A Method for Creating a Genealogical Tree of Khom Script Manuscripts: A Case Study from the Mahāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya

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1. Background

Khom script palm-leaf manuscripts are found in central and southern Thailand. Conventionally, a bundle of palm-leaf manuscript was separated into several small fascicles (phūk) and a scribe would copy text on both sides of a palm leaf, i.e. front and back. A page number or Anga number was inscribed on the back side. The manuscripts can be divided into two categories by their source or creation circumstances and repositories: royal manuscripts which relate to a king and a non-royal manuscript which do not relate to a king. Most royal palm-leaf manuscripts were made from the best quality palm leaf and inscribed by skillful experts in Khom script. Normally, we can know the year of creation by reading its colophon1). However, more than 80% of Khom manuscripts of the Pāli canon in Thailand have no colophon, which creates difficulty in finding information about their creation. It is therefore challenging to determine the age of a manuscript. Under the circumstances, information about the age and creation of manuscript can be determined by studying its physical appearance such as the decorations on the first or last page, a king’s emblem, the edition it belongs to, and the style of handwriting which differs by period and royal reign. To create a genealogical tree of Khom script manuscripts, a scholar is required to appraise each manuscript from multiple aspects and conduct a comparative study of the various sets of information.

2. Acquiring Information from a Manuscript

2.1. Physical appearance

This paper makes use of eight copies of the Mahāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya of Khom script manuscripts from the National library, Bangkok, Thailand. The information regard-
ing the physical appearance of each manuscript is as follows:

Most manuscripts are in good condition with complete text. They can be divided into two groups by the number of small fascicles. The manuscripts N1, N2, N3, N4, N7, and N8 have 17 fascicles (around 800–900 pages), while N5 and N6 have only 14 fascicles (around 700 pages). Only three manuscripts have a colophon that clearly shows the information about the manuscript creation. However, detailed study is needed to determine the age of the rest of manuscripts.

2.2. Information from a colophon

The colophons of the manuscripts N5, N6, and N7 are available and the year of creation is described clearly. The manuscript N6 was created in the Ayutthaya period and the N5 and N7 were created in the reign of King Rama II and IV in the Rattanakosin period.

For the manuscripts N1, N2, N8, there are some traces of the scribe or donor which hint to the manuscript age. In the manuscript N1, the name “Phraya Srisahadeva” is described as the donor. He was a well-known person in the reign of King Rama III in Rattanakosin period. Therefore, it can be assumed that N1 was created in the reign of King Rama III (1824–1851). For the manuscript N2, the scribe was the novice named Phuek of “Wat Sa Ket” temple. Even though the scribe was not a well-known person in history, the name of the temple does give important information. In the Ayutthaya period, the temple Wat Sa Ket was called “Wat Sa Kae,” which changed into “Wat Sa Ket” in the Rattanakosin period. Moreover, the cover of N2 is decorated with a painting style called Rod Nam Dam2), which was popular during the reign of King Rama III. Therefore, it seems that N2 was created in the Rattanakosin period around in the time of King Rama III (1824–1851). For the manuscript N8, the donor’s name is “Krom Maen Phra Mahesuan Sivavilad” who

| MS | Colophon | Age (years) | Available fascicles | Number of pages |
|----|----------|-------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| N1 | Not available; the donor’s name is found | Unknown | 1–17 | 852 |
| N2 | Not available; the scribe’s name is found | Unknown | 1–17 | 912 |
| N3 | Not available | Unknown | 1–17 | 856 |
| N4 | Not available | Unknown | 2–17 | 798 |
| N5 | Available | 206 | 1–14 | 696 |
| N6 | Available | 379 | 1–14 | 686 |
| N7 | Available | 151 | 1–17 | 906 |
| N8 | Not available; the donor’s name is found | Unknown | 1–17 | 848 |

Figure 1: The information of selected manuscripts from the National library, Bangkok, Thailand
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was a person in the reign of King Rama IV (1851–1868) in the Rattanakosin period. In conclusion, based on the above information, the manuscripts N1, N2, and N8 were created in the reigns of King Rama III to IV. However, for the manuscripts N3 and N4, there is no way to determine their age.

3. A Comparative Study of the Text in Manuscripts

3.1. Start point of each chapter

In each manuscript, the start points of each chapter of the Mahāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya are shown with their fascicle, page and line number. For example, the start points of the first chapter, Magga-samyutta, in all manuscripts is “1-ka-b-2,” which means the text of the first chapter begins from the “1st” fascicle, page “ka (b side)” and the “2nd” line. The details of the start points of each chapter in all manuscripts are shown in the table below.

The results show that the start points of each chapter of the manuscripts N1, N2, N3, N4, N7, and N8 are mostly identical, and the N5 and N6 are clearly different from the others.

3.2. Uddāna

An uddāna is a summary list added after each chapter of the text but it is not counted as content of the Pāli canon. Therefore, the details of uddāna are more likely to differ by the manuscript lineages than the text itself. Thus, uddāna provide more information to determine the age of manuscripts.

The comparison results show that most uddāna of the manuscript N1, N2, N3, N4, N7,
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and N8 are similar. It also seems that the manuscripts N1, N2, and N8 are occasionally in the same sub-group. But the N5 and N6 are different from the others.

3.3. Selected passages

Results of comparing selected passages found that the manuscripts N1, N2, N3, N4, N7, and N8 are similar and the N2, N7 are occasionally in the same sub-group. It is interesting that in the fascicle no. 8 of N1 and N3, both manuscripts skip page “ṇaṃ” but have page “ṇah” twice which is different from the N2, N4, N7, and N8. It seems that the manuscripts N1 and N3 are also in the same sub-group. On the other hand, the manuscripts N5 and N6 are partially similar and distinctive from the above group.

Figure 3: A sample detail of comparing the manuscripts by their uddāna

Figure 4: A sample detail of comparison of the manuscripts—Selected passages

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4. Conclusion

Based on the acquired information and comparison results, the eight copies of the manuscripts can be divided into two groups:

**Group A** (N1, N2, N3, N4, N7, N8): the manuscripts of this group have 17 fascicles and were created in the Rattanakosin period (Rattanakosin Lineage). Moreover, they can be divided into three sub-groups which are A1 (N1, N8, N3), A2 (N2, N7) and A3 (N4).

**Group B** (N5, N6): the manuscripts of this group have 14 fascicles and were created in the Ayutthaya period (Ayutthaya Lineage).

Finally, a genealogical tree of selected Khom script manuscripts of the *Mahāvagga* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya* can be drawn as follows:

Figure 5: The genealogical tree of Khom script manuscripts of the Mahāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya

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Notes

1) A colophon is a scribe’s statement at the beginning or end of a manuscript. Normally, it provides information about the creation of the manuscript.

2) Painting style with golden and black colors.

3) The *Mahāvagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya* consists of 12 chapters (*saṃyuttas*).

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Key words  Genealogical tree, Khom script, Palm leaf manuscript, Thailand, Pāli canon, *Saṃyuttanikāya* (Dhammachai Tipitaka Project Thailand, Ph.D)