Comparison of the Khom Script Manuscripts of the *Majjhimanikāya*
Found in Thailand and Cambodia

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1. Background and Previous Research

According to the study of history of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, specifically in Siamese kingdom and later Khmer kingdom in the previous research “A Problem on the Origin of the Pāli Canon of Khom Script Manuscripts Found in Thailand and Cambodia”, the evidence of transmission of Theravada Buddhism and manuscripts of the Pāli Canon in Khmer Kingdom is scarce and what evidence there is indirect. On the other hand, Siamese and related chronicles show a lot of concrete evidences of the transmission of Theravada Buddhism and manuscripts of the Pāli Canon in the area of the Siamese kingdom. Moreover, most Khom script manuscripts have no colophon which creates difficulty in knowing about their origin and age with any certainty. The data, that appears in the chronicles or historical documents, seems to support the theory that the Khom script manuscripts of the Pāli canon in Cambodia are influenced by those from Thailand. However, the evidence is insufficient to determine the origin in both countries. Therefore, to clarify this issue, a preliminary comparative study of selected texts of the Pāli canon in Khom script manuscripts is necessary. In this paper, a portion of the Mūlapaṇṇāsa of the *Majjhimanikāya* will be used for a comparative study of the Khom script manuscripts found in both countries.

2. Overview of Selected Khom Script Manuscripts

2.1. Selected Khom script manuscripts of the Pāli canon from Thailand (K01–K05)

Five sets of Khom script manuscript of the Pāli Canon from Thailand are selected as research materials. The first manuscript (K01) is found at Wat Phrananchoeng, Ayutthaya. It was created in 1779 CE or Thonburi Period (King Taksin). The second manuscript (K02) is from
National Library, Bangkok, the year of creation is unknown. The next one (K03) is found at Wat Phra Chetupon (Wat Pho), Bangkok. Its edition is Thep Chum Num, the special edition of King Rama III, therefore, its creation time can be dated around 1824–1854. The last two manuscripts (K04 and K05) are from National Library, Bangkok and were created during the Rattanakosin Period (King Rama III). The detail of each manuscript shows as follow.

2.2. Selected Khom script manuscripts of the Pāli canon from Cambodia (K95)

In 2015, the DTP digitized Khom script manuscript of the Pāli Canon from Vat Saravan Techo, Phnom Penh, Cambodia (K95). The period of creating this manuscript is unknown and only one phuk, the phuk number 6, had been found. Its content is Sīhanādavagga of the Mūlapaṇṇāsa in the Majjhimanikāya, beginning from the end of the Mahāsīhanādasutta to the end of the Anumānasutta. The first page of the manuscript shows the text title and the table of contents. The table of contents shows the sutta titles along with alphabetical page numbers, but they are written in Thai language with Khom script.

3. Comparison of Selected Khom Script Manuscripts

When comparing the above Khom script manuscripts, it is useful to include palm-leaf manuscripts from other traditions as well in order to gain a larger view of the manuscript transmission in the Theravada tradition. The process of comparison starts by transliterating the content of each selected manuscript from local scripts such as Khom, Tham, Mon, Burmese, and Sinhalese into the roman script. The transcriptions have been used for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript Code</th>
<th>Inscribed year (CE)</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K01: TH_08_01_004_00_01</td>
<td>1779</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>King Taksin (Thonburi Period)</td>
<td>Wat Phra Nakhon, Ayutthaya, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K02: TH_05_01_036_00_01</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>National Library, Bangkok, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K03: TH_04_01_999_00_01</td>
<td>1824-1854</td>
<td>164-194</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Wat Phra Chetupon (Wat Pho), Bangkok, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K04: TH_05_01_035_00_01</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>King Rama III (Rattanakosin Period)</td>
<td>National Library, Bangkok, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K05: TH_05_01_034_00_01</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>King Rama III (Rattanakosin Period)</td>
<td>National Library, Bangkok, Thailand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1  A detail of five sets of selected Khom script manuscripts of the Pāli Canon from Thailand
creating a synoptic table with reference to the Burmese printed edition (Chaṭṭha saṅgīyana edition) as the preliminary text. Then, the content of all selected Khom script manuscripts and those from other traditions has been compared in the synoptic table word by word.

Based on the palm-leaf Manuscript found in Cambodia, the area of comparison will be focused on the Sīhanādavagga of the Mūlapaṇṇāsa in the Majjhimanikāya texts beginning from the end of the Mahāsīhanādasutta to the end of the Anumānasutta. Its length is around 50 pages of palm-leaf manuscript or 4,670 words. As well as this, manuscripts from other tradition have been used. One set of Tham script and one set of Mon script manuscript from Thailand, five sets of Burmese script manuscripts from Myanmar and five sets of Sinhalese script manuscripts from Sri Lanka.

4. Comparison Result of Selected Khom Script Manuscripts

Even though the overview content of each manuscript is almost the same, many significant omissions and differences are found. For instance, at the end of the
Mahāsīhanādasutta, several words in K01, K02 and K95 are omitted while all of them are available in K03, K04 and K05. Moreover, these kinds of omission pattern appear in other several places, in total more than 50 words.

And, in several cases, we found word transpositions and obvious differences between the group of K01, K02, K95 and the group of K03, K04, K05, in total more than 60 cases.

Based on the comparison result, these selected Khom Script Manuscripts can be divided into two groups: group A (K01, K02, K95) and group B (K03, K04, K05).

4.1. Group A (Thonburi Lineage)

K01 is the manuscript of the Thonburi period (1779 CE) that is the oldest one among these selected Khom script manuscripts. K02 and K95 (manuscript from Cambodia) are very similar to each other but their ages are unknown. However, their content is almost entirely consistent with K01. Therefore, it seems that K01, K02 and K95 come from the same or very close lineage. It could be called Thonburi lineage. As well as this, it seems that some parts
4.2. Group B (Rattanakosin (Rama III) Lineage)

K03, K04, K05 are the manuscripts of the Rattanakosin period in the reign of King Rama III (1824–1854 CE). Therefore, it could be called Rattanakosin (Rama III) lineage. Besides, it seems that some parts of K03, K04, K05 agree with Sinhalese script manuscripts rather than Burmese script manuscripts. Moreover, it feels that some parts of K03, K04, K05 agree with Thai printed edition, Syāraṭṭha edition (Se), rather than the group of the Thonburi Period (K01, K02, and K95).

4.3. Information of Pāli canon in Thonburi period

Information about the Pāli Canon in Thailand and in Cambodia during the Thonburi period (1768–1782 CE) appears in historical documents. In the chapter “Legend of the Royal Pāli Canon” in The Legend of Library, Montein Dhamma library, Vajirañāṇa library, Buddhasaṅgaha Library and the National Library states as follows:

In the last large war in Ayutthaya, the Burmese army did not attack Nakhon Si Thammaraja, therefore, a huge amount of Pāli Canon is surviving there. In the year 2312 BE (1769 CE), king Taksin with his army attacked Nakhon Si Thammaraja and borrowed the Pāli Canon from there back to Thonburi. He also asked senior monks to go to Cambodia and many cities to seek some
texts of the Pāli Canon that cannot be found in Thonburi.²)

This information shows that there existed Khom script manuscripts in Cambodia at least since Thonburi period.

5. Conclusion

The comparison result demonstrates that the examined section of the Pāli Canon in Khom script manuscripts in Cambodia and Thailand come from the same lineage. Moreover, the Pāli Canon of Khom script manuscripts have been available in Cambodia since Thonburi period. It is also possible to state that Pāli Canon of Khom script manuscripts have been available in Cambodia since Ayutthaya period. Therefore, at that time, king Taksin would have known of the Pāli Canon in Cambodia. However, it is also worth noting that during the Ayutthaya period, some parts of recent Cambodia were still vassal states of Ayutthaya.

With regard to the question of whether Khom script manuscripts from Thailand and Cambodia belong to the same lineage and whether they have any significant differences, it seems that the differences are minimal and they both influenced each other.

As to the basic question of whether the Dhammachai Tipitaka Project needs make use of Khom script manuscripts from both countries for creating a database of palm-leaf manuscripts to produce a critical edition of the Pāli canon, based on the information studied, it is sufficient to focus exclusively on the Khom script manuscripts from Thailand.

Notes

2) Translated Srisetthaworakul from HRH Prince Damrong (1916, 4).

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Key words  Majjhimanikāya, Khom script, Palm leaf manuscript, Pāli canon, Siam, Khmer, Thailand, Cambodia, Comparison, Lineage

(DCI-Dhammachai Tipitaka Project Thailand & PhD)