

THE ROLE OF KING MONGKUT IN IMPROVEMENT OF BUDDHISM IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this thesis are 1) to study development of Buddhism in Thailand 2) to study development of Buddhism in the reigns of King Rama III and King Mongkut 3) to integrate development of Buddhism in the reign of King Mongkut 4) to propose a new approach in creating new knowledge about ‘development models of Buddhism in Thailand in the reign of King Mongkut.’ This research is a qualitative research through analyzation of data from the Pali Canon, Commentaries, texts and relevant documents as the principle source of data and also conducted a deep interview with 15 Buddhist scholars and historians.

The results of the thesis were found that:

1. Buddhism in Thailand is the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lankan lineage which have been adhered as a national religion of Thailand respectively from the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Rattankosin periods to the present day.
2. Buddhism in the reign of King Rama III was the original Buddhism or traditional Buddhism which was adhered by the most of the population. Whereas

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Buddhism in the reign of King Mongkut principally went through a massive reformation. The reformation of Buddhism covered both on Buddhist studies and practices. The reformation took in different aspects: on educational perspective of Buddhist studies and practices, on collections of the Tipitaka texts to its completion, on teaching Buddhism both to monks and layman to get a right knowledge and understanding particularly focused on education and producing religious personals.

3. King Mongkut's integration with the development of Buddhism in Thailand has 4 dimensions: textual, educational, creedal, and practical. This conduces to gain a new knowledge about King Mongkut and development of Buddhism in Thailand on 3 aspects i.e. knowledgeable, disciplinary, and meditateness. Knowledgeable means in the level of the primary development process one must develop proficiency in knowledge, mastering the right knowledge and become an expert. Disciplinary means discipline oneself as well as strictly follow disciplines according to doctrines and disciplines. Moreover, this has to go with having a proper discernment and belief which must be along the right view. Meditateness means minding in meditational practice. In case of monastics they must mind in the practice of Samtha and Vipassana meditations. In case of layman they must mind in Dhamma practice i.e. keeping precepts and developing meditation. One who follows this proper practice is the one who is considered to be a Dhamma practitioner or holding on to the Dhamma i.e. the right principle which is labeled as Dhammayuttika. 4. New knowledge we gained from King Mongkut's integration with the development of Buddhism in Thailand is the KDM Model.

Keywords: King Mongkut, Improvement, Buddhism

1. INTRODUCTION

Both schools of Buddhism, namely, Theravada and Mahayana, were introduced into Thailand, but it is Theravada Buddhism that has been continuously

adhered by Thai people ever since the Sukhothai period till the present period of Ratanakosin. Historically, all the ruling monarchs in all periods are devout Buddhists, and one of their important responsibilities is to patronize Buddhism in the fields of scriptural texts, personnel and requisites. The promotion of the Buddhist scriptures involves the collection, clarification and publishing of Tipitaka, the Holy Scripture of Buddhism. To fulfil this royal duty, the Sangiti or the assembly of elder monks to collect and purify the Buddhist teachings is to be organized with the royal sponsorship. The collection and purification of the Buddhist teachings is regarded as the most important task as can be seen in the First Sangiti, organized three months after the Buddha's pass-away, where Most Venerable Mahakassapa Thera said, "Let us, Elders, assemble to collect and purify the Buddha's teachings, as in the future the pseudo-Dhamma will prosper, but the authentic Dhamma will be blocked, and the pseudo-Vinaya will prosper, but the authentic Vinaya will be blocked. Moreover, in the future, those who teach pseudo-Dhamma will become strong, but those who teach the authentic Dhamma will become weak, and those who follow the pseudo-Vinaya will become strong, but those who follow the authentic Vinaya will become weak." (Vi.Cu. (Thai) 7/614/380) According to the inscription stone pillar No.1, in the Sukhothai period, the kings appreciated the monks who were well-versed in the Tipitaka as a Buddhist scholar, and appointed as Supreme Patriarch. And in the reign of King Lithai, the king himself was ordained as a monk for a period of time, and wrote the doctrinal book entitled, 'Tribhumikatha' (The Story of Three Planes of Existence), where thirty references were mentioned. This means that at that time, the Buddhist scriptures were available in full number. Besides, the title reflects the belief in the issues of hell and heaven has been rooted in the Thai society from that time on and so far. The role of support and promotion of Buddhism has been carried out by the rulers even in the Ayutthaya period, and in the reign of King Boromkot, a group of Thai monks led by Most Venerable Upali Thera was shipped to Sri Lanka in order to restore Buddhism over there as invited by a king of Sri Lanka at the time, as can be

seen at the time being there still be prevalent the Sect of Upalivamsa or Siamvamsa monks. In the Ratanakosin period, King Rama I (King Phrabuddhayodfachulalok, the Great) undertook a paramount renovation of Buddhism in view that the second fall of Ayutthaya in C.E.1767 had caused great damage to Buddhism in all aspects. The Council to collect and purify the Buddhist scriptures was organized, and the rules governing the Sangha Order of Buddhist monks had been issued. From the Sukhothai period to the Ratanakosin period, the belief of Thai Buddhists in the cosmological dimension is the same as that written in the book of Tribhumikatha or Phra Ruang's Three Planes of Existence. Thus, the issues of Mahajati, Panca Antaradhana and the wish to be born in the time of a Buddha named Sri Aryamettrayya in the future all are interrelated. Take for example the prevalent faith that to finish listening to the tale of Mahajati (Jataka tale of Bodhisatta Vessantara, the last former birth of Gotama Buddha) from its beginning to the end within one day will result in being reborn in the time of a Buddha named Sri Aryamettrayya, who will be born in the planet, Earth, 5,000 years after the pass-away of Gotama Buddha. However, it was not until the reign of King Rama III that such a belief changed to a more scientific aspect. (Walter F. Vella, Siam under Rama III. Translated into Thai by Nij Thongsopit. 1987:75) King Mongkut was the change agent, who caused a catastrophe in the history of Thai Buddhism. During the 27 years of his monkhood, he tirelessly studied Buddhism to the extent that he became one of Buddhist scholars, and he was the first person who discovered a marble plate, on which a well-known Buddhist stanza was inscribed. It says, "Ye Dhamma hetuppabhava tesam hetum Tathagato tesanca yo nirodho ca evam vadi Mahasamano" (The Tathagata has told the cause of those elements of existence which arise from causes, and also of their cessation-thus spoke the Great Ascetic.). (Vi.M. (Thai) 4/65/58) With his great willing to reform the faith of the Buddhists to be strictly based on Tipitaka, the Holy Scripture of Buddhism, the king introduced the study and practice that is right and reasonable, based on wisdom. Even the taking of Buddhism as one's own religion, the king recommended that the

meaning of the Triple Gem should be apprehended and the benefits to be received from taking refuge in the Triple Gem should be realized. This is because the majesty did not like the blind faith, and thought that the adherence to Buddhism at the time was just a kind of heritage, i.e. believing as parents did. This was consistent with what a foreigner made a notice in his writing that “Thai people are not different from those of some other nations who believe in, and pay respect to, divine idols, and tend to follow strange practical ceremonies and cults. However, it is noticed that those who are educated people do not believe in such practices and cults, and it seems that they are not interested in such practices and cults at all.” (Pallegoix Jean-Baptiste. Siam under King Mongkut. Translated by Sant T. Komolbut. 2006:342) In view of the royal initiative and tasks implemented by King Mongkut as mentioned above, the researcher is interested in studying his majesty’s role in improvement of Buddhism in Thailand.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 To study development of Buddhism in Thailand.

2.2 To study development of Buddhism in the reigns of King Rama III and King Mongkut.

2.3 To integrate development of Buddhism in the reign of the King Mongkut.

2.4 To propose a new approach in creating new knowledge about ‘development models of Buddhism in Thailand in the reign of the King Mongkut.’

3. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 Content scope

1. History of Buddhism in Thailand.

2. Royal Biography and Buddhism in the reigns of King Rama III and King Mongkut.

3.2 Population scope

In-depth interviews with 15 Buddhist scholars and historians.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 The data of this qualitative research were collected from the Tipitaka, Commentaries, chronicles, collections of chronicles, texts and relevant documents.

4.2 In-depth interviews with 15 Buddhist scholars and historians.

4.3 The data were analyzed, synthesized and classified in category.

5. RESULTS OF THE THESIS

The conducting of the research to find out the answers to the improvement of Buddhism in the reign of King Mongkut could yield the results as follows:

5.1 Buddhism in Thailand. Buddhism in Thailand is the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lankan lineage which has been adhered as a national religion of Thailand respectively from the Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi and Rattanakosin periods to the present day. After the second fall of Ayutthaya, Buddhism suffered damage and loss in the fields of both religious personnel, objects and buildings. They had been renovated in the Dhonburi period, but at the limited scale. Thus, in the Ratanakosin period, they had been rehabilitated and reconstructed in all fields, including the organization of the Singiti to collect and clarify the Tipitaka and issuing the rules governing the Sangha Order.

5.2 Buddhism in the reigns of King Rama III and King Mongkut. Buddhism in the reign of the King Rama III was the original Buddhism or traditional Buddhism which was adhered by the most of the population. The king had supported and promoted Buddhism in continuation from the reigns of King Rama I and King Rama II. In fact, the situation of Buddhism improved notably, but there still existed some drawbacks, especially the conducts and behaviors of monks which were lenient in lack of right knowledge. Buddhism in the reign of King Mongkut principally went through a massive reformation. The reformation of Buddhism covered both on Buddhist studies and practices. The reformation took in different aspects: on educational perspective of Buddhist studies and practices, on collections

of the Tipitaka texts to its completion, on teaching Buddhism both to monks and laymen to get a right knowledge and understanding particularly focused on education and producing religious personals. The reformation of Buddhism conducted by the majesty resulted in the prosperity and security till the time being.

5.3 The integrated development of Buddhism in the reign of King Mongkut. The integrated development of Buddhism in the reign of King Mongkut emphasized on 4 dimensions: textual, educational, creedal, and practical. This conduces to gain a new knowledge about King Mongkut and development of Buddhism in Thailand on 3 aspects i.e. knowledgeable, disciplinary, and meditateness.

6. NEW BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

King Mongkut's integration with the development of Buddhism in Thailand has 4 dimensions: textual, educational, creedal, and practical. This conduces to gain a new knowledge about King Mongkut and development of Buddhism in Thailand on 3 aspects i.e. knowledgeable, disciplinary, and meditateness. Knowledgeable means in the level of the primary development process one must develop proficiency in knowledge, mastering the right knowledge and become an expert. Disciplinary means discipline oneself as well as strictly follow disciplines according to doctrines and disciplines. Moreover, this has to go with having a proper discernment and belief which must be along the right view. Meditateness means minding in meditational practice. In case of monastics they must mind in the practice of Samtha and Vipassana meditations. In case of lay they must mind in dhamma practice i.e. keeping precepts and developing meditation. One who follows this proper practice is the one who is considered to be a Dhamvma practitioner or holding on to the dhamma i.e. the right principle which is labeled as Dhammayittika.

The New knowledge we gained from King Mongkut's integration with the development of Buddhism in Thailand is the KDM Model.

K = Knowledgeable is an academically eruditeness which means being an expert in doctrines and disciplines or in academic Dhamma as a result out of learning from the correct texts. **D** = Disciplinary is strict in discipline which means being a strict practitioner of doctrines and disciplines and self-disciplined as a result out of learning.

M = Meditativeness is minding in meditation which means being diligent in practicing Samatha and Vipassana meditations or simply practice correctly according to Buddhism.

7. HOW TO APPLY THE KDM MODEL

The KDM model can be applied to the development of Buddhism in the three following aspects as follows:

1. Knowledgeable means one, if a clergy, must develop proficiency in knowledge, mastering the right knowledge and become an expert, but if a layperson, he must study the Buddhist teachings to ensure the reasonable belief and right practice.

2. Disciplinary means discipline oneself as well as strictly follow disciplines. Moreover, this has to go with having a proper discernment and belief which must be along the right view. As monks, Patimokkhasamvara Sila should be followed, and as laypeople, either five or eight Sila should be observed properly.

3. Meditativeness means minding in meditational practice. In case of monastics they must mind in the practice of Samtha and Vipassana meditations. In case of laymen they must mind in Dhamma practice i.e. keeping precepts and developing meditation.

One who follows this proper practice is the one who is considered to be a Dhamma practitioner or holding on to the Dhamma i.e. the right principle. And the model, if appropriately applied, is to guarantee the prosperity and security of Buddhism.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Policy Recommendations

1. Educational institutions, both public and private, are recommended to apply King Mongkut's model of Buddhism improvement to the curriculum in order to educate their students to be knowledgeable, disciplinary and meditative.

2. Religious institutions, specifically the Buddhist Sangha Order, should bring into practice the said model for the sake of good and right practice of religious persons.

3. Family institutions should also follow the said model so that family numbers will be good individuals. Thus, the good family will become a good base for both society and the country as a whole.

8.2 Research recommendations

1. The improvement of Buddhism in the reign of King Mongkut effecting a compact on Buddhism in the later age.

2. Critical Buddhist teachings in the opinions of King Mongkut.

3. Religious and Traditional Paradigm in the reign of King Mongkut.

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