




The Contemporary Thai Version of the Kathin Ceremony: Ceremonial Importance of the Distribution of White Envelops and the Money Tree Tradition

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[Abstract]

The Kathin ceremony is generally known as a ceremony of the Buddhist laypeople to make an offering of new robes to the monks. The joyfulness of people in the contemporary Thai Kathin festival reflects a fusion of the traditional ritual and the modern socioeconomic context in the Thai society, which can be explained in three points. Firstly, since there is a strong incorporation between Animism, Buddhism and Brahmanism-Hinduism. Kathina reflects a combination of all the three beliefs, conducting good deeds to some sacred things in exchange of the protection from them as in the Animism theme, giving new robes to the monk as the traditional Buddhist scripture allows them to conduct, and putting a great deal of effort to create richness of rituals and processes as the Brahmanism-Hinduism heritage. Secondly, capitalism has trained people heavily on investing for gaining something. Apparently, there are many laypeople who conduct meritorious practices for gaining some instant happiness. Since Kathina is a ceremony recognized to provide a great amount of good result manifestation regarding the Law of Kamma, it is therefore not

unusual to find the Thai laypeople who are enjoying enclosing some banknotes into the white envelopes or to attach some banknotes on to the money tree. However, the Law of Kamma is complex. Sometime, it seems a person will spend more than a lifetime to see the results of what one sowed. Being generous or gaining merit acquired by giving, therefore, seems to become something to heal people from the everyday traumas of life. In other words, giving is a way to help them emotionally not a way to purify their mind.

Keywords: Kathin, Contemporary Thai Society, Kamma, Dānā

Introduction

Every year around October, for people who reside in Thailand, there is a high chance to see some standard white envelopes (DL or C6 size) being distributed from one person to other people. The people receiving these envelopes can include the person distributing the envelopes' friends, colleagues, neighbors, relatives and other people in their social networks. On the outside front of the envelope there will be an information headline with the name of a temple along with its location and its construction project. Beneath this headline, it generally has a small blank form to fill out. This form includes the name of the donator, their address and the amount of money they will donate. Aside from this, in public spaces you will often see a tree shaped object, a wood pillar which has wooden branch style sticks attached to form a small tree shape. On each of the branches of this tree, people will attach Thai Baht banknotes. Many of my expatriate friends who work in Thailand have been amazed at this event and have come to me with many questions about the white envelope distributed in their offices and the remarkable standing money tree. Even my father, a Japanese who has lived and worked in Thailand for ages, still doesn't quite seem to get the feeling of how this event seems to be so celebrated by the Thai people. The first explanation that I give to my foreign friends is that this event is not for Thai People. This is for the Thai Buddhists who account for 93.5% out of the Thai population (National Statistic Office Thailand, 2561).

Why are there so many white envelopes to be distributed? Why are they distributed by people who make a tree with bank notes attached to it? These activities are parts of a contemporary Thai Kathin ceremony. Lay Buddhists will donate some money by enclosing it into the envelopes and returning the envelope to the envelope distributor who is a sponsor of a particular Kathin ceremony (Kathina in Pāli and Sanskrit). Some sponsors will also set up a money tree as a landmark of the event. This money tree is an object that acts as an invitation to anyone who would like to contribute to the temple's activity by attaching some banknotes onto the tree. Sometimes they will also attach several items of small personal toiletries. Finally, the money from the envelopes and from the tree will be gathered up. New robes for the monks, other building materials and small cleaning utensils like hammers, buckets, and brooms will also be prepared. All of these things will be presented to a monastery in a ceremony called thod-Kathin (which refers to making an offering of new robes to monks). The envelopes and the money tree of the Kathin ceremony can be seen as a symbol of the contemporary Thai Buddhist. It synthesizes the traditional ritual and the modern socioeconomic context. This fusion becomes a unique form of the Kathin ceremony which cannot be found in the Pāli canon.

Thailand; where magic, rituals and monks are finely united, makes the Kathin ceremony a remarkably festive ritual.

The spirituality of Thais has been influenced by major three types of beliefs; Animism, Brahmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism. Animism has long been part of the Thai spiritual heritage and still shines gloriously in the contemporary Thai society. This includes such things as worshipping ancestral spirits, thewada(angels), totems or sacred objects. All of these things can be seen in the common lives of Thai people. The disciples beg the 'sacred objects' (or in Thai 'sing-sak-sit') for their 'power' (sak-sit), to help them get through all the unpredictable forces and disturbances in everyday life. A shrine of guardian spirits exists in almost every household compound especially in the rural areas. The guardian spirits are those of their passed away ancestors or else could be some passed away landlords, who deal in maintaining the general peacefulness and protection of their territory. Totems are sometime derived from some parts of wild animals

such as a tooth of wild pig, which is empowered or made to be ‘sak-sit’ by a shaman. In general, the disciples have to worship the sacred objects properly otherwise they could get some chaos from the power. As Niels Mulder explains, “The sak-sit forces respond to presentation, such as right ceremony, proper words, appropriate movements and formulae, and people know how to perform their side of the contract. Contracts with such entities are defined by their purpose, have a relatively short time perspective, and need to be periodically renewed. Sak-sit forces are potentially benevolent and protective, but can be dangerous, jealous and vengeful if they feel slighted” (2000, p.28). This sacred power worshiping is very common to be seen in Thailand today, and has been transferred from generation to generation.

Theravada Buddhist teachings came to Thailand dating back to the pre-Christian era and has been well unified with Animism since their first arrival. The pattern of development exists more clearly from the 11th century onwards when the Northern Thai region made contact with the Pagan kings of Burma who had accepted Pāli Buddhism (Desai, 1980). Buddhism has been made the state religion ever since the Sukhothai Kingdom in the 13th century. The collaboration between Thailand’s animistic heritage and Buddhism in Thailand was well unified, as Neils Mulder comments, “For the contemporary Thai, the pleasant prospect of a heaven peopled by ancestors has been replaced by a long cycle of rebirths, and the knowledge that to do good improves one’s karmic position, and that to do evil worsen it” (2000, p.37). Also as Justin T. McDaniel shares his point in *The Lovelorn Ghost & the Magical Monk*, “there is not one ‘local’. Each monastery in Thailand is a site of accretion. Images, murals, teachers, texts, are constantly being added, repaired, and rearranged” (2011, p.17). The reason for this unification of the beliefs of Animism and Buddhism is comprehensible by referencing an ancient Indian cultural context, where both Brahmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism originated. In this society Animism had already been cultivated. He further explains that “When Buddhism was brought to Southeast Asia, it was not corrupted by local belief in ghosts, spirits, and ancestors. Indeed, there is ample textual and art historical evidence that ancestor and animistic spirit worship was part of early Buddhism in India, as well as in Burma and Sri Lanka” (2011, p.16).

Brahmanism-Hinduism was introduced to the Thais by the Khmer Empire around the 9th and 14th century. During the Ayutthaya period, the Brahmic-Hindu beliefs and practices were further intensified. However, they did not replace Theravada Buddhism (Desai, 1980). As a matter of fact, Buddhism fused the traditional Brahmic-Hindu beliefs in the Law of Kamma and the belief in reincarnation. Therefore, the Buddhist approach to Thailand's belief system were already cultivated by the Hindu way of lives. Yet Brahmanism-Hinduism has played key roles in rituals and sacred ceremonies led by the elites and the royal families. Many festivals, ceremonies, and rituals were initiated by the royal families and those initiatives have influenced the Thais' way of belief and pattern of life.

Most of the Thai Buddhist laypeople are not the comprehensive readers of the Tripitaka. Instead they practice religious rituals and listen to the Buddha's teachings from the living monks. As previously mentioned around 93.5% of Thai people are believers in Buddhism, and within this group we can see some variations of Buddhist practices. Julia Cassanin explains in 'Mind, Self, and Emotion in a Thai Community', there are two kinds of Buddhism in Thailand. The first kind is a Buddhism of the abstract texts and the second kind is a popular Buddhism of the uneducated masses (2015, p.22). Though this information came from the laypeople who claim themselves to be in the first group, it still reflects an alienation between the different groups of the Thai Buddhists. This information conforms with Barend J. Terwiel's idea that describes the two fundamentally different religious approaches within the Buddhist population. The first one, he calls syncretist Buddhism, which explains the basic approach towards religion as the animistic worldview prevails and Buddhist concepts and beliefs are incorporated in magico-animism. The other one, is described as the compartmentalized Buddhism, who feel that Buddha's teachings should be considered superior to the beliefs and practices that are obvious animistic. The syncretist Buddhism is typically found among lower income earners. The compartmentalized Buddhist group members are found among the upper ranks of the government officials, elites, and the wealthy leisure class (2012, p.5). However, even so some Thai elite laypeople can often be seen in the daily news that they will visit some reputable Brahmic god

shrines, pay a visit to a medium who communicates with spirits, or visit to reputable forest monks, to ask for helps. From my observation and interviews with staff members who operate one of these famous sacred places where there is a medium who communicates with Brahmic-Hindu angels, most of the visitors are a group of successful business people who regularly come to participate in a ritual asking for good fortune.

Fundamentally, the absolute aim of the lay Buddhists is for liberation from Samsara, or else to have a better reincarnation along the way to liberation. The means of achieving this aim is to practice meritorious actions. These include bodily actions, verbal actions, and mental actions. Kamma, as a law of nature, means that there is a persistence if one performs bad actions, one will continue to reap bad results. However, there are four pairs of factors promoting and obstructing the fruition of Kamma. These are the four accomplishments (*sampatti*) and the four defects (*vipatti*). The four factors include; 1) birth; environment, place of birth, 2) the body; how fortunate of the body 3) time; how favorable is the time when one is born, and 4) undertaking; how one engages in rightful or wrongful activities (Buddhaghosacariya, 2017, p.358). All of which result to manifestation in the fruition of Kamma. Therefore, sometime bad people seem not to necessarily get bad results immediately, whereas some good people have to face their unfortunate occasions consistently. Because of this, some Buddhist laypeople rely during their lives on help from the power of *sak-sit* forces. This shows a strong incorporation between animism, Buddhism and Brahmanism-Hinduism in the Thai society.

For contemporary Buddhist laypeople, especially for those influenced by the popular form of Buddhism, are likely to observe and practise the teachings for emotional reasons. “When I Think of Impermanence I feel Better” (Cassaniti, 2015, p. 29). Some Buddhist rituals and practices are conducted in the same way among the people as is the way they worship the sacred objects. This is done in the hope that wholesomeness will eventually bring good fortune to them. In other words, the aim of Buddhist rituals and practices are deviated from purifying the mind, toward the emotional and momentary releasing from suffering. The Kathin ceremony is a clear example. People would like to take part into the

ceremony because they wish for the good fortune of Kamma. Kamma is then used to explain a person's existent fortune and becomes a religious reason for making merit, which is simply similar to showing respect to spirits or making merit to the wada, as a protective pursuit.

Kathina takes place only once a year, so it is the grand pursuit of beneficial Kamma which Buddhist laypeople desire to participate in.

In the contemporary lay Buddhist society, many people perceive Kathina as an event that a sponsor and an association will donate a great sum of money to a Buddhist monastery after the Rain Retreat ends (the end of three-month annual retreat). One monastery can have only one sponsor to support the Kathin ceremony. Less people recognize Kathina as an activity of the saṅgha (the Buddhist community of monks) during which the Buddha gives them permission to make a new robe after the Rain Retreat. The traditional Kathin ceremony in Pāli canon and the Thai contemporary Kathin ceremony are quite different. Kathin is one of the major ceremonies for the Thai monastery which conducts these ceremonies annually. Traditionally, as stated in Tripitaka, during the rainy season, the Buddhist monks, or Bhikkhus, would be restricted. They will be required by the Buddha master to stay within a monastic boundary for three months without leaving to go anywhere else overnight. During this three-month period at the monastery where the monks had declared they would stay, they must present themselves each morning at the first moment of sunrise. This is called Vassa, "The earlier time for entering (upon Vassa) is the day after the full moon of Asalha (June-July)" (Müller, 1965, p.299). The main reason for this prohibition of not leaving a monastery is to conform with ecological reasons and also the way of living of the country's residents. This allows the monks to avoid damaging the vegetables of the local residents, and also from disrupting or damaging the lives of small living things which are fertile during the rainy season. However, it should be noted that in cases of necessity the Bhikkhus can leave the monastery without being guilty of interruption of Vassa. For example, in cases where the Bhikkhus were troubled by some great danger such as fire, floods, robbers or dangerous beasts.¹

¹ See Mahavagga, Third Khandhaka (Residence during the Rainy Season)

After the three-month retreat has ended, often the robes of the Bhikkhus will be worn out. As a consequence of this, the Buddha gave permission to the monks living within the boundaries of a monastery where there were five or more Bhikkhus,² who stayed in unity together during the Vassa residence, to make new robes together. This is where the Kathin ceremony starts. All Bhikkhus will search for cotton-cloth to be made into a new robe. Once enough of this cloth is found for making a new robe, this cloth will become the property of the saṅgha (the monastic order). This cloth is called Kathina-cloth. After this cloth is gathered the Bhikkhus will work to find a consensus in order to approve of the handing over of this Kathina-cloth to a particular Bhikkhu. According to Vinaya text from the Pali³, the criteria for distributing the Kathina-cloth to a Bhikkhu are in order; to the monk who has the most worn-out-robe, to the monk who is the most senior, to the monk who knows how to dye the robe, to the monk who knows how to make a robe and who is able to finish making a robe within one day. After all the Bhikkhus approve for this appointment⁴, then they will together go through the process of dyeing and sewing the cotton cloth into a robe. Finally, the Bhikkhus will have a formal approval for the actual possession of a particular Bhikkhu of this new robe. This entire process, including dyeing the robe, tailoring it, getting formal approval for the individual monk's possession of the robe and the immediate distribution of the created robe must be all finished within the same day. In ancient time, it was hard to find some cotton-cloth. Monks needed to collect the cloth from rags on dead bodies in the forest. The laypeople recognized this situation and they desired to help the Bhikkhus by giving the Kathina-cloth to the Bhikkhus as a meritorious gift to the whole saṅgha. In the early morning after the end of the Rains Retreat, laypeople then presented the cloth to a right constituted meeting of the saṅgha. All the Bhikkhus therefore did not have to search for clothes as they used to and the Kathin ceremony was to be gone through right away.

² See Mahavagga-atthakathaKathinakkhandhakam

³ See Mahavagga, Seventh Khandhaka(The Kathina Ceremonies)

⁴ "If the Saṅgha approves of the handing over of the Kathina to such and such a Bhikkhu for spreading it out, let it remain silent. The Saṅgha approves thereof. Therefore does it remain silent. Thus I understand."Mahavagga, Seventh Khandhaka(The Kathina Ceremonies) (Müller, 1881, p.152).

Another ancient tradition was for some laypeople to give Kathina-cloth by intentionally hanging it on the branch of a tree in the forest where they expected the monks would go to look for some cotton-cloth. This is the origin of pha-pa (forest cloths), the cloth which was hung on a tree. Nowadays this tradition is continued through the creation of the artificial Kathina trees. Lay people hang not only cloth on these trees now, but banknotes and it is also very common to see small groceries attached to these trees as well.

Kathina has become a significant event for the lay Buddhists for many reasons. Firstly, this event is restricted by time and location, which is at each Buddhist monastery and only one time per year. Therefore, the lay person who wants to be a sponsor needs to make an advance booking. Getting the chance of being a Kathina sponsor for some reputable temples is unbelievably impossible. This is not even including the royal temples and the chance to take part in a Royal Kathina. As an example, at Wat PaknamBhasi Charoen, their waiting list for being a Kathina sponsor is extended to 540 years in advance. The lay people put their name on this waiting list in the hope to have this opportunity granted for their descendant (Thairathonline, 2013). In general, there are those who won't be able to succeed as a sole sponsor. This creates the opportunity of being co-sponsors with others. Kathin Samakki is the name of Kathin ceremony conducted by a group of sponsors (samakki means unified or united). Secondly, being a Kathina sponsor requires a great deal of money, time and manpower, which is regarded as a great meritorious giving action.

Lastly, regarding the Law of Kamma, whatever a person sows is whatever a person reaps. For human beings, no volitional actions are fruitless. Great meritorious actions, including being a sponsor of a Kathin ceremony, leads to great fruitful results. Therefore, if Kathina is conducted with righteous action, righteous speech and a righteous mind, then this good Kamma could come to fruition. In sum, Kathina makes people feel peaceful in their mind in spite of a great deal of complexity of the Law of Kamma.

A change from the past meritorious practices which were formerly conducted as simple righteousness and are now pursued with the goal of

instant happiness.

Tam-boon, is a general Thai word^x for meritorious action. Lay people make merit because they believe it helps them receive good Kamma in the future. This is found in the teachings of Buddha about the cause and effect of doing good things. Regarding the meritorious action, the Buddha describes the three grounds for it; one is founded on ‘gifts’ (dānā), two is found on ‘virtuous conducts’ (sīla) and three is founded on the cultivation of the mind and of wisdom ‘making mind become’ (bhāvanā). As the following description states;

“Take the case, monks, of a man who only on a small scale creates the base of meritorious action founded on gifts, only on a small scale creates the base of meritorious action founded on virtue and does not reach the base of meritorious action founded on making mind become. He, on the breaking up of the body after death, is reborn among men of ill luck” (The Book of The Gradual Sayings, 1935, pp.164-165).

The Buddha demonstrates thoroughly that through the higher scale of meritorious action founded on gifts and virtue, the higher level of prosperity a man would reborn to be. According to the Buddhist teaching, the only action which will lead to a state of Nibbana(which is the state of release from the cycle of rebirths) is making one’s mind free (or verifying that one’s mind is free) which is the ultimate spiritual goal in Buddhism. Whereas the meritorious actions that are founded on gifts and virtue still promote reincarnation. Giving requires a lower level of effort; whereas, observing the precepts and working on mental development require higher levels of effort and determination. According to SomdetPhraBuddhaghosacariya, this teaching on meritorious actions is for householders which emphasize a person’s external environment and are elementary forms of spiritual practice. Whereas, teachings for the monastic saṅgha emphasize a person’s inner life and are higher level of spiritual practice (2017, pp.998-999).

Tam-boon, or meritorious action founded on ‘gifts’, is the most popular activity of the Thai lay Buddhists used to express generosity to the monastery and to the monks. The 2017 Survey on Conditions of Soci-

ety, Culture and Mental Health by National Statistical Office of Thailand reports that 92.9% of Thai lay Buddhist practitioners give alms to Buddhist monks, 75.9% pray to the Buddha, and 55.4% observe all of the Buddhist five precepts (National Statistic Office Thailand, 2561). Giving alms to the monks is a meritorious action founded on giving a gift. Observing the five precepts is a meritorious action founded on virtue. Praying to the Buddha is a meritorious action founded on a preliminary action of making mind become free.

During 1920s-2000s, the reformation of Buddhism in Thailand developed in parallel with the establishment of major Thai universities. This intellectual agitation has fragmented the Buddhist society into several divisions. Apart from Mahanikaya, the traditional mainstream monasteries, there has been a group devoted to the reform of Vinaya (the regulatory framework for the sangha) and to forest monasticism (Dhammayutnikaya), in groups of new sects; Santi-asoke and Dhammakaya. Surrounded by this intellectual movement, there have been changes in socioeconomic conditions as well. This has widely effected the behavioral practices and emotional practices of the Thai lay Buddhist.

As the first point, the political revolution in 1932 that turned Thailand from an Absolute Monarchy to a Constitutional Monarchy, followed by the Economic and Social Development Plans that are executed every five years since 1961, has led to changes of Thai society in its economic and social aspects. From being a low-middle income country, the country reached to being an upper-middle income country in 2010 by the threshold of World Bank classification. Yet the situation in Thailand of the standard of living and the human capacity are below the target, which seems to be a contradiction of the socio-economic development direction. This has been reflected in the problem of the quality of Thai education that cannot develop human resources who are as adaptable as they should have been (Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand, 2017, pp. 8-16). Additionally, Thai society has to deal with the inequality of resource allocation, the inequality of accessibility to resources, and income inequality all of which are harshly occurring in Thailand. One of the results of this is that the majority of lower income people who practice popular Buddhism

seem to rely on their religious practices as their sanctuary.

Secondly, there has been a development of the concept cultivated by capitalism of “giving to get something immediately in return” within the middle class. There has been growth in the Thai middle class population along with an expansion of urbanization highlighted in Thailand. The two broad groups among the laypeople, a Buddhism of the abstract texts and a popular Buddhism, have also been reflected within the middle class. Jim Taylor comments that during the 1960s to the 1980s in Thailand, there was a wider social disaggregation, that we could see religious hybridism as a reflection of. There has been a sector of the middle class, who have a here-and-now religious orientation. This group of people give charity with a belief that it will make them richer in the immediate future (Taylor, 1999). The action consisting in ‘giving’ like Kathin ceremony, nowadays, has carried great prestige and has brought honour to the sponsor. The higher amount of money to raise up and donate to a monastery, the more privilege of good Kamma manifests. Pāramī is a virtuous quality or perfections derived from wholesome actions. It is worth it to notice that, the Thai lay Buddhists value some relationship between the ‘value of gifts’ to the ‘pāramī givers have’ or that pāramī givers will receive from their wholesomeness. It can be noted that this shows a very thin line between the Law of Kamma and a mechanic of capitalism. The Law of Kamma says “the doer of good reaps good; the doer of evil reaps evil” (Buddhaghosacariya, 2017, p. 357). Whereas, in capitalism, the more capital one accumulates, the more wealth is likely to be generated now and in the future. Rachele M. Scott comments in ‘Nirvana for Sale?’ about the consumerism and the commercialization of Buddhism that “Contemporary Buddhists who correlate wealth with religious piety employ the traditional idea that wealth is a sign of merit and infuse it with contemporary sensibilities, aesthetics, and identities, many of which are mediated through the lens of global capitalism (2009, p.157). However, many Buddhists today claim that capitalism ruins authentic forms of religiosity. As a result, the practice of the middle way of living and in Buddhist economics has been widely discussed.

Pāramī has a word with the similar sound in Thai ba-ra-me which

is connected to khuna(moral goodness) and decha(power). Thais usually use the word phra-dech-phra-khun(decha+kuna) when we would like to express the quality of a person who has charisma of being a good leader and who will protect and govern a community with virtuous governance. NidhiEosiwong, comments that “Thai middle class also adhere to a so-called traditional cultural worldview, especially with their ideas of karma and barami(charismatic power)” (Scott, 2009, p.164). According to the Buddhist teaching, there are ten types of pāramī, each type is derived from different sources of wholesomeness.; giving, good conduct, renunciation, wisdom, endeavor, endurance, truthfulness, self-determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity (Payutto, 2005). ‘Giving’ is the most popular for laypeople because they can get an instant pleasant feeling. The pleasant feeling comes from an expectation of fruit of Kamma they will get in a future.

Lastly, the monastery and the secular community in Thailand have long been connected since ancient times; and a change in secular matters affects the monastery and vice versa. The monastery serves as the center of the community with many functions. Apart from being a spirituality center, it also includes being a center of education, recreation, health and wellness. This is supported by a comment by Mcdaniel, “No monastery is isolated from the economic and cultural morphologies (economic, social, political, cultural changes, as well as the congruent and contingent personal and institutional adaptations to these changes) in the streets and paths surrounding it” (2011, p. 15). While monks are required to restrictively practice Dharma-Vinaya to purify themselves, one of the more important role of monks is to teach people the path to achieve a release from suffering. Many historical events show a close relationship between the rulers and the monastery. The Supreme Patriarch is also appointed by the King. As an example, in a contemporary event, The King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the IX monarch of Thailand from the Chaki dynasty, granted an initiative for the establishment of the Chaipattana Foundation and appointed Her Royal Highness Princess Mana Chakri Sirindhorn to be the Executive Chairperson. Under this foundation, Bor Worn or the Home, Temple and School (HTS) organization, or to be called the three pillars (Boonbongkarn, n.d.), was set

up as a learning organization in the Thai communities. The role of HTS, is to strengthen the communities by providing knowledge and morality from generations to generations. It shows the close relationship between home, temple and school. Whatever one does, will reflect to the others.

In religious practice, 'giving' in Buddhist teaching aims for nothing. The expectation for such a good result could turn to greed. As Phrakrubhavanavaranulak concludes in his research of 'The Pattern of Offering Dāna Helping one to the Enlightenment of the Dhammas in Present Thai Societies' that, "Thai societies have offered the alms giving, emphasizing on almost egoistically becoming as self-centeredness.; that is the increase of defilement and desire mostly present and future" (2017, p.134). He further mentions the different form of principles and the methods of alms giving between practices in contemporary Thai society and in the Tipitaka.

Buddhist monastics are subject to limits placed on any indulgence of their processions. Every day the Theravada monks recite the reflections of taints to be abandoned by using, which describes the four basic needs of human being for life. One of those reflections is about the robe, "Here a bhikkhu, reflecting wisely uses the robe only for protection from cold, for protection from heat, for protection from contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, the sun, and creeping things, and only for the purpose of concealing the private parts" (Bodhi, 1995, p. 95). Therefore, the lay Buddhist should aware of this and support the monks to fulfill this discipline properly. However, the reputable reformist monk PhayomKallayano, comments that monks these days are defeated by material gains. The monks nowadays want to lavish a great sum of resource on building construction to attract more laypeople to come visit the temple. The more visitors, the more chance to get great amounts of donations (Taylor, 1999). On the layperson's side, when laypeople know that temples would like to build anything, they will respond by raising fund and donating to temples in the hopes that they will receive good results in return. Kathina is a good occasion to raise fund and donate to temples. Some Kathin ceremonies make giant money trees and conduct amazing parades while they walk to temples.

Conclusion

In the Thai contemporary society, it can be noticed that there has been a change of perspective of the Buddhist laypeople towards meritorious actions. Since there is a strong incorporation between Animism, Buddhism and Brahmanism-Hinduism in the society, it is not unusual to see a layperson makes merit with a monk in exchange for a sacred object to protect oneself. Once one element fails to function, the other element could be called as a support immediately. This explains such a complex and contradictory belief in one person who practices meditation to attain wisdom, while at the same time, this person also worships some sacred objects for peace of mind. Kathina reflects a combination of all the three beliefs, conducting good deeds to some sacred things in exchange of the protection from them as in the Animism theme, giving new robes to the monk as the traditional Buddhist scripture allows them to conduct, and putting a great deal of effort to create richness of rituals and processes as the Brahmanism-Hinduism heritage.

The change of socioeconomic status also influences the perspective of the Thai Buddhist laypeople about their religious way of practices. Capitalism has trained people heavily on investing for gaining something. Apparently, there are many laypeople who conduct meritorious practices for gaining some instant happiness, Kathin is one of the best example. Since Kathina is a ceremony recognized to provide a great amount of good result manifestation, it is therefore not unusual to find the Thai laypeople who are enjoying enclosing some bank notes or coins into the white envelopes or to attach some notes on to the money tree.

However, the Law of Kamma is complex. Sometime, it seems a person will spend more than a lifetime to see the results of what one sowed. Kamma is used to explain a person's existent fortune and becomes religions reason for making merit, which is comparable to showing respect to spirits or making merit to thewada, as a protective pursuit. Because of the complexity of the Law of Kamma, being generous or gaining merit acquired by giving seems to be less recognized as the Law of Kamma, instead it becomes something to heal people from the everyday traumas of

life. In other words, it is a way to help them emotionally. This explains why we can see the joyfulness of people in the contemporary Kathin festival.

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