

Religious Cultures in ASEAN: A Case Study of Thailand and Cambodia

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Abstract

Documentary research was used: 1) to investigate religious culture in ASEAN, 2) to review religious culture in Thailand, 3) to explore religious culture in Cambodia, and 4) to analyze religious culture in Thailand and Cambodia.

The results showed that ASEAN countries demonstrated vast cultural diversity in many areas including language, beliefs, arts, and traditions that largely depended on the religion in each respective country. The important religions were Brāhmanism-Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Before these religions came to the ASEAN region, people worshiped and believed in nature and spirits. The first religion to arrive in this region was Brāhmanism-Hinduism, which continues to have influence over the area. Buddhism arrived later and spread to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Singapore. Islam arrived in the ASEAN region in approximately the 9th century A.D. (B.E.1400) and was concentrated mainly in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian islands. Christianity, on the other hand, came with Western

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colonialism and is today firmly established in the Philippines. Moreover, Chinese-ASEAN people follow a mixture of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.

In both Thailand and Cambodia, there have been similar beliefs in Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism since the times of their earliest kingdoms no less than two thousand years ago. Both religions are the foundation of the religious cultures of both countries, which have led to similar and composite cultures that might be called Buddhism compounded with Brāhmanism. Of course, there are differences between the cultures of the two countries. For example, Thai is a tonal language, whereas Cambodian is not. Also, Brāhmanism-Hinduism has influenced Cambodia more than Thailand as seen for instance in its ancient architecture and statuary while Buddhism has influenced Thailand more than Cambodia as seen in the form of pagodas, Buddha images, and the Pali language. Nevertheless, both countries have related religious cultures and have influenced each other over a lengthy period of time.

Keywords: religious cultures; ASEAN; Thailand; Cambodia

วัฒนธรรมทางศาสนาในอาเซียน: กรณีศึกษาประเทศไทยและประเทศไทยกัมพูชา

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยเชิงเอกสารนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ 1) เพื่อตรวจสอบวัฒนธรรมทางศาสนาในอาเซียน 2) เพื่อทบทวนวัฒนธรรมทางศาสนาในประเทศไทย 3) เพื่อสำรวจวัฒนธรรมทางศาสนาในประเทศไทยกัมพูชา และ 4) วิเคราะห์วัฒนธรรมทางศาสนาในประเทศไทยและกัมพูชา

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ประเทศไทยกลุ่มอาเซียนมีความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรมทั้งด้านภาษา ความเชื่อ ศิลปะ และประเพณี ทั้งนี้ขึ้นอยู่กับการนับถือศาสนาของประเทศนั้นๆ ศาสนาสำคัญที่ชาวอาเซียนนับถือ คือ ศาสนาพราหมณ์-อินดู พระพุทธศาสนา ศาสนาคริสต์ และศาสนาอิสลาม แต่ในยุคดั้งเดิมก่อนศาสนาหลักเหล่านี้เข้ามา ประชาชนในอาเซียนนับถือธรรมชาติและวิญญาณ ศาสนาแรกที่เข้ามาคือ ศาสนาพราหมณ์-อินดู ซึ่งมีอิทธิพลต่อกลุ่มศาสนาในปัจจุบัน ลำดับต่อมาคือ พระพุทธศาสนา มีการนับถือในประเทศไทย ลาว กัมพูชา เวียดนาม และสิงคโปร์ เมื่อศาสนาอิสลามได้แพร่เข้ามาสู่อาเซียนประมาณศตวรรษที่ 9 (พ.ศ.1400) ส่วนใหญ่จะนับถือบริเวณคาบสมุทรลายและหมู่เกาะอินโดนีเซีย ส่วนศาสนาคริสต์ได้เข้ามาในยุคล่าอาณานิคมของชาวตะวันตก มีการนับถือเป็นหลักที่ประเทศไทย

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ฟิลิปปินส์ ส่วนประชาชนในอาเซียนที่มีเชื้อสายจีนบกีอุคานาเต้า ศาสนาของจื้อ และพระพุทธศาสนาผสมผสานกัน

ทั้งประเทศไทยและกัมพูชา มีความเชื่อแบบเดียวกันในศาสนาพราหมณ์-ชินดูและพระพุทธศาสนา แต่สัมยอานาจักรโบราณเป็นเวลาไม่น้อยกว่าสองพันปี ทั้งสองศาสนาได้เป็นรากฐานวัฒนธรรมทางศาสนาของทั้งสองประเทศ ทำให้ประเทศไทยและประเทศกัมพูชา มีวัฒนธรรมที่คล้ายคลึงกันและเป็นวัฒนธรรมที่ผสมผสานกันที่เรียกว่า พุทธศาสนาพราหมณ์ แต่ก็มีความแตกต่างระหว่างวัฒนธรรมของทั้งสองประเทศ เช่น ภาษาไทยมีวรรณยุกต์ ในขณะที่ภาษา กัมพูชาไม่มีวรรณยุกต์ นอกจากนี้ ศาสนาพราหมณ์-ชินดู มีอิทธิพลต่อประเทศกัมพูชามากกว่าประเทศไทย อย่างที่ปรากฏในด้านสถาปัตยกรรมโบราณและรูปปั้น ในขณะที่พระพุทธศาสนา มีอิทธิพลต่อประเทศไทยมากกว่าประเทศกัมพูชา ดังเช่นรูปแบบของเจดีย์ พระพุทธรูป และภาษาบาลี อย่างไรก็ตาม ทั้งสองประเทศมีวัฒนธรรมทางศาสนาที่เกี่ยวข้องกันและมีอิทธิพลต่อกันมาเป็นเวลายาวนาน

คำสำคัญ: วัฒนธรรมทางศาสนา; อาเซียน; ประเทศไทย; ประเทศกัมพูชา

1. Introduction

ASEAN comprises 10 countries which bound themselves to establish a common community in 2015. The religious culture of ASEAN can be traced back to ancient times when people held beliefs in nature worship and animism. These beliefs were later mingled with Indian culture. Brāhmanism was the first of the major world religions to come to the ASEAN region as stated by Karunā Ruang-urai Kusalasai (1995, p. 84). Brāhmanism-Hinduism was brought to the coasts of Southeast Asia by merchants, noblemen and priests. Native peoples then embraced Brāhmanism, worshiping various gods such as Nārāyana, Brahma, and Shiva and the Shiva lingam. Brāhmanism influenced the royal court in royal ceremonies, and then the concept known as the “Devarājā cult, in which the appeared king was perceived as a god.” Nevertheless, no caste system developed as in India. Theravāda Buddhism spread into this area in the mid-third century B.C. 300 during the Suvanabhumi Era and Mahāyāna Buddhism also came from both India and China. Islam emerged in A.D.563 in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and then arrived in the ASEAN region around the middle of the 9th century A.D., (B.E.1400) first in Indonesia and later spread to Malaga and the southern part of Thailand, which was originally under the influence of Brāhmanism and Buddhism as suggested by archaeological evidence of Yarang Ancient City of Pattani Province in accordance with the evidence gathered by Department of Tourism (1971).

Yarang Ancient City of Pattani Province features ancient ruins located in the area of three villages of Yarang District and consisting of religious places, Satupa, Chedi, earthen molded Lord Buddha images, baked clay molded Lord Buddha images, and ancient patterned metal artifacts of Mahayāna

Buddhism aged more than 1,300 years. These are evidence of the prosperity of “Langkāsuka” up until the Dvāravati Period. Ban Pra Wae ancient town features a quadrangular-shaped town built during the early Ayutthaya Period (early 14th century A.D. late 19th Buddhist century). Many artifacts found in archaeological survey work such as Shiva lingam stones give testimony to the history of this region.

Although many ASEAN people have converted to other religions in certain countries, Brāhmanism or Buddhism can have had certain influences upon their life. As stated by Mary (1994, p. 96) for instance, Indonesia was the first country being under the influence of Brāhmanism-Hinduism. Certain beliefs have survived although the people have converted to Islam. Muslims in some villages do not eat beef as their forebears were Hindus. In Hinduism, the cow is considered the holy animal as it is ridden by the god *Shiva* etc. Once they embraced Islam, some of their practices remained the same. Also, Brāhmanism has a strong impact in Thailand and Cambodia, where “Buddhism mingled with Brāhmanism” or “Buddhism mingled with magic” is generally perceived as normal in practices. Thus, understanding about interrelated religions will be helpful in gaining a better understanding about the cultural aspects of ASEAN.

In the age of Western colonialism, Spain was the first to arrive Philippines in B.E. 2131 to trade spices, and then occupied the Philippines. Christianity had been introduced into their colony although there was some competition from Islam. The land as “up” of the ASEAN region; Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, however, remains Buddhists.

Thai culture is the foundation of national development, unity and security. It represents a common source of honor, dignity and the pride of Thai people, and is a significant factor in the ethics and morality of the people, which

are crucial for individual, social and national development. Sucheep Punyanuphap (1995, p. 67) stated that Buddhism has been the Thai national religion since the mid-third century B.C. during the 'Suvanabhumi' Era. Therefore, Thai culture is directly rooted in Buddhism. The Thai way of life or lifestyle, including the notions, beliefs, values, traditions, customs, morals, rituals, social manners, arts, language and literature, all have Buddhism as their pattern or ideology. Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development (2001, p. 22) underlined that the government realizes the significance and necessity that a Buddhism-based culture exists in the Thai society. The government is therefore bound to include in its policy urging all stakeholders to provide support for the study of the religion and evangelism among children and youth so as to allow them to have the understanding of religious principles and to join in religious ceremonies. At the same time, the tourism industry does also promote Thai arts and culture in appropriate and creative ways.

Cambodia was heavily influenced by Brāhmanism-Hinduism since the early stage of the Funan Kingdom as it was considered the religion of the city state. Cambodia is also the site of several religious places in Brāhmanism-Hinduism including the most famous world-heritage, *Angkor Wat*. Later, Buddhism arrived at this area around the 4th century A.D., 10th century of the Buddhist Era and became the religion of the nation since the 14th century A.D., the 18th century of the Buddhist Era except during the time the country was under the control of the Khmer Rouge. At present, more than 95% of Cambodian citizens are Buddhists. The history of Buddhism in Cambodia can be traced back almost two thousand years through several Khmer kingdoms. Buddhism came to Cambodia via two ways as follows: 1) the traditional pattern of the dissemination of Buddhism through Indian traders coming to the Funan kingdom and 2) Buddhism disseminated to Cambodia during the time of Angkor through

Mon kingdoms, which were, Dvāravati and Hariphunchai, as Phradhammapiṭok (P.A. Payutto) (1997, p. 68) stated:

The Angkor Period commenced after the fall of the Chenla Kingdom as a result of the attack by Javā. Jayavarman V had a priest, Kirati Bundit, who convinced him to convert to Buddhism and to strongly support Buddhism. During his reign, Suryavarman I fully embraced Mahāyāna Buddhism while Khmer Empire extended to the Chao Phraya River basin and Burma as well as Luang Phrabang in the north and Kingdom of Tambralinga in the south, which was a colony of the Khmer Empire.

During its first thousand year period, the Khmer empire was a monarchy under the influence of Hinduism though some of the kings were Buddhists e.g. Jayavarman I of Fūnan and Suryavarman I. Buddhism in various forms existed peacefully under the rule of Hindu kings and the Theravāda Buddhism neighboring countries.

As discussed above, the researcher wishes to study ASEAN cultures from the overall perspective first and then focuses on Thailand and Cambodia, both of which have been rooted in Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism up to the present day. These religions have provided the basis for philosophy and religion and the development of various aspects of culture such as language, traditions, arts, literature, architecture and sculpture. This research aims to underline that cultures in ASEAN have been rooted in religions such as Brāhmanism-Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. The study of religious culture of ASEAN therefore plays an important and necessary role as it can help the general public as well as academics to obtain more understanding and may stimulate the search for new frontiers of knowledge through future

research in order to promote cooperation and unity among the peoples of ASEAN Which study of Thai and Cambodia based on their interrelated cultural varieties.

2. Objectives

Documentary research was used: 1) to investigate religious cultures in ASEAN 2) to review religious cultures in Thailand 3) to explore religious cultures in Cambodia and 4) to analyze religious cultures in Thailand and Cambodia which both countries have been influenced and originally shared the same “cultural root” by Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism.

3. The Methodology of the Research

This research method was a qualitative documentary research conducted through the following steps:

1. In the preparatory phase, data were collected from various sources classified by type of those sources, namely, primary sources e.g. religious scriptures and exegesis, and secondary sources e.g. academic papers, research reports, theses, textbooks and data from the internet as well as the books written by experts in culture, philosophy and religion.

2. This was followed by data analysis in which the data obtained were interpreted, analyzed and compared and their validity assessed, The findings from the research were then presented together with a summary and recommendations.

4. Scope of Study

The scope of this research is limited to the religious cultures in ASEAN, focusing on the religious culture relating to Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism in Thailand and Cambodia covering four major aspects as follows: 1) Language and literature 2) Beliefs 3) Arts and architecture 4) Traditions and rites; through the analysis of interrelations and influences among these religious cultures in both similarities and differences between Thai and Cambodian cultures.

5. Research Findings

The religious cultures of all ASEAN countries have been mainly developed based upon Brāhmanism-Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism and Taoism which may differ from country to country. Such religious cultures include language, literature, beliefs, arts, architecture, performing arts or traditions. Those countries having the same religions are more likely to share similar cultures albeit with some minor differences as follows:

5.1 Religious Cultures in Thailand

Buddhism and Brāhmanism-Hinduism as a foundation of Thai culture and the Thai way of life has originated a range of customs and traditions nurturing unity and diversity. Thailand has been a Buddhist kingdom since the mid-third century B.C. during the 'Suvanabhumi' Era. All Thai kings have been Buddhists and patron of all religions in the kingdom. Buddhism is one of the

key institutions for the solidarity, sovereignty, identity, values, characteristics and belief system of the Thai nation and is the foundation of Thai traditions and customs from the past. At present, more than 94.72% of the Thai population are Buddhists. Brāhmanism-Hinduism cultural elements and concepts of Language, literature, the gods, arts and traditional beliefs etc. were absorbed into Thai culture and society. These elements have been passed down for generations to become a national culture allowing all Thais to have the unique identities. As an Thai I can say that Thailand shows very early cultural influence from Buddhism and Brāhmanism-Hinduism. Four aspects are prominent:

- 1) Conception of Royalty characterized by Buddhism and Hinduism
- 2) Literary expression in Pāli and Sanskrit Language
- 3) Mythology based on Ramayana and other Hindu texts on royalty
- 4) Legal codes based on Manava Dharmasastra (Laws of Manu)

These four aspects produced a recognizable Indianized cultural zone and application to be Thai cultures. However, some key aspects of culture are discussed below.

5.1.1 Language and Literature

Language: Language is considered the core component of culture. Thailand has had its own language for a very long time. In the Sukhothai Kingdom, King Ramkhamheang invented an alphabet in A.D. 1283 which has been the basis of the present Thai alphabet. The Thai alphabet was influenced by Pāli and Sanskrit largely taken from Buddhism because Theravāda Buddhism brought Pāli while Mahāyāna Buddhism brought Sanskrit into the area. For instance, the words derived from Pāli and Sanskrit have been used for naming persons, towns, buildings and official places in order to create meaning and bring good fortune as per the beliefs in Buddhism.

The early inscriptions found in Thailand are largely in the Khmer empire lasting from 802 C.E. To 1431 C.E. and the Dvāravati Period and were inscribed on stone rods or metal plates in the Khmer language, Sanskrit language (Pallava alphabet), Mon language (Mon alphabet). Pāli language was written in the Khmer alphabet, the Mon alphabet or the Pallava alphabet. Srivijaya inscriptions were mostly found in ancient Malay, Java language and Sanskrit. The oldest inscription found so far is a Sanskrit inscription in the Pallava alphabet from the 7th century - the 12th Buddhist Century discovered in Chanthaburi, and the inscription of King Jitrasen was made not so long afterwards. Thai people have their own spoken language, and evidence suggests that the Thai alphabet was invented in the 13th century A.D. the 19th Buddhist Century, namely, Lai Sue Thai, by King Ramkhamheang the Great. The early Thai states considered Sanskrit, Pāli and Khmer sacred languages and all of them were therefore used for inscriptions concerned with religion and kingship. Thai has a special vocabulary for use regarding royal persons, and many Khmer words are used in this royal language. Sanskrit was introduced to Thai people by Mahāyāna Buddhism at the time of the Nan Chao Kingdom around the middle of the 1st century A.D. B.E.600. In A.D.1239 at Sukhothai Period, Thais have embraced Hinayāna Buddhism in which Pāli was used, and so Pāli became more widely known in the society than Sanskrit.

However, Thai people have had high regard for both Pāli and Sanskrit as noble languages representing holiness, perfection and the majesty of the intellect, and these languages have greatly influenced the Thai language up until the present.

Literature: Thai people embraced Buddhism and thus absorbed a large number of Buddhistic literary works via the Tripitaka, the life of the Buddha and the Jātaka stories. Other scriptures include the *Tebhumikata*, or

Tribhumi Phraruang, by Phayālithai written in the 14th century A.D. the 20th Buddhist Century, the *Tribhūmi Winitchai*, *Life of the Lord Buddha* and the tale of the Lord Buddha's last former birth; the origin of Thai literary style of the *Mahājataka* (the Great Birth Story); the story of the Buddha when he was born as Prince Vessantara, *Mahājātaka Khamluang*, *Mahājātaka Poem*, the *Long Tale of Prince Vessantara* written during the Ayutthaya Period, the Tale of Prince Vessantara written in the Ratanakosin Period, *Dasajati*; the ten longest birth-stories of the Buddha, the *Mahājanaka*; a literary work by King Rāma IX aiming to adapt the subject matter of the tale to the Thai people's life at present, *Phrapathomsomphothikatha*; *the story of the Lord Buddha's life written in several styles including a Lanna Version, an Ayutthaya Version, the Version written by Prince Paramanuchit Chinorot, the Supreme Patriarch, and Nanthopanantasutta Khamluang* derived from Dikanikāya Scripture written by Prince Thammatibet. Srisurang Phoonsap (2010, p. 23) stated that

Buddhist literature has always had considerable influence upon the vibrant growth of Thai literature. This has been especially true during the time of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Early Ratanakosin and even until the present date in which *Mahājatakadesana* (the “Great Birth Sermon”), a sermon on the great birth story of the Bodhisatta Vessantara, is still recited in temples, and the *Mahājanaka* was written by King Bhūmibol Adulyadej. Buddhist literature also inspires other artistic works such as mural paintings and decorations at Buddhist temples depicting stories from the *Tribhumi Phraruang* and *Dasajati* which are considered to have high artistic value. The construction of Wat Rong Khun (B.E. 2540) by Mr. Chalermchai Kositpipat, the National Artist, was also deeply inspired by Buddhism.

Thai poets wrote literary works influenced by Buddhism such as Phra Mālai derived from *Mālaiyasut* and written by Prince Thammatibet in a work called *Phra Mālai Khamluang*. *Panyāsajātaka* written by a monk from Chiang Mai Province (Plueang na Nakhon, 1980, p. 47) was used for creating other poems e.g. *Sua Kho Gamchan*, script of Phra Suthon *Rottasane* and Sung Thong as well as *Khun Chang Khun Phaen*. Phramahā Suradet Surasakko (1994, p. 74) stated that:

Buddhist doctrines are abundantly found in the Sepha Khun Chang Khun Phaen such as teaching on Karma and the three signs of being in which it is believed that the rebirth process of human beings and other creatures in the wheel of life is driven by Karma power. All human lives shall inevitably follow the *Tilakkhaṇa* Principle (the three signs of being), namely, *Aniccatā* (impermanence), *Dukkhatā* (the state of being subject to suffering, painfulness, stress, conflict) and *Anattā* (non-self). These principles exist for one's entire life. Although the supreme doctrine provides that *Nibbāna* is the ultimate solution through which one can develop oneself to be absolutely free from impurities and lustful desires, it seems very difficult for a layperson to achieve. Therefore, in real life, *Nibbāna* in the Sepha Khun Chang Khun Phaen was just an ideal dharmic principle that man wishes to achieve in his future life only.

In addition, Thai culture was partly influenced by Brāhmanism-Hinduism through the Vedas and other sacred books e.g. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*, which are viewed as both literature and scripture. There is also Thammasart Scripture particularly the work which has been most

frequently referred to, called Manawa Thammasart Purana Scripture. As explained by Pluang Na Nakhon (1980, p. 62), these scriptures have had a significant influence upon Thai literature. For instance, the *Rāmāyana* was used for creating the *Rāmakien*. In general, such scriptures were used as sources of information or inspiration. King Rama VI in the Ratanakosin Period was also influenced by Indian literature in writing works such as *Phra Nol*, *Sakuntalā*, and *Sawitri*. Additionally, “Thanma Thamma Songkhram” was written based on the plot of Dharma Jātaka “Aeka Dossanibat” Mongkollasūtta gamchan which was a Buddhist literary work. *Mattana Phātha*, or The Legend of Roses, was a “Gamchan” Play written in following the format of Sanskrit dramatic works with ancient Indian background. Four ancient style plays including *Mahāphali*, *Ruesi Siang Luk*, *Phra Nora Singhawatarn* and *Phra Khanesorn Sia Nga* are musical and narrative scripts following the original version of the *Rāmāyana* by Valmiki; to be used for performing several episodes of “Khon” including Missing Sida, Expelled Phi Phek. Furthermore, Srisurang Phoonsap (2010, p. 24) stated that in writing *Phra Nol Kham Luang*, King Rama VI adapted a minor plot (Ouppa Kayan) of *Mahābhārata Lilit 10 Lives of Narāyana*, an adapted version of Purāna Scripture. During the early Ratanakosin Period, Phraphutthayodfa Chulalohk (King Rama 1 the Great) has encouraged the study of Buddhist literature.

Literature can be used as a medium for communicating one’s feelings and social ideology from one generation to another, making literature inheritable. It can be said that Thai literature recorded stories in the past that reflected the culture, tradition, language, politics, moral principles, arts, rites, and ways of life of Thai people in the old days and has passed them down to our generation. Literature can also function as guide for Thai society in the future.

5.1.2 Beliefs

The former beliefs among Thai people involved nature, ghosts and spirits, and magic. When Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism from India were embraced in the development of early states, these religions and beliefs became the foundation of traditions, rites, literature and arts starting with the Suvarnabhumi Kingdom around the 3rd century B.C., the Mahāyāna age around the 8th century A.D., the glory of the Srivichaya Kingdom, to the Pagan-pattern Theravāda age around the 11th century A.D. in the northern part of Thailand. Religious beliefs inherited from the Khmer included the worship of the Shiva lingam and Vishnu of Hinduism as well as Naga. The influence of Dhavāravati included embracing Buddhism, either Mahāyāna or Theravāda, and worshipping Buddha images, Bodhisattvas, and Buddha footprints. As stated by Phramahā Suradet Surasakko (Intharasak) (1994, p. 89).

For the largest part of the Thai people, although Buddhist principles play a significant role on their belief, it cannot be denied that the belief in ghosts and spirits and superstition still exists as inheritance from the past generations and has made such belief a mixture of religious and superstitious belief that cannot be alienated from real life. These beliefs are predominantly revealed in rites involved in the way of life of Thai people from the cradle to the grave and to whichever social strata they belong from the king to the ordinary person such as the royal ceremony of accession to the throne, the royal ploughing ceremony or the wedding ceremony.

According to his stone inscription, King Rāmkhamheang the Great accepted in his Sukhothai Kingdom Sinhalese Buddhism from Nakhon Si Thammarat, in which influenced from Brāhmanism existed as it was the religion

of the Cambodian people at that time and at the same time Mahāyāna Buddhism gradually played less significant role. However, the worship of gods of Brāhmanism still exist. Evidence for this is found in the text of the Rāmkhamhean inscription (Fine Arts Department, 1983, p. 43) which states there were Phra Kha Phung Phi, angels in the mountain who were superior to all spirits in this city. Whoever rules this Sukhothai shall fittingly worship them if he wants to establish rightness and prosperity in the city. If he has not properly worshipped them, the city will face misfortune as they would not protect the city. Kha Phung was an ancient Khmer term referring to a god or angel that was used during the time before the Angkor Period. The term Phra Kha Phung in this inscription referred to Shiva on the mountain according to Indian mythology. In fact, Shiva might refer to the spirit dwelling on the mountain. It can be seen that people of the Sukhothai Kingdom believed in ghosts and spirits and superstition before Sinhalese Buddhism; however, from that time onward, Sinhalese Buddhism has played a significant role in Thai culture.

Religious beliefs are the origin of moral principles adhered to by Thai people. This is the same as in other races, that is, the belief that magic, ghosts, angels and gods, and supernatural powers can affect one's life either in good or bad ways. As Thai people are very close to nature and supernatural things, they believe in all things because they, as human beings, want to live with nature in a harmonious way. This is also a strategy to nurture love for and a sense of belonging to things that are of benefit for one's own life. The original belief among Thai people was that "Phi" (ghosts) referred to ancestor spirits, Phi Fah (Sky-angels), Phi Na (the Rice Goddess-Mae Pho Sop), Phi Din (the Earth Goddess), Phi Nam (the Gangā Goddess) and a lot more Phi. About these beliefs Sucheep Punyanuphap (1995) stated that :

In Thailand we can find examples of animism in nature, architecture and social behavior. Animism in Thailand is the spirit houses situated outside home, banks and hotels, even rice fields, public parks, lakes and ponds. Hindu deity who if respected and well looked after will protect the land. Thai house owner offering incense and food and drink to the spirit at least once a day.

Thai people therefore pay homage to both the Buddha image and the spirit house and other spirits and gods. Thai culture also has such distinctive elements of Thai identity as a close relation to Buddhism and Brāhmanism-Hinduism

Therefore, this study shows that supernatural powers or ghosts have also influenced from Brāhmanism in the concepts of transmigration of soul which is the belief that as long as man does not attain the Prahman or Nirvan then the soul must circulate, die in the transmigration, and to be free from transmitting it requires good karma. This is because the human beings in this world will have to circulate and die in the future. In the next life, they may be born of any kind of human beings or animal. All living things depend on each other. So the survival of all life in the world is only temporary.

5.1.3 Arts and Architecture

The Thai people who migrated into this region brought with them certain Chinese traditions which were then blended with Khmer and Mon traditions. The only thing indicating that they had absorbed some Chinese arts was the form of their temples, especially those with tapering roofs. Material culture in Buddhism included various areas of the arts which have been created by the intellect of the Thai people and have become part of their identity and

have been passed down in thought, belief, faith and imagination in fine material form such as in architecture in the form of their temples as places for worship, in sculpture, molding, casting, and carving of Buddha images and in painting on the walls of the Ubosot (Buddhist sanctuary).

Arts: Thai arts have been heavily influenced by the king and persons in the royal court and most art is related to religion such as wall paintings depicting religious stories and rites, and structures in Buddhism e.g. pagodas, temples or Stūpas. Traditional **Thai art** is primarily composed of Buddhist art and scenes from the Indian epics and Thai sculpture almost exclusively depicts images of the Buddha. Traditional Thai paintings usually consist of book illustrations, and painted ornamentation of buildings such as palaces and temples and other religious shrines as acts of merit or to commemorate important events. Moreover, In the Sukhothai period Buddha images are elegant, with sinuous bodies and slender, oval faces. This style emphasized the spiritual aspect of the Buddha. But traditional Thai paintings showed the most frequent narrative subjects for paintings were or are: the Jataka stories, episodes from the life of the Buddha, the Buddhist heavens and hells, themes derived from the Thai versions of the *Rāmā�ana* and *Mahābhārata*.

However, **Thai art** was heavily influenced by Buddhism and Brāhmanism-Hinduism traditions. In ancient Thailand, artists typically followed the styles and aesthetic conventions of their era and works of art were produced as acts of religious merit, not for individual recognition even though Traditional Thai sculpture, painting and classical dance drama was primarily religious.

Architecture: Most architecture was dedicated to religion in Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism e.g. Khmer Stupas reflect beliefs in

Hinduism. The beliefs concerning the universe of Buddhism and Brāhmanism-Hinduism are very similar to each other. The pattern and plan of stupas formerly enshrining the images of gods or the Shiva lingam in Brāhmanism-Hinduism were adapted to enshrining Buddha images or relics when they became Buddhist religious place, such as Phra Prang Samyot in Lopburi. Later, Phra Prang was developed to be the principal Buddha image of the temple in Thai architecture. Pagodas were constructed by adapting Khmer arts or by imitating the existing ancient pagodas in Thailand including Khmer patterns used in decorating the pagoda and then later being developed to become Ayutthaya and Ratanakosin Architecture. Such pagodas are commonly found in Mun and Chi river basin and also Chaophraya-Pa Sak river basin; they are tall tapering buildings like an ear of corn built with laterite and brick.

The temple has been used as a center for organizing community activities, such as annual festivals. Moreover, the temple has also served as the place for education of the younger generation and for conducting religious ceremonies. Stupas and pagodas are built for keeping relics. If the relic was one of the Lord Buddha or a king, it was called “Dhātu Cetiya” (relic pagoda). These structures also reminded people of the principle in Buddhism that all things are unsteady and impermanent depending on conditioning factors. Thai people have built pagodas in the temples for a long time as a reminder not to do bad things and to keep doing good things for one's own benefit and for that of the public at large both in the present or the next life. The temple is therefore a source for disseminating various kinds of knowledge through painting, architecture, and sculpture.

5.1.4 Traditions and Rites

Thai traditions and rites are the customs or ways of acting that continue to be followed by generation after generation, such as the traditions

observed to mark birth, ordination, marriage, death or other important occasions e.g. Sart Day, Trut Day and other Buddhist holy days e.g. Māgha Pūjā, Visākha Pūjā, Asālha Pūjā, the Beginning of Buddhist Lent, and the End of Buddhist Lent. During the Sukhothai Period, according to evidence gathered by Suphaphan Na Bangchang (1975, p.136) six Buddhist rites normally held were: 1) the Samphat Charachin Ceremony, or Trut Day (for the end of the year) held on the 15th day of the waxing moon of the 4th lunar month and during which monks were invited to recite “Phra Paritta” for three entire days and nights 2) the Visākha Pūjā Ceremony, on which the king would pay the homage to the Buddha images: “Phra Phutthachinnai”, “Phra Phutthachinnarat” and “Phra Loganart” 3) the Beginning and the End of Buddhist Lent ceremonies 4) the “Kran Kaṭhin” ceremony 5) the Kuan Khao Thip ceremony, and 6) the Chong Prieng ceremony. This clearly indicates that Buddhist traditions and rites have become part of state policy adhered to by the king at that time and also indicates the harmonious coexistence of the Thai state and Buddhism which has continued ever since.

During the Ayutthaya Period, Buddhist rites were more intermingled with those of Brāhmanism-Hinduism. When Phrachao U-thong, the first king of Ayutthaya, ascended the throne, he was interested in Brāhmanism-Hinduism, which was adopted from the Khmer. During the ceremony of his accession to the throne, he invited real Brāhmins from Vāranasi, India in order to be consistent with the notion of Brāhmanism-Hinduism that the person who can master Brāhmin ceremony must be an authentic Brāhmin who is well born in both sides (Uphato Suchāti) as evidenced by the statement given by the people of the old capital (Phrayotha Thammanithet, 2003, p. 53)

Somdet Phrachao U-Thong, the ruler of Ayutthayā was the great king of Siam and desired to establish friendship with

Vāranasi and conveyed diplomatic relation to the king of Vāranasi, who was widely recognized for his commitment to the virtues of the king (10 perfections). Ayutthayā would therefore like to seek for your royal kindness to offer eight noble and authentic Brāhmins who is well born in both sides (Uphato Suchāti) to master and witness the accession to throne ceremony in order to bring about fortune and prosperity and set forth the royal custom in Siam endlessly.

The above indicates the importance the first king of Ayutthayā placed upon Brāhman ceremonies. Succeeding kings also adhered to this custom, and more and more Brāhman traditions and ceremonies were brought into the royal court. (Udom Pramuanwit, 1962, p. 100). They continued as royal traditions in the reign of King Narāyana the Great, who, according to historical records, was a Buddhist but never abandoned Brāhman traditions.

Brāhmanism-Hinduism rites played important role in the royal ceremonies as they were perceived to have magical and sacred power that could be exploited for strengthening political power such as the Chong Prieng Royal Ceremony, Thiruppavai, the Drinking the Water of Allegiance Ceremony and the Royal Ploughing Ceremony. As explained by Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (2008, p. 586) some of these rites were carried out to express direct respect to the gods while others to express respect to the god king and others to expressing concern for the people's livelihood-all of which helped strengthen the king's status. The ruler presented himself as having faith in god and the desire to take good care of his people, and at the same time, used the ceremonies as a way to assess the loyalty of his servants. During the early Ratanakosin Period, King Rama I the Great revived the Visākha Puja Day ceremony after it had been fallen into desuetude for a time. Visākha Puja Day

had been celebrated since Sukhothai era and then disappeared after the collapse of Ayutthayā, but it is now firmly established in Thailand after being reintroduced by King Rama I.

5.2 Religious Cultures in Cambodia

In ancient times, before embracing the rites of Indian cultures, the Cambodian people believed in spirits and magic. The first religion to be received was Brāhmanism-Hinduism. As stated by Rooney (2003, p. 60) a lot of Cambodian temples exhibited a variety of Hindu deities such as Nārāyana, Brahma, Shiva, the Shiva lingam, and Apsara (goddess) and these became the basis of Khmer art. Later, Buddhism arrived in Cambodia around the 10th Buddhist century and Theravāda Buddhism became the state religion in the 18th Buddhist century. There are two sects of Theravāda Buddhism in Cambodia, namely, the *Mahanikāya Sect* and the *Dhammayuttika-nikāya Sect*. Theravāda Buddhism is the religion of as much as 96.4% of the Cambodian people. Cambodian culture is thus founded on both Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism. Cambodia was influenced by India in terms of language and arts through trade among India, China and the mainland of Southeast Asia which started in the time of the Funan Kingdom. Suphattharadit Ditsakun (2004, p. 98) explained that Funan Kingdom was located in the central area of Thailand which is now U-thong District of Suphan Buri Province and subsequently expanded to the east.

The golden age of Cambodia was approximately in the period between the 8th and the 13th centuries A.D. 14th and the 19th Buddhist centuries. or the Angkor Period; the time when a vast area of Southeast Asia was under Cambodian rule. The significant religious structures had been established in this period including Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom and many other stone

temples found in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam today. During this era, Mahayana Buddhism had more influence on Cambodia than Theravada Buddhism. Chatterji (1964, p. 49) observed:

Mahāyāna Buddhism from Srivijaya Kingdom was increasingly accepted in Cambodia during the reign of Suryavarman I (A.D.1002-1049 B.E.1545-1592). Many Cambodian scholars affirmed that all scriptures and mentors came from Tambralinga (Nakhon Si Thammarat). Therefore, Cambodian arts, architecture, music and performing arts had an influence in the development of the arts in neighboring countries like Thailand and Laos.

Therefore, the Cambodian people believed in spirits and magic since the ancient times but later, in 10th Buddhist century they received Brāhmanism-Hinduism. After that, during the reign of Suryavarman 1, Mahāyāna Buddhism from Srivijaya Kingdom was increasingly accepted in Cambodia in B.E.1545-1592. However, in the 18th Buddhist century, the king accept to be Theravāda Buddhism as the state religion. By this reason, Cambodia people are Theravāda Buddhists, which is about 96.4% in present day.

5.2.1 Language and Literature

The Cambodian language was influenced by Indian languages using the Pallava alphabet, widely used in the South of India during the Pallava Dynasty (5th-6th centuries A.D./ 11th-12th Buddhist Era) and is generally seen in the ancient inscriptions recorded in Sanskrit and found in the area of Southeast Asia. Sanskrit was considered the upper class language used by Brahmins. The influence of Sanskrit and Pāli came with Buddhism and Brāhmanism-Hinduism while influences from other languages including Thai or Lao resulted

from interrelations and proximity of geographical location. The Cambodian language (Khmer), however, differs from the languages of neighboring countries (Thai, Lao and Vietnamese) in that it has no tones.

With respect to literature, Cambodia was influenced by Brāhmanism through, for instance, the *Vedas*, which have been used by Brahmins from ancient times. Most old Khmer documents including the *Tripitika* and other scriptures translated from Pāli were recorded in Khmer script on palm leaf by monks. From the Funan Period onward, there were stone inscriptions, most of which were concerned with religion e.g. dedications and the affairs of the royal court. The popular stories include the *Rāmāyana*, the *Mahābhārata* and *Jātaka* (tales of the lord Buddha's former births). Thai literature has also had an important influence in Cambodian literature. One example is Phra Worawong and Sorawong, which is a story about two Khmer princes who were expelled and then returned and reclaimed their kingship. This story was later adapted for the Royal ballet of Cambodia in B.E.2549 (2006). The Cambodian version of the *Rāmāyana* has influenced classical dance and is considered the oldest story that has been adapted for performance. Cambodia also has a rich oral literature.

5.2.2 Beliefs

Originally, the ancestors of people in the Kingdom of Cambodia worshiped *Lokadhātu* (a unit of the Universe - consisting of earth, water, wind and fire) and spirit. They also believed in being incarcerated with ancestor spirits and thus the sorcerer was their spiritual leader. They believed in supernatural things such as nymphs or wood fairies, a sort of belief that may be called animism. Once they had relationships with people from other countries, especially India, they accepted the beliefs of Brāhmanism- Hinduism and Buddhism. Finally, Theravāda Buddhism became dominant in Cambodian society because in the 18th Buddhist century, the king accept to be Theravāda

Buddhism as the state religion. Therefore, most Cambodian people (over 90%) are Theravāda Buddhists. However, the principles and beliefs of Brāhmanism-Hinduism still have a significant role in administration, tradition, rite, and ceremony. De Casparis and Mabbett (2004, p. 63) stated that:

Brāhmanism- Hinduism was used to explain the king' s political status through the cult of worshipping the lingam, which is the exclusive symbol of Shiva, the god of creation and fertility. The cult of worshipping the Shiva lingam had influence in Cambodia until the 12th century B. E. In the Jampa Kingdom, worshipping Shiva was done by venerating the Shiva lingam called “Phattharasuan” another name of Shiva and “Samphuphattharasuan” (name of the king “Samphu Varaman + Shiva) which was the integration of the king as a part of Shiva according to the Devarājā cult, in which the king was most respected and sacred as if he was a god of Hinduism.

Later, about three centuries before Christian Era, Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism were disseminated to Suvarnabhumi, the former arriving during the reign of Rachendara Varaman II and the latter during the reign of Taren Varaman II. These forms of Buddhism had more and more influence upon the Khmer Kingdom. During the reign of Jayavarman VII, the Khmer Kingdom embraced both Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism (accepted from the Dhavaravati Kingdom). The great work of this king was to build Angkor Thom with the Bayon Temple as the center based on the beliefs of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Later, Inthara Varaman III supported Theravāda Buddhism until the reign of Jayavarman Ramasuan who preferred the king be honored by writing records in Pāli (instead of Sanskrit as it had been done

previously). This suggests that the Khmer Kingdom had completely converted to Theravāda Buddhism.

5.2.3 Arts and Architecture

Thought-out Cambodia's history, Brāhmanism and Buddhism guided and inspired its arts between 9th and 15th centuries, Massive temples, including Angkor Wat and the Bayon at Angkor Thum were build. The sculptures were carved from stone with great craftsmanship and many of them represent the Hindu deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Brahmans, the elephant god Ganesha and many other gods and goddesses, as well as Hindu mythical monsters such as the serpent naga, the giant Makara etc. Some large sculptures even portray the epics of the Hindu Myths such as *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmā�ana*. In later the Buddha statues appeared and enshrined in many temples. The most astounding Buddha statues are found in Angkor Thom (Bayon) where the magnificent statues of four-faced Bodhisattava Avalokiteshvara, the lord Buddha were sculptured of fifty towers. According to Dawn Rooney (2003) mentioned that

The gods in Hinduism reside in the five sacred mountains with central Mount Meru and these mountains are surrounded by the cosmic ocean. The structure of the Khmer temples mostly symbolizes the heavenly residence of the gods with five towers, called Prasats. The central dominant tower of Prasat represents the Mount Meru with four smaller ones, each at its corners, to represent the other four sacred mountains of the heaven. In some temples, there are galleries connecting the towers. The mount surrounding the temple symbolizes the cosmic ocean.

About the arts of dancing, the Cambodian royal dancing arts originated in the early 7th century A.D. before the Khmer Empire which was influenced by Brāhmanism such as Apsara dancing. Shadow puppet performances are another thing which had come into existence for more than hundred years before the Empire and might be referred to the well-known pattern in Indonesia called “Wayang” such as Nang Sbek which was also like Nang Yai of Thailand and Wayang of Malaysia and Indonesia in the area of Java and Bali. Nang Sbek originated in Malaysia and Indonesia and has three patterns at present: 1) *Nang Sbek Thom* in which only episodes from the *Ramakien* are performed with a traditional musical orchestra, 2) *Nang Sbek Toch* in which smaller puppets perform episodes drawn from several stories 3) *Sbek Por* in which colored puppets are used.

Architecture: With respect to architecture, structures built during the Angkor Period were usually made of stone and inspired by Buddhism and Brāhmanism-Hinduism. The stone was carved to tell religious stories. Religious symbols were also used for decoration; for example, in the palace in Phnom Penh, Garuda, the sacred half bird half angel in Brāhmanism-Hinduism, is used for decorative purposes. In the construction of Angkor Wat by Suryavarman II (A.D.1113-1150), the prominent feature is the story of Vishnu and his incarnation as Lord Krishna accompanied by detailed pictures of rites and the Universe. It is truly a magnificent artistic work dedicated to Vishnu.

So Khmer arts and Architecture showed the concept of heaven and gods, which are symbolized to be called Prasats. There are many Prasats in both Camboca and Northeast Thailand such as temple complex of Angkor Wat, initially Hindu and subsequently Buddhist.

5.2.4 Traditions and Rites

Cambodia has many traditions and rites especially those related to merit making similar to those of Thailand. The ceremonies are held on an annual basis to allow the young generation to learn about such traditions and rites. Cambodian culture involves history, beliefs and the people's way of life. Distinctive arts and traditions include:

1. The "Bun Sart" festival is an ancient tradition that is still observed today. It is a religious festival lasting 15 fifteen days held in the tenth lunar month. The objective is to devote merit and good deeds to deceased ancestors in order that they can reincarnate.

2. The *Mahājataka Sermon* tradition has also been observed from ancient times down to the present day. It is held in April. During this time, monks give sermons on the penultimate life of the Buddha, when he was Prince Vessantara. This sermon tradition commemorates the Lord Buddha enlightening the people of this world.

3. The Songkran Festival is held for a 3-day period at the beginning of harvesting season between 14th and 16th April. The first day of the festival is called Mahasongkran Day and is traditionally a day for making merit and building sand stupas. The second day of the festival is dedicated to family members, and children visit their parents and perhaps give them gifts. The third day is dedicated to amusements including throwing a ball similar to Saba Throwing in Thailand and then sprinkling water on Buddha images and respected elders.

On the whole, Cambodia has many rites and traditions that are similar to those of Thailand such as making merit and praying and worship. An important doctrine of Buddhism is the teaching on making merit as explained by De Casparis and Mabbett, (2004, p. 296).

Karma refers to making merit such as making a donation to a religious institution. This is a good deed attributed to the donor, who may devote the good deed to another person. Many times a donor intends to dedicate such good deeds for the benefit of other persons. During the Angkor Period, Jayavarman VII explained that his mother gave birth to him and was responsible for his life and behavior, and so anytime he made merit, his mother had the right to share such good deeds.

This clearly suggests that there is a belief that a donor giving property to a temple or sacred place will receive in return a reward in his present life. Performing actions and reaping the results of our actions if good actions bring good results, bad actions fetch bad results. Kamma includes the intentional actions of past lives and present life. At the moment of death the unexhausted units of kamma move with the consciousness on to a new life. It is the kamma which provides the power to move the person through Samsara, the cycle of life. As suggested by the proverb that merit collecting brings about happiness.

5.3 Similarities and Differences between Thai and Cambodian Cultures

Religious cultures in Thailand and Cambodia are similar to each other in many respects as they both have their roots in Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism. The major part of the populations of the two countries have similar traditions and culture that can be summarized as follows:

5.3.1 Languages and Literatures:

There are certain similarities between the Thai and Cambodian alphabets. Thai and Cambodian share many words including many derived from Sanskrit and Pāli. The two, however, differ in that Thai is a tonal language whereas Khmer has no tones. The literatures of both countries have been influenced by Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism such as the *Rāmāyana*, the life of the Lord Buddha, *Jātaka*, *Tebhumi Phra Ruang* etc. and these have had a great impact on other fields of art.

5.3.2 Beliefs:

Both Cambodian and Thai people pay respect to nature, spirits and gods and perform similar rites such as making merit, praying, offering alms to monks, participating in the Wien Thien ceremony on important Buddhist days, and making merit on Sart Day with some minor differences in the ceremonies.

5.3.3 Arts:

Both countries have influenced by religious cultures of Brāhmanism and Buddhism. For instance, dancing usually comprises movements of the hands and feet to convey emotion and meaning to the audience. Dance is considered a major art in both countries. The royal dancing art of Cambodia, Apsara Dancing, originated in the early 7th century heavily influenced by Brāhmanism. Shadow puppet theater has been performed for more than hundred years. Like other arts and literature in Thailand and Cambodia, the performing arts have been influenced by Brāhmanism. With respect to architecture, ancient shrines like Phimai, Phanom Rung, and Angkor Wat were built for worship of the supreme deity or for recollection of the Lord Buddha or his doctrine (*Buddhānussati* or *Dhammānussati*, respectively).

Both Thailand and Cambodia have Nang Talung (shadow puppet shows) *Manorah*, Nang Yai, Li Ke (Thai traditional dramatic performance), and dancing for worshipping gods according to Hindu belief. Moreover, the arts have been merged into Thai culture suggesting that the ancient arts of Cambodia and of Thailand were interrelated in telling of the life of gods. Thai and Cambodian people also believe that the life of the gods is very much involved with their lives in terms of happiness or woe and, foretelling the future. The *Ramakien* is an outstanding cultural feature in both Cambodia and Thailand.

5.3.4. Tradition and Rites;

Both Thai and Cambodian people show respect by placing the palms of the hands together and raising them in a gesture called the “Wai”. Several traditions and rites are similar in Cambodia and Thailand such as the Beginning of Buddhist Lent, the End of Buddhist Lent, ordination, and the Loi Krathong Festival (honoring the river goddess). Songkran Day is the traditional New Year day for both Thailand and Cambodia and can be traced back to ancient times. In both countries, Trut Day is observed. The term “Trut” which derives from the Tamil language spoken in the south of India, means “ending of the year”. Tamil people have sailed to trade with ASEAN countries since ancient times.

6. Conclusion

People in ASEAN countries formerly believed in nature and spirits before embracing religious cultures from India, China, Europe and the Middle East; the period in which identity has been developed under the religious cultures. Thailand and Cambodia originally shared the same “cultural root” of

Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism for not less than 2,000 years through several ancient kingdoms. These two religions have influenced cultural development in various fields such as language, literature, beliefs, arts, architecture, tradition and philosophy. However, religious cultures depend upon ruling of kings when Cambodia was ruled a series of Hindu kings with an occasional Buddhist kings such as Jayavarman I, II who became a Mahāyāna Buddhist and they regarded themselves to be a Dharma-king, a bodhisattva which their devotions withdrew from the old gods in Hinduism and began identify more openly with Buddhist traditions. Later, King Jayavarman VII had sent his son Tamalinda to Sri Lanka to be ordained as a Buddhist monk and study Theravada Buddhism according to the Pāli scriptural traditions. Tamalinda then returned to Cambodia and promoted Buddhist traditions according to the Theravada training he had received, galvanizing and energizing the long-standing Theravada presence that had existed throughout the Angkor empire for centuries.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Recommendations based on research findings

1. Most ASEAN countries have been influenced by cultures of India, the Middle East, Europe and China, the extent of the influence differing from country to country. The Thai and Cambodian cultures, for instance, have mainly been influenced by Indian culture. The establishment of AEC should not be viewed as a forum mainly for political elites and business tycoons; consideration should be given to the fact that the AEC has gathered people of many cultural backgrounds. The challenges that have been encountered by ASEAN countries will probably involve significant changes in the structure of

their cultures, religions, politics and economies. A case in point is the difficulties in the three deep southern provinces of Thailand.

2. How can we conserve valued cultures passed down from generation to generation through thousand years to sustainable development ? In present day, this age is globalization with the development of information technology, materialism, and consumerism. The reshaping of global political and economic structures has caused one country to depend on and interconnect more with other countries. The force of globalization has revealed itself in the form of multi-national corporations. The notions of human rights, democracy, rule of law, standardization, environmental conservation, impartial enforcement of law, transparency and justice as well as logical criticism with empirical evidence have become dominant global trends. Borderless communication has led to Neo-Westernization that dominates our thought, world perspective, dress and tastes. In other words, it has resulted in a borderless monopoly system in which the world has become the single one community in which we can see phenomena like Pop Culture under which certain forms of practice have been widely accepted and adopted in food consumption, education, and many other areas.

7.2 Recommendations for future study

There should be further study on other dimensions of culture using qualitative, quantitative or mixed approaches as follows:

- 1) To analyze the impact of globalization on religious culture in Thailand.
- 2) To explore Buddhist cultural patterns found in the Sukhothai or Srivichai inscriptions.

- 3) To analyze the influence of Buddhism or Brāhmanism-Hinduism in ASEAN countries.
- 4) To investigate the culture of Brāhmanism-Hinduism and Buddhism in the Kingdom of Tambralinga and the Ayutthaya Kingdom.
- 5) To survey the integration of cultural diversity and the unity of ASEAN countries.
- 6) To review religious literature like the *Rāmāyana*, or *Ramakien*, and their influence in ASEAN countries.

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