



SOUTHEAST ASIA LIBRARY GROUP

NEWSLETTER

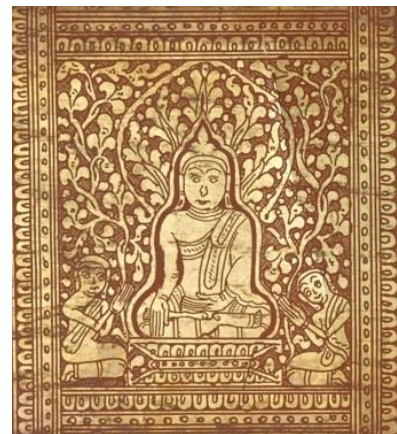
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Contents

SEALG Annual Meeting 2016, Copenhagen	p. 2
Early newspapers in Burma (<i>San San May</i>)	p. 8
Vietnamese manuscripts at the British Library (<i>Sud Chonchirdsin</i>)	p. 14
The mystery of the 'naughty monks' in Thai manuscript illustrations of Phra Malai (<i>Jana Igunma</i>)	p. 29
Call for Papers: EUROSEAS Conference, Oxford 2017	p. 55



Editorial

Welcome to the latest issue of the SEALG Newsletter! It was a busy year for all of us with many new projects and exciting initiatives in addition to our everyday library work. Our recent annual meeting took place in Copenhagen and stimulated the exchange of information and experiences between librarians, scholars and publishers. Detailed information on the meeting can be found in the first item in this issue. Also included are three articles on early newspapers in Burma, Vietnamese manuscripts (paper presented at the annual meeting), and certain aspects of Thai manuscript painting. Your feedback on any of the articles will be very welcome. We hope you will find this issue beneficial and inspirational for your work and your research!

Jana Igunma, Editor

SEALG Annual Meeting 2016, Copenhagen

Report by Doris Jedamski (Leiden) and Holger Warnk (Frankfurt)

The Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asia Library Group 2016 took place on 24-25 June 2016 in Copenhagen (Denmark), hosted by the Library of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

Participants from Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Thailand and the United Kingdom attended this year's meeting.

Participants:

Inga-Lill Blomkvist (NIAS Library & Information Centre, Copenhagen, Denmark)

Christophe Caudron (Bibliothèque de la Maison Asie-Pacifique, Aix-Marseille Université, France)

Sud Chonchirdsin (British Library, London, UK)

Claudia Götze-Sam (Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Germany)

Per Hansen (Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark)

Preedee Hongson (Department of History, Thammat University, Bangkok, Thailand)

Søren Ivarsson (Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen, Denmark)

Gerald Jackson (NIAS Press, Copenhagen, Denmark)

Doris Jedamski (Leiden University Library, Netherlands)

Jotika Khur-Yearn (SOAS Library, London, UK)

Mia Nilsson (Asia Library, Lund University, Sweden)

Edyta Roszko (School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, UK)

Holger Warnk (Library of Southeast Asian Studies, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany)

On Friday morning, **24 June**, all conference participants and guests were welcomed by their host, Inga-Lill Blomkvist, NIAS Library & Information Centre, and Dr. Doris Jedamski, Chair of the Southeast Asia Library Group.

Holger Warnk opened the first panel with his paper on "*Malay Islamic Publishing in Malaysia in Jawi Script*". The Arab-based Jawi script has been used for the Malay language for centuries. However, in religious publishing for pupils, students and scholars affiliated with traditional Islamic schools in Malaysia the speaker noted a drastic decline in recent years and a growing tendency toward using the Latin script instead in religious publications. Holger emphasized the urgency of collecting those diminishing publications in Jawi more systematically, as had been done by Sophia University (Tokyo).

Sud Chonchirdsin spoke on the "*Vietnamese Manuscripts at the British Library*", which for obvious reasons, so he noted, were clearly outnumbered by the plentiful collections of hand-written books in Burmese or Thai kept in London but which, nonetheless, represent various historical and literary styles. Sud elaborated on the various variants in script and language of those Vietnamese books and scrolls and also analyzed the

mythical animal symbolism present in the beautifully illustrated manuscripts influenced by Chinese traditions.

The second session commenced with **Preedee Hongsaton** and his presentation on "*Thai Cremation Volumes: Precious Sources for Historical Research*". Preedee depicted the beginnings of this particular genre and further development since the 1880s. Cremation volumes, limited editions of chiefly Buddhist texts, also often provide valuable biographical information on the deceased, and therefore they can form magnificent sources in the field of social history, the history of emotions, and social anthropology. Preedee primarily related to his research of the rich collection of more than 4.000 titles in ca. 3.000 volumes kept in the National Library of Australia.

Jotika Khur-Yearn then presented his paper "*Following the Footprints: H. J. Inman and his Remarkable Works on Shan Manuscripts at SOAS University of London*". Jotika gave an overview of the collection of Shan manuscripts at SOAS Library with a focus on two particular manuscripts that have been well researched by Captain J. H. Inham who taught Shan at SOAS between 1936 and 1948. Inham, in particular, pioneered the studies of Shan literature and manuscripts which to date have been heavily understudied.

Doris Jedamski reflected on "*What's in an Archive?*" She presented fascinating examples of several recently acquired archives, both from private persons and organization and associations, still to be processed and added to the Leiden University Library collections. Among the examples were the Jager-Maasen family archive, the research archives of the scholars Hildred Geertz and Frans Hüsken, as well as the so-called Koopman-archive covering four generations of Dutch colonial power, but also the archive of the Batavia Voetbal Club (1903-1955) and its alumnis.

In the afternoon the conference participants visited the Royal Library, where the Research Librarian **Bent Lerbæk Pedersen** showed us a great number of treasures from the Southeast Asian manuscript collections. Among them were Batak tree-bark books (*pustaka*), Khmer books and Burmese manuscripts, Javanese palm leaf manuscripts (*lontar*) and letters to the Danish merchant-adventurer Mads Lange written by his Balinese wife on palm-leaf in Malay language. After Bent's retirement next year, his position will most probably not be filled again. The day ended with a lovely conference dinner in the wonderfully Danish Toldbod Bodega.

On Saturday, **25 June**, we were kindly allowed to hold our Annual SEALG Business Meeting at the conference venue at NIAS. Present were Inga-Lill Blomkvist, Christophe Caudron, Sud Chonshirdin, Claudia Götze-Sam, Per Hansen, Doris Jedamski, Jotika Khur-Yearn, Holger Warnk, and Gerald Jackson, who attended part of the meeting as a guest. Apologies had been received from Annabel Gallop, Jana Igunma, Mikihiro Moriyama, Margaret Nicholson, Louise Pichard-Bertaux, San San May, and Mia Nilsson.

Doris Jedamski welcomed all participants. After establishing the quorum, she presented the agenda, the minutes from the Annual Meeting 2015 in Paris, and the financial report

that once again had been compiled by our treasurer Margaret Nicholson. The following item on the agenda was the election of the committee. Doris Jedamski as Chair, Holger Warnk as Vice-Chair, Margaret Nicholson as treasurer and Jotika Khur-Yearn as Secretary of SEALG were re-elected in these functions. Louise Pichard-Bertaux had informed the committee beforehand that she had decided to step down as member of the committee due to her new work situation. Christophe Caudron and Mia Nilsson (in absence) were welcomed as new members of the committee. All other committee members were confirmed. Jana Igunma, also confirmed as member of the committee, had beforehand agreed to continue her work on the SEALG Newsletter and SEALG blog with the support of other committee members.

Responding to a proposal from the well-known and experienced academic publisher NIAS Press, represented by Gerald Jackson, the long aspired and repeatedly discussed SEALG book project had been put back on the agenda. Gerald Jackson kindly joined the meeting to discuss a possible joint NIAS-SEALG project that should exceed a mere conference volume. Gerald presented his ideas to the group: the proposed book should be no erratic compilation of articles but a means to put Southeast Asian Studies and the collections back on the map. Such publication could even serve as some kind of handbook to be used for profiling several special Southeast Asian collections in relation to the world of teaching and research. For this purpose, it would be essential to bring together librarians/curators and scholars/researchers with experiences with particular Southeast Asian collections and to spark a dialogue between both parties. This dialogue could be documented in the book as well. A first 'brainstorming' could take the form of a panel at the EUROSEAS conference 2017 in Oxford. Questions to be raised might include: What is collecting, how does it change (Jedamski)? What are the sources or materials, how are these items used (Caudron)? How does in the age of information science the use of sources change and effect research (Caudron)? What kind of sources will survive – both physical and digital (Jackson)? Furthermore Gerald raised the question what audience the proposed book should address: should it be an academic book or a kind of source book? He mentioned the option to think of an additional series with volumes focusing on one particular region at a time. The reactions covered both enthusiasm and apprehension; in particular practical aspects were brought forward: Who will do the extra-load of work that it will take to put together such a book? How to cover the various regions equally? Is this kind of publication really necessary – aren't there enough other platforms to promote our collections/activities. It was agreed to set up a group that should look into the possibilities of organizing a EUROSEAS panel in preparation for the proposed publication. A tentative title will be needed soon but could not be formulated as yet. Gerald agreed to contact a couple of scholars who might be interested, so did Christophe Caudron, Doris Jedamski and Holger Warnk. Doris and Holger announced already their willingness to be members of the steering group.

The meeting continued with the reports from the participants. Many members rendered somber news all related to budget cutbacks and extensive workload. However, there

were also proud reports of successfully completed projects as well as new initiatives:

Inga-Lill Blomkvist reported on the long-term effects that the drastic changes of the recent years have brought about: The fusion of the NIAS collection with the University Library has more or less anonymized the NIAS collection. For scholars visiting NIAS, the change of location results in time-consuming travelling, the reduction of staff has made it more difficult to support and facilitate research activities. However, Inga-Lill has accepted the challenge and expressed her keen interest to expand the digital collections of NIAS.

Christophe Caudron provided an overview of the IrASIA and CREDO libraries in Maison Asie-Pacifique in Marseille. Serving two universities, his library faces various challenges. As in many other libraries space for books might become a problem soon.

Claudia Götze-Sam announced the good news that their application to the Specialized Application Services provided by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DfG) has been successful. Together with their partners from the South Asia Institute at the University of Heidelberg this special budget will secure the acquisition of books on and from Southeast Asia for the coming years. Moreover, Claudia told us about the special training programmes that have been introduced for their library users.

Holger Warnk informed the group that in May 2016 an electronic loan system was finally introduced at the Library of Southeast Asian Studies at Frankfurt. This new loan system allows for inter-librarian loan. The integration of the OPAC of the former Asia House Library is still delayed due to severe technical problems. Furthermore, Holger evaluated last year's Frankfurt Book Fair, in particular the performance of its Special Guest of Honour, Indonesia.

Per Hansen mentioned dramatic budget cuts which might lead to the dismissal of numerous colleagues. He also gave a short account of the acquisition policies, which strikingly enough exclusively allows the Asian Studies collections to buy printed materials, unfortunately on Social Sciences only.

Jotika Khur-Yearn reported that the SOAS Jubilee in 2016 will see the opening of a new building for the school in September 2016 which then will also include several exhibitions. SOAS Library has carried out several cooperations with British Library, e.g. in digitalization projects. However, SOAS Library has also faced budget cuts, which will affect staff members, but not the acquisition of books.

Sud Chonchirdsin provided a summary of the latest developments at British Library. The retro-cataloguing of the old card catalogue of books in vernacular languages will be continued as well as the digitization of Southeast Asian manuscripts. The new Asia-Africa Blog of the library has attracted a great many visitors and apparently had quite some impact on the website. Finally, it is now allowed for users to use their own cameras in the reading rooms.

Doris Jedamski informed the group about the progress of the Asia Library at Leiden University which will formally open in September 2017. This achievement will be celebrated with an "Asia Year" in 2017 in the city of Leiden and beyond. The large-scale preparations are ongoing and very time-consuming. Apart from a book publication, there are three exhibitions planned for 2017, all involving the South and Southeast Asian

collections. Massive retro-cataloguing projects have started and parts of the collection are being digitized. At the same time the UB Leiden has chosen to introduce various new programs, for instance ALMA, MARC 21, or Islandora. On top of that, the website is also entirely renewed.

The next item on the agenda was the SEALG Meeting 2017. It was agreed that an effort will be made to organize next year's meeting once again as a panel of the EUROSEAS Conference, which will take place in Oxford, on 15-18 August 2017. The deadline for the submission of panel proposals has not been announced yet on the EUROSEAS website. A SEALG proposal will be put together as soon as possible. We hope again to attract participants and audience from both the library and the scholarly world. Leiden was mentioned as an option for a joint SEALG-SAALG conference in 2018. The discussion on possible SEALG fund raising has been postponed again due to lack of time, but shall be put on the agenda for the committee meeting in 2017.

Concluding the meeting, and on behalf of Jana Igunma, Doris briefly reported on the SEALG weblog and forwarded Jana's appeal to all members to send in contributions.

We would like to thank Inga-Lill Blomkvist and her team from NIAS for the perfect organization of a wonderful meeting.



Impression from the SEALG Meeting 2016. (Photograph by Doris Jedamski)

Early Newspapers in Burma

San San May, British Library, London

By the 19th century, a number of printing presses had been established and were already fully operating in Maulmain (Mawlamyaing). The Commissioner of the Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Provinces inaugurated *The Maulmain Chronicle*, the first English newspaper in Burma. Its first issue appeared on April 15, 1837. It was printed and published every Wednesday in Maulmain.

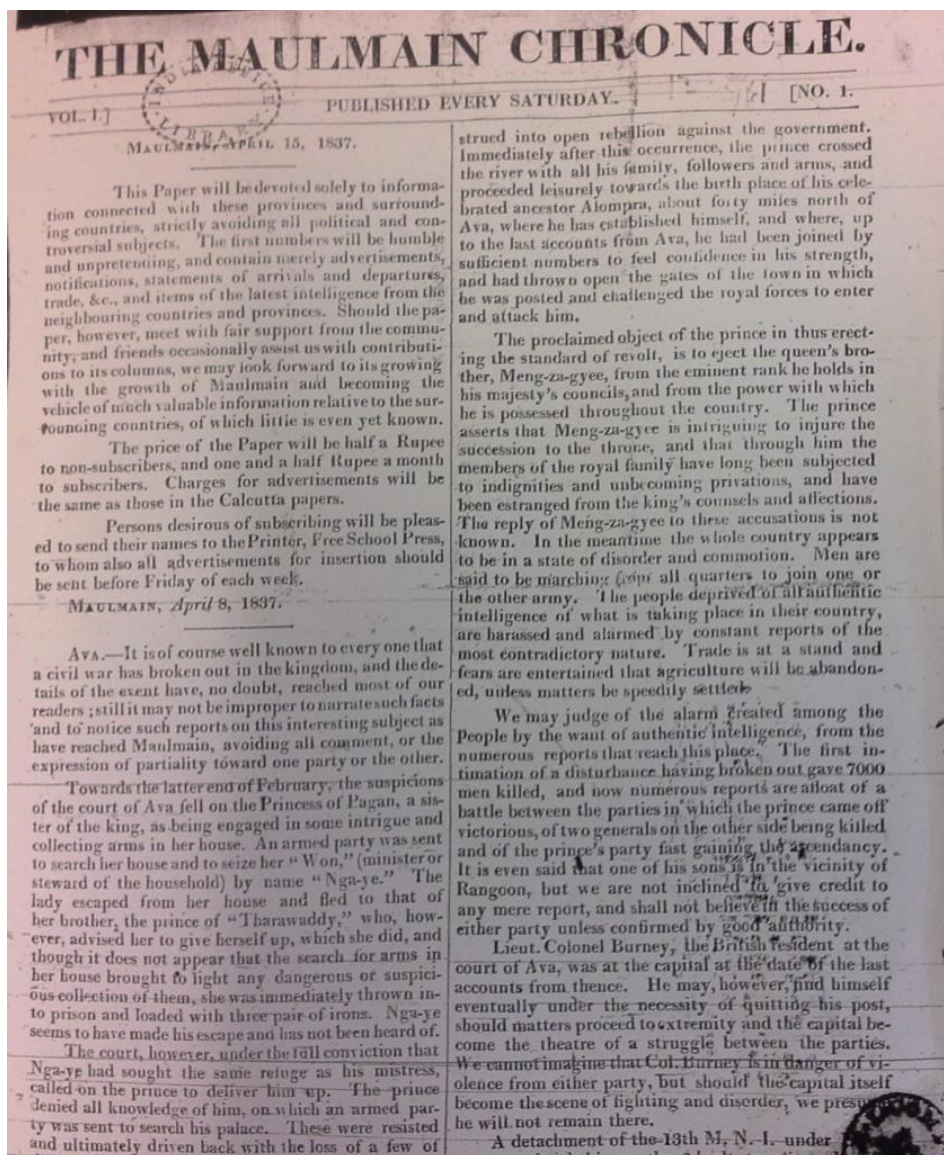
In the introductory paragraph on the first page of *The Maulmain Chronicle*, 15 April 1837, Vol. 1, no. 1 (British Library, SM.114), it was reported that

“This paper will be devoted solely to information connected with these provinces and surrounding countries, strictly avoiding all political and controversial subjects. The first number will be humble and unpretending, and contain merely and advertisements, notifications, statements of arrivals and departures, trade, & c., and items of the latest intelligence from the neighbouring countries and provinces.”

The first article of the paper then continues as follows:

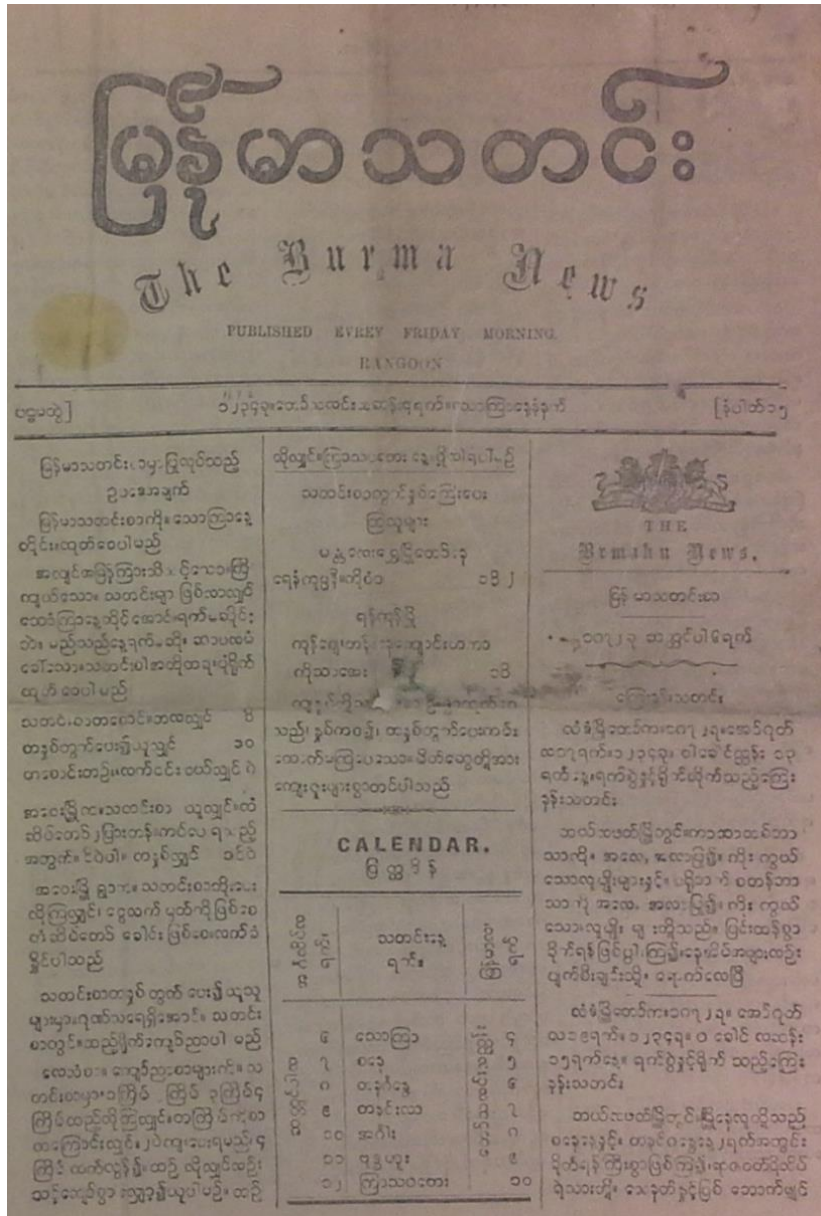
“Towards the latter end of February, the suspicions of the court of Ava fell on the Princess of Pagan, a sister of the king, as being engaged in some intrigue and collecting arms in her house. An armed party was sent to search her house and to seize her “Won,” (minister or steward of the household) by name “Nga-ye.” The lady escaped from her house and fled to that of her brother, the prince of “Tharawaddy,” who however, advised her to give herself up, which she did, and though it does not appear that the search for arms in her house brought to light and dangerous of suspicious collection of them, she was immediately thrown in to prison and loaded with three pairs of irons.”

The monthly Sgaw Karen language newspaper, *The Morning Star* (British Library, 11103.h.1) appeared in Maulmain in September 1842. It was published by the Baptist Mission based in Tavoy (Dawai). In January 1843, the first newspaper in Burmese language *Dhamma thadinsa = The Religious Herald* was published by the American Baptist Mission based in Maulmain and it appeared once a month. *The Maulmain Advertiser* (British Library, NEWS.12238), another newspaper in English, appeared in July 1848 and it was published three times a week. A weekly newspaper in English, *Friend of Burmah* appeared in 1849 in Maulmain.



The Maulmain Chronicle, Vol. 1, no.1. British Library, SM.114.

The first newspaper in Rangoon, *The Rangoon Chronicle*, appeared in January 1853 and was initially published twice a week. Later, its name was changed to *The Rangoon Times* (British Library, SM.69, MFM.MC.1196) and its frequency increased to three times a week. After some time it became a daily newspaper. *The Akyab Commercial News*, a twice weekly newspaper in English, was published in Akyab (Sittwe) in 1853 by Arakan Weekly News Press. The following year, the newspaper changed its name to the *Arakan News*. *The Rangoon Gazette* was published twice a week in 1861 and later it became daily. *Toungoo News Sheet* (British Library, NEWS.12243) was first published in 1864. *The Burmah Herald*, a newspaper in Burmese, appeared in Rangoon in 1869. In 1871, *The Burma Gazette*, a weekly newspaper in Burmese, also appeared in Rangoon. This weekly newspaper changed its name to *The Burma News = Myanmar Thadin* in May 1872.

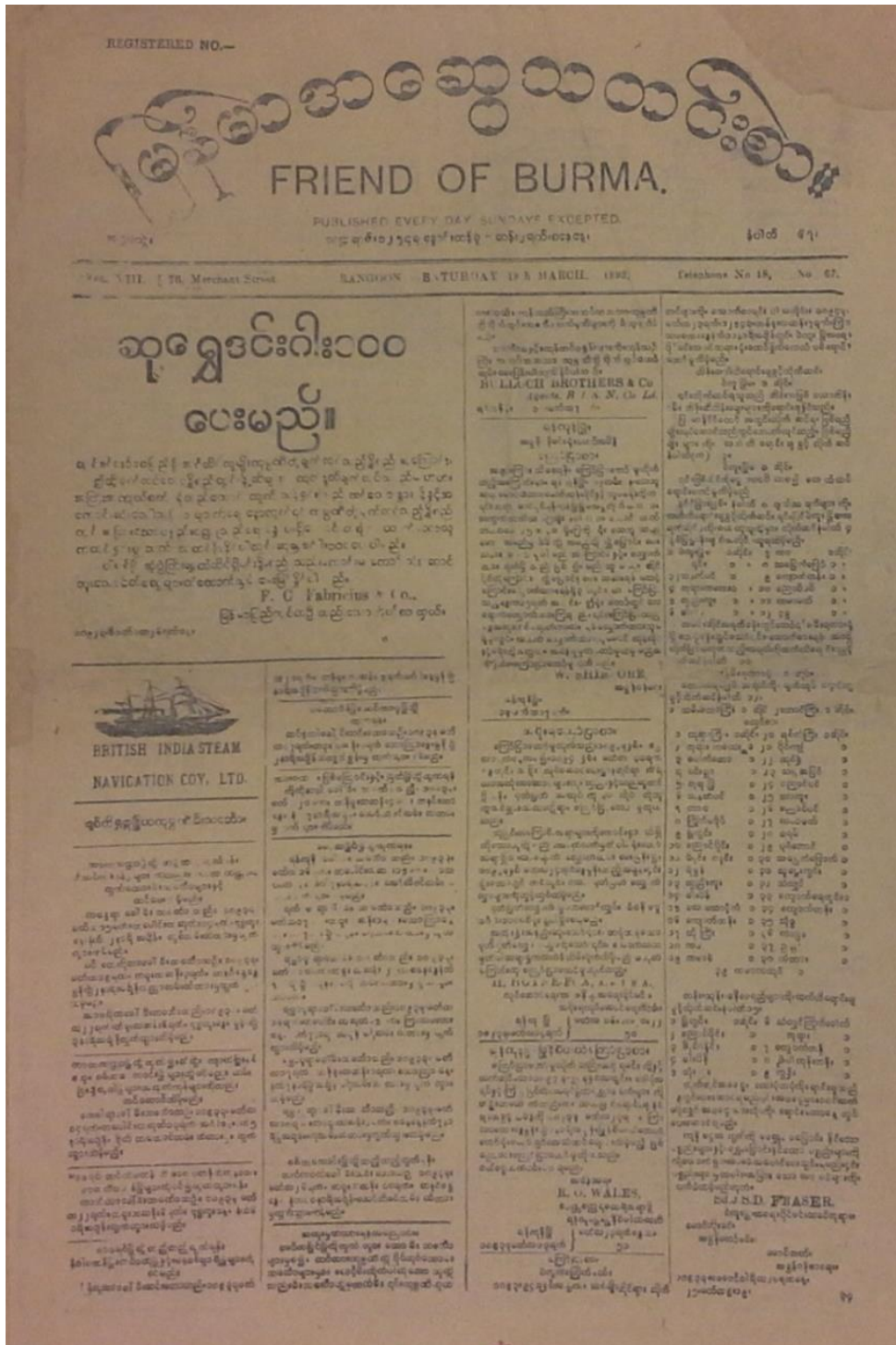


The Burma News=Myanmar Thadin, 1872, British Library, ORB.40/799 (c)

Loki Suta Panna (*The Worldly Knowledge*) was a newspaper that appeared in Rangoon in 1873. *Friend of Maulmain*, another newspaper in Burmese, appeared in Maulmain in 1874. *Yadanabon Thadinsa* (*British Burma News*) appeared in Rangoon in January 1875. The weekly newspaper *Yadanabon Nay-Pyi-Daw* (*Mandalay Gazette*) was published on 20 March 1875 in Mandalay. The Burmese language newspaper, *The Tenasserim News* appeared in Maulmain in 1876. *Myanmar Thandawsint* (*The Burmah Herald*) was published once a week in Rangoon in 1871 and later it became a daily newspaper (British Library, Or.Mic.11072; Or.Mic.702).

In 1878 and 1879 two other English newspapers, *the Rangoon Daily Mail* and *the Daily Review* were established. *The Burma Herald* newspaper was first published in Mandalay in 1878. *The British Burmah Advertiser* appeared in Rangoon as a daily

newspaper in 1882. The Akyab Weekly Advertiser was published every Monday in Akyab in 1883. The English language weekly newspaper, The Maulmain Almanac was published in Maulmain in 1884. The Burmese language newspaper, Myanmar a swe newspaper (Friend of Burma) was published in Rangoon in 1886 and it stopped in 1929. The Mandalay Times newspaper appeared twice a week in Mandalay in 1886.



Myanmar a swe (Friend of Burma), 18 March 1893. British Library, ORB.40/103.

The *Rangoon Gazette Weekly Budget* (British Library, MFM.MC.1198) started in 1887 in Rangoon. In 1889, *The Hanthawaddy Thadinsa* (*The Hanthawaddy Weekly Review*), a Burmese language newspaper, appeared twice a week in Rangoon. In 1892, the English language newspapers *The Daily Advertiser*, *The Arakan Echo* and the *Arakan Advocate* were established in Akyab. In 1894, the English-language newspapers *De Vaux Press Advertiser*, *The British Burma Advertiser*, *The Rangoon Commercial Advertiser* and *The Burma Chronicle News* were all published in Rangoon. *The Mawlamyaing Myo* (*Moulmein Town*) was published in Moulmein in 1895. *The Mandalay Herald*, a three-times a week newspaper, was published in Mandalay in 1887 and it became a daily newspaper in 1899. *The Upper Burma Gazette* appeared on 1 May 1899 in Mandalay for the first time.

The Karen National News, the *Bassein Weekly News* and *The Advertiser* were also published weekly in Bassein (Patheingyi), Irrawaddy Division. *The Times of Burma* (British Library, MC.1200) was established in Rangoon in 1899. It was published weekly from 1 January 1899 to 10 March 1900; twice weekly from 23 January 1900 to 30 December 1905; and daily in January 1906. The pro-British Burmese-language newspaper *Star of Burma* was published in 1900 in Mandalay until 1948. The religious newspaper *Maha-Bodhi News* appeared once a week in Rangoon on 3 March in 1901 until 1926. *The Burma Printer News* emerged three times a week on 2 August 1904 in Rangoon, but it stopped three years later. *Bassein News* was published in Bassein once a week in 1906. The weekly newspaper *The Burma Critic* appeared in Mandalay in April 1907. *The Burma Echo* (British Library, NEWS.12240) started on May 18, 1907 and was published once a week in Rangoon. The religious newspaper, *Dhamma Dethana* was published in Rangoon from April 1907. *The Burma Commercial Advertiser* was published twice a week in Rangoon and *The Ramanna Times* was published in Moulmein in 1908. *The Dawkale*, a Sgaw Karen language newspaper, was published in Bassein by the Karen Magazine Press in September 1909.

Burmese nationalists began publishing *The Sun* (*Thuriya*) newspaper (British Library, Or. Mic.10660) on 4 July 1911 in Rangoon. It was published three times a week but it became a daily newspaper in March because of its popularity. This newspaper was one of the most outspoken Burmese language newspapers and it was published until 14 October 1954. Another free-spoken newspaper, *Hanthawaddy Thadinsa* was established along with *The Sun*. *The Burma Guardian* (*Myanmar Pyi Saung*) newspaper was published in Rangoon in 1917.



Myanmar Pyi Saung Thadinsa = The Burma Guardian, 1923, British Library, BUR.G.23

Pyinnya Alin Thadinsa was published in 1918 until 1924, and the Myanmar Alin Thadinsa (The New Light of Burma) appeared in May 1919. The Home Rule was published in Mandalay in 1921 and Myanmar Taing Gyo = Burma's Progress (British Library, ORB.40/215) was first published in 1921 in Rangoon.

Vietnamese manuscripts at the British Library

Sud Chonchirdsin, British Library, London

The number of Vietnamese manuscripts in the British Library is relatively small in comparison with other Southeast Asian manuscript collections. Nonetheless, these manuscripts represent very well the writing methods and formats of the region. Since Vietnamese literary and historical styles were heavily influenced by Chinese traditions, they shared some similar characteristics. First and foremost, Vietnamese literati studied and wrote in Chinese (*chữ Hán* in Vietnamese), even though the Vietnamese later invented a simplified script based on Chinese script (*chữ Nôm* in Vietnamese). Thus Vietnamese manuscripts in our collection are all written in *chữ Hán* or a mixture of *chữ Hán* and *chữ Nôm*. Secondly, the Vietnamese also wrote on scrolls as well as in bound books, in the same fashion as East Asian literary cultures.

In this paper I will highlight some of the outstanding manuscripts in our collection and their historical and cultural backgrounds.

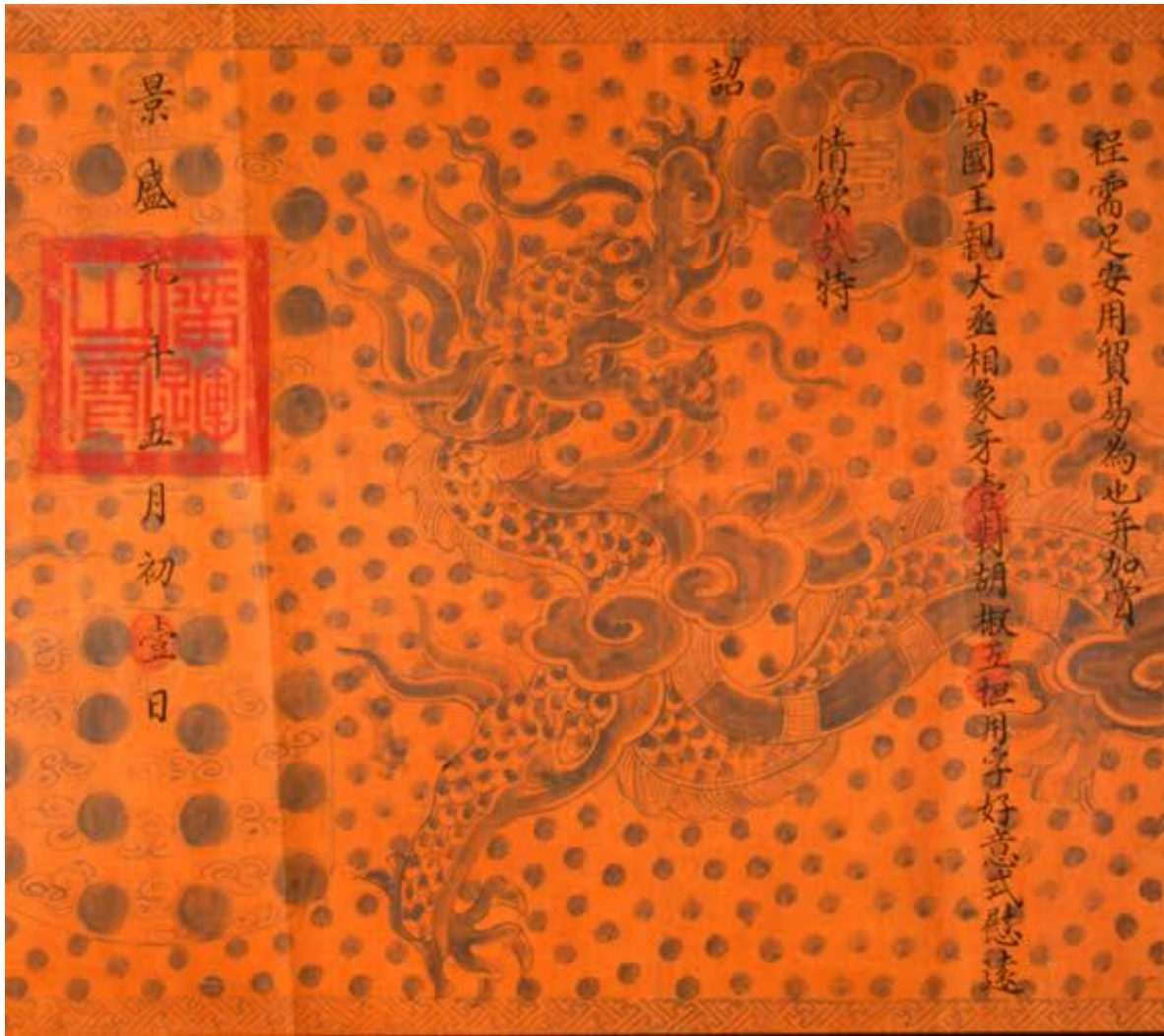
Scrolls

The British Library holds five scrolls, from two different periods: the late 18th century and the early 20th century. All of them are imperial scrolls and edicts with bold dragon patterns, symbolising the emperor and imperial power.

Emperor Cảnh Thịnh's scrolls (Or.14817/a and Or.14817/b)

These two scrolls are important historical documents of the Tây Sơn rulers (1772-1802) who ruled Vietnam for only a short period (1772-1802). The first scroll (Or.14817/a) is written in Hán-Nôm characters on orange paper decorated with a large dragon, and bears the royal seal stamped in red ink. The manuscript is in good condition with all of the scripts still intact, whereas the second scroll (Or.14817/b), though retaining the day of the month (20), has lost two important scripts regarding the month and year. However, Trần Nghĩa, a Vietnamese scholar and an expert in Hán-Nôm, who inspected these two scrolls in 1995 is of the opinion that considering the content and style of writing, these two scrolls were issued at similar dates and for the same occasion.

The content of the first scroll reveals that it was issued by Emperor Cảnh Thịnh on 1st May 1793 to Lord McCartney, the head of the British diplomatic and commercial mission to China in 1792. In 1793 the McCartney Mission, headed by Lord McCartney, was on its way to China to establish commercial relations between Britain and China when it was struck by storm off the coast of Central Vietnam. Lord McCartney sent a delegation to the Emperor seeking help and provisions. In return, the Emperor provided rice and other foods and sent this scroll to welcome the mission.



Vietnamese imperial scroll, 1793. British Library, Or. 14817/A



Vietnamese imperial scroll, 1793. British Library, Or. 14817/B



Reverse of Vietnamese imperial scroll, 1793. British Library, Or. 14817/B

Imperial Edicts of Emperor Khải Định

Emperor Khải Định (1885-1925, r. 1916-1925), who considered Vietnam to be a backward country in need of western technology, was criticised by the nationalists for his pro-French attitude and extravagant lifestyle. We hold three imperial edicts issued during his reign and all three are elaborately decorated.

Imperial edict, 1917 (Or. 14631)

On the occasion of enthronement, Emperor Khải Định issued an edict dated March 18, 1917 to raise the status of the spirit of Đông Hải of Hậu Bồng village in Hải Dương province. Đông Hải was upgraded to a mid rank god (Trung đẳng thần). The edict was written on yellow paper. The front side has a dragon pattern with silver scales and bears an imperial seal. On the reverse, unlike other scrolls in our collection, there are two patterns of flower pots and symbols of longevity instead of four mythical creatures (123x51 cm).

It should be noted that the Vietnamese have observed the tradition of deification of spirits or gods. These spirits could be nature deities, community or kinship tutelary deities, national heroes or ancestral gods of a specific family. They are also classified into different statuses.



Front of Imperial edict of Emperor Khải Định, 1917, British Library, Or. 14631

The Imperial edict of Emperor Khải Định, Or. 14632

On the occasion of his 40th birthday, Emperor Khải Định issued an edict on July 25, 1924 to honour the spirit of Phạm Công of Văn Lâm village, Hải Dương province.

The edict was written on yellow paper and is beautifully decorated with different patterns. The main design in the middle of the paper is a gilded dragon, an imperial emblem and an imperial red seal. On the reverse are the four mythical and sacred animals; i.e., dragon, phoenix, turtle and unicorn, all beautifully painted with gilded touch. There are two symbols of longevity in the middle of the scroll (135x52 cm).



Front of Imperial edict of Emperor Khải Định, 1924, British Library, Or. 14632

On the same day, Emperor Khải Định issued a further edict; this one was to raise the status of the spirit of the god Nam Hải of of Hậu Bồng village in Hải Dương province (the same deity in Khải Định's edict in 1917) to the highest rank. He became God of the South Sea.



Front of Imperial edict of Emperor Khải Định, 1924, British Library, Or.14665

The edict is written on gilded yellow paper in the same fashion as the edict issued on the same date (July 25, 1924), with a bold golden dragon design. The reverse was decorated with the four gilded mythical and sacred animals and also two symbols of longevity.

Regarding the dragon designs, it should be noted that they differed from one dynasty to another. Nguyễn Ngọc Tho from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University points out that in comparison with the Japanese dragon, the Vietnamese dragon consists of three main characteristics: (1) non-standardisation, (2) diversity, and (3) constant change and development. For example, the Ly dynasty's dragon (11-13th century) was a long snake-like figure with non-scale and zig-zag curly body. During the Trần dynasty (A.D.1226-1400) the dragon's body became bigger and fatter, the claws were sharper and the head and the neck were irregularly changed, while the dragon tail remained unchanged. From the Le dynasty onward, the dragon was greatly influenced by the Chinese one; therefore, the local features tended to recede. The Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945) promoted the effort of Confucian renaissance, however the effect was limited. After 1945 – the last feudal dynasty ended, the noble significance of the dragon became weak and gradually disappeared. (Nguyễn Ngọc Tho, 2015, pp.11-13)



Reverse of Imperial edict of Emperor Khải Định, 1924, British Library, Or.14665

Bound Books

Tale of Kiều (Or. 14844)

Truyện Kiều (The tale of Kiều), written by Nguyễn Du (1765–1820) is regarded as the most significant poem in Vietnamese literature. It was composed in Lục-bát (6-8) stanzas and its original title in Vietnamese is *Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh* (A new cry from a broken heart). However, it is better known as *Truyện Kiều* or *Kim Văn Kiều*. The story is based on a 17th century Ming Chinese novel, which Nguyễn Du discovered while he was on an ambassadorial mission to China in 1813. The plot portrays the chaotic political and social circumstances of Vietnam in the 18th century, arising from political infighting. The theme of the story is filial piety, one of the main tenets of Confucianism. It recounts the life and trials of a beautiful and talented young woman who sacrificed her happiness to save her disgraced family. She had to go through many sufferings, such as being lured into prostitution, being wed to a man who was already married, and being thrown out of a Buddhist sanctuary before she was finally reunited with her first love. However, this reunion did not bring earthly joy for Kiều, who chose to devote her life to serving her family as filial piety demanded. Literary critics have argued that the theme of the story is an allegory of Nguyễn Du's guilt and conflict of interest in agreeing to work for the new regime (the Nguyễn dynasty, 1802–1945), which had been indirectly involved in the overthrow of his former master. This behavior was unacceptable in traditional Confucian Vietnamese society, as it was tantamount to betraying filial piety. Hence the theme of the story was a poignant reminder for Nguyễn Du, who was born into a high-profile mandarin family, and whose father served as a high-ranking minister under the Le dynasty.



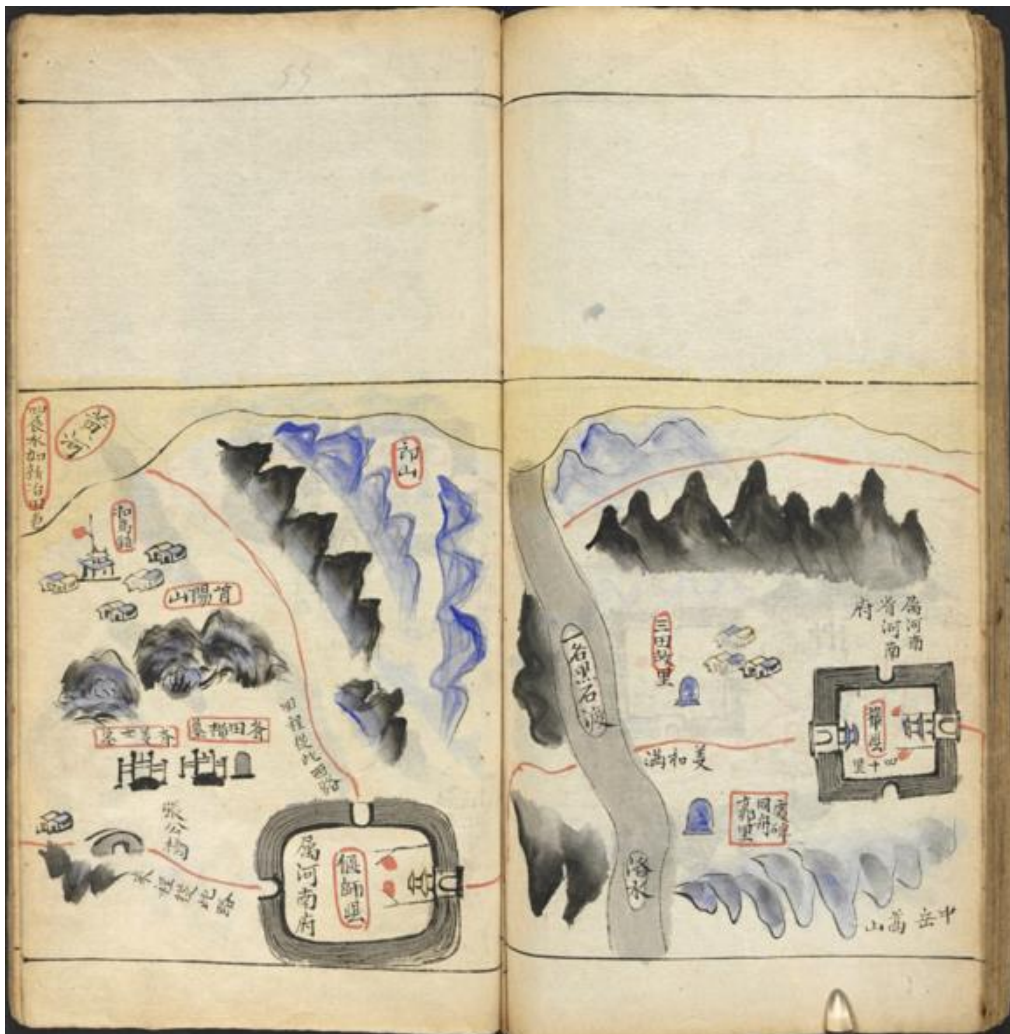
Two pages from the Tale of Kiều, British Library Or. 14844

The copy of the *Truyện Kiều* manuscript held at the British Library (reference number Or 14844) was completed around 1894. It is written in *Chữ Nôm* (Sino-Vietnamese characters). Each page is beautifully illustrated with scenes from the story. It is bound in a royal-yellow silk cover with dragon patterns. Nguyễn Quang Tuân, an independent Vietnamese scholar who inspected the manuscript, is of the opinion that this manuscript bears some royal significance because the dragon on the cover has the five claws normally reserved for imperial use only. Another significant feature of this manuscript is that it bears annotations by Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), the renowned French Sinologist, who bought the manuscript in 1929.

This manuscript was in a very poor condition due to acidity in the paper. It had become fragile and brittle and a few pages were severely damaged. However, after the completion of a remarkable restoration work undertaken by the British Library's conservation department in 2014, the manuscript is now in good condition. It has also been fully digitised and can be viewed through our digitised manuscripts.

A rare Vietnamese map of China (Or. 14907)

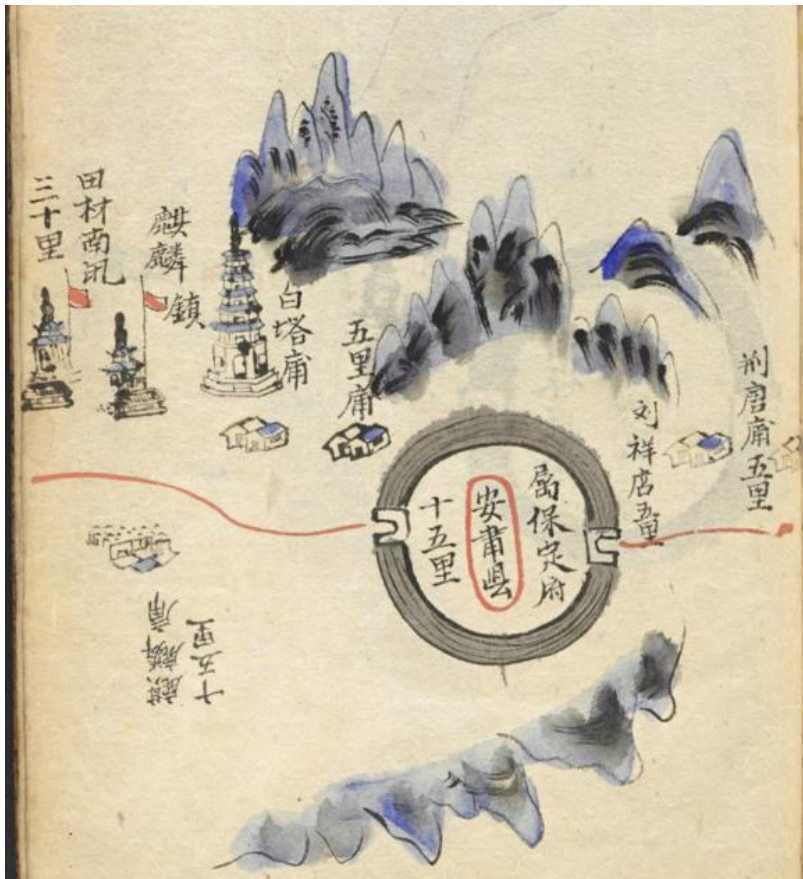
One of the most interesting Vietnamese manuscripts in the British Library, *Bắc Sứ Thủy Lục Địa Đô* or, in Chinese, *Beishi shuilu ditu*, 'The northwards embassy by land and water from Hanoi to Beijing' (Or. 14907), has just been digitised. Written in the Vietnamese language in Chinese characters (*chữ Hán*) and dated 1880, the manuscript is a complete visual record of the route from Bắc Thành (the former name of Hanoi under the Nguyễn Dynasty) through China to Beijing, taken by envoys of the Vietnamese Emperor Tự Đức (r.1847-1883) on their tribute-bearing mission in 1880. This work was probably created as an archival record of the journey. Roads, mountains, waterways, bridges, buildings, cities and towns are all clearly depicted, as are the points of departure and arrival on the first and last pages. The title, written in Chinese characters (*Beishi shuilu ditu*), also includes the date (*gengchen*) of the journey, according to the Chinese 60-year cyclical system. The annotations on each page list place names and distances in Chinese miles (*li* or *ly* in Vietnamese) with occasional useful notes, such as 'from here merchants used only Qianlong money'. Land routes are marked in red ink and water routes are recorded in blue ink.



The mission passed through Gong Xian County in Henan Province and crossed Luo River. British Library, Or.14907, ff.54v-55r.

Towards the end of the 19th century Vietnam was faced with serious threats from French colonialism. After taking South Vietnam (Cochin China) in the 1860s, the French gradually fulfilled their territorial desire to occupy the rest of the kingdom. In January 1874, after another defeat, the court of Emperor Tự Đức had to sign a treaty with the French which led to the occupation of North Vietnam. Under this treaty, Vietnam's foreign policy was under the control of French colonial power. However, Vietnam still kept up its tradition of sending tribute missions to China.

The tribute system was employed in Chinese foreign policy for many centuries before its collapse at the end of the 19th century under the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). As the most powerful kingdom in East and Southeast Asia, China saw herself as 'the Middle Kingdom' and demanded that smaller and 'inferior' kingdoms in the region send her tribute on a regular basis. Small states in the region willingly sent tribute missions to Beijing, while not viewing this tradition as acknowledgement of vassalage to China; on the contrary, it was perceived as a reciprocal system, whereby Beijing was accepted as the patriarch of other, inferior, kingdoms. Once their missions had been received by the court in Beijing, recognition by China gave rulers of smaller kingdoms legitimacy to rule. The tribute system also provided security and political stability for smaller kingdoms against invasions from China so long as they did not implement any policy which would disturb the Middle Kingdom.



Arriving at Ansu Xian County in Hebei Province, north of the Yellow River, their route took them through temples and the White Pagoda. British Library, Or.14907, f.66r.

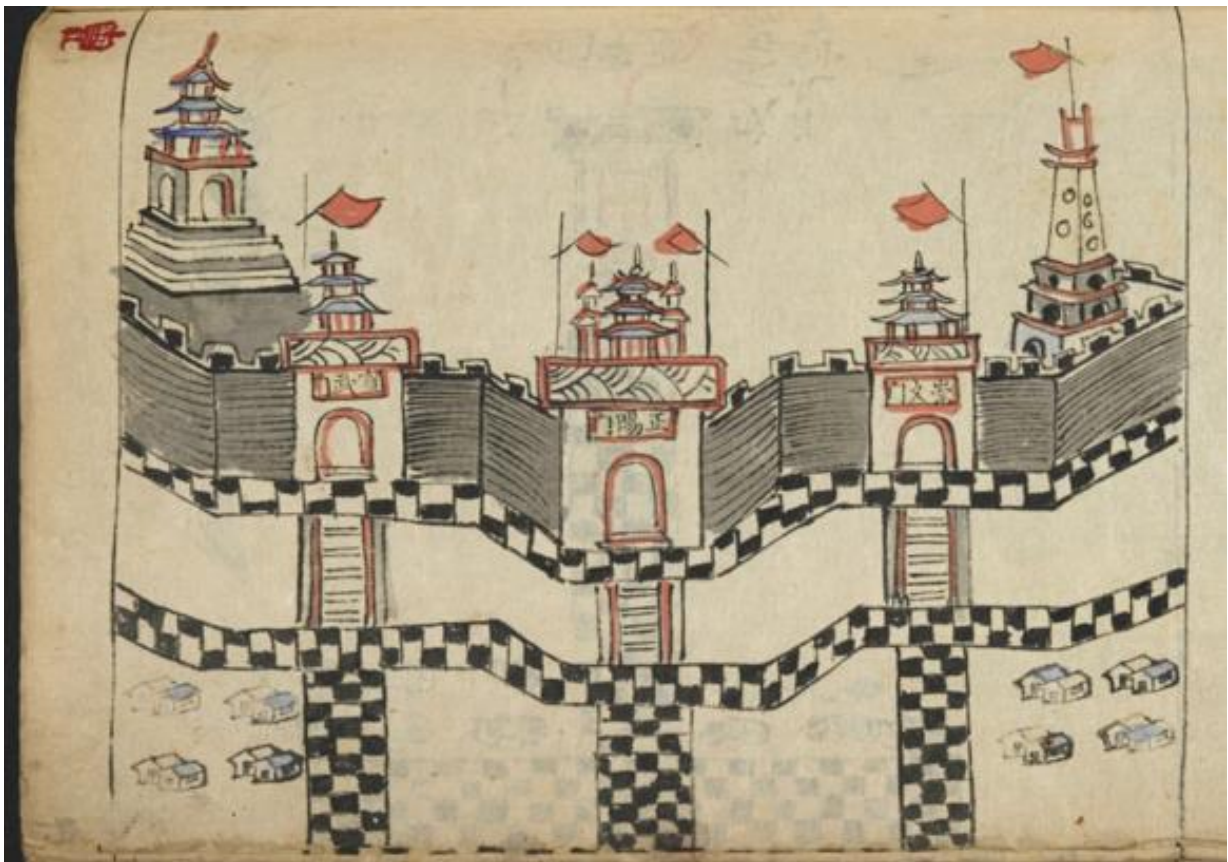
As a neighbouring country, Vietnam had been one of the most active participants in the Chinese tribute system, which offered political gains allowing for peaceful co-existence with its powerful neighbour. As Brantly Womack points out, China was always Vietnam's greatest political threat. Thus Chinese recognition of the Vietnamese court as the legitimate rulers of the country was invaluable and was tantamount to an acknowledgement of Vietnam's right to exist. In contrast to the colonialism of Western imperialism, China acted as the passive guarantor of a matrix of unequal but autonomous relationships, rather than as an active metropolitan power: to go to Beijing was more reassuring than to have Paris come to you (Womack 2006: 135).

From its very beginnings, not only did independent Vietnam publicly accept its status as a vassal, but it sent its most prominent scholars as emissaries on tribute missions. William Duiker has characterised the historical relationship between China and Vietnam as follows: *'To China, the Vietnamese must have resembled a wayward younger brother ... Chinese attitudes toward Vietnam combined paternalism and benevolence with a healthy dose of arrogance and cultural condescension stemming from the conviction that it was China that had lifted the Vietnamese from their previous state of barbarism. As for the Vietnamese, their attitude toward China was a unique blend of respect and truculence, combining a pragmatic acceptance of Chinese power and influence with a dogged defence of Vietnamese independence and distinctiveness'* (Duiker 1986: 6).



Guangning Gate (30 ly before the main City gate). British Library, Or.14907, f.69r.

The 1880 tribute mission took place against a backdrop of political difficulties in Vietnam. After the signing of the 1874 treaty, there was unrest in North Vietnam (Tonkin) among Vietnamese who saw the Nguyễn rulers as weak leaders who had readily capitulated to French power. The Black Flag rebellion, led by Lưu Vĩnh Phúc, caused disruption to foreign commercial businesses and French religious missions, disturbing both Beijing and Paris. Hence two Chinese incursions took place in 1878 and 1879, while at the same time, the French kept putting pressure on the court in Huế with the threat of another invasion (Đình Xuân Lâm 1999: 47). In order to appease the Chinese and to seek help from the Middle Kingdom, the Vietnamese court tried to send missions to Beijing. Some missions were successful, but others were intercepted by the French. The 1880 tribute mission was therefore one of several attempts. It probably crossed the border in early October and arrived in Beijing in December 1880.



Zhengyang Gate, Beijing, leading to the Forbidden City. British Library, Or.14907, f.69v.

The French perceived the Vietnamese court's attempt to seek help from China as a violation of the 1874 treaty, which stipulated that Vietnam's foreign affairs were under French authority. The colonial power thus used this as one of the pretexts to launch another attack against the Vietnamese. In April, 1882, French forces attacked Hanoi and consequently Huế. Emperor Tự Đức passed away on July 17, 1883 just before the court agreed to sign another treaty with the French (August 25, 1883), which brought all three parts of Vietnam under complete control of French colonial government.

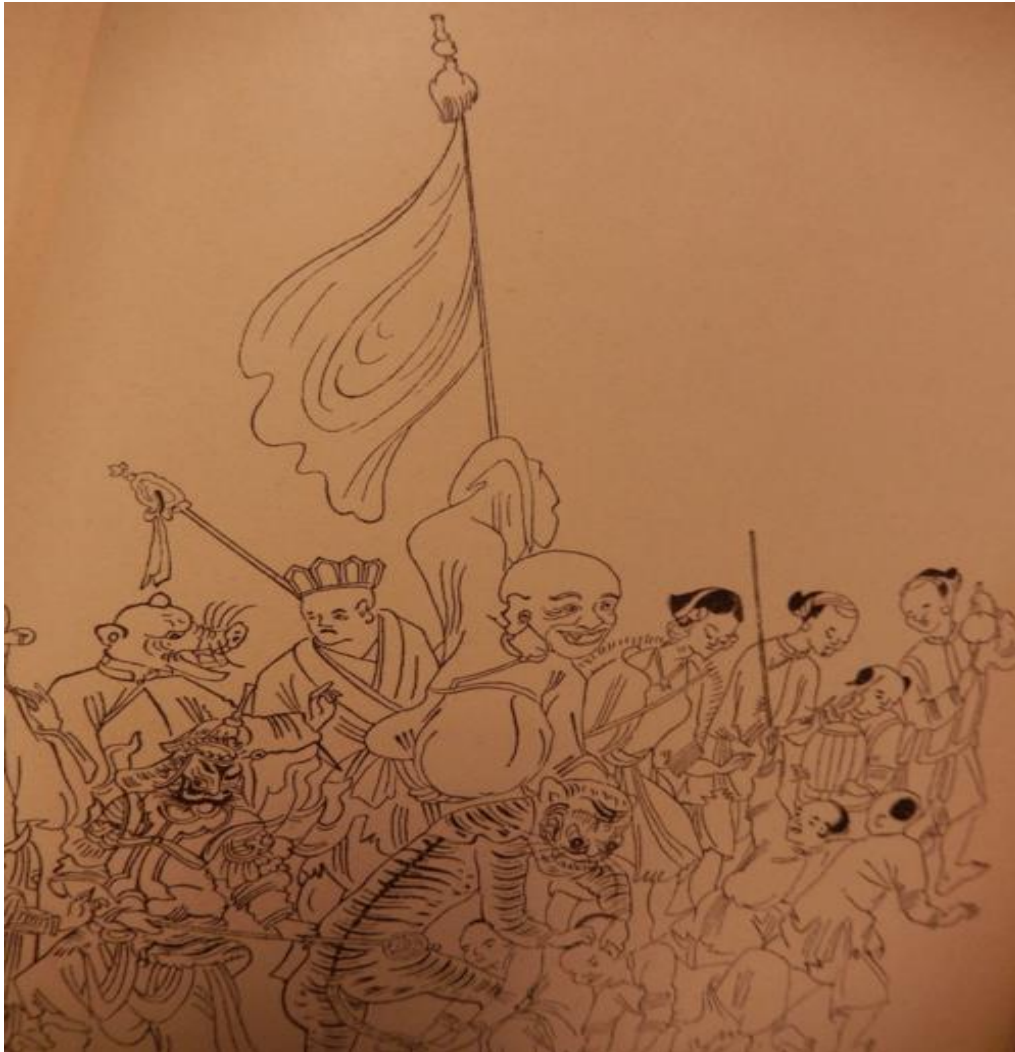
The advent of French control over Vietnam seriously affected Chinese interests because trade between southern China and northern Vietnam was disrupted. Therefore, from 1882 China sent troops to northern Vietnam to protect its interests and fighting between French and Chinese forces erupted. However, the weakening Qing dynasty was not able to match the French might. The confrontation ended with Tientsin Agreement in May 1884 (Đình Xuân Lâm: 1999, 58), in which China agreed to rescind its claims over Vietnam's sovereignty. This also brought an end to the long-lasting tradition of the tribute system between China and Vietnam.

Tuồng Việt Nam (Vietnamese Theatre) (Or.8218)

Traditional Vietnamese theatre can be divided into two main genres: *chèo* and *tuồng* or *hát bội*. *Chèo* is probably the oldest form of Vietnamese theatrical performance and can be dated back to the tenth century. It is believed that it originated from a boating song performed at popular festivals, hence the name *chèo* or "song of oars". This traditional performance was popular in the north of Vietnam and was closely associated with peasants or commoners because of the simple and basic way it was performed. Initially, it did not even require a stage, and the artists simply wore their everyday clothes. There were no written texts, and the accompanying songs were closely related to folk songs. This form of performance was meant to be a funny and light-hearted entertainment.



Chiếu chèo, a very basic play performed on a mat. Sân Khấu, Hanoi : Báo Quân Đội, no.184 (8-1996), p.42. British Library, 16671.c.4



Phường chèo đóng đường: chèo performed at a funeral. Gustave Dumoutier, Le Rituel Funéraire des Annamites. Hanoi: F.H. Schneider, 1904; plate 6 bis. British Library, 11100.f.22

If *chèo* was originally a popular entertainment for peasants, *tuồng* (in the North) or *hát bội* (in the South) stood traditionally at the other end of the performance genre. *Tuồng*, which could be translated as “classical theatre”, was believed to have originated in a royal court of the Trần dynasty (1225-1400 AD). Most scholars agree that there was a Chinese impulse to the birth of Vietnamese classical theatre (Mackerras 1987: 3). Legend has it that in 1285, a Chinese opera troupe was captured during a Vietnamese military campaign against the invading Mongols. Emperor Trần Nhân Tông (1279-1293), the third emperor of the Trần dynasty, was so impressed by the operatic and theatrical knowledge of the captives that he had the leader of the troupe train young Vietnamese in the performing art in exchange for his life. Under the patronage of subsequent emperors, *tuồng* developed to suit Vietnamese taste, and new plays were written, some based on Vietnamese, rather than Chinese, history (Brandon 1967: 73-4). In the 16th century *tuồng* spread to the South and by the 18th century it was popular throughout the country and among all classes, from emperors to peasants (Mackerras 1987: 3).



Tuồng play. Pierre Huard et Maurice Durand, Connaissance du Việt Nam (1954), p. 265. British Library, X.800/281 0332

Tuồng reached its apogee under the Nguyễn dynasty (1802-1945). Emperors and high-ranking mandarins became patrons of troupes and had performances given in their private chambers. The first special theatre was built in the imperial palace of Emperor Gia Long (1802-1820). Emperor Tự Đức (1847-1883) encouraged court poets to write opera, and he brought into his court the Chinese actor Kang Koung Heou and maintained 150 female performers (Brandon 1967: 73). During the Nguyễn dynasty, *tuồng* was very similar to Beijing opera in terms of costumes, stagecraft and makeup.

It was under these conditions that a large number of *tuồng* play scripts were created, written in Hán-Nôm (Sino-Vietnamese script) or Hán (Chinese script). One Vietnamese scholar reports that in Vietnam nowadays there are still four to five hundred compositions, some of which run to as many as a dozen volumes. Most traditional *tuồng* are based on Chinese history or literary works, but there are others which dramatised events in Vietnamese history or literature. Themes include struggles at court between an evil courtier and the emperor, loyalty, filial piety and the virtues of patriotism (Mackerras 1987: 4).

Sadly, *tuồng* declined in the 20th century because it lost royal court support. Former glamorous court performers had to earn their living after they retired by taking their troupes to travel around and perform wherever people were willing to pay them. However, the decline in court performances eventually led to a new genre of theatre known as *cải lương*, which was an adaptation of this classical performance.



Title page of the first play in the manuscript, Tống Từ Minh truyện. British Library, Or. 8218, Vol. 1, f. 1.r

A ten-volume set of *tuồng* plays (Or. 8218) held in the British Library is very likely the product of the popularity of this performing art form in the mid-19th century under the Nguyễn dynasty. Or. 8218 comprises a collection of forty six plays and legends, possibly from Hue, the capital of Vietnam during the Nguyễn dynasty. Most do not include the author's name, date and place except for one piece, *Sự tích ra tuồng*, which has a line which could be translated into modern Vietnamese as 'làm vào ngày tháng tốt năm Tự Đức 3'. According to Trần Nghĩa, this note indicates that the play was written in 1850 during the reign of Emperor Tự Đức (1847-1883). The complete ten-volume set of manuscripts (Or. 8218/1-10), containing over 6,800 pages, has been now fully digitised thanks to the legacy of Henry Ginsburg, and may be accessed through the Digitised Manuscripts website www.bl.uk/manuscripts/ with the search term 'Vietnam'.

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The mystery of the 'naughty monks' in Thai manuscript illustrations of Phra Malai

Jana Igunma, British Library, London

The legend of the Buddhist monk Phra Malai is one of the most popular subjects of 19th-century illustrated Thai manuscripts, which has helped to shape the Thai understanding of Buddha's teachings about the karmic effects of human actions and thoughts. The oldest surviving text of Phra Malai is written on palm leaves in Northern Thai (*Tham*) script dated 2059 B.E. (1516 A.D.), without illustrations (Brereton 1993). Other versions of Phra Malai exist in the Burmese, Shan, and Lao traditions. In 19th century Thailand, Phra Malai manuscripts were frequently produced and donated to Buddhist monasteries as acts of merit on behalf of a deceased person (funeral or commemoration books) – therefore lavish illustrations and gold cover decorations were often added to increase the meritorious value. The artists who created the paintings and cover decorations usually remained anonymous. The theme of Phra Malai also features

on mural paintings and painted temple banners (*phrabot*) as well as in Buddhist sculpture.

Two versions of Phra Malai are known in Central Thailand: *Phra Mālai klōn sūat* (a popular version, often recited, sung and dramatised at funerals), and *Phra Mālai kham lūang* (the royal version, attributed to Prince Thammathibet, 18th century, which is said to be closer to the northern Thai Pali version). Most of the illustrated versions of Phra Malai in folding books (*samut khōi*) from Central Thailand date back to the 19th century. One example that may date back to before 1800 A.D. is a folding book found at Wat Pak Khlong, Changwat Phetchabun (*Samut khōi*, 1999, p. 141).

One particular illustration from Thai manuscripts containing the legend of Phra Malai has fuelled controversial views among scholars. The illustration shows four Buddhist monks who, in real life according to Thai Buddhist tradition, attend the home of the family of a deceased person on the night that person has passed away for the *ngān hū'an dī* ceremony. During the ceremony they would chant a selection of Pali texts and give their blessings to the deceased and the family before the family, friends, neighbours and distant relatives continue with a “wake” involving singing, poetry, games, performances, drinking, eating, betel chewing, smoking etc. In some Thai manuscripts, however, these four monks are not depicted in a serene manner, but they look like naughty children, clowning around, playing games, indulging in sweets, betel, drinks and cheroots – behaving against all conventions for Buddhist monks. The question arises whether these illustrations are a result of the introduction of artistic realism in Thai painting mirroring the real world, or whether they are evidence of growing freedom of artistic expression, or evidence of the use of manuscript art as propaganda.

The Image of the “Naughty Monks”

Illustrations of “naughty monks” can be frequently found in 19th-century Phra Malai manuscripts, showing varying levels of excessive behaviour. Indecent manners include comical gestures or dancing, knocking over paraphernalia, touching or pinching each other, pulling faces and throats, smoking, gambling, eating, engaging in sexual activities, wearing ear studs, moustaches, flowery robes etc.

There are controversial views among scholars regarding the image of these monks. My mentor of several years, late Henry Ginsburg, suggested two possible interpretations which I agreed with for many years. He pointed out that in Phra Malai manuscripts various genre scenes were used to contrast examples of good and bad behaviour, referring to illustrations of the age of evil showing people fighting and killing each other, in contrast to people from a better age, shown in meditation or offering alms to monks. He suggested in his book on Thai manuscript painting that

“... in a similar vein, pious monks are contrasted with lax ones, the first properly seated at prayer or meditation, while the latter are lolling at their ease, unsuitably adorned with ivory plugs in their ears, taking snuff and sweets and drinks, attended by children.” (Ginsburg 1989, p. 77)

Ginsburg thought that these illustrations were of a certain educational or even propagandistic value to promote proper Buddhist manners and behaviours, especially of the monks, following the reforms introduced by King Rama I in 1805 in the Three Seals Law (*Kotmāi Trā Sām Dūang*), and by the monk Vajiranano (crowned as King Rama IV in 1851), who founded the Dhammayutika reform movement in 1833 with the aim to strictly follow the Vinaya Pitaka and to remove superstitious elements and practices regarded as non-Buddhist from the monks' lives. The 1902 Sangha laws issued by Sangharaja Vajiranana again emphasized the proper behaviour of monks. However, Ginsburg also warned that

"... the explanation of these scenes of monks in very informal modes is open to interpretation, and it is not certain that they are being parodied. Often the monks are depicted with hands on their throats, which could refer to problems with their voices, perhaps vocal stress resulting from chanting." (ibid.)

In his second book, Ginsburg suggested that the illustrations actually may reflect real-life situations, in which

"... former monks often delivered the recitations [of Phra Malai], dressed up as monks for the occasion, unconstrained by the rules for proper behaviour for monks." (Ginsburg 2000, p. 92)

He must have come to this conclusion after he had got access to many more Phra Malai manuscripts since his first book was published, realising that most manuscripts containing illustrations of the "naughty monks" were created after the reforms of Rama I and Rama IV had been implemented, and theoretically it should have become more and more difficult for monks to misbehave or offend against the rules of the Vinaya Pitaka.

Bonnie Brereton, perhaps the leading Western scholar on the topic of Phra Malai, took a closer look at the historical context of the tradition of reciting the legend of Phra Malai at funeral wakes and at weddings (Brereton 1995, pp. 125-137). Brereton argues that

"With its varied rhythms and melodies, its repetitive phrases and stark – even sensationalistic – images, and its vernacular syntax and vocabulary, this treatise during its heyday was a powerful and entertaining mechanism for teaching moral principles. However, a set of ecclesiastical laws issued by King Rama I (1782-1809), suggest that by the early Ratanakosin period, the chanting of Phra Malai Klon Suat had become more a source of entertainment than one of religious edification." (ibid., pp. 130-131)

Citing S. Virulrak (1980), Brereton describes how initially morally enlightening performances of Phra Malai may have been transformed into some kind of slapstick comedy, with monks wearing false moustaches, glasses, hats and made-up faces and costumes. However, in the absence of any historic photographic or written evidence such descriptions seem far-fetched, if not entirely based on manuscript illustrations, and are therefore not very useful for the interpretation of exactly these same illustrations. Nonetheless, Brereton – again citing Virularak – provides the useful insight that after monks had been banned from performing Phra Malai at the beginning of the 19th century

“... some monks apparently seized on the new financial opportunities provided by this development and retired from the Sangha to form professional chanting groups, known as suat kharuehat. The kharuehat routine closely resembled that of the monks... but a central element in any routine was that of entertainment and fun.” (ibid., p. 133)

Barend J. Terwiel opposes Ginsburg’s and Brereton’s views in various aspects. He sees the illustrations of the “naughty monks” in Phra Malai manuscripts as true representations of historical realities, proposing that

“I think that we are not dealing with actors. Nowhere is ever mentioned that during a funeral ceremony actors would play licentious monks. In my view, the older Phra Malai documents illustrate scenes that really took place. Monks recited the Phra Malai text, in an intoxicated state. They indulged in drugs, sat with women, they chanted in ecstasy, they went into trance and, like Phra Malai, and uncounted generations of shamans before them, they travelled in trance to the other worlds, thereby accompanying the spirit of the deceased to the world of the dead. The monks shown in the pre-1850 manuscripts are, I propose, ritual specialists in trance, they travelled to the unseen worlds for their community, they assisted souls, and (presumably) they also predicted the future.” (Terwiel 2012, p. 12)

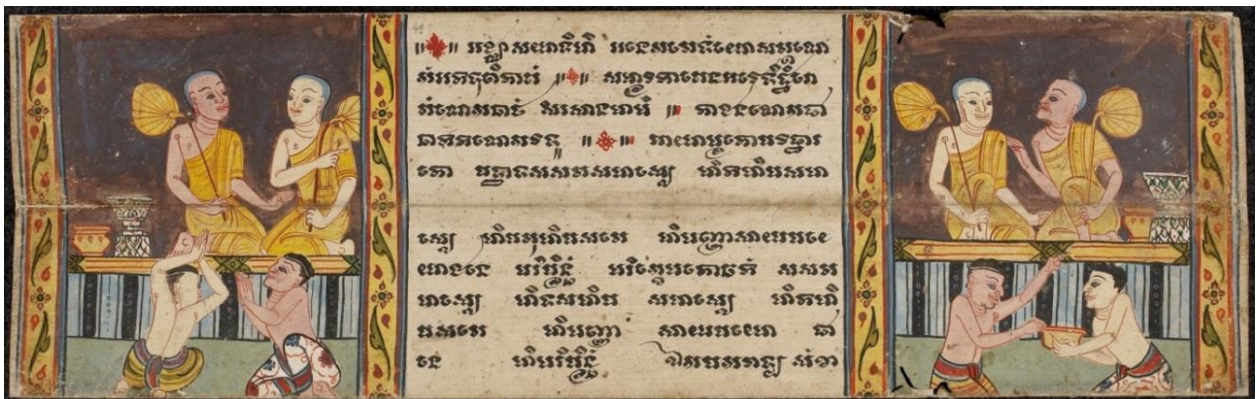
Acknowledging that Terwiel used the example of Phra Malai performances (as illustrated in Thai manuscripts) to paint a more realistic picture of Thai Buddhism in the 19th century than what is believed by devout Thai Buddhists and Buddhist scholars, I cannot fully agree with Terwiel though. In fact King Rama I’s Three Seals Law is the only written source to document a certain degree of misbehaviour and lack of discipline within the monkhood, reportedly including the chanting of Phra Malai in foreign melodies or dialects. Historical eye-witness reports of Thai *ngān hū’an dī* and funeral ceremonies fail to mention any involvement of misbehaving monks (for example Carons/Schouten 1663, A relation of the voyage to Siam performed by six Jesuits sent by the French King to the Indies and China in the year 1685, de Choisy 1741, Turpin 1771, Richardson 1839, Neale 1851, Mouhot 1864, Chevillard 1889, Le May 1926, Wells 1960). On the other side, such reports mention the washing of the corpse with coconut water, the binding of the corpse in sitting position with a white cord that is extended to the four monks transferring merit to the deceased while chanting, of musical and theatrical entertainment, or details of a river/water cremation. The question arises why observers would have left out the fact of misbehaving monks; particularly some Christian observers who were critical of Buddhism and actively searched for reasons to ridicule Buddhist practices.

Another important aspect is that in Thai society there never really arose the need for monks to replace the traditional non-Buddhist ritual specialists (*mō*) who were always available to professionally serve the ritual and spiritual needs of their communities, like travelling in trance to invisible worlds, accompanying or calling the souls,

communicating with ancestors, deities, gods, natural and evil spirits, forecasting the future, interpreting the stars, omens, dreams etc. Sometimes, such ritual specialists may have entered the monkhood in order to gain more popularity or to extend their knowledge, or even on request of local rulers who had embraced Buddhism in order to support and to spread their new religion; and in reverse, some retired monks would also have become ritual specialists building on the knowledge they had acquired as monks (the knowledge of some Pali, or the ability to write and draw yantra and number diagrams would in some communities have been enough to be regarded as a powerful *mō*, let alone the calculation of time or acquisition of Buddhist higher knowledge like the *chalabhiñña*). Even at the royal court roles to serve certain ritual needs of the rulers and their administration were carried out by *phrām* (Brahmin), not by monks.

Early Illustrations of Four Monks

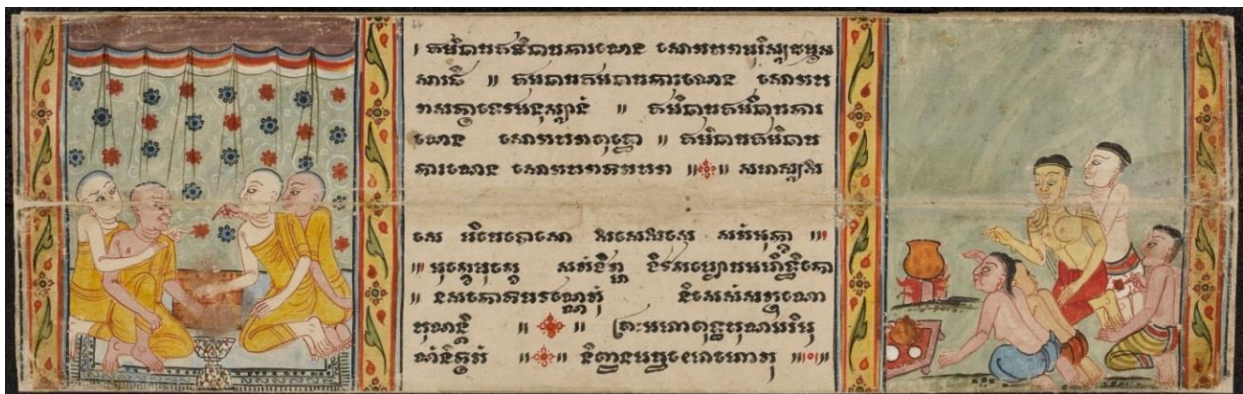
Funeral books from the late Ayutthaya period (18th century) sometimes contain illustrations of four monks combined with scenes from the last Ten Birth Tales or with natural scenes to accompany Pali texts, usually the *Abhidhamma 7 khamphi* or the *Mahābuddhaguna*, that were used for chanting, but they do not usually contain the legend of Phra Malai. In these early illustrated funeral books monks are always portrayed showing decent behaviour, though sometimes they can be holding their throats which without doubt is meant to indicate voice problems during prolonged chanting. Sometimes they may be shown as if gesticulating or touching each other, and receiving food and other offerings. The four monks are usually placed on a pedestal or a mat with their paraphernalia or a folding book, sometimes with a coffin or urn and lay people nearby.



Lively scene of four monks with fans and offering bowls on a pedestal, and four lay people in front of them. *Mahābuddhaguna* and other short extracts from the Pali canon, second half of 18th century (BL IO.Pali.207)



At the top one can see a monk meditating and transferring merit on the deceased person in a lavishly decorated coffin, accompanied on the left by Brahma, and Sakka (Indra) on the right. At the bottom are four monks with fans, seated on a mat, with text in Khmer script written in gold ink inbetween them. *Abhidhamma 7 khamphi*, 18th century (source: Samut khoi 1999, p.123)



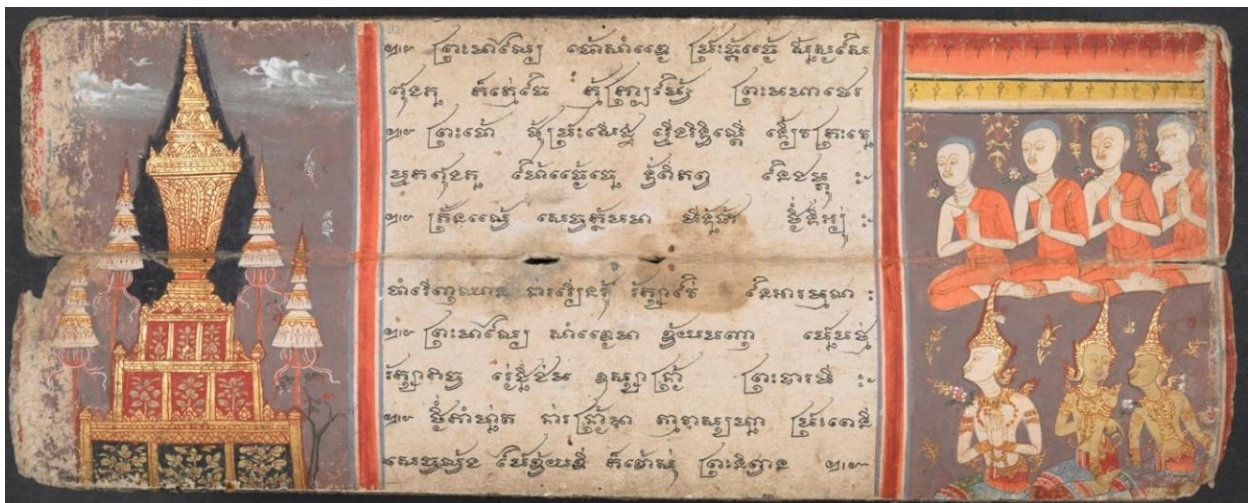
Four monks gesticulating or pointing at each other on the left side with a flowery curtain at the back, and a group of lay people preparing food on the right side. *Mahābuddhaguna* and other short extracts from the Pali canon, second half of 18th century (BL IO.Pali.207)

19th-century Illustrations of Four Monks

Looking at 19-century illustrated funeral books which usually contain the legend of Phra Malai in addition to some relatively short texts or extracts from the Pali canon, one can make out three different types:

- ✓ Books showing illustrations of decent monks, which can be seen as a continuation of the older Ayutthaya-style illustrations
- ✓ Books showing illustrations of “naughty monks” with indecent behaviour
- ✓ Books showing both types of monks, or monks together with actors, contrasting each other

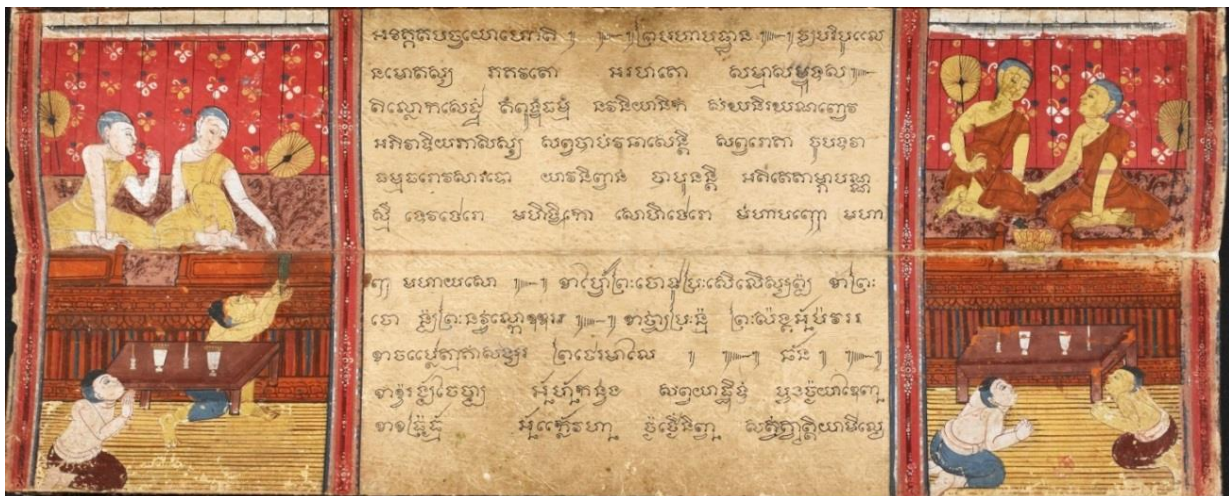
The first three images below depict groups of decent monks painted in a style similar to the older Ayutthaya tradition.



A lavishly decorated urn stands on a pedestal, with four three-tiered umbrellas on the left side, accompanied by a group of four neatly dressed monks seated in a row in chanting position, and three lay people in outfits as seen on royals or dēva on the right. The monks are fair-skinned and spotless, almost appearing like Buddha statues. Phra Malai with short extracts from the Pali canon, 19th century (BL Or.15258)

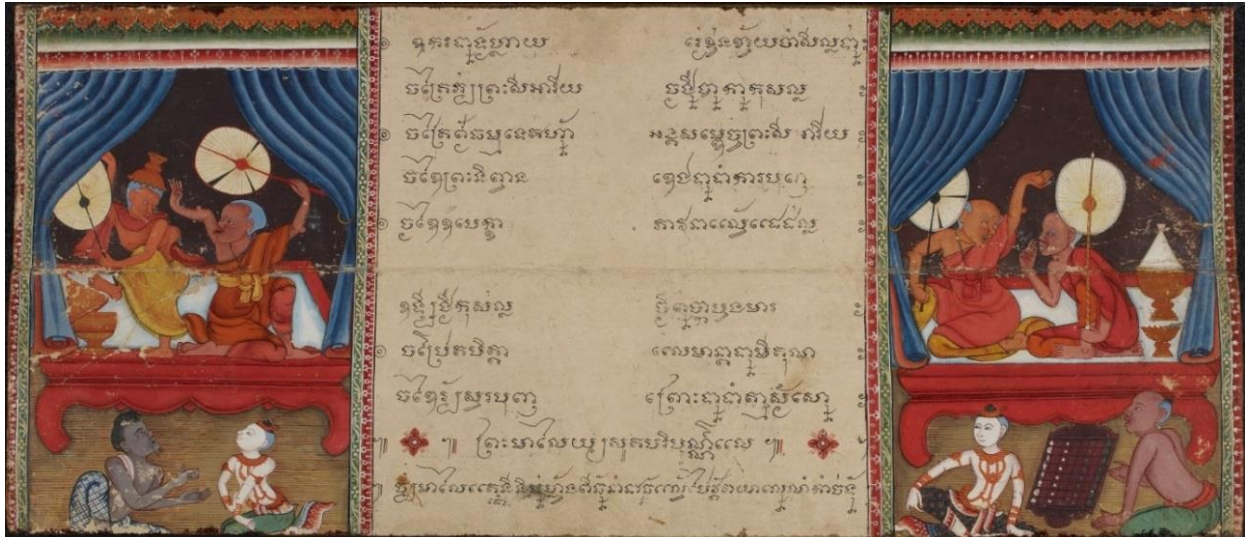


On the left side there are the four monks seated on a stage-like pedestal with bowls of offerings in front of them. Two of the monks are slightly bent towards each other, as if whispering. There is also a small table with a white folding book and a yet smaller table with candles and another bowl of offerings. Two lay people are seated in front of the pedestal with more offerings. On the right side one can see the coffin behind a blue flowery curtain and three more lay people with offerings. Mahābuddhaguna and Phra Malai, second half of 19th century (BL Or.14559)

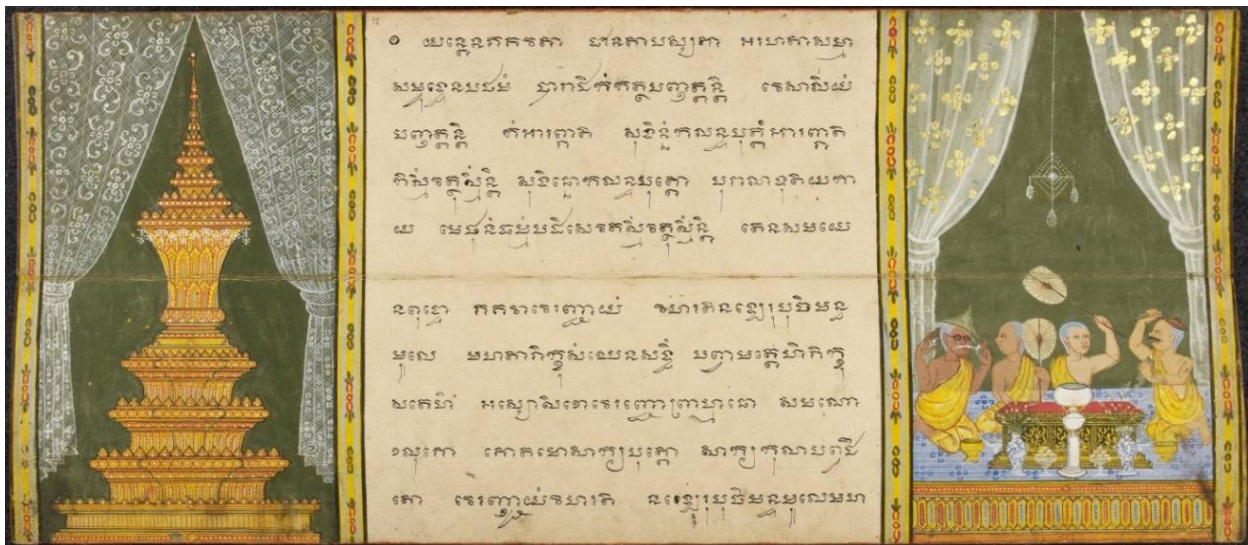


In this scene the four monks, all seated on a pedestal with their fans nearby, are split into two groups. On the left side one monk is receiving from a layman something that looks like a betel wrapping while the other seems to be eating something. Another layman is kneeling in front of a small table with candles and perhaps incense sticks, paying respect. On the right side there are two more lay people in a respectful position in front of another small table with candles and incense. Behind the table are two monks, one apparently pinching the other's leg. Phra Malai with short extracts from the Pali canon, dated 1857 (BL Or.14732)

Similar to the manuscript painting tradition in the Ayutthaya period, illustrations of the four monks can show a hint of “naughtiness” like eating, gesticulating or touching each other. In stark contrast are the following two examples, which represent the category of illustrations of “naughty monks”. Such illustrations appear particularly frequently in Phra Malai manuscripts from the second half of the 19th century, although some rare examples date back to the 1840s and 1830s.

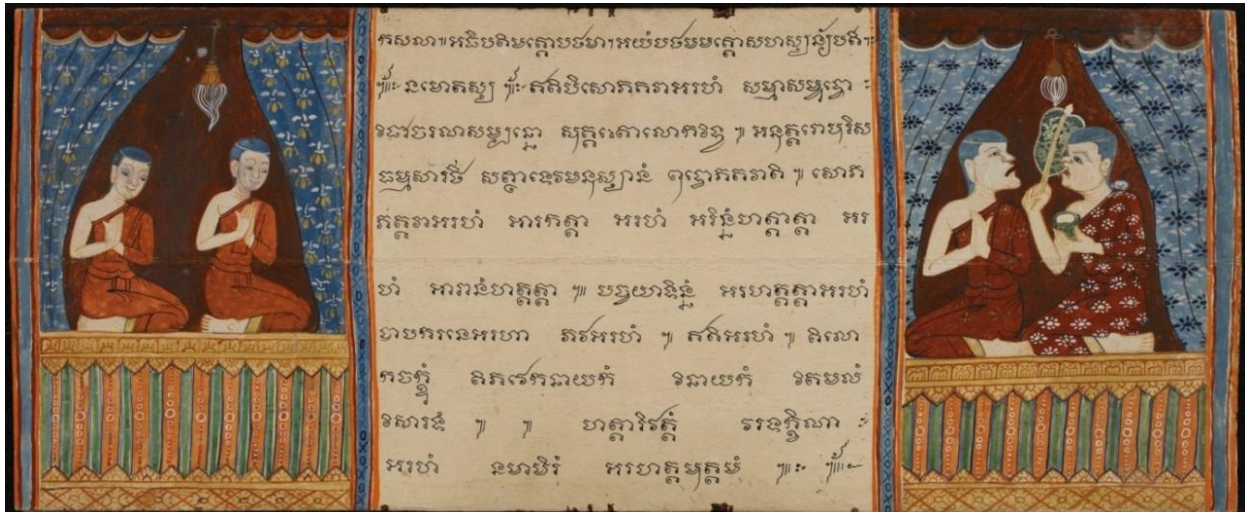


The scenes above shows two monks on each side, placed on stage-like pedestals with blue curtains. The monks are showing excessively bad behaviour that would not be acceptable or excusable in any way according to the rules for monks. The pair on the left are wildly gesticulating with their fans, one of them being a hunchback and wearing an offering bowl as a hat and knocking another offering bowl over. His upper cloth is hanging loose around his chest and shoulders. The monks on the right are also gesticulating. One of them is naturally bald, and both of them were painted with strikingly ugly teeth. Two of the monks also have particularly misshaped elbows or tumours. In front of the pedestals are four lay people, the pair on the right side playing the makruk game, and one of them is also naturally bald. Bald men were not the most respected in traditional Thai society. They were often called names and teased to play bald-head-butting games. The bald-headed monk above would have been called “thung mā long” (one of seven types of bald-heads), meaning a “piece of land so smooth that a dog would slip if allowed to walk on it”. Khun Chang, the foolish and selfish opponent of the heroic Khun Phaen in the folk epic Khun Chang Khun Phaen, is also described as being bald-headed. Phra Malai with short extracts from the Pali canon, dated 1849 (BL Or.14838)

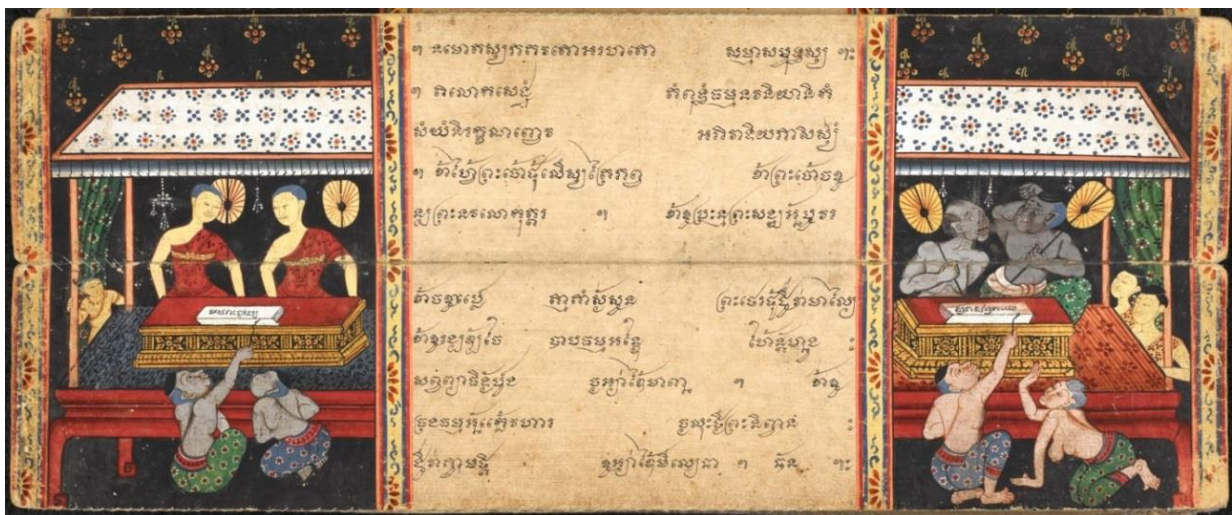


The illustration on the left shows a lavishly decorated urn on a large pedestal with white lace curtains. On the right side there are four monks seated on a pedestal with a white lace curtain interwoven with gold flower decorations. In front of them are monks' bowls, a lacquered and gilt manuscript box, an extravagant gas lamp, two stands with rice cakes, and flowers in two Chinese porcelain vases. Two of the monks are wearing moustaches and hats, perhaps one being a small food tray and the other a basket with attached fake pig-tail to make it look like the hair of a Chinese trader. Both these monks are playing rhythmic musical instruments, ching and krap sēphā, an activity not appropriate for monks. Their robes hang sloppily around their chests, and one of them also seems to be naturally bald whereas the other wears glasses. The two other monks are holding fans, one of them apparently trying to fend off with his fan one of the monks wearing hat and moustache, although hitting someone with a fan is equally inappropriate for a monk. Phra Malai with short extracts from the Pali canon, dated 1894 (BL Or.16101)

The example described above may be seen as a transition from the depiction of four “naughty monks” to an illustration of two well-mannered monks contrasting two “naughty monks”. Such illustrations of monks contrasting each other, as well as monks in contrast to actors or comedians are shown in the examples below.



Two monks kneeling on a pedestal in a serene, respectful posture are seen on the left side. Their body features are handsome and immaculate, and their kind and calm facial expressions show similarities with Thai Buddha or deva images. On the right side, also kneeling on a pedestal, two monks seem to be arguing. One of them wears a robe with conspicuous white flowers and waves a fan in the air while holding a drinking cup in his other hand. Their heads are misshaped, and their facial expressions seem angry in a comical way, reminding the viewer of clown figures in Thai shadow theatre (nang talung) where the painter of this scene may have drawn his inspiration from. *Mahābuddhaguna* and other extracts from the Pali canon, dated 1841 (BL Or.15925)



Shown on the left side are two well-mannered monks with their fans on a pedestal with a green flowery curtain and a white canopy. In front of the monks one can see a lavishly gilded manuscript chest with a small folding book in Khmer script, and on the floor are two laypeople and a child on the left side. The monks are fair skinned, and again, with facial expressions showing a happy kindness similar to Buddha or deva images. On a similar pedestal on the right side are two dark skinned, muscular men, one of them bald headed (of the “raeng kraphu pik” type, meaning a vulture flapping its wings). Their chests are bare, and one of them wears a flowery sarong. They appear to be mocking monks in a comical way, while gesticulating wildly with monks’ fans, though they are

clearly not monks, but more probably people normally doing hard outdoor work. In front of them is also a manuscript chest with a folding book in Khmer script, and an audience of four lay people. Phra Malai with short extracts from the Pali canon, second half of the 19th century (BL Or.16007)

In rare cases, artists deviated from the tradition of depicting monks altogether, and included a painting of a group of four lay people or professional actors impersonating monks instead.



This illustration shows a stage-like roofed pedestal with a small round table in front of it. On the table are floral offerings, candles and incense sticks. A group of four lay people or actors, perhaps kharuehat, are seated on the pedestal with a manuscript stand and a folding book in front of them. Two of the figures hold monks' fans whereas the other two, who might be females, have foldable hand-fans that are often used by women. All four figures wear multi-coloured sarongs and the typical short-cut hair style (for males and females) as documented in 19th century Thai photography. The figure on the left side is holding their throat, a gesture that can often be seen in illustrations of the four monks. Phra Malai with short extracts from the Pali canon, short folding book (samut Thai) dated 1880 (BL Or.15246)

Risks of (Over)-Interpretation

When looking at genre illustrations, there is always a temptation to regard these illustrations as true representations of real life. Often, they look very realistic or naturalistic, with details (like landscapes, plants, animals, appearance and outfits of human figures, buildings, objects etc.) resembling what is indeed known of the real world.

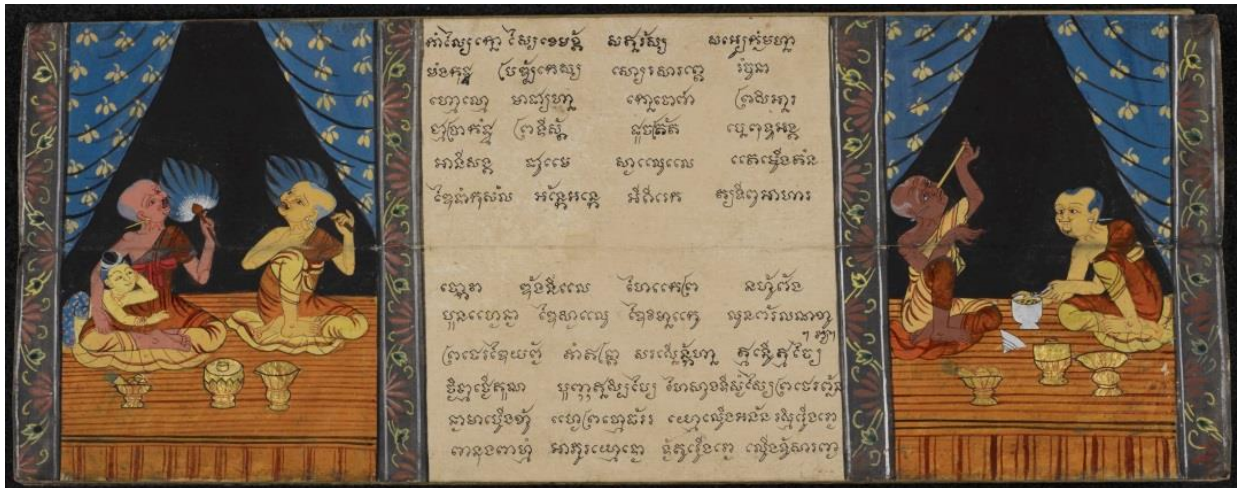
There is no doubt that the texts in Thai Buddhist manuscripts had a certain educational value at the time they were produced, therefore one may also suspect an educational or even propagandistic purpose of the illustrations, although these would not usually have been easily, if at all, accessible by lay people or the general public.

Due to the fact that Thai manuscript illustrators usually would have worked on commission and always remained anonymous, one may be tempted to think that these artists “just did a job they were requested and paid to do”, without much drive for creativity, innovation or the desire to express themselves.

However, when interpreting manuscript illustrations, there are many other aspects to take into consideration. First of all, the provenance and historical context of an illustrated manuscript have to be taken into consideration; even the knowledge about the intentions of a particular manuscript collector or copyist can be helpful in judging a manuscript. An illustrated manuscript should always be viewed as a whole; isolating certain illustrations could lead to wrong assumptions. Often one can find clues within the manuscript that may help with the interpretation of the illustrations, even if the text is not directly related to the illustrations. Comparison of the illustrations within one manuscript can tell, for example, if more than one illustrator were at work, or whether unusual elements in one illustration are repeated in the other illustrations as well. In addition, historical developments and trends of manuscript painting at a certain period of time should be taken into consideration. Certain styles, techniques and motifs may have become fashionable and copied by various artists. Finally, a comparison with developments and trends of mural painting and other decorative art forms is advisable as styles, techniques and motifs could have been adopted from there.

To explain these aspects in more detail, I will use some examples below.

Provenance and Historical Context



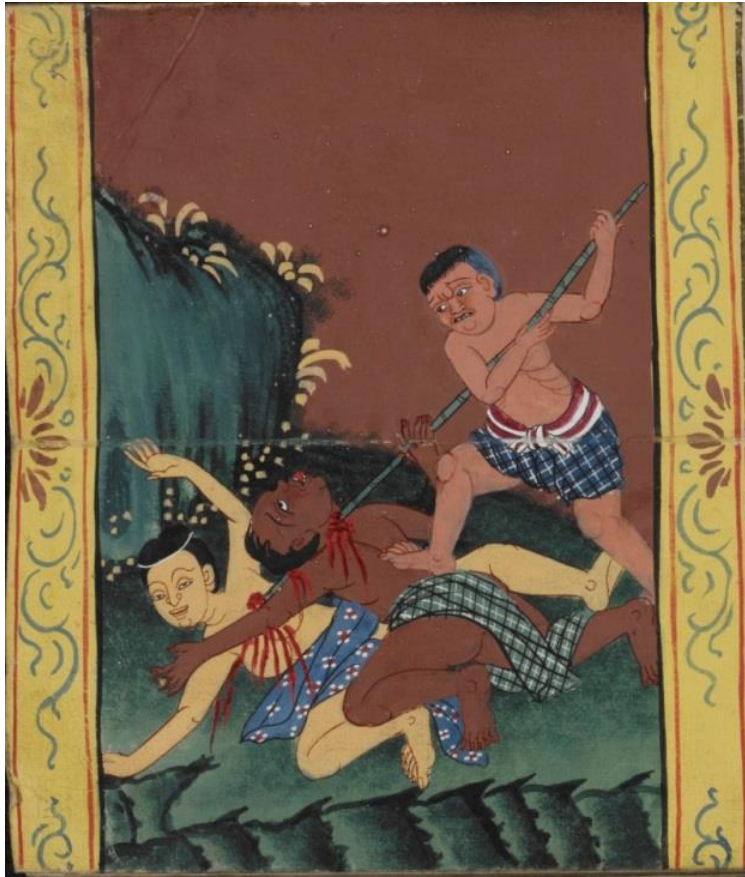
Illustrations of four “naughty monks” offending the rules for monks in many ways: engaging in (sexual?) play with a child, wearing ear studs, sniffing a drug and indulging in sweets. All four monks are naturally bald-headed, and the one on the right side wears a thin moustache and a short beard. Maleyyathēravannana (Pali title for Phra Malai), ca. 1838? (BL Add.15347)

This manuscript was originally given to the British Museum, and was transferred to the British Library in 1973. An acquisition note reads “*This manuscript was bought of a Malay or Siamese sailor at Singapore by the master of a British trading ship and has been presented to the Trustees of the British Museum by M. Thomas Mac Gill, Merchant, Liverpool 12 December 1844*”. From historic records it is known that Mac Gill sailed on the trading ship *Tom Thumb* to Penang twice in 1838 for business. It is not exactly known how Mac Gill came into possession of the manuscript, but according to the acquisition note it seems likely that Mac Gill acquired it from the “master of a British trading ship” that had sailed to Singapore. Therefore, the manuscript can be dated relatively safely to the year 1838 or shortly before.

The manuscript is in an almost “brand-new”, unused condition. It has very unique bright green covers, which may have been painted with an imported substance. It does not contain the usual collection of Buddhist texts in Pali that one can find in funeral books, but only the legend of Phra Malai. The writing seems unsteady or unskilled; the scribe may have used an imported pen that he was not familiar with (only after having completed about 10-12 folios the scribe seems to have become familiar with the pen). The dark background and the use of blue paint are rather unusual for the 1830s since they became fashionable and were imported more frequently only in the second half of the 19th century. These signs could point towards the fact that the manuscript may have been commissioned by a Westerner, or was produced with the aim to be sold to a Westerner. It is unlikely that it was produced as a funeral book; it definitely was not used much, if at all.



This illustration from the same manuscript shows a typical genre scene with a couple carrying offerings to the temple. Again, the background is presented in unusually dark colours. The man's sarong is painted with an imported blue colourant. Whereas the man's face is painted in the late Ayutthaya or early Rattanakosin style (with delicate lines above the upper lip), the lady's face is extremely unusual for a manuscript illustration before 1850. She seems to look to her left mischievously out of the corners of her eyes, and she wears her long hair openly – a feature that can hardly be found in other manuscript illustrations from before 1850. The sarong she is wearing is, in Thai painting, often an attribute of deva, but does not actually resemble the fashion of the Rattanakosin period (BL Add.15347)



Another illustration from this manuscript with slightly brighter background colours. Shown is a scene from the legend of Phra Malai illustrating the monk's teaching about the future of mankind just before the coming of the future Buddha; a time when ordinary humans will kill each other whereas the faithful ones will meditate hidden in caves until the age of destruction is over. Such scenes can frequently be found in Phra Malai manuscripts, however, a scene like the one above where a couple is being killed while having sexual intercourse is extremely unusual for the period before 1850. BL Add.15347

The use of paints imported from Europe, dark background colours, choice of imagery, and presentation of figures break with conventions of late Ayutthaya and early Rattanakosin manuscript painting style. This manuscript is unique and anticipates the developments in Thai manuscript painting after 1850. It is not a typical manuscript representing Thai manuscript illustration of the 1830s. However, the illustrations are generally in line with developments of Thai mural painting of the Thonburi and early Rattanakosin periods where dark background colours and experiments with imagery and presentation of figures (like for example inclusion of ethnic minorities) were already present. The green covers and innovative imagery that was breaking with the conventions of manuscript painting would not have increased the value of the manuscript in terms of merit (as a funeral book in the Buddhist context), but the market value at which it could have been sold to a Westerner.

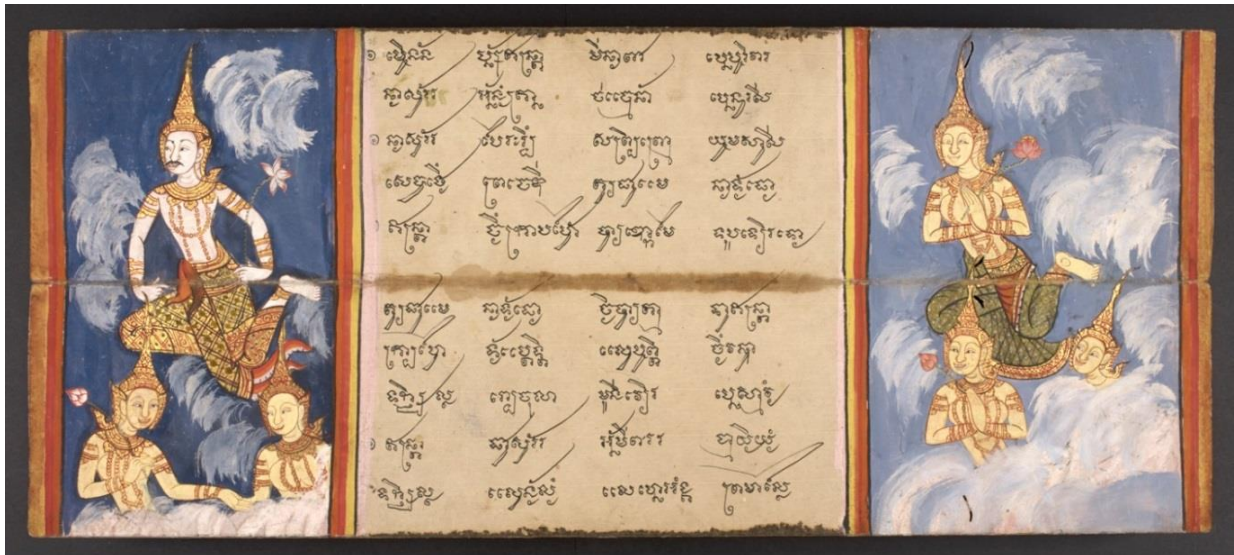
Clues within the Manuscript



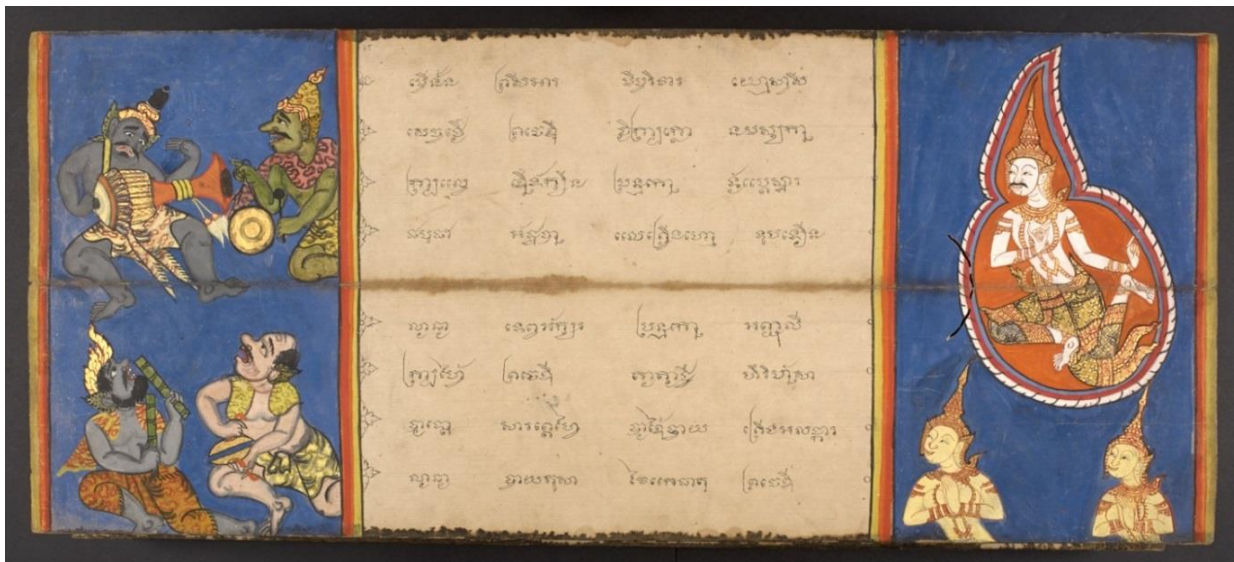
Illustrations depicting a funeral scene with two laymen playing the makruk game in front of a coffin on the left, and on the right side four monks with a gilt manuscript box and two more laymen in front of them. All people in these illustrations wear black moustaches, and one of the monks wears a bushy black beard. Two monks also wear glasses, and all four of them gesticulate inappropriately with their fans. Phra Malai and short extracts from the Pali canon, second half of 19th or early 20th century (BL Or.15371)

This manuscript was acquired from the collection of the Danish sinologist Søren Egerod in 1995. Egerod had travelled extensively in Southeast Asia in 1950s-60s to study and research Southeast Asian languages. Most of the manuscripts in his collection contain texts (without illustrations) in Northern Thai, Shan, Tai Khoen or Tai Lue scripts, only a few are illustrated manuscripts from central Thailand.

Whereas the handwriting is neat and at times almost calligraphic, the poor design and layout of the illustrated folios in this manuscript are striking. Also the quality of the illustrations is questionable: some elements reveal good painting skills, but other elements appear utmost unskilled, even childish. However, low quality design and illustrations can frequently be found in manuscripts that were produced towards the end of the 19th century or at the beginning of the 20th century.



Illustrations depicting one male and five female deva the monk Phra Malai met during his trip to the Buddhist heavens. The figures are mostly painted following the conventions of the Rattanakosin period, but the clouds appear like brush strokes that were made hastily or carelessly. Otherwise, the painter may have been trying to imitate clouds in a more naturalistic or Western style. What attracts attention here is the unusual black moustache that the male deva is wearing – similar to the moustaches of the “naughty monks” and other male figures on the aforementioned folio in this manuscript. (BL Or.15371)



Illustrations from the same manuscript showing a scene from the Buddhist heaven. On the left side, four asura-dēva, all with moustaches and one with a beard, play musical instruments before a bright blue background. On the right one can see two female deva at the bottom, and the future Buddha with a bright red aura. What is peculiar about the future Buddha in this illustration is his noticeable black moustache. (BL Or.15371)

If one looks at all the illustrations in this manuscript, it becomes clear that the painter had a strong liking of black moustaches. They were not only added to the four “naughty monks” in the funeral scene, but to all male figures in this manuscript. The shapes of the moustaches are indeed similar to the moustache worn by King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), which had become a popular fashion in Siam towards the end of the 19th century.



King Chulalongkorn (Rama V, reigned 1868-1910)

Variations in the handwriting and quality of the illustrations suggest that this manuscript may be the work of a team. One of the painters seemed to adhere to the traditions of manuscript painting in the early Rattanakosin period, whereas the other experimented with new motifs and techniques. One important aspect to note here is that the illustrations include elements that were fashionable at the time of creation of this manuscript – to add such fashionable elements was innovative and a movement away from older conventions that left much less room for artistic interpretation.

Historical Developments and Trends of Manuscript Painting



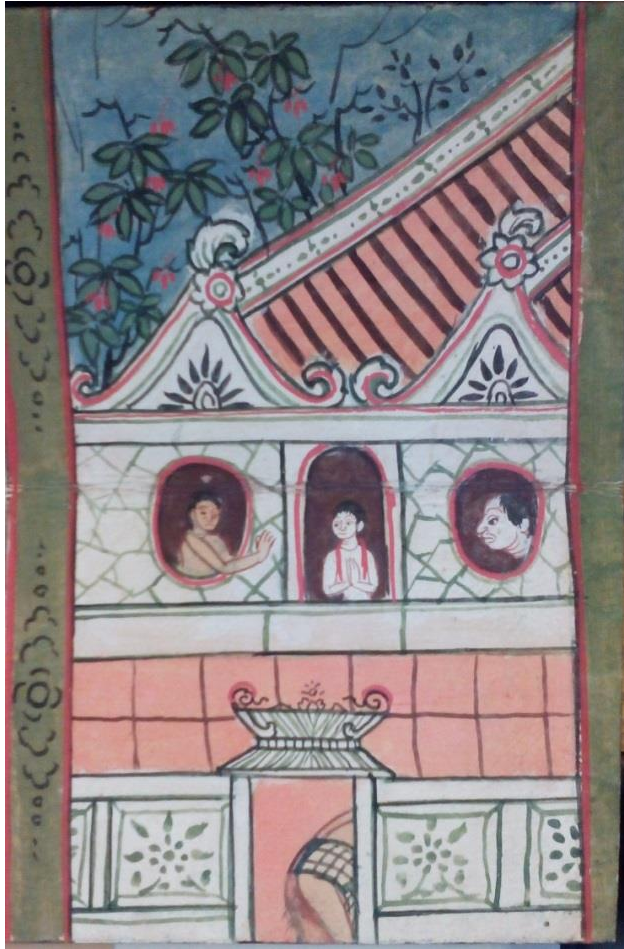
Illustrations from two different folios showing contrasting types of “naughty monks” (left) and monks as role models sitting in a serene posture (right). Phra Malai with extracts from the Pali canon, second half of 19th century (BL Or.14664 folios 3 and 6)

The trend in 19th-century Thai manuscript painting to include more frequently contrasting illustrations of “good” and “bad” monks within one manuscript may point toward an educational or propagandistic purpose of the paintings directed at monks and novices, which seems even more probable in the light of the Dhammayutika reform movement that opposed older or local/ethnic Tai Buddhist traditions. The Dhammayutika order followed strict rules adhering to the Vinaya, opposed folk religious elements and ceremonies of the Mahanikaya and other Tai Buddhist traditions which included divination, “magic”, occultism, forest meditation, folklore, amulet making, tattooing and certain rituals regarded as non-Buddhist etc. However, at the same time there was a growing appetite for innovative, non-conventional manuscript illustrations that were unthinkable in Ayutthaya or early Rattanakosin manuscript painting. Towards the end of the 19th century it became common practice to experiment with motifs, colours and painting techniques.



On the right side one can see the usual funeral scene, though only with two monks reciting or chanting from a folding book, and three laymen playing games. On the left side, however, is a scene that would not have been used to illustrate the legend of Phra Malai before the mid-19th century. It shows a Chinese pavilion with a small Chinese-style table with flower and candle offerings. Close to the pavilion is a wooden structure that looks like a palanquin, with a person sitting inside, probably a monk (due to the poor physical condition of the manuscript this is not clearly visible). In front of it are five lay people paying their respects. Mahābuddhaguna and Phra Malai , second half of 19th century (BL Or.15372)

During the second half of the 19th century, funeral and commemoration books enjoyed growing popularity. Wealthy people and people of Chinese origin commissioned such books more and more frequently so that the number of book workshops in Bangkok increased significantly. However, with the increase of the workshops came a decrease of the quality of manuscript painting. Although some high quality folding books were still produced, a huge number of low-quality illustrated manuscripts appeared on the market. At the same time, the mass production of printed funeral and commemoration books exploded, and by the 1920s such printed works had completely replaced the funeral books in manuscript format.



Another example of an unusual scene in a Phra Malai manuscript. It shows a Chinese-style temple building with three people looking out of windows. At the bottom of the illustration is a decorated wall with a gate, out of which a person is sticking their bottom in order to defecate. This motif again breaks with the conventions of manuscript painting of the Ayutthaya or early Rattanakosin period. Phra Malai, second half of 19th century (BL Or.14026)

General trends in mural painting and decorative art

Towards the end of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century, Thai mural painting saw a huge advance in creativity and innovation. Painters seemed to enjoy the increasing freedom to experiment and to let their imagination go wild. More and more often they included non-Buddhist themes and motifs, like for example realistic looking genre scenes, crime scenes, scenes involving foreigners and ethnic minorities, as well as fantastic erotic scenes of humans, animals and supernatural beings. Sometimes such scenes were smartly built into Buddhist scenes (Jatakas or scenes from the life of Buddha, for example). The educational value of erotic scenes on temple walls is questionable though. It is more likely that painters aimed to transform narrative imagery into visual images, or to express their own sense of humour. The inclusion of humorous scenes may also have helped the artists – and temples - to gain popularity since humoristic elements were traditionally much appreciated in Thai literature, performing arts and everyday communication.



Mural painting showing a scene from the Bhuridatta Jātaka. A snake hunter (upper right corner) is approaching the serpent Bhuridatta and thus disturbing the erotic play and sexual intercourse of nāga maidens in human shape with male humans or dēva. Note the dark background which became fashionable in manuscript painting only around the 1850s. Wat Nai Rong, late 18th or early 19th century (Source: Preecha Kanchanakom, 1980, p. 15)



Mural painting depicting a detail from a funeral scene. In the upper left corner, one can see two phrām (Brahmin) with their pointy white hats within a walled area. In the upper

right corner, outside the walled area, actors and musicians are shown on a roofed stage. In front of them, a crowd of people engages in an orgy, whereas some people (seen at the bottom of the painting) are fleeing the scene and escaping through a gate. Wat Thong Thammachat, Bangkok, first half of 19th century (Source: Wat Thong Thammachat, 1982, p. 69)



Scene from the Ramakien (Ramayana) with “naughty” monkeys in a forest environment. Gold on black lacquer decoration of a Central Thai manuscript cabinet, second half of 19th century (Source: Setthaman Kanchanakun v.1, 2016, p. 82)



A humouristic animal scene of a monkey and tiger shown in a natural environment while copulating. This could be seen as a naturalistic scene, but actually depicts animal life as imagined in the heavenly Himavanta forest. Gold on black lacquer decoration of a Central Thai manuscript cabinet, second half of 19th century (private collection).

Conclusions

Thai manuscript painting is a fine art form which can be used to explore, understand or explain ideas and ideals, thoughts, beliefs, values, moods, humour, attitudes, artistic trends / traditions / innovations / imaginations. It may also be used to reconstruct narratives, including rumour and gossip, in a historical perspective. However, we need to respect the fact that Thai artists, though usually working anonymously and on commission, would have had a strong desire to show their skill, their knowledge, their imagination and creativity, their sense of humour, and thus to express themselves. This desire became increasingly obvious during the 19th century.

Manuscript illustrations can also be used as supportive evidence of otherwise established facts, for example through historical records, recorded narratives, eye witness reports, photographic evidence, newspaper reports etc. Caution is necessary if manuscript paintings are used as sole evidence in ethnographic, historic or cultural research - for example to illustrate logical conclusions resulting from other facts - when no other evidence can be found. Manuscript paintings are not an acceptable "Ersatz" for missing historical records, documentary photography, or other written and material evidence.

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Panel of the Southeast Asia Library Group

‘Collecting, Preserving, Showcasing: Cultural Pasts of Southeast Asia’

Convenors: *Holger Warnk (Frankfurt) and Dr. Doris Jedamski (Leiden)*

Globalization, new communication technologies, digitization - all buzz-words to some extent – are both stimulating and challenging the world of library collections and archives. The act of collecting itself has tremendously changed in nature, so have the expectations of users of collections. Over the last two decades, the phenomena behind those buzz-words showed an undeniable impact on the ways sources and materials from other cultures were collected, preserved, made accessible and showcased to the public.

At the same time – and at least as importantly - those developments have been shaping and changing the user experience. With a focus on collections from, in, and on Southeast Asia, this panel seeks to explore the changing dynamics of the interaction between the collection/archive holders and their clientele but also the change in physical aspects, storage, and presentation/showcasing of the collections. Hence one question might be: What kind of sources will survive longer – physical or digital? And what impact does this have on prioritization of certain technologies, or on preservation - related decisions?

Participants in this panel will address the challenges related to collection management and major shifts in library and archive policies, but they will also reflect on the shifts in the actual and/or desired usage of such collections. This panel seeks to facilitate the exchange of experiences between representatives of the library/archival sphere, museums and the scholarly world. Therefore participants from all three fields are welcome.

Please email **paper proposals by 15 May 2017** to Holger Warnk (h.warnk@em.uni-frankfurt.de) and Jana Igunma (jana.igunma@bl.uk), and copy in Dr Doris Jedamski (d.a.jedamski@library.leidenuniv.nl).

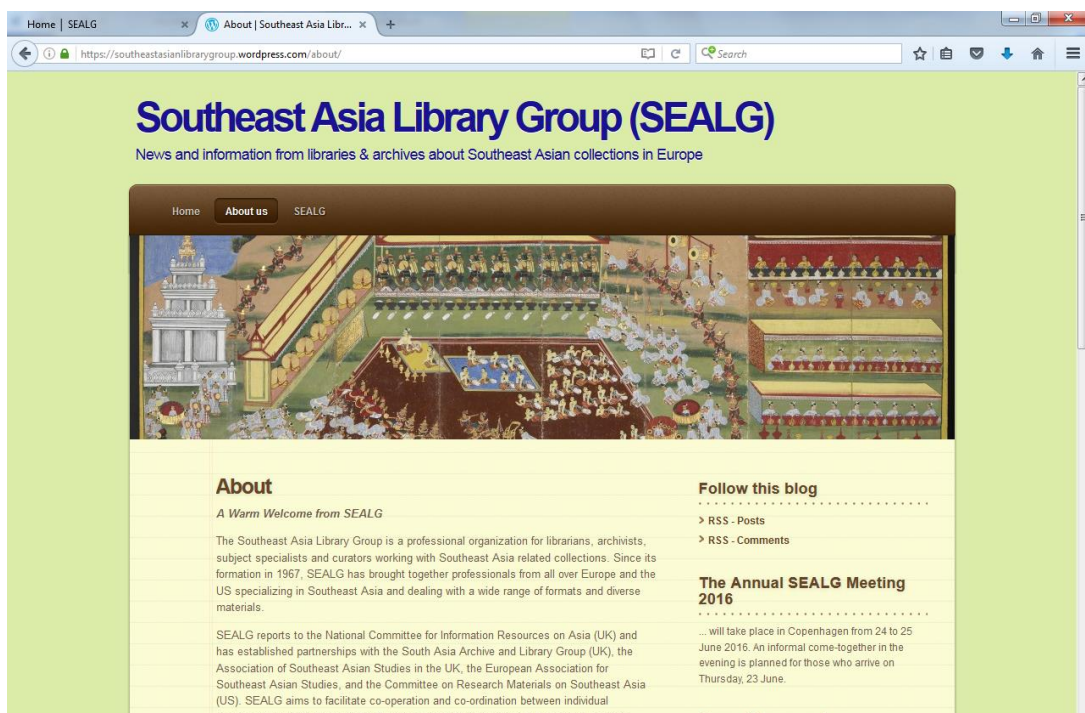
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The British Library

96 Euston Road London NW1 2DB, United Kingdom

Contact: jana.igunma@bl.uk

Cover image: Detail from a Burmese Kamavaca manuscript cover, gold on red lacquer, 19th century. British Library, Or.12010/b

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