

---

## The Bird in the Corner of the Painting: Some Problems with the Use of Buddhist Texts to Study Buddhist Ornamental Art in Thailand

Justin McDaniel

---

**Electronic version**URL: <http://moussons.revues.org/2966>

DOI: 10.4000/moussons.2966

ISSN: 2262-8363

**Publisher**

Presses Universitaires de Provence

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 22 septembre 2014

Number of pages: 21-53

ISBN: 978-2-85399-956-4

ISSN: 1620-3224

**Electronic reference**

Justin McDaniel, « The Bird in the Corner of the Painting: Some Problems with the Use of Buddhist Texts to Study Buddhist Ornamental Art in Thailand », *Moussons* [Online], 23 | 2014, Online since 16 September 2014, connection on 01 October 2016. URL : <http://moussons.revues.org/2966> ; DOI : 10.4000/moussons.2966

---

The text is a facsimile of the print edition.



Les contenus de la revue *Moussons* sont mis à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

# The Bird in the Corner of the Painting

## Some Problems with the Use of Buddhist Texts to Study Buddhist Ornamental Art in Thailand

McDANIEL Justin \*

University of Pennsylvania, School of Art & Sciences, South Asia Center

Traditionally the study of Buddhist art tries to relate the sources of the art, whether it be a painting of a bodhisattva or a statue of hell being, to its source in a Buddhist text, preferably a really old text in a classical language. As a scholar trained in Pali and Sanskrit who works on Buddhist manuscripts in Laos and Thailand, I often get asked by art historians, usually friends and colleagues that I have met over the years and occasionally by a curator, student, or collector of Southeast Asian art, to provide them with some information on the textual origins for objects, characters, and ornamental features they have seen on pieces of Buddhist art. Sometimes they are figures in illuminated manuscripts or animals depicted on murals or particular characters on bas-reliefs or sculpted architraves. Sometimes I can identify the character or object

\* Dr. Justin McDaniel received his PhD from Harvard University's Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies in 2003. Presently he is an Associate Professor of Buddhism and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. His research foci include Lao, Thai, Pali and Sanskrit literature, Southeast Asian Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, ritual studies, manuscript studies, and Southeast Asian history. His first book is on the history of Buddhist monastic education in Laos and Thailand, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008). It won the Harry Benda Prize from the Association of Asian Studies for the best first book in Southeast Asian Studies (2008-2009). His second book is a study on material culture and ritual in Thai Buddhism: *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magic Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Thailand* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). He is the co-editor of the journals: *Buddhism Compass* and *Journal of Lao Studies*, and is the Chair of the Southeast Asian Studies Council of the Association of Asian Studies. He has won teaching and advising awards at Harvard University, Ohio University, and the University of California at Riverside. In 2012, he was named a Guggenheim Fellow.

in question with ease, other times I am stumped and consult texts at my disposal or ask others for help. Often times the art historian, curator, or collector has already identified the “main story” of the mural or relief, usually a *jātaka* or scene from the life of the/a Buddha, but is bothered by certain elements in the particular piece that seems out of place. The questions often go something like: “I think the green figure in the corner with the pointed crown is Indra and the figure sitting next to the Buddha is Ananda, but I can’t figure out who the person peaking over the wall in the upper register is,” or “I understand that this scene is probably drawn from the *Temiya-jātaka*, but why is there a kinnari in the scene?” or “why is a Chinese merchant painted in a scene that was supposed to take place in India?” or “does the tree carved behind the Buddha image indicate that this image is supposed to represent Siddhārtha Gautama or Dīpaṅkara?” or “what does this type of flower represent?” I love these types of questions. It is a gift of a mystery that arrives in my e-mail inbox when I get to my office. It usually leads to a fun back and forth with the questioner trying to decipher the story and identify all of its textual sources. In general, I think trying to discover what a piece of Thai art refers to textually, what message or lesson (whether historical and descriptive or ethical and didactic) is a productive exercise. These questions linking text to art have also given me the privilege of getting to know many art historians and art enthusiasts who have exposed me to an entire side of Buddhist Studies I neglected for far too long.

As I became interested in Buddhist art more seriously, soon roles reversed. I started being one of the many people trained in Buddhist texts, particularly Pali texts, that assisted specialists in art, but soon became a person trained in texts that was sending my own queries to art historians about the paintings I encountered while translating manuscripts or on the walls of the monasteries where I was conducting interviews with monks and nuns. More and more I encountered paintings, mosaics, and reliefs where I could not identify the exact textual source and I did not know where to turn. The best textual scholars, art historians, curators, and even long-term monastics were not able to help. Like a drinking problem, what used to be fun pastime slowly turned towards anxiety and frustration. I couldn’t just put the art down even though it wasn’t giving me any answers or solving any of my problems. Texts were only taking me so far.

The problem became particularly acute when I started what I thought was a relatively harmless investigation into birds as depicted in Siamese/Thai Buddhist art. It all started when I was reading a short description of King Chulalongkorn’s coronation in 1868. I learned that two books were published for that occasion and given to him as special gifts. One described the ten avatars of the God Vishnu, perhaps strange considering Chulalongkorn was a Buddhist king of a Buddhist kingdom; however, not strange if you realize that Thai kings are usually seen as both as Buddhist bodhisattvas and representatives of Vishnu on Earth. The other was about birds. This second book was apparently chosen above new editions of Buddhist canonical or commentarial texts, chronicles of past Siamese monarchs, royal law codes, great Sanskrit epics, stories of Indra, Śiva, or Avalokiteśvara, and important ethical and philosophical treatises. Printed books were still quite rare in Siam and why would the efforts of printing one to present to a king be wasted on birds? There isn’t much evidence that King Chulalongkorn was particularly fascinated with bird

watching, ornithology or animal folklore. However, it started to dawn on me that if one takes a stroll around the great 18th and 19th century monasteries and palaces of Bangkok, s/he will find statues and paintings of birds virtually everywhere. They form a permanent backdrop for Thai religion, art, and literature. Indeed, throughout the history of mainland Southeast Asian culture we find stories of birds in manuscripts, murals, and reliefs. Stories of birds and human-bird hybrids abound in Buddhist and Hindu literature popular in Southeast Asia. Naturally, I resorted to my addiction and started looking for the textual sources of this bird art. Big mistake.

## WHY ORNAMENTAL ART?

Every monastery regardless of lineage, sect, or region has ornamental elements, but they have been ignored in favor of studies of ritual activity or institutional history. It is striking that the monks in the Theravada school of Buddhism, known for their orthodox attention to the Vinaya, eschewal of material luxury, and austerity of monastic practice, dress, and comportment, are also the purveyors and stewards of some of the most lavish (if not gaudy) monasteries in the Buddhist world. There is hardly a monastery, even a forest monastery in the region that could be called aesthetically austere. There are gold images, flowers, incense, posters, amulets, intricate murals, packed altars, signs nailed to trees with ethical maxims and advertisements, and large amounts of food, reading material, and paraphernalia found at thousands of Thai monasteries. Monks are neither hapless victims of the crude materialism of modern society nor the overwhelmed recipients of the arbitrary gifts of overzealous merit-makers too lazy or ignorant to meditate, or read ethical and philosophical texts. Monks often promote, encourage, and explicitly advertise occasions to not only give gifts to their monasteries, but also distribute objects to their followers.<sup>1</sup> Part of the gifts ordered by patrons and monks are decorative elements added or restored on the monastic grounds. For example, Phra Thammakittiwong, the abbot of Wat Ratchaorot in Bangkok personally oversaw the restoration of the bird paintings on the window shutters between 2006 and 2011. My own abbot in rural Northeast Thailand along the Lao and Cambodia border, in 1995, personally drew the plans for a new *chedi* (reliquary) including its floral and bird decoration.<sup>2</sup> Whole committees of monks work with local artisans to add decoration to their monasteries on a daily basis. They might offer sermons, perform funerals, and meditate, but they are also often amateur interior designers and landscape architects.

The study of the ornament arts, dance, drama, and non-explicitly religious poetry, has not excited folks in Buddhist Studies even though, visually Buddhist monasteries are highly decorated throughout Asia, and have decoration (often depicting birds and other animals) that rivals, if not surpasses, the greatest palaces in the region.<sup>3</sup> Manuscript chests are often highly decorated with birds and other natural designs, the architraves, columns, murals, sermon chairs, platforms of Buddha statues, etc. abound with birds of various colors flying among trees and over oceans.<sup>4</sup> In the 19th and early 20th centuries kings, poets, artists, dancers, and sculptors that were interested in birds, foreign scholars of Southeast Asia were too. However, these studies dried up over the last 80 years and there have been precious few serious studies of Thai theatre, music, and non-explicitly Buddhist literature by anyone trained or

teaching Buddhist Studies. What happened? In many ways, it is the nature of modern scholarly disciplines and the rise of the professional scholar of religious and Buddhist Studies. Many foreigners and local scholars who studied humanistic endeavors like art, literature, ritual, drama, or clothing were not writing dissertations, trying to earn tenure, earn research fellowships, and other standard activities of the academy. They were members of various noble families, dilettantes, collectors, amateur botanists, big game hunters, missionaries, tutors, colonial officials, Buddhist monks, surveyors, or translators. These producers and documenters of religion and culture are part of the missing history of Southeast Asian Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> Amateurs like James Audubon, often broke and desperate to earn a living, ran around the Southern United States capturing, drawing, and selling paintings of birds, were also running around Siam, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma in the 19th century, exploring, doing field sketches, and writing up what they saw. They were trying to make money, collecting, promoting, and observing. There was often little separation between Buddhist and non-Buddhist or secular and religious culture in these early documentary studies and reports. Professional scholars in established disciplines over the past few decades though have developed a habit of intentional selecting of evidence and ignoring of aesthetics, seeing certain parts of a monastery as “religious” and others as “cultural.” Culture was left to the art historians and the ethnomusicologists, while scholars of religion believed they were the students of the texts and the “ideas.” This is particularly acute in foreign studies of Buddhist life. Encyclopedias and survey texts, especially in the Thai and Indonesian languages for example, include much information on decorative and performative art and drama at monasteries. Indeed, the study of Southeast Asian religion, art, drama, and literature in non-Western languages, until recently, has made little separation between the Buddhist and non-Buddhist cultural expression. In Buddhist monasteries there was little separation, if any, of secular and religious manuscripts and stories—both were held and often together.<sup>6</sup> Now though it is entirely acceptable for a scholar of Southeast Asian Buddhism, especially one trained in the West to study Buddhist texts and admittedly know nothing about drama, decorative arts, music, or dance. On the other hand, art historians might never read extensively in Pali literature or vernacular poetry (although, in my experience, art historians are often trained in Buddhist texts, but textual specialists are not trained in art history). A student of local romance and adventure epics might never read the *Abhidhamma* and vice versa, even though these knowledges were rarely separated, even at Buddhist monasteries in the past. Indeed, the greatest composer of epic romance and adventure poems in Thai history, Sunthorn Phu, wrote some of his best work as a monk residing at Wat Thepdhitaram. The doyen of Lao Buddhist history and former monk, Mahasila Viravong, wrote actively about both what would be called “secular” and Buddhist art, literature, and drama without much need to separate their study.

This is one of the major reasons why birds and ornamental art in general have been seen but not studied by Buddhist Studies scholars. Birds are ignored, not because of their popularity or beauty or the fact that they are common in Buddhist art and literature, but because they no longer fall within the discipline of religion or religious history, but in Buddhist life they are everywhere, on lintels, as decorative elements in manuscripts (part of a class of images with the unfortunate name—“drolleries”—in European manuscript studies), on the edges of ceremonial skirts, on headdresses and

crowns, on tattoos and belt buckles, and flying around the edges of murals. Being ordinary, they are unnoticed as if they were flying above us quickly and then, in a moment, out of sight. Birds are a normal part of European and American life, Buddhist monks are not. Monks are noticed by scholars and birds are not.

## PROBLEMS

When noticed, the scholar of religious studies retreats to the tried and true methods of textual research and textual origins. There are several problems that a textual scholar or a specialist in art history or material culture encounters when trying to link Thai Buddhist art (sculpture, mural paintings, architectural facades and ornamental elements, and illuminated paintings and drawings in manuscripts) to their textual sources. The problems are particularly acute when one tries to decipher the meaning of ornamental art. Is there a meaning to ornamental art? Is there a message in it? Is there a purpose for decorating a manuscript or a mural or a lintel with a particular flower or particular bird over another? Since ornamental is such a significant feature of Thai Buddhist art, I want to know if a scholar of texts can bring anything to its study. I will try, as systematically as possible to go through these problems briefly and then offer some possible solutions. As an organizing tool and in order to keep this relatively short (the editor, Natacha Collomb, has already permitted me a few extra thousand words!) I will concentrate on birds in Thai ornamental art since they are features in every type of art and have been for a long time. Some of my comments will be specific to the study of ornamental art and texts, some will suggest broader approaches to Buddhist art in Thailand in general. Simply put, as I hope this will help future students of Buddhist texts and/or Buddhist art in Thailand and Southeast Asia more broadly avoid some of the mistakes I have made in the linking of texts to ornament.

### Problem One: When Texts aren't Whole Stories and Symbols aren't Referents

Textual scholars like to complain that art historians need their language skills and vast knowledge of Buddhist texts to know the sources of their art. However, this rhetorical (and condescending) move in guise of normative scholarly "due diligence" has the tendency to make art derivative of texts. In my investigation into the near ubiquitous presence of different types of birds in Thai Buddhist art, I initially went through my normal routine of one-by-one trying to associate different birds in Thai Buddhist ornamental art to particular birds found in different Buddhist texts. I also consulted ornithologists, field guides to birds in Thailand and Southeast Asia, and dictionaries of symbols in Buddhist art. I went looking for meaning. However, I quickly discovered that this tells us little about how the birds in art are actually encountered by occupants and visitors to monasteries. I have nearly never found in many years of observation, interviews, and interaction, Buddhist practitioners (including resident nuns and monks) who actually know these textual sources of these birds (and sometimes art in general) or think of them on a regular basis. Birds were seen as beautiful and normative ornamental art, not as something to be "sourced" or deciphered for symbolic meaning or textual origin. Knowing that a particular bird in the corner of a

mural painting or on a bas-relief comes from a particular *jātaka* is no more telling that a “fun fact.” Sure, some birds and half-human/half-bird hybrids like kinnari and garuda are probably drawn from the *Sudhana Jātaka*, an extra-canonical *jātaka* (*chadok nok nibat*) commonly found in the region.<sup>7</sup> Others are drawn from the *Sivijaya Jātaka*, the *Sussondī Jātaka*, and the *Mora Paritta*.<sup>8</sup> Most artists, monks, and laity did not and do not read these texts (although the *Mora* is chanted as a protective text) in the original Pali or Sanskrit, and many haven’t encountered the story as a whole in the vernacular.

The bird depicted in a particular painting might not be invoking the entire classical text. For example, kinnari are commonly depicted in Thai statuary, murals, framed paintings, and on ornamental door panels and window shutters. However, they are not depicted as characters in a particular story, whether it be the *Sudhana Jātaka* or the *Pakṣī-pakaraṇam*. They are not included in a particular narrative sequence (more on this below) or with other characters in the text. Rebecca Hall, a visiting curator of Thai art at the Walters Museum in Baltimore, sent me two examples of kinnari depicted in 19th century Siamese art. One was a stunning framed painting (*phra bot*) of five kinnari in a forest.<sup>9</sup> The textual courses speak of seven kinnari sisters or a couple—female kinnari and male kinnara—not five. The painting is beautiful but does not point to any know text. The second is found on a gold and black lacquer manuscript chest. One panel features a kinnari and kinnara curled together in a loving embrace. So I thought this must refer to the *Sudhana Jātaka*, but then the other panels on other sides did not continue the story and moreover simply depict several other birds, not mythological hybrid birds, but actual thrushes, peacocks, and finches alongside lions, rabbits, and other animals. Examples like this started to accumulate in the image database on my computer’s desktop and in piles of reference works stacked in the corner of my office.

I thought, maybe I shouldn’t be looking for a particular text, but a textual trope. I began to assume that this whole manuscript chest might be referring to the Himaphan Forest (Pali: Himavanta). This mythical forest in the Himalayan Mountains is the backdrop of many Buddhist and non-Buddhist stories in both Pali and Sanskrit. Indeed, the *Pali Dictionary of Proper Names* (which is now conveniently on-line rendering my heavily appended and tattered copy that I lugged around from monastic library to monastic library for years obsolete!) shows how many references that there is to it:

The name given to the Himālaya. It is one of the seven mountain ranges surrounding Gandhamādana (SNA.i.66).<sup>10</sup> It is three hundred thousand leagues in extent (SNA.i.224), with eighty-four thousand peaks its highest peak being five hundred yojanas (SNA.ii.443) In Himavā, are seven great lakes, each fifty leagues in length, breadth and depth—Anotatta, Kannamunda, Rathakāra, Chaddanta, Kunāla, Mandākinī and Sīhappapātaka; these lakes are never heated by the sun (A.iv.101; SNA.ii.407; cf. AA.ii.759). From Himavā flow five hundred rivers. SNA.ii.437; but according to Mil.114, only ten of these are to be reckoned, the others flowing only intermittently [...].<sup>11</sup>

This definition goes on for another page with nearly twenty more references. I cite it for a reason. I have asked numerous scholars, monks, nuns, and lay people in Thailand if they can tell me which text they think a particular scene from the Himaphan forest depicted on a door panel, mural, or manuscript painting comes from and they look at me like I’m crazy. The answer is usually (in Thai), “I don’t know, it is just the

Himaphan Forest, a beautiful place, it is just a place of beauty and many animals.” They don’t refer to the Manipabbata mountain peak or the *Kunāla Jātaka* or the various rivers that flow out of it. On two occasions, I was told it was the place Prince Vessantara went with his wife and children, but nothing more specific than that. The Himaphan forest is so common a background to paintings, stories, and is the abode to so many animals that it is disconnected from any specific text. It has become like the mysterious forests in medieval European folktales like *Hansel and Gretel* or *Little Red Riding Hood*. It is the place where action happens, but no longer tied to a specific forest or a specific textual source in the mind of a reader of an illustrator. A forest is a forest. Buddhist art in Thailand often invokes these backdrops set vaguely somewhere in India usually but the characters and the backdrops often invoke scenes and moments, not specific texts or narrative sequences.

They are not symbols or signs either. Symbols invoke meanings and concepts. They are specific referents to larger ideas. However, the kinnari, thrush or peacock in various settings do not invoke any specific concept as far as I have been able to determine besides the vague notion of beauty and love. Strange concepts to invoke, it might seem, for Buddhists, although I hope to challenge this below. They are also not signs pointing to specific references with specific meanings. They are not to be “read” and do not contain messages in Thailand to the same degree that they supposedly do in Chinese court and temple art, for example. This leads us to the next problem.

### Problem Two: Buddhist Art doesn’t Necessarily Teach Buddhist Lessons

While there are certainly hundreds of examples of art drawn from *jātakas* (either canonical or apocryphal Southeast Asian *jātakas*), and scenes from the life of the Buddha, often murals in Thailand do not attempt to represent Buddhist narratives or illustrate texts at all or provide symbols invoking Buddhist concepts.<sup>12</sup> This is how art historians working in Southeast Asia often talk about art though—either as visual representations of texts or pedagogical tools for the illiterate masses. Either way they are secondary to texts. They represent a lesser form of traditional learning. Moreover, the birds in art are generally not depicted in a narrative sequence and so the paintings or the sculpture is not an effective visual aid or cue for relating these narratives. I have never witnessed a teacher in a monastery use ornamental features in art to tell a textually based story. There is also no ethnographic evidence or travel accounts from the past stated that monks ever did this on a regular basis in Thailand. Michael Baxandall and Henry Maguire have tried to show the problems with assuming that text and image are simply two different ways for depicting the same narrative. The former observed that “we [art historians] do not explain pictures, we explain remarks about pictures—or rather, we explain pictures only in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specification.” (Baxandall 1985: 1, Maguire 2007.)<sup>13</sup> Eugene Wang laments the way murals have been unimaginatively studied in China. He notes that modern scholarship on the subject is based on the premise that murals are “pictorial illustrations or derivatives of sutras. Therefore, to make sense of these tableaux is to match them with sutra texts. They are accordingly filed away in our mental cabinet according to the bibliographic taxonomy of sutra sources.” (Wang 2005: xiii.)<sup>14</sup> The same can be said for scholarship on Thai art.<sup>15</sup> Almost every introduction to a study of murals at a Thai monastery, especially in

English, begins with the association of the mural with a particular text.<sup>16</sup> There are studies of Thai painting in particular which completely ignore the particular histories, local contexts, artist biographies of any one set of murals, choosing instead to offer a study which takes examples of murals from many monasteries that depict one text. These often neglect to mention that the particular sets of murals they are drawing evidence from contain scenes from several narratives, some of which are unknown, and may be the product of an artist's own imagination. For example, the doyen of Thai mural painting, Jean Boisselier, bases his analysis of some of Thai best known mural paintings, almost solely on the way in which they depict Buddhist texts (Boisselier 1976). Uthong Prasatwinichai's two volume study of the murals of last ten *jātakas* offers a long introduction on the texts, but very little on the artists who painted the murals. Furthermore, he draws examples of murals of the ten *jātaka* from monasteries like Wat Ban Takhu, Wat Khao Yisan, Wat Mahathat (Petchaburi), among many others whose histories and styles are not related. The only thing that links them is the choice of *jātaka* to represent. The grouping of these murals is the choice of Uthong, not the artists who painted these murals originally and may not have seen themselves as part of a movement to teach or represent this particular collection (Ringis 1990: 124).

Paintings, mosaics, and reliefs whether they be in frames, carved into lintels, or as wall murals are often not seen as the creators of their own narratives, as texts in themselves. However, some mural sets creatively combine elements from a number of oral and textual sources with the artist or artists own imagination.<sup>17</sup> For example, in an illuminated manuscript from 1897 held in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland, there is a large manuscript of the Phra Malai story which contains a wide variety of paintings. Some are taken from specific scenes in specific texts, like the Phra Malai visiting two parents. However, in the background there is a ghostly child that is not usually found in the text and seems to suggest a local oral version or perhaps just the particular artist's addition. However, this is one of the only textual references in the entire manuscript. Other illuminated folios include decorative devas, flowers, *asubhakkammaṭṭhana* meditation (meditation on human corpses), a scene with four men fighting with knives, a scene of a monk (not Phra Malai) speaking with a deva on a city street replete with European street lamps, and other eclectic features. There are many other manuscripts like this which contain a seemingly haphazard set of images not connected to the text of the manuscript.<sup>18</sup> The murals in the *ubosot* of Wat Kongkaram (Ratchaburi Province) are a good example. It was originally a monastery used by the Mon ethnic community in the area and built in the 18th century. The murals on the interior walls are drawn from several sections of several different stories. There are scenes from the story of Prince Siddhattha's "Great Departure" into the ascetic life, the *Traibhūmikathā* cosmology, and scenes from various *jātakas*, some included in the last ten, like the *Temiya*, *Suvannasama*, and the *Nimi*. Among these more common *jātakas* is a rendering of erotic and violent parts of the *Cullapaduma* (the 193rd story in the canonical collection). This is a racy story of husbands hacking up their wives, roasting them on a fire, and feasting on their flesh, a bodhisatta feeding his wife from the blood dripping out of self-inflicting wound on his knee, and even an erotic scene of a woman having sex with an armless, legless, earless, noseless man. These are combined with scenes of Persian soldiers, the Buddha subduing the evil Mara, and naked, perhaps lesbian and gay, women

and men embracing and fondling. These murals form a type of creative anthology. Not only are these stories only loosely related, if at all, the choice of scenes to draw from the stories seemed to be based more on the unknown artist's penchant for depicting erotic sexuality than for choosing iconic narrative triggers from each story. Moreover, each scene does not attempt to "faithfully" depict the Indian stories, but sets these Indian characters in scenes with Persian, French, and Mon peoples, as well as cosmopolitan Ayutthayan architecture. The fact that Mon peoples often forbid women from entering their *ubosots*, suggests that this room may have been a type of room for pornographic entertainment. It is not an isolated example though. The artist drew many of the building and dress styles, as well as some of the story choices, not drawn from texts, but from murals at other monasteries like Wat Thong Noppakun (Thonburi), Wat Pakklongbangkaeo (Nakhon Chasi), among others. Therefore, the "texts" the artist was drawing from were not texts in the traditional sense. He was drawing from other murals at other places in Thailand.<sup>19</sup> These murals reference each other; they do not attempt to accurately depict Indic Buddhist stories.

Many muralists and sculptors in Thailand, past and present, are not concerned with teaching or representing a particular text, but instead with executing a vision, creating an atmosphere, and invoking a mood. In reality, although they certainly could have been in the past, they are rarely used today as visual pedagogical tools during sermons. The murals high on the walls are often hard to see and were much harder to see before the age of electric lights. Indeed, I have interviewed many monks and nuns who were unaware what texts or histories the murals at their own monasteries represented. They did not "study" these artworks, nor were they inspired to go and read the texts they supposedly represented or reproduced. Moreover, paintings and reliefs almost never present an entire history or visually executed set of teachings in total or in sequence. In fact, the physical space of the walls or the frame, the artist's own tastes and talents, and the possible lack of textual knowledge of the artists themselves may account for the fact that rarely can a story be reconstructed. There are also paintings seemingly based on texts which add elements not contained in those texts. Therefore, art could either be evidence of textual variants or sites of creative expansion of texts. It is likely that in many cases, the artist was not concerned with reproducing a text in a different medium. In this way, murals have limited value if a monk wants to use them as systematic and sequential visual aids during textual lessons. Thai Buddhist art is evidence of the individual repertoires of particular artists and patrons, they reveal the influences, texts, daily experiences, values, socio-historical contexts, and teaching lineages unique to them rather than depictions of a known canon of Buddhist texts or Royal histories. Now if this is a problem for murals that depict narratives with human characters, how much more of a problem could it be for the ornamental features of paintings, reliefs, etc.? Can ornament be sourced? In some cases, yes, as we will see below, but in many cases, it is one of the places in art where an artist is free from the weight of direct prototypes and combine many disparate ornamental features into a single piece or even develop new types.

### Problem Three: Performance not Text as a Source for Art

Another problem with looking for the textual "origins" of ornamental art that features birds (or trees or animals or particular flowers) is that even if they were at some point

placed there by an artist who was wanted to or was instructed to make reference to a particular text, the likely source for the text might very well not likely have been a Buddhist text in Pali and either orally delivered as a sermon or encountered in an actual physical manuscript or printed text. Most Buddhists in Thailand past and present did not encounter birds in stories in Pali texts, but through the live performance of vernacular dramas.<sup>20</sup> This is also true of well-known Buddhist characters in Thailand like Phra Malai, Maddi and Prince Vessantara, Phra Sangkhajai, Khun Paen, Sangtong, Phra Lo, and even the historical Buddha. Many of these performances are based on stories of birds and their costumes and sets feature trees, flowers, patterns designs, and the like. The most popular bird dance is probably that of the female kinnari and male kinnara.<sup>21</sup> Living in the forest flying from tree to tree and delighting in themselves and nature, the couple, especially the kinnari, loved to play a lute and sing. The beauty of their song and dance that seems to be the most common way people in Southeast Asia learn the story—dance. Surely, Buddhists in the region, growing up, do not read entire Buddhist stories often, but witness parts of them in sermons, dances, dramas, and murals. Scholars often read whole texts and assume that is what is actually being received, copied, and learned by others. In my experience, it is obvious that certain scenes, characters, tropes, and images from stories are being accumulated over time. For example, Tai Yai/Shan Buddhists in Burma and Northern Thailand sponsor the *Kan Fon Nok Kingkala* or Kinnari Bird Dance. This dance is highly stylized with elaborate costumes and headdresses made of silk, feathers, gold leaf, and bamboo strips which support silk wings that project out from the dancers backs. Besides the kinnara and kinnari there are other characters dressed in elaborate forest animal costumes. All of these costumes and the rehearsals for the annual performances take weeks to prepare and children are picked at a young age to learn the dance and become apprentices to masters. The dance which takes years to learn properly is precise in its movements as the dancers must act like two birds desporting and enticing each other. The lead dancer must master thirty-seven poses that mimic the flight of a bird and can be executed at various speeds.<sup>22</sup> The *Kan Fon Nok Kingkala* dance of the Shan takes place most often at the end of the Buddhist rains retreat in (usually) October and is as large a festival as the ordination ritual which has been extensively studied by scholars. The dance ritual is referred to as Buddhist by Shan Buddhists.

The texts that guide the dance are referred to as *anisong* (Pali: *anisamsa*) which is a Buddhist guide to the advantages or “blessings” of making merit by giving gifts (like the gift of dance) to Buddhist monks. These *anisong* texts are found as manuscripts in monastic libraries throughout the region alongside other Buddhist texts and are not seen as secular in anyway. The dance is not only performed at monasteries but is part of a ritual which involves giving lighting candles and incense, chanting Buddhist liturgical texts, and prostrating to Buddhist monks and Buddha images. Performers are instructed to meditate (*nang bhavana*) before their performance. Sermons at the beginning of the dance relate a story of the Buddha himself returning from preaching to his deceased mother in the 33rd level of heaven (similar to the story of the first preaching of the Abhidhamma). It is said in these sermons that the Buddha stopped to delight in the Himalayan forests among the kinnara and kinnari. Since the Buddha enjoyed the music and dance of the half-bird/half-humans, the Shan ritual involves

not only prostrating to his image, but also to the instruments and costumes. Indeed, not only are Buddhist texts and images honored, but musical instruments, masks, silk wings, and costumes are placed on the altar and presented with gifts and words of gratitude. They are collectively called in “*sing saksit tang buang*” (part of a class of sacred objects) (Sangkham Changyot 2548 [2005]): 12). Moreover, the teachers of the dance and the craftspeople (*nak silipin*) who made the costumes receive prostration and words of praise.<sup>23</sup> The dance is fully part of a Buddhist ritual and not relegated to a “cultural” performance or entertainment. It is referred to as “*mongkhon*” (Pali: *mangala*) or auspicious by Sangkham Changyot who has written extensively about the dance in Thai and Shan, but has been consulted by scholars of Buddhist Studies. *Mongkhon* here does not just mean karmically beneficial, but also beautiful and the Buddha is described as delighting in beauty and so the dance, costumes, and music should be beautiful to honor his presence. If ornamental art in a monastery, either in a mural or even on a costume of a dancer, is encountered, it does not invoke a Pali text, but a very different vernacular performance.

This does not merely happen in villages, but even on the stages of National Theatres or on the grounds of royal monasteries in the region, parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Arjuna Wiwaha*, or the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or the *Vessantara Jātaka* are being heard and seen. Indeed, some of the most important dances in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia feature birds, the most common form being the *Manora* (often transliterated as *Manohra*) or the story of Sunthon and Manora. This dance drama is based in narrative form on the Buddhist *Sudhana Jātaka*. Like the Shan kinnari/kinnara dance, it is a love story. It depicts the great love between the Buddha in one of his past lives as the bodhisatta Prince Sudhana and the most beautiful kinnari in the world—Manora. The dance is quite popular in Southern Thailand and parts of Cambodia and is known in Burma, and Laos as well.<sup>24</sup> Originally it was not considered an inner-court (*lakhon nai*) or royal play, but a play performed outside the palace (*lakhon nok*) often on the grounds of Buddhist monasteries. However, it became popular with the royal family and elite playwrights and choreographers in the 1830s and by the 1950s it was one of the most elaborate royally sponsored dance dramas in Thailand (Mattani Moj dara Rutnin 1996: 175-179 and 235-239).<sup>25</sup>

Even though the non-elite story of Manora was taken up by the royal court and brought to the grand stage of the National Theatre, the play is still performed often at Buddhist monasteries throughout Laos, Cambodia, and especially Southern Thailand. There are nine forms of Manora (often called simply *Nora* or *Chatri* in Southern Thailand). Even though only one of the forms, the *Ram Nora Klong Hong*, closely follows the *Sudhana Jātaka*, they each involve a lead character as a female bird and all can be performed on the grounds of monasteries as these are often the cleanest and most spacious places to establish stages. The biggest performances, as among the Shan, are performed at the end of the rainy season (*Chak Phra* in the South or *Ook Pansa* in Central Thai), one of the biggest Buddhist celebrations in the region. Indeed, what needs to be emphasized here is that the costume designers and set builders and painters for these stages at these monasteries are often the same craftspeople (including Buddhist monks, nuns, and novices) who also help make Buddhist decorative banners, paint Buddhist reliquaries, built altars for Buddha images, and help prepare for a whole range of ritual celebrations. In rural areas, this decorative

multi-tasking is normal. I once helped lift a wooden frame of a set for the Manora at Wat Kutithong in rural Ayutthaya and was amazed as to the degree in which the novices and monks and lay people visiting the monastery for religious purposes got involved in helping the dance troupe prepare. They also formed the audience that evening along with throngs of teenagers, food vendors, and dating couples showing off their new motorcycles or cell phones. Often times, public and Buddhist primary and secondary schools involve their students, in classes, decorating sets, sewing costumes, and practicing musical instruments to play at the performance. Many high school courses enlist teenage girls (and some boys) to perform dances at the monasteries. Indeed, when I was a teacher at an all-girls high school in Samut Sakhon in the early 1990s, my students often performed the Manora and other dance dramas at monasteries. They took class time in their “culture” and music courses to work on these performances and designs. Buddhist monks at these monasteries were active participants in staging these events and there seemed to be little notion that these were somehow non-Buddhist activities.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the Manora is drawn from one of the most popular Buddhist narratives in Southeast Asia and is not only the source for the dance performance, but also for sermons and monastic murals.<sup>27</sup> Marlene Guelden in her sadly unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, provides a serious investigation of this performance. She notes the great degree to which Buddhist monks are involved in the ritualization of the performance and its arrangement and production (Guelden 2005<sup>28</sup>). However, this dance, like others, has not been a central subject of research for scholars of Buddhism and despite its appeal and familiarity to all classes and age groups in many parts of Southeast Asia, it remains largely unmentioned in the dozens of studies of monastic life and history in the region in Western languages.

Regardless of how or where it is performed and by whom, these performances do not usually replicate a text, but present iconic scenes like paintings or reliefs. The narrative sequence, the beginning and end of the story is much less important than the design of the costumes, the talent of the dancers, and the quality of the set and sound system. The story isn't presented in full. Moreover, for anyone who has spent anytime attending these performances, they know that entire stories are far too long to present to a single audience at a single sitting. Even when abridged versions are performed, the stages are often outside, the acoustics are awful, there isn't a ticket counter or a barrier closing off the performance from other activities at the monastery or public park. People come in and out, children play, people talk on cellphones, eat, have picnics, leave in the middle, laugh and joke, and the like. Getting to a proper seat in time for the performance, silencing one's cellphone, listening attentively, is just not the culture of these performances. In murals and manuscript illustrations scenes of monastic festivals and performances are relatively easy to find. They show that this culture of performance was common in the pre-modern period as well. Moreover, many scenes and songs performed on stage take on the “medley” form. Students from particular schools form dance troops that train in different regional dances that when combined on stage form a medley of Northeastern style “*ram wong*,” Southern style “*nora*,” etc. dances. The best scenes, the favorite songs are taken from various traditions and combined in one performance. Narrative sequence, textual allegiance, ethical message, and historical lesson are either secondary to beauty and form or neglected altogether.

### Problem Four: Monastic Art doesn't Always Draw from Buddhist Texts

Any tourist to the Grand Palace or the famous Wat Pho in Bangkok will see that non-Buddhist texts like the Rāmāyaṇa or the Javanese Inao are prominently featured in relief and mural painting on the walls of Buddhist monasteries. I have argued in a recent article that these Sanskrit “Hindu” stories are so common in Buddhist monasteries that they should be considered Buddhist in Southeast Asia (McDaniel 2013a). However, here let me focus on birds. Birds are major and/or minor characters in many non-canonical and often non-Buddhist stories commonly known in Lao, Burmese, Thai, and Khmer like *Kekey (Story of the Crow)*, *Kogan Pyo*, *Sangthong*, *Litlit Phra Lo*, *Xiang Miang*. These are taught in monastic and secular schools and featured in monastic art alongside *jātaka* tales, canonical *suttas*, or narratives from the Pali *aṭṭhakathā* collections. Manuscripts of these stories are also held together in monastic libraries, and sometimes painted together with Buddhist stories on monastic murals.<sup>29</sup>

This all leads back to the book I mentioned in the introduction that was given to King Chulalongkorn when he ascended his throne—the *Book of the Birds* (Thai: *Pakṣī-pakaraṇam*; Sanskrit: *Pakṣī-prakaraṇam*). The *Pakṣī-prakaraṇam* is part of a whole genre of *prakaraṇam* texts that have circulated in Southeast Asia since, according to manuscript evidence, the 15th century.<sup>30</sup> Some of the most important *prakaraṇam* texts include the *Vetāla-prakaraṇam* (the Collection of Stories of Zombies), the *Nandaka-prakaraṇam* (Collection of Stories of the Bullock, but it is actually tale which includes all manner of animals visiting a single bullock in Indian, Javanese, Tamil, and Lao tellings), the *Maṇḍūka-prakaraṇam* (Collection of Stories of Frogs), the *Piśāca-prakaraṇam* (Collection of Stories of Ghosts), and the *Pakṣī-prakaraṇam*, which is also titled the *Śakuna-prakaraṇam* in some tellings (both words mean bird in Sanskrit).<sup>31</sup> These are usually collections of short stories featuring monsters and animals. However, the term can also be used, at least in one case, for a historical collection of stories about the founding of certain cities or the travels of certain statues and relics.<sup>32</sup> They are similar in some ways to the *Setzuwa* tales of medieval Japan or the *Zhiguai* stories of China, but not bestiaries like we find in Europe. They are not descriptive guides to the worlds of fantastic or grotesque creatures, but stories in which the agents are animals and humanoid demons, ghosts, and hybrids. The *prakaraṇam* genre does not see collections of stories of birds as different in kind than collections of stories about other species or supernatural ghosts and monsters. In fact, seven out of the 31 stories contained in the Central Thai versions of the *Piśāca-prakaraṇam* (Collection of Stories of Ghosts) are about birds like peacocks, eagles, crows, and geese (another four involve kinnari and/or garuda). These stories differ from those found in the Thai telling of the *Pakṣī-prakaraṇam*. The longest story (out of a total of 25) in the *Vetāla-prakaraṇam* (the Collection of Stories of Zombies) is about a parrot and a myna bird trying to decide whether women or men are more virtuous.<sup>33</sup> Many of these stories contained within individual *prakaraṇam* texts in Southeast Asia are drawn from Sanskrit stories in the *Pañcatantra*, *Hitopadeśa*, *Kathāsaritsāgara*, and other Indian collections. Like other Indian stories though, many telling in Southeast Asia are quite different from their Indian counterparts. The Lao and Thai *Pakṣī-prakaraṇam* in particular are drawn indirectly from different stories in the *Pañcatantra*, especially the third book, but a few are only known locally. Directly though, they were

first introduced in Southeast Asia (especially Java, Northern Thailand, Shan region, and Cambodia) through the *Tantropākhyāna* (Lao: *Mun Tantai*; Thai: *Nithan Nang Tantrai*; Javanese: *Tantri Kāmandaka* or *Tantri Demung*).<sup>34</sup> Of course, more widely known tellings of these stories also appear in Central and Middle-Eastern languages.<sup>35</sup> For example, the Pahlavi, Persian, and Syriac tellings of the *Kalilah and Dimnah* story (also known as the *Fables of Bidpai*) is shares close similarities with several birds stories in the *Pakṣī* and the *Pañcatantra*.<sup>36</sup> Some of these stories were also translated in Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Spanish.<sup>37</sup> The very popular *Conference of the Birds* (Persian: *Manteq at-Tair*) by the 12th century poet Farid ud-Din Attar has similarities to the plot and bird characters of the *Pakṣī-prakaraṇam*.<sup>38</sup>

There are no Pali equivalents found and the Northern Thai manuscripts are in *nissaya* form which draw from Sanskrit texts and not Pali. In some cases the Sanskrit terms have been rendered into Pali, but there seems to have been no full Pali translation of these texts before the Northern Thai vernacular translations and glosses.<sup>39</sup>

So what is the *Southeast Asian Book of the Birds* about?<sup>40</sup> Like the Sanskrit, Syriac, Tamil, Malayalam, Persian and other tellings, the basic story is about a group of birds, often thirty, who meet together for the purpose of choosing a king. In the Sufi telling, the birds have the purpose of undertaking a journey to find a king. In Southeast Asia, this meeting is the setting to explain the different qualities of each bird and learn lessons on the differences in temperaments, physical qualities, tendencies, and virtues that make a good leader. There is a wide variety of birds mentioned, most of which can be found in naturalists' descriptions. Some of the birds include the Myna, Brahminy Kite, Peacock, Partridge, Pigeon, Pheasant, Hen Kite, Vulture, Lapwing, Stork, Cuckoo, Hoopoe, Karawek, Eagle, Thrush, Parrot, as well as the garuda and kinnari. Indeed, these supposedly mythical birds are mentioned right alongside birds that have been documented by ornithologists.

I offer this description of the *Book of the Birds* because I hope it shows the complexity of looking for textual sources for Buddhist art in Thailand. Many of the birds featured in monastic art whether it be on an wall or in a manuscript could be drawn from oral and written versions of these non-Buddhist stories just as scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* are depicted in Thai art. However, do viewers of a peacock on a lacquer cabinet in a sermon hall or readers of a manuscript that includes paintings of crows flying over a palace or a Brahminy Kite landing on a tree branch on a mural depicting the life of the Buddha think of these textual sources? Did the artists? There is no evidence whatsoever that Thai artists were trained in the past or the present to use certain birds as symbolic meanings or to convey certain messages. There is no evidence that any text, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, served as guide to painters of birds or other non-narrative elements in Buddhist art. The manuals that are found in pre-modern Japan and China for artists to use certain colors, flowers, birds, and the like to convey certain teachings or invoke certain stories are not found in Thai.<sup>41</sup>

### Problem Five: What is Ornamental Art and does it Mean Anything?

In Burma and Northern Thailand anserine and gallinaceous bird weights were often used to measure opium, rice, and other commercial products. Although these metal weights were not used in Buddhist ceremonies as far as I know they do open connections through the study of symbolism and metallurgy that help reveal trade routes that

existed between Yunnan, Chiang Mai, Tak, Moulmein, and Yangon. Not only does the metal probably come from Southwest China, but the birds, which look at first glance like a *hamsa* (Thai: *hong*), a common bird symbol found in Thai and Mon art, are probably a Feng-Huang bird which is a symbol for longevity in Southwest China. However, this Feng-Huang bird may have been domesticized in a sense in Northern Thailand and Burma because on the weights we sometimes find the larger bird being led by two smaller birds which is the way Hamsa birds are depicted often on the tympana of Buddhist monasteries in the region, especially those monasteries founded in the Mon ordination lineage tradition. A lineage based in the old Mon capital called “Hamsavati” (Hamsa Bird City).<sup>42</sup>

Bird-shaped weights are simply some of the type of ornamental art found in Buddhist Southeast Asia. Just as the bird weights help us make connections between trading partners, religious lineages, metal foundries, and artistic styles, birds found on tympana, lintels, doors, flags, the borders of skirts, murals, and jewelry help us open up connections to an understudied world of Buddhist activity. Let me provide a few examples of the plethora of depictions of birds, the list could fill several books, but I will try to contain myself.

Reliefs, images, and murals in Southeast Asia depict birds. These are sometimes kinnari and garuda drawn from narrative texts and appear in the art of royal, commercial, Hindu and Buddhist buildings as either main images or as architectural and decorative elements. Some of the more striking examples include: the kinnari carved on the vantaux (door panels) of Wat Aram in Luang Phrabang (Laos) where they are, as in most cases, depicted frolicking among flowers and trees; the beautifully executed garuda bas-relief on the so-called “Lacquer Pavillion” (a *Ho Trai* or library for monastic texts) which had been moved from Wat Ban Kling south of Ayutthaya to Bangkok by the royal family in 1959 to Bangkok; the 7th-8th century reliefs of dancing kinnari found at the Kok Maiten site in Nakhon Sawan, Central Thailand; the spectacular golden garuda on the central tympana of the uposatha at Wat Channasongkhram in Bangkok; and the wooden carvings of an entire garuda army on the tympana of Wat Mae Nang Plum (held at the Chao Sam Phraya National Museum in Ayutthaya).<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, carved garuda appear on Angkor Wat in Cambodia; carved images of garudas appear in the art of Pagan (Burma) from the 11th century and in painted on murals at the famous Ananda Temple in Burma (added in the Konbaung Period); and the dozens of iconic kinnari and garuda statues on the grounds on the Grand Palace and lining the base of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Thailand) that appear in most tourist photo albums. Indeed, kinnari and garuda have been such mainstays in Buddhist art in Southeast Asian Art since at least the 7th century that a garuda is one of the symbols of the royal family of Thailand, the name of Indonesia’s national airline is *Garuda*, and Thai Airways International’s magazine is called *Kinnari*. For the last ten years there has been efforts in Bali (Indonesia) to construct what will be the largest statue in the world, a 146 meter image of Vishnu riding on the back of a garuda in the Garuda Wisnu Kencana Park.<sup>44</sup> Even the cover of the catalog from one of the most respected and largest exhibitions of Burmese and Thai art in history, *Emerald Cities: Arts of Siam and Burma, 1775-1950*, is a wooden kinnari image (McGill 2009). A garuda was the symbol of the 2011 Southeast Asia Games. The Buddha was a kinnara (male kinnari) in four his previous lives. Kinnari and garuda also show up carved on

royal insignia, banks, silk shops, and schools. As for murals, they are so common throughout Thailand and Laos (as well as examples from Cambodia and Burma) that they are not worth mentioning. Indeed, it could be argued that the kinnari and the garuda rival the Buddha as the unifying artistic figure of Southeast Asia. South Asian, especially Tamil examples, are beyond the scope of this paper.

Besides the nearly ubiquitous and pan-Southeast Asian part-human, part-bird kinnari or the animal-hybrid garuda though, there are other birds that fly throughout Southeast Asian Art and are more specific to certain ethnic groups, time periods, and monastic lineages. According to Sombhong Akharawong, royally designated as one of the leading instructors of art in Thailand, painting birds and forest vegetation is the basis of each artist's training (Sombhong Akharawong 2550 [2007]). These birds come in many types: peacocks, finches, hoopoes, parrots, swans, geese, kites, thrushes, among others. These birds often appear in murals, illuminated manuscripts, bas-reliefs, and other architecturally dependent Buddhist monastic art. Most often they are depicted, as mentioned briefly above, as part of the scenes of the Himaphan/Himavanta forest, the mythical forest inaccessible to most humans that appears in many Buddhist and Hindu narratives and nearly every mural of the *Vessantara Jātaka* and other *jātakas* like the *Cullapaduma*, *Sudhana* (discussed below) and the more rare *Himavanta Sutta* (*Samyuttanikāya*<sup>46</sup>). Other birds appear in the forest scenes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the *Aranyakaparvan* (or *Vana Parva*) of the *Mahābharata*. This is not surprising, of course, birds everywhere attract birds and birds don't particularly follow one religious tradition and so appear in temples of various lineages and traditions in the region. Of course, it is well-known that many of the same artists worked on art in temples regardless of their religious affiliation, central images, patrons, or narrative program. Artists painted birds, not just "Buddhist" birds whatever they might be. The importance was, it seems, to create beautiful, lush, verdant, and evocative spaces that the central statues, as well as the human visitors and practitioners could passively take in.<sup>45</sup> I believe that this is not so different from the gifts offered to land and tree "spirits" (*thewada* or sometimes ghosts—*phi*) at small spirit houses in the region (Thai: *san phra phum*). The house for the Buddha and the house for land spirits are supposed to be beautiful and welcoming. Indeed, they should be much more beautiful than your own home. Beautiful decorative accents and gifts are everywhere in the region, many involve depictions of birds. This accumulative affect/effect of birds in the forest recreated spaces which matched or enhanced the stories of forested places where heroes learned magic and practiced asceticism, lovers secretly embraced, gods were exiled, and children and animals played.

These non-kinnari/garuda birds are rarely found though alone as the subjects of murals, bas-reliefs, and architectural elements in the region unless one looks closely at Sino-Thai Buddhist monastic art of the King Rama III period in Central Thailand in the early 19th century. Indeed, the Chinese influence in this period of Thai Buddhist art history shows clearly the problem for looking for meaning or linking textual sources to Buddhist ornamental art in Thailand. Under the direct patronage of Rama III several monasteries were constructed or renovated and renamed in the 1830s and 1840s. Of the more than 80 monasteries that he sponsored, some of the largest ones were built in the honor of his family. Besides Rama III's affection for Chinese style architecture and his use of Chinese artisans (much of the growth in wealth under his reign was due

to extensive trade with China and the influx of cheap Chinese labor into the Bangkok area), he also apparently had an affection for birds as they are one of the dominant artistic features of many of his monasteries. For example, the monastery, Wat Nang Nong, he dedicated to his Muslim mother, Queen Sulalai (her family origins were in Southern Thailand, but she grew up in Nonthaburi near Bangkok) features gold and black lacquer birds, in the *lai gamalo* style, on every door and window shutter of Northern (there are two at Wat Nang Nong) *wihan* (Pali: *vihāra*).<sup>46</sup> These birds frolic in the forest reminiscent of murals of the Himaphan forest. However, unlike most murals of the Himaphan, there are no humans on these doors and the birds become the main focus.<sup>47</sup>

Birds are also the main focus of the murals at a monastery dedicated to Rama III's youngest daughter, Ying Wilat.<sup>48</sup> Wat Thepdhitaram's (which means "Monastery of the Divine Daughter") Western *Wihan* features impressive murals populated only by a single type of bird, the so-called Chinese Phoenix (Chinese: Fenghuang; Thai: Nok Hong), which in Thai is often associated with the *haṃsa*. Phra Wisuddhiwaraphon, one of the assistant abbots at the monastery and its primary historian who has written two books on the subject, believes that these birds are symbols of women. This is a symbolic association that he is unsure about and I have not been able to corroborate it with any other text or scholar.<sup>49</sup> The birds on this mural program may not be narrative murals describing the life of the Buddha, kings, or previous lives of the Buddha and arahats, but they are "decorative elements" that have taken center stage.

Rama III's first and most beloved monastery is Wat Ratchaorot (Wat Ratchaorosa Wararam).<sup>50</sup> Here birds are not simply featured on the doors of one of the buildings or on one set of murals, but fly around all of the buildings in lacquer, mother-of-pearl, on painted doors and shutters, and on murals. This monastery's design were so strikingly different from previous Central Thai examples that the author of Thailand first major study of architecture, Prince Damrong Ratchanuphap, called this monastery "*wat nok yang*" (the monastery without precedence or literally "with outside style").<sup>51</sup> This monastery came to be the one of the models on which later "Silpa Racha Niyom" (the so-called "favored artistic style of the King") was based. In order to feature certain birds in this new style, he or at least the unrecorded architects and artists who worked on the monastery) had to remove some birds. Therefore, what we do not find at Wat Ratchaorot which is common on most Thai monasteries are the distinctive roof ornaments: *cho fa* (distinctive golden finials that project off the corners of the upper and lower roof lines and can be in the shape of birds taking flight or dragons/nagas), *hang hong* (tails of swans or geese and sometimes nagas/snakes, usually made out of gold painting wood) which decorate monastic roofs, and *bai raka* (garuda designs on roofs, usually on the lower tiers of multi-tiered monastic and palace roofs). However, different birds were added. Despite having spent several years visiting Wat Ratchaorot and taking over 2,000 photographs of its art and architecture and examining every available document about its history and interviewing its abbot and many scholars I have not been able to determine exactly why these other, non-mythical, birds feature so prominently there.<sup>52</sup> Even though the style of the monastery's murals, tympana, architraves, columns, courtyards, tiles (*bhradab krabueang khleuab*), and much of its statuary is clearly influenced by Fuzhou, Quanzhou, Zhangzhou and Teochiu (or Chaozhou) architecture and decorative elements found in 18th century

Fujian, Taiwan, and parts of Guangdong monastery architecture and art, most of the birds that adorn its doors, window shutters, tympana, tiles, and other places are not particularly “Chinese” and seem to be unique to Wat Ratchaorot.<sup>53</sup> These birds include kites, peacocks, cranes, something that looks close to a Red Summer Tanager (although it is not native to Southern China or Southeast Asia and might actually be a Red-headed Trogon), and numerous birds with blue tipped wings which I could not identify (and which the monks and laypeople who resided and worked at the monastery could not as well). For example, there are ceramic birds on nearly every tympana and architrave and are often depicted flying alone and not flying in the sky above Buddha images or characters from *jātakas*.<sup>54</sup> Painted on the interior of every pair of window shutters in the largest building on the monastic grounds, the Hall of the Great Reclining Buddha Image (Wihan Phra Phuttha Saiyat) are pairs of mostly peacocks. These very large paintings of birds, 46 in all. They feature the birds not as ancillary features, but as standing alone on rocks neither facing the Buddha image nor the viewer, but towards the other birds along the wall. Each bird is different in shape, color, and posture, and while most seem to be peacocks, there are no peacocks quite like these in color and plumage in nature. Published descriptions of the monastery by Prince Damrong, John Crawfurd, Phra Thammakittiwong, among others strangely hardly mention these prominent and striking paintings of peacock-like birds.<sup>55</sup> One could speculate that since these birds are on window shutters surrounding a nearly 100 feet long giant statue of the Buddha on his deathbed that the peacocks symbolize death. However, as seen below, peacocks are usually symbols of the escape of death as they were believed to protect against poison. Painted on the window frames of this image hall are gold cranes standing in lotus ponds against black lacquer. These cranes in Southeast Asian and Indian Buddhist art can symbolize bad monks. Cranes, like monks, stay still in meditation. However, cranes stand in water and stay still because they are waiting for fish to let down their guard so can strike quickly and eat them. Bad monks can stay still, but might have unfettered desire in their minds.

Even if a particular bird or flower was designated in texts as having a meaning, how do we know if the artist intended that meaning or the audience, if they knew the meaning, would somehow have their experience at the monastery changed in any significant way? Third, meanings shift over time and different meanings can be applied over time by different visitors, abbots, restorers, etc. Perhaps the crane and peacock in this instance mean nothing. This is especially true if these birds and flowers had specific (which they did) symbolic and representational meanings in Southern China, but these meanings were not communicated to audiences in Thailand. If these were Chinese artisans or Thai artisans guided by Chinese master craftsmen, then the meaning in Fuzhou or Sanming might be different from the meaning of the same bird in Thailand. Regardless, there were no texts and no evidence of sermons that explained the meanings of these ornamental features in any systematic way and if there was an artist, a patron, or a monk (of which I have not found evidence) that explained his or her interpretation of the meaning orally at some point in the past, that knowledge has not been passed down or recorded, which means it obviously was not that important.

Even if we had documents, *which we do not*, naming the individual artisans, the prices they were paid for their work, the detailed instructions from their patron

King Rama III, diaries of craftspeople working daily on the monasteries, a guide to the use of birds in Thai art composed in 1836, or even knew what the artisans ate for lunch while they worked—who cares?<sup>56</sup> Yes, as an enthusiastic student of Thai monastic life, I would love such detail. All I have are some poetic descriptions of 37 of Rama III's monasteries by the poet, Sunthorn Phu, in his lovely *Ramphanphilap* and a few royal orders in Rama III's chronicle, and the *Phra Thammadesana Chaloem Phra kiat Rachatkan thi 3*, a long sermon delivered during the reign of King Rama V about the life of Rama III which talks about his building projects. This fascinating sermon was delivered on the 100th anniversary of Rama III's birth and is not an eyewitness account. It does not tell us anything about birds. But all the possible historical detail which I have patiently assembled is only useful for providing a richer description of these individual monasteries and works of art. This detail might eventually make it into a monastery brochure which would be temporarily be examined by a visitor before ending up in a trashcan or wrinkled in the bottom of a backpack.

Following birds shows that art in Buddhist temples doesn't necessarily have to be Buddhist, teach Buddhist lessons, invoke Buddhist stories, or symbolize Buddhist truths. Monasteries are constructed and reconstructed over time for multiple reasons, for mothers and sons, to celebrate military victory, or to impress one's friends. Wat Ratchaorot became of the two medical schools in Central Thailand in the 19th century for example. Birds lead us to think not about Buddhist texts, but at the lives of decorative artists, the ways in which local ethnicity and popular aesthetic trends impact monastic decoration and design. They show us that monasteries are not just repositories of tradition, but dynamic arenas of cultural, economic, and social life. If we followed birds further it would lead us to study the world of jewelry, textile production, kite-making, and bird-song imitation—all of which take place on the grounds of monasteries often and all of which feature bird designs.<sup>57</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The controversial and world-famous Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima was obsessed with the tempting allure of beauty and the way the presence of beauty made him feel inadequate. This is one of the enduring themes of his best known works, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, *Confessions of a Mask*, and *Temple of the Dawn*. The *Temple of the Dawn* named after the Buddhist monastery in Bangkok (Wat Arun). In that novel (part of a four-part series) the protagonist Honda travels to India, Thailand, and back to Japan and on the way spends much time discussing a Buddhist treatise that features a peacock.<sup>58</sup> He refers to it as “The Sutra of the Great Golden Peacock Wisdom King,” which is his slightly incorrect translation of the Mahāmāyūrī Vidyārājñī Sūtra<sup>59</sup> or Kujaku-myoo in Japanese. The Peacock king (actually queen in this text) is a foundational *dhāraṇī* or protective text probably inspired by the Pali text, the Mora Paritta, which came to Japan via China where the text had been translated from Sanskrit by some of the most prominent translators including Kumārajīva, Saṅghavarman, Yijing, Amoghavajra, and others. Similar stories are also found in the *Mora Jātaka* and important meditation training text by Dharmarākṣita (via Atiṣa)—*The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*.<sup>60</sup> For the frequency of its appearance alone, the Peacock

may be the most Buddhist of all birds. Both the female and male peacock are featured in several very popular texts and stories throughout East, South, and Southeast Asia.

These texts have been studied by scholars interested in tantric ritual, sacred kingship, and ritual protection (especially against poison). However, despite the insights of these studies, I find myself still confused as to why peacocks? Why does the peacock figure so prominently in Buddhist stories when it seems another animal or human could easily be substituted for the text to make sense? I believe that Mishima, a 20th century novelist who committed ritual suicide in 1970 without any formal training in Buddhist Studies, might have had some insights into this text missed by us in Buddhist Studies. Mishima's character Honda states that the story of the peacock and its *dhāraṇī* were popular in Japan because they were used to protect the emperor in the Heian period (and certainly beyond) from poisoning and other attacks. He stated that it was the beauty of the peacock as a "gorgeous and sumptuous figure, and its song 'ka-ka-ka-ka-ka' [...]" its mantra "*ma yu kitsu ra tei sha ka,*" and its majestic *mūdra* which impressed the emperor. This ritual and the story depicted displayed "a blue Indian sky trailed behind the Wisdom King on his golden peacock mount. A tropical sky with its impressive clouds, its afternoon ennui, and its evening breezes, all necessary for spinning a gorgeous and colorful illusion." Mishima (1973: 141-143.) He is enamored with the beauty of the peacock and ends the chapter not discussing the teachings of the text, just its beauty (unlike other sections of the novel where he discusses Yogācāra [Japanese: Yuishiki] notions of reality). For Mishima, the importance of the text and the peacock was its beauty. This is not just the uninformed opinion of a novelist though. This is certainly a legitimate reading of the story of peacock.

In many cases the metaphor of the peacock transforming things of harm, whether they are selfish thoughts or actual poison, into beauty has developed far beyond the story of the bird. The text was used for royal protection and had little to do with birds. However, while the story has changed in different places at different times, the root of the story still emphasizes, like many Buddhist texts, the beauty of bodhisattvas and Buddhas and their previous births as animals of various sorts. Mishima didn't analyze the Peacock Sutra, he simply describes its beauty of the Peacock King as reminding him of a beautiful woman he couldn't possess—Satoko and the goddess Kali whose beauty was both terrible and alluring:

The Wisdom King posed with compassionate countenance, and his body was extremely fair. The skin visible under silk gauze was enhanced by such magnificent jewelry [...] a cool weariness lingered on the heavy lids of the half-open eyes as though the diety had just awakened from an afternoon nap [...] of the plumage of all birds, that of the peacock was closest to the hue of the evening clouds [...].

Mishima's description is actually close to the way these peacock texts are presented in Lao, Thai, Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese texts, as well as painting and drama. The beauty of the bird and the allure of passion, especially dangerous passions, are at the forefront of literary and artistic expressions of peacocks, kinnaris, and other birds.

Is it simply that beauty just is? It is hard to write, analyze, explain? In mine and other textual scholars' efforts to find political messages, symbolic equivalences, psy-

chological coping mechanisms, metaphors, class aspirations, philosophical positions, and the like, have we avoided the elephant, or perhaps beautiful bird, in the room? Buddhists produce beautiful things. These birds may not symbolize anything and be, like many features of Southeast Asian ornamental art, there for their beauty. And beauty does not have meaning but accumulative affect. What a child learns growing up playing cards in monastic courtyards, taking mathematics and writing lessons in monastic schools, and eating afternoon snacks under the eaves of *wihans* is different from what a student of Buddhist Studies learns through canonical and extra canonical texts and examining the main Buddha images or narrative murals in person or in catalogs. They learn through accumulating visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile cues. The subtle affect of a monastery enhanced by not just the main images, but the decorative elements can lead a child to associate monasteries not only (or not necessarily) with the values of non-attachment, compassion, self-control, self-denial, or indifference, but with the values of beauty, abundance, and frivolity.

I do not want to leave the reader with the idea that there is no meaning to be derived from birds in Thai Buddhist art or that texts and art have nothing to do with each other in the study of ornamental art. I hope that the plethora of examples above has shown, what one of the very helpful anonymous reviewers of this article stated, was “the multi-vocality” and “fuzzy meanings” of this art and the jazz-like “improvisation” of its enactment. I am just concerned with the way art, especially ornamental art, is experienced in multiple contexts, more than what it “originally” meant (in whatever way we decide to attribute original meaning). All experience and interpretation is contingent, inconsistent, and partial. Of course, the *kinnari* or *hamsa* hybrids and birds have textual sources and these sources are known to many people, but when they are used in art it is not necessarily for the purpose of invoking “the” moral of a story or “the” symbolic meaning. The meaning shift or get lost over time, the connection with one or many texts becomes vague. Moreover, the viewer (usually experiencing the bird in the mural or relief as they pass by it or under it, not gazing at it) might possess numerous and conflicting interpretations of what the bird means or completely ignore it. The artists creating these theatrical sets and costumes, ornamental architraves, and decorative manuscript chests were not telling stories or designing elaborate coded messages through the deliberate employment of certain symbols, but drawing on a common and wide-ranging body repertoire of sources of which they also had an incomplete knowledge. Some artists had a plan, a deep knowledge of texts, and message to offer. Most clearly did not. If we as scholars seek out the textual source or the symbolic meaning we miss the way the art is experienced.

My point is that by using a “thing” like a bird as a “organizing device” or “critical term” instead of languages, countries, regions, schools/sects, institutions, ethical or speculative teachings, textual lineages (i.e. studying a source text and its subsequent commentaries and sub-commentaries), in an exploration into Buddhist expression, we can undertake studies that depend less on the traits, great thinkers, and teachings of particular Buddhist schools and national or ethnic groups and more on the “aesthetics” which help shape Buddhist cultures. We can start to question the authority of texts. We can give more attention to affect than doctrine. We can start to design research projects that both value a close study of the historically and culturally specific aspects of local Buddhisms while acknowledging the translocal history of Buddhism

as a “world religion” which shares certain affective ways of presentation and certain material culture that is recognizable beyond the boundaries of language difference and sectarian affiliation. We can start studying not just the actors and scripts of Buddhism, but the sets, scores, and costumes as well.

Scholars often see widely distant communities bound together by their shared humanity—we all face death, need food, have the drive to procreate, gravity, and the like.<sup>61</sup> But perhaps it is more basic than that. We all share death, but we also all share birds. We all want to procreate, but we also all like beautiful or sensuous things—flowers on table, paintings on temples walls, jewels, insignia, theatre, music, comedy, etc. Beauty is a fundamental to Buddhist literature and art whether it is found in a mandala, a ritual costume, or a sublime statue. Widely distant communities don’t just share the ethical and ontological problems of death, sex, and children, also share other universals—birds, trees, and water. Since all Buddhist communities are inhabited by birds, is there something Buddhist to say about birds? If so, what can we learn from it? I would like to point out some resources for the study of birds by my field of Buddhist Studies and see where this takes us both historically and methodologically, and what, in the end this tells about the way we make categories and decide what counts as subjects of study. I draw most examples from my own field of Thai and Lao Buddhist Studies, but I trust that some of my comments and examples will have resonance for those working on other Buddhist repertoires in East and South Asia. Birds fly over the walls of royal courts, monastic complexes, rural theatres, rivers, and seas, landing where they wish and often not where we might expect. I have learned much from trying to catch up.

## Notes

---

1. See McDaniel (2011a: chapter four).
2. Although it is not the focus of the article, for a comparative example of monks involved in decorative art at monasteries in Cambodia, see John Marston (2004). This is a well-documented phenomenon in Japan where monks are closely involved in artistic design at monasteries.
3. The study of ornament in Western and Islamic has become more developed recently. See for example the influential works by Oleg Grabar (1995), Michael Snodin and Maurice Howard (1996), and David Cannadine (2002). I also thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this article for her/his very helpful suggestion of looking at E.H. Gombrich’s *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Gombrich 1994) which discusses information theory with reference to patterns and ornaments in art. Most works on ornament in South and Southeast Asian art, like Henry Wilson’s *Pattern and Ornament in the Arts of India* (Wilson 2011), have been largely descriptive works. Although largely descriptive as well, perhaps the most well-developed area of research on ornamental art, especially in symbolic meaning of ornamental elements is in the study of Chinese and Japanese court and temple art. See for example: Terese Tse Bartholomew (2006), C.A.S Williams (2006), Motoji Niwa (2001), Li He and Michael Knight (2008), among many others. There are many studies of specifically “flower and bird” art of China and Japan as well, a few will be mentioned below.
4. Recently, Rebecca Hall sent me photographs of a wonderfully detailed manuscript chest decorated with birds in the Walters Art Museum Collection.
5. Although he did not focus on artists, collectors, restorers, choreographers, and the like, Craig Reynolds revolutionized the study of Southeast Asian history by studying thieves, traders, printers, and criminals, all people generally left out of court, state, and monastic histories.

- See particularly his *Seditious Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Past*s (Reynolds 2006).
6. For the ways Lao and Thai manuscripts were grouped in monastic libraries see my *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words* (McDaniel 2008: chapter four).
  7. It is also found in the Sanskrit *Divyāvadāna* and famously forms of the main subjects of the reliefs of Borobodor in Java and in cave #1 of Ajanta. See Padmanabh Jaini (1966). See also Andrew Rotman's new translation of the *Divyāvadāna* (*Divine Stories: Translations from the Divyāvadāna, part 1* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008) which recounts many love stories popular in South Asian Buddhist literature. Henry Ginsburg's Ph.D. dissertation "The Sudhana-Manohara tale in Thai: a comparative study based on two texts from the National Library, Bangkok, and Wat Machimawat, Songkhla," (1971) provides a detailed look at early textual sources for the dance performance in Southeast Asia. See also his "The Manora dance-drama: an introduction," *Journal of the Siam Society* (Ginsburg 1972).
  8. The *Sivijaya* is well-known in Laos and Thailand and is the subject of popular sermons where it is called the Si Vixai (Lao) and Srīwijai (Thai) today. Although there has not been any literary analysis of the story, thanks to the codicological research of Jacqueline Filliozat, Saveros Pou, and Harald Hundius, we now have evidence that it is also found both in Pali and in the bi-lingual sermon guide *nissaya* form as well with many manuscripts going back to the 16th century at least. In Cambodia, this story was mentioned in inscriptions in Siemreap and was part of one of the several *Paññāsajātaka* collections.
  9. See Walters Museum object report ID # 2010.12.32 and James Bogle (2011).
  10. An explanation of the text abbreviations are also now on-line at: <http://what-buddha-said.net/library/Wheels/img/paliabbreviationsystem.html>.
  11. [http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali\\_names/h/himava.htm](http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/h/himava.htm).
  12. At some new monasteries, especially among the immigrant Thai communities in the U.S., there are now framed cartoonish lithographs hanging on the walls with descriptions printed on them depicting the life of the Buddha. These are hung at U.S. temples in place of traditional murals (which are often too expensive and finding qualified artists is difficult). They are similar to Catholic paintings of the "Stations of the Cross" popular in the 1950s. I thank Donald Swearer for reminding me of these new narrative paintings.
  13. See also James (2007).
  14. See also Fraser (2004) and Teiser (2007).
  15. A major exception to this is the last book written by the late Wyatt. See his *Reading Thai Murals* (2004).
  16. See particularly Zaleski (1997: 93-150); Ringis (1990); Matics (1992); Fickle (1979); Bhirasri (1959); Nidda Hongwiwat (2549 [2006]); Chuphon Euachuwong (2007); No Na Paknam (2538 [1995]). This last book by Na Paknam contains his collected articles on Thai art published between 1974 and 1991. He often refers to the texts that murals represent. However, in two articles, one on the murals of the partition wall of Wat Suthat ("Phap kian bon lap lae faprachan thi wat suthat thepwararam") and another on the murals at Wat Bangkhae Yai in Samut Songkhram ("Chitakam faphanang thi wat bangkhae yai changwat samut songkhram"), he notes that—probably because there was not clearly identifiable textual source—these murals are a creative interpretation of daily life scenes depicting Mon, Chinese, Shan, and other peoples who resided near the monasteries. In 2003 (Vol. 29.4), *Muang Boran Journal* dedicated a special issue to murals which depicted historical events.
  17. Narrative additions to well-known canonical texts was of course also common on murals and other forms of Thai painting. One notable addition is seen in a Thai cloth painting held by the Asian Art Museum. The painting depicting chapter five of the story shows several women ridiculing the wife of the elderly Brahmin Jūjaka. In the original Pali text, this scene is quite short and simply contains 12 verses in which a group of women poke fun at Jūjaka's wife for being so obedient to an old man. There is only a subtle mention of the lack of romance and sex in

- their relationship; however, the painting is quite bawdy. The women are depicted groping each other, dancing, and holding long wooden phalluses (dildos). Many are half-naked pretending to penetrate each other vaginally in various positions. This kind of explicit sexual display is not mentioned in the Pali text, but must have offered some shock and delight to the late nineteenth century audiences of the painting. I appreciate Forrest McGill taking his time to show me this painting at the Asian Art Museum. See Cowell (1907: 271). Naked women are not limited to cloth paintings and are also found on prominent royal temple murals like those at Wat Pathumwanaram, Wat Rakhang, among others.
18. Thai Ms. 1319 (Chester Beatty Library). I thank Sinead Ward for helping me locate this manuscript while in Dublin.
  19. See Chutima Chunhacha (2537 [1994]) and Sanitsuda Ekachai (2008: 1). See also No Na Paknam's historical introduction to the temple, *Wat Khongkaram: Moradok paen din bon lum nam mae khlong* (Bangkok: Muang Boran, 2537 [1994]) and the special issue on Wat Khongkaram, with contributions from Nit Ratanasanya among others (Nit Ratanasanya *et al.* 2517 [1974]: esp. 19-53). I thank Donald Swearer for giving me a copy this last source.
  20. According to the *Sekhīya* (chapter ten, verses 5-6 of the Pali *Pāṭimokkha*), a monk should be "well-restrained" and this according to later commentaries emphasizes that being restrained means not dancing. However, that should not suggest in any way that dancing has been absent from Buddhist monasteries. While monks and novices do not dance (well, at least not publicly) dance performances are frequent in their courtyards and open-air pavilions (*sala*) at monasteries.
  21. They are half-human/half-birds popular in South and Southeast Asian mythology. However, in the *Mahābhārata* (in both the *Adi* and *Vana Parva*), the *Bhagavata Purāna* (see: Purnendu Narayana Sinha [1901: 26-27]), and the *Viṣṇu Purāna* (see: *The Vishnu Purana*, translated by Horace Hayman Wilson, [1840], at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/vp/vp115.htm>. Accessed on April 2, 2012). The male kinnara was a half-horse/half-human and they were one of the Himalayan tribes of superhumans. The horse changed to a bird in Southeast Asia.
  22. This is one of the biggest events of the annual monastic calendar in the Shan regions. Crowds are a mixture of novices, monks, and lay people at monasteries. However, it has hardly been mentioned in the plethora of excellent studies of Shan Buddhism that have come out over the past several years. This is not strange and in no way the fault of scholars in this growing field. Dance has not been a part of Buddhist or Religious Studies and is one of the least studies parts of the field of ethnomusicology. However, this has more to do with these fields of study than what actually goes on "in the field." There has been a real efflorescence in the study of Shan Buddhism over the past decade. See particularly Eberhardt (2006); Tanenbaum (2001). See also the special issue on Shan Buddhism in *Contemporary Buddhism* edited by Kate Crosby, Khammai Dhammasami, Jotika Khur-Yearn, and Andrew Skilton (2009). Unfortunately for the field of Shan Studies, performances like the Kinnari dance were rendered "non-Buddhist" by E. Paul Durrenberger in the early 1980s. See particularly Durrenberger (1980: 48-56; 1982:16-26; 1983: 63-74).
  23. See particularly Wong (2001). This is a rare study of non-ecclesiastical, lay Buddhist performances, particularly focused on the "wai khru" ritual and classical drama. Unfortunately, it has not been followed by other studies on the subject.
  24. There is another, related, *Sudhana* in East Asian Art which is one of the main characters in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. See for example Jan Fontein's *The pilgrimage of Sudhana: a study of Gaṇḍavyūha illustrations in China, Japan and Java* (1967).
  25. The doyen of Thai dance and former director of the department of Fine Arts in Bangkok, Dhanit Yupho, even invited the famous costume designer and choreographer Mom Phaeo, who was married to Mom Sanitwongseni, to work on new Manora sets and costumes. Her husband held different high ranking positions in the foreign service in Europe. This enabled her to bring set and costume design ideas from France, Italy, and other places and combined them with classical royal dance forms for the staging of Manora. Her work was also enhanced by the set innovations of Mot Wongsawat who was the artistic director for

- stage design with the Department of Fine Arts between 1933 and 1967. Dhanit also designed most sets for the National Theatre of Thailand in the middle of the 20th century. Wongsawat travelled to Japan with 36 Thai dancers, musicians, and artists in 1934 and brought Kabuki stage technology to Thai bird dances. Soon he had built a revolving set in Thailand replete with real trees, waving cloth mimicking flowing rivers, flowers, and mountain scenery, as well as bridges for his dancers which extended into the audience. The dancers dressed as birds could even fly around the audience suspended by ropes. In different ways, they added new dance styles to the play emphasizing the intimacy between Prince Sudhana and his half-bird/half-human lover in her elaborate winged dress. Some of these innovations were also applied to the *Prasantha To Nok*, a well-known scene from the epic royal poem, *Inao* (adapted from a Javanese romance) which involves a hunter chasing a female bird.
26. For more general information on festivals that take place at Buddhist monasteries that often include Chinese romance plays/operas, fashion shows, and dance performances see my *Love-lorn Ghost* (McDaniel 2011: 132-139).
  27. See especially Phitya Busararat (2553 [2010]: 211-145).
  28. See especially chapters four and five.
  29. The slim pickings include some of the chapters in David Symth's *The Canon in Southeast Asian Literature* (2000) and John Okell's "'Translation' and 'Embellishment' in an Early Burmese 'Jātaka' Poem," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1967: 133-148).
  30. Louis Finot first identified these types of texts in Laos in 1917. See his "Recherches sur la littérature laotienne," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (Finot 1917). Jean Brengues documented vernacular Lao telling of the stories in his "Une version laotienne du Pan-catantra," *Journal Asiatique* (Brengues 1908). Henry Ginsburg helped identify the twenty manuscripts of the *Tantropākhyāna* in the National Library of Thailand (there are also many in Northern Thai collections).
  31. The Royal Press in Bangkok published a printed copy of the *Nandaka-prakaraṇam* (Thai: *Non-thuk Pakaranam*) in 1876 and Ginsburg (1972) mentioned that there is a lost copy from 1870 (314).
  32. Another Northern Thai text with *p(r)akaraṇam* in its title is the *Jinakālamāli-pakaraṇam*. This text has been translated and studied by numerous scholars, including myself in 2002, as a chronicle or history. However, I now see that I might have missed something fundamental about the text even though it is right in the title. If we see it as a collection of stories instead of a chronicle it might permit different readings.
  33. Skilling, writing on Indian and Tibetan Vinaya commentaries clarifies the meaning of *vetala* in Sanskrit. He shows that the oldest Sanskrit spelling of *vetala* was "*vetāḍa*" (Pali: *vetāla* or *vetāla*). He also believes that the closest English translation is zombie versus Burton's (see below) use of "vampire." See Skilling (2007: 315fn7). See Ginsburg (1975: 279-314). Furthermore, Ginsburg wrote a fascinating Masters thesis in 1967 on the *Tantropākhyāna*, especially collection of ghost stories called the *Piśācap(r)akaraṇam* (Ginsburg 1967). This vernacular Thai text, unlike the rest of the *Tantropākhyāna*, has little connection to any known Sanskrit text. It seems to be the creative work of Thai authors. It was quite popular in the mid-19th century in Bangkok, there were several manuscript copies, and was actively studied by both Thai and foreign scholars in the late nineteenth century. Bishop Pallegoix, adviser to the Siamese king, included it in his list of important vernacular Thai "secular" texts in his 1850 Thai grammar. There were some English and German translations made of the stories in 1872 and 1894 respectively (this was a time in which there were very few translations of any Thai text available). Adolf Bastian hand copied these ghost stories in 1864. In was certainly seen as an important collection. These texts were copied and circulated among monks as well as lay people and clearly influenced modern Thai understandings of ghosts and the ritual needed to protect against them. See my "Encountering Corpses: Notes on Zombies and the Living Dead in Buddhist Southeast Asia", *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, Special Issue on Death and Funerary Cultures in Southeast Asia (2013b). There are many modern English and Sanskrit edi-

- tions of this collection. See for example N.M. Penzer (ed.) and C.H. Tawney's translation *The Ocean of Streams of Story* in ten volumes (London: Chas Sawyer, 1926) or the more recent translation by Arshia Sattar, *Somadeva: Tales from the Kathāsaritsāgara* (New York: Penguin, 1994). Riccardi (1968). This was later published in a slightly reduced form by the American Oriental Society (Riccardi 1971). The oldest manuscript of this collection in India was found in Mysore and dates from 1031 CE. Sanskritists and South Indian literary specialists Edgerton, Venkatasubbiah, and Artola have traced different versions of the Sanskrit text, as well as Tamil, Kanada, and Malayalam telling attributed to the Indian authors like Vasubhāga, Viṣṇuśarman, and Durgasiṃha. There are similarities with the stories about the Jain sage Pār-gvanātha composed by Bhāvadevasūri. Burton's telling were published by Longmans, Green, and Co. (London, 1870) and Ryder's 1917 translation is now available on-line at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/ttg/>.
34. Bloomfield (1920: 314-316).
  35. The *Book of the Birds* is briefly in Southeast Asia in the context of comparing it to examples from the Islamic and Indic world in Benfey (1864: 171-172). The first European to study these connections to Southeast Asia seems to be Adolf Bastian who traveled extensively in the region, especially Thailand, in the 1860s.
  36. For Indian influences of Kalilah and Dimnah and information on the Syrian, Arabic, and other tellings see Keith-Falconer (1970: introduction).
  37. Syam Phathanuprawat and Kusuma Raksamani have undertaken extensive studies of these possible Indian progenitors, as well as comparing them to the Javanese telling. He shows that this text, as well as the *Pakṣī*, *Maṇḍūkā*, and *Piśāca*, were introduced into Northern Thailand in the mid-1400s and probably came from the tradition of Vasubhāga, although much of the *Pakṣī* seems to come from the Viṣṇuśarman textual lineage. See Raksamani (1978: 12-15). See also studies of the Indic and Javanese manuscripts by Artola (1965); Sastri (1938); Hooykaas (1929); and three articles by Venkatasubbiah (1965: 74-142; 1966: 59-100; 1969: 195-283).
  38. See Farid ud-Din Attar (1984 and 1954). Recently, a beautiful children's telling was published by Peter Sis (*The Conference of the Birds*, 2011). Although none of the numerous scholars of these texts which circulated widely in the Islamic world has undertaken a serious comparative study with the Sanskrit manuscripts nor the Southeast Asian tellings.
  39. Some *Tantropākhyāna* manuscripts do not include the *Maṇḍūkā* and most do not include the Vetala. Most manuscripts include the Nandaka, *Pakṣī*, and Piśāca. There are many Northern Thai Nithan Nang Tantrai manuscripts available, including complete ones (with at least four of the *prakaraṇam* collections). For example, there are four in Chiang Mai monasteries, one in Lampang, one in Phayom, two in Phrae, and one in Nan. In Laos, the National Library has collected two large manuscripts of the Mun Tantai and the National Library of Thailand has two as well, although both exclude the *Maṇḍūkā* and seems to have come from a very different Indian source. For a relatively complete bibliography of manuscript and printed editions of the various *prakaraṇam* texts in the region see Syam Phathanuprawat's three articles in different stages of publication: "Nithan bhisatbhakaranam: chak rueang phi lueak nai ma ben rueang bhisat taeng ngan kap manut," "Kan bhlaeng nithan sanskrit ben chatok nai rueang kalithat," and "Nithan rueang chao chai okatanna kap mi: rong roi nithan sanskrit nai lanna." I thank Syam for sending these articles and for his advice and guidance. For a general study that draws from this research see his thesis "Bhaksibhakaranam: kan seuksa bhriaptiap chabap sanskrit lanna lae thai" (Bangkok: Silapakorn University, 2546 [2003]) and his "Lanna bhaksibhakaranam," *Damrong Journal of the Faculty of Archaeology*, 4, 1 (2005: 39-51). I also thank Jacqueline Filliozat for her kind help with this research. It should be noted that in Central Thailand (Siam) there was an entire other genre of manuscripts, many held at Buddhist monasteries, which depicted birds—*Tamra nok* (Bird Manuals). These colorful *khoi* paper manuscripts from the 19th century depict different type of birds, mostly roosters, cranes, and other birds, as well as garuda and kinnari.

These are more descriptive like European bestiaries and document different species, as well as connect them to human types and astrological symbols (although they are different from the quite common zodiac (*tamra horasat*) manuscripts. There are also elephant, horse, and cat manuals in these forms. Hiram Woodward is conducting a study of the elephant in Southeast Asia and looks at these manuscripts. I am cataloguing some of these manuscripts at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland.

40. A modern Thai translation of the text is found in Kriangkorn Sambhacchalit (2553 [2010]: chapter two). I thank Arthid Sheravanichkul for providing me with a copy of this book. J. Crosby (1910) translated the Thai text into English based off a manuscript in the Wachirayan Royal Library in 1910. He noted that there were both metrical (*khlon*) and prose manuscripts available. He was unable to find another *lilit* (mixed measured classical Thai lyrical poetry) manuscript mentioned in the 1904 *Vachirana Magazine* (n°113). I thank Peter Skilling for sending me a copy of this translation.
41. See for example: Arakawa, Hasebe, Imanaga & Okumura (1967); Baird (2001: esp. 101-123); Laumann (1991: 285-354). The numerous source books guiding artists in China discussed in Park's *Art by the Book* (2012) do not have an equivalent in pre-20th century Thailand.
42. See Gear & Gear (2002).
43. See in order Parmentier (1988: planche 6); Griswold (1960); No author (2510 [1967]: 14); M.R. Naengnoi Saksit (2537 [1994]: 81); McGill (2005: 162).
44. See <http://gwk-culturalpark.com/> (accessed March 22, 2012).
45. For a provocative study on the way murals were perhaps meant as visual gifts for Buddha images see Brown (1997); and my "The Agency between Images: the relationships among ghosts, corpses, monks, and deities at a Buddhist monastery in Thailand" (2011b).
46. I am undertaking a study of her life and her connection not only to Buddhist monasteries, but also to the Ton Son Masjid (Mosque) in the Thonburi Section of Greater Bangkok.
47. Although not focused on the doors of the wihan, a good, highly detailed introduction to the decorative arts and architectural elements of Wat Nang Nong is in the cremation volume dedicated to Mrs. Suthin Bunbhan which is a collected study of three Rama III monasteries which were built around the same time along the same canal in Chomthong District of Thonburi/Bangkok—Wat Nang Nong, Wat Nang Ratchawihan, and Wat Ratchaorot. This impressive tome is simply titled *Wat Bhrawatisat* ([The History of the Monasteries], Bangkok: Published through Wat Nang Nong, 2552 [2009]). I also thank Phra Maha Wichan Chutibanno at Wat Nang Nong for all the time he spent with me and his detailed tours of the monastic grounds.
48. This monastery and the life of Ying Wilat, Queen Sulalai, and the Thai poet Sunthorn Phu is the subject of another study I am presently completing.
49. This monastery, as I argue in a forthcoming article, was a monastery dedicated to women.
50. Wat Ratchaorot was originally a monastery known as Wat Chomthong that was built during the late Ayutthayan period. It was a place in which Prince Jessada camped with his army in preparation for a planned battle with the Burmese near Kanchanaburi. At this monastery, Prince Jessada, who later became King Rama III, had the brahmanic ceremony, Khon Thawan, performed, to ensure his battle with the Burmese would be successful.
51. Phra Thammakittiwong (2548 [2005]: 17). See also Prince Damrong Ratchanuphap's *Tamnan Nangseu Samkok* (reprint 2543 [2000]).
52. Some of the documentation can be seen at my website for the Thai Digital Monastery Project. Wat Ratchaorot is one of three monasteries featured on the site. See [tdm.sas.upenn.edu](http://tdm.sas.upenn.edu).
53. For example, see strikingly similar decorative birds at the Kaiyuan Temple in Chaozhou or the "White Pagoda" of Fuzhou which is nearly identical at its base to the chedi of Wat Nang Nong. The saddle-shaped roofline of the gates of Wat Ratchaorot is distinctly Hokkien in style.
54. Christopher Adler, composer, ethnomusicologist and avid bird-watcher, helped me considerably identifying the birds at Wat Ratchaorot. I cannot do justice to the details he provi-

- ded, but he noted that some of the birds featured in the decorative art there included: the Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*), a type of Laughing Thrush (perhaps the Spotted or the Yellow-throated Laughing Thrush), what look to be Green Peafowls (*Pavo muticus*) or Lady Amherst's Pheasants all of which can be found in Southern China and Southeast Asia. He also noted that bringing captive birds by wealthy people to the region was not an unknown practice and so often birds in art can be copied from other pieces of art or be the artist's favorite bird. See also the useful guide to the birds of Thailand by Bhrasit Chanserikon (2551 [2008]).
55. John Crawford, a Scottish collector and traveler, described Wat Ratchaorot in his journal while serving in the embassy in Siam in the 1820 and 1830s. See excerpts from this description in No author [it was composed by an unnamed committee working at the monastery] *Wat Ratchaorosara Ratchawirawihan* (2541 [1998]). The full journal, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the courts of Siam and Cochin China* was published in London in 1929 based on the original notes. Oxford University Press reprinted this in 1987. See also: *The Crawford papers: a collection of official records relating to the mission of Dr. John Crawford sent to Siam by the government of India in the year* (London: Gregg Books, 1915). The only description of the window shutters I have found in detail is in Phra Thammakit-tiwong's *Wat Ratchaoroasaram Ratchaworawihan* (2548 [2005]: 33). He neither speculates on their meaning nor origin.
  56. I recently came across a *samut khoi* (black) manuscript from 1831 in the University of Pennsylvania archives. It has several sections of handwritten notes by an unnamed adviser to Rama III. The section section contains specific instructions on repairing a monastery in Bangkok. Giving instructions on monastery building and repair was obviously a regular part of the king's workday. The cataloguing and translating of this manuscript will take place in fall, 2014.
  57. See for example recent, but yet unpublished, work by Rebecca Hall on the very large bird-shaped Nok Hadsading funerary floats that carry corpses of important monks and laity through village streets before being ignited in huge bonfires.
  58. I thank Cecilia Segawa Siegle, one of the original translators of Mishima's *Temple of the Dawn* (Mishima 1973) into English, for her insights into this section and assistance with understanding the Japanese terms rendered into English. Honda's travels to India, especially scenes at Ajanta and along the ghats in Benares, are mirrored in the many ways in Shusaku Endo's *Deep River* (*Fukai Kawa*) in 1993.
  59. For more information see Orzech (2002: 55-83).
  60. The Peacock is also mentioned as a beautiful bird in the popular *Amitābha Sūtra* (also known as the *Shorter Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*). In Tamil poetry, like the *Tirukkōvaiyār*, the peacock can represent Śiva. I thank Leah Comeau for conversations on this point.
  61. See particularly the work of Wendy Doniger, especially (1999).

## References

---

- ARAKAWA, Hirikazu, Gakuji HASEBE, Seiji IMANAGA & Hideo OKUMURA, 1967, *Traditions in Japanese Design: Kachō Bird and Flower Motifs*, vol. 1, Tokyo: Kodansha.
- ARTOLA, George, 1965, *Ten Tales from the Tāntropakhyana*, Madras: The Vasanta Press.
- BAIRD, Merrily, *Symbols of Japan*, 2001, New York: Rizzoli International.
- BARTHOLOMEW, Terese Tse, 2006, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum.
- BAXANDALL, Michael, 1985, *Patterns of Intention*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- BENFEY, Theodor, ed., 1864, *Orient und Occident*, Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 3: 171-172.
- BHIRASRI, Silpa, 1959, *The Origin and Evolution of Thai Murals: Edifices Containing Murals*, catalogue of murals in the Silpakorn Gallery, Bangkok: Fine Arts Department.
- BHRASIT CHANSERIKON, 2551 [2008], *Phapthai nok nai mueang thai*, Bangkok: Mahachon.

- BLOOMFIELD, Maurice, 1920, "On Overhearing as a Motif of Hindu Fiction", *American Journal of Philology*, 41, 4: 301-335.
- BOGLE, James, 2011, *Thai and Southeast Asian Painting: 18th through 20th century*, Atglen, PA: Schiffer.
- BOISSELIER, Jean, 1976, *Thai Painting*, Tokyo: Kodansha International.
- BRENGUES, Jean, 1908, "Une version laotienne du Pancatantra", *Journal Asiatique*, 10, 12: 361-362.
- BROWN, Robert, 1997, "Narrative as Icon: The Jataka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture", in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, Juliane Schober, ed., Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 64-112.
- CANNADINE, David, 2002, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- CHUPHON EUACHUWONG, 2007, "Chitrakam Samkok nai sala Chao Kian An Keng" [The romance of the three kingdom paintings in the Chao Kian An Keng Pavilion], *Muang Boran*, 33, 3: 50-58.
- CHUTIMA CHUNHACHA, ed., 2537 [1994], *Chut chitakam faphanangnai prathet Thai Wat Khongkharam*, Bangkok: Muang Boran.
- COWELL, E.W., ed., 1907, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, vol. 6, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- CRAWFURD, 1915, John & Willaim STORM, *The Crawford Papers: A Collection of Official Records Relating to the Mission of Dr. John Crawford Sent to Siam by the Government of India in the Year*, London: Gregg Books.
- CROSBY, J., 1910, "Translation of The book of the Birds", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 7, 2: 1-90.
- CROSBY, Kate, Khammai DHAMMASAMI, Jotika KHUR-YEARN & Andrew SKILTON, ed., 2009, "Shan Buddhism", *Contemporary Buddhism*, 10, 1.
- DONIGER, Wendy, 1999, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth, The 1996-1997 ACLS/AAR Lectures*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- DURRENBERGER, E. Paul, 1980, "Annual Non-Buddhist Religious Observances of Mae Hong Son Shan", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 68: 48-56.
- DURRENBERGER, E. Paul, 1982, "Shan Kho: The Essence of Misfortune", *Anthropos*, 77: 16-26.
- DURRENBERGER, E. Paul, 1983, "Shan Rocket Festival and Non-Buddhist Aspects of Shan Religion", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 71: 63-74.
- EBERHARDT, Nancy, 2006, *Imagining the Course of Life*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- FARID UD-DIN ATTAR, 1954, *The Conference of the Birds*, transl. by S.C. Nott, London: Cirwen Press.
- FARID UD-DIN ATTAR, 1984, *The Conference of the Birds*, transl. by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, New York: Penguin.
- FICKLE, Dorothy H., 1979, *The Life of the Buddha in the Buddhaisawan Chapel*, Bangkok: Krom Sinlapākōn.
- FINOT, Louis, 1917, "Recherches sur la littérature laotienne", *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 17, 5: 5-224.
- FONTEIN, Jan, 1967, *The Pilgrimage of Sudhana: A Study of Gaṇḍavyūha Illustrations in China, Japan and Java*, The Hague: Mouton.
- FRASER, Sarah E., 2004, *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618-960*, Chicago: Stanford University Press.

- GEAR, Donald & Joan GEAR, 2002, *An Ancient Bird-Shaped Weight System from Lan Na and Burma*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- GINSBERG, Henry, 1967, "The Literary Tales Derived from the Sanskrit *Tantrōpākhyāna*", Master's Thesis, University of Hawai'i.
- GINSBURG, Henry, 1971, "The Sudhana-Manohara Tale in Thai: A Comparative Study Based on Two Texts from the National Library, Bangkok, and Wat Machimawat, Songkhla", Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
- GINSBURG, Henry, 1972, "The Manora dance-drama: an introduction", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 60, 2: 169-181.
- GINSBURG, Henry, 1975, "The Thai Tales of Nang Tantrai and the Pisaca Tales", *Journal of the Siam Society*, 63, 2: 279-314.
- GOMBRICH, E.H., 1994, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*, The Wrightsman Lectures, V. 9, London: Phaidon.
- GRABAR, Oleg, 1995, *The Mediation of Ornament*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- GRISWOLD, A.B., 1960, "Notes on Siamese Art", *Artibus Asiae*, XXIII: 5-14.
- GUELLEN, Marlene, 2005, "Ancestral Spirit Mediumship in Southern Thailand: The Nora Performance as a Symbol of the South on the Periphery of a Buddhist Nation-State", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
- HOOYKAAS, Christian, 1929, "Tantri de Mittel-javaansche Pancatantra—beworking", Ph.D. dissertation, Leiden University.
- JAINI, Padmanabh S., 1966, "The Story of Sudhana and Manoharā: An Analysis of the Texts and the Borobudur Reliefs", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 29, 3: 533-558.
- JAMES, Liz, 2007, "Introduction", in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, Liz James, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- KEITH-FALCONER, Ion G.N., 1970, "Introduction", in *Kalilah and Dimnah or the Fables of Bidpai*, Ion G.N. Keith-Falconer, Amsterdam: Philo Press.
- KRIANGKON SAMBACCHALIT, ed., 2553 [2010], *Bhrachum bhakaranam bhak thi 1-6*, Bangkok: Saengdao.
- LAUMANN, Martya, ed., 1991, *Chinese Decorative Design*, vols 1-4, Taipei: SMC Pub.
- LIHE & Michael KNIGHT, eds., 2008, *Power and Glory: Court Arts of China's Ming Dynasty*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum.
- M.R. NAENGNOI SAKSIT, *Moradok sathabatyakam krung ratanakosin*, 2537 [1994], Bangkok: Roongphim krungthep.
- MAGUIRE, Henry, 2007, "Eufrosius and Friends. On Names and their Absence in Byzantine Art", in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, Liz James, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 139-160.
- MARSTON, John, 2004, "Clay into Stone: A Modern-Day Tāpas," in *History, Bud-dhism, and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, John Marston & Elizabeth Guthrie, ed., Honolulu: University Of Hawaii Press, pp.170-196.
- MATICS, Kathleen I., 1992, *Introduction to Thai Murals*, Chonburi: White Lotus.
- MATTANI MOJDARA RUTNIN, 1996, *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- MCDANIEL, Justin, 2008, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- MCDANIEL, Justin, 2011a, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk*, New York: Columbia University Press.

- MCDANIEL, Justin, 2011b, "The Agency between Images: The Relationships among Ghosts, Corpses, Monks, and Deities at a Buddhist Monastery in Thailand", *Material Religion*, 7, 2: 242-267.
- MCDANIEL, Justin, 2013a, "This Hindu Holy Man is a Thai Buddhist," *Southeast Asia Research*, 21, 2: 191-209.
- MCDANIEL, Justin, 2013b, "Encountering Corpses: Notes on Zombies and the Living Dead in Buddhist Southeast Asia", *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, 12, "The Linvind and the Dead", special issue on death and funerary cultures in Southeast Asia.
- MCGILL, Forrest, ed., 2005, *The Kingdom of Siam: The Art of Central Thailand, 1350-1800*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum.
- MCGILL, Forrest, ed., 2009, *Emerald Cities: Arts of Siam and Burma, 17715-1950*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum.
- MISHIMA, Yukio, 1973, *The Temple of the Dawn*, transl. by E. Dale Saunders and Cecilia Segawa Seigle, New York: Knopf.
- NIDDA HONGWIWAT, 2549 [2006], *Wessandon Chadok: Thotsachadok kap chittrakam fa-phanang [The Vessanatara Jataka: The Ten Jatakas Accompanied by their Mural Paintings]*, Saeng daet pheuandek: Bangkok.
- NIT RATANASANYA et al., 2517 [1974], "Wat Khongkaram", *ASA: Journal of the Association of Siamese Architects*, 3,1.
- NIWA, Motoji, 2001, *Snow, Wave, Pine: Traditional Patterns in Japanese Design*, transl. Jay Thomas, Tokyo: Kodansha.
- No author, 2510 [1967], *Rambam chut borankhadi*, Bangkok: Phiphithaphan sathan haeng chat.
- No author, 2541 [1998], *Wat Ratchaorosara Ratchawirawihan*, Bangkok: No publisher listed.
- NO NA PAKNAM, 2537 [1994], *Wat Khongkaram: Moradok paen din bon lum nam mae khlong*, Bangkok: Muang Boran.
- OKELL, John, 1967, "'Translation' and 'Embellishment' in an Early Burmese 'Jātaka' Poem", *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 99, 2: 133-148.
- ORZECZ, Charles, 2002, "Metaphor, Translation, and the Construction of Kingship in the Scripture for Humane Kings and the Mahāmāyūrī Vidyārājñī Sūtra", *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, 13: 55-83.
- PARK, J.P., *Art by the Book*, 2012, Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- PARMENTIER, Henri, 1988, *L'Art du Laos: Iconographie*, planche 6, Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- PHITYA BUSARARAT, 2553 [2010]), *Nathakam haeng lum tale sap songkhla*, Bangkok: Amarin Printing.
- PHRA THAMMAKITTIWONG, 2548 [2005], *Wat Ratchaoroasaram Ratchaworawihan*, Bangkok: no publisher listed.
- PRINCE DAMRONG RATCHANUPHAP, 2543 [2000], *Tamnan Nangseu Samkok*, Bangkok: Dokya (reprint).
- PURNENDU NARAYANA SINHA, 1901, *A Study of the Bhagavata Purana*, Benares: Tara Printing Works.
- RAKSAMANI, Kusuma, 1978, "Nandakapakarana attributed to Vasubhaga: A Comparative Study of Sanskrit, Lao, and Thai Texts", Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto.
- REYNOLDS, Craig, 2006, *Seditious Histories: Contesting Thai and Southeast Asian Pasts*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

- RICCARDI, Theodore, 1968, "A Nepali Version of the Vetālapañcaviṃṣati Nepali Text and English Translation", Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- RICCARDI, Theodore, 1971, *A Nepali Version of the Vetālapañcaviṃṣati Nepali Text and English Translation*, New Haven: American Oriental Society, vol. 54.
- RINGIS, Rita, 1990, *Thai Temples*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SANGKHAM CHANGYOT, 2548 [2005], *Kan fon nak kingkala*, Chiang Mai: Nopbori Kanphim.
- SANITSUDA EKACHAI, 2008, "Thailand's Gay Past", *Bangkok Post*, February 23.
- SASTRI, Sivasamba, 1938, *The Tāntropākhayāna*, Trivandrum: Government Press.
- SIS, Peter, 2011, *The Conference of the Birds*, New York: Penguin Books.
- SKILLING, Peter, 2007, "Zombies and Half-Zombies: Mahāsūtras and Other Protective Measures", *Journal of the Pali Text Society*, 29: 315fn7.
- SOMBHONG AKHARAWONG, 2550 [2007], *Chitakam Thai*, Bangkok: Amarin.
- SNODIN, Michael & Maurice HOWARD, 1996, *Ornament: A Social History Since 1450*, Yale New Haven: University Press.
- SYMTH, David, 2000, *The Canon in Southeast Asian Literature*, London: Routledge.
- TANENBAUM, Nicola, 2001, *Who Can Compete Against the World?: Power-Protection and Buddhism in Shan Worldview*, Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies.
- TEISER, Stephen F., 2007, *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples*, Washington: University of Washington Press.
- VENKATASUBBIAH, A., 1965, "A Tamil Version of the Pañcatantra", *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, 29: 74-142.
- VENKATASUBBIAH, A., 1966, "A Javanese Version of the Pañcatantra", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 46: 59-100.
- VENKATASUBBIAH, A., 1969, "The Pañcatantra Version of Laos", *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, 33, 1-4: 195-283.
- WANG, Eugene, 2005, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*, Washington: University of Washington Press.
- WILLIAMS, C.A.S., 2006, *Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs*, 4th edition, Tokyo: Tuttle Books.
- WILSON, Henry, 2011, *Pattern and Ornament in the Arts of India*, New York: Thames and Hudson.
- WONG, Deborah, 2001, *Sounding the Center: History and Aesthetics in Thai Buddhist Performance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- WYATT, David K., 2004, *Reading Thai Murals*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- ZALESKI, Valérie, 1997, "The Art of Thailand and Laos", in *The Art of Southeast Asia*, Bernard Wooding, ed., Paris: Éditions Citadelle et Mazenod.

---

**Abstract:** Despite the prevalence of ornament and decoration in Buddhist monasteries in Thailand, as an art form, ornament has been almost entirely ignored in favor of the study of narrative and didactic art and literature. In this paper, I approach the subject of temple ornament (focusing primarily on the use of decorative birds) in Thai Buddhism through the lens of Affect Theory. As scholars of this approach emphasize that to study affect is to study "of accumulative beside-ness." It is the study of accumulation of encounters. The senses accumulate images, feelings, scents, and sounds constantly. It is the slow accretion of knowledge in the form of non-discursive impressions. It is not the systematic learning of facts, dates, titles, terms, narrative sequences, ethical standards, and logical progressions, but the body's "capacity to affect and be affected." Birds are so common in

Buddhist stories, murals, illuminated manuscripts, dance dramas and comedies, jewelry, and decorative parts of clothing and temple architecture that they become, like ritual and music, repetitious affective encounters experienced in Buddhist popular culture. I assert that these affective encounters are as fundamental, if not more fundamental, to the ways Buddhists learn to be Buddhists, because they are more accessible and common, than ethical arguments, philosophical treatises, and doctrinal formulations.

***L'oiseau au coin du tableau : quelques problèmes relatifs à l'usage des textes bouddhistes dans l'étude de l'art ornemental bouddhiste en Thaïlande***

*Résumé : en dépit de l'omniprésence des ornements et des éléments décoratifs dans les monastères de Thaïlande, les ornements comme forme d'art ont été quasiment ignorés à la faveur de l'étude des arts et de la littérature narrative et didactique. Dans cet article, j'aborde le sujet des ornements de temples (en me concentrant principalement sur l'usage des oiseaux décoratifs) dans le bouddhisme thaï à travers le prisme de la théorie de l'affect. Les spécialistes de cette approche insistent sur le fait qu'étudier les affects, c'est étudier « l'accumulation des à-côtés ». C'est l'étude de l'accumulation des rencontres. Les sens accumulent constamment des images, des sensations, des odeurs et des sons. Le savoir est lentement accumulé sous la forme d'impressions non discursives. L'intérêt ne porte pas sur l'apprentissage systématique des faits, dates, titres, termes, séquences narratives, standards éthiques et progressions logiques, mais sur la « capacité du corps à affecter et à être affecté ». Les oiseaux sont si présents dans les histoires, les peintures murales, les manuscrits enluminés, le théâtre dansé, les bijoux et les éléments décoratifs des vêtements et de l'architecture des temples bouddhiques, qu'on peut les décrire, comme le rituel ou la musique, comme des rencontres affectives répétitives dont on fait l'expérience dans la culture populaire bouddhiste. J'affirme ici que ces rencontres affectives, parce qu'elles sont plus accessibles et répandues, sont aussi, sinon plus, fondamentales dans l'apprentissage par les Bouddhistes de la manière d'être bouddhiste que les arguments éthiques, les traités philosophiques et les formules doctrinales.*

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Thailand, ornament, affect theory, art, bird, material culture, decoration.

**Mots-clés:** Bouddhisme, Thaïlande, ornement, théorie des affects, art, oiseau, culture matérielle.