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

Taweesak Yanprateep
Ramkhamhaeng University

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 (ปารัจจิก), Karma (กรรม), Tripitaka (ไตรปิฎก), Trilakkhana (ตรีลักษณ์), Ariyasacca (อริยสัคคะ), from Buddhism; Bible, Catholic, Protestant, Jesus, Valentine’s day, Christmas day and Pope from Christianity; and mosque, masjid, Mohammed, hadji from Islam. Brahmaa(พระพหุ), Vishnu (วิษณุ), Shiva (ศิวะ), Indra (พระินทรา), Ramayana (รามายณะ), Mahaapharata (มหาภารตะ) Brahmacari (พระมจารี) from Hinduism; Cheng Meng (ซีเนมัง- Chinese Family Day to pay respect to the ancestors) Si-kow (ซิกว้- 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 (พระอัลลัห์เจ้า). In Hinduism, Brahma (笳ตอัน) will be united with Mahabrahma (ประมาทมัน). 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 (คัมภีร์อัลก์รุคำ) 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 (พระสุมุท-นางสุชา) from Hinduism; and Sudhana-Manoraha (พระสุธัน-นางมโนราห์) from Buddhism. Moreover, some references derive from traditional beliefs such as Lohasimbali Naraka (สิ้นแรก-a red cotton tree planted in hell), Khuen Ton Ngiw (the punishment for those committing adultery), Sriarya (พระศรีอาชี), 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
"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.)

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

"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.)

"Fate was favorable and personal merits helped."

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

B. Rituals in Buddhism

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.)

"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.)

ตักบาตรอย่างตามพระผู้

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.)

เศรษฐากร

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.)

ผูกแฝดจุฬสถิน

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.)

คำสวด

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.)

ตื่นแต่เต็กสีกันเหมือน

get up while late leave the monkhood while young at night
"an early bird" (Those who get up early will have a better chance.)
(As a Buddhist, a man should be ordained once in his lifetime. If he becomes a monk and leaves the monkhood while still young he still has strength and energy to be successful in his careers.)

ชายสามโบสถ์ /chai sāam bōt/

man three temple

"A man who has entered the monkhood three times is believed to be a weak-minded person."
"Those who always change their mind."

ปิฎกทองหลางพระ /pìt thocù láp phrá

stick gold leave back Buddha statue

"To do good by stealth"
"To do decent thing without expecting any reward or gain."

(In Buddhist beliefs, if you stick the gold leaves in the front part of Buddha statue, it will be noticeable. If you stick them at the back, it will remain unseen.)

ไปวัดไปว่าได้ /pái wát p'ai waa dâai/

go temple go - can

"To be good looking enough to appear in public."

(This refers to the merit-making at the temple. Beautiful women will dress in their best clothing and go to the temple late. However the less beautiful will go to the temple very early when it is still dark in order not to be seen by many people.)

ทำคุณบุคคลใด /tham khun buuchaa thôot pröot sât dâai bàap/
do good pay homage guilt show mercy animal get sin
"To cherish (nourish) a viper (snake, serpent) in one's bosom"

"To do a good deed in homage of a bad return."

ทำบุญเพาะนา /tham bun ?au nâa/

make merit get face

"To show off when making merit."
(Some who wants his name be publicized when making merit so that everyone will know and give a compliment.)
วันพระไม่มีหนังเสี้ยว /wan phrá mai mii hən diau/
    day monk no have time one only
    “Buddhist days of worship do not occur once.”
    “Every dog has his day.”
    “Every man has his moment.”
(Buddhist sabbaths usually come on the 8th and 15th day of the new moon and the waning moon on the lunar calendar. On that day Buddhists go to the temple to chant prayers and listen to the sermon.)

C. Special vocabulary from Buddhism used in Thai.
พระมาลัยมาโปรต /phrá maalai maa prət
    Phra Malaya come bless
    “One who is helpful to person in need.”
(Phra Malaya was a Buddhist monk who was believed to have gone to hell to temporarily stop the torturing)
สตูนหนังเสี้ยวสัมพันธ์ /sɔːn nəŋ sən səŋkhārət/
    teach book Supreme Patriarch
    “To teach someone who already knows best.”
(In former times, the priests educated the children in both general knowledge and morality)
เจ้าไม่มีศักล สมการไม่มีวัด
/càa mai mii sān sōmphaan mai mii wàt/
    Spirit no have shrine abbot no have temple
    “Those who do not have a place to settle down.”
(Thai people have a belief that a god or the spirit of the dead should reside in a shrine whereas an abbot should stay in a temple.)
ลูกสมการ หลานเจ้าวัด
/lùuk sōmphaan làan cǎo wàt/
    son abbot offspring noble temple
    “Children of the nobility or important people are
เสียงจากคำศิลป์ /sia thâu cam siin/
tiger old dormant

"Those who are not what they seem to be."

มือถือลากร้ายถือศีล

/mii thii saak paaak thii siin/
hand hold pestle mouth hold precepts

"A wolf in sheep's clothings.
"The hand holds a pestle while the mouth utters Buddhist precepts."

(If you tell people how they should behave, you yourself must be the model.)

พลังปากเสียงศีล พลังดีนกั้นไม่

/phlan paaak sii sii phlan tii tok tonmaay/
slip mouth lose precepts slip foot fall down tree

"To speak carelessly may be to cause of trouble."

วยร์ในอกก่อกอยู่ในใจ

/sawun yuu nai tok narok yuu nai cai/
heaven is in chest hell is in mind

"The good and the bad will both affect our mind."

ตกกระที่เป็น /tok narok than pen/
fall hell still alive

"Almost be dead because of sufferings."

(In Buddhist beliefs, the hell is where a person with bad deeds will be tortured.)

พระอิฐพระปูร /phra ?it phra puun/
Buddha statue brick Buddha statue plaster

"To sit still or to be indifferent."

(This refers to the statues of Lord Buddha that only sit still because they are made of brick or plaster.)

เก่าตรง /thcen tron/
senior monk straight

"To call spade a spade"
"To be straight as a senior monk."

(Someone who is too frank, and has no wit to conceal his feelings or to be flexible.)
ขั้นแม่น้ำห้างห้า /chák mæənáam thán hâa/
pull river all five
"Beat around (about) the bush."
"To give a long explanation to get what one wants."
(A reference to Vessantara story.)

ไม่เชื่อน้ำมนต์ /mài chiâ náam mon/
not believe water consecrated
"Not believe in the words or promise of that person."
(In Hinduism or Buddhist beliefs 'náam mon' is thought of as the holy water.)

ชั้วช่างชี ตีช่างลงซ์ /chûa chââŋ chi dii chââŋ sóŋ/
evil let nun good let monk
"To be indifferent to the nun and the monk no matter how good or bad they behave."
(Thai Buddhist have high respect for the monks. They dare not criticize them, being afraid that they may go to hell.)

ตัดหางปล่อยวัด /tât hâaŋ plûoi wát/
cut tail leave temple
"To cut off a shilling."
(Buddhist temple is usually a shelter for all kinds of unwanted animals. Especially, those that are naughty, will have their tail cut off and are left at the temple.)

แพทย์เป็นพระชายาเป็นมาภร /phâeæ pen phrá chûñá pen mæn/
be defeated is monk win is demon
"It is sometimes better to be patient and lose the game."
(Buddhist monks must tolerate all kinds of passions.
เห็นงวงจาระเป็นดอกบัว /hên koŋçâk pen dûok bûa/
see disk is flower lotus
"Do not mistake evil for good."
กิจกำได้ทาง /kîŋkâa dâay thâông/
“to have vanity.”

D. Influences from Hinduism, Christianity and other religions.

วัดธโรเทา /wát rócì thàau/
measure print foot

“To prove himself better or be more powerful.”
(In the Ramayana, when Thoraphi, a son of Thorapha, grew up having the same size of footprint as his father, he then went to fight with his father.)

เทวี /thàocráphiì/
Thoraphi (a water buffalo.)

“Those who are ungrateful. They do not appreciate the favors done to them.”
(This refers to the story of Thorapha and Thoraphi in Ramayana.)

งอมพระราม /hùocm phrá raam/
overripe Rama

“to be over-tired because of sufferings.”
(In Ramayana, Vishnu, reincarnated as Rama, had to wander in the jungle for 14 years.)

บันบาณศาลากล้าว /bon baan sàan klàau/
pledge vow shrine say

“Make a vow to offer something to a god if your problem can be solved.”

พระศุภ์เข้าพระศรีเทพก /phrá sùk khâu phrá sáu sàeìk/
Venus enter Saturn come in between

“It never rains, it pours.”

“Misfortunes never come singly.”
(Sufferings usually occur in our life repeatedly.)

พระรับบาป /phaè ráp bàap/
goat receive sin

“a scapegoat.”

“The innocent who suffers in the place of the others.”
(In Hindusim, an animal may be killed as an offering

1) ตนแลเป็นที่พึ่งของตน

One is his own refuge.

2) บุคคลไม่ควรล้มตน

Don't over estimate yourself.

3) ความประมาทเป็นทางแห่งความตาย

Imprudence leads to disaster.

4) ผงฟ้าผ่าแล้ว ทำคืนไม่ได้

What has been done cannot be undone.

5) พึงประกอบธุรานให้เหมาะสมกับกาลเที่ยง

Manage your affairs at proper times.

6) พึงรักษาความดีของตนไว้ ดังเกลี้ยรักษาความเดิม

Safeguard your virtue against decline, just as salt never loses its saltiness.

7) บุคคลกว่าพืชเขี้ยนใด ย่อมได้ผลเช่นนั้น ผู้ทำกรรมเขี้ยอมได้ผลดี ผู้ทำกรรมเขี้ยอมได้ผลชั่ว

One reaps whatever one has sown. Those who do good receive good and those who do evil receive evil.

8) ความอยากมีอัธรรมเท่าที่สุดมิได้เลย

Desires are unlimited.

9) จิตที่ไม่สงบ นำสู่ชำนาญไม่ได้

A well-disciplined mind can bring happiness.
10) ภูเขาคิลาน่งที่ปุ๊ ไม่สะเทือนเพราะลมชนิดใด
บันทิคิตย์ยอมไม่หวั่นไหวเพราะนินทาและทรงเริ่ญ
ซันนัน

As a mountain of solid rock remains
unshaken by the storm, so the wise man
remains unmoved by praises.

11) ผู้ให้มอบผูกไม่ตรีไปได้

Giving brings friendship.

12) ความจนเป็นทุกข์ในโลก

Poverty is a cause of suffering.

13) ธรรมแผล ยั่อมรักษาผู้ประพฤติธรรม

The virtuous are protected by their own
virtues.

14) ปัญญาฟื้นฟูได้ด้วยการสนทนา

Wisdom can be known in discussion.

15) คนไม่ถูกนินทา ไม่มีในโลก

Never is there a person who is not
gossipped about.

16) คนคนใดก็เป็นชื่นคนนันแฉ

You will become what your associates are.

17) เรื่องราวจากาน ยังประโยชน์ให้สำเร็จ

Good words get things done.

18) ความพร้อมเพรียงของหูจุ๊ก

Unity within a group creates happiness.

19) ความไม่มีใจค์ เป็นกลางอย่างยิ่ง

Health is wealth.

20) เมตตาเป็นเครื่องค้าจุ้นโลก

Loving-kindness enhances the world.

21) ความกดดันภูฎกับเวที เป็นเครื่องหมายแห่งคน

ดี

Gratitude is an earmark of the virtuous.
22) สิ่งกายของสัตว์ย่อมยับได้ แต่ซื่อและสกุลไม่ย่อยยับ
Bodies perish, but not honour and fame.
23) ได้ศักดิ์แล้วไม่ควรมา
Don’t be infatuated by honor.
24) ต้องห้าประพฤติเช่นใด ถึงลับหลังก็ให้ประพฤติเช่นนั้น
Behave the same way both before and behind others.
25) เวระย่อมระบายด้วยไม่มีเวร
Enmity is ended by forgiving.
26) ความฝรั่งเศสและไม่ฝรั่งเศสไว้เฉพาะตัว
A person’s stain or purity belongs to its owner.
27) ความผู้จักประมาธย์ ยังประโยชน์ให้ลำเลียงทุกเมื่อ
Moderation is always advisable.
28) กำลังใจให้เพื่อนใต้ในวารัณย์อันตราย
Danger is the measure of courage.
29) พิชิตคนไม่ได้ด้วยความคิด
Overcome an evil person with virtue.
30) คำสัตย์แล่ในวาระไม่ตาย
Truth is immortal.

CONCLUSION

Even though the Thai language is influenced by many religions, Buddhism plays the most important role since it is the religion of the country. Buddhist idioms, sayings and proverbs in Pali (the language of Theravada Buddhism) are most often seen. Stories from Hinduism in Sanskrit (the language of the Brahmin’s Hinduism) are also widely-spread since Hinduism was well founded in Thailand long before Buddhism. Some children of the
Royal family are named after Hindu Gods such as Rama and Narayana. These can also be traced in the name of some important places such as Bueng Phra Ram (Rama’s Lake), Thale Chup Son (Dip Arrowhead Lake).

Religion is the stronghold of the mind and sets guidelines in life for a human-being. The language is affected greatly by every religion.

References


