

Buddhism in Thai life : Thai model for ASEAN

(พระพุทธศาสนาในวิถีชีวิตไทย : แบบอย่างการดำเนินชีวิตสำหรับอาเซียน)

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ABSTRACT

Historically the Thai people cannot live without Buddhism regarded as the religion of wisdom playing a great role in the Thai society. It is a great characteristic of the Thai Buddhists that they always know to adjust themselves in living together with nature surrounding them. As the spiritual center, Buddhism also provides the harmony and stability for the whole Thai Nation in forms of several festivities helping to bind people of different groups together harmoniously. In matter of fact, the way of Thai life is inseparably connected with Buddhism from birth to death such as having a newborn child the parents are to approach a respected monk for an auspicious name for him. Children are taught to pray and pay homage to the **Triple Gem** (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) before going to bed, and to pay respect to monks. Generally speaking, Buddhist families always offer food to the monks every morning; this is regarded as a way of accumulating merit and fulfills the duty of lay Buddhists to support the monks who preserve the Buddha's teachings for the world, that make all members of the society live together in the Thai society happily and peacefully. Accordingly, it can be said as the Thai Model, the model of living together happily and peacefully in the big society known as ASEAN.

KeyWords : Buddhism, Thai Life, ASEAN

บทคัดย่อ

เมื่อว่าตามประวัติศาสตร์แล้ว ประชาชนคนไทยไม่สามารถอยู่โดยปราศจากพระพุทธศาสนา ในฐานะที่เป็นศาสนาแห่งปัญญาซึ่งเข้ามามีบทบาทสำคัญในสังคมไทยเป็นอย่างมาก ลักษณะเฉพาะของชาวพุทธไทยที่น่าทึ่งประการสำคัญอย่างหนึ่งนั่นคือ การรู้จักปรับตัวให้เข้ากับสิ่งแวดล้อม ในฐานะที่เป็นศูนย์รวมจิตใจ พระพุทธศาสนาช่วยให้เกิดความสามัคคี ความมั่นคงและความสงบสุขของคนในชาติ

ในรูปแบบของขนบธรรมเนียมประเพณีและเทศกาลต่างๆ ซึ่งช่วยให้กลุ่มต่างๆ สามารถอยู่กันได้อย่าง สัมผัสความสามัคคี ในความเป็นจริง ชีวิตของชาวไทยได้เกี่ยวข้องกับพระพุทธศาสนาตั้งแต่เกิดจน กระทั่งตาย จนไม่สามารถแยกออกจากกันได้ ตัวอย่างเช่น เมื่อแรกเกิด พ่อแม่จะไปวัดเพื่อให้พระตั้งชื่อ อันเป็นมงคลแก่เด็ก เป็นต้น และเมื่อเจริญวัย ก็จะสอนให้เด็กๆ รู้จักกราบพระรัตนตรัยก่อนนอนและ ให้ทำความเคารพพระสงฆ์ ซึ่งโดยทั่วไปแล้ว ครอบครัวชาวพุทธจะทำบุญตักบาตรพระสงฆ์ทุกเช้า เพื่อเป็นการสั่งสมบุญและเพื่อเป็นการทำหน้าที่อุบาสกอุบาสิกาในการทำงานบำรุงพระพุทธศาสนา อันเป็น การช่วยสืบทอดอายุพระพุทธศาสนาอีกทางหนึ่งด้วย และเมื่อเด็กชายเจริญวัยเป็นผู้ใหญ่ พ่อแม่ก็จะ จัดการงานบวชให้ตามประเพณี อย่างน้อยหนึ่งพรรษา ครั้นพอจะแต่งงานมีครอบครัวก็ต้องนิมนต์พระ พอจวนจะสิ้นลมก็ให้นึกถึงพระ หรือแม้แต่ประเพณีเกี่ยวกับคนตายก็ล้วนเกี่ยวข้องกับพระ อนึ่ง แม้แต่ ทางบ้านเมืองจัดงานหรือเทศกาลต่างๆ ก็ล้วนแต่มีพระเข้ามาเกี่ยวข้องเสมอ ซึ่งนั่นทำให้สมาชิกทุกคน ของสังคมสามารถอยู่ร่วมกันได้อย่างมีความสุข ดังนั้น จึงสามารถกล่าวได้ว่า แบบอย่างการดำรง ชีวิตแบบไทย สามารถยึดเป็นแบบอย่างแห่งการดำรงชีวิตอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสงบสุข ในสังคมที่ใหญ่ขึ้นซึ่ง เรียกว่า ประชาคมอาเซียนนี้

คำสำคัญ : พระพุทธศาสนา, วิถีชีวิตไทย, ประชาคมอาเซียน

Introduction

Generally speaking, human beings are only species holding a great ability to use brain for establishment of ones' own cultures, which reveal civilization and development of each society. Custom is an important communal and national culture showing its specific characteristics and making sense of unity or integration and solidarity among members of community or society. On the other hand, national and communal development depends upon the custom. Its values help to control behaviours of each member in the society, i.e., a spiritual control automatically. Through this makes all members of group or society enable to live together happily and peacefully.

Geographically, the Kingdom of Thailand, situated in the heart of South-east Asia, covers the area of 513, 115 sq.kms. It borders Burma to the North, the Republic of Laos to the North-east; the Gulf of Thailand to the East, Cambodia to the South-east; Burma and Indian Ocean to the West; Malaysia to the South. Thai society, ethnically not

a homogeneous society, is of more than 64 millions of population mainly consisting of Thai, Chinese, Laotian, Mon, Khmer (Cambodian), Vietnamese, Malay, Indian, and several small groups from the Middle-east including a large number of hill tribesman mostly in Northern Thailand. However, the social trends concerning races in Thai society are not matter, while the economic development and national stability are the most important factors. Accordingly, every individual in the nation should think of only highest benefits for the majority of one in the nation; hence, born as a Thai do not forget to requite favor or an obligation back to the motherland. In the matter of fact, almost they are the Thais by birth; meanwhile, some just only attained the Thai nationality no any longer. On the one hand, they possess a specific colourful culture well known in worldwide for many decades.

Then it should be said that the Thai cultures are the complex ones due to those belong to several races of human beings from many parts of the globe. Consequently, sometimes the new generations could not exactly know what is the real Thai culture inherited from their ancestors. The change is a result of civilized cultures overspreading throughout the mainland since nearly a century ago. And the Thais have permeated those from time to time and modified some suitably for themselves. Those have become a unique characteristic as realized the cultural genius. In fact, every individual by legal duty should know to perform and protect one's culture as appeared in Article 5 of the National Constitution that:-

“Everybody has duty to perform following the national culture and to preserve, support to develop the progress of the country, by preserving the traditional and cultural morality and helping to develop, offering to support more according to the time coming.”¹

Basically, the Thai traditional cultures have obviously been based on the Buddhist tradition since the initial establishment of the real Thai Kingdom. In regard to this, some

¹ 100 Year Anniversary of the Ministry of Education (Thailand), Ministry of Education Press, 2535 BE (1992), p. 290.

of them remain practiced even in the present time; meanwhile, some disappeared for many decades ago. For example, the belief in the Law of Karma being influential from the first Thai Buddhist didactic writing entitled “*Tribhumikatha*” compiled by the King Lithai of Sukhothai Kingdom; and the most popular *Loy Krathong Festival*, etc., have been still practiced till the present time. Thus, it can be said that the Thai people are very rich in different kinds of traditional cultures of which the specific characteristics symbolize the Thai nation through a very long history.

Generally speaking, the Thai people have been very proud in their traditional cultures for many decades ago, continuously practiced and transmitted from generation to generation. Therefore, there are many aspects concerning the traditional cultures that cannot be understood completely about the real purpose of their ancestors. Besides, in the ritual performance there are many mistakes in accordance with their conjectures and social values at that time. The social value is regarded as an important factor dealing with changes of traditional cultures in each society or community; it, however, is an agreement between members within the community. Hence, all those traditional cultures performed in current year may not be the original practice like the ancestors used to do in the past time.

The Thais meekly accept cultures from different races associated with them, try to adjust themselves with those and suitably apply those somehow. To spend lifetime in the same trend with European and American including Japanese is one example of outsiders’ cultural acceptances. It is noticed that the forlate few decades the Thai way of life has changed so much that fully becomes the consumerists’ society. This is because they are impressive in the comforts and luxuries, and then easily accept those cultures. Every year the flock of foreigners who are interested to travel and some make a living in the land of freedom well-known as Thailand is increasing in number. In this way, they have fully right to do whatever they wish, which is not illegal. In fact, a great defect of the Thai is the thought that every aspect belonged to the foreigner is a good one at all. Consequently, without carefull analysis they accepted those cultures and behavioural imitation is unavoidable; e.g., according to the ancient Thai tradition, girl

and boy could not do touching each other or even holding hands before marital ceremony. Later on, when they saw the foreigners used to do touching each other, the Thai new generations have imitated such behaviour because they think it is common thing. Then, currently, the ancient fine tradition disappeared from the Thai society.

The Thai Cultural Genius

Generally speaking, although the Kingdom of Thailand will consist of several cultures of countries associated with it since centuries ago but fortunately the Thais cleverly know to adjust those suitably for themselves. Through this process it has become the new unique characteristics presenting the nationhood and resulting the national integration and stability. The way to pay respect to each other (*Wai*) is the fine and unique Thai traditional culture. Meeting friends or acquaints the Thais are to greet those with smiles, and say *Swasdee*² (politely saying *Swasdee grap* for male and *Swasdee ga* for female) and saluting by pressing two hands together, and ask by *Pai nai ma grap/ga* (Where are you coming from?), or *Tan khao ma rue yang grap/ga* (Do you have your meal?). The last sentence shows the abundant plain of the mainland as generally speaking that “*there were plentifully fish in river and rice in farm.*” Additionally, unlike other countries’ people, the Thais prefer to consider other one as a relative. For example, meeting unknown people the one would greet and call him looking younger that “*Nong* (younger brother),” elder “*Pi* (brother),” more elder “*Lung* (uncle),”³ or “*Na* (uncle/auntie),” or “*Ah* (uncle/auntie),” and old “*Ta* (grandfather).”⁴ According to the ancient Thai tradition, since childhood the Thais are brought up to

² The term *Swasdee* meaning happiness or prosperity was first used around 1937 with the purpose of greeting each other.

³ Normally, *Lung* is father’s elder brother, while his elder sister is locally called *Pa* (auntie), and also for calling ordinary women. *Ah* signifies both father’s younger brother and sister; while, *Na* is also meant both mother’s younger brother and sister.

⁴ Actually, *Ta* is mother’s father; meanwhile, her mother is called *Yaiy* (grandmother). On the other hand, father’s father is called *Poo*, and mother is *Ya*.

pay respect to the elders, know to respect one another and know showing filial devotion and obedience to all benefactors.⁵ The research work has been conjectured that this tradition probably rooted from the Buddhist one as monks in Buddhism respect each other in accordance with an account of year of becoming a monk. Consequently, the ancient Thai traditional way followed the Buddhist tradition and inherited from generation to generation. In addition, the youths are trained to not touch above the head of elders somehow; the unique Thai manners look polite and gentle. The Thais by nature are kind hearted, generous and hospitable, full of compassion, and also like to estimate one's own ability and strength. It also should be said that they have gained a great benefit from the Buddhist ethics providing the needful Dhamma for all aspects of social life. However, the Thai cultural genius can be divided into the following headers as mentioned in the book "*The Cultural Evolution of Thai Society*"⁶ that:

1) *Highly Adaptive*:- As opened society the Thais easily have adapted the other cultures associated with them through several centuries. Mostly the Thais accepted the spiritual cultures like religion, language, etc. from the eastern countries like India, China, Cambodia, and so forth; while, material ones in the forms of technological progress from the western ones, e.g., civilized countries: Great Britain, America, Japan, etc.

2) *Highly flexible*:- Possibly the Thais are clever to accept other culture and modify those suitably for themselves; finally, this process promotes the national integration and stability.

3) *Thai-ism*:- They are very proud in their Nationhood supporting the Patriotism among people in the country. When some of them faced difficulties, they with one heart gather to help one another to overcome those.

⁵ The one who is thankful for benefits received and reciprocates them is worthy to be praised in the Thai society.

⁶ Prof. Sanit Samakkarn, **The Cultural Evolution of Thai Society**, (Bangkok: O.S. Printing House Co. Ltd., 1991), pp. 79-81.

Additionally, there is a general speaking: “*Thais are the Thais everywhere they would be,*” that the Thais with their cute smile are always kind hearted, generous and hospitable, and full of compassion.

The Buddhism Originating Thai Customary Culture

The Thai race, an oldest race settled in the South-east Asian region, has inherited plenty of colourful and magnificent customs since many centuries ago. Historically, it has been regarded that the Thai society with the specific characteristics symbolizing the Thai nation bears customary development through a very long century. On the other hand, it can be said that the Thai custom has been complex and specific due to several cultures of inland small-groups and also from oversea associated with the mainstream Thai people for many decades. Some remain constantly to play an important role in the society; meanwhile, some have been adjusted for suitability of time, and some disappeared without any inheritance due to some reasons. However, those have made the new generation enable to study and know several aspects in way of life of their ancestor. Those also cited various events, cultures as well as civilization in the ancient time.

In our life from birth to death, there are several most important events involving in. In Thai traditional culture, almost member of society has been cultivated on the base of Buddhist teachings for many centuries. The Buddhist ethics have been applied suitably for daily life of the Thais. Through those ethics the Thai children are initially to be instructed with moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*), forbearance (*khanti*) and modesty (*soracca*), including gratitude (*katanyu*) and repayment (*katavedi*). Parents gradually bring up children to pay respects their elders and also know how to perform meritorious services including several aspects of traditional culture and festivities.

Since childhood a child is to be trained to offer food- alms to monks every morning, or sometimes go to monastery and make meditation before going to bed. Accordingly, almost civilian cannot live without the existence of Buddhist monks;

many like to live in location near a monastery. The Buddhist monk has often played a great role in their daily life from birth to death. Formerly, villagers preferred to send their children for the sake of being trained or educated in monastery where they could get both secular and religious knowledge. Most of village-men who passed the study from monastery are always to be honoured and placed in a high position of society; and also ordinary people will pay most respects to them. Anyway, after the government had taken the responsibility on educational system during the reign of King Rama V, monk gets lost the great position. Then, the religious products have become valueless but there is no any blame, because the religious institution itself should produce higher quality of products for the society. Then the followings are some details of the circle of Thai life based on the influence of Buddhist Ethics. The circle of Thai life can mainly divided into four major steps as follows:

1. Birth

Generally speaking, the birth signifies the beginning of life; according to Buddhist thought, it is to go on for the sake of enjoying the result of Karma in the previous life. It, therefore, can be said that only Buddhism regards the birth as the cause of sufferings as the Lord Buddha said in his First Sermon “...birth is ill (suffering) and old age is ill and disease is ill...”⁷ In the ancient Thai tradition, there are lots of performances for a newborn baby and also mother, but after the Western treatment became influential in the Thai society, the old magnificent tradition has been neglected without any intention. In regard to this, the new generation is able to do only study about the ancient tradition in books at school. At the same time, they cannot exactly know how to ceremoniously do performance for the new-born baby. Several scholars, however, are trying to campaign cultural reformation in order to bring back the ancient magnificent culture.

Formerly, the Thai family paid great attention even to a pregnant woman in house. She was not allowed to do any hard work or lift a heavy thing; those household works

⁷ For more details of the First Sermon see I.B. Horner (tr.), **The Book of the Discipline, Vol. IV**, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), pp. 15-19.

would be the responsibilities of her husband at all. She should look at only the beautiful things and listen to only persuasive sounds because it is firmly believed that she would have a nice child with beautiful mind. She should observe precepts at least the Five Precepts, make a chanting and meditation including spreading loving-kindness toward all living things, and do other meritorious services. Through doing those the new-born baby will be nice and good person. She should hold several kinds of slang on every aspect in order to save baby, for example, she is not allowed to eat fragrant banana causing flatulence and may have a miscarriage if she ate a lot, etc. Here there are some more details of ancient slang for her as *Arjahn Manee Phanomyong*⁸ of Chiang Mai University compiled: for example, a pregnant woman should not be allowed to eat a spicy food that may harm baby; she should continuously work but not hard. *Wichiarn Na-Nakorn* and colleagues⁹ cited that there are many laws that forbid for the pregnant woman as follows:

- 1) Do not sit on the stair for long time.
- 2) Do not nail at night.
- 3) Do not take a bath after the sunset.
- 4) Allow no one to walk behind her sitting.
- 5) Do not eat hot meals.
- 6) Abstain from killing any creatures.
- 7) Do not beat the egg.
- 8) Do not participate in dead mortuary rites.
- 9) Do not try to leap or make a large step.
- 10) Do not have a nasty tumble.

However, a few decades ago some parts of the said slang have already been neglected because of the modernization influencing the Thai way of life. On the one

⁸ Manee Phanomyong, "The Beliefs of Thai", in Pensri Duk, "et. al.," **Local Culture: Revelation of Belief**, (3rd ed., (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1987), p. 92.

⁹ Wichiarn Na-Nakhorn, "et. al.," **Nakhonsridhammarat**, (Bangkok: Aksornsamphan Printing, 1978), pp. 240-241.

hand, a number of new generations misconstrued the slang through looking it as meaningless thing for them. It is one of reasons that made some Thai fine culture disappear through a period of time.

In ancient Thai *Isan*¹⁰ tradition, mother of new-born baby must lie near fire after giving birth for 8–15 days,¹¹ locally called *Yu-fai* or *Yu-kam* in order to make sure that both of them would be exactly safe. In regard to this, whole day and night bonfire would be burnt and water also be boiled; and the mother would be allowed to drink only warm water, as well as take a bath with warm water boiled with some herbs. It had been strongly believed that through doing this she would be healthy, and also everyone would take good care of her whole day and night. After three days there would be a ceremony of putting the new-born into cradle that the local scholar including close relatives would come to participate the ceremony. The local scholar is to compensate for the new-born baby in the front of cradle in which they put notebook and pencil or pen in the case of a son, and, needle and string in the case of a daughter. According to the ancient traditional belief, for son when he grew up he would be a great scholar, and for the daughter she would be intelligent in keeping household. To give a name mostly they would ask for the help from monk in nearby monastery for the sake of the new-born baby's good luck.¹² At the same time, generally everyone likes to have a warm family somehow. In order to live together peacefully and happily as a warm family, according to Buddhist thought, parents have their duty not only feeding children but also the following categories:

- 1) They restrain him (them) from vice,
- 2) They exhort him (them) to virtue,
- 3) They train him (them) to a profession,

¹⁰ Isan stands for the North-eastern region of Thailand.

¹¹ The mother who gives birth to the first baby must stay 15 days, and from the second 8 days.

¹² More details about birth and child care see in Phramaha Sutimonti Puksinsiri, "Buddhist Monks in Southern Thailand: A Sociological Study", **Thesis Submitted for Ph.D.**, (Department of Sociology : Banaras Hindu University, 2000), pp. 203-207.

- 4) They contract a suitable marriage for him (them), and
- 5) In due time they hand over his (their) inheritance.¹³

In five ways a child should minister his duties parents as the eastern quarter:–

- 1) Once supported by them I will now be their support;
- 2) I will perform duties incumbent on them;
- 3) I will keep up the lineage of my family;
- 4) I will keep up the tradition of my family;
- 5) I will make myself worthy of my heritage.¹⁴

Through completing these duties all family members can live together harmoniously and happily. Accordingly, when their children are growing up parents provide them the fundamental study through both at home and school. Normally, at the age of 3-5 years children are to be sent to kindergarten (pre–elementary school) and aging 6 years elementary school (6 years course), then secondary school (6 years deal). In regard to this, the Government has managed education for ordinary people as mentioned in the Article 10 of the National Education Act 2542 that “Educational arrangement must be equally provided the individual to attain fundamental education at least 12 years attentively and qualitatively without any charge....”¹⁵ It is meant that every individual will be freely provided the educational arrangement from the elementary school till the secondary school totally 12 years deal in every government school. But for the fee of educational instrument will be under the responsibility of parents or guardians of children.

Traditionally, during summer every year there is a special training locally called *Summer Renunciation Fair* organized by student monks of the two Sangha Universities in order to offer special course of Dhamma study to the young children. Both boys and girls have equal right to study the same while a number of boys will be ordained as

¹³ T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (trs.), **Dialogues of the Lord Buddha, Part III**, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 181.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁵ Educational Reformation Office, National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999), p. 7.

novices taking four weeks term. It is a very good way to bring up the new generation through Dhamma understanding. Many are able to improve their knowledge of Dhamma and apply in daily life. However, at school children can study general Dhamma with providing in a subject namely moral education but not directly taught by monks.

2. Ordination

Literally, ordination is to abstain holding life as householder or stop committing sin. It is to find the true peacefulness in mind through destroying all mental intoxications (*asava*) and defilements (*kilesa*). Therefore, when the Buddhism has flourished in Thailand the ordination has thoroughly changed the real revelation as a custom.

Initially, it was the King Lithai of Sukhothai entered the Order and trained for a time as monks. This set a precedent for a national custom: ever since then it has been a general practice for Thai men to leave home and enter the monkhood to receive monastic training for a certain period of time, at least once in their lives.¹⁶ On the one hand, through busy life in current society some intending only to follow the ancient Thai custom spent only three days in monastic life of which he attained only a little part of the Dhamma. However, it can be said that the ordination is only the important second step of man's life in the Thai society. The ordination is mostly to be fixed in advance for some period around at least 15 days to which the man wishing to become a monk has more times to prepare himself and the needful things for monk's life. Traditionally, he needs to keep in mind the speech requesting to be ordained (*Gam khan Nag*) and also study other needful things before entering into the Order. During that time he is to be locally named *Nag* and stays in monastery for a few days in order to adjust himself with the new lifestyle. A few days before the ordained date *Nag* would be allowed to go back home in order to humbly apologize to all his respected relatives for some mistakes on them. At the same time, his parents would prepare the needful things for ordination rite, and give information to all relatives and acquainted ones including all friends. In addition, they need to

¹⁶ Sunthorn Plamintr, **Getting to Know Buddhism**, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1994), p. 187.

prepare alms-bowl, double-thick outer robe, inner robe, upper robe (locally called the three robes), girdle, filtered cloth, needle, and razor including other suitable things and also offerings given as alms for monks in the religious rite.

One day before ordination, at his house there would be evening chanting of a number of monks (normally nine ones) and some celebration, i.e., local shows or film shows. On the ordination date, all relatives with one heart offer alms-food to monks. Afterward, the Brahmanic ceremony would be performed that is to perform a ceremony in order to give strength or courage to *Nag* who already had his hair cut and eyebrows shaved. Accordingly, *Nag* would be taken into a big parade (not necessary but should be mentioned here) moving forwards the monastery. Arrived at the monastery, the *Nag* parade walked turn right three times around the temple's hall (*Uposatha*) and went into the hall where a number of invited monks was waiting. To enter the hall father of *Nag* takes the *Nag*'s left hand and mother right. After that the parents offer *Nag* the three robes; he comes close to preceptor (*Upajjhaya*) gives the three robes to him and requests for ordination. Henceforth, it was the Sangha's rite, which all except the number of monks, were not permitted to be present. After the Sangha's rite finished the ordination is to be regarded completely. Accordingly, relatives get into the hall once again then proffer monks offerings and gain blessings from the Order.

3. Marriage

Marriage is the legally recognized union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. As an institution, marriage provides a social structure for sexual relations, procreation, and the sharing of familial property. Marriage creates particular moral rights and duties between partners; some religious groups believe that marriage has spiritual significance.¹⁷ Accordingly, at the suitable age every individual thinks of having a warm family, which in the ancient Thai society was a big family. However, it had been appeared that they could live together harmoniously and happily till the end of lives, but after

¹⁷ Warren T. Reich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, Vol. 3, (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995), p. 1397.

the Thai society accepted the western culture everything has changed. The Thai family is decreasing the number of member in particularly the present Thai family, a small family consisting of father, mother and not more than two children. Additionally, it is noticed that due to influences of Westernization the relationship among the neighbourings is reduced year by year.

Modern technology impresses the Thais and the Western system of education has been adopted in lieu of the traditional one. People with a Western education have been regarded as a progressive class; while, their counterparts were branded old fashioned and conservative. Gradually, more and more Thai intellectuals began to identify themselves with Western thought and values; unconsciously, they isolated themselves from traditional Thai society.¹⁸ Thus the ancient way of Thai life is in oblivion and thoroughly disappears day by day with the influences of globalization. Additionally, it can be said here that the ancient Thai marriage-ceremony seldom plays an important role in the present Thai society.

However, according to the ancient Thai tradition, marriage regarded as the most important step of life stands for the ceremony indicating the approach of adult age. This is because from moment both bride and groom would share their lives together; then it is denoted that they need to take responsibilities on each other including children. Meanwhile, in the ancient Thai marriage mostly arranged marriage there were lots of rules and regulations between two families; however, the new generation has neglected those since a decade ago. However, it has been noticed that formerly although it would be arranged-marriage but the family members were able to live together harmoniously and happily. That was probably because they completely practiced their duties mostly based on the Buddhist ethics mentioning bellow.

Love-marriage is quite popular in the current Thai society. When boy and girl love and well understand each other they are to inform their parents; then both families take agreement and fix an auspicious day for the couple through asking a respected

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 194.

monk. In the case both are ready to hold a ceremony the betrothal ceremony will be organized in suitable place forwardly senior relatives. Additionally, the male side would find precious ring or gold and a sum of money as dowry in accordance with an agreement including propitious things, fruits, sweets and vegetable seeds, and take into the betrothal ceremony. In this connection, they also need an auspicious moment for the couple in the ceremony of putting ring on the bride's finger and conferring all betrothal items to the bride side. However, some demand nothing; while, both families share the cost for organizing a party according to their economic situation. After making agreement between the bride's and the groom's families the invitation cards would be published and sent to all relatives and acquainted ones. In the morning of married function, a number of monks mostly ten would be invited to take chanting sacred Buddhist verses. The bridegroom joins hands to offer alms-food to monks and confers offerings to them after breakfast. The leader of monks gives a special sermon concerning the needful Dhamma for a successful married life, anoints the groom's forehead¹⁹ with the holy fragrant powder, cites the groom do the same to his bride's, and sprinkles them with holy water. All monks chant sacred Buddhist verses in order to bless the bridegroom for their successful married life at all.

Afternoon same day the groom's relatives who prepared tray of dowry locally called *Khanmark* take a parade toward bride's house holding double doors where the groom who wants to pass needs to pay sum of money to the bride's relatives standing there. The bride is to welcome her groom and accepts the tray of dowry, then the bridegroom pays respects the late ancestors and does the same to their parents. Mostly the evening is to be arranged to pour sacred water on hands or heads of the married couple. On the auspicious moment the couple would sit together in crouching position and hold their hand in pray-gesture in order to receive blessing from all invited relatives, quests and acquainted ones. It begins with the senior

¹⁹ In some region it is not the monk to anoint the groom's forehead with the holy fragrant powder; while, it should be the duty of senior relatives to do during the ceremony of pouring sacred water from conch shell on hands of couple.

relatives come to pour the sacred water through a conch shell on the heads of the couple and give blessings including admonition as below:

In five ways a husband should serve his wife as the western quarter:

- 1) By honouring her.
- 2) By being courteous to her.
- 3) By being faithful to her.
- 4) By handing over authority to her.
- 5) By providing her with ornaments.²⁰

In five ways his wife, thus served as the western quarter, shows her love and royalty for him:

- 1) The household affairs are to be managed.
- 2) She should be hospitable and faithful to friends and relations of both hers and his.
- 3) She should be faithful to him.
- 4) She should take care of the goods he brings home.
- 5) She should be skillful and industrious in all her duties.²¹

After all guests took pouring sacred water on the couple's hands in return the couple may offer some memorial gift to all during their meals. Mostly the ceremony of conferring bride to the bridal room is to be arranged at night on the auspicious moment. Traditionally, at first the ideal couple who experienced successfully in married life would be supposed to lie down on the new married couple's bed full of auspicious things including money or gold. For a while the ideal couple would talk together with all sweet or auspicious words; then the bride's relatives take her in the room, entrust her to the groom and give private moment to them for a while. And at the end of wedding function the couple comes out in order to say their thankfulness to all guests.

²⁰ Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto), **Dictionary of Buddhism**, 9th ed., (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn Press, 2000), p. 226.

²¹ Ibid., p. 227.

General belief concerning marriage: the ancient Thai believed that a man should spend a part of his life at least four years in monastery as a monk in order to study the needful Buddhist teachings to be applied in daily life. It appeared that in the ancient Thai society no any girl wished to get married a man who had never passed a monastic life. With regard to this, it had been found that the ancient Thai family member, especially husband and wife could be able to live together harmoniously and happily since the end of their lives. While, rate of divorce in the current Thai family is increasing day by day; a reason is the lack of a good understanding the Buddhist teachings. On the other hand, the average of the suitable age for getting married was determined that a man should be of 28 years old; while, girl 22. However, in the present day all these traditional determinations have already been forgotten since around a decade ago. At the same time, the new generations are not interested to study the said traditions, because they think that these become useless in the modern age. Accordingly, through such decision-making several kinds of social problems have taken place in the current Thai society.

4. Death

The real truth that only few numbers of human beings can accept is the death signifying end of life. Many fear to die because regret life and properties of which they could earn and save for nearly whole life. In the matter of fact, they can take nothing even his body after death, only wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) follow them. Then we should always think of our death that by nature we must die someday; it is not possible to go beyond the death; nevertheless, we should hurry to do only goodness physically, verbally and mentally for the sake of leaving this world peacefully and happily.

In the Thai society, rituals for dead are of particular practice, but not at all. According to the ancient Thai Buddhist tradition, if patient were nearly to die his relatives would remind him the Buddha's teachings and put flowers, candles and joss-stick in his hands. In regard to this, it has been strongly believed that he would be born in a good family and able to understand Dhamma of the Lord Buddha. Additionally, it is also to remind the living one not to be careless in daily life and do only good thing.

Traditionally, the newly deceased is to be bathed at first, dressed with nice clothes or the favourite ones but in opposite way. Before being placed into the coffin there would be a ceremony for the senior relatives and general acquainted people to perform the bathing-rite and make apology to the deceased for some mistakes that might have. The bathing-rite is customary to invite guests in order to pour the scented water on the hand of the dead person; additionally, it will be special for the monk holding a high level of Sangha-ranking and the Royal Family's members or cousins. On the one hand, the coffin would be specially made in order to protect the bad smell of the deceased remain kept for at least three nights²² for performing meritorious rite. The performance of meritorious rite would be done in deceased's house but mostly in nearby monastery. On every evening the four monks would be invited to chant the *seven Abhidhammas* for deceased's relatives till a cremation ceremony would be fixed mostly after three to seven nights passed. Through the mentioned period the relative would light a big candle and also burn a big joss-stick constantly till the cremation day.

On the cremation day, after offering lunch to a number of monks at least one of the deceased's relatives would be ordained as a novice²³ to carry the coffin with corpse around the crematory.²⁴ In the afternoon, monks chant verses connecting the cremation (*Matika*); then the coffin is to be moved to the crematorium nearby and taken left turning-walk three times. Ceremoniously monks are invited to take yellow robes laid down on the coffin. Afterwards, the deceased's relatives offer the monks the joss-sticks and candles; and also all participants would take the same

²² In this connection, a number of some deceased who had formerly a high position in society including monks holding an over Sangha rank of warrant or Sanyabat would be offered the Royal water of pouring corpse and all cremation ceremony of the royal trends. And the said deceased one would be kept for some period but mostly not more than one year.

²³ There is no clear fixture of duration; some disrobed after the end of meritorious deed dedicating the dead person on day coming, some stayed for long; while, some whole life.

²⁴ Philosophically, it is supposed that the novice is to be bringing the deceased one to the calmness or the heaven.

ceremoniously and follow the monks to put those under the coffin as fuel. Traditionally, the one who takes the candles, flowers and joss-sticks warding the coffin, bows or *wai* signing a respect, places the objects in front of the coffin, and bows once again. Before departing, all guests may sometimes be presented with some gift or booklets relating the brief life and works of the deceased; then the ceremony is over. Generally speaking, manner of dressing for guest invited in the death rite was determined in order to pay respect to the deceased during the reign of King Rama V, that elder should dress with black; while, the one younger than the deceased one with white and general guest with purple and blue. At the present day, for all only the black and white dresses are popularized.

Summary

The way of Thai life is inseparably connected with Buddhism from birth to death such as having a newborn child; the parents are to approach a respected monk for an auspicious name for him. Children are taught to pray and pay homage to the **Triple Gem** (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) before going to bed, and to pay respect to monks. Generally speaking, Buddhist families always offer food to the monks every morning; this is regarded as a way of accumulating merit and fulfills the duty of lay Buddhists to support the monks who preserve the Buddha's teachings for the world. When a young man reaches twenty years of age, the parents arrange for his temporary ordination as a monk, and he remains in the monkhood for at least the three months of rainy season. It then can be summarized that historically the Thai people cannot live without Buddhism regarded as the religion of wisdom taking a great part in the Thai society. It is a great characteristic of the Thai Buddhists that they always know to adjust themselves in living together with nature surrounding them. As the spiritual center Buddhism also provides the harmony and stability for the whole Thai Nation in forms of several festivities helping to bind people of different groups together harmoniously. The traditional culture is an important communal and national one showing its unique characteristic and making sense of unity and integration among communities. Its values help to control behaviours

of member automatically, that make all members of the group live together in the Thai society happily and peacefully. Accordingly, it can be said as the Thai Model, the model of living together happily and peacefully in the big society known as ASEAN (Association of South-east Asian Nations).

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