

UNESCO INTERNATIONAL MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

NOMINATION FORM

1.0 Title of item or collection being proposed

"National Collection of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts of Phra That Phanom Chronicle"

2.0 Summary (Total 200 words)

"National Collection of Palm-leaf Manuscripts of *Phrathat Phanom Chronicle*" comprises 10 different versions. They are of different length, inscribed for different purposes by different personalities, at different time in history, covering different timespans. They narrate the tale of the Buddha's breast bones brought from India for enshrinement at *Phrathat Phanom*, vibrantly recognized since antiquity until today as most sacred Buddhist centre in Mekong Region.

This Collection is representative of the countless diverse palm-leaf manuscripts depicting the same story, kept in varying conditions at multiple villages, towns, and temples in many parts of the Northeast of Thailand and in Mid-Mekong region. Popularly copied and widely transmitted for merit-making, they are cherished as sacred Buddhist literature, forming a strong basis for the collective multi-generational memories about the coming of Buddhism into the Mekong Basins, amalgamating with local beliefs, and flourished over millennia.

Irreplaceable as collective source of Buddhist historiography written in local Dharm language, describing in mythical styles the ancient Mekong geography, social and political developments, and successive constructions, restorations and revitalizations of *Phrathat Phnom* by generations of regional chiefs, they cast light on the intellectual and moral history of the region and its interrelationship with the universe, through local Buddhists' lens.

3.0 Nominator contact details

3.1 Name of nominator (person or organisation):

- Mr. Kittiphan Phansuwan

Director-General, the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture
and Chair of the Thai National Memory of the World Committee

- Mr. Dipwat Watjarasiriamon

Director, Manuscripts and Inscriptions Group,
The National Library of Thailand

3.2 Relationship to the nominated material

The Director of Manuscripts and Inscriptions Group, the National Library of Thailand is the direct custodian of the collection being nominated.

The Director-General of the Fine Arts Department is the highest chief of administration overseeing all tangible cultural heritage, including Museums, National Libraries and National Archives in all parts of Thailand.

3.3 Address

The National Library of Thailand
Samsen Road, Dusit
Bangkok 10300
THAILAND

3.4 Telephone: (66) 2281 0263

Fax: (66) 2280 7543

Email: director@nlt.go.th

1) Signature

(Mr. Kittiphan Phansuwan)

Director-General, the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture
and Chair of the Thai National Memory of the World Committee

Date: 29th November 2021

2) Signature

(Mr. Dipwat Watjarasiriamon)

Director of Manuscripts and Inscriptions Group,
The National Library of Thailand

Date: 29th November 2021

4.0 Declaration of Authority

I, as Director-General, the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture, certify that I have the authority and the full support of other stakeholders to nominate the item described in this Nomination Form to the UNESCO Memory of the World's International Register.

Signature



(Mr. Kittiphan Phansuwan)

Director-General, the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture
and Chair of the Thai National Memory of the World Committee

Date: 29th November 2021

5.0 Legal information

5.1 Name of owner (person or organisation)

The National Library of Thailand (Custodian of the nominated document)

5.2 Address:

The National library of Thailand

Samsen Road, Dusit

Bangkok 10300

THAILAND

5.3 Telephone: (662) 281 0263

5.4 Name and contact details of custodian IF DIFFERENT from the owner

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5.5 Legal status of the National Library of Thailand.

The National Library of Thailand, established in 1905, is under the Fine Arts Department. In 2011, the Minister of Culture announced a new set of administrative rules concerning the administrative units under the Fine Arts Department. The Rules stipulated that the National library of Thailand is one of the Bureaux under the Fine Arts Department. The first responsibility of the National Library of Thailand, as stipulated, concerns the investigation, retrieval, collection, storage and preservation of the cultural documentary heritages of the nation, as seen in the scanned text of paragraph 15 in Thai. (see Attachment No.1)

The ancient traditional books and manuscript collections of the National Library of Thailand are part of the national documentary heritage, protected as a national cultural heritage.

The document is the property of Thailand under the custodianship of the National Library of Thailand and under the supervision of the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture.

5.6 Copyright status

There is no copyright status of the nominated documentary heritage. But credit must be given to the owner and custodian.

Images:

Images supplied with the Nomination Document has been provided by the National Library of Thailand who agrees to grant Non-Exclusive Rights to UNESCO for use in UNESCO Memory of the World Project.

Please see attached signed 'Agreement Granting Non-Exclusive Rights' forms, taken from the UNESCO Memory of the World website, and signed by Mr. Kittiphan Phansuwan Director-General, Department of Fine Arts, supervising the National Library. (see Attachment No.2)

5.7 Accessibility

There is no accessibility restriction. However, permissions must be sought from and granted by the Director of Manuscripts and Inscriptions Group, the National Library of Thailand, prior to accessing the microfilms of the nominated document. Digitization of ancient books and manuscripts are undertaken to promote easy access to and wider use of these cultural documentary resources while preserving the carriers. Handling of the original document must be done by the officers in charge of the document only. Furthermore, official opening and closing hours must be observed.

Virtual accessibility to the nominated document is free online, at: <finearts.go.th> and <digital.nlt.go.th>.

6.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

6.1 Name and identification details of the items/collection being nominated

6.1.1. Name: *National Collection of Palm-leaf Manuscripts of Phra That Phanom Chronicle*

6.1.2. Nominating institutions:

- Mr. Kittiphan Phansuwan

Director-General, the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture
and Chair of the Thai National Memory of the World Committee

- Mr. Dipwat Watjarasiriamon

Director of Manuscripts and Inscriptions Group,
The National Library of Thailand

6.1.3. Identification details:

1. Urangathat Chronicle (Phra That Phanom Chronicle):

- Registration number 462/1-7, totally 7 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 52cm x 5cm palm leaves, Chad Version, Plain Wood Cover, with lacquer on one side

2. Urangathat Chronicle

- Registration number 727/1-6, totally 6 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 57cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, No Plain Wood Cover

3. Phra That Phanom Chronicle:

- Registration number 3/4, totally 1 bundle, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 58cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Chad Version, Plain Wood Cover

4. Phra That Phanom Chronicle:

- Registration number 79/1:1A-1D, 2:2A, 3-5, totally 11 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 57cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Lacquer-Chad-Dark/Gold Lacquer Version, No Plain Wood Cover

5. Phra That Phanom Chronicle:

- Registration number 203/1:1A-1N, totally 16 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 51cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Gold-Chad-Plain Version, No Plain Wood Cover

6. Phra That Phanom Chronicle:

- Registration number 414/3, totally 1 bundle, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 55cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, Plain Wood Painted with Chad and engraved with gold pattern

7. Phra That Phanom Chronicle (Urangathat Chronicle):

- Registration number 454/1, totally 1 bundle, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 52cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, No plain Wood Cover

8. Phra That Phanom Chronicle:

- Registration number 460/1-3:3A, 5-6 totally 6 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 57cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Chad-Plain Version, Plain Wood Cover

9. Phra That Phanom Chronicle:

- Registration number 491/1:1A, 2:2A, 3-4:4A, 5:5A, totally 9 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 55cm x 3-5cm palm leaves, Dark Gold-Dark/Gold Lacquer-Plain Version, No Plain Wood Cover

10. Phra That Phanom Chronicle

- Registration number 565/1, totally 1 bundle, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 56cm x 5cm palm leaves, Plain Version, No Plain Wood Cover

6.2 Type of document

- A Collection of Buddhist Palm-leaf Manuscripts, totalling 10 different versions
- Ancient Esan Dharm scripts.
- Subject matter: Phra That Phanom Chronicle (Uranghathat Tale)

6.3 Catalogue or registration details

(1) Urangathat Chronicle (Phra That Phanom Chronicle)

- Registration number 462/1-7,
- Total: 7 bundles,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages
- Size: 52cm x 5cm palm leaves, Chad Version, Plain Wood Cover, with lacquer on one side

(2) Urangathat Chronicle

- Registration number 727/1-6,
- Total: 6 bundles,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages
- Size: 57cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, No Plain Wood Cover

(3) Phra That Phanom Chronicle

- Registration number 3/4,
- Total: 1 bundle,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 58cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Chad Version, Plain Wood Cover

(4) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

- Registration number 79/1:1A-1D, 2:2A, 3-5,
- Total: 11 bundles,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 57cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Lacquer Version-Chad-Dark/Gold Lacquer Version,
No Plain Wood Cover

(5) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

- Registration number 203/1:1A-1N,
- Totally 16 bundles,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 51cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Gold-Chad-Plain Version, No
Plain Wood

(6) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

- Registration number 414/3,
- Total 1 bundle,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 55cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, Plain Wood Cover painted with Chad and
engraved with gold pattern

(7) Phra That Phnom Chronicle (Urangathat Chronicle)

- Registration number 454/1,
- Total 1 bundle,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 52cm x 4 cm palm leaves, Chad Version, No Plain Wood Cover

(8) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

- Registration number 460/1-3:3A, 5-6
- Total 6 bundles,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 57cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Chad-Plain Version, Plain Wood Cover

(9) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

- Registration number 491/1:1A, 2:2A, 3-4: 4 A, 5:5A,
- Total 9 bundles,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 55cm x 3-5cm palm leaves, Dark Gold/Dark Gold Lacquer-Plain Version, No Plain Wood Cover

(10) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

- Registration number 565/1,
- Total: 1 bundle,
- Inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages,
- Size: 56cm x 5cm palm leaves, Plain Version, No Plain Wood Cover

6.4 Visual documentation (if available and appropriate)

Visual documentation of the Nominated document is attached includes: --

11 photographic images attached photos as jpg. files are submitted with this Nominated Form. (see Attachment No. 3)

6.5 History/Provenance**6.5.1. Overview of the history of the *Phra That Phanom Chronicle*,**

The history of *Phra That Phanom Chronicle* probably began as an oral tradition transmitted by words of mouth. Later it was written on palm leaves in local mythical styles narrating the events as perceived by the local people in connection with the coming of Buddhism into the middle Mekong River Basins. This region which subsequently developed into historical social and political Buddhist city states and kingdoms, located on both banks

of the river, considered *Phra That Phanom* as their centre of worship and pilgrimage, a tradition vibrantly upheld until the present time.

With the introduction of Esan Dharm scripts used mostly in Buddhist scripture writing, this orally transmitted Tale of Buddha's breast bone was inscribed on palm leaves, copied into numerous copies for safe-keeping and auspiciousness at Buddhist temples in Northeast of Thailand, in Lao PDR, and further beyond.

6.5.2. Recent studies of palm-leaf manuscripts of *Phra That Phanom*

A recent broad-base study of palm-leaf manuscripts of *Phra That Phanom* reveal that a multitude of copies exist in a variety of versions and in varying conditions, and are being kept at various village temples, national libraries, university libraries, located in the different districts of cities both in Thailand, such as Chiang Mai, Nan, Prae, Loei, Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham, Nakhon Phanom, Roi Et and Ubon Ratchathani and Lao PDR, such as Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, Khammouane, Vientiane, Bolikhamsai, and Champasak, scattering along the Mid Mekong River Basin.

Examples of these versions which have been published are broadly categorized by modern scholars into 4 groups, as follows:

1) Multi-bundle versions which range from 4-16 bundles describing the ancient primitive land inhabited by the Naga species, the journey into the area by the historical Buddha during his lifetime, his prophecy about the future prosperity of Buddhism in this area and the enshrinement of his relics at *Phu Kampra*, the construction of *Phra That Phanom* shrined by *Maha Kassapa Monk*, assisted by 5 regional kings, and chronicling the development of the Buddhist kingdoms in *Srikotaboon* and *Lanchang* and the successive restoration of *Phra That Phanom*.

2) Single-bundle versions describing the events surrounding the transporting of the Buddha's breast bone to *Phu Kampra* and the construction of *Phra That Phanom* assisted by 5 regional kings who were subsequently reborn as kings of several local city states to protect *Phra That Phanom*.

3) Split-bundles versions which tell the same story but are lost and incomplete in certain parts.

4) Combined versions in which several different versions of the palm-leaf manuscripts are put together to tell the same story.

6.5.3) The National Collection of 10 versions

The Palm-leaf Manuscripts of *Phra That Phnom* in the National Library of Thailand's Collection represent all the 4 categories above.

Each however arrived with its own provenance as recorded in the registration note as follows.

(1) Urangathat Chronicle (Phra That Phanom Chronicle)

Registration number 462/1-7 totally 7 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 52cm x 5cm palm leaves, Chad Version, plain wood cover with lacquer on one side. According to the National Library of Thailand, this version was transliterated by the committee chaired by Kromluang Prajaksilpakom. It was published for the royal-sponsored funeral of Luang Prachumbarnakarn (Pin Dechakupta) on 21 April 1940 (B.E. 2483) at Wat Makutkasatriyaram. The Foreword by the Fine Arts Department reads, "The *That Phanom* Chronicle was once published in the form of synopsis. This version referred to an Esan provincial Prince Regent, his wife and son, who ordered to make a copy of the palm-leaf manuscripts written in ancient Dharm Scripts used in Northern Thailand in 1861 (B.E. 2404). It was later presented to Kromluang Prajaksilpakom who donated the copy to the National Library in 1921 (B.E. 2464). Mr. Sood Srisomwongse and Mr. Thongdee Chaiyachat were entrusted by the Fine Arts Department to study and translate the scripts in an outstanding and detailed manner. This unique version was named *Uranghathat* or *That Phanom* Chronicle".

(2) Uranghathat Chronicle

Registration number 727/1-6 totally 6 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 57cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, plain wood cover. This version originally belonged to the National Library of Thailand. At the beginning, it referred to Chao Hua Buachan who composed Uranghathat Chronicle for the sake of sustaining Buddhism to last long for the full 5,000 years. May the wishes come true. Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu Anumodami.

(3) Phra That Phanom Chronicle

Registration number 3/4 totally 1 bundle, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 58cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Chad Version, plain wood cover. This version originally belonged to the National Library.

(4) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

Registration number 79/1:1A-1D, 2:2A,3-5 totally 11 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 57cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Lacquer-Chad-Dark/Gold Lacquer

Version, no plain wood cover. Donated by Wat Nong Vang, Muang District, Kon Kaen Province in 1975 (B.E. 2518).

(5) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

Registration number 203/1:1A-1N totally 16 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 51cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Gold-Chad Version, plain wood cover. Donated by Wat Bo Non Tan, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province, Wat That, Muang District, Khon Kaen Province, Wat Sri Pham, Dansai District, Loei Province (with a bundle of palm-leaf manuscript entitled Little Bird) and Wat Bosri, Dansai District, Loei Province respectively in 1975 (B.E. 2518).

(6) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

Registration number 414/3 totally 1 bundle, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 55cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, plain wood cover painted with Chad and engraved with gold pattern. Donated by Mr. Hut Sudhiprapa, Ban Nong Sim, Ta Muang Sub District, Selaphum District, Roi Et province.

(7) Phra That Phnom Chronicle (Urangathat Chronicle)

Registration number 454/1 totally 1 bundle, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 52cm x 4cm palm leaves, Chad Version, no plain wood cover. Purchased from Ray W. Bugtang in 1921 (B.E. 2464). The composer was Chao Hua Somdej Rung.

(8) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

Registration number 460/1-3:3A, 5-6 totally 6 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 57cm x 5cm palm leaves, Dark Chad-Plain Version, plain wood cover. Donated by Luang Senapakdee in 1916 (B.E. 2459)

(9) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

Registration number 491/1:1A, 2: 2A, 3-4:4A, 5:5A totally 9 bundles, inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 55cm x 3-5 cm palm leaves, Chad-Dark Gold-Dark/Gold Lacquer and Plain Version, no plain wood.

The first, the first A, the first B, the second A, the third, the fourth and the fifth bundles were donated by the Office of Cabinet Secretariat in 1936 (B.E. 2479). The second, the fourth A and the fifth A originally belonged to the National Library of Thailand.

(10) Phra That Phnom Chronicle

Registration number 565/1 totally 1 bundle inscribed in Esan Thai-Pali languages on 56cm x 5cm palm leaves, Plain Version, no plain wood. This version originally belonged to the National Library of Thailand.

6.6 Bibliography

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6.7 Names, qualifications and contact details of up to three *independent* people or organisations with expert knowledge about values and provenance of the nominated material.

Below are the names, qualifications and contact details of three independent organisations/individual with expert knowledge about values and provenance of the nominated material.

1) Name of Organisation: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University

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3. Name of Independent Person: Suttinee Yavaprapas, Former Director, Office of Cultural Promotion and Dissemination, Ministry of Culture

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7.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

7.1. Significance

7.1.1. Social or spiritual movements

7.1.1-A Introduction

Manuscripts made of palm leaves were a most popular medium of writing in Asia and Southeast Asia. Palm leaves were the cheapest and most easily available material, and if well treated are strong and quite durable.

Writing on palm leaves was believed to have spread into Southeast Asia from South India along with Hinduism and Buddhism, and were used as material for manuscripts before the widespread of paper and before the introduction of printing in this region. They cover subjects considered as sacred, such as the religious scriptures, medicine, music, astrology, music, and Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist Tales. Their most important historical and cultural contribution is the great development and widespread of Buddhism in this region from ancient time until the present.

Throughout Southeast Asia, and along the middle Mekong River Basins, the landscape is dotted with monuments enshrining some corporeal relic of the Buddha, known as "*Relic Stupas*" or "*Phra That Chedi*". Every such stupa, in Myanma, Thailand, Lao PDR, or Cambodia, is provided with a literary historical tradition narrating how that relic came to be cherished in that place, who transported it here and which personalities were responsible for constructing the stupa for enshrining the relic. The genre of historical writing represented by such traditions has long exerted an important influence on Southeast Asian historiography.

Generations of devotees of *Phra That Phanom* consider the Stupa to be sacred because it is a place where the Buddha himself is believed to have made a visit during his lifetime when he prophesized that his religion would greatly prosper in this area and that his breast-bone relics, (*Uranghathat*) be brought here for enshrinement after his Parinibban. The source of this inter-generational belief is the *Uranghathat* Tale, or the Chronicle of *Phra That Phanom*, a regional religious tale narrating the events from the historical Buddha's time until the Stupa has been established and restored.

In addition, some versions of *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle give interesting and specific accounts concerning the "communities of *Kha Ogas*" who were the regular and permanent "carers and protectors" of *Phra That Phanom*. These communities were donated by the Lanchang political leaders who came worship and restore the *Phra That Phanom* Stupa. These communities settled around the *Phra That Phanom* about 500 years ago. They were committed, throughout generations until today, with the responsibility for maintaining the pilgrimage site and the historical buildings within the site, watch out for any possible harm or danger that might occur, and serve the monks in residence at *Phra That Phanom* Temple, and service the pilgrims and worshippers at *Phra That* especially during the annual festivals.

7.1.1-B. The importance of the Dharm Script

The scripts used in the writing of the *Uranghathat* Tale, or the Chronicle of *Phra That Phanom* are known as "*Aksorn Dharm*". They developed from the Indic Palava scripts from South India and had been adapted for use in the Pali and Buddhist inscriptions by the Mon people in Bagan in the 17th Century B.E. (11th Century C.E.). The scripts later spread into Hariphunchai and Lanna Kingdoms, now Northern region of Thailand, and subsequently influenced the Buddhist writings of the ancient kingdoms in Esan of Thailand and in the Lanchang Kingdom of Lao, as evidenced in the *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle manuscripts. The use of "*Aksorn Dharm*" can be found at many historical sites near *Phra That Phanom* area, such as the inscription at the base of the main Buddha image in the *Ubosot* of *Phra That Phanom* Temple, Nakhon Phanom Province, and the inscription at *Suwannakuha* Cave Temple in Nong Bua Lamphu Province. Moreover, the Dharm Scripts are mainly used in the numerous palm-leaf Buddhist manuscripts and Khoi-paper sacred manuscripts found scattered at many village temples along both banks of the Mekong River. Dharm Scripts were also inscribed for religious stories in Thai and Pali languages in the Ayutthaya period in 1572 (B.E. 2115).

7.1.1-C. The unique importance of the National Collection

The National Collection, comprising of 10 different versions of the Palm-leaf Manuscripts dealing with "*Uranghathat Tale*" or "*Phra That Phanom Chronicle*", were preserved at the Royal Pra Vajirayan Library, established in the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Later, they were transferred to the National Library of Thailand, where they are being safeguarded as part of the national cultural heritage. They form a most significant as valuable collection as historical and cultural sources for a broad-based comparative study of the Chronicle of *Phra That Phanom*, particularly for intertextual investigations.

Modern academics have recently become more interested in comparative study of different versions of these manuscripts in order to understand the historical consciousness of the Esan and the multi-ethnic people now living in the Northeastern Region of Thailand, as well as in inhabitants of the neighboring countries in the Middle Mekong River basins. These people's collective sense of Buddhist cultural identity is embodied in the Tale of *Uranghathat*, the Buddha's Breast-bone Relic, enshrined at Phra *That Phanom*. A recent comparative study made on the published contents of several versions reveal that though they are similar in terms of contents, giving information how the That Phnom Stupa came into being, they can borrow from one another, reduce or extend the contents of the texts to suit their style and in purpose.

Indeed, there are numerous versions of *Phra That Phanom* palm-leaf manuscripts which are being kept at many villages, temples, libraries and museums, scattered on both banks of the Mekong River. In that sense, the 10 versions in the National Library Collection may not be considered as rare. But collectively, they uniquely represent all the uncountable number of the same or similar manuscripts found in the region. The existence of a rich variety of the *Uranghathat* Chronicle Palm-leaf Manuscripts, found widely scattered, reflect the great importance that the people of Esan, Lao, and the neighboring countries attach to this mythical and sacred literature about the coming of Buddhism into this region. This literature in countless versions and variations have somehow formed the common basis of the regional memory concerning the sacredness and the potency of *Phra That Phanom*, a centre of Buddhist pilgrimage since ancient time. This memory is still alive among the present generations of the Thai-Lao communities in this region.

Because of the significance of Krom Luang Prachak Silpakom's version of *Phra That Phanom Chronicle* Manuscript as described above, this version has therefore been placed on the National Register of Thailand Memory of the World Project, in 2018, receiving a certificate jointly issued by the Thai National Commission of UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture.

7.1.1-D. Krom Luang Prachak Silpakom's Version

Of all the 10 different versions in this unique collection, one particular version, the *Uranghathat* Chronicle or *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle (registration number 462/1-7, in 7 bundles) is of particularly outstanding value, in terms of physical condition, provenance, the completion of the textual contents, and impact on modern research and study.

This seven-bundle version previously belonged to Krom Luang Prachak Silpakom who was King Chulalongkorn's half-brother and the King's Representative to the Monthon Lao Puan based at Udon Thani, covering 6 cities namely Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakhon, Leoi and Nong Khai. The manuscript, wrapped in a good quality cloth, came to the National Library in 1921 (B.E. 2464) for preservation. The National Library subsequently engaged the services of two experts: -- Mr. Sood Srisomwongse and Mr. Thongdee Chaiyachat who was most knowledgeable in Buddhism and in ancient Esan Dharm Scripts at that time, to study and transcribed the entire texts of the manuscripts into central Thai Language. The transcribed texts were published thrice in book form.

The epilogue of the manuscripts indicated that Achaya--the Uprat, and his family sponsored the production of this version by copying from an older version of palm leaves dated 1861 (B.E 2404)

Modern comparative researches of the different versions of *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle manuscripts reveal significant interrelationships among the multiple versions studied. They appear to borrow from one another as they develop their different style of narratives. Different versions may cover different timespan, some may go back into antiquity before the time of the historical Buddha and describe related geography and the primitive beings in the Mekong area while other may begin with the historical Buddha journeying into the Middle Mekong River Basins and mentioning the places and the personalities whom he taught and who were reborn in several lives to build, protect and restore *Phra That Phanom*.

The version, as translated by Mr. Sood Srisomwongse and Mr. Thongdee Chaiyachat, was first published as an abridged version, but was printed in full by the Fine Arts Department in 1940 (B.E. 2483). It was reprinted in 1994 (B.E. 2537) with permission of the Fine Arts Department by Matichon Press, on the occasion of a regional academic seminar on the Literature of the Two Banks of Mekong River. It has been periodically used as one of the source texts for comparative and intertextual studies in many subsequent studies until the present time. A recent comparative study with other versions suggested that this version might have been written in 1638 (B.E. 2181) in the reign of King Suriyawongsathammikaracha (A.D. 1629-1656 / B.E. 2172-2199) of Lanchang in Lao which falls into the reign of King Prasart Thong of Ayutthaya (A.D. 1630-1656 / BE. 2173-2199) overlapping with the reign of King Narai (A.D. 1656-1689 / BE. 2199-2232).

7.1.2 Form and style

Palm-leaf manuscripts of *Phra That Phanom* are considered books of regional sacred literature, widely disperse in the Northeast (Esan) region of Thailand and in Lao PDR as well as other parts of the Mekong Basins.

They were traditionally and popularly produced out of local devotions, by copying, in parts or in totality, the contents of the previously written manuscripts. The copying and multiplying the contents of such manuscripts are considered a form of merit making since the contents deal with the coming of Buddhism into the area, and at the same time they serve as a means of preservation and wider transmission of the chronicle in the popular Buddhist tradition.

These manuscripts are typically written in the ancient "*Esan Dharm Scripts*" incised on palm leaves, and tied into a variety of bundles, ranging from one single bundle to 16 bundles, to make the traditional form of palm-leaf manuscripts, depending on the length of the manuscript and the timespan covered in each version.

They are generally lengthy and free-flowing in style, recounting a substantial amount of information about the coming of Buddhism directly from India to the Mekong region, describing ancient geography, places and personalities related to the spread of Buddhism since the time of antiquity, and providing a timeline of events as perceived or understood to be real or imagined by the chronicler, often in a rather mythical and fictional manner, but fundamentally in an objective and nonfictional fashion, inserting the Pali text of Dharma here and there, where relevant.

The Palm-leaf Manuscript of *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle is deeply associated with the regional beliefs that: --

- (a) the historical Buddha paid a visit to the sacred site of "*Phu Kampra*";
- (b) the Buddha sowed the first seeds of Buddhism here by teaching the local primitive people, *yaks*, and *nagas* who offered food and drink to the Buddha and listened to his Dharma enabling him to be born as a higher level being in the next life;
- (c) the Buddha prophesized that his religion would greatly prosper in this area of the middle Mekong area, and that his relics would be brought over by Maha Kassapa Monk from India to be enshrined at this "*Phu Kampra*"-- the site where the relics of the three previous Buddhas had already been enshrined;
- (d) 5 years after the Buddha's Parinibban, the Maha Kassapa Monk, one of the chief disciples of the Buddha who was inclined to roam the forest in solitude, carried the breast-bone relics of the Buddha to be enshrined at "*Phu Kampra*" the present site of the *Phra That Phanom* Stupa;

(e) five regional kings from different kingdoms in the Mekong Region joined Maha Kassapa Monk and his accompanied 500 *arahant* monks in constructing the first square base of the stupa where the Buddha's relics were first enshrined;

(f) that those who participated in the construction of the first *Phra That Phanom* Stupa were reborn to protect and to make merit further at *Phra That Phanom* for the promotion of peace and safety of the region.

The Chronicle also describes the geography of the ancient Mekong River basin, naming certain places specifically visited by the Buddha, the social relations and cooperation of the kings and peoples located in different directions of this river basin. It also gives detailed accounts of certain personalities who after having encountered the Buddha and made merit to him, are subsequently re-born as the Buddhist rulers of certain pre-modern states in order to venerate the *Phra That Phanom* and restore the stupa and the temple.

The Chronicle is a unique example of historiography of the middle Mekong region and the spread of Buddhism into this part of the world.

7.1.3. Social, community or spiritual significance.

As mentioned earlier, the palm-leaf manuscripts of *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle (*Uranghathat* Tale) now exist in a multitude of versions scattered in many parts of the Mekong Basins. These indicate the immensely numerous social and spiritual communities attached to the belief in *Phra That Phanom*.

The communities and individuals who are socially and spiritually attached to the beliefs in the sacredness of *Phra That Phanom* can be categorized as follows:

(a) The communities of *Kha Ogas* (the families of devotees, assigned by the political and social leaders who restored the *Phra That Phanom* Stupa and *Phra That Phanom* Temple in the past, to settle in the vicinity of the Temple of *Phra That Phanom* in order to care, maintain, protect and service *Phra That Phanom* and the Temple.

(b) The communities of *Look Phra That* (those whose parents were unable to have children and came to worship *Phra That Phanom* asking for a child and service *Phra That* after the success)

(c) The academic communities who study the historiography of *Phra That Phnom* through the Chronicle Manuscripts and through the architectural investigation of *Phra That Phanom* Stupa.

- (d) Buddhists who generally believe in the sacredness of *Phra That*.
- (e) Members of the families whose ancestors contributed to the restoration of *Phra That Phanom* or made a copy of *Phra That Phanom Chronicle* in the past.

The Temple of *Phra That Phanom* annually organizes several Buddhist festivals at the temple, the most important of which falls in the third month of Lunar Calendar. These festivals are fully attended by several thousands of devotees coming from all parts of the Mekong River Basins, especially the Third Month Festival when hundreds of thousands of people packed the *Phra That Phanom Area* for 7 days and 7 nights.

These devotees represent the spiritual communities whose collective memory about their ancestors' involvement in the construction of *Phra That Phanom* in one way or the other, as recorded in any of the versions of *Phra That Phanom Chronicle* manuscripts. Therefore, wherever they live now, they never fail to attend the festival, especially in the third lunar month, and they will contribute by performing any of the several acts of worship to *Phra That Phanom*, such as offering special flower arrangements, performing music and dances, as well as practicing Dharma and meditation at the Temple area.

7.2 Comparative criteria.

7.2.1 Rarity

The National Library's Collection of *Phra That Phanom Chronicle* Manuscripts is rare in the sense that they form a sizable comparative collection of 10 different versions from different sources, produced in a different period, varying in length and extent of the contents, and have been preserved in a well-established institution at the national level for examination and study for more than a century.

7.2.2 Integrity, completeness, condition

The Collection in its variety is complete, authentic, and in excellent condition. They are photographed and the contents are made accessible to the public in printed versions.

7.3. Statement of significance

The National Collection of Palm-leaf Manuscripts of *Phra That Phanom Chronicle*, comprising 10 different versions, provides a unique ensemble of physical evidence of the *Uranghathat* Tale, written in Esan Dharm Scripts, chronicling the events pertaining to the coming of Buddhism into the Middle Mekong Basins since ancient time. The chronicle sheds

light on the cultural, intellectual and moral history of the multi-ethnic populations of the region, as perceived by the first narrator, or the original chronicler who remains unknown to us.

The Tale, transmitted through generations via the widespread of a multitude of versions of the Manuscripts, copied, elaborated, reduced, to suit different purposes, and transmitted throughout the region, has formed a collective memory of the multi-ethnic inhabitants of the Northeast of Thailand and in the Middle Mekong area whose ancestors had embraced Buddhism and the belief in the intangible presence of the Buddha, symbolized by *Phra That Phanom* where the breast-bone relics of the Buddha is believed to be enshrined, as told and retold in the Chronicle.

The entire National Collection is of particularly outstanding value, in terms of physical condition, provenance, the completion of the textual contents, and impact on modern research and study. The version given to the National Library by Krom Luang Prachaksilpakhom (registration number 462/1-7, in 7 bundles) is particularly important and has been transliterated by experts into modern Thai language, and published for wider appreciation. This published version has been used as a point of reference in later comparative intertextual studies conducted by academic researchers until the recent time. It has been listed on the National Register of Thailand's Memory of the World by the Ministry of Culture and Thailand National Commission for UNESCO.

The existence of countless number of versions richly diverse in contents, currently being kept in varying conditions at many villages, temples, and educational and cultural institutes in Thailand and in Lao PDR, as well as in the neighboring countries, make this diverse Collection of the manuscripts more valuable and necessary. It is now widely recognized that to understand the full subject contents of the *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle and to appreciate the underlying conception or imagination of the *Phra That Phanom* Chroniclers, it is not enough to study one or two versions of the Manuscripts, but a broad-based comparative examination of the texts and intertextual content analysis of such texts are recommended. The availability of multiple and a wide variety of versions preserved in the National Library of Thailand therefore provide a rare and uniquely important set of examples for such intertextuality approach.

The history of Southeast Asia and particularly of the Mekong Region, as generally known to the world, has been largely written by Western historians from their perspectives. Here, in the palm-leaf manuscripts of *Phra That Phanom* Chronicle, we are provided with a rich and complex "cultural history" as perceived, understood, and recognized by the "insiders" of the Mekong Region themselves.

8.0 Consultation with stakeholders

8.1 Provide details of consultation with relevant stakeholders about this nomination

Relevant stakeholders include:

(1) Owners/custodians of the documentary heritage

The Fine Arts Department, Samsen Road, Dusit, Bangkok

Names and positions of officials and experts

- Ms. Kongkaew Weeraprachak, expert and member of the National MOW Committee
- Ms. Pimpan Paiboonwangchareon, special expert,
- Ms. Orawan Sapploy, Arts Official Specialist, the Office of Literature and History
Samsen Road, Dusit, Bangkok
- Ms. Em-orn Chawsuan, Ancient Language Specialist, the National Library of Thailand

(2) Organisations with involvement in the promotion of Palm-leaf Manuscript, Phra That Phanom Chronicle and Esan Dharm Script

2.1 Name of Organisation: The Research Institute of Northeast Art and Culture (RINAC), Mahasarakham University

Address: The Research Institute of Northeast Art and Culture (RINAC), Mahasarakham University, Talad Sub-District, Kantarawichai District, Maha Sarakham 44000 THAILAND

Tel/Fax.: (66) 437 1686

Email: rinac@msu.ac.th

<https://rinac.msu.ac.th/en/>

(3) Communities with involvement in the documentary heritage

3.1 Phra That Phanom Temple, Chayang Kun Road, That Phanom District, Nakhon Phanom Province, 48110 THAILAND

Contact person: Pra Debhvaramuni **Tel.** (66) 4254 1050
Prakru Sribhanomvaraguna **Tel.** (668) 3360 7170

3.2 Mahachai Temple, Mahachaidumri Road, Muang District, Maha Sahakham Province,
44000 THAILAND

Contact person: Pra Debhsiddhacan (พระเทพสิทธิศาสตราจารย์)

Pramaha Athaphong Sirisobhano (พระมหาอรรถพงษ์ สิริโสภณ)

Tel. (668) 9278 7851

4) Scholars who research the documentary heritage

4.1 Dr. Chanyuth Sonjan

Faculty of Education

Roi Et Rajabhat University,

Selaphum District, Roi Et Province, 45120

THAILAND

Tel. (669) 8585 4423

4.2 Dr. Yoothapong Martviset

Devabhibal Rord 5, Naimuang Subdistrict,

Muang District, Roi Et Province, 45120

THAILAND

Tel. (668) 1600 8504

4.3 Asst. Prof. Dr. Athirach Nankhantee

Faculty of Education, Nakhon Phanom University

167 No. 8 Naratkwai Subdistrict

Muang District, Nakhon Phanom Province

Email: Nankhantee.a@gmail.com

Tel. (661) 1024 9190

9.0 Risk assessment

Usually, the palm-leaf manuscripts kept in private repositories are fragile, dusty, brittle, and are under the daily threat of damage, such as humidity, termites, and decay, due to lack of knowledge for preservation.

The two palm-leaf manuscripts kept in the National Library of Thailand, contrary to those kept in most private repositories such village centres and temples, are free from many

commonly found risks affecting palm-leaf manuscripts in Thailand. They are being preserved in a 24 hours temperature-controlled room, and are constantly inspected, cleaned and treated by trained officials.

The risk of directly handling of the two manuscripts is largely minimized. They have been photographed, thoroughly investigated and documented by experts of the National Library of Thailand, and their contents have also been translated into modern Thai for modern transmission. Direct handling of the fragile documentary heritages is prohibited, and only trained staff of the National Library of Thailand has direct access to the documents.

However, in the traditional context of palm-leaf manuscripts kept in the local villages and temples, rewriting and copying by monks, novices, and other scholars have, over the past centuries, helped to multiply and preserve the palm-leaf manuscript traditions and their contents, in their original or related religious contexts, and hence have kept the palm-leaf manuscript traditions vital and alive.

According to the Thai tradition, palm-leaf manuscripts were protected from physical damage with wooden boards. Aside from that, they were generally wrapped in high-quality cloth such as silk or silk brocade. The wrapping palm leaf manuscripts then were tied with 5 pieces of string representing the Five Precepts in Buddhism or the five elements that sum up the whole of an individual's mental and physical existence. A piece of string was entwined around the bundle for 3 times representing the threefold refuge in Buddhism comprising the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Both ends of the string were tucked underneath. They were not tied together representing freedom and independence. In such a manner, one can easily attain Nirvana.

To prevent the risk of losing the tradition of palm-leaf manuscript writing, the National Library of Thailand in collaboration with National Libraries in the provinces have organized activities to promote the traditional knowledge of palm-leaf manuscript making and preservation.

10.0 Preservation and access management plan

10.1. Preservation.

The collection of palm-leaf manuscripts in the National Library of Thailand was previously preserved in the Vajirayanana Library for the Capital City, founded by King Chulalongkorn by amalgamating three libraries together in 1905: -- the Mandira Dharma Library, the Vajirayanana Library, and the Buddhasasana Sangaha Library. In 1933, after

democratic reforms, the Fine Arts Department was established and assumed the supervision role of the Capital City Library whose name was subsequently changed to "National Library".

Preservation has always been at the heart of the policy of the National Library's palm leaves collections, since palm-leaf manuscripts are ancient documents related mostly to Buddhism, and are made from organic materials vulnerable to natural and manmade conditions.

The first step of preservation of the palm-leaf manuscripts is examination of the documents, cataloguing them and classification them by experts for preservation and management. Good treatment, safe storage, and regular maintenance are a rule so that they can have a reasonable long life and durability.

The humidity and temperature of the storage room for the National Library's palm leaves collections are 24 hours controlled at 22-24-degree Celsius temperature, and 50-65% humidity, lighting is also controlled, and only iron compactus (horizontal filing cabinet on rails) are used for their storage instead of wood or other materials.

As for future preservation plan, the National Library of Thailand will digitize the entire collection for accessibility comparative studies without physical burdening of the palm-leaf manuscripts.

10.2. Access

Ancient palm-leaf manuscripts are not suitable for constant handling. Therefore, human contact with the manuscripts will be minimized and will be done by trained officials wearing gloves only.

In the Manuscript and Inscription Sector Zone, cleanliness and security are strictly observed to control garbage, food, insects, dust, and especially to have early warning for floods and fires.

Access to photographs, digital photos, copies, and printed versions of the palm-leaf manuscripts are promoted. Prior permission must be sought and granted by the Director of the Section. The Rules for accessibility and public services of the manuscripts must be strictly observed by all parties. (see scanned Rules in Attachment No. 4)

Constant check-ups and regular good house-keeping are a good preservation measure. Any damage found will be immediately reported to the Conservation Section immediately.

11.0 Any other information that may support the nomination

11.1 The nomination of this Collection of documentary heritage has received the strong support and commitment from the following organisation:

11.1.1 **Name of Organisations:** Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University, and Mom Luang Boonlua Tepayasuwan Fund, Sanam Chandra Campus, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand.

11.1.2 **Name of Organisations:** Bureau of Post Graduate Studies, in collaboration with the Student Body of the Faculty of Humanities, Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, Thailand

11.1.3 **Name of Organisations:** Department of Eastern Languages, Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, 31 Na Pra Lan Road, Bangkok 10200.

Contact Person: Instructor Porpol Sooksai

Email: Khem_ranadek@hotmail.com

11.1.4 **Name of Organisations:** Royal Society of Thailand, Sanam Sua Pa, Suan Chitlada Sub-district, Dusit District, Bangkok, 10300

Tel. (66) 2356 0466-70, (66) 2356 0477

Email: ripub@orst.go.th

11.1.5 **Name of Organisations:** Wat Phra That Phanom, 183/13 Chayangkun Road, That Phanom District, Nakhon Phanom 48110

Tel. (669) 4543 5888

11.2. The plans of promotional activities to be organized for the nominated documentary heritage

1. ASEAN Language and Culture Center

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mahasarakham University.

- International Seminar on the Ancient Document

2. The Project of Palm Leaf Manuscript Preservation in Northeastern, Mahasarakham University.

- Transliteration of the Ancient Document “Uranghathat or That Phanom Chronicle” and Its Textual Content Study

3. Phra That Phanom Woramahawihan temple.

- Establishment of the Learning Center on Phra That Phanom Chronicle and Uranghathat

Tale

4. Faculty of Education, Nakhon Phanom University.

- Transliteration of the Ancient Document “Uranghathat or That Phanom Chronicle” and Exhibition on Phra That Phanom Chronicle

5. KKU Art&Culture Center, Khon Kaen University.

- Seminar and Exhibition on the Ancient Document in Mekong River Basin

12.0 CHECKLIST

Summary completed (section 2);

Nomination and contact details completed (section 3);

Declaration of Authority signed and dated (section 4);

If this is a joint nomination, section 4 is appropriately modified, and all Declarations of Authority obtained;

Legal information (section 5);

Details of custodian if different from owner (section 5);

Details of legal status completed (section 5);

Details of accessibility completed (section 5);

Copyright permission for images completed (section 5);

Catalogue and registration information (section 6);

History/provenance completed (section 6);

Bibliography completed (section 6);

Independent referees identified (section 6);

Significance – primary criteria (section 7);

Significance – comparative criteria (section 7);

Statement of significance (section 7);

Details of consultation with stakeholders completed where relevant (section 8);

Assessment of risk completed (section 9);

Summary of Preservation and Access Management Plan completed or strategy proposed (section 10);

Any other information provided – if applicable (section 11);

Additional scanned documents, including suitable reproduction quality photographs identified to illustrate the documentary heritage (300dpi, jpg format, full-colour preferred);