

## Recent Books on LAO PDR – Feb 2018

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(Pheun Meuang Kham Thong Luang) The History of Kham Thong Luang :  
A Translation and Study of an Early Twentieth Century Lao Poem (Book  
One) / Upahat Ba Phoi (Translation & Study) Peter Koret with the  
assistance of Maha Kaew Sirivongsa  
USA : Broken Handle Press, 2018  
584p.  
9780999668313  
\$ 55.00 / PB  
1040gm.

Kham Thong Luang, the subject of the longest Lao history ever to be written, no longer exists, its name little known even in Laos. There is only a single copy of the work, owned by the ninety-six-year-old great granddaughter of the man who composed it. She lives in a small provincial town that once was the capital of Kham Thong Luang and cannot read even a single word. The manuscript had been hanging on her wall and collecting dust for nearly a century before anyone took the time and effort to open its pages and read it. This book is a study and annotated translation. It is a long time in coming. The History of Kham Thong Luang is a poem, over one thousand pages in length, that tells three separate stories, historical, religious, and autobiographical in nature. As an historical document, The History of Kham Thong Luang is unique. It is the sole first-hand account of the period of French colonization from a Lao perspective. Composed by a high-ranking government official, it provides a detailed account of every-day life in French colonial Laos, a depiction of the millenarian uprising of Ong Kaew, and a description of corruption, abuse of power, and political intrigue. In the context of religious studies, it is the most thorough and detailed work of millenarian Buddhism in existence in Laos, and perhaps all of Southeast Asia. Whereas other millenarian writings in Laos are deliberately ambiguous, The History of Kham Thong Luang alone fills in religious philosophy with specific factual detail, focusing on how events

in Lao history such as French colonization are attributable to the downfall of human society during the late stage of the Buddhist Era. It is also the first autobiography in the history of Laos, quite possibly the earliest first-hand account of the life of a Lao person in existence. When the historical, religious, and autobiographical contents of this poem are viewed together, they tell yet one more story, the tale of Laos on the verge of modernization. The History of Kham Thong Luang begins with a mythological account of the origins of Kham Thong Luang at the time of the Buddha's enlightenment and ends with the author's excitement in conveying the news that an airplane has for the first time landed at a field in Ubon. Ultimately, it is a forty-year-long diary of an educated man steeped in Lao culture who recorded his attempts to make sense of, accommodate, and at times resist, the changes that were coming to drastically alter the landscape of his country. The translation, based upon photographic documentation of the manuscript provided by the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, was completed through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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(Pheun Meuang Kham Thong Luang) The History of Kham Thong Luang : A Translation and Study of an Early Twentieth Century Lao Poem (Book Two) / Upahat Ba Phoi (Translation & Study) Peter Koret with the assistance of Maha Kaew Sirivongsa

Middletown, Delaware: Broken Handle Press, 2018

556p.

9780999668306

\$ 55.00 / PB

1040gm.

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