



ANAM NIKAYA IDENTITY AND THE PRESERVATION OF VIETNAMESE CULTURE AND TRADITION IN THAI SOCIETY

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Anam Nikaya (Annamese sect) is a school of Mahayana Buddhism adhered to by Vietnamese living in Thailand, who form an ethnic group closely related to Thai society called “Yuan” by the Thais. The Yuan, or Vietnamese, have been immigrating to Thailand at least since the Ayutthaya period. Their community became established in many areas of Bangkok, the most important of which is “Yuan Saphan Khao” (Yuan at White Bridge) in Bangkok’s Dusit district, where Anam Nikaya teachings have been practiced for a long time. The early Vietnamese here were close to the royal Thai court, especially during the reign of King Mongkut or King Rama IV. (Limpasut Pussadee, 1976: 51-52). When the King had been a monk at Rachathiwat Temple, he got to know them well. On his ascension to the throne, he invited Vietnamese monks to perform the ceremony on the coronation and then, did the first “Kong Teck” ritual (funeral ceremony) for his late queen. In establishing their community on the bank of Phadung Krungkasem Canal, the Yuan (Vietnamese) built Wat Yuan Saphan Khao (White Bridge Vietnamese Temple) as their community center, to which King Mongkut gave the formal name “Wat Samanam Borihan.” (Chompoohom Krissana. 2003: 24) For all these reasons the area surrounding Wat Yuan Saphan Khao is considered to be culturally important and a major center of Vietnamese culture, uniting Anam Nikaya Buddhists and reinforcing the Vietnamese identity expressed in their traditions and customs, including important religious practices. However, current globalization affects behavior, values and social influence towards people in Thailand which rapidly affect the identity of the Vietnamese community.

Keywords: Anam Nikaya identity, Wat Samanam Borihan, Royal Kong Teck, Anam sect ritual, Thai-Vietnamese descendants.

Introduction

Anam sects or Anamnikaya in Buddhism is originated from Vietnam. Vietnamese or Yuan has faithfully passed on their beliefs for a long time. In terms of the development of Anam sect, the number of devotees has been decreased for over 100 years. Ongpalat Sitthisak Tianya. (2011) Most people faithful to this sect are limited to only Thai – Vietnamese which are a limited society since the important ritual in various ceremonies, prayers have to read aloud and pronounce in ancient Vietnamese which comes from the scriptures written in Vietnamese language with Chinese characters. This Research is in line with Ongpalat SitthisakThianya (Saekhow). (2011). The Roles of Anumnikaya Buddhists Monks towards the Community Development in Kanchanaburi Province. It is a research studying components that make monks participate in the development including 1. Education aids 2. Public aids 3. Religious teaching dissemination 4. Arts and Culture Promotion and 5. Mental Development. It has been noted that the clergy

should develop and formulate policies on the development of the community in all aspects and activities are planned together with the community to build Buddhists' confidence regularly. Tran Thanh Ha. (2014). Strategic Management Model on the Identity for Religious Tourism of the Anamnikaya Temples in Thailand. The research "Strategic Management Model on the Identity for Religious Tourism Anamnikaya Temples in Thailand" aimed to: 1) study the ritual identity of the Anamnikaya Temples in Thailand 2) study tourists' attitude and expectations on the ritual identity of the Anamnikaya Temples in Thailand and 3) study the model of strategic management on the identity for religious tourism of the Anamnikaya Temples in Thailand. The results showed that: Thawon Wararam Temple has preserved and carried on the ritual of Anamnikaya Buddhism including the exorcising ritual, Buddhist lent (which is 2 months before Thai Buddhist temple), the feeding of the lonely hungry ghost' ritual, and Chinese vegetarian festival. The exorcising ritual seems to be a particularly important part of the identity of Thawon Wararam Temple. Overall, tourists' demands and expectations on the ritual identity of Thawon Wararam Temple were at a high level.

Research Objective

To study and analyze the factors that affect the adaptability and the persistence of Vietnamese traditional culture, using Wat Yuan Saphan Khao (White Bridge Vietnamese Temple) as a case study.

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative research using historical methods as follows:

1. Documentary Research
2. The use of historical documents in the way of data review and interpretation.
3. The interview of involved people both individually and in groups with open ended question
4. Field observations
5. 5. The synthesis and analysis: the stages after we obtain the facts through the procedure according to the historical methods.

Findings

Anam sects or Anamnikaya in Buddhism is originated from Vietnam. Vietnamese or Yuan has faithfully passed on their beliefs for a long time. In terms of the development of Anam sect, the number of devotees has been decreased for over 100 years. Most people faithful to this sect are limited to only Thai – Vietnamese which are a limited society since the important ritual in various ceremonies, prayers have to read aloud and pronounce in ancient Vietnamese which comes from the scriptures written in Vietnamese language with Chinese characters. (Ongpalat Sitthisak Tianya. 2011: 45-46) So, there are not so many monks in this sect; only 5 monks residing here at White Bridge. Vietnamese Temple which it remains its major role as a centre of Vietnamese descendants. Because there are Vietnamese descendants coming here to perform ceremonies regularly, for example, merit making in various festivals, the change of environments and surroundings make this Vietnamese temple and the neighboring communities need to depend on each other to remain the status of the changing Anam Sect. (Limpasut Pussadee. 1976: 40). According to Buddhist teaching, the first precept is to refrain from killing life. Therefore, the monastic life of the monks both Chinese and Vietnamese Anam Sects in Thailand eat vegetarian food but with the changing environment, the Anam monks receive ordinary food when getting morning food offering from people in that neighborhood. This makes monks eat meat implicitly. The senior monks who strictly follow the rules of Mahayana need to hire a cook to prepare vegetarian food for them. Moreover, according to the ancient practice following to the Buddhist scripture, Anam monks have only one meal per day; the

morning meal. For food preparation, the temple pays the cook monthly. The temple, which is the place for performing ceremonies, try to remain Racial Anam Identity. What isobviously appeared is the praying in Vietnamese language. Since the Vietnamese praying is not translated into Thai, the monks to be need to study Vietnamese language written in traditional Chinese characters. (Today, people in Vietnam use Vietnamese language with Roman characters. As a result, to study provision Prayer is necessary to study Vietnamese traditional engraved with Chinese characters.) This causes the restriction for general public. So, people faithful to Buddhism in surrounding communities seldom ordain in Anam Sect.

People who ordain in Anam Sect can be classified into three types of groups.

Group 1 : People who are Vietnamese descendants or who are familiar with Anam Sect. Moreover, the abbot of the monastery is native of Kanchanaburi. He came to study in Bangkok and then became the abbot at Wat Yuan white bridge. He remains contact and relation with people and Anam Temples in Kanchanaburi province until now. This brings people from his hometown to get ordination in this sect.

Group 2 : is the general public in the area of Wat Yuan White Bridge. This temple has helped people in ceremonies. It is the group with low income. The ordination into the Anam sect is another way to learn and develop themselves.

Group 3: is the general public who want to get ordination to make a votive offering or exorcise.

To perform Anam ceremonies, there are prayers in both Vietnamese language and Pali. For each ritual, though, those attending the ceremony do not understand the meaning of the language used, some of the senior monks with the knowledge and Vietnamese language in monastic scriptural rituals perform various ceremonies, there will be groups of monks in Anam Sects from different temples participating the ceremonies. Thus, those monks as well as the studying novices need to memorize the prayer. (Nathalang Sowatree.1994: 23-25)The inheritance of Vietnamese identity at present as well as the interpretation of language and Vietnamese tradition by the clergy from one generation to the next generation resulting in fraternal denominational ceremonies are to be determined date. It was a similar pattern as in the past, based on the lunar calendar. Ceremonies with schedules and appointment are done in order to help the monks from different temples participate in the ceremonies. For example, for traditional worship, Vietnamese temples throughout Thailand will be held near the Chinese New Year which is considered as the Vietnamese New Year too. Each temple will not manage the ceremonies at the same time in order that the monks from different temples can participate and run the ceremonies from the beginning to the end with the temple as main host similar to White Bridge Vietnamese Temple.

Anam sect's rituals in Thailand.The important rituals of Anam sect Annual rituals includes:

- Stars worship ritual (During Chinese New Year). To welcome good luck and chasing bad luck.
- The ceremony concerning important Buddhist Days as Lent candles casting.
- Kathin ceremony.
- Ordination ceremony.

The ritual about life:

- Taekrajad ceremony (Taekrajad = empty the basket) (Distributing food to the poor.)
- Vegetarian ceremony
- Kong Teck (Chinese funeral Ceremony)
- Other rituals including merit-based cases etc.

Discussion

The maintenance of Yuan identity in Bangkok over the years has undergone continual change due to a number of factors, including political and economic, which have caused most of the Yuan to assimilate and become primarily Thai. As a result, those who value Vietnamese culture and character have been trying to keep these traditions alive and pass them on, for one thing using the Vietnamese language in the

ceremonies. Of course Vietnamese represented in Chinese characters is different from the way it is written today, so the Anam Nikaya Sangha bears primary responsibility for the preservation of traditions, as only they understand old Vietnamese and are able to impart and perform the ancient rituals. Because this Sangha has a quite limited number of monks, a network of Anam Nikaya Buddhists has been set up for mutual support of Anam Nikaya activities all over Thailand. The conclusion from the finding are as follows:

Firstly, the mutual dependence between temple and the surrounding local people in various rituals and ceremonies has sustained the existence of Anam Sect and Vietnamese culture and tradition in Thai society. Secondly, because of the limitation of language, there are not so many monks ordained this sect. This causes the insufficient monks to perform the ritual alone. So, they help each other among themselves to do the rites and rituals. They set up and run the activities on different days so they can perform the ceremonies together. This is another way to preserve this culture and tradition. Thirdly; people with low income receive ordination here to develop themselves. At the same time, people from the abbot's hometown come here to join the activities regularly. Fourthly, The Anam sect monks are invited to perform ceremony called Kong Teck by the royal court, referring to the traditional funeral rites in Anam style in a case when the kings or the royal family members are dead. The purpose of the ceremony is to send souls to Heaven.

This makes them known and acceptable from the public and high ranking people as well as the business people. This is one way of "the preservation of Vietnamese culture and tradition in Thai Society as well as Anam Nikaya identity" elegantly and efficiently. Finally; in terms of the persistence of Anam sects in Thailand, there are groups of people realizing the value the Vietnam tradition and cultures trying to create a conservation network to prolong their tradition. Moreover, the rites of Anam sect are similar to the ones performed by Chinese monks in Thailand for example merit making that make some Chinese descendants in Thailand perform ceremonies in Vietnamese temples at present.

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