

SIAMESE TREASURES IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS¹

by

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The Library of Congress is one of the best-known institutions in the United States of America. Without even going to Washington many students from all over the United States and from other countries have had an occasion to use its services. The sale of printed cards to libraries throughout the world and inter-library loans are among the most familiar of these services. But there are many services of the Library that are not widely known. It is some of these that we will treat as the subject here.

"The Library of Congress is, in fact, an aggregate of many libraries. The entire range of man's graphic expression, moreover, is covered in the Library's collections. They contain everything from Babylonian and Assyrian clay tablets long predating the Christian era, early papyri, Chinese books printed from wood blocks antedating by centuries the introduction in Europe of printing from movable metal type, and medieval manuscripts to the microcards, by which a hundred pages or more of printed matter are photographically reproduced on a single sheet."²

These materials are acquired by purchase, copyright deposits, gifts, international exchange of government publications, exchanges with other institutions, and transfers from other United States government agencies. Much has been acquired by gifts from distinguished donors.

The Kings of Siam have been among the most generous these donors. One of the earliest, if not the earliest gift from these Kings is the first printed edition of the *Tripitaka*. (See the inscription

1. Revised from an article originally prepared by the author for the Thai Alliance and published in the 1956 Mahidol Yearbook.

2. Annual report of the Library of Congress, 1954.

of this work from the copy in the Library of Congress, on plate 1.) This work reveals the concern of King Chulalongkorn for spreading the knowledge of Buddhism and for enlarging the scholarship of his own and of other countries. In order to commemorate the twenty-fifth year of his reign, His Majesty appointed a committee to prepare and issue the first printing of the *Tripitaka* in the Pali language written in Siamese characters. His choice of this project reveals his great vision, and his reasons are treated in full in the introduction which he wrote himself. He notes that other countries, whose people had been adherents of the Hinayana Buddhist faith, had fallen to foreign conquerors. Because these conquerors were unsympathetic to the faith it had declined. But Siam had remained free and independent and it had a sacred trust to preserve the tenets of the religion. In order to do this it was necessary to record the teachings of the Buddha and make them more widely known. He decided, very wisely, that these records should be printed rather than written on palm leaves as they had been in the past. He observed that palm leaf books would have had to be written in Cambodian characters, which were unfamiliar to most people. By using type, many copies could be printed and made available to everyone who could read.

The volumes of the *Tripitaka* are bound in three-quarter leather with the seal of King Chulalongkorn embossed in gold on the cover. The King presented copies of the work to major libraries and universities throughout the world. The Library of Congress was fortunate enough to be one of these. This treasure was recently brought again to light from where it lay in the Library's uncatalogued collection. The author of this discovery was M.R. Sumonjati Swasdikul, a teacher and scholar known and loved by many graduates of Chulalongkorn University.

The second edition, which was prepared under the direction of a Royal Commission of dignitaries of the Thai Buddhist Clergy during the years 1925-1928, is more complete in that it contains several books that were omitted from the earlier edition. It was



พุทธศักราช ๒๔๖๕
 จตุลัสดาภิธานี

ลัทธิมัทถ.
 ฤควโต
 ทวินัน

ปรีณิพพานโต
 วิลลิตทิลลสถานุมปรี

สัตตคัตติสตีเมวัสเส

อัคร เคาฎกั

ทักขิณฑทศรามาณานัน
 สันมาภิมานนาลัมบิ

ฉลยฉนิ วัณณา
 ปรมันทมนังคังจา อังกรมณ

ลขมาเมกรมราชกณ
 มัจจุวัณณา สัจจวานัน

ปรีณิณณามาณังเจ
 ปาณิกิ กัถวา มุททาเนติ,

อิม สันมัจ ภาวณ

มหาวิทธานันตัส ฉนลสรณัน ทนัน.

พระคัมภีร์

อัน เปนที่นับถึะ ของ ทูต สาสนิกชน นาน โต
 พระ ไทว บัฎกั นั

ทึอง ทนตึ ประภาส โดย พระบรม ราชโอง ภาว
 ในพระบาท สมเด็จพระ ปรมันทร มหาจุฬาร าชกรณ

พระ จตุจยเมถึ เจ้า กุง ลขมาน ใน สฉย
 เมถึ ได เสด็จ เถลง ถึองบรร สันนติ ครม ๗๕ ปี

มลูพระราชทานให้ เปน ที่ ระก ใน เหนุนี้ นกั

หอสมุดคองเกรส, วอชิงตัน ดี. ซี.

Q. B. F. F. S.

This Edition of the sacred writings of the Southern Buddhists the Tripitaka has been published by order of His Majesty Somdetcch Phra Paramindr Maha Chulalongkorn Thra Chula Chom Klao King of Siam on the 25th anniversary of His ascension to the Throne and is presented by Him in commemoration of this event to

Cette édition des écritures saintes des Bouddhistes du Sud le Tripitaka a été publiée par ordre de Sa Majesté Somdetcch Phra Paramindr Maha Chulalongkorn Thra Chula Chom Klao Roi de Siam le 25 e anniversaire de son avènement au Trône et est par Lui présentée en commémoration de ce jour à

Diese Ausgabe der heiligen Schriften der südlichen Buddhisten der Tripitaka wurde auf Befehl Seiner Majestät Somdetcch Phra Paramindr Maha Chulalongkorn Thra Chula Chom Klao König von Siam bei Gelegenheit Seines 25 jährigen Regierungsjubiläums veröffentlicht und wird von Ihm zur Erinnerung an dieses Ereignis zum Geschenk gegeben

The Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

dedicated to King Vajiravudh who, not long before its publication, had died. A complete description of this edition may be found in the *Journal of the Siam Society*, Volume XXXV, No. 2. The set comprises 45 volumes with the figure of the royal elephant imprinted on the Chakri colors of the paper covers. This edition also was presented to the Library of Congress.

The Library of Congress has in its possession another set of volumes, which constitutes a body of explanation and commentary on the *Tripitaka*. These books were designed to explain and clarify difficult parts of the texts, but they are not for the layman. They were also written in Pali. These volumes were edited by Khemacari Thera, Phra Dhammatrailokacarn, who was then Chief Monk of Wat Mahatat. They were published in 1925, and dedicated to the memory of the Prince of Chandaburi.

In addition to these gifts, the Library of Congress has many Siamese volumes which were acquired through exchanges. These exchanges, which were made on an informal basis, began in 1859, when President Buchanan sent two cases of books to King Mongkut as a traditional exchange of gifts between governments following the making of a treaty. Since 1904, the Library of Congress and the National Library of Thailand have exercised a system of official exchanges. These exchanges have brought many valuable publications to Thailand and to the United States. In the years ahead, as the two countries strengthen their cultural relationships, the libraries of each will undoubtedly become greatly enriched with the materials of the other. The Library of Congress, which is even now working on a new system of transliteration of Siamese names in order to facilitate the cataloging of these materials, is proud of its role in these enlarging cultural exchanges.
