

Article

Tai Manuscripts in the Dhamma Script Domain: Surveying, Preservation and Documentation, Part 1

Volker Grabowsky | Münster *

From 22–23 March 2001, an international conference on ‘Studies of History and Literature of Tai Ethnic Groups’ was convened in Chiang Mai under the auspices of the Japanese Toyota Foundation. Two dozen philologists and historians from Thailand, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), China, Japan, the United States and Germany came together to examine the research of the past and to explore new directions for future studies. They underscored a disturbing trend: While during the last three decades the corpus of accessible primary source material—notably manuscripts and inscriptions—has increased enormously, the number of scholars able to read and analyse this material has decreased dramatically in the same period. This observation not only pertains to the decline of philologically oriented ‘Thai and Lao Studies’ in Europe and North America but also to the academic environment in Southeast Asia itself, where basic research in the fields of philology, history and literary studies is under pressure to justify its ‘social relevance’.

There is no reason for Thai-Lao (Tai) philology to put on sackcloth and ashes. On the contrary, the present writer will try to demonstrate that Tai manuscripts provide an extensive, fascinating, and rewarding field of research for scholars coming from a wide range of disciplines—linguistics, philology, history, religious studies, and others. This article will give an overview of how manuscripts have been surveyed, registered, documented, and edited in the Tai speaking areas of Southeast Asia and Southwest China. The geographical scope will be limited, mainly for practical reasons, to those areas where the Dhamma script (*tua aksòn tham*) was either used for writing religious texts (thus the script’s name) or became the only script for religious as well as secular texts. In ethno-linguistic terms, this is a region that includes Lao (Laos and Northeast Thailand or Isan), Tai Yuan (Northern Thailand), Tai Khün (Chiang Tung or Kengtung), and Tai Lü (Sipsòng Panna). In historical terms, this is the land under the political and cul-

tural influence of the kingdoms of Lan Na and Lan Sang. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the two kingdoms were united and ruled, albeit for a very short period, by a Lao king and his son.¹

The ‘Dhamma script domain’ comprises an area of more than 400,000 square kilometres, with a population of approximately 30 million inhabitants, of which more than 80 per cent are native speakers of Tai languages. The earliest evidence of the Dhamma script, probably a derivative of the ancient Mon alphabet of Hariphunchai,² is from the year 1376. It is a Pāli inscription of one single line discovered in the early 1980s on a golden leaf in a *cetiya* in Sukhothai.³ The earliest datable evidence of the Dhamma script used for writing a vernacular Northern Thai text that has been identified so far is inscribed on the pedestal of a Buddha image housed in Wat Chiang Man in the city of Chiang Mai. This inscription dates from 1465. It comprises two short lines (mentioning the names of Buddhist dignitaries who supported the casting of the Buddha image as well as the name of the laywomen who sponsored it), that are preceded by two lines written in Pāli.⁴ Since the late sixteenth century, the Dhamma script has become the main media of written communication in Lan Na, replacing two other scripts that were used for secular texts. The first, called *tua aksòn fak kham* or ‘Tamarind-Pod script’, appears to have been used almost exclusively for inscriptions.⁵ The

¹ King Photisarath (r. 1520–1548) married the daughter of King Ket Kao of Lan Na. His son Sai Settha, became ruler of Chiang Mai in 1546 but returned to Luang Prabang, the Lao capital of that time, after his father’s death in 1548. King Sai Setthathirat, however, did not renounce the throne of Lan Na until 1551.

² Penth (1992, 60) argues on the basis of epigraphical evidence found in the Chiang Mai-Lamphun area that ‘the Tham script had been the local Mon script of Lamphun around 1250–1300 which the Thai Yuan naturally used when they study religious matter’.

³ The whole inscription runs over four lines. Three lines are written in Thai language and Sukhothai script; only the fourth line, containing a Pāli phrase, uses the Dhamma script. See Udom 1999, 2363. Cf. Hundius 1990a, 119.

⁴ Hundius 1990b, 10 n. 1.

⁵ According to Penth (1992, 52 and 76), the Fak Kham script spread further north to the region of Chiang Tung and beyond. From the fact that a Chinese

* This article draws upon several published and unpublished papers by Harald Hundius. I am grateful to him for giving his kind permission to use this material. However, any shortcomings in the analysis are my own responsibility.

second and relatively short-lived variant, called *tua aksòn thài nithet*, has been used mainly for transmitting works of classical Lan Na poetry.⁶ In the decades after 1850, the Thai Nithet script fell out of use and the Dhamma script eventually became the exclusive ‘script of the country’ (*tua müang*).

The diffusion of the Dhamma script in the Upper Mekong region has still to be studied thoroughly. However, based on our present state of knowledge, we may assume that the script spread from Lan Na to Chiang Tung and Chiang Rung (Sipsòng Panna) no later than the mid-fifteenth century. It ultimately reached Lan Sang, where it made its first documented appearance in 1520/21 (CS 882) in a monolingual Pāli palm-leaf manuscript kept at the Provincial Museum in Luang Prabang (formerly the Royal Palace).⁷ The oldest epigraphical evidence of the Dhamma script in Lan Sang is from an inscription in Luang Prabang, dated 1527.⁸ This occurred during the reign of King Phothisarath (1520–1547), when cultural and dynastic relations between Lan Na and Lan Sang became very close. Unlike Sipsòng Panna and Chiang Tung, Lan Sang developed a secular script nowadays called ‘Old Lao script’ (*tua aksòn lao buhan*). According to Lorrillard, ‘the first true example’ of an inscription in secular Lao script is from a stele found in the central Lao town of Thakhek. Though influenced by the Fak Kham script of Lan Na, the secular Lao script also shows traces of independent development.⁹

The Lao, Lan Na and Tai Lü versions of the Dhamma script are very similar to one another, and the lexemes of the Lao, Lan Na and Tai Lü languages are to a very high degree identical.¹⁰ Manuscripts in these languages and scripts from

Laos, Northern or Northeast Thailand, and Sipsòng Panna can be read and, to a certain extent, understood by anyone literate in any one of them. However, somebody reading a manuscript from a different region would normally pronounce the written words according to the phonology of his or her own mother tongue. For example, words written with consonants representing the voiced Pāli sounds of /b/, /d/, /g/ are pronounced in Lao as voiceless aspirated /ph/, /th/, /kh/, whereas they are pronounced in Lan Na as voiceless unaspirated /p/, /t/, /k/. Another example is that in spoken Tai Lü, the historical diphthongs /ia/, /ua/, /ua/ have been monophthongised into /e/, /ə/, and /o/, and their written forms are pronounced accordingly. Texts written in Pāli language in any of these scripts are normally read according to the phonology of the vernacular. Lastly, orthographic usage in general is not strictly consistent, which adds to the number of variant spellings of the same title. These will be left unchanged, as they do not pose a problem to the user.

1. Inventories and Documentations

The earliest systematic efforts of surveying and documenting traditional manuscripts, mostly kept in monastic libraries but some also in private households, started in Northern Thailand already in the 1960s. Given the relative political stability of Thailand in the second half of the twentieth century, this does not come as a surprise. Political unrest and civil war in the rest of the region delayed similar efforts among Thailand’s neighbours. Civil war in Laos ended in December 1975 with the proclamation of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. The revolutionary regime neglected the cultural and literary heritage of the country during the initial phase of socialist transformation and took a renewed interest in the preservation of traditional Lao literature only in the late 1980s. The neglect of the Tai cultural and literary heritage was most significant in Yunnan (China), where even Buddhist temples and the manuscripts they harboured were deliberately destroyed on an unprecedented scale during the so-called ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’. Serious efforts toward the preservation and documentation of Tai manuscripts in China began in the late 1990s. In Myanmar the situation appears to be most difficult, as the ruling military regime seems to regard projects that aim at a systematic survey of the literary heritage of non-Burman ethnic groups,

polyglot collection of dictionaries and documents from ten *tusi* (non-Chinese tributary states or ‘Pacification Commissionerships’ of the Ming and Qing dynasties) include examples from Chiang Mai written in Fak Kham script, Penth concludes that this script had been the ‘official script of Lan Na’ for quite a long period. The holdings of the Tōyō Bunko (Tokyo) contain bilingual (Tai-Chinese) memorials presented by various Tai vassal rulers to the Ming court. One of these memorials was sent by the king (*cao*) of Lan Na, probably by King Müang Kaeo (r. 1495–1526), in c. 1522; it is written in Fak Kham script. For details, see Liew-Herres et al. 2008, 152–155.

⁶ This script has also been known by the misleading name *tua aksòn khòt müang*. See Penth 1992, 53.

⁷ The palm-leaf manuscript, written in a Lao variant of the Dhamma script, is a copy of parts of the Parivāra. A copy of this manuscript is accessible in the collection of the Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts (DLLM) in Vientiane. I thank Harald Hundius and David Wharton for providing me a frame showing the date of the manuscript.

⁸ See Lorrillard 2005, 372.

⁹ Ibid., 371.

¹⁰ This can bring about incorrect classifications of Tai manuscripts by researchers not sufficiently familiar with the regional variations of the Dhamma script. For example, almost all manuscript listed by Wenk (1975)

in his catalogue of Lao manuscripts in Germany are in fact Lan Na manuscripts. The same holds true for Cœdes’ catalogue of Pāli, Lao and Siamese manuscripts, all ‘Lao’ manuscripts being of Northern Thai provenance. See Cœdes 1966.

such as the Shan or Tai Khün, as a potential challenge to the political unity of Myanmar.¹¹

In the context of preservation and documentation of ancient Tai manuscripts, one often encounters the colloquial term ‘Palm-leaf Manuscript Projects’ (Thai: *khrongkan bai lan* โครงการใบลาน). Though it is true that palm-leaves were the preferred material for writing traditional texts, due to their durability in the humid climate of Southeast Asia,¹² other writing materials were also used. A small, but not insignificant, number of Northern Thai and Lao manuscripts are leporello manuscripts made of paper. The standard paper pulp is derived from the *sa* tree, a kind of mulberry (*Brousonetia papyrifera*). Thus the folding books made of mulberry paper are colloquially called *pap sa* (*pap* being a word meaning a folding book similar to the Siamese *samut khòì*).¹³ In addition, bound books exist, notably in the Tai Lü areas, where each piece of paper has been folded over once vertically, so that it becomes much longer than it is broad. By folding the paper, both the front and the back page of one sheet can be used for writing. These sheets of paper are sewn together along one of the vertical sides. This kind of manuscript is called *pap hua* (พับหัว).¹⁴

In the manuscript tradition of the Tai Lü and the Shan, *pap sa* manuscripts play a very important role and are even more widespread than palm-leaf manuscripts, the latter being restricted to the writing of religious texts. In contrast, less than one tenth of the Lan Na and Lao manuscripts are written on mulberry paper, though for certain genres—notably astrology, traditional medicine and white magic—the proportion of *pap sa* manuscripts runs to between one fifth and one third of the total (Tables 1 and 2).

¹¹ In Myanmar, the National Commission for the Preservation of Traditional Manuscripts has been engaged in field preservation and inventory of palm-leaf and *parabaik* (leporello) manuscripts since its establishment in 1994. In addition to compiling an electronic database of manuscripts in Myanmar, it began field-microfilming manuscripts in 1998, and also undertakes digitisation and printing. It is unknown to the present author whether and to what extent this project also includes the preservation and documentation of Tai, in particular Tai Khün and Tai Lü, manuscripts in the Shan State.

¹² The method and the material employed in the manufacture of palm-leaf manuscripts is described in Sirichai and Kunlaphanthada 1992, and in Kòngkaeo 1987 and 1989. For a very concise description see Schuyler 1908/09 and Koson 1999.

¹³ The production process of mulberry paper manuscripts is described in detail in Chaichuen 2005 and Terwiel 2003, 17–20, who also provides a typology of Shan mulberry paper manuscripts (*ibid.*, 20–26).

¹⁴ See Buppha 1998; the *pap hua* of the Tai Yuan and the Tai Lü resemble the *pap kiñ* of the Shan (see Terwiel 2003, 24–26).

1.1 Northern Thailand (Lan Na)

Lan Na, the land of a ‘million rice fields’, comprises—in the narrow sense of the term—the eight provinces of today’s Northern Thailand, namely Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lamphang, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Phrae, Nan, and Mae Hông Sòn. More than four-fifths of the population of Northern Thailand belong to a Tai ethnic group called (Tai) Yuan, making up almost five million people. They represent the majority of the population in all the above mentioned provinces, except for the thinly populated mountainous province of Mae Hông Sòn in the western region where the Shan (Tai Yai), Karen and other hill peoples are predominant. The Yuan also live in the northern parts of the provinces of Tak, Uttaradit, and Kamphaeng Phet, as well as in enclaves in the central Thai provinces Saraburi and Ratburi, and in north western Laos. Apart from the Tai Yuan, there are large communities of other Tai ethnic groups, such as Tai Lü, Tai Khün, and Shan (Tai Yai), scattered throughout Northern Thailand. Descending from forced resettlements that took place mostly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as from voluntary migration, these communities not only preserved but continued to copy manuscripts that their ancestors had once taken from their places of origin. Thus, the appearance of Tai Khün manuscripts in San Kamphaeng (Chiang Mai province) or Tai Lü manuscripts in Pasang (Lamphun province) would have to be studied against a background of historical population movements.¹⁵

When and how did the first survey of Northern Thai manuscripts begin? In the early 1960s, the Siam Society started a survey of manuscripts in the possession of various monastic libraries in the North. The leading scholar responsible for this survey was Achan Singkha Wannasai (1920–1980), a specialist on Lan Na literature and culture. Focussing on Achan Singkha’s home province of Lamphun, the survey was completed in 1966. Six years later Harald Hundius initiated another project which, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), aimed at establishing a microfilm collection of manuscripts representative of the indigenous literary tradition. The research project, entitled ‘Dokumentarische Erfassung literarischer Materialien in den Nordprovinzen Thailands’ (Documentation of literary material in the northern provinces of Thailand), collected and microfilmed more than one thousand manuscripts from 98 monastic and private libraries. The microfilms are housed in the Thai National Library collections (since 1974), as well as

¹⁵ Up to two-fifths of the present-day Northern Thai population, but four-fifths in Lamphun province, are descendants of war captives who were resettled in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century during the age of *Kep phak sai sa kep kha sai müang* (‘Put vegetables in the basket, put people in the politics’). For details on that subject see Grabowsky 1999 and 2004.

Table 1: Statistics of microfilmed texts of the manuscript project of the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai (Balance: 31 Dec. 2002)

no.	genre	manuscripts	in %	palm-leaf (fascicles)	pap sa (volumes)	total	in %
01	Buddhism พระพุทธศาสนา	3,602	69.98	14,683	233	14,916	86.43
02	Folktales นิทานพื้นบ้าน	11	0.21	19	1	20	0.16
03	customary law กฎหมายโบราณ	191	3.69	120	17	137	0.79
04	ethics จริยศาสตร์	68	1.31	73	3	76	0.44
05	history ประวัติศาสตร์	189	3.65	289	18	307	1.77
06	astrology โหราศาสตร์	168	3.25	194	55	249	1.44
07	poetry โคลงกลอน	110	2.12	114	42	156	0.90
08	traditional medicine ยาสมุนไพร	189	3.65	202	97	299	1.73
09	rites and rituals ลัทธิพิธีกรรม	128	2.47	145	55	200	1.15
10	(white) magic ไสยศาสตร์	103	1.99	113	51	164	0.94
11	miscellany ปกรณัม	402	7.91	666	67	733	4.24
Σ	Total	5,168	100.00	16,618	639	17,257	100.00

Source: Social Research Institute 1991.

Table 2: Statistics of microfilmed texts of the manuscript project of the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai. Only texts of religious provenance (Balance: 31 Dec. 2002)

no.	genre	manuscripts	in %	palm-leaf (fascicles)	pap sa (volumes)	total	in %
01A	legendary history พุทธตำนาน	48	1.33	189	4	193	12.94
01B	<i>mahā jāti jāta</i> มหาชาติชาดก	450	12.76	6,167	2	6,169	41.369
01C	<i>dasa jāti jāta</i> ทศชาติชาดก	40	1.33	154	–	154	1.03
01D	general <i>jātaka</i> ชาดกทั่วไป	952	24.31	3,711	126	3,837	25.72
01E	<i>sutta</i> พระสูตร	328	8.95	1,270	11	1,281	8.59
01F	<i>abhidhamma</i> พระอภิธรรม	31	0.93	94	5	99	0.66
01G	<i>vinaya</i> พระวินัย	74	2.23	257	1	2585	1.73
01H	<i>dhamma</i> (general) ธรรมทั่วไป	601	17.06	1,206	27	1,233	8.27
10I	<i>ānisaṃsa</i> อนิสงส์ต่างๆ	246	7.06	298	5	303	2.03
01J	cosmology ทฤษฎีเกี่ยวกับจักรวาล	64	1.80	176	3	179	1.20
01K	history of Bud- dhism ประวัติศาสตร์ พุทธศาสนา	46	1.24	306	2	308	2.06
01L	history of sacred objects ตำนานปูชนียวัตถุ	402	11.37	436	16	452	3.03
01M	famous disciples พระสาวกที่มีชื่อเสียง	60	1.39	120	4	124	0.83
01N	prophecies พยากรณ์เหตุการณ์อนาคต	176	4.92	211	2	213	1.43
01O	prayers and rituals บทสวดมนต์และ พิธีกรรม	23	1.70	15	10	25	0.17
01P	<i>Samgha</i> ceremonies พิธีกรรมสงฆ์	52	1.52	62	7	69	0.46
01Q	Buddhist myths เทพนิยาย	9	0.28	11	8	19	0.13
Σ	Total	3,602	100.00	1,483	233	14,916	100.00

Source: Social Research Institute 1991.

at the Chulalongkorn University (Department of History; as a donation from the German Foreign Office in 1978/79), and Chiang Mai University (Department of Thai; also a donation from the German government), as well as at the universities of Kiel and Göttingen in Germany. A list of texts contained in the microfilm collection, including a large number of parallel versions, exists in the form of a computer print-out¹⁶ available upon request from Harald Hundius.¹⁷

1.1.1 The Social Research Institute (SRI)

The survey and documentation of Northern Thai manuscripts that are scattered among the over 3,000 Buddhist monasteries of the region gained further momentum in 1976 when a group of sociologists and social anthropologists from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, established the ‘Social Science Research Centre’ (ศูนย์วิจัยสังคมศาสตร์) with the goal, among other objectives, of promoting research in palm-leaf manuscripts. In 1978, this centre, headed by Sommai Premchit, became the core of a ‘Project to prepare the founding of a Social Research Institute’ (โครงการจัดตั้งสถาบันวิจัยสังคม). It was almost three years before the Social Research Institute (สถาบันวิจัยสังคม) was officially inaugurated on 28 January, 1981 as an autonomous institution attached to Chiang Mai University. The Social Research Institute (SRI) made the survey and documentation of Lan Na manuscripts and inscriptions as a task of primary importance. The activities carried out by the SRI and its predecessor can be roughly divided into the following three phases:

1.) 1978–1981: The Toyota Foundation and the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, jointly supported a project on ‘The Survey and Microfilming of Palm-leaf Manuscripts in Northern Thailand,’ which covered four densely populated districts in Chiang Mai province (Müang, Saraphi, Sansai, and San Kamphaeng), as well as additional districts in the provinces of Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Phrae, and Nan.

2.) 1982–1992: Based on the experience gained during the first phase, the survey and microfilm documentation continued in Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Tak, and Uttaradit,¹⁸ as

¹⁶ See Hundius 1976.

¹⁷ Professor (emeritus) of ‘Languages and Literatures of Thailand and Laos’ at the University of Passau (1993–2004).

¹⁸ Tai Yuan make up more than one half of the population in Tak province and form a significant minority in Uttaradit, especially in the province’s northern districts. There are isolated pockets of Tai Yuan settlements in the central Thai provinces of Saraburi and Ratburi, whose ancestors were deported from Chiang Saen in 1804. Tai Yuan manuscripts are still being kept in these two provinces; the most famous one is a version of the *Mangraisat* translated by Griswold and Nagara 1977.

well as in a few other districts of Chiang Mai. Most of the work was accomplished by 1987. Since 1988, the project has concentrated on increasing the number of microfilmed texts related to genres such as astrology, poetry, and traditional medicine, which so far remain under-represented.

3.) Since 1993, very few additional manuscripts have been added to SRI’s microfilm collection. The Institute’s researchers concentrate on editing the wide range of publications that are based on manuscripts from the microfilm collection.

By 2002, a total of 5,168 manuscripts comprising 17,257 fascicles (of palm-leaf manuscripts) or volumes (of mulberry paper manuscripts) had been microfilmed on more than 220 reels. 720 monasteries in 78 districts of ten Northern provinces had been surveyed. The texts were systematically classified into eleven different genres, including Buddhism, Customary Law, History, and Poetry. As more than two thirds of the collected manuscripts fitted the category ‘Buddhism’, this genre was divided into seventeen sub-categories running from legendary histories of the Buddha to cosmological texts and Buddhist myths. The system of categorising Tai manuscripts will be discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter, suffice it here to mention that a number of texts fit into more than one category. In particular, the borders between the genres ‘history’ (No. 05) and ‘history of Buddhism’ (No. 01K) or ‘customary law’ (No. 02) and ‘rites and rituals’ (No. 09) are somewhat fluid. Moreover, in a few cases manuscripts are a collection of completely disparate texts. These manuscripts are usually listed under the category ‘miscellany’.

1.1.2 Centre for the Promotion of Arts and Culture, Chiang Mai University

In 1986, Harald Hundius initiated the Preservation of Northern Thai Manuscripts Project (PNTMP), which was coordinated by Chiang Mai University’s Centre for the Promotion of Arts and Culture (CPAC) and funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs through its Cultural Assistance Programme. The CPAC was established in 1985 as an institution with the express aim of fostering cultural awareness in academic circles as well as among the general public, and to conduct projects leading to the preservation and restoration of the cultural heritage of Lan Na. The Preservation of Northern Thai Manuscripts Project was the first and thus far most prestigious project initiated by the Centre. Recognised as an important institution, the CPAC became an official entity in July 1993, and its researchers were granted status equivalent to that of university faculty.

In contrast to previous projects, the PNTMP did not restrict its activities to a survey and documentation of manuscripts but pursued a wider goal: The aim of the project was to give a strong incentive to local academic as well as non-academic institutions to take effective measures for the preservation of the vast literary heritage of this region. This heritage had been neglected by monks and local villagers for more than three decades.¹⁹ The PNTMP defined three main objectives: (1) to restore and preserve the existing traditional Buddhist palm-leaf and paper manuscripts through the application of scientific techniques before they will be further damaged; (2) to promote awareness of the value of the manuscripts and encourage active participation among local people in their preservation with the collaboration of scholars and technicians from Chiang Mai University as well as other agencies involved, and (3) to set up a model for preservation with continuous technical support from Chiang Mai University as well as provincial centres of higher education.

Out of a total of some 3,300 registered monasteries, approximately 160 were pre-selected by a committee of local scholars and researchers. Due to budget constraints and the requirement that the survey be completed within five years (1987–1992), only a reduced number of monasteries was finally selected for manuscript preservation based on the following criteria:

- 1.) Historical, religious, cultural, and social value of the manuscript collection.
- 2.) Size of the collection (from 100 manuscripts upwards).
- 3.) Ethnic affiliation of the monastery (Tai Yuan, Shan, Tai Lü, etc.).
- 4.) Geographical location (special attention given to monasteries with sizable collections that were located in remote areas).
- 5.) Amount of interest in preservation activities on the part of a monastery and its lay community.

The most important and valuable manuscripts stored in the libraries of these monasteries were microfilmed. Priority was given to unique and rare texts and very old manuscripts (those older than 150 years). A committee of scholars from Chiang Mai University and other institutions was set up for the selection of monasteries and manuscripts including, among others, Udom Roongruangsri, Mani Payomyong, Aroonrut Wichienkeo, and Sommai Premchit. Of great

¹⁹ An important factor contributing to this neglect was the centralisation of monastic education in the early 1940s replacing Northern Thai texts with Siamese (Central Thai) books in the studies of monks and novices.

importance was the active participation of the project's special advisor, Harald Hundius, who also helped establish a Master's Degree (MA) programme in Lan Na Language and Literature in the Thai Department of Chiang Mai University from 1983 until 1992 (seconded by the German Academic Exchange Service or DAAD).²⁰

The Preservation of Northern Thai Manuscripts Project was headed by MR Rujaya Abhakorn, then head of the Central Library of Chiang Mai University, as director. In the course of the project, from 1987 to 1991, 336 reels of microfilms containing selected primary sources of the Lan Na tradition were reportedly produced.²¹ The original microfilms are stored at the Thai National Library in Bangkok. A complete copy of the microfilms is kept at the main office of the CPAC, a colonial-style building formerly belonging to Arthur Lionel Queripel, a British resident in Chiang Mai, which was used as the office of the Social Research Institute until 1994. A second set of copies is available at the 'Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur' (Academy of Sciences and of Literature) in Mainz.

1.2 Northeast Thailand (Isan)

While Northern Thai manuscripts have been systematically surveyed since the 1970s and a considerable number of them also microfilmed, manuscripts in Northeast Thailand have been largely neglected.²² A preliminary survey of manuscripts was conducted from 1984 until 1987 through a joint project undertaken by several local Institutes of Higher Learning under the leadership of the Teacher Training College of Mahasarakham, now Mahasarakham University. This project, supported by the Toyota Foundation, resulted in fourteen volumes of inventories. However, no preservation, microfilming, or digitisation was carried out.²³ One of the authors used these inventories in 1998 to identify Lao texts to be studied in a research project on 'Traditional Lao literature in the Late Lan Sang period'. Many of the identified

²⁰ In recognition of his contribution to Northern Thai studies, Harald Hundius was awarded an honorary doctorate in Lan Na Language and Literature by Chiang Mai University in 2000.

²¹ According to the original plans, almost 6,000 manuscripts comprising 27,570 fascicles (or volumes in the case of *pap sa* manuscripts) were to be microfilmed. In September 1987, the microfilming started at Wat Sung Men (Phrae province), which has by far the largest collection of manuscripts in Northern Thailand. Because of the huge volume of manuscripts, the Microfilming Project operated in this place for one full year.

²² A general short overview of the studies of manuscripts in Northeast Thailand is provided by Jaruwan 2005.

²³ The proceedings of the *Sammana bai lan thua pathet khang thi ning* (Centre de Recherche Artistique et Littéraire (ed.), Vientiane 1989) mentions a survey of 214 monasteries and 8,908 manuscripts undertaken by a group of teacher training colleges of Northeast Thailand in 1983 (BE 2527).

manuscripts were either wrongly documented or no longer in the place where they were originally found and recorded. We were told by some monasteries that a certain manuscript once in the possession of their respective libraries had been lent out to other monasteries and not returned. Many monastic libraries in Northeast Thailand were poorly organised and manuscripts kept without proper care. This illustrates how surveys of manuscripts without a preservation component are of limited value.

Further research carried out between 1997 and 1998 focused on the manuscript holdings of Wat Mahathat in Yasothon province. The research site was chosen by the Japanese historian Akiko Iijima (Tenri University) because the *hò trai* (library of scriptures) of Wat Mahathat held a large number of manuscripts, many of which originated from Vientiane (where they were carried from after 1830). With the help of research staff from the Documentation Centre of Palm-leaf Manuscripts (ศูนย์ข้อมูลเอกสารใบลาน) at nearby Mahasarakham University, a preliminary survey was conducted between August 1997 and October 1998. In the course of this survey, the research team listed ‘almost 2,700 titles of palm-leaf manuscripts; of which 1,002 titles were found on eight-stage shelves and 1,694 in nine scripture boxes and cabinets.’ Due to several shortcomings of the preliminary survey, it was later ‘decided to carry out a second round and a more careful reinvestigation’ to compile a durable catalogue.²⁴ The oldest dated manuscript, entitled ‘Somdet Thewarat’, is from CS 936 (AD 1574/75).

By 1998, the Documentation Centre of Palm-leaf Manuscripts had conducted surveys of manuscripts kept at three other locations, including Wat Sawang Khongkha in Kalasin province. It was also engaged in activities not directly related to palm-leaf manuscripts. For example, it cooperated with the Archaeological Office and the National Museum in Khon Kaen to study the inscriptions—written in Lao Dhamma script or Lao Buhan (Thai Nòi) script—found in the seven provinces of the ‘Upper Northeast’.²⁵

To be continued in the next issue

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Buppha Khunyotying บุพผา คุ้มยั้ง (1998), ‘Phap’ ‘ພັບ’, *Saranukrom wathanatham thai phak nua* สารานุกรม วัฒนธรรมไทย ภาคเหนือ, vol. 5 (Bangkok: The Encyclopedia of Thai Culture & Siam Commercial Bank), 4653–4654.
- Chaichuen Khamdaengyodtai (2005), ‘Carük kan banthük lae kan süpthòt khòng chao tai (tai yai)’ ‘จารึกการบันทึก และการสืบทอด ของ ชาวไต (ไทใหญ่)’, in National Library of Laos (ed.), *The Literary Heritage of Laos: Preservation, Dissemination and Research Perspectives* มໍລະດົກວັນນະຄະດີລາວ ການປົກປັກຮັກສາ ການເຜີຍແຜ່ ແລະ ຫັດສະນະການຄົ້ນຄວ້າ (Vientiane: The National Library of Laos), 166–186.
- Cœdès, Georges (1966), *Catalogue des Manuscrits en Pali, Laotien et Siamois provenant de la Thaïlande* (Copenhagen: The Royal Library).
- Grabowsky, Volker (1999), ‘Forced Resettlement Campaigns in Northern Thailand During the Early Bangkok Period’, *Journal of the Siam Society* 87/ 1 and 2: 45–86.
- (2004), *Bevölkerung und Staat in Lan Na: Ein Beitrag zur Bevölkerungsgeschichte Südostasiens* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz).
- Griswold, Alexander B., and Prasert na Nagara (1977), ‘The “Judgements of King Man Ray”’: Epigraphic and Historical Studies No. 17’, *Journal of the Siam Society* 65/1: 137–160.
- Hundius, Harald (1976), *Verzeichnis der auf Mikrofilm erfaßten literarischen Dokumente aus Nordthailand* (Frankfurt [unpublished computer print-out]).
- (1990a), *Phonologie und Schrift des Nordthai* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft and Kommissionsverlag Franz Steiner).
- (1990b), ‘The Colophons of Thirty Pāli Manuscripts from Northern Thailand’, *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 14: 1–173.
- Iijima, Akiko (2005), ‘A Historical Approach to the Palm-leaf Manuscripts Preserved in Wat Mahathat, Yasothon (Thailand)’, National Library of Laos (ed.), *The Literary Heritage of Laos: Preservation, Dissemination and Research Perspectives* มໍລະດົກວັນນະຄະດີລາວ ການປົກປັກຮັກສາ ການເຜີຍແຜ່ ແລະ ຫັດສະນະການຄົ້ນຄວ້າ (Vientiane: National Library of Laos), 341–357.
- Jaruwan Thammawat จารุวรรณ ธรรมวัฒน์ (2005), ‘Sathanaphap khòng khamphi bailan nai phak tawenòksiangnua pathet lao’ ‘ສະຖານະພາບຂອງຄຳພີໃບລານໃນພາກຕະເວັນອອກສຽງເໜືອ ປະເທດໄທ’, in National Library of Laos (ed.), *The Literary Heritage of Laos: Preservation, Dissemination and Research Perspectives* ມໍລະດົກວັນນະຄະດີລາວ ການປົກປັກຮັກສາ ການເຜີຍແຜ່ ແລະ ຫັດສະນະການຄົ້ນຄວ້າ (Vientiane: The National Library of Laos), 95–98.
- Kòngkaeo, Wirapracak ก่องแก้ว วีระประจักษ์ (1987), *Kan tham samut thai lae kan triam bai lan* การทำสมุดไทย และ การเตรียมใบลาน (Bangkok: Department of Fine Arts).

²⁴ Iijima 2005, 341.

²⁵ Research Institute on Isan Arts and Culture 1998, 8.

- (1989), ‘Kan anurak bai lan’ ‘การอนุรักษ์ใบลาน’, *Sinlapakòn* ศิลปากร, 33/5: 23–33.
- Koson Kantharot โกศล กันทะรส (1999), ‘Bai lan’ ‘ใบลาน’, *Saranukrom watthanatham thai phak nüa* สารานุกรมวัฒนธรรมไทย ภาคเหนือ, vol. 5 (Bangkok: The Encyclopedia of Thai Culture & Siam Commercial Bank), 3541–3546.
- Liew-Herres, and Grabowsky, Volker (in collaboration with Aroonrut Wichienkeo) (2008), *Lan Na in Chinese Historiography: Sino-Tai Relations as Reflected in the Yuan and Ming Sources (13th to 17th Centuries)* (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University).
- Lorrillard, Michel (2005), ‘The Diffusion of Lao Scripts’, in National Library of Laos (ed.), *The Literary Heritage of Laos: Preservation, Dissemination and Research Perspectives* มัลละติกรอานณะอะดิลาอว ภาณบิภักักรสา ภาณเฒัฒ และ ทัตสะนะภาณถัันถอ้า (Vientiane: The National Library of Laos), 366–372.
- Penth, Hans (1992), ‘Thai Literacy’, *Bulletin of the Archive of Lan Na Inscriptions* 4 (Chiang Mai: Social Research Institute), 19–96.
- Research Institute on Isan Arts and Culture (RIAC) สถาบันวิจัยศิลปะและวัฒนธรรมอีสาน (1998), *Khu mü kan chai bõrikan sun khõmun ekkasan bai lan* คู่มือการใช้บริการศูนย์ข้อมูล เอกสารใบลาน (Maha Sarakham, Maha Sarakham University).
- Schuyler, Montgomery (1908/09), ‘Notes on the Making of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts in Siam’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 29: 281–283.
- Sirichai Wangcharoentrakun, and Kunlaphanthada Chanphotsi สิริชัย หวังเจริญตระกูล และ กุลพันธาดา จันทร์โพธิ์ศรี (1992), ‘Bai lan’ ‘ใบลาน’, *Sinlapakòn* ศิลปากร, 35/3: 85–92.
- Social Research Institute (SRI) สถาบันวิจัยสังคม (1991), *Catalogue of Palm-leaf Texts on Microfilm at the Social Research Institute* รายชื่อหนังสือโบราณล้านนา: เอกสารไมโครฟิล์มของสถาบันวิจัยสังคม มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่ ปี ๒๕๒๑-๒๕๓๓ (Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University, 1978–1990).
- Terwiel, Barend Jan (compiled and edited with the assistance of Chaichuen Khamdaengyodtai) (2003), *Shan Manuscripts*, part 1 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner).
- Udom Roongruangsri อุดม รุ่งเรืองศรี (1999), ‘Tua müang’ ‘ตัวเมือง’, *Saranukrom watthanatham thai phak nüa* สารานุกรมวัฒนธรรมไทย ภาคเหนือ, vol. 5 (Bangkok: The Encyclopedia of Thai Culture & Siam Commercial Bank), 2363–2365.
- Wenk, Klaus (1975), *Laotische Handschriften: Verzeichnis der laotischen Handschriften in Deutschland* (vol. 32 of *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*) (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner).