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VALUE AND INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM TO “KHMER-LOA KUI” WAY OF LIVES IN MOON RIVER, SURIN PROVINCE

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Abstract

This qualitative research aimed to study values and influences of Buddhism to ways of lives of Khmer-Laos-Kui’s communities in the Moon River, Surin Province. Three objectives of this study consisted of ways of lives, cultural relationship, and analyze the values and influences of Buddhism to the communities of Khmer-Laos-Kuis in the Moon River, Surin province. The research methods used were document studies. The data were collected from the research field, and in-depth interview from 21 informants. The results were as follows earlier ways of lives of Khmer-Laos-Kui’s communities living in the Moon River had different identities in language, culture, and tradition. Later, they had got close relationships, dependence in each other in

living, learning, exchanging, economics, society, cultures, politics, and religious believes. These activities made them lived together in peace and harmony. The cultural relationships of Khmer-Laos-Kui's communities in Surin province were classified into four aspects. They consisted of the moral aspect such as the belief in ancestral spirits and in Buddhism, the legal aspect such as the social orders by using ancient cultures and traditions, state laws, and Buddhist moral rules, the cohabitation aspect such as living in harmonious culture but being different in performing arts, such as, Kantrum folk music for Khmer, Isan Mor Lam traditional song for Laos, Kallmor Ritual for Kui, etc., and the material aspect such as they had similarity in housing, constructions, dressing, and appliances.

Keywords

Value and Influence, Buddhism, Way of Live, Khmer Lao Kui's Community

1. Introduction

In this research, it was originated by the interest in studying life, culture relation, worth and influences of Buddhism on life the community of "Khmer-Laos-Kui" at a basin of Moon river in Surin province. This research will improve the knowledge about life in these communities, culture relation about moral lesson, belief, living pattern, regulations in a community, an architecture in each community. This will provide the thought of sources or the origin of these things, and will be useful for further research.

2. Objectives

The objective was to study the life in "Khmer-Laos-Kui" at a basin of Moon river in Surin province and to study the culture relation in "Khmer-Laos-Kui" at a basin of Moon river in Surin and analyze the influences of Buddhism on the communities in "Khmer-Laos-Kui" at a basin of Moon river in Surin

3. Methodology

The method can be divided into 2 patterns, including 1) documentary study, it was used to study about the history and cultures of "Khmer-Laos-Kui" at a basin of Moon river in Surin, and 2) field study which was carried out by interviewing a monk, a scholar person, a community leader, and people to be able to know the life, cultures, relation, worth, and the influences of

Buddhism on communities. The sample population, in this study, was purposive sampling based on the importance of study. 21 samples included 2 monks, 12 scholar persons, 4 community leader, 3 ordinary people. The fields used to study were Khmer community (Yang Bo Pirom, Chumphon Buri, Surin province), Laos community (Wat Ban Arjya community, Ban Arjya, RattanaBuri, Surin), and Kui community (Wat Ban Ta Klang community, Ban Ta Klang, Tha Tum, Surin province)

4. Results

According to the studying results, the life of Khmer-Laos-Kui at a basin of Moon river in Surin province can be explained via the four perspectives relating to the study of life, including 1) economy 2) social and cultures 3) politics, 4) belief and religion, as written in following details.

1. Khmer community in a basin of Moon river in Surin province, after 18 Buddhist era, Sukhothai was found as a capital city and the power of Khmer was deteriorated. When, King U-Thong found Ayutthaya, he was trying to overwhelm Khmer (Cambodia). The boarder of Khmer was dominated by Ayutthaya. Then, Ayutthaya overwhelmed the East of Thailand, and Surin, Khukhan, RattanaBuri, and Sangkha were found in the reign of the princess royal Suriya. These cities were dominated by Phimai (Nakhon Ratchasima). Hence, it was assumed that it was a community of Khmer. They found and evacuated to the South East and lived along Moon River in Surin.

Economy of Khmer's community, Thai Khmer had a simple way of life, and their occupation was agriculture for living. The most popular agriculture, at that time, was rice planting (Khao Jao) because the community of Thai Khmer was a mountain plain. Thai Khmer liked to eat the rice, known as Khao jao, so they did not plant sticky rice (Sed Saked) which was known as economy in Thai. Because of Thai Khmer iving in the border line, the economy was considered simple with the perspective for living.

Social and Cultures, Thai Khmer was an old community and was the same as another Cambodian people living in another part of Cambodia, or another part of South East of Thailand, i.e. Vietnam etc. the community of Thai Khmer was gathered as a small village as similar as the community in North East and North of Thailand. At the beginning of community construction, every people in the community were relatives. The community was usually built in the area near

a river due to water was important for living. After that, the community was expanded to become a big community and in every community, people always built either NaTa house or a spirit house to protect people in the community. According to the belief of Khmer people, the spirit house will protect people living in the house and NaTa was a god to protect people in the community. The relationship of community of Thai Khmer was deep and strong. Every people in the community helped each other like Thai's community, which referred to the leader of family was father. Thai Khmer community was gathered as an expanded family.

Politics, the head of village took the responsibility govern communities. The leader of Thai Khmer and the leader of religion, at that moment, were considered the same person. After King Rama V announcing Local Government Act 116 (announced at 22 May B.E. 2440), the political way was changed and the village headman was in charge of governing villages.

Belief and religion, Thai Khmer was an old community. They had many cultures and beliefs from the ancestors. These activities related to the belief in living, i.e. wedding, ordination, medication, and mourning. The example was the belief of ordinary teacher. Thai Khmer people believed that every people were born with the protective god known as "teacher." The god will protect people. Hence, every newborn will be in the ritual to welcome the god. Besides, Thai Khmer people also believed that that the child was born because a mother, which was known as "ordinary mother" or "Sanon mother" who took care of newborns. The meaning of Sanon mother was a person who created life. In the case of ordination, the people believed in "Bua-Nieng."

2. Laos community at Moon river basin in Surin, it was assumed that Laos community evacuated after Khmer and Kui. According to historical record, Forest Khmer including Surin, Sungkha, Khukan, and Rattanakosin evacuated to a basin of Moon river in Surin and neighboring areas in the beginning of Rattanakosin era. Their ways of life included.

In economical view the Laos communities living at a basin of Moon river were considered agricultural community. Besides, they also did fishing and household industry, such as pot molding, basket and clothes weaving etc. Laos's women took the responsibility for weaving, domestic, food preparing, cooking, and agriculture. In the case of Laos's men, they were in charge of planting. Laos's people did respect to relatives. After wedding, they will live at a women's house in a short period of time. After that, they will move to new house. A daughter usually obtained a heritage from parent and usually lived with parent after wedding.

Social and cultures, Thai Laos people usually lived gregariously at a village known as “Non” based on the area of planting which was referred to the area around the villages having a large basin or a small river that possessed water in summer. Not far from the village, there will have a grove wood having benefits for domestic buffalo and cow and also having benefits for collecting wild plants. According to Laos’s people, the temple was placed at the back of village because they believed that the temple should be separated from the villages, which was known as Wisungkhamasima (literally meant outside village). However, in the practical way, the monk and the people in the village usually did activities together. Apart from temple, another important place was a shrine of the ancestor (or Tub Pu Ta) which was normally located in front of the village that was a highland. Some large areas were called “the highland of the ancestor.”

Politics, it was dominated by the belief of the ancestor living in the northern part, in particular the influence of China in terms of materialism or ancestors, such as father and mother, ancestors, heroes.

Belief and cultures, Thai Laos people believed in cultures known as “Heet Sib Song” which occurred one time in 12th months. They respected to Buddhism, as the religion affected the cultures and the ways of living of people, and focused on teaching people to be a good person instead of teaching them to reach nirvana. Besides, they also believed in ghosts and evils. The highly affecting one was an ancestor ghost. Every people in communities had a shrine of ancestors in their houses. In addition, there was a person who can contact with ancestor spirit, called “Tao Jum” (shaman). The shaman got a lot of respect from people in communities, and the shaman paid respect to Theravada Buddhism and Brahmanism as occurred in many rituals. In Thai-Laos village, the center was a temple, as it was the place for religion activities and for teaching children. According to this reason, a boy will be familiar with the temple because it was the place for learning, ordination etc. Besides, Thai-Laos people also believed in ghosts and spirit, for example ghosts staying in trees, river, house, farm, villages and also the spirit of ancestors. They had a ghost rite in cultivating season. When they got sick, they believed that it caused by the power of ghost. Hence, the shaman will begin the ritual to cure people. Additionally, they also believed in the presence of an ogre, which was the person being controlled by the evil spirit and can hurt anybody.

3. Kui community at a basin of Moon river in Surin, during 22 Buddhist era , Kui people living in Champasak evacuated to the north east via Kaeng Sapa or Kaeng Kachunpeud (big

snake lake) located at Khlong Jeam (Phongjeang-Foog Chang) because of political problems. Then, they distributed in the north east. Their life included;

In economic view, in the past the Kui's community was considered an agricultural community before they were evacuating from Laos to the south east of Thailand. Their community was highly depended on nature, believed in ghosts, and always hunted elephants in the forest. After that getting the relation with Khmer and Laos, they got the belief to change behaviors to be compatible with Buddhism, Brahmanism, and mysterious things. According to these reasons, whenever they faced with the problems, they always asked helps from shaman, as they believed that the shaman can contact with the mysterious power. The mysterious ritual was, then, considered relevant to the ways of life, especially in the mentality. Nowadays, the characteristic of elephant is preserved as the elephant village for tourists to observe the way of living between human and elephant.

Social and cultures, in the past, their communities were dynamic for seeking a fruitful area being suitable for agriculture. Besides, they also had the abilities in forest investigation and elephant hunting. They evacuated to the southern part of north east in between the reign of King Narai the Great (B.E. 2199 – 2231) to Thonburi era. Kui people who evacuated will have their own leaders. The evacuation had been stopped in the reign of King Rama IV. After that, they also distributed to neighboring areas including Buri Ram, Ubon Ratchathani, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Mahasarakham. Kui people living in Surin and Srisaket called evacuated Kui people as “new village.” In the present, there is the combination of cultures, and it was difficult to distinguish what types of cultures are.

Politics, in the past Kui community had an unofficial leader known as “ancestor or father.” Each village will have elderly people who had great impacts on the ways of problem solving, internal and external activities of community. The group was separated, and the things that can give the historic information were language, clothing, ritual, and belief etc.

Belief and religion, the belief of Kui people, nowadays, is still related to the spirit of ancestors, for example sacred areas. They preserve this culture because they believe that it positively causes the village environment. According to this reason, they have annual activities, for instance making offering to the spirit in third and sixth months using the area having large trees which were a residence of a monitor lizard. They believed that it was a sign of merit of their

ancestors that protected environment, asset, and life of people in the village. When it comes to ritual, the person known as “Ta Tao Jum” is a representative for carrying the ritual out.

The study showed that the relationship between cultures and Khmer-Laos-Kui communities at a basin of Moon river in Surin, it included 4 views including (1) merit view which was referred to the way of living that believed in gods and ancestor’s ghost mixed with the religion belief, (2) legal view which was referred to the social organization process caused by the cultures, laws, and also religion regulations, (3) integrated merit or homogenized cultures, but they had an unique culture in their own community for example KunTeum in Khmer community, Laos’s dancing in Laos community, and Kal Mor in Kui community etc., (4) Culture view, their cultures were close such as houses, architectures, clothes, and stuffs etc. Therefore, it could be concluded that. Khmer-Laos-Kui communities at a basin of Moon river in Surin, each group had unique cultures which were obtained from their ancestors. When they lived together, they had to change behaviors to live with others according to the study of merit, legal, integrated merit, and cultures.

Merit view

They lived in the same village or the same district. They had the related relationship in terms of working and living. Albeit, these groups had their own belief obtained from the ancestors, but when they lived together they had to have the culture relation and merit, which were referred to ways of living, teaching, belief, or another issue obtained by the religion.

Method

There were an evolution and a distribution of cultures. It illustrated the ways of behavior adaptation to be suited with the surrounded physical environment and cultures. Besides, there were the homogeneity and the integration of cultures through culture ways.

Similarity and difference

The merit of Khmer-Laos-Kui communities had the similar belief which was referred to ghosts and spirit. However, what was different was the way to call ghosts and spirits.

Legal view

In Khmer-Laos-Kui communities at a basin of Moon river, the culture was related to the regulations of Khmer-Laos-Kui living in the same village. Apart from being obeyed the laws, the people had to be under the regulation of culture.

They had to respect another culture that was not their original cultures, and they also need to integrate and to blend cultures together.

Khmer-Laos-Kui communities at a basin of Moon river in Surin, they had their own cultures, for instance Khmer had the culture relating to preying respect to an original teacher in newborns, wedding, and new house ritual etc. However, they had the ritual that can be carried out with others, for example San-Pon-Ta ritual, ordination, or new house ritual applying the culture of Khmer, Laos, and Kui etc.

Integrated merit

For example the combination of Laos's dancing with the melody of Kun Teum, lyrics blending between Khmer rhythm and Laos's dancing, and the integration of Kal Mor activity with Pun-Jo-Ma-Moud activity of Khmer community. These sorts of activities led to happiness of all communities.

The cultural transfer in term of integrated merit occurred via activities or music contests. They had their own styles, but they can blend each separated one.

Khmer-Laos-Kui communities had different music styles, for example Kum Teum and Jeang in Khmer community, Laos's dancing and poem dancing in Laos community etc. These activities had language differences. However, what considered similar was blending of religion views to the music for example Jeang, or poem dancing etc.

Cultures

It can be seen that there was the relationship between tools and knowledge of Khmer-Laos-Kui people and the stuffs were really meant to cultural environments of these communities, such as clothing, dwelling places, and foods etc.

The way to pass the cultures relating to merit things, houses, and cooking of each group was coincidentally changed. Each group had their own unique style. However, these communities were also exchanged cultures with others.

The beginning, there were differences in terms of dwelling places and foods, but in the present these communities modernized their houses. Hence, it is rarely found the outdated houses today. In the case of food, there are still the differences in the way of eating, but they can eat food from other cultures.

The results studying about the influences of Buddhism on the Khmer-Laos-Kui communities at a basin of Moon river in Surin revealed that Buddhism acted as a connecting

bridge between these communities. According to the results analyzing the worth and the influences of Buddhism on Khmer-Laos-Kui communities, it exhibited that Buddhism homogenized these people together, and it also related to the ways of living and the activities, such as respecting ancestors (San Pon Ta) ordination on the back of an elephant, new house ritual, or wedding etc. The influences of Buddhism can be divided into 6 parts based on tangible and intangible views as described in the following details. Worth and influences of Buddhism.

Society and culture

Building a temple as a sign of respect toward Buddhism Good merit such as actions reflect results, magnanimous, recognizing parents, belief, and faith based on the contents of Buddhism

Politics

Creating the rules to govern the community based on Buddhism contents a monk acting as a community leader to haul problems based on the belief and the faith of people toward Buddhism

Economy

Goods, stuffs, services based on either faith or belief in Buddhism, Buddhism-related activities supporting economy and benefits of communities, such as ordination on the back of an elephant, or charity etc. The economy was based on the environment, agriculture, hand crafting, and sufficient economy

Way of life

Crafting clothes such as clothing weaving and crafting accessory (simple houses) Respect and helping others for peacefully living in communities.

Art

Integrating art and dancing to pay respect to Buddhism (arts decorated on the ceiling of a temple, stuffs, and houses) Applying the contents written in Buddhism to contests to pay respect to Buddhism Artistic things decorated in a temple revealed the history of Buddhism

Language

Palm leaves engraving for history of community and Buddhism contents using local, Thai, and Pali languages. Using Pali language in daily life, such as naming people, praying, talking, writing, and integrating Pali with local and Thai languages.

5. Conclusion

The results showed that Khmer-Laos-Kui communities in a basin of Moon river resided along the river. In the cases of economy, society, cultures, politics, and belief, there were distinct at the beginning of foundation. After that these communities exchanged knowledge and cultures. What making these communities blended was Buddhism as it greatly affected the way of life and cultures. Nevertheless, the language was still different as it depended on each community. Besides, the external cultures that could blend these communities and could clarify the points were not investigated in this study because many communities were distributed in various areas in Thailand. The results showed that Khmer-Laos-Kui communities possessed the difference in term of settlement at a basin of Moon river in Surin. The previous belief affected the social pattern, way of life, living style as well. After evacuating, they had to coincidentally use resources, so it caused the relationships in every single group. Besides, their cultures were blended through the help of important factor known as "Buddhism." This phenomenon influenced the wealth and the stability of society and nation based on Buddhism, but the characteristic of each community was still preserved.

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