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**The Phra Malai legend in Thai Buddhist literature: A study of
three texts**

Brereton, Bonnie Pacala, Ph.D.

The University of Michigan, 1992

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A STUDY OF THREE TEXTS**

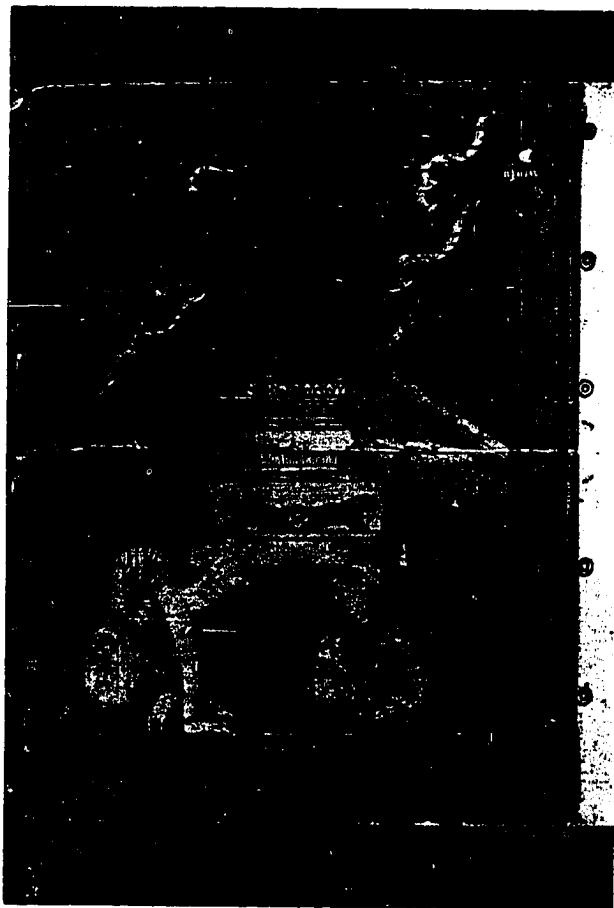
by

Bonnie Pacala Brereton

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Asian Languages and Cultures: Buddhist Studies)
in The University of Michigan
1992**

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For Derek, Abraham, and Liza

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ABBREVIATIONS

BEFEO - *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*

JPTS - *Journal of the Pali Text Society*

JSS - *Journal of the Siam Society*

Rsv. - *Rasavāhini*

Shv. - *Sahassavatthu-pakarana*

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INTRODUCTION

THE PHRA MALAI LEGEND: THEME AND VARIATIONS

The legend of the compassionate monk, Phra Malai,¹ and his visits to heaven and hell is one of the most pervasive themes in Thai Buddhism. The Phra Malai story is found not only in Pali and in the Siamese language of central Thailand, but also in the Lan Na Thai dialect of the north, the Lao dialect of the Isan or northeast region, and the southern dialect of peninsular Thailand. It has been narrated in courtly poetry as well as in colloquial rhyme and extemporaneous sermons; it has been passed along in oral traditions, hand-written manuscripts, and printed books. The legend has been depicted in manuscript painting, murals, and sculpture. For centuries it has played an important and

¹ Malai is the name of the main character of the legend. The word *phra* is used here as a title given to a monk or other sacred person. This title is used not only within the context of Buddhism before the name of the Buddha and the Bodhisatta Metteyya, but also in referring to Hindu deities, Christ, and Christian ministers and priests. Some Western scholars, including Denis, have translated it as "venerable." The word also occurs frequently as a prefix denoting royalty, holiness, honor, or perfection before the names of temples, Buddha images, relics, or scriptures. In other contexts it can be translated as precious, excellent, best, noble, great, holy. (See George Bradley McFarland, *Thai-English Dictionary* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1944, 566-7.)

colorful role in religious ceremony, teaching, and even entertainment.

Various scholars have remarked on the importance of *Phra Malai* as one of a group of texts that have constituted the core of Theravāda Buddhist teaching in Southeast Asia.² For example, Charles F. Keyes states that "three texts--or, more properly, several versions of three texts--define for most Thai Buddhists today, as in traditional Siam, the basic parameters of a Theravadin view of the world." These texts -- *Phra Malai*, the *Trai Phum* cosmology, and the *Vessantara Jataka*-- according to Keyes constitute

what might be termed the 'key' texts of both popular and elite traditions of traditional Siam. The large number of other sermons, ritual texts, and folkloric texts familiar to villagers...can be said to have been understood in light of the Buddhist world view projected in these key texts.³

In a similar vein John S. Strong writes:

The volumes of the Pali canon which neatly line the shelves of buddhologists in the West are generally not to be found in the bookcases of Buddhists in Southeast Asia. What is there is mostly "extracanonical": *jātakas* (stories of previous lives of the Buddha), collections of legends from the commentaries, tales of the adventures of saints, accounts of other worlds, *ānisāmsas* (stories extolling the advantages of merit-making), grammars, and primers. For most Buddhists, these are the sources that are read and

² Charles F. Keyes, *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State* (Bangkok: D.K. Book House, 1989) 179-181. See also Frank E. Reynolds, "Buddhism as Universal and Civic Religion" (*Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*. ed. Bardwell Smith, Chambersburg, PA, ANIMA Books, 1978) 194-203.

³ Keyes 181.

repeated, the texts that best illustrate the Buddha's Teaching.⁴

The Phra Malai legend encompasses several categories in the above list mentioned by Strong. It is an "extra-canonical" treatise set in the framework of the adventure of a saint, Phra Malai; at the same time it is also an account of other worlds -- heaven and hell, and a story that extols the benefits of making-merit.

While this tale is known throughout Theravāda Buddhist Southeast Asia,⁵ it has been especially popular in Thailand, where its teachings have for centuries influenced the content of sermons and the practice of a number of different rituals. It is primarily through the medium of the Phra Malai story that the common belief and hope in the coming of the future Buddha Metteyya was disseminated in Thailand. It is through certain expanded versions of the story that principles of right and wrong, of merit and demerit, of reward and punishment were passed along to both Sangha and

⁴ *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) xi.

⁵ In Laos, the legend appears under various titles: *Malai Mun-Malai Saen*, *Malai Niemphet*, *Malai Cot*, *Malai Phot Lok*, *Malai Photisat*, *Malai Thampet*, and *Phra Malai Liep Lok*. See Eugène Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevattheravatthūm: Légende bouddhiste du saint thera Māleyyadeva" (thesis, the Sorbonne, 1963) 89-90; Denis also mentions Cambodian versions at the French National Library under the titles of *Malai* and *Malaiy debb ther* (see 10-11). In Burma, the story is known under the name of *Shyan Malay Mather*, which is spelled in various other ways, including *Maliya*, *Malan*, and *Maliah*. The monk is also called *Mahādeva Thera* (Denis 11). See also Louis Finot, "Recherches sur la littérature laotienne," *BEFEO*, 17.5: 65, n. 3.

laity. It is through the growth and dissemination of the story that grisly hell scenes, fantastic wish-fulfilling trees, and visions of the glorious city of *nibbāna* became affixed on the walls of temples and in the minds of the faithful.⁶

The Phra Malai legend has manifested itself in an immense number and variety of texts, both written and oral. Although Western scholars sometimes refer to the Phra Malai legend as if it were a standard text, the story actually exists in numerous versions. In the course of my research, I have collected and examined more than a dozen different versions of the story, many of which exist in various different recensions as well.⁷

⁶ Phaya Anuman Rajadhon describes a Thai funerary custom of placing a special floral arrangement (Thai: *kruai dokmai*) consisting of a lotus, a candle, and an incense stick in the hands of a dying or deceased person. According to Phaya Anuman, this practice is a symbolic reenactment of Phra Malai's presenting lotuses at the Cūlāmani Cetiya in Tāvatīmsa Heaven. See *Kan Tai* (Bangkok: Ngan' niphon chut prapheni thai khong "Sathien Koset", Mae Kham Phang Press, 1988) 67-68.

⁷ These texts are *Malai Ton* and *Malai Plai*, Chiang Mai, Tarathong Kanphim, n.d.; "Malai Mün" and "Malai Saen," in *Maha Chat Isan* (Bangkok: National Library, 1988) 1-25; *Malai Prot Lok* [*Malai Phot Lok*] (Lampang: Lampang Sangkhaphan Press, n.d.); *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, attributed to Prince Thammathibet, (Bangkok: 1948); *Phra Malai Klön Suat*, Chomrom Phutthasat (Thonburi: Thonburi Teachers College, publ. for the study of the Maha Chat, 31 August - 3 September, 1984) at Wat Arunratchaworaram); *Phra Malai* (Bangkok: Akson Charoenthat Press, 1961); *Phra Malai Sut Sam Thammat*, [The Phra Malai Sutta in Three Lessons.] (Bangkok: Sophit Thammakhon, 1972); *Phra Malai Phu Poet Narok - Sawan*, by Phunsak Sakdanuwat (Bangkok, 1977); *Maleyyadevathera-vatthu*, in Supaporn Makchang, "Maleyyadevathera-vatthu: Kantruat Sopchamra lae Kansyksa choeng wikhro" [Maleyyadevathera-vatthu: An Edition and a

My study of this topic has not only uncovered numerous versions of the legend in diverse media; it has also suggested that the message conveyed through these variant forms of the legend is not always the same. In other words, the meaning of the text derives not only from its content, but also from its function.

This dissertation will explore the Phra Malai theme in the light of the relationship between text, context, and meaning. It will do so by comparing three versions of *Phra Malai*. The first is the oldest known Southeast Asian version of the legend, what I have termed the Pali/Lan Na version. This is actually a group of related texts, most of which are recited in only one context: the *Vessantara Jātaka* festival, which for Thai Buddhists has traditionally been the greatest merit-making occasion of the year. The second version I will examine is the literary *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, or "royal version," by the famous Ayutthayan poet Prince Thammathibet. The third is the popular, colloquial *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, which was used to disseminate Buddhist

Critical Study] (Bangkok: Master thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1978) also found in Denis: "Brahmāleyyadevattheravatthum"; *Dika Malai Thewasut doi Phitsadan* (Bangkok, 1971); two synopses of oral traditions and a translation of a copy written in Mon, in Watana na Nakorn, "Laksana ruam khong Phra Malai nai Wannakam Phun Ban lae Phra Malai Kham Luang" [Common Elements in (the) Phra Malai Story in Folk Literature and Phra Malai Kham Luang] (Bangkok: Masters thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1983); a brief account in the *Traiphumlok Winitchai Katha*, 3 vols. (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1977); *Phra Malai Sut* (n.p., n.d., from the Gedney Collection at the University of Michigan); "Phra Malai Thewa Sut," in *Chumnum Nangsü Thet* (Bangkok: Thai Press) 1929.

teachings, morals, and warnings through the performance of songs and skits.

To facilitate discussion, I will begin, in Chapter 1, with a summary of the Phra Malai legend. The summary is drawn from the Lan Na Thai *Malai Ton - Malai Plai*, which is a basic version of the text, similar to the one upon which the *Kham Luang*, translated in the Appendix, was based.

Chapter 2 will briefly survey some of the many different versions of the Phra Malai legend. It will also categorize them by content and ritual function.

Chapter 3 will trace the Sinhalese origins of the character of Phra Malai, together with the legend that evolved and developed around him and eventually made its way into the Lan Na kingdom.

In Chapter 4 the main focal point will be the historical context in which the embryonic Phra Malai story from Sri Lanka developed in the Lan Na region. There I will also discuss the close textual and ritual connection between the Pali/Lan Na version of Phra Malai and the *Vessantara Jataka*. I will also explore reasons for this connection in the light of the development of Sinhalese Buddhism in the Thai states and predictions concerning the future dissolution of the Buddhist religion.

Chapter 5 will examine motivations behind the composition of the *Kham Luang*, or "royal version" of the Phra Malai story, written by Prince Thammathibet of Ayutthaya in the early eighteenth century, which is translated in the

Appendix.⁸ This chapter will analyze some of the poetic techniques used by the author in creating a highly literary, embellished work of merit.

Chapter 6 will discuss the third of the texts, the *Klqn Suat* or popular version, as a work representing the expansion, indigenization, and popularization of the Phra Malai story. The discussion will also include a look at the *Klqn Suat's* lasting impact on art, ritual, and entertainment.

Finally, the conclusion will present an overview of the Phra Malai theme by suggesting explanations for the story's longevity and continued significance in Thailand. It will also propose areas for future research.

⁸ The translation is based on the edition of *Phra Malai Kham Luang* published by the Thai Fine Arts Department in 1948.

CHAPTER 1
DETAILED SUMMARY

A long time ago, so it is said, there lived on the island of Lanka¹ an arhat² and mahāthera³ named Phra Malai. Endowed with great compassion, Phra Malai one day used his extraordinary powers to travel to hell to bestow mercy on the suffering beings there. Upon his arrival, the hell beings begged him to seek out their relatives in Jambudīpa, the human realm, and ask them to make merit on their behalf. Phra Malai returned to the human realm, did as he was asked, and after the relatives performed acts of merit, the hell beings were reborn in heaven.

Then one morning, as he was going out to receive alms, the arhat encountered a poor man who supported his parents by cutting grass. The man presented Phra Malai with eight lotuses, and as he did so, requested that, as a result of this act of merit, he never be born poor again.

¹ The historical advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka grew out of the diplomatic relations between the Sri Lankan King Tissa and the Indian Emperor Ásoka in the third century B.C.

² The term arhat refers to one who has reached the final stage of spiritual progress.

³ The Pali term thera (literally, "elder") is used in Buddhism to refer to senior bhikkhu or monks; the prefix mahā means "great" in Sanskrit and Pali, as well as in Thai.

Phra Malai accepted the offering and told the man that his wish would be granted. Then he used his extraordinary power once again to fly to Tāvatimśa Heaven to worship the Cūlāmani Cetiya in which the hair relic of the Buddha is said to be enshrined.⁴ After presenting the eight lotuses as an offering, Phra Malai met Indra,⁵ the deity who presides over this realm. As they conversed, Phra Malai learned that Indra had built the cetiya to provide the devas in heaven with a means of continuing to make and accrue merit. Without this way of making merit, their next birth would be in a lower state.

⁴ All Phra Malai texts mention both a hair relic and a tooth relic as being enshrined in the Cūlāmani Cetiya. According to traditions concerning the life of the Buddha, Prince Gotama cut off his hair to symbolize his renunciation of worldliness when he left his father's palace and embarked on a life of asceticism. Indra, the tradition continues, collected the hair and enshrined it in the cetiya at this time. After the Buddha's *nibbāna*, tradition holds that the brahmin Dona divided the Buddha's relics among eight kings who had quarreled over them. During the distribution, Dona hid the right eyetooth of the Buddha in his turban. Indra saw this, however, and believing that Dona was not able to honor this relic appropriately, removed it and placed it in the Cūlāmani Cetiya. G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac) 1960, v. 1, 1122)

⁵ DPPN, v. 2, 957-65 notes that the god Indra (Pali: Inda), also known as Sakka, in Buddhist literature is known as king of the gods. He rules over Tāvatimśa Heaven and occasionally visits the human realm to intercede in earthly affairs. "Sakka's devotion to the Buddha and his religion is proverbial," Malalasekera writes. "He was present near the Bodhi tree..., when Māra arrived to prevent the Buddha from reaching Enlightenment." He also ministered to the Buddha when he was ill, and did all he could to help the Buddha's followers.

Phra Malai then asked Indra when Metteyya⁶ would leave his abode in Tusita Heaven to come to worship the cetiya. Indra replied that he would come on that very day, since it was an *uposatha* day,⁷ the fifteenth day of the waxing moon, one of the times for his regular visits.

As Phra Malai and Indra conversed, a deity accompanied by a retinue of a hundred celestial beings arrived to worship the cetiya. Phra Malai asked Indra how this deity had made merit in the past to earn this reward. Indra answered that in his former life, this deity was a poor man who, out of compassion, gave his own food to a starving crow. That act of generosity earned the poor man the reward of being born in heaven, surrounded by a retinue numbering a hundred.

Soon another deva arrived, this one with a retinue numbering a thousand. Again, Phra Malai inquired about the ways in which this deva made merit. He was told that this deity, in his former life, was a poor cow herder who shared his food with his friends.

⁶ Metteyya, the future Buddha, is referred to as Mettraiya or Phra Si Ariya in the Thai texts.

⁷ The *uposatha* days, occurring on the days of the new and full moon, are observed as holy days by both the Sangha and lay people. On these occasions, the members of the Sangha recite the 227 rules of the *Pātimokkha*, and any monk who has broken a rule is required to declare his offence. On these same occasions devout lay people observe the Eight Precepts, that is, abstaining from killing, stealing, harmful sex, lying, drinking intoxicants, eating solid food after midday, taking part in entertainment, and sleeping on high and luxurious beds.

As the text proceeds, the deities continue to arrive, with retinues of 10,000, 20,000, etc. In each case, Indra explains how merit was made -- generally through practicing *dāna* (generosity), although observing the precepts and having faith are sometimes mentioned, as well. The size of the retinue and the corresponding acts of merit are as follows.

The third deity, with a retinue of 10,000, had made a gift of food to a virtuous novice.

The fourth deity, with a retinue of 20,000, had presented food to a mendicant monk.

The fifth deity, with a retinue of 30,000, had lived in Anurādhapura where he had sponsored cremations and offered medicine, food, and clothing to the Sangha on behalf of the deceased.⁸

The sixth deity, with a retinue of 40,000, had been a wealthy man named Haritala who was honest and generous. He had made merit by giving the four requisites to the Sangha.⁹

The seventh deity, with a retinue of 50,000, had been King Saddhātissa¹⁰ of Lanka, brother of Abhayaduttha. He

⁸ In the *Kham Luang* version, this has a slightly different name, Haripala; moreover, he and the subsequent deity appear in reverse order; he is followed by a deity with 40,000 in his retinue, who in his former life was a weaver who sponsored cremations.

⁹ Clothing, food, lodging, medicine.

¹⁰ Saddhātissa, the younger brother of King Dutthagāmani, ruled from 77 to 59 B.C. (see note 11 below).

observed the Five Precepts regularly and the Eight Precepts on uposatha days and gave generously to the Sangha.

The eighth deity, with a retinue of 60,000, was named King Abhayaduttha.¹¹ He gave the four requisites; he zealously served the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha; he built the Mahāthūpa;¹² planted the Mahābodhi tree¹³; and made offerings in honor of his parents.

The ninth deity, with a retinue of 70,000, had been a diligent novice who served the Sangha by bringing water, and by sweeping and cleaning the monastery grounds.

The tenth deity, with a retinue of 80,000, had been born into a poor family and lived off the generosity of others. One day, seeing a monk on his alms rounds, he alerted the master of the house who had not noticed the monk, and in this way provided him with the opportunity to make merit.

The eleventh deity, with a retinue of 90,000, had lived on the island of Lanka, in the village of Kannikara. There

¹¹ Dutthagāmani (101-77 B.C.) is admired both as a warrior who liberated the country from foreign domination and as a ruler who restored Buddhist institutions, which had weakened during an extended period of political unrest. In Ceylon he is considered a national hero and is often compared with Asoka.

¹² The reference is to the great stupa, or Mahā Thūpa of Sri Lanka, built through the support of King Dutthagāmani.

¹³ The reference here is to the great bodhi tree of Sri Lanka, which grew from a cutting taken from the tree under which the Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment at Bodhgaya, India.

he had seen the great stupa and had made an offering of kannikara flowers. He offered his eyes in place of lamps, his head in place of flowers, his words in place of incense, his heart in place of perfume.

The twelfth deity, with a retinue of 100,000, lived in Anurādhapura as a poor but honest grass cutter. One day he went to the river and collected enough white sand to build a sand cetiya. He decorated it and paid homage with his body, mind, and heart.¹⁴

Finally, Metteyya arrived [from his abode in Tusita Heaven], surrounded by a retinue of an infinite number of celestial gods and goddesses. Phra Malai asked Indra about the merit made by those retainers in front of the Bodhisatta who were dressed, bejewelled, and adorned completely in white. Indra replied that in their former lives, these celestial beings had presented to the Three Gems offerings of flowers, cushions, cloth, etc. that were pure white.

The text continues with the same sort of question and answer concerning the celestial beings on the right side, dressed in yellow, those on the left in red, and those behind Metteyya, in green.

¹⁴ This humble offering resulted in the highest reward presumably because the offering of constructing a cetiya was made to the Buddha, rather than to ordinary people or the Sangha. This point in the narrative marks the end of the first part of the story, which in the Pali/Lan Na texts comprises the first of two separate palm leaf manuscripts. The next part of the story continues in the second "volume" of the set.

Phra Malai then asked Indra how Metteyya had made merit. After protesting that he had insufficient wisdom to explain the subject fully, Indra replied that Metteyya had practiced the Ten Perfections for an infinite number of years. In addition, he had performed the Five Great Sacrifices, giving up material possessions, wealth, children, wife, and even his own life.

Finally, Metteyya, having paid reverence to the cetiya, greeted Phra Malai, asking him where he had come from. Hearing that he had come from the human realm, he inquired about the nature and characteristics of the beings there. Phra Malai commented on the diversity as well as the suffering of life in that realm. Some people were rich, he noted, but most were poor; some were handsome, but many were plain; some lived a long life, but many died young; those who did good deeds were few in number, those who sinned were great in number, etc.

Upon hearing this reply, Metteyya wished to know how the people of Jambudipa made merit. Phra Malai explained that they performed meritorious acts in a multitude of ways: some presented offerings; some listened to sermons; some had Buddha images cast; some built residences for the Sangha; some presented robes; some dug ponds and wells; etc. They performed these good deeds according to their abilities, all because of their wish to meet Metteyya in the future. Metteyya responded by giving Phra Malai a message for the people of Jambudipa: those who wished to meet him should

listen to the recitation of the entire *Vessantara Jātaka*-- all one thousand verses -- in one day and one night. In addition, they should bring offerings of one thousand candles, incense sticks, flowers, etc. to the temple.

The Bodhisatta then told Phra Malai about the deterioration of Buddhism that would come about after Gotama Buddha's teachings had been on earth for 5,000 years. Human nature would degenerate both physically and morally. The life span would decrease to ten years, and incest, promiscuity, chaos, and violence would be commonplace. In a tumultuous outbreak of fighting and bloodshed, virtually everyone would die, except for a small number of wise people who had retreated to the forest and hidden themselves in caves. After seven days, they would emerge and create a new society based on mutual good will and a commitment to morality. Gradually the human life span would begin to increase again.

Following a period of intense rainfall, the earth would flourish with vegetation, and villages would be thickly populated. The surface of the earth would be as smooth as a drumhead, rice would husk itself, people would be handsome and free from physical disabilities, spouses would be faithful to one another, and all beings would live in harmony.

At that time, Metteyya would be born in the human realm and attain enlightenment. Then the Bodhisatta described to Phra Malai the various acts he had performed during previous

lifetimes to earn sufficient merit to enable him to become the next Buddha. Each act involved the practice of *dāna*, or generosity, and each would have a specific beneficial effect on humankind in the future. For example, because Metteyya had listened and responded to a beggar's request for alms, no one would be deaf or mute during his Buddhahood. Because he had radiated loving kindness, everyone would be gentle and loving.

Metteyya continued his discourse, describing to the thera how he would help all beings transcend *samsāra*, the cycle of rebirth and continued suffering, by freeing them from the ties of greed, hatred, and delusion. Finally, after exhorting Phra Malai to take this message to the people of Jambudipa, the Bodhisatta returned to Tusita Heaven. Phra Malai then returned to the human realm and delivered Metteyya's message. The people responded by making merit with great devotion. The text ends with a reference back to the poor grass cutter who offered Phra Malai the eight lotuses early in the story. After his death, he was born in Tāvatīmsa Heaven as Lord of the Lotuses; wherever he walked, lotuses sprang up to receive his feet -- all because of the merit he had made through his single act of *dāna*.

CHAPTER 2**A BRIEF SURVEY OF PHRA MALAI TEXTS**

Before examining the three texts that form the core of this dissertation, it will be useful to note that there are essentially two types of Phra Malai texts: those in which the monk's visit to hell is mentioned only briefly, perhaps in only a few lines, and those in which a major portion of the text, often one-quarter or more, is devoted to describing the punishments in hell. This difference is not only a formal one. It is also one of meaning and usage.

The first type is centered on one main theme: the rewards of merit-making by performing acts of *dāna*, or generosity, which eventually lead to *nibbāna*. Beginning with a brief section that describes the merit-making on behalf of deceased relatives in hell, the narrative, both literally and figuratively, progresses to higher and higher levels of attainment, reached through the performance of correspondingly greater and greater acts of *dāna*. The ultimate acts of *dāna* are those performed by the Bodhisatta Metteyya in countless past lives. The fruit of his generosity in performing these acts will be manifest in the ideal society that will exist when he comes to earth as the next Buddha.

These "heavenly" texts relate the tale with little or no repetition of lines or phrases. References to hell are devoid of emotional terms. The goal of these texts: to encourage the faithful to perform acts of merit, including listening to the *Vessantara Jātaka*. The ritual context: for the vast majority of these texts, a frame for the *Vessantara Jātaka*.

In the "hellish texts," by contrast, Phra Malai's visit to the world of the damned and descriptions of the kammic effects of sin have been expanded into a major theme equally important as that of *dāna*. Type Two texts, moreover, are for the most part, characterized by extensive repetition, graphic and grisly descriptions, and explicitly stated rules of right and wrong. In other words, the "hellish texts" are teaching tools, the scripts for audio-visual aids intended to have an emotional impact on their audience, and thereby warn them about the consequences of committing sin. The goal: behavior modification, that is, the deterrence from sin. The ritual context: sermons and funeral wakes. The teaching conveyed through vivid descriptions of the sufferings of hell beings is more immediate, powerful, and compelling than that conveyed through descriptions of the deities in heaven. This is demonstrated by the fact that to most Thai Buddhists, the name Phra Malai evokes images of hell rather than heaven.

Because these two types of texts are used in completely different ritual contexts, I believe that any

meaningful discussion of the Phra Malai story must deal with these differences.

Apart from these differences, there are still many others -- differences of style, structure, language -- between the various texts within each of the two groups. The section that follows identifies some of the most prominent Pra Malai texts and describes their most salient features.

Type One: The "Heavenly" Texts

These texts include the more simple and earlier forms, which include the oldest dated version of the Phra Malai legend I have found. Type One texts include the Lan Na Thai *Malai Ton - Malai Plai*, the Isan or Lao¹ *Malai Myn - Malai Saen*, the Pali *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu*, and the Siamese *Phra Malai Kham Luang*.

Malai Ton - Malai Plai ("Malai, part one," and "Malai, part two") is a pair of texts that represents the oldest dated form of the Phra Malai legend known at the present time. They are written in the Lan Na, or Northern Thai language, in a relatively simple verse form known as *rai* (pronounced *raai*³). The first text ends with the arrival of the twelfth deity in Tāvatimsa Heaven; the second begins with Metteyya's arrival.

¹ Lao is the main dialect spoken in northeast Thailand as well as Laos.

Hundreds of copies of palm leaf manuscripts of the *Malai Ton - Malai Plai* exist in monasteries throughout northern Thailand.² The oldest known copy of this text at the present time and possibly also the oldest extant book written in a Thai language is a palm leaf manuscript with a Chula Sakkarad date corresponding to 1516 A.D.³ Written in the *Tham* script, the treatise employs a dual language format consisting of Pali passages followed by their Lan Na Thai equivalents.⁴

² Since the 60's Chiang Mai University has carried out numerous projects involving the preservation and study of palm leaf manuscripts written in the Lan Na Thai language. The Social Research Institute and the Center for the Preservation and Promotion of Northern Thai Culture have both been involved in locating, cataloging, and microfilming manuscripts throughout the north. The manuscripts are cleaned, repaired, wrapped and stored at the monasteries where they were found. For a list of such manuscripts see *Rai chy nangsy boran lanna: ekasan maikhrofim khong sathaban wichai sangkhom mahawithiyalai chiangmai, pi 2521-2529* [Catalog of (Ancient) Palm Leaf texts: Microfilm documents of the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University, 1978-1986].

³ The Chula Sakkarad date is 868. For an explanation of this dating system, see Sao Saimong Mangrai, *The Padaeng Chronicle and the Jengtung State Chronicle Translated* (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1981) 34-38.

⁴ In north Thailand, there exists a Pali form of the *Malai Ton - Malai Plai* known as the *Pathama Malaya - Dutiya Malaya* (lit. "first Malai" - "second Malai").

The Wat Kittiwong manuscript is catalogued under the name *Nissai Malai Plai*. The word *nissai*, in this context, is a Lan Na Thai usage of the Pali *nissaya* to refer to treatises written in Pali with a phrase-by-phrase rendition in Lan Na Thai. (Personal communication: Sommai Premchit, April 30, 1991.)

The actual manuscript is stored at Wat Kittiwong, under the care of the district abbot, Phra Khru Satsanakiat,

In north and northeast Thailand the reading of the Phra Malai story has traditionally been considered a necessary preface to the preaching of the Vessantara Jātaka. The connection between the two texts lies in Metteyya's admonition to Phra Malai that those who wish to be born when the future Buddha is on earth should listen to the entire Jātaka.

The *Malai Myn* and *Malai Saen*⁵ are the northeastern equivalent of the northern *Malai Ton - Malai Plai* in terms of content, structure, and ceremonial usage. Like their parallels in the north, the *Malai Myn - Malai Saen* are read before the Vessantara Jātaka at annual festivals throughout

who has long taken an active role in cultural preservation. The wat houses an extensive collection of palm leaf manuscripts in Pali and La Na Thai, many of which were discovered in a cave near the Salween River in 1968. It is not known at this time whether the manuscript under discussion was part of those removed from the cave. The discovery was made by a small group led by the abbot and by Charles F. Keyes, who described the expedition into the jungle in "New Evidence on Northern Thai Frontier History" in *In Memoriam Phaya Anuman Rajadhon*, ed. by Tej Bunnag and Michael Smithies (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1970) 221.

At the time of the discovery, Keyes estimated the number of manuscripts removed from the cave to be about 400. Another group was taken out later. From these two groups an unknown number of the manuscripts were taken to Bangkok by officials of the Fine Arts Department. The present location of these manuscripts is not known.

⁵ Published in *Maha chat samnuan isan*, [Maha Chat: Isan Dialect] (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1988) 1-25. See also Santhani Abuarat, "Kan sūksa wannakam isan ryang malai myn malai saen," [A study of Isan Literature Concerning Malai Myn Malai Saen] (Bangkok: Master's thesis, Si Nakharinwirot University) 1985.

the region.⁶ They are written in Lao, in a variant form of the *Tham* script. Palm leaf copies can be found in monasteries throughout the northeast.

The *Maleyyadethera-vatthu* is a Pali language Phra Malai text written in the Khmer script. Like the Lao *Malai Myn - Malai Saen*, it is very similar to the *Malai Ton - Malai Plai*, and is likewise divided into two sections. The Thai National Library in Bangkok has an extensive, but uncatalogued collection of palm leaf manuscript copies of this text, none of which are dated. The one manuscript that is thought to be the oldest, based on the style of its calligraphy, may date from as early as the 16th century A.D.⁷ It has a colophon stating that it was made at Wat Chi-sa-in, in Phetburi, just south of Bangkok.

Phra Malai Kham Luang, the "Royal Version of Phra Malai," is written in Siamese, with Pali words and brief phrases scattered throughout. The oldest dated copy was written in 1738 A.D. *Phra Malai Kham Luang* is essentially a

⁶ The times at which the festival is held differ, however. In the north it is held during the twelfth lunar month, corresponding to the full moon night of October-November. In the northeast it is held any time after the harvest and before the beginning of the hot season (February through April). The *Maha Chat* festival is also read in the central region (usually from the end of lent until the twelfth month, October through November) and in the south during the first month (December-January). Only in the north and northeast, however, is a Phra Malai text read before the *Maha Chat*.

⁷ Supaporn Makchang, "*Maleyyadethera-vatthu: kantruat sopchamra lae kan suksa choeng wikhro*," ["*Maleyyadethera-vatthu: An Edition and a Critical Study*"] (Bangkok: Masters thesis, Chulalongkorn U, 1975) 8.

translation and expansion of a recension of the *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* discussed above, particularly in the area of Buddhist doctrine.⁸ A highly descriptive text, its language is richly embellished through skillful use of rhyme, alliteration, and other specialized poetic devices. Attributed to Prince Thammathibet, one of Thailand's most famous poets, *Phra Malai Kham Luang* appears to have been written as an act of merit during his years as a monk. The text ends with a colophon expressing the poet's wish that the merit earned in composing the poem might enable him to meet Metteyya and thereby attain *nibbāna*. There is no evidence that the text was ever recited in a ritual context.

A completely annotated translation of the *Phra Malai Kham Luang* appears in the Appendix.

Type Two Texts: The "Hellish" Texts

These texts stress the kammic effects of actions -- particularly sinful actions -- through an expanded description of the arhat's visit to hell. They include the Pali *Māleyyavatthudipani-tika* and its Thai translation -- the *Dika Malai Thewa Sut*; the *Phra Malai Klōn Suat* from central Siam, the closely related southern Thai *Kap Malai*,

⁸ Luis O. Gómez believes that the *Kham Luang* version was not based on the recension of the *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* that Denis translated, but rather on a different recension of that text.

the Northern Thai *Malai Prot Lok*, and the modern novel, *Phra Malai-Phu Poet Narok-Sawan*.

The Pali *Maleyyavatthudipani-tika* is a lengthy and greatly expanded version of the *Maleyyadevatthera-vatthu* that elaborates every element of the earlier text. It appears to have incorporated extensive borrowings from the *Traiphum*, a Thai Buddhist cosmological treatise.⁹ Like the *Traiphum*, it delineates the Buddhist cosmos, including descriptions of the hells, and the inhabitants of all the regions.

There are twelve palm leaf copies of this text in the Thai National Library, one of which has a colophon indicating that the text was composed by a monk named Phra Phutthawilat. No date is given, and opinion among Thai scholars differs as to where the text was written and the identity of "Phra Phutthawilat."¹⁰ This text has not yet been studied by either Thai or Western scholars.

The *Dika Malai Thewa Sut*¹¹ is a translation into Thai of the *Maleyyavatthudipani-tika* by Mii Chuthong. It has

⁹ Frank E. Reynolds and Mani B. Reynolds. *Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology*. Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Series, 4, 1982.

¹⁰ Supaphan na Bangchang, *Wiwathanakan ngankhian thi pen phasa bali nai prathet thai* [Research on Works Written in the Pali Language in Thailand] (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1986) 473.

¹¹ *Dika malai thewa sut doi phitsadan* (Bangkok: Thamma Banakan Press) 1971.

been published several times, originally in 1954, and more recently in 1972.

Phra Malai Sam Thammat is a well known version of the tale arranged for preaching (Thai: *theet*³) by a trio of monks.¹² The text is edited into three parts -- Phra Malai, Indra, and Metteyya -- each of which is read by a different monk, much like a dramatic performance. The three monks also read the additional roles of minor characters: the poor grass cutter who offers the eight lotuses, the hell beings, and the relatives in the human realm.

Phra Malai Klön Suat ("chanted version of Phra Malai") is perhaps the most famous Phra Malai text. For the past two centuries, and perhaps even longer, it has been chanted at funerals in the central region and in the south,¹³ a practice that is now becoming increasingly rare. The *Klön Suat* text basically follows the sequence of events of Type One texts. The main difference lies in the expansion of Phra Malai's visit to hell. Approximately a quarter of the text is devoted to descriptions of gruesome tortures and grotesquely deformed hell beings, together with the act that

¹² The style of recitation in the *theet*³ genre resembles reading, as opposed to the chanting (*suat*¹) used for the *Klön Suat* text, which resembles singing.

¹³ During the reign of King Rama I (1782-1809), an ecclesiastical decree ordered the Sangha to cease chanting this text because of the irreverent and sometimes obscene manner which they had adopted to perform it. See Robert Lingat, *Kotmai tra sam duang* [Laws of the Three Seals] (Bangkok: Khurusapha Press, 1962).

caused rebirth in these conditions. The oldest known extant copy of this text dates from A.D. 1738.¹⁴

Phra Malai Klɔn Suat has traditionally been written on accordion-folded heavy paper manuscripts, known as *samut khöi*, and illustrated with miniature paintings depicting incidents from the Phra Malai legend.

Malai Prot Lok (lit.: "Malai bestows mercy on the world") is a text written in Lan Na Thai that is read as a way of making merit for deceased relatives. Unlike the *Klɔn Suat*, however, it is read rather than chanted, and by a single monk rather than by a group. This text is unique in that the story takes place entirely in hell.

Apart from the works described above, there are numerous others inscribed on palm leaf,¹⁵ copied in notebooks, and printed in the form of modern sensationalistic novels. *Phra Malai-Phu Poet Narok-Sawan*¹⁶ (translated literally as, "Phra Malai, the one who opens hell and heaven"), published in 1977, is one such work. This text is written in direct, simple prose and is divided into chapters. Stylistically closer to a work of pop fiction than to a religious treatise, it has a highly melodramatic tone, revealing the motivations, attitudes, and emotions of the suffering beings, hell wardens, and people in the human

¹⁴ Eugène Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevattheravatthum."

¹⁵ Two such versions can be found in Watana na Nakorn, "Laksana ruam khöng Phra Malai."

¹⁶ Bangkok: 1977.

realm. Roughly sixty percent of the work concerns descriptions of the hells and the creatures that inhabit them.

Versions of the Phra Malai story have been depicted in murals as well. The most spectacular example can be found at Wat Phra That Haripunchai, Lamphun, in the Than-chai Wihan. In recent years the story has appeared as a set of post cards that can be presented to a monastery as a merit-making offering on behalf of the deceased. Printed in Japan, the scenes have a science fiction feeling in the rendering of human figures and buildings.¹⁷

Phra Malai texts also exist in the form of sculptures, examples of which can be found in several museums in Thailand.¹⁸ (See fig. 2). The iconography here is typical: a figure of a monk standing on a cube, to which are attached figures of suffering ghosts (Thai: *preet*²; Pali: *peta*), part human and part animal in form). The cube is a composite representation of the various hells, which are described in various treatises as cubical in shape.

¹⁷ See Anatole Peltier, "Iconographie de la Légend de Brah Malai," *BEFEO*, 71-72 (1982-83), 63-76; see also Henry Ginsburg, *Thai Manuscript Painting*, London: British Library, 1989.

¹⁸ The example in fig. 2 is from the Bangkok National Museum. Other sculptures with similar iconography can be found in the Thai National Museum at Nakhon Pathom, as well as in the Museum Rietberg, Zurich. Stylistically, the sculptures date from the Ratanakosin Period (1782 to the present). Griswold, A.B., "A Warning to Evildoers" (*Artibus Asiae*, v. xx. 1, 1957) 18-22.

* * * *

It is obvious from the above survey of texts that the Phra Malai theme has grown and flourished as a significant and varied theme within Thai Buddhist culture. The following chapter will examine the Sinhalese roots of this theme and the origins of the character of the arhat Phra Malai.

CHAPTER 3

PRIOR TEXTS, PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Although the Phra Malai story achieved its greatest florescence in Thailand, there is in Sri Lanka an extensive tradition concerning a Maliyadeva who is famous as the last arhat. Certain sites are regarded in local folklore as places where Maliyadeva lived, preached, meditated, and died, and two government schools are named after him.¹

"Was this Maliyadeva, the hero of our story, a real person or a purely mythological character?" This question was posed by the late Father Eugène Denis, the French Jesuit missionary-scholar, in a pioneering study of the origin and development of the Phra Malai legend written in 1963. Denis, who lived in Bangkok from 1955 to 1971 and again from 1976 until his death in 1986, wrote the only comprehensive study of the Phra Malai theme before the present one.²

¹ P.B. Meegaskumbura, professor of Sinhalese at the University of Peradeniya, personal communication, June 18, 1992.

² Although Western scholars have frequently referred to the Phra Malai story in their writings, their comments generally seem to suggest that they have not actually had the opportunity to read any versions of the text, much less compare them. However, a new translation

Apart from Denis's work, the only Westerners to examine the Phra Malai story were two scholars who wrote brief accounts of the iconography of certain artistic depictions it. A.B. Griswold, one of the major contributors to Thai historical and art historical studies, in 1957 wrote an article on the Phra Malai bronze sculptures that were mentioned at the end of the previous chapter.³ The other article, written by Anatole Peltier in 1982, discusses the iconography of a set of modern post cards depicting the theme.⁴ Both articles shed some light on interesting aspects of the Phra Malai story, but are limited in scope and are most useful in discussing possible sources of the descriptions of the hells that were grafted on to the basic story.

While little comprehensive or comparative work on the story has been done by Western scholars, a considerable amount of preliminary research on the different versions of Phra Malai has been done by Thai scholars in recent years. This chapter will begin with an examination of Denis's thesis and then summarize the work of the Thai scholars concerning the sources and evolution of the Phra Malai legend in Thailand.

of the *Māleyyadēvathera-vatthu* into English by Steven Collins will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of the Pali Text Society*.

³ Griswold "A Warning."

⁴ "Iconographie."

Denis's study, entitled "Brah Maleyyadévattheravatthum: Légende bouddhiste du saint thera Maleyyadéva,"⁵ was written as a thesis presented to the Sorbonne in 1963. Unfortunately, this fine piece of scholarship, which has long stood as the definitive work on the evolution of the legend, has never been published in book form and remains difficult to obtain. Denis did, however, publish a summary of this work in 1965 in a brief article, "L'Origine Cingalaise du P'rah Malay," in the *Journal of the Siam Society*.⁶ For the past twenty-seven years, scholars have relied almost exclusively on this eleven-page article whenever they have referred to the subject of Phra Malai.

Denis's primary contributions -- in the areas of translation and textual development -- displayed admirable linguistic ability and an extensive knowledge of Buddhist writings. He did not, however, include any textual material from north or northeast Thailand, nor did he examine the legend in any of its ritual contexts.⁷

⁵ I am indebted to Dr. Louis Gabaude for assisting me in obtaining a copy of this work.

⁶ *Felicitation Volume of Southeast Asian Studies Presented to H.H. Prince Dhaninivat*, v.ii, 329-38, Bangkok.

⁷ In all fairness to Denis, I should note that he does mention the names of Malai texts listed by Finot in his research on Pali literature in Laos (*Récherches sur la littérature laotienne*. BEFEO, 17 (1917) 65. He also makes references to the recitation of Phra Malai in certain ritual contexts, but does not mention which version of the story was recited. For example, on p. 73,

His thesis included a critical edition and translations into French of the Pali *Māleyyadavathera-vatthu*, based on four manuscripts in various collections: one from the Thai National Library,⁸ one from the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh,⁹ and two from the National Library in Paris.¹⁰ He also translated the Central Thai *Phra Malai Klōn Suat* (chanted version) and an embryonic Pali *Phra Malai* text from Sri Lanka known as the *Cūlagalla-vatthu*.¹¹

he cites a reference by Konrad Kingshill (*Ku Daeng, The Red Tomb: A Village Study in Northern Thailand* (Chiang Mai, Prince Royal's College, 1959: 176) to the recitation of *Phra Malai* in conjunction with merit-making rites for the deceased. Denis did not identify this text, which is the *Malai Phot Lok* [Malai Bestows Mercy on the World], a unique northern Thai version of the legend dealing only with the arhat's visit to hell and used only in the context he describes.

⁸ Pali Ms. No. 147, written in *mul* characters, engraved on 24 leaves, consisting of 48 pages, with 5 lines per page, undated. This manuscript was the principal text used in the thesis.

⁹ Uncataloged manuscript given to the Institute by Damnap Monastery in 1930; written in *mul* characters, engraved on 26 leaves, comprising 52 pages, with 5 lines per page; undated.

¹⁰ The first of these, cataloged as No. 326; written in *mul* characters, engraved on 18 leaves, comprising 36 pages, with one line per page; entitled *Phra Maleyya Sutra*. The second, cataloged as No. 658; written in *mul* characters engraved on 12 leaves, comprising 24 pages with 5 lines per page; entitled *Phra Maleyya devathera*. The second is an incomplete text with the first part (the arrival of the twelve deities) is missing.

¹¹ This story is part of a collection of tales known as the *Rasavāhī* and is translated in Denis's thesis.

In searching for the source of the deva-thera character, Denis sifted through an extensive collection of chronicles, commentaries, and legends in which a thera called Malaya or some variation of this name (such as Maliya or Māleyya) plays a role. In the following pages I will synthesize the material that he assembled, which suggests that the Phra Malai character can be traced back to an actual thera named Maliya who lived in Sri Lanka in the second century B.C., contemporaneously with the renowned Sinhalese king, Dutṭhagāmanī. This monk became renowned during his life because of his saintly qualities and his ability to preach, both of which were passed along in the legend. About his memory developed the folklore of a thera with god-like powers such as the divine eye and the ability to travel to the heavens, acquired as the result of living numerous virtuous lives. Over the centuries various mythic motifs were added to the legend, including the character of Sakka and incidents demonstrating the benefits of dāna.

One of the earliest references to a thera named Malaya-mahādeva appears in the *Mahāvamsa*,¹² the great Pali chronicle that relates the history of Buddhism from its beginnings in India through its introduction and growth in Sri Lanka. This work is believed to date from

¹² See *The Mahāvamsa or The Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka*, translated into English by Wilhelm Geiger (Colombo: Ceylon Govt. Information Dept., first pub. 1912, reprinted 1986) Ch. XXXII, 30 and 49-50.

between the fourth and the sixth centuries A.D. In it, the thera is one of five arhats to whom King Dutṭhagāmani, during a terrible famine, made an offering of sour millet gruel obtained by selling his precious earrings.¹³ According to the chronicle, the arhat, after receiving the gruel, shared it with nine hundred other monks before partaking of it himself. Thus, in this initial reference, Malaya is already accorded the status of an heroic figure through his association with one of Buddhism's most revered rulers, and through the miraculous increase in the amount of food given as an act of dāna.¹⁴

A Maliya-mahādeva also appears in several of the writings of Buddhaghosa, the Theravadin monk-scholar of the late fourth and early fifth centuries A.D. These texts are the *Manorathapūrāṇī*, a commentary on the

¹³ Dutthagāmani (101-77 B.C.) is admired both as a warrior who liberated the country from foreign domination and as a ruler who restored Buddhist institutions, which had weakened during an extended period of political unrest.

¹⁴ The name Maliya also occurs twice in the *Jātaka Atthākatha*. In neither occurrence does the thera play a major role; the name is simply mentioned together with the names of other theras. The first such mention is in the *Hatthi-pāla Jātaka*, (No. 509), where Mali-mahādeva is one of several theras who renounced the world in response to the Bodhisatta's exhortation. The second is in the *Mūga-Pakkha Jātaka* (also known as the *Temiya Jātaka*) (No. 538), where Mahāmaliyadeva is among the last group of theras to renounce the world during one of the past lives of the Buddha. According to W. Geiger, this work dates from approximately the same period as the *Visuddhimagga*. (See Denis, "Brah Māleyyadēvattheravatthum," 25-26.)

Ānguttara Nikāya; the *Papañcasūdani*, a commentary on the *Majjhima Nikāya*; and the *Visuddhimagga*, or the "Path of Purification," which is sometimes described as a kind of encyclopedia of Buddhism. In the first of these works, the thera Maliyadeva achieves the state of arhatship, becomes renowned for his preaching ability, and acquires perfect knowledge of the *Tipitaka*. In the second, he is famous for his eloquence in preaching a certain sutta, causing sixty monks to become arhats every time he preached it.¹⁵ In the third, a Malayavasi Mahādeva is presented as a meditation master, particularly skilled at suggesting the type of meditation technique suitable for each individual.

Several centuries later the thera Malaya appears in a number of texts in the context of another motif, i.e., the rewards that follow from practicing *dāna*, particularly by presenting food to a virtuous arhat. This motif, as we have seen, is emphasized throughout the Phra Malai legend. One such text where it occurs is the *Mahāvamsa Tīkā*,¹⁶ where a Maleyadeva is mentioned in an episode concerning the son of King Dutthagāmani, named Saliya. In a previous existence, Saliya gave a meal of

¹⁵ This text is known as the "Cha Chakka Sutta"; see E.W. Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Co., Ltd., 1953).

¹⁶ The date of this text may be as early as the eighth century or as late as the twelfth; Denis, "Brah Maleyyadevattheravatthum" 29.

pork to eight arhats, including Maleyadeva. As a result of this meritorious act, on the day of Saliya's birth, the whole island of Lanka was replete with rice.

Another occurrence of this motif is an eighth century Sinhalese story about the thera Māleyya where we find not only the theme of dāna, but also the power of the divine eye. This story is the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*,¹⁷ which is found in the *Sīhalavatthu-pakarana*, a collection Pali translations of Sinhalese legends. Here, Māleyya goes out to receive alms one day and arrives at the house of a poor old woman who presents him with a ladle of soup. Later, when other theras offer to share their food with him, Māleyya declines, out of compassion for the old woman; he sees with his divine eye that the old woman, by presenting him with the soup, will enjoy the fruit of the merit she has made for sixty cosmic eras.

This cluster of motifs -- a central character named Maliya-mahādeva, the rewards of dāna, and prophetic vision -- are found in three more stories which are part of two other, similar collections of Sinhalese legends. These collections are the *Sahassavatthu-pakarana* (ca. ninth century A.D.), and the *Rasavāhini* (fourteenth century).¹⁸

¹⁷ This story has the same name as the Pali *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*, which Denis translated; but it is, in fact, a different story.

¹⁸ Denis cites Rahula's *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* as his source.

These two collections each contain three stories in which a thera named Maliya-mahādeva appears. The first story, the *Mahallikā-vatthu*,¹⁹ contains many of the same elements found in the tale summarized above. Again, the main character is an old woman. Here, however, she is something of a quarrelsome old shrew. The thera Maliyadeva, through his prophetic vision, sees that this woman will soon die and be born in hell. Through meditation, he discovers that he can save her by accepting alms from her. Consequently, he goes to her house to receive alms from her and is given a small serving of soup. Upon leaving her house, he refuses to allow another monk to help him carry his food, not wanting to deprive the woman of the fruit of the merit she has made. Shortly afterward, the woman dies and is born in heaven.

The second story from these two collections, the *Dantakutumbika-vatthu*,²⁰ introduces still another motif which we find in the Phra Malai legend, that is, the character of Sakka or Indra. This tale tells of a wealthy man known as Dantakutumbika, who donated much of his fortune to the Sangha. One day the thera Maliyadeva, along with seven other arhats, goes to the home of Dantakutumbika, who presents them with a sumptuous feast and vows to support them perpetually.

¹⁹ Shv. 92; Rsv. 11-1; see Denis, "Brahmāleyyadevattheravatthum" 33.

²⁰ Shv. 95 and the Rsv. 11-13.

Shortly afterward, Dantakutumbika is involved in a shipwreck in which he is the only survivor. He is saved through the divine vision of Maliyadeva who sends another monk to rescue him. After resting, Dantakutumbika prepares to return home, but Maliyadeva invites him to remain for the visit of Sakka that night. When the god arrives, Maliyadeva introduces Dantakutumbika and tells Sakka of the man's generosity. Then the god gives a sermon on the merits of almsgiving.

The third story in which we find this accumulation of motifs -- that is, the character of Maliya-mahādeva, the theme of *dāna*, prophetic vision, and the character of Indra -- is the *Cūlagalla-vatthu*, or the story of Cūlagalla.²¹ In this tale, Cūlagalla is a devotee living in Lanka. One day, Maliyamahātheradeva, suffering from indigestion, goes to the house of Cūlagalla to obtain some medicine. Cūlagalla prepares the medicine and while it is brewing, Maliya uses his extraordinary power to take him up to Tāvatimsa Heaven to worship the Cūlāmani Cetiya. Upon their arrival, they see a succession of five deities who have come to pay respect at the cetiya. Maliya recounts the ways in which each deity made merit in his previous life. Each of the first four had been a cowherder and had made merit by building a stupa of sand and decorating it with flowers.

²¹ Shv. 77, Rsv. 10-1.

The fifth, however, had not been a cowherder, but a man of faith and piety who had built a rest house and other buildings for the Sangha. For this meritorious act he was born in a golden palace. Moreover, because he had performed other acts of *dāna*, he received other heavenly rewards as well, including jewelled palaces, a retinue of a thousand heavenly maidens, and superior status in heaven.

Finally, Cūlagalla is introduced to Metteyya, who presents him with a divine cloth. After returning to the human realm, Cūlagalla tells the people of his experience in heaven. Seven days later, he dies and is born as a deva in Tusita Heaven.

The Cūlagalla-vatthu, then, as Denis demonstrates, was the core text upon which the Phra Malai legend was constructed. If we compare it with the Māleyyadethavattha-vatthu, similarities as well as differences between the two texts become obvious. In both tales, Maleyya (or Malai) is a thera who has attained the state of arhat. He uses his extraordinary power to go up to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three to worship the Cūlāmani Cetiya. There he encounters Indra and a sequence of devas who arrive in great grandeur to worship the cetiya. A conversation follows, centering on the ways in which each deity made merit in his past life to earn the reward of birth in heaven. Finally, the Bodhisatta Metteyya arrives, in even greater glory than the others. We learn that

because of having completed the Perfections, he will be born as the next Buddha and lead everyone from the cycle of *samsāra*. In both cases, the story ends with the main character's return to the human realm to relay to the people the lessons he has heard on his travels to heaven.

Apart from these similarities, however, the two stories are vastly different. In the *Cūlagalla-vatthu*, as we have seen, the main character is not the thera Māleyya, but the layman Cūlagalla. It is he who asks the questions about each of the devas who come to worship, and he who relays the answers back to the people on the human realm. His centrality to the narrative is also apparent in the gift of the divine cloth that he receives from Metteyya and his subsequent rebirth in Tusita Heaven as a powerful deva.

In the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*, the character of Cūlagalla does not exist. Rather, the main character is the arhat Māleyyadeva, and he travels not only to Tāvatimsa Heaven, but also to hell.

In both texts information is revealed, and teaching facilitated, through questions and answers. Māleyya's role shifts, however, from that of the character who provides the answers, in the *Cūlagalla-vatthu*, to the questioner, in the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*.

Another difference between the two stories, as Denis points out, lies in the number of deities who come to worship the Cūlāmani Cetiya, and more important, in the

ways in which they made merit in their previous lives. In the *Cūlagalla-vatthu*, the number is five; in the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu* it is twelve. Moreover, in the *Cūlagalla-vatthu*, four of the five deities made merit by worshipping a cetiya, while in the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*, only two of the twelve made merit in this way. The other ten deities earned their respective rewards through the practice of *dāna*.

But the greatest difference between the two texts lies in the second half of the Southeast Asian version, which includes passages describing Metteyya and his Perfections, the ways in which he made merit, and future events. None of these elements are found in the *Cūlagalla-vatthu*, where the appearance of Metteyya is rather brief and forms the conclusion of the story. In the oldest known versions of the legend in Thailand, this part of the legend is contained in the second of the two texts,²² where it is greatly expanded.

In the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*, however, it occupies the major part of the text, and contains the most significant teachings of the treatise. What is the

²² *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu* which Denis studied, and which bears the closest resemblance to the *Malai Ton - Malai Plai*, this division is indicated by the following lines: "The first part of the story of Phra Malai, concerning the twelve deities, is finished." (Supaporn, 1978, 205. Denis, "Traduction du 'Brah Māleyyadevattheravatthum'" in "Brah Māleyyadevattheravatthum" 29. See also Northern Thai versions and Lao versions.)

source of the themes developed in this section of the text? Denis found the answer in the *Saddharmālankāraya*, a Sinhalese translation of the *Rasavāhini*, composed by a monk named Dhammadikitti, who lived at the Gadaladeni Vihara in the fourteenth century.²³ According to Denis, this text contains expanded versions of all the stories of the *Rasavāhini*, including the story of Culagalla. Although the text contains no other references to the thera Maliyadeva, it does contain two supplementary chapters not found in either the *Rasavāhini* or the *Sahassavatthu-pakarana*. The last of these chapters contains a long discourse by the Buddha Gotama on the coming of the Bodhisatta Metteyya. This text, says Denis, follows the second part of the *Māleyyadevatheravatthu* nearly point by point. It lists the Perfections attained by Metteyya during sixteen *asamkheyyas* and ten thousand *kappas*, the gradual disappearance of the religion of the Buddha, the degeneration of morals, the diminishing life span of the human race, etc., and the eventual coming of the Bodhisatta.²⁴

These similarities between the two texts led Denis to believe that this last chapter of the *Saddhamālankāraya* was transformed into the second part of the

²³ Denis: "Brah Māleyyadevathera-vatthum," 37-38, n. 81.

²⁴ Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevathera-vatthum" 57-60.

Māleyyadēvathera-vatthu. The Buddha's discourse in the *Saddharmālankārāya* became Metteyya's discourse in the *Māleyyadēvathera-vatthu*. Denis believed that this Sinhalese text made its way into Southeast Asia and he cited the presence in Burma and Thailand of a number of texts that he felt are Pali adaptations of this work.²⁵

Denis's proposal certainly points in the right direction for future research. A comparative study of relevant texts -- such as the *Metteyyavāmsa*, *Metteyyasutta*, and *Anāgatavāmsa* -- found in Sri Lanka, Burma, northern Thailand, and Laos would reveal a great deal about the creation and movement of Buddhist literature within and between these areas. These works exist in manuscript form at wats throughout northern Thailand and only recently have been made available in microfilm through Chiang Mai University. In the absence of such a study, Denis's conclusions should not be considered the final word on the matter. As he himself pointed out, some of the themes found in the Phra Malai legend, such as the Perfections completed by Metteyya, the decline of the religion of Gotama Buddha after 5,000 years, the degeneration of human society, etc., are also

²⁵ The texts he cites are the *Madhurasavāhini* *Vatthu*, published in Rangoon (Hamsavati Pitaka Press, 1927), the *Madhurasavāhini*, *Jambudvīpa*, MS # 169, National Library, Bangkok, *Madhurasavāhini Lankādvīpa*, MS # 179, National Library, Bangkok, and *Tika Madhurasavāhini Lankādvīpa*, MS # 172, National Library. (See 37-38, n. 81).

found in the *Anāgatavāmsa*, or "History of Future Events." This noncanonical text, which exists in various recensions in Burma and northern Thailand, is of uncertain date and authorship. An edition based on three manuscripts in Burma was published as early as 1886, with a partial translation in 1896, but it remains inadequately studied.²⁶ In the absence of translations and critical editions of all of the above documents, it would be premature to trace the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu* to any one such source.

Moreover, Denis does not mention that some of the main themes of the second part of the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu* can actually be traced back to the *Cakkavatti-Sihañada-Suttanta*, a canonical text found in the *Dīgha Nikāya*.²⁷ This sutta also takes the form of a discourse by the Buddha. It speaks of a future time of "incest, wanton greed, and perverted lust,"²⁸ when the human life span, which will have increased to 80,000 years, will decrease down to 500 and then to only ten years. Like

²⁶ Minayeff's Pali edition was published in *JPTS*, 1886; a partial translation was published by Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Oriental Series, 1896).

²⁷ A translation of this text is published in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, translated from the Pali of the *Dīgha Nikāya* by T.W. and C.W.F. Rhys Davids, pt. III (London: Oxford U P, 1921) 63-76.

²⁸ *Dialogues of the Buddha*, translated from the Pali of the *Dīgha Nikāya* by T.W. and C.W.F. Rhys Davids, pt. III, 69.

the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*, this sutta foretells a "sword period" (*Satthantarakaappa*) of seven days during which people will look on each other as wild beasts and kill one another.²⁹

Both texts tell us that during this time of violence, some people will hide in the forest or in caves. After seven days of fighting, they will emerge from seclusion, embrace one another, and discuss the ways in which they can lead moral lives. As a result of the merit they earn through practicing morality, their descendants will lead increasingly long lives, and Jambudīpa will prosper. The *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Suttanta* then mentions the arising of "Sankha," a righteous "Wheel-turning" monarch, endowed with the "seven precious things" (the wheel, elephant, horse, gem, woman, house-father, and councillor³⁰), during whose reign the exalted Metteyya will be born.³¹

²⁹ The *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Suttanta*, however, attributes the occurrence of these phenomena to the growth of "poverty, stealing, violence," etc., all resulting from the king's negligence in this area of kingship, rather than to the disappearance of the religion.

³⁰ *Dialogues of the Buddha* 73.

³¹ Reference to such a monarch is also found in *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, but not in the recension of the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu* translated by Denis or in the *Klqn Suat* version. There are numerous differences between the various recensions; after comparing the Pali phrases in *Phra Malai Kham Luang* with Denis's Pali text of the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*, Luis O. Gómez concluded that the *Kham Luang* was adapted from a different recension of the Pali text.

Although Denis does not mention the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda-Suttanta*, this text is among the ones that Supaporn Makchang, a faculty member at Thonburi Teachers College, in a master's thesis written in 1978, listed as one of the sources of the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*.³² Supaporn based much of her initial research on Denis's work. Using his critical edition as a foundation, she added to it by examining not only the four manuscripts Denis had studied, but also ten others in the National Library, Bangkok. In addition, she presented a Thai translation of the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*.

Like Denis, Supaporn concluded that the *Cūlagallavatthu* formed the core of the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*. However, even though she had his thesis at her disposal, she made no mention of his discussion of the *Saddharmālānīkārarya* as an important source of the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*. Instead, she proposed that the embryonic Malai story of the *Cūlagallavatthu* was expanded through the addition of several canonical texts as well as elements from the *Mahāvamsa*. The canonical texts, she suggested, include not only the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda-Suttanta*, but also the *Agañña-Suttanta*, and the *Vimāna-vatthu*. Supaporn did not discuss the influence of these

³² Supaporn Makchang, "Māleyyadephatheravatthu: kantruat chamra lae kansuksa choeng wikhro," [Māleyyadephatheravatthu: An Edition and a Critical Study] (Bangkok: Masters thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1978) 32.

texts in any detail, but simply enumerated the contribution she felt each text had made.

From the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda-Suttanta* she suggested, came ideas about the increasing and decreasing life span of the people of Jambudīpa and the decline of the religion of Gotama Buddha. From the *Agañña-Suttanta*, which immediately follows this text in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, came the concepts of cyclical nature of the universe, which is periodically destroyed and renewed, producing grain that grows by itself without needing to be planted.³³

From the *Vimāna-vatthu*,³⁴ which is part of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, she listed six stories that she felt contributed ideas about the meritorious acts performed by the deities who had retinues of various sizes. The *Vimāna-vatthu*, "Stories of the Heavenly Mansions," consists of 80 brief tales of the meritorious acts performed by devotees who have been born in Tāvatimsa Heaven. Supaporn lists the following tales: No. 22, Bhadda, in which a woman had observed the silas and generously presented offerings to the Sangha; No. 36, Mallika, which tells of a woman who had presented offerings that were all gold in color; No. 40, Shining

³³ The *Agañña-Suttanta*, in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 77-94.

³⁴ *Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon*, Part IV, tr. by Jean Kennedy (London: Luzac & Co., 1942).

Mansion, where a woman had made offerings of food but had not listened to the dhamma; No. 45, Four Women, in which four sisters had presented flowers of different colors to a monk; No. 47, Yellow Mansion, which tells of a woman who was killed on her way to make merit and was reborn in Tāvatiṁsa Heaven adorned completely in yellow; and No. 75, Varied Creeper Mansion, the story of a poor layman who had supported his parents his entire life.

From the *Mahāvamsa*³⁵ came the idea of the merit made by Kings Dutṭhagāmani and Saddhātissa of Lanka.³⁶ As noted earlier, Dutṭhagāmani was both warrior and a great Buddhist monarch, who ruled during the first century B.C. He is referred to in all the versions of the *Phra Malai* story known in Thailand as Lord Abhayadutṭha, who comes to worship as the eighth deity at the Cūlāmani Cetiya. Saddhātissa, who succeeded him, ruling from 77 to 59 B.C., appears in *Phra Malai* as the seventh deity and is identified as Lord Abhayadutṭha's younger brother.

Whether these texts were in fact the direct sources of the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*, or whether their influence came through some intermediary treatise or from a general pool of narrative motifs seems to be impossible to say with any certainty. What is significant is the

³⁵ The Great Chronicle of Ceylon, dating from around the fourth to the sixth centuries A.D.

³⁶ Supaporn, "Maleyyadevattheravatthu" 32, n. 1

fact that, despite the cumulative nature of the Phra Malai legend as it is known in Thailand -- that is, the obvious way it has been constructed out of segments of older texts, these earlier texts in some cases have quite a different focus or function from that of the early Phra Malai story.

An example can be seen in the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda-Suttanta*, the main point of which is the importance of following the dhamma or one's duty. This text tells of an Ariyan king who fulfilled his role completely in all respects but one: he neglected to give alms to the poor. As a result, the morality of nearly everyone in his kingdom declined, followed by a decline in the human life span, etc.

In the Phra Malai texts, however, where the same theme and some of the same events occur (i.e. the degeneration of morality, the emergence of a new moral society, and the coming of the future Buddha Metteyya), the purpose appears to be to encourage the faithful to make merit before Gotama's teachings disappear. In this way they will ensure being born during the time of the future Buddha, and thereby attain *nibbāna*.

Predictions concerning the gradual disappearance of the religion of Gotama Buddha, according to Lamotte, "were formulated from the earliest times and repeated throughout the centuries. They have exerted a decisive

influence on the history of Buddhism."³⁷ In the following chapter I will discuss this prediction and the effect it had on the writing of Buddhist texts in Southeast Asia - or at least Thailand - in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Place of Origin - Sri Lanka or Southeast Asia

Both Denis and Supaporn were interested not only in the textual sources of the *Maleyyadevathera-vatthu* (the oldest Southeast Asian form of the legend of which they were aware), but also in the place of origin of this text. In other words, did the Phra Malai legend, as it is now known in Southeast Asia, originate there? Or did the tale develop to its present form in Sri Lanka, and then make its way to one of the Southeast Asian countries?

Denis remained equivocal on this matter both in his thesis and in the article he published two years later. As he pointed out, there is compelling evidence to warrant this equivocation. On the one hand, there are several fragments of Sinhalese manuscripts with references to the character of Malai that point to Sri Lanka as the place of origin. One such fragment contains part of a popular old Sinhalese text recited in the

³⁷ Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, translated from the French by Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 1988) 192.

province of Rohana, where the Phra Malai story is set.³⁸ This brief text, essentially a dialogue between the thera Maliyadeva and Indra, to which Metteyya joins in at the end, resembles a greatly abridged version of the *Maleyyadephathera-vatthu*. Maliya arrives at the Cūlāmani Cetiya, explains to Indra that he has come to worship, and asks whether Metteyya will also come on that day. Indra replies that the Bodhisatta will indeed come since it is the day of the full moon. Then a succession of three deities arrives to pay respect. Maliya inquires about the past lives of each of them and learns that the first was a poor man, while the other two were former kings of Lanka (Saddhātissa and Dutṭhagāmani). Then Metteyya arrives and tells Maliya that if the people of Jambudīpa make merit with devotion, he will save them from samsāra.

Other pieces of evidence pointing to Lanka as the place of origin of the Phra Malai legend are fragments of Sinhalese manuscripts in the British Museum that mention a thera named Maleyya. One contains a sacred poem unrelated to the legend of Malai, but attributed in the text, to a certain Maliya Thera.³⁹ The other manuscript contains a small section, much altered, of the

³⁸ Denis, "Brah *Maleyyadephathera-vatthum*" 15-17.

³⁹ Denis, "Brah *Maleyyadephathera-vatthum*" 15-17.

*Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*⁴⁰ that includes verses in Pali followed by translations in ancient Sinhalese. Since neither text is dated, Denis was willing to conclude only that the Phra Malai legend was not unknown in Sri Lanka.

On the other hand, Denis noted that there is reason to believe that the development of the legend in its Southeast Asian form took place in a Southeast Asian country. He pointed out that the Cūlagalla story apparently made its way to Burma under the name *Culakallakanda-Vatthu*. The story appeared in a book entitled *Madhurarasavāhini-Vatthu*, a collection of Sinhalese legends translated first into Pali by a thera named Arhan Ratthapala, and subsequently into Burmese by another thera, Arhan Varirapabhasa.⁴¹

Both Supaporn and Supaphan na Bangchang, a professor of Pali at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, also argued that the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu* was composed in Southeast Asia. In Supaporn's opinion, the legend was written in Burma by a Burmese monk sometime between the tenth and twelfth centuries A.D. She began her argument by pointing out that the Hinayāna Buddhism of the Sri Lankan school had first entered Southeast Asia by way of Burma, from where it spread to Lan Na, Lan Chang (the

⁴⁰ Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevatthera-vatthum" 14.

⁴¹ Denis, "L'Origine Cingalaise" 334-335.

ancient Lao state), and Cambodia, in succession. She noted that in Burma, moreover, during the reign of King Anuriddha (B.E 1581-1620) (A.D. 1038-1077), Buddhism flourished and spread to nearby areas that were under Burmese rule, such as Lan Na and Dvaravati.⁴²

Then, relying on the work of Denis, Supaporn pointed to a Burmese inscription discovered by G.H. Luce which suggests that a Malai text of some sort was known in Burma at the very beginning of the thirteenth century A.D. This inscription was discovered by Luce at Thadun-e, a village located near Mahlaing, in the district of Meiktila, not far from Mandalay. It states that in the year C.S. 563 (1201 A.D.), "The great monk Non up ..., after completing his work of merit, on Sunday the fourteenth day of the waxing of the month of Tagu (Caitra), listened to the recitation of Malan [the Burmese name for Malai]. On Monday, the full moon, he listened to the Pisamantra [a word that Luce believed to be a form of the Vessantara Jātaka]. On Tuesday, the last waxing, he listened to the Dhammacakka [Sutta]."⁴³

The information in this inscription, connecting the recitation of a Malai text with that of the Vessantara Jātaka, appears to be further corroborated by the preface

⁴² Supaporn, "Maleyyadevattheravatthu" 34.

⁴³ Supaporn, "Maleyyadevattheravatthu" 34; Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevatthera-vatthum" 67; "L'Origine Cingalaise" 334.

to a book entitled *Porānadīpanī kyamh*, which is a collection of ancient Burmese legends. Included in this volume is the story of "Ashyan Mālaih rahantā" (the Burmese name for Phra Malai). According to its compiler, Hmawbi Saya Thein, "in ancient times" the Malai story was read at religious festivals held in the villages and towns on the day of the full moon of the Burmese month of "Tazaugmon", [which corresponds to October-November], at the end of the rainy season. During this time, known as *kathina*, the Buddhist faithful would bring offerings of flowers, fruit, and robes to the monasteries. They also listened to the recitation of the *Vessantara Jātaka*.⁴⁴

The Malai text included in this volume closed with the information that formerly the festival of "Shin Male" had been widely celebrated, but that since the beginning of the twentieth century A.D. it continued only in upper Burma. In Siam, however, said the text, in the five "Yuan" [northern Thai] territories, at the time of the full moon in November, one could still see the Shan⁴⁵ Yuan monks, on their pulpits, reading the *Vessantara Jātaka* for the people to hear. Some scholars, it said,

⁴⁴ Denis, "Brah Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthum" 12-13, 70; "L'Origine Cingalaise" 334.

⁴⁵ The Shan are a distinct Thai ethnic group in upper Burma and north Thailand.

believe that the Phra Malai originated in the country of Yonoka, and there they have "Phra Malai" festivals.⁴⁶

This information is highly significant for two reasons. First, it tells us that the Burmese ceremonies were much like those of the "Yuan" or Northern Thai and involved the reading of both a Malai text and the *Vessantara Jataka*. Second, if these ceremonies were indeed the same as those mentioned in the 1201 A.D. inscription referred to above, it would suggest that the tradition of reading these two texts in succession is a very old one and that the origin of this practice, and perhaps of the Phra Malai legend, as it is known in Southeast Asia, originated in Burma. Unfortunately, however, in the absence of more information about the 1201 ceremonies or the nature of the Malai text that was recited at that time, there is little that can be concluded with any certainty.

Nevertheless, the evidence in the 1201 inscription formed the core of Supaporn Makchang's argument that the Pali *Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthu* was composed in Burma. She points out that festivities similar to those described in Burma are still held (although not at every temple, as in the past) in north Thailand at the end of Buddhist Lent, near the day of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month,

⁴⁶ Denis, "Brah Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthum" 12-13.

which occurs in late October or early November.⁴⁷ These festivities involve elaborate decorations of the temple grounds with banana trunks and paper cut-outs of animals to replicate the forest setting of the story of Vessantara. In addition, devout Buddhists (the majority of them older women) bring with them offerings of flowers, incense, and candles to listen to the night-long recitation of this Jātaka, which proceeds only after the *Malai Ton - Malai Plai* texts have been read.

Supaporn Makchang is of the opinion that these practices of merit-making and reading the Phra Malai and Vessantara Jātaka, along with the *Māleyyadevatheravatthu*, went from Burma to Lan Na, from where they were passed on to the Lao kingdom of Lan Chang.

Supaphan na Bangchang, however, argues that the *Māleyyadevatheravatthu* was written in northern Thailand by a local monk in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. To support this position, she points to the large number of manuscript copies of this text in Thailand. After examining the collection of palm leaf manuscripts in the National Library, Bangkok, Supaphan found that, despite variations in the names and spellings of the titles, and minor differences in the text itself,

⁴⁷ The twelfth month of the calendar in central Thailand corresponds to the second month of the northern calendar.

thirty-seven manuscripts contained essentially the same treatise -- the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*.⁴⁸

As further evidence, she cites a reference in the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*, written by King Luthai of Sukhothai in 1345 A.D. to a text called the *Paleyyaka*. This name is found in a list of texts mentioned in the *Traiphum* as sources upon which Luthai drew in writing his treatise. This Pali *Maleyyaka* from Burma, she believes, was not the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu*, but rather a smaller work. She believes that this text is a variant spelling of "Phra *Maleyyaka*" and refers to a Phra Malai text that was written in Burma around the eleventh to the late twelfth century A.D. Suphaphan hypothesizes that the earliest Pali version of the Phra Malai story in Burma was probably named *Maleyya* or *Maleyyaka*. This work, she feels, spread into Lan Na and influenced the writing of the *Māleyyadephathera-vatthu* there later.⁴⁹

Suphaphan's proposal is significant in that it points to the need for further study of intertextuality in Thai Buddhist literature, a point that I will discuss in a later chapter. There are two problems with her

⁴⁸ Suphaphan na Bangchang, *Wiwithanakan ngankhian thi pen phasa bali nai prathet thai* [Research on Works Written in the Pali Language in Thailand] (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 1986) 320.

⁴⁹ In both the prologue and the epilogue to the *Traiphum* the author lists the various texts he consulted in his writing of the cosmological treatise. The name "Paleyya" occurs in the prologue. (Reynolds and Reynolds, *Three Worlds* 46, 349-350.

proposal, however. The first is that there has yet to be discovered an extant text that we can identify as the "Phra Maleyyaka." In the absence of such a text, Suphaphan's ideas, however interesting, must remain in the realm of the theoretical.

The second problem with Suphaphan's proposal is that the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* exhibits no obvious influence from the Phra Malai legend. That is, none of the themes found in the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*, such as a thera named Malaya, the visit to Tāvatīmsa Heaven, the demise of the religion of Gotama Buddha, or the coming of Metteyya are found in the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*. It is more likely, as Denis has suggested, that the reverse is true, i.e. that certain sections of the *Traiphum*, such as the descriptions of the hells and the peta or suffering ghosts, influenced later Phra Malai texts, such as the *Klōn Suat* or the *Dika Malai Thewa Sut*.⁵⁰ I will discuss this point more completely in Chapter 6, which deals with the *Klōn Suat* text and its sources.

Apart from Denis, Supaporn, and Suphaphan, no other scholars have examined the sources and origin of the Southeast Asian Phra Malai legend in any detail. There are, however, several Thais, some of them highly respected, who have commented on the subject. Because

⁵⁰ As Denis points out, the descriptions of certain of the torments are identical; the most famous is the thorny kapok tree which adulterers are forced to climb. (Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevathera-vatthum" 62.)

their opinions are frequently cited, I will mention them briefly here. One of the earliest to venture an opinion was Saeng Monwithun. In a cremation volume published in 1934⁵¹ he wrote that the *Maleyyadetha-vatthu* was written in Sri Lanka; in another publication he hypothesized that the treatise was composed in 1696 B.E., or 1153 A.D.⁵² In neither case did he substantiate his ideas. This same date of 1153 was mentioned in a brief reference to the Phra Malai story by P. Schweisguth, who, despite the specificity of the date, similarly, did not cite any evidence.⁵³

Another early commentator on the subject was Phaya Anuman Rajadhon, writing on behalf of the Thai Fine Arts Department in the introduction to an edition of *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, also published as a cremation volume in

⁵¹ *Ruang malai*, cited in Watana 17. Cremation volumes are editions of books published for distribution at cremations. Thousands of titles have been published in this way. They are either about the deceased or they concern subjects in which the deceased was interested. Gedney, "Patrons and Practitioners: Chakri Monarchs and Literature," *CROSSROADS* 2 (2): 1-22.

⁵² See Saeng Monwithun "Kham nam" [Introduction], *Ruang malai*, cited in Santhani Abuarat, *Kan suksa wannakam isan ruang malai mun malai saen* [A Study of Isan Literature Concerning *Malai Mun - Malai Saen*] (Bangkok: Master's thesis, Si Nakharinwirot University, Prasarnmit Campus) 1985.

⁵³ *Étude sur la littérature siamoise* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1951) 128-129. Schweisguth's remarks on Phra Malai are superficial and inaccurate, suggesting that he had never read any of the texts.

1936.⁵⁴ This writer maintained that the character of the arhat Phra Malai was derived from the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, a figure who in Mahāyāna Buddhist lore is able to travel to the hells and the heavens like Phra Malai. I will discuss this point briefly in the chapter on *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, particularly in reference to its association with funerals.

Following these early speculations, there was little written by Thai scholars about the possible source of the legend until 1969, when Dr. Likhit Likhitanon wrote his doctoral dissertation, *The Pali Literature of Thailand*.⁵⁵ In this pioneering work, Dr. Likhit suggests that the *Māleyyadethera-vatthu* was written in the early 17th century A.D. by a Thai bhikkhu in Ayuthaya. This bhikku, in Dr. Likhit's opinion, was probably educated by a Sri Lankan monk. Unfortunately, like Professor Saeng, Likhit does not elaborate his ideas or give evidence to support them.

⁵⁴ *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, attributed to Prince Thammathibet (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1936).

⁵⁵ Dr. Likhit now teaches at Chiang Mai University. His dissertation, unfortunately, has never been published.

Research on Other Phra Malai Texts

In addition to the scholars whose work was discussed above, others have done research on particular Thai Phra Malai texts in recent years. I will summarize these works briefly here and discuss them, when relevant, in later chapters.

Supaporn Makchang, whose thesis on the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu* was described above, in 1981 wrote a lengthy research paper centered on the *Klōn Suat*, or chanted version of the legend.⁵⁶ In this study Supaporn transcribed the text from the Cambodian script into Thai and established a critical edition based on five manuscripts (*samut khōi*) at Wat Sisa Krabū in Thonburi just outside of Bangkok. She also compared the *klōn suat* version of the legend with both the *kham luang* version and the *Māleyyadevathera-vatthu*.

Phra Malai Klōn Suat also formed the basis of a master's thesis written by Chadalak Sanpanich that same year.⁵⁷ Chadalak worked with three *samut khōi* manuscripts from two temples⁵⁸ in Rayong Province on

56 *Phra malai klōn suat (samnuan wat sisakrabū) : kantruat sopchamra lae kansuksa priapthiap*, [Phra Malai Kham Suat - Wat Sisa Krabū Version: An Examination and a Comparative Study] (Thonburi: Thonburi Teachers College, Center for Cultural Preservation and Development) 1983.

57 Chadalak Sanpanich, "Phra malai: kansuksa choeng wikhrg" [The Phra Malai: A Critical Study] (Bangkok: Masters thesis, Silapakorn University) 1981.

58 The temples are Wat Rajabanlang and Wat Noenko, located in Klang district.

Thailand's east coast. Like Supaporn, Chadalak transcribed the texts from the Cambodian script into Thai. She also compared this text to the *kham luang* version and examined the legend as a reflection of local societal and religious values.

Ornanong Padpaddee, in a master's thesis written in 1978, also studied the *Phra Malai Kham Luang* together with another major Buddhist work by its author, the poet Prince Thammathibet. Ornanong sought to define the characteristics of Thai literary works that have the designation "*kham luang*" ("royal writings"). Only four works have this designation: two of them, *Phra Malai Kham Luang* and *Nanthophanan Sut* (Pali: *Nandhopananda Sutta*), were written by Prince Thammathibet. In her research, Ornanong analyzed nine manuscript copies of *Phra Malai Kham Luang* in the National Library, Bangkok. Writing from the perspective of a student of literature, Ornanong discussed the structural, symbolic, and didactic elements of Prince Thammathibet's two *kham luang* works and examined their influence upon Thai society.

Santhani Abuarat's thesis⁵⁹ concerned the Isan version of the *Phra Malai* legend (*Malai Myn - Malai Saen*) within its cultural and ceremonial contexts. Working within Mahasarakham province in the heart of the Isan region, Santhani studied three palm leaf manuscripts

59 "Kan suksa wannakam isan."

written in the Lao variant of the *Tham* script. One manuscript was from Wat Nagwichai, and the other two were from the Mahasarakham Cultural Center. Santhani analyzed the legend as a reflection of the distinctive religious, sociological, historical, and economic features of the Isan region. Her study examined the legend not only in its relationship to the *Vessantara Jātaka*, but also from the viewpoint of comparative literature and mythology.

The comparative literature perspective was also taken by Watana na Nakorn in a particularly comprehensive and well researched thesis.⁶⁰ Watana collected several Phra Malai stories from oral traditions and compared them to both the popular *Klōn Suat* and the literary *Kham Luang* version of the tale. Her research included extensive interviews with monks and elderly members of *kharyhat* ensembles who formerly chanted the *Klōn Suat* text at funerals.

* * * *

The works described above vary considerably not only in their approach to the subject matter, but also in the quality and the amount of original research involved.

⁶⁰ "Laksana ruam khong phra malai nai wannakam phyn ban lae phra malai kham luang" [Common Elements in (the) Phra Malai Story in Folk Literature and Phra Malai Kham Luang] (Bangkok: Masters thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Department of Comparative Literature) 1983.

Nevertheless, as a whole, they represent a significant contribution to the material available for further study. The accessibility of this primary source material from scattered geographical regions and distinct dialects has greatly facilitated my research. A great gap remains, however, in the area of Lan Na or northern Thai Phra Malai texts, which are the earliest Thai vernacular versions of the legend. In the following chapter, I will examine these texts and others that grew out of a period of intense religious literary activity in the Lan Na region from approximately the fourteenth through the eighteenth century A.D.

CHAPTER 4
THE PALI / LAN NA TEXTS

The oldest extant Phra Malai texts in Thailand comprise what I have termed the "Pali/Lan Na" group. I have chosen this term because it refers to both the extensive use of Pali in the texts of this group and to their connection with the great body of Buddhist treatises created around the fifteenth century A.D. in the Lan Na kingdom. This area of corresponds roughly to the present-day provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Lamphun, Phrae, Nan, Lampang, Tak, and Mae Hongson. (See map, fig. 1.) Until the beginning of the present century, the Lan Na region was culturally and linguistically distinct from central Siam.

The Thais of the Lan Na region and their relatives in other parts of Southeast Asia are generally believed to have arrived in these areas around the tenth century A.D.¹ Their migration from their homeland near the present-day border between northern Vietnam and southern China was a gradual process lasting several centuries. The earliest evidence of their presence occurs in the first half of the fourteenth

¹ See David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984) 1-37, for a hypothetical reconstruction of the early history of the Thai.

century, when inscriptions attest to the emergence of a number of Thai states.

A major development associated with the movement and rise of the Thai was the revitalization of the Buddhism already adopted by the Thai from the Mon, who preceded them in the area. This revitalization, brought about through contacts with Sinhalese Buddhism,² was characterized by the founding of strong, well-supported Buddhist institutions. Monarchs who supported this form of Buddhism and exploited its symbols of authority and kingship were able to establish new political, social, and religious identities about which to rally support and wield power.

From the time of the Lan Na kingdom's founding by King Mangrai in 1292 to its fall to the Burmese in 1558, its rulers supported Buddhist institutions through the construction of monasteries, casting of images of the Buddha, sponsorship of religious festivals, and production of Buddhist manuscripts. The most active monarch in this respect was King Tilok (sometimes referred to as Tiloka or

² The advent of Sinhalese Buddhism throughout the area is documented in chronicles and inscriptions beginning in the fourteenth century that record the movement of monks from Lan Na and Sukhothai to Sri Lanka for reordination, and the interchange of monks between these states. On their return they brought with them several Sinhalese monks and stopped at Ayutthaya, Si Satchanalai, and Sukhothai, before reaching Chiang Mai. Sao Saimong Mangrai summarizes an episode from the *Jinakalamali* describing these travels. See *The Pādaeng Chronicle and the Jengtung State Chronicle Translated* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1981) 40. See also Wyatt 38.

by his full title Tiloka Racha), who ruled from 1441 to 1487.

The Lan Na Literary Tradition

The Lan Na kingdom flourished as a center of Buddhist scholarship during this time, when a great number and variety of Buddhist treatises were composed in Pali by local monks. These works were later disseminated into Siam, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia.³ Harald Hundius, a German scholar who has studied these treatises for nearly three decades, observes:

It was a time of religious zest: Lan Na, the Tai Yuan [i.e., Lan Na Thai] kingdom established by King Mangrai in the 13th c., had been consolidated and reached a high level of prosperity and cultural blossoming. After a time of intensive scholarly exchange with Singhalese-reform Buddhism, in the 15th-16th c. a number of learned Lan Na monks had emerged as masters of Pali, the holy language of the Southern Buddhist tradition.

³ For example, Richard Davis, in *Muang Metaphysics* (Bangkok: Pandora Press, 1984) 30-31, writes that in the 1520's the Lao King Photisara secured monks and a copy of the *Tripitaka* to revitalize Buddhism. He also notes that the *Paññasa Jātaka* or Lan Na version of fifty stories concerning previous lives of the Buddha, was completed around 1650, after which the collection also made its way to the other states of Theravāda Buddhist Southeast Asia. Hundius states that Louis Finot's monograph, "Recherches sur la littérature laotienne," published in 1917, "had actually included genuine Lan Na manuscripts (examples of which, due to centuries of cultural exchange and cooperation, had been kept at those libraries) without, however, identifying them as such." He also notes that, according to Lan Na oral history, several boat loads of Lan Na Thai manuscripts were taken from monasteries in Lamphun to Bangkok in the later eighteenth or early nineteenth century to be used in reconstructing the scriptures lost in the destruction of Ayutthaya. (See "The Colophons of Thirty Pali Manuscripts from Lan Na Thailand," *JPTS*, XIV, 27, 18.)

Such was their mastery that they were not only able to translate the huge corpus of Buddhist scriptures from Pali into the vernacular language, Lan Na Thai, but were also able to produce scholarly as well as literary works of their own.⁴

The medium used for the copying of these treatises was palm leaf, cut into long narrow sheets approximately 6 cm. x 60 cm. in size, and pierced at two places for a string to be drawn through, holding the leaves together as a book.⁵ The script used in the writing of these books was the Lan Na Tham script, which was also adapted for use in writing the Lan Na Thai language.

Texts written in a bilingual format of Pali-Lan Na Thai or in monolingual Pali⁶ versions included not only canonical works but also an extensive range of treatises composed by Lan Na scholars: "commentaries and sub-commentaries on

⁴ Hundius, "The Colophons" 19. This work is a most thorough and insightful study the colophons of thirty Pali manuscripts from Lan Na Thailand. His work conveys a sense of the times and the people involved in the creation of these books.

⁵ Evidence of the use of palm leaf for this purpose in Southeast Asia goes back to 1296, in the account of Chou Ta-kuan, a Chinese emissary to Cambodia. See Notes on the Customs of Cambodia, Trans. by Paul Pelliot and J. Gilman d'Arcy Paul (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1967) 24.

⁶ Pali is used extensively in Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhist ritual, and for centuries was the scholarly language in the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia, much like Latin in Medieval Europe. The importance of this language was expressed in the colophon of a Lan Na Thai manuscript: "...Pali words are deep and subtle... elusive is their meaning and often difficult to grasp...if words are dropped, no hint is given -- only Enlightened Ones will know...". (Hundius 26)

canonical and post-canonical texts, treatises on cosmology, religious chronicles, and treatises on Pali grammar."⁷

The colophons of these manuscripts, written in Lan Na Thai, are a valuable source of information concerning the time, place, and circumstances in which the text was copied. A theme echoed repeatedly in the colophons is the importance of preserving Buddhism. If it is to be kept vital, the colophons say, the basic texts must continually be copied. The vast majority of colophons explain the motivating factor in their creation with a declaration similar to the following: "Written...in support of the Excellent Teachings of [the] Buddha so that they may [last] for five thousand years...."⁸

Similar statements, expressing hope that the religion will endure five thousand years, can also be found inscribed on the bases of Lan Na Buddha images dating from this period.⁹ Despite the brevity of these assertions, their significance must not be underestimated. This preoccupation with preserving the Buddha's teachings was a major factor

⁷ Hundius 11.

⁸ Quoted in Hundius 28.

⁹ See, for example, *Phiphithaphan sathan haeng chat hariphunchai*. [Catalog, National Museum, Haripunchai], (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1979) where the images depicted in figs. 43, 42, 46, and 47 have inscriptions indicating that they were cast as works of merit to enable the religion to endure 5,000 years. The reference to 5,000 years is related to a prediction that the religion of the present Buddha, Gotama, would deteriorate in stages and finally disappear after five thousand years. See the discussion below, 95-112.

not only in the production of works of literature and art. As we shall see in the pages ahead, it was also manifested in the symbolic acts of the monarchs in the region.

Apart from the goal of supporting the religion, those persons involved in the manuscript projects were motivated by the hope of attaining certain rewards in their own balance of merit and demerit. The most frequently expressed wish is for the "Three Kinds of Happiness, the ultimate goal being *nibbāna*," which Hundius explains as happiness in the present and future lives in the human realm, in the heavenly worlds, and in the world of *nibbāna*.¹⁰ Scribes also expressed their desire to transfer the merit they had made to the deceased, usually to relatives.¹¹ It should be noted that these same goals, along with practical advice on how to achieve them, are reflected in one of the most important texts of the time, *Phra Malai*.

Characteristics of the Pali/Lan Na Group

Phra Malai texts in the Pali/Lan Na group share the following characteristics: 1) they all relate the Phra Malai story in a relatively simple, straightforward style with few adjectival or adverbial phrases and little repetition; 2) they include Pali words or phrases to varying degrees,

¹⁰ Hundius 30.

¹¹ In one of the examples however, the scribe also included his teachers in the list of those upon whom he wished the fruit of the merit to be conferred (Hundius 92).

ranging from a few words to the entire text; 3) they are divided into two sections, the first ending with the arrival of the twelfth deity in Tāvatimsa Heaven, and the second beginning with the arrival of Metteyya; and 4) they appear to have a ritual connection to the Vessantara Jātaka.¹²

This group of texts includes a work written exclusively in Pali, the Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthu, which was translated into French by Denis, into Siamese by Supaporn, and more recently into English by Steven Collins. This group also includes two works written in a combination of Pali and either Lan Na Thai or Lao. The latter include the Lan Na pair known as *Malai Ton-Malai Plai* and the Lao *Malai Myn-Malai Saen*.¹³ The words *myn* and *saen* (in both Thai and Lao) mean 10,000 and 100,000, respectively. They refer, in a general sort of way, to the number of celestial beings in the retinues of the deities who come to worship the Cūlāmani Cetiya. In the *Malai Myn*, the first deity has 100 retainers, the second 1,000, the third 10,000 (or one *myn*), the fourth 20,000 (two *myn*), etc., up to the twelfth, who has 100,000. (The same type of division into two

¹² The one exception to this generalization is the Pali Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthu, simply because we have no evidence suggesting that it was, in fact, ever recited in connection with the Vessantara Jātaka as were the others in this group.

¹³ I would like to emphasize that for each of these bilingual texts many copies or "recensions" exist which differ from one another not only in the quality and quantity of Pali used but also in the sentence structure of the vernacular language. Despite these differences, they all tell essentially the same story.

"volumes" is true of the Lan Na Thai *Malai Ton*.) The *Malai Saen* begins with the arrival of Metteyya, whose retinue has an infinitely vast number of retainers, expressed by the term *saen koti*, which if taken literally would be written "100,000 x 10,000,000." (This is also true of the northern *Malai Plai*.)

The most historically significant text of this group, however, is a work known as the *Nissai Malai*, the oldest known dated copy of which dates from 1516 A.D. This book, now housed at Wat Kittiwong in Mae Sariang district, Mae Hongson province, bears the title *Nissai Malai Plai*. The words "*Malai Plai*" in the title indicate that the text relates the second half of the Phra Malai story, that is, the section beginning with Metteyya's arrival in Tāvatimsa Heaven. The word *nissai* [*ni⁴sai⁵*], from the Pali *nissaya* ("to lean on"), refers to the fact that the complete text is written in both Pali and Lan Na Thai.¹⁴ That is to say, the format consists of a series of Pali passages followed by Lan Na Thai glosses. In this context, the vernacular section of the text, then, serves as a kind of crutch or support for those who are unable to read the Pali.

The *Nissai Malai Plai* is only one of many texts of the *nissaya* genre, which is found not only in Thailand, but

¹⁴ Harald Hundius, personal communication, August 19, 1991.

throughout mainland Southeast Asia and Ceylon as well.¹⁵ This dual language format gives the text the appearance of a translation based on Pali sources, with remnants of the "original" retained as a sign of authenticity and sacredness. *Nissaya* texts closely resemble those of another, related, genre known as *wohan* [woo¹haan⁵] (Pali: *vohara*). The latter, Hundius explains,

generally represent fairly free and elaborate vernacular renderings of presupposed Pali or *nissai* texts. In many cases, e.g., in a number of Jatakas belonging to the so-called *Paññasa Jātaka* recensions, the term "*nissai*" is being used for texts which fulfill the common criteria of "wohaan" versions rather than those of '*nissai*', i.e. literal or word-for-word translations. As it appears then, the borderline between *nissai* and *wohaan* texts is not always perfectly sharp.¹⁶

According to Hundius, it is highly probable that some or even most of the so-called '*wohan*' versions of non-canonical *Jātakas* found in Lan Na Thai monasteries were actually composed as such, i.e., as '*wohan*' versions. In Hundius's view, the crucial question concerns the generally assumed view about '*nissai*' texts -- that they are translations from Pali -- and whether one must always presuppose the existence of a monolingual Pali predecessor

¹⁵ The same genre exists in Laos and Burma, while Sri Lanka has the *sanne* or *sannya* genre corresponding to the *nissaya* texts. (Oskar von Hinüber, personal communication, July 3, 1991.)

¹⁶ Hundius, personal communication.

to each and every '*nissai*' text. Hundius admits to having "some doubts about such an implication."¹⁷

Stylistic Features

While the Pali *Maleyyadecatthera-vatthu* is written in a combination of prose and verse, the Lan Na *Malai Ton-Malai Plai* texts are written entirely in a prose-like verse form known as *rai* (*raai*³) which will be discussed in the section on versification later in this chapter. The style is direct and didactic, with simple sentences that are free of the long-winded descriptions, complex epithets, and abstruse technical terms that typify the *Kham Luang*, or royal version of Phra Malai.¹⁸

The style of the *Malai Ton-Malai Plai* differs in still another way from that of the *Klon Suat*, or popular version of Phra Malai. The *Klon Suat* is written in several varieties of a verse form known as *kap* (*kaap*²), and is characterized by vivid, sensationalistic imagery, colloquial expressions, and descriptions designed to elicit

¹⁷ Hundius, personal communication.

Can one take the argument a step further and propose that vernacular forms were the prototypes for the *nissaya* texts? Hypothetically, it seems possible that the writing of these texts might have been a three-step process beginning with the composition of the text in the Lan Na Thai language, followed by its translation into Pali to lend a sense of authority and sacredness. The final step would have been copying the text into the *wohan* or *nissai* format.

¹⁸ The *Kham Luang* version is also written in a form of *rai*, known as *rai suphap*, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

an emotional response in the audience. To give the reader some sense of the differing styles of these texts, I have translated several lines describing the arhat's journey to hell. The first example is from the *Malai Ton*.¹⁹

[Phra Malai] bestowed mercy and compassion on the suffering beings by going down to the abyss [of hell], where he saw a great number of people suffering all kinds of horrendous punishments. And so he brought word of their suffering to their relatives in the human realm...

For purposes of comparison, we can examine the corresponding section of the *Kham Luang* version. While the message is similar, the language is much more detailed, hyperbolic, and repetitive.

...yathāpi moggallano ca... He was like Phra Moggallana, the peerless, esteemed, kind-hearted one, who through his extraordinary power, went to bestow mercy on the beings in hell, and then went up to heaven to help all the celestials and devas with the esteemed dhamma and the greatest compassion of all times.

...devatthero thito tathā... As for the radiant, powerful Phra Malai, he was of the same mold as Moggallana. As he was wandering about through the air one time, he went down to hell, hoping to bestow happiness upon the beings there and lessen their torment through his power. He vowed to bring them relief. When the [hell] beings asked him to tell their relatives [in the human realm] about their misery, he resolved to report

¹⁹ In a palm leaf manuscript version dating from 1831 at Wat Duang Dii in Chiang Mai, Phra Malai is compared to Moggallana, but his journey to hell is not mentioned. There are countless other differences between the various recensions of this text. The existence of so many variables is a fascinating aspect of these texts, but is beyond the scope of the present study. For example, Sanguan Chotsukrat, writing on Lan Na Thai customs, mentioned that he knew of the existence of fifty-eight recensions of the *Vessantara Jataka* in Lan Na Thailand. (See *Prapheni thai phak nya*, Bangkok, Odien Press, 1969, 127.)

everything. With great compassion in his heart, he contemplated the multitude of beings enduring unbearable suffering, endless sorrow, and grief as a result of their acts.

...bahuguno nārakānām devānāñ ca bahuguno... His beneficience extended to both heaven and hell. Hoping to extinguish sorrow and pain, he once soared through the air, and in just the snap of a finger, in no time at all, he reached the hells. Through his extraordinary power a golden lotus throne appeared, the size of a cart wheel. The preeminent one, seated on the ornamented throne, performed wondrous miracles. He caused celestial rain to shower down, dousing the flames; he destroyed the Lohakumbhi cauldron, leaving nothing but dust; he caused the caustic, burning river to dry up and disappear; he extinguished the mountain of flames; he caused the kapok tree to lose its sword-like thorns.

All of the hell beings, relieved of their suffering, were peaceful and content. They bowed down in reverence, and asked, "Oh Lord, where have you come from bringing us such happiness?

The thera answered, "I have come from the human realm."

Hearing this, the group in hell was overjoyed, and they asked him to tell others about the conditions of the place where they were. "Please, Lord, we beg you to tell our relatives, wherever they may be."

Finally, I have included a sample from the *Klōn Suat* version, where the hell scenes are much expanded and filled with repeated warnings of the dire consequences awaiting those who sin. The following excerpt is only a small section of this part of the text.

Phra Malai went to help the beings in hell, just like Phra Moggallana, the wise. He made hell cool and comfortable. While Phra Malai was there, the iron cauldron shattered into pieces. When he left

[to return to the human realm] the iron cauldron became whole again, the pieces joined together.

The hell beings were terribly hot, because of their sin of using monks, and causing them to break the rules of the Vinaya. If you give offerings as merit, don't use [monks] to do work. Whoever uses monks will fall down into the iron cauldron....

Whoever beats their parents, or their elders, or curses monks, bhikkhus, or novices, when they die, as a result of their sins of beating their mothers and novices, [will have] a savage wind blow a wheel that will spin [slicing] at their heads [like a saw]²⁰ for an entire Buddhantarakappa.²¹ [This will happen] because of the sin of beating their parents and beating [members of] the Sangha. A wheel will spin [slicing] at their heads [like a saw]. Their whole body will be bathed in blood because of the sin of beating their mothers and [members of] the Sangha. A wheel will spin [slicing them], and they'll moan and groan to death....

Phra Malai, the Lord, went down to find them. He smashed the wheel through his special power, [and] the [hell] beings were relieved of their suffering. When he returned [to the human realm], the wheel became whole again because of their sins of beating their mothers and beating [members of] the Sangha.²²

Versification

Thai literary anthologies and textbooks on poetry define four basic categories of poetry: *khlong* (which is

²⁰ The Thai reads: *kong¹ cak⁴ phat² hua⁵*, literally "wheel wheel blow heads." I have inserted the word "sawing" into the translation because hell scenes in Thai painting typically depict a wheel flying at the head of one or more hell beings, like a rotary saw.

²¹ The period between the death of one Buddha and the appearance of another (McFarland 594).

²² *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, Thonburi Teachers College 4-5.

usually grouped with *rai*), *kap*, *chan*, and *klɔn*.²³ As Gedney points out, "this is the order in which they are often treated in the textbooks, and it is the historically correct order, that is, *khlong* and *rai* are the oldest forms, and *klɔn* the most recent."²⁴

The *Malai Ton - Malai Plai* pair of texts is written in *rai*, which is often described as "a kind of rhymed prose, or verse without division into stanzas."²⁵ *Rai* also means "to recite incantations or formulas"²⁶ and indeed, *rai* is frequently used in the writing and oral reading of laws and sermons. Still another definition, "to walk here and there, this way and that way; to go in a serpentine course or line,"²⁷ conveys a sense of the smoothly undulating rhythm of this verse form, an effect achieved by having the last syllable of each line rhyme with one of the first three syllables of the following line. This rhyme can be seen in the diagram on the following page, which represents *rai boran* the simplest version of *rai*.

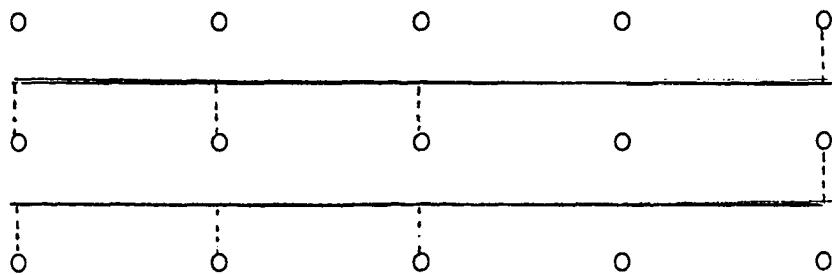
²³ *khloong*¹, *raai*³, *kaap*², *chan*⁵, and *klɔon*¹.

²⁴ Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 493.

²⁵ Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 500.

²⁶ McFarland 711.

²⁷ McFarland 711.



In practice, however, poets often adhere to both the rhyme scheme and the five-syllable requirement rather loosely. Many, perhaps most, lines tend to be longer than five syllables, as can be seen in the following example from the opening lines of a recent, abridged version of the *Malai Ton*. The rhyming words are underlined.²⁸

naan¹ luang³ laew⁴ laai⁵ phan¹saa⁵
 yang¹ mii¹ ma⁴haa⁵ theen¹ chao³ nung²
chy³ waa³ theep³ maa¹lai¹
 ton¹ song¹ siin⁵ sai⁵ sa²aat²
 ruu⁴ cop² cha⁴laat² a²phin⁴yaa¹

²⁸ This example is given for the purposes of demonstrating the rhyme scheme and the simple sentence structure of the northern version. I have represented the tones as they would be pronounced in Central Thai, for the sake of consistency with the rest of the dissertation. However, the reader should be cautioned that the tones indicated here do not represent the correct Lan Na Thai pronunciation, where the tonal system is distinct from that of Central Thai.

Translation:

Many years ago,
there was a great Lord Thera
named Malai Deva.
He was virtuous and pure
and was skilled in higher knowledge.

As can be seen in the rhyme pattern between lines two and three, the words *nung*² and *chy*³ have the same vowel, but not the same final sound. If the poem were to have many such discrepancies, it would not be considered a work of high quality.

Apart from the external rhyme scheme diagrammed above, *rai*, like all forms of Thai poetry, is characterized by various types of internal rhyme. There are two types of internal rhyme: vowel rhyme and consonant rhyme, or alliteration. Several examples of consonant rhyme can be seen in the brief example above: the first line has three syllables beginning with *l*: *luang*³ *laew*⁴ *laai*⁵; while line four has four syllables beginning with the sound *s*: *song*¹ *siin*⁵ *sai*⁵ *sa²aat*². The amount and complexity of these internal rhyme patterns in any poem vary considerably and depend on the ability of the poet. This topic will be covered more completely in the following chapter, which

deals with some of the poetic techniques used by Thammathibet in writing *Phra Malai Kham Luang*.²⁹

Ritual Context of the Phra Malai Story:
the Vessantara Jātaka

In the Lan Na and Isan regions of Thailand, and in Laos as well, the Phra Malai story has traditionally been recited as a preface to the Vessantara Jātaka at an annual, elaborate, all-night festival.³⁰ This festival traditionally was considered the most important merit-making occasion of the year.³¹ On these occasions, laypeople sponsor the recitation of the Jātaka, which in Theravāda

²⁹ I did not attempt to do an in-depth study of rhyme patterns in the northern texts because the materials I used were a combination of transliterations from the Lan Na script, and in some cases, translations from the Lan Na language into central Thai.

³⁰ Descriptions of the festival can be in the following sources: Mani Phayomyong, *Prapheni sipsong dyan lan na Thai* [The Ceremonies of the Twelve Months in Lan Na Thai] (Chiang Mai: So Sap Kan Phim, 1986) v. 2, 23. *Maha chat samnuan isan* (Bangkok: National Library) 1988; Gerini, G.E., *A Retrospective View and Account of the Origin of the Thet Mahā Ch'at* (Bangkok: 1976 - originally published in 1892); Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand* (Cambridge: 1970) 162-167; Santhani Abuarat, "Kan Suksa,"; Sommai Premchit and Pierre Doré, *The Lan Na Twelve-month Traditions: an Ethno-historic and Comparative Approach*, 32-49; Anuman Rajadhon, "Thet-Mahā-Chat," *Essays on Thai Folklore*, (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1968) 164-177; see also Larry McClung, "The Vessantara Jātaka: Paradigm for a Buddhist Utopian Ideal," diss. Princeton U, 1975.

³¹ The importance of this festival in the north has declined dramatically in the past three decades. The recitation of the *Maha Chat* or the *tang tham luang* festival, is now held at only a handful of wats in the north. It is, however, still vital in the Isan region.

Buddhist Southeast Asia is a lengthy story comprising thirteen chapters,³² containing a total of a thousand stanzas, recited in the local language.³³ Sponsoring a festival of such great magnitude requires considerable investment of material resources by the faithful, who are rewarded not only with a wealth of future merit, but also with an evening of entertainment by monks skilled at reading.³⁴ In the past, certain monks deliberately injected

³² Festivals revolving about the recitation of the *Vessantara Jatāka* take place in all parts of Thailand, but only in the north and the northeast is the Phra Malai story read as a preface. In the central region the festival is known as *Thet Maha Chat*: the word *thet* (pronounced *theet*) is derived from the Pali *desanā*, "to preach"; *Maha Chat* literally means "the great Jātaka." In the northeast the festival is known as *Bun Pha Wet*, "Vessantara merit-making"; in the north, as mentioned above, as *tang tham luang*, "setting up the great dhamma."

³³ This convention of one thousand stanzas and thirteen chapters apparently is a Southeast Asian invention. It represents a much longer rendition of the Jātaka than those known from Pali sources. While "one thousand" may be intended metaphorically to represent completeness, Gerini's list of chapter names and number of stanzas does add up to thirteen and a thousand, respectively: 1) *Thotsaphon* (Pali: *Dasavara*) - 19 stanzas; 2) *Himaphan* (Pali: *Himavanta*), 134; 3) *Thanakan* (Pali: *Dānakanda*), 209; 4) *Wanaprawet* (Pali: *Vanapavesa*), 57; 5) *Chuchok* (Pali: *Jūjaka*). 79; 6) *Chulaphon* (Pali: *Cullavana*), 35; 7) *Mahaphon* (*Mahāvana*), 80; 8) *Kuman* (Pali: *Kumāra*), 101; 9) *Matsi* (Pali: *Maddī*), 90; 10) *Sakkabap* (Pali: *Sakkapāvacana*), 43; 11) *Maharat* (Pali: *Mahārāja*), 69; 12) *Chokrasat* (Pali: *Chakhattiya*), 36; 13) *Nakhorakan* (Pali: *Nagarakanda*), 48. See Gerini, A *Retrospective View*, 27.

³⁴ According to the story, Vessantara, the son of King Sañjaya, is banished from the kingdom by his father for giving away a magical white elephant which brings rainfall and prosperity to the kingdom. Vessantara then gives away all his other possessions and goes with his wife, Maddī, and his two children into the forest. One day, as Maddī is gathering food, a vile brahmin named Jūjaka (Thai: Chuchok) comes along and asks for the children so that his wife may

pathos, bawdy humor, and special effects into their recitations to attract large numbers of appreciative listeners.³⁵ Nowadays, portable movie projectors and giant screens set up next to the preaching hall serve that purpose.

In the north and the northeast, a significant part of the ritual is the offering by individuals of candles, incense, flowers, food, etc. in various quantities, collectively totalling one thousand, as stipulated by Metteyya in the Phra Malai story.³⁶ This ritual connection between the two stories has textual parallels as well; a

use them as servants. Sakka, king of the gods, learns of what has happened, disguises himself as a brahmin and asks Vessantara for his wife in order to prevent him from giving her to someone else and being all alone. On receiving her, he gives her back. Jūjaka and the children arrive at Sañjaya's court, where the king ransoms his grandchildren. Jūjaka dies of overeating. Sañjaya becomes filled with remorse and takes a retinue into the forest to find Vessantara to invite him back. Laypeople are particularly fond of hearing the sections of the story in which Maddī and Jūjuka appear. The first elicits great sadness as Maddī mourns for the loss of her children; the second, great fun, for the brahmin is plays the part of the buffoon.

35 Gerini (p. 25), for example, wrote that "all sorts of tricks calculated to excite laughter in the multitude were resorted to. The blaring of trumpets, the ringing of bells, the whistling of birds..., the noises of a storm and the pealing of thunder were imitated almost to perfection and given...to relieve the monotony of the entertainment." Reformists, led by King Mongkut, were highly critical of those members of the Sangha who were particularly talented entertainers, viewing them as self-serving opportunists.

36 Sommai Premchit explains that sponsors are divided into groups (*muat*) determined by their year of birth, according to the twelve-year cycle. The members of each *muat* make offerings of items equal to the number of stanzas in the chapter which they are sponsoring. *The Lan Na Twelve-month Traditions* 37-38.

complete set of palm leaf manuscripts of the *Vessantara Jātaka* includes, and is prefaced by the two parts of the Phra Malai story, as well as the thirteen chapters of the *Vessantara Jātaka*. In addition, a set of such manuscripts sometimes includes an *anisong* (Pali: ānisamsa) text, describing the benefits to be gained from reciting or listening to a recitation of the text.³⁷

The themes of the two stories are also connected pictorially in the religious folk art of the Isan region. That is to say, handpainted cloth banners depicting scenes from the *Vessantara Jātaka*, which are hung in the preaching hall during the annual *Bun Pha Wet* festival, often depict scenes from the Phra Malai story as well. These banners (see fig. 3) can be found in nearly every wat throughout the Isan region.³⁸

Textual Connections

The traditional pairing of *Phra Malai* with the *Vessantara Jātaka*, at least in the north and northeast, inevitably raises questions regarding the basis of this

³⁷ The term *anisong* (Pali: ānisamsa), meaning 'blessing', 'merit', or 'benefit', "is used in the Yuan [Lan Na Thai] tradition to designate commentaries on or explanations of certain merit-making ritual." See Keyes, "New Evidence" 227. Sommai Premchit suggests that *anisong* texts were specifically written to encourage participation in Buddhist rituals and festivals (personal communication).

³⁸ The banners are carried by a procession of laypeople that proceeds outside the temple complex, around the town or village, before returning to the temple.

connection. That is to say, how did the texts come to be so closely connected in ritual, and why does the Phra Malai story lay such heavy emphasis on listening to the *Vessantara Jātaka*?

A related question concerns the reasons for the popularity of the *Vessantara Jātaka*. Not only is this story the basis of an important ritual, it is sometimes described as a sacred (Thai: *saksit*) text, and it is also one of the most common written religious treatises found in manuscript collections in Lan Na Thai temples.³⁹ In a recent catalog of Lan Na Buddhist manuscripts, 396 out of 2,790, or fourteen percent, were devoted to the *Vessantara Jātaka*. By way of contrast only 254 contained suttas.⁴⁰ The story is also one of the most frequently depicted themes in Thai mural painting in all parts of the country.⁴¹

In seeking to answer the first question -- what is the connection between the Phra Malai story and the *Vessantara*

³⁹ The work of the Social Research Institute and the Center for the Preservation and Promotion of Lan Na Thai Culture at Chiangmai University in cataloging and microfilming palm leaf manuscripts has brought to the fore a considerable number of copies of the *Vessantara Jātaka* with the *Malai Ton* and *Malai Plai* pair of texts as its preface.

⁴⁰ It is not clear whether the suttas listed here are canonical texts. In terms of numbers of volumes, the *Vessantara Jātaka* far exceeds all other texts or categories of texts. The total number of palm leaf manuscripts (Thai: *phuk*) devoted to the *Jātaka* was 5,665 out of 12,570, or forty-nine percent. *Rai chy nangsy boran Lan Na [Catalogue of Palm Leaf Texts on Microfilm]* 1978-1986, 8.

⁴¹ Ferguson and Johannsen, "Modern Buddhist Murals in Lan Na Thailand: A Study of Religious Symbols and Meaning," in *The American Ethnologist*, v.3.4: 645-699.

Jātaka, we can take into account the answer given to me by a group of devout laypeople at a *Bun Pha Wet* festival at Wat Aphiwat in the provincial capital of Mahasarakham in 1990. When asked about the significance of *Phra Malai*, they replied that it is the source (Thai: *khwan pen ma*) of the *Bun Pha Wet*⁴² or *Vessantara Jātaka* festival. This same view has been expressed by several Thai scholars as well.⁴³ In the minds of many Thai Buddhists, then, the celebration of the *Bun Phra Wet* festival is a direct response to Metteyya's admonition to listen to the entire story in one day and one night, as related in the *Phra Malai* story.

On the other hand, G.E. Gerini, writing on this festival in a monograph published a century ago, had the opposite interpretation. In his description of the *Maha Chat* in central Siam, Gerini suggested that the *Phra Malai* story was written "to encourage a practice already in force" rather than to create a new one. "It was clearly written,"

⁴² *Bun Pha Wet* is the Lao pronunciation of *Bun Phra Wet*, which is short for *Bun Phra Wetsandōn*, which literally means "the merit-making of Phra Vessantara".

⁴³ See *Bun phawet khong chao isan: kan wikhro lae ti khwammai thang manutwithaya* (Khonkaen: Khonkaen University, 2534) 17-18, in which the editors express agreement with Dhanit Yupo, who wrote more than twenty years earlier; see also Prakhong Nimanhaemin, writing about the *Vessantara Jātaka* in the north in *Maha chat la na, kan suksa nai thana thi pen wannakhadi thong thin* (Bangkok: Munithi krongkan tamra sangkhomsat lae manutsat, 1983) 2.

Gerini insisted, "with the intention of rendering such a practice more general and popular."⁴⁴

It is surprising that this theory has received virtually no attention during the entire century since the monograph's publication. This can probably only be explained by the fact that over the years there has been virtually no attention on the part of scholars to the Lan Na Thai and Lao versions of Phra Malai.⁴⁵ Gerini himself perhaps was not aware of the implications of his idea that the Phra Malai story was written as a promotional text for the *Vessantara Jātaka* and the impact this had on ritual for centuries to come. A considerable part of the present chapter will discuss these implications within the context of Buddhist institutions and the historical relations between the kingdoms of Lan Na and Ayutthaya.

The *Phra Malai* story does, in fact, encourage the faithful to support the *Vessantara Jātaka* festival. It does so through what amounts to a virtual guarantee that those who listen to the entire *Jātaka* will be reborn during the time of Metteyya, and thereby attain *nibbāna*. This guarantee is stated in the *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* as follows:

⁴⁴ Gerini 21. In the Isan region the Phra Malai story is recited only in the context of the *Maha Chat* or *Vessantara Jātaka* festival.

⁴⁵ It has, however, been mentioned briefly in the works of Swearer, Tambiah, Wells, Davis, and McClung.

All those who wish to meet me when I become enlightened should listen to the recitation of the Mahā Vessantara Jātaka in one day and worship with a thousand lanterns, a thousand lotuses, a thousand blue lotuses, a thousand green lotuses....and they will attain the state of arhat. They will meet me face to face when I attain enlightenment.⁴⁶

A Lan Na version of the legend contains a nearly identical promise:

If anyone wishes to see me in the future, they should make extraordinary merit in the following way. Have them set their minds on listening to the Vessantara Jātaka Dhamma. Have them listen in one day until it is finished, with the customary objects of worship, that is one thousand lanterns, one thousand [of various kinds of] lotuses, completely without lacking in any way, one-thousand balls of rice. Have them invite the monks to preach the esteemed Vessantara Jātaka Dhamma, all one thousand stanzas....They should go together and listen to it in one night and one day until it is finished. When everyone follows these teachings,...they will see me.⁴⁷

Attainment of *nibbāna*, as we know, is no easy feat to accomplish. For the average Buddhist, it is much more than one could hope for even after an infinite number of lifetimes. The very fact of its being out of reach, of being attainable only after countless lifetimes of trying to attain the Perfections has discouraged ordinary persons from striving to attain it.

On the other hand, inscriptional and textual evidence suggests widespread belief in the idea that one could attain *nibbāna* simply by being born during the time of Metteyya.

⁴⁶ From Supaporn's Thai translation (Supaporn, 1978, 209).

⁴⁷ *Malai Plai* (Chiang Mai: Tarathong Kanphim, n.d.) folios 8-9.

One need only to read the careful studies of Thai epigraphy by A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara to find frequent references to this theme. A typical example is found in an inscription of 1426, written by a king from the northern state of Nan, stating that "he devoutly wishes to behold the Lord Sri Ariya [Metteyya]."⁴⁸ Similar expressions of this belief are frequently mentioned in dedicatory inscriptions on the bases of Buddha images and in the colophons of manuscripts presented to monasteries as acts of merit.⁴⁹

For those who could not afford to commission the casting of an image or the copying of a manuscript, the opportunity to participate in the recitation of the *Vessantara Jātaka* provided an alternative means of making the merit necessary to ensure such an auspicious rebirth.

Moreover, another Lan Na Thai text, which describes the benefits of hearing the *Vessantara Jātaka*, also suggests

⁴⁸ A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Pact between Sukhodaya and Nān, Epigraphical and Historical Studies, No. 3," *JSS* 57/1 (January 1969) : 105. McGill makes this point in his paper, "Jatakas, Universal Monarchs, and the Year 2000," *Artibus Asiae*, forthcoming. McGill also lists numerous other inscriptions that include this wish: "three from Sukhothai dated to 1357 (Griswold and Prasert, "Mahādharmarāja I," 102-103), 1399 Griswold and Prasert, "The Asokārama Inscription of 1399 A.D., Epigraphic and Historical Studies, No. 2," *JSS* 57/1 (January 1969): 55; and ca. 1418 (Griswold and Prasert, "A Declaration of Independence and Its Consequences, Epigraphic and Historical Studies, No. 1" *JSS* 56/2 (July 1968): 240; one from Keng Tung of 1451 (Griswold and Prasert, "Keng Tung", 87; and two from Lan Na of 1540 and 1565 (A.B. Griswold, *Dated Buddha Images of Northern Siam*, *Artibus Asiae* supplements no. 16 (Ascona, 1957), nos. 76 and 82.

⁴⁹ See note 9, above.

that a more immediate reward would accrue to the listener as well. The passage below, from an *anisong* text that is part of a *Vessantara Jātaka* set, promises that, in addition to the long-term goal of *nibbāna*, the listener could also look forward to more immediate, more easily comprehensible, and perhaps even more desirable rewards, including rebirth in heaven and the fulfillment of all wishes.

Whoever...wants to see the glorious Metteyya Bodhisatta, let him bring the following propitiatory elements, such as 1,000 lamps, 1,000 candles and incense sticks, 1,000 balls of (glutinous) rice...worship and listen to the Maha [V]essantara sermon finishing it in one day with great respect...All his wishes will be fulfilled...In the future [he] will attain *nibbāna*...in front of the Buddha...If the bodhisatta ha[s] not yet attained enlightenment, ..., while travelling in the cycle of death and rebirth, [he] will enjoy happiness in the heavens and in the [human] world...all the time.⁵⁰

Thus it appears that the possibility of happiness even while in the cycle of rebirth (in other words, a more prosperous rebirth) was also part of the guarantee promised to those who listened to the *Vessantara Jātaka*. From the viewpoint of the Buddhist devotee, the benefits to be gained were virtually unlimited.

The question that next arises is, why the *Vessantara Jātaka*? If the *Phra Malai* treatise was in fact written, as Gerini suggests, to promote the recitation of the *Vessantara Jātaka*, why this *Jātaka*? What meaning did this text have for the Buddhists of Lan Na in the fifteenth century?

⁵⁰ Sommai Premchit and Pierre Doré, *The Lan Na Twelve-month Traditions* 33.

The answer to this question is complex. Part of it relates to the teaching the text conveys, that is, the importance of *dāna*, or generosity. This birth story exemplifies the perfect generosity of the Buddha in his former life as Prince Vessantara, who gave away his auspicious elephant, kingdom, children, and wife. While the model of *dāna* it provides is far beyond the capacity of even the most devout Buddhist, it nevertheless provides a message regarding the importance of this Perfection. Thus, for the Sangha, which must rely on the generosity of the laity for its very survival, the *Vessantara Jātaka* provides a convenient way of reminding the faithful of the preeminent importance of *dāna*.⁵¹

As we have seen, the theme of *dāna*, or practicing generosity, particularly toward the Sangha and Buddhist institutions, permeates not only the *Vessantara Jātaka*, but also the Phra Malai story. In the Phra Malai story, we are

⁵¹ In a slightly different vein, Margaret Cone and Richard Gombrich have written on the immense popularity of this birth tale throughout the Buddhist world. "Culture in Buddhist countries, "they observe, "is traditionally dominated by the clergy; they are the arbiters of taste." The monastery, they point out, is the center not only of ritual, but also of art, story-telling, and education. "Thus it is monks who dominate the cultural scene and choose its themes; and however much the *Vessantara Jātaka* may appeal to the laity... we must ask above all why it should appeal to monks."

The answer, they say, lies not only in the overt message of the story -- the paramount importance of giving. "But the story has for the monk also a covert appeal: like him, Vessantara has renounced all worldly ties, and in particular, family ties." (*The Perfect Generosity*, xxvi.)

told of the diverse acts of *dāna* performed by the future Buddha Metteyya (which parallel those of the present Buddha), as well as those performed by devas, by ordinary people from all walks of life, by the relatives of the suffering hell beings, and by the poor grass cutter who gave eight lotuses to Phra Malai.

Another reason for the emphasis on listening to the *Vessantara Jātaka* is that the story encourages the faithful to keep alive the hope of encountering Metteyya. As I mentioned above, the hope of meeting the future Buddha Metteyya was, and to a certain extent still is, the ultimate aim of Theravāda Buddhists in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.⁵² Larry McClung, in a doctoral dissertation on the *Vessantara Jātaka*, suggests that "the ultimate aim of the preaching of the *Maha Chat*, that toward which all else points, is to enable the disciple to be reborn in the future world of Metteyya."⁵³ And, as we have seen, the Phra Malai story provides the stimulus for reaching the goal of meeting Metteyya. It does this not only by exhorting the faithful to listen to the *Jātaka*, but also by providing biographical material regarding Metteyya -- in effect, attesting to his credentials as Buddha-to-be. In this way it serves as a

⁵² A.B. Griswold, "The Holy Land Revisited: Replicas of the Mahābodhi Shrine in Siam and Elsewhere" in *Paranavitana Felicitation Volume on Art, Architecture, and Oriental Studies*, ed. N.A. Jayawickrama (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1965) 173-221. See also McGill.

⁵³ McClung 230.

credentials as Buddha-to-be. In this way it serves as a kind of interface between past and future. The biography of the Bodhisatta of the past, Vessantara, is mirrored in the deeds of the Bodhisatta of the future, Metteyya. Just as, the *Jataka* tells us, Vessantara gave up wealth, kingdom, wife, and children, so also, the *Phra Malai* legend tells us, did Metteyya. Just as King Vessantara in the past used the power of his merit to meet the needs of his people, so will Metteyya in the future bestow upon the faithful a utopian world free from suffering and desire.⁵⁴

Not only are there thematic and biographical parallels between the two stories; there are also symbolic ones. One of the most visible of these is the wishing tree. McClung cites an image from the E.B. Cowell edition of the *Jataka* from a Pali version, following the banishment of the prince: "King Vessantara was the granter of every boon, the 'wishing tree' full of every good fruit."⁵⁵ Ritually, the wishing

⁵⁴ That is to say, in the *Phra Malai* story, the Bodhisatta describes to Phra Malai the various acts of *dana* he had performed in previous lives and the beneficial effect each would have on humankind. For example, because Metteyya had listened and responded to a beggar's request for alms, no one would be deaf or mute during his Buddhahood. Because he had made his offerings in an upright and noble manner, with good intentions, no one would be hunchbacked or crippled.

⁵⁵ McClung, 230. (*The Jataka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, E.B. Cowell, gen. ed., 6 vols. bound in 3; London: reprinted for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Co., 1969) vi, 260. It is unfortunate that McClung did not translate one of the many Thai versions of the *Vessantara Jataka*, or at least relevant sections of it. The translation by Cone and Gombrich (23) reads as follows: 'They have cut down a sturdy tree bearing all kinds of

tree is an integral part of the *Maha Chat* festival, represented by banana trunks set up at the four corners of the preaching pavilion symbolizing "the four trees that will blossom at the four corners of the city in which the next buddha, Metteyya, will be born."⁵⁶ In this and other festivals as well, the symbol takes the form of artificial trees bedecked with money which are carried in procession and presented to the Sangha. In the *Phra Malai* story Metteyya specifically mentions the wishing tree as one of the features of the landscape that will be manifest in his utopian world. Thus, the recitation of the two texts within the same ritual context reiterates the continuity of Buddhist teachings in both the past and in the future.

But are these philosophical and symbolic connections enough to explain why the *Phra Malai* story became such a successful promotional scheme for the *Vessantara Jataka* festival?

Historical Perspectives on the Connection Between Phra Malai and the Vessantara Jataka

Still another, perhaps more realistic, explanation for the connection between the two texts can perhaps be found in an examination of the religious and political history of the Lan Na - Sukhothai - Ayutthaya region at the time when the

fruit, in banishing Vessantara from the kingdom although he is guilty of no crime...They have cut down a strong tree, a fulfiller of every desire...They have cut down a tree which brought the pleasures of all one's desires..."

56 Tambiah 165.

Phra Malai story appears to have been introduced into this area, that is, around the fourteenth or fifteenth century A.D. Inscriptional evidence suggests that King Lüthai, also known as Mahādharmarāja I, the ruler of Sukhothai from 1347 to 1368,⁵⁷ was deeply concerned about a prophecy according to which the religion of Gotama Buddha would suffer a progressive decline and gradually disappear.⁵⁸

This prophecy was apparently a modification by the great commentator Buddhaghosa in the fifth century A.D. of an earlier prediction attributed to the Buddha himself. According to this earlier prophecy, the Buddha had set at 500 years the length of time during which the religion would endure.⁵⁹ Buddhaghosa, however, extended this time span to 5,000 years. As historian Georges Coedès explains, "He saw five successive stages of retrogression, at intervals of one thousand years one from the other: the disappearance of the acquisition of the degrees of sanctity, of the observance of the precepts, of the knowledge of the Scriptures, of the exterior signs, and lastly of the corporeal relics of the Master."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ There is some question concerning the dates of his reign. Wyatt (309) lists "1346-47 - 1368-74?"

⁵⁸ A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarāja I of Sukhodaya," *JSS* : 61.1, 84.

⁵⁹ Georges Coedès, "The Traibhumikathā Buddhist Cosmology and Treaty on Ethics," in *East and West*, 7 (1957) Coedes uses the term "Good Law"; see 349.

⁶⁰ Coedès 349.

This theory subsequently appears in all the Pali texts dealing with times to come, but the second and third stages are usually reversed, with the disappearance of the scriptures preceding that of the precepts.⁶¹ To illustrate the influence it had on religious and political affairs in neighboring areas at the time in question, we can look to fourteenth century inscriptional and textual documents attributed to King Lüthai.

The inscription, dated 1357 A.D., discusses this prophecy and calculates the exact number of years and days that had elapsed since the Buddha's *nibbāna*, and the time remaining before each stage in the decline of the religion would be reached.⁶²

At the time our Lord attained Buddhahood, our human life-span was still a hundred years. Between that time and this, it has decreased to ninety-nine years. If anyone asks, 'How many years have elapsed since it decreased from a hundred years to ninety-nine?', let him be told this: In the year of the hare, a hundred and thirty-nine years before [Phraya] Mahādharmarāja built this reliquary monument, the human life-span decreased from a hundred years. From that year on, the princes, Brahmins and [wealthy people] gradually lost their high standing; the men who were learned in astrology and medicine lost their standing; from that time on, they were no longer favored or respected....

If anyone asks, 'How much longer will the Lord's religion survive?', let this answer be given him: 'Three thousand and ninety-nine years after this

⁶¹ Coedès 349.

⁶² A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarāja I of Sukhodāya, Epigraphic and Historical Studies No. 11," JSS, 61.1: 96-99.

relic is enshrined the Lord's religion will come to an end.'

In the year of the boar, ninety-nine years from the year this relic is enshrined, the Three Pitakas will disappear. There will be no one who really knows them, though there will still be some who know a little bit of them. As for preaching the Dharma, such as the *Mahājāti* [i.e., the *Maha Chat*] there will be no one who can recite it; as for the other Dharmajātakas, if the beginning is known the end will not be, or if the end is known the beginning will not be; and as for the Abhidhamma collection, the *Pathhana* and the *Yammaka* will disappear at that time.⁶³

There are two things that are particularly striking in the passage above. The first is Lythai's belief that the teachings of the Buddha would disappear in just ninety-nine years. The second is the mention of the *Maha Chat*, or *Vessantara Jātaka*, as a significant text that would disappear. Interesting, also, is the use of the word "dharma" to refer to the *Jātakas*. This rather unusual usage occurs in several other Sukhothai inscriptions as well.⁶⁴ It also occurs in the Lan Na Thai term for the *Vessantara Jātaka* festival, *tang tham luang*, which literally means, "setting up the great dhamma." All of this suggests that for the general lay person, the *Jātakas*, with their colorful characters and plots, constituted most of what they actually knew as "the dhamma." It is worth emphasizing here the importance the *Jātakas* have held as teaching texts relative

⁶³ Griswold and Prasert, "The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarāja I" 96-99.

⁶⁴ See A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Inscription of Văt Trabăn Jān Phoak, Epigraphic and Historical Studies No. 7," *JSS*, 59.1 (1971) 169.

to the canonical texts and the commentaries. These stories, particularly the last ten, known in Thai as the *Totsachat* (Pali: *Dasajātaka*), have traditionally played a major role in disseminating Buddhist values, as embodied in the ten Perfections or virtues of the Bodhisatta.⁶⁵ They were among the most popular themes represented in mural painting and were easily recognizable to all who came to worship by the iconographic conventions particular to each story. The loss of such a basic and essential set of teachings would be a serious one indeed.

Despite this dire prediction, the author goes on to imply that part of it could in some way be at least delayed, if not prevented, if devout laypeople were to perform meritorious acts, since they had the advantage of being born at a time when the teachings were still known. Thus, the author urges his subjects to take advantage of this opportunity as follows:

From now on, all good people should make haste to perform meritorious actions in (accordance with) the Buddha's religion while it still survives. The present generation has the immense advantage of being born in time (to know) the Lord's religion; so everyone should be assiduous in doing homage to stupas, cetiyas and śrimahābodhi trees, which is the same as (doing homage) to our Lord in person. If anyone (when doing homage to them) makes a wish with perfect faith, it will come true, even if he makes the wish that he will be reborn in heaven, (that he will stay there) until Sri Ariyamaitri comes down (to earth) to become a

⁶⁵ Each story demonstrates the attainment of a specific *parami*, or perfection by the Buddha.

Buddha, and that he will be reborn on this earth at the same time.⁶⁶

This same theme of the demise of the religion is central to the *Anāgata-Vamsa* ("History of Future Events"), which exists in several variant forms in both Pali and Sinhalese.⁶⁷ A Pali version of the text found in Burma presents the same prediction, and, as we have seen in Chapter 3, a form of it may have been one of the sources of the *Phra Malai* legend.⁶⁸ Like the 1357 Lüthai inscription, the *Anāgata-Vamsa* describes the gradual decline of Gotama Buddha's religion over the duration of 5,000 years, followed by a period of immorality and strife. After a time of bloodshed that will virtually destroy the human race, the text tells us that those few people who have retreated to caves to escape the carnage will emerge to create a new

⁶⁶ Griswold and Prasert, "The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarāja I" 102-103.

⁶⁷ To be more specific, the version of the *Anāgata Vamsa* edited by J. Minayeff (*Journal of the Pali Text Society* 1886, 33) was translated from a Pali manuscript in the library of Mg. Hpo Hmyin in Rangoon. In this article, Minayeff refers to two other manuscripts. The translation was published in Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, 481-486. A Sinhalese version, known as the *Anāgatavāmsa Desana*, was recently translated by Udaya Meddegama. In an introduction to this text, John Holt writes that it "seems to date from the eighteenth century (on the basis of the language employed), [and] is itself a shorter version of the elaborate and elegant Sinhalese *Anāgatavāmsa* composed by Vilgammula in the fourteenth century, which, in turn, is ultimately based on the 142 verse original Pali poem." (*Anāgatavāmsa Desana* 12.)

⁶⁸ The prologue to the *Traiphum* mentions the *Anāgata-Vamsa* in a list of texts from which the author, Lüthai, drew in writing his cosmological treatise. Reynolds and Reynolds, *The Three Worlds* 46.

utopian society, after which Metteyya will be reborn in the human realm and lead all beings who are on earth to nibbana.

It should be noted that the Pali recension of the *Anagāta-Vamsa* from Burma, cited above, makes two references to the *Vessantara Jataka*. Like the 1357 inscription, the *Anagāta-Vamsa* states that the *Vessantara Jataka* will be the first of the *Jatakas* to be forgotten. The prediction, spoken through the Buddha, is as follows.

When the Abhidhamma-Pitaka has disappeared, the Suttanta-Pitaka will also disappear. When the Suttanta disappears, it is first the Anguttara-Nikaya that disappears...My disciples will only remember the Jataka together with the Vinaya-Pitaka. It is, however, only the well-conducted priests that will remember the Vinaya-Pitaka. But as time goes on they will be unable to remember the Jataka, and first the Vessantara Birth-Story will disappear, and when the Vessantara Birth-Story has disappeared...the Apannaka Birth-Story will disappear. When the Jataka has disappeared, they will remember only the Vinaya-Pitaka. As time goes on the Vinaya-Pitaka will disappear...⁶⁹

The text goes on to describe the disappearance of the religion, the destruction of the *kappa*, and the coming of Metteyya. It concludes by listing those who will not and those who will meet Metteyya. Particularly relevant for our purposes here is the list of those who will see him. It includes those who "give gifts, keep the precepts, keep fast days, fulfill their religious duties, found shrines, plant sacred fig trees...[and those who] make an offering of a handful of flowers...," in other words, those who observe

⁶⁹ Warren 483-484.

any of the standard ways of making merit. In addition, the *Anāgata-Vāmsa* specifies that "those who listen to the Vessantara Birth Story shall see him..." It seems significant that the Vessantara Jātaka is the only text that should be listened to in order to meet Metteyya.

Like the 1357 inscription, this text seems to imply that the disappearance of the Vessantara Jātaka will foreshadow the loss of the rest of the Jātakas. Once the Jātakas disappear, the Sangha will have no texts with which to teach the laity, for only the *Vinaya* (the rules pertaining to the Sangha) will remain.⁷⁰

The connection between the impending loss of the Jātakas and Metteyya's admonition to listen to the Vessantara story is made even more direct in an early nineteenth century Lan Na Thai *Phra Malai* manuscript :

⁷⁰ Warren 485-486. At a later point in the text, the *Anāgata-Vāmsa* mentions the Vessantara Jātaka again, in reply to the question, "'But who shall not behold Metteyya, The Blessed One? and who shall behold him?'" The reply includes the following: those who commit the five great sins, those who create a schism within the religion, and those guilty of heresy and slander shall not see him. However, "[a]ll other beings, who give gifts, keep the precepts, keep fast days, fulfill their religious duties, found shrines, plant sacred fig trees...make bridges, clear the highways, take their stand in the precepts, and dig wells, shall see him. Those who, longing for a Blessed One, shall make a gift even if only of a handful of flowers, or of a single lamp, or of a mouthful of food, shall see him....Those who listen to the Vessantara Birth Story shall see him, likewise those who give to the congregation offerings of food shall see him." 485-486.

When the teachings of the Buddha⁷¹ are destroyed at the time that the religion comes to an end, the Ten Jātakas will disappear in reverse order; the Vessantara Jātaka will disappear first. This is the reason that Metteyya Bodhisatta exhorted⁷² the people to listen to the Vessantara Jātaka.

The implication here seems to be that if the people listen to Vessantara, the Jātakas, as a whole, will endure. The question now becomes, what relevance did these beliefs have for the practice of Buddhism at the time when the texts and inscriptions were written?

Part of the answer lies in an examination of the role of Theravāda Buddhist institutions in Southeast Asian kingship. The manipulation of Buddhist symbols for royal empowerment and the performance of symbolic acts -- specifically those intended to identify a king with buddhahood, as a bodhisatta -- were common practices among Buddhist monarchs. The bodhisatta ideal first came to be adopted into the Theravadin ethos of kingship in Ceylon around the sixth century A.D.⁷³ The ideal grew out of the biography of the Buddha Gotama who, in the life preceding the one in which he attained Buddhahood, that is, his life

⁷¹ The text uses the word *pariyat*, which McFarland defines as "that which is learned; the text of the Buddha's word," 509.

⁷² Typescript of a *Malai Plai* text, identified as *Dutiya Malai*, dated C.S 1184 (A.D. 1831), from Wat Duang Dii, Chiang Mai, transcribed from Lan Na Thai (*Tham* characters) into Siamese. This particular text, although identified as a recension of the *Malai Plai*, reads more like a commentary in that it seeks to explain and amplify the contents of a more typical *Malai Plai* text.

⁷³ Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965) 45.

as Vessantara, was a universal emperor. "As king he had made a vow to 'become a guide of the world, teacher of gods and man.'⁷⁴ Against this background, birth as a *cakkavattin*, or ideal universal king, came to be seen as the last stage before birth as the next buddha.⁷⁵ This ideal spread to the Thais in the fourteenth century, when, as was mentioned earlier, the states of Sukhothai and Lan Na sent delegations of monks to Sri Lanka to be reordained.

King Luthai, the fourteenth century author of the 1357 Sukhothai inscription mentioned above, in another inscription proclaimed his bodhisatta vow to work for the salvation of all beings. In addition, he sponsored the casting of several images that were intended to be "portraits of himself in the guise of a Buddha."⁷⁶

Even before Luthai ascended the throne, Reynolds contends, he wrote the *Traiphum* cosmological treatise with the stated twofold purpose of advancing 'the cause of the

⁷⁴ *Mahavastu*, I, 52-53: transl. Jones, vol. I, 41f. Cited in Sarkisyanz 45.

⁷⁵ Sarkisyanz 45, explains: "Though Theravāda tenets could not promise each believer, not even each member of the dynasty, to become a Buddha, its traditions, by implication opened for Ceylon's kings the possibility of becoming the only future Buddha that the Theravāda admits within this World Age. There evolved in Ceylon first a cult of [Metteyya] and then ideals of the King's association with this future Buddha. Eventually this culminated in the royal ideal of aspiring to become the Bodhisatta [Metteyya]."

⁷⁶ Reynolds and Reynolds 9-10. See Griswold and Prasert, "The Epigraphy of Mahādharmarāja I" 142-143.

Dhamma' and teaching the Dhamma to his mother.⁷⁷ In this way, Reynolds maintains,

the king directly emulated the pattern of the Buddha himself, who according to the tradition had preached the Dhamma to his mother and, in a closely associated act, had performed a great miracle through which his followers had been given a vision of the various cosmic realms and their inhabitants.⁷⁸

In a similar way, we have seen how King Tilok of Lan Na modelled his activities after those of a bodhisatta, all the while publicizing both his meritorious acts and the motivation behind them. One of the northern chronicles, for example, declares that Tilok's ordination followed the precedent set by King Lythai of Sukhothai, who, like Tilok, was motivated by the desire to become a Buddha in the future.⁷⁹

A significant factor in Tilok's reign was his rivalry with Borommatailokanat of Ayutthaya, who ruled 1441-1487.⁸⁰ The two monarchs spent much of their reigns on the battlefield in contention with one another over the vestiges of the once-powerful kingdom of Sukhothai, located in the area between the two kingdoms. While this kingdom had withered and declined in political power, it remained in the

⁷⁷ Reynolds and Reynolds 7.

⁷⁸ Reynolds and Reynolds 10.

⁷⁹ Swearer and Premchit, "Religion and Polity", 30, are referring here to the Chronicle of Wat Pa Daeng.

⁸⁰ Borommatailokanat also ruled in Phitsanulok 1463-1488.

fifteenth century the site of a flourishing ceramics industry that produced great quantities of wares for foreign export. Art historian Hiram W. Woodward, Jr. has suggested the rivalry between Lan Na and Ayutthaya was over control of this ceramics industry and the revenues it brought.⁸¹

The competition between the two monarchs also involved espionage, the use of symbols, and competition for merit. Both monarchs sent spies to each other's kingdoms to keep abreast of the other's military strength, magical potency, and merit-making activities.⁸² Borommatrailokanat's arsenal included the psychological weapons of words. In or around 1475 he commissioned the writing of a panegyrical poem called the *Yuan Phai* ("The Defeat of the Lan Na Thai") to record in glorious hyperbole his army's defeat of the northerners.

The rivalry between Tilok and Borommatrailokanat appears to have extended from the battlefield to the

⁸¹ Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., "Dating Sukhothai and Sawankhalok Ceramics," (*JSS*, 66.1, 1978) 1-7. In 1451 Lan Na invaded this area, which was then under the control of Ayutthaya. This attack was repulsed, but in 1460, Lan Na struck again, this time gaining control of Sukhothai for two years and Si Satchanalai, the center of the ceramics industry, for fourteen years, until 1474. That year, Borommatrailokanat carried out an invasion, which recovered Si Satchanalai and inspired the composition of the *Yuan Phai*. Woodward believes that the city was "a prize....Si Satchanalai was in 1474 a wealth-producing city," and the battles for it continued into the next century. (5-6).

⁸² A.B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "A Fifteenth-Century Siamese Historical Poem," *Southeast Asian History and Historiography, Essays Presented to D.G.E. Hall*, ed. by C.D. Cowan and O.W. Wolters (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976) 123-163.

religious sphere as well. The similarity begins with their regnal names, which were variations of the same epithet for the Buddha: "Great Lord of the Three Worlds." Borommatailokanat's name can be separated into several words: *boromma*, meaning "great"; *triloka*, "three worlds", and *natha*, "protector," or "lord." Similarly, in the name Tilokaracha, *tiloka* is derived from the Pali form of the Sanskrit *triloka* "three worlds," while *racha* or *raja* means "king."

Like Tilok, Borommatailokanat lived his kingly life according to the bodhisatta model exemplified by both Vessantara and Metteyya. His activities included acquiring an auspicious white elephant and performing numerous great acts of merit. These included giving up his palace for use as a monastery, and entering a life of austerity himself -- as a monk at a monastery that he built and named "Wat Culamani," calling to mind the Cūlāmani Cetiya in Tāvatimsa Heaven, where the future Buddha, Metteyya, goes to worship.⁸³

He also commissioned the writing of the *Maha Chat Kham Luang*, or "Royal Version of the Vessantara Jātaka" around

⁸³ In Lan Na the same comparison was made with a local site, the great cetiya known as Wat Cedi Luang, which was rebuilt by Tilok. In the Wat Pa Daeng Chronicle it is described as "crowning Chiang Mai like the Cūlāmani Cedi." See Swearer and Premchit, "Religion and Polity in Northern Thailand," *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Chambersburg, PA: ANIMA Books, 1975) 20-33.

1482.⁸⁴ This version of the *Vessantara* story, according to Thai political scientist Sombat Chantornvong, was steeped with political messages.⁸⁵ That is, throughout the text, both the Buddha and Vessantara are referred to by epithets similar to Trailok's name: Phratrailoknat, Phra Sasada Mahaboromtrailoknat, Phratrailokayamuninat, and others. Moreover, Trailok's complete name, Boromatrailokanat, occurs at two key points in the text, the first and last chapters.⁸⁶ In the first, the name refers solely to the king himself, for the passage reads: "[this text is] ...the official version composed by all the wise men in the reign of King Boromatrailokanat." At the end of the last chapter, however, the name is used for a different purpose: to equate the king with the Bodhisatta:

Prince Wetsandorn [Vessantara] who in the Tenth Birth practiced the virtue of charity,...is none other than...Phra Boromatrailokanat *Tathāgatha*,⁸⁷ who has the honor of the Buddhahood.

⁸⁴ This royal composition resembles a northern *nisai* text in its dual language format; that is, it is written in alternate passages of Pali and Siamese.

⁸⁵ "Religious Literature in Thai Political Perspective: The Case of the *Maha Chat Kamluang*" in *Essays on Literature and Society in Southeast Asia*, ed. Tham Seong Chee (Kent Ridge: Singapore UP, 1981) 187-205.

⁸⁶ Chantornvong argues that these would be the chapters the faithful would be most likely to hear if they were attempting to attend the entire recitation.

⁸⁷ Charntongvong, "Religious Literature," 196. Although Chantornvong used this evidence as a basis for arguing that the *Maha Chat Kham Luang* was used to promote the acceptance among the populace of "unlimited monarchical rule," it is pertinent, nonetheless, to our discussion here.

This endeavor to tap into the power inherent in buddhahood is related to another, equally ambitious and symbolically relevant project on the part of Borommatrailekanat some years earlier. In 1458, he ordered the casting of five hundred (some accounts say 550) bronze sculptures to represent each of the Jātakas.⁸⁸

The project of casting a set of five hundred images is unparalleled in the history of Thai artistic endeavors. Remnants of several images believed to be from Borommatrailekanat's Jātaka set have been discovered in Ayutthaya.⁸⁹ These fragments indicate that the images were half life-size, requiring an immense amount of material. Moreover, their sheer number implies that the court had to expend a substantial amount of resources to recruit and coordinate a legion of skilled sculptors who could carry the project through to completion. The reasons for undertaking a project of this scale must have been compelling.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Jean Boisselier, *The Heritage of Thai Sculpture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1975) 176. In Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhist traditions it is common to speak of 500 or sometimes 550 Jātakas. Whether this is simply a shorthand or whether traditions of 500 and/550 Jātakas exist, separate from the 547 Jātakas of the Pali tradition, is unclear. In this context, one also wonders if Borommatrailekanat was inspired to undertake this project by learning of the 500 monks who were ordained at Trailekanat's coronation.

⁸⁹ Boisselier, *The Heritage*, ; McGill, "Jātakas" . . I am grateful to Dr. McGill for providing me with a draft of this article and for his conversations on this subject.

⁹⁰ See McGill, "Jātakas."

Art historian Jean Boisselier has interpreted this project as a "commemoration" of the 2000th anniversary of Buddhism.⁹¹ This project, he believes, was comparable in terms of its magnitude and timing to Tilok's founding in 1455 of Wat Mahabodharama, popularly known as Wat Chedi Chet Yot (the Monument of the Seven Spires) in Chiang Mai.⁹² However, Griswold, who observed this connection earlier, saw the coming of the year 2000 as a time for vigilance rather than one for celebration.

He points out that the founding of this temple occurred in that same 'year of the Boar' about which King Lüthai of Sukhothai had made such a dire forecast ninety-nine years earlier. Griswold also interprets Tilok's summoning of the Eighth Sangayana or Council as another effort at averting the prediction. In 1477, more than one hundred monks convened at Wat Mahabodharama to purify the scriptures and ensure that they conformed to the *Buddhavacana*, or words of the Buddha.

Art historian Forrest McGill argues that these ominous connotations associated with the year 2000 could be used advantageously by a Buddhist monarch.⁹³ Writing with

⁹¹ This monument was intended to establish a symbolic connection with the Mahābodhi Temple in India, which commemorates the site where the Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment. A.B Griswold appears to have been the first scholar to observe this connection. See *The Arts of Thailand* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1960) 122.

⁹² Griswold 182.

⁹³ McGill 11.

reference to Borommatrailokanat's *Jātaka* projects, McGill suggests, that as the year approached,

the threat of losing knowledge of the Dharma, particularly of the Vessantara and other *Jātakas*, increased. Surely a Buddhist king would do his best to delay or avert this loss. What better way than to commission sculptural representations of all the *Jātakas*, and eventually to compose a 'royal version' of the Vessantara *Jātaka*?⁹⁴

If a king were to prevent or mitigate the fulfillment of this prediction, and thereby succeed in affecting the course of cosmic history, it "would show him to have the power of great accumulated merit."⁹⁵ Such a demonstration of merit would substantially enhance a ruler's charisma both within his kingdom and without.⁹⁶

Given the intense competition between Tilok and Borommatrailokanat and the resources that the Ayutthayan monarch had expended, it would have seemed imperative for Tilok to make an effort to forestall the prediction that was even greater than his arch rival's effort. Was the promotion of the Vessantara *Jātaka* festival in Lan Na still another move of one-up-manship on Tilok's part? By encouraging his people, through the guarantee of both material and spiritual rewards, to listen to the entire

⁹⁴ McGill 11.

⁹⁵ McGill 11.

⁹⁶ Historian Jeremy Kemp notes that one way for a king to ensure security in his reign was "by demonstrating his magico-religious powers in such ways as to bring benefits to the populace and to emphasize his own inviability." *Aspects of Siamese Kingship in the Seventeenth Century* (Bangkok: Social Science Review) 44.

Jātaka at an annual celebration, he would ensure that the story would survive at least another year. Moreover, by encouraging them to bestow massive donations ("a thousand candles, a thousand incense sticks, a thousand blue lotuses...etc"), his kingdom would also accrue a correspondingly massive amount of merit to ensure its survival.

While we have no evidence indicating how far back in time the recitation of the *Vessantara Jātaka* was held on the full moon night following the end of Buddhist lent, it will be recalled from Chapter 3 that a Burmese inscription written in 1201 A.D. referred to the recitation of the Phra Malai story and the *Vessantara Jātaka* on two consecutive nights.⁹⁷ Furthermore, it was also noted in Chapter 3 that, according to a book of Burmese legends, "in ancient times" these same two texts were read in succession on the full-moon night of the lunar month corresponding to October-November. This occasion followed the celebration of the end of lent.

All of this evidence seems to suggest that when Tilok ascended the throne, the custom of reciting the *Vessantara*

⁹⁷ See Chapter 3: 52-53. The inscription states that in the year C.S. 563 (1201 A.D.), "The great monk Non up ..., after completing his work of merit, on Sunday the 14th day of the waxing of the month of Tagu (Caitra), listened to the recitation of Malan [the Burmese name for Malai]. On Monday, the full moon, he listened to the Pisamantra [a word that Luce believed to be a form of the *Vessantara Jātaka*]. On Tuesday, the last waxing, he listened to the Dhammacakra [Sutta]. Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevattheravatthum" 12-13, 70; "L'Origine" 334.

Jātaka on the full moon night of the twelfth lunar month was already in existence. If this were the case, Tilok, being both a righteous Buddhist monarch concerned with preserving the religion as well as a bold opportunist intent on outdoing his opponent, might well have developed this annual recital into a full-fledged state ceremony. Participation in this ceremony would have been promoted by royal sponsorship of manuscripts of both the *Vessantara Jātaka* and the Phra Malai story. This ceremony would not only keep the teachings alive for another year; it would also renew the power and authority of kingly symbols and build a treasury of merit for the kingdom of Lan Na.

Even after the 2000th year of the Buddhist Era had passed, the prediction regarding the disappearance of the Dhamma continued to be regarded seriously by Thai monarchs. For example, Gerini writes that King Song Tham, who ruled Ayutthaya 1610-1628,

[b]lindly accepting the prediction as to the future dispairition [sic] of the *Vessantara Jātaka* and seriously preoccupied by the eventuality of such an important text becoming lost,... employed all his leisure in composing a poem based on the subject of this *jātaka*, which he named *Maha Chat*. By means of this poem -- vested in an epic form and thus more likely to remain impressed on the minds of the people -- he proposed to hand down to the coming generations the story...in the hope of preventing, or at least, mitigating the effect of the prophecy.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Gerini 24; Song Tham's version of the *Jātaka* was known as *Kap Maha Chat*, the word *kap* (*kaap*²) referring to the verse form employed. Gerini maintains that the *suat* style of recitation originated during this time. This style

The recitation of the *Vessantara Jātaka* has remained one of the most important state ceremonies of the Chakri dynasty, which emerged in 1782 to form a new capital in Bangkok after the fall of Ayutthaya, and which remains in power today. King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) who ruled Thailand 1868-1910, has described the royal celebrations of the *Maha Chat* performed during his reign and previous ones in his book, *Royal Ceremonies of the Twelve Months*.⁹⁹ According to his account, during the first three reigns of the dynasty a special merit-making ceremony was performed on behalf of the nation.

Furthermore, the *Maha Chat* also figured prominently in another royal custom, practiced during the early reigns of the Chakri dynasty, in which the crown prince, at his ordination, recited certain sections of the *Jātaka*. Even nowadays, segments of the *Maha Chat Kham Luang* are recited at Wat Phra Kaew, the royal temple of the Chakri Dynasty, at the beginning, middle, and end of lent each year.

* * *

of recitation is employed in the *Klon Suat* version of Phra Malai, which is also written in *kap* verse.

⁹⁹ *Phra ratchapithi sipsong dyan* (3 vols.; Bangkok: Ongkan Kha Khurusapha, 1963) vol i, 78-83. Elizabeth Gosling notes that "King Chulalongkorn based his work largely on a manuscript said to have been written by a wife of one of the kings of Sukhothai, but it is doubtful if any of the material actually derives from the Sukhothai period." *The History of Sukhothai as a Ceremonial Center: A Study of Early Siamese Architecture and Society* (Diss. U of Michigan, Ann Arbor: pub. by UMI, 1983) 256-257.

In tracing the development of early Phra Malai texts in Thailand, this chapter has suggested that the *Malai Ton-Malai Plai* pair of texts was developed in the Lan Na kingdom for the purpose of publicizing and promoting participation in the *Vessantara Jātaka* festival. In this context, the northern Phra Malai texts serve as a frame for the *Vessantara Jātaka*, a way of enlisting widespread support for the performance of works of merit to preserve the *dhamma*, and, thus, the stability of the kingdom, as long as possible. Through the influence of this text, the recitation of the *Vessantara Jātaka* became established as a state and local Buddhist institution that remains strong today.

In the next chapter we will examine the ways in which a Pali recension of this basic text was embellished into a work of royal literary art for other merit-making reasons. In that context, the text took on another meaning -- that of a personal work of atonement.

CHAPTER 5

PHRA MALAI KHAM LUANG: THE ROYAL VERSION

Phra Malai Kham Luang, the "royal version" of the Phra Malai story, closely parallels the Pali/Lan Na version of the legend in its content and sequence of events. In fact, the *Kham Luang* text ends with a colophon stating explicitly that the work is based on an earlier Pali model. Like the Lan Na and Isan *Phra Malai* texts, the royal version is written in one of the variant forms of *rai* (*raai*³) verse and has Pali words and phrases scattered throughout the text.

Phra Malai Kham Luang is attributed to Prince Thammathibet,¹ the first son of King Borommakot, who ruled Ayutthaya from 1733 to 1758. This attribution is based on a verse found in several manuscript copies of the text, stating that it was composed by the Prince of the Front Palace, (Thai: *uparat*) a title that Thammathibet held. The verse reads:

¹ Thammathibet is actually a title given to the Prince, whose familiar name is Cao Fa Kung. He is also known as Cao Fa Krom Khun Sena Phitak and Phra Maha Siriban (the name he had as a monk). Schweisguth gives c. 1715 and c. 1755 as the approximate dates for Thammathibet's birth and death (Etude 127).

This exalted writing of [the story of] Phra Malai
 Was composed by a lord of the palace.
 I have completed the story and embellished it,
 And tried to make it harmonious and melodic.²

Moreover, the *Kham Luang* text ends with a colophon dated 2280 B.E., corresponding to 1737 A.D., when Thammathibet was in the Buddhist monkhood.

Thammathibet is much admired as one of the greatest poets in Thai literary history. He is best known for his rhythmical boating songs (*hee² rya¹*), which today are still used to set the cadence for royal barge processions on the Chao Phaya River. He is also famous for a group of evocative travel memoirs, known as *nirat* (*ni⁴raat³*), wherein descriptions of specific landscape elements are intended to call to mind particular memories of a loved one. Among students of literature he is recognized as the author of two works based on earlier Buddhist texts: *Phra Malai Kham Luang*

² Ornanong cites the passage, which is written in *khlong* verse, in her thesis and states that it is found in several manuscript copies of the text in the collection of the Thai National Library (Ornanong 41). Unfortunately, she doesn't identify the manuscripts by their catalog number, or indicate how many include this passage.

The title of Prince of the Front Palace (Thai: *uparat*) was given to the heir to the throne. (See Prince Dhani Nivat, "Phra Malai, royal version," *JSS*, 37.1: 1948, 69-72. As Prince Dhani notes, Phaya Anuman Rajadhon expressed doubt concerning this attribution, contending that *Phra Malai Kham Luang* was inferior to other works by Thammathibet. See Phaya Anuman's epilogue in *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, attributed to Prince Thammathibet (Bangkok: Fine Arts Dept. 1948). In general, however, most Thai scholars accept the attribution without question.

and *Nanthopanan Sut Kham Luang*.³ Both are lengthy and relatively difficult to read, however, and are thus less popular than his other works.

These two works are among the four pieces of Thai literature that have the designation *kham luang*, which literally means "royal words." The other two are the *Maha Chat Kham Luang*, a poetic rendition of the *Vessantara Jātaka* commissioned by King Borommatrailokanat of Ayutthaya in 1482, and *Phra Non Kham Luang*, a text based on an English translation of a Sanskrit text, written by King Rama VI (1910-25). It is possible that still other *kham luang* works existed at one time, but were lost in the Burmese sack of Ayutthaya in 1767.

Despite the small number of extant *kham luang* texts, the term *kham luang* is sometimes referred to as a category or genre of Thai literature.⁴ When one attempts to define the distinctive characteristics common to these four texts,

³ As was mentioned in Chapter 3, above, this work is a Thai translation. The text is a translation into Thai verse of the Pali *Nandopananda Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*; the tale concerns Moggallana's subduing of a *naga*; see Pluang 165.

⁴ An example occurs in a recently published book on the languages and literatures of Southeast Asia, where it is inaccurately stated: "These are poetic works often based on the last great *Jātaka*, the *Vessantara Jātaka*." In fact, only one *kham luang* text, the *Maha Chat Kham Luang*, out of four is based on this *Jātaka*. Two of the others *Phra Malai* and the *Nanthopanan Sut* (Pali: *Nandopananda Sutta*) are based on extra-canonical Pali texts; ; the fourth, *Phra Non*, is based on a Sanskrit work. (See *South-East Asia: Languages and Literatures, a Select Guide*, edited by Patricia Herbert and Anthony Milner, U of Hawaii P, 1989.)

however, it becomes clear that the parameters of this "genre" are ambiguous. This ambiguity is reflected in Ornanong Phadpaddee's discussion of the term *kham luang* in her master's thesis, where she includes seven definitions of the term from various Thai literary sources and scholars, including the Royal Thai Institute, Anuman Rajadhon, Plyuang na Nakhon, and others. Each of these definitions is, by itself, too broad or too general to be of much use.

For example, Plyuang defines the term as "a type of literary work relating an important legend or religious story, written in the form of a poem, such as *Phra Non Kham Luang* [or] *Maha Chat Kham Luang*."⁵ This definition is so vague as to be meaningless, for it holds true for nearly every work of traditional Thai literature. Another definition, by Roeng Atwibun, poses a different sort of problem. It reads "*kham luang* means a royally written or commissioned work," thereby including a large number of other royal prose texts, such as various versions of the *Traiphum*.⁶

In an effort to arrive at a more satisfactory and precise definition of the term, Ornanong lists the following features as distinctive to the four *kham luang* texts:

- 1) They were either written by a king, as is true of *Phra Non Kham Luang*, or commissioned a king, as is the case with *Maha Chat Kham Luang*.

⁵ Ornanong 18.

⁶ Ornanong 17.

- 2) They were written by another high-ranking member of the royal family, such as the heir to the throne, as is the case of *Nanthopanan Sut* and *Phra Malai Kham Luang*.
- 3) The content is not new, but is based on older writings.
- 4) They are sacred stories based on religious themes; *Phra Non* is a Brahmanical story; the other three are Buddhist.
- 5) They contain words from Indic languages interspersed throughout the Thai. *Phra Non* contains Sanskrit words; the other three contain Pali words.
- 6) They are written in at least two different verse forms.
- 7) The poetry is of high quality.
- 8) They were probably written to be chanted at royal ceremonies. This is known to be true of the *Maha Chat Kham Luang*. While there is no evidence that the others were used in this way, each of them is written in a form suitable for chanting.
- 9) They have the words *kham luang* (royal text) in their title.⁷

While the combined characteristics in this list do serve to help differentiate *kham luang* from other royal or religious literary works, some of the items seem irrelevant. For example, the third characteristic in the list ("the content not new, but is based on older writings") is true of most works of Thai literature of any genre. The eighth characteristic in the list, stating that the texts were probably meant to be chanted, is also problematic in the

⁷ This last characteristic, is of, course a tautology. I am including it here because it is part of Ornanong's list.

absence of evidence suggesting that any other *kham luang* texts besides the *Maha Chat Kham Luang* were actually chanted. Consequently, the question of whether the four works having these characteristics can be said to comprise a genre is still debatable.

The Historical Setting

While little biographical information concerning Thammathibet is available, the period during which he lived has been called "an age of brilliant literary revival."⁸ This period preceded the Burmese sack of Ayutthaya in 1767, and historian David K. Wyatt believes that, to subsequent generations, it "must have seemed a sort of golden age, an ideal to be recaptured."⁹ He explains,

There was much about Borommakot's reign that accorded with traditional ideas of the virtues of good kings....He was, first of all, a strong supporter of Buddhism. His reign is perhaps best remembered for an exchange of missions with the Kingdom of Kandy in Ceylon. In 1751, a mission arrived from Ceylon requesting aid in restoring Sinhalese Buddhism, which had declined under Portuguese and Dutch rule. Accordingly, a party of eighteen Siamese monks was dispatched to Kandy to reordain Sinhalese monks and establish what was to become a Siam order of monks on Ceylon. A second mission was also sent to Kandy in 1755. The implications of these events were not lost on Siamese who for centuries had regarded Ceylon as the preeminent center of Buddhism. Did not this exchange imply that Siam now had that position?¹⁰

⁸ Dhani Nivat 69.

⁹ Wyatt 129.

¹⁰ Wyatt 129.

Wyatt also points out that this period was one in which Ayutthaya played the role of "a great kingdom in its relations with neighboring states," intervening in Cambodian affairs, resuming relations with Burma "after a century of virtually none," and facing no serious external threats.¹¹ It would be fair to assume that in such a prosperous and prestigious time for the kingdom and the local Sangha, Thammathibet, as heir to the throne, would have had the opportunity to study Buddhist texts, Thai literature, and Sanskrit grammar with the most learned monks and pundits in the land.

The honor, privilege, and opportunity associated with Thammathibet's high rank as crown prince, however, were offset by a fatal attraction to court intrigue and romantic dalliance that was to lead to his eventual, and violent, demise. One major event involving court politics occurred in 1735, when Thammathibet instigated an abortive plot to assassinate his cousin, Prince Naren. Although coups and assassinations directed against close relatives were fairly routine in Thai history, Thammathibet's plot was particularly grievous because Naren was a monk at the time. Naren had been ordained in 1733, just before the outbreak of a dispute over the successor to the throne. This dispute followed the death of Naren's father, King Thai Sa, and

¹¹ Wyatt 129-130.

brought Borommakot (Thai Sa's brother) to the throne. As Wyatt explains it,

Throughout his reign, King Thai Sa had been loyally served by his younger full brother, the uparat [sometimes referred to as the "second king" and heir apparent], Prince Phon. Thai Sa himself had three sons born to his only queen, the princes Naren, Aphai, and Paramet. On his deathbed, the king expressed his choice for Aphai to succeed him. Naren was at the time serving briefly in the Buddhist monkhood and chose not to dispute the succession; but all the other parties prepared militarily to contest it.¹²

In the end, Prince Phon managed to defeat his rivals, and ascended the throne. Though he had several regnal names, he is best known as King Borommakot.¹³ Wyatt's account of the battle suggests that Aphai and Paramet were both killed, leaving only Naren, who was in the monkhood at the time. Apparently Naren's unwillingness to leave the monastery at this time of courtly instability aroused the suspicion of Thammathibet, who viewed him as a potential rival for the throne.

Thammathibet thus arranged to have two of his daughters invite Naren to the palace on the pretext of having him visit Borommakot, who was ill. Thammathibet's plan was to hide behind a doorway and stab Naren as he walked by. The plot failed, however, as Naren managed to flee and Thammathibet succeeded in only tearing his robe.

¹² Wyatt 127.

¹³ His regnal names were King Song Tham (not to be confused with an earlier king of that name) and Borommathammikarat. The title, King Borommakot, was bestowed posthumously.

The Chronicles of Ayutthaya report that when Borommakot learned of what had happened, he was incensed, for Naren was one of his favorite nephews. Perhaps another factor behind Borommakot's anger, though not mentioned in the Chronicles, was the demerit (*akusala*) incurred upon the both kingdom and the heir apparent by Thammathibet's attempt to murder a monk.

According to the Chronicles, Thammathibet hid in his mother's quarters in the palace to escape his father's wrath and then persuaded her to sponsor his ordination.

Ironically, Thammathibet entered the monkhood at Wat Khoksaeng, the same monastery where his cousin was residing. It was at this time that he wrote the two major poetic works based on Buddhist themes, *Nanthopanan Sut Kham Luang* and *Phra Malai Kham Luang*.

Despite Thammathibet's major accomplishments in the field of religious literature during his years in the monkhood, in retrospect these efforts appear to have had little influence on the rest of his life. This is reflected in the subject matter of his poetry, which from this time onward is purely secular. Moreover, Thammathibet's appetite for court intrigue -- and romance as well -- surfaced again in 1755, this time tragically. Thammathibet

joined with two of his half-brothers also born to queens to curb what they perceived as the pretensions and ambitions of three of their half-brothers, sons of royal concubines. The junior three, in fact, had quietly been expanding their departments, promoting their officials, and recruiting additional retainers. When

[Thammathibet] went so far as to have some of those officials arrested and flogged, the junior party in turn revealed that [Thammathibet] had been carrying on a love affair with one of his father's three queens. [Thammathibet] pleaded guilty to the charge, and he and the woman were flogged to death.¹⁴

Thammathibet and his mistress were not afforded cremation ceremonies because of the circumstances surrounding their deaths. Their bodies were buried together at Wat Chai Watthanaram.

Poetry and Politics

Phra Malai Kham Luang (along with the *Nanthophanan Sut*), as mentioned above, differs markedly from the other poems written by Thammathibet. Though there is insufficient evidence to support a coherent thesis explaining the poet's motivation in writing it, we can speculate that several different factors may have been at work.

The first is the fact that throughout Thai history, as mentioned in the previous chapter, monarchs were often writers or sponsors of important and highly revered literary works. Gedney points out that five of the first seven kings of the Chakri dynasty (the present dynasty, which began in 1782) were "leading figure[s] in the field of literature."¹⁵ We have already seen that this literary tradition has antecedents in numerous royally written or sponsored works,

¹⁴ Wyatt 130-131.

¹⁵ William J. Gedney, "Patrons and Practitioners: The Chakri Monarchs and Literature," CROSSROADS 2 (2) 1.

many of them with religious themes and political motivations, dating from the Thonburi, Ayutthaya, and Sukhothai periods.¹⁶ Prominent examples include Borommatrailokanat's *Maha Chat Kham Luang* and Song Tham's *Kap Maha Chat*, discussed in the previous chapter. Other examples are the various recensions of the *Traiphum* cosmological treatise: the first, attributed to King Luthai of fourteenth century Sukhothai; two others, commissioned during the reign of King Taksin in 1776 and 1778; and a more extensive revision, ordered by King Rama I. These treatises all had covert political messages in addition to their overt religious messages.

The previous chapter has demonstrated some of the ways in which the *Traiphum* and the *Vessantara Jātaka* were used for political purposes. A similar motivation behind Prince Thammathibet's writing of *Phra Malai Kham Luang* is less immediately apparent. However, since it is nearly impossible to find instances where royal writings were not politically motivated, a closer look seems warranted.

On the surface, *Phra Malai Kham Luang* appears to be an affirmation of the poet's faith in the coming of the future Buddha Metteyya and the formulation of his wish to be born at that time. Moreover, unlike the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*, it

¹⁶ Portions of the Rama epic were written under the sponsorship of the Thonburi court; as we have seen in the previous chapter, Borommatrailokanat is famous for his sponsorship, of the *Maha Chat Kham Luang*, as is King Luthai, the fourteenth century monarch of Sukhothai, for the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*.

was not intended to serve as a teaching text for the general public, since the *Klon Suat* was apparently being used for that purpose. Rather, the writing of *Phra Malai Kham Luang* provided a courtly, elegant version of a popular text. In writing this work Thammathibet demonstrated an impressive command of literary skills and a profound knowledge of Buddhist texts. This accomplishment by itself may have augmented his chances for succession by demonstrating that he had the knowledge required of a Buddhist monarch.

Poetry as Dana

Another theory regarding Thammathibet's motivation in composing *Phra Malai* was advanced by Ornanong Phadpaddee, who explained it as an effort "to erase the negative consequences (*akusala kamma*) of his attempt to assassinate his cousin, Prince Naren, while he was a bhikkhu."¹⁷ Ornaong is suggesting, then, that the composition of *Phra Malai Kham Luang* can best be understood as an act of personal merit-making. This intent is obvious from Thammathibet's colophon wherein he states his twofold purpose in writing the text: to compose an ornate and beautiful work of poetry and to make sufficient merit to meet Metteyya in the future.

I have finished telling the legend of Phra Malai, intending to write the story down in poetry, to compose passages that are fluent, ornate, orderly and varied. My aim has been to follow the

¹⁷ Ornanong 41.

original, to compose passages without error, to be proficient in the rules of writing, and to be fluent in [expressing] the essence of the eternal Dhamma. I composed it, creating a message that is elaborate and complete.

Through the merit that I have made, may I meet Metteyya, the Eminent Lord. May I not have the misfortune of missing him. May I be born in a purer state; may I be a man so that I can be ordained by Phra Metteyya; [may I] meet him face to face. [May I] receive his teachings and thereby succeed in becoming an arhat, until at last I attain *nibbāna*. May this wish come true.

On the surface the text is saying that Thammathibet wrote *Phra Malai Kham Luang* in the hope of being reborn during the time of Metteyya. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this concern for meeting Metteyya has been (and continues to be) a common aspiration for Theravāda Buddhists in the kingdoms of Lan Na, Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and Burma since at least the fourteenth century. It is reflected not only in stone inscriptions, but also in the colophons of manuscripts, inscriptions on Buddha images, and in ceremonies such as the recitation of the *Vessantara Jātaka*. Mention of it is also made in the *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, when the arhat, in reply to Metteyya's question, explains the motivation behind the meritorious deeds of the people of Jambudīpa, listed above.

"They think of meeting you and wish to be united with you when you have attained enlightenment. They want to transcend samsāra; they hope for it constantly. They want to meet you at that time. They say, 'Through the power of the merit resulting from practicing dāna, if I should die, may I not go to hell. May I meet Phra Sri Ariya Metteyya when he comes to be reborn on this world and becomes enlightened as a Buddha. Oh, please may I meet him.' Every person wishes this. When they finish their merit-making practices, each one

of them, everywhere on earth, thinks of you and awaits you."

On the other hand, Luis O. Gómez has suggested that the message embodied in Thammathibet's colophon could perhaps be construed not only as a formulaic wish to meet Metteyya, but also as an indirect expression of apology to Borommakot, who as king is also bodhisatta, and by extension of this idea, Metteyya himself. In the light of the political uses of religious texts that we have considered in the previous chapter, this suggestion is worth considering. It is particularly relevant in the light of the succession dispute that had marked the beginning of Borommakot's reign and that Thammathibet had himself become embroiled in.

The method of succession throughout Thai history has been rather loosely structured, in that quite often the position of crown prince did not by itself guarantee access to the throne. The uncertainty of the situation apparently was a motivating factor in Thammathibet's attempt to assassinate Naren, who, as Thai Sa's oldest son, could have challenged him for the throne. However, the failed assassination attempt, as we have seen, had more far-reaching implications. It alienated Thammathibet from his father and damaged Thammathibet's chances of inheriting the throne. Following this line of reasoning, it is possible that *Phra Malai Kham Luang* was directed both toward Metteyya and toward Thammathibet's father in the hope of winning back the king's favor.

It seems significant that the offence which so angered Borommakot, the attempt to kill a monk, is explicitly mentioned in the *Kham Luang* version of *Phra Malai* as one of the few acts that will prevent a person from being born at the time of Metteyya. The Bodhisatta tells *Phra Malai*:

"Many people commit numerous sins that will prevent them from being [born] at the time of my religion. They commit the five offenses that bring immediate retribution, that is violating *bikkhunis*, instigating disputes and dissension within the Sangha, cutting down bodhi trees, allowing stupas to fall into ruin, letting images become dilapidated, causing bodhisattas to die a violent death, and killing [members of] the Sangha."

The above list is problematical because it begins by referring to the five offenses that bring immediate retribution, but then lists seven.¹⁸ Moreover, it deviates somewhat from the five *anantariya* listed in canonical teachings: matricide, patricide, killing an arhat, causing a Buddha to bleed, causing a schism in the Sangha. Nonetheless, what is most relevant about this list is that it includes killing a monk, an offence not mentioned in other *Phra Malai* texts I have examined.¹⁹ Its occurrence in

¹⁸ Similar lists are found in the Pali *Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthu*, as well.

¹⁹ The lists of offences that will prevent a person from meeting Metteyya vary somewhat from text to text. In all cases, the five grievous offenses are mentioned, together with abusing *bhikkunis*, cutting down bodhi trees, etc. Sometimes stealing the belongings of the Sangha is also mentioned. See Supaporn, "Maleyyadēvattheravatthu," 210; see also Denis's translations of the *Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthu* and *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, in "Brah Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthum."

Thammathibet's work of merit seems to be an acknowledgement of the fact that by attempting to assassinate a monk, he had lost the opportunity to meet Metteyya. What better way to try to erase the demerit incurred by this act than to write a learned and elegant version of Phra Malai, a text primarily concerned with merit and demerit?

As a work of merit, *Phra Malai Kham Luang* reflects the author's concern with creating an offering commensurate with his status, education, and intellectual abilities. Just as a wealthy person would be expected to make an elaborate donation of monastery buildings, Buddha images, murals, etc., reflecting his economic and social class, so might someone with knowledge and poetic talent be expected to offer the most refined, artfully arranged demonstration of ability, knowledge, and devotion possible.

This kind of expectation regarding merit-making is reflected at several points in the Phra Malai legend itself. For example, each of the twelve deities who come to worship the Culāmani Cetiya has, in his previous life, performed an act of *dāna* reflecting his social and economic status. In their former lives, these deities ranged from poor men who shared their food to kings who built splendid monasteries.

Another reference to merit-making is found in Phra Malai's description to Metteyya of the good deeds of the people of Jambudipa. He says,

"Some give alms in great abundance. Some uphold the precepts. Some people practice generosity by building ordination halls and stupas. Some have

Buddha images cast. Some have preaching halls built. Some have great numbers of monasteries built where the Sangha can reside during the rainy season. Some do it by presenting robes to the monks at kathina. Some people present food to the monks. Some give medicine to monks who are ill. Some plant bodhi trees, build reliquaries, monasteries, diases, and cloisters. Some donate the eight requisites of a monk and give the finest food and financial support. Some follow the ten-fold wholesome course of action.²⁰ Some observe spiritual practices. Some take care of their fathers. Some look after the needs of monks. Some serve their mothers who protected and nurtured them. Some make offerings at funerals on behalf of deceased relative and transfer the merit to all those who have died. Some make offerings to the Three Gems with great faith. Some have their own sons become monks, the sons whom they love above all else. Some adopt sons as acts of merit and have them become monks. Some people go constantly to make offerings before Buddha images. Some build bridges and pavilions. Some build shelters for outcastes. Some dig ponds and wells. Some build roads. Some build dwellings and dining halls for the Sangha. These are the ways in which merit is attained. The people have faith according to their individual abilities. With faith in their hearts they make merit, according to their own abilities as I have described it here."

In the same way, I believe, the *Phra Malai Kham Luang* text and the effort that went into its composition can be viewed as still another example of merit-making. This ornate and doctrinally sophisticated work of literature can perhaps be compared with a royally sponsored ordination hall or stupa, highly ornate and beautiful, but inaccessible to

²⁰ *kusala dasa kammapatha*, i.e. avoiding 1) destroying life, 2) stealing, 3) sexual misconduct, 4) lying, 5) malicious speech, 6) harsh language, 7) frivolous talk, 8) covetousness, 9) ill will, 10) wrong views; see *Phra Thepwethi* 277-278.

the general public. In both instances, what matters is the quality and beauty of the donation.²¹

Just as the question of the *Kham Luang*'s inaccessibility to a general audience did not lessen its value as a work of merit, so neither did the fact that the text was not an original creation, but the reworking of an old theme.

William J. Gedney, who has written insightfully on Thai language and literature, has made the following observation:

Poetic artistry in Siamese verse finds expression mainly in the skillful manipulation of language within the constraints imposed by the various verse patterns. So much of the value of Siamese poetry lies in the form, as opposed to the semantic content, that translations into Western languages are notoriously disappointing. The paramount importance of form is reminiscent of eighteenth century Western music; in both cases, in Siamese poetry as well as, say, in minuets by Haydn and Mozart, one feels that the main purpose was not so much to produce something basically new and different as to exploit existing patterns in elegant and graceful ways.²²

We can think of the "existing pattern" in this case as the Pali/Lan Na version of the Phra Malai story. Some of the "elegant and graceful ways" in which Thammathibet exploited this pattern to create a meritorious work of literary art will be discussed in the following sections.

²¹ A cetiya at Wat Rajaburana in Ayutthaya contains a crypt decorated with murals, which was sealed off soon after completion. It is generally believed that the paintings were not intended to be seen.

²² William J. Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms in Historical Perspective," 489.

Poetic Techniques

Descriptions of Thai poetry are found in traditional Thai textbooks known as *chanthalak* (*chan⁵tha⁴lak⁴*), or principles of versification, as well as in literary anthologies. These textbooks invariably include diagrams of various poetic forms, together with descriptions that state the appropriate number of syllables per line, lines per stanza, and rhyme scheme.²³ The discussion that follows is based on descriptions in the anthology by Pluang na Nakhon,²⁴ and on the the *chanthalak* descriptions, as summarized in the works of Hudak and Bickner.²⁵

According to these sources, all forms of Thai poetry are governed by various constraints, but only two types of constraints are found in all forms of Thai poetry; these constraints concern rhyme or *samphat* (*sam⁵phat²*) and structure, *khana* (*kha⁴na⁴*). As linguist Robert Bickner points out, "Each poetic form has a definite structure, and

²³ Robert Bickner writes, "Of the modern versions of the *chanthalak*, the most thorough and most influential is that done by Phrayaa Uppakit Silapasarn as part of his work *Lak phasa thai* [Principles of the Thai Language] (1968). He set down the ideas and attitudes of his generation, and added much of his own, and his work has formed the basis for many of the modern literature textbooks written for the rapidly expanding educational system of Thailand." An *Introduction to the Thai Poem "Lilit Phra Law"* (The Story of King Law). De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Center for Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series, 1991) 39.

²⁴ *Prawat wannakhadi thai samrap naksuksa* [History of Thai literature for students] (Bangkok: 1952) 16-18.

²⁵ Pluang 16. Phrayaa Uppakit, *Lak Phasa Thai*, Bickner, *An Introduction* 39-41; Hudak, *The Indigenization* 34.

each form has rhyme, and without structure or rhyme, there is no poetry."²⁶ Depending on the form of poetry, other constraints include the following: light and heavy syllables, tone requirements, live and dead syllables, introductory phrases, and additional "decorative" syllables added to a poem.²⁷ Since these constraints are either nonexistent or relatively unimportant in *rai*, the poetic form of *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, they need not be discussed here. The following pages will examine the ways in which rhyme and structure are manifest in *Phra Malai Kham Luang*.

Rhyme

The *chanthalak* textbooks define two types of rhyme: vowel rhyme and consonant rhyme. Vowel rhyme is similar to the concept of rhyme in English. That is, it requires that the rhyming syllables match both in vowel and in consonant final sound, if there is one. The following are examples of vowel rhyme:

kaa¹ and maa⁴, dii and mii, kak² and dak²

The other type of rhyme, consonant rhyme, is what we call alliteration in English. It is said to involve only the initial sound of the syllables involved. The vowel, the

²⁶ Bickner, *An Introduction* 40.

²⁷ Hudak, *The Indigenization* 34, cites Plyuang 16, as his source.

tone, and the final consonant -- if any -- of the syllables are not significant. Examples are the following:

*khaw*⁵, *khan*⁵ *khuu*, *kham*³

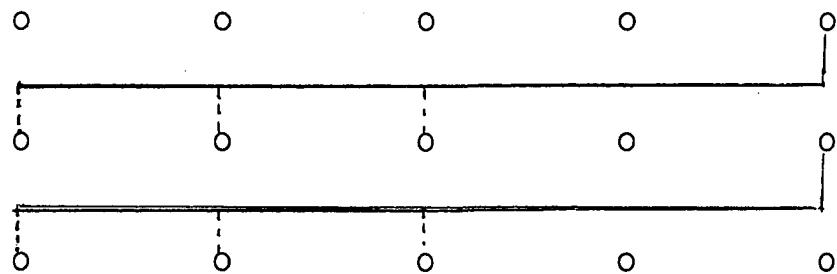
As rhyme relates to structure, it is described as being either "inner rhyme," or "outer rhyme." The latter type is generally required. It occurs between lines, though usually not between the last syllables of two consecutive lines. In many cases, the last syllable of a line rhymes with an early syllable in the following line. Only vowel rhyme is acceptable for outer rhyme. On the other hand, inner rhyme occurs within a given line and may be either vowel rhyme or consonant rhyme. According to Hudak, "while not compulsory, internal rhyme [or inner rhyme] is the area in which Thai poets display their genius."²⁸

Structure

Phra Malai Kham Luang is written in one of the varieties of *rai* known as known as *raai*³ *su²phaap*³. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, *rai* is one of the oldest verse forms in both Siamese and Lan Na Thai, and is the form frequently used in religious texts, including the Lan Na *Malai Ton* and *Malai Plai*. Its most distinctive structural features are 1) there are at least five syllables per line and 2) there are

²⁸ Hudak 37.

no limitations on the number of lines per stanza. In terms of rhyme, the last syllable of each line should rhyme with an early syllable of the following line.²⁹ This is essentially the same pattern we saw earlier in the *rai boran* of the *Malai Ton* and *Malai Plai*. The *chanthalak* textbooks and anthologies also mention tonal constraints on *rai* verse, but the issue of tone is a complicated one that need not concern us here.³⁰



²⁹ Bickner, writing of *Phra Law*, which is also written in *rai*, points out, "Phrayaa Uppakit notes that the rhyming syllables should be of the same 'sort,' that is, if either syllable has a tone mark, both must have that same tone mark. Although Phrayaa Uppakit does not seem to recognize the fact, this point is connected with the ancient tone categories of Thai and the nature of rhyme at the time *Phra Law* was composed." (*An Introduction* 51-52.)

³⁰ The issue is complicated by the fact that the *rai* form probably developed when the Thai language had a three tone system rather than the five tone system it has today. At some time during the Ayutthaya period, the three tones split. See Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 493.

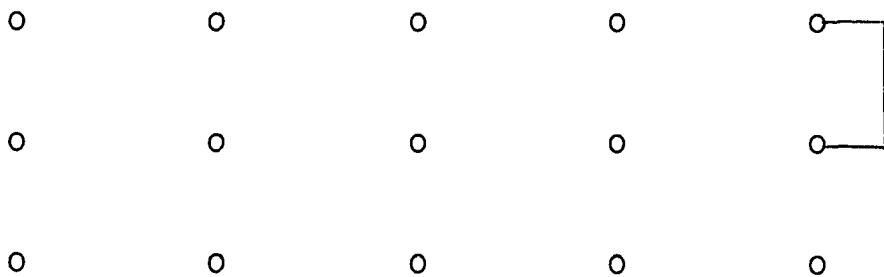
In the example below, the rhyming syllables are underlined:

maa¹lai¹ theep³ naa¹maa¹
mii¹ sa²tha⁵ pra²sit²
than³ song¹ rit⁴ pra²soeoet²
prii¹chaa¹ loeoet³ samaat³
su²khum⁵ aat² sat²caa¹

Translation:

"He was known as Malayadeva and he had great faith and was endowed with extraordinary power, superior intelligence, and competence."

In *rai suphap* the rhyme scheme diagrammed above continues throughout the entire text, until the end, which is written in *khlong song* (*khloong¹ sqong⁵*) as diagrammed below. As with *rai*, a line of *khlong* poetry consists of five syllables. However, in *khlong song* the last syllable of the first line rhymes with the last syllable of the second. In the diagram that follows, the first three lines are written in *rai*, the last three in *khlong*. As the diagram indicates, the final line is not connected to the preceding line or lines by rhyme.



Example: (rai pattern with *khlong song* ending)

suan² thee¹waa¹ u²bon¹ raat³
 yuu¹ con¹ aat² aa¹yu⁴ khai⁵
 ko³ pai¹ taam¹ ya⁴tha⁵ ku²sa²lang¹
 an¹ tham¹ maa¹ tæ² lang⁵ nan⁴ sai⁵
 tham¹ sing² dai¹ ni⁴yom¹ hai³
 dut² nan⁴ ryu¹ khlaa¹

Translation:

"As for the deva who was Lord of the Lotus, he lived to the end of his years, and then he went in accordance with the merit that he had made in the past, through observing spiritual practices."

As I have noted above, *Phra Malai Kham Luang* is written entirely in one poetic form -- *rai suphap*, unlike the *Klon Suat*, which is written in several varieties of *kap*. Moreover, one of the most prominent features of *rai* is that it is not divided into stanzas, but is written in a continuous series of five-syllable lines. This characteristic gives *rai* poetry an even, regular, stately tone.³¹ At the same time, however, poets who choose to write in long passages of *rai* run the risk of having their poetry sound monotonous. This is particularly true in a text like the *Phra Malai* story, where much of the content is

³¹ As we will see in the following chapter, the use of this single form throughout the entire text differs sharply from the *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, which is written in several varieties of the verse form known as *kap*, and which is chanted in various rhythms and melodies.

repetitive and devoid of action. Some poets avoid monotony by alternating *rai* passages with another poetic form, usually *klong*. Thammathibet's solution is to use an extensive repertoire of poetic techniques that add variety, interest, as well as the aesthetic quality known in Thai as *phairoq*, to the text. These techniques will be explained in the sections that follow.

Aesthetics: The Quality of Pairoq

Phairoq (*phai¹roq⁴*), or aesthetically pleasing sound, is perhaps the single most important characteristic in the aesthetics of Thai poetry, and of Thai languages in general. Though some would argue that aesthetically pleasing sound is the basis of poetry in any language, linguist Thomas J. Hudak maintains that the quality of *phairoq* is an integral part not only of Thai poetry, but of Thai speech in general. He writes:

In Thailand, both villagers and urban dwellers alike have great esteem for someone who speaks *phairoq*. The word *phairoq* can mean 'sweet, melodious, musical, and harmonious'; a reduction to *phroq⁴* signifies 'melodious, pleasing to the ear, beautiful (of sounds), sweet sounding, agreeable to the ear, and tuneful'.³² This concept of *phairoq* pervades all literature.

Phairoq, then, is a Thai cultural concept closely intertwined not only with poetry and music, but with

³² Thomas John Hudak, *The Indigenization* 25.

ordinary speech.³³ While the quality of *phairø* is achieved through a number of techniques, Hudak maintains that rhyme is "perhaps the most important criterion for the creation of pleasing sound."³⁴

In order to fully understand the Thai concept of rhyme, it is necessary to briefly examine an important linguistic feature of Tai languages, that of reduplication. This term refers to a process of word building by which syllables are duplicated for purposes of either pluralization (as in the word *dek² dek²*, "children") or emphasis (as in the word *maak³ maak³*, "very much"). Apart from simple repetition of the word, reduplication can also involve alternation of vowels, as in the following: *yung³ ying³*, "confusing", *soo see*, "to stagger", and *phloo⁴ phlee⁴*, "twilight."

Reduplications such as these are far more common, and certainly more valued, in Thai than in English.³⁵ As Hudak notes, "The Thais view these lexical items as highly expressive, capable of painting a picture, and suitable for

³³ Part of the melodious nature of spoken Thai derives from the tonal nature of the language. Central Thai has five tones: mid, low, high, falling, and rising. It also differentiates long from short vowels.

³⁴ The others include: "1) reduplication, 2) intensification, 3) the use of puns, 4) the use of elaborate expressions, 5) the use of particles, 6) the use of special vocabularies." Hudak 28.

³⁵ There is, indeed, no real English counterpart to reduplication. The few reduplicative words we find, are for the most part trivial, even silly expressions, such as "teeny weeny," "true blue."

poetry."³⁶ Alliteration and rhyme, Hudak points out, which are "so important in Thai aesthetics, may also be viewed as reduplicative processes." Manifestations of this can be seen in the linguistic techniques known as elaborate expressions. Two examples follow.

Pattern 1: a b a c

<u>nam</u> ⁴	hua ⁵	<u>nam</u> ⁴	taa ¹
water	head	water	eyes
to shed tears; to cry			

Pattern 2: a b b c

huu ⁵	<u>paa</u> ²	<u>taa</u> ¹	thyen ²
ear	forest	eye	forest
to be ignorant of what is going on			

Roffe, discussing a similar expression in Lao, writes:

Without them the speaker or writer will make himself understood, but prove to be rather dull and pedestrian. With them, he entralls his audience with both lilt and light, making his message both meaningful and melodious.³⁷

An examination of how the reduplicative process is manifested the rhyming of Thai poetry will provide some insight into the tools and raw materials that Thammathibet had at his disposal in creating and embellishing *Phra Malai*

³⁶ Hudak 29.

³⁷ Roffe, "Rhymes, Reduplication" 228.

Kham Luang. A list of internal rhyme patterns generally recognized by Thai scholars of literature can be found in Plyang's anthology, where he defines five varieties of vowel rhyme and six of consonant rhyme.³⁸ Hudak maintains that these internal rhyme patterns can be found in nearly any Thai poetic composition, even one of mediocre quality.

On the other hand, Hudak states, only works of high quality contain not only the types of internal rhyme identified by Plyang, but also another group of seven additional, more subtle, reduplicative techniques.³⁹ The section that follows will list all of these types of rhyme and identify those found in *Phra Malai Kham Luang*. In so doing, it will demonstrate some of the ways Thammathibet infused a potentially monotonous rhyme scheme with melody.

Vowel Rhyme

"Popular opinion contends that the poets kept their rhyming patterns secret and only revealed them to their students before their deaths," writes Hudak. "Nevertheless, certain internal rhyme patterns are recognized and frequently listed in literature texts."⁴⁰ Vowel rhyme, it will be recalled, employs the same vowel, vowel length, and final consonant, but not necessarily the same tone. Of the

³⁸ Plyang 18-19.

³⁹ Hudak 39-41.

⁴⁰ Hudak 37-39.

five types of vowel rhyme described in the textbooks, three are found in *Phra Malai Kham Luang*:⁴¹

1) two words/syllables (*kham*¹ *khiang*¹)

*dut*² *at*² *sa*² *nii*¹ *baat*² *phaat*² *phlaan*¹

like a lightning bolt striking

2) intermittent rhyme - two words/syllables with an intervening word/syllable (*kham*¹ *saek*³ *khiang*¹)

*thuan*³ *thang*⁴ *muan*¹ *thuk*⁴ *pra*² *kaan*¹

[he expounded it] properly in every respect

3) another variety of intermittent rhyme - two words/syllables with two intervening words/syllables (*kham*¹ *sææk*³ *ææk*²)

*phlaan*¹ *kam*¹ *sang*⁵ *saan*⁵ *hai*³ *haak*²

[he] shattered the wheel of samsāra

Consonant Rhyme

The textbooks describe consonant rhyme, or alliteration, as reduplication of initial consonants in patterns similar to those of vowel rhyme. Each of the six varieties

⁴¹ The two that are not found are: three consecutive rhyming syllables (*kham*¹ *thiap*³ *khiang*¹) and two sets of paired syllables (*kham*¹ *thop*⁴ *khiang*¹). The reason for their absence can probably be explained by the fact that the five-syllable constraint of *rai* does not allow for these two patterns.

of consonant rhyme defined in the Thai textbooks on poetry is found in *Phra Malai Kham Luang*.

1) two words/syllables (*kham*¹ *khuu*³)

pai¹ proot² sat² na⁴ra⁴kaan¹

[he] went to bestow mercy on the beings in hell

This type of alliteration is found in more than seventy-five percent of the lines of the *Phra Malai Kham Luang* text.

2) three words/syllables (*kham*¹ *thiap*³ *khuu*³)

dut² phra⁴ moo¹ka¹laa¹ lan loeoet³

[He was] like the peerless Phra Moggallana

3) four words/syllables (*kham*¹ *thiap*³ *rot*⁴

*phuu*³ song¹ siin⁵ sii⁵ sa²wat²

the one who is virtuous and blessed

Watana notes that this type of alliteration and a variant type with five syllables are used frequently throughout the *kham luang* text. This technique of repeating the initial sound in virtually every syllable adds a sense of weight and importance to the line.⁴²

4) two sets of two words/syllables (*kham*¹ *thop*⁴ *khuu*³)

thon¹ thuk² sa²hat¹ saa⁵hot²

42 Watana 122.

[they were] enduring unbearable suffering

5) intermittent alliteration - two words/syllables with the same initial sound separated by an intervening syllable (*kham¹ sæk³ khuu³*)

pen¹ phra⁴ san⁵ phet⁴ munii¹

[he] was the omniscient sage

6) another type of intermittent alliteration - two words/syllables with the same initial sound, separated by two intervening words/syllables (*kham¹ sæk³ rot⁴ su²khum⁵ aat² sat²chaa¹*)

truthful in the smallest detail

Other Reduplicative Techniques

Works of poetry that are considered to be of high quality, according to Hudak, make generous use not only of the above types of rhyme, but also of other, additional, reduplicative techniques that are not discussed in the Thai textbooks or anthologies. These types of reduplicative techniques are found throughout Thammathibet's *Phra Malai* text.

1) consonance - the reduplication of a final consonant with a different vowel preceding it

bam¹phen¹ phon⁵ bun¹naa¹

observe merit making

2) para-rhyme - the reduplication of both the initial and the final consonant with a different intervening vowel

an¹ na⁴ra⁴ chon¹ chin¹ baan¹

which makes people happy and content

3) reverse rhyme - the reduplication of the initial consonant and vowel with a different final consonant

laa¹ phit² phiang² phim¹ diaw¹

[he was] of exactly the same mold

4) semi-alliteration - the reduplication of initial consonants which are the same except for some linguistic feature(s), such as voicing (for example, p/b) or aspiration (for example, t/th).

pen¹ ban¹lang¹ phai¹cit²

[as if it were] a decorated throne

5) semi-consonance - the reduplication of final consonants, the same except for some linguistic feature(s), such as point of articulation

naam¹ phong¹ phan¹ naa¹naa¹

meaning: the names of numerous relatives

6) assonance - the reduplication of the vowel with different final consonants

khan⁴ sat² sang² khwaam¹ a²naat³

when the beings sent word of their misery

7) semi-assonance - the reduplication of vowels, the same except for some feature(s), such as length

yuu¹ nai¹ kaan¹ nan⁴ lao³

[he] lived at that time

Varied Vocabulary

Still another means of achieving the quality of *phairo* in a poem is to make the text varied, to add to its structure and rhyme patterns a rich texture and diverse texture of sounds. As Thammathibet wrote in his colophon, one of his objectives was: "to write the story down in poetry, to compose passages that are fluent, ornate, orderly, and varied."

One way in which Thammathibet adds variety to his work is through the use of an extensive vocabulary. This is particularly true in the case of actions or descriptions that recur frequently. For example, the act of paying reverence occurs repeatedly throughout the legend. It is performed not only by the twelve deities but also by Phra Malai, Metteyya, and Indra. The poet, however, avoids redundancy by relying on his Thesaurus-like knowledge of words to refer to the act of worship. In a similar way, he describes the glory of Metteyya and the celestial women by drawing from his immense stock of synonyms for a lengthy litany of words denoting brilliance and beauty.

Imagery

Phra Malai Kham Luang contains many passages in which Thammathibet expanded and elaborated descriptive passages occurring in the *Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthu*. The most notable example is the passage below, from Metteyya's discourse on the future of the world, which paints a vivid sensory background of nature during the utopian era that will precede his advent.

When the age of people reaches 80,000 years, a torrent of celestial rain will pour down every half-month. Cascading down at midnight, it will strike the surface of the earth, cooling it and fertilizing it with its essence. The continent of Jambu will then appear, flourishing with vegetation: climbing plants and vines heavily laden with flowers; trees sending up shoots that pierce the sky; clusters of flowers mingled together; ripe yellow fruits that drop from branches bent like bows under their weight; leaves so green in color they rival the brilliance of emeralds; fruit as beautiful as if artfully painted. Bees will drink the nectar of unfolding flowers, savoring it and bathing noisily in its essence. Fragile petals will slowly unfurl, and slender stems will stretch upward toward the clouds. The breeze will dance through the tops of the trees, causing the rustling of leaves to resound throughout the shady forest, like the sound of falling water. The wind will sweep through the branches, swinging and swaying them to and fro. Flowers and leaves will wave in the wind, scattering fine particles of pollen. The scent will become widespread over the ground, the rich fragrance diffused as if someone had perfumed the earth by strewing flowers over it. Brilliant grass, four inches long, even and fine, will sparkle like the elegant throat of a peacock. The surface of the earth will be as smooth as a drumhead, flat, with no stumps or stakes visible, as if it had been leveled."

This passage is an amalgam of elements from two sources: the Thai literary convention of listing natural

landscape features: sights, sounds, fragrances, flora and fauna and stock images from Indic literature. Typically these natural features are described as being beautiful because of human intervention, as in the examples from above:

"fruit as beautiful as if artfully painted."

"The scent will become widespread over the ground, the rich fragrance diffused as if someone had perfumed the earth by strewing flowers over it."

Literary critic Trisilpa Boonkachorn points out that it is "a common desire among Thais to improve upon nature with craft. Admiration of craftsmanship overshadows that of nature." As manifested in arts and crafts, "flowers are artistically arranged into imaginative forms, garlands are intricately fashioned for specific purposes, fruits are carved into flowers, animals, other kinds of fruits, and even miniature replicas of themselves."⁴³

Indic borrowings include, among others, the image of "grass, four inches long" and the reference to the ideal surface of the earth as "smooth as a drumhead, flat, with no stumps or stakes...." The description also calls to mind visionary literature from other Buddhist texts, including the noncanonical Pali *Anāgata-Vamsa*, which also describes the utopian conditions that will be present during the time

⁴³ "Intertextuality in Thai Literary and Social Contexts: A Study of Contemporary Poets," (Diss. U of Michigan, 1992) 81.

of Metteyya and the Mahāyāna *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, which describes the "Land of Bliss" of the Buddha Amitabha.⁴⁴

Use of Pedantic Language

Apart from Thammathibet's artistic manipulation of words and use of imagery there is yet another device he employs to produce a work of literary *dāna* commensurate with his royal status and ability. This is the use of pedantic language, that is to say, elaborate, didactic phrases, generally used as modifiers to describe the Three Gems or particular Buddhist doctrines or teachings. These phrases add a tone of authority and learnedness to the story, and demonstrate Thammathibet's knowledge of an extensive range of Buddhist texts. Some of these phrases occur in the invocation, where they act as embellishments to the names of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

Example:

I humbly bow down in respect to the Budddha,
joining my ten fingertips together gracefully in
reverence to the eminent flawless refuge.
Victorious over Mara, resplendent in purity, he is
the supreme lord. All celestials, humans, devas,
and brahmas respect the magnificent teachings of
the esteemed, joyous pinnacle of the Three Worlds,
the sublime crown jewel of omniscience.

⁴⁴ *Anāgatavāmsa Desanā* (*The Sermon of the Chronicle-To-Be*). Tr. from the Sinhala by Udaya Meddegama with an introduction by John Clifford Holt. Unpublished manuscript, 1990; see also Luis O. Gómez's forthcoming translations of the *Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*.

Other extended passages of this type, containing references to higher Buddhist teachings, occur within Metteyya's discourse, as in the example below.

The words ignorance, false views, sense desire, and renewed existence, -- these are known as the flood waters that are difficult to cross. They are Mara's trap, his way of obstructing beings, of overwhelming them, of binding them, and preventing them from becoming liberated. I, having accumulated merit for a long period of time, hope to rescue living beings by taking them to ships, which are the perfections that I have completed. I will not let them sink into an abyss of suffering like that of the asuras, petas, animals, or hell beings. I will free them from their fears and bonds. I will break the fetters of Mara that bind them, that oppress living beings, that cause them to cling to unwholesome acts. These [bonds] are delusion, lack of shame, lack of moral dread (not fearing to sin), unrest, greed, wrong views, conceit, hatred, jealousy, stinginess, worry, sloth, torpor, and lack of faith in the Three Gems.

These are the fourteen unwholesome mental factors that cause beings to continue in the cycle of rebirth and lead them to the eight abysses of hell.

Names and Epithets

Finally, Thammathibet also demonstrates his knowledge through the use of varied names and epithets for the three main characters: Phra Malai, Metteyya, and especially Indra. The mythology surrounding Indra is particularly rich. We have seen how in the Pali *Māleyyadēvatthera-vatthu* he is known as Sujampati, which means the spouse of Suja.⁴⁵ In *Phra Malai Kham Luang*, however, he is referred to by

⁴⁵ The name Sujampati derives from Indra's marriage to the Asura maiden Suja. DPPN, v. 2: 958.

numerous names, some derived from Pali, others from Sanskrit. These names include Sakka,⁴⁶ Kosiya,⁴⁷ Devaraja, the Lord of Traitrungsa,⁴⁸ Vajrindra,⁴⁹ the Thousand-Eyed One, and others. These appellations include names from his various earlier incarnations as well as epithets describing some of his more distinct features. All told, he is referred to in the *Kham Luang* in more than thirty different ways;⁵⁰ many of these are actually orthographic variations of an epithet or name invented by Thammathibet to facilitate rhyme and variety.

* * * *

In summary, then, it appears that *Phra Malai Kham Luang* was created as an act of merit motivated by the author's hope of being reborn during the time of Metteyya. Thammathibet's attempted murder of a monk resulted in a ponderous negative balance in his stock of merit, particularly because the demerit incurred by this act, it appears, was considered to equal to that of doing bodily

⁴⁶ Malalasekera, citing Rhys Davids, believes that "Sakka and Indra originally were independent conceptions that merged into a single entity" (DPPN, v. 2: 965).

⁴⁷ Kosiya is his clan name.

⁴⁸ "Lord of Traitrungsa" (Pali: Tāvatimśa) Heaven.

⁴⁹ Indra's attribute is the vajra, or thunderbolt.

⁵⁰ Watana 119.

harm to a buddha. By committing this act, Thammathibet had seemingly destroyed his chances for meeting Metteyya in the future. Only a major work of merit could erase the *akusala* that tarnished his hopes for future happiness.

Moreover, the text may have another level of meaning as well. The writing of *Phra Malai Kham Luang* also seems to have been directed to King Borommakot as an offering of atonement and a demonstration of Thammathibet's worthiness to succeed him.

Composed when the *Klön Suat* version of the Phra Malai story was already well-known, the *Kham Luang* represented a refined, even conservative form of the legend. Like its earliest known Thai antecedents (the Lan Na texts), the royal version was written in the oldest indigenous poetic forms, *rai* and *khlong*, and thus represents a return to tradition.

In choosing to write his poem primarily in *rai*, Thammathibet chose a format that was traditionally used for religious treatises, laws, and proclamations -- in other words, a medium associated with the use of words in power-wielding contexts. At the same time, this format had the potential to be embellished with a repertoire of literary devices, many of which were available only to a highly educated and highly skilled poet. The fact that the ability not only to manipulate these devices, but even to comprehend the language they produced was based on a high level of literacy supports the argument that *Phra Malai Kham Luang*

was a personal work of merit, created with little or no regard for public edification. That purpose was already being served by the *Klon Suat* text, which is the topic of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

PHRA MALAI KLQN SUAT: THE POPULAR TEXT

In the present chapter I will examine another variant form of the Phra Malai legend, that is, the vernacular *Klqn Suat* version. This anonymously written text preceded the royal version, and was intended to serve as a vehicle of religious and moral instruction directed to an unsophisticated audience.¹ Thus, it was written not only as a religious treatise, but also as a work of folk literature designed to capture the listeners' attention through extensive use of colloquial expressions, repetition, relatively simple doctrine, sensationalistic descriptions, and even bawdiness.²

¹ The *Kham Luang* text ends with a colophon stating that it was composed in 1737. The oldest *extant* *Klqn Suat* text is dated 1738, but is unlikely to have been the first copy ever made.

² A.B. Griswold wrote the following concerning the *klqn suat*: "An astute critic, the late Prince Damrong, after reading 'as much of it as he could stand,' found the *Story of Pra Malai* equally worthless as dogma and poetry. Yet if the dogma, expressed in such literal terms, is now considered primitive in the most learned Buddhist circles, its power to promote virtue and discourage evil is still strong at the village level. And the poem has long stood high in popular esteem, for it provides the same sort of thrills people find today in the cinema -- hell is like the torture chamber in some film story of a police state, while heaven recalls the princely mansions and elegant satisfactions of the very rich." ("A Warning to Evildoers" 21.)

It is this, the *Klön Suat* version of the Phra Malai story, rather than the *Kham Luang* or any other version, that was illustrated with miniature paintings on heavy accordian-folded paper manuscripts known as *samut khöi*.³ The paintings depict key scenes from the story, and usually consist of one or two views of hell, the poor grass cutter picking lotuses in a bog, the same man presenting the lotuses to Phra Malai, the monk Malai seated in front of a cetiya next to Indra, and groups of flying deities, one of whom is, presumably, Metteyya. (See figs. 4-8.) Many manuscripts also include funerary scenes -- depictions of people bathing the corpse, listening to the monks, or playing games to pass away the long hours of the wake.

From at least the early eighteenth until the early twentieth century these manuscripts were commonly found in temples throughout the central and southern regions of Thailand, where they were presented by people who had commissioned them as a way of making merit.⁴

³ The Pali/Lan Na version is found on palm leaf manuscripts, while the *Kham Luang* is written on *samut khöi* (paper) manuscripts, but without illustrations.

⁴ The text found in south Thailand is similar, and is known as *Kap Malai*. Phra Malai manuscripts can be found in the collections of the Thai National Library (Bangkok branch), in wats as well as public and private collections. Other good collections of illustrated manuscripts are the New York Public Library's Spencer Collection, Harvard University's Hofer Collection, the Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art in Dublin, and the British Library.

In discussing this text I will refer to one of the earliest printed editions of the text, published as a cremation volume in 1932.⁵ I will begin by taking a close look at the language and teachings of the *Klön Suat*, and then discuss the sources of these teachings and the context in which they were disseminated.

Language

One of the most obvious features of the *Klön Suat* is that, apart from a brief group of Pali phrases in the opening salutation, the text is written entirely in Siamese. That is, it does not have Pali words or phrases scattered throughout the text as do most other versions,⁶ including the *Nissai Malai* and the *Kham Luang*. This characteristic sets it apart from other versions of the legend, which are written either in Pali or in one of the Thai dialects with Pali phrases embedded throughout the text. The *Klön Suat*'s single language format makes the text easier to read, understand, and memorize.

As we have seen, in both the Lan Na and the royal version, the Pali words that are sprinkled throughout the Thai text interrupt, rather than blend with, the flow of

⁵ *Phra tham cet khamphi lae samut malai*, Bangkok. I will also refer, when relevant, to two other editions: *Phra Malai*, Aksorn Charoenthat, Bangkok, 1961; and *Phra Malai Klön Suat*, Chomrom Phutthasat Withalayai Khru Thonburi, 2527 B.E. (1984 A.D.).

⁶ For example, *Phra Malai Sam Thammat*, *Dika Malai Thewa Sut*, *Malai Myn - Malai Saen*.

poetry surrounding them. Thus, it seems that they would have interfered with rather than augmented the memorization of a text. For this reason, I believe that these two texts were disseminated through the copying of manuscripts, while the *Klon Suat* version was disseminated both orally and in written form.

Moreover, the language of the *Klon Suat* text is the colloquial Thai typical of a folktale. It resounds with the familiar vocabulary, vernacular expressions, and down-to-earth images of everyday speech. Its vocabulary consists of fewer Indic-derived words than the royal version. These etymological and structural differences between the vocabularies of the *Klon Suat* and the royal version become obvious when one compares the vocabulary of corresponding sections of the two texts. Examples of these differences can be seen in the chart that follows.

<u>Royal Version</u>	<u>Klon Suat</u>	<u>Translation</u>
a ² mɔn ¹	chao ¹ faa ⁴	heavenly being
Skt. amara		
trai ¹ rat ⁴ ta ⁴ na ¹	kæzw ³ thang ⁴ saam ⁵	Three Jewels
Skt. tri ratna		
sa ² triιi ¹	ying ⁵	woman, girl
Skt. stri		
pha ⁴ ra ⁴ ya ¹	mia ¹	wife
Pali: bhariya		
saa ⁵ mii ⁱ	phua ⁵	husband
Pali sami		

The *Klōn Suat* text, as a Buddhist treatise, does of necessity contain a great number of words derived from Pali and Sanskrit. They occur, however, in simple expressions, rather than the elaborate demonstrations of virtuosity found in the royal version, which were discussed in the previous chapter.

Names and Epithets

A similar point can be made regarding the use of varied names and epithets for the three main characters: Phra Malai, Metteyya, and especially Indra. We have seen that in the Pali *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu*, Indra is called by two names, Sakka and Sujampadi (lit. the spouse of Suja), and by two epithets, Great King and King of the Gods. In the royal version, he is referred to in more than thirty different ways;⁷ many of these names are actually orthographic variations of an epithet or name devised to facilitate rhyme and variety, as discussed in the previous chapter.

By comparison, in the *Klōn Suat*, the number of appellations for Indra lies somewhere between these two extremes; Watana lists ten.⁸

⁷ See above, Chapter 5, 151-152.

⁸ In, Thaaw Intharaa, Theep, Thephadaa, Thaaw Kosii, Theewaa, Thaaw Amarintharaa, Thaaw Makhawaan, Thaaw Sii Neet, Chaw Phraichayon (Watana 119).

Colloquial Expressions and Vocabulary

Colloquial expressions abound throughout the *Klōn Suat* text, contributing to the familiar, conversational, low-brow tone of the text. For example, as Phra Malai eagerly awaits Metteyya's arrival, Indra urges him to be patient, with the familiar and rather inelegant expression, "yaa² rōon⁴ cai¹," (lit., "Don't be so hot in your heart/mind," or, loosely translated, "take it easy"). Likewise, Phra Malai uses this same expression in response to the Bodhisatta's exhortation to return immediately to Jambudīpa to relay his message to humanity.

Another example is the use of the term "*pen¹ baa³*" (which literally means "to be crazy," but in this case is an idiomatic intensifier) generally used only in spoken Thai. In the *Klōn Suat* it is used to describe one group of suffering hell beings in the phrase "*sat¹ nan⁴ rōon⁴ pen¹ baa³*": "those beings were really hot."

Poetic Techniques

This discussion of the use of colloquial terms is not meant to imply, however, that the *Klōn Suat* text is lacking in the poetic techniques so essential to the aesthetics of Thai verse and so integral to Thai speech in general. The most fundamental of these is structure, or poetic form.⁹

⁹ The word *suat* means "to chant," and the word *klōn* here means "poetry" in the general sense. Thus, *klōn suat* in the present context refers to poetry composed for chanting. *Klōn* can also refer to a particular poetic form.

Phra Malai Klon Suat is written in *kap* (*kaap*²), a form used frequently since the Ayutthaya period. The word *kap* has its source in the Sanskrit word *kavya*, meaning a type of elaborate court poetry. Thai forms of *kap* (of which there are several), however, are derived not from Sanskrit models, but from Cambodian forms.¹⁰

Kap is sometimes compared with another form, *chan* (*chan*⁵), in structure as well as use; both were derived from foreign models and are often used for religious and ceremonial purposes.¹¹ *Chan*, based on Indic patterns of "light" and "heavy" syllables arranged into metric feet, is difficult to compose as well as to recite in Thai; it is a highly contrived form that requires the use of numerous Indic loanwords and grammatical endings.¹² Its use is generally confined to courtly compositions. Because of the difficulty of sustaining *chan* throughout a lengthy work, *kap* verses are often interchanged with *chan* verses within the same composition.

The category of *kap* actually includes several varieties, each requiring a specific syllable count and

Phra Malai Klon Suat, however, is not written in this form but in one called *kap*.

¹⁰ Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 512.

¹¹ James N. Mosel, *A Survey of Classical Thai Poetry* (Bangkok: Wat Areekul, 1959) 8.

¹² Mosel 91. Furthermore, Gedney points out that "each of the three favorite Siamese *kap* patterns has its exact counterparts, agreeing in every detail, in Cambodian." ("Siamese Verse Forms" 512.)

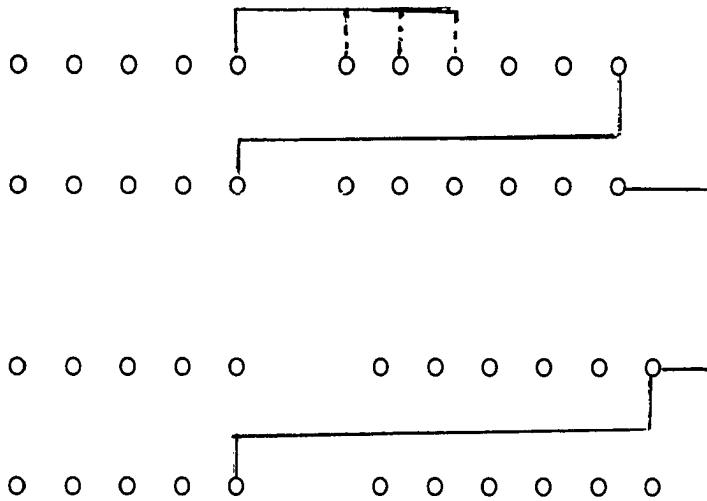
rhyme scheme. Each variety, according to Gedney, "has a certain number of lines per stanza, in some patterns unequal in length, consisting of a specified number of syllables."¹³ The three most frequently used types are *yani* (*yaa¹nii¹*), with eleven syllables per stanza; *chabang* (*cha⁴bang¹*), with sixteen; and *surangkhanang* (*su²raang¹kha⁴naang¹*), with twenty-eight or thirty-two.¹⁴ Indeed, it is these three forms of *kap* that provide the main poetic structures in *Phra Malai Klon Suat*. Used as a complementary group, they contribute movement and variety to the progression of the tale, and allow for a combination of narrative, description, and conversation in the text. The following examples demonstrate the use of these rhyme schemes in the text. In many cases there are obvious discrepancies between the textbook descriptions and the text.

The first form, *kap yani*, is often used for detailed descriptions, because of its even, regular rhythm. *Kap yani* has eleven syllables per line, each of which is divided into two groups of five and six syllables respectively. A complete stanza consists of two such eleven-syllable lines.¹⁵ The configuration and rhyme pattern can be seen in the scheme that follows.

¹³ Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 512.

¹⁴ Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 18-19. These varieties of *kap*, as well other traditional Thai verse forms, are described in the *chanthalak* textbooks.

¹⁵ Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 510.



The example below suggests that this rhyme scheme is sometimes adhered to rather loosely, as in the first line.

<i>ræəŋ⁴ paak² lek² <u>kaa¹</u> paak² lek²</i>	<i>nok⁴ <u>ta²</u> krum¹ rum¹ kan¹</i>
	<i><u>maa¹</u></i>
<i>ten³ khao³ sap² cik² <u>taa¹</u></i>	<i>huu⁵ ca¹ muuk² khaat²</i>
	<i>ria³ <u>raai¹</u></i>
<i>preet² nan⁴ ca² pen¹ bo² mi⁴ pen¹</i>	<i>suan² ca² taai¹ bo²</i>
	<i>mi⁴ <u>taai¹</u></i>
<i>thon¹ wi⁴ baak² yaa³ lya⁴ <u>laai⁵</u></i>	<i>yang³ yuu¹ maak³ kwa²</i>
<i>thon- wi -baak- yaa- lya- <u>laai-</u></i>	<i>phan¹ pii¹</i>

Translation:

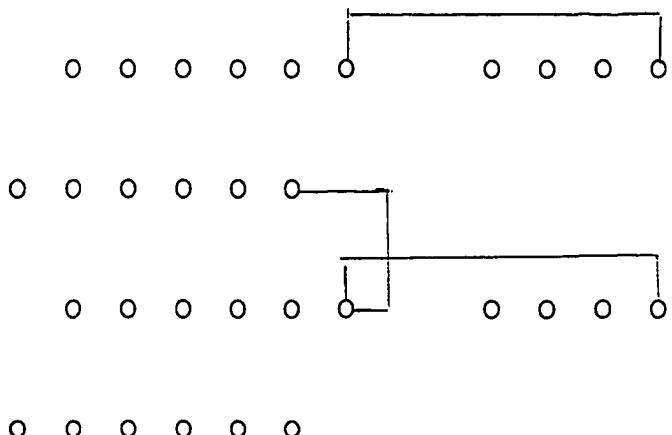
Iron-beaked vultures, crows, and storks swarmed around,

Swooping in to peck at his eyes, ears, and nose.

That peta will remain partly dead and partly alive,

Enduring terrible hardship, for more than a thousand years.

The second *kap* form used in *Phra Malai Klön Suat* is *chabang*. This is the form most often used of all *kap* meters, especially in fast-moving narrative. In *Phra Malai Klön Suat*, it is also used in short conversations.¹⁶ Each stanza has sixteen syllables, arranged in three lines of six, four, and six syllables, respectively; the last syllables of the first two lines rhyme.¹⁷ The configuration and rhyme scheme for *chabang* can be seen in the diagram below.¹⁸ The underlined syllables indicate rhyme.



¹⁶ Gedney, "Siamese Verse Forms" 511; Watana 84.

¹⁷ Gedney, Watana 80.

¹⁸ Watana 81.

Example:

mya³ nan⁴ ban¹daa¹ preet³ a²su²ra¹ kaai¹ na⁴rok⁴ thang⁴
laai³
 taang²taang² ko³ yok⁴ myu¹ wai³ phra³ maa¹lai¹
 tuu¹ khaa³ lam¹baak² lya⁵ cai¹ khoo⁵ som⁵det²
phra⁴maa¹lai¹
 cong¹ aaw¹ kha⁴dii¹ nii⁴ pai¹ book² kæ² yaa¹ti²kaa¹

Translation:

Then all the suffering beings, all the hell beings with monstrous bodies,

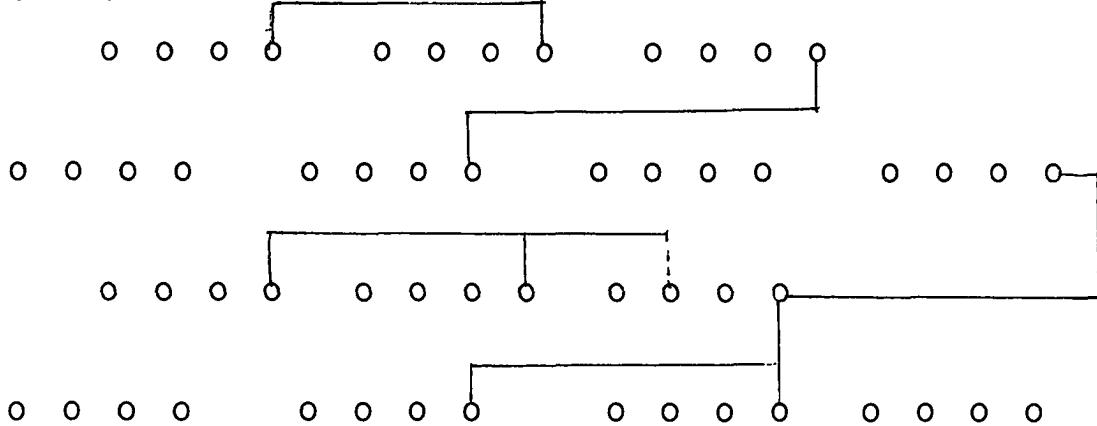
Raised their hands in reverence to Phra Malai.

"We are overcome with distress. We beg you, Phra Malai, to take this news to our relatives."

The third kap form used in *Phra Malai Klon Suat* is surangkhanang, which generally has twenty-eight syllables (distributed in seven lines of four syllables). A similar form, with thirty-two syllables (eight lines of four syllables) is also found in the text, where it is referred to as either rai or rap (*raap*³), meaning "smooth" or "even." Its regularity from start to finish makes it one of the easiest meters to chant.¹⁹

19 Watana 83.

The form and rhyme scheme are seen in the diagram below.



Example:

khaa³ tæ² phra⁴ caw³
khøø⁵ phra⁴ cong¹ fang¹
khaa³ ca² sam⁵ dæøng¹
hai³ phra⁴ caw⁵ fang¹

maa¹ lai¹ phan¹ klaw³
bun¹ maa¹ bang² lang⁵
bun¹ hæøng² naang¹ u² raan¹

naang¹ naat³ thang⁴ laai⁵
buang³ saai⁴ phra⁴ sii⁵ aan¹
møa³ køøn² kam¹ noeoet²
dai³ saang³ som⁵ phaan¹

an¹ maa¹ riang¹ raai¹
koeoet² phai¹ song⁵ saan⁵
pen¹ nit⁴ thuk⁴ wan¹

This passage is spoken by Indra describing the celestial women on the left side of Metteyya.

Translation:

Oh esteemed Lord Phra Malai, please listen
 I will describe to you the merit of those who are
 coming.

All of these graceful women who come, surrounding
 Phra Malai,

In their past lives, before being born in heaven,
 Made merit constantly, every day.

Along with these three varieties of the *kaap*² verse form, *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, like other texts of the *klon suat* genre, has several cue words at the front of stanzas, indicating the type of verse form and rhythm that will follow. It is not known if these words were part of the text as it developed or whether they were inserted by editors into published editions.²⁰ These cue words typically occur in places where the verse form changes, and alert the reader, chanter, or singer to the change. The cues include: *chan*, *rai* or *rap*, *ekabot*, *makon*, *wasan*, and *choet*.

The word *chan* here includes several forms modelled after *chan* meters in rhyme scheme and syllable count, but lacking the metrical requirements of *chan*.²¹ The *chan* meters include *phuchongkhaprayat chan* with twelve syllables,

²⁰ They occur in the printed editions that I have examined, most of which are based on actual manuscripts.

²¹ For a comprehensive study of *chan* meters, see Hudak.

wasantadilok chan with fourteen, and *intharawichian chan* with eleven.

These cues or stage directions are somewhat similar to those found in works such as the Ramakian²² which were dramatized, and attest to the theatrical context in which *Phra Malai Klon Suat* was chanted. A further element that adds interest to the chanting of the *Klon Suat* text is the use of various melodies for the different sections of the text. These melodies are used to set the mood of the particular passage that is sung. For example, melodies that accompany passages describing the suffering of the hell beings often include wailing and moaning sounds. Most of these melodies take their names from the first few lines of the passages they accompany. Like the stage directions above, they point to the theatrical use of this text.

Imagery

The *Klon Suat's* appeal to a popular audience also lies in its use of down-to-earth, locally familiar images. An example can be seen in the motif of the poor man who presents Phra Malai with the eight lotuses. This motif is similar to the poor cow herder commonly found in Sinhalese and Pali religious literature, who was born in Tāvatīmsa Heaven because he had made a simple act of merit. In the

²² See Theodora Helene Boffman, *The Poetics of the Ramakian* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois U, Center for Southeast Asian Studies Monograph Series on Southeast Asia, 1984) 192-193.

Pali/La Na and in the royal versions of *Phra Malai*, he is described simply as a poor man who takes care of his mother. In the *Klon Suat*, however, two added details make this character locally appealing. The first concerns the way in which he supports himself and his mother -- by cutting wood and gathering wild vegetables, activities familiar to an audience of subsistence farmers who supplemented their diet by hunting and gathering.

The second detail that adds familiarity is that the *Klon Suat* text specifies that the man goes down to the stream not just to bathe, but to wash the sweat from his body -- another activity the local peasant could identify with.

Teachings: Simple vs. Sophisticated

The popular appeal of the *Klon Suat* text is also apparent in the teachings it emphasizes and those it de-emphasizes relative to both the Pali/Lan Na and the royal version. This is obvious, first of all, in the relative simplicity of the teachings of the *Klon Suat* text compared with the obvious sophistication demonstrated in the royal version, which I have discussed in the previous chapter.

An example occurs in a key section of the legend where Metteyya describes the disappearance of Gotama Buddha's religion and the subsequent degeneration of human society. The example below is taken from the royal version.

"O blessed protective arhat, when the religion of the great Gotama, Lord of the World, has been in existence for 5,000 years, it will disappear completely. The elements of the world²³ will become scattered and dispersed. Defilement will predominate and virtue will decline. The human race will gradually degenerate. All people will lose their sense of shame. Then there will occur an epidemic of incest within families -- with mothers and daughters, sisters and granddaughters -- like the mating of pigs, like dogs and goats. With their perceptions so distorted, they will not be ashamed to sin so audaciously. Restless like animals in heat, they will be burning with desire. Defilement will cause the life span of living beings to decrease. What was originally a hundred years will gradually diminish to ten years. People will marry at the age of five. It will be a time of cruelty, savagery, and confusion, known as the Satthantara or Mikhasannyi Kappa. People will be incestuous, without regard for family ties."

In the *Klon Suat*, by contrast, the reference to the future decline of the religion is vague, and such details as the time when it is to occur are not even mentioned. On the other hand, the text goes into great detail in listing the sins that people will commit at this time, particularly incest.

When the religion of Samana Gotama reaches a state of decline, everyone will commit a lot of sins and make very little merit.

²³ The Thai word used here, *thaat*³, is derived from the Sanskrit *dhātu*. The Thai word can mean relics, and in this context may refer to the Buddha's relics. According to the prediction concerning the decline in the Buddhist religion mentioned in at least one recension of the *Anāgata-Vaimsa* (and in other texts as well), the Buddha's relics will cease to be worshipped, and will "go wherever they can receive honor and worship." Then, the text tells us, when the teachings have completely disappeared, the relics will gather at the Great Bodhi Tree and form an effigy of the Buddha which will teach the Dhamma to all the gods from ten thousand worlds before going up in flames (*Buddhism in Translations* 484-485).

They will be unwilling to practice generosity, observe the precepts, and meditate. They'll be unwilling to support the Three Jewels. They'll tempt each other to sin. Crude and vulgar, they won't be afraid or ashamed.

They'll caress their mothers -- the ones who gave birth to them. They won't be embarrassed about having sexual relations with their own mothers, with their aunts. Aroused by sexual passion, they will be out of control.

They'll have sex with nuns. Lacking fear and respect, they will be wild and unruly. They will be involved in improper sexual relations with their own older sisters, even with their mothers. Relishing sensual pleasure, they'll have no shame.

Women and men will all have sex without shame, without remembering who nourished them as children. They will violate these boundaries like pigs, dogs, and deer. They will lack fear and shame, just like four-legged animals.

They'll live together with their daughters, and after a while, they'll crave fleeting pleasures. Some evil men, totally without shame, will have sex with their own mothers-in-law, with their caretakers [the Thai word is the equivalent of "baby sitters"].

They'll have sexual relations with the same people who raised them. They'll have sex with their caretakers, with their wet nurses, they'll have sex with anyone, with their sisters-in-law. Both women and men will be out of control, sinning like this, so shamelessly.

[They'll have sex] with their own daughters, they won't even think of what they're doing. They'll act like dogs and pigs, goats and deer, four-legged creatures. At that time those in the world of samsāra will not live very long.

When their lives are over and they die, they will fall into hell, where they will suffer terribly because of their sins. They will stay in hell for an entire kappa because of their wickedness in having sex with their mother.

Some women will take a boy and raise him as their son. After a while, they'll treat this child like a husband. Some men will take a girl and raise

her as their daughter. Then they'll become drunk with desire to have sex with her.

Both women and men, when they die at the end of their lives, because of their sins of becoming drunk with desire, will suffer terribly because of their immoral acts.

....

Their life span will then decrease day by day, till they live only to the age of ten. Little children only four months old -- both girls and boys -- will look for someone to marry; they'll have wives and husbands. Little girls, four months old, will try to make themselves look appealing. Boys of four months will be concerned with getting a wife quickly. At five months they'll have children. Those children will be grown up at four months, and will take care of themselves. Because of sins such as these [incestuous situations mentioned above], lives will be short, people will die quickly; by the time they're ten, they'll be dead.

The *Klōn Suat*, then, like the royal version, predicts a decrease in the human life span and attributes it to increased promiscuity, particularly incestuous relationships. The *Klōn Suat*, however, takes this idea one step further and lists virtually every incestuous combination possible.²⁴

²⁴ By comparison, an eighteenth century abbreviated recension of the Sinhalese *Anāgatavāmsa Desanā* gives the following sequence of events: "The *karunasasana* will last for five thousand years after which, as the result of a dominance of demerit, the maximum age of a human being will gradually deteriorate to ten years. At that time people will be similar to animals. They will not observe the difference between themselves and their parents, nor will they observe a difference between a sister or a sister-in-law, a brother or a nephew or even one's own daughter. They will only love themselves." Like the *Phra Malai Klōn Suat*, the *Anāgatavāmsa Desanā* states that "five month old boys will marry five month old girls." (32)

This emphasis on incest inevitably raises the question of the circumstances and motivations behind it. Lacking other evidence from historical or anthropological sources, it is impossible to make any unqualified statements about the relevance of this passage to Thai society. At the same time it is difficult to ignore this passage or to believe that it was totally unrelated to contemporary societal circumstances. One possible explanation is that incest was, in fact, a serious concern at the time and that the text represents an attempt to address this concern by defining those relationships that were considered taboo. Another possibility is that this extensive list of incestuous situations was included for its sensationalistic impact: to attract the attention of listeners whose minds might have wandered during the recitation of the text.

Moreover, while the royal version and the Pali/Lan Na texts predict that the human life span will decrease to five years, the *Klon Suat* again takes the idea one step further and adds that future generations will marry at the age of four months and become parents at the age of five months.

Another interesting comparison can be seen in the canonical *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Suttanta*, which attributes the decline in the life span to a king's failure to provide alms to the poor, thereby causing stealing, which gradually caused a chain reaction that led to violence, murder, lying, speaking evil, adultery, abusive and idle talk, covetousness and ill will, false opinions, incest, wanton greed and perverted lust, which finally led to lack of filial and religious piety. (*Dialogues of the Buddha* 66-72.)

Still another example of the difference in emphasis between the two texts occurs at the end of the Phra Malai legend, following Metteyya's departure from Tāvatimsa Heaven. Both the Pali/Lan Na and the royal version contains an elaborate passage describing Phra Malai's return to Jambudīpa -- using his extraordinary powers. The terms that are used glorify the many spiritual accomplishments of the arhat and, at the same time, demonstrate the scholarly accomplishments of the poet. The passage ends by comparing Phra Malai and his spiritual attainments to a *hamsa*, a heavenly swan.

By contrast, the *Klon Suat* operates on a much more mundane level, containing no such image. There is, in fact, no discussion of how Phra Malai returned to the human realm. Following a passage that describes Metteyya's departure to Tusita Heaven and the devas' return to their heavenly mansions, without any explanation, Phra Malai is suddenly back home in his village, where he relays Metteyya's message to the people of Jambudīpa.

Advice and Admonitions

The *Klon Suat*'s purpose as a teaching tool is also apparent in the admonitions that are interjected throughout the text, urging the audience to observe the precepts, avoid sin, practice generosity, etc. Although the sequence of events, motifs, and descriptions is generally the same as in the royal version, the *Klon Suat* constantly reminds the

audience of the relevance of its teachings in their daily lives.

This point is obvious when we compare examples from parallel passages describing the continent of Jambudipa during the idyllic time that will precede the coming of Metteyya. The first example, from the royal version, is purely descriptive. Its apparent purpose is to create a poetic landscape of visual, auditory, and other sensory features of the utopian age that is to precede the coming of Metteyya.

The continent of Jambu will then appear, flourishing with vegetation -- climbing plants and vines heavily laden with flowers; trees sending up shoots that pierce the sky; clusters of flowers mingled together; ripe yellow fruits falling from branches bent like bows under their weight; leaves so green in color they rival the brilliance of emeralds, fruit as beautiful as if artfully painted. Bees will drink nectar from unfolding flowers, savoring it and bathing noisily in its essence. Fragile petals will slowly unfurl, and slender stems will stretch upward toward the clouds. The breeze will dance through the tops of the trees, causing the rustling of leaves to resound throughout the shady forest, like the sound of falling water. The wind will sweep through the branches, swinging and swaying them to and fro. Flowers and leaves will wave in the wind, scattering fine particles of pollen. The scent will become widespread over the ground, the rich fragrance diffused as if someone had perfumed the earth by strewing flowers over it. Brilliant grass, four inches long,²⁵ even and fine, will sparkle like the elegant throat of a peacock. The surface of the earth will be as smooth as a drumhead, flat, with no stumps or stakes visible, as if it had been leveled.

²⁵ The Thai word is *ongkuli*, from the Pali *anguli*, meaning a unit of measure, approximately equal to an inch. The same word is used in the *Klon Suat* text below.

The people of the countryside will flourish. The houses lining the road will be thickly populated, and so close together that if a fowl swooped down, it could fly from one roof to the next.

The example that follows from the *Klon Suat*, while containing some of the same images, is less an artful description of the utopian world of the future than a reiteration of moral teachings.

At that time the people of Jambu will enjoy complete happiness, with plenty of silver, gold, wealth, and material goods.

The ground will be flat -- flatter than a drumhead, with soft grass four inches tall, light green and tender.

Water will flow up one side of the bank and down the other; the ponds will always be filled to the top. The level of water will be neither too shallow or too deep, but just enough so that a crow can drink just by tilting its head. It will always²⁶ be full and so clear that you can see the fish.

Maitri the Pure Lord, the future Buddha, will come down, to become the sasada to help the beings of the world. The people will listen to the Dhamma that the Lord teaches them. They'll reach the city [of *nibbana*] and transcend *samsara*.....

At that time the trees will be covered with foliage, and flowers will bloom profusely during every season; every branch will be bent under the weight of fruit which is flavorful, fragrant, and appetizing.

People will be completely happy, Phra Malai.
That's when I'll go to help the beings of the

²⁶ In the royal version a somewhat similar passage occurs in the subsequent section of the text, when Metteyya reviews the meritorious acts he performed in the past and the specific effects these acts will have on the world in the future.

world enter nibbāna. Whoever wishes to be there, to see the face of Phra Si Ariya [Metteyya], have them observe the precepts, practice generosity, and meditate every day.

At the time the people of Jambu will look out for each other and love one another like members of the same family, like brothers and sisters. They'll live as close together as reeds and bamboo; their homes will be so close that a fowl will be able to fly between them.

At that time I'll go, Lord Arhat Malai, to help the beings, to enable them to go heaven, to reach nibbāna.

Kammic Retribution

The most obvious way in which the *Klōn Suat* differs from the Pali/Lan Na and the royal Phra Malai texts, however, lies in its emphasis on kammic retribution - the negative consequences of misdeeds that inevitably follow in the next life. This teaching is propounded in a lengthy section describing various suffering beings encountered by the thera during his descent into hell. We have seen that in both the Pali/Lan Na and the royal version this section is very brief and its purpose is to emphasize the importance of making merit on behalf of deceased relatives.

In the *Klōn Suat*, on the other hand, the section describing the arhat's visit to the hells adds a second dimension: a warning about the formidable consequences of sin. This warning is conveyed through a series of vignettes, each describing a different type of hell being or

*peta*²⁷ encountered by Phra Malai together with the misdeeds that led to their respective rebirth situations. There are thirteen such vignettes in the published version of *Phra Malai Klon Suat* that I have used as my text. I have numbered and summarized them in the paragraphs that follow.

Kammic Retribution in the *Klon Suat* Text

1) Those who patronize monks by giving them food and water, and then use them to work in gardening or farming, or to solicit funds, or to construct buildings fall into the iron cauldron of Lohakumbhi hell. There they are boiled 80,000 years. Those monks who are guilty of such misconduct also go to Lohakumbhi hell when they die.²⁸

²⁷ These two types of beings, though distinct from one another in canonical sources, are not differentiated in the *Klon Suat*. All are understood to be situated in the hells, but are referred to as *peta*.

²⁸ This section of the text is introduced rather abruptly and may be a later addition. It is a commentary on social conditions existing after the fall of Ayutthaya, when the symbiotic relationship between Sangha and laypeople was completely disrupted. For a thoughtful discussion of the effects of the fall of Ayutthaya on the Sangha, see John W. Butt, "Thai Kingship and Religious Reform (18th-19th Centuries)," in *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma*, ed. Bardwell Smith (Chambersburg PA: ANIMA Books, 1978) 34-51. Butt points out that much of the city was deserted and the monks were faced with a severe shortage of food, forcing them to disrobe or find ways to survive on their own. Those separated from their monasteries were deprived of the religious discipline to which they were accustomed and in many cases their behavior began to degenerate.

The text tells us that when Phra Malai went to Lohakumbhi hell, he struck the cauldron and it shattered to bits, bringing relief to the suffering beings. When he returned to the human realm, the pieces of the cauldron

2) Those who beat or who verbally abuse parents, elders, or members of the Sangha have a sharp discus fly at their heads constantly. They become drenched with blood and suffer for the duration of an entire *Buddhantarakappa*.

3) Those leaders who are corrupt, show favoritism in their judgments, and take bribes have a discus fly at them, striking their heads, covering them with blood which is rotten and filled with pus. They consume their own decayed flesh for the duration of a *Buddhantarakappa*.

4) Those men and women who are unfaithful to their spouses, and those women who give their husbands love potions to incite their desire²⁹ are forced by snarling dogs

fused together and the suffering resumed. The other instruments of punishment are likewise destroyed during his presence and reconstituted when he leaves.

29 Thai traditional folklore includes accounts of various concoctions known as *yaa¹ fæəd²* given by women to win a man's attentions and increase his sexual desire. Robert Textor, who did anthropological fieldwork in a village in central Thai village from 1955 to 1957, describes the preparation and use of several kinds of coupling philtres to win back the affections of husbands who have had affairs with other women. One particularly notable method proceeds as follows: "Mrs. X prepares a dish of, say, curry. She takes the curry to some private place. She puts the still-hot dish of curry on the floor, lifts her skirt, and squats so as to straddle [hover over] the curry. The heat from the curry will cause sweat to form, especially in the pubic area. This sweat drips down into the curry. Later, the curry is fed to Mrs. X's husband Y, who will thereupon lose interest in the other woman." Textor adds that "a maiden would not dare to use Coupling Philtre. She would be inhibited not only by maidenly embarrassment, but also by the fact that [the *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, which he refers to as] 'the Wake Manual' condemns its use, because it "stimulates the desires (tanhaa) of men)." See "An Inventory of Non-Buddhist Supernatural Objects in a Central Thai Village," (Cornell U Southeast Asia Program and Yale U Southeast Asia Studies, 1960) 150-151.

and sword-wielding hell wardens to climb a thorn tree to reach their lover, who is at the top.

5) Those who obtain the land of others through deceit and those who cheat others through inaccurate weights and measurements go to a hell where the floor is made of hot metal, and a mountain of fire pursues them in all directions.

6) Anyone who becomes intoxicated by drinking alcohol or smoking *kancha*³⁰ has acid poured down his throat, causing his intestines to burst open.

7) Those who kill animals for food are attacked by crows, vultures, and herons that swoop down and tear away at their flesh while vicious dogs of all sizes attack them on the ground.

8) Those who butcher pigs for a living have their body hairs become sharp swords embedded in their skin.

9) Those who shoot birds have their body hairs become guns that pierce their skin.

10) Those who cheat others have their body hairs become swords embedded in their skin.

11) Those rulers who are corrupt, or who rule unjustly are born with huge, decayed, foul-smelling testicles that hang down to the ground.

³⁰ *Kancha* is marijuana. The text uses several terms for alcohol : *nam*⁴ *mao*¹, *kin*¹ *laao*³, and *mao*¹ *suu*² *ra*¹. Some copies of the text do not mention smoking marijuana.

12) Women who deceive others by leading them to believe they have shamanistic powers and that they are able to become possessed with the spirits of their ancestors become *petas* whose bodies are completely decayed and are covered with festering boils, which they feed upon. All those who believe in these false shamans and kill animals to comply with their requests are born as *petas* that are part animal, part human in form.³¹

13) Anyone who robs others, who encourages his companions to go and steal with him, is reborn without a head; his face is in his abdomen, his mouth in his pubic region. The hell wardens tie a red-hot metal cord around him, while vicious birds swoop down and peck at his flesh.

Kammic Retribution : a Closer Look

An obvious characteristic of the vignettes summarized above is the use of concrete examples to convey moral principles. That is, the misdeeds in this list, rather than being defined in terms of abstract moral principles, such as the five basic Buddhist precepts,³² are conveyed anecdotally with emotion and a sense of drama. These features give the

³¹ By falsely claiming to have powers of divination or spirit possession, these women, according to the text, extract offerings from them of food (ducks, cattle, chickens) money, betel, whiskey, etc.

³² These consist of refraining from killing, stealing, lying, taking intoxicants, and committing sexual misconduct. Theoretically, they are not commandments imposed by religious authority, but basic moral guidelines which the faithful attempt to follow.

Phra Malai Klon Suat the quality of a morality play, rich in narrative detail that makes the moral principles come to life.

Another characteristic of the vignettes is the use of extensive repetition, a common feature of oral literature. Each vignette contains numerous recurring phrases that reiterate the lesson being taught, making the task of memorizing it easier for both the listener and the chanter. Some sources claim that the text was used as a primer for temple boys to learn to read.³³ To illustrate these characteristics -- the use of anecdotes and repetition -- I have translated excerpts from three vignettes.

In the first example, both the misdeed -- killing animals -- and the type of consequence -- direct retribution meted out by animals -- are relatively standard motifs that are found in a number of Buddhist texts.³⁴

There was a group of petas that were in great torment. They were prey for vultures and crows that flocked around them, along with dogs of all sizes, running and eating together in a pack. Flocks of vultures, crows, and cranes swarmed around them, picking and pecking away at them.

Their flesh was nearly all gone; nothing remained but skeletons. Pecking and slashing them eagerly were flocks of vultures, crows, and cranes. They swarmed around them, pecking away ferociously, pecking back and forth, slashing at them back and forth.

They pecked and slashed at those petas, swooping down from high up in the sky and pecking back and

³³ Watana 95.

³⁴ See, for example, the Nimi Jātaka.

forth. This group of *petas*, when they were humans, killed animals for food without remorse.

They killed cattle and buffalo. Lacking kindness, they stabbed animals, making them struggle, fall, and die. They killed hog deer and deer as well as cattle and buffalo. They killed all kinds of four-footed animals.

[Because of] their sin of killing deer and cows and buffalo repeatedly, vultures, crows, and cranes swooped down and tore them apart.

Because of their sin of killing deer, all that remained were skeletons. Vultures and crows pecked them apart. Their flesh was all gone because of the sin of killing animals.

Another type of misdeed described in the *Klon Suat* is more specifically relevant to social conditions of pre-modern Siam, follows in the passage below.

Another type of peta was a hideous looking woman. Her body was completely covered with boils, decayed and decomposing. Her toenails and fingernails were rotten, with no way to cure them. Those boils turned to pus continuously.

This woman scratched and peeled the boils and ate them, everyday, regularly -- at dusk, at dawn, and at noon. They quickly became decayed and soft with no way to cure them. Her whole body turned to pus.

Vultures, crows, and cranes pecked and chopped, swooping down from the sky. Slashing at her mouth and nose, pecking at her ears, nibbling at her eyes were vultures, crows, and herons.

Her sin -- this woman, in her former life, she claimed to be a spirit doctor. [Claiming powers of spirit possession,] she'd say, "I'm your father", "I'm your mother", "I'm your grandfather", "I'm your grandmother."

"Me, I'm one of the family. I'll help you get better. Don't worry. Just hurry up and promise me a pig. Promise me a duck, a chicken, a cow, a buffalo -- a great big one with a huge liver in its belly."

"Take some money and tie it to the neck of a pot as an offering with candles and gold, some betel in a container, some strong whiskey, together with an offering of rice and fish -- complete with heads and tails."

Pretending to be a spirit medium, she became hideous and rotten. She tricked people, leading them to believe her. The sin of lying caused the slaughter of ducks and chickens. Her toenails are all rotten, her hands are decayed and hideous....

Those who believe witches and revere ghosts and glorify them become petas and asuras. The sin of lying, taking this sin as one's master [results in] having the head of a buffalo and the body of a person.

Those who believe witches, who see them as auspicious, have the body of a person and the head of an ox. Those who believe witches and request a favor have the body of a person and the head of a deer....

I have included the above passage for several reasons.

First, it is interesting in its own right as a source of ethnographic information about certain local spirit beliefs that existed in the region at the time of the writing of the text (and even several centuries later). Some of these practices have been described by Textor, Skeat, and Giles in Thailand and Malaya, as well. Second, it illustrates how the Phra Malai story became indigenized through the embedding of local anecdotal material.³⁵

³⁵ See Robert Textor, "An Inventory" 176-350, for descriptions of beliefs about ghosts in rural Thailand as late as the 50's. Other folklore common to Burma and Malaysia, as well as Thailand, describes the use of oil obtained by burning a candle under the chin of a corpse. See Francis H. Giles, "About a Love Philtre," (*Siam Society Fiftieth Anniversary Commemorative Publication, Selected Articles from the Siam Society Journal v. 2; 1929-1953*) 74-77; also William Skeat, *Malay Magic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), esp. "Charms, Talismans, and Witchcraft," 566-580.

A third example of kammic retribution from the *Klön Suat* text serves quite a different purpose from the others. It is what I would call "comic retribution." This is the consequence that awaits corrupt government officials who take advantage of their position at the expense of the peasants.

There was another type of suffering ghost who was in great torment. He had testicles that were as huge as water jugs. They hung way down to the ground like a "yam"³⁶ shoulder bag. Rotten and putrid, bloated and stinking, they were like slimy snails.

Whenever he wanted to go somewhere, he'd fling them over his shoulder, stagger under their weight, and reel from side to side. When he wanted to sit down, they'd get pinched between his legs, and he'd have to stand up, and then sit down on top of them.

When he wanted to sit down, he was bent over with pain. He'd slowly straighten up, get up, oh eh, fling them over his shoulder, and stagger on his way under their weight, oh eh, getting weaker all the time.

One cannot help but wonder if the rebirth situation described above was intended to be completely serious. Although some might argue that this scenario is no less frightening or believable than any of the others, I believe that it is intended to be humorous -- to provide an element of comic relief as well as social criticism. That is to say, the caricature of the dishonest government official whose misdeeds earn for him a most hideous and embarrassing

³⁶ A *yam* is a cloth bag, worn over the shoulder and hanging down to waist level, used by monks in Thailand.

condition is as much a political statement as it is a moral one. Like a political cartoon, it is a way of poking fun at a social injustice that one is unable to rectify.

Moreover, the type of character described in this vignette has parallels in Thai art as well as in Thai folk drama. For example, in murals of the *Vessantara Jātaka* the villainous brahmin Jūjaka is usually depicted in comically deprecating scenes, such as climbing a tree to flee vicious dogs, sometimes with his buttocks or genitals protruding from under the edge of his lower garment. Such scenes, which are an integral part of Thai mural and manuscript painting, add an element not only of playfulness and comic relief, but also comic retribution, to the drama being acted out above.

Even murals representing stories or events that do not have a villainous buffoon character to satirize often include genre scenes at the very bottom of the composition. In these scenes ordinary village folk are depicted going about such mundane activities as taking naps, preparing food, and making love. One typical example is that of a set of murals at Wat Pradu Song Tham in Thonburi depicting the cremation of the Buddha.³⁷ Dating from the late nineteenth century, these scenes reflect royal funerary practices, which included various kinds of entertainment, including dramatic performances and acrobats. At the very bottom of one of

³⁷ See № Na Pak Nam, *Wat Pradu Song Tham* (Bangkok: Muang Boran Publishing House, 1985) 30-31.

these scenes is an audience of common people, crowded together, their faces uplifted toward the entertainment. On the right side, a woman is seated, talking to her companion and nursing her baby; just above her another woman stands, with a startled look on her face and a hand upraised as if to punch the man next to her who is fondling her breast.³⁸ These scenes add a sense of humor and playfulness to the drama taking place above, and are an example of the Thai love for fun (*sanuk*) in every aspect of life.

Similarly, Thai dramatic forms, particularly those intended for a folk audience, invariably include comic characters, who in their physical characteristics, speech, or actions, add a generous dose of bawdy humor to the story. A typical example can be seen in the southern Thai shadow puppet theater known as *nang talung*, which includes a standard trio of joker figures. Uneducated but world-wise buffoons, the three have conversations revolving about politics as well as scatological and sexual subjects, to the delight of the audience. The best known of the three, Ai Teng, has the index finger of one hand in the form of a phallus; the thumb and forefinger of the other hand form a circle. Ai Teng's hand movements, as can be imagined, are

³⁸ There is even more going on as one continues to look. Further to the left, crawling underfoot, a boorish looking man points to the erect phallus bulging inside the pajamas of a Chinese man watching a seductive dancing girl nearby.

highly suggestive and a great source of amusement to the audience. (See fig. 9)

In the same way, I believe, the description of the villainous corrupt government official, who has to endure his next life burdened with enormous, foul-smelling testicles, is so outrageous that it must have been intended to provide an element of comic relief to the recitation of an otherwise ponderous text.

I will return to this point later in the chapter when I examine the funerary context in which the *Phra Malai Klon Suat* was recited.

Sources and History

We have noted that the most obvious difference between the *Phra Malai Klon Suat* and other versions of the legend lies in the *Klon Suat's* extended description of the suffering petas and hell beings. Is it possible to identify the textual sources of the thirteen petas and the deeds that led to their condition? The following section will pursue this question by examining descriptions of hell in other Buddhist sources.

Within the vast field of Pali Buddhist literature as well as that written in Thai languages there are numerous texts referring to the hells and to the peta realm. One of the first such texts to come to mind is another Thai religious text, the fourteenth century cosmological treatise

attributed to King Luthai of Sukhothai.³⁹ Commonly known as the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*, this work is a synthesis of more than thirty canonical and noncanonical Pali treatises. It is organized into a geographical framework that defines the universe in terms of thirty-one realms of existence, each of which is populated by various sorts of beings at diverse stages of spiritual development. The realms are described in precise terms that include location, measurements, physical characteristics, and the types of beings that inhabit them. The lowest realm, that of the hell beings, is described as a system of eight large hells, surrounded by sixteen smaller ones, each of which is surrounded by still smaller ones, for a total of 136 in all.

The *Traiphum* lists the names (and their meanings) of the eight great hells.⁴⁰ It then gives the names and elaborate descriptions of the sixteen auxiliary hells surrounding one of the eight great hells, *Sanjīva* - the hell of those who are killed but revive continuously.⁴¹ The

³⁹ Reynolds and Reynolds.

⁴⁰ The eight great hot hells listed are *Sanjīva* - "the hell of those who are killed but revive continuously," *Kālasutta* - "the hell whose floor is marked with black rope," *Saṅghāta* - "the hell of crushing and smashing," *Roruva* - "the screaming hell," *Mahā Roruva* - "the great screaming hell," *Tapana* - "the hell of fiercely burning fire," *Mahā Tapana* - "the great hell of fiercely burning fire," and *Mahā Avīci* - "the great hell of suffering without respite." Reynolds and Reynolds 66.

⁴¹ The *Traiphum* points out that the hell of those who are killed but revive continuously "is the one that Lord Matali took King Nimi to see" in the *Nimi Jataka*. The sixteen auxiliary hells are *Vetarani*, *Sunakha*, *Sorajati*,

Traiphum suggests that it drew its description of these sixteen auxiliary hells from the *Nimi Jātaka*.⁴² In addition, the *Traiphum* describes the *peta*, or suffering ghosts, who live in various places, including the middle of the ocean, in or on the top of mountains.⁴³

Of the torments described in the *Traiphum*, several are also mentioned in the *Phra Malai Klon Suat*. These tortures include the thorn tree that adulterers are forced to climb; dogs, crows, and vultures that attack the hell beings and eat away their flesh; and hell wardens who "poke, stab, kill, cut, and beat" the hell beings with "flaming lances, swords, spears, and iron clubs."⁴⁴ However, descriptions of these punishments, as will be seen below, are found in a number of canonical Buddhist sources, as well. At the same

Angārakāsuma, Lohakumbhi, Lohakhumbha, Thūsapalāca, Lagatihasala, Sīlakatta, Morapamilaha, Lohitapubba, Lohabalisa, Saṅghāta, Vasira, Lohasimbali, and Micchāditthi. (Reynolds and Reynolds 71-79.)

⁴² The *Traiphum* says, "The smaller hells that surround the auxiliary hells are so numerous that we cannot possibly describe them all. We will describe only the sixteen auxiliary hells that surround the hell of those who are killed but revive continuously, which is located above the other hells and is the one that Lord Matali took King Nimi to see. However, when the king went to see the hell of those who are killed but revive continuously, which is large and in the center, he was only allowed to see the sixteen auxiliary hells that surround it and are called the protruding hells. (Reynolds and Reynolds 71.)

⁴³ Reynolds and Reynolds 95. According to this treatise, one kind of *peta* lives outside the city of Rajagaha, which was the capital of Maghada during the time of the Buddha. The stories of the *peta* found in the Pali *Peta-Vatthu* were also set in Rajagaha.

⁴⁴ Reynolds and Reynolds 80.

time, certain of the punishments of the *Klön Suat*, such as being reborn with the head of an animal, with huge testicles, or with knives or swords as body hair, are not found in the *Traiphum*.

Moreover, there are vast differences in the treatment of these motifs in the two texts. The *Traiphum* is characterized by an orderly sense of classification, whereby the hells are named, grouped into main and auxiliary hells, and described in terms of both their physical characteristics and the misdeeds that caused their inhabitants to be born there.

In the *Phra Malai Klön Suat*, by contrast, there is no such classification. In fact, the name of only one hell, Lohakumbhi, is given and the *Klön Suat* does not even differentiate the various hells or distinguish them from the peta realms.⁴⁵ That is to say, the *Klön Suat* uses the same term, *preet* (*peta*) for all the suffering beings.

Upon close examination, then, it seems unlikely that the author of the *Phra Malai Klön Suat* drew his inspiration directly from the *Traiphum*. While the *Traiphum*'s purpose is to describe the physical and spiritual characteristics of the cosmos and its inhabitants, the *Phra Malai Klön Suat*'s

⁴⁵ Thus, the *Klön Suat* differs in this way from the *Dika Malai Thewa Sut*, the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* (Three Worlds According to King Ruang), and the *Traiphum Lok Winitchai Katha*, all of which are concerned with defining and delineating the various realms of the cosmos.

main concern is with conveying to the audience the frightful consequences of committing misdeeds.

Supaporn Makchang mentions as another possible source for some of the descriptions of the hell beings the *Devaduta Sutta* (*Discourse on the Deva Messengers*), which is part of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.⁴⁶ In this text the Buddha relates the cross-examinations of Yama, head warden of the hells, with people who have committed sins, immediately following their deaths. He also describes some of the punishments inflicted on those born in seven different hells.⁴⁷ This text is similar to the *Bālapanditta Sutta* (*Discourse on Fools and the Wise*) which is also found in the *Majjhima Nikāya* and which contains certain identical passages.⁴⁸ In this text the Buddha describes conditions in the Niraya Hell as well as numerous rebirth situations as animals. Only some of the hell motifs mentioned in these texts (thorn trees, mountain of flames, boiling cauldron) are also found in the *Phra Malai Klon Suat*, suggesting that these texts by themselves

⁴⁶ Watana 14.

⁴⁷ The Niraya Hell, Gūthaniraya (the Great Filth Hell), Kukkulaniraya (the great Ember Hell), Simbalavana (Forest of Silk-Cotton Trees), Atthipattavana (Sword-leafed Forest), River of Caustic Water (Kharodaka nadi), and the Great Niraya Hell. (*Majjhima Nikāya*, V. III, 223-230.)

⁴⁸ Still other texts in the *Majjhima Nikāya* are the *Culakammavibhaṅga Sutta* (*Discourse on the Lesser Analysis of Deeds*), and the *Mahākammavibhaṅga Sutta*, both of which focus on the types of acts (rather than the outcomes) that lead to various favorable or unfavorable rebirth situations. (*Majjhima Nikāya*, V. III, 248-262.)

did not directly contribute to the hell scenes of the Thai text.

Another possible source of the descriptions of hell in *Phra Malai Klōn Suat* is suggested by a line within the *Klōn Suat* text itself. This is a reference to the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, that occurs in the section on Phra Malai's visit to hell, following the description of the fifth type of misdeed -- cheating people though mismeasurement of land. The text states, "This teaching is one that a wise scholar named Methi took from the *Khuddaka Nikāya* as a lesson that is useful for all women and men to hear and learn."⁴⁹ How are we to interpret this statement?

We can begin by examining the texts found within the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, one of the five collections of texts of the Pali *Sutta Piṭaka*. This collection includes a diverse assortment of texts that vary greatly in style, length, and subject matter.⁵⁰ Of these, descriptions of hell beings and peta can be found in several places: the *Jātakas* and the *Peta-Vatthu* (Stories of the Departed). Regarding the *Jātakas*, the most obvious source of descriptions of hell scenes is the *Nimi Jātaka*, No. 541. It is one of the last ten stories, or *Totsachat* (Pali: *Dasa Jātaka*) which have

⁴⁹ *Phra Malai Klōn Suat* 9-10.

⁵⁰ The *Khuddaka Nikāya* includes the following: *Khuddaka Pātha*, *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka*, *Sutta Nipata*, *Vimāna-Vatthu*, *Peta-Vatthu*, *Thera Gātha*, *Theri-Gātha*, *Jātaka*, *Niddesa*, *Patisambhida Magga*, *Apadāna*, *Buddhavamsa*, *Cariyā Piṭaka*.

long been a popular subject of mural and manuscript painting in central and south Thailand and more recently in the north and northeast.⁵¹

In this *Jātaka*, King Nimi, the future Buddha, was so renowned for his merit that the gods sent their heavenly chariot to escort him to the heavens so they could meet him in person. On the way there, however, the charioteer Matali asks Nimi if he would first like to stop at the various hells so that he might have a glimpse of something he had never seen before. Nimi agrees, knowing that he will go to heaven in any case, because of his great merit. The *Jātaka* proceeds with the chariot stopping at each of the hells, where Nimi expresses his anguish at what he beholds, and in so doing, gives us a description of the hell scene.

A comparison of this *Jātaka* with the Phra Malai legend indicates that while there is some correspondence between the misdeeds and consequences described in these two stories, there are even more differences. The point on which they agree most closely concerns the consequences that befall those who mistreat ascetics. Both texts claim that people who commit this misdeed will fall into Lohakumbhi Hell and that they will also be torn apart by crows, vultures, and dogs. The two texts further agree in a

⁵¹ In the north and northeast up until the beginning of the present century the stories of the Totsachat, with the exception of the Vessantara *Jataka*, were probably less popular than the *Paññasa Jātaka*, a local collection of fifty folktales which were told as stories of former lives of the Buddha.

general way on the types of actions that they include as misdeeds. That is, both, in addition to condemning acts that hurt ascetics, also mention mistreatment of parents, killing animals, stealing, cheating in business and commerce, and adultery.

There is also a structural and thematic resemblance between these two texts that is particularly obvious in Thai mural and manuscript painting. In both cases, the main character is a meritorious being who leaves his abode in the human realm to travel first to hell, and then to Tāvatimsa Heaven. Both texts describe the sins committed by the suffering hell beings and the meritorious acts performed by the inhabitants of heaven. Thai mural paintings, in fact, use some of the same motifs to represent the realms that Nimi, in one case, and Phra Malai, in another, are visiting — e.g., a boiling cauldron filled with heads, naked figures climbing a tree of thorns to reach their lover at the top, vicious dogs and hell wardens.

In addition, there are three other *Jātakas* that A.B. Griswold, writing about the Phra Malai sculpture mentioned earlier, believed to be among the "more obvious sources" for the popular Phra Malai story.⁵² These are the *Lohakumbhi Jātaka* (No. 314), the *Samkicca Jātaka* (No. 530), and the *Mahānāradakassapa Jātaka* (No. 544). In the *Lohakumbhi Jātaka*, four hell beings must endure the consequence of

52 A.B. Griswold, "A Warning to Evildoers."

being boiled in iron cauldrons for 30,000 years because of having committed adultery with their neighbors' wives.

In the *Samkicca Jātaka*, the Bodhisatta is questioned about the hells by Brahmadatta, who feels remorse after having killed his father. The Bodhisatta names eight hot hells (*Sanjīva*, *Kālasutta*, *Roruva*, *Mahāroruva*, *Saṅghāta*, *Avīci*, *Tapana*, and *Patapana*) and several others (*Khuradhāra*, *Veterani*, *Lohakumbhi*). He does so while describing a grotesque landscape where hell beings boiled in an iron cauldron, pierced with shafts of steel, blinded, condemned to eat filth, plunged in brine, and attacked by vultures and other fierce birds.⁵³

Finally, in the *Mahānāradakassapa Jātaka*, the Bodhisatta is a Brahma who warns the king about the punishments in hell, including the hells of ravens, dogs, cruel beasts of torture, arrows and spears, hot wind, fiery ground, a blazing mountain studded with razors, a mountain of coals, thorn trees, forests of iron spikes, a caustic river, as well as hells where one's entrails are mangled, where weapons rain down and flames fall, where one is tied to a chariot, and more.

A review of these *Jātakas* indicates that several standard motifs (the iron cauldron, ferocious birds, a flaming mountain, thorn trees, etc.) are found in these stories as well as in the *Phra Malai Klon Suat*. However, as

⁵³ *The Jātaka*, v. 5, 135-140.

I noted above, these motifs are also found in other sources, including the *Majjhima Nikāya*, and it is likely that they are part of a repertoire of stock motifs that occur throughout Buddhist texts.⁵⁴

Another possible source from the *Khuddaka Nikāya* is the *Peta-Vatthu*, which is sometimes translated as "Stories of the Departed."⁵⁵ This text consists of fifty-one stories about suffering ghosts. Each tale recounts a narrative, supposedly told by the Buddha, concerning a deceased person who committed certain misdeeds that result in rebirth as a peta. One story, for example, concerns a monk who used to verbally abuse other monks. As a result, he was reborn first as a hell being and later as a peta with a beautiful golden body but with the mouth of a boar.⁵⁶

The similarities between the *Peta-Vatthu* and the *Klön Suat* are twofold. Both are concerned with the conditions of the deceased and both emphasize the themes of merit-making

⁵⁴ For a complete discussion of the hells as conceived in Indian Buddhist and Brahmanical texts, see M. Leon Feer, "L'Enfer Indien," in *Journal Asiatique*, Septembre-Octobre 1892 (I - Bouddhisme) and Janvier-Fevrier 1893 (II - Brahmanisme). See also Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Concept of Hell*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1972, and Bimala Churn Law, *Heaven and Hell in Buddhist Perspective* (Varanasi: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1973).

⁵⁵ Supaporn Makchang suggested this collection of stories, but did not discuss it in any way. See "Khwam pen ma khong malai sut" 8-9.

⁵⁶ *Peta-Vatthu*, "The Story of the Boar" 143-144.

and merit-transference by people in the human realm on behalf of deceased relatives suffering in the peta state.

Apart from these similarities, however, the two texts are quite different. Unlike the Phra Malai legend, where the vignettes are set in hell, the *Peta-Vatthu* tales take place in the human realm and the peta tells his story to a monk, who then informs the Buddha. Moreover, as H.S. Gehman points out, there is a heavy emphasis in the *Peta-Vatthu* on the consequences of "niggardliness towards, or abuse of the monks." In Gehman's opinion, "the text lays so much stress upon this phase of religious life that it becomes wearisome, and we gain the impression that there was a mercenary motive in compiling the tales."⁵⁷

In the *Klön Suat*, as we have seen, only two of the thirteen misdeeds described refer to mistreatment of monks. The great majority deal with the relationships between laypeople.

What, then, are we to make of the reference in the *Phra Malai Klön Suat* to the *Khuddhaka Nikāya*? An interesting interpretation has been suggested by Watana na Nakorn.⁵⁸ She points out that certain Buddhist scholars (whom she does not identify) mistakenly believed that both the *Vinaya-Pitaka* and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* were part of the *Khuddhaka Nikāya*.

⁵⁷ Introduction to the *Peta-Vatthu* 135

⁵⁸ Watana discusses this section of the *Vinaya*, concerning the major offences of the Sangha which merit expulsion, 15-16.

Watana notes that the *Parajika* section of the *Vinaya* contains a number of references to suffering beings with features similar to those in the *Phra Malai Klon Suat*. These references occur within the context of Moggallana's description, to the disciple Lakkhana, of certain visions he had experienced as he was descending from the summit of Vulture's Peak.⁵⁹ After Moggallana describes a specific suffering being he has seen, the Buddha explains the misdeeds which this being performed in his past life. Several of the beings that Moggallana describes correspond closely to those in some of the vignettes in the *Klon Suat*. And, in fact, they correspond more closely than those in any other sources. These beings include a skeleton that is being devoured by vultures, crows, and hawks as a consequence of having been a butcher in his past life (corresponding to the *Klon Suat*'s vignette # 8); various creatures with swords, knives, and arrows for hair, who had hunted and killed animals (vignettes # 7 and 9); a man with gigantic testicles, who had been a "village fraud" (vignette # 11); a "malodorous, ill-favored woman" who had been a

⁵⁹ Moggallana describes a series of visions he has had, and with each description, the other monks become angry and charge that he "is claiming a state of further-men." The Buddha in each case acknowledges that it is possible to have such a vision, recounts the misdeeds which the suffering being committed in his or her past life, and explains that Moggallana has not committed an offense by describing these experiences. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka)*, trans. by I.B. Horner (London: publ. for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Co., Ltd. 1949) 180-191.

fortune teller and had deceived people (vignette # 12); and a headless man who had been an executioner (vignette # 13).

Two other possible sources of the hell scenes are the *Mahāvastu* and local Southeast Asian stories about the saints. The first of these comes to mind because of the comparison that is made at the beginning of the *Phra Malai* texts between the thera and Moggallana, whose travels to the hells are described in the first chapter of the *Mahāvastu*.⁶⁰ In this text eight hells are mentioned; six are described in detail, generally corresponding to the descriptions in the *Jātakas*. The *Mahāvastu* also describes Moggallana's visits to the *peta*, *asura*, and *deva* realms. While there are few parallels between the *Mahāvastu*'s descriptions and those of the *Phra Malai Klɔ̄n Suat*, it is possible that the two texts are indirectly connected through the intermediary of a Southeast Asian genre of Moggallana stories.

These local stories, which are found in Laos and north Thailand, feature the disciples Moggallana, Ananda, and Upagutta. Titles include *Mokkala Pai Du Narok* ("Moggallana Goes to Look at Hell") and *Mokkala Long Lok* ("Moggallana Descends to the World"), and *Mokkala Tham Pet* (Moggallana Questions the Petas"). There is, moreover, another series of such texts, featuring Phra Malai: *Malai Phot Lok*

⁶⁰ Denis, "Brah Māleyyadevatthera-vatthum" 5-6, cited the research of Finot ("Recherches sur la littérature laotienne," BEFEO: 17 (1917). *The Mahāvastu*, Translated from the Buddhist Sanskrit by J.J.Jones (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1949) 6-21.

("Malai Bestows Mercy on the World"), *Malai Phot Sat* (Malai Bestows Mercy on Living Beings), and *Malai Liap Lok* ("Malai Goes Around the World"). Copies of these texts exist in palm leaf manuscript form in the Lao and Northern Thai languages, and to my knowledge, have never been translated into Siamese or any Western language. It is possible that a study of the other texts of this series might yield some valuable results.

One last source of the hell scenes that will be mentioned briefly here is Kshitigarbha, a bodhisattva figure in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Anuman Rajadhon has suggested that traditions connected with this bodhisattva, whose role is rescuing beings from the hells and whose aid is invoked at funerals, entered Thailand from Vietnam.⁶¹ Iconographically, depictions of Ksitigarbha from Vietnamese temples in Thailand do not resemble Phra Malai. He appears as a bald Chinese-looking lord, seated on a tiger, holding a staff.

It is possible, however, that an influx of beliefs concerning Kshitigarbha may perhaps have cast Phra Malai in a new, more active, role as rescuer rather than that of intermediary which he usually plays. This perhaps would explain the appearance of Phra Malai in the medium of bronze

⁶¹ Sathien Koset and Naga Prathip, *Latthi khong phyan* (publ. as a cremation volume for Wuwai Bunyopapham, 1928) 117-119. See also "Ruang pithi kongdek khong sathien koset," in *Tamra kongdek lae tamra kathin khong phra song anamanikai*. Bangkok, 1986, 35-38.

sculpture in the nineteenth century. As of now, however, this issue remains to be examined before more can be said.

Historical Context

While nothing is known of the authorship of the *Klon Suat* text, the little that we do know of its history over the past two hundred years is as fascinating and colorful as the text itself.

The oldest known extant copy is an illustrated *samut khöi* manuscript with a Buddhist Era date corresponding to 1738 A.D. This suggests that the work preceded the *Kham Luang* text, which was apparently written in 1737. It is possible that the *Klon Suat* was well known during the early Ayutthaya Period, and that numerous copies of it were destroyed in the Burmese sack of 1767. There is evidence, which I will discuss below, indicating that the text was immensely popular, influential, and even controversial in the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries.

The *Klon Suat* text traditionally has been associated with funerals and post-funerary rituals, including those occurring seven days, one hundred days, and one year following the cremation. Evidence of this close connection can be seen in paintings of death rituals which are often found in illustrated *Phra Malai* manuscripts.

Nevertheless, the *Phra Malai Klon Suat* is said to have once had an auspicious connotation. Thai scholars

invariably state that the text was formerly chanted at weddings as a way of teaching moral principles to the young couple who were about to embark upon a new life together.⁶² The source most commonly cited for this information is Anuman Rajadhon (also known as Sathirakoses, or Sathien Koset), who is considered by both Thai and Western scholars to be the father of Thai ethnography.

Anuman explains that, traditionally, Thai wedding dates were set after consultation with an astrologer, who would calculate the auspicious times for two rituals that were central to weddings: the presentation of betel trays by the groom's family to the family of the bride and the arrangement of the bridal chamber.⁶³ Occasionally it happened that these two days would not coincide, and the couple would have to wait several days for the auspicious day on which to consummate their marriage. Phaya Anuman explains,

the groom, then, had to spend several nights alone, lying outside the bridal chamber, watching over it... He might have to spend three nights, or five, or seven, or even more until the auspicious day. During the time that he was watching over the bridal chamber, his family and that of the bride would each find two learned men to chant the *Phra Malai Sutta* for him. The chanting would consist of several different melodies...which were popular. The content of the *Phra Malai* chanting was a lesson on morals, good behavior, and good speech so that he would know right and wrong, good

⁶² Phraya Upakitsilapasan, in Santhani 42.

⁶³ Anuman Rajadhon, *Taengngan [Weddings]*, (Bangkok: Ngan niphon chut prapheni thai khong "Sathien Koset", Mae Kham Phang Press, 1986) 146-148.

and evil. All this was described in the Phra Malai text. The chanting took place at the house and lasted until dawn.⁶⁴

Another function of the chanting, Nantha Khunphakdi suggests, was to lull the groom to sleep and prevent him from becoming too lonely and despondent in the absence of his bride.⁶⁵

I know of only one scholar who expressed skepticism concerning this practice -- Santhani Abuarat, who wrote her master's essay on the Isan (northeast Thai) version of the Phra Malai story. Santhani took issue, however, not with the subject of Phra Malai, but with the specific text involved. She writes,

I have examined the content [of the text] and I don't understand the reason the *Phra Malai Sutta* was used [in this way]. There is nothing in the text that is suitable for teaching the bridal couple, except for the description of families during the time of Metteyya. Aside from this, much of the content of *Phra Malai Klon Suat* is about the various hells and wouldn't be suitable for chanting at festive occasions."⁶⁶

Santhani argues, instead, that it was the royal version that was chanted at weddings.

There is no evidence, however, to support this idea; and, in the light of Ornarong Phadphadee's research on the royal version presented in the previous chapter, it seems highly unlikely that the royal version of Phra Malai would ever have been recited by commoners. Moreover, one could

⁶⁴ *Taengngan* [Weddings] 146-148.

⁶⁵ Nantha, personal communication.

⁶⁶ Santhani 42.

argue that the *Klon Suat* text is, in fact, an appropriate lesson for a newly married couple. Apart from describing the consequences of sin, it also strongly recommends observing the Five Precepts, practicing generosity, avoiding the Five Great Sins, etc. In addition, proper sexual conduct, a vital component of marriage in most cultures, is emphasized at three points in the text.

The first is in the hell scenes, where the consequences of adultery and other types of sexual misconduct, including the use of love potions, are described. The second is in the description of the future degeneration of society, when various kinds of incestuous situations are listed and strongly criticized. The third is in the description of the utopian society that is to emerge during the time of Metteyya, when it is predicted that marriage will be characterized by monogamy, harmony, and bliss. This section of the text, in fact, emphasizes this point more strongly than does the royal version, as a comparison between the two texts demonstrates. The first passage is from the royal version.

Wives and husbands will live in harmony. They will not get angry or annoyed with one another, but will enjoy a state of married bliss. They won't have to work in farming or trade.... Women will never have two husbands. Men will have only one wife. They will never go about seeking a second wife, nor will they ever commit adultery or secretly admire another man's wife. They will live with one wife until death with love, intimacy, and tenderness. They will love one another and take care of each other at all times.

The *Klön Suat*, makes a similar prediction, but emphasizes it through repetition.

When husbands and wives won't separate, but will live together a long time, one husband, one wife living together, empathazing with each other, day after day never quarreling, leading virtuous lives, together through feast or famine, tranquil, full of joy,

At that time I'll go, Phra Malai, have no doubt, I'll go to preach, to help the beings enter the city [of nibbāna]....

When men take pleasure in practicing meritorious acts, and are content with their wives, with having only one wife, and women are in love with only one husband, living together, attracted to one another, desiring each other above all others, [Then there will be] one husband, one wife, one spouse for each person.

Men won't flirt with the wives of others; Women won't commit adultery. [They'll be] bonded by love and affection, one husband and one wife.

At that time I'll go, Phra Malai, have no fear, To be the unique one named Phra Si Ariya. I'll take living beings and lead them to nibbāna.

One husband, one wife, one spouse for each person. If each person has only one spouse, then they'll meet the Great Lord and transcend suffering, without being led astray.

However, at some time in the past, say Thai scholars, *Phra Malai Klön Suat* ceased being chanted at weddings and came to be used exclusively at funeral wakes. This change, according to Anuman Rajadhon, has never been satisfactorily explained.⁶⁷ Neither do the Thai sources mention when this

⁶⁷ Anuman Rajadhon, *Taengngan* [Weddings], 146-148. Speaking before an audience at a demonstration performance of a *suat kharyhat* group, Ajan Paisan of the Ayutthaya Teachers College speculated that the groom, after listening to the Phra Malai being chanted night after night instead of being with his bride, might just as well have been dead.

change occurred, or how far back in time the custom of chanting the text at weddings extended.

The Funerary Context

Thai funeral wakes were traditionally held at the home of the deceased and would last several nights. During this time friends and relatives of the deceased would come to visit, often from neighboring villages, and would generally stay until the cremation had taken place. The presence of these "friends of the deceased" (*phyan sop*), as they are called, was particularly welcome during the night-long wake, when the company and comaderie of many people was welcome to help ward off feelings of loneliness, fear of ghosts, and sorrow for the loss of a loved one. People would pass the time by playing cards or board games, by eating, drinking, gossiping, telling jokes, or dozing.

At funerals for members of the royal family it was common to have various sorts of entertainment, which would continue for several nights. Prince Damrong, one of the sons of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) describes several types of entertainment that were part of the mourning ceremony held in the palace for Queen Sunanthakumari in 1880.⁶⁸ Depictions of acrobatic and dramatic performances, included in mural paintings of the Buddha's funeral at Wat Pradu Song

Tape of *kharuhat* performance at Bangkok Bank Cultural Arts Centre.

⁶⁸ Summarized and quoted in Virulrak 31, 45.

Tham in Ayutthaya, are probably based on some of the activities that took place at royal funerals.

On the village level, ethnomusicologist Terry Miller, who did field work in northeast Thailand in the 70's, noted that as recently as twenty years ago, friends and relatives would come to the home of the deceased for three successive nights to participate in a gathering much like a big house party, replete with food and drink, where they would listen to older men read the traditional Lao stories from both *Jataka* and local sources.⁶⁹ Even today funeral wakes continue to have an atmosphere of fun and festivity that may include card playing, feasting, and consumption of alcohol. Specific arrangements depend on the social and financial circumstances of the family. These functions, as Nantha Khunphakdi points out, provide a buffer for the grief of the survivors and remind them of the need to go on with their lives, to continue to "fight life" (*suu³ chi⁴wit⁴*).⁷⁰

Regarding the chanting of Phra Malai, the funeral wake would begin at night when a group of monks -- usually four in number -- would arrive at the home of the deceased. They would bring with them a large scripture box, roughly three

⁶⁹ Terry Ellis Miller, "'Khaen' Playing and 'Mawlum' Singing in Northeast Thailand" (Diss., Kent State U, 1977) 104.

⁷⁰ Nantha Khunphakdi, "Kansuat 'oo ee wihan rai' lae kansuat kharyhat" [Chanting of 'oo ee wihan rai' (genre) and suat kharyhat] in *Kitawannakam*. Bangkok: Sinlapakorn University, Graduate School Alumni Association, 1987, 44-71, esp. 54-59.

feet long by two feet high, containing manuscripts of the texts to be recited -- excerpts from the seven books of the Pali *Abhidhamma* (*Phra Aphitham Cet Khamphi*)⁷¹ and *Phra Malai Klön Suat*. The scripture box would then serve as a table upon which the manuscript and a single candle would be placed.⁷² The monks would sit on the floor in a row, each holding a *talabat* (a fan-like object connected to a handle) in front of his face while they chanted.⁷³ Depictions of scenes like this are commonly found in illustrated *samut khöi* manuscripts. After chanting excerpts from the *Abhidhamma*, they would shift to the more melodic chanting of the Thai-language *Phra Malai Klön Suat*, which was a welcome change of pace from the mesmerizing effects of the Pali text that had preceded it. With its varied rhythms and melodies, repetitive phrases and stark -- even sensationalistic --

⁷¹ The *Abhidhamma* is one of the three divisions of the *Tripitaka* and includes the following texts: 1) *Dhamma Saṅgani* ("Enumeration of Dharmas"), 2) *Vibāṅga* ("Divisions") - more on sets of Dharmas, 3) *Dhatū-Katha* ("Controversial Topics"), 4) *Puggala Paññatti* ("Designation of Persons") - classifications of people according to their spiritual traits and stages, 5) *Kathā-Vatthu* (Subjects of Discussion") - arguments about theses disputed among the Hinayana schools; 6) *Yamaka* ("The Pairs") - pairs of questions dealing with the basic sets of categories; 7) *Patthāna* ("Causal Bases") - 24 kinds of causal relation.

⁷² A single candle or single incense stick is usually lit only in funerary contexts. In other circumstances, Thai Buddhists light three of each.

⁷³ The use of the *talabat* is not restricted to funerals, but is always used by monks while they are chanting, presumably to prevent them from becoming distracted. It should be noted that representations of *Phra Malai* in painting or in sculpture always depict the arhat holding a *talabat*.

images, vernacular syntax and vocabulary, this treatise during its heyday was a powerful and entertaining mechanism for teaching moral principles.

However, a set of ecclesiastical laws issued by King Rama I (1782-1809), suggest that by the early Ratanakosin Period, the chanting of *Phra Malai Klon Suat* had become more a source of entertainment than one of religious edification.⁷⁴ This change was symptomatic of the state of Siamese Buddhism at the time. The destruction of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767 had left the kingdom in total chaos. Monasteries were sacked alongside palaces, and people were carried off by the conquerors to be slaves, completely disrupting the symbiotic relationship between Sangha and laity. As Craig Reynolds writes, "Adherence to the Vinaya depended on prosperous lay people whose alms would allow monks to live free from care for their livelihood. Asceticism was possible only in prosperous times."⁷⁵

By the time King Rama I came to power, he and many of his contemporaries, according to Wyatt, "appear to have believed that [the religion] was in a state of crisis. Many monks appeared ill-disciplined, poorly educated, and susceptible to immorality and heresy....Beginning within a

⁷⁴ Virulrak 38.

⁷⁵ *The Buddhist Monkhood In Nineteenth Century Thailand*, Ann Arbor: Diss. Cornell U, publ. by University Microfilms, 1973) 38.

month of his accession to the throne, Rama I issued the royal edicts to restore discipline to the monkhood."⁷⁶

These laws reprimanded certain members of the Sangha for their "brazen" and "indecent" behavior in disregarding the rules of the *Vinaya*, and ordered this behavior to cease.⁷⁷ Among the acts cited were sexual misbehavior (both with women and with young boys), eating solid food at night,⁷⁸ consumption of alcohol and other types of intoxicants, improper wearing of the monastic robes, failure to shave the head, and watching various kinds of entertainment, such as plays and cock fights. Many of these types of behavior can be seen in the depictions of monks in the illustrated Phra Malai manuscripts from around the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ (See fig. 8.)

The laws also ordered members of the Sangha to stop chanting Phra Malai in comic fashion, "in Cambodian,

⁷⁶ Wyatt 146.

⁷⁷ *Kotmai tra sam duang* [Laws of the Three Seals] (Bangkok, 1962), no. 10, 222-228.

⁷⁸ According to the *Vinaya*, monks are prohibited from eating solid food after the noon hour. However, the *Kotmai tra sam duang* specifically mentions eating at night, probably because this was when monks went to recite Phra Malai at funeral wakes and when they were given food to eat by the sponsor of the funeral.

⁷⁹ The use of magical and animistic practices was also widespread among monks. The tenth, and last, law of the series, issued in 1801, ordered that one hundred and twenty-eight monks be expelled from the Sangha and forced to do hard labor. Butt 44.

Chinese, Farang, and Mon melodies."⁸⁰ This prohibition refers to the fact that some members of the Sangha, in an effort to hold the interest of the audience, had interspersed extraneous material, such as folk songs, stories, and comic parodies of various ethnic groups, between segments of the *Phra Malai Klon Suat* text. Gradually, costumes, ribald jokes, and witty repartee had been added, as well as hand gestures and swaying from side to side. Some monks apparently went so far as to add comic dancing, done to the accompaniment of the rhythmic tapping of the tips of the talabat handles on the floor. Thus, a funerary ritual that apparently began as a kind of morality play was transformed into pure slapstick comedy.

The king's objection to such comic performances lay not in the routine itself, for entertainment has long been an integral part of funerals in many Thai cultures. His objection lay in the fact that Buddhist monks, supposedly exemplary figures in society, were blatantly breaking the rules of the Vinaya in virtually every aspect of life, and thus undermining the authority and respectability of the Sangha. Thus, the chanting of Phra Malai in such an unseemly fashion was part of an entire spectrum of behaviors that was felt to be in need of reform.

⁸⁰ The word "melodies" mentioned here refers to songs that were supposed to reflect the music of various ethnic groups being parodied during a Phra Malai performance. See Virulrak 38-43.

A favorite routine was the *ok phasa* (performance in a foreign language), a comedy caricaturizing foreigners and their distinctive mannerisms and clothing styles.⁸¹ Dhanit Yupo describes a performance as follows:

During the priest-chanters' heyday, there were various paraphernalia for the performance in their [yam] (bags), such as makeup, earrings, a Malay hat, a Chinese hat, and a mirror. They sat with their knees up and hid their faces behind their fans, holding the handles in their toes. The bags were laid in front of them to support the small mirrors. In this way, they could do various styles of makeup. The audience in those days did not feel that this was out of place. On the contrary, they appreciated and supported the performance by insisting those priests perform in competitions with other entertainments. The priests usually won because they gained a greater audience.⁸²

Apparently, the comic effect was heightened by the manner in which the chanting began and progressed. The monks would begin by chanting the opening stanzas of the *Klon Suat* text in routine fashion as they sat with their faces hidden behind their fans. Then, when they reached a certain point in the text that was marked by a change in rhythm and meter, they would suddenly move their talabat aside revealing, to the delight of the audience, their made up faces and costumes, complete with false moustaches, glasses, and hats.⁸³ The host of the funeral apparently

⁸¹ Virulrak 39.

⁸² Cited in Virulrak 39.

⁸³ Virulrak 39-40. For a similar description of this genre in south Thailand, see "Suat malai," in *Saranukrom wattanatham phak tai*, lem thi 9 [Encyclopedia of

responded by serving the monks various kinds of sweets, as evidenced by the fact that the ecclesiastical laws of King Rama I, mentioned above, include a provision forbidding this.

However, the chanting of Phra Malai in comic fashion was apparently in such demand that as soon as monks ceased doing it, laymen took over. These laymen were former monks, who had been ordained for a period of time, and then resumed their secular lives, as is customary in Southeast Asia. Moreover, some monks apparently seized on the new financial opportunities provided by this development and retired from the Sangha to form professional chanting groups, known as *suat kharyhat*.⁸⁴

The *kharyhat* routine closely resembled that of the monks. That is, a *kharyhat* group consisted of four men, who would come to the house of the deceased bringing with them a wooden scripture case containing a Phra Malai manuscript.

Southern Thai Culture], v. 9. Songkhla: Si Nakharinwirot University, 1986, 3697-3699.

⁸⁴ Virulrak 40. According to Nantha Khunphakdi, *kharyhat* groups were known by various other names, including *suat khi mao*, "the drunken chanters" or "chanters who like to drink," because most performers felt they needed to be intoxicated before they could lose their inhibitions and perform well. Other names for this genre, *suat samruat* ("to chant prayers for the dead") and *suat malai*, are derived from the context and content of the funerary situation. Still other names, *ram suat* ("dance-chanting"), *cham-uat phra* and *yi-ke phra* (both can be loosely translated as "clowning in imitation of monks"), reflect some of the things that actually occurred during a performance. See "Kansuat 'oo ee wihan rai' lae kansuat kharyhat" ["Chanting of 'oo ee wihan rai' (genre) and suat kharyhat"]. In south Thailand, the term *suat malai* is used.

The scripture case served as a table on which a single candle and the manuscript would be placed during the chanting. The group sat in a row on the floor, each one holding in front of his face a talabat.⁸⁵ (See fig. 10.)

The degree to which the *kharyhat* deviated from straightforward chanting varied greatly, but a central element in any routine was that of entertainment and fun. The following description, recalling a wake held ca. 1900, describes a relatively conservative style of *kharyhat* performance:

Since the time I was a child I remember hearing the distant sounds of the monks chanting the dhamma at someone's house. It was a sound that made me feel cold and fearful and afraid of ghosts....In the old days chanting would begin at nightfall.... After the monks had gone back to the wat, those villagers who enjoyed having fun would begin to chant. But instead of chanting the dhamma, they would chant Phra Malai....[When they came to the part about his] going down to bestow mercy on [the beings in] hell... the people would become very sad....but the chanters loved to have fun. Sometimes they'd drink whiskey, even though it would add to their own demerit.... They usually enjoyed the part about hell most of all. When they came to the part where the peta appeal to Phra Malai to tell their relatives on earth about their sufferings, they'd say, "This person who died a while ago is chanting now. He wants the sponsor to make merit by giving each of the four chanters a bottle of whiskey."

Upon hearing this, the audience would cry out in excitement. Some would say, "They're lying! It's not the peta who are saying that, it's the chanters! They just want to drink whiskey."

⁸⁵ Anake Nawigamune, "Nak suat kharyhat hai pai nai?" [Where have the Kharyhat Chanters Gone?], *Sinlapa Watthanatham*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1979, 73-77.

"A whole bottle is too much," others would say.

"The peta say that if you can't give each of us a bottle of whiskey, a half bottle will do," the chanters would continue. The sponsors would then serve rice wine to the chanters who would soon become inebriated, and continue the mock dialogue, "If you don't give us some real whiskey, the peta say they will come and grab the sponsor by the neck right away." Finally they would get some real whiskey.⁸⁶

At dawn, the account continues, a group of monks would arrive and the sponsor would present food to them and then to all the villagers who had stayed through the night. The *kharyhat* would then resume chanting after the sponsor had set up a branch next to the scripture box to represent the wishing tree mentioned in the text. The villagers would then hang tobacco or money on the tree in response to the *kharyhat's* requests, as a way of rewarding them for their efforts.⁸⁷

Other *kharyhat* groups, on the other hand, used the Phra Malai theme only as an introduction and then shifted to pure entertainment -- short skits, slapstick, puns, dancing, bawdy humor, and scenes and songs from well known works of literature, including *Kraithong*, the *Ramakian*, *Phra Aphaimani*, and *Khun Chan Khun Phaen*.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ "Nangsu malai" [the Malai Book], in *Carambun* (Bangkok, Khana Wat Chetuphon, 1961) 4-5.

⁸⁷ "Nangsu malai" 4-5.

⁸⁸ The *Ramakian* is the Thai version of the *Ramayana*; *Phra Aphaimani* and *Khun Chan Khun Phaen* are popular literary and epic romances.

Virulrak describes a typical *kharyhat* performance, based on the writings of the revered musician and music historian Montri Tramot.

The performance began with vocal testing by the four chanters. This consisted of projecting nonverbal sounds in a repetitive pattern. Then a long Buddhist text was chanted. The chorus then sang secular songs while the clowns acted, danced, and occasionally beat each other with their talapat. These were so called "introductory pieces," which would be followed by the major part, the *chut ok phasa* [chut⁴ ok² phaa¹saa⁵] (foreign theme). Each *chut* (theme) began with a short Buddhist chant by all chanters, then the *mae khu* (chorus master) introduced a major song for the group to follow. The last part of the song was a *phasa* song (song with a foreign air) and the clowns acted accordingly. For instance, if the major song ended with a Chinese air, the clowns acted and danced a parody of the Chinese opera. After the song was finished, the clowns continued to perform a short comic sketch based on that nationality.⁸⁹

The episode would usually dissolve into a farcical fight among the clowns. Then the chorus master would begin a new major song, thus signalling the opening of another *phasa* theme which would follow the same pattern. The sequence of consecutive *phasa* themes were called the *sipsong phasa* (the twelve foreign languages or foreign themes).

This term, according to Virulrak, "has been used since the Ayutthaya Period to refer to various foreign residents who lived in Thailand."⁹⁰ However, "twelve" was not a literal number; a performance did not necessarily involve

⁸⁹ Virulrak 40; See also Nantha, "Kansuat 'oo ee wihan rai' lae kansuat kharyhat."

⁹⁰ Virulrak 42.

every ethnic group. Those ethnic groups represented were the *Chin* (Chinese), the *Phama* (Burmese), the *Khamen* (Cambodian), the Mon, the Lao, the *Yuan* (Northern Thai), the *Kha* (a hilltribe group), the *Nakhon* (people of Nakhon Si Thammarat province, which was once a tributary state of the Ayutthaya Kingdom), the *Khaek* (Indians, Malaysians, Indonesians, Sri Lankans or Arabians),⁹¹ the *Ngieo* (a Thai ethnic group in the Shan States of northern Burma), and the *Farang* (all the Caucasians).⁹²

Towards the end of the 19th century, the *sipsong phasa* was incorporated into another form of entertainment known as *yikay sipsong phasa* which eventually evolved into dramatic comedy known as *yikay* or *likay*.⁹³ This latter form of entertainment became prominent in the last decade of the nineteenth century and has continued to be a popular form of folk entertainment today.

Suat kharyhat, while becoming less visible, continued to be vital until the second half of the twentieth century. Even with its secularization, it retained a semi-sacred quality, for it continued to be performed at funerals. Somewhere along the course of *suat kharyhat*'s development, several opening rituals, similar to those observed by

⁹¹ Virulrak defines this term as referring to "any ethnic group with dark skin, curly hair, large eyes, and prominent noses." (42)

⁹² Virulrak 42.

⁹³ Virulrak 43-45.

musical and/or theatrical troupes, were added. These rituals, which may vary somewhat in detail from place to place and genre to genre, are a necessary preface to Thai performance.⁹⁴

Even today, a small number of active *kharyhat* groups remain, three of which have performed at the Bangkok Bank's Musical Arts Centre since 1975. Video tape recordings of their performances, which I viewed in 1990, suggest that their repertoire is overwhelmingly devoted to slapstick comedy and that the subject of Phra Malai is little more than a vestige.

At the same time, however, excerpts from the *Phra Malai Klon Suat* are still chanted at wakes by groups of monks from Wat Dawadoeng in Thonburi, just outside of Bangkok. The chanting, which includes no extraneous material, generally lasts for about an hour, and is sometimes done in alternation with a group of nuns from either of two nearby monasteries. Sponsored by the relatives of the deceased, the recitation of Phra Malai is regarded as a way of earning merit to ensure a favorable rebirth.

* * * *

⁹⁴ For a complete discussion of rituals of paying respect to teachers of the performing arts, see Deborah Anne Wong, "The Empowered Teacher: Ritual, Performance, and Epistemology in Contemporary Bangkok," Diss., U of Michigan, 1991.

This chapter has demonstrated the uniquely Thai character of *Phra Malai Klon Suat*. Unlike the Pali/La Na texts, which present a straightforward account of the story, the *Klon Suat* employs humor, hyperbole, repetition, and allusions to Thai indigenous practices and contemporary problems to captivate its audience. Written to be chanted or sung in various rhythms and melodies, the *Klon Suat* was for many decades a vital, living text that elicited in its audience a range of emotions.

The *Klon Suat* version of *Phra Malai* can be viewed as a collection of Buddhist teachings and folklore that reflected the hopes and fears of the common people of central Thailand for over three centuries. While many of the beliefs and practices mentioned in the text are less common today than they were two or three hundred years ago, the text continues to have an impact on society.

Over the course of time, the manner and context in which the text was recited underwent numerous transformations that reflected changing conditions in Thai society and politics. Despite these changes -- or perhaps because of its response to them -- *Phra Malai Klon Suat* made an indelible mark on Thai folk drama as well as on the visual arts.

CONCLUSION

This study began with the statement that the legend of Phra Malai is one of the most important and pervasive themes in Thai Buddhism. Now, having surveyed the gamut of texts with this name, and having examined three of those texts closely, I will propose several reasons that may explain why this theme has proved to be so compelling.

One possible reason is that the story of *Phra Malai* recontextualizes certain canonical teachings in a way that makes them more accessible and credible to the faithful. That is to say, the teachings of the *Phra Malai* story are revealed through the adventures of a person who has experienced them directly. Even though *Phra Malai* is an arhat, he is still human. In his role as intermediary between the human realm and the realms of heaven and hell, he plays the role of the shaman, transcending the parameters of human consciousness. To put it another way, he is an early astronaut, a cosmic traveler who, by his very ability to set foot in the other realms of the universe, lends credibility to their existence. Accounts of the beings he has seen in the other realms are made to seem real because, we are told, someone from our world has actually been there. In some versions of the story, such as the *Klqn Suat* and the

Kham Luang, the existence of these realms is further confirmed by the statement that the arhat's descriptions of his travels were so vivid that the people of Jambudipa could virtually see heaven and hell with their own eyes.

Phra Malai's appeal also lies in the psychological satisfaction it provides. In other words, it is a good story because it meets human needs. One way it does this is by providing a measure of solace to those in the human realm who grieve for their deceased relatives. It also reassures them that their relationship with their loved ones has not ended with death.

In addition, the repeated accounts of deities who were rewarded for their good deeds provide successful role models for the listeners to emulate. At the very least, the humble grass cutter who had only eight flowers to offer Phra Malai is rewarded with the promise that he will never be poor again in any future life.

Moreover, the popular, folkloric versions of the story, through their accounts of kammic retribution, present some assurance that those who have done harm and committed misdeeds will, in the next life, receive their just deserts by being born in hell. There is a sense of justice in the *Klqn Suat*'s description of the tortures endured by corrupt leaders, thieves, adulterers, etc. For those who have been oppressed, it is encouraging to know that some day their oppressors will be held accountable, even if it is not in the present lifetime.

Finally, the story is psychologically satisfying in that it portrays Metteyya as being keenly interested in human affairs and concerns. Not only does the Bodhisatta inquire about the material and spiritual conditions in the human realm; the faithful are also told that he is delighted to learn that everyone wants to meet him in the future.

Moreover, the story tells us that *nibbāna*, which seems so impossibly out of reach, can actually be attained through the intervention of Metteyya. In other words, it teaches that there is a shortcut to *nibbāna* that circumvents the seemingly impossible path of the arhat. It also presents a practical guide to attaining *nibbāna*: practice generosity, avoid sin, and listen to the *Vessantara Jātaka*. Those who follow this program will be born during the time of Metteyya, who will lead his followers out of *samsāra*.

Phra Malai's appeal also derives from the fact that, as an extracanonical work, it has had the flexibility to assume numerous different forms and serve several distinct functions over the centuries. As we have seen, the northern and northeastern recensions of the text are intimately connected with the annual *Vessantara Jātaka* festival. They serve the role of pre-text, or promotional text for the *Jātaka* and are recited only once a year. Historically, it appears that this annual recitation may have been sponsored by King Tilok to encourage the making of massive amounts of merit for the preservation of the religion and, ultimately, the Lan Na kingdom.

In the royal version of the story, a decorative literary veneer was laid over the framework of the earlier text. The result was an ornate, highly literate text that apparently served as a personal merit-making project to atone for the author's massive debt of demerit.

The *Klon Suat* version, on the other hand, represents the most widely known and commonly used *Phra Malai* text. We have seen how it was read at weddings to instruct the bridegroom before the consummation of the marriage; how it provided merit-making opportunities as well as edification and entertainment at funeral wakes; and how it was used as a primer for temple boys to practice reading. Finally, we have seen how it left an indelible imprint on art and on Thai Buddhists' conceptions of merit and demerit, *nibbāna* and *samsāra*, and hope in Metteyya.

* * * *

This study of the *Phra Malai* theme in Thai Buddhist literature has revealed that there is no one, single *Phra Malai* text, but rather an assortment of written, spoken, chanted, painted, and sculpted depictions of the story of the compassionate arhat. This study has laid some of the groundwork for an understanding of the relationship of these texts to one another and the functions they served in their cultural contexts. There is still much work to be done, however. The first important area of research would be on

the development of early texts in the north. A wealth of textual material has recently become available at Chiang Mai University in the form of microfilm copies thousands of Pali and Lan Na Thai manuscripts.

Texts relevant to the present study include the *Anāgata-Vaṃsa*, the *Metteyya Vaṃsa*, the *Anisong Vessantara Jataka*, and *Malai Prot Lok*. A study of the first three would be useful in evaluating some of the ideas I proposed here concerning the history of Buddhist institutions in the Lan Na kingdom in the light of the prediction concerning the religion's disappearance. A study of *Malai Prot Lok*, which tells only of the arhat's visit to hell, and which is recited to make merit for the deceased, would help in understanding the development of the hell motif and its relationship to the *Malai Ton - Malai Plai*.

Another important area of research would be in the area of the royal version. In my own research, I found very little written material about Prince Thammathibet or the use of religious texts in courtly circles. As so often happens, research concerning the Ayutthaya Period leads to a dead end because so many texts and records were destroyed in the Burmese attack of 1767. Perhaps the place to start would be with royal Buddhist rituals during the present dynasty. While Thai state ritual is heavily influenced by Brahmanical rites borrowed from Cambodia, as in the ploughing ceremony, for example, members of the royal family frequently officiate at Buddhist ceremonies throughout the kingdom. It

is possible that a study of royal merit-making rituals would yield some clues.

Fortunately, there is much that can be learned about the *Klon Suat*. Segments of this text are still chanted occasionally in the central and southern regions at funerals and at commemorative merit-making ceremonies held after the cremation. Since the practice is becoming increasingly rare, this is perhaps the area of research that is the most urgent and the most likely to shed light on how the Phra Malai legend has remained vital.

Finally, the area of art history needs to be examined. Important questions here include how or why the figure of Phra Malai came to be depicted in bronze sculpture, a medium that in Thailand has generally been reserved for images of the Buddha and Brahmanical deities.

In addition, the relationship between written texts and mural paintings of *Phra Malai* is worth studying. Apart from the written texts mentioned in this dissertation, there are still others, and these may have influenced the content of paintings and sculpture. However, some paintings and sculptures are texts on their own right, with no written textual referents. In the course of my research in Thailand, I recall seeing two interesting depictions of Phra Malai's visit to hell not found in any written text that I have read. One was at a temple in Ubon, in the northeast, painted on the outside of an image hall. It portrayed a man in hell being castrated -- a punishment he earned by having

castrated his water buffalo. Another depiction was in the south, in a Phra Malai manuscript at the Nakhon Si Thammarat Teachers College. It portrayed two creatures with the faces of roosters and the bodies of men engaged in a bloody fight -- apparently, the punishment they earned by having organized cock fights. The opportunities for local interpretation and expansion of the Phra Malai theme are nearly endless and are waiting to be explored.

APPENDIX

PHRA MALAI KHAM LUANG

...*Namo mama atthu*...¹ That is to say, may I always revere² ...*tassa nāthassa*... the exalted one, the precious Lord, the refuge of the Three Worlds, who has transcended the renewed existence of celestials, humans, and all other beings; ...*bhagavato*... the one who is virtuous and blessed, triumphant and auspicious, flawless and magnificent, peerless and illustrious. ...*arahato*... He has cut off defilements and forsaken them; he has shattered the wheel of saṁsāra, destroying it, putting an end to the cycle of rebirth ...*ñāṇāśinā*... through the path of the highest knowledge. Like a diamond sword slashing, like a lightning

¹ In this translation I have transliterated (rather than translated) the Pali words and phrases that occur throughout the Thai text in order to retain some of the feeling of the *Phra Malai Kham Luang*. These Pali words and phrases are italicized and are indicated by the use of three dots before and after, to differentiate them from other Pali and/or Sanskrit terms in the translation for which there is no suitable English equivalent (such as *asāmkheyya*, *koti*, *mahākappa*).

² In the Thai text the Pali words *namo mama atthu* are not written as a phrase; instead, each word is followed immediately by its Thai gloss. The translation from the Thai, however, becomes very awkward (literally, "Reverence belonging to me as worshipper -- may it always exist"); consequently, I have in this case taken the liberty of grouping the three words together.

bolt striking, he destroyed it, severing it completely, irrevocably.

...*sammāsambuddhassa*... The omniscient one expounded the true Dhamma, following the teachings of previous Buddhas flawlessly, steadfastly. He expounded it properly in every respect. ...*samupacitasambhara nibbatta sayambhu nānena*... With the highest knowledge resulting from the pure merit that the Buddha accumulated since the previous exalted teacher, for the duration of four *asamkheyyas* and 100,000 *mahakappas*, he observed every kind of merit making completely, culminating in the Five Great Sacrifices, which is a difficult accomplishment. He gave with ease, bestowing his wealth graciously. Not fearing poverty, he courageously abandoned his possessions. Not attached to his own life, he surrendered it completely, generously. Having accomplished these things, he became enlightened. He is the omniscient sage, the valiant, peerless lord of this world.³

I respectfully pay obeisance

Bowing in reverence to the omniscient, transcendent one,

Endowed with superior virtue and incomparable vigor.

May I attain ultimate wisdom and the virtues of
Buddhahood.

³ The preceding passage, and the major portion of the text is written in rai; the four lines that follow, an invocation addressed to the Buddha (or perhaps to Metteyya?), are written in khlong.

*suranaramahinīyām buddhasetthām namitvā
 sugatapphavadhamūm sādhu samghāñ ca natvā
 sakalajanappasādām mālayyām nāma vatthūm
 paramanayavicittām samāsā ārabbhissanti⁴*

[translation from the Pali above:]

Having worshipped the great Buddha, the one honored by
 gods and humans,
 Having saluted the Dhamma preached by the Buddha, and
 the good Sangha,
 I will begin [telling] in short form the story of
 Malaya, which is pleasing to all people,
 The story that is variegated and replete with the
 highest means.⁵

I humbly bow down in respect to the Buddtha, joining my
 ten fingertips together gracefully in reverence to the
 eminent flawless refuge. Victorious over Māra, resplendent
 in purity, he is the supreme lord. All celestials, humans,
 devas, and brahmas respect the magnificent teachings of the
 esteemed, joyous pinnacle of the Three Worlds, the sublime
 crown jewel of omniscience.

⁴ This invocation is virtually identical to that found in Denis edition of the Pali *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* as well as that found in the Thai *Dika Malai*.

⁵ I would like to thank Professor Madhav Deshpande for translating this Pali verse.

...*sugatappabhavadhammam*... I pay obeisance with the five parts of the body,⁶ and also with the highest part, by bowing my pure head in reverence to the nine-fold supramundane Dhamma,⁷ the eternal elixir that flows from the divine lips of the perfect, fully enlightened one. It is replete with the manifold essence that leads beings from the world of *samsara* to the peace and tranquility of *nibbana*, free from suffering and lamentation, free from fear and danger, far removed from the enemy which is the aggregate of unwholesome, harmful deeds.

...*samghañ ca natvā*... I humbly pay respect to the lotus garland of the noble extraordinary ones,⁸ who are free from the fetters of defilement and lust. I praise the descendants of the Buddha⁹ -- the Sangha, [whose members

⁶ The five-fold prostration, that is, paying reverence by touching the ground with five parts of the body: knees, hands, and head.

⁷ *Lokuttara-dhamma*: the nine supermundane states, i.e., *magga*: the Four Paths; *phala*: the four fruitions; and *nibbana*, the unconditioned state. See Phra Thepwethi, *Phochananukrom phutthasat* [Dictionary of Buddhism]. (Bangkok: 1989) 267.

⁸ *Ariya puggala*, or simply *ariya*: "noble ones" - "those who have realized one of the eight stages of holiness, i.e. the four supermundane paths (*magga*) and the four supermundane fruitions (*phala*) of the paths. See Nyantiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, 17; Phra Thepwethi 90-91.

⁹ The Thai word here, *phutthorot*, which I have translated as "descendents of the Buddha" is derived from the Pali *buddho* (Buddha) + *orasa* ("lit. belonging to one's own breasts, self-begotten, legitimate"- P.E.D., 170). In Thai the word *orot* is used as a royal word for "son."

are] accomplished in observing the four-fold purity.¹⁰ Replete with wisdom they are a field of merit¹¹ that brings people contentment. I respectfully present offerings to the Sangha in order to attain the threefold prosperity.¹² May my supreme request be granted so that I will obtain whatever I desire and attain nibbāna.

...*sabbasubham atthu...* May all the blessings of the Three Gems be mine. May I always have faith. I pay obeisance, bowing my head to the power of the Three Gems with the greatest respect and reverence. May I now relate the story of Phra Malai as it is told in the Pali texts for the well-being and faith of all men and all women. May I be blessed by all good things.

...*atīte kira tiratanapatitthanabhūte lankādīpa-saṅkhāte tāmbapanniyadīpe...*

¹⁰ Does the Thai *catu borisut* refer to the *parisuddhi-sila*, or morality of pure conduct? This morality consists of "restraint in accordance with the monastic discipline"; "restraint of the senses"; "purity of conduct as regards lievlihood"; and "pure conduct as regards the necessities of life." Phra Thepwethi 147-148.

¹¹ With reference to the Sangha as a "Field of Merit," Sao Saimong Mangrai explains, "the idea being that the institution of the Sangha is the place where one performs meritorious acts, thereby gaining good kamma for future rebirths." The *Pādaeng Chronicle and the Jengtung State Chronicle Translated*, n. 127, p. 175.

¹² The Thai *prasit sombat trai phit* is derived from the Pali *sampatti* and in this context appears to refer to *manussa sampatti* - human prosperity; *deva sampatti* - heavenly prosperity; and *nibbāna sampatti* - successful attainment of nibbana. Phra Thepwethi 122.

A long time ago, it is said, when the Three Gems were established on Lanka, in the village of Rohana ... *Malayadēvatthero nāma*... there lived a great thera named Malai Deva. He had great faith and was endowed with extraordinary power, superior intelligence, and competence. Truthful in the smallest detail, forsaking all defilements, he found contentment in practicing morality. He was determined to bestow mercy on all beings. He was an arhat unequalled in supporting the precious teachings. His faith in the religion of the Exalted Sage was as clear to behold as the radiant moon moving across the sky.

...*yathāpi moggallano ca*... He was like Phra Moggallana,¹³ the peerless, esteemed, kind-hearted one, who through his extraordinary power, went to bestow mercy on the beings in hell, and then went up to heaven to help all the celestials and devas with the esteemed Dhamma and the greatest compassion of all times.

...*devatthero thito tathā*... As for the radiant, powerful Phra Malai, he was of the same mold as Moggallana. As he was wandering about through the air one time, he went down to hell, hoping to bestow happiness upon the beings there and lessen their torment through his power. He vowed to bring them relief. When the [hell] beings asked him to tell their relatives [in the human realm] about their

¹³ Moggallana, one of the Buddha's disciples, whose travels to various heavens and hells are described in the *Mahāvastu*, as well as in the *Vimāna-vatthu* and the *Peta-vatthu*. (See *DPPN*, v. 1, 541-7.

misery, he resolved to report everything. With great compassion in his heart, he contemplated the multitude of beings enduring unbearable suffering, endless sorrow, and grief as a result of their acts.¹⁴

...bahuguno nārakānām devānañ ca bahuguno... His beneficience extended to both heaven and hell. Hoping to extinguish sorrow and pain, he once soared through the air, and in just the snap of a finger, in no time at all, he reached the hells. Through his extraordinary power a golden lotus throne appeared, the size of a cart wheel. The preeminent one, seated on the ornamented throne, performed wondrous miracles. He caused celestial rain to shower down, dousing the flames; he destroyed the Lohakumbhi cauldron, leaving nothing but dust; he caused the caustic, burning river to dry up and disappear; he extinguished the mountain of flames; he caused the kapok tree to lose its sword-like thorns.

All of the hell beings, relieved of their suffering, were peaceful and content. They bowed down in reverence, and asked, "Oh Lord, where have you come from bringing us such happiness?"

The thera answered, "I have come from the human realm."

¹⁴ A similar passage, briefly foretelling events that are elaborated in the lines that follow, occurs in some of the Pali *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* manuscripts.

Hearing this, the group in hell was overjoyed, and they asked him to tell [those in the human realm] about the conditions of the place where they were. "Please, Lord, we beg you to tell our relatives, wherever they may be." They named cities, towns, and regions far away. They told him the names of their fathers and where they lived, and the names of other relatives -- sons, daughters, husbands, mothers, sisters, and brothers. "Have all of them hasten to make merit and transfer it to us. Have them worship the Buddha, the exalted Dhamma, and the praiseworthy Sangha, teacher of morality. Have them practice generosity and send the merit to us by pouring the water of donation. Then each of us will be delivered from suffering."

The thera heard what they said, noting every word. Then, he travelled quickly through the air by means of his extraordinary power.

...thero āgantvā... Returning to the human realm, he reported on the adversity of the hell beings. In great detail he described everything, telling all who came to listen. He urged them, as he had been requested, to hasten to make merit on behalf of their kin.¹⁵ He told them to do it quickly, without delay, so that their relatives in hell could transcend torment and suffering.

¹⁵ Note that in all cases of merit-making and transference, the fruit of the merit is transferred to relatives.

When the people heard that their kinfolk were suffering, they wept with grief. Hearing of the torments in hell, they were alarmed and dismayed. They paid respect to the Threefold Refuge and gave alms to make merit on behalf of their relatives. They dedicated the precious merit, saying, "May our relatives be free from all suffering through the power that radiates forth from this merit as we pour the lustral water of donation."

When the water fell to the earth, the group in hell rejoiced, expressing their gratitude and their hope that their descendants could also share in their merit. Through the power of this merit, they were born in a celestial abode made of every kind of magnificent jewel, ornament, and treasure.

[Then Phra Malai,] the one endowed with wisdom, went quickly to Tāvatimsa Heaven. He saw heavenly treasures as wonderful as could be wished for, through the power of the Three Gems. With joy and faith the thera observed it and then quickly returned to tell of it. He described everything so completely to the people that they could imagine heaven as if they were seeing it with their own eyes. With steadfast faith in the teachings of the Buddha, the people hastened to perform acts of merit fully, completely, without negligence. They transferred it to their relatives unceasingly. They set their minds on practicing generosity everywhere because of having heard all that he reported.

...athekadiwasam... Then [one day] Phra Malai, the one worthy of respect, the one endowed with extraordinary power, vigor, and compassion, resolved to help the world transcend human suffering and bestow happiness upon humankind. So it happened one day ...*pubbanhasamaye*... at dawn, when the sun shone with the brilliant glow of daybreak, ...*utthayāsanā*... he arose from the cushion where he was seated and went to bathe.¹⁶ ...*pattacivaram ādāya*... Then, clothed in a monk's robe and shawl, and holding an alms bowl in his hands, he went to receive alms. ...*gamam pavisi*... He entered the village in order to bestow mercy on other beings.

...*tasmim game eko daliddakapuriso*... At that time in that village there was a poor man who took care of his mother constantly. ...*tasmim kāle*... Just at that very moment, the man was going down to the water to bathe. As he approached the pond, he saw some beautiful lotuses blooming there. He picked eight of the flowers and held them up to admire them as he walked along. Then he noticed the radiant Phra Malai, his hands holding a beautifully decorated alms bowl. Restrained, serene, and composed, he was careful of all his actions. He proceeded gracefully and elegantly. Seeing him, the man was filled with joy and delight. He knelt down at his feet and put his ten fingertips together in the form of a lotus to express his reverence. Filled

¹⁶ This interpretation is open to question; the Thai reads *sa²det² cham¹ra⁴ kit² phra⁴ ong¹*, literally "he went to clear up (or wash) the responsibilites that were his."

with utmost faith, he presented the lotuses to [the arhat]. Phra Malai received them and rejoiced at once.

Then the man made a wish. "O Eminent Arhat, I ask that through the meritorious power I have received in giving you these brilliant, gemlike lotuses, if I am born again in any existence, let it not be one of poverty and misfortune. If I am reborn thousands of times, may I be surrounded by wealth. May I never be poor in any future existence." And he bowed down with respect at his feet.

...thero *atthani luppala pupphāni gahetvā*... Phra Malai received the lotuses from the poor man, and then recited a verse, ...*yām yām lūkham panītām vā*... expressing gratitude in this way: "Because you have given this gift properly, with devotion, all of your wishes will be fulfilled."

...thero *anumodanām katvā*... When Phra Malai had finished the verse, he thought: "Where shall I [go to] worship with these eight lotuses -- the mahābodhi tree, or the cetiya, or the sacred mountain, or the site of nibbāna, or the place where the Enlightened One expounded the Dhamma, or the [Seven] Sacred Sites where he sat [after Enlightenment]."¹⁷

¹⁷ The translation is highly conjectural, due to the abstruse nature of the poetry. It reads as follows:
*raw¹ ca² buu¹chaai¹ thii³ dai¹ soot² phra⁴ malhaa⁵ phot⁴
 ryu¹ cee¹dii¹ phra⁴baat² khii¹ri⁴ ryu¹ thii³ nip⁴phaan¹
 ryu¹ thii³ wo¹ra¹ yaan¹ su²khot⁴ sam¹dæeng¹ rot⁴phra⁴tham¹
 ma¹cak² ryu¹ nai¹ thii³ ak² kha⁴ tha⁵naa¹ thoe¹
 ni⁴si²tha¹ thang⁴ cet²*
 literal translation:
 where should we (I) worship? the bodhi tree or the cetiya?
 ("the foot of") the exalted sacred mountain, or the site of

When [Phra Malai] had finished deliberating, he was not satisfied. Then the Cūlāmani Cetiya in heaven came to mind and he was pleased with this thought. He meditated, entering the fourth jhana, which is a step to [attaining] extraordinary powers. When he had finished meditating, he used his extraordinary power to fly like a golden *hamsa*. In the snap of a finger, he reached the heavens. He turned his flawless face directly toward the Vechayanta Palace belonging to the valiant Lord Kosiya¹⁸ in Tāvatimsa Heaven. In an instant he reached the sapphire studded Cūlāmani Cetiya. He circumambulated the site, paying homage at the eight directional points with the five parts of his body and with his head. After presenting the splendid lotuses at all eight directional points of the cetiya, he gazed at it with delight. Then he sat down there and joyfully raised his hands in respect.

...*sakko devarājā*... At that time Lord Makhaphan,¹⁹ leading a host of attendants, arrived at his radiantly

nibbāna? or the [place] where the One of Supreme Knowledge revealed the essence of the Phra Dhammacakka, or at the pre-eminent place[s]? He sat at all seven.

Each of the Phra Malai texts I have examined has a different list, with only one or two of the sites corresponding. One could write a short paper comparing these differences.

²³ Kosiya is Indra's clan name (*DPPN*, v. 1, 309).

¹⁹ This is the Thai rendering of Magha (Pali) or Maghavant (Skt.), one of the many epithets for Indra. The *DPPN* (v. 2, p. 957) states that, according to the *Samyutta Nikāya*, "he is called Maghava because as a human being, in a former birth, he was a brahmin named Magha."

jewelled throne at the Cūlāmani tooth reliquary.²⁰ Circumambulating the relic of the Buddha, Indra paid homage with offerings of diverse heavenly garlands, ointments, and perfumes and then went to his special seat. Then, seeing that Phra Malai had come, the Wielder of the Thunderbolt²¹ went to him and joyfully bowed his head in veneration to him, the refuge. Then he went back to his proper seat.

...devaparisa... As for the devas of the retinue, they paid homage by circumambulating and bowing in respect at the cetiya. When they were finished, they urged one another to greet the excellent arhat, the one abounding in purity and virtue. [Then] they adorned him with their presence, bowing down in obeisance on all sides.

...devaccharā... As for the celestial women, they performed the five-fold reverence before the hair relic of the Buddha. When they had finished their circumambulation and obeisance, they surrounded the venerable Phra Malai and greeted him with respect.

...sakko devarājā... The Lord of the Vajra then said pleasantly, "O, Lord, where did you live before coming here? Please tell me, O Eminent One."

...thero... "Oh, Lord Makhaphan, I am from the human realm. My purpose in coming here is to revere the cetiya.

²⁰ See Chapter 2, note 2, for a reference to a tooth reliquary.

²¹ One of Indra's epithets is "Wielder of the Vajra" (or Thunderbolt); see DPPN, v. 1, 309-310.

Oh, great Indra of the Kosiya clan, how did the Cūlāmani Cetiya come to be built?"

Indra replied, "It was established by me to provide the devas a means of worship."

...thero... The thera responded, "Oh, Lord, King of the Devas, these celestials already made an abundance of merit while they were human; that is how they came to this divine abode. So why are they coming to make merit now? What are they seeking? Of what use will it be? What result will it have in the future?"

...bhante... The Lord of the Devas answered, "The celestials all come, encouraging one another to accumulate merit, because they hope to attain a higher state in the next life."

Indra then explained that certain deities had made only a small amount of merit while they were still human. Consequently, when they reached heaven, they stayed only a short time before dying and falling to a lower state, because the fruit of their merit was totally exhausted.

"Allow me to illustrate this for you with an allegory," he said. "There was once a poor man who had only one measure²² of unmilled rice -- very little indeed. He did not plow his field and grow rice to maintain and replenish his supply. When it was used up, the man was filled with sorrow. [Because] he did not till the soil or carry on

²² The Thai word is *tha⁴naan¹* - a measure made from a hollowed out coconut.

trade, any surplus he might have accumulated for the future was completely squandered. It is the same for a deity with little merit. When it is all used up, he becomes sorrowful -- completely removed from happiness, just like the man in the story."

...bhante bahuthanam... "O Great Arhat, I will tell you another allegory. There was a certain man who was surrounded by wealth, material goods, and granaries overflowing with grain. He put great effort into farming and trade. He used his riches to earn more, adding to it measure by measure. He gathered it together and added to it repeatedly, and soon he became very wealthy. In the same way, a deva with merit from previous lives has greater ability to increase his merit. As each life is finished, he enters a higher level of heaven until he finally reaches Suddhavasa.²³ If he were to die, he would attain nibbana there, never to return again."

...thero pasiditvā puna sakkam pucchi... Phra Malai responded by asking, "O Lord of Tāvatimṣa,²⁴ a tumultuous crowd of devas has arrived to revere the decorated cetiya. Why is that we have not seen Phra Si Ariya yet? Is he really coming?"

²³ *Suddhāvāsa* - Phra Thepwethi (p. 411) defines this realm as "the (Five) Pure Abodes (in the Form Sphere) where the Non-Returners are born."

²⁴ In this occurrence of the name of this heaven, the Thai spelling corresponds to the Sanskrit Trairūnasa, rather than the Pali Tāvatimṣa, in order to facilitate the rhyme scheme.

The Thousand-Eyed Lord²⁵ replied, "Phra Metteyya comes here at regularly."

The thera then asked, "When is it that he comes?"

Indra answered, "The Supreme Protector comes on the eighth and the fourteenth days of the lunar month -- the *uposatha* days. The Honorable One comes then to revere the *cetiya*."

...thero sakkena... The thera replied instantly, "This is an *uposatha* day, the eighth to be exact. He should come today."

Kosiya, hearing his words, at once agreed with joy. As the arhat and the Thousand-Eyed One sat continuing their discussion, a powerful deva came to pay obeisance accompanied by his entire retinue totaling a hundred.

...thero disvā... The thera, noticing his arrival, immediately asked Indra, "Is that Phra Metteyya who has come?"

Indra answered, "No, it is not."

[Then] Phra Malai said, "Who is that deva?"

The Thousand-Eyed Lord replied, "I don't know his name."

The thera inquired about the deva's deeds in his previous life, asking, "How did he make merit?"

²⁵ The Thai *sahassa nai* is derived from the Pali *sahassa-naya[nā]*, literally, "thousand-eyed;" this epithet is related to Indra's ability to think of a thousand matters in one moment. See *DPPN*, v. 2, 958.

[Indra], The Three-Eyed One,²⁶ replied, "This deva was an extremely poor man. He wandered about constantly, cutting grass and selling it to make a living. One day he gave his sole portion²⁷ of rice to a crow so that it would not suffer. When he died, he went to heaven and enjoyed good fortune with a retinue numbering a hundred, all because of the fruit of the merit that he created."

...tadanantare... Subsequently, a deva arrived with a retinue of a thousand, their magnificent brilliance illuminating every direction.

Phra Malai asked Indra whether this was Metteyya.

Indra answered, "No, it is not the One of Superior Knowledge."

Phra Malai asked, "In his past life how did this deva earn merit?"

The powerful Makhaphan replied, "This deva in a former life was a cowherd in the middle of a field who shared his food with the other herders. That virtuous act alone earned this reward for him, who had been deficient in accumulated merit. Anyone who practices generosity will receive a

²⁶ The term "three-eyed" is generally used to refer to Siva, and not Indra.

²⁷ The Thai word is *koon*³, meaning "lump," the word used for portions of glutinous rice, the staple food of the northern Thai and the Lao. A similar motif is found in the *Jengtung State Chronicle*, from the Shan States, translated and annotated by Sao Saimong Mangrai. The text reads: "There was a poor cowherd who lived in Baranasi and earned a living by looking after people's cattle every day without a break. Whenever the cowherd opened his food packet he always gave some rice balls to the crows." (209)

retinue numbering a thousand, each one of them winsome and well-formed."

The deva paid obeisance by circumambulating, bowing down, and presenting offerings of fragrant garlands. Then he bowed in the westerly direction and seated himself there.

...aparo devaputto... At that time another deva with a retinue of 10,000 came to pay homage at the cetiya. The venerable thera asked the King of the Devas again, as before, about the merit this celestial had made.

Indra answered, "When this deva lived in the human realm, he offered food to a virtuous novice.²⁸ The *samanera* accepted the alms, and the merit earned in this way enabled the donor to become a deva enjoying wealth and a retinue. An ordinary person like this needs only to observe the precepts and offer food in order to receive a retinue of 10,000, elegant and beautiful."

The deva arrived and joyfully presented garlands, jewels, incense, and candles. He circumambulated three times and bowed with respect at the elaborately jewelled cetiya. Then he seated himself at the southern point as was his usual practice.

...aparo visati sahassehi... Subsequently, another extraordinary deva drew near to pay homage at the jewelled

²⁸ An alternative translation is "a novice who observed all of the precepts." That is, a novice or *samanera* must observe only ten precepts; a monk, by contrast observes 227.

stupa. He was arrayed in great splendor and accompanied by 20,000 attendants.

Phra Malai, seeing him, asked, just as he had a moment before, "Is that Metteyya?" And then he asked his name and his past deeds.

The King of the Devas replied, "Previously this deity was a man who presented food to a monk who was collecting alms. A single ladle of rice given that way enabled him to enjoy heaven and to have a retinue numbering 20,000.

Similarly, anyone else who gives to the Sangha with noble intentions will receive an equal reward -- a retinue of 20,000 attendants, each one as lovely as the next."

The radiant deva arrived at the cetiya and made offerings of perfume, garlands, and gold. He paid respect and circumambulated. Seating himself on the north side, he raised his hands in a gesture of respect and remained there.

...*tada eko timsa sahassaparivārehi*... Another deva, full of radiance and grace, and adorned with a retinue of 30,000, came to pay homage at the stupa.

Phra Malai thus asked whether this was Metteyya.

The Wielder of the Vajra answered, "No, it is not." Phra Malai inquired about the deva's merit.

The spouse of Sujata,²⁹ said, "This deva was a wealthy man in his former life. He was known by the name of

²⁹ In the *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* this epithet for Indra is used more frequently than any other.

Haripala.³⁰ He had faith and he upheld the principles of the Three Gems faithfully. He donated everything -- cloth, food, medicine, water, and monks' robes -- to monasteries. The power of the merit that he accumulated enabled him to attain heavenly rewards, an immense retinue numbering 30,000, and complete joy and tranquility."

When the deva arrived at the site, he presented offerings of golden lotuses and exquisite garlands, scattering them everywhere in sight -- in all eight directions. Then he circumambulated the relic of the Buddha three times. When he had finished the five-fold obeisance, he seated himself amidst the other great devas, raising his hands and bowing his head in reverence.

...eko cattālisasahassaparivārehi... Another deity approached, accompanied by a retinue of 40,000. He paid obeisance and bowed his head. Seeing him, Phra Malai asked, "O Greatest of the Devas, is this Metteyya coming?"

The Thousand-Eyed One answered, "No, it is not."

The thera then asked about his deeds.

Indra explained, "This deva lived in the beautiful haven of Anurādhapura as a silk weaver. He sponsored cremations for the poor and generously presented food, robes, mats, and beds to the Sangha on behalf of those who

³⁰ In the *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* translated by Supaporn, he is the sixth deity, accompanied by a retinue of 40,000, and is known as Haritala.

had died. The power of the merit that he made truly brought him joy and wealth in his next life."

The deva arrived at the hair reliquary and made offerings of delicately scented garlands. He circumambulated three times and when he had finished paying homage, he seated himself at his proper place, according to his rank and remained there.

...eko paññassahassaparivāro... Another deva, surrounded by a gracious, fully adorned retinue of 50,000, approached majestically. The eminent Malai asked Indra, Lord of Tavatimsa, "Is this Phra Si Ariya coming now?"

The Thousand-Eyed One answered, "No."

Phra Malai inquired about the deva's merit.

Indra replied by identifying him. "This deva lived in Tamba.³¹ He was the younger brother of King Abhaya and was named Saddhātissa.³² He had faith in the precious Buddha, he upheld the Dhamma, and revered the Sangha. He observed the Five Precepts regularly and the Eight Precepts on uposatha days. His generosity was apparent to the entire world. He was not greedy or miserly. He bestowed his wealth upon the poor unceasingly. Because of the immense merit that he accumulated this way, he received an extensive retinue."

³¹ An ancient name for Sri Lanka.

³² See above, Chapter 1, n. 9.

Upon arriving at the site of the cetiya, the deva bowed down in adoration. He circumambulated three times, placed flowers at the eight directional points and made offerings of lights and fragrances. Then he seated himself at a place appropriate for a king, on a throne, where he remained.

...eko satthisahassaparivārehi... At that time a stately deva with 60,000 celestials surrounding him with delight and attending him came to the jewelled cetiya.

Malai asked, "Is that Metteyya coming, perhaps?

Indra replied, "No, it isn't."

Again Phra Malai asked about his past merit.

Indra explained, "This deva was Lord Abhayaduttha, King of Lanka.³³ He was a benevolent person, a patron of the Three Gems. He extolled the sacred teachings and revered the Three Gems with great zeal and faith. He looked after bodhi trees and took care of stupas constantly. He supported his mother and father and provided monastery buildings, food, and the four basic requisites to the eminent Sangha. He supported countless street musicians and beggars, giving abundantly without hesitation. He never grew tired of taking care of the needs of others. All the benefits of his generosity were without parallel. All his virtues were without peer. As a result, he was born in heaven with a glorious retinue and vast wealth."

³³ See Chapter 1, n. 10.

The deva approached with grandeur and majesty as he came to pay respect. He bowed down in reverence at the cetiya and presented candles, incense, and fine heavenly fragrances as offerings. He circumambulated three times and placed garlands of flowers at the eight directional points. Then, having completed the five-fold obeisance, he went to his proper place as the others had done before him.

...tada ēko sattatisahassaparivārehi... At that time another deva drew near to pay respect. In his retinue came 70,000, splendidly ornamented. Malai, the Refuge, inquired of Indra, pondering the same question as he had earlier.

The Head of the Devas replied as before by describing the past deeds of that deva. Indra said, "This deva was a young novice who practiced morality constantly. He took care of his spiritual teacher and always treated him with great respect. He would sit politely in his teacher's presence and massage him. He would sweep and clean the floor. He would spread out mats and fetch water. He would prepare incense and candles, and polish lamps to make them glisten. He would put oil and wicks in the lamps and light them. He would fold clothing. When he was finished, he would sit quietly and listen to his teacher's instruction. Without neglecting his duties he made offerings to the Three Gems and studied the Dhamma. He never lacked perseverance and he never wearied. At night he studied the Dhamma. During the day he took care of his teacher. The results of this merit can be seen in his magnificent glory."

The deva, arriving at the reliquary, paid homage with splendid celestial garlands, just as the other devas had done. When he had finished paying respect and presenting offerings, he sat down joyfully at the appropriate seat.

...eko as̄itisaḥassasehi... Subsequently, another deva approached majestically, coming to pay homage at the cetiya. His retinue numbered 80,000. Phra Malai asked Indra, "Is this Metteyya?"

The Thousand-Eyed One replied, "It is another."

Malai again asked the reason for his magnificence.

The Protective Head of the Devas, said, "This particular deva king was born into poverty. One day, seeing a mendicant monk going to collect alms, the man took his own food and presented it as an offering. Then he took containers and went along the streets and lanes, informing his neighbors, beckoning loudly to the people. He did his best to find them and encourage them to make offerings. The householders rejoiced and brought great quantities of food. Some gave food to the poor man [to present to the monk] resulting in an abundance of food. The man shared the fruit of his merit with others rather than doing it for himself alone. Merit like this enabled him to be born in heaven with possessions and wealth."

The deva arrived at the stupa and presented offerings of gold flowers and delicate fragrances. Then he paid respect, circumambulated the sapphire stupa, and seated himself according to rank on a dais, where he remained.

...eko navuttisahassaparivārehi... Another deva, endowed with extraordinary power and surrounded by a splendid retinue of 90,000, surging together on all sides of him, came to pay respect. Phra Malai, seeing the deva and knowing that he was not Metteyya, asked Indra about his past deeds.

[Indra], the Supporting Celestial, declared, "This great deva, when he lived in Lanka, saw a stupa containing a relic of the Buddha. He had faith of the highest degree. He paid homage, brought flowers, and scattered them about unceasingly. He offered his head as a lotus. He offered both his eyes in place of radiant golden lamps. He offered his voice to extol the scriptures, in place of the finest golden lamps and candles. He offered his heart eternally in place of fragrances. [All this he offered] to the precious Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Through the fruit of this mindful giving, he received supreme contentment in this heaven."

The great deva, upon reaching the flawlessly beautiful jewelled cetiya, paid reverence by bowing his head, offering fragrances, and circumambulating the site. Then he seated himself there.

...puna aññataro satasahassehi... Another deva, the highest of the assembly, attended by a tumultuous procession of 100,000 celestial women, came to pay respect at the hair relic. Phra Malai, seeing him, asked Kosiya, "Is that Si Ariya ?"

The Head of the Devas answered, "No."

Phra Malai said, "How did this deva make merit?"

The Lord of Tāvatimśa said, "When this deva lived in Anurādhapura, he was a poor man who earned his living by cutting grass and selling it. He was virtuous, he observed the Five Precepts, and had constant faith in the Threefold Refuge. Then one day, as he was walking along the bank of a stream, he discovered a great mass of sand and pebbles. The sand, pure white in color, glittered like molten precious metals. The man gathered it together, piled it into a mound, and formed it into a cetiya.³⁴ When he was finished, he was filled with joy. The cetiya glittered like a jewel; it was brilliant, luminous, sparkling, as resplendent as the rays of the sun. With exultation and delight, he brought flowers and scattered them about. Blissful and content, he bowed his head in obeisance. His gift was appropriate for a person of little means. He gave to the Sangha with resourcefulness. Pleased with what he had done, he paid respect in three ways, with speech and mind constantly.³⁵

³⁴ The building of sand cetiyas in Thailand and Laos is connected with the celebration of Songkhran, the traditional New Year, which is held in mid-April. For an account of texts and rituals related to this event, see Louis Gabaude, *Les Cetiya de Sable au Laos et en Thailande*, Paris, Publications de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Oriente, vol. cxviii, 1979.

³⁵ Here is an instance of poetic license; while the poet refers to the three means, or three avenue by which the deity paid respect, he specifies only two, mind and speech, omitting the third, body, presumably because it didn't fit the rhyme scheme.

Thus he enhanced his merit, enabling him to have a retinue of 100,000 and become a celestial lord."

When the deva reached the cetiya, he paid respect at the eight points, circumambulated, and presented blue flowers and splendid fragrances as offerings. Then he sat down at the proper place.

...tada metteyyo bodhisatto pana kotisatasahass ehi...

Then the Supreme Head of Tusita, the powerful Metteyya, the Great Refuge, drew near, walking majestically with a group of celestial women -- 100,000 *kotis* in number. Radiant as the seven-colored aura of the moon were their elegant fans, bodhi-leaf shaped sun shades, and multi-tiered umbrellas. Scattered throughout were plumes, fly whisks, and tail-hair fans swinging to and fro. Parasols of five colors, brilliant as peacocks, stood here and there, while pointed banners and peacock feathers swayed steadily in the breeze. In unison, the devas joined together to play music -- the thundrous cacophony of drums and gongs and the sweet refrain of a flute and a lute. Dancing and singing with great exultation, [each group] of devas sang in succession, on the right side and on the left.

The celestials were graceful and elegant, adorned with radiant gold waist chains, bracelets, and bandoliers a brilliant coral in color like the glow of the newly risen sun. Brightly glistening with light were their lustrous ornaments. All that could be seen were the celestials, surrounding and attending Metteyya. They carried garlands

of golden gem-like lotuses, incense, and candles like golden lamps. Strung together were red lotuses as well as white lotuses clothed in the color of the moon. Flowers of gold, riches, and jewels were brought by the endless stream of magnificent devas.

...tadā ariyametteyyo kotihi parivārito purato ca satam
kañña pacchato accharā satam dakkhinato satam kañña vāmato
ca accharā satam tāsam majjhe ca metteyyo tārā majjhe vā
candimā...³⁶

The Pre-eminent One was in their midst. The celestial women surrounding him, illuminating the sky with their brilliance, totaled a hundred thousand *kotis* in number. At the head of the procession, surrounding him joyfully, were twenty-five thousand *kotis*; on the right and on the left were an equal number. There were as many behind as in front, gathered together on all four sides in multifarious beauty, to form a retinue of one hundred thousand *kotis*. Diversely colored in their radiance, the entire group glowed with multi-hued luster: white, like the clear sparkle of diamonds; red, like the glowing orb of the sun; gold, like clear sunlight; and green, rivaling the color of emeralds. The devas formed four adjoining groups, each a different color -- on the right, on the left, in front, and behind.

Embellished with radiance, Metteyya at the center of
the retinue was like the moon casting a luminous glow

³⁶ This Pali passage, which is considerably longer than the others, draws attention to Metteyya's arrival.

through a cloud, illuminating it completely -- so magnificent was his splendor. The chosen celestials encircled the Most Esteemed One like a constellation of stars. Their exquisitely jewelled ornaments, as radiant as sunlight, reflected the beauty of their clear complexions. Fine, delicate adornments and gems enhanced their loveliness. Their luminescent brilliance was as magnificent as ten thousand suns, blazing with radiance. Adorned with splendor, endowed with glory, the celestials had Metteyya, the One of Supreme Virtue, as their lord. His glory extended ten thousand *yojanas*, outshining the radiance of the sun. The splendor of the Adorned One was an intense gold that outshone the magnificence of the heavenly spectrum. It was like the color of the sun and ten million splendidous moons, illuminating each of the six heavens. The heavens shone with the light cast by the multifold grace of all the devas, arrayed in the radiance of the supreme one, drawing all eyes to their beauty. Devas of every rank, outshone by Metteyya, bowed down in respect.

...thero āha... Phra Malai gazed at the adorned Bodhisatta and seeing that he was exceedingly wonderous, asked the Wielder of the Vajra, "Is that Phra Metteyya?"

The Lord of the Devas answered, "Yes, it is Phra Si Ariya and his entire retinue."

The venerable thera continued, "O Thousand-Eyed Refuge, the host of celestials preceding Phra Metteyya are arrayed completely in white. Their clothing, jewelry, and their

brilliant ornaments are all white in color, like diamonds, glittering and gleaming. How have they made merit?"

Indra, the Victorious One, explained to Malai, "These celestial women previously performed acts of merit in the finest way. They presented offerings that were completely white in color. Cloth, mats, food, fragrances, flowers -- all were spotlessly pure and white. They made daily offerings to the precious Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, Field of Merit. They observed the Five Precepts regularly and the Eight Precepts on *uposatha* days. With the abundance of merit attained in this way, they were reborn as devas. Thus they have attained what you see here."

...thero ahā... The thera asked, "Oh Lord of Tāvatimsa Heaven, all of the devas on the right of the Great Lord are completely arrayed in yellow, the shade of gold. Their necklaces and bandoliers, their radiant bodies, their clothing and crowns and fragrant flowers are all the same wonderful golden hue. How did they make merit?"

Great Indra, Bringer of Merit, said, "When these blessed celestial women performed acts of merit, they would use the color yellow. They gave lustrous cloth, mats, fragrances, food, and flowers -- all completely yellow in color. They presented offerings unceasingly to the eternally powerful Three Gems, and they observed the Five Precepts. For performing their duties so faithfully in this way, they became as bright as the brilliant sun adorning the

Refuge of the Three Worlds, the color of an infinite expanse of gold."

...thero āha... [Phra] Malai then turned to ask Indra about the elegant devas on the left, saying, "Completely crimson in color, their complexions are as lustrous as jewels, their faces are as lovely as if sprinkled with powder made from fine gems. Golden necklaces, waist chains, and bracelets encircle them with brilliance. Arrayed in glittering jewels, as fragrant as flowers, all a vivid shade of red, they are as radiant as the resplendent sun. Richly adorned, they stand in procession and wait on him. How did the merit of these devas come to be?"

Indra, the Supreme Deva of Tāvatimsa, replied, "These flower-like maidens made merit by presenting garlands of bright red flowers, red sandalwood, pure fragrances, cloth, cushions and mats, and an assortment of wonderful foods, all of a red hue, pleasing and plentiful. They presented gifts to the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, Field of Merit. They listened to the Dhamma on uposatha days. These celestial maidens made merit completely. For this reason, for the fruit of these good deeds, their glory came into being. Splendorous as the sun, appropriate adornments for the Bodhisatta, they are magnificent to behold."

...thero āha... Phra Malai then asked the Supremely Powerful Celestial about the host of joyful maidens in the back rows of the glittering procession. "As green as emeralds are their perfumes, flowers, and gems; their

ornaments and clothing are the color of emeralds. Crowns and necklaces decorate them. Exquisitely jeweled bracelets, rings, and bandoliers encircle them. The golden necklaces, waist chains, anklets, and bright adornments accentuating their beautiful figures sparkle with a deep green luster, rivaling that of a green lotus, as lovely as the lambent full moon. How did they make merit in the past?"

The Supremely Powerful Celestial explained fully, saying, "These beautiful women, as graceful as dancers, made merit in their past lives by presenting cloth and food, perfumes and fragrant flowers, all bright green in color. With elegance and grace they made perpetual offerings to the precious Buddha who supports the Dhamma, and who is the head of the excellent Sangha. They observed the Five Precepts regularly, [and the Eight Precepts] on uposatha days. They paid respect to the Buddha (Jinaraja) and were not lacking in meritorious deeds. As a result of these good acts, they all became completely resplendent with these radiant green jewels and treasures, with which adorn the Supreme Lord of the brahmas."

...thero tam sutvā tāsam puññakammam pasamsanto...

Phra Malai, glancing at the Bodhisatta, asked the Lord of the Heavens, "The Supreme Protector of the World; the Glorious, Honorable King; the Radiant, Prosperous, Magnificent Omniscient One; the Auspicious One who has attained a state even higher, even greater even than that of the sun-like Indra in Tusita Heaven -- by what means did he

achieve this end, becoming famous and powerful? Please tell me."

The Lord of the Vajra replied, "I am not wise enough [to answer you completely]. To use a metaphor, I would say that my wisdom is like a small hare probing the depth of the sea.³⁷ It is like a blind man trying to descend³⁸ from a mountain top. Similarly, I can describe the perfections of Metteyya the Supreme Deva only in a limited way. There are three types of "Perfected Buddhas"³⁹ : the first excels in wisdom, the second excels in faith, and the third excels in energy. Metteyya is among those excelling in energy. He accumulated merit in this way, paying homage in three ways, that is, through mind, speech, and body. He was steadfast in right conduct in all three ways, over a long period of time. And he completed the Five Great Sacrifices, which is a difficult accomplishment. To name them specifically,

³⁷ This comparison between Indra's wisdom and a rabbit's legs is a reference to a metaphor explained to me by Sommai Premchit. Just as a rabbit's legs are so short they could never touch the bottom of the ocean, Indra's wisdom is so limited that he could never explain the depth of the matter he is being asked by Phra Malai.

³⁸ In the *Maleyyadevatthera-vatthu* the image is one of a blind man trying to climb to the top of a mountain.

³⁹ I have taken liberties in translating this difficult section of the text. The Thai reads "Phuttha paramet" (Pali: *Buddha paramesa*). The concept of three types of bodhisattas seems to be confined to Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhism. It is also mentioned in the *Dasa-Bodhisatta-Udessa*, Texts Pali publie avec une traduction et un index grammatical par Francois Martini, 367-368; and in *Dasavatthupakarana* ed. and trans. by J. Ver Eecke, EFEQ, v. 108 (1976) 133.

they are material goods, which he bestowed with noble intentions; his wife whom he offered without grieving; his children whom he gave with away firm resolve; his own flesh and blood, which he sacrificed without attachment; and even his own life, which he gave up [completely]. He was not selfish or greedy in completing all Five Great Sacrifices.

And he completed the Ten Perfections,⁴⁰ which consist of generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, fortitude, patience under opposition, truthfulness, resolution, loving kindness, and equanimity. Each of these ten items can be further divided into three groups: the ten ordinary perfections, the ten superior perfections, and the ten supreme perfections, totaling thirty in all. Metteyya, having completed them fully, with energy, can expect the ultimate joy of becoming a Buddha, resplendent and omniscient.

As for reckoning these infinite virtues, it is not within my power to describe them. They are incomparable. I will discuss only part according to my ability; I am not able to do it completely. The virtues of an incipient Buddha are infinite. The pure accumulated merit leading to omniscience is difficult to reckon in time and cannot really be described."

⁴⁰ This passage has proved to be particularly difficult to render into English. The Perfections are as follows: *dāna, sīla, nekkhamma, paññā, viriyā, khanti sacca, adhitthāna, metta, upekkhā*.

...tayo hi bodhisattā... "There are three types of Bodhisattas, those who have accomplished the essentials of enlightenment completely. One type of future Buddha is he who excels in wisdom.⁴¹ After he accomplishes the Perfections for four asemkheyas and 100,000 mahākappas, completely as required, then it becomes apparent that he is replete with the essentials of enlightenment and he becomes a Buddha. These are the ones excelling in wisdom," he told him.

...eko saddhādhiko... "Another type of Bodhisatta excels in faith. He accomplishes the Perfections over a period of eight asemkheyas and 100,000 kappas. When he has completed them, it becomes apparent that he should attain enlightenment. This type is called the *saddhādhika*, following the tradition of the previous Buddha."

...metteyyo bodhisatto... "The virtuous Lord Metteyya, having completed the Perfections, is known as one who excels in energy.⁴² He accumulated the essential elements of enlightenment for a full sixteen asemkheyas and 100,000 kappas. Having completed the Perfections, he came to dwell in glorious Tusita Heaven for 96 kotis and six million years. When the Perfections are complete, he will come down to the human realm. The excellent one, pure in every

⁴¹ *paññādhika*

⁴² *viriyādhika*

respect, after completing the requisites of a Buddha, will become enlightened.

As for the eminent group of qualities, the incomparable ones that enable him to attain the necessary amount of merit to become a Buddha, they are beyond reckoning. I who have insufficient wisdom cannot describe them completely. I cannot do it fully, as I showed you earlier. Just listen to the extent that I am able to tell and learn accordingly."

...metteyyo bodhisatto... While the arhat was speaking with Lord Sakka, King of the Devas, at his throne, the Bodhisatta, together with the devas of his retinue, arrived in Tāvatimsa at the jewelled Cūlāmani Cetiya. They bowed down in respect, circumambulated three times, and performed the five-fold obeisance. They bowed their heads in reverence at all directional points and made offerings of flowers and sweet fragrances, scattering them at each place. And assembling five kinds of musical instruments⁴³ they sang and played music, presenting it as an offering at the Cūlāmani Cetiya. Then Metteyya went over to the easterly direction, sat down, and paid respect to Phra Malai.

"Where have you come from?" he asked him.

Phra Malai said, "O Great Flawless King, I live in the human realm. I have come to pay respect at the Cūlāmani Cetiya."

⁴³ The five instruments may refer to a *phi phat*, or Thai classical musical ensemble, which consists of wind instruments, xylophones, gongs, drums, and cymbals.

...bhante...Jambudīpe manussānam kim vattamānam... Phra Metteyya said, "Oh Venerable Mahāthera, what is life like for the people of Jambudipa?"

Phra Malai answered, "In the human realm, on earth, people live in various different circumstances.⁴⁴ Some people earn their living through trade. Some are totally impoverished; some are immensely wealthy. Some are filled with happiness; some suffer from unhappiness. Some are handsome; some are coarse and ill-born. Some live to an old age. Some die young.

...samiddhā appaka honti... "Few are wealthy; many are poor. Few are happy; many are sorrowful. Few are beautiful; many are ill-favored. Those who live long are rare; those who die young are numerous. Humans are few in number; animals are plentiful. As for all of the people, those who carry on trade and those who till the soil, they work very hard to earn a living."

...bodhisatto therassa vācanam sutvā... The Bodhisatta responded, "Do the people of the human realm perform acts of merit or are they entangled in unwholesome acts?"

The mahathera replied, "The people of Jambu make very little merit, while their demerit is great."

Phra Metteyya asked, "How do the people of Jambudipa make merit?"

⁴⁴ In the version of the Pali *Maleyyadēvattheravatthu* translated by Denis and Supaporn, Phra Malai states that people are born according to their past *kamma*.

Phra Malai explained, "They do it in [many] different ways. Some give alms in great abundance. Some uphold the precepts. Some people practice generosity by building ordination halls and stupas. Some have Buddha images cast. Some have image halls built. Some have great numbers of monasteries built where the Sangha can reside during the rainy season. Some do it by presenting robes to the monks at *Kathina*. Some people present food to the monks. Some give medicine to monks who are ill. Some plant bodhi trees, build reliquaries, monasteries, diases, and cloisters. Some donate the eight requisites of a monk and give the finest food and financial support. Some follow the ten-fold wholesome course of action.⁴⁵ Some observe spiritual practices. Some take care of their fathers. Some look after the needs of monks. Some serve their mothers who protected and nurtured them. Some make offerings at funerals on behalf of deceased relatives and transfer the merit to all those who have died. Some make offerings to the Three Gems with great faith. Some have their own sons become monks, the sons whom they love above all else. Some adopt sons as acts of merit and have them become monks. Some people go constantly to make offerings before Buddha images. Some build bridges and pavilions. Some build

⁴⁵ *kusala dasa kammapatha*, i.e. avoiding 1) destroying life, 2) stealing, 3) sexual misconduct, 4) lying, 5) malicious speech, 6) harsh language, 7) frivolous talk, 8) covetousness, 9) ill will, 10) wrong views; see Phra Thepwithi, 277-278.

shelters for the homeless. Some dig ponds and wells. Some build roads. Some build dwellings and dining halls for the Sangha. These are the ways in which merit is attained. The people have faith according to their individual abilities. With faith in their hearts they make merit, according to their own abilities as I have described it here."

...bhante Jambudīpamanussā... Phra Metteyya said to the exalted [Phra] Malai, "The people on earth make merit in great abundance, and then they make a wish. What is it that they hope for? Please tell me."

Phra Malai answered with in this way. "The inhabitants of the human realm all make a great amount of merit and they always dedicate it to meeting you. They hope to meet you and wish to be united with you when you have attained enlightenment. They want to transcend *samsāra*; they hope for it constantly. They want to meet you at that time. They say, 'Through the power of the merit resulting from practicing *dāna*, if I should die, may I not go to hell. May I meet Phra Si Ariya Metteyya when he comes to be reborn on this world and becomes enlightened as a Buddha. Oh, please may I meet him.' Every person wishes this. When they finish their merit-making practices, each one of them, everywhere on earth, thinks of you and awaits you."

...bodhisatto Jambudīpamanussānam... Phra Metteyya, hearing this message, was overjoyed and delighted with this pure faith. Gratified and pleased that the people made merit, he gave Phra Malai a message to take to them. "When

you go back to Jambudipa, please be sure to give them this message. Tell those who can be taught that if they want to meet me, they should pay homage by respectfully following these instructions. Advise them to participate in the Maha Chat⁴⁶ without ceasing, making offerings of a thousand of each item. Have them finish in one day, setting up a thousand lanterns and a total of a thousand lotuses, indigo flowers, and *madar[va]* blossoms, as well as candles, flags, and umbrellas. There should be a thousand of each of these articles of merit-making. Poor people should do whatever they are able to do to pay reverence. Advise them to listen respectfully to a thousand verses of the Dhamma until they complete the lesson of King Vessantara, who in a previous life fulfilled all the requisites of Buddhahood to the highest degree. By following the Dhamma completely they will meet me when I come to be reborn and become enlightened. Those people will be on time for my religion and will meet me face to face. They will become arhats accomplished in the Dhamma through the merit they have accumulated in these various ways."

...iti vatvā pana pāpamanussānam... Phra Metteyya, the Great Refuge, continued, "Many people commit numerous sins that will prevent them from being [born] at the time of my religion. They commit the Five Grievous Offences, namely: cohabiting with nuns, instigating disputes and dissension

⁴⁶ The Vessantara Jātaka.

within the Sangha, cutting down bodhi trees, allowing stupas to fall into ruin, letting images become dilapidated, causing Bodhisattas to die a violent death, and killing [members of] the Sangha. Those who do not make merit, but who are selfish with their wealth; those who are negligent due to ignorance -- people like that will not be able to meet me when I come to be enlightened in the Three Worlds."

When Phra Malai heard what had been said so eloquently, he replied, "O Eminent Wise Refuge, when is it that will you come to the human realm to be enlightened?"

Phra Metteyya answered immediately, "Oh Great Arhat, when the sacred teachings of the eminent Gotama, Lord of the World, have been in existence for 5,000 years, they will disappear and become completely destroyed. The whole world will become scattered and dispersed. Defilement will predominate and virtue will decline. The human race will degenerate. Everyone will lose their sense of shame. Then there will occur an epidemic of incest within families -- with one's mother and daughter, sister and granddaughter -- resembling the mating of foxes and pigs, dogs and goats. With their perceptions so distorted, they will not be ashamed to sin so audaciously. Like animals in heat they will be burning with lust. [This] immorality will cause the lifespan of living beings to decrease. What was originally a hundred years will gradually diminish to ten years. People will marry at the age of five. It will be a time of cruelty, savagery, and confusion, known as the

*Satthantarakappa*⁴⁷ or *Mikhasannyikappa*.⁴⁸ People will be promiscuous, without regard for family ties. There will be enmity and animosity among them. Gathering in angry mobs, some of them carrying clubs, they will brandish their weapons as they run. Slashing and striking at each other, they will scatter, dying on all sides. Blood will flow until it is deep enough to wade through, like flood water inundating the seas. Relatives -- sons and daughters -- wives and husbands -- will become enemies with one another. Provoked and angry with each other, they will slash each other to death, annihilating nearly the entire human race.

"Wise people, however, when they see that the Kaliyuga has suddenly occurred, bringing sorrow and suffering, will flee from the cataclysm, and retreat into the forest. In caves and caverns they will take refuge, staying in solitude where they cannot be seen, observing the Dhamma each day. Those who remain outside will die to the last of them in countless numbers.

"After seven days have gone by, the people who have retreated to caves will emerge from their dwellings and look at one another. Those who have survived will sit down and

⁴⁷ Cp. the *Cakkavatta-Sīhanāda-Suttanta*, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 71, n. 2: "Sattha is sword; antarakappa is a period included in another period."

⁴⁸ The *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda-Suttanta* contains a line that reads, "Just as a sportsman feels towards the game that he sees, so will they feel." (*Dialogues of the Buddha*, 71). N. 1 explains the word *migo*, deer, which can mean all game, or wild animals. The implication is that this will be a period when all people act like wild animals.

invite each other to talk with friendship and affection. They will embrace one another - virtuous people, all of them. They will urge one another, 'Let us do good deeds and observe the precepts without interruption.⁴⁹ Let us not plunder or cause torment. Let us not indulge in adultery, nor lying, nor drinking. Let this be a way of life for us. Let us not slander others or hurt their feelings. Let us be patient, controlling anger and abusive language. Let us not be rash or resentful without reflection. Let us not hold wrong views. Let us associate with friends who are honest. Let us not be negligent or careless. Let us aspire to a moral life and share the fruit of our merit with both hell and heaven to the very limits of the universe.'

"It is said that the human life span, which had been limited to ten years, will gradually increase to twenty years. Future generations will eventually live beyond thirty years. Through the gradual accumulation of merit, the human life span will increase greatly, reaching one hundred years."

...anukkamena dvivassasatāyukā... "As the people of the world strive to make merit, their sons, daughters, and succeeding generations will have increasingly longer lives - one hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, reaching one hundred thousand years and going beyond the bounds of infinity. The limits in age will be reached only when

⁴⁹ The lines that follow enumerate the Five Silas.

people become oblivious to old age, suffering, and death, because they will be so deeply immersed in pleasure. The limitless human life span will then gradually begin to decrease and return to what it was originally.⁵⁰

When the age of people reaches 80,000 years, a torrent of celestial rain will pour down every half-month. Cascading down at midnight, it will strike the surface of the earth, cooling it and fertilizing it with its essence. The continent of Jambu will then appear, flourishing with vegetation: climbing plants and vines heavily laden with flowers; trees sending up shoots that pierce the sky; clusters of flowers mingled together; ripe yellow fruits that drop from branches bent like bows under their weight; leaves so green in color they rival the brilliance of emeralds; fruit as beautiful as if artfully painted. Bees will drink the nectar of unfolding flowers, savoring it and

⁵⁰ Compare a similar passage in a recension of the Sinhalese *Anāgatavāmsa Desanā* recently translated by Udaya Meddegama: "on account of continuously improving virtues, the age limit will increase to [asamkheyya]....In that time, the human world will surpass even the heavens with regard to age....And so, people will generally forget when they were born, nor will they know when they are about to die. They will experience neither old age or decay; nor will they suffer from illness. Without realizing the cause of happiness or suffering, people will not be interested in making acts of merit; consequently, their ages will gradually decrease to eighty thousand years; maidens of five hundred years will marry lads of the same age; the whole of [Jambudipa] will have food in plenty, many useful goods, and all of the five types of comfort. Fortnightly at midnight, the rain will nurture the fertility of the earth. And by that time, the name of the city of Mandara will be changed to the kingdom of Ketumati." *Anāgatavāmsa Desanā*, 35-36).

bathing noisily in its essence. Fragile petals will slowly unfurl, and slender stems will stretch upward toward the clouds. The breeze will dance through the tops of the trees, causing the rustling of leaves to resound throughout the shady forest, like the sound of falling water. The wind will sweep through the branches, swinging and swaying them to and fro. Flowers and leaves will wave in the wind, scattering fine particles of pollen. The scent will become widespread over the ground, the rich fragrance diffused as if someone had perfumed the earth by strewing flowers over it. Brilliant grass, four inches long, even and fine, will sparkle like the elegant throat of a peacock. The surface of the earth will be as smooth as a drumhead, flat, with no stumps or stakes visible, as if it had been leveled."

...*gamanigama samākinno*... "The people of the countryside will flourish. The houses lining the road will be thickly populated, and so close together that if a fowl swooped down, it could fly from one roof to the next. As for the capital city, it will be teeming with people, as prosperous as heaven, replete with wealth and power. The treasury will be filled to overflowing with silver, gold, and beautiful cloth.

A Solar King⁵¹ will come to the throne, endowed with the Seven Precious Things,⁵² with an entourage assembled

⁵¹ Here I have translated Solar King from the Thai *suriya aphisek*; Pali: *Suriya Abhiseka*). In the Sinhalese *Anāgatavāmsa Desanā* (45) and the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda-Suttanta* (*Dialogues of the Buddha*, 60) he is referred to as

around him. In an instant he will surround every country, every district, with felicity and bliss. All of the rulers will be free from worry about food supplies. Grain will be plentiful. The people will have an abundance of food and possessions to enjoy. Fish and meat will be abundant, and the people will enjoy a good life. Those born at that time will be content and full of mutual love, as if they were all of one family.

"Wives and husbands will live in harmony. They will not get angry or annoyed with one another, but will enjoy a state of married bliss. They won't have to work in farming or trade, but will be fully content. Both men and women will enjoy great happiness. They will partake of the fruit of wishing trees. They won't need to work hard, but will be content with taking care of themselves. Their clothes will be sparkling, delicate, and lustrous. The most wonderful ornaments will adorn their bodies, which will be as youthful and attractive as those of apsarases. Their wealth will equal that of the inhabitants of heaven. Women will never have two husbands. Men will have only one wife. They will never go about seeking a second wife, nor will they ever commit adultery or secretly admire another man's

Sanka. Several lines further in the present text, the king is referred to as *cōm¹ cak²*, literally, the "highest wheel."

52 The Seven Precious Things are enumerated in the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda-Suttanta* as "the Wheel, the Elephant, the Horse, the Gem, the Woman, the Housefather, the Counsellor" (*Dialogues of the Buddha*, 60).

wife. They will live with one wife until death with love, intimacy, and tenderness. They will love one another and take care of each other at all times."

*...yadā khattiyaṁ amaccā senāmattadayo pañcasilani
rakkhanti...* "As for the kings, the officials, and all of the common people, women and men of every class, they will encourage each other to uphold the Five Precepts without ever ceasing. There will be no danger of punishment. People will not be angry or malicious, nor will they bear ill feelings toward any other living being, whether it be a higher or lower form of life. They will not be vengeful, but will be patient with each other. They will have only good will and loving kindness toward one another.

"Flocks of crows and owls will fondly caress each other. Cats will watch mice lovingly. The mongoose will take delight in the snake. The tiger will be content with admiring the deer. The lion will be trusted by the hog deer. Creatures of all varieties will be full of affection for one another. There will arise a genuine friendliness, clear and pure. People will be full of unceasing rapture and delight. They will invite each other to play music together, forming an orchestra of gongs and drums, striking them joyfully. They will sing and play the oboe skillfully and pluck stringed instruments to make pleasing music.

"Every night and day they will beat drums, dance, and compose poetry⁵³ of various forms for entertainment. They will play joyfully for a long time. Like the inhabitants of heaven enjoying prosperity, they will hear pleasant sounds, see beautiful sights, and partake of ten kinds of succulent food.

"Another matter concerns grain.⁵⁴ From each seed of grain that falls to the ground, a bright green sprout will arise, bursting into a thousand shoots and spreading into a thousand plants, each producing a thousand heads of grain. Two measures of grain will increase a thousandfold. A single seed will yield a vast amount; if reckoned by carts that are filled to overflowing, it would reach two thousand, two hundred, forty-odd carts, plus sixteen pots and sixteen measures exactly.⁵⁵ It is not an accident that the grain grows by itself, becomes sweeter, and harvests and winnows itself. What has been described about the grain occurs because of the merit that people made in the past.

⁵³ The poet actually mentions three types of Thai poetry: *khloong*¹, *kaap*², and *kloon*¹, presumably for their alliterative value. While each word is the name of a specific poetic form, when used in pairs or in a group, the term means "poetry in general."

⁵⁴ The text uses the word *pho⁴cha⁴na⁴saa⁵lili¹*, literally "wheat," but the theme of a kind of self-generating rice that grows without human effort is reminiscent of that found in the *Agañña-Suttanta* (*Dialogues of the Buddha*, 84-85).

⁵⁵ The *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu* translated by Denis and Supaporn specifies 2270 cartloads. See Denis, "Traduction" 51, and Supaporn 212.

...yadā khattiyā brāhmaṇā vessa ca...

"As for the rulers and kings, they won't have conflicts and quarrels. Nor will they try to seize the territory of another. The kings of each city will be on friendly terms with one another. They will travel from capital to capital, visiting each other and bestowing gifts upon one another. Kings will live in harmony. They will not oppress their citizens by confiscating their property on behalf of the crown. Neither cattle nor buffalo, neither elephants nor horses, nor slaves--nothing--will be taken from anyone. The rulers will be magnanimous and sincerely concerned about others. No one from any level of society will seize fields or villages, dwellings or orchards, shops, buildings, or any other place. No one will think of stealing or plundering. Fierce predatory animals, lions, and other forms of life, including snakes, will not bother anyone. Lice, mosquitoes, and poisonous caterpillars will not exist at that time.

"As for *gandhabbas*, as well as *yakkas*⁵⁶ and other nonhuman beings, they will not be cruel or oppressive because everyone will be virtuous as a result of the goodness of people everywhere on earth. No one will have wrong views or unwholesome thoughts. Everyone will earn their living honestly. They will have perseverance, wisdom, and knowledge of the arts. They will not be ill, diseased, or in pain, nor will they be crippled. Among the entire

⁵⁶ Varieties of earth and tree spirits that are believed to exist by some South and Southeast Asian peoples.

population of the world, there will be none who are dwarfed, hunchbacked, paralyzed, weak, blind, deaf, mute, or mad. Those conditions won't exist among the people at that time. There will be only constant joy and tranquility. Through their previous good works, the people will accumulate a wealth of merit equal to that of the gods in heaven.

...tadā bhante dasasahassa cakkavālavaśinam... "O Lord, everyone on earth will enjoy a state of bliss. At that time an assembly of Makhapan's celestials from 10,000 universes will gather together and come to invite me to come down to be born in order to be enlightened. At that time, when I have heard them, I will pause to consider five important matters.⁵⁷ These are: the former lives of the mother and the father, the city, the country, and the age of the mother. When I have finished deliberating completely, I will accept the invitation and descend into the human realm and become enlightened as a Buddha. I have already fulfilled the Perfections. Let me describe them to you, from the beginning until complete at this time.

"The Perfections are extraordinary, diverse, infinite. For sixteen *asamkheyas* and 100,000 kappas as a Bodhisatta of great energy, I practiced generosity, morality, and meditation constantly, without interruption, as a way of life. I gave my head together with my diamond crown, which

⁵⁷ Five matters a Bodhisatta must consider before he comes down to be reborn. See Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970) 294.

is pure and flawless. [As a result,] when I attain enlightenment, everyone's bodies will be magnificent; no one will be deformed. I gave my eyes, which are brilliant and black, to satisfy a beggar. I presented them as a gift that would last a long time -- one hundred thousand *kotis* of *kappas*. [As a result,] when I reach enlightenment, the eyes of all beings will be glowing with light. Those who are blind will not be in darkness, but will be in radiant light. And I gave myself, my own body. I gave until there was nothing left. [As a result,] when I attain enlightenment, all beings will be graceful and without flaw. Those who were crippled will be healed. Their bodies will become elegant and handsome. I never spoke falsely. [As a result,] when I am a protective sage endowed with the ten powers, the people of the three worlds will not be mute.

"I listened to the message of the Dhamma; in addition, when a beggar asked for money, I listened willingly. I didn't avoid practicing generosity. [As a result,] when I reach the state of enlightenment, no one in the world will be deaf. Furthermore, I gave my beautiful eyes to those who were virtuous. When I am enlightened, people will not be blind. Their eyes will be radiantly clear. When I practiced generosity, I did it in a dignified, sincere manner. [As a result,] when I become enlightened, people will not be bent and twisted with old age [but will] be elegant and graceful in form. I gave medicine to the sick. When I am the highest refuge of the world, there will be no

diseases afflicting people all across the land. I radiated loving kindness in all directions, not allowing danger to trouble anyone. When I reach the highest state of knowledge, Māra will not come to attack. I practiced generosity, satisfying those who wanted it.

"Everything I gave was appreciated -- rice, water, every detail. When I am enlightened, all beings will have great wealth and all the possessions that they desire. I distributed clothing as a flawless gift. When I become enlightened as a Buddha, people who are born at that time will be attractive and delightful in appearance through the merit that I have made. I gave elephants, horses, and carriages, splendidly caparisoned with ornaments of gold, as well as palanquins and ships to enable them to transcend suffering. When I perceive the ten excellent powers [of a Buddha], people will be full of joy. They will not be indebted to anyone. They will not be slaves who have to redeem their freedom with riches. They will have power. I radiated loving kindness everywhere, directing it evenly over the entire world without bias. When I am enlightened, all beings will love one another as if they all belonged to the same family. I gave food in great abundance; pure, cool water; and vast amounts of silver and gold. When I attain the ultimate path as a teacher at the summit of the world, water will flow in a clear stream, delightfully cool and sweet, filled right up to the edge of the bank, plentiful but not overflowing. It will be this way constantly. As

for my profuse merit, I gave away my entire fortune, the amount of which cannot be reckoned. When I know the Threefold Refuge, people will be content with the wealth that I distribute with generosity. I myself, in the past, gave things that delight the senses -- material objects, sounds, tastes, scents, mats -- generously, carefully decorated, and pleasing to those who wanted them. I gave unceasingly by the tens of millions. When I am enlightened, people will be handsome and well-formed. They will enjoy the five sensual pleasures to a greater degree than the devas partaking of heaven.

"As a result of my listening attentively to the Dhamma, when I am enlightened, people will be able to perceive the meaning of the Dhamma. I led a virtuous life. Therefore, all beings will be virtuous and will succeed in following the precepts. I committed myself to practicing generosity and upholding the precepts. I hope to put an end to sensual defilements to practice good works, and to accumulate merit without ceasing. I am determined to help living beings cross over the flood of *samsara*, which is fraught with danger. This is the condition of the world. That is to say, it is a wide expanse of water. It is delusion,⁵⁸ causing darkness, hindering beings, delaying them, causing them to continue in the cycle of rebirth. The words

58 *moha*

ignorance,⁵⁹ false views,⁶⁰ sense desire,⁶¹ and renewed existence,⁶² -- these are known as the flood waters that are difficult to cross.⁶³ They are Māra's trap, his way of obstructing beings, of overwhelming them, of binding them, and preventing them from becoming liberated. I, having accumulated merit for a long period of time, hope to rescue living beings by taking them to ships, which are the perfections that I have completed. I will not let them sink into a state of suffering like that of the asuras, petas, animals, or hell beings. I will free them from their fears and bonds. I will break the fetters of Māra that bind them, that oppress living beings, that cause them to cling to unwholesome acts. These [bonds] are delusion, lack of shame, lack of moral dread (not fearing to sin), unrest, greed, wrong views, conceit, hatred, jealousy, stinginess, worry, sloth, torpor, and lack of faith in the Three Gems.

"These are the fourteen unwholesome mental factors⁶⁴ that cause beings to continue in the cycle of rebirth and lead them to the eight abysses of hell: Sañjīva, where they

59 *avijjā*

60 *dittha*

61 *kāma*

62 *bhava*

63 *ogha*

64 The Thai term *sip¹ siil¹ sa²kad²* ("fourteen hindrances") is used in this instance to refer to the cetasika akusala which are listed in the text.

suffer from intense heat continuously; Kālasutta, where they lie down in a row and are beaten; Tāpanaraka, where the leaves of trees are sharp blades of fire; Mahātāpa, a similar abyss; Saṅghāta with smoke and piercing flames; Rorupa, ablaze with flashing flames; Mahārorupa, where they smolder until cooked; Avīci, with flames issuing forth intensely.

"[Human] beings don't know about these dangers. I will reveal the Dhamma to them and have them see the horrors of hell. Those beings who are inclined to cling to the cycle of samsāra will be reborn and die again. They will remain worried about their sons and daughters as well as their material possessions, their slaves, animals, and everything they own. They will cling to these things. Defilement will grow up and entrap them. Craving⁶⁵ will entangle them. Attachment will hold them, binding them tightly together. I will reveal the Dhamma, enabling them to perceive the impermanent khandas, which cause extreme suffering and distress. I will advise them to let go of their attachment both to material possessions and children so that they will not be held back. I will enable them to see the impermanence of everything and develop wisdom according to the ten principles of insight⁶⁶ in order to dispel

65 tanhā

66 Phra Thepwethi explains the ten aspects of *vipassana ñāna*, or insight knowledge as follows: 1) knowledge of contemplation on rise and fall; 2) knowledge of contemplation on dissolution; 3) knowledge of the appearance

ignorance. I will lead humans and gods, the entire universe, into the realms of my knowledge. I will use my extraordinary wisdom as a weapon to sever completely the bonds that entrap beings, and I will free them from these shackles. I will take them to the realm of bliss. I will inform them about the conditions that are wrong, that is to say, the sixty-two false doctrines.⁶⁷

"I will open the door and reveal the Eightfold Path as the way and have them see clearly the essence of the Dhamma. I will reveal it and enable them to see the path to nibbāna, which is tranquil and secure, which is filled with contentment and devoid of suffering. I will have them see it through the Dhamma. All beings will all attain the state of stream enterers until eventually becoming arhats. Then they will enter the abode of nibbāna through my accumulated merit. I will lead the beings of the world to the perfection [of nibbāna].

...evañ ca pana vatvā bodhisatto yathāham bhante vadāmi... Then the great Lord Metteyya, having finished revealing the pleasant words of the sermon to Phra Malai, went to pay homage. Bringing his fingertips together, he bowed with both his hands joined like a seven-jewelled lotus

as terror 4) knowledge of contemplation on disadvantages; 5) knowledge of contemplation on dispassion; 6) knowledge of the desire for deliverance; 7) knowledge of reflective contemplation; 8) knowledge of equanimity regarding all formations; 9) conformity knowledge; 10) comprehension knowledge (268-269.)

⁶⁷ *micchāditthi*

above his sacred crown, which glowed like brilliant crystal quartz. Bowing his head and raising his hands in a gesture of respect, he joyfully performed the fivefold obeisance. Prostrating his radiant body at the eight directional points, he circumabmulated the blue-jewelled Cūlāmani Cetiya with delight. Then he paid respect to the noble arhat, and bid him farewell.

He departed serenely with the great assembly of celestial women in his retinue, 100,000 *kotis* in number. The blessed noble celestials, bright and clear-skinned, scattered about in great numbers, were like stars circling the splendorous moon, like a stream of water flowing into the ocean, as brilliant as jewels with the radiant light of the Supreme One. Rays of light from the circle of retainers shone with pure faith. Their sparkling crowns, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, bandoliers, and other beautiful ornaments sparkled like the colors of the rainbow, converging in crystalline rays, as clear as the lustrous moon. The east side glittered with gems; the south was radiant with faith; the west shone with gold; the north abounded with beautiful women. They encircled him, the one of supreme virtue, surrounding him with beauty, accompanying him to Tusita Heaven, like golden *hamsas* ascending in infinite numbers.

...yathā pi sīho pavarō migānam... Like a lion-king, surrounded by a pride of lions, like a powerful sovereign attended by tributary kings; like Maghavala, the peerless

Indra, surrounded by a multitude of deities; like the golden Meru encircled by seven mountains; like the ocean, crowned with elixir; like a graceful wish-bestowing tree amidst a dense grove of ordinary trees; like a brilliant white gem-like lotus surrounded by a profusion of red lotuses; like a prominent world emperor receiving the homage of kings; like a mountain of fire emitting brilliant rays of light -- so glorious was the pre-eminent splendor of Lord Metteyya. The immense gathering of celestials surged together in departure, swelling like waves made up of infinite flecks of froth. It was a sight that filled one with awe. The tumultuous sound of the multitude burst forth from earth to sky and echoed throughout the universe as the celestials called out in unison, "Sadhu! Sadhu!" As splendidous as a thousand suns, Metteyya went beyond Tāvatimsa. When he arrived at Tusita Heaven, he ascended the foremost celestial abode and ruled there, enjoying complete peace and happiness.

...tasmin khane yeva therō parama pāti mokkhasāmvaro...

At that time, the Supreme Lord Metteyya took leave, returning to the blessed heaven of Tusita. The arhat, the one endowed with extraordinary power, the one adorned with unblemished virtue, the arhat observing all the precepts of the Patimokka, pure, accomplished in restraint, endowed with moral integrity, flawless, without cravings, observing the precepts correctly, arrayed in resplendent virtue, paid respect by bowing with his hands joined together above his

head. When he had performed the five-fold prostration at all eight directional points and circumbulated the refuge of the jewelled Culāmaṇi Cetiya, he took leave of Indra, Lord of the Vajra, the highest of the celestials. Then he flew joyfully from Tāvatimsa [Heaven] through the sky. Radiant and bright as the splendid sun, he was shining, brilliant because he had rid himself of craving, anger, and egoism. He reflected on craving, the defilement that -- like a vine that twists and twines about a tree, tangling itself around its branches -- binds people to life, death, old age, and suffering. He severed it with the force of a diamond sword, which is the noble path of knowledge, and he shattered it into fine dust. How could any defilement remain? Endowed with the threefold powerful knowledge,⁶⁸ he departed, through his extraordinary power, like a *hamsa*. His superb form was like the elegant body of a *hamsa*. His attainment of all four levels of *jhāna* was like the wings of birds in the sky. His attainment of the fourfold path to power was like a golden *hamsa*, beautifully formed. Adorned with the power of the pure Dhamma, he departed from Tāvatimsa Heaven.

Instantly he reached Jambudīpa and went to collect alms, along village paths, in cities large and small. He went, graceful in all four postures⁶⁹ appearing in each city

⁶⁸ Nyantiloka explains *te-vijja* as follows: "remembrance of former births, the divine eye, extinction of all biases" (154).

⁶⁹ The four *iriya-patha*, that is, walking, standing, sitting, or lying down.

like a disciple of the Venerable Sage in the past.

Brilliant beyond description, his radiance appeared in every part of the world.

...so pindapātapatikkanto metteyyassa pavattim...

The flawless Lord Phra Malai thus conveyed the message of Phra Si Ariya Metteyya. He revealed its essence to the people of Jambudipa, describing every detail to them. The people listened gladly and raised their hands in reverence. They were all delighted and they urged one another to make merit through the constant practice of generosity. When they died, they were born in heaven and they enjoyed their rewards in accordance with the merit that they had accumulated, thus becoming devas replete with heavenly pleasures.

...so daliddakapuriso... As for the poor man who gave the eight beautiful lotuses to the arhat, when he died, he went to Tāvatimsa Heaven, resplendently decorated and replete with five kinds of radiant lotuses. He had a retinue of a thousand celestial women who joined together in playing music with five kinds of instruments, entertaining him without ceasing. Blissful and content, he enjoyed extensive possessions. He was named Lord of the Lotus, and both his lips and his body were as fragrant as flowers. When he walked, lotuses sprang up to support his feet with each step that he took.

One day he went to the city of Indra near the Vejayanta Palace. The Thousand-Eyed Protector saw the deva who had

been wondrously transformed, adorned with flowers and fragrances.

Indra was delighted, and thus he asked him, "What kind of merit did you make in the past to have lotuses bestowed upon you?"

The deva explained, "[In my past life] I was a poor man. One day, as I was going to the water to bathe, I saw eight glorious lotuses in full bloom. I picked them and presented them to an arhat. Through the fruit that grew out of that merit, I received the rewards that I now enjoy."

...*sakkassa vacanam sutvā*... The Lord of the Vajra, having heard what the deva said, was delighted. He went with contentment to the pristine Bokorani lotus pond. Then he picked some lotuses and presented them as an offering at the Cūlāmani Cetiya hair reliquary. Then he returned to the Chetsada heavenly mansion.

As for the deva who was Lord of the Lotus, he lived to the end of his years, and then he went in accordance with the merit that he had made in the past, by observing spiritual practices.

* * * * *

...*malaya vatthum nitthitam*... What has been described [here], following the Pali text of Phra Malai, has been done to the best of my wisdom and understanding. It is now finished. If it is incomplete, excessive, or deficient

in the composition or in the letters, or if the poetry is awkward, I invite wise men to kindly help me correct it. Don't add anything or invent anything new, but preserve it completely for the religion. I humbly revere and respect the venerable Three Gems through the avenues of body, mind, and speech.

I have finished telling the legend of Phra Malai, intending to write the story down in poetry, to compose passages that are fluent, ornate, orderly, and varied. My aim has been to follow the original, to compose passages without error, to be proficient in the rules of writing, and to be fluent in [expressing] the essence of the eternal Dhamma. I composed it, creating a text that is elaborate and complete.

Through the merit that I have made, may I meet Metteyya, the Eminent Lord. May I not have the misfortune of missing him. May I be born in a purer state; may I be a man so that I can be ordained by Phra Metteyya and meet him face to face. May I receive receive his teachings and thereby succeed in becoming an arhat, until at last I attain nibbana. May this wish come true.

This completes the essence of the legend
Of Phra Malai, the eminent exalted one,
Who went to Tāvatimśa through his glorious power,
Bringing a message from the highest Lord Ariya.

The loftiest praises to Metteyya.
Endowed with superior power, known throughout the
world,
Replete with virtue and compassion for all forms of
life,
He sent a message to those who wish to meet
him.

The Lord, wishing to protect all beings,
Sent a message relating the complete essence:
"Follow the Dhamma and it will inspire you to refrain
from sin.
Shed the kamma that entangles you, and you will meet
[the Lord]."

May the composing of this work,
May the telling of this legend,
May the effort of persevering until finished,
May the merit earned in this way enable me to meet the
virtuous one.

Completed in the year two thousand,
Two hundred eighty; created in
Eleven months, six days; [completed] on Thursday,
The fifth month, the seventh day of the waning moon,
In the Year of the Horse.

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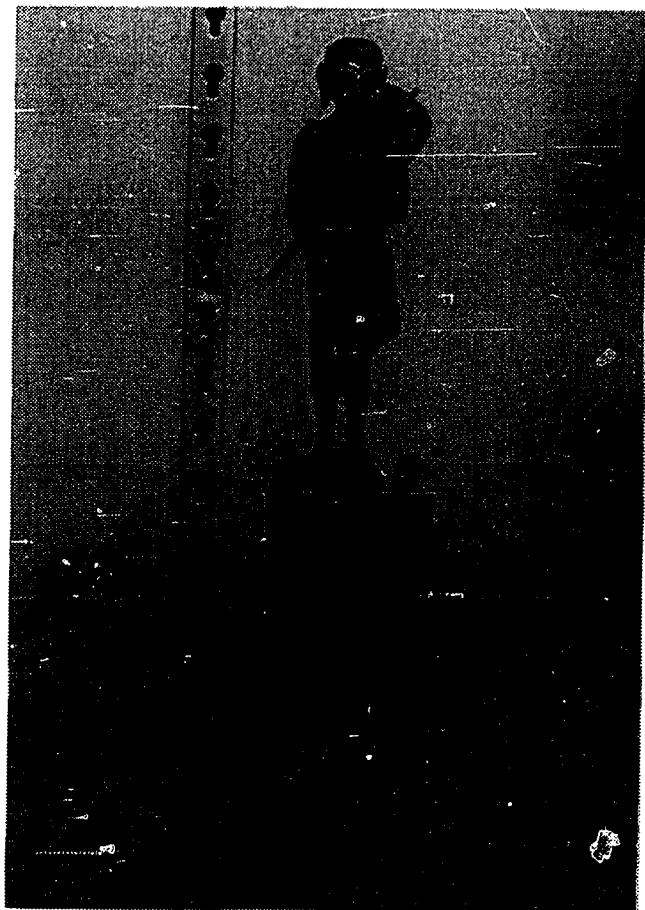


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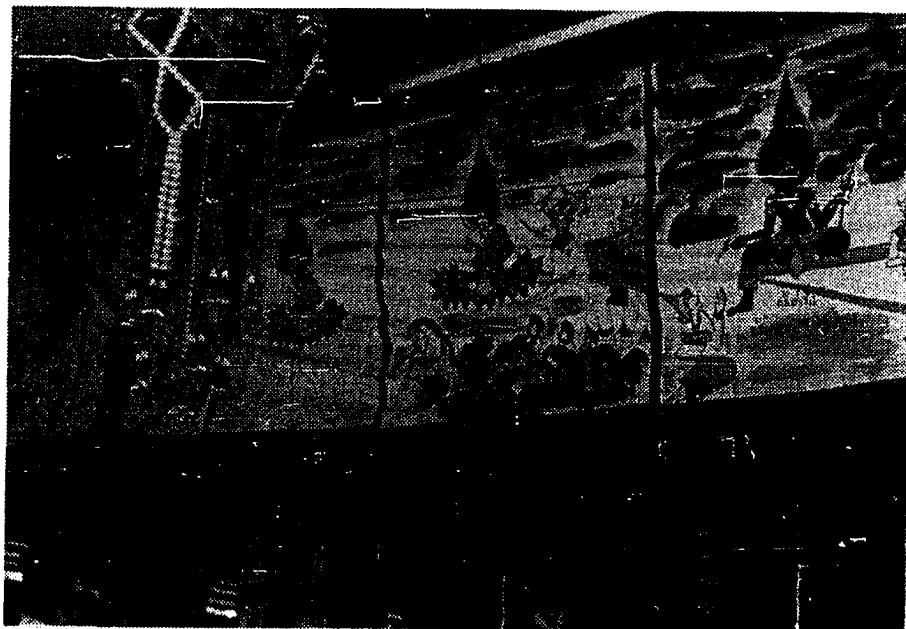


Fig. 3 - Phra Malai banner, northeast Thailand

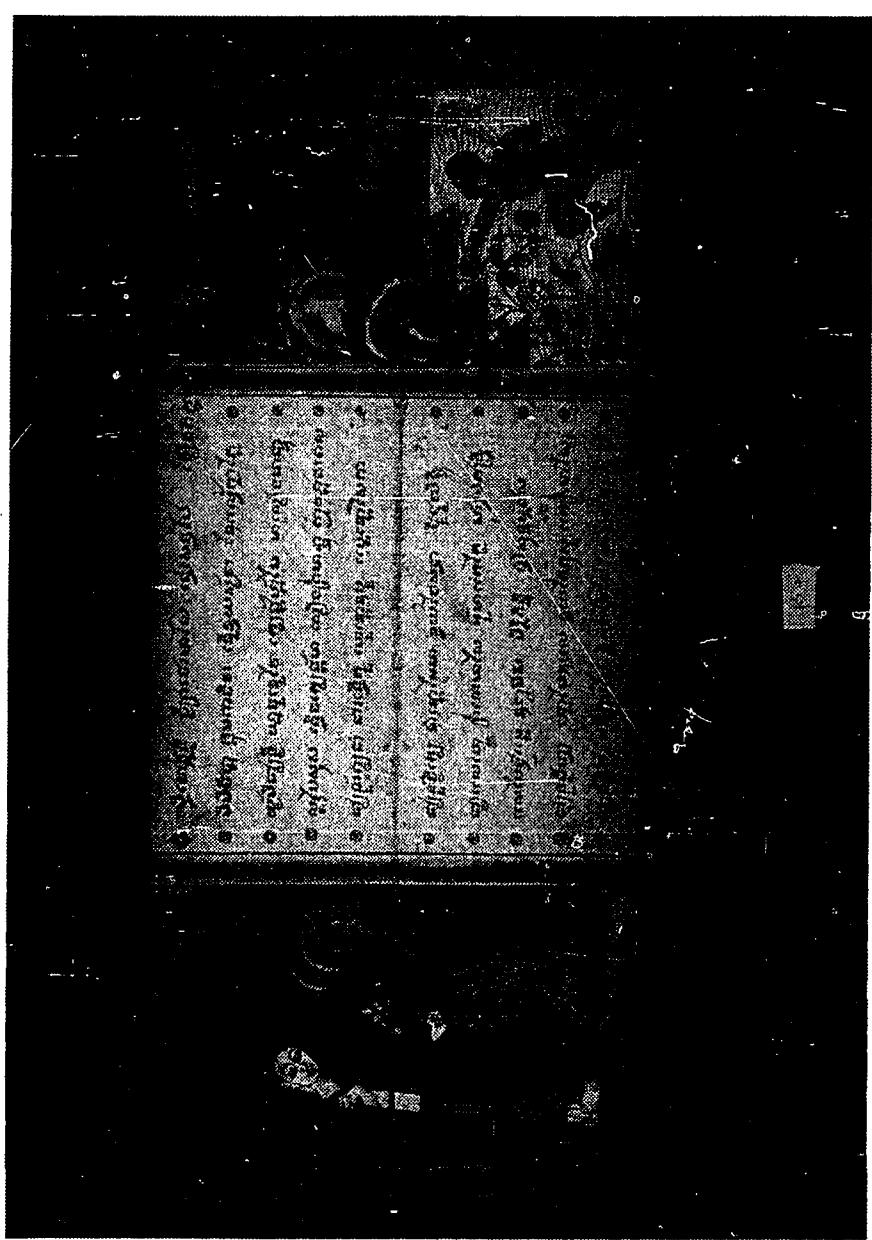


Fig. 4 - Phra Malai manuscript: (r) poor man picking lotuses; (l) poor man presenting lotuses to Phra Malai; Spencer Collection, New York Public Library

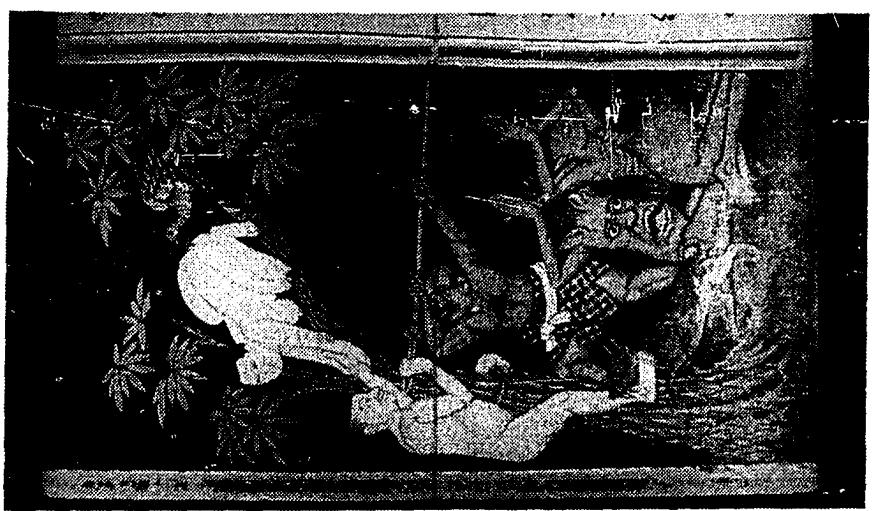
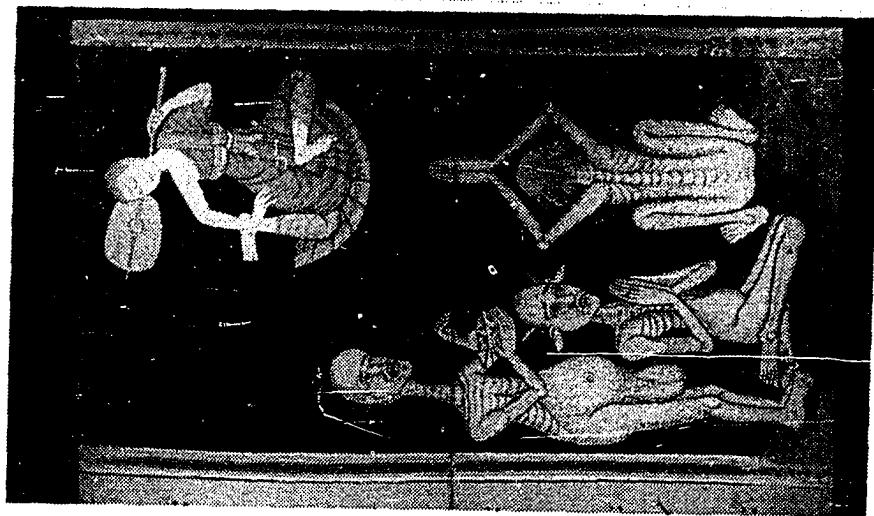


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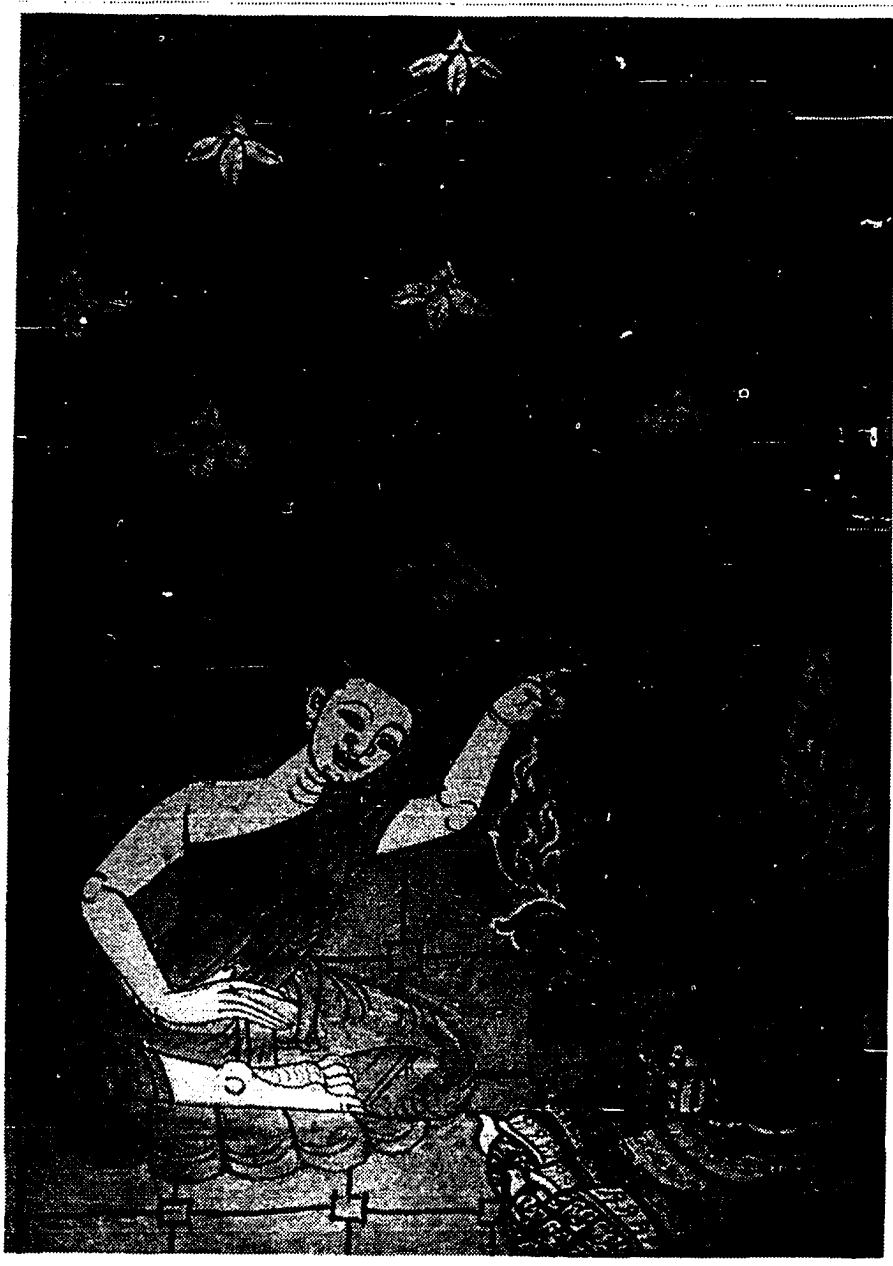


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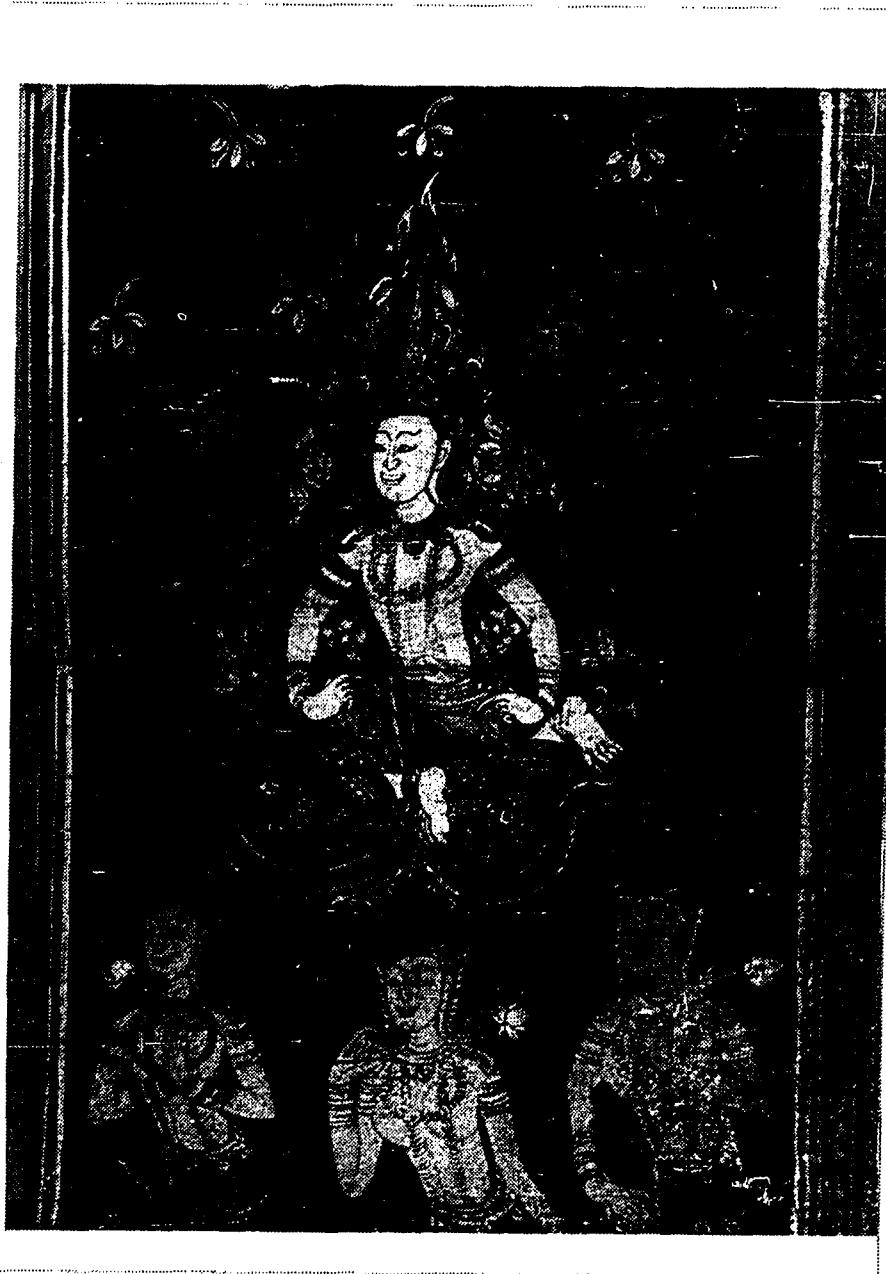


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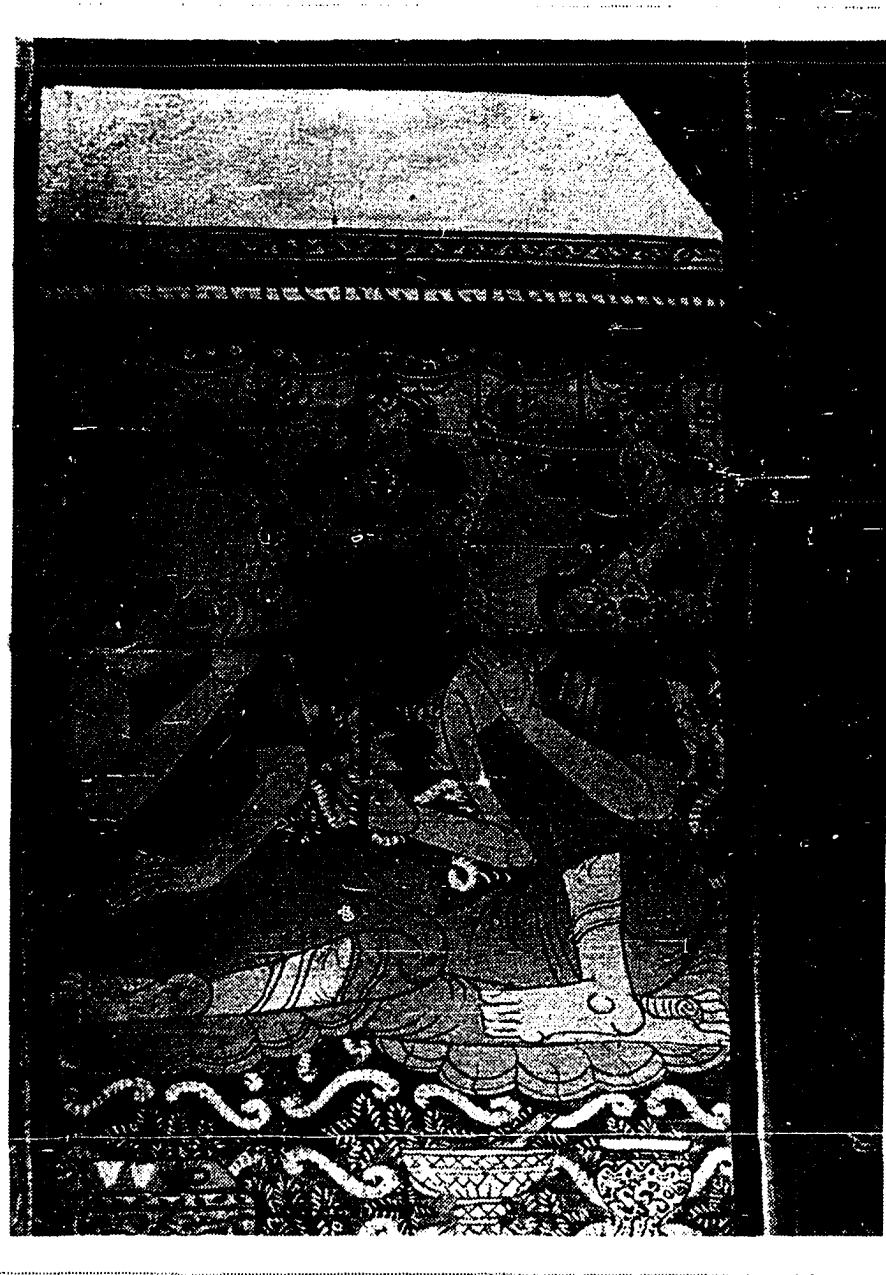


Fig. 8 - Phra Malai manuscript: disreputable monks, Spencer Collection, New York Public Library



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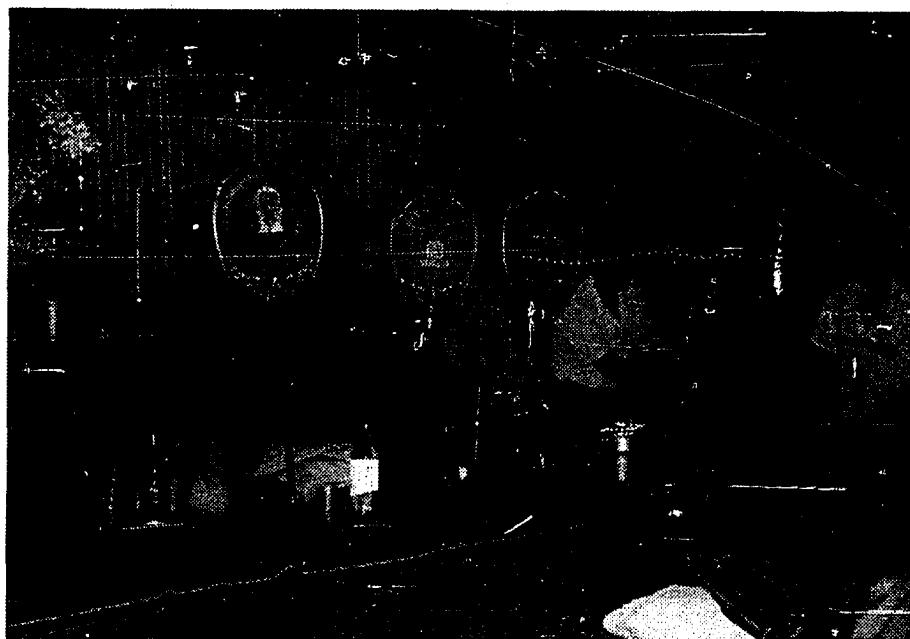


Fig. 10 - Kharuhat ensemble