

# 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) Brahmachari (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 (อามัน) 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 (พระศรีอารีย), 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 bāt/

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

*"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 sām 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."*

ปิดทองหลังพระ /pit thong lǎng 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.)

ไปวัดไปวาได้ /pai wát pai waa dāai/

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.)

ทำคุณบูชาโทษ โปรดสัตว์ได้บาป

/tham khun buuchaa thōot prōot sāt dāai 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."*

ทำบุญเอาหน้า /tham bun ?au nāa/

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.)

วันพระไม่มีคนเดียว /wan phrá mâi mii hǒn 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.

พระมาลัยมาโปรด /phrá maalai maa pròt

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)

สอนหนังสือสังฆราชา /sǎon nǎngsǎi sǎngkháráat/

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)

เจ้าไม่มีศาล สมภารไม่มีวัด

/câa mâi mii sǎan sǒmphaan mâi mii wát/

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.)

ลูกสมภาร หลานเจ้าวัด

/lûuk sǒmphaan lǎan câo wát/

son abbot offspring noble temple

*"Children of the nobility or important people are*

เสือเผ่นจำศีล /sǎi thâu cam sǎin/

tiger old dormant

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

มือถือสาก ปากถือศีล

/mii thǎi sàak pàak thǎi sǎin/

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.)

พลั้งปากเสียศีล พลั้งตีนตกต้นไม้

/phláng pàak sǎi sǎin phláng tiin tòk tôn máay/

slip mouth lose precepts slip foot fall down tree

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

สวรรค์อยู่ในอกนรกอยู่ในใจ

/sàwǎn yùu nai ?òk nárók yùu nai cai/

heaven is in chest hell is in mind

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

ตกนรกทั้งเป็น /tòk nárók thǎng 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.)

พระอิฐพระปูน /phrá ?it phrá 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.)

เถรตรง /thěen 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.)

ชักแม่น้ำทั้งห้า /cháak mæænáam thán̄ 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 /mâi chîa 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.)

ชั่วช่างชี ดีช่างสงฆ์ /chûa chàan̄ chii dii chàan̄ sǔŋ/  
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 /àt hǎan̄ plǝwí 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.)

แพ้เป็นพระ ชนะเป็นมาร

/phǎæ pen phrá cháná pen maan/

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.)

เห็นกงจักรเป็นดอกบัว /hǎn kɔŋcàk pen dòok bua/  
see disk is flower lotus

*"Do not mistake evil for good."*

กิ้งก่าได้ทอง /kínkàa dâay thɔwŋ/



*"to have vanity."*

# **D. Influences from Hinduism, Christianity and other religions.**

วัดรอยเท้า /wát rooi tháau/

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.)

ทหรพี /thoóráphii/

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.)

จอมพระราม /jom 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.)

บนบานศาลกล่าว /bon baan sǎan klàau/

pledge vow shrine say

*"Make a vow to offer something to a god if your problem can be solved."*

พระศุกร์เข้าพระเสาร์แทรก

/phrá sùk khâu phrá sǎu sǎæk/

Venus enter Saturn come in between

*"It never rains, it pours."*

*"Misfortunes never come singly."*

(Sufferings usually occur in our life repeatedly.)

แพะรับบาป /phǎc 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

พาลีหลายหน้า /phaalii läai nâa/

Phali many face

*"To be unreliable, untrustworthy."*

(from the Ramayana)

## 6. Buddhist sayings.

1) ตนแลเป็นที่พึ่งของตน

*One is his own refuge.*

2) บุคคลไม่ควรลืมนตน

*Don't over estimate yourself.*

3) ความประมาทเป็นทางแห่งความตาย

*Imprudence leads to disaster.*

4) สิ่งที่ทำแล้ว ทำคืนไม่ได้

*What has been done cannot be undone.*

5) พึงประกอบธุระให้เหมาะแก่กาลเทียว

*Manage your affairs at proper times.*

6) พึงรักษาความดีของตนไว้ ดังเกลือรักษาความเค็ม

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

7) บุคคลหว่านพืชเช่นใด ย่อมได้ผลเช่นนั้น ผู้ทำกรรมดีย่อมได้ผลดี ผู้ทำกรรมชั่วย่อมได้ผลชั่ว

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

8) ความอยากมีอารมณ์หาที่สุดมิได้เลย

*Desires are unlimited.*

9) จิตที่ฝึกแล้ว นำสุขมาให้

*A well-disciplined mind can bring happiness.*

10) ภูเขาศิลาแท่งทึบ ไม่สะเทือนเพราะลมฉันใด  
 บัณฑิตย่อมไม่หวั่นไหวเพราะนินทาและสรรเสริญ  
 ฉันนั้น

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

11) ผู้ให้ย่อมผูกไมตรีไว้ได้

*Giving brings friendship.*

12) ความจนเป็นทุกข์ในโลก

*Poverty is a cause of suffering.*

13) ธรรมแล ย่อมรักษาผู้ประพฤดิธรรม

*The virtuous are protected by their own  
 virtues.*

14) ปัญญาพึงรู้ได้ด้วยการสนทนา

*Wisdom can be known in discussion.*

15) คนไม่ถูกนินทา ไม่มีในโลก

*Never is there a person who is not  
 gossiped about.*

16) คบคนใดก็เป็นเช่นนั้นแล

*You will become what your associates are.*

17) เปล่งวาจางาม ยังประโยชน์ให้สำเร็จ

*Good words get things done.*

18) ความพร้อมเพรียงของหมู่ให้เกิดสุข

*Unity within a group creates happiness.*

19) ความไม่มีโรค เป็นลาภอย่างยิ่ง

*Health is wealth.*

20) เมตตาเป็นเครื่องค้ำจุนโลก

*Loving-kindness enhances the world.*

21) ความกตัญญูกตเวทิตี เป็นเครื่องหมายแห่งคน  
 ดี

*Gratitude is an earmark of the virtuous.*

22) ร่างกายของสัตว์ย่อยยับได้ แต่ชื่อและสกุลไม่  
ย่อยยับ

*Bodies perish, but not honour and fame.*

23) ได้ยศแล้ว ไม่ควรเมา

*Don't be infatuated by honor.*

24) ต่อหน้าประพติเช่นใด ถึงลับหลังก็ให้  
ประพติเช่นนั้น

*Behave the same way both before and  
behind others.*

25) เเวรย่อมระงับด้วยไม่มีเวร

*Enmity is ended by forgiving.*

26) ความบริสุทธิ์และไม่บริสุทธิ์มีเฉพาะตัว

A person's stain or purity belongs to its  
owner.

27) ความรู้จักประมาณ ยังประโยชน์ให้สำเร็จทุก  
เมื่อ

*Moderation is always advisable.*

28) กำลังใจพึงรู้ได้ในคราวมีอันตราย

*Danger is the measure of courage.*

29) พึงชนะคนไม่ดีด้วยความดี

*Overcome an evil person with virtue.*

30) คำสัตย์แลเป็นวาจาไม่ตาย

*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.

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