

BUDDHIST LITERATURE IN THAI¹

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Abstract

Buddhist literature in Thai can be divided as follows: translation of Buddhist literature originally composed in other language, and Buddhist literature originally composed in Thai. The first category consists of works translated from the Buddhist canon such as the Tripitaka and, the Arthakatha. The famous Dhammapada belongs to this category. This category also includes translations into Thai of Pali works by the famous monks of the Lanna kingdom. Examples include the Chamadevivangsa and the Jinakalamali. The second category consists of literature originally composed in Thai, and its chief exemplar is the Traiphum, written by King Lithai during the Sukhothai period. These works are inexhaustible sources of knowledge and facts about Buddhism, as well as of Thai history and culture.

Buddhist Literature in Thai

There is a large amount of well-known literature. In our Thai society, there is a lot of famous and well-known literature. Included in this category is Buddhist literature, which is another type of literature that is valuable and is widely accepted by the readers. As Buddhism is the national religion of Thailand, it is not surprising that one finds a large amount of literature showing the deep relationship between Buddhism and Thai society, some of which can serve as valuable historical sources on history of Buddhism in the country.

Buddhist literature are stories taken directly or adapt from the canon. However, this paper will concentrate on Buddhist literature in Thai language, which can be divided into two types: Buddhist literature originally composed in other languages including Pali and later translated into Thai, and Buddhist literature originally composed in Thai.

Buddhist Literature Originally Composed in Other Languages

This includes translations from the Tripitaka and the Arthakatha, as well as those works originally written in Pali by Lanna monks.

Literature Translated from the Tripitaka or the Arthakatha

Translating the Buddhist canon has been going on for a long time. In the year 1957 C.E., when was 2500 Buddhist era, there were large scale activities of translating the canon, both in Pali and Thai. How-

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ever, the language and style of those translations are not quite consistent, for each monk who undertook the translations has his own style. But the idea of translating the entire Tripitaka into Thai was a commendable one, and the effort of translating the whole 45 volumes of the Pali Tripitaka into Thai was an immense undertaking.

There are many books translated from the Tripitaka. It is believed by some scholars understand that there are five of them, viz., the books translated from the major nikayas of the cannon: Diganikaya, Samyuttanikaya, Auttanikaya, and Khuttakanikaya. However, when one considers which of these are to be considered Buddhist literature in Thai, one needs to be careful. Here we will discuss two volumes from the Diganikaya, which strongly deserve to be called Thai Buddhist literature. These are the *Mahasutassansutta* and *Mahaparinibbanasutta*. Among the two, the work most admired and praised is the *Mahaparinibbanasutta*. This is because the writing and the description are very good, both at the level of composition and of translation. The story enables the reader to see clearly the last days of the Buddha before he entered parinirvana. We see clearly how the Buddha felt, what he experienced, how he suffered, and so on. Even when the Buddha was very ill, he walked to the town of Kusinara and announced to the Malla kings of his presence. The writing of the translation is so good that those who are not experts in Pali are aware that this is a superb piece of work. Those who would like to know the events of the last days of the Buddha have to read the *Mahaparinibbanasutta*. Otherwise he or she has to read the

Pathomsompothikatha of Prince Paramanuchitchinoros, especially the last chapters. The language of the *Pathomsompothikatha* is also considered the standard of Thai language.

Another work, the *Mahasutassanasutta*, is related to Thai literature and some Thai customs. The Buddha told about a capital of the world named *Usavati*. This capital was erected by an emperor. The capital's name was *Usavati*. In this city there were many wondrous things that were fit for an emperor, such as jewel elephant, jewel horse, jewel generals, jewel treasures, etc. The *Traiphumikatha* also mentions this story. Hence the two works relate the same story here. But if we are to compare both works, we have to choose the *Traiphumikatha* since it is a later work and the story was written in finer details. How could an earlier work contain more details than a later one? *Mahasutassanasutta* contained just the gist of the story; whereas the *Traiphumikatha* elaborated on the story on a grand scale. Anybody who wants to know where the *Traiphumikatha* got the sources on the emperor from the Tripitaka has to consult this work.

Apart from the Diganikaya, Buddhist literature also appears in the *Kutthakanikaya*, or miscellaneous texts. Those that can be considered literature are: the *Theragatha*, *Therigatha*, *Dhammapada* and *Jatakas*, among others.

Some people think that the *Theragatha* are utterances of the Arahants when they entered the blessed realm. When they entered the Arahamhood, they uttered the words that became the

Theragatha. The word ‘gatha’ means poetic verses in Pali. Considering this, I have the opinion that the arahants actually did not spontaneously utter these words because such utterances should be short. But some arahants ‘uttered’ for ten minutes, or for six to eight pages of text. Who could utter that long? Thus I think that we should change our understanding. The verses of the Theragatha should be considered as ‘reflections’. The Theras reflected upon what they had experienced, and it is not surprising how long they reflect, but they did not spontaneously utter the words.

The other book is the Dhammapada, which is considered one of the most special books in the Tripitaka. It is an anthology, a garland of poetry consisting of many kinds of exquisite flowers. There are altogether 26 chapters in the Dhammapada. The author of the work took short sayings from the various books in the canon and even the words of Buddha himself and arranged them in topics such as old age, greed, happiness, love, anger, and so on. There are works of this kind in other languages such as Sanskrit, which contains excerpts collected from various sources. The Dhammapada consists of material taken from the Buddhist aphorisms. Now I will give you some examples from the chapter on flowers:

“Insects mingle with flowers without destroying their colors and smell, so do monks mingle among the households without destroying the people’s faith.”

“The smell of the flowers cannot flow against the wind. Even the flowers of the Chan Krishna and the Jasmine

flowers cannot do so. The smell of a virtuous person, on the other hand, does flow against the wind. The fragrance of a virtuous person is thus present in all directions.”

When I recited to you these verses, I thought of a later work in Thai which is also an anthology of various aphorisms like the Dhammapada. That is, Khlong Lokniti. Some verses in this work imitated those of the Dhammapada. The following verse has the same content as the one from Dhammapada:

“The smell of a flower always follows the wind and is never against it, But the fragrance of virtue and righteousness is resonant both far and away.”

Another example, this one from the chapter on defilement in Dhammapada:

“Rust born from iron will eat away that iron, so the bad karma committed by a person will eat away that person.”

The same idea appears in the Khlong Lokniti thus:

“Rust born deep inside iron bites and eats the iron, corroding it; Evil deeds born deep inside an evil person will surely punish the one who commits the evil.”

We can see that this verse has exactly the same content as the one from the Dhammapada. In addition, there is this verse from the chapter on love:

“Wherever there is love, there is sorrow. Wherever there is nothing to love, there is no sorrow and no danger.”

This verse has the same meaning as our own saying:

“Where there is love, there is suffering.”

Apart from what I have said, there is another kind of Buddhist literature translated into Thai. This is the Kham Luang. Here I will discuss only three works, Mahachat Kham Luang, Nanthopanantassutta Kham Luang, and Phra Malai Kham Luang.

Mahachat Kham Luang was composed in accordance with the wish of King Boromtrailokanatha. The work was completed in B.E. 2425, making it the first Buddhist poetry in Thai language. The next work is the Nanthopanantassutta Kham Luang, which was translated from the Pali into Thai in the form of Rai Yao or long verses. The translation was done in B.E. 2279 by Prince Thammathibet. We can see that in the work, the author, Prince Thammathibet, repeatedly wrote (both at the beginning and at the end of the work) that he was the author of this Kham Luang. This showed that the author's strong pride in himself. He knew that he was a good poet and was so proud of his work and his ability. However, calling this work a “Kham Luang” raises a question whether it is appropriate or not, since “Kham Luang” means the words of a king. This can mean either the work was composed entirely by a king or by a committee of scholars and poets with the final version approved by the king. The latter was the method used by King Rama of Bangkok. However, Prince Thammathibet called his work a Kham Luang even though when he composed it, he was only a prince, a son of King Borommakot. We might speculate here that

Prince Thammathibet must have been sure of his position as a future king, however, the Prince Thammathibet himself died even before his father did. I am thus quite uncertain that this work should really be called Kham Luang.

The third work of this category is the Phra Malai Kham Luang, composed in B.E. 2280, only one year after the Nanthopanantassutta Kham Luang. Both works are in the form of Rai Yao ending with a Klong Si. Thus, some people believe that both were authored by the same man, Prince Thammathibet. However, if one considers the matters closely, one finds that there is little in the Malai Kham Luang to support this belief. This is because throughout the work there was no mention of who was the author, which was contrary to the character of Prince Thammathibet who was highly proud of his achievement and would never have failed to mention that he authored it. Another argument in favor of the prince's authorship is the evidence that the work ends with a Klong Si. An examination of all the extant manuscripts show that only one manuscript has a Klong Si at the end. Thus it is possible that the Klong might have been added later particularly to the manuscript. Thus I believe that the Phra Malai Kham Luang was not authored by Prince Thammathibet.

Many other famous poets were also very proud of themselves, such as Prince Paramanuchitchinoros and Sunthon Phu. These poets extolled themselves very highly indeed, and when they wrote a book they would never fail to mention about themselves. Thus, if we can't find any mentioning of the names of these poets, we have a strong reason to

believe that they were not the author. An example to illustrate this is the Suphasit Son Satree saying - teach - woman or Suphasit Son Ying, commonly believed to be authored by Sunthon Phu. But we need to consider whether this is actually credible. I think it is not appropriate to base the argument on a single phrase at the end, where the author wrote "let Sunthon's name become widespread throughout the city. "This is because Sunthorn Phu was so well known that he scarcely needed to say this. And after much debate and deliberation I think that the actual author of the Suphasit Son Ying should be Nai Phu Nok Krajab, who had his book published near Wat Pathum Kongkha.

Buddhist Literature Translated from the Works of Lanna People

I have earlier mentioned that Buddhist literature in Thai can be translation from Pali by Lanna monks and later into Thai. I would like to specifically mention three great Lanna monks: Phra Pothirangsi, Phra Ratanapanya and Phra Sirimangalacharya.

The works of Phra Pothirangsi that came down to us are two. The first one is Sihinganidana, which was the history of the Buddhasihinga Buddha image. The second work is Chamdevivangsa. The Buddhasihinga image has an obscure history. Today there are three "Buddha- sihingas" in the country: one is in Nakon Si Thammarat, another is in Chiang Mai, at Wat Phra Singh, and the other is at the National Museum in Bangkok. The first two are quite

reliable as authentic ones; however, the last one has a problem of who built the image and where the image was obtained. When we examine the content of the Sihinganidana, we learn that the image was made by a Lankan king of bronze. The image became very much respected and worshipped by Sri Lankans. When the King of Sukhothai heard of the news, he ordered the Governor of Nakon Sri Thammarat to request the image from the King of Sri Lanka, and the latter actually gave the image to him. I don't think this part is true. Then Nakon Si Thammarat took the image in a boat and delivered it to Sukhothai. The image stayed in Sukhothai not for long, because Khun Luang Pha-ngua, the third king of Ayutthya whose other name was King Boromrachathirat I, defeated Sukhothai and took the Buddhasihinga to Ayutthaya.

Afterwards Khun Luang Pha-ngua's stepson, Phraya Yandis, was appointed governor of Khamphaengphet. He asked for the Buddhasihinga Buddha image from his father. The king was reluctant at first but finally relented and told Phraya Yandis to pick the Buddha image from inside the Buddha's quarter. Phraya Yandis thus bribed the curator of the Buddha's quarter to tell him which one was the Buddhasihinga Buddha image. He told the curator to put a garland of flowers on the hands of the real Buddhasihinga. Then the Buddhasihinga was moved to Khamphaengphet. Afterwards King Mahaphrom of Chiang Rai learned of the news. He then sent an army and defeated Khamphaengphet, taking the Buddhasihinga to Chiang Rai. Then the

king quarreled with King Saen Muang Ma of Chiang Mai who was his nephew. This resulted in a war between the two cities. The result was that the nephew defeated his uncle and took the Buddhasihinga to Chiang Mai. I don't know how many years the image stayed in Chiang Mai. Then Chiang Mai was at war with Ayutthya. There were many wars between the two. When Ayutthya defeated Chiang Mai, the Buddhasihinga was taken down to Ayutthya. But when Burma became dominant and defeated Ayutthya, they took away the Buddhasihinga back to Chiang Mai again. The image stayed in Chiang Mai until King Rama I established Bangkok as the new capital when he took the Buddhasihinga to Bangkok, where the image is today.

What is interesting in this story is that, according to our story, we know that the Buddhasihinga was originally from Sri Lanka and then moved to Nakorn Sri Thammarat. The king of Sukhothai wanted it and told the Governor of Nakorn Sri Thammarat to send it to him. The Governor then had a replica of the image made and sent the replica to Sukhothai. The King of Sukhothai took the image as the real one. When the image was moved to Chiang Mai and when the King of Chiang Mai was about to be defeated by Ayutthya, also ordered another replica to be made. The Ayuddhya people then took the replica of the replica back to Ayutthya. The Buddhasihinga is one of the most beautiful Buddha images there is. The one in Bangkok is different from the one in Chiang Mai because it is in the meditation position, whereas the one in Chiang Mai is in the "Marawichai" position. The one at Nakon Si

Thammarat is also in the Marawichai position.

There is another question. If the Buddhasihinga was highly respected and wanted, why was it never mentioned in the First Sukhothai Inscription? King Ramkhamhaeng had it recorded that there were many Buddha images in the past, but he never mentioned the Buddhasihinga. So one has a reason to believe that in fact the Buddhasihinga was made by Thai people at a very early age. They made the image copying the style of Lankan images. The resulting image was so beautiful that, people believed that it was a real Lankan image. This is a way is what the craftsmen wanted because nobody would want to worshi the image had he known that the image was made by the Thais themselves. Because if the makers told people that they themselves made it nobody would worship the image.

Then after many centuries passed, it had become virtually impossible to tell that the Buddhasihinga was in fact made by Thai people. And the text of Sihinganidana is well known. In order to clarify the issue, I had a chance to meet a Lankan professor when I was studying at the University of Pennsylvania. I showed him a picture of the Buddhasihinga and asked him whether there were Buddha images of this kind in Sri Lanka. He told me that there were. However, I am still unconvinced because I have studied a lot of Lankan Buddha Images and have not found the one like the Buddhasihinga.

The history of the Buddhasihinga reminds me of another important Buddha image in Thailand, the

Emerald Buddha, which is mentioned in the Ratanapimpavangsa by Phra Ratchapanya. The story of the Emerald Buddha is also as doubtful and controversial as that of the Buddhasingha. The original author of the work wrote the whole thing in Pali, and in early Bangkok period the work was translated into Thai. Phra Ratchapanya was a Sukhothai native. He later moved to Lampang. The story handed down to us was that Nagasenathera was in India and he wanted to have something to remind him of Buddha. He thus asked for a favor from Indra, who searched for a precious green stone to make a Buddha image. Indra went to the Vaikuntha Mountain, off Rajagraha, and forced the demons and deities who looked after the treasure there to give him the precious green jewel which was the chief of all the jewels in the world. The demons, however, did not want to give up the treasure to Indra, saying that there was only one such jewel, and if a great emperor was born, he must possess this jewel as one of his seven magical paraphernalia. Indra then asked for another precious stone which was as beautiful. And finally he obtained six pieces of emerald. These stones were sufficient to make a beautiful image of the Buddha. Indra then took the stones to Vishnukarma to make the image. Then Nagasenathera put the relics of the Buddha inside each of the Emerald Buddha. The story told us further that the Emerald Buddha then moved from Pataliputra where Nagasena lived to Lanka. Then the image crossed the sea to Thailand, arriving at the Andaman shore and later on to Nakon Si Thammarat. Then the image moved to Cambodia. The Cambodians reading the

text then thought that the image actually arrived in Cambodia and they thought that Angkor Wat was the place for the Emerald Buddha.

An interesting question is why the ancient Cambodians built Angkor Wat? In fact Angkor Wat was not built to house the Emerald Buddha. When M.R. Kukrit Pramoj traveled to Cambodia, he said that there was a hole beneath the prang, and he thought that the prang was used to house the urn of past Khmer kings and the hole and the fine sand underneath was excavated to collect the fat that oozed out of the corpse. Now when the Emerald Buddha arrived in Ayutthya, the image was taken again to Khamphaeng Phet. When the King of Chiang Rai defeated Khamphaeng Phet, the King of Khamphaeng Phet put plaster on the Emerald Buddha and hid it together with other Buddha images inside a stupa. The Emerald Buddha stayed there for a long time. Nobody knew that there was a priceless Buddha image there. Then in the year B.E. 1977 a lightning struck the stupa, many plaster covered images were seen. One, however, had the plaster cover taken off, revealing the green stone inside. When the plaster was taken off, the Emerald Buddha returned to its beautiful state again. When the King of Chiang Mai learned of this, he took the Emerald Buddha to Chiang Mai. However, when the elephant carrying the image arrived at a crossroad leading to Lampang the elephant happened to want to walk to Lampang and nobody could stop him. So the Emerald Buddha stayed in Lampang for 32 years. Finally King Tilokraj of Chiang Mai took the image to Chiang Mai. The Emerald Buddha stayed in Chiang Mai for 85 years. Then

King Chaicheta of Lan Chang took the image to Luang Prabang, and when the King built Vientianne to escape King Bayinnuang of Burma, he took the image with him. The Emerald Buddha stayed in Vientianne for as long as 215 years. When Somdej Chao Praya Maha Kasatsuk, who later became King Rama I of Bangkok, defeated Vientianne, he took the image to Thonburi. The Emerald Buddha stayed there for four to five years and when King Rama I established Bangkok as the capital he then took the Emerald Buddha there.

An interesting point concerning the Emerald Buddha is what it is made of. King Mongkut once wrote in his *Legend of the Emerald Buddha* that the green stone was originally found in Southern China, around Yunnan Province. Then the ancient inhabitants of Chiang Saen got hold of a piece of this stone and made a Buddha image out of it. The King said further that the makers of the Emerald Buddha could not have been gods, because at the base of the Emerald Buddha some splinters of the stone were found. This was because the craftsmen who made the Buddha did not want to waste the stone so they did not want to cut the splinters off. If the Buddha image was really the work of gods, there could not have been such imperfections. Thus the words in *Ratanapimpavangsa* of PhraRatchapanya, which stated that the Emerald Buddha was made by gods, were refuted. As for the question of what the Emerald Buddha is made of, even King Mongkut could not give an answer during his lifetime. However, the answer was found during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. When he visited Russia and met Czar Nicholas II, the

Czar showed him cigarette box made of Russian jade to King Chulalongkorn and told him that this box was made of the same material as that of the Emerald Buddha. King Chulalongkorn had a close look at the box and agreed with the Czar. Thus the truth was revealed.

Phra Pothirangsi's second work which I will discuss now is *Chamadevivangsa*. This is a chronicle of Lumphun. The story tells us about Queen Chamadevi, who was a Mon. At that time the Mons ruled Lavo or Lopburi. When a hermit created the town of Hariphunchai at Lumphun, he told his deputy to ask her to preside over the newly built city. The Queen journeyed to the city together with 500 monks and 500 skilled artisans. Queen Chamadevi reigned there for as long as 95 years, and her descendants continued to rule the city until King Arthityaraj, who built one of the greatest stupas in the country-Phra That Hariphunchai.

How did this great stupa come into being? The text stated clearly that King Arthityarat went into his toilet to relieve himself. But he was always chased and pecked on by a group of crows every time he did that. So he took a new born baby and raised the baby together with the crows, so that the baby would grow up understanding crow's language. Eventually the King realized that his lavatory sat on top of the Buddha's relics in an urn. So the king ordered the relics to be dug up and held a great ceremony. He then built a great stupa to house the relics. The story after this was not quite interesting until Lumphun was lost to King Mengrai. The last king of Lumphun was King Yiba. This is really in the chronicle. If we consider what

aspects of this story are related to Buddhism, the construction of Hariphunchai stupa. That is all of Phra Pothirangsi's work is, but his name stayed on until today. As for the other two great scholar monks of Lanna, it appears that none of them became as quite famous as Phra Pothirangsi. However, I will now talk about the second great monk, Phra Ratanapanya.

The work of Phra Ratanapanya is *Jinakalamali*. Some scholars call this work *Jinakalamalini*. This work could be regarded as an ancient dissertation, because the author cites ancient texts and commented on them without anything else. He just kept on commenting on those texts. The work concerns the city of Chiang Mai, so if anybody would like to learn the history of the city and how it is related to the development of Buddhism he must study this work. Some might wonder why there are two versions of this work. I used to ask Arjarn SathianPantharangsai why he referred to the work as *Jinakalamalini*; he told me that this title was used since the time of King Rama I. Arjarn Saeng Monwithun, on the other hand, chose to spell the title "*Jinakalamali*" because according to him the ancient Thai texts did not favor the use of tone markers. The work was written so as to facilitate reading. If you have some knowledge of Pali grammar, you would know why the title should be *Jinakalamali*.

The work of the third great Lanna monk, Phra Sirimangalacharya, is the *Mangalatthatipani*. This work is so famous it was mentioned in the Burmese chronicle. This work comments on each of the 38 verses of the *Mangalasutta*.

Every citation is backed up by careful documentation, making this work another good modern dissertation. There are altogether 11 chapters in the *Mangalatthatipani*. I chose to study only two of them for my Ph.D. dissertation. These two chapters were as long as 500 pages or so. This is why I did not carry on and study all the eleven chapters. When I returned to Thailand, a Cambodian monk asked me whether he could continue translating the whole book. I appreciated his dedication, but soon afterwards he disappeared. I have not heard from him ever since.

The works of these great monks have created a tradition which is imitated by later writers. One such tradition is that at the end of the work the author has to tell who he is, what the purpose for composing the work and what he hopes to achieve writing it. That is, the author has to show the poet's pride that I alluded to earlier. From my experience, authors usually state at the end that they hope to be born again in the age of Maitreya Buddha, and to achieve nirvana then. In addition, they also wish that their works last a very long time. For example, *Lilit Talaeng Phai*, composed by Prince Paramanuchitchinoros, ends with the following saying: "Even though the world is coming to an end, may my words live on." I have found the following saying in the Bible, as Jesus said, "Earth and sky may pass away, but my words remain."

Another piece that I would like to discuss here is also a translation from Pali by Thais. This is the *Mahavessantarajataka*. The work consists of Rai Yao. There are two ways to translate the *Jataka*. One way is to translate word by

word from the Pali. The version translated by the Patriarch at Wat Rat-chabophit, the Nipatajataka version of the famous Jataka. The other way is to employ poetic licence to the full and greatly expand the original Pali text. This is the version of Mahavessan-tarajataka that we usually know of in school textbooks. This second way of translating makes a very lively and beautiful text. For example, the Pali "Bhadde" is literally translated as "O prosperous woman." But according to the second way of translating this becomes "O prosperous woman, whose face is as beautiful as golden stars." Or "Es selo" in Pali means "There, mountain." "Es" means "there" and "selo" means mountain. But according to the second way of translating, this becomes "Looking out far ahead, over there lies a great mountain, whose peak plays with the clouds, glittering in white, green, black and red dazzling light of crimson jewels so pleasant to the eyes, ablaze with sunlight, shining like glittering stars and shooting out rainbow colors into the sky..." "Now this is a very beautiful composition. When one reads it one gets a clear picture. This kind of translation is considered a perfect way of translating sermon verses. That is, the content is accurately transmitted, and at the same time the listeners gets to appreciate the beauty of poetic language.

Buddhist Literature Originally Composed in Thai

Buddhist literature originally composed in Thai and not translated from any sources is the Tephumikatha, or Traiphum Phra Ruang by Phya Lithai.

The author collected data for his work from more than thirty original sources. In fact Phya Lithai composed the work as Abhidharma; that is, he would like to make merit for his mother. But this work is mostly ancient geography, which let us know how ancient Thais understood geography, the shape of the world, what earth and sky look like, and so on. "Traiphum" is a description of all the "bhumi" or birthplaces of people and all other beings. There are altogether 31 bhumis, consisting of 11 Khamabhumis, or birthplaces of those who are attached to carnal desire, 16 rupabhumis, or birthplaces of the rupabrahmas, or those who have attained a high level of meditation, and finally 4 arupabhumis, or birthplace of those who attained even higher levels of meditation. If we considers its literary merit, there are only a few bhumis that are worthy of attention. These are the ones describing hell, pettas, animals and humans, especially the latter is so well written. In the chapter on the realm of human beings there are descriptions of the earth as divided into four large 'continents' and 2,000 smaller ones. If the Sumeru Mount is taken as the axis, these for large continents are Uttarakurudvipa in the north. This is like heaven on earth, so many people would like to be born there. Another good thing of this continent is that women in the continent must be consorts of world conquering emperors. So whenever there is such an emperor, he must have his Empress from this continent, and there was actually such an empress, Phra Nang Asantamitta. People in this continent have square faces. This is an excerpt from Traiphum describing Uttarakurudvipa: "The land at the feet of Mount Sumeru is called

Uttarakurudvipa. It is 8,000 yojana wide, containing 500 smaller lands surrounding it. People in this land have square faces. Many golden mountains surrounding their place. The people do not have to earn their living. They do not have to grow rice, but the rice grow themselves and bear milled grains." This kind of rice is called 'Sanjatasali.' And here is the description of women there: "The women are neither fat nor thin. They are very well proportioned." The men are described thus: "They do not know old age" Moreover, "The people of Uttarakuru do not fear anything, for they know neither hot nor cold, and they do not know snakes at all."

In addition to all these good things, there is the Kalapapruksa, one hundred yojanas high and one hundred yojanas wide. The people who want anything, desire anything will get anything they want or desire. So this is the most perfect continent. To the east of Mount Sumeru is the Bupphavidehadvipa. People in this continent have round faces like cartwheels. To the south is Chombudvipa. People have oval faces. And to the west is the Amarakhoyanadvipa. People there have semi-circle faces, which should be the Arabs who wear turbans across their faces.

The Tephumikatha also mentions various animals. Here I would like to

give you an example of the description of the Karavik bird, which is very beautiful example of descriptive language: "The voice of a bird called the Karavik is so beautiful. All the animals love its voice. If the tiger is about to drag a deer to eat, and if hears the sound of the bird he forgets all about the deer. Children who have been beaten and run away from home, when they hear its voice they care nothing about running away at all. Fish in water cease to swim when they hear the voice of the bird. They stand still, amazed."

Each literary work discussed above is Buddhist literature in Thai, which is very valuable for those who are interested in literature in general as well as those who are interested in Buddhist literature. These works are inexhaustible sources of knowledge and facts about Buddhism. Examples include stories about important Buddha images, ancient beliefs, histories of various people and tribes, even knowledge of ancient geography. Studying these literary work still give us benefits no matter how many years separate us from their authors. Perhaps in the future one might get a new insight on Buddhism from these works. And when that arrives there will surely be debates and discussions on new topics. In any case I believe that these literary works will continue to be studied and read, continuing this line of humanistic studies.