

The Buddhist Cultures in Thai Society:
Happy and Harmonious Society
วัฒนธรรมชาวพุทธในสังคมไทย : สังคมสงบสุขและสามัคคี

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Abstract

Thailand as the *Land of Culture* is converging—place of world cultures as a result of its easiness to accept other cultures, in which several kinds of unique customary cultures constantly are practiced through a very long history. Throughout the year, Thai people are very joyful with a number of festivals, functions and fairs presenting the Thai cultural genius. On the other hand, 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.

Factually, the way of Thai life is inseparably connected with Buddhism from birth to death: for example, having a newborn child, the parents approach a monk for getting an auspicious name for him. Children are taught to pray and pay homage to the **Triple Gems** (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. Additionally, as explained above all the national festivities and custom are connected with Buddhism, the State Religion. It then can be said that 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, stability and happiness for the whole Thai Nation in forms of traditional cultures and several festivities helping to bind people of different groups together harmoniously.

Keywords : Buddhist Cultures, Thai Society, Happy and Harmonious Society

บทคัดย่อ

ในฐานะที่เป็นดินแดนที่อุดมไปด้วยวัฒนธรรม ประเทศไทยเป็นที่มาบรรจบกันแห่งวัฒนธรรมโลกที่หลากหลาย อันเป็นผลมาจากการที่คนไทยยอมรับเอาวัฒนธรรมเหล่านั้นเข้ามาโดยง่าย นั้นทำให้วัฒนธรรมประเพณีมากมายผสมกลมกลืนจนแยกไม่ออกและได้ปฏิบัติสืบทอดกันมาเป็นเวลาอัน

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ยาวนาน ซึ่งทำให้ตลอดทั้งปี ประชาชนชาวไทยได้เพลิดเพลินกับวัฒนธรรมประเพณีมากมายรวมทั้งงานรื่นเริงต่างๆ อันแสดงให้เห็นถึงความเป็นเอกลักษณ์ของวัฒนธรรมไทย อนึ่ง วัฒนธรรมประเพณีอันเป็นของชุมชนคนในชาติซึ่งแสดงถึงลักษณะอันเป็นเอกลักษณ์และสร้างสรรค์ให้เกิดความเป็นน้ำหนึ่งใจเดียวกันระหว่างชุมชนต่างๆ คุณค่าของวัฒนธรรมมีส่วนช่วยในการควบคุมพฤติกรรมโดยอัตโนมัติ ซึ่งทำให้สมาชิกในของกลุ่มสามารถอยู่ร่วมกันในสังคมไทยได้อย่างสงบสุข

ในความเป็นจริง ชีวิตของชาวไทยได้เกี่ยวข้องกับพระพุทธศาสนาตั้งแต่เกิดกระทั่งตาย จนไม่สามารถแยกออกจากกันได้ ตัวอย่างเช่น เมื่อแรกเกิด พ่อแม่จะไปวัดเพื่อให้พระตั้งชื่ออันเป็นมงคลแก่เด็ก เป็นต้น และเมื่อเจริญวัย ก็จะสอนให้เด็กๆ รู้จักกราบพระรัตนไตรก่อนนอน และให้ทำความเคารพพระสงฆ์ ซึ่งโดยทั่วไปแล้ว ครอบครัวชาวพุทธจะทำบุญตักบาตรพระสงฆ์ทุกเช้า เพื่อเป็นการสั่งสมบุญและเพื่อเป็นการทำหน้าที่อุบาสกอุบาสิกาในการทำนุบำรุงพระพุทธศาสนาอันเป็นการช่วยสืบทอดอายุพระพุทธศาสนาอีกทางหนึ่งด้วย และเมื่อเด็กชายเจริญวัยเป็นผู้ใหญ่ พ่อแม่ก็จะจัดการงานบวชให้ตามประเพณี อย่างน้อยหนึ่งพรรษา พ่อจะแต่งงานมีครอบครัวก็ต้องนิมนต์พระ พอจนจะสิ้นลมก็ให้นึกถึงพระ หรือแม้แต่ประเพณีเกี่ยวกับคนตายก็ล้วนเกี่ยวข้องกับพระ อนึ่ง แม้แต่ทางบ้านเมืองจัดงานหรือเทศกาลต่างๆ ก็ล้วนแต่มีพระเข้ามาเกี่ยวข้องเสมอ ดังนั้น สามารถจะสรุปได้ว่าตั้งแต่อดีตกระทั่งปัจจุบัน ประชาชนชาวไทยไม่สามารถอยู่ได้หากปราศจากพระพุทธศาสนา ซึ่งถือว่าเป็นศาสนาแห่งปัญญาและมีบทบาทอย่างมากในสังคมไทย ลักษณะเฉพาะของชาวพุทธไทยที่น่าทึ่งนั้นคือการรู้จักปรับตัวให้เข้ากับสิ่งแวดล้อม ในฐานะที่เป็นศูนย์รวมจิตใจ พระพุทธศาสนาช่วยให้เกิดความสามัคคี ความมั่นคงและความสงบสุขของคนในชาติ ในรูปแบบของขนบธรรมเนียมประเพณีและเทศกาลต่างๆ ซึ่งช่วยให้กลุ่มต่างๆ สามารถอยู่กันอย่างสมัคสมานสามัคคี

คำสำคัญ : วัฒนธรรมชาวพุทธ,สังคมไทย, สังคมสงบสุขและสามัคคี

Introduction

Generally speaking, although the Kingdom of Thailand will consist of several cultures of countries associated with it since centuries ago but the Thais cleverly know to adjust those suitably for themselves, especially the Buddhist cultures. Through this process it has become the new unique characteristics presenting the nationhood, resulting the national integration and stability and becoming to be happy and harmonious society.

Wai (to pay respect to one another) is the fine and unique Thai traditional culture. Meeting friends or acquaints the Thais are to greet those with smiles, saying *Swasdee*¹ (politely saying *Swasdee krap* for male and *Swasdee kha* for female) and saluting by pressing two hands together, and followed by *Pai nai ma krap/kha* (Where are you coming from?), or *Tan khao ma rue yang krap/kha* (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),”

¹ The term *Swasdee* meaning happiness or prosperity was first used around 1937 with the purpose of greeting each other.

more elder “*Lung* (uncle),”² or “*Na* (uncle/auntie),” or “*Ah* (uncle/auntie),” and old “*Ta* (grandfather).”³

According to the ancient Thai tradition, since childhood the Thais are brought up to pay respect to the elders, know to respect one another and know showing filial devotion and obedience to all benefactors.⁴ 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 years 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*”⁵ 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.

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

Buddhist Cultures in National Holidays and Festivals

The Thai enjoys the way of life through participating in several festivals and religious ritual supposed to be held many times in a year. Actually, Thai people work eight hours a day and five days a week; and Saturday and Sunday are holidays. And in the case any official holiday may fall into Saturday or Sunday, they will be allowed to rack up another holiday as substitution on Monday. In current year, there are fifteen national holidays as follows:

1. New Year’s Day (January 1)
2. Maghpuja Day (rest on the Lunar day)
3. Chakri Day (April 6)
4. Songkrant Day (April 13-14-15)
5. National Labour Day (May 1)
6. Coronation Day (May 5)

² 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.

³ 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*.

⁴ The one who is thankful for benefits received and reciprocates them is worthy to be praised in the Thai society.

⁵ Prof. Sanit Samakkarn, *The Cultural Evolution of Thai Society*, (Bangkok: O.S. Printing House Co. Ltd., 1991), pp. 79-81.

7. Visakhapuja Day (rest on the Lunar day)
8. Asalhapuja Day (rest on the Lunar day)
9. Buddhist Lent Day (rest on the Lunar day)
10. Her Majesty the Queen's Birthday (August 12)
11. Buddhist Lent's End Day (rest on the Lunar day)
12. Chulalongkorn Day (October 23)
13. His Majesty the King's Birthday (December 5)
14. Constitution Day (December 10)
15. New Year's Eve (December 31).

All those holidays are mostly concerned with Buddhism of which details will be discussed as follows:

1. New Year's Day

Like other people around the world the Thai has also celebrated the New Year through sending friends or relatives a greeting card or presenting some gifts and even organizing a party. Not only that the Thai, as a Buddhist, is to prepare several items of food, fruits, some kinds of sweets and water including all needful things for offering monk on the beginning of year.

Some family privately invites five or seven or nine monks to have meal in house for breakfast or lunch falling before the noontime. Some join relatives to offer breakfast or lunch in some suitable place; meanwhile, some come together with other people in community and invite monks to receive food-offering in morning. Mostly in rural area villagers gather in monastery to make merit and give food offerings to monks in morning and also offer lunch. At the same time, they also are to organize a religious ceremony to offer monks the yellow robes locally called "*phapa*" and at night time several kinds of entertainment like movie, folk singer, playing game, etc. will also be held for celebration. In addition, it has been noticed that on the 31st December every year traditionally there are in large number of *phapa* groups from Bangkok, the capital, towards provinces in countrywide. With regard to this, it has made traffic problem for many hours long.

The Thais as Buddhists popularly like to make merit in the beginning day of year in order to drive out all badness of old year and take a new good or auspicious thing from the New Year. Besides, they remain continuously do the good things from the old year and try to do it more and more. Actually, they do like to release different kinds of captured animals such as bird, fish, turtle, cow, buffalo and so forth. Furthermore, most people like to start some types of business at the beginning of year as generally speaking that "to start doing good from beginning and go on step by step are the great thing for business."

Historically, there had been many changes of the Thai Traditional New Year Day. Initially, the Thai Traditional New Year Day fell into the 1st waning moon's day of the 1st lunar month in accordance with the Buddhist inspiration regarding the winter as the beginning of year; later on, the 1st waxing moon's day of the 5th lunar month in consonance with the Brahmanic inspiration. Hence, when the Thai Government had initially regarded the solar calendar the Thai Traditional New Year fell into the 1st April starting from the year 1889. Afterwards, due to popular influence of solar calendar in several countries the Thai Government once again changed to celebrate the New Year on the 1st January since the year 1940.⁶ It has been noticed that is because the mentioned day is quite close to the initial Thai Traditional New Year Day (i.e. the 1st waning moon's day of the 1st lunar month falling just around a couple of weeks or less before the 1st January). However, in the current year almost Thais have already forgotten the initial Thai Traditional New Year, just only remember the former New Year Day, i.e., the 1st waxing moon's day of the 5th lunar month usually falling around the 13th to 15th of April.

⁶ Plaek Sonthirak, Rite and Tradition, (Bangkok: Religious Publishers, 1990), p. 26.

Besides, later on the Thai Government had fixed the mentioned period as the Thai Traditional New Year Day officially called *Songkrant Festival*.

On the other hand, in fact the Thai people are to celebrate the New Year Day thrice a year that is to celebrate on the 1st January, the Chinese Traditional New Year Day (depending on the lunar day) and the Thai Traditional New Year Day (*Songkrant Day*). But there will be a big celebration on *Songkrant Day*, a most famous festival in Thailand as well known among foreign tourists. Generally speaking, the Thai tends to start some business at the beginning of year that it means to start the good new thing from the first day of the New Year. In addition, many keep trying to give up smoking or drinking in the occasion of the New Year; then try to do only good or useful and helpful thing for their community or society. As the pious Buddhist they try to follow the Buddha's Exhortations, i.e., to avoid doing evil, keep doing only good, and purify one's mind.

2. Maghapuja Day (rest on the Lunar day)

The Maghapuja Day, one of the Buddhist holidays, is regarded as the Buddhist Valentine Day. Because it was the day of which the Buddha preached the Three Admonitions or Exhortations (the Principal Teaching) called "*Buddha-Ovada*" (i.e. briefly to not do any kind of evils, do only the good thing and purify one's mind)⁷ with his great kind love towards all kinds of living things.

Looking back to the Buddha's time, there were four unexpected events happened in the 15th waxing moon's day of the 3rd lunar month or the 4th for a leap year. Those are as follows:

1) Unappointedly 1,250 Arhants gathered in Veluvana Mahavihar, the first Buddhist monastery, Rajghir (in Bihar, present India).

2) All those were directly ordained by the Buddha himself.

3) There was no any appointment between those.

4) It was the full moon day of the Maghamas (the 3rd lunar month).

Then, in such special occasion, the Buddha had showed his great love for all living-things through preaching the Exhortations (*Ovadapatimokkha*), the principal teaching of the Buddha. The *Ovadapatimokkha* has cited the three principles, four means and six ideals of the Buddhism. The Buddhist three principles are:

1) to not do any kind of evils (*sabbapapassa akaranam*),

2) to do only the good thing (*kusalassupasampada*), and

3) to purify one's mind (*sacittapariyodapanam*).

The Buddhist Four Means are:

1) endurance or patience (*kanti/tapo/titikkha*),

2) non-striking others (*param vihethayanto*),

3) calmness or peace (*samano*), and

4) ultimate truth (*nibbana*).

The Buddhist Six Ideals are:

1) not blaming (*anupavado*),

2) not harming (*anupaghato*),

3) restraint under the law (*patimokkhe samvaro*),

4) knowing moderation (*mattannuta bhataasmim*),

5) remote lodging (*pantam sayanasanam*), and

⁷ See more details in Phramaha Kasem Laksanawilas, *The Buddhist Way to Peace: A Critical Study*, (Thesis Submitted for Ph.D. Department of Philosophy & Religion, Banaras Hindu University, 1994), pp. 10-14.

6) dwelling on lofty thoughts (*adhicitte ayogo*).⁸

On the other hand, at the 45th year, the last year, of the Buddha's propagation he had decided to reach the end of his life, viz., the announcement of his coming death (3 months from the moment: the full moon day of the 6th lunar month). Not so long after that, he left for *Kusinara* where he calmly reached the end of life at the age of eighty in the full moon day of Visakhmas (the 6th lunar month or the 7th of leap year) on which his birth and enlightenment were.

Historically, in the ancient Thai society there was no any source exactly mentioned the period in which the Maghapuja was performed, but evidence obviously appeared in the reign of the King Rama IV of the Chakri Dynasty.⁹ However, the researcher analytically conjectured that this religious ceremony used to be performed since the duration, which Buddhism initially flourished in this area. But after the immense burn of the Ayutthaya Kingdom on the second loss (in the year 1767) to the Burmese aggressor, a large number of properties was completely destroyed. It was a reason that all records were also destroyed; then, people also could not keep on their religious performance concerned Buddhism because of the fear to war.

In the current year of Thailand, the Maghapuja Day has been regarded as a most important day of the Buddhist in nationwide. It is the religious rite to specially worship the Triple Gems, viz., the Lord Buddha, His Teaching (Dhamma) and Disciple (Sangha). In the morning the Buddhist is to go to a monastery nearby in order to offer monk some special breakfast. It is meant that monk would not go for a morning alms-bowl on the street like in ordinary day. People gather food in a hall and help each other to prepare food including water as a set enough for monk. When the preparation was completely done monk would come into the hall; then the religious rite would be performed. It is to start from the spiritual guide (i.e., a man who knows religious ritual very well) will be a leader in preying the worship-word towards the Triple Gems; then ask the senior monk (mostly abbot) for *Pancha* or *Attha Silas* (Five or Eight Precepts),¹⁰ respectively.

In addition, the ordinary people will accept the *Pancha-Sila* (the Precepts for householder) i.e.,

- 1) to abstain from killing,
- 2) to abstain from stealing,
- 3) to abstain from sexual misconduct,
- 4) to abstain from false speech, and
- 5) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness.

Meanwhile, the one who wants to stay in monastery for one night will accept *Attha-Sila* (the higher Precepts for householder) i.e.,

- 1) to abstain from killing,
- 2) to abstain from stealing,
- 3) to abstain from unchastity,
- 4) to abstain from false speech,
- 5) to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness,
- 6) to abstain from untimely eating,

61. ⁸ Eugene Watson Burlingame (tr.), *Buddhist Legends*, Part 3, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1990), p.

⁹ Asst. Prof. Sumet Methavidyakun, *Concept of Ritual*, (Bangkok: O.S. Printing House, 1989), p. 98.

¹⁰ See more details in Chadin Nuprasert, *Theravāda Buddhism and Hinduism: A Comparative Study in Morality*, (Thesis Submitted for Ph.D. Department of Philosophy & Religion, Banaras Hindu University, 2000), pp. 91-92.

7) to abstain from dancing-singing-music and unseemly shows-wearing garlands-smartening with scents-and embellishment with unguents, and

8) to abstain from the use of high and large luxurious couches.

The *Attha-Sila* acceptor will spend one day and one night in monastery in order to have a great chance to practice more higher Dhamma, that is to practice meditation (Pali: *Samadhi*).

Afterwards, the senior monk is to lead to tell all Precepts; and people follow respectively. Then, all monks start preying; and during monk's preying *Chayamangalakatha* people are to start offering food to monk. The monks finished preying; while, people also finished their offering food. They led by a spiritual guide deliver a food-offering speech to the Buddha and the monks respectively. During monks' having meal, one of them is supposed to give a special sermon to people bearing ears with kind regards. At the end of breakfast the monks are to give blessings to all people. People themselves are to have meal together there.

On the other hand, the royal family members led by the King have traditionally performed a special merit-making in the royal palace in which numbers of monks are to be invited for receiving alms-bowl. At the same way, the senior monk does preach a special sermon concerning the significance of Maghapuja. Furthermore, on this auspicious occasion the King himself, as a pious Buddhist, has done several kinds of goodness, like to donate different types of facilities for monasteries, to give a great chance for the good-behaved prisoners by making them free, etc. And also as a good population, people have tried to practice the same trend with their beloved King, Father of the whole Land, by giving a freedom to captured bird or fish, turtle, cow and so forth.

In the evening, monks and people with several kinds of flowers, candles and joss-stick or incense in hands once again gather in a suitable place of monastery. When the proper time came they led by senior monk (mostly abbot) prey the worship-word towards the Triple Gems and offer flowers, joss-sticks and candles in order to worship the Buddha, His teaching and disciples; then walk three times around the hall of temple or pagoda. During the first round walking they unitedly take complimentary address towards the Buddha, second towards the Dhamma and the third towards the Sangha, respectively. At the end of the third round they put all oblations on an arranged place in the front of the hall; then some participate a special sermon preached by a learned monk. In addition, some monastery organized preaching concerned the significance of Maghapuja for whole night. In regard to this, the researcher analytically conjectured that the Maghapuja Day mostly fell no long distance from the "*Shivaratri*" of Hindus; in the same way, Buddhists wish to have a great chance to spend whole night for practicing higher Dhamma, i.e., to do meditation.

However, in Northeastern Thailand there are many areas taking the auspicious occasion to organize a big celebration, such as Thatphanom district of Nakornphanom province, the researcher's village (located in Muang district, Nongbualamphu province) etc. Every year a big celebration has been organized on the occasion of the Maghapuja Day. Especially, in the researcher's hometown there are three days celebration locally called "*Boon Phraves*". It is annual religious rite held in order to give a great opportunity to villagers to hear a special sermon concerned the *Vessantara*,¹¹ a previous carnation of the Buddha. It is the other kind of sermon with a very nice melody traditionally called "*Thes Lae*", but without playing any musical instrument. This kind of sermon is to be preached by 2-6 learned monks during daytime on the last day of celebration. These monks have been supposed as four important characters: *Vessantara*; *Mathri*, his wife; *Kanha* and *Chali*, his

¹¹ In the Central portion of Thailand, especially Patumthani province, this kind of sermon will be preached whole day on the full moon day of the 10th Lunar month; while, some monastery in Bangkok spends whole night for listening to this sermon.

children; and *Choochok*, a great beggar. Briefly it is a story dealing with the great donation of *Vessantara*, the Great Being. Literally, he donated all his properties; for instance, gold, money, ornaments, and different kinds of facilities for all needful people; then his parents drove out him along with his wife and two children who decided to follow their parents. On the way, lots of people remain begged many things from him; and also he provided their desires. Finally, when he reached the deep forest where he and family settled a living as ascetic; later on, he donated his two children as servants of the great beggar, *Choochok* and also his wife to a man being a deity-incarnate. In this connection, his wife realized her husband's strong wish to get enlightenment; then she was happy that she took a fully part in his generous perfection (*dāna-pārami*). Through this he completely cultivated thirty perfections: ten ordinary perfections, ten superior perfections and ten supreme perfections. The ten perfections are as follows:—

- 1) Charity (Dāna)
- 2) Morality (Sila)
- 3) Renunciation of sensual pleasure (Nekkhamma)
- 4) Wisdom (Pannā)
- 5) Effort or energy (Viriya)
- 6) Patience or forbearance (Khanti)
- 7) Truthfulness (Sacca)
- 8) Resolution (Adhitthāna)
- 9) Loving-kindness (Mettā)
- 10) Equanimity (Upekkhā).¹²

This is an example of the first perfection (charity) in different steps of perfections: the charity of Ordinary Perfection is to give materials, money and all outside-property including all facilities to the others. The charity of the Superior Perfection is to donate a part of body for the use and the help to the others; meanwhile, the charity of the Supreme Perfection is to sacrifice oneself for the others. The other items of perfections also would be explained in the same way, but there would not be any more detail.

In addition, every year many people want to participate in this kind of the religious rite because they do strongly believe that if they could hear this story whole day once in their life they would not be born in the world of hell after death. On the one hand, they would be born in the contemporary time of the next Buddha named *Sri-Ariyamettrai* in the Great Harmonious World. In fact people are traditionally permeated with a great belief that it would be a peaceful and completely perfect world. In all probability, it was a very good technique to hammer an idea into head of the next generation to do only a good thing for oneself. Hence, they have continuously practiced the religious rite through centuries long. Although sometimes they might be able to understand exactly the real purpose that their ancestor expected, but they remain sustain the ceremony inherited incessantly from generation to generation.

3. Chakri Day (April 6)

Looking back 219 year-ago, Thailand (Siam) remain existed in the lack of security and solidarity due to the aggression of the Burmese forces and also the disruption of small inland-groups. With a great capability of the brave warrior-king named **Phrabatsomdej Phra Buddhayotpha Chulaloke** (King Rama I) all turbulence was completely cracked down; and he founded the new dynasty, Chakri Dynasty, on the 6th April 1782. Bangkok or *Krungthep* (the City of Angels), the capital, was built in the same style of the ancient city, Ayutthaya. Thailand has become the peaceful and solitary down to the present. And then the King Rama I was regarded as the founder of Chakri Dynasty.

¹² See more details in H.R.H. the late Supreme Patriarch Prince Vajiranavarorasa, *Dhamma Vibhaga*, Part two, 3rd ed., tr., by Siri Buddhasukha, (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University, 1995), pp. 134-137.

Hence, when the 6th of April comes every year a special function is to be held in every official unit in countrywide; of course, it is an official holiday. It marks the anniversary day of Chakri Dynasty's foundation in order to commemorate the great kindness of all primitive Kings. As the Buddhist people cannot be separate from monks in every kind of function held in private place or community; so that there must be a suitable place arranged for religious ceremony enough for a number of the invited monks. In the beginning, when the chief guest arrived in the function he does light candles and joss-stick at incense burner table; then pay respects to the Buddha's image and the monks. Then, a spiritual guide would lead to prey the worship-word towards the Triple Gems; then, ask the senior monk for *Pancha Silas*. The monk tells the *Silas* and start chanting for around 45 minutes or more; at the end of chanting, participants help to offer the prepared food to the monks. Afterwards, it is the good time to perform the memorial function for the sake of paying respects to His Majesty's Predecessors, and to lay a wreath in front of the statue or picture of the King Rama I.

On the other hand, the memorial function is immensely held in Bangkok, the capital, where the King and also all royal family's members preside over the religious rite. The religious rite is to be performed in order to dedicate the acquired merits to the deceased Kings; additionally, there are several people from all walks of life take part in the function.

4. Songkrant Day (April 13-14-15)

Currently the Thai Traditional New Year is well known as "*Songkrant Day*" falling between the 13th – the 15th of April. It is an ancient festival performed to celebrate the year's end and the year's beginning in accordance with the lunar calendar of Brahmanic thought (1st waxing day of the 5th month). Mostly it has been appeared that this period of time falls between the 13th – the 15th April; then it is a reason that Thai Government has fixed the mentioned period as the Thai Traditional New Year.

The "*Songkrant*" is the festival of entertainment with celebration being full of eating, drinking, different kinds of fun, enjoyment and plays. It marks the festival of water, which is to pour sacred water on the Buddha's image, on the hands of monks to gain their blessings and revered elders including playing between friends with water. On the one hand, it is similar to an Indian festival called "Holy" because both are to be celebrated in the period of time not too far from each other during Summer, but there is no colour-playing in *Songkrant Festival*; just only water and incense powder. In Thailand a most famous place of the water festival is in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. In every year, there are many people from several parts of the country and also from overseas flocking there in order to enjoy a unique colourful festival. Actually, a large number of tourists like to visit Chiang Mai because of its beautiful natural places. Furthermore, the main points of the water-festival are the Miss Songkrant Contest and the unique beautiful parades. This is normally three-day celebration; meanwhile, many places remain kept on pouring water since the 19th of April. In the same way, a district of Samuthprakarn province namely Phrapradaeng, where many Mons make a living, does start celebration on around the 19th April and keep water-pouring on around a week long. It is believed that the Mons have constantly practiced the ceremony for many decades.

There are many stories concerned the *Songkrant Festival* as appeared in the book entitled *Thai Auspicious Ceremony*¹³ that:-

A very long time ago there was a millionaire who had no child lived in a city. His house settled very close to a drinker's one, who had two well-looking sons. One day the drinker had a visit at the millionaire's home and he looked down the millionaire by many ways like to give a bad word etc. The millionaire asked the cause of those actions and had gotten an answer that was because the millionaire had no child; then, all property would be useless and get lost because of no successor. The millionaire agreed with the drinker's

¹³ Thiranantho, *Thai Auspicious Ceremony*, (Bangkok: Duangkaew Publishers, nd.), pp. 178-180.

answer; then he started to worship with different kinds of oblation in order to ask for a son from a large number of deities such as the Sun, the Moon, etc., but he had got nothing through three years.

He came to see that his desire reached the end when he made a wish of son under a *Ficus obtusifolia* where a Dryad lived with lots of oblation and musical instrument–playings. A deity named *Dhammapaladevaputtar* emerged in the womb of millionaire’s wife; then he was named *Dhammapalakumar* after getting to be born. He was growing up step by step and studied lots of subjects; he could finish the three early Vedas and be able to understand several kinds of animal’s speech. Not so long after that he became a famous teacher who told people different kinds of auspicious things. In regard to this, he had taken the responsibility of *Mahabrahma* named *Kabilabrahma* who used to be the auspicious thing–teller. Wherever he knew that *Dhammapalakumar* became a famous auspiciousness–teller instead of him; then he came in this world and asked the three questions: where is human beings’ awe–inspiring in morning (1), noon (2), and (3) evening? The matter was that, if *Dhammapalakumar* would be able to give correct answers the *Kabilabrahma* would sever his head to worship the knowledge of *Dhammapalakumar* then. In the same way, *Dhammapalakumar* would have to cut his own head in the case he would not be able to give correct answers. Inevitably, *Dhammapalakumar* agreed to accept a challenge but would give the answers after a week.

When sixth day came through lots of pondering deeply over the matter he still could not find the correct answers yet; then he thought tomorrow would be the seventh day I would die undoubtedly; it would be better to flee my house (castle) and hide getting dead somewhere. He without any aim journeyed through forestry and took a nap under a couple of toddy palms where the pair eagles had their net. Fortunately, he could be able to understand animal’s speech; hence, when the couple of eagles were talking to each other: “By which way we should go for our food tomorrow?,” female eagle asked her mate. “Tomorrow we would have human’s meat as our meal because it would be the day of deadline for *Dhammapalakumar* who could not find the correct answers,” her mate answered. “Do you know the answer?” “Of course, I do. In the morning, the human’s owe-inspiring is on face; that is why people prefer to wash the face after getting up; at noon it is on chest, so people perfume the chest or sprinkle with water. Meanwhile, it is at feet on evening, people clean their feet before going to bed.” *Dhammapalakumar* who heard the conversation became very happy then; he suddenly returned to the castle and waited for *Kabilabrahma*’s coming.

In the appointed day, *Dhammapalakumar* correctly answered the three questions in accordance with eagle’s speech he heard. However, after giving order to his seven daughters¹⁴ for the sake of taking his head contained magical destructive properties by the gilded bowl *Kabilabrahma* sever his head to worship the knowledge of *Dhammapalakumar*. In regard to this, there would be badly destroy; if his head fell into the earth everything would get burn, in the ocean water would get drain. Due to his kind heart to all living things he ordered his daughters to take his head not to let it fall into any space as said. The eldest daughter named *Tungsa* took responsibility on holding her father’s head, placed in *Gandhajuli Cave* at mountain namely *Krailas*, and worshiped with several kinds of flowers and incenses. On the 365th day of the *Kabilabrahma*’s death regarded as a year round, one of the seven daughters would take a responsibility by term to bring out their father’s head and placed outside to give a great chance for all deities to worship *Kabilabrahma* with flowers and incenses. The performance has constantly been succeeded for many centuries from generation to generation and later on supposed as the *Songkrant Festival*.

In Thailand, this is the story told by ancestor for centuries ago; and when the *Songkrant Festival* comes every year people are enthusiastic to enjoy the water-festival. At draw of the

¹⁴ The seven daughters are *Tungsa*, *Raksot*, *Korak*, *Kirini*, *Monda*, *Kimida*, and *Mahothorn*, who later have been supposed as the Songkrant Mastery.

12th of April, villagers clean their houses and kitchen utensils, and wash their clothes and bed-sheets to purify themselves for the coming year. In the same time, they release fish into the rivers and ponds and free the captured birds; the meritorious deeds whose goodness will hopefully redound in the New Year. During *Songkrant*, in villages throughout the country, the principal Buddha images are to be removed from the *Wat* and bathed by the monks and the people with incensed water. In the courtyards of country *Wat*, devotees build dozens of small *Stupa* of sand carried from the river and place small flags on the top. The gift raises the *Wat*-ground for the sake of replacing all the soil inadvertently carried out of the compound in shoes and cuffs during the previous year.

In Bangkok, one day before *Songkrant*, people are to gather to parade the *Phra Buddha Sihing*, one of the most sacred Buddha images, around the old royal city. It is then installed at *Sanam Luang*, the oblong field adjacent to *Wat Phra Kaew*, where devotees continue their obeisance throughout the day. Buddhists lining the route fling bowls of water to wash the residue of the old year from the image. Thais, then, sprinkle water on each other to wash away bad luck and bestow blessings. Actually, the most Bangkokians prefer to leave the crowded city in order to enjoy the water-festival in different places, especially, Chiang Mai. In fact, in the current year almost people living in Bangkok originally belong to the other places. It is an ancient tradition that everyone should return to the original places during the *Songkrant Festival* in order to perform meritorious services in different ways and give a meritorious part to the dead relatives. Additionally, it is a best chance for all family members to be once at home together in the same time. Hence, the government announced the *Songkrant Festival*, the 13th April as *Mahasongkrant Day*, the 14th as *Family Day* and the 15th as the *National Older Day*.

In order to celebrate the 220th Anniversary Year of Bangkok's foundation the Bangkok Municipality cooperated with the **Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)** organized "**Bangkok's Water World Festival**" dating the 7–15th April (2002) along the *Rajadamnoenklang* road up to *Sanam Luang*. On the opening day, more than a hundred thousand people both Thais and foreigners participated in the function presenting beautifully all Thai traditions. There were also the 83 cultural parades of the 76 provinces in countrywide. Those parades were brilliantly decorated with flowers, other Thai art-works, Thai classical dance and performers dressed the Thai traditional clothes showing the local unique cultures. Additionally, there are several ancient Thai traditional shows in the area of *Sanam Luang*. It has been expected that from this year the function would be organized constantly.¹⁵

In fact, every family member always looks forwards to the water-festival in order to be all present and pour the incensed water on the hands of eldest relatives including parents for the sake of asking for their blessing. It is a tradition that everyone should pay respects and show the filial devotion and obedience to the eldest relatives and parents, especially, the 15th of April regarded as the **National Older Day**. This is because in general day the new generation has not been at home due to an away-work. Furthermore, in the original places everyone does perform different kinds of meritorious deeds such as to give alms-bowl to monks through three-day celebration. At the same way, it is full of enjoyment with sprinkling water among friends and several kinds of local playing. It can be said that *the Songkrant Festival* bears a unique characteristic, which is unable to see in other countries except Thailand.

5. National Labour Day (May 1)

¹⁵ Information supported by the Thai TV Global Network, news hour April 7, 2002.

In all business concerns, there is one common element, i.e. human resources,¹⁶ or labour, which refers to the collectivity of workers.¹⁷ Labour force is regarded as a most important factor of a country development. It should be better to pay attention to all labourers with a great monetary and welfare facility; they also are to return with uncountable benefits.

In fact, in a year every government has provided lots of holidays to the labourers for their rest; but it is not enough and worthy with what in return they have done for proprietors concerned with the government. And in order to show a great attention to them, in Thailand the **National Labour Day** was supposed on the 1st of May. In regard to this, it is not only the **Thai National Labour Day** but also the **International Labour Day**.

As a great Buddhist country, the Thai workers never live without monk including novice, and monastery; and, before going to have a fully holiday they prefer giving food–alms to monks in morning. Some of them are to invite monks for a special breakfast or lunch in residence; while, some do offer in a nearby monastery. It is because sometimes it is very difficult for them to perform a meritorious service in common day because of a busy job. Meanwhile, some factory workers led by their manager invite monks to receive food–offerings in the factory and also keep ears to a sermon; then they spend the time for private lives.

6. Coronation Day (May 5)

The 5th May of every year has been regarded as an auspicious day for all Thais rejoicing to demonstrate the affection and loyalty to their beloved King, **His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej**. The present King, the 9th King of **Chakri Dynasty**, was crowned on the 5th May 1950. In regard to this, He has been regarded as the King who is longest on the throne in the world.

Formerly, in Thailand there was no ceremony to commemorate the Coronation Day on the 5th May but also it was of coronation ceremony that ordinary people did not aware of. Meanwhile, everyone knows the 5th May of every year; of course, it is one of the national holidays. All schools and official units are to rejoice in holding on coronation ceremony in order to demonstrate the affection and loyalty to the King regarded as the **Father of Land**. The ceremony is to start from organizing a suitable place where the Buddha statue and a royal portrait of the King could be properly placed. Definitely, for the Thai Buddhist, monks cannot be excepted before the process to perform every ceremony that may be held in the Thai society. In the morning, monks are to be invited to receive food–offerings in the area of organized place. All participators come together in the function ground and join in performing meritorious deeds; thereafter look towards the royal portrait of H.M. the King. The leader pays respects, lays a wreath and foregoes to sing the King's anthem.

In Bangkok, the capital, His Majesty the King does perform the merit–making ceremony at the **Audience Hall of Amarindra** for the sake of dedication to the former kings. The invited monks, holding a high Sangha–ranking, chant, provide a special sermon and perform a requiem on the deceased kings' royal ashes. Thereafter H.M. the King is to offer food to monks finished their chanting; then, the chief Brahmin read the proclamation of the **Coronation Day** and followed by a celebration of the royal Regalia. Besides, the Thai Army forces fire twice 21–gun salute for the sake of honour of the King. On the one hand, people performed valuable contribution to the Thai society will also be honoured and receive the present of royal decorations from His Majesty the King himself.

7. Visakhapuja Day (rest on the Lunar day)

¹⁶ S.A. Sherlekar, "et. al.," Industrial Organisation and Management, (3rd ed., (reprinted), Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1988), p. 269.

¹⁷ K.K. Ahuja, Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice, (New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1988), p. 7.

A most important Buddhist holiday is widely known as **Visakhapuja** falling on the full moon day of the 6th lunar month (or the 7th lunar month in the leap year), usually in May. It marks the day to commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death of **Lord Buddha**. Then every year the immense Buddhists have paid a great attention to take part in the **Visakhapuja**.

It has been conjectured that in Thailand the **Visakhapuja** ceremony has constantly been practiced since the initial appearance in the main land of Buddhism around the 3rd Buddhist century. But, there is no any source clearly mentioned this truth; however, it is believed that the **Visakhapuja** ceremony has been performed before the **Sukhothai period**, in which the Buddhism was vastly flourishing. During the **Sukhothai period**¹⁸ it is said that it was of a big celebration throughout the city full of light-decoration in every house. And also different kinds of flowers and several colours of flags were decorated in front of houses and monasteries. Besides, it had appeared that whole city was splendidly illustrious with lamplight, candle-light and fireworks; through whole day and night ordinary people were entertained with different kinds of musical instrument-plays. And they were enthusiastic to perform meritorious services like to observe the eight precepts, keep ears on sermons, offer foods to monks, do social works, release captured birds and fish, etc.

On the other hand, it has been recorded that the ceremony of **Visakhapuja** was first revived once again with the support of the **King Rama II, Phrabuddhalertlah Naphalai**. He gave order to his subjects in countrywide to light candle and do meritorious deeds for the sake of worshipping the Buddha for three days: the fourteenth and the fifteenth waning moon days and the first waxing moon day.

In the current year, the new generation remains keep on the ancient ceremony; meanwhile, some trends disappeared for many decades through the changes of social system. With the tide of modernization the Thai unique cultures has lost because Western ones have become influential in the Thai society more and more every moment. However, most Thai scholars are worrying about the case and campaigning in taking back the national unique cultures, for example, having an easily and common life, being not extravagant and the correct usage of Thai language, etc. Although this project will need more long-period to be proved the situation, but it would be better to do nothing.

In Bangkok, His Majesty the King as the **Religious Upholder** accompanied by royal family's members is to perform merit-making and religious ceremonies in the area of the **Emerald Buddha Temple** located in the Royal Palace, a most famous tourist place. He, in the morning of **Visakhapuja Day**, does offer alms-food and several facilities to a number of monks. And also in the evening, he once again leads to candlelit with flowers in hands and walk three times around the hall of the **Emerald Buddha Temple** where a large number of civilians come together with one mind. Thereafter he as a pious Buddhist takes keeping ears to a sermon preached by a high Sangha-ranking monk. Additionally, in the case he would be busy in some year he would order some of the royal family members to take his duty in performing **Visakhapuja** ceremony. While, every year one of the royal family members is to preside over the **Visakhapuja** ceremony at the *Buddha Molthon* (*Nakornpathom* province) built to commemorate in the occasion of 25th century anniversary year of Buddhism. At the same time, the ordinary people throughout the country enthusiastically perform meritorious services, such as, to observe the Five or the Eight Precepts, keep ears to sermons, get chanting and take part in three-time walking around the hall in a monastery. They also decorate the religious flag¹⁹ in the front of house. On the one hand, as the auspicious occasion of the anniversary day that the Buddha completely enlightened some takes chance to start to do new business with the hope of successfulness.

¹⁸ Asst. Prof. Sumet Methavidyakun, *Concept of Ritual*, Op. Cit., pp. 30-31.

¹⁹ It is the yellow coloured flag with symbol of doctrine-wheel (Dhammacakra).

Furthermore, a week before the **Visakhapuja Day** is regarded as “*The Week of Buddhism*” or “*the Week of Visakhapuja*” held by several Buddhist Organizations in the area of *Sanam Luang*, Bangkokians’ playing ground. There are different kinds of exhibition concerned Buddhism, not only in the present time but also historic; including the show of incense–burner–table decoration, monks’ preaching, children’s answering Dhamma–questions for reward and generally speaking on Buddhist topics by some great Buddhist scholars. Not only those but also there are lots of bookstalls concerned Buddhist texts written by many temporary Buddhist scholars, cassette tape–selling shops, as well as some show; including several kinds of charitable stores, chandlers and public facilities. Fortunately, every year it has been clearly seen that through a week long there are many people taking part in the **Week of Visakhapuja**. Furthermore, a great number of tourists also take this chance for visiting Thailand.

Additionally, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University accompanied by the United Nations has celebrated the Day of Vesak for eleven years continuously. There was an international conference in which Buddhists from more than 80 countries participated in both the university and the United Nations’ office in Bangkok, and the program ended at the *Buddha Molthon*.

On the other hand, the religious ceremony of the **Visakhapuja Day** will be performed similarly to the other two important Buddhist holidays: the **Maghapuja Day** and the **Asalhapuja Day**. That is to go to monastery for the sake of offering alms–food to monks in morning, observing precepts, hearing a sermon; and taking part in the evening’s three–time walking around the monastic hall. For the Thai it is a good aspect to do their duty as the Buddhist in order to adhere to the ancestor’s religious practice continuously. It is to show that the Thai Buddhism is still alive and flourishing in the main land as well as spreading to other countries, which is only hope to see this phenomenon.

8. Asalhapuja Day (rest on the Lunar day)

One day before the beginning of Buddhist Lent is known as the **Asalhapuja Day** falling in the full moon of the 8th lunar month (*Asalhamas*) around July. It was that day that the Lord Buddha preached the first sermon to his first group of disciples at the Deer Park known as *Isipatanamarigadayavana* (*Sarnath*) where seven events had first taken place. These are as the followings:

1) The First Sermon (*Dhammajakkappavattanasutta*) of the Lord Buddha had been delivered to the five ascetics (*Panjavaggis*): *Kondanna*, *Vappa*, *Bhattiya*, *Mahanama* and *Assaji*.

2) The first disciple gained enlightenment after the end of the First Sermon; he (Venerable *Annakondanna*) was the first one who could understand the first preaching of the Lord Buddha.

3) The completely perfection of the Triple Gems, viz. the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.

4) The first lay man devout who was the father of Venerable *Yasa*.

5) The first lay woman devout who was the mother of Venerable *Yasa*.

6) It was the first rainy season of the **Lord Buddha**, after enlightened as the **Exalted One**.

7) The first group of the Buddhist missionary consisted of 60 **Arahants** was altogether here before separately going out for the welfare and the benefits of gods and men.

The main point of the **First Sermon** is that the Buddhist monk should not cultivate the two extreme performances, i.e., indulgence in the sensual pleasure and the self–torment. Because these are the low and common practice, not belong to the *Ariyas* (the wise) but ordinary fellow and lead to degeneration. Meanwhile, he should do practice

the doctrine of mean (the **Middle Way** or the **Noble Eightfold Path**) consisting of the **Right View**, the **Right Thought**, the **Right Speech**, the **Right Action**, the **Right Livelihood**, the **Right Effort**, the **Right Mindfulness** and the **Right Concentration**. Later he propounded the **Four Noble Truths**, i.e., *Dukkha* (the suffering), *Samudaya* (the cause of suffering), *Nirodha* (the cessation of suffering) and *Magga* (the path leading to the cessation of suffering). Actually, we cannot exempt suffering but should exactly know and understand it, and also try to find out its real causes and correctly solve them at all. In fact, the *Magga* signifies The **Noble Eightfold Path**, which is regarded as the middle way for every social life. The **Noble Eightfold Path** is regarded as the sublime path (the Buddhist higher morality), which finally leads to attain the salvation or *Nibbāna* (the highest goal of Buddhism). The followings are some more details of the **Noble Eightfold Path**:—

1. The Right View (Sammādiṭṭhi)

The **Right View** regarded as the most important is the beginning point to observe in accordance with the **Middle Way (Majjhimāpaṭipadā)**²⁰ because a person without the right view cannot get right understanding before practicing. It is to help the practitioner to know what the **Right Thought** is, what the **Right Speech** is and what the **Right Action** is and so forth. The **Right View** is also meant to understand the **Four Noble Truths**, viz., the suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

According to The **Path of Purification (visuddhimagga)**, the right outlook frees a person from ignorance and leads him to authentic peace in life.

Seeing rightly is its characteristic, the setting forth, of the elements is its function, the dispelling of the darkness of ignorance is its manifestation. The path-factor which is possessed by one endowed with right outlook, which is associated with it and kills wrong aims and is the direction of the mind on the *Nibbāna* as the base is ‘right aims.’²¹ To cultivate right understanding, one must be mindful and aware. To develop awareness, one must find clarity. To see things clearly, one must find stillness and strength within. Inner development then depends upon building inner strength and clarity.²²

2. The Right Thought (Sammāsaṅkappa)

The **Right Thought** is to think of only the good things, i.e., the three wholesome thoughts (**Kusala-vitakka**) as follows:

- (1) Renunciation—thinking,
- (2) Thinking to get rid of ill—will, and
- (3) Thinking to get rid of harm.²³

3. The Right Speech (Sammāvācā)

The **Right Speech** is to avoid lying, slanderous speech, harsh speech and gossiping including several kinds of speech that may make other get pain, unhappiness and suffering.

4. The Right Action (Sammākammanta)

²⁰ Factually, in the Tipitaka the **Majjhimāpaṭipadā** is not only meant the Eightfold Noble Path.

²¹ Bhikku Nanamoli (tr.), *Visuddhimagga (The Path Of Purification)*, (London: The Pali Text Society, 1964), p. 605.

²² Sulak Sivaraksa, “et. al.” (ed.), *Socially Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium: Essay in Honor of the Ven. Phra Dhammapitaka (Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto) on His 60th Birthday Anniversary*, (Bangkok: The Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation for Children, 1999), p. 170.

²³ E.M. Hare (tr.), *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. III, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1988), p. 311.

The **Right Action** is basically is meant to observe the threefold good conduct comprising of abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct. At the same way, a certain one should not harm all kinds of living things, but spread a good wish toward them somehow. While, he abandons taking what is not given and has no intercourse with any girl.

5. The Right Livelihood (Sammā-ājīva)

The **Right Livelihood** signifies to avoid the wrong mode of livelihood (**Micchā-ājīva**) which are trickery, cajolery, insinuating, dissembling and rapacity for gain upon gain.²⁴ And also a Buddhist lay disciple should not do the following trades:–

- (1) Trade in weapons,
- (2) Trade in human beings,
- (3) Trade in flesh (trade in animals for meat),
- (4) Trade in spirits, and
- (5) Trade in poison.²⁵

6. The Right Effort (Sammāvāyāma)

Actually, the **Right Effort** is signified the great or perfect four efforts (**Sammappadhāna**) which are as follows:–

- (1) The effort of restraint,
- (2) The effort of abandoning (effort to overcome),
- (3) The effort of making–become (developing),
- (4) The effort of watching over (maintaining).²⁶

7. The Right Mindfulness (Sammāsati)

In Buddhism the **Right Mindfulness** is meant the four foundations of mindfulness (**Satipaṭṭhāna**) regarded as a most important way of practicing in order to attain the Nibbāna (*the Ultimate Happiness*). The four foundations of mindfulness are the contemplation of body, the contemplation of feeling, the contemplation of mind and the contemplation of mind-objects.

8. Right Concentration (Sammāsamādhi)

The concentration (**Samādhi**) means the mental state of being firmly fixed; it is the fixing of the mind on a single object.²⁷ The **Right Concentration (Sammāsamādhi)** is signified the Four Absorptions (**Jhānas**).

Whether many Thai people thought the Buddha's teachings were very old is often wrong; meanwhile, truly those are always fresh; and the wise remain practice those on every moment. And also the **Noble Eightfold Path**²⁸ is not only useful and helpful for the one who wishes to attain the highest goal in Buddhism but also for the ordinary people wishing to hold a happy life in this world. Then in daily life every one should practice Dhamma, which is immensely useful all times. The one used to study Dhamma is to know what should and should not do, and for him it is easier to look at the both sides of things when he was facing a difficult situation. Just try to do by yourself; then you will know this truth as the Buddha said *Ehi passiko* (come and see by yourself).

²⁴ I.B. Horner (tr.), *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. III, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), p. 118.

²⁵ E.M. Hare (tr.), *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. III, Op. Cit., p. 153.

²⁶ F.L. Woodward (tr.), *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, Vol. II, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1992), p. 17.

²⁷ A.P. Buddhaddatta Mahāthera, *English-Pali Dictionary*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publication, 1980), p. 97.

²⁸ See more details in Grissana Taruno (Buchagul), *The Concepts of Suffering in Theravada Buddhism: An Analytical Study*, (Thesis Submitted for Ph.D. Department of Philosophy & Religion, Banaras Hindu University, 1997), pp. 222-227.

Historically, in Thailand the **Asalhapuja** ceremony was firstly performed in 1958,²⁹ meanwhile the researcher conjectured that this ceremony has been performed since the Buddhism initially appeared in this area around the 3rd Buddhist Century, but there is no any obvious evidence. It is the ceremony that is to be held in order to commemorate the first Sermon, first group of Bhikkhu Sangha, as well as the first lay man and woman in Buddhism. In Thai society it is strongly believed that to do some business a good commence denotes a half part of success has already come; hence, many businessmen take this special occasion to begin some business.

In Thailand, however, the **Asalhapuja Day** is regarded as a most important day for all Buddhists in countrywide because it is the great duration of their meritorious deeds. In the day they all are enthusiastically to prepare several kinds of food, fruits as well as water including other needful things for monks and go to a monastery nearby for the sake of taking part in religious ceremony. Meanwhile, people do not pay attention to this day too much like the other Buddhist Holidays because it is very near to the Buddhist Lent Day (the next day after **Asalhapuja**); then they are looking for only the special occasion (will be explained next). Besides, the religious ceremony is performed similarly to the other **Buddhist Holidays** that is to offer alms–food monks in morning and take part in three–time walk around the monastery’s hall in evening. (See more details mentioned in the **Maghapuja Day**). On the one hand, people are enthusiastic to perform several kinds of meritorious services.

9. Buddhist Lent Day (rest on the Lunar day)

According to the Buddhist tradition, a day after the **Asalhapuja Day** is well known as the beginning of Buddhist Lent taking three months duration from the 1st till waning moon day of the 8th lunar month (or the 9th month in the leap year). The term “**Buddhist Lent**” denotes as a traditional rule of Buddhist monk to stay in one place through three months in the duration of rainy season.

As the Buddha said: “Monks, one should not enter upon the rains. Whoever should not enter upon (them), there is an offence of wrong-doing.”³⁰ Then it has been regarded as the ancient Buddhist tradition taken place since the time of the Lord Buddha around the 2nd to the 4th rainy season of the Lord Buddha after his enlightenment. It was the time of the Buddhism’s flourishing. During the Buddhist missionaries were going for the purpose of propagation in different places of ancient *Champudipa* it was rainy season, but they did not stop moving while other priests did. It was the six-man (Bhikkhus) group who had walked in the midst of villagers’ rice paddy getting damage a lot. Accordingly, the Buddha who was living in the *Veruvana* in *Rajagir* (presently in Bihar State) came to know the matter; later on, he had laid down the way of practice as a law for the Buddhist monk to stay only in one place for three–month of rainy season. In regard to this, monks are not allowed to stay in another place, however, they having the necessities get permission to leave dwelling for a while but must return to the same place within 7 days.³¹

Then it has been the tradition for Buddhist monk to stay only in one place through rainy season in order to get trained in proper way for higher level of study or practice. It constantly has been practiced in the Thai Buddhist society for centuries ago long. And also it is a great deal time for the lay Buddhist people (*Upasaka* and *Upasika*) to hold a good chance to offer food and needful things as well as other facilities to a large number of monks through three months long. It is regarded as a valuable time for the Buddhists to perform several kinds of meritorious

²⁹ Office of the National Culture Commission (The Ministry of Education), *Thai Life: Our Ancestors*, (Bangkok: Kurusabha Publishing House, 1994), p. 120.

³⁰ I.B. Horner (tr.), *The Book of the Discipline*, Vol. IV, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), p. 184.

³¹ See more details in I.B. Horner (tr.), *The Book of the Discipline*, Vol. IV, (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1993), pp. 183-207.

services. For the lay Buddhists, they can take this chance to observe the Eight Precepts through a long distance of three months. Many take this great chance to give up smoking or drinking (alcohol), including to stop doing other bad or useless things. Meanwhile, they try to become to be more helpful for the ones around them and live by observing at least the **Five Precepts**.

Traditionally, the Thai Buddhists like to send their sons to a monastery for the sake of getting trained the Buddhist Ethics as a monk for the duration of Buddhist Lent. And it has been appeared that in countrywide there is a large number of Buddhist monks during this three-month. Then in monastery the special training course, i.e., general basic Buddhist Ethics including the needful virtues for common life, will be organized for the new comers through three months. Meanwhile, the ordinary people cannot gain free time to have studied such training course. Accordingly, a man who spends a part of his life in a monastery as a monk will acquire a greater benefit than the one who does not do so. At least, when facing some difficult or melancholy events in his life, he knows how to look at the bright sides of things; and also he looks calmly in the middle of terrible events. However, there are countless benefits in practicing Dhamma (the Buddhist Ethics).

On the beginning day of Buddhist Lent, there has been a tradition to offer candles called “*Tian Pansa*”³² to monks for the sake of worshipping through three months in monasteries. The two candles symbolize the Dhamma or wisdom in Buddhism; while, the three-joss-sticks mean the Buddha, and flowers specify the Sangha. Then it has been strongly believed that to offer candles would provide wisdom, in return, to the one done. In Bangkok, also H.M. the King accompanied by the Royal family—members offers the *Tian Pansa* to all royal monasteries.

Additionally, in *Ubonrajathani* province (Northeastern Thailand) there is a big unique ceremony of candle. It is said that initially villagers donated wax as much as they were able to do for the sake of molding a big candle. Later on, it became one kind of competition in order to offer the beautiful candles to the Sangha. Through a period of time and the plentifulness of agricultural products villagers had thoughtful development of the decorating candle parade and skillful engraving the candle. Currently you can see several magnificent candle parades appearing through the ceremony of candle in *Ubonrajathani* province. The big candles and waxes are to be engraved as several aspects concerned with Buddhism; for example, the Buddha image including the great beings, the most distinguished disciples, deities, castles, elephants, king of *nagas* as well as other animals. It is skillful art joined Thai with Laos Buddhist arts harmoniously. Every year there are many people taking part in the ceremony of candle well-known among the tourists from both inland and overseas.

In fact on the beginning day of **Buddhist Lent**, it is the suitable time for offering monk yellow loin-clothes (for the use of taking bath). This tradition has been performed through centuries since the Buddha’s time when he was staying in *Puppharam* (*Shravasti*) donated by the great lay Buddhist lady namely *Visakha*. In regard to this, the great lay Buddhist woman was the first one who offered this kind of cloth to the Buddhist monk in Buddha’s time; then when this season come all Buddhists enthusiastically do in the same trend with her.

In Thai society the season of Buddhist Lent has been regarded as the great season of meritorious deeds for the Buddhists because they can do perform several kinds of meritorious services through the season. In current year, it appears that a large number of people prefer to make merit within the Buddhist Lent. A probable reason is that their relative or someone whom they know has become a monk in the monastery. On the one hand, due to the Thai people strongly believe in the next life; then in order to be born with a good better life they would like to perform some meritorious deeds during the three-month of Buddhist Lent. As the Buddha has eloquently

³² *Tian Pansa* is the name of a couple of big candles that can be lighted in the front of the incense burner table in order to worship the Dhamma of Lord Buddha through three months long.

declared: “Just as the seed is sown, so will the fruit be obtained. The doer of good receives good; the doer of evil receives evil.”³³

In the beginning day they are to offer candles called “*Tian Pansa*” and yellow loin-clothes including several kinds of food and needful things to monks in nearby monastery. Actually they do support monks with food and other facilities through the long period of Buddhist Lent that enable them to strengthen their mind in order to stop doing evils or all bad things but perform only goodness, for example, observing the Five or Eight Precepts, and so forth.

In the middle of **Buddhist Lent**, there is a ceremony known as *Sart* (Sanskrit = *Shrath*) which is to be held for the sake of performing meritorious act in order to dedicate the acquired merits to the deceased relatives according to Buddhist tradition. In Thai society the *Sart* ceremony falling around the end of the tenth lunar month has been performed constantly for many centuries ago (before the Buddha’s time). It has been strongly believed that at the night end of the tenth lunar month the prince of devils would allow all hell-beings to get a great chance to come back to this world for accepting the meritorious part from their relatives. Unfortunately, if relatives did not perform any meritorious deed today the deceased ones (spirits) would harm them or appear to them as a form or unheard terrible sound.

Conjecturally, the ceremony of *Sart* has been influenced with Indian *Shrath* one since centuries ago when Indian culture flew into the main land formerly called *Siam*. Therefore, the purposes of the ceremonial performance must be different. The **Thai Sart** expects to dedicate the acquired merits to the deceased relatives in accordance with Buddhist tradition, while the Indian *Shrath* is a kind of funeral rite in honour of the departed spirits of dead relatives observed at fixed periods and on occasions of rejoicing as well as mourning.³⁴ According to the ancient Thai royal tradition, there is a special dessert mixing young rice and several types of fruits boiled with sugar, several kinds of cane sugar, cream cheese, *ghee*, butter, milks and so forth. It can be said that this kind of dessert traditionally called *Khaothip* or *Khaokrayathip* is the assorted dessert because several things were mixed together and cooked for few hours. The term *Khaothip* stands for enriched rice or vita rice. Traditionally, the virgin girl is to take the responsibility to cook the *Khaokrayathip*. In the same way, for ordinary people this kind of dessert called *Krayasart* preparing from rice, bean, sesame and sugar or cane sugar cooked into a sticky paste and put in the open air. Generally, the *Krayasart* is quite sweet; then traditionally it is to be eaten with ripe dainty banana.

After finished cooking the *Krayasart* in *Sart Day* people are to take it with ripe dainty banana including several kinds of delicate food and fruits to offer monk in nearby monastery. When the proper time come the spiritual guide traditionally called *Maggadayaka* is to be a leader in preying the worship-word towards the Triple Gems; then ask the senior monk for *Pancha Silas* (Five Precepts) and offer food. During almost monks are having meal one monk is supposed to preach a Sermon concerning *Sart Day* for some period; then all monks give blessing and people dedicate the acquired merits to the deceased relatives. Afterwards, most people get enjoyed food together; in regard to this, traditionally they need to get permission from monks before taking any thing there; otherwise it will become the sin. Meanwhile, sometimes many remains will be taken for school children or the poor ones including other social welfare units. After that people take another part of *Krayasart* wrapped with a banana leaf and put on the temple’s wall or on the trees in monastery or in area of the rice paddy. In fact, it has strongly believed that all hell-beings would come and have those thoroughly; it is also dedicated for the spirits who have no relatives. Although

³³ Sunthorn Plamintr, Getting to Know Buddhism, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1994), p. 110.

³⁴ For more details see in Suryakanta, Sanskrit-Hindi-English Dictionary, (New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd., 1995), p. 594.

the *Sart* rite is to be called in different names in each region of Thailand but the main purpose is the same that is to dedicate the acquired merits to the deceased relatives.

Thus, it can be said that the duration of three-month in Buddhist Lent is the great and valuable period of time in the Thai life because they are able to do have chance to perform several kinds of meritorious deeds. However, during these three months of **Buddhist Lent** in the Northeastern portion there are several kinds of meritorious acts; for example, a ceremony locally called *Bun Khaopradabdin* falling at the end of the 9th lunar month, *Bun Khaosak* the midst of the 10th lunar month. Both similarly to the pure *Thai Sart* are the ceremony that is to make merit and dedicate the acquired merits to deceased relatives. At the same time, entire people are able to pay respects to their mother on the National Mother Day.

10. Her Majesty the Queen's Birthday (August 12)

The 12th August, widely known as the **National Mother's Day**, is the anniversary birthday of **Her Majesty the Queen Sirikit**, *Somdej Phranangchao Phraboromrajininarth* who is widely regarded as the Mother of people in entire nation. It is because she is not only the Queen who holds a happy life in Palace, but she always performs hard work just only for happiness of people.

Accompanying **His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej** on more than a thousand of Royal Projects throughout countrywide, she has paid a great attention in order to uplift the well-being of the poor. Through long decades ago she did not only stay in the palace but always accompanies with the King to dedicate themselves for the benefits and happiness of people. She has never feared to face all difficulties and obstacles on the way to visit people in remote areas of provinces throughout the country. Through these visits to provincial and rural areas, she has been able to gain valuable insight into people's lives and problems; thus it caused the ways out to solve those problems with establishment of organizations.

The **Support Foundation** is one of the rare organizations whose work fosters goodwill among the community, enables poor people to find a means to earn a stable income and has saved numerous traditional Thai crafts from almost certain extinction.³⁵ Moreover, she who always works hard for the development of the country has become a mother-like figure to entire people of the country.

Then the 12th August of every year, in order to show their affection and loyalty to her all Thais come together with one heart to hold a big celebration. Houses and buildings become brilliant and magnificent with light and flag decoration. In the front of houses ordinary people are to place the incense burn table where the figure of H.M. the Queen is to be placed on with flower-balls in shape of lotus bud, decorated with lights and national flag including a bunch of white Jasmine flowers symbolizing mother's pure true love. In the morning there will be the religious rite that is to offer alms-food to a number of monks including novices in community. Many organizations both private and official together with one heart hold **Mother's Day Fair** in their place in order to pay respects to their mothers. The **Mother's Day Fair** consists of several kinds of shows dealing with mother's story and competition in poet-reading. Traditionally, at home all good children with a bunch of the white jasmine flowers and some gift in hands step up to their mother and pay respects to her; in return the mother will give blessing to her children. Consequently, it is a good custom for the relationship between family members to live together happily and peacefully, effecting community or society and also the nation. It is because the stability and unity of the nation are based on the strength of the small unit that is family.

11. Buddhist Lent's End Day (rest on the Lunar date)

³⁵ David Keen, "Her Majesty the Queen's Foundation," in *Sawasdee*, Vol. 25, (Bangkok: Thai Airways International Public Company Limited, August 1996), p. 19.

The end of **Buddhist Lent** falling on the 1st waning day of the 11th lunar month is traditionally called *Orkpansa* meaning the end of rainy season. It is well known as the day that monks in a monastery give each other a great chance to admonish each other, showing democratic system in Buddhism. Normally, monk in Buddhism especially Thai is highly supercilious and self-opinionated one; meanwhile, this ceremony helps to destroy those feelings. They make a promise to each other without harbour resentment, which enables the juniors to admonish seniors somehow.

In Thailand the religious rite has been constantly performed along with the Buddhist Lent ceremony for centuries ago. All Buddhist people are enthusiastic to perform a special merit-making locally called *Takbadthevolohana*³⁶ to be held in the morning of Buddhist Lent End especially in Bangkok. Almost organizations and schools both private and official hold the religious rite that is to offer alms-food to a number of monks. In countrywide some villages also do in their community; meanwhile, some monastery like **Wat Phrabuddhabath** (Saraburi province) organizes a special *Takbadthevolohana* that is to offer flowers instead of alms-food, which is locally called *Takbad-dokmai*. In Thailand this place is very famous to perform this ceremony, and many people like to participate in every year. It has been firmly believed that through performing *Takbad-dokmai* they could acquire lots of spiritual merits.

During the period of time, in Southern Thailand there is a famous ceremony of festooned boats in a parade traditionally called *Chakphra* or *Lakphra* in order to worship the Lord Buddha. *Prof. Sutthivong Pongpaiboon*³⁷ cited that the ceremony of floating parade has been continuously performed in Southern Thailand since ancient time. The Southern pious Buddhists especially in *Nakornsridhammarat* province are to come together with one heart to magnificently decorate the boats on which a local sacred Buddha image is placed with several kinds of flowers and Thai-style artworks. In regard to this, it is also of a competition between communities within the province and becomes more exciting event for visitors from both inland and overseas.

On the other hand, in Northeastern Thailand there are many different ceremonies being held during the *Orkpansa* day. For example, annually every province alongside the *Maekhong River* is to hold a unique ceremony locally *Lai Reua Fai* (Illuminating Boat Floatation), most famous in *Nakornphanom* province. It is aimed to worship the Lord Buddha, who was anciently coming down from the *Tavatingsa Realm*³⁸ where he preached his former mother the Abhidhamma meaning *the higher doctrine*,³⁹ the special Dhamma.⁴⁰ In the Canon itself the word means “special dhamma,” i.e. the Doctrine pure and simple (without admixture of literary treatment or personalities, etc.)...⁴¹

³⁶ *Takbadthevolohana* means the name of ceremony performed to offer alms-food to the monks including novices in the occasion of the end of Buddhist Lent. Meanwhile, people living in Patumthani province are to perform this alms-food-offering within a month after the Buddhist Lent's end.

³⁷ Prof. Sutthivong Pongpaiboon (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Southern Thailand*, Vols. 8, (Bangkok: Amrintra Printing, 1968), p. 3153.

³⁸ One of the six heavens of the sense-sphere consisting of *Catummaharajika* (the realm of the Four Great Kings), *Tavatingsa* (the realm of the Thirty-three Gods), *Yama* (the realm of the Yama Gods), *Tusita* (the realm of the satisfied gods), *Nimmanarati* (the realm of the gods who rejoice in their own creations), and *Paranimitavasavatti* (the realm of gods who lord over the creation of others). C.f. Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto), *Dictionary of Buddhism*, (9th ed., Bangkok: Mahachulalongkorn Press, 2000), pp. 231-232.

³⁹ *Pali-Thai-English-Sanskrit Dictionary*, 4th ed., Compiled by His Royal Highness Prince Kitiyakara Kromphra Chandaburinarunath, (Bangkok: Mahamakut Rajavidyalaya, 1994), p. 76.

⁴⁰ T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993), p. 65.

⁴¹ G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, Vol. I, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998), p. 137.

The ceremony of *Lai Reua Fai* in *Nakornphanom* province has been regarded as the most famous **Illuminating Boat Floatation** of which the boats are to be wonderfully and artfully decorated. Bamboo used as its shape has been skillfully created in form of various symbols concerning the Nation, the Religion and the Monarch (King) including Thai cultures. Traditionally, the ceremony of *Lai Reua Fai* is to be performed in the evening of *Orkpansa* day when all communities are ready to float their illuminating boats. In this ceremony there is a great deal number of people participate joyfully. And also every year in *Nongkai* province there are lots of visitors pouring to see an exciting phenomenon locally called *Bangfaipayanag* (the skyrocket of the *Naga*). It is unexplainable phenomenon when a number of a thousand or more fire-balls were radiating up from the midst of *Maekhong River*, taking around three to six hours in some year. It happened once a year only after the sunset of the end of Buddhist Lent. In this year (21st October 2002) there were many people flock to see the phenomenon caused the big traffic jam on the road to *Nongkai* province. Meanwhile, there were a few number of fire-balls has been seen in the first night because of a big storm; but uncountable ones in a night later. It has been strongly believed that the *nagas* made the skyrockets in order to worship the **Lord Buddha**.

Duration of one month after the end of **Buddhist Lent** is traditionally regarded as the periodical time of *Kathin* function that is a ceremony performed in order to offer monks the yellow robes. According to the Buddha's Order, monks have been anciently allowed to seek shroud for making robe within a month after **Buddhist Lent**; meanwhile, they faced difficulties in finding out some shroud in the graveyard or garbage heap. Then many Buddhists considered the matter and asked for permission from the **Lord Buddha** to offer monks some shroud (cloth) for making robe; and later on it has been known as *Kathin* festival. *Visakha*, a great lay Buddhist woman in the Buddha's time, was the first one who offered *Kathin* robe to monks. In regard to this, monk has been allowed to accept *Kathin* robe once a year; it then is firmly believed that they would acquire lots of spiritual merits through offering *Kathin* robe to monk.

According to Discipline (*Phra Vinaya*), however, the one who wishes to offer the *Kathin* robe needs to give information in advance in order to cite that this year the *Kathin* robe-offering in the monastery had already been reserved. On the one hand, there are two kinds of *Kathin*⁴² viz. *Culkathin* standing for robe would be made within one day, and *Mahakathin* standing for *Kathin* consists of several things. At the same time, the first kind of *Kathin* is very difficult to be done because in one day the doer must start to spin cotton into yarn, weave and make the three robes (*Tricivarani*) composing of double-thick outer robe, inner robe and upper robe. Accordingly, in the current year it has already disappeared since decades ago due to those difficulties and also the technological development; the doer himself does not need to make the robes. In the opposite way, *Mahakathin* popularly plays a great role especially in the current Thai society because doers have unlimited time to prepare *Kathin* robe. Besides, the most important things in offering *Kathin* consist of alms-bowl, the three robes, girdle, filtered cloth, needle, and razor; traditionally, those are called the eight necessities (Pali = *Attha-parikharas*). Currently, in the Thai society it is of some misunderstand to offer several things; meanwhile, some are not necessary and useless for monks.

In Thailand the *Kathin* festival regarded as an occasional making-merit has been continually performed since the ancient time because it is the Buddhist tradition similarly to the Order of Lord Buddha. Every year almost people prefer to perform this kind of meritorious deed, then, you can see a number of *Kathin* parades⁴³ moved from Bangkok towards provinces throughout the country.

⁴² Phramaha Preecha Parinyano, *The Ancient Ceremonies of Isan Thai*, (Ubonratchathani: Siridhamma Printing House, 1987), p. 149.

⁴³ Those are the big buses of which 80-85 seats are available in each bus.

Loykrathong Festival is a most beautiful one to be held at the last day of *Kathin-offering* season. It is to float a lotus-shaped vessel and worship a river. Initially, it was **Thaosrichulalak** (*Noppamash*), a chief royal consort of the **King Lithai** (*Phramahadhammaraja I*) of the **Sukhothai Kingdom**, who had introduced this type of traditional festivity in the royal palace.

These are just only some parts of the Thai customs performed within a month after the end of Buddhist Lent; however, here it is like information while more details cannot be given to all. On the one hand, there are several kinds of unique subcultures practiced in some small ethnic groups in many parts of the countries; and also those symbolize the Thai national culture.

12. Chulalongkorn Day (October 23)

The constitution defines the power and position of the King, who also enjoys many prerogatives. He is perceived as representing the soul of the nation and the focal point of national loyalty and national cohesion, who transcends all partisan and sectorial interests and conflicts.⁴⁴ Through the long Thai history there have been several great rulers who are always in memory of the Thais. *Ram Kamhaeng*, the Great of Sukhothai, *Somdej Phranaresuan*, the Great of Ayutthaya, *King Taksin*, the Great of Thonburi and the *King Chulalongkorn* are the examples of those great rulers.

The **King Chulalongkorn** (*Rama V*) was born on September 20, 1853,⁴⁵ succeeded to the throne after the death of his father, **King Mongkut** (*Rama IV*) in 1868 and reigned until 1910.⁴⁶ During this period, it can be said that it was a great period of reformation in aspects of the Thai social system. He was the first ruler to abolish slave system in Thai society and westernized the country. The educational, administrative and political systems including communication in country were reformed in the same trend with Western countries. In addition, the Thai railway was first taken place in this period. Although he himself would do reformation of administrative system in the Thai society but also he was conservator of the old royal tradition, Paternalism practiced during the **Sukhothai** period. Through this he with unknown form extensively traveled throughout the country in order to investigate all conditions in states; then faced people's problems he found the way out. It made the relationship between him and his people become close more and more. However, it is quite difficult to discuss all of what he had done for the Thais who just know only those are countless and incomparable. Accordingly, the Thais have regarded him as one of the most beloved Thai Kings and widely called "*Somdej Phrapiyamaharaj*" because of his great kind heart. Every Thai has firmly believed that ones paying respects to his picture (or statue) would be provided with a good luck, wealth and successfulness somehow.

Thus, when the 23rd of October well-known as the anniversary day of his death come on every year people enthusiastically prepare several things for offering alms–food to monks in morning and lay punch of flowers at his picture or statue. Through this they believe in miraculous power of the beloved King. Therefore, it appears that a number of Bangkokians often do worshipping the picture of the beloved King, especially at his equestrian statue in the front of Royal Plaza. There the royal family members preside over the religious ceremony, pay respects and lay wreaths at the equestrian statue of the late believed King; and also many people have participated in the ceremony.

Moreover, people throughout the country with one heart organize the ceremony to offer alms–food to monks, keep ears to a sermon in the morning; afterwards, lay wreaths in the front

⁴⁴ Alexandra R. Kapur-Fic, *Thailand: Buddhism, Society and Women*, (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1998), p. 35.

⁴⁵ Thanapol Chadchaidee, *Essays on Thailand*, (7th ed., Bangkok: Thaichreun Printing, 1999), p. 38.

⁴⁶ Bradley Winterton, *The Insider's Guide to Thailand*, (Hong Kong: CFW Publishers Ltd., 1989), p.

of the beloved King's picture and sing the National Anthem. This ceremony is to be organized in order to demonstrate the loyalty to monarchic institution of the Thai people.

13. His Majesty the King's Birthday (December 5)

In Thai society, the **Monarchical Institution** is the one of the most three important institutions (i.e. the Nation, Religion and the Monarch) symbolizing the national solidarity and stability. It can be said that these three institutions are the highest institutions of the Thai nation that the whole nation honors over the life with the sense of respect and admiration. In order to protect the three institutions, people of the nation yield to sacrifice oneself as mentioned in a part of the Thai national song (Anthem) that...*sacrifice one's life for independence of the country*... In current year the **King Bhumibol Adulyadej**, the Ninth King of the **Chakri Dynasty**, is symbol of the **Monarchical Institution**.

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the United States of America, on Monday the 5th December 1927, being the third and youngest child of Their Royal Highness Prince and Princess **Mahidol** of Songkla and grandson in direct line of His Majesty King **Chulalongkorn** or Rama V of the Royal House of **Chakri**. **Prince Mahidol** passed away when his youngest son was only a little past two years of age and after a period of primary schooling in Thailand, he went with his family to Switzerland for further education. He was already studying Sciences at Lusanne University when the death of his elder brother **King Ananda Mahidol** in Bangkok on 9 June 1946 changed the course of his life completely when the Law of succession bestowed upon him the arduous but challenging function of the Thai Crown. His Majesty decided to go back to Switzerland for another period of study, but this time in the subject of Political Science and Law in order to equip himself with the proper knowledge of Government.

His Majesty married **Mom Rajawongse Kitiyakara** at a ceremony presided over by **Her Majesty Queen Sawang Vadhana**, the paternal grandmother of His Majesty at Sra Patum Palace in Bangkok on 28 April 1950. The Coronation of Their Majesties was held in the Grand Palace on 5 May 1950 and His Majesty became the first Thai monarch to be presented with the water of consecration by a representative of the Parliament.

After the presentation of the Royal Regalia, Royal Weapons and Royal Paraphernalia on the Patrabutr Throne the newly crowned King pronounced that:

"We will reign with righteousness, for the benefits and happiness of the Siamese people" and thus vowed to dedicate himself to rule the country "with righteousness" not for the glory of himself or his family, but for the "benefits and happiness" of the people in his trust.⁴⁷

His Majesty is caters to the full to all the Buddhist traditions of Thailand. His addresses and advises often quote the Buddhist scripture and the basis of all his thoughts and actions. The Constitution also appoints him as the Defender of all Faiths in Thailand and he carries out this latter duty in a spirit of complete tolerance.⁴⁸

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej whose name means "Strength of the Land Incomparable Power" set himself from the beginning of His reign to analyze and find the true circumstances of the task at hand in order to devise the best approach and then try to accomplish the task in the best possible manner. His sense of involvement, be it in small or significant duties, is always so total that he would never feel relieved until each duty is carried out to his complete satisfaction. Emphasis is given by His Majesty, in particular, to the close contact which he holds with the ordinary Thai people in all corners of the realm and through extended tours or brief but

⁴⁷ M.R. Putrie Viravaidya, "His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand," in Festival of Thailand in India, Published by Office of National Culture Commission on the occasion of the Celebrations of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Golden Jubilee, (Bangkok: Religious Printing Press, 1997), p. 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

frequent visits the King, often with the Queen at his side, has been to everyone of the 76 provinces.⁴⁹ At the same time he would emphasize to the local population the necessity of self improvement and the importance of the basic factors of life such as education and health so that at least the level of their general welfare could be improved.⁵⁰

His Majesty has given attention and consideration to reforestation with a goal for replenishing destroyed forests for the preservation of watersheds and natural reservoirs. Crop substitution programmes in the north has served to eliminate gradually the growth of opium poppies which used to be widespread among the hill tribes, for the agricultural incomes earned through the Royal Projects substantially exceed the price which hill tribesmen used to acquire through selling of opium. Elsewhere His Majesty's ingenuity and intellectual leadership in analyzing the problems of land reclamation and the usage of arable land to its fullest content led to the instigation of land development projects with infrastructures necessary for agriculture such as the construction of weirs and dams for watershed management and flood control, cropping and pasture development, farm ponds and fish ponds, as well as breeding of cattle and utilization of waste products for the improvement of the soil.

Mention must also be made of His Majesty's initiative in devising the Artificial Rain-making Project to provide water to arid areas in order to sustain crops beset by drought and the promoting of the digging of drainage canals most of which are designed to mitigate in vast areas of paddy land and some of which are designed to reclaim swamp land for allocation into cooperative villages under an integrated scheme of land and community development to enhance the livelihood and well-being of the people of Thailand. The dredging of existing canals to act as sumps in flood prone areas has also been suggested to the relevant authorities while His Majesty's invention of an aerator to alleviate the problems of water pollution has served to benefit members of the general public.⁵¹ On the one hand, the most famous royal project being known worldwide is the New Theory or the Self-sufficient Economy that is very helpful in East Timor and paying a great role in Afghanistan after early discuss between Thai and Britain Governments. Therefore, there are uncountable royal projects processed just only the benefits and happiness of the people of Thailand. Accordingly, His Majesty is not only the King ruling the Kingdom but he always acts like a father of entire people.

Then, on his anniversary birthday the Thais not only in the Kingdom but also in overseas are with one heart to organize honored function demonstrating their affection and loyalty to him. This occasion also drives the Thais to perform several kinds of meritorious deeds; for example, offering arms-bowl to monks, giving lives to captured animals, and so forth. All buildings and houses including monasteries are magnificently and brilliantly decorated with lights, flags, and several kinds of flowers. Through the big celebration the Thai Government announced the 5th of 1960 as the National Day from which formerly the 24th June commemorated the 1932 Revolution. In addition, whole number of Thai people have performed meritorious deeds and spread best wishes toward him for the sake of his good health and happiness. Long-live the King.

14. Constitution Day (December 10)

Through the 1932 Socio-political Revolution had made Thailand that previously was absolute monarchy become constitutional monarchy regarded as Western modern system of democracy. The 1932 Revolution was taken place on the 24th June during the reign of **King Rama VII** by a group of people called "*Kanarassadorn*" under leadership of Colonel *Phrayaphaholpholphayuhasena*.⁵² As well-known that during 1928-1935 world was facing

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Sak Phasuknirantara, *Administration of Thailand*, (Bangkok: The State Council Press, 1971), p. 68.

economic crisis, and Thailand was one of those countries faced the economic crisis. It was a reason that *Kanarassadorn* had revolved on early morning of the 24th June 1932.

Afterward, the Thai Constitution was issued on 26th June but used temporarily till the 10th December of same year the real issue had come into upon promulgation. It has been regarded as the first Thai Constitution, which was formally promulgated thereafter. However, the previous Constitution was already admonished and another is to be issued from time to time (the current one is the 16th). In regard to this, it can be said that the latest Constitution undoubtedly belonged to the ordinary people because representatives of people from all walks had drafted a bill of the current Constitution promulgated in early 1997. Additionally, the political powers are decreased while individual can hold increasing in rights. Thus, it should be said that the present Constitution is democratically constitution of the people, by the people and for the people.

Hence, traditionally the 10th December is to be announced as an official holiday in order to commemorate the day of graciously conferring the First National Constitution. Entire people are to immensely celebrate by decorating houses, offices including monasteries and other buildings with flags, lights and several kinds of flowers beautifully and brilliantly. By the way, as the Buddhist country, the religious rite is also to be held that is to offer alms–food to monks, keep ears to a sermon and perform other meritorious deeds.

15. New Year's Eve (December 31)

The end of year is an official holiday continuing the **New Year Day** that is of three–day duration (31 Dec. to 1-2 Jan.). It is the day to prepare several needful things for the coming day, but mostly it is to prepare for performing meritorious services like offering alms–food on the New Year Day or privately offer breakfast or lunch to a number of monks at home. In regard to this, it has been appeared that some year number of monks was not enough for the need of people; later on many communities joined each other to offer fine food to monks in their communities. Naturally, the Thais like joyful and delightful matters, then, generally there will be entertaining parties in countrywide.

As mentioned above that during this period, as a Buddhist country, popularly several fairs concerning Buddhism are to be organized throughout the country, especially in provinces. It is clear that around a decade ago Thai society has become consumer instead of producer like in the ancient time. Currently, many monasteries in Thailand like to create materials more than to produce qualitative religious person, accordingly, you can see Thai monasteries are full of magnificent buildings presenting the national arts. The Thais, by nature, are philanthropists and they intend towards Buddhist monasteries symbolizing their faith in order to do meritorious acts. Hence, when monastery organized a fair to make a building, many people flock into the monastery in accordance with their faith. In regard to this, traditionally villagers who migrated for working in Bangkok prefer to return home during this special occasion with a parade of *phapa*, a religious ceremony to offer yellow robe to monks after *Kathin* season. Mostly, the real aim is only to collect a sum of money for the sake of making a religious building in the monastery.

Then, among acquainted ones they might make a promise to each other that every year they would do any help for the village of each respectively with a parade of *phapa*, generally known as *social tax*. It is a very good tradition to new generation of villagers to look back into their origin; at least they will never forget where they come from and try to develop their home–places for the well–being. It is an important factor providing the integration (unity) and solidarity in community. Therefore, the researcher would like to suggest that do not neglect to create qualitative products to our beloved community in order to support the stability and solidarity of the nation.

Thus, although generally speaking the New Year's Eve will be the end of year but it looks like a good beginning for New Year of Thai life, resulting to live together

harmoniously, peacefully and happily. Through this it is meant that their existence becomes precious in itself, affecting the majority of national people providing stability and solidarity of the nation.

Summary

Here it can be summarized that people from several countries consider Thailand as the *Land of Culture* because the Thai society is converging–place of world cultures as a result of its easiness to accept other cultures. In the Thai society there are several kinds of unique customary cultures constantly practiced through a very long history.

In a year, all Thais are very joyful with a number of festivals, functions and fairs presenting the Thai cultural genius. The way of Thai life is inseparably connected with Buddhism from birth to death. Having a newborn child, the parents approach a monk for an auspicious name for him. Children are taught to pray and pay homage to the **Triple Gems** (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 (*Pansa*).

Additionally, as explained above all the national festivities and custom are connected with Buddhism, the State Religion. It then can be said 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, stability and happiness 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.

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