

# The *Dhammakāya* Text Genre and Its Significance for Tai-Khmer Buddhism and Modern Marginalisation<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT**—The *Dhammakāya* text genre is a corpus of documents, such as manuscripts, inscriptions and printed books, that shares the same core Pāli passages called “*Dhammakāya*.” The core Pāli *Dhammakāya* identifies the knowledge and qualities/virtues of the Buddha with physical attributes of his body. The *Dhammakāya* text genre can be found in Central Thailand, Northern Thailand and Cambodia, and played a significant role in a range of core Theravada practices, including meditation, Buddha-image consecration (*buddhābhiṣeka*) and individual recitation on the part of intellectuals and ordinary Buddhists in those regions. The earliest extant version of the *Dhammakāya* text genre can be dated back to the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767). Today, the *Dhammakāya* text genre is not well known in Central Thailand, but is still used in Northern Thailand and Cambodia during *buddhābhiṣeka*, as well as the ritual of installing the Buddha’s heart into a Buddha statue or a *chedī*. The *Dhammakāya* text genre disappeared from Central Thai practice during the Fifth Reign of the Rattanakosin Era when the royal chanting curriculum was reformed under Supreme Patriarch Sā in 1880. Around this time, Siam’s *Tipiṭaka* was also revised in 1893. In this article, I examine a corpus of documents belonging to the *Dhammakāya* text genre and its different functions, revealing how a single genre can, in fact, fulfil functions that we may have thought would be at opposite ends of the practice spectrum: from meditation, on the one hand, to consecrations and protective chanting on the other. I then conclude that the disappearance of the *Dhammakāya* text genre from Central Thai practice is further evidence for the suppression of Siam’s “*boran*”,<sup>2</sup> or pre-reform, Buddhism in response to modernist concerns about canonicity and textual authenticity.

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<sup>2</sup> The Thai word *boran* (Khmer: *purāṇ* and Pāli/Sanskrit: *purāṇa*) means “traditional/ancient/old.” This term is used to identify practices (Crosby focuses on meditation practice) that were widespread before the Buddhist reformation that took place during the Fourth and Fifth Reigns. Moreover, in contemporary Northern Thailand, Buddhists still call this ritual and related elements “*boran*.” See Kate Crosby, *Traditional Theravāda Meditation and Its Modern-Era Suppression* (2013), 3-4. See also John Marston, “Reconstructing ‘Ancient’ Cambodian Buddhism” (2008), and Trent Walker, “Unfolding Buddhism: Communal Scripts, Localized Translations, and the Work of the Dying in Cambodian Chanted Leporellos” (2018), 26.

## Introduction

The core Pāli passages of the *Dhammakāya* text genre can be separated into three parts. The first lists thirty parts of the Buddha that constitute the Buddha's *dhammakāya*, body of *dhamma*, and equates those marks with the Buddha's *ñāṇa*, "knowledge", and the Buddha's *guṇa*, "qualities" or "virtues." The second part is followed by verses in praise of the brilliant Buddha's body *qua* the *dhammakāya*. The third section exhorts one in the lineage of the *yogāvacara* (practitioner of spiritual discipline, i.e. meditator) to recollect the *dhammakāya*.<sup>3</sup>

The *Dhammakāya* text genre, the content and use of which will be discussed in more detail below, has been found in Central Thailand, Northern Thailand and Cambodia.<sup>4</sup> The earliest extant version of the *Dhammakāya* text genre discovered to date is the "Brah̃ Dharmakāya inscription", an engraved stone slab from a stupa at Wat Suea, Phitsanulok, dated 1549 CE.<sup>5</sup> The existence of the *Dhammakāya* text genre in inscriptional and manuscript forms, dating back to the early Ayutthaya period, reflects the important role they once had for Buddhist rituals and practices, such as *buddhābhiṣeka*, the consecration of Buddha images. However, during the Buddhist reforms of the Fifth Reign (1868-1910) of the Rattanakosin Era, manuscripts of the *Dhammakāya* text genre and their associated rituals were marginalised and then excluded from Central Thailand. The reasons for this disappearance are still unclear, but, as I shall show below, are probably connected to the Buddhist reforms that took place during the reigns of Rāma V and Rāma IV.<sup>6</sup> While the *Dhammakāya* text genre is still used during *buddhābhiṣeka* in Northern Thailand and Cambodia, it is no longer used in Central Thailand.

It is my argument in this article that the Buddhist reforms that took place during the Fifth Reign resulted in the disappearance of the *Dhammakāya* text genre from Central Thailand. During this time a number of Buddhist texts were classified as "non-canonical" and removed from Siam's "formal canon."<sup>7</sup> As a result, Buddhist texts and associated practices, that were once popular, began to disappear from Central Thai Buddhism. My findings are consistent with the theories of James Taylor, Kate Crosby and others about the suppression of traditional Theravāda Buddhism during the Fourth and Fifth

<sup>3</sup> Walker, "Unfolding Buddhism," 350-51. See also George Coedès, "Dhammakāya," *The Adyar Library Bulletin* XX, no. 3-4 (1956): 261.; and Kitchai Urkasame, "A Study of Elements in Yogavacara Tradition from Tham Scripts Palm-Leaf Manuscripts" (University of Sydney, 2013), 251.

<sup>4</sup> A number of scholars have worked on texts within this genre. See, for example, Damrongrajanubhap (1909), Coedès (1956), Thongkhamwan (1961), Bhāvanāmaṅgala (2003), Reynolds (1977), Bizot (1992), Ploychum (1992), Swearer (2004), Urkasame (2013), Nayokworawat (2013), Crosby (2016) and Walker (2018), using a variety of approaches including textual analysis, historical analysis, ethnography and translation.

<sup>5</sup> Cham Thongkhamwan, "The Transliteration and Translation of Brah̃ Dharmakāya Inscription Dated in 2092 (B.E)," *Silapakorn* 5, no. 4 (1961): 54-58.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Supreme Patriarch Sā revised the royal chanting curriculum in 1880, and further revisions were made to the Siamese *Tipiṭaka* during the tenth Saṅgāyanā in 1893.

<sup>7</sup> "Formal canon" is the canon as a concept and as the ultimate locus of interpretative authority. See Anne M Blackburn, "Looking for the Vinaya: Monastic Discipline in the Practical Canons of the Theravāda," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 284.

reigns.<sup>8</sup> My arguments are based on my analysis of the lists of Buddhist chants in the 1911 edition of *Nang Sue Suat Mon Chabap Luang Khong Somdet Phra Sangkarat Pussadeva* (NSSMCL),<sup>9</sup> and the published records of the tenth Saṅgāyanā, the revision of the Siamese *Tipiṭaka* in 1893.<sup>10</sup> Here, I have found that the *Pakiṇṇaka-gāthā* “miscellaneous verses” section containing *Dhammakāyānussati-kathā* verses (DK) was removed from Sā’s chanting curriculum. In addition, its associated manuscripts—the *Braḥ Dhammakāyādi* (BD) and *Braḥ Dhammakāyādi-ṭikā* (BDT), which once were included in the Siamese *Tipiṭaka*—were omitted from the 1893 Siamese formal canon.

### The core Pāli passages of the *Dhammakāya* text genre

The *Dhammakāya* text genre is a corpus of documents that includes palm-leaf manuscripts, leporellos, inscriptions and printed books, all sharing the same core Pāli passages called the ‘Dhammakāya.’ The core *Dhammakāya* passages are written in Pāli and recorded in different scripts, such as Khom, Tham, Thai and Mūl, depending on geographical continents where manuscripts are found. In this section, I provide the translation of the core Pāli passages of the *Dhammakāya* text genre, so that a reader can understand the content and be able to identify its relationship with the ritual uses in the section below.

[The Body of Dhammas] has the Omniscient Knowledge as the sublime head. It has the realm of Nibbāna, the objective of meditative consciousness, as the sublime hair. It has the Four Absorptions as the sublime forehead. It has Knowledge of Obtaining Great Thunderbolt as the sublime long hair which appears in the middle of the forehead and between the eyebrows, and that hair consists of radiance. It has Knowledge in the practice of the Meditative Recognition of Blue Objects as a pair of sublime eyebrows which is beyond worldly. It has the five eyes of Knowledge as the two sublime eyes. The five eyes include (1) the divine eye, (2) ten Knowledges of the Buddha, (3) Omniscient Knowledge, (4) the clear Knowledge in [knowing] the traditions of the Buddhas i.e., what Buddhas do (not what Buddhists do), (5) the absolute Knowledge in [knowing] the Truth completely. The Body of Dhammas has the Divine Ears as the two sublime ears. It has Knowledge of Gotrabhū as the prominent sublime nose. It has Knowledge of the Fruit of Noble Path and the Fruit of Liberating Truth as a pair of sublime cheeks. It has Knowledge of the Thirty-

<sup>8</sup> Crosby, *Traditional Theravāda Meditation*, 103-142; James L Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State: An Anthropological and Historical Study in Northeastern Thailand* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993), 32, 40-45. See also Walker, op cit, 26, cf. 104, for a list of scholars who have worked on this topic.

<sup>9</sup> See also Justin McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), 234; Wat Ratchapraditsathitmahasimaram, *The Biography of Somdet Phra Ariyawongsakhatayan (Sa Pussadevo) Somdet Phrasangkharat พระประวัติสมเด็จพระอริยวงศาคตญาณ (สา ปุสฺสเทโว) สมเด็จพระสังฆราช*, 3 vols. (Nontaburi: Matichonpakkret, 2015), 95-99.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Chalmers, “The King of Siam’s Edition of the Pāli Tipiṭaka,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1898): 2.

Seven Virtues Contributing to Awakening as the sublime teeth. It has Knowledge of the Mundane Truths and the Supramundane Truths as the sublime upper and lower lips. It has Knowledge of the Four Noble Paths as the four sublime eye teeth. It has Knowledge that clearly sees the Four Truths as the sublime tongue. It has [the irresistible] Knowledge of the Buddha, which is eternal, and nothing can interfere with it, as the sublime chin. It has Knowledge of the liberation, which is the Supramundane Truths, as the sublime tubal neck. It has Knowledge of the Three Characteristics of Existence as the sublime neck. It has Knowledge of the Four Folds of Intrepidity as the two sublime upper arms. It has Knowledge of the Ten Recollections as the gracefully rounded fingers. It has Knowledge of the Seven Awakening Elements as the sublime full chest. It has Knowledge of the Instinctive Disposition in all beings as a pair of sublime breasts. It has Knowledge of Ten Buddha's Powers as the sublime middle trunk of the body. It has Knowledge of the Truth of Dependent Origination as the sublime navel. It has Knowledge of the Five Controlling Faculties and the Five Powers as the sublime waist. It has Knowledge of the Four Great Efforts as a pair of sublime thighs. It has Knowledge of the paths of the Ten Wholesome Actions as a pair of sublime legs. It has Knowledge of the Four Paths of Accomplishment, as a pair of sublime feet, and the Body of Dhammas also wears morality, concentration, and knowledge, as its outer robe. It wears Knowledge of the Moral Shame and Moral Fear, as the great upper robe of discarded cloth. It wears Knowledge of the Noble Eightfold Path, as the sublime under robe, and it wears Knowledge of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, as the sublime girdle.

The Buddha is more brilliant than divine beings and men by means of the Body of Dhammas.

Whatever knowledge, beginning with that of the sublime head, etc., which is omniscience, and so on and so forth, which is, for all the Buddhas, that which is called the "Body of the Dhammas," that knowledge beginning with the head, etc., is the set of marks of the Buddhas called the "Body of the Dhammas" which is the leader away from the world. It is to be recollected repeatedly by one in the lineage of the yogāvacara, who possesses a keen intelligence and aspires to the state of an omniscient Buddha.<sup>11</sup>

### Textual analysis of the core Pāli *Dhammakāya* passages

According to Coedès,<sup>12</sup> Urkasame<sup>13</sup> and Nayokworawat,<sup>14</sup> the *dhammakāya* described in the first section of the *Dhammakāya* passages is constituted by thirty elements which are identified with the Buddha's knowledge and virtues.<sup>15</sup> Twenty-six

<sup>11</sup> See the original core Pāli passages of the *Dhammakāya* text genre in Malasart, "Dhammakāyānussati-Kathā," 49-63.

<sup>12</sup> Coedès, "Dhammakāya," 255-256.

<sup>13</sup> Urkasame, "Study of Elements in Yogavacara Tradition," 246-251.

<sup>14</sup> Nayokworawat, "Dhammakāya in Braḥ Dhammakayadi Scripture," 5-7.

<sup>15</sup> Coedès, "Dhammakāya," 254; Frank E Reynolds, "The Several Bodies of Buddha: Reflections on a

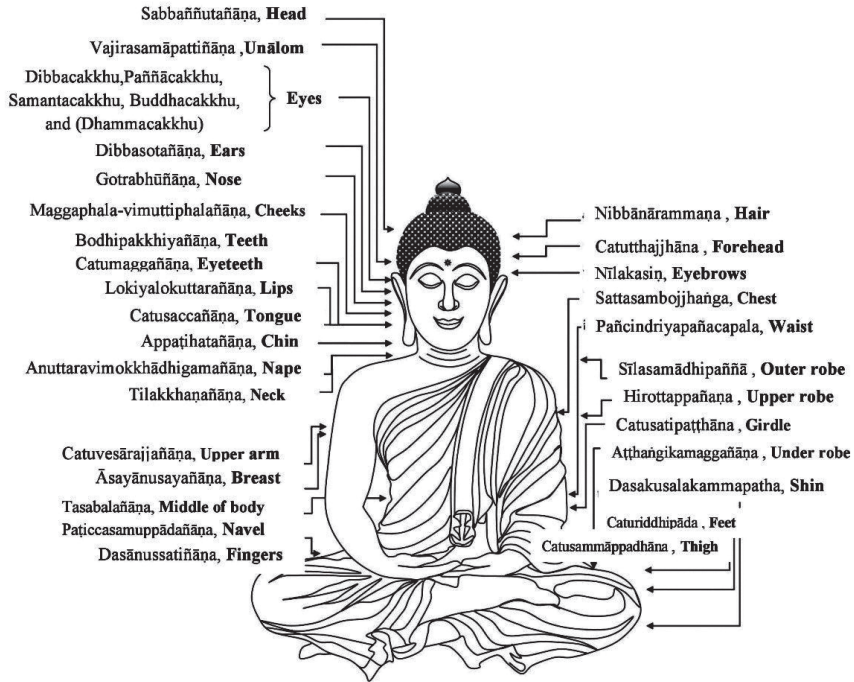


Figure 1. Each element of the dhammakāya corresponding with the Dhammakāya Passages

of these are identified with the parts of the Buddha's physical body and the other four elements are identified with his robe. Most identification contains doctrinal significance. In other words, the features of the *dhammakāya* correspond to the physiological (e.g., the equations between the eyes and the different kinds of the supernatural eyes, and between the ear and the divine ear), and numerical characteristics of the Buddha (e.g., the equations between the teeth and thirty-seven fold of partaking of enlightenment, between the eye teeth and the Knowledge of Four Noble Paths, and between the fingers and the Knowledge of Recognising the Ten Recollections). In some cases, the identifications are made based upon the combination of physiological appropriateness and metonymy or verbal congruence, for instance, the equations between the feet (*pāda*) and Four Paths of Accomplishment, *caturiddhipādañña*. Here, *pāda* could be rendered as "path" or "basis."

The second section of the *Dhammakāya* passages states that the Buddha is more sublime than other beings (both human and divine) because of the *dhammakāya*.

The third section of the *Dhammakāya* passages contains a supramundane (lokuttara) purpose: attaining Buddhahood. The path to Buddhahood requires a meditation practitioner to recollect the *dhammakāya*:

...the set of marks of the Buddhas called the "Body of Dhammas" (*dhammakāyabuddhalakkhaṇaṃ*) which is the leader away from the world

Neglected Aspect of Theravada Tradition," *History of Religions* 16, no. 4 (1977): 385; Urkasame, "Study of Elements in Yogavacara Tradition," 245-246.



(*lokanāyakaṃ*); it is to be contemplated (*anussaritaḅbaṃ*) repeatedly (*punappunam*) by one in the lineage of the *yogāvacara*-s (*yogāvacarakulaputtana*) who possesses a keen intelligence (*tikkhaññāṇena*) and aspires (*patthantena*) to the state of an omniscient Buddha (*sabbaññūbuddhabhāvaṃ*)....<sup>16</sup>

The passage instructed the *yogāvacara*, or “practitioner of spiritual discipline”, i.e. the meditator, to use the *dharmakāya* (here, embodied in the Buddha image)<sup>17</sup> as a meditation object.<sup>18</sup> The process of recollecting the *dharmakāya* will lead the *yogāvacara* directly to Buddhahood.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, in using textual analysis, Coedès, Bizot, Urkasame, Crosby and Walker have all linked the third section of the *Dharmakāya* text genre to the *yogāvacara* tradition or *boran kammaṭṭhāna*. “*Yogāvacara*” tradition is the term that Crosby used to describe the presence of an esoteric tradition of texts and practices within the Theravāda tradition of mainland Southeast Asia, before the Dhammayutika-nikāya reformation by King Rāma IV of Thailand (reigned 1851-1868). This tradition is far removed from the rationalistic monolithic Theravāda presented in many secondary sources.<sup>20</sup> In terms of *kammaṭṭhāna* practice, Walker commented that:

The closing lines of this text [the *Dharmakāya*] make clear that the desired soteriological aim is to become the Buddha oneself...In this case, the implication is that certain *kammaṭṭhāna* meditation practice can lead directly to Buddhahood.<sup>21</sup>

### The *Dharmakāya* text genre in the ritual context

New kings, *chedīs*, and Buddha images must all be consecrated in order to fulfil their religious functions. Tambiah (1984), Bizot (1992), Swearer (2004) and others have written about *Buddhābhiṣeka*, the consecration ritual that takes place to “enliven” a Buddha statue and “make the Buddha present.”<sup>22</sup> In this section, I will explore the use of the *Dharmakāya gāthā*, a number of texts belonging to the *Dharmakāya* text genre, during *Buddhābhiṣeka*, meditation practice and individual recitation in contemporary Cambodia and Northern Thailand.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Malasart, “*Dharmakāyānussati-Kathā*,” 49-63.

<sup>17</sup> Swearer, 185-191, analyses the concept of the *Dharmakāya* in its ritual context during *buddhābhiṣeka*, but not during meditation.

<sup>18</sup> See also Reynolds, “Several Bodies of Buddha,” 386.

<sup>19</sup> Walker, “Unfolding Buddhism,” 598.

<sup>20</sup> Crosby, “Tantric Theravāda,” 141.

<sup>21</sup> Walker, “Unfolding Buddhism,” 598.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism, and Millennial Buddhism* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 254; Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 5-6, 108-115. For the concept of “making the Buddha Present”, Tambiah did not mention the *Dharmakāya* text genre in his book, but this is a central focus of the works of Bizot and Swearer on *Buddhābhiṣeka*.

<sup>23</sup> Although there are national boundaries between Thailand and Cambodia, as Walker (2018, 7-8) demonstrated, I find the notion of “Khmer-Tai Buddhism” a useful way to work with the manuscript cultures of mainland

*Buddhābhiṣeka*

*Buddhābhiṣeka*, with “its transformation of the body through samādhi and the transformation of the *dhammakāya* into a material representation, provides a striking insight to the operative significance of the meaning of the consecration ritual of the Buddha image.”<sup>24</sup>

Swearer identified the relationship between theoretical considerations discussed in Buddhist texts and practical considerations articulated during ceremonies.<sup>25</sup> He claimed that *buddhābhiṣeka*, during which an inanimate image is transformed into the Buddha’s *dhammakāya*, is a re-enactment of the scriptural claims that the Buddha has the *dhamma* as his body (D III.89),<sup>26</sup> and that whoever sees the Buddha sees the *dhamma* (S III. 120).<sup>27</sup> Swearer interprets the *dhammakāya* as the embodied *dhamma*, and as “spiritual phenomenon.”<sup>28</sup>

In *Le Chemin de Lanka*, Bizot described how the Dhammakāya text genre was used during the consecration of Buddha images in the Cambodian tradition.<sup>29</sup> The consecration ceremony described by Bizot consisted of three rituals: first, the implantation of *lakkhaṇa* (marks), such as the head, ears, nose, eyes, eyebrows, etc.; second, the opening of the eyes; and third, the recitation of consecration stanzas.<sup>30</sup> The monks gather in front of the new Buddha statue and recite the *Dhammakāya* formula in order to introduce the twenty-seven marks of the *dhammakāya* (as listed in *Dhammakāya* texts) into those parts of the Buddha image. While reciting the text, the monks invite the pāramī (perfections, or here, powers of the Buddha) to enter the Buddha statue being consecrated in order to infuse the statue with the *dhammakāya*.<sup>31</sup> A witness to this ritual usage in the Cambodian tradition, Mr. Kun Sopheap stated in an interview (available on YouTube) that he had participated in five consecration ceremonies where the *Dhammakāya gāthā* was recited.<sup>32</sup>

My name is Sopheap. My nickname is Mong. I used to be a monk in Wat Kweanklang. At that time, there was a forest monk (*dhutaṅga*) who had a palm-leaf manuscript called the “*Dhammakāya*,” and this text was recited during the Buddha image consecration ritual. The text was also installed in Buddha images

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Southeast Asia.

<sup>24</sup> Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 72. See also Crosby, *Traditional Theravāda Meditation*, 51-52.

<sup>25</sup> Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 184-191.

<sup>26</sup> See also Harrison, “Is the Dharma-Kāya the Real? Phantom Body” of the Buddha?,” 50.

<sup>27</sup> Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 188-189.

<sup>28</sup> See also Collins, “Reflections on the Dichotomy Rūpakāya/Dhammakāya,” 259.

<sup>29</sup> Bizot, *Le Chemin De Lanka*, 293-294. See also Kate Crosby, “Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and Others on the Yogāvacara Tradition,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 1, no. 2 (2000): 156-159.

<sup>30</sup> Bizot, *Le Chemin De Lanka*, 294.

<sup>31</sup> Bizot, *Le Chemin De Lanka*, 294. See also Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 71-73.

<sup>32</sup> Personal communication, Phrakru Videśasudhammayāna (18 January 2018) and Elizabeth Guthrie (4 July 2018). See also [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yt\\_0aMOOp3k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yt_0aMOOp3k) for the interview which I have translated from Thai into English

and put under the stones (*pañcuḥ sīmā*) in order to make the Sangha boundary. Therefore, as I have remembered, I will attempt to recite the *Dhammakāya gāthā*.

Sopheap then starts chanting with *Sabbaññūtañāṇa pavarasisaṃ*... and ends with ...*dhammakāyabuddhalakkhaṇaṃ lokanāyakaṃ yogāvacarakulaputtana tikkhañāṇena patthentena sabbaññūbuddhabhāvaṃ punappunaṃ anussaritabbam*.

The video shows that in Cambodia, recitation of the *Dhammakāya gāthā* was part of *buddhābhiseka*. By pointing out his body parts, Sopheap showed the correlation between the teachings of the *Dhammakāya* text and the practical considerations during the ritual of implantation of the Buddha's marks.

The *Dhammakāya gāthā* is also used during *buddhābhiseka* in Northern Thailand. Although the *gāthā* was recited during consecration rituals in both Cambodia and Northern Thailand, there are differences between them. For instance, in Cambodia, the *Dhammakāya gāthā* is recited during the eye-opening part of the ceremony but in Northern Thailand, the *gāthā* is recited during the construction ceremony of a Buddha image and the ritual of installing the Buddha's heart into a Buddha image or *chedī* (see below). Despite these differences, Cambodian and Northern Thai Buddhists use similar Buddhist technologies to "make the Buddha present."<sup>33</sup>

Tambiah and Swearer write that the ritual of consecration—the Buddhist technology for giving "life" to the material representation of the Buddha—has four dimensions.<sup>34</sup> First, a portion of the *pāramīs* and virtues, that reside in an old Buddha image, are transfused into a new Buddha image. This newly consecrated statue is considered to be a "reincarnation" of the older image. Second, *paritta* "the protective chant," from the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (the first sermon of the Buddha), and the *Paṭhamasambodhi* (a biography of the Buddha) are recited to instruct the image about its former lives. Third, the meditative power of monks is transferred to an image by means of a sacred length of string, in order to transform the image into what Swearer calls "the holy Buddha spirit", or *dhammakāya*.<sup>35</sup> Fourth, the eye-opening ceremony is performed in order to recreate the moment when the Buddha attained enlightenment.<sup>36</sup>

#### *The ritual of installing the Buddha's heart into the Buddha image or chedī*

A fifth method to bring an image of the Buddha to life, used in Northern Thailand (though not studied in detail by Tambiah, Bizot or Swearer), is the ritual of installing the heart of the Buddha into a Buddha image or *chedī*. During this ritual, the *Dhammakāya gāthā* is recited and written on a metal plate and placed inside the image or *chedī*. The ritual of installing the Buddha's heart into a Buddha image can be found in Northern Thailand, Cambodia, China and Tibet.<sup>37</sup> In Thailand, this ceremony can be traced back

<sup>33</sup> See the concept of presence in Donald K Swearer, "Hypostasizing the Buddha: Buddha Image Consecration in Northern Thailand," *History of Religions* 34, no. 3 (1995): 270-271.

<sup>34</sup> Tambiah, *Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 245-256.

<sup>35</sup> Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 189-190.

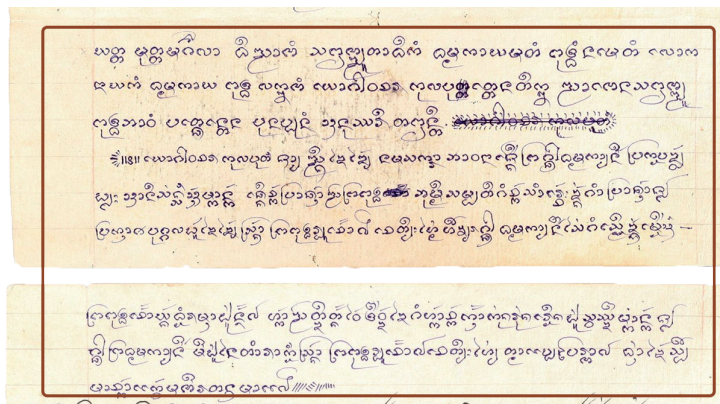
<sup>36</sup> Richard Gombrich, "The Consecration of a Buddhist Image," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1966): 26. See also Bizot, *Le Chemin De Lanka*, 293.

<sup>37</sup> Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 262. For associated information about the ritual of installing the Buddha's



to at least the Sukhothai period (1283-1317 CE) when Buddha images were often constructed from stucco. These images often had a cavity in the chest area where relics, manuscripts and valuables were placed.<sup>38</sup> Some installations involved the placement of models of the heart, two lungs, two small intestines, two large intestines, and two livers inside an image of the Buddha.<sup>39</sup> During my own research on buddhābhiseka, I identified a Northern Thai consecration ceremony in which a *Dhammakāya* text is recited and a “heart” is placed inside a cavity in a Buddha image or in a *chedī*.<sup>40</sup> An important source for this practice is *Tamra Kan Banchu Huachai Phraphuttharup Lae Phra Chedī Boran* (the old manual for installing a Buddha’s heart into a Buddha image and *chedī*) composed by Northern Thai monk Kruba Kong (1902-1989), who wrote:

Whoever recites or worships the *Dhammakāya gāthā*, and whoever worships the Buddha statue or the *chedī* that has been consecrated by the *Dhammakāya gāthā* will gain great merit, living prosperity, and even attain the state of an omniscient Buddha, if they wish. The *Dhammakāya gāthā*, which great teachers recommended for recitation, should be written on golden plates and put inside both a Buddha image and *chedī* as the “heart.” **It will be as if the Buddha himself is present.** Moreover, if a temple has this *gāthā*, it will bring prosperity because the *Dhammakāya gāthā* originated from the *Tamra Kan Kosrang Phraphuttharup*<sup>41</sup> *Lae Phra Chedī Boran* (the old manual for making Buddha images and *chedī*)<sup>42</sup>



heart into a Buddha image in China, see Gregory Henderson and Leon Hurvitz, “The Buddha of Seiryōji: New Finds and New Theory,” *Artibus Asiae* (1956): 23-25.

<sup>38</sup> Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 262.

<sup>39</sup> Surasavas Suksavas, *The Lanna Buddha Image and the Influence of Vajirañāna Nikāya* พระพุทธรูปล้านนา กับ ศติพระพุทธรูปศาสนาหายานแบบตันตระนิคายวัชรยาน (Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai University Press, 2016), 41-42.

<sup>40</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjCiauLiNLk> for the ceremony of installing a Buddha’s heart into a Buddha statue in contemporary Northern Thailand.

<sup>41</sup> This manuscript was studied by Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 259-260. This text is found in Northern Thailand and written in *Tham Lānnā* scripts dated back to the Golden Age of Lanna (ca.1400-ca. 1525). See the Thai translation in Phisit Kotsupho, “The Manual for Constructing a Buddha Image from the Old Manuscript ตำราสร้างพระพุทธรูปจากคัมภีร์โบราณ.” See also [http://phil-re4you.blogspot.com/2017/09/blog-post\\_30.html?m=1](http://phil-re4you.blogspot.com/2017/09/blog-post_30.html?m=1)

<sup>42</sup> See also Suksavas, *Lanna Buddha Image* 244. Watch the online clip on <https://www.facebook.com/diri.ac.nz/videos/927925597388034/>

As the above quotation shows, in the past, and today in Northern Thailand and Cambodia, the *Dhammakāya gāthā* and its symbolic, alphabetic and inscriptional elements were part of the individual practice of Buddhists, and also essential for official ceremonies. Buddhists used the *Dhammakāya gāthā* not only for worldly (*lokiya*) purposes of gaining merit and living prosperity, but also for a supramundane (*lokuttara*) purpose: attaining Buddhahood.

*Individual recitation for living prosperity and meditation progress*

It seems that the *Dhammakāya gāthā* was not only considered essential for public rituals but was also part of individual religious practice in Cambodia and Northern Thailand. Bizot found that Cambodian Buddhists use the *Dhammakāya gāthā* as part of their individual recitation. One section (2.3) of the *Dhammakāya* manuscript (registered number: TK217) found in Wat Uṇālom, Phnom Penh states:

Anyone who venerates and praises or studies the *Dhammakāya* text everyday will obtain whatever that person wishes. For example, a person who recites this *Dhammakāya* for only one complete day is reborn as a god who lives in a precious palace. For another example, a person who recited the qualities (of the *Dhammakāya*) spat on a female ant, and that caused her death. This ant at the time of her death was reborn in heaven because of the great merit, which that person had accumulated from the recitation of the *Dhammakāya*.<sup>43</sup>

In Northern Thailand, Urkasame also found that the *Dhammakāya* text genre was associated with meditation practice. The *Mūlakammaṭṭhān* (MK)<sup>44</sup> instructs meditation practitioners (including monks and laypeople), who fail to achieve their meditation goals, to recite the *Gāthā Thammakāy*, so as to remove the obstacles during meditation practice:

When the *yogāvacaras*, including laypeople, monks or nuns, practice meditation, or observe *dhutaṅgavatra*, and they cannot manage their mind in the path of meditation, or their mind lacks power and wants to sleep at all times [...] They should use the *Gāthā [Thammakāy]* to make sacred water. Before drinking or using this water, they should ask for forgiveness from the five gems.<sup>45</sup>

### The disappearance of the *Dhammakāya* text genre

The Buddhist reformation, which took place during the Fourth and Fifth reigns, caused the disappearance of many Buddhist manuscripts and *boran* practices. Encouraged by Rāma IV and Rāma V, Sangharāja Sā and Wachirayan made many

<sup>43</sup> Bizot, *Le Chemin De Lanka*, 299.

<sup>44</sup> See the translation of the *Mulakammaṭṭhāna* in Urkasame, "Meditation in Tham Scripts Manuscripts," 132-204.

<sup>45</sup> Urkasame, "Meditation in Tham Scripts Manuscripts," 195-196.

reforms to the sangha's educational system, centralised the sangha's hierarchy, and modernised religious practices in accordance with the Pāli Canon.<sup>46</sup> Crosby's research has demonstrated the marginalisation of Siam's traditional meditation practices, which she called the *yogāvacara* tradition or *boran kammaṭṭhāna*, during the Fourth and Fifth Reigns.<sup>47</sup> According to Crosby, when Rāma IV was a monk in 1820, he complained that the teachings of his meditation masters at Wat Ratchasitharam were not authorised by the Pāli Canon, and redirected his attention to the study of texts, *pariyatti*, over practice, *paṭipatti*.<sup>48</sup> The emphasis on the study of the Pāli Canon continued during the reign of Rāma V.<sup>49</sup> As Taylor noted: "...by late in the Fifth Reign a meditation seems to have become less important and a Grade Five Pāli scholar then appointed as abbot [...] In the eyes of leading Thammayut reformers, meditation and austere practices had a useful function only in terms of orthopraxy and orthodoxy. Thus, with emphasis on canonical studies, the Fifth Reign reforms effectively redefined sanctity at many monasteries and the functions of religiosity..."<sup>50</sup> Some concerns of canonical authenticity can also be identified in the ways that Sā composed the *Paṭhamasambodhi* in 1890. In his *Paṭhamasambodhi*, Sā paid close attention to the Pāli Canon:

... [If] the stories or Pāli passages [used to compose the *Paṭhamasambodhi*] are not found or authorised by the Pāli Canon, I will skip or talk about them briefly...<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, the omission of some texts can be found in the process of composing the *Paṭhamasambodhi*. The *Bimbābhilāpa*<sup>52</sup> was considered as having textual authenticity by Buddhists, such as Somdet Krom Phra Paramanuchitchinorot, during the reign of King Rāma II (1809-1824). Paramanuchitchinorot included the text in the eighteenth chapter of the *Paṭhamasambodhi* in 1845.<sup>53</sup> This text, however, seemed to have less textual authenticity in the view of Sā, and then it was omitted from his 1890 *Paṭhamasambodhi*, a demythologised version of Paramanuchit's *Paṭhamasambodhi*.<sup>54</sup>

The reformation and reinterpretation continued during the so-called tenth Saṅgāyanā in 1893, when the *Tipiṭaka* was revised. Before this revision, Thai Buddhists believed

<sup>46</sup> See also McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words*, 98-108.

<sup>47</sup> Crosby, *Traditional Theravāda Meditation*, 120-123.

<sup>48</sup> Phaladisai Sitthitunyakit, *His Majesty King Mongkut Rama 4 of Thailand พระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว พระเจ้ากรุงสยาม รัชกาลที่ ๔* (Bangkok: One World, 2004), 49; Crosby, *Traditional Theravāda Meditation*, 114; and Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State*, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Crosby, *Traditional Theravāda Meditation*, 121.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *Forest Monks and the Nation-State*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> Somdetphrasangharat Pussadeva, *Brah Paṭhama Sambodhi Composed by Supreme Patriarch Sa พระปฐมสมโพธิของ สมเด็จพระสังฆราชปฐกเขต ตอนที่ ๑*, vol. 1 (Bangkok: Pimthai, 1922), 7.

<sup>52</sup> See the translation of this text in Donald S Lopez Jr, ed. *Buddhism in Practice: Abridged Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 419-430.

<sup>53</sup> Somdet Phra Paramānuchitchinorot, *Paṭhama Sambodhi* ปฐมสมโพธิ, vol. 1 (Bangkok: Karnasana, 1962), 325-343. See also Lopez Jr, *Buddhism in Practice*, 420. Swearer assumed that Paramānuchitchinorot might have used Northern Thai *Paṭhamasambodhi* composed in the 16th century as the sources to compile his *Paṭhamasambodhi*, because the incorporating texts, such as the *Bimbābhilāpa*, can be found in both versions.

<sup>54</sup> See also Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, 124.

that the Tipiṭaka was a general (non-fixed) collection of Pāli literature, including the *Buddhavacana*, “Words of the Buddha”, its commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*), sub-commentaries (*ṭīkā*), sub-sub commentaries (*anuṭṭikā*), as well as texts composed during a later period (*pakaravisesa*).<sup>55</sup>

The goal of the 1893 Saṅgāyanā was to produce a modern printed Siamese *Tipiṭaka* collection that contained only authentic texts (mostly in the views of Sangharāja Sā and Wachirayan). To achieve this goal, a number of palm-leaf manuscripts, composed in Pāli and written using Khmer script, were collected, edited and transliterated into modern Thai script. During this process, the contents of Siamese Tipiṭaka were fixed and shrunk in size. The 1893 Tipiṭaka collection consisted of three baskets: the *Vinaya-Piṭaka*, *Sutta-Piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma-Piṭaka*. Commentaries, sub-commentaries, sub-sub commentaries and later composed texts were excluded as non-canonical. A number of texts, that were once considered part of Siamese Tipiṭaka, namely the *Vimānavatthu*, *Petavatthu*, *Theragāthā* and *Therīgāthā*, *Jātaka*, *Apādāna*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Cariyapiṭaka*, *Anulomapacca-nīyapaṭṭhāna*, and the *Paccanīyānulomapaṭṭhāna*, were also omitted from the 1893 printed *Tipiṭaka*.<sup>56</sup> However, these texts came back in later editions in 1925, i.e., during the reign of King Rama VII (1925-1935).

My survey has shown that in Thailand, manuscripts of the *Dhammakāya* text genre—titled *Brah̐ Dhammakāyādi* (BD), *Brah̐ Dhammakāyādi-ṭīkā* (BDT), the Golden Manuscript *Brah̐ Dhammakāya* (GBD), *Dhammakāyānussati-kathā* (DK), and *Suttajātakanidānānisamsa* (SJNA)—played a significant role during the First, Second and Third reigns in terms of the manuscript culture and religious practices. However, it is more likely that those manuscripts were not considered as important and practical from the Fourth and Fifth Reigns onwards, because firstly, there were no dated documents of the *Dhammakāya* text genre produced during this period. Secondly, during this period, the BD and BDT manuscripts were classified as non-canonical and excluded from Siam’s Buddhist Canon in 1893.<sup>57</sup> As for ritual practice, DK disappeared even earlier in 1880 when Sangharāja Sā replaced *Suat Mon Plae*, a collection of Buddhist ritual chants dated to the reign of King Rāma I, with *Nang Sue Suat Mon Chabap Luang Khong Somdet Phra Sangkarat Pussadeva*.<sup>58</sup> Ploychum believed that Sā used *Suat Mon*

<sup>55</sup> Skilling and Pakdeekham, *Materials for the Study of the Tripitaka 1*, 1: Pali Literature Transmitted in Central Siam สยามบาลีวรรณกรรม, xviii. See also Santi Pakdeekham, *Tāmrā Traipitaka* ตำราไตรปิฎก: *Handbook of the Tripitaka* (Bangkok and Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute and Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation)

<sup>56</sup> Srongwit Kaewsri, “The Royal Tipitaka พระไตรปิฎกฉบับหลวง,” in *Tipitaka: The History and Significance* พระไตรปิฎก: ประวัติและความสำคัญ (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalalai, 1992), 75; Ratchapraditsathitmahasimaram, *The Biography of Somdet Phra Ariyawongsakhatayan (Sa Pussadevo) Somdet Phrasangkarat* พระประวัติสมเด็จพระอริยวงศาคตญาณ (สา ปุสฺสเทโว) สมเด็จพระสังฆราช, 99-102. See also Patrick Jory, “Thai and Western Buddhist Scholarship in the Age of Colonialism: King Chulalongkorn Redefines the Jatakas,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 3 (2002): 19.

<sup>57</sup> See the lists of manuscripts comprised of the printed *Tipiṭaka* in Chalmers, “Siam’s Edition of the Pāli Tipiṭak,” 6.

<sup>58</sup> Ratchapraditsathitmahasimaram, *The Biography of Somdet Phra Ariyawongsakhatayan (Sa Pussadevo) Somdet Phrasangkarat* พระประวัติสมเด็จพระอริยวงศาคตญาณ (สา ปุสฺสเทโว) สมเด็จพระสังฆราช, 95-99; McDaniel, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words*, 234.

*Plae* as the source to compose *Nang Sue Suat Mon Chabap Luang*, but he did not make a detailed comparison between the two chanting texts. He based his argument on the historical information and identified similarities between Buddhist chants, as they appear in 1911 *Nang Sue Suat Mon Chabap Luang* and 1909 *Suat Mon Plae*.<sup>59</sup> In the table below, I compare *Suat Mon Plae* with *Nang Sue Suat Mon Chabap Luang*.

<i>Suat Mon Plae</i>	<i>Nang Sue Suat Mon Chabap Luang</i>
<i>Dvādaśa paritta</i>	<i>Cularāja paritta</i>
<i>Satta paritta</i>	<i>Mahārāja paritta</i>
<i>Paṭhama bhāṇavāra</i>	<i>Paṭhama bhāṇavāra</i>
<i>Dutiya bhāṇavāra</i>	<i>Dutiya bhāṇavāra</i>
<i>Tatiya bhāṇavāra</i>	<i>Tatiya bhāṇavāra</i>
<i>Catuttha bhāṇavāra</i>	<i>Catuttha bhāṇavāra</i>
<b><i>Pakiṇṇaka-gāthā</i></b>	-
<i>Phra Aphitham Chet Phra khamphi</i>	<i>Phra Aphitham</i>
-	<i>Mahāsatiṭṭhānasuttapāṭho</i>
-	<i>Vattra</i>
-	<i>Suat Chaeng</i>
-	<i>Gāthā</i> for the royal ceremonies
-	Chanting in the Dhammayuttika-nikāya tradition

This table shows that only one chapter was omitted from Sā's revised chanting manual: the *Pakiṇṇaka-gāthā*, the seventh chapter of *Suat Mon Plae*, which contains the *Dhammakāyānussati-kathā*. When this omission is considered with the disappearance of other manuscripts belonging to the *Dhammakāya* text genre (here BD and BDT manuscripts) at the time of the tenth Saṅgāyanā in 1893, I conclude that the reason for omitting the texts of the *Dhammakāya* text genre is because they were considered non-canonical and fell out of favour during the Fourth and Fifth Reigns.

## Conclusion

According to the historical evidence, documents of the *Dhammakāya* text genre have been transmitted for almost 500 years from the Ayutthaya kingdom, evidenced by the Phisanulok inscription to the contemporary period within a cross-cultural sphere of Tai-Khmer Buddhism. The multiple existence of manuscripts belonging to the genre is not only important for Siam's textual transmission, but also reflects the practical nature of the texts in this genre, including meditation, individual recitation for gaining merit

<sup>59</sup> Suchao Ploychum, *The Contribution of King Rāmā 2 to Siamese Buddhism* การส่งเสริมพระพุทธศาสนาในสมัยรัชกาลที่ ๒ (Bangkok: Sahadhammika Press, 1992), 156.



and prosperity, *buddhābhiṣeka* ceremonies, and the ritual of installing the Buddha's heart into a Buddha image or *chedī*.

Like Crosby and Taylor, in this article, I distinguished between *boran* Buddhism and reform Buddhism based on the changes on Thai Buddhism during the Fifth Reign. I concluded that the *Dhammakāya* text genre and associated ritual performances were considered authentic during the First, Second and Third Reigns, evidenced by the existence of multiple versions of the *Dhammakāya* text genre during this period. However, during the Fourth and Fifth Reigns, “*boran* Buddhism” fell out of favour and between 1880 and 1893 many *boran* texts belonging to the *Dhammakāya* text genre, the *Dhammakāyānussati-kathā*, *Braḥ Dhammakāyādi*, and *Braḥ Dhammakāyādi-ṭīkā* were excluded from Central Thai Buddhism. Although some texts, that were once omitted from the 1893 printed *Tipiṭaka*, came back in the 1925 printed editions, the manuscripts—*Braḥ Dhammakāyādi* and *Braḥ Dhammakāyādi-ṭīkā*—have still been left behind, with no or little interest of scholars. Moreover, although these manuscripts physically exist in the present time, i.e. those preserved in the National Library of Thailand, they are only seen as valuable in terms of sacred ancient objects, and their ritual functions were less important and/or perhaps no longer in use by reform Buddhists after the Fifth Reign onwards. Today, their associated rituals, i.e. the recitation of the *Dhammakāya* passages and the ritual of installing the Buddha's heart into a Buddha image or *chedī*, are no longer performed in Central Thailand (although they survive in Northern Thailand and Cambodia). One of its ritual performances, illustrated in this article, is the ritual of installing the Buddha's heart into a Buddha image or *chedī*, that is still practiced in Northern Thailand today. Although the focus of this article is on a small group of texts, it makes a contribution to the wider field of Tai-Khmer Buddhist Studies by demonstrating that Buddhist texts are not static or abstract doctrines, but living orientations. Texts circulate between communities, individuals, rituals, meditators and students and, in the process of their transmission, reflect Buddhist beliefs and practices from particular times and places. Today, as a number of manuscripts in Tai-Khmer and Theravāda textual tradition remain unstudied, I hope that this article will provide the foundational methodology for approaching and analysing similar texts in other regions.

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