

ART AND BUDDHISM IN THAI SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This article reveals relations between arts, and Buddhism in Thailand. The data was collected from media, scientific researches, articles and monographies. Thai people believe in the power of sacred, religious and devotional matters and their correlation to personal and economical success as a certain leverage. They dedicatedly pray for their success in any way of life and concurrently promise to return gratitude to the sacred power of Buddha by performing lay artwork such as contemporary temple architecture design and traditional performances after having been given what they have asked for gratefulness and veneration towards the sacred power in Thai Buddhism therefore is constituting a mechanism to preserve and inherit original Thai artworks and artistic performances as well as displaying the pursuit of happiness in Thai people's way of life by believing in supernatural power.

KEYWORDS: art, supernatural power, Buddhism, belief, Thailand

1. INTRODUCTION

Thailand is a mainland country in Southeast Asian. It sets close to Laos PDR. Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia that they are most Buddhism. There are few provinces in southern region of Thailand are Muslim. So the mainland of this area are Buddhism. In the present time Thailand has around 68 million of population and most of them about 96 percent are Buddhism and the rest are Muslim and Christian. However, root of this area in mainland of Southeast Asian is supernatural believer and the Hinduism believe of Gods who come with the Hinduism and Buddhism in the ancient period. So, in the present Thais people have mixed believe between Buddhism, Hinduism, and Supernatural power. Thais people believe in power of Buddha, Hindu Gods, and Supernatural or holy things that they can give good and bad things to people who live around their areas. For instance, the holy thing lives and protect the rivers and forest. The villagers who want to use or travel by boat along the river or they need some foods from the forest. They should ask for or get the permit from the holy things who take care of forest before as well as they should to express or thanks the holy things to protect them and let them can took out the resources from the river or forest. Each year the villagers will arrange the sacred rites for express that they are grateful the holy things at river or forest. This ceremony has monks and special person whom contact to the supernatural power. The people will prepare food, drink, and animal such as duck, chicken, or pock for the spirit and after the ceremony they will eat together at the ceremonial place. This is the way of Thais people in the past time for expression the gratefulness toward what they believe. The picture1 below is a ceremony of people who live in rural area of Northeastern region. The arranged the sacred rites toward the supernatural things who have protected their villages. This village has one lack where has been used to be fish and use the water

for daily life. Therefore, before Thai new year, Song-Kran Festival in May the villagers will arrange ceremony to thanks and show the respectfulness toward the holy things in this area closely to their village



Figure 1: sacred ceremony in rural village.

In now a day, the role of supernatural believe was decreasing because of the science expression. Thais in both rural and urban cities, however, have still believe in supernatural power as same as Buddha and Hind's gods. The figure 1 above the villagers took local foods such as chicken, sticky rice, lab, juice, and whiskey from their home to come at the supernatural holy living there where close to the river and the villagers build the small house for them. After the ceremony finished the villagers will eat foods together and this time is to learn the rule and talk about how the power of supernatural things gave and punished the people who do not believe in. Not only in the rural area believe in supernatural power but also in the urban cities believe. The figure 2 below shows that the ceremony to respect supernatural power that lives in the office area was arranged by the government's staff in the office as follows;



Figure 2: The respected ceremony to supernatural power

The figure 2 above is the respectfulness arranged by the government at front of the priminister office. This ceremony has Mo-Pram who did the ceremony as he can contact supernatural power. This believe is a root of Thai culture and it make people who work there having happiness and feel safety. This ceremony is not only to express the respectfulness, but the people also ask from the supernatural power something to give them happy so this ceremony each year also expresses the gratefulness to the supernatural things. A part of the Buddha, Thais people do the similar that is they pray and ask for some special things for them and family and after they got it. They will thank the Buddha by do what they promise and/or pay for someone do for them. This is a procedure of Thais in our culture and believe. The temple or the Buddha in each temple has power for giving and punishing in similar and different points that related to local people believe and their culture. The temples in northeastern region mostly people ask for richness because people living in this region, they are poor. The temple in northern region give the healthiness because the people in north they are caring of healthy and living in the good environment. The temples in central region mostly people ask for babe because of central region is the business cities as well as capital city of Thailand so most people marriage when they get older than 35 years old of which is not easy to get baby. The temple in southern region mostly people ask for couple or lover and safety travelling because this region has beautiful scenes and beach where the lover travel to there so people ask for love in the southern region where people love to be relaxing there.

II. OBJECIVE, METERIAL, AND METHOD

This research is a survey research in qualitative research in culture perspective to disclose the relation between arts, performances, believe in Buddhism toward Thai people. The data were collected from various sources; media, scientific researches, articles, monographies. In addition, the observation into ceremonies and praying by the Buddhist, and the key informant interviewing are the ways to get the data in this research. The finding will explain the relationship between arts and

Buddhism and it will be divided into 3 art categories; 1) temple architecture design, 2) traditional performances, The insider point of view will be used to reveal the believe of Thais and society.

III. WHAT THE PEOPLE ASK FOR?

The previous studies (Kasemsuk2015; Ponsuwan2010; Ruangmark2016; Sangkla&Wong-ea2015) shown the result of their studies was that the most Thais people ask for from the Buddha being richness, healthiness, good job, travel safety, higher work position, educational success, lottery, to get baby, and family's member get the best things, respectively. In Thai culture and people believe that each temple, each Buddha or each Hindu's gods like or love arts and performances differently. After people gained what is they ask for and they promise with the Buddha to give some things, they will do in 3 ways mainly; 1) People do what they promise to Buddha by themselves. 2) People pay for buy or for other people do for them. And 3) people donate money for temple or Buddha for arranging the things. This is the ways that people express the gratefulness and respect the Buddha. Most of all that they promise was related to what the Buddha or the Hindu's gods in each area like or love. For example the temple in northeastern like small elephant sculpture so people prefer to buy the sculpture for the Buddha. However, it is not only who will get what they asked but only having many people did not get what they need. They will go to the other temples in the same point and in the similar temple well known as give the things they need.

IV. THE ROLE OF ARTS TOWARD EXPRESSION THE BUDDHA

Art plays an important role in expressing faith and respect for Buddhism and belief in the way of life of Thai society. The research finding will be explained in terms of art's branches that are temple architecture and design, regional performances, sculpture, painting, and handy craft. The art prominent examples in 4 main regions of Thailand will be shown to reveal the Thais' believe.

1) Temple architecture and design

In the present time, the temples in Thailand have been designed to stand out by architecture view, along with expressions of Buddhist stories of which are relation to local beliefs. The temples current build indicates the economic status of the community because of the high cost of building temples in order to be the beautiful place or similarly the heaven that is the land after death in Buddhism believe of Thais.

The modern architecture material was used to build the temple and they should be difference and drag the tourist or Thais who would visit the temple. In terms of the Buddhism tourism has been growing in Thai society. It has not only the Thai people but the Buddhist or tourist from outside as economic impacts are perhaps the most widely touted benefits of the arts (Guetzkow,2002). The figure below are the famous temples in Thailand being each region as well.



Figure 3: Wat Rong-Khun, Northern region

The temple in figure 3 is wat Rong-Khun in Chiang Rai province, northern region of Thailand and this temple is being popular in Thai and Chinese tourist. It was designed by the famous Thai painter to explain the heaven for good Buddhist after the death. The northern region has more a lot beautiful and modern temples than other regions as this region where the famous monks prefer to live there. In the northeastern region has most temples designed to express the believe of giant snake or Naka. It is myth animal that do protect this region and has super power to raining. As this region quite poor land in the past time, most population are agriculture especially farmer or rice field. Coming of raining therefore affect to agriculture product each year. The famous temple today is Wat Kham-Chanot where people believe that the Naka live there, and this temple has a secret way link to the Mekong River, as the main river of Southeast Asian countries in mainland. The figure 4 below will show this temple.



Figure 4: Wat Si-rin-thon, Northeastern region

The people believe that Naka is one of Buddha story in the last life and it has supernatural power giving the luck about money especial lottery. The people travel to this temple because the believe that this year is the most power of Naka. As Mekong river is the biggest and most important to people ways of life, the Naka was raised to be the agent of Buddha in this region. The temples in the central Thai mostly in provinces around Bangkok are show the Chinese temple architecture as this region has Chinese -Thai people than other region and they play a role of economic and political power in this region. There are plenty of the temples that were build in 20 years, however, the famous temples mostly have a supernatural power to economy or occupations such an example the figure 5 below.



Figure 5: Wat Leng-Ne-Yee, Central region

The mostly respectful temple of Thailand is in Bangkok and the amazing architecture in classical style of traditional temple; Wat Pra-Kaew. Thais believe that this temple has power to protect the city and the country. This temple belong of the King and relative for do important ceremonies both families and countries believes. The architecture designed mixed between ancient Thai, Khmer, and Chinese. This temple, therefore, is one destination visiting of Thais and foreigner tourist. The figure 6 below will show Wat Pra-Keiw from outside view.



Figure 5: Wat Pra-Keiw

The architecture design of temple in Thailand since the past time till the present have been shown the role of arts toward Buddhism. Thais adapted the modern architect in terms of arts to relate the ways of life and the ancient believe toward supernatural power and Buddha.

2) Performance Mostly the things expressed toward the Buddha is arts and performance depending on each region. The local performance often is used to show the respects and gratefulness; in northeastern region is Mo-lam performance, in northern region is Fon-Ngiew performance, in the central region is Li-ke performance, and in southern region is No-Ra performance. The figures 6 to 9 below will show the performance and traditional dance in each main 4 regions of Thailand.



Figure 6: Mo-Lam performant of the northeastern region

Mo-lam in the figure 6 above is the Isan or northeastern region performance. It was developed from Mo-lam Kron that has only few singers and instrument player but now a day Mo-lam was shown by more than 50 people in one night. The people who cannot do what they promised to Buddha, therefore, they will pay the money to share with the city or other for paying arrange this

performance. Similarly, Li-ke in the figure 7 is traditional performance in central region that showing as similar as Mo-lam in northeastern region but just only use the different dialect in showing and the both stories are quite similar by use the myth or folk story in each region to show. And both performances have to spend big money to arrange them.



Figure 7: Li-Ke performance of the Central region



Figure 8: No-Ra performance of the South region



Figure 9: Fon-Ngiew performance of Northern region

The figure 8 is the No-Ra performance being traditional performance of southern region as well as the figure 9 is the Fon-Ngiew performance is the traditional performance of northern region. Both performances people who asked for some special things from temple they will perform this performance by themselves or they can pay for the group or professional dance in each kind showing it for them. The other arts also have been applied to show the respectfulness to the Buddha such as painting, sculpture and handy craft things. The painting is such outstanding art being in temples. In the past the painting shown the Buddha stories and Thai society in each period as well as the prestige literature such as Pra-Lak and Pra-Ram which basically belong to the Indian myth. The next figure shows the famous painting in Wat Suwandararam wall at Ayutthaya province.



Figure 10: The painting in temple wall, Ayutthaya province

The figure 10 shows the importantly historical painting which again the wall of Wat Suwandararam at Ayutthaya province. Ayutthaya city was used to be the capital city of Thailand before the Rama

kingdom in the present. The painting at temple therefore explained the historical events in that period. This painting let to know about the fighting of both kings between Thailand or Ayutthaya and Myanmar. The modern sculpture was created being in the temple as it was the things that people promise to Buddha in case, they would have gotten what they asked from the Buddha. Most sculpture mixed with temple's architecture design such as Naga, pagoda, giant animals in myth; big bird, elephant as follows.



Figure 11: The giants at Wat Pra-Kaew, Bangkok

The giant sculptures appear in Wat Pra-Kaew in heart of Bangkok are the famous one sculpture and they have become the Thai's temple symbolic sculpture that well known of the tourist.

V. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The way of life and believe in Thai culture is deeply root in Thai society and people believe in it. The arts also play an important role to express the gratefulness and respectfulness to the Buddha or supernatural things. The sacred ceremony was arranged not only by the people, villagers but it was done by the government. This believe therefore really the way of Thais. The Buddha in Thailand has quite differently from the other countries because they mixed between supernatural power, spirit, Hinduism and as well Buddha's principle being core of religion. Thais donate money for temple and temple do what the people ask for because they believe that monks could be contact with supernatural power and give them what they need and donating money is one way to go to heaven after death in Buddhism believe. Arts will have role toward expression of Thai people in other ways that should have been studies in the future and comparing between each region in Thailand. The intergrade issue between tourism and Buddhism also should be studies as Thailand has strongly Buddhism's believe, and various kinds of arts have been adapting and applied to build the temple

and the things to show how Thais respect the Buddha and how the Buddha play in crucial role into Thai society since the past till the present time.

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