

**The Life, Work and Social Roles of the Most Venerable
Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (1920–2007)**

Dissertation

zur Erlangung der Würde des Doktors der Philosophie

der Fakultät für Geisteswissenschaften

Universität Hamburg

vorgelegt von

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Hamburg 2015

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The date of the oral defense: 29. January 2016

Contents

Table of Contents	i
Preface	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
Notes on Transcription, Dates, and Honorifics	xi
Transcription and Transliteration of Lao	xi
Dates and Eras	xi
Honorifics for Monks and Ex-monks	xii
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Table of Illustrations	xv
Chapter 1 Introduction	
1. Spread of Buddhism to Laos	1
2. Organization of the Lao Sangha	6
3. Prominent Features of Lao Buddhism	10
4. Role of Charismatic Monks in the History of Lao Buddhism	12
5. State of the Art	16
6. Core Questions	22
7. Methodology and Sources	22
8. Field site and Fieldwork	24
9. Structure of the Thesis	26
10. Illustration and Captions	29
Chapter 2 The Life History of Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela	
1. Introduction	32
2. Childhood and Primary Education	33
3. Family Background	34
4. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's Teachers	40
5. Life as a Buddhist Novice	46
6. Leaving the Monastery and Life as a Layman	49
7. Ordination as a Monk	50
8. Positions, Honorific Titles, a Medal and Certificates	52
8.1 Ecclesiastical Positions	52

8.2 Honoric Titles	55
8.3 A Medal and Exaltation Certificates	57
8.4 Thelaphisek Ceremony	58
9. Accused by Local Officers of Supporting the Lao Issara.....	59
10. Kitchavat (Monastic Routines).....	61
11. Personal Character and Moral Conduct.....	68
12. Birthday Celebrations	72
13. Attendants and a Foster Child	74
14. Lay Buddhist Supporters	77
14.1 A Medical Doctor	77
14.2 A Female Supporter	78
15. Unexpected Events, Nam mon and Amulets	79
15.1 Unexpected Events.....	79
15.2 Nam mon (Holy Water)	80
15.3 Amulets	82
16. The Last Year	84
16.1 Sathu Nyai Khamchan's Death.....	85
16.2 Arrangement of the Funeral Ceremony	86
16.3 The Cremation Ceremony.....	88
17. Conclusion.....	92
18. Illustrations and Captions	95

Chapter 3 Construction and Reconstruction of Monastic Buildings

1. Introduction	127
2. The Historical Background of Vat Saen Sukharam.....	131
3. Renovation of Vat Saen Sukhakhham	134
3.1 Restoration of the Sim	135
3.2 The Construction and Reconstruction of Other Buildings in Vat Saen Sukharam... 143	
3.2.1 Brick Walls and Landscape.....	143
3.2.2 Upmung (The Vaulted Chapel).....	144
3.2.3 Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk (The Eighteen-Cubit Buddha Statue)	145
3.2.4 Hò Kòng (The Drum Shelter).....	147
3.2.5 Sala Hongtham (The Preaching Pavilion).....	149
3.2.6 Hò Phiphithaphan (The Museum Building).....	150
3.3 The Construction and Renovation of <i>kuti</i> (Abodes)	150
3.3.1 Kuti Nòi (The Small Abode).....	151
3.3.2 Monks' Kuti and Kuti Mae Khao.....	151
3.3.3 Hò San (The Refectory)	151

3.3.4 Kuti Nyai (The Main Abode)	151
3.3.5 Kuti Sam Pae (The Abode with a Three-Part Roof)	153
4. The Construction Works in Other Monasteries	153
4.1. Hò Lakhang (The Bell Shelter) at Vat Pa Fang	153
4.2 The Sim of Vat Si Khottabun.....	154
5. Donations and Contributions to Other Monasteries	155
5.1 Vat Pa Phon Phao.....	156
5.2 Other Monasteries	157
6. The Walkways and Crematories.....	159
6.1 The Concrete Walkways and Village Office	160
6.2. The Public Crematories at Vat Pa Nya Thüp.....	161
7. Conclusion.....	162
8. Illustrations and Captions	165

Chapter 4 Collections, Compositions and Publications

1. Introduction	180
2. Collection of Photographs	182
2.1 Monastic Exhibitions in Vat Saen Sukharam	184
2.2 Collaboration with Hans Georg Berger for Photograph Preservation	185
2.3 Sathu Nyai Khamchan's Perspective on Photography.....	188
2.4 The Foundation of the Buddhist Archive of Photography.....	190
3. Collection of Art Objects.....	192
3.1 Buddha Statues.....	194
3.2 Monk Statues	197
3.3 Hò Thammat and Vò Pha Bang	199
3.4 Hùu Xuang (Racing Boats)	202
4. Collections of Documents, Manuscripts and Publications	205
4.1 Collection of Personal Letters.....	205
4.2 Collection of Official Documents	206
4.3 Collection of Thelaphisek Certificates.....	210
4.4 Collection of Religious Books and Magazines	213
4.5 Collection of Manuscripts.....	215
5. Compositions and Publications	217
5.1 The Pātimokkha Manuscript	217
5.2 The Vessatara Jātaka in Book Form	219
5.3 Composition of Other Manuscripts and Sponsoring of Manuscript-Making	223
5.4 Other Religious Publications	226
6. Conclusion	228

7. Illustrations and Captions	231
 Chapter 5 Socio-religious Roles	
1. Introduction	239
2. As Abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam.....	241
3. As the Ecclesiastical Provincial governor of Luang Prabang.....	245
4. Travels around Laos	250
5. Attending the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana in Burma, and Participating in the Celebrations of the 2500th Anniversary of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.....	255
5.1 Attending the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana in Burma.....	256
5.2 Participating in the Celebrations of the Buddha Jayanti in Sri Lanka	258
6. International Official Visits	265
6.1 Thailand	265
6.2 The Soviet Union	270
7. Pilgrimage to Buddhist Sites	273
7.1 Thailand and Malaysia.....	274
7.2 India and Nepal	276
7.3 Sri Lanka.....	279
7.4 Burma (Myanmar)	281
8. International Travels.....	283
8.1 Vietnam and Cambodia.....	283
8.2 France and other European countries.....	285
8.3 Australia.....	289
8.4 North America	290
8.5 China.....	296
9. Conclusion.....	298
10. Illustrations and Captions	302
 Chapter 6 Conclusion	
Conclusion.....	312
 Appendix	
Glossary.....	322
 Bibliography	
1. Archival Documents of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang	353
1.1 Books and Journals	353
1.1.1 Collection of Vat Suvannakhili.....	353

1.1.2 Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam	354
1.1.3 Collection of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram	359
1.2 Personal Letters: Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam	359
1.3 Official Documents: Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam	361
1.4 Thelaphisek Certificates: Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam	366
1.5 Manuscripts: Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam	366
1.6 Collections of Photographs at the Buddhist Archive of Photography	368
1.6.1 Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam, series A and B	368
1.6.2 Collection of Vat Suvannakhili	369
1.6.3 Collection of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram	369
2. Collection of Art Objects in the Monasteries in Luang Prabang	370
2.1 Museum Numbers of Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam	370
2.2 Museum Numbers of Collection of Vat Suvannakhili	370
3. Literature	371
3.1 In Lao	371
3.2 In Thai	373
3.3 In Western Languages	376
3.4. Dictionaries	384
4. Video	385
5. Interviews	385
6. Websites	387
About the Author	388
Zusammenfassung	389
Eidesstattliche Erklärung	391

Preface

The following dissertation is a study of the life history, work and socio-religious roles of the Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, a central figure of the Lao Sangha of Luang Prabang in the second half of the twentieth century. It mainly employs the sources in the data bank of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang, which include historic photographs and written documents. With a documentary and historical focus on the intellectual biography of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, his significant works and social roles, it covers four main topics: his life as a prominent and charismatic monk, his monastic constructions, his collections of documents and art objects, and his social as well as religious practices.

The Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan was born at Ban Lakkham village, Luang Prabang on 23 September 1920, into a noble family of Luang Prabang. He was ordained as a novice for the first in 1932 and a second time from 1934 to 1938, after which he disrobed and spent his life as a laymen for three years. He was ordained as a monk at Vat Saen Sukharam on 9 June 1941 and lived in the monkhood for over sixty-six years. He also held the position of abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam and chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Luang Prabang province until his demise. He passed away unexpectedly from heart failure at his monastery in Luang Prabang on 9 July 2007.

The Venerable Abbot was a charismatic monk who served as a role model for many monks and novices in Luang Prabang, who tried to emulate him. He was highly respected by monks, novices and lay people of the old royal capital of Luang Prabang, which has been the spiritual center of Lao Buddhism and culture since ancient times and was the seat of the Supreme Patriarch until 1975. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's outstanding works include the constructions and restorations of Vat Saen Sukharam and many other monasteries in the style of modern Lao Lan Xang architecture. Moreover, the Most Venerable Abbot led numerous Buddhist ceremonies, rituals and other festivals in accordance with the rules of the Sangha. He traveled to visit seventeen countries in the world. His travels reflect the important role of his personality in promoting the Lao Sangha's relationships with the Sangha organizations of other Buddhist countries in South and Southeast Asia. Finally, by preserving his collections and making them available for study, he was the decisive figure who allowed for the setting up of the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang and the Museum of Buddhist Art at Vat Saen Sukharam.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan served as an abbot for a long time (60 years) in one of the most prominent monasteries of Luang Prabang. He developed very close relations to the highest-

ranking individuals of the Lao Sangha hierarchy and rose up to high positions within the Sangha himself. When he passed away, he left behind a huge corpus of documents and artefacts, which have enabled us to reconstruct his life history and learn more about his roles in the Sangha. Therefore, studying Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life and work is in many ways representative of a study of the social roles and practices of the Lao Sangha as a whole.

My personal interest in Sathu Nyai Khamchan comes from the experiences I had when I stayed in Vat Saen Sukharam as a novice and later as a monk from 1992 to 1996, while working with him on the publication of his biography, and while researching the historic photographs of his collection. During my stay at Vat Saen Sukharam, the other monks, novices and I often listened to the instructions Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave after the evening chants. He told often of his own life story, the history of Vat Saen Sukharam, and other stories about Luang Prabang and Laos in general. During the three months of the Buddhist Lent, his talks had an extremely strong focus on the Buddhist teachings and practices of monastic discipline. I was also assigned by him to take care of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam, where the morning and evening chanting ceremonies take place, which, together with my attendance at the Buddhist festivals and ceremonies held for the community, gave me a chance to get to know him even better.

Through my engagement at the monastery, I was able to observe his methods of practice and instruction as well as his lifestyle, which inspired in me a deep respect for him. He was kind enough to act as the sponsor and preceptor of my ordination—together with two other monks—and also the preceptor at the ceremony itself, which was organized on 4 October 1995. In August 2006 and 2007, I worked on a project of the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang under the direction of Hans Georg Berger, a German photographer and writer, with the goal of preserving the historic photographs of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's collection for research and public display. I worked with Sathu Nyai Khamchan in order to add annotations to photographs which were at the time still unidentified or uncaptioned. Furthermore, during my work on the project "The Lao Sangha and Modernity" directed by Prof. Dr. Volker Grabowsky of the Asia-Africa Institute at Hamburg University, which features Sathu Nyai Khamchan's collections of written documents including personal letters and official documents as well as religious books and journals, I found a plethora of additional interesting information about Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life and work. After all this, I realized that, despite the difficulties posed by writing about one's own master, it is vital that I make this attempt in order to provide my own contribution to the development of such a significant project.

Acknowledgements

First of all, even though he was never aware that this dissertation would be carried out, I would like to respectfully thank and express my deepest gratitude to the Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, who was my teacher, preceptor and spiritual master, and who lit the candle for the way of my life and supported my endeavors in Buddhist education.

I would like to express my gratitude and respect to Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, Sathu Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela, Sathu Khamlar Lakkhano, Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo and all the members of the Sangha of Luang Prabang for their encouragement, advice and the information they shared on Sathu Nyai Khamchan.

I am very grateful to the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang for making the primary sources available for me to use. I thank the hard-working team of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang consisting of Somsack Thongsavatphon, Mixay Chaloensuk, Viengkeo Phainasone, Hot Keopanya, Khamsuk Suliyaphone, Bounsou Saytham, Bunpheng Ounchan, Johnny Ounchan, Phab Pisavat, and Suneth Thammalat for their assistance in sending me various documents.

Many thanks also go to Hans Georg Berger, who was behind me for the whole duration of this study, for his kindness, advice and encouragement. He made it possible for me to meet Dr. Volker Grabowsky in Luang Prabang, which led to our cooperation at the Universität Hamburg and me pursuing my PhD in Germany. Without his generosity and initial support, my research project would never have been realized. His messages always inspired in me to remain patient to carry out my work to its completion.

I am also grateful to Dr. Volker Grabowsky, professor of Thai and Lao studies at the Asia-Africa Institute within the University of Hamburg for his kindness and wisdom in supervising this dissertation, and for his work on Lao history and Lao Buddhism. That I could begin and complete my doctorate is largely due to him, and I am very grateful for all his kind assistance. Without him, this dissertation would never have been initiated. He also took great pains in giving constant advice and inspiration.

I wish to express my gratitude to my Associate Supervisor as well, Dr. Michael Zimmermann, for his kindness and his valuable time providing precious advice on matters related to Buddhist doctrine. I am grateful to Dr. Steffen Döll for his useful advice and comments. I greatly thank Dr. Patrice Ladwig for his advice and useful comments on the thesis.

I also would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to both Lars Brandt and Luke Bauer for their great assistance in advising me on my formulations in English and making useful comments. They also took great patience in reading through rough drafts to help improve their quality.

I would like to thank my good friend Sathu Ounkham Akkhapanyo (Souksavatdy) for his support sending me materials and sharing his information on Sathu Nyai Khamchan via both interviews and social media.

I thank Dr. Khamlor Boulyaphonh, a relative of mine, Mae Buachan Chanthavong and Mae Bangon Siphanthone for their generosity for financing my project in its first years as a token of their support and encouragement.

I received answers to many questions relating to my topic from Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, Sathu Nyai Chanpheng Phalittathamma Maha Thela, Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, Sathu Nyai Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela, Sathu Khamsao Paphatsaro, Sathu Ounkham Akkhapanyo, Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo, Bunkhong Khutthao, Achan Maha Onsi Mangkhala, Outhai Onviangsai, Achan Khamdi Saloemsak, Achan Khampom Phongsavan, Achan Tui Sisomphone, Thongvan Phetmungkhun, Achan Kaeo Suksavat, Hans Georg Berger, Singkeo Buppha, Rangsit Chongchanasittho, Khamman, Mae Hüan, Pa Khambua Vongphit and Mae Bunmi Phongphichit. They all took time away from their own work to answer questions for my research. For this I am, of course, most thankful.

I greatly thank Sathaphorn Limmany for his support by giving me the books which are related to the history of Laos and Lao Buddhism, of which are useful for my research. I would also like to thank Autcharavadee Sudprasert for her support and friendship.

I am grateful to my friends, Markus Seewald and Martin Jürgens, who helped find an apartment in Hamburg for me to stay in. As many are aware, finding accommodation in Hamburg is not easy, so I was very lucky to have their support in this matter.

I also thank Christoph Riemer for his kindness, friendship, and advice not to get too stressed out during the research and writing process. He often invited me to his place for dinner to discuss various topics related to my research. Thank you also to Tinnakorn Siangnam and Wichitta Phobunma for their friendly support.

I would also like to thank Jettana Wannasai-Grabowsky for her generosity and hospitality in hosting wonderful get-togethers at the shared residence of her and Dr. Volker Grabowsky.

I would like to thank my colleagues, Apiradee Techasiriwan, Aussana Nasriken, Pantipa Chuenchat, Prasong Kittinan, Sasithorn O'Charoen, Amnuayvit and Pisinee Thitibordin,

Catthiyakorn Sasitharamas, and Anando Kaddar for their practical help, advice, encouragement, friendship and fun. I especially thank Bounleuth Sengsoulin, the first new friend of mine in Hamburg, who has helped me since my arrival in Hamburg with various administrative and more general matters. I would also like to thank Savuth Prum for his friendship and support.

I thank Dr. Wibke Lobo, Neil Huggett, Michael Kreinod, Brian Lingham and Olivia Killias for their advice, English corrections and thought-provoking comments on the articles I published while writing this thesis.

I also wish to thank the project “The Lao Sangha and Modernity: A Buddhist Archive in Luang Prabang” and Competence Network “Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia” (DORISEA) which funded my work and study at the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg, which allowed me to complete this dissertation.

I am very grateful to my parents, Mai Lai and Nang Baeng, my grandmother, Nang Khong, and my brothers and sisters, who have always remained interested in my work, encouraging me and sending me their good wishes. Their sincere words on the telephone always helped keep me motivated and cheerful.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Chanmaly Phaengkhamphat, for her patience in looking after our house and taking good care of our two young daughters in my absence. Her excellent and thoughtful management of our house, our children and our small bakery helped me achieve peace of mind, enabling me to confidently carry out my work. Finally, I must thank my daughters, Malichan and Phennapha, who told their father regularly about their experiences at school with their friends, which helped him keep his head on straight and motivated throughout this project.

Notes on Transcription, Dates, and Honorifics

Transcription and Transliteration of Lao

No formal system of transcription from Lao into Roman script exists at present. This thesis transcribes Lao words following the pronunciation according to the rules of present-day Lao orthography and, whenever possible, is in accordance with the system devised for Thai and Lao at the Asia-Africa Institute within the University of Hamburg. The old orthography, which was in use until the Lao revolution of 1975, differs from modern Lao with regard to the use of certain consonants and terms. For example, the old orthography retained both “l” and “r” in terms such as “*phra*” and “*thera*”. However, in modern Lao, the letter “r” was either eliminated or replaced by “l”. As such, the two above mentioned words are now spelled “*pha*” and “*thela*”. These changes occurred due to “the instructions of Phumi Vongvichit, cultural czar under the Pathet Lao,” wherein “‘rò’ was replaced by ‘lò’ on the ground that in purely Lao words no ‘r’ sound occurs” (Stuart-Fox 2002: xv). I have chosen to follow Stuart-Fox’s method in using “ch” over “j” and “v” over “w”. For example, in the case of the term “*vat*”, which transcribed as “*wat*” by some scholars, I use “v” to indicate that the Lao consonant is pronounced with a more fricative quality than the corresponding sound in Thai. However, I make certain exceptions for well-known words in order for them to be read more conveniently, such as by using “Sangha” instead of “Sangkha”, “Luang Prabang” instead of “Luang Phabang”, and “Vientiane” instead of “Viang Chan” and so on.

Most documents used for this dissertation are written or typed according to the old Lao orthography. In these documents, which were produced pre-1975, some words are written differently from modern Lao and are difficult to comprehend by a Lao audience who is not familiar with the old spellings. Therefore, I have transliterated them into modern Lao, although the pronunciations and meanings are retained in accordance with their origins.

Dates and Eras

Nowadays, the calendric systems most widely used in Laos are the Christian and Buddhist calendars. However, the dates that appear in the primary sources used in this study often occur in the form of the traditional Lao calendar. Especially the dates of birth of people were reckoned in watch (*yam* ຍາມ), day, month and year. In those cases, I provide both the dates in the Lao calendar and the corresponding dates in the Gregorian calendar. Buddhist and Lao calendars denote important days for Lao people in their daily lives, for example Buddhist holy

days. The Lao calendar belongs to the lunisolar system: its months follow the moon and coincide with each lunation, while the year is determined by the revolution of the sun around the earth.

The different eras in use in Laos, particularly in Luang Prabang are: Phutthasakkarat or Buddhasakarāja (Buddhist Era), whose year 0 corresponds to the year 543 BC; Culasakkarat or Cūlasakarāja (The Minor Era), beginning in AD 638, today it is used only in private agreements and in astronomical or astrological documents, particularly when determining the date of the Lao (and Thai) New Year in mid-April. The Christian Era is officially and popularly used in modern Laos. In 1955, the government of the Kingdom of Laos declared the use of both Buddhist dates and Christian dates to be acceptable within officialdom. An example of a date which we might find in some of the pre-1975 sources under study is: “Vientiane, Friday, the fifteenth day of waning moon of the tenth lunar month (10) BE 2498 (corresponding to 16 October AD 1955)” (BAD-12-2-1955.107). In present-day Laos, official acts – by government agencies, for example – are dated in accordance with the Christian era, whereas religious acts are dated in accordance with the Buddhist era (Phetsarath 1959: 98).

Honorifics for Monks and Ex-monks

In Laos as well as in other Theravada Buddhist countries,

“respect for monks is indicated by using certain honorifics when addressing them. There are two main types of honorifics: those that precede and those that follow a monk’s name. The following may precede a monk’s name: “Pha” (“Phra”) (“holy” or “Exalted”), which identifies a monk, a person, or object worthy of religious veneration; “Sathu” (the equivalent of “Pha”), a term used locally in Luang Prabang; “Sathu Nyai,” a term used to address senior monks who have been elevated to a higher level of honor during a special ceremony. [...] When following a monk’s name, the term “Thela” (“Thera”) indicates a monk who has maintained his vows for at least 10 years and the term “Maha Thela” (“Maha Thera,”) for at least 20 years.

(Morin and Farmer 2009: Note to reader)

Notably, in Luang Prabang, the term “Sathu” is given to a monk who has been invited for a consecration ceremony called *thelaphisek* (literally, to pour water onto a Venerable one); before that his honorific is “Pha” or “Chao Mòm”. Moreover, when the Kingdom of Laos still existed, “Sathu” was also used in spoken language for princes, princes and noblemen, or *chao* (Nhouy 1959: 190).

In this dissertation, there are three types of monks’ honorifics in use, which are applied in accordance with the local traditions: the first is “Sathu” and “Sathu Nyai” preceding the monks’ names, indicating that these monks are from Luang Prabang. The second is “Pha Achan”, indicating monks of Vientiane and of other provinces. The third is “Phra” indicating

monks in Thailand and other countries. In most texts, I use a monk's full name in the first reference, for example, Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, and the more commonly used form in subsequent reference, e.g. Sathu Nyai Khamchan.

The term "Achan" ("Master") identifies a qualified teacher of a craft or a teacher at a university, and is also an honorary title given to a former monk who was a monk for at least ten years. Former monks who have had the official title "Maha" are called "Achan Maha". The term "Thit" is a title given to a person who has disrobed from monkhood. "Thit" is adopted from the word "pundit", which means "knowledgeable person", "wise", or "the one who lives wisely."

Finally, the term "Xiang" is a title given to a person who has disrobed from being a novice. This term is also used for the names of cities in the Tai-speaking regions covering large parts of northern Laos, northern Thailand, the Shan state in Myanmar and territories in southern China. Some examples of this usage can be found in Xiang Dong, Xiang Thong (present Luang Prabang), Xiang Khouang in Laos, Xiang Mai (Chiang Mai), Xiang Hai (or Chiang Rai) in Thailand, Xiang Tung (or Keng Tung) in Shan state, and Xiang Hung (present Jinghong) in China.

List of Abbreviations

AD – Anno Domini (Christian Era)

BAD – Buddhist Archive of Documents

BAL – Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang

BAP – Buddhist Archive of Photography

BE – Buddhist Era

BC – Before Christian Era

BFOL – Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos

BHP – Buddhist Heritage Project

CS – Chulasakkarat (Minor Era)

CBSA – Central Buddhist Spiritual Administration

CLBFO – Center of Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization

CRI – China Radio International

DORISEA – Dynamic of Religion in Southeast Asia

EAP – Endangered Archives Programme

EFEO – École française d’Extrême-Orient

LBFO – Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization

LBMO – Lao Buddhist Monk Organization

RLG – Royal Lao Government

UNESCO – United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Table of Illustrations

1.1 Five senior monks, members of the first administrative board committee of the Sangha organization of the Kingdom of Laos	29
1.2. Monks in the Liberated Zone in Xam Nua are studying the theory of revolution	30
1.3 Working with Sathu Nyai Khamchan in his abode on identifying the historic photographs in July and August 2006.....	31
2.1. Achan Thongdi, grandfather of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, wearing the uniform of Chao Phaya Luang Müangchan	95
2.2. Nang Khamasuk, grandmother of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, in her nun attire	96
2.3. All members of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s family	97
2.4. Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela (1893–1943)	98
2.5. Sathu Nyai Khamchan framed his portrait together with the portrait of his preceptor.....	99
2.6. Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly went to Bangkok and visited his preceptor.....	100
2.7. Khamchan (Sathu Nyai Khamchan), at the age of 6 in 1926.....	101
2.8. Teacher and pupils of Vat Pa Fang, Luang Prabang in 1934.....	102
2.9. Novice Khamchan Virachit and Novice Onsi Mangkhala in Chiang Rai province, Thailand.....	103
2.10. Monks and novices of Vat Benchamabòphit in Bangkok in 1936.....	104
2.11. This first passport portrait of Khamchan Virachit as a layman.....	105
2.12. Khamchan Virachit riding on his very own bicycle.....	106
2.13. The <i>nak</i> procession before the ordination ceremony on 9 June 1941	107
2.14. The ordination process in the temple hall (<i>sim</i>) of Vat Saen on 9 June 1941	108
2.15. A group of monks and novices of Vat Pa Fang in 1941	109
2.16. Sathu Nyai Khamchan and his souvenir objects presented to him by the Sangha and government of the Union of Myanmar in 2002	110
2.17. The assembly of the Luang Prabang Sangha in the <i>sim</i> of Vat Vixun in the 1960s	111
2.18. The assembly of the Luang Prabang Sangha in the <i>sim</i> of Vat Saen Sukharam for the recitation of the Patimokkha	111
2.19. Sathu Nya Khamchan walking at the head of hundreds of monks and novices on the main street for collecting alms	112
2.20. The Luang Prabang people presenting alms to Sathu Nya Khamchan	113
2.21. Sathu Nyai Khamchan posing for a portrait on 24 November 2000.....	113

2.22. Sathu Nyai Khamchan practicing <i>thudong</i> in Vat Pa Phon Phao, Luang Prabang in the 1990s	114
2.23. The regular practice and simple lifestyle of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in his abode	115
2.24. Sathu Nyai Khamchan receives Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn at Vat Sean Sukharam in November 1993	116
2.25. Sathu Nyai Khamchan and his doctor, Doctor Khamphui in Jinghong	117
2.26. Mae Hüane and Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam.....	118
2.27. The holy water pot that Sathu Nyai Khamchan used	118
2.28. The small amulet contains Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s picture.....	119
2.29. The larger amulet contains Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s picture	119
2.30. Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s biography kept on the altar shelf in a house in Vientiane that burned down in March 2007	120
2.31. On 9 July 2007, the day when Sathu Nyai Khamchan passed away.....	121
2.32. In the evenings the Sangha and lay Buddhists performed the <i>matika</i> chanting.....	121
2.33. Over a thousand attendees at the funeral procession of Sathu Nyai Khamchan on 21 July 2007	122
2.34. The procession of the chariot in front of the former palace	123
2.35. At That Luang stupa before moving the body of Sathu Nyai Khamchan from the <i>hong</i> chariot to place at the <i>phasat</i> pyre	123
2.36. A view of the cremation ceremony from a high point on the Vat That Luang side	124
2.37. Important figures posing for a portrait after finishing the <i>bang sukun</i> ritual (the taking of funeral robes)	125
2.38. After the storm began, the fire started burning intensely	126
2.39. The remains of Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected on 22 July 2014	126
3.1.1. A graphic of the boundary of Vat Saen Sukharam.....	165
3.1.2. A graphic of the boundary of Vat Saen Sukharam.....	166
3.2. The old <i>sim</i> of Vat Saen Sukharam in the late 1940s.....	167
3.3. Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing in front of the <i>sim</i> of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1961	168
3.4. The <i>sim</i> of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1962.....	169
3.5. The <i>upmung</i> (vaulted chapel) was repaired in 1992	170
3.6. Pa Mon from Ban Phon Hüang village making an offering to the spirits.....	171
3.7. Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing next to the ruins of the Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk Buddha in 1972.....	172
3.8. A clay jar containing a bronze bowl with six silver Buddha amulets	173
3.9. Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk Buddha statue	174

3.10. The drum shelter at Vat Saen Sukharam	175
3.11. Sadhu Nyai Khamchan standing in front of the museum building at Vat Saen Sukharam	176
3.12. Kuti Nyai, the original building probably taken in the 1980s before the renovations had begun.....	177
3.13. Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing in front of his <i>kuti</i> in the 1980s.....	178
3.14. Kuti Sam Pae (the <i>kuti</i> with a three-part roof)	179
3.15. The <i>sim</i> in Luang Prabang style at Vat Si Khottabun, Tha Khaek district, Khammuan province	179
4.1. Sathu Nyai Khamchan giving instructions to his disciples in his abode.....	231
4.2. Pha Phutthaviramahamuni Buddha in the style of Chiang Saen Sing I	232
4.3. Sathu Nyai Khamchan ordered for a statue of himself to be built in 1995	233
4.4. Sathu Nyai Khamchan preserved and protected this elaborate Hò Thammat.....	234
4.5. The racing boat of Ban Vat Saen	235
4.6. King Sisavang Vatthana hands over the trophy for first prize to the racing boat of Vat Saen	236
4.7. An example of an original <i>thelaphisek</i> certificate of Sathu Nyai Khamchan	237
4.8. Two copies of the Patimokkha manuscript compiled by Sathu Nyai Khamchan	238
5.1. Sathu Nyai Khamchan is handing over a monk-fan to Phra Phimonlatham at Vat Maha That Yuwarat Rangsarit, Bangkok	302
5.2. The Supreme Patriarch of Laos and other monks from Luang Prabang were received by senior monks of Savannakhet at their arrival.....	303
5.3. Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela is giving a blessing to the Pathet Lao leaders	304
5.4. The leaders of the Pathet Lao are receiving the blessing from Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela	304
5.5. The Lao delegation posing for a portrait at Amaragoyana building in Kaba Aye	305
5.6. Six senior monks and one state officer at the Department of the Religious Affairs in Vientiane.....	306
5.7. Four senior monks from Luang Prabang are visiting to Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma in Vientiane	307
5.8. Senior monks from Luang Prabang posing for a portrait in front of the Taj Mahal in India	308
5.9. The Lao delegation and a Mahayana monk in Ulan-Ude during their travel in the Soviet Union.....	309

5.10. Sathu Nyai Khamchan is looking at Apsaras on the bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat, Cambodia	310
5.11. The image of a gold stencil of Apsara in the interior of the <i>sim</i> of Vat Saen Sukharam.....	310
5.12. Sathu Nyai Khamchan visits the Lao Embassy in Washington DC, the United States	311

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Spread of Buddhism to Laos

Many chronicles and local accounts state that Buddhism was officially introduced to the region of mainland Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos) by a mission¹ from India, led by the Venerable Sona Thera and the Venerable Uttara Thera. The accounts state that these monks were sent out by the Most Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa Thera, and that their missions were officially supported by King Aśoka (Ashoka)² in BC 250. From a general point of view, one can conclude that this process has led to profound transformations of the cultures and societies of the region: “The spread of Buddhism to Southeast Asia along with other aspects of Indian culture is one of the most significant events in the history of Southeast Asia. Its impact penetrates into all walks of life and still plays an important role in the Southeast Asian ways of thinking and society” (Prapod 2015: 1). The point that this transfer remains influential until today is an important one, and is also emphasized by other researchers who pronounce the continuity of this process that links ancient history with the modern present: “Buddhism is a colourful, energetic, dynamic and

¹ The seven other missions were: The first mission, led by Majjhantika Thera, to Kashmir in the northwest of India, and to Peshavar and Ravalpindi in north Punjab. The second mission, led by Mahadeva Thera, was to Mahimsaka Mandala, modern Mysore, in southern India. The third mission, led by Rakkhitta Thera, was to Vanavasi in North Kanara, southern India. The fourth mission, led by Yonaka Dhammarakkhitta Thera, was to Supparaka, modern Sopara, in Aparanta, western India. The fifth mission, led by Mahadhammarakkhitta Thera, was to Maharashtra, mid-west India. The sixth mission, led by Maharakhitta Thera, was to Yonakarathta, the kingdom of the Greeks, it was believed to be part of the Greek Kingdom that existed in western India. The seventh mission, led by the Arahan Majjhima Thera, to the Himalaya region, it is possible that this includes Nepal. Each mission consisted of at least five Theras in order that the *upasampada*, the Ordination Ceremony, could be performed (Kyimo 2007: 255).

² “King Aśoka, third ruler in the Mauryan Dynasty, reigning from BC 272–231, and famous for propagating the Dhamma as well as erecting rock and pillar edicts throughout his sphere of influence. Grandson of Candragupta Maurya and son of Bindusara, Aśoka may well have been sympathetic to Buddhism prior to his victory over the Kalinga region in 260. However, following the bloody battle of conquest cited above, Aśoka is reputed to have become a Buddhist lay disciple, noted in Rock Edict Number III. While attempting to rule as a pious “Dhammarājā (righteous Buddhist king),” he emphasized the practice of *ahimsā* (non-injury, non-violence), respect for religious teachers, and other principles demonstrating a “Reign of Dhamma.” Aśoka established officers (known as “Superintendents of Dhamma” or Dhamma-Mahāmātras) to disseminate the region. He is perhaps best known, though, for two major enterprises during his reign: (1) the convening of a Buddhist council and (2) an extensive missionary activity” (Prebish 1993: 57).

diverse subject. It brings teachings, which are over [twenty-five] centuries old, alive and meaningful to the modern world” (Kyimo 2007: 6).

Laos is a land-locked country situated in the mainland of Southeast Asia. According to local tradition, Buddhism was introduced to the country in several phases: in the third century BC, during the reign of King Aśoka from India; in the seventh century, Tantric Buddhism came from southern China during the reign of Khun Lò of Müang Sua; and in the fourteenth century, the Sri Lankan tradition of Theravada Buddhism was brought from Cambodia by King Fa Ngum, the founder of the Lan Xang Kingdom (Kingdom of a Million Elephants). A further and most significant transmission of Theravada Buddhism to Laos, originating from the Kingdom of Lan Na with Chiang Mai as its religious and cultural center, took place in the second half of the fifteenth century; it also brought about the spread of the Dhamma script, a religious script used in the Lao world until the twentieth century (see Grabowsky 2008: 17). However, the local tradition of the *Luang Prabang Chronicle*,³ describes how the Buddha, accompanied by his close disciple, the Venerable Ananda, travelled through the region now known as Luang Prabang. The Buddha left a number of footprints when travelling through the land, for examples, at Vat Pha Phutthabat Tha Pha Hak or Vat Phutthabattai (also known Vat Phabattai) and on the slope of Mount Phusi above Vat Si Phutthabat. The Buddha also predicted to his disciple, the Venerable Ananda, that “a rich and powerful capital would be erected” in the place where Luang Prabang is located (UNESCO 2004: 5), and his religion would be established in the region.

In *Urangkha Nithan* (the Chronicle of the Stupas of the Breast-bone Relic of the Buddha, or the That Phanom Chronicle), it is stated that the Buddha traveled along with the Venerable Ananda to the regions in the northeast of Thailand and central Laos, now known as the Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon and Nong Khai provinces of Thailand, and the cities of Vientiane and Bòlikhamxay, as well as the Khammuan and Savannakhet provinces of Laos, leaving his footprints in these regions. According to the chronicle, the Buddha traveled to these regions because at Phu Khampha Mountain (where the Phra That Phanom stupa stands) we also find the relics of three previous Buddhas—Kukusantho, Gonagamano, and Kassapo—that were enshrined there (BAD-01-0027).

Travelling through the region, one day the Buddha was sitting under a *hang* tree (*Shorea siamensis* Miq.) where nowadays the Ing Hang stupa is situated in Savannakhet, to have a meal offered by Phaya Si Khottabun. After this, the Buddha left his footprint at Vat Phabat Phonsan in Bòlikhamxay. Shortly after the Buddha’s Mahaparinibbāna, the chest relics of the Buddha were brought by his disciples, led by the Venerable Maha Kassapa

³ Saveng Phinith, 1987. *Contribution À L’Histoire du Royaume de Luang Prabang* ພິງສາວະດານ ເມືອງຫຼວງພູມະບາງ, 354–359. Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient.

Thera, together with five hundred Arahants, to the region and installed in holy shrines at Phra That Phanom stupa in Nakhon Phanom. Later, other relics were installed at the Pha That Ing Hang and Pha That Luang stupas. Although the ancestors of the Lao people had already come into contact with Buddhism, the Buddha's Teachings (Dhamma) and order of disciples (Sangha) had yet to be permanently established. Therefore, many Lao still believed in other cults and religion like animism and Brahmanism, which existed prior to Buddhism's arrival.

Concerning the spread of Buddhism to Laos, the Lao scholar-monk Pha Achan Damrong P. Dhammikamuni states that "King Aśoka sent Arahants—including Phra Sona Thera and Phra Uttara Thera—to spread Buddhism in the lands of Suvannaphum (Pali: *suvannabhūmī*, the golden land), which is known as Indo-China or the Indo-Chinese peninsular, to Sisattanakhanahutta (Vientiane). Both elders brought relics of the Buddha to the region and installed them in Chedi Lokachulamani (Pha That Luang stupa), which was built by King Chanthaburi and five Arahants in previous times" (Dhammikamuni 2010: 151). As a result of Pha Achan Damrong's work, the region of Vientiane is claimed to be Suvannaphum. However, the same claim is made by the Mon for the town of Suddhamavati or Thaton in southern Myanmar, and by the Thais for the area of Nakhon Pathom in central Thailand (Prapod 2015: 12).

Other histories and narratives claim that Buddhism came to Laos from Cambodia, and was established as the state religion of the Kingdom of Lan Xang in 1359 by King Fa Ngum⁴ (1353–1374) in the capital of Xiang Dong Xiang Thong (present Luang Prabang). Previously, people from all parts of Lao society—from ordinary people to officials and dignitaries—believed in and worshiped *phi fa phi thaen* (the divine spirits of the sky), *phi phò phi mae* (paternal and maternal spirits), and *phi dam* (ancestral and household spirits). They seem to have held these beliefs since their migration from southern China. The *nithan* of Khun Borom testifies that:

⁴ "King Fa Ngum, the twentieth-second ruler of Lan Xang Hom Khao Dynasty, was born in 1316 (some source says 1328) in Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, and was founder of the imperial *mandala* of Lan Xang, reigned 1353–1374. Legend recounts how Fa Ngum and his father, Crown Prince Phi Fa, were exiled from Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, either because Phi Fa had seduced one of the king's concubines, or because Fa Ngum had been born with a set of 33 teeth. Whatever the reason, the chronicles agree that the family took refuge at the court of Angkor, where Fa Ngum was brought up and married a Khmer princess named Kaeo Keng Nya. Somewhere around the year 1350, Fa Ngum is said to have been provided with a Khmer army, which he led north to subdue a number of small, predominantly Lao principalities in the southern Khorat Plateau and other cities. Finally, in 1353, he seized Xiang Dong Xiang Thong and proclaimed himself king of the imperial *mandala* of Lan Xang Hom Khao (the Kingdom of a Million Elephants and the White Parasol). Upon the death of his Khmer queen in 1368 Fa Ngum is recorded no longer to have followed the precepts of Buddhism, to have lost interest in his kingdom, and to have given himself over to debauchery. In 1371, he was deposed by a coalition of nobles who placed his son Unhüan on the throne. Fa Ngum was exiled to Nan where he died two years later in 1374 (in Sila says, died in 1373)" (Stuart-Fox 2001: 102–103, Sila 2001: 30, 48).

When Phrayā Fā conquered all the Bān Müang and returned to live in Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, all the people of Müang Lān Xāng worshiped [only] the Phi Fā, Phi Thaen, Phi Phoh, Phi Mae. Worse, they did not know the virtue of the Phra Buddha, Phra Dhamma, and Phra Sangha. Moreover, they liked to show off their precious stones, their daring, their lances and swords.

(Souneth 1996: 193)

Thus, Queen Kaeo Keng Nya, King Fa Ngum’s wife, a daughter of the King of Angkor and a devout Buddhist, requested her husband to bring Buddhism to the country. When asked by his son-in-law, the Khmer King of Angkor (Angkor Thom) sent a religious mission to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong in order to establish Buddhism, along with a sacred Buddha statue called Pha Bang and a complete collection of the Tipiṭaka and other Pali texts. Even though Buddhism was now established in the kingdom, the population continued to believe in animism and spirit cults alongside Buddhism until the reign of King Phothisararat (r. 1520–1550). In 1527, the king announced his royal orders to his population and officers to stop the “misguided” worship of *phi fa phi thaen* that they had practiced since ancient times. The great shrine near Sop Dong stream, where the royal worship ceremony for the spirits was held, was destroyed and the king ordered to build a temple at this place. Nowadays Vat Savankhalok (or Vat Sangkhalok) is situated there (Sila 2001: 63).

Since Buddhism was established in the Kingdom, it has been promoted by kings and supported by the local population. However, its rise and decline depended much on the faith of the kings. “According to Lao Buddhist theory, a king’s legitimacy was derived from a superior store of merit that he had accumulated over many previous existences. The king had to increase his store of merit in his present life by doing good deeds, notably by making donations to the religious order and constructing or repairing Buddhist monuments” (Grabowsky 2007: 127). Buddhism was thereby actively supported, flourishing widely in the sixteenth century in the reigns of King Vixunnarat (1500–1520), King Phothisararat and King Saysetthathirat (1550–1572), during which the well-known Buddhist temples and monuments were built and renovated (for examples, Vat Vixun and Vat Xiang Thong in Luang Prabang, as well as Vat Pha Kaeo and Pha That Luang stupa in Vientiane). Many parts of the Buddhist canon, literature, and historical accounts of the Lan Xang kingdom, were composed and re-established during the reign of King Vixunnarat. The best and most prominent example is here the Chronicle of the Kingdom of Lan Xang, known as *Nithan Khun Borom* (the Chronicle of Khun Borom). According to the Lao researcher Souneth Phothisane, this is a “document of most fundamental importance, for it records the origins of the Lao race and the Lao kingdom” (Souneth 1996: 333). Other chronicles and inscriptions report that King Phothisararat brought the sixty manuscripts of the Tipiṭaka from Chiang Mai to Luang Prabang in order to strengthen Buddhism and its teachings. After the first wave is said to have come from Cambodia, several researchers consider this as the “second wave of Buddhism [reaching] Lan

Xang from the north in the mid-fifteenth century” (Lorrillard 2006: 143; Grabowsky and Berger 2015: 27–28).

While Laos was under Siamese rule (1779–1893), the country was divided into the three areas of Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champasak. Nevertheless, the practice of Buddhism depended upon local traditions, although it was also influenced by Siamese traditions. However, the city of Vientiane was entirely cleared out by Siamese troops in 1828 during the reign of King Anouvong, destroying all but a few of the Buddhist structures. Luang Prabang maintained its status as a Siamese tributary state and Buddhism was saved and practiced as before. Subsequently, large parts of Laos came under French rule as a colony, with Luang Prabang as a French protectorate (1893–1953). This was a difficult period for Buddhism in Laos, and had a great influence on its development. Dhammikamuni compares the situation of Buddhism in this time to that of a lion in a cage: “ເມື່ອຊາວພຸດຕິກຳຢູ່ໃນການຄວບຄຸມຂອງອານາຈັກລ່າເມືອງຂຶ້ນແລ້ວ ຊາວພຸດກໍ່ເໝືອນລາຊະສີ ທີ່ຖືກຈັບເຂົ້າກິງຂັງ ບໍ່ມີອິດສະຫຼະພາບໃດ ໆ [after the Buddhists fell under the control of colonial rule, they were like lions in a cage without any freedom]” (Dhammikamuni 2010: 292). However, some significant monuments were renovated and Buddhist organizations were established by Lao learned elites, for instance, the ruined Vat Pha Kaeo was renovated in 1936, Pha That Luang stupa was renovated from 1929 to 1935, and in 1931, Prince Phetsarat Rattanaavongsa established the Buddhist Pandit Assembly known as *phuttha bandit sapha* in Vientiane as the first modern official Buddhist organization for supporting Buddhist education.

After the end of the colonial period with the arrival of the Kingdom of Laos (1953–1975), Buddhism was officially supported by kings and governments. Monasteries and religious monuments were constructed and renovated. The government and the Sangha collaborated in organizing the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in the whole country in 1957, which became a remarkable event for Buddhists. On the occasion of the celebrations, the first volume of Abhidhammapitaka, the Suttantapitaka and the Vinayapitaka of the Tipitaka were published for the first time in Tham-Lao script, hundreds of Buddha images were built, and the Sangha Assembly Hall known as *sala phan hòng* (the pavilion of one thousand rooms) was erected at Vat That Luang, Vientiane for holding the annual Sangha conference. Monastic schools for boys and young novices opened in many urban monasteries and Pali schools were established at the monasteries in remote districts. Buddhist festivals were organized by the state, the Sangha and local communities throughout the country. Particularly, the That Luang festival in Vientiane was promoted as a national festival. Buddhism in Laos developed significantly in this period, and was actively supported by the state.

After the Lao revolution of 1975, the Pathet Lao forces started their program of turning Laos into a socialist society with a new role assigned to Buddhism (Ladwig 2008: 49). The

Buddhist activities were strictly controlled. For example, men who wanted to ordain had to apply for permission from the local authorities. This was because the country needed young men as workers for the purpose of national development. The changes that came along with the Lao revolution affected not only Buddhism, but also other socio-cultural structures, due to the country's need to setup a new regime. Subsequently, since the 1990s, after the country was opened to the outside world, the situation gradually changed back to normal. At present, Buddhism is fully supported and promoted by the state, and Buddhists are normally free to organize Buddhist festivals and ceremonies. Buddhist culture has again become an important force for the general development of the country, and the identity of Laos as a modern nation state.

2. Organization of the Lao Sangha

Lao histories describe that the Sangha order was formed in Xiang Dong Xiang Thong after the establishment of Buddhism in the country in 1359. At the time, the Sangha community was small and led by the Khmer monk "Pha Maha Pasaman and [the Sri Lankan monk] Pha Maha Thep Langka, and twenty monks who were their pupils" (Souneth 1996: 194). In Laos, just like in other countries in Southeast Asia, Buddhism was

[...] marked by a symbiotic relationship between the monarch and the Buddhist monkhood, the Sangha. The monks legitimized the rule of a king in return for his support. Because the Sangha and the state were closely interlinked, each king had to define his relationship with the Sangha and subsequently his status and power.

(Krieken-Pieters 2010: 86)

In the seventeenth century, during the reign of King Suriyavongsa, Buddhism and the Sangha in Laos flourished far and wide due to the king's strong support. Cambodian and Siamese monks came to Vientiane to study Buddhism for extensive periods of time. As stated in a note of the Dutch merchant Van Wuysthoff, who travelled to Vientiane in 1641: "[The] numbers [of those in the Sangha] may be compared to the number of soldiers of the Emperor of Germany. [...] annually Cambodian and Siamese popes come here for 10 to 12 years until they have graduated and are promoted (Van Wuysthoff, quoted from Krieken-Pieters 2010: 89).

In 1560, when King Saysetthathirat moved the capital of the Lan Xang Kingdom from Xiang Dong Xiang Thong (after 1560 called Luang Prabang) to Vientiane, he assigned the duty of overseeing administrative matters to the Sangha in order to protect the venerated Buddha of Pha Bang (Ibid.: 73). This demonstrates the relationship between the Sangha and monarch as well as the important role of the Sangha; they were not only spiritual leaders but also city administrators.

When Laos was under Siamese and French rule, the administration of the Sangha community was separated according to the territories' respective boundaries, namely, Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Champasak. Particularly, in Luang Prabang which had kept its status as a protectorate, the Sangha officially formed its organization following the royal ordinance of 1928. The Supreme Patriarch was appointed by a King as head of the Sangha of the Luang Prabang Kingdom. The royal ordinance indicates that monks and novices in the whole Kingdom of Luang Prabang were placed under the authority of a superior, the Supreme Patriarch, whose seat was, as a rule, established in the capital of the kingdom. In his administration, the Supreme Patriarch was assisted by a religious council consisting of three high dignitaries. The monks, novices and monasteries in each province were placed under the authority of a *chao khana khuaeng* (ecclesiastical provincial governor), in a *tasaeng* (sub-district) under the authority of the *chao khana tasaeng* (ecclesiastical sub-district head), and in a *vat* (temple or monastery) under the authority of the *chao athikan vat* (abbot).⁵

On 12 October 1945, Laos proclaimed independence. Subsequently, the Sangha organization known as *ongkan song* was established to govern the monastic population throughout the whole country according to the royal ordinance of 1951, which was then re-issued in 1959.⁶ The Sangha Organization was then under the supreme authority of the Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela (Bunthan Buppharat, 1891–1984) who was appointed by King Sisavang Vong in 1936, and stayed at Vat Longkhun and in 1940, moved to Vat Mai Suvannaphummaram, Luang Prabang. The administrative office was at Vat That Luang in Vientiane. The Supreme Patriarch was assisted by a religious council in administering the Sangha which consisted of five high-ranking dignitaries including a *sangkhanayok* (ecclesiastical prime minister) and four *sangkhamontri* (ecclesiastical ministers) (see Illustration No. 1.1). In the hierarchy of monks, honorific titles divided into six grades according to the monks' positions existed, namely *pha yòtkaeo*, *pha lukkaeo*, *pha lakkham*, *pha khu*, *pha xa* and *pha samdet*.⁷ The title of *pha yòtkaeo* was the official title for the position of the Supreme Patriarch, *pha lukkaeo* for the ecclesiastical minister, *pha lakkham* for ecclesiastical provincial governor, *pha khu* (or *khru*) for

⁵ This royal ordinance is regarded as the first version when Luang Prabang was a French protectorate, entitled ລາຊະການປະເທດລາວ ພະລາຊະໂອງການ ເລກທີ ໒໙ ລົງວັນທີ ໑ ເມ ໑໙໒໘ ຂອງສົມເດັດລ້ານຊ້າງຮົ່ມຂາວຫຼວງພະບາງ ຫຼືງ (ຊິງ) ຕັ້ງແຕ່ງລະບຽບສິ່ງຂອງ ພະລາຊະອານາຈັກຫຼວງພະບາງ [The affairs of Laos, the Royal Ordinance, No. 29, issued on 1 May 1928, of Somdet Lan Xang Hom Khao of Luang Prabang, established the regulations of the Sanga of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang] (BAD-02-0044).

⁶ ພະລາຊະອານາຈັກລາວ, ພະລາຊະໂອງການ ເລກທີ 160 ລົງວັນທີ 25 ພຶດສະພາ 1959 ຕັ້ງແຕ່ງລະບຽບສິ່ງແຫ່ງພະລາຊະອານາຈັກ [The kingdom of Laos, Royal Ordinance, No. 160, issued on 25 May 1959, for establishing the Sangha regulations in the kingdom]” (BAD-05-0026).

⁷ For details on the Lao Sangha, see also Kruong Pathoumxad, 1959. “Organization of the Sangha.” In *Kingdom of Laos* by René de Berval, 256–257. Saigon: France-Asie.

ecclesiastical district head, *pha xa* for ecclesiastical sub-district head, and *pha samdet* for abbot.

However, during the civil war, the Sangha were drawn into politics by the state ruling elites of both the Royal Lao Government (RLG) and the Pathet Lao. Therefore, in the late 1950s, a number of monks who were involved in the national liberation movement of the Pathet Lao⁸ left Vientiane and set up their own organization in the “Liberated Zone”⁹ in Xam Nua in northern Laos known as *ongkhan phutthasasana samphan haeng pathet Lao*, or the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos (BFOL). In 1989, during its third general meeting, the Sangha approved the change of the name to “Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization (LBFO)” which has been used until the present. The organization was initially established at a meeting of 179 monks held at Vat That Fun in Vientiane on 19 November 1958. Pha Achan Maha Khamtan Thepbuali was elected as its first president, Pha Achan Maha Thongkhun Anantasunthòn as vice-president, and Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singharat as secretary. It adopted the slogan “unite Lao Buddhist monks into one sect, and unite our struggle for independence, peace and neutrality”. The organization was reformed by the Sangha meeting at Vat Phon Savan (presently Vat Santiphap) in Paek district of Xiang Khouang province on 12 July 1962 (Khamyad 2006: 144–146). The committee was later moved to Xam Nua. This resulted in Laos having two Sangha organizations which were supported by two different political orders. *Ongkan song* was the national Sangha organization overseeing religious matters for the whole country, except the area of the Liberated Zone, which was supported by the Royal Lao Government¹⁰ (also known as Vientiane government) and under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Lao: *kaxuang thammakan*). At the same time, members of the BFOL taught young monks, novices, soldiers and lay people about both Buddhism and theories of revolution in the Liberated Zone, seemingly functioning as a political organ for the Pathet Lao (see Illustration No. 1.2).

After the Pathet Lao seized power at the national level in 1975 and established the *labòp mai* (new regime) following a socialist policy, the royal court, RLG and *ongkan song* were automatically abolished. They were regarded to be part of the *labòp kao*, the old regime.

⁸ “Pathet Lao literally means country or land of the Lao. The term seems to have been first used as a political designation in 1950 in the manifesto issued by the Congress of the Free Laos Front to refer to those areas liberated from French control. Thereafter, it was applied more broadly by the international media to refer to the anti-French guerrilla movement allied to the Vietminh, and subsequently, to the pro-communist, anti-government insurgency and to the Lao revolutionary movement in general” (Stuart-Fox 2001: 232).

⁹ “The name given by the Pathet Lao to those parts of Laos under their military and administrative control. Form the regroupment areas of Phongsali and Huaphan provinces set aside under the terms of the Geneva Agreements of 1954, the Pathet Lao steadily expanded the area under their control, especially while temporally allied with the Neutralists after the Battle of Vientiane at the end of 1960” (Ibid.: 190).

¹⁰ “The name given to successive governments appointed by the king during the existence of the Kingdom of Laos from 1947 to 1975. The Royal Lao Government came to designate the political Right in contradistinction to the Pathet Lao” (Stuart-Fox 2001: 266).

Thereafter, the BFOL became the national Sangha organization in 1976. It was under the supervision of the Lao Front for National Construction (Neo Lao Xang Xat), and established the *thammanun pokkhong song Lao* of BE 2541 (1998), the constitution governing the Lao Sangha of 2541 (BAD-02-0244). The supreme leader of the Sangha organization is called—in accordance with the title of Laos’ head of state—the president of the BFOL, not Supreme Patriarch. At present, the head office of the LBFO is situated at Hò Thamma Sapha—the Buddhist Assembly Hall—at Vat That Luang Nüa, Vientiane.

During and after the revolution, the monks who did not agree with or were affected by the new government left the country together with lay people as refugees, first to Thailand, and then to various Buddhist temples in the Western countries around the world.¹¹ As a result, there are many Lao Buddhist temples in European countries, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Even a Lao Sangha organization outside of Laos exists, the “Lao Buddhist Monk Organization” in the United States of America. The monastic population, according to the report of the sixth general conference of the Lao Sangha held in Vientiane in 2011, has provided statistics saying that there were 9,582 monks and 14,671 novices, a total of 24,253 people. The report also provides more figures such as 13 clergymen in white clothes, 478 nuns, 539 temple servants, and 4,894 monasteries including 3,860 inhabited monasteries and 1,034 abandoned monasteries. There are 54 Buddhist schools including two Buddhist colleges, one at Vat Ong Tü in Vientiane and another one in Champasak, 7,472 Buddhist students including 484 student monks studying in foreign countries, namely, 450 monks in Thailand, five monks in Myanmar, 13 monks in India, five monks in Vietnam, seven monks in the United States of America, and four monks in France.¹² The report of the LBFO of Luang Prabang province of 2015 provides us with the numbers of 359 monks and 1,378 novices as well as 253 inhabited monasteries and 95 uninhabited monasteries in the province, with Luang Prabang district in particular having 205 monks and 1,090 novices, 94 inhabited monasteries and 5 uninhabited monasteries.¹³

¹¹ However, some of those monks supported or were involved in the political and military resistance to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic Government in southern Laos (see Baird 2012).

¹² See ບົດລາຍງານ ສະພາບການເຄື່ອນໄຫວວຽກງານ ຂອງອົງການພູດທະສາສະໜາສຳພັນລາວ ຕໍ່ກອງປະຊຸມໃຫຍ່ ຜູ້ແທນພະສົງລາວທົ່ວປະເທດ ສະໄໝທີ VI ທີ່ຫໍທຳມະສະພາ ວັດພະທາດຫຼວງເໜືອ ເມືອງໄຊເຊດຖາ ນະຄອນຫຼວງວຽງຈັນ ວັນທີ 08-10 ມີນາ 2011 [The report of the work of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization to the sixth general conference of the representatives of the Lao Sangha of the whole country held at Hò Thamma Sapha at Vat That Luang Nüa, Saysettha district, Vientiane capital between 8 and 10 March 2011].

¹³ ບົດລາຍງານສະພາບການເຄື່ອນໄຫວວຽກງານ ສົກປີ 2011–2015 ແລະທິດທາງການດຳເນີນງານ ສົກປີ 2016–2020 ຂອງອົງການພູດທະສາສະໜາສຳພັນລາວ ແຂວງຫຼວງພະບາງ ຕໍ່ກອງປະຊຸມໃຫຍ່ ຜູ້ແທນພະສົງ ທົ່ວແຂວງຫຼວງພະບາງ ທີ່ ສາລາ ປະຕິບັດທຳ ວັດພູຄວາຍ ໄພຄາຣາມ ຄັ້ງວັນທີ 29–30 ກັນຍາ 2015. [The report of the work between 2011–2015 and of the future plan between 2016–2020 of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Luang Prabang province to the seventh general conference of the representatives of the Sangha of the province held at Sala Patibatham at Vat Phukhouay Phokharam, Luang Prabang between 29 and 30 March 2015].

3. Prominent Features of Lao Buddhism

Even though Lao Buddhism is a type of Theravada similar to the Buddhism found in its neighboring countries, especially to Thai Buddhism, in practice, Lao Buddhism has its own unique, particular characteristics. Notably, in Luang Prabang where the center of Lao culture and Buddhism was and is, the monks and lay people regularly follow their Buddhist practice in their daily lives. While these practices certainly exist elsewhere in Laos and in Thailand as well, such as strictness of routine can only be observed in Luang Prabang. The following are examples of particular features of Lao Buddhism in Luang Prabang:

Daily practice: At 4:00 a.m. at every monastery, bells ring to wake up monks and novices for their morning chanting, and to remind the lay people to cook sticky rice and prepare food for the monks when they make their rounds with their alms baskets. The bells are also hit at 4:00 p.m. to call monks and novices for evening chanting and to remind the lay people to cook rice and prepare food for their diners. On the Buddhist holidays, after the bells, big drums, gongs and cymbals are played by monks or novices to mark the holidays in order to summon the lay Buddhists to the monasteries to hear the sermons and remind farmers and workers not to work on that day (traditionally, they do not rest on Sundays). At 10:30 a.m. a novice hits a *kalò* (a long wooden bell) to remind the lay people to bring the food to the monastery for the monks' lunch. These practices are not common in this form in the Buddhist communities in the neighboring countries. They demonstrate the traditional way of life in central Lao Buddhism, in which monasteries and their communities are closely connected.

Binthabat or *tak bat* (alms-collecting): Regularly in the early morning, hundreds of monks and novices leave their monasteries. They walk along the main streets of the town, single file, oldest first, carrying their alms-bowls in front of them. The lay people wait for them, men standing and women kneeling, carry bamboo boxes filled with sticky rice. When monks and novices walk past them, one by one, they respectfully put small balls of sticky rice into their alms-bowls. This practice of alms-giving is common in Theravada countries, but in Luang Prabang, the number of monks and novices walking continually is spectacular and they are well organized.¹⁴

Traditional and respectful dress: When the lay Buddhists visit monasteries to make merit, give offerings, and participate in ceremonies, all women wear a traditional Lao skirt or *sin*, a wraparound skirt similar to a sarong (Kislenko 2009: 124); they are not allowed to wear trousers for such ceremonies. Both men and women wear scarves (Lao: *pha biang*) covering their left shoulders. Such dress is considered a part of Lao tradition and shows respect to the sacred ceremonies and holy sites.

¹⁴ For more information about *tak bat*, see <http://www.thequietintheland.org/pdf/tak-bat.pdf>.

Procession of monks: During the celebration of the Lao New Year festival (Lao: *bun pi mai*) in mid-April, the spectacular traditional procession called *hae vò* takes place. The *hae vò* procession was originally a parade only of monks, novices and lay people through the main street of the town. It takes two days; on the first day, the procession of monks from *hang müang* (southern town) start from Vat Maha That before paying a visit to the monks in *hua müang* (northern town) at Vat Xiang Thong; then, on the second day, the monks from the northern town visit the monks in the southern town in return. In the procession, the most senior monk sits on a *vò* (palanquin) carried by strong men. Young monks, novices, younger girls in traditional dress and lay people also participate in the procession. On the way, lay people splash water over the monks and novices. This tradition exists only in Luang Prabang. However, the character of the procession has significantly changed and it has become intermixed with many other processions, for instance, the procession of Miss New Year (Lao: *nang sangkhan*). Thus, the original meaning of the *hae vò* has changed in terms of its significance, and the monastics do not play the same central role they once did.¹⁵

The celebration at the end of Buddhist Lent (Lao: *bun òk phansa*): At the night of the first day of the waning moon of the eleventh lunar month (approximately the second half of October), monasteries in the town are decorated with colored lanterns in various patterns, the most popular pattern being the star-shape, and the so-called fireboats (Lao: *hüa fai*) made of bamboo and colored papers, decorated with candles and lamps. Villagers of each community make a fireboat and bring it in a procession starting from Vat Maha That to Vat Xiang Thong. Then, the fireboats are floated on the Mekong River. This event marks the local tradition of Lao Buddhism. During the same night, lay people also participate in *lòi kathong* (floating an ornate tray made of banana stalks or other materials) to express their gratitude to the water that they have used and drunk. Concerning the *lòi kathong* festival in Thailand and Cambodia, it falls on the full moon day of the twelfth lunar month (in November).

The national palladium: The sacred image of Pha Bang Buddha which is now established in the compound of the former royal palace in Luang Prabang, is the national palladium. During the Lao New Year festival, the Pha Bang image is carried by a procession of monks, officials and ordinary people, from its place at the former royal palace to a pavilion temporarily erected at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram especially for this occasion, in order for lay Buddhists to water it for three days. The people come from all over the country to pay homage to and water the image. It is believed that the water becomes sacred through this watering, so the people then sprinkle the used water on their heads.

¹⁵ For more information about the Lao New Year festival, see Pierre S. Nginn, 1959. "New Year Festival (Fifth Month Festival)." In *Kingdom of Laos*, 268–271. Siagon: France-Asie; Hans Georg Berger, 2000. *Het Bun Dai Bun*. London: Westzone (no page number); and Arne Kislenko, 2009. *Culture and customs of Laos*, 147–150. London: Greenwood Press.

The temple hall (also ordination hall): In Laos, the temple hall is called a *sim*, while in Thailand it is called a *bot* or *ubosot*. This most significant building in a Lao temple is marked by eight stone boundary markers (Pali: *nimitta*) set up in the four cardinal and four intercardinal directions around the *sim*'s perimeter. It is used for Sangha formal activities and events e.g. the ordination, *uposatha* and *kathin* ceremonies. The traditional Lao *sim* are mostly lower shaped, with multiple layered, sloping roofs. At the middle of the roof of the Lao *sim* is a *xòfa* (literally, sky cluster, ornate finials on the temples; Thai: *chòfa*) which represents or symbolizes Mount Meru (the center of the universe). The Lao *xòfa* is a sky tassel designating the finial at the end of the ridge of each of the multiple roofs. The *sim* of Vat Xiang Thong is one of the most magnificent of the Lao monasteries. It represents sacred Lao architecture and remains a significant monument to the spirit of religion, royalty, and traditional art. The *xòfa* of the *sim* represents Mount Meru in the middle of the world which is surrounded by seven other mountains (Lao: *satta bòriphan*) on two sides. On the outside is an eighth rim of mountains, called the 'Crystal Walls of the World'. The *phasat* on the top of the mountains refer to the gods' abodes. Under these mountains is the Ananda fish, which is acclaimed to carry the world on its back. The *xòfa* and *satta bòriphan* are important decorations and a unique feature of the various *sim* built in Luang Prabang (Woralancha 2004: 64–65).

The That Luang stupa: At the national level, the That Luang stupa in Vientiane represents national glory and is the most prominent symbol of Laos. It is proudly revered by all Lao People, and the festival of That Luang organized on the full moon day of the twelfth lunar month (in November) is a national Buddhist festival. The highlights of this festival are the *hae phasat phoeng* (the processions of wax castles, the creation of yellow trees made of wax, golden paper and Lao Kip notes) of thousands of lay Buddhists from Vientiane and the surrounding areas, which moves around the stupa three times and presents offerings to the shrine, followed by the action of *tak bat* by thousands of monks and ten thousands of lay Buddhists. Thousands of monks and ten thousands of pilgrims come from all over the country to attend the festival. These are some basic examples designating the special characteristics of Lao Buddhism.

4. Role of Charismatic Monks in the History of Lao Buddhism

According to Weber:

The term "charisma", according to Weber, will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the

basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a “leader”. In primitive circumstances this peculiar kind of quality is thought of as resting on magical powers, whether of prophets, persons with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, leaders in the hunt, or heroes in war.

(1978: 241)

The term “charismatic monk” has become widely used by scholars since the 1950s to describe a particular type of prominent monk in South and Southeast Asia, who have unique personal qualities and influence in the regions. Monks who are considered to have charisma are those who are successful and remarkable for their personal qualities, leadership skills, special talents and outstanding achievements. Sometimes they are even considered as *arahants* (enlightened ones). The charismatic monks were brave and put great efforts in acting in accordance with their ideals and perspectives and sometimes sacrificed their lives to protect Buddhism from being destroyed by governments. Therefore, their lives and works are interesting for and influential towards society at a large, a significance which has been recognized for centuries. Kawanami states that “the monks’ popularity derived from a mixture of charismatic qualities, talent and outstanding communication skills that they manifest” (Kawanami 2009: 213–214).

In Thailand, there are many monks regarded as charismatic monks whose life-stories and works have been studied and published. An example is Somdet Phra Phutthachan To Phromrangsī or Somdet To, (1788–1872) the prominent charismatic monk who is renowned for his unique tactic in teachings, his magic, and his amulets. He was a prominent monk in the first five reigns of the current Bangkok dynasty, from King Rama I to King Rama V. The well-known story related to Somdet To is the story of Mae Nak Phrakhanong (Mother Nak of Phrakhanong):

A female ghost [that] terrified a small village in the still thickly forested suburbs of Bangkok. With her long fingernails she gutted any person who attempted to tell her husband that she was merely the specter of his wife. All the while her husband, Mak, a poor soldier and woodsman, lived unaware that his beautiful and caring wife was indeed a ghost whose throat was coated with the blood of his friends and neighbors. When he realized her true nature, he was torn between the love for his departed and the fear of her ghost. In the end [Somdet To] used Pali incantations to release the ghost, thus freeing Mak and his village of her misguided love.

(McDaniel 2011: 1)

The Chinnabanchòn Khatha (*Jinapañjara gāthā*) which was composed by Somdet To, is popular and widely used in present-day Thai society as a protective Sutta. Statues of him in portrait form have been preserved.¹⁶

¹⁶ The well-known book written about Somdet To is “The lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk” by Justin McDaniel, published in 2011, and another book in Thai version is “สมเด็จพระพุฒาจารย์ (โต พรหมรังสี) [Somdet Phra Phutthachan (To Phromrangsī)]”, by Nitda Hongwiwat, published in BE 2554 (2011).

Khruba Sriwichai (1878–1938), acclaimed as a *ton bun haeng lan na* (‘source of merit of Lan Na’) because of his accumulation of *pāramī* (perfection), was well-known in northern Thailand during the early twentieth century. His Buddhist charisma was founded on his spiritual practice and his reputation as a meditation master. Furthermore:

Many people know him for his opposition to the national Thai Sangha and his construction of the 12-kilometre road to Wat Phra That Doi Suthep [in Chiang Mai]. There have been many books [in Thai] written about Kruba Sriwichai which are mainly based on personal faith and respect for him, [such as Singkha Wannasai (1979), Sopha Chanamun (1991)]. There are also works in English on the life of Khruba Sriwichai by Tambiah, Swearer, Cohen, and Thomson which are mainly concerned with the analysis of his role of *ton bun* [‘source of merit’], his charisma and his political activities.

(Isara 2011: i)

In Myanmar, for example, the Most Venerable Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) (Candima 2004), a Buddhist scholar, is renowned for his scholarly work of *dīpanīs* describing many meditation methods. In Cambodia, Ven. Sam Bunthoeun (1957–2003) is the president of the Buddhist meditation center of Oudong and a budding Buddhist scholar (Kent 2003: 23), as well as the spiritual leader who came to prominence in the 1990s and achieved considerable fame among the general population (Öjendal and Lilja 2009: 238–43). A prominent example for Vietnam would be the Most Venerable Thich Quang Duc (1897–1963), the charismatic monk widely known for his fiery self-immolation on 11 June 1963 in Saigon to protest the persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government led by Ngo Dinh Diem (Abuza 2001: 191). Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–), the Vietnamese Zen monk who lives in the USA, “is a global spiritual leader, poet, and peace activist, revered through the world for his powerful teachings and bestselling writing on mindfulness and peace” (plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography).

In Laos, scholarly works on charismatic monks are rare, and typically the stories of such monks are told orally. In fact, from time to time, monks who were successful and remarkable in their careers and can be considered as charismatic monks played a crucial role in the creation of the Lao nation, the development of the country and the dissemination of Buddhism and Buddhist teachings, also helping local people in various roles such as teachers, advisors, healers and governors. In spite of their monastic carrier, the monks also played a role as advisors to the king on religious and administrative matters, sometimes even becoming regents for short terms while a new king was being chosen when the throne was vacant. For example, in the late seventeenth century, the charismatic monk Pha Khu Phon Samek (1631–1720), also known as Pha Khu Nyòtkaeo Phon Samek, Rajakhu Luang Pho Samek and Nyakhu Khihò¹⁷, is acclaimed as *pha ariya song sòng fang khòng* (the *arahant* of both sides

¹⁷ Literally, “the learned monk whose feces smell good.” The Lao term “*khi*, feces” here does not mean the feces from the monk’s bottom but means all the remains from his body and things used, such as the remains of his

of the Mekong's banks). He was renowned for his talent, protective amulets, and charismatic leadership in the region of southern Laos and of Isan in northeastern Thailand. With his outstanding intelligence and amazing capacity to memorize whole volumes of Buddhist texts, he was given the title *xachua* (learned novice) by King Suriyavongsa (1638–1695). Grabowsky refers to the *Champasak Chronicle*, that “Pha Khu Phon Samek combined a strict observation of the Buddhist moral precepts and a profound knowledge of the religious scripts, which he learned perfectly by heart, with the alleged possession of supernatural powers (Grabowsky 2011: 134). He played a crucial role in creating the new Kingdom of Champasak as well as re-establishing Buddhism in the region by renovating Pha That Phanom (1690–1692). He was the ruler of the kingdom for a short time until the young King Chao Sòì Sisamut Phutthangkun (r. 1713–1737) was established as the first King of the new Kingdom.

Somdet Lun (1850–1920)¹⁸ of Vat Voensai in Phonthòng district of Champasak is another example. He was popular in the region of southern Laos, northern Cambodia and northeastern Thailand during the late nineteenth and early twenty centuries. His supernatural powers were recognized not only by the local people but also the French officers who governed in southern Laos. Somdet Lun's stories are described in Pha Achan Maha Phong Samaloeok's work entitled “Luang Pu Somdet Lun”. For example, one miraculous event occurred when Somdet Lun was invited by a French officer to travel with him by ship from Phonthòng to Pakse district. When Somdet Lun stepped on the wood that connected the bank and the ship, suddenly the ship began to tip, allowing water into the boat and stupefying the passengers.

In the context of charisma to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, he was not recognized as a monk with magical powers, but he was very renowned for his personal qualities of strict practice in the monastic order, his charismatic leadership of both religious and secular communities, and the unique quality of his voice when chanting the Vessantara Jātaka, which was very popular and is emulated by the monks of Luang Prabang even still today. However, in this research I will not only concentrate on Sathu Nyai Khamchan's charisma but prefer to elaborate on his whole life and work. I present his exceptional personal qualities here in the context of why he is regarded as one of the most charismatic monks of Laos in the twentieth century.

hairs, nails, tooth, scurf, and his things used e.g. cigarettes, betel nuts, wooden toothbrushes, etc., these things were believed by his disciples and the people to be auspicious and protective objects.

¹⁸ For a full biography of Somdet Lun, see Pha Maha Phong Samaloeok, 1997, *ຫຼວງບູລີມເດັດລຸນ* [Luang Pu Somdet Lun]. Vientiane.

5. State of the Art

Venerable U Candima, a Myanmar scholar-monk who completed his M.A. thesis from the Buddhist University, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, in Bangkok in 2004, on the topic “A study of the life and work of the Most Venerable Ledi Sayadaw”, observes:

History tells us that outstanding learned people appear from time to time in every country of the world, yet because good records and archives are often not kept, subsequent generations generally remain ignorant of these people or their work. The younger generation needs to recognize that it is essential to remain good records of the life and work of outstanding or famous people.

(2004: 1)

Academic biographies on prominent monks of Laos are very rare, even for monks who have played or continued to play an important role as spiritual figures, teachers, and advisors to the lay people and the rulers. There are a few works on the Lao Sangha and their religious and social practices, and most describe the Sangha as a whole rather than providing details on individual members of the organization. The article, *Organization of the Sangha*, by Kruong Pathoumxad (1959), who served as the Director of Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Vientiane, elaborates the organization of the Sangha following the issuing of Royal Ordinance, providing details of the hierarchy of monks, appointments of religious leaders, religious duties, admission to the Sangha, and rules of the Sangha.

The historical and anthropological study of Patrice Ladwig’s PhD thesis (2008) on Lao politics and the Lao Sangha before the revolution examines the connections between the Lao state and the Sangha as well as the connections between state policies and the survival of Buddhism. He has determined that Cold War politics increasingly caused divisions in the Lao Buddhist clergy. The strong American influence on the Royal Lao Government (RLG) and the direct courting of the clergy by the communist forces led to an increasing polarization inside the Buddhist monastic order. At the Sangha meeting in Vientiane in 1958, the new Sangha organization, which nowadays is the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization, was set up with the objective of uniting monks and Buddhist believers of the whole country, in order to use the acquired power for the “fight for the nation” and to protect Buddhist morality. On the other hand, Ian G. Baird (2012) examines a Lao monk’s support for political and military activities directed against the communist Lao People’s Democratic Republic and its Vietnamese supporters since 1975. He observes that monks have not become directly involved in armed conflict, as monastic rules do not allow participation in offensive violent acts, or arms trading, but they have played various important roles in supporting armed resistance against the Lao government. His research concluded that some monks assisting insurgents were actually shot in Thailand. Now, most of the Lao insurgent-supporting monks live in the United States, Canada, and France, where a few continue to assist the political

resistance against the Lao government, arguing that providing such support does not contradict Buddhist teachings.

Despite this seeming lack of a research body, the biographies of forty-three great monks of Luang Prabang who lived between 1854 and 2007 have been published bilingually, in Lao and English by Pha One Keo Sitthivong and Khamvone Boulyaphonh (2010). Next to a short biography, this compilation also contains the portraits of the monks. Those monks played important religious and social roles as abbots, artists, architects and intellectuals, leading Buddhists to practice Buddhist ceremonies and festivals, and preserving Lao traditions and culture in Luang Prabang during the last two centuries.

The knowledge of contemporary Lao Buddhists is enriched by several anthropological and historical studies on Lao culture and Buddhism which have been published since the second half of the twentieth century. The following have served as guides to my research. The article, *Buddhism in Laos*, by Thao Nhouy Abhay (1959), describes the foundation of Buddhism, the spread of Buddhism from India to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia in the middle of the third century BC, and the foundation of Theravada Buddhism in Laos in the middle of the fourteenth century. Children traditionally learned the life history of the Buddha and the Buddhist doctrines not through reading and study of the scriptures but through oral tradition. Lao Buddhists practiced the Buddhist teachings in their daily lives, communities and at home. Marcello Zago, missionary in Laos from 1959 up until just before the Lao revolution of 1975, contributes to this work with his groundbreaking study *Rites et Ceremonies en Mileu Bouddhiste Lao* which was published in 1972 and contains an excellent analysis of Lao festivals and rituals. He discovered that Buddhism in Laos was different from what he had studied in Europe. It is not treated as a philosophy, but rather is a way of life with multiple religious facets. His book is considered to be the first comprehensive study of Lao Buddhism by a western scholar. Additionally, an article by Vongsavanh Boutsavath and Georges Chapelier (1973) studied Lao Buddhism and community development during the 1960s. Their study describes the monastic system and analyses the monk's role and status within rural society, with the *vat* as a center of modernization and the Sangha as an institution. The 1969 census made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs covered only the area of two thirds of the population without the area controlled by the Pathet Lao, counting 6,348 monks and 11,250 novices – a total of 17,598 monastics. The high status of the monk is reflected in behavioral and linguistic forms by laymen during interactions with members of the Sangha. By assisting the monks to sustain their existence in this world and to spend a life unconcerned with physical contingencies, the layman gains merit, as there is nothing more meritorious than to take care of the Buddha's representatives. The *vat* is, for the villagers, the main symbol of their community; it is through their monastic buildings that they are distinguished from other villages. When the community has gathered the necessary funds, it will feel the need to

beautify and enlarge its temple. They also tell of the significant role that Buddhist monks can play in helping to diffuse the impact of technical and social innovations inside the village community.

Relevant publications of the early twenty-first century: *Treasures of Luang Prabang*, a historical, architectural, socio-cultural study of Luang Prabang by Homphanh Rattanavong, Bounthieng Siripaphanh, Patrick Gay, and Michel Derepas (2000), elaborates the history of the city of Luang Prabang from its foundation until it became a world heritage site, the architectural art of some of the important monasteries, the furniture and statuary, beliefs and religions, as well as the populations and habitats in the region. Luang Prabang, capital of the Holy Golden Buddha (Pha Bang), has sometimes been called the “city of the fifteen families of *naga*” or “city of the sixty-five monasteries”, and, in more recent times, the “Jewel of Southeast Asia”. According to local annals, this capital has existence since the fifth century BC. From the various buildings, furniture and statuary that are found generally in monasteries up to the present day, it is possible to define the general features of traditional Luang Prabang art, unique in its kind within Southeast Asia. The religion practiced in Luang Prabang is a mixture of animist beliefs and Buddhism, the former having evolved from historic beliefs and creation myths.

The architectural study of Woralanha Bunyasurat, architectural researcher and lecturer at Chiang Mai University, is presented in *ชื่นชมสถาปัตยกรรม: วัดเมืองหลวงพระบาง* [Architectural Appreciation: Monasteries in Luang Prabang], published in BE 2547 (2004), detailing the architecture of the monasteries, particularly, the *sim*, in Luang Prabang. She concluded that Buddhism is regarded as the spiritual heart of Luang Prabang, and the monasteries play the role of the spiritual and educational center of the communities (therefore, the name of the village and the name of the monastery are usually the same). The *sim* in Luang Prabang features lower structures with multiple-layered sloping roofs. There are five different styles, each of them detailed and magnificent in its own right.

In her historical, architectural study of Lao Buddhism and the monasteries in Luang Prabang, Denise Heywood determined that over sixty monasteries and shrines were built between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, all “sumptuously gilded, stuccoed and stenciled, and set in tranquil courtyards with chapels and pagodas” (2006: 7).

With the arrival of the French in the nineteenth century came a new wave of building. Elegant colonial villas were constructed in Luang Prabang blending harmoniously with the temples and secular architecture. [...] The French embellished Luang Prabang, but changed it, giving it a dual identity, Eastern and Western. The fusion of these two disparate cultures resulted in a singular beauty. In 1995, Luang Prabang was nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site to protect its fragile culture, a status which extends to 177 sacred structures which make up the 34 temples that have survived, together with 443 civic buildings.

(2006: 8)

Pha Achan Damrong P. Dhammikamuni (2010), who wrote *Buddhism in Laos: A study from the ancient up to the present*, comments that most scholars state Buddhism was introduced into Laos for the first time when the Lan Xang Kingdom was established by King Fa Ngum. However, he discovered that Buddhism had first been introduced into Laos over two thousand years ago. To the same conclusion came Maha Khamyad Rasdavong (2006), a former monk who finished his M.A. from the Buddhist Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Bangkok, and is now working as an official of the Central of Lao Front for National Construction in Vientiane. He also emphasizes that Buddhism has been a significant influence in Lao society from early centuries and continues into the present day as the country's most popular and vital religion. As previously mentioned, before Buddhism, the Lao people believed in and practiced animism. Theravada Buddhism was introduced simultaneously into Laos and other countries of Southeast Asia during the reign of King Aśoka, the great king of India. This work describes the introduction and development of Buddhism in Laos over various periods, the structures of organization of the Lao Sangha, and the impact and influence of Buddhism on Lao society. The organization of the Lao Sangha has four duties, namely administration, education, propagation, and social welfare. Buddhism is an inherent feature of daily life and has a strong and visible impact on the Lao people. Women can be seen each morning giving alms to the monks and novices, and men who have reached 20 years of age are expected to become monks.

The article of Michel Lorrillard (2006) gives insights on the diffusion of Lao Buddhism in a historical perspective. Lorrillard states that knowledge of the history of Lao Buddhism is currently limited to a single reputation, often incomplete and always lacking in any critical analysis. Firstly, he examines the Lao inscriptions linked to the relationship between Lan Xang and Lan Na, concluding that the first known example of a Lao inscription is an unpublished foundation stele from a temple, dated 17 April 1494, found near Tha Khaek in Khammuan province. It is this inscription that best reveals the influence of Lan Na, for it portrays a horoscopic disc and very precise calendrical data, characteristics which are elsewhere found only in northern Thailand inscriptions that appear from the middle of the fourteenth century. Secondly, he examines the Luang Prabang inscription kept at Vat Vixun, dated as 1530, which happens to be the sole epigraphic example of which the content is not religious. These inscriptions, which bear a very strong mark of northern Thai culture, are royal inscriptions commissioned by King Phothisararat and King Setthathirat, who were the first Lao sovereigns to appear in epigraphy during their lifetimes. It can be seen very clearly that the Lao land, which had already been reached by a form of Buddhism originating in Lan Na during the fifteenth century, experienced a second wave of Buddhism in the sixteenth century.

Volker Grabowsky (2007), a historian specialized in the history and culture of Tai peoples in mainland Southeast Asia and Southwest China, analyzes the diffusion of Theravada Buddhism in Laos and its relationship with the pre-colonial political order. He shows how Theravada Buddhism came to Laos quite lately and in several waves. The first wave started shortly after the founding of the Lan Xang Kingdom by King Fa Ngum in the middle of the fourteenth century, coming from Cambodia in the south, while the second wave came from Lan Na in the north in the mid-fifteenth century during Phothisararat's reign (1520–1547/48). All the kings of Lan Xang Kingdom emulated the ideal of the righteous Buddhist monarch (Pali: *dharmarājā*) and many of them claimed at least formally the status of *cakkavatin* or universal conqueror. A righteous king had to abide by the *dasarājadhamma* (the tenfold code of the king) and several other moral codes, and almost all kings founded monasteries or built stupas as visible manifestations of Buddhist kingship. The Sangha received many privileges from the monarchy, which in return was legitimized by a supportive Sangha. The relationship between the religious and political orders was in fact one of reciprocal benefit.

The study on Buddhist education in Laos carried out by scholar like Justin McDaniel (2008) examines modern and premodern Buddhist monastic education in Laos and northern Thailand. There are no studies of Buddhist schools or teaching methods during the pre-modern period in Laos. The monastery was the place where teachers and students “gather[ed] to discuss texts and learned how to conduct rituals” (Ibid. 2008: 28). The earliest known formal Buddhist monastic school is Vat Vuxun in Luang Prabang (Ibid.: 29). In villages with more than one monastery, it is usually only one that serves as the central place for textual instruction. However, “informal instruction on etiquette, ritual performance, discipline, and mediation takes place at every monastery” and “Education is also offered to laity in sermons, through art and image, and in ritual performance” (Ibid.: 28). In the colonial period, most students—monastics and laypeople alike—still studies at monastic schools. Those were operated without French involvement, and not influenced by French curriculums (Ibid.: 39). “Despite decades of French, American, Russia, and Thai ‘influence’, Lao monastic education has developed and maintained its own, unique curriculum” (Ibid.: 67).

Arne Kislenko (2009) states that Buddhism came to Laos via traders and missionaries from India and spread over the course of several centuries, beginning in the seventh century AD. By the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD, it took root, and by the mid-fourteenth century, it had become the dominant religion in Lan Xang. It became the official religion of the kingdom in the early sixteenth century and remained so in the separate divisions of Lan Xang following its collapse. It was also the official faith of Laos under French rule and as an independent country. Following their takeover in 1975 the communists tried to undermine and control the Buddhist clergy but met with limited success. Today the government's

Department of Religious Affairs oversees monastic training and liturgy but has allowed more autonomy to the clergy, as it continues to conform to Marxist principles.

A scholarly work relating to Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the social practice of the Lao Sangha of Luang Prabang is the book entitled “The Lao Sangha and modernity.” This *book* which has been published by the end of 2015, is contributed articles by many scholars who have worked in the projects of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang—I am one of the contributors. It is edited by Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger, presenting, as the succession of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang for its first ten years foundation, on Lao Buddhism and culture, preserving historic photographs and knowledge of Lao intellectuals reflected in the manuscripts. Moreover, the editors also mention, from their perspective, that Sathu Nyai Khamchan was probably the most prominent charismatic and intellectual monk in northern Laos during the second half of the twentieth century. The other works are two interesting articles, “Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela” and “The catafalque of Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela”, which have been published in “the Quiet in the Land Luang Prabang, Laos”, edited by France Morin and John Alan Farmer in 2009. The first article describes the brief life story of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, his important role in the Sangha community and Lao Buddhism as well as in Lao culture and his important travels to foreign countries during his lifetime. The second article describes the official organization of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s funeral ceremony, and elaborates on the construction of the funeral chariot in the shape of *hong* (a mythical swan), catafalque and wooden urn.

An interesting film with 55 minutes running time, produced by the team of Sparkle Media (2006), the Lao descendants in Australia, presents Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s daily life, his practice and his work at Vat Saen Sukharam, also providing useful information for my research. Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s biography in a photobook format in Lao version, entitled ພະຫລັກຄຳ ວິຣະວິສຸດທິຄຸນ (ສາທຸຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະເຖລະ) Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhuan (Sathu Khamchan Virachitta Thela) (Khamvone at al. 2004), presents a list of his life’s activities and is a base source for this dissertation. Hans Georg Berger’s work (2000), *Het Bun Dai Bun* (literally, ‘make merit get merit’) is the outcome of his collaboration with monks, in particular with Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the local communities in Luang Prabang. It presents photographs of ceremonies, festivals and monastic daily life in Luang Prabang which have developed and changed from their ancient traditional form.

The comprehensive study of “Luang Prabang, the world cultural heritage: memories of royal city, ritual space and globalization”, by Suphachai Singyabuth (2010), examines the ritual space and the identity of the people in Luang Prabang. Describes the specific features of the body of Luang Prabang town, the small plain with a small hill standing in the middle of the town, the town is limited by rivers and mountains. The original inhabitants of Luang Prabang are the Sawa, in the chronicles called ‘Kha’, but modern historians call them ‘Kasak’

or ‘Ai Lao’. During his fieldwork in Luang Prabang, he conducted several interviews with Sathu Nyai Khamchan on various aspects, for instance, on the development of the body of Luang Prabang, and the original tradition of the Lao New Year and boat racing festivals, which has much changed over the time. In order to express his gratitude to Sathu Nyai Khamchan for his great support, first page of his book contains a dedication to Sathu Nyai Khamchan reading, “คุณงามความดีของหนังสือเรื่องนี้ ผู้เขียนและสำนักพิมพ์สาขาราชวรา ขอน้อมอุทิศถวายแด่ สาธุใหญ่คำจันทร์ [May the great contributions and achievement of this book be devoted by the author and Saithan publishing Sathu Nyai Khamchan].

6. Core Questions

The core questions I aim to answer throughout the thesis are as follows:

6.1 What does the life story of Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela reflect about monastic life, Lao traditions and the body of the Lao Sangha in Luang Prabang?

6.2 Why was Sathu Nyai Khamchan the most eminent monk of the Buddhist community in Luang Prabang?

6.3 What importance does Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s work have for preserving the ancient Lao cultural heritage and supporting the development of Lao Buddhism?

6.4 What were Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s endeavors to preserve Lao culture and Buddhist arts?

6.5 How important are Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s collections of documents and objects for studying the religious role of the Lao Sangha and the history of Lao Buddhism in the twentieth century?

6.6 What important religious and social roles did Sathu Nyai Khamchan play—both inside and outside of Laos—that had an influence on the Lao Sangha and Buddhism?

6.7 What knowledge does the outcome of the study of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s life, work and social role provide on Lao Buddhism and society in the twentieth century?

7. Methodology and Sources

I will use a historical and philological approach for this dissertation, and analyze the archival documents. In the main contents, I will elaborate the life and work of Sathu Nyai Khamchan. In the details, I will also explore the history of monasteries and religious sites, and examine the written documents which are related to the topic. A large corpus of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s collections of historic photographs, official documents, and personal correspondence which are accessible in the databank of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang, are the primary sources that are to be testified in this research. I expect that these

sources will provide me with sufficient information to study my topic. Official documents which were sent by ecclesiastical and state officers to the Venerable Abbot are related to his work on constructing of monastic buildings and his social and religious roles as the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam and ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang. Personal correspondences refer to the letters that the Most Venerable received from monks, novices and lay people of which sent from inside and outside Laos related to personal issues in general. Of particular interest for understanding Sathu Nyai Khamchan's role for the Lao diaspora are the letters from Lao people who fled from the country after the Lao revolution (1975) and their invitations to the Venerable Abbot to visit them during the 1980s and 2000s.

Such a wealth of sources clearly document the social role of the Most Venerable as a spiritual figure highly respected by Lao Buddhists. Photographs are very important sources that represent a great degree of the information discussed here, some of them carrying annotations relating to persons and events in the photographs and dates as well. Furthermore, I conducted fieldwork based on qualitative interviews with monks and laypeople on various aspects related to Sathu Nyai Khamchan. For instance, I interviewed Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, the head of the Luang Prabang Sangha, about the leadership and personal characteristics of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, and Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan, the foster child of Sathu Nyai Khamchan about the monastic construction work and abbotship of Sathu Nyai Khamchan. This provides me the information to prove and emphasize my findings from the archival documents.

The most important primary sources for the study and research of this dissertation are a large corpus of historic photographs, manuscripts, official documents, notes, and correspondences that are stored in the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang. Historic photographs which cover a period of more than 120 years (1880s–2007) depict Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life, his works on the construction of the monastic buildings, Buddhist rituals and ceremonies that he participated and presided over and his travels. Palm-leaf and mulberry paper manuscripts present his works on compiling and sponsoring the manuscripts; particularly, the Pātimokkha manuscript in Tham-Lao script and Vessantara Jātaka in Lao version are regarded as his masterpieces. Official documents that Sathu Nyai Khamchan received from state and ecclesiastical officers while serving as ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province (1953–1966 and 1976–2007) provide information in various aspects related to the administration of the Sangha, the construction of religious monuments and monastic buildings, Buddhist education, the organization of Buddhist ceremonies and festivals, and official and important events, particularly the celebration of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism.

Notes of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and of other monks detail the Buddhist rituals and ceremonies such as ordinations, *thelaphiseka*, and daily activities during his travels. The more

than one thousand correspondences that Sathu Nyai Khamchan received from Buddhists including monks, novices and lay people from inside and outside of Laos are mostly concerned with private matters between Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the senders. Personal letters from Lao people who fled the country during and after the Lao revolution (1975) and live in the western countries in the USA, Europe and Australia, give interesting accounts on the condition of their lives and new societies. Following the connection via the personal letters, Sathu Nyai Khamchan travelled many times to visit those countries between the 1980s and 2007. Moreover, his collection of more than two thousand Buddhist art items are now kept on exhibit at the Museum of Buddhist Art in Vat Saen Sukharam, representing his work for the preservation of Lao cultural heritage. These objects are also of value for generations to come in order to learn about their ancient cultural art.

8. Field site and Fieldwork

The legend about the origins of Luang Prabang traces back to the reign of Khun Borom, the mythical ruler of the principality of Thaeng and the son of the king of the celestial world. Khun Borom had seven sons who formed seven principalities of their own. The eldest, Khun Lò, founded the principality of Luang Prabang (UNESCO 2004: 5). "The center of the town is dominated by Mount Phusi, the 'marvelous mountain', with a golden [stupa], Pha That Phusi, perched on the top, its beauty is twofold, a combination of a dramatic nature setting and a legacy of sacred art and architecture" (Heywood 2006: 7). Luang Prabang, the ancient capital of the kingdom of Lan Xang also known as Müang Sua and Xiang Dong Xiang Thong (1353–1560) was and still is the center of the Lao Theravada Buddhism and the barn of Lao culture, and was the seat of the kings of Lan Xang Hom Khao Dynasty and the Supreme Patriarch for centuries.

Luang Prabang, the beautiful ancient capital of Lan Xang, a city of legends and myths set between the rivers Mekong and Khan, has preserved many of its festivals and sacred ceremonies up to our own day. Traditions and rituals that in other places have been lost forever still form a vital part of Luang Prabang's urban life. In thirty-four monasteries, monks and novices celebrate the peaceful and refined ceremonies of Theravada Buddhism which came to the city in the course of the fourteenth century.

(Berger 1997)

Luang Prabang municipality has about 50,000 inhabitants, 99 monasteries—94 inhabited monasteries and five abandoned monasteries—and 1,295 monks and novices (LBFO of Luang Prabang 2015). In Luang Prabang, like in the other provinces of the country, "usually, each village carries the same name as the temple to be found and the latter often still represents the spatial and sometimes the social center of the village" (Ladwig 2008: 3). Luang Prabang Buddhists support monks and novices by factors of four for living and inheriting Buddhism.

Some Buddhist activities in Luang Prabang are “mixed with other cults which existed before, such as the worship of *naga*, Brahmanism, and different forms of Animism” (Berger 1997).

In 1995, Luang Prabang was nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site to protect its fragile culture (Heywood 2006: 8). From then on, Luang Prabang has been opened to the world and became well known by tourists. With atmospheric and charming personality, Luang Prabang has topped the Top City category in Wanderlust’s annual (popular choice) travel awards several times in recent years (2015, 2012, 2011, 2010, and 2009).¹⁹ According to the report from the Department of Luang Prabang, tourism in the first nine months of the year 2015, hit numbers of 470,279 tourists (*Vientiane Times*).²⁰ Meanwhile, the population of Luang Prabang town has increased rapidly in recent years. In the areas surrounding the town appear new villages and communities such as in the large area next to the airport in the north and the area of Ban Sangkhalok in the south. The people in the new communities moved there from both inside the town and from the countryside.

Vat Saen Sukharam and the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang at Sala Thammavihan, Vat Suvannakhili are the main sites where I conducted my fieldwork. During my work for the Buddhist Archive of Photography (BAP) in Luang Prabang, my regular research work was to identify the historic photographs—events, dates and names of people—in the collection of Vat Saen Sukharam, which contain more than 15,000 items and describe each photograph in Excel Lists in Lao and English. Some photographs have annotations on their rectos or versos, but most of them are without any information, so research was necessary to make the descriptions in a somewhat accurate fashion. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was the best source for detailing these historic photographs (see Illustration No. 1.3). When he passed away unexpectedly, I faced the challenge of coming up with an alternative way to find the information related to the photographs. Thereafter, I figured that my research work had two possibilities to receive this information: (1) to read the notes and documents and (2) to interview senior monks and lay people. That gave me the opportunity to encounter many people and monks in Luang Prabang, thereby broadening the scope of my research. More research and more information related to Sathu Nyai Khamchan—his life, his work and his travels—deepened my interest in his roles and convinced me that an intensive academic study on him should be carried out.

¹⁹ <http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/news/wanderlust-travel-awards-2015-the-winners>, accessed on 14 September 2015. <http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/awards/wanderlust-travel-awards/the-winners-2012>, accessed on 6 November 2015. <http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/awards/wanderlust-travel-awards/wanderlust-travel-awards-2011---winners-announced>, accessed on 6 November 2015. <http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/articles/destinations/luang-prabang-laos?page=all>, accessed on 6 November 2015.

²⁰ http://www.vientianetimes.org.la/Business/Business_Luang_prabang.htm, accessed on 14 September 2015.

The project deals with the digitizing and preserving of the document collections of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other abbots, including correspondences, official documents, religious books and journals, and manuscripts. The documents have been transferred from the monasteries to the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang to be scanned and stored there. Therefore, as managing director of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang (BAL), from time to time, I returned to Luang Prabang to examine the work flow and work with the staff at the Buddhist Archive and the Sangha, e.g. by organizing the ceremony of handover of the constructions at Vat Pak Khan to the Sangha and the ceremony of handing over the school building to the Sangha at Vat Pa Pha O.

While staying in Luang Prabang, I also interviewed monks and lay people to question them for information relating to Sathu Nyai Khamchan. One comment I often heard from the people I interviewed was that Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a monk who very strictly followed the monastic rules and Lao traditions, to a degree nobody else could achieve. In April 2014, I traveled to Tha Khaek district, Khammuan province to visit Vat Si Khottabun where the *sim* was built by Sathu Nyai Khamchan in 1966, and found that on the door leaves of the main entrance door of the *sim* are inscriptions indicating the donors, namely King Sisavang Vatthana and Queen Khamphui (see Chapter 3).

9. Structure of the Thesis

The following thesis deals with the life history of a monk who was the central figure of the Lao Sangha of Luang Prabang in the second half of twentieth century—the Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela—and also with his work and his religious and social roles. The thesis has six chapters, including an Introduction and Conclusion as the first and last chapters. The body is made up of Chapters 2 to 5.

In Chapter 2, I describe the life history of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and how he was looked after by his grandmother, Nang Chao Phaya Luang Müangchan (Khamsuk), after his mother's death from the time when he was only four years old. His grandmother, who was a devout Buddhist, brought Khamchan to Vat Saen Sukharam, the monastery quarter of their village, and introduced him to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela (1893–1943), the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, as his pupil for studying the Buddhist Teachings and Lao tradition. Subsequently, I explained his life as a novice and his Buddhist studies in Thailand, where he finished the *naktham*²¹ *tho* (second grade of Dhamma-study) from Vat

²¹ *Naktham* (Pali: *dhammika*) is a person who has passed the examination of any of three grades of Dhamma-study. The three grades consist of *naktham tri*, *naktham tho* and *naktham ek*. The *naktham* study, the Dhamma-study in Thai in the monastery schools, was established by Somdet Phra Mahasamanachao Kromphraya Vajiranavarorasa (1860–1921), the tenth Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand). The main

Benchamabòphit in Bangkok. When his family needed his help in the family business, Novice Khamchan disrobed and lived as a layman for three years. Following his grandmother's wish, Khamchan entered the monastery again as a monk and spent his life in the monastery until his demise. Then, I explore the monastic routines that Sathu Nyai Khamchan strictly followed, and his personality and character traits which made him well known and gave him the reputation of being a strict monk. I also show what positions in the Sangha order he obtained. At the end of this chapter, I elaborate on the special and official cremation ceremony of his body, in which I participated.

In Chapter 3, I focus on Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work on constructing and renovating monastic buildings. He made great efforts in reconstructing and enhancing the buildings and the landscape of Vat Saen Sukharam from the 1940s until the 2000s. Particularly, the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam, which was rebuilt by him between 1958 and 1962, is one the most beautiful and magnificent buildings in the town. Its style is considered to be a mix of the traditional styles of Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Xiang Khouang, with modern yellow and red tiles and decorations of golden stencil images of mixed arts from South and Southeast Asia, which became known as Sathu Nyai Khamchan's style. However, the *sim* is criticized by Heywood to be "more Thai in style" (2006: 80) because it is covered by yellow and red tiles, which are themselves Thai products. I argue that it should be considered to be a variant of the Lao Lan Xang style which merely uses more modern materials and technique that Sathu Nyai Khamchan acquired from his travels to other Buddhist countries. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work also appears in Vat Si Khottabun in Tha Khaek district, Khammuan province in central Laos, where Sathu Nyai Khamchan built a *sim* in 1966. This *sim* also demonstrates the Luang Prabang style and its construction work was supported by King Sisavang Vatthana, Queen Khamphui, General Bunloet Sanichan, and other lay people in the country. Moreover, Sathu Nyai Khamchan also provided the financial and ideological support to the construction works of other monasteries and religious buildings in both Luang Prabang and other provinces.

In Chapter 4, I examine the collections that Sathu Nyai Khamchan established in Vat Saen Sukharam and analyze some special and important examples of the collections. The collections are divided into two main categories, documents and objects. The collection of documents includes his photographs, manuscripts, personal letters, official documents, books and magazines, which mostly are at present kept at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang, Sala Thammavihan, Vat Suvannakhili. These collections contain rich information related to Lao Buddhism and traditions of the twentieth century. They are useful and of value for

subjects include Buddhist doctrines, disciplines, and the stories of the Buddha and his excellent disciples. The *naktham* was introduced to Laos by learned monks like Pha Maha Sila Viravong (Maha Sila Viravong) in the early 1930s, and taught in the Buddhist schools throughout the country until 1975.

research on the history of Lao Buddhism, and not matched by the national archives. The collection of objects include ancient Lao art and Buddhist art objects, which are available for creating the Buddhist art museum at Vat Saen Sukharam, the only museum of this kind in the country.

In Chapter 5, I research Sathu Nyai Khamchan's religious and social roles. For his religious role, I focus on his administration as the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam and the ecclesiastical provincial governor (Lao: *chao khana khuaeng*) of Luang Prabang province and his travels inside and outside of the country to handle various religious matters. For his social role, I focus on his international travels to visit the Lao people who fled the country during and after the Lao revolution (1975) and then mostly settled in the Western countries in the world. He played an important role in the Lao Sangha Organizations as the ecclesiastical provincial governor in two different time periods. The first period commenced in 1953 and lasted until 1966, with the second period beginning in 1976 and lasting until his passing in 2007. His resignation in 1964 was a shock for everybody, particularly the Supreme Patriarch and the Minister of Religious Affairs, who was in charge of the Sangha organization. They both tried to reject his resignation but their endeavor was useless. It was considered that the state officers ignored his request in order to resolve a certain religious problem to be discussed later. His second period began in 1976 after the country had experienced a change in governmental structure and systems. This second term lasted for thirty-one years during which Lao Buddhism had to face the challenge of being under strict control by the communist government.

Under the administration of Sathu Nyai Khamchan as the abbot and ecclesiastical provincial governor, Vat Saen Sukharam was well known for its monastic rules which positively affected its dwellers, i.e. the monks and novices. It was one of the monasteries where parents and teachers wanted their sons and pupils to ordain. The Buddhist education had been actively supported and established under the names of Pali schools in the remote districts in the region of the northern Laos during the 1950s and 1960s. The settlements of Lao people in western countries spread knowledge of the Lao traditions and culture to the world. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's visits to the Lao diaspora supported them in reviving the Lao Buddhist culture which is unique in non-Buddhist lands.

10. Illustrations and Captions



Illustration No. 1.1. A reproduced photograph of five senior monks of the first administrative board committee of the *ongkan song* (organization of the Sangha) posing for a portrait in Vientiane on 23 March 1953. The text on the photograph reads, ພະມະຫາເຖຣະ ຄະນະບໍລິຫານອົງການສົງ ປີ ຄ.ສ. 1953. 23.3.53.” From left to right: Somdet Pha Lukkaeo Khamfan Silasangvaro (Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela, 1901–1987), Chao Raxakhana Xay (left-hand ecclesiastical minister to the Supreme Patriarch in the Sangha hierarchy) in charge of monastic construction, from Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang; Somdet Pha Lukkaeo Khun Manivong (1898–1967), Chao Raxakhana Na (front ecclesiastical minister to the Supreme Patriarch in the Sangha hierarchy) in charge of administration, from Vat That Luang, Vientiane; Somdet Pha Yòtkaeo Phutthasinorot Sakonmahasangkha Pamokkha (Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela (1891–1984), Somdet Pha Sangkhalat (the Supreme Patriarch), Superior to the Lao Sangha, from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Luang Prabang; Somdet Pha Sangkhavutthamahatherachan (Kaeo Uthensakda, 1889–1953), Sangkhanayok (ecclesiastical prime minister), from Vat Sisaket, Vientiane; and Somdet Pha Lukkaeo Lüam Pasanna Maha Thela (1897–1973), Chao Raxakhana Kua (right-hand ecclesiastical minister to the Supreme Patriarch in the Sangha hierarchy) in charge of education, from Vat Xaiyaphum, Savannakhet (Buddhist Archive No. B0713R).

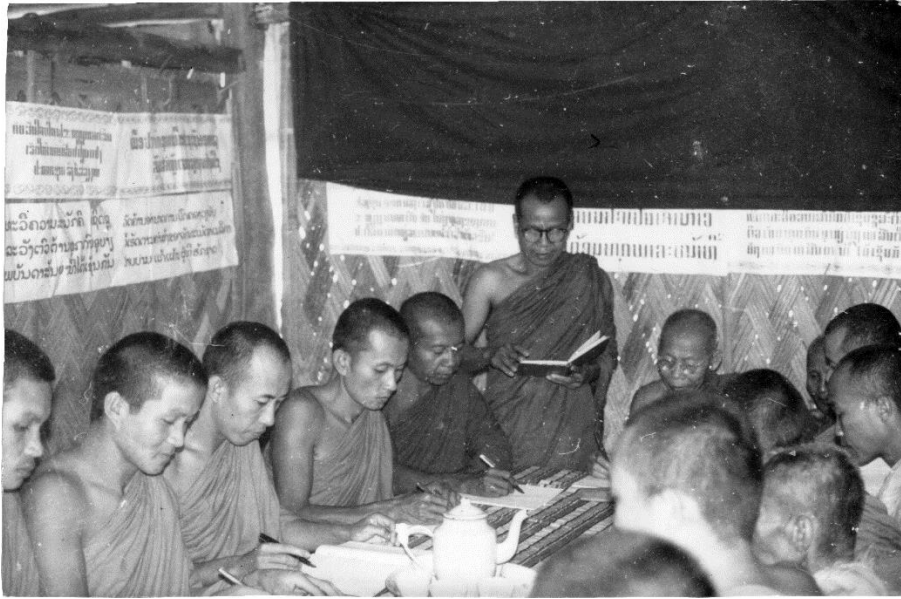


Illustration No. 1.2. Monks in the Liberated Zone in Xam Nüa studying theories of revolution, taught by Pha Maha Khamtan Thepbuali, the president of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos (BFOL). The monk on his left hand is Pha Achan Maha Buakham Voraphet, the advisor to the BFOL. The text on a label attached to the verso of this photograph reads, “ຂະບວນການຄົ້ນຄວ້າຮູ້າຮຽນພາລະກິດປະຕິວັດໃໝ່ໄດ້ເພີ່ມທະວີຢ່າງບໍ່ຢຸດຢັ້ງ [The process of studying the role of the new revolution has been increasingly great [in its scope]]” (Buddhist Archive No. C1117R and C1117V).



Illustration No. 1.3. Working with Sathu Nyai Khamchan in his abode on identifying the historic photographs in July and August 2006. I often showed him digital images on a laptop and questioned him about the information on the photographs (events, dates, and names of people). The digital scans of images could be made larger than the original, which he found most impressive. Photograph taken on 19 July 2007 by a novice of Vat Saen Sukharam under Sathu Nyai Khamchan's tutelage.

Chapter 2

The Life History of Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela

1. Introduction

Some of the data I used for studying the life history of Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela were taken from his biography, which includes personal recollections by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself and interviews conducted with him. Additional data were obtained from various other primary sources, such as his collections of personal letters, official documents, notes, and photographs. Information obtained from interviews with senior monks and lay people who were close to him has also been included in this study. I stayed in Vat Saen Sukharam, first as a novice and later as a monk, from 1992 until 1996, and it is during this period that I had the opportunity to attend Sathu Nyai Khamchan's sermons and talks, as well as to listen to him when telling stories about his life experiences after the evening chanting.

Throughout the twentieth century in Laos, the publications of monk biographies were very low in number due to a lack of resources, knowledge, financial support and sufficient motivation. In particular, it has been very rare for monk biographies to be made available to a wider audience via their translation into and publication in Western languages. The Lao studies published up until now mainly have as their goal the portrayal of an individual life story and the research aspect of these works is insufficiently thorough. Therefore, this study on Sathu Nyai Khamchan aims to be the first comprehensive and contextualized biographical study of a Lao monk's life. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a senior monk who reflected deeply on his practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya. He spent almost the entirety of his life at Vat Saen Sukharam in Luang Prabang, where he lived a simple life, deliberately refraining from such habit-forming practices as chewing betel and smoking. He was a wise, compassionate, and steadfastly religious.

One of the aspects of his personality which stands out is his diligence and austerity in following the Vinaya and its prescribed monastic routines, especially when compared with his contemporaries, as there was much political turmoil in Laos during his lifetime, making it more difficult for monks to uphold their precepts and abstain from involvement in worldly life

than had previously been the case. Sathu Nyai Khmachan has been recognized as a highly respected monk and a central figure of Buddhism in Luang Prabang during the second half of the 20th century, playing a key role both in the Sangha and in the lay community of Luang Prabang in the construction and reconstruction of monastic buildings, as well as in the preservation of Buddhist rituals and ceremonies.

2. Childhood and Primary Education

Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, originally named Khamchan, was born on Thursday, at *nyam kòng that mü hung* (approximately at some time between 4:00 and 5:00 a.m.), on the tenth day of the waxing moon of the eleventh lunar month, Year of the Monkey, BE 2463 (Khamvone et al. 2004: 1). This date corresponds to 23 September 1920 of the Gregorian calendar. His birthplace was in Ban Lakkham in the Tasaeng Vat Nong sub-district of Luang Prabang, which is located in the peninsular area of the city. He was the last of five children to Thit Khamtan, his father, who was from Ban Aphay, and Nang Khamonsi, his mother, who was from Ban Chum Khòng. He had two elder brothers and two elder sisters, Khammungkhun Virachit (1909–1984), Khamxao Phummavong (1911–1980), Khamphan Virachit (1913–1995) and Khamuan Upalavan (1915–1966), respectively according to age. Initially, he carried the family name of Mongkhonsavat, until 1938 when the family name was changed to Virachit.²² Tragically, his mother died in 1925 when he was only four years old; after which he was looked after by his parental grandmother, Nang Khamsuk, his elder sister, Nang Khamxao Phummavong, and his brother-in-law, Khamphan Phummavong. Khamchan entered Vat Saen Sukharam, the monastic quarter of Lakkham village, as a temple boy when he was 6 years old (see Illustration No. 2.7).

As a child, he was adored and praised by the abbot, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, and by other monks in Vat Saen Sukharam such as Sathu Nyai Phaeng (1902–1966). In 1927, at the age of seven, he entered the primary school of Luang Prabang. At that time, this school was the only public school in Luang Prabang and was open only to children from royal families or families within the ranks of officialdom. Most pupils who finished this primary school first continued their studies at Pavie College in Vientiane and then later in

²² *Virachit* (Pali: *vīracitto*), literally, “a person who has a brave hearted or mindful persistence”. Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s family name appears as Mongkhonsavat in portraits of him both as a novitiate and a layman attached handwritten. For instance, on his portrait as a novitiate, Buddhist Archive No. B6525R, one can read the following handwriting: “ส.น. คำจัน มีถิ่นสะขะวัด ฤายเมื่อวันທີ ๑๗ เมษายน [เมษา] พ.ศ. ๒๔๗๑ อายุ ๑๖ ปี [S.N. (samanen: Novice) Khamchan Mongkhonsavat, taken on 17 April BE 2479 (AD 1936) at the age of 16]”, and another portrait as a layman, Buddhist Archive No. A3728R, there is Thai handwriting on the recto and verso which reads: “ถ่ายที่วัดป่าฝาง พระนครหลวงพระบาง พ.ศ. ๒๔๘๑ คำจันทร์ มงคลสวัสดิ์ [Khamchan Mongkhonsavat posted at Vat Pa Fang in the capital district of Luang Prabang in BE 2481 (AD 1938)].”

Vietnam or France.²³ Sathu (or Chao) Suvan Xaiyasan was Khamchan's teacher during the latter's time at this school. Khamchan passed the examinations from the fifth class to the third class.²⁴ During school vacations between 1927 and 1931, he entered Vat Saen Sukharam as a temple boy, where he learned about the Buddhist tradition and the way of life in a monastery, as well as how to read and write the Tham-Lao script. Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela and his brother, Novice Khamphan taught Khamchan to read and write by having him copy texts onto a stone plate word by word, which Khamchan then had to learn by heart and copy again onto a wooden plate. These lessons enabled Khamchan to read manuscripts written in the Tham-Lao script, which provided him with necessary skills for further developing his interest in Buddhism.

3. Family Background

Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela came from a noble family of *chao phaya luang müangchan*²⁵ in which the family members were devout Buddhists and natives of Luang Prabang. His childhood life experiences were rooted in a traditional Lao Buddhist society and he was influenced significantly in this regard by both his family as well as the abbot of the village monastery, especially in terms of learning about monastic etiquette, merit-making and the importance of deference. This next section provides information on the different family members who were influential in Khamchan's life.

²³ Laos was under French colonial administration and Luang Prabang was a French protectorate since 1893. The other villagers' children, especially the boys, were allowed to go to monastic schools, where instruction was given by monks in the monastery, and where they could also serve as temple boys. However, many children, especially the girls, remained unschooled. The monastic education was mostly based on the traditional Lao Buddhist teachings inscribed on palm leaf manuscripts in Tham-Lao script. Following the French education system designed for its protectorates, the school gave lessons bilingually in Lao and French and went from fifth class to first class. In 1928, the first Pali school was established in Vientiane as a branch of the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh (Stuart-Fox 1997: 43). This is the reason why other monks from Luang Prabang later went to Phnom Penh to further their Buddhist studies, such as Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphoto from Vat Pa Fang, Sathu Maha Uan Virasi from Vat Vixun and Sathu Maha Chansuk Panyapaxoto from Vat Aphay.

²⁴ Primary schools at that time started from the fifth class and counted backwards down to the first class.

²⁵ In the ancient monarchical administration system, the three highest ranking positions of *chao phaya luang* had served as privy councilors to the kings, those being *chao phaya luang müangsaen*, *chao phaya luang müangchan* and *chao phaya luang minlukthao*. *Chao phaya luang müangsaen*, the king's right chief official, was in charge of the country's administration. The last person who held this title was Achan Khamsuk Buppha (1889–1979). *Chao Phaya Luang Müangchan*, the left chief official, was in charge of the country's military, and *chao phaya luang minlukthao*, the middle chief official, was in charge of palace matters, the last person to hold this title being Phui Pannya (1898–1978, Museum No. VSS_000598). These positions were established in the seventeenth century during the reign of King Suriyavongsa Dhammikarat (Buasisavat 1993) and were in use until the end of the Kingdom of Laos in 1975.

Achan Thòngdi (1862–1926)²⁶, Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s grandfather, was born in Ban Khili village in Luang Prabang. He was the elder brother of Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, who was Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s teacher, and served as a high-ranking official with the official title *chao phaya luang müangchan* (see Illustration No. 2.1) during the reign of King Sisavang Vong. After he and his wife had established a family, he built his own traditional house in Ban Lakkham²⁷ village in 1911. One year later, he and his family moved into their new home from their former residence in Ban Chum Khòng village. The house was built in the colonial style of the Lao Lan Xang-French variety, which was very much in vogue at the time and reflected the noble status of its owner. He spent 3,000 piaster on the construction of the house (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2006: Interview), which was recently rented and restored by a foreign architect, Pascal Trahan, and now serves as a guest house with the name of 3 *Nagas*. Achan Thòngdi died in 1926 when Sathu Nyai Khamchan was six years old. His cremation ceremony was held at the bank of the Khan River in Ban Khili village in the form of a traditional wooden funeral pyre, which Sathu Nyai Khamchan attended.

Nang Khamsuk (1863–1943)²⁸, Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s grandmother, was born at the Ban Nyai Na Khum house in Chum Khòng village, Luang Prabang, and married Achan Thòngdi, who later had the official rank of *chao phaya luang müangchan*. Therefore, through her marriage, she received the honorary title of *nang chao phaya luang müangchan*. She had two daughters, Nang Khamonsi, Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s mother, and Nang Khamphio

²⁶ The dates of birth and death of Achan Thòngdi appear under a painting of his portrait, Buddhist Archive No. B4973R, which reads: “ເຈົ້າພະຍາຫຼວງເມືອງຈັນ (ອາຈານທອງດີ) ເກີດເມື່ອວັນສຸກ ຂຶ້ນ ໑໒ ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ຕູ ປີ ເຕົ້າເສັດ ຈ.ສ. ໑໒໒໔ ກົງກັບວັນທີ ໑໕ ກໍລະກະດາ [ກໍລະກົດ] ຄ.ສ. ໑໘໘໒. ເຖິງແກ່ກຳວັນສຸກ ແຮມ ໑໕ ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ໖ ປີ ເປັກສີ ຈ.ສ. ໑໒໙໐ ກົງກັບວັນທີ ໘ ກຸມພາ ຄ.ສ. ໑໙໒໘ ອາຍຸໄດ້ ໖໔ ປີ ໖ ເດືອນ ກັບ ໒໔ ມື້. [Chao Phaya Luang Müangchan (Achan Thòngdi) was born on Friday, the twelfth day of the waxing moon of the eighth lunar month, the Year of *tao set* (the Dog), CS 1224, corresponding to 15 July 1862. [He] died on Friday, the fifteenth waning moon of the sixth lunar month, the Year of *poek si* (the Snake), CS 1290, which corresponds to 8 February 1928, at the age of 65 years, 6 months and 24 days].”

²⁷ Lakkham literally means “gold post” and refers to a gilded stone which was installed as the *lak müang* (city post or pillar) in this village. The stone, now placed behind the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam, was collected by Sathu Nyai Khamchan. After the Lao revolution of 1975, the name of the village was changed to Ban Vat Saen village, which combined the two villages of Ban Hualat and Ban Tatmò, and the same was done with the name of the village’s temple. The change was made according to the policy of the new national regime to merge small neighboring villages and temples into one bigger village or temple.

²⁸ A portrait of Nang Khamsuk, Buddhist Archive No. B4974R, there are two texts in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s handwriting, one under the photograph and one on the verso, but the content, which relates the dates of birth and death of Nang Khamsuk, is identical. The note on the verso reads: “ນາງພະຍາຫຼວງເມືອງຈັນ (ຄຳສຸກ) ເກີດເດືອນ ໑໑ ຂຶ້ນ ໑ ຄ່ຳ ວັນຈັນ ຍາມທຸ່ງວັນ ປີ ກຳໄລ້ ຈ.ສ. ໑໒໒໕, ພ.ສ.໒໔໐໖, ຄ.ສ. ໑໘໖໓ ເຖິງແກ່ກຳ ວັນສຸກ ແຮມ ໔ ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ຈຽງ ເວລາ ໙ ໂມງ ໑໐ ນາທີ ຍາມກອງງາຍ ຈ.ສ. ໑໙໐໕, ກົງກັບວັນທີ ໑໗ ເດຊອມ [ທັນວາ] ໑໙໔໓ ປີ ກຳມິດ ພ.ສ. ໒໔໘໖, ອາຍຸໄດ້ ໘໐ ປີ ໒ ເດືອນ ໑໙ ວັນ. [Nang Phaya Luang Müangchan (Khamsuk) was born on the first day of waxing moon of the eleventh lunar month, at noon, the Year of *ka khai* (the Pig), CS 1225, BE 2406, AD 1863. He died on Friday, the fifth waning moon of the second lunar month, at *nyam kòng ngai* (morning), 9:10 a.m., CS 1305 correspond to 17 December 1943, the Year of *ka mot* (the Goat), BE 2486, at the age of 80 years, 2 months and 19 days].” The information relating to the death of Nang Khamsuk also appears on the verso of another photograph, Buddhist Archive No. A3243R, with the same date.

(1892–1962)²⁹. Nang Khamphio married Achan Khamsuk Buppha (1889–1979), who was later given the title *chao phaya luang müangsaen*, and so she thereby received the honorary title of *nang chao phaya luang müangsaen*. Nang Khamsuk was extremely influential in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s life, as she looked after him from the time of his mother’s passing when he was four years old. She was a devout Buddhist and put her Buddhist morality into rigorous practice by observing five precepts in her daily life and eight precepts on Buddhist holy days as a nun (see Illustration No. 2.2), as well as by regularly listening to sermons at Vat Saen Sukharam temple, especially during the three-month period of the Buddhist Lent. She followed the tradition of Lao Buddhism by giving alms (Lao: *sai bat*) together with sticky rice (*khao niao*) to monks and novices in the morning and by bringing food to monasteries for *chang han* (breakfast) and *phen* (lunch) every day. She was usually the head of her family in organizing Buddhist festivals and ceremonies such as ordination ceremonies, *kathin*-robe offering ceremonies, Vessantara Jātaka festivals, etc. She had deep compassion for her descendants and those around her, and for this reason, she was beloved and respected by the people in her family as well as those in the community.

In 1932, she gave a donation at the amount of 3,000 piaster (Lao: *ngoen man* or *man ຄືນ ພັນ ຫຼື ພັນ*)³⁰ to sponsor the renovation of the *sim* of Vat Saen temple by offering the amount to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, the abbot of Vat Saen, who was also the renovator. After renovation was complete, at the celebration ceremony of the *sim*, she also organized a *thelaphisek* ceremony for Sathu Nyai Kaenchan. Afterwards, she became a *mae yok*³¹ (sponsor mother) for the abbot. Finally, she donated a gold bracelet with a weight of 20 *bat* (304.8 Grams) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan which he sold in order to sponsor the construction of the Sala Hongtham of Vat Saen Sukharam in 2000. She died in the morning on 17 December 1943, at the age of 80. The cremation ceremony was held at the pyre of Vat Buppha Vipassanaram (Vat Pa Nya Thüþ) with a significant number of monks and lay people in attendance.

²⁹ The dates of Nang Khamphio’s birth and death appear on photographs of her in Buddhist Archive No. C1554R and No. C1538R to C1566R, a series of photographs of the funeral of Nang Khamphio Buppha, whose pyre was held at Vat Buppha Vipassanaram or Vat Pa Nya Thüþ in 1962.

³⁰ “The *man* (ພັນ), originally a unit of measurement of weights, became the name of the Indochinese piastre in Northern Laos. The French in Indochina introduced a silver piastre in 1885. It weighed 27.2156 grammes (pure silver of 0.9000 fine). [...] The piastre at the turn of the century was therefore the very close equivalent (in silver weight) of the Mexican-Spanish dollar and the US silver dollar, and equal to approximately 1.81 Thai Baht (15 g silver)” (Grabowsky 2015: 314).

³¹ According to the Lao Buddhist tradition, those who sponsored a monk or novice in a *thelaphisek* ceremony or in the ordination ceremony will thereafter become that monk or novice’s supporter or sponsor, a so-called *mae yok* if one is a woman, using the term *phò yok* for men. These *mae yok* and *phò yok* are to provide the monk with necessary utensils for his daily life and for his Buddhist studies. The sponsor refers to the monk for whom they provide as their *luk yok* (sponsored son). The supporter and the supported show mutual respect to one another.

Nang Khamonsi, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's mother, was born in 1890.³² She was the first daughter of Nang Khamsuk and Achan Thòngdi, and married Thit Khamtan, a *phia müxa* from Ban Aphay village in 1909, at the age of 19. They had five children, three sons and two daughters: Khammungkhun, Khamxao, Khamphan, Khamuan, and Khamchan. The couple built their own house at Ban Lakkham village for the benefit of their parents, and they moved into the house in 1912. Nang Khamonsi died in 1925 at the age of 35. Her parents cared for her five children after her passing.

Thit Khamtan Virachit (–1972), Sathu Nyai Khamchan's father, was a son of Thit Khamtū from Ban Aphay and Nang Khambua from Ban Chum Khòng village in Luang Prabang. He served as an officer and held the title of *phia müxa*. After the death of his first wife, Nang Khamonsi, he had two more wives, Nang Phio from Ban Pak Xüang, with whom he had one daughter, Khamphan living at Ban Pak Xüang, and Nang Phia Phio from Ban Xiang Muan village, with whom he had four other children altogether: Nang Khamfong Thammachedi, Nang Thòngsi Sisuphan, Nang Chanthi Virachit and Sathu Phò Sisuphan Sirivanno/Virachit (1936–1994) of Vat Saen Sukharam. For this reason, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had four younger half-sisters and one younger half-brother. Thit Khamtan died in Luang Prabang in early 1972. His cremation was held at the pyre of Vat Buppha Vipassanaram (Vat Pa Nya Thüp) on the sixth day of the waning moon of the third lunar month of BE 2514 (5 February 1972) (Buddhist Archive No. B6126R and B6126V).

Khammungkhun Virachit (1909–1984)³³, was Sathu Nyai Khamchan's eldest brother. In the 1920s, he went to study in Hanoi, Vietnam.³⁴ When he returned to Luang Prabang, he served as an officer until he was promoted to district chief officer of Luang Prabang (Lao: *chao khong kamphaeng müang luang prabang* ເຈົ້າຄອງກຳແພງເມືອງຫຼວງພະບາງ) during the 1960s,

³² A document, BAD-02-0028, handwritten in Old-Lao script: “*pavat khong khamonsi: biography of Khamonsi*”. The document states that: “ປະຫວັດຂອງຄຳອ່ອນສີ, ຄູນແມ່ຄຳອ່ອນສີ ເກີດປີ ຍີ ຂານ ເດືອນ ໙ ແຮມ ໑໔ ຄຳ ວັນສຸກ ຍາມກອງເດິກ ພ.ສ. ໓໓ [2433] ທີ່ບ້ານໃຫຍ່ ຫ້າຄູ່ມ ຕາແສງຈູມຄ້ອງ ແຂວງກຳແພງ ຈັງຫວັດຫຼວງພະບາງ, ບິດາ ຊື່ ຈານທອງດີ “ພະຍາຫຼວງເມືອງຈັນ”, ມານດາ ຊື່ ນາງພະຍາເມືອງຈັນ ຄຳສຸກ. ເມື່ອອາຍຸໄດ້ ໑໙ ປີ ໄດ້ແຕ່ງງານວິວາກັບທິດຄຳຕັນ [...] ມີບຸດດ້ວຍກັນ ໕ ຄົນ ມີ ຊາຍ ໓ ຍິງ ສອງ (໒) ຄົນທີ່ ໑ ຊື່ ຄຳມຸງຄຸນ ຄົນທີ່ ໒ ຊື່ ຊາວ ຄົນທີ່ ໓ ຊື່ ຄຳພັນ ຄົນທີ່ ໔ ຊື່ ຄຳອ້ວນ ແລະ ຄົນທີ່ ໕ ຊື່ ຄຳຈັນ. ແລະເມື່ອ ຄ.ສ. ໑໙໑໒ ໄດ້ຍ້າຍຄອບຄົວຈາກບ້ານໃຫຍ່ມາຕັ້ງບ້ານເຮືອນຢູ່ທີ່ຕ່າບິນບ້ານຫຼັກຄຳ ຕາແສງບ້ານເຈ້ຍ ແຂວງກຳແພງເມືອງຫຼວງພະບາງ [The biography of Khamonsi, the mother Khamonsi was born at *nyam kòng doek* (approximately at some time between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m.) on Friday, the fourteenth day of the waning moon of the ninth lunar month, the Year of *nyi khan* (the Tiger), BE 33 [2433], (13 September 1890) at Ban Nyai Na Khum of Chum Khòng sub-district in the capital city of Luang Prabang. [Her] father's name was Achan Thòngdi “*phaya luang müangchan*”, [her] mother was named Nang Phaya Müangchan Khamsuk. At the age of 19, [she] married Thit Khamtan [...] together with 5 children, 3 boys and 2 girls: the first child's name is Khammungkhun, the second child is named Xao, the third child is named Khamphan, the fourth child is named Khamuan and the fifth child is named Khamchan. In AD 1912, [she/they] moved from Ban Nyai house to settle in Lakkham village, Ban Chia sub-district, Luang Prabang].”

³³ A portrait of Khammungkhun, Buddhist Archive No. B4831R. There is a caption under the portrait which reads: “ຄຳມຸງຄຸນ ວິຣະຈິດ ເກີດວັນທີ 18 ສິງຫາ 1909, ຕາຍວັນທີ 28 ຕຸລາ 1984 ອາຍຸ 75 ປີ 2 ເດືອນ 10 ມື້ [Khammungkhun Virachit was born on 18 August 1909 and died on 28 October 1984 reaching the age of 75 years, 2 months and 10 days].”

³⁴ A studio portrait of Khammungkhun, together with his two colleagues, posing in Hanoi on 3 April 1927. Buddhist Archive No. B1838R and B1838V.

carrying the honorary title *phaya khammungkhun*. Later he served as a privy counselor in the royal court to King Sisavang Vatthana until the Lao revolution in 1975. In the 1980s, he had health problems and he was sent to Thailand for medical service, where he died in 1984 at the age of 75.

Khamxao Phummavong (1911–1980), Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s eldest sister, married Thit Khamphan Phummavong (1902–1967)³⁵ from Ban Lamaet village, currently Ban Phon Hüang village in Luang Prabang, who later became a head merchant of Luang Prabang province and carried the honorary title *phia phichit phanit*. Due to her husband’s status, she carried the honorary title of *nang phia phichit phanit*. They had ten children, six sons and four daughters. They inherited the family house and cared for the family members living there (see Illustration No. 2.3). In the early 1930s, they established a grocery shop at Ban Lakkham village selling miscellaneous utensils and fabric, mostly goods purchased from Thailand. They also gave out business loans as a source of income. Once business was booming, they needed an assistant, and considered the hiring of Novice Khamchan to be the best solution, so they asked him to disrobe. In 1956, she was one of the five female Lao delegates from Luang Prabang to attend the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana, the Sixth Great Buddhist Council held in May 1956 in Rangoon, Burma. She died in 1980 at the age of 68.

Out of all of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s family members, it is clear that it was most certainly **Maha Khamphan Virachit** (1913–1995), Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s second eldest brother, who had the greatest influence on his monastic life and Buddhist studies. He was a model for Sathu Nyai Khamchan in the latter’s studies of Buddhism. In the late 1920s, Khamphan was ordained as a novice by the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, who was also Khamchan’s teacher. Khamchan then followed his brother’s example, entering the monastery as a temple boy. In 1933, Khamphan was ordained as a monk and stayed at Vat Pa Fang. After that, he went to Phnom Penh in Cambodia to further his Buddhist studies as a Lao student monk in one of the student exchange programs between Laos and Cambodia under the administration of French Indochina. The exchange program gave him the opportunity and ability to advance his level of Buddhist study and then pass the third level of Pali examination, qualifying him as a Pali scholar monk, a status awarded with the addition of *maha*³⁶ to his title, his full title being

³⁵ Thit Khamphan Phummavong was born in Ban Lamaet, Luang Prabang on 9 November 1902. In 1952, he received the title *phia phichit phanit* and received two medals from King Sisavang Vong, one for being an exemplary citizen, and the other for his esteemed agricultural abilities. He died of a heart attack in Vientiane on 19 April 1967. The information on Thit Khamphan Phummavong presented here was taken from the pamphlet which was published for his funeral, BAD-12-2-1967.108.

³⁶ A photograph, Buddhist Archive No. B0111R, depicts monks and novices posing for a portrait at the celebration ceremony for Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto’s completion of the third level of Pali studies (Lao: *maha parian tham sam payok*) held at the Buddhist school building of Vat Pa Fang on 23 October 1938.

Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto. In 1938, he went to Bangkok to continue his Buddhist studies once more. There he stayed at Vat Benchamabòphit, a temple in which Novice Khamchan had previously resided. In 1939, he returned to Luang Prabang and was appointed as a teacher by the Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang at the Pariyattitham school of Luang Prabang³⁷ located at Vat Pa Fang³⁸, and he played a key role in setting up the Buddhist school in Luang Prabang. He disrobed in 1942 and was thereafter known as Achan Maha Khamphan Virachit.³⁹

Novice Khamphan taught Khamchan as a temple boy how to read and write the Tham-Lao script and later inspired him to become a novice. In 1934, after Novice Khamchan's second ordination, Sathu Khamphan, who was at that time the abbot of Vat Pa Fang, had Novice Khamchan stay in his monastery, where he taught him the basic Buddhist teachings. Later, in 1935, he brought Novice Khamchan to Chiang Rai province in northern Thailand to study Buddhism, but Novice Khamchan could not stay there long due to differing views about the Vinaya practice, a disagreement about which I will provide more details later in this chapter. Despite Novice Khamchan's early departure from Chiang Rai, Sathu Khamphan did not abandon the hope that his brother would follow the religious path which the older brother thought was best. In 1936, he brought Novice Khamchan to Vat Benchamabòphit in Bangkok, where Novice Khamchan advanced his Buddhist studies for two years. In 1941, when

The Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Dhammanana Maha Thela from Vat Longkhun, presided over the ceremony.

³⁷ A photograph, Buddhist Archive No. B4871R, the appointment dates 6 July 1939. It reads: “ມາດຕາ ໒ - ຊົງຕັ້ງພະຄຳພັນ (ປ.໓) ເຈົ້າອະທິການວັດປ່າຝາງ ໄດ້ຮັບປະກາສະນິຍະບັດຈາກໂຮງຮຽນປະຣິຍັດຕິທຳ ກຸງພະນົມເປັນ ເປັນຄູສອນບາລີ ນະໂຮງຮຽນ ປະຣິຍັດຕິທຳ ຫຼວງພະບາງ. [Article 2, Pha Khamphan (P.3), abbot of Vat Pa Fang, has been certified by the Pariyattitham of Phnom Penh to become a teacher of Pali language at the Pariyattitham school of Luang Prabang].”

³⁸ Vat Pa Fang was built in CS 1161 (AD 1799) in the reign of King Anuruttha (Khamman 1964: 41). It was merged with Vat Pa Kae into the current Vat Siphutthabat in 1941. The combination was effected by a royal decree of King Sisavang Vong and Crown Prince Sisavang Vatthana. They read the royal decree at the consecration ceremony of the assembly hall boundary, which was held on the fifteenth day of the waxing moon of the eighth lunar month, BE 2484 (8 July 1941), and presided over by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang on the ecclesiastic side and Crown Prince Sisavang Vatthana on the secular side. Sathu Nyai Khamchan attended this ceremony (BAD-12-2-1941.001).

³⁹ In 1945, he was involved, together with other political elites in Luang Prabang, in the liberation movement against the return of French political influence in Laos, later becoming a member of the Lao Issara (Free Lao). During the civil war, Achan Maha Khamphan played a key role in facilitating communication between the Pathet Lao movement and the Sangha. One piece of evidence supporting this statement is a photograph (Buddhist Archive No. A3425R) of Achan Maha Khamphan, a representative of the Pathet Lao, handing over an envelope to the Ecclesiastical Prime Minister, Pha Achan Khun Manivong at Vat That Fun in Vientiane in 1957. The text appears on the recto reads: 1957, and on the verso reads: “ເຄນສາທຸຄຳຈັນ. ເວລາເປັນກຳມະການໃນຄະນະກຳມະການເຈລະຈາການເມືອງຂອງຝ່າຍປະເທດລາວຢູ່ວຽງຈັນ ໄດ້ຕາງໜ້າໃຫ້ຄະນະນຳເອົາເຄື່ອງໂທຍະທານພ້ອມເງິນ 2,000 K ໄປຖວາຍຊ່ອຍໃນການພິພິດທະພຸດທະສະຫຼອງ 2500 ພຸດທະການ- ທີ່ວັດທາດຝຸ່ນ ວຽງຈັນ [Offer to Sathu Khamchan. As a member of the political negotiation committee on the side of the Pathet Lao in Vientiane, I, on behalf of the committee, present these offerings and money in the amount of 2,000 Kip to sponsor the casting of Buddha statues in celebrations of the 2500th year of the Buddhist Era at Vat That Fun, Vientiane].” Following the Lao revolution, Achan Maha Khamphan became an important member of the Lao People's Party, as he was in charge of religious affairs. He even once served as a Lao ambassador in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. He died in Vientiane in 1995 at the age of 81.

Khamchan became a monk, Sathu Maha Khamphan persuaded him to stay at his monastery so that Sathu Maha Khamphan would be able to help him with his Buddhist studies (see Illustration No. 2.10) of the Dhamma, Vinaya, the Suttas, and Buddhist Jātaka chants.

In 1943, after the passing of Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, Achan Maha Khamphan, as a member of the Vat Saen community's committee, played a crucial role in persuading Sathu Khamchan Virachitto to move from Vat Siphutthabat to Vat Saen Sukharam in order to be the successor of the former abbot. In 1957, during the civil war in Laos, acting then as a member of the Pathet Lao movement, Achan Maha Khamphan sent 2,000 Kip which he had collected from other members to Sathu Nyai Khamchan to sponsor the construction of the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam. He also regularly sent letters to Sathu Nyai Khamchan reporting to him about the state of political affairs and also representing his care to the Buddhist education of the Sangha in Luang Prabang.⁴⁰ Therefore, the relationship between Achan Maha Khamphan and Sathu Nyai Khamchan can be regarded as having been an extremely intimate one when compared to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relationship with the other members of his family.

4. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's Teachers

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was under the tutelage of two masters of Buddhism: Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela (see Illustration No. 2.4), late abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, and Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela (see Illustration No. 2.5), the Supreme Patriarch of Laos at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram. These senior monks were specialists in the particular fields of monastic architecture and Buddhist practice. They were very influential in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's practice, and should be considered as important monks and models for him who spent much time with him and gave him much encouragement even before his official entry into the Sangha community.

⁴⁰ An official letter from the Pathet Lao movement to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen in Luang Prabang “ນະຄອນວຽງຈັນ, ວັນທີ ໑໐ ມີນາ ໒໕໐໐ ຈາກຄະນະຜູ້ແທນບັນດາກຳລັງປະເທດລາວ. ນັອມນະມັດສະການ ເຈົ້າລາຊາຄະນະ ແຂວງຫລວງພະບາງ ຊາບ. ຕາມ ໂບດິກາແຜ່ກຸສິນ ເພື່ອປະຕິສັງຂອນ ວັດແສນ, ພວກຂ້ານ້ອຍພ້ອມກັນມີໃຈໃສ່ສັດທາ ບໍ່ຮິຈາກເງິນຈຳນວນ ໒,໐໐໐ ກີບ (ສອງພັນກີບ) ມາໂມທະນາໃນ ການສ້າງນີ້. [...] ຕາງໜ້າຄະນະ, [ລາຍເຊັນ] ທ້າວ ໜູຮັກ ພູມສະຫວັນ. [Vientiane, 10 March [BE] 2500 (AD 1957). From the representative committees of the Pathet Lao Forces, to the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang, following your *bai dika phaekuson* (a letter asking for donation) for supporting the renovation of Vat Saen Sukharam, we all have a faith in mind and donated the amount of money of 2,000 Kip (two thousand Kip) to you for this construction work. [...] On behalf of the committees, [signature] Thao Nouhak Phoumsavanh] (BAD-12-2-1957.061). A personal letter by Achan Maha Khamphan sent from Vientiane to Sathu Nyai Khamchan in Luang Prabang. A part says, “ວຽງຈັນ, 5.3.57. ນະມັດສະການສາທູດຳຈັນທີ່ຮັກເຄົາລົບ. [...] ສາທູດມີໂອກາດພົບຄູສອນທຸກທ່ານແລະນັກຮຽນ ກໍເລົ່າຂາວໃຫ້ພວກເພິ່ນຮູ້, ຂ້ານ້ອຍຜູ້ໜຶ່ງແລະຝ່າຍປະເທດລາວທັງໝົດ ເປັນຫ່ວງເປັນໃຍນຳການສຶກສາເລົ່າຮຽນພະປະລິຍັດຕິທຳ ແລະຕຳແໜ່ງໜ້າທີ່ຂອງ ຜູ້ສຶດສອນໂຮງຮຽນນີ້ [ໂຮງຮຽນປະລິຍັດຕິທຳລຶງຫຼວງພະບາງ] ຢູ່ສະເໝີ. [Vientiane, 5.3.57, [...] When you have a chance to meet all of the teachers and students, please let them know that I myself and all members of the Pathet Lao always have the interests of the Phapariyattitham in mind, as well as the positions of the teachers of this school]” (BAD-12-1-1957.003).

Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana (Kaccāñāna) Maha Thela (1893–1943),⁴¹ was a younger brother of Achan Thongdi (Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s grandfather), and was one of the eminent monks who specialized in the field of monastic building construction in Luang Prabang during the first part of twentieth century. Sathu Nyai Kaenchan sent a letter he wrote in Phongsali province in the north of Laos to King Sisavang Vong providing him with an update about the progress of temple construction projects and the general situation of the area.⁴² The letter recounts that he was asked by the king to travel to the north and check the monastic construction work. This letter is a verification of the fact that Sathu Nyai Kaenchan was indeed an authority on the subject of monastic temple construction. In 1936, as a senior and eminent monk, he was a candidate for the position of the Supreme Patriarch of the kingdom of Luang Prabang. However, he did not receive the position, despite the fact that he had been encouraged by abbots and high-ranking officials in the city as well as King Sisavang Vong to pursue the status of Supreme Patriarch.⁴³

⁴¹ A portrait of Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, Buddhist Archive No. A4328R, under which a caption appears indicating his dates of birth and death, reads: “ສາທູ້ໃຫຍ່ແກ່ນຈັນ ກັດຈາຍະນະ ມະຫາເຖລະ ອະດີດເຈົ້າອາວາດວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ເກີດປີ ເຕົ້າສີ (ມະໂຮງ) ພ.ສ. 2435, ຄ.ສ. 1893. ມະຣະນະ ປີກາມິດ (ມະແມ) ພ.ສ. 2486 - ຄ.ສ. 1943 (ອາຍຸ 51 ປີ). [Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, late abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam was born in the Year of *tao si* (the Snake), BE 2435, AD 1893. [He] passed away in the Year of *ka mot* (the Goat), BE 2486, AD 1943 (at the age of 51)].”

⁴² The following is a part from the letter sent by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan to King Sisavang Vong: “ວັດພອງສະລີ [ຜຶ້ງສາລີ] ວັນທີ ໑໘ ຊຸມພະເມສາ [ມັງກອນ] ໑໙໓໙. ອາຕະມາພາບ ພະແກ່ນຈັນ ຂໍຖວາຍພະພອນມະຫາບໍພິດພະລາຊະສີມພານ ສິມເດັດພະເຈົ້າສີສະຫວ່າງວິງ ລ້ານຊ້າງຮຶມຂາວ ອີງຊິງພະລາຊະອານາຈັກລາວຫຼວງພູບາງຊິງຊາບ. ດ້ວຍມະຫາບໍພິດພະລາຊະສີມພານຊິງພະກະລຸນາໂປດ ໃຫ້ອາຕະມາພາບພ້ອມ ດ້ວຍພໍ່ອອກແສນ ເມື່ອກວດການກໍ່ສ້າງວັດພອງສະລີ [ຜຶ້ງສາລີ]. ເຖິງພອງສະລີວັນທີ ໒໘ ເດຊອມ [ທັນວາ] ໑໙໓໘ [...] ຈ້າຢູ່ວັດ [...] ຈັງຫັນເພິນກໍບໍລະບູນ ສິມຄວນ ຂ້າລາຊະການແລະລູກຄ້າອຸປະຖໍາ [...] ລາຊະດອນພູນ້ອຍນີ້ເປັນຄົນທຸກຫຼາຍ ຈະວານເປັນປົກກະຕິຢູ່ກໍເຫັນບໍ່ຕະຫລອດການ ການສ້າງວັດພອງ ສະລີກໍເປັນການຂັດຂ້ອງໄປທຸກສິ່ງທຸກຢ່າງ ວານລາຊະດອນຊ່ອຍກໍບໍ່ເຕັມມີເຕັມໂມງ ຫາຈ້າງຄົນເລື້ອຍໄມ້ກໍຫຍາກ ຫາປູນຫາຊາຍກໍຫຍາກ [...]. [Vat Phongsali, 18 January 1939. I, Pha Kaenchan, wish to respectively inform Your Majesty, King Sisavang Vong of the Lan Xang Hom Khao Dynasty, regarding your kind order to me, together with a member of the laity, Saen, to examine the construction work of Vat Phongsali. [We] arrived in Phongsali on 28 December 1938 [...] and we stayed at the temple. Food for breakfast and lunch was perfect, provided by the officers and merchants [...]. The population of the Phunoi ethnic group is very poor and they are unable to provide proper assistance. The construction of Vat Phongsali is difficult in every aspect. The help of the local population is only partial in nature. Sawyers, cement, and sand are difficult to find]” (BAD-12-2-1939.014).

⁴³ In 1936, following the death of the late Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thongchan Thammathara Maha Thela, at Vat Tao Hai, two candidates, both senior monks, were considered and both of them were suitable for the position: one, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, was a *khamavasi* (Pali: *gāṃavāsī*, town-dwelling monk) and the other, Sathu Nyai Bunthan Thammayana Maha Thela, abbot of Vat Longkhun, was as an *aranyavasi* (Pali: *araññāvāsī*, forest-dwelling monk). An election was then held for the members of the Sangha of Luang Prabang to vote on the matter. The night before the election, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan sent his assistant monks from Vat Saen to whisper to the abbots of each monastery in the town that he did not wish to take on the position and to please select another monk. Thereafter, Sathu Nyai Bunthan was elected to the Sangha, in which he was then established as the Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang by King Sisavang Vong. Sathu Nyai Kaenchan served only as a chief monk of the Xiang Thong sub-district (Lao: *chao khana tasaeng xiang thong*). There were two reasons why Sathu Nyai Kaenchan rejected the position: firstly, because he respected Sathu Nyai Bunthan as his senior and close friend, and also because he was already satisfied with his current status, which attests to his modest and sanguine nature. One photograph shows seven senior monks posing for a portrait at Vat Xiang Thong Raxavoravihan, in which Sathu Nyai Kaenchan and Sathu Nyai Bunthan are sitting next to each other, surrounded by other senior monks. This photograph reflects the significance of the twos’ relationship and also depicts him receiving congratulations from senior monks of Luang

In 1932, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan received Khamchan as a temple boy and his disciple, to whom he was introduced by Khamchan's grandmother, Nang Khamsuk. Sathu Nyai Kaenchan taught Khamchan how to pay respect to seniors and monks, how to properly serve the monks, and how to keep in accordance with monastic etiquette. Khamchan served his teacher by boiling water for drinking and cleaning his abode, and followed him to attend ceremonies. As mentioned above, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan taught the young boy how to read and write Tham-Lao script by copying texts onto a stone plate word by word, after which Khamchan had to learn the texts by heart and then re-write them on a small wooden board. The boy followed his teacher to Buddhist ceremonies in order to learn about the ways of Buddhist culture and society, and during the school vacation, Khamchan was ordained by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan as a novice so that he might study Buddhism more closely, particularly the Suttas.

According to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's recollection, in 1933, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan brought him to a royal Buddhist ceremony at Vat Longkhun. While he was standing in the line for the reception of King Sisavang Vong, the king stopped suddenly as he passed by Khamchan, asking him "is your father in attendance?", something which very much surprised and startled him, who had not been expecting to be graced by the king's personal address. Khamchan, a bit perplexed, looked up at the king and asked "To whom are you referring, Your Majesty?" The king then asked Khamchan, "whose son are you?", upon which Khamchan promptly replied, "I am a son of Nang Khamonsi". "Oh, the son of my elder sister!"⁴⁴ the king said. The person whom the king was referring to was the *chao phaya luang müangsaen* (Achan Khamsuk Buppha), the husband of his mother's younger sister, Nang Khamphio Buppha, (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2006: interview). This was the first time that Khamchan was confronted with the king. The reason why the king was so interested in Khamchan was because he was dressed in the proper attire of a member of the royal family, and the king had taken an interest in *chao phaya luang müangsaen*. This was actually the second time that Khamchan had met King Sisavang Vong. Once, as a novice, he had accompanied Sathu Nyai Kaenchan to the royal palace, as King Sisavang Vong had invited Sathu Nyai Kaenchan to look at the bronze Buddha statues which he had recently built. The king walked over to Novice Khamchan while he was burnishing a Buddha statue, patted Novice Khamchan's throat with his hand and made the following prediction, "ຈົມ້ອຍ, ສຽງເຈົ້າຊິມ່ວນໄດ້! Young novice, your voice will be heard!" The king's prediction might have become

Prabang following the establishment of the new Supreme Patriarch. This information was taken from Sathu Nyai Khamchan's own recollections, which he recounted to me in 2006.

⁴⁴ Sathu Nyai Khamchan often made reference to monks and novices during his sermons after the evening chanting in the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam. He was talking in this manner and was wearing a smile on his face when he mentioned that "the king knew our family very well".

true that when Sathu Nyai Khamchan had grown up he had a unique voice of Vessantara Jātaka chanting.

In 1937, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan asked Novice Khamchan to act as his representative and lead the chanting of the Vessantara Jātaka at the Vessantara festival of Vat Pa Phai. At that point in time, Novice Khamchan had yet to acquire any experience in this specific chant, and the episode of the chant which he was to lead was *nakhòn kan* or *lakòn kan*.⁴⁵ As there was only a short period of time to prepare for the festival, Novice Khamchan had to be particularly diligent when practicing chanting. He trained with both Sathu Nyai Kaenchan as well as with other specialists of Vessantara known for their chanting in the city. These experiences enabled him to acquire insight on unique techniques used in chanting, while at the same time also making him interested in the Vessantara Jātaka. Sathu Nyai Khamchan had another great opportunity to learn from his teacher in 1932, when Sathu Nyai Kaenchan renovated the roof of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam. During this process, Khamchan was sure to first carefully observe and then note in his mind to the best of his ability the special methods of building construction used by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, methods which did not include the drawing of blueprints. When Sathu Nyai Kaenchan passed away in 1943, Sathu Nyai Khamchan became his successor, and he was able to carry on his teacher's methods in his own renovation of the new *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1958.

Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana (Dhammañāna) Maha Thela⁴⁶ (Sathu Nyai Bunthan Buppharat, 1891–1984), the last Supreme Patriarch of the kingdom of Laos, was originally the abbot of Vat Longkhun⁴⁷. In 1936, when he was 46 years old, he was established as the Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang,⁴⁸ and in 1940, following the

⁴⁵ *Nakhòn* or *lakhòn* means city; *kan*: episode in the Jātaka. *Nakhòn kan*, the episode tells the story of Prince Vessantara's return from the forest to his home town and his subsequent inheritance of the throne from his father.

⁴⁶ Before being established as the Supreme Patriarch, he carried the title of Sathu Nyai Bunthan Thammayana Maha Thela, and then later, as the Supreme Patriarch, he carried the honorific ecclesiastical title Somdet Pha Yòtkaeo Phutthasatorot Sakonmaha Sangkha Pamok", but he was popularly known as Somdet Pha Sangkhalat. In 1957, he received from Burma the religious title Abhi Dhaja Maha Rattha Guru ("Most Eminent Great Spiritual Teacher").

⁴⁷ Vat Longkhun is located on the right bank of the Mekong River opposite of Luang Prabang, was built in BE 2334 (AD 1791) during the reign of King Anuruttha, and is a religious historical site of great significance. It is considered to have been a royal forest monastery to which, since the eighteenth century, the crown princes of Luang Prabang had traditionally traveled in order to practice Buddhist doctrine for a short number of days before their coronation (Woralancha 2004: 178–179). On 26 February 1905, Crown Prince Sisavang Vong, also known as Tiao Khao, came to stay in this monastery for seven days as a *latsi* (ascetic), observing eight precepts, after which four Brahman *purohitachans* arrived and asked him to disrobe, inviting him to take the throne. The coronation ceremony was held on the same day in three different locations: the Brahmin at Donsay Mungkhun Island on the Mekong River, the Buddhist religious ceremony at Vat Xiang Thong, and the royal official ceremony at the palace, on 5 March 1905 (BAD-01-0064: 6).

⁴⁸ The certificate of appointment was made by Royal Edict No. 29, dated 8 April 1936 in both the Lao and French versions (Buddhist Archive No. H1818R).

invitation of King Sisavang Vong, he moved to reside at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, the royal monastery next to the palace in Luang Prabang. In 1941, he was the preceptor of Khamchan's ordination ceremony and can also be regarded as one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's teachers who led him in his practice during Buddhist retreats and the organizing of Buddhist rituals. In the same year, following the royal declaration which combined the monasteries Vat Pa Fang and Vat Pa Khae into one monastery and gave it its current name of Vat Siphutthabat. Sathu Nyai Khamchan had been a monk only one month when Somdet Pha Sangkhalat asked him to accompany him in attending the consecration ceremony of the assembly hall boundary (Lao: *phuk phatthasima* or *khòt sim*) at Vat Si Phutthabat. During the ceremony, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat closely observed Sathu Nyai Khamchan, noticing his intelligence and disciplined practice. After the ceremony, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat came over to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, took his hand and said to him, “ເບິ່ງເອົາໄວ້ເມີນິດຄອງປະເພນີອັນນີ້ນາ ພົດຂ້ອຍແລ້ວແມ່ນເຈົ້າຂີ່ສີບ (Watch and remember this traditional ceremony. After I die, you will become my successor)” (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2007: Interview). This was the first consecration of the assembly hall boundary that Sathu Nya Khamchan had attended, observed and studied in this manner. Somdet Pha Sangkhalat's words surprised Sathu Nyai Khamchan, because there were many senior or highly learned monks at the ceremony, but Somdet Pha Sangkhalat selected him as his successor for this matter. Eventually, they became true, as Sathu Nyai Khamchan did indeed succeed Somdet Pha Sangkhalat after his passing.

During the 1950s and the 1960s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan closely followed Somdet Pha Sangkhalat during the latter's *thudong*⁴⁹ practice in the forest of Ban Xiang Maen's area. As a keepsake to remember his *thudong* practice, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat gave Sathu Nyai Khamchan his *sappathon*⁵⁰ (large umbrella), the very *sappathon* that he had regularly used in his *thudong* practice and stayed under the tree in the forest, and he said, “I am old and no longer use this, so use it for me” (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2007: Interview). Sathu Nyai Khamchan brought his *sappathon* every year after that while on *thudong* for the rest of his life. At present, it functions as a value object for commemorating the life of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, and is kept in the Museum of Buddhist Art in Vat Saen Sukharam. Some of the other Buddhist rituals that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had practiced and learnt from Somdet Pha

⁴⁹ (Pali: *dhutaṅga*) refers to the shaking off or moving of defilements; austere practices; ascetic practices. The *thudong* contains the following thirteen types of practices: *pāmsukūlikaṅga*: refuse-rug-wearer's practice; *tecīvarikaṅga*: triple-robe-wearer's practice; *piṇḍapātikaṅga*: alms-food-eater's practice; *sapadānacārikaṅga*: house-to-house-seeker's practice; *ekāsanikaṅga*: one-sessioner's practice; *pattapiṇḍikaṅga*: bowl-food-eater's practice; *khalupacchābhattikaṅga*: later-food-refuser's practice; *ārañṇikaṅga*: forest-dweller's practice; *rukkhamūlikaṅga*: tree-root-dweller's practice; *abbhokāsikaṅga*: open-air-dweller's practice; *sosānikaṅga*: charnel-ground-dweller's practice; *yathāsanthatikaṅga*: any-bed-user's practice; and *nesajjikaṅga*: sitter's practice (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 256–257). A monk who practices *dhutaṅga* chooses one or more of these items.

⁵⁰ A *sappathon* is a large umbrella with a white cotton net used by a monk for dwelling while practicing *thudong* (see illustration No. 2.22).

Sangkhalat included the ordination procedure, the *kathin* ceremony, *parivasakam* practice, meditation retreats, the *uposot* ceremony, among a list of others. By following Somdet Pha Sangkhalat in his practice of Buddhist rituals, he gained significant experience which laid the foundations for his own practice when he became a leader of the Sangha in the late 1980s. Furthermore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was one of the followers of Somdet Pha Sangkhalat, sometimes accompanying him abroad on official visits. For instance, between December 1956 and February 1957, they travelled to a number of countries in the region, heading first to Sri Lanka upon an invitation from the government to attend and participate in the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism. From there, they continued their pilgrimage to India, where they visited and paid homage to the Buddhist sites there, also paying an official visit to Burma. In 1967, following an invitation by the Supreme Patriarch and government of Thailand, they paid an official visit to Thailand. I will describe more details on Sathu Nyai Khamchan's travels in chapter 5.

After the Lao revolution in 1979, Somdet Pha Sankhalat and four of his followers, among them one monk, two laymen and one laywoman, boarded a bamboo raft mounted to inner tubes and floated to Thailand via the Mekong River between Vientiane and Sri Chiang Mai district in Nong Khai province. They arrived at 11:00 p.m. on the night of 5 March 1979.⁵¹ Somdet Pha Sangkhalat stayed at the Sangha hospital in Bangkok, Thailand, for five years, where he passed away on 24 June 1984 at the age of 92. According to the Lao Buddhist tradition, during the days before Buddhist Lent, a monk is expected to visit his teachers and preceptors in order to pay them the proper respects (Pali: *sāmicikamma*). Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly travelled to visit Somdet Pha Sangkhalat at the Sangha hospital in Bangkok during this time period (see Illustration No. 2.6)

The two Buddhist masters mentioned above, both Sathu Nyai Kaenchan and the Somdet Pha Sankhalat, were held in high respect by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, who had their

⁵¹ The reason of his escape is still unclear: on the one hand, it has been argued that he fled for political reasons, but on the other hand, it is said that the move was planned by his followers both in Laos and Thailand, a plan of which he was unaware and would not have agreed to. The person behind the plan has been said to have been Sathu Fan Tissavangso (1925–1993), Somdet Pha Sangkhalat's secretary who had already left the country and was staying at Vat Yannava in Bangkok. Sathu Nyai Khamchan recounted that "on the day Somdet Pha Sangkhalat stayed at Vat Dong Miang in Vientiane, many of his followers came and asked him to visit their family houses, so he went from house to house until the end of the night visiting each of them. On the way back to Vat Dong Miang, they drove along the road on the bank of the Mekong River until they stopped and asked Somdet Pha Sangkhalat to get out of the car so he could see the view of the Mekong at night. Then, as the story goes, they suddenly carried him to the prepared raft. Somdet Pha Sangkhalat exclaimed, 'do not take me away, I do not want to go', but they did not listen to him." When Sathu Nyai Khamchan visited Somdet Pha Sangkhalat at the Sangha hospital in Bangkok where he was staying, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat often asked him to try to find a way to bring him back Laos, saying, "I wish to die in my homeland". In the early 1980s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan asked Phummi Vongvichit, the deputy prime minister of Lao P.D.R. at the time, about this matter, to which Phummi Vongvichit responded, "Somdet Pha Sangkhalat fled by himself. He should also return by himself. Although I myself respect him and want him back, the government cannot do anything" (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2006: Interview).

portraits hung on the posts in front the main alter in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam where monks and novice pay their daily respects and chant the Buddhist Suttas. To honor the obligations his teachers had upheld to the Sangha, Sathu Nyai Khanchan regularly performed a Buddhist ceremony on his birthday each year to make merit. During the ceremony, he would reverently place their portraits on the altar set in the middle of the *sim* while a number of monks gathered round.

5. Life as a Buddhist Novice

On 15 June 1932, during the two and a half month school vacation period, at the age of twelve, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was ordained as a novice at Vat Saen Sukharam by his teacher, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, the preceptor of his ordination ceremony. He learned the Suttas by heart, as well as how to chant Buddhist scripture, and he also studied the *sāmanera sikkhā* (monastic disciplines for novices). At the end of August 1932, he disrobed in order to continue his secular studies in the new term. In that year, he attended the second class, in which he received bilingual instruction in both Lao and French. As he found French to be quite difficult, he was unable to pass the examination in the first term of the second class, and was thereby dismissed. Sathu Nyai Khamchan remarked that “I failed the exam only in the first term. The school should have given me a chance to continue with the second term, but they did not, and instead dismissed me” (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2006: Interview). Thus, his education in public school came to a halt when he was thirteen years old, but his interest in learning persisted.

As a consequence of these circumstances, he spent his time in the period thereafter studying Buddhist teachings with his teacher in the monastery. Khamchan was again ordained as a novice on 14 June 1934 at the age of 14, together with his uncle Suvan, at Vat Saen Sukharam by their preceptor, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Thela. Shortly after ordination, Khamchan moved to Vat Pa Fang, where his brother, Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto was residing at the time, in order to receive help with his further Buddhist studies (see Illustration No. 2.8). While there, he would go to study the Buddhist teachings organized and taught by Sathu Chanti at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram in the morning, and would then study Pali grammar with Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto at Vat Pa Fang in the afternoon. At that time, there were no examinations for the study of the Dhamma and the Pali language, as these institutes had yet to be officially established by the government in the form of Buddhist schools.

In June 1935, Novice Khamchan, as well as Novice Onsi Mangkhala (1917–2012), also known as Maha Onsi, from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, were brought to Chiang Rai province in Thailand (see Illustration No. 2.9) by their teachers, Sathu Maha Khamphan and

Sathu Chanthi, for further Buddhist studies.⁵² It is possible that they had connection with a Thai monk, Phra Maha Charun from Vat Benchamabòphit in Bangkok, who came to Luang Prabang and stayed at Vat Mai in Luang Prabang in that same year. Phra Maha Charun was appointed by the Central Thai clergy in Bangkok as second commissioner (Thai: *khanachan tho* คณาจารย์โท) to be in charge of organizing Buddhist education in Chiang Rai province.⁵³ Novice Khamchan and Novice Onsi stayed at Vat Sri Mungmüang in the Chiang Rai district, where the seat of the ecclesiastical provincial governor (Thai: *chao khana changwat*) and the Buddhist school were established. They stayed there only for a few days because they were quite uncomfortable living with Yuan novices⁵⁴ there, who often ate meals at nighttime, a

⁵² One studio portrait of Novice Khamchan and Novice Onsi which they took together in Chiang Rai can be found in Buddhist Archive No. A0803R; the handwriting on the verso of this photograph reads: “ຖອນທີ່ຊຽງຮາຍ ເດືອນ ມິຖຸນາ 1935-2478 ອາຍຸ 15 ປີ ຍັງ 3 ເດືອນ [This photograph] was taken in Chiang Rai during June 1935, [BE] 2478, 3 months before Novice Khamchan turned 15.” The additional information on Achan Maha Onsi Mangkhala found below is based on an interview with him at Vat Suvannakhili in 2009. He was born at Ban Pa Kham in Luang Prabang on April 5, 1918 to Thit Phao (Phia Phanitphon) and Nang Kaenchan of Ban Pa Kham. In 1934, he was ordained as a novice at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram by his preceptor Sathu Chanthi, abbot of Vat Mai. In 1935, he was sent with Novice Khamchan to Chiang Rai province and then later to Bangkok in Thailand, where they stayed together at Vat Benchamabòphit. He finished *nak tham ek* (the third and last level of Buddhist scripture studies) and the third grade of Pali studies, earning him the title *maha* in Maha Onsi Mangkhala. In 1939, he moved to Xaiyabuli province which was under the administration of the kingdom of Thailand (according to Thai-French treaty) at the time, where he stayed at Vat Sisavang and taught Thai. In 1940, he was ordained as a monk at Vat Xangkham in Nan province, and then returned to Luang Prabang, staying at Vat Mai and working as a teacher in the Buddhist school of Luang Prabang. In 1945, he disrobed, and then later married Nang Khamphaeng at Ban Khili, having altogether 11 children. From 1960 to 1975, he worked at the governor’s office and served as a secretary of the governor of Luang Prabang. A good friend, Maha Onsi regularly went to visit Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam, where they discussed various topics regarding religious matters, Sangha administration and Lao Buddhism. Sometimes he even played an important role in giving suggestions to Sathu Nyai Khamchan on religious issues as his private advisor. They travelled together for Buddhist pilgrimages and disseminations both in Laos and Thailand. For example, in 1989, they travelled to Thailand for a pilgrimage as well as sight-seeing, and there they visited many renounced religious sites and tourist attractions, namely, Pattaya, Chonburi province, Rama IX’s garden in Bangkok, Vat Maha That in Phissanulok province, Vat Phrasing, Vat Chedi Luang in Chiang Mai province, Vat Pha That Lampang Luang in Lampang province, and the Golden Triangle in Chiang Rai province. See photographs in Buddhist Archive No. A1603R to A1616R. Maha Onsi Mangkhala was regarded as one of the eminent specialists on the tradition and culture of Luang Prabang, and was greatly respected by the people of Luang Prabang. He died in 2012 at the age of 94. Maha Onsi Mangkhala kindly recounted the details of his life to me at Vat Suvannakhili on 1 April 2009.

⁵³ Sathu Nya Khamchan noted that Phra Maha Charun was a Thai Isan monk (Thai Isan refers to the majority of the minority ethnic group who live in northeastern Thailand and speak a dialect of Lao). In 1935, Phra Maha Charun came to Luang Prabang and stayed at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram where Sathu Chanthi was the abbot. They discussed the Buddhist education system and determined that the monastic education system of Luang Prabang was quite similar to the Thai system; therefore, Phra Maha Charun agreed to receive the student novices from Luang Prabang to study in Chiang Rai where he would be in charge of them during their stay. Phra Maha Charun once sent a photograph which he took together with his disciples, including novices and temple boys, to Sathu Chanthi at Vat Mai in Luang Prabang. Under the photograph, there is a handwritten dedication: “พระมหาจรรณ ป.๕ คณาจารย์โท พร้อมคณะศิษย์ ๑๒ พฤษภาคม ๒๔๗๕ ถวายท่านอาจารย์จันท์ ไว้เป็นที่ระลึก ด้วยความรักและนับถือ [Phra Maha Charun P.5, second commissioner, together with a group of pupils, presented on 12 May [BE] 2479 (AD 1936) to Than Achan Chanthi with love and respect]” (Buddhist Archive No. B0362R).

⁵⁴ Yuan or Tai Yuan refers to one of the Tai-Kadai ethnic groups that has settled in the Lanna region of Southeast Asia, which mainly covers the northern part of Thailand and includes Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, the Shan states of Myanmar, and, in Southern China, Xishuangbanna. Although Yuan Buddhism is of the Theravada sect, it also has some of its origins in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism; therefore, some Yuan monks and novices do

practice strictly forbidden by the Vinaya in Theravada Buddhism and strictly adhered to within the Buddhist tradition of Luang Prabang. Therefore, they left Chiang Rai for Lampang province and stayed at Vat Bunyavat where their teacher, Sathu Chanthi, was staying. During their stay in Lampang, they had the opportunity to travel to Chiang Mai by train in order to meet and pay respects to Khruba Sriwichai⁵⁵, a monk who was known to be a *ton bun* (source of merit) for the Lanna region in northern Thailand. At that time, he was staying at Vat Phrasing in Chiang Mai. Thereafter, they went on a pilgrimage to the significant reliquary stupas in Chiang Mai, Phra That Doi Suthep and Phra That Sri Chòmthong. Phra That Doi Suthep is one of Khruba Sriwichai's famous works and is also a central religious monument in Chiang Mai. Sathu Nyai Khamchan recounted that "at that time, traveling from Lampang to Chiang Mai was possible only by train, and it took one day to travel back and forth, as there were no roads for cars to make the trip. He then returned to Luang Prabang and resided once again at Vat Pa Fang.

In 1936, Sathu Khamphan and Sathu Chanthi brought Novice Khamchan to Lampang to attend the funeral ceremony of Novice Bunma, a Lao student who had been studying there and then died suddenly. After the funeral of Novice Bunma, they travelled by train to Bangkok and stayed at Vat Benchamabòphit where many Lao student monks and novices were quartered so they could pursue their Buddhist studies (see Illustration No. 2.10). Novice Khamchan studied once again the elementary level of both Dhamma studies (Thai: *nak tham tri*)⁵⁶ and Pali grammar, this time passing the examinations for both subjects. In the following year, 1937, he studied the intermediate level of Dhamma studies (Thai: *nak tham tho*), as well as Pali translation into Thai, passing these exams as well. During his stay at Vat Benchamabòphit in Bangkok, Maha Ongsi noted that "while Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a novice, he was quite physically sensitive and his study results were only average, but he

not strictly uphold the Vinaya practice of abstaining from eating during the night. Novices went to their family's house to have dinner in the evening (Watana 2002: 3). In northern Thailand, the Yuan call themselves Khon Müang.

⁵⁵ Khruba Sriwichai (1877–1938) was renowned as a charismatic monk in the northern part of Thailand, being often called a *ton bun* (source of merit), (Cohen 2000). One part of his life history became widely well known in the Sangha communities in the northern Thailand: his traditional practice as a preceptor for ordination ceremonies of monks and novices was in conflict with the new ecclesiastical ordinance of the Thai Sangha established by the Central Thai Clergy in Bangkok (Administrative Ordinance Act of the Clergy, RS 121), for which he was arrested, confined and investigated by the Sangha officials both at the regional level and by central authorities from Bangkok. His biography, entitled *Sara Prawati Khruba Sriwichai nak bun haeng Lanna (The Biography of Khruba Sriwichai, the Holy Man of Lanna)*, was recorded and composed by a renowned Thai scholar, Achan Singkha Wannasai (1920–1980), in 1979. Thereafter, more biographical works like his on charismatic monks were released, such as the M.A. thesis of Sopha Chanamoon in 1991, Issara Treesahakiat in 2011, and others.

⁵⁶ Novice Khamchan's certificate of *nak tham tri* is dated 24 May BE 2480 (AD 1937). At that time, he had yet to receive the certificate for *nak tham tho* due to his immediate departure from Bangkok to Luang Prabang after the completion of his examinations.

compensated his lack of intelligence with strong willpower and discipline” (Onsi 2011: Interview).

6. Leaving the Monastery and Life as a Layman

During the school vacation in late 1937, Novice Khamchan returned to Luang Prabang to visit his family just as the other novices did. Together with Sathu Tan, he traveled by train from Bangkok to Nong Khai, and then took a paddle boat across the Mekong River to Vientiane. From there, they traveled by motor boat to Luang Prabang (Buddhist Archive No. B2483R). At that time, the Mekong River was the only way available through Laos. Before travelling to Luang Prabang, Khamchan wrote a letter to his teacher in Luang Prabang. The following is a part taken from a letter by Novice Khamchan.

ວັດເປັນຈະມະບໍ່ພິດ, ວັນທີ 21 ອົກໂຕບ [ຕຸລາ] 1937. ນະມັດສະການທ່ານອາຈານທີ່ເຄົາລົບຢ່າງສູງ. ຈົດໝາຍຂອງທ່ານອາຈານພ້ອມດ້ວຍເງິນ 5 ພັນຝາກມາໃຫ້ຂີ້ແຜ່ນສຽງນັ້ນ ຂະນ້ອຍໄດ້ຮັບແລ້ວ ຂະນ້ອຍມີຄວາມຍິນດີທີ່ໄດ້ຮັບຈົດໝາຍຂອງທ່ານອາຈານ [...] ຖ້າສອບໄດ້ແລ້ວຂະນ້ອຍແລະສາທູ້ຕົນຈະໄດ້ກັບມາບ້ານພ້ອມກັນເດືອນຍີ່ນີ້ຈະໃຫ້ທ່ານມາເຂົ້າປ່າພີ້. ຂະນ້ອຍມີຄວາມສະບາຍດີ ມີຄວາມຄິດຮອດບ້ານຢູ່ສະເໝີ ຢາກຈະກັບມາທຸກວັນ.

Vat Benchamabòphit, Bangkok, 21 October 1937. Most respected Achan, I have received your letter, together with five *man* (piaster) to be used in the purchasing of records. I was very pleased to have received your letter. [...] After finishing my exams, I, together with Sathu Tan, will return home in the second lunar month. [We] will arrive before it is time to leave to *khao pa* (go on a forest retreat). I am doing fine and miss home as always. Every day I long to return.

(BAD-12-1-1937.001)

Khamchan’s elder sister, Khamxao Phummavong, ran a grocery shop with her husband at Ban Lakkham village selling miscellaneous utensils and fabric. They needed an assistant to help look after the shop, so when Novice Khamchan arrived, they asked him to disrobe. Novice Khamchan decided to disrobe on the second day of the waxing moon of the fourth lunar month of the year BE 2481 (3 March 1938), at the age of 18, thereby becoming Xiang Khamchan Virachit. With this action, his Buddhist studies came to an end for the second time. He was a good salesman and took good care of the shop. When the business started to generate substantial profits, he was sent to Bangkok to buy consumer goods and commodities, as he was, of the three vendors, the one most comfortable with international travel. He traveled for three days by boat from Luang Prabang to Chiang Khong district in Chiang Rai, and then took a train from Chiang Khong to Bangkok (see Illustration No. 2.11).

As a layman, he still maintained an interest in Buddhist teachings, thus engaging in many Buddhist rituals and ceremonies of merit-making. He did not drink, smoke or gamble. He was a delightful shopkeeper, always in a good mood, and often heard lightly singing or chanting the Vessantara Jātaka which he found so captivating. During the three years of his life as a layman, he did such successful business that by 1939 he was able to buy his very own

bicycle.⁵⁷ Back then, anyone who could afford a bicycle was regarded as wealthy. This particular bicycle was imported from Saigon, Vietnam at the price of 65 piaster, and at that time there were only five bicycles in total in Luang Prabang (see Illustration No. 2.12). In 1940, Khamchan became one of the shareholders in the family business. Before re-entering the monastery, this time as a monk, his share in the business had reached 15,000 piaster, but he did not take this money with him to the monastery, instead leaving it to his sister so she could continue running the business. During talks to his disciples in Vat Saen Sukharam, Sathu Nyai Khamchan often proudly claimed that “the purpose of my ordination in monkhood was only for the benefit of gaining merit, not material offerings. If I had wished to do so, I need not have become a monk, my family already had a good standard of living”.

7. Ordination as a Monk

According to Lao tradition, only men who have reached the age of twenty may be ordained as Buddhist monks and stay in the monastery for a period of time to learn and practice Buddhist teachings and Lao traditions. Entry into the monkhood is believed to be an expression of gratitude to one’s parents, particularly to the monk’s mother, who gave birth to him and nourished him. Lao tradition regards a man who had been ordained as a monk as a *khon suk* (trained person), while a man who had never been ordained is referred to as a *khon dip* (untrained person).⁵⁸ Moreover, due to the stress placed on learning and practice by the Buddhist teachings and Lao tradition in general, a monk in the monastery also had the opportunity to be trained in other fields of knowledge necessary in his life as a layman, such as crafts, architecture, and the arts. Therefore, after leaving the monastic community, he became admired and honored by the lay community as a learned person, known as a *thit* (pundit) and/or *achan* (master).

Khamchan Virachit’s grandmother, Nang Khamsuk, wished to see each of her male grandchildren enter the monkhood, saying, “Your brother (Sathu Khamphan) has already been ordained. You should follow his example and stay in the monastery for at least one year” (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2006: Interview). Bowing to the wishes of his grandmother, a person he highly respected, Khamchan decided to be ordained for one year. Nang Khamsuk did not

⁵⁷ The document of their contract of partnership for investing can be located in BAD-12-2-1940.001. Sathu Nyai Khamchan recounted that the amount of 15,000 piaster would have been enough to build five two-floor houses at that time (1940s). One of his photographs, Buddhist Archive No. A0191R, shows him riding on it, and his handwriting on the recto reads: “ເມື່ອປີ 1939 ອາຍຸ 19 ປີ ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດ [In 1939, age 19, Khamchan Virachit].”

⁵⁸ *Khon*: person; *dip*: raw; and *suk*: ripe/cooked. *Khon suk* refers to a man who is trained in Buddhist teachings and has learned the monastic Lao traditions. It is believed that a *khon suk* can distinguish between good and bad. He is said to be calm and docile, and is compared to a piece of clay which can be molded into any form.

only make this request to Khamchan, but also to her other nephew, Khamphay Buppha⁵⁹ (1917–2009). As both of them agreed to her request, they were ordained together at the same ordination ceremony. The ceremony was held on the full moon day of the seventh lunar month of the year BE 2484 (9 June 1941) at Vat Saen Sukharam when Khamchan was 21 years old, with Nang Khamsuk as his sponsor.⁶⁰

On the day of the ordination, both of Nang Khamsuk's grandchildren were dressed in the traditional Lao costume of a white suit and indigo pants. Khamchan can be seen riding on a white horse in a photograph of the *nak*⁶¹ procession, which was prepared and organized by Nang Khamsuk (see Illustration No. 2.13). Their ordination ceremony was presided over by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang, from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, who was also their *upatxa* (Pali: *upajjhā*, preceptor) (see Illustration No. 2.14). Somdet Pha Lukkaeo Silasangvaro, Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela (1901–1987), abbot of Vat Suvannakhili, was their *pha kammavachachan* (Pali:

⁵⁹ Khamphay Buppha, son of Nang Khamphio Buppha, another daughter of Nang Khamsuk, only remained a monk for one year. In the second half of the 1940s, he was involved in the Lao Issara movement against the French return, and later he became an important member of the Lao People's Revolution Party. After the Lao Revolution, he served as the deputy minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao P.D.R between 1975 and 1982.

⁶⁰ The evidence linked to the ordination of Khamchan and Khamphay is composed of Khamchan's ordination certificate and a series of photographs of their ordination process depicting Khamchan and Khamphay with a number of their friends posing in front of the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam, the actual ordination ceremony taking place in the *sim*. For instance, Buddhist Archive No. A3290R shows Khamchan is riding on the white horse under a big umbrella (or *sappathon*) surrounded by his friends; B0650R shows they posted with their relatives, some of them carrying the offerings for the ceremony; and A3995R, both of them sitting on their knees in front their preceptor surrounded by the monks, carrying the robes on their chests, the posture is for requesting the ordination. Another piece of evidence is a copy of *vithi upasombot*, the ordination procedure in book form, the production of which was sponsored by Nang Khamsuk at her own expense and distributed to the monks in commemoration of the ordination of her two beloved nephews. This book was the first publication of the ordination procedure in the Lao language; it was composed by Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto and approved by the Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang. The book contains the following dedication: “ອຸປະສົມບົດວິທີ ນາງພະຍາຫຼວງເມືອງຈັນ (ຄຳສຸກ) ບ້ານຫຼັກຄຳ ພິມແຈກໃນການອຸປະສົມບົດ ຄຳຈັນ ແລະ ຄຳຜາຍ ຫຼານທີ່ຮັກ ນະວັດແສນ ພະນະຄອນຫຼວງພະບາງ ວັນ ຈັນ ເພັງ ເດືອນ ກຸ ພະພຸດທະສັກກະລາດ ໒໔໘໔. ວັນທີ ໙ ຊຸວງ [ມິຖຸນາ] ໑໙໔໑ [This *upasombot vithi* (ordination procedure) was produced by Nang Chao Phaya Luang Müangchan (Khamsuk) of Ban Lakkham village for distribution at the ordination ceremony of her beloved nephews, Khamchan and Khamphay, at Vat Saen, in the capital district of Luang Prabang on Monday, day of the full moon in the seventh lunar month of Buddhist Era 2484, 9 June 1941].”

⁶¹ *Nak* or *naga* is used for a person who will be ordained as a Buddhist monk in Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia. According to the Theravada tradition, the belief in the *naga* related to the Buddhist ordination process refers to a legend of the period of Gautama Buddha. Legend has it that a *naga* (Lao: *nak*, meaning a huge mythical serpent living in the underworld) who was a devout admirer of the Buddha and his teachings once disguised himself as a young male and was ordained as a monk. One night, the magic lost its power and he returned to his natural serpent form, to the horror of his fellow monks. The monks informed the Buddha about the *naga* monk, and after verifying, the Buddha ordered him to disrobe, telling him that as he is now an animal, he is now no longer allowed to be in the monkhood. Due to his great admiration for the teachings of Buddhism, the *naga* sadly request that the Buddha at least use his name, *naga* or *nak*, when referring to a young man who was about to be ordained, thus ensuring that his name would remain of religious significance forever. The Buddha consented, and monks in the pre-ordination phase are still called *nak* to this day.

kammavācācariya, act-announcing teacher), and Sathu Maha Chansuk Panyapaxota (Paññāpajoto) Maha Thela (1908–1986), abbot of Vat Aphay, was their *pha anusavanachan* (Pali: *anusāvanācariya*, ordination-proclaiming teacher). These two senior monks sat to the left and right, respectively, of the preceptor and assisted in carrying out the ordination procedure. The ceremony was attended by 27 other monks presenting as witnesses. The ceremony took two hours, and was finished at 3:30 p.m. Khamchan Virachit was bestowed with the Buddhist epithet “Virachitto” (Pali: *vīracitto*) meaning “one whose mind is full of perseverance and courage.”

As a new monk, he wished to continue his study of Buddhist doctrine, practice and literature. Therefore, shortly after ordination, Pha⁶² Khamchan moved from Vat Saen Sukharam to Vat Pa Fang and stayed with his brother, Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto, abbot of the monastery (see Illustration No. 2.15). While there, he learned the Suttas and the Pātimokkha by heart, and practiced diligently the chanting of the Vessantara Jātaka as well as other works of Buddhist literature, becoming remarkably proficient in all of these subjects. These learning opportunities might help to explain why Pha Khamchan did not remain at Vat Saen Sukharam with his teacher, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan.

8. Positions, Honorary Titles, a Medal and Certificates

8.1 Ecclesiastical Positions

Sathu Nyai Khamchan held his monastic careers since the earliest stage of his monkhood. When his teacher, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, passed away on Thursday, the second day of the eleventh lunar month of BE 2486 (30 September 1943). During the funeral ceremonies, the senior villagers of Ban Lakkham village (present Vat Saen) assembled in the monastery and discussed with great earnest the situation of their abbot, during which time one of the community’s committee members, Achan Maha Khamphan Virachit, suggested that “We don’t need to worry, as Sathu Nyai Khamchan is still alive. We should invite him to stay here and nominate him to be the successor.” His suggestion made everyone relax considerably. Furthermore, Nang Khamsuk, Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s grandmother, came and touched the coffin of the late abbot, asking his physical remains to “please be so kind as to inspire Sathu Khamchan to return to Vat Saen”. After that, they all went to see Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Siphutthabat and invited him to return to Vat Saen as their new abbot. Sathu Nyai

⁶² As a new monk, his preceding honorific was “Pha” or “Chao Mòm”. He then received the honorific “Sathu” after he was invited at the first time of the consecration ceremony or *thelaphisek* in 16 January 1942.

Khamchan moved back to Vat Saen Sukharam on Monday, the second day of the waxing moon in the second lunar month of BE 2487 (7 January 1944).⁶³

Initially, even though he was already the abbot in the monastic community of Vat Saen Sukharam, the Sangha community had only recognized him as an acting abbot as he had not yet been officially appointed by the Sangha. The official appointment was not held until 1949. This might be due to his having only been in the monkhood for three years at the time, making him a *navakabhikkhu* (newly ordained monk of less than five year's stading). Nevertheless, after he began at Vat Saen Sukharam as abbot, Sathu Nyai Khamchan also started his work of constructing the break walls on the West of Vat Saen Sukharm to prevent the flowing of soil, while other constructions that had already been underway were continued. He continued to study Buddhist practice intensively by following his preceptor to practice *thudong* and *vipassana* meditation during forest retreats and to perform the Buddhist festivals. At the same time, he studied the Buddhist teachings even more intensively than before. The construction work left his mind with little free time to think about the secular world, and the thought of disrobing never even occurred to him.

In 1949, he was officially appointed by the Sangha of Luang Prabang as the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam. His certificate of appointment was issued on 14 January 1949. On 4 September 1951, he was appointed to the head of the Sangha of the northern sub-district of Luang Prabang (Lao: *chao khana tasaeng niia* ເຈົ້າຄະນະຕາແສງເໜືອ) which was located in the Xiang Thong area. On 9 June 1953, he was elected by the Sangha of Luang Prabang to serve as the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province (Lao: *chao khana khuaeng* ເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງ) and was officially appointed per a royal declaration by King Sisavang Vong issued on 14 August 1953. He was preceded by Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela who was promoted to the higher position of *chao raxa khana xay* ເຈົ້າລາຊາຄະນະຊ້າຍ (“ecclesiastical chief left hand positon” of the Supreme Patriarch in the highest ecclesiastical level of the clerical hierarchy). Sathu Nyai Khamchan served as *chao khana khuaeng* until 1966. In 1964, he sent a letter to Phaya Phao Panya, the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Lao: *kaxuang thammakan* ກະຊວງທຳມະການ) in Vientiane, notifying the minister of his intention to resign from his position with the following reasons: he had been running Sangha activities in this position for more than 11 years, he was 45 years old, disheartened, and unable to take care of his duties any longer.

However, his request was kept at the Ministry of Religious Affairs for two years for consideration. During these two years, the administrative work was carried out by the deputy

⁶³ Sathu Nyai Khamchan recounted this information to me during an interview with him in 2004.

ecclesiastical provincial governor, Pha Khu Silavisutthi, Sathu Nyai Bunchan Punyasaro.⁶⁴ The Sangha of Luang Prabang did not wish for Sathu Nyai Khamchan to resign, the Supreme Patriarch asking him many times to stay in the position, but Sathu Nyai Khamchan maintained his intent to resign. Phaya Phao Panya also came to see Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam, claiming that as he has just been appointed as the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, if Sathu Nyai Khamchan resigned now, it would be a considerable disfavor to him. Nevertheless, Sathu Nya Khamchan saw his resolution through, and after Sathu Nyai Khamchan's resignation in 1966, Sathu Nyai Fan Tissavangsa Thela, abbot of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, the secretary of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos, was appointed as ecclesiastical provincial governor, a position which he held until 1975 (One Keo and Khamvone 2010: 100).

Following the Lao revolution in 1975, the organization of the Sangha of Laos (Lao: *ongkan song haeng pha raxa anachak Lao* ອົງການສົງແຫ່ງພະລາຊະອານາຈັກລາວ) was dissolved to subscribe to the new regime's ideology which was predominately governed by communism. In 1976, the senior monks who were involved in the Pathet Lao movement, which was led by Pha Achan Khamtan Thepbuali, chairman of the Sangha organization, founded the new Lao Sangha Organization known as the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos (BFOL) (Lao: *ongkan phuttha sasana samphan haeng pathet lao* ອົງການພູດທະສາສະໜາສໍາພັນແຫ່ງປະເທດລາວ).⁶⁵ Sathu Nyai Khamchan was elected by the Sangha of Luang Prabang as the chairman of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Luang Prabang province,⁶⁶ a position he maintained until his passing on 9 July 2007.

In 1987, the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization in Vientiane considered whether to offer Sathu Nyai Khamchan a seat in their office at Vat That Luang Nua as a committee member of LBFO. The Sangha of Luang Prabang, led by Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitto, deputy chairman of the Luang Prabang branch of LBFO, together with other twelve senior monks of Luang Prabang, held a critical meeting on 5 June 1987 at Vat Xiang Muan Vajiramagkhalaram to consider the issue. The resolution of the meeting was that Sathu Nyai Khamchan should not be offered the position, the three reasons for which are clear from the following quote:

໑. ພວກເຮົາຂາດຜູ້ຊົງຄຸນນະວຸດທິ ແລະ ຜູ້ຊີ້ນໍາ ນໍາພາຢູ່ໃນອົງການຂອງພວກເຮົາ, ກ່ຽວກັບຄວາມເປັນລະບຽບຮຽບຮ້ອຍພາຍໃນແຂວງ.
໒. ໃນໄລຍະປັດຈຸບັນນີ້ ສາທູ່ໃຫຍ່ຄໍາຈັນ ວິລະຈິດໂຕ ມີອາການປ່ຽນແປງທາງດ້ານສຸຂະພາບຂອງເພິ່ນ ເຊັ່ນ ມີອາການອ່ອນເພຍ ແລະ

⁶⁴ Later known as Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitto (1920–1996), abbot of Vat Xiang Muan Vajiramagkhalaram, see a full biography of Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitto in Kongdeuane et al., 2012. *Pha Bunchankaeo Phothichitto and Lao Philology*. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing.

⁶⁵ Later known as the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization or LBFO (Lao: *ongkan phutthasasana samphan Lao* ອົງການພູດທະສາສະໜາສໍາພັນລາວ).

⁶⁶ The certificate of appointment was issued on 3 April 1976 and signed by Pha Maha Khamtan Thepbuali, chairman of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos.

ຊຸດໂຊມຫລາຍ, ອາຍຸວັດສາກໍ່ແກ່ ທັງຂາດຄວາມຊຶງຈໍາອີກດ້ວຍ. ໓. ພວກເຮົາ ຂາດເຂົນຜູ້ທີ່ຈະປຶກສາຫາລື ກ່ຽວກັບກິດປະໂຫຍດ ອັນສໍາຄັນທາງພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ຢູ່ພາຍໃນແຂວງຂອງພວກເຮົາ.

1. We lack seniority and leadership in our Sangha organization regarding inner-provincial organization 2. At present, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's health conditions are changing; he is very weak and decrepit. He is of old age and is also losing his memory. 3. We lack senior advisors to be consulted on matters of advancing the Buddhist society in our province.

(BAD-12-2-1987.025)

As a result of this meeting, Sathu Nyai Khamchan did not become a representative of the LBFO office in Vientiane. Nevertheless, the fact that he was considered for the position reflects his prominent reputation in the Luang Prabang Sangha community as they guarded him and really needed him exiting in Luang Prabang as their leader. However, as the second reason as stated above, demonstrates that Sathu Nyai Khamchan was seriously ill at the time. In August 1987, the Sangha of Luang Prabang led by Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitto, organized a special ceremony for Sathu Nyai Khamchan, which was called “*sut thòt phayat and tò ayu*” (the chant for dispelling deceases and prolonging life)⁶⁷ in order to help him recover. The ceremony took place in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam on 7 August 1987, and was presided over by Sathu Nyai Phummi from Vat Nòng Si Khunmüang. The invitation was made by Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo to invite monks to attend the ceremony, stating that “ທັງນີ້ ກໍ່ ເພື່ອເປັນການສະແດງຄວາມກະຕັນຍູກະຕະເວທິຕາຄຸນຕໍ່ຄູບາອາຈານຂອງພວກເຮົາ [To do this is in order to present our gratefulness to our master]” (BAD-12-2-1987.10). The following years, Sathu Nyai Khamchan recovered and became healthy again.

8.2 Honorific Titles

In 1959, as the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province, Sathu Nyai Khamchan received the Buddhist honorific title Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhun from King Sisavang Vong (Khamvone et al. 2006: 45). This title was established by the king for monks holding the status of ecclesiastical provincial governor, with each province only appointing two monks for this position (BAD-12-2-1957.009). To present the honorific title, the royal *thelaphisek* (Pali: *therabhiseka*) ceremony was performed and the symbolic object of an embroidered monk fan and its stand (Lao: *talapat* or *talabat*) was presented (see Museum No. VSS_001273 and 001365).

In 2002, the National Peace Assembly and the government of the Union of Myanmar presented Sathu Nyai Khamchan with the grand Buddhist religious title Agga Maha

⁶⁷ The main Sutta used for the kind of this ceremony is *satta bojjangā* (the seven factors of enlightenment). It was believed that the Buddha used to preach this Sutta to his disciples, Venerable Maha Kassapa Thera and Venerable Moggalana Thera, when they were suffering from illness. After listening to the Sutta from the Buddha, both of them recovered. In Laos, this ceremony is still organized for a person who has a serious illness.

Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja (the Great Noble of the Shining Teacher)⁶⁸ (see Illustration No. 2.16). The presentation ceremony took place in Mahapasana Cave in the Kaba Aye Estate of Rangoon on 28 March 2002.⁶⁹ As stated in the official document of the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, this religious title was conferred to Sathu Nyai Khamchan in recognition of his contributions to the purification, preservation, and propagation of Buddhist teachings.

Subsequently, the Sangha of Luang Prabang, in collaboration with the Central Buddhist Fellowship Organization in Vientiane and the Lao Front for National Construction, coming both from the local government as well as from the headquarters in Vientiane, organized a Buddhist celebration ceremony of the honorary title presented to Sathu Nyai Khamchan. The celebration ceremony took place on 25 May 2002 at Vat Saen Sukharam in the form of a *thelaphisek* with the Lao religious title “Pha Lukkaeo Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja.”⁷⁰ The ceremony was presided over by Pha Achan Maha Phong Samaloek, deputy president of CLBFO, from Vat Ong Tü, Vientiane. On this auspicious occasion, a Lao scholar monk, Pha Xaykham Champauthum, composed and presented the following exaltations in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s honor:

ພະເດັດພະຄຸນສາທຸໂຫຍ່ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະມະຫາເຖລະ ເຈົ້າອາວາດວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ, ປະທານ ອພສ ແຂວງຫຼວງພະບາງ ເປັນພະມະຫາເຖລະທີ່ຈະເລີນດ້ວຍພັນສາຍຸການ ໄວຍາວູດ ຄຸນນະວູດ ແລະ ຄຸນນະທຳ ອົງທ່ານ ໄດ້ບຳເພັນຕົນເພື່ອປະໂຫຍດຕໍ່ພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາແລະພູຄະນະເປັນອະເນກ ພະພິກຂຸສາມະເນນແລະອຸປະສັກອຸປະສັກາ ພ້ອມທັງສິດສານຸສິດ ໄດ້ຍິດຖືເປັນທີ່ເພິ່ງໃຫ້ເກີດຄວາມຮື່ມເຢັນເປັນສຸກ ປຸງປະດູດຕັ້ງຮື່ມໂພຮື່ມໄຊ ທີ່ໃຫ້ຄວາມຮື່ມເຢັນແກ່ພູສະກຸນາ ແລະ ຜູ້ທີ່ເຂົ້າໄປອາໄສສັນໃດ ພະພິກຂຸສາມະເນນແລະ ສິດສານຸສິດ ທີ່ເຂົ້າໄປອາໄສປາລະມິທຳຂອງອົງທ່ານ ຕ່າງກໍໄດ້ຮັບຄວາມຮື່ມເຢັນເປັນສຸກເຊັ່ນດຽວກັນ ໂດຍປາສະຈາກ ການເລືອກທີ່ຮັກມັກທີ່ຊັງ ກໍໃຫ້ເກີດປະໂຫຍດຕໍ່ມວນມະນຸດ ໂດຍບໍ່ໄດ້ຫວັງຜົນຕອບແທນໃດ ໆ. [...] ສາທຸໂຫຍ່ເປັນສະມະນະທີ່ເລັ່ງຄັດໃນພະທຳວິໄນ ແລະ ວັດປະຕິບັດຂອງບັນພະຊິດ ເປັນຜູ້ຈະເລີນໃນທຳຢ່າງແທ້ຈິງ. ເພິ່ນມຸ່ງໝັ້ນເຜີຍແຜ່ທຳມະ ຕາມວິຖີທາງທີ່ຖືກຕ້ອງ ແລະ ມຸ່ງສອນໃຫ້ພຸດທະສາສະນິກະຊົນ ລະເວັ້ນຄວາມຊົ່ວ ປະກອບກຳຄິ ມີສຳມາປະຕິບັດໃນກິດທັງປວງ ຍືດໝັ້ນໃນອະລິຍະສັດສີ່ ເຊິ່ງຈະນ້ອມນຳຜູ້ປະພຶດປະຕິບັດໃຫ້ເຖິງພ້ອມ ເຊິ່ງປັນຍາອັນຈະນຳຄວາມສຸກສະຫງົບ ມາສູ່ສັງຄົມປະເທດແລະສັງຄົມໂລກ [...]

His holiness, Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, chairman of LBFO of Luang Prabang province, is a senior monk who is advanced in his monkhood, experience, qualifications, and moral conduct. He has done much to benefit Lao Buddhism and the Sangha community. Monks, novices, *upasok* and *upasika* [male and female devotees] have adhered to his teachings as their spiritual refuge which gives them peacefulness and happiness like a banyan providing shade to all the different kinds of birds that live there. Monks, novices and disciples who turn to his *palamitham* (Dharmic charisma) for guidance receive happiness in return. [Sathu Nyai’s actions are the same regardless of person and he helps] without bias, hoping for nothing in return, benefiting all of human kind. [...] He is a monk who

⁶⁸ Later, this religious title has been presented to other Lao senior monks, such as to Pha Achan Maha Ngòn Damrongbun, abbot of Vat Nyaisaiyaphum in Savannakhet province, and, more recently in 2014, to Pha Achan Vet Masenai, abbot of Vat Sisaket and deputy chairman of the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization in Vientiane.

⁶⁹ An official document from the “Government of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Religious Affairs” to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam, dated 22 January 2002. This document has yet to be given an archive number as processing is still underway.

⁷⁰ The certificate of the Lao religious title signed by Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singharat, the president of the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization, on 10 July 2002 (Khamvone et al. 2004: 38).

strictly upholds the Dhamma, Vinaya and monastic religious routines. [Thus] his knowledge of the Dharma flourishes in magnitude. He has strived to disseminate the Dhamma using right and proper means, his teachings aiming to instruct lay Buddhists to abstain from all forms of evil, to perform only good deeds and to have correct views when practicing and adhering to the duties of the Four Noble Truths, into which the practitioners will receive insight, [thereby] bringing peace to the society, the nation and the world [...]

(BAD-12-2-2002.002)

In addition, the *Vientiane Times*, which is one of Lao's most popular world-wide newspapers in Lao and English, posted a short blurb on this event. The following is a quote from the newspaper:

Ven. Khamchanh receives highest Myanmar title: The Most Venerable Achan Khamchanh Virachitto, President of the Luang Prabang branch of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Association and member of its National Board, has received the highest Buddhist title of the Union of Myanmar. At a ceremony held in Yangon on March 28, Sadhu Khamchanh [Sathu Nyai Khamchan], who is the respected Abbot of Vat Saensouk Aram in Luang Prabang, was made Akha Maha Saddhamma Sotika Thasa by the head of the Myanmar Buddhist clergy for his excellence in Buddhist studies and practices. Sadhu Khamchanh, 82, was the only foreign monk to receive the distinction. All other recipients were from the Myanmar clergy and all of them were over 80 year-old scholars. With the certificate, Sadhu Khamchanh also received a golden banner and a ceremonial umbrella. "This distinction is a great honour for the whole Lao clergy and all the Buddhists in Laos. It is also a strong encouragement for me to continue Buddhist studies," the Venerable monk said. Pha Achan Khamchanh Virachitto presided over all the religious ceremonies during Lao New Year in Luang Prabang including the two *hae vô* processions and the Phabang procession and ablutions.⁷¹

This event was meaningful not only for Sathu Nyai Khamchan but also for the Lao Sangha, especially the Sangha of Luang Prabang. It reflected his long standing of more than sixty years in the monkhood and was the recognition of his reputation in the international society for his strict practice of the Dhamma and Vinaya as well as his other works supporting and propagating Buddhism.

8.3 A Medal and Exaltation Certificates

Medals and exaltation certificates (Lao: *bai yòngyò*), has been popularly presented by state officers to the people, officials, and monks who have done great works bringing about societal advancements on a broad scale. Medals are mostly presented by political figures such as prime minister or president for great contributions to the state, society, and the environment at both local and international levels. Exaltation certificates are issued by village heads, district chiefs, governors and ministers for other contributions at the local or ministerial levels. Sathu Nyai Khamchan contributed a lot of money to abbots in support of their monastic construction work as well as to Buddhist schools, and donated medicine and other necessary supplies to

⁷¹ "Arts & Culture: Ven. Khamchanh receives highest Myanmar title", *Vientiane Times*, 16. 23–25 April, 2002.

hospitals. Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself received a medal as well as many exaltation certificates, as shown below.

In 1988, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was awarded a labor medal of the third highest rank from the president of the Lao P.D.R. for his contributions to the public good. The medal was presented by President Prince Souphanouvong on 17 November 1988 in Vientiane. In 2002, he received an exaltation certificate from the Minister of the Ministry of Education of the Lao P.D.R. for his contributions to Buddhist education as well as his high-quality contributions within the community. The certificate was signed by Minister Phimmason Leuangkhamma on 14 November 2002.

In 2003, he received an exaltation certificate from the Prime Minister of the Lao P.D.R. for his financial support of the construction of the Dhamma assembly building (Lao: *hò thamma sapha*) at Vat That Luang, Vientiane. The certificate was signed by Prime Minister Bounyang Volachit on 17 February 2003.

In 2006, he received a *bai anumothana* (donation certificate) from the president of the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization for his financial support of 9,300,000 Kip for the construction of the Dhamma assembly building. The certificate was signed by the President of the CLBFO, Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singharat and the governor of Vientiane capital, Bunheuang Duangphachan (the date is missing), (see Khamvone et al. 2006: 99).

8.4 Thelaphisek Ceremony

The *thelaphisek* ceremony, also known as *bun kòng hot* ບຸນກອງຫິດ, is Buddhist ceremony for the veneration of the monks which is organized by lay Buddhists to promote and celebrate the monks, so as to pay their respects to, support and encourage the monk to remain in the Sangha community forever, disseminating the Buddhist teachings. The term literally refers to the watering ritual and the offering of new robes to the monk. This ceremony is popularly organized in the Theravada countries in Southeast Asia.

According to the ancient Lao tradition, this ceremony was held for a monk upon whom an advanced monastic title was conferred by the royal court or government, meaning it was and still is regarded as an important and sacred ceremony. In general, monks who are honored in a *thelaphisek* ceremony have to have been in the monkhood for at least five years. However, the case of Sathu Nyai Khamchan was an exception to this rule, as a *thelaphisek* ceremony was held for him after having been ordained as a monk for only seven months. This must be at least partially due to the fact that choosing suitable monks for the *thelaphisek* was not only dictated by the number of years one had been in the monkhood, but rather by one's diligence and discipline in the practice of rituals and study of the Vinaya. It is this aspect which caught the attention of and most impressed those in charge of scheduling such

ceremonies of honor, which also included lay Buddhists. Therefore, his lay supporters and their faith in him seems to be that which got him noticed as a great monk.

As appearing in the collection of *thelaphisek* certificates compiled in numerical order by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself, the first *thelaphisek* in his honor was held a Vat Pa Phay in the Pak Xaeng district of Luang Prabang on 16 January 1942, the ceremony sponsored by Saen Khan-amat (also known as Xiang Khian)⁷², headman of the sub-district of Ban Pa Phay village. The last such ceremony held in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's honor took place on 8 June 2007, one month before his passing. In total, there are 493 certificates. As far as I have been able to determine, there have been no monks in the country of Laos, either past or present, who have received comparable numbers of invitations to *thelaphisek* ceremonies. This clearly indicates the faith of the lay Buddhists of Luang Prabang and Laos in general in Sathu Nyai Khamchan, also indicating his followers' adherence to his teachings. I will describe the *thelaphisek* ceremony in detail in Chapter 4.

9. Accused by Local Officers of Supporting the Lao Issara⁷³

Concerning the reoccupation of Laos by French in 1946, there was an intervention by the Lao Issara (Free Laos) government led by Prince Phetsarat Rattnavongsa that involved mostly high-ranking officers as well as other people in Luang Prabang, some of whom were Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives, one among them being Achan Maha Khamphan. For this reason, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was under surveillance by French officers as well as French loyalist Lao officers. In 1995, Sathu Nyai Khamchan told his story to the monks and novices of his being accused of resistance to the French return, a time during which I myself was a novice and thereby able to attend these story-tellings.

The matter arose during the reconstruction of the brick walls around the temple of Vat Saen in 1948⁷⁴, the task was reported to the French governor-general, or *résident supérieur*, of Luang Prabang, by an unidentified officer, who claimed Sathu Nyai Khamchan was

⁷² Xiang Khian was the father of Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan who was Sathu Nya Khamchan's foster child whom I will describe in the next chapter.

⁷³ The name given to the movement opposing the return of Laos to French jurisdiction. Its guiding force was Prince Phetsarat who proclaimed the continued independence of Laos after King Sisavang Vong agreed to return the country to the protection of France. The Lao Issara seized power following the Japanese surrender in August 1945, formed a government, and ran the country for the next six months. Members of the government and their supporters were forced to flee to Thailand, however, when the French reoccupied Laos in March and April 1946. From exile in Bangkok, the movement continued its diplomatic offensive and military operations against the French (Stuart-Fox 1996: 172).

⁷⁴ A proposal of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, BAD-12-2-1948.008 submitted to the governor of the district of Luang Prabang on 21 October 1948 for permission to build the breakwall in the southern of Vat Saen Sukharam and the governor signed and stamped on the document dedicated his approval.

reconstructing the brick walls with the purpose of embedding timed explosives into them, as he was a leftist and a supporter of the Lao Issara Movement, seeing as his brother Achan Maha Khamphan had already become involved with the movement. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was summoned for an investigation by the governor-general at his office in Luang Prabang. During this first interrogation, the governor-general asked him gruffly, “So, are you or are you not constructing the brick walls at your temple with the purpose of embedding timed explosives?” and “are you or are you not giving support to the Lao Issara Movement?” Sathu Nyai Khamchan did not answer the questions by saying “Yes” or “No”, as either answer would have been equally dangerous. Instead, he replied with, “You know better than anyone else whether I did or did not this, as you have subordinates throughout the city working for you. I am a monk and native of this city. I am always in my temple, never having moved or fled to any other place. If you have any evidence indicating that I have done and am doing as you have accused, then punish me”. Upon hearing this, the governor-general said “that being said, you have not committed these crimes”. Sathu Nyai Khamchan said “No, you should say like that meaning I am doing as accused”. And then the governor-general said “Well, I know you are a good person”. Sathu Nyai Khamchan then replied that if that is the case, then his punishment did not depend on his innocence or guilt in the matter of inquiry.

Another story which related to Sathu Nyai Khamchan was accused by a local officer of following the other cultural architecture in building of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam. After the completion of the first phase in the reconstruction work of the *sim*. The new *sim* created in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s unique style contained a mix of the ancient and modern Lao styles, was taller than the original one, and looked similar to the Vientiane or Thai styles, with the roof covered by the enameled tiles from Thailand. This led to misunderstandings on the part of the architects in Luang Prabang. Phia Phay from Ban Vat Saen, who served as an advisor to King Sisavang Vatthana, reported to the king that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had renovated the new *sim* in the Thai style; this eventually led to the palace withdrawing its support as the king was not impressed by the project at all. However, one day, in 1960, King Sisavang Vatthana went to Vat Xiang Thong, and it is assumed that on the way to Xiang Thong he must have passed by Vat Saen Sukharam. During the return trip, the king stopped at Vat Saen Sukharam and entered the *sim* during a time at which Sathu Nyai Khamchan was not present at his monastery. The king arrived, sat down and looked around, observing the temple’s interior decoration scheme, and then left without saying anything.

Later, the king called for a royal Buddhist ceremony at his palace. The abbots of all monasteries in Luang Prabang were invited to attend this ceremony, which Sathu Nyai Khamchan also attended. At the end of the ceremony, the king came over to talk to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, saying that, “ສາທຸຄໍາຈັນ ວັດງາມຫຼາຍ! (Sathu Khamchan, your monastery is very beautiful!)” He then asked him from where he had taken the decorative patterns, to which

Sathu Nyai Khamchan answered, “They mostly have been taken from monasteries in Laos”. This very much impressed the king, upon which he then asked “What are you doing now?” Sathu Nyai Khamchan answered, “Due to fatigue, I am not doing anything”, to which the king replied, “When you are feeling better, continue your work, and if you need any support, let me know”. If this accuse were true, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Vat Saen Sukharam would confront a problem as the king would get angry and ordered to change the structure of the *sim*. I will describe more details of this aspect in Chapter 3.

10. Kitchavat (Monastic Routines)

The lives of monks and novices in monasteries follow monastic routines (Lao: *kitchavat* ກິດຈະ ວັດ) based on the rules of the monastic community, consisting of ten practices. Most of them are carried out in daily practice, while some are practiced over a fortnight, and others are practiced over a month or an entire year. These ten monastic routines are simple and not too difficult to observe, but the regular and complete observance of them is not archived to have been practiced by every monk or followed by every monastery. There are many reasons why the monks stray from following their routines, such as ignorance, negligence, slackening of discipline, etc. During Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s lifetime, Vat Saen Sukharam was well known for strictly upholding monastic regulations, as monks and novices had to regularly attend the morning and evening chantings, be properly dressed, learn the Suttas by heart at night, ask for the abbot’s permission before leaving the monastic quarters, etc. Sathu Nyai Khamchan has been recognized and remembered by the Sangha of Luang Prabang not only as a leading monk but also as a strict follower of the *kitchavat*. All of the *kitchavat* that Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly practiced are detailed below, from daily practices to bi-weekly, monthly, and annual practices, respectively.

Waipha sutmon – payment of homage to the Buddha and chanting of the Suttas⁷⁵. Sathu Nyai Khamchan considered this to be one of the most important daily activities for monks and novices in the monastery. In the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam, the monks and novices practiced this routine twice a day in the early morning from 4:00 to 5:00 a.m., with 30 minutes for chanting and 30 minutes for meditating. In the afternoon, they gathered in the large *sala*

⁷⁵ The benefits of chanting, as listed in the chanting book of Suan Mokkh International, the temple founded by a Thai senior monk known for his Buddhist philosophies, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, are as follows: Settles and calms the restless or agitated mind; Mindfulness training: must be alert, nimble and attentive to avoid making mistakes; Concentration training: focus the mind on the words and their meaning; Wisdom training: deepen the understanding of the teachings, which can eventually become direct realization; Develops confidence through familiarity and reflection; Cultivates energy, joy and patience, as well as endurance; Develops friendliness towards all beings; Fills the mind with skillful, beneficial thoughts, so that low and impure thoughts can not enter; Prepares the mind and body for meditation; Helps in the dedication of one’s life to spiritual practice (Suan Mokkh International 2012: 2).

(pavilion) at 5:30 p.m. for one hour of evening chanting. The chanting ceremony was conducted by monks and novices sitting in line, bringing their hands together at the chest, paying homage to the Triple Gem, and chanting the Suttas, either by heart or from chanting books for new novices. It is mandatory for monks and novice to learn the Sutta by heart and be able to chant them from their own memory. Following the chanting, Sathu Nyai Khamchan often discussed the Dhamma and Vinaya, so as to guide and provide Dhammic instruction to his disciples. During his talks, Sathu Nyai Khamchan pointed out that, “We do not have anything to give in return to the lay people who provide us with the four requisites. What we must do, therefore, is practice the *wai pha sut mon* and *phavana* (meditation), in order to share with them our good deeds”.

Sadaeng abat (Pali: *āpattidesanā* – the confession of an offence; to confess an offence). As a monk must observe 227 precepts in order to remain pure, the *sadaeng abat* is a ritual of purification. The offences that bhikkhus can confess are only the lighter offences such as *aniyata* 2, *nissaggiya pācittiya* 30, *pācittiya* 92, *pātidesanīya* 4, and *sekhiya* 75 (see Berger 2010: 65–78). The heavy offences such as *pārājika* 4 and *sanghādisesa* 13 cannot be purified by the *sadaeng abat*. Any *bhikkhu* using violence against any member of the *pārājika* must disclose this act and immediately disrobe, meaning his complete loss of his status as a monk, being forbidden from reordaining as a monk in his lifetime. Any *bhikkhu* who uses violence against a member of the *sanghādisesa* can be purified by disclosing this act to the Sangha and practicing a type of *mānatta* (penance) in *parivāsakamma* practice. The procedure of the *sadaeng abat* is conducted by two monks sitting on their knees in front of each other, both confessing in Pali any of their offences against the Vinaya. The younger monk confesses his offences first, after which the older monk does the same. The monks are supposed to practice the *sadaeng abat* on *uposot* days at least twice a month before listening to the *pātimokkha* recitation, but in Luang Prabang, monks uphold this practice everyday, both in the morning and evening, a practice which Sathu Nyai Khamchan also conducted daily, once after chanting in the morning and once again after the evening chants.

Binthabat (Pali: *piṇḍapāta*) – to gather alms. Generally, at 6:00 a.m., signalled by the sound of *kalò* (wooden bell)⁷⁶, monks and novices would line up in order, dressed in yellow robes and carrying alms-bowls at their bellies by a string, awaiting Sathu Nyai Khamchan in front of his abode. Sathu Nyai Khamchan usually came out about five minutes after the ringing of the wooden bell, so as to allow for maximum attendance. Then, he would walk up and down each line of monks or novices for the duration of one hour. After this, he departed

⁷⁶ *Kalò* is a local term meaning a wooden bell made by excavating and decorating a log with a length of 2 meters and diameter of 50 centimeters. It is struck in the morning as the signal for *binthabat* and again at 10:30 a.m. as the signal for people to bring food to the monastery for the monks’ lunch. The *kalò* is still used in Laos and in the northeastern part of Thailand or Isān.

from the group of monks and novices at Vat Saen Sukharam, then continuing the practice with other groups from other monasteries in the Xiang Thong area. The lay Buddhists would line the streets holding the bamboo boxes of sticky rice (Lao: *aep khao* or *kòng khao* ແອບເຂົ້າ ຫຼື ກ່ອງເຂົ້າ), the women kneeling and the men either standing or kneeling (see Illustration No. 2.20). It is important that they do not wear shoes and hats during this process. They present the monks and novices who pass by with sticky rice by shaping it into small-sized balls and placing the balls into the alms-bowls. Every day for 66 years, throughout the entirety of his stay in the monkhood, Sathu Nyai Khamchan engaged in this monastic practice, something which was not considered common for a senior monk in such a high position. Somebody once said to him “you do not need to go for alms-collecting because the people will bring you rice and food to the monastery”. He replied: “It is our duty. As the Buddha told us to do so, we must carry out this duty. Walking in the morning is good exercise.”⁷⁷

The *binthabat* is considered by the Lao people to be a method of daily merit-making, which is important because they believe individual actions in one’s life will affect their overall spirituality and ultimately determine their karma for future reincarnations along the path to enlightenment (Kislenko 2009: 59). It is the most basic and popular form of making merit for Lao Buddhists, as by giving the monks rice and food, they also gain merit in return. The Lao believe that seeing the monks walking around their communities in the morning to collect their alms is an auspicious sign, as the monks represent one part of the Triple Gem, and it signifies direct interaction between monks and lay people. By giving alms to the monks, the people are granted a chance to make merit for themselves, as well as to support Buddhism through their support of the monks. Lao Buddhists believe that “giving is receiving, and the more one gives, the more one receives”. This means once we have given something, we shall then receive something which brings us happiness. This gift-giving nature has earned the Lao a reputation as being welcoming and generous hosts. Nowadays, Luang Prabang is well known as a city where hundreds of monks and novices from various monasteries walk through the streets collecting alms every morning. The ancient practice of *binthabat* has even become a tourist attraction, often drawing curious travelers to watch and sometimes join in the practice (see Illustration No. 2.19).

Phicharana (Pali: *paccavekhana*)⁷⁸ – the consideration of the four requisites before using them. The livelihood of monks depends on the lay people for the four material

⁷⁷ Sathu Nyai Khamchan recounted this to me while we were discussing *binthabat* at his abode in Vat Saen Sukharam in 2004.

⁷⁸ The consideration of robes: mostly done during morning and evening chanting. The consideration of robes: wisely reflecting, I use the robe: only to ward off the cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, burning and creeping things, and for the sake of modesty. The consideration of alms: wisely reflecting, I use the alms: not for fun, not for pleasure, not for fattening, not for beautification, but rather only for the maintenance and nourishment of this body, to keep it healthy, and to aid in the living of the Holy Life; thinking thus, “I will allay hunger without overeating, so that I may continue to live blamelessly and at ease.”

necessities, known as the four requisites, which consist of robes, food, lodging and medicine. Sathu Nyai Khamchan realized the importance of this practice and, before having breakfast, he reflected on these requisites by reciting the corresponding chapter in Pali, and also by blessing the lay people who offered him food.

Sūksa thamma vinai – the study of the Dhamma (doctrine) and the Vinaya (code of discipline) is one of the three main duties monks must uphold, those being the *pariyat* (study of the scriptures), *patibat* (the practice of the true doctrine) and *pativet* (insight and knowledge). According to the Buddhist tradition, monks must first learn or study from their teachers or from manuscripts and books about the correct practice of the Buddha’s teachings. Once sufficient knowledge has been acquired through study, he will begin to see the results of this study in his actual practice. Sathu Nya Khamchan was one of the Lao intellectuals who was well trained in both Buddhism and Lao history, especially in matters related to the Buddhist history of Luang Prabang. Whenever he had free time, he would read books, magazines, manuscripts and documents, most of which were related to Buddhist teachings, monastic disciplines and religious rituals. Particularly, during the three-month period of Buddhist lent, he regularly lectured on the Dhamma and Vinaya to his disciples after the evening chants. In his talks, he often emphasized that “if you do not learn, you may not know; if you do not know, you may make mistakes because of unawareness; and if you make mistakes, then that is wrong-doing”. In order to support the study of Buddhist scripture, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had many copies of Dhamma and Vinaya books produced in Lao versions, often composing or transliterating them himself from Tham-Lao manuscripts or Thai books and then distributing them to monks and novices for free as Dhamma gifts.

Haksa Phakhong – to keep the three robes of a monk always close during the night and wear them in the early morning. The *ticīvarā* consists of the under robe (*sa bong*), the upper robe (*chivòn*) and the outer robe (*sangkha* or *sangkhati*). According to the Buddhist tradition, and as mentioned in the Vinaya, a monk has to keep these robes close to him at night, and wear them in the early morning. Sathu Nyai Khamchan kept these three robes with him wherever he went. He wore them in the early morning for chanting, changing the robes before going for alms-collecting and again in the afternoon for evening chanting. He wore his robes in the proper fashion and kept them in good condition at all times. For this reason, he was a model for the traditional dress of monks in Luang Prabang. Once, he saw a group of novices walking on the street not wearing their robes in the correct way, upon which he asked his driver to stop the car; he spoke to the young novices and directed them to “please dress in the

The consideration of lodging: wisely reflecting, I use the lodging: only to ward off the cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, burning and creeping things, for protection from dangerous weather, and to promote a life of seclusion. The consideration of medicine: wisely reflecting, I use aids to the sick and medicinal requisites: only to ward off painful feelings that have arisen for maximum freedom from disease (Amaravati 2006: 44).

appropriate and correct way”.⁷⁹ He translated and published Part I of the Vinaya book, and in between the chapters he inserted images of a monk dressed in the correct way to serve as an example.

Kuat vihan lan chedi – cleaning the monastic buildings and grounds. As the monastery is a religious site highly respected by Buddhists, the physical maintenance of the monastic buildings and grounds is imperative. Sathu Nyai Khamchan, a monk who loved cleanliness and orderliness, realized the importance of this matter. During his lifetime, Vat Saen Sukharam was always very clean and pleasant for its visitors, because every morning and afternoon monks and novices had to sweep the yard and places of worship in the monastery. He used to walk around to monitor the cleanliness; if he saw a place which was dirty or cluttered, he would immediately give an order to a novice or a monk to take care of the matter.

Uposot (Pali: *uposatha*, biweekly recitation of the Vinaya rules by a chapter of Buddhist monks) – twice a month, on *uposot* days, the fifteenth day of the waxing and waning moon, the monks meet in the temple hall for the obligatory recitation of the *pātimokkha*, “the fundamental precepts”. These 227 precepts are binding rules for the *bhikkhus*. Sathu Nyai Khamchan organized and presided over that ceremony in Vat Saen Sukharam and sometimes recited the text himself (see Illustration No. 2.17). Since the 1990s onwards, at 8:30 a.m. on the *uposot* days, at the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam, a number of monks from various temples in Luang Prabang assembled to hear the *pātimokkha* recitation recited by Sathu Nyai Mao Manivangsa Maha Thela (1921–2001) from Vat Xiang Thong and in the early 2000s by Sathu Nyai Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela from Vat Phukhouay Phokharam (see Illustration No. 2.18), a ritual over which Sathu Nyai Khamchan presided. The reciting monk sat on a *thammat* (preaching pedestal) which was placed in the middle of the assembly of the monks, and recited at a quick pace. The recitation took at least 35 minutes, and to ensure accuracy, he had an assistant monk, Sathu Nyai Thongsuk Suchinna Maha Thela, who was a specialist on the Tham-Lao script in which the book was inscribed, sitting beside him, following along and quickly correcting any mistakes the reciting monk might make. Following the recitation, Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave talks during which he explained in more detail the content of the *pātimokkha*, reminding the monks to be aware of their practice of the Vinaya. In addition, Sathu Nyai Khamchan established a manuscript of the *pātimokkha* in Tham-Lao script which he compiled from various sections of ancient palm-leaf manuscripts in Luang Prabang. The *pātimokkha* was published in the form of a mulberry paper leporello manuscript and distributed throughout the country by the ministry of Religious Affairs in BE 2504 (AD 1961). I will provide more details on this manuscript in chapter 4.

⁷⁹ Interviewed Khampom Phongsavan, one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s close disciples at Vat Pa Pha O, Luang Prabang in March 2013.

Thae phom tat lep – to shave the hair and beard as well as cut the nails. Monks and novices should keep their hair and nails short. Normally, they shave their head once a month on the fourteenth day of the waxing moon of the lunar month, called *van kon* (shaving day). In ancient times, they shaved their heads with a small knife (see Museum No. VSS_000762) that was unwieldier than a razor – it was common for a monk’s head to bleed while shaving. In the modern days, they use a razor which allows them to get the job done safely and more smoothly. Sathu Nyai Khamchan did this in quite a particular way: while having his head shaved by another monk, he would ask the monk to pull the razor up and down in order to cut the hair off completely. He would examine his head repeatedly during the shaving, and if he felt his hand run across any unsmooth spots with hair remaining he would ask the monk to shave his head one more one time. In general, monks will cut their nails twice a month to keep them short and clean. When a monk or novice came to meet Sathu Nyai Khamchan at his abode for conversation or to ask for help, if he saw that his visitor’s nails were long, he immediately gave him a nail clipper and told him to cut his nails before talking to him. He did this by strictly adhering to the monastic disciplines.

Sadaeng tham vat – preaching sermons at the monastery. In order to uphold and further cultivate the morality of the people, the sermons provided spiritual advice and guidance. Regularly, at 4:30 p.m., on Buddhist holidays (*van pha*) on the eighth and fifteenth of the waxing and waning moons, Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave sermons in the *sim* and then later in the main *sala* (big pavilion) in Vat Saen Sukharm. His audience included monks and novices of the monastery and lay Buddhists from the community around the monastery. On these days, known as *dhammassavana* (the days of hearing the preaching of the Dhamma), the Buddhists would come to assemble in the *sim* or in the *sala* at 4:00 p.m., paying homage to the Buddha and taking part in the chanting. When they finished, they gave a signal by hitting the gong, after which monks and novices in ready dressed in their holy attire came and sat down lined up in rows. Sathu Nyai Khamchan sat on a beautiful decorative pedestal or seat for giving sermons (Lao: *thammat*) and preached by reading texts from palm leaf manuscripts or books containing Buddha’s teachings and religious stories. The texts on the palm leaf manuscripts he read were inscribed in Tham-Lao, Lao or Thai scripts, but he always spoke in Lao. The main Dhamma articles he selected for preaching were *nungkhun xivit* 38 (38 steps towards enlightened living), *phahung* (Pali: *bāhum*, the victory of the Lord Buddha), and the six *disās* or six directions (concerning the various people with whom we come into contact in society and the different directions from which they come). The *sadaeng tham vat* is a way to spread Buddhist teachings. As he found it beneficial for all Buddhists to hear these teachings, Sathu Nyai Khamchan emphasized them, particularly during the three-month period of Buddhist Lent, during which he gave sermons daily.

Khao parivasakam (Pali: *parivāsa* – probation) – a religious retreat ritual of purification. If any *bhikkhu* has violated any of the thirteen articles of the Vinaya on the *sanghādisesa āpatti* (rules detailing an initial and subsequent meeting of the Sangha) (see Berger 2010: 63–65) and then conceals his misconduct, he must be quarantined in a specific place for a length of time equal to the time he concealed the information. He must then declare his misconduct before an assembly of the monks, stating which article of the *sanghādisesa āpatti* he has violated. Next, he requests the Sangha to end his punishment. If his punishment is ended, the Sangha will then recite the declaration of his purification. At present, the practice of *parivasakam* is considered a tradition. It is practiced in groups during a specific period in December for ten days, which is known as *khao parivasakam*. This practice is slightly different from the original as described in the Vinaya. Sathu Nyai Khamchan recounted that nowadays most monks would be too ashamed to confess their misconduct or, due to a lack of knowledge of the Vinaya, might not even be aware of such a confessional practice. *Parivasakam* practiced in groups gave those monks participating an opportunity to purify themselves. Furthermore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan observed that many monks did not know how to practice *parivasakam* properly. He also established the tradition of *parivasakam* in groups with the goal of teaching them proper practice. It is often combined with the practice of *thudong* (see illustration No. 2.22). Since 1941, his first year of monkhood, he had been trained in meditation by his preceptor, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela. As the leading monk of the Sangha in the 1990s, he established *parivasakam* as a regular annual ritual in December at Vat Pa Phon Phao Vanaram (see Illustration No. 2.21). This practice is still followed by the Sangha of Luang Prabang in the present day.

In the Lao tradition, even though the *kitchavat* is thought to exist mainly for the monastic community and to be followed only by monks and novices, some of these practices clearly and closely involve the participation of lay people, especially *binthabat*. The *kitcavat* outlines the normal rules every monk has to follow; however, everyday practice is often not so easy. A monk who can regularly follow these rules is considered a monk of good standing, and through his conduct he will gain the faith of the Buddhists laity.⁸⁰ By practicing this religious routine regularly, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was highly respected by both the Sangha and the lay people, particularly in Luang Prabang, but also in the rest of Laos as well. During his time in the monkhood, he was invited to *thelabhiseka* ceremonies on 493 occasions. In that aspect, he outnumbers any other monk in the country in both past and present, which clearly

⁸⁰ Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela recalled that Sathu Nyai Khamchan advised him on his further monastic life in the Sangha at Vat Pak Khan 2013. Taken from an interview with Sathu Nyai One Keo at Vat Pak Khan on 24 February 2013.

denotes how highly respected he was and how steady and consistent his faith and practice were.

The following is a time table of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's daily life, adhering diligently to the monastic routines unless in times of serious illness:

4:00–5:00 a.m.	woke up punctually and led monks and novices in the morning chanting for 30 minutes, followed by 30 minutes of meditation, in the temple hall.
6:00–7:00 a.m.	collected alms (<i>binthabat</i>).
7:00–8:00 a.m.	ate breakfast (<i>san changhan</i>).
8:00–11:00 a.m.	did various activities: edited texts, read books, repaired damaged manuscripts, received guests, or attended the Buddhist blessing ceremonies for new houses to which he was invited.
11:00–12:00 a.m.	ate lunch (<i>san phen</i>).
12:00–16:00 p.m.	did various activities things: edited texts, read books, repaired damaged manuscripts, took time to relax, received guests, and attended the Buddhist ceremonies to which he was invited.
04:30–05:00 p.m.	gave sermons to monks, novices and lay people at the large <i>sala</i> (pavilion). This practice was conducted regularly on Buddhist holidays such as the eighth and fifteenth day of the waxing or waning moon and every day during Buddhist Lent.
05:30–07:00 p.m.	led monks and novices in the evening chanting at the large <i>sala</i> , and, during Buddhist Lent, gave didactic talks to disciples on the Dhamma and Vinaya.
07:00–09:00 p.m.	received guests or read books.
09:00–10:00 p.m.	chanted and meditated regularly before then going to bed.

11. Personal Character and Moral Conduct

In the Buddhist community, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was well known for his forthright verbal reproof of wrong behavior or bad attitudes of monks and lay people, as well as for his own austere practices regarding his manner and appearance. He came across as very generous, but also quite severe in his rebukes, which made everyone around him both respectful of him and eager to behave appropriately in order to please him. As he was adept at following the monastic etiquette and ancient Lao tradition, other monks who encountered him had to make sure they were properly dressed before doing so; if not, they would be immediately

reprimanded by him.⁸¹ Monk etiquette states that, in order to pay respects to the elder, the younger monk should keep his one shoulder open. Nevertheless, some monks came to meet him with both of their shoulders covered. They were quickly reminded to open one shoulder before paying their respects to him.

Sathu Nya Khamchan was widely recognized for being polite to his elders and merciful towards his subordinates, while also being considered an open-minded individual by his monk friends. He consistently interacted with others in a friendly and compassionate manner, without deception and bias. Once Sathu Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela commented on Sathu Nyai Khamchan's character:

ສາທູໂຫຍຄຳຈັນ ມີຄວາມຈິງໃຈ ບໍ່ຖືຕົວ ເຂົ້າພົບໄດ້ງ່າຍ ກູຕິຂອງເພິ່ນນັ້ນຈະເປີດປະຕູໄວ້ຕະຫຼອດເວລາ ເປັນຜູ້ມີຄວາມສຳລວມທຸກອິລິຍະບົດ ເວົ້າຈາດ້ວຍຖ້ອຍຄຳໄພເລາະເພາະສົມ ເປັນພະສົງທີ່ມີອາລົມເບີກບານແຈ່ມໃສ ເພາະເພິ່ນເປັນນັກປະຕິບັດທຳ ເຖິງຈະຖ້າແກ່ແລ້ວ ແຕ່ຜິວພັນຂອງເພິ່ນຍັງຮຸ່ງເຮືອງແຈ່ມໃສ ບຸກຄົນທີ່ມີລັກສະນະເຊັ່ນນີ້ ແມ່ນເກີດຈາກພະລັງພາຍໃນຄືໃຈທີ່ມີຄວາມສະຫງົບແລະມີຄວາມເມດຕາ.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan showed sincerity to everybody he met, was not arrogant, and was very approachable, the door to his abode always having been open [for anyone to meet him]. He was aware of his every bodily movement, speaking with pleasant and proper words. He was a monk with a cheerful frame of mind due to his Buddhist practice. Even in old age his skin was still clear and healthy. The mind of a person who has these characteristics, because of his inner power, is calm and obliging⁸²

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's personal characteristics as a well-practiced monk were also observed and noted by Arai Saidan, a Japanese monk of Mahayana Buddhism, which he described in a letter sent to Sathu Nyai Khamchan after returning home to Japan from his travels to Luang Prabang as a tourist, where stayed at Vat Saen Sukharam for several days in early April 2007. He wrote the letter in order to express his appreciation and gratitude to Sathu Nyai Khamchan. The following is a part quoted from Arai Saidan's letter:

Venerable Sathu Khamchan Virachitta Thero, I am a Japanese monk who stayed at your temple in the early part of April. I thank you very much for your kindness. Owing to your kindness, I could visit Buddhist temples and sites in Luang Prabang and know the history of Laos and the Buddhism in Laos. They were very interesting to me because I visited Laos for the first time. When I saw you to ask a favor of you for my staying at your temple, I felt some memories on your face that were seen on the faces of well-practiced monks whose memories were very tender and peaceful but severe. They are those of such monks of dignity. One of them is that monk at Siemreab in Cambodia and another is my teacher...⁸³

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life was very simple. He did not smoke or chew betel-nut as some older monks preferred to do. He did not use electronic devices himself, even though he

⁸¹ I myself had a chance to observe this practice during my novitiate and monkhood at Vat Saen Sukharam (1992–1996).

⁸² Interview with Sathu Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela at Vat Phu Khouay Phokharam on 28 February 2013.

⁸³ BAD-12-1-2007.004, the letter of Arai Saidan carries dates on 06 June 2007, one month before Sathu Nyai Khamchan's passing away (09 July 2007), postal address: Gusoku-An, 1169 Sugano Mitsue, Nara 633-1302, Japan. The letter contains one page and was typed in English.

owned cameras, a tape recorder and an amplifier; instead he always asked another monk or a novice disciple use the equipment for him. His dwelling contained neither a television nor ornate furniture, but on the walls were covered with portraits, mostly of himself, but also of other senior monks both Thai and Lao, as well as noble persons like the kings of Laos and Thailand, the viceroys of Laos, former prime ministers such as Prince Suvannaphuma and Prince Suphanouvong, and other notable Laotian politicians. He used his floor space for the activities of eating, writing, reading and sleeping. His bed consisted of a soft-bamboo mat laid on the floor, upon which a pillow and a blanket rested.

He had his food from small bowls on a *pha khao vuai* (a round plate with a stand made of rattan and wood) around which the monks sat when having a meal. When writing, he would sit on the floor cross-legged with the paper in front of him, over which he would stoop, supporting himself with his left elbow. He held the paper with his right hand while writing with his right; his handwriting was neat and well-ordered. Sitting on the floor is a part of traditional Lao culture and is the Lao Buddhist way to respect what one is doing, especially when undertaking tasks relating to Buddhism. When performing Buddhist rituals and ceremonies such as chanting the Suttas, listening to sermons, eating, and other activities, Lao Buddhists are always seated on the ground, as is the case for Buddhism in all of Southeast Asia.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a monk who was very skilled and admirable in his interaction with others. He knew quite precisely the proper methods for speaking and communicating with all kinds of ethnic groups in Lao society, both within the Sangha when interacting with the Supreme Patriarch, senior monks, young monk and young novices, as well as in secular society, which included contact with the highest royalty (King Sisavang Vatthana), politicians and political elites (i.e. Prince Suvannaphumma and Prince Suphanouvong), military officers (i.e. General Bunloet Sanichan) and the general lay population. During these various interactions, he was always friendly, honest and sincere. It is possible that much of his success is attributable to these personality traits; those who spoke with him were impressed and inspired by his optimistic and respectful nature. He also established friendships with many foreigners who were neither Buddhists nor speakers of Lao (see Illustration No. 2.24).

He ate, slept and practiced according to a rigorous schedule. He ate only twice daily; once in the morning at 7:00 a.m., and once again from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., and was never voracious in eating. Any time he happened to miss lunch, he would abstain from eating until the next morning. Achan Khampom Phongsavan, who lived with Sathu Nyai Khamchan during the late 1990s, said that, “After *binthabat*, Sathu Nyai Khamchan paid worship to the Buddha statues on the alter in his dwelling by presenting sticky rice from his collected alms. He paid homage to these statues every day, as well as chanting the Suttas every evening

before going to bed. He liked to eat *ò lam* (Lao stew)⁸⁴, *khao piak* (cooked rice) and Luang Prabang salad, as well as durian. He enjoyed drinking honey with Coffee-Mate after the evening chanting, and during ceremonies, he liked to drink Green Mirinda” (Khampom Phongsavan 2014: Interview). He regularly went to bed at 10:00 p.m., and got up at 4:00 a.m. He wore his robes in the proper manner, following the monastic prescriptions for attire, according to which the bottoms of the outer-robe (Lao: *chivòn*) and the under-robe (Lao: *sa bong*) are to extend down the same length to the middle of the calves, with the chest-belt fastened securely in place at the chest. His discipline in upholding these prescriptions for monastic dress was exemplary for novices as well as other monks in Luang Prabang.

Regarding his hobbies, Sathu Nyai Khamchan enjoyed collecting ancient art objects discovered all over Luang Prabang to be kept in his abode at Vat Saen Sukharam, such as pieces of abandoned architecture or decorations no longer in use. He began his collection with objects originally in his own possession, after which he began gathering antiques from the houses of his family and relatives as well as from the other monasteries in Luang Prabang. The scope of his collection caused what was originally a hobby to grow into a substantial project, and by 2004 he had organized for the building of a small museum on the grounds of Vat Saen Sukharam to exhibit his collection, which consists of more than 2,000 items. During the day, he would often inspect the various palm-leaf manuscripts in the cabinets to make sure they were complete. If he noticed any of them were incomplete, he would insert a new palm leaf with a copy of the text to fill in any gaps in the manuscript. If the cotton string binding the manuscript bundles was torn, he replaced it with a new one.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was known for agreeing to preside over Buddhist consecration ceremonies for new houses upon first invitation, without considering the status of their family, as it did not matter to him whether they were rich or poor. One day, in 1995, he accepted a man’s invitation to preside over his house’s consecration ceremony to be held over the following three days. Sathu Nyai Khamchan accepted his invitation of course, but then, on the very next day, another man came and invited Sathu Nyai Khamchan to preside over the consecration ceremony at his new house to be held over the same time as that of the first man. The second man was a businessman; he was known as a man of high status due to his wealth, which was displayed by his large modern-style house. Despite the businessman’s prominence in society, Sathu Nyai Khamchan declined his request, telling him that, “I have already been invited to another ceremony and cannot attend two ceremonies held during the same time. You should invite the other senior monk.” The businessman, not wanting to give

⁸⁴ One of famous Lao foods and original to Luang Prabang, this tasty stew comprises mainly vegetables including beans, eggplant, lemongrass, basil, chilies, wood ear mushrooms, cilantro, green onion and locally grown vine called ‘*sa kaan*’ go into the dish, with optional meat (classically prepared water buffalo meat), (see http://www.tourismlaos.org/show.php?Cont_ID=9, consulted on 8 October 2015).

up easily, did not accept Sathu Nyai Khamchan's response. He tried to persuade the monk by saying: "my house is very big and was built by millions [of Kip], and for this reason I would like to have you preside over the consecration ceremony – perhaps you can ask the other monk to preside over the other ceremony on your behalf". To this Sathu Nyai Khamchan replied, "Big or small, it is a house, and I am a monk. I cannot choose to only go to the houses of rich or prominent families. I must attend the house consecration ceremony of the man whose invitation I originally accepted". Sathu Nyai Khamchan did exactly as he told the businessman he would do: he went to the first house. Such an action depicts clearly the high standards of monastic Buddhist ethics practiced by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, who believed a monk should keep his word and conduct himself impartially towards lay Buddhists.

12. Birthday Celebrations

Although celebrating one's birthday is originally a western tradition, nowadays birthday celebrations are popular in every corner of the world. However, such celebrations are mostly held for the laity. Traditionally, the people of Laos popularly organized merit-making ceremonies on deathday anniversaries rather than celebrating their own birthday anniversaries. Members of the family organized a merit-making ceremony on the day of anniversary of their parents' or grandparent's death and disciples of their former abbot or teacher in order to dedicate the merit and the result of good deeds to these beloved and revered persons in the other world. This socio-cultural practice is notably more common in Eastern than in Western societies.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan practiced this tradition since the very early days of his monkhood and continued it until the end of his life. Initially, he organized merit-making ceremonies on the anniversary of Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela's death, probably for the first time in 1945, at his *kuti* in Vat Saen Sukharam (Buddhist Archive No. B1457R and B1458R). People from the surrounding communities as well as abbots and monks from the monasteries in the town were invited to attend. The death of Sathu Nyai Kaenchan and the birth of Sathu Nyai Khamchan were in the same month; Sathu Nyai Kaenchan died on the second day of the waxing moon of the eleventh lunar month and Sathu Nyai Khamchan was born on the tenth day of this month (approximately corresponding to the first half of October). Therefore, in the following year, Sathu Nyai Khamchan organized the ceremony on his birthday with the purpose of both commemorating Sathu Nyai Kaenchan's death and celebrating his birthday. More people participated, and so the space in his *kuti* was not sufficient. Subsequently, he organized the ceremony in the *sim*, and later in the Sala Hongtham, which have more space.

The celebration ceremony took place in the morning from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. In the afternoon, sometimes other ceremonies, such as an ordination ceremony or a *thelaphisek* ceremony, took place. The programme for the ceremony in the morning mostly consisted of the chanting by monks and a sermon delivered by a senior monk, the offering of food to monks and novices, offerings other necessities of daily life to monks, and finally, the chanting of the Suttas for blessing by monks. Afterwards, the lay people had their lunch. The offerings (Lao: *attha*) for the monks who were invited to attend the ceremony were items that were offered to him by lay people at ceremonies he attended during the year.

In the middle of the ceremony, he would place framed photographs of his Buddhist masters, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, and Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, and his adviser, Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangavara Maha Thela, in order to make merit on their behalf (Buddhist Archive No. B6748R). At the end of the ceremony, he would announce to whom the proceeds of the merit-making donations would be given, the benefactors of which included his supporters and sponsors such as his parents, grandparents and teachers. While making this announcement, he would pour water from a glass into a bowl, a Buddhist symbol of transferring merit, an action which expressed their favor with him. During talks given to his disciples, he often made reference to his teachers, preceptors and sponsors in order recognize the influence and effect they had on his life as well as his obligations to them in return. He did so to remind his disciples that they should be mindful of the benefits and the support they gained for themselves from others such as their parents, teachers, sponsors, etc., as such mindfulness is crucial to Buddhist ethics and the Lao tradition, which both hold that “gratitude is the mark of a good person”.

The celebration of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s birthday in the Buddhist tradition was new in the context of such celebrations and was exemplary for the new generations. In the context of Buddhist tradition, such celebration were significant as they demonstrated his gratitude to the teachers who taught and trained him, to his mother who gave birth to him – it is said the birthday of a child is almost as the death of his/her mother, – and to others to whom he was indebted. During the ceremony, the lay people from villages in Luang Prabang and countryside brought him money, food, and offerings to join with him in his celebration. Most monks and novices in Luang Prabang were invited to attend the ceremonies and have lunch. In the years before his death, the ceremony had become the festival of the town, and every time there was a festival, the monastery was full of lay people. These festivals were even marked on the Lao calendar of Luang Prabang as dates of importance. At the end of each ceremony, the money and offerings that Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected during the ceremony were distributed to abbots, schools and hospitals in support of monastic construction, education and social welfare projects (Buddhist Archive No. B7273R).

13. Attendants and a Foster Child

As the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, Sathu Nyai Khamchan would often select a few novices whom he had allowed to stay in his temple and whom he considered intelligent and clever to become his close attendants and stay within his abode (Lao: *luksit ton kuti* ລູກສິດຕັ້ງນຸ່ງຕີ). These novices, who mostly came from various parts of the countryside of Luang Prabang, were well-trained in the monastic etiquette of receiving the guests of Sathu Nyai Khamchan at the *kuti* as well as in the maintenance of the abode's orderliness. He would later select the novice he considered to be more intelligent and attentive in his duties than the others as his personal secretary. Since the 1950s, the novices who became Sathu Nyai Khamchan's close attendants and secretaries were: Novice Bunpheng Khanamat from Vat Pa Phai, Pak Xeang district, who served in the 1950s, Novice Khamdi from Ban Aen, Xiang Ngoen district, who served in the 1960s, Novice Phuangphet, later known as Pha Phuangphet Vajiro, from Ban Xiang Muan, Luang Prabang, who served in the 1980s, Novice Singkham Khamsavan from Ban Sopkong, Ngòi district, who served between 1989 and 1997, Novice Khampom Phongsavan from Ban Pak Chaek, Pak U district, who served between 1998 and 2000, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan's last attendant, Novice Thongla from Xiang Khouang province, who served between 2004 and 2007. The novices served Sathu Nyai Khamchan in his abode by making tea for his guests, taking care of various errands for him, giving him massages to relieve his stress, and always being nearby so as to quickly respond when he needed them.

One of these secretary novices, Novice Bunpheng Khanamat, became Sathu Nyai Khamchan's foster child. He has played a key role in managing and organizing the various events and tasks within the monastery of Vat Saen Sukharam for Sathu Nyai Khamchan since the 1950s. For instance, in 1957, Novice Bunpheng Khanamat led novices in the construction of the *sim* and was in charge of the grounds of Vat Saen Sukharam during any periods of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's absence from the monastery. He was ordained as a monk at Vat Saen Sukharam in 1962 with his ordination ceremony organized by Sathu Nyai Khamchan. After finishing his M.A. at Magadh University in India, he returned to Luang Prabang and disrobed in 1976, known thereafter as Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan. After Sathu Nyai Khamchan's passing in 2007, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan played an important role in organizing the funeral ceremony for his deceased foster father. In 2014, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan ordained as a monk at Vat Saen Sukharam, taking the name Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo. His stated purpose is to re-establish the administrative regulation of Vat Saen Sukharam.

The life story of Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo (1941–) is interesting, especially in terms of how he became the foster child of Sathu Nyai Khamchan. He was ordained as a novice at the temple of Vat Pa Phai village, Pak Xeang district in Luang Prabang province. Later, he moved to Vat Saen in 1953. The connection between Novice Bunpheng and Sathu

Nyai Khanchan initially began with Novice Bunpheng's father, Xiang Khian, who was the first supporter (Lao: *phò yok*)⁸⁵ of Sathu Nyai Khamchan for a *thelaphisek* ceremony. The ceremony took place at Vat Pa Phai temple on 16 January 1942.⁸⁶ Xiang Khian, who served as the headman of Pa Phai sub-district (Lao: *tasaeng*), was killed in the civil war in the early 1950s by Vietminh⁸⁷ soldiers due to political reasons. The Pak Xeang district region is located in the northeastern part of Luang Prabang, and was at that time part of the disputed territory between the Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao Movement. The headmen of the sub-districts and villages in the area suspected of aiding the enemy were often killed by soldiers of both parties.

In 1952, when Sathu Nyai Khamchan heard that Bunpheng was a novice, he ordered him to move to Vat Saen Sukharam. Novice Bunpheng, an intelligent boy skilled in human relations and management, was appointed by Sathu Nyai Khamchan as the head of novices of Vat Saen Sukharam and as Sathu Nyai Khamchan's representative at Vat Saen Sukharam while the monk was traveling away from the monastery. Novice Bunpheng assisted Sathu Nyai Khamchan in the construction work of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam in 1957. After finishing the intermediate level of *matthayom tho* (second level of secondary school) from the Pali school in Luang Prabang in 1958, Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent him to Vientiane for further Buddhist studies at the high level of *matthayom ek* at the Pali school of Vat Ong Tü in Vientiane, residing during that time at Vat Chanthaburi (or Vat Chan), of which Pha Achan Maha Pradit Phutthakhosako, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's close friend, was the abbot. Novice Bunpheng finished the *udom ek* level, the highest level of Buddhist education in Laos, and was thereby bestowed with the title *maha pariantham kao payok* (great person who completes the ninth level of Buddhist studies). At that time, the Buddhist education system in Laos consisted of nine levels for a total of nine years: the first three years comprised the elementary level, known as *matthayom tri*, the next three years the intermediate level, known as *matthayom tho*, and the last three years were for the highest level, known as *matthayom ek*.

⁸⁵ In Lao tradition, those who have supported a monk's ordination or his *thelaphisek* ceremonies are named as his *phò yok* and *mae yok* (adoptive father or mother). They have to support the monk in his studies and see to it that he is always provided with his four requisites.

⁸⁶ The ceremony certificate is dated 16 January 1942 (BAD-12-3-1941.001).

⁸⁷ The League for the Independence of Vietnam, or Vietminh was set up by the Indochinese Communist Party in May 1941 to serve as a broad front organization for the communist-directed revolutionary independence movement in Vietnam. Even though subsequently superseded by the even broader Lien Viet Front, the term Vietminh was used to designate Vietnamese revolutionary nationalist forces throughout the First Indochina War. In December 1952, Vietminh forces overran a number of border posts on the Lao side of the Lao-Vietnamese border in the proximity of Dien Bien Phu (Müang Thaeng). In the second week of April 1953, substantial Vietminh units, elements of three divisions, thrust deeply into Lao territory, overrunning all of Huaphan province, together with portions of Phongsali, Luang Prabang, and Xiang Khuang provinces, (Stuart-Fox 1996: 349–350).

In 1962, Novice Bunpheng returned to Luang Prabang and was ordained as a monk at Vat Saen Sukharam on 10 February 1962 by the Supreme Patriarch of Laos, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela. The ordination was organized by Sathu Nyai Khamchan and supported by Chao Phaya Luang Müangsaen (Khamsuk Buppha). In 1963, Sathu Nyai Khamchan again sent him to Thailand to study undergraduate level Buddhist studies at Mahamakutrajavidyalaya University. While studying in Bangkok, he stayed at Section 2 (Thai: *khana 2*) in Vat Maha That Yuvarat Rangsarit. Later, in 1970, he found a way to continue his Buddhist studies in India, where he studied at Magadh University and finished his Master of Arts in 1975, after which he returned to Luang Prabang. He disrobed in 1977 and had thoughts of joining the Pathet Lao movement with other members of the people's revolution party such as Somsavath Lengsavath, who later became deputy prime minister of the Lao P.D.R., but he was dissuaded from this by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, who reminded his former attendant that the latter's father, Xiang Khian, was dead because of the war.⁸⁸ Since that time, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan has worked for a state enterprise as the director of Phusi Hotel, which is regarded as a traditional Luang Prabang hotel, as well as having established his own hotel, New Luang Prabang Hotel (present Indigo House). While Sathu Nyai Khamchan was at Mahosot hospital in Vientiane for treatment of a headwound caused by accidentally falling down a staircase, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan was one of the main people at Nyai Khamchan's side. He has also taken over many private, social and political matters formerly managed by Sathu Nyai Khamchan.

In July 2007, Achan Bunpheng, who was known to the people and local government of Luang Prabang as Sathu Nyai Khamchan's foster child, played an important role in the efficient organization of the cremation ceremony for Sathu Nyai Khamchan. He later became a member of the inspection and preservation committee for Sathu Nyai Khamchan's collection of valuable objects which he left in his monastic abode (*kuti*). In 2014, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan re-ordained as a monk at Vat Saen Sukharam, taking the name Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo. He aims to re-establish the administrative regulation of Vat Saen Sukharam. As someone who was close to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo had the opportunity to learn and collect knowledge from him regarding the ancient Lao culture and its festivals. He is nowadays considered an established intellectual on ancient Lao culture, traditions and festivals, and he gladly shares his knowledge and experiences with others. He also acts as an advisor to local state officers.

⁸⁸ Interviewed Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan at his house, Ban Phon Hüang villige, Lunag Prabang on 9 March 2013.

14. Lay Buddhist Supporters

14.1 A Medical Doctor

Many of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives were medical doctors, so he received from them regular medical care, but there was one particular doctor who was quite influential in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life and should be recognized and recorded in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life story. Even though Sathu Nyai Khamchan was plagued by multiple illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease and hypertension, his vitality level remained high even in his later years because he had a doctor who took especially good care in monitoring and treating his health conditions. It has been said that if this doctor had not been by Sathu Nyai Khamchan's side at the moment of his first heart attack in 1982, he would never have been able to live until 2007. This doctor's name was Khamphui Pathumvan (also known as *than mò* Phui or Doctor Phui), recipient of an M.A. in Medical Science from Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand in 1974. In 1978, already a devout Buddhist in Vat Saen Sukharam's community and a faithful follower of Sathu Nya Khamchan, Khamphui entered the temple of Vat Saen Sukharam to see Sathu Nyai Khamchan and offered him his assistance in health and medical matters. From that day forth, he often went to see Sathu Nyai Khamchan in the morning to ask him about the condition of his health. If Sathu Nya Khamchan felt tired or sick, Khamphui gave him the necessary medication or treatment, sometimes including treatment by injection. He regularly made Sathu Nya Khamchan's test his blood sugar, an important part of diabetes maintenance.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was very grateful to his doctor. Once he said to his followers and relatives that “*than mò phui pen chao xivit khòì* ທ່ານໝໍຜູ້ເປັນເຈົ້າຊີວິດຂ້ອຍ. [My life rests in Doctor Phui's hands].”⁸⁹ After Doctor Khamphui's death in December 2005, Sathu Nyai Khamchan remarked that, “nobody can better understand the condition of my health and my diseases than Doctor Phui,” as if he had already accepted his fate soon to come. During his time in Doctor Khamphui's care, he had followed his doctor's advice entirely, and if anyone else offered him injections, medicine, or advice, he would always first consult with Doctor Khamphui before following the advice or taking the medicine. Doctor Khamphui took such good care of Sathu Nyai Khamchan that he did not need to go to the hospital after he had his heart attack in 1982; as per his request to the doctor, the treatment was administered at the monastery. In the 1990s, Doctor Khamphui observed Sathu Nyai Khamchan was beginning to become overly fatigued from the extended periods of sitting during the regular Buddhist ceremonies. He injected him once a month with Deca-Durabolin, known in Laos known as *nya tan thao* (anti-aging medication) which gave Sathu Nyai Khamchan more refresh and not much painful from the long sitting. The injection was a French product sent to him by Lao Buddhists or his relatives who lived in France. The care of Doctor Khamphui enabled Sathu

⁸⁹ Interviewed Mae Bunmi Phonghichit, Doctor Khamphui's wife at Ban Vat Saen village on 18 February 2014.

Nyai Khamchan to he sit on the floor with his legs tucked back to one side for many hours in the religious ceremonies without experiencing serious fatigue (see Illustration No. 2.25).

14.2 A Female Supporter

Normally, the people in the community of Vat Saen Sukharam as well as Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives would bring food to the monastery for him and the other monks and novices, both in the morning for breakfast and before noon for lunch. Mae Hüan (Mother Hüan, 1925–2015), who usually prepared the food for Sathu Nyai Khamchan, was considered to be an important supporter of his. She was not related to him, but she inherited her duties from her mother, who had formerly been the one who prepared Sathu Nyai Khamchan's food. Due to the fact that he had diabetes, his medical doctor asked him to refrain from eating sticky rice, a traditional meal for the majority of the Lao ethnic group. Therefore, the sticky rice that Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected in the morning during the alms-collecting was of little use to him, but he nevertheless persisted with this practice, with the conviction that it was his duty to do so, as mentioned above. Sathu Nyai Khamchan usually ate *khao piak* (cooked rice) with pork, chicken, fish or other kinds of seafood. In general, his relatives who lived near the temple would bring the *khao piak* for him in the morning, but Mae Hüan would expend her own means to obtain the raw rice and was also the one who cooked the rice for Sathu Nyai Khamchan. She usually entered the monastery three times daily. In the early morning, after the giving of the alms, she would bring a pot of cooked rice for *changhan* (breakfast). Late in the morning, she brought food, often including soup, in a tiffin carrier for *phen* (lunch). At 4:00 p.m. in the afternoon, she would often bring a cup of orange juice for Sathu Nyai Khamchan by herself (see Illustration No. 2.26). When Sathu Nyai Khamchan ate outside of the temple during Buddhist ceremonies, she would prepare the cooked rice in a pot and cover it with a white cloth, having the driver then transport the pot and present it to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at the ceremony. Mae Hüan of Ban Phon Hüang village, who was at the time getting very old, recounted to me how honored she felt to have had the opportunity to prepare Sathu Nyai Khamchan's food. She recalled to me once that:

My mother was strictly religious and she had diligently attended to the preparation of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's food. After her death, I took over her duties, and our family was happy to support him by providing him with food. Sathu Nyai Khamchan never committed bad deeds, even in childhood. He was in the monkhood for more than 65 years in total and he never ate dinner once. Even when he was seriously ill and restricted to his bed, I brought cooked rice for him, but he absolutely refused to eat. I often told him that I wished to die before he did, to which he responded, "We do not know the day of our death, nor who will die before who".⁹⁰

Mae Hüan is one example of women in Laos who are devout Buddhists and play an important role in supporting monastic communities by bringing food to monks and novices in

⁹⁰ Information from an interview with Mae Hüan at Ban Phon Hüang, Luang Prabang in 2012.

their monasteries. In Luang Prabang, the provision of food to monks is a popular tradition of merit-making passed down through generations. In the morning, the streets of Luang Prabang are lined with Buddhists, mostly women, who wait to place sticky rice in the monks' bowls. They get up very early in the morning, often at around 4:00 a.m., in order to cook the rice and prepare the food. This is a traditional cultural practice which has been observed exclusively in Laos.

15. Unexpected Events, Nam mon and Amulets

The stories that I will describe in the following are of unusual happenings in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life, some directly experienced by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself and some told to him by others. This is not to be considered as an attempt to eulogize Sathu Nyai Khamchan as a monk with supernatural abilities. It is merely a record of unexpected events that occurred in his lifetime. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was not a monk who liked to wield his charisma in order to gain popularity, because he was very much aware of how such a display would be a violation of the Vinaya. The amulets containing his image which he produced in limited quantity were only for free distribution as a souvenir to those who asked for them.

15.1 Unexpected Events

There are two unexpected events which occurred in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life which he himself also found incredible. He often talked about these unexpected events in relation to *thevada* (devas) who have supernatural abilities to cause such events, instead of attributing them to the power of his own merit or virtue.

The first event: Sathu Nyai Khamchan discovered with his own eyes a jar containing auspicious objects among a group of monks, novices and lay people. In 1972, when Sathu Nyai Khamchan was supervising the renovation of the ruined standing Buddha statue called *pha chao sippaet sòk* (the standing Buddha statue of eighteen-cubit high) at Vat Saen Sukharam, he gave an order to a group of monks and novices led by Sathu Khiao Khantiko⁹¹ to tidy up the appearance of the Buddha statue of which only the body remained, at that time covered by vines. During the cleaning process, no one noticed anything spectacular on the

⁹¹ Sathu Khiao Khantiko (1932–2000) was a Khmu monk from Ban Khom in Pha sub-district, Pak Tha district, Udomxay province (information taken from the census of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1990, BAD-12-2-1990.028). He moved to Vat Saen Sukharam in 1960. He was one of the monks in Vat Saen Sukharam who was trusted by Sathu Nyai Khamchan and authorized to take care of the temple's administration. In the late 1990s, Sathu Khiao Khantiko had the wish to return to his home village, but he was torn, as he also did not wish to leave Vat Saen Sukharam, where he had been for a long time. He decided to help his village by organizing the construction of monastic buildings, which was sponsored by Sathu Nyai Khamchan. Sathu Khiao Khantiko passed away at the age of 68 at Vat Saen Sukharam in 2000, with his cremation arranged by Sathu Nyai Khamchan and held at the funeral pyre of Vat Pa Nya Thüp in Luang Prabang on 2 March 2000.

statue at all. However, after the statue had been cleaned, Sathu Nyai Khamchan came to inspect it, upon which he immediately noticed a clay jar on the scruff of the statue, much to the surprise of those present, as no one had noticed the jar despite the fact that some of them had climbed up to the scruff to clean the top of the statue. The clay jar, covered with its lid, contained a bronze bowl with six silver Buddha images (see Buddhist Archive No. B1431). I will provide more details about the renovation of the Buddha statue in Chapter 3.

The second event: In early 1986, a fortune-teller predicted that Sathu Nyai Khamchan “would preside over a significant Buddhist ceremony in Luang Prabang”. At that time, the important Buddhist ceremony of putting relics of the Buddha into the Santi Chedi stupa of Vat Pa Phon Phao was to be held in the coming week. In that year, Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela, who was considered to be the eldest monk in Luang Prabang, had been invited to preside over the ceremony. As it turned out, on the morning of the ceremony, Sathu Nyai Khamfan became severely ill and could not attend. Therefore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, who was already present, was asked, very much to his surprise, to preside over the ceremony, thus fulfilling the fortune teller’s prediction.⁹² The Santi Chedi stupa is one of the most significant Buddhist monuments in Luang Prabang. It was built in the twentieth century and is located on the mountain of the Phao forest in the outskirts of the city.

15.2 Nam mon (Holy Water)

Sathu Nyai Khamchan made his *nam mon* by putting ordinary fresh water into a holy pot, the so-called *mò nam mon*, which was rested on the altar in his abode when it was not being used. Every evening, before going to bed, he chanted many Suttas and also meditated to bless the *nam mon*. The *nam mon* was used in special cases, mostly for healing and for aiding specific persons whom he really wanted to help. The *nam mon* was drunk by and/or patted on the head of patients, and in some cases the patients miraculously recovered over time. After Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s passing, a small amount of *nam mon* was discovered in a pot on the altar in his *kuti*, but no one dared to use it, deciding instead to have it preserved within the holy water pot on display in the museum of Vat Saen Sukharam (see Illustration No. 2.27).

The first case: In the late 1960s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan helped a girl who was mentally disturbed by using his *nam mon*. As the story is told, a younger sister of Novice Khamdi

⁹² There is an inscription on the wall inside the stupa at the third floor, which commemorates the ceremony as follows: “...ວັນພະຫັດຂຶ້ນ 14 ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ຍີ່ ປີຮັບເບົ້າ ພ.ສ. 2528. ວັນທີ 23 ມັງກອນ 1986 ເວລາກ່ອນເພນ ສາທູ່ໃຫຍ່ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະມະຫາ ເຖລະ ວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ໄດ້ເປັນປະທານບັນຈຸພະບໍຣົມສາຣີຣິກະທາດ ໃສ່ໃນອົງພະເຈດີ. ເພື່ອໄວ້ເປັນທີ່ໂຫວ້ແລະບູຊາແກ່ຄົນແລະເທວະດາ ຕາບເທົ້າ 5,000 ວັດສາ. [On Thursday, the fourteenth day of the waxing moon of the second lunar month, the Year of *hap pao* (the Cow), BE 2528, 23 January 1986, before lunchtime, Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, Vat Saen Sukharam, was to preside over the ceremony of putting the relics of the Buddha into the stupa, in order to pay respects to and worship mankind together with the gods over 5,000 years].

Saloemsak,⁹³ who was one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's attendants, a villager of Ban Aen village, Xiang Ngoen district in Luang Prabang province, was under a spell known as the *sa-ne hang pa* ສະເໜ່ທາງປາ (charm of the fish tail). The mind of anyone under this spell, it is said, will become like the tail of a fish, with thoughts constantly brandishing about, causing them to pace up and down the banks of the water while crying out in agony. The sister of Novice Khamdi was put under this spell by her former boyfriend, upon which she went insane, crying and walking back and forth along the stream of her home village every day. Her family knew what had happened to her, but they did not know what they could do to help her. Therefore, the father came to see Sathu Nyai Khamchan and asked for the monk's help. A day later, Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave a cup of his *nam mon* to Novice Khamdi and told him to "let your sister drink this water and also pat her head with it". A few days later, he heard that she had recovered and was back to normal.

The second case: In 1997, Sathu Nyai Khamchan travelled around the world with a couple of followers, who also happened to be his relatives, Somnük Thongphanit and his wife, Kongkham Thongphanit. Some parts of the story from Somnük Thongphanit may lead one to attribute the occurrence to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's power of compassion:

ຢູ່ແຂວງໂນເຊ, ຍັງມີ ໑໓/໑໓ [ຄອບຄົວ] ຫຼືງມີລູກ 2 ຄົນ, ເມຍເປັນບ້າປົວຢູ່ສະຫະລັດເທົ່າໃດກໍບໍ່ເຊົາ-ເງິນຄ່າຫາມາໄດ້ ກໍໝົດ-ເມື່ອຜົວລາວ ໄດ້ຊາຍຂ່າວວ່າມີພະອົງຫຼິ້ງມາແຕ່ລາວ, ຜົວລາວເລີຍຊອກຫາພົບຈົນໄດ້ ເພື່ອຂໍແຕ່ເມດຕາໃຫ້ເມຍລາວ ເຊົາບ້າ. ເລື່ອງເປັນແນວນີ້ ກໍ ເລີຍນໍາຄວາມເປັນຈິງມາລາຍງານຕໍ່ສາທູ່ໃຫຍ່-ເພິ່ນກໍວ່າຈະເມດຕາໃຫ້. ລາວກັບເມື່ອບ້ານ ນໍາເມຍມາຫາສາທູ່ໃຫຍ່, ເມື່ອພົບເພິ່ນຄັ້ງ ແຮກ[ທ່າອິດ]ຜູ້ເປັນບ້າກໍຊິ້ນ [ສິ້ນ] ແລ່ນເຂົ້າວິດ [ຫ້ອງນໍ້າ]. ນາງກິງຄໍາ [ເມຍທ່ານສົມນິກ] ກໍແລ່ນໄປຈອບ ທັງປູກລະດົມໃຫ້ລາວເຂົ້າມາ ຫາສາສະໜາພຸດຊາ, ອອຍກັນຢູ່ນັ້ນນານເຖິງ 25' [ນາທີ]. ຜູ້ເປັນບ້າກໍອອກຈາກວິດມານິບພະ [ສາທູ່ໃຫຍ່ຄໍາຈັນ] ແຕ່ແສງຕາບໍ່ສູ້. ເມື່ອ ສາທູ່ໃຫຍ່ສູດໄປນານເທົ່າໃດຜູ້ເປັນບ້າຄ່ອຍກົມຫົວລົງນິບພໍ້ວໍ້ ເກີດມີໃບໜ້າຊິ້ນບານຂຶ້ນທັນທີ. ສາທູ່ໃຫຍ່ກໍໃຫ້ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ [ສົມນິກ] ມັດ ແຂນໃຫ້, [ເພິ່ນ] ແນະນໍາຜູ້ເປັນຜົວແລະເມຍຕັ້ງຕໍ່ສິນທໍາເປັນຫຼັກປັສະຈາກ [ປາສະຈາກ] ຖິຜິສາງນາງຮ້າຍ ແລ້ວເພິ່ນກໍເອົາພະໃຫ້ແຂນ [ແຂວນ] ຄໍ ຜູ້ລະອົງ. ຕັ້ງແຕ່ນັ້ນເຖິງບັດນີ້, ຜົວຂຽນ ຈ.ມ. [ຈິດໝາຍ] ຫາຍອກເລົ່າວ່າ ເມຍລາວເຊົາເປັນບ້າແລ້ວ.

In San Jose, There was a couple with two children. The wife had gone insane. [Her husband] tried to have her cured in [many places] in the United States, [but] her illness persisted. They had used up all of their money. When [the husband] heard that a Buddhist monk had come from Laos, [he] tried to find the monk to ask him to spread loving kindness to his mad wife. Once he found him,

⁹³ From an interview with Achan Khamdi Saloemsak at Sala Thammavihan, Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang, on 13 August 2013. Achan Khamdi Saloemsak recounted to me how he met and stayed with Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam. His story began in 1960, as he was ordained as a novice at his home village of Ban Aen, Xiang Ngoen district in Luang Prabang province. After only two years, he was able to learn by heart many chapters of the Suttas, to chant the Vessantara Jātaka and other works of Buddhist literature such as *Itipiso*, and to inscribe Tham-Lao script on palm-leaf manuscripts. These qualifications were considered to be of utmost importance by Sathu Nyai Khamchan. In 1963, already well aware of his intelligence and abilities, during their meeting at Vat Dõmmo, a nearby monastery, Sathu Nyai Khamchan asked Novice Khamdi to live at his abode as his attendant. At Vat Saen Sukharam, his daily tasks were: serving Sathu Nyai Khamchan his meals, reception of guests, cleaning the abode, making copies of manuscripts by inscribing them onto new palm-leaf manuscripts, and bettering the chanting of the Vessantara Jākata. He often accompanied Sathu Nyai Khamchan as his follower to the palace of Luang Prabang on Buddhist holy days, where Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave sermons to King Sisavang Vatthana and the royal family. Novice Khamdi disrobed in 1970 and became a schoolteacher at an institute for teacher training (Lao: *honghian sangkhu*) in Luang Prabang. Nowadays, he is known for his knowledge gained through his experience in the monastery and is a renowned master of Lao ceremonies.

he explained the situation [to Sathu Nyai Khamchan], who then agreed to spread loving kindness to her, upon which he brought his wife to meet [the monk]. When she met him for the first time, she trembled and ran away to hide in the bathroom. Kongkham went in to her and soothed her and asked her to embrace Buddhism. She soothed her for at least 25' [minutes]. The insane woman then came out of the bathroom and paid respect to the monk [Sathu Nyai Khamchan], but her eyes were cast downwards and did not look at him [Sathu Nyai Khamchan]. As Sathu Nyai chanted, she gradually unstiffened her body and her face became refreshed. Sathu Nyai gave me [Somnük] white cotton strings to tie to her hands. [He] then advised them to believe in Buddhist morals and not in spirits or witches, also giving each of them one of his amulets to hang around their necks. Thereafter, the husband reported me by mail that her insanity had ceased entirely.⁹⁴

15.3 Amulets

The amulets that I will describe in the following are the locket containing Sathu Nyai Khamchan's portrait, the back side of which is a talisman. His lockets were initially produced at Charoenchaikanchang Buddhique shop in Bangkok in the late 1980s. The following stories were told by lay Buddhists who carried or wore Sathu Nyai Khamchan's locket and worshipped his biography. Their accounts of these occurrences are quite incredible (see Illustration No. 2.28 and 2.29).

The first case: In the note of Somnük Thongphanit, he reports that he received a letter from Pok in Hawaii telling of how he miraculously survived a car accident. The story is that while Sathu Nyai Khamchan was visiting the Lao diaspora in Hawaii in 1997, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had distributed amulets containing his image to the Lao people who believed in him and asked for an amulet of their own with his portrait. One of the recipients of such an amulet was Pok. In May 1998, Pok traveled to California, and on May 25, he was in a severe car accident. His car was totaled when it was hit by a much larger vehicle. At first, everyone expected him to die, but after time his condition stabilized. Pok later wrote the letter to Somnük telling him that he had miraculously survived the near-fatal accident because he was wearing Sathu Nyai Khamchan's amulet around his neck (BAD-02-0107: 17).

The second case: In 1999, Pa Thip from Ban Phon Hüang, Luang Prabang, traveled by boat to Pak U cave at high tide. On the way back, the boat collapsed in the middle of the Mekong. As she was not able to swim, she thought she was about to die, but miraculously, she survived. While she was sinking, almost completely out of air in her lungs, her foot suddenly made contact with a log of some sort, allowing her to push her body back up to the surface of the water. She was then able to reach out her hand and grab the edge of the boat. That day, she was wearing the amulet of Sathu Nyai Khamchan around her neck. She told her story with great reverence to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, with the understanding that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had rescued her. When Sathu Nyai Khamchan recounted this story to me, his

⁹⁴ The note of Somnük Thongphanit on their travelling around the world in 1997, BAD-02-0107, pp. 16–17.

facial expression was quite sanguine, neither excited nor delighted. He said simply, “the Dhamma saves those who practice the Dhamma”. In another episode during the same period, Daeng Anongdet of Ban Aham village, Luang Prabang came to see Sathu Nyai Khamchan one day at his *kuti*. As they were quite familiar with one another, Sathu Nyai Khamchan asked Daeng where he had been recently. Before answering him, Daeng pulled out Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s amulet which was hanging around his neck and showed it to him, saying, “thanks to your locket, I did not die, and that’s the truth”. Sathu Nyai Khamchan immediately questioned him as to why this was so. Daeng then started to describe his story, saying, “I took three members of my family to watch the boat racing festival in Xaiyabuli province. On our way, we were in a car accident; our car did three full somersaults, but no one was injured and the car suffered only minimal damage. This was because your *palami*⁹⁵ (Pali: *pāramī*, ‘perfection’) protected us”. Sathu Nyai Khamchan replied by showing a light smile and saying, “good that everyone is safe”.⁹⁶

The third case: The last story, which occurred in 2007, involved a family of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s relatives in Vientiane, whose house had been built next to the office of the headman of their village. One night in March 2007, the office was burnt down by a rapidly spreading fire caused by an electrical short circuit. The house, made of two floors, the upstairs of which was entirely made of wood was damaged so badly by the fire that only the pillars remained. The next morning, all the members of the family raked the ashes to find the nine *bat* in gold (137.16 Grams) they had lost in the fire, but they were unsuccessful in finding it. However, they did find one object in the ashes while raking which very much surprised and delighted them, namely, a copy of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s biography (see Illustration No. 2.30). Before rebuilding the new house, they arranged a Buddhist ceremony to which they invited nine monks, including Sathu Nyai Khamchan and his disciple, Sathu Ounkham Akkhapannyo, to chant *paritta mungkhun* (the Suttas of protection and auspicious signs). When Sathu Nyai Khamchan arrived at the ceremony, the owner of the house showed him the book and proudly reported to him that ‘my house was burnt to the ground, but we found your biography, which we keep for worship at the altar, most likely spared from the fire by the *khuam saksit khòng sathu nyai* (sanctity or sacredness of Sathu Nyai Khamchan)’. Sathu Nyai Khamchan immediately replied, “you should say it itself is sacred, it is a fluke and the book is

⁹⁵ The term “*palami*” in this context, refers to the power of merit or the result of good deeds done by Sathu Nyai Khamchan which protected them as his followers. However, in Pali, *pāramī* means “completeness, perfection, highest states. In later literature there is mentioned a group of 10 perfections (*dasa pāramiyo*) as the perfect exercise of the 10 principal virtues by a Bodhisatta” (Davids and Stede 1921: 77). “Ten qualities leading to Buddhahood: (1) perfection in giving (or liberality; *dāna*), (2) morality (*sīla*), (3) renunciation (*nekkhamma*), (4) wisdom (*paññā*), (5) energy (*virīya*), (6) patience (or forbearance; *khanti*), (7) truthfulness (*sacca*), (8) resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*), (9) loving-kindness (*mettā*), (10) equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Nyanatiloka 1988: 236).

⁹⁶ This information was provided by Achan Khampom Phongsavan, Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s attendant who was in the conversation with Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Daeng Anongdet, on 7 July 2014.

a good product”. They displayed the book at the ceremony as an auspicious object. The man also reported that he was offered by someone to sell the book for 20 million Kip (US\$ 2,155), but he refused based on the book’s priceless value for him and his family.⁹⁷

16. The Last Year

One afternoon in January 2007, a monk came from the south of Laos to visit Sathu Nyai Khamchan at his abode in Vat Saen Sukharam. They mostly only discussed general matters, but before leaving, the monk told Sathu Nyai Khamchan that, “this year, your horoscope is not good. You will have bad luck. If you do not die, you will at least be in a dreadful accident. If you can make it past this year, you will have a long life.” Sathu Nyai Khamchan, a monk who did not believe in the powers of astrology, fate, luck or anything other such beliefs, but rather only believed in the power of karma resulting from one’s own actions, did not say anything and kept silent.⁹⁸ This monk from the south could be seen as a fortune teller who correctly warned Sathu Nyai Khamchan that his life was approaching its end.

In February 2007, Sathu Nyai Khamchan fell down the steps at Vat Pa Phon Phao Vanaram. His head, which struck against a stone mound during the fall, was severely wounded, and so he went to the hospital in Luang Prabang. The governor of Luang Prabang province, Bunhüang Duangphachan, informed Nouhak Phoumsavanh (1910–2008), advisor to the president of the Lao P.D.R. in Vientiane, of the esteemed monk’s injury over the phone. Nouhak Phoumsavanh gave an urgent order to the governor to bring Sathu Nyai Khamchan to Vientiane as soon as possible. The following day, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was sent to Vientiane by airplane, and was cured there while staying at Mahosot Hospital in Vientiane. The medical staff took extra special care of him due to his status as an important person. During his stay of 25 days at Mahosot Hospital, many Buddhist people from various parts of the country, mostly from Vientiane and surrounding districts, came to visit him. They brought flowers and donated money to cover the costs of his medical bills, raising a total of 25 million Kip (US\$ 2,498). His medical bills totaled about 5 million Kip (US\$ 499), but all of these bills were footed by the Lao government, after which Sathu Nyai Khamchan donated 5 million Kip from the proceeds back to the hospital. After his recovery, he returned to Luang Prabang, where his headwound gradually healed, but regular treatment was provided by doctors from the hospital of Luang Prabang. After several months, although the wound had been fully healed, his diabetes and old age had really started to wear him down physically.

⁹⁷ This information came from Sathu Ounkham Akkhapano on 7 July 2014, who accompanied Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the Buddhist consecration ceremony for the new house.

⁹⁸ This information came from Humphaeng Sukkasoen, a temple taker who was sitting in the abode as Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s servant during our talks. He recounted the story to me at Vat Saen Sukharam in 2009.

16.1 Sathu Nyai Khamchan's Death

On the morning of 9 July 2007, Sathu Nyai Khamchan enjoyed good health and practiced his normal activities; nothing indicated that this day would be his last. At 8:30 a.m., I had a chance to introduce Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the German digitization expert, Martin Jürgens, from Hamburg, Germany, during his first day of work on the project titled “Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang, Laos”. After the introduction was complete, we paid Sathu Nyai Khamchan our respects, and we were preparing to head off to our work when Sathu Nyai Khamchan handed Martin Jürgens a copy of his biography. He told us he would go to attend the monastic ceremony of Vat Xiang Thong, as the last day of the three-day ceremony was to begin at 9:30 a.m., where he planned to stay for lunch. After the ceremony, he came back to his monastery and took a rest, during which time he received a massage from three young novices. At 01:00 p.m., he began to have great difficulty breathing, so he told a novice to call Humphaeng Sukhasoem, the temple care-taker who contacted the doctors at the hospital. At 02:00 p.m., two doctors arrived and examined his heart, determining that he had had another heart attack. One of the doctors went back to the hospital to fetch the necessary medical instruments, but, unfortunately, he did not make it back to the monastery in time. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was lying on his back, barely breathing, but still able to speak to the doctor, his voice soft and slow. At 02:55 p.m., he turned his face to the north and let out two loud breaths accompanied by a snore; these were his final breaths. He peacefully passed away at the age of 86 years, 9 months and 9 days.

At 04:00 p.m., his body was moved to Sala Hongtham (see Illustration No. 2.31). While his body was being removed from his abode, an unexpected event happened: although there was a clear sky that day and the sun was shining over the monastery, a small cloud in the sky suddenly produced three louds claps of thunder. It was said that, “Gods and Goddesses have come to invite the pure spirit of Sathu Nyai Khamchan to stay in the heavens”. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body was put on the gilded decorative wooden bed⁹⁹, covered by a glass case¹⁰⁰, and then placed in front of the altar at the center of the Sala Hongtham. Close to his feet, one saw a set of altars with a statue of his, vases with flowers, a couple of lit candles and one incense stick pot. Those who came to visit and pay their respects to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body lit an incense stick and put it in the pot. According to Lao traditional beliefs, the scent of the incense stick can be perceived by spirits, so those who wish to send a message to the deceased will light an incense stick and speak to the deceased with their mind. However, the incense sticks also have metaphorical significance in Buddhism, where their scent is thought to represent the positive karma and meritoriousness of the deceased, with three incense sticks

⁹⁹ Meseum No. VSS_001308. This bed was used for laying the corpse of senior monks.

¹⁰⁰ The glass case sponsored by Oun and Khamla Hungarun, the owners of Manolak hotel, Luang Prabang, was listed at a price of 810,000 Kip (US\$ 81).

symbolizing the wisdom, compassion and purity of the person whose death is being mourned. On 11 July 2007, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body was put into a cool stainless steel casket¹⁰¹ (or fridge) donated by one of his faithful supporters.

16.2 Arrangement of the Funeral Ceremony

Upon the death of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, a committee was formed to organize the funeral rite, schedule the events for the cremation and collect money to pay for the costs of the ceremony. The committee was co-chaired by the deputy provincial abbot, Sathu Nyai Bunbang Mahayana Maha Thela from Vat Xiang Lek, who represented the Sangha, and the provincial president of the Lao Front for National Construction, Kongchan Khammavong, who represented the laity. The rest of the committee consisted of other members of the Sangha of Luang Prabang, provincial state officers, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives. Five groups of subcommittees were set up to handle the administrative work of the funeral process, those being subcommittees for reception, collection of offerings and donations, transportation during the ceremonies, security guards, and secretarial matters.

I was on the secretarial subcommittee, with our task being to provide biographical information on Sathu Nyai Khamchan as well as other documents related to the funeral ceremony. The subcommittees were headed by the high-ranking officers of the province, and they consisted otherwise of state officials, Sathu Khamchan's relatives and disciples; they all were secular individuals, not monastics. As Sathu Nyai Khamchan was not only a renowned monk but had also been the chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Luang Prabang province, he had held status both as a member of the Sangha organization and also as a state official. For this reason, the cremation was carried out according to the officially prescribed rituals. The committee and subcommittees were appointed by the governor of Luang Prabang province.

During that time, monks and lay people, the latter group including both commoners and state officers, came to pay their respects. They brought flowers, wreaths, and other offerings, as well as also donating some money to support the merit-making ceremony. Important members of the government also attended, such as Somsavath Lengsavath, the deputy Prime Minister of Lao P.D.R., who came on 12 July 2007, Nouhak Phoumsavanh who attended on 14 July, former governors of Luang Prabang such as Vongphet Saykoe Yachongtua, Chansi Phosikham, the current governor, Bunhüang Duangphachan, and other members of the Lao People's Party. In the evening, a number of monks and novices from the monasteries in the town held a full assembly in the Sala Hongtham to conduct the chanting of the *matika* Suttas

¹⁰¹ The cool stainless steel casket brought from Thailand sponsored by Pinkham Vongpanya from Bòkeo province, was listed at the price of 73,000 Baht (US\$ 2,267), which included the cost of transport by machine boat from Chiang Rai in Northern Thailand to Luang Prabang.

(funeral chanting)¹⁰² (see Illustration No. 2.32). The first four evenings, the monks and novices who came to chant the *matika* were from various monasteries in the city of Luang Prabang, which meant there was not sufficient space in the Sala Hongtham for their assembly. Therefore, from the eleventh onwards, the monasteries were divided into six groups, each group consisting of six to ten monasteries each of which was then invited to gather for chanting on a specific evening.

The catafalque, urn and chariot were built at Vat Sop Sikkharam, the monastery contiguous with Vat Saen Sukharam, and the structures were designed and drawn by a renowned artist of Luang Prabang, Achan Manivong Khattiyarat.¹⁰³ The catafalque is usually used to support the body of the deceased during funeral ceremonies, but in this case it was placed over the body and an empty wooden urn shaped like a stepped pyramid was then set on top of the catafalque, which was then crowned with a wooden urn (Lao: *kot* ໂກດ). Both objects were lacquered red and decorated with stenciled gold motifs. When the urn was placed on the catafalque, they together resembled a stupa, a religious monument for containing the relics of the Buddha or of sacred monks. The funeral chariot was erected over a metal armature mounted on four wheels and controlled by a steering wheel, with four long white cotton strings attached to the front and back used to pull the chariot back and forth. A wooden painted plaster sculpture of an enormous celestial bird (*hong* or *hamsa*: mythical swan) more than 4 meters high, also designed by Achan Manivong Khattiyarat, was attached to this armature. The catafalque was set between the bird's wings. Related to this is a series of photographs of the cremation of two senior monks in Vientiane I once found in the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang. The photographs show the chariots in the shape of a *hong*, but the structure of the birds' heads are different: the one at the funeral of Somdet Pha Sangkhavutthamahatherachan (Keo Uthensakda, 1889–1953), former abbot of Sisaket in

¹⁰² The *matika* chant to a corpse is a Lao tradition which has been practiced since Buddhism was established in Laos in the fourteenth century. The Abhidhamma (one of the three parts of the Tipiṭaka, which includes philosophical commentaries on and analyses of the Buddha's teachings) that monks recite at funeral ceremonies consists of seven chapters describing the impermanent nature of the body and mind of human beings along with the process of birth, development and death, linking the fate of those in attendance with that of the deceased. The audience who were listening the Abhidhamma will understand their lives well and the chanting of Abhidhamma at the corpse considered as worshiping the obligation of the deceased.

¹⁰³ Manivong Khattiyarat, commonly known as “Achan Manivong” (“Master Manivong”), is one of the most important Lao artists of his time in Luang Prabang. He exemplifies the Lao tradition of a drafter (Lao: *nak òk baeb*, architect) who provides others with an artistic model and vision. He was born in Luang Prabang in 1929 to a family of artists and intellectuals. His father was Chao Khattiyavong, younger brother of Chao Maha Uparat Bunkhong, father of Chao Phetsarat Rattanavongsa. Achan Manivong has created designs for numerous buildings in Luang Prabang, including structures for Vat Xiang Thong, Vat That Luang, Vat Vixun, Vat Pa Phon Phao, and former royal palaces, as well as for buildings in other cities in Laos. Achan Manivong knew and respected Sathu Nyai Khamchan for long time, and they really connected when discussing topics such as Lao art and architecture, (Morin and Farmer 2009: 104).

Vientiane, looked like a *naga*'s head with a long crest and bear,¹⁰⁴ and the other one at the funeral of Pha Khu Luang Nakharut (1882–1955), former abbot of Vat Inpaeng in Vientiane, looked like a chicken head with a cockscomb.¹⁰⁵ Charles F. Keyes has made reference to Turner's work, who observed a funeral of the Henthawady Sayadaw in the Mandalay peninsula, in which the structure of the hearse was erected in the shape of a *hong*.¹⁰⁶ This together with my research reinforces the understanding that the *hong*-shaped chariot used at the funerals of senior monks is a common practice of Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia.

16.3 The Cremation Ceremony

After extensive discussion among Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives and followers, the villagers of Ban Vat Saen and Ban Phon Hüang villages, the monastic community, and the authorities, the date of the cremation ceremony was on 21 July 2007, twelve days after his death. The day is Saturday, in general, official working off and available for people who wanted to join the ceremony. The duration of the funeral process took longer than ordinary person, as his body has to be kept for people from various part of the world to visit and pay respect. For the copse of ordinary people was mostly kept for three days. The place for organization of the cremation ceremony was That Luang field located in the central Luang Prabang city, where an esplanade is attached to Vat That Luang temple, former site of the great royal celebrations. It was an exceptional honor for the cremation ceremony to be held here, as it had formerly been used for cremation ceremonies of very important people such as the royal cremation of Prince Phetsarat Rattanaovongsa in 1959, King Sisavang Vong in 1961, and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela, abbot of Vat Suvannakhili, a senior monk of Luang Prabang in 1987. The cremation for the ordinary monks and lay people is held at Vat Buppha Vipassanaram or Vat Pa Nya Thüþ, which is located in the suburbs of Luang Prabang.

The funeral procession on 21 July 2007 began at 10:00 a.m., with all relatives of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and some of his followers dressed in all white. Some of them observed the eight precepts as announced by a senior monk, and after that 16 senior monks chanted the *matika* Sutta. At 12:00 p.m. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body was transferred from the cool stainless steel casket to an ordinary wooden coffin, over which the catafalque was placed.

¹⁰⁴ Buddhist Archive No. C1049R to C1060R – a series of photographs of the funeral ceremony of Somdet Pha Sangkhavutthamahatherachan (Keo Uthensakda) held at the field of Vat That Luang in Vientiane on 28 June 1953. For his biography, see BAD-02-0032.

¹⁰⁵ Buddhist Archive No. C1089R to C1108R – a series of photographs of the funeral ceremony of Pha Khu Luang Nakharut held at the field of Vat That Fun in Vientiane in 1955. His biography noted by Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela, abbot of Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang, BAD-01-0232, pp. 25–29.

¹⁰⁶ Charles F. Keyes, 1975. "Tug-of-War for Merit: Cremation of a Senior Monk." *Journal of the Siam Society* 63 (1975), 44–59; Charles F. Keyes, 2000. "The Cremation of a Senior Monk." Edited by Frank E. Reynolds and Jason A. Carbine, 124–135. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Before moving Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body out of the Sala Hongtham for the funeral procession, the Sangha and laity held a *somma* (proper act of respect) ceremony, inviting the deceased to join in the procession. The cortège started at 01:30 p.m. at Vat Saen Sukharam on the side facing the That Luang field through the main street of Sisavang Vong Road. (see Illustration No. 2.33).

The official funeral rite consisted of multiple processions with participants divided according to their duties as follows: two policemen at the front two and two policemen lining the sides of the road; two young novices from Vat Saen Sukharam holding the Buddhist religious flags hung on bamboo sticks; two young novices from Vat Saen carrying a photograph of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, which depicts him carrying an umbrella on his left shoulder and his alms-bowl on his right shoulder during his *thudong* practice in the forest; a Lao folk band playing music on the back of a police car with two megaphones; eight Brahmins, senior dignitaries dressed in traditional white costume and carrying silver bowls with offerings made of banana leaf and Dok Dao Hüang flowers; students from the Law college of Luang Prabang carrying wreaths; two senior monks, Sathu Nyai Chanpheng Phalittathama Maha Thela from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram and Sathu Nyai Khamphai Phasuka Maha Thela from Vat Phabattai, reciting the *yamuk* (Pali: *yamaka*, "The Book of Pairs", name of the sixth book of the Abhidhammapitāka) by reading the text aloud from a mulberry paper manuscript, sitting under a yellow umbrella on a jeep with two megaphones decorated by yellow and white cloths; Pha Achan Maha Sali Kantasila Maha Thela from Vat Phuddhavongsa Pa Luang in Vientiane, representing the committee of the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization from Vientiane, sitting on a jeep followed by other senior monks from Luang Prabang and other provinces; further down the line, a crowd of monks and novices filled the roads, which were lined on both sides by students, the left side for girls and right for boys, both of whom came from various colleges and universities in Luang Prabang; a group of novices; and finally, the chariot with the catafalque and urn containing Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body, surrounded by organizers of the ceremony, dressed in white clothes, who came from Ban Vat Saen, Ban Phon Hüang and other communities surrounding Vat Saen Sukharam. These men, who pulled and steered the chariot, were followed by relatives of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, high-ranking officials, dignitaries, foreigners, and thousands of lay people. (see Illustration No. 2.34).

Located on the esplanade of That Luang, the funeral pyre where Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body was cremated was built in the shape of a *phasat*, consisting of a masonry pyre mounted to a tall metal pyramid symbolizing Mount Meru (see Illustration No. 2.35). The *phasat* was covered by a roof supported by four poles about 20 meters high and four wooden eaves crutches (Lao: *khaen nang*) connecting the poles with the eaves. The roof itself had four tiers with a golden-painted cusp in the center, with yellow curtains hanging down

from the roof. In keeping with tradition, the pyre was dismantled after the ceremony, its only traces being the four boundary stones that had designated the sacred space of the pyre and that were reused to mark the two main entrances to the esplanade. The pyre was surrounded by a wooden fence decorated with flowers and wreaths, with a large framed photograph of Sathu Nyai Khamchan erected next to the entrance. A large temporary marquee, around 30 meters in length, was erected on each of three sides of the funeral pyre for the attendees. The marquee on the east side was for monks and novice, the one on the south side for organizers and lay people, and the one on the west side was for relatives of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, high-ranking officials, dignitaries, foreigners, and other lay people. (see Illustration No. 2.36).

When the chariot arrived at the cremation site on the esplanade of That Luang, before transferring Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body, resting on the catafalque and covered by the urn, into the pyre, the Sangha and lay people, led by Sathu Nyai Bunthan Punyakama Thela from Vat Pa Phon Phao, made a *somma* ceremony to invite Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body to the pyre. The cremation ceremony of Sathu Nyai Khamchan was co-presided over by the chairman of the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization, CLBFO, Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singhalat, representing the Lao Sangha, and the deputy Prime Minister, Somsavath Lengsavath, representing the laity, who both sat in separate marquees. The announcements for the ceremony were made by Achan Nikon Thammachaloen, one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's disciples. The cremation ceremony programs began by reading a short biography of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, which was followed by a reading from Sathu Nyai Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela of Vat Phukhouay. After that came the religious ritual of *bangsukun* (Pali: *pamsakūla*).¹⁰⁷ The first group to place the *bangsukun* robes around the pyre were those from the official committee, led jointly by Somsavath Lengsavath for the government officials. On the monks's side were those from the LCBFO committee, led by Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singharat, who recited the funeral verses (*aniccā vata...*)¹⁰⁸ and took the robes which were placed in front of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's coffin (see the photo of the important figures at Illustration No. 2.37). The other groups were followed by the relatives of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other senior monks. After the *bangsakun* ceremony, participating monks and lay people gathered together to pose for portraits. The next step was the placing of *dok mai chan* (flowers sandalwood", artificial flowers made of dried sandalwood in the shape of a white rose), attached to which were one incense stick, one small candle and one small piece of pine, onto the pyre. This was first done by the monks, after which the laity followed, with each person saying, “ຂໍໃຫ້ດວງວິນຍານສາທຸໄທຍ໌ໄປສູ່ສຸຄະຕິເທີ້ນ [may the soul of Sathu Nyai rest in

¹⁰⁷ A number of monks are usually even numbers and start from four, take the robes placed around the pyre known as *sak phabangsukun* (taking of the yellow robes dedicated to the deceased person) and recite the *pamsukūla* chanting while taking the robes.

¹⁰⁸ Verses for recitation while taking *bangsukun* robes (see the verses in Pali with English translation in Nārada and Kasspa 2008: 15–16, and see also Langer 2012: 27–28).

peace].” This sentence is popularly and traditionally used by the Lao people during cremations; it is their last chance give their blessings and pay their respects to the deceased. According to Lao cultural and religious beliefs, one makes merit by participating in a cremation ceremony. Therefore, it is also believed that the participation in the cremation of such a senior monk will bring even more merit, as anyone who dies in the yellow robes and dedicated his life to the religion is thought to be a source of great merit.

Before the actual cremation began, all participants joined in a final mourning ceremony paying homage to Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s body, asking for him to remove all bad karma resulting from any wrong action they may have taken against him, and also offering blessing to his spirit that it be sent to paradise. The burning began at 5:30 p.m. by setting off a small rocket which travelled along a wire into the pyre in order to ignite it. While the fire was burning, it began to rain heavily, and all of the participants were drenched as it continued to pour for about an hour. The rain brought with it a strong wind, which fueled the fire and made the flames grow and glow magnificently. It should be noted that a similar event occurred at the royal cremation ceremony of King Sisavang Vong in 1961, whose cremation was also held at the esplanade of That Luang on 29 April 1961.¹⁰⁹ When rain pours down at the moment of performing the ceremony, it is believed by some that the heavens are expressing their appreciation for the offering, while others believe that the raindrops are ‘flowers from the heavens’. In the case of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s cremation, many interpreted the rain as a symbol of his high status as a meritorious person or *phu mi bun*, (see Illustration No. 2.38).

On the following morning of 22 July 2007, at 8:30 a.m., Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s bones were presented in a procession with his relatives and followers, both monks and lay people, with the police on duty for security and safety patrol. Some of the participants collected some of the remains of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s burnt bones and put them into a glass bowl shaped like an alms-bowl (see Illustration No. 2.39). After the merit-making ceremony, the bones were moved and stored in the small nook in the main altar in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam, which was prepared by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself a few years before his death. He told his foster child, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan, that, “if I die one day, you are to have my bones kept in this nook”. The altar already contained the bones of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s teacher, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, former abbot of Vat Saen, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan had requested for his bones to be kept together with those of his teacher and mentor. Both monks were and still are regarded as great and highly respected abbots by the monks and novices of Vat Saen Sukharam. Moreover, some people collected pieces of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s bones to keep them on a sacred shelf in their houses for worship. People do not normally do this with the bones of lay people or ordinary monks, because it is believed

¹⁰⁹ Information came from Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan (present Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo), at Ban Phon Hüang, Luang Prabang on 12 August 2013.

that the spirit of the deceased may punish them for such actions, making them afraid to do so. It was quite different, however, with Sathu Nyai Khamchan's remains, as they believed it would be able to protect them, keep their infants from crying at night and perform other miracles.

17. Conclusion

Sathu Nyai Khamchan had an extraordinary and fascinating life. His family members were influential in his childhood, especially his grandmother, who was a devout Buddhist and strict practitioner of Lao Buddhist tradition and culture, as she actively encouraged him to enter the monastery as a temple boy, a novice and then later as a monk. Sathu Nyai Khamchan remarked that his grandmother, Nang Khamsuk, had had a significant impact on his personality, and this is reflected in the diligence in giving charity and making-merit he exhibited throughout his life. Another important family member was his brother, Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto, who was Sathu Nyai Khamchan's model for monastic life and education, greatly helping and supporting him in the furthering of his Buddhist studies, both during Sathu Nyai Khamchan's childhood and in the early stages of his monkhood.

Understanding a simple way of life as a monk in the monastery and always being properly dressed in yellow robes with an orderly *kuti*, monastic etiquette learned by Sathu Nyai Khamchan from his master, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, provided him a basic standard of living in an environment that was rapidly being changed by global forces. The relationships he had built with seniors, high-ranking persons and dignities, the people skills which he acquired from his master, helped him to make many significant achievements during his time as a monk. His sense of discipline in following Buddhist rituals and ceremonies instilled in him by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela during the early days of his monkhood provided him with in-depth experience and knowledge which became useful for him in leading the Sangha and Buddhists in the community from the late 1980s until his death in 2007.

He received a high honorific title from Myanmar in 2002, distinguished for his role in continuing the religious and political ties between Laos and Myanmar. This title indicated the prominence of Sathu Nyai Khamchan as a senior monk in Theravada Buddhism, while also reflecting the importance of Theravada Buddhism in maintaining and developing political and cultural relationships between Laos and Myanmar. The official bilateral nature of this title bestowment also reflected the high level of development and stability of the Buddhist institutions in these two countries.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's strict adherence to the monastic routine throughout his life earned him great respect among monks and lay people, through which he also became a model for later generations of monks in Luang Prabang in the twenty-first century. Personal conduct is very important for a monk who is to be regarded as well trained in the Buddhist disciplines (Vinaya), which contains many rules for monastic conduct and personal expression. A modest manner gains a monk more veneration from the people, with every bodily movement being subject to scrutiny by spectators, who place their faith in those who follow these rules rigorously. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was known for being hospitable, direct in his speech, austere in his practice, and modest in his manner and appearance, including a high sense of morality. The Mahayana monk from Japan's reaction after meeting the well-trained Sathu Nyai Khamchan, putting him on the same level as other well-practiced monks in Cambodia and even his own teacher in Japan, was similar to those of many Lao Buddhists who met Sathu Nyai Khamchan on different occasions; namely, they were most impressed by him. Such reactions reflect his well-trained mind and body, as well as the power of his lovely kindness. Even in old age, these qualities could be recognized in his face, which was always fresh and friendly, often carrying an almost serene expression.

Among his disciples, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan, who became his foster child, played an important role in the organization of the funeral ceremony for Sathu Nyai Khamchan and managed the valuable objects in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's collection at Vat Saen Sukharam. Achan Bunpheng later ordained as a monk in Vat Saen Sukharam in order to re-establish the rules of the traditional administrative system of the monastery set in place and practiced by Sathu Nyai Khamchan during his lifetime, as he had observed that the system had been neglected by young abbots who were unaware of such practices. There were also two lay Buddhists who were important and faithful supporters of Sathu Nyai Khamchan because they provided him with medicine and food throughout their lives. One of these supporters was Doctor Khamphui Pathumvan, who regularly provided Sathu Nyai Khamchan with his medical services, giving him monthly injections of Deca-Durabolin which enabled him to sit through Buddhist ceremonies for hours without pain. The other influential supporter was Mae Hüan who devoted much of her time to the preparation of cooked rice for Sathu Nyai Khamchan at breakfast and lunch. Through the loyal support of these devout followers, Sathu Nyai Khamchan remained in relatively good health despite his multiple illnesses.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was not famous for having magical powers or healing abilities, but the stories reported by those who used his holy water (*nam mon*) to heal the mentally ill and those who wore his amulets of around their necks and survived extreme car accidents reflect the powers of his virtue. However, he himself reasoned that the amulets were only auspicious objects that we use to give ourselves confidence to achieve our goals or go through life without fear, emphasizing that the result of good deeds will be the supernatural power

which protects those who do them. Sathu Nyai Khamchan did have two amulets of his own, one with a Pha Bang Buddha image made of gold and another one received in person from Luang Phò Sot¹¹⁰ of Vat Pak Nam in Bangkok in 1955. He always kept these two amulets in his pocket, carrying them with him whenever he performed Buddhist rituals or whenever he left the temple.

As he was a central figure of Buddhism in Luang Prabang, the magnificent official cremation ceremony for Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body was held at the stadium of That Luang Prabang in Luang Prabang on 21 July 2007. The stadium is located in the middle of the city, and it is the same place that was used for the royal cremation ceremonies for Prince Phetsarat Rattanaovongsa in 1959, King Sisavang Vong in 1961 and the senior monk Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela in 1987. The 9th of July is noted in the Luang Prabang Sangha as the anniversary Sathu Nyai Khamchan's death. A merit-making ceremony is co-hosted each year by the Sangha of Luang Prabang, his disciples and relatives, and lay people at Vat Saen Sukharam for the purpose of memorizing his death and transferring their good deed as merit to his spirit which is now in another world.

¹¹⁰ His last honorific title Pha Mongkhonthepmuni (Sot Candhasaro, 1884–1959). He was well known on meditation and established a Dhammakaya subject. His original amulets cost million Baht in Thailand.

18. Illustrations and Captions



Illustration No. 2.1. Reproduction of a painting of Achan Thongdi (1862–1926), grandfather of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, in the uniform of Chao Phaya Luang Müang Chan. There is typed and handwritten text on the verso of this photograph, which reads, “ເຈົ້າພະຍາຫລວງເມືອງຈັນ-ອາຈານທອງດີ ມໍຣະນະ ປີ ຄ.ສ.1926 ອາຍຸ 64 ປີ. [Chao Phaya Luang Müang Chan-Achan Thongdi died in AD 1926, at the age of 64]” (Buddhist Archive No. A4338R).



Illustration No. 2.2. Nang Khamsuk (1863–1943), or Nang Chao Phaya Luang Müangchan, of Ban Lakkham village, Luang Prabang, grandmother of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, in her nun attire. This photograph was probably taken in the late 1930s (Buddhist Archive No. A4332R).



Illustration No. 2.3. All members of Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Mah Thela’s family posing for a portrait in front of their house in Ban Lakkham village, Luang Prabang in late 1937. The handwriting of Sathu Nyai Khamchan on the photograph reads: “ຄະນະຍາຕິພິນ້ອງຖ່າຍຮ່ວມກັນ ເມື່ອປາຍປີ ພ.ສ. ໒໔໗໙ ເມື່ອອາຍຸໄດ້ ໑໖ ປີ. ພະຄໍາຈັນ. [A group of relatives, taken together in late BE 2479 (AD 1937) at age 16, Pha Khamchan].” Seated in the chair: Nang Khamsuk (Nang Chao Phaya Luang Müiangchan). Back row, l-r: Thit Khamtan (Phia Müxa), Khammungkhun, Unidentified woman, Nang Phia Phio (third wife of Thit Khamtan), Nang Khamuan Upalavan, Nang Khamxao Phummavong, Thit Khamphan Phummavong, Novice Khamchan, Sathu Khamphan Suamanphuto (Buddhist Archive No. B4800R).



Illustration No. 2.4. Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela (1893–1943), former abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam (1913–1943), He was Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s Buddhist teacher, and he passed away at Vat Saen Sukharam in 1943 at the age of 51. This photograph was taken in 1933 when he was 40 years old (Buddhist Archive No. B0228R).



Illustration No. 2.5. Sathu Nyai Khamchan framed his portrait together with the portrait of his preceptor, Somdet Pha Sanghalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch of Laos as a personal souvenir. These two photographs were both taken in the the year of 1957 when Sathu Nyai Khamchan was 37 and Somdet Pha Sanghalat was 66 (Buddhist Archive No. A0026R).



Illustration No. 2.6. Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly went to Bangkok and visited his preceptor, Somdet Pha Sanghalat Thammayana Maha Thela, who fled his home country in 1979 to the Sangha hospital in Bangkok. Sathu Nyai Khamchan practiced his duties as a good *antevāsika* (disciple) to his preceptor. This photograph was probably taken in 1983/84 at the Sangha hospital in Bangkok. The other monk seated on the right hand of Sathu Nyai Khamchan is Sathu Phò Uan Aphakaro (1920–), who was ordained by Sathu Nyai Khamchan in 1982 (Buddhist Archive No. B4789R).



Illustration No. 2.7. From left to right, Khamchan (Sathu Nyai Khamchan), at the age of 6 in 1926. The handwriting on the photograph, reads: “តាំຈັນ ខាមុ 6 បី, ជូ ខាមុ 10 បី, សាហូ ហៃយ៉ង្ស ខាមុ 24 បី ពុំយមើបី ព.ស. 1926. [Khamchan, age 6, Phu, age 10 and Sathu Nyai Phaeng [of Vat Saen Sukharam], age 24, taken in AD 1926].” This photograph confirms that he was already a temple boy at that time (Buddhist Archive No. B0544R).



Illustration No. 2.8. Teacher and pupils of Vat Pa Fang posing for a portrait in front of the staircase of the Buddhist school in Vat Pa Fang, Luang Prabang in 1934. Novice Khamchan, age 14, is standing on the right, Sathu Khamphan Sumanaphuto is sitting on the chair, and the other two novices have yet to be identified (Buddhist Archive No. A0837R).



Illustration No. 2.9. A studio portrait of Novice Khamchan Virachit (left) and Novice Onsi Mangkhala (right), drawn in Chiang Rai province in Thailand in June 1935 directly after their arrival there. The handwriting on the verso reads: “ຖອນທີ່ຊຽງຮາຍ ເດືອນ ມິຖຸນາ 1935, 2478 ອາຍຸ 15 ປີ ຍັງ 3 ເດືອນ. [Taken in Chiang Rai in June 1935, [BE] 2478, 3 months before my fifteenth birthday]” (Buddhist Archive No. A0803R and A0803V).



Illustration No. 2.10. Monks and novices of Vat Benchamabòphit in Bangkok in BE 2479 (AD 1936). Novice Khamchan Virachit (Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela) is fifth from the right in the front row. This photo is from the first year of his Buddhist studies in Bangkok (Buddhist Archive No. B0663R).

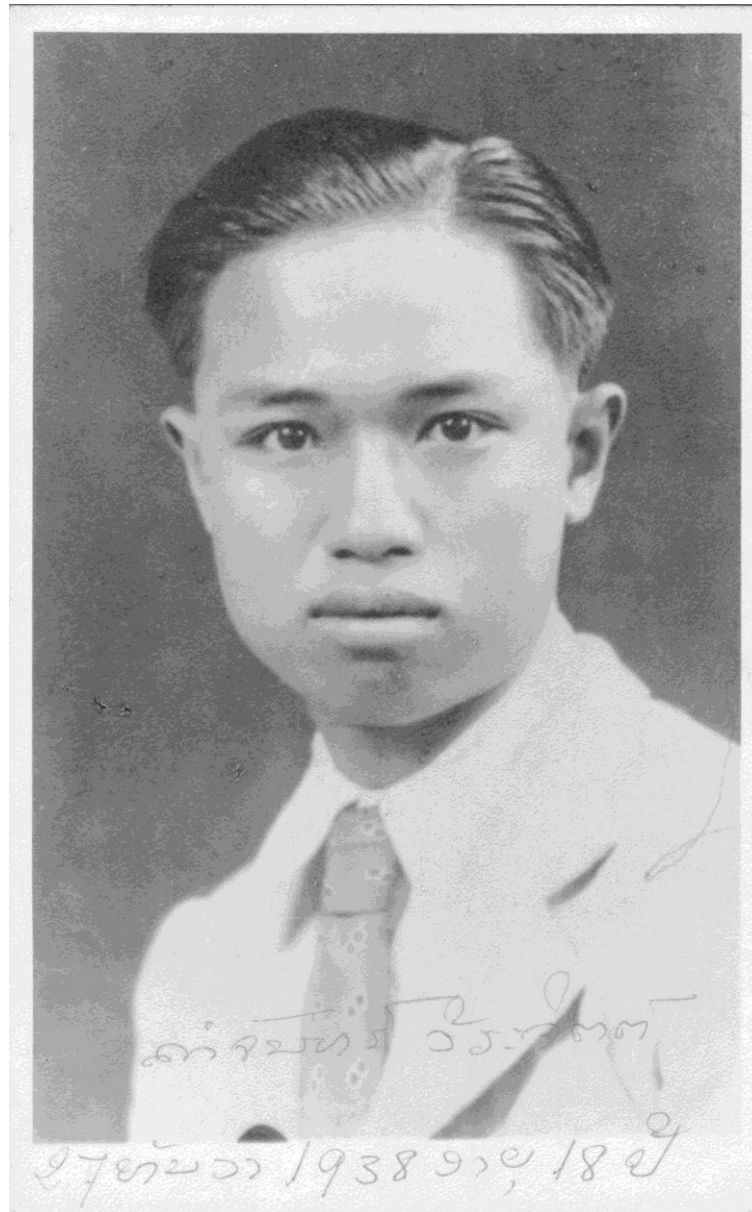


Illustration No. 2.11. This first passport portrait of Khamchan Virachit as a layman was taken in 1938, when he was sent to Bangkok to buy consumer goods to sell at their grocery store in Luang Prabang. The text on the photograph, reads: “คำจัน วิรัชิต จิด ๒๗ ธันวาคม ๑๙๓๘ อายุ ๑๘ ปี [Khamchan Virachit on 27 December 1938 at the age of 18]” (Buddhist Archive No. B1109R).

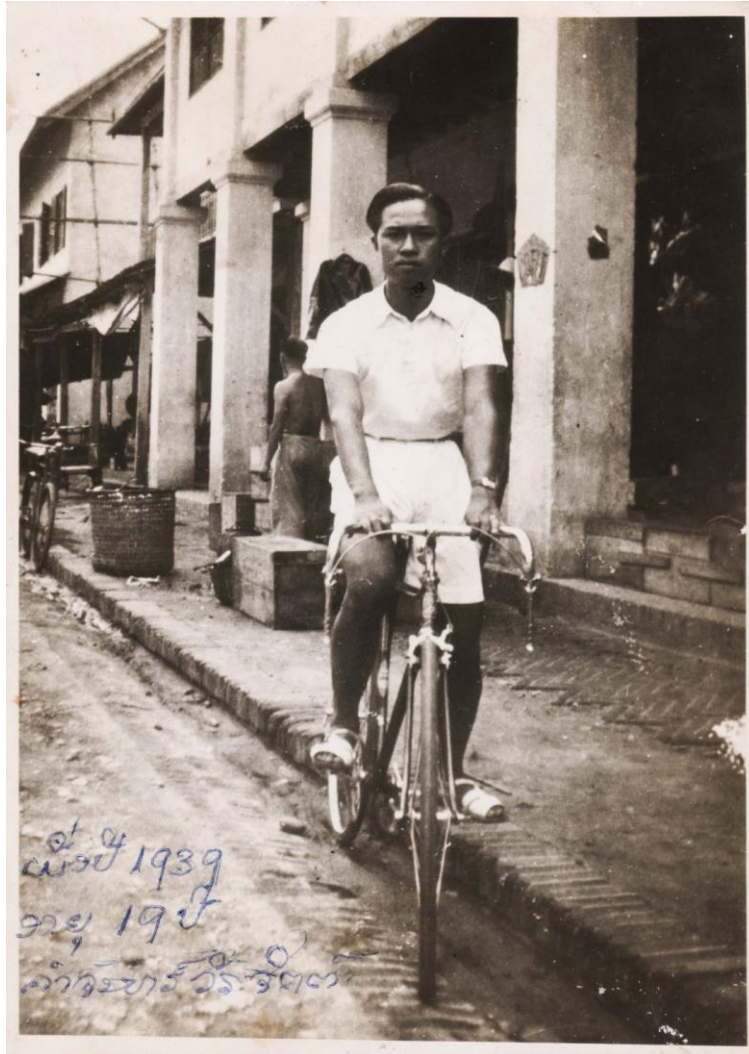


Illustration No. 2.12. Khamchan Virachit riding on his very own bicycle imported from Saigon in southern Vietnam, which cost him 65 piaster. At that time, there were only five bicycles in the entire city of Luang Prabang. The text on the photograph, reads: “ເມື່ອປີ 1939 ອາຍຸ 19 ປີ ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດ [Khamchan Virachit at the age of 19 in 1939]” (Buddhist Archive No. A0191R).



Illustration No. 2.13. Photograph of the *nak* procession before entering into the temple hall for the ordination ceremony on 9 June 1941, with Khamchan Virachit riding on the white horse, posing together with his friends for a portrait in front of the temple hall of Vat Saen Sukharam. Most of them are dressed in Lao Lan Xang attire. Khamchan's riding on the horse is symbolic of the great departure of Prince Sitthatha (Gautama Buddha) for his ordination with his horse Kandhaka (Buddhist Archive No. A3290R).



Illustration No. 2.14. The ordination process in the temple hall of Vat Saen on 9 June 1941, with Nak Khamchan Virachit (left) and Nak Khamphay Buppha (right) kneeling on the floor with their hands raised in prayer, holding a *ticvara* in front of their preceptor, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, requesting to be ordained before an assembly of 30 monks (Buddhist Archive No. A3406R).



Illustration No. 2.15. A group of monks and novices of Vat Pa Fang posing for a portrait in front of the *sim* on the day of Buddhist Lent in 1941 during Pha Khamchan's first year of monkhood. Sitting on the chairs from right to left: Sathu Khamchan Virachitto and the abbot (his brother), Sathu Maha Khamchan Sumanaphuto (Buddhist Archive No. B0112R).



Illustration No. 2.16. Sathu Nyai Khamchan posing for a portrait in his kuti with souvenir objects presented to him by the Sangha and government of the Union of Myanmar in 2002 together with the sacred honorific title of ‘Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja’. The objects are as follows: a wooden sign with his name located in front of him, a framed and decorated certificate in Burmese and English on his left hand side, a white umbrella behind him, and a yellow flag with his title embroidered into the center on his right hand side (Buddhist Archive No. B4915R).

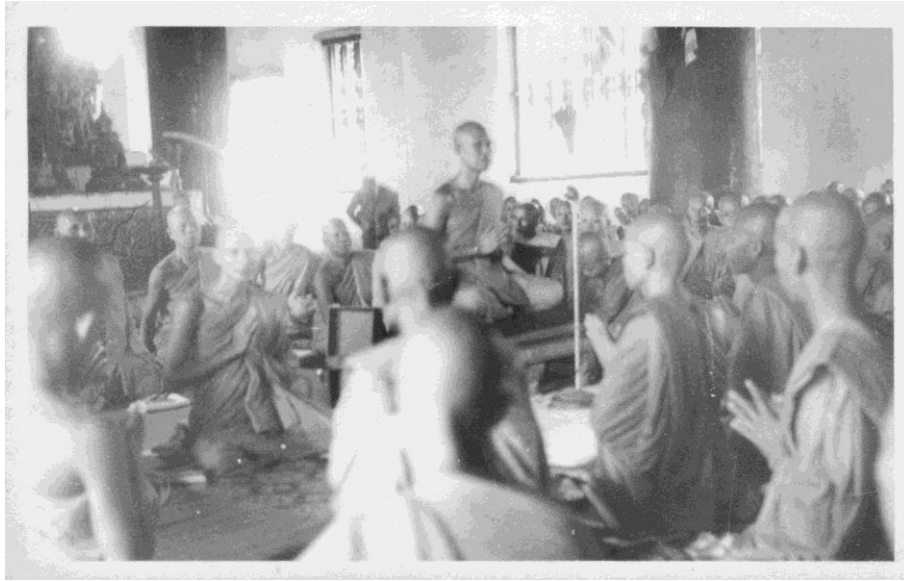


Illustration No. 2.17. the assembly of the Luang Prabang Sangha in the *sim* of Vat Vixun in the 1960s for the recitation of the Pātimokkha by Sathu Nya Khamchan (sitting on the preacher's pedestal). The ceremony was presided over by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela (Buddhist Archive No. B1759R).



Illustration No. 2.18. Another photograph of the assembly of the Luang Prabang Sangha in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam for the recitation of the Pātimokkha by Sathu Nyai Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela (sitting on the preaching pedestal). The photograph was taken by the author in August 2006 during the Buddhist Lent.



Illustration No. 2.19. Sathu Nya Khamchan walking at the head of hundreds of monks and novices on the main street of Sisavang Vong Road for alms-collecting. The photograph shows a Western woman giving alms to Sathu Nyai Khamchan. It was taken on 21 October 2005 and was posted on the Facebook address of Tom Pmv for free distribution on 15 August 2014. The photograph shows how the other people also participate in the popular Lao tradition of *binthabat*.



Illustration No. 2.20. This photograph shows the Luang Prabang people presenting alms to Sathu Nya Khamchan and other monks and novices; the women are seated and the men are standing. The photograph was taken by the author in August 2006.



Illustration No. 2.21. Sathu Nyai Khamchan posing for a portrait on 24 November 2000 in front of a small hut in Vat Pa Phon Phao where he had stayed during the annual *parivasakam* practice and which he had used as his *tupkam* (*parivasakam* hut) since the 1980s. This hut was normally used as the office of the monastic foundation of Vat Pa Phon Phao known as *munnithi paetmün siphon phathamakhan* (the Foundation of Eighty-four Thousands of Dhamma), founded by Sathu Nyai Xaysamut Jotika Maha Thela, former abbot of the monastery. At

present the hut has been renovated and given a modern style (Buddhist Archive No. B8727R).

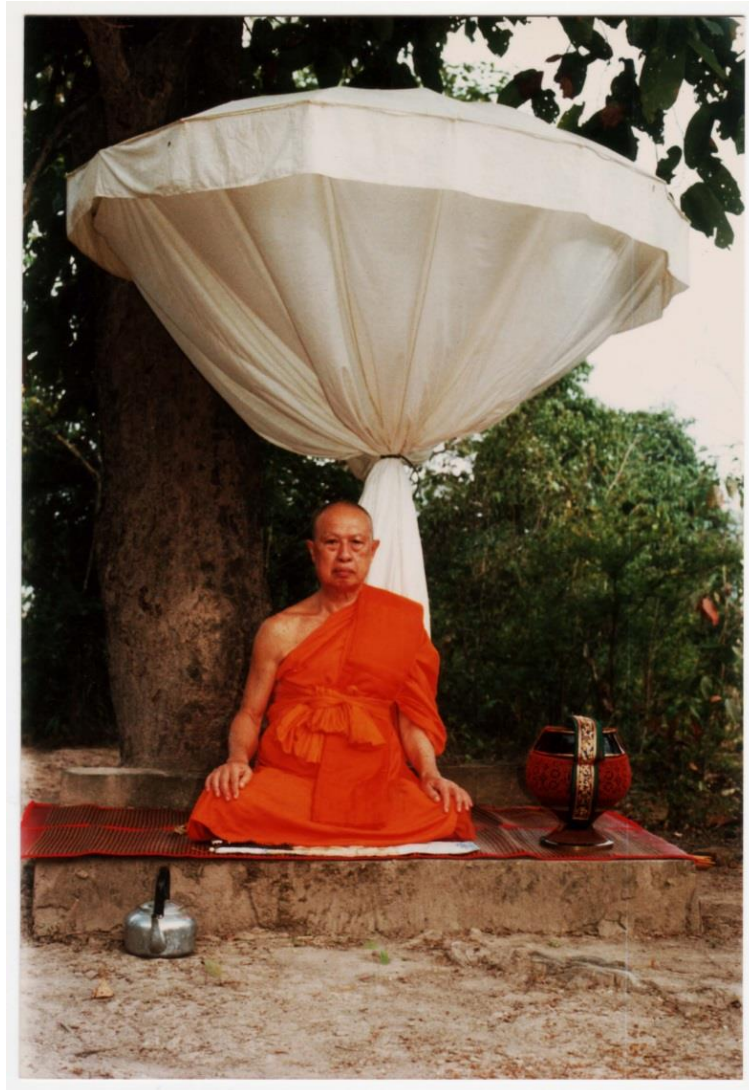


Illustration No. 2.22. Sathu Nyai Khamchan under his *sapphathon* (large umbrella) and behind a net beneath a tree while on thudong in Vat Pa Phon Phao, Luang Prabang in the 1990s. He inherited the sapphathon from his preceptor, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela (Buddhist Archive No. A0173R).



Illustration No. 2.23. This photograph shows the regular practice and simple lifestyle of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in his abode, which contained no lavish furniture. All of his belongings were arranged on the floor, and he himself sat on the floor when eating, reading, writing, etc. Portraits of himself and other important figures including senior monks, kings and politicians are hung on the wall. This photograph was taken in March 2007 and was provided courtesy of Sathu Ounkham Akkhapanyo.



Illustration No. 2.24. Sathu Nyai Khamchan receiving Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn at Vat Saen Sukharam in November 1993. The photograph reflects his good-natured and friendly attitude (Buddhist Archive No. B4756R).



Illustration No. 2.25. Sathu Nyai Khamchan and his doctor, Doctor Khamphui, posing for this photograph in the cultural garden of the Tai Lü ethnic group in Jinghong, located in the Autonomous Prefecture of Xixuangbanna in Yunnan, China, on their last journey to the south of China and the north of Laos, on 12 May 2005. Doctor Khamphui, who entered Vat Saen Sukharam in 1978 as Sathu Nyai Khamchan's doctor, showed great dedication in caring for the monk's health, and was referred to Sathu Nyai Khamchan as his '*chao xivit*' (the owner of [his] life) (Buddhist Archive No. A0247R).



Illustration No. 2.26. Mae Hüan was one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s supporters who always took special care in preparing his food over the years. I asked Sathu Nyai Khamchan for his kind permission to allow me to photograph the two of them together before having lunch in March 2007. This photograph was taken in March 2007 and was provided courtesy of Sathu Ounkham Akkhapanyo.



Illustration No. 2.27. The decorative pot which Sathu Nyai Khamchan used as his *mò nammon* (holy water pot). A small amount of water was found remaining in the pot, which was discovered two months after his passing (Museum No. VSS_000628).



Illustration No. 2.28. This small amulet containing Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s picture was manufactured by Charoenchai Kanchang Buddhique in Bangkok, in 2003. The photograph is from the biography of Sathu Nyai Khamchan published in 2004.



Illustration No. 2.29. This larger amulet containing Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s picture was manufactured by Che Daeng Buddha shop in Vat Rajanadda, Bangkok, in 2003. The photograph is from the biography of Sathu Nyai Khamchan published in 2004.

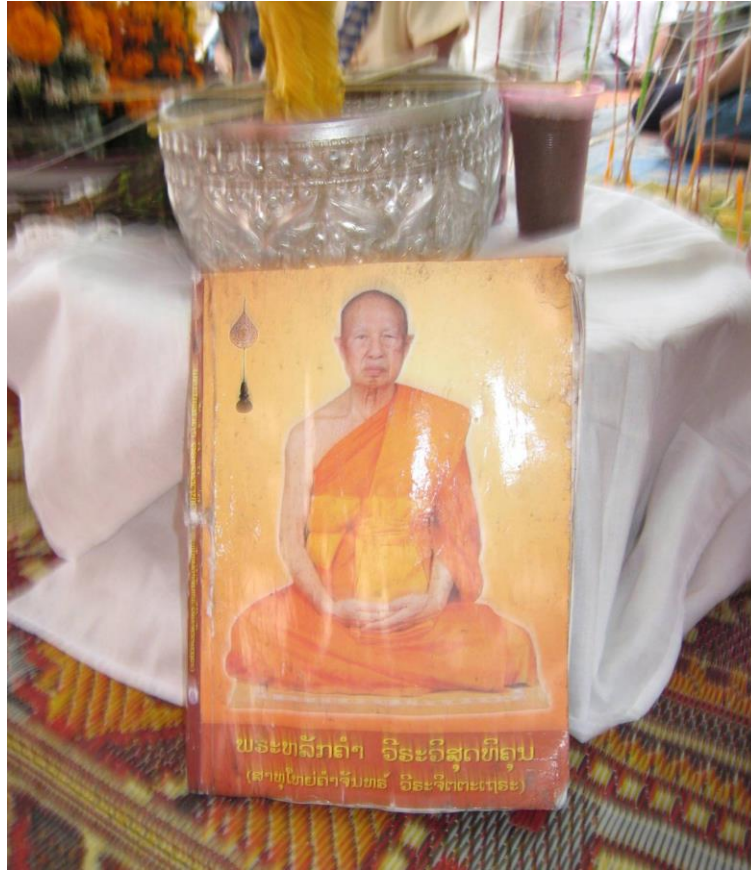


Illustration No. 2.30. Here one can see the condition of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's biography which was kept on the altar shelf in a house in Vientiane that burned down in March 2007. In the photograph they placed it in the *paritta mungkhun* ceremony as an auspicious object before starting the building of their new house. Someone offered to buy the book for 20 million Kip (US\$ 2,155), but the owner rejected the offer, as a price cannot be placed on a such an invaluable work. The photograph was taken in March 2007, and provided courtesy of Sathu Ounkham Akkhapsanyo.



Illustration No. 2.31. On 9 July 2007, the day on which Sathu Nyai Khamchan passed away, his body was displayed on a decorative wooden bed in Sala Hongtham in Vat Saen Sukharam. The news of his passing rapidly spread through the city of Luang Prabang. Monks and lay Buddhists who heard the news came to attend the ceremony and pay their respects (courtesy of Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan)



Illustration No. 2.32. In the evenings between the 9th and 21st of July, the Sangha and lay Buddhists performed the *matika* chanting (courtesy of Sathu Nyai Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela).



Illustration No. 2.33. Over a thousand attendees at the funeral procession, including monks, novices, state officials, students, people from the Buddhist community and tourists, walking through the main street in Luang Prabang on 21 July 2014 (courtesy of Martin Jürgens).



Illustration No. 2.34. The procession of the chariot in front of the former palace (courtesy of Martin Jürgens).



Illustration No. 2.35. At the That Luang before moving the body of Sathu Nyai Khamchan from the hong chariot to place at the *Phasat* pyre, the Sangha and lay people paying homage and asking for permission from him, (courtesy of Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan).



Illustration No. 2.36. A view of the cremation ceremony from a high point on the Vat That Luang side (courtesy of Martin Jürgens).



Illustration No. 2.37. Important figures from both sides of the government and the Lao sangha organization posing for a portrait after finishing the *bangsukun* ritual (the taking of funeral robes). Front row, l-r: Mr. Vongchan Phomsavat, the Vice President of the Central Lao Front for National Construction, H.E. Vongphet Xaikoe Yachongtua, the President of the Central Lao Front for National Construction, H.E. Somsavat Lengsavat, the Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Khamuan Buppha, the Minister of the Ministry of the Prime Minister's office, H.E. Chansi Phosikham, the governor of the province of Viangchan, H.E. Prof. Dr. Buntiam Phitsamai, the Minister of the Ministry of the Prime Minister's office. Back row, l-r: Phakhu Anāviro Bunthong Vipaxai (Yathan Xagnon), from Vat Nong Duang, Vientiane, Pha Achan Bunsi from Vat Sinuan, Vientiane, Unidentified monk, Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singharat, the President of LBFO, from Vat That Luang Neua, Pha Achan Sali Kantasila Maha Thela from Vat Maha Phutthavongsa (Sok Pa Luang), and Pha Achan Vet Masenai from Vat Sisaket, Vientiane, (Courtesy of Sathu Nyai Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela).



Illustration No. 2.38. After the storm began, the fire started burning intensely (courtesy of Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan).



Illustration No. 2.39. The remains of Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected by monks, novices and his disciples and relatives from the pyre on 22 July 2014. The foster child of Sathu Nyai Khanchan, Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan, appears here carrying the tray supporting the glass bowl with Sathu Nyai Khmachan's bones. The other person is Achan Khampom Phongsavan, who was also a disciple of Sathu Nyai Khamchan (courtesy of Achan Khampom Phongsavan).

Chapter 3

Construction and Reconstruction of Monastic Buildings

1. Introduction

It is well-known that monasteries are places which embody many aspects of the cultural heritage of Laos, particularly in Luang Prabang, a World Heritage Site, where we can find lively traditions in the fine arts, architecture, decoration, rituals, festivals, ceremonies and Buddhist studies. In Luang Prabang, the temples and monasteries act the most culturally significant architectural feature of the city, and they are well known throughout Southeast Asia for their distinctive style, which is composed of tiered roofs and pillared porticos, embellished with ornamentation of the highest quality, including wood carving, stucco molding, dry fresco wall painting, lacquer work, and glass mosaic work (UNESCO 2004: 24).

The *sim*¹¹¹, a monastic building displaying a unique style of architecture and decorative style in which ecclesiastical acts and ceremonies are performed, is the most important building in the monastery. The prominent feature of a *sim* in the Luang Prabang style is the multiple-layered sloping roof. In general, they have six large pillars in binary standing at their front facades, and the two central pillars are taller than the others, which gradually decrease in size. They are categorized into two main types – the shorter structures are known as the female type, while the taller structures correspond to the male type (Association of Lao Architects and Civil Engineers 2011: 11). In Heywood’s inspiring work, “Ancient Luang Prabang,” she describes in detail the varying styles of the different *sim* in Luang Prabang. She states that:

Parmentier classified them between 1911 and 1927 architectural styles were categorized into three main categories, denoted by region, namely, Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Xiang Khouang. These are identified principally by the roof styles, and sometimes by the construction of the *sim*. [...] Subsequently, the temples have been categorized by UNESCO. They have identified four specific styles, based on the layout of the supporting pillars and the position of the Buddha image inside, which they have classified as Luang Prabang Style I, II, III and Thai Style. [...] In the UNESCO

¹¹¹ This may be also referred to as a *phattha sima*, *vihan* (Pal: *vihara*), *aham*, *alam* or *aram* (Pali: *ārāma*), adapted from the Pali word, *buddhasīmā* (boundary established by the Sangha). In English, it may referred to as a hall, an assembly hall, an ordination hall, or a temple hall.

categorization, Luang Prabang Style I has pillars within the central structure are higher than those of the supporting periphery, and a covered gallery surrounds the central structure. Inside, the pedestal of the Buddha is separated from the back wall by a gallery. This simpler style includes Vat Mai, Vat Pak Khan, Vat Vixun and Vat That Luang. In Luang Prabang Style II, the pillars within the central structure are higher than those of the exterior supporting periphery, as in Style I. However, in this category, the building spreads out across four sections, when viewed from the front eastern end, with a veranda leading to the main portico. Inside, the pedestal of the Buddha is attached to the back wall. This more elaborate style includes Vat Xiang Thong, Vat Khili, Vat Chum Khòng, Vat Si Bun Hüang, Vat Xiang Muan and Vat Saen. In Luang Prabang Style III, the pillars of the central structure are all of the same height, unlike Style I and II. There are no pillars within the building, and the building spreads out across three to five sections, with a veranda in front. Inside, the pedestal of the Buddha is attached to the back wall, so there is no gallery behind it. This style includes Vat Chòmphet, Vat Pa Phai, Vat Sop, Vat Aham, Vat Muenna, Vat Phon Say, Vat Hò Xiang [Hua Xiang], Vat Maha That, Vat Aphay and Vat Nòng. In the Thai Style, the pillars of the main structure are all of the same height, as in Style III, and there are no pillars inside the sanctuary and the building extends across three to four closed sections, preceded by a veranda. Although the basic structure is the same as Luang Prabang Style III, the temples are higher and less graceful. These are later constructions, built during the second half of the 19th century. These include Vat Pa Khae and Vat Pa Huak.

(Heywood 2006: 39–40)

According to Asian scholars such as Woralancha Bunyasurat in his work, “^{ที่}ชมสถาปัตยกรรม: วัดในหลวงพระบาง Architectural Appreciation: Monasteries in Luang Prabang”, he has classified the *sim* into five styles, those being the Luang Prabang style, Vientiane style, Xiang Khouang style, Tai Lü style and the mixed style. Hence, a *sim* in Luang Prabang style is found at Vat Xiang Thong; one is found in Vientiane style both at Vat Pa Khae and Vat Pa Fang; the Xiang Khouang style can be found at Vat Suvannakhili; a *sim* of the Tai Lü style can be found at Vat Pak Khan and Vat That Luang; there are also *sim* of the mixed style, which can be found at Vat Saen and Vat Vixun.

Since the fourteenth century, the Buddhist faithful among the royal patrons, noblemen, merchants and local villagers of Luang Prabang focused their funds and efforts on the erection of temples and monasteries. In former times, the status of a monastery was determined in relation to its founder; monasteries which were built by kings or rulers were recognized as *vat luang* (royal monasteries), such as Vat Xiang Thong, Vat Vixun, Vat Mai and others.¹¹² Monasteries which were built by officials, merchants, noblemen and ordinary people were

¹¹² Vat Xiang Thong was built in 1560 by King Setthathirat (r. 1548–1571), and it is one of the most beautiful and charming monasteries in the city, well-known as an architectural gem in Southeast-Asia. Vat Vixun was initially built between 1512 and 1515, during the reign of King Vixunnarat (r. 1501–1520), but was partially destroyed by a fire in 1887 and then restored by King Sakkarin (Khamsuk) in 1898; it was one of the most imposing monasteries in the old royal town. At present, Vat Vixun is part of the national museum exhibiting the wooden Buddha statues and other Buddhist art objects. Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, one of the most impressive temples in Luang Prabang, was initially built in 1796 by King Anurut with its restoration undertaken in 1821 by King Manthaturat (see Houmphanh et al. 2000). At present, Vat Mai is well-known as the place where the watering of the Pha Bang, the sacred gold Buddha statue, takes place during the Lao New Year festival, (see Berger 2000).

recognized as *vat lat* or *vat rat* (community monasteries). However, in the twentieth century, the construction and renovation of monastic buildings in many monasteries in Luang Prabang were led by abbots and senior monks, with the support of the people. These projects were approved by and sometimes even received financial support from the government.

The important religious structures are composed of various buildings such as: the *sim* or the *phutthavat* (Pali: *buddhāvāsa*, the residence of the Buddha), where Buddha statues are erected and formal acts of the Sangha take place; the *ho tai* (Pali: *dhammacetiya*, a monastic library or a shrine of the doctrine) where Buddhist teachings such as the Tipiṭaka as well as manuscripts and other religious books are held; *kutis* (monks' living quarters) where monks and novices stay; *that* (reliquary stupas) in which relics of the Buddha are kept; and a *hò kòng* (drum shelter) where a large drum for the monastery is hung and stored as well as, at least in some monasteries, a hanging bell. In the eighteenth century, there were sixty-five monasteries in the city of Luang Prabang¹¹³, of which only twenty-nine monasteries remain at present. There are three reasons which explain why the monasteries in Luang Prabang have disappeared. Firstly, the climate with its tropical storms and rains has ravaged many of these frail and mostly wooden structures. Secondly, there were fires which devastated the town on several occasions, particularly the one during the Lao New Year in 1774. Finally, during both the French and American colonial periods, the reconstruction and restoration of the city was accompanied by the demolition of several monasteries in order to make way for administrative buildings, barracks and new housing (Houmphanh et al. 2000: 17). For example, in 1895, Vat Si Than or Vat Thithan, which was built in CS 1218 (AD 1856) was destroyed by the French commission so they would have space to construct their own houses (Khamman 1964: 14). Despite this tragic loss of monastic sites in the past, during the late second half of the twentieth century, the number of the monasteries has been increasing, both in the surrounding area of the city where people have established new villages and communities, as well as in the countryside. It is very important to note that the construction of those monasteries was mostly supported and advised by none other than Sathu Nyai Khamchan.

In this chapter, a critical analysis of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's involvement in construction projects and his contributions to Luang Prabang's cultural and architectural heritage will be conducted by examining the primary sources found in his abode following his passing, including personal correspondences, official documents, historic photographs and

¹¹³ The area is bounded by the Khan River in the north, the Dong River in the south, the Mekong River in the west and Ban Vixun village in the east. The list of the sixty-five monasteries which existed during that time period appear in Chao Khamman Vongkottrattana's work, *tannan vat müang luang prabang* ທຳນານວັດເມືອງຫຼວງພະບາງ [History of the Monasteries in the City of Luang Prabang] (1964). See also in Pha One Keo Sithivong and Volker Grabowsky, 2000. "Comprehensive List of Monasteries in Luang Prabang." In *Het Bun Dai Bun*, by Hans Georg Berger. London: Westzone.

religious books, as well as interviews with several individuals who were close to the abbot. It is my hope that, through these texts, a better understanding can be attained regarding Sathu Nyai Khamchan's architectural achievements and his personal style. Architects have questioned the traditional nature of this *sim* as to whether or not it is an authentic example of a Luang Prabang style, and due to the fact that it is the first *sim* in Luang Prabang to have a covered roof with glazed flat tiles – products which are not considered to be the traditional materials used for construction – some scholars like Heywood contend that the style is closer to the Thai style (Heywood 2006: 80). This chapter seeks to provide an answer to the questions as to why and how Sathu Nyai Khamchan reconstructed his monastery in this particular style.

Another goal of this chapter is to propose that the architectural achievements of Sathu Nyai Khamchan be recognized for their influence upon the cultural heritage of Luang Prabang. The mark of many outstanding architectural intellectuals has been left in Luang Prabang throughout the twentieth century, be it in the form of artworks, architectural designs or general constructions, and many of these intellectuals have received great recognition and acclaim by both scholars and the public, such as Phia Tan¹¹⁴ (1919–2000), Achan Manivong Khattiyarat¹¹⁵ (1929–2014) and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Sirasangvara Maha Thela¹¹⁶ (1901–

¹¹⁴ Also known as Thit Tan, he studied the fine arts at the drawing school of Ban Pa Kham in Luang Prabang during his time as a novice in the 1930s, later becoming a monk at Vat Xiang Muan. After disrobing, he worked as a craftsman and artisan for the royal palace from 1940 until the Lao revolution of 1975. He created many of the prominent decorative works in Luang Prabang such as the bas-relief of 15 *naga* protecting the three-headed elephant on the front gable of the former palace of Luang Prabang, the decorations on the walls within the main hall of the palace in glass mosaic, the exterior walls of the *sim* of Vat Xiang Thong, the urn and chariot for King Sisavang Vong, the exterior front wall of the funeral chapel in Vat Xiang Thong, the staircase, and a seven-headed *naga* at Vat Hua Xiang and Vat Maha That (Supachai 2010: 173–175).

¹¹⁵ A descendant of the front palace of Luang Prabang and a renowned Lao intellectual, he was also known as Thu Lung Mani and was responsible for various creations within the fields of visual art, traditional music and performance art. In the 1990s, he was an important intellectual who served as an adviser to the local government of Luang Prabang in the revival of all kinds of ancient Lao royal art (Ibid.: 26) important to the city's cultural heritage. His prominent architectural designs flourished throughout Luang Prabang and Laos, some of his famous works being the former Luang Prabang palace, the chapel and royal chariot at Vat Xiang Thong, the Santi Chedi stupa at Vat Pa Phon Phao, and, his final work, the catafalque, urn and chariot in the *hong* (swan) shape which carried Sathu Nyai Khamchan's body in July 2007. For a full biography of Achan Manivong Khattiyarat, see France Morin and John Alan Farmer, 2009. *The Quiet in the Land, Luang Prabang, Laos*, 101–102. New York: The Quiet in the Land, Inc.

¹¹⁶ An artist and architect monk, during the 1920s, he spent the most of his time studying the fine arts in Bangkok. In 1930, he returned to Luang Prabang and then became the abbot of Vat Suvannakhili. In 1953, he was nominated as a *chao raxa khana xai* ເຈົ້າລາຊາຄະນະຊ້າຍ (ecclesiastical minister to the left hand of the Supreme Patriarch in the Sangha hierarchy) of the Monastery Construction Organization. His outstanding construction works of monastic buildings are spread throughout rural villages in Luang Prabang province as well as in the city, such as the *sim* of Vat Ban Tha Salüan, of Vat Ban Sing, of Vat Khok Man, of Vat Ban Xông Tai, of Vat Ban Xaen Khalok, of Vat Ban Xiang Lôm, of Vat Ban Pak Chaek (old temple), of Vat Ban Khònkham (old temple), Vat Ban Hat Khò, and of Vat Ban Dan, all of which are located in the countryside, and the Sala Thammavihan building, and *kuti* at Vat Suvannakhili in the city. Most notably, in 1943, he drafted the blueprints for monastic buildings in Luang Prabang in book form and distributed it to the Department of Religious Affairs in Luang Prabang. His sketch of the Sala Thammavihan has also been realized in the temples of Vat Pha Nom

1987), abbot of Vat Suvannakhili, with whom Sathu Nyai Khamchan was very familiar and whom he greatly respected. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's construction works at Vat Saen Sukharam and other monasteries throughout Laos, mainly in Luang Prabang, including Vat Sikhottabun with its *sim* in his unique style in Tha Khaek,¹¹⁷ have yet to receive much interest from scholars despite his having been very knowledgeable and well-practiced in the fields of architecture and culture, evidence for which will be provided clearly in the second half of this chapter.

2. The Historical Background of Vat Saen Sukharam

Vat Saen Sukharam is located on Sakkarin Road, a part of the community of Ban Vat Saen¹¹⁸, and is one of the most beautiful and ancient monasteries in Luang Prabang. It is situated in the peninsular area between the Mekong and Khan rivers, which is a world heritage protected area. The temple was initially founded in CS 1080 (AD 1718/19) by Ta Chao Hang, a nobleman in the city during the reign of King Kingkitsarat¹¹⁹ (r. 1707–1725). The original *sim* featured a single porch and a triple nave of four bays with a lean-to structure added onto the sides, and it was surrounded by eleven small stupas (Houmphanh et al. 2000: 38), only one of which, the rear-most pillar, still remains today. The original grounds of the monastery were not large, containing only a *sim*, a drum shelter, a *hò tai*, an *upmung*, three stupas and a few *kuti*. The current space occupied by Vat Saen Sukharam is the result of the integration of Vat

and Vat Xiang Ngoen. There exists ample evidence for his artistic works as well, such as his collections at Vat Suvannakhili which contain various types of concrete molds for floral motifs produced by himself and used to produce plaster and cement decorations for sacred architectural structures (Museum No. VSK_004180 to VSK_004209). One photograph of him taken by an American photographer shows him drawing a painting at the veranda of the *sim* of Vat Suvannakhili and another shows him instructing a novice on how to make a Buddha statue (Buddhist Archive No. C1378R and C1780R). For a full biography of Sathu Nyai Khamfan see Pha One Keo Sithivong and Khamvone Boulyaphonh, 2011. *Great monks of Luang Prabang (1854–2007)*, 67–69. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing.

¹¹⁷ Tha Khaek refers to the place known as the pier (*tha*) on the Mekong River which Indian merchants formerly frequented to produce merchandise made of fabric in the nineteenth century. The term *khaek* is mainly used to refer people from India and other countries in the Middle Eastern zone. In the history of Laos, this port town is well known for the “Battle of Tha Khaek,” in which the Lao Issara Government commanded by Prince Souphanouvong (1909–1995) met against French troops on 21 March 1946 to deter the French reoccupation of Laos after World War II (see Sukprida 2009: 82 and Stuart-Fox 1997: 65). Today, Tha Khaek is the main district of Khammuan province in central Laos.

¹¹⁸ This is due to the policy of the new regime to combine many small villages into one larger village. The name Ban Vat Saen was derived from the monastery's name, and it is the result of the combination of Ban Hua Lat, Ban Tat Mò and Ban Lakkham into one village after the start of the Lao Republic in 1975.

¹¹⁹ His full royal title was “Phra Dhammakit Lan Xang Hom Khao Borombòphit Rajathani Krungsisattanaganahut Utamarajathani Buriromyommachakkaphatratchao” or, in the abbreviated form, “Pha Dhammakit Lan Xang Hom Khao”. He was the first king of Luang Prabang after the kingdom of Lao Lan Xang had split into the two independent royal states of Lan Xang of Luang Prabang and Lan Xang of Vientiane in 1707 (Surasak 2002: 285).

Saen Sukharam itself with the ancient and abandoned Vat That Nòi¹²⁰ (temple of the small stupa) as well as with Vat Pha Chao (temple of the Buddha)¹²¹ in the early 1940s, which expanded the total area of the temple to 4,893 square meters (Title Deed ໃບຕາດິນ, 2003). The temple is surrounded by a brick wall of two meters in height (Illustration No. 3.1).

The resources I examined indicate two different dates for the founding of this temple. The first date is AD 1714, which is cited in two works, “Treasures of Luang Prabang” (Houmphanh et al. 2000: 38) and “Ancient Luang Prabang” (Heywood 2006: 80). The second date is CS 1080 or AD 1718¹²², found in the “Chronicle of the Monasteries in the City of Luang Prabang” (Khamman 1964: 33), in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s biography (Khamvone et al. 2004: 5) and in other collected documents of his. All of these resources, however, name Ta Chao Hang as the initial founder during King Kingkitsalat’s reign. In order to resolve the discrepancy between the two sets of resources, I argue that the first resource must have listed the beginning date for the construction work, while the second date is the date on which the construction was completed.

The most prominent and eye-catching building in Vat Saen Sukharam is the *sim*. The restoration work, supported financially and materially by Nang Khamsuk (Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s grandmother) and the people from the surrounding communities, was carried out by the abbot at that time, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, in 1932. The work involved the re-flooring of the hall, the decoration of the Buddha’s altar, the framework, the door, the building’s façade and the porch (Ibid.), as well as the reparation of the roof (Buddhist Archive No. B4700R). In 1936, the abbot oversaw the installation of decorative gold leaves at the pediments and façade, receiving support from Phia Rattanamongkhun, Xiang Ounkham, and Nang Phia Khamsuk from Ban Lamaet. Between the 1890s and 2007, Vat Saen Sukharam had four abbots, those being Pha Maha Akkavoraraxakhu Luang (unknown dates), Sathu Nyai Di (–1914), Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (Khamman 1964: 33). The present abbot is Sathu Buavan Punyasaro, who moved to the temple from Vat Na Xao in the Müang Khai region.

Originally, Vat Saen Sukharam was known by the name of Vat Saen, the word *saen* in Lao meaning 100,000 (one hundred thousand). The monastery’s name has been explained as having two origins. One is the name of a stone, *kònsaen* ກ້ອນແສນ, which is located at a spot on

¹²⁰ This temple was founded by Phuan people from Xiang Khouang (Khamman 1964: 35) in CS 1095, AD 1733 (BAD-12-2-1993.002).

¹²¹ Vat That Nòi and Vat Pha Chao were most likely used only for storing and displaying Buddha statues and for worship, because their grounds were very small and they did not have a *kuti* where monks could reside.

¹²² This date also appears on the inscription written in Lao script on the wall under the picture of the original *sim* on the right side of the *sim*’s porch at Vat Saen Sukharam, which reads: “ຮູບວິທາຍຫຼັງເກົ່າເຊິ່ງຕາເຈົ້າຮັ່ງໄດ້ສ້າງໄວ້ເມື່ອ ພ.ສ. ໒໒໖໑ ຮອດ ພ.ສ. ໒໕໐໐ ຈຶ່ງໂປດ ອາຍຸໄດ້ ໒໓໙ ປີ. [A picture of the old *sim* which built by Ta Chao Hang in BE 2261 (AD 1718), and in BE 2500 (AD 1957), it has been damaged [by a natural] and built for 239 years].”

the Khan River where the initial founder, Ta Chao Hang, discovered gold which he spent on materials used in the construction of the monastery. The second explanation is that the name comes from the amount of money (one hundred thousand Lao Kip) given by each donor as their contribution to the construction. Therefore, based on these two origins, the monastery was named ‘Vat Saen ວັດແສນ’. In 1953, Sathu Nyai Khamchan added the word *sukharam* ສຸຂາຣາມ to the title, which means “a Buddhist place full of happiness”. Since that time, it has been known as Vat Saen Sukharam. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was encouraged by some of his monk friends to make this addition to the name of Vat Saen. Initially, the Minister of Religious Affairs in Vientiane did not approve the name change, stating that the original name (Vat Saen) was already most appropriate and suitable. His words appear in an official document sent to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen, which reads as follows:

ອັນໜຶ່ງ ຄຳຮຽກຊີ້ ວັດແສນ ຕິດກັບຄຳ “ສຸຂາຣາມ” ນັ້ນ ບໍ່ເໝາະວ່າ ຈະມີປາກົດງົດງາມຂຶ້ນເທົ່າໃດ ສະນັ້ນ ຂໍໃຫ້ເອົາແຕ່ຊື່ວັດແສນ ຕາມ ເຖົ້າແກ່ບູຮານເອີ້ນກັນມາກໍພໍແລ້ວ.

Moreover, I do not see how the addition of “Sukharam” to the name Vat Saen contributes anything to make the name more magnificent. Therefore, please retain the name of Vat Saen, as it has been called in this manner since ancient times and does not need to be changed.

(BAD-12-2-1953.015)

With his steadfast intentions, Sathu Nyai Khamchan replied to the minister’s letter with an explanation as to why it would be reasonable to change the name of the monastery. Part of a copy of his official letter to the Minister of Religious Affairs in Vientiane, dated 1 September 1953, reads:

ອັນໜຶ່ງ ທີ່ໄດ້ຮຽກວ່າ ວັດແສນສຸຂາຣາມນັ້ນ ກໍ່ເນື່ອງຈາກໂດຮັບຄຳແນະນຳ ຈາກພະເຖລະຫຼາຍອົງວ່າ ຊື່ເກົ່ານີ້ມັນສັ້ນໂພດ ແລະບໍ່ມີ ຄວາມໝາຍດ້ວຍ ສຸກ ເຂົ້າມາ ໝາຍຄວາມວ່າ ຖ້າຜູ້ໃດຫາກເຂົ້າໄປຢູ່ແລ້ວປະພຶດປະຕິບັດຕາມພະທຳວິໄນແລ້ວ ຍ່ອມໄດ້ຮັບຄວາມ ສະຫງົບສຸກທາງກາຍແລະທາງໃຈ. ທີ່ຕໍ່ທ້າຍວ່າ ອາຣາມ ນັ້ນ ກໍ່ເນື່ອງຈາກວັດນີ້ກໍ່ໄດ້ຕັ້ງເປັນອາຣາມ ມານານແລ້ວ.

Additionally, the reason for now calling the temple Vat Saen Sukharam is that I was advised to do so by many *pha thela* (great monks) who felt that the original name was too short and carried no meaning [particular to a Buddhist place]. I added the word *suk*, which refers to a place to which people come to practice the Dhamma and Vinaya and establish peacefulness of body and mind. The word *aham* shows that this temple was built as a Buddhist place a long time ago.

(BAD-12-2-1953.082)

Because Vat Saen was combined with the grounds of Vat That Nõi and Vat Pha Chao, Sathu Nyai Khamchan thought the entire area should be integrated into one united monastery. Therefore, in 1950, he organized the consecration ceremony of the stone boundary markers (Lao: *luk nimit*)¹²³, which was held on the full moon day of the seventh lunar month, BE 2493

¹²³ *Luk nimit* (*luk*, sprout, *nimit*, auspicious sign), a round stone of at least 30 cm in diameter placed at a depth of 1 meter, one in a newly constructed or reconstructed *sim* during the consecration ceremony. Only after this ceremony can the *sim* be used by the Sangha for *sangkhakam* (Pali: *saṅgākama*, formal acts) such as ordination, *uposot*, *kathin* and others. Another eight *luk nimit* of a smaller size must be placed at the four corners of the *sim* as well as at the center of each side so that all of the eight directions are covered. The eight smaller *luk nimit* are buried partially into the ground so that only the top can be seen. They are often painted in gold color.

(31 March 1950), and presided over by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram. The Pali text recitation was led by Sathu Maha Chanpheng Piyophaso, abbot of Vat Si Phutthabat and Sathu Khamchan Virachitto, and the ceremony was attended by all of the monks in the city (Buddhist Archive No. B0565R and BAD-12-2-1950.002). A ceremony of this kind was held again in 2000, presided over by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself (BAD-12-2-2000.062). At the side of each *luk nimit*, Sathu Nyai Khamchan attached *bai sema*¹²⁴ on the lower walls of the *sim*.

Moreover, between the 1990s and 2007, by then one of the most beautiful and charming monasteries in Luang Prabang, Vat Saen Sukharam was also renowned as the seat of the head of the Luang Prabang Sangha, which resulted in Vat Saen Sukharam receiving the honor to host royal visits by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand in 1992 and 1993 (Khamvone et al. 2004), and be presented with a royal *kathin* ceremony by Princess Galyani Vadhana (1923–2008) of Thailand, accompanied by Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Kiao Upaseno, 1928–2013), abbot of Vat Saket Rajavoramahavihan in Bangkok, who later became the Acting Supreme Patriarch of Thailand from 2004 to 2013. The royal *kathin* ceremony was held in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam on 28 October 1998 (Buddhist Archive No. B5557R and BAD-12-2-1998.033). These events carry very high significance for the history of this temple and its community.

3. Renovation of Vat Saen Sukhakhom

During the time in which Sathu Nyai Khamchan was the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, it was considered to be one of the most pristine and impressive monasteries in Luang Prabang. The boundary of the temple is surrounded by a brick wall two meters in height elaborately decorated by lotus-shaped *bai sema* at the top. Eight entrances have been carved out of the brick wall, five in the front and three in the back. All buildings and religious monuments in the monastery were constructed and renovated entirely under the supervision and orders of Sathu Nyai Khamchan between the 1940s and 2000s. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's unique technique was to have no drawing plans but came from his observance and practical exercise which he learnt from his master, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan. For the construction of Vat Saen Sukharam, he used both traditional and modern materials, as it was his goal to find combinations of materials that would be elegant, stable and long-lasting, and this combination of the traditional and the modern makes this temple a classic example of the fusion of traditional and modern architecture in Luang Prabang in the twentieth century.

¹²⁴ For more details about the consecration ceremony of boundary markers, see Pinna Indorf, 1994. "The Precinct of the Thai uposatha hall [bōt]: A Southeast Asian Spirit World Domain", *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 82, Pt. 1 (1994): 19–54.

3.1 Restoration of the Sim

In the 1950s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan noticed that the whole structure of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam had become increasingly deteriorated; particularly, some parts of the walls and roof were damaged. The holes in the walls allowed water to come through, which made the paintings on the walls become faded and pale. He was motivated by these dilapidated conditions to restore the *sim* to its original standing. He determined that the decay might have been caused by the traditional materials used in construction (Illustration No. 3.2). The year 1957, which is equivalent to the 2500th year of the Buddhist Era¹²⁵, is recognized as the “half-way mark” of Buddhism and Buddha Jayanti (the victory of the Buddha). According to a famous prediction of Gautama Buddha, his teachings will endure only for 5,000 years before his teachings will be lost, after which a fifth Buddha, Maitreya, will then come to restore the knowledge of the Dhamma.¹²⁶ To celebrate this auspicious occasion, Buddhists in various Theravada countries organized many festivals, special events and activities. They also organized important projects such as the holding of conferences, the revising and publishing of the Tipiṭaka, the reproduction of manuscripts and their donation to monasteries, the carving and casting of Buddha images, and the construction and renovation of various religious sites and monuments. Sathu Nyai Khamchan deeply understood the significance of this occasion, and it was during his reflection on this matter that he made his decision to restore the *sim*.¹²⁷ On 31 October 1957, he wrote a proposal to the Minister of Religious Affairs in Vientiane requesting permission and monetary support for the reconstruction, upon which he received 27,000 Piaster (Lao: *ngoen man*) from the ministry and 2,000 Kip from members of the Pathet Lao.¹²⁸ Based on the resources we have available to us at present, it does not seem that he

¹²⁵ In Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, the Buddhist Era starts one year after Gautama Buddha passed away, but in India, Sri Lanka and Burma, the era starts one day after the Buddha’s passing. Therefore, BE 1 in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos is equivalent to BC 543, and BE 1 in India, Sri Lanka and Burma is equivalent to BC 544 (Visudh 2004: 468–478). For this reason, India, Sri Lanka and Burma celebrated the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in 1956, while Thailand, Cambodia and Laos celebrated the occasion in 1957.

¹²⁶ This belief is widely reflected in scribal colophons of manuscripts bearing Buddhist texts and in inscriptions of Buddha images. The scribes and/or sponsors and donors usually express their desire that their meritorious deed of sponsoring the copying of a manuscript or donating a Buddha image will support (Lao: *khamxu*) Buddhist Teachings (Lao: *sasana*) in persisting until the end of 5,000 years, counting from the time of the Buddha’s *parinibbāna*. This desire is grounded in the widespread belief among the Tai and Lao that the Buddha’s Teachings will be completely forgotten after 5,000 years (See Grabowsky and Apiradee 2013. See also Veidlinger 2006: 164–166).

¹²⁷ In commemoration of this meaningful and auspicious year, on the middle of the roof of the new *sim*, he made patterns of the figure of 2500 in Lao numbers (Buddhist Archive No. A4089R). Later, he took it off due to an order from King Sisavang Vatthana to do so, because some people might end up thinking that the temple had been built in the year BE 2500 (AD 1957), when it had actually been built more than three hundred years before that (Bunpheng 2013: Interview). Sathu Nyai Khamchan argued that this restoration was to commemorate the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism, but the king insisted that this monastery had been built almost 300 years ago, so the appearance of the number 2500 would be an inaccurate representation of the temple’s history.

¹²⁸ Documents relating to these donations can be found in BAD-12-2-1958.021, BAD-12-2-1957.061 and BAD-12-2-1957.185.

received any royal patronage from the palace. This may be due to the fact that his monastery was not considered to be of royal status. Nevertheless, in 1961, he received the long-term support of King Sisavang Vatthana. Later, he organized the Vessantara Jātaka festival as a fundraiser for the reconstruction of Vat Saen Sukharam, and, during the same time period, he distributed hundreds of copies of a flyer¹²⁹ throughout the country asking for donations from officials and lay people. In the flyer, he gave his reasons for restoring the *sim* as well as an explanation of what he considered to be the meaning of the Buddhist faith:

ອາຕະມາ ພະຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດໂຕ ເຈົ້າອະທິການວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ແລະ ເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງ ຫລວງພະບາງ. ຂໍຈະເລີນພອນ ທ່ານ ຜູ້ມີສັດທາທັງຫລາຍ. ວິຫານວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ເມືອງຫຼວງພະບາງ ຊຶ່ງຕາເຈົ້າຮຸ້ງ ໄດ້ສ້າງມາເກືອບ ໓໐໐ ປີແລ້ວ ເມື່ອມາຮອດປີ ພຸດທະສັງກາດ ໒໕໐໐ ເຫັນວ່າ ຂໍາລຸດຫລາຍ. ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ແຜ່ກຸສົນ ແກ່ຜູ້ມີສັດທາ ພ້ອມກັນປະຕິສັງຂອນໃໝ່ ຕັ້ງແຕ່ ມີ້ແຮມ ໔ ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ຍີ່ ພ.ສ. ໒໕໐໐ ມາຈົນເທົ່າທຸກວັນນີ້ ຍັງບໍ່ທັນແລ້ວ. ເພາະວ່າ ເມື່ອໄດ້ລົງມືເຮັດແລ້ວ ກໍ່ຕ້ອງໄດ້ເຮັດໃຫ້ໝັ້ນຄົງ ຖາວອນ ດົງງາມ ຫລັງຄາມູງໃໝ່ ດ້ວຍດິນຂໍເຄືອບ, ປະຕູ, ສີໜ້າ, ເສົາ, ພິດານ (ເພດານ), ຈະປະດັບດອກ ພອກແກ້ວ ພອກຄຳ ທັງພະເຈົ້າອົງຫລວງກໍ່ຈະໄດ້ພອກຄຳໃໝ່ ເພື່ອໃຫ້ເປັນທີ່ຣະລຶກ ໃນສະໄໝເຄິ່ງພຸດທະການ. ການສ້າງວິຫານນີ້ ເປັນພາລະໜ້າທີ່ຂອງພວກເຮົາ ເຫລົ່າພຸດທະສາສະນິກະຊົນທັງປວງ ຈະໄດ້ຊ່ອຍກັນປະຕິສັງຂອນ ເພື່ອເປັນການທຳບຸນ ຝັງຊັບຂອງຕົນໄວ້ໃນພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ປະການໜຶ່ງ ແລະ ເປັນການສະແດງກະຕັນຍູກະຕະເວທີ ຕໍ່ບັນພະບຸລຸດຂອງພວກເຮົາ ທີ່ໄດ້ສ້າງໄວ້ແລ້ວມອບໃຫ້ເປັນມໍລະດົກ ແກ່ພວກເຮົາ ປະການໜຶ່ງ, ແມ່ນອົງສົມເດັດ ພະສຳມາສຳພຸດທະເຈົ້າ ກໍ່ຍ້ອງຍໍ ວ່າມີຜະລະອານິສົງຫລາຍ ເປັນພະລະວະປັດໄຈ ນຳຕົນໃຫ້ໄດ້ສຸກສົມບັດ ໃນມະນຸດ, ສະຫວັນ ແລະ ນິບພານ. ສະນັ້ນ ຈຶ່ງຂໍແຜ່ສັດທາ ຈາກທ່ານຜູ້ມີທັງຫລາຍຕື່ມອີກ ເພື່ອຈະໄດ້ຊ່ອຍກັນສ້າງໃຫ້ແລ້ວ ຂໍຈະເລີນພອນ ມາດ້ວຍເມດຕາທຳພະຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດໂຕ.

I am Pha Khamchan Virachitto, abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam and the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang. May all faithful followers [of Buddhism] be blessed. The *vihan* of Vat Saen Sukharam in the city of Luang Prabang was built by Ta Chao Hang almost 300 years ago. As we are approaching the year 2500 of the Buddhist Era, I noticed it had become very tattered and worn down. [I] collected money from devout Buddhists and have worked on the restoration of the *vihan* from the fourth day of the waning moon of the second lunar month, BE 2500 (Saturday, 19 January 1957) until the present, at which point it has not yet been finished. This is because when we started the process [of reconstruction we] decided that it would have to be made stable, permanent and magnificent. The new roof has been covered with glazed tiles. The door frames, façade, pillars and ceilings will be decorated with stencil motifs of glass mosaics, and of gold leaves. The main Buddha statue will be re-covered with gold leaves. These acts of renovation are to commemorate the passing of the first half of the Buddhist Era. The construction of the *vihan* is a duty of all of us Buddhists, as it will both help us to place our treasures in Buddhism and thereby acquire merit, as well as display our gratefulness towards our ancestors who built [this building], which has now become a part of our heritage. According to the Buddha, he also appreciated that by building the *sim*, [we gained] much merit which is one of great factors that lead us to reach the perfection in the human world and in the heavens, and to attain *nibbāna*. Therefore, I would like to ask for your donation to help bring the construction to its completion. May the kindness of the Dhamma be with you, Pha Khamchan Virachitto.

(BAD-12-2-1959.016)

At the beginning of January 1958, the old *sim* was demolished. The demolition work, which was carried out by students from the Pali school of Luang Prabang, was completed

¹²⁹ In Lao, a document of this kind may be referred to as a *bai dika*, a *bai pheua kuson*, or a *bai pheua sattha*. The purpose of these documents was to announce the schedule for the festivities and to invite lay people to both attend and participate by giving donations. This kind of flyer still retains significant popularity and is still in wide-spread use today.

within a day (Bunpheng 2013: Interview). On 19 January 1958, Sathu Nyai Khamchan began the reconstruction work (Buddhist Archive No. B4689R) which he was to finish in late 1960. The new *sim* was taller and looked very different from the original structure (Illustration No. 3.3), as it did not really resemble a *sim* in Luang Prabang style, bearing much more similarity to the present *sim* at Vat Pa Huak and of Vat Si Phutthabat (former Vat Pa Khae) which are of Vientiane or Thai style. One day, in 1961, while King Sisavang Vatthana was on his way back to his palace from a visit to Vat Xiang Thong, he stopped at Vat Saen and entered the *sim* in order to have a look at the reconstruction work. On this particular day, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was not present in his monastery. Later, at a Buddhist ceremony in the royal palace, the king said to Sathu Nyai Khamchan that, “ອາລາມນັ້ນງາມຢູ່ ແຕ່ວ່າ ມັນລະຕ່ອງຍ່ອງໄວ້ ມັນລະບໍ່ມີວາດບໍ່ມີຊົງ - [the *sim* is beautiful, but it is very tall and lacks characteristic and style]” (Bunpheng 2013: Interview). The king also advised him that he should improve the structure by adding lateral rooms on two of the sides. In late 1961, following the king’s advice, Sathu Nyai Khamchan began the additional construction work for which he received significant financial support from the king and the government. In his proposal to the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs requesting financial support, he gave the following explanation as to why the additional construction work was necessary:

ວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ຫຼວງພະບາງ ວັນທີ່ ໔ ທັນວາ ໒໕໐໔ ເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງ ຫຼວງພະບາງ ຈະເລີນພອນ ພະນະທ່ານລັດມົນຕີກະຊວງທຳມະການ ວຽງຈັນ ເລື່ອງ ຂໍເງິນມາຊ່ອຍການເຮັດລະບຽງສົມວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ. ອາຕະມາພາບໄດ້ປະຕິສັງຂອນສົມວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມກໍແລ້ວໄປຂັ້ນໜຶ່ງແລ້ວ ແຕ່ບັດນີ້ ເຫັນຄວາມຂັດຂ້ອງ ເພາະບໍ່ມີລະບຽງທັງສອງຂ້າງ ເມື່ອລະດູຝົນໆກໍຜະເຂົ້າ ເມື່ອລະດູແລ້ງມີແດດສ່ອງ ເມື່ອມີເທສະການຄົນມາຫຼາຍບໍ່ພໍຢູ່ແຄບໄປ ພະບາດສົມເດັດພະເຈົ້າມີພະລາຊະປະສົງຢາກໃຫ້ເຮັດລະບຽງ ໄດ້ຊົງແນະນຳໃຫ້ເຮັດ. ອາຕະມາພາບກໍໄດ້ຮັບພະລາຊະປະສົງ [...] ສະນັ້ນ ອາຕະມາພາບ ຂໍຈະເລີນພອນມາເພື່ອຂໍແຕ່ເງິນງົບປະມານ [...] ຈຳນວນ 200,000 ກີບ.

Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 4 December 2504 (AD 1960). Presented by the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Luang Prabang to the Minister of Religious Affairs in Vientiane in regard to the following matter: request for finances to support the construction work of the two lateral rooms of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam. I completed the first phase of the *sim*’s reconstruction at Vat Saen Sukharam by myself, but now I see there is a problem due to the lack of lateral rooms on two of the sides. Rain can get into the structure during the rainy season, and the sun shines in too brightly during the dry season. The space is also too narrow to support the high number of participants in attendance during religious ceremonies. His Majesty [King Sisavang Vatthana] expressed to me his royal wish to see lateral rooms constructed, advising me to carry out this construction. [...] therefore, I request to be granted with a budget in the amount of 200,000 Kip.

(BAD-12-2-1961.002)

Furthermore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan also organized fundraising events in the form of a Vessantara Jātaka festival at Vat Saen Sukharam between the 18th and 20th of February 1962 (BAD-12-2-1962.015), as well as several other times during the construction process. The additional reconstruction work was completely finished by 1962. The new, which is also the current, structure of the *sim* has five naves of six bays, a single porch and a four-tiered roof.

The central roof finials (Lao: *xòfa* and *satta buraphan*¹³⁰) on top of the roof have seven small *phasat* which are the most important parts of the *sim* in Luang Prabang, as they represent Mount Meru, which is regarded by Buddhist cosmology to be the center of the universe, the most central *phasat* symbolizing *Phaichayon Maha Prasat*, the *phasat* of Indra, which is located on top of Mount Meru. The horns of the ridge-tiles (Lao: *ngo*) portray *naga* heads. On either side of the exterior wall, seven brackets (Lao: *khaen nang*, lit. lady's arm) made of stucco are decorated with stencil prints of gold leaves and gold paint and then attached to the eaves for additional support. These brackets look very similar to those at Vat Xiang Thong. The body of the *sim* has four windows on both sides as well as one entrance staircase with two *naga* both lying on their sides. The porch has six octagonal pillars and three staircase entrances: one at the front as a main entrance with the others located on both sides. In front of the *sim*, two golden-painted lions, which were part of the original structure but were refurbished during the reconstruction of the *sim*, stand guard at the entrance. UNESCO has identified the structure as belonging to Luang Prabang Style II (UNESCO 2004), same style as that of Vat Xiang Thong (Illustration No. 3.4).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was the architect and supervisor of the construction, with Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela serving as his advisor, particularly concerning the decoration. He employed local craftsmen and architects specialized in wood, carving and stenciling as his assistants paid on a day-by-day basis. Among these assistants were Lung (uncle) Thit Hüan (whose house is located directly in front of Vat Saen), Lung Thit Chandi from Ban Vat Lakkham, and Mai Thong from Ban Pha Nom. Later, Achan Phan from Ban Vat Saen also became involved in the process. The manual labor, including the carpentry, sculpting, and painting, was carried out by monks and novices of Vat Saen Sukharam. Some photographs I found show monks and novices hard at work, both installing tiles on the roof and sawing the wood for construction (Buddhist Archive No. B1366R, B1423R and G9082R).

As mentioned before, Sathu Nyai Khamchan did not create or have at his disposal any blueprints for the construction, basing his judgments instead on the experience he acquired through his teacher, regarding the construction of monastic buildings. Before the old *sim* was destroyed, he took several days to study the whole structure well enough that he could internalize the form of the original structure in his mind. He ordered for the roof and the walls on the left and right sides to be destroyed, but decided that the back and front walls, as well as the six round pillars in the middle, should stay in place. After the demolition was complete, he

¹³⁰ This is the name of a cluster of seven mountains which surround *Sineru* or *Sumeru* Mountain (the most important mountain in Indian cosmology). The mountains are named as follows: Yukhanthon (Yuganthara), Isinthon (Isadhara), Koravik (Karavīka), Suthatsana (Sudassana), Neminthon (Nemindhara), Vintaka (Vinataka) and Assakam (Assakaṇṇa) (Sila 2006: 220). Also see Richard Gombrich 1975. "Ancient Indian Cosmology." In *Ancient Cosmologies*, edited by Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe, 110–142. London: Allen and Unwin.

took various measurements and noted these on every piece of wood. During an interview with a film maker from Sparkle Media, Sathu Nyai Khamchan explained how he built the roof without the drawing of blueprints:

ແຕ່ກໍກໍ່ນໍາຫຼັງຄູບາອາຈານ ເພິ່ນພາໄປເຮັດຫັ້ນເຮັດນີ້ ແຕ່ກ່ອນ ເພິ່ນຕັດໄມ້ເຮັດວັດນັ້ນ ພາທີ່ຈະຂຽນໃສ່ທີ່ນັ້ນຂອງ ທໍ່ນັ້ນຂອງ ເພິ່ນເອົາກາງວັດນີ້ເລີຍເດີ ເພິ່ນເອົາເຊືອກມາແທກ ນີ້ສີ່ເມັດ ນີ້ສີ່ເມັດ ເອົາມາເບິ່ງ ກໍເປັນຮູບວັດຈັ່ງຊື່ແທລະ ຢູ່ກາງວັດຫັ້ນແທລະ ຂ້ອຍມາເຫັນ ເພິ່ນນີ້ພາເຮັດເນີ.

In the past, I followed my teacher while he took care of various [architectural] matters. Back then, he cut the wood for the roof. Instead of taking measurements and noting them onto paper, he used strings to make a replica layout [of the roof] of four meters [wide on both sides], on the monastery's ground. I watched him do this, and it did indeed resemble the roof of the monastery.

(Sparkle Media 2006: Video)

This was the traditional way in which monastic architects in Luang Prabang undertook projects of monastic construction, and this technique is still followed by many abbots and lay architects today. Achan Bunpheng Siudomphan, who was a novice at the time and participated in the reconstruction, recounted that:

ເມື່ອມ້າງແລ້ວ ໄມ້ແຕ່ລະອັນບໍ່ໄດ້ຖິ້ມ ຈັດກອງກັນໄວ້ເປັນລະບຽບ ແລ້ວເພິ່ນກໍ່ມາແທກເອົາໄວ້ໝົດ ມີແຕ່ວ່າ ຝາສອງຂ້າງນັ້ນຫັບອອກ, ສ່ວນຝາທາງດ້ານໜ້າແລະດ້ານຫຼັງນັ້ນບໍ່ຫັບ, ຊຸມປະຕູດ້ານໜ້າມີຫ້າປ່ອງ, ສາມປ່ອງທີ່ຢູ່ເຄິ່ງກາງນັ້ນແມ່ນຂອງເກົ່າ. ບໍ່ມີປະລັງ ເພິ່ນເອົາໂຕເກົ່ານັ້ນມາແທກແລ້ວຖອກເສົາຂຶ້ນ ແລະກໍ່ຝາຂຶ້ນໃໝ່. ເສົາທາງກາງນັ້ນແມ່ນເສົາກົມ ເພິ່ນໃຫ້ນາຍຊ່າງປັ້ນເສົາແລ້ວເອົາເມື່ອຕໍ່ໃສ່ທາງເທິງ ທາງໃນເສົາໃຫຍ່ນັ້ນບໍ່ມີແກນ ບໍ່ມີເຫຼັກ ບໍ່ມີໄມ້ ມີແຕ່ດິນຈີ່ກໍ່ກັນຂຶ້ນ.

After demolishing [the roof], he (Sathu Nyai Khamchan) did not throw away even a single piece of wood but systematically collected and measured each piece of wood. The walls on the sides had been knocked down, but the back and front walls remained. There are five doorframes at the front walls; the three in the middle are original. Without using a blueprint, he measured the old wood, extended the pillars and rebuilt the walls. The central pillars are round in shape. He ordered the architects to first create and then attach the additional pillars to the tops of the old ones. These large pillars contain no spindle poles, metal, or wood, using only bricks instead.

The structure old *sim* was built of bricks and mortar (know by the locals as *pathay*¹³¹), its roof being made of wood and covered with flat tiles. The decorative reliefs on the doorframes were first made of *pathay phet*¹³² and *khamuk*¹³³, painted in black lacquer and then

¹³¹ Traditional Lao cement for plastering work contains the main ingredients of rough sand, *khüa sam hang* (a sort of vine) which is cut into small pieces and put into water for a day, pounded *bai mak faen* (leaves of *Protium serratum*), buffalo skin cut into small pieces and boiled, boiled sugar cane juice and *yang bong* plaster (gypsum, calcium sulfate), all of which are mixed to create a powerful adhesive (information provided by Achan Tui Sisomphone from Ban Xiang Thong village in 2010, who learned the method for making *pathay* from Sathu Nyai Khamchan). In 2010, Achan Thit Chanda from Ban Pha Nom village, a master at the Buddhist School of Fine Arts at Vat Xiang Muan, said that the simple *pathay* for buildings is produced by mixing sand, buffalo skin, *bai mak faen*, *yang bong*, *khüa sam hang* and white lime.

¹³² *Pathay phet* (diamond *pathay*, stucco) for sculptures and architectural decorations is made from very fine (and almost red in color) sand from the top of the mountains, buffalo skin, *bai mak faen*, bark of *yang bong* tree, *khüa sam hang*, white lime, sugar cane juice, peels of green bananas, *khüa khao hò* (*Tinospora crispa*), clay, *nam man* (oil) of the *ton yang* tree, as well as sun-dried sticky rice then soaked in water. Achan Thit Chanda states that the Buddha figures were always made of *pathay* and *pathay phet*, even in French times, and that artisans did not begin using cement until after the arrival of the Americans in 1962 (Ikegami and Sintheva 2007: 131–132).

covered with gold leaves. For the majority of the reconstruction work in 1958, Sathu Nyai Khamchan used both traditional and modern materials. The traditional materials included bricks (to build walls and pillars), wood (for the roof's structure), *pathay phet* and *khamuk* (for decorations), and red paint (to paint the exterior walls). The modern materials included cement, iron wires and glazed tiles, all of which he imported from Thailand¹³⁴. He believed these materials would make the *sim* more stable and longer lasting. The red paint was not a normal color sold in shops or markets; rather, it was a special paint made of natural ingredients, namely *din daeng*¹³⁵ (red clay) and *namman yang*¹³⁶ (oil from the rubber tree). Only skilled craftsmen with access to the ancient knowledge of Luang Prabang are equipped to create the proper mixture for this paint; nowadays, very few people are familiar with these materials and their preparation as paint.

The decorations on both the interior and exterior walls are elaborately decorated with gold-coloured stencils on the stark red background. The four walls of the interior are covered with bright gold stencil motifs, such as stars in the sky, depictions of historical images of the Buddha, prominent religious sites, slender deities wearing pointed crowns, dancing *thevada* (gods) throwing flowers, and mythical animals. Appearing on the rear wall, from left to right, are the Phra That Haripunjaya in Lamphun, Thailand, the Pha That Mak Mo at Vat Vixun, the twenty-eight Buddhas¹³⁷ from the Buddhavaṃsa (the history of the Buddhas), the Parinirvana

¹³³ There are three resources detailing the production of *khamuk*: Achan Tui Sisomphone explained that “*khamuk* is produced by mixing the ashes of the Bodhi Tree with water and lacquer and then letting it harden so it may be used to modify the plasticity of the decorations” (Tui 2010: Interview); Achan Thit Chanda also explained that “it is produced from the ashes of the *ton pho* (Bodhi Tree) or *ton hai* (Banyan tree) together with a lacquer. The *ton hai* has a lot of juice, which can be turned into a glue used to catch birds. Lacquer is obtained in Laos from the *kok nam kiang* tree, the oil of which is potent and causes itching on the skin, and the juice of which is at first white in color, gradually becoming darker as it exposed to the open air. This material is no longer in use, as lacquer has become very expensive” (Chanda 2010: Interview); p. 142 of Ikegami and Sintheva (2007) states that *khamuk* is produced from a mixture of one part ash of the Bodhi Tree (p. 133–34) and two parts lacquer, which is stirred until it becomes glue. *Khamuk* can be used to adhere two objects to one another, fill small holes, and also for decoration work for Buddha statues, important buildings and other sculptures (see Lobo and Khamvone 2011).

¹³⁴ First, he ordered the tiles from the Thai Thaworn Glazed Tile Factory (โรงงานกระเบื้องเคลือบไทยลาว) in Bangkok. The tile were transported through Nongkhai and Vientiane by boat (BAD-12-2-1957.133 and BAD-12-2-1957.178), with cement and iron wire being imported from Chiang Rai province. Documents related to the procurement and transportation of these materials can be found in BAD-12-1-1957.018, BAD-12-2-1957.125 and BAD-12-2-1957.139.

¹³⁵ *Din daeng* (red soil) has to be unearthed from locations at least two meters under the surface of the ground. The deeper the soil, the more red in color it is. This soil can be found in the area around Ban Paeo village in Chòmphet district of Luang Prabang province. It is a two-hour walk away from the city of Luang Prabang (Ikegami and Sintheva 2007: 116).

¹³⁶ *Namman yang* (oil from the rubber tree) can be used for other purposes, e.g., painting it on wood to protect it from animals or as a fuel for making fire (Ikegami and Sintheva 2007: 114).

¹³⁷ Each Buddha image contains a caption below it in Tham-Lao script, which reads, in choronological order and from top to bottom, as follows: Tanhangkaro (Taṅhaṅkara), Methangkaro (Medhaṅkara), Saranangkaro (Saraṅaṅkara), Thipangkaro (Dīpaṅkara), Kondannyo (Koṇḍañña), Sumangkaro (Maṅgala), Sumano (Sumana), Revato (Revata), Sophito (Sobhita), Anomathassi (Anomadassi), Pathumo (Pauma), Narato (Nārada),

stupa in Kushinagar, India, and the Pha That Ing Hang in Champasak. On the front wall, one can see: the Pha That Sikhottabun in Tha Khaek, Khammuan province (top), in Lumbini (middle) and in Nepal (bottom); the Phra That Phanom (top) in Nakhon Phanom province and the Buddha's footprint (bottom); the Pha That Ketkao Chulamani in front of Vat Saen, depicting the scene in which the Bodhisattva Maitreya meets Pha Malai¹³⁸ in Tushita Heaven; Pha That Chòmsi in Luang Prabang (top) and the Buddha's footprint (bottom); and the Suvannamalika Chedi in Sri Lanka (top) as well as the Dhammiga stupa in Sarnath (place of first sermon), India (below). On the eastern wall one can see depictions of the Chedi Lokachulamani or Pha That Luang in Vientiane, the Bodh Gaya (place of enlightenment), and the Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon. The images of Kakusandho, Konagamano, Kassapo, and Gotamo, the four most recent Buddhas, appear above the Shwedagon, from left to right, respectively.¹³⁹ On the Western wall are the images of Phra That Hariphunchai in Lamphun, Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom (Thailand), Pha Maha That at Vat Maha That in Luang Prabang and Pha That Sithammahaisok or Pha That Luang at Vat That Luang in Luang Prabang. Not only representing the famous Buddhist sites found in Buddhist countries throughout South and Southeast Asia, these images also reference the Buddhist pilgrimages made by Sathu Nyai Khamchan during his life time to India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and even to various places in Laos.

The six central pillars, round in shape, are the original pillars of the temple. The other pillars, square in shape, are decorated with gold stencils of lotus and other flowers against the red background. Sathu Nyai Khamchan copied these motifs from the old *sim*. The craved main door leaves, on the back, show two slender deities wearing pointed crowns standing upon the giants' heads who are sitting on their bottoms and heels upholding the deities; and around them there appear dancing *thevadas* (*devas*), flowers, peacocks, mythical animals and mother-earths. On the front side there is a sculpture depicting a scene in Ramayana with Pha Lak and Pha Lam carrying their swords on their shoulders and standing on the figure of Thotsakan (in the form of a monkey), floating in the sky and decorated with inlaid flowers and colored glass. The door frames and their *phasat* shape content multi-dimensional decorations of bas-reliefs with colored glass and gold paint. On each side of the main frame there appear

Pathumuttaro (Padumuttara), Sumetho (Sumedha), Sujato (Sujāta), Piyathassi (Piyadassi), Atthathassi (Atthadassi), Thammathassi (Dhammadassi), Sitthattho (Siddhattha), Tisso (Tissa), Pusso (Phussa), Vipasso (Vipassi), Sikhi (Sikhi), Vessaphu (Vessabhū), Kakusantho (Kakusandha), Konakhamano (Koṇāgamana), Kassapo (Kassapa), and Gotamo (Gautama).

¹³⁸ For the story of Pha Malai, see Chapter 4.

¹³⁹ According to the history of Buddhism, the Shwedagon stupa was built during the Buddha's lifetime, enshrining the holy hair relics of Gautama Buddha and other sacred relics of the other three historical Buddhas, Kakusandho, Konagamano and Kassapo. For a full history of the stupa see U Win Maung (Tampawaddy), "The Ancestral Stupas of Shwedagon", which was written for and presented at the international Buddhist conference in Brastagi, Indonesia, October 2010.

two gods standing and holding their clubs.¹⁴⁰ Within the porch, on the exterior front wall, beams and ceilings, one finds elaborate decorations with gold floral stencil motifs; the pillars are octagonal rather than rounded and are engraved with floral motifs and covered by gold paint. On the exterior walls, especially on either side of each window, there appear single slender deities wearing pointed crowns and holding lotus blossoms, with some standing on mythical horses and others on lions (Heywood 2006: 80).

In summary, I would like to emphasize that while the *sim* of Vat Saen in Sathu Nyai Khamchan was created in a hybrid style combining elements from the styles of Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Xiang Khouang, its construction was nevertheless much more developed than other *sim* constructed or reconstructed in the twentieth century. I fully agree with Woralancha Bunyasurat who states that:

ลิมของวัดแสนสุขาราม มีการผสมผสานรูปทรงหลายอย่าง เช่น ตัวลิมมีความสูงมากกว่าเดิม ซึ่งการสร้างลิมแบบนี้ เป็นเอกลักษณ์ของลิมทรงเวียงจันทน์ แต่ใช้หลังคาซ้อนลดหลั่นแบบหลวงพระบาง และเพิ่มหลังคาเล็กตรงกลางแบบ เชียงขวาง ทำให้ลิมหลังนี้มี ความงดงาม

The *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam contains multiple architectural styles. The building itself is taller than the original, and a *sim* with such a high structure is reminiscent of the Vientiane style. However, its multi-layered and sloping roof is in the style of Luang Prabang, while and the addition of the small roof in the middle is in the style of Xiang Khouang. This combination is that which makes this *sim* so magnificently beautiful.

(Woralancha 2004: 122)

On the altar in the *sim*, there are many Buddha statues on display, the largest of them being the *pha chao nyai* or *pha pathan* (main Buddha statue), also named Pha Chao Saensuk by Sathu Nyai Khamchan. The original structure was built in 1718 during the same period in which the *sim* was constructed. In 1958, Sathu Nyai Khamfan was the architect of the reconstruction, but his work was not completed until 1962, when Sathu Nyai Khamchan asked Sathu Nyai Chanpheng Chanthasara Maha Thela (1900–1978), abbot of Vat Pha Nom, for his assistance in finishing the task.¹⁴¹ The Pha Chao Saensuk, 4 meters high and 2.37 meters wide (measured at the knees), sits cross-legged on a semicircular lotus pedestal; his left hand, palm up, lies on his lap, and the right hand rests on the knee with the fingers pointing downward in the position known as “Subduing the Mara”. The robe is plain and the right shoulder is left bare. The long *sangkhati* (outer robe) falls down to the navel; the statue contains the usual three folds at the neck. The face is triangular in shape due to the straight

¹⁴⁰ According to the Buddhist faith, *chatumaharajika* (Pali: *cātummahārājika*), the first of six heavens, is ruled by four heavenly kings (Lao: *Thao chatu lokkaban*) who each live and reign over different regions around Mount Meru. King Dhataratha is the lord of the *gandharvas* living in the East; King Virulhaka is the lord of the earth *devas* (ogres) living in the South; King Virupaka is the lord of the *nagas* living in the West; and King Kuvera or Wessuvan is the lord of the *yakkhas* (giants) living in the North. Therefore, as they are the guardians of the universe, Sathu Nyai Khamchan placed there images next to the door frames to provide protection to the religious sites.

¹⁴¹ The photographs of the Buddha statue was constructing see Buddhist Archive No. A4434R and B0485R.

hairline at the temples; the hair curls are pointed at the ends; the groove between the nose and the upper lip is broad; the eyes are inlaid, the arch-shaped eyebrows meet at the base of the nose; the ears are in a graceful coil shape, with a deep but narrow opening across the earlobes presumed to be a slit for inserting ornaments; on top of the large *ushnisha* (Lao: *kesa* or *ket*) is a flower rising from lotus leaves with the petals just open enough so that they look like flames. This Buddha statue was built elaborately in the Lan Xang style and is one of the most beautiful and charming Buddha statues in the town.

3.2 The Construction and Reconstruction of Other Buildings in Vat Saen Sukharam

Like other monasteries in the city in the early 1940s, Vat Saen Sukharam was situated within the community and surrounded by bamboo fences. The buildings, which had been built entirely with the traditional materials of brick, mortar and wood, had become deteriorated and broken down over time. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's spent his lifetime constructing and reconstructing all of these buildings, which helped to create the serene monastic landscape which can be seen today.

3.2.1 Brick Walls and Landscape

The original walls surrounding Vat Saen Sukharam's boundary, erected by the late abbot, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan during the early twentieth century, were created in the same fashion as the present walls of Vat Sop Sikkharam, along the main road, having a height of about one meter. In the book of "Treasures of Luang Prabang" appears a photograph taken in 1930, the wall demarcating the boundary between Vat Saen and Vat That Nòi on the southern side of the current Pha Sathup (or *upmung*, vaulted chapel) (Houmphanh et al. 2000: 40). In the early 1940s, following the royal order of King Sisavang Vong's royal, the abandoned Vat That Nòi and Vat Pha Chao were integrated into the grounds of Vat Saen Sukharam. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was appointed as the acting abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1944. He began his construction work by constructing the stone and brick wall on the west section of the former Vat That Nòi, in order to protect the soil from raindrop erosion, after which he built the stone staircases which created an entrance to Ban Tha Khok village (currently Ban Phon Hüang).

In 1948, he laid concrete throughout the ground temple grounds in order to enhance the monastic landscape, and he also constructed a 25-meter-long brick wall on the south side of monastery of the monastery. This side of the temple, which had originally been marked off by a bamboo fence, is next to land which belonged to Nang Khamsuk of Ban Lamaet during that period (BAD-12-2-1948.008). Between 1953 and 1956, Sathu Nyai Khamchan built the brick walls surrounding the entire monastery, adding *bai sema* in lotus shape at the top of the walls, a practice which he copied from the ancient wall of Vat Pha Kaeo in Vientiane. After this, the

brick walls at Vat Nòng Si Khunmüang were then also built in this style. The walls are two meters high, completely separating the monastery from the secular community, encouraging a more tranquil and focused atmosphere at the temple. It should also be noted here that, although he passed away before his ideas could be realized, Sathu Nyai Khamchan can also be credited for the suggestion to build these types of walls around other monasteries in the area such as Vat Sop, Vat Si Bun Hüang, and Vat Si Mungkhun.

3.2.2 Upmung (The Vaulted Chapel)

The *upmung* (vaulted chapel) which had belonged to the former Vat That Nòi¹⁴² (the monastery of small stupa) was built by Phuan¹⁴³ people from Xiang Khouang province in 1733 (BAD-12-2-1993.002). Sathu Nyai Khamchan recollected that “the *vihan* of this temple is the artwork of *xao phuan* (Phuan people) from Xiang Khouang. As the *vihan* had completely collapsed due to natural deterioration and only the *upmung* remained, I constructed the pavilion” (Sparkle Media 2004). In “Treasures of Luang Prabang”, there are two photographs of this monastery which show the *vihan* in Xiang Khouang style “featuring a single hall, porch and a double roof in simple style” (Houmphanh et al. 2000: 41). Nowadays, a *sim* in the Xiang Khouang style which still is still in existence can be found at Vat Suvannakhili¹⁴⁴ (golden mountain) which was built by Chao Kham Sattha, a Phuan prince from Xiang Khouang (Ibid.: 27). The vaulted chapel is thought to have once been kept inside the *vihan* where the main Buddha statue was located, which would have been a difference from the vaulted chapels in other monasteries in the city, as their *upmung* were outside the *sim*. Behind the chapel, there is a monk’s quarter, the so-called *kuti nüa* (the abode in the northern side), the original building of which was built in 1938 by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan (BAD-12-2-1937.002). It was completely reconstructed to its original structure in 2010 by Sathu Sithóng (abbot 2009–2012); the drawing plan was contributed by the department of the

¹⁴² It is possible that the That of this monastery is smaller than the one which belonged to its neighboring monastery, Vat Saen (Lao: *nòi*, small as in the antonym of *nyai*, big).

¹⁴³ Phuan is the ethnic group which originally lived in the highlands of Xiang Khouang province. Most Phuan are Buddhists, as revealed by the fact that there were 17 monasteries in a small region of the Phuan principality during the early twentieth century in what is today a part of Xiang Khouang, including Vat Phu Chomphet, Vat That Fun, Vat Bun Kong, Vat Phu Khun, Vat Si Phom, Vat Phu Thuai, Vat Na Saoman, Vat Inpaeng, Vat Kang, Vat Kao, Vat Phia Vat, Vat Na Hua Ngao, Vat Na Hom, Vat Phu Kham, Vat Na U, Vat That Luang nad Vat Xae Fa (Kham Luang 2003: 319). Most of these monasteries were destroyed by bombings during the secret war in the 1960s.

¹⁴⁴ Historically, the temple was built in CS 1135 (AD 1773) by Chao Kham Sattha, a Phuan prince from Xiang Khouang in dedication to the souls of his soldiers who were inducted by him to guard Luang Prabang and who fought and died in battle against the Burmese troops. Chao Kham Sattha married a Luang Prabang princess, Chao Nang Vaenkaeo Sam Phio (princess with three colors of skin), who was one of the daughters of King Inthasom (r. 1723–1749) (Khamman 1964: 40). The building of this monastery also represented the reinstatement of the relationship between Xiang Khouang and Luang Prabang (Heywood 2006: 72) after the separation of the Kingdom of Lao Lan Xang into the two independent states of Lan Xang Luang Prabang and Lan Xang Vientiane in 1707.

World Heritage of Luang Prabang. These vaulted chapels, containing Buddha statues inside for worship, were also known as *hò wai* (worship chapels). Their building in monasteries has been commonplace since the sixteenth century onwards. At present, they can be found in many main monasteries in the heritage town of Luang Prabang such as Vat Xiang Thong, Vat Xiang Muan, Vat Chum Khòng, Vat Mai and Vat Hua Xiang.

In 1992, Sathu Nyai Khamchan built the chapel and also restored the *upmung* at Vat Saen Sukharam (see Illustration No. 3.5). He made the following remarks regarding the construction of the chapel and restoration of the *upmung*:

ວັດຖຸໂບຮານ ເກົ່າແກ່ ຢູ່ພາຍໃນວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ. ວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ, ເທສະບານ ເມືອງຫຼວງພະບາງ, ທາງວັດໄດ້ສ້ອມແປງພະສະຖູບເກົ່າ ຊຶ່ງໄດ້ສ້າງມາແຕ່ ຈ.ສ. ໑໐໙໕, ຄ.ສ. ໑໗໓໓, ໄດ້ຊໍາຮຸດຊຸດໂຊມ, ໃຫ້ຄົງຄົນຄືເກົ່າ ຕິດອກລວດລາຍ ທາສີພອກຄໍາ, ພ້ອມທັງທັງວ່າ ໒ ຫ້ອງ, ກວ້າງ ໔ ແມັດ, ສູງຮອດຂີ້ ໔ ແມັດ - ຮອດໂງ່ ໘ ແມັດ, ສີໜ້າຕິດລວດລາຍ ຮູບພະພຸດທະເຈົ້າ ທໍາຍະມະກະປາຕິທານ ຂຶ້ນຕົ້ນໜາມາກມ່ວງ ຮອດຊັ້ນຕາວະຕິງສາ. ຄ່າກໍ່ສ້າງທັງໝົດ ໑.໕໑໑.໙໘໓ ກີບ, (ໜຶ່ງລ້ານ ຫ້າແສນ ໜຶ່ງຫມື່ນ ໜຶ່ງພັນ ເກົ້າຮ້ອຍ ແປດສິບສາມກີບ) ວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ, ວັນທີ່ ໒ ກັນຍາ ໑໙໙໓ ປະທານປົກຄອງວັດ, ພະຄໍາຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດໂຕ.

The ancient objects are at Vat Saen Sukharam. At Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, the ancient stupa (*pha sathup*), which was built in CS 1095, AD 1733 [and] had become deteriorated, has now been restored to its original condition and decorated with flower motifs and gold paint. A chapel four meters wide and four meters in height from its rafters – eight meters from its ridge – with two naves was also built there. The gable is decorated with motifs illustrating the Buddha performing the Twin Miracle (*yamaka patihariya*) of growing the mango tree and then ascending on it to Tavatimsa.¹⁴⁵ The total cost of construction amounted to 1,511,983 Kip (one million, five hundred and eleven thousand, nine hundred and eighty-three Kip). Vat Saen Sukharam, 2 September 1993, Pha Khamchan Virachitto – abbot.

(BAD-12-2-1993.002)

This vaulted chapel serves not only as a sacred place of Buddhist worship but also as the dwelling of a spirit (Lao: *ahak vat*, the spirit protector of the monastery). The people in the communities around Vat Saen Sukharam regularly offer rice, water, food and dessert in small bowls on a plate during the Lao New Year festival and the *bun hò khao padap din* (festival for making merit by decorating the ground with wrapped rice), one example being Pa Mon from Ban Phon Hüang, who is a deep believer, regularly paying respect to this place and presenting offerings to this place (see Illustration No. 3.6). On the day of the boat racing festival all the oarsmen of Vat Saen must pay respect to this vaulted chapel before they can begin the race.

3.2.3 Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk (The Eighteen-Cubit Buddha Statue)

This standing Buddha was built in 1738 during the reign of King Inthasom (r. 1723–1749). Initially, it was known as a *pha chao* (Buddha statue) and its temple was also known as Vat

¹⁴⁵ According to the history of Gautama Buddha, in the seventh year after his enlightenment, the Buddha ascended to Tavatimsa Heaven and stayed there for three months during the Buddhist Lent to preach the Abhidhamma to his mother. Before ascending, he performed the Twin Miracle (Pali: *yamakapātihāriya*) on a mango tree which immediately sprouted from its seed after being buried into the earth by the Buddha.

Pha Chao (temple of the Buddha statue) (One Keo and Grabowsky 2000). Later, parts of the statue were damaged when the temple collapsed (Buddhist Archive No. B0558R). At the time when Vat Pha Chao was integrated into Vat Saen Sukharam's ground together with Vat That Nòì, it had already been an abandoned temple for quite some time. After the statue had been restored and erected at the height of eighteen cubits (nine meters), Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave the name Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk to this Buddha statue.

The source for the date of this temple's foundation can be found on a framed photograph which shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing to the right of the ruined standing Buddha statue. Under the image, there is a text containing the following:

ພະເຈົ້າສິບແປດສອກນີ້ ໄດ້ສ້າງຂຶ້ນແຕ່ເມື່ອປີ ຄ.ສ. 1738 ໄດ້ຊຳຮູດຊຸດໂຊມ ຈົນມາປີ ຄ.ສ. 1972 ເປັນເວລາ 234 ປີ ສາທູຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດໂຕ ໄດ້ສ້ອມແຊມຄືນຈົນຮອດປີ ຄ.ສ. 1980 ຈຶ່ງສຳເລັດ ໄດ້ສະຫລອງພ້ອມອາຍຸ 60 ປີ ໃນວັນທີ 23 ກັນຍາ 1980.

This Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk was built in 1738 and then became damaged. In 1972, being 234 years old, Sathu Khamchan Virachitto restored it, finishing the reconstruction work in 1980. [He] organized the Buddhist celebration ceremony for its re-establishment on 23 September 1980, together with the celebration of his 60th birthday.

(Museum No. VSS_001534)

In 1954, Sathu Nyai Khamchan built the brick walls surrounding the temple as Vat Saen's boundary. In 1972, he began the work of restoring the statue and then later building the chapel, with restoration and construction lasting until 1980, a total of eight years. Before the reconstruction work had begun, Sathu Nyai Khamchan incidentally discovered with his own eyes a clay jar resting in the remains of the statue (Illustration No. 3.7). The jar contains a bronze bowl filled with auspicious objects such as the six silver Buddha amulets (Illustration No. 3.8) which he later reinserted into the body of the statue. When the restoration work was completely finished, King Sisavang Vatthana donated one gallon of black lacquer (Lao: *nam kiang*) and 20,000 pieces of gold leaves for the painting and covering of the Buddha statue.

This Buddha statue is considered to be the most beautiful and largest standing Buddha in the city of Luang Prabang (Illustration No. 3.9). The chapel, pillars, walls and ceiling are elaborately decorated with golden and platinum stencils of Lao floral motifs on a red background. The two-tiered roof is covered with orange glazed tiles which are a product from Thailand. The highlight is the set of scenes at the gable depicting the Lord Buddha descending from the heaven to the earth accompanied by Indra and devas.¹⁴⁶ In the episode displayed here, the Buddha is stepping on the crystal stairway with a silver stairway on his left and a gold one to his right, all three of which are decorated in multi-colored glass mosaic.

¹⁴⁶ According to the history of Gautama Buddha, he returned to the earth in the city of Sangasa in Banaras, India, in the early morning of the last day of Buddhist Lent (Lao: *van òk pansa*), coming back from his three-month retreat to *Tavatimsa* where he preached the Abhidhamma to his mother. The day on which he descended back down to earth is called the *devorohana*, which means humans, deities and ghosts can all see each other.

According to the Lao tradition, the standing Buddha with his two arms stretched at his sides and his hands pointing down is popularly known as the “rain-making” pose (Lao: *hiak fon*), (Phui 1962: 8). Created in the Luang Prabang style, the body is elongated and slim and the arms are very long; the robe and the outer robe (Lao: *sangkhati*) are plain with no decoration; the face is oval in shape, the chin has the shape of a mango core (one of the 32 characteristics of a Buddha), the eyes are inlaid with mother-of-pearl and the pupils are made of lacquer; his ear conches have a curled structure, the earlobes are very long and curved backwards; the hair curls are pointed and produced separately of clay and lacquer paste. This is different than in Thailand, where the Buddha statue position for rainmaking has him seated in a lotus pose; he wears a cloth for the rain (Pali: *vassikasātikā*); his right hand is raised, showing that he is calling the rain, his left hand is laid with the palm upon his lap to receive the rain. Such a pose for rainmaking has not been found in Laos.

The standing Buddha found in this pose in Thailand, is known as the “Standing Buddha” or as the posture of “Benevolence and Compassion”. It symbolizes the moments when the Buddha stepped out of his lodging to lead his pupils to go somewhere; he regularly stood a short while posted in front of his lodging so he could study and observe his pupils, even if they all were there in place and ready to go. This behavior by the Buddha indicated his benevolence and compassion towards his pupils. Giteau explains that “the posture with the hands pointing down is called the “Pose of Benevolence and Compassion”, symbolizing the moment when the Buddha stepped out of his fragrant *kuti* (Pali: *gaṇḍhakuti*) in the *jetavana* (forest of Jeta); he had the habit of standing a short while in front of his *kuti* and contemplating (Giteau 2001: 157). I argue that, for the gesture of calling rain, it makes more sense that his hands would be making some signal of calling instead of simply hanging down. Therefore, I fully agree with Giteau that this Buddha statue is in the “Pose of Benevolence and Compassion”. One crucial remark is that Sathu Nyai Khamchan restored this Buddha based on his own imagination; he did not have a full original image which he could have aspired to follow, as he had only seen the remaining half body of the statue. In spite of this fact, he was able to restore the building and make it look as elaborately and as beautiful as the work of the other renounced architects which were created in the town, which clearly demonstrates his rich knowledge of the cultural architectural heritage of ancient Lao.

3.2.4 Hò Kòng (The Drum Shelter)

The original shelter was situated on the right side of and behind the *sim* and next to the main road. In 1959, Sathu Nyai Khamchan demolished it and kept the drum in the *kuti sam pae* (a *kuti* with a three-part roof). As for the reason why it was destroyed, in his proposal which he submitted to Chao Kamphaeng Nakhòn (District officer of Luang Prabang) on 29 March BE 2502 (AD 1959), he states that:

ເນື່ອງດ້ວຍທຳກອງວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ໄດ້ສ້າງມາເປັນເວລານານແລ້ວ ດຽວນີ້ໄດ້ຊຸດໂຊມໄປຫຼາຍ ແລະອີກປະການໜຶ່ງ ກໍ່ຕັ້ງຢູ່ທີ່ບໍ່ເໝາະສົມ ແລະເປັນທີ່ກົດຂວາງດ້ວຍ ດັ່ງນັ້ນ ອາຕະມາຍາກຈະມ້າງອອກ ແລ້ວຈະໄດ້ຍ້າຍໄປຫາທີ່ເໝາະ ແລະຈະໄດ້ປຸກຂຶ້ນໃໝ່ ໃນບໍລິເວນວັດນີ້.

As Hò Kòng at Vat Saen Sukharam was built a long time ago, at present it has deteriorated dramatically. Additionally, its location was not suitable and [its position] was obstructing. Therefore, I would like to destroy it and build it at a [more] suitable location within this monastic area.

(BAD-12-2-1960.033)

In 1979, he built a new drum shelter with an elevated floor which was erected on the left side in front of the *sim*, the upstairs used for hanging the drum and the downstairs used for hanging a *kalò* (long wooden bell). The roof is two-tiered and the roof horns (Lao: *ngo*) portray *naga* heads. The beautiful carved woods which decorate the drum shelter were unused woods which Sathu Nyai Khamchan brought from other monasteries, such as the elaborately carved wooden gable (Lao: *sina*) under the gables which was brought from Vat Mai; the elaborately carved and gilded wood (Lao: *huang phoeng*) under the beam from Vat Maha That, and the six supporters in *naga* shape for the eaves (Lao: *khaen nang*) from Vat Xiang Thong (Sparkle Media 2006: Video) (Illustration No. 3.10).

The drum itself is made from a single piece of tree trunk 92 centimeters in diameter and 130 centimeters long which was built in 1882 by Pha Maha Akkavoraraxakhu Luang Chao, late abbot of Vat Saen. It is hollowed out and covered at both ends with taut cowhide. On its body it is decorated with floral stencil prints in a silvery color against a red background. It is hung by a hook which is attached to the beam. There is a wooden sign and inscription on the sign written in old-Lao script saying:

ຈຸລະສັງກາດ ໑໒໔໔ ຕົວປີເຕົ້າສະຫງ້າ (ມະເມຍ) ເດືອນ ໖ ແຮມ ໔ ຄຳ ພໍ່າວ່າໄດ້ວັນເສົາ ພາຍມີພະມະຫາອັກຄະວິຣະລາຊະຄູຫຼວງເຈົ້າ ເປັນເຄົ້າ ພ້ອມດ້ວຍສັງຄະຊາຕິດສະປັນຍາ ສິດໂຍມສູ້ຄົນ ທັງທາຍິກສູ້ຄົນ ໄດ້ສ້າງກອງນີ້. ກົງກັບວັນທີ່ ໖ ພຶດສະພາ ຄ.ສ. ໑໘໘໒. 1882 ຮອດປີ ຄ.ສ. 1990 ນີ້ມີອາຍຸໄດ້ 108 ປີ.

In Chulasakkarat 1244, the Year of *tao sang*a (the Horse), on the fourth day of the waning moon of the sixth lunar month on Saturday, Pha Maha Akkavoraraxakhu Luang Chao, the principal initiator, together with Monk Xa Tissapannya, all disciples [and] lay Buddhists, built this drum. [The date] corresponds to 6 May A.D. 1882 until 1990, giving it the age of 108 years.

(Museum No. VSS_001944 and Buddhist Archive No. B0534R)

The drum is generally used to announce Buddhist holy days, as well as to mark important events like village festivities, bereavements and festivals. Traditionally, the drum is beaten, accompanied by a gong and cymbals at 4:00 a.m. and p.m. on the Buddhist holy days of the seventh, eighth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of the waxing and waning moon. While the drum, gong and cymbals can be played by either monks or novices, the novices are typically the ones who take over that task. The sound of the drum informs the people that that day is a Buddhist day. In ancient times, they did not have printed calendars we do today, so the only way to know which days were Buddhist holy days was to hear the announcement via

the drum. The drum is also beaten in the case of emergency, such as if there is a fire in the monastery; the abbot dies or there is an assembly of villagers, but the style of beating differs from its common usage on holy days. The sound of the drum is believed to be influential in creating and maintaining the the harmony of the people in the communities who live around the monastery.¹⁴⁷

3.2.5 Sala Hongtham (The Preaching Pavilion)

The Sala Hongtham was built in 1999 by Sathu Nyai Khamchan to commemorate the 80th anniversary of his birthday. It was built with multiple purposes in mind – to be the place where the general *bun* (merit-making) rite can be performed – and for the installation of three ancient carved and gilded *phasat*.¹⁴⁸ He was the architect and supervisor of the construction and had local architectural assistants following his orders, and the construction work was carried out with the great help of many young monks and novices in the monastery.¹⁴⁹ Initially, he spent 225 million Kip (US\$ 29,742) on materials and the labor of architect assistants. Then, later, a woman donated 25 million Kip to pay for the tile flooring, and Thongvan Phetmungkhun from Ban Vixun paid 15 million Kip. The total cost was 265 million Kip to cover the cost of electric material and labor. To help pay for all of this, Sathu Nyai Khamchan sold a gold bangle of 20 *bat* (304 grams) which he inherited from his grandmother, Nang Khamsuk. The construction was completely finished in 2000 and a Buddhist celebration ceremony was held between 9 and 11 December 2000 (BAD-12-2-2000.010). It is currently used for organizing Buddhist ceremonies and it is also the site at which the three ancient *phasat* and other valued objects such as Buddha statues, carved and gilded gutters in *naga* shape (Lao: *hang lin*) and an elaborate carved and gilded preaching chair, have been stored. The walls exhibit photographs of framed monk portraits and others, making it feel like a monastic exhibition.

¹⁴⁷ For more information about the function and symbolic value of the drum see Archaimbault, 1959, “Temple Drums”, in *Kingdom of Laos*, pp. 185–189, see also Houmphanh et al. 2000, p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ The *phasat* of the middle one once belonged to the royal palace in Luang Prabang. During the French colonial period, this *phasat* was transported to France for showing it in Paris in the 1950s; but since in the meantime a *phasat* was needed in the palace for royal ceremonies, the palace asked for a *phasat* from Vat Saen and kept it there at all times. Later, when the *phasat* which was shown in Paris, was transported back to Luang Prabang it was kept in Vat Saen to replace the one which had been loan to the palace. The decoration of the *phasat* is partly done in carved wood and partly molded in gilded lacquer paste, adorned with pieces of mirror glass (or vitrified lead); the rims of some supporting parts at the feet of the columns are covered with bands of vitrified lead, a typical decoration for 19th century architecture (see Giteau 2001: 127).

¹⁴⁹ Khampom Phongsavan, one of young monk who was in Vat Saen at that time, recounted that Sathu Nyai Khamchan supervised the construction by himself and we were like his workers to follow his order to build this building (Khampom 2014: Interview).

3.2.6 Hò Phiphithaphan (The Museum Building)

In the early 2000s, as he began to age considerably, he decided that he should do something special, which turned out to be a museum for exhibiting his collection of art objects which he had gathered and kept them in his *kuti* as he found them to be immensely magnificent and significantly useful to younger generations when learning about Lao history and Buddhism. In 2003, he began building the museum building in Vat Saen Sukharam and the construction work was finished shortly after in 2004. The building, with its simple style, is six meters wide and eighteen meters long, and was built of bricks and cement; it is located to the left of and behind the *sim* (Illustration No. 3.11). He spent 135 million Kip on the construction, with main monetary support of 74 million Kip (US\$ 9,726) coming as donations from three sisters, Nang Bunthan, Nang Vaen, and Nang Kaenchan from Ban Aphy village. A ceremony celebrating the completion of the museum building was held on 24 October 2004 (BAD-12-2-2004.033); however, his wish had yet to come true. After he passed away in 2007, the building was used as a storage room for the monastery's belongings.

Nevertheless, his work on the construction of the museum building obviously demonstrates his status as an intellectual monk with farsightedness who knew to cherish these art objects which are a crucial part of the Lao cultural heritage which is disappearing, and was inspired to collect them and build a museum for them. By 2009, the project of the “Museum of Buddhist Arts and List of Endangered Art Objects in Monasteries in Luang Prabang” had been established in collaboration with the Sangha of Luang Prabang, the provincial Department of Information and Culture, and the German embassy in Laos. All of the objects have been searched, cleaned, numbered, digitized, described and relocated, as they are now kept on shelves in the museum building, awaiting the hand technical experts to arrange and them for display at an exhibition. I will describe the symbolic value of the assembly of these art objects in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.3 The Construction and Renovation of *kuti* (Abodes)

In the early 1940s, there were only a few *kuti* at Vat Saen in which six to eight monks and novices lived, those being the *kuti nyai* (the main abode), the *kuti sam pea* (the abode with a three-part roof) and *kuti niia* (the abode in the north) – all of them were built during the 1910s and 1930s by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan. The number of monks and novices increased significantly during his time as abbot, i.e., in 1950, there were twelve monks and nine novices. To support them, he built more *kuti* and also a refectory where monks and novices could assemble for having meals.

3.3.1 Kuti Nòi (The Small Abode)

The first *kuti* he constructed, which Sathu Nyai Khamchan built shortly after his appointment as acting abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1946, was the *kuti nòi* in 1946, which is situated behind the what is currently the museum. He transferred the fruit of his good karma by building this *kuti* in honor of the pure soul of his teacher, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan (Khamvone et al. 2004: 5). The *kuti* with a mere two bedrooms for novices was the smallest abode in the monastery. In 2003, he rebuilt it to its original condition at a site nearby on the temple grounds.

3.3.2 Monks' Kuti and Kuti Mae Khao

In 1960, Sathu Nyai Khamchan built a monk's *kuti* situated on the southwestern side of the monastery, a *kuti* in the simple style with two floors and one gallery built of wood, walls built of bricks and mortar and a roof covered with flat tiles. The three upstairs bedrooms with wooden floors serve as sleeping places for monks and novices, while the concrete floor downstairs is used as a storeroom. In 1964, the abbot bought the land next to this *kuti* on the western side and erected a *kuti mae khao* (abode for nuns) with a kitchen, a toilet and bathroom in it for nuns to stay temporarily while observing the eight precepts and participating in the Buddhist rituals during the Buddhist Lent season or on other Buddhist holidays. Nowadays, nuns are no longer able to use these facilities, as the *kuti mae khao* has become run-down to the point of disrepair.

3.3.3 Hò San (The Refectory)

In 1961, Sathu Nyai Khamchan built another *kuti* which is currently used as a *hò san* (refectory) where they all gather for breakfast or lunch. The two-story *kuti* in simple style was built with wooden floors, brick and mortar walls and a flat tile roof. This *kuti* with seven rooms and a staircase at both ends was built as a dwelling for novices, but since the monastery did not have a refectory for monks and novices to have their meals together, Sathu Nyai Khamchan modified the five rooms in the middle of the second floor into a dining hall, keeping two bed rooms at both ends for novices to sleep. The downstairs is used as a storeroom. Based on its gastronomic function, this *kuti* is called the *hò san* which literally means "dining hall". The beating of a small drum is used to signal mealtimes.

3.3.4 Kuti Nyai (The Main Abode)

The *kuti nyai* was built in the 1920s by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan with support from King Sisavang Vong. The *kuti nyai* is called as such because it is the largest *kuti* in the monastery and the residence of the abbot. It is where Sathu Khamchan lived from 1944 until the end of

his life. It is located behind the *sim* on the main road. In front of this *kuti*, there is a well, the water from which was used by the monks and novices for drinking for many decades as they had no water supply. Nowadays the water from this well is used for washing things such as bowls and flowers. The original *kuti* was in the Luang Prabang style with a two-part roof covered with traditional flat tiles and was built of wood, bricks and mortar (Illustration No. 3.12). The glazed floor tiles donated by King Sisavang Vong can no longer be found there. In 1987, Sathu Nyai Khamchan renovated it and modified its roof into a more modern style with one sweeping roof covered with glazed flat tiles which he imported from Bangkok, Thailand (BAD-12-2-1985.013). He spent 2,800,000 Kip on the reconstruction work, and in 2003, he renovated it and spent 38,426,000 Kip.

The reconstruction work involved the re-covering of the floor with modern tiles, the installation of an electric wire system as well as repainting (Khamvone et al. 2004: 7, 10). The bas-reliefs on the wall beneath the gable depict the episode of the incarnations of Gautama Buddha. The upper scene depicts the Bodhisattva is sitting on his pedestal in Tushita Heaven surrounded by Indra and Deva when they invite him to be born on the earth. The Bodhisattva descends to the earth, to be born as Prince Siddhartha and finally become Gautama Buddha. The lower scene depicts an episode in which, while Dīpaṅkara Buddha¹⁵⁰ and his *arahant* fellows were walking to a village, a hermit named Sumedha, lying face-down to cover a marshy spot on the path, invited the Buddha and his fellows to step over him in order that their feet would remain unsoiled by the mud.¹⁵¹ Today, the *kuti nyai* is regarded as a very important building, as it was the residence of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, and is part of the museum at Vat Saen Sukharam exhibiting his valuable belongings and objects from his collection, i.e. his portraits, statues, utensils and other auspicious objects. The museum acts as both a memorial to the venerable monk as well as an importing learning tool for future generations to study the Lao Buddhist art objects which are housed there (Illustration No. 3.13).

¹⁵⁰ Dīpaṅkara Buddha was the first Lord Buddha of the twenty-four Buddhas who preceded Gautama Buddha during the last twelve world cycles (Pali: *kappas*) (see Morris 1882), and is said to have lived on earth one hundred thousand years. He was 80 cubits tall, shining like a massive illuminated tree, and his sermons were always attended by 84,000 Arahants. He lived for 100,000 years (Ghosh 1987: 34).

¹⁵¹ This interesting story is recounted by Ghosh (1987), who states that “Gautama the Buddha was at the time a rich Brahman named Sumedha. One day he felt disgusted with the world, he cast off the wretched body, as though it were dirt, and withdrew to a hermitage in the Himalaya. This was precisely his campaign of conquest throughout the world, and men and gods worshiped him. Sumedha, the hermit, comes too, and at a marshy spot loosens his plaited hair, spreads it out on the dirty ground, with his hempen garment and his cloak of skins, and lies face downwards, inspired with the wish that the exalted Buddha Dīpaṅkara, with his host of disciples, may step over him without having their feet soiled by mud. Prostrated on the ground, he resolved to become a Buddha one day and bring salvation to the world. Dīpaṅkara approaches and prophesies the future greatness of Sumedha. The inhabitants of the ten thousand worlds make a joyful noise and signs and miracles happen, as is always the case when future Buddha is foretold. But Sumedha determines to realize in himself all the ten perfections (Pali: *pāramitās*), in order to fulfill the preliminary conditions of Buddhahood” (Ghosh 1987: 34).

3.3.5 Kuti Sam Pae (The Abode with a Three-Part Roof)

The original structure of this abode, formerly situated on the left side of the *sim* where the present Sala Hongtham is located, was built in the 1920s by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan. The *kuti* with three lateral rooms and a three-part roof was built entirely of wood, save the roof which was covered with traditional flat tiles. The middle room was open and both of the other two rooms were divided into two bedrooms each. This style of *kuti* was and still is popular in Luang Prabang, and can be found at Vat Xiang Thong, Vat Nong, Vat Xiang Muan and elsewhere. In 1999, this *kuti* collapsed due to heavy rain and weather conditions. Sathu Nyai Khamchan erected the *sala hongtham 80 pi* in its place, building the new *kuti sam pae* in its original form but on the southern side of the monastery on the main road. The land upon which the *kuti* sits was donated in 1983 by Nang Thong Samut and Khamphio Phongsavan of Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai province.¹⁵² This *kuti* is also a testament to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's outstanding work regarding the preservation of his people's architectural heritage, as he rebuilt it to its original structure even in the smallest details, despite the fact that he had no blueprints or images to aid him in the process (Illustration No. 3.14).

4. The Construction Works in Other Monasteries

Other monastic buildings designed and overseen by Sathu Nyai Khamchan are the *hò lakhang* (bell shelter) at Vat Pa Fang and the *sim* of Vat Pha That Si Khottabun, both part of the Tha Khaek district in Khammuan province of central Laos. The former project was his first architectural work and the latter presents his architectural prominence at the national level.

4.1. Hò Lakhang (The Bell Shelter) at Vat Pa Fang

In 1941, Sathu Nyai Khamchan helped his brother, Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto, build the main *kuti* at Vat Pa Fang, what he considered to be his first experience in

¹⁵² Khamphio Phongsavan and Nang Thongsamut were of Luang Prabang origin and lived in the communities around Vat Sukharam. After the Lao revolution in 1975, they moved to the Chiang Saen district of Chiang Rai province in northern Thailand. In 1983, Sathu Nyai Khamchan went to Chiang Saen to visit his relatives. Khamphio and Nang Thongsamut transferred their estate Nang Thongsamut inherited from her parents, which is located next to Vat Saen Sukharam on the southern side, to Sathu Nyai Khamchan while he was the abbot. In the letter, they declared the following: "At Chiang Saen, on 15 March 1983, we, Nai [Mr.] Phio and Nang [Mrs.] Thongsamut, together with our descendants, would like to donate the land belonging to our personal estate which is located next to the southern wall of Vat Saen, Luang Prabang, to Sathu [Pha] Khamchan, who is the head [abbot] of Vat Saen, so that he may merge it into the land belonging to the Sangha [so that it] will forever be a part of Vat Saen. I would like to dedicate the merit derived from this offering to our benefactors, such as our parents, who have already passed away, and to all those to whom we have a karmic debt. Please pay retributions to one other. May we be rid any maladies or perils, and may we be of strong health. May we continue to develop our morality and give offerings for all time. May this be a support to us for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna* (*nibbāna paccayo hotu no*) (BAD-12-1-1983.004).

construction work. In 1942, Sathu Maha Khamphan disrobed, and in 1943, he built his own *hò lakhang* in front of the *kuti*. His initial idea to build a two-story building was not approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as evidenced by an official document in which the ministry gives permission to Sathu Nyai Khamchan to build the *hò lakhang* as long as he will make some certain changes to the structure. A part of the document reads:

ກະຊວງທຳມະການ ອະນຸຍາດໃຫ້ ພະຄຳຈັນ ວັດສີພຸດທະບາທ ປຸກທໍລະຄັງ ໑ ຫຼັງ ໃສ່ດິນ ບ່ອນທີ່ໝາຍໄວ້ໃນແປລນ ແຕ່ທໍລະຄັງຂໍປຸກ
ມານີ້ມີສອງຊັ້ນ ສູງເກີນສ່ວນໄປ ບໍ່ຖືກຕ້ອງຕາມສິລະປະສາດຂອງລາວ ຈຶ່ງໃຫ້ຕັດອອກໜຶ່ງຊັ້ນ.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs will grant Pha Khamchan of Vat Si Phutthabat permission to build a *hò lakhang* at the place indicated in his drawing plan. However, the *hò lakhang* submitted has two floors, which is too high and not in correspondence with the Lao Fine Arts. We ordered [him] to cut one floor of it out.

(BAD-12-2-1943.001)

He never lost his interest in his initial idea, and when he had another chance to build a *hò kông* at Vat Saen, he made it with floors. The *lakhang* (bell) is essential to the monastery tradition in Luang Prabang, as it is beaten by a monk or novice at 4:00 a.m. and p.m. every day to announce the watch. Monks and novices wake up to this sound, after which they go to their morning chanting. The bell is also a signal for lay people to get up so they can steam the sticky rice for alms giving and cook the food for breakfast of monks in the monasteries and also for themselves. The bell is beaten in the afternoon as the signal for monks and novices to prepare for their evening chanting, and for lay people to prepare food for dinner.

4.2 The Sim of Vat Si Khottabun

By the time Sathu Nyai Khamchan completed the reconstruction of the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1962, his construction work was already quite well-known and widely recognized by the people and had even managed to impress King Sisavang Vatthana. Due to this prestige, in 1966, he was invited by General Bunloet Sanichan to build a *sim* at Vat Pha That Si Khottabun¹⁵³ in Tha Khaek district, a renowned religious site in central Laos. He was the architect and supervisor of the construction, which was carried out from 1966 and 1972, and was supported by General Bunloet Sanichan and the people of Tha Khaek as well as other nearby communities. The *sim* in the Luang Prabang style, built of bricks and stucco with a

¹⁵³ Pha That Si Khottabun or Si Khottabong is one of the most ancient and sacred religious stupas in central Laos. It is located in Ban Müang Khao village on the bank of the Mekong River in the southern part of the Tha Khaek district around six kilometers away from the city limits. According to its chronicle, this stupa was built in the sixth century by King Suminthalat or Sumittathamavongsa Athilat of the Si Khottabong Dynasty (Khemphone 1999: 11). The stupa was built with bricks and mortar, each side of its base being 25 meters wide and 1.30 meters high. Its second base is 14.33 meters wide and the body of the stupa is 28.89 meters high. Its parasol (Lao: *settasat*) with seven umbrellas stands 2 meters high and is made of silver and gold (Sanguan 2002: 155–157). Most of the restoration was carried out in 1963 and the ceremony for installing the parasol on its finial, which Sathu Nyai Khamchan and monks from Luang Prabang also attended, was held on 7 February 1963 (Buddhist Archive No. B1560R, B1561R, B1566R to B1569R)

three-tiered roof, is 31 meters long and 11 meters wide. The roof is covered with flat yellow tiles. The central spike has seven *phasat*, and the horns of the ridge-tiles portray *naga* heads. Its structure looks similar to that of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam (see Illustration No. 3.15). King Sisavang Vatthana and his Queen Khamphui supported the construction by donating the elaborate carved door leaves found at the main entrance of the *sim*. Engraved on the interior door leaves is the symbol of the kingdom, a three-headed elephant with two parasols at each side, and the right one leaf also carries an inscription under the symbol which reads:

ໝາຍມີ ພະບາດສົມເດັດພະເຈົ້າບໍລົມມະເສດຖະຂັດຕິຍະສຸຣິຍະວົງສາ ພະມະຫາສີສະວ່າງວັດທະນາ ພ້ອມດ້ວຍສົມເດັດພະອັກຄະ
ມະເທສີຄໍາຜູ້ຍ ຊົງພະລາຊະສັດທາ ສ້າງຂຶ້ນໃນເດືອນສາມເພັງ ພ.ສ. ໒໕໑໔ ສຳລັບວັດທາດສີໂຄດຕະບູນ ນະຄອນຄໍາມ່ວນ ເພື່ອການ
ອຸປະຖໍາ ຄຳຂູ່ພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ໃຫ້ກ້ານກຸ່ງຮຸ່ງເຮືອງ ແລະວັດທະນາຖາວອນ ຕະຫລອດຫ້າພັນພະວັດສາ. ຈິຣັງ ຕິດຖະຕູ ສາສະນັງ
ນິບພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕູ [ຂໍໃຫ້ພະສັດທ່າຈົງໝັ້ນຄົງຕະຫຼອດໄປ ຂໍໃຫ້ເປັນປັດໄຈແຫ່ງພະນິບພານ].¹⁵⁴

His Royal Holiness Pha Chao Borommasetthakhattiya Suriyavongsa Pha Maha Sisavang Vatthana, together with Her Royal Queen Khamphui, along with their royal entourage, made a donation on the full moon day of the third lunar month BE 2514 (corresponds to Sunday, 30 January 1972) to Vat That Sikhottabun in Khammuan province, as a contribution to the flourishing prosperity of Buddhism over five thousand years. May the Teachings of Buddha be forever stable. May this be a support for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna* (*ciraṃ tiṭṭhatu sāsanaṃ nibbāna paccayo hotu*).

When considering this construction work, one can clearly see how important Sathu Nyai Khamchan's role was in terms of monastic architecture in Luang Prabang, as he had become accepted and recognized by both officials and common people for his abilities. Another thing to note is that the donation from the king and queen was given to support Buddhism, in order to increase their religious merit and function as an indicator for the legitimacy of royal rule (Grabowsky 2007: 136), and also as a symbol of encouragement to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work. The *sim* of Vat Si Khottabun in the Luang Prabang style is the only one which can be found in central Laos, an area famous for its unique architectural influence which lasted for many centuries.

5. Donations and Contributions to Other Monasteries

The donation of money and materials to support monastic constructions, a popular practice in Laos as well as in the rest of mainland Southeast Asia, is certainly one of the most basic and traditional ways of making merit in Buddhism, a donation of such kind is beneficial to Buddhism and the donor is thus to become a devout Buddhist by engaging in this practice. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was well-known as a generous donor whose donations were wide spread throughout the country. The abbots and villagers who decided to undertake the construction of their monastic buildings often came to see him in Vat Saen and asked him for support and help in the form of donations and other assistance such as his advice, all of which

¹⁵⁴ I had a chance to visit this monastery on 21 April 2014 and copy down the contents of this inscription.

he was of course happy to provide. One could even claim that most if not almost all of the monasteries in Luang Prabang province which were either constructed or restored from the 1990s until 2007 would have most likely received his support and contribution.

5.1 Vat Pa Phon Phao

Vat Pa Phon Phao, located on a mountain of the *phao* (*Shorea siamensis* Mig) forest, situated on the eastern outskirts of Luang Prabang, had abandoned monastery for years. In the early 1960s, Sathu Nyai Xaysamut Xotika Maha Thela (1927–1992) moved there (Buddhist Archive No. C5016R and C5016V) after his *vipassana* meditation study and practice with Pha Achan Maha Pan Anantho at Vat Maha Phutthavongsa Pa Luang or Vat Sok Pa Luang Vientiane as well as in Burma (BAD-12-2-1961.033). He renovated the *sim* and stayed in a room behind it and lived there until his death. Since its restoration, Vat Pa Phon Phao has become a well-known as a significant monastery for *vipassana* meditation and *parivassakam* practices in Luang Prabang and Laos in general. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a strong supporter of Sathu Nyai Xaysamut in establishing Vat Pa Phon Phao as the monastic center of *vipassana* meditation practice in Luang Prabang, and he also helped with the construction of the Santi Chedi (stupa of peace). For example, in 1962, he organized an event by holding a *kathin* ceremony which raised 50,000 Kip, the proceeds of which he gave to Sathu Nyai Xaysamut to support the construction of the Sala Hongtham and the restoration of the *sim*.¹⁵⁵ In 1970, during the celebrations of his 50th birthday, he also offered 101,000 Kip in donations made by various people to Sathu Nyai Xaysamut for his “Munnithi Paetmün Siphon Khan” (the foundation for the eighty-four thousand of the Buddha’s words)¹⁵⁶. In 1982, Sathu Nyai Khamchan offered Sathu Nyai Xaysamut US\$ 6,500 which he collected from Lao diaspora during his visits to France and Australia to support the construction of the Santi Chedi

¹⁵⁵ ປະຫວັດຫຍໍ້ ພະຫຼັກຄຳ ວິຣະວິສຸດທິຄຸນ (ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດໂຕ) [The short biography of Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhun (Khamchan Virachitto)].” ພຸດທະປະທິບ ປີທີ ໕ ສະບັບທີ ໑໖ ປະຈຳເດືອນ ໑໒ ເມັງ ພ.ສ. ໒໕໑໗ In *Phutthapathip* magazine, the Year 5, Vol. 16, BE 2517 (AD 1974) (BAD-02-0516).

¹⁵⁶ This refers to the entire teachings of the Buddha which consist of a total of eighty-four thousand words as found in the Tipiṭaka, and this fund consisted of eighty-four thousand shares of 1,000 Kip. This foundation was a Buddhist foundation in Luang Prabang that which was very supportive of various religious activities. It was established on 20 January 1971 by Sathu Nyai Xaysamut at Vat Pa Phon Phao with three main aims: to support the study of the Dhamma and the Vinaya; to support the propagation of the Dhamma and the Vinaya; and to support the construction of Buddhist monuments. With support from the foundation, Sathu Nyai Xaysamut founded the Abhidhamma School (school teaching the higher doctrine) at his monastery for monks, novices and lay Buddhists. He also published the *phutthapathip* magazine which contained the contents of Buddhist teachings, Lao literature and traditional ceremonies and festivals. Finally, he was responsible for the building of the Santi Chedi stupa. At present, the Abhidhamma School and Phutthapathip magazine are no longer in existence, but the foundation still exists, its function having been reduced to the maintenance of the buildings in the monastery.

stupa.¹⁵⁷ After Sathu Nyai Xaysamut's passing in 1992, Vat Pa Phon Phao was looked after by Sathu Nyai Khamchan. For instance, he supported Sathu Bunthan Punnyakamo, the abbot of Vat Pa Phon Phao on developing the monastery and Sathu Nyai Khamchan also established *parivasakam* practice as a regular annual ritual in December at this monastery. In 2006, he handed over US\$ 2,376, 3,500 Euro and 17,400 Baht to Sathu Bunthan to help pave the ways with cement within his monastery (Khamvone et al. 2006: 95).

5.2 Other Monasteries

The followings is a list detailing the donations in money and materials that Sathu Nyai Khamchan contributed to the construction and reconstruction of monastic buildings in various monasteries, not only in the Luang Prabang province but also in other provinces and abroad. Most donations were made on the occasion of his birthday celebrations, a time before which people both inside and outside Laos submit their monetary so they that they too could participating in the ceremonies, or, in the case of those who donated but were also present, for the purpose of making additional merit.

In 1982, his 62nd birthday of Sathu Nyai Khamchan was celebrated in Paris during his visit to France. The Lao people living in France offered him 25,000 Francs, all of which he donated to a Lao temple in France to aid in the construction of their *sim*. In 1983, he donated 10,000 sheets of gold leaf to be used to cover the Buddha image in the *sim* of Vat Vixun. In 1985, he ordered the architects to finish the work of the altar for the principal Buddha image in the *sim* of Vat That Luang in Luang Prabang, which was ordered by King Sisavang Vatthana before the Lao revolution of 1975. The construction also included decoration with 31,000 sheets of gold leaf.

In 1995, he donated 270,000 Kip to help cover the cost of cement for the reconstruction of the *sim* of Vat Na Xao, 100,000 Kip for Vat Na Pho, 100,000 Kip for Vat Hat Khip, Ngoi district, Luang Prabang province, 300,000 Kip to the secondary Buddhist school of Luang Prabang, 100,000 Kip to the hospital of Luang Prabang, and 100,000 Kip to the Lao Red Cross Society of Luang Prabang. In 1996, he donated 100,000 Kip for the reconstruction of the *sim* of Vat Si Bun Hüang, and 100,000 Kip for Vat Saylom. In 1997, he donated US\$ 10,000 to Vat Saen Sukharam for regular maintenance. The money that he collected was given to him by Lao people overseas during his visits to the USA, Canada, France and Germany between 13 March 1997 and 7 July 1997 (Khamvone 2014: 14). On his 77th birthday, he donated 3,400,000 Kip for the construction and reconstruction of many different monasteries in Luang Prabang. In 1998, he donated 1,000,000 Kip as initial capital for the

¹⁵⁷ Sathu Nyai Xaysamut got the idea and inspiration for this stupa from Burma during his travels there to study Vipassana meditation in the late 1950s. The drawing plan was made by Achan Manivong Khatiyarat. At present, this stupa is one of the most popular religious tourist attractions and by far the most visible spot in the town.

reconstruction of the *sim* of Vat Sop Sikkharam which he acquired via collaboration with nearby lay communities. The reconstruction work consisted of repairing parts of the roof, carried out by monks and novices of Vat Saen and Vat Sop. He donated 1,800,000 Kip for the construction of a Tup Kam (a small hut for a monk to reside during his *parivassakam* practice) at Vat Pa Phon Phao. On his 78th birthday, he donated 6,660,000 Kip and offered various advice to numerous abbots regarding construction and reconstruction in their monasteries.

In 1999, he reconstructed a concrete staircase climbing up from the bank of the Mekong to Vat Chòmphet¹⁵⁸ with a total of 222 steps; the funds for the reconstruction were raised in collaboration with lay people and cost 8,200,000 Kip. Later, in 2000, he ordered the Luang Prabang branch of Electricite Du Laos install electricity at the monastery, which cost 1,891,600 Kip. On his 79th birthday, he donated 5,490,000 Kip to the attending abbots for the construction and repair of their monasteries.

In 2000, he collaborated with lay people to fund the construction of a concrete staircase climbing from the bank of the Mekong to Vat Xiang Nyoen in Ban Xiang Maen village, costing 4,700,800 Kip. He ordered to restore the floor of the *sim* at Vat Na Xao with tile and lay people supported his work the money of 3,708,000 Kip. He worked as a fundraiser and helped collect 3,200,000 Kip for tiles covering the roof of a *kuti* in Vat Pongvan. On 25 July 2002, he handed over the amount of US\$ 200, 100 Euro and 1,275,000 Kip to Sathu Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela for the restore of the *sim* of Vat Phukhouay Phokharam. In October 2002, on his 82th birthday, he donated 9,700,000 Kip to ten abbots for the construction and reconstruction of buildings in their monasteries. In 2003, on his 83rd birthday, he gave 30 million Kip to Sathu Chanthalin to fund the restoration of the *sim* of Vat Phukhouay Phokharam, donated 5,300,000 Kip to the Sangha committee to support the construction of the Hò Thamma Sapha – the Buddhist Assembly Hall – of the Lao Sangha at Vat That Luang in Vientiane, and he divided the other 9,700,000 Kip among multiple

¹⁵⁸ The full name of the temple is Vat Chòmphet Santi Siri Mungkhun Vutthivajiraram. It is located at the top of the small Mount Phet opposite of Luang Prabang town and has been abandoned for decades. The date of foundation has not been determined, but Heywood's work says it was possibly in the eighteenth century (Heywood 2006: 144). Sathu Nyai Khamchan said that this temple was built in 1880 by the Siamese army led by Chao Phraya Surasak Montri (Choem Saeng-Chuto, 1855–1931) when they were ordered by King Rama V to come to Luang Prabang (Sparkle Media 2006). He based this claim on a cement plate he found in this temple in 1992 with an inscription on the back in Thai script, which reads “กองทัพบกสยามฝ่ายเหนือ (จ.ศ.) ๑๒๕๐ ทำเมืองหลวงพระบาง สุรศักดิ์ [Northern Division of the Thai Army, CS 1250 [equivalent to AD 1888] made in Luang Prabang, Surasak]” (Krairoek 2012: 138–139). He gave the plate to a Thai researcher who offered him US\$ 200 as a donation which he then used as a start-up for the construction of the staircases. The Siam army led by Chao Phraya Surasak Montri came to Luang Prabang to suppress and expell the Hò (Thai: *prap hò*) who in 1887 were attempting to overtake Northern Laos for the second time (Anusone 1975: 48). The term *hò* refers to a Chinese ethnic group from Yunnan in southern China. Later, this temple became a Siamese citadel for observing the movement of the French troops in Luang Prabang to protect the opposing frontiers contested by the Siamese government and the French in Indochina.

monasteries for construction and repair work. In 2004, he donated 4,778,000 Kip for the enhancement of five staircases of the *sim* of Vat Nòng Si Khunmüang, 2 million Kip for the tiles covering the roof of the *sim* of Vat Khing Muak, and 2,500,000 Kip for the tiles covering the roof of a *kuti* in Vat Phu Mòk. In 2005, he donated 3 million Kip to Vat Phu Mok to pay for the iron wire used in the construction work of the *sim*, and 2 million Kip to Vat Xiang Kaeo for the reconstruction of the brick walls around the monastery. In 2006, he donated 2 million Kip to Vat Ban Xat to cover the roof of their *sim* with tile, 3 million Kip to Vat Pha Keng Nòi in Phu Khun district for the initial construction of their *sim*, 2,600,000 Kip to Vat Mai, Khua district, Phongsali province for the tiles covering a *kuti*, 3,300,000 Kip to the district governor of Müang Viangkham, Luang Prabang, for the tools and equipment used in road construction, and 3,500,000 Kip for medicine at the hospital in Phonxay district. Between 2001 and 2005, he donated a total of 14,500,000 Kip on seven different occasions for the construction of the Hò Thamma Sapha.

Furthermore, it was not uncommon for abbots as well as people from the countryside to seek out Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen and ask him for advice and assistance in funding the construction of their village monasteries, many of them also asking him to act as an honorary member board of the construction committee for their monasteries. This meant he didn't just offer his donations and various forms of support from a distance; he actually went to the sites, sometimes handing over some start-up money. Sathu Nyai Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela who followed Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the site, recollected to me that while Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave his money to the lay people and said: “ອັນນີ້ ຂ້ອຍຕັ້ງຕົ້ນໃຫ້ພວກເຈົ້າກ່ອນເດີ [This money, I give you for the start of your construction.” Sathu Nyai Chanthalin observed that monasteries where Sathu Nyai Khamchan went to; he would give the lay people advice on how to build the temple and also gave a money for their start.¹⁵⁹

6. The Walkways and Crematories

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was an influential local architect not only in terms of the monasteries or religious sites – he also was involved with a significant amount of secular work for the communities and people of Luang Prabang, such as the building of roads and the paving of walkways with cement within the communities around Vat Saen, the construction of the village office at Ban Phon Hüang and the reconstruction of the the public pyres at Vat Pa Nya Thüp. These things are immensely useful for people in Luang Prabang and thus are an indicator the central role he played in his community, both in the period of after the Lao revolution of 1975 and throughout his lifetime in general.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Sathu Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela, abbot of Vat Phukhouay Phokharam, on 28 February 2013.

6.1 The Concrete Walkways and Village Office

The following is a detailed account of all that Sathu Nyai Khamchan contributed to the communities of Ban Vat Saen and Ban Phon Hüang.

In 1972, he built two concrete walkways: one running from Vat Saen to the main road of Ban Lamaet (the present Ban Phon Hüang) which is 3.50 meters wide and 70 meters long, and one running from the main road on the east side of the monastery to the main road on the bank of the Khan River. These walkways look like large staircases, and they were at least partially made possible by the one ton of cement donated by King Sisavang Vatthana. In 1973, Sathu Nyai Khamcahn finished the construction of the walkway in Ban Vat Saen, half of which had been built by his brother, Phaya Khammunkhun Virachit, and which leads from the main road to the road on the bank of the Khan River. In 1975, he restored a stone staircase which had been built in 1934 by his grandmother, Nang Khamsuk, (BAD-12-2 1971.005), in Ban Lakkham, from the riverside route down to the Khan River. He spent 250,000 Kip on the reconstruction work. In 2001, he built two staircases made of concrete leading from the road on the bank of the Khan River directly to the river, the so-called Tha Nüa ທ່າເໜືອ (northern pier) and Tha Tai ທ່າໃຕ້ (southern pier) in Ban Vat Saen. He spent 18,250,000 Kip in total on the construction for both. In 2002, he spent 9,170,000 Kip on the construction of a concrete staircase from the riverside route to the Khan river, the so-called Tha Kang ທ່າກາງ (middle pier). On 25 May 2002, he gave 6 million Kip to Sathu Chanthalin to support the construction of a bridge at the stream Huai Mao along Ban Na Sang Woei connecting the primary school of Sathit and Vat Phukhouay Phokharam. In 2005, he donated 20 million Kip for the construction of the head village office of Ban Phon Hüang. In commemoration of his generous contribution, the head village (Lao: *nai ban* ນາຍບ້ານ) presented him with a certificate of exaltation expressing their gratitude and respect to him. The text in the certificate reads as follows:

ພວກຂະນ້ອຍ ຄະນະປົກຄອງບ້ານ ພ້ອມດ້ວຍປະຊາຊົນ ພາຍໃນບ້ານໂພນເຮືອງ ຂໍສະແດງຄວາມຮູ້ບຸນຄຸນ ຕໍ່ສາທູ້ໃຫຍ່ຄຳຈັນ ວິລະຈິດຕະມະຫາເຖລະ ທີ່ໄດ້ເປັນເຈົ້າສັດທາ ສ້າງທ້ອງຖານປົກຄອງບ້ານ ໃຫ້ແກ່ພວກຂະນ້ອຍ ເປັນມູນຄ່າ 20,000,000 ກີບ (ຊາວລ້ານກີບ) ພວກຂ້ານ້ອຍຊາວພຸດທະບໍລິສັດທັງໝາຍຂໍນັອມຖະຫວາຍໃບຈາລິກາບຸນຄຸນ ແດ່ສາທູ້ໃຫຍ່.

We, the group of village leaders together with the people of Ban Phon Hüang village, would like to express our gratitude to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela who donated the amount of 20,000,000 Kip (twenty million Kip) for the construction of the building of our village office. We, all as Buddhists, are very pleased to present Sathu Nyai with this certificate of gratitude.

(Khamvone et al. 2006: 95)

Because he contributed so much to these various local communities, he was revered not only as a monk but also as the spiritual leader of their communities. On his birthday, the people from these communities would come and spend the whole day in the monastery preparing food, organizing activities and events, and taking part in the celebrations.

6.2. The Public Crematories at Vat Pa Nya Thüp

The public crematories at Vat Buppha Vipassanaram, also known as Vat Pa Nya Thüp, is very significant for the people of Luang Prabang because most cremations are held there. At present, there are three concrete crematories and one large pavilion. As far as the evidence shows, public cremation was not practiced in the town of Luang Prabang town until the 1930s. The cremation ceremonies, sometimes for members of the royal family and other dignitaries, were held at the *pa xa luang* ປ່າຊ້າຫຼວງ (public cemetery forest)¹⁶⁰, a temporary pyre which were scattered in various places throughout the suburbs. For example, in 1926, the cremation of Chao Phaya Luang Müangchan (Achan Thòngdi, grandfather of Sathu Nyai Khamchan) was held on the bank of the Khan River in Ban Khili village (Buddhist Archive No. A0009R). The *pa xa luang* was located on the lower hill of Mount Phu Thao, in the area near Ban Xiang Maen, opposite of Luang Prabang town. The location lies far outside the city and the people have to cross the Mekong by boat.

In 1931, Achan Khamsuk Buppha who, at that time, was appointed as district governor of Luang Prabang, saw this created great difficulties for the people, so he discussed the issue with his high ranking official colleagues, namely, Chao Phaya Luang Muenlukthao, Phaya Kumphonsoek Luang Müangxai and Phaya Sisonxai. The outcome of their discussion was the decision to declare the new space for public cremations to be the area next to Vat Pa Nya Thüp, which is only five kilometers from the town and much more easily accessible (BAD-02-0121). Originally, two crematories and two open pavilions were built and had been in operation for fifty years. In 1980, when their condition was significantly deteriorated, Sathu Nyai Khamchan restored them. The restoration work was carried out with the help of monks and novices from Vat Saen. He spent 12 million Kip on the materials and architect labor. In 2000, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, as the head of the Sangha, cooperated with the Lao Front for the National Construction of Luang Prabang District and the people to rebuild these three concrete crematories and restore the large open pavilion. The middle crematory has a high roof in the shape of a *phasat* supported by four poles. He donated 45 million Kip (US\$ 5,000) from his own funds, and the whole construction cost a total of 188,346,364 Kip (Khamvone et al. 2006: 7). These crematories still serve as the site for public cremations in Luang Prabang people, representing an important part of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work and his contributions which were a great benefit to the public good.

In addition, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was an advisor to the committee of the provincial office concerning the UNESCO world heritage status of Luang Prabang and the question of

¹⁶⁰ Between the 1940s and 1960s, when the Sangha of Luang Prabang practiced the forest retreats near this area in January, they regularly came to assemble at this cemetery on the last day of the retreat to chant and transfer the merit from their practice to the spirit, the so-called *phot pa xa* ໂຜດປ່າຊ້າ (dedicating merit to spirits). There is a photograph showing monks chanting in this forest (Buddhist Archive No. A0856R and A0856V).

how to set up an art school for traditional Lao arts and crafts at Vat Xiang Muan Vajiramangalaram in 1998. He initially gave advice as to where to establish the school, as well as who the teachers and students should be.¹⁶¹ Since its very beginnings, the school's aim has been to teach monks, novices and young Lao people about the techniques and materials used in the production of art objects in the Luang Prabang Lao Lan Xang style. In 1995, during the restoration of the national museum of Luang Prabang (former royal palace), Sathu Nyai Khamchan was also respected as an intellectual by architects for his wealth of knowledge on ancient royal art and culture.

7. Conclusion

Vat Saen Sukharam is considered one of the most captivating and charming monasteries of the world heritage site that is the town of Luang Prabang. After the restoration which took place between 1957 and 1962, its new *sim* came to be recognized for its unique “hybrid” architectural style and its elaborate decorations. The other buildings on the temple grounds are also architecturally unique and elaborately decorated with stencil prints of gold leaf against a red background and gold paint, covered with yellow and red tiles, causing the monastery to radiate a most brilliant aura when the sun rises. The monastic buildings in Vat Saen represent in ocular fashion Sathu Nyai Khamchan's outstanding achievements and his in-depth knowledge of the field of Lao cultural architecture. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's unique technique piqued the interest of numerous architects, both locally and internationally, as they were fascinated by the fact that he built and reconstructed the buildings from his own memory and vision, i.e., without any drawing plans or blue prints to which he could refer to ensure that he was keeping exactly with tradition. After Luang Prabang became a world heritage site, Vat Saen Sukharam became very popular with visitors due to its unique magnificence. The temple also had a crucial role following the Lao revolution in 1975, as it housed the chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of the province of Luang Prabang from 1976 to 2007. Vat Saen Sukharam is the only main monastery in the heritage town that does not collect an entrance fee from visitors. This reflects the intentions of the late abbot, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, who stated that “the monastery is our heritage, it was founded by our ancestors. We should open the doors to all who wish to come and visit, and we should not use monastery to the advantage of others” (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2006: Interview).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's construction of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam became exemplary for other abbots, inspiring many of them to restore structures at their own monasteries, i.e., the reconstruction of the *sim* at Vat Nòng Sikhunmüang between 1963 and

¹⁶¹ Interview with Bounkhong Khouththao, vice director of the World Heritage Department of the Province of Luang Prabang on 9 March 2013, who was one member of the committee.

1990, carried out by Sathu Nyai Phummi Phalappatta Maha Thela (1921–1995), the *sim* at Vat Maha That Raxabovoravihan in the 1960s by Sathu Nyai Bunthan Thitapunnya Thela (1920–1967), and the *sim* at Vat Manolom Saththaram in 1999 by Sathu Nyai Onta Santapanya Maha Thela (1923–2003). Most of them were close friends of Sathu Nyai Khamchan as well as the recipient of his advice and contributions to their construction work. At present, the abbots known for leading lay people in monastic construction and restoration in Luang Prabang are Sathu Nyai Chanthalin and Sathu Nyai One Keo . Both of them had followed and learned much about the field from Sathu Nyai Khamchan in the above-mentioned period from the 1990s to 2007. However, Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s work of the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam in the first phase has been criticized by King Sisavang Vatthana for exemplifying a structure due to it was not in accordance with the Luang Prabang style. According to the king’s advice, therefore, the *sim* had been developed in the second phase and finished in 1962, by adding the lateral on both sides. Then, it looks more magnificent as it is at the present and it made the king much impressive.

Moreover, one final thing to be taken from Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s way of doing things is the fact that he, after completing construction work of each monastic building, always organized a celebration ceremony for it. The ceremony was usually held at Vat Saen Sukharam on the same day as his birthday. This is important in terms of the Buddhist faith – the construction of a monastic building will bring the fruits of merit. Therefore, after the building has been erected, the founders and donors should organize such a ceremony to celebrate the completed structure, where they explain their motivation for the construction/reconstruction and what they hope to receive or be blessed with in the future. Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s donations and contributions to other monasteries became a good example for the lay people and inspired them to give their support, such as for Pa On (Aunt On), who was a well-known donor, supporting the construction monastic buildings and structures both in Luang Prabang and in the nearby rural villages. The villagers asking for her donation had to present evidence that Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s signed his approval of their construction project in order to actually receive the donation.

In the case of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, he explained three main purposes in his address to those who gathered at these celebrations: first, to transfer the merit acquired through the construction to the Sangha community and to support Buddhism; second, to transfer the merit resulting from this deed to his parents, masters and teachers, as well as to animals and creatures of every kind; and, finally, he stated “may this be a disposition to reach nirvana”. These dedications of merit are one of the most important Buddhist practices for people who have just finished making merit and now have the opportunity to share that merit with others. The way in which Sathu Nyai Khamchan embodied the values of the teachings he symbolized and the nature of Buddhism as a driving force in his life are clearly reflected by his address,

just as they are reflected by the overall narrative of his life and his engagement as monk, architect, and philanthropist. His actions as any of the three all seemed to be with one goal in mind: sharing happiness with his fellow human beings.

8. Illustrations and Captions



Illustration No. 3.1.1. A graphic of the boundary of Vat Saen Sukharam, view from north to south, created by Thansamay Construction & Architecture Company of Luang Prabang (courtesy of Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo, Vat Saen Sukharam in March 2014).

List of buildings:

1. Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk (the eighteen-cubit Buddha)
2. The hut for keeping electric appliances
3. The house of two racing boats
4. Toilet
5. Kuti Nüa (the northern *kuti*)

6. That Nòi stupa (a small stupa)
7. The small stupa moved from in front of the *sim*.
8. Upmung (the vaulted chapel)
9. Pha That Chedi Lokachulamani stupa
10. Drum shelter



Illustration No. 3.1.2. A graphic of the boundary of Vat Saen Sukharam, view from South to North, created by Thansamay Construction & Architecture Company of Luang Prabang (courtesy of Sathu Pho Bunpheng Virathammo, Vat Saen Sukharam in March 2014).

The list of buildings (cont.):

11. Sim
12. Sala Hongtham
13. Toilet and kitchen
14. Kuti Nyai (a large *kuti*)
15. Museum building
16. Hò San (the refectory)
17. Kuti Sam Pae (an abode with a three-part roof)
18. Monk's *kuti*
19. Kuti Nòi (a small abode)
20. Toilet and bathroom
21. Kuti Mae Khao (the abode for women dressed in white)



Illustration No. 3.2. The old *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam in the late 1940s. In the photograph, people are attending a Buddhist ceremony, with the children of the patrons playing outside in front of the *sim*. The stupa on the left side of the *sim* called “Chedi Lokachulamani” is the former old drum house, and on the right is the former location of the manuscript library (Lao: *hò tai*), both of which have been moved to new locations at present (Buddhist Archive No. B3678R).

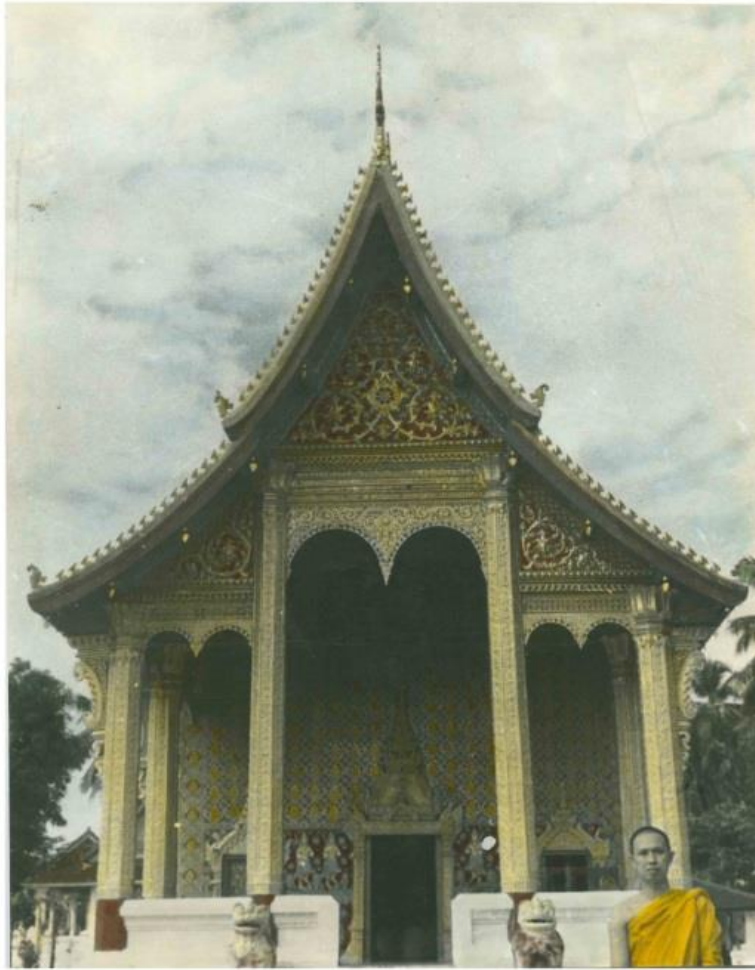


Illustration No. 3.3. Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing in front of the new *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1961 (Buddhist Archive No. B4066R).



Illustration No. 3.4. The *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1962 (Buddhist Archive No. B0626R).



Illustration No. 3.5. The *upmung* (vaulted chapel) with its lotus shape and curved roof was repaired under the orders and supervision of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in 1992 (photograph taken by the author in 2007).



Illustration No. 3.6. Pa Mon from Ban Phon Hüang village making an offering to the spirits at the *upmung* in Vat Saen Sukharam by setting out food on a plate, a bottle of water and two lit candles. This photograph was taken by a staff member of the museum project team, Sone Lengsavat, on 8 April 2010. Pa Mon said that her family has always respected the spirits at this place and thus they present them with offerings during the Lao New Year festival to ask for protection for the members of her family who have been sick for a long period of time or who are about to go on a long journey.



Illustration No. 3.7. Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing next to the ruins of the Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk Buddha statue before its restoration led by Sathu Nyai Khmachan himself in 1972 (Buddhist Archive No. B0558R).



Illustration No. 3.8. A clay jar containing a bronze bowl with six silver Buddha amulets which Sathu Nyai Khanchan found on the ruins of the Pha Chao Sippaet Sök in 1972 (Buddhist Archive No. B1368R).



Illustration No. 3.9. Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk Buddha statue. Photograph taken by the author in 2006.



Illustration No. 3.10. The drum shelter at Vat Saen Sukharam (Buddhist Archive No. A1526R).



Illustration No. 3.11. Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing in front of the museum building at Vat Saen Sukharam on 5 February 2007 (Contesy of Sathu Ounkham Akkhapanyo in 2007).



Illustration No. 3.12. This photograph of the original building of Kuti Nyai, was probably taken in the 1980s (Buddhist Archive No. B8181R).



Illustration No. 3.13. Sathu Nyai Khamchan standing in front of his *kuti*, the Kuti Nyai, in the 1980s. At present, this *kuti* is preserved as a memorial of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, exhibiting his various utensils and art objects (Buddhist Archive No. B8341R).



Illustration No. 3.14. Kuti Sam Pae (the abode with a three-part roof) at Vat Saen Sukharam was rebuilt by Sathu Nyai Khamchan in 2000. (Courtesy of Sathu Ounkham Akkhapsanyo in 2007)



Illustration No. 3.15. The *sim* in Luang Prabang style at Vat Si Khottabun, Tha Khaek district, Khammuan province, built by Sathu Nyai Khamchan between 1966 and 1972. The stupa behind the *sim* is the renowned Pha That Si Khottabun stupa. The Photograph was taken by the author on 21 April 2014.

Chapter 4

Collections, Compositions and Publications

1. Introduction

After Sathu Nyai Khamchan's death on 9 July 2007, his *kuti* was closed off for three months to allow enough time for the formation of an official committee to compile an inventory of his belongings, during which time the *kuti* was under the surveillance of police guards day and night. Two incidents occurred while the *kuti* was closed. First, a burglar tried to enter into Sathu Nyai Khamchan's bedroom by punching a hole in the ceiling and climbing in from above, but he was unable to squeeze his way in as the hole was too small, so nothing was stolen from the bedroom. The second incident occurred when, after the monks and novices of Vat Saen Sukharam had re-opened the *kuti* for cleaning, they found that termites had severely damaged a large number of documents. The monks reported that the car transporting the damaged documents for disposal had to make two trips because of their high number.

The official committee, established by the governor of Luang Prabang province, consisted of the Sangha as well as various officers and laypeople from the communities near Vat Saen Sukharam. Presiding over the committee was the chair of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of the province of Luang Prabang, Sathu Nyai Bunthan Punyakama Thela from Vat Pa Phon Phao. The committee concentrated only on the art and valuable objects found in the *kuti*, paying minimal attention to the documents and publications.

On the day the *kuti* was re-opened, I was granted status as a special member of the committee and assigned the task of handling the documents and publications of the belated abbot. The inside of the *kuti* was full of objects to be gathered, with documents on the floor as well as in the cupboards, in which many other objects were also found. Framed photographs covered the walls of what used to be the abode of the Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan. The committee began by first inspecting and then listing the valuable objects found in the bedroom before moving on to the living room. It took an entire week to organize the written material, which comprised both official documents and personal letters. In the short time we had, it was not possible to do this for many of the photographs and publications (religious books, Buddhist journals, and social magazines) as well as the manuscripts, which remained

in the cabinets for the time being. As one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's disciples, I would, from time to time, request permission from the chair to open the *kuti* in order to examine the documents and books inside to determine the quality of their condition.

In fact, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had already begun with the planning for the preservation of these documents. In 2004, he ordered for the construction of a building on the grounds of Vat Saen Sukharam to house the art objects he had been storing and put them on display. However, a lack of technical support halted the exhibition's development. In 2006, he founded the Buddhist Archive of Photography for preserving his collection of photographs, located at the Sala Thammavihan of Vat Suvannakhili. Subsequently, all collections of Sathu Nyai Khamchan came under the protection of the Sangha in order to facilitate collaborative research with the government and foreign scholars.

During Sathu Nyai Khamchan's lifetime, Laos experienced significant difficulties, be it those created by French colonial rule (1893–1953), World War II, a civil war spanning more than twenty years (1954–1975), or the more recent socialist transformation (1975–present). These situations had both direct and indirect effects on the lives of the Lao people, including their faith and practice of Buddhism as well as the societal structure as a whole. Many of most important documents kept in personal archives and the National Library were lost during the civil war and the revolution that followed. Moreover, after the revolution, most educated Lao people as well as elites and members of the royal family fled the country and settled in foreign countries around the world as diaspora. With most educated people having left the country, coupled with the destruction of these significant documents, the study of the history of Laos, and of Lao Buddhism in particular, is extremely lacking in primary sources. Fortunately, most of the documents kept in the monasteries, in particular in Luang Prabang, were kept safe in hiding for decades, because the monks, many of whom participated in the revolution and maintained good relationships with the revolutionary Lao leaders, were careful not to use disclose them to the public at large. For instance, Sathu Nyai Bunchankhao Phothichitta Maha Thela, abbot of Vat Xiang Muan, together with members of the Lao Patriotic Front, discussed the abdication of King Sisavang Vatthana with the king himself. He also had a very good relationship with Kaysone Phomvihane, the first Prime Minister of the Lao P.D.R. (Kongdeuane et al. 2012: 68–72). This might be the reason why the new government refrained from investigating the monasteries in Luang Prabang. From 2007 onwards, the sources in the monasteries become increasingly more available for research, starting with the collections of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in Vat Saen Sukharam, and then later the collections in other monasteries. Eventually, the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang were founded at Vat Suvannakhili.

The key questions I would like to pursue in this chapter are 'why and to what ends did Sathu Nyai Khamchan collect so many objects and documents in his *kuti*?' and 'what methods

did he use for collection?’ This chapter will explore the various types of documents that Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected both in his abode and at Vat Saen Sukharam in general, as well as surveying the methods employed during his collection. I will focus on his collections of documents and art objects as well as compositions and publications; I will refrain from exploring such valuable objects as the sacred amulets, gold, silver and money he collected, as they are still under the committee’s protection, who has yet to make these materials available for research purposes.

2. Collection of Photographs

Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected the photographs in his *kuti* at Vat Saen Sukharam over a period of more than sixty years of monkhood. The photographs cover a periodical range of more than 120 years (1880s–2007). Hans Georg Berger states that, only shortly after the invention of photography in France, which is dated at about 1840, a time when Siam (now known as Thailand) was still in control of most of the territory today known as Laos, the king of Siam sent printing technologies from Bangkok to the king of Luang Prabang as gifts. Already by the late 1870s, photography was being practised in the town's monasteries (Berger 2015: 99). Catherine Choron-Baix argues that photography first appeared in Laos in the 1880s, and was likely to have been brought to the court by princes and high-ranking officials sent to study in Europe (Choron-Baix 2015: 149). I agree that the first photographs to appear in Laos might have indeed come from Siam, as Hans Georg Berger suggests, as Laos was under Siamese suzerainty during the 1880s. It was not until 1893 that Laos officially became a French colony. The relationship between the royal palaces in Luang Prabang and Bangkok was a close one; members of the royal family from Luang Prabang regularly traveled to Bangkok to receive political orders or to study. One photograph discovered in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s collection is a reproduction of an original which was taken in 1851. It shows King Ounkham in the uniform of Crown Prince. The caption below the photograph, handwritten by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, says:

ສົມເດັດພະເຈົ້າມະຫິນທະເທບນິພາທອນ ເຈົ້າຊີວິດຫຼວງອູ່ນຄຳ ເປັນພະລາດຊະບຸດຂອງພະເຈົ້າມັງທາຕຸລາດ ເປັນພະລາຊະບິດດາ
ພະເຈົ້າສັກກະຣິນ (ຄຳສຸກ). ປະສູດ ເມື່ອປີຮ້ວງໄຈ້ ຈ.ສ. 1178. ຂຶ້ນເປັນເຈົ້າມະຫາອຸປະລາດ ປີຮ້ວງໄຈ້ ຈ.ສ. 1213 ພະຊົນມາຍຸ 35 ປີ
ໄດ້ຖ່າຍຮູບນີ້. ຂຶ້ນຄອງລາດຊະສົມບັດ ປີ ກຳເຮົ້າ ຈ.ສ. 1235 ພະຊົນມາຍຸ 57 ປີ. ສະຫວັນຄິດປີ ຮັບມິດ ຈ.ສ. 1257 ພະຊົນມາຍຸ 79
ປີ.

His Majesty King Mahinthathepniphathòn [or] King Ounkham was a son of King Mangthaturat and the father of King Sakkarin (Khamsuk). He was born in 1816. He took this photograph when he became as viceroy at the age of 35 in 1851. Later he was established as a king at the age of 57 in 1873. He passed away in 1895 at the age of 79.

(Buddhist Archive No. B4914R)

King Ounkham was established as the viceroy of Luang Prabang by King Mongkut, or Rama IV, of the Chakri Dynasty in Bangkok in 1852. Then, in 1872, King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) appointed him as king of Luang Prabang (Surasak 2002: 305–315). A very fashionable photograph was taken of him in Bangkok to commemorate his crowning as viceroy, which he then brought with him back to Luang Prabang.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was very well aware of the importance of these photographs in relation to the history of Lao Buddhism. As he always said when asked about his collection, he preserved the photographs with the aim of serving future generations in their own studies of history, Buddhism, Lao culture, and Lao society. Some photographs were in albums, and some were simply in stacks, while others hung in frames on the walls. The German conservationist Martin Jürgens¹⁶² notes that “these print are, for the most part, in very poor condition, since they have been exposed to light, dust, water, environmental fluctuations, mould, and insects over many years” (Jürgen 2015: 271). Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s photography collection, which is currently held at the Buddhist Archives, contains 17,386 items, and comprises various sizes of prints and negatives including silver gelatin prints, chromogenic prints, silver gelatin film negatives, chromogenic negatives, and glass plate negatives (Berger and Khamvone 2011).¹⁶³ Most of the photographs are of Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself and his activities, while other photographs are of monks, novices, kings, princes, noblemen, officers, politicians, laypeople, religious sites, art objects, ceremonies, festivals, conferences, educational institutions and events, travel experiences, pilgrimages, and landscapes, both inside and outside Laos.

Among the photographs are those from 1926 when he was still a child, as a novice, as a layman, and, particularly, the pictures of him as a monk up until his passing in 2007. Some of his studio portraits he had framed and then hung on the walls of his abode together with other photographs which depict him presiding over ceremonies and rituals, practising meditation in the forests, traveling throughout Laos to visit people and places, and to spread Buddhism in rural villages in northern Laos. There are also pictures of his travels to sixteen different countries¹⁶⁴ around the world for both private and official visits, as well as pilgrimages, conferences and his attendance of the 2500th anniversary of Buddha Jayanti in Sri Lanka and Burma with other senior monks. I noticed that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had gathered these photographs from various sources; the majority are indeed from his own personal collection, but many others came from the collection of his teacher, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, as well as

¹⁶² Marint Jürgens, photograph conservator from Hamburg, Germany, joined the project “the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang” from 2007 to 2011 as a technical expert.

¹⁶³ Recently, more photographs from Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s abode were discovered. They are kept at the Buddhist Archives for numbering and digitizing.

¹⁶⁴ The 18 countries he traveled to were: Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Burma, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, China, India, Nepal, Russia, Australia, Germany, France, England, Belgium, Switzerland, U.S.A., and Canada.

from the members of his family, i.e. his sister, Nang Khamxao Phummavong, and his brothers, Phaya Khammungkhun Virachit and Achan Maha Khamphan Virachit. Other photographs of interest are those of young monks and novices of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, mostly from the 1930s, as this was the time during which photos were exchanged by monks of different origins at Buddhist institutes in Cambodia and Thailand. The photographs often carry affectionate annotations in Lao, Thai, and, sometimes French on the back, referencing the time spent together at Pali schools and other Buddhist institutes in Phnom Penh and Bangkok (Berger and Khamvone 2010: 70). These photographs obviously reflect the relationships between monks in mainland Southeast Asia and are a great source of information regarding the studies of Lao monks at international institutes during the earlier part of the twentieth century before World War II.

2.1 Monastic Exhibitions in Vat Saen Sukharam

Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected photographs and used them in a way that was both well thought-out and productive. He would often employ a photograph or multiple photographs as a medium for telling stories about past events, in the community or in his own life, when receiving visitors in his *kuti*. He also used the pictures to teach the young monks and novices about the history of Lao Buddhism. Such visual aids were of course very helpful in helping his audience to more accurately picture the stories he told. Sometimes he displayed them as monastic exhibitions by hanging them in frames on the walls of the buildings in his monastery. His own abode was a most special sort of photographic exhibition, as there he placed pictures of Buddha statues and religious sites high on the wall, with pictures of famous Lao political leaders, members of Lao royal families, his teachers, his monk friends, his family, and himself below them (Illustration No. 4.1). Occasionally, he replaced the older pictures of his younger self with more current ones; his reason was for doing so was to observe the changes of his life as he became older.

In the *sim*, he displayed only images linked to Buddhist pilgrimages, such as pictures of him taken while visiting Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India in 1968 and 1969, and pictures of monks assembled in the *sim* during the *uposot* ceremony. These photographs signify the *sim* as a place for Buddhist worship as well as for the assembly of the Lao Sangha. Two photographs that really stand out are the ones of his teachers, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela and Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, which he hung on the posts in front of the main Buddha statue to show his respect for them. When instructing his disciples at Vat Saen Sukharam, he often referenced this act as an example of showing respect to one's teachers that they too should emulate. Inside the museum, he presented black and white prints taken and later donated to him by the well-known German photographer and writer on Lao culture, Hans Georg Berger, in the early 2000s. The Sala

Hongtham, which is larger than the other buildings in the monastery and serves as a place for public gatherings during various ceremonies, was another great spot for him to put other framed photographs, most of them, too, related to Buddhism, on display. It should also be mentioned that framed photographs of Sathu Nyai Khamchan were found hanging on the walls of the reception rooms in various monasteries, as well as in the living rooms of various households of the city, and in the abodes of other senior monks (especially the highly respected monks Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela of Vat Suvannakhili). The monks represent the Sangha, one element of the Triple Gem in Buddhism, next to the Buddha, and the Dhamma. Hence, devout Buddhist laypersons display pictures of senior monks on shrines in their homes, behind Buddha images, for the purpose of worship.

It is a wide-spread belief of Buddhists that the portraits of monks are an auspicious object to behold, serving as a reminder to be good people by practicing right thought, right speech, and right action. Some Buddhists revere these pictures with a kind of amulet-like status, hoping that they will protect their houses from evil spirits. The belief regarding the beholding of something auspicious in Buddhism is similar to that of the Hindu tradition, which calls it “*darśan*, or the “seeing” of the divine image” (Eck 1985: 1). “While the eye touches the object, the vitality that pulsates in it is communicated” (Kramrisch 1976: 136). Sathu Nyai Khamchan once mentioned to Hans Berger during a conversation about the importance of monk’s portraits that “the photographs, particularly portraits of monks, were for the devout Buddhists carriers of karmic energy acquired by the depicted monk” (Berger 2015: 111). Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly reproduced the images from the photographs of himself, his preceptors, and laypeople, such as his relatives, for distribution and exhibition, as this was something he very much enjoyed. During the early 2000s, he often asked Sathu Nyai Bunthan Punyakama Thela, abbot of Vat Pa Phon Phao, who possessed the equipment needed, namely a computer, a printer, and a scanner, to make reproductions of historic photographs in the form of inkjet prints. Through what were for that time in Laos still considered relatively new technological developments, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was able to channel his passion for photography into a process of and what could thought of as basically giving these photographs new life.

2.2 Collaboration with Hans Georg Berger for Photograph Preservation

In February 1995, Sathu Nyai Khamchan met Hans Georg Berger at his *kuti* in Vat Saen Sukharam. He was introduced to Hans Georg Berger via a letter from Madame Dara Kanlaya, the director of the National Library and the “Preservation of Lao Manuscripts Programme”, which he read in front of Hans Berger before agreeing to meet with him. Hans Berger came to Luang Prabang in 1993 to continue with his long-term project of the “photographic

documentation of sacred ceremonies and rituals”, in which he documented monastic life, as well as ceremonies and festivals, in Luang Prabang.¹⁶⁵ With him came his assistant, Bounyang Phanthavong (nickname: Ong), who was introduced to him by Sathu One Keo and could speak English moderately well. During their first meeting, both were quite uneasy and reticent. Berger recalled the moment he first met with Sathu Nyai Khamchan to me as follows:

At Vat Saen, I gave Sathu Nyai Khamchan the letter. He read the letter sitting there in the *kuti*. The face showed no special features, no smile, it is very serious. He read the letter, put it on the floor, and then looked at me without saying anything. I did not know him, and at first I thought I was not welcome. Based on his facial expression and the fact that he did not say or ask anything, I thought he was not going to agree. So there was a long silence.¹⁶⁶

Usually, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was very kind and friendly to everybody who encountered him. As I witnessed while staying with him, he often kept silent when he was hesitant to deal with the proposal of his interlocutor. As I examined the letter, I saw that it provided him with very little information about the man who had come to request his collaborative effort, which led me to conclude that he might have been unsure as to how exactly he was to work with Hans Georg Berger. This uneasiness was compounded by the communication barrier, as Berger did not speak Lao and the abbot did not speak English. However, their relationship began to develop positively when Sathu Nyai Khamchan saw Berger’s work. The monk’s attitude began to change when he saw Berger photographing significant ceremonies at his temple. Their first collaboration was for the documentation of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s 75th birthday ceremony, which was also the day of my ordination as a monk. The events took place at the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam on 4 October 1995.

The relationship between the two continued to develop over time. It was often that Sathu Nyai Khamchan invited Berger to come and eat at his *kuti* after his own meal, sometimes in the morning and sometimes at noon. In 1999, after getting to know one another over a period of four years, they were finally able to establish trust in one another. One day, Sathu Nyai Khamchan called Berger to his *kuti* to show him his photographic collection. Berger noted his surprise on that day as follows:

Ong said one day [in 1996], “Sathu Nyai wants you to come this evening at five o’clock to the *kuti* and he wants to show you something for which you will need to take some time.” So we went and

¹⁶⁵ Later, he called his project “Het Bun Dai Bun” in Lao, meaning “whatever is given freely and with good intentions will come back in the same beneficial way” (Berger 2015: 107). For the biography of Hans Georg Berger, see Hans Georg Berger, 2009. *The Learning Photographer: Scholarly Texts on Hans Georg Berger’s Art Work in Laos and Iran*, New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha publishing. For his work on Lao culture, see Berger, 2000. *Het Bun Dai Bun*. London: Westzone; Hans Georg Berger, 2009. *The Floating Buddha: The Revival of Vipassana Meditation in Laos*. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha publishing; and www.hansgeorgberger.de

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Hans Georg Berger at his residence in Ban Müang Khai, Luang Prabang, on 5 April 2014. For the letter from Madame Dara Kanlaya, see BAD-12-2-1995.013.

he was sitting there and there were four or five novices. [...] He said that he wanted to show me something that is sacred. [...] Then, he made a gesture to the novices, and the novices got up – he had prepared this – and opened the cabinet that was there on the side. In that cabinet were all these boxes of photographs, and he suggested to pulling out all the boxes. The entire *kuti* was then full of the boxes. He started taking photographs out of the boxes and showing me the photographs. [...] I was very surprised. I saw immediately that these were old historic photographs, and also very early photographs. It was clear that these were not photographs from the last ten years, but rather these were photographs of the last one hundred or eighty years – and many! So I said to him, “Sathu Nyai, what is this?” and he said, “this is my collection of photographs, and this is the history of Lao Buddhism. I want you to take care of this. [...] I am a very old monk. Here, nobody understands what these photographs are. These photographs are important for future Lao generations and I want these photographs to make it to the future Lao generations. How can I do [that] I am afraid that when I die they [monks and family] will put these photographs in my coffin and burn them.”¹⁶⁷

This shocked Berger, who did not expect that this task would come to him and fall onto his shoulders. He considered himself a photographer, not a collector or an archivist, and he was not sure how to handle the matter, but out of respect for the venerable abbot and not wanting to damage their mutual trust, he could not reject. He accepted the duty as disciple would he has been entrusted with taking good care of his teacher’s heritage. Furthermore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan also said that “since nobody around him would be able to understand the importance of the photographs for future study, there was a danger that they would all be burnt together with his body, having been put into the coffin before cremation. This was, he explained, a traditional way of treating photographs that were found in the possession of a monk” (Berger 2015: 111). Some locals believed that, as a deceased monk becomes a spirit upon his passing, his portraits, which represent his identity, are not to be kept. Looking at or seeing the image of deceased monks was generally considered inauspicious. Nowadays, however, the beliefs surrounding the photographs of deceased monks and the treatment of these images have developed in positive ways. Sathu Nyai Khamchan tried to push for such developments in practice by collecting the photographs of deceased monks at his monastery and looking for ways to preserve them for future generations. It is for this reason that he assigned the preservation of his photographic collection to Hans Berger, whom he trusted and whom he knew would be the most knowledgeable person for the job.

Throughout their collaboration, Sathu Nyai Khamchan would arrange the schedule and then inform Hans Berger as soon as he knew when and where the events would take place, so that he could accompany him. Sometimes he had Berger ride with him in his car when the events were in rural villages. Over the six-year period his art project spanned, Berger produced over 14,000 black and white photographs entirely dedicated to the documentation of the ceremonies and festivals in Luang Prabang as well as the monastic life and practices

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

present there.¹⁶⁸ In remembrance of their good relationship and productive collaboration, Berger gave Sathu Nyai Khamchan many black-and-white photographs, such as some of the framed photographs hanging on the walls of the museum at Vat Saen Sukharam, as well as a series of 39 special photographs bound together in an album.¹⁶⁹

This was not, however, the only instance in which Sathu Nyai Khamchan worked together with Western photographers. In fact, many photographs taken in 1963 show that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had also worked with an American photographer who worked for the U.S. Information Service in Vientiane and documented the decorations in his new *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam.¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the name of the photographer is unknown. The pictures are from when some foreigners came to visit after the structural building of the *sim* was finished and the decorative work was already underway. This work resulted in official printed portraits of the Supreme Patriarch and other senior monks. The back of each photograph reads, “U.S. Information Service Vientiane Laos”. From this, it is clear that Sathu Nyai Khamchan appreciated the medium of photography and was involved in the documenting of important events even much earlier on than his work with Berger. Such an interest shows how Sathu Nyai Khamchan had realized rather early in his life that photographic documentation provides an important source of information, especially regarding various practices and ceremonies which are of central importance to Lao culture.

2.3 Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s Perspective on Photography

Although Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a collector of photographs, and he used them as a medium for his stories and his lessons, he was not a photographer. Despite offerings of cameras from laypeople, he never touched these offerings with his own hands. Nevertheless, since he enjoyed and also had some knowledge of photography, as well as a notion of what the function and nature of a photograph should be, his perspective on photography is worth taking into consideration here.

Berger’s work makes clear reference to some of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s views on photography. A photograph that he took in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam during the celebration of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s 75th birthday in 1995 shows a group of monks sitting around him and chanting in front of the main Buddha statue. Many photographs would argue anyway that cutting objects off is not ideal for the form of sacred pictures. However, the frame cut out the upper part of the head of the Buddha statue (Sanskrit: *uṣṇīṣa*, an oval or

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ A series of the photographs that Hans Georg Berger handed over Sathu Nyai Khamchan for remembrance of his work on various ceremonies and festivals in Luang Prabang, see Buddhist Archive No. A1048R to A1086R.

¹⁷⁰ For the photographs of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the American photographer, see Buddhist Archive No. B0546R to B0548R.

flame at the top of the head of the Buddha symbolizing his having reached enlightenment and affirming him as the supreme spiritual guide). Hans Georg Berger produced a large print of this photograph in frame and gave it to Sathu Nyai Khamchan. Berger himself regarded it as a work of good quality. Sathu Nyai Khamchan, however, reacted to this photograph with total indifference, which raised his suspicions as to what the matter might be. Berger explained this matter to me as follows:

It is a photograph made on his birthday for the ordination ceremony where you see the group of monks sitting around him and he is in the centre, sitting in front of the Buddha statue of Vat Saen. I thought always that this photograph is very beautiful and very strong. I made a big print of this photograph in frame and gave it to him. He looked at it and did not say anything and he put it away. Usually, when I brought him photographs, at least he would [make some comments on them]. But for this photograph, he did not say anything. Usually, he puts photographs that I gave him in the *kuti* somewhere but this one disappeared. [...] I asked him [why he did not put the photograph on the wall] and Sathu Nyai said, “the photograph is wrong.” So I said to him that I do not understand why the photograph is wrong. Then he said something very strange: “Now you worked for so many years here, and you still don’t understand why the photograph is wrong!” [I asked him to explain to me what is wrong with the photograph.] Then he said something to one of novices, who then left and quickly returned with the photograph. He said, “Look at your photograph. it is wrong!” Then I said “Sathu Nyai, for me, as a Westerner and a photographer, and with my small knowledge of Buddhism, this is a beautiful photograph. [...] For me, this is perfect. I have showed it to many people and everybody said that it’s a beautiful photograph.” Then again, the abbot said, “It’s wrong, look!. He then pointed to the head of the Buddha. It turns out the photograph cut off the *ushnisha*. He said, “If you photograph the Buddha statue like this and you cut off the *ushnisha*, then you are making the Buddha into a normal man, which means he is no longer the Buddha. We do not sit in front of the statue of a normal man, we sit in front of the statue of the Buddha. That’s the difference and that’s why your photograph is wrong. You should know this.”¹⁷¹

This indicates how photographic perspective regarding aesthetic methods of seeing of the Buddha image as a sacred object are from those of what could be called more mainstream photography as understood in the West. While modern photography normally depends on the frame and position of the objects being photographed, in this instance Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the monks around him, the aesthetic understanding of devout believers in Buddhism comes from the standpoint that if any portion of the Buddha statue has been cut out of the frame, then the photograph itself is inherently imperfect. After their discussion, Berger understood these distinct concepts, and he refers to this matter as one of the great contributions of the monks of Luang Prabang to his work. He came to respect Sathu Nyai Khamchan as his venerable teacher, who would critically comment on his photographs, making his work more meaningful and special.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Hans Gorge Berger at his residence in Ban Müang Khai, Luang Prabang on 5 April 2014.

2.4 The Foundation of the Buddhist Archive of Photography

The foundation of the Buddhist Archive of Photography was the last collaboration between Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Hans Georg Berger. It was this project that initiated the process of making available a number of valuable sources on the history of Lao Buddhism, which had been preserved and kept in secrecy for decades, to the public for research and study. After Sathu Nyai Khamchan had asked Berger to take care of his collection, Berger spent years looking for funding and support to preserve the photographs. He also asked the German government and the French ambassador to Laos in Vientiane for help, but both were unable to provide him their support. He talked of this matter with many of the people whom he knew. In 2004, his friend, Valery Scott, librarian of the British School at Rome, who is responsible for a large collection of historical photographs there, suggested to him that he should get in touch with the British Library in London (see Berger 2015: 114–115). He did so and was able to obtain funding through their Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) for a pilot project in 2006. Subsequently, he met with me in Bangkok where I was working for a printing company as a graphic designer and asked me to get involved in his project, mentioning that my involvement was also Sathu Nyai Khamchan's explicit wish.

In August 2006, I travelled to Luang Prabang and stayed at Vat Saen Sukharam for one month, working on the scanning of 997 historic photographs. During my work, I often visited Sathu Nyai Khamchan in his *kuti* to show him the images on the computer screen in order to have him help me identify the names of various people and events shown in the photographs, when the pictures were taken, as well as who took them. For most photographs, he was able to provide all of this information in detail. In January 2007, I moved to Luang Prabang to work on the project as project manager. On 4 February 2007, Sathu Nyai Khamchan signed an agreement with the British Library (Berger and Khamvone 2007), allowing for his photographs to be made available for preservation, digitization and research. Subsequently, he donated the entire collection of photographs which he kept in his living room to us for study and preservation. In June 2007, he designated the Sala Thammavihan,¹⁷² a two-story building at Vat Suvannakhili, as the future house of the archive, because the museum building at Vat Saen Sukharam in which we were working was too small and full of his own utensils, making the place cluttered and cramped. The project started on 1 July 2007, set initially to run for two years, but later it was extended two additional years, having concluded on 31 August 2011.

Regrettably, Sathu Nyai Khamchan passed away on 9 July 2007. After his passing, the work was halted until the nomination of his successor. The conservationist Martin Jürgens

¹⁷² A unique building in the town showcasing the colonial-style influences. It was designed and constructed in the 1940s by Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela, and was used by the founder as a Buddhist training room upstairs and a reception hall for merit-making activities downstairs. The style of this building was reproduced at Vat Pha Nom and Vat Xiang Ngoen just outside of Luang Prabang.

was in charge of the technical work, while a team of researchers, of which I was a part, conducted research under the supervision of Hans Georg Berger, the research director. Within the context of the archive and research, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was the spiritual rector of our project and the most reliable source of information on the photographs. His memory of the persons and events in the photographs was reliable and impressive for a man of such old age. “In fact, he could identify by memory almost each person depicted, and date almost every single” (Berger 2015: 109). His good memory might be a result of his practice and application of the Buddhist concepts of awareness (Pali: *sati*), concentration (Pali: *samādhi*), and knowledge (Pali: *paññā*). From my observation, when he saw the image, he would first perceive it with awareness. Then, his knowledge of, or information about the image from the past, would be at his service. He was able to concentrate on one image in depth without interruption, sometimes talking for an entire hour about just one picture. Such a process might be evidence of *sati*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* at work.

After starting the project with Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s collection, we then asked for permission from the Sangha to look for and search through other abbots’ collections. Between 2006 and 2011, the photographic collections in the corpus of the Buddhist Archive, which came from 19 monasteries and five private collections, totaling 33,933 items including photographs and negatives,¹⁷³ have been identified, digitized and catalogued in an Excel list in Lao and English languages. “While the originals stay in Luang Prabang and remain the property of the Sangha, digital copies are now available at the National Library of Laos in Vientiane, and the British Library. In 2014, these copies were made available online by the online programme of the EAP (Berger 2015: 119, and www.eap.bl.uk). Since after 2011, further collections from monastic sources have been brought to the Buddhist Archive – at the time of writing (2015), the Buddhist Archive possesses more than 35,000 photographs.

Under the patronage of the Sangha of Luang Prabang – particularly Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, abbot of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xiang Thong – the Buddhist Archive of Photography has continued its development into the present. It now includes the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang, which contains official documents, personal letters, religious books, manuscripts, and audio recordings, as well as an exhibition of photographs on Vipassana meditation. In 2013, it was officially re-established as “the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang” following the approval of the chair of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Luang Prabang province. Since that time, the Buddhist Archives has become officially the archives of the Sangha of Luang Prabang province. Moreover, the Sala

¹⁷³ The photographs came from Vat Saen Sukharam, Vat Suvannakhili, Vat Xiang Thong, Vat Pak Khan, Vat Si Bun Hüiang, Vat Nong Si Khunmeuang, Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Vat Xiang Muan Vijiramangkharam, Vat Maha That Raxabòvòravihan, Vat Aphay, Vat Vixunnarat, Vat Aham Uttamathani, Vat Phoukhouay Phokharam, Vat Pa Phon Phao Vanaram, Vat Khomkhouang, Vat Xiang Yün or Vat Xiang Maen, Vat Longkhun, and Vat Na Xao (project overview of EAP 177 and EAP 326).

Thammavihan building where the Buddhist Archives are located, together with other monastic buildings, a rose garden, and the campus of Vat Suvannakhili, were restored and renovated between December 2013 and June 2014. The restoration was carried out by the Buddhist Heritage Project (BHP)¹⁷⁴ and funded by the Badur Foundation¹⁷⁵ in London. From 2011 onwards, the Buddhist Archives have been collaborating with the National Library of Laos and the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg, Germany, on research still in progress at this time. At present, the Buddhist Archives are regarded as one of the largest archives in Southeast Asia containing primary sources related to the history of Theravada Buddhism.

3. Collection of Art Objects

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was one of the senior monks who possessed farsightedness regarding changes to Lao culture driven by processes of modern civilization, in both tangible and intangible ways. He was convinced that the objects created during his lifetime for use in daily life would be forgotten or lost in the times to come as new technologies replaced them. Therefore, he made it his intention to collect cultural objects from his own monastery, other monasteries, households, and private collections, and keep them in his monastery to display them for the younger generations to see and learn from. In 2004, he built a museum building on the grounds of Vat Saen Sukharam, and provided a small budget for the installation of the museum. However, since there were no experts with the necessary expertise, his plans did not come to fruition, so he used the building instead simply as a storage space for the collected objects. He unfortunately did not live to see the construction of the museum.

Two months after Sathu Nyai Khamchan's death, a number of committee members nominated by the governor of Luang Prabang, including monks, state officers, members of the deceased abbot's family, and people from communities around Vat Saen Sukharam, inspected, listed, and numbered the objects. However, no one had any idea what to do with these objects, until in 2009 the Sangha and Local government called for a project with the aim of drawing up a concept for the museum and making a list of endangered art objects in the monasteries of Luang Prabang. The project was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and took place from 2009 to 2011, in collaboration with the Buddhist Archive of Photography

¹⁷⁴ The Buddhist Heritage Project founded by the Sangha of Luang Prabang in 2007, is the main body of the whole project under the administration of the Sangha of Luang Prabang covering the three sub-projects including the Buddhist Archives, the Buddhist Academy, and the reconstruction of monasteries.

¹⁷⁵ Badur Foundation is a charity foundation in London that aims to support education, social change and cultural heritage. The foundation came to Luang Prabang in 2011, started supporting the reconstruction and enhancement of Vat Pak Khan (2012–2014), the construction of the school buildings at the Buddhist Academy, Vat Pa Pha O (2012–), and the renovation and enhancement of the buildings at Vat Suvannakhili (2013–2014). For more details on the foundation, see at <http://www.badurfoundation.org>.

of Luang Prabang, the Sangha of Luang Prabang, the Department of Information and Culture of the province of Luang Prabang, the National Library of Laos, and the German Embassy in Laos (Khamvone 2014: 15). The project can boast the recovery of 2,174 objects at Vat Saen Sukharam as well as numerous photographic objects in nine other monasteries in the town – a total of 4,834 objects were digitized and catalogued. Martin Jürgens was responsible for the technical aspects, while Hans Georg Berger supervised a research team with Dr. Wibke Lobo¹⁷⁶, myself, and other employees. All objects were inspected, cleaned, numbered, digitized, given a label and relocated to the shelves in the museum building, where they are now kept, awaiting their arrangement and display by exhibition experts.

The art objects that Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected are magnificent and of immense importance for Lao cultural heritage. The objects represent various kinds of Lao Buddhist art, some of which are very rare or have completely disappeared at present.¹⁷⁷ Many objects are very significant, such as medals of Lan Xang Hom Khao (Kingdom of a Million Elephants and the White Parasol), various ranking stamps in the Sangha hierarchy for abbots or local, district and provincial positions during Sathu Nyai Khamchan's lifetime, as well as decorated wooden vases hand made by Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela of Vat Suvannakhili. The most interesting objects are probably the Buddha statues representing the Lao Lan Xang styles in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, both in wood and bronze. Most objects were produced in Laos, in particular in Luang Prabang, but some objects are from other countries in the world, e.g. Buddha statues, amulets, monks' fans, gongs, and bowls from Thailand, monks' bowls from Myanmar, marble elephants from India, porcelain tea sets, vases, and bowls from China, conch, shell, and yaks from India, a telephone with a dial disc from Paris, France (Museum No. VSS_000060), and kerosene lamps, which had been used during the French colonial period in Laos during the early 20th century, from Sherwood in Birmingham, United Kingdom (Museum No. VSS_000217 to VSS_000219).

I would like to give three examples of objects with interesting stories in terms of their historical, cultural and religious meaning. The first of these objects is a triangular vase (Museum No. VSS_000130). Its front contains a traditional floral decoration by a Lao silversmith. On the right side, it has the inscription "Neo Lao Haksat" (Lao Patriotic Front); and on the left "Debris du 2.2 00 Avion U.S. Apattu au Laos". This vase was created by

¹⁷⁶ Head of the South and South East Asia Collections, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany.

¹⁷⁷ The objects were catalogued during the project into the following types: alter, amulet, architecture, Buddha statue, clock, box, calendar, monk's fan, embroidery, figure, funeral items, furniture-profane, furniture-sacred, healing, manuscripts, manuscript jacket, mask, medal, model, money, mould, musical instruments-profane, musical instrument-sacred, ornament-profane, ornament-sacred, pedestal, pot-profane, pot-sacred, relic, reliquary, set of betel nut, stamp, statue, stencil, stone inscription, tableware, technical device, textile, tray, umbrella, uniform, utensil profane, utensil sacred, vase, votive tablet, watering gutter, and whetstone. See the catalogues in the program Filemaker Pro Advance (unpublished).

Pathet Lao, who resisted and combatted the Royal Lao Government supported by the C.I.A. during the cold war and civil war in Laos, out of a piece of sheeted aluminum that came from an airplane. Its purpose was not for worship in the monastery, which is evidenced by the fact that it is not designed to stand on its own but rather to be hung on the wall. Therefore, this vase was probably given as a gift to one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives as a souvenir and later transferred to Vat Saen Sukharam. Despite its not being sacred, the object does represent the history, politics, and art of Laos.

The second object is a *mai sak pha bang sukun* (ໄມ້ຂັກຜ້າບັງສຸກຸນ), or a wooden stick used by a monk for taking the shroud from a corpse at a funeral ceremony, about 150 cm long with an iron prong at one end (Museum No. VSS_000534). In former times, it was traditional for the deceased's remains to be buried. Before the burial, relatives would invite four monks, the so-called *bang sukun*, to pray at the funeral. While the monks were praying, one of them would lift the white shroud (Lao: *sak pha bang sukun*) which covered the corpse with this stick. The monks would then take that white cloth to the temple and dye it so that it could be used use it as a monk's robe, as it was difficult to find material to make monks' robes at that time. This practice of the *sak phabangsukun* was common until the first half of the twentieth century, when the people of Luang Prabang created the crematory at Vat Pa Nya Thüip due to a lack of space at the cemetery. These days, people usually put yellow robes wrapped in plastic on the corners of the hearse instead of a white shroud over the corpse; therefore, this stick is no longer used.

The third object is a small Buddha statue sitting in the Subduing Mara gesture on a high throne with ornaments similar to that of an emperor (Museum No. VSS_000544). Its crown has a large bud and twelve spikes with a cow, a horse, a deer and an elephant supporting its pedestal. These animals all connect to the Buddha's life. The cow refers to his family name, Gautama, the horse points to his great departure, the deer to the first sermon in the Park of Sarnath, and the elephant to the story of the Buddha receiving aid in the wilderness from an elephant and a monkey.¹⁷⁸ Buddha statues in this style are not common in Lao culture. Sathu Nyai Khamchan might have gotten this statue when he was visiting Mahayana communities in the Soviet Union in 1969 or in India in 1957, 1968 or 1969.

3.1 Buddha Statues

Among the collection of art objects of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the most valuable and auspicious objects are the Buddha statues; they represent the Lao Lan Xang since styles since the eighteenth century, as well as the Khmer and also the Thai and Lanna styles from the 17th

¹⁷⁸ For the full text of this story, see Buddha Dharma Education Inc., 2002, *Life of the Buddha for Secondary Students*, p. 69.

century. One of the statues that exemplifies how Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected the Buddha statues from other places to Vat Saen Sukharam in order to preserve them is an adorned wooden Buddha built in the nineteenth century. It has a high pointed crown and shoes and stands on a round, stepped pedestal, with his two palms turned to the body and the fingers pointing to the ground, the Pose of Benevolence and Compassion (see Giteau 2001: 157, Lobo and Khamvone 2011) (Museum No. VSS_001051). The recesses of the pedestal along with the robe and the ornaments are decorated with glass mosaics and mostly covered with golden paint. The hair curls have been produced separately from *khamuk*. On both sides of the pedestal are loops for carrying the statue in a procession. Sathu Nyai Khamchan brought this Buddha statue from Vat Siphutthabat in 1943 and kept it at Vat Saen Sukharam. In the same year, Xiang Khian from Ban Pa Phai village, Pak Xeang district, Luang Prabang province, asked for permission to keep this Buddha figure in his village of Vat Pa Phai for public worship. Xiang Khian was the father of Achan Bounpheng Siudomphan (the foster child of Sathu Nyai Khamchan). The statue remained there until 2000. When Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Achan Bounpheng got the chance to visit the village, Xiang Khian asked Sathu Nyai Khamchan to bring the Buddha statue back to Vat Saen Sukharam to keep it from being stolen. Thereafter, Sathu Nyai Khamchan told Houmphaeng Sukkasom, who took care of Vat Saen Sukharam at that time, to paint it with golden paint to give it a new appearance and thus protect it from theft.¹⁷⁹ Painting the Buddha statues in gold in order to make them looking new. Then, they are more secured from stolen by comparing the ones which look old. In Theravada Buddhism, the Buddha in full regalia is often related to the legend of the conversion of Prince Jambūpati, narrated in the Jambupatti Sutta, a late Sutta held in high honor in Laos. It tells of the conversion of the arrogant King Jambūpati who refused to accept the superiority of the Buddha, in response to which the Buddha showed himself in all his glory as a universal monarch (Giteau 2001: 181, Lobo and Khamvone 2011). This is only one of many cases clearly illustrating the great deal of effort expended by Sathu Nyai Khamchan on the collection and preservation of these highly valuable objects with such great significance for Lao culture and heritage.

Moreover, Sathu Nyai Khamchan donated a Buddha statue to Vat Saen Sukharam to commemorating his 60th anniversary as the end of the fifth round of the twelve-year cycle – according to Lao and Thai astrology, an important and auspicious year. In 1979, Sathu Nyai Khamchan ordered a blacksmith in Bangkok to cast a bronze Buddha statue with a weight of 150 kg and a height of 80 cm at his knees, in the posture of meditation known as the Buddha

¹⁷⁹ Information from Achan Bounpheng Siudomphan, who recounted it to me at Vat Saen Sukharam in 2010.

of Thursday.¹⁸⁰ He named this Buddha Pha Phutthaviramahamuni; he held a ceremony celebrating the donation on 19 October 1980 at Vat Saen Sukharam. (Illustration No. 4.2).

The Pha Phutthaviramahamuni Buddha sits in the lotus position with his hands in the gesture of meditation on a lotus throne, which shows the pericarp and the lotus seeds like a string of pearls around the upper rim of the socle and lotus petals hanging down as well. His *sangkhati* lies on his chest and has decorative pleats at the end. His hair curls are large and three-dimensional. The eyes are inlaid with mother-of-pearl and the pupils are of lacquer paste. The *ushnisha* is rather flat and carries a removable lotus bud on top. His facial features, his robe, his hair curls, his chin, and the slightly pointed ears have the characteristics of Chiang Saen Sing I.¹⁸¹

Apparently, this bronze image is a recent copy of an antique original in the Chiang Saen style of Lan Na art in northern Thailand, which was created in the twentieth century of the Buddhist Era [fifteenth century AD] during King Kūna's reign (Sakchai 2013: 196), and which Sathu Nyai Khamchan favored in particular. Chiang Saen style figures were highly appreciated throughout the past centuries in Luang Prabang and there are many bronzes of varying ages made in this style. This Buddha statue is covered with thick golden paint and is kept on the altar in the Sala Hongtham in Vat Saen Sukharam. In addition, when Sathu Nyai Khamchan went to Bangkok to bring the Buddha figure back to Luang Prabang, the owner of the shop was very kind and offered him 1,000 Baht to cover the cost of transportation. Sathu Nyai Khamchan defined this generous donation as a blissful effect of the Buddha. When the statue arrived in front of the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam, a supernatural event occurred: although the figure was not very heavy, the wheel of the car transporting it sank into the ground and broke. The abbot viewed this as proof of the Buddha statue's power (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 1995: Interview).

¹⁸⁰ The Buddha images for the other days of the week are as follows: Sunday - the Buddha image in a standing position with open eyes, the right hand covering the left hand in front of the waist. It represents the Buddha looking at the Bodhi tree for seven days without closing his eyes. Monday - the Buddha image in a standing position with both hands raised at chest height, with palms and fingers facing straight out. It represents the time where he stopped quarrel among members of his family about the rights to river water for paddies. Tuesday - the Buddha image in a reclining position on his right side. It represents the Buddha's entering into Parinibbana. Wednesday (day time) - the Buddha image in a standing position and holding an alms bowl. It represents the receiving of alms without asking. Wednesday (evening) - the Buddha image in a seated position with a monkey and an elephant offering him honeycomb and fruit, respectively. Friday - the Buddha image in a standing position with the right palm covering the left hand at chest level. It represents his contemplation regarding how to teach the doctrine to others. Saturday - the Buddha image in a seated position, being protected by a multi-headed Naga (serpent). It represents being protected. The birthday Buddha images in Laos were influenced by practices from Thailand since the early twentieth century.

¹⁸¹ Sakchai Saising explains that the important characteristics of the Buddha in the "Chiang Saen Sing I" style are as follows: the Buddha sits cross-legged in meditation, his body is more plump, his face is oval-shaped, his lips are smiling, his chin is shaped like a mango core, his hair curls are large, his *ushnisha* is a round knob like a lotus bud on top, and, finally, his *sangkhati* is short and ends at his left breast (Sakchai 2013: 197).

3.2 Monk Statues

Life-sized monk statues can be seen as a new trend in Luang Prabang. They were first cast in the early 1990s, and they were ordered mostly from the neighboring country of Thailand. Before that, only monk amulets were popular. There are six monk statues in Vat Saen Sukharam: four of them were ordered to be built by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the other two were ordered by his disciples. All of the statues are in a seated position. Among them is the oldest statue of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in existence, which was molded and cast in Bangkok in 1995 to commemorate his 75th birthday. The other three statues in the Sala Hongtham are also of Sathu Nyai Khamchan. (Illustration No. 4.3).

In 2000, Sathu Nyai Khamchan ordered the making of a second bronze statues of himself (Museum No. VSS_001412), a statue of Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchanyana Maha Thela (Museum No. VSS_001916), and a statue of Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela (Museum No. VSS_001915) to be brought up from Bangkok.¹⁸² In 1994, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had already ordered for the cast of statues for two other abbots, namely Sathu Nyai Xaysamut Jotika Maha Thela of Vat Pa Phon Phao, and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela of Vat Suvannakhili. These two senior monks were considered the most prominent personalities of Buddhism and Buddhist culture in Luang Prabang during the late twentieth century.¹⁸³ The price for each statue was 33,500 Baht (US\$ 1,342) (Khamvone 2004: 8). At present, the statue of Sathu Nyai Khamfan is housed within the memorial *kuti* of Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela at Vat Suvannakhili, and the statue of Sathu Nyai Xaysamut is kept in the Santi Chedi stupa at Vat Pa Phon Phao. Each of the statues is

¹⁸² The official letter written by Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the directors of Bòkaeo province branches of the Tax Department and of the Department of Information and Culture regarding the waiver of taxes on imports. In one part, he writes: “ອາຕະມາພາບ ຈະໄດ້ເຮັດບຸນອາຍຸ 80 ປີ, ທ້າຍປີ 2000 ນີ້, ໄດ້ຊື້ຮູບພະອຸປັດຊາ 2 ຮູບ, ຮູບສ່ວນຕົວ 1 ຮູບ ທີ່ໂຕ. ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ເຮັດໃບສະເໜີນີ້ມາເພື່ອຂໍອະນຸຍາດນຳເຄື່ອງເຂົ້າມາແລະຂໍຍົກເວັ້ນຄ່າພາສີ ນຳທ່ານ. ຫຼວງພະບາງ, ວັນທີ 19 ມິຖຸນາ 2000. [I will perform the merit-making ceremony for my 80th birthday at the end of this year 2000. I ordered the casting of two statues of my two preceptors, and one of my own in life size. I submit my proposal to you for your permission to import these objects with the taxes being waived - Luang Prabang on 19 June 2000].” (BAD-12-2-2000.056).

¹⁸³ Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela (1901–1987) was an artist and architect monk who graduated from the Fine Arts school Saraphatchang in Bangkok in 1930. He designed the models for monastic buildings in Laos in the 1950s and oversaw the construction of many monasteries in Luang Prabang and northern Laos. His most magnificent architectural work is the Sala Thammavihan in colonial style at Vat Suvannakhili where, the Buddhist Archives are situated at present. Sathu Nyai Xaysamut was a practitioner monk who became a monk on the occasion of the 2500th Buddha Jayanti celebrations in 1957, and then studied and practiced Vipassana meditation from the great master of Vipassana, Pha Achan Maha Pan Anantho (1911–1968), at Vat Maha Phutthavongsa Pa Luang (Vat Sok Pa Luang) in Vientiane. Later, he was sent to Bangkok, Thailand, by the venerable master, and then after that to Burma, for further Vipassana practice and studies. He returned to Luang Prabang in the late 1960s and restored an abandoned monastery on the outskirts of Luang Prabang, establishing it as a Vipassana monastery at Vat Pa Phon Phao, and also erecting the Santi Chedi stupa on top of a mountain on monastery grounds (One Keo and Khamvone 2010). The construction of the monastery and the stupa received great support from Sathu Nyai Khamchan. Later, Sathu Nyai Xaysamut became a renowned Vipassana master and Vat Pa Phon Phao a well-known Vipassana monastery where the Sangha convene for the annual *ā* practice in December.

sitting in the lotus pose meditation, which is considered a more venerable pose than other poses. On the front of the socle on each statue is an inscription bearing their names and the dates of their birth and passing.

In 2010, the third life-size statue of Sathu Nyai Khamchan was ordered from Bangkok by one of his pupils, Sathu Ounkham Aggapanyo, and sponsored by a Chinese businessman, Chen Alvin from Hong Kong. This statue built of resin and plastics depicts him sitting in the meditation pose in a very realistic way, the hair on the head even looking like real hair. There is an interesting story about this statue told in the biography of Sathu Nyai Khamchan,¹⁸⁴ which reads:

In the summer of 2006, Alvin came to [Luang Prabang], Laos for sightseeing. Maybe led by Buddha, he visited a monastery and had the chance to talk to the head monk, Master Khamchan. In the distant monastery, they drank tea, talked about the teaching of Buddha, the sadness and happiness of life. It was only a two days' visit, Alvin was deeply impressed with the conversation with Master Khamchan. He felt the wisdom of Master Khamchan and [the] power of Buddha. Afterwards, Alvin came back to China. He sent his best regards to Master Khamchan and his factory's porcelain wares to Laos for consecration.

Alvin visited Laos again in the spring of 2009. Unfortunately, Master Khamchan passed away. Alvin was so sad to miss him. In remembrance of Master Khamchan, he asked Venerable Joy Suksavatdy [his full name, Sathu Ounkham Akkhapanyo] to make a statue of Master Khamchan for public worship. Meanwhile, he hoped to have an exquisite book for remembering of Master Khamchan. It would be tell the deeds of his life, his teachings and included some precious photos. Through the Master Khamchan's simple and substantial life style, people could feel the power of the teachings of Buddha.

(The original text is in English in Ounkham and Khamvone 2010: 120)

One aspect that can explain this deep respect for Sathu Nyai Khamchan is the kindness and friendliness he exhibited towards others. Even though he could not speak English or Chinese with Chen Alvin and their conversation was mediated by an interpreter, they understood each other well. His conversation about the Dhamma was easy to understand for a learned person. One image in the book shows Chen Alvin giving Sathu Nyai Khamchan money on a bowl in his *kuti* during their one of their encounters. Most of the porcelain ware that Chan Alvin sent from his factory in Hong Kong to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam are beautiful and of high quality, including sets of tea cups, tea pots, vases, dishes, and bowls. Most notable are a set of five fine tea cups, one of them filled with camphor paste, two tea sets, one with five small tea cups and saucers with yellow glaze at the rim and a white flower pattern, another with two tea cups in a paper box, and a saucer decorated with Sathu Nyai Khamchan's portrait (Museum No. VSS_001084). There are inscriptions on the plates and cups in both Lao and Latin script. On one side, it reads, “ສາທຸຄຳຈັນທຣ໌ ວິຣະຈິຕໂຕ Sathou Khamchanh Virachitto 2nd October, 1920” and on the other side in English, “Send from

¹⁸⁴ The book is like a photobook. It describes and depicts the story life of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, compiled by Sathu Ounkham Akkhapanyo and Khamvone Boulyaphonh, and published in 2010.

Hong Hua”. Some of the other porcelains were still contained a label in the Chinese script. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was very surprised when they arrived at the temple, because he did not know from whom they had been sent. At present, they are kept and preserved in the museum building as part of the display of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s belongings. Even though Chen Alvin is not a Buddhist himself, he was deeply impressed by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, making him become more interested in Buddhism and even making him into a supporter of the religion.

An additional purpose that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had in mind when ordering for the casting of these monk statues, besides honoring the senior monks highly respected by him and other Buddhists and use for public worship, was to have a space inside the statue to store each abbot’s ashes. Traditionally, people had preferred to build small stupas on the monastery grounds to hold the ashes of their abbots. These stupas, however, take up a lot of space in the monastery and are usually in bad condition due to lack of maintenance. This may have been a significant factor making casting of monk statues more popular in Luang Prabang. Many laypeople have ordered for the casting of such statues, such as the statue of Sathu Nyai Onta Santapannya Maha Thela (1923–2003) of Vat Manorom Satharam, Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothicitta Maha Thela (1920–1996) of Vat Xiang Muan Vajiramangkhalaram, Sathu Nyai Mao Manivangsa Maha Thela (1921–2001) of Vat Xiang Thong, and Sathu Nyai Phummi Phalappatta Maha Thela (1921–1995) of Vat Nong Si Khunmüang.

3.3 Hò Thammat and Vò Pha Bang¹⁸⁵

Hò Thammat, also called *phasat*,¹⁸⁶ is a high decorated chair used as a seat for a monk to give a sermon or recite holy texts, particularly the Vessanantara Jātaka. There are three elaborate Hò Thammat in the Sala Hongtham at Vat Saen Sukharam, which are some of the most magnificent and ancient in Luang Prabang. The one on the right side is the property of Vat Saen Sukharam. The middle one is older and more magnificent, and was transferred to its current location from the palace. The one on the left side used to serve as a Vò Pha Bang (shrine used to carry the Pha Bang statue in the procession) in the palace and had been brought to Vat Saen Sukharam in 2004. These Hò Thammat clearly reflect Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s work to preserve Lao heritage. He built the Sala Hongtham, which is higher than the *sim*, to house these special objects. According to the Lao Buddhist tradition, since the *sim*

¹⁸⁵ Hò in Lao means tower, house. Thammat (Pali: *dhammāsana*) means Dhamma-seat, a seat on which a monk sits while preaching, a pulpit. Vò means a palanquin with a roof. The Pha Bang is the Pha Bang Buddha image. In Luang Prabang, vò are used for senior monks to sit on during the so-called *hae vò* procession in the Lao New Year festival on the 15th and 16th of April.

¹⁸⁶ Phasat (or Prasat in Thai and Khmer terms) means palace or temple. It is derived from Sanskrit *prasādā* “temple”.

is where the Buddha images are located and it is thus considered the most important or sacred building of the monastery, the other surrounding buildings should not exceed it in height.

The Hò Thammat is a large structure standing in the centre of the altar. It has a four-footed base and five tapering steps on top of which the seat rests. A ladder is needed to climb up to it. Four columns with braces in the *khaen nang* (lady's arms) Naga style support the ceiling, which also has five tapering levels. On top of them is a That-like structure with a very high and fine umbrella pole bearing five stylized umbrellas. The decoration of the Hò Thammat is partly done in carved wood and partly moulded in gilded lacquer paste, adorned with pieces of mirror glass (mosaic). The rims of some supporting parts at the feet of the columns are covered with bands of vitrified lead, a typical decoration found in nineteenth century architecture (Giteau 2001: 127).

This Hò Thammat once belonged to the royal palace in Luang Prabang. During French colonial times it was transported to France to be shown in Paris in the 1950's, but since in the meantime a Hò Thammat was needed in the palace for ceremonies, the palace asked for the Hò Thammat from Vat Saen Sukharam and then did not return it to the temple. Later, the Hò Thammat which was shown in Paris was brought back to Luang Prabang and kept in Vat Saen Sukharam to replace the one which had been lent to the palace. Before 2000, it was installed on the entrance terrace of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam and kept there for many years. When the Sala Hongtham was finished in 2000, it was moved inside. Sathu Nyai Khamchan built the Sala Hongtham to keep the Hò Thammat safe and protected. Conversely, the Hò Thammat is why he ordered for the Sala Hongtham to be built larger and higher than both tradition and the rules put up by UNESCO authorities permitted: He thought that this Hò Thammat was very important and that a special Sala Hongtham was therefore appropriate. However, he did not tell anybody why he built the *sala* bigger than the *sim*. Initially, the UNESCO authorities did not agree to its size. Despite this, Sathu Nyai Khamchan went ahead with his plan. Finally, when the building was finished and the Hò Thammat moved in there, he invited the UNESCO team in Luang Prabang to come and see the fruits of his labor. There he explained to them the reasons behind his actions, telling them about the importance of this Hò Thammat and its history over the past 50 years¹⁸⁷ (Illustration No. 4.4). In addition, a series of photographs show Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other monks sitting on this Hò Thammat chanting the Vessantara Jātaka during the Vessanantara festival in the early 2000s (Buddhist Archive No. B7918R to B7983R).

Vò Pha Bang is an gilded wooden shelter in *phasat* shape dedicated to the sacred Buddha statue of Pha Bang, the Buddha statue which is the palladium of Luang Prabang and

¹⁸⁷ This information was provided by Humphraeng Sukkasoen, housekeeper at Vat Saen Sukharam at the time of Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam in 2009.

Laos, kept at the royal palace. During the Lao New Year festival (between 17 and 19 April), the Vò Pha Bang carrying the Pha Bang is transferred in the procession from the palace to Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, where people pour water over the Pha Bang for three days before carrying it back to the palace. In 2004, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had observed that the Vò Pha Bang which had carried the Pha Bang during prior festivals had become weak and would not be strong enough to safely withstand the weight of the Pha Bang. Seeing this was the case, he asked Achan Manivong Khattiyarat, an architect of Luang Prabang renowned for his professional handcraft work, to construct the Vò Pha Bang by copying the old one. When it was finished, he presented it to the governor of Luang Prabang province at the national museum of Luang Prabang (the former palace) on 10 April 2005.¹⁸⁸ He paid 43 million Kip for the materials and labor, which he obtained through generous donations from Lao people both inside and outside of Laos. At present, this Vò Pha Bang supports the Pha Bang Buddha which is kept in the Pha Bang's house situated in the palace's ground in Luang Prabang. Achan Manivong also requested the governor to allow him to take care of the old Vò Pha Bang and keep it in the Sala Hongtham at Vat Saen Sukharam to preserve it. There is an inscription in Tham-Lao script at its base, which reads:

ຈຸລະສັກກະຫຼາດ 1288 ຕົວ ປີຮວາຍຍີ ເດືອນ 3 ຂຶ້ນ 8 ຄ່ຳ ວັນ 3 [ອັງຄານ] ລິດຈະນາແລ້ວຍາມກອງວັດ ໝາຍມີແມ່ເຖົ້າຄຳອ້ວນບົວ ເປັນເຄົ້າ ເປັນເຫງົ້າກວ່າມູນລະສັດທາກັບບຸດຕະນິດຕາ ພິນ້ອງວົງສາເປັນອັນຍິ່ງ ມີໃຈໃສສັດທາສ້າງຍັງວິທານຫຼັງນີ້ໄວ້ກັບພະພຸດທະສາ ສະໜາແຫ່ງພະມະຫາໂຄດິມເຈົ້າ ຕາບຕໍ່ເທົ່າ 5,000 ວັດສາ ຂໍໃຫ້ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າໄດ້ດັ່ງຄຳມັກຄຳປາດຖະໜາສູ່ສິ່ງສູ່ປະການກໍ່ຂ້າເຫັນ ນິບ ພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕຸໂນ ນິດຈັງ.

On the third day [Tuesday], the eighth day of the waxing moon of the third month, Culasakkarat 1288 (21 January 1926), the Year of *huai nyi* [the Cow], completed in the morning. The faithful Mae Thao Khamuane Bua has taken initiative, together with her children, and her whole family, in donating this *vihan* to support the Teachings of Gautama Buddha until the passing of 5000 years. May all our wishes be fulfilled. May this be a support to us for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna* (*nibbāna paccayo hotu no niccam*).

(Museum No. VSS_001677)

The wish to attain enlightenment, to reach *nibbāna*,¹⁸⁹ as the supreme goal of Buddhist endeavors (Humphreys 1997: 153), is popular for Buddhists when they perform merit-making or donate something to a monastery. It is believed to bring supreme blessings beyond all others. In Southeast Asia, texts with this type of content are also commonly found on other Buddhist objects, such as at the pedestals of the Buddha statues, in the colophons of manuscripts, and on manuscript boxes and cabinets.

¹⁸⁸ See a series of photographs of procession of the Vò Pha Bang from Vat Saen Sukharam to the national museum of Luang Prabang, and the ceremony of handing over the Vò Pha Bang at the Buddhist Archive No. B1644R, B2353R, B5058R to B5070R.

¹⁸⁹ *Nibbāna* (P.) or *nirvana* (Sk.), lit. extinction, is the supreme core of Buddhism; the extinction of greed, extinction of hatred, and extinction of delusion: this is called *nibbāna* (Nyanatiloka 1988: 201). For the details of this term see Bhikkhu Pesala, 2001. *The Debate of King Milinda*. Penang: Inward Path, pp. 154–159., and see Nyanatiloka, 1988. *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms & Doctrines*, 201–203. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

3.4 Hūa Xuang (Racing Boats)

Hūa Xuang or racing boats are long boats with decorations used for competition during the boat racing festivals, which are popularly organized by the communities living along the rivers in different countries of Southeast Asia, namely Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and in Xishuangbanna in the South of China. In Laos, particularly in Luang Prabang, the racing boats are traditionally made of a hollowed trunk and 30–35 m long, and can hold about 40–45 oarsmen who come from the local communities around the monasteries. The boat racing takes place on the Khan River in the middle of Buddhist Lent. Formerly, the boat racing festival was one of the royal ceremonies attended by kings, their families and royal guests. At present, the technique of racing boat building has changed because a full tree trunk is difficult to find and more expensive. Now it is usually built of many long flat pieces of wood. Furthermore, the oarsmen nowadays do not only come from the local communities around the monasteries, but also from other more distant communities, or sometimes even from neighboring countries, as the competition has become much more commercial.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan commissioned the building of two racing boats while at Vat Saen Sukharam. The first one, called Saen Nūng or Nang Khiao (Miss Green), was a salt transporter boat that had been remodified in 1964, and the second one, called Saen Sòng or Nang Daeng (Miss Red), was built in 1967.¹⁹⁰ Normally, one monastery is linked to one community or village and has one racing boat, but Vat Saen Sukharam is linked to two communities, Ban Vat Saen in the East, and Ban Phon Hūang in the West. Therefore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan built two racing boats, one for each of his communities.

The story behind the building of these two racing boats is quite interesting. Both of them are huge dugouts built of the trunks of the hardwood tree known as Mai Khaen (*Hopea*),

¹⁹⁰ A reference to Nang Hūa (female images attached to the racing boats) appears in a letter sent from Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitta Maha Thela of Vat Xiang Muan to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, which reads: ເຈົ້າອາຮັກຜູ້ປົກປັກຮັກສາເຮືອນາວາ ມີ 2 ຕີນ, ໃຫ້ຕົກແຕ່ງພາເຂົ້າທິບ 4 ພາ ຄື ລໍາລະ 2 ພາ ທ້າຍ-ຫົວ. ພາເຂົ້າທິບນັ້ນຢ່າໃຫ້ມີຂອງຄາວ ໃຫ້ມີແຕ່ຂອງຫວານ ເປັນຕົ້ນວ່າ ພາກໄມ່ຕ່າງໆ (ກ້ວຍ ອ້ອຍ ເຂົ້າໝິ່ມຕ່າງໆ ຄຳພາກ ບູລີ[ກອກຢາ] ເຫຼົ່ານີ້ເປັນຕົ້ນ). ການທີ່ເຮືອຂອງເຮົາບໍ່ແລ່ນດີນັ້ນ ຍ້ອນມີຄວາມຜິດພາດ ກ່າວຄືຈະເຮັດພິສັງຢ່າງໃດຢ່າງໜຶ່ງກຽວແກ່ເຮືອ ບໍ່ໄດ້ນຳເຄື່ອງຂຶ້ນນາງເຮືອສາກ່ອນ ແລ້ວຈຶ່ງກະທຳພິທີ 1. ເວລາຈະເອົາເຮືອອອກໄປທົດລອງບໍ່ໄດ້ຄອບໄຄວ. 2. ເວລາອອກຈາກເຮືອ ພວກສີພາຍກໍ່ໃຊ້ຄວາມມະລິງຕິ່ງຕ່າງຢູ່ບ່ອນນາງເຮືອທັງ 2 ນີ້ເປັນເຈົ້າມາຍາຄຸ້ມຄົມແລະມັກຄວາມ (ຖືຄວາມ) ຜິດພາດໜ້ອຍໜຶ່ງແມ່ນມີອັນເປັນໄປແທ້. [There are two protectors of the boats. Please offer to them four *pha khao thip* [sets of food and dessert on a plate with a stand], dividing them into groups of two, one for each boat, and place them on the head and tail of each boat. The *pha khao thip* is to contain no savory foods, but rather only sweet or snack-like foods (such as banana, sugar cane, various desserts, a pack of nuts, and even cigarettes). The cause of our boat not running well is the mistake that we did our business without sacrificing to them, for example, one, we tested the boats without sacrificing them; and two, the oarsmen practiced roughly on them during the racing. These two spirit ladies are strict on everything, even if there is any mistake they will react immutably].

Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitta Maha Thela (1920–1996), abbot of Vat Xiang Muan was a close friend of Sathu Nyai Khamchan who was renowned in astrology, especially, in calculating auspicious moments, in philology, and Vipassana meditation. This information, he got as a result of his Vipassana meditation practicing in the night of 2 August 1986 as stated in the letter (BAD-12-1-1986.016). For the full biography of Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitta Maha Thela, see Kongdeuane et al. 2012. *Pha Bunchankaeo Phothichitto and Lao Philology*. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing.

a strong wood also regarded as very auspicious. In Thailand, this wood is called Mai Takhian and is considered a sacred wood. Some of these old trees are believed to be inhabited by female spirits called Mae Takhian (lady mother Takhian), so they are enshrined and worshiped with flowers, incense offerings, and requests for lottery numbers by lay people.¹⁹¹

Saen Nüing was originally a punt boat built in the 1940s and used for transporting sacks of salt from Vientiane to Luang Prabang. It belonged to a relative of Thongvan Phetmungkhun at Ban Vixun who was a merchant. In the early 1960s, it began to rot and so was anchored at the Ban Vat Nòng pier for some time. In 1964, Sathu Nyai Khamchan bought it from the merchant and ordered a craftsman to rebuild it as a racing boat.¹⁹² It joined the boat racing festival for the first time in 1965.¹⁹³ In 1967, it became well recognized when its oarsmen won the first prize in the boat racing festival, which took place on the Khan River on 6 September 1967. Their contenders in the final round were the oarsmen of Ban Sing (Illustration No. 4.5). The winning team, which came from Vat Saen Sukharam's communities, was awarded the first prize of an elaborate silver bowl by King Sisavang Vatthana, who presented it at the victory pavilion (Lao: *phamxay*) after the race, with the Prime Minister, Prince Suvannaphumma, standing at the king's side (Illustration No. 4.6). In addition, the King gave a special bonus of 10,000 Kip from his pocket to the head of the team, which made both the team and their communities very proud (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2006: Interview).

Saen Sòng was built in 1967. Sathu Nyai Khamchan had asked Colonel Bunchan Phommalin, one of his relatives, who was an official in Xaiyabuli province, for his help finding a trunk of Mai Khaen. Once the tree had been cut down, Sathu Nyai Khamchan asked Colonel Bunchan Phommalin's subordinates, who were specialists in chopping the trunk and building it into a racing boat, to carry out this work.¹⁹⁴ The first trunk the soldiers cut was 36 m. long, but Sathu Nyai Khamchan needed a trunk of only 32 m. He did not want them to cut the trunk shorter, so he gave it to King Sisavang Vatthana. The king gave his order to the royal craftsmen to use it to build his royal racing boat. As its edges were not of the same level, it was called Hūa Ī Ngiang (the boat with one edge that is slightly distorted), but it

¹⁹¹ See Johnson, 2012. "Naming Chaos: Accident, precariousness, and the spirits of wildness in urban Thai spirit cults." *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 39: 771–772.

¹⁹² Interview with Thongvan Phetmungkhun at Ban Vixun, Luang Prabang on 13 April 2014.

¹⁹³ In a note of Colonel Pheng Chittaphong entitled "ລາຍຊື່ນັກກິລາເຮືອງຊ່ວງວັດແສນ ສຳຫຼັບ 1965 [List of sportsmen on the racing boat of Vat Saen Sukharam in 1965]" appears a total of 47 with 44 oarsmen and one controller, Colonel Pheng Chittaphong, sitting at the head, and two steersmen, Chan Phan and Thit Heuane, at the rear. There were two boat-racing festivals: one on the Dong River on 24 August 1965 and one on the Khan River on 26 August 1965. For more information on these boat-racing festivals, see Berger, 2000. *Het Bun Dai Bun*. London: Westzone.

¹⁹⁴ An official telegram was sent from Colonel Bunchan Phommalin in Xaiyabuli to Colonel Khamxao in Luang Prabang, asking him to inform Sathu Nyai Khamchan and to ask Sathu Nyai Khamchan to travel to Xaiyabuli to take a look at the site where they were building this boat (BAD-12-2-1967.113).

actually did perform quite well.¹⁹⁵ At present, this boat is kept within the boundary of the former palace and is no longer in use. Then Sathu Nyai Khamchan ordered a new 32 m trunk and used it to build Saen Sòng. The boat was built in Ban Nampui village, Pak Lay district, Xaiyabuli province, with a size similar to that of Saen Nüng. At first, this boat did not do well in the competitions as its structure was not very well-designed. In the late 1970s, it was renovated and its head was partly cut out. After that, it placed much higher in the rankings on several occasions. For example, in 1984, 1985, and 1987, it won first place, and in 1986, it came in second. Since the late 1990s, these racing boats have become outdated, especially Saen Nüng, which is no longer used at the festivals, and has been preserved as a heritage object. Only Saen Sòng is able to enter the competition from time to time in order to preserve the tradition, but due to its density, weight, and age, it is not running as well as before. This might be one of the reasons, or at least an additional reason, why the oarsmen from the communities have become less interested in joining the boat racing festivals.

When Sathu Nyai Khamchan constructed the pavilion to house these two racing boats in the early 1970s, he received material support from King Sisavang Vatthana in the form of zinc for roofing and some sacks of cement for flooring. Moreover, the king sent 30 of his royal guards to Vat Saen Sukharam to work on the concrete floor for one day. Therefore, the pavilion and these racing boats are important symbols indicating the close relationship between Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the king. In remembrance of the royal patron, on the pediment of the pavilion, he attached wooden craftworks containing traditional symbols, at the middle of which is a three-headed elephant, with Naga floating on either side and their heads rising up towards the three-headed elephant. Historically, these symbols signified that the royal kingdom was under the protection of the *naga* (Suphachai 2010: 92).

There were five reasons why Sathu Nyai Khamchan had these racing boats built: First, as boat racing is one of the traditional sports of Laos that has been practiced for centuries, it should be preserved and supported. Second, it is a local sport in which young men in the two communities of Vat Saen Sukharam can engage to exhibit their showcase their physical abilities, which helps instill self-confidence and pride. Third, the oarsmen consisted of local people from the same community, and this kind of sport created harmony among them, something very important for communities living in Lao society. The fourth was to dedicate the boats to the Naga believed to protect the city, and final reason, to celebrate the rice harvest of the people.

¹⁹⁵ Information came from Thongvan Phetmungkhun at Ban Vixun village on 13 April 2014. Thongvan Phetmungkhun is one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's close lay disciples, who often visited him at his abode to talk to him about general matters for hours at a time. In 1983, Thongvan himself ordained as a monk and stayed at Vat Saen Sukharam with Sathu Nyai Khamchan for one year. He is famous for his performances of *nang kao* dance and Lao folk music in Luang Prabang, which he partly learnt from Sathu Nyai Khamchan. He also organized a youth group for Lao folk dance and music.

4. Collections of Documents, Manuscripts and Publications

In September 2007, although I was not an official member of the committee, I was given special status making me responsible for the collection and preservation of the photographs, books and documents found scattered on the floor in the reception room and his bedroom. It took me one week to get the documents organized and into cabinets. In 2011, the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang began a collaborative project with Prof. Dr. Volker Grabowsky of the Asian-Africa Institute at the University of Hamburg, Germany, to research and preserve these material under the project title “The Lao Sangha and Modernity: A Buddhist Archive in Luang Prabang”. The project compiles significant texts regarding the study of Lao Buddhism and the social and political role of the Lao Sangha in the twentieth century. Sathu Nyai Khamchan, his work, and his legacy are excellent examples of transitions made and influenced by the Lao Sangha over the past century. In the following, I will present additional information on the texts I found, which I have divided into four types: personal letters, official documents, *thelaphisek* certificates and religious books.

4.1 Collection of Personal Letters

Most of the letters in this collection are personal letters addressed to Sathu Nyai Khamchan from Buddhists, his relatives, friends, disciples and followers, both inside and outside of Laos. Some were from within the monastic community, while others were laypeople. Of particular interest are the letters sent from the Lao diaspora who fled the country due to political issues after the Lao revolution in 1975 and now live in foreign countries all over the world. At present, a total of 1,171 personal letters are accounted for in the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang, covering a period of seventy years (1937–2007). However, some of the letters in this collection it seemed he kept on his relatives’ behalf; some had been originally sent to his siblings, Phaya Khammungkhun Virachit and Achan Maha Khamphan Virachit, while others were for his foster child, Sathu Maha Bunpheng Virathammo.

23 letters written within the collection are copies of letters written by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself to fellow high-ranking monks, his disciples and brothers, to inform them of his travels, both within Laos and abroad.¹⁹⁶ These letters correspond with photographs

¹⁹⁶ Some examples of the interesting letters he wrote were: one to his teacher in Luang Prabang when he was studying in Bangkok in 1937 (BAD-12-1-1937.001), to inform him of his return back to Luang Prabang during school vacation in the coming year; one to Somdet Phra Vannarat, abbot of Vat Benchamabòphit in Bangkok, about his travels with Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, Sathu Nyai Khamfan, Sathu Phò Phatthaman, Sathu Fan, Pha Maha Samram and Achan Maha Chanpheng to Sri Lanka to participate in the 2500th Buddha Jayanti celebrations, as well as his pilgrimages to India and Burma between December 1956 and February 1957; one to Pha Maha Bunpheng Virathammo, his foster child, who was studying at Magadh University in India in 1972 in response to the latter’s letter, informing him that he would make a pilgamage to Sri Lanka (BAD-12-1-1972.006); one to Pha Sisuphan Sirisuvanno in Vat Saen Sukharam while he was visiting his relatives as well as on pilgrimage to Thailand in 1989 (BAD-12-1-1989.020), which is verified by a series of photos from the trip (Buddhist Archive No. A1603R to A1629R and A1631R to A1636R), and on to Pha

which Sathu Nyai Khamchan took during his travels and visits to the places he mentions. The photographs, together with these letters, make up a very valuable piece of evidence for studying the life of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and his role in society, as well as the international relations of the Lao Sangha.

Other letters were from Lao people living outside Laos. After 1975, when the Pathet Lao gained power on the national stage and established a socialist regime, a large number of Lao people who disapproved of the new regime fled to foreign countries. From these letters, an impressive amount of them kept contact with Sathu Nyai Khamchan, whom they esteemed as their spiritual guide, over large distances and extended periods of time. There are a number of exciting reports about their living conditions in the refugee camps in Nong Khai and in other provinces in Thailand along the Mekong River during the late 1970s and the 1980s. From Thailand, they then migrated to more-distant countries and established Lao societies in new and considerably more unfamiliar environments than they had been exposed to in Thailand. These letters provide information on their new settlements in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Belgium, Germany, England, and Switzerland. In addition to his written correspondence with the Lao diaspora overseas, Sathu Nyai Khamchan visited some of his relatives as well as many Lao Buddhists living abroad in Thailand, Australia, Germany, France, the United States and Canada. I provide more details concerning these Lao diaspora and Sathu Nyai Khamchan's visit to them in Chapter 5.

4.2 Collection of Official Documents

The total number of official documents in the archive is currently at 5,217, covering a period of almost one hundred years (1912–2007). They consist of documents Sathu Nyai Khamchan received from state organizations, Sangha organizations, Buddhist schools, abbots, monks, novices, laypeople, and members of his family while he was in office as the Sangha governor of Luang Prabang province between 1953–1966 and 1976–2007. The documents from state organizations such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs of pre-1975 Lao governments and the Lao Front for National Construction, both of which monitored and administered matters relating to Lao Buddhism and the Sangha, pertain to various matters, such as administration of the Sangha in general, Buddhist studies, the construction of monastic sites, the organization of ceremonies and festivals, political propaganda, and royal ceremonies. The documents from the Sangha organizations in Vientiane and the Supreme Patriarch in Luang Prabang pertain to Sangha conferences, the administration of the Sangha, the dissemination of Buddhism, and the celebrations of the 2500th Buddha Jayanti in Laos, Sri Lanka, and Burma. The documents from the district Sangha governors inside Luang Prabang province, as well as those from

Thongchan Thantachitto at Vat Saen Sukharam during a long trip which covered the United States, France and Germany.

abbots deal with the elections of abbots and district Sangha governors, the appointment Sangha members, census lists of monks and novices in each monastery, reports on the situation of their monasteries, reports of monks who passed away, and requests for support for monastic buildings. The documents from Buddhist schools¹⁹⁷ include matters such as the establishment of Pali schools in rural villages, census lists of the teachers and students, and examination results.

The documents from ordinary monks and novices consist of requests for to enter and leave the monastery as well as travel recommendations¹⁹⁸ to visit family in other provinces or study in Vientiane. The documents from laypeople are requests to hold merit-making events, such as *thelaphisek* ceremonies and Vessantara festivals. In the past, people wishing to organize Buddhist ceremonies and festivals had to submit their proposals in writing to the provincial Sangha governor, but nowadays a phone call or personal agreement arranged orally is sufficient. The documents from Phaya Khammungkhun Virachit when he was the district governor of Luang Prabang in the 1960s, as well as later documents from when he was royal advisor to King Sisavang Vatthana, pertain to social and political matters such as various event invitations, i.e. to meetings, weddings, celebrations, and civil administrative offices. As for the documents belonging to Nang Khamxao Phummavong, they are either loan contracts or family business contracts. Some of the documents found were written by Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself: they are either copies of documents which he wrote to officials, recommendations for the ordinations of monks and novices over whose ceremonies he either presided over or helped organize directly, and Sangha appointments for abbots and Sangha governors at the commune and district levels.

As reflected in the official documents, 1956 and 1957 were two very important years, as these were the years in which the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism were held. Laos, as well as other Theravada Buddhist countries in Asia such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia, regard the year BE 2500 – 1956 in Sri Lanka and Burma, and 1957 in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia¹⁹⁹ – as the halfway mark between the passing of Gautama Buddha (Pali: *parinibbāna*) and the end of Buddhism after its 5,000th year. The Gautama Buddha himself predicated this, saying that after this span, his teachings will have been forgotten. Then, the fifth Buddha of this aeon, the Maitreya Buddha, will come to restore the

¹⁹⁷ Buddhist schools are monastic schools that are also called “Pali schools”. These schools teach mainly about Pali and Buddhism, but also offer secular subjects.

¹⁹⁸ When passports or ID cards were still uncommon, the Sangha or state officials issued travel recommendations for monks allowing them to travel to outside provinces.

¹⁹⁹ Sri Lanka and Burma count the year of the Buddha’s passing on the Vesak (Visakha) day as Year One Buddhist Era (BC 543), but Laos, Thailand and Cambodia count it as Year Zero.

knowledge of the Dhamma in the world (Khamvone 2014: 8).²⁰⁰ Due to the strong beliefs in these teachings and professions, these two years were of obvious great importance to the Theravada Buddhist world.

In Laos, they celebrated in every province of the country during December 1956 and June 1957 with festivals organized by collaboration of Sangha, people, government, and royal court. In late 1956, the Sangha leaders from the whole country, together with officials from the government, held meetings in Vientiane between 1 and 5 July to establish the committee for the celebrations. Subsequently, many important and significant activities were organized for this auspicious occasion. These activities included the publication of a new version of the Pali canon, or Tipiṭaka, in Tham-Lao script, the manufacturing of Buddha statues, the organization of Vessantara festivals in every province, the construction of the Sangha assembly hall (Lao: *sala phan hòng*, lit: pavilion with a thousand rooms) at Vat That Luang Neua, Vientiane, and the donation of religious books to monasteries. The Tipiṭaka in its entirety contains 80 volumes (the age to which the Buddha lived). However, only three volumes, the first volume of the Sutta, the Vinaya, and the Abhidhamma, were published for these celebrations (BAD-12-2-1956.024). The Buddha statues were produced in Vientiane, including 15 bronze copies of the Pha Soem Buddha with a height of 45 cm., and a pedestal of 35 cm, as well as a crystal copy of the emerald Buddha currently installed in Vat Phra Kaeo, Bangkok.²⁰¹ Unfortunately, we do not know where the other Buddha statues mentioned above are located today. In Luang Prabang, the celebrations started on the full moon day of the sixth lunar month (Visakha Day) – which fell on 13 May 1957 – and lasted for seven days. According to the program (BAD-12-2-1957.126), important activities included:

- Day 1: The procession of the Tipiṭaka books from the airport through the roads of the town to Vat Xiang Thong and Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram.
- Day 2: The procession of the Bodhi tree sapling from the palace around Phusi mountain and the planting of it on the slopes of Phusi on the Western side of the palace.

²⁰⁰ This belief is reflected in scribal colophons of manuscripts bearing Buddhist texts and in inscriptions of Buddha images: the scribes and/or sponsors and donors usually express their desire that their meritorious deed of sponsoring the copying of a manuscript or donating a Buddha image will support the teachings of the Buddha so that they will remain on earth until the completion of 5,000 years, from the year of the Buddha's passing (See Grabowsky and Apiradee 2013, and see also Veidlinger 2006: 16–166).

²⁰¹ These two Buddha statues were once located in Laos. The Emerald Buddha installed at Vat Pha Kaeo, Vientiane, was moved to Thonburi, the former capital of Siam (Thailand) in 1779, and then later to Bangkok by the General Chao Phaya Chakri, who thereafter became King Rama I of the current Bangkok dynasty. At present, it is at Vat Phra Kaeo, Bangkok. As for the Pha Soem Buddha, it was made in the sixteenth century by three daughters of King Sethathirat, together with Pha Suk, but it sunk in the Mekong River while being transported. The Pha Sai is installed at Vat Phochai, Nong Khai province. These Buddha statues were ransacked by Siamese troops in 1828 during King Anou's war. At present, Pha Soem Buddha is located in the mail hall of Vat Pathum Vanaramrachavoravihan, Bangkok.

- Day 3: Activities at Khun Island (a sacred island on the Mekong River in northern Luang Prabang) next to the mouth of the Xüang River (Lao: Pak Xüang).
- Day 4: The procession of the Pha Bang Buddha image from the palace to Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram for public display and worship. At night, there was a ceremony in which a large crowd of people walked with candles around Phusi (Lao: *vian thian*).
- Days 5 and 6: The Vessantara festival at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram.
- Day 7: 19 May 1957, procession of the Pha Bang Buddha image back to the palace for its installation and the closing ceremony.

There are several relevant facts to be noted about the celebrations. First, most activities were held at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram due to its central location in the town and status as the royal monastery. Secondly, two different sources confirm the arrival date of two Bodhi tree siblings from India as 1955. The first source is a report by Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela in Vientiane on 25 February 1956, entitled “ເຈົ້າລາຊາຄະນະຂວາ ຄຳຜັນສິລະສັງວະໂຣ ກ່ຽວກັບປະຫວັດຕົ້ນໂພ” (A speech of Chao Raxa Khana Khua Khamfan Silasangvaro about the story of the Bodhi tree) (BAD-01-0005). The report reads as follows:

ຕົ້ນໂພອິນເດຍ: ໃນ ຄ.ສ. 1955 ສະເດັດພະບໍຣົມໂອລະສາທິລາດ ມຸງກຸດລາຊະກຸມມານ (ເຈົ້າພ້າສະຫວ່າງ ວັດທະນາ) ແລະ ພະນະທ່ານກະຕ່າຍ ໂດນສະໂສຣິດ ນາຍົກລັດຖະມົນຕີ ໄດ້ຊົງນຳໜ້າຕົ້ນສົມະທາໂພ ຊຶ່ງໃນນາມພຸດທະສະມາຄົມແຫ່ງອິນເດຍ ໄດ້ມອບຖວາຍມາ. ຈະປູກໄວ້ທີ່ວັດປ່າທຽບພູສີຫຼວງພະບາງ 1 ຕົ້ນ ແລະຈະປູກໄວ້ທີ່ ບໍລິເວນທາດຫຼວງ ວຽງຈັນ 1 ຕົ້ນ ໃນ ພ.ສ. 2500.

Bodhi trees from India: In 1955, Crown Prince Sisavang Vatthana and Prime Minister, Katay Donsasorit, presented the Bodhi tree saplings as an offering by the Buddhist Association of India. One will be planted in the area of Vat Pa Thiap, [on the slopes of Mount] Phusi in Luang Prabang and the other one will be planted at That Luang stupa in Vientiane, in early BE 2500 [AD 1957].

The other source is a report of the Bodhi tree reception ceremony in Luang Prabang titled “ລາຍງານພິທີຮັບຕ້ອນ ຕົ້ນໂພທີ່ມາຈາກ ເມືອງພາລານະສີ (ປະເທດອິນເດຍ)” [Report of the Reception Ceremony for Bodhi trees from Benares (India)], with the event’s date as 12 October 1955 (BAD-12-2-1955.016).²⁰² Evans, however, states in *The Last Century of Lao Royalty* that President Nehru made a gift of two Bodhi tree saplings to Crown Prince Sisavang Vatthana during his visit to India in early 1957 (2009: 190). Both saplings, he says, were planted in Laos, one at Vat Ong Tü and the other on the slopes of Phusi in Luang Prabang. The first resource seems to be more reliable, because the report was written in 1956, when the Bodhi trees were already in Laos, and planted at Vat Ong Tü was brought from Sri Lanka in 1939 as stated in Sathu Nyai Khamfan’s report.

²⁰² See also Grabowsky and Khamvone 2015. “Multi-faceted perspectives on the Buddhist Archive of Luang Prabang: The case of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana and the Buddha Jayanti.” In *The Lao Sanga and Modernity: Research at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang 2005–2015*, edited by Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger, 219–247. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing.

In 1956 and 1957, the Lao Sangha did not just celebrate the 2500th anniversary of the Buddha Jayanti in Laos. The Lao Sangha, led by the Supreme Patriarch together with Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela from Vat Suvannakhli and Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela from Vat Saen Sukharam, followed an invitation to participate in the celebrations in Sri Lanka and made pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in India and Burma (Khamvone 2014: 8–11). This clearly demonstrates the diplomatic mission of the Lao Sangha and reflects a religious network of relationships among the Theravada countries already in existence 60 years ago. More details to come on these travels in chapter 5.

4.3 Collection of Thelaphisek Certificates

Sathu Nyai Khamchan received, according to his collection, 493 *thelaphisek* certificates throughout his life. The documents are of formal structure with traditional text written in Tham-Lao and Lao scripts. Some were reproduced as mimeographs, some were printed, and some were made in artistic handwriting. Sathu Nyai Khamchan compiled 502 of such documents in total, and they were still in chronological order when we found them.²⁰³

The *thelaphisek* ceremony is a popular traditional practice in Theravada countries in Southeast Asia. It is mostly organized in a temple to praise and celebrate a well-practiced, erudite monk, who is respected by laypeople, particularly by the sponsors of the ceremony. This ceremony can be organized for one or for many monks. Who is invited to the ceremony is up to the sponsors; they choose only monks whom they respect and in whom they have faith based on their level of knowledge and good behavior. This ceremony was practiced in both conventional and formal ceremonies, from Buddhism's arrival in Laos in 1359 until the present. Any monk who is invited to such a ceremony will receive a formal certificate. Formal ceremonies were held to commemorate monks who were appointed as ecclesiastical officers in the administrative hierarchy of the Sangha – e.g. abbot of a monastery, teacher at a Buddhist school, head of the Sangha at the commune, district, provincial, or national level – the sponsors were ordinary people, officials and kings. There were six titles available for the formal ceremonies, and monks invited to the ceremony would receive the different titles according to how many times they had been awarded: Pha Samdet, Pha Xa, Pha Khu, Pha Lakkham, Pha Lukkaeo, and Pha Yòtkao.²⁰⁴ According to the Luang Prabang tradition, a

²⁰³ While the main text of the certificates is usually similar, the titles they carry often differ. Some of the titles are Lap hot Pha Khamchan - ຫຼາຍທິດພະຄຳຈັນ, Lap hot Thelaphisek - ຫຼາຍທິດເຖລາພິເສກ, Aphiseka Thelaphisek - ອະພິເສກາເຖລາພິເສກ, Batsaya Thelaphisek - ບາດສາຍາເຖລາພິເສກ, Bai Paknam Thelaphisek - ໃບປາກນາມເຖລາພິເສກ, Bai Saya Thelaphisek - ໃບສາຍາເຖລາພິເສກ, and Thelaphisek - ເຖລາພິເສກ. While all of these titles refer to a *thelaphisek* ceremony, the title *thelaphisek* is most often used as this term is the most formal and therefore suitable for such an occasion (see an example, Illustration No. 4.7).

²⁰⁴ For the state declaration regarding these official titles, see BAD-12-2-1957.009. These titles were repealed after the revolution.

monk who has completed a *thelaphisek* ceremony will receive the title “Sathu”²⁰⁵ in front of his name. In older times, the sponsors conventionally had to inform the ecclesiastical provincial governor (Lao: *chao raxa khana khuaeng*) in writing and ask him to approve the monk(s) to be invited to the ceremony.²⁰⁶ After the country became a republic, stipulations were changed so that requests may now be made orally, either in person or over the phone.

The *thelaphisek* certificates Sathu Nyai Khamchan were both official and unofficial, and his last title was Pha Lakkham Virasutthikhun, the position of ecclesiastical provincial governor. The important event of this ceremony is the sprinkling of water onto the monk’s/monks’ heads with a *hanglin* and the offering of new robes, which are prepared by the sponsors. Aside from the eight requisites²⁰⁷ of a monk, the most important and valuable offerings at this ceremony are the *lap ngoen* and *lap kham* (silver and gold plates, typically weighing 7.622 g), both of which contain the monk’s name inscribed in Tham-Lao script. The finished plates are referred to as *lap hot*. At the end of the ceremony, the certificate’s contents are read aloud by the master of ceremony.

The text of each of these certificates is formally composed, beginning with “ສີສີ ສຸຂະສະ ວັດສະດີ” (*Sisi sukha sawatsadi*: honour, happy and well-being – a common greeting for traditional formal documents), followed by the year of the event in the Buddhist Era. Also shown is the name of the supporters and their addresses, the name(s) of the monk(s) to be honored, and the name of the senior monk presiding over the ceremony, as well as the location of the event. One sentence reads, “Like the Great King Patsenthikoson and his beloved queen, Nang Natkaeo Manlika, who, through the pouring of water on Phra Saributta, were granted pure wisdom.”²⁰⁸ This indicates that this ceremony was practiced by King Pasenthi, a devout Buddhist king with great faith in the monk named Phra Saributta, so much

²⁰⁵ A monk or *phra, pha*, in Sri Lanka is also called *sathu* or *sadhu*, and in Northern Thailand called *tu*, which is derived from *sathu* (Sommai 2010).

²⁰⁶ Here is an example of a letter from a *thelaphisek* ceremony sponsor to the head of the Sangha “ອາຕະມາພາຍ ສົມເດັດພະສັງຄະລາດ ທຳມະຍາໂນ ຂໍນະມັດສະການທຸ່ງໃຫຍ່ເຈົ້າລາຊາຄະນະແຂວງ ວັດສຸວັນນະຄິລິ ຂໍເມດຕາຊາບ ດ້ວຍອາຕະມາມິຈິດສັດທາຈະເຖລາ ພິເສກ ທຸຄຳຈັນ ເຈົ້າອະທິການວັດແສນ ຊຶ່ງມີອາຍຸ 32 ປີ ວັດສາ 11 ເຈົ້າຄະນະເໜືອ. ສະນັ້ນ ຂໍທຸ່ງໃຫຍ່ຈິງໄດ້ພັດຕາອະນຸໂມທະນານຳອາຕະມາພາຍແລະ ວາງໜັງສືອະນຸຍາດເຖລາຖວາຍອາຕະມາພາຍຕາມຄວນດ້ວຍ. [I, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayano, wish to respectfully inform the ecclesiastical provincial governor at Vat Suvannakhili of the following: I have faith in the *thelaphisek* for Thu [Sathu] Khamchan, abbot of Vat Saen, who is 32 years old, has spent 11 years in the monkhood, and is the chief of the Sangha of the northern area. Therefore, please grant my request by approving this *thelaphisek*]” (BAD-12-2-1952.014).

²⁰⁷ Three robes, a bowl, a razor, a needle, a girdle, and a water-strainer.

²⁰⁸ “ເໝືອນດັ່ງພະມະຫາກະສັດ ປັດເສນທິໂກສິນລາດ ກັບທັງນາງນາດແກ້ວມັນລິກາ ອັນເປັນມະເທສີນຶ່ງເຫງົ້າ ຮິດສົງເຈົ້າສາຣິບຸດ ຕົນບໍລິສຸດດ້ວຍ ປັນຍາ.” King Pasenthikoson or Pasenthi was a king of Savatthi (Shravasti), an ancient city in India, during the Buddha’s lifetime. He was a devout Buddhist king, who, together with his satellites, erected eighty-four thousand sand stupas to worship the Triple Gem (Berger and Khamvone 2013: 44). Phra Saributta was one of the two most important disciples of the Buddha along with Phra Maha Moggallana. He was praised by the Buddha as excelling in his wisdom, later becoming renowned for his teachings. His image is depicted often in the Theravada tradition (BAD-12-3-1941.001).

so that he organized a *thelaphisek* ceremony as a token of his belief.²⁰⁹ When I looked through the collection of the *thelaphisek* certificates, I noticed that some of them looked new even though they carried dates from the 1940s. In the same time, I also found a notebook of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's containing lists of supporters, dates and locations for the ceremonies (BAD-02-0489).²¹⁰ From this, we can conclude that these *thelaphisek* certificates from the 1940s were reproduced by Sathu Nyai Khamchan based on the list he had compiled, as the original documents were no longer available.

According to the collection of the *thelaphisek* certificates, the first *thelaphisek* ceremony in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's honor was performed at Vat Pa Phay in the Pak Xeang district of Luang Prabang province on 16 January 1942, sponsored by Saen Khan-Amat (Xiang Khian), headman of the sub-district of Ban Pa Phay village (BAD-12-3-1941.001). The last ceremony was performed at Vat Nong Si Khunmüang on 8 June 2007, sponsored by Mae Thao Buathong Khaphon (BAD-12-3-2007.013). The latest document carries the number 493, meaning he was invited to such ceremonies 493 times during the more than 60-year period from 1942 to 2007. I also learned that the sponsors of the *thelaphisek* ceremonies for Sathu Nyai Khamchan comprised various classes of Buddhists, including laypeople, monks, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, King Sisavang Vatthana, members of the royal family, and politicians.

Most ceremonies took place in Luang Prabang and surrounding villages, as well as in other provinces such as Luang Namtha, Phongsali, Udomxay, Xiang Khouang, Xaiyabuli and Vientiane, as well as in France. The photographs of the *thelaphisek* ceremonies portray Sathu Nyai Khamchan sitting in a make-shift bathroom (Lao: *hong song*), with a crowd of laypeople pouring water through a *hang lin*. Men are sitting on both sides of him with their hands raised, inviting him to enter the *sim*, where Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other monks received offerings from supporters.²¹¹ Such a practice clearly indicates the faith of the Buddhists of Luang Prabang and the Lao people in general in Sathu Nyai Khamchan. As far as I have been able to determine, there have been no monks in Laos, either past or present, who have received comparable numbers of invitations to *thelaphisek* ceremonies. Since he was very much engulfed in his personal achievements as a monk, he took more care towards notating the number of ceremonies to which he was invited. Even if other monks had had comparable

²⁰⁹ This text passage at least suggests that the ceremony might have been adopted from ancient Indian traditions already in place during the Gautama Buddha's life time and was then later brought into Southeast Asia together with Theravada Buddhism.

²¹⁰ The notebook is entitled ລາຍຊື່ຜູ້ມີສິດທາທິດສິງ ຕັ້ງແຕ່ 12-1-42 ຮອດປັດຈຸບັນ 29-1-2005 [List of *thelaphisek* Supporters from 12/01/1942 until the present, 29/01/2005]. The last list in this notebook says "04/02/2006 [No.] 457, ສາທຸບຸນ ເລີດ ວັດມະໂນຣົມ ວັດມະໂນຣົມ Sathu Bunleuth [from] Vat Manorom; [ceremony held] at Vat Manorom.

²¹¹ Buddhist Archive No.A3523R, A4008R, A4010R, A4011R, B0543R, B0543V, B1009R and B1770R.

statistics, this would not be knowable unless they went to the same great lengths to preserve the prove of this as Sathu Nyai Khamchan did.

4.4 Collection of Religious Books and Magazines

The books, magazines and pamphlets kept in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's *kuti*, roughly 5,000 items in total, are mostly religious in nature. Others pertain to politics, social issues, natural sciences, secular literature, philology, astrology, history and personal biographies. Almost half of the materials printed pre-1975 are in the Thai language. 488 of the most interesting materials were selected, assigned numbers within the Buddhist Archive, and digitized into PDF format for research purposes, while the original materials are preserved. Among these interesting materials are notebooks which Sathu Nyai Khamchan used as journals to log the activities of his daily life, his journeys inside and outside Laos, his life story, matters of Sangha administration,²¹² and drafts of the Vessantara Jātaka written in Lao based on his compilation of Tham-Lao manuscripts, which he published in 1977.²¹³ The pamphlets, which are biographies of monks and important laypeople, i.e. of Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, of Somdet Pha Sangkhavuthamahathelachan (Kaeo Uthensakda, 1889-1953), the chief monk of the Lao Sangha, Vat Sisaket, Vientiane, published in 1953, of King Sisavang Vong, and of Phaya Khammao Vilay, former Prime Minister (1945–1946).²¹⁴

The religious magazines published in the 1950s and early 1970s include *Phutthavong*, *Phrasasana* and *Phutthapathip*. *Phutthavong* was published by Vat Phutthavongsa Paluang (or Vat Sok Paluang) in Vientiane and directed by Pha Achan Pan Anantho, probably the most famous Vipassana master of Laos. *Phrasasana* was published by Vat Chanthaburi in Vientiane and directed by Pha Achan Maha Pradit Phutthakhosako, the director of the Pali school of Vientiane. *Phutthapathip* was published by Vat Pa Phon Phao in Luang Prabang and directed by Sathu Nyai Xaysamut Xotika Maha Thela, a famous Vipassana master of Luang Prabang. These three religious magazines provide valuable information about Vipassana meditation practices in Laos, the organization of the Sangha, Buddhist education, as well as Buddhist teachings, literature, and folk tales. Notably, *Phutthapathip* contains articles not only on Lao Buddhism and culture but also about Christian priests in Luang Prabang, e.g. the article, “How is Religion Necessary for the Life of Human Beings?” (“ສາສະໜາຈຳເປັນແກ່ຊີວິດມະນຸດຢ່າງໃດ?”) by Father Martion Pramante, first presented at Vat Pa Phon Phao on 1 October 1972 (BAD-02-0512: 8–12). The magazine also contains photographs from

²¹² For Sathu Nyai Khamchan's notebooks, see BAD-02-0007, BAD-02-0009, BAD-02-0010, BAD-02-0152, BAD-02-0155 to BAD-02-0157, BAD-02-0159, BAD-02-0161, BAD-02-0163, BAD-02-0187, BAD-02-0188, BAD-02-0198, BAD-02-0199, BAD-02-0283, BAD-02-0286.

²¹³ See BAD-02-0007, BAD-02-0348- BAD-02-0356.

²¹⁴ See BAD-02-0032, BAD-02-0495 and BAD-02-0002.

the early 1970s showing senior Buddhist monks such as Sathu Nyai Xaysamut Xotika Maha Thela, Sathu Maha Anurat Phuttharakkhita Maha Thela and Sathu Nyai Fan Tissavanga Maha Thela, as well as some Catholic priests, including Marcello Zago, in discussion about the Dharma and religion in general.²¹⁵ This demonstrates that interreligious dialogue and exchange between Lao Buddhism and Christianity in Laos.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. Information Service Office in Vientiane published social, political, and scientific magazines under the names *Free World (Lok seri)*, and *Current World (Lok patchuban)*. These magazines provide information about society, politics, the military, agriculture, religion, and science in Laos, Asia, the United States, and the world. The publishers aimed to promote the relations among Laos, Asia and the USA. *Samakkhi* (lit, “harmony”), published by the UK Information Service Office in Vientiane between 1954 and 1975, covers the topics of science, society and geography in England as well as in the U.K.’s commonwealth countries in Asia. These three magazines demonstrate how two world powers (the USA and the UK) attempted to gain power in Asia after the withdrawal of France in 1954 via the dissemination of information in written, circulated, serialized form.

Among the publications in Thai, many books describe the case of Phra Phimonlatham (1903–1989), abbot of Vat Maha That Yuwarat Rangsarit in Bangkok, who was accused by high-ranking monks in the Thai Sangha organization and state officers of being a communist, also being charged with a misdemeanor for breaking major precepts of the Vinaya. He was arrested and jailed for five years during the regime of the staunchly anti-communist Thai Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat (1958–1963). The book, *The Historical Case of the Thai Sangha: The Victory of Phra Phimonlatham Asapha Thera*,²¹⁶ describes Phra Phimonlatham’s case step by step, whom the police captured on 20 May 1962 at Vat Maha That and jailed at the police of public security (Thai: *santiban*) station in Bangkok for five years. He was stripped of his honorific title of Phra Phimonlatham and pressured by high-ranking monks to leave the Sangha, but he insisted that he was innocent and did not give in to the pressure. To symbolize his purity/innocence, he wore white robes throughout the duration of his sentence. Phra Phimonlatham’s case was settled by a military tribunal in Bangkok on 30 August 1966 in which the court declared him not-guilty. Upon his arrival back at Vat Maha That, a large crowd of Buddhists awaited him. The government restored his honorific title. Phra Phimonlatham’s case is well-known and commonly referenced within the context of the Thai Sangha’s history. However, the books related to Phra Phimonlatham’s case found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s collection indicate that Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the Sangha of Luang

²¹⁵ Photographs archived as: Buddhist Archive No. C5006R to C5009R. Marcello Zago was a Christian priest in Laos during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1973, he made the visit of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos to Pope Paul VI at the Vatican possible. His prominent work on Lao culture is *Rites et ceremonies en milieu bouddhiste lao*, Roma, 1972, Università Gregoriana Editrice.

²¹⁶ “คดีประวัติศาสตร์สงฆ์ไทย ชัยชนะ พระพิมลธรรม” (BAD-02-0274).

Prabang closely followed the case, reflecting the close relationship between monks in Luang Prabang and the monastic networks in neighboring Thailand (Grabowsky and Khamvone 2015: 220). Sathu Nyai Khamchan was very close to Phra Phimonlatham personally, a claim supported by the framed portrait of Phra Phimonlatham found at Vat Saen Sukharam, under which appears the following handwritten dedication: “In offering to Pha Khamchan Virachitto, Chao Khana Khuang Luang Prabang, Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang. May it bring good fortune. [signature] 30 December 2497 [AD 1954], Vat Maha That, Bangkok, the ecclesiastical cabinet of the Sangha administration.”²¹⁷ Moreover, Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent many generations of his disciples to stay at Vat Maha That to continue their studies as well as their practice of Vipassana meditation (Khamvone 2014: 6–8).

Moreover, these publications are an indicator of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s passion for reading and researching a wide variety of fields. As far as I saw during my stay at his monastery, whenever he had the time, Sathu Nyai Khamchan could always be found reading one of his books, many of which he read more than once.

4.5 Collection of Manuscripts

In Laos, as well as in other parts of Southeast Asia, manuscripts are regarded with great reverence because of the knowledge they contain in different fields. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the manuscripts kept in monasteries were used and studied by monks and novices, who also sometimes read from these manuscripts when giving sermons to laypeople. The private collection of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in his *kuti* comprises over 400 items, including palm-leaf and mulberry paper manuscripts. These manuscripts are unique, because, unlike the project “Preservation of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts in Laos”²¹⁸ of the National Library of Laos, they did not have national archive numbers, as they had been kept for his private use and collection. Some of them he regularly used during Buddhist ceremonies as well as for his studies in his abode, where he is pictured in photographs reading palm-leaf manuscripts and a mulberry paper manuscript to a group of foreign researchers in his abode. Since 2011, Bounleuth Sengsulin and I have been working on our PhD dissertations at the the Asia-Africa Institute of University of Hamburg under the direction of Dr. Volker Grabowsky. The manuscripts found in Sathu Nyai’s abode serve as the base corpus of primary texts for Bounleuth’s research.²¹⁹ The variety of the manuscripts is surprising: They include long palm-

²¹⁷ “ให้พระคำจันท์ วิริจิตโต วัดแสน สุขาราม หลวงพระบาง เจ้าคณะแขวงหลวงพระบาง เพื่อศิริมงคล (ลายเซ็น) 30.12.97 วัดมหาธาตุ กรุงเทพฯ สังฆมนตรีว่าการองค์การปกครอง” (Buddhist Archive No. B4763R).

²¹⁸ The project had been carried out, funded by the German government, for ten years (1992–2001) by both Lao and foreign scholars on manuscripts, such as Madame Dara Kanlaya and Prof. Dr. Harald Hundius from the University of Passau, Germany.

²¹⁹ “The Lao Sangha and Modernity: A Buddhist Archive in Luang Prabang”, is part of a research network organized between several universities of Germany, “The Dynamics of Religion in South East Asia” (DORISEA), see: www.dorisea.de.

leaf (Lao: *lan yao*), short palm-leaf (Lao: *lan kom*), *pap sa*, *pap lan* (leporello mulberry paper manuscript), and *samut khòì* (*khòì* paper); the manuscripts cover various fields of knowledge, including religious and non-religious subjects such as Buddhist teachings, literature, history, pharmacopeia (Lao: *tamla ya*), astrology, and magic (Lao: *khatha*); furthermore, they are written in various scripts, namely Tham-Lao, Tham-Lan Na, Tham-Lü, Tai Khuen, Old-Lao, Modern-Lao, Thai, Burmese, and Khmer; and various languages such as Pali, Lao, Thai, Khmer, and Burmese.²²⁰

Two aspects deserve our attention. First, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had collected or received these manuscripts from various places and persons such as monasteries, abbots, families of his relatives and houses of laypeople not only in Laos but also in Southeast Asia. Secondly, as his collection contains manuscripts on various topics and in various languages, it can be assumed that the abbot had studied these manuscripts and gained knowledge in these languages and subjects.

Among the collection of palm-leaf manuscripts, two very special manuscripts containing non-religious texts²²¹ were found in a cupboard in the Sala Hongtham, in 2013. These manuscripts were probably installed there by Sathu Nyai Khamchan not long before he passed away. The first manuscript runs over five folios written on both sides, except for the last folio, on which only one side is written. The second manuscript has only one folio with writing on both sides. The texts of both are royal commands inscribed in Old-Lao script in neat handwriting. There is a seal made of black lacquer on the left side of each manuscript. The first manuscript is painted gold with a white paper label on the right side, its text reading, “1976 ເມື່ອ ຈ.ສ. 1219 ພ.ສ. 2400 ຄ.ສ.1857 (ໄດ້ 119 ປີ) (From CS 1219, BE 2400, and AD 1857 to 1976 (119 years old))”. The second manuscript reads, “1976 ເມື່ອ ຈ.ສ. 1226 ພ.ສ. 2407 ຄ.ສ.1864 (ໄດ້ 112 ປີ) [from CS 1226, BE 2407, and AD 1864 to 1976, (112 years old)].” These manuscripts were created during the reign of King Chantharat (r. 1852–1871) when the whole kingdom of Laos was under Siamese suzerainty except for Luang Prabang, which had been preserved as a Siamese vassal state. Therefore, these manuscripts are very important evidence for reconstructing Lao history in the context of the royal court.

In the collection of mulberry paper manuscripts is one other special manuscript, 62 cm long and 23 cm wide, which contains lists of more than 1,300 words (BAD-13-2-063). It is unclear where and by whom this manuscript was produced, as it does not have a colophon. It can be assumed that this manuscript was brought to Luang Prabang either by Lao diaspora

²²⁰ For the details of the manuscripts, see Bounleuth Sengsoulin, 2014. “Manuscripts found in the abode of the Venerable Pha Khamchan Virachitto, Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, Laos.” *DORISEA Working Paper Series*, No. 14.

²²¹ At the time of writing (2015), these two manuscripts have not yet been assigned Buddhist Archive numbers, but the filing process for them is currently underway.

who moved to Chiang Saen in Chiang Rai province of Thailand, a place Sathu Nyai went to visit from time to time, or by a Tai Khün monk who came to Luang Prabang from northern Thailand or Chiang Tung in the Shan states. Despite its unclear origins, this manuscript suggests continuous relations in matters of religion between Luang Prabang, northern Thailand and Chiang Tung in the twentieth century.²²²

5. Compositions and Publications

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was renowned as an expert in the Tham-Lao and Old-Lao or *lao buhan* scripts. He often read from palm-leaf manuscripts when giving sermons to lay Buddhists. He was able to read Thai text fluently, albeit with a Lao accent. From the 1950s onwards, he compiled and published many religious books, including the Pātimokkha, Vessantara Jātaka, and Vinaya for distribution to Buddhists. The following are some examples of his Buddhist literary works.

5.1 The Pātimokkha Manuscript

In Theravada Buddhism, the Pātimokkha (fundamental precepts) makes up the basic code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for fully ordained monks. It is a part of the Suttavibhaṅga, a division of the Vinayaṭīka, one of the collections of Buddhist canonic texts. According to the Vinaya, twice a month on the fifteenth day of the waxing and waning moons, the monks must assemble in the *sim* to listen to a recitation of the Pātimokkha. “The monks of Luang Prabang congregate every fortnight to solemnly recite the Pātimokkha: a reminder of the precepts and rules they obey, and also an occasion that provides a means of strengthening their community (see Berger 2010: 6).

The Pātimokkha text was composed in Pali and written in the Sinhala, later in the Khmer, Burmese and Thai scripts. In Laos, from the fourteenth century until in the middle-twentieth century, the Pātimokkha text was written in the Tham-Lao script and inscribed, first onto palm-leaf manuscripts, and later also onto mulberry paper manuscripts, to be regarded as a sacred object. Since palm-leaf manuscripts were engraved by hand, only a limited number of Pātimokkha manuscripts were produced, and there were none available enough for study in the past.

²²² The Buddhist Tipiṭaka and monks had once been brought from Chiang Mai to Xiang Dong Xiang Thong (Luang Prabang) in the 16th century during the reigns of King Phothisararat of the Lan Xang kingdom and Pha Müang Kaeo of Chiang Mai. See Maha Sila Viravong, 1964. *History of Laos*, 49. New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp; and see also Volker Grabowsky and Khamvone Boulyaphonh, 2015. “Multi-faceted Perspectives on the Buddhist Archive of Luang Prabang: The Case of the Chaṭṭha Sangāyana and the Buddha Jayanti.” In *The Lao Sangha and Modernity: Research at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang 2005–2015*. Edited by Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger, 245–247. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan considered this issue and decided to promote the reading of this manuscript himself. In the 1950s, he tried to compile his own version²²³ of a Pātimokkha manuscript in Tham-Lao script, which he collected from various extant palm-leaf and mulberry paper manuscripts in Luang Prabang.

He then asked Sathu Phò Phan Phothipanyo, abbot of Vat Pa Siao (the present Vat Hat Siao), who was well-known for his beautiful handwriting, to write the manuscript using calligraphy.²²⁴ One copy of this manuscript that he kept in Vat Saen Sukharam was found in 2012. The colophon at the end of the first fascicle carries the following dedication:

ພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ ສາທູຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດໂຕ ວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ສ້າງເປັນທີ່ຣະລຶກ ໃນຄາວອາຍຸ ຄົບ 3 ຮອບ ວັນອາທິດ ອອກໃໝ່ 10 ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ 11 ປີ ຮວາຍສັນ ຈ.ສ. 1318, ພ.ສ. 2499 ເພື່ອທິດກຸສົນເຖິງສາທູໃຫຍ່ແກ່ນຈັນ ກັດຈາຍະນະມະຫາເຖລະ.

This *phikkhu patimok* [Bhikkhu Pātimokkha]²²⁵ Sathu Khamchan Virachitto of Vat Saen Sukharam produced to commemorate his completion of three 12-year cycles on his birthday, a Sunday, the tenth day of the waxing moon of the eleventh month CE 1318, BE 2499, the year of *huay san* (the Monkey) [Sunday, 14 October 1956]. The merit [from this] shall be dedicated to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela.

(BAD-13-1-0280)

In 1959, he sent another copy to the Minister of Religious Affairs in Vientiane to be published as a first edition in the form of leporello mulberry paper manuscript and distributed throughout the country (Khamvone 2014: 9).²²⁶ One copy of this manuscript was found in Vat Saen Sukharam, with 154 folded pages containing writing on both sides with five or six lines per side. The front and back covers are painted with black lacquer and decorated with golden stencil. It was kept in an elaborately designed wooden box (Illustration No. 4.8). In the colophon on the last page, typed in Lao script three years later, Sathu Nyai Khamchan stated his intentions when composing the manuscript as follows:

ພະພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ ບັນຈຸຂໍ້ວິນັຍບັນຍັດ ໃຫ້ພິກຂຸມີຄວາມປະພຶດສະຫມ່ຳສະເໝີກັນ ຈຶ່ງເປັນການສຳຄັນໃນພຸດທະສາສະໜາຢ່າງຍິ່ງ ຈຳ ຕ້ອງມີໄວ້ທຸກພະອາຣາມ ເພື່ອພະສົງຈະໄດ້ສາທະຍາຍທຸກເຄິ່ງເດືອນ ໃນວັນອຸໂປສິດ ແລະ ເພື່ອຄວາມຕັ້ງໜັ້ນຂອງພະພຸດທະ

²²³ I call this his own version, however, I do not mean that he wrote in his own words or added his own words in the Pātimokkha manuscript but I mean he himself compiled the manuscript by examining and revising the text based on other manuscripts. This work had to depend on Pali language skills and a good understanding of the Pātimokkha.

²²⁴ The palm-leaf manuscript of the Pātimokkha, scribed by Sathu Phò Phan Phothipanyo by following, is located in the collection of Vat Saen Sukaram (BAD-13-1-0280).

²²⁵ Bhikkhu Pātimokkha is the title of the Pātimokkha manuscript.

²²⁶ Preface of the mulberry paper manuscript of the Pātimokkha by the Deputy Minister of Interior and Religious Affairs. “ຕົ້ນສະບັບໜັງສືນີ້ ພະສາທູຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດ ເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງຫລວງພະບາງ ໄດ້ຈັດສົ່ງມາໃຫ້ ເພື່ອຂໍໃຫ້ກະຊວງທຳມະການ ຈັດພິມອອກເຜີຍແຜ່ ແກ່ສະຫະທຳມິກ. ການທີ່ກະຊວງທຳມະການ ໄດ້ຈັດພິມໜັງສືນີ້ກໍດ້ວຍມິຄວາມມຸ່ງຫມາຍ ຈະໃຫ້ບັນດາພະພິກຂຸສາມະເນນທັງຫລາຍ ໄດ້ຝຶກໄຝ່ລຶກສາສູດ ຮຽນແລະປະຕິບັດ ໃຫ້ຖືກຕ້ອງຕາມພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ. [...] ວຽງຈັນ, ວັນທີ ໑໒ ກັນຍາ ໑໙໕໙. ລັດຖະມົນຕີຊ່ວຍວ່າການກະຊວງມະຫາດໄທ ແລະ ທຳມະການ, ພະຍາ ຄໍຣະຍົກ ສຸວັນນະວົງ. [The original text of this manuscript was sent [to me] from Pha Khu Khamchan Virachit, the ecclesiastical leader of Luang Prabang province, with his request to the Ministry of Religious Affairs to have it published and distributed to his fellow monks. With the publication of this manuscript, the Ministry of Religious Affairs aims for the monks and novices to become more interested in its study, learning it by heart and practicing correctly according to the Buddha’s teachings. [...] Vientiane, 12 September 1959. The Deputy Minister of Interior and Religious Affairs, Phaya Khòrayok Suvannavong]” (BAD-13-2-066).

ສາສະຫນາສິນກາລະນານ, ພະພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ ແຕ່ເກົ່າເພິ່ນຂຽນໃສ່ໃບລານ ຈຶ່ງບໍ່ສູ້ແພ່ຫລາຍ ບັດນີ້ການພິມສະດວກ ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຢາກໃຫ້ຫນັງສືພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກແພ່ຫລາຍ ໃຫ້ໃຊ້ເປັນແບບສະບັບດຽວກັນທົ່ວໄປ ເພື່ອປະໂຫຍດແກ່ຄະນະສົງເປັນສ່ວນໃຫຍ່ ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ອຸດສາພະຍາຍາມ ກ່າຍຫນັງສືນີ້ຈາກສະບັບໃບລານ ແລະ ພັບລິ້ນ ຊຶ່ງໃຊ້ກັນຢູ່ທົ່ວໄປ ແລະ ໄດ້ກວດສອບ ທານ ໃຫ້ຖືກຕ້ອງຕາມສະບັບເດີມ ແລະ ໄດ້ແກ້ໄຂເລັກນ້ອຍ.

The Pha Bhikkhu Pātimokkha²²⁷ contains the regulations of the Vinaya ensuring that behavior of Bhikkhus is consistent, which is of great importance for Buddhism. There needs to be one in every monastery, so that monks can recite it every half month on the *uposot* day. This is to ensure countless years of stability for Buddhism. In former days, the Pha Bhikkhu Pātimokkha text was written onto palm-leaf manuscripts, which were not so widely distributed. At present, [we have] printing, [which is very] convenient. I would like for this same version to be distributed everywhere. Primarily for the benefit of the Sangha, I have tried to copy this manuscript from the palm-leaf and leporello paper manuscripts which were commonly used, revising it to make it correct according to the original version, as well as other minor corrections.

In 1995, the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization in Vientiane published a second edition with 1,000 copies to promote the study of Buddhism throughout the country. In 2010, the manuscript was produced in book format by Hans Georg Berger, which entitled *Sacred Dust from the Buddha's Feet: Theravada Buddhism in Laos*, with the English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Berger 2010). Therefore, it is clear that Sathu Nyai Khamchan's version of the Pātimokkha manuscript has been widely accepted and recognized in Laos, as this version is popularly in use throughout the country. This work reflects on Sathu Nyai Khamchan's knowledge skills of Pali language, contents of the Pātimokkha, and Tham-Lao script. Sathu Nyai Khamchan not only produced the Pātimokkha manuscript, but was also able to recite the text by heart at the *uposot* ceremony.²²⁸ He also was able to proficiently use the text when teaching his disciples. The Pātimokkha text is long and difficult for remember, and a monk who can recite such a text by heart is considered to be a monk with great perseverance, thereby gaining the respect of the Sangha.

5.2 The Vessantara Jātaka in Book Form

The Vessantara Jātaka, which narrates the story of Prince Vessantara, is a tale derived from ancient Indian literature. It became important and highly influential in Southeast Asian Theravada cultures. The Vessantara Jātaka is the story of the generous Prince Vessantara, who is thought to be the last incarnation of the Buddha before his rebirth as Prince Siddhartha, who later became the Gautama Buddha. The Vessantara Jātaka has been translated into the major Southeast Asian vernacular languages with minor changes in the text, and virtually all monastery libraries contain one or more copies in their palm-leaf manuscript collection

²²⁷ Pha Bhikkhu Pātimokkha is also the title of the Pātimokkha manuscript, the same as Bhikkhu Pātimokkha. It is up to the author to use these two titles.

²²⁸ The photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan sitting on the preaching chair, surrounded by monks, in the *sim* of Vat Nong Si Khunmüang during an *uposot* ceremony in the 1960s. They were probably posing for a picture before or after the recitation of the Pātimokkha (Buddhist Archive No. B2543R).

(Swearer 2010: 34). Its rather long story is chanted during the Vessantara festival by monks and novices. For centuries, Buddhists in every village all over the subcontinent have organized annual Vessantara festivals. The chanting of this piece of Buddhist literature by monks, who read the story from palm-leaf manuscripts or books, plays a central role in the proceedings. This festival is regarded as the most important of twelve annual festivals (Lao: *hit sipsòng*) and is known as *bun pha vet* or *bun mahaxat*. It traditionally takes place in the fourth lunar month, (Lao: *bun düane si* or *bun pha vet* - ບຸນເດືອນສີ່ ຫຼື ບຸນພະເຫວດ) which corresponds roughly to March, although nowadays the festival can be any time between November and June.²²⁹

One of the main objectives of organizing the festival is the raising of funds for the construction of monastic buildings. Maha Sila Viravong,²³⁰ a prominent scholar on the history, language, and literature of Laos, stated that “the Vessantara book is the principal support to Buddhism, [because the organization of the Vessantara festival] helps to raise money, many million or many ten million [Kip], for the construction of monastic buildings and stupas.”²³¹

The story tells of Prince Vessantara’s great generosity, giving away to others not only his possessions, but also his two children and his wife. His generosity is considered to be *dāna paramatthapāramī* (giving as the supreme perfection), which a Bodhisattva who wishes to be enlightened and become the future Buddha must follow.²³²

Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s another masterpiece of Lao Buddhist literature is his Lao version of the Vessantara Jātaka (Lao: *vessantara xadok* - ເວດສັນຕະລະຊາດິກ), which he compiled from various Tham-Lao manuscripts and translated from Tham-Lao into Lao scripts

²²⁹ For more interesting information on Vessantara festivals in Laos and northern Thailand, see Hans Georg Berger 2000, *Het Bun Dai Bun*, London: Westzone, and Donald K. Swearer, 2010. *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 34–37. New York: State University of New York Press.

²³⁰ Maha Sila Viravong was one of the more well-known Lao scholars in the 20th century, born in Ban Nong Mün Than, Atsamat district, Rõi-et province, northeastern Thailand, on 1 August 1905. First as a novice, later as a monk, Sila Viravong acquired profound knowledge of the Buddhist teachings and also of Lao traditional literature, the Lao and Thai languages, as well as Pali. In 1930, he left Thailand, which at that time was still called Siam, to start a new life as a monk in Vientiane, which was the administrative centre of a French colony. In Vientiane, he got into contact with Louis Finot and other scholars of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient. In 1931, he left the monastery and became teacher at a Pali school in Vientiane. Later, he became the mentor of the viceroy, Prince Phetsarat. He wrote many books related to history, literature and linguistic of Laos i.e. *History of Laos*, *The Lao Epic Thao Hung Thao Chüang*, and *Lao Grammar*. In 1939, he married Mrs. Mali and had with her fourteen children, several of whom have continued their father’s work. He died in Vientiane on February 1987 at the age of 81. See The Social Science Committee, 1990. *ມະຫາສິລາ ວິຣະວົງສ໌ ຊີວິດແລະຜົນງານ* [The Life and Work of Maha Sila Viravong].” Vientiane: State Printing House.

²³¹ “ທັງສີມະຫາຊາດ ໄດ້ເປັນຫຼັກຄ້າຊຸພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ຊ່ວຍຫາເງິນສ້າງວັດວາອາຮາມ, ສ້າງທາດເຈດີຕ່າງໆ ມາບໍ່ຮູ້ວ່າເປັນເງິນເທົ່າໃດລ້ານໂກດ.” (BAD-02-0449).

²³² For more details on the Vessantara story see Ladwig 2008, *From Revolution to Reform: Ethics, Gift Giving and Sangha-State Relationships in Lao Buddhism*, PhD thesis of the University of Cambridge, p.108, and Hans 2000, *Het Bun Dai Bun*, London: Westzone (the book has no page numbers).

and published in book form, and edited the locution according to the Lao pronunciation. Some notebooks containing handwritten drafted versions of this book were found in his abode.²³³ He published a first edition in 1977, and this was followed by many reissues sponsored by himself.²³⁴ As stated in the preface of the book, his transliteration and publication of the Vessantara Jātaka in the Lao version had the aim of making the Vassanantara Jātaka available to those who are interested in the content but unable to read the Tham-Lao script in which the palm-leaf manuscripts are written. The text says:

ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຢາກຈະຮັກສາວັນນະຄະດີລາວເຮົາໄວ້ ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ພະຍາຍາມກວດຂໍາລະສະສາງວັນນະຄະດີເລື່ອງນີ້ໄວ້ຕາມສະຕິປັນຍາ ແລະ ເພື່ອຈະໃຫ້ໄດ້ສໍານວນອັນມ່ວນແລະຖືກຕ້ອງ ຕາມອັກສອນແລະບົດກອນ. ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ເລືອກເອົາຕົ້ນສະບັບທີ່ມີຢູ່ກັບວັດແສນສຸຂາຣາມ ຊຶ່ງເປັນສະບັບທີ່ນິຍົມເທສະນາກັນຢູ່ເປັນປະຈໍາ ເຫັນວ່າ ມ່ວນດີ ທັງຂ້າພະເຈົ້າກໍເຄີຍໄດ້ເທສະນາມາແລ້ວນັ້ນເປັນຫຼັກ ແລ້ວໄດ້ກວດກຽບຄຽງກັບສະບັບອື່ນໆອີກ ຊຶ່ງມີສໍານວນໄວຫານຄ້າຍຄືກັນ ແລ້ວເລືອກເອົາສະເພາະທີ່ຖືກຕ້ອງເປັນປະມານ ແລະໄດ້ຮັກສາສໍານວນໄວຫານເດີມໄວ້ທຸກປະການ.

ສ່ວນສະບັບເດີມເປັນອັກສອນທໍາທີ່ໄດ້ຈັດພິມເປັນອັກສອນລາວນີ້ກໍເພື່ອໃຫ້ຜູ້ທີ່ບໍ່ໄດ້ອັກສອນທໍາອ່ານໄດ້ທົ່ວໄປ ສ່ວນຄໍາບາລີໄດ້ແກ້ໄຂໃຫ້ຖືກຕ້ອງຕາມຄໍາພິຄາຖາພັນ ການຂຽນເປັນອັກສອນລາວຈະຖືກຕ້ອງຕາມບາລີບໍ່ໄດ້ ເພາະຕົວອັກສອນລາວບໍ່ມີຄືບຕາມອັກສອນບາລີ ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ຂຽນຕາມອັກສອນລາວເທົ່ານັ້ນ.

It is my desire to preserve our Lao literature, and have tried to edit and correct this piece of literature with the best of my knowledge, so as to make the wording, the orthography, and the verses themselves more pleasant and correct. For this edition, I chose the original manuscripts of Vat Saen which are commonly used for sermons and considered pleasant. I too primarily use these manuscripts and have also compared them with other original manuscripts which have similar expressions. I determined this version to be correct and have preserved the original expressions.

The original version was in Tham [Tham-Lao] script. This publication is in Lao script for those who cannot read Tham-Lao script. I tried to adjust the Pali words in accordance with the *khatha phan*²³⁵ scripture, but it was difficult to do so as the Lao alphabet does not have letters corresponding to all Pali characters, so I used just the available letters.

The statement obviously points to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's deep interest in Lao literature. He also thoroughly understood the Lao language, explaining that difficulties arise because the Lao alphabet has only 27 letters, whereas the Tham-Lao alphabet in which the original versions had been inscribed comprises 41 letters. The Vessantara Jātaka book in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's version contains 22 episodes, including 18 episodes of the

²³³ See BAD-02-0349 to BAD-02-0356.

²³⁴ The first edition of the Vessantara Jātaka in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's version, see pdf file with BAD-02-0491. The 3,000 copies of the second edition were published in 1991, and 3,000 copies of the third edition were published in 2006. He distributed these books as Dhamma gift on the occasions of the Buddhist ceremonies of his birthday anniversaries.

²³⁵ Khatha means verse, stanza of four half-lines, incantation, magic spell, protective magic diagram; *phan* means 1,000 (one thousand). The original versions of the Vessantara Jātaka were composed in Pali language and consisted of 1,000 chapters, with one chapter containing 32 verses. The tale has been translated into the majority of the national languages in mainland Southeast Asia such as Lao, Thai, Khmer and Burmese. *Khatha phan* in this story means 1,000 Pali chapters, or the entire Vessantara Jātaka story (Singthong 2010).

Vessantara Jātaka and three other relevant stories, i.e. Pha Upakhut Pap Phaya Man (Pha Upakhut conquers Mara), Malai Muen, Malai Saen,²³⁶ and Sangkat Luang (great era).

As far as I know, during the twentieth century, there were only two people in Laos who composed their own version of the Vessantara Jātaka. One was Maha Sila Viravong and the other was Sathu Nyai Khamchan. Their work appeared in Lao religious magazines such as *Phutthavong*, *Phrasasana*, and *Phutthapathip*, which were in circulation between the 1950s and 1975. Maha Sila Viravong's work was published in *Phutthavong* under the title “ວິຈານ ເລື່ອງເວດສັນຕະລະຊາດິກ [Review of the Vessantara Jātaka]” (BAD-02-0449: 41), in which he provided additional background information about the story and helped readers to understand more details. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work was published in *Phrasasana* and *Phutthapathip* under the title *Maha Vessantara Jātaka* (ມະຫາເວດສັນຕະລະຊາຕະກະ) (BAD-02-0533: 17). He provides the full story of the Vessantara Jātaka in his version.

Moreover, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was renowned for his sound and tune when preaching the Vessantara Jātaka, which were unique. People frequently praised him that he *thet siang muan* (preached with a good sound). He also often memorized the text by heart and, whenever he was in good mood, he would utter passages of it. He learned, trained and practiced the tempo of Vessantara Jātaka preaching with his master, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, and lay masters in Luang Prabang since the time he was a novice in the 1930s. Later, he developed and created this aforementioned style of preaching, well summarized by Sathu Nyai One Keo, one of his disciples whom he trained in Vessantara preaching: “The tone of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's voice and the tune of his Vessantara chanting were soft, neither too fast nor too slow, and it was well- articulated. It was acknowledged and appreciated by the audience as well as the Sangha community, and it became the Luang Prabang style in the twentieth century.”²³⁷ Sathu Nyai Khamchan's style differed from other monks of his time as it clearly followed the Lao pronunciation and was smooth and easy to understand while some others were rather not smooth or not to follow the Lao pronunciation which were difficult to listen.

In the present day, Sathu Nyai One Keo and Sathu Nyai Buavan Punyasaro, abbot of Vat Naxao, have been able to re-create the style of Vessantara preaching established by Sathu

²³⁶ The Pha Malai story contains two episodes called Malai Mūn and Malai Saen. The Malai Mūn episode tells how Pha Malai went to pay homage to the Ketkaeochulamani stupa in Tavatisa for the first time. There were ten thousand Devas who came to worship the stupa at that moment. Mūn means “ten thousands” of followers. According to Buddhist historical belief, relics of the Buddha's hair are enshrined in the Ketkaeochulamani Stupa. The Malai Saen episode tells how Pha Mailai went to pay homage to Ketkaeochulamani stupa in Tavatisa for the second time, when many Devas with their followers, from one hundred thousand to ten hundred thousand came to worship the stupa at that moment, these Devas including Meitreyā, the future Buddha. Saen means “ten hundred thousands” of followers (BAD-02-0449).

²³⁷ Interviewed with Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, abbot of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xiang Thong, chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of the district of Luang Prabang on 24 February 2013.

Nyai Khamchan. In 2002, Sathu Nyai Khamchan received an invitation from his relatives in Paris for a visit for three months, where he recited each episode of the Vessantara Jātaka and a recording was made. As we can see from this, Sathu Nyai Khamchan devoted a great deal of effort to the development and spreading of the Vessantara Jātaka, which has become highly influential literature in the Lao Buddhist communities.

5.3 Composition of Other Manuscripts and Sponsoring of Manuscript-Making

The colophons in many of the manuscripts from the 1940s and 1950s in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s collection state that he had written or inscribed them himself in the Tham-Lao and Old-Lao scripts to commemorate important events in his life, particularly his birthdays. The manuscripts he scribed mostly relate to Buddhist literature, for example, *salòng* (celebration) or *anisong* (*ānisaṃsa*-profit, merit, good result, advantage) i.e. *salòng sang nangsue* (celebrating of manuscript-making),²³⁸ *Maravichai* (conquer Mara), and *Chettamnan* (seven legends).²³⁹ One of the most interesting among these is an important palm-leaf manuscript (BAD-13-1-0287), which he wrote in Lao letters with a blue ball-point pen. He did not make this manuscript for himself, but rather he created it specifically for Prince Suphanouvong (1909–1995), the first president of the Lao P.D.R. (1975–1995). This manuscript was for the occasion of a Buddhist merit-making ceremony hosted by Prince Suphanouvong and his wife, Mrs. Viangkham, commemorating the 31st anniversary of the death of Prince Phetsarat Rattanaovongsa, his half-brother. The ceremony took place on 15 October 1990. The manuscript has only two palm-leaf folios (inscribed recto and verso), but it contains very important text regarding the biography of Prince Phetsarat Rattanaovongsa, one of the most important Lao political leaders of the 20th century. It says:

ສົມເດັດເຈົ້າອຸປະລາດ ເພັດຊະລາດ ຮັດຕະນະວົງສາ ຜູ້ເປັນພະໂອລົດຂອງສົມເດັດເຈົ້າມະຫາອຸປະລາດ ບຸນຄົງ ແລະເຈົ້າຍິງທອງສີ ຊົງປະສູດເມື່ອວັນອາທິດ ແຮມ 14 ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ຍີ່ ພ.ສ. 2432. ວັນທີ່ 19 ມັງກອນ ຄ.ສ.1890. ປີ 1918 ຈຶ່ງໄດ້ຮັບພະລາຊະທານຍົດເປັນເຈົ້າລາຊະພາຄີໄນ.ປີ ຄ.ສ. 1941 ພະບາດສົມເດັດພະເຈົ້າສີສະຫວ່າງວົງ ຊົງພະລາຊະທານເລື່ອນຍົດຂຶ້ນເປັນສົມເດັດເຈົ້າມະຫາອຸປະລາດ ດຳລົງພະຕຳແໜ່ງອັກຄະມະຫາເສນາບໍດີ ບໍລິຫານປະເທດບ້ານເມືອງ. ວັນພຸດ ຂຶ້ນ 12 ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ 11 ປີກັດໄດ້ ພ.ສ. 2502

²³⁸ The text of the colophon on the first fascicle reads, “ສອງ [ສະຫຼອງ] ສ້າງໜັງສືຫຼືປີຕະກະ ພະວິຣະຈິຕໂຕ (ຄຳຈັນ) ວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ສ້າງໄວ້ໃນພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ເມື່ອວັນພຸດ ຂຶ້ນ 10 ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ 11 ປີວອກ (ກາບສັນ) ພ.ສ. 2487 ເພື່ອລະນຶກໃນຄາວອາຍຸຄົບ 2 ຮອບ ວັນພຸດ ຂຶ້ນ 10 ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ 11 ປີວອກ (ກາບສັນ) ພ.ສ. 2487 [Celebration of manuscript-making, Pha Virachitto (Khamchan), Vat Saen Sukharam, created in Buddhist faith on Wednesday, the tenth day of the waxing moon in the eleven lunar month, the Year of the Monkey (*kap san*) BE 2487 (16 October 1944) to commemorate the completion of two cycles (twenty four years of age), which corresponds to Wednesday, the tenth day of the waxing moon in the eleven lunar month, the Year of the Monkey (*kap san*) BE 2487] (BAD-13-1-0128, BAD-13-1-0157, BAD-13-1-0163, BAD-13-1-0208). For more information on the making of *anisong* manuscripts, see Bounleuth Sengsoulin, 2015. “Buddhist Manuscript Culture in Laos on the Road to Modernity: Reflections on Anisong Manuscripts from Luang Prabang.” In *The Lao Sangha and Modernity: Reseach at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang 2005–2015*. Edited by Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger, 249–265. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing.

²³⁹ BAD-13-1-0004 to BAD-13-1-0013.

ວັນທີ່ 14 ຕຸລາ 1959 ຊົງປະຊວນ ເວລາໃກ້ທ່ຽງກາງຄືນເກີດແຜ່ນດິນໄຫວ ແລ້ວຝົນຕົກ ຄັນຮອດເວລາ 5 ໂມງ 30 ນາທີ ໄດ້ສິ້ນພະຊົນ ດ້ວຍໂລກຄວາມດັນໂລຫິດສູງ ໂຮມພະຊົນມາຍຸໄດ້ 70 ປີ ຫຼຸດ 3 ເດືອນ 18 ມື້ ທີ່ ວັງຊຽງແກ້ວ ໄດ້ແຫ່ພະສົບມາຖວາຍພະເພັງທີ່ເດີນ ທາດຫຼວງ ໃນມື້ຂຶ້ນ 12 ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ 12 ໃນປີດຽວກັນນັ້ນ.

Somdet Chao Maha Uparat Phetsarat Rattanavongsa was a son of Somdet Chao Maha Uparat (viceroy) Bunkhong and Princess Thongsī. He was born on Sunday, the fourteenth day of the waning moon in the first month of the year BE 2432. [This date corresponds to] 19 January 1890. In 1918, he received the royal rank of the title Chao Lachaphakhinai. In 1941, he was offered a promotion by King Sisavang Vong, who bestowed upon him the royal position of Somdet Chao Maha Uparat and the rank of *akkha maha senabòdi* (Prime Minister) to govern the country of Laos. He became very sick on a Wednesday, the twelfth day of the waxing moon in the tenth month of the year BE 2502. [This date corresponds to] 14 January 1959. Shortly before midnight of that day, there occurred an earthquake accompanied by heavy rain fall. He passed away during the next morning at 5:30 a.m. due to high blood pressure, 3 months and 18 days before his 70th birthday, at Xiang Kaeo palace. His funeral was held at That Luang field in Luang Prabang on the twelfth day of the waxing moon in the twelfth lunar month of the same year.

(BAD-13-1-0287)

This manuscript can be explained from at least three important aspects: First, the importance of merit-making for the dead is addressed in his sermon. Second, it reflects an important part of history of Laos in the 20th century because both Chao Maha Uparat Phetsarat Rattanavongsa and Prince Suphanouvong are considered to be the most significant leaders for the establishment of Lao independence in the twentieth century. Third, it demonstrates the deep knowledge of Sathu Nyai Khamchan regarding manuscript composition as well as his close ties to members of the royal family.

In Laos, the making of palm-leaf manuscripts and their donation to monasteries has been a very popular practice, with the elaborately fashioned wooden cabinets for keeping the manuscripts sometimes also being donated as well. It is common for the donors' names, the date of creation, and the purpose of the manuscript to appear in the manuscript's colophon. As most of the texts pertain to the Jātaka and other works of Buddhist literature, the manuscripts are regarded as sacred objects. Traditionally, there are three main purposes of making a manuscript: to make merit, to support the religion, and to achieve *nibbāna* in a future life (Veidlinger 2006: 164). "It is generally believed that one way to support Buddhism is to contribute to the promotion of Buddhism by writing/copying Buddhist texts so that Buddhism may flourish for five thousand years, as predicted by the Buddha" (Bounleuth 2014: 10–11).

Donors or sponsors (Lao: *phu sang* - ຜູ້ສ້າງ) would pay a scribe to copy the Buddhist texts from the original version onto a new manuscript in his most beautiful handwriting. Sometimes the work was done pro bono if the scribe was a Buddhist monk, as the propagation of Buddhism is part of duty and monks are not allowed to work in exchange for money. However, the donors would offer him other offerings like flowers and monk's utensils – this type of offering is known as *buxa tham* (worship for the Dhamma), and such offerings were

presented as a display of gratitude for his work. Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself a great sponsor of palm-leaf manuscript-making.

Between the 1940s and 1960s, he sponsored hundreds of manuscripts and then donated them to his monastery. He collected the palm-leaf manuscripts that he had brought from the neighboring country of Thailand and asked monks, novices and laypersons for their beautiful handwriting, e.g. Sathu Phò Phan of Vat Hat Siao, to copy the texts in the original manuscripts. Such endeavors are considered a great support to Buddhism, as they preserve the Buddha’s teachings. Achan Khamdi Saloemsak, one of the scribes whom Sathu Nyai Khamchan asked to create manuscripts while he was a novice at Vat Saen Sukharam between 1963 and 1970, explained to me that, “I was able to come and stay at Vat Saen Sukharam - which I thought would be impossible – because of my specific abilities, as I was good at chanting the Vessantara Jātaka as well as inscribing manuscripts. I first met Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Dònmo during the Vessantara festival. After my chanting, I was asked by Sathu Nyai Khamchan [to come to Vat Saen Sukharam]. [There] my daily task was the inscribing of palm-leaf manuscripts according to Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s orders. I sat in front of his abode while inscribing the manuscripts.”²⁴⁰ Some manuscripts were sponsored by him in order to make merit for his teacher, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan, as stated in the colophon. For example, the text of one colophon reads:

ພຸດທະສັງກາດ ໒໔໘໙ ປີ ຈໍ ເດືອນ ໑໑ຂຶ້ນ ໒ ຄໍ່າ ວັນສຸກ ພະວິຣະຈິດໂຕ (ຄໍ່າຈັນທ) ວັດແສນ ໄດ້ສ້າງທັງສີເຈັດຕໍານານກັນທີ ໑ ເພື່ອ
ອຸທິດແກ່ສາທຸໂຫຍ່ແກ່ນຈັນ ເນື່ອງໃນການທໍາບຸນຂວບວັນມະລະນະພາບ ຮອບປີທີ ໓ ວັນສຸກ ຂຶ້ນ ໒ ຄໍ່າເດືອນ ໑໑ ປີຈໍ ພ.ສ. ໒໔໘໙ ໂດຍ
ບຸນຍະລາສີອັນນີ້ ຂໍຈົ່ງເປັນປັດໄຈຕາມອຸປະຄໍາພິກຄໍາຊູ ແມ່ນວ່າຕິກທີ່ຮ້າຍຂໍໃຫ້ຍ້າຍໃສ່ທີ່ດີ ຕິກທີ່ດີແລ້ວ ກໍຂໍໃຫ້ດີຍິ່ງກວ່າເກົ່າໄດ້ໝັ້ນ
ແສນທີ ກໍຂໍາເຫັນ ນິບພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕຸ ເມ.

In Buddhist Era 2489, in the Year of the Dog, the eleventh lunar month, the second day of the waxing moon, a Friday (Friday, 27 September 1946), Pha Virachitto (Khamchan) of Vat Saen has donated bundle one of the Chettamnan manuscript as a dedication of merit to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan on the third anniversary of his passing, on a Friday, the second day of the waxing moon in the eleventh lunar month of the year 2489 in Buddhist Era, the Year of the Dog, (27 September 1946). May he be supported by the results of this merit-making. If [his soul] is in a bad place, may it then be moved to a better place. [Even if his situation] was already good, may it become 100,000 times better than before. May this be a support to me for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna* (*nibbāna paccayo hotu me*).²⁴¹

(BAD-13-1-0007)

The dating format in this colophon is quite strange when compared to the others, as it starts with the year, followed by the month and the day. Normally, a colophon begins by recording the day, then the month and finally the year in which the manuscript was copied to

²⁴⁰ Interview with Achan Khamdi Saloemsak at Sala Thammavihan, Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang on 13 August 2013.

²⁴¹ For more examples of interesting colophons, see Volker Grabowsky, 2011. “Manuscript Culture of the Tai.” *Manuscript Culture*, No. 4: 153–156. Veidlinger states that *nibbāna* as a result of good karma, the hope that sponsoring the manuscript will lead to *nibbāna* helps us to discern the way ideas found in the *Tiṭṭaka* have been understood by Buddhists in Southeast Asia (see Veidlinger 2006: 169–171).

completion. Otherwise, this colophon points to two different things: first, it is indicative of the deep relationship between Sathu Nyai Khamchan and his teacher; second, that through manuscript-making, one will gain merit, which can be dedicated and transmitted to deceased loved ones. Traditionally, sponsoring the production of palm-leaf manuscripts was a frequent and highly meritorious karmic deed in traditional Lao Buddhist society. Grabowsky states that, “For the Thai, Lao and other Tai peoples, “donating a Buddhist manuscript to a monastery was an act of religious devotion, as is evident from the usually belief colophons that mention the scribe, donor and the date of the manuscript’s completion” (Grabowsky 2011: 146). Whoever made or donated a manuscript was acknowledged as a supporter of Buddhism, and the deed was thought to generate good karma.

Moreover, Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly examined all manuscripts in his abode to ensure that they were in good condition, in the right order, and ready to use, e.g. that each bundle was properly wrapped in cloth (Lao: *pha hò nangsiü/khampi*) and resting in its proper place. Whenever he had time, he would study the collection of palm-leaf manuscripts. If some bundles were incomplete or worn-out, he would mend them. This indicates Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a manuscript-maker who did painstaking work, and was also a great sponsor, collector and preserver of manuscripts.

5.4 Other Religious Publications

During the 1980s and 1990s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan published many books on Lao Buddhism with the aim of supporting the study of monks and novices as well as lay people, because he perceived that most Buddhists did not really understand the teachings of Buddhism, especially those teachings regarding Buddhist discipline. This lack of understanding, he found, was due to a lack of accessible information, which led to unintended mistakes regarding monastic discipline and Buddhist doctrine. Traditionally, the Buddhist teachings and the monastic code found in palm-leaf manuscripts were written only in the Tham-Lao script. The limited number of copies produced was not sufficient for the number of people who wanted to study them. Moreover, in the modern era, the number of people able to read the Tham-Lao script decreased. He took great efforts to solve this problem by transliterating the books in Tham-Lao and Thai scripts into Lao versions, and then publishing them and distributing them for free as Dhamma-gifts.

In 1988, he published 3,000 copies of *Vinaya Part I* (ໂຮ່ນພາກ ໑). This book details the 227 precepts for monks and 10 precepts for novices, which are the fundamental rules for monastic communities. In 1990, he published 1,200 copies of *Vinaya Part II* (ໂຮ່ນພາກ ໒), which contains the *abhisamācāra* (higher training in proper conduct) for the study and practice of monks and novices. Among the chapters of this book, he inserted copies of drawings showing examples of proper monastic dress. Furthermore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan

read to his disciples from these two Vinaya books regularly after evening chants during the Buddhist Lent. In 1994, he published 3,000 copies of Ordination process and basic duties of a Bhikkhu (ວິທີອຸປະສົມບົດແລະກິດເບື້ອງຕົ້ນຂອງພິກຂຸ), originally composed in 1941 by Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto and thought to be the first version of the work in Lao script. The Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Luang Prabang gave an order for all abbots in the kingdom to use this book for ordination ceremonies (BAD-02-0492).

In 1996, he published 3,000 copies of *Khihipatibat* (Pali: *gihipatipatti*) ຄືພິປະຕິບັດ (code of morality for the laity). This book contains the code of morality for lay practice in their daily lives, i.e. the six *disā* or directions, the code of morality for a person's conduct towards the people around them. The east stands for parents, the south for teachers, the west for one's spouse and children, and the north for friends - the nadir is for servants and workers, while the zenith is for monks. One acts in all six directions and, thus, experiences in turn the reactions from all six directions.²⁴²

Lay people had been asking Sathu Nyai Khamchan for a copy of his bibliography in book format, which they wanted to have to use as an auspicious object of worship. In 2004, according to these wishes, 3,000 copies of his full biography were published with a rich selection of pictures in four-color print. My contributions included the preparation of the text itself as well as the creation of the graphic design. He then made corrections together with other monks and one layperson. The book was distributed free of charge on the celebration of his 84th birthday as a Dhamma-gift. It is the first biography of a monk to appear in this kind of book format in Laos. Some people put this book on the altar in their house next to other amulets and objects of worship. One anecdote about the book recounts its seemingly magical ability to survive a house fire even after the dwelling had been razed to the ground (see chapter 2). Later in 2006, the second edition was published.

Moreover, in 1974, a short biography of Sathu Nyai Khamchan was published in 1974 in the Lao Buddhist magazine, *Phutthapathip* (BAD-02-0516). The biographies of monks which was published in this magazine were considered as belonging to the prominent monks in Luang Prabang, e.g. the Supreme Patriarch. Of interest is a draft version typed in Thai language, which Achan Kaeo Suksavat, the author of this document, explained was made for submission to the Council of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Bangkok to receive an honorary PhD. The first paragraph of the text says "...biography of Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhun (Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela), Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang province (World Heritage City), Lao People's Democratic Republic, submitted to receive an Honorary Title as Doctor of Buddhist Philosophy from the University of

²⁴² For more information on the six directions, see Phra Brahmaganabhorn, 2015. *Dictionary of Buddhism*, pp. 191–196.

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya.”²⁴³ There were two Lao senior monks whom the committee council of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya were considering at the time, one of them being Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachittha Maha Thela, and the other being Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singharat from Vat That Luang, Vientiane. In 1999, the university council decided to award the honorific title to Pha Achan Maha Vichit Singharat.²⁴⁴ Although he did not win this title, his being considered for the title evidences his prestige at an international level. In 2002, the Sangha and government of Myanmar offered him the official high Buddhist honorary title Agga Maha Saddhamma Jotika Dhaja (for more details, see Chapter 2).

6. Conclusion

Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected various documents and objects from which he hoped coming generations would study and learn. The collection includes photographs, art objects, personal letters, official documents, manuscripts and religious publications, all of which had been concealed for many decades and have now been brought to light, allowing them to become rich treasures of primary information for the study of the history of Lao Buddhism and culture. After his passing, his collection was divided into two main categories, the visual and written documents on the one hand, and art objects on the other. These collections served as the basis of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang and the future museum of Buddhist art at Vat Saen Sukharam. These projects have been carried out through collaborative efforts of the Sangha of Luang Prabang, particularly, Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, the ecclesiastical leader of Luang Prabang province, the Department of the Information and Culture of Luang Prabang province (old name), the National Library of Laos, the British Library’s Endangered Archives Programmes, the German Embassy to Laos, and the Badur Foundation in London. In addition to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, another key figure who co-founded the Buddhist Archives with Sathu Nyai Khamchan and who now still helps maintain them today is Hans Georg Berger.

In my point of view, Hans Georg Berger’s work, which he began in the early 1990s, is a great contribution to the preservation of traditional Lao culture. In collaboration with Sathu

²⁴³ “ประวัติของพระหลักคำวิริวิสุทธิคุณ (คำจันท์ วิริจิตมมหาเถร) วัดแสน สุขาราม แขวงหลวงพระบาง (เมืองมรดกโลก) ประเทศสาธารณรัฐประชาธิปไตยประชาชนลาว เพื่อเสนอเข้ารับพุทธศาสนาคณะผู้บัณฑิตกิตติมศักดิ์ มหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย ในพระบรมราชูปถัมภ์”, See BAD-12-2-XXXX.324.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Achan Kaeo Suksavat at the museum building, Vat Saen Sukharam in September 2010. Achan Kaeo Suksavat was born in Ban Fai village, Pak U district in Luang Prabang province in 1965 had been ordained as a novice and later became a monk for almost period of his life time. After finishing Bachelor from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya he worked for the university as administrative staff for almost twenty years. Between 1979 and 1984, he often visited and looked after Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela who stayed at the Sangha hospital for five years. In 2004, Achan Kaeo moved back to Luang Prabang, disrobed and lives in his native village until the present. The ceremony of awarding the honorific title was held at the University of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, Bangkok, on 9 May 1999. See BAD-02-0254.

Nyai Khamchan, Hans Georg Berger has produced more than 14,000 black and white photographs of ceremonies and festivals in Luang Prabang. Since 1997, he published many books related to Lao Buddhism and culture, also organizing exhibitions of his photographs presenting aspects of Lao culture, both in Laos and abroad. While running the Buddhist Archive of photography and the Museum project, he invited Martin Jürgens, conservationist, and Dr. Wibke Lobo, archeologist, to assist him in his work in Luang Prabang. Since 2011, he has made it possible for the Buddhist Archive of Photography, in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Volker Grabowsky at the Asia-Africa Institute within the University of Hamburg, Germany, to research the collection of documents of Sathu Nyai Khamchan as well as of other abbots. The project is still currently underway. Thanks to Hans Georg Berger's great efforts and meaningful contributions, the Buddhist Archives in Luang Prabang preserve and display the photographs and documents from 19 different monasteries in Luang Prabang, with new monasteries being added into the archives on a continual basis.

Thanks to the collaboration and assistance mentioned above, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's collection has been preserved and catalogued, not only in hard copy form but also as digital copies as well. The art objects are currently being inspected and prepared for display in the Museum of Buddhist Art at Vat Saen Sukharam, which will be one of the most important museums for Buddhist art in the country displaying objects that represent Lao cultural heritage. The originals of the visual and written documents are kept safe in the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang, while still being made available for study and research in digital format to both Lao and international scholars. The digital images of 33,933 photographs are available online via EAP's online programme.

Hans Georg Berger also noted that there is no other town in Buddhist Southeast Asia in which a similar collection has been established (Berger 2015: 97). This is a great contribution to the study of the history of Lao Buddhism via valuable primary sources. Choron-Baix states that the discovery of thousands of photographs hidden away from public view for decades by Buddhist monks in Luang Prabang provides valuable insight into the interest of the Lao people and Lao monks in the medium of photography (Choron-Baix 2015: 149). After the Lao revolution, the documents in the national archives were destroyed. Even the National Library of Laos does not have such sources in its possession.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan is regarded as one of the great donors in Laos who published religious books in large quantities and distributed them for free as Dhamma-gifts. The publishing of Dhamma and Vinaya books in Lao is popular these days, as modern printing techniques can also be used for Buddhist purposes of text creation, differing, of course, from manuscripts in that multiple copies can be produced very rapidly. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's publications were a turning point for the study of Buddhist teaching studies in Luang Prabang, as formerly the Buddhist teachings contained in manuscripts were only available to master

monks with access to manuscripts in the monastery. Now, however, young monks, novices and lay people can easily access the Buddhist teachings in the publications and therefore learn anywhere and anytime, just as Sathu Nyai Khamchan himself always strived to do. Moreover, in the books published by him, a Pali phrase concerning this free distribution is often found: “*Sabbadānaṃ Dhammadānaṃ jināti*” (the gift of truth exceeds all gifts). This Buddhist proverb has a very strong effect not only on him but also on other Buddhists, and the practice of free distribution of the Buddhist teachings is popular in the Buddhist countries.

7. Illustrations and Captions



Illustration No. 4.1. Sathu Nyai Khamchan giving instructions to his disciples in his abode in which he regularly practiced meditation and other tactics of mindfulness. He displayed the photographs on the walls as his own sort of exhibition. Photo taken by Sathu Ounkham Akkhapano in March 2007.



Illustration No. 4.2. Pha Phutthaviramahamuni Buddha in the style of Chiang Saen Sing I. It was donated to Vat Saen Sukharam by Sathu Nyai Khamchan on his 60th birthday in 1980. The inscription on the pedestal of the statue is inlaid in Tham-Lao script, with the text reading as follows: ພະພຸດທະວິຣະມະຫາມຸນີ ພະຫລັກຄຳ ວິຣະວິສຸດທິຄຸນ (ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະເຖລະ) ເຈົ້າວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ປະທານຄະນະແຂວງຫຼວງພະບາງ ສ້າງນ້ອມເປັນພຸດທະບູຊາເມື່ອຄົບຮອບວັນເກີດ ອາຍຸ ໖໐ ປີ ປີກິດສິນ ວັນພະຫັດ ຂຶ້ນ ໑໐ ຄ່ຳ ເດືອນ ໑໑ ພຸດທະສັງກາດ ໒໕໒໖ ນິບພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕຸ. [Pha Phutthaviramahamuni Buddha was built by Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhun (Khamchan Virachittathera), abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, head of the Sanhga of Luang Prabang province, to worship the Buddha, on the occasion of his 60th birthday in the Year of *kot san* (the Monkey), on Thursday, the tenth day of the waxing moon in the eleventh month of Buddhist Era 2523 (19 October 1980). May this be a support for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna* (*nibbāna paccayo hotu*)] (Museum No. VSS_001432).



Illustration No. 4.3. Sathu Nyai Khamchan ordered for a statue of himself to be built in 1995 and installed in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam. The inscription on the pedestal of the statue is in Lao script and reads: ພະຫຼັກຄຳ ວິຣະວິສຸດທິຄຸນ (ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດໂຕ) ວັດແສນ ສຸຂາຣາມ ຫຼວງພະບາງ ເກີດວັນທີ 23 ກັນຍາ ພ.ສ.2463 ບວດວັນທີ 9 ມິຖຸນາ ພ.ສ. 2484. [Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhun (Khamchan Virachitto), Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, was born on 23 September BE 2463 (AD 1920), and ordained as a monk on 9 June BE 2484 (AD 1941)] (Museum No. VSS_001914).



Illustration No. 4.4. Sathu Nyai Khamchan preserved and protected this elaborate Hò Thammat, which once belonged to the palace of Luang Prabang, by building a Sala Hongtham to house this special architectural object (Museum No. VSS_001678).

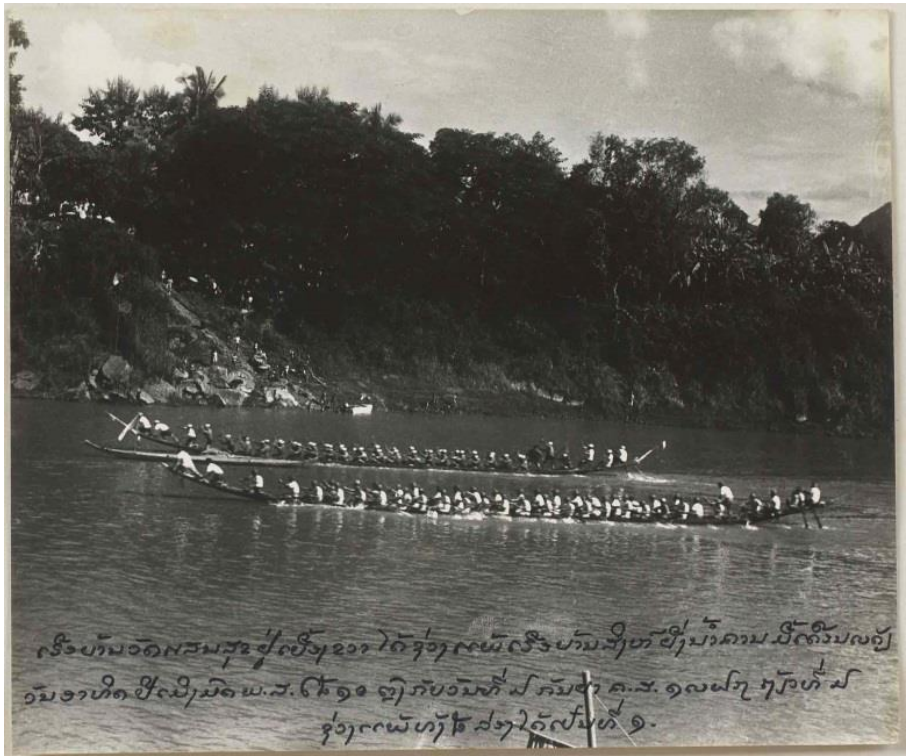


Illustration No. 4.5. The annotation on the photograph reads: ເຮືອບ້ານວັດແສນສຸກ ຢູ່ເບື້ອງຂວາ ໄດ້ຊ່ວງກັບແພ່ເຮືອບ້ານສິງ ຢິ່ງນ້ຳຄານ ມີ້ເດືອນ 9 ດັບ ວັນອາທິດ ປີເມິງມິດ ພ.ສ. 2510 ກົງກັບວັນທີ 3 ກັນຍາ ຄ.ສ. 1967 ຖ້ວງທີ່ 3 ຊ່ວງແພ່ທັງ 5 ລ່ອງ ໄດ້ເປັນທີ່ 1. [The racing boat of Ban Vat Saen is on the right side. It is ahead of its competitor, the racing boat of Ban Sing, in the third round on the Khan River, on Sunday, the fourteenth day of the waning moon in the ninth month of BE 2510, in the Year of *moeng mot* (the Goat), corresponding to 3 September 1967. The boat won a total of five rounds and was awarded first prize (Buddhist Archive No. B0006R).



Illustration No. 4.6. The annotation under the photograph says: ສົມເດັດພະເຈົ້າມະຫາຊີວິດ ພະລາດຊະທານຂັນລາງວັນທີ່ 1 ໃຫ້ເຮືອຊ່ວງວັດແສນ ມີ້ເດືອນ 9 ດັບ ປີເມັງມິດ ພ.ສ. 2510 ວັນທີ 3 ກັນຍາ ຄ.ສ. 1967. [The Royal King [Sisavang Vatthana] hands over the trophy for first prize to the racing boat of Vat Saen on the fourteenth day of the waning moon in the ninth month of BE 2510, in the Year of *moeng mot* [the Goat], corresponding to 3 September 1967] (Buddhist Archive No. B4767R).

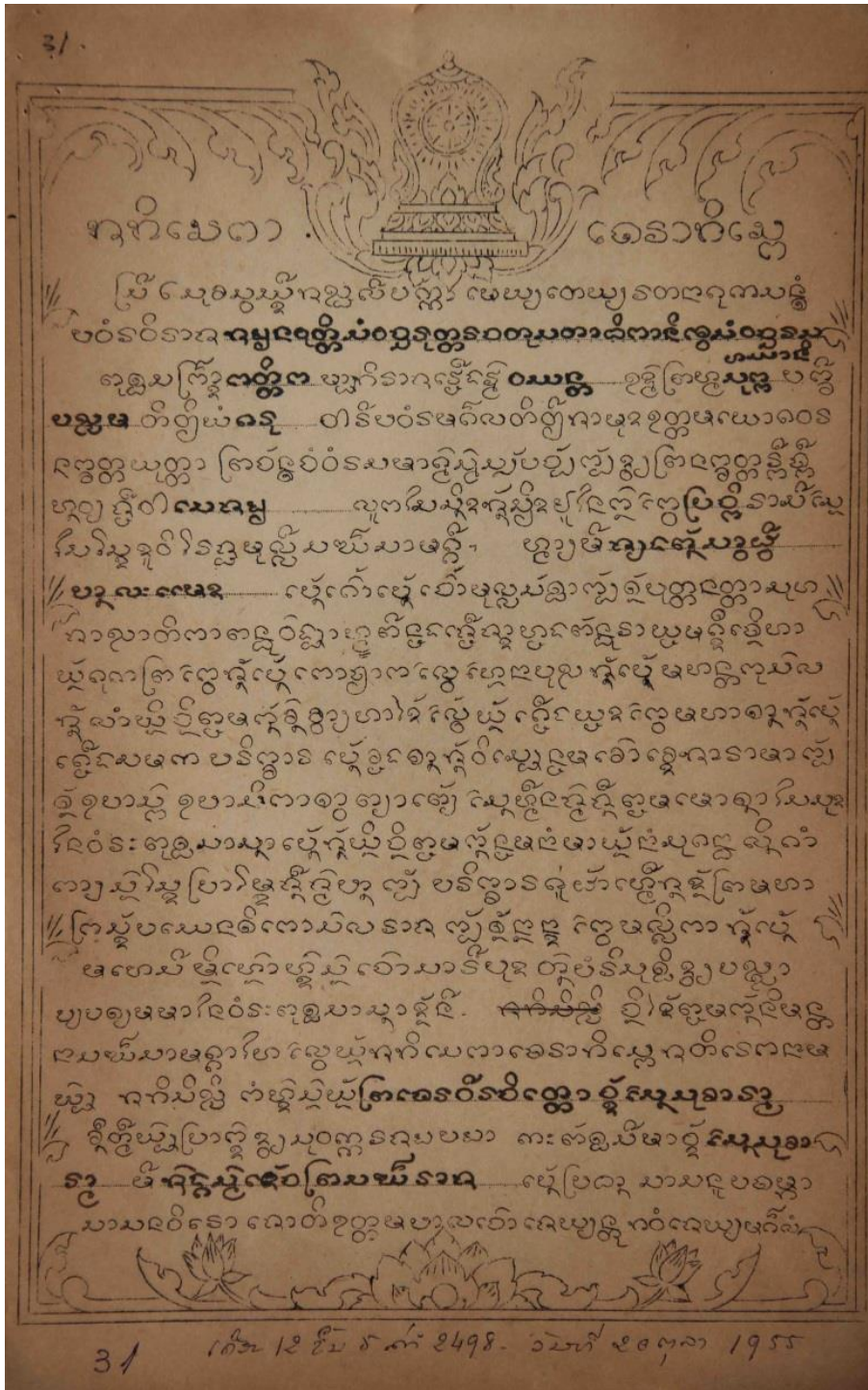


Illustration No. 4.7. An example of an original *thelaphisek* certificate of Sathu Nyai Khamchan with formal structure in Tham-Lao script. In the last line, Sathu Nyai Khamchan added the certificate number, the time and date to these certificates. Here we see: 31. ເດືອນ 12 ຂຶ້ນ 5 ຄ່ຳ 2498. ວັນທີ 20 ຕຸລາ 1955. [Number 31, on the fifth day of the waxing moon in the twelve month of BE 2498. On 20 October 1955]. (BAD-12-3-1955.005). The 31 means this was his 31st *thelaphisek* ceremony.



Illustration No. 4.8. Two copies of the Pātimokkha manuscript compiled by Sathu Nyai Khamchan together with the elaborate wooden box for keeping the manuscripts and a copy of the Pātimokkha. The golden inscription under the lid of the box is in Tham-Lao script, and it reads: ພຸດທະສັກກະລາດ 2499 ປີ ວອກ (ຮວາຍສັນ) ເດືອນ 11 ຂຶ້ນ 10 ຄ່ຳ ວັນອາທິດ ພະຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະເຖລະ ເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງໄດ້ສ້າງພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ ໃນຄາວອາຍຸຄົບປີ ເກີດ 3 ຮອບ 36 ປີ ເພື່ອທິດກຸສົນເຖິງສາທຸໂຫຍ່ແກ່ນຈັນ ກັດຈາຍະນະມະຫາເຖລະ ທີ່ເຖິງແກ່ມໍຣະນະພາບຮອບປີທີ່ 13 ນິບພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕຸ ໂນ. [On Sunday, the tenth day of the waxing moon in the eleventh month of BE 2499, the Year of the Monkey (*huai san*) (14 October 1956), Pha Khamchan Virachitta Thela, the ecclesiastical provincial governor [of Luang Prabang], produced the Pātimokkha manuscript for his third life cycle on his 36th birthday in order to dedicate the merit gained therefrom to Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, who had passed away 13 years prior. May this be a support to us for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna* (*nibbāna paccayo hotu no*). The text on the box says ພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ Bhikkhu Pātimokkha. (Museum No. VSS_0011847).

Chapter 5

Socio-religious Roles

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explore two major aspects of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work: his administrative role in the Lao Sangha as abbot and ecclesiastical provincial governor, as well as his travels domestically and abroad, both as a representative of the Lao Sangha and as a private visitor.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan succeeded his master, Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela, who passed away in 1943, as the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam from 1944 to 2007. He served two periods as the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province, first from 1953 to 1966, and then again from 1976 to 2007. In 1964, the Sangha of Luang Prabang was affected by political powers which led to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's decision to resign from the position of the ecclesiastical provincial governor. However, the Sangha of the province voted in 1976 for Sathu Nyai Khamchan to be their leader. The fact that he held this position for thirty-two years, reflects both his general popularity and the Sangha's respect for him.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's religious and social roles are reflected in his travels as representative of the Lao Sangha for various purposes both inside and outside of Laos. He often traveled alone, but was sometimes accompanied by other monks to represent the Lao Sangha in Buddhist celebrations and during visits to other Buddhist countries. These travels reflected his crucial role in the Sangha organization. The most significant journeys of the Lao Sangha were: for the Sixth Great Buddhist Council in Rangoon, Burma, the celebration of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in 1956, official visits to Thailand in 1967 and the Soviet Union in 1969, and the visit of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos to the Vatican in Rome in 1973. This last journey is regarded as the first time that the Supreme Patriarch, the head or leader of Lao Buddhism, met the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church. Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela met Pope Paul VI at the Vatican on 8 June 1973.²⁴⁵ During their meeting, they exchanged their messages in a most friendly atmosphere

²⁴⁵ The pamphlet with images published in Lao and Italian, is entitled “ທີ່ລະລຶກໃນການເຂົ້າພົບ ສົມເດັດພະສັນຕະປາປາ ປະມຸກແຫ່ງພະຄິດຕະຈັກສາກິນ ຂອງສົມເດັດພະສັງຄະລາດແຫ່ງພະລາຊະອານາຈັກລາວ” [Commemoration of a Meeting between the Pope, the head of the Universal Catholic Church, and the Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Laos] (BAD-05-0030).

(Buddhist Archive No. H0884R). The their speeches indicated a genuine interest in a good understanding of both religions and the spirit of Lao Buddhism and Christianity.²⁴⁶

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's pilgrimages to the Buddhist places in India and in other Buddhist countries reflected to his reverence and respect for the Buddha; and they could also reflect to his sense of duty for his monastic position. In going on these pilgrimages, it seems Sathu Nyai Khamchan was following the advice of the Buddha giving before his passing. The Buddha's words handed down in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta state: "And whosoever, Ananda, should die on such a pilgrimage, with his heart established in faith, after death and decomposition of the body, shall be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness" (Khoon San 2001: 15).²⁴⁷ In Khoon San's interesting work, "Buddhist Pilgrimage" he also states that:

The Buddha advised pious disciples to visit four places that may be for their inspiration after he was gone. They are Lumbini in Nepal, where he was born; Bodhi Gaya, where he attained supreme enlightenment; Deer Park in Sarnath, where he preached the first sermon; and Kusinara, where he passed into *mahaparinibbāna*. The pious disciple should visit these places and look upon them with feelings of reverence, reflecting on the particular event of the Buddha's life connected with each place.

(2001: 1)

During the period of King Aśoka (BC 304–232), the Buddhist emperor of the Maurya Dynasty, the king officially supported "the dispatch of missions which established Buddhism over a far wider area, within the Indian subcontinent and beyond. It was Elder Tissa Moggaliputta who sent out nine missions to 'border areas' in BC 250" (Seneviratna 1994: 10). Thereafter, relics of the Buddha were distributed to these other regions by his disciples and enshrined in stupas or pagodas. Today, these borders regions are now Buddhist countries, and the places where the relics are enshrined are now popular destinations for Buddhist travelers. Sathu Nyai Khamchan made great efforts to take pilgrimages to Buddhist sites in all of these countries (Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma,) as well as in India.

²⁴⁶ The historical visit of the Supreme Patriarch Laos to the Pope of Roman Catholic Church in Rome was published in a pamphlet with images published in Lao and Italian, entitled "ທີ່ລະລຶກໃນການເຂົ້າພົບ ສົມເດັດພະສັນຕະປາປາ ປະມຸກແຫ່ງພະຄິດຕະຈັກສາກິນ ຂອງສົມເດັດພະສັງຄະລາດແຫ່ງພະລາຊະອານາຈັກລາວ" [Commemoration of a Meeting between the Pope, the head of the Universal Catholic Church, and the Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Laos]. The conclusion of their speeches says:

ເປັນໂອກາດອັນປະເສີດຂອງເຮົາທັງສອງ ທີ່ໄດ້ພົບກັນ ຈຶ່ງຄວນຈະໃຫ້ເປັນຄວາມຫວັງ ຢ່າງແນ່ນອນວ່າ ສາສະໜະໄມຕິລະຫວ່າງ ຄິດຕະສາສະໜາ ແລະ ພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ ຈະພົ້ນແກ່ນແໜ້ນໜາ ແລະຈະເລີນຮຸ່ງເຮືອງຢື່ງໆ ຂຶ້ນໄປ. ສົມເດັດພະສັງຄະລາດ. [[It] is the auspicious occasion of both of us that have a meet. It should be certainly a hope that religious relations between Christianity and Buddhism will be permanent and prosperous forever. Somdet Pha Sangkhalat (the Supreme Patriarch)].

ຂໍໃຫ້ການເຈລະຈາຢ່າງມິດສະຫາຍ ແລະການຮ່ວມມືຢ່າງສະນິດແໜ້ນ ຈຶ່ງມີໃນລະຫວ່າງພຸດທະບໍລິສັດ ກັບຄິດຕະຈັກສາກິນຢື່ງ ໆ ຂຶ້ນຕະຫຼອດໄປເຖິດ. ສົມເດັດພະສັນຕະປາປາ. [May our friendly conversation and closely cooperation have between Buddhists and Universal Christians prosperously and forever. Somdet Pha Santapapa (the Pope)]. (BAD-05-0030).

²⁴⁷ See also พระวิเทศโพธิคุณ (ว.ป. วีระยุทธโพธิ์) Pha Vithetphothikhun (V.P. Virayuttho) 2544, (2001). *สู่แดนพระพุทธองค์ (อินเดีย-เนปาล)* [To the Buddha's Land (India-Nepal)], 1. ธรรมสภาและสถาบันบันลือธรรม หน้าแรก Buddhist Council and Institute of Banlūtham.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan also traveled to western countries to visit diasporic Lao Buddhists living there. During and after the Lao revolution in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Lao people fled the country, due to both political and personal reasons. Evans examines the countries, where the Lao refugees left for, he states that:

The destinations of the refugees who left Laos during and after 1975 were the advanced capitalist countries of the world: the US, France, Australia, Sweden, New Zealand and so on. [...] In general, the former elite headed for France, while many members of the army, officers and soldiers alike, went to the USA. [...] Ultimately, close to 50,000 went to France and 225,000 to the USA. Smaller refugees populations in Australia and New Zealand tended to be drawn from the ranks of ordinary Lao. Approximately two-thirds of those who left were lowland Lao [or Lao Lum], the others from upland groups.

(2002: 231–232)

Traditionally, the Lao people maintain close ties to their families and monasteries, and are strict adherents to Buddhism. Thus, when they live in non-Buddhist environments far away from their homeland, it is natural for them to miss their families and the monasteries and festivals where they used to make merit on a regular basis. Among these Lao diaspora were relatives of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and people from the communities surrounding Vat Saen Sukharam. This group, in particular, sent hundreds of letters to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam. They mostly concerned individual matters, such as asking Sathu Nyai Khamchan about his physical health, telling him about the condition of their lives, and asking him to deliver news to their relatives in Laos. Some even sent him money to support the construction of monastic buildings which he had organized. This indicates Sathu Nyai Khamchan's religious and social role as a spiritual figure for Buddhists in Luang Prabang. He traveled to the west between 1982 to 2006 in an attempt to maintain relationships with those who had left Laos and promote the continued practice of Lao tradition and Buddhism.

2. As Abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam

According to the rules in the Vinaya, a monk must be in the monkhood for at least five years in order to be eligible for the position of abbot. A monk with less than five years in the Sangha is considered a *navaka bhikkhu* (newly ordained monk), who must remain under the supervision of a senior monk. According to the Royal Ordinance of Luang Prabang of 1928, an abbot must be elected by the monks and novices of the monastery together with the village headman (Lao: *nai ban*) and senior members of their respective monastery communities.²⁴⁸ The abbot is not only the leader of the monastic community, as he acts also as an advisor and spiritual figure to laypeople in the surrounding communities. Since the monastery has served (and still does serve) as the center of the village, and in many cases there is a lack of

²⁴⁸ Royal Ordinance of King Sisavang Vong in 1928 (BAD-02-0044).

experienced senior monks, it often occurs that monks with less than five years experience as a monk are appointed as abbots so that the monastery and its surrounding communities will not be without an abbot. The role of an abbot as community leader is particularly clear in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's case. In 1944, he relocated from Vat Si Phutthabat to Vat Saen Sukharam at the invitation of monks and lay people of Vat Saen Sukharam. At the time, he had been in the monkhood only two years, but due to the reasons listed above, he was chosen to serve as an acting abbot, which he did until 1949, when he received his appointment by the Sangha.²⁴⁹

A census list of monks and novices living in Vat Saen Sukharam and other monasteries in the Tasaeng Nüa sub-district (the peninsular area of Luang Prabang), which had been recorded from 1943 to 1950 provides interesting information about the monks and novices (BAD-12-2-1943.003). This census not only lists the names of the monks and novices, their age at ordination, their duration of stay in the monkhood and their villages of origin, but also provide data on their family and social background. In 1944, the year Sathu Nyai Khamchan became acting abbot, there were six monks and ten novices living in Vat Saen Sukharam. Interest is they came not only from Luang Prabang but also from other parts of Laos. For example, a monk called Sathu Say came from Savannakhet, the novice Phò Si hailed from Vientiane and the novice Humpheng came from Pak Tha district in northern Laos. According to the census of 1953 – at which time Sathu Nyai Khamchan served as the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province – there were twenty-two residents at Vat Saen Sukharam (seven monks and fifteen novices, among them four novices from Phongsali, the northernmost Lao province) (BAD-12-2-1953.088).

The census of 2003, however, provides more detailed information than its predecessors, as the ethnicities of residents and the number of households and population of the two communities surrounding Vat Saen Sukharam are also recorded. There were thirty-two residents living in Vat Saen Sukharam (nine monks and twenty-three novices), some of whom came from the northern provinces of Laos, i.e. Luang Namtha, Udomxay, Phongsali, Bòkeo and Xiang Khouang. Their ethnicities were lowland Lao (Lao Lum), Phuan (from Xiang Khouang), Lü (from Udomxay and Luang Prabang), Phu Nòi (from Phongsali), and highland Lao (Lao Sung). Ban Phon Hüang village had 104 households and 546 people, and Ban Vat Saen village had 36 households and 383 people (BAD-12-2-2003.040). From these censuses, we see that the numbers of residents of Vat Saen increased over time, meaning that Sathu Nyai Khamchan accepted more novices to stay at his monastery. Some of the monks and novices who lived in Vat Saen Sukharam came with their fathers and teachers to meet Sathu Nyai Khamchan and asked him to receive them as his disciples, while others Sathu Nyai Khamchan invited himself after meeting them during his travels or at festivals in which he

²⁴⁹ He was appointed on 14 January 1949 (Khamvone et al. 2004: 39).

took part. The novices he invited were considered to be extraordinarily clever boys who were especially skilled in preaching the Jātakas or writing palm-leaf manuscripts.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan regularly taught his disciples the monastic rules, inspired them in their studies of both religious and worldly subjects, and provided them with the necessities for living and studying. Nevertheless, if anybody broke the monastic rules he would adjudicate him forthright. From time to time, he distributed to his disciples robes, notebooks, pens, toothpastes, toothbrushes, and washing powders that were offered to him by laypeople during the ceremonies. Using perfume or fragrant soaps and smoking cigarettes was not allowed – if he caught any novices doing these things, he rebuked them. Everybody had to follow the ten articles of the *kitchavat* (monastic routines). He particularly emphasized *wai pha sut mon* (daily chanting at 4:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.), *binthabat* (collecting alms in the morning), dressing in the proper manner, and the study of the Dhamma. A young monk or novice who wanted to go out of the monastery without disrobing had to ask for his permission in person and explain to him where he wanted to go and for what reasons. If permission was not granted, they had to remain at the monastery. This practice is in accordance with the rules of the Vinaya. Moreover, Sathu Nyai Khamchan emphasized the rule that monks and novices must fasten their sashes at their chests – not around their stomachs or waists – and that the ends of both the under robe and cover robe must fall to the same level at the middle of the shins.

The *sim* and the main *sala*, where the rituals and ceremonies take place, are regarded as sacred places, and monks or novices not wearing their cover robe are prohibited from entering as to do so would be considered disrespectful. To promote moderation in eating, Sathu Nyai Khamchan prescribed a maximum of two meals a day, with breakfast lasting from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. and lunch from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Any meals in excess of this he considered in conflict with the Vinaya. He made a great effort to train his disciples to follow the monastic rules and be attentive in their studies, also instruct them to learn the Suttas by heart. When attending ceremonies, they had to chant the Suttas without reading from the Sutta books.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan often explained that to enter the monkhood means becoming the Buddha's disciple and following the Buddha's path; therefore, it is essential to study and learn the Buddha's teachings and practices. The novices spent their time after the evening chants memorizing various Suttas and Buddhist teachings, sitting in a circle in the *sim* while learning the Suttas so that Sathu Nyai could hear them and gauge their progress. Moreover, when he recognized in some novices the capability to chant the Jātakas used in the Vessantara festivals, he would train them until they were proficiently able to do so during such festivals. At the time of Nyai Khamchan, it was well-known by Buddhists that many novices in Vat Saen Sukharam were able to chant these Jātakas from memory, a quite impressive feat for a relatively inexperienced member of the monkhood.

Among the interesting documents found in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's collection are the so-called *bai patiyān ton* (oaths of allegiance) that novices wrote to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, in which they expressed their gratitude to him and swore to follow and uphold his teachings. These documents reflect the strict but caring manner of his tutelage. Exemplary for these oaths is the *bai patiyān ton* by Novice Vilakone in 1986. The text says:

ຂໍນອບນ້ອມນະມັດສະການ ແຕ່ອົງບິດາຈານ ທີ່ບູຊາເຄົາລົບນັບຖືຢ່າງສູງສຸດ ຂະນ້ອຍ ສາມະເນນວິລະກອນ ຈະຂໍປະຕິຍານຕິນ ແຕ່ສາທຸໂຫຍ່ທີ່ໂຄລົບ ຕັ້ງແຕ່ນີ້ເປັນຕົ້ນໄປ ຂະນ້ອຍຈະຂໍປ່ຽນຈິດປ່ຽນໃຈໃໝ່ ບໍ່ດີ້ດ້ານ ແລະຈະຕັ້ງໜ້າຟັງຄຳສັ່ງສອນຂອງສາທຸໂຫຍ່. ຂະນ້ອຍໄດ້ມາເຝິງພາອາໄສເພິ່ນ ຢູ່ວັດນີ້ກໍ່ເປັນເວລາດົນແລ້ວ ສະນັ້ນ ຂະນ້ອຍບໍ່ມີໜ້າຈະຕອບບຸນແທນຄຸນເພິ່ນ ມີແຕ່ຈະຕັ້ງໜ້າຮ້າຮຽນພະສູດແລະພະທຳ ປະຕິບັດລະບຽບວິໄນ ອຸປັດຊາຍະວັດ, ອາຈະຮິຍະວັດ ສັງລວມສິນ ສິກຂາບົດ ບໍ່ເຫັນແກ່ຄວາມຂີ້ຄ້ານ ມັກງ່າຍ ບໍ່ເອື້ອຍອີງໃຫ້ແກ່ຜູ້ອື່ນ ວຽກມັນຈະສຳເລັດໄດ້ ມັນກໍ່ບໍ່ນອກເໜືອຄວາມສາມາດຂອງຄົນເຮົາ. ຖ້າປະຕິບັດບໍ່ໄດ້ຕາມທີ່ກ່າວມາຂ້າງເທິງນີ້ ຂະນ້ອຍຂໍສາບານນຳສາທຸໂຫຍ່ ກຳຕ້ອງສະໜອງກຳໃຫ້ເຫັນທັນຕາໂລດ ຈະຕັ້ງໜ້າປະຕິບັດທຸກປະການ ເພື່ອອຸ້ມອຸຊຸພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາໃຫ້ຍິນຍົງຄົງຕົວ ຕາບເທົ່າ 5000 ວັດສາ ແຕ່ຂໍນ້ອຍເຫຼິ້ນ ນະມັດສະການມາ ດ້ວຍຄວາມເຄົາລົບນັບຖືບູຊາຢ່າງສູງສຸດ ວັນທີ 18 ເດືອນ 11 ປີ 1986.

I present this in respectful veneration for the highest worship to my honorary father and teacher. I, Novice Vilakone, pledge my allegiance to [you], Sathu Nyai, that from now on, I will cleanse my mind, cease my naughtiness, and intently follow your instructions. I have relied on you and lived in this monastery for a long time. As such, I have no way to repay, however I will dedicate myself to the study of the Suttas and the Dhamma. [I] follow my duties in serving you as my preceptor and teacher. [I] will be mindful of my precepts and other virtues. [I] will not be lazy, negligent or dependent on others. [I think] the work will be finished and it will not be beyond our ability. I swear to you that if I cannot do that which I have stated above, then the result of my bad *action* will have an effect on me immediately. [I] will do my best to uphold all of these matters, in order to support the existence of Buddhism until its 5,000th year. Sincerely and best regards. Date: 18 November 1986.

(BAD-12-2-1986.016)

This document reflects Sathu Nyai Khamchan's methods of monastic administration, stipulating that a novice should follow his abbot's instructions and fulfill his duty to serve him of his own volition. This concept corresponds to the Buddhist proverb "*Attanā codayattānam* - By oneself one must admonish oneself" (Brahmagunabhorn 2013: 17). The best instruction is to teach a person to admonish himself. If any novice repeatedly ignored Sathu Nyai Khamchan's instructions, he would have them write one of these *bai patiyān ton*, in order that they may admonish themselves and be motivated to follow the teachings.

When his disciples graduated from the Buddhist school in Luang Prabang, Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent them to continue their studies at higher levels in Vientiane, Thailand and India. From the 1950s until 2007, Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent his disciples to study abroad, particularly in Thailand and India. The monasteries in Thailand where Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent his disciples to stay were Vat Maha That Yuwarat Rangsarit and Vat Saket Ratchavòramahavihan, both in Bangkok. He was good friends with the abbot of Vat Maha That, Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Aat Asapha Maha Thera, formerly Phra Phimonlatham) who was also known as Somdet Aat. A photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan handing over a monk-fan made in Lao style to Phra Phimonlatham at Vat Maha That on 29 December 1969

as a token of respect (Illustration No. 5.1). In the 1950s to the 1960s, he sent multiple generations of his disciples there for additional study, two of those students being Sathu Thongsuk Suchinno and Sathu Maha Bunpheng Virathammo, the latter of whom pursued his Master's degree at Magadh University in India in 1975 after completing his Bachelor's (Khamvone 2014: 6–7). He also was on good terms with the abbot of Vat Saket, Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Kiao Upaseno), who was also known as Somdet Kiao. During the 2000s, he sent disciples such as Sathu Khampom Piyasilao (Khampom Phongsavan) and Sathu Somsay to stay at the monastery. In 2003, Somdet Phra Phutthachan led the robe-offering ceremony (Lao: *kathin*) at Vat Saen Sukharam (see Chapter 3). Both Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Aat Asapha Maha Thera) and Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Kiao Upaseno) served at one time as the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, which represents how Sathu Nyai Khamchan was able to establish connections with important figures of the Thai Sangha.

3. As the Ecclesiastical Provincial governor of Luang Prabang

Sathu Nyai Khamchan served as the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province two times, once before and once after the revolution. He was appointed as *chao khana khuang* (ecclesiastical provincial governor) in 1953 and resigned in 1966, later serving a second term, appointed as *pathan ò phò sò khuang* (chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization at the provincial level) from 1976 and until his death in 2007 (see Chapter 2). The Sangha administration of Luang Prabang between the 1950s and 1975 oversaw the northern provinces of Laos covering Luang Namtha, Bòkæo, Udomxay, Phongsali, Xam Nüa, Nan, and Kasi. Some of them are today independent provinces, while others have been integrated into other provinces such as Müang Nan, now a part of Xaiyabuli, and Kasi, now part of Vientiane province. The monastic organization of the Sangha of Luang Prabang province consisted of Khuang (province), Müang (districts), Tasaeng (sub-districts), and Vat (monasteries), and was under the supervision and control of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, acting in collaboration with the Department of Religious Affairs of Luang Prabang province (Lao: *hòngkan thammakan*). Accordingly, the Sangha hierarchy starts from the *chao khana müang* (head of the district), below whom is the *chao khana tasaeng* (ecclesiastical sub-district head), to whom the *chao athikan vat* (abbot) must then answer.

As the ecclesiastical provincial governor, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was responsible for tasks such as the compilation of annual census data for monks and novices from the abbots in the province for submission to relevant ministries, as well as the appointment of a *chao khana müang*. He also signed documents approving Buddhist ceremonies, such as permission documents for ordination, disordination and *thelaphisek* ceremonies. He also issued documents to monks and novices that enabled them to travel throughout the country. He made

great efforts to support the construction and renovation of monastic buildings by organizing Buddhist festivals such as Vessantara festivals and *kathin* ceremonies in order to raise money in the form of donations from lay people. For example, on 1 November 1953, he organized a *kathin* ceremony for fund raising, which was held at Vat Tao Hai (monastery of the potters' community) located on the right side of the Khan River (BAD-12-2-1953.067). Vat Tao Hai had been formerly the seat of the Supreme Patriarch of Luang Prabang, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thongchan Thammathara Maha Thela, who passed away in 1936 and was succeeded by Somdet Pha Sanghakhalat Thammayana Maha Thela (Bunthan Buppharat) from Vat Lòngkhun. The procession of the *kathin* ceremony from Vat Saen Sukharam to Vat Tao Hai was made by boats via the Khan River during a time when the water level was quite high (Buddhist Archive No. B3721R and B3733R). Sathu Nyai Khamchan traveled often to the regions in northern Laos, which were under the authority of Luang Prabang province, in order to visit monasteries and the locals, and to set up Buddhist schools. Sometimes, he was accompanied by Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela or by other monks. These travels enabled him to become so familiar with the localities in the region of northern Laos that he was able to speak the vernacular of other ethnic groups, e.g. Lü.

As hinted at above, Sathu Nyai Khamchan spent much time making sure that Buddhist education was improved under his administration. In 1953, the Sangha of Luang Prabang, in collaboration with the Department of Religious Affairs of Luang Prabang, organized the creation of monastic schools at the monasteries in Luang Prabang, because the public schools did not have enough space for the ever-increasing number of pupils. The laterals of the monastic buildings served as temporary classrooms. Monks who had completed the third tier of Pali studies (Lao: *panyok sam*) were the teachers, while novices and boys from the communities were the pupils. The monasteries in the town, i.e. Vat Hua Xiang, Vat Mahathat, Vat Nong, Vat Xiang Muan, Vat Visun, Vat Aham and Vat Aphay, housed these provisional schools.²⁵⁰ On 16 October 1953, Sathu Nyai Khamchan organized a meeting at Vat Saen Sukharam attended by seven senior monks, one from each of the monasteries in the town, in order to discuss the current state of Buddhist education. The meeting resulted in the establishment of a learned group of monks who were then sent to teach at the public schools in the province. The monks were also instructed to monitor the behavior of the student novices in Pali schools (BAD-12-2-1953.023).

On 20 December 1957, the Ministry of Religious Affairs issued regulations (Lao: *kot kasuang thammakan*) entitled “Regulations from the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding Curriculum Creation for the Phapariyattitham Schools in the Kingdom of Laos”.²⁵¹ Based on

²⁵⁰ See BAD-12-2-1953.004, BAD-12-2-1953.006 and BAD-12-2-1953.010.

²⁵¹ ກົດກະຊວງທຳມະການ ວ່າດ້ວຍການແຕ່ງຕັ້ງແລະວາງໜັກສູດການຮຽນ ຂອງໂຮງຮຽນພະປະລິຍັດຕິທຳ ແຫ່ງພະລາຊະອານາຈັກລາວ (BAD-02-0247).

these regulations, Phapariyattitham schools (or Pariyattitham schools, also known as Pali schools, and sometime) were established in various districts of Luang Prabang province. The two senior monks who were the key figures in establishing and organizing these Buddhist schools were Sathu Nyai Khamchan, as president, and Sathu Bunchan Punyasaro (Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitta Maha Thela) (Kongdeuane et al. 2012) as director of the Pali school in Luang Prabang province. According to the director's report, (BAD-12-2-1958.076), there were twelve other Pali schools established in four rural districts (*müang*), those being Müang Xiang Ngoen, Müang Hun, Müang Xay (present Udomxay), and Müang Pak Tha, which were the first Pali schools of this kind in that area. The Buddhist schools in Hun district were managed by Sathu Onta Santapanyo (Sathu Nyai Onta Santapanya Maha Thela) under the supervision of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, who was at the time the head of the district of Hun district (BAD-12-2-1955.087). Later, in 1965, Sathu Onta Santapanyo moved to Vat Manorom where he, as the abbot, rebuilt the *sim* and created a Buddhist primary school for young novices (One Keo and Khamvone 2010: 94).

The Pali schools were located in the following locations: Vat Xiang Ngoen, Vat Phosi Rattanaram and Vat Phon Hin in Müang Xiang Ngoen; Vat Na Hong in Pak Tha district; Vat Xaysi, Vat Xaekham, Vat Müang Aay and Vat Sophita Vithayaram in Xay district; and Vat Phon Kaeo, Vat Setuphon, Vat Sisattanak, Vat Ta Nam Baeng and Vat Bua Thòng in Hun district.²⁵² In Luang Prabang, there are Buddhist schools were established at Vat Si Phutthabat and Vat Lòngxhun. The school at Vat Si Phutthabat has served as provincial governor the central institute for religious education in northern Laos up until the present. The monks and novices teaching at these Pali schools were sent from Luang Prabang to teach a total of 1,637 students in the entire province. The regulations of the Ministry of Religious Affairs divided the education system of Phapariyattitham schools into three main levels, namely *pathom* (primary), *matthayom* (secondary) and *udom* (higher). The *pathom* level consists of the *pathom tri*, *pathom tho* and *pathom ek* classes, with students having to study for a total of three years. Note that, before enrolling in the *pathom* level, students must study one year of preparatory courses. The *matthayom* level is broken down into the *matthayom tri*, *matthayom tho* and *matthayom ek* classes, which also takes three years to complete. The *udom* level consists of the *udom tri*, *udom tho* and *udom ek* classes, and takes three years as well. Before enrolling at the *udom* level, students must study one year of coursework to prepare for the *udom* level (BAD-02-0247: 5–6).

In 1964, Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent a letter to the Minister of Religious Affairs requesting permission to resign from office. A draft of his request dated 21 November 1964, only containing part of the entire text, reads as follows:

²⁵² See BAD-12-2-1958.095 and BAD-12-2-1958.161.

ວັນທີ 9 ຊຸງ [ມິຖຸນາ] 1953 ໄດ້ຖືກເລືອກຕັ້ງໃຫ້ເປັນເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງຫຼວງພະບາງຕາມຈົດໝາຍບັນທຶກເລືອກຕັ້ງລົງວັນທີ 9 ຊຸງ [ມິຖຸນາ] 1953. ວັນທີ 14 ອາສູດ [ສິງຫາ] 1953 ຈຶ່ງມີດຳລັດສັ່ງໃຫ້ວ່າການເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງ ແລະບໍ່ມີໃບຕາຕັ້ງແລະມອບໃບຕາຕັ້ງຕາມພະລາດຊະໂອງການແຕ່ງຕັ້ງລະບຽບສິງ ສະບັບເລກທີ 62 ລົງວັນທີ 8 ມາກ [ມິນາ] 1951 ມາດຕາ 18 ນັ້ນ. ແຕ່ອາຕະມາພາບກໍໄດ້ປະຕິບັດຕາມໜ້າທີ່ເອົາທຸລະກິດພະສາສະໜາມາຕາມຄວາມສາມາດ ແລະບໍ່ໄດ້ຖືກຕໍາໜິຈາກຊັ້ນສູງຈັກເທື່ອ. ຄັນມາຮອດປີ 1964 ພະນະທ່ານລັດຖະມົນຕີກະຊວງທຳມະການຈຶ່ງໄດ້ນຳສະເໜີໃນຈົດໝາຍ ເລກທີ 312 ລົງວັນທີ 16 ແມ [ພຶດສະພາ] 1964. ຄັນຮອດວັນທີ 23 ຊຸງ [ມິຖຸນາ] 1964 ໃນຈົດໝາຍເລກທີ 69/ທກ ເຈົ້າແຂວງຫຼວງພະບາງໄດ້ນຳມອບເຄນ ອາຕະມາກໍໄດ້ຮັບດ້ວຍຄວາມພໍໃຈຍິນດີຍິ່ງ. ອາຕະມາໄດ້ຊ່ອຍພະສາສະໜາໃນຂັ້ນນີ້ມາເປັນເວລາ 11 ປີກວ່າ ອາຍຸກໍເຂົ້າ 45 ປີ ວັດສາ 24 ແລ້ວ. ອາຕະມາພາບເກີດຄວາມທ້າທາຍ ບໍ່ສາມາດຈະປະຕິບັດໃນຕຳແໜ່ງໜ້າທີ່ນີ້ໃຫ້ຈະເລີນຍິ່ງໄປກວ່ານີ້ອີກຕໍ່ໄປໄດ້ແລ້ວ [...] ອາຕະມາຈຶ່ງມີຄຳຮ້ອງສະບັບນີ້ມາຈະເລີນພອນເພື່ອຂໍລາຈາກຕຳແໜ່ງເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງ.

On 9 June 1953, [I] was elected [by the Sangha] to become the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province as found in the letter detailing the election results from 9 June 1953. On 14 August 1953, I was ordered [by the Ministry of Religious Affairs] to act as the ecclesiastical provincial governor, but there was no appointment certificate or assignment ceremony in accordance with the Article 18, No. 62 of Royal Ordinance for establishing the Sangha organization, issued on March 1951. However, I have done my best to fulfill my duties concerning Buddhist matters, and [I] was never rebuked at any time by my superiors. Then, the Ministry of Religious Affairs issued certificate No. 312 on 16 May 1964. On 23 June 1964, [I was offered the certificate] together with Letter No. 69/TK, by the provincial governor. I was very glad to receive [the appointment]. I have acted in this position for more than 11 years. I am 45 years old and have spent 24 years in the monkhood. Now I am disheartened and unable to hold the position any longer [...] Therefore, I submit to you my request to resign from the position of ecclesiastical provincial governor.

(BAD-12-2-1964.005)

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's request was very much a surprise to the minister and the Sangha in Luang Prabang. On 26 April 1965, he wrote another letter to the minister asking for a response (BAD-12-2-1965.023). It took almost an entire year before he received a response from the minister on 18 April 1966 (BAD-12-2-1966.031) allowing him to resign. Sathu Nyai Khamchan stated that, during this two-year period, the minister, Phaya Ounhuan Norasing and the Supreme Patriarch of the Sangha both urged him to stay in office, but he still insisted on his decision, which was due to political reasons (Sathu Nyai Khamchan 2007: Interview). In the early 1960s, some officials brought a Thai forest monk to Luang Prabang. This monk promoted himself as a magic monk with magical powers who could predict lottery numbers for lay people. Such practices are not in accordance with the Sangha in Luang Prabang and considered to be a violation of the Vinaya. Sathu Nyai Khamchan, as the ecclesiastical provincial governor, could not allow the monk to stay in Luang Prabang due to these infractions. He informed the police to have them deal with the issue, but his request for the monk's removal seemed to fall on the deaf ears of the state officers. This led him to the opinion that, as he seemed to have no authority with state officials, he was no longer suitable for the position. A related issue in politics happened in the early 1960s after the coup d'état by Captain Konglae in August 1960.²⁵³ The Lao military forces in the south led by Phommi

²⁵³ For the details of the coup d'état, see Stuart-Fox, 1997. *A History of Laos*, 12–18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norsavan closely collaborated with the Thai government of Sarit Thanarat in resistance against the coup d'état and also communism in general, which made it possible for Thai people to enter Laos freely. After Sathu Nyai Khamchan was allowed to step down, Sathu Nyai Fan Tissavangso, the secretary of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos and abbot of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, took his place and held the position until the revolution of 1975.

After the revolution, in 1976, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was appointed as the chairman of the LBFO of Luang Prabang province. The certification of appointment was signed by Pha Maha Khamtan Thepbuali²⁵⁴ on 3 April 1976 (Khamvone et al. 2004: 40). His responsibilities were similar to those which he had held as ecclesiastical provincial governor. However, he also had a new task, namely to urgently educate local officers in the rural districts of northern Luang Prabang, particularly in the Ou and Xeang River Valleys, on Buddhism and the role of the Sangha. This was necessary due to the fact that the communist forces of the Pathet Lao Movement had taken control of the country on 2 December 1975, significantly changing the administrative system of the country and thereby heavily impacting Buddhism. New district chiefs (Lao: *chao müang*) were assigned, some of whom were Khmu (hill-land Lao), *lao sung* (highland Lao) or from other non-Buddhist ethnic groups, and were therefore lacking in basic knowledge regarding Buddhism and the roles, tasks and duties of Buddhist monks. They found the monks' way of life in the monasteries to be useless and an obstruction to national development, because the monks did not have regular work like the lay people and depended on donations of food and other necessities for sustenance. Therefore, Chao Müang wanted the monks and novices to work like lay people, e.g. by planting vegetables or rice. The ordination of new monks was restricted, as young, able-bodied men were needed for development. This indicates that they had a totally different ideology and vision for the country that the Sangha had to clarify urgently. Following the orders of the CLBFO from Vientiane and the center of the Lao Front for National Construction, Sathu Nyai Khamchan organized a group of senior monks headed by himself to travel from Luang Prabang to the U and Xeang Rivers.

Among the other monks who accompanied Sathu Nyai Khamchan were Sathu Nyai Saysamut of Vat Pa Phon Phao and Sathu Nyai Chanpheng of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram. Sathu Nyai Chanpheng, one of the monks in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's group, noted that they

²⁵⁴ Later, the Sangha organization has developed into *Ongkan phutthasasana samphan Lao* (the United Buddhists Organization of Laos). Pha Maha Khamtan Thepbuali was born in Champasak province on 10 June 1922. He was educated in Bangkok, where he studied Buddhist psychology. On his return to Laos in 1956, he was appointed head of the Pali school in Vientiane. He supported the Pathet Lao throughout the Second Indochina War. Of a series for propaganda of Pathet Lao, one photograph shows him writing in a cave in northern Lao during the civil war (see Buddhist Archive No. C1121R). After the revolution, he was appointed by the Lao Patriot Front president of the Lao United Buddhists Organization. He left the Sangha to return to lay life as director of the Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Education. He was a permanent member of the Standing Committee of the Front for National Construction until his retirement in 1994 (Stuart-Fox 2008: 158–159).

traveled by a small gasoline-engine boat from Laung Prabang to the U River, first staying overnight at Vat Pak Chaek, then stopping at Vat Dòn Khun, and finally traveling three or four days to Ngòi district. They were welcomed and well-received by the villagers, because they recognized Sathu Nyai Khamchan, who had traveled to the area previously to visit them during the 1950s and 1960s (Sathu Nyai Chanpheng 2013: Interview). During this journey, the group stopped mainly at the large villages which served as central areas of commerce for each region. At each village, they invited the *chao müang*, *tasaeng* (ecclesiastical sub-district head), *nai ban* (head villages) and villagers to attend a meeting. At the meeting, Sathu Nyai Khamchan would deliver the opening speech, which was then followed by speeches from other monks. They explained to the audience that they had been assigned by the CLBFO from Vientiane and the center of the Lao Front for National Construction to come to deliver sermons to them on Buddhist matters. They talked about the basics of Buddhist teachings, enabling the non-Buddhists to understand easily the nature of Buddhism and its teachings. Particularly, they talked about the meaning of *dāna* (gift giving), *sīla* (a precept, moral conduct), *bap* (wrong action, demerit) and *bun* (meritorious action, merit), also answering the audience's questions related to Buddhism. These tours were carried out extensively during the 1970s and the 1980s by Sathu Nyai Khamchan's group, and later by other monks. This helped to gradually restabilize the condition of Buddhism in the more remote villages in the country.

Since the 1990s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was often asked to serve as the preceptor at ordination ceremonies and serve as chair at other important rituals and ceremonies. According to his biography, from 1941 to 2006, Sathu Nyai Khamchan participated in the 195 consecration ceremonies for the erection of new *sim* (Khamvone et al. 2006: 59). From that time onwards, he presided over Buddhist rituals and ceremonies in the town, and was the honorary chair of committees for the construction of monastic buildings in many monasteries. Moreover, he was a committee member of the provincial project for the reconstruction of Lao art in Luang Prabang style organized by the Department of World Heritage of Luang Prabang.

4. Travels around Laos

Most evidence related to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's travels around the country exists in the form of photographs taken at the places he visited, the versos of which often contain annotations indicating the place and date of his visits. Furthermore, the archive has preserved some letters sent by Sathu Nyai Khamchan to Novice Bunpheng Khanamat, his foster child at Vat Saen Sukharam, in which the former tells the latter about his travels, so that the monastery and also the people in surrounding communities might know how he was doing and what he had experienced. Sometimes contact with home was necessary in order to obtain specific documents for special events. Sathu Nyai Khamchan mostly traveled at the invitation

of lay people in rural villages to attend and chair Vessantara festivals and ceremonies of consecration at the main hall (Lao: *khòt sim*) in their communities. After these ceremonies, he often took the opportunity to visit prominent Buddhist sites in the area in order to pay his respects.

In late 1953, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, as *chao khana khuaeng*, together with Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela, *chao raxa khana*, went to Xay district (present Udomxay) in the northern Laos by airplane to preside over a Buddhist festival to which they had been invited (BAD-12-2-1953.008). As far as evidence suggests, this may be the first time Sathu Nyai Khamchan visited northern Luang Prabang. There are numerous photographs of the excursion, with some showing the monks, officers and lay people receiving them and seeing them off at the airport of Xay district, and others depicting the procession of the Buddha statues and one round stone used as boundary marker of the *sim* through the city as well as the subsequent festival in a monastery.²⁵⁵ One photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Sathu Nyai Khamfan together with a third monk, Lao officers, a photographer and a French officer at the monastery where the consecration ceremony took place (Buddhist Archive No. C1814R). This indicates that the organization of the festival was supported by the French while Laos was still under French colonial rule. In order for a village to be considered a Buddhist village, it is necessary to have a monastery. After this ceremony was complete, the *sim* could then be used by the Sangha for official religious rituals.

In 1960, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, in the company of other monks from Luang Prabang, travelled to the central town of Phongsali province on the northern Lao border to attend a significant Buddhist ceremony at Vat Kaeofa. A series of photographs shows the ceremony of watering the Buddha's relics and the procession of the Bodhi tree from Vat Kaeofa to Mount Phufa.²⁵⁶ One photograph shows the governor is preparing to pour water with scent on a bowl which contains the relicts of the Buddha, the text on the verso of this photograph reads, “ເຈົ້າແຂວງຄຳອ້ວນລົງນ້ຳທອມພະສາວິນິກະທາດ [Provincial governor Khamuan pouring perfume on the Buddha's relicts] (Buddhist Archive No. B2808V). Another photograph shows the procession of the Bodhi tree including monks and lay people from the village to Phufa Mount which is located next to the village, the text on the verso of this photograph reads, “ເທິງພູພ້າ ສາມາດເຫັນເຂົ້າສາລີ ໄດ້ຢ່າງຈິງຈາງ [from the top of Phufa Mount can see Phongsali clearly] (Buddhist Archive No. B2812V). This was a very significant event for the establishment of Buddhism in northern Laos, as most of the indigenous people had held animistic beliefs and taken part in various spiritual cults for centuries. Planting the Bodhi tree and installing the Buddha's relicts in the stupa on Phufa Mount mean converting the local people to Buddhism.

²⁵⁵ See photographs at Buddhist Archive No. Y0108, Y0116 and Y0124.

²⁵⁶ See Buddhist Archive No. B2807R, B2807V, B2808R, B2808V, B2809R, B2809V, B2810R, B2810V, B2811R, B2811V, B2812R, B2812V.

In December 1961, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other monks from Luang Prabang, led by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch, traveled by airplane from Luang Prabang to Savannakhet province to participate in the annual festival at Pha That Ing Hang,²⁵⁷ one of the most sacred stupas in the center southern Laos. A series of photographs show the senior monks of Savannakhet receiving the Supreme Patriarch and company at the airport in front of an airplane of the Lao Royal Air Force (Illustration No. 5.2). The annual festival performed for Pha That Ing Hang was held on the day of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month (November); in later years, the date was changed to the full moon of the first lunar month (December). Thousands of people attended this ceremony, both locals and those making a pilgrimage to pay their respect to the magnificent stupa in which relicts of the Buddha are believed to be enshrined. The Supreme Patriarch's trip was supported by King Sisavang Vatthana, who, with his wife, Queen Khamphui, also attended and co-presided over the festival.²⁵⁸ The participation of the King and Queen can be explained from two different aspects. On the one hand, they attended in order to pay their respects to the Buddhist shrine, but at the same time, their presence at such an important event bolstered the image of the national monarchy, strengthening their visual presence in a manner seen by many countries who have preserved monarchies throughout the 20th century. As Evans has observed, "traditional monarchs ruled over their subjects like unseen gods, whereas modern monarchs court their citizens and seek to be seen and known" (2009: 173).

In February 1963, Sathu Nyai Khamchan travelled to Tha Khaek province in central Laos with five monks and two novices to participate in the auspicious ceremony of *nyòt xòfa* of Si Khottabun stupa at Vat Si Khottabun, which was held on 7 February 1963. A photograph shows them standing in a line posing for a portrait before boarding the airplane of Royal Air Lao at Vat Tai airport, Vientiane. The handwriting on the photograph reads, "At Vientiane airport before leaving for Tha Khaek and Si Khottabun stupa on 6 February 1963"²⁵⁹. The group of monks and novices stayed at Vat Kang, the main monastery in Tha Khaek. After the ceremony, they also visited the house for the provincial governor in Tha Khaek on 10 February 1963. One photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other monks standing behind the *nyòt xòfa*. On the verso of that photo is Sathu Nyai Khamchan's

²⁵⁷ Pha That Ing Hang stupa, nine meters wide at the base and twenty-five meters high, is located in Ban That village, 14 kilometers far away from Savannakhet town. It was built in the fourth century BE (two centuries BC) by King Sumittatham of Marukhanakhon Kingdom (Si Khottabun). Its structure looks similar to Phra That Phanom in Nakhon Phanom province, Thailand, but smaller. Historically, Pha That Ing Hang was built at the spot where once the Gautama Buddha leaned the Hang tree for his meal offered by King Sumittatham. It is believed to have enshrined the back relic of the Buddha brought from India by five Arahants (BAD-02-0111).

²⁵⁸ The images of the King and Queen on pilgrimage to Pha That Ing Hang in 1961 appear in the pamphlet entitled "ປະຫວັດຫຍໍ້ພະທາດອີງຮັງພ້ອມດ້ວຍຄຳໄຫວ້ພະທາດ [A Brief History of Pha That Ing Hang and the Words for Paying Respect to the *pha that*]" (BAD-02-0111).

²⁵⁹ ທີ່ທາງເຮືອບິນວຽງຈັນ ກ່ອນຈະໄປທ່າແຂກ ທາດສີໂຄດຕະບູນ ວັນທີ 6 ກຸມພາ 1963 (Buddhist Archive No. B1570R and B1570V).

handwritten caption, “The ceremony of lifting the *settasat* (tiered umbrella) of the *phathat* of Müang Khao Tha Khaek, on 7 February 1963 the year of *tao nyi*, [BE] 2505.”²⁶⁰ Other photographs show the Si Khottabun stupa under construction for renovations. The participation of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and monks from Luang Prabang in the Si Khottabun stupa ceremony is remarkable in terms of evidencing his religious role in other provinces outside of the north and Luang Prabang. He was later invited by Bunloet Sanichan to act as advisor for the construction of the *sim* at Vat Si Khottabun in 1966 (for more information on Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s involvement in construction projects, see Chapter 4).

One crucial journey of Sathu Nyai Khamchan was to Xam Nüa province, the Liberated Zone of the Pathet Lao movement, in May 1975. He accompanied Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela of Vat Suvannakhili. They were received by both political leaders and monks involved in the revolution in Xam Nüa headed by Pha Achan Buakham Voraphet. As shown on the photographs and in their annotations, they visited many important political and religious places. On 1 May 1975, they visited the sewing factory at Ban Xiang village where the Pathet Lao produced clothes for their soldiers and officers during the civil war, and also visited and payed their respects to the Ong Tü Buddha statue²⁶¹ at Vat Phoxai Xanasongkham in Müang Soi district of Huaphan province (see Buddhist Archive No. B0091R). The photograph shows the following senior monks and Pathet Lao officers standing on both sides of the Ong Tü Buddha statue. Sathu Nyai Khamchan wrote an annotation on the verso of the photograph saying, “ວັດເມືອງໂສຍ ຊຳເໜືອ 1.5.75 ສ້າງເມື່ອຈຸລະສັງກາດ 927 ປີຮັບເປົ້າ ຄ.ສ. 1565 ໄດ້ມາໂຫວ້ເມື່ອວັນທີ່ 1 ພຶດສະພາ 1975 ອາຍຸ ໄດ້ 410 ປີ. [Vat Müang Soi, Xam Nüa, 1/5/75 – This temple was founded in Culasakkarat 927, the Year of *hap pao* [the Cow], AD 1565. [I] paid my respects to [Ong Tü Buddha] on 1 May 1975. [The monastery] is 410 years old]” (Buddhist Archive No. B0091R).

Two significant photographs of this trip show a Buddhist ceremony attended only by head monks and Pathet Lao leaders held at the revolutionary headquarters in Viang Xai (Hua Phan province). One picture shows Sathu Nyai Khamfan and Sathu Nyai Khamchan sitting in the ceremony, with Sathu Nyai Khamfan holding a ceremonial monk’s fan and giving a blessing. The other one shows important Pathet Lao leaders sitting in a straight line, dressed

²⁶⁰ “ພິທີຍົກເສດຕະສັດພະທາດເມືອງເກົ່າ ທ່າແຂກ 7 ກຸມພາ 1963 ປີ ເຕົ້າຍີ່ 2505” (Buddhist Archive No. A1531R and A1531V).

²⁶¹ The Ong Tü Buddha statue, one of the most magnificent and sacred Buddha images in northern Laos, with a weight of 3,850 kilograms, and 2,90 meters high (from the bottom of the pedestal to the peak of its *ushnisha*), was moulded and cast of bronze in BE 2108, AD 1565 at Ban Soi village in Soi district during the reign of King Setthathirat. It was erected at Vat Phoxay Xanasongkham in Soi district, 87 kilometers from Xam Nüa, where it stayed until 2013, when a new temple was built for it by the people and government (construction lasted from 2007 to 2013) called Vat Ong Tü Sibunhüang Xaiyaram, in Xam Nüa town of Huaphan province on 24 May 2013 (<http://www.sedthakid.la/home/khao/14928.html>). See also Pha Achan Maha Chalun Vaxilangsi and Pha Maha Thongphòn Saiyasit, 1989. *The History of Ong Tü Buddha in Soi district of Huaphan province*. Vientiane: Pakpasak Printing (BAD-02-0074).

in white with scarves on their shoulders, receiving the blessing from the monk depicted in the other picture (Illustration No. 5.3 and 5.4). These photographs demonstrate that the Liberated Zone was a peaceful place and that the Pathet Lao movement respected Buddhist monks and believed in Buddhism. A series of twenty-eight photographs in silver gelatine prints (Buddhist Archive No C1109R to C1137R) was discovered at Sathu Nyai Khamfan's *kuti* at Vat Suvannakhili in 2007 by the team from the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang. The photographs show the disastrous effects of the the Secret War in the 1960s on northern Laos. On the verso of each photograph is a label with a text in Lao explaining the meaning of the photograph attached. For instance, the fourth photograph in this series shows a mother carrying her naked son, whose legs, arms and face were disfigured through explosions, on her lap. The text on the verso reads: "This most miserable and cruel existence of hundreds and thousands of people has been brought to the Lao people by the American imperialists"²⁶² (Buddhist Archive No. C1112R and C1112V). The other photographs show monasteries destroyed by bombs, a march of Buddhist monks, villagers and soldiers supporting the revolutionary forces of the Pathet Lao during the civil war, and the holding of Buddhist ceremonies which were resumed after the war. This series aimed to propagate Buddhism and Lao tradition as symbols for peace. Sathu Nyai Khamfan probably received it as a gift from the Pathet Lao. It was made to show what had happened to the Lao people in the war, accentuating the need for peace in the region. A part of the same series – eight photographs in total – was also discovered in the collection of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram (Buddhist Archive No. H0049R to H0058R). Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch, might have received the photographs from the Pathet Lao during his visit to Vieng Xai in April 1975. The Supreme Patriarch together with several members of the Royal Lao Government accompanied King Sisavang Vatthana visited Viang Xai in order to fulfilled the invitation of Souphanouvong, the leader of the Pathet Lao in the Liberated Zone. The visit was to demonstrate the will to peace in Laos after the long civil war. (see Evans 2009: 413).

In December 1989, Sathu Nyai Khamchan travelled by boat with a group of senior monks and lay people from Luang Prabang up the Nam U River to Khua district in Udomxay province, where they were invited to perform the consecration ceremony at the monastery in Müang Khua district. After the ceremony, they travelled to Udomxay to pay their respects to the Singkham Buddha statue, the most sacred Buddha statue in northern Laos, at Vat Pha Chao Singkham, Müang La, Udomxay on 14 December 1989. Müang La district is a small district located in the mountains of the Phak River, 28 kilometers from the town of Udomxay. On their return to Luang Prabang on 17 December, they stopped at Tham Pha Kuang, the very

²⁶² ຊີວິດອັນແສນທໍລະມານຄືແນວນີ້ ມັນເປັນຮ້ອຍ ເປັນພັນລາຍ ທີ່ຈັກກະພັດອາເມລິກາ ເປັນຜູ້ກໍ່ຂຶ້ນໃຫ້ແກ່ປະຊາຊົນລາວ.

beautiful cave at Ban Pak Bak, and the bridge crossing the U River at Ban Sop Hun village, Nồng Khiao, the most natural and well-known tourist attraction on the U river.²⁶³

Among other travels of Sathu Khamchan's shown on the photographs is a journey he made in 1955, when he accompanied a group of monks from Luang Prabang led by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela to conduct the consecration ceremony at Vat Chomkhaio Manirat in Huaysay town on 20 March 1955 (Buddhist Archive No. H1418R and H1418V). At the time, Huaysay was under the authority of Luang Prabang, nowadays in Pha Udom district of Bokeo province. On 16 February 1970, he visited the Lahakhok or Umung stupa²⁶⁴ located at Vat Lahakhok, Sòngkhòn district in Savannakhet province with Sathu Nyai Phummi Phalappatta Maha Thela from Vat Nồng Si Khunmüang and a group of lay people from Luang Prabang in order to make a pilgrimage to the stupa (Buddhist Archive No. A1561R and A1561V).

On 23 December 1996, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other senior monks visited Khòn Pha Pheng Falls in Champasak province located in southern Laos, the largest waterfall in Southeast Asia. They visited the falls after the conference of the Sangha held in Champasak (Buddhist Archive No. A0192R).

In March 2004, he traveled to Xiang Khouang province to participate in the annual festival there. During his stay, he also visited the ruins of religious sites *qua* tourist attractions, such as Vat Phiavat which was destroyed by T28 aircraft gunfire during the civil war in 1968. Now, only the pillars of the building and parts of Buddha statues remain. He also visited the plain of Jars, “where thousands of prehistoric stone jars scattered across the Xiang Khouang plateau including clusters of stone jars, varying in height and diameter from one to over three meters” (Creutz and Bergh 2009: 42–48) in Xiang Khouang province.²⁶⁵ Sathu Nyai Khamchan traveled around the country to fulfill his role as one of the Sangha leaders, mainly attending ceremonies of new monasteries set up to establish Buddhism in the more rural areas of the country.

5. Attending the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana in Burma, and Participating in the Celebrations of the 2500th Anniversary of Buddhism in Sri Lanka

Theravada Buddhism was established in Sri Lanka during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa (BC 236–276) and in Burma during the reign of King Min Dong by missions from India

²⁶³ See Buddhist Archive No. B6137R, B6137V, B6142R and B6142V.

²⁶⁴ The Umung stupa was built in the 1950s and looks similar to the Ing Hang stupa.

²⁶⁵ See photographs at Buddhist Archive No. B4649R and B4619R.

under dispatch and patronage of King Aśoka of India. The 2500th Anniversary of Buddhism, also known as Buddha Jayanti (the victory of the Buddha), has been and is still today considered a crucial and significant mark for Buddhists, and these countries held festivals and events to celebrate this auspicious occasion. Burma organized the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana or the Sixth Great Buddhist Council²⁶⁶ at Karba Aye, Rangoon, which took place over a two year period from May 1954 to May 1956, and Sri Lanka held celebrations in Kurunegala in December 1956. The Lao Sangha were invited by the Sangha and governments of both countries to participate in the celebrations in their countries. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was one of representatives of the Lao Sangha who attended the second session of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana and participated in the celebrations in Sri Lanka.²⁶⁷

5.1 Attending the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana in Burma

A Saṅgāyana is “a synod of Buddhist monks [convened] in order to rehearse, recollect and complete the Budddhavacana (the words of the Buddha) in a systematic way for the benefit of the Buddhist order as well as that of the lay followers” (Thakur 1996: 110). The Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana consisted of five sessions. The opening session was held between 17 May and 7 July 1954, and the closing session began on 23 April 1956, culminating in the official celebration on the full-moon of the sixth lunar month corresponding to 24 May 1956. The

²⁶⁶ The first three synods of the five prior to the one mentioned above took place in India, the fourth was organized in Sri Lanka, and the fifth was held in Burma. The Buddhist Councils which were acknowledged and recognized by Buddhist countries at different times and in various places. The first five Buddhist Councils occurred as follows: the First Council was held three months after the Buddha’s passing (543 BC) at the Sattapanni Cave in Rajagṛha, India, under the patronage of King Ajatasattu and the presidentship of the Venerable Maha Kassapa, with 500 Arahants having taken part in the assembly. The Second Council was held in BE 100 (BC 643) at Varigaram in Vesali (Vaishali), India, under the patronage of King Aśoka and the presidentship of the Venerable Yasagaganthabud (Revatta), with 700 Arahants in attendance. The Third Council was held in BE 234 (BC 777) at Aśokaram in Pataribut, India, under the patronage of King Aśoka and the presidentship of the Venerable Moggalliputta Tissa Thera, with 1,000 Arahants. The Fourth Council was held in BE 238 (BC 781) at Aluvihara in Anurathaburi, Sri Lanka, under the patronage of King Devanampiya Tissa and the presidentship of the Venerable Mahintha Thera, with a total of 68,000 monks who attended. Finally, the Fifth Council was held in AD 1871 at Mandalay in Burma, under the patronage of King Mindon and the presidentship of the Venerable Jagarabhivamsa, this time with only 2,400 monks in attendance. However, “according to the Mahavamsa and other Ceylon traditions three Councils were held in Ceylon. The first of these was held during the reign of King Devanampiya Tissa (BC 247–207) under the presidentship of the Venerable Ariṭṭha Thera, the second was held during the time of King Vaṭṭagamini Abhaya (101–77 BC), and the third was held in 1965 at Ratnapura in Ceylon” (Bapat 1956: 50–51). In Thailand, the Council held in Chiang Mai in BE 1580 (AD 1037) is sometimes cited as the eighth Council under the patronage of King Sridhammachakravarti Tilakararajadhipati” (Thakur 1996: 249) [or King Tilokarat], and “the ninth Council was held in Bangkok in BE 2331 (AD 1788) (Ibid: 251).

²⁶⁷ For the other sessions of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana in which the representatives of the Lao Sangha participated, see Grabowsky and Khamvone, 2015. “Multi-faceted Perspectives on the Buddhist Archive of Luang Prabang: The Case of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana and the Buddha Jayanti.” In *The Lao Sangha and Modernity: Research at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang 2005–2015*. Edited by Volker Grabowsky and Hans Georg Berger, 219–247. New York and Luang Prabang: Anantha Publishing. See also the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Souvenir Album [1956] (BAD-05-0031) and Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana 2500th Buddha Jayanti 1956 (BAD-02-0249).

council met at the Great Sacred Cave, Maha Pasana Guha, in Kaba Aye, Rangoon, which was modelled after the Sattapanni Cave in Rajagṛha, under the patronage of the Burmese government led by Prime Minister U Nu, presided over by the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–1982) and attended by 2,500 monks from eight different countries including Burma, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, and also observed by lay Buddhists from Western countries.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan, head of the provincial Sangha of Luang Prabang, was a member of the Lao delegation that attended the proceedings of the second session (Pali: *dutiya sannipāta*) held from 15 November 1954 to 29 January 1955. The Lao delegation consisted of three senior monks and one religious officer, namely:

1.) Pha Khu Lüam Pasanno,²⁶⁸ abbot of Vat Xaiyaphumaram, ecclesiastical provincial governor of Savannakhet province, head of the delegation.

2.) Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto, abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam, ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province, committee member.

3.) Pha Maha Samran Kittiyano, abbot of Vat Ong Tü Mahavihan, Vientiane, committee member.

4.) Maha Chanpheng Phetmüangsua, a religious officer from the Department of Religious Affairs of Luang Prabang. He served as the secretary of the delegation (Illustration No. 5.5).

In Rangoon, they were also accompanied by Pha Maha Chansuk Suriyachak, a Lao student-monk from Sri Lanka who had also accompanied the official Lao delegation during the opening session. The Lao delegation stayed at the Amara Goyana Building in Karba Aye, one of the buildings of which served as the accommodation for the guests of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana. One photograph of the Lao delegation was taken from behind this building, as the text on the photograph, states, “ທີ່ຫຼັງຕີກອະມະລະໂຄຍານະ ກາບາເອ່ ພະນະຄອນຢ່າງກຸ້ງ ຄາວໄປຮ່ວມ ສັງຄາຍະນາ ທຸດີຍະສັນນິບາດ ແລະຮ່ວມປະຊຸມ ພຸດທະສາສະນິກສິກສິນ 1954 [At the back side of the Amara Goyana Building in Kaba Aye, Rangoon, on the occasion of attending the second session of the Saṅgāyana and the conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists] (Buddhist Archive No. B3103R). During the second session, the Third Conference of the World Fellowship of

²⁶⁸ Pha Khu Lüam Pasanno was born on 4 March 1897 in Ban Kaengkòk village of Champhòn district in Savannakhet province in southern Laos. In 1911, he was ordained as a novice at Vat Ketumatikaram of Ban Kaengkòk and became a monk at the same monastery in 1916. In 1925, he moved to Vat Xaiyaphum in Savannakhet and was appointed as abbot, a position he retained until his passing. 1955, he was also appointed as *chao lasakhana na* (“the front” of high ecclesiastical ranks in the religious hierarchy), receiving the honorific title Somdet Pha Lukkaeo Lüam Pasanna Maha Thela. He passed away on 23 March 1973 at Vat Xaiyaphum. *Anusòn Pasanna Mahathela (Lüam Pasanno) adit sangkhamontri ongan pokkhòng song lae adit chao athikan vat xaiyaphum savannakhet* (Memorial of Pasanna Maha Thela (Lüam Pasanno), the late ecclesiastical minister of the organization for Buddhist governance and the late abbot of Vat Xaiyaphum, Savannakhet), Vientiane (undated) (BAD-01-0016) (Grabowsky and Khamvone 2015).

Buddhists²⁶⁹ was held on 4-5 December at Aparā Goyana Hotel in Rangoon; the Lao delegates attended this conference as well. Photographs taken during these conventions show, e.g., Pha Maha Chansuk reading a message from the Lao Sangha in the conference, as well as Maha Chanpheng Phet Müangsua, in glasses and a white suit, seated behind a signboard reading “Laos” among the participants from other countries.²⁷⁰

5.2 Participating in the Celebrations of the Buddha Jayanti in Sri Lanka

The celebrations of the Buddha Jayanti and the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in 1956 were extremely significant for Sri Lankan Buddhists. Firstly, the event celebrated their national independence from Britain in November 1947, and secondly, it aimed to restore Theravada Buddhism after being under the yolk of a colonial Christian government for four hundred and fifty years. Bond stated that :

This period can be seen as the flowering of the Buddhist revival and particularly as the highpoint of Protestant Buddhism. Coming some eight years after Ceylon had received its independence, it was a time of enormous optimism. The watchword of the Jayanti was, “Let us restore Buddhism to its rightful place.” Buddhists believed that doing so would (1) restore their heritage and identity, long eclipsed by colonialism, and (2) resolve the country’s problems and ensure a bright future for the new nation.

(Bond 1988: 75–76)

The national celebrations were supported by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress. For this significant event, they invited representatives from neighboring Theravada Buddhist nations such as Laos and Burma to participate as witnesses of their successful national Buddhist revival.

The Lao Sangha were invited by the Sri Lankan government via their Ministry of Religious Affairs to be the representatives of Laos. A group of Lao delegates led by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch, was nominated and funded by the Lao government to travel to Sri Lanka. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a member of the group. The destination of their travels was not to only Sri Lanka but also to Thailand, India and Burma. The circuit lasted a total of two months and acted as an important symbol of the beginning of relations between the Lao Sangha the religious organizations of these Theravada countries. The Lao delegation consisted of six monks and one officer, most of whom were from Luang Prabang:

1.) Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Dhammayana Maha Thela (1892–1984), the Supreme Patriarch of Laos from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Luang Prabang, head of the delegation.

²⁶⁹ The World Fellowship of Buddhists was established in Sri Lanka in 1950 to unite Buddhists everywhere “to work for the Dhamma and for peace” (Bond 1988: 76–77).

²⁷⁰ Buddhist Archive No. B0391R, B039V, B0583R and B0583V.

2.) Somdet Pha Lukkaeo Silasangvaro, Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela (1901–1987), ecclesiastical minister of the right-hand to the royal council, from Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang, vice-head of the delegation.

3.) Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhun, Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, (1920–2007), ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang, from Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, committee member.

4.) Sathu Fan Tissavangso (1925–1993), secretary of the Supreme Patriarch, from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Luang Prabang, committee member.

5.) Sathu Phò Phatthaman Phattaramuni (1888–1960s) from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaran, Luang Prabang, special committee member.

6.) Pha Maha Samran Kittiyano (unidentified dates), secretary of Sathu Nyai Khamfan, from Vat Ong Tū Mahavihan, Vientiane, committee member.

7.) Achan Maha Chanpeng Phetmüangsua (1917–2002), religious officer from the Department of Religious Affairs of Luang Prabang, secretary of the delegation (Illustration No. 5.6).

According to two diaries and a travel report,²⁷¹ the members of the Lao delegation started their journey leaving Luang Prabang for Vientiane on 23 November 1956. There they stayed at Vat Ong Tū and also met important figures of the government. For instance, on 25 November, they visited Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phumma at his private residence in Nong Thevada village to inform him about their journey and request that he give them a US dollar exchange²⁷² (Illustration No. 5.7), and on 29 November, they visited Prince Souphanouvong at his residence in Vientiane. The presents that the Lao delegation brought to Sri Lanka consisted of auspicious and cultural objects including one set of yellow robes, one alms-bowl, a flower of gold, a bowl, and three copies of the Pha Bang Buddha image. The government sponsored their flights from Laos via Thailand to Sri Lanka, to India, and to Burma of 99,400 Kip (Lao currency), and offered them 50,000 Kip to cover their expenses in foreign countries during their journey.

They left Vientiane for Bangkok on 5 December and stayed for four days at Vat Benchamabòphit. During their stay in Bangkok, they paid their respects to the Gold Buddha statue Phra Phuttha Maha Suwan Patimakòn – the world’s largest solid gold Buddha statue with a weight of 5,500 kilograms – at Vat Traimit, and visited Vat Mahathat Yuwarat

²⁷¹ Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s diary is not entitled carries BAD-02-0484; Sathu Nyai Khamfan’s diary typed carries 39 pages, is entitled ບັນທຶກການໄປຮ່ວມສະຫຼອງພຸດທະຊະຍັນຕິ ທີ່ປະເທດລັງກາ ວັນທີ 23 ໂນວອມ [ພະຈິກ] ຄ.ສ. 1956 ຂອງ ເຈົ້າ ລາຊາຄະນະຂວາ [The note of traveling of the ecclesiastical minister of the right-hand to the royal council to participate in the celebrations of Buddha Jayanti in Sri Lanka on 23 November 1956] (BAD-01-0224); and Sathu Phò Phatthaman’s report published in pamphlet format and distributed free of cost to the public, is entitled ການສະເດັດໄປຮ່ວມສະຫຼອງພຸດທະຊະຍັນຕິໃນປະເທດລັງກາຂອງສົມເດັດພະສັງຄະລາດ [The journey of the Supreme Patriarch to participate in the celebrations of Buddha Jayanti in Sri Lanka] (BAD-05-0023).

²⁷² At the time, official permission was needed for changing Lao kip to foreign currencies.

Rangsarit, where they were welcomed by the abbot, Phra Phimonlatham, 600 monks and 500 lay people in the *sim*. Subsequently, they visited Vat Phra Chetuphon Vimonmangkhalaram or Vat Pho, the monastery museum housing Buddhist art objects, most famously the Reclining Buddha, and Vat Saket and its Golden Mount (Thai: *phu khao thong*), which offers a far-reaching view of the city of Bangkok. On 7 December, they visited Prince Phetsarat Rattanavongsa and enjoyed breakfast at his residence in Phrakhanong district, where he lived as a political refugee.²⁷³

The Lao delegation left Bangkok on 8 December 1956 and arrived in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, on the same day. They stayed at Vat Vija Dhammadūta, where ten monks and five novices resided, and were welcomed by the abbot, Agga Bandita Panyanantha. On that evening, they gathered with Sinhalese monks at the assembly hall to perform the evening chanting, and talked with the Sinhalese monks afterwards. During their stay in Sri Lanka, they were always accompanied by an officer of the Ministry of Religious Affairs named Sirijaya Jaiyasingha, who acted as their guide and organized their travels to religious sites and to the location at which the celebrations took place. They were also accompanied by two Lao student monks, Pha Maha Khamphaeng Saengsavang, and Pha Maha Chansuk Suriyachak, and one Thai student-monk, Phra Maha Chusak, who were their interpreters from Lao into English or from Sinhalese into Lao or Thai.

Between 10 and 15 December, they travelled around to the monasteries and religious monuments in Colombo and other cities in the south of Sri Lanka such as Matara, Tissamaharama, Tangalle, and Hambantota. At every place they visited, they were welcomed by local monks, officers and other lay people. At one place they were received by people standing in a line on both sides of their path playing local music on instruments such as drums, conches and horns, as well as talking to them while offering them tea, orange juice and coconut water. On 12 December, they arrived in Tissamaharama and stayed overnight at Vat

²⁷³ In September 1945, following the Japanese surrender, Prince Phetsarat took the initiative to reaffirm the independence of Laos proclaimed by King Sisavang Vong under Japanese duress the previous April and to proclaim the unity of the kingdom. To this the king reacted by dismissing Prince Phetsarat as both *uparat* (viceroy) and prime minister, as well as by accepting the continued status of a French protectorate. The response of the Lao Issara leaders was to issue a provisional constitution from a provisional government. When the king refused to recognize the constitution, the Provisional People's Assembly voted to depose him, leaving Prince Phetsarat as effective head of state (actually honorary president of the Lao Issara). Subsequent negotiations with the king led to his reinstatement as monarch on 23 April 1946, in exchange for the legalization of the constitution and the endorsement of the Lao Issara Government. The next day, French forces took Vientiane and Prince Phetsarat was forced into exile in Thailand with other Lao Issara leaders. For the next three years, Prince Phetsarat was the effective head of the Issara Government from exile, and he stayed in Thailand for eleven years. With great efforts, the government led by Prince Souvanna Phoumma, the prime minister at the time, invited him to return to Laos as a political and spiritual figure for the whole Lao nation. On 11 April 1957, he arrived in Luang Prabang and on 16 April 1957, the king reinstated him as *uparat*, by then a purely honorary and symbolic position. Prince Phetsarat died at Xiang Kaeo palace in Luang Prabang on October 1959 (Stuart-Fox 2001: 236–237) (BAD-12-2-1957.117).

Tissamaharama Raja Maha Vihara, which was consecrated by the Buddha himself, who spent some time there in meditation with 500 Arahants. One of the largest stupas in Sri Lanka is situated at this temple, the dome-shaped Tissamaharama Dagoba. On 13 December, they followed Sirijaya Jayasingha's invitation to visit his family at his private house in Pingvatta village in Tissamaharama. He brought his wife and younger son to pay their respects to the Lao delegation. Subsequently, the delegation visited Vat Pingvatta monastery where they were received by crowds of lay people and monks. On 14 December, they visited Mahabodhi Society in Colombo, where they paid their respects to the relics of Venerable Maha Moggallana and of Venerable Sariputta, the two supreme disciples of the Buddha.²⁷⁴

On 16 December, they traveled to Kurunegala, the former royal capital of Sri Lanka where the festivities were held. Upon their arrival, the Lao delegation was received by the people, officials and monks in the procession at the city gate and then brought to the hotel where they stayed. The first ceremony in which the Lao delegation participated took place on 17 December at the Ridi Viharaya temple under a large marquee of 10 meters width and 50 meters length, which was filled with a total of 30,000 participants. The ceremony started at 9:30 a.m. with the procession of the Lao delegation from the temple's gate to the ceremony's location, with monks standing along both sides of the path chanting *Bhavatu*²⁷⁵, followed by pupils singing the Sri Lankan national anthem and chanting the *Buddha-jaya-maṅgala Gāthā* or *Bāhuṃ* (the verses of the Buddha's auspicious victories) (see Yossaphat and Watcharapol 2011: 63). A speech was then given by the master of ceremony, after which the Supreme Patriarch of Laos gave a speech in Lao, which was translated into English by Pha Maha Chansuk, and into Sinhalese by Sirijaya Jayasingha. This speech was followed by a speech from Burmese Prime Minister U Nu,²⁷⁶ and then from other prominent figures in Sri Lanka.²⁷⁷ The second ceremony took place at Vat Attanagalla Maha Vihara on 18 December, where the Lao delegation had a chance to pay their respects to the relics of the Seven Arahants, those

²⁷⁴ In 1947, the British government had agreed to send back to India the relics of Venerable Maha Moggallana and Venerable Sariputta, which had been discovered during archaeological excavations in India. These relics were exhibited in Sri Lanka en route to India and evoked deep religious feelings among the Sinhalese Buddhists (Bond 1988: 76).

²⁷⁵ *Bhavatu* is the last three stanzas of *Mahā-maṅgala-cakkavaḷa* (the Great Universe of Blessings) used to chant blessings. The meaning of it is, "May you be blessed in every way. May all heavenly beings protect you. Through the power of all the Buddhas, Dhamma and Sanghas may you always be well" (Yossaphat and Watcharapol 2011: 68).

²⁷⁶ He was one of the most important Buddhist leaders who played various important roles in the field of Buddhism in Burma; particularly, in 1950, he created a Buddhist Sanana Council whose purpose was to propagate Buddhism and supervise the monks (Swearer 2010: 111). His great contribution to the Buddhist revival in Burma was the holding of the *Chatṭha Saṅgāyana* (the Sixth Great Buddhist Council) in 1954–1956 (Brahmagunabhorn 2000: 96), and of the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in May 1956 (Khamvone 2014: 9).

²⁷⁷ The information about the celebrations came from a note of Pha Phò Phatthaman Phattharamuni, one of the Lao Sangha who participated at the ceremony (BAD-05-0023).

being the Venerable Angulimala, Venerable Sivali, Venerable Phimpha, Venerable Maha Moggallana, Venerable Saributta, and Venerable Phutta. The final ceremony took place on 18 December at 2:30 p.m. in front of the local government house of Kurunegala where a crowd of two hundred thousand participants joined. Here, the Supreme Patriarch of Laos offered up gifts, including one set of yellow rope, an alms-bowl, and one silver bowl, to Phra Maha Thela Srisatthammasaranamkara Maha Nikaya, and presented Minister Kurupu with a copy of the Pha Bang Buddha image. In the evening, the Lao delegation performed a Buddhist chant in the traditional Lao style at the request of the Sri Lankan religious officers, during which their voices were recorded and broadcast live by radio networks in Sri Lanka.

From 19 to 25 December, the Lao delegation continued their visits to monasteries in many important cities in central Sri Lanka, i.e. Matale, Anuradhapura, Tamura, and Kandy. On 19 December, they visited Arogya Vihara, where the first Pali Canons were engraved on the palm-leaf manuscripts by Arahants during the Fourth Council held in Matale. On 20 December, they visited Kandy and paid their respects to the Tooth Relic of the Buddha at Dalada Maligawa (also known as the Temple of the Tooth) as located in the royal palace complex of the former Kingdom of Kandy.

The Lao Sangha's participation in the celebrations of the Buddha Jayanti in Sri Lanka signifies the relationship between the two countries and also indicates the recognition of the religious role of the Lao Sangha on the international stage. It is also notable that Laos and Sri Lanka have shared a similar political history in that both were under colonial rule and received their independence in the same period: Sri Lanka attained its independence from Britain in November 1947 and Laos from France in October 1953.

After Sri Lanka, the representatives of the Lao Sangha continued their travels to India. On 26 December, they left Colombo for Bombay and stayed at the Astoria hotel for their first night, later staying at the Lao Embassy in New Delhi for three additional nights. Before leaving Sri Lanka for India, Sathu Nyai Khamchan wrote a letter to a Thai monk in Bangkok whom he referred to as *phradet phrakhun somdet*.²⁷⁸ The copy of the letter (BAD-12-1-1956.014) is dated 24 December 1956, and it details their travels and activities in Sri Lanka as well as their further journeys to India and Burma.²⁷⁹ The letter indicates that Sathu Nyai

²⁷⁸ Regularly, this phrase is used for a high-ranking senior monk with the honorific title of "Somdet" or "Somdech" in Thailand. Maybe Sathu Nyai Khamchan wrote to Somdet Pha Vannarat (Plot Kittisobhano, 1889–1962), abbot of Vat Benchamabòphit, who later became the fourteenth Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, bearing the official honorific title Somdet Pha Ariyawongsakhatayan. I make this assumption because Vat Benchamabòphit was the place where the Lao Sangha stopped during their journey in Bangkok. Another reason is that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had stayed and studied in this monastery when he was a novice for two years (1936–1937); as a result of this, he was a disciple of Somdet Pha Vannarat as well (Khamvone 2014: 9).

²⁷⁹ See Khamvone Boulyaphonh, 2014. "International connections of Lao Buddhism as reflected in personal letters found at Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela's abode (*kuti*) in Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang." *Dorisea Working Paper Series*, No. 13, and www.dorisea.de

Khamchan stayed in contact with monks at Vat Benchamabòphit in Bangkok where they stayed both on their way from and back to Laos. In India, the Lao monks were accompanied by Pha Maha Chantao Chanthavong, a Lao student monk in India, as their guide, and also received assistance from the officials of the Lao Embassy in New Delhi. The purpose of their visit to India was to make a pilgrimage to the Buddhist sites, particularly, to the four most significant places of the Buddha's life (the places of his birth, enlightenment, first sermon and death). From 27 December 1956 to 13 January 1957, they undertook these pilgrimages on their own with Pha Maha Chantao, mostly by train.

On 1 January 1957, the Lao delegation set off for its visit to the Taj Mahal. The group took a photograph in front of the monumental religious building (Illustration No. 5.8). On 5 January, they traveled to Savatthi or Sharavasti and visited Jetavana, one of the most famous monasteries in India and the place where the Buddha gave the majority of his teachings and discourses. They visited the Gandhakuti, the Buddha's dwelling there (see Ahir 1986: 46), and the Dhamma assembly hall, where the Buddha usually gave his teachings and discourses, as well as the former royal palace of King Pasenthikoson, the devout Buddhist King of the Kingdom of Kosala during the Buddha's lifetime. On 6 January, the members of the Lao delegation traveled to Nepal to pay their respects to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, which is marked by an Aśokan pillar. On the following day, they traveled to Kusinara, the place where Buddha passed away, to pay their respects to the huge reclining statue of the Buddha in the Mahāparinibbāna stupa. On 8 January, their journey took them to the state of Uttar Pradesh to pay their respects to the Dhamek stupa at Sarnath, the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon, or the Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta (Discourse on the turning the wheel of the Dhamma), to the five ascetics who later became his first disciples. On 10 January, they traveled to Bodh Gaya to pay their respects to Bodh Gaya stupa, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, where the famous Bodhi tree still stands (see Ahir 1986: 17). On 12 January, they reached Rajagriha, where they paid their respects to Gandhakuti, the Buddha's dwelling on the slope of Gijjhakuta (Vulture Peak), and visited the Sattapani Cave where the First Buddhist Council was held. On 13 January, they traveled to Calcutta, from which point they continued their journey to Rangoon, Burma, on the following day.

Sathu Phò Phatthaman noted that their travels were difficult at times because they had to hurry to catch their trains, where they often slept and ate, but that their experience was worth these troubles, as they were thus able to pay respects to these famous Buddhist pilgrimage sites, something they had aspired to achieve all their lives. Luckily, they met a group of Burmese pilgrims who accompanied them, provided them with food, and sometimes, took them to Burmese temples so that they could get some quality sleep. The Lao Sangha's travel to India was a private visit, so they did not meet with any political or religious officials.

However, they were welcomed and received by the government of Burma during their travels in the latter country.

According to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's letter, during the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in Kurunegala, Sri Lanka, the Lao delegation met with the renowned U Nu. This is confirmed by one photograph showing U Nu giving a speech at the ceremony, observed by the Supreme Patriarch of Laos who was sitting on his left side as the honorary chairperson (Buddhist Archive No. C1657R). They informed U Nu about their further journey to Burma and the prime minister told them that as long as he was given proper notice that he would make arrangement to meet with them. This was of advantage to the Lao Sangha, because when they arrived in Rangoon, they were received as official visitors of the state. Their pilgrimages to various Buddhist sites in Burma were organized by the government there, who ensured that they were received warmly by officers and lay people whenever they arrived in a new town or city.

They arrived in Rangoon on 14 January and stayed at Somphuthip (Jambudvipa) Building in Kabar Aye, where the Lao student monk Pha Maha Phimpho was staying at the time. When U Nu was notified of their arrival, he went with U Win, Minister for Religious Affairs and National Planning, to meet them, having also organized for them an itinerary for a tour through Burma. From 17 January to 5 February 1957, the Lao Sangha was accompanied by Burmese officials of the Department of Religious Affairs as well as a group of monks during their travels to many famous Buddhist sites, schools, and places for meditational practices in various districts i.e. Rangoon, Mandalay, Mangoon, Sagaing, and Pagan (Bagan). In Rangoon, they were invited to attend Buddhist ceremonies at the houses of key figures of the Burmese government. For example, on 20 January, they were invited with six other Burmese monks to the private residence of Dr. Ba U, President of the Union of Burma, to hold a Buddhist ceremony and have lunch together. On 4 February, they went to the house of the Minister of Education, and on 5 February to the house of the Minister of Industry. Most significantly, on 2 February, the members of the Lao Sangha and 17 senior Burmese monks were invited to the government house, where the President and his cabinet bestowed the Supreme Patriarch of Laos with the honorific title "Abhi Dhaja Maha Rattha Guru" ("Most Eminent Great Spiritual Teacher"), one of the highest honorary titles for a Buddhist monk in Burma.

During their visit to Burma, Sathu Nyai Khamchan wrote to the abbot of Vat Benchamabòphit report the details of their journey in India and their plans to return from Burma to Thailand, so that the latter could be sure to prepare accommodation for them on their way through (BAD-12-2-1956.014). The Lao Sangha's delegation left Burma on 5 February for Bangkok, after which they traveled back to Laos, first to Vientiane before finally arriving back in Luang Prabang on 14 February 1957. The visits of the Lao Sangha to

Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and Burma were considered successful in the context of strengthening religious relations with these Theravada countries. They gained many ideas and much crucial experience from the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism that they observed in Burma and Sri Lanka, which inspired them to organize such celebrations to be held in Laos in 1957.

6. International Official Visits

From the 1950s to 1973, the Lao Sangha made many efforts to visit foreign countries in order to develop their religious networks on an international level as well as with other domestic organizations. The official visits made by Sathu Nyai Khamchan with a group of monks from Laos to Thailand in 1967 and to the Soviet Union in 1969 were both significant in that they reflected religious and political relationships between Lao Buddhism and the outside world.

6.1 Thailand

This official visit was made in May of 1967 in response to an invitation of the Thai government. The Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Thailand, Somdet Phra Ariya Vongsagatayan Somdet Phra Sangharaja Sakalamahasangha Parinayaka (Chuan Udhayi, 1897–1971), received a visit from the Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Laos, who was accompanied by four senior monks, one layman and one official. They traveled by car from Vientiane to Nong Khai province on 15 May 1967.²⁸⁰ Sathu Nyai Khamchan was part of the entourage. This visit was fully supported by both the government of Laos and of Thailand. According to the program published bilingually in Thai and Lao²⁸¹ and a series of photographs taken during this visit, the Lao Sangha met with many important figures of Thailand, both religious and state officers, also visiting many religious organizations and Buddhist sites in Bangkok and in other provinces in central, northern and northeastern Thailand. The program and photographs provide interesting information on how they were received, whom they met and where they visited.

²⁸⁰ The program mentions an entourage of only four senior monks, a *vaiyavatchakòn* (servant) and director of the Department of Religious Affairs, and does not indicate their names. However, one photograph they took at Vat Makut Kasattiyaram with the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand shows the four senior monks: Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachittha Maha Thela from Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, Sathu Fan Tissavangsa Thela from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Luang Prabang, Pha Maha Pan Anantho from Vat Maha Phutthavongsa Pa Luang, Vientiane, and Sathu Maha Singthong Banlūsak from Vat Si Khunviang (Dong Miang), Vientiane (Buddhist Archive No. H1711R).

²⁸¹ “กำหนดการรับเสด็จ สมเด็จพระสังฆราชแห่งราชอาณาจักรลาว ซึ่งเสด็จมาเยี่ยมคณะสงฆ์ไทย และพุทธศาสนิกชน ในฐานะแขกของ สมเด็จพระสังฆราช สกลมหาสังฆปริณายก ตามคำทูลอาราธนาเสด็จของรัฐบาลไทย วันที่ ๑๕-๒๗ พฤษภาคม พ.ศ. ๒๕๑๐. [Program for the Reception of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos, who is visiting the Thai Sangha and lay Buddhists on behalf of the guests of Somdet Pha Sangharaja Sakalamahasangha Parinayaka, according to an invitation of the Thai government, between May 15th and 27th, BE 2510 (AD 1967)]” (BAD-02-0116 and BAD-12-2-1967.107).

On 15 May 1967, the Supreme Patriarch and company arrived in Nong Khai province at 2:45 p.m. At the Nong Khai railway station, they were received by high-ranking monks and officials as well as local monks, officials and laypeople of Nong Khai. On the stage behind the seat for the Supreme Patriarch was a large sign with Thai text reading “Long live the Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Laos.”²⁸² Subsequently, at 7:10 p.m., they left Nong Khai for Bangkok by an express train supplied by the Department of Religious Affairs.

On 16 May 1967, at 6:00 a.m., at the Bangkok railway station Hua Lamphong, they were received by the Supreme Patriarch, high-ranking monks and officials, abbots from monasteries in Bangkok and Thonburi, and student monks from Buddhist universities (Buddhist Archive No. H1588R). From the train station, they took part in a car parade to Vat Benchamabòphit where they received accomodation. On that same day at 2:00 p.m., they paid a visit to the Sixteenth Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Thailand, Somdet Phra Ariya Vongsagatayan Somdet Phra Sangharaja Sakalamahasangha Parinayaka (Chuan Udhayi, 1897–1971) at Vat Makut Kasattriyaram (Buddhist Archive No. H1711R). At 5:00 p.m., the Minister of Education of Thailand paid a visit of his own to the Supreme Patriarch of Laos at Vat Benchamabòphit.

On 17 May 1967, at 9:00 a.m., the members of the delegation were visited by the Thai Prime Minister, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikhachorn (1911–2004) at the government house (Buddhist Archive No. H2008R). At 9:45 a.m., they visited the Department of Religious Affairs and provided an overview of the Buddhist religious affairs of Thailand (Buddhist Archive No. H1709R). At 11:00 a.m., they visited Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, the Buddhist University of the Maha Nikaya sect, and paid their respects to the relics of the Buddha at Vat Maha That Yuwarat Rangsarit. At 2:00 p.m., they paid their deep respects to the Emerald Buddha, the Kingdom’s palladium, at Vat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram (Vat Phra Kaeo) on the grounds of the Grand Palace, and paid their visit to Somdet Phra Vannarat (Pun Punnasiri, 1896–1973),²⁸³ abbot of Vat Phra Chetuphon Vimonmangkharam, and to Somdet Phra Bhutthachan at Vat Arun Rajavararam, a significant tourist temple in Thonburi.

On 18 May 1967, at 9:00 a.m., the members of the Lao Sangha delegation had an audience with H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), the current King of Thailand, at the Royal Palace. At 10:30 a.m., they visited the Educational Council of

²⁸² “ที่คาชุก โหตุ มหาสังฆราชา แห่งราชอาณาจักรลาว” Buddhist Archive No. H1607R, and a similar sign also hangs on the wall of Hua Lamphong Bangkok central railway station. The text is printed in Lao Buddhist Archive No. H1586R.

²⁸³ He later became the Seventeenth Supreme Patriarch of the Kingdom of Thailand. His last honorific title was Somdet Pha Ariya Vongsagatayan Somdet Pha Sangharaja Sakalamahasangha Parinayaka (Pun Punnasiri), often shortened to Somdet Pha. In 1972, he met with Pope Paul VI at the Vatican during his international travels to the United States and Europe.

Mahamakutraavidyalaya University, the Buddhist university of the *dharmayutta* sect, at Vat Bovorn Nivet Vihan where the Supreme Patriarch gave a speech. At 2:00 p.m., they visited the National Museum, and at 3:30 p.m., they visited the Buddhist Association of Thailand, the World Fellowship of Buddhists, and the Young Buddhist Association of Thailand in the offices of the Buddhist Association.

On 19 May 1967, at 8:00 a.m., they continued by car to Phra Nakhon Sri Ayutthaya province, the former capital of Siam, to visit and pay respects to the ancient religious sites there. At 9:00 a.m., they arrived at Vat Sri Sanphet and paid their respects to the Phra Mongkhonbòphit Buddha statue, after which they visited the various Buddhist associations there. At 10:00 a.m., they visited Vat Phanan Choeng, and met the Lao descendants living in the area of Ban Nyai commune in Ayutthaya, whose parents came from Vientiane during King Anovong's war in 1827.²⁸⁴

On 20 May 1967, at 7:00 a.m., they traveled by airplane from Bangkok to Chiang Mai province in northern Thailand. They arrived in Chiang Mai airport at 9:00 a.m., where they were received by the ecclesiastical provincial governor, the provincial governor, local officers, and other people. From there they traveled to Vat Phra Sing Wòramahavihan, where monks, novices and pupils stood in line in front of the monestary gates to the *vihan*. Phra Dhammarajanuvat, chief monk of Chiang Mai province, gave a welcome speech. At 2:00 p.m., they visited Dhammarat Sùksa school so that the Supreme Patriarch could give his talk to both ordained and unordained students of the Dharma. At 2:30 p.m., they visited Vat Phra That Doi Suthep,²⁸⁵ located on the mountain known as Doi Suthep, one the most significant and beautiful monasteries in the region, and a symbol of Chiang Mai province (Buddhist Archive No. A0853R). Subsequently, they visited the Phuphing Rachanivet palace and the Phra Chedi Chet Yòt stupa (seven-peak stupa) at Vat Chet Yòt (Buddhist Archive No. A0858R), Vat Chao Kao Tue, Vat Suan Dòk, and Vat Chedi Luang.

On 21 May 1967, at 8:30 a.m., they traveled by car to Lamphun province and visited Vat Phra That Hariphunchai Wòramahavihan where the Phra That Hariphunchai stupa is located, Vat Phra Phutthabat, and Vat Chamadhevi. At 5:00 p.m. they returned to Chiang Mai and flew back to Bangkok.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ The programme for the travel to Pha Nakon Sri Ayutthaya province, see BAD-12-2-1967.067.

²⁸⁵ Vat Pha That Doi Suthep is thought to have been founded in 1383 by King Kūna, the founder of Chiang Mai. It is well-known for its Pha That Doi Suthep stupa enshrining the relics of the Buddha brought from Sukhothai and established by the king. Doi Suthep is actually named after a legendary hermit, named Sudeva, who lived on the slopes of the mountain. Before this, about 1,000 years ago, it was still known as Doi Aoy Chang (Sugarcane Elephant Mountain) (Malcolm 2002). In 1934, Khruba Sriwichai, one of the most famous monks in northern Thailand, inaugurated a project to construct a road to make the access to the sacred site easier for pilgrims (Issara 2011: 108).

²⁸⁶ For the trip to Chiang Mai and Lampun provinces, also see BAD-12-2-1967.067.

On 22 May 1967, they stayed at Vat Benchamabòphit the whole day in order to recuperate from the strenuous traveling.

On 23 May 1967, at 2:00 p.m., they paid respects and said farewell to the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand at Vat Makut Kasattiyaram. At 6:00 p.m., they participated in the Visakha Puja ceremony at Vat Benchamabòphit.

On 24 May 1967, at 8:00 a.m., they traveled from Bangkok to Nakorn Pathom province to visit and pay respects to the Phra Pathom Chedi which enshrines relics of the Buddha. After that, they went to visit a rural temple, Vat Raikhing, famous for its main Buddha statue which is classified as being in the Lan Xang style. At 7:30 p.m., they left Bangkok for Ubon Ratchathani province in eastern Thailand by express train. Ubon Ratchathani province is one of the provinces in which most of the population comprises of members of Lao ethnic groups.

On 25 May 1967, at 7:30 a.m., they arrived in Ubon Ratchathani. At the railway station, they were received by high-ranking monks and officers as well as other audience members, just like in the other provinces that they had visited. They stayed at Vat Supatthanaram Wòravihan. At 10:00 a.m., the lay people tendered the Supreme Patriarch a *basi* ceremony,²⁸⁷ “the traditional Lao ceremony designed to bring prosperity to the person in whose honor it is given” (Halpern 2009: 130). The Supreme Patriarch was seated on a decorative chair in the main hall of Vat Supatthanaram, the *pha khuan*²⁸⁸ standing on a table in front of him, with all of the monks and lay people squatting down around him (Buddhist Archive No. H1750R). The lay people tied his wrists with white bands of rope and gave blessings in the customary manner of the Lao Ubon ethnic group (Buddhist Archive No. H1771R and H1772R).

On 26 May 1967, at 7:30 a.m., they traveled by helicopter from Ubon Ratchathani to Amnat Charoen district²⁸⁹ to visit the Phra Mongkhol Ming Müang Buddha, the most sacred Buddha statue at Buddha Park in Amnat Charoen (Buddhist Archive No. H1762R, H1783R). At 9:00 a.m., they took a helicopter from Amnat Charoen to Nakhon Phanom province which is located in northeastern Thailand on the bank of the Mekong River, to pay their respect to the Phra That Phanom stupa, a sacred stupa enshrining the relics of the Buddha at Vat Phra That Phanom, where they stayed one night. On 27 May 1967, at 8:00 a.m., they traveled by

²⁸⁷ *Basi* more properly known as the *basi sukhuuan*, it is the most culturally characteristic and popular ceremony in Laos. A *basi* is designed to concentrate the spiritual force of the persons for whom it is held on important occasions such as a birth, marriage, or before embarking on or after returning from a long journey. This it does by calling back any of 32 guardian spirits (*khuan*) that might have strayed, as they do on occasion. After chanted blessings, usually by an old man, preferably a respected former monk (Lao: *achan*, ceremonial master), white strings are tied around the wrists of participants to the accompaniment of wishes for future happiness and success (Stuart-Fox 2001: 34).

²⁸⁸ *Pha khuan* literally means a round plate (made of bamboo, wood, or metal) with offerings for guardian spirits, “offerings to the spirits given during the *basi*” ceremony (Kislenko 2009: 172).

²⁸⁹ At the time, Amnat Charoen was one district of Ubon Ratchathani province, it was split off and became its own independent province on 12 January 1993. For the trip to Ubon Ratchathani see also BAD-12-2-1967.066.

helicopter from Nakhon Phanom to Nong Khai province, and a good-bye ceremony was held at Vat Sri Müang (Buddhist Archive No. H1651R). They returned to Vientiane in Laos by car.

The Lao Sangha's journey to Thailand was significant because it helped to strengthen the religious relationship between the Lao and Thai orders of the Sangha. The political relationship had begun to improve since Laos had attained its independence from the French in 1953 thanks to reciprocal visits of the political leaders. For example, from 20 to 25 July 1955, Crown Prince Sisavang Vathana, accompanied by Queen Kham Phui and Princess Sawivan, paid an official visit to the Kingdom of Thailand, where they met the H.M., the prime minister, and other high-ranking officers.²⁹⁰ In January 1957, Prime Minister and Field Marshal Plaek Phibun Songkhram made an official visit to Laos. In Luang Prabang, the prime minister paid a visit to the Supreme Patriarch of Laos at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram and visited prominent religious sites there, i.e. Vat Xiang Thong, where he was received by Prime Minister Prince Sounvanna Phouma and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela.²⁹¹ Another significant event which reflects their mutual cooperation was the joint grand opening of the Nam Ngüm Hydroelectricity Dam by both the Thai and Lao king. The royal ceremony for the transmission of electricity took place on a barge in the middle of the Mekong River at Tha Nalaeng on 16 December 1967 (Evans 2009: 186).

Moreover, in 1974, Sathu Nyai Khamchan accompanied Sathu Nyai Khamfan Sirasangvara Maha Thela to participate in the royal cremation ceremony of the seventeenth Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, Somdet Phra Ariya Vongsagatayan Somdet Phra Sangharat (Pun Punasiri) from Vat Phra Chetuphon Vimolmanggalaram. After the ceremony, they were invited to meet King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX) at his Chitralada Royal Villa on 29 May 1974 (Buddhist Archive No. A4334R). During their conversation, an interesting question came up: H.M. asked "How many sects are there in the Lao Sangha order?" Sathu Nyai Khamfan answered "There is only the Lao Sangha" (Onsi 2009: Interview). The King suspected that Laos might have Mahanikaya and Thammayut sects like Thailand and Cambodia, as Laos is a neighbor which a society and culture, which, while distinctly different in some ways, shares many similarities with Thailand (such as speaking, eating and socializing). Lao Buddhism was influenced by Thai Buddhism in many aspects, particularly, methods of Buddhist education and practice. In fact, the Thammayut sect from Thailand came to southern Laos in the 1960s. However, they were integrated into the Lao Sangha order due to the Lao Sangha's authority to administrate their orders without interference by the government (Daosayam 2012: 162).

²⁹⁰ For more information of this visit, see Evans, 2009. *The Last Century of Lao Royalty*, 196–203. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

²⁹¹ The document and photographs of this official visit see Buddhist Archive No. C1396R to C1400R and BAD-12-2-1957.031.

6.2 The Soviet Union

The Lao Sangha delegation paid an official visit to the Soviet Union to secure the religious relationship between Lao Theravada and Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism in the Soviet Union. This visit also served to demonstrate that a communist country like the Soviet Union exercised religious tolerance.²⁹² In 1969, the Lao Sangha received an invitation by Pandido Khambo-Lama Jambal Gomboiev,²⁹³ the chief monk of the Tibetan Mahayana communities in Ulan-Ude, to make an official visit to their country. This invitation was linked to an official visit of a group of Mahayana monks and laities led by Khambo-Lama Jambal to Luang Prabang and other places in Laos, which seems to have taken place in 1968. The group met important figures of Laos, such as King Sisavang Vattahana at the royal palace (Buddhist Archive No. H1983R), the Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram (Buddhist Archive No. H1967R.), and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela at Vat Suvannakhili (Buddhist Archive No. C1297R). They also visited prominent religious sites such as Vat Xiang Thong in Luang Prabang. Five senior monks were selected as representatives by the Lao Sangha under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Illustration No. 5.9). Sathu Nyai Khamchan was the representative of the Sangha of Luang Prabang, due to the fact that the Supreme Patriarch who was expected to be head of the delegation fell ill and had to go to Vientiane for treatment.²⁹⁴

²⁹² “It was said that when King Aśoka sent Buddhist missions to spread Buddhism [outside of India in the third century BE], Buddhism had been entered in Siberia of Russia. In the mid-seventeenth century BE (Second century AD), Mahayana Buddhism had been entered the region of the eastern bank of Lake Baikal by Mongolian and Tibetan monks. Hilgantus temple was built as the first monastery in the region. Later, the Buddhist temples known as Datsan were built in other regions of Buryatia. In BE 2478 (AD 1935), when Russia was under Communist rule, the temples, Buddha images, and manuscripts had been destroyed. However, in BE 2491 (AD 1948), the government of the Soviet Union approved for constructing Buddhist temples in the Wolga region with the financial support of the government. They did this because they realized that most of Russian population still had a faith in Buddhism even though they were strictly controlled by the government” (Prayura 2011:144–145). In BE 2540 (AD 1997), Pha Assist. Prof. Dr. Chatri Hemaphantho was the first mission of Theravada Buddhism from Thailand who got scholarship by Russian government for his Bachelor, Master and Doctorate in Russia. In BE 2549 [AD 2006], he founded Vat Abhidhambabuddhavihan Saint-Petersburg regarded as the first Theravada monastery in the country and also considered that is the first period of Theravada Buddhism has spread and established in Russia by Thai monk (Managersonline 2008).

²⁹³ Pandido (or Bandido) Khambo Lama, literally, ‘Wise-Teacher Abbot Guru’, title of the supreme head of the Buddhists of Russia. Originally just ‘Khambo Lama’ when created in 1741 by the Empress Elizabeth; changed to this form c1766 by Chatherine the Great (Snelling 1993: 306). Pandido Khambo-Lama Jambal Gomboiev was the Seventeenth Khambo-Lama whose position was established in 1963. He was the Khambo-Lama who established strong connection and relationships with other Buddhist countries in the world; Laos was one of them.

²⁹⁴ Later in 1972, the Supreme Patriarch accompanied by three monk followers, made an official visit to the Soviet Union with an invitation of Mahayana communities in Ulan-Ude and the support of the Soviet government, from 15 to 22 June 1972. The Supreme Patriarch participated in the Visakha day festival at Ivolguinski monastery in Ulan-Ude (Buddhist Archive No. H0984R, H0985R), and visited Moscow, and Leningrad. See Pha Maha Chalun Vaxirarangsi, 1977, *ຊີວະປະຫວັດ ສົມເດັດພະສັງຄະລາດ ທຳມະຍານະມະຫາເຖລະ (ບຸນຫັນ) ທີ່ ບົກສາສູງສຸດ ຂອງອົງການພຸດທະສາສະໜາສຳພັນແຫ່ງປະເທດລາວ* [Biography of Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's notebook (BAD-02-0007) contains 19 pages on which he recorded this trip day by day. They left Vientiane on 25 May 1969, transited through Bangkok, Thailand, stopped in Delhi, India, and headed to their final outward destination in the Soviet Union. During their stay in Delhi, Sathu Nyai Khamchan wrote a letter to Pha Maha Bunpheng Virathammo, his foster child studying in Bangkok, stating that they arrived in Delhi at 9:00 p.m., on 26 May 2512 (AD 1969). Officers from the Lao and Soviet Union Embassies in New Delhi received them at the airport and brought them to stay in a hotel (BAD-12-2-1969.002).

They first arrived in Moscow on 27 May 1969 at 6:00 p.m. Two Lao officers from the Lao Embassy brought them to stay at a hotel. On this day, they visited a Christian Church where they met the head of the Church (Buddhist Archive No. B3289R to B3293R) and conversed with him, and subsequently went sightseeing around the city. They were excited to take the subways because it was their first time ever doing so. On 28 May 1969, they went to visit the museums exhibiting rockets and atomic bombs (Buddhist Archive No. B3270R to B3278R), and St. Basil's Cathedral, which was under restoration (Buddhist Archive No. B3321R). On this day, Sathu Nyai Khamchan met his niece, Surasit, a Lao student in Moscow.

They left Moscow on 30 May 1969 for Ulan-Ude. At the airport, they were greeted by crowds of Mahayana Buddhists, led by Pandido Khambo-Lama Jambal Gomboiev, including monks, lay people and children. At Ivolguinski monastery, on 31 May 1969, the full moon of the sixth lunar month, the Lao Sangha delegation participated in the celebration of the Visakha ceremony, which was the highlight of this visit. The Lao delegation was seated on chairs in a line, and the lay Buddhists gave them offerings including flowers and money in request for a blessing. The Lao monks gave them blessings by blowing on their heads (Buddhist Archive No. A1007R and A1007V). The Mahayana also performed a special ceremony in the monastery hall where other members of the Lao delegation chanted to consecrate Pha Achan Aat Suphattha Maha Thela, head of the delegation (Buddhist Archive No. A1001R).

On 1 June 1969, the Lao delegation was accompanied by a Mahayana monk and a lay man as their guide when they left Ulan-Ude, for Leningrad. On the way they stopped overnight at the airport in New Siberia. In Leningrad, on 2 June 1969, they visited the state cemetery said to house the graves of 25 million soldiers and people who died during World War II (1942–1943). On 3 June 1969, they visited a former palace, posed for a portrait at the

Thela (Bunthan), the Supreme advisor of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos], pp. 9–10. Vientiane (BAD-01-0015).

monument post (Buddhist Archive No. A0947R), visited St. Isaac's Cathedral²⁹⁵ and went to a university to enjoy tea at the library with Catholic priests. On 4 June 1969, they visited a museum in the former palace for two hours. On 5 June 1969, they visited another Christiane Church, a former prison, and left Leningrad for Tashkent.²⁹⁶ In Tashkent, on 6 June 1969, they visited the Friendship Organization. There, they were greeted with tea and each handed a hat. They later visited an Islamic Mosque and looked around the library at which they were received by the Mosque's leader (Buddhist Archive No. A1024R and A1024V). On 7 June 1969, they visited the state department of agriculture as well as a machine equipment company. On 8 June 1969, they left Tashkent for Moscow.

In Moscow, on 9 June 1969, the delegation visited the religious centre in Moscow where they had a conversation with the director to whom they gave a copy of the Pha Bang Buddha statue (Buddhist Archive No. B3261R). Then they went to the Lao Embassy where they were offered lunch and where they chanted to bless the holy water and also gave white-string ties to the Lao ambassador, H.E. Buasi, and his staff. On this day, Sathu Nyai Khamchan met Lao students in Moscow. One of them, Somsak, offered Sathu Nyai Khamchan his photograph. On the verso is his handwriting saying “offered this photograph to Sathu Nyai of Luang Prabang in remembrance of [his] visit to the Soviet Union, Moscow, on 9.6.69, Somsak.”²⁹⁷

On 11 June 1969, they left Moscow for Delhi, India, where they stayed at the Lao Embassy. Sathu Nyai Khamchan visited the houses two Lao embassy officials, Thip and Virat. On 12 June 1969, Sathu Nyai Khamchan planned with Pha Maha Ammòñ, the Lao student monk in Delhi, to go on a pilgrimage to Buddhist sites such as Sanchi, the Elora Caves and the Ajanta Caves. He stayed in India for one week (this pilgrimage is recounted in the next section), while the other monks returned back to Laos.

It is remarkable that Sathu Nyai Khamchan was selected to take part in this trip, because at the time he was only the abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam and did not hold any position of rank within the Sangha hierarchy comparable to other monks in the group, most of whom were ecclesiastical provincial governors.²⁹⁸ In fact, he was given a special offer by Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma to accompany him on this trip. Sathu Nyai Khamchan recalled to

²⁹⁵ The photograph of the visit to St. Isaac's Square and St. Petersburg contains Sathu Nyai Khamchan's handwriting below it, saying “ເມືອງຫຼວງ ເລນິນກລາດ ສະຫະພາບໂຊວຽດ ວັນທີ 15 ເດືອນ ມິຖຸນາ 1969, ສາທູດຈີນ. [Leningrad, capital of the Soviet Union, 15 June 1969, Sathu Khamchan].” Buddhist Archive No. B0380R. In fact, according to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's notebook, they stayed in Leningrad between the 2nd and 5th of June.

²⁹⁶ Tashkent at the time was a part of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it became the capital and largest city of Uzbekistan.

²⁹⁷ “ນ້ອມຖວາຍພາບນີ້ແດ່ອາດຍາທ່ານສາທູດໃຫຍ່ຫຼວງພະບາງ ເພື່ອເປັນອະນຸສອນໃນຄາວໄປຢ້ຽມຢາມສະຫະພາບໂຊວຽດ ມິດສະກູ 9.6.69 ສົມສັກ” Buddhist Archive No. B3358R and B3358V

²⁹⁸ At the time, Sathu Nyai Fan Tissavangsa Maha Thela, abbot of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram was the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Luang Prabang province until the revolution of 1975.

me that “when Prince Souvanna Phouma was informed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs that no representative from Luang Prabang Sangha would join the trip because the Supreme Patriarch was not well and unable to join the trip, the prince advised them: ‘if so, please invite Sathu Nyai Khamchan for me.’”²⁹⁹ The Lao royal government believed that this trip would carry political implications. At the time, Laos was attempting to remain neutral in the Cold War, but both blocks tried to pull it onto their side. Consequently, the Royal Lao government was not comfortable dealing with this invitation, because they feared that a visit of Lao monks to the Soviet Union might be interpreted by the US as an effort to strengthen the ties between Laos and the Soviet Union. Therefore, the delegation comprised only of senior monks; the supreme patriarch was absent. Sathu Nyai Khamchan viewed the matter that “in fact, this trip was not organized by the Soviet Union government but by the Mahayana monks of Ulan-Ude: they desired the Lao Sangha to participate in their Visakha day festival.”³⁰⁰

At least two purposes for the trip can be identified. The first was to clearly demonstrate the religious relationship between Lao Theravada and Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism in Ulan-Ude district. The trip is regarded as the first time that the Lao Sangha had come into official contact with the Mahayana world. The second was to show that the Soviet Union was a country governed by communism that respected and tolerated the beliefs and rituals of various religions, such as Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

7. Pilgrimage to Buddhist Sites

After the cremation of the Buddha’s body, Brahmin Dona divided “the relics into eight equal measures using a measuring jar” and distributed them to eight leaders³⁰¹ of eight nations (Khoon San 2013: 21). Later, Arahants spreading Buddhism to other countries brought the relics and enshrined them into the Buddhist monuments of stupas and pagodas in various countries. The number of pilgrimage sites, holy shrines or *cetiya*s in which the relics of the Buddha are enshrined increased, as they can be found not only in India but all over the world, in particular in Asia and Southeast Asia. Prominent examples are Pha That Luang (the great stupa) in Vientiane, Laos, Phra That Phanom in Nakhon Phanom province, Thailand, the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, Myanmar, and the Tooth Temple in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Besides the official visits to the foreign countries mentioned above, since the 1940s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan also traveled often, both inside of the country and to the other Buddhist countries, i.e. Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka and India with the purpose of making a

²⁹⁹ Interview with Sathu Nyai Khamchan at his *kuti* in Vat Saen Sukharam on 9 February 2007.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ They were King Ajatasattu of Magadha, Licchavis of Vesali, Sakya of Kapilavatthu, Koliyas of Ramagama, Buliyas of Allakappa, Brahmin of Vethadipa, Mallas of Pava and Mallas of Kusinara.

pilgrimage to the Buddhist sites. His efforts to make these pilgrimages show that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had deep faith in the Buddha's remains and monuments, which was exemplary for the Lao Buddhists of the new generation. The sources which relate to his journeys are provided in his biography, notes and personal letters, as well as photographs.

7.1 Thailand and Malaysia

Thailand (formerly Siam) is one of the symbolic centers of the Theravada Buddhist world. Buddhism was established in this country in the third century BC by a group of missionaries led by Venerable Sona Thera and Venerable Uttara Thela, sent by the elder Tissa Moggalaputta with the official support of King Aśoka. It “flourished from a very early period, about the first or second century AD if not earlier” (Bapat 1956: 89). From then up to the present, many Buddhist monuments (Chedi, stupas) which contain relics of the Buddha were built throughout the country. They are popular pilgrimage destinations, e.g. Phra That Doi Suthep in northern Thailand, Phra Pathom Chedi in central Thailand, Phra That Phanom in the northeast and Phra That Chaiya in the southern Thailand.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan made a pilgrimage to the Buddhist sites in northern Siam (Thailand) in 1935 when he was still a novice. At the time, he went together with his brother monk, Sathu Maha Khamphan Sumanaphuto from Vat Pa Fang, his teacher, Sathu Chanthay, and Novice Onsi Mangkhala from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram to Chiang Rai province to begin his Buddhist studies in the Thai Sangha education system. He took the chance to travel to Chiang Mai to pay his respects to Phra That Doi Suthep and Phra That Sri Chòmthòng.

In 1949, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was accompanied by a group of monks and laypeople from Luang Prabang on a pilgrimage to the religious sites in Thailand (Khamvone et al. 2004: 3). They started with a visit to Vat Phra That Phanom, where they paid their homage to Phra That Phanom stupa in Nakhon Phanom province, the well-known stupa in northeastern Thailand. Relics of the Buddha are believed to be enshrined there. The later days, they visited Vat Phra Phutthabat (Temple of the Buddha's footprint) in Saraburi province and paid their respects to the Buddha's footprint, one of the most famous footprints of the Buddha in Thailand.³⁰² Then, they went to Vat Phra Pathom Chedi to pay their respects to Phra Pathom Chedi stupa³⁰³ in Nakhon Pathom, and the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok, and Phra That Chaiya in Suratthani province.

³⁰² “The Lord Buddha's footprint found on a stone slab on Suvan Banphot Hill or Satchaphantha Khiri Hill, measures 21 inches wide, 60 inches long, and 11 inches deep. It was discovered during the reign of King Songtham of Ayutthaya around 1620–1628. The footprint had all 108 auspicious characteristics, so the king commanded that a temporary Mondop be built to cover the footprint” (Tourist Authority of Thailand 2010: 17–18).

³⁰³ Pha Pathom Chedi, meaning the ‘First Stupa’, is in the shape of an overturned bell, enshrining relics of the Buddha. An impressive 127 meters tall from base to tip, this fantastic edifice stands on the site where Buddhism

Other pilgrimages to Thailand Sathu Nyai Khamchan repeated many times. As shown in photographs, he led tour groups of monks and lay people from Luang Prabang on pilgrimages in Thailand. The following are a few examples of these pilgrimages. The photograph with Buddhist Archive No. A0370R shows him together with Sathu Nyai Bunthan Thitapunyo, Sathu Nyai Ounhuan Hasapanyo and four lay people –including a small girl – paying their respects to the Phra Pathom Chedi stupa. The handwriting on the photograph reads “ນະມັດສະການພະຖົມເຈດີ ເດືອນຈຽງ ພ.ສ. 2500 [Paying homage to Phra [Pa]thom Chedi in the first lunar month, BE 2500 [corresponds to December 1957].” Another photograph, Buddhist Archive No. A1563R, shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan together with five other monks sitting on their knees with their hands together at their chests (Pali: *añjalim karoti*), paying their respects to Phra Phuttha Patiphakhamatthayomphutthakan Buddha at Vat Khao Phra Ngam in Lopburi province. The handwriting on the photograph reads “ໄຫວ້ພະວັດເຂົ້າພະງາມ 3 ທັນວາ 2502, 1959. [Paying respects to the Buddha statue at Vat Khao Phra Ngam on 3 December [BE] 2502, 1959].”³⁰⁴ The photograph Buddhist Archive No. A1563R shows monks and laypeople from Luang Prabang sitting on their knees in two lines with hands held at their chest in the pose of respect, paying deep homage to the Phra That Phanom stupa. The handwriting on the photograph reads “ວັດພະທາດພະນົມ 14.2.1970. [Vat Phra That Phanom on 14.2.1970].” Among the lay people in this group was his elder sister, Nang Khamxao Phummavong.

The last example—Buddhist Archive No. B8783R—shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan, Sathu Nyai Ounhuan Hasapanyo and a group of lay people from Luang Prabang, standing in lines at the side of the Phra That Doi Suthep stupa. Each of them is holding flowers in the hands to worship the stupa while also posing for the photograph. Two of them can be identified as Nang Somchan Ounthuang from Ban Vat Saen (first one from right in front row) and Nang Ounhuan from Ban Phon Hüng. This pilgrimage was made in April 1971. In his biography, it is noted that Pha Khamchan went on a pilgrimage to northern Thailand in 2000 to pay his respects to Phra That Doi Suthep and Phra That Sri Chomthong in Chiang Mai province, Phra That Doitung and Phra That Pha Ngao in Chiang Rai province, Vat Pha Bat Tak Pha in Lampun province, and the great image of the Buddha (Phra Chao Ton Luang) in Phayao province (Khamvone et al. 2004: 4). As mentioned above, these can be considered as

was first introduced into Thailand two thousand years ago. The original structure was first mentioned in Buddhist scriptures in the year 675, but archaeological discoveries found traced of it all the way back to the fourth century. Much later in the 19th century, King Mongkut visited the remains of the temple and ordered the construction of a gigantic *chedi* which was completed in 1870 (see <http://www.bangkok.com/magazine/phra-pathom.htm#>, accessed on 7 December 2015).

³⁰⁴ Vat Khao Phra Ngam (the monastery with a beautiful Buddha on the hill), with the official name Vat Sirichannimit Wōravihan, is located on the slope of Phra Ngam Hill, Lopburi district. It was said to have been built around BE 1100 (AD 557), and was restored in BE 2455 (AD 1912) by Phra Ubalikhunupamachan (Chan Sirichantho, 1857–1932), abbot of Vat Boromivat, Bangkok. It is one of the tourist attractions of Lopburi.

evidence that Sathu Nyai Khamchan understood well the importance of pilgrimages to Buddhist sites. The tours were organized by the venerable monk himself.

Malaysia, even though it is recognized as a Muslim country, it has some Buddhist temples in its cities where Buddhist communities exist. During his visit to Bangkok, Sathu Nyai Khamchan accompanied a group of Thai monks and laypeople traveling to Malaysia on a pilgrimage for visiting Thai Buddhist temples from 23 to 27 June 1967. On 23 June, they arrived in and visited Kota Bharu, Kelantan, on 24th and 25th, they visited Kuala Lumpur, and on 26th and 27th, they visited Penang. Photographs show the group posing in Kota Bharu on 23rd (Buddhist Archive No. A0485R and A0485V), at Wat Chetawan in Kuala Lumpur on 24th (Buddhist Archive No. A0492R to A0496R), and Sathu Nyai Khamchan posed for pictures at Wat Chaiya Mangalaram in Penang on 27 June 1967 (Buddhist Archive No. A0509R, B6536R and B6536V). Wat Chaiya Mangalaram is most notable for its Reclining Buddha statue, and on the temple grounds many coloured statues of Devas and other mythical creatures are on display.

7.2 India and Nepal

King Aśoka the Great (BC 304–232), the famous Buddhist emperor of the Maurya dynasty, embarked on a holy pilgrimage to visit all Buddhist sites in existence at that time. His pilgrimages were landmark journeys, because wherever he went, he built stupas and raised pillars known as the Aśokan pillars with inscriptions to commemorate his visit. Through this, the king added four other sacred places sanctified by the Buddha where he had performed miracles to the list of holy places for pilgrims, i.e. Savatthi (Sravasti), where the Buddha performed the Twin miracle to silence the heretics, after which he ascended to Tavatimsa Heaven to preach to his mother; Sankassa (Sankasia), where the Buddha descended from Tavatimsa Heaven accompanied by Brahma and Sakka (Indra), after preaching to his mother and the devas for three months; Rajagaha (Rajgir), where the Buddha tamed the drunk elephant, Nalagili; and Vesali (Vaishali), where a band of monkeys dug a pond for the Buddha's use and offered him a bowl of honey (Khoon San 2001: 15–17). Therefore, the four sacred places and four places of miracles are known as the eight great locations, most of which are located in India and Nepal.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan made pilgrimages to Buddhist places in India and Nepal in three journeys. The first was in January 1957, together with the Supreme Patriarch of Laos, as I already described in the previous part of this chapter. The second was in November 1968 and the third was in June 1969. Before this, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was persuaded by his fellow monk, Pha Maha Pradit Phutthakhosako, abbot of Vat Chanthaburi in Vientiane to join his journey made with a group of monks and lay people from Luang Prabang and Vientiane as a pilgrimage to the four sacred places in India. Pha Maha Pradit expressed his intentions

concerning the pilgrimage, inspiring Sathu Nyai Khamchan to join his trip, as stated in this letter:

ຂະນ້ອຍຄິດວ່າ ໃນຊາດນີ້ ທີ່ໄດ້ເກີດມາ ຮ່ວມພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາຂອງພະອົງແລ້ວ ກໍຂໍໃຫ້ໄດ້ໄປ ນະມັດສະການ ສະຖານທັງ 4 ນີ້ແລ້ວ ແມ່ນຈະທຸກລົງໄປ ດ້ວຍການເສຍສະຫຼະ ຄັ້ງນີ້ ກໍບໍ່ກິນແໜງແຄງໃຈ ປະການໜຶ່ງ ໜ້າທີ່ກິດຈະການງານທຸກສິ່ງຢ່າງ ຂະນ້ອຍກໍຂໍສະຫຼະ ຫາກວ່າ ທາງຊັ້ນສູງຈະຕໍາໜິ ຕິຕຽນ ຫຼືຮີບບົດ ບົດຕໍາແໜ່ງຢ່າງໃດ ໆ ຂະນ້ອຍກໍດີໃຈ ດ້ວຍຄວາມນ້ອມຄາລະວະປະສັນນະສັດທາ ໃນ ສັງເວຊະນິຍະສະຖານນີ້ໂດຍແທ້.

I think that, in this life, as [I] was born in the period of the Buddha's religion, [I] wish to travel to pay my respects to the four places [of the Buddha]. Even though I will become poor because of [the money spent on] this, [I] will not be disappointed. On the other hand, even if I will be rebuked by my superiors, or be removed from any of my Sangha duties and positions, I will still be very happy because of [my] reverence and piety to these Buddhist sites.

(BAD-12-1-1956.007)

This demonstrates his faith and piety in the Buddha and the pilgrimage. The journey was made between May and June 1956 for 23 days. During that time the government and people of India were celebrating the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism. For this occasion, the ticket price was reduced by half for pilgrims who were travelling by train to the Buddhist sites. That was one reason why Pha Maha Pradit made his trip (Pha Maha Pradit 1956, BAD-12-1-1956.007). As Sathu Nyai Khamchan did not join the trip, Pha Maha Pradit wrote another letter to Sathu Nyai Khamchan after the journey to report to him his exciting travels in India and what interesting things he found during the journey, mentioning that:

ສາທຸເອີຍ ພະຍາຍາມໃຫ້ໄດ້ໄປອິນເດຍໃຫ້ໄດ້ແທ້ໆ ມັນຜິດກັບພະມ້າເໝືອນພ້າກັບດິນ ພະມ້າມີຄົນເຜົ່າດຽວຄືພະມ້າເທົ່ານັ້ນ ທັງນີ້ ໝາຍຄວາມວ່າ ເບິ່ງເອົາຮ່າງກາຍ ການແຕ່ງຕົວ ຄໍາເວົ້າ ວັດທະນະທໍາ ເປັນຕົ້ນ ແຕ່ອິນເດຍນັ້ນມີຄົນຫຼາຍເຜົ່າແທ້ໆ...ເວົ້າພາສາຕ່າງກັນ ມີຕັ້ງ 200 ກວ່າພາສາ. ທຸກວັນນີ້ ອິນເດຍກໍາລັງສົນໃຈພະພຸດທະສາສະໜາ...ປັດຈຸບັນນີ້ ໂບຮານສະຖານ ຝ່າຍພຸດທະສາສະໜາທຸກ ແຫ່ງ ລັດຖະບານລົງມືສ້າງ-ຟື້ນຟູຢ່າງແຂງແຮງ ເຊັ່ນຢູ່ ພຸດທະຄະຍາ, ພາລານະສີ, ກຸສິນາຣາ, ລຸມພິນີ, ຣາຊະຄຶ, ນາລັນທາ, ສາວັດຖີ, ຖ້ຳອະຊັນຕະ ແລະເອວໂລລາ ເປັນຕົ້ນ. ການໄປເຖິງອິນເດຍນັ້ນ ບໍ່ຍາກ ແຕ່ການຈະທ່ຽວ ແລະກ່ຽວກັບການຈະເວົ້າກັບເຈົ້າໜ້າທີ່ລິດໄພ ເວົ້າຈ້າງລິດ ນັ້ນ ຍາກແສນຍາກ ຈຶ່ງຕ້ອງມີຜູ້ສໍາຄັນໃນການເວົ້ານີ້ໂດຍຈໍາເພາະຈຶ່ງຈະດີ.

Sathu [Nyai Khamchan]! [You] should try to travel to India; it is completely different from Burma. In Burma, there is only one tribe, the Burmese, judging from their physical appearance, dressing, wording and culture in general.³⁰⁵ But in India, there are so many tribes...they speak more than 200 languages. These days, India is interested in Buddhism [...]. At present, the Buddhist heritage sites are being extensively reconstructed and renovated by the government such as in Buddhagaya, Benares, Kusinara, Lumbini, Rajgir, Nalanda, Sravasti, the Ajanta Caves and the Ellora Caves. Reaching India is easy but traveling around and communicating with the train officials as well as hiring a taxi are immensely complicated. Therefore, [it would be better for us to] have a special person who can deal with these issues.

(BAD-12-1-1956.013)

Pha Maha Pradit's letter made Sathu Nyai Khamchan very eager to make his own pilgrimage.

³⁰⁵ In fact, the people of Myanmar are made up of over 100 ethnic groups with their own languages and dialects. The Burmese people make up a majority of the population, followed by the Chin, Kachin, Shan and other ethnic groups. Pha Maha Pradit's means here that, in his own experience, their physical appearances are more similar to each other than when comparing Indian ethnicities which apparently bear less resemblance to one another.

As appears in photographs showing their visits to the holy places in India, in June 1968, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was accompanied by three women from Luang Prabang and Pha Maha Ammòñ, the Lao student monk in India who was their guide. They stayed at the Lao Embassy in New Delhi. During their travels, they incidentally met a Lao monk from Savannakhet in the south of central Laos – unfortunately his name has yet to be unidentified – who later became a member of their group (Buddhist Archive No. B0068R, B0095R and B0095V). They organized their train travel to many significant and historical places all by themselves. For example, on 9 November 1968, they visited the place where the body of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), preeminent leader of India, was cremated (Buddhist Archive No. B3155R and B3155V). On 20 November, they traveled to Pharanasi (Benares) and paid their respects to the Dhamek Stupa, where the Buddha gave his first sermon in Sarnath (Buddhist Archive No. B0095R and B0095V). On 21 November, they traveled to Gijjhakuta hill (Vulture Peak), where the Buddha spent his private time at his Ghandhakuti (perfume chamber). There are copies of a photograph showing Sathu Nyai Khamchan sitting in meditation to honour the Buddha at the ruins of the *kuti*, his handwriting on the verso of a photograph reading “at the Gandhakuti on the top of Gijjhakuta hill, on 21 November 1968.”³⁰⁶ On 22 November, they traveled to Buddhagaya and paid respects to the Buddhagaya stupa. At this place, Sathu Nyai Khamchan also meditated in honor of the Buddha (Buddhist Archive No. B3133R and B3133V), and subsequently, moved on to visit the Neranjara River, where “the Ascetic Gautama ate the food, put the bowl into the river, and tested his mind-power by saying, “If I attain the supreme knowledge of enlightenment today, may this bowl float upstream.” The bowl floated upstream. This encouraged him further” (Abeysekera 1996: 23).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan made the other pilgrimage in June 1969 after returning from the Soviet Union. He was accompanied by Pha Maha Ammòñ, who traveled with him to locations that he had not visited the last times. On 14 June 1969, they traveled to Sanchi. Some photographs show them paying respects to the Great Stupa at Sanchi,³⁰⁷ one of the most famous religious monuments. It was built over the relics of the Buddha by Aśoka (Ahir 1986: 77–78). On 15 June, they traveled to the Ajanta Caves³⁰⁸ in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra state of India where there are thirty rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments including the paintings and sculptures described by the government archaeological survey of India, which date from the “second century BC to about seventh century AD. The Ajanta Caves are unique as they combine three best specimens of art: architecture, sculpture and painting” (Ibid.: 103). On 15 June, they traveled to the Ellora Caves,³⁰⁹ an archaeological site in the

³⁰⁶ “ພະຄັນທະກຸຕີຍອດພູເຂົາຄິຊະກູດ ວັນທີ 21 ໂນວອມ [ພະຈິກ] 1968.” Buddhist Archive No. B0070R, see also B3134R, B3134V, B4773R and B4773V.

³⁰⁷ Buddhist Archive No. B3149R and B3154R.

³⁰⁸ Buddhist Archive No. A3378R and A3378V.

³⁰⁹ Buddhist Archive No. B3121R and B3121V.

north-west of Aurangabad district. It was built by the Rashtrakuta dynasty between the fifth and tenth centuries and is wellknown for its monumental caves, presenting the epitome of Indian rock-cut architecture. The Ellora consists of 34 caves housing Buddhist, Hindu and Jain rock-cut temples. Today, the Sanchi stupa, the Ajanta Caves and the Ellora caves are preserved as UNESCO world heritage sites. With his three visits to India, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was able to pay his respects to all the most significant sites visited by the Buddha himself and other Buddhist historical places in India and Nepal.

7.3 Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka or Ceylon is one of the oldest continually Buddhist countries where Buddhism has existed. Theravada Buddhism from India was officially introduced to this country in BE 236 (BC 250) by a mission of five monks from India, lead by Venerable Mahinda Thela, the son of King Aśoka, during the reign of King Aśoka's friend King Devanampiya Tissa (r. 307–267 BC).³¹⁰ Later, Venerable Sanghamitta Theri (Bhikkhuni), the daughter of King Aśoka, at the order of her father, brought a branch of the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha obtained enlightenment from Bodh Gaya to Sri Lanka. It was planted in Anuradhapura, the capital of Sri Lanka at the time. She also established the nuns' order in Ceylon (Gombrich 1998: 135 and 149). Since then, the relics of the Buddha and of other Arahants were brought and installed in these religious monuments as sacred sites in Sri Lanka, one of the most well-known being the Buddha's Tooth at Sri Dalada Maligawa Temple in Kandy, as well as the relics of Venerable Maha Moggallana Thera and Venerable Sariputta Thera at the Maha Bodhi Society, a group to which the Lao Sangha paid their respects in 1956.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan made pilgrimages to Sri Lanka on dtow different occasions, once in 1956 and again in 1972. The first time he traveled in a group with five other monks as the Sangha delegation of Laos, led by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, to participate in the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in December 1956, as explained in the previous section. The second time, he traveled together with other monks and lay people from Vientiane. According to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's letter, this group consisted of three monks, one layman and four laywomen, including Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the Abbot of Vat Phabat Phonsan, Pha Thone from Vat Phabat Phonsan, Siha, Amnuai, Siha's wife, Kongkaeo, Khamphong, and Tuy. He wrote the letter to Pha Maha Bunpheng Virathammo, his foster child who was studying at Magadh University in Bodh Gaya, India, before leaving Vientiane for Sri Lanka on May 23 1972 and traveling by train from Nong Khai to Bangkok, after which they took an airplane from Bangkok to Sri Lanka on the following day (BAD-12-1-1972.006). A photograph depicts Sathu Nyai Khamchan posing for a portrait in front of the

³¹⁰ H.R. Perera, 1998. *Buddhism in Sri Lanka: A Short History*, 14–15. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Temple of the Tooth. His handwriting under the photograph reads “the Vihan where the Tooth relic[of the Buddha] has been installed in Kandy, Sri Lanka. [I] came to pay my respects to [the Tooth] on 9 June 1972, at my age of 52.”³¹¹

The Temple of the Tooth Relic or Dalada Maligawa built in the seventeenth century near the shore of Kandy lake is one of the most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the world. One of the Buddha’s Tooth Relics, the left eye-tooth, is kept there.³¹² Tradition says that the Tooth Relic was brought from India around BE 805 (AD 262) by Princess Hemamali and her husband, Prince Dantha, from Kalinga, present-day Orissa in India. As a palladium of Sri Lanka, it is one of the most venerated objects not only to the Sri Lankans but also to the whole Buddhist world. Every day, hundreds of pilgrims pay respects to it. During their stay in Sri Lanka, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and his company met the Lao student monks who were studying at Srilanka Vidyalaya in Maradana, Colombo. One of those students, Pha Maha Somboon Khoonsirivong, wrote to Sathu Nyai Khamchan to express his gratitude and thanks to him due to his organization of their pilgrimage to Sri Lanka. Pha Maha Somboon also mentioned that the members of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s group gave them some money and appliances which were useful for their studies (BAD-12-1-1972.007).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s pilgrimage to Sri Lanka for the second time obviously emphasizes his faith in the Buddha’s Tooth relic, which likens the faith of the Sri Lankan people who are considered as strictly devout Buddhists by frequently paying homage to the relics of the Buddha and adhering consistently to the Buddha’s teaching. They go on pilgrimage to the religious sites, particularly to the Tooth Relic, in groups or with their family annually. Importantly, they all dress in white clothes while travelling on pilgrimage. At the sacred sites, they pay their homage to the sacred objects by offering flowers, candles and incense, as well as by taking their time in order to chant Suttas, meditate and circle the site three times. The pleasant and charming word *sadhu* that Sri Lankans often say with reverence three times during their pilgrimage to the sacred shrines or when making merit is a praise of ones’ good deeds, also training the minds of the speakers to live without envious thoughts (Piyamethi 2011: 25–28). This word is also commonly used by Buddhists in Southeast Asia when they express their impression or congratulation to somebody who has performed an act of merit.

³¹¹ “ພະວິຫານ ບ່ອນປະດິດສະຖານ ພະແຂ້ວແກ້ວ, ຢູ່ເມືອງແກນດີ ປະເທດສີລັງກາ ໄດ້ມານະມັດສະການ ວັນທີ 9 ມິຖຸນາ 1972, ອາຍຸ 52 ປີ.” (Buddhist Archive No. B3229R).

³¹² Historically, four Tooth relics of the Buddha remained. One is at the Chulamani stupa in Tavatimsa Heaven, one is in the *naga* world, one once was in Gandhara of Pakistan and another one was in Kalinga of the southern India. Later, the one which was in Gandhara has been moved to Linguang Temple in Beijing of China, and the one which was in Kalinga has been moved to Sri Lanka where is Dalada Maligawa Temple in Kandy (Piyamedhi 2011: 62–63).

In connection with Sri Lanka, Buddhism was introduced into Laos via Cambodia by King Fa Ngum, who is considered the *Theravadin Lankavamsa* of Buddhism (Sayadej 2012). Luang Prabang is especially linked to Sri Lanka through the famous Buddha statue called Pha Bang after which Luang Prabang is named. The statue was made in Sri Lanka in BC 101. It was sent to Cambodia in AD 857 before it was finally sent to Luang Prabang, then still called Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, in 1359 (Berger and Khamvone 2013: 30). In 1560, when the administrative centre of the Lan Xang kingdom was moved to Vientiane, the name of the city was changed to Luang Prabang.³¹³ The Sangha of Laos made a replica of this Buddha statue which was presented to the Sangha of Sri Lanka during the visit. It is to be understood as representing a historical link between the two Buddhist lineages.

7.4 Burma (Myanmar)

Myanmar is widely known as the Land of Pagodas or the Golden Land all over the world. It has scenic beauty and historical remains, which are inextricable and remarkable. Innumerable pagodas belonging to all ages can be found throughout the country. Wherever one looks within the country one will see Buddha images, temples, *simas* and pagodas on almost every mound and every hillock.

(Tun Shwe Khine 1996: back cover)

For example, Pagan is a city where Buddhism has flourished for centuries and is today known as the sea of pagodas. “Because the people of Pagan believe that pagoda building is the source of a great amount of merit, [...] in the vast valley of the Irrawaddy, nearly 4,000 pagodas could be once seen along its banks. Today, only 2000 of these pagodas remain.” (Dhammakaya Open University 2012: 135).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan had the chance to travel to Burma for conferences, visit and pilgrimages on four different occasions, one time each in 1954, 1957, 1961, and 2002. In 1954, as a delegate of Laos, Sathu Nyai Khamchan went to Rangoon to participate in the proceedings of the second session of the Chaṭṭa Saṅgaāyana – the Sixth Great Buddhist Council – and the third Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, which were held between 15 November 1954 and 29 January 1955 (as explained in the section above). As shown in photographs, made a pilgrimage to the Buddhist sites in Rangoon and in other cities

³¹³ In Maha Sila Viravong’s work, ປະຫວັດສາດລາວແຕ່ບູຮານ ເຖິງ 1946 [History of Laos since ancient time until 1946], he describes that “in 1560, King Setthathirat considered that Nakon Xiang Dong Xiang Thong was a small city and its location was also under the journey of Burmese army who was an adversary of the Xiang Dong Xiang Thong, and Viang Chan was a large city with a large space for livelihood of his populations. [...] Therefore, he assigned the Xiang Dong Xiang Thong city and the Buddha image of Pha Bang to the Sangha to protect. He, together with his ministers, and the Buddha images of Pha Kaeo Mōrakot (Emerald Buddha) and Pha Xaekham, moved to Viang Chan (Vientiane) and named it as *phanakhon chanthaburi sisattana khanahut uttamaraxathani* and Nakon Xiang Dong Xiang Thong was called “Nakhon Luang Prabang” [or Luang Prabang] since then” (Sila 2001: 72–73). The move of the King Saysetthathirāt to Vientiane, is also mentioned in Stuart-Fox’s work, *The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng: Rise and Decline*, pp. 79–80.

like Pagan with Maha Chanpheng Phetmüangsua (Buddhist Archive No. B2187R). Not much information is provided on this pilgrimage. He traveled extensively throughout Burma during January and February 1957, when he was a member of the group of the Lao Sangha led by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat (see the above section). In 1961, again as part of a delegation from Laos, Sathu Nyai Khamchan traveled to Rangoon to participate in the Four Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, which took place in December. The evidence of his travel shows in photographs that he took part with other participant monks from Laos—unfortunately their names have yet to be unidentified—at Shwedagon Pagoda (Buddhist Archive No. B0895R and B0895V).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's final trip to Myanmar was in March 2002. He traveled to Rangoon on official invitation to receive the religious honorific title "Agga Maha Saddhamma Jodika Dhaja" offered to him by the government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (see Chapter 2 on this dissertation). During his stay in Myanmar, which was organized by the Myanmar government, he went on pilgrimage to many of the most significant Buddhist sites in Rangoon, Pagan, Sagaing, Hanthawaddy (Bago), and the Mon state. For example, on 26 March 2002, he paid his respects to the Shwedagon Pagoda, one of the most sacred shrines in Asia where eight hair relics of Gautama Buddha and other holy relics of the previous Buddhas are enshrined.³¹⁴ On 30 March, he paid his respects to the Kyaiktiyo Pagoda (Pagoda on a hermit's head) location Mount Kyaiktiyo in the Mon state in southern Myanmar. The Pagoda is a golden rock in the shape of a hermit's head and is regarded as one of the most sacred sites of the Golden Land of Burma next to Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon and Mahamuni Temple in Mandalay. The granite boulder is thought to contain three hair relics of the Buddha.³¹⁵ On the same day, he also traveled to pay his respects to Shwethalyaung Buddha, the 55-meter Reclining Buddha in Bago, which is believed to have been built in 994 during the reign of Mon King Migadepa (Buddhist Archive No. A1486R and A1486V).

³¹⁴ Shwedagon is a Burmese word. *Shwe* means gold and *dagon* means the city of Dagon, Rangoon's old name. Therefore, Shwedagon Pagoda means the gold Pagoda of Dagon City (Dhammadaya Open University 2012: 134). The 326 feet high pagoda on top of a hillock is completely coated with thin sheets of real gold plates, brilliantly shining in the sun light. According to the chronicle, it is said that this pagoda has existed since ancient times contemporary to that of the Buddha, now enshrining the holy hair relics of the Buddha, which were given to two merchant brothers, Tapussa and Bhallika from Ukkala, by the Buddha himself, a few days after his enlightenment.³¹⁴ Not only the hair relic of Gautama Buddha, but also other holy relics, such as the robe, the walking stick and the water filter of the previous Buddhas, Kakusanna, Gonagamana and Kassapa, were enshrined inside the relic chamber of Shwedagon (U Win Maung 2010: 1). See also Maring 1973. *Historical and Cultural Dictionary of Burma*, 227–228. Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan's photograph, see Buddhist Archive No. A1452R and A1452V.

³¹⁵ For more information on this story and how to pilgrimage to this pagoda, see Hall, 2000. "Pilgrimage to Kyaiktiyo Pagoda (Golden Rock)." *Kyoto Journal*, Fall 2013: 102–108. See also Stadtner, 2008. "The Golden Rock at Kiyak-Hti-Yo." *SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research*, Vol. 6, Part 1-2. Spring & Winter, 2008: 19–69. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's photograph, see Buddhist Archive No. B1143R and B1143V.

On 31 March, he traveled to Pagan and Mandalay and paid his respects to Bupaya Pagoda, a notable pagoda in Pagan which is located on the right bank of the Irrawaddy River. The original one is widely believed to have been erected by King Pyusawthi of Pagan, who ruled from 168 to 243 (Buddhist Archive No. A1496R); to Shwezigon pagoda (Buddhist Archive No. B2570R and B2570V), and is one of the most popular pagodas for pilgrims to Pagan due to its large collection of relics of the Buddha including a frontlet relic from Prome and a Tooth relic from Ceylon (Maring 1973: 230). Thereafter, he paid his respects to the Maha Myat Muni Buddha image at Mahamuni Temple, a golden image which is one of the most revered, ancient and beautiful Buddha images in Mandalay and in all of Myanmar. (Buddhist Archive No. B2569R and B2569V). “The image is both a sacred religious structure and the repository of the spirit of the entire Myanmar Buddhist people” (Tun Shwe Khine 1996: back cover).

Notably, the holy relics of the Buddha which are believed to have been enshrined in the sacred sites in Burma are mostly hair relics i.e. at Shwedagon Pagoda, Golden Rock, and Shwemawdaw Pagoda. Nowadays, visits to Buddhist sites are very popular in Myanmar for both those making a pilgrimage and tourists in general. Many travel agencies provide tours for their customers and the top five-sacred places popularly selected are Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, the Maha Myat Muni Buddha image in Mandalay, the Golden Rock, Kyaikhtiyo in Kyaikhtiyo, Mon state, the Shwemawdaw Pagoda in Bago, and the Shwezigon Pagoda in Bagan. Sathu Nyai Khamchan paid his respects at all of these sacred sites.

8. International Travels

Beside the official visits and pilgrimages as mentioned above, Sathu Nyai Khamchan also made international travels to visit places in Vietnam and Cambodia and Lao people living in foreign countries. Because of the Lao diaspora who fled the country during and after the Lao revolution of 1975, it was possible for Sathu Nyai Khamchan to travel around the world thanks to their hospitality. In 1982 and 1983, he went to France and Australia, and in 1997 to the United States of America, Canada, and some countries in Europe.

8.1 Vietnam and Cambodia

According to Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s biography (Khamvone et al. 2004: 3), his journey to Vietnam and Cambodia in May 1960 was organized by His Excellency Uan Sanith, who, at the time, was the advisor to the Lao Ambassador in Vietnam. In Vietnam, they traveled to Saigon (present-day Ho Chi Minh City) which was then the capital of the Republic of South Vietnam (1955–1975). Their itinerary consisted of sight-seeing in Saigon and a visit to the complex of Hue monuments where once a Lao Prince, Say Ong Hue, Chao Somphu’s son,

was held as a political hostage. Prince Say Ong Hue later became King Saysethathirat II (r. 1698–1730, Sila 2001: 106–108) of the Kingdom of Sisattana Khanahutta (Vientiane). During this period, Laos was separated in three kingdoms, i.e. Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champasak. His original name was Prince Say. Because he used to live in Hue, he was called Prince Say Ong Hue by the people. On 9 May 1960, they visited the ruined Brahmin temples of the Champa minority in Nha Trang district, Khanh Hoa province (Buddhist Archive No. A0868R and A0868V).

Subsequently, they left Saigon for Phnom Penh in Cambodia by car. In Phnom Penh, as they had only a short time, they visited only the royal palace and Vat Pha Kaeo on 15 May 1960.³¹⁶ On the same day, they traveled further from Phnom Penh to Siemreap, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan posed for a portrait with the car, a Volkswagen, on their way. The handwriting on the photo reads “ລະຫວ່າງທາງຈາກພະນົມເປັນຮອດສຽມຽບ 15 ພຶດສະພາ 1960 [On the way from Phnom Penh to Siemriap on 15 May 1960]” (Buddhist Archive No. A1179R and A1179V). On 16 May 1960, they first visited Angkor Thom (“Great City”) and Angkor Wat³¹⁷ (“Temple City”). On the same day, Sathu Nyai Khamchan took a flight at Seam Reap leaving for Bangkok, then retruned Laos (Buddhist Archive No. B3507R). Even though their time in Cambodia was short, they visited many important places and many photographs of their visits were taken during this trip.

Remarkably, the decorations of golden stencil display on the interior walls and leaves of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam appear to be images of *apsaras*,³¹⁸ *devatas*, and other flying angels. These images are popularly “shown in relief at very important monuments (most notably on the walls of Angkor Wat)” (Coe 2003:160). There are “more than 2,000 *apsaras* or *devatas* decorate the temple of Angkor Wat. Careful study reveals many differences in their dress, head-dresses and physiognomy” (Jacques and Freeman 2008: 50). Sathu Nyai Khamchan had seen these images while visiting Angkor Wat (Buddhist Archive No. B3508R and B3508V and B3511R and B3511V) before he elaborated the decoration work of golden

³¹⁶ Buddhist Archive No. A3411R, A3411V, B2545R and B2545V.

³¹⁷ Angkor Wat is a group of large Hindu temples situated in Siem Reap, the ancient capital of Cambodia during the Angkor period (802–1432), 327 kilometers far away from Phnom Penh. The structure is square with 1,250 rai (2,000,000 square meters) and surrounded by four canals. It was initially built by King Suryavarman II who reigned between 1113 and 1150. The idea of the temples was to model them after Sumeru Mount for worship to Vishnu. The four canals are to model the four oceans which cover the world. The main stupa is 65 meters high surrounded by other less high stupas as its satellites. The construction work took at least 100 years, used 600,000 cubic meters of stones, 40,000 elephants for transporting the stones from Phnom Kulane Mount 50 kilometers far from the place, around 100,000 workers and 5,000 carvers. The decoration made of 1,500 *apsaras* or *devatas* (in Jacques and Freeman 2008: 50 says 2,000 *apsaras*) appears on the walls throughout the buildings. Angkor Wat was nominated by UNESCO as the World Heritage Site in 1994 (Daosayam 2012: 24, 34).

³¹⁸ Divine dancing girls (Coe 2003: 160, Roveda 2003:75), celestial water nymphs, wives of the *Gandharvas* (celestial musicians), appeared in the skies of Khmer myths. They are always bare-breasted, adorned only with jewels, and with elaborate hairstyles (Roveda 2003:75,172).

stencil on the interior walls and leaves of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam in 1964. The *apsaras* and *devatas* at Vat Saen Sukharam are made in the Lao style, e.g. they wear Lao silk skirts (Lao: *sin mai*) (Illustration No. 5.10). The artist who created the stencil work for Sathu Nyai Khamchan, might have been Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela who studied the Fine Art in Bangkok for ten years during the 1920s and had produced art work in Laos. One of Sathu Nyai Khamfan's works is Sala Thammaviahana at Vat Suvannakhili in the Lao colonial style. It can be assumed that Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected ideas from his travel in Cambodia and he blended the Khmer art into his own Lao style. This is one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's important works in Lao art and the so-called 'cultural exchanges' between Laos and Cambodia through monks' travels.

8.2 France and other European countries

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's international travels to the western countries began in 1982, seven years after the Lao revolution, during which the situation of the country was anything but back to normal. The Lao people continued to flee the country and the country was closed to the outside world than ever before. Sathu Nyai Khamchan could make his travels. Two possibilities can be considered: firstly, it might have been because of his reliable personality that the Lao government was confident that he had a deep love for his homeland and would return from his visits; and secondly, it might have been due to the help of his relatives who were high-ranking officials in the government and members of the Lao People's Revolution Party, for example, Khamphay Buppha, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Achan Maha Khamphan Virachit, the Lao Ambassador to Cambodia. Otherwise, he would have a difficulty to leave the country at that time.

Invited by relatives living in France, in June 1982, Sathu Nyai Khamchan visited them for six months. During his stay in France, his relatives took him to visit places in other countries in the European Union, for instance, the United Nations building in Geneva, Switzerland on 20 June 1982 (Buddhist Archive No. A1704R), the Grand Palace in Brussel, Belgium (Buddhist Archive No. B3407R and B3407V), the Great Royal Albert Hall or the millennium Dome in London, England (Buddhist Archive No. B8677R). In France, Sathu Nyai Khamchan visited many famous places in Paris e.g. the Eiffel Tower, and other cities where the Lao people lived. He met an old and close friend there, Alexandre Snith (or Uan Sanith), who was an ascetic dressing in white cloths. Ascetic Uan Sanit accompanied Sathu Nyai Khamchan to visit the Lao diaspora in various locations in France and during the Buddhist ceremonies in the Lao houses. He as the ascetic was sitting aside of Sathu Nyai Khamchan and other monks (Buddhist Archive No. A1733R and A2739R). He was not a monk but he was respected by the people, so that, he got a special place to sit in the ceremonies. They visited houses in Dinan where August Pavie was born, the famous

diplomatic in Lao history who was crucial for Laos becoming a French colony in 1893,³¹⁹ and also Mont Siant Michel in Normandy. A photograph of this visit is labeled Buddhist Archive No. B3417R and B3417V – the handwriting on the verso reads, “ທີ່ຮະລິກ ຈາກ ‘ມິງແຊງ ມີ ແຊນ’ Mont Siant Michel ປະເທດຝຣັ່ງ ເດືອນ ຊຸງ [ມິຖຸນາ] 1982 [Souvenir from Mont Saint Michel, France in June 1982].” In the photograph, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the driver and Asetic Uan Sanit can be seen standing on the side of the road, with the Mont Saint-Michel behind them. Subsequently, Uan Sanith was ordained as a monk by Sathu Nyai Khamchan as his preceptor, and became Sathu Phò Uan Aphakaro.³²⁰ He accompanied him to Australia. In addition, Sathu Nyai Khamchan presided over the ordination ceremony as the preceptor for Kavimon who was ordained as a monk at a Lao temple in Paris on 4 September 1982.³²¹

As shown on photographs, the activities of Sathu Nyai Khamchan comprised the attending the Buddhist ceremonies in the Lao houses, which were the main purpose of his visits, visiting the famous places, and Buddhist temples. At the ceremonies he attended, he sometimes was the only monk chanting, and sometimes he was joined by other monks. The Lao diaspora still practiced the ceremonies like in Laos, for example, after the ceremony the men they would ask him to give them a blessing by tying their hands with a white thread and chanting a short Sutta. In the beginning of January 1983, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Sathu Phò Uan left France for Thailand and continued their journey to Australia. The trip to Australia is mentioned in the section.

In 1995, Sathu Nyai Khamchan traveled to France once more. According to his biography (Khamvone et al. 2004: 4), Sathu Nyai Khamchan was invited by Buddhists to participate in their festivals in France and England for three months. Unfortunately, it is

³¹⁹ Auguste Lean-Marie Pavie, French colonial civil servant, explorer, and diplomatic, born in Dinan, France on 31 May 1847, was known as the first French vice-consul in Luang Prabang. Pavie was introduced to King Mahinthathepniphathòn (or King Ounkham) by Sathu Nyai Tan Tissapanya Maha Thela (died in 1911), abbot of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram in 1887 (One Keo and Khamvone 2010: 22). He died in Thourie, France on 7 May 1925. For photographs of their visit to the place see Buddhist Archive No. B9904R and B9904V. The handwriting on the verso of this photograph reads, “ຮູບນີ້ຖ່າຍທີ່ ດີນັນ (Dinan) ເດືອນ 6 ປີ 1982 ຢູ່ຕໍ່ໜ້າບ້ານເກີດຂອງທ່ານປາວີ (Pavie) [This photo was taken in front of the birth house of Sir Pavie in Dinan in June 1982]. Ici est mé Auguste Pavie Exploteur Ministre Plempotentiaire 1847–1925”

³²⁰ Sathu Phò Uan Aphakaro (Uan Sanit) was born on 11 June 1921 in Luang Prabang. He graduated from the Law and Political School in Vientiane and obtained a diploma of West London College of Commerce in 1957. From 1942 until 1972, he worked as a state officer. He was the police superintendent in Salavan province in 1946, the district chief of Xaiyabuli district in 1950, the head office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vientiane in 1954, the second secretary of the Lao Embassy in London in 1955, the first secretary of the Lao Embassy in Saigon in 1957, the director of the politic department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vientiane in 1960, the advisor to the Lao Charge d’affaires in Phnom Penh in 1962, the directot general of tax department in Vientiane in 1965, the advisor to the Lao Ambassador in Bangkok in 1967, the government of Luang Prabang province in 1970 and the governor of Vientiane province in 1972 (BAD-02-0029). His honorific title was Phaya Anurak Raxasena. On 6 January 1959, he was ordained as a monk at Vat Saen Sukharam for a short period (Buddhist Archive No. A4387R), and ordained as a monk again in France on 13 November 1982 (BAD-02-0478), where he currently still lives.

³²¹ Buddhist Archive No. A2707R, A2707V, A2712R, A2712V and A2713R.

known where the festivals were held and the Buddhists who the organizers were. However, as shown on the photographs of this trip, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was accompanied by Sathu Phò Uan Aphakaro in visiting the places and in the Buddhist ceremonies in the Lao houses both in France and England. In Lyon, Sathu Nyai Khamchan attended the ordination ceremony as the preceptor for Phetsarath Chaophrasy to be as a monk at Vat Buddhadham (Buddhist Archive No. A3613R and A3613V). In London, as of right now, there is no information related to the Buddhist festivals they participated in or the people they met. However, the photographs show that they visited many famous tourist attractions in the city, e.g. on 24 June 1995, they visited the Elizabeth Tower (the Big Ben) and the Tower Bridge (Buddhist Archive No. B8705R and B8705V); and on 26 June 1995, they visited Madame Tussauds, the museum and tourist attraction, and the Buckingham Palace (Buddhist Archive No. B8685R and B8685V). This was Sathu Nyai Khamchan's first time in London and his second time in France.

Sathu Khamchan's third visit to France and other European countries was made after he visited the United States of America and Canada (see section below). Sathu Nyai Khamchan and a couple as his followers, Somnük and Kongkham Thongphanit left Canada on 1 June 1997 for France and stayed there for one month. Somnük noted that when they arrived in France, many of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives and disciples invited him to visit their families. He accepted their invitations and paid a visit to them all. They also visited the Lao embassy in Paris. A photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan sitting on a sofa together with Ambassador Khamphan Simmalavong. The handwriting on the verso of the photo reads "visit with the Lao Ambassador, Khamphan Simalavong, to France at the Lao Embassy in Paris on 6 [June] 1997 (signature of Sathu Nyai Khamchan)" (Buddhist Archive No. A1232R and A1232V). During their stay in France, they visited many cities i.e. Nice, Ifres, Artres, Valrace, Nimes, Antibes, Toulon, Marseille, Solon, and Aix-en-Provence. They also traveled to Germany to visit the Lao people from Luang Prabang living in Germany for four days i.e. Mrs. Thong Vankham Chittranonh at Winzer Str. 17, 53639 Königswinter (BAD-12-1-1997.011). They also traveled to Berlin led by Sanga as their tour guide to visit the Berlin Wall Memorial, the Berlin Television Tower, the Berlin Cathedral (Buddhist Archive No. A1243R), the Brandenburg Gate, and Kerbelweg in Hamburg, northern Germany. They stayed in Germany for four days before returning to France. On 2 July 1997, they left France for Bangkok and stayed there a few days before flying to Vientiane. Sathu Nyai Khamchan arrived in Luang Prabang on 10 July 1997.

The last visit of Sathu Nyai Khamchan to France and the European countries was made on 16 June 2002 for a period of fifty days. On this trip, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was accompanied by Sathu Anusit Asito (1951–2005), abbot of Vat That Luang as his follower. This time he was invited by Buddhists to participate in the Vessantara Jātaka festivals which were held at Lao temples in Paris i.e. Vat Buddhamedta and Vat Lao Velouvanaram by Lao

diaspora in France. The festival at Vat Buddhamedta (Choisy-le-Roi) was held on 2 June, and the festival at Vat Lao Velouvanaram at Le Petit Rouge Bourse (RN 3) 77260 Chamigny, was held on 7 June 2002.³²² At the festivals, Sathu Nyai Khamchan preached many episodes of the Vessantara Jātaka. At Vat Lao Velouvanaram, he met Prince Soulivong Savang³²³ and Prince Sauryavong³²⁴ and the Lao people organized a *thelaphisek* ceremony for him (Buddhist Archive No. A3312R and A3312V).

Sathu Nyai Khamchan met Prince Soulivong Savang again at Vat Savang in Paris (Buddhist Archive No. A2369R). Sathu Ounkham Akkhapsanyo who was at the meeting and observed their conversation states that “the prince questioned whether Sathu Nyai Khamchan remembered him or not. Sathu Nyai Khamchan answered him, ‘yes, I remember you’. Then the prince also enquired about his mother, Princess Manilai. Sathu Nyai Khamchan told him that his mother is taking refuge in Buddhism, she gives alms-offerings to monks in the morning of every day and also regularly attends the Buddhist rituals. Sathu Nyai Khamchan said that he was happy to see that the Lao people in France can preserve the Lao culture and tradition.”³²⁵ A photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan, Prince Soulivong and Prince Sauryavong sitting in front of the Buddha statue in Vat Lao Velouvanaram during the Buddhist ceremony (Buddhist Archive No. A1340R). When he was ten years old, the Prince was ordained as a novice at Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang, by Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela as his preceptor, for two months during the school vacation in 1973 (Buddhist Archive No. C1337R). During his novitiate, Sathu Nyai Khamchan arranged a tour for him to the different monasteries in Luang Prabang, as depicted in one of the portraits taken

³²²At Vat Buddhamedta, see Buddhist Archive No. B1977R to B1981R, and at Vat Velouvanaram, see Buddhist Archive No. A1323R, A1323V and BAD-12-2-2002.023.

³²³ Prince Soulivong Savang is the son of Crown Prince Vong Savang and Princess Manilai, and the grandson of King Sisavang Vatthana, the last King of Laos. He was born in Luang Prabang in 1963, with strange marks, a white tongue, a birthmark shaped like the Lao map on his chest, and stripes on his body and feet of which were believed to be the traces of the Buddhist wheel of life. These marks then faded, changed and disappeared when he was over twelve years old (Evans 2009: 385). He escaped from captivity in Laos together with his younger brother, Prince Thayavong Savang in 1981, arriving in France as refugees. The Prince currently lives in Paris and is the pretender to the Lao throne. For more information of Prince Soulivong Savang, see Evans 2009, *The Last Century of Lao Royalty*, 385–387. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

³²⁴ Prince Sauryavong Savang, the youngest son of King Sisavang Vatthana and Queen Khamphui, was born in Luang Prabang on 22 January 1937. In 1965, He married Princess Dalavan; they had four children. In November 1975, he escaped from Laos by swimming across the Mekong River to Thailand, and subsequently, arrived in France. Since 1984, after the Lao exile community conceded that King Sisavang Vatthana and Crown Prince Vong Savang were dead in the internment camp in Xam Neua, Hua Phan province, in northern Laos, the government in exile declared him as a regent (Evans 2009: 38). He is currently head of the Lao royal family in France and acts as Regent to his nephew Prince Soulivong Savang.

³²⁵ Interview with Sathu Ounkham Akkhapsanyo who at present lives in Vat Lao Buddhist Temple of Visalia, California, the USA by a social media in June 2015.

of them at Vat Xangkhong in Luang Prabang on 29 July 1973 (Buddhist Archive No. A0148R and A0148V). They also took a studio portrait at Vat Saen Sukharam together.³²⁶

8.3 Australia

In January 1983, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Sathu Phò Uan Aphakaro took a flight from Paris to Thailand to get their visas at the Australian Embassy in Bangkok. They continued their journey to Australia and stayed there for two months. In Australia, they visited the states where the Lao people were living, for instance, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. The trip was similar to their journey to France, as they were invited by Lao people to events and sometimes went to visit famous places i.g. Manly Beaches, Tha Big Banana, and the Sydney Opera House, Buddhist temples and Christian churches in the cities. Many Lao people in Australia live in Sydney. Photographs with annotations indicating date and places that were taken during Sathu Nyai Khamchan's visit as well as personal letters that Lao people sent to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam after his visit proved the information of the places and people they visited and their activities.

For example, on 10 January 1983, they went to Queensland where they visited the sea and other tourist attractions (Buddhist Archive No. B3406R and B3406V). On 13 January 1983, they went to participated in the Buddhist ceremony at the house of Mrs Samon Phatthanak at 101 Vine St, Fairfield, New South Wales (Buddhist Archive No. A2582R and A258V). On 14 January 1983, they visited and participated in the Buddhist ceremony at the family of Khamsing Inthapanyo and Bangon Vilay in the New South Wales. A photograph shows the hosts were handing food to Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Sathu Phò Uan; the handwriting on the verso on the photograph reads:

ວັນທີ 14 ມີນາ 1983 ຄຳສິງ ອິນທະປັນໂຍ ແລະຄອບຄົວ (ບັງອອນ ວິໄລ) ໄດ້ມີໂອກາດທຳບຸນຕັກບາດ ເມື່ອງໃນໂອກາດ ສາທູໄຫຍ່ຄຳຈັນ ໄດ້ຢູ່ມຢາມປະຊາຊົນລາວທີ່ປະເທດອອສເຕຣເລຍ [ໂອສະຕາລີ] [ລາຍເຊັນ].

On 14 January 1983, Khamsing Inthapanyo and the family (Bangon Vilay) had the chance to make the merit of alms-giving on the occasion of Sathu Nyai Khamchan visiting Lao people in Australia [signature].

(Buddhist Archive No. A2580R and A2580V)

In the afternoon of the same day they visited the monastery of the Thai community, Vat Buddharangsi Stanmore, where they were received by the monks and lay Buddhists at the monastery (Buddhist Archive No. A1676R and A1676V). Other photographs demonstrate their participation in the Buddhist ceremony at the house of Mrs. Bouasanith Sukaseum at 10/63 Kamira Ave. Villawood NSW 2163 (Buddhist Archive A1655R, A1655V, and BAD-

³²⁶ A picture of them in Evans shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan sitting on a chair and Soulivong sitting to his right on the floor. The caption reads, "Soulivong as a Buddhist novice, here with Sathu Khamchan of Vat Saen Luang Prabang" (2009: 385).

12-1-1985.003), the house of Bouachanh Mangala at No. 3 Shoemaker Place, Bonnyrigg NSW 2177 (BAD-12-1-1986.017, B8561R and B8561V), the house of Bouachine Sodarak (BAD-12-1-1989.059), the house of Thongchan Chanthery (158 Midleborough Rd, Blackburn South Vic 3103 (BAD-12-1-1994.022). On 6 February 1983, they participated in the Buddhist ceremony of *sai bat* (alms-giving in an alms-bowl) at the Villawood Hall in Sydney where the Lao people gather to make merit (Buddhist Archive No. B8595R, B8595V, B8597R and B8597V).

The Lao immigrants in Australia live in particular in Sydney and Melbourne, – some live in New Zealand, half of them live in Auckland; among them were Buddhist monks. Buddhist temples still are their spiritual centers and they still follow the Buddhist Teachings and Lao traditions. Therefore, when they had established their Lao communities, they erected Lao Buddhist temples to be used as the spiritual centers for the whole Lao exile community to organise the Buddhist ceremonies and Lao festivals. Vat Phayortkeo Dhammayanaram,³²⁷ where Pha Achan Thongsavan Chanthathirat is the abbot, was considered as the first Lao temple in Australia and the center of the Lao Buddhist Society of New South Wales. It was built in the 1980s. So far (2015), there are ten Lao Buddhist temples in three states in Australia, i.e. in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.³²⁸ In New Zealand, Vat Lao Auckland was the first Lao temple which was developed by Pha Khamlor Rattanayano in the late 1980s (Khamvone 2014: 12), later, the Lao diaspora founded their temple, Vat Lao Buddharam Association Trust Board at 5 Nixon Ave, Otahuhu, Auckland; Pha Saengchan Soratanavong is the abbot. Among the Lao refugees living in the outside Laos compare to the USA and France, ‘smaller refugee populations in Australia and New Zealand’ (Evant 2002: 230). In the recent years, there are 10,769³²⁹ Lao descents in Australia and 1,344³³⁰ in New Zealand.

8.4 North America

Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s international travels in 1997, which took four months, were considered by him as a journey around the world.³³¹ He started his journey with China Airline

³²⁷ The temple is located at 711-715 Smithfield Rd, Edensor Park NSW 2176, and its name was chosen in honor of the last Supreme Patriarch of Laos, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, whose honorific title is Pha Yotkhaeo Phutthasinorot Sakonmaha Sangkhamok.

³²⁸ Vat Lao Buddhimit and Vat That Luang Canberra in Canberra, Vat Phayortkeo Dhammayanaram, Vat Lao Buddhometta, Vat Lao Buddhavongsa and Vat Buddhavalarn Forest Monastery in New South Wales, Vat Lao Queensland in Queensland, Vat Lao Melbourne and Vat Lao Phutthanivet in Victoria. <http://comptablelao.com/Watthebandol/Links.html>, accessed on 31 July 2015.

³²⁹ See www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/lao (consulted 16 November 2015).

³³⁰ See www.teara.govt.nz/en/laotians/page-1 (consulted 16 November 2015).

³³¹ Sathu Nyai Khamchan recalled his travel when he gave an interview to the team of Sparkle Media for producing a film of his life entitled “ສາທູໂຍຍໍຄໍາຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະມະຫາເຖລະ [Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela” at Vat Saen Sukharam in 2006].

from Thailand and went via Taiwan and Japan to Hawaii, then to the continental USA, Canada, and Europe before finally heading back to Thailand and finally to Laos. His travel to the USA was made at the invitation of Mrs. Chansouk Suvannavong who lives in Virginia (BAD-02-0107: 22) for the purpose of visiting his relatives and other Lao diaspora in North American and European countries. He was accompanied by relatives, the couple Somnük and Kongkham Thongphanit from Vientiane (Buddhist Archive No. A1810R). This long trip was reported in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's personal letter as well as Somnük's notes and letter, and depicted in a large collection of photographs. According to Sathu Nyai Khamchan's letter that he wrote in France, dated 22 June 1997, sent to Sathu Thongchan Thantachitto at Vat Saen Sukharam (BAD-12-1-1997.010), his travelling went well with safety and comfort; the content of the letter is as follows:

ອັງໂຕນີ, ວັນທີ 22 ມິຖຸນາ 1997

ສະຫວັດດີມາຍັງສາທາງທອງຈັນທີ່ຮັກແພງ.

ຂ້ອຍໄດ້ຈາກໄປແຕ່ວັນທີ 10 ມີນາ, ຮອດບາງກອກວັນທີ 13.3.97. ຈາກບາງກອກວັນທີ 15.3.97 ຮອດເກາະຮາວາຍຢູ່ 8 ມື້ ອອກຮາວາຍຮອດຊານຟານຊີສະໂກວັນທີ 26.3.97. ວັນທີ 14.4.97 ລົງມາຊານດີເຢໂກ. ວັນທີ 22.4.97 ກັບຄືນຊານຟານຊີສະໂກ. ວັນທີ 30.4.97 ໄປຮອດມິສສຸຣີ, ນັ່ງເຮືອບິນ 6 ຊົ່ວໂມງ, ຢູ່ນໍາທ້າວສົມນິກລູກແມ່ອອກຫຼ້າບ້ານຫາດຮຸ່ນ 4 ຄືນ. ທ້າວສົມນິກເອົາລົດໄປສົ່ງຮອດທ້າວຜາຍ, ນັ່ງລົດໄປ 4 ຊົ່ວໂມງ, ຢູ່ນໍາທ້າວຜາຍ 3 ຄືນ. ຂຶ້ນເຮືອບິນໄປ 1 ຊົ່ວໂມງຮອດນາງບັງອອນ ວັນທີ 7.5.97. ວັນທີ 12.5.97 ທ້າວສິທັດຂັບລົດໄປສົ່ງ 6 ຊົ່ວໂມງ ຮອດນາງຈັນສຸກ ວໍຊິງຕັນ. ຢາມພື້ນ້ອງຍາດໂຍມເຫັນຫຼາຍຜູ້ຫຼາຍຄົນ. ວັນທີ 17.5.97 ນາງຈັນສຸກແລະລູກຊາຍຂັບລົດມາສົ່ງຮອດນາງຈັນທີ 1 ຄືນ, ຮອດບ້ານທ້າວໂຕ້ຍ 1 ຄືນ. ວັນທີ 20 ຮອດປະເທດຄານາດາ ຢູ່ 11 ມື້. ຮອດວັນທີ 1.6.97 ຈາກຄານາດານັ່ງເຮືອບິນ 6 ຊົ່ວໂມງ ຮອດຝຣັ່ງເສດວັນທີ 2.6.97. ການເດີນທາງສະດວກສະບາຍດີ ບໍ່ເຈັບໄຂ້ໄດ້ພະຍາດຫຍັງ. ທຸ່ງວເບິ່ງບ້ານເມືອງຢາມຍາດໂຍມ. ມື້ອື່ນວັນທີ 23 ຈະຂຶ້ນເຮືອບິນໄປເຢຍລະມັນ. ວັນທີ 26 ຈະກັບຄືນມາຝຣັ່ງ. ວັນທີ 30.6.97 ໄດ້ໄປສູດມິນສະຖານທູດລາວຢູ່ຝຣັ່ງເສດ ສັນເພນແລ້ວລາທ່ານທູດ. ວັນທີ 1.7.97 ຈະໄດ້ຂຶ້ນເຮືອບິນຈາກຝຣັ່ງເສດມາປະເທດໄທ, ແວ່ຢາມພວກຫຼານແລະເວົ້າວຽກຢູ່ 5 ຄືນ ແລ້ວຂຶ້ນເຮືອບິນມາວຽງຈັນ. ກະໃຫ້ຮອດວັດຫຼວງພະບາງ ວັນທີ 10 ກໍລະກົດ 1997, ຄິບ 4 ເດືອນພໍດີ. ສິ່ງຂ້າວພະຈິວແລະພວກພໍ່ອອກແມ່ອອກບ້ານເຮົາດ້ວຍ ຄິດຮອດຫາທຸກຄົນ.

ຂ້ອຍສະບາຍດີ ຫວັງວ່າຄົງຢູ່ສະບາຍດີທຸກຄືນ.

ດ້ວຍຄວາມຮັກແພງ ຄິດຮອດ.

Antony, on 22 June 1997

Dear beloved Sathu Thongchan,

I left [Luang Prabang] for Vientiane on 10 March [1997, and left Vientiane] for Bangkok on 13.3.97. [I] left Bangkok for Hawaii on 15.3.97 [and] stayed there for eight days. [I] left Hawaii for San Francisco on 26.3.97. On 14.4.97, [I] traveled to San Diego. On 22.4.97, [I] returned to San Francisco. On 30.4.97, [I] traveled to Missouri, was six hours on board, and stayed at the house of Thao Somnük's [who is] the son of Nang Khamla from Ban Hat Hian, [Luang Prabang] for four nights. Thao Somnük took [me] in his car to Phay, four hours in the car, and [I] stayed at Phay's house for three nights. On 7.5.97, [I] traveled by airplane for one hour to Nang Bangon [Siphanthone]. On 12.5.97, Thao Sithat took [me] in his car for six hours to Nang Chansuk in Washington. [I] had visited [my] relatives and other Buddhists; [I] met many people. On 17.5.97, Nang Chansuk and her son took [me] in their car to Nang Chanthi and stayed at her house for one night, and stayed at Thao Toy's house for one night. On 20.[5.97, I] traveled to Canada and stayed there for eleven days. Until on 1.6.97, [I] left Canada for France, was six hours on board and arrived in France on 2.6.97. My travels are comfortable and [I] was not met by pain, fever or disease. [I] traveled to go sight-seeing and to visit Buddhists. Tomorrow is 23.[6.97, and I] will travel by airplane to Germany. On 26.[6.97, I] will return to France. On 30.6.97, [I] will go to chant [the Buddhist Suttas for a Buddhist ceremony] at the Lao Embassy in France and say good-bye to the Lao Ambassador after my lunch. On 1.7.97, [I] will take an airplane from France to

Thailand, and stop [in Thailand] to visit my descendants and doing my business for five nights, then take an airplane to Vientiane. [I] expect to arrive in [our] monastery in Luang Prabang on 10 July 1997, [it] takes four full months for my travel. Give my news to monks, novices and lay Buddhist men and women in our villages. [I] am thinking of everybody.

I am fine and hope you all are fine too.

With my love and missing you all.³³²

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's letter provides an overview of the travels. However, Somnük's note entitled *ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຮອບໂລກຂອງສາທຸໄທຍ໌ຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະເຖລະ* [Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Thela's Travels around the World], provides additional details about the four months of their journey. The note was a hand-drafted version made in 1998 by Somnük, one year after their travel, with the aim to be published in book format, but the publication has not been realized yet. The foreword of the note describes Sathu Nyai Khamchan's expression on his travels:

ຕົກມາໃນປີນີ້ ອາຕະມາ ກໍ່ສູງອາຍຸແລ້ວ ເຫັນວ່າ ພໍໄປໄດ້ຢູ່ ກໍ່ຂໍໄປທ່ຽວລອບ[ຮອບ]ໂລກກ່ອນ ພໍ່ອອກ ແມ່ອອກ ຢູ່ວຽງຈັນ ແລະ ຫຼວງພະບາງເຮົາ ກໍ່ຫ້າມ ແຕ່ແລ້ວ ກໍ່ໄປມາໄດ້ສະດວກດີ ບໍ່ເຈັບຫົວມົວເກົ້າ ແຕ່ປະການໃດເລີຍ ການທ່ຽວລອບໂລກຄັ້ງນີ້ ໄດ້ຮັບການລັບ[ຮັບ] ຕ້ອນ ຈາກພໍ່ອອກ ແມ່ອອກ ຢູ່ຕ່າງຖິ່ນ ດີລິມຄວນ.

By this year [1997, even though] I am an old (77-year-old) man, I felt I could make the journey. I wanted to travel around the world [but] was inhibited by lay Buddhist men and women in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. In the end I was able to travel without much trouble. [During] this journey around the world, I was well welcomed by lay Buddhist men and women in foreign countries.

(BAD-02-0107)

In Hawaii, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was warmly received at the airport by Pha Achan Bunkong Singsuvan (1945–2013), abbot of Vat Lao Sithammaram³³³ in Hawaii, president of the Lao Buddhist Monk Organization (LBMO) in the United States of America,³³⁴ and other

³³² According to the post office's seals on the envelop of this letter, it was sent out of France on 23.6.97 and arrived in Luang Prabang on 30.6.97. However, Sathu Nyai Khamchan wrote that "on 30.6.97, he went to participate in the Buddhist ceremony at the Lao Embassy in France and said good-bye to the Ambassador after his lunch." This sentence will be his expect to do because it did not occur when the letter was made. The term 'night' appearing in this letter means 'day'; in the Lao way, when they talk about their stay overnight, they prefer saying 'night' to 'day'. The term 'Thao' is a Lao term using for the prefix of a man's name means 'Mr.', the term 'Nang' is a Lao term using for the prefix of a woman's name means 'Mrs.'

³³³ Vat Lao Sithammaram is the only Lao temple in Hawaii and is the center of the Lao Buddhist society of Hawaii. It is located on the slope of a hill at 1801 Manaiki Place, Honolulu, Hawaii 36819–2813. Its original was a house and later was adopted as the monastery. At present, Pha Achan Inpaeng, a monk from Luang Prabang with a bachelor degree from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Bangkok, is the abbot.

³³⁴ It was founded in 1980 in San Diego, California, under the presidency of Pha Maha Dr. Singthong Thitathammo (Banlūsak) with a supervision of the last Supreme Patriarch of Laos, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela for gathering and administrating the Lao monks in the USA. Since 2003, this organization has its business name as the Lao American Buddhist Sangha Council Inc. The council serves for the Lao monks in the North America. Pha Achan Maha Bunkong Singsuvan was the successor from 2000 until his death in 2013, at present; Pha Achan Phaivanh Phommavong is served as its president (Ounkham 2015: Interview).

Pha Maha Dr. Singthong Thitathammo (Banlūsak) was born on 15 March 1931 in Ban Nakhòn village, Tasaeng Nam Bak, Ngòi district in the U River, northern Luang Prabang. In 1943, he was ordained as a novice at his village monastery. In 1952, he was ordained as a monk at Vat Mai Suvannaphoumaram, Luang Prabang, in

Buddhists (Buddhist Archive No. A1785R). They brought him to stay at Vat Lao Sithammaram (Buddhist Archive No. A1792R). On 18 March 1997, they traveled around Hawaii for sight-seeing, for instance, to visit the Hilovolcano, and the folk performance of the local Polynesians for tourists. Somnük observed that:

ຄົນລາວອຸປະຍົກ [ອົບພະຍົບ] ຢູ່ເມືອງ Honolulu ລັດ Hawaii ກໍມີຫຼາຍວິຊາຊີບ. ສັງກັດລັດເບີເຊັນໜ້ອຍ. ປູກຝັງແລະເປັນກຳມະກອນສ່ວນມາກ. ບາງຄົນຕັ້ງຮ້ານອາຫານ ເຊັ່ນ ຮ້ານອາຫານ ແມ່ໂຮງ, ຮ້ານອາຫານບາງກອກ ແຕ່ຄົນລາວເປັນຜູ້ຈັດການ. ສາທູໃຫຍ່ຢູ່ Hawaii ກໍມີສຸຂະພາບແຂງແຮງດີ, ດີກວ່າພວກຂ້າພະເຈົ້າຊ້າ. ເວລາເພິ່ນຍ່າງເພິ່ນດີໃຈກໍເທດໃນຄໍສຽງອຸ່ມ ໆ. ເພິ່ນມັກຖ່າຍຮູບຫຼາຍ, ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຄັ້ງນີ້ ໝົດເງິນນຳການຖ່າຍຮູບຫຼາຍສົມຄວນ. [...] ວຽກຂອງສາທູໃຫຍ່ຢູ່ໂຮໂນລູລູກໍແມ່ນບາງຄັ້ງຄາວ ກໍຖືກມີມົນໄປເຮັດບຸນທຳທານນຳພີ່ນ້ອງຫຼວງພະບາງໄປຕົກທີ່ນັ້ນ.

The Lao diaspora in Honolulu of Hawaii have different jobs. A few percent [of the Lao diaspora] are state officials, while most are planters and workers. Some are engaged in running restaurants, such as Mae Hong and Bangkok restaurants managed by the Lao. In Hawaii, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's health was good, and even better than ours. When he was walking with happiness, he would preach [the Jātakas] to himself. He loved much to be photographed. [We] spent a lot of money developing the photographs of this trip. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was invited to participate in the Buddhist ceremonies at the houses of his relatives in Honolulu who came from Luang Prabang. (BAD-02-0107)

This explains that the Lao diaspora still worked mainly as farmers and workers as they had done while they were in Laos, as well as why there so many photographs of this trip in the collection of Vat Saen Sukharam.

On 26 March, they left Hawaii for San Francisco. They first stayed at the house of Ki in San Jose, and subsequently, on 27 March, they moved to stay at the house of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's niece, Mrs. Sengdara Phongsavan, in the same town, for two weeks. On 29 March 1997, Sathu Nyai Khamchan participated in the Buddhist ceremony which was organized by the Lao diaspora to receive him in San Francisco at the Lao Association Center. They carried out the ritual of *tak bat* and held a Lao traditional *basi* for him. A photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan sitting in the hall on a platform; there is a monk's alms bowl put in front of him. Lay Buddhist are sitting in front of him. A *pha khuan* is standing in front of them. This means the ceremony was made for receiving him as their venerable guest, following the Lao tradition (Buddhist Archive No. A9636R).

which Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela was his preceptor. After finishing the secondary school from the Buddhist school of Luang Prabang, in 1957, he went to Vientiane for his study in the high school and received the diploma from Ong Tū College in 1961. Later, he was appointed the abbot of Vat Dong Miang or Vat Si Khum Viang. In 1972, he received a scholarship from the Lao government to study bachelor and master degrees at Nanlanda University in India. After the Lao revolution in 1975, he moved from India to the USA. Subsequently, in 2000, he finished his PhD on the topic "Cullasila and Mahasila" (smaller precepts and greater precepts) from Magadh University, India. He was the founder and sponsor of the foundation of Lao temples in the USA such as Vat Lao Buddharam in San Diego, California, Vat Lao Buddharam of Amarillo, Texas, Vat Lao Buddhavath in Iowa, Vat Lao Buddharam of Charlotte, North Carolina, Vat Lao Buddharam of Oklahoma city in Oklahoma, and Vat Lao Buddharam of Hampshire, Illinois. He died on 14 November 2003 at Vat Lao Buddharam in San Diego (Daosayam 2012: 203–205). For postal addresses of the Lao temples in the USA, access the following website: <http://comptablelao.com/Watthebandol/Links.html>.

On 14 April, they traveled to San Diego and stayed in Vista at the house of Viangxai from Luang Prabang for nine days. Somnük stated that “in Vista city, there are many families of Lao diaspora living in every part of the town. Most of them are gardeners. They mostly came from Ban Hòm, Ban Sikhai, Ban Tha Dũa and Ban Don in Vientiane and some from Luang Prabang” (Somnük 1998). During their stay in San Diego, Vianxai organized for them a sight-seeing tour in Los Angeles. They visited Hollywood, the Dream World, and walked along the Pacific beach. They also visited the Golden Gate Bridge (Buddhist Archive No. B9661R). On 22 April, they returned to San Jose and stayed at the house of Mrs. Sengdara Phongsavanh again. On 24 April, Mrs. Saengdara took them to the French Consulate in San Francisco to apply for their visas for France. On 29 April, Mrs. Sengdara Phongsavanh took them to Modesto to meet Doctor Bunchan, because Sathu Nyai Khamchan felt unwell. On 30 April, they left San Jose by airplane for St. Louis, a city and port along the western bank of the Mississippi River in Missouri. There were a few families of the Lao diaspora living in this city, and most of them came from Luang Prabang. They stayed at the house of Somnük Maniphon for four days.

On 3 May, they traveled by Somnük’s car, passing through many states, to Tennessee. In Tennessee, they stayed at the house of Khamphai, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan was received by the Lao diaspora from Luang Prabang. On 7 May, they left Tennessee by airplane for North Carolina and stayed at the house of Chanthy and Bangon Siphanthone at 1523 S Battleground Ave. Kings Mountain, NC (Buddhist Archive No. B9491R). Chanthy and Mrs. Bangon Siphanthone are a devout Buddhist couple from Ban Phon Heaung, the community of Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang. Together with their four children arrived at North Carolina in 1987. As stated in their letters to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, they sent a lot of money to Sathu Nyai Khamchan to support his work on construction and renovation of the monastic buildings at Vat Saen Sukharam and of other monasteries (BAD-12-1-1987.011).

On 11 May, they traveled to Virginia and stayed at the house of Mrs. Chansuk Souvannavong, who was the sponsor of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s travels to the USA. Sathu Nyai Khamchan stayed at her house for ten days. During their stay in Virginia, on 13 May, Mrs. Chansuk Souvannavong took them to the Lao Embassy in Washington DC, because Sathu Nyai Khamchan needed a new passport as his old one was full of stamps. Therefore, Sathu Nyai Khamchan met Ambassador Hiam Phommachan who invited him to have lunch at the Embassy (Illustration No. 5.11). In the afternoon of the same day, they visited important places, such as the White House (Buddhist Archive No. A2117R), the Parliament (Buddhist Archive No. A2065R) and the Washington Monument (Buddhist Archive No. A9369R).

Somnük noted that during their stay in San Jose, Sathu Nyai Khamchan cured a woman (of the Lao diaspora) of a mental disorder by chanting Suttas. The woman, a mother of two children, suffered from mental illness. Her husband brought her to hospitals in the USA but

she did not get better. When they heard Sathu Nyai Khamchan was there, her husband brought her to meet him. A part of Somnük's note says that:

ເມື່ອສາທູໂທຍສູດໄປ ນານເກົາໃດ ຜູ້ເປັນບ້າຄ່ອຍກັມທົວລົງ ນົບພໍ້ວ້ ເກີດມີໃບໜ້າຊື່ນບານຂຶ້ນທັນທີ. ສາທູໂທຍກໍ່ໃຫ້ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ [ສົມນົກ] ມັດແຂນໃຫ້, [ເພິ່ນ] ແນະນຳຜູ້ເປັນຜົວແລະເມຍ ຕັ້ງຕໍ່ສິນທຳເປັນຫຼັກ ປັດສະຈາກ [ປາສະຈາກ] ຖິຜິສາງນາງຮ້າຍ ແລ້ວເພິ່ນກໍ່ເອົາພະໃຫ້ແຂນ [ແຂວນ] ຄໍ ຜູ້ລະອົງ. ຕັ້ງແຕ່ນັ້ນເຖິງປັດນີ້, ຜົວຂຽນ ຈ.ມ. [ຈິດໝາຍ] ມາບອກ ເລົ່າວ່າ ເມຍລາວເຊົາເປັນບ້າແລ້ວ.

As long as Sathu Nyai Khamchan had been chanting, she bended. Her face began to look increasingly refreshed. Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave me (Somnük) white cotton strings to tie to her hands. [He] then advised the couple to believe in Buddhist morals without believing in ghosts or female demons [*nang hai*]; he also gave each of them a Buddha image [as an amulet] to hang around their necks. Thereafter, her husband sent me a letter saying that her lunacy has completely stopped.³³⁵

In my point of view concerning to the use of chanting Suttas for treating effectively treating the mental health problems, the person who chants might have strong mental power, which is the result of his strict practice of meditation.

Numerous Lao people emigrated to the USA after the Lao revolution 1975, were “members of the army, officers and soldiers alike” (Evans 2002: 230), spreading in almost cities of the countries. The state that has the largest Lao diaspora is California, due to the weather conditions: the city is warm and the weather similar to the weather in Laos. Therefore, the Lao diaspora can plant the same vegetables they had planted in Asia. There are seventeen Lao temples in California.³³⁶ Where the Lao monasteries have been established there are the Lao people because the monastery was and is an important cultural and social center of the Lao communities, and it is also considered as a spiritual refuge, because the monks in the monasteries can teach them the Buddhist doctrine and practice and give them advise on their daily problems. The condition of living and behavior of the Lao diaspora in the USA, they still practice the same as they were in Laos. As appear in the letter of Pha Achan Maha Pradit Phutthakhosako sent from Vat Phouthapathane Lao in California to Sathi Nyai Khamchan in Luang Prabang, a part of the letter says:

ຄວາມປະຕິບັດຂອງພຸດທະບໍລິສັດ ປະຕິບັດຕາມເດີມ ບໍ່ມີປ່ຽນແປງ ມີຫຼິ້ນ ມີກິນ ມີມ່ວນຊື່ນ ໃຊ້ຈ່າຍແບບເກົ່າ ຄູ່ສິ່ງຄູ່ແນວ. [...] ລາງຄົນ ໄດ້ຊື້ເຮືອນເປັນຂອງໂຕເອງ. ລາງຄົນ ມີຄວາມລຳບາກ ບໍ່ຕ່າງກັບເວລາເຂົາຢູ່ເມືອງເຮົາ. [...] ພົນລະເມືອງລາວອົບພະຍົບ ຢູ່ລັດຄາລິຟໍເນຍແລະເທັກຊັດ ຫລາຍກວ່າລັດອື່ນໆ ແລະຄິດວ່າຄົນລາວມີຢູ່ຄົບທັງ 50 ລັດ [...] ພະສົງລາວ ຢູ່ລັດຄາລິຟໍເນຍ ມີຫລາຍກວ່າລັດອື່ນໆ. [...] ສ່ວນລັດຄາລິຟໍເນຍລັດດຽວມີ 9 ສຳນັກສົງ [...] ໂຮມພະຈິວລາວໃນອະເມຣິກາປະມານ 50 ອົງ.

The behavior of Lao Buddhists is still as it was [in Laos], it did not change; they play, they eat, they have entertainment and they spend money just like before. [...] Some people buy their own houses. [But] some face [financial] difficulties just like when they lived in their own country [in Laos]. [...] More people of the Lao diaspora live in California and Texas than in other states, and I

³³⁵ BAD-02-0107, Somnük's note (1988), ການທ່ອງທ່ຽວຮອບໂລກຂອງສາທູໂທຍຄຳຈັນ ວິຣະຈິດຕະເທລະ [Travelling around the world of Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Thela], handwriting. See also Khamvone 2014. “International Connections of Lao Buddhism as reflected in Personal Letters found at Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela's Abode (*kuti*) in Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang.” *Dorisea Working Paper*, Series, No. 13: 14, and www.dorisea.net

³³⁶ See <http://comptablelao.com/Watthepbandol/Links.html> (consulted 17 November 2015)

think the Lao diaspora lives in all fifty states. [...] More Lao monks live in California than in other states. Only in California, there are nine monasteries. A total of fifty monks live in U.S.A.³³⁷

The Lao people love socializing like eating, drinking and entertaining. Commonly, they love to party, in particular the festivals which are joined by their relatives and friends and take a whole day. They spend a lot of money for food and drinks and there were many left overs after the party. There was no reason for this waste of food. These practices are a defect of the Lao society, are some things in contrast with Buddhist Teachings which teach to live with sufficiency and carefulness.

On 20 May, they traveled by airplane to Canada and stayed at the house of Anon and Mrs. Vone in Blainville, Quebec, for eleven days. In Canada, Sathu Nyai Khamchan visited his relatives and the Lao diaspora from Luang Prabang in Ontario and Quebec, for instance, Bounthiem and Duanepheng Phommaline at 65 Place, Lévis Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville, Quebec, and Khamonh Don Sasorith at 68 Hallam St. Toronto, Ontario (BAD-12-1-1997.006 and BAD-12-1-1999.017). A series of photographs show Sathu Nyai Khamchan and the Lao diaspora performing a Buddhist ceremony at Anon and Mrs. Vone's house on 26 May 1997 (Buddhist Archive No. A1393R to A1400R). On 1 June 1997, they left Canada for France (see the section above). According to the Wikipedia report, in Canada Census of 2011, there were about 22,090 Canadians of Lao descendants in Canada, with nearly three-quarters of the population living in Ontario and Quebec.³³⁸ The Lao people have Theravada Buddhist temples as the cultural and social centers of their communities. There are nine Lao temples in Canada.³³⁹ Pha Achan Sounthone Inthirat (1945–2015), abbot of Vat Lao Xayaram of Manitoba was the president of the Lao Buddhist Monk Organization in Canada since the organization was established in the country.

8.5 China

Sathu Nyai Khamchan traveled to China three times, first in 1999, second in 2005 and third in 2006. Most of his travels were to visit tourist attractions and go on pilgrimages to Buddhist

³³⁷ The letter send by Pha Maha Pradit Phutthakhosako sent via airmail to Sathu Nyai Khamchan on 23 December 1987 (BAD-12-1-1987.030). See also Khamvone 2014, "International Connections of Lao Buddhism as reflected in Personal Letters found at Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela's Abode (*kuti*) in Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang." *Dorisea Working Paper Series*, No. 13: 13.

³³⁸ See <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/dt-td/Rp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=0&PID=105396&PRID=0&PTYPE=105277&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2013&THEME=95&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=> (consulted 17 November 2015).

³³⁹ Other monasteries are Calgary Lao Buddhist Society and Sam Nuk Song Temple in Alberta, Vat Lao Xayaram of Manitoba in Manitoba, Vat Lao Ottawa, Phommavihara Buddhist Temple, Vat Lao Toronto and Vat Lao Veluwannaram in Ontario, and Vat Lao Samakkhidhammaram and Vat Lao Thepbandol in Quebec. For more postal address of the temples, see <http://comptablelao.com/Watthebandol/Links.html> (consulted 17 November 2015).

monasteries. They were organized by his relatives and lay people from Vat Saen Sukharam’s communities. In July 1999, he traveled to Beijing with an invitation from his relatives for nine days. He visited many well-known places and religious and historical sites. This trip was organized by Mrs. Pani Buppha and her son, Anousa Buppha, collaborating with her sisters who live in Beijing.

As shown on photographs, on 18 and 19 July 1999, they visited the Great Wall of China (Buddhist Archive No. B9241R to B9275R), which is called in Chinese the “Ten Thousand-*li* Great Wall” as it totals more than 10,000 *li* or 5,000 kilometers in length, running across vast areas from west to east (Zewen 1980: 1; see also Lindesay 2003). On 20 July 1999, they visited two ancient temples in Beijing, namely Tanzhe Temple, one of the most well-known and oldest Buddhist temple in Beijing, was built in the Jin Dynasty (AD 265–420) and Jietai Temple which was built in Tang Dynasty, and then visited Tiantan, the Temple of Heaven, and the Beijing Palace Museum (the Forbidden City, *Gu Gong* in Chinese).³⁴⁰ On 21 July 1999, they visited Tiananmen Square (Buddhist Archive No. A0668R), a large city square in the center of Beijing which contains the monuments to the heroes of the revolution, including the Great Hall of People, the National Museum of China, and the Chairman of Mao Zedong Memorial Hall (Wikipedia). On 22 July 1999, he was invited to perform a Buddhist ceremony at the Lao Embassy in Beijing (Buddhist Archive No. A0657R and A0657V).

The crucial event of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s visit to Beijing was on the evening of 21 July 1999, he visited the China Radio International (CRI) where he was invited to express his opinion on his visit to China. One photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan speaking on air at the radio station and on the verso of the photograph there is handwriting which says “giving a speech at China Radio International.”³⁴¹ The text of his speech was prepared by him in Lao as follows:

ຂ້າພະເຈົ້າ ຮູ້ສຶກມີຄວາມປິຕິຍິນດີເປັນຢ່າງຍິ່ງ ທີ່ໄດ້ມີໂອກາດ ມາຢ້ຽມຢາມນະຄອນປັກກິ່ງ ປະເທດສາທາລະນະລັດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ປະຊາຊົນຈີນ ຊຶ່ງເປັນປະເທດເພື່ອນບ້ານ ຊຶ່ງຢູ່ຮ່ວມໂລກດຽວກັນ ຄັນລົງເຖິງເດີນເຮືອບິນແລ້ວ ຍ່ອມໄດ້ເຫັນພວກເພື່ອນມະນຸດ ມາກ ຫ້າຫຼາຍຕາ ຊຶ່ງມາຄອຍຕ້ອນຮັບພັກພວກດຽວກັນ ລ້ວນມີໜ້າຕາເບີກບານ ຊຶ່ງມ່ວນ ຍິ້ມແຍ້ມ ແຈ່ມໃສ ດັ່ງນັ້ນແລ້ວ ຍິ່ງມີຄວາມປິຕິຍິນດີ ອີກ ແລ້ວກໍຮັບເອົາກັນໄປຫາທີ່ພັກຂອງໃຜລາວ. ຄັນວັນຮຸ່ງຂຶ້ນ ເປັນວັນທີ 18.7.99 ໄດ້ມີຍາດໂຍມຜູ້ນໍາພາໄປທຽວຊົມສະຖານທີ່ຕ່າງໆ ໂດຍສະເພາະ ໄປວັດ ໄດ້ໄຫວ້ພະພຸດທະຮູບ ພະສະຖູບ ຮູບເຈດີ ຊຶ່ງບັນພະບູລຸດໄດ້ສ້າງໄວ້ ເປັນເວລາຫຼາຍພັນປີມາແລ້ວ ເພື່ອໄວ້ໃຫ້ ພວກເຮົາໄດ້ໄຫວ້ແລະບູຊາຈົນຮອດເຮົາທຸກວັນນີ້ ແລະ ທາງພັກແລະລັດ ກໍໄດ້ອຸປະຖໍາ ບໍາລຸງ ຮັກສາ ໄວ້ເປັນຢ່າງດີ ບໍ່ໃຫ້ເສື່ອມສູນ.

I am extremely happy that I have the opportunity to visit Beijing Capital, the People’s Republic of China, which is a neighboring country [of Laos] and exists in the same world. [When I] was at the airport, [I] saw humans with different features waiting to receive their own groups. Their faces were sanguine, joyful, smiling and good-tempered. Thereafter, they were happier [after meeting the people they were waiting for] and took them to their residences. On the next day, 18.7.99, [I was brought] by lay Buddhists to visit various places, particularly, to visit the monasteries, where [I] paid my respects to the Buddha statues, stupas and pagodas which were built by our ancestors

³⁴⁰ Buddhist Archive No. B9204R, B9217R, B9217V, B9235R, B9235V, B9267R.

³⁴¹ “ປາຖະກະຖາຢູ່ວິທະຍຸສາກົນແຫ່ງປະເທດຈີນ.” Buddhist Archive No. B9167R and B9167V.

thousands years ago, for us to pay respect and worship, until the present day; and [these monasteries] are fully supported and preserved by the government to protect them from destruction.

(BAD-12-2-1999.002)

Sathu Nyai Khamchan's speech reveals two sentiments. First, he seems to have been excited about the crowds at Beijing Capital International Airport, which is one of the largest international airports in the world. Secondly, he seems to have been particularly impressed by the ancient and huge buildings and monuments he had seen, such as the Great Wall, Buddhist temples and Tiananmen square which were built by humans. The second visit was made in May 2005. This trip was organized by members of the Phongphichit family from the community of Vat Saen Sukharam, supporters of Sathu Nyai Khamchan. The members of the tour consisted of ten members of the Phongphichit family, Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Sathu Phò Uan Aphakaro (Buddhist Archive No. A0228R and A0228V). They traveled by car from Luang Prabang directly to Udomxay in northern Laos and entered southern China. As shown in the photographs, they visited many monasteries in Chiang Hung or Jinghong, the capital of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture. A photograph shows Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Sathu Phò Uan Aphakaro conversing with the abbot of a temple. The handwriting on the verso of the photograph reads “ວັດເມືອງຊຽງຮຸ່ງ ສິບສອງພັນນາ ເດືອນ 5 2005 [At a temple in Chiang Hung, Xishuangbanna (Sipsòng Panna) in May 2005]” (Buddhist Archive No. A0229R and A0229V). They also visited Mengle (Moeng Lü) Museum (Buddhist Archive No. A0237R) in Mengle Cultural Garden, the most famous tourist attraction in Yunnan, which exhibits more than 1,000 pieces of historical and cultural relics that perfectly reflect Xishuangbanna's history.

The third visit was made in June 2006. Sathu Nyai Khamchan and Sathu Nyai Chanthalin from Vat Phukhouay Phokharam were accompanied by a group of lay people from Luang Prabang – mostly women and Sathu Nyai Khamchan's relatives. The trip was organized by a tour agency. They traveled to Dali city in Yunnan province. As shown on photographs, they went sightseeing in Dali city. On 12 June 2006, they visited the Three Pagodas in Chongsheng Temple (Buddhist Archive No. C3814R), the Ancient City of Dali and took a ship floating on the Erhai lake, one of the large lakes in Yunnan.

9. Conclusion

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a prominent monk who played important religious and social roles in the Lao Sangha and for Lao people both inside and outside of Laos. His roles as a central figure for the Sangha and people of Luang Prabang had gradually developed since the 1990s when the other senior monks who were leaders of the Sangha, e.g. Somdet Pha Sanghakhalat

Thamayana Maha Thela, Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela, and Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitta Maha Thela passed away. Sathu Nyai Khamchan acted as head of the Sangha in all religious rituals and activities and also as advisor on matters of ancient Lao tradition to the Lao people and officials.

While Sathu Nyai Khamchan was serving as abbot, Vat Saen Sukharam was widely known for its strict adherence to the monastic rules and practice. This is a result of the close attention Sathu Nyai Khamchan gave to his disciples' practice and education. Vat Saen Sukharam became the place where parents and teachers wanted their sons and disciples in novitiates to stay in, because this place gave them the opportunity of being educated by a strict monk with deep knowledge of Lao tradition and Buddhist education. However, the situation of the monastery has obviously changed after he passed away in 2007. It seems to have become similar to the other monasteries in town where monks and novices take less care of their duties and the monastic rules due to a lack of the models to lead them. This might be because the monastic rules in Sathu Nyai Khamchan's administrative system were not written down. They had been practiced personally by him and therefore ended after his demise. Nevertheless, in 2013, one of his disciples, his foster child Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo, entered the monkhood at Vat Saen Sukharam and tried to re-establish the regulations and put them in writing. This revived the situation. The monks and novices all together follow the monastic routines and the environment of the monastery is pleasant. It seems necessary that the regulations are recorded and practiced by a role model for the young monks and novices.

Similar to the situation at Vat Saen Sukharam was the situation of the Sangha community in Luang Prabang. After Sathu Nyai Khamchan's passing, it gradually changed and eventually problems arose. A problem in the Sangha community arose because the successor monk, Sathu Nyai Bunthan Punyakama Thela, lacking of experience in administering the Sangha community. Even though Sathu Nyai Bunthan Punyakama Thela was a good abbot of Vat Pa Phon Phao in terms of managing his monastery and organizing festivals, he had difficulties with his administrative position within the Sangha due to the different nature of such duties from those within his monastery. Subsequently, many abbots as well as lay people of Luang Prabang did not agree with his relatively conservative administration of the Sangha. Eventually, the situation led to the election of a new leader in March 2013. The election was organized by the Central Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization from Vientiane in collaboration with the Lao Front for National Construction, at Vat Pa Phon Phao, Luang Prabang on 14 March 2013, and all abbots of Luang Prabang province cast their vote. Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela was elected and appointed as the head of the Sangha. It was the second time since the Lao revolution that such an election took place. When the first election was organized in 1976 at Vat Vixun and Sathu Nyai Khamchan was elected by the Sangha. Commonly, the election of the head of the Sangha

takes place every five years. After he was elected, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was successively confirmed five times and served this position for thirty-one years (1976–2007). This apparently indicates that the Sangha and Luang Prabang Buddhists were satisfied with the ideological leadership of Sathu Nyai Khamchan.

The 2500th anniversary of Buddhism which corresponds to AD 1956 in Burma, India and Sri Lanka and AD 1957 in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia was a significant and auspicious occasion for Buddhists in revising and re-establishing the Buddhist Teachings in their countries. Celebrations of this occasion were held throughout the countries by organizing Buddhist councils and publishing the Tipiṭaka in new volumes in their own scripts. As Buddhist culture has become integrated the indigenous cultures of each nation thus making Buddhism part and parcel of their national cultures, the celebrations in many countries did not organize only for Buddhism itself but also to celebrate their independence from the colonial powers of Western Empires, British and French. India, Burma and Sri Lanka obtained their freedom from Britain in the 1940s, Cambodia and Laos obtained it from France in the early 1950s. The participation of the Lao Sangha in the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in Burma and Sri Lanka had twofold results. One, they can be regarded as the first time since Theravada Buddhism came to Laos from Cambodia in 1359 – which is believed to have come through the Sri Lankan tradition (*Srī Laṅkavaṃsa*) – that they developed connections and relationship with the other Theravada countries. Two, they collected much of the experiences which inspired them to perform such celebrations in Laos in 1957. Two official visits of the Lao Sangha to Thailand in 1967 and to the Soviet Union in 1969 were the significance of the Lao Sangha's religious role in the international stages. They presented both religious and political relationships. In terms of religion, the Buddhism in the Soviet Union is of the Mahayana branch which at present is rooted in Tibet and Mongolia,³⁴² whereas Theravada is the branch practiced in Thailand, which is the same as in Laos. On the political side, the Soviet Union had been under communist rule while Thailand had a capitalist system. Therefore, these visits were of significance for the future of Laos where, at that time, a civil war that was supported by these two countries was fought.

The pilgrimage to the Buddha's sites in India and to the Buddhist places in other Buddhist countries is popular among Buddhists in the modern days. However, it was introduced by the Buddha himself before Buddhists should make a pilgrimage to important places connected to his life, i.e. his birthplace, enlightenment, first preaching and

³⁴² In 1712, a group of some 100 Mongolian and 50 Tibetan monks who fled Mongolia due to an upheaval came to Buryatia. Their arrival accelerated the spread of Buddhism. According to Russian statistical data of 1741, there were eleven temples and 150 monks in Buryatia (Sabirov 2012: 236). After the revolution in the 1930s Buddhism was totally destroyed, and although in 1948 Stalin allowed a Central Buddhist Spiritual Administration (CBSA) to be established and legalised Buddhism, its leaders continued to be arrested, its holy place desecrated and only one dastan could function. The Ivolginsky dastan (Buddhist temple) remained open during the communist period (Filatov 2010: 1).

Mahaparinibbāna. Later, the Buddha's relics spread to other countries in South and Southeast Asia today, and were enshrined in stupas and pagodas, recently becoming popular tourist attractions. Most of them have been registered as world heritage sites by the UNESCO as they are ancient, historical and significant places. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's pilgrimage might be considered under two aspects. First, as a devout Buddhist, he followed the Buddha's advice. Secondly, from his travels he collected many ideas on constructing the monastic buildings, which inspired him to his work in Laos.

Many Lao people fled from their country during and after 1975 and have settled in capitalist countries over the western world. Thus the Lao communities were created abroad and Lao culture and tradition – including Lao Buddhist temples – were established in those countries. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's visits to the Lao diaspora in France, the United States, Canada and Australia between 1982 and 2006, as represented in the photographs, notebooks and personal letters, show that the Lao people still preserve the tradition of merit-making and organize the same festivals as the Lao people in their home country. Notably, Sathu Nyai Khamchan had a large collection of photographs which were taken during his travels. He showed his photographs to Lao people who came to meet him, knew not much of the world outside of Laos due to during the 1980s and 1990s, the communication and economic systems of the country had been in poor conditions. It seems that Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected the photographs not only for his own interest but also with the intention of teaching the Lao people about his travels and the places he visited.

10. Illustrations and Captions



Illustration No. 5.1. Sathu Nyai Khamchan respectfully handing over a ceremonial fan in Lao style from Luang Prabang to Phra Phimonlatham (Aat Asapha Maha Thela), abbot of Vat Maha That Yuwarat Rangsarit, at his abode in Vat Maha That on 29 December 1969. This photograph depicts their amicable relationship of mutual respect (Buddhist Archive No. B2856R).



Illustration No. 5.2. The Supreme Patriarch of Laos and other monks from Luang Prabang were received by senior monks of Savannakhet on their arrival at Savannakhet airport to participate in the festival of the Pha That Ing Hang stupa in 1961. From left: unidentified monk, Sathu Phò Phatthaman Phattharamuni from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, unidentified monk, Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela from Vat Saen Sukharam, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Pha Khu Lüan Pasanno and Pha Khu Aat Suphattho from Savannakhet (Buddhist Archive No. A0022R).



Illustration No. 5.3. Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela is holding a ceremonial fan while giving a blessing to the Pathet Lao leaders at a Buddhist ceremony. Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela sits on his left. The Buddhist ceremony was organized in Viangxay during their visit to the Liberated Zone of the Phatet Lao movement in May 1975 (Buddhist Archive No. C1762R).



Illustration No. 5.4. The leaders of the Pathet Lao are receiving with deep respect the blessing from Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela at a Buddhist ceremony in Viangxay in May 1975. From right: Faydang Lobliayao (1910–1986), Nouhak Phoumsavanh (1910–2008), Kaysone Phomvihane (1920–1992) and two other unidentified leaders (Buddhist Archive No. C1763R).



Illustration No. 5.5. The Lao delegation posing for a portrait at Amaragoyana building in Kaba-Aye where they stayed during their attendance of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana in the second session in 1954. From left to right: Achan Maha Chanpheng Phetmüangsua from Luang Prabang, Pha Maha Samran Kittiyano from Vat Ong Tü, Vientiane, Pha Khu Lüam Pasanno from Vat Sayamungkhan, Savannakhet and Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitto from Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang. Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s handwriting on the photograph reads “ໄປປະຊຸມ ສັດຖະສັງຄາຍະນາ ແລະ ປະຊຸມພຸດທະສາສະນິກະສຳພັນແຫ່ງໂລກ ຢູ່ເມືອງຢາງກຸງ ປະເທດພະມ້າ ປີ ຄ.ສ. 1954, ອາຍຸ 34 ປີ [Attended the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana and the conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon, Burma in 1954, at the age of 34]” (Buddhist Archive No. B4672R).



Illustration No. 5.6. six senior monks and one state officer, representatives of the Lao Sanhga, posing for a portrait at the veranda of the department of the Religious Affairs in Vientiane before leaving for Sri Lanka in December 1956. They were led by Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch of Laos. Front row, l-r: Somdet Pha Lukkaeo Silasangvaro, (Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela) from Vat Suvanakhili, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch of Laos from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram and Pha Lakkham Viravisutthikhun (Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela from Vat Saen Sukharam. Back row, l-r: Sathu Phò Phatthaman Phattaramuni from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaran, Sathu Fan Tissavangso from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Achan Maha Chanpeng Phetmüangsua, religious officer from the Office of Religious Affairs of Luang Prabang and Pha Maha Samran Kittiyano (unidentified dates) from Vat Ong Tü Mahavihan, Vientiane. The auspicious objects placing in front of them are five silver bowls (Lao: *khan ngoen*) and the replica of the Pha Bang statue as offerings to the Sangha of Sri Lanka. The text on the photograph reads “ທີ່ຣະລຶກໃນຄາວໄປສະໜອງພຸດທະຊະຍັນຕິທີ່ປະເທດລັງກາ ພ.ສ. ໒໕໐໐. [Commemorating the journey in celebration of the Buddha Jayanti in Sri Lanka BE 2500]” (Buddhist Archive No. B4854R).



Illustration No. 5.7. Four senior monks from Luang Prabang pay a visit to Prime Minister Prince Souvanna Phouma at his residence in Nong Thevada village in Vientiane on 25 November 1956, before leaving for Sri Lanka as the Lao delegation to participate in the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism. From l-r: Sathu Phò Phatthaman Phattharamiuni from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela from Vat Saen Sukharam, Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela from Vat Suvannakhili, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, the Supreme Patriarch of Laos from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, the prime minister and Phaya Phuy Pannya, president of the National Parliament (Buddhist Archive No. H1708R).

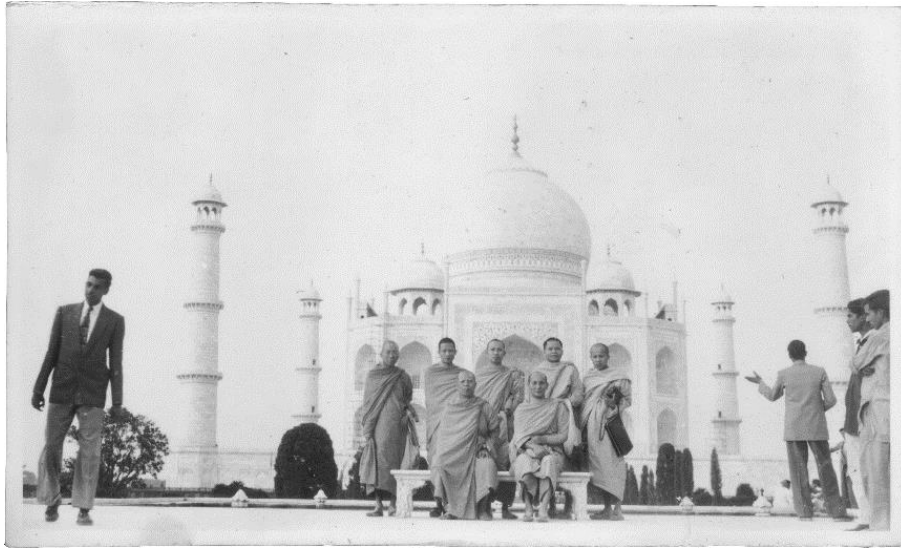


Illustration No. 5.8. Senior monks from Luang Prabang posing for a portrait in front of the Taj Mahal on their first visit during a pilgrimage to India on 1 January 1957. Sitting from left: Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela from Vat Suvannakhili. Standing from left: Sathu Phò Phatthaman Phattharamiuni from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Sathu Fan Tissavangso from Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela from Vat Saen Sukharam, Pha Maha Samran Kittiyano from Vat Ong Tü, Vientiane and Pha Maha Chantao Chanthavong, the Lao student monk in India who was their guide (Berger and Khamvone 2010: 29) (Buddhist Archive No. C1679R).

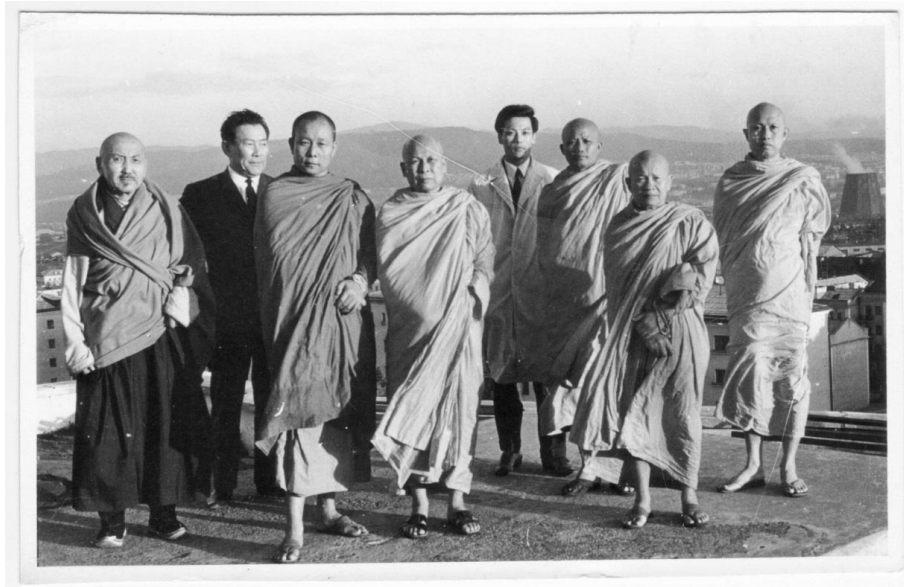


Illustration No. 5.9. The Lao delegation posing for a portrait together with a Mahayana monk and a layperson at the airport in Ulan-Ude during their travels in the Soviet Union in May and June 1969. From left: an unidentified Mahayana monk and an unidentified man from Ivolguinski monastery who were the organizers of their visits to the places in Moscow, Pha Achan Thongkhun from Pakse, Champassack, Pha Achan Sithon Visittathammo from Vat Sithan Neua, Vientiane, Phukhaothong, the Lao student in the Soviet Union, who was their guide, Sathu Maha Singthong Banlusak from Vat Dong Miang, Vientiane, Pha Achan Aat Suphattho from Vat Nyai Xaimungkhun, Savannakhe, who was head of the delegation, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela from Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang (Buddhist Archive No. B3242R).

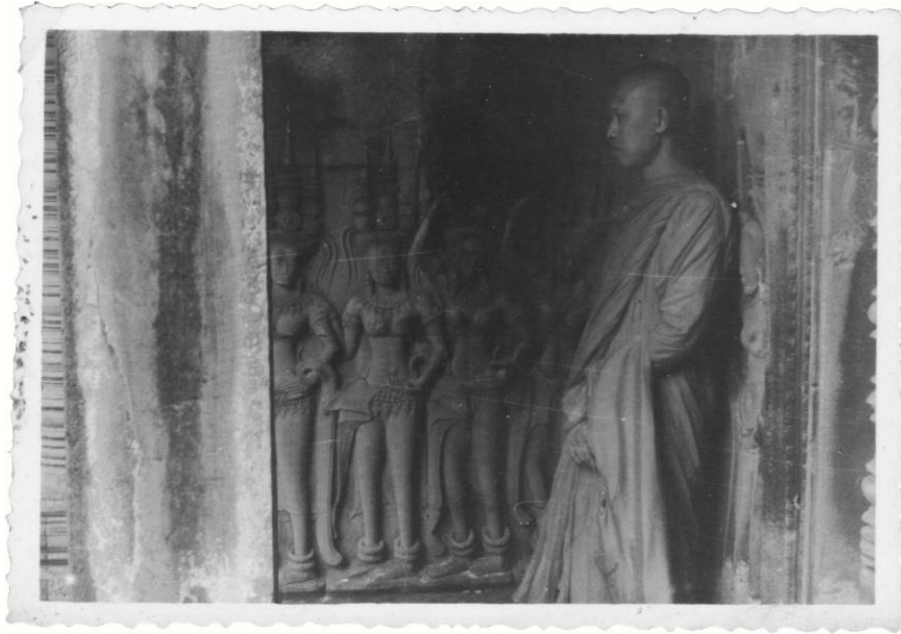


Illustration No. 5.10. Sathu Nyai Khamchan is looking at *apsaras* on the bas-reliefs at Angkor Wat on 16 May 1960. He elaborated these images in the stencil work on the walls and leaves of the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam. The handwriting on the verso of this photograph reads “ນະຄອນວັດ 16 ພຶດສະພາ 2503 [Angkor Wat on 16 May [BE] 2503 [AD 1960]” (Buddhist Archive No. B3508R and B3508V).



Illustration No. 5.11. The image of a gold stencil of *apsaraa* in Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s style in the interior of the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam. Photograph was taken by the author on 23 February 2015.



Illustration No. 5.12. Sathu Nyai Khamchan visits the Lao Embassy in Washington DC and meets the Lao Ambassador to the USA. From left: Kongkham Thongphanit, two unidentified Lao officers of the Lao Embassy, Sathu Nyai Khamchan, Lao Ambassador Hiam Phommachan, Somnük Thongphanit and an unidentified woman. Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s handwriting on the verso this photograp reads “ໄດ້ເຂົ້າ ຍ້ຽມຢາມທ່ານທັງມ ພິມມະຈັນ ເອກອັກຄະລັດຖະທູດລາວຢູ່ສະຫະລັດອາເມລິກາ ທີ່ສະຖານທູດລາວ ກຸງວໍຊິງຕັນ ວັນທີ 13.5.1997 (ລາຍເຊັນ: ພະຄໍາຈັນ). [Visited the Lao Ambassador, Hiam Phommachan, at the Lao Embassy in Washington on 13.5.1997 (signature: Pha Khamchan)]” (Buddhist Archive No. B3451RR and B3451V).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This study of the life, work and socio-religious roles of the Most Venerable Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela has put its emphasis on the description, presentation and translation of various historical sources. Although some parts of the thesis also stressed the comparative and analytical potentials of the material, the specific historical focus I developed in the thesis is in my opinion crucial because in comparison, for example, to Thailand or Myanmar, there has been up to the present very little research on Lao source material. Therefore, the results of my documentary, historical and ethnographic research carried out over an extended period at the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang and at Vat Saen Sukharam in Luang Prabang is intended to pave the way for further studies of Lao Buddhism.

My experience as a novice and later as a monk for fifteen years (1991–2005) provided me first-hand insights into the organization of the Buddhist Sangha in Luang Prabang, the old royal capital and religious center of Laos. As my research has shown, Sathu Nyai Khamchan should be considered one of the most prominent monks in modern Laos, whose life and manifold exploits reflect the history of Lao Buddhism, quasi in a nutshell, during the second half of the twentieth century. Four main topics were discussed in this thesis: 1) the Venerable Abbot's life as a novice, his later career as a layman, and his life as a monk over a period of 60 years of his lifetime, or essentially his biography; 2) his dedication to promoting the construction of monastic buildings and religious monuments; 3) his remarkable role as a collector of historic photographs, documents, and art objects, which later enabled the founding of the Buddhist Archives and the Museum of Buddhist Art in Luang Prabang; and 4) the Venerable Abbot's religious and social roles in administering the municipal and provincial Sangha as well as his travels both domestically and abroad for various purposes. As a devout Buddhist monk, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's life and work also reflects many aspects of the traditional ways of life of the people of Luang Prabang people in the twentieth century.

In chapter 2, I combined the most important aspects of the Most Venerable's life. I explored his monastic education, his studies at Luang Prabang primary school, and his periods at Vat Saen as a temple boy and as a novice. Eventually, he entered the monastery as a novice when he was fourteen years old, later staying with his brother at Vat Pa Fang. His brother sent him to Bangkok to further his Pariyatti Dhamma studies at the renowned monastery of Vat

Benchamabòphit. Novice Khamchan finished the first three of five classes from Luang Prabang primary school, and received his degrees in *naktham tho* and Pali grammar from Thailand. I also discussed some events that lead him to disrupt his monastic studies when he had to return to Luang Prabang quite suddenly in 1938. He asked to disrobe in order to help with the family business, a grocery shop, and subsequently lived as a layman for three years. In 1941, however, he returned to monastic life and ordained as a monk. I then explored his career in the Laos Sangha and described that in 1944 Sathu Nyai Khamchan was invited to move to Vat Saen Sukharam in order to take over the position of abbot after his teacher's passing. He also held a number of other important positions in the Sangha organization. In 1951, he was appointed as *chao khana tasaeng* (ecclesiastical sub-district head). In 1954, he was appointed as the *chao khana khuaeng* (ecclesiastical provincial governor) of Luang Prabang province, a position he held until 1966.

The following episode of his life also demonstrates that Sathu Nyai Khamchan had a very specific and strict interpretation of monastic discipline and routine: in 1966, he resigned from the aforementioned positions because some officials had brought a Thai forest monk to Luang Prabang, who then began predicting lottery numbers to the locals, something which Sathu Nyai Khamchan considered to be against the monastic discipline as well as local traditions. All the requests which he submitted to the police officers to deal with the case, despite his position as head of the Sangha, were ignored. Consequently, from 1966 until 1975, Sathu Nyai Khamchan held only the position of abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam. On a practical level, he nevertheless remained an important monk with an active role in the Sangha, even without his former high-ranking title. The case of his resignation in my opinion shows that Sathu Nyai Khamchan opposed practices that in his view did not correspond to local traditions and monastic discipline. His decisive reaction, his appeal to the state administration to intervene in religious affairs and his resigned clearly testify for his strong and particular vision of a Buddhist society.

With regard to the historical development in Laos, I showed in chapter 5 that Sathu Nyai Khamchan was always a royalist in his heart, remaining close to the royal government and its promotion of Buddhism. At the same time, however, he was a sincere Lao patriot who did not leave the country following the victory of the liberation movement. Instead, he stayed in order to cooperate in constructive ways with the new revolutionary regime and thereby contribute to the continuity of Buddhism, its teachings and institutions. After the Lao Revolution, in 1976, he was elected and appointed as chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Luang Prabang province, a position he held until his demise in 2007. From the early 1990s onwards, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was the senior monk who had more time of his life as a monk than anyone else, and therefore became the leader of the religious community of Luang Prabang, overseeing various rituals, ceremonies and festivals.

Due to his experience and reputation he was recognized by monks and laypeople alike as a monk who strictly adhered to the monastic discipline and its religious routines. A good metaphor for his career, his engagement and reputation can be seen in his idea of merit making, Sathu Nyai Khamchan once explained why he followed the religious routine so scrupulously. He compared his need of merit to a merchant's need for profit and he said that “ເພາະປາດຖະໜາຫາບຸນເນ່ ຕ້ອງອົດທົນ ກໍຄື ພໍ່ຄ້າຢາກໄດ້ກໍາໄລ ທຸກປານໃດກໍໄປ ຄັນບໍ່ໄປກໍບໍ່ໄດ້ເນ່ [Because of our need of merit, we have to be patient [in following the religious routine]. It is like a merchant who needs profit. Even though it is difficult, [he must] tend to [his business]. If he does not do so, he never gains profit.]”³⁴³ This “economic” metaphor is easy to understand when we take into account that Sathu Nyai Khamchan might have been inspired to develop this view by his experiences as a layman. At this time, he frequently went to Bangkok in order to acquire goods which he then imported back to his family's shop in Luang Prabang. Then, even under difficult circumstances, one has to continue to strive for merit and engage in religious activities in order to uphold Buddhism and its teachings.

Looking at the life history of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, it becomes evident that he was considered one of the most successful and remarkable monks in twentieth-century Laos. As a charismatic monk, he specialized in specific fields, developed his abilities and did the utmost to play all the roles that a monk is supposed to fulfil. His reputation came from both his behavior and his creative works. He renowned for his sound, tune and tempo when chanting the Vessantara Jātaka; his style was so unique and became so popular that it is still emulated by monks in Luang Prabang today. Moreover, his unique role was reflected by his leadership of the Buddhist communities in Luang Prabang, by his personal practice of the religious routine, and also by his construction works, publications and collections, all of which remain of high value and influential for Lao Buddhism.

There were many prominent monks in Laos in particular in Luang Prabang, like, for example the Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Pha Sangkhalat Thammayana Maha Thela, who left the country in 1979 and stayed in Thailand until his passing in 1984, and Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela who passed away in 1987. Following these monks and taking over some of their duties, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was able to lead the Sangha community and Buddhism in Luang Prabang through the difficult times of the Lao revolution. During a turning point of Lao society as a whole, and in a period of intense political transition to a socialist system he remained in the country and arranged himself with the new circumstances. In summary one can state that in the context of the Luang Prabang Buddhist community, and in Laos as a whole, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was like the bridge that links the transitions of Laos over the course of several historical periods. His life encompasses and reflects very important social, political and religious changes that happened in Laos during the

³⁴³ Sathu Nyai Khamchan, recorded by Sparkle Media in 2006.

colonial period under French and the coming of national independence advanced by the Lao Issara Movement. Then, he lived through the long and disastrous civil war backed by the USA and other internal and external forces, and the subsequent Lao revolution. Sathu Nyai Khamchan life and works connect and reflect these changes, and are by many Lao people and his followers understood as preserving traditional culture in the face of these events. Moreover, current and younger Lao generations continue to be inspired by his practices, collections and instructions.

In chapter 3, I discussed that in the context of the Venerable Abbot's work of preserving the Lao cultural heritage that Sathu Nyai Khamchan's carried out numerous construction and renovation works of monastic buildings not only at Vat Saen Sukharam, but also in other monasteries in Luang Prabang as well as in other provinces in Laos. Again, he can here be understood as acting as a bridge between tradition and modernity. His works at Vat Saen Sukharam combined both traditional and modern materials, as well as modern and more traditional techniques. A particular good example is the structure of the *sim* on which he worked. With its magnificent gold stencils, it mixes various styles of the Lao *sim*. Heywood states the *sim* of yellow and red looks more Thai in style (2006: 80), and Woralancha observes that it was mixed with many styles, namely, of Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Xiang Khouang (2004: 122). However, I argue that this is in fact a modern Lao style that combines various features.

This unique *sim* can be regarded as the master piece of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work, and also stands for Sathu Nyai Khamchan's profound understanding and comprehensive knowledge of Lao architecture and traditions. In my research, I found out that this Lao style is by local people also commonly referred to as the "Sathu Nyai Khamchan style". His architectural and building work is by local people and beyond regarded as exemplary, and continues to inspire monks and laypeople that are engaged in monastic architecture and building projects.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan learnt from his teacher through observation and practice, which was and is still common in monastic studies. Besides oral instruction, the teacher also gives his students the opportunity to apply their newly acquired skills in practice, i.e. to learn by doing. For this it is important that the students pay close attention to the actions of their teacher, because not all knowledge is passed down orally. Knowledge and associated skills are being displayed more in what the teacher is doing, than in what he is saying. Regarding the traditional method of learning architectural skills, it seems that Sathu Nyai Khamchan possessed impeccable skills of observation. Although he never officially studied architecture at a school, he was nevertheless able to carry out construction works like an architect would have. This is rooted in his monastic education with its emphasis on close attention being paid to the works of one's teacher. This especially became relevant during the construction of the

sim of Vat Saen Sukharam in the early 1930s. Here, he was able to use these methods when he renovated the *sim* himself in later years. The practice of this traditional method can still be observed in present-day Luang Prabang. In addition, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's experience and knowledge of Lao cultural heritage enabled him to advise the local committee of the project “ໂຄງການພື້ນຜູ້ວັດທະນະທຳທີ່ຫຼວງພະບາງ-ອົງການຢູແນສໂກເລກທີ 516/ລາວ/70. Cultural Survival in Luang Prabang-UNESCO Project 516/Lao/70” (BAD-12-2-2000.002), which resulted in the establishment of the art school at Vat Xiang Muan in Luang Prabang. This shows that Sathu Nyai Khamchan continued to use and apply his knowledge beyond traditional building works, and in his later life aimed for a stronger cooperation with international agencies.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan not only carried out and supervised the construction works of his own projects, but also supported and encouraged monks and lay people to do so themselves. He made great contributions to Vat Pa Phon Phao by supporting the construction of the Pha That Khong Santi Chedi and the concrete paths inside the monastery. He also supported the construction of the public crematorium at Vat Pa Nya Thüp. All of these constructions are of great benefit to the public and the city of Luang Prabang. He made small donations to almost every monastery which was under construction during the final decades of his life. Most donations he made during his birthday celebrations at Vat Saen Sukharam in the form of funds given to him by lay Buddhists from Laos and abroad. Donations are one kind of *dāna* (giving), a basic way to make merit in Buddhism. Sometimes, he allowed monks and lay people to use his name as the head of their committee for the construction works of their monasteries, so that they could use his name when discussing the project with other people in order to raise more funds. This obviously represents Sathu Nyai Khamchan's popularity as a spiritual figure of Lao Buddhism in Luang Prabang.

In chapter 4, I have examined the various collections of the Venerable Abbot. As we can see from his collections, Sathu Nyai Khamchan was a great collector and conservationist in Laos. He knew much about the objects of his collection and had a clear vision of how to present and use them, and was aware of their importance to Lao generations to come. The Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang, which is now a part of the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang, is the result of his vision to have his collections protected and preserved beyond his lifetime. He asked Hans Georg Berger, a German photographer and writer who came to Luang Prabang in 1993, to find a way to make this vision come true. The Buddhist Archive of Photography has enabled the photographs which had been hidden for decades to come to light, and Sathu Nyai Khamchan's idea inspired other abbots as well as lay people to donate their own personal collections to the Buddhist Archive. As a result, the data base of the Buddhist Archive of photography contains more than 35,000 items of photographs, including a minor number of negatives from nineteen monastery collections and

five personal collections. “We know of no other town in Buddhist Southeast Asia where a similar collection has been established” (Berger 2015: 97).

The photographs and art objects Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected came from various places, such as from his family, his relatives, and other abbots and monasteries. This wide array of sources indicates his great endeavors for Lao Buddhism. For researchers, the collections contain important information on Buddhism, Lao daily life, festivals, ceremonies and rituals, people, and even contact with places outside of Luang Prabang and Laos. The historic photographs cover a period of more than 120 years, including the pioneering period of photography in Luang Prabang. It may be assumed that, already in the late 1870s, photography was practiced in the town monasteries (Ibid. 99). The photographs portray not only Buddhism in Laos but also in other countries in South and Southeast Asia, as well as in the western countries where Lao people currently live and to where Sathu Nyai Khamchan traveled.

I would like to emphasize the vital role Hans Georg Berger has played in gathering the collections, keeping them in a safe place and making them available for study and research. As we have seen in many monasteries, after the abbots’ death, the collections would typically disappear. Since 2007, Hans Georg Berger has set up many projects in collaboration with Sathu Nyai One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, the head of the Sangha of Luang Prabang, for the preservation and digitalization of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s collections. This is a significant contribution to the preservation and research of Lao cultural heritage. Above all, Hans Georg Berger does this out of respect to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, his spiritual master (Ibid. 107).

Furthermore, the other collections of personal letters, official documents as well as palm-leaf and mulberry manuscripts are also important for studying Lao society, the administration of the Sangha, and Lao intellectuals. The 1,171 personal letters that Sathu Nyai Khamchan received from monks, novices and lay people, mostly concerning private matters, cover a period of seventy years (1937–2007). The personal letters represent various dimensions of Lao society, for instance, communication, travel, migration, and so on. Of high interest are the letters sent by Lao people living outside of Laos to Sathu Nyai Khamchan for various reasons (e.g. to express their reverence to the Most Venerable, to discuss private matters, to make contact with their relatives in Luang Prabang, or to send money in support of Sathu Nyai Khamchan’s construction works). In these letters, they also report to Sathu Nyai Khamchan on their living conditions and Lao associations in western countries.

From these letters, we learn a lot about their lives in these countries, their perspectives on and so forth. Moreover, they are excellent sources of examining the spread of Lao culture and Buddhism to the Western world. In turn, this is also of value for the study of contemporary Lao Buddhism abroad and in Laos. Above all, the letters express the faith,

respect and reverence of Lao Buddhists to Sathu Nyai Khamchan as their spiritual refuge. Sathu Nyai Khamchan was probably one of the first Lao monks who established such extensive networks with the Lao diaspora overseas. His travels and visit he paid to them are symbolic for the establishment of linkages between the Lao past, and the significantly more fragmented existence of Lao people across the globe in the present. The photographs he took during the visits to Lao people abroad represent important sources for future researchers for studying the large-scale migration of the Lao that occurred in the twentieth century.

A total of 5,217 official documents which Sathu Nyai Khamchan received from both monks and laities have been found so far in the late abbot's personal chamber. These documents are related to various Sangha activities, administrative matters of the Sangha, and Buddhist festivals, covering a period of nearly one hundred years (1912–2007). The documents provide valuable information for the study of Lao traditions and culture, as well as the role of the Sangha and Sathu Nyai Khamchan's role in the twentieth century. Concerning Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the documents mostly relate to his administrative tasks and his construction work; the documents concerning the Sangha all related to various types of administrative matters. Of particular importance is the information on relations of the Lao Sangha with other Buddhist countries, e.g. information about the participation of the Lao Sangha in the Sixth Great Buddhist Council in Burma between 1954 and 1956, the participation of the Lao Sangha in the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in 1956 in Sri Lanka, the official visit of the Lao Sangha to Thailand in 1967, and the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism in Laos 1957. The collection of religious books and journals provides various information on Lao traditions and culture, the history of Lao Buddhism and monasteries, as well as the biographies of monks and lay people. These books and journals are extremely relevant and significant sources for the study of contemporary Lao Buddhism as well as its history.

Of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's publications, the Pātimokkha manuscript and Vessantara Jātaka book are the master pieces of his intellectual work, representing his deep knowledge of monastic discipline, Lao Buddhist literature and the Tham-Lao script. The manuscript and the book are popularly used in Luang Prabang. Both have been republished many times. From the 1980s onwards, he transcribed and translated many religious books on Buddhist teachings and monastic discipline from Tham-Lao or Thai, publishing them in Lao for free distribution in order to enable monks and novices as well as lay people to study the Buddhist teachings and monastic discipline conveniently. Finally, the 2,174 art objects Sathu Nyai Khamchan collected in Vat Saen Sukharam obviously indicate his diligence in preserving Lao cultural heritage. The collection consists of many unique objects, particularly preaching chairs and Buddha images which date back centuries. He established the collection with the aim to create the museum of Buddhist Art at Vat Saen Sukharam so that these artifacts might be exhibited

to the public. When the museum is complete, it will show the uniqueness of Lao culture and will be the only museum of its kind in Laos. Above all, Sathu Nyai Khamchan's efforts to collect these documents and objects provides valuable sources for researchers that want to study the history of Lao Buddhism and culture.

In chapter 5, I have discussed the various socio-religious roles of the Most Venerable. He was a responsible abbot who took good care of his disciples, supported them in education and other items necessary for their sustenance, and also sent them abroad for their higher-level Buddhist education. Sathu Nyai Khamchan set up regulations for his disciples to follow in Vat Saen Sukharam, such as wearing the yellow robes appropriately, regularly attending chants and collecting alms in the morning, leaving the monastery only with permission of the abbot, and requiring everyone to learn the Suttas by heart. Therefore, Vat Saen Sukharam was recognized as a monastery with a strict order, and novices who had lived in this monastery were expected to become good monks and to have a bright future. The strict regulation Sathu Khamchan established as the abbot was neglected after he passed away, but was recently re-established in 2013 by his foster child, Sathu Phò Bunpheng Virathammo. Today, Vat Saen Sukharam has its own regulation for its inhabitants and has become a role model for other monasteries in Luang Prabang.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan was also a good leader of the Sangha communities in Luang Prabang province who took great responsibilities and duties on him. He traveled a great deal throughout the country during the decades before the Lao revolution. Most of his travels were to remote villages and districts in northern Laos in order to visit villagers, organize Buddhist ceremonies for new monasteries, establish Buddhist schools, and participate in traditional festivals, as well as to attend Sangha conferences. These travels can be read as a kind of "map" of his role in developing Buddhism in the countryside where Buddhism was often rather weak, and the local peoples had previously believed in other cults. In the urban areas, he supported and encouraged monks and laypeople with potential to develop certain skills at constructing monastic buildings to become even better at their craft. Such examples do much to showcase Sathu Nyai Khamchan's great sense of leadership.

Since the 1950s, Sathu Nyai Khamchan repeatedly went on international excursions, visiting many countries on various occasions and with different purposes. During these travels, he visited eighteen countries on official and personal visits, sometimes as pilgrimages and sometimes so as to participate in international conferences. During official visits, he usually went as a member of the Lao Sangha delegation or sometimes in accompaniment of the Supreme Patriarch, Somdet Pha Sanghakhlat Thammayana Maha Thela. His official visits were as follows: to Burma in 1954 as a representative attending the Sixth Great Buddhist Council, to Sri Lanka in 1956 as a follower of the Supreme Patriarch, participating in the celebrations of the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism, to Burma in 1957 as a follower of

the Supreme Patriarch, to Thailand in 1967 and 1974 as a follower of the Supreme Patriarch, to the Soviet Union in 1969 as a representative, and to Myanmar in 2002 as a distinguished visitor to receive an honorific religious title. These official visits mark the international religious connection between the Lao Sangha and other Buddhist Sangha in Asia, both of the Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist sects. They represent the role of the Lao Sangha on an international level, which had been hidden in the mainland of Southeast Asia for centuries. The connections with the international Sangha that the Lao Sangha established during this time period have since been developed further and continue to flourish into the present day.

For Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the cultivation and extension of interpersonal relations with other monks and lay people was very important. He developed large networks with many senior monks both in and outside of Laos. In Luang Prabang, he was able to use his social skills to unite the Sangha community, even in difficult times, like after the communist revolution. In Thailand, he was on good terms with many prominent monks, e.g. Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Aat Asapha Thera) of Vat Maha That Yuwarat Rangsarit, and Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Kiao Upaseno) of Vat Saket, in Bangkok. These networks enabled him to send his disciples to stay in these monasteries for their Buddhist studies. This helped to strengthen the ties between Buddhists in Luang Prabang and Bangkok and, in turn, between Laos and Thailand in general. Through his networks and personal skills he contributed significantly to the establishment of transnational links of Lao Buddhism that have now under the influence of globalization become even more important.

Sathu Nyai Khamchan traveled to the following countries either on pilgrimage or to conduct unofficial visits: Thailand in 1956, 2000, 2003, as well as a number of less significant visits; Burma or Myanmar in 1957; Sri Lanka in 1972; India in 1957, 1968 and 1969; Vietnam in 1960; Cambodia in 1960; Malaysia in 1967 and China in 1999 and 2006. The countries that he went for personal visits are France in 1982, 1995, 1997 and 2002; Switzerland in 1982; Belgium in 1982 and 1995; Australia in 1983; England in 1995; Germany, the United States of America, and Canada in 1997. Sathu Nyai Khamchan had observed many things from his travels which gave him ideas which contributed to his vision for his work in Laos. These are reflected in his works at Vat Saen Sukharam, where many buildings have been covered with glazed tiles that he imported from Thailand as well as the stencil motifs of gods and goddess on the walls which he copied from the Angkor Wat. His travels also inspired his idea of exhibiting the photographs on the walls of his monastery buildings, as well as his idea to found a museum of Buddhist art. These are not common for Luang Prabang.

In summary, we can say that my thesis has discussed the most important aspects of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's work and life in order to explore his contribution to the preservation and development of Lao culture and Buddhism. Of special importance was here that this

influence stretched over different historical periods that also were marked by changes and ruptures. The heritage he left for Laos and its people will remain valuable sources for studying the history and culture of Laos. We can learn from his life that the proper practice and understanding of Buddhism and its teachings is also bound to the examples of the life of venerable monks. People can therefore try to follow his example in order to develop their karma and thereby support Buddhism. Sathu Nyai Khamchan's exemplary life and influence shows that the preservation of old things remains significant for understanding and establishing the present, not only in Laos, but also beyond that.

Appendix

Glossary

Note: Bur. = Burmese, Hin. = Hindu, Kh. = Khmer, Skt. = Sanskrit

A

Abat ອາບັດ (Lao), *āpatti* (Pali). An ecclesiastical offence

Abhidhamma (Pali), *pha aphitham* ພະອະພິທໍາ (Lao) Term meaning “high doctrine.” “One of the three baskets of the Buddhist Tipiṭaka of the Theravada canon. Deals with the psychology of the mind and the refined states of experience found through meditation” (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 295).

Achan ອາຈານ (Lao), *ācariya* (Pali). Teacher; monk (lit. ‘master’); regular instructor.

Aepkhao or *kongkhao* ແອບເຂົ້າ ຫຼື ກ່ອງເຂົ້າ (Lao). A fabricated bamboo box for holding sticky rice.

Agga Maha Saddhama Jotika Dhaja ອັກຄະມະຫາສັດທໍາມະໂຊຕິກະທະຊະ (Pali). “The Great Noble Teacher of the Shining Dhamma”, the high honorific title that the government of Myanmar offered to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela in 2002.

Ahak vat ອາຮັກວັດ (Lao). The spirit or god protecting a monastery.

Aham or *alam* ອາຮາມ, ອາລາມ (Lao), *ārāma* (Pali). A monastery; temple-monastery.

Ahimsā, avihimsā (Pali), *ahingsa* ອະຫິງສາ (Lao). Non-violence; non-harming; inoffensiveness; non-injury.

Ajanta ຖ້ຳອະຊັນຕະ. Site of a remarkable and world famous series of manmade cave temples and monasteries on the Deccan in Maharashtra, India. The structure contains sculptures and wall paintings executed by Buddhist religious communities between the second century BC and the seventh century AD (Mansinh 2006: 43).

Akkhamahasenabòdi ອັກຄະມະຫາເສນາບໍດີ (Lao). Highest-ranking official as an advisor to the king, equivalent to the rank of prime minister.

Ananda (Pali), *Pha Anon* ພະອານົນ (Lao). Buddha’s friend, cousin, and favorite disciple, and the monk who memorized the Suttas in their entirety. He was recognized as a shadow of

the Buddha and renowned as one of the principal figures of the first Buddhist Council, where he presented all the Suttas that he had heard from the Buddha.

Anattā ອະນັດຕາ (Pali, Lao). Not-soul; soulless; not-self; non-self; non-ego.

Angkor (Kh), Angkor ອັງກໍ (Lao). Temple complex in Cambodia founded by Jayavarman VII which was dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu by King Suryavarman II, who reigned between AD 1131 and 1150. The name Angkor comes from the Sanskrit word *nagara*, meaning ‘town’. The temple was constructed over a period of 30 years, and evidences some of the most beautiful examples of Khmer and Hindu art (Keown 2003: 13–14).

Angkor Thom ອັງກໍທົມ (Kh). Literally, Great City, located in Cambodia, was the longest enduring capital city of the Khmer empire.

Angkor Wat (Kh), Angkor Vat ອັງກໍວັດ (Lao). Temple city. Angkor Wat is the largest structure amongst the cluster of temples and is located approximately six kilometers north of the provincial capital of Siem Reap. The structure was built in the twelfth century by King Suryavarman II and was originally dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu. The main temple has a rectangular floor plan topped with a succession of progressively elevated and receded levels, giving the structure a somewhat pyramidal outline (Keown 2003: 18).

Aniccatā (Pali), *anitcha* ອະນິດຈະຕາ (Lao). Impermanence; transiency.

Anisong ອານິສົງ (Lao), *ānisamsa* (Pali). Benefit, merit, spiritual profit, good result, advantage.

Anisong salòng van koet ອານິສົງສະຫຼອງວັນເກີດ (Lao). The benefit [derived from] the celebration of one’s birthday.

Añjalim karoti (Pali), *panommü* ປະນົມມື (Lao). To lift the joined palms as a token of reverence; put the hands together (at the chest or forehead) in salutation (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 339).

Aphisamachan ອະພິສະມາຈານ (Lao), *abhisamācāra* (Pali). Higher training in proper conduct. Refinements of virtuous conduct and etiquette. The regulations for the conduct of a bhikkhu without the Pātimokkha.

Apsara (Skt.), *accharā* (Pali), *nang thep apsòn* ນາງເທບອັບສອນ (Lao). Female divinities originally associated with water and the clouds; celestial dancers and wives of the *gandhabbas* (Stratton 2004: 417); celestial nymph; heavenly dancer.

Arahant (Pali), *arhat* (Skt.), *pha òlahan* ພະອໍລະຫັນ (Lao). Worthy one; the Holy one; perfected one; one who has attained *nibbāna*. An enlightened being, free from all delusion.

Aranyavasi ອະຣັນຍະວາສີ (Lao), *araññavāsī* (Pali). One who dwells in the forest; forest-dwelling monk; the forest order.

Aśoka (Pali), Ashoka, Aśoka (Skt.), Pha Chao Asok ພະເຈົ້າອະໂສກ (Lao). An Indian emperor of the Mauryan Dynasty who ruled from approximately 272 BC to 232 BC. He adopted Buddhism during his reign and encouraged extensive missionary activity throughout India and Southeast Asia. He was the first ruler able to unify India into one empire (Stratton 2004: 417).

Attanā codayattānam ອັດຕານາ ໂຈທະຍະຕານັງ (Pali). By oneself, one must admonish oneself” (Brahmagunabhorn 2013: 17).

B

Bap ບາບ (Lao), *pāpa* (Pali). Evil; wrong action; demerit.

Bai anumothana ໃບອະນຸໂມທະນາ (Lao). “Donation certificate” is a document religious organizations or monasteries issue to donors or supporters as a symbol of gratitude. The donation certificate indicates the name of donor/s, the amount of money donated and the donation’s purpose, followed by a religious blessing

Bai dika ໃບດິກາ (Lao). A letter from a monastery sent to Buddhists announcing a monastic festival, e.g. the Vessantara Jātaka, and asking for donations.

Bai khao bun ໃບຂາວບຸນ (Lao). Literally, “paper with merit news”. A letter from a monastery or merit-making organizer sent to Buddhists announcing a festival and merit-making ceremony and asking for donations.

Bai mak faen ໃບໝາກແຟນ (Lao). *Protium serratum* leaf.

Bai patiyān ton ໃບປະຕິຍານຕິນ (Lao). “Allegiance to Oneself” that novices wrote to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela affirming his instructions.

Bai phae kusun ໃບແຜ່ກຸສິນ (Lao). Literally, “paper dedicating merit.” A letter sent by a monestary to Buddhists asking for donations to the monastic construction projects.

Bai phae sattha ໃບແຜ່ສັດທາ (Lao). Literally, “paper giving faith.” The content and function are the same as a *bai phae kusun*.

Bai sema ໃບເສມາ (Lao). Boundary stones placed upright around a *sim*, usually at the eight cardinal and subcardinal points, to mark off the consecrated area; *bai semas* designate the place where the eight *luk nimit* are buried, with a ninth *luk nimit* buried in the center (Stratton 2004: 417).

Bai thelaphisek ໃບເຖລາພິເສກ (Lao), *therābhiseka* (Pali). *Thelaphisek* certificates issued by the Sangha inviting a monk to a water-pouring ceremony.

Bai yòngyò ໃບຍ້ອງຍໍ (Lao). “Exaltation certificate” which state officers, village heads, mayors, governors, ministers and prime ministers issue to someone who has contributed greatly in ways beneficial to the public.

Bang sukun ບັງສຸກຸນ (Lao), *pamsukūla* (Pali). Literally, soiled or loathsome as dirt; like a dust heap; discarded; disposed of; unwanted. Rags from a dust heap; a robe made of rags taken from dust-bins; discarded cloth; rag-robe. To take robes after contemplating on the impermanence of compounded things; to meditate and take a funeral (or memorial) robe (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 333).

Basi ບາສີ (Lao). A blessing or welcome ceremony designed to concentrate the spiritual force of those for whom it is held on important occasions such as a birth, marriage, or before embarking on or after returning from a long journey.

Bhāvanā (Pali), *phavana* ພາວະນາ (Lao). Development, mental culture, meditation

Bhikkhu (Pali), *phikkhu* ພິກຂຸ (Lao). Monk (lit. ‘beggar’), alms mendicant.

Binthabat ບິນທະບາດ (Lao), *piṇḍapāta* (Pail). Food received in the alms-bowl (of a Bhikkhu); alms-gathering; alms-food. To collect alms-food, to receive alms-food, to go on alms-rounds.

Bodhgaya, *phutthakhaya* ພຸດທະຄະຢາ (Lao). Modern Indian name for Buddha-gaya, the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment on the bank of the river Nairanjana, a southern tributary of the Ganges, near ancient Rajagṛha (Keown 2003: 36).

Bodhi Tree, *ton pho* ຕົ້ນໂພ (Lao). The tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, or any tree of the same species, *Ficus religiosa*, a large spreading fig (Ibid.).

Brahmanism, *satsana pham* ສາສະໜາພາມ (Lao). The religion of pre-Buddhist India brought to India by the Aryans during the second millennium BC. The Vedas reflect the beliefs in anthropomorphic nature gods who are propitiated by magic sacrifice and rituals supervised by Brahman priests. Brahmanism was the matrix for both Buddhism and Hinduism (Stratton 2004: 418).

Buddha, *pha phutthachao* ພະພຸດທະເຈົ້າ (Lao). The awakened one; the enlightened one. A person who has attained *nibbāna* without receiving instruction.

Buddha Jayanti, *phutthasayanti* ພຸດທະຊະຍັນຕີ (Lao). “The victory of the Buddha.” “Celebration of Buddhism. Name given to the celebrations held in 1956–7 to mark the 2500th year of the Buddhist era” (Keown 2003: 43).

Buddhism, *phuttha-sasana* ພຸດທະສາສະໜາ (Lao). Western term which became established in popular usage in the 1830s to refer to the teachings of the Buddha (Ibid.: 45).

Bun ບຸນ (Lao), *puñña* (Pali). Merit; meritorious action; virtue; righteousness; moral acts; good works (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 334). In Laos, it is also mean festivals and ceremonies.

Bun diian si ບຸນເດືອນສີ່ (Lao). Festival organized in the fourth lunar month, i.e. the festival of Vessantara Jātaka.

Bun hòkhao padap din ບຸນຫໍ່ເຂົ້າປະດັບດິນ (Lao). Literally, the festival in which rice is wrapped to decorate the ground - this is a festival devoted to the dead, organized in the middle of Buddhist Lent on the fourteenth day of the waning moon in the ninth lunar month.

Bun mahaxat ບຸນມະຫາຊາດ (Lao). The festival of the chanting of the story of the last great incarnation of the Gautama Buddha. Another name for the festival of Vessantara Jātaka.

Bun òk phansa ບຸນອອກພັນສາ (Lao). The festival at the end of Buddhist Lent.

Bun phavet ບຸນພະເຫວດ (Lao). The Vessantara Jātaka festival (recitation of the story of Prince Vessantara or *phavetsandòn*).

Bun pi mai ບຸນປີໃໝ່ (Lao). The Lao New Year festival.

Buxa tham ບູຊາທຳ (Lao). “Dhamma worship” Offerings given by the donor to the monk who scribed or wrote the manuscript.

C

Changhan ຈັງຫັນ (Lao). “Breakfast, breakfast food” of monks.

Chao athiakan vat ເຈົ້າອະທິການ (Lao). The abbot.

Chao khana ເຈົ້າຄະນະ (Lao). Chief monk of an administrative division; ecclesiastical chief officer; ecclesiastical governor.

Chao khana changwat ເຈົ້າຄະນະຈັງຫວັດ (Thai). The Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor.

Chao khana khuaeng ເຈົ້າຄະນະແຂວງ (Lao). The Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor.

Chao khana müang ເຈົ້າຄະນະເມືອງ (Lao). The Ecclesiastical District Officer.

Chao khana tasaeng ເຈົ້າຄະນະຕາແສງ (Lao). The Ecclesiastical Sub-district Head Officer

Chao khong kamphaeng müang luang prabang ເຈົ້າຄອງກຳແພງເມືອງຫຼວງພະບາງ (Lao). The district chief officer of Luang Prabang city.

Chao mòm ເຈົ້າໝ່ອມ (Lao). The name given to a monk in Laos, in particular in Luang Prabang, who has been ordained and has not yet been invited to a *thelaphisek* ceremony. In other regions of the country he is called *khuba*.

Chao raxa khana ເຈົ້າລາຊາຄະນະ (Lao). Ecclesiastical Minister.

Chao raxa khana xay ເຈົ້າລາຊາຄະນະຊ້າຍ (Lao). Ecclesiastical minister, left hand of the Supreme Patriarch in the Sangha hierarchy.

Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana (Pali), *sangkhayana khang thi hok* ສັງຄາຍະນາຄັ້ງທີ່ຫົກ (Lao). The Sixth Great Buddhist Council was held in Rangoon, Burma, between 1954 and 1956 to celebrate the 2500th anniversary of Buddhism.

Chedi ເຈດີ (Lao), *cetiya* (Pali), *caitya* (Skt.). A memorial or reminded, usually used for religious monuments containing relics or ashes of the Buddha. Chedi can also refer to a funerary monument containing ashes of other holy or important people (Stratton 2004: 418). A person, place or object worthy of worship, pagoda, shrine, dagoba, bell-shaped stupa (with a slender spire), tapering-spined stupa (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 322).

Chet tamnan ເຈັດຕໍານານ, ເຈັດຕໍານານ (Lao, Thai). Title of manuscript or book gathering the special seven Suttas including Mangala Sutta, Ratana Sutta, Mettā Sutta, Khandha Paritta Sutta, Mora Paritta Sutta, Dhajagga Sutta, and Ātānātiya Paritta Sutta. (Dhammakittivong 2008: 175).

Chivon ຈີວອນ (Lao), *cīvara* (Pali). The principle robe of a *bhikkhu*; the yellow robe (of a Buddhist monk or novice); any of the three garments of the monk.

Chulamani, *phathat chulamani* ພະທາດຈຸລາມະນີ (Lao). The stupa in which the Buddha's tooth relic is enshrined, located in the Tavatimsa heaven.

D

Dāna (Pali), *than* ທານ (Lao). “Giving”; often used to refer to an offering, particularly food, to Buddhist monastics (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 359).

Dasarājadhamma (Pali), *thotsaphit ratsatham* ທິດສະພິດລາຊະທໍາ (Lao). The tenfold code of the king; the tenfold virtue or duty of the king; the ten royal virtues; virtues of a ruler (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 327).

Desanā (Pali), *thesana* ເທສະນາ (Lao). Preaching; discourse; sermon; instruction; to preach; to expound the Doctrine; to give a sermon.

Deva (Pali), *thep* ເທບ (Lao). A shining one; god; deity; divine being.

Din ດິນ (Lao). Soil, clay, earth, land.

Din daeng ດິນແດງ (Lao). Red soil, made of natural ingredients mixed with oil from a rubber tree and used as red paint on the walls of monastic buildings. It must be unearthed two meters from under the surface of the ground. The deeper the layer, the redder it is. This soil can be found in the region of Ban Paeo village in Chòmphet district of Luang Prabang province.

Dhammeka stupa, *Thammekasathup* ທຳເມກະສະຄູບ (Lao). At Sarnath, is one of the more prominent and revered Buddhist structures in India, famous as the place where the Buddha delivered his first sermon. It was constructed by King Aśoka in BC 249. It is one of the holiest sites for Buddhist pilgrimage in India.

Dhamma (Pali), *thamma* ທຳມະ (Lao). “Truth, religion, the sum-total of Buddhist doctrine, Nature,” a thing as it is, or phenomenon. When capitalized, it refers to the way things are or the ultimate reality, or the Buddha’s teachings on that reality (a Buddhist takes refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha) (Ibid.).

Dhammassavana (Pali), *fang tham* ຟັງທຳ (Lao). “Hearing the preaching of the Dhamma” i.e. when lay Buddhists come to monasteries on Buddhist holidays on the eighth and fifteenth of the waxing and waning moons to hear a sermon from an abbot or other monk.

Dòk huang phoeng ດອກຮວງເຜີ້ງ (Lao). The elaborated carved and golden wood under the beam of a *sim*.

Dòk maichan ດອກໄມ້ຈັນ (Lao). Artificial flowers made from sandalwood in the shape of a white rose used at cremation ceremonies.

Dukkhatā (Pali), *thuk* ທຸກ (Lao). The state of being subject to suffering; painfulness; stress; conflict (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 328).

Dutiya sannipāta (Pali), *thutiya sannibat* ທຸຕິຍະສັນນິບາດ (Lao). The second session of the Sixth Great Buddhist Council in Rangoon, Burma, held from 15 November 1954 to 29 January 1955.

E

Ellora, *tham eolora* ຖ້ຳເອວໂລຣາ (Lao). A unique city of carved cave temples was created in the Deccan in Maharashtra, India, between the seventh and eleventh century. Ellora illustrates the flourishing and passing of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain artistry under royal patronage in the early medieval period (Mansinh 2006: 204).

F

Fa Ngum or Pha Chao Fa Ngum ພະເຈົ້າຟ້າງຸ່ມ (Lao). The king of Lan Xang kingdom, who reigned from 1353 to 1373 and is well-known as the founder of the Lan Xang Hom Khao Dynasty. He established Theravada Buddhism, imported from Angkor, in the Lao kingdom in 1359 as the state religion.

G

Gandhakuti, *gandhakuṭi* (Pali), *pha khantha kuti* ພະຄັນຖະກຸຕິ (Lao). Perfumed chamber. Any private chamber devoted to Buddha's use was called *gandhakuṭi*, but especially the room he always occupied at Savatthi (Childers 1875: 141).

Gihipaṭṭipatti (Pali), *khihipatibat* ຄິຫິປະຕິປັດ (Lao). Practices for a layman; code of morality for the laity (Brahmagunaborn 2012: 320).

Gijjhakuta (Pali), *phukhao khitsakut* ພູເຂົາຄິດຊະກູດ (Lao). “Vulture” or “eagle” peak, located in northeastern Rajagaha, the capital of Magadha in ancient India. Eagle peak was the Buddha's retreat in Rajagaha and the setting for many of his discourses. It is located in Rajgir, Bihar, India.

Golden Rock, *phathat inkhuaen* ພະທາດອິນແຂວນ (Lao). Also known as Kyaiktiyo pagoda, meaning pagoda on a hermit's head, this pagoda is located in the Mon state in southern Burma. “The 611.45 ton granite boulder balances on a cliff side. The hair relics of the Buddha believed to be inside the granite boulder are the objects of devotion” (Stadtner 2008: 19). It is one of the most renowned sacred sites for pilgrims in Burma.

H

Hae phasat phoeng ແຫ່ຜາສາດເຜິ້ງ (Lao). Processions of wax castles (creations of yellow trees made of wax, golden paper and Lao Kip banknotes).

Hae vò ແຫ່ວໍ້ (Lao). “Literally, the process of palanquin” on which senior monks sit during the Lao New Year festival.

Haksa phakhong ຮັກສາຜ້າຄອງ (Lao). The keeping close of a monk's three yellow robes during the night.

Hang lin ຮາງລິນ (Lao). Wooden gutter carved in the shape of a *naga*, the faithful pouring of lustral water into a small gutter cut in the *naga*'s tail directing it out of the *naga*'s mouth onto the Buddha images which have been placed under it. It is also used in consecration ceremonies (*thelaphisek*) for monks.

Hap pao ຮັບເປົ້າ (Lao). The Year of the Cow in the ancient Lao calendar.

Het Bun Dai Bun ເຮັດບຸນໄດ້ບຸນ (Lao). “Make merit, receive merit” which “means whatever is freely given and with good intention will come back in the same beneficial way” (Berger 2015). This Lao phrase is the title of a book published by Hans Georg Berger in 2000 about Lao culture and daily life in Luang Prabang.

Hiak fon ຮຽກຝົນ (Lao). Buddha statue in the rain-calling pose.

Hit sipsòng ຮີດສິບສອງ (Lao). The traditions or customs of the Lao in the twelve months of the year.

Hit sipsòng khong sipsi ຮີດສິບສອງຄອງສິບສີ່ (Lao). The traditions or customs of the Lao in the twelve months of the year and the fourteen regulations.

Hò ຫໍ້, ສ່ອ (Lao, Thai). A term widespread in Laos and Northern Thailand for denoting the Chinese, especially those living in the Yunnan province.

Hò kòng ຫໍກອງ (Lao). Drum shelter.

Hò lakhang ຫໍລະຄັງ (Lao). Bell shelter.

Hong ຫົງ, ນົກຫົງ (Lao), *hamsa* (Skt., Pali). A mythical swan, goose, or gander, an emissary between the gods and humans that is also the mountain upon which the Hindu god Brahma resides. In Buddhism, a *hong* is symbolic of the flight of the Buddhist doctrine to all realms (Stratton 2004: 419).

Hò tai ຫໍໄຕ (Lao). The monastic library where the palm-leaf manuscripts, Tipiṭaka volumes, and other religious books, are stored.

Hò thammat ຫໍທໍາມາດ (Lao). Decorative wooden shrine with roof and spire used by monks when giving a sermon, or for housing a very special Buddha image.

Hò wai ຫໍໄຫວ້ (Lao). A worship chapel in the monastery.

Huay san ຮວາຍສັນ (Lao). The Year of the Monkey, according to the ancient Lao calendar.

Hüa xuang ເຮືອຊວງ (Lao). A racing boat with a length of 30–35 meters long manned by 40–45 oarsmen, used for competition in the boat racing festivals which are popularly organized in Southeast Asia during the second half of the year when the water levels are high.

Hüa I-ngiang ເຮືອອີ່ງຽງ (Lao). The name given to the royal racing boat of King Sisavang Vatthana, with one of its edges having become a bit distorted.

I

Indra, Pha In, Phaya In ພະອິນ, ພະຍາອິນ (Lao). The greatest of the gods in the Tavatimsa Heaven. He has many names in Lao, such as Sahassanai, Sakka, Makkawan and Amarin (among others). His elephant is called Aiyarapot or Arawan and he has a white horse called Oujachaisop with a gold-coloured chariot yoked to a red horse named Vejchayan or Phaichayon.

J

Jambūpati (Pali), *Phaya somphu* ພະຍາຊົມພູ (Lao). A skeptical king converted by the Buddha who changed himself into an apparition of a universal emperor (*chakravartin*). The legend was composed in Pali and appeared in Burma and Thailand at an unknown date. Statues of the crowned Buddha might represent him as a subduer of Jambūpati (Stratton 2004: 419–420).

Jātaka (Skt.), *xadok* ຊາດົກ (Lao). 1. A birth story; the stories of the Buddha's previous lives. 2. "Birth Stories"; name of the tenth division of the Khuddaka Nikaya (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 324).

K

Kalò ກະລໍ (Lao). A long wooden drum made of a hollowed out trunk. It is beaten by monks or novices in the early morning before going out to collect alms and a second time at 10.30 a.m. to remind the laypeople to carry food for lunch to the monastery.

Kanlòn ກັນຫຼອນ (Lao). A surprise gift / offering (a donation tree with money and others presented at the Vessantara festival).

Kamot ກາມົດ (Lao). The Year of the Goat, in the ancient Lao year calendar.

Kathin ກະຖິນ (Lao), *kathinna* (Pali). The *kathin* ceremony, the annual robe-presentation ceremony (in the month following the end of the Rains Retreat), post-lent robe-offering, post-retreat robe-presentation.

Kaxuang thammakan ກະຊວງທຳມະການ (Lao). The Ministry of Religious Affairs in the pre-1975 period.

Khaen nang ແຂນນາງ (Lao). Eave crutches supporting the lower edges of roofs on the temples. They appear in a variety of forms, among them floral designs and creatures both mythological and realistic.

Khamavasi ຄາມະວາສີ (Lao), *gāmvāsī* (Pali). A town-monk.

Khamxu ຄ້າຊູ (Lao). To support; to sponsor.

Khatha ຄາຖາ (Lao), *gāthā* (Pali). 1. verse, incarnation, magic spell. 2. Stanza of 4 half-lines. 3. Protective magic diagram.

Khatha phan ຄາຖາພັນ (Lao). One thousand Pali words or phrases in the Vessantara Jātaka.

Khamuk ຄະມຸກ (Lao). The material made of the ash of a Bodhi tree, water and lacquer. It is the local material used for the decoration works of religious and secular traditional buildings in Laos, in particular in Luang Prabang.

Khao niao ເຂົ້າປ່າ (Lao). Sticky rice.

Khao pa ເຂົ້າປ່າ (Lao). “Entering the forest”, meaning the Vipassana meditation retreat in the forest.

Khao piak ເຂົ້າປຸກ (Lao). “Cooked rice” with fish, pork, chicken or seafood. Traditional food of Luang Prabang people.

Kap san ກາຍສັນ (Lao). The Year of the Monkey, according to the ancient Lao calendar.

Kathong ກະທົງ (Lao). The ornate floating tray made of banana stalks or other materials, used for making offerings to the water goddess.

Khi ຂີ້ (Lao). Feces.

Khon dip ຄົນດິບ (Lao). Literally: “raw” person (describing a man who has not yet been a monk or novice (Ladwig 2005: 22).

Khon suk ຄົນສຸກ (Lao). Literally: “cooked, well-done” person (describing a person who has already been a monk or novice) (Ibid.).

Khuaeng ແຂວງ (Lao). Province.

Khüa khao hò ເຄືອເຂົ້າຮໍ (Lao). *Tinospora crispa*.

Khun Borom ຊຸນບໍລົມ (Lao). Also, *Khum Borom*, “mythical first Lao ruler, son of the king of the Thaen (celestial deities) dispatched to rule over all those, both Lao Lum and Lao Thoeng, who were born of giant gourds produced by a vine that grew from the nostrils of the divine buffalo” (Stuart-Fox 2001: 160).

Khwan or *khuan* ຂວັນ (Lao). Guardian spirits attached to the human body.

Kip ກີບ (Lao). Lao currency, the Lao kip (LAK).

Kitchavat ກິດຈະວັດ (Lao), *kiccāvatā* (Pali). Religious routine, daily religious observances.

Kot kaxuang thammakan ກິດກະຊວງທຳມະການ (Lao). The regulation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Kusinara ກຸສິນາຣາ. Capital of the Mallas in northern India where the Buddha entered his Mahaparinibbana. As the place of Buddha’s death, it is considered one of the holy places for Buddhists to visit while on a pilgrimage.

Kuti (Pali), ກຸຕິ, ກະຕິ *kuti, kadi* (Lao). Hut; typical abode of forest monastery bhikkhu. An abode of a Buddhist monk or novice, a monk's cell, a monk's lodging, a monk's dwelling, dormitory, living quarter of monks.

L

Labòp kao ລະບອບເກົ່າ (Lao). The “old system” referring to the former royalist regime of Laos, which preceded the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (1975).

Labòp mai ລະບອບໃໝ່ (Lao). The “new system” of Laos following the Lao revolution and the founding of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975.

Lakhòn kan or *nakhòn kan* ລະຄອນກັນ ຫຼື ນະຄອນກັນ (Lao). The episodes in Vessantara Jātaka tell the story of when Prince Vessantara returned to his town and the people organized celebrations to welcome him.

Lak müang ຫຼັກເມືອງ (Lao). City pillar.

Lan kòm ລານກ້ອມ (Lao). A short palm-leaf manuscript.

Lan yao ລານຍາວ (Lao). A longer palm-leaf manuscript.

Lao buhan ລາວບູຮານ (Lao). Ancient Lao script, particularly the old Lao script still used in the pre-1975 period.

Lao Issara ລາວອິດສະຫຼະ (Lao). Literally “Free Lao,” the name given to the movement opposing the return of Laos to French jurisdiction.

Lao Lum ລາວລຸ່ມ (Lao). Lao of the lowlands. This generic term refers to those ethnic groups practicing wet rice cultivation at lower altitudes and speaking a Tai (or Daic) language (Stuart-Fox 2001: 173).

Lao Sung ລາວສູງ (Lao). Lao of the mountain tops. This term refers to those ethnic groups engaging in slash-and-burn agriculture (and often also opium production) at high altitudes, and speaking Hmong-Mien or Sino-Tibetan languages (Ibid.: 181).

Lao Thoeng ລາວເທິງ (Lao). Lao of the mountain slopes. This term refers to those ethnic groups practicing slash-and-burn agriculture on hillsides at moderate elevations and speaking Austroasiatic languages akin to Mon and Khmer (Ibid.: 182).

Lan Xang ລ້ານຊ້າງ (Lao). [Land of] a Million Elephants, 14th century kingdom.

Lan Xang Hom Khao ລ້ານຊ້າງຮີ່ມຂາວ (Lao). [Land of] a Million Elephants and the White Parasol, also the name of Lan Xang Dynasty of Laos (1353–1975).

Liberated Zone, *khet potpò* ເຂດປົດປ່ອຍ (Lao). The name given by the Pathet Lao to those parts of Laos under their military and administrative control. From the regroupment

areas of Phongsali and Huaphan set aside under the terms of the Geneva Agreements of 1954, the Pathet Lao steadily expanded the area under their control, especially while temporarily allied with the Neutralists after the Battle of Vientiane at the end of 1960 (Stuart-Fox 2001: 190).

Lòì kathong ລອຍກະທົງ (Lao). To float an ornate tray made of banana stalks or other materials, used for making offerings to the water goddess.

Lue or Tai Lue ລື້ ຫຼື ໄຕລື້ (Lao). The principal minority group in northwestern Laos, extending west into Thailand and north into the Xishuang Banna (Sipsòng Panna) autonomous region in southern Yunnan.

Luk nimit ລູກນິມິດ (Lao), *sīmā-nimitta*, *nimitta* (Pali). A boundary marker, boundary-marking stone. It is a large round stone buried in the ground and serving as the boundary marker for the consecrated area used for a *sim*. Eight *luk nimits* are marked above ground by upright *bai sema* stones, with a ninth buried beneath the center of the *sim*.

Luksit tonkuti ລູກສິດຕິນກຸຕິ (Lao). A close disciple.

Luk yok ລູກຍົກ (Lao). “sponsored son.”

Lumbini, *lumphinivan* ລຸມພິນີວັນ (Lao). The place of the Buddha’s birth, a park located near to Kapilavastu in present-day Nepal near the Himalayan foot-hill (Keown 2003: 159).

M

Mae yok ແມ່ຍົກ (Lao). “Adoptive mother.” The name given by a monk or novice to a woman, who is the sponsor of his ordination ceremony.

Maha ມະຫາ (Lao), *mahā* (Pali). “Great, excellent.” Title given to a person who passed examination of Pali studies from the third grade to ninth grade, and honorary title given to a high-ranking monk.

Mahanikay ມະຫານິກາຍ (Lao), *mahānikāya* (Pali). “Great Sect.” The Mahanikaya sect.

Maha parian tham kao payok ມະຫາປະຮຽນທຳເກົ້າປະໂຫຍກ (Lao). The title given to a person who had completed the ninth level of Buddhist studies, which was the highest level of the Buddhist educational system of the Kingdom of Laos.

Maha pariantham sam payok ມະຫາປະຮຽນທຳສາມປະໂຫຍກ (Lao). The title given to a person who had completed the third level of Buddhist studies in the Kingdom of Laos.

Mahaxat ມະຫາຊາດ (Lao), *mahājātaka* (Pali). The great nativity; one of the best-known and most popular of the Jātaka, which tells the story of how Prince Vessantara – practiced *danaparami* (perfection of giving) – gave away his children, wife, elephant, horses, and servants.

Mahayana, Mahāyāna (Pali), *mahayan* ມະຫາຍານ (Lao). Great Vehicle. The spiritual path of those who practice Buddhism for the sake of liberating all living beings. The Northern School of Buddhism that arose in India in the first centuries CE and subsequently spread to Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, and Mongolia (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 299).

Mai sak phabangsakun ໄມ້ຊັກຜ້າບັງສະກຸນ (Lao). A stick used by a monk for taking the shroud from a corpse at a funeral ceremony.

Maitreya (Skt.), *metteya* (Pali), *pha ariyamettai* ພະອະຣິຍະເມດໂຕ (Lao). Loving One, last of the five great bodhisattvas and the future Buddha to come (Edwards 2007: 319).

Malai Muen ມາໄລເໝີນ (Lao). The title of a Buddhist work of literature describing the story when the Venerable Malai went to pay homage to the Ketkaeochulamani stupa in Tavatimsa for the first time. There were ten thousand Devas who came to worship the stupa at that moment.

Malai Saen ມາໄລແສນ (Lao). The title of a Buddhist work of literature describing the story when Venerable Malai went to pay homage to Ketkaeochulamani stupa in Tavatimsa for the second time, when ten hundred thousand Devas, including Maitreya came to worship the stupa at that moment.

Manat ມາມັດ (Lao), *mānatta* (Pali). Penance.

Mandala, maṇḍala ມັນດະລະ. A circular symmetrical image used as an object of meditation in Mahayana Buddhism. Also refers to an inscribed area with spiritual significance (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 299).

Māra (Pali, Skt.), *man, phaya man* ມານ, ພະຍາມານ (Lao). The Evil One; Death; the Tempter (Brahmagunaborn 2012: 344). “King of the realms of desire. In the story of the life of the Buddha, Mara tried to prevent Siddhartha Gautama, from achieving enlightenment because he feared the loss of his own power if people learned to control their earthly cravings” (Stratton 2004: 421).

Maravichai ມາຣະວິໄຊ (Lao), *māravijaya* (Pali). “The defeat of Mara.” The title of the palm-leaf manuscript that contains the text of the story telling when the Buddha conquered Mara in the night of his enlightenment.

Matthayom tho ມັດທະຍົມໂທ (Lao). Second class of secondary school of the Buddhist education system of the kingdom of Laos.

Mātikā ມາຕິກາ (Pali). Funeral chanting (of Abhidhamma matrices or schedules).

Müang ເມືອງ (Lao). The traditional Lao (Tai) polity or city-state like principality. In the administrative system of modern Laos, this term designates a district.

Mungkhun xivit 38 ມຸງຄຸນຊີວິດ 38 (Lao). 38 steps towards enlightened living.

N

Nāga (Pali), ນາກ, ພະຍານາກ *nak*, *phaya nak* (Lao). An applicant (or candidate) for ordination, ordinand. (Pali). Serpents, often hooded. Many were converted by the Buddha, and they are often portrayed as protectors of the Dhamma (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 299). A multi-headed snake, a guardian deity (Heywood 2006: 210). In Hindu and Buddhist mythology, the *naga* is a serpent divinity who can assume human form at will. These creatures live beneath the earth or in watery places, guardians of its hidden wealth and controller of the rains. In Southeast Asia, the *naga* is used extensively as an architectural motif. In sculpture, the *naga* is often represented as a multi-headed cobra who protects the meditating Buddha. Also the Thai (and the Lao) call a young man, destined to become a monk, *naga* (or *nak*), between the time his head is shaved and his ordination. It is also the name for a prized reddish gold bronze (Stratton 2004: 422).

Nai ban ນາຍບ້ານ (Lao). Head of a village.

Naktham ນັກທຳ (Lao), *dhammika* (Pali). One who is learned in the Doctrine; Doctrine-knower; one who has passed the examination of any of the three grades of Dhamma-study; ecclesiastical graduate of Dhamma studies; Dhamma graduate; Dhamma scholar (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 331).

Naktham ek ນັກທຳເອກ (Lao). The Buddhist certificate for a person who has passed the examination of Dhamma studies in last grade of a total of three grades.

Naktham tho ນັກທຳໂທ (Lao). The Buddhist certificate for a person who has passed the examination of Dhamma studies in second grade of a total of three grades.

Naktham tri ນັກທຳຕຣີ (ຕີ) (Lao). The Buddhist certificate for the person who passed the examination of Dhamma studies in first grade of a total of three grades.

Nam ນ້ຳ (Lao). Water

Nam kiang ນ້ຳກຽງ (Lao). Black lacquer.

Nam man ນ້ຳມັນ (Lao). Oil, petroleum, fat, benzine.

Nam man yang ນ້ຳມັນຢາງ (Lao). The oil from the rubber tree.

Nam mon ນ້ຳມົນ (Lao). Consecrated water, blessing water, lustral water, holy water.

Nang ນາງ (Lao). Mrs. or Miss, goes together with the first name.

Nang Hüa ນາງເຮືອ (Lao). The spirit ladies attached to the racing boats. The girls in traditional dressing participate in the boat racing procession during bringing the racing boats to the competition.

Navakabhikkhu ນະວະກະພິກຂຸ (Pali). A neophyte; newly ordained monk (of less than five years' standing).

Neo Lao Hak Sat ແນວລາວຮັກຊາດ (Lao). Lao Patriotic Front. The organization formed in January 1956 to act as the broad political front of the Pathet Lao. It was replaced in February 1979 by the Lao Front for National Construction.

Ngo ໂງ່ (Lao). Bunch of sky or sky tassel, designates the finial at the end of the ridge on each of the multiple roofs on a *sim*. It often appears in the form of *naga*'s head.

Ngoen man ເງິນໝັ້ນ (Lao). The Lao term used for calling the French Indochina Piastre, "Piastre De Commerce" which was the currency of French Indochina between 1885 and 1952.

Nibbāna (Pali), *nirvana* (Skt.), *nipphan* ນິບພານ (Lao). Cessation of the origins of suffering: delusion and craving. "The extinction of the fires of greed, of hate, and of ignore; the Unconditioned; the supreme goal of Buddhism; the Summum Bonum of Buddhism; the Final Goal; the extinction of all defilements and suffering (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 332).

Nibbāna paccayo hotu ນິບພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕຸ (Pali). "May this be a support for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna*" (Veidlinger 2007: 170). This Pali phrase is popular found at the end of the colophon of a manuscript, which is the supreme goal of the donor's wish.

Nibbana paccayo hotu me ນິບພານະ ປັດຈະໂຍ ໂຫຕຸ ເມ (Pali). "May this be a support to me for attaining enlightenment of *nibbāna*."

Nikay ນິກາຍ (Lao), *nikāya* (Pali). 1. A collection; group; any of the five main divisions of the Suttantapīṭaka. 2. A sect; school; denomination (Ibid.).

Nithan ນິທານ (Lao). Tale, story.

Nithan Khun Borom ນິທານຂຸນບໍຣົມ (Lao). The Chronical of Khun Borom is regarded the first source of the history of the Lao.

Nya tanthao ຢາຕ້ານເຖົ້າ (Lao). Injection for anti-aging.

O

Ó lam ເອາະຫຼາມ (Lao). One of the famous Lao foods original to Luang Prabang, this tasty stew comprises mainly vegetables including beans, eggplant, lemon grass, basil, chilies, wood-ear mushrooms, cilantro, green onion and a locally grown vine called 'sa kan', with optional meat (classically prepared water buffalo meat)

Ongkan phutthasasana samphan haeng phathet lao ອົງການພຸດທະສາສະໜາສໍາພັນແຫ່ງປະເທດລາວ (Lao). The Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos (BFOL).

Ongkan phutthasasana samphan lao ອົງການພູດທະສາສະໜາສໍາພັນລາວ (Lao). The Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization (LBFO) has been adopted from BFOL in 1989.

Ongkan song haeng pha raxa-anachak lao ອົງການສົງແຫ່ງພະລາຊະອານາຈັກລາວ (Lao). The Sangha Organization of the kingdom of Laos was established along by the Sangha Administration Act of 1951. The organization played its role until the revolution of 1975.

P

Pa ປ້າ (Lao). Aunt.

Palami ປາລະມີ (Lao), *pāramī* (Pali). Perfection; stage of spiritual perfection achieved by a Bodhisattva on his path to Buddhahood.

Pali, Pāli ປາລີ. One of the spoken languages of ancient India, derived from Vedic Sanskrit. This was the language chosen by the Theravada sect of Buddhism for writing its scriptures and is the sacred language for this branch of Buddhism (Stratton 2004: 422).

Panya ປັນຍາ (Lao), *paññā* (Pali). Wisdom, knowledge, insight, discernment.

Pap hò ປາບຫໍ້ (Lao), *prap hò* ปรปราบห่อ (Thai). “Suppressing the hò.” The words used by the Siamese army, led by Chao Phraya Surasak Montri who came to Luang Prabang to suppress and defeat the hò, who were hijacking Luang Prabang and northern Laos during the 1880s.

Parinibbāna (Pali), *parinipphan* ປະນິນິບພານ (Lao). The complete / great extinction, the death and *nirvana* of the Buddha.

Paritta mungkhun ປະຣິດຕະມຸງຄຸນ (Lao). Protective Suttas chanted as auspicious signs.

Parivasakam ປະຣິວາສະກໍາ (Lao), *parivāsakamma* (Pali). Probation practice.

Pathan ò phò sò khuaeng ປະທານ ອພສ ແຂວງ (Lao). Chairman of the Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization at the provincial level.

Pathay ປະທາຍ (Lao). Traditional Lao cement for plastering work has the main ingredients of rough sand, *khüa sam hang* (a sort of vine) which is cut into small pieces and put into water for one day to be used as glue, *bai mak faen* pounded and put into water to be used as glue, buffalo skin cut into small pieces and boiled to be used as glue, sugar cane juice boiled for some time to be used as glue, and *yang bong* plaster (gypsum, calcium sulfate).

Pathay phet ປະທາຍເພັດ (Lao). *Pathay phet* (diamond stucco) for sculptures and architectural decoration is produced of very fine (almost red) sand from the top of the mountains, buffalo skin, *bai mak faen*, bark of *yang bong* tree, *khüa sam hang*, white lime, sugar cane juice, bark of long green banana, *khüa khao hò* which is cut into small pieces and put into water for one day to be used as glue (also used for healing malaria), clay mixed with all the ingredients, oil of rubber tree, sticky rice dried in the sun and put into water.

Pathet Lao ປະເທດລາວ (Lao). Literally means the country or land of the Lao; the term was used for the name of the communist movement in Laos between 1950 and 1975.

Patibat ປະຕິບັດ (Lao), *patipatti* (Pali). Practice of the true doctrine.

Pativet ປະຕິເວດ (Lao), *pativedha* (Pali). Penetration; realization; realization; comprehensive; attainment; insight; knowledge.

Pariyat ປະຣິຍັດ (Lao), *pariyatti* (Pali). The Scriptures; study of the Scripture; the Teachings to be studied.

Pātimokkha, Pāṭmokkha (Pali), *patimok* ປາຕິໂມກ (Lao) “The Fundamental Precepts”; the fundamental rules of the Order; the 227 disciplinary rules binding on Bhikkhu; a collection of the fundamental precepts of the Order recited every fortnight; fortnightly recitation of the fundamental precepts; Disciplinary Code (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 338).

Pa xa luang ປ່າຊ້າຫຼວງ (Lao). The public cemetery forest.

Pha ພະ (Lao), *brah* (Pali), *phra* (Thai). 1. title used when speaking of a Buddhist monk, venerable. 2. a *bhikkhu*, Buddhist monk, monk, a priest, minister, clergyman.

Pha achan ພະອາຈານ (Lao). Master monk, teacher monk.

Pha ariya song sòng fang khòng ພະອະຣິຍະສົງສອງຝັ່ງຂອງ (Lao). The *arahant* from both sides of the Mekong’s banks.

Pha Bang ພະບາງ (Lao). The most venerated Buddha image in Laos. The statue, displaying the Dispelling Fear mudra, is made of a gold, silver and bronze alloy, is 83 cm in height and weighs 43.4 kg. Believed to have been cast and melted in Sri Lanka in BE 436 (BC 107) by an arahant, Phra Chulanakhasen Thera, it was brought to Laos from Cambodia and given by the Khmer king of Angkor to King Fa Ngum in 1359, in order to symbolize the establishment of Buddhism in his new kingdom. At present, the Pha Bang is held in the compound of the former royal palace in Luang Prabang.

Pha bang sukun ຜ້າບັງສຸກຸນ (Lao). “Rag robes”, the yellow robes used at the cremation.

Pha biang ຜ້າບຸ່ງ (Lao). Scarf.

Pha chao ພະເຈົ້າ (Lao). An appellation for both a Buddha statue and a king.

Pha chao nyai or *pha pathan* ພະເຈົ້າໃຫຍ່ ຫຼື ພະປະທານ (Lao). The principal Buddha statue in a *sim*.

Pha chao Ong Tü ພະເຈົ້າອົງຕື້ (Lao). Principal Buddha statues in subduing Mara, which were melted of bronze, built by King Setthathirat in the 16th century. At least, there are two

Pha Chao Ong Tü: one is the principal Buddha in the *sim* of Vat Ong Tü, Vientiane; and other one is at Vat Si Bun Hüang, Xam Nüa, Huaphan province.

Pha chao Saensuk ພະເຈົ້າແສນສຸກ (Lao). The principal Buddha statue in the *sim* of Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, was built in the 18th century, and was renovated in 1960.

Pha chao Singkham ພະເຈົ້າສິງຄຳ (Lao). The sacred Buddha statue in the northern Laos is established at Vat Pha Chao Singkham, La district, Oudomxay province.

Pha Chao Sippaet Sòk ພະເຈົ້າສິບແປດສອກ (Lao). The eighteen-cubits standing Buddha statue at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, was built in the 18th century, and was rebuilt between 1972 and 1980 by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela.

Pha hò nangsue or **Pha hò khamphi** ຜ້າຫໍ່ໜັງສື ຫຼື ຜ້າຫໍ່ຄຳພີ (Lao). The cloth for wrapping the bundles (*phuk*) of a palm-leaf manuscript.

Pha Kaeo Mòlakot ພະແກ້ວມໍລະກົດ (Lao). The Emerald Buddha. Actually, carved from green jade, this sacred Buddha image was one of the most venerated in Lana Na. it was brought to Vientiane by King Setthathirat in the 16th century, where the Vat Pha Kaeo was constructed in its honor. In 1778, the Pha Kaeo Mòlakot was seized by the Siamese General Chaophraya Chakri, who as King Rama I made it the palladium of his dynasty. It is now housed in the temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok. The Vat Pha Kaeo in Vientiane was reconstructed in the 1930s and is now a museum (Stuart-Fox 2001: 241).

Pha thao thip ພາເຂົ້າທິບ (Lao). “Deity food”, the food in a round plate, dedicates to the spirit of a relative in the other world, or sacrifices the spirit of the place.

Phakhao wai ພາເຂົ້າຫວາຍ (Lao). A round plate on a stand made of rattan and wood.

Pha khuan ພາຂວັນ (Lao). A round plate (made of bamboo, wood, or metal) with offerings for guardian spirits, “offerings to the spirits given during the *basi*” ceremony.

Pha Lakkham ພະຫຼັກຄຳ (Lao). The honorific title for high-ranking monks who were the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor (Lao: *chao khana khuaeng*). There were able to have two Pha Lakkham in one province during Laos had been the kingdom of Laos (1950s–1975).

Pha Lukkaeo ພະລູກແກ້ວ (Lao). The honorific title for high-ranking monks who were the Ecclesiastical Ministers. There were only five Pha Lukkaeo in the same time in the whole country during Laos had been the kingdom of Laos (1950s–1975).

Pham xay ຜາມໄຊ (Lao). “The victory pavilion.” The name given to the pavilion that located near the mouth of the Khan Rive in Luang Prabang where high-ranking state officials sit to watch the boat races, as well as where the committee sits to judge the races. Formerly, the king, members of royal family and the high-ranking state officials also sat that to watch the boat races.

Phap lan ພັບລິ້ນ (Lao). A leporello manuscript.

Pha pariyattitham ພະປະຣິຍັດຕິທຳ (Lao). Refer to Buddhist schools (during the Kingdom of Laos period) of studying the Buddhist Teachings, discipline and high doctrine as well Pali language.

Phap sa ພັບສາ (Lao). A manuscript or book made of mulberry paper.

Pha Samdet ພະສຳເດັດ (Lao). First title given to a monk who has been invited for their first *Thelaphisek* (consecration) ceremony.

Phasat ຜາສາດ (Lao), *pāsāda* (Pali), *prāsāda* (Skt.). A secular or religious structure shaped like a terraced pyramid.

Pha satup ພະສະຖູບ (Lao). Vaulted chapel.

Pha that ພະທາດ (Lao), *dhatu* (Pali). Reliquary stupa.

Pha That Inghang ພະທາດອີງຮັງ (Lao). One of the important stupas in Laos, situated in Savannakhet province. Inghang is a Lao term, which derived from two terms, “*ing*” meaning lean; and “*hang*” meaning a *Shorea siamensis* tree. It refers to the place where Buddha once sat under the tree for a meal.

Pha That Khong Santi Chedi ພະທາດໂຄ່ງສັນຕິເຈດີ (Lao). “The hollow stupa of peace.” It is located on the mountain of Phao forest at Vat Pa Phon Phao, on the eastern outskirts of Luang Prabang, and was built by Sathu Nyai Xaysamut Xotika Maha Thela in 1975.

Pha That Luang ພະທາດຫຼວງ (Lao). “The great stupa” refers to the That Luang stupa in Vientiane, its official name being the Chedi Lokachulamani. It was originally built by King Chanthabuli Pasitthisak in BE 236 (BC 307), and was has been rebuilt many times, entirely in 1566 and to its current complete form in 1934.

Pha Yòtkaeo ພະຍອດແກ້ວ (Lao). The highest honorific religious title in Laos, which was bestowed upon by the king to the Supreme Patriarch, during the period when Laos was a monarchy.

Phen ເພນ (Lao). “Lunch, or food for lunch” of monks.

Phi ຜີ (Lao). Spirit, ghost.

Phi Ban ຜີບ້ານ (Lao). Spirit of the village.

Phichalana ພິຈາລະນາ (Lao), *paccavekkhana* (Pali). “Reflection; consideration; reviewing.” The consideration of the four necessities of life before using them, particularly, for monastic life. The four necessities consist of robes, food, lodging, and medicine.

Phi dam ຜີດຳ (Lao). Ancestral and household spirits.

Phi fa phi thaen ຜີພ້າຜີແຖນ (Lao). The divine spirits of the sky.

Phikkhu patimok ພິກຂຸບາຕິໂມກ (Lao). The title of the leporello mulberry paper manuscript of the Pātimokkha in Tham-Lao script composed by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela and published by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Vientiane in 1959 (see also Pātimokkha).

Phi Müang ຜີເມືອງ (Lao). Spirit of the city.

Phi phò phi mae ຜີພໍ່ຜີແມ່ (Lao). Paternal and maternal spirits.

Phot paxa ໂຜດຜ່າຊ້າ (Lao). To share merit with the spirits at the cemetery forest.

Phò pokkhòng luk ພໍ່ປົກຄອງລູກ (Lao). The administration system akin to a father looking after his children.

Phò yok ພໍ່ຍົກ (Lao). “Adoptive father.” The name given by a monk or novice to the sponsor of his ordination ceremony.

Phuan ພວນ (Lao). The Tai-speaking people who wrestled control of the Plain of Jar from its original inhabitants (probably Khamu) and established the early Lao *miang* of Xiang Khuang.

Phu khao thòng ພູເຂົາທອງ, ກູເຈາທອງ (Lao, Thai). The mountain with the golden stupa on the top, situated in Vat Saket in Bangkok.

Phuk phatthasima or **khòtsim** ຜູກພັດທະສີມາ ຫຼື ຂອດສີມ (Lao).

Phu mi bun ຜູ້ມີບຸນ (Lao). A person who has much of merit.

Phu Nòi ພູນ້ອຍ (Lao). A substantial and successful Tibeto-Burman minority inhabiting Phongsali province, where they live in large villages of around 50 houses and practice swidden and sedentary agriculture. After long contact with the Tai Lue, most have converted to Buddhism, though they still bury rather than cremate their dead (Stuart-Fox 2001: 250).

Phu sang ຜູ້ສ້າງ (Lao). “Maker or producer of manuscript.” In fact, this phrase is used for the donor or sponsor who supported the production of a manuscript and donated it to a monastery as appears in the colophon of the manuscript.

Phusi ພູສີ (Lao). Name of the hill rising above Luang Prabang, overlooking the Mekong River and the royal palace, and of the of the small temple there with its associated stupa (Pha That Phusi) at the summit. In relation to both the city and the *miang* (and eventually the kingdom) of which it was the center, Phusi symbolized Mount Meru, the axis of the world in Buddhist cosmology (Stuart-Fox 2001: 244).

Phuttha Bandit Sapha ພຸດທະບັນດິດສະພາ (Lao). The Buddhist Institute of Laos established in 1930 with official French support to coordinate and invigorate Buddhist studies

in Cambodia and Laos, it consisted of a complex of a school, library, and museum in Phnom Penh (1930) followed by second center at Vat Chanthabuli, Vientiane (1931) and Luang Prabang (1933). Later a minor branch was established at Pakse. Apart from promoting Buddhist, especially Pali, studies, and being responsible for supervising the work of Buddhist libraries, museums, and schools for monks, the Institute was designed to sever religious links between Laos and Siam (Stuart-Fox 2001: 42).

Pūjā (Pali), *buxa* ບູຊາ (Lao). Worship (external and mental); honour; veneration; homage; devotional; attention; devotional offerings.

S

Sabbadānam Dhammadānam jināti (Pali), *sappha thanang thamma thanang xinati* ສັບພະ ທານັງ ທໍາມະ ທານັງ ຊິນາຕິ (Lao). “The gift of truth exceeds all gifts.” A Buddhist proverb is popular found on the first pages of the Dhamma books that are distributed for free by the author and publisher as a Dhamma gift.

Sabong ສະບົງ (Lao). A simple wrapped cloth worn like a skirt. This is the name used for the under-robe worn by bhikkhus (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 299).

Sadaeng abat ສະແດງອາບັດ (Lao), *āpattidesanā* (Pali). The confession of an offence; to confess an offence.

Sadaeng tham vat ສະແດງທໍາວັດ (Lao). Delivery of a sermon to Buddhists in the monastery on the Buddhist holy days.

Saen nueng ແສນໜຶ່ງ (Lao). The name given to the first racing boat of Vat Saen Sukharam in Luang Prabang.

Saen sòng ແສນສອງ (Lao). The name given to the second racing boat of Vat Saen Sukharam in Luang Prabang..

Sai bat ໃສ່ບາດ (Lao). Placing alms into a monk’s bowl. The term is used by lay Buddhists. However, the monks say *binthabat*. (See *binthabat*).

Sak phabangsukun ຊັກຜ້າບັງສຸກຸນ (Lao). “Taking of the rag robes.” The taking of robes from a corpse by monks at the cremation ceremony.

Sala ສາລາ (Lao). In Lao usage, an open-sided pavilion, sometime with walls to shelter the public.

Sala hong tham ສາລາໂຮງທໍາ (Lao). The pavilion of the Dhamma in the monastery where general Buddhist ceremonies are held.

Sala phan hòng ສາລາພັນຫ້ອງ (Lao). The Sangha Assembly Hall, a pavilion with thousand rooms, was erected at Vat That Luang in Vientiane for holding the annual Sangha conference.

Sala Thammavihan ສາລາທໍາມະວິຫານ (Lao). A two-story building in Lao-colonial style at Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang, which was designed and built by the artist monk, Sathu Nyai Khamfam Silasangvara Maha Thela, abbot of Vat Suvannakhili, in the 1940s. At present, it houses the Buddhist Archives of Luang Prabang.

Salòng ສະຫຼອງ (Lao). Celebration, to celebrate; a term designating the literary genre of *anisong* or *ānisamsa* (see also *anisong*).

Salòng sang nangsue ສະຫຼອງສ້າງຫ້ອງສີ (Lao). Celebration of manuscript-making.

Samanen ສາມະເນນ (Lao), *sāmaṇera* (Pali). Novice.

Samanera sikkha ສາມະເນນະສິກຂາ (Lao). The monastic disciplines for novices.

Samathi ສະມາທິ (Lao), *samādhi* (Pali). Concentration, one-pointedness of mind, mental discipline. Collectedness. Mental calm, a concentrated, equanimous state of mind in which excitement and dullness are overcome (Ibid.).

Samichikam (Lao), *sāmīcikamma* (Pali). Proper act of respect; opportune gestures of respect.

Samut khòì ສະມຸດຄ່ອຍ (Lao). A *khòì* paper manuscript, mostly in leporello format.

San changhan ສັນຈັງຫັນ (Lao). Have breakfast, the term is used only for monks.

Sanchi ສານຈີ. Famous for its magnificent stupa in Raisen District in Madhya Pradesh, India, with four imposingly high stone gates, Sanchi is considered one of the most beautiful and perfect monuments of ancient India.

Saṅgha (Pali), ສັງຄະ *sangkha* (Lao). “Order.” Community of those who follow the Buddha’s path. Often, more specifically, those who have committed themselves to monastic training (Ibid.).

Sane hang pa ສະເໝຫາງປາ (Lao). Fish tail charm, one kind of black magic.

Sangkha nayok ສັງຄະນາຍົກ (Lao), *sanghanāyaka* (Pali). Ecclesiastical Prime Minister.

Sangkhati ສັງຄາຕິ (Lao), *saṅghāti* (Pali). The upper robe of a bhikkhu. Today usually not worn, but still draped over the left shoulder for formal occasions (Ibid.: 301).

Saṅgāyana, *sangkhayana* ສັງຄາຍະນາ (Lao). Rehearsal; a Council; general convocation of the Sangha in order to settle questions of doctrine and to fix the text of the Scriptures (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 351).

San phen ສັນເພນ (Lao). “Have lunch”, a term used only for monks.

Sappathon ສັບປະທິນ (Lao). Big umbrella used to shield an important person from view during a ceremony. Sappathon are also used by monks for shelter when they are practicing *thudong* in the forest.

Saraphat chang สรรพช่าง (Thai). Polytechnic school in Bangkok, Thailand.

Sarnath สารนาถ. City near Benares where, in a Deer Park, Buddha preached his famous sermon known as the Dhammacakrapravartana-Suta. Because the site marks the beginning of his formal Dhamma exposition, it is considered as one of the holy locations in Buddhism. The spot was marked by the erection of a stupa, and is the location of an Aśoka n edict (Prebish 1993: 233).

Sāsana ສາສະໜາ (Pali, Lao). Teachings, messages, doctrines, a religion.

Sathu ສາທຸ (Lao), *sādhu* (Pali, Skt.). “Good man, holy man, worthy, very good.” Title given to monks in Luang Prabang already has invited a consecration ceremony, the so-called (*therabhiseka* ceremony). “(Hindi) wandering holy man. Formalized by Shankara into orders, bringing the wandering *samana* (a religious) ethic into the mainstream. Anyone can become a sadhu, as in becoming one the person renounces caste and takes on a life outside of but supported by secular society. Sadhus live by begging for food and money and are usually dressed in ochre robes and often covered in dabs of paint to signify the deity they follow. In Pali “Sadhu” is an exclamation meaning “it is well,” used by listeners at the end of a Buddhist *desana* (sermon)” (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 301).

Sathu Nyai ສາທຸໂຫຍ່ (Lao). The honorific title that Buddhists use to address senior monks who have been in the monkhood for more than ten years, a term particular to Luang Prabang.

Sati ສະຕິ (Pali, Lao). Mindfulness, attentiveness, detached watching, awareness.

Shwedagon (Bur.), *chedi xavedakong* ເຈດີຊະເວດາກອງ (Lao). Shwe means gold and Dagon means the city of Dagon, Rangoon’s old name. Shwedagon Pagoda means the gold Pagoda of Dagon City. The pagoda stands 326 feet high on top of a hillock and is completely coated with thin sheets of real gold plates, brilliantly shining in the sun light. It is the most significant and renowned religious monument of Myanmar and acts also as a unique landmark.

Sīla (Pali), ສິນ *sin* (Lao). Morality; moral practice; moral conduct; code of morality; Buddhist ethics, a precepts; rule of morality (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 354).

Sim ສິມ (Lao), *baddhasīmā* (Pali). The main hall, ordination hall, temple hall, assembly hall. The term “*sim*” is derived from the term “Phatthasima” (*baddhasīmā*) which means boundary established by the Sangha, consecrated area, consecrated place of assembly.

Sina ສີໜ້າ (Lao). The gable on the veranda of a *sim*, and other religious secular buildings.

Sin mai ສິ້ນໄໝ (Lao). A Lao silk skirt.

Sisi sukha sawatsadi ສີສີ ສຸຂະ ສະວັດສະດີ (Lao). “Honor, happy and well-being.” The popular phrase that a ceremonial master speaks out when he recites a text in a celebration ceremony.

Somdet ສົມເດັດ (Lao). “The great or the supreme.” Honorific title given to high-ranking monks and laities.

Somdet Pha Sangkhalat ສົມເດັດພະສັງຄະລາດ (Lao). His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch.

Somma ສົມມາ (Lao), *sāmīcikkamma* (Pali). Proper act of respect; opportune gestures of respect.

Stupa (Skt.), *pha that, chedi* ພະທາດ, ເຈດີ (Lao). “Buddhist reliquary monument. Hemispherical mound wherein sacred relics of the Buddha or other revered religious person may be enshrined” (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 365).

Su khuan or **Su khwan** ສູ່ຂວັນ (Lao). “Calling of the soul”, to call back any of the 32 guardian spirits of a person.

Sumeru, *khao sumerulat* ເຂົາສຸເມຣຸລາດ (Lao). Also known as Mount Meru. In ancient Indian cosmology, the mountain that stands at the center of the world. Mount Sumeru is surrounded by seven concentric mountain ranges made of gold, alternating with seven concentric seas of fresh water. The seventh gold mountain range is surrounded by a saltwater ocean, in which four continents – Purvavideha, Aparagodaniya, Uttarakuru, and Jambudvipa – are situated respectively to the east, west, north, and south of Mount Sumeru (Gakkai 2002: 639).

Sut mon ສູດມົນ. To chant the Suttas in Pali; to recite the Buddha’s teachings.

Sutta (Pali), *Sūtra* (Skt.), ພະສູດ *pha sut* (Lao). A Buddhist discourse attributed to Gautama Buddha is one of Tipiṭaka.

Suvannaphum ສູວັນນະພູມ (Lao), *suvaṇṇabhūmī* (Pali), *suvarṇabhūmi* (Skt.). “The Golden Land or Land of Gold” refers to an area of many cities in Southeast Asia. The region was first mentioned when a Buddhist missionary, led by Venerable Sona Thera and Venerable Uttara Thera came to spread Buddhism during the reign of King Aśoka in the third century BC. In Thailand, the term refers to Nakhon Pathom province where the Phra Pathom Chedi

stupa is the located. In Myanmar, it is the town of Thaton in the south (Dhammapitaka 2540: 182, see also Prapod 2010: 49–56). In Laos, the term refers the area called Sisattanakhanahutta (currently Vientiane). The elders brought the Buddha’s relics to the region and installed the relics in Phachedi Lokachulamani (Pha That Luang stupa), which was built by King Chanthaburi and five Arahants in the previous time” (Dhammikamuni 2010: 151).

T

Taj Mahal ຫໍດຊະມາຮານ. The Taj Mahal at Agra is one of the most famous buildings in the world. It was built by the Mughal Empire Shaha Jahan at a tomb for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1631 (Mansinh 2006: 614).

Tak bat ຕັກບາດ (Lao). Morning alms-collecting of monks and novices.

Talapat ຕາລາປັດ (Lao), *tālapatta* (Pali), *tālapatra* (Skt.). “A fan made from the leaves of the palm-tree.” Monk fan or monastic ceremonial fan, a monk uses this fan in aceremony when he is giving precepts and blessing. In the Kingdom of Laos, the fan came to be an emblem of monastic rank for a senior monk, granted by the king.

Tamla nya ຕໍາລາຢາ (Lao). “Pharmacopeia”, the manuscript contains pharmacopeia text.

Tam nan ຕໍານານ (Lao). Legend; myth; chronicle; history.

Tao si ເຕົ້າສີ (Lao). The Year of the Giant Snake in the traditional Lao calendar.

Tao sanga ເຕົ້າສະຫງ້າ (Lao). The Year of the Horse in the traditional Lao calendar.

Tat lep ຕັດເລັບ (Lao). To cut nails.

Tavatimsa (Pali), *tavatingsa* ຕາວະຕິງສາ (Lao). The realm (or heaven) of the Thirty-three Gods; name of the second heavenly abode; of which Sakka (Indra) is the king (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 325).

Thae phom ແຖຜີມ (Lao). To shave hair.

Tham-Lao ຫໍາລາວ (Lao). The Lao variant of the Dhamma script.

Thammanun pokkhong song lao ຫໍາມະນູນປົກຄອງສິງລາວ (Lao). The constitution for governing the Lao Sangha of BE 2541 (1998).

Thammat ຫໍາມາດ (Lao), *dhammāsana* (Pali). Preaching chair; the Dhamma-seat; a seat on which a monk sits while preaching.

Thanmò phui pen chao xivit khòì ຫ່ານໝໍຜູ້ເປັນເຈົ້າຊີວິດຂ້ອຍ (Lao). Doctor Phui is the owner of my life. This sentence was used by Sathu Nyai Khamchan in reference to his

medical doctor, Khamphui Pathumvan of Ban Vat Saen village, who took good care of his health for years.

Thao ທ້າວ (Lao). Mr., goes together with the first name.

Thao Chatulokkaban ທ້າວຈະຕຸໂລກກະບານ (Lao). The Guardian [Kings] of the Four Quarters of the World. “The lords of the four quarters who are said to serve the god Sakka as his generals and protect the four quarters of the world. They are Upholder of the Nation (Skt. Dhritarāshtra), who protects the east; Wide-Eyes (Virūpāksha), who guards the west; Hearer of Many Teachings (Vaishravana), who watches over the north; and Increase and Growth (Virūdhaka), who defends the south. They are called the guardians of the world and are said to live halfway up the four sides of Mount Sumeru, on whose summit Sakka dwells. Their respective functions are to protect the world; to listen to the Buddhist Teachings and protect the place where the Buddha expounds them; and to relieve people of their sufferings (Gakkai 2002: 221).

Thela ເຖລະ (Lao), *thera* (Pali). An elder; a senior member of the Order; a senior monk (of at least ten years’ standing) (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 327).

Thelaphisek ເຖລາພິເສກ (Lao), *therabhiseka* (Pali). Literally, “to pour water on Venerable.” To consecrate as in royal consecration or the consecration of the Buddha images.

Theravada, Theravāda (Pali), *theravat* ເຖຣະວາດ (Lao). Literally, “the path of the elders.” A school of Buddhism that dominates the South and Southeast Asian cultural sphere. Its teachings, embodied in the Pali canon (Tipiṭaka), are sometimes considered more conservative than those found in Mahayana (Harris 2005: 303).

Thet siang muan ເທດສຽງມ່ວນ (Lao). Preaching with a good sound

Thevada ເທວະດາ (Lao), *devatā* (Pali). A god; an angel; a deity; “a celestial being; a generic female divinity who communicates between heaven and earth” (Edwards 2007: 322).

Thevorohana ເທໂວໂຣຫະນະ (Lao), *devorohana* (Pali). Literally, “Coming down from the *deva* world (of the Buddha).” It is the memory of the return of the Buddha from Tavatīmsa Heaven to the earth in the seventh year of Buddhahood.

Thit ຫິດ (Lao). The abbreviation of the term “pundit” means graduate, sage. Title given to a person who left monkhood as a layman. This word also means ‘direction’.

Thudong ຫຸດົງ (Lao), *dhutaṅga* (Pali). Special observance of austerity. Dhutangha Bhikkhus are noted for their diligence and strictness. Such monks often undertake the mendicant’s wandering practice of the Buddha’s time.

Tipiṭaka, tepiṭaka (Pali), *tripitaka* (Skt.), *pha tai pidok* ພະໄຕປີດິກ (Lao). Literally, the Three Baskets; “the Buddhist canon, the “three baskets”, the three versions of the Buddhist

Canon: Vinayaṭṭaka (book of discipline), Suttantapitaka (book of discourses), Abhidhammapitaka (book of analysis, psychology and metaphysics” (Ladwig 2005: 35).

Ton bun ຕີນບຸນ (Lao). The source of merit.

Ton bun haeng lan na ຕີນບຸນແຫ່ງລ້ານນາ (Thai, Lao). The source of merit of Lan Na.

Ton kan ຕີນກັນ (Lao). “A donation tree” made from bamboo or banana tree and hang with money. The *ton kan* is popularly used during the Vessantara Jātaka festivals.

Ton hai ຕີນໄຮ (Lao). Banyan tree.

Tooth Relic, *pha khaeo kaeo* ພະແຂ້ວແກ້ວ (Lao), *danta dhātuya* (Pali). The tooth relics of the Buddha, four of which are believed to remain: the first at the Chulamani stupa in Tavatimsa Heaven; the second in the *Naga* world; the third at Linguang Temple in Beijing of China, and the fourth at Dalada Maligawa Temple in Kandy, Sri Lanka. By a result of this, two of them are established in the world, and two others are outside of the world.

Tup kam ຕູບກຳ (Lao). A small hut for a monk to live in during his *parivasakam* practice.

U

Udom ek ອຸດົມເອກ (Lao). The highest level of Buddhist education in the Kingdom of Laos between the 1950s and 1975.

Upajjhāya (Pali), ພະອຸປັດຊາ *pha upatxa* (Lao). The preceptor at the ordination ceremony.

Upasika ອຸປາສິກາ (Lao), *upāsika* (Pali). A Buddhist laywoman.

Upasok ອຸປາສິກ (Lao), *upāsaka* (Pali). A Buddhist layman.

Upasampadā (Pali), *upsombot* ອຸປະສົມບິດ (Lao). Full (or higher) ordination; taking up the Bhikkhuship; Full Admission to the Sangha; Ordination Ceremony; to be ordained; enter the monkhood; join the Order (Brahmagunabhorn 2012: 362).

Uparat ອຸປະຣາດ (Lao). Viceroy

Upmung ອຸບມຸງ (Lao). A vaulted chapel.

Uposot ອຸໂປສິດ (Lao), *uposatha* (Pali). The Buddhist “Sabbath” or “Observance Day.” The *uposot* day occurs on the lunar “quarters” of the full and new moons (Ibid.).

Urangkhathat Nithan ອຸຣັງຄະທາດນິທານ (Lao). The Chronicle of the stupas of the breast-bone relic of the Buddha.

Ushnisha, *uṣṇīṣa* (Skt.), *uṇhīsa* (Pali), *ket pha chao*, *utsani* ເກດພະເຈົ້າ, ອຸດສະນີ (Lao). Hair curls; “In Buddhist iconography the *ushnisha* refers to the bony protuberance on the head of the Buddha. It is one of the thirty-two major marks of the Buddha’s person listed in the Pali canon, the sacred scriptures of Theravada Buddhism. These characteristics recompense for right conduct in his previous lives” (Stratton 2004: 424).

V

Van kon ວັນໂກນ (Lao). “Saving day” is on the fourteenth day of the waxing moon, a day on which monks and novices save their hair.

Van òk pansa ວັນອອກພັນສາ (Lao). “The day of the end of the Buddhist Lent” falls on the full moon day of the eleventh lunar month (usually falling in October). After three months restricted to their temples learning Dhamma and Vinaya and practicing meditation, monks once again return to their social duties. This is a day of joyful celebration and merit-making.

Van pha ວັນພະ (Lao). “Buddhist holidays”, specifically the eighth and fifteenth days of the lunar month during both waxing and waning moons.

Vat ວັດ (Lao), *vihāra*, *ārāma* (Pali). Monastery; temple.

Vessanatara xadok ເວດສັນຕະລະຊາດົກ (Lao), *Vessantara Jātaka* (Pali). The story of Prince Vessantara, the previous life of the Buddha.

Vesak or **Wesak**, *visakhabuxa* ວິສາຂະບູຊາ (Lao). The name has come to indicate the festival by Theravada Buddhists on the full-moon day of the same month commemorating the Buddha’s birth, renunciation, enlightenment and *mahaparinibbāna*.

Vietminh ຫວຽດມິນ. The League for the Independence of Vietnam, or Vietminh was set up by the Indochinese Communist Party in May 1941 to serve as a broad front organization for the communist- directed revolutionary independence movement in Vietnam. Even though subsequently superseded by the even broader Lien Viet Front, the term Vietminh was used to designate Vietnamese revolutionary nationalist forces throughout the First Indochina War.

Vihan ວິຫານ (Lao), *vihāra* (Pali). “Dwelling.” Used in early Indian Buddhism as the name for any type of dwelling.

Vinaya (Pali), *pha vinai* or *vinai* ພະວິໄນ ຫຼື ວິໄນ (Lao). The monastic discipline, or the scriptural collection of its rules and commentaries.

Vipassana ວິປັດສະນາ (Pali, Lao), *vipaśyanā* (Skt.). Insight, intuitive, vision, introspection, contemplation, intuition, insight development. “Penetrative insight of meditation, as distinguished from *samatha*, the tranquility of meditation (Sucitto and Scott 2010: 303).

Vishnu (Hin), *viṣṇu* (Skt.), *pha visanu*, *pha narai* ພະວິສະນຸ, ພະນາຣາຍ (Lao). The supreme god of the Vaishnava school of Brahmanism and the symbol of light. Later he became one of the three gods in Shaivism (the Trimurti), as the god who protects and saves (Piriya 2012: 399).

Vithi upasombot ວິທີອຸປະສົມບົດ (Lao). The procedure of ordination.

Vò ວໍ (Lao). Palanquin, the elaborate wooden shrine with a roof for carrying the Buddha statue or a high-ranking monk in the procession during the festival. e.g. the Lao New Year.

Vò Pha Bang ວໍພະບາງ (Lao). The elaborate wooden shrine with a roof for carrying the Pha Bang Buddha statue during the Lao New Year's festival.

W

Waipha ໄຫວ້ພະ (Lao). To pay homage to a Buddha statue; to pay respects to a monk.

Wai pha sut mon ໄຫວ້ພະສູດມົນ (Lao). One of ten religious routines, monks and novices gather in the *sim* or *Sala hongtham*, paying homage to the Buddha statue and chanting *suttas* both in the morning and evening.

World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) ພູດທະສາສະໜາສໍາພັນແຫ່ງໂລກ. Founded on 25 May BE 2493 (1950) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for the purposes of bringing Buddhists of the world closer together; exchanging news and views about the condition of Buddhists in different countries (including Theravada and Mahayana); and discussing ways and means whereby Buddhists may make efforts towards the attainment of peace and happiness (WFB 2014: Vol. 3).

X

Xiang ຊຽງ (Lao). Title given to a person who left their novitiate status; name of a walled town or city where the a king or provincial ruler is seated.

Xiang Dong Xiang Thong ຊຽງດົງຊຽງທອງ (Lao). The former name of Luang Prabang, capital of the kingdom of Lan Xang, used between 1353 and 1560.

Xòfa ຊໍຟ້າ (Lao). Literally “Sky cluster”, ornate finials on the temples symbolizing Meru Mount (the center of the universe). “Decorative symbol of the universe placed on the roof of a temple” (Heywood 2006: 209).

Y

Yam kongthat muehung ຢາມກອງທາດມື້ຊຸ່ງ (Lao). The time around 4:00–5:00 a.m., the traditional way of measuring time in ancient Laos.

Yang bong ຢາງບົງ (Lao). The gum from a *bong* tree.

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- BAD-12-1-1956.002: Draft of letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (Chomphuthip Building, Kaba Aye, Rangoon, Burma) to a high-ranking Thai monk whom he calls Somdet in Bangkok, Thailand, 20 January 2499 (1956).
- BAD-12-1-1956.007: Letter by Pha Maha Pradit Phutthakhosako (Vat Chanthaburi, Vientiane) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 16 May 1956.
- BAD-12-1-1956.013: Letter by Pha Achan Maha Pradit Phutthakhosako (Vat Chanthaburi, Vientiane) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 16 May 2499 (1956).
- BAD-12-1-1956.014: Draft of letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (Vat Vajiraram, Colombo, Sri Lanka) to a Thai high-ranking monk whom he calls Somdet in Bangkok, Thailand, 28 December 2499 (1956).

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- BAD-12-1-1957.018: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (Vat Saen Sukharam) to Khamphan Viracit in Vientiane, 4 October 2510 (1967).
- BAD-12-1-1969.002: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (Hotel Janpath, New Delhi, India) to his foster child, Pha Maha Bunpheng Virathammo who is studying in Bangkok, Thailand, 26 May 2512 (1969).
- BAD-12-1-1972.006: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang) to his foster child, Pha Maha Bunpheng Virathammo who is studying at Magadh University, Bodh Gaya, Bihar State, India, 23 May 2515 (1972).
- BAD-12-1-1972.007: Letter by Pha Maha Sombun Khoonsirivong, a Lao student monk in Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Vidyalaya, Maradana, Colombo 10, Ceylon) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 13 June 1972.
- BAD-12-1-1983.004: Letter by Mr. Phio Phongsavan (Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai province) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 15 March 1983.
- BAD-12-1-1985.003: Letter by Mrs. Bouasanith Soukhaseum (10/63 Kamira Ave. Villawood, NSW 2163, Australia) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 6 February 1985.
- BAD-12-1-1986.017: Letter by Mrs. Bouachanh Mangala (3 Shoemaker Place, Bonnyrigg, NSW 2177, Australia) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 21 November 1986.
- BAD-12-1-1987.011: Letter by Chanthy and Bangon Siphanthone (4125-A2 Camelot Dr., Raleigh, North Carolina) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 21 November 1987.
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- BAD-12-1-1994.022: Letter by Mr. Thongchan Chanthery (158 Middleborough Rd., Blackburn, South Victoria 3130) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 19 June 1994.

- BAD-12-1-1997.006: Letter by Bounthiem and Deuanepheng Phommaline (65 Place, Lévis-St, Bruno, Quebec J 3V 1K1.) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 27 May 1997.
- BAD-12-1-1997.010: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela (Antony, France) to Sathu Thongchan Thantachitto at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 22 June 1997.
- BAD-12-1-1997.012: Letter by Mr. Somnük and Mrs. Kongkham Thongphanit (Vientiane) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 10 July 1997.
- BAD-12-1-1999.017: Letter by Kham Onh Sasorith (68 Hallam St. Toronto, Ontario, M6M 1W6) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 30 June 1999.
- BAD-12-1-2007.004: Letter by Arai Saidan (Gusoku-An 1169 Sugano Mitsue, Nara, Japan) to Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang, 6 June 2007.

1.3 Official Documents: Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam

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- BAD-12-2-1939.014: Letter sent by Sathu Nyai Kaenchan Katchayana Maha Thela from Vat Phongsali, northern Laos to King Sisavang Vong in Luang Prabang for reporting to the king about his work on building the temple of Phongsali in Phongsali, 8 January 1939.
- BAD-12-2-1941.001: Note of Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela on the consecration ceremonies of monasteries that he had participated in between 1941 and 1949.
- BAD-12-2-1943.001: Letter from the governor of Luang Prabang to the district chief of Luang Prabang concerning the permission for Pha Khamchan (Sathu Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela) to build the Hò Lakhang at Vat Si Phutthabat, Luang Prabang, 9 March 1943.
- BAD-12-2-1943.003: The census lists of monks and novices lives in Vat Saen and other monasteries in the area of the peninsular of Luang Prabang town from 1943 to 1951.
- BAD-12-2-1948.007: Letter by Chao Phaya Luang Müangsaen and a group of Lao refugees in Xiang Khan, Loey province to Prince Phetsarat Rattanavongsa, head of the Lao Issara movement, who was staying in Bangkok as a political refugee, for reporting him on Pradit Thongpaphai, district chief of Xiang Khan has malice to the Lao refugees in Xiang Khan, 9 August 2491 (1948).

- BAD-12-2-1948.008: Letter sent by Pha Khamchan (Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela) in his capacity as abbot of Vat Saen to the district chief of Luang Prabang for requesting official permit to build the walls surrounding Vat Saen, 21 October 1948.
- BAD-12-2-1950.002: Letter sent by Chao Khana Khouang Luang Prabang (ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province), Sathu Nyai Khamfan Silasangvara Maha Thela (Vat Suvannakhili) to Satu Khamchan, abbot of Vat Saen for permitting him to expand the monastic ground of his monastery in 2493 (1950).
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- BAD-12-2-1953.004: Letter of the director of the Department of Religious Affairs of Luang Prabang to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, 2 October 1953.
- BAD-12-2-1953.006: Letter of the governor of Luang Prabang to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, 12 October 1953.
- BAD-12-2-1953.008: Letter of the governor of Luang Prabang to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, 27 October 1953.
- BAD-12-2-1953.010: Letter of the governor of Luang Prabang to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, 1 December 1953.
- BAD-12-2-1953.015: Letter of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Vientiane to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, 24 August 1953.
- BAD-12-2-1953.023: Note of the meeting of Luang Prabang Sangha which took place at Vat Saen Sukharam, 16 October 1953.
- BAD-12-2-1953.067: News of Luang Prabang Sangha on organizing the *khathin* ceremony at Vat Tao Hai, Luang Prabang, 1 November 1953.
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- BAD-12-2-1955.087: Letter sent by Sathu Onta Santapanyo, the ecclesiastical district officer of Hun district to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of

- Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, on proposing to open the monastic school at Vat Phon Kaeo in Hun district, Luang prabang province, 30 June 1955.
- BAD-12-2-1956.014: Letter of the director of the Pali school of Luang Prabang to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, 22 November 1956.
- BAD-12-2-1956.024: Letter by the governor of Luang Prabang province to the people of Luang Prabang on announcing the publication of Tipiṭaka, Pali Canon in Tham script, 3 November 1956.
- BAD-12-2-1957.009: Letter of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Vientiane to ecclesiastical provincial governors in Laos concerning on *thelaphisek* ceremony matter, 21 February 2499 (1956).
- BAD-12-2-1957.031: Letter of the governor of Luang Prabang to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, 1 December 1953.
- BAD-12-2-1957.117: Report on welcoming Prince Phetsarat from in Luang Prabang, 11 April 1957.
- BAD-12-2-1957.061: Letter sent by the representatives of the Pathet Lao force to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the ecclesiastical provincial governor of Luang Prabang province at Vat Saen Sukharam, on donating money of 2,000 Kip for supporting the construction of Vat Saen Sukharam, 20 March 2500 (1957).
- BAD-12-2-1957.125: Letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to the Minister of Religious Affairs in Vientiane on proposing to allow him to import materials for the construction of monastic buildings at Vat Saen Sukharam from Thailand, 27 June 2500 (1957).
- BAD-12-2-1957.126: Program the celebrations of the 2500th Anniversary of Buddhism in Luang Prabang, 30 June 1957.
- BAD-12-2-1957.133: Draft of letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the owner of Thai Thavón factory in Bangkok on buying 25,000 glazed tiles, 30 July 2500 (1957).
- BAD-12-2-1957.139: Draft of letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the director of the Department of Public Works of Luang Prabang, 9 August 2500 (1957).
- BAD-12-2-1957.178: Draft of letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the owner of Thai Thavón factory in Bangkok, 22 October 2500 (1957).
- BAD-12-2-1957.185: Draft of letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Vientiane on proposing to allow him to restore the sim at Vat Saen Sukharam, 30 October 1957.
- BAD-12-2-1958.021: Copy of letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to the governor of Luang Prabang province, 9 February 2501 (1958).

- BAD-12-2-1958.076: Letter of the director of the Pali school of Luang Prabang to the Minister of Religious Affairs and Arts in Vientiane reporting on the annual opening of the school, 9 June 1958.
- BAD-12-2-1958.095: The census list of Pali schools in Luang Prabang province and the names of teachers, 15 January 1958.
- BAD-12-2-1958.161: Letter of the director of the Pali school of Luang Prabang to the Supreme Patriarch of Laos in Luang Prabang and the Ecclesiastical Prime Minister in Vientiane on presenting them the annual report of the school, 9 June 1958.
- BAD-12-2-1959.016: Letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to Buddhists for fundraising to support the construction work of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam in the 1950s.
- BAD-12-2-1960.033: Letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to the district chief of Luang Prabang on proposing to destroy the Hò Kòng at Vat Saen Sukharam, 29 March 2502 (1959).
- BAD-12-2-1961.002: Letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Vientiane, 4 December 2504 (1961).
- BAD-12-2-1961.033: Letter sent by Sathu Xaysamut Xotiko of Vat Aham to Sathu Nyai Khamchan for leave permit from Luang Prabang to Burma for Abhidhamma studies, 10 March 2504 (1961).
- BAD-12-2-1962.015: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the governor of Luang Prabang on permitting to organize the Vessantara festival at Vat Saen Sukharam, 9 February 1962.
- BAD-12-2-1964.005: Draft of a letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Luang Prabang province sent to the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Vientiane on requesting to resign his office, 21 November 2507 (1964).
- BAD-12-2-1965.023: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Luang Prabang province to the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Vientiane in order to ask about his request to resign his office, 6 April 1965.
- BAD-12-2-1966.031: Draft of letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Luang Prabang province to the Minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Vientiane, in 1966.
- BAD-12-2-1967.066: Program for the reception of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos, visiting the Thai Sangha and lay Buddhists as guest of Somdet Pha Sangharaja Sakalamahasangha Parinayaka, according to an invitation of the Thai government, in Ubonrachathani province on May 25th and 26th, BE 2510 (1967).
- BAD-12-2-1967.067: Program for the reception of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos, visiting the Thai Sangha and lay Buddhists on as guest of Somdet Phra Sangharaja Sakalamahasangha Parinayaka, according to an invitation of the Thai government, in Chiang Mai and other provinces in northern Thailand on May 20th and 21st, BE 2510 (1967).

- BAD-12-2-1967.107: Program for the reception of the Supreme Patriarch of Laos, visiting the Thai Sangha and lay Buddhists as guest of Somdet Phra Sangharaja Sakalamahasangha Parinayaka, according to an invitation of the Thai government, in Phranakhòn Sri Ayutthaya province on May 19th, BE 2510 (1967).
- BAD-12-2-1967.108: News of the death of Phia Phichitphanit (Thit Khamphan Phummavong) (Sathu Nyai Khamchan's brother in law) and his cremation in 1967.
- BAD-12-2-1967.113: Telegram sent by Colonel Bunchan Phommalin, Xaiyaburi to Police Colonel Khamxao in Luang Prabang, informing him on the building of a racing boat for Vat Saen Sukharam, 1 February 1967.
- BAD-12-2-1971.005: Note of Sathu Nyai Khamchan on restoring the staircase at the bank of the Khan River in Luang Prabang, 8 March 1975.
- BAD-12-2-1977.006: Annual report 1977 of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos (from January 1st to December 31st, 1977), 31 December 1977.
- BAD-12-2-1985.013: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan, Chairman of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Luang Prabang province, to the Minister of Finance in Vientiane on requesting a tax exemption for the import of glazed tiles from Thailand, 17 May 1984.
- BAD-12-2-1986.016: Oaths of allegiance of Novice Vilakone of Vat Saen Sukharam sent to Sathu Nyai Khamchan, 18 November 1986.
- BAD-12-2-1987.010: Invitation made by Sathu Nyai Bunchankaeo Phothichitto to invite monks in Luang Prabang to attend the ceremony of “*sut thòt phayat and tò ayu* [the chant for dispelling deceases and prolonging life]” for Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam, 2 August 1987.
- BAD-12-2-1987.025: Note on the meeting of the Sangha of Luang Prabang on considering the request of the Central Buddhist Fellowship Organization of Laos in Vientiane to have Sathu Nyai Khamchan working in their office in Vientiane, 8 June 1987.
- BAD-12-2-1990.028: The census list of monks and novices of Vat Saen Sukharam and number of populations and households of Ban Vat Saen village, 15 October 1990.
- BAD-12-2-1993.002: Note of Sathu Nyai Khamchan on restoring the Unmung (vaulted chapel) and building the pavilion covering the Upmung at Vat Saen Sukharam, 2 September 1993.
- BAD-12-2-1995.013: Letter sent by Madam Dara Kanlaya, the director of the project “The Preservation of Lao Palm-leaf Manuscripts Program”, Vientiane, to Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Saen Sukharam on introducing him to Hans Georg Berger, 1 February 1995.
- BAD-12-2-1998.033: Program for HRH Princess Kalyaniwatthana of the Kingdom of Thailand offering the royal ceremony of *kathin* robes at Vat Saen Sukharam on 28 October 1998.

- BAD-12-2-1999.002: Note of Sathu Nyai Khamchan to be read by him at the China Radio International (CRI) in Beijing on 21 July 1999.
- BAD-12-2-2000.002: Note on the role and duty of the committee of the “Cultural Survival in Luang Prabang – UNESCO Project 516/Lao/70” in 2000.
- BAD-12-2-2000.010: Letter by Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to Buddhists inviting them to join the celebration ceremony for the new Sala Hongtham at Vat Saen Sukharam, 9 December 2000.
- BAD-12-2-2000.056: Letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan to the directors of the Departments of Tax and of Information and Culture of Bòkæo province on requesting the tax exemption and permit to import two monks’ statues from Thailand to Vat Saen Suarakhm, 19 June 2000.
- BAD-12-2-2000.062: Permission of the governor of Luang Prabang province for Sathu Nyai Khamchan to organize the consecration ceremony of the *sim* at Vat Saen Sukharam, 10 November 2000.
- BAD-12-2-2002.023: Program for the Vessantara festival at Vat Velouvanaram, Le Pertit Rougebourse, RN3 77260 Chamigny, France, from June 7th to 9th, 2002.
- BAD-12-2-2003.040: The census list of monks and novices of Vat Saen Sukharam and number of populations and households of Ban Vat Saen and Ban Phon Hüang villages, 29 August 2546 (2003).
- BAD-12-2-2004.033: Letter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent to Buddhists for notifying them of the program for the celebration ceremonies of his 84th birthday and of the new building of museum at Vat Saen Sukharam on 24 October 2004.
- BAD-12-2-XXXX.324. A short biography of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in Thai, submitted to receive an Honorary Title as Doctor of Buddhist Philosophy from the University of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya in 1998.

1.4 Thelaphisek Certificates: Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam

- BAD-12-3-1941.001: Reproduction of the first *thelaphisek* certificate of Sathu Nyai Khamchan, 16 January 1942.
- BAD-12-3-1955.005: The *thelaphisek* certificate of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in Tham-Lao script, dated on 20 October 1955.
- BAD-12-3-2007.013: The last *thelaphisek* certificate of Sathu Nyai Khamchan in Lao version, dated on 8 June 2007.

1.5 Manuscripts: Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam

- BAD-13-1-0004. ມາລະວິໄຊກັນທິ 1 [Malavisai kan thi nüng], Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 31 folios; CS 1309 (AD 1947).

- BAD-13-1-0005. ມາລະວິໄຊກັນທີ 2 [Malavisai kan thi song], Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 17 folios; CS 1309 (AD 1947).
- BAD-13-1-0006. ມາລະວິໄຊກັນທີ 3 [Malavisai kan thi sam], Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 22 folios; CS 1309 (AD 1947).
- BAD-13-1-0007. ເຈັດຕໍານານເທສະໜາກັນ 1 [Chet tamnan thesana kan nüng], Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 19 folios; BE 2489 (AD 1946).
- BAD-13-1-0008. ເຈັດຕໍານານເທສະໜາກັນ 2 [Chet tamnan thesana kan sòng]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 13 folios; BE 2489 (AD 1946).
- BAD-13-1-0009. ເຈັດຕໍານານເທສະໜາກັນ 3 [Chet tamnan thesana kan sam]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 14 folios; BE 2489 (AD 1946).
- BAD-13-1-0010. ເຈັດຕໍານານເທສະໜາກັນ 4 [Chet tamnan thesana kan si]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 14 folios; BE 2489 (AD 1946).
- BAD-13-1-0011. ເຈັດຕໍານານເທສະໜາກັນ 5 [Chet tamnan thesana kan ha]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 14 folios; BE 2489 (AD 1946).
- BAD-13-1-0012. ເຈັດຕໍານານເທສະໜາກັນ 6 [Chet tamnan thesana kan hok]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 14 folios; BE 2490 (AD 1947).
- BAD-13-1-0013. ເຈັດຕໍານານເທສະໜາກັນ 7 [Chet tamnan thesana kan chet]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 15 folios; BE 2491 (AD 1948).
- BAD-13-1-0128. ສອງ[ສະຫຼອງ]ສ້າງໜັງສື ຫຼື ປິຕະກະ [Benefits of donating manuscripts or Pitaka [any of the three main divisions of the Pali Canon]]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 36 folios; BE 2487 (AD 1944).
- BAD-13-1-0157. ຊຸດສະຫຼອງ: ສອງ[ສະຫຼອງ]ດອກໄມ້ທູບທຽນ; ສອງຮັກສາສິນ; ສອງຟັງທໍາ; ສອງເຜົາຜີ; ສອງມະຫາເວດສັນຕະລະຊາດິກ [A series of celebrations: Benefits of worshipping [the Buddha] by flowers, incenses and candles; benefits of observing the precepts; benefits of listening to a Dhamma sermon; benefits of burning a dead body; benefits of listening to the Vessantara chanting]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 40 folios; BE 2487 (AD 1944).
- BAD-13-1-0163. ຊຸດສະຫຼອງ: ສອງບວດ; ສອງກະຖິນະທານ; ສອງຜ້າອາບນ້ຳຝົນ; ສອງບັງສຸກຸນ; ສອງຖວາຍຈິວອນ [A series of celebrations: Benefits of ordination; benefits of offering the *kathin* robes; benefits of offering the rains-cloth; benefits of offering robes at a funeral ceremony; benefits of offering a robe to a monk]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 31 folios; BE 2487 (AD 1944).
- BAD-13-1-0208. *Unhatsa visai* ອຸນຫັດສະວິໄຊ, Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 36 folios; BE 2487 (AD 1925).
- BAD-13-1-0280. *ພິກຂຸປາຕິໂມກ* [Patimokkha], Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao and Pali; script: Tham-Lao; 92 folios; CS 1316 / BE 2499 (AD 1956) and CS 1309 / BE 2490 (AD 1947).

BAD-13-1-0287. ຄຳຂຶ້ນຕົ້ນເທດໃນພິທີເຮັດບຸນຫາເຈົ້າເພັດຊະລາດ, [Preamble of the sermon delivered at the merit-making which dedicated to Prince Phetsarat]; Palm-leaf manuscript; language: Lao; script: Lao; 16 folios; undated.

1.6 Collections of Photographs at the Buddhist Archive of Photography

1.6.1 Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam, series A and B.

A0009R; A0026R; A0148R; A0148V; A0173R; A0191R; A0192R; A0228R; A0228V; A0229R; A0229V; A0237R; A0247R; A0370R; A0485R; A0485V; A0492R to A0496R; A0509R; A0657R; A0657V; A0668R; A0803R; A0803V; A0815R; A0815V; A0831R; A0831V; A0837R; A0856R; A0856V; A0858R; A0868R; A0868V; A0947R; A1001R; A1007R; A1007V; A1024R; A1024V; A1048R; A1049R; A1050R; A1051R; A1052R; A1053R; A1054R; A1055R; A1056R; A1057R; A1058R; A1059R; A1060R; A1061R; A1062R; A1063R; A1064R; A1065R; A1066R; A1067R; A1068R; A1069R; A1070R; A1071R; A1072R; A1073R; A1074R; A1075R; A1076R; A1077R; A1078R; A1079R; A1080R; A1081R; A1082R; A1083R; A1084R; A1085R; A1086R; A1179R; A1179V; A1232R; A1232V; A1243R; A1323R; A1323V; A1340R; A1393R; A1394R; A1395R; A1396R; A1397R; A1398R; A1399R; A1400R; A1486R; A1486V; A1452R; A1452V; A1496R; A1526R; A1561R; A1561V; A1563R; A1603R; A1604R; A1605R; A1606R; A1607R; A1608R; A1609R; A1610R; A1611R; A1612R; A1613R; A1614R; A1615R; A1616R; A1617R; A1618R; A1619R; A1620R; A1621R; A1622R; A1623R; A1624R; A1625R; A1626R; A1627R; A1628R; A1629R; A1631R; A1632R; A1633R; A1634R; A1635R; A1636R; A1655R; A1655V; A1676R; A1676V; A1704R; A1733R; A1785R; A1792R; A1810R; A2065R; A2117R; A2369R; A2580R; A2580V; A2582R; A2582V; A2707R; A2707V; A2712R; A2712V; A2713R; A2739R; A3243R; A3290R; A3312R; A3312V; A3378R; A3378V; A3406R; A3411R; A3411V; A3425R; A3523R; A3613R; A3613V; A3995R; A4008R; A4010R; A4011R; A4066R; A4328R; A4332R; A4334R; A4338R; A4387R; A4434R; A9636R; A9369R.

B0006R; B0068R; B0070R; B0091R; B0095R; B0095V; B0111R; B0112R; B0228R; B0362R; B0380R; B0391R; B0391V; B0485R; B0534R; B0544R; B0543R; B0546R; B0547R; B0548R; B0558R; B0565R; B0583R; B0583V; B0650R; B0663R; B0895R; B0895V; B1009R; B1109R; B1143R; B1143V; B1368R; B1431R; B1457R; B1458R; B1560R; B1561R; B1566R; B1567R; B1568R; B1569R; B1570R; B1586R; B1644R; B1759R; B1770R; B1838R; B1838V; B1977R; B1978R; B1979R; B1980R; B1981R; B2187R; B2353R; B2483R; B2543R; B2545R; B2545V; B2569R; B2569V; B2570R; B2570V; B2807R; B2807V; B2808R; B2808V; B2809R; B2809V; B2810R; B2810V; B2811R; B2811V; B2812R; B3103R; B3133R; B3133V; B3134R; B3134V; B3149R;

B3154R; B3121R; B3121V; B3155R; B3155V; B3229R;; B3261R; B3270R; B3271R; B3272R; B3273R; B3274R; B3275R; B3276R; B3277R; B3278R; B3289R; B3290R; B3291R; B3292R; B3293R; B3321R; B3358R; B3358V; B3406R; B3406V; B3407R; B3407V; B3417R; B3417V; B3507R; B3508R; B3508V; B3511R; B3511V; B3678R; B3721R; B3733R; A3995R; B4619R; B4649R; B4689R; B4700R; B4756R; B4763R; B4767R; B4773R; B4773V; B4789R; B4800R; B4831R; B4871R; B4915R; B4974R; B5058R-B5070R; B5557R; B5658R; B5659R; B5660R; B5661R; B5662R; B5663R; B5664R; B5665R; B5666R; B5667R; B5668R; B5669R; B5670R; B6126R; B6126V; B6525R; B6536R; B6536V; B6748R; B7273R; B7918R; B7919R; B7920R; B7921R; B7922R; B7923R; B7924R; B7925R; B7926R; B7927R; B7928R; B7929R; B7930R; B7931R; B7932R; B7933R; B7934R; B7935R; B7936R; B7944R; B7945R; B7946R; B7947R; B7948R; B7949R; B7950R; B7951R; B7952R; B7953R; B7954R; B7955R; B7956R; B7957R; B7958R; B7959R; B7960R; B7961R; B7962R; B7963R; B7964R; B7965R; B7966R; B7967R; B7968R; B7969R; B7970R; B7971R; B7972R; B7973R; B7974R; B7975R; B7976R; B7977R; B7978R; B7979R; B7980R; B7981R; B7982R; B7983R; B8181R; B8276R; B8277R; B8341R; B8561R; B8561V; B8595R; B8595V; B8597R; B8597V; B8677R; B8685R; B8685V; B8705R; B8705V; B8727R; B8783R; B9167R; B9167V; B9204R; B9217R; B9217V; B9235R; B9235V; B9241R; B9242R; B9242R; B9243R; B9244R; B9245R; B9246R; B9247R; B9248R; B9249R; B9245R; B9251R; B9252R; B9253R; B9254R; B9255R; B9256R; B9257R; B9258R; B9259R; B9260R; B9267R; B9275R; B9491R; B9661R.

1.6.2 Collection of Vat Suvannakhili

C1049R to C1060R; C1089R to C1108R; C1121R; C1297R; C1337R; C1378R; C1396R; C1397R; C1398R; C1399R; C1400R; C5006R; C5007R; C5008R; C5009R; C5016R; C5016V; C1538R to C1566R; C1554R; C1657R; C1780R; C1814R; C3814R; Y0108; Y0116; Y0124.

1.6.3 Collection of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram

H0049R; H0058R; H0884R; H0984R; H0985R; H1418R; H1418V; H1588R; H1607R; H1709R; H1711R; H1750R; H1762R; H1771R; H1772R; H1783R; H1651R; H1967R; H1818R; H1983R; H2008R.

2. Collection of Art Objects in the Monasteries in Luang Prabang

The following art objects are registered by the project “*Buddhist Monasteries of Luang Prabang: Object List*”

2.1 Museum Numbers of Collection of Vat Saen Sukharam

VSS_000060; VSS_000130; VSS_000217; VSS_000218; VSS_000219; VSS_000534;
VSS_000544; VSS_000598; VSS_000628; VSS_000762; VSS_001051; VSS_001084;
VSS_001273; VSS_001308; VSS_001365; VSS_001432; VSS_001534; VSS_001677;
VSS_001678; VSS_001847; VSS_001914; VSS_001915; VSS_001916; VSS_001944.

2.2 Museum Numbers of Collection of Vat Suvannakhlili

VSK_004180; VSK_004181; VSK_004182; VSK_004183; VSK_004184; VSK_004185;
VSK_004186; VSK_004187; VSK_004188; VSK_004189; VSK_004190;
VSK_004208; VSK_004209.

3. Literature

3.1 In Lao

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5. Interviews

Bounkhong Khouthao, Deputy Director of the Department of World Heritage of the Province of Luang Prabang at Ban Ma, Luang Prabang on 9 March 2013.

Bunmi Phongphichit, Doctor Khamphui's wife at Ban Vat Saen village on 18 February 2014.

Bounpheng Siudomphan, Achan, foster child of the late Pha Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela at Ban Phon Hüang village, Luang Prabang on 9 March 2013.

_____, at Ban Phon Hüang village, Luang Prabang on 12 August 2013.

Chanda, Achan, master of art and architecture of Luang Prabang, at Vat Xiang Muan, Luang Prabang in 2010.

Chanpheng Phalittathamma Maha Thela, Sathu Nyai, abbot of Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, at Vat Mai Suvannaphumaram, Luang Prabang on 28 February 2013.

Chanthalin Chinnathamma Thela, Sathu Nyai, abbot of Vat Phukhouay Phokharam, Vice Chairman of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of the province of Luang Prabang, at Vat Phukhouay on 28 February 2013.

Kaeo Suksavat, Achan, at the museum building, Vat Saen Sukharam in September 2010.

Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, Sathu Nyai, abbot of Vat Saen Sukharam at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang in 2004.

_____, at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang in August 2006

_____, at Vat Saen Sukharam, Luang Prabang in the first half of 2007.

Khamdi Saloemsak, Achan, one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's closest disciples. Sala Thammavihan, Vat Suvannakhili, Luang Prabang on 13 August 2013.

Khamphom Phongsavanh, Achan, one of Sathu Nyai Khamchan's closest disciples (Achan Khamphom Phongsavan was ordained as a novice and later a monk and stayed with Sathu Nyai Khamchan in Vat Saen Sukharam from the late 1990s to 2001. Sathu Nyai Khamchan sent him to Vat Saket and study at Mahachulalonghornrajavidyalaya University, Bangkok, Thailand.) at Vat Pa Pha O, Luang Prabang, Laos in March 2013.

_____, at Ban Nongkham, Luang Prabang on 20 September 2013.

_____, at Ban Phan Luang, Luang Prabang, via skype, on 7 July 2014.

Hans Georg Berger at his residence, Ban Müang Khai village, Luang Prabang on 5 April 2014.

Hüan, Mae, a female supporter of Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Ban Phon Hüang, Luang Prabang in 2012.

Humphsaeng Sukkasom, a temple taker of Vat Saen Sukharam at Vat Saen Sukharam in 2009.

One Keo Kittiphattha Thela, Sathu Nyai, abbot of Vat Pak Khan and Vat Xiang Thong, Chairman of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of the province of Luang Prabang, at Vat Pak Khan on 24 February 2013.

Onsi Mangkhala, Achan Maha, an advisor of Sathu Myai Khamchan at Ban Khili village, Luang Prabang in 2009 and 2011.

Ounkham Akkhapanyo, Sathu, a close disciple of Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Vat Pa Pha O, Luang Prabang. 5 March 2013. Pha Ounkham is now living at Vat Lao Buddhist temple of Visalia, California, the United States of America.

_____, at Vat Lao Buddhist temple of Visalia, California, the United States of America, via Skype, on 7 July 2014.

_____, Vat Lao Buddhist temple of Visalia, California, the United States of America, via skype, in June 2015.

Thongvan Phetmungkhun, a close disciple of Sathu Nyai Khamchan at Ban Vixun village, Luang Prabang on 10 April 2014.

Tui Sisomphone, Achan, local architect, at Ban Xiang Thong village, Luang Prabang, Laos in 2010.

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About the Author

Khamvone Boulyaphonh

I was born on 3 September 1975 at Ban Pak Chaek village in Pak U district of Luang Prabang province, approximately fifty kilometers north from of Luang Prabang city along the U River. In 1991, I was ordained as a novice at Vat Pa Phon Phao in Luang Prabang, after which I moved to Vat Saen Sukharam in 1992. In 1995, I was ordained as a monk at Vat Saen Sukharam. I finished my secondary school at the Buddhist school of Luang Prabang in 1996. I completed the *nak tham ek* at Vat Kaeofa School at Vat Kaeofa in Bang Kruay district of Nonthaburi province in Thailand in 2000. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Bangkok, Thailand in 2001, and received my Master of Arts in Business Administration (M.B.A.) from Krirk University, which is also located in Bangkok. I disrobed from the monkhood in 2005, and began working as a graphic designer for October Printing in Bangkok in 2006. Within the context of research projects from 2007 to 2011 funded by the Endangered Archives Programme of the British Library in London, I became Managing Director of the Buddhist Archive of Photography in Luang Prabang and of the project “The Museum of Buddhist Art and List of Endangered Art Objects in Monasteries in Luang Prabang”. Since 2011, I have been pursuing my doctorate in Lao Buddhism at the University of Hamburg as part of the project “The Lao Sangha and Modernity”.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit behandelt das Leben, Wirken und die sozialen Rollen des Ehrwürdigen Sathu Nyai Khamchan Virachitta Maha Thela, der Abt von Vat Saen Sukharam und Vorsitzender der „Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization“ der laotischen Provinz Luang Prabang. Er zählt zu den bemerkenswertesten laotischen Intellektuellen und ist einer der erfolgreichsten laotischen Mönche des 20. Jahrhunderts. Der ehrwürdige Abt war ein charismatischer Mönch, bekannt für seine strikte Einhaltung der Ordensregeln und ein Vorbild für viele der Mönche und Novizen in Luang Prabang.

In der alten königlichen Hauptstadt Luang Prabang, von alters her das spirituelle Zentrum des laotischen Buddhismus und bis 1975 Sitz des Obersten Patriarchen (*saṅgharāja*), genoss Sathu Nyai Khamchan den höchsten Respekt der Mönche, Novizen und Laien. Zu seinen herausragenden Tätigkeiten zählten Bau- und Renovationsarbeiten in einer von ihm selbst entwickelten modernen Variante des architektonischen Stils von Lan Xang in Tempelgebäuden in Vat Saen Sukharam und vielen weiteren Klöstern. Außerdem schuf der ehrwürdige Abt eine Fassung des in Laos sehr populären Vessantara Jataka in moderner laotischer Schrift. In den 1990er Jahren wurde Sathu Nyai Khamchan zu der zentralen Person der buddhistischen Gemeinschaften in Luang Prabang und ganz Nordlaos. Er leitete fortan zahllose buddhistische Zeremonien, Rituale und Feste nach den Regeln des Sangha.

Der ehrenwerte Abt war ein passionierter Sammler; er sammelte über fünfzehntausend historische Fotografien, zweitausend Kunstobjekte sowie offizielle Dokumente, persönliche Briefe und Palmblattmanuskripte in seiner Hütte im Vat Saen Sukharam. Er war schließlich die ausschlaggebende Person für die Schaffung des Buddhistischen Archives der Fotografie in Luang Prabang 2007 und des Museums für Buddhistische Kunst im Vat Saen Sukharam.

Diese Arbeit untersucht auch die sozio-religiösen Netzwerke des ehrenwerten Abtes, welche anhand seiner Reisen inner- und außerhalb von Laos analysiert werden. Seine Reisen in über siebzehn Länder – Pilgerreisen, private und offizielle Besuche – dokumentieren nicht nur Sathu Nyai Khamchans eigene Rolle im laotischen Sangha, sondern spiegeln auch die in der Forschung oftmals vernachlässigte Integration des laotischen Sangha in der Welt des Theravada-Buddhismus wider. Die Besuche des ehrwürdigen Abtes bei der laotischen Diaspora im Westen zeigen darüber hinaus, welche Bedeutung charismatische Äbte für die Verbindung der Lao in Diaspora mit ihrem Heimatland besaßen.

Der Fokus der Arbeit liegt auf der intellektuellen Biografie des Ehrenwerten Sathu Nyai Khamchan und den Ergebnissen von historischer Forschung und Dokumentenanalyse, sowie der über einen längeren Zeitraum an den Buddhistischen Archiven von Luang Prabang, Laos, vorgenommene Archiv- und Feldforschung. Die Arbeit stützt sich auf die umfangreichen Sammlungen von historischen Fotografien, Manuskripten, Dokumenten, persönlichen Briefe und buddhistischer Kunstgegenstände, die der ehrenwerte Abt über einen Zeitraum von mehr als sechzig Jahren in seinem Kloster erstellte. Basierend auf diesem bislang nicht zugänglichen Quellenmaterial ermöglicht die vorliegende Arbeit – über einen rein biografischen Ansatz hinausgehend – eine neue Sicht auf die Entwicklung des laotischen Buddhismus im 20. Jahrhundert.

Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Ich versichere an Eides Statt durch meine eigene Unterschrift, dass ich die eingereichte Arbeit selbstständig und ohne fremde Hilfe angefertigt und alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder annähernd wörtlich aus Veröffentlichungen entnommen sind, als solche kenntlich gemacht habe und mich auch keiner anderen als der angegebenen Literatur bedient habe. Diese Versicherung bezieht sich auch auf die in der Arbeit verwendeten Zeichnungen, Skizzen, bildlichen Darstellungen und dergleichen.

