

# Buddhist Teachings in *Pyha* (Riddle Philosophy): Dhamma Riddles in Isaan Culture and Society

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## Abstract

This research aims to study the Buddhist teachings embedded in the *Pyha* of Northeastern Thai (Isaan) society and culture. It has been documented that Buddhism was first introduced into the Isaan region after the third revision of the Buddhist teachings, under the leadership of King Asoka the Great from India. The king sent 9 teams of Buddhist missionaries to declare the religion in different places, including Thailand. Older Thai people who had practiced the teachings of The Buddha became grateful for the teachings and as a result, found different ways to spread them to others. *Pyha*, or Dhamma riddle, is one of the techniques used in the Isaan region as a means for spreading the great teachings. For this research, the *Pyha* were divided into 4 categories based on the discipline of purified philosophy. In some cases, certain extracts of *Pyha* could not be classified into any particular philosophical isle. The contents embedded in *Pyha* demonstrate the wisdom of the ancient Isaan people and their faith in Buddhism. The teachings of Buddhism are presented in certain *Pyha* in order to help correct social behaviors with regard to the precepts of Buddhism.

**Keywords:** Buddhist teachings, *Pyha*, Dhamma riddles, Riddle philosophy, Northeastern Thailand, Isaan

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## Introduction

Buddhist teachings are fundamental to all learning disciplines on earth. The degree to which a science is similar to the teachings of Buddhism varies depending on the factual nature of that science. A science can have a high level of similarity to Buddhism if its contents or artifacts are obtained largely through a process of research. In contrast, a science is more dissimilar to Buddhism when less of its conclusions are obtainable via a process of research (Prayong Sanburan. BE 2558:10). The principles of Buddhism have been translated into many different languages, and they have also been communicated through many different compositional forms, such as poetry and rhymes. These forms of language use are crucial for communication, as they make language more captivating, and they also exist in the Thai language. The teachings of Buddhism were first introduced into Thai society in 234 B.E., which was after the third revision of the Buddhist teachings. The principles of the Buddhist teachings were first encrypted after their fifth revision, when the revised version of the teachings was recorded in Sri Lanka. The recorded teachings were later translated into Thai. Readers found that studying these teachings was inspiring and it increased their incentive for becoming disciples of Buddhism. Many readers were so faithful to Buddha's teachings that they rejected their worldly possessions and relationships to become monks. As the years went by, an increasing number of Thais acknowledged their faith in Buddhism, leading to the establishment of Buddhism as the national religion of Thailand. It is estimated that over 90 percent of the people in Thailand are Buddhist, making it a nation in the world with one of the most consolidated Buddhist establishments. One of the reasons for Thai people's faith in Buddhism is the religion's consistency with the nature of Thai people's behavior. Moreover, the teachings of The Buddha are higher than any science.

The Buddha's teachings can be considered a science because they can be proven, yet they offer more than any science because most of the teachings involve demands on the human mind and conduct in areas that mainstream science has been unable to reach. Because of its effects on practitioners' minds, many people around the world are turning to Buddhism. A significant number of people have converted to Buddhism in Europe, America, and even in Africa. The spread of Buddhism is not due to any forms of payment or trickery that would persuade people to believe in it. The empirical challenges of its teachings are the only magnet drawing more and more people to believe in Buddhism.

Buddhist countries, both new and old, apply different measures to make Buddhism cling to the minds of their people, including the opening of religious schools or practice centers, provision of religious training, and publishing of the teachings in the form of poetry and rhyme. Particularly in the northern region of Thailand, Buddhism has been merged into schools and the people have been trained in religion. Because of the intense levels of Dhamma in their mind, people in Northeast Thailand are honest, generous, modest, and sympathetic. The ancestors of the people in this region also used religious riddles as a part of their religious teaching to make the teachings of Buddhist principles, such as the 4 Noble Truths, the Tilakkhaṇa, The 6 Directions, and the 6 Devils, fun and more firmly embedded in the minds of the people. The art of turning ideas from the Buddhist teachings into story or riddle is better known as "*Pyha*" (riddle philosophy), or "Dhamma Riddle." In this research *Pyha* or Dhamma riddles, were investigated through a philosophical lens and categorized accordingly into metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics.

## 1. Metaphysics

The term “metaphilosophy” or “meta-*Pyha*” refers to a branch in purified philosophy that talks about truth relating to God, the soul, the world, substance, and free will (English-Thai Dictionary: The Thai Royal Institute. 1989:17). The truth as referred to in different doctrines may vary. Specifically in this research, the truth in Buddhist teachings is represented using the form of *Pyha*, which is a metaphilosophy of the people of Northeast Thailand presented in the form of religious riddles. An example of *Pyha* is presented below.

- “If you want to have rice,                      grow it right at the stone yard.  
If you want to master Sila,                      torture your parents.  
If you want visitors,                              raze your acquaintance.  
If you want to be in heaven,                      disrobe the Sin in the temple.”  
(Preecha Pinthong. BE 2500:108)

The above Buddhist riddle can be decoded and its meaning interpreted in the following way.

“If you want to have rice, grow it right at the stone yard,” means if one wishes to live well, having enough to eat and to live in the next life, one should learn to offer food to the monks. Making merit by offering rice, placing it into monks’ alms bowls, which are made of iron or stone, is symbolized with growing rice in the stone yard.

“If you want to master Sila, torture your parents,” implies that “parents” are being compared to sinners, leading to many transgressions. One should learn to eliminate the cause of sin to live a pure life.

In the line, “If you want visitors, raze your acquaintances,” the word “acquaintances” is used to evoke stinginess and selfishness, personality traits most people are familiar with. Correcting these behavioral culprits makes us

generous and wide-hearted, personality traits that will be the foundation for having a lot of friends.

Finally, the riddle ends with the line, “If you want to be in heaven, disrobe the *Sin* in the temple.” A “*Sin*” is a kind of long skirt worn by Isaan women. Typically, a *Sin* is made of fine selected silk. A new *Sin* is used to wrap chanting or preaching books. When the monks use the books for chanting or when the villagers want to read the books, they have to untie the *Sin* that is wrapped around the books. Reading the Buddhist teachings from these books is a kind of merit making that can lead disciples to heaven.

One of the *Pyha* (riddle philosophy) says:

- “*Two old men grew rice in bushy land.*

*In an unlucky year they got three, in an unrewarding year they got four.*

*In a totally devastating year, they gave to everyone”*

(Boongerd Pimworametakul, BE2544: 123)

Below is the meaning of each of the above stanzas.

“Two old men,” refers to body and mind.

“Grew rice in bushy land,” refers to meditating in the forest.

“In an unlucky year they got three,” refers to living one’s life according to the *Ratanattaya*.

“In the unrewarding year they got four,” signifies conforming to the 4 Noble Truths in one’s life.

“In the totally devastated year, they gave to everyone,” refers to enlightenment, i.e. reaching a free state of mind, and teaching the knowledge of enlightenment to all.

This *Pyha* is an arousing Buddhist riddle in the way that it encourages interpretation, leading to a broader understanding of Buddhism, which is why it endures as a Buddhist riddle.

The *Pyha* below is a Buddhist teaching presented in the form of a comparative riddle.

- *“The boat is made, so cross the river we can.*

*The lac is fed, for the silk to be dyed.*

*The wood is chopped, so it’s easy to make the fire.*

*The rice is purified, so we can eat anytime.”* (Preecha Pinthong. BE 2500:107)

The *Pyha* above can be interpreted as described below.

“The boat is made, so cross the river we can,” suggests that the boat should be made ready for crossing to the other side of the river.

“The lac is fed, for the silk to be dyed,” suggests that the lac should be raised so it can be used for silk dyeing.

“The wood is chopped, so it’s easy to make the fire,” suggests that preparing the wood makes it easier when it comes time for making a fire.

“The rice is purified, so we can eat anytime,” refers to the traditional process of preparing rice to be eaten. Historically, rice was crushed in a mortar in order to remove the husk from the rice seed. Before cooking the rice, the husk contaminant had to be removed. Only then could the rice be soaked and steamed.

Overall, this *Pyha* is intended to motivate people to be careful in their lives. Preparation in life is important in order to lower the potential of errors occurring. The teaching embedded in this *Pyha* is consistent with Buddha’s teaching. The Buddha said, “As monks, all of you should live your life without negligence.”

The three *Pyha* discussed above are examples of metaphilosophy conveyed in the teachings of Buddha. *Pyha* are useful as understandable and figurative explanations of Buddhist teachings. Buddhist teachings are about truth, which is the core of metaphilosophy. They are different from the teachings of other doctrines to the extent they do not mention ubiquitous spirits, gods, or religious artifacts.

## 2. Epistemology

The term “epistemology” refers to a branch of philosophy that expounds upon the origins, types, functions, and reasoning of knowledge (English-Thai Philosophy Dictionary: The Thai Royal Institute: 1989: 37). Explanations of the characteristics of knowledge can vary across different disciplines or doctrines. The excerpts below are examples of the epistemology embedded in the Isaan culture of *Pyha*, or Buddhist riddles.

- “*To have much knowledge, so much it fills your stomach and piles up to your mouth,  
Yet being unable to teach yourself, who else will admire.*”  
(Samlee Ragsoothi. BE 2532: 197)

An interpretation of the *Pyha* above follows.

“To have much knowledge, so much that it can fill your stomach and pile up to your mouth,” suggests that it does not matter how much knowledge you have gained.

“Yet being unable to teach yourself, who else will admire,” suggests that if you end up unable to teach yourself to do good deeds, no one will admire you.

This *Pyha* illustrates that anyone who has great knowledge but who still behaves badly will be insulted and looked down upon by others. People with higher levels of knowledge are expected to conduct themselves more properly since they are better educated. It might be more acceptable for a person with lower education to excuse their misconduct on the basis of being uneducated and therefore, unable to distinguish right from wrong. This implies a standard that people and societies expect well-educated people to positively contribute to creating community wellness. Lord Buddha referred to people who had excellent knowledge after having read all his teachings, yet who were unable to put the *Sila* to practice, as dead palm leaves, or as employees on a cattle farm who merely received their wage but possessed no right over the cow or its milk or beef. Suffice it to say that the Buddha did not appreciate an unknowledgeable person. A *Pyha* similar in meaning says:

- “If you are a sage, don’t be too arrogant,  
Keep down on the ground, stand among the crowd”

(Samlee Ragsoothi. BE 2532: 199)

Each line of the above *Pyha* portrays the following instructions.

“If you are a sage, don’t be too arrogant,” means a knowledgeable person should not look down on others, boasting too much about oneself or showing conceit.

“Keep down on the ground, stand among the crowd,” suggests that a knowledgeable person should behave normally, living with diverse people without differentiating between them.

This *Pyha* teaches people with higher education to be humble because they may not be better than others in every way. Knowledgeable people should learn to live at the same level as other people, joining social activities, and this will ultimately lead to their gaining social recognition and



respect. People who have superior world knowledge are no better than typical people. In fact, their level of knowledge only illustrates that they have had the opportunity to be better educated. Therefore, there is no guarantee that a person with more years in school is any better than those who never attended any school before. Lord Buddha did not support people who had a lot of theoretical knowledge but lacked practical skills. Another Buddhist riddle is written:

- *“Let’s just use knowledge, for good clean work  
Knowledge possessed, is edible for life.”*

(Samlee Ragsoothi. BE 2532: 199)

Each line of the above *Pyha* can be interpreted in the following way:

“Let’s just use knowledge, for good clean work,” indicates that one should use the knowledge they have earned for the sake of accomplishing innocent tasks.

“Knowledge possessed, is edible for life,” indicates that if the knowledge one has earned is used correctly, then that knowledge can contribute toward one’s ability to make a living throughout life.

This *Pyha* encourages people to use their knowledge properly in order to make a living. It is often the case that people with excellent knowledge become distracted and their knowledge abused. If we apply our knowledge correctly, then it can be of benefit to us our entire lives. On the other hand, knowledge can be harmful when applied in negative ways. Knowledge that is used in positive ways can generate limitless value. As the great Thai poet Sunthornphu put it, “Possessing knowledge is like possessing a huge sum of money.” Money was hard to find in Sunthornphu’s time, so money was used in this comparison to indicate something highly valuable. In terms of Buddhist teachings, however, knowledge or wisdom is highly valuable because it leads to problem solving and the elimination of suffering.

All of the *Pyha* described above are relevant to an epistemological framework. It is clear that *Pyha* have been used to convey Buddhist teachings to the disciples of Buddhism. While the examples presented above do not represent the characteristics of epistemology in all respects, they demonstrate how Isaan people have learned to apply the linguistic wisdom of *Pyha* toward the teaching of religious philosophy. Interested readers may refer to the bibliography for further reading.

### 3. Ethics

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that quests for the highest virtues human life has to offer. The discipline also seeks to define criteria that can help judge to what extent different human behaviors are right or wrong. Ethical philosophy considers the moral value of each existing behavior (English-Thai Philosophy Dictionary. 1989:37). Based on this definition, some examples of *Pyha* relating to ethical philosophy follow.

- “*The great sapphire, holds its great value.*

*Dipped deep in sewage, washed well it can shine*”

(Boongerd Pimwanmetakul. BE 2544:100).

The *Pyha* above holds the following meaning.

“The great sapphire, holds its great value,” has a figurative meaning. The sapphire is a metaphor for the Buddha, who is highly valuable.

The line, “Dipped deep in sewage, *washed well it can shine*,” further describes the value of the Buddha by comparing the Buddha’s value to that of the sapphire, which can shine again after being washed.

This *Pyha* emphasizes the value of having good conduct. Those who purify their physical, verbal, and mental behaviors can always be free of blame and accusations, simply because a good and purified person is always

exempt from immorality. Metaphorically, the phrase, “dipped deep in sewage,” can be interpreted as “being accused,” while the phrase, “well-wash makes it shine,” signifies that the person will be proven innocent after an investigation into the accusations. This *Pyha* corresponds with Lord Buddha’s quote, “Neither a good deed nor a bad deed happens with humans due to others’ accusations. Rather, it happens because of the person’s actions.” Another *Pyha* reads:

• *“Ancestors, grandparents, mom, dad  
Should be worshipped, lifted up high.  
Merit may support, so many of your dreams  
Win whatever wishes, as you desire”*

(Boongerd Pimwarametakul, BE 2544:100)

The significance of the above *Pyha* is explained below.

The first two lines, “Ancestors, grandparents, mom, dad / Should be worshipped, lifted up high,” implies that grandchildren should pay respect and be grateful to their parents and grandparents.

“Merit may support, so many of your dreams / Win whatever wishes, as you desire,” shows that being grateful and having respect to one’s grandparents is a kind of merit making. This kind of knowledge will bring blessings for the grandchildren so that they may be successful in whatever they wish.

This *Pyha* teaches young people in Isaan to show respect to their grandparents, a concept that conforms to Buddhist teachings. Parents and grandparents are analogous to enlightened monks. Being able to take good care of one’s parents is equivalent to making merit with enlightened monks. The merit gained by taking care of one’s parents results in a person leading a successful life. On the other hand, it is a severe sin to abandon or let one’s parents and grandparents face their own hardships. Lord Buddha postulated that, “taking care of one’s parents is the highest form of auspiciousness, and

it yields the kind of merit that protects the doer from any obstacles.” A similar concept is presented in the *Pyha* below.

- “*Woods can be diverse, aromatic Junto  
Cannot be compared with, those floating logs*

(Sumlee Rugsuttee. BE 2532:202)

The meaning of the *Pyha* above is described below.

“Woods can be diverse, aromatic Junto,” is an observation that there are a lot of different kinds of woods, such as the wood Junto, which stands out from other types of wood because of its sweet aroma.

“Cannot be compared with, those floating logs” indicates that other ordinary woods, such as logs floating in a river, should not be compared with the Junto since the two have different types of value.

The *Pyha* above is written as a metaphorical form of riddle. The Junto wood represents people who adhere to the *Sila*, while ordinary people who do not practice the *Sila* are the floating logs. The value differences between these two groups of people are a result of whether or not they practice the *Sila*. People are different from other animals because they adhere to the *Sila* and have morality in their life. People who adhere to the *Sila* are “Human” while those who do not are called “Man.” The latter type of person overindulges in passion, anger, distraction, and inhumanity.

The examples of ethical *Pyha* described above are only a small sampling of what exists. *Pyha* in Isaan typically emphasize ethical values and behaviors as exhibited by both ordinary people and monks. The *Pyha* are intended to remind, teach, and reprimand readers. Dhamma is at times embedded within it. Since *Pyha* hold significant preaching value, they are worth preserving.

#### 4. Aesthetics

“Aesthetics” is a branch of philosophy that deals with the beauty of both artistic artifacts and nature. It seeks to identify criteria for defining beauty while investigating what beauty is and is not (English-Thai Philosophy Dictionary: The Thai Royal Institute. 1989: 4). The Buddhist riddles in Isaan culture called *Pyha* describe many dimensions of beauty, as exemplified below.

- “*Ugly girl, charm with Sila*  
*Bad-looking man, rise with wisdom*”

(Sumlee Rugsutti. BE 2537:211)

The meaning of the above *Pyha* is described below.

“Ugly girl, charm with Sila,” means a woman can have an external and physical look that is ugly. However, she can be beautiful if she upholds worthy life ethics and Buddhist percepts.

“Bad-looking man, rise with wisdom,” means a man who is not good looking can be beautiful if he is smart.

It is explained in this *Pyha* that an ugly woman who has good ethics, speaks politely, and is generous can become beautiful because her internal goodness can surpass and shine over her physical appearance. The good manners that women exercise are what can truly make them beautiful. Similarly, for a bad-looking man, both his good manners and intellect can make him handsome. It does not matter how short or ugly a man is, he can still be successful if he has wisdom. Therefore, women’s beauty is in their manners, and men’s beauty is in their talents. Another *Pyha* says:

- “*Bring no in-fire out, bring no out-fire in*  
*It will burn us out, our hearts deprived*”

(Preecha Pinthong. BE 2548:28)

The meaning of the above *Pyha* is described below.

“Bring no in-fire out, bring no out-fire in,” is a warning meant to deter people from revealing their own internal matters to people outside their family and bringing other people’s matters into their family.

“It will burn us out, our hearts deprived,” means if people reveal their family secrets or matters to outsiders and bring others’ matters into their house, families may end up being broken apart.

This *Pyha* is telling people to beware of their speech. Speaking in a negative way is like causing a fire that can burn anything. The phrase, “Bring no in-fire out,” warns people not to publicize their internal family, workplace, or institutional problems, bringing them into the public, because doing so is the same as badly condemning oneself, and it does no good for the family or organization. “Bring no out-fire in,” is a warning telling people not to bring troubles from outside into their homes or workplaces. For example, if someone has gossiped about a family member and that matter is reported to another family member, that person may agonize over it and eventually have an argument with the accuser. The *Pyha* is saying to remember when undergoing any challenge not to expand the waves but to find a correct and peaceful way to tackle the problem. This is the beauty of upholding Buddhist precepts.

Another *Pyha* says:

- “*With the quest to, perceive all precepts*

*Like owning crystal, watch without getting bored, really”*

(Sumlee Rugsutti. BE 2532:212)

The meaning of the above *Pyha* is described below.

“With the quest to, perceive all precepts,” refers to having a decisive intention to study and apply the precepts.

The line, “Like owning crystal, watch without getting bored, really,” shows that after one has appreciated the value of the precepts, they will feel fulfilled and will never be bored of the taste of the precepts.

Based on the line by line implications of the above Pyha, the first line, “With the quest to, perceive all precepts,” suggests that one should be attentive to intense studies until they can deeply understand things the way they truly are. The phrase, “perceive all precepts,” (or *hian hop*—เขียนชอบ in Isaan) means to understand everything clearly. The phrase, “like owning crystal, watch without getting bored, really,” means that becoming enlightened by practicing Buddhist precepts is the most rewarding because attaining a peaceful state of mind is beautiful. It is a beauty that cannot be perceived or felt by the organs of the senses. Only practitioners who have mastered the precepts can comprehend this beauty.

The *Pyha* above correspond to some of the aesthetical concepts of the Buddhist teachings. It can be more difficult for people without knowledge of Buddhist teachings to understand the meanings hidden within the riddles.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This research aimed to (a) study the core Buddhist teachings, and (b) study the *Pyha* that exist in Northeastern Thai culture. Many important Buddhist teachings conveyed in the form of riddle were observed in the *Pyha*. The appearance of different concepts within the *Pyha* can be classified based on the four branches of philosophy, including metaphilosophy, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. Details describing each of these philosophies are included in the full research paper off of which this article is based. Below is a summary.

Metaphilosophy or metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that attends to truth, which can vary across different doctrines. In spiritualism, for example, mind or ubiquitous spirits are regarded as the source of truth. Materialism upholds that artifacts or substances are the source of truth. From a Buddhist perspective, truth refers to general truth and involves uncertainty and selflessness, as described in the *Trilaksana* (*Anitjung* = life is uncertainty, *Tookkung* = life is suffering, and *Anatta* = nothing is concrete). Truths, hidden in these forms of uncertainties, reveal themselves through the cycle of nature. Isaan scholars elaborately conveyed *Trilaksana* in *Pyha*, or Buddhist riddles, as shown below.

- “If you want to have rice, grow it right at the stone yard.  
If you want to master Sila, torture your parents.  
If you want visitors, raze your acquaintance.  
If you want to be in heaven, disrobe the Sin in the temple.”

Understanding this Buddhist riddle requires interpretation. An interpretation of this *Pyha* is provided in this article’s discussion of metaphilosophy. This *Pyha* corresponds with metaphilosophy in Buddhism.

Epistemology is a branch of purified philosophy that concerns itself with the origin, type, discipline, and rationale of knowledge. Reflections on these dimensions of epistemology by different groups are diverse. The teaching of knowledge within Buddhism is unique, especially when embedded in *Pyha*. Below is a *Pyha* that demonstrates epistemology within Buddhism.

*Bright moonlight, never impedes sunlight  
A thousand candles, can’t shine like the moon.*

In these two lines of *Pyha*, moonlight represents the knowledge of the enlightened disciples of Lord Buddha, while sunlight represents the knowledge of Lord Buddha. The candles denote lay men’s knowledge. The purpose of using these three types of light is to portray that there is no



knowledge comparable to the knowledge of Lord Buddha. No matter how much laymen have learned, their knowledge is nothing relative to the knowledge of Lord Buddha's enlightened disciples, and even the knowledge of the enlightened disciples cannot be compared to the knowledge of Lord Buddha. This *Pyha* explains that knowledge possessed by people is differentiated according to their different levels of merit accumulation.

Ethics is a branch of purified philosophy that seeks to define the highest virtues in life by creating criteria for making judgments on the moral aspects of human behaviors in order to explain which behaviors are correct or incorrect. References to ethics by different sciences or doctrines vary. Therefore, what is regarded as moral by one doctrine may be deemed immoral by another. Buddhism has its own ethics according to ritual, which provide direction toward enlightenment. Local Isaan people have learned to explain these ethics through *Pyha*, which can be applied toward teaching laymen, administrators, or monks. One example of a *Pyha* that represents ethics is presented below.

*"The great sapphire, holds its great value.*

*Dipped deep in sewage, washed well it can shine"*

The meaning of this *Pyha* is explained in this article's discussion of ethics. The *Pyha* demonstrates how Buddhist teachings related to ethics are conveyed in the beautiful form of the *Pyha*.

Aesthetics is a branch of purified philosophy that focuses on beauty in artistic artifacts and nature. This field attempts to explain the experience and value of beauty while attempting to identify criteria for evaluating beauty. People from different disciplines refer to beauty differently. However, beauty in Buddhism is unique, as shown in the *Pyha* below.

*"Ugly girl, charm with Sila*

*Bad-looking man, rise with wisdom"*

As explained in this article's discussion of aesthetics, the core of beauty in Buddhism concerns one's compliance to upright morals. In countries or areas in which Buddhism has been introduced, practicing Buddhists appreciate the positive results brought about by their practice, and they therefore spread the practices to other people via a variety of methods, such as erecting Buddhist schools or centers for meditation, or even ordaining people into monkhood. Levels of appreciation for the teachings of Buddhism correspond to the seriousness with which people put the Buddhist teachings into practice. The best practitioners can even reach enlightenment. Since people are grateful for the teachings, they try to extend the teachings to others in different ways. A method called "*Goan*," which is a type of riddle conveying Buddhist teachings, is used in different branches of Buddhism, such as Mahayana and Jainism, in countries like Japan, China, and Korea. Likewise, *Pyha* in Isaan serves as a tool to instill the teachings of Buddha in people and to apply the teachings' principles to bettering lives. The expression of Buddhist teachings in *Pyha* is not limited to those that can be classified under the four branches of purified philosophy discussed in this article; it also portrays other teachings, as in the example below.

*If you're on elephant, under Chattra's\* shade  
Don't forget convoys who deploy alongside*

\*(Translator's note: *Chattra* is an umbrella-like object used in royal ceremonies)

These two lines of *Pyha* serve as a reminder for officials who have successfully struggled from being bottom line officers to becoming successful administrators to not forget their past. They need to remind themselves of their difficult past and show sympathy for those under their supervision. This teaching evokes the Buddhist teaching called "The Nine Endurances," which forbids administrators from being arrogant and overconfident about

their successes while looking down on others. The *Pyha* below, in the mean time, aims to remind teenagers to complete tasks more in advance.

*You are basil bush, short stalk, thick leaves.*

*Trunk's not yet secured, how rushed to blossom*

*Roots not underground, how can leaves fast grow?*

The basil bush in the first line of the *Pyha* above is used to figuratively denote a “teenagers.” The phrase, “short stalk, thick leaves,” is referring to young kids who like to overdress to look like mature women. “Trunk’s not yet secured,” implies that the teenager is not yet ready for anything, or they are still too young. “How rushed to blossom,” denotes having a baby. “Roots not underground,” implies that they have not prepared for anything. “How can leaves fast grow,” denotes dressing in a sexually inducing manner. In brief, the above *Pyha* emphasizes the concept that young teenagers are not ready to start a family, and they should not express themselves as if they are ready for everything. The next *Pyha* offers a reflection on an ongoing social issue.

*It's raining, store rain in tanks*

*The big tank imbued, the small tank bare.*

“It’s raining, store rain in tanks,” denotes people using tanks to collect rain water. “The big tank imbued, the small tank bare,” means the water is full and overflowing in the big tank, but the smaller tanks have less water. This is a comparative *Pyha* invoking unfair social treatment toward the rich and the poor. The rich are well-served by society, so they get richer while the poor are made poorer. This is a universal fact. To reduce this gap, Buddhism teaches people to relinquish their needs and selfishness. If people do not learn to eliminate their needs, there will be no sharing within society. It is implied in the *Pyha* above that passions can never be fulfilled, so it is better for one to reject their passions.

In conclusion, *Pyha* have a close resemblance with Buddhist teachings, and for Isaan people, *Pyha* are a form of heritage passed down to them from their ancestors. Since *Pyha* are valuable and thought-provoking teaching tools, they should be preserved by younger generations. *Pyha* are valuable, serving as mental nourishment that results in wellbeing and peace for practitioners. *Pyha* is therefore a priceless cultural heritage possessed by folk scholars for people living in Isaan.

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