



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE AFFECT OF BELIEF IN DEVATĀ ON THE CURRENT THAI SOCIETY

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Thai society is a society that has diverse beliefs in various dimensions and adopts various cultures into daily life effortlessly and harmoniously with such cultures without gaucherie. It can be said that Thai society is a flexible society. It adapts so well to many cultures. Even though Thai society in the present is ever-changing, it consists of many forms of modern technologies to satisfy the comfort of life or addiction to the convenience of materialism. In another part of the human mind, it still sustains the belief in Devatā (Deities) and sacred entities. The objectives of this research are to study the concept of the belief in Devatā in Thai society, study the story of Devatā that appears in Buddhist scriptures, and analyze the belief in Devatā that affects current Thai society.

Methodology: This research was qualitative research that consisted of studying documentary data by studying primary documents such as Thai Tripitaka and secondary documents such as data from textbooks, books, articles, and research documents related to the subject field. All obtained data was then analyzed and presented in the form of an analytical description together with the researchers' opinions and perspectives in order to summarize, discuss the results, and present recommendations in the research.

Main Results: The result indicated that the concept of belief in Devatā had existed for a long time in Thai society, which was influenced by Buddhist teachings. It was believed that Devatā had sacredness that could give fortune or safety in life. In the Buddhist scriptures, it was found that Devatā meant a group of heavenly deities. It was a collective term for the inhabitants of heaven, both male and female. They were the inhabitants of heaven who ate divine food and had etheric bodies, clairvoyance, and clairsaudience. They were born spontaneously. Devatā, or deities that appeared in various scriptures, were considered the beings within Saṃsāra. They were companions in emergence, aging, suffering, and death, much like humans and animals. In terms of the belief in Devatā affecting current Thai society, the research indicated that there was a belief in Devatā as a role model for doing good deeds and a role model of conduct. They were believed to be the sacred entities that constantly protected



and assisted humans who had done good deeds and the sacred entities that constantly protected the country.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This research involves Applied Buddhism, which is Buddhism and the Development of Wisdom and Morality with Buddhism. Devatā has appeared in Buddhist scriptures as a role model in doing good deeds that include giving gifts, cultivating ethical conduct, and committing to development, which is Buddha's teaching that has made people believe in the existence of Devatā. Moreover, people also believe that Devatā will protect their lives if they live their lives by giving gifts, cultivating ethical conduct, and committing to development. The belief has influenced and remarkably set a guideline for daily life in Thai society.

Conclusions: The belief in Devatā was a belief that was influenced by Buddhist teachings and had existed for a long time in Thai society. Especially in the society of Buddhists, Devatā was regarded as a powerful entity. It had a sacredness that could bring forth things, protect humans from dangers, and safeguard humans' happiness and prosperity. It was the belief that influenced and affected Thai society in many ways, such as the belief that Devatā was a role model for doing good deeds. Every belief that Thai society perceived about Devatā was consistent with Buddhist teachings and resulted in the prosperity and tranquility of Thai society all along.

Keywords: Belief, Devatā (Deities), Current Thai Society

Introduction

Thai society can be said to be a society that consists of beliefs in various dimensions. Thai society is a society that has developed and changed in various aspects continuously. Moreover, Thai people can also easily adopt different cultures into their daily lives and blend in with them without gaucherie. If it says positively, it can be said that it is a resilient society that adapts well to different cultures (Phrakrubaidika Hassadee Praking, 2020).

The cultural belief in Devatā (Deities) is considered another dimension of Thai society. Especially Thai society that has practiced Buddhism and has inherited this belief for a long time. It is the inheritance of belief in Devatā from generation to generation. It is considered the belief that is related to sacred entities, including the belief in various spiritual entities. Stereotypically, the belief in spiritual entities collectively includes belief in ghosts, ancestral spirits, and the Devatā. With these beliefs, they are the causes that lead to the practice of worshiping sacred entities, including ancestral spirits. It can be seen from the front yard of the Buddhists' houses where spirit houses are placed. They are believed to be the residences of ancestors, including guardian Devatā, and they are regularly worshipped (Boonchuay et al., 2023).

At present, Thai society is a modern society that is rapidly developing in various aspects. Human beings are living in new ways. Modern technology is brought to be used to support human lifestyles to make life happy. It is comfortable in every way that it seems to have forgotten the context of the old way of living, which is the way that our ancestors have



practiced in the past. Nevertheless, it also includes issues of belief in cultural traditions that have been passed down by ancestors for a long time. The issue of belief in Devatā in current Thai society is considered a very interesting issue that should be studied and analyzed in various aspects because it may help the belief about Devatā to continue existing alongside Thai society (Phrakru Uthakitjaruk & Phrakrubaidika Suwin Suvichano, 2019).

However, although current Thai society is a society that has rapid changes in various dimensions, modern technologies are used in various forms, which human beings have sought to satisfy the comfort of their life. No matter how addicted human is to comfort in materialism, another part of the human mind still sustains the belief in Devatā and sacred entities (Phrakrubaidika Hassadee Praking, 2020). For the mentioned reasons, they make the researchers interested in conducting an analytical study on the issue of which way belief in Devatā (Deities) can affect current Thai society in any aspect. The researchers think that this study will establish the preservation and inheritance of beliefs, including traditions and practices regarding the worship of Devatā and sacred entities that ancestors have continuously preserved and inherited to descendants in Thai society.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are to study the concept of the belief in Devatā in Thai society, study the story of Devatā that appears in Buddhist scriptures, and analyze the belief in Devatā that affects current Thai society.

Methodology

This research was qualitative research. It consisted of documentary data studies. The process of conducting research consisted of:

1. The scope of data sources, the researchers divided the scope of data sources in this research into two parts:

- 1.1 Information from documents in primary source, which included the Thai Tripitaka, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, B.E. 2539 (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996).

- 1.2 Information from documents in secondary source, which included information from textbooks, books, articles, research documents related to the subject field, which included information from electronic media.

The information collected from the documents of both parts were provided information about the concept and belief in Devatā that appeared in the Buddhist scriptures and affected current Thai society.

2. The scope of content, the researchers defined the scope of content that consisted of:

- 2.1 The content about the concept of the belief in Devatā of Thai society.

- 2.2 The content about the belief in the story of Devatā that appeared in Buddhist scriptures.



2.3 The content about the analysis of belief in Devatā that affected current Thai society.

All the obtained data was then analyzed and presented in the form of analytical descriptions along with opinions and perspectives from the researchers.

3. Summary, discussion and presentation of suggestions.
4. Publication of a complete thesis.

Results and Discussion

1. The concept of the belief in Devatā in Thai society

According to the topic of the research, which was the concept of the belief in Devatā (Deities) in Thai society, the researchers studied the concept of belief in Devatā (Deities). It appeared that Thai society had believed in Devatā (Deities) for a long time. They were belief influenced by Buddhist teachings. It was believed that Devatā (Deities) were sacred and benevolent in the preservation and protection of those who had done good deeds. (Phra Jukkrit Teeradhammo, 2015) It was believed that Devatā (Deities) could give fortune or safety in life. Therefore, every time there were Buddhist rituals, Devatā (Deities) would always be invited to participate in the ritual. It conformed to the research of Tattan (2018) who conducted the research on "A study of belief in devas in Lanna society." The results of the research showed that Devatā (Deities), according to Buddhism, were defined as those who lived in the realm of the gods, in which male deities were defined as gods and female deities were defined as goddesses. They lived in the six heavens of the sense-sphere, hence the name Six heavens of the desire realm.

The belief in Devatā (Deities) that appeared in Thai society was influenced by the belief of ancestors from ancient times. It came from the evolution of belief in the natural spirit that established traditions and belief in worshipping ancestral spirits, tree nymphs, and Devatā (Deities). It was consistent with traditional practices and Hinduism. Thus, the concurrence had established in each aspect of society, which included influence on literature, various arts, painting, and sculpture, and had been exchanged over time and era.

Lanna people had belief in Devatā (Deities), which are in accordance with Buddhist teachings and influences from Lanna's traditional belief. These were the important principles for relying on and depending on natural phenomena as the guidance of life, which could also be used as a spiritual anchor. It motivated Lanna people to do philanthropic activities. (Inthachak, 2019)

2. Devatā that appeared in Buddhist scriptures

According to the topic of the research, which was about Devatā that appeared in Buddhist scriptures, the researchers studied and found that Devatā (Deities) referred to the heavenly deities. It was a collective term for the inhabitants of heaven, both male and female. They were the inhabitants of heaven who ate divine food and had etheric bodies, clairvoyance, and clairaudience. They were born spontaneously.



Devatā (Deities) that appeared in various scriptures were considered as beings within Saṃsāra (Cycle of Existence). They were companions in emergence, aging, suffering, and death, much like humans and animals. They were humans who made meritorious actions at the time. Upon their death, the merits led them to enjoy happiness in various planes of the heavens with divine happiness, divine life span, divine beauty, and divine sovereignty until they dissipated their merits from heaven and then reincarnated to other worlds according to the power of good and evil deeds that had been done (Phrakru Kanchanakitcharak et al., 2022).

The passages in Thai Tripitaka indicated that the Buddha did not deny the existence of the worlds of Devatā (Deities) and the existence of Devatā (Deities) but did not regard the existence of Devatā (Deities) to be above the righteous persons who could become the refuges. For if any human being has access to the Triple Gems, the Devatā (Deities) must come to worship them. There was a Buddha's saying which indicated that:

"Whatever beings have gathered here, on the ground or in the sky: the Realized One is honored by gods and humans! We bow to the Buddha! May you be safe! Whatever beings have gathered here, on the ground or in the sky: the Realized One is honored by gods and humans! We bow to the Dhamma! May you be safe! Whatever beings have gathered here, on the ground or in the sky: the Realized One is honored by gods and humans! We bow to the Saṅgha! May you be safe!" (Kh.p.(Thai) 25/7/7) (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996).

Devatā (Deities) that appeared in the Buddhist scriptures were divided into several categories, which included gods by convention, gods by rebirth, and gods by purification. In addition, there was a classification according to the planes of heaven where the Devatā (Deities) or gods could have dwelled. It conformed to the research of Phra Saokam Dhammavaro (2017) who conducted the research on "An Analytical Study of the Ethics in Deva to Thai Society." The results of the research showed that there were three types of Devatā (Deities), which included gods by convention, gods by rebirth, and gods by purification. Gods by rebirth, maintained their existence according to the universe, heavens, life span, birth, death, worlds, landscapes, foods, and relationships with humans.

3. Analysis of the belief in Devatā that affects current Thai society

From the analysis of the study issues, it was found that Thai society believed Devatā (Deities) as sacred entities that protected and helped humans all the time, which included persons who well-practiced or acted righteously. Devatā (Deities) had always protected the country as well.

The belief of Devatā (Deities) that affected current Thai society included many characteristics. It concluded that current Thai society: 1) had faith in Devatā (Deities) as a role model for doing good deeds; 2) had faith in Devatā (Deities) as a role model of self-conduct; 3) had faith in Devatā (Deities) as influences on Thai society. All the beliefs that Thai society received from Devatā (Deities) were in agreement with Buddhist teachings and had resulted in



Thai society's prosperity and happiness all along (Phra-adhikan Khampa Atibalo, 2014). It conformed to the research of Phramaha Somporn Buddhaviro (2018) who conducted the research on "A Critical Study of the Utility of the Belief in Gods in Theravada Buddhist Philosophy." The results of the research indicated that:

1. According to the belief in Devatā (Deities) in Theravada Buddhist philosophy, they were the beings within Saṃsāra (Cycle of Existence). They were companions in emergence, aging, suffering, and death. They were humans who had done good deeds, which included regularly giving gifts, being steady in ethics, committing to development, maintaining conscience and prudence, undertaking seven vows and four right efforts, and cultivating in recollection of the deities. Upon death, they could be reincarnated in planes of the heavens to feel pleasantness, including divine life span, divine beauty, and divine happiness until they dissipated their divine life span.

2. According to the ethical benefits in Theravada Buddhist philosophy, they consisted of three elements, which included: 1) Benefits in the present life, happiness in the present; 2) Benefits in the lives to come, being born as human beings, Devatā (Deities), or Brahma in various planes of heavens; 3) The highest good included the attainment of the path, fruition, and extinguishment.

3. According to the concept of the ethical benefits from the belief in Devatā (Deities) in Theravada Buddhist philosophy, which included three benefits: 1) Benefits in the present life included temporal welfare and common welfare; 2) Benefits in the lives to come indicated godlike persons with conscience, prudence, and good conduct. When they left this world and went to the next world, they left in peace and then reincarnated in the heavens. There was a Buddha's saying indicating that "Cittē Asankilittē Sugati Patikankha, which meant when the mind was undefiled, a happy destination may be expected."; 3) The highest good included the path, fruition, and extinguishment. Attaining dhamma required one's own practice only, but those who had faith, perseverance, and poor intuitive wisdom must rely on Kalyāṇamitta to guide them on the way to benefits. Devadhamma accommodated the improvement of the ethics to be higher, which served as the base for enhancing the mundane dhamma to the supramundane dhamma, which included the path, fruition, and extinguishment.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

According to the research, Devatā (Deities) are the ones who have regularly conducted themselves with good deeds when they are living as humans. Those good deeds include giving gifts, cultivating ethical conduct, and committing to development. Upon their reincarnation after death, their merits lead them to reincarnate as Devatā (Deities) and enjoy happiness in various planes of the heavens with divine happiness, divine life span, divine beauty, and divine sovereignty until they dissipate their merits from heaven and then move (Reincarnate) to other worlds according to the power of good and evil deeds that they have done. The current Thai society consists of three types of faiths in Devatā (Deities): 1) faith in Devatā (Deities) as a role

model for doing good deeds; 2) faith in Devatā (Deities) as a role model of self-conduct; 3) faith in Devatā (Deities) as influences on Thai society. All the beliefs that Thai society receives from Devatā (Deities) agree with Buddhist teachings and have resulted in Thai society's prosperity and happiness all along, as indicates that Figure 1.

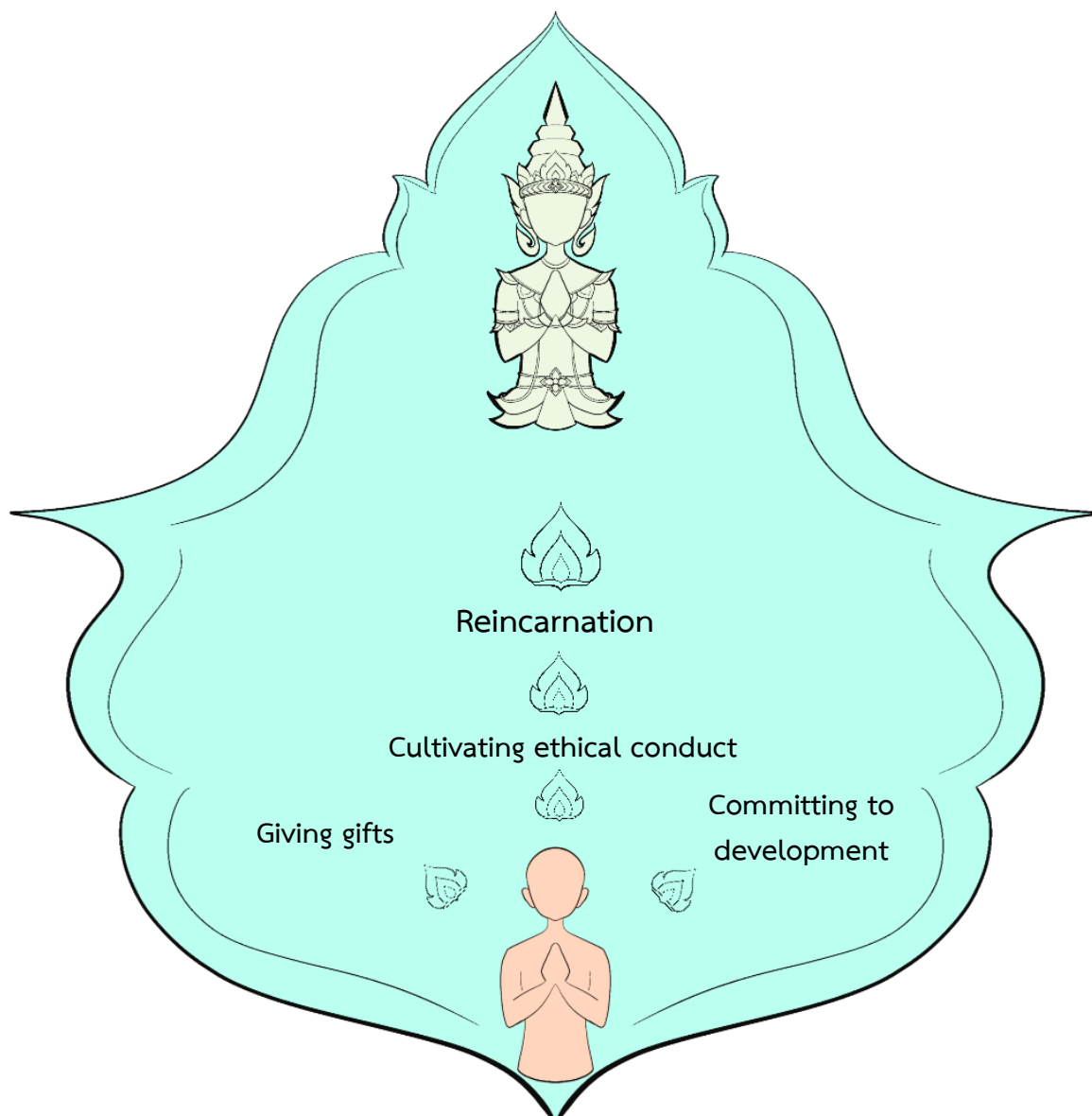


Figure 1 The practices to be reincarnated as Devatā (Deities).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The belief in Devatā (Deities) in Thai society was the belief that was influenced by Buddhist teachings. In the context of Thai society, especially in the society of Buddhists, Devatā (Deities) were regarded as powerful gods who had a sacredness that could bring forth things, protect humans to experience happiness and prosperity, and be safe to live. There was a belief that influenced and affected Thai society in many ways. For example, there were belief in Devatā (Deities) as role models of doing good deeds and as role models on how to behave in order to



be reincarnated in various planes of the heavens. And there was information about Devatā (Deities) in the scriptures indicating that they were the beings within Saṃsāra (Cycle of Existence). They were companions in emergence, aging, suffering, and death, much like humans and animals. Devatā (Deities) were human beings who had practiced good deeds in their past lives. Therefore, good deeds led them to enjoy pleasantness in various planes of the heavens with divine happiness, divine life span, divine beauty, and divine sovereignty until they dissipated their merits from heaven and then reincarnated to other worlds according to the power of good and evil deeds that had been done. It was the belief that was in agreement with Buddhist teachings and had resulted in Thai society's prosperity and happiness all along. This study indicated that there were still interesting issues to study for further research, which included an analysis of the belief of the new generation of young people towards Devatā (Deities) in current society and an analysis of the value of belief in Devatā (Deities) on improving the quality of life among the new generation of Thai youth.

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