

THE CURRICULAR CANON IN NORTHERN THAILAND AND LAOS

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Abstract

Nissaya texts are idiosyncratic vernacular notes composed and used by Buddhist monks in Northern Thailand and Laos between the 16th and early 20th centuries. They evince a particular relationship of the authors with the classical (i.e., originally composed in Pali) scripture of Theravada Buddhism, as well as with their intended audience. They reflect certain understandings of the notions of authorship, textual authenticity, the possibility of translation, and homiletics. A comprehensive study reveals the early development of Buddhist curricula in the region and a detailed study pedagogical methods used in these texts affords us a way to describe the nature of Buddhist belief and practice with much greater precision. In this paper, I will demonstrate how the choice of source texts by *nissaya* translators and the commentarial services they employ reveal the contours of the pre-modern Northern Thai and Lao Buddhist curricula. By focusing on the development of curricula in the region before the middle of the 19th century, we can avoid the vagaries that come with the application of normative notions of the Theravada Buddhist canon to a region of diverse textual production and disparate intellectual expression.

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Introduction: What defines a canon?

In 1983 Charles Keyes wrote:

"the evidence from monastery libraries in Laos and Thailand...reveals that what constitutes the Theravādin dhamma for people in these areas includes only a small portion of the total Tipiṭaka, some semi-canonical commentaries such as Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, a large number of pseudo-jātaka and other pseudo-canonical works, histories of shrines and other sacred histories. Liturgical works, and popular commentaries. Moreover, for any particular temple-monastery in Thailand and Laos, the collection of texts available to the people in the associated community are not exactly the same as those found in another temple-monastery." ¹

Steven Collins used this statement and the research that supported it to develop his notion of a "ritual canon." The "ritual canon[s]" are the collections of texts used at any particular monastery in the "actual ritual life in the area concerned." ² The term "practical canon," inspired by the work of Collins, was coined by Blackburne in her 1996 dissertation on the *Saratthadīpani* from Sri Lanka and shows how the choice of texts to copy, translate, teach and preserve, both canonical and non-canonical, Pāli

¹ Collins (1990: 103).

² Ibid.: 104; David Carpenter comes to similar conclusions in his study of the canonicity of the Veda. He states that the Veda was "largely a symbolic source for the legitimation of current practice." The Vedas can only be understood as a canon for ritual action and "orthopraxy," not "orthodoxy." The Vedas as a canon and as texts, at least for its commentators like Bhartṛhari, were inseparable from "the conditions of their practical employment." Carpenter (1992: 24-28).

and vernacular, in any given Theravāda community actually must be seen as defining the particular canon of that region and time period. Derris, providing a succinct overview of this modern trend in Theravāda Studies, demonstrates that texts like the Jātakas, the Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā, the Buddhavaṃsa and the Maṅgaladīpanī dominate Southeast Asian monastic libraries and archives.

Although, I do not want to simply create a canon that did not actually exist historically in Northern Thailand or Laos, I want to add to this current discussion in Theravāda Studies by emphasizing a new way to define a "canon" by focusing specifically on what Pāli texts were most commonly translated and were used in educational settings.³ I want to expand this idea of a practical canon by, first, looking at *nissaya* texts in Laos and Northern Thailand. *Nissayas* reveal their pedagogical purpose by the choice of the texts the authors chose to translate and comment upon, and the semantic content of the

stories or the ritual instructions themselves. They also contain linguistic, material, and rhetorical features that serve pedagogical purposes. While certain canonical texts written in Pāli are found, and sometimes in large numbers and wide-spread across a region, the texts that were translated (i.e. *nissayas*) seemed to have formed a practical vernacular canon which dominated language instruction and were the subjects of sermons at rituals and other community events. The *nissayas* may be the evidence of, what I call, multiple "curricular canons." By focusing on what texts were actually taught, copied, and translated, we can break away from the scholarly tendency to study Pāli texts and not their, often quite different, vernacular translations. These curricular canons were not well-copied and beautifully illustrated for royalty and wealthy patrons. They did not remain unread and neglected in the royal libraries or large monastic libraries of Thailand and Laos, nor were they strictly collections of Pāli liturgical prayers, protective chants or blessings. Instead, they were individually fashioned lenses through which individual scholars read, translated and commented on Pāli texts in the vernacular and the individually forged megaphones by which they taught.

What Charles Keyes observed in 1983 can be confirmed today with even the most cursory inventory of the major monastic, royal and governmental manuscript libraries of Laos and Northern Thailand.⁴ Moreover, it was previously noted (although not extensively commented on) by Louis Finot in 1917, George Coedes from 1911 to 1935 and Pierre LaFont in 1982.⁵

³ I thank Oskar von Hinüber for his personal comments on the danger of inventing canons that never existed historically or conceptually.

⁴ See the *Raicheunangseuporānlānnā ekasānmaigrofilm kong stāpanwijai chiengmai: 2521-2533 (Catalogue of Palm Leaf Texts on Microfilm at the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University: 1978-1990) (1991); Panchi Maigrofilm Kwang Luang Pabāng, Haw Papitapa Kwang Luang Pabāng, Hongsamut Haeng St Lao (Catalogues of Palm Leaf Texts on Microfilm from Luang Pabang, the Museum of Luang Pabang and from the National Library of Laos) (1999)*. Vernacular narratives and histories or translations and summaries of Pāli texts in the vernacular dominate these collections.

⁵ See Finot (1917: 1-218); Coedes (1966); LaFont (1965: 429-545).

Generally, the most popular texts were the anisamsas (blessings used in ritual and magical ceremonies), parittas (incantations for protection), chalongs (ceremonial instructions for both lay and religious ceremonies), apocryphal jātakas (non-canonical birth-stories of the Buddha), kamavācās (ritual instructions and rules), local folktales, and tamnāns (relic, image and temple histories).⁶ The first three categories of texts have clear reasons for being the dominant texts preserved in the region due to their everyday usage in house, buffalo, temple and bodily blessings or for their usefulness in cases of revenge, fear, and lust (love potions and incantations are included here). The tamnāns are mostly, but certainly not exclusively, vernacular histories that have political, economic, social, aesthetic and educational reasons for being popular, which I have discussed in another article, but which is largely beyond the scope of this paper. I will discuss the apocryphal jātakas, folktales and kamavācās below. What is important for my purposes is that untranslated Pāli canonical texts are often in the minority in these collections.⁷ Therefore, in 1990 Steven Collins wrote:

*"we need empirical research into each individual case, not a simple deduction from the existence of the closed tripiṭaka produced by the Mahāvihāra. We need more research, for example, historical and ethnographic, on the actual possession and use of texts, in monastery libraries and elsewhere, and on the content of sermons and festival presentations to the laity, to establish more clearly than we currently can; just what role has been played by the works excluded in the canonical list."*⁸

Charles Hallisey surmises that modern scholars of Theravāda Buddhism have

a "common assumption that a closed canon had a rigid and inviolable force."⁹ Therefore, there is often a distinction made between canonical and apocryphal texts that exists in the mind of the scholar, but not the members of individual Theravāda communities. Therefore, following Collins, he notes that :

"an awareness of the special problems which the Theravāda faced in transmitting a systematic, but complex doctrine abstracted from a large and diffuse literary tradition is important for understanding the continuing

⁶ For *paritta* literature in Southeast Asia see Skilling (1992: 109-82); for *tamnāns* see my brief overview in the forthcoming "Transformative History: Nihon Ryōiki and Jinakālamālipakaraṇam," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* and references cited at the end of this paper.

⁷ For example, I recently made a trip to the rural temple in Baan Nawm Lam Jan of Savaanakheth Province in Southern Laos. In this temple's rather large collection of manuscripts I found only one canonical text in Pāli—the *Dhammapada*. Although a few of this temple's manuscripts had been removed for microfilming by the National Library of Laos, the catalogue of the temple's collection held by the library had very few canonical texts and very few in Pāli. It also may be noted that the Pāli *Dhammapada* held by the temple was not complete and clearly, by its placement in the closet (tū) and the dust on its cover had not been untied or read in years (probably since the National Library's survey in 1993, since the label had been tied to the binding cord and neither seemed as if they had been tampered with). Furthermore, the abbot, Luang Pū Pommā, was unaware that he had a Pāli *Dhammapada* manuscript in the collection, but did call many attention to the several manuscripts of Lao folktales.

⁸ Collins (1990: 104).

⁹ Hallisey (1990: 161).

*literary activities of Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. This awareness above all allows us to acknowledge the conditions under which new suttas...could have been composed and accepted in the Theravāda; it is easy to see that the very idea of a closed canon might well have functioned more as a rhetorical marker than as a strictly closed list in contexts where the canon circulated and was known in parts rather than as a whole."*¹⁰

We will see below that the canon was not only transmitted, chanted and held in parts rather than as a whole in pre-modern Southeast Asia, but it was translated and taught in even smaller vernacular parts alongside numerous non-canonical narratives, ritual texts, blessings and grammatical treatises.

John Cort's study of the "canon-near" and "canon-far" of the Svetāmbara Jaina Communities of Gujarat echoes Collins' and Hallisey's call for scholars to pay more attention to what type of collection they are referring to when they use the term "canon." Cort, following Folkert's separation of Jaina scripture into two types of canon¹¹ - Canon I

(canon-near) defined by "praxis" and the

and do not claim to be the words of the Buddha. Therefore, other parameters for canonicity, whether they be chronological, topical or other must be examined. (Norman, 1983: 140). Even the canon was considered closed before the common era, there are texts like the *Milindapañhā*, *Peṭakopadesa* and the *Nettipakaraṇa* which have been included in some Pāli canon collections and not in others. Origen used the term canon as an adjective with the phrase *scripturae canonicae*, but the first nominative use was not until the fourth century. (Childs, 1979: 50). In the Jewish tradition, the definition of canon was simply "sacred writings" that would not "defile the hands." However, examining the philological evidence, we see that the canon meant simply a collection of texts written in a fixed historical period. These texts were decided as sacred by consensus and usually were determined as canonical by their status of being taught as the divinely inspired words of God. Marvin Pope, in his translation and historical study of the *Song of Songs*, elucidates the difficulty in defining canonical and non-canonical works. He gives detailed comparative philological evidence (by connecting to Egyptian love poems or extracting its secular topics) to show that it could be considered non-canonical in the basis of date, literary integrity, authorship, language style and topic. (Pope, 1977: 18, 29-33, 41-49, 66-67, 72 and 85). In scriptural traditions throughout the world and across history, canonicity is often defined, not necessarily arbitrarily, but definitely eclectically based on multiple and over-determined factors. Childs writes:

The term canon has both a historical and theological dimension. The formation of the canon of Hebrew Scriptures developed in a historical process, some lines of which can be accurately described by the historian. Semler was certainly right in contesting an exclusively theological definition of canon in which the element of development

¹⁰ Hallisey (1993: 105).

¹¹ The academic interest in defining the term canon has gained momentum in the last twenty-five years. K.R. Norman believes that a canon of religious texts can either be closed or open. By closed, he means that it consists of a fixed number of texts or utterances to which all additions would be considered the work of theologians, but not the work of the prophet or first promoter of the faith. Norman's study of the canonical tradition of Theravādan Buddhists shows that even though they claim to have a closed canon, many of the works contained therein are not

resultant contextualized understanding; Canon II (canon-far) defined by "authority" and "some intrinsic ontological value of the texts themselves."¹² Cort employs the example of the Kalpa *Sūtra* to illustrate his point. The Kalpa *Sūtra* is a relative "minor" text in terms of its placement in the recognized critical edi-

was subsumed under the category of divine Providence or Heilsgeschichte of some sort. Conversely, the formation of the canon involved a process of theological reflection within Israel arising from the impact which certain writings continued to exert upon the community through their religious use. To seek to explain the historical process leading towards the formation of the canon solely through sociological, political, or economic forces prejudices the investigation from the start. (Childs. Introduction: 58)

This shows us that the canonical process is not on-going and limitless as maintained by James Saunders, but restrictive. However, the restrictions come under shifting rubrics of historical, literary, etc. Jonathan Z. Smith believes that the necessarily limiting function of the word canon that separates canon from commentary is a "radical and arbitrary reduction." (Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982: 43) He states that the only formal element that truly defines a canon is "closure." (Ibid.: 48) The reduction "represented by the notion of canon and the ingenuity represented by the rule-governed exegetical enterprise of applying canon to every dimension of human life is that most characteristic, persistent, and obsessive religious activity." (ibid.) That the making of the canon was a natural development of a religious people who seek to define their religion.

tion of the Prakrit Jaina canon, but plays a primary role in the ritual life of Svemāmbar Jains. Moreover, most Jains conflate the Sanskrit and vernacular commentaries with the Kalpa *Sūtra* proper and consider the sculpted and illustrated representations and vernacular folktales based on these commentaries as part of the canonical sūtra. From this study Cort submits that the Jaina canon is more "fluid" than Western scholars have previously understood. The Theravāda canon of Southeast Asia is also more fluid. Prapod Assavavirulhakarn drew my attention to the fact that Thais use the term *Tipiṭaka* (i.e., the canon) to refer to all types of religious books, not simply the three baskets collected and arranged in Sri Lanka over 1,500 years ago. The monk who holds a printed copy of a vernacular commentary on a non-canonical text while he gives a sermon is considered to be reading the *Phra tripiṭok* (*Tipiṭaka*). Lao monks refer to *nissayas* as *gampī tipidok* (canonical scripture). One of the better selling books in the Mahāmakūṭarājawidyālai Bookstore (the largest religious bookstore in Bangkok) is titled the *Phra tripiṭok chapap samrap brachāchon* (*The Tripiṭaka, (Common) People's Edition*) which claims to be an abbreviated collection (*yō kwām*) of the 45-volume Mahāmakūṭarājawidyālai Edition of the Pāli Tipiṭaka, but includes non-canonical material.¹³ A monastic student's textbook from Rong Phim Kānsāsānā, a

¹²Cort (1992: 175).

¹³Suchīp Buññānuphāp (1996). Studies of what constituted the Tipiṭaka in Burma are also rare. The Royal Orders of Burma report that on April 4th AD 1638 the king ordered the copying of "new sets" of the Tipiṭaka and assigned twenty learned monks as editors-in-chief, thirty as editors and ten

popular press for religious textbooks in Bangkok, publishes a book titled *Bramuan dhamma nai phra Tripiṭok* (*Dhammic Lessons in the Tipiṭaka*) by Suddhipong Tontyāphisālasut, which draws from a mixture of canonical and non-canonical sources.¹⁴ There is no religious bookstore in the country of Laos which sells the Tipiṭaka (either the Pāli Text Society Edition or any of the several Thai editions). Wat Ong Tēu, the central monastic university in Wiengjan, has a copy of the Burmese Script edition that is dusty and apparently unused. Their Thai edition remains unopened with some volumes still in plastic wrap. Pāli grammars and readers in Thailand generally contain passages from canon

cal and non-canonical sources without distinction.

There are some modern books like the *Phra tripiṭok sangkhep* (*The Tipiṭaka Abridged*) which contains only descriptions of canonical texts and monastic Pāli exams are separated into canonical and non-canonical sections (Although the most difficult exams and the ones that, if passed, give the highest respect are the non-canonical ones.). Moreover, Peter Skilling brought to my attention the *Tamnān Hō Phrasamut* (*The History of the Monastic Library*), which provides a detailed history of the copying and/or printing of various Thai editions of the Tipiṭaka from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century and which that generally follows the parameters of the Sri Lankan canon (Although many editions also include the major commentaries, expanding the canon from approximately 45 to 91 volumes.). Still, what is important is that the idea of the canon for most South-east Asian Buddhists is simply wider than is commonly understood in the West or to largely Western educated Buddhist studies scholars at Asian Universities.¹⁵ Evidence from monastic holdings, translation practices, and, as we will see below, *nissaya* texts, leads us to believe that this fluid and more comprehensive sense of the term Tripiṭaka was even more prevalent before the introduction of the printing press (1830's) and foreign notions of what constituted the Theravāda canon.¹⁶

The common Thai and Lao notions of the canon and the research of Court, Collins and others show the difficulty of defining what constitutes a canon and the more insidious problem of allowing a "defined" canon to lead a scholar into assuming that the canon is universally

sub-editors to work at Maha Myal Muni Pagoda. He also had scribes and clerks work under them with thirty Shan guards to protect them. Later that month he ordered the production of 10,008 ivory plaques, 10,008 gold plaques, 10,008 silver plaques from the Ministry of the Interior and food from the Office of Graneries to support the monks and scribes. We have no idea though if these sets of the Tipiṭaka were similar to the PTS canon, what texts they included or left out and if these texts were similar to the long list of texts found on the mid-15th century inscription from Pagan, which is our best source for information on texts held and considered important in pre-colonial Burma. See Than Tun (1983: April, 1638); Luce and Tin Htway (1976).

¹⁴Suddhipong Tontyāphisālasut (no date).

¹⁵ Amnuay Sukhumānan (1989). I thank Peter Skilling for providing me with a copy of this source (as well as dozens of others over the past three years).

¹⁶Peter Skilling also gave me a quick description of the Chiang Mai *Piṭakamāla* manuscript which is a long list (60 folios) of texts in the Tripiṭaka. This text, although as yet unedited and scrutinized, seems to change the order of many texts and expand the parameters of the Sri Lankan canon.

read, understood, held, preserved and unaltered by the religious community that ideally adheres to it. In addition, Collins pointed out a general problem in the study of Theravāda Buddhism that I hope to address. To truly address this general problem, as he points out, we need targeted and specific research of certain regionally important texts. Therefore, the first part of this paper will look in detail at *nissaya* texts. I chose *nissaya* texts, at the suggestion of both Oskar von Hinuber and Charles Hallisey, because they are extremely common throughout manuscript collections in Northern Thailand and Laos and have never been studied by scholars locally or internationally. There is a serious lack of study of *nissayas* as a genre of Buddhist commentaries and early vernacular translations and more generally a total absence of previous studies that focus on the nature of Thai and Lao translations of Pāli texts, of which *nissayas* are the best example.

The *nissaya* genre is unique to Laos, Burma and Northern Thailand.¹⁷ Beginning as early as the 15th century, but becoming much more prevalent between 1720 and 1880, monks began to translate Pāli texts in local vernacular languages using a variety of scripts. These *nissaya* (or "support") texts quickly became a popular medium to express doctrinal teachings, ritual practices, and daily monastic and lay obligations. *Nissaya* texts consist of Pāli words or phrases followed by vernacular translations, usually with numerous commentarial additions by the translator. Many *nissaya* texts were based on canonical Buddhist scriptures originally composed in Sri Lanka in Pāli. However, in many cases the original Pāli text is not cited, or if cited, the Pāli phrase used in the *nissaya* cannot be located in the classical text. Furthermore, scholars in Laos

and Northern Thailand often composed *nissaya* texts on non-canonical texts written in Pāli or on local Pāli narratives that cannot be traced back to an original Pāli version from Sri Lanka or India. These bilingual translations and/or commentaries vary from narratives, strict word commentaries, ritual instructions, and socio-ethical directives, and represent a singular creative endeavor in the emerging pre-modern states of Thailand and Laos. They also reveal a diverse and creative Buddhist scholarly atmosphere, which before now has been largely characterized as uniform and intellectually stagnant.

Nissayas reflect a stage of local Buddhist literature in which composing texts in Pāli was being largely replaced by vernacular translations, commentaries, summaries, ritual instructions and narratives. These vernacular texts either drew directly from the Pāli canon

¹⁷ In Thailand and Laos there are several designations for translations: *nissaya*, *nissai*, *nisai sab*, *khan*, *nisrai*, and *wohān*. I am as of yet unsure as to why authors choose to use one term over another or why some scribes use two or three titles for their manuscript. For example, the *Hā Sip Jāt Nissaya* found at Wat Sung Men is entitled: "*Wohān Hā Sip Chāt Nisrai Hā Sip Chāt*." While I surmise that these titles are synonymous, I have yet to determine whether certain titles are used more in one region or at one time period more than another. In the Critical Study of the Northern Thai Version of the Panyasa Jātaka published by the Dept. of Thai at Chiang Mai University, it is mentioned that no one has found a manuscript of the Panyasa Jātaka in Pāli in Northern Thailand. However, they state that the only difference between *nissayas* and *vohāras* (*wohān*) is the amount of Pāli used in the text. This is oversimplified. *Bhākwijābhāsā Thai* (1978).

and its commentaries or created new texts reflecting a creative engagement between local literary tropes and themes and Buddhist characters and Pāli literary structures.¹⁸ What is particularly interesting about nissayas is that their physical features, rhetorical style and choice of texts translated (object/ source texts) demonstrate that they were most likely employed as teaching aids for monks and novices who were learning to read/listen to and write both Pāli and the vernacular and guides to explaining Pāli words and passages for sermon

¹⁸ McDaniel (2002)

¹⁹ I recently went to the two major monastic universities of Thailand and Laos to inquire about which texts they used to instruct Pāli. At Wat Ong Teu in Laos they do not use a standard Pāli grammar text, but instead, the instructor reads Pāli passages and translated them into Lao for his students. Translation is more at the level of memorization than detailed explanations of grammar or linguistic issues. The text he was using for the lesson on the day I interviewed him was an excerpt from the Dhammapada. At Wat Borworniwet (Mahāmakutarājāwidyalai) in Bangkok, instruction generally takes the form of memorization as well; however, there is a series of short paper-back Pāli grammars for novices. I am still unclear on how they are incorporated in a Pāli lesson and need to investigate further. It may be noted that these grammars were hard to locate at the Wat Borworniwet bookstore and when I asked about what texts novices and monks used for Pāli study I was given a few bi-lingual liturgical texts with Pāli and Thai in two columns. These books are very prevalent at the bookstore and would be too numerous to list here. However the most common ones would certainly be: Phrakhrūrunathamrangsi. *Monpīti blāe samrap Phrabhiksusāmanen lāe Phutthasāsānikachon tua bai*. Bangkok: Wat Arunrāchawararm, 2534 [1991] and the Suatmon chabub lu'ang.

to both the lay and the ordained. The following two sections will provide evidence for this pedagogical thesis and discuss its relevance to the idea of the curricular canon in Northern Thailand and Laos.

What follows is a very brief overview of examples drawn from a wide variety of nissaya manuscripts collected in Northern Thailand and Laos. These are merely representative examples and are part of a more comprehensive study of nissaya texts in progress. The examples will suffice for the purposes of this paper and will show the need to determine what texts were most commonly used in educational contexts, thus helping to identify a curricular canon of a region or individual temple. Still, the larger pedagogical thesis which they support remains tentative and awaits examination of a wider collection of texts, a comparison of nissaya texts with other genres of vernacular commentaries and translation like *vohāras*, *sābs*, *desanās* and vernacular *aṭṭhakāthas* and *ṭikās* from the region, as well as a comparison of *nissayas* with the most common Pāli grammars used by monks in pre-modern Northern Thailand and Laos.¹⁹

Object Texts

Nissaya manuscripts generally range from one fascicle (*phūk*) with approximately nine folios to 12 fascicles with over 250 folios. The choice of what texts the composers of the *nissayas* translated and commented on (object texts) is wide-ranging, but Pāli narratives from the *Paññāsajātaka* and *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* and vernacular stories like the *Madhurāsachampū* and ritual texts such as the *sattaparitta* and various *kammavācās* tend to dominate the different collections. A list of

some of the most prevalent extant nissayas that I have had the opportunity to acquire and read are:

Channāburi Dhammapada Nissaya Mak Cet, Chiang Mai Kāthā Dhammapada Nissaya, Chiang Mai Sūmon Nissaya, Chiang Mai Kit Nissaya, Chiang Mai Atthasālinī Nissaya mak bhaet, Lampāng Kammavācā Nissaya, Lū'ang Pabāng Kammavācā Nissaya, Lū'ang Pabāng Uposatha Khan Nissaya, Lū'ang Pabāng Xai Nōi Nissaya, Lū'ang Pabāng Saman Nissaya Mak Ton, Phrae Madhurāsachambu Nissaya, Phrae Hā Sip Chāt Nissaya, Wiangchan (Vientiane) Panchakanipāt Nissaya, Wiangchan Malai Bodhisat Nissaya, Wiangchan Phrakao Nissaya .

There are several other nissayas less common which I have not examined in any detail as of yet. Still, this list is a representative one and I am confident that it is large enough to allow us to make some generalities regarding the genre.

The choice of what texts and what words from a particular text to comment on and translate in nissaya form can tell us a great deal about the needs of the communities that composed them and what aspects of Buddhism were deemed more important and most necessary to teach, especially in the vernacular. Narratives and ritual texts are chanted or drawn from for instructions at ceremonies such as house-blessings, ordinations, the beginning and end of the rains retreats, etc. Therefore, they provide the perfect subject for sermons by a teacher for the benefit of his fellow monks, nuns and lay followers at these occasions. Translations of Pāli terms found in these texts is a common subject for sermons in present-day Thailand and Laos. The few

dessanās (sermons) from the 17th to 19th century that I have had the opportunity to examine employ a similar method.²⁰ *Nissayas*, like *dessanās*, consist of lists of vernacular synonyms for Pāli terms or translations and illustrative explanations of the object text in question. I will offer a more detailed explanation of these methods below, but for now, what is important to note is that the choice of what canonical and non-canonical Pāli texts from Sri Lanka, as well as Pāli and vernacular texts from Thailand and Laos, to translate was in part an act in service of creating the local culture and provides insight into what texts were considered particularly efficacious for pedagogical purposes. Indeed, by the time the *nissaya* was composed, the Northern Thai and the Lao had centuries of familiarity and belief in Theravāda Buddhism. The *nissayas* may be seen as articulations of a particular understanding of the Theravāda in an attempt to make sense of a world in which the religion of the Buddha constituted the overarching and dominant system of belief and practice. The Lao and Northern Thai people used a foreign, translocal literary practice and plot structure to express their local practices, beliefs, values, social and historical concerns, and vernacular language. These texts are negotiations between the classical and vernacular, the translocal and the local. The *nissayas* incorporate local religious, cultural and linguistic elements into a non-native literary structure. Further research along these lines might lead us far in determining the

²⁰ "There are a few manuscripts from Northern Thailand and Laos which have the titles 'desananissai' or 'voharanaissai'. There was clearly a link between these two genres. However, a full comparison between pre-modern *desanas* and *nissayas* would require a separate study."

different modes of interaction between classical, translocal literature, and local, vernacular literature, among the various peoples of Southeast Asia. By looking closely at *nissaya* texts we can see the evolution of Pāli and vernacular, local Buddhist literature as processual and dynamic, reflecting strong ties to the past and engagement with the present.

Still, aside from these lofty reflections, there may be a very simple reason authors of the *nissayas* chose to translate the object texts they did. The narrative *nissayas* are simply entertaining stories. They may not systematically layout Buddhist ethics or doctrine or provide an accurate history of the Buddha's life, but they are funny, frightening, and memorable stories of magic, family crisis, wealth and love. Donald Swearer and Ranjani Obeyesekere have noted the prevalence of narratives as teaching tools in Theravāda Buddhist societies, and Bōsāenggām Wongtālā notes that stories from the *Paññāsajātaka* collection and other stories are often requested by lay people to be told at religious ceremonies and family events (weddings, funerals, house-blessings, tonsure ceremonies, etc.).²¹ Therefore, monks have to be taught, as I was when I was a monk, to learn these stories and be able to chant them in Pāli. Excerpts from these stories are often the basis for sermons on these occasions. Could this have been the reason these narratives were translated as *nissayas*? It is well-known that monks in Thailand are judged on their ability to relate a good story.²²

Besides Jātaka style narratives, ritual texts are also common object texts for *nissayas*, and there are clear reasons why. The *Kammavācā Nissaya* explains the meaning of the Pāli chanted at one

of the most common and public of Buddhist rituals—the ordination. The ordination ceremony is a time of great celebration and interaction between monks and lay people. Could the *Kammavācā Nissaya* (on the *upasampada*) have been used to train monks who would give a sermon to the lay people who were in attendance at the ordination? The *Sattaparitta* (*Sutmon Nissaya*) is a collection of mantras chanted for protective purposes at a number of Buddhist ceremonies. Therefore, would it not provide a logical subject for a sermon following the ceremony? These questions are basic and difficult to confirm without historical descriptions of sermons, of which there are few, and the ones we have are usually embedded in dramas, epic poems or narratives involving monks. However, a comprehensive study of these descriptions, as is so often the case in Theravāda studies, remains a desideratum.

Besides narratives and ritual texts, there are three *nissaya* manuscripts that I have read that are drawn from the Abhidhamma, seemingly for the purpose of teaching Pāli grammar (as we saw in a few examples given above), which was one of the main activities of any large monastic school. The *Aṭṭhakathāmātikā Nissaya* is a partial translation of the *mātikā* of the

²¹ Bōsāenggām Wongtālā (1987: 208); note also that vernacular epic poems which do not have any particular religious themes like the Thao Hung Thao Cheung and Xin Xai are also often chanted at Buddhist ceremonies in Laos. See Khongdeuan Bunyāwong (2000: introduction).

²² Priyā Jāngkhwanyen, Dhammavacana Wōhān Thai, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2540 [1997]: introduction.

Dhammasaṅgaṇī that seems to also draw from explanations, in a non-systematic way, given in the *mātikā* section of the *Atthasālinī*. However, this is not simply a vernacular sub-commentary or a straightforward translation of the *Atthasālinī-atthayojanā* written by Ñāṇakitti of Wat Panasārāma in Chiang Mai in the late 15th century, although it has certainly been influenced by the methods of grammatical instruction in the latter and helps the "reader" identify grammatical compounds in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*.²³ While the *Atthasālinī* and the *Mātikā* (on the doublets or the triplets in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*) are not specifically grammatical texts, the *nissaya* uses these texts as a matrix on which grammatical lessons are based. These lessons were important to teach the audience how to identify terms (They are term-based grammatical lessons that provide lexicographies of related terms with alternate grammatical suffixes, as the syntax of sentences and long explanations of grammatical rules were usually not the concern of Southeast Asian authors). The identification of terms was important for chanting (to identify the first words of texts as pneumatic triggers) and for sermons that were based on the explanation and expansion of certain key Pāli terms. Furthermore, the *mātikā* of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* has played an important role in the history of Buddhism. In 1900, R.E. Iggle den noted that the *mātikā* 's influence was "felt strongly throughout the whole of the Abhidhamma-Tiṭṭaka. Not

only are the definitions and expansions of the classifications of this *mātikā* the material used in the states of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* itself, but they form the basis on which a large proportion of subsequent discussion is built in the remaining books of the *Piṭaka*."²⁴ He goes on to show that the terminology presented in the *mātikā* is fundamental to understanding how these terms, which generally refer to states of consciousness, are used throughout the whole *Abhidhamma*. The *mātikā* is "used to isolate and establish the make-up of the khandhas... and [the terms in the *mātikā*] acts as a series of focal points."²⁵ For these reasons we can see why the author of the *nissaya* would have wanted to emphasize the terms in the *mātikā* through repetition, rather than translation, because they were technical terms his students would have had to be familiar with if any teaching based on material from the *Abhidhamma* was to be comprehended.

The *Saccasankhepa Nissaya*, another *nissaya* based on a grammatical text, is one of the few *nissayas* that generally follows its source text, but again it is incomplete and there seems to be no particular logic behind the author's decision to translate certain passages from its source text versus others, unless s/he was using the passages in question for the purpose of grammatical instruction unrelated to the source text's purported content. I have not as yet been able to identify the source text (if there is indeed only one) of the *Nāma Nissaya* from Chiang Mai; however, its purpose is clearly to provide a Pāli grammar lesson in Northern Thai. The text is badly broken and difficult to read, but, as far

²³ I have not been able to obtain a copy of A.K. Warder's (1961) PTS edition of the *Mohavicchedanī* or a manuscript copy which may have also been a source text for this *nissaya*.

²⁴Iggle den (1974: ix).

²⁵Ibid.: xi-xii

as I can tell, it is unrelated to the *Nāmarūpasamāsa* or the *Nāmacāra-dīpaka* cited by Oskar von Hinüber in his Handbook of Pāli Literature.²⁶ It is interesting to note that nissayas used for the instruction of Pāli grammar or translation of Pāli grammar texts are largely not found in Laos (Although a full investigation of grammatical manuscripts that may be nissaya-like, although not containing the word in their title, might reveal otherwise.).

The choice of what texts to translate and comment on in the vernacular was, according to the latest manuscript inventories, in no way standardized across the region or even from one temple to the next. While narratives and ritual texts tend to be the most prevalent, there are occasionally nissayas on abbreviated Pāli verses from the *Abhidhamma* and the *Vināya*. Moreover, two manuscripts with the same title copied around the same period are often completely different. For example, *Dhammapada Nissaya* manuscripts (the most prevalent by far) reflect the fragmented nature of the process of composing *nissayas*. One *Dhammapada Nissaya* (*mak* 7) manuscript from Chiang Mai does not seem to have any direct connection to another *Dhammapada Nissaya* (*mak* 7) manuscript from Lū'ang Pabāng. Furthermore, from an examination of different manuscript collections in the region there are sixteen sections of the *Dhammapada Nissaya*. Each section is called a "*mak*."²⁷ Each *mak* is of different length, ranging from 12-34 leaves. These *mak* do not correspond to the Pāli *Dhammapada*'s 26 *vaggas* (chapters) or 423 verses. Moreover, there is not one monastic library that contains all 16. Each *mak* seems to have been composed

independent of the others by different local scholars at different times in different places. I have collected numerous *maks*, but not all 16 and not different "recensions" of an individual *mak*, except for one - *mak* 7. I am attempting to collect and translate as many as possible, but from my experience, I am quite sure many of these *maks* will be mislabeled, have numerous missing or severely damaged leaves or simply be lost. In addition, one manuscript can have several *pecia*. Regardless, I believe that any attempt to collect "all" of the *maks*, place them in sequential order, and translate them as one text would be misleading, as to how they were composed and collected in their original context. It would create a false sense of "completeness."²⁸ I am confident that these *maks* were not composed in order, by one author at one place, or ever bound together as one large manuscript. There is simply no evidence of this for this *nissaya* or for *nissayas* in general. Instead, they are translations of individual Pāli narratives and word commentaries of the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* from Sri Lanka. The Lū'ang Pabāng *mak* 7, for example, is a Lao translation of the 252nd verse and commentary of the Pāli *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* with numerous additions and running sub-commen-

²⁷The best, although somewhat misleading, English equivalent for this term would be "quire" or a several bi-folios sewn together. For a good description of manuscript codicology in Southeast Asia see Schuyler (1908: 281-83); see also the National Library of Thailand's guide to manuscript materials and production (*Bāeprīen nangsēu bhāsāborān*. Bangkok: Hōsamut hāeng chāt, 2543 [1999]; and, their older *Kāntham Samutthai lae Kāntrēm Bāilān*. Bangkok: Hōsamut hāeng chāt, 2530 [1988].

²⁸ I thank Charles Hallisey for enlightening conversations with me about this issue.

²⁶ Von Hinüber (1996: 164-175).

tary or paraphrase. The Lampun *mak* 4 is a northern Thai translation of another story from the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*. These vernacular narratives and word commentaries seemed to have circulated independently and were considered complete texts in and of themselves and never read as a "complete" (i.e., all 16 *maks*) text. I have only found 16 *maks* in different places, this in no way means that 16 was the total number of *maks* of the *Dhammapada Nissaya* in any of these regions. Finally, there is only one *mak* that mentions the name of the author of the manuscript, but the colophon does not indicate whether the monk was the copyist or the original translator and does not mention the date of the work. Determining authorship is often a problem in South-east Asian manuscript studies.²⁹

Unlike modern English translations of Pāli texts published by the Pāli Text Society, *Nissayas* were rarely (if ever) translated as "complete" Pāli texts. The sections of Pāli source texts that are translated are manipulated for pedagogical purposes. When the source text can be identified it is usually a summary of that source text that lifts out Pāli words or phrases and then translates them while leaving many words, phrases, sections, etc. untranslated. Furthermore, narratives are occasionally left incomplete, passages seemingly vital to the plot are missing, and certain characters are emphasized, while others go unmentioned. *Aṭṭhakathāmātikā Nissaya*, the *Atthasālinī Nissaya*, the *Kamavāca*

See Hundius (1990: 35-36).

Nissaya, and the *Dibbamon Nissaya*, are all incomplete translations of Pāli source texts and parts of their commentaries and sub-commentaries(if available). The *Sutmon Nissaya* is a commentary on selected passages of the Thai Sattaparitta (Cet Tammān), which is itself a non-canonical collection of paritta texts. There is apparently no extant Pāli source text for the *Madhurāsachampū Nissaya*, the *Nāma Nissaya*, the *Saman Nissaya*, the *Lokabhāsā Nissaya*, and the *Kit Nissaya*.

The last point I will mention as regards to object texts is that the choice of what texts to translate and comment on in the vernacular was, according to the latest manuscript inventories, in no way standardized across the region or even from one temple to the next. While narratives and ritual texts tend to be the most prevalent, there are occasionally *nissayas* on abbreviated Pāli verses from the *Abhidhamma* and the *Vināya*. Moreover, two manuscripts with the same title copied around the same time period are often completely different.

Rhetorical Style

While reading numerous *nissaya* manuscripts slowly, I soon became aware of certain repetitive syntactical structures, which actually taught me how to read the text. There was gradual lexical replacement at strategic intervals in these structures that allowed me to memorize Pāli vocabulary and their vernacular glosses without a concerted effort, very much like children's songs which slowly add new words within familiar syntactical structures. Three examples may suffice to illustrate my point. First, a *Kammavācā Nissaya* from *Lū'ang Pabāng* (KNLP-1.f 6.3-f.7v.1)

²⁹Many of the manuscripts I have collected or plan to examine this coming year are from Wat Sung Men in Phrae Province, Northern Thailand. There is better evidence for composers of Pāli manuscripts at this temple than at temples in Laos or even in Chiang Mai.

reads:

"**Pucchi** *kō thām nā kō yang nan vaccanena dūai khām wā gandā kō tī dang nee // nāk dūrā nāk ābādha rī phrayādhi thang lāi evarūpa an mī sahāwa pān dang nī // tae thā gu' wā pen dūma pen bao pen nap () santi mī sālile nai kāyya nū'a ton te hāeng thān wū' an seun nāgo rī nak sammanēn // papijānti*³⁰ *gaw papinān khān rap āchariyam sōeng phrā achān vaccanena dūai khām wā natthi bhante bhante khā wai phrā achān // ābādha rī phrayādhi thang lai evarūpa an mī sabhāva bān dang nī // gandā gū' wā pen tūm pen bao pen nap natthi gaw bim sarire nai kāyya nū'a tōn [sic]*"³¹

There is a gloss of the Pāli word *gandā*. First the novice asks what *gandā* means and receives the answer in bold "it is a boil, it is something swollen, it is a nap (); namely, these things are in the body (*sālile*) in the body, (which is) the flesh of you (*te*) of you that spreads over (you). Notice that in this gloss of the Pāli word *gandā* there are two additional Pāli glosses of the words *sālile* (*sārire*) and *te*. Furthermore, between the question, what does *gandā* mean and the answer, it is a boil, etc. there is another phrase which reads "*ābādha* (disease/mistake) means diseases in general; namely, that have characteristics like

of using the indigenous alphabetical system. this." This phrase is repeated again on the next line and then the definition for *gandā* is repeated again in an abbreviated form. Therefore, the reader reads the gloss of *gandā* twice as well as reading the gloss of *ābādha* twice. What is interesting is that *ābādha* had already been glossed in the manuscript several times before. Although not adding anything to the gloss of *gandā*, the gloss of *ābādha* reminds the reader of the gloss of *ābādha* (which this entire section of the manuscript is about), while adding a gloss of a new Pāli word, *gandā*, which is a type of *ābādha*. Moreover, when the glosses of both *gandā* and *ābādha* are repeated alternate spellings of *sālile*, *sahāva*, *pān*, and *tūma* are used *sārire*, *sabhāva*, *bān* and *tūm* (we will return to the issue of orthography and phonetic spelling below). Finally, inserted within these glosses are glosses of common Pāli words like *te* and *evarūpa* and *sārire*, that had already been glossed several times before, and are simply reinforced here. We will return to this issue of reinforcement below.

The second example comes from a *Dhammapada Nissaya* (*mak* 7) from *Channābuli* (f.khāi.3-f.khām.v.1). This example reflects another type of repetitive glossing. On these three and one half leaves alone, although not limited to these leaves, the Pāli words *menḍaka* and/or *setṭhi* are mentioned 47 times. *Menḍaka* is the name of one of the characters in this narrative and *setṭhi* is a treasurer or a wealthy person. Almost every time *Menḍaka* is mentioned, he is called a *setṭhi*. While this in itself is not surprising, what is interesting is how many times *menḍaka* is mentioned and the fact that his name is glossed in Lao nearly every time he is mentioned. For example, although *menḍaka* had been

³⁰Oskar von Hinüber believes this is more likely *paṭijānāti*.

³¹I have typed all Pāli words that are drawn from the nissaya texts in italics and bold throughout to clearly separate them from the vernacular words. If a vernacular word is a cognate of a Pāli word and it is clear from the script and the syntax that the word was read as if a vernacular word then it will not appear in bold face. When the edges of the ms. are broken (which is quite common) or the alphabetical ordering of the folios are missing I have numbered the folios instead

introduced and re-introduced dozens of times in the story on folio khāo.4-5 we find:

"tasmim cā samaye nai kāla mū'a nan menḍakagahapatti rī menḍaka seṭṭhi mī bun sompān an prasōet kwā kon thang lai hā kon an mī bun māk hai katam yang sī sampatti pen seṭṭhi () phū pen kon an ūai nai wiang thi nan lāe pañca dūai thang lai hā kon an mī puṇṇa māk nak menḍakonāma ku' ton menḍaka seṭṭhi phū nu'ng [sic]"

"and at that time at that time when *menḍaka* the householder who is known as *menḍaka* the Wealthy One, the one who has excellent and important merit in greater amounts than all five others who also have ample amounts of merit, (he) obtained the (position) of a wealthy person; namely, a person who is important within that city among the five people who have great amounts of merit. His is known as *menḍaka*, that is *Menḍaka* the Wealthy One."

This is very repetitive and by reading or listening to line after line of glosses embedded in the narrative, the reader/audience would surely not forget the name *Menḍaka* or the fact that he was a wealthy person/treasurer. The repetition of phrases and words at frequent intervals allows the audience and scribe to memorize certain important words like *aham*, *nāma*, *satthā*, *buddha*, *seṭṭhi*, *dhamma*, etc., as well as remember the main characters of the text. Any other reader (listener) or scribe (I was both, since I read, translated into English, and transliterated each manuscript into modern Thai or modern Lao.) would be able to remember numerous Pāli words, many specific to the story in question, and relate the main themes and characters of the story without reference to the text.

In the ninth and tenth folios of the *Sutmon Nissaya* from Chiang Mai, the terms *maṅgala* (auspicious) and *uttamam* are translated five times in exactly the same way. The passage reads "*maṅgala pen maṅgala uttamam an udom ying nak*" ("*maṅgala* is auspiciousness, *uttamam* (means) ultimate"). After reading or hearing this definition five times within two leaves, one surely would not forget it. *maṅgala* in Pāli is spelled the same way in Pāli and Northern Thai, but is pronounced differently (mon-kon)³² and since these manuscripts were most likely were written by a scribe listening to a teacher rather than copied from a written text (a point that will be discussed below), the difference would have been obvious. The Northern Thai word *udom* is phonetically and semantically cognate to *uttamam*. I use the term "ultimate"

³²For more information on how script and pronunciation relate in Northern Thai see Hundius (1990: esp. 101, 127-139). Depending on how the ligature is written and the status of the final consonant in Northern Thai or Lao, two words spelt in identical ways can be pronounced differently. These differences can often be emphasized when reading a text out loud, but would be difficult to discern if read silently without the aid of a teacher familiar with the phonetic parameters of both Pāli/Sanskrit and Northern Thai/Lao. While modern Thai script retains the spellings of words that are derived from Pāli/Sanskrit even though their vocalization does not follow their spelling, the Lao government have changed the Lao script three times in the past century. These changes have effectively dropped all letters from the alphabet which exist for the purpose of transliterating Pāli and Sanskrit. So, whereas the Thai alphabet has three different letters for the palatal, lingual and dental sibilants, in order to be able to write the three sibilants in Sanskrit. The Lao alphabet has dropped all but the dental

to translate *uttamaṃ* versus other possible definitions like "great," "north" or "important" because it takes into consideration the words that follow it *ying nak* (literally "great and heavy"), because when they follow a noun they make it superlative. Therefore, the repetitive definition teaches that *maṅgala* is cognate with Northern Thai (mon-kon), that *uttamaṃ* and *udom* are cognate, even if spelt differently. The definition also employs alliteration.

One of the most excessive cases of repetition is found in the *Aṭṭhakathāmaṭika Nissaya* from Chiang Mai. Here the *nissaya* translates the *mātikā*, or "table of contents", of the *Dhammasaṅgani* (the first book of the *Abhidhamma*).³³ Now Why it would

seem strange to devote an entire *nissaya* to translate the table of contents of one book of the *Abhidhamma*, there is a long tradition of composing commentaries and sub-commentaries and grammatical treatises on the *mātikā* (see section I.C.). This *nissaya* continues that tradition, but instead of explaining the contents of the table, it uses the words in the *mātikā* as a matrix for a Pāli grammatical lesson in the vernacular. For example, the first three folios (six lines per folio) are dedicated to explaining methods for reading compounds involving the compound *vipākādharmā* found in the third verse of the *mātikā*. The first verse is barely mentioned and there is no mention of the second verse, but the third verse found itself the subject of a lengthy and repetitive translation/commentary. A section of it reads:

"vipāka iti mak wā ni adhivacana pen kō arupadhamma () nāmadhamma thang lāi... saddo reu sapdā³⁴ vipāka dhammādharmā iti dang ni attho atthassavācaṇo bōk yang atthavipākādharmādharmānāti

sibilant where the Thai alphabet has two letters for the retroflexed and non-retroflexed "l" in Pāli, Lao has dropped to just one, since there is no phonetic equivalent to a retroflexed "l" in spoken Lao, etc. One of the most notable characteristics of epigraphy in Southeast Asia is the unusually large number of scripts employed to write both classical and vernacular languages. In the numerous Buddhist kingdoms that occupied what is now Thailand and Laos between the 13th and 18th centuries there often seems to be no rigid one-to-one correspondence between certain scripts and certain languages. Moreover, multiple scripts remained actively employed in every region up until the 17th and 18th centuries, even though certain languages fell out of usage. Strangely, there has been no serious attention paid to the question of why so many scripts were used and why a scribe would choose one script over another. I addressed this problem as it relates to scripts used on inscriptions at the 1999 National Conference of the American Oriental Society in Portland, Oregon.

³³ Again I thank Oskar von Hinuber for pointing out that Frauwallner is a better edition of this text than Rhys Davids and that "table of contents" really obscures the meaning of the term; however, I was unable to obtain a copy of this edition before submission. The *mātikā* is a list of terms useful for memorizing a text.

³⁴ *Sabda* is the Sanskrit equivalent for the Pāli term *sadda*. However, speakers of Northern Thai, Lao and Central Thai use the Sanskrit form for this word instead of *sadda* (*sapda*). In other passages of this manuscript the more common and indigenous Thai term *gām* is used.

padassa haeng bot wā vipākadhammadhammāni paṇḍitanaṃ an // veditabbo () nayava dadacchedo reu tang bot vipākadhammadhammānati dang ni vipākadhammadhammāti // padassa haeng paṇḍitena an veditabbo // dhammā reu dhamma dang lāi vipākadhammāvippaccanasabhāvā lae / / attho reu yathā //p// dhammā iti tang nī vipākadhammāti padassa haeng pot wā vipākadhammā paṇḍitena an veditabbo...vipākadhammadhammā nī pen kammadhāreya ching () vakya mā dai pot samāsa wā vipākā dhammā dhammā nī // vipacanaṃ vipāko vipacanaṃ..[sic]"³⁵

"*vipāka* (result) tends to have this *adhivacana* (designation), it is [related to] *arupadhamma* () *nāmadhamma* (the class of abstract concepts)...*saddo* (word) or word [in sanskrit] *vipākadhammādhammā* (states that have resultant quality)³⁶ this means *attho* (the meaning), *atthassavācaṇo* (the verbal expression of the meaning), that which is said, *atthavipākadhammadhammānāti* (the states that have resultant quality with reference to the meaning), *padassa* (of the word), that is of the word *vipākadhammadhammānati* (the states that have resultant quality), *paṇḍitena veditabbo* (it ought to be known by the wise one), the chapter/section or all the words *vipāka-dhammadhammānati* like this *vipāka-dhammadhammāti* //

³⁵There are numerous omissions of the long "ā" in this section and the extra "n" on the end of *vipākadhammānāti* seems to be superfluous. The failure to write the retroflexed "ḍ" after the retroflexed "ṇ" in the word *paṇḍitena* is also common in Northern Thai manuscripts.

(it ought to be known by the wise one) [that is] the [meaning] of [this] word, *dhamma* (state) or all the dhammas (states), namely, *vipāka-dhammāvippaccanasabhāvā* (those things that have the essence of resultant quality and those states that have resultant quality) // *attho* (the meaning) or *yathā* (that which is so) // *pe*³⁷ // *dhammā iti* [means] like this, the word *padassa* (of the word) of the word *vipākadhammā*, (those states that are results) *paṇḍitena veditabbo* (ought to be known by the wise)...*vipāka-dhammadhammā*, (those states that have resultant quality) this [compound] is a *kammadhāreya* [a compound in which the first member modifies the second as an attributive adjective or as a modifying noun or as an adverb], that is () *vakya* (a word) [in sanskrit] that can come, a word (that refers to a type) of compound, namely this *vipākadhammādhammā // vipacanaṃ* (a result), *vipāko* (a result), *vipacanaṃ* (a result)..."

Clearly, anyone who would listen to or read this passage would not forget the term *vipākadhammā* or one of the

³⁶ The English translation of this word was drawn from Rhys Davids (1974: 2).

³⁷ Not only is the compound, either in larger compounds or alone, repeated several times, the translator/commentator uses the term *pe* which signals to the reader (usually not chanted aloud) that s/he should repeat the section that had been repeated several times before here. Since, the section I am translating comes from the beginning of the manuscript, it is unclear what section we are supposed to repeat here. The term *pe* is found throughout the manuscript (f.ghā.5 for example) (which is quite rare in other *nissayas*) and it is similarly unclear which section should be repeated in those instances as well.

compounds that incorporates this word. They would know how to read the compound since the translator/commentator explicitly defines it as a *kammadhāraya* (later on folio ghā.3. the reader is told to read the compound *vipākadhammā* as a *bahubbīhi* type of compound). The importance of the word is emphasized not only by its repetition, but also by the clause *paṇḍitena vēditabbo* ("It ought to be known by the wise".) which is repeated several times throughout this section. Furthermore, when the commentator/translator moves on to comment/translate other sections of the *mātikā* s/he continually returns to the compound *vipākadhammā* or compounds like *vipākasapdā* (f.ghā.5) *vipākajana* (f.ghā.3) or *lokiyavipākakathattārupa* (f.ghō.v.3-4)[sic]. This method is repeated with other words drawn from the *mātikā* of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, like *kusala* and *upādiṇṇa*. The section ends with the translator/commentator giving a synonym for *vipāka* and then repeating the synonym lest the reader/listener forgets. What is strange about this section and several others like it in the *Aṭṭhakathāmātikā Nissaya* is that the semantic meaning of the term under discussion is not translated into the vernacular. Instead, the term is repeated, divided, combined with other words, and given alternate grammatical endings, but never actually translated. The vernacular is only used in this section to divide Pāli words and indicate how to read their suffixes. For example, *haeng* means "of" and indicates that the Pāli word that precedes it should be read in the genitive. I included the Pāli terms in the English translation of this passages to demonstrate to the non-Pāli reader how a non-Pāli reader in pre-modern Northern Thailand may have read it, i.e., not for the semantic mean-

ing, but to learn how to read Pāli compounds. We will see further examples of this type of grammatical commentarial service in the next section.

Repetition is a well-known feature of Pāli texts, especially mantra texts like the *maṅgala sutta* (which is one of the texts partially translated in the *Sutmon Nissaya*). However, *nissayas* employ repetition in different ways. First, repetitive phrases in *nissayas* do not mimic the Pāli passages of the source texts being translated (if the source text is known or even exists). Second, repetition is not for the purposes of ritual praise, does not involve metre, and rarely is associated with litanies of qualities or directives. Finally, because they are vernacular translations that often, but certainly not always, lift Pāli words and phrases from the source texts, they do not simply provide vernacular glosses for the Pāli words, but actually write the Pāli words followed by their vernacular glosses and then often repeat this gloss within the context of the narrative, ritual, or ethical instruction. This repetition of both Pāli and vernacular words is seen clearly by focusing on what I call "reinforcement." Certain Pāli words are consistently glossed in *nissayas*, even though their gloss must have been commonly known. For example, in the *Paññāsajātaka Nissaya*, the first person nominative pronoun *ahaṃ* is glossed dozens, if not hundreds, of times with the Northern Thai word *khā* (I). One would assume that once the word has been glossed once it would be remembered by the reader/audience or would only have to be re-translated occasionally; however, even in the last fascicle (10th) of the *nissaya* we read the phrase *ahaṃ reu khā* (I means I) numerous times. In the *Madhurasachambū Nissaya*, the Pāli second person nomi-

native (and often accusative) plural pronoun *tumhe* (you all) is one of the many relatively simple words glossed dozens of times, with identical vernacular translations over fifteen fascicles. In the *Saccasankhepa Nissaya*, the word *navaka* (ninefold) is repeated seven times in less than two lines of one folio (f.gu.1-2). Other common words, like *puggala* (person), *āha* (s/he said), *evam* (thus), *sutvā* (having heard), are given the same vernacular gloss *ad nauseum* in many nissaya texts.

While there are clear pedagogical reasons for these rhetorical features, what is important now is to note that these narrative, ethical, grammatical, and ritual translations cannot be read as connected texts. The vernacular text is constantly interrupted by glosses of Pāli words and phrases, and the excessive repetition serves to teach vocabulary and to display methods of rendering Pāli words within the bounds of vernacular phonetic parameters and syntactic patterns, rather than provide a simple and accurate vernacular translation of a source text.

Commentarial Services

From the brief overview of the rhetorical features of *nissaya* texts we could argue that *nissayas* should be placed under the rubric of a vernacular commentary, instead of a translation. Before providing an "accurate" translation of *nissaya*, some examples of the commentarial services the texts provide is required.

Nissayas are translations of canonical and non-canonical Pāli texts and, in some cases, vernacular narratives with no extant or known Pāli source text. However, these translations encompass

many of the services most commonly associated with commentaries. Therefore, this section will look at the commentarial services of *nissayas*. Conversations with Charles Hallisey, Louis Gabaude, Donald Swearer, Prapod Assavavirulkaharn and Peter Skilling, and Lily de Silva's introduction to her edition of the *Dīgha nikāya-aṭṭhakathā-ṭīkāṭīnattha vaṇṇanā*, Paul Griffiths' *Religious Reading* and John Henderson's *Scripture, Canon and Commentary* have helped me isolate these commentarial services.

The first service of the *nissaya* is the glossing of individual words. As we saw above, this glossing is repetitive and runs throughout the translation. For example, the *Madhurasachambū Nissaya* from Wat Sung Men of Phrae province provides glosses of the most basic Pāli words, like *ahaṃ* and *dhamma*, as well as less commonly known words like *parasuddha* [*parisūḍha*](pure). The glosses range from simple synonyms in the vernacular to long explanations incorporating other Pāli words (which may or may not be glossed). *The Dibbamon (Dibbamanta) Nissaya* from Wat Mai Suvannabhūmarām in Lū'ang Pabāng, Laos operates more like a bi-lingual dictionary than a textual translation. This is the function usually associated with *wohāra* or *sab* texts, but some *nissayas* provide this service, and indeed some *nissayas* are titled *nisrai wohān* or *nisai sab* in their colophons.³⁸ For example, one passage reads:

"*siddhi man gong kō dī kammaṃ an ko geu wā kām kō dī dhammaṃ an kō geuwā dhamma kō dī saccaṃ an kō geu wā sacca kō dī nibbānaṃ an geu wā*

³⁸ A study of these types of texts remains a desideratum.

nirabbān..."

"*siddhi* (means) powerful, *kammaṃ* is action, *dhmmaṃ* is *dhmma* (law, truth), *saccaṃ* is *sacca* (truth), *nibbānaṃ* is *nibbāna*..." (f.1.v.1-2)

This passage is a clear example of the many ways Pāli words can be rendered in Lao. First, *siddhi* is given the Lao gloss of *man gong* (strong/powerful). Second, *kammaṃ* is glossed with its Lao derivative *kām*. Third, the glosses for *dhmmaṃ* and *saccaṃ* suggest that there is no Lao lexical equivalent (although there are several for *saccaṃ* and *dhmmaṃ* is usually written *dām* in Lao) and simply removes the ending (accusative singular masculine) of the Pāli word (*dhmmaṃ* is *dhmma* (and) *saccaṃ* is *sacca*). However, the last word (*nibbānaṃ*) is translated with an apparent hybrid Sanskrit and Pāli lexeme (*nirabbān*).³⁹

Several pecia (*maks*) of the *DhPN* usually only provide brief glosses for individual Pāli words in the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha*, consisting mostly of synonyms in Lao or Northern Thai; however, there are occasionally different glosses for the same word and/or providing a definition for the Pāli word in question that makes sense only in the context of the particular story. For example, in the *Dhammapada Nissaya* (*mak* 7), there is a gloss for the word *disvā*, that reads: *kō hen yang khao dip kao ngām sōem chum* ("this means (s/he) sees/saw new (and) excessively beautiful rice").

These extended glosses which move many *nissaya* texts out of the realm of translation and into the realm of commentary are similar to the early Chinese translations of the

Aṣṭasahāśrikaprajñāpāramitāsūtra (*Aṣṭa*), examined by Lewis Lancaster in his 1968 dissertation.⁴⁰ Lancaster notes that Chinese translators often inserted their own interpretations and additions into the *Aṣṭa* when translating lists or litanies. This litany expansion is seen in the *nissaya* of the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha* #252. There is a list that mentions beautiful garments, jewels, etc. removed magically from a ram's mouth. In the *nissaya* translation, these items are specified and expanded to include local terms for specific fabrics and the mention of silver as well as gold. Still, the list of foods taken from the ram's mouth is shortened, and ghee and sesame are not mentioned. This may account for the general lack of sesame and ghee in a Lao diet (although there are Lao words for these foods), and therefore a lack of understanding of their value by the author or audience. The same explanation can be given for the addition of specific fabrics, since silk and cotton production and the artistic skill associated with it have been extremely important to the Lao economy and symbols of its local identity for centuries.

The second commentarial service is grammatical explanation.⁴¹ A *Kammavācā Nissaya* manuscript from Wat Pichai, Lampang Province, Northern Thailand reads: "*sammāpetvā kō hai pati ao dūai dī lae hai mī chai-ya an*

³⁹ These hybrid Sanskrit and Pāli lexemes are very common in Thai, Northern Thai and Lao and *Nissayas* often gives both the Pāli and the Sanskrit spelling or a hybrid of the two when they gloss words from Pāli.

⁴⁰ Lancaster (1968).

⁴¹ Oskar von Hinüber has written extensively on the subject of the Pāli grammar of Northern Thai manuscripts. See especially (1983):75-88; (1987): 111-119; (1988a); and, (1988b): 173-74.

lōem sīa ying dī [sic]"("sammāpetvā means that he caused the *pati* (lord) to hand (it) over (it immediately) and he caused (him) to have a complete and successful victory")(f.kāi.v.2). The word *hai* indicates the causative in Northern Thai. In the *Dhammapada Nissaya* (mak 7) (f.kāe.v.5), there is a passage that reads: *alamkaritvā kō bradap yang dūai khrū'ang bradap thang mū'an lāeo* ("*alamkaritvā* means (she) adorned (herself) with all types of ornaments"). The word *lāeo* is a word that, if placed at the end of a phrase, indicates that the verb (s) in the phrase must be read in the past tense. Most grammatical explanations are of the locative, ablative or nominative plural, using the words *nai* (in), *chāk* (from) or *xāk* (Lao) and *thang lāi* (all/many) respectively. Furthermore, the imperative is consistently indicated with the word *chu'ng* or *chong* (Lao). However, there are dozens of examples of Pāli words, not in the nominative singular present, that are never grammatically indicated in the vernacular. This could indicate a poor knowledge of Pāli grammar, but in most cases the grammatical form of the Pāli word seems to be understood by the translator and simply not indicated because it can be understood in context. This follows Lao and Northern Thai grammar, which only indicate tenses and modals if not apparent from the context. Words like *cha* (will/shall) and *lāeo* (already/in the past) are often considered superfluous.

Although most grammatical explanations are relatively simple, there are often efforts to provide more extensive explanations. One passage from the *Sutmon Nissaya* is particularly lengthy. I have translated a section of it as follows:

"*corato wā chōn thang lāi kō dī manusato wā tae chon kō dī amanusato wā tae pāi haeng pī iti* (??) *aggito wā tae fāi iti uddakato wā tae nām iti pisācato wā tae pī wisāt iti khānukato lak tām iti kaṇḍakato...*"[sic]

"*corato* means all those who are thieves, *manusato* means from people, *amanusato* means from the danger(?) of ghosts, *aggito* means from fire, *uddakato* means from water, *pisācato* means from demons, *khānukato* means from an underground (??) root, *kaṇḍakato* means..."

Although this section of the *Sutmon Nissaya* claims to be a translation of the *Maṅgalasutta*, these words are not found in the *Maṅgalasutta*. Moreover, the "-ato" (from -atas) ending usually signifies the ablative.⁴² However, reading the Pāli words in the ablative leads us to wonder why *corato* (the first word of the list) is translated as a nominative plural. However, the scribe could have accidentally omitted the *tae* following *corato*, which would solve the inconsistency. I am genuinely perplexed by this passage's meaning, especially since it is supposed to be part of a translation of the *Maṅgalasutta*, and these words with these endings are not found in any addition of the *sutta* of which I am familiar. Still, what is important for the purposes of this paper is that the author seems to be presenting us with a lesson on a particular grammatical form and seems to be more concerned with that grammar

⁴² K.R. Norman was one of the first to note the particularities of Northern Thai Pāli; namely: "unhistorical gemination of consonants and the converse, unusual retroflexion of dentals, and unusual spellings." They are genuine characteristics of Pāli as it was spoken in Northern Thailand in the sixteenth century" Norman (1983: 144).

lesson than in providing an accurate translation of a source text. Certainly, reading passages like this would ingrain the association of the "-ato" suffix with the ablative marker in Northern Thai *tae*. If we look at the manuscript pedagogically, we may seriously suggest that this passage was designed to be an audience-centered grammar lesson, drawing material from a source text. In this way, the source text becomes the servant of the translation and reverses the general notion of the superiority and inviolability of the "original" or source text. As we saw in section I.B., the *Aṭṭhakathāmātikā Nissaya*, the source text is employed to teach the reader/ audience how to read compounds and the translator only gives the semantic meaning of the Pāli terms in the vernacular when it serves this grammatical end.

The third commentarial service is the clarification of word order. The beginning of the *Dhammapada Nissaya* (*mak* 7) re-orders the words of the initial sentence of a verse in the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*. The sentence reads: "*sudassan ti imam dhamma desanam Satthā Bhaddiyam nissāya Jātiyāvaṇe viharanto Meṇḍaka seṭṭhim ārabha kathesi*" ("'*Sudassan*' the teacher gave this dhamma-sermon while living in the Jātiyā forest near the town of Bhaddiya about meṇḍaka the Wealthy Man"). The *nissaya* translates these words in an entirely different order (Just as I just did in rendering the passage into English!). As in Lao syntax, the time and the place are usually the first things mentioned when relating an event in the past. Therefore, the *nissaya* begins by translating *viharanto* (living/residing) and the last part it translates are the words *kathesi* and *dhammadesana*. This in no way takes away from the meaning of the Pāli sentence, but like any transla-

tion, re-orders the words so as to make the translation easier to understand to a local audience (see: f.1.1-3). Throughout *nissayas*, this manipulation of Pāli word order is commonplace. However, in order to identify where a *nissaya* is changing the word order of the source text, that source text needs to be identified, which is (as we will see below) often difficult if not impossible. Moreover, when the source text can be identified, the translation is often simply a translation of some selected passages or words, or a summary of the source text that is not extant in Pāli or perhaps was written by the translator himself. The *Aṭṭhasālinī Nissaya* is a good example of the former and the *Nāma Nissaya*, the *Madhurasachampū Nissaya*, and *Lokabhāsā Nissaya* are good examples of the latter.

The fourth commentarial service is as a thesaurus of Lao or Northern Thai vocabulary. Often times throughout *nissayas* a Pāli word is given several definitions or at least a list of synonyms. The *Aṭṭhasālinī Nissaya* (*mak* 8) from Chiang Mai, for example, gives numerous different definitions for the word *dhamma*. In the *Dhammapada Nissaya* (*mak* 7) we find a translation of the word *bhariyā* (wife)(f.1v.1). This is followed in Lao with *nāng an pen mahesī su' wā nāng chandapadumā iti* ("an older, upper-class female, that is a *mahesī*, whose name is Madame *Candapadumā*") Here, the Lao provides a simple synonym for *bhariyā* with *nāng*, which does not specifically mean a married woman or wife, but often is a title only given to married women. There are several words for wife in Lao, *mia*, *pariyā* (from *bhariyā*) and *fāen* to name a few, but this author decided to refer to this wife by her title and a very important title at that. *Nāng* is followed

by *mahesī*. *Maheśī* comes from the Sanskrit word for female buffalo and is often translated as queen. It is uncommon in Lao, but would be spelled and pronounced the same way in Lao. This would seem a strange choice as a definition for *bhāriyā* (*kalatta* is also common in Southeast Asian texts) but could indicate an effort on the part of the writer to teach more vocabulary to the audience or the scribe or student monk who may have been taking dictation. Furthermore, *maheśī*, being a Sanskrit word might have also added a sense of importance (as Madame does in English). *Maheśī* is not mentioned in the *Dhammapada-Aṭṭhakathā*, from which this *nissaya* has been translated (i.e., the manuscript that the PTS used to assemble this critical edition of the *DhPA*). Finally, the Lao specifies the name of this woman as she relates directly to this story; namely, *nāṅ chandapadummā*.

In the *Nissaya Nāma* from Wat Phra Dhāt Chōmgūī in Chiang Mai we find other lists of vocabulary that blur the line between a thesaurus and a dictionary. One example reads: "*itthi rēu pū ying // vadhu rēu lūk saphai // bhikkuni rēu bhikkhuni tang itthivadhu bhikkhuni long sichū* (??) *hāeng pubba āo tth āo dh āo long wai āo i wai...*" ("*itthi* (means) woman, *vadhu* (means) daughter, *bhikkhuni* (means) nun, all of these, the *itthi*, the *vadhu* (and) the *bhikkhuni* come (??) previously (one) took 'tth' (and) took dh (and) placed them (??) (and) took 'i' (and) placed it...").(f.1.3) This example (which is unclear and haphazardly written) not only demonstrates that some *nissayas* provide lists of semantically related lexical items, but also that they offer instructions in how to write or, more likely, pronounce the words. Although

I am unsure, the passage that follows the list of "woman, daughter, nun" seems to be the translator's note of how the words can be spelled differently (i.e., replace "tth" of *itthi* with "dh"). Still, the fact that "tth" is in *itthi* and "dh" is in *vadhu* and "i" is in *bhikkhuni* might suggest that these were abbreviations for these words. There are dozens of other examples of these synonyms that demonstrate how a *nissaya* could have worked as a thesaurus or a dictionary for students learning how to listen to, read, and/or write in Pāli and the vernacular.

As we saw in the *Aṭṭhakathāmātikā Nissaya*, the word *vipāka* was given the synonym *vipaccanam*. Later in this manuscript, (f.1.1) in another long and repetitive passage explaining how to read different types of compounds, we find the term *sahāvicāra* [sic] translated with the synonym *savitakka*. The translators and/or commentators of Pāli texts added new Pāli words to the source texts on which they were commenting.

There is another commentarial service that I have only found in the manuscript of the *Madhurasajambū Nissaya*.⁴³ There, several Pāli sentences are given, followed by Northern Thai translations. What is interesting is that the Pāli sentence given seems to be abbreviated with the endings of individual words dropped off and a system of *sandhi*, developed solely for this text. Although I do not have, and actually doubt there exists, an "original" Pāli text for this *nissaya*,⁴⁴ what source the author of the

⁴³ In the *Aṭṭhakathāmātikā Nissaya*, we find a similar type of commentarial service which instructs the reader/listener how to understand *sandhi* rules in Pāli. Folio *ghā*, line four explicitly mentions the reason the long "ā" is found in a compound.

nissaya was drawing on was either from a very poorly written Pāli text, was written by the author of the *nissaya* him/herself to demonstrate his talent in clarifying garbled Pāli, or was a pedagogical technique designed to demonstrate several ways of writing Pāli words or how to manipulate Pāli *sandhi* rules. For example, one Pāli sentence reads: "*khemimaggayaṃ kampiya rūkkha rucei dāmana manipabhābhidhammāga samam manamānicca*" (MRChNP-1-f.ka.v.1). This verse makes little, if any, sense as it is, although individual words like *rūkkha*, *magga*, *abhidhamma*, etc. can be isolated. But without grammatical endings, it would render this passage a litany devoid of syntax. Still, the author of the *nissaya* divided the words and provided endings. Her/his translation reads:

"*khemam maggam yang hon thāng an brasōet siddham an sāmret //yam mak wā yodhammo ree dhamma an dai kāppaya rūkkha ruci dadāma kī bhā kī⁴⁵ an rung rōen an hai lāeo yang () dang chai mak pen dang ton kārabbi dip nan aham rī khaa namāmi kaw wai dhammam yang dhammā aggam an asamam an hā dhamma an ūn cha sem bō dai niccām thang mū'a lāe santi ni () yam samgatatan()m pavaram visuddham...*" (Phūk 1.f.kā.v.3-f.kā.v.5)

This passage is unclear due to damage to the manuscript, but a provisional

translation can be given that reads: "*khemam maggam*' means the way that is excellent. '*Siddham*' means completed. '*yam*' means 'tends to.' 'That *dhamma*' is known as any dhamma whatsoever. '*Kāppaya rūkkha ruci dadāma*' means a forest that is brilliant that gave (), he concentrates his own (mind) (??) on that light. 'I means I. 'I honor' means "to bow to the dhamma, that 'dhamma which is known as the highest', that which is excellent, 'that which is incomparable' [meaning] [one] is unable to find another dhamma which is better. 'Permanent' [means] all the time and peaceful. () 'for that one which is well-joined, excellent, (and) pure.'" Clearly, this passage was not meant to be read as a connected or coherent narrative, but rather provides translations of rather disjointed Pāli phrases. What is important here though is not the semantic resonance of the Pāli or the Northern Thai translation, but instead the way the author of the *nissaya* provides declension markers for Pāli words without markers, most often placing them in the accusative singular masculine. Furthermore, he "corrects" or provides alternate spellings for certain Pāli words, like writing *khemam* for *khemim*, *pavara* for *pabhābhidhamma*, and *rucei* for *rucei*. The clarification of *sandhi* is also interesting, because *pabhābhidhamma* is divided into two unrelated words *pavara* and *visuddhim*. *Manamānicca* is simply rendered as *niccām*. This second example shows how important *sandhi* is in understanding this passage, because the author of the *nissaya* seems to translate the Pāli to say that *dhamma* is permanent, which defies one of the most important teachings of canonical Theravāda Buddhism -- the *dhamma* is impermanent. This Pāli passage and its translation would make any good Sri Lankan or British

⁴⁴ The folktale is described by Dr. Balee Buddhaksa and the *Encyclopedia of Northern Thai Culture* (Saranukrōm watanadham thai phāk nēua) native to Northern Thailand and existing only in the vernacular, it is related to the Lao story of Ōm Lōm Dāeng Khieo, which has no extant *nissaya*.
⁴⁵ Kī is a common (mis)spelling for kō is this manuscript.

Pāli scholar shudder because both the Pāli sentence and its translation butcher canonical Pāli grammar and spelling. We could simply relegate this manuscript to the dust-bin as an example of the poor Pāli training in medieval Northern Thailand or designate it as the product of an exhausted and amateurish scribe. This I believe would overlook some of the most significant facts about the languages of Northern Thai and Pāli in Northern Thailand and the creative and pedagogical aspects of translations in the region in the pre-modern period. Moreover, since we have dozens of examples of "good," normative Pāli in this very *nissaya* and in other *nissayas* and in other manuscripts from the same temple written around the same period, we cannot simply say that the training of this particular author was poor or that the author was completely unaware of his unorthodox translation. In the process of dividing words, the author does not simply add endings and split up the Pāli words and provide vernacular translations. He adds Pāli words that are not found in the Pāli sentence he is translating. Moreover, he not only adds Pāli words and ignores others, he provides vernacular glosses for those Pāli additions. Therefore, as he translates, he is composing a new Pāli text. This is more than a translation. It is a commentary on his own translation and not one of any "original" Pāli source text. These "notes" of the translator provide access into the largely unknown world of pedagogical methods, manuscript production and hermeneutics in medieval Southeast Asia.

From Commentary to Canon to Curricula

From our brief examination of the source texts, commentarial services and

rhetorical style of many *Nissaya* manuscripts, we can tell immediately that they incorporate many of the features of what Buddhist Studies scholars include under the rubric of "commentary." For the last twenty years there has been a growing interest in the study of commentarial practices in Religious Studies. In 1978, Jonathan Z. Smith noted that all religious writing was in some way commentarial, but there had been no serious study of what features were common to commentaries across religious traditions, how commentary defined a canon and what assumptions the writers of commentary make about the "original" text.⁴⁶ Paul Griffiths, Jeffrey Timm, Laurie Patton, Steve Collins, Charlie Hallisey, Karen Derris, Anne Balckburne, John Henderson and others have taken J.Z. Smith's call for a more in-depth study of commentaries seriously, but the study of commentary in religious studies, and especially in Theravada Buddhist Studies, is still an underdeveloped field of inquiry. Paul Griffiths sees commentary as the quintessential way to read "religiously." Commentary is an active process, or what John Dagenais calls "lecturature." Commentary is done for the purpose of "altering the course of the reader's cognitive, affective, and active lives by the ingestion, digestion, rumination, and re-statement of what has been read."⁴⁷ Reading "specialists" in many traditions, especially Buddhist India, guided readers through their own particular interpretation of a "canonical" through commentary. Commentary is thus a "belief-forming practice."⁴⁸ Therefore, in order to understand the particular epistemology of an individual religious commur-

⁴⁶ Smith (1978: 299-300); and, (1982: 45).

⁴⁷ Griffiths (1999: 54).

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 74.

nity, we must look at their commentarial methods to understand how a text was understood at different times by different communities. Griffiths also provides his own definition for what constitutes a commentary, that being: 1) apparent and direct relation to some other work through direct quotation, paraphrase, or what Michael Fishbane calls "multiple and sustained lexical linkages;" and, 2) these linkages should "quantatively" dominate the text, such that, if they were removed, the work becomes incomprehensible. From the brief examples I have given above, it should be clear that *nissayas* are a form of commentary according to Griffiths definition.⁴⁹ However, Griffiths is generally writing about commentaries written in the same language as the object text (i.e., Hebrew commentary on the Hebrew Bible, or Sanskrit Commentary on Sanskrit Buddhist texts). However, a commentary in one language on a source text of a different language does not necessarily change the style or purpose of the commentary. Furthermore, some of the *nissayas* we have seem to be written on Pāli texts that never actually existed prior to the *nissaya*. They often have multiple and sustained linkages to a source text, but that source text is either unidentifiable or almost completely divergent from any extant version of the source text. Or the *nissaya* follows a known source text at points and then makes long detours away from the source or makes a conglomerate vernacular commentary on an idiosyncratic, ad hoc anthology of excerpts from various source texts. These

facts, combined with the fact that *nissayas* are most often written on non-canonical and even non-Pāli texts, shows that if *nissayas* are to be considered commentaries, then they do not reinforce the closure and boundaries of the Pāli canon, but actually work to expand the canon. Furthermore, *nissayas* expand the purposes of a commentary as: explaining a text, justifying its importance in the tradition, and absorbing and replacing the original text.

Three other recent works on commentary are also important to the study of *nissayas*. Laurie Patton wrote an intensive study of the *Bṛhaddevatā* and its multiple commentarial services. By looking at the *nirukta*, *anukramani* and *mūmāṃsā* traditions of ancient India, she shows how the *Bṛhaddevatā* was a creative act that emphasized certain parts and aspects of the *Ṛg Veda* over others.⁵⁰ It also reinforced the sacred and canonical status of the *Ṛg Veda*. Patton, following Bruce Lincoln, J.Z. Smith and Brian K. Smith, shows how the *Bṛhaddevatā* formulated taxonomies of important words and ideas, and thus can be seen as developing the categories of ordering information, and helps us understand the epistemology of a particular community.⁵¹ By emphasizing certain parts of the *Ṛg Veda* and setting them out in lists, the *Bṛhaddevatā* was able to keep the *Ṛg Veda* relevant and viable in a different historical period. Drawing on work done by Gananath Obeyesekere and Lee Yearly, she shows how the composers of the *Bṛhaddevatā* used and manipulated the *Ṛg Veda* to serve the social and intellectual needs of their time. Numerous points in Patton's work are helpful for the study

⁴⁹ Griffiths takes many of his ideas about what constitutes a commentary and different commentarial strategies from John Henderson's comparative study of Confucian, Midrashic, Sufi, Greek and Sanskrit commentaries. See especially chapter five of Henderson (1991).

⁵⁰ Patton (1996: chp. 2).

⁵¹ Ibid.: 27-28.

of *nissaya* as a type of commentary, especially her thesis regarding the manipulation of a canonical text for different historical circumstances. Looking at *nissayas* allows us to expand this thesis in two ways. First, the evidence of repetitive glossing, the introduction of new vocabulary as additions to stock phrases of the *nissaya* texts shows that the composers of the *nissayas* wanted to use the commentary as ways to teach language and help scribes or the audience remember stories. This defined what was important to know as a Buddhist in that community. Second, and more importantly here, by seeing the *nissayas* as primarily educational, we can see how the very choice of what texts to translate and comment on was a way of serving the intellectual and social needs of medieval Laos and Northern Thailand. For example, why would the composers of the *Dhammapada Nissaya* choose the stories to translate and comment upon? Why do most stories chosen by the *Dhammapada Nissaya* writers involve stories of wealthy people finding magic stones or bowls, miraculously becoming rich or controlling famines and wild animals? Why do other *nissayas*, like the *Kammavācā Nissayas*, emphasize the status of certain Southeast Asian tribes or social groups over others, or teach how ordination cures epilepsy? Why was the apocryphal *Paññāsa Jātaka* collection a subject of a *nissaya* and not canonical *Jātakas*, and why did they only organize the stories the way they did? Why does the *Madhurāsachambu Nissaya* have long lists of animals inserted in the middle of the story? The choice of what texts and what words from a particular text to comment on and translate in *nissaya* form can tell us a great deal about the needs of the communities that composed them and what

aspects of Buddhism were deemed more important and most necessary to teach, especially in the vernacular. If commentaries define what is considered "canon" by a particular community, then *nissayas* define a set of texts that were considered "canonical" for the sake of Buddhist education.

Nissayas are evidence of what we can call a type of curricular canon operating in pre-modern Northern Thailand and Laos. This canon did not exist in the minds of the writers and audience, but these texts were the ones taught and copied in the vernacular. They can be called vernacular commentaries on an ad hoc canon composed of Pāli canonical material, Pāli commentaries, vernacular folktales, apocryphal *Jātakas*, locally-assembled anthologies or collections of prayers. This certainly stretches and qualifies our understanding of commentaries. Since certain types of texts were used for different purposes (i.e., *parittas* for life-cycle rituals and warding off bad spirits; *jātakas* for calendrical rituals such as New Year festivals, weekly sermons, calling for rain, *visakha puja*, etc.; *kammavācās* for ordination ceremonies, the establishing of a new monastery, etc.) we can say that there were multiple overlapping canons of texts. *Nissayas* I believed formed one of these "practical canons." Since *nissayas* clearly incorporate pedagogical methods and may have been employed to teach both vernacular and classical vocabulary, syntax, phonetics, etc., I would venture to call them a type of curricular canon. Still, I do not want to suggest that *nissayas* were the only texts used in the day-to-day education at a monastery. There are other types of Pāli and vernacular texts similar to the *nissayas*, like sabs and *wōhāns*, that need to be looked at to determine if they

incorporate similar pedagogical methods. Furthermore, many of the manuscripts in regional archives and monastic libraries have Pāli canonical titles, but on further investigation many are actually vernacular summaries or vernacular commentaries. I merely want to suggest that *nissayas* could have served as notes and guides for sermons and grammar lessons (either to fellow monks or to a lay audience). The examples given in the section on rhetorical style and object texts support this understanding. *Nissaya* traditionally means "support." It is, of course, an old term meaning, on the one hand, the relationship between a young monk or novice and his teacher (*āchārya* or *upādhāya*), or on the other hand, the period of training, support or dependence of a newly ordained monk, usually lasting between five and ten years (*Mahāvagga* I.32,1; I.54,4; I.1,36; V. 1,5; V.4,2). *Nissayas* were just that -- supports or guides written by a teacher for one or a small group of students to guide their translation and study of Pāli texts, and thus enable them to not only learn how to read and write Pāli and the vernacular, but also enable them to explain Pāli concepts for the purpose of a sermon to fellow monastics or to a lay audience.⁵² *Nissayas* are not conducive to reading as a connected narrative, because they are interspersed with Pāli words and because of their definitions and short explanations of their grammatical forms. They are disjointed texts, and to read them straight through would be like reading the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" episode of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, if every third word was followed by its dictionary definition in Italian. They do not read like sermons, stories or instructions, but as notes for telling stories, giving sermons, or explaining instructions. They are supports for those who have to read and

explain Pāli texts to an audience. The choice of the object text depended on its popularity for use in sermons and ceremonial chanting, while the purpose for writing it was to instruct its readers/audience on the meanings of Pāli words and phrases. I doubt any *nissaya* was read aloud verbatim as a sermon or as a narrative, but instead was a reader's/teacher's guide to consult when explaining the meaning of words and phrases in a popular narrative. Since collections of manuscript have vernacular translations of texts, like the *Dhammapada*, *Kammavācā*, *Sattaparitta*, etc., as well as Pāli and vernacular commentaries, there is no reason to have a separate genre of manuscript called *nissayas* unless they served a separate purpose.⁵³ I contend that while translating a Pāli text a student read alongside the object text as a running commentary and translation. But since the *nissayas* often diverge widely from any source text that scholars have come across, they may have been merely inspired or influenced by the structure, ideas and lexicon of a particular source text. The reason for having a middle-stage of translation between a Pāli object text and a straight vernacular translation was to be able to explain the Pāli text to yourself and to an audience -- a student's guide and a teacher's handbook. *Nissayas* (or at least the wide selection of *nissayas* I have examined) most likely served two pedagogical functions. First, they were assignments given orally in monasteries so the student monks could learn Pāli vocabulary in a slow, repetitive way while learning how to use those new words in context and within a

⁵² Oskar von Hinüber suggested to me that *nissaya* could perhaps be derived from the fact that they "lean on" Pāli texts.

⁵³ I thank Prof. Michel Lorrillard for a particularly insightful discussion of this issue.

vernacular syntactic structure. Second, they were used as guides on how to explain certain Pāli texts, perhaps for the purposes of a sermon (this is how monks in Laos use them today and how sermons in Central, Northeastern and Northern Thailand operate). This educational purpose might account for the relatively poor quality of the manuscripts (they lack illustrations, carved and ornamented wooden covers, and elegant lettering, and numerous interlinear and marginal corrections written by the original scribe of the manuscripts in question). It also might provide an explanation of the lack of multiple copies of any individual *nissaya* manuscript. Indeed, these manuscripts might not have been intended as texts to be presented to royalty or other temples or as items of display at a monastery, but instead are the remnants of the "homework," lecture notes, and marginalia of teachers teaching how to translate, or as notes for or recordings of sermons dictated by a teacher to a student.

Could *nissayas* be the result of a long period of experimentation to develop superior pedagogical techniques or the result of an unconscious internalization of the best methods to format a Pāli or vernacular text so as to be easily learned and remembered by the student, whether it be a single monastic scribe or a lay audience? *Nissayas* may have been consciously planned in order to be an effective pedagogical technique for presenting new information and teaching language. Or, perhaps, the pedagogical methods found in *nissayas* are the result of influences of traditional commentarial styles in Sanskrit and Pāli from South Asia combined with local literary experiments with alliteration, repetitive patterns, etc. which served as a model for composing instructional

manuals for giving sermons and language "textbooks" or "readers." For example, two of the most well-known and oft-printed Pāli prayers in Thailand and Laos are the *Sambuddhe* and the *Buddhābhigīti* verses.⁵⁴ Both of these are found in virtually every version of standard chanting books in Thailand and Laos and both have repetitive phrases that frame new information with every verse. Dozens of examples of other Pāli prayers in verse could be cited, and their style could have influenced the prose structure of *nissayas*. Still, while interesting, this "similarity" is too general to be useful.

There are many other possible sources for the pedagogical, repetitive, and reinforcing style of *nissayas*, and some modern teaching methods that mimic *nissayas*, that can be more systematically examined. For example, the general style of sermons in present day Thailand and Laos supports the contention that *nissayas* were primarily pedagogical and that *nissayas* could have been inspired by oral sermons. We have few examples of sermons in Northern Thailand and Laos from before the late 19th and early 20th centuries. From my cursory reading of a number of *desanā* (sermon) manuscripts, it seems that they are very similar with the *nissayas*, at least in the manner of "lifting" individual Pāli words from a particular text and employing several methods to explain the word in the vernacular. Furthermore, one manuscript from Laos is titled a "*nisai-desana*."⁵⁵ Still, the study of *desanā* as a genre of manuscripts remains a desideratum.

The "Phra Dhammadesanā

⁵⁴ See for example the *Suat mon chabap lū'ang* (1975); and the *Suatmon Mū'ang Nū'a chapab sombūn* (1994).

Piyakaraṇakathā" by Phra Kawīwaraṇān and Phra Priyatthīrakhun's "Phra Dhammadesanā Dhammacārikathā" are transcripts of two modern sermons that are based on the repetitive and meticulous (but often fanciful) translations of individual Pāli words and phrases. It also may be noted that audiocassettes of sermons or nightly radio and television broadcasts of sermons in Thailand generally have the style of repetitive lessons based on the creative and multiple translation of Pāli words. Taped sermons by the late Lū'ang Pū Tō of Bangkok and Lū'ang Pū Chā from Ubon Rachātānī Province are very common and particularly good examples of this style. The infamous disrobed monk, Phra Yantra of Kanchanāburi Province, now living in exile in California, would often base whole sermons on the translation of one Pāli term like "tañha."⁵⁶ This repetitive style of translating one term in slightly different is not limited to sermons by monks. On the eve of his 74th birthday, the King of Thailand gave a speech, lasting approximately one hour, on various subjects including a development project in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province and about taking care of dogs. When lecturing the government on the subject of cooperation and equality among its members, he translated the English idiom "double standard." He spent almost 25 minutes breaking down the word into its components and trans-

lating them in different ways and relating this idiom to certain practices of the Thai government. The next day, I asked people in my Bangkok neighbourhood what they remembered about the speech and, besides the humorous story about the dogs, they all could recall the English term "double standard." There were numerous newspaper articles that

⁵⁶ These cassettes can be purchased at many temples and at any religious bookstore in Thailand. This style of giving sermons can also be observed by attending most sermons on full and half moon days in Thailand or Laos. As a side note, I recently went to the two major monastic universities of Thailand and Laos to inquire about which texts they used to instruct Pāli. At Wat Ong Teu in Laos, they do not use a standard Pāli grammar text, but instead, the instructor reads Pāli passages and translates them into Lao for his students. Translation is more at the level of memorization than detailed explanations of grammar or linguistic issues. The text he was using for the lesson on the day I interviewed him was an excerpt from the Dhammapada. At Wat Borworniwet (Mahāmakutārājawidyalai) in Bangkok, instruction generally takes the form of memorization as well; however, there is a series of short paper-back Pāli grammars for novices. I am still unclear on how they are incorporated in a Pāli lesson and need to investigate further. It may be noted that these grammars were hard to locate at the Wat Borworniwet book store and when I ask about what texts novices and monks use for Pāli study I was given a few bi-lingual liturgical texts with Pāli and Thai in two columns. These books are very prevalent at the bookstore and would be too numerous to list here. However, the most common ones would certainly be: Phrakhrūrunathamrangsi' Monpīti blāe samrap Phrabhiksusāmanen lāe Phutthasāsanikachon tua bai (Bangkok: Wat Arunarārachawarāram, 2534 [1991]) and the Suatmon chabub lu'ang blāe (Royal Chanting Book Text and Translation).

⁵⁵ See the *nisai-itipiso-desanā* (ms. 06 01 85 05 003 05) from the Luang Pabang Museum in Laos composed in CS 1199 [AD 1837]. The early date of this *desanā* and its rare title in comparison with other *desanā* could suggest that this is evidence of a transition of texts titled *nissayas* and texts titled *desanā* since *nissayas* declined in production after the 1840's and *desanā* increased. Investigating the differences between *desanā* and *nissaya* would require a separate study.

discussed the King's use of the term and two weeks later it was the subject of a panel discussion at Chulalongkorn University, with four speakers discussing the practice of "double standards" in Thai society. Clearly, the term was repeated hundreds of times, and given multiple translations and interpretations. This is not to say that basing a lecture, sermon or meeting on the translation of a term is unique to Thailand, but that it is a standard way of structuring a sermon or speech, and this gives us a clue as to how to read and explain the excessively repetitive rhetorical style of *nissayas*. Whether sermons in Thailand and Laos were constructed in this way and in turn were a source for the methods found in *nissayas* or vice versa is impossible to say, but the similarities are striking.

The repetitive style of commentaries and sub-commentaries, like the *Aṭṭhasālinī* and the *Aṭṭhasālanī Atthayojanā* that were mentioned above, also are a possible source of the *nissaya* rhetorical style. For example, a passage from the latter reads:

"vā aparo nayo ye akusalā kucchitena ākārena sabhāvena sayanti pavattanti iti te akusalā kusā kupubba si saye"

"Another method [for reading the word *akusalā* in the sentence]: 'those things that are supported by and sustained with a disposition [characterized] by vile modes of acting;' [in this example] *akusalā* is formulated from 'ku' as the first member and with the root 'si' in the sense of 'saye' (to sleep)."⁵⁷

This passage goes on to give several methods for reading the words *kusalā* and *akusalā*. Although more systematic in its explanation of the word *akusalā* than most *nissayas* would be (except for the *Nāma Nissaya* which employs a

similar folk etymological method by breaking individual terms into their component syllables), the repetitive style and focus on individual terms might have been a source for *nissaya* methods of commentary, which could have subsequently influenced translation methods.

Still, this feature of the *nissayas* is also closely akin to a little-studied linguistic feature of Lao and Thai poetry and vernacular religious texts known as "*rōi (hōi) gāeo*." Lao linguist and literary historian, Mahāsila Wirawong, is the only scholar I am familiar with that has seriously discussed this textual practice.⁵⁸ He shows that it was common for local writers to string an alternating and repetitive series of vernacular and Pāli words together like "jewels on a necklace" (i.e. *hōi gāeo*) for reasons of education and aesthetic appeal. The *hōi gāeo* method of composing bi-lingual texts in the region is most likely the result of the mixing of traditional Lao and Northern Thai poetry (that works on the scheme of a repetitive pattern of alliteration, tone alternation and rhyming) with Pāli word commentaries. The result is a unique linguistic feature that allows the reader/audience to easily remember certain Pāli and vernacular lexical items through repetition, alliteration and rhyming. Moreover, the *hōi gāeo*

⁵⁷ *Aṭṭhasālinī Atthayojanā*. (Phumipala Edition. Bangkok):111. I thank Prapod Assavavirulkaharn for helping me read this passage.

⁵⁸ Wirawong, Mahasila (1995: 4-5). In modern Thai the meaning of *roi gāeo* has changed and now simply means prose. This is probably because the earliest non-verse vernacular literature, of which *nissayas* are evidence of, was distinct from Pāli and early vernacular epic poems and verse dramas.

system combined with the type of excessive glossing shown above reflects one of the pedagogical functions of *nissayas*: to tell entertaining, melodious stories or give ritual instructions or ethical sermons while teaching Pāli and vernacular vocabulary and certain important Buddhist concepts. We can see that they were most likely intended to be and employed as language and religious teaching texts and, if so, give us a rare glimpse into the world of pre-modern Theravāda education in Southeast Asia.

The method of translation and commentary found in *nissayas* is also similar to that used in Pāli textbooks at the major monastic schools in Thailand. A survey of the published Pāli textbooks popular in Thai monastic schools shows that no matter the level of the text (beginning with Madhyom seuksā pī thī neung (approximately 7th grade in the American system or 12-13 years old) up until Madhyom seuksā pī thī hok (12th grade) Pāli grammar is taught by a series of Pāli words displaying a certain grammatical suffix or a type of compound followed by its translation in modern Thai. There is rarely any explanation and textbook that consists of repetitive drills where students must translate single words or short clauses from Pāli into Thai. As the student advances the passages to translate gets slightly longer and what little introduction and explanation there was completely disappears. Moreover, what is interesting is that the lessons are drawn randomly from both canonical and non-canonical texts, and the most popular selections seem to be from *paritta* prayers that would be familiar to novices, monks, nuns and lay people from chanting during liturgies. In fact, the most common translations of Pāli texts available in Thai religious book-

stores (besides Buddhist comic books with stories drawn from *Jātakas*) are bi-lingual, word-for-word, translations of Pāli liturgies and *parittas*. While there are too many examples to list and any number of these texts can be bought easily in any major urban center in Thailand, a few examples would be: *Nangsēu rīen klum wijābhrapariwattham*, published by Mahāchulalongkornrāja-withyālai (volumes one through six), 2534 [1991], another six volume series of the same title published by Rongbimsāsana under the auspices of the Department of Education, *Pāli wāiyākorn* (six volumes with additional volumes on selected subjects like verbs and compounds) published by Mahāmakuṭarājawithyālai, 2538 [1995], and, under the same title, a series published by Krombhrayāwajirayān-worarot, 2538 [1995]. For bi-lingual translations of liturgies see these same publishers. I was told by two different bookstore owners that the Mahāmakuṭa editions are the best sellers, but have conducted no independent research.⁵⁹

From the textual evidence we can see that *nissayas* incorporate many of the features of commentaries, or at least commentaries as they are understood in South and Southeast Asia. However, it would be overly reductive and premature to simply label *nissayas* commentaries, place them back in the archives and monastic libraries, and forget about them. *Nissayas* diverge from definitions

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that there is also a series of English textbooks for religious students published by Mahāmakuṭa Monastic University which uses a very similar method to teach English words and phrases through examples drawn from Buddhist stories translated into English that asks the students to translate them into Thai.

of commentary offered by Griffiths, J.Z.Smith, Henderson among others. First, commentaries in the Pāli tradition are usually understood as being in the same language as the source text. Still, it would be overly reductive to call them vernacular commentaries. Second, *nissayas* often diverge widely from their particular source text, often to the point that they seem to be re-writing the source text, inventing entire sections or writing a commentary on a source text that may have never existed as a separate text in Pāli or a vernacular. Third, *nissayas* often contain internal sub-commentaries on their own commentaries of a source text, and it is occasionally difficult to determine whether the author was attempting to teach the meaning of a passage from a source text or comment on her/his own explanation of the source text. Fourth, the source text, as was most apparent in the *Aṭṭhakathāmatikā Nissaya*, is employed as a platform from which to teach grammar, vocabulary, and concepts almost completely divorced from the semantic meaning or original purpose for which the source text seemed to be composed. In this way, the source text plays the role of a canvas that only serves to provide a space for the author of the *nissaya* to paint his own picture and to widen our understanding of a commentary. The source text no longer guides the sequence, structure, or subject of the commentary. It could be compared to a tourist who strolls through a Bangkok monastery inspired by its architecture, images, and residents to compose, in no particular order, a long journal entry on all and sundry subjects. Finally, if commentaries, as J.Z. Smith and Laurie Patton emphasize, define a canon, then the *nissayas* define a canon wholly different from that of the Pāli Tipiṭaka.

Our stroll through the linguistic and codicological world of *nissayas*, guided by the work by Collins, Hallisey, Cort, J.Z. Smith, Patton and others, have shown us that there are many ways to define a canon. I have hoped to emphasize the importance of seeing how texts were used in an educational context, so as to reflect upon what could have been the unstandardized and particular curricular "canon" of a certain region and certain time. Between the 16th and 19th centuries in Northern Thailand and Laos there was a concerted effort to translate and comment on Pāli texts, both canonical and non-canonical. This constant referral to and manipulation of Indic textual methods, rhetorical styles, tropes, and themes of the past in order to comment on the present was part of the general commentarial and translation (oral, textual, architectural, and artistic) culture of Southeast Asia. *Nissayas* were prevalent types of translations and commentaries that manipulated, obfuscated, and elucidated source texts with inventive method of teaching vocabulary, grammar, and occasionally meanings of a seemingly random collection of Pāli texts. These were texts that not only gave the definitions of Pāli words and phrases, but also taught their readers/audience how to incorporate Pāli terms into Lao or Yuan syntax. The pedagogical methods and physical features of the manuscripts show that these texts were listened to, read, collected, and handled. I surmise that from this evidence we can begin to identify, or at least define, the parameters of the general curricula and pedagogical methods for and of monks, nuns and novices (and devoted lay people) of the region and period. This would help us to develop new ways to define what a canon can be.

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