



BUDDHIST CULTURE IN THAILAND

Paramat Kham Ek¹

Silpakorn University, Bangkok,
Thailand¹

Email: ParaK@gmail.com¹

Received: July 31, 2022; **Revised:** August 30, 2022; **Accepted:** November 31, 2022

Abstract

Thailand is a multicultural country and there are numerous ethnic groups and religions in the country. Despite of their diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious background along with rapid progress in technology and communication system under the globalization era; Thai people still retain their traditions, culture and belief. Thai art and culture have been held and preserved by many generations of Thai people and Thais still take pride in their art and culture (Thai Art and Culture, Publisher Ministry of Culture,2008). Before Buddhism came to Thailand, people believed in supernatural things who were guardian of that area known in Thai “Chouthi” in Mon “Pechu”. Mon people worshipped their ancestors and the nature as the spirits who give them the benefits such as bamboo, turtles, chicken, horse elephant, etc. They built a small house called “Spirit House” and kept worshipful idols. Some people who worshipped turtles when they saw turtles. They had to kill them and ate them. The Buddhism came to Thailand and was adapted and became their way.

Keywords: Buddhism, Thai Culture



Thai Spirit House



Mon people dancing and worship their spirit House



Mon people who regard the tortoise as their spirit

Thai people 94.6 percent are Buddhist. So, the way of life of Thai people concerns with Buddhism. First of all, I would like to talk about Thai Buddhist Cultures through monastic building, Buddha image, religious objects, etc., starting from the period –

Davaravati culture (6th-11th century). We regarded that Dvaravati is Mon who used Mon language in Pallava script. Their culture was strongly influenced by Indian culture and art, especially the Gupta and Post-Gupta art styles. Davaravati's cities in this area are Nakhon Pathom Province, U Thong in Suphan Buri Province, Khu Bua in Ratchaburi Province, Sri Thep in Phetchabun Province, Nakhon Champa si in Maha sarakham Province, Hariphunchai in Lanmphun, and Muang Yarang in Pattani Province (ibid. p. 23.). The famous Buddhist verse was discovered in the headstone inscription (Dharma chakra) in this time is “ye dhammā hetupabhavā tesam hetum tathā gato tesam ca yo nirodho evam vādī mahāsamaṇo



Stone inscription (Dharma Chakra)



Buddha image in Gupta period



Buddha image in Davaravati period

Srivijaya Culture (8th-13th century), during this period Mahayanist Buddhist culture was founded by maritime traders who set up a number of ports along the Malay peninsula and traded with overseas merchants from Arabia, China, India and Java. Like Dvaravati culture, Srivijaya art and culture were strongly influenced by the Gupta, Post-Gupta and Pala-Sena Indian art styles. There are Buddhist architectures and a large number of objects related to Mahayannist Buddhism (e.g., images of Bodhisattva, images of Buddha and sundried clay tablets) Satharkoses, (1989); Cetiya in the Srivijay period was like Mahayana Buddhist Pagoda in Candi Mendut Java.



Pala-Sena Indian art style



Srivijay Period in Thailand



Cetiya Wat Boromathat Jaiya, Suratdhani Province, Thailand



Buddhist Mahayana Cetiya at Candi
Mendut, Java

Lop Buri Culture (8th -13th century), This culture is also widely known as Khmer-style culture incorporated both Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist ideology, and spread from Cambodia across the lower part of northeast and eastern Thailand such as Phnom Rung and Mueang Tam in Buri Ram Province and Phimai in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. In the 13th century in Cambodia Hinduism was replaced by Mahayana Buddhism and this new religious ideology was introduced into Thailand. Monuments built during the period that favor Mahayan Buddhist ideology are scattered across northeast and west-central Thailand including Prang Ku in Roi-Et Province, Prasat Ta Muan in Surin Province, and Prasat Mueang Sing in Kanchanaburi Province.



Khmer style, all the worshiped images have a wide forehead, thick mouth, square chin, and a short stature



The sitting Buddha on the serpent,
Khmer style was a famous image in
Lopburi period



Three stupas in Lopburi province

Since the 13th century, in Thailand there are many states and cities in existence at this time. I will select some important and well-known cities such as —

The Nakhon Si Thammarat State, southern Thailand was also a major Buddhist center on the peninsula. It had frequent contacts with Sri Lanka and Buddhism from there was introduced into Nakhon Si Thammarat. Not only Buddhism Mahayana and Hinnayana spread in this state, but Hinduism was also practiced. (See the Pagodas of Both Thai and Sri Lanka)



Pagoda in Nakhonsithammarat, Thailand was impacted by Sri Lanka style



Pagoda in Sri Lanka

The Lan Na state received a Hinayana Buddhist tradition from Pegu (an ancient Burmese kingdom) and was also culturally influenced by Sukhothai culture



Buddha image in Lan na



Buddha image in Lan na influenced by Burmese style.



Buddha image in Burma

The Sukhothai State was a Buddhist state, based on the large number of Buddhist structures and material remains found at its major associated cities such as Si Satchanalai, Kamphaeng Phet, and Phitsanulok, Sukhothai art and culture were influenced by a variety of artistic styles from other ancient kingdoms including India (Chola style), Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Srivijaya, and Lan Na (ibid.p. 29). We can see the way of life of people, Buddhist culture through literature as stone inscription.



Most beautiful Buddha statue of
Sukhothai

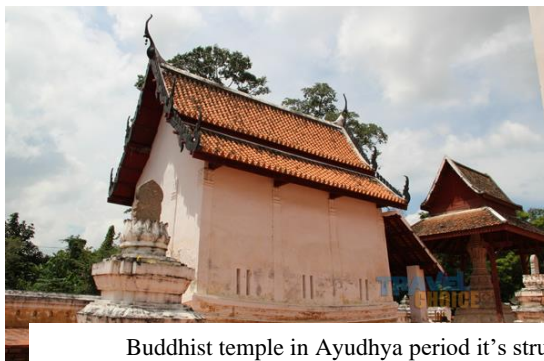


Buddha image was compacted
by Chola style.

The Ayudhya State was situated on an island of the Chao Phraya, Pa Sak, Lopburi and Noi River. It was one of the largest and wealthiest cities in Asia. The Buddhist culture, art in this period was not fine and beautiful like Sukhothai period, because of the atmosphere of war between Thai and **Burmese** (Arne Kislenko,2004)



The Buddha image in Ayudhya period looked sad



Buddhist temple in Ayudhya period it's structure like the sailing boat

Thonburi Kingdom was ruled by King Taksin after Ayudhya was attacked by Burmese army. King Taksin restored the Buddhist temples and supported monks.

The Rattanakosin Kingdom started from Chao Phraya Chakri (Thong Duang) King Rama I of Chakri Dynasty. The king Rama I moved the capital from the east bank of the Chao Phraya River to the west bank of the river and the capital was called “Krungthep Mahanakhon” or “Bangkok” (It's long name is Krung Thep (Deva) Mahanakhon (Mahānagar) Amor (amar) Rattanakosindra (ratna-koṣ-indra) Mahindrārāyudhayā Mahādilok(mahātilak) bhop (bhava) Nobbharat (nava-ratna) Ratchathani Burirom(purī-ramy) Udomratchaniwet (uttam-rāja-nivesa) Mahasathan Amor Piman (vimān) Awatar Sathit Sakkathattiya (sakka-aditya) Viṣanukarma Prasiddhi)



Wat Phrakaew Emerald
Buddha Temple



Painting Thai Ramakirati on
the wall



Inclining Buddha in Wat
Pho

The second Buddhist Cultures will be known from Thai Festivals. Since the Rattanakosin era Thai society was affected by the west. The kings sent their sons to study in west and brought the new civilization such as education, post offices, trains, printing, etc., and Thai cultures, traditions which related with Buddhism still were preserved and restored, collected from Lanna, Sukhothai and Ayudhya. Thai festivals have been celebrated since Sukhothai era but it was evident in the Ratanakosin period. Here are only the well-known Thai festivals- **Songkrant Day** (The festival of Water) Thai New Year started from April in which a big festival will be celebrated Songkrant (from Sanskrit word “saṅkrānt” it means the sun moves from Zodiac Aries to Pisces). At this time people after finishing their cultivation got some earning from the morning, they go to temple and give alms to the monks then release birds from their cages and fish into the river. Then they pour the perfumed water on the monks first and then splash water on other people who come to the temple. This festival is similar to Holi but their mythology is different.



People are setting the birds free from the cage
and fishes free to the river



People are pouring the perfumed water
to the monks

Ordain Tradition: In May, when it's rainy season, people go to cultivate in their farms and the ordination tradition will start this month as well. People have their sons who are 20 years old become a monk. They believed that whose son becomes a monk, the parents will receive the best merit. First the man who will become a monk is called “Naga” means a serpent. One story concerned with the lord Buddha time there was a serpent who had faith in the lord Buddha and wanted to become his disciple and become a man. The lord Buddha recognized him as a non-human and didn't allow ordaining. Naga was very grateful and requested the lord Buddha to name him “Naga” for calling the man who will become a monk. Now Nāga belief is very famous in Wat Khamchanot, Udonrajadhani, northeast of Thailand.



Thai boy become the Naga first and monk later



Worship ceremony of Naga at Wat Khamchanot



Buddhist Lent day:

The former Thai Prime minister Miss Yingluk Chinawatra visited there for worship Naga



The believers are dancing for worship Naga



Thai Buddhist are giving a big candle to monks for using 3 months



The famous festival of carved candle in Ubolrajathani

The tradition of Ordain continues from May up to July. In July the Asalha puja (āsāḍh) and Buddhist Lent day will be celebrated, in Thai called Khou Phansā (loanword from Sanskrit “Varṣā” means rain). The Buddhist Monks have to stay in the temple for 3 months in rainy season. In northeastern Thailand, one of the famous candle carving ceremonies in Ubon Ratchathani is held every year. The prize will be given to the team who can make excellent sculpture of the Buddha’s sculptures and then offering to the temple for performing the Buddhist ceremony for 3 months.

Chak Phra festival: After three months Buddhist Lent is over and on the other day people come to give alms to monks early morning. This ceremony is called “Takbat Dhevo” means giving alms to the lord Buddha after came down from the heaven Tavatimsa. In the southern province of Thailand Nakhonsridhammarat, Patani, Patthalung, Songkhla and Yala celebrated in this day known as “Chak Phra” This day, people will pull the Buddha image in the rivers in some provinces and drag the image along the roads. The boat on which the royal throne will be placed will be decorated with flowers. This ceremony is likened to the Indian festival Ratha Yatra in Puri.



“Chak Phra” Ratha Yatra festival in southern Thailand can celebrate in the river and on land



Ratha Yatra in Puri

Loi Krathong Festival (Floating the banana-leaf-cup): This festival is celebrated in November after farmers they have cultivated their farm and plant rice. The water in the river is full to the bank; they worship the Gaṅgā goddess who yielded their harvest.



And also the Buddha's foot prints. At the same time, in the northern Thailand, people float lanterns in the sky at night to pay homage to the hair of the Buddha in the heaven Tāvātimsa.



New Year: At this time people go to the temple in the morning and give alms to monks and worship the lord Buddha in the temple and pray for blessing then let birds free from cage and fish free into the river.

Māgh Pūjā: At this time Thai Buddhist believed that the lord Buddha after he had enlightened the Buddha and taught his doctrines to people then he had many followers. In this day the lord Buddha followers came to visit him without appointment about 1250 monks and then he taught the “Ovāda pātimokha” to them. There are many ethnic groups in Thailand, Mon is one of them. Mon people they believe strongly in Buddhism and stopped Indian Cultures. One of the ceremonies they performed that year was Māgh Dahan like Holikā Dahan or Lohri in Punjab and Māgh Bihū in Assam.





Buddhist Mon people is doing worship Lord Buddha with burning heap of wood in Māgh Pūjā and giving alms to monks.

Conclusions

The main contribution of this study is to point out that viewing Thai culture as large culture, which focuses merely on national differences, depicts a simplistic and one-dimensional image of Thai nationals. Furthermore, large cultures treat Thai nationals as a homogenous group – neglecting the fact that Thai culture is complex, fluid, and multifaceted and cannot be shortened to a single explanation. The small culture approach leaves the perceptions of Thai culture open to all types of social groupings, allowing individuals to form their own beliefs and norms, which can differ from the characteristics of specific national cultures. This study also supports a review of the impact of Thai culture on interactions between Thai people and those from different cultural backgrounds in the areas of intercultural communication or cross-cultural communication. This is because looking at culture and following a national culture perspective leads people from different cultures to treat Thai women as passive and submissive individuals.

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