

A Book Review
The *Jambūpati-sūtra*:

A Synoptic Romanised Edition
By Santi Pakdeekham (ศานติ ภัคดีคำ)

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Buddhism in South-East Asia is a vast topic. The sources for learning it are extremely limited; most books which deal with it nowadays are mostly drawn from historical or cultural issues. It is hard to find a book on Buddhism in Thailand written which is based on the information from the Pāli manuscripts produced there. Having printed the book, Skilling said: ‘This is a text edition, and we await the reaction of scholars. There will be many questions. Is it true that the Pāli texts composed in Thailand cannot be suitably handled by the classical critical edition? Is the synoptic edition the best method? Are there any other options? We hope the appearance of the edition will inspire debate and, even more so, will inspire the production of further editions of Southeast Asian Pāli texts.’¹

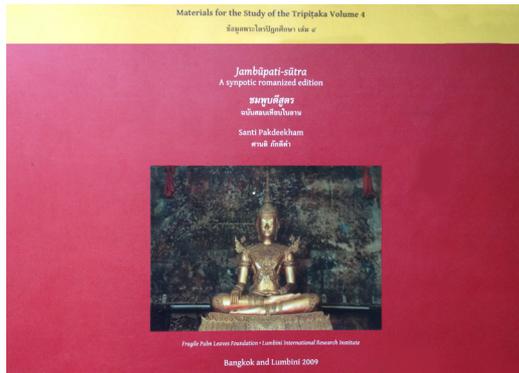
I sincerely welcome the newly published edition of the *Jambūpati-sūtra* (henceforth JBS) by Santi Pakdeekham since even though a large number of Pāli manuscripts have yet to be properly edited by modern scholars, extremely few Pāli texts in South-East Asia have been edited and translated into modern languages. Skilling has been a main driving force, and has also done an admirable job, in promoting the study of these texts, for not only bringing the issue into the attention of modern scholars on a wide scale, but also for encouraging or nurturing new generation of Buddhist scholars, especially local, to study the Pāli texts preserved in local tradition seriously. This JBS is one of the products of his efforts. I find this edition extremely useful to understand the

¹ Peter Skilling, An Impossible Task: The Classical Edition and Thai Pāli Literature, in *Thai International Journal of Buddhist Studies (TIJBS)*, I, 37.

stylistic features of Siamese Pāli during the Ayutthaya period.

There are two things which strike me most when I first read this text: first, the Pāli language used in the text is somewhat poor grammatically, in comparison to the classical Pāli, found in the Pāli Canon and its commentaries, and, second, the method used to edit the text itself may conflict with the Thai and English translations to come.

(front cover)



Linguistically, the text shows that the Pāli used is of a low standard, and it is tempting to think that it is probable the standard of Pāli schooling during the period was not high. Previously, Peter Masfield² used the word ‘Indo-Chinese Pāli’ to contrast it from a more standard Pāli found in the classical Pāli texts. However, I would think that it simply reflects the background of Pāli of individual authors, whose training in Pāli was somewhat poor. It might also reflect the attempts made by the Thais of Ayutthaya, inspired by the famous, classical Pāli writings of the Lanna Kingdom (1292-1775), who tried to compose Buddhist Pāli texts. But since the background in Pāli of the author(s) was not sufficient, the Pāli used in their texts is not up to the standard of the Lanna’s classics, such as the *Mangalattadīpanī*, the *Vessantaradīpanī*, the *Samkhyāpakāsakaṭikā*. To me, the difference between the somewhat corrupt Pāli of works produced in South-East Asia, and the somewhat higher standard of the classical Lanna texts is similar to the linguistic difference between the Dipavaṃsa (Dīp) and the Mahāvaṃsa (Mhv). Earlier, Hermann Oldenberg who edited Dīp said:

² Peter Masfield, Indo-Chinese Pāli, in *The Mahachulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies*, I, 2008, 1-9.

The *Dīpavaṃsa*, as regards its style and its grammatical peculiarities, betrayed the characteristics of an age in which the Sinhalese first tried to write in the dialect of sacred texts brought over from India; there are passages in the *Dīpavaṃsa* which remind us of the first clumsy attempts of the ancient German tribes, to write Latin. The *Mahāvāṃsa* is composed very differently; its author masters the Pāli grammar and style with a perfect use which cannot have been acquired but after fruitless attempts, and which may be compared with the elegant mastership of Latin composition by which the Italian poets and scholars of the renaissance excelled.³

K.R.Norman further explained:

Once Buddhaghosa has shown the way, the author of the *Mhv* was able to master Pā grammar and style with perfect use. It is true that *Dīp* is, for the most part, written in Pā. of a poor quality, and it is tempting to think that the much higher standard of Pā in *Mhv* is due to the appearance of Buddhaghosa's cities in the intervening period.⁴

There are two reasons for me to think that the Pāli of the *JBS* was actually written by an author, whose Pāli background was not of a very high standard.

First, it was widely known that the Pāli schooling of the Ayutthaya was not strong and could not be matched to the Lanna glory since the Ayutthaya Kingdom did not attempt to send monks to Sri Lanka to learn how to compose a standard Pāli book, as the Lanna Kingdom did. The Pāli schooling was simply established to train monks to be able to translate Pāli texts from palm-leaf manuscripts, not to compose a Pāli text. Pāli examinations were held only when there were candidates who felt confident enough to perform orally in front of the committee. Many monks during this period not only studied Buddhism, but also Vedic texts such as the *Atharvaveda*. It

³ Hermann Oldenberg, (ed.), *Dīpavaṃsa*, London 1879, 7 (introduction).

⁴ K.R.Norman, 'The Role of Pāli in early Sinhalese Buddhism' in *Collected Papers*, II. Oxford: The Pāli Text Society, 1991, 48.

studies to the monastic curriculum too. The Prince monk was personally impressed by his royal father, King Mongkut (1804-1868), who was in the monkhood for 27 years, during which he read Pāli texts extensively, covering the Pāli Canon, non-canonical texts as well as many other Pāli writings, and afterwards, being able to compose Pāli exceptionally well, in a style quite similar, or close to, that of the classical Lanna Pāli works.⁸ The Prince Monk thought that studying only Pāli was not sufficient for Buddhist monks, the understanding of *dbamma* should be equally emphasised too. He said⁹:

เนื่องด้วยการสอนบาลี ได้ตั้งมหาภิกขุราชวิทยาลัยขึ้นโดยพระบรมราชานุญาตเพื่อเฉลิมพระเกียรติพระบาทสมเด็จพระจอมเกล้าเจ้าอยู่หัว ผู้ทรงเปรี๊องปราชญ์ในทางนี้ ใช้หลักสูตรใหม่ สอบความรู้ด้วยวิธีเขียน ผู้สอบได้ ทรงตั้งเป็นเปรียญหลวงเหมือนกัน วัดมหาธาตุได้จัดขึ้น ตามแต่การเรียนการสอนยากกว่าเรียนและแปลด้วยปาก

For teaching Pāli, King Mongkut Royal Academy (henceforth KMRA) was founded with the royal permission, aiming at honouring Mongkut, who was a real specialist in Pāli, using the new curriculum measured by writing. Those who passed the exams was also appointed as 'Parien' (Pāli specialist) similarly. Later, Wat Mahathat followed this study system too. However, this written system was more difficult than the old, oral one.

In addition, when his royal brother, King Chulalongkorn (1853-1910), ascended to the throne, the Prince Monk changed from oral system to the writing one. Apparently, in his mind, only reading the Pāli texts extensively, as his royal father did, can ensure monks of a full professional proficiency in Pāli.¹⁰

⁸ The collection of His Pāli writings as well as their Thai translation were recently published by Mahamakuta Rajavidyalaya Foundation (MRF) in 2002, titled *Pra Chum Phrarājñiphon Bhāsā Bāli Nai Phra Bat Somdet Phra Chomklao Chao Yubua* (The Collection of Pāli Writings by King Mongkut).

⁹ See Prince Vajirananavarorasa et al, *Tamnarn Wat Bowornniwet Vibarn (The Legend of Wat Bowornniwet Vibarn)*. (*Tamnarn Wat Bowornniwet Vibarn* [Lit. The Legend of Wat Bowornniwet Vibarn], the authentic account of the monastery, written by its successive former Abbots). Newly printed to mark the 90th Birthday of His Holiness Somdet Phra Nanasamvara the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand on 3 October 2001. Bangkok: Karn Sātsanā Printing House, 2001, 67.

¹⁰ He developed a Pāli curriculum which can make sure that his monk students can

The general features of the language in the JBS include:

1. The frequent use of participles as finite verbs such as the use of *viharanto* (<*viharati*)
2. The appearance of both Pāli and Sanskrit forms such as the *Jambūpati-Sūtra* itself (instead of *Jambūpati-Sutta*).
3. The frequent use of gerundives ending in *-tvā* as finite verbs.
4. The disagreement between subjects and finite verbs such as between *ahaṃ* and *pakkosati* (JBS 24.3) in all the four manuscripts.
5. Nonstandard forms of Pāli are frequently found.

Other evidence of corruptions which point to the grammatical weakness on the part of the author (s) are such as the uses of *suttaṃ* (<*sutaṃ*), *veḷuvanne* (<*veḷuvane*).

All the four manuscripts contain lots of nonstandard Pāli words. We know that the corruptions could find their ways through many channels, especially the scribal errors, and, during the Ayutthaya period, some learned monks might also have existed, we must also be aware of the hypercorrection on the part of editors who may try to rectify all the nonstandard forms grammatically. Since few Pāli manuscripts in South-East Asia are critically edited, and the investigations of errors in terms of how they arise and how they can be removed are not fully developed, I have an impression that the text itself is similar to Dīp in the sense that its author probably did not have a full competence in Pāli.

Sporadically, there are words usually used in the Thai language such as *iddhiriddhi*, which is obviously created from a Thai compound ‘อิทธิฤทธิ’ (*itthirid*<*iddhi/riddhi*). It is the combination of both Pāli and Skt. Words, each of which carries exactly the same meaning. For the *iddhi* in Pāli, equivalent to in Skt. *ṛddhi*, the Thai language usually combines into a new compound *iddhiriddhi*, either in written or spoken

compose Pāli very well and he tried this at KMRA within the compound of Wat Bowornniwet Viharn first, and, at the same time, he also developed the ancient Pāli curriculum into nine grades for the whole sangha's monastic education. However, the one used at KMRA for his students was too difficult and it was finally stopped since most monks were interested in the system of nine grades he created for all the Thai monks instead.

language. The word occurs in three manuscripts, and the following is its context:

*mahāraja mā bhāyī ti vatvā bhagavā iddhiriddhiññānena
mahāsupaṇṇaṃ ninimmitvāsabassasīse satasahassapakkehi
nimmitvā visajjhiṃ* (JBS 20.18,21.1)

Having said: ‘Oh Great King, don’t feel fearful’, the Blessed One, using his miraculous powers and insight, transformed himself into the giant Garuḍa and created a thousand heads, with a hundred and thousand wings.’

One manuscript, which is derived from the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, reads: *iddhividbhaññāna*. In the above context, the author prefers the Pāli-Thai word to the normal Pāli or Skt. one, an influence from a local dialect. While the correct form might be restored as *iddhividbhaññānena*, presumably surmising that the error was probably caused by the scribes, I think, more or less, Laotian or Burmese Pāli texts might have similar features.

All the corrupt words, which are many in all the four manuscripts, might originate in various ways, but, probably, the major cause of the errors was from the author himself, and all these types of errors were not confined to South-East Asian countries only. Any author, in any country, whose Pāli was not that strong, could produce a similar corrupt text. I would prefer the use of ‘Siamese Pāli’ or ‘Burmese Pāli’ or ‘Laotian Pāli’ etc. to ‘South-East Asian Pāli’ or ‘Indo-China Pāli’ when specifically referring to the peculiar characteristics of languages produced in each specific country such as the abundance of grammatically corrupt texts in the manuscripts, following such terminologies as ‘Bactrian Pāli’, used by previous scholars.¹¹

But for general features, which are pan-South-East Asian such as the use of *-by-* rather than *-vy-*¹², the tendency to record short vowels rather than the long ones, I do agree that they can constitute what is called “Indo-China Pāli”. These unique characteristics, which are common to all Pāli manuscripts produced in South-East Asia,

¹¹ Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 17.

¹² *Suttapiṭaka Dīghanikāya*, 1: *Silakkhandhakavagga*, Dharmachai Tipiṭaka Series, Pilot Version 2013, iv,xii.

nonetheless, must be collected and systematised, covering aspects of the epigraphy of various local dialects used in the manuscripts as well as variations in terms of phonology, morphology and syntax of Pāli used in the manuscripts first before a theory can be firmly established. So I would suggest that a book on the stylistic features of Pāli in South-East Asia be another project of the Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation and the Lumbini International Research Institute in the series of Materials for the Study of the Tripiṭaka.

Now, let me move to the editorial method, used to manage this text, known as *synopsis*. Skilling addresses the problem in the introduction of this edition: ‘It is difficult to edit the text following the normal, usual process since there are lots of divergent readings’.¹³ By nature, as we all know, the synoptic edition is not a critical edition. It was probably because of this, there is not much of the information usually seen in a critical edition but are lacking in the JBS: no linguistic observations in the form of footnotes on the part of the editor, no necessary historical backgrounds in the form of a family tree between each witness are given, no details about each witness are provided, and we don’t know very much about how each witness is transmitted. Actually, Skilling already provides a brief historical background in two articles, the first one being entitled ‘An Impossible Task: The Classical Edition and Thai Pāli Literature’ published in TIJBS, Vol.1,¹⁴ and the second one being *Pieces in the Puzzles: Sanskrit Literature in Pre-modern Siam*,¹⁵ but Santi Pakdeekham did not incorporate them to his synoptic edition. At least, all the historical information on the texts, either in Thai or in English, should be provided because, obviously, even if the synopsis is selected to deal with the somewhat complicated

¹³ Peter Skilling, ‘Pieces in the puzzle: Sanskrit Literature in pre-modern Siam’, in *Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of South-East Asia Selected Papers*. Edited by Claudio Cicuzza. Bangkok and Lumbini: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation & Lumbini Research Institute, 2009, 30-32.

¹⁴ Skilling, An Impossible Task: The Classical Edition and Thai Pāli Literature, in *Thai International Journal of Buddhist Studies (TIJBS)*, I, 36.

¹⁵ He developed a Pāli curriculum which can make sure that his monk students can compose Pāli very well and he tried this at KMRA within the compound of Wat Bowornniwet Viharn first, and, at the same time, he also developed the ancient Pāli curriculum into nine grades for the whole sangha’s monastic education. However, the one used at KMRA for his students was too difficult and it was finally stopped since most monks were interested in the system of nine grades he created for all the Thai monks instead.

manuscripts, the successful editors in the past who used this theory to edit texts also creatively employed different strategies in their work.¹⁶ That means that there is no uniform standard for a work called ‘the method of synopsis’, and each editor has their choices, either to provide the variant readings of various witnesses only, or to furnish his or her synoptic edition with relevant information as much as they can, if they so desire.

The further important question is this: if the correct version, supposed to be the archetype, has not been fully restored, how can we trust that the subsequent translation, which is also being undertaken by Skilling’s team,¹⁷ represents the genuine content of the author? This is because, as we all know, we cannot produce an authentic translation out of a text which is still corrupt. Since the four manuscripts have different phrases/sentences with different meanings, how can we select the meanings which are supposed to be more original?

Every year, when I conduct a course called ‘Seminars on Pāli literature of Thailand’, for which I select the JBS as one of the South-East Asian Pāli texts for students to read in the classroom, many students ask how to translate the texts, with variant readings from the four manuscripts. I say that we should try to select the readings which make more sense, emending, thereby, all the non-sensical readings. But the sentences which make sense are not necessarily the original version of the author(s).

As a matter of fact, translation is the product of how the translator perceives the text, or, more or less, how he or she edits the text too. In other words, both edition and translation are interconnected, and determine each other. If the translator selects only the readings which make more sense, which is considered to best fit the context, ignoring all types of errors, it means they entirely base themselves on the scrutiny of internal evidence of manuscripts only and, therefore, they are using a radical eclectic method to edit. If, on the other hand, they take both internal and external evidence into consideration before translation, it implies they are using the reasoned

¹⁶ Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 17.

¹⁷ *Suttapiṭaka Dīghanikāya*, 1: *Silakkhandbakavagga*, Dhammachai Tipiṭaka Series, Pilot Version 2013, iv,xii.

conservative text-critical method to produce their translation. If one of these two methods is considered unfitting, perhaps we should think of combining many different, text-critical methods, to restore the JBS's original autograph out of the divergent manuscripts first.

The question, therefore, is what is the real purpose of producing a synoptic edition? Skilling briefly explains: 'This permits the reader to compare the readings at a glance, and to easily understand the relationship between the manuscripts used'.¹⁸ If 'to understand the relationship between the manuscripts used' is its aim, I think the current synoptic edition under review, undoubtedly, reaches its aim perfectly. It is acceptable if the synoptic edition is simply aimed at providing students a chance to appreciate directly the divergence and similarity of the four manuscripts at the same time.

But if 'synopsis' is seen as a foundation for another text-critical theory, which has not been developed, to trace the original text supposed to be composed by the author, all the necessary information found in the introduction of a critical edition, with the exception of critical apparatus, should be provided in its introduction too. I myself consider this synoptic edition an initial step before a proper, text-critical method can be found because many mistakes could be scribal errors and correctly emended. So I think the editor should provide all the necessary, basic information, as they can pave the way for future proper research.

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¹⁸ Peter Skilling, 'Pieces in the puzzle: Sanskrit Literature in pre-modern Siam', in *Buddhism and Buddhist Literature of South-East Asia Selected Papers*. Edited by Claudio Cicuzza. Bangkok and Lumbini: Fragile Palm Leaves Foundation & Lumbini Research Institute, 2009, 30-32.