

THE ART OF READING AND TEACHING DHAMMAPADAS:
REFORM, TEXTS, CONTEXTS IN THAI BUDDHIST HISTORY¹

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Speaking of nineteenth century Buddhist reform in Thailand Charles Hallisey writes:

“[B]eginning in the eighteenth century and continuing throughout the nineteenth century, there was a radical shift in the interpretation of Buddhist thought, a process of reformation which was encouraged by leading members of the Buddhist monastic order, and supported by the authority of the Siamese throne...[T]his process of reinterpretation included reform of the Buddhist monastic order, an insistence on strict ritual, canonical fundamentalism, and purity of ordination...[T]he fact that the Thai developments were clearly not determined by the presence of antagonistic Westerners provides a useful reminder that we should avoid attributing too much force to the ‘West’ (or Christianity, or Protestant assumptions, or Orientalism) in the changes to Theravāda Buddhism...These developments also open up the possibility that...there may have been an equally productive elective affinity between some European and some Theravādin responses to modernity”(Hallisey 1996: 48-49).

Further, a general call for scholars to understand why certain Buddhist texts endure while others disappear:

“[T]he survival of any particular text is not self-explanatory, but in fact it is normally the case that the texts fade in their significance as social change occurs, then we need to discover how those texts which do endure are maintained. In part, this will require us to look at the manner in which texts were circulated — the technology, practices, and institutions which made their survival possible—but especially the processes by which certain texts were singled out as worth preserving. Discovering answers to such questions will require investigations about the extent to which the production and survival

¹ Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, Anne Blackburn, Thomas Borchert, Georges Dreyfus, Michael Jerryson, Jeffrey Samuels, Anil Sakya (Phra Sugandha), Peter Skilling, and the editors at JIABS read earlier drafts of this paper and offered numerous corrections and suggestions. I thank them.

of a text is both dependent and independent of the audiences which receive it. In the course of doing all of this we will inevitably end up having to rethink our conceptions of Buddhism as a translocal tradition with a long and self-consciously distinct history but which is at the same time a tradition dependent on local conditions for the production of meaning”(Hallisey 1996: 51).

The present study takes up Hallisey’s call (second quotation) with specific reference to the Thai reading and teaching of the Dhammapada. I use the Dhammapada as a window into the changes and continuities of Thai Buddhist education. Like Hallisey, I question the uniformity and pervasiveness of “Western” influence on the local production of meaning. However, I diverge from him (first quotation) by questioning the basic assumption that Thai/Siamese reforms in the nineteenth century, especially in regards to Buddhist textual canonization and educational standardization, actually were “reforms” at all. For monastic education specifically, I assert that the choice of texts did not “radically shift” in the nineteenth century and did not reflect “canonical fundamentalism” in practice. Moreover, the ways of reading and the pedagogical methods used to teach texts have seen little reformation. Methods evinced in manuscripts from before the nineteenth century and those employed today reveal a deep epistemological and methodological continuity in the Thai approach to Buddhist thought. Major changes in Thai Buddhist education have been primarily institutional and ideological². Institutions and ideologies, though, are only part of a comprehensive understanding of education. Often histories of education are written as histories of educational institutions or the ideologies of the elite reformers. For me, studying the history of education is studying the history of reading in shifting performative contexts. Tracing the mediums and methods of Dhammapada instruction over time will begin to expose the processes of textual circulation and curricular development among Thai Buddhists. In the end, I question the nature of a local Buddhist “text” and the way it is read. I offer suggestions of ways to study the history of Buddhist textual education and the art of reading with a pedagogical objective. This, I hope, will begin to dust off and examine some of the field-wide skeletons Hallisey has so carefully exhumed.

² Thomas Borchert’s suggestions were instrumental in revising this section of the paper.

Introduction

Walk into most any Thai bookstore, look at most any Thai Buddhist-themed website, look at most any Thai Buddhist curriculum, examine most any Thai manuscript archive and you will see the Dhammapada. *Some form* of the Dhammapada has been wide-spread for at least 500 years. If we look at Thai, Mon and Khmer epigraphic evidence, *some form* of the text goes back another thousand. Still, all Dhammapadas are not created equally. Despite its importance for students and teachers in Thailand, the nature of the “text” of the Dhammapada or how it has been read, summarized, manipulated, expanded, anthologized and transformed through various pedagogical methods and mediums has not been explored³.

At first glance it would seem that the Dhammapada in modern Thailand is radically different from its pre-modern antecedent. There have been several key changes in the text and the manner in which it has been conveyed over the last five centuries. First, a pre-twentieth century emphasis on narrative commentarial sections as a pedagogical subject has been replaced by a valorization of canonical Dhammapada verses. Prior to the twentieth century, the verses as a separate or complete collection had little commerce among teachers and students. In the pre-modern period the Dhammapada verses were rarely collected as one text. Second, manuscripts of some form of the Dhammapada are most often in the vernacular, not in Pali. The most common way to render and teach the Dhammapada prior to the modern period was the *nissaya* method which is a vernacular gloss and explanation of Pali words and phrases from the source. Third, the manuscripts of the Pali Dhammapada and vernacular Dhammapada translations, commentaries and glosses nearly always include extra-canonical material and are often included in anthologies of local and canonical material. The Dhammapada grew and changed over time in Thailand until the advent of the printing press which has slowed, but not killed, its expansion. Expansion still happens when teachers read in order to prepare an oral exposition. Fourth, the mediums for teaching the Dhammapada have changed in response to technological advances, the

³ Kevin Trainor is undertaking a larger study of the Dhammapada and its appropriations historically.

influence of Western ideas of the Buddhist “original canon,” the rise of the primacy of Pali over vernacular commentarial texts, and changing social concerns; however, these changes need to be qualified based on the audience and the manner of the instruction. These primitivist, textual, cultural, and moralist biases have been well-documented in the study of Sri Lanka Buddhism⁴. In more recent years the Dhammapada’s role in education has expanded into television programs, popular anthologies, handbooks, websites, and avant-garde dramas. There are also abundant copies of the complete Pali Dhammapada (verses and commentarial narratives) thanks to the efforts of Thai royal family and Sri Lankan and British Buddhist scholars who brought copies to Thailand in the late nineteenth century.

Although the mediums and content have changed significantly, the methods used to instruct the Dhammapada have remained largely the same since the sixteenth century. Instruction still operates on a system of drawing selected Pali words from the text and offering expanded creative glosses and analogies to contemporary issues. Reading, it seems, still involves looking for the terms, themes, and narratives that are the best vehicles for conveying a point orally. Moreover, commentarial narratives on the Dhammapada are still the primary content for lecturers and sermon-givers. Seeing how the Dhammapada is taught in an oral context is essential in avoiding convenient and facile reification of unrealistic barriers between the past and the present and the East and the West. Lopez, Jory, Obeyesekere, Ludden among others have astutely identified how the “Western scholarly interpretation of Buddhism” was subsequently adopted by Sinhalese and Thai Buddhists and became the official view of Buddhism locally (Jory 2002: 893). However, as Blackburn emphasizes this monolithic aping of the West can be over-emphasized and may remove the multivocal, inconsistent, and dynamic agency of colonized Buddhists⁵. It is wise not to over-emphasize this change lest we become blind to some fundamental continuities in the various ways Buddhism has been taught to Buddhists by Buddhists.

⁴ Prothero (1995) provides a summary.

⁵ See Blackburn (2001) for background on the post-orientalist debates in Buddhist Studies.

There is certainly an “elective affinity” between the popularity of the Dhammapada in Thailand and the West, where it is arguably the most frequently translated and cited Buddhist text. Indeed, it was the first Buddhist text translated into a Western language, Latin, “*Dhammapadam ex tribus codicibus Hauniensibus Palice edidit Latine vertit...*” in 1855, by Viggo Fausbøll⁶. The history of the Dhammapada in the West and a full bibliography is sorely needed, but that must be left for another day⁷. However, just because the text is popular among students and scholars in London and Bangkok, Los Angeles and Chiang Mai, Sydney and Samut Sakorn does not mean that the text is taught and printed the same in all contexts. As American historian David Harlan argues, studying texts in their socio-historical context is not purely instrumental where “complex texts are reduced to mere tokens and documents.”⁸ One context is not explanatory of how the text should be taught. Instead, texts are always parts of multiple contexts, multiple readings and educational settings, which, I argue, we would do well to compare. The context in which a text was first composed is not the only context of a text, and not even its most important⁹. The author of the original text is not the only person’s intention to which we need to pay attention. Our questions to texts need to shift with shifting contexts. Intention is spread and shared across every reader, teacher, every printer, every translator, every student who engages with the text. Being attentive to the nexus of intentions, mediums, and methods in particular contexts is the duty of the historian of education. Official canons of texts, elite ideologies, and the institutions where they are promoted are part of big history and it seems that big history has dominated the study of Thai Buddhism. Big history ignores the small encoun-

⁶ For good introductions to the text see Oskar von Hinüber and K.R. Norman (1994) and J.R. Carter and M. Palihawadana (1987). There are dozens of translations of the Dhammapada in European and Asian languages. It seems as if new ones are published every year. There are also many available on the internet. There are many Thai editions of the verses and commentaries.

⁷ Hecker (1993) and von Hinüber (1996).

⁸ This is quoted from Elizabeth Clark’s (2004) study of Harlan in her sweeping overview of the field of history. Harlan indicts the field of history and its allegiance to “context” in *The Degradation of American History* (1997).

⁹ Hypertext editions of poems by Blake and Rossetti by of Jerome McGann, George Landow, and others offer good comparative examples of reading texts across different contexts.

ters of students and individual textual passages, teachers and particular classes. It ignores the conversations, arguments, and mistakes that take place in monastic cells, royal corridors, vernacular manuscripts, and novice notebooks.

I see the need to explore the relationships created between the text, reader [teacher] and the audience when teaching as congruent with the relationships formed between the reader and text when reading. I approach the Dhammapada as a “text” following Michel de Certeau who takes into consideration both the *espaces lisibles* (discursive and material forms of texts) and their *effectuation* (procedures of interpretation in changing contexts). He writes:

“Whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control. It becomes a text only in relation to the exteriority of the reader, by an interplay of implications and ruses between two sorts of ‘expectation’ in combination: the expectation that organizes a *readable* space (a literality), and one that organizes a procedure necessary for the actualization of the work (a reading).”¹⁰

To this Roger Chartier adds:

“The dialectic [when reading and I would argue teaching] between imposition and appropriation, between constraints transgressed and freedoms bridled, is not the same in all places or all times or for all people. Recognizing its diverse modalities and multiple variations is the first aim of a history of reading that strives to grasp — in all their differences — communities of readers and their ‘arts of reading.’”

In this case, understanding the ways Thai Buddhist readers and teachers have creatively translated and taught the Dhammapada will provide insight into how socio-historical forces have influenced the local reading and teaching of Buddhism, and provides a more sophisticated way of seeing the changes and continuities of Buddhist exegesis in Thailand. This is an approach that I hope will serve as a model of how to write a history (certainly not the only way) of Buddhist education without describing merely institutions and official curricula and the ideologies that sponsor them. This is an alternative to the institutional and ideological

¹⁰ See Michel de Certeau (1984): 174 and Roger Chartier’s commentary (1994): 2.

approach. This study does not simply teach us more about Thai exegetes, translators and instructors. In the end, I hope that it will force us to think about how we read, learn, teach, and translate the Dhammapada in our classrooms, libraries and offices, as well as what we choose to count as historical evidence. There is much to learn from the ways Thais have negotiated with the Dhammapada. We have much to learn from Thai teachers about what counts as the Dhammapada. In this way learning from the ways Thai learn the Dhammapada is not only a historical investigation, it is also an inter-textual and self-reflective project¹¹.

Instability and Freedom: The Pre-modern Vicissitudes of the Dhammapada in Thailand

The Dhammapada is one of the oldest and best recognized texts of South and Southeast Asian Buddhism. In pre-twentieth century Thailand it was a central subject of commentaries, sermons and inscriptions¹². How-

¹¹ For example, Bailey and Mabbet (2003) use the teachings of the Dhammapada in support of their thesis that early Buddhism was an ascetic religion in which the Buddhist monk was primarily an ascetic who played a mediating role in society. Regardless of the accuracy of their thesis or the intentions of the author(s), they use socio-historical evidence to provide a clearer reading of the Dhammapada and the Dhammapada to strengthen their sociological argument. It is an important, if somewhat convoluted, contribution, but tells us nothing of how the Dhammapada was taught, how the verses were received, altered, etc. in oral exposition. It tells us nothing about appropriation. The early Pali commentaries reflect a wide diversity of interpretations of the verses, many not in support of the ascetic life. These narrative commentaries expanded in Southeast Asia and became mixed with local folktales, political agendas, etc. For a longer discussion on this topic and a bibliography on Buddhist narrative transformations in Thailand and Laos see McDaniel (2000) and McDaniel (2005). For a good model on how stories in India become intertwined see Insler (1991: 97-139).

¹² The diversity of Dhammapada and Dhammapada-Atthakathā manuscripts in the region can be seen from the most cursory of surveys. For example, in Balee Buddharaksa's catalogue of 89 Pali manuscripts from Northern Thailand there is a manuscript from 1583 from Wat Lai Hin with one *phūk* (fascicle) and 42 folios, which is not complete, which contains two stories (*Velatthisīsattithera* and another unidentified narrative). There is another manuscript titled simply "Dhammapada" from 1511 composed by a Lao monk from Xaiyaburi, but found in Northern Thailand with 23 verses. Other Dhammapada manuscripts include: from Wat Doi Kaeo in Chiang Mai with one *phūk* and 99 folios, from Wat Kāsa in Chiang Rai with one *phūk* and 109 folios composed in 1647. These are all commentarial narratives. There are also three rare manuscripts which contain only Pali verses. These were used by Oskar von Hinüber and K.R. Norman for their PTS edition. One from

ever, before the twentieth century there is little evidence that there were many “complete manuscripts” of the Pali Dhammapada in Thailand¹³.

1786 has one *phūk*, 57 folios, and was found at Wat Lai Hin. It is missing verses 319 to 343. Another is from 1611 (Wat Lai Hin) and is almost complete. The last is from 1827, Wat Kāsā, Chiang Rai has 109 folios. In the catalogues from the Center for the Promotion of Art and Culture at Chiang Mai University there were over 20 Dhammapada manuscripts found in Phrae province alone, many from Wat Sung Men (although many were probably composed in Luang Phrabang, Laos). Most are vernacular *nissaya* stories and not verses. I examined many of these manuscripts myself at the monastery, but a complete study is needed. These manuscripts are very diverse in size (one to 21 *phūks*) and contain different content (different local narratives and collected, often mis-ordered narratives from the Dhammapada-Atthakathā). In Lampang Province we find a great deal of Dhammapada manuscripts from the early to mid-eighteenth century which range widely in size and content. Most are vernacular *nissaya* type manuscripts with mixed local and Indic narratives in idiosyncratic order. In Central Thailand (Siam) this diversity is also found; however, there are fewer manuscripts of the Dhammapada from the Central region due to the ravages of war and neglect. The manuscripts used to make the first *tipiṭaka* in Thonburi-early Bangkok/Ratanakosin era (late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries) came from Ayudhya, Nakorn Sri Thammarat (Southern Thailand) and were edited and compiled at Wat Rakhankositaram in what is commonly known as the Wang Lang section of Thonburi (properly Bangkok Noi). I am undertaking a study of early Dhammapada manuscripts in Central Thailand. In the library of Wat Boworniwet in Bangkok there is a printed edition of the Dhammapada in Ariyaka script. Ariyaka is the script that was designed by King Mongkut in the mid-nineteenth century. This edition does not seem to have had much commerce among monastic students, but this is likely the first known printed edition of the text. Phra Sugandha (Anil Sakya) was of much help in locating early printed editions of this text. He recently published (2004) a new edition and introduction to the first Ariyaka text produced (a small collection of liturgical and protective prayers called the “Suat Mon Tua Ariyaka”). The first four texts, and as far as I can tell the only four, printed in Ariyaka script were the Suat Mon, the Dhammapada, the Bhikkhupatimokkha and the Bhikkhunī-patimokkha. The last text is strange considering that there were no bhikkhuni (fully ordained nuns) in the country at that time. For this paper, it is telling that the Dhammapada (verses) were seen as foundational to Thai Buddhist education and heritage. I also thank Phra Mahasillapa Dhammasippo (Hinchaisri) for his assistance and guidance. Dhammapada-Atthakathā manuscripts dominate and the use of vernacular gloss is common. Many manuscripts I consulted for this paper were read *in situ* at various monastic libraries in Laos and Northern Thailand. Many are also housed in microfilm in archives in the region. There has been no comprehensive catalogue for these manuscripts. A list of catalogues for the collections (which certainly does not cover all extant manuscripts) appears in McDaniel (2003) and a slightly different list in Skilling (2002). See also Skilling (2004) for more information on vernacular texts.

¹³ In their introduction, Carter and Palihawadana (1987) note that little is known about the “original” Dhammapada. There are several early versions in a Gāndhārī Prakrit and the Patna Dharmapada, as well as the *Udānavarga* of the Sarvāstivādins in hybrid Sanskrit which contains a large percentage of nearly identical verses to the Pali Dhammapada. We can surmise that by the time the Dhammapada was received in Thailand the 423 verses

While there are a few manuscripts that contain most of the 423 verses, the text is found most commonly in *nissaya* form. *Nissayas* are bi-lingual Pali-Thai manuscripts used for the instruction and oral translation of Buddhist texts. They almost never provide a complete translation of the original text and in parts of the text are often found in numerous different monastic libraries. For example, a manuscript found in one of the regional microfilm catalogues has “Dhammapada mad #4” as its title. One would assume that this is the fourth section or chapter of the Dhammapada. However, this text is a Thai translation of several (disconnected) stories drawn from the Pali Dhammapada-atthakathā. There is also extra-canonical material included in this manuscript. Each section of the Dhammapada is called a “*mad*.” Each *mad* is of different length, ranging from 12-42 folii or one-two fascicles (*phūks*). From the available manuscript catalogues there seems to be a total of 16 *mad*. These *mad* do not correspond to the Pali Dhammapada’s 26 *vaggas* (chapters) or 423 verses. Moreover, there is not one monastic library that contains all 16. Each *mad* seems to have been composed independent of the others by different local scholars at different times in different places. I have collected numerous *mad*. From my experience, many of these *mads* have been mislabeled, and often have numerous missing or severely damaged leaves. In addition, one manuscript can have several *pecia*. I believe that any attempt to collect “all” of the *mads*, place them in sequential order and translate them as one text would be misleading to how they were composed and collected. It would create a false sense of “completeness.” I am confident that these *mad* were not composed in order, by one author at one place and ever bound together as one large manuscript. These vernacular narratives and word commentaries seemed to have circulated independently and never read as a “complete” (i.e. all 16 *mads*) text. I have only found 16 *mads* in different places, this in no way means that 16 was the total number of *mads* of the Dhammapada in any of these regions. In addition to having several *mads* for the Dhammapada, there are also numerous *mads* for the *Dhammapada Nissaya*. These scattered *nissaya*

of the Pali Dhammapada and the 299 commentaries of the Pali Dhammapada-atthakathā were relatively standard. However, there is very little evidence that the complete text of either the verses or the commentary were read or taught widely as complete texts or bound in one collection.

manuscripts were used for instruction and creative re-telling of particular stories from the commentarial sections of the *Dhammapada*. *Nissayas* are evidence of the first Dhammapada guidebooks in Thailand. Finally, it is very difficult to determine the actual content from the title of the manuscript on the wooden cover, in the colophon, or in the margin on the first leaf. For example, there are manuscripts with the title “Dhammapada,” but they do not contain the Pali verses. Usually they are vernacular glosses (*nissaya*, *vohāra*, or *nāmasadda*) of some stories from the atthakathā and other local narratives¹⁴.

For the sake of space I will only discuss one example which I hope will suffice to understand this reception and transformation between the sixteenth and late nineteenth centuries. It is a mixed Pali and Thai manuscript with the title: *Dhammapada Nissaya* (Northern Thai: *Nisai Dhammapot*). The manuscript comes from Phrae Province in modern day Thailand composed in 1836. It is a long manuscript over ten fascicles and 175 folios.¹⁵ The title would suggest that this manuscript is a gloss and explanation of the Pali verses of the Dhammapada; however, this is actually a *nissaya* loosely based on the *Khadiravaniyarevatatheravatthu* from the *Arahantavaggo* of the Dhammapada-Atthakathā. However, details and events from another story seem to have become inserted in the process of translation. The main narrative is based on the ascetic powers and great devotion of Revata and his ordination as a bhikkhu. The Pali story also relates the Buddha’s trip to the Khadiravana retreat. Revata was the youngest brother of the eminent disciple Sāriputta and was held back from ordaining by his mother, because she did not want all her children to abandon her for the mendicant life. However, Revata not wanting to marry and raise a family and take care of his mother (because he realized the impermanence of all things) secretly ordained. After ordaining Revata displayed his ascetic power by creating luxurious dwellings for the Buddha and his followers while staying in the Khadira forest. The Buddha told the skeptic Visākhā about the wonderful powers of Revata.

¹⁴ *Vohāras* and *nāmasaddas* are closely related to *nissayas* in Laos and Thailand. I describe the differences extensively in McDaniel (2003).

¹⁵ McDaniel (2003: 247-273). The catalogue number from the Chiang Mai University Center for the Promotion of Art and Culture is: PHR 010200800. There is a good chance that this manuscript was originally composed in Luang Prabang and brought to Phrae to educate local monks in 1835.

There are numerous other narratives taken from the Dhammapada-Atthakathā in these ten fascicles. The order of *mad* does not follow any previously known order of the Pali Dhammapada-Atthakathā and the choices of narratives to comment on and translate from do not follow the order of stories or chapters in the Pali source text. For example, the last narrative glossed in this manuscript (fascicles nine and ten) is the *Culla-ekasātakavatthu* which is not situated near the *Khadiravaniyarevatattheravatthu* in the canonical Dhammapada nor its commentary. However, it is also a story that involves Vipassī Buddha. Since a number of the narratives in this Dhammapada manuscript mention Vipassī Buddha, this may have been the underlying reason for grouping these seemingly disparate canonical and non-canonical narratives together. This is further supported by the fact that Vipassī is emphasized more in these stories than in the Pali versions. From this example, it is important neither to assume that two manuscripts with the same titles have the same contents nor to assume that the Pali title is anything more than a loose guide to the actual contents of the largely vernacular text. In fact, this is rarely the case and never the case with *nissaya* versions of the Dhammapada. The narratives chosen by the authors of any of the manuscripts of this Dhammapada not follow the order of the Indic Dhammapada-Atthakathā and narratives from different *vagga* (chapters) of the atthakathā are bound together. The choice seems to be based on preference for certain stories or based on plot or other similarities rather than any traditional translational order.

Looking directly at the Revata narrative, as the story progresses the author gradually cites fewer and fewer Pali words from the source text. By the end of the fascicle there is little to connect the manuscript to any known Pali source and even the final verse in Pali is not cited. This author begins his translation through direct and sustained citations from a source (whether present or in mind), but gradually ceases to maintain that connection, although the basic and abbreviated contents of the story are still present in the vernacular. In this section, certain details, like the mention of the cities of Bandhumatī and an unusual emphasis of the life of Vipassī Buddha (the nineteenth of 24) suggest strongly that the author was drawing on material from the Vipassī section of the *Buddhavaṃsa* (21) and the story of Dipankara and Vipassī from the *Dūrenidānakathā* of the *Nidāna*.

The *Nidāna* is the introduction to the Pali *Jātakas*. On the one hand, combining details and narrative events from stories in both the *Nidāna* of the *Jātaka* and the Dhammapada-Atthakathā reveals that our author may have had a very different collection of stories, called the Dhammapada, as his source text. On the other hand, he composed this *Dhammapada Nissaya* by using Pali trigger words and phrases, which would invoke a mixture of different stories with similar characters, locales and events in the process of oral translation. Hence, he might not have had a physical manuscript of the Pali source text. If he did have a Pali source text then this is evidence that there was another recension of this story available in the region different from the Sri Lankan recensions. It seems most likely that the author did not have a Pali source text present and was not translating but recalling a Pali story or parts of stories from memory and hearsay and dictating them in the vernacular, since he does not directly quote any lengthy passages and does not follow one story consistently. It would be understandable if the author was using the Pali trigger words written and glossed to combine details and events from these two stories. Both the story of Dipankara from the *Nidāna* of the *Jātaka* collection and the story of Revata from the Dhammapada-Atthakathā involve the Buddha Vipassī and Revata. Moreover, the fact that the city of Bandhumatī is mentioned in this text although it is never mentioned in the Dhammapada is because it was the birthplace of Vipassī. The Buddhas of the past were often known by their tree, height, life-span, birthplace, and other basic biographical details. The author of our text seems to have been telling the story of Revata using certain Pali words to anchor and order the narrative and when Vipassī was mentioned as part of the Revata story from the Dhammapada-Atthakathā. The author recalled or confused the two stories and added information about the life of Vipassī not mentioned in the Dhammapada-Atthakathā. If trigger or key words were used to translate this manuscript they also might have been used to guide the collection of narratives in this particular collection. If we see trigger words or particular details, like the names of cities, particular Buddhas of the past, certain acts of charity or ascetic power, present in previously unrelated stories as organizing principles then this might explain why two stories like the *Culla-ekasātakavattu* and the *Khadiravaniyarevatattheravattu* are bound together in this manuscript. They both involve Vipassī Buddha.

Moreover, the plot details and characters of the former are found in versions in the *Milindapanha*, the *Anguttara-atthakathā*, as well as the *Dhammapada-Atthakathā*. The version from the *Anguttara* commentary takes place in the city of King Bandhumatī, which may be another linkage between this story and the Revata story. It is easy to see how the events of two stories both involving Revata and Vipassī may have been conflated. This tendency to conflate different legends from the lives of one famous holy man is very common in Thailand where legends and retellings of legends in highly divergent forms are found in books on the lives of famous monks and in sermons. Any speaker of Thai who has spent time in the amulet markets and monastic cells in this region can attest to the popular past time of relating the miraculous events of famous monks living and dead, legendary and historical. Accuracy and sources never seems to be a major concern to the story tellers. It is their power as moral and ritual exemplars which have ethical and discursive force. Where these stories came from is of little importance to our study, because most stories in these collections are found in numerous narrative collections in Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, etc. However, the organizing principles in the mind of the author who combined these stories into one collection are telling. For scholars to define the parameters of Buddhist, local and India literature in Northern Thailand and Laos, they must understand this creative anthologizing of stories as defining the idea of canon or curriculum of Buddhists in the region. Since narratives are the most common way Buddhism is taught in Southeast Asia and narrative texts are some of the most prevalent in manuscript collections, examining what stories were collected, how they were manipulated, expanded, contracted and conflated provides a good picture of the subjects and themes of Buddhist education. The intellectuals of the region did not simply reproduce, translate, collect and preserve the Pali canon and commentary, but they creatively engaged with that wide corpus and contributed to it through creative and expansive translation and anthologizing.

A brief selection from the manuscript will help understand how *nissayas* work. Pali words are in bold:

“thoeng **revatathera** an yū pā mai sak phian hai pen het laeo **dessanā** yang **dhamma dessancā** an nī an phūt Tuai **ātikalyāṇā paddha gathā** pāt ton wā **gāme vā yadī** vāraṇeni lae **āyasmā hi sārīputto** Tuai dae **sārīputtathera**

cao ton mī āyu lao wai yang **vatthū** khong thoeng gam an Tai 87 kū kot laeo meua lun **pabbājesi** go rom yang...**gon lae phiang Tang revata nan dao phū Tiao yū reuan lae luk nan phī wā ca puat**” (approx.: folio kâ.recto-folio.kha.verso) [sic].

“This **dessanā** meaning this **dhammadessanā** is distinguished by being a **paddha gathā** that is **ātikalyāṇa**. This means [the verse] “**gāme vā yadi vārñeni**” and “**āyasmā hi sārīputto**.” This refers to **sārīputtathera**, the honorable one, [who] has reached **āyu** (proper age) and has already placed down **vatthū** (clothes), material goods, silver, and gold of all types amounting to 87 **koṭis**, after he caused to ordain...[he brought together his three sisters to ordain] Only **Revata** still lives in the house and this child, his older [brother wants] to ordain” [sic]¹⁶.

The decision of when to write out a Pali word and supply a vernacular gloss is idiosyncratic and depends on the author and the words which he wants to mention and gloss. From the manuscript, this sermon-giver wanted to emphasize the importance of gifts to the Sangha; however, a number of other themes could be expanded upon orally. Most *nissayas*, including this one have approximately 5-20 percent Pali words. The vast majority of Pali words from the ideal source are not lifted or glossed.

The standard hierarchy between the Pali source text, as well as Pali words and vernacular glosses and translations is either neutralized or reversed and the vernacular and the classical languages play together like well-matched tennis players. In this match, the second-seed vernacular upsets the top-seeded classical. This pedagogical method is a defining feature of Thai and Lao *nissayas* in general. It would be going too far, without evidence as to the conscious or sub-conscious intentions of the author, to say that he purposely attempted to de-value the Pali text. In fact the opposite is more likely. He strung Pali words and phrases through the vernacular to maintain a link with the prestigious and ancient Pali source text, but used the vernacular to communicate with and edify his audience. The Pali text is invoked, but reduced to a bank of words and phrases, not an intact, canonical or inviolable text.

What is not seen from this short selection is the degree of repetition, for example, many words from this section are repeated *ad nauseum*.

¹⁶ The obvious orthographic anomalies are beyond the scope of this paper. I discuss them extensively in McDaniel 2003: 270-273.

Clearly, they were used for emphasis in an oral exposition. They almost form the chorus of the sermon that is returned to over and over again. Despite this repetition, the actual narrative would be unclear and useless for reading alone. It needs oral commentary and explanation. These repetitive words are triggers and clues to what the sermon-giver emphasized for oral commentary.

It is difficult to determine if the author of the *nissaya* was drawing material from the *Nidāna* or any other known source directly. It is more accurate to say that the author was drawing from a common bank of terms, names, and narrative sequences from various sources including the *Nidāna*, *Cariyapīṭaka*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, local folktales, his own memory, stories from his teachers, etc. There are only enough terms or the passages to associate details and events from this manuscript with some version of the Revata story, but this story should be seen as inspirational not prescriptive. A great number of new *jātaka*-type narratives were being composed in this region, many including random bits of information, tropes, characters, plot elements, morals, etc. The authors of *nissayas* were freely borrowing details, characters and events from each other and from the collective bank of well-known narratives (both canonical and non-canonical, vernacular and Pali-Sanskrit). This free borrowing of whole narratives or elements is certainly not unique to Thailand. The Dhammapada-atthakathā, the *Jātakas*, etc. possess many stories from Sanskrit narrative collections such as the *Pañcatantra*, *Mahābhārata* and the *Hitopadeśa*, or from Buddhist Sanskrit and Hybrid Sanskrit collections. Many of these same stories, of course, worked their way into the collective memory of Persian and European storytellers. Great stories are always stolen, always adapted and always shared.¹⁷

Other Dhammapada *nissaya* manuscripts reveal that the authors were not following any known source text, but is instead glossing a very few selected words from the known Pali sources alongside hundreds of other

¹⁷ This supports the *ākhyāna* theory which has been a point of controversy for a number of scholars studying early Buddhism. An *ākhyāna* narrative is composed during a sermon, and I believe during vernacular translation, based on trigger words from a verse from the *Jātakas*, Dhammapada or other collection. This seems to have been a common method for attaching prose narratives to verses and may have had its origins in R̥g Vedic literary and exegetical practices. See Alsdorf (1974: 36-47) and von Hinüber (1996: 113).

Pali words not found in the known sources. They are mostly anthologies of stories drawing a few words and phrases from non-sequential parts of the source, but representing themselves as the entire source. The authors used certain known terms, names and narrative sequences as triggers to compose their own texts¹⁸. The introduction, titles of the chapters, etc. served as anchors to the texts. If we trust the *ākhyāna* theory then this is the way that most Buddhist narrative commentaries were passed down orally until recorded in manuscripts¹⁹. This oral method from early Indian and Sri Lankan Buddhist authors is seen in written form in Thailand. The authors of our manuscripts may be simply initiating or taking part in another stage of commentarial development. These are partly new texts based on new ideas, new vocabulary, new creative anthologizing, new audiences, a new stage of Pali, new intentions, and a new socio-historical context. Since these texts are in *nissaya* form, they were used as a guide to an oral sermon/lecture. This is the way that most monastics and laity were introduced to the Dhammapada. It is certainly the way most Thais are introduced to the Dhammapada today. Sermons often draw the first line from the story of the Dhammapada-atthakathā and occasionally a verse from the text and then explain each word in the vernacular accompanied by stories, anecdotes, historical lessons, and links to contemporary events. The source text serves the needs of the teacher, the translator, the anthologizer, the politician, or the poet.

After seeing evidence from one manuscript one may ask if there is any relation to the “actual” Dhammapada at all. Given that the *nissaya* only draws selected passages, is repetitive, does not mention the “original” Pali

¹⁸ Orthographic, phonological, and philological evidence reveals that, in terms of “authorship,” these texts were most likely inscribed by scribes by dictation. A teacher most likely orally dictated to a scribe in the form of notes to prepare a sermon. The scribe could also have taken notes while a teacher actually gave a sermon. The abbreviated and abrupt nature of these texts could be evidence of an early type of stenography. Finished manuscripts in turn were used by future teachers as notes when teaching and therefore were changed every time they were taught through oral exposition. *Nissaya* manuscripts composed in the seventeenth century are still used by teachers today (especially in Laos) when giving sermons.

¹⁹ The debate over the way early Buddhist texts were composed and transmitted orally is still a point of contention in the field. Allon (1997), Gethin (1992), Collins (1992), Gombrich (1990), Cousins (1983), and Wynne (2004) offer good summaries of these debates, but offer different explanations.

verse, has extensive vernacular asides, draws from multiple versions of a story, and is useless as a connected narrative can this even be called text is the Dhammapada lineage? I argue that since local communities saw this as part of the Dhammapada tradition, the fact that most people in the region (literate and illiterate) over time were taught that this text was part of the Dhammapada (or even “the” Dhammapada), and that the *nissaya* author was clearly drawing from some version(s) of the Dhammapada-atthakathā, we cannot discount it unless we believe that texts should only be read in the form of a critical edition or that context and reception are of no use to historians, textual scholars, philologists, anthropologists, and the like. Is the Dhammapada only valuable as a complete text? What counts as a complete text? Who decides value? Is a partially oral text part of a textual tradition? Can there be a partially oral edition?

The Rise of the Verse: The Dhammapada in Modern Thailand

From this one example (of which there are hundreds like it in the manuscript libraries of Thailand), manuscript evidence shows us that the Dhammapada grew and changed in Thailand before the twentieth century and the rise of the printing press and royally sponsored monastic reforms. It also demonstrates that the commentarial narratives, not the verses, were the primary vehicles for teaching the Dhammapada. These narratives were creative anthologies of a bank of common stories, themes, terms, and names, rather than a standard collection based on the normative Pali Dhammapada-Atthakathā. Before the modern period it seems that these versions of the Dhammapada-Atthakathā were presented to their audience as normative. In fact, in modern sermons, these anthologies are still often called the “Dhammapada” and for the non-specialist we would assume, and my interviews confirm this, that they are considered normative. From the mid-nineteenth century to the present a shift has occurred in which the verses began to receive more prominence in terms of printed editions, royally sponsored canons, websites, and anthologies. The narrative commentaries have become more standard and have witnessed changes in format under influence from the West. However, the use of the Dhammapada in Buddhist education and homiletics has changed little.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it became more common for the verses of the Dhammapada to be published separately from the narratives of the Dhammapada-Atthakathā. This was certainly a new phenomenon in the way the Dhammapada was rendered in writing. The several editions of the *Tipiṭaka* and Pali commentaries sponsored by the royal family between the 1780s and present separate the verses and narratives (although the content of the canons has shifted from edition to edition). This separation of the verses and the narratives, as well as the creation of a “standard” or “mattatan” edition of the Dhammapada-Atthakathā in 1916 by the Liang Chiang publishing house in Bangkok, changed the manner in which a teacher or student could possess the text. This *mattatan* edition of the Dhammapada’s verses and narratives has been re-issued twice recently, once in 1972 and again in 1987 by Mahamakut press. There are six volumes in each paper-back set²⁰. The first is based on Prince Wachirayan’s nineteenth century edition and the latter was translated into Thai by the novice Udit Sirivanna Prian, who is now an American educated businessperson. Udit and another novice named Adisak Thong Khwan Prian also published a small handbook for the study of the verses of the Dhammapada which helps students learn how to translate the verses into Thai²¹. Udit provides specific instructions on the nature of verb endings, noun declensions, word order, and syntax not seen in any pre-1902 manuscript versions. The main guide is for translating the verses, while only the last two chapters mentioned methods of translating the narratives. In both six volume sets and the handbook Udit states that he abides by the more authentic “blae doi payanchana” or “literal translation method” versus translating for the spirit of the text. This method was rarely employed in pre-1902 Thailand exegetical practice. However, the standard is now “literal.” To emphasize the superiority and gram-

²⁰ This, of course, is not the only published edition of the text, but it is the most frequently used by students. There are too many editions to cite (indeed different editions occupy an entire section of the Mahamakut bookstore!) but see for example Samanera Udit Sirivanna Prian, *Dhammapot Bhāḥ 1-6 Plae doi byanjana* (Bangkok: Liang Chiang, 2530 [1987] and Prince Wachirayan’s often reprinted Dhammapada-Atthakathāya (Bangkok: Mahamakut Press).

²¹ There is a small “pocket edition” (*chapap krapao*) of this which is very popular called the *Gū meu kân plae dhammapot* [Handbook for translating the Dhammapada]. Most recent edition: 2531 [1988].

matical integrity of the original Pali, the handbooks emphasize the eight sub-methods used to translate the text: according to the nouns, according to the verbs, according to compounds, etc²². The Dhammapada, instead of an evolving and ever-changing part Pali, part vernacular collection of narratives has been limited to a translocal Pali text with literal Thai translation. The Pali original and the Thai translation are grammatically fixed. The text is standardized and not available in multiple local scripts, and the verses and the narratives are separate. Moreover, both the 1972 and the 1987 editions have changed the experience of reading the text through formatting. The way the text has been formatted has changed the way it is read. The verses are now printed in many modern editions in bold and formatted separately from the narratives (or in bound as an edition without narratives). There is a table of contents separating the stories. English punctuation, not part of the Thai language, has been added, so there are quotation marks, paragraph breaks, parentheses, periods, etc. copying Roman font editions Western editions of the text. Included in the standard printed editions are photographs of Bodhgaya, the stupa at Mahavihara temple in Sri Lanka, the cover of one edition is from a nineteenth century Sri Lankan painting. The only way to know that this text is Thai is the script. The Dhammapada has been internationalized in Thailand. In manuscripts there was no way to know without reading through every story (or more likely listening to every story) where one story ended and the next began. There are no tables of contents, paragraph markers, punctuation, or font changes. Colophons provide little more than the ritual dedication, date, and title of the entire text, all according to local customs.

This internationalization is also reflected in new mediums used to teach the Dhammapada, especially the verses. First, there is a nightly television program called “Dhamma Samrap Brachachon” which highlights Dhammapada verses and then gives literal Thai translations. There is no mention of the narratives. Also, ITV, one of Thailand’s major television networks ends its broadcast day with a picture of a Buddha image and soothing new age music over which a Pali verse from the

²² This follows Kaccāyana’s grammar, known as *Mūl Kaccāi* in Thailand. For a study on Pali grammatica and methods of teaching Pali grammar in Thailand see my “Notes on the study of Pāli grammar in Thailand” (forthcoming articles in honor of W.S. Karunatilake).

standard Dhammapada is given. This type of daily affirmation or chicken soup for the Buddhist non-soul style of presenting the Dhammapada valorizes and promotes the verses in Pali and removes them from the local tradition of teaching, binding, translating, and expanding on the text. Avant-garde dramas, like Patravadi's "The Buddhist Bible" (she uses an English title although her play is in Thai) invokes verses from the canonical Dhammapada without touching upon the commentarial verses. She told me she wanted Thais to see the true core of Buddha's word made accessible to the younger urban generation. She also reads the Dhammapada in English. There are also several Thai websites, most sponsored by university Buddhist study groups, which emphasize the centrality of the Dhammapada and promote its verses instead of the narrative commentaries. For example, at Mahidol University group <http://www.mahidol.ac.th/budsir/buddhism.htm> uses verses from the Dhammapada, disconnected from their narratives, which claims to teach students "the core truths" of Buddhism. A Thai real estate company run by Luanchai Vongvanit has started the Dhammathai website in order to provide the "essence of Buddhism" in an accessible manner. The website provides the verses of the Dhammapada in English and Thai. There is no mention of the narratives. This is a massive change considering palm-leaf manuscripts rarely emphasized the verses.

Rethinking Reform: How do we trace changes in the history of Buddhist education?

The rise of the Dhammapada verses and the creation of standard editions of the verses and narratives would seem to indicate a massive shift in the modern period. This shift can seemingly be placed squarely on the shoulders of the West and their intellectually colonized royal and monastic admirers. However, neither did the Thai simply copy the West nor do the apparent changes to the written text of the Dhammapada and Dhammapada-Atthakathā (the difference between these two texts was not clearly pronounced in the pre-modern period) reflect the continuities in pedagogical methods, examinations, and sermon-giving. In order to understand these important distinctions we need a short historical review.

Beginning in the late eighteenth and continuing into the twentieth century Siamese kings made great efforts to formalize the Buddhist ecclesiastical system and educational practices in Siam and in their spheres of influence (or vassal states) in the north, northeast and south. The greatest proponents of educational and administrative reform were Rama the Fourth (Mongkut) and Rama the Fifth (Chulalongkorn). This was part of the nation-building and social control process to suppress regionalism, strengthen the country against foreign missionary influence, formalize the curriculum, and “modernize” the entire education system. Siamese ecclesiastical ranks, textbooks printed in Siamese script, monastic examinations, the Pali Buddhist canon, and teachers approved from Bangkok and Central Siam were disseminated to the rural and urban areas in Siam and its holdings. Monks from the recently pacified north, northeast and south were brought to Bangkok to study in two new monastic universities (Mahachulalongkorn and Mahamakut). Localized forms of expression, language, curricula, script were considered irrelevant to this formalization and centralization. One of the most significant features of Buddhism in modern Thailand is its apparently well-organized and centralized institutional structure. Since Siam (later Thailand) is the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonized, the nation-building project in which religious reform played a major part could be considered a success²³.

Looking at the study of Thai Buddhist education, perhaps the most common marker for change from the pre-modern to the modern are the reforms of King Chulalongkorn and Prince Wachirayan culminating in the Sangha Act of 1902. Yoneo Ishii (1986), Craig Reynolds (1975), Patrick Jory (2002), and David Wyatt (1969) all invoke this royal administrative act as the signal that Thai Buddhism was entering into modernity, or perhaps that modernity was impacting Thai Buddhism. The main crux of this act was the formalization and centralization of Thai Buddhist education and administration.

Royal reform of Buddhism is not particularly modern. Consistently from the earliest thirteenth century records to 1902 Siamese kings and high

²³ The status of Siam never being colonized is hotly debated. What is colonization? Many scholars consider Siam crypto-colonized. Most recently this debate was highlighted by a panel at the International Thai Studies Conference in DeKalb, IL (April, 2005) titled “Thailand: Anything but Never Colonized.”

ranking monks had seen it as their duty to collect and edit Buddhist texts, rewrite Buddhist history, purge the community of monks (Sangha) of corrupt persons, and rein in renegade, independent-minded practitioners. By 1902 these techniques had become more efficient and widespread. In 1902, King Chulalongkorn and Prince Wachirayan, who was an ordained monk and who had become the Supreme Patriarch of the entire Thai Buddhist Sangha, appropriated the role of the Sangha to educate the Thai people and regulated the organization of monastic education. Those two working with another half-brother, Prince Damrong (the Minister of the Interior), released the Act on the Administration of the Sangha (“Acts of the Administration of the Buddhist Order of Sangha of Thailand: 2445 [1902], 2484 [1941], 2505 [1962]” See specifically R.S. 121 cited in Ishii 1986, 68). Before this Sangha Act, monastic education and administration in Thailand was neither formal nor centralized (See Wutichai 1995 and Reynolds 1975). It depended largely on the aims of the monks of each monastery. The Sangha Act was designed to make those residing in a monastery a “service to the nation” and to deflect criticism from European missionaries who denounced the poor and idiosyncratic state of Thai Buddhist education and organization.

The details of the Sangha Act represent largely administrative rules dividing the Buddhist ecclesia into formal ranks and assigning national, provincial and district heads of the Sangha (Ishii 1986: 69). They are still in effect today. Prince Wachirayan commented on the act, “Although monks are already subject to the ancient law contained in the Vinaya [Buddhist Book of Precepts], they must also subject themselves to the authority which derives from the specific and general law of the State” (Ishii 1986: 70)²⁴.

In 1902, around 80,000 monks became subject to the law of the royal government of Siam who controlled their admission to monkhood, the right to ordain, the size and status of monastic ground, and the ranking

²⁴ Each of the regions (north, south, central, and northeast) has a formal hierarchy of monks and they all report to the *Mahathera Samakom* (Council of Elder Teachers) headed by the Supreme Patriarch. Individual monasteries are still run by abbots (*chao awat*) and deputy abbots (*rong chao awat*), but after 1902 they had to report regularly to their district and regional heads. All monks had to be registered with a particular monastery and were issued identification numbers and cards.

of monks. There was certainly sporadic resistance in the form of renegade monks in the north like Krupa Siwichai and rebellions of holy men in the northeast until 1924²⁵. Still, the suppression of the independent-minded outer kingdoms was not cited as the main impetus for the State's monastic reforms. Prince Wachirayan believed that reform was necessary to ensure that Siamese Buddhism could purify itself. He believed, as did the king, that Buddhism was simpler and more pure in the distant past. "True Buddhism" was that designed by the Buddha himself in India 2400 years earlier. The only way to return to that purity was to go directly to the Buddha's words—the Pali Canon²⁶.

Studies by Jory, Ishii, Reynolds, Tambiah, and Wyatt (among others) which posit a rupture between pre-1902 and post-1902 Buddhist education are certainly accurate if we see Buddhist education as royal, ideological, institutional, canonical, elite, and Bangkok-centered. However, this approach has certain limitations. First, it focuses only on the changes ushered in by the elite in Bangkok. Second, it does not examine the actual impact institutional changes have on the reception of Buddhist learning among students. Alongside this focus on institutional changes is a conflating of royally sponsored editions of the canon and the formalization of monastic education. Although there were different and varied editions of the canon produced in Thailand from the fifteenth century to the present, these canons, as I have argued elsewhere, had little to do with the textual monastic curriculum or the content needed to pass monastic examinations (McDaniel 2002, 2003). Third, it does not offer us any real understanding of the nature of Buddhist education before these institutional changes. Wyatt and Ishii in particular only state that Thai Buddhist education before King Chulalongkorn's reforms was amorphous, informal, idiosyncratic, and decentralized. While there certainly is little information available about the specifics of institutional Buddhist education before 1902 outside the royal court there has been nearly no effort to look directly

²⁵ See Collins (1998: 405-408). He lists several of the major studies by Keyes, Chatthip and others on these revolts. See also two more recent studies by Yukio Hayashi (2004) and Duncan McCargo and Krisadawan Hongladarom (2004: 219-234).

²⁶ The founding of the Dhammayuttika Nikāya (Thammayut Sect) in the mid-nineteenth century has been studied extensively as being tied to this rising purification and return to the canon. This is beyond the scope of this paper. I question this in McDaniel (2006).

at the texts used in pre-modern education to discover possible rhetorical styles, pedagogical techniques, and curricular parameters used generally in the region²⁷. Fourth, historians have classified the royal reformers as monolithic in their thinking. King Mongkut, Prince Wachirayan, and King Chulalongkorn for example were great patrons of monks, like Somdet Buddhācārya Brahmaraṃsī Toh, who were famous for their amulet production and protective magic. They openly criticized local folktales in Buddhism, but embraced similar tales in the *Jātakas* and *Dhammapada-Atthakathā*. They promoted a return to the canon, but did not necessarily agree on what texts were contained in the canon. Furthermore, the monastic examinations they approved and formalized were based primarily on commentarial texts and locally produced anthologies. Knowledge (memorization, translation) of the *Dhammapada-Atthakathā* is necessary to pass one third of all the monastic examinations²⁸. Locally produced commentaries, like the *Mangala-atthadīpanī* commentary from sixteenth century Northern Thailand, is another major component of the exams. In addition to this, and as will be discussed more fully below, examinations are taken by very few monks and have little impact on everyday Buddhist education in Thailand. Finally, the institutional approach avoids looking at the

²⁷ Reynolds (1973) examines the famous Siamese cosmology, *Traibhūmikathā*, and its popularity in the reign of Rama I. He shows how it was incorporated into monastic education. The pedagogical value of this text, in face of Western science, was questioned in the late nineteenth century. I thank Michael Jerryson for stimulating conversations on this issue.

²⁸ Ishii (1986) and Wyatt (1969) describe the history of educational reform in Thailand well. This institutional history (including a few haphazard efforts to reform Siamese Buddhist education had been made by Kings Boromatrailokanat in 1466 and King Narai in 1688) are well summarized. The important thing to understand in this paper is that the texts used for Buddhist examinations through out Thai history were largely non-canonical. Ishii provides a detailed list of texts used for these examinations. Many things have changed since Ishii's book was published. However, these changes are primarily organizational and technological. For example, the examination administrators gave me the CD-Roms which include all of these texts. These CD-Roms are designed to make studying for the examinations more efficient and less expensive. The examinations and results can be obtained at the central monastic examination office in the Banglumpu section of Bangkok. The major text used for the actual examination is now called the "Reuang Sob Dham khong Sanam Leuang Paneak Dham" and is produced (with changes) in two volumes every year. The results are publically displayed on the outside bulletin board of the main examination office and in other public places in the major monastic universities. I thank the staff at the examination office for their help.

texts that were taught before 1902 and those that are taught in the modern period. The texts themselves reveal much about the oral context of the teaching, translation and pedagogical practices, and epistemological approaches.

Generally I am asking why historians and anthropologists of the Theravada tend to see a break between the pre-modern and modern without offering detailed examples of bridges between the pre-modern and modern. The reasons for changes in education, political policy, healthcare, literacy, notions of nationhood, and Buddhist practice from the pre-modern to the modern period have been discussed extensively by the leaders in the fields of Southeast Asian history and religion (or scholars choose either to work on the modern or pre-modern period). Rarely are efforts made to trace the connections between them. For example, Nicholas Tarling, Milton Osbourne, Joginder Singh Jeesy, Sulak Sivaraksa, Yoneo Ishii, David Wyatt, François Bizot, and others emphasize the changing face of Theravada Buddhism based on the disruption of colonialism, capitalism, globalism, technology or Christianity. While massive changes are undeniable, these are rarely explicitly coupled with detailed attempts to see what meaning-making systems, literary tropes and themes, exegetical practices, indigenous systems of data compression, and conceptions of history and nation persist. What is lost and what is gained by looking for ruptures between the pre-modern and the modern in the Theravada? While changes in elite ideologies (which are never uniform), institutions, printing and media technology, national border formation, and bureaucratic administration are undeniable these types of changes are mapped onto assumed epistemological changes in teaching, expressing, and learning.

For the sake of space, let me concentrate on one danger of the institutional and ideological approaches. Scholars typically overestimate the influence of the central Thai ecclesia and the government's Ministry of Religion and Culture on the practice of Thai Buddhism²⁹. The central

²⁹ The uniformity of the ideology of the royal reformers is also over emphasized. Wyatt (1969) notes that there were many arguments and disagreements over the way to reform monastic education. These disagreements have been unexplored except for Wutichai (1995) who notes, among other nuances, that many educational reforms were influenced by the Japanese as well as the British and the Americans. I spoke about these Japanese influences as well as the tensions and shifting ideologies of Thai royal reformers in McDaniel (2004).

Thai government's sponsorship of ecclesiastical examinations, suppression of local religious practice (esp. Lao) and training of Thamma-yut missionaries has had only limited influence over the past century. The new Buddhist education created by the elite has little commerce among the vast majority of monks and novices in Thailand today. According to national statistics, of the 267,000 monks and 97,840 novices in Thailand in the year 2000, only 9,775 were enrolled in monastic universities. Of the 9,775 enrolled, only 351 are studying beyond the bachelor degree level and only a handful are studying for their doctorates³⁰.

Before monks and novices can enter monastic universities they study at primary and secondary monastic schools. There are 31,071 monasteries in Thailand, but only a small percentage of these monasteries actually run schools. 3,554 have *Rongrien Pathom* (elementary schools). 78 percent of these schools are in the North and Northeast. In Central Thailand only 1.66 percent have monastic elementary schools. The North and Northeast have 21,629 and 160,991 monastic elementary students respectively, while Bangkok and surrounding provinces have less than 8,000 students enrolled at monastic elementary schools. The largest number of monastic students in modern Thailand study in Pariyattidhamma Secondary Schools. In these schools there are three major divisions: *Paliseuksā* study (Pali language, liturgy and texts), *Dhammaseuksā* (ethics, general Buddhist history and teachings) and *Samanseuksā* ("common," secular). On paper, most schools teach only Buddhist subjects, but some also teach *garuhat* (householder or lay subjects). However, in each school, an emphasis can be placed on householder/common/secular subjects (mathematics, economics, political science) by individual teachers. In fact, individual teachers, like in edu-

³⁰ These statistics are published annually by the Ministry of Education in Thailand (in Thai). The northeast, despite being the poorest and least populated of the four major regions of Thailand, has the largest number of monks and novices in the country (over 40 percent of the total). The north has 20 percent of the total. However, the northern seven provinces and the twenty-six northeastern provinces produce the least amount of university students. They sit for monastic examinations much less frequently than Bangkok monks and novices even though Bangkok and surrounding provinces only supply 16 percent of the total monks and novices in the country. The South has the least and only six percent of all the monks and novices reside that region. A very small number of monks study specific subjects at secular universities like Mahidol, Chulalongkorn, Khin Kaen, and Chiang Mai Universities. Some get independent tutoring, for example, I tutored several monks in Sanskrit grammar outside of a formal institutional framework.

cation systems worldwide, often change the official curriculum to suit the needs of their students, the pressures of parents, and their own political and social agendas. Even if monastic students are in institutions that only teach Buddhist subjects, they often can gain access to secular subjects in a variety of ways. Moreover, many of these students are only in robes for temporary periods and often disrobe in their late teens³¹.

These statistics are striking because they reflect the sparse influence that the Sangha educational and institutional reforms—especially the textbooks, curriculum and examinations, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—have had on the state of Buddhist education in the country. Among the statistics found in a National Ministry of Religion report, less than 30 percent of all the monasteries in the country have schools.

³¹ See Borchert (present volume) for a more detailed description of Theravadin secondary monastic education in Northern Thailand and Xipsongpanna. What he describes is certainly more congruent with practices in Laos than in Central Thailand and the urban centers of Northern and Northeastern Thailand. Rural areas of Thailand are more informal and even though they are supposed to use the official curriculum their teachers often diverge from this curriculum based on the availability (and affordability) of textbooks, teacher training, and willingness to stay within the narrow/examination focused national curriculum. Presently, I am finishing a study on monastic education in Laos and Northern Thailand which will explore the relationships between rural and urban monastic education in greater depth. Besides these three divisions of primary and secondary religious education in Thailand, there are also “Buddhist Sunday Schools” (*Rongrien Kānseuksā Buddhasāsanā Wanāthit*). The name for these schools was influenced by the popularity of Christian “Sunday Schools” run by missionaries in Sri Lanka and, later, Singapore. Buddhists saw the success at which Christians could teach basic Christian history and ethics to students in large, secular government schools. They adapted this model to teach Buddhism. In 1958 they were introduced formally to Thailand at Wat Yuwarajaransristi in Bangkok. They have spread quickly to other monasteries throughout the country and have become very popular in rural areas where monasteries lack the facilities or teachers to run their own schools. They are usually funded by private donors who are dissatisfied with the purely secular education provided by government schools. These local and independent Sunday Schools design their own curricula, schedules, hire their own teachers (usually monks or lay volunteers), and produce or purchase their own materials. For example, the Sunday School at Wat Sung Men in rural Phrae Province has designed a curriculum which promotes the study of Northern Thai culture, the old Yuan alphabet, Northern Thai manuscripts and history. The class (two hours) is taught in the Northern Thai language and the abbot himself wrote and photocopied the textbook for his students (both lay and monastic). There are 1,239 registered Sunday Schools in Thailand. 82 percent are in the North and Northeast. Less than six percent are in Central Thailand. Sunday Schools continue to grow as government schools become less accessible, less funded, and more overcrowded, and as they provide less in the way of an ethics-based education in a country dealing with the harsh effects of drug abuse, prostitution, economic stagnation, and emigration of the youth to Bangkok.

Many novices and monks reside at one monastery and travel to attend classes at another nearby. Many novices and monks have never attended school formally and study with their abbots, older novices and senior monks. They do not use textbooks, but rely on the notebooks or oral expositions of their teachers and older students. If they do attend a neighboring monastic school or government school, it may be only for 2-3 years. The vast majority of formally or informally trained monastic students never sit for state-sponsored monastic *nak dham* or *parian* examinations³². Of those who sit, even fewer pass the exams. The rise of Buddhist Sunday Schools, as well as meditation centers, mosques, Christian mission schools, and government schools further reflect the sparse influence that the Sangha educational reform has outside the elite monasteries of Bangkok and a few other major urban centers. The reforms of the kings and princes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have little effect on Buddhist education throughout Thailand today³³.

A Modern Dhammapada: Orality and Homiletics as History

Most Buddhist educational reforms have remained ideological, institutional and relatively innocuous in the daily teaching of Buddhism in Thailand. The same can be said of changes in the instruction of the Dhammapada. Certainly the text has been standardized and formatted differently. It was set in several editions of the canon. Moreover, new mediums and editions have emphasized the verses over the narratives. Still, the way the text is taught and its role in education have remained relatively intact³⁴. In the first two sections, we saw how the *atthakathā*,

³² Anne Blackburn (2001) makes the useful distinction between the apprentice (informal) versus curricular (formal) monastic education in Sri Lanka.

³³ There are formal and informal sermon-giving training at monastic universities. For example, at Mahamakut University students are asked to give mock sermons in front of other students and the good sermon-givers are given different time slots to give sermons to the public depending on the size of the audience.

³⁴ Homiletic style is by no means rigid, proscribed, and/or universal. Even though the *nissaya/vohāra*-mode is popular and pervasive, some sermon-givers like the nun, Maechee Sansanee Sathirasut, Luang Pho Khun, and Phra Phayom Kalyano are famous for their own unique styles of giving sermons which incorporate jokes and dramatic analogies and allusions to contemporary news events.

not the verses, are essential to the monastic examination taker. Therefore, there is little change here except for the institution of written examinations in 1913 and the focus on standard and grammatically fixed editions of the narratives. Still, most laity, nuns and monks do not take these examinations. Most come into contact with the Dhammapada-Atthakathā through sermons and lectures at monastic schools or in sermon halls. These sermons are where the *nissaya* pedagogical method and the creative expansion and adaptation of the Dhammapada persist in Thailand.

The difficulty with studying the evolution of Buddhist texts in Thailand is that it is hard to define the nature of a text. I began my research comparing manuscript versions of the Dhammapada (which include *nissaya*, *vohāra*, *nāmasadda*, verse only, and Pali only narratives, the latter two being rare and not widely circulated) to modern editions of the Dhammapada (Pali verses, Thai translations of the verses, editions of the Dhammapada-Atthakathā used for examination preparation, handbooks to the grammar of the Dhammapada-Atthakathā). There was a great disconnect in content, medium, formatting, grammar, orthography, and rhetorical style. However, listening to sermons and attending monastic classes based on the Dhammapada or listening to teachers who invoked the Dhammapada (verses and narratives) revealed a deep continuity between the pre-modern manuscripts and the modern sermons. The problem was only comparing one type of “text.” If scholars only compare the palm-leaf manuscript versions of the Dhammapada (or any other text) to the modern printed editions of the Dhammapada (or any other text) then this reifies the common assumption that modern editions are simply newer manuscripts using a different medium. This is an easy assumption to make being that most of the time scholars read palm-leaf manuscripts in transliterated printed form or if they actually read the palm-leaf manuscript it is from a copy made from a microfilm roll and read in French, British, Danish, Australian, Japanese, or American archives, or in monastic libraries and national archives in Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, India, etc. This reading is done seated alone under electric light attended by dictionaries, concordances, or CD-ROMS. The practices and experience of reading a printed text alone is mapped onto the experience of reading a Palm-leaf manuscript. The size and paper and the clarity of the script seems to be the only difference. This is a very important part of textual and philological

research of which I am a practitioner, but this is not the only way to study texts. This experience and practice misses the fundamental orality and social experience of the study of, listening to, worshipping, and teaching a palm-leaf manuscript. For many, the Dhammapada is not read in a text, but vibrates in the air between the sermon-giver or lecturer and the audience. It was/is an aural/oral experience. The context in which the pre-modern Dhammapada manuscripts (especially the *nissaya* versions) were composed, copied, taught, and studied was oral and homiletic in nature. It was part of the ritual, meditational and devotional life of a Thai Buddhist as it still is. Therefore, it is of limited value to compare pre-modern manuscripts used in educational settings to modern printed editions. Differences can be noted. Corrections to the past or to the present text can be made. Chronological textual stemma can be created. Judgments of textual integrity can be made. To what end? What do any of these answers tell us about how Thais have read and taught these texts and how that has changed over time? What do we learn of appropriation? Of course these endeavors are not useless. Indeed, I think they are fundamental in the process of research. However, they are not adequate for tracing educational history and defining the contours of a Buddhist reading and teaching culture.

In order to trace the history of Buddhist education and the texts used in that education we must compare pre-modern manuscripts used as guides to sermons, lectures, and training (ritual, monastic, astrological, magical, medicinal) to modern teacher's handbooks, sermon-guides, handwritten notebooks, audio/video-recorded sermons, etc. It would also help to compare these to student notebooks and textbooks. We need to compare oral text to oral text — educational context to educational context. These texts are created for and in response to oral presentations, summaries, expansions, and adaptations of source texts whether they are canonical, commentarial, vernacular, or classical. They exist in a group setting. They are cues to unwritten oral expansions and asides. They are responsive to contemporary events, personal biases, political agendas, idiosyncratic wonderings, and audience reactions. These encounters may float above the texts, but they are part of the history of Buddhist education.

By listening to sermons both in the city and at rural temples, reading transcripts of sermons delivered by monks all over the country, or attend-

ing classes at monastic high schools and grammar schools which teach the Dhammapada, we can see the creative reading, exegesis, expansion, and anthologizing of the Dhammapada witnessed in pre-modern manuscripts and through the *nissaya* method. In these sermons and lessons in the non-elite monastic schools and sermon halls teachers most often do not work from a standard edition of the Dhammapada, but instead tell stories from the Dhammapada-atthakathā and then “lift words” (*yok sab*) from the story and offer creative glosses and expanded oral narrative sub-commentaries. These sermons are becoming relatively standard as well. They can be purchased through out the country in faux manuscript form. One popular sermon-guide is the *Nidān Dhammapot* published by Liang Chiang, but different from their other *mattatan* editions and those standard editions published by Mahamakut press. It is an anthology of stories from the Dhammapada-Atthakathā. Like pre-modern *nissayas* the collection of stories in this *Nidān Dhammapot* edition are not identical to the canon. The creative *nissaya* method of presenting the Dhammapada stories orally lives on in this popular guide for sermon-givers. Its shape mimics that of a palm-leaf manuscript and shows the importance of the traditional manuscript that is to be held when a monk gives a sermon (the text is the same width and length as a traditional palm-leaf manuscript and folded into a libretto book). The “feel” of a manuscript is not only maintained through size, but also by weight, as the pages are made of stiff cardboard and make holding it similar to holding stiff palm-leaf. There is also a space on the back of the text where the donor of the text can handwrite in her or his own name. Therefore, new colophons are being created every time this printed text is donated. It also comes in codex form as a two volume set, but this version is not as popular for sermon-givers. The title is misleading³⁵, it is not all the “stories of the Dhammapada” (*nidān* (from the word for story, not the Pali text *Nidāna*) *dhammapot* (Dhammapada)), but actually short introductions to some of the stories. In the beginning there are instructions on how to give a sermon based on these summaries and a selection of important terms. The text has 12 *phūks* or *gan* (Pali: *gaṇḍha* English: *fascicles*). There is a list of techniques for giving ser-

³⁵ ???

mons and its states that it is in the *vohāra* style, which is nearly identical to the *nissaya* style³⁶. Both the *nissaya* and *vohāra* methods use the “yok sab” method of lifting Pali words and phrases from a canonical or extra-canonical source text/anthology (or a bank of Pali words and phrases in mind) and expand on them orally with a high degree of repetition for emphasis and stylistic flow. It gives insight into the ways canonical texts are anthologized and taught in the modern period. Here the Dhammapada verses are not taught, but only 12 selected and abbreviated stories from the Dhammapada-Atthakathā. For example, the *Maṭṭhakunḍa-līmāṇapa* story is introduced as good for teaching on various occasions and this is followed by the story of *Nāṅg Kālīyakṣiṇī*. Here we see that across the 12 *phūks* the stories that are chosen are mainly about the benefits of giving to the Sangha or stories about how listening to the dhamma cures disease and brings wealth. These were consistent themes in the *nissaya* Dhammapadas. At the beginning of each *phūk* there are instructions to the monk using the text on how to give a sermon. Since the identical instructions are at the beginning of each *phūk* it shows that the *phūks* can be used and shared separately from the set. This gives us an indication of why we find so many scattered and shared palm-leaf *phūks* in pre-modern Thailand. The instructions state that there are four techniques for giving a sermon:

“**sandassanā** is the sermon which helps the listener clearly understand that which is (true); 2) **samādapanā** is the adapting (drawing out/*nom nao*) of meaning in order to help the listener use the teachings in practice; 3) **samuttejanā** is giving the listener confidence and motivation in his/her practice; 4) **sampahansanā** is the instilling in the listener a sense of happiness, joy, hope and enthusiasm.”³⁷

Following these are the five objectives a preacher should have:

“1) offer the listener something s/he has never heard before; 2) help her/him understand things s/he has heard before more clearly; 3) help her/his doubt abate; 4) help them develop right view (*kwām hen tūk tong*) according to

³⁶ Many pre-modern manuscripts have titles like *nissayavohāra* or *vohāranissaya* and often there is little distinction between these types of texts. At the 2005 IABS conference in London I presented a paper specifically describing *vohāras*.

³⁷ These Pali terms are part of a string of terms from a common formula in the *Vinaya* and *Suttanta*. Translated from the Thai and Pali.

the dhamma; 5) help them liberate their mind from confusion (in order to begin to lessen the power of kilesa (moral stains) and taṇhā (craving).”

Then the text provides explicit warnings and inspiration to the sermon-giver:

“Before you [the sermon-giver] begin this sermon on the stories of the Dhammapada in prose using the *vohāra* sermon style, [you should know that] this text uses modern vernacular colloquial language, but should be given properly as a sermon ought to be, because this is part of the world heritage of the wisdom of Buddhists. This is designed to draw out the dhamma and explain it clearly so that the audience will understand it easily and clearly. You should only speak for about 25 minutes. This sermon is important because it summarizes the main theme of each story. Its objective is to be convenient for the sermon-giver and to be used easily in his teaching of essential information in accordance with the theme of the story. It supports the sermon-giver by allowing him/her to use his own language [expressions, turns of phrases, accent] however he sees fit and in anyway that facilitates learning and appreciation from the audience. This ensures that the dhamma penetrates and seeps into (*saek seum*) the listener and becomes part of her/his way of life. This is designed to sow the seeds of virtue in the heart and mind of the people so that the roots of virtue grow from the heart and mind. This will make each person and the whole society happy.”³⁸

Here we see an example of what Jeffrey Samuels calls “attracting the heart” (see his contribution in the volume) and how the stories from the Dhammapada are designed, in this text, to be adapted by and be inspiring to the sermon-giver. The sermon-giver must be attentive to the needs of his audience. The text that is negotiated by the sermon-giver and his/her reading exists somewhere in the space between the text, the reading, the teaching, and the reception — never stable, never alone on paper.

Conclusion

Seeing this modern Dhammapada text and pre-modern *nissaya* manuscripts as a sermon and lecture guides is essential to understanding how the vast majority of Thai teachers and students come in contact with the Dhammapada through reading and listening to *nissaya*, *vohāra* and

³⁸ Translated from the Thai.

nāmasadda style sermons and lectures. In Thailand, there was a radical shift institutionally (and in some ways ideologically, although this is often over-emphasized and over-simplified) in the way Buddhist education was organized and administered³⁹. However, these institutional changes and their ideological bases have not been widely or uniformly adopted in Thailand. Moreover, these institutional adaptations and contested ideological re-imaginings did not cause, in any significant way, the pedagogical methods, rhetorical styles, or subject matter of Buddhist lessons to radically shift. Looking at the homiletic and pedagogical practices we can see a deep continuity. The history of the Dhammapada demonstrates this.

Looking at the Dhammapada, we see that the teacher and the student transform, manipulate, and expand the core, and that is the core of his or her idiosyncratic reading/listening. This core is transformed to the degree that it is no longer a core or from the canon. The canon is rarely consulted by sermon-givers or teachers. The idiosyncratically appropriated text, the sermon-guide, the handbook, the lifted series of terms are enough. The teacher's reading and the audience's reception are tantamount. The integrity of the original (whatever that may be) text is secondary. The core, whether a canonical or commentarial source, is an ever shifting body of ideas and narratives. The forces of the core text and the forces of changing contexts, intentions, mediums, opinions, agendas, and abilities are always in play while reading and teaching. The source text and the text of the sermon-guide ceases to be a simply a text, but a practice. Therefore, studying the Dhammapada, as Hallisey states about Buddhist texts in general, is a study of shifting practices of circulation. The study of appropriation is part of a study of circulation. Studying a text's circulation and appropriation, I am arguing, is not merely institutional and ideological. Studying a text in its context means studying shifting contexts and not just external socio-historical contexts, not just ideological and

³⁹ The format of printing texts was also a significant change. The simple fact that students can each have their own copy of a book and study on their own changes their relationship to the teacher and weakens her/his power to deviate from the text. However, despite mass printing most students in rural Thailand (and especially Laos) cannot afford or do not have access to books in school and teacher's handwritten notebooks still are widely used.

institutional changes and contexts, but the personal and internal contexts (training, worldview, language skills, moods, epistemological approaches, etc.) of the sermon-givers, students, and teachers. Combined with a study of educational institutions and the ideologies of the designers of curricula, I believe that this homiletic approach will flesh out the complex history of monastic education in Buddhist and other contexts.

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