing gratitude to their benefactors.³⁷ Even many years after the deceased have passed away, their children, relatives and other grateful people still express their appreciation with an annual act of merit. Sometimes, followers of a monk obtain merit by commemorating the anniversary of his death. By doing so, they acknowledge their superiors, and, in turn, their superiors' goodness and worthiness will live on in their hearts, so they believe. Colophons of some of the manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai

³⁷ Not only do Lao Buddhists believe that they can gain merit by their own ways of merit-making, but they have confidence that merit can be transferred to the deceased as well. This probably reflects the rite of passage 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 a person dies, his or her relatives must 'make merit' in the name of the deceased person. For more details about death rites in Theravada Buddhist countries in South-east Asia, see Tambiah 1970, 191–194, Swearer 1981, 28–32, Berger 2000, and Terwiel 2012, 247–260.

Khamchan's abode strongly suggest that this was the main reason for making them (BAD-13-1-0007, BAD-13-1-0164) (fig. 20):

[...] ອຸທິດແກ່ສາທຸໃຫຍ່ແກ່ນຈັນເນື່ອງໃນການທຳບຸນ
ຂວບວັນມໍລະນະພາບ [...]

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

Sathu Nyai Kaenchan was a former abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan took over his position once he had passed away. The above-mentioned colophon contains a message indicating that Sathu Nyai Khamchan 'made' manuscripts in order to dedicate merit to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan after becoming his successor. According to the colophon of this fascicle, this event took place in be 2489 (1946 CE). Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the Buddhists of Luang Prabang as a whole may have followed the traditional way 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 the practice. For instance, Thit Suk made a palm-leaf fascicle (BAD-13-1-0090) to dedicate merit to his wife who had already died; Phia Sai-uppakan and his spouse made a fascicle (BAD-13-1-0106) to dedicate merit to their deceased son; and Miss Sim and Mòn Thòngdi made a fascicle (BAD-13-1-0281) to dedicate merit to their relatives who had passed away. In practice, numerous manuscripts were made in the name of deceased teachers and their beloved.³⁸

Achieving health and good luck

Although the manuscript-making ritual was frequently dedicated to transfer merit to deceased persons, it is believed that the living who made the manuscript in their name also received merit from this act.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan probably read manuscripts containing texts dealing with the maintaining of fortune and knew that Lao Buddhism allows for organising a ceremony of merit-making to prolong the lives of people (*het bun sūp sata/tò anyu*). Usually, there is no specific point in the life of

a layperson when it is advisable to conduct this ceremony; it is performed when it seems convenient or when the layperson faces misfortune and quickly needs to get rid of bad luck. Besides the part of manuscript-making, this ceremony consists of three additional parts: receiving the five precepts, listening to a specific sermon, and offering alms.

Conclusion

A large number of educated Buddhists – i.e. practising monks and novices – have produced various types of manuscripts from ancient times to the present day. Some of them were made a long time ago, but have been preserved, copied and passed on from one generation to the next.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan should be regarded as one of the senior monks of Luang Prabang who devoted himself to many activities related to the monastic order and the Buddhist community, including the writing, collecting and preserving of manuscripts. His regular efforts to achieve merit by making manuscripts in commemoration of his birthday was welcomed and adopted by the people 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 needed to be revived. On the other hand, he did not disapprove of modern techniques. The traditional stylus and palm leaves – once the main tool and material required for this kind of work – could be replaced. Therefore, a number of books found in his abode reflect the use of various modern tools like ballpoint pen and typewriter. They were made from both palm leaves and paper.

To complete the picture of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, it should also be considered that he showed a keen interest in the orthographic system of the Dhamma script. In former times, a number of words – especially the ligatures (*kham nyò*) – could be written in different ways. During his life they were seldom used, but frequently replaced with full words. Moreover, various features of 'modern' writing and printing such as the use of correcting and formatting of columns, paragraphs, and punctuation marks can be seen in a large number of manuscripts written during the abbot's lifetime.

³⁸ For more details, see the colophons of manuscripts 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 and BAD-13-1-0322.

LIST OF MANUSCRIPTS

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.
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