



A MODEL OF USING SONGKRAN ACTIVITIES TO FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS OF THE THAI AND THE BURMESE BUDDHISTS: THAILAND

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Abstract

The study of “A Model of Using Songkran Activities to Foster Relationships of the Thai and the Burmese Buddhists in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province” consisted of the three following objectives: 1) to study the behavior of oneself during the Songkran Festival of the Burmese Buddhists, 2) to develop and 3) to present forms of Songkran activities to strengthen the relationship between the Thai Buddhists and the Myanmar Buddhists. **The results** were the temples or areas that organized and carried on various traditions emphasizing cultures promoting uniqueness inherited the values, essences and things to do of the Thai Songkran traditions such as cleaning temples, making merit, giving alms to monks, practicing Dharma, activities that focused on building relationships between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists through the evident promotions of constructive activities. The Thai and the Burmese brothers and sisters will cooperate, join forces and unite together as one. Three customizable and traditional activities organized during Songkran Festival to strengthen the relationship between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists in Krathum Lom Sub-district, Sam Phran District, Nakhon Pathom Province were 1) to make merit by giving alms to monks in 2 nationalities, 2) to pour water on monks and to return gratitude, 3) to make merit for the ancestors, and 4) to build sand pagodas to create 3 values: value towards the community, social value, and religious value.

Keywords: Songkran; personal practices; activities; multicultural

Introduction

Songkran Festival was influenced by Hindu Brahmanism and then mixed with Buddhist rituals and evidently found that there was a Songkran tradition since before the reign of King Boromakot in the Ayutthaya period. Which was a royal ceremony only available in the royal court. Later, it spread to the villagers in early Rattanakosin period during the reign of King Rama III Phra Nang Klao March 31, 1788 –April 2, 1851). It was observed that the Thai Songkran tradition has been initiated by the elite trying to find their roots to control Thai societies to counter the western cultures flooding in early Rattanakosin and in order to stabilize the monarchy. As a result, the elite systematically wrote their own traditions. It was a tradition of pouring holy water, which was practiced only in the royal court and considered a sacred tradition according to religious beliefs including promoting the monarchy, not playing and splashing water like ordinary villagers as seen today.

Religion can be said to be the most powerful belief and anchor. Religion bound the strongest and deepest minds, helped bridge social gaps, built mutual trust, and became the foundation of unity and cooperation for community development and created peace and stability for the community (Phra Brahmaganubhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2012. Living together as a society was a group of at least two or more people living together in one area having both direct and indirect relationship. Direct relations were such as greeting, collaboration, trading and mutual generosity, etc. The indirect relationships were such as walking past people, even we did not know but they were from the same province, and the uses of products which we never saw the producers before. These people will be the groups whom we related to them through other people, through documents or through television. However, it can be seen that humans were different from animals. Although living in a group similar to being a society this was because human beings needed to satisfy their basic biological and cultural needs. Human beings were creative and able to continually invent tools, utensils and patterns of society (Somparn Promta, 2011). Human beings came together as a society able to comply with the rules of coexistence in the form of regulations or laws and had virtue in helping each other, participation in various social activities such as participation in political activities and administration, participation in human rights protection and the virtue of coexistence. According to the religion respected, people can live together in



peace under the religious principles which they respected (Duan Khamdee, 2010).

Differences may arise from many things such as physical dimensions and psychological dimensions were resulted from casting raised from sub-units of society at the family level or even from the experience of using life of each person in each age range. It may even result in people from same family. There may be differences in opinion, behavioral diversity, different preferences and expectations. However, if any society caused by the gathering of people with diverse races, religions and cultures would make differences. In society, there were many issues of managing diversity of citizens. It was therefore a great challenge for the state in order to find a way to organize such diverse groups of people living together. There was a point of connection between them until unity can occur. There was harmony, unity, peaceful co-existence, free from dangers and deadly situations while developing sense of nationality and ready to join forces and being the part to develop the future of the country (Continuing ASEAN Legal Information Project, 2015).

Therefore, the researcher was interested in conducting the research on the pattern of using Songkran activities to strengthen the relationship between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province. The Songkran festival has been considered a tradition helping to sustain both religion and society for human beings where peaceful life could be met. The majority of the Myanmar Buddhists practiced Buddhism with the great respect for the Triple Gems as in Thailand where they had to travel to work. The Myanmar people therefore needed something to anchor their mind, so the "temple" became a gathering place for religious activities. The Myanmar Buddhists had similar beliefs and religious practices with Thai people. The same belief became the guideline for the coexistence in the community, which helped change behavior and reduce conflict. The researcher therefore used the form of Songkran activities to build relationships and social stability in multicultural society for the prosperity of Buddhism.

Research Objectives

1. To study the behavior of oneself during the Songkran Festival of the Burmese Buddhists in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province.

2. To develop Songkran activities to strengthen the relationship between Thai Buddhists and Myanmar Buddhists.

3. To present forms of Songkran activities to strengthen the relationship between the Thai Buddhists and the Myanmar Buddhists in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province.

Literature Reviews

Multicultural society was an area with unique characteristics different from other local social conditions. It was indicative to the identity of the people in each locality. There were ways to maintain local culture under the way of life of a multicultural society covering ethnicity, language, and ways of living, ways of life, religion and belief. There were four merit-making festivals of Thai Buddhists, i.e. Songkran Festival, Buddhist Lent Festival, Sart Festival and End of Buddhist Lent Festival as for the merit-making festivals of the Balinese Hindu people, include the Thai Buddhist Songkran Festival. The merit-making festival to show gratitude to the ancestors, management multicultural society as well as solving problems conflicts arising from differences, the diversity of races, religions and cultures would be difficult and time consuming for a long time in instilling awareness among people in society and change their thinking as well as accept variety of differences especially, in Thai society where most people had confidence in unity, and cultural unity. Krongchai Hatta (2007) studied "Multicultural Society and National Security in the Case of Southern Border Provinces". Resolving unrest in border provinces in the southern part of Thailand for a sustainable manner must create a correct understanding of the issue of a multicultural society that had a long history of development and that were different. "A study of the model communities of different religions living together peacefully in Wat Kanlaya Subdistrict, Thonburi District, Bangkok". Generosity to help each other joint activity and having a sense of belonging to the same race were factors contributing to peaceful coexistence.

Suraiya Wani (2014) studied "Community Coexistence in a Multicultural Society: A Case Study of Sai Khao Subdistrict Khok Pho District Pattani Province. Thai Buddhists and Malay Muslims in Sai Khao Khok Subdistrict, Pho District, Pattani Province." A system of government that was fair and had natural resources with readiness to have strong community leaders, kinship relationship and the same language for communication.



Guidelines for building social stability in a multicultural society in each society, there would be the guidelines for creating social stability that was the principle of being able to live together in multi-religious beliefs, multi-traditions and multicultures. The concept of multiculturalism according to the field of cultural anthropology, the meaning of culture was defined as the sum of complex things consisting of knowledge, belief, art and culture, morality law traditions, habits, and other behaviors that humans expressed.

Research Methodology

The research entitled "The Pattern of Using Songkran Activities to Strengthen the Relationship between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province. The researcher used qualitative research, documentary research, and the field research with In-depth Interviews to study adaptation for coexistence with different ethnic populations of people in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province. In in-depth Interview, the researcher used a purposive random sampling method from 12 key informants based on their qualifications specified by the researcher, among groups of monks, high ecclesiastical dignitary, community leader monk, representatives of government officials involved in the area of Nakhon Pathom Province.

Results

The First Objective: The Results of the Study of the Behaviors of Thai and Myanmar Buddhists during the Songkran Festival.

Songkran was a tradition of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, and the Tai minority in Vietnam and Yunnan province of China including Sri Lanka and countries in the east of India. It was assumed that the Songkran tradition was culturally derived from the Holi festival in India. But Holi uses a splash of color instead. It will be held every day of the first waning moon of the 4th month, which is March.

Songkran eminent activities were making merit, offering food to monks, make merit for oneself and the dead. Merit making in this way was usually pre-

arranged. When it was time to make merit, they brought food to be offered to the monks at the temple hall as a gathering place for making merit. On the same day after completing the merit-making, sand pagodas would be built which was an important tradition on Songkran Day as well as watering. It can be regarded as blessings on the New Year for each other. The water used pourings on the head in this practice was usually perfume mixed with plain water. It was the watering on Buddha images at home and at temples. In some places, there would be an additional bath for the monks with the requiem of the ashes. For the ashes of relatives who have passed away often made to store in the style of a pagoda. After that, the monks would be invited to pay respects to elders. We went to bless respected adults like teachers, with the perfume mixed water on the hand. The elders will return blessings those who watered them. If they were monks; they may bring a cloth to offer to change as well. But if they were lay persons; they will find sarongs or loincloths to change. It meant starting something new on the day of the Thai New Year. Its purpose was similar to the watering of the central region. Most of them could be seen in the north. It consisted of robes, coconuts, bananas, pomegranates, candles and flowers which were considered the purification of the sins that we have done. It was to exorcise misfortune to welcome blesses. There were only happiness and comfort on New Year's Day. In carrying sand into the temple, in the north, it was popular in representing a sign of good fortune that brought happiness, prosperity, and money flowing like sand that was carried into temples. But there were some areas believing that it was a sin to remove sand from the temple. Therefore, sand must be transported to the temple to avoid sin.

The Second Objective: Summary of Research Results for the Development of Songkran Activities to Strengthen the Relationship between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists.

According to traditions, Songkran Day activities were traditions of Phatthalung people and other provinces. It represented unity, gratitude and traditional fun. In general, there were various activities before Songkran. It was a preparation in various fields for auspiciousness and to welcome a new life that will begin on the upcoming New Year. Activities done included cleaning residential houses, temples, pavilions, community areas, preparing clothes to wear to make merit including various decorations. There were also clothes for paying respect to the elders, to pray for blessings as well, preparing food for



making merit and special desserts, including the preparation of desserts that were considered symbols of the New Year and Songkran Day, that was, red sticky rice for the New Year and stir-fried sweets or caramel for Songkran.

The importance of the Songkran festival was a tradition of celebrating New Year's Day that has been adhered to since ancient times. Songkran was a day of generosity, love, and commitment to each other in the family, community, society and religion. This was a time to welcoming family members to have the opportunity to come together to show their gratitude, such as helping to clean the house, to arrange a new house, to help making desserts for making merit and to raise children, Thai desserts, Songkran, coconut milk, peeling coconut milk, etc. This was to provide new cloth for the loved ones, respect pouring water on the elders as well as expressing gratitude to the ancestors who have passed away by making merit and dedicating the charitable contribution to the community. This was to create unity in the community, for example, delivering snacks/food to each other, making merit, meeting, having fun together, clean houses, temples, public places and various buildings, religious values, helping to preserve religion by offering food to monks, practicing Dharma, listening to sermons, and pouring water on monks.

The Third Objective: The study on Songkran activities usage patterns to strengthen the relationship between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province.

Activities performed on Songkran Day were for the purposes of inheriting the goodness of this traditional values including to organize activities to make merit, offering food to monks or bringing food to the monks at the temple to inherit and maintain Buddhism and to refine the mind to know how to give and sacrifice without expecting anything in return. There were different values and practices related to the Songkran tradition; it was appropriate to act accordingly. In order to respect the wisdom of the ancestors that have been refined and selected to be suitable for their own locality, therefore, any changes were directly dependent on the discretion of the owner of that culture to choose to receive or not accept something different from the original. This included new things that were inserted incessantly the knowledge gained from the research

was the Songkran Festival to strengthen the relationship between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists.

Discussions

Extremely inappropriate activities like drinking alcohol to the point of intoxication, unable to control consciousness, powder on the face of women and torso are not encouraged. Measures are also imposed for prevention and correction if the drinkers are intoxicated and causes damage to others. They will be executed if the drinkers are intoxicated causing trouble and nuisance to others and will be prosecuted for accusing him of using liquor or other intoxicants until intoxication, behave chaotically, or are unable to control themselves while on public roads or public places, are offense under the Criminal Code, section 378, with a fine of not more than 500 Baht in the case driving while intoxicated. When the alcohol content in the blood is found to be over the limit, they will be prosecuted immediately according to the allegation of driving while intoxicated it is an offense under the Road Traffic Act, 1979, Section 43(1) (2), 142, Ministerial Regulation No. 16 (1994), issued under the provisions of the Traffic Act. By land, section 154 is punishable by imprisonment of not more than 3 months or a fine not exceeding 1,000 Baht, or both. If such action exceeds and causes damage to others; the offender will be prosecuted for allegations of indecent acts against other persons. According to the Criminal Code, Section 278 is punishable by imprisonment for not more than 10 years or a fine of not more than 20,000 baht, or both if such action is so excessive that it causes the death of another person. The offender shall be guilty of an offense under section 280 (2) and shall be liable to death or imprisonment for life.

The economy and promoting tourism in Nong Khai Province enable to create values for people in communities in the municipality of Nong Khai Province. There is a purchase within the province. Therefore, creating economic value and also promoting the tourism of the province causing people in the community to be proud of their origins and jointly preserve the tradition for a long time in line with Wandee Srisawat et al. (2016) conducted a research study on the study of cultural knowledge and local wisdom in Thap Nam sub-district, Bang Pahan District Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province supported by the Thailand Research Fund and Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi.



In addition, they should help each other clean temples, public places and buildings of various agencies as well, in line with the research of Busaba Hinthao, et., al (2021) conducted a research study on education. Way of life, culture, traditions of most people in Ban Na Mueang Community, Chat Trakan District Phitsanulok Province, Faculty of Management Sciences Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University 2021. Villagers in Na Mueang, Pa Daeng Subdistrict, Chat Trakan District Phitsanulok Province. It is an ethnic group of Laos who migrated from Xayaburi, Lao People's Democratic Republic. These people came to Thailand through Na Haeo District, Loei Province and migrated to settle in Ban Na Muang in 1924. According to the information of the Padaeng Subdistrict Municipality, there was a family of a former village headman named Nai Phaeng Inthip who has settled in a village on the edge of the river. Noi Nam Canal and named it Ban Nam Phak Noi. Later, around 1978, the village was split up. Therefore, separated the village from Ban Nam Phak Noi and named the village Na Muang because the village has rice fields surrounding the village and after the village, about 5 kilometers away, there will be a beautiful Tad Noi waterfall and near the Chat Trakan Waterfall at present, most of Ban Na Muang villagers still have their relatives in Xayaburi Province, Laos, and always travel across to visit each other when they have the opportunity.

New Knowledges

1) The activity of offering alms to two nationalities is considered to make merit and make merit for oneself and dedicate that merit to those who have passed away. This kind of merit making is usually prepared in advance bring food to be offered to the monks at the temple hall which is organized as a gathering place for making merit on this day. After completing the merit-making, there will also be the creation of a traditional sand image.

2) Bathing Buddha images and gratitude, it's a new year's greetings to each other. The water is usually perfume mixed. Bathing Buddha images are poured water over Buddha images at homes, in the temples and some place to bathe the monks with requiem ashes bones of the dead relatives often built into pagodas then invited monks to pray requiem.

3) Activities to make merit and dedicate merit to the ancestors remembering them is another form of remembrance and expression of gratitude.

4) Sand Pagoda Building Activities, is the use of sand to form a pagoda-like shape and adorned with various flowers. This is rarely seen among urban people.

Conclusions

The relationship between the Thai and the Myanmar Buddhists in Krathum Lom Subdistrict, Sampran District, Nakhon Pathom Province. Activities that should be performed on Songkran Day in order to inherit the goodness value of this tradition, organizing activities to make merit, offering food to monks or bringing food to the monks at the temple to inherit and maintain Buddhism and to refine the mind to know how to give and sacrifice without expecting anything in return. There are different values and practices related to the Songkran tradition. It is appropriate to act accordingly in order to respect the wisdom of the ancestors who have been refined and selected to be suitable for their own locality. Therefore, any changes are directly dependent on the discretion of the owner of that culture to choose to accept or not to accept something different from the past including what is new in the present, and so on.



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