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Intertextuality in Thai–Lao Buddhism: The *Gavampatisutta*

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Abstract—Reflecting his prominence in Thai–Lao Buddhism, the Buddha's disciple Gavampati is the subject of a corpus of texts recounting the religious career of the "Fat Monk" and culminating in his final extinction (*parinibbāna*). Although these narratives have received some scholarly attention, closer study of their manuscript transmission and textual features invites a reassessment of their structure, intertextual relationships, and circulation. This article examines the *Gavampatisutta* within the broader context of Tai Buddhist literary production, highlighting its links with Pali canonical and post-canonical traditions, the role of *nissaya* literature in vernacular transmission, and the articulation of themes such as merit-making and filial piety across Thai–Lao communities.

Keywords: Filial Piety; *Gavampatisutta*; Manuscript Transmission; Pali *Nissaya* Literature; Thai–Lao Buddhism

Introduction

The *Khavampattisut* (ຄະວັມປັດຕິສູດ; "the *sutta* of Gavampati") is a Pali–Lao text recounting the teachings of the Buddha's disciple Gavampati. It is preserved in two extant manuscripts from Laos (formerly the kingdom of Lan Xang) and exists in numerous related versions circulating in Thailand under various Siamese and Pali titles. Although it shares its name with a Pali canonical discourse in the *Saṁyuttanikāya* (S V 436–37), these texts differ significantly in content, structure, and narrative scope. This contrast reflects the broader divergence between Gavampati's marginal role in early Pali tradition and his far greater prominence in later Thai–Lao Buddhism.

In the Pali scriptures, Gavampati appears among the early converts of the Buddha (Vin I 15–20; see also John Strong, this Special Edition), but he remains a secondary figure within the Sinhalese textual corpus. By contrast, Southeast Asian traditions—especially those associated with Mon–Burmese historiography—credit him with introducing Buddhism to Thaton (Sudhammapura) in the Mon country (Rāmaññadesa), thereby elevating him to a foundational role in the religious history of the region (Lagirarde 2005; see also Donald Stadtner, this Special Edition). This expanded status is also reflected in the visual and ritual traditions of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, where Gavampati enjoys widespread popularity and is depicted in distinctive forms, most often with a protuberant belly, seated in meditation. His corpulent appearance—which led Western observers to refer to him as the "Fat Monk"[2]—

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[2] This colloquial designation, first coined by Gordon H. Luce (1969–70: I, 208), is not used in vernacular languages and does not occur in Buddhist texts.

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Figure 1: Hybrid representation of Gavampati–Qieci; 20th or 21st century, Wat Phan Tong, Chiang Mai © Gregory Kourilsky

is not attested in India or Sri Lanka. As Lagirarde (2005: 131) points out, this distinctive iconography has often given rise in Thailand to confusion between "Phra Khawam" (พระควัม) and the corpulent Chinese "Laughing Monk" Qieci 契此 (also known as Budai 布袋), who is frequently identified as an incarnation of the future Buddha Maitreya and whose image is commonly installed in both Buddhist monasteries and Daoist temples. It is not always possible to determine whether the confusion arising from the resemblance between these two figures is intentional **[Figure 1]**.

In Thailand and Laos, Gavampati has also been popularly known as Phra Sangkachai (พระสังกัจจายน์) or Phra Kachai (พธะภะจาย). The origin of this appellation, which is not attested in Myanmar, remains unclear, but it suggests an identification with (Mahā-)Kaccāyana, another eminent disciple of the Buddha.[3] François Lagirarde (2004: 98) dates this association to the Rattanakosin period in Siam and to an earlier period in Lan Na. An inscription on a bronze statue of the "Fat Monk" from Laos attests that he was already identified as Phra Kachai in Lan Xang by the mid-17th century **[Figure 2a]**.[4] Other inscribed images from Laos indicate that the monk

[3] Mahākaccāyana of the canonical tradition is also well represented in the vernacular corpus, where several texts are specifically devoted to him. See Lagirarde 2001.

[4] The inscription states, in a stereotypical formulation, that the sponsor "had this image of Phra Kachai made with the aim of ensuring that the [Buddhist] doctrine would endure for 5,000 years [after the Buddha's Great Extinction]". It gives the exact date of the statue's consecration as year [100]9 of the Little Era (CS = *cūḷasakarāja*), corresponding to 17 March 1648 CE.



a b

Figures 2a–b: Two bronze images of Phra Kachai; bearing donative inscriptions, dated 1648 CE (a) and 1845 CE (b); Ho Pha Keo Museum, H. 35 cm, inv. no. 230 & 333, Vientiane © Catherine Raymond

continued to be known by this name in the mid-19th century Laos **[Figure 2b]**.[5]

This article focuses on the Lao *Khavampattisut* as a textual artifact, examining its manuscript transmission, variant titles, and intertextual connections within the broader corpus of Tai Buddhist literature. By situating it within this regional and textual network, the study aims to clarify how local traditions reworked canonical and post-canonical materials to produce new narratives centered on Gavampati, thereby contributing to his enduring prominence in Thailand and Laos.

Gavampati in the Thai–Lao Manuscript Tradition

Louis Finot (1917: 66) first mentioned a vernacular "*Gavaṃpati-sutta*" (i.e., *Khavampattisut*) in his monumental study of Lao literature.[6] He provides a summary of what he describes as a "hagiographic legend", emphasizing the central place occupied in the narrative by Gavampati's final extinction (*parinibbāna*). Finot detected an inspiration from the canonical *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (D II 72–168) and noted the existence in Laos of similar accounts relating the *parinibbāna* of other eminent disciples such as Ānanda, Sāriputta, and Mahākassapa.

[5] An inscription likewise dedicated to "Phra Kachai," very similar to the previous one, is engraved on the base of a statue of the Fat Monk, dated 22 March 1845 (also indicated in the Little Era). I am grateful to Michel Lorrillard for providing the dates and transcriptions of these two inscriptions.

[6] Finot in fact first mentions this text—described as an "apocryphal Jātaka"—as early as 1914, in a letter addressed to the Commissioner General in Luang Prabang (Lagirarde 2001: 313).

This parallel is particularly relevant since, as Lagirarde (2000) later demonstrated, (*pari*)*nibbāna* narratives constitute a literary genre in their own right within the Thai–Lao Buddhist corpus, especially in Siam (central Thailand).[7]

This genre, attested in both monolingual Pali and vernacular compositions, may be regarded as a subcategory of sutra (*sutta*), as some titles clearly suggest (see below). The *Khavampattisut* is composed in vernacular Lao, more precisely in the form of a *nissaya*: the main text, written in Lao, is interspersed with Pali terms or passages that are glossed or explained in the vernacular.[8] Such bilingual Pali–vernacular compositions, or "bitexts"—a term coined by Trent Walker (2022a: 271)—constitute a major component of the Buddhist manuscript corpus not only in Laos, but also in Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

Lagirarde was the first to offer a study and French translation of the *Khavampattisut* (2001: 321–443), more than 80 years after its initial mention by Finot. He also compared this Lao *nissaya* with related versions of the Gavampati narrative from central Thailand, where the text exists both in monolingual Pali and in Siamese translation. No Pali–Siamese *nissaya*, however, was identified in his survey.

The titles of these Pali and Siamese manuscripts reflect the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the Fat Monk, referring at times, as explained above, to Gavampati and at others to (Mahā-)Kaccāyana—although this confusion does not appear in the texts themselves, which consistently refer to Gavampati.[9] This ambiguity, combined with that of the literary genres to which these works belong, results in considerable variation in the titles—for example, *Gavampatisutta*, *Gavampatinibbāna*, *Braḥ Gavampatinibbānasutta*, *Kaccāyananibbāna* in Pali and their Thai equivalents (Lagirarde 2000: 76).

Such diversity contrasts with the situation in Laos, where this narrative is known only through two manuscript copies identified to date. Both are Pali–Lao *nissaya* and uniformly entitled *Khavampattisut*. The first (Khs1), lacking a few folios, is preserved at the National Library of Laos or NLL **[Figure 3a]**. It likely corresponds to manuscript no. E 210 listed in the "Liste générale des manuscrits laotiens" appended to Finot (1917: 184). This classification number refers to the EFEO library collection, then located in Hanoi, which was transferred to the NLL following the country's independence in 1954. Although its exact provenance is unknown, the manuscript was probably among the texts collected by Finot during his first mission to Luang Prabang in 1900, when he was appointed director of the newly established École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO).[10] The manuscript served as the basis for the later edition and French translation by Lagirarde.

[7] These hagiographic accounts seem to have first been written and circulated independently before compilation as the *Nibbāna of the 80 Great Disciples* (*Asītimahāsāvakanibbāna*). See Lagirarde 2000: 59–61, and 2006; also Schnake 2024.

[8] Word-for-word translation or gloss (*namsap*, ນາມສັບ; Skt, *nāmaśabda*) and the translation or explanation of extended quoted Pali passages (*vohan*, ໂວຫານ; P., *vohāra*) are comparable to *nissaya* (McDaniel 2008).

[9] A Pali manuscript from the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) illustrates this well: the title folio gives *Kaccāyanasutta*, while the colophon states "the *Gavampatinibbānasutta* is finished" (*Gavampatinibbānasuttaṁ niṭṭhitaṁ*). See Filliozat 2020: 46–47.

[10] "Laos" in *BEFEO* 21: 308–312.



Figure 3a: First folios of the *Khavampattisut* manuscript in Pali–Lao, dated 1697/8 CE, National Library of Laos, Vientiane © NLL

This palm-leaf manuscript originally consisted of two fascicles totaling 49 folios, with an additional cover folio. It is written in Lao Tham (*dhamma*) script, in four lines on both sides. Three colophons—one on the verso of the first folio and two at the end—state that Khs1 was copied in [10]59 CS, that is, of the Little Era **[Figure 3b]**, corresponding to 1697/8 CE.[11] The craftsmanship and condition of the folios, as well as the spelling and style of the colophons, are characteristic of 17th- and 18th-century manuscripts. The colophons further indicate that the copying of the manuscript was commissioned or sponsored by a dignitary holding the rank of *saen* (ແສນ; "ruler of one hundred"), named Mongkhun (ມຸງຄຸນ), together with his wife, who express the conventional wish for the Buddha's teaching to endure for 5,000 years and for them to attain nirvana. Trent Walker (pers. comm.) has identified this dignitary as an active sponsor of other Lao manuscripts in the late 17th century.

The second manuscript of the *Khavampattisut* (Khs2) is preserved in the collection of the Luang Prabang Museum, formerly the Royal Library. This collection was established at the instigation of Government Commissioner Meillier, who, noting the dilapidated state of the city's monastic libraries, persuaded the monarch of Luang Prabang, Sisavang Vong (r. 1904–1945), to found the "Bibliothèque royale" in 1914 (Finot 1917: 2). Khs2 consists of three fascicles totaling 74 folios and is complete. It likely corresponds to the

[11] A handwritten note in modern Lao script was added to the manuscript's cover folio, apparently in the 20th century, incorrectly giving the date 2459 BE (= 1916 CE) as that of the copy. The error likely arises from a fine scratch at the end of the word *sangkalat* (ສັງກຣາດ, "era") in one of the colophons, which could be misread as the numeral 4—thus [2]459 BE. This misreading also misled Lagirarde (2000: 76; 2001: 400) who interpreted it as 1902 CE.



Figure 3b: Detail of the colophons, bearing the date [10]59 CS = 1697/8 CE © NLL

manuscript in three fascicles labeled R 466 in Finot's inventory, formerly kept in the Royal Library. Like Khs1, it is a Pali–Lao *nissaya*, written in Tham Lao script,[12] dated 1216 CS (= 1854/5 CE). The text contains numerous errors in the Pali passages, a feature often observed in relatively late manuscript copies in Laos.[13] Khs1 and Khs2 are very similar in content but differ in some details, suggesting that they were copied from different exemplar manuscripts.

The dates recorded in the colophons of these two manuscripts are particularly valuable, as none of the available examples from central Thailand provide a date of copying, let alone composition. In their case, only codicological features —such as craftsmanship, layout, and possibly handwriting—offer approximate indications. On this basis, Jacqueline Filliozat has tentatively dated a Siamese manuscript of the *Mahākaccāyananibbāna*, preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF PALI 409), to the 18th century.[14] The date 1059 CS (1697/8 CE) recorded for Khs1 therefore provides a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of this narrative. This date broadly coincides with the earliest securely dated image of the Fat Monk in Laos, which, as we have seen, bears a donative inscription giving the year [100]9 CS (= 1648 CE) **[Fig. 2a]**. This period shortly precedes the fragmentation of the Lan Xang kingdom (1707 CE) into the principalities of Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Champassak. The date of Khs2, in turn, shows that the *Khavam-*

[12] The title appearing in the margins of the first folio of each fascicle is respectively *Khavampattisut nisai* (ຄະວັມປັດຕິສູດນິໃສ) and *Nisai Khavampatti* (ນິໃສຄະວັມ ປັດຕິ), that is, "The *Nissaya* of the *Gavampati*[*-sutta*]".

[13] Lagirarde (2001: 314) correctly identified this copy in Finot's list but was unable to locate it at the time of his doctoral research. Thanks to the extensive inventorying and digitization work initiated in 1992 by Harald Hundius and later continued by David Wharton, these Lao manuscripts are now readily accessible online at: https://iiif.crossasia.org/s/dllm.

[14] Cited in Lagirarde 2000: 58, n. 3. According to Lagirarde, this palm-leaf manuscript is probably among those sent to France from Ayutthaya by the MEP Missionaries before the city's destruction in 1767.

pattisut continued to be copied in Luang Prabang as late as the eve of the French colonial period, a fact also consistent with the presence of the Fat Monk in the statuary of that time **[Fig. 2b]**.

Finot (1917: 177) compiled his "general list" of Lao manuscripts on the basis of a small number of monastic library inventories. One might expect that more extensive surveys would yield additional copies of the *Khavampattisut* or related texts. However, this does not appear to be the case. The Digital Library of Lao Manuscripts, which catalogs more than 12,000 items, does not list any other copy under this title or a related one. The text also appears to be absent from catalogs in northeast Thailand, despite the predominantly Lao-speaking population of the region. While the existence of additional, as yet unidentified copies cannot be excluded, the available evidence suggests that the text did not enjoy the same level of popularity in the Lao sphere as it did in Siam or central Thailand.

Even more strikingly, no text related to Gavampati has yet been identified in the manuscript collections of northern Thailand, despite the close affinities between the religious corpora of Lan Xang and the former Lan Na kingdom.[15] Nor does it appear in Burmese collections, notwithstanding the popularity of the Fat Monk in Myanmar, as attested by both late chronicles and popular imagery—a situation paralleled in northern Thailand, where his statues abound in temples and monasteries. Finally, in Cambodia, no similar text has been identified to date.[16]

Gavampatisutta and *Khavampattisut*: A Comparison

The relationship between the Pali *Gavampatisutta* preserved in Siamese manuscript collections and the Lao *Khavampattisut*—a vernacular *nissaya* version of the same narrative—can be clarified through a close comparison of their structure, language, and textual features.

Considering the various extant versions of the narrative of Gavampati in Siam and Laos, the question arises as to which served as the basis for the others. The most straightforward assumption is that the Pali version preceded the vernacular ones, which would then represent translations or adaptations. Some caution is nevertheless required, since in mainland Southeast Asia it is not uncommon for Pali texts to have been reconstructed from vernacular compositions.[17] Only a close comparison between the Pali and vernacular versions can shed light on this issue. Such a comparison is now possible thanks to the available critical edition of the monolingual Pali *Gavam-*

[15] Some Lan Na manuscripts belonging to the so-called *nibbāna* genre have been recorded in various online databases, but none seem to concern Gavampati or (Mahā-)Kaccāyana (see also Cœdès 1966: 94–95). Further research is needed to determine whether the *Khavampattisut* is attested in the manuscript traditions of other Tai-speaking Buddhist groups, such as the Tai Lue or Tai Khuen.

[16] I would like to thank Olivier de Bernon and Trent Walker for checking whether this was indeed the case in the available catalogs of Cambodian manuscripts.

[17] This is the case, for instance, with the *Jinakālamālī* (Jkm), a Pali chronicle that was compiled in part from various earlier chronicles written in Tai (Penth 1994: 48). It is also known that some Burmese legal codes in Pali are translations from vernacular models—the latter themselves possibly derived from earlier Pali compositions. See, for example, Huxley 1996: 84; also Lammerts & Kieffer-Pülz 2025.

patisutta and its vernacular edition in Lao of the *Khavampattisut*.[18]

All versions present a hagiographic account of Gavampati, from the circumstances of his "transformation" to his nirvana. The narrative structure is broadly consistent across versions, with only minor variations. It may be divided into three main parts:

1. The story of the monk Brahmaputta, one of the 80 Great Disciples of the Buddha (*asīti mahāsāvakās*), living in the "city of the Golden Land" (*Hemabhūminagara*),[19] renowned for his religious fervor and physical beauty. To avoid being mistaken for the Buddha, he transforms himself into a potbellied, hunchbacked dwarf, and takes the name Gavampati.[20]
2. An account of Gavampati's monastic life as an arhat, culminating in his successful conversion of a householder named Sambala through an extended sermon—his last before entering final extinction. In this sense, the title *Gavampatisutta*/*Khavampattisut* may refer either to this sermon or to the narrative as a whole.
3. The final episode recounting Gavampati's death and attainment of *parinibbāna*, envisioned as a great city made of crystal.

Despite their titles, the *Gavampatisutta* and the *Khavampattisut* do not conform to the structure of a classical sutra. They do not begin with the standard Pali formula *evaṁ me sutaṁ ekaṁ samayaṁ bhagavā* [...] *viharati* ("Thus I have heard: at one time the Blessed One was residing [...]"), which traditionally signals that the discourse was "heard" (*suta*) by an auditor—often identified as the disciple Ānanda—from the Buddha himself. Whereas canonical sutras typically depict the Dhamma as spoken by the Buddha, often in verse (*gāthās*), the Thai–Lao narratives place such teachings in the mouth of Gavampati (Lagirarde 2001: 328).

Both the monolingual Pali and the Siamese-language versions begin directly with the story of Brahmaputta, alias Gavampati: *ekasmiṁ kira samaye eko mahāthero Brahmaputto nāma* [...] ("At one time, there was a great elder named Brahmaputta [...]"). The Lao *Khavampattisut* retains this opening but precedes it with an incipit in Pali verse, loosely following the *anuṭṭhubha* (Skt, *anuṣṭubh*) meter. Although not identical, the incipits in Khs1 and Khs2 are closely related. Both take the form of an exhortation addressed to an implied audience by an unidentified narrator, followed by a Lao translation or gloss in *nissaya* style, which is rendered here in English.

[18] For the Pali edition, see Javier Schnake, this Special Edition; for the Lao text, see Lagirarde 2001: 476–506.

[19] This may be a reference to Suvaṇṇabhūmi, possibly a region of Southeast Asia.

[20] Javier Schnake (this Special Edition) is likely correct in interpreting the Pali compound *gavaṁ-pati* as "Lord of Speech", rather than "Lord of Cattle". While the latter, more literal interpretation (*go* = "ox, cow") may appear more straightforward, it makes little sense in the canonical context. By contrast, all versions agree that the monk acquires the name Gavampati because of his ability to convert beings to the Dhamma through the harmonious recitation of the teachings and the use of appropriate speech (Khs1 [2B]).

Khs1:

Namo tass' atthu
yo sāvakānaṁ pavaro |
seṭṭho thero ñātīnaṁ |
damakusalo karissāmi | taṁ
parinibbānaṁ taṁ sunātha[21]
samāhitaṁ ||

[Homage to Him.]
[***sādhavo***:] O Everyone!
yo thero: The Elder who, ***pavaro***: was more excellent, ***sāvakānaṁ***: than [all the other] disciples, ***seṭṭho***: the best [among them], ***damakusalo***: and skilled in training, ***ñātīnaṁ***: his family and relatives, [***ahaṁ***:] I, ***kathesāmi***:[22] will speak about, ***taṁ***: that Elder, ***parinibbānaṁ***: who has already reached final extinction.
[***tumhe***:] O all of you!
samāhitā:[23] who have already established your mindfulness, ***sunātha***: listen, [***taṁ vacanaṁ***:] to the words I am about to utter as follows.

Khs2:

Namo tass' atthu
vanditvā sirasā buddhaṁ |
sasaddhammagaṇuttamaṁ |
upaṭṭhākānañ ca
ovādādinna-|gavampattissa
ekatherassa ||
nidānaṁ bhāsissaṁ |
sādhavo sukham icchantā |
dvisotaṁ odahitvāna | taṁ
suṇātha samāhitā ||

[Homage to Him.]
[***sādhavo***:] O Everyone!
[***ahaṁ***: I,] ***vanditvā***: having paid homage, ***buddhaṁ***: to the Buddha—the Enlightened One who understood the entire Dhamma by himself perfectly, ***sasa***[***d***]***dhammagaṇuttamaṁ***: who is complete with his teaching for good people and his noble assembly (*saṅgha*) that is excellent—***sirasā***: with my head, [***bhā***]***sissaṁ***: I shall speak, ***nidānaṁ***: the story of the past,[24] ***ekatherassa***: of one great Elder, ***uppaṭṭhākānañ ca ovādā***[***di***]***nnaṁ Gavampattissa***: whose name is Gavampati, and who [f. 2] instructed families devoted to the service [of the Saṅgha].[25]
sādhavo: O Everyone!
tumhe: you, ***sukha***[***m***] ***icchantā***: who surely seek happiness for yourselves, ***odahitvāna***: please keep, ***dvisotaṁ***: your two ears wide open, ***samāhitvā***:[26] establish mindfulness, ***suṇātha***: and listen to, ***taṁ nidānaṁ***: this story!

For both versions, this introductory speech functions as a sermon, intended to be read aloud or recited in a liturgical setting rather than studied in solitude. In this respect, the *Khavampattisut* has

[21] Lagirarde (2001: 373) reads *tasmiṁ kathesi*.
[22] *karissāmi* in the verses.
[23] *samāhitaṁ* in the verses.
[24] Literally, *tamnan nithan* (ตำนานนิทาน).
[25] *takun upatthak* (ตะภูธอุปัดถาก; P., *kūla upaṭṭhāka*)—although *kūla* is omitted in the Pali section.
[26] *samāhitā* in the verses.

more in common with texts of the *anisong* (ອານິສົງ; P., *ānisaṁsa*, "advantage") or *salong* (ສະຫຼອງ, "celebration") genre than with a sutra, as understood in the canonical tradition.[27] Indeed, the excerpt from Khs2 reproduced above explicitly refers to the "advantage" that listeners to this narrative are certain to obtain, possibly including the attainment of nirvana.

Additionally, the Lao *Khavampattisut* differs from its Pali counterpart not only in its homiletic form but also in its use of Pali terms, which are not primarily intended to convey meaning, but rather to legitimize the act of preaching and, potentially, to serve an educational function.

From a formal point of view, these excerpts exemplify a principle underlying many Southeast Asian "bitexts", in which Pali terms, isolated from their original context, are immediately followed by a literal translation or vernacular gloss. The *Khavampattisut* alternates Pali verses, delivered by Gavampati in direct speech, with narrative developments recounted in indirect discourse by an anonymous narrator. The monolingual Pali version from Siam follows the same structure; however, the prose passages are, by definition, entirely in Pali.

An illustrative excerpt from the *Khavampattisut* is given below,[28] in which Gavampati preaches to Sambala in order to convert him to the Dhamma:

[Folio 19B] He [Gavampati] then uttered the following verses (*gāthā*):
mātāpitā disapubbā | ācariyā dakkhiṇadisā |
ñātivaggā[29] **pacchādisā |**
bhariyāputtā ca uttarādisā |
dāsakammakarā heṭṭhā |
uddhaṁ samaṇabrāhmaṇā |

[***mātāpitā***: Fathers and mothers, ***disapubbā***: are called "the eastern direction"; ***ācariyā***: teachers, ***dakkhiṇadisā***: are called "the southern direction"; ***ñātivaggā***: family members, ***pacchādisā***: are called "the western direction"; ***bhariyāputtā***: children and wives, ***uttarādisā***: are called "the northern direction"; ***dāsakammakarā***: works and servants—male and female—***heṭṭhādisā***: are "the nadir"; ***samaṇabrāhmaṇā***: leaders in religious life, ***uddhaṁdisā***: are called "the zenith". ***thero***: The Elder Mahā-Gavampati, ***ahā***: continued:][30]
tātā: Listen, O Everyone!
mātāpitāro: Mother and father, ***mayā***: I, ***vuccati***: call them, ***pubbādisā***:[31] "the direction of the east". ***kasmā***: Why is that? ***vis***[***s***]***ajjanā***: The answer [is as follows]:

[27] On this literary genre, see Kourilsky 2007: 43–44.

[28] To avoid repetition and undue heaviness, only passages in Lao are translated into English; Pali passages (in bold) are left untranslated in the body of the text. This approach also reflects how Lao listeners—most of whom do not understand Pali—are likely to perceive the sermon.

[29] *ñātivatta* in the *Gavampatisutta* (see Javier Schnake, this Special Edition).

[30] This extended bracketed passage is absent from Khs1 and has been supplied here from Khs2.

[31] *disapubbā* in the verses.

hi: In truth, ***mātāpitāro***: fathers and mothers are called, ***pubbādisā***: "eastern direction", ***pubbapakāratāya***: because they were the first among all to show kindness[32] [toward us]. ***mātāpitaro***: [Indeed,] fathers and mothers, ***katvā***: having accomplished, ***puññaṁ***: meritorious deeds in the past first, ***akaṁsu***: then made, ***pa***[***t***]***thanaṁ***: a vow, thinking, "***mayaṁ***: we both, [***la***]***bhissāma***: wish to obtain, ***puttaṁ***: a son,[33] ***manāpaṁ eva***: exactly as desired [f. 20A], ***iminā puññena***: by means of our meritorious deeds!"

mātāpitāro: The mother and the father, ***mayā vuccati***: I therefore call them, ***pubbādisā iti***: "the eastern direction". ***putte***: As soon as the child, ***pajjāyamāne***: came out [of its mother's womb], ***mātāpitaro***: his parents, ***rakkhanti***: protected, ***posenti***: and raised, ***puttaṁ***: this very child. ***mātāpitaro***: Mother and father, ***niyojenti***: provided [***puttaṁ*** their child],[34] ***atthe***: with everything he needed, ***pubbe***: right from the beginning.[35] ***mātāpitaro***: Mother and father, ***das***[***s***]***enti***: then advised, [***y***]***uttakammaṁ***: on what was appropriate, ***putta***[***ṁ***]: for their child [to do]. ***pubbe***: From the earliest days, ***denti***: they provided, ***vatthālaṅkāraṁ***: cloths and adornments, ***puttassa***: to their child, ***puna***: afterward. ***mayā vuccati***: That is why I say that, ***mātāpitaro***: parents are, ***pubbadisā' ti***: "the eastern direction".

As Lagirarde (2001: 328) points out, this passage—particularly the opening Pali verses—is inspired by the *Sigālovādasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* (D III 191–192), in which the Buddha teaches a brahmin named Siṅgala how a "noble disciple" (*ariyasāvaka*) honors the six cardinal directions (*chaddisā*). However, several important differences should be noted. As mentioned above, the *gāthā* is presented in both *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* as Gavampati's own teaching, rather than as a discourse delivered by the Buddha, as in the canonical sutra. Although a minor detail, the recipient of the teaching is not the brahmin Siṅgala, but a certain Sambala, a lay follower (*upāsaka*) "of wrong views" (*micchādiṭṭhiko*) who had hitherto remained unmoved by the Dhamma (folios 18B–19A).

In fact, at the literal level, the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* borrow from the sutra only a couple of verses. Moreover, these Pali verses are not reproduced verbatim; in addition to variations in wording, the correspondence

[32] *khunopakan* (ຄຸໂນປะกาม; P., *guṇopakāra*). See explanation on this word below.

[33] Here, the Lao author translates *putta* as "son" (*sai*, ຊาย), in keeping with its original meaning in Pali. In other instances, however, he leaves the child's gender unspecified by using the term *luk* (ลูก).

[34] Found only in Khs2.

[35] The translation given here is based on the Lao gloss, which sometimes differs significantly from the strict meaning of the Pali term to which it refers. The same applies to the other excerpts below.

Table 1: The Six Directions and Their Social Referents in D III and *Gavampatisutta/Khavampattisut*

Directions	D III	*Gavampatisutta/Khavampattisut*
East	Parents (*mātāpitā*)	Parents (*mātāpitā*)
South	Teachers (*ācariyā*)	Teachers (*ācariyā*)
West	Wife and children (*puttadāra*)	Family members (*ñātivagga*)
North	Friends and colleagues (*mittāmaccā*)	Wives and children (*bhariyāputtā*)
Nadir	Servants and workers (*dāsakammakarā*)	Servants and workers (*dāsakammakarā*)
Zenith	Ascetics and brahmins (*samaṇabrahmaṇā*)	Ascetics and brahmins (*samaṇabrahmaṇā*)

between the cardinal directions and the categories of persons to be venerated does not exactly match that of the canonical text.

Table 1 shows that the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* have, on the one hand, added "family members" (*ñātivagga*) and, on the other, omitted "friends and colleagues" (*mittāmaccā*) found in the canonical list. "Wives and children", here expressed as the compound *bhariyāputtā* rather than *puttadāra*, are associated with the north rather than the west, as in the canonical sutra, the latter direction being reassigned to "family members".

The addition of *ñātivagga* is significant, given the importance of family and forebears in the religious life of Thai–Lao Buddhist communities (see below). The reassignment of the cardinal directions—specifically, the attribution of the west to "family members" rather than to "wives and children", now associated with the north—may be explained by the traditional association of the west with death and, by extension, with ancestor worship.

Apart from the word-for-word translation that immediately follows the *gāthā*, the *nissaya* does not appear to be based on any text from the *Tipiṭaka* or its authorized commentaries or sub-commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*s or *ṭīkā*s). A close comparison between the *Gavampatisutta* and the *Khavampattisut* shows that the Pali words glossed in the latter text correspond precisely to those that constitute the body of the former. In other words, the *Khavampattisut* appear to function as a vernacular adaptation of the Pali version—though not of the entire text, but of selected passages. Exceptions may be attributed to a few minor additions or adjustments introduced by the Lao compiler, presumably for the sake of clarity.

As is the case for most *nissaya*s, the Pali terms are, moreover, rearranged from their original syntactic order to conform to Lao, which follows very different grammatical rules. This "syntactical rearrangement" (Walker 2022a: 274) renders the Pali scarcely intelligible to anyone unfamiliar with this method of composition, to the point that one might even question the existence of an original Pali text (Lagirarde 2001: 325).

The following passage from the Pali version (see also Javier Schnake, this

Special Edition) corresponds to the excerpt from the *Khavampattisut* cited above. The index numbers, given as subscripts below each word, indicate the order in which the Pali terms appear in the Lao *nissaya*; the absence of a number indicates that the word is omitted in the Lao text:[36]

thero āha:
"tātā$_1$ kasmā$_5$ mātāpitā$_2$[37]
'pubbadisā$_4$' ti vuccanti$_3$.[38]
pubbapakāratthāya$_3$[39] mātāpitaro$_2$
hi$_1$ pubbe puññaṁ$_5$ katvā$_4$ "iminā$_{11}$[40]
pamāṇena$_{10}$[41] puttaṁ$_9$ labhissāmā$_8$"[42] ti
patthanaṁ$_7$ akaṁsu$_6$ tasmā mātāpitaro$_1$
'pubbadisā' ti$_3$ vuccanti$_2$.[43]
pajāyamāne$_2$ putte$_1$ puttaṁ$_6$
rakkhanti$_4$ posenti$_5$ mātāpitaro$_3$.
pubbe$_4$ atthe$_3$ puttaṁ$_2$ niyojenti$_1$.[44]
pubbe yuttāyuttakamme$_2$[45] puttaṁ$_3$
dassenti$_1$.[46] pubbe$_1$ vatthālaṅkāraṁ$_3$
puna$_5$ puttassa$_4$ denti$_2$. tasmā
mātāpitaro$_2$ 'pubbadisā' ti$_3$ vuccanti$_1$.[47]

In summary, the Lao *Khavampattisut* evidently derives from the *Gavampatisutta* in Pali, for which numerous manuscripts are preserved in central Thailand. The question remains whether the former represents a direct translation from the latter by a Lao scholar, or an adaptation, rendered in Tham script and the Lao vernacular, of an earlier bilingual Pali–Siamese version circulating in Khom script, that is, a form of Khmer script commonly used for Buddhist texts in the central region. Although no such intermediary version has yet been identified in northern Thai collections, the possibility of a transmission through Lan Na, already adapted into a northern Thai–Lao milieu and transcribed in Tham script, cannot be totally excluded.[48]

Gavampati and Filial Piety

The sutra dedicated to Gavampati sheds light on how Thai–Lao scholars composed texts that, while drawing inspiration from canonical or post-canonical writings, nonetheless constitute original works.

While taking, as we have seen, a passage from the *Sigālovādasutta* as their model, the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut* differ from it—without ever explicitly referring to that source—in placing particular emphasis on the theme of filial piety. In the canonical sutra, the Buddha's instruction concerning obligations toward parents occupies only a few lines (see D III 189). In the *Gavampatisutta* and *Khavampattisut*, however, Gavampati develops this argument in much greater depth. In fact, filial piety constitutes the most important part of the sermon that

[36] Significant variations in the *nissaya* in comparison with the Pali *Gavampatisutta* are indicated in the footnotes below.

[37] Khs1: *mātāpitaro.*

[38] Khs1: *mayā vuccati.*

[39] Khs1: *pubbādisā* [...] *pubbapakāratthāya.*

[40] Khs1: *iminā puññena.*

[41] Khs1: *mānapam eva*.

[42] Khs1: *mayaṁ* [...] *labhissāma.*

[43] Khs1: *mayā vuccati.*

[44] Khs1: *mātāpitaro niyojenti.*

[45] Khs1: *yuttakammaṁ.*

[46] Khs1: *mātāpitaro dassenti.*

[47] Khs1: *mayā vuccati.*

[48] Although they differ slightly in graphic form, "Tham Lao" and "Tham Lan Na" should be regarded as two closely related variants of the same script, just as the variants used by the Tai Lue of the former Sipsongpanna kingdom (Xishuangbanna 西双版纳) and the Tai Khuen of the Chiang Tung (Kengtung) region in Myanmar.

Gavampati delivers to Sambala; moreover, this sermon contains certain archetypal themes found in other texts from Thailand and Laos.[49]

For instance, the texts explain that, if parents are called the "eastern direction" (*pubbādisā*), it is because they are "the first among all to show kindness (*pubbapakāratāya*) [toward their child]". This interpretation of parents as the first benefactors in one's life does not occur in the canonical *Sigālovādasutta*. Here, the author seems to play on the double meaning of *pubba*, namely "before" and "east".

A similar vision of parents as the first benefactors in one's life can, on the other hand, be found in the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* (Maṅg-d), a Pali work composed in 1524 CE in Chiang Mai and one of the most widely disseminated Buddhist texts in Thai–Lao Buddhist communities (Kourilsky 2021: 69). Drawing both on the canonical *Sigālovādasutta* and on a passage from the *Aṅguttaranikāya*, the Maṅg-d states that, through their efforts and sacrifices for the well-being of their children, parents are their "first benefactors" (*pubbakārī*, lit., "those who have done [good] first"; Kourilsky 2015: 464, 474). Conversely, children are "[those] who must show them gratitude" (*kataññūkatavedī*). Gavampati speaks in similar terms of filial piety in the sermon he delivers at Sambala:

> [Folio 23B] ***putte vaḍhite ca mātāpitaro rakkhitabbā kathaṁ:***[50] How do parents take care of their children when they grow up?
>
> ***mātāpitaro***: Parents, ***putte niyojenti***: raise their children, ***kusalesu***: by having them perform meritorious deeds, encouraging them by saying: "***amma tātā tumhe***: Listen to us, children [f. 24A], ***tumhe***: you, ***rakkhatha***: must hold, ***sīlaṁ***: the precepts, ***tumhe***: [and] you, ***detha***: must practice, ***dānaṁ***: giving [toward the Community of monks]!"
>
> On the other hand, ***mātāpitaro***: mothers and fathers, ***nivārenti***: ought to prevent, ***putte***: their children, ***pāpeti***: from committing wrongful acts. ***taṁ puttadhammarakkhaṇaṁ nāma***: This is what is referred to as "raising children in a righteous manner".
>
> ***pana***: In return, ***puttā***: children, ***rakkhanti***: [must] protect, ***mātāpitaraṁ***: their parents, ***dhammena***: in a righteous manner. ***mātāpitaro***: Just as parents, ***bahūpakārā***: have made many good deeds, ***puttānaṁ***: for their children, ***puttā***: children in turn,

[49] This topic is even more prominent in Khs1, which emphasizes in its incipit that Gavampati's merit came about because he "intelligently delivered the teachings [of the Dhamma] to his family and relatives (*ñātīnaṁ*)" (see above). Moreover, this echoes a passage from the *Sāsanavaṁsa*, the famous 19th-century Pali chronicle written by the Burmese monk Paññāsāmi, in which Gavampati travels to Sudhammapura (Thaton) in the Mon kingdom (Rāmaññaraṭṭha) to teach the Dhamma, with the particular aim of saving his mother from rebirth in hell (Sās 36).

[50] In some cases, strictly following the word order of the Pali text makes translation difficult—especially where the Pali itself is irregular or incorrect. In such instances, as here, words have been regrouped for the sake of clarity.

> ***anuppatikāraṇā***: must repay the kindness, ***mātāpitunaṁ***: to their parents. It is only right and proper!

This relation of reciprocity gives rise to the notion of debt—expressed in the Thai–Lao tradition by the concept of *khun* (ຄຸນ, "legacy"; P., *guṇa*, "virtue", "benefit", or "merit")—which makes parents creditors who must be repaid by caring for them, encouraging them to follow the path of the Dhamma, and performing rites for them after their death (Kourilsky 2022: 165–166). This is why the *Khavampattisut* glosses the Pali word *bahūpakārā* (lit., "of great help") with *khunopakan* (P., *guṇopakāra*), referring to the support provided by parents to their child. In this example, we can see how a "vernacular" gloss of a Pali word may be formed using a term that is itself borrowed from Pali but to which a slightly different meaning is applied. Here, the substitution of the term *guṇa* for *bahu* in the compound introduces the notion of a "debt" that children incur toward their parents from birth and that they must "repay" once they become adults. These archetypal themes are also found in Maṅg-d (Kourilsky 2015: 474–475), as well as in other texts from Thailand and Laos.[51] Gavampati then elaborates on this same theme:

> [Folio 27A] [To repay one's debt (*paṭigunaṁ*) to one's parents] ***puttā***: children, ***sampaṭicchiṁsu***: must agree, ***pāde pāde mātāpitunaṁ attano sisena***: to place their own head at their feet, ***sacce atthi mātāpitusu***: as long as their parents, ***jivamānesu***: are alive.[52]
>
> ***puttā***: All children, ***posenti***: [must] support, ***rakkhanti***: and protect, ***mātāpitare***: their parents, ***annenā vā pāṇena vā vatthena vā senāsanādīhi sabbupakārehi***: by providing them with basic necessities, such as food, drink, clothes, a dwelling-place, ***veyyāvaccakammehi ca***: or anything that may be useful [to them].
>
> ***puttā***: Children, ***mātāpitaraṁ bhāvanti***: make also their parents [f. 27B], ***bhāvanaṁ***: develop mind-cultivation on kindliness [towards all living beings] (*mettābhāvanā*), ***payojenti***: and encourage them, ***sabbakusalesu***: [to perform], merits of all kinds; ***mātāpitaro sace***: if their parents, ***gahaṇti***: hold, ***micchādiṭṭhiṁ***: wrong views, ***puttā***: then their children, ***patiṭṭhapesuṁ***: must reestablish them, ***sammādiṭṭhisu***: in the right understanding of things.
>
> ***sace hoti mātāpitusu***: When parents, ***avijjivamānesu***: are no longer alive—when they are departed—, ***puttā***: their children, ***sacce rakkhanti***: may observe, ***silaṁ***: the precepts, ***denti***: and make, ***dānaṁ***: offerings, ***sayaṁ***: themselves;

[51] An illustrative example is the Lao *Salong manda bida* (ສຫຼອງຄຸນມາຣດາບິດາ, "Celebration of Parents' Legacies"). See Kourilsky 2007.

[52] Here again, the Pali and Lao terms have been significantly rearranged in order to produce a more intelligible translation.

> ***karonti***: [they also may] commission, ***buddharūpaṁ***: the erection of an image of the Lord [Buddha]; ***sace ropenti***: they may plant, ***bodhirukkhaṁ***: a Bodhi tree; ***sace karenti***: [f. 28A] they may [order to] build, ***thūpa***: a stupa, ***vihāraṁ vā***: or a temple; ***sabbakusalakamma***: they may make any other meritorious act as well; ***gahetvā phalaṁ denti***: then they may give the fruit (*phala*) collected from these good deeds, ***tesaṁ mātāpitūnaṁ***: to their father and mother; ***puttā***: if the children, ***sace katvā sabbakusalakammaṁ udissa-puñña***: dedicate the merit obtained by all these good deeds to their father and mother, ***evaṁ mātāpitunaṁ dhammarakkha***[***na***]***ṁ nāma hoti***: the children are thus worthy of being called "those who have cared for their father and mother in a righteous manner".

The instructions addressed by Gavampati **[Figure 4]** to Sambala closely reflect the devotional practices of Lao Buddhists toward their parents, as well as those associated with funeral and post-funeral rites: participating in the construction of a temple or other religious building, planting a Bodhi tree, or erecting a stupa are all meritorious acts that can be dedicated to deceased parents (Kourilsky 2015: 181).

The theme of parents' immeasurable good deeds—understood as "legacies" that children must "repay" (*thaen khun*, ແທນຄຸນ; P., *paṭiguṇa*)—appears in several Thai–Lao Buddhist texts in a variety of forms: as a narrative, as in the *Gavampatisutta*; as an edifying sermon, as in the *Khavampattisut*; or as a recitation in dedicated rituals.[53] This trope also appears in the Buddhist literature of neighboring communities, especially in Cambodia (Kourilsky 2007). A particularly common motif related to this theme is the suffering experienced by mothers during childbirth, which Gavampati's sermon does not fail to evoke:

> ***putte***: When [her] child, ***kucchigate***: enters the womb, ***mātā***: this very mother, ***dassati***: starts making, ***dānaṁ atirekataraṁ***: larger donations that in the past.
>
> ***putte***: When [her] child, ***bandhabandhe***: has settled in the womb, ***mātā***: this very woman who consequently became a mother, ***anubhavanti***: begins to endure, ***mahāntaṁ dukkhaṁ***: great suffering, ***puttajitthāya mātā***: for her child's sake.
>
> ***kadāci***: Periodically, ***mātā***: the mother, ***kiḷantakāyā***: experiences pain in her body; ***duvaṇṇā***: on some days, ***kīsā***: she finds herself thinner, her complexion yellow; ***sakalasarīrā***: her whole body, ***rujanti***: is in a lot of pain.

[53] Besides the aforementioned *Salong manda bida* ("Celebration of Parents' Legacies"), another example is a Pali–Lao *nissaya* entitled *Thaen nam nom mae* (ແທນນ້ຳນົມແມ່; lit., "[The Buddha] repays [the price of] his mother's breast milk"), which recounts the journey the Enlightened One makes to Tāvatiṁsa heaven in order to repay the debt of gratitude to his mother Mahāmāyā, who died during childbirth. See Kourilsky 2015: 543–555.



Figure 4: Image of Gavampati depicted reading a palm-leaf manuscript, possibly reading instructions or preaching to Sambala; probably 19th century, Wat Ket Karam, Chiang Mai © Nicolas Revire

pajāyamāne kāle: When the time comes [f. 25A] to give birth to her child, ***mātā***: the mother, ***pāpuṇāti***: ends up, ***atirekataraṁ dukkhaṁ***: experiencing such intense pain, ***maraṇāpannaṁ eva***: that it feels like dying.

kadāci: Sometimes, ***mātā***: the mother, ***visaññī hutvā***: may lose consciousness, ***vinassanti***: and can be lost forever.

putte: When the child, ***pajāyamāne***:[54] is born, ***mātā***: his mother, ***lohita***[***makkhita***] ***sarīrā***: finds herself covered in blood; ***anubhavati***:[55] she then endures *evarūpaṁ dukkhaṁ*: such great suffering.

mātā: The mother [who has just given birth], ***āha***: asks, ***puttassa***: about her child, saying: "***kuhaṁ putto me*** [Where is my child]?". ***puttasinehena***: It is with great love for her child that she asks, "***putto*** [***me***] ***gato kuhaṁ***: Where has my child gone?". ***gahetvā***: She then takes, ***puttaṁ lohitimakkhitaṁ***: her child in her arms, even though he is covered in blood, ***nipajjāpetvā uro***: so that she can hold it against her breast, ***pāpesi khīraṁ***: and nurse him, ***aho***: indeed!

[Folio 25B] ***mātā***: The mother, ***bahupakārā***: thus does great good, ***puttānaṁ***: for her children.

[54] *pajāyakāle* in the *Gavampatisutta*.

[55] *anubhavitvā* in the *Gavampatisutta*. The change from the absolutive in the Pali version to the indicative in the Lao *nissaya* is one example among many of the adjustments made by its author to make the text more accessible to readers or reciters.

kadāci: At times, ***putto***: the child, ***vissajjesi***: makes, ***kirisaṁ***: his feces, ***muttaṁ vā***: or urine, ***bhājane***: fall into the food, ***bhojanakāle***: while [her mother] is eating; ***mātā***: the mother, however, ***na jigucchati***: is not disgusted by this, ***puttasinehena***: because of her love for the child.

kadāci: At times, ***putto***: the child, ***visajesi khelaṁ***: drools, ***millaṁ***: or defecates, ***bhājane***: into the food; ***mātā***: [his] mother, ***n'eva jigucchati***: is nevertheless not disgusted, ***bhojeti***: and still eats, ***muttak***[***a***]***rīsaṁ malaṁ makkhita***[***bhat***]***taṁ***: the rice soiled with saliva, urine, excrement, and vomit of her child.

mātusariraṁ: Although her body, ***puttassa malamuttasemhādi samissaṁ*** [f. 26A] ***sabbadā ahosi***: is constantly covered in her child's feces and urine, ***mātā***: the mother, ***na jigucchati***: shows no signs of rejection or disgust, ***āhāraṁ***: toward the food, ***puttassa tehi malamuttehi samissaṁ***: of her child, soiled with his feces and urine; ***aho***: really, ***mātā***: the mother, ***bahuppakārā***: is of great merit (*guṇopakāra*).

The suffering endured by the mother during gestation and childbirth is addressed in several canonical and post-canonical works—e.g., M I 266, Ja 532, Vism 305. However, this theme is particularly developed in Buddhist literature composed in mainland Southeast Asia.[56] It appears, for instance, in the Maṅg-d, which explicitly draws on the *Soṇandajātaka* (Ja 532). Vernacular meditation manuals—such as the *Mul preah kammatthan* (មូលព្រះកម្មដ្ឋាន) in Cambodia and the *Bualaphantha* (ບົວຣະພັນທະ) in Laos and Lan Na—remind the practitioner (*yogāvacara*) of the suffering their mother endure for their children (Lagirarde 1994: 68). Some exercises even require the *yogāvacara* to reproduce these sufferings through a series of ascetic practices: sleeping only in a sitting position represents the discomfort experienced during pregnancy; not sheltering from the sun evokes the pain endured when "being on fire" after childbirth, etc. (Bernon 2000: 475). The torments of the mother also feature in the Khmer "Prayer of Repentance" (*sma lia*, ស្មារឮ; see Bernon 2000: 748, 757; also Walker 2022b: 71–79) and in certain Lao formulas for "recalling the vital spirits" (*su khwan*, ສູ່ຂວັນ).[57]

The teachings on filial piety delivered by Gavampati certainly find echoes in canonical sources but, more importantly, form part of a hermeneutic tradition common to the entire region, transmitted over the centuries either through the circulation of texts or through oral transmission from master to disciple. A number of archetypal teachings—concerning parents' "legacies", the

[56] This theme is also often present in Chinese Buddhist texts (e.g., Cole 1998).

[57] Among these "formulas for recalling the vital spirits" that evoke the suffering of the mother, we may cite those for the "woman in labor" (*su khwan mae ok kam*, ສູ່ຂວັນແມ່ອອກກັ້ມ), the "candidate for ordination" (*su khwan nak*, ສູ່ຂວັນນາກ), or that recited for the bride and groom before the wedding (*su khwan noi kon taeng dong*, ສູ່ຂວັນນ້ອຍກ່ອນແຕ່ງດອງ). See Kourilsky 2015: 485.

filial duty to "repay" them, and the suffering of mothers during childbirth and breastfeeding—circulated widely, sometimes detached from their original sources, across Buddhist communities in mainland Southeast Asia. While certain passages in the Lao *Khavampattisut* relating to filial piety echo those found, for instance, in the Maṅg-d, this does not necessarily imply direct borrowing from the Lan Na text. Rather, as shown above, the former clearly derives from a Pali version of the same narrative that most likely originated in Siam. Far from being constrained by the *Gavampatisutta/Khavampattisut*, the phenomenon of intertextuality is fundamental to literary production in Thai–Lao Buddhist circles.

Concluding Remarks

Beyond its philological implications, the present case study offers broader insights into the historical circulation of texts and the dynamics of Buddhist literary production in mainland Southeast Asia. It highlights the role of regional centers in shaping both the transmission and transformation of Pali and vernacular traditions.

Close philological and comparative examination of the Thai–Lao Gavampati narratives indeed confirms our initial hypothesis that the Pali version predates the *nissaya* and other vernacular adaptations. Given the *terminus ante quem* provided by the dated copy of the Lao *Khavampattisut* (1697/8 CE), the composition of the Pali *Gavampatisutta* must go back, at the latest, to the end of the 17th century. The wide diffusion of this narrative—attested in both Pali and Siamese versions preserved in collections from central Thailand—and its relative absence in northern regions suggest that it was most likely composed in Ayutthaya, then the capital of Siam, where the composition of original Pali texts is well documented (Skilling & Santi 2002).

The story of Gavampati had thus already circulated well beyond the borders of the Ayutthaya kingdom prior to its destruction by the Burmese in 1767. It was evidently present in Lan Xang before the fragmentation of the Lao kingdom into several principalities (ca. 1707 CE). This pattern likely extends to other texts belonging to the so-called *nibbāna* genre, which are abundant in Siam but comparatively rare in present-day Laos. For instance, only a small number of manuscripts of the *Mahākassapanibbāna* have been recorded in Lao collections, whereas numerous copies—both in monolingual Pali and in Pali–Siamese *nissaya*—are preserved in central Thai collections (Lagirarde 2006: 108–110).[58] As in the case of the Lao *Khavampattisut*, the Lao *Mahakatsapaniphan* (ມະຫາກັດສະປະນິບພານ; "the *nibbāna* of Mahākassapa") appears to be a *nissaya* derived from a monolingual Pali version (*Mahākassapanibbānasutta*) that most likely originated in Siam.[59]

This textual relationship is particularly significant. While the close connections between the Buddhist

[58] Unlike the (*pari*)*nibbāna* narratives of Gavampati, those of Mahākassapa, Sāriputta, and Mahāmoggallāna are sporadically attested in Lan Na (Cœdès 1966: 94–95), but they are far less widespread than in the central plains of the Chao Phraya.

[59] This becomes apparent when comparing the respective editions and translations of the two texts produced by Lagirarde (2006), based on the Siamese version, and Schnake (2024), based on the Pali.

traditions of Lan Xang and Lan Na—evident in shared scripts as well as historical and political ties—have long been emphasized,[60] the role of Ayutthaya in shaping Lao Buddhism remains insufficiently explored. Between the 15th century and the first half of the 16th century, Lan Na functioned as a major regional center for Pali scholarship and textual production (Penth 1997). The Burmese conquest of 1558 disrupted this dynamic, and Ayutthaya appears gradually to have assumed a leading role in the production and transmission of Buddhist literature. Learned monks from Lan Na likely took refuge in Siam, bringing texts with them. Siamese collections, for example, preserve numerous copies of the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, along with many other Pali works originally composed in Lan Na.[61] These monks may also have continued to produce new texts in Pali while in Siam. It is also reasonable to assume that monks from Laos traveled to Ayutthaya for pilgrimage or study, from where they could have brought back texts to transcribe into local forms.

From this period onward, contacts between Lan Xang and Ayutthaya are indeed well attested in contemporary sources.[62] This was also the time when the royal capital of Lan Xang was moved from Luang Prabang to Vientiane, partly in response to Burmese pressure (Lorrillard 1995: 126). By the 17th century, at the height of Lan Xang's power, trade routes linking Ayutthaya with Vientiane—and even Luang Prabang—are known to have been active (Lorrillard 2014: 204–205). There is little doubt that Siamese and Lao monks traveled along these routes, carrying manuscripts with them. Even if attested only rarely, the presence of the *Gavampatisutta* in Lao manuscript collections stands as concrete evidence of the religious and textual networks that connected Ayutthaya and Lan Xang in the early modern period.

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[60] For evidence of Lan Na's religious influence on Lan Xang in the 16th century, see Lorrillard 2021.

[61] Pali chronicles composed in Lan Na, such as the *Jinakālamālī* and the *Mūlasāsanā*, recount exchanges of visits between monks from the northern regions and those of the Chao Phraya plain.

[62] An illustrative example is the two-sided inscription recording a treaty of demarcation between the two kingdoms, dated 1562/3 CE (Griswold & Prasert 1979). The *Aḍḍhabhāgabuddharūpanidāna*, a Pali chronicle composed in Laos around 1570, also refers to Ayutthaya as bordering the kingdom of the Million Elephants (Schnake 2025: 141, 153).

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