Overview:

The project lead selected all materials for digitisation by himself. Project driver, Mr Kittimase Thitanopphan aka 'Phi Tae', and the project photographer, Mr Akanan Tithanoppun 'Phi Tu', provided invaluable assistance, but neither was literate in Mon. During the process of selection, the project lead consulted with members of the Thai Mon and Burma Mon communities at times. Thai Mon community elder, Nai Phisarn Boonpook, had surveyed some of the manuscript collections in the region and so was able to provide insights into what kinds of materials were held where, and something of their provenance. The project lead also went to Nai Sunthorn Sripanngern (who, despite his name, is of Burma Mon origin) and Daw Pyone Pyone Aye of the Mon Pitakattaik Library of Rangoon with questions about which manuscripts were extant in Burma. On a few occasions, community members communicated their requests for the project lead to look out for certain texts, such as on music. Aside from this kind of occasional assistance, however, the project lead could not secure the involvement of a Mon assistant: vanishingly few Thai Mons are literate in Mon, while the Burma Mon migrants were otherwise occupied or perhaps not interested.

To state the matter clearly, all the decisions were taken by the project lead, who is not Mon and not a native speaker, and any oddities or errors will reflect that reality. The project lead is a specialist of Burmese and Mon history, who spent sixteen years in Burma before becoming involved in this project, hence the decided 'Burmese' bent to the execution of this project.

Selection Principles:

At every site, the project team selected only some materials to digitise – at no site were all materials digitised. First priority was given to 'non-religious' material. The project lead kept an eye out for 'secular texts', that is, works of literature, history, medical treatment, horoscopology and the like, although the project lead was aware that most texts had some connection to Buddhism, given the intellectual environment of the monastery. The rationale for this decision was that such 'secular' materials tend to exist in smaller numbers, sometimes only in a few or even single copies.

Nevertheless, the project lead wanted to serve the interests of scholars and the community, and so endeavoured to digitise a wide sampling of texts. The majority of materials were in the Mon language (which the project lead could read) and in Pāli (which the lead could not), largely in the Mon script, but also in Khom and Thai. Within these religious texts, the project lead gave especial priority to Mon-language commentaries, Pāli-Mon glosses and interlinear texts, and *trāy* or *nissaya* bilingual Pāli-Mon texts. On the other hand, the project lead tended to exclude texts that occurred in great numbers both within and between collections, such as the numerous copies of the *Abhidhamma.* The project did, however, digitise several illuminated *parabaik* of the *Abhidhamma* because of their interest also as art objects.

After coming across the above-mentioned manuscripts written in the Khom script, the project lead also decided to digitise many of these, which represent both Pāli and Thai-language material. Experts whom the lead consulted explained that few of these materials had otherwise been digitised. The project lead recognises the help of Dr Michel Antelme of INALCO for transliterating and naming Khom manuscripts.

Excluded Materials:

Aside from the above principles, certain kinds of materials were generally *not* digitised:
-Thai language, machine printed 'palm leaf' texts.

-Most printed books. No printed Thai book was digitised, although one or two Mon-language texts that had been printed at the Pak Lat press in the early twentieth century were for historical interest.
-Highly degraded *parabaik* texts. At Wat Koh, for example, some *parabaik* were little more than bits, and some could not be opened.
-Un-inked manuscripts. A surprising number of palm leaf manuscripts were found un-inked, and the project lead was not aware of a non-destructive technique to ink them without undergoing the full traditional process. Nevertheless, the project did digitise a few such manuscripts, in the hopes that the high resolution of the photographs would allow the determined reader to use them.
-Severely curved palm-leaf manuscripts. Either through the vagaries of time or because of improper storage, some manuscripts had become so curved as to make photographing impossible. In some cases, the photographer was able place a piece of non-reflective plastic over the images to flatten without damaging them – hence the presence of the piece of plastic in some images.
-Bundles of random or loose leaves. The traditional practice was to tie leaves of a palm leaf manuscripts into folios with string. Often these strings disintegrate or snap over time. Other times, readers untied the strings to pull out leaves which they wished to study or read. All too often these leaves ended up scattered and separated. A common practice at temples was to gather these loose leaves up and bundles them, either alone, or with incomplete, damaged, or old manuscripts. The project lead did, however, choose and digitise random leaves because they were examples of unique handwriting, or offered information about donors, scribes, or the like.

Other Notes:
-Age per se did *not* disqualify a manuscript from being digitised, even if some leaves were torn, missing, chewed by rats or the like. Also it should be noted that some manuscripts still looked grimy, dirty, or dark even after cleaning.
-The project lead made every effort to ensure that manuscripts are in the correct order. Where leaves appear missing in a folder, that was simply the state in which the manuscript was found. The value of the subject matter outweighed the completeness or otherwise of the original text.

Dealing with Manuscript Titles and Cataloguing
    Wherever possible, photograph files and the folios have been named following the title found in the manuscript itself. In many cases, however, the manuscripts lacked colophons or another clear indication of title. In the case of palm leaf manuscripts, the project lead tried to select the full sentence after any ritual introductions. Often a Pāli-language or sometimes a Mon-language formula opens a text. In some cases, however, the Mon-language formula went on so long that it became impractical to follow that practice. Any confusion and lack of clarity are regretted, and the continued relevance of this project must depend on the feedback of future users. In a few cases from Wat Khongkharam, the Mon language manuscript itself had no title or colophon, but the Thai-language bundle wrapper did provide a name, which was then used instead.
    The case of the *parabaik* was more difficult: almost none of them had titles, and often a single *parabaik* might contain several texts, which may or may not be connected. Scribes of the past seemed to treat *parabaik* as notebooks, filling pages with doodles. The long stretches of blank pages often found in the *parabaik* were often not photographed, although sometimes a

blank page or two were photographed in order to indicate that a particular text had ended. Furthermore, *parabaik* were glued together, which means that over time, they are vulnerable to coming apart. The project lead often was not able to ensure that sections were put together in the proper order, especially when the text was in Pāli. In this context, the project lead gave the *parabaik* titles, often thematic based on the contents. At Wat Khongkharam, some of the *parabaik* had been given a short description of the contents, and so the project lead relied on that.

This project did not create a catalogues of the collections as such. The metadata which the project created does, however, form a catalogue of sorts, albeit not exhaustive. The project lead was aware that Thai institutions and members of the Mon community do value such catalogues, but given that the lead was working alone, without the assistance of members of the Mon community, such an undertaking was not possible.

It should also be noted that the storage conditions often precluded a straightforward assessment of contents, let alone cataloguing. At most temples, palm leaf manuscripts were stored in bundles, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, with no indication of their contents. At Wat Koh and Wat Pom, which stored the manuscripts in such conditions, it would not have been a good use of time to separate the processes of surveying, cataloguing, and photographing.

At Wat Koh and Wat Pom and in the 'discard' cabinet at Wat Khongkharam (which had otherwise been excluded from the labelling done on much of the rest of the collection), the project left Mon-language tags to indicate as much of the contents as was possible, and also to indicate whether the some or part of the bundle was digitised. Although not the most desirable outcome, this was what the project was able to do under the circumstances.

In the process of unwrapping the bundles at Wat Koh, Wat Pom, and in the 'discard' cabinet at Wat Khongkharam, the project often had to replace the wrapping cloths themselves. Many of these wrappers had clearly once been beautiful textiles, and it was often painful to watch them disintegrate upon unwrapping. When reuse was not possible, with the consent of the collection holders, the project team rewrapped those bundles using either monk's robes or plain white cotton cloth.

Future Work:

As indicated above, it is hoped that future readers can contribute to the accuracy of this digital collection by providing corrections or greater precision to the naming of some of the files.

The project lead would also like to advocate for a few best practices in relation to any future digitisation of Thai Mon manuscripts. It is a best practice to *always* include the titles of manuscripts in the Mon language, in the Mon script. As of this writing, there are no Thai scholars who read Mon, nor can most Thai Mons. The readership at this point will be Mon speakers from Burma, who generally cannot read Thai. In other words, creating labels only in Thai (or only in English, for that matter) does not serve any readership.

Second, it is a best practice when creating catalogues to make them available online. Catalogues done by hand, or which are created and then either printed out in a few copies also do not serve the public. The creation of any catalogue therefore should ideally be undertaken in a way to provide online access. In this case, an ideal would be to provide titles in Mon in the first instance, and then also in Thai, English, and even Burmese.