Reverse glass paintings within a specific Buddhist context: 
the art of Wat Chon Klang

Wat Chon Klang (alternatively, Jong Klang), in Mae Hong Son in the former Lanna Kingdom—now far northwestern Thailand—is a Shan monastery dedicated in 1871, although the interior artworks may be older. Because of the open floorplan—rendering difficult more conventional temple mural paintings—the primary decorative installation comprises floor-to-ceiling panels mounting some two hundred discrete “reverse paintings” on glass, which according to local legend were created by Tai Yai artists and brought from Mandalay. While the subjects of those paintings include the Life of the Buddha, they also depict the most popular Jataka stories such as Vessantara or Phavet (Lao) Vessndon (Shan) or We Thandara (Burmese).

In 2004 an earthquake struck and destroyed or irreparably damaged a certain number of the glass panels (which are individually captioned in Burmese script). There existed no photographic archive of these particular glass paintings from either before or after the 2004 earthquake until now. This a comprehensive image archive in a notably interactive format with a larger objective to interpret these exemplary artworks and architecture of the height of the teak boom in the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries having preserved very well the structures, styles, and decor fulfilling the merit-making requirements then of Lanna, Shan and Burmese Buddhism.

*Team Leader, Digital Conservation Facility, Laos; c/o Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University (NIU), De Kalk IL 60115 USA
**Associate Professor of Art History, NIU; and Director, NIU Center for Burma Studies