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HIT SIP SONG, KHONG SIP SI

(TWELVE TRADITIONS, FOURTEEN PRECEPTS)

Translator's Introduction

I have often heard Lao people say, "According to Hit Sip Song Khong Sip Si traditional custom...." They say that the Lao try to keep this tradition until now, and that it is good to follow this tradition. But it is difficult to find out exactly what the tradition is because knowledge of it is vague. People often refer to Hit Sip Song Khong Sip Si to urge or to justify some action, when actually the Hit Sip Song Khong Sip Si teaching may not be relevant.

I have now found a booklet, published by the Ministry of Culture, Vientiane, on 1 August, B.E. 2495 (A.D. 1952) which lists the twelve traditions and fourteen precepts for lay persons and fourteen precepts for the king. The translation is attached. My comments and explanations are enclosed in brackets [] throughout the text.

Area UDOL
8904, Luang Prabang
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HIT SIP SONG KHONG SIP SI

Introduction

This book was copied from the HIT SIP SONG KHONG SIP SI which is recorded in palm leaf volume No. 227 in the Vientiane library, and from Prarasa Thammien Lao Lansang Luang Prabang /Lao Royal Customs of Luang Prabang, Kingdom of Lansang/ which was compiled by Thongphoum Singchak in B.E. 2479 /from a number of old sources/.

Of these two books, the palm leaf record must have been written before the other because it is in ancient idiom which makes the exact date of it uncertain. (See footnote.) The writer /of the palm leaf text/ wrote that this was a teaching of the Buddha to the monks. A monk gave these teaching to a rich man was Chao Muong /GOVERNOR/ of Phothiyanakhern. The writer said that if any king or any people do not follow the HIT SIP SONG KHONG SIP SI their kingdom or those people will lose everything; if they follow, they will be in complete well-being and will progress and prosper.

The Prarasa Thammien Lao Lansang Luang Prabang is in modern language which is much different from the ancient idiom. For the use of good men who are interested, we also publish here the Khong Sip Si for the King. But the Hit Sip Song is the same, so we publish the Hit Sip Song from the palm leaf volume.

HIT SIP SONG

Hit is from the Pali word Charita, which the Lao pronounce Chahit, and shortened to Hit. Charita means "tradition". The Hit Sip Song are the traditional festivals which we must observe each month following ancient practice.

1. In the first month feed the Phi Möt and Phi Yom household spirits which are thought of rather like pets and used as servants to run errands. They can be sold or given to other owners. They are supposed to be given food at every meal. The Phi Yom are represented as small wooden figures carved in the shape of a young child and kept in a bottle of sandalwood oil. Phi Fa /spirit of the sky/, Phi Than /SPIRIT of heaven/;

Footnote: Probably it was written before the time of king Phothisarath /the father of Sayasethathirat, who was the builder of Vientiane and the first King of the Kingdom of Vientiane, over 300 years ago/, at a time in which it was the custom not to wear shirts or blouses in the presence of monks, royalty or superiors. Spirit belief and practices and manner of dressing are different now.

and invite the monks to enter Pariyassakan [meditation forest].

2. In the second month, invite the monks to pray Sayamoungkhoun for the kindness [or blessing or favor] [the spirit of] rice.

3. On the full moon of the third month, have the Khao Chi [Khao-rice; Chi-roasted]. Nowadays the Maka B ceremony is also celebrated on the same day [commemorate] the day the 500 arahants listened together to the teaching of the Buddha on the rules of discipline for the clergy.

4. In the fourth month, arrange flowers to show respect [to the Buddha] and listen to a teaching of the monks, as Boun Maha Phravesadon Chadok (the Buddha's story about previous life before he became the Buddha).

5. In the fifth month, on the day of Sang Khan Pai, last day of the old year when the god of the old year leaves, invite the monks to pray the Sayamoungkhoun [a prayer at successful completion of some activity; in this case, bless the departing god of the year].

The next day, Meu Mao [Rest Day, when the gods rest; day between the last day of the old year and the first day of the new], feed the monks and then show respect and beg the pardon of the Buddha, the Dharma [Dharma in Lao; the truth], the Sangha [Sangha in Lao; the preservers of religion, i.e., the clergy], parents, elders and husbands. Build a shelter in the center of the town and invite the monks there to pray the Sayamoungkhoun for seven days and seven nights. After giving food to the monks, feed the spirits and send merit to spirits. [Merit transferred to the spirits or departed souls is that earned by giving food to the monks. The transfer is symbolized in this ceremony by pouring water.]

The shelters for the spirits [which are maintained throughout the year] have been built at the four corners of the village and the monks have been invited to invite the [four] spirits, Cha na Thang Si, to stay in the shelters; and there is a Sainlouchali [a magic white cotton string to prevent evil spirits from entering] around the village. At the end of the seventh day, take seven bowls of magic water [these are bowls of water that the monks have performed a special ritual over], ask the monks to walk around the village—praying, scattering gravel and sand and sprinkling magic water at the same time.

Write the magic incantation Prachao Praong [Five Buddha] and hang on the door [in present practice they glue to the lintel of every entrance door]. (This incantation is: a-ou-e wat-na-wa-wa na-na ma-a-ou na-mo phou-tha-ya.)