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The Structure, Functions, and Tradition of Siamese Royal Scribal Colophons

Abstract: This paper focuses on colophons written by royal scribes in Siamese manuscripts from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. These royal scribal colophons can reveal not only the manuscripts' origin in the royal palace, but also the roles of the royal scribes in the book production of the Siamese royal court, as the noble titles of the royal scribes are always recorded in the colophons. Even after the 1932 revolution, the modern royal scribes under the Secretariat of the Cabinet continued to produce official handwritten copies of the constitution and, in the tradition of the royal scribes of the past, ended their manuscripts with colophons.

1 Introduction

Colophons, though not often found in Siamese manuscripts, provide insight into different aspects of textual history and manuscript production, allowing us to locate manuscripts in place and time. The colophons in Siamese manuscripts attest a wide range of formal and informal language registers, both in prose and verse, and provide different types of information. For example, colophons in monastic manuscripts may record the date of production alongside the merit scribes and sponsors expected to gain. One scribe, for instance, mourns his tedious scribal task and pleads for remuneration.¹ In another manuscript, the owner curses anyone writing anything playful on the manuscript.²

Siamese writing can be traced back to the thirteenth century, when Tai-speaking people in the upper Chao Phraya River basin began to note down their own language by adapting the Old Khmer script, and possibly the Old Mon script, both of which had developed from the writing system of Southern India since the fifth century. Despite earlier traces of Siamese writing and manuscript culture, actual manuscript evidence has only survived from the later period of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, i.e. since the seventeenth century. The most common types of Siamese manuscripts are palm-leaf manuscripts and *khòì*-paper leporello

1 National Library of Thailand, Chan Subsection, Bò Initial, Ms no. 28, recto p. 80.

2 Copenhagen, Royal Danish Library, Siam 6, recto p. 2.

manuscripts. Palm-leaf manuscripts are largely used for religious texts (i.e. canonical Pali texts, commentaries, etc.), whereas the *khòì*-paper manuscripts, composed of a very long piece of paper folded together in the concertina or leporello fashion, are mainly used for secular texts, such as historical records, law, secular treatises, and poetry. The earliest Siamese palm-leaf manuscript ever found is dated to 1615, while the earliest *khòì*-paper manuscript dates to 1680.³

Colophons in Siamese manuscripts are found in various locations. For example, colophons in palm-leaf manuscripts can be found on the cover leaf, along with the title, but sometimes at the end on the last leaf of the fascicle (Thai *phuk*).⁴ Correspondingly, colophons in *khòì*-paper manuscripts are written either at the beginning (the first folded page of the recto side) or at the end. However, in the case of multiple-text manuscripts the colophon can be located at the end of any of the works copied in the manuscript, thus not necessarily at the end of the manuscript. It is worth mentioning that even those colophons appearing at the beginning of the manuscript may have been written after the copying of the main text was completed, as in most cases they record the date in which the work was finished. Sometimes modern scholars differentiate these paratextual elements on the basis of their location in prefaces (at the beginning of the manuscript) and colophons (at the end of text or manuscript). However, to emphasize the colophon's function as the 'finishing touch', suggested by its etymology,⁵ the term colophon will be applied here to those found both at the beginning and the end of a text.

This article focuses on the colophons of the Siamese royal manuscripts, which not only helps in identifying their origin and main function (for presentation to the King) but also reveals the practice of the royal scribes at the royal court taking part in royal manuscript production. As the Siamese royal manuscripts featured in this article largely contain secular texts for royal court circulation, our focus will be on the *khòì*-paper manuscripts.⁶

³ Kongkaew Weeraprachak 2010, 24 and 38.

⁴ In the context of Thai and Lao manuscripts, the term 'fascicle' is often used among modern scholars to refer to a unit of palm-leaf manuscript consisting of 24 leaves bound together, known in Thai and Lao as *phuk* (Boulyaphonh and Grabowsky 2017, 20; Kongkaew Weeraprachak 2010, 35). The term 'bundle' – *mat* in Thai and Lao – is reserved for a larger codicological unit consisting of multiple fascicles (Boulyaphonh and Grabowsky 2017, 20).

⁵ Beal 2009, 80.

⁶ The tradition of the royal palm-leaf manuscript has been briefly mentioned in Kongkaew Weeraprachak and Wirat Unnathornwarangkun 2003. According to this work by Kongkaew Weeraprachak and Wirat Unnathornwarangkun (2003, 19–24), the royal palm-leaf manuscripts of *Tipiṭaka* were marked by the royal seals of each reign, not by the royal scribal colophons. Note

2 Royal manuscripts and royal scribes

The tradition of the royal manuscripts must have existed in the Siamese Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1351–1767), but no direct evidence has survived. The earliest manuscripts containing royal scribal colophons can be attested from the Thonburi period (1767–1782) and the Bangkok period (since 1782). Though several manuscripts were produced within the royal court of Ayutthaya (i.e. the manuscripts of Luang Prasert's *Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya*, *Sansoen Phra Kiat Phra Cao Prasat Thong*, and *Nanthopanantha Sut Kham Luang*), none may be proven as manuscripts produced by royal scribes for presentation to the King and preserved as a part of the royal manuscript collections. To identify a royal manuscript, modern scholars employ the colophons of the royal scribes, in which the noble ranks and titles of the royal scribes are mentioned. Furthermore, royal scribal colophons always use the royal language register, indicating communication to a royal family member, or the King. The phrase royal scribes used to refer to themselves appears most often in the royal register as *kha phra phuttha cao*, literally meaning 'slaves/servants to the Buddhist King'. This phrase was then considered one of the first personal pronouns in Thai royal language,⁷ used by commoners to refer to themselves when speaking with the King and high-ranking members of the royal family. The ending phrase *khò decha* (literally 'may [your] power [protect me]'), which can be roughly rendered into the English phrase 'May it please Your Majesty', is regularly used to end sentences addressed to the King. When use of these words and phrases in the royal language is attested along with the titles of the royal scribes of the royal palace, modern scholars accepted that manuscript to be a royal manuscript.⁸

Producing the so-called royal manuscripts is one of the main tasks of the royal scribes, along with other tasks largely concerning the court's mainly bookwork such as the editing of legal texts, preserving the royal manuscript collections, writing the royal announcement, inscribing the golden plate (Thai *suphannabat*) for appointing the royal, noble and monastic titles,⁹ and reading the royal announcement aloud in the royal ceremonies. Certainly from the Bangkok period and possibly since the founding of the capital, the office of the Royal

that the task of producing and editing religious manuscripts of the royal court belonged to the royal pandits of the Royal Pandits Department (Th. *krom ratcha bandit*), not to the royal scribes (Wales 1965, 100).

⁷ Hoonchamlong 1992, 195; Natthaporn Panpothong 2009, 67–68.

⁸ See Damrong Rajanubhab 1960, 163.

⁹ Wales 1965, 100.

Scribes Department (*krom phra alak*) was located in the Royal Manuscript Hall (*hò nangsü luang*), which housed the royal manuscript collections within the royal grand palace of Bangkok. Positions within the Royal Scribes Department can be determined from their noble titles. For example, the head of the department traditionally held the title Phra Si Phuripricha or abridgedly as Phra Alak ('Lord of Royal Scribes'), while the first deputy of the department was known as Khun Sara Prasoet and the second deputy as Khun Maha Sitthiwohan. A group of newly trained and registered royal scribes have no titles and historical records mention them by their personal names. The extant salary records now preserved at the National Library of Thailand indicate that in the early nineteenth century the Department of Royal Scribes employed more than one hundred scribal officers.¹⁰ As their main tasks were the production and preservation of the administrative, legal, and historical manuscripts, the royal scribes formed, arguably, one of the most significant departments within the traditional Siamese royal court's administration.

Aside from their tasks of producing administrative and legal manuscripts, the royal scribal colophons reveal that royal scribes also took part in the literary production of the royal court, by making copies, proofreading, and sometimes editing and composing the texts. It is evidenced in the colophons that royal scribes made copies of literary manuscripts. Furthermore, some royal scribes proved themselves to be the scholars of the royal court being assigned by the King to edit texts transmitted from the Ayutthaya period and even newly composed literary texts in the Bangkok period. Regularly when the royal scribes finished copies, other royal scribes would be assigned to proofread the texts. Thus, the colophons of the royal manuscripts, usually at the beginning of the manuscripts, record the titles of the royal scribes responsible for producing the royal manuscripts in the proper language when communicating with the King.

In spite of there being no information available on the royal manuscript hall of Thonburi, a few manuscripts produced by the royal scribes of Thonburi have survived indicating scribal activities within the Thonburi royal court. For instance, King Taksin of Thonburi ordered illustrated manuscripts of Buddhist cosmology, or *Samut Phap Trai Phum*, to be produced by royal scribes and royal painters in 1776. In the specific size of an illustrated cosmology manuscript, these manuscripts are large and each page is full of colour illustrations featuring short,

¹⁰ For example, National Library of Thailand, Cotmaiher Section, King Rama III's Reign, CS 1200, Ms no. 92 (dated 1838); King Rama III's Reign, CS 1203, Ms no. 87 (dated 1841); King Rama IV's Reign, CS 1220: Ms no. 202 (dated 1858).

explanatory texts.¹¹ Of several extant copies, the finest and most complete and very likely the original royal copy presented to the King, is the manuscript preserved at the Museum of Asian Arts in Berlin.¹² This manuscript contains a lengthy preface, recording the King's intention to have the text copied along with illustrations on the date equivalent to 24 September 1776 according to the King's order.¹³ The production of the manuscript was supervised by the Supreme Patriarch to ensure it followed the Pali texts. The preface ends with the names of the royal painters and the royal scribes in the structure, which is usually found in later evidence, as follows:

๑ หลวงเพชรกรรรม ๑ ๑ ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า นายนาม ๑ นายบุญญา ๑ นายเรือง ๑	๕ คนได้เขียนแผนพระไตรภูมิ ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า นายเซต ๑ นายสน ๑ นายทองคำ ๑
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อาลักษณ์ได้จารึกอักษรมูลเกล้าพูลกระหม่อมถวายฉลองพระเดชพระคุณ ฯ

We, Luang Phetchakam, Nai Nam, Nai Bunsu, and Nai Rüang, four of us have painted the illustrations of *Trai Phum* ('three worlds'). We, Nai Bun Can, Nai Chet, Nai Son, and Nai Thòng Kham, the royal scribes, have written to be presented to and serve the King.

The colophon in this illustrated manuscript dated in 1779 can be considered the earliest evidence on the tradition of the Siamese royal scribal colophons. Furthermore, six manuscripts of *Ramakian-The Royal Composition of King Taksin of Thonburi* (known in Thai as *Ramakian Phra Ratcha Niphon Somdet Phra Cao Krung Thonburi*) written with gold (five of them preserved at the National Library of Thailand and the other one at the State Library of Berlin) contain the prefaces of the royal scribes dated in 1780. In all the manuscripts, the colophons at the beginning (written in gold like the main text) mention the date of composition by King Taksin and the colophons at the end (written in yellow ink) provide the manuscript's date and the names of the royal scribes who copied and proofread.

The manuscript now kept at the State Library of Berlin contains the following colophon:¹⁴

¹¹ See Kongkaew Weeraprachak 2010, 3.

¹² Terwiel 2014, 50. Although several manuscript copies of *Samut Phap Trai Phum* (with relatively the same texts and illustrations) kept at the National Library of Thailand, due to significant reasons the illustrated manuscript in Berlin today is regarded as the original royal copy presented to King Taksin in 1776 rather than any other (see Terwiel 2014, 66).

¹³ Berlin, Museum for Asian Arts, II 650, verso pp. 1–2.

¹⁴ Berlin, State Library of Berlin, Ms orient Fol 333, recto p. 1.

ทราชม
อยู่
พอดิ

๑ วัน ๑ + ๖ ค่ำจุลศักราช ๑๑๓๒ ปีชารโหศก พระราชนิพนธ์ทรงแต่ขึ้นต้นเป็นประถม ยัง

On Sunday, the first day of the waxing moon of the sixth lunar month of CS 1132,¹⁵ the Year of the Tiger, the second year of the decade [equivalent to Sunday, 14 April 1771]¹⁶, the King has composed this text which is still fresh and sufficiently fine.

While this colophon mentions the date of original composition in 1771 and King Taksin as the original author, the scribal colophon at the end of the manuscript¹⁷ gives the date of copying as 1780 and mentions the royal scribes as the copyist and proofreaders, which reads as follows:

๑ วัน ๑ + ๑๒ ค่ำ จุลศักราช ๑๑๔๒ ปีชวดโทศก ๑๐-
ขุนสรปเร็ด
๑ ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า นายเชตอлакษณชูปเส้นทอง ทาน ๓ ครั้ง
ขุนมหาสิท

On Sunday, the eighth day of the waning moon of the twelfth month of 1142 CS [equivalent to Sunday 19 November 1780], the Year of the Rat, the second year of the decade, I, Nai Chet the royal scribe, have copied this manuscript with gold strokes. We, Khun Sara Prasoet and Khun Maha Sit, have proofread it three times.

The other five manuscripts feature the prefaces and colophons in the same structure, although the royal scribes' names and the date vary.¹⁸ As the royal scribes' noble titles are mentioned the colophons at the end of these manuscripts confirm they were produced at the Department of the Royal Scribes in King Taksin's royal court. Even those with no title such as Nai Chet,¹⁹ the noun *alak* 'royal scribe' is attached to his name, indicating his status as a royal scribe, in the same manner found in the preface of the above mentioned illustrated cosmological manuscript.

The total number of manuscripts with royal scribal colophons is unclear, but is thought to be more than a hundred. A complete set of the *Three Seals Law* (Thai *Kotmai Tra Sam Duang*) contains 27 manuscripts with royal scribal colophons and at least three official sets of copies authorized by the three seals were produced by the royal scribes in the reign of King Rama I of Bangkok.²⁰ As a result of the

¹⁵ About the siglum CS, see below.

¹⁶ The equivalent date in the modern Gregorian calendrical system in this article has been calculated with the help of an astrological calendar available on myhora.com and Lars Gislén's computer programme based on Chris Eade's works (e.g. Eade 1995).

¹⁷ Berlin, State Library of Berlin, Ms orient Fol 333, verso p. 58.

¹⁸ See Boontuen Sriworapot 2018.

¹⁹ Berlin, State Library of Berlin, Ms orient Fol 333, verso p. 58.

²⁰ See Ratcha Bandittaya Sathan 2017a–b.

restoration of Ayutthaya literature in the Bangkok period, at least 48 manuscripts of Ayutthaya literature were copied and edited by the royal scribes of Bangkok for presentation to the King from the late eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century (see the list of manuscripts in the Appendix at the end of the article). Further to which, hundreds of manuscripts of Bangkok literary texts were produced for the King during these centuries but have never been systematically surveyed by modern scholars.

3 Structure and variation of royal scribal colophons

The common structure of royal manuscript colophons is the following: it begins with the date of copy according to the traditional lunar calendar and the year in the Lesser Era (Thai *cunla sakkarat*, abbreviated as *cs* here) along with the year in the twelve zodiac, the year order in the decade, followed by the names or titles of the royal scribes responsible for the copy and proofreading, before ending with the phrase *khò decha* ('May it please Your Majesty'). The royal language is always used, in giving this information. The royal scribes refer to themselves, for instance, as *kha phra phuttha cao*, literally 'slave/servant to the Buddhist King'.

In the calendrical information, the year in the Lesser Era (*cs*) was often given with the year in the twelve zodiacs and its order in the decade (according to the Lesser Era decade). For instance, the date in the preface of the earliest *Cindamani* manuscript reads:²¹ '1144 *cs* the Year of the Tiger, the fourth year of the decade' (จุลศักราช ๑๑๔๔ ปีชวดจัตวาศก). Some calendrical information may be omitted. When the exact date in the lunar calendrical system has been provided, the cross sign <+> has been employed together with numerals, which would be located around the cross. The number written on the left-hand side of the cross signifies the day in the week (1–7), starting from Sunday (1) to Saturday (7). The numeral indicating the day in the lunar month would be placed either above or below the vertical line of the cross. The numeral above signifies the day in the waxing moon (1–15), while the one below signifies the waning day (also 1–15). The numeral on the right-hand side of the cross sign indicates the lunar month in the year (1–12).²²

²¹ National Library of Thailand, Aksònsat Section, Ms no. 60, recto p. 2.

²² For more details on the lunar month in the traditional calendrical system of Southeast Asia, see Eade 1995.

The example below comes from a royal copy of a bilingual Pali-Thai version of *Vessantara Jātaka* or *Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter IX Maha Rat* dated 1814,²³ containing the common information and structure as follows:

วัน ๑ + ๑๑ ค่ำจุลศักราช ๑๑๗๖ ปีจอฉ้อศก	ข้าพระพุทธเจ้าขุนพิทักษ์อักษรชุบ
ขุนมหาสิทธิโวหาร	
ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า	ทาน ขอดะชะฯ
หลวงลิขิตรจนานา	

On Sunday, the fourth day of the waxing moon in the eleventh month of 1176 CS, the Year of the Dog, the sixth year of the decade, I, Khun Phithak Aksòn, have made a copy. We, Khun Maha Sitthiwohan and Luang Likhit Rotcana, have proofread. May it please Your Majesty. [Equivalent to Sunday 18 September 1814]

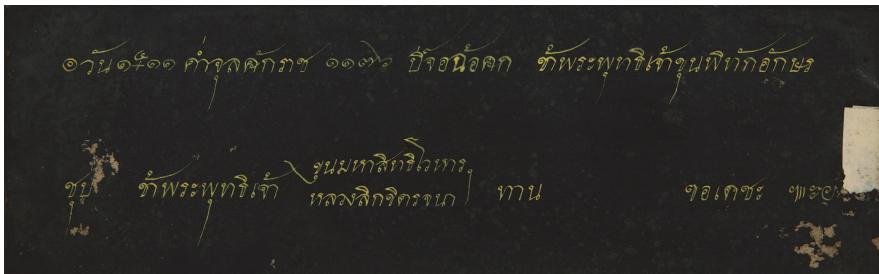


Fig. 1: The royal scribal colophon found in a manuscript of *Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter IX Maha Rat* dated 1814 (National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms no. 106, recto p. 2).

In some cases, when a royal scribe or scholar of the royal court took part in editing or (re-)writing a text, their names or titles are also mentioned in the royal scribes' prefaces. An example of such a preface mentioning a royal scribe as the editor is the manuscript of *Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter XI Maha Rat*,²⁴ which reads:

วัน ๕ + ๙ ค่ำจุลศักราช ๑๑๗๖ ปีจอฉ้อศก	ข้าพระพุทธเจ้าหมื่นสิทธิอักษรชุบ
หลวงลิขิตรจนานา	
ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า ขุนมหาสิทธิโวหารชำระตกแต่ง	ทาน ๒ ครั้ง ขอดะชะฯ
ขุนหมื่นอาลักษณ์	

On Thursday, the tenth day of the waxing moon, in the ninth month, in 1176 CS [1814 CE], the Year of the Dog, the sixth year of the decade [most possibly equivalent to Wednesday 27 July 1814], I, Mün Sitthi Aksòn, have made a copy. I, Khun Maha Sitthiwohan, did the

²³ National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms no. 106, recto p. 2; see Fig. 1.

²⁴ National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms no. 104, recto p. 2.

editing. Luang Likhit Rotcana and the other royal scribes holding the titles of *khun* and *mün* have proofread it twice. May it please Your Majesty.

In rare cases, the royal scribe may say he ‘composed’ (Thai *taeng*) the text, suggesting that the text is a new composition rather than copied from an earlier period text. As in the manuscript of *Kap Maha Chat: Chapter XI Maha Rat*,²⁵ where the colophon reads:

วัน๑ + ๑๐ ค่ำจุลศักราช ๑๑๔๔ ปีชาลจัตวาศก ข้าพระพุทธเจ้าพระอาลักษณ์แต่งทูลเกล้าฯ ถวาย
 นายขำนารอักษรร | เขียนฯ
 ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า หมื่นทิพไมตรี

On Sunday the eighth day of the waning moon of the tenth month 1144 CS [Sunday 29 September 1782], I, Phra Alak (‘Lord of the Royal Scribes’), have composed the text for the King. We, Nai Chamnan Aksòn and Mün Thip Maitri, have made copy.

Different processes of textual production from the terms used in the colophon may be identified here. In the first line of the above colophon, the Lord of the Royal Scribes or Phra Alak is stated as having composed (Thai *taeng*) the text for the King, whereas, as mentioned in the second line, two other royal scribes wrote the copy (*khian*). Although mention of the royal scribe as author is quite seldom, the royal scribes of Bangkok have clearly proven here that aside from any other book work, they have served the court as royal poets.

Despite the standardised structure of the royal scribal colophons, variations still appear, with some manuscripts omitting elements of the structure. At times the scribes’ names or titles are not mentioned but instead feature the first personal pronoun in the royal language, e.g., a manuscript of *Anirut Kham Chan*,²⁶ in which the preface reads: ‘I have responded to Your Majesty’s royal order [to make a copy of this manuscript]’, (ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า ขอรับพระราชทาน ฟ้าล่องธุลีป่าท). Or, for instance, several royal manuscripts omit the date of copy, but the titles of the copyist and proof reader are given, as in the sole example of the royal copy of *Süa Kho Kham Chan*.²⁷ In the latter, the status of the royal manuscripts is evident, although the date is not given. Despite these variations, the formality in the royal scribal paratexts is remarkable, there is no word play, no versification, and

²⁵ National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms no. 204, recto p. 2.

²⁶ National Library of Thailand, Chan Subsection, Ò Initial, Ms no. 72, recto p. 2.

²⁷ Volume I: National Library of Thailand, Chan Subsection, Sò Initial, Ms no. 91; Volume II: National Library of Thailand, Chan Subsection, Sò Initial, Ms no. 92.

apparently no merit aimed to gain, in contradistinction to paratexts found in manuscripts of other contexts.

The prefaces and colophons of the royal scribes featuring the structure and content mentioned above are found throughout the nineteenth century, the earliest evidence of which surfaces in the late eighteenth century. The latest date for a manuscript of Ayutthaya literature transmitted in the Bangkok royal court is of the early twentieth century. It is intriguing that the calendrical system has also been changed following royal orders on the new calendrical system from the late nineteenth century, namely, the Bangkok Era or *rattanakosin sok* (RS) regarding the numeral indicating the year of the reign. The following example taken from a manuscript of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam*²⁸ (literally ‘Oath of Allegiance on Water’) is the latest example of a royal manuscript of Ayutthaya literature with the paratext of the royal scribe (dated 1901). The colophon at the beginning of this manuscript reads:

๑ คำโคลงห้าแข่งน้ำฝ้ายใน ฯ
ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า ขุนปฏิภาณพิจิตร (เหรียญ)
จำลองทูลเกล้า ฯ ถวาย ๓๔
วันที่ ๑๘ กันยายน รัตนโกสินทรศก ๑๒๐
ควรมิควรแล้วแต่จะทรงพระกรุณาโปรดเกล้า ฯ ขอเดชะ

The Oath on Water for the Inner Court.

I, Khun Patiphan Phichit (Rian), have made this copy for the King on 18 September 120 RS, the 34th year of the reign [equivalent to 1901]. May the matter rest upon your judgement. May it please Your Majesty.

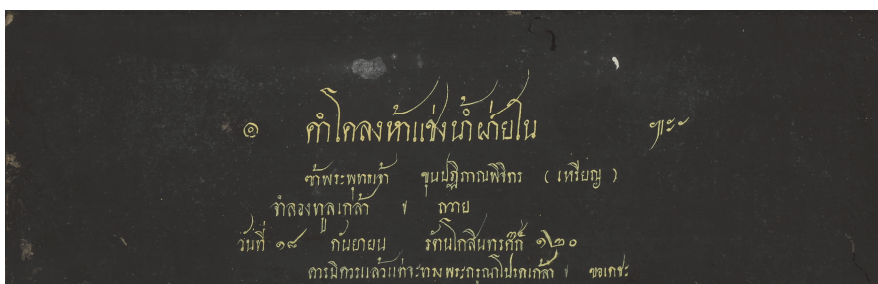


Fig. 2: The royal scribal colophon found in a manuscript of *Ongkan Chaeng Nam* dated 1901 (National Library of Thailand, Khlong Subsection, Ms no. 175, recto p. 2).

²⁸ National Library of Thailand, Khlong Subsection, Ms no. 175, recto p. 2; see Fig. 2.

Aside from the royal scribal colophons found in the royal manuscripts of Ayutthaya literature, an illustrated treatise on the iconography of Hindu gods dated 1882 (now preserved in the Berlin, Museum for Asian Arts, II 652)²⁹ also contains royal scribal colophons. It suggests other royal manuscripts exist aside from those of literature covering secular treatises, such as the illustrated treatises on Hindu gods. The colophon at the beginning of this illustrated treatise from the Museum of Asiatic Arts in Berlin³⁰ reads:

ณ วัน ๖ ๖ ๖ ค่ำ จุลศักราช ๑๒๔๔ ปีเมษจัตวาศก ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า
 นายवादจำลองรูปภาพ
 นายมากเขียนอักษร
 ทูลเกล้าทูลกระหม่อมถวาย ทานแล้วตามฉบับ ขอเดชะ ฯ

On Friday the sixth day of the waxing moon of the second eighth month, 1244 CS, the Year of the Horse, the fourth year of the decade [Friday 24 July 1882], We, Nai Wat, copied the illustrations, and Nai Mat, copied the writing, for the King. We have proofread against the exemplar. May it please Your Majesty.

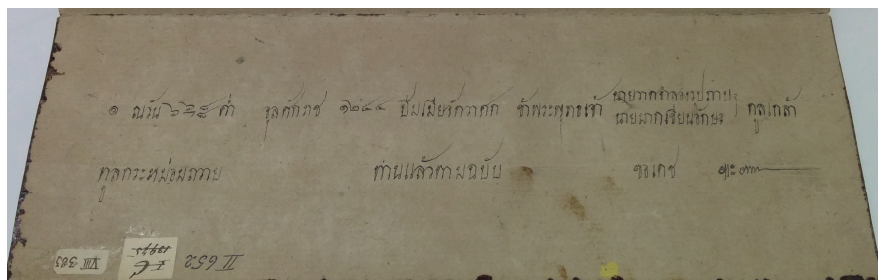


Fig. 3: A royal scribal colophon found in an illustrated treatise on the iconography of Hindu gods dated 1882 now preserved in Berlin (Berlin, Museum for Asian Arts, II 652, recto p. 2).
 © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst.

²⁹ Cover title of the manuscript reads: Samut Isuan Pang Lae Witsanu Pang Kap Thewa Pang / สมุด อิศวรปางแลวิศณุปางกับเทวปาง บริบูรณ์ ฯ (literally 'Manuscript of Gestures of Shiva and Vishnu and other Gods').

³⁰ Berlin, Museum for Asian Arts, II 652, recto p. 2.

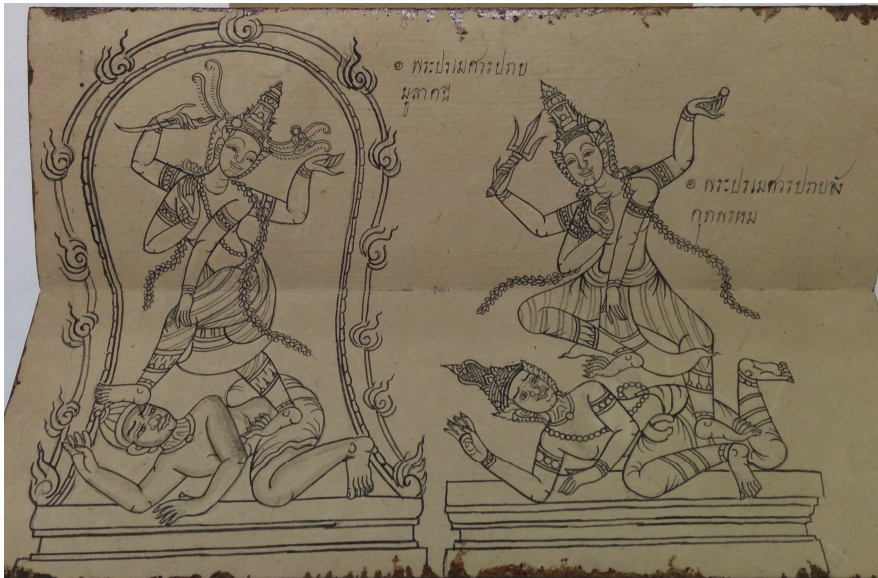


Fig. 4: An example of the text in the royal manuscript of an illustrated treatise on the iconography of Hindu gods dated 1882 (Berlin, Museum for Asian Arts, II 652, recto pp. 5–6). © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst

According to its colophon, the illustration was by Nai Wat with the text written by Nai Mak, demonstrating the division of tasks between illustrators and scribes in Siamese royal court manuscript production. It is worth noting that not all the manuscripts featuring royal scribal colophons may have belonged solely to the Royal Grand Palace, but may also have been royal manuscripts pertaining to the Front Palace (Thai *wang na*), the viceroy's seat. The structure of the Front Palace royal manuscripts follows that of the Grand Palace, in terms of the use of first personal pronouns in royal language to the ending phrase *khò decha*;³¹ but Front Palace royal scribes always maintain distinctive titles that differ to those of the Grand Palace. The Head of the Royal Scribes of the Grand Palace, for instance, was known as Phra Si Phuri Pricha, whereas the Front Palace scribe bore the title Luang Likhit Pricha (with the lesser rank of *luang*, one rank lower than *phra* in

³¹ Note that the register used for the Grand Prince of the Front Palace is very close to the one used with the King, as the viceroy is normally the highest member of the royal family in the traditional feudal system of Siam, but only inferior to the King (see Ratcha Bandittaya Sathan 2007a).

the hierarchy of Siamese nobility)³². Aside from the limited group of Front Palace royal manuscripts, in this study, the majority of manuscripts featuring royal scribal colophons were produced in the Grand Palace for presentation to the King.

Notably, the royal scribal colophons appear to be the only group among the paratexts found in Siamese manuscripts that have a relatively standardized structure, content and function. The royal scribal colophons help not only identify the origin and ownership of the manuscripts, but also reveal the royal scribes' role in royal court manuscript production. Furthermore, the royal scribes' tradition, has long been practiced, as manuscripts featuring royal scribal paratexts date from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century.

4 Functions and continuation of royal scribal colophons

As royal scribal colophons largely record the date of copying, occasionally also editing and composing, along with the names or titles of the royal scribes who accomplished the tasks, it may be argued that the royal scribal colophons perform the documenting function.³³ Furthermore, the royal scribal colophons featuring the register of the royal language alone, mark the King's ownership and their original collection in the Royal Manuscript Hall in the royal palace. Although not all the manuscripts of the Royal Manuscript Hall contain royal scribal colophons, such colophons alone mark the King's ownership, as the first page of the manuscript can easily be recognized by any member of the royal court. It has to be said that due to royal ownership, any royal manuscript from the hall was 'forbidden', but could be lent for copying with permission by the authority of the Royal Scribes Department.³⁴ Furthermore, the mentions on the titles and names of the royal scribes in the royal scribal colophons represent the royal scribes' responsibility for their tasks and culpability for any mistake. Conversely, these records could also have been a way for royal scribes to gain the King's recognition, resulting in the King's praise, reward, or promotion. Occasionally, however, it appears the royal scribes did not state their titles or names, despite expressing

³² See Thamniap Nam Phak Thi Song 1968, 12.

³³ See the three main functions of paratexts: structuring, commenting, and documenting, in Ciotti and Lin 2016, vii.

³⁴ Thanet Aphornsuvan et al. 2006, 346.

their intention to present the manuscripts to the King in the register of the royal language.

The royal scribal colophons not only reaffirm the status of royal manuscripts, but also authorize the versions of the texts they contain to be royal versions, especially when royal scribes took part in editing them as traditional editors. These royal versions must have also been recognized by the Bangkok period scribes and scholars as containing more textual authority, as manuscripts exist that have been recorded as copied from the exemplar of the royal manuscripts.³⁵

After the growth of printing technology in Siam in the late nineteenth century, the main task of the royal scribes was no longer manuscript production. Due to mass production of the prints, the number of the royal manuscripts of Ayutthaya literature in the late nineteenth century was restricted to the manuscripts used in actual ceremonies. These were two manuscripts, the *Maha Chat Kham Luang*³⁶ and *Ongkan Chaeng Nam*.³⁷ The traditional manuscript form for both texts was still required in the actual ceremonies even in the early twentieth century. Despite their restricted tasks in manuscript production, the royal scribes still performed the ceremonial function in the state and royal ceremonies, such as reading the royal announcement or inscribing the *suphannabat* for the royal appointment. After the 1932 revolution, the political transition of Siam from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy, the Department of the Royal Scribes was transferred to the Secretariat of the Cabinet (Thai *krom lekhatthikam khana ratthamontri*), the governmental office to which the royal scribes were then appointed.

To this day, there is still an office for the royal scribes within the Secretariat of the Cabinet (nowadays called *samnak lekhatthikan khana ratthamontri*), known as the Office of the Royal Scribes and Royal Decorations (*samnak alak lae khruang ratcha itsariyaphon*). The royal scribes under this office are still responsible for the cabinet's official documents. Handwriting is also practiced by the royal scribes, but only for important occasions. Within the office, as of 2019, a section still exists dubbed the *Likhit* Section (Thai *khum ngan likhit*, literally 'the handwriting section') consisting of ten officers for calligraphy in duty and an additional officer who preserves the royal seal (Thai *phanak ngan raksa phra ratcha lancakon*). Occasions for which the royal scribes would be required to write documents by hand would be, for instance royal appointments (*suphannabat*),

35 National Library of Thailand, Aksònsat Section, Ms no. 62, verso p. 53.

36 National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms no. 63, dated 1854; National Library of Thailand, Rai Subsection, Ms no. 34, dated 1889.

37 National Library of Thailand, Khlong Subsection, Ms no. 175, dated 1901.

traditional manuscript copies of the constitution and diplomatic charters. The King directly assigns handwriting tasks to the royal scribes, usually pertaining to a royal or state ceremony. Other than that, the royal scribes prepare typescript charters and documents, for royal decorations today.

Official manuscripts of the modern constitution of Thailand to this day are still produced by the modern-day royal scribe. Since the 1932 revolution, the constitution has always been portrayed on a greyish *khòì*-paper leporello manuscript, imitating the traditional form of the *Three Seals Law* manuscript (as exhibited in the Democracy Monument built in 1939 at the centre of Bangkok) and any other images or symbols of the constitution. Amendments to a new constitution incur the assignment of the modern royal scribes to make a copy of the constitutional text manuscript imitating the above-mentioned greyish *khòì*-paper leporello from, but manufactured using modern materials and procedures. The most recent royal ceremony of declaration of the constitution took place on 6 April 2019. Three copies of the constitution manuscripts were made and in a royal ceremony presented to the King, who signs each copy of the manuscripts at their beginning to donate ultimate authorization as the head of state.

Interestingly, modern royal scribes always record their names as copyists at the end of each manuscript, using the first pronoun in the royal language (Thai *kha phra phuttha cao*) and the ending phrase *khò decha* ('May it please Your Majesty'), in conformity to a tradition that may be traced back to royal manuscripts as far back as the eighteenth century. The royal scribes making the copies also state they proofread the copied text three times (Thai *than sam khrang*). The phrase 'three times' here is most likely in keeping with the practice of traditional royal scribes rather than signifying literal meaning, as royal scribes were always held to proofread the texts more than three times.³⁸ Thus, the modern royal scribe preserves the royal scribes' long tradition via the production of the manuscripts of the supreme law such as constitutions, the practice of the royal scribal hands and the practice of the colophons following those from the royal manuscripts, even though the role of the royal scribes having drastically changed from those of traditional manuscript culture.

³⁸ Interview with Suwannachai Nonthasen, a senior scribal officer of the *Likhit* Section within the Office of the Royal Scribes and Royal Decorations, the Secretariat of the Cabinet, on 17 April 2019.

5 Conclusion

Although the exact number of Siamese royal scribal colophons is still unclear, royal scribal colophons are found in more than one hundred manuscripts of Ayutthaya literature and the *Three Seals Law*. The royal manuscripts of the Bangkok literary texts and the secular treatises transmitted in the royal court in the form of *khò*-paper leporello manuscripts, however, require further investigation. In addition, the royal scribal colophons can be considered one of the most continuous paratextual traditions of a specific group of scribes, which have long been practiced in the Siamese royal court over centuries, and now adopted by today's scribes. Ending phrases such as *khò decha*, or 'May it please Your Majesty', still adorn the modern constitution manuscript.

Royal scribal colophons show that a paratextual tradition has existed alongside the textual tradition of Siamese manuscript culture. This article proposes, in particular, that the royal scribes of the Siamese royal court constructed their own colophon tradition, at least since the Thonburi period in the late eighteenth century, which continued being practiced by the Bangkok royal scribes even after the introduction of printing technology.

Thus far, modern scholars of Thai literature have only paid limited attention to the paratexts of Siamese manuscripts, but the folded pages of these royal manuscripts and their royal scribal colophons, either at their beginning or end, most definitely deserve attention. For their documenting function, these colophons call out for more detailed investigation, therefore providing more information regarding the place and time of manuscript production and textual transmission and enabling a greater understanding of these phenomena.

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Abbreviations

CM: DHC: NTIC The Northern Thai Information Center, Digital Heritage Collection,
Chiang Mai University Central Library, Chiang Mai, Thailand

NLT (National Library of Thailand, Bangkok):

ASS	Aksònsat ('orthography') Section
ChSs	Chan Subsection, Literature Section
KHKHLSs	Kap Hò Khlong Subsection, Literature Section
KHLSs	Khlong Subsection, Literature Section
LLSs	Lilit Subsection, Literature Section
RSs	Rai Subsection, Literature Section

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Appendix: List of Royal Manuscripts of Ayutthaya Literature from the Bangkok Period

Texts	Manuscripts	Date
Royal Manuscripts of King Rama I's Reign (1782–1809)		
<i>Kap Maha Chat: Chapter IV Wana Prawet</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 160	1783
<i>Kap Maha Chat: Chapter VIII Kuman</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 199 (Vol. I)	1782
	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 196 (Vol. II)	1782
<i>Kap Maha Chat: Chapter IX Matsi</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 195	1782
<i>Kap Maha Chat: Chapter X Sakka Bap</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 204	1782
<i>Kap Maha Chat: Chapter XI Maha Rat</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 210	1782
<i>Cindamani</i>	NLT: ASS: Ms no. 60	1782
<i>Thawathotsamat</i>	NLT: KhISs: Ms no. 228	1782

Texts	Manuscripts	Date
Royal Manuscripts of King Rama II's Reign (1809–1824)		
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter I Thotsa Phôn</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 35	1814
	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 38	1817
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter IV Wana Prawet</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 56	1814
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter VI Cunla Phon</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 65	1814
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter VIII Kuman</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 93	1814
	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 84	1817
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter XI Maha Rat</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 104 (Vol. II)	1814
	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 106 (Vol. I)	1814
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter XII Chô Kasat</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 119	1818
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter XIII Nakhôn Kan</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 125	1814
<i>Samutthakhot Kham Chan</i>	NLT: ChSs: Sô: Ms no. 47/2 (Vol. IV) ³⁹	1817
<i>Anirut Kham Chan</i>	NLT: ChSs: Ô: Ms no. 75	1817
<i>Collection of Phra Si Mahosot's Poems (or Prachum Kap Phra Si Mahosot)</i>	NLT: KHKHsSs: Ms no. 18	1816
<i>Collection of Old Elephant Treatises (or Prachum Kham Chan Klôm Chang Krung Kao)</i>	NLT: ChSs: Kô: Ms no. 17	1817
Royal Manuscripts of King Rama III's Reign (1824–1851)		
<i>Samutthakhot Kham Chan</i>	CM: DHC: NTIC: 17069 (Vol. I)	1849
	CM: DHC: NTIC: 17070 (1) (Vol. II)	1849
	CM: DHC: NTIC: 17177 (Vol. III)	1849
	CM: DHC: NTIC: 17070 (2) (Vol. IV)	1849
<i>Anirut Kham Chan</i>	NLT: ChSs: Ô: Ms no. 44 (Vol. I)	1847
	NLT: ChSs: Ô: Ms no. 81 (Vol. II)	1847

³⁹ This royal copy of *Samutthakhot Kham Chan* contains four volumes of manuscripts, but the preface of the royal scribes appears only in the manuscript of the Volume IV (NLT: ChSs: Sô: Ms no. 47/2). However, the manuscript Volume I of the set of copy is identifiable to be the manuscript NLT: ChSs: Sô: Ms no. 47/3, while Volume II is NLT: ChSs: Sô: Ms no. 47/4, due to the material, scribal hands, and their structuring paratexts. The manuscript Volume III of this set is unfortunately unidentified.

Texts	Manuscripts	Date
Royal Manuscripts After King Rama III's Reign (After 1851)		
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter V Chuchok and Chapter VI Cunla Phon</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 63	1854
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter I Thotsa Phôn</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 34	1889
<i>Ongkan Chaeng Nam</i>	NLT: KhISs: Ms no. 175	1901
Undated Royal Manuscripts		
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter VIII Kuman</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 91	—
<i>Lilit Phra Lô</i>	NLT: LLSs: Ms no. 140	—
<i>Samutthakhot Kham Chan</i>	NLT: ChSs: Sò: Ms no. 22 (Volume I)	—
	NLT: ChSs: Sò: Ms no. 23 (Volume II)	—
	NLT: ChSs: Sò: Ms no. 24 (Volume III)	—
	NLT: ChSs: Sò: Ms no. 26 (Volume IV)	—
	NLT: ChSs: Sò: Ms no. 31 (Prince Paramanuchit's Version)	—
<i>Cindamani (The Odd Content Version)</i>	NLT: ASS: Ms no. 6	—
<i>Cindamani</i>	NLT: ASS: Ms no. 22	—
<i>Collection of Didactic Poems (or Prachum Khlong Suphasit)</i>	NLT: KhISs: Ms no. 202	—
<i>Süa Kho Kham Chan</i>	NLT: ChSs: Sò: Ms no. 91 (Volume I)	—
	NLT: ChSs: Sò: Ms no. 92 (Volume II)	—
<i>Anirut Kham Chan</i>	NLT: ChSs: Ò: Ms no. 72	—
<i>Sansoen Phra Kiat Phra Narai</i>	NLT: KhISs: Ms no. 329	—
<i>Collection of Old Elephant Treatises</i>	NLT: ChSs: Kò: Ms no. 21	—
Royal Manuscripts of the Front Palace		
<i>Maha Chat Kham Luang: Chapter XI Maha Rat</i>	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 107 (Volume II)	1830
	NLT: RSs: Ms no. 108 (Volume I)	1830
<i>Collection of Ancient Poems by Phraya Trang (or Prachum Khlong Kawi Boran)</i>	NLT: KhISs: Ms no. 154	—
<i>Kap He Rüa</i>	NLT: KHKHISs: Ms no. 2	—