

Article

Phra Lakkhaṇa Dhamma: A Unique Siamese Meditation Text of the Late 18th Century

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Abstract

The present article is the product of ongoing research by the present authors into pre-reform meditation traditions in Siam. Historical and textual circumstances indicate that the *Phra Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* (lit., the honorable characteristics of Dhamma) the meditation manuscript under our study here, was copied during the reign of King Taksin (r.1767–1782), the founder of Thonburi, post-Ayutthaya Siam. The manuscript has, until now, been kept unstudied at Wat Hongrattanaram, one of the most important temples during Taksin's reign, located adjacent to this palace in Thonburi city. The authors, while engaged in researching manuscript collections in Thonburi, were shown this important manuscript. Its contents clearly show this to have been aligned with what some contemporary authors have designated the *boran kammathan* ("old-" or "traditional meditation") or *yogāvācāra* ("meditation practitioner") tradition that flourished in pre-modern Siam and has been the subject of recent research by the present authors and others. In this article, the manuscript is described, summarily translated, and contextualised, and its meditational contents are analysed.

Keywords: boran kammathan; King Taksin; Lakkhana Dhamma; Siam; meditation

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1. Background

In the course of fieldwork searching for manuscripts relating to pre-reform meditation systems in Thonburi (Bangkok), the city during King Taksin's (r.1767–1782) reign, which is now part of Bangkok, the present authors were cataloguing and recording images of manuscripts relating to the meditation tradition of the Supreme Patriarch Suk Kaithuen (Somdet Yannasangwon, 1733–1822)¹, at Wat Ratchasittharam (alternative name: Wat Plab), the royal temple during the Rattanakosin period, located in Thonburi.² This location had been the home temple of Suk in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The temple still preserves a meditation system that is traced by the present incumbent back to Suk and via him to the late Ayutthaya period in the early eighteenth century (see [Choompolpaisal 2021](#), pp. 229–35). This system involves, at least in its preliminary stages, complex manipulation of "signs" (*nimitta*)³ for both traditional and non-traditional meditation objects. These include, among the non-traditional objects, delight (*pīti*), the pairs (*yuggala*), and happiness (*sukha*), which are considered to be aspects of meditative concentration (*jhāna*) but not meditation objects in themselves in *sutta* sources and the *Visuddhimagga*.⁴ The normative list of meditation objects, as defined, for example, by Buddhaghosa, number 40; but, through this kind of supplementation, that list is expanded to something nearer to 100 in the system associated with Suk (see below). In our previous publications and in line

with other members of the research team, we dubbed this meditation the *boran kammattthan*, i.e., the “old meditation”, since this is the term used for it by some contemporary Thai and Lao sources, which promote the modernist Burmese *vipassanā* style practices that have usurped it over the last century.⁵

This system of meditation was, at this stage of research, already known in its Cambodian form from the research of François Bizot published over the preceding four decades.⁶ Preceding his work by several more decades, baffled Western scholars had published a Sri Lankan text from the same meditation tradition with the title *The Yogāvacara's Manual Or Indian Mysticism As Practised By Buddhists* in 1896 (Rhys Davids 1896). While research had already been pursued by team members in Cambodia, and on Sri Lankan manuscripts in the British Library Nevill Collection, it was understood in broad terms that this meditation system had also been used in Siam and modern-day Thailand. The doctoral thesis of Olivier de Bernon had already made the connection with Wat Ratchasittharam, and his article on a 1661 CE manuscript from Wat Rachathiwat in Bangkok had made it clear that this meditation method was not restricted to Wat Ratchasittharam alone (see de Bernon 2000, 2002). All this research by Western scholars was pursued in the often unrecognised shadow of earlier research conducted by Siamese and Thai scholar monks on the tradition. This included key survey studies made of the manuscript tradition generated by practitioners of the *boran kammattthan*, written by Yasothararat and Darunnakon. Venerable Jai Yasothararat (Phramahachoti, 1897–1963) of Wat Borom Niwat, one of the royal temples in Bangkok, brought together Siamese and Laotian meditation manuscript sources and published them in his *Nangsue Phuttharangsi Thritsadiyan Waduai Samatha lae Wipatsana Kammattthan Si Yuk* [Book on the Theory of Perception of the Buddha's Halo Relating to Samatha and Vipassana Meditation during the Four Periods] (Yasothararat 1936). This publication covers varieties in meditation texts during the four eras from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Around the same time, Visan Darunnakon (1884–1950), an officer in the Thai government, published *Samatha-Vipassana Kammattthan Makka Palimut lae Withi Aratthana Phra Kammattthan* [The Path of Samatha- Vipassana Meditation and Methods for Invoking Phra Kammattthan Objects Related Independently of Canonical Scripture (Palimutta)] (Darunnakon 1935). This publication on Suk's meditation method is based on a manuscript, which Darunnakon received from Venerable Chum (Phrasangwaranuwongthera, 1853–1910s), the abbot of Wat Ratchasittharam.⁷

The fieldwork was located at Wat Ratchasittharam because the research team wanted to record the manuscript heritage there for the purpose of further research, but they found a willing partner in the incumbent of Section Five of the temple and lineage holder for this meditation tradition there, Ven. Veera Thanaviro (Veera Sukmisap; 1949–present), who was also strongly concerned to both preserve and disseminate the record of his meditation tradition, of which he is the sole teacher, as a form of protection against the likelihood of its disappearance. This phase of the project made records and images of 73 manuscripts, although by no means all of these were related to the meditation tradition, which was the subject of the research project.⁸

It was of considerable interest, therefore, that in the early stages of this research project, Phibul Choompolpaisal was informed that a related manuscript had been identified at another temple nearby in Thonburi. The information came via the local monastic network and originated from Ven. Sombun Rattanayano at Wat Hongrattanaram⁹ (other names, Wat Hong and Wat Jao Sua Hong; hereafter, Wat Hong—a royal temple in Thonburi within walking distance from Wat Ratchasittharam), who had shared the information with Ven. Veera. Ven. Sombun had discovered, amongst manuscripts held in the library in his own section at that temple, a single manuscript that struck him as similar to those from the tradition he knew to be associated with Suk Kaithuen at Wat Ratchasittharam. Ven.

Sombun is locally renowned for amulets produced in his section that incorporate ash from burned manuscripts. The candidates for this treatment are usually damaged, partial, or incomplete and of unrecognised contents. This process of incorporation, involving mixing the ash from the cremated manuscripts with clay and impressing the resulting mixture into a mold, is understood to transfer the power of the text, usually assumed to be *buddhavacana* (lit., the speech of the Buddha), into the amulet and thus endowing it with protective qualities. Whether or not the manuscript here concerned was being considered for this use, Sombun decided to keep it and then translate the text it contained into modern Thai.¹⁰ The manuscript was subsequently photographed by the Manuscript Conservation Association (Samakhom Anurak Ekkasan Boran)¹¹ under Choompolpaisal's direction, and a transferable digital record was thus made.¹²

Via Choompolpaisal, the translated text was shared with our project, and subsequent examination showed that indeed it does belong to the broader pre-reform meditation tradition that we were researching, but not to the strand which came to Thonburi from Ayutthaya via Suk Kaithuen from Ayutthaya. It became clear that the text describes practices already familiar from our work both on Suk's tradition and from the Cambodian and Sri Lankan branches of this meditation tradition. It employs meditative processes and meditation objects already well-known to us, in most cases employing recognisable designations for these processes. In addition, it emphasises the appearance of signs (*nimitta*) in the way and for the purposes already known from other sources, and finally, it employs the same distinctive litany found in other manuscripts belonging to this tradition and still in use in Wat Ratchasittharam, as will be seen below.

While these discoveries are significant and exciting in their own right, there is a further layer of importance that inheres in this discovery. Firstly, Wat Hong, located adjacent to the old palace of King Taksin, was in origin the *pariyatti* or education centre set up by King Taksin with his establishment of the new Siamese capital after the Burmese invasion of 1767. Taksin established a new capital city because the previous capital, Ayutthaya, had been destroyed during the recent war at the end of a 15-month siege. Among the actions required to create a new state capital was the need for both new educational and meditation centres to replace those destroyed in Ayutthaya. As did Buddhist monarchs throughout South and Southeast Asia, Taksin promoted Buddhism not only because of his own interest but also for political legitimacy. During Taksin's reign, Wat Hong and Wat Rakhang (previous name, Wat Bangwa Yai) became the two top royal temples for the national Sangha administration, education, and storage of manuscript collections. Located on Wat Deum Road (lit., "Former Palace Road"), both temples were within an easy walking distance from Taksin's palace and to the Chao Phraya River. This location was geographically important for two reasons. It enabled Taksin to centralise control over Buddhism. It also facilitated Taksin's mission in his attempts to bring important manuscript collections from several parts of Siam to be kept at these two temples and others in the Thonburi area. Alongside promoting these two temples, Taksin appointed in turn the monks Di, Sri, and Chuen as Supreme Patriarchs, and in turn, all of them became the abbots of either Wat Hong or Wat Rakhang (Choompolpaisal 2021, pp. 238–40). During the Thonburi and early Rattanakosin periods, manuscript collections and meditation practice became important components in royal temples, especially in the Thonburi area. During the reign of King Rama II (r.1809–1824), Wat Ratchasittharam became the new meditation centre concerned with the practice of the Dhamma (*paṭipatti*), with Suk Kaithuen appointed as the head of the meditation wing of the Sangha (*Hua Na Fai Vipassana Thura*) and later Supreme Patriarch (Choompolpaisal 2021, pp. 229–30).

We can see that during Taksin's reign, Wat Hong became one of the two most important temples, where a considerable library of manuscripts was then lodged, doubtless many saved and brought from temple libraries in Ayutthaya itself, others brought from other

regions of Siam, plus new texts written or copied under the patronage of the new king, Taksin (Choompolpaisal 2021, p. 238). It would seem likely, therefore, that the manuscript thus saved by Sombun was ultimately a relic of Taksin’s “new” library¹³ that was not transferred to the east bank of the Chao Phraya river after his reign finished and the Chakri dynasty started by King Rama I in 1782 settled there the new royal palace and the new *pariyatti* (monastic educational) and *paṭipatti* (monastic practice) centres of the Rattanakosin Kingdom. During early Rattanakosin, Wat Ratchasittaram and Wat Rachathiwat became the two meditation centres,¹⁴ and Wat Pho and Wat Phra Kaew became educational centers (Ramkhamhaeng University n.d., pp. 8–10). This likelihood thus adds further circumstantial support for the use of this meditation practice both in Taksin’s circle and prior to the date of 1782.

Of even greater significance, however, is the identity of the text. The manuscript carries the title *Phra Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* (Pali; Thai, *lakkhana tham*), which Sombun identifies as possibly a part of a literary work composed by Taksin himself and thought, until this discovery, to have been lost to history. In his view, this manuscript could be either an autograph manuscript composed during Taksin’s reign or a copy of one. Whether or not this manuscript had any connection with Taksin himself and his own teachings and practices, in any case, it is still significant, as it offers an insight into meditation practice during Taksin’s reign.

Not only historical circumstances but textual analysis also seems to indicate that the manuscript was certainly written and possibly composed during Taksin’s reign. The letters in the *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* manuscript are more square and less rounded in shape than the common Ayutthaya script. So, this suggests that this manuscript was written after the Ayutthaya period.¹⁵ Moreover, the consonant symbol ๗ (pho), as it appears in the text, indicates that this manuscript was written before the reign of King Rama III. So, by taking into consideration the characteristics of letter forms, this manuscript was likely written during the period between the reign of King Taksin and that of King Rama II. Below, in Figure 1, we provide an image of the consonant symbol ๗ (pho) from the manuscript in the text compared to the symbols used before and after the reign of King Rama III. Image a shows the double consonant “bba” in typical Ayutthaya form; image b shows “bbā” from our manuscript; and image c shows the typical rendering of “bba” from Rāma III onwards.

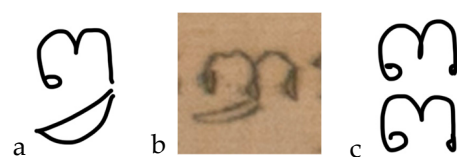


Figure 1. Comparison of the images of the consonant symbol ๗ (pho) used in different historical periods. (a) typical Ayutthaya bba; (b) bbā from our manuscript (c) bba from Rāma II onwards.

In addition to this argument, according to existing Thai historical scholarship, during his reign, Taksin composed and used a text called *Laksana Tham* (Thai; Pali, *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma*), literally meaning “the characteristics of Dhamma”, for teaching monks and lay people, particularly at Wat Intharam Worawihan.¹⁶ There are two titles Thai scholars use in relation to the text. These are *laksana kan patibat tham* (lit., “the characteristics of the practice of Dhamma”) and *laksana bun* (lit., “the attributes of merit”). The text consists of two major sections differentiated by content. The first is on meditation. The other is on general teachings, including details of the attributes of merit (*puñña*) and demerit (*pāpa*), outlining codes of good conduct as well as the mechanism of greed, hatred, and delusion. Thai scholars consider the first section of the text to have been lost, although the second section on the characteristics of merit is still available in rare publications (Supasophon 1962, p. 154; Kabilsingh 1984, p. 13; Chatikun 2015, pp. 119–21). According to Cholvijarn,

the section on *Laksana bun* (Thai; Pali, *Lakkhana puñña*; “The Attributes of Merit”) is known from a *samut khoi* (paper) manuscript in the National Library of Thailand and was published in 1984 (Cholvijarn 2022, p. 32). There, Taksin recommends the accumulation of merit and the practice of the precepts, *sikkhāpada*, as a precursor to meditation practice (Ibid., p. 34). Since the section *Laksana Tham* is understood to have been lost, there has been little clue as to its contents or the type of meditation as practiced by Taksin himself or royal monks during his reign.¹⁷

Whether or not the *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* text presented here happens to be Taksin’s writing in the section *Laksana Tham*, the text under our study here is significant in its own right.¹⁸ As historical circumstances and textual analysis of the script seem to indicate, the text was highly likely to be written during the reign of King Taksin and under royal support. It is, therefore, a major discovery that royal court-level patronage of this meditation system at Wat Hong existed during the reign of King Taksin. Taksin not only provided temple support to Wat Hong but also meditation teaching, and he practiced there. Other evidence also shows that he supported a variant of the *boran kammathan* meditation system in other temples in the Thonburi area, such as Wat Intharam, where we can also still see an image of Taksin sitting in meditation position (see Choompolpaisal 2021, pp. 244–45).

2. Description of the Manuscript

The manuscript is incomplete but has a brief colophon stating the standard wish, *nibbānapaccayo hotu*, “May this [text/copy] be a condition for enlightenment”. The text is composed in mixed Pali and Siamese Thai languages. The manuscript is made of palm leaf and incised in *thai khom* characters, i.e., Cambodian script as employed for Pali text in central Thailand, with occasional minor modern ink annotations in Thai in a second hand. Folio dimensions are c.340 mm × 48 mm, numbered ka–gī (1–28), with six folios missing: kho–ga (20–25). There are twenty-seven folios in total in the digital record, of which three at the end are blank. The first two folios contain the cover information but are otherwise also blank. The text proper, therefore, originally covered 28 folios, of which we now have 22.

All are damaged significantly on the right-hand margin by insects and damp, albeit the loss of characters resulting from this is relatively small. There is also worm damage around the single string hole. The manuscript is undated, but we can infer a Thonburi–early Rattanakosin date from the script.

The cover folio is split vertically and has been repaired with adhesive tape. Between the tape, we can see the title in *thai khom* script.

Phra lakkhaṇa dhamma phuk 1. “The Honourable Lakkhaṇa Dhamma, section one.” (*Phuk* means “section or fascicle”).

To the left, in Thai script, there are the following annotations. They are handwritten in modern Thai script, giving a Thai translation of the Pali title above and a note on the contents below.

Above: *phra lakkhana tham phuk 1.* “The Honourable Lakkhaṇa Dhamma, section one”. (Tham in Thai = Dhamma in Pali.)

Below: *phra Trai Lak* (Trai Lak in Thai = Ti Lakkhaṇa in Pali = “three characteristics”).

3. Contents

In the translation that follows we have normalised the spelling for Pali and incorporated between square brackets explanatory additions to fill out ellipses and contractions in the text. Indented text is the translation, but it is sometimes summarised either in our own words or through ellipsis—we make it clear where and why this is performed. Our translation below includes all the honorifics employed in the text in order to make clear the reverential attitude with which the practitioner engages with the meditation subjects.¹⁹

4. Preparation for the Meditation

The text begins with instructions for general preparations for meditation. As in the Suk tradition, the text uses honorifics *phra* and *chao* plentifully and we render them here literally to give a sense of the flow of the text.²⁰ The text indicates that the total number of meditation objects is 127: the 40 calming meditation objects (as found in *Visuddhimagga*), plus 50 insight *vipassanā* objects, plus the 37 Qualities that Constitute Awakening, the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*.

His majesty the meditation practitioner (*yogāvacara*) should practice the teaching concerning the 40 honorable (*phra*) majesties (*chao*) the meditation objects for calming (*samathakammatthan*) the 37 majesties the *bodhidhammā*²¹ and the 50 majesties, the insight topics (*vipassanā*); and should perform the practice according to all the instructions that the honorable majesties the teachers (*ācariya*) have given. This includes undertaking the precepts (*sīla*) for purification and then petitioning the teachers who teach and the disciples who learn. When learning, light five candles, offer puffed rice and flowers to the honourable majesties the five jewels [that are the Refuges]²² which are: the honorable majesties the *buddha*, the honorable majesties the *dhmma*, the honorable majesties the *ariyasāṅgha*, the honorable majesties the teachers (*ācariya*) who teach the meditation objects (*kammatthāna*), and all the honorable majesties the meditation objects [themselves].²³ And then recite ‘Homage [to him, the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully and Perfectly Awakened One’] (*namo. . .*)²⁴ 3 times, offer incense, candles, flowers, and recite:

aggi bahūpupphaṃ sine datoā asītikappakoṭiyo abhirūpo mahāpañño dhārento piṭakatayaṃ tippaṃ nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ and bow once.

Then stand up and recite: “Please, Sir,²⁵ I make obeisance. [Sir, please forgive me all my faults. May all the merit I have made be approved by my master. May the merit made by my master be given to me.] It is good! It is good! I am thankful.” [Recite] one time.

Then sit down, reciting: “Sir, please forgive me all my faults.”

[Thus repeat the request beginning] “Please. . .” a second and third time.

5. The Meditation Proper

When these preliminaries are over, the practitioner is then instructed in the techniques for meditation on each of the *samatha* meditation subjects. We can already see that the text uses abbreviations, and as we go through the techniques, the presentation becomes ever more summary. This can be explained by first, the repetitive character of the meditation methods being described, and second, the expectation that the practitioner has to be led through the practices by a teacher, and in this connection, we should recall that the tradition transmitted from Suk (and in Cambodian traditions) is esoteric. It requires both initiation and close guidance from the instructing *ācariya*. There is no reason to assume otherwise here. The function of a text like this is, therefore, to summarise and offer prompts to the practitioner or even to the instructor. Since there is a high degree of repetition within the practice, it would be otiose to write out each repetition.²⁶ For similar reasons, we will not, therefore, give a full translation of the meditation instruction but summarise and refer where necessary to places where parallel details or procedures have already been published—the method of the text is clearly related in some respects to that of Suk. Before proceeding, we should also note that a number of different terms are used for the meditation objects in this method. At one level, they are *nimitta*, i.e., signs perceived by the meditator, but this term seems to be restricted to mentioning them in relation to their broader function in relation to the attaining of *jhāna*. Here we find this term only in relation

to the distinction between *uggaha-* and *paṭibhāga-nimitta*, i.e., stages in the acquisition of the meditation object. As existent entities that are propitiated and invoked by the meditator, they are also referred to as *dhamma*, which we translate as “essential entities”. Occasionally, they are also referred to as *ong*, a Thai honorific term for royalty. Finally, when described in their specific details, i.e., the colours that they display, they are referred to by their *lakkhaṇa*, i.e., colour characteristics.

*Samathakammaṭṭhāna*²⁷

As it stands, the exposition of the text does not cover any *vipassanā* topics, as we are led to expect from his introduction, and it seems likely that this material was covered in the missing folios. Therefore, we are unclear as to the content of the 50 *vipassanā* topics he mentions at the start. Discussion, in the folios we have, is confined to the calming topics *samathakammaṭṭhāna* and the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*. The list of topics, when extracted from his exposition, is as follows:

1. pīti 5;
 2. yugala 6;
 3. sukha 2;
 4. ānāpānasati 1;
 5. kasiṇa 10;
 6. asubha 10;
 7. kāyagatāsati 32;
 8. anussati 10;
 9. brahma-vihāra 4;
- [break in ms.]
10. sammappadhāna [4];
 11. satipaṭṭhāna 4;
 12. iddhipāda 4;
 13. bojjhaṅga 7;
 14. indriya 5;
 15. gottabhū 5;
 16. rūpārūpajjhānañāṇa 8;
 17. paṭisambhidāñāṇa 4;
 18. tevijjā 3;
 19. tilakkhaṇa 3.

From this, we can see that his list of *samathakammaṭṭhāna* runs from one to nine, and far from constituting the standard list of 40, which is the number that he cites in his introduction, here, constitute 80 objects. Suk’s tradition counts 99, which, aside from other minor variations of numbering, includes the eight *rūpa* and *arūpa-jhāna* (here, a *bodhipakkhiya* category), ten disgustingnesses of food (*āhārepaṭikulasaññā*), and an analysis of the four *dhātu*.²⁸ From 10 through 19, we have his account of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*.

But what is the meditation technique that the text says should be applied to these objects? In this aspect of his teaching, much of his treatment is very similar indeed to Suk’s. The text begins, as most *boran kammatthan* traditions²⁹ appear to do, with the topic of *pīti*, i.e., the group of five kinds of delight that can be experienced in low-level *jhāna*. They are *khuddaka-*, “minor”, *khaṇika-*, “momentary”; *okkantika-*, “showering”; *ubbega-*, “uplifting”; and “pervading”, *pharaṇa-pīti*. These are specified and analysed in the *Atthasālinī*³⁰, but there as aspects of the subjective experience of meditative concentration. Here, in the text, as elsewhere in *boran kammatthan*, they are treated as autonomous entities, to be propitiated and invited to attend on the meditator.³¹ The interaction with them has three phases.

First, the practitioner must take refuge and then propitiate for and invoke the *pīti*. In the propitiation, the meditation objects are specified and honored. The invocation requires that the meditator sees them in their specific details, differentiating each from the other by colours. The first phase of taking refuge is lengthy and, while given in detail for the *pīti*, is understood to be repeated with due substitution of terminology for each successive meditation object, *kammaṭṭhāna*, in the list.

Then bow one time, standing up and chant: “Please Sir. . . It is good! It is good! I am thankful.”

Then bow one time, then sit down, reciting: “Homage [to him]. . .” three times, then: “itipiso bhagavā. . . buddho bhagavā ti”.³²

Then bow face down, saying: “I go for refuge to the Buddha for life until Nibbana.”³³

Then face up, say “svakhāto. . . viññūhī ti”.³⁴

Then bow facing down: “For a second time, [take refuge in] the Buddha; for a second time, the Dhamma; for a second time, the Saṅgha.”

Then face up, saying: “supatipanno. . . lokassā ti”.³⁵

Then bow facing down saying: “For a third time, [take refuge in] the Buddha; for a third time, the Dhamma; for a third time, the Saṅgha.”

Then face up, and propitiate for them, [saying]: “Please, I wish to acquire its honorable majesty the method to acquire access [concentration] (*upacāra[samādhi]-vidhi*) and its honorable majesty the method to acquire full [concentration] (*appanā[samādhi]-vidhi*) and its majesty the essential entity that is the transcendent concentration (*samādhi-lokuttara-dhamma*³⁶) in the stage (*hong*³⁷) of its honorable majesty the minor delight which has appeared for their Honourable majesties Buddhas, . . . Paccekabuddhas, and . . . Arhats, more than all the grains of sand in the four oceans all of whom have gone to the honorable *nibbāna*. May their honourable majesties Buddhas, . . . Paccekabuddhas, and . . . Arhats and their honorable majesties the dhammas arise for me in my five components, *khandhas*, here and now”.

Then bow three times, pay respect to the teacher, then engage in meditation (*bhāvanā*) in mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna*) focusing the mind on the heart centre (*hadayavatthu*) then moving downward to the navel (*nābhi*) 3 inches outside the *hadayavatthu* [i.e., not in the abdomen]³⁸ but inside the skin.³⁹ Then recollecting the virtues of their honorable majesties the Buddhas, repeating [the mantra] “*arahaṃ*” 100 or 1000 times, once gaining possession of the refined majesty that is the concentration in mindfulness (*sati-samādhi jao*) then meditate on the five honorable majesties, the delights (*pīti*). Before doing that, offer puffed rice, flowers, and 25 candles to the five jewels [that are the Refuges]. Once the teacher has done the chanting, then propitiate for them in the stage of the honorable majesties that are the minor, momentary, showering, uplifting and pervading forms of delight. Then invoke the green honorable minor delight, the red honorable momentary delight, the white honorable showering delight, the yellow honorable uplifting delight, the yellow honorable pervading delight.

As we can see from this, contemplation of the *pīti nimitta* only begins once one has attained mindfulness concentration, *sati-samādhi*, by means of the mindfulness of breathing meditation, *ānāpānasati*. Each of the *nimitta* being invoked here is understood in other accounts of *boran kammaṭṭhan* to appear as a sphere of light, and, circumstantially con-

firming this here, the text specifies the colours of the *nimitta*, as it does for the other meditation objects.

Once this stage is successfully completed, the meditator can begin the process of manipulating the *pīti nimitta* around his or her body. This is performed following a number of specific patterns that are named by the text and that are familiar in type from other expositions of *boran kammattān* (see Skilton and Choempolpaisal 2014). These are patterns both of location and of movement. Those details are not explained in the text, which assumes the practitioner either knows what the names refer to or has access to a teacher who can explain them. In some cases, these “movements” follow specified paths around the body but also of movements of sequencing, timing, and direction—almost all must be performed forwards and in reverse, *anuloma* and *paṭiloma*. For *pīti*, the text specifies by name six such methods: *khao lamdap* (proceeding in sequence), *khao sab* (proceeding by switching), *khao khuep* (proceeding incrementally), *khao ruab* (proceeding all together), *khao sakot* (proceeding with ball weights), and *khao wat* (proceeding round or in a circle). For the *brahma-vihāra*, the text specifies eight: *khao lamdap*, *khao sab*, *khao khuep*, *khao ruab*, *khao chatu* (proceeding with four), *khao pancha* (proceeding with five), *khao sakot*, and *liab bhūmi* (traversing the realms). By contrast, Suk only specifies five in his account of *pīti*: *khao lamdap*, *khao sap*, *khao khuep*, *khao wat ok wat*, and *khao sakot*. The Sri Lankan sources for *boran kammattān* give eleven: *paṭipatiya*, *cha-sadda-ggahana*, *vidatthi*, *dhātu-samūha*, *catu-naya*, *pañca-naya*, *hadayaṃ*, *samādhi*, *dhamma-tira-ṭṭhitika*, *iṭi-pandam pūjā*, and *kāya-vasī-vaṭṭa*. The exact details of what each method requires have already been discussed for Suk’s system, but a full explanation of each and a full correlation between these traditions must wait for another day.⁴⁰ All the methods have the effect of developing absolute control of the *citta* of the practitioner, such that their focus is highly stable and can allow them to direct the mind in any fashion they choose—the ultimate object to which the mind will be directed is, of course, the formulations of *vipassanā* that are characteristically listed in the *boran kammattān* texts (see Skilton 2019).

As soon as the procedures for meditating on the *pīti* are listed, the text says the following:

In this stage, *hong*, the four majesties the *pīti* end now. To start the six honorable majesties, the essential entities *dhamma*, the pairs, *yugala*, make decorations of puffed rice, flowers and thirty candles for offering to the six honorable crystal⁴¹ majesties (*phra kaew chao*). Then the teacher should recite the verses of chanting. Then [the meditator should] propitiate for them again in the stage (*hong*) that is [of the pairs, *yugala*, i.e.]: the honorable majesties the tranquility of body and of mind (*kāya-passaddhi citta-passaddhi*); lightness of body and mind (*-lahutā*); elasticity . . . (*-mudutā*); readiness. . . (*-kammaññatā*); proficiency. . . (*-pāguññatā*); and uprightness of body and of mind (*-ujukatā*).

Then invoke [i.e., visualise]:

tranquility of body and of mind—yellow inside, white outside,

lightness of body and mind—red inside green outside,

elasticity . . .—green inside red outside,

readiness. . .—green inside yellow outside,

proficiency. . .—yellow inside white outside,

uprightness. . .—white inside yellow outside.

Once having acquired the characteristics (*lakkhaṇa*) of the six honorable majesties the entities that are the pairs then [proceed to] *khao lamdap*, saying: “I wish to *khao lamdap* in this stage, . . . [naming the twelve components of the six pairs; our abbreviation] . . . in forward and reverse order.”

Thereafter, the text specifies the five further methods that are to be employed for the *yugala*, *khao sap*, *khao khueb*, *khao ruap*, *khao sakot*, and *khao wat*, indicating by name the movements required for each. Thereafter, it continues through the *samathakammaṭṭhāna*, moving in order to *sukha*.

To start the happiness [meditation object] (*sukha*), taking 10 candles, puffed rice and flowers, make offerings to the two⁴² honorable crystal majesties. Then propitiate for them in the stage of the honorable majesties bodily happiness (*kāyasukha*) and mental happiness (*cittasukha*) while doing recollection of the Buddha at the level of access concentration majesty (*phra buddhānussati upācārasamādhī chao*). Then invoke honorable bodily happiness and mental happiness while doing recollection of the Buddha at the level of access concentration majesty, having two kinds of characteristic: one yellow entity (*ong*⁴³) one white entity. Once having acquired these two honorable majesties as essential *entities* (in some texts *phra kāyasukha jittasukha*, red inside—yellow outside)⁴⁴, propitiating: I wish to [perform the] *khao lamdap*, *khao sap*, *khao khueb*, *khao ruap* [techniques] in the stage of the honorable majesties bodily happiness and mental happiness while doing recollection of the Buddha at the level of access concentration majesty in forward and reverse order. Then [perform the] *khao sakot* [technique], propitiating: I wish to [perform the] *khao sakot* [technique] for their honorable majesties bodily happiness and mental happiness while doing recollection of the Buddha at the level of access concentration majesty in forward and reverse order. Using two candles and attaching 4 weights (*luk sakot*⁴⁵) to these candles, and flowers, then propitiate for the *khao vat* [technique], propitiating: I wish to *khao vat* their stage the honorable majesties bodily happiness and mental happiness while doing recollection of the Buddha at the level of access concentration majesty in forward and reverse order. The honorable happiness meditation object *sukha* is now complete.

His majesty the meditation practitioner (*yogāvacara*) should develop the honorable majesty that is the mindfulness of breathing meditation object (*ānāpānussati*⁴⁶ *kammaṭṭhān jao*). If a [*sāma*]ṇera⁴⁷ has faith, keep the ten precepts purified prior to the practice and when one wishes to do the honorable majesty that is the mindfulness of breathing practice, use puffed rice, flowers, and 30 candles to make offerings to the five honorable crystal majesties [that are the Refuges?]. After the teacher chants the verses, then propitiate in the stage of its honorable majesty the learning sign (*uggaha-nimitta*) of the mindfulness of breathing, then meditate (*bhāvanā*) contemplating *sati* at a distance of around one arm's reach.⁴⁸ Then contemplate the *assāsa* and *passāsa*, [i.e., inbreath and outbreath] counting 1 2 3 4 5, one hundred times and one thousand times. Once having acquired the learning sign in the form of a purified white buddha about the size of a rosary bead, then contemplate *sati* in the reverse direction moving it to the point of contact at the base of the nose (*puttaṭṭhāna nāsik*).

Whenever the sign [*uggaha-*]nimitta is steady, then carry on to contemplate the honorable counterpart signs (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) and propitiate by saying: “in the stage of the honorable counterpart sign of the mindfulness of breathing.” Contemplate *sati* until seeing (visualising⁴⁹) the purified white honorable counterpart sign. Carry on to the first *jhāna* saying: “in the stage of its majesty the first *jhāna* in mindfulness of breathing.”

[Now describing the *lakkhaṇa*.]

The first *jhāna* [is like] crystal as white as pearl,

The second *jhāna* [is like] clear coloured crystal,

The third *jhāna* [is like] is as white as conch,

The fourth *jhāna* has the bright colour of sunlight,

The fifth *jhāna* has the colour of gold, bright and beautifully transparent, incomparable.

Then do the five *jhāna*, in the form of pure entities (*ong*), forwards and in reverse order. The honorable mindfulness of breathing is completed.

To do the honorable *kaṣiṇa*, use 50 candles⁵⁰, puffed rice and flowers to make offerings to the honorable majesties the five jewels [that are the Refuges]. The teacher chants the verses, then [the meditator] propitiates in the stage of the honorable majesties that are learning signs, *uggaha nimitta* [for the *kaṣiṇa*]: the earth *kaṣiṇa*, *pathavīkaṣiṇam*; water *kaṣiṇa*, *āpokaṣiṇam*; fire. . . , *tejokaṣiṇam*; air. . . , *vāyokaṣiṇam*; blue. . . , *nīlakaṣiṇam*; yellow. . . , *pītakaṣiṇam*; red. . . , *lohitaṣiṇam*; white. . . , *odātaṣiṇam*; space. . . , *ākāśakaṣiṇam*; light. . . , *ālokaṣiṇam*.⁵¹ Then invoke each entity (*ong*) at each location⁵² [now describing the *lakkhaṇa* for each]:

pathavīkaṣiṇam clear inside, white in the middle, clear outside,

āpokaṣiṇam white inside, yellow in the middle, white outside,

tejokaṣiṇam red inside, yellow in the middle, red outside,

vāyokaṣiṇam clear inside white in the middle clear outside,

pītakaṣiṇam yellow inside, white like *kaew* in the middle, yellow outside,

lohitaṣiṇam as clear as a crow's egg inside, yellow in the middle, clear outside

ālokaṣiṇam yellow inside, as black as charcoal in the middle, yellow outside.⁵³

All these are called the 'learning signs'.

Propitiate for the counterpart signs (*patibhāganimitta*) saying: in [the stage of] the honorable majesty counterpart signs of the *kaṣiṇa* . . . [thru to]. . . the light (*āloka*) *kaṣiṇa*, then invoke the honorable counterpart signs which are purified white, ten of them. Once having acquired these ten, propitiate for them in the *jhāna* states saying: in the stage of the first *jhāna*, the second *jhāna*, the third *jhāna*, the fourth *jhāna*, the earth *kaṣiṇa* . . . [through to]. . . the light *kaṣiṇa*. Contemplate the ten entities in the five *jhāna* in a similar way to how it was done in the honorable majesty the mindfulness of breathing. This is the end of the stage of the *kaṣiṇa*.

To perform its majesty the repulsive meditation objects (*a[su]bhakammaṭṭhāna*) having 50 candles propitiate for them saying: "In this stage of the learning sign of the honorable . . .

swollen corpse (*uddhumātakaṃ*)

green coloured corpse (*vinīlakaṃ*)

a rotten corpse (*vipubbakaṃ*)

fissured corpse (*vicchiddakaṃ*)

gnawed corpse (*vikkhāyitakaṃ*)

dismembered (*vikkhittakaṃ*)

scattered corpse (*hatavikkhittakaṃ*)

a bloody corpse (*lohitaṃ*)

worm-eaten corpse (*puḷuvakaṃ*)

skeleton (*aṭṭhikaṃ*)

These are learning signs (*uggaha nimitta*). Incorporate loathing (*patikkulaṃ*) into the practice. Then propitiate for the honorable counterpart signs saying: “In the stage of the honorable majesties the counterpart sign of the swollen corpse. . . [thru to]. . . of the skeleton.” To acquire the ten purified white entities (*ong*), then propitiate for the *jhāna* saying: “In the stage of the first, second, third fourth and fifth *jhāna*, the swollen corpse, . . . [thru to] the skeleton.” Then contemplate in *jhāna* with these ten entities. This is all for the stage of the honorable repulsive meditation objects.

When starting the honorable majesty of the [32 components of] the body, (*kāyagatā[sati]*) take 50 candles then propitiate for them saying: “In the stage of the honorable majesties, the learning signs of hair of the head (*kesa*), hair of the body (*loma*), nails (*nakha*), teeth (*danta*) skin (*taco*). . . [thru to]. . . the brain in the head (*matthake matthaluṅga*) that are the recollection of the body.” Then experience loathing towards all the (body) components: . . .

The text at this point rehearses the 32 components of the body individually, as found in the *Visuddhimagga*, 239ff., and continues:

Then propitiate for them invoking the honorable counterpart sign (*patibhāga-nimitta*) to appear for the 32 components, then moving on to *jhāna*.⁵⁴ This is the end of the honorable components of the body (*phra kayakatā* 32).

To start on the ten majesties that are the essential entities of the recollections (*anussati*) take 50 candles and propitiate for them saying: “In the stage of the honorable majesties the recollections:

of the honorable Buddha (*phra buddhānussati*)

of the Dhamma (*dhammānussati*)

of the Saṅgha (*saṅghānussati*)

of good conduct (*sīlānussati*)

of generosity (*cāgānussati*)

of the gods (*devānussati*)

of what is calming (*upasamānussati*)

of death (*maraṇānussati*)

of what has the same perception (*ekasaññā*)

of what has the same elements (*ekadhātuvatta*)

[The respective mantra are:]

for the honorable *buddhānussati* repeat *buddho* 3 [times]; *dhammānussati*, *dhammo* 3 [times]; *saṅghānussati*, *saṅgho* 3 [times]; *sīlānussati*, *sīlāni* 3 [times]; *cāgānussati*, *muttacāgo* 3 [times]; *devānussati*, *saddhā* 3 [times]; *upasamānussati*, *nirodho* 3 [times]; *maraṇānussati*, *maraṇaṃ* 3 [times]; *ekasaññā*, *ahaṃ paṭikūlo* 3 [times]; *ekadhātuvatta*, *dhātu*⁵⁵.

Contemplate the purified white rays (*rasmi*) of these ten entities. Recollection of 10 entities [of the *anussati*] is completed.

The final section of the text’s exposition of the *samathakammaṭṭhāna* in the manuscript is the *brahmavihāra*.⁵⁶

To start its majesty the *mettā brahmavihāra*, take 50⁵⁷ candles and propitiate for it in the stage of its majesty *mettā brahmavihāra* [using the mantra], ‘*ahaṃ sukhito*

homi’ 3 [times], *’atta sukhī*’ 3 [times]. Once having acquired its honorable majesty the essential entity (*dhamma*), then proceed to *jhāna* saying: I wish to proceed to *jhāna lamdub* in the stage of first, second, third and fourth *jhānas* in the stage of its majesty the *mettā brahmavihāra* in forward and reverse order. Then *kao sab*, *kao kueb*, *koa ruab*, *kao jatu* (*catu*) inside, *kao panja* inside, *kao sattha* (candles) inside. Then propitiate for the worlds (*bhūmi*) saying: I wish to *liab bhūmi* in the stage of its majesty *mettā brahmavihāra* in forward and reverse order. Once having acquired all the ten worlds, then come out of these ten worlds. Then [perform the] *kao sattha* [technique] saying: I wish to *kao sattha* in the stage of the first, second, third, fourth and fifth *jhāna* in the stage of its majesty the *mettā brahmavihāra* in forward and reverse order. Using 20 candles (*sattha*) attaching 5 *sattha* weights, then *kao wat* saying: I wish to *kao wat* in the stage of the first, second, third, fourth and fifth *jhāna* in its majesty the *mettā brahmavihāra* inside my body (*kāya*) in forward and reverse order. [I wish] to appear for me *mettā karuṇā muditā* entities (*ong*) of the four *jhāna*: the first, second third and fourth; and its majesty the *upekkhā brahmavihāra* possessing one *jhāna* which is the fifth *jhāna*. The first *jhāna* [has] five [components]: *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*, *ekaggatā*. The second *jhāna* [has] four: *vicāra pīti sukha ekaggatā*. The third *jhāna*, three: *pīti*, *sukha*, *sukha*, *ekaggatā*. The fourth *jhāna* two: *sukha*, *ekaggatā*. The fifth *jhāna* one: the honorable *ekaggatā*.⁵⁸

At this point, i.e., what appears to be the conclusion of the *samathakammaṭṭhāna* section, the manuscript contains a series of diagrams that help the meditator understand the physical movements around the body, and each technique employed above requires the following:

Diag 1 khao lamdap;

Diag 2 khao sap yang nueng (=khao sap first stage);

Diag 3 khao sap;

Diag 4 khao khuep;

Diag 5 Khao ruap yang nueng;

Diag 6 Khao chatu inside khang nai;

Diag 7 Khao pañca inside khang nai;

Diag 8 Khao sakot inside khang nai;

Diag 9 Liab bhumi.

The diagrams seemingly punctuate the flow of the text, but it is possible that the text’s exposition of the *samathakammaṭṭhāna* carries on beyond this point. The text breaks off at this point due to the missing folios.

6. The Missing Section

At the opening of the text, it promises exposition of 40 *samathakammaṭṭhāna*, followed by 50 *vipassanākammaṭṭhāna*. Since there is no discussion of any *vipassanākammaṭṭhāna* in the folios we have, the simplest analysis of the situation is that these topics were covered in the folios missing from the manuscript at this point. It is not unreasonable to guess that these folios may have been removed for specific study or teaching related to *vipassanā*. Quite how we might have had a total of 50 topics here is also unclear. In other accounts of the *vipassanākammaṭṭhāna* from other *boran kammaṭṭhan* traditions, most lists are considerably shorter, in the region of 20 *vipassanā* topics. The nearest comparator is Suk’s tradition; in one account of which, if one includes all topics listed after the *brahmavihāra*, the total comes to 51.⁵⁹ This near agreement is an outlier, so perhaps it is all the more significant.

Bodhipakkhiyadhammā

From items 10 to 19 in the list of meditation objects that we extracted above, we have the text's account of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*. The 37 Qualities that Constitute Awakening (*bodhipakkhiyadhammā*) are a well-known classification of doctrine. Mainstream convention, derived from numerous references to them in the *suttapīṭaka*, numbers seven doctrinal sets of qualities/attainments, etc., for which, if the individual contents of each are added up, the total number is thirty-seven.⁶⁰ The standard account of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* is that they consist of the following, as listed in the right-hand column of the Table 1.

Table 1. The comparative lists of meditation objects between the *Lakkhanadhamma* and the standard *Visuddhimagga* texts.

The <i>Lakkhanadhamma</i> 's List in Order of Presentation	List in <i>Visuddhimagga</i> (678ff.)
4 sammappadhāna	4 satipaṭṭhāna
4 satipaṭṭhāna	4 sammappadhāna
4 iddhipādā	4 iddhipādā
5 indriyāni	5 indriyāni
5 balāni	5 balāni
7 bojjhaṅga	7 bojjhaṅga
5 gottabhū	8 ariyaatṭhaṅgikamagga
8 rūpārūpajjhānañāṇa	
4 paṭisambhidāñāṇa	
3 [tevijjā?] pubbenivāsānusativijjāñāṇa, paracittavijjāñāṇa, dibbacakkhuvijjāñāṇa	
3 tilakkhaṇa	

Our manuscript resumes on folio gā (verso) with a sequence of four formulae, which clearly are offered as *mantra* for the cultivation of the four *sammappadhāna*. This term does not appear, so it presumably must have been mentioned by way of introduction in the final line of the previous missing folio. The *mantras* conclusively show that the *sammappadhāna* are the first components of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* in the text's exposition.

We can see that the text's list, in the left-hand column, differs in two ways from the *Visuddhimagga* account. First, it includes different categories. The *ariyaatṭhaṅgikamagga* of *Visuddhimagga* is gone, and new categories are added: five *gottabhū*, eight *rūpārūpajjhānañāṇa*, four *paṭisambhidāñāṇa*, three *vijjā*, and the three *lakkhāṇa*. The second difference is that it seemingly includes within the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* not 37, but 52 items. This number is reached by the addition of these further sets: five *gottabhūñāṇa*, four *paṭisambhidāñāṇa*, the *tilakkhaṇa* (*aniccā, dukkha, anattā*), and a set of *vijjā* that partially correspond to the three knowledges, *tevijjā*, of canonical accounts: knowledge of former existences (*pubbenivāsānusativijjāñāṇa*); knowledge of the mind of other people (*paracittavijjāñāṇa*); and the divine eye (*dibbacakkhuvijjāñāṇa*). This numerical difference possibly reflects a developed commentarial tradition in that the *Nettipakaraṇa*, an early Pali exegetical text, numbers the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* at 43, not 37, although its additional items are the *tilakkhaṇa* plus the perceptions of overcoming/abandoning (*pahāna*), dispassion (*virāga*), and cessation (*nirodha*).⁶¹

Regarding this method, in the section dealing with the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*, the text presents the information in a different manner, and this appears to indicate a different procedure or a change in technique.⁶² Here, the individual components of each category or

doctrinal formulation are specified simply as a list in line, with each item followed by the *mantra* for its invocation. No litany is offered. The provision of these *mantras* confirms that the author sees the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* as meditation objects (*kammaṭṭhāna*). Here, as in Suk's tradition, the *mantra* is to be recited as a means or support to invoke the individual component or meditation object (Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2014, p. 101). Since there is no litany or other discursive material, we tabulate the text for the sake of clarity and saving space in Table 2.

Table 2. *Mantra* used in relation to *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* section in the manuscript.

Category	<i>Mantra</i>
[4 sammappadhāna]	1 [saṃvara:] yathā paṭipannasetam sakusalam uppannam tathā paṭipadisāmi 2 [pahāna:] yathā paṭipannasetam [a]kusalam ⁶³ uppannam na tathā paṭipadisāmi 3 [bhāvanā:] yathā paṭipannasetam kusalam ⁶⁴ upajjamānam paṭipadesāmi 4 [anurakkhaṇa:] uppannam me ya tathā paḷihaññati eva[m] punnapunam uddādhessāmi
4 satipaṭṭhāna	1. kāya asubho 2. cittaṃ aniccaṃ 3. vedanā dukkhā 4. dhammā anattā
4 iddhipāda	sammāsambuddho for all 4.
5 bala	[bu]ddho? for all five
7 bojjhaṅga	sammāsambuddho for all 7
5 indriya	sammāsambuddho for all 5.
5 gottabhūmi	nāmarūpaṃ etc. for all 5.
8 jhānañāṇa	nāmarūpaṃ for all 8.
4 paṭisambhidāñāṇa	samāsambuddho for all 4.
3 tevijjā	nāmarūpaṃ aniccaṃ khayyathena niccavattaniṅjanaṃ
3 ti-lakkhaṇa	–

A final ambiguity remains. Immediately prior to the colophon, the text's final line follows on from the *tevijjā* and simply says "Once having completed this, then proceed to *phra trai lakkhaṇa*". No *mantra* is provided, possibly suggesting that they are not seen by the author as part of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*. We have assumed that the *tilakkhaṇa* are the final three of the text's account of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*, in the manner of the *Nettipakaraṇa* and its commentary, but it may be that the composer of the text sees them as a stage beyond that being addressed through the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*.

7. Discussion of the Practice in *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* and How It Differs from Suk's

The broad similarity of the meditation method according to the *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* text to that of Suk Kaithuen is notable. This ranges from the structure and general content through to the ornate and highly deferential tone of the litany that is employed. There is the same sense that the *nimitta/dhamma* are external entities that the meditator is inviting to appear in his/her mind and then to move around their body. The meditation in both presentations is oriented towards the acquisition of *jhāna* via the emergence of *uggaha-* and *paṭibhāga-nimitta*, a transition that is described in the *Visuddhimagga*, but in addition,

the meditator employs techniques, such as *khao lamdap*, etc., that give him/her absolute control over their mind, *citta*. Minor variations, for example, in the number of techniques so applied to one object or another—and in the total list of meditation objects for that matter—suggest that individual teaching traditions of *boran kammatthan* select exercises and meditation objects from an “inventory” of possibilities, all of which may contribute to the final desired outcome. The *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* text’s preparatory litany differs in some detail from that of Suk but performs the same function. The former gives us further details for the implementation of the *boran kammatthan* method not present in materials from Suk’s tradition and thus helps us understand better the application in practice of the techniques.

A major difference between the Suk and the Cambodian and Sri Lankan strands of this meditation system is its incorporation of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* into the meditation cycle. The reason for this inclusion is not stated, but we can reasonably conclude that, in fact, the composer of the *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* text is here following the presentation of the Path as seen in the *Visuddhimagga*, where transcendental realisation of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* is the first part of the acquisition of the fourth fruit of the Path, i.e., becoming an *arahat*, and is the culmination of the 7th *visuddhi* of the Path, i.e., purification by knowledge and vision *ñāṇadassanavisuddhi*.⁶⁵ This inference is confirmed by the text employing a formulation that paraphrases the *Visuddhimagga*’s discussion of the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā* as a *mantra* for the acquisition of the *sammappadhāna* (above): *yathā paṭipannass’etaṃ uppannaṃ, na tathā paṭipajjissāmi*; “I shall not behave as he has done in whom this is now arisen.”⁶⁶ (followed here by variations—in Siamese Pali—to reflect the four correct efforts.)

The *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* tells us the *lakkhaṇa* of the meditation objects, i.e., the colours in which the *nimitta* appear. In Suk’s tradition, as curated by Ven. Veera, such details are a part of the esoteric transmission. Veera forbids the circulation of such details, as the meditator, if made aware of them, can become distracted by anticipation. There are, however, other *boran kammatthan* manuals that do specify the *lakkhaṇa* in this way, and so our text here is not an outlier in this respect.

It is disappointing that the section on *vipassanā* is missing from the manuscript. Not only would we like to be able to confirm the content of the *vipassanā kammatthāna* category in this meditation system but we would like to see its manner of presentation, including the possibility that the text sheds light for us on the methods used for cultivating *vipassanā* in this Taksin era version of *boran kammatthan*. Other *boran kammatthan* texts known to the authors do not discuss any method for meditation on the *vipassanā kammatthāna*. It remains a possibility that the six folios missing from the manuscript still remain somewhere in the Wat Hong manuscript collection, unidentified, and their significance not understood.

8. Reflections on Taksin’s Religious Practice

Overall, there are a number of sources that give us information about meditation practice and experience during the reign of King Taksin. These include the writing from his contemporary Sangharāja, affirming Taksin’s meditation attainment (cited in *the British Museum Edition of the Royal Chronicle of Thonburi*) (Choompolpaisal 2021, pp. 242–43), the text summarised by Phosai (1985) (Cholvijarn 2022, pp. 31–47), the writings of Kabilsingh and others (see Kabilsingh 1984), and even, circumstantially, the hostile assessments of later commentators on Taksin’s “madness”—a retrospective caricaturing of the legitimate *boran kammatthan* attainment of *buddhanimitta* (Choompolpaisal 2021, pp. 242–46). The *boran kammatthan* content of this manuscript is completely consistent and congruent with these other sources. The *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* presented here, however, is the longest, most detailed, and explicit source for an understanding of meditation practice during Taksin’s reign. It potentially aligns him with other teachers of *boran kammatthan* and affirms the status of this meditation tradition in court circles in the 18th century. That Taksin may have

been its author, i.e., the *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* is his *Laksana Tham*, remains a possibility but is certainly not proven here. Evidence for this possibility is at best circumstantial. However, what discovery of this text seems to make quite clear is that *boran kammattthan*, as known and described from other sources across mainland Southeast Asian Theravāda, was also known and practised in Taksin's court and probably by Taksin himself.

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Notes

- 1 In this article, all Pali terms are in standard romanised form, and all Thai terms are transliterated following RTGS, a standard system used for Thai transcriptions, unless suggested otherwise. There are exceptions for names of authors, contemporary monks and persons. We spell them according to official records or how they want to spell their names.
- 2 Itsaraphap 23 Alley, Wat Tha Phra, Bangkok Yai, Bangkok 10600, Thailand.
- 3 Traditionally these are subtle images perceived within the mind, usually responding to some degree of active visualisation on the part of the meditator, but in this tradition are considered independent entities that can 'attend' on the practitioner and need to be invited to appear.
- 4 See (Skilton and Choempolpaisal 2014) on this category change.
- 5 *boran kammattthan* is the Thai equivalent of the Pali *purāṇa-kammattthāna*. Some manuscripts use the term *kammattthan* instead of *kammattthan*. For the use of the term *boran kammattthan*, see (Choempolpaisal 2019, p. 154, note 4 p. 179 and pp. 157–58). Some authors may use the term *yogāvacara* (lit., 'practitioner of spiritual discipline').
- 6 Crosby (2000) is a review of Bizot's publications relating to *boran kammattthan*.
- 7 Choempolpaisal (2019, pp. 153–56). See also other works on pre-modern meditation in *ibid*.
- 8 Digital images were recorded and at the request Ven. Veera are held by the present authors as managers of the research team for distribution to interested parties. A handlist-catalogue is available from them. The images were also deposited with Ven. Veera on CD-rom for his own use.
- 9 Head of *khana* (Thai, lit. 'division') 4, Wat Hongrattanam, Arun Sub-district, Bangkok Yai District, Bangkok, 10600. Completed 26 October 2007.
- 10 On the Manuscript Conservation Association, see (Choempolpaisal 2022, pp. 291–326).
- 11 We gratefully acknowledge Ven. Sombun's permission to study and translate this unique manuscript in his care.
- 12 ...whether dating itself from that era or being a copy, i.e., a descendent, of a text held there during that era.
- 13 https://www.matichon.co.th/columnists/news_1585736 (accessed on 30 August 2025).
- 14 For Thai language evolution and the characteristics of letters in each period of Siam, see (Tiewcharoenkij et al. 2022, pp. 364–75).
- 15 256 Thanon Thoet Thai, Bang Yi Rue, Thon Buri, Bangkok 10600, Thailand.
- 16 The qualification to this statement comes from a publication by Phairot Phosai in 1985 which claims to summarise another text, *Tamra Kammattthan khong Somdet Phra Chao Krung Thonburi (Meditation Manual of the King of Thonburi)*, also attributed to Taksin. This too clearly indicates a *boran kammattthan* tradition. Unfortunately, although based on a *samut khoi* manuscript, that manuscript cannot now be located and is thought possibly to have been burned for amulet production. This, like the subject of the present article, was a mixed Siamese Thai and Pali language text. For his publication Phosai translated the Siamese Thai into modern Thai and left out all the components in Pali (recorded in *khom* script). This information comes from (Cholvijarn 2022), who also provides a summary translation and analysis of the meditation system described in Phosai's article.
- 17 From hereon, we use the title *Lakkhana Tham* to denote Taksin's text and *Lakkhaṇa Dhamma* to denote the text in our manuscript, leaving the question of their identity or relationship moot.
- 18 While we regard our present translation to some extent as work still in progress, we are happy that it fairly represents the full contents of the manuscript. We also wish gratefully to acknowledge that in preparing our current treatment we have built on the pioneer translation of Ven. Sombun and a second translation of the Siamese Thai that we commissioned from Ms. Laongdao Supsinchai.

20 The authors discuss this feature of litany at Wat Ratchasittharam in (Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2014).
 21 i.e., the *bodhipakkhiyadhammā*.
 22 five *phra kaew jao* crystal bodies—literally glass, coloured light bodies of the five refuges.
 23 That is, the *boran kammatthan* tradition honours five jewels not three.
 24 *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa*. A standard salutation to the Buddha.
 25 The Pali text is as follows, the material within brackets being elided in the text and restored here by the authors. *Ukāsa vandāmi bhante [sabbaṃ aparādhaṃ khamatha me bhante mayā kataṃ punnaṃ samina anumoditabbam sāmīnā kataṃ puññaṃ mayhaṃ databbam] sādhu sādhu, anumodāmi*. The elision is possible as this is the opening request made by an ordinand in the legal procedure, *kammavācā*, for ordination, and would be familiar to all monks and many lay supporters. The *kammavācā* being drawn on here by the text is that of the Mahānikāya.
 26 Interestingly this is what was done when the Siamese tradition was transmitted to Sri Lanka. In some cases manuals preserved there do write out the detailed repetitions, perhaps reflecting that the tradition was new and that after the Siamese mission returned home, practitioners needed as much textual support for their practice (and memories) as possible. This does make such texts very difficult to read. See (Crosby 2013, 2020).
 27 To avoid confusion, we use the Pali term *kammaṭṭhāna* to denote specific meditation objects as such. We use the Thai *kammatthan* to refer to the meditation tradition we are discussing in this article.
 28 See (Skilton 2019) for a comparative discussion of meditation topics in *boran kammatthan* from Thailand, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka.
 29 Some commentators see the presence of the *pīti* meditation as a diagnostic criterion for identifying a meditation text as of the *boran kammatthan* type. Whether or not a strict application of this criterion is sustainable needs to be established by further research. We refer to ‘traditions’ here since both evidence ‘on the ground’ i.e., amongst meditation groups using variants of this system, and from manuscript sources suggests that within the broader transmission of this system individual teaching lineages employ versions of it that vary in some degree or another. It has been a goal of the work of the present authors to begin to shed light on such internal variations rather than treat the *boran kammatthan* as a monolithic entity.
 30 *Atthasālinī* pp. 115–17.
 31 Noted in Bizot (1992) and de de Bernon (2000). See (Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2014) for a more recent discussion.
 32 These phrases are the opening and closing terms of the standard litany of worship for the Buddha, as used in almost all Theravāda litany, and ultimately derived from the *sutta-piṭaka*. The text is familiar to all practising Theravāda Buddhists.
 33 *buddhaṃ jīvitaṃ yāva nibbānaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. Looking ahead to the pattern for the *dhamma* and *saṅgha* it seems likely that the practitioner is meant to go for refuge to all three jewels using this formula.
 34 These phrases are the opening and closing terms of the standard litany of worship for the Dhamma.
 35 These phrases are the opening and closing terms of the standard litany of worship for the Saṅgha.
 36 Our interpretation here is that this list is simply additive, rather than dependent.
 37 *hong* literally means ‘a room’. In this meditation context, *hong* designates a step or stage of the meditation method. For example, *hong ānāpānasati* means a step or stage in the mindfulness of breathing.
 38 The text literally reads ‘3 inches outside the flesh but inside the skin’, and our interpretation is that this means outside the abdominal cavity, but still under the skin.
 39 These are key locations in the movement of *nimitta* around the body. See (Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2014).
 40 See (Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2014) on Suk’s use of *khao lamdap*, *khao sab*, *khao kuep*, *khao vat ok vat* and *khao sakot*. A comparative analysis of this terminology and correlation of the methods denoted is under way.
 41 The *nimitta* for this meditation object are understood to appear as crystalline spheres. There are 30 candles because for each of the six *yugala* there needs to be five candles for the five refuges in *boran kammatthan*.
 42 The ms. has ‘6’ but there are only two *kammaṭṭhāna* in this stage.
 43 *ong* denotes a sacred item.
 44 Comment added in ms.
 45 These are metal balls or weights that are inserted into the side of the candle. As it burns down these are released and fall into a receptacle—at Wat Ratchasittharam, this would be a metal alms bowl. The explanation at the latter temple is that this tests the attention of the meditator, who should not be shaken from their concentration by the rather loud noise this makes.
 46 Skilton and Choompolpaisal (2015) gives an account of the *ānāpānasati* meditation as practised in the tradition of Suk Kaithuen at Wat Ratchasittharam.
 47 i.e., a monk who has only received the lower ordination.
 48 Presumably a reference to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*’s (much discussed) injunction ‘setting up mindfulness in front’, *parimukhaṃ satipaṭṭhapetvā*. DN 2.291.
 49 Added in ms.
 50 Presumably five candles for each *kaṣiṇa*.

- 51 This list of ten *kaṣiṇa* follows that of the *Visuddhimagga* which includes *ālokakaṣiṇa*, light in place of consciousness *viññāṇakaṣiṇa*. The latter component is normative through the *mūla* text of the Tipiṭaka, this indicating that our text's doctrinal context is rooted in Buddhaghosa's account of meditation.
- 52 These locations are not specified.
- 53 This list contains only seven *kaṣiṇa*; *nīla*, *odāta* and *ākāsa* are missing. Since we are working from a solitary manuscript, we must assume that this is a matter of accidental omission.
- 54 Presumably to contemplate each of the 32 components in each of the *jhāna* as in other meditation objects.
- 55 No number given.
- 56 We acknowledge there may have been more *samathakammaṭṭhāna*, but the missing folios deny us any knowledge of what immediately follows here.
- 57 Should we understand, on the model of previous topics where there are 5 candles for each component of the topic, that for this text it has 10 components?
- 58 The text's account of the *jhāna* here follows Abhidhamma which divides the *sutta-piṭaka* account of four *rūpajjhāna* into five.
- 59 See (Skilton 2019, pp. 55–57) for comparison of various sets of *kammaṭṭhāna* listed in *boran kammaṭṭhan* texts.
- 60 Vism 678ff.
- 61 The *Nettipakaraṇa-atthasaṃvaṇṇanā* clarifies the rather succinct statement in the *mūla* text with the following explanation: *tecattālīsaṃ bodhipakkhiyā dhammā ti aniccasaññā dukkhasaññā anattasaññā pahānasaññā virāgasaññā nirodhasaññā cattāro satipaṭṭhānā. . . pe. . . ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo ti ete tecattālīsaṃ bodhipakkhiyā dhammā.*
- 62 There remains the possibility that there is no intended change, but just that the text employs increasing levels of abbreviation—in which case we may be expected to understand the full procedure as outlined for the *samathakammaṭṭhāna* being employed here.
- 63 *a-* added by present authors for sake of sense.
- 64 *a-* added incorrectly before in modern ink by a modern reader of the ms.
- 65 From the *Visuddhimagga* onwards, the Theravāda had reconceptualised the Path from simple structures such as the Eightfold Path, *aṭṭhaṅgikamagga*, to a more sophisticated evolution via the acquisition of a series of seven purifications, *visuddhi*—hence the title of the work. In stating that the author of this text may be following the *Visuddhimagga*, we do not mean to suggest that he was necessarily referencing the text itself, but more that he was working with an account of the Path that derived from it.
- 66 Vism. 680. Translation from (Ñāṇamoli 1976, p. 794).

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