In recent decades, the commonly accepted history of Buddhism in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia has been challenged by scholars who have brought to light a group of texts, primarily concerned with meditation, that, it has been argued, have been suppressed for nearly two hundred years and that put forward methods and views that are not strictly orthodox from a Theravādin point of view. The dust has not settled. This article presents an analysis of a short section of an illustrated manuscript in the National Library, Bangkok, arguing that the program of meditation it presents is derived from the Visuddhimagga, the classic 4th–5th-century textbook of Theravāda meditation. At the same time, the manuscript incorporates features that link it to such supposedly heterodox texts as the one translated from Khmer into French in 1976 as Le Figuier à cinq branches, and—rather more speculatively—a case will be made that the Bangkok manuscript can help establish an historical position for Le Figuier.

The Bangkok manuscript will be introduced in a roundabout way, in large part in order to indicate how meditation was traditionally a creative endeavor. True, texts such as the Visuddhimagga laid down protocols to be followed, but meditators might deviate from the prescribed rules and subsequently compose a text that might itself serve as the ground for additional innovations. In this process visual images might play as large a role as the instructions in a text.

In 1968, the Social Science Press of Thailand, then managed by Sulak Sivaraksa, published an illustrated book entitled Teaching Dhamma by Pictures: Explanation of a Siamese Traditional Buddhist Manuscript. This manuscript, kept at the time in Chaiya, probably dates from the late eighteenth century, and the explanations were written by the famed Buddhist teacher, practitioner, and writer the Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993).¹ I was re-directed back to this book, which is not

¹ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Teaching Dhamma by Pictures: Explanation of a Siamese Traditional Buddhist Manuscript, trans. Sulak Sivaraksa and Donald Sweetbaum (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1968). On the web site WorldCat, the author’s name is given as Phra Thēpwisutthimēthī (Ngu’am). A German translation was published in 1969. There have been subsequent reprintings. Due to library closures, it has not been possible to consult the original Thai text, published as Pritsanā tham Thai.
well known, by an illustration of a fragmentary manuscript in the British Library. The same scene appears in both manuscripts: an illustration of the bhayañāṇa ("Knowledge of fear"), as exemplified by the sudden appearance of a mythical lion (rājasīha) inside a cave where the meditation practitioner has gone for a rest. This exploration then led to the depiction of another of the īñāna (Knowledges) in the same manuscript, and then to a second manuscript of the same type, one that also includes a section devoted to the Supramundane Path. The effort to understand this presentation, finally, led to the challenge of describing its historical relationship to the group of texts—those variously described as Old Mahānikāya, Yogāvacara, Tantric, esoteric, and Boran Kammathan—that in recent decades has created new currents in the study of the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand and Cambodia. These are the topics that will be addressed successively in this article.

The last of the ten Knowledges, in the program of Vipassanā, or insight meditation, is Conformity Knowledge (anulomañāṇa; also Conformity-to-Truth, sacca-anulomañāṇa), and this is the illustration in Teaching Dhamma that will be examined here (Figure 1). Buddhadasa’s explanatory text reads as follows:

Figure 1. “Conformity Knowledge.” After Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Teaching Dhamma by Pictures (Bangkok: Social Science Association Press, 1968), pl. 38.

Dhamma Puzzles

Saccānulomikā-ñāṇa. The ninth stage of knowledge derived from conformity with truth. The ship represents the body (rūpa) and the owner of the ship, standing at the bow is mind (citta).

The ship is crossing from the burning world of mortality to the other shore of Nibbāna, which is represented by the Three Gems to which the owner of the ship (mind) points. The crew and equipment aboard are the various teachings necessary to cross the seas of wandering-on in birth-and-death (saṁsāra). The Noble Eight-fold Path and other necessary Dhamma such as faith (saddhā), or wisdom (paññā) are essential to guide the ship across. Of these teachings, Right View (Sammādiṭṭhi) is the most important.

The importance of right view and wisdom is shown by the bird perched atop the mast of the ship. Should the ship go astray, the bird is sent out to establish the right course. This practice of using a sea-bird for navigational purposes dates back to the time three or four thousand years ago, when compasses and other navigational instruments were not available. Steering from the stern of the ship is the captain who represents Right Mindfulness [Sammāsati].

Since Buddhadasa does not tell us anything about the captions in the manuscript, which are written in Khom script and are more or less indecipherable in the reproductions, we might wonder how his explanations relate to them. In general, it would appear that he has noted the captions but is not interested in providing a text that explicates or reinforces them. He feels free to instruct.

The Knowledges are the subject of Chapter XXI of the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa’s exhaustive treatise on meditation, a cornerstone of Theravādin orthodoxy. The chapter begins by stating that there are eight Knowledges (beginning with the Knowledge of Rise and Fall), then goes on to add a ninth Knowledge, Saccānulomikāñāṇa, at the end of the chapter. The pre-12th-century treatise, the Abhidhammatsañgaha, on the other hand gives a list of ten Knowledges, adding Sammasana, Investigating Knowledge, at the beginning. All ten appear in Teaching Dhamma. These differences make for a slight confusion when it comes to numeration. Buddhaghosa explains his eighth Knowledge, Saṅkhara-upākhā, Knowledge of Equanimity About Formations, as follows:

---

3 Buddhadasa, Teaching Dhamma, 87.
4 In the case of the Saccānulomikāñāṇa, in fact, consultation of the Visuddhimagga indicates that the invocation of Sammādiṭṭhi, the full realization of the Four Noble Truths and the first step in the Eightfold Path, is doctrinally more strongly associated with a Knowledge that is a step beyond the Saccānulomikāñāṇa, namely Maggañāṇa, Knowledge of the Path, which is realized when the practitioner reaches the state of a Stream Winner. Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga), trans. Bhikku Nāṇamoli (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), 706 (ch. XXII, section 45; henceforth XXII 45). In Buddhadasa, Teaching Dhamma, 67, plate no. 28, it is stated that the Knowledges are explained in detail in chapter XXI of the Visuddhimagga, but this information was apparently added by Phra Khantipalo, a British monk residing at the time at Wat Bowonniwet (see “Acknowledgements” following the title page).
But if this [Knowledge] sees nibbāna, the state of peace, as peaceful, it rejects the occurrence of all formations [saṅkhāra] and enters only into nibbāna. If it does not see nibbāna as peaceful, it occurs again and again with formations as its object [ārammaṇa], like the sailors’ crow.

When traders board a ship, it seems, they take with them what is called a land-finding crow. When the ship gets blown off its course by gales and goes adrift with no land in sight, then they release the land-finding crow. It takes off from the mast-head, and after exploring all quarters, if it sees land, it flies straight in the direction of it; if not, it returns and alights on the mast-head. So too, if knowledge about formations sees nibbāna, the state of peace, as peaceful, it rejects the occurrence of all formations and enters only into nibbāna. If it does not see it, it occurs again and again with formations as its object. (Vism. XXI 64-65)

What the tale makes possible is a vision of the meditator’s focused mind, engrossed in the Knowledge, becoming a crow, and then forming a partnership: the crow sees land and the meditator sees Nibbāna, but at the same time the crow sees Nibbāna and the meditator sees land. This crow/mind either sees Nibbāna for what it is, peaceful, or it doesn’t. The crow is shown twice; once on the mast-head, once on the shore. Nibbāna is surely symbolized by the three disks in the bowl, as Buddhadasa writes; whether they are also the Triple Gem is less clear. Buddhadasa’s understanding of the scene is not drastically different from one directly informed by the tale in the Visuddhimagga, but the latter seemingly puts more emphasis on the meditational experience and on the projection of the mind of the meditator into the body of a crow. We don’t know if Buddhadasa was aware that the story in the Visuddhimagga illustrated the Knowledge of Equanimity about Formations rather than Conformity Knowledge. In the Traiphūm lōk winitchayakathā, the cosmology compiled during the reign of King Rāma I (1783–1802), extensive translations from the Visuddhimagga appear, and there the crow story is placed at the end of an extensive section devoted to the Knowledge of Equanimity about Formations.6

In 2002, the National Library published Samut phāp pritsanā tham, a volume devoted to a manuscript of exactly the same type, with complete readings of the Khom-script captions and interpretations of the illustrations.7 This manuscript, undated, was transferred from the Royal Palace to the National Library in 1938. The manuscript is in agreement with Teaching Dhamma that the crow is an illustration of Conformity Knowledge (Figure 2). Transcribing the Indic loan words in italics and the Thai words phonetically (here and subsequently), the caption reads:

\[
\text{Anulomañāṇa dut dang samuddakāki an nai samphao liang}
\]

Conformity Knowledge is like the sea-crow raised by the ship captain.


7 Praphat Surasen, Samut phāp pritsanā tham (The illustrated manuscript “Dhamma Puzzles”) (Bangkok: Họ Samut Haeng Chāt, Krom Sinlapakōn, 2002). I thank Dr. Samerchai Poolsuwan for sharing a pdf.
The ship with the crow at the top of the mask is the emblem; there is no shore, no Nibbāna, no captain, steersman, or crew, no fire on the right. The words dut dang make it clear that this is a comparison; it would be a mistake, we are instructed, to consider the visual image the subject of the meditation. In Buddhaghosa’s text the crow is a “land-finding crow” (disākāka), which in this manuscript becomes female. Kāka becomes kākī, using Indic grammatical rules. This adds a new dimension to the relationship between captain and crow, as does the fact that it has been raised, or nurtured, by the captain.

An additional example of the crow image survives in a text but not an illustration. In 1936, the monk Chot Panyo published an extensive compendium of old texts on meditation (henceforth the 1936 anthology) he had uncovered in monasteries around Thailand and in Laos. In one of the texts there is a list of the Knowledges (beginning with the Knowledge of Rise and Fall) and their associated images. Here is the description of the Conformity Knowledge:

8 The Pali text was consulted on the site http://www.palikanon.com.
Nai hông phra anulomañāṇa sī khoao bicāraṇā hen nāmarūpa nī mūn dang kā an bin ‘ōk chák plaï sao kradong hēng thāï samphao an tām nām mahāsamuddra-sāgara nan læ bo mi thiang thē yōm prakōp pai duai dukkha bo mi chai tua ton læ mī laksana hai śān phā ñup pai ñup mā mūn hāo nūn læ

In the room of the holy Conformity Knowledge, which is white, (the meditator) considers, seeing the constituents of the personality as like a crow flying off the top of the mast of a ship, following the waters of the great ocean; there is nothing straight; all is bound to be painful; there is no fixed identity; having a character soft and feeble, nodding up and down, as if dozing off.

The white color of the “room” is an additional meditational aid. The author of this passage appears to have no notion of the original meaning of the crow image. Maybe it was for him merely a memory device, which he did not hesitate to interpret as he saw fit. At the same time, the author may be accused of having failed to adhere to the stricture to maintain one-pointed concentration. His mind has wandered. But having recorded what can be understood as his experience, he has created a text that might serve as inspiration for even more adventurous meditation. The lesson here is that meditation, far from being bound by precise rules, could become an innovative endeavor.

In another list of the ten Knowledges in the 1936 anthology, by Phra Mahāthera Phuttharangsi of Wat Pa Daeng in Chiang Mai, the associated images in the manuscripts are more or less ignored, and the Truth Conformity Knowledge is said to be pure white, like the luminous moon.

THE OPENING SECTION OF THE BANGKOK MANUSCRIPT

The illustration of Conformity Knowledge in the Bangkok manuscript (Figure 2) is accompanied by a straightforward text. That is not the case in the opening section (Figures 3 and 4), where there is a sequence of twelve images, some of which have clear identifications, others whose captions consist of Pali-language terms. The images are arranged at right angles to the normal placement, so that the manuscript needs to be turned sideways to read. The manuscript title is Pritsanā Tham, or “Dhamma Puzzles.” The word pritsanā (spelled priśnā) is derived from Sanskrit praśna, “question” or “problem,” and it might seem appropriate that a
manuscript that presents so many problems of interpretation be called a “puzzle.” Nevertheless the publication does not indicate that this title comes from internal evidence; it might be a name assigned by a cataloguer. Without this title, the subject of the manuscript would probably be considered Kammaṭṭhāna (‘stations of action’), a program of meditation, the most orthodox of which consists of a sequence of forty. The captions in the manuscript are not the only elements that demand interpretation; there are the disks or empty circles, the plant forms, and the matter of where, in any one image, we stand on the path to sainthood.

The accompanying charts provide a summary account of the illustrations and the texts of the captions. These texts depend entirely on the transliteration of the Khom script into Thai by Praphat Surasen in Samut phāp prītsana tham. It would seem that with so much information, from both captions and images, an explanation of these scenes would be relatively straightforward, but that is hardly the case. Nevertheless it is clear that the twelve scenes depict the Supramundane Path (lokuttara magga) and the noble persons (ariya puggala). There are tiny numbers, 1-11, written next to all the scenes (except for the wheel of existence) which suggests the existence of what will be called the Lost Text—presumably, when it is found, a meditation manual in which the content of the captions is explicated at greater length. The Teaching Dhamma manuscript includes depictions that correspond to numbers 6–12 in the list in the chart, including the small numbers (5–11), but these depictions are not placed in the publication at the beginning. Scenes 1–4 are missing. I suspect that originally the sequence was the same but that the opening page of the manuscript was irreparably damaged, as is frequently the case.

Captions 1–4 all contain the Pali words lobha dosa moha and so therefore can be grouped together. Greed, hate, and delusion are the three immoral roots. Among the factors that form the personality they play a special role because they not only number among fourteen unwholesome mental factors within the family of Feeling, but as roots, they serve to fortify twelve unwholesome consciousnesses that are grouped in the Consciousness family. They are preceded in #1 and #2 by words that refer to Buddhist cosmology: kāma (-bhava), or kāma (-bhūmi), the Realm (or World) of Sense Desires; rūpa, the World of Pure Form, and arūpa, the Formless World. The other term in all four of these captions is nirodha, extinction; initially it might be regarded cosmologically, as

---

12 Prītsana Tham is the title of two texts in Chotpanyo, Nangsi phuttharangs, 348–68. Both are questions or questions-and-answers. Nineteenth-century murals at Wat Bowonnivet and Wat Boromniwat are also titled Prītsana Tham, meaning that they display symbols that are explained in accompanying texts. See Suthā Linawat, Kānsuksā sanyalak nai ēhikakamphāp prītsana tham không nikāi thammayut (A study of symbols in dhamma-puzzle murals of theThammayut sect) (Bangkok: Piriya Krairiksh Foundation, 2012). I thank Dr. Piriya Krairiksh.

13 These forty are the organizing principle in Sarah Shaw, Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology of Texts from the Pāli Canon (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

14 Buddhadasa, Teaching Dhamma, 11: “The sequence of the illustrations has been re-arranged here, for a more lucid presentation.” According to a statement on the book jacket, the illustrations were arranged in two groups, the first showing attachment to Samsāra, the second the practices leading to enlightenment and Nibbāna. Numbers 6–9 appear as pl. 42, 94–95, introduced as “This is another way of explaining the four stages of knowledge leading to Nibbāna.” Numbers 10–12 are in pl. 43, 96–97.

Hiram Woodward

Figure 3. The Supramundane Path, scenes 1–6. Begins at the lower left, and then moves up. Right-hand column, from the bottom: (4) the Wheel of \textit{Sam}\ddash sāra; (5) Stream Winner. After Praphat Surasen, \textit{Samut phāp pritsanā tham}, 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Marked number</th>
<th>Position of circle</th>
<th>Posture</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Caption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>overhead</td>
<td>standing, grasps plant</td>
<td>nīrodha ariyā niśa lobba dosa mōhā*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>above, on pole</td>
<td>standing</td>
<td></td>
<td>bhava kāma bhava nīrodha lobha dosa mōhā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>above, on pole</td>
<td>seated</td>
<td></td>
<td>nīrodha lobha dosa mōhā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>above, on pole</td>
<td>standing</td>
<td></td>
<td>nīrodhasacca lobha dosa mōhā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>overhead</td>
<td>standing, grasps lotus-bearing plant</td>
<td>dai sōta nīrodhasacca nīrodhasacca “Having become a Stream Winner; Truth of Extinction, Truth of Extinction”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The manuscript appears to have \textit{nīrodha ariyāpa parū}. Along with Praphat, I take \textit{parū} as an inadvertent mistake for \textit{rūpa}. The stray \textit{r} is a problem; perhaps it is supposed to stand for \textit{arupāvacara}, “belonging to the immaterial sphere.”
### Figure 4. The Supramundane Path, scenes 7–12.

**Left-hand column, from the bottom:**

1. **Change of Lineage Knowledge**
   - *gotrabhuñā yip chu wai*
   - "Change of Lineage Knowledge; having grasped and lifted"

2. **Stream Winner**
   - *dai nī ṅīnādhavacca*
   - "Having become a Stream Winner; Truth of Extinction"

3. **Stream Winner**
   - *thūng sōtā nang katuk nirodhasacca*
   - "Having become a Stream Winner, sitting, jerking; Truth of Extinction"

4. **Once Returner**
   - *thœng sakadāgā mā kœt jātī nī*
   - "Having become a Once Returner, come to be born this life"

5. **Never Returner**
   - *thœng anāgā bō̄ mī dai _ _ _ _ _ samuddha _ _ _ _*
   - "Having become a Never Returner, never . . ocean . ."

6. **Arahatta**
   - *thœng arahatta tat bāpa dhamma thang puang sia læo dai pen bru khā iε ya lu ațisukha*
   - "Having become an Arahatta, cutting off sinful factors entirely, becoming someone noble and supremely blissful."

---

*This is the one caption where the reading and meaning are uncertain. Praphat read the Khom-script letters as follows:

thōṅgāṇā gāpmi ḍaimāt sssmu ḍdulk

Phonetically:

Thūng ‘anākhā bō mī dai māt samuddhalk

"Having become a Never Returner, never coming (back), cutting off the ocean . .""

There is no known word dunk / thulaka, and Praphat did not attempt to explain it. Thomas Hudak (in email messages) has suggested that mātṣ could stand for māt sīa mã and that a line through the l of dunk indicates an erasure, leaving dukkha for dukkha ṣukh, suffering. That would lead to the translation

"Having become a Never Returner, never again fixing his mind on the ocean of suffering."*

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Marked number</th>
<th>Position of circle</th>
<th>Posture</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Caption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7.     | 6             | in palm of outstretched hand | standing, arm outstretched |       | *gotrabhuñā yip chu wai*
|        |               |                    |         |       | "Change of Lineage Knowledge; having grasped and lifted" |
| 8.     | 7             | overhead, between palms | standing |       | *dai nī ṅīnādhavacca*
|        |               |                    |         |       | "Having become a Stream Winner; Truth of Extinction" |
| 9.     | 8             | Between palms, in front of face | kneeling |       | *thūng sōtā nang katuk nirodhasacca*
|        |               |                    |         |       | "Having become a Stream Winner, sitting, jerking; Truth of Extinction" |
| 10.    | 9             | on the pedestal | standing, hand touches stem of flowering plant | in monk’s robes | *thœng sakadāgā mā kœt jātī nī*
|        |               |                    |         |       | "Having become a Once Returner, come to be born this life" |
| 11.    | 10            | on the pedestal | seated in meditation | in monk’s robes | *thœng arahatta tat bāpa dhamma thang puang sia læo dai pen bru khā iε ya lu ațisukha*
|        |               |                    |         |       | "Having become an Arahatta, cutting off sinful factors entirely, becoming someone noble and supremely blissful." |
| 12.    | 11            | Replaced by gem, in palm | reclining | in monk’s robes | *thœng arahatta tat bāpa dhamma thang puang sia læo dai pen bru khā iε ya lu ațisukha*
|        |               |                    |         |       | "Having become an Arahatta, cutting off sinful factors entirely, becoming someone noble and supremely blissful." |
a fourth realm, but then in #4, with nirodhasacca, it is clear that it is the third of the Four Noble Truths, the Truth of Extinction.

Some of the different ways these terms can be understood will become clearer later in this paper, but probably they should be regarded as extractions from some longer text, or possibly from canonical scriptures, and understood as providing snapshots of the meditator’s consciousness, not here focused on one thing but embracing a range of topics. The place of greed, hate, and delusion can to some degree be mapped by reference to a Pali text called the Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha, written in Chiang Mai in 1534 by Ratanapañña, quite probably the same Ratanapañña who composed the Buddhist history the Jina kalamali. The Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha has recently been exhaustively studied by Javier Schnake. It contains a number of heart formulas (hua čhai, “head heart”), sequences of phonemes, each of which stands for a word; they could be called acronym-like mantras. One of these is sa lo sī do pa mo, which stands for samādhi lobha sīla dosa paññā moha.

Clearly this sequence of terms has a kinship with nirodha arūpa rūpa lobha dosa moha and the following three captions in the manuscript. On the other hand it has a clear meaning: concentration destroys greed, morality destroys hate, and wisdom destroys delusion. It could be that the captions have equally clear meanings; it is just that the text clarifying the meanings has not been identified.

In another section of the Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha appears a brief psychological analysis that offers a way to connect lobha, dosa, and moha with the levels of the cosmos. Ordinary people (those not yet on the Supramundane Path) are a combination of six different motivations (hetu): lobha, dosa, and moha and their absence, alobha, adosa, and amoha. It is necessary to have all three of the favorable motivations in order to enter the first Jhāna, at the lowest level of the World of Pure Form; before then, one is confined to the World of Sense Desires.

This invocation of the Vajirasāratthasaṅgaha raises methodological issues. It could be argued that an interpretation of the Bangkok manuscript should be postponed until the Lost Text, or something comparable among the thousands of Buddhist manuscripts awaiting discovery and

---


17 Schnake, “Letters and Numbers,” 165–66; Schnake writes (p. 160, n. 8) that heart formulas are often referred to as mnemonics in Western studies but that he prefers the Thai terminology. The same point was made in 2012 by Peter Skilling: “These are often described as ‘mantra’ in some European studies, but it seems better to retain the terminology of the traditions.” See “At the Heart of Letters: Aksara and Akkhara in Thai Tradition,” in 80 That Phon Tri Mōm Rātchawong Suphatavat Kashemri, ed. Weerawan Ngamsantikul (Bangkok: Deuan Tula, 2012), 436 n. 8. In a master’s dissertation Ake Nakornthab quoted a 1992 publication by Phaya Upakit Sinlapasan stating that heart formulas were initially mnemonic devices that came to be regarded as having intrinsic powers and used as mantras. See Ek Nakkhonthap, Kānsūkñā lak khamsõn phutthasātsana thi prahot nai lekyan thai / A study of Buddhist Teachings as Appeared in Thai Tantra, Mahachulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 2017, 104 (downloaded from http://mcupress.mcu.ac.th/userfiles/file/นิพนธ์ปริญญาโท/พระพุทธศาสนา/2560/MCU600202208.pdf). Since there are heart formulas in which the syllables do not have a phonetic connection with a text, the terminology is an open question. More examples are presented in Peter Skilling, “Calligraphic Magic: Abhidhamma Inscriptions from Sukhodaya,” Buddhist Studies Review 35.1–2 (2018): 161–87.

Number 5 is the wheel of saṃsāra, which will be discussed later. Captions 6, 8, and 9, all contain the words nirodha sacca—twice in #6, possibly suggesting that spoken repetition was part of the practice. Captions 6–12 differ from the first four because they include Thai-language verbs, primarily thion (or in an alternative spelling thang), reach, and dai, obtain. Like numbers 1–4, numbers 9–12 can also be grouped together. The captions refer to the four stages in the Supramundane Path to sainthood: sotāpanna or -patti, the Stream Winner; sakadāgāmi, the Once Returner (to a rebirth in this world); anāgāmi, the Never Returner; and the arahatta, the arahant, saint. If both #1–4 and #9–12 are groups, that leaves numbers 5–8, which, it will be argued here, can be considered transitional. To understand them, as well as the sequence as a whole, and its relationship to the practice of meditation as found in other sources, it is necessary to review a variety of texts and then incorporate an analysis of the images into the interpretation.

THE TEXTS

As in the case of the Knowledges, the most crucial text is the Visuddhimagga, even when recognizing the role of the Lost Text. To understand the Pritsanā Tham, it is necessary to grasp the position in the Visuddhimagga of the Earth Kaṣina, the initial meditation device that remains a foundation for meditational exercises of many sorts. The ten kaṣina are the meditation subjects or “totalities” (the four elements, the four colors, light, and space), and the first, the earth, becomes a tool, the Earth Kaṣina, made by the practitioner by smearing mud onto a flat surface in the shape of a disk, about six inches in diameter. The practitioner stares at the Earth Kaṣina and concentrates his mind (this can be reinforced by exclaiming “Earth!”) until he is able to retain a vivid image even when his eyes are closed. This is called the uggaha nimitta, the learning sign. Focusing on the learning sign suppresses unhealthy tendencies, and at a certain point the paṭibhāga nimitta (the Counterpart Sign) “appears as if breaking out from the learning sign, and a hundred times, a thousand times more purified” (Vism. IV 31). Through subsequent processes of expansion the counterpart sign leads to upacāra samādhi, access concentration, which gives way in turn to absorption, appanā samādhi (Vism. IV 34, IV 126). And absorption is equivalent to the First Jhāna, the meditative state or “absorption” physically located at the bottom of the material (rūpa) world. Buddharañsi, the Chiang Mai mahāthera already quoted, simplified it somewhat: “after you have

---

19 I retain Stream Winner because of its familiarity. According to Peter Masefield, Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism (London: Routledge, 2013), 134, the actual meaning is “one who has come into contact (or undergone) the hearing.” I thank Nicolas Revire.

truly seen the \textit{paṭibhāga nimitta} as pure white you can request entry into the First \textit{Jhāna}.\textsuperscript{21}

Other parts of the \textit{Visuddhimagga} will be discussed at length further on. Some of these chapters appear in Thai translation in the Rāma I cosmology, \textit{Traiphūm lōk winitchayakathā}. In the 14th-century cosmology, the \textit{Traiphūm Phra Ruang}, brief accounts of the Supramundane Path appear near the end of the text because the upper reaches of the cosmos, the Formless Realm in particular, are knowable only through meditation.\textsuperscript{22} In the Rāma I \textit{Traiphūm} this need became an excuse for including extensive excerpts from the \textit{Visuddhimagga} in translation.

The introductory chapter of the Rāma I \textit{Traiphūm} is also worthy of note. It has a section devoted to the \textit{ariya puggala}, dwelling on the pairing of two phases, path (\textit{magga}) and fruit (\textit{phala}), for Stream Winner, Once Returner, Never Returner, and Arahatta. The eight phases appear as the introductory illustration in the illustrated \textit{Traiphūm} of the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods (Figure 5). Captions identify all eight figures. The \textit{phala} phase is denoted by a rare gesture, arms raised upward. One of the mystical-tradition texts that have come to light in recent decades, the Khmer-language \textit{Mūl braḥ kammattṭhān}, known in translation as \textit{Le figuier à cinq branches}, may provide an explanation. The raised arms accompany an exclamation.\textsuperscript{23} Most likely, the same gesture is seen again in \textit{Pritsanā Tham}, no. 8 (Figure 4). Another point of connection is the disk or circle seen in the hands of the Fruition-phase Arahatta (Figure 5, upper right), which looks very like the disks depicted in \textit{Pritsanā Tham}.\textsuperscript{24} That is a matter that will be addressed below. At any rate, the placement of the eight figures at the very beginning of the cosmological treatise can be said to parallel the placement of the Supramundane Path in \textit{Pritsanā Tham}.

The remaining texts belong to a mystical tradition that has not been entirely absorbed by historians of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. \textit{Manual of a Mystic Being a Translation from the Pāli and Sinhalese Work Entitled The Yogāvachara’s Manual}, which appeared in 1916, has an appendix by D. B. Jayatilaka (1868–1944), in which he recounted the missions that led to monks from Ayutthaya carrying texts to Sri Lanka in the mid-18th century, and then gave his reasons for believing that the \textit{Manual}’s origins lay in Siam.\textsuperscript{25} The manual is a course of meditation, \textit{Kammattṭhāna}. The Ten Knowledges are given a concrete mental focus by connecting each with one of the four elements in turn (earth, water, fire, and wind), and some visual images are provided (“lions, tigers and devils” for Fear, but no crow).

The very last part concerns the Supramundane Path, and it corresponds to the depictions of the Ariya Puggala seen in Figure 5. There are nine supramundane states in all; one becomes a Stream

\textsuperscript{21} Chotpanyo, \textit{Nangsii phuttharangsii}, 153.

\textsuperscript{22} Frank E. Reynolds and Mani B. Reynolds, \textit{Three Worlds According to King Ruang: A Thai Buddhist Cosmology} (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1982), 331–48.


Winner, Once Returner, Never Returner, and Arahatta (four); then the fruit of each is experienced (another four); then Nibbāna is reached (making nine). As with the Knowledges, an element is associated with each state. There is an additional feature of considerable importance. The complete meditational sequences relating to each state are placed inside the body, each in a different spot. The process is initiated with the statement at the very beginning of the section, “I earnestly ask to attain in the inmost shrine of my being [antogabbha] the mark of upholding [uggabanimitta, the learning sign], the image of the mark [patibhāganimitta, the counterpart sign], the way of access (upacāravidhi, access concentration), the way of ecstatic concentration [appanāsamādhividhi, absorption] and, of the four paths, the path of entering the stream.”

These are the four steps that have already been reviewed, as found in the Visuddhimagga. Placement of the sequences, or of other qualities, inside the body does not feature in the Visuddhimagga, however, and is sometimes considered an identifying characteristic of the mystical tradition.

---

The Pali and Sinhalese text of *The Yogāvacara’s Manual* had originally been published in 1896, and T. W. Rhys Davids added “of Indian Mysticism” at that time because he believed that the practice of Jhāna was inherently mystical.27 Mrs. Rhys Davids, in her introduction to the 1916 translation, questioned the usage because she believed that Western mysticism implied some sort of union with a divinity, while Theravāda Buddhism was not a theistic religion. Both assumptions could be questioned today, yet the term mysticism might well be valid for somewhat different reasons, namely that the installation into the body of the meditational steps leading to Sainthood implies a mystical identity.

It was not until 1976 that a Southeast Asian text with an apparent relationship to *The Yogāvacara’s Manual* was published. This was the Khmer text *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhāna* (Roots of Kammaṭṭhāna, or maybe Basic Kammaṭṭhāna), translated as *Le figuier à cinq branches* (The Fig Tree with Five Branches), which has already been mentioned.28 This was the first of a series of publications by François Bizot with the overall title “Recherches sur le bouddhisme khmer.” Eventually there were to be five “Recherches,” which were followed by three “Textes bouddhiques.” Bizot found manuscripts of texts in Cambodia and, eventually, in Laos and northern Thailand, that he believed represented traditions that had been suppressed by reform Buddhists and overlooked by Western scholars. The downloading of divine qualities in the *Yogāvacara’s Manual* is paralleled by the placement of the Triple Gem in the body in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhāna*, the Saṅgha, for instance, becoming associated with the heart, the *ṭuoṅ cit*—in French the “globe vital.”29 This word *ṭuoṅ* appears frequently in the *Mūl brah kammaṭṭhāna*, especially in the expression *ṭuoṅ kèv* (equivalent to Thai *duang kæo ภวิวัณ*), globe of crystal. In the text, these globes, containing letters and standing for various ideal entities—the Triple Gem, texts, elements, Perfections—are hidden inside of the figs of a fig tree; the Mind (*cit*, or *citta*) must seize them if Nibbāna is to be reached. Much more about this text (versions have which have been found in Northern Thailand and in Sri Lanka) and about “globes” will be found on subsequent pages.30

From the beginning, the question of terminology has bedeviled the study of the mystical tradition in Southeast Asia. In *Le Fiquier*, Bizot used the term “ancien Mahānikay,” drawing on the name of the older Buddhist sect in both Cambodia and Thailand (the newer sect, established in the 19th century, being the Dhammayutika). This raised the question of whether he meant all Mahānikaya or simply one portion of it, and the term tends not to appear in subsequent writings. He also used Tantric and *yogāvacar*, meaning the Cambodian practitioner (distinguishable from the

yogāvacara, the practitioner who appears in the *Visuddhimagga*. In later works, the negative appellation “non-Mahāvihāra” is sometimes the term of choice, to indicate a tradition outside the Sri Lankan bastion of Theravādin orthodoxy, with its adherence to the teachings of the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Abhidhamma Saṅgāba*. When the British Buddhologist Kate Crosby came to write a thorough summary of Bizot’s publications in 2000, she chose the words *Tantric* and *yogāvacara*: “Tantric Theravāda: A Bibliographic Essay on the Writings of François Bizot and Others on the Yogāvacara Tradition.” Crosby’s interest had been stimulated by her Ph.D. project, on Sri Lankan manuscripts in the British Library that could be linked to *The Yogāvacara’s Manual*.

Since 2000, Crosby’s career has been devoted to the study of the mystical tradition in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and in 2013 she introduced a new term, *boran kammatṭhāna*, prefacing *kammatṭhāna* with a phonetically transcribed Thai word meaning “ancient” (one derived from Pali *purāṇa*, old). The two words together sound weird to anyone who knows some Thai because ordinarily one would say *kammatṭhān borān*. The term is also used, in various spellings, by Crosby’s colleagues and collaborators, Andrew Skilton and Phibul Choompolpaisal. “Boran kamman” is a useful term because of its artificiality: it means whatever Crosby, Skilton, and Phibul say it means. By and large, according to their most recent publications (in *Contemporary Buddhism*, vol. 20), they appear to think that not all old-tradition meditation was “boran kamman,” that “boran kamman” has definable limits, and that within “boran kamman” there were various schools of practice and a number of lineages. There are many other terms that could be brought into play: “unorthodox” or “heterodox,” as opposed to “orthodox,” “esoteric” as opposed to “exoteric,” “Old Meditation,” “Old-School Meditation,” “Old-Text Meditation.”

Crosby, Skilton, and Phibul have also written about survivals (notably, at Wat Ratchasittharam) and revivals of mystic traditions in Thailand. Significant among the latter is the Dhammakaya...
movement, based on the teachings of Luang Pho Sodh (1884-1959), who was trained at Wat Ratchasittharam and also made use of a text (one included in the 1936 anthology) by Suk Kai Thuan (1733-1822), Supreme Patriarch in the early Bangkok period.\textsuperscript{36} Luang Pho Sodh’s \textit{Samatha Vipassanā Meditation}, which is available online in both Thai and English, is a valuable text because—among other reasons—it gives explicit instructions about recitations, which must once have been a substantial part of the practice but are hard to reconstruct on the basis of texts alone.\textsuperscript{37}

One text that stands apart from the \textit{kammaṭṭhāna} practices discussed so far is a protective \textit{paritta}, the Pali-language \textit{Jinapañjara}, Armor of the Conqueror Buddhas, one page in length and widely recited today in Thailand (but also known in Sri Lanka). The twenty-eight Buddhas of the past are fixed on the speaker’s head, the dhamma is in his eyes, and, among the disciples, one is in his heart, and others are in his ears. “I dwell in the Victors’ cage [or armor], protected by the power of the true Dhamma.”\textsuperscript{38} In his discussion of this text in his 2011 book, \textit{The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand}, Justin Thomas McDaniel recognized that there are connections with the texts published by Bizot, but he was not interested in making specific comparisons. Not only do the texts belong to different realms, one to the world of popular Buddhism, the other to solitary pursuits in monasteries, but in McDaniel’s view, there has always been a great variety of practices in Theravāda communities, and the popularity of the \textit{jinapañjara} disproves Bizot’s contention that texts proclaiming beliefs like those in this \textit{paritta} have been suppressed.\textsuperscript{39} Although the origin of the \textit{paritta} is not known for sure, the placement of twenty-eight Buddhas on or in the head in the opening stanzas brings to mind 13th-century Buddha images from Thailand in which the Buddhas of the past appear over the head in the leaves of an aureole.\textsuperscript{40} Meanwhile, in 1994, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, Roger R. Jackson, had published in an obscure journal an article entitled “A Tantric Echo in Sinhalese Theravāda? Pirit Ritual, the

---

\textsuperscript{36} Potprecha Cholvijarn, “The Origins and Development of Sammā Araham Meditation: From Phra Mongkhon Thepmuni (Sot Candasaro) to Phra Thep Yan Mongkhon (Sermchai Jayamangalo),” Dissertation, University of Bristol, November 2019 (accessible on line from Academia.edu.), 1-10.


\textsuperscript{39} For McDaniel’s view of the work of Bizot, \textit{The Lovelorn Ghost}, 100–109.

\textsuperscript{40} For some of these images, Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., “The Bayon-Period Buddha Image in the Kimbell Art Museum,” \textit{Archives of Asian Art} 32 (1979): 72–83. McDaniel was inclined to put the origin in Sri Lanka, in about the 15th century: \textit{The Lovelorn Ghost}, p. 88 and n. 21, p. 245. The question is not addressed in Petra Kieffer-Pülz’s article.
Jackson’s sophisticated discussion of the Tantric elements in the text was unknown to McDaniel, and has remained unrecognized by Kate Crosby and her associates. Not being a meditation text, the Jinapañjaraya has nothing about visualizations, but the placement of divine qualities in the body raises questions about its relationship to the texts of the mystical tradition.

THE MEDITATOR’S PATH

The time has now come to endeavor to interpret the twelve scenes depicted in Figures 3 and 4. Despite the speculative nature of many of the identifications, I shall try to avoid expressions like “might be” and “it could be argued that.” It will be seen that the Lost Text upon which these scenes depended apparently combined paths that were based on Vipassana (Insight) meditation, through the Ten Knowledges, on one hand, and on Samatha (Calming) meditation, beginning with the Earth Kaśina, on the other. Also conflated were two distinct transformative points: first, the entry into the World of Form and the First Jhāna, and, second, the entry into the Formless World and the Fifth Jhāna.

Let us start with the middle section, which begins with the wheel at number 5. Crucial is number 7, gotrabhūñāṇa, Change of Lineage Knowledge, the subject of Visuddhimagga XXII 1—14. It interrupts the flow from one state to the next because it involves the acquisition of a new self and the obliteration, so to speak, of all the DNA one was born with. “Change of Lineage knowledge’s seeing the clear Nibbāna when the murk that concealed the truths has disappeared is like the man’s seeing the clear moon in the sky free from cloud” (Vism. XXII 9). It follows the Conformity Knowledge discussed in the first section above, and it is associated with the Stream Winner stage. This association must account for the depiction of the Stream Winner at numbers 6 and 8, on either side of Change of Lineage.

Change of Lineage Knowledge makes it possible for the Path to pierce and explode “the mass of greed, the mass of hate, and the mass of delusion never pierced and exploded before” (Vism. XXII 11). So the lobha dosa moha (greed, hate, and delusion) present in numbers 1-4 are at this point destroyed. At XXII 12, Buddhaghosa inserted one of his illustrative examples: this is like a man shooting an arrow from a revolving platform. “Revolving platform” is the interpretation by the translator, Bhikkhu Nānamoli, of “wheel contrivance,” cakkayanta. But in this manuscript, clearly, cakkayanta was understood to be a yantra in the form of a wheel, that is, the wheel of saṃsāra. Escape from saṃsāra is the platform for the destruction of greed, hate, and delusion. There is no little number in this scene, suggesting that if the wheel was mentioned in the Lost Text, it was not considered to constitute a stage of meditation distinct from Change of Lineage Knowledge or becoming a Stream Winner. It should probably be understood as having an emblematic role; it is an image extracted from the text, somewhat in the way syllables are extracted from words in heart
formulas.

Moving now to the very beginning of the section, it is time to identify the circles. They have a long but quite precise name: *kasiṇugghatimakasanimitta*, “the sign (*nimitta*) of the space (*ākāsa*) left by the removal of the Kaśina” (*Vism.* X 8-9). The practitioner is in the Fourth Jhāna, still in the confines of the World of Form, and starts up the meditative process, beginning once more with the Earth Kaśina. But since the Earth is inherently material, he can’t very well achieve Immaterial Sphere Consciousness (*ariyavacaracitta*) while thinking about Earth. With some violence, Earth is removed from the Kaśina. The Kaśina with a hole punched through it can just be referred to as a circle, both in Pali (*mandala*, *Vism.* X, 11, 276) and Thai (*wong*).

In the first illustration (Figure 3, bottom left), the circle is shown over the head of the practitioner. In numbers 2-4, it appears to float above a pole the practitioner holds aloft. Is he aware of it, oblivious of it, or somewhat conscious of its presence? At the very beginning of chapter X of the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa wrote, “Now as to the four immaterial states mentioned next to the divine abidings (*brahmavihāra*, states belonging to the World of Form), one who wants firstly to develop the base of boundless space (*ākāsa*) sees in gross matter danger through the wielding of sticks (*daṇḍa*), etc.” The practitioner has two opposing things in his mind: some kind of awareness of the Formless World, on one hand, and his recollection of disputes, on the other. The nearness of the Formless World is indicated by the circles. Awareness of brawls is symbolized by the incorporation of a short pole, a kind of staff (*daṇḍa*) the practitioner holds overhead with both arms. This awareness may also be indicated by the reference to the World of Desire (*kāma*) in the number 2 inscription. I do not mean to suggest that the meditator is involved in brawls. The *daṇḍa* he holds is an emblem, another example of the extraction of a single item from the text, and the way it is depicted is no doubt informed by an awareness of a counterpart, say the royal staff, the *thān phra kǭn* / *dhāra brah kara* ค่าพระกร, “supporting the hand.”

Number 5 is the Wheel of Life. At number 6, the Stream Winner state has been achieved. If he is not yet fully aware of the circle upon his head, that would suggest that he is still dwelling in the World of Form. He carries a bouquet of three lotus blossoms and is poised to pluck a fourth. Although it does not appear in the *Visuddhimagga*, a passage in the *Vimuttimagga* (a meditation manual somewhat older than the *Visuddhimagga*), presenting an image found in the canonical scriptures, is apt:

> Hence, the Buddha taught the bhikku this: “Just as in a pond of blue and white lotuses, the blue, red, and white lotuses are born, grow and stand in the water and are immersed in the cold water from root to neck, so this body is filled and

---

42 The Pāli term is used in the translation in the Rāma I *Traiphūm: Traiphūm lōk*, vol. 3, 290.
43 *Traiphūm lōk*, vol. 3, 288, 290.
44 For illustrations of the royal staff, enter the Thai characters in an internet search engine. In the Rāma I *Traiphūm*, the *daṇḍa* and the words that follow are rendered as “short sticks and big sticks,” *mai nǭi mai yai* ไม้น้อยไม้ใหญ่ (*Traiphūm lōk*, vol. 3, 287). For the purposes of meditation, *daṇḍa* was conceptualized differently. I owe a debt to Louis Gabaude for raising the issue of the royal staff. The overhead poles in the *Traiphūm* illustration (fig. 5) may or may not be the same *daṇḍa*. Three poles are removed, one by one, suggesting they could stand for greed, hate, and delusion.
saturated with bliss that is free from joy.” As the blue, red and white lotuses stand in the water, so he abides in the third meditation, *jhāna*. His body should be known thus: as the lotuses born in the water are immersed in the water from root to neck, so he abides in the third meditation, *jhāna*, with body and mind filled and saturated with bliss that is free from joy.\(^{45}\)

There is also a plant in number 1. The practitioner reaches for a flower in the middle, but it is unclear if he will actually pluck it or not. I suspect that he does not obtain what he is seeking at this point. One of Buddhaghosa’s anecdotal illustrations can be invoked, but if it is relevant, it would mean that the source text departed from the *Visuddhimagga* in certain ways, and that the plant has to be understood in a negative way. The tale appears toward the end of the Knowledges chapter (XXI).

There was a bat, it seems. She had alighted on a *madhuka* tree with five branches, thinking ‘I shall find flowers or fruits here’. She investigated one branch but saw no flowers or fruits worth taking. And with the first so too she tried the second, the third, the fourth, and the fifth, but saw nothing. She thought, ‘This tree is a tree.’ She climbed up on a straight branch, and poking her head through a gap in the foliage, she looked upwards, flew up into the air and alighted on another tree.

Herein the meditator [*yogāvacara*] should be regarded as like the bat. The five aggregates [five *khanda*] as objects of clinging are like the madhuka tree with the five branches. The meditator’s interpreting of the five aggregates is like the bat’s alighting on the tree. His comprehending the materiality aggregate [*rupakbanda*] and, seeing nothing there worth taking, comprehending the remaining aggregates is like her trying each branch and, seeing nothing there worth taking, trying the rest. His triple knowledge beginning with desire for deliverance [the *nīna* three prior to Conformity Knowledge], after he has become dispassionate toward the five aggregates through seeing their character of impermanence, etc., is like her thinking ‘This tree is barren; there is nothing worth taking here’ and losing interest. His Change of Lineage knowledge is like her poking her head out and looking upwards. His path knowledge [*maggañāna*] is like her flying up into the air. His fruition knowledge [*phalañāna*] is like her alighting on a different tree. (*Vism. XXI 91–92.*)

It is not easy to give a specific interpretation of the plant in number 1. Number 7 is Change of Lineage Knowledge. It has already been pointed out that the destruction of greed, hate, and delusion has been already carried out by the Wheel of Life. What Change of Lineage does here is to continue the story of the circle. There are only two instances in which the captions describe actions involving the circle, and this is one. (The circle itself rests unidentified.) The practitioner has *yip chū wai* หยิบชูไว้, “grasped and raised” (it).\(^{46}\) Change of Lineage again plays a revolutionary

---


\(^{46}\) *Wai* ไว here would indicate a completed action.
role; here he perceives the nature of the void, ākāsa, symbolized by the circle, and has entered the Formless World. The next figure (#8) is identified as the Stream Winner, who is closely associated with Change of Lineage. He might be identified as a Stream Winner in the fruition (phala) phase, making number 6 a path (magga) – phase Stream Winner. That would concur with the meaning of the raised-arm gesture in the illustrated Trai Phum (Figure 5). The kasiṇugghāṭimākāsanimitta floats between his palms; perhaps he is not yet fully aware of its nature.

That clearly changes with number 9, which shows the Stream Winner once again, now the first in the sequence that ends with Sainthood. Here he is sitting nang "jerking repeatedly" katuk ถูก. This takes us back to the Visuddhimagga, X 9, “He adverts again and again to the-sign-of-the-space-left-by-the-removal-of-the-kaśina as ‘space, space’, and he strikes at it with thought and applied thought (takka [thought] – āhata [struck] vitakka [applied thought] – āhata). As he adverts to it again and strikes at it with thought and applied thought, the hindrances are suppressed, mindfulness is established and his mind becomes concentrated in access (upacāra).” (Hyphens added.) The mental action is obscure (it might be a battle between reasoning [takka] and initial apprehension [vitakka]), but it is described in physical terms, and that is how it is depicted in the manuscript; katuk here is a kind of tossing between palms. In the Rāma I Trai Phūm translation, the action is rendered, “raise vitakka up in space (ākāsa), place vitakka in space.”

There is little to say about the remaining episodes. In number 10, the Once Returner is depicted not in a supramundane sphere but here on earth, in his last incarnation. The precise meaning of the plant and his interaction with it remains to be determined, but would no doubt be linked to the significance of the plant in number 1. Number 11 shows the Never Returner meditating; the circle appears beneath his legs, on the rock pedestal. Finally the Arahatta is shown reclining in number 12; no circle is visible, and there may be a gem in his palm, but the reproduction is unclear.

This is a remarkable series of images, not yet encountered elsewhere. In the Lost Text upon which it was based, the author took apparently incidental aspects of the Visuddhimagga—the single word danda from the beginning of chapter X being the most notable example—and devised extended sequences of meditational exercises based upon them (presumably numbering them 1–11, as indicated in the manuscript). Much, of course, remains for the present inexplicable: the function of many of the Pali terms; whether any them were supposed to be chanted in the course of meditation; why the scenes prior to the final path beginning at number 9 were stretched to eight in number; why the magga and phala aspects were not explicitly illustrated, except by implication in numbers 6 and 8.

47 Praphat, without referencing the Trai Phūm illustration, suggested that grasping the gem stands for Path Knowledge, and placing the gem over one’s head for Fruition Knowledge: Pritsanā ibam, p. 9.
49 Change of Lineage Knowledge appears elsewhere in the Bangkok manuscript (pl. 42), and between it and Conformity Knowledge (pl. 37 and Figure 2 here), there are exactly four scenes: the four primary elements, mahābhūta, as snakes (pl. 38; cf. Vism. XXI 35), the Arahant khīnāsava, with cankers destroyed (pl. 39; cf. Vism. XXII 30); the primary elements again (pl. 40); and the three liberations, vimokkha (pl. 41; cf. Vism. XXI 66). Whether this format could have any bearing on numbers 1–4 in plate 3 (prior to Change of Lineage Knowledge at number 7) is unknown. It is also possible that the concept of javana (impulsions) plays some role. This term appears in the Traiphūm Lōk, vol. 3, 291.
of the mystical-tradition Sri Lankan texts: that they are natural developments within Theravāda, entirely orthodox.\textsuperscript{50} The circles represent more of a challenge, in order to understand how they fit into the history of the development of mystical texts in Thailand and Cambodia.

**DUANG**

In *Teaching Dhamma by Pictures*, Buddhadasa provided his understanding of an opening in the Chaiya manuscript with four images, corresponding to numbers 6–9 in the Bangkok manuscript. In one, the practitioner “has just found a precious stone while plucking lotuses at a lotus pond,” and in another, he is “appreciating the flawless quality of that gem.”\textsuperscript{51} In *Pritsanā Tham*, Praphat Surasen wrote that the plant in number 1 is a lotus, to which he ascribed an allegorical significance close to that in the passage quoted above (number 6, the lotus), and that over the head is a *duang kæo* ดวงแก้ว symbolizing the *yogāvacara*’s *sati* (mindfulness).\textsuperscript{52} Obviously, these interpretations differ from those presented here, but the terminology, “gem” and *duang kæo*, has a claim to legitimacy.

The *ṭuoṅ kev* (the transliteration of the cognate Khmer term) is ubiquitous in the *Mūl braḥ kammatṭhān* and has been translated by Bizot as the “globe de cristal.” In *Le figuier*, Bizot wrote that “the important and complex question of the ‘globe de cristal’ will be the subject of a separate study,” but this has never appeared.\textsuperscript{53} A number of years has now passed, and subsequent studies emanating from the École Française and produced by Kate Crosby and her colleagues have altered the picture considerably. Three distinct approaches to *ṭuoṅ / duang* can be characterized, focusing on *duang* at the expense of *kæo*. There is overlapping, and blurring as the result of the existence of two linguistic realms, one vernacular (involving the words *duang* and *ṭuoṅ*) and the other Indic (*nimitta*)—categories sometimes distinguishable, sometimes not. *Duang*, in the first of the three approaches, can be considered the direct outcome of meditation on the Earth Kaṣina; or, secondly, it can be regarded as one of many possible *nimitta*; finally, whatever its origins may be, it should be treated as an independent entity.

The first is in line with the thrust of this article. The point at which the vernacular term *duang / ṭuoṅ* is likely to have entered the vocabulary of meditation is with the realization of the counterpart sign, the *patibhāga nimitta*. Although actual evidence for this historical reconstruction is spotty, it is possible to point to the end of a text dating from 1661, where ten characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of the Counterpart Sign are listed, each one becoming the basis for a subject of meditation. The first is the *candamandala* (moon circle), glossed in Thai as “appearing as the *duang* (orb) of the


\textsuperscript{51} Buddhadasa, *Teaching Dhamma*, pl. 42, 94–95.

\textsuperscript{52} Praphāt, *Samut phaip*, 18.

\textsuperscript{53} “Tout spécialement, l’important et complexe question du ‘globe de cristal’ fera l’objet d’une étude à part.” *Le figuier*, 111n.
moon” prākot dang duang čhan ปรากฏดังดวงจันทร์. 54 Duang here is a translation of maṇḍala, circle.

The word duang is widespread in Tai languages but is not found in Angkorian Khmer. 55 Its first attestation in Siam is in the 14th-century Inscription II of Sukhothai (2.51), where it appears with dao: duang dao ดวงดาว, the orbs of stars. Orb was the gloss of the linguist William Gedney, who used it in his private notes on the vocabulary of Sukhothai inscriptions. 56 Orb is a tempting translation because it conveys duang’s inherently radiant quality. That it has retained this luminosity is suggested by Bizot’s intermittent translation of the single word duang / tuon as the two words “globe lumineux.” 57

The second approach to the word duang can be found in the beliefs of the followers of the Dhammakaya movement. There, the final product—the nimitta as perceived by the Ariya Puggala in Pritsanā Tham—becomes the initial object of concentration, rather than the Earth Kaśīṇa. This is entirely within the bounds of orthodox Theravāda, since any object can be chosen as an object of concentration; the Earth Kaśīṇa is just the recommended one. Dhammakāya nimitta, produced and kept in the monastery, look like giant clear marbles. Luang Pho Sodh wrote, “The sphere might be about the size of an eyeball, transparent like glass and round like a ball, without any flaws. It is like a magic crystal ball [ดวงแก้ว กายสิทธิ์ duang kao kāyasiddhi ‘magically formed’]. The sphere is called the parikamma-nimitta or Preliminary Sign of Concentration.” 58 The duang that is placed in the body has a center of space (ākāsa) like the nimitta in the Pritsanā Tham, but its border, in four quarters, consists of the four elements, as if materiality were needed to place the ineffable in the body. The role of the elements is reminiscent of their presence in the mental states that are placed in the body in the final section of The Yogāvacara’s Manual. In general, Kate Crosby and her colleagues have adopted a terminology that presupposes an outlook similar to that of the Dhammakaya. To speak of “nimitta as spheres of light,” for instance, is to regard the duang kao as one possible kind of nimitta. 59 The earthless nimitta that appears in the Pritsanā Tham (Figures 3 and 4) is a narrower concept, but seeing it presented floating in the air opens the way to understanding it more broadly.

Finally, the approach of Bizot was somewhat different. For him the gem and the crystal globe were more or less interchangeable, and the gem became a “vehicle of immortality,” quite in opposition to orthodox Theravāda—“a sort of equivalent of the eternal and luminous ātman.” 60 In other words, although initially the yogāvacara might through meditation achieve a realization

55 For information about duang in Tai languages I thank Thomas Hudak.
56 For this information I am indebted to Thomas Hudak. Duang also serves as a classifier for objects generally circular in shape.
57 E. g., Bizot, Le Chemin, 237.
58 Mongkol-Thepmuni, Venerable Phra (Sodh), Samatha Vipassanā Meditation, 5-7; Thai text (see note 37), 5-7.
59 Skilton, “Meditation and its Subjects,” 50. The French word sphère has been used to translate Khmer leïn (e. g. Bizot, Le Chemin, 221), but chambre, or room, would be preferable; leïn here corresponds to Thai hông, the “room” that bounds the mental space of a meditation. For chambre, Joseph Guesdon, Dictionnaire Cambodgien-Français, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1930), vol. 2, 1620.
60 Bizot, Le Chemin, 29.
visualized outside the body, once it was installed within the body, it became eternal and more or less divorced from the nimitta.

The fact that Khmer ūṅ is a loanword from Thai does not mean that the Mūl brah kammatṭhān was composed outside Cambodia. Three of its features—the use of Indian phoneme mysticism, the presence of an internal duct in the body, and the image of the tree—most likely have Angkorian sources. At the very beginning of the Mūl brah kammatṭhān, the five syllables or letters (aksara = Pali akkhaṇa) are born, NA MO BU DHĀ YA, that is, “homage to the Buddha.” Each of the syllables stands for something, NA being maternal guṇa (quality), for instance, and DHĀ both inhalation /expiration and the Abhidhamma texts. In fact, the five syllables can be made to stand for any fivefold entity, and they can easily be presented spatially. This type of thinking can be found in the Mantrayāna Buddhism that came to Cambodia in the 9th and 10th centuries, exemplified especially by the alphabet diagram (prastāra), the circle of Sanskrit letters, with an inner ring of sixteen vowels. Although the evidence concerning Theravāda Buddhism in Cambodia in these centuries is practically nonexistent, it is likely that there were pockets of Theravāda Buddhists who became familiar with the power of mantras and the mechanics of phoneme mysticism.

The second phase of Tantric Buddhism, that of the Yogiṇī Tantras, became established in the Khmer empire in the eleventh century; the Yogiṇī Tantras incorporate an elaborate inner anatomy and a meditation curriculum that involves movements of qualities within the body. That the Mūl brah kammatṭhān preserves traces of the influence of the Yogiṇī Tantras is evidenced by the use of the word iddha for a vertical duct within the torso; it is a borrowing of the duct iḍā in the Yogiṇī Tantras. Finally, the image of the tree itself must have an Angkor-period source. In inscription K. 484 of the Jayavarman VII period (ca. 1200), the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha was enlightened is said to have the Hindu god Shiva for a trunk and Vishnu for branches. It promises deliverance and is called a giver of fruits (phala).

That brings us to the 13th century, a period of increasing contact between Thai and Khmer speakers. At various points Bizot and his colleagues have drawn attention to the fact that in some of the texts belonging to the mystical tradition exhibit Mon linguistic influence. That accords well with what art history informs us about the religious history of the 13th century. Then or not too long thereafter comes the point at which the Supramundane Path of the Pritsanā Tham necessarily

---

61 Bizot, Le figuier, 74.
63 Bizot, Le figuier, 94.
plays a role. The crucial joint feature is the act of seizing, ṭṭ, of the nimitta, performed at the point of Change of Lineage, no. 7. This corresponds to the grasping or obtaining of the fruit of the fig tree in the Mūl brah kammatthān, each fruit containing a tvoṅ kēv. If this is also the point at which the Thai word duang was adopted into Khmer as tvoṅ ṭṭ, it is also worth asking if the conceptualization of duang was shaped by the existence of a similar sounding word in Khmer, namely daung ṭṭ, “coconut.” The Khmer-language legend accompanying an illustration in Le figuier compares the fruit of the fig tree to the coconut.67 These observations support the priority of Pritsana Tham. This means that the primary monk responsible for Mūl brah kammatthān probably stood at least two generations away. One monk, having been trained in the discipline of the Pritsana Tham, made some adjustments and adaptations, retaining certain visual elements and altering content; his successor made even more changes.

That is not the end of the story, however, because one element, the eagles guarding the tree, must historically be the most recent. They are also the most puzzling. The mind of the practitioner, before the fruit and the tvoṅ kēv can be seized, must kill the guardian eagles. The bow and arrow with which they are shot I regard as a re-appearance of the weapons in the Visuddhimagga, which Change of Lineage Knowledge used to destroy greed, hate, and delusion. The problem is that the eagles stand for the senses, eye, ear, and so forth, which in Buddhist texts are not generally considered enemies.68

There is word play involved. The Thai word for senses is indrīya (lengthening the short i of the Pali indriya, as is quite common), and the same word is used to mean eagle. In Thai they are both pronounced insī. The same pair occurs in Khmer, pronounced ěntri, written indrī.69 It was Bizot’s belief that the meaning “eagle” for Khmer ěntri was spread by people who were familiar with the depiction of the indrīya (senses) as eagles in the Mūl brah kammatthān.70 If that seems hard to accept, it is with good reason. It is more likely that the existence of the two homonymous words pre-dated the composition of the text. In Thai there is not just a nok (bird) insī นกินทรี but a plā (fish) insī ปลา ินทรี (a kind of mackerel), and it is probable that this insī is a word of non-Indic origin that

---

67 Bizot, Le figuier, pl. XIII. The illustration caption translates the Khmer legend: “Voici ce qu’on l’appelle le figuier à 5 branches et 5 fruits de chaque côté. Les fruits ressemblent aux noix de coco. Voici ce qu’on l’appelle les oiseaux Indrī. Il y en a six pour garder les figues. Ces dix fruits, le Maitre les tient pour les dix globes (tvoṅ). Les oiseaux Indrī sont représentés sur la figure en couleur bleue.” (“Here is what is called the fig tree, with five branches and five fruits on each side. The fruits resemble coconuts. Here are what are called Indrī birds. There are six to guard the fruits. These ten fruits, the Master holds for the ten globes (tvoṅ). The Indrī birds are blue in color.” For the word for coconut in Khmer, see Philip N. Jenner and Saveros Pou, A Lexicon of Khmer Morphology, Mon-Khmer Studies IX–X ([Honolulu]: The University Press of Hawaii, 1980-81), 111 (tōnā); Saveros Pou, Dictionnaire vieux khmer — français — anglais (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1992), 220 (ton, tvan, tvoṅ).

68 Perhaps it is not the indrīya that are the enemy but the cravings these faculties have a need for: Crosby et al., “The Sutta on Understanding Death,” 187. One of the texts in Chotpanyo, Nangṣā phuttharanṣi, “Phra kammathān bæp phra tham,” 289-95, also has a lengthy discussion of indrīya, and it should be studied.

69 Guesdon, Dictionnaire Cambodgien-Français, vol. 1, 52. Actually it says sātēntri means “l’oiseau d’Indra, l’aigle.”

70 The text of the Mūl brah kammatthān spells the term with a long i and a y, Indrīy: Bizot, Le figuier, 57, 83. Bizot apparently thought that when the text said sāte indrīy, it meant “the creature (standing for the) indrīya (sense).” In a footnote (p. 83), he pointed out that when he was studying textile patterns at Angkor Wat, he was told that certain birds (evidently Chinese phoenixes) were “sātv indrīya,” thereby demonstrating to him that his informants were familiar with the name given to the birds in representations of the fig tree in the Mūl brah kammatthān.
ended up being spelled in an Indic way. Thus the compiler of the *Mūl brah kammatthāhān*, having the bow-and-arrow image in his head, and engaged by the two distinct meanings of *insi / ěntri*, decided it would be a good idea to have the arrow shoot senses/eagles.

There is much else left to understand about this rich text, or family of texts, including the circumstances of the spread to northern Thailand and to Sri Lanka. Lagirarde believed that the Khmer and Thai texts had a common ancestor. The Lao text, the *Saddavimala*, has a brief section near the beginning incorporating the imagery of the fig tree. Immediately following conception, the *duang kæo* in the flowers of the fig tree are obtained; they stand for various virtues (*sīla*). A few sentences later the *yogāvacara* stands at the crystal gates of the city of Nibbāna, firmly holding the *duang kæo* that will make it possible to enter (*thīi ao duang kæo dai thæ* ถือเอาดับแก้วได้แท้).

**THE RĀMA I TRAIPHŪM**

This image of the *yogāvacara* holding the *duang kæo* fits the depiction of the Fruition Arahatta in the illustrated Traiphūm (Figure 5, top right). The importance of this representation was recognized by B. J. Terwiel, who called the circle a “crystal ball” and concluded his article with this sentence, “It is just possible that what I tentatively call the ‘City of Nibbāna school’, where invariably the crystal ball represents the ultimate goal of meditation, is also a branch of the *yogāvacara / borān kammathān* school.” In the light of the *Pritsanā Tham*, the crystal ball (=$duang kæo$) is technically the *kasīnugghātimakāsānimitta*, the sign of the space left by the removal of the kaśīna. It is clutched by the Arahatta as an indication he has realized the pinnacle of the cosmos. Terwiel’s identification of “schools” and “branches” seems premature. At this point, it would be better to say that segments of meditational practices and their associated imagery circulated around Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos and combined in ways that are difficult or impossible to reconstruct.

The depictions of the Supramundane Path in *Pritsanā Tham* (Figures 3–4) and in the Traiphūm manuscript (Figure 5), together with the text of the Rāma I Traiphūm, may constitute two somewhat

---

71 This was the view of William J. Gedney, as found in William J. Gedney, “Indic Loanwords in Spoken Thai,” doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1947. I thank Thomas Hudak for this information.

72 Crosby et al., “The *Sutta on Understanding Death*”; Lagirarde, “Textes bouddhiques du pays Khmer.” One small observation on the relationship of the Northern Thai to the Khmer text. Lagirarde says (p. 69) that the Khmer text has a Triple Gem where the Thai *a nimitta*. It seems more probable that *nimitta* corresponds to the *ṭuoṅkèv* just preceding (Bizot, *Figuier*, 77, 53)—an instance in which the vernacular term is replaced by the Pāli.


75 Another depiction of the same type is in a Cambodian manuscript illustrated in *Le figuier*, pl. XIII. The practitioner is shown standing, crowned, and six-armed—two arms on the hips, two raised toward the five-branched fig tree (with five branches on each side), and two holding a disk in front of the chest. This is the illustration with the caption translated in n. 67.
divergent developments. The hand-raising gesture is quite explicit in the Traiphūm, and only implied in Pritsanā Tham, where the terms magga and phala do not appear in the captions. The illustrations of the newly identified meditational practices, one with a daṇḍa (at numbers 2, 3, and 4), the other with a “jerking” of the circle (at number 8), differ sufficiently from the descriptions of the actions in the Traiphūm to suppose they are independent outgrowths of Visuddhimagga meditation.

Despite the difficulty of establishing borders around one or another “school,” the introductory chapter of the Rāma I Traiphūm suggests the existence of a divide between exoteric and esoteric that might be useful. Various epithets of the Buddha are introduced. One is Braḥ arabain (pronounced arabang); others include satthā and buddho.76 Braḥ arabain is said to mean “far from evil people, far from unworthy persons, near good people, near worthy persons”; the Buddha has the name arabain because he is far from enemies like the kilesa (defilements) and halted with his hand the wheel of samsāra.77 The meanings continue, from various points of view (naya), for arabain and the other epithets.

Arabain is a frequently chanted epithet, especially in Dhammakāya meditation and in the text translated as Le chemin de Laṅkā. In the Sinhalese preamble to the Manual of a Mystic, the A of Arahan is said to stand for the Dhamma, the ra for the Buddha, and the ban for the Sangha.78 For the author of the Rāma I Traiphūm, the word is a semantic unit; the different meanings are ascribed to it as a whole. Surely the author was aware that the syllables comprising arabain could be said to signify various terms, syllable by syllable. But he pointedly refused to involve himself in such an activity. The reason may be that he considered phoneme mysticism a secret business, one not to be addressed in the Traiphūm but nevertheless valid, and a practice that could coexist with the exoteric Buddhism presented in his text.

POSTSCRIPT

My first encounter with the word kammathān occurred in about 1965, in Peace Corps days. My adopted intellectual father was Than Chand, Prince Chand, M. C. Chandhirayu Rajani, and one day he lent me a book entitled Thīeo kammathān khǭng Phra ‘Āčhān Bunnāk (in the WorldCat transliteration), telling me it was not that difficult to read. It was the autobiography of a wandering monk in northeastern Thailand. I own a copy but have not looked at it for ages. I remember it as about a sort of do-it-yourself program of meditation, in which the author rid himself of sexual yearnings by nearly starving himself to death. I do not know how much of it might resonate with the programs of Kammathān I have learned about in carrying out researches for this article. I was able to report back to Than Chand that I thought it was a wonderful book. It also meant something to him, and he was proud to have been part of a remote section of the royal family descended from

77 Traiphūm lok, vol. 1, 24.
Rāma III rather than King Mongkut—through the Second King under Chulalongkorn (“George Washington”) and Than Chand’s father Prince Bidyalankarana, the poet N. M. S. This meant he could disdain the Thammayut Sect as nothing to do with him. I would like to think that the precious memory of borrowing this book has helped fortify me with the patience needed to write this article.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank the following, some of whom shared materials, some of whom offered valuable criticisms or provided other assistance: Anne Blackburn; Alastair Gornall; Thomas Hudak; Louis Gabaud; Piriya Kairiksh; Nicolas Revire; Samerchai Poolswan; Peter Skilling; Ashley Thompson; and an anonymous reviewer.

WORKS CITED


Chotpanyo, Phra Mahā (Chai Yasotharat). Nangṣī phuttharangsi thrisadi yān wa duai samaitha le wipatsanā kammathān si yūk (Book of the Ńāṇa of the bold rays of the Buddha, consisting of the calming and insight meditations of the four eras). Bangkok: Wat Baromniwat, 1936.
____. Traditional Theravada Meditation and its Modern-Era Suppression. Hong Kong: Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2013.
McGovern, Nathan. “Esoteric Buddhism in Southeast Asia.” Online, Oxford Research

Mongkhon Thepmuni (Mongkol-Thepmuni, Venerable Phra (Sodh Candasaro)). *Lak le withi samatha le wipatsana biang ton thiang thammakai* (Principles and methods of calming and insight meditation from the beginning through Dhammakaya). In Khū mii patibat samathawipatsanākammathān 5 säi (Handbook of the practice of calming and insight meditation, five traditions), 5-1 – 5-202. Ratchaburi: Wat Luang Phū Sot Thammakāyārām, 2010.


Skilling, Peter. “At the Heart of Letters: Akṣara and Akkhara in Thai Tradition.” In *80 That Phon Trī


