

The socio-semantic influence of religious beliefs and concepts on Thai language

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INTRODUCTION

Since Thailand is a democratic country with the king as Head of State, Thai people have freedom to worship any religions or beliefs, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism. As a result, the Thai language is liberally sprinkled with words from various religions, for example Parajika (ปาราชิก), Karma (กรรม), Tripitaka (ไตรปิฎก), Trilakkhana (ไตรลักษณ์), Ariyasacca (อริยสัจ), from Buddhism; Bible, Catholic, Protestant, Jesus, Valentine's day, Christmas day and Pope from Christianity; and mosque, masjid, Mohammed, hadji from Islam. Brahmaa (พระพรหม), Vishnu (วิษณุ), Shiva (ศิวะ), Indra (พระอินทร์), Ramayana (รามายณะ), Mahaapharata (มหาภารตะ) Brahmacari (พรหมจารี) from Hinduism; Cheng Meng (เซ็งเม้ง- Chinese Family Day to pay respect to the ancestors) Si-kow (ซิโกว-การทิ้งกระจาด-a custom of throwing baskets to poor people) from Confucianism. These loan-words have been well-accepted and incorporated into the Thai language.

The vocabulary concerning religious beliefs and concepts enters the Thai language in many ways.

1. **Moral preaching.** Though every religion aims at the same thing-to do good and avoid evil, the means to the goal is different. In Buddhism, people wish to go to heaven not to hell. However, the ultimate goal is Nibbana (นิพพาน), which is the Ultimate Truth. As for Christianity, the ultimate goal is to be with God in heaven. Muslims also

want to be reunited to Allah (พระอัลเลาะห์เจ้า). In Hinduism, Brahma (อาตมัน) will be united with Mahabrahma (ปรมาตมัน). In brief all these things are concerned with the relationship between good and evil.

2. **Allusion.** It is the reference to religious stories from the Bible, the Koran (คัมภีร์อัลกุรอาน) the Veda Scripture (พระเวท) and the Tripitaka (พระไตรปิฎก). Those of Buddhism and Hinduism which have been deeply rooted in Thailand for a long time are most often quoted. For example, the separation of lovers because of past karma (past deed) is usually referred to Rama-Sita (พระราม-นางสีดา), and Unnarudda-Usa (พระอุณรุท-นางอุษา) from Hinduism; and Sudhana-Manoraha (พระสุธน-นางมโนราห์) from Buddhism. Moreover, some references derive from traditional beliefs such as Lohasimbali Naraka (จันทน์แดง-a red cotton tree planted in hell), Khuen Ton Ngiw (the punishment for those committing adultery), Sriarya (พระศรีอารียะ), Malaya (พระมาลัย)

3. **Religious Festivals.** Buddhists celebrate Songkran Day (the former Thai New Year Day), Wan Khao Phansa (Buddhist's lent or the Rainy Retreat), Wan Asalha Puja (The day of Buddha's first sermon to his first five disciples), Thot Kathin (the ceremony of presenting the yellow robe to the monks at the end of the Rainy Retreat). Christians also celebrate Easter and Christmas.

4. **Idioms.** It is the connotative or the secondary meaning of the language. Many are seen both in everyday spoken and written language.

5. **Sayings and proverbs.** Sayings are interpretations of a story, while proverbs are written in concise and precise styles.

Examples for 4 and 5

A. The concepts of 'karma' in Thai

กงกำกงเกวียน /kon kam kon kwian/

circle spoke circle cart

"Come home to roost"

"Sow the wind and reap the whirl wind."

"One reaps what he has sown."

(In Buddhism's law of causality, good deeds beget good results whereas bad deeds beget bad results.)

ก่อกรรมทำเข็ญ /kòo kam tham khên/

create deed do adversity

"Always give troubles or problems to others(those who do bad things repeatedly)."

บุญทำกรรมแต่ง /bun tham kam tææn/

merit make past deed arrange

"What will become of a person depends upon the good and the bad that he did in the past."

(This idea is based upon Buddhist beliefs about the law of causality or karma.)

บุญมาวาสนาส่ง /bun maa wâatsànaa sòn/

merit come fate send

"Fate was favorable and personal merits helped."

กินบุญเก่า /kin bun kàw/

eat merit past

"To live a happy life because of the merit of deeds in the past."

B. Rituals in Buddhism

กรวดน้ำคว่ำขัน

/krùat náam khwâm khân/

pour water put upside down bowl

"To break the relationship after doing something together for some time."

(Buddhist usually pours water into the ground so that the dead might benefit from this merit-making.)

คว่ำบาตร /khwâm bàat/

put upside down alms-bowl

"To excommunicate"

(During Lord Buddha's period, some heretics annoyed the priests when going out to receive alms, so the priest stayed away from them.)

ตักบาตรอย่าถามพระ /tāk bāat yāa thāam phrá/

put in alms-bowl don't ask monk

"When you want to give something don't bother to ask whether it is a favorite or not."

(In Buddhist doctrines, the monks must accept whatever be offered and bless that person since everyone usually offers the best he can find.)

เถรส่องบาตร /thēen sǝwŋ bāat/

senior monk look at alms-bowl

"To do like the others but not knowing the reason."

(In Buddhist rules, the bowl of a senior monk must be taken care of by the young ones. So after every wash the latter must examine the bowl carefully to see if there is any crack. The new monk does the same but he does not know what for.)

วุ่นเป็นจุลกฐิน

/wūn pen cunlá kàthín/

busy be (as) small a ceremony of presenting a yellow robe to the monk at the end of Buddhist Rainy Retreat.

"To work busily." (It's a kind of Kathin when the process of making the yellow robe must be done within one day starting from collecting the cotton from the field.)

เดาสวด /dau sùat/

guess chant prayer

"guesswork."

(This refers to some new monks who cannot remember all the prayers. Then, they have to listen to the senior ones and guess. This may be correct, or incorrect.)

ตื่นแต่ดึก สึกแต่หนุ่ม

/tʰin tæx dīk sīk tæx nūm/

get up while late leave the monkhood while young
at night