

# A Narrative of Monks: Culture Heroes in Songkhla Province

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**Abstract**—This study aimed to look into roles of culture heroes of monks in Buddhism in Songkhla province during the last 50 years. Qualitative study, in-depth interviews, participatory observation and non-participatory observation were employed for this study.

The results of the study indicated that culture heroes in Songkhla province would act as the followings. 1) For secular matters, monks would do something beneficial to the community. 2) For religious matters, monks would behave to follow Buddhism discipline strictly and unambitiously. At the same time, monks would not neglect to teach Buddhists to give respect to Lord Buddha by doing meditation and praying. However, when some of those culture heroes passed away, villagers in the community would show gratitude and appreciation by arranging a religious death anniversary ceremony, having icon, or having narrative to recognize those, continuously.

**Keywords**—Narrative of Monks, Culture Heroes, Songkhla Province.

## I. INTRODUCTION

CULTURE heroes are leaders without any political powers, but those will have social powers. Those will be accepted because of their observance of precepts or plans of lifestyles. Culture heroes will be young male or female, monks, or villagers, but these have to be admired respectively and will not be used for political benefits or be created as spiritual icons.



Fig. 1 Map of Songkhla in Thailand

Songkhla province is in the south about 950 km far from the capital of Thailand with the area of 7,400 Km<sup>2</sup> [1]. Songkhla

composes of 16 districts with the total population of 1.4 million which most them are farmers.

In the past, Songkhla areas used to have thick forest with a lot of wild animals. Students and villagers encountered something difficult and unreliable with living and properties. At present even the arriving of progress of having hospitals, roads, and schools, but villagers in the remote areas are still poor and lack of good public utilities. From the interview of Phrakhu Utaithamthada, the Abbot of Wat Muangkom, Hat Yai District, let this study learn that for the last 50 years, people of Songkhla have received mercy and help from monks with various requisites and matters, continuously that let the community live with happiness and good harmony [2]. Or even with the present generation, indirect supports and helps are still kept on. Such of mercy and helps from monks are mentioned respectfully and faithfully. However, situation seems to be different at present when news and medias report something negatively with some monks. For example, there was an arresting of Phra Atichart Apagaro, the Abbot of Wat Kokekratin at Wang Wiset District in Trang for the case of peculating, for Buddhist temple construction, for an amount of 1 million baht [3], and etc. Some news of disgrace brings to the occurrence of critical faith among Buddhists. Then the researcher has question concerned to the roles of monks on what some particular practices the culture heroes have that people always give high respect, faithfully.

### A. Aim

This study aimed to look into roles of culture heroes of monks in Buddhism in Songkhla Province.

### B. Definitions of Terms

Culture heroes: ones who have good observance of precepts, teach people to live with good morals, and help community and society.

Monks: priests in Buddhism who practice 227 precepts.

Wat: A Wat is a monastery temple in Thailand

### C. Benefits of the Study

1. Learns some example roles of monks to regain respect and faith of people in Songkhla Province.
2. Urge monks to maintain the attitude of self-practices for the public benefits.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. Data Givers

The sample of 9 qualified data givers was selected from a group of abbots, close-servants of abbots, disciples, and nearby-living villagers whose individual age was above 65

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years old and used to hear some narrative related to the culture heroes. This sample had directly experienced with morals and received supports from the culture heroes.

#### *B. Study Boundary*

Data collection was carried out particularly from the culture heroes who have lived in the sample site for 50 years in Songkhla Province.

#### *C. Instrument*

The researcher employed in-depth interviews to collect data and conducted analytical description.

### III. FINDINGS

The study indicated for the first period of the last 30 years that Songkhla still lacked of progress. Villagers had to be persistent and fight to step over some barriers of living for the matters of food, medicine, and safety. Children encountered various difficulties when they were going to schools because their schools were quite far away from their houses. However, villagers still had various supports from monks in the community as the followings.

For Public Health: Villagers at Takria Sub-district, Ranote District, Songkhla who were suffered from the symptoms of snake venom, catfish sting, mental illness, fever overlays menstruation, and broken bone would be taken care by Luangpoh Plod (Phrakhru Pisitboonsarn), a former abbot of Wat Huapa at Ranote District. Medical herbs would be used for those treatments of symptoms. Particularly, those with the broken bones symptoms would be treated back to normal [4]. LuangpooLek (Phra Atigarn Lek Lamapago), a former abbot of Wat Charoen Phupa at Rattapoom District was also a monk who could treat some blood disease and infertility disease by medical herbs [5].

For Public Utility: Villagers at Kuanroo Sub-district, Rattapoom District who always did not have ample water for farming in the past. Luangpoh Sikaew (Phrakhru Kalaya Thammarat), a former abbot of Wat Saiyai at Rattapoom District dedicated himself to find out the source of water in the deep forest and helped villagers to dredge some canals to let water flow to the village. Villagers were able to keep some water for Wat Saiyai and farming [6]. This was the same as Luangpoo Lek who was supporting villagers to construct a small road from front of the temple to the district area for the length of 2 kilometers to let students and villagers have more convenience to go to schools or different district areas [7].

For Village Safety: There was a narrative that some cattle of villagers were stolen from the village. Villagers went to ask for help from Luangpoo Lek. Luangpoo Lek informed aggressively to the other villagers in the village to bring back the cattle in 3 or 7 days or there would be something bad occurred to the stealer. Not more than 3 days, the stolen cattle came back to the pen. Villagers were happy and felt secure without worrying for the stealing [7].

For Craftsmanship: Luangpoo Horm (Phrakhru Sukonthasilajarn), a former abbot of Wat Kutao at Bangklum District, was a monk who had knowledge of craftsmanship.

Novices and other monks in Wat Kutao learned such knowledge from helping of building bridge, pavilion, monk's house, and etc. During that time, whoever had skill of craftsmanship would have the wealthy future [2].

Besides monks who had many benefactions to secularly help villagers, Luangpoo Lek was another monk who had religiously help villagers. Luangpoo Lek behaved to follow discipline strictly and hardly spoke to anybody [7]. Moreover, Luangpoo Horm had never forgotten to disseminating beliefs of Buddhism by trying to teach villagers to practice meditation and praying for peaceful mind [2].

Villagers who had been helped to solve their problems from various sufferings by monks would give high respect and faith to those. When there were some religious ceremonies at temples of Luangpoo Lek and Luangpoo Kaew, male villagers would lie in-line on the ground and let both monks walk on their backs instead of walking on the ground. Even when both monks passed away for many years, villagers still recalled of them and would show gratitude and appreciation by arranging a religious death anniversary ceremony and having icons lay in the temples to let villagers give respect [6], [7].

This study described that monks in the past would be leaders for many activities in the community by dedicating their knowledge, intelligence, and strength to work with villagers shoulder to shoulder. However, while doing those, monks never decreased what they had to behave to follow discipline strictly.

20 years later with the National Economic and Social Development Plan of Thailand that has aimed to move Thailand forward to be one of the developed countries, Songkhla has developed some infrastructures to have roads, electricity, tap water, hospitals, and schools. However, the development of such infrastructures did not cover the whole areas of Songkhla. Monks still have the same major roles with the community as what had occurred in the last 30 years. Only for the 20 years later, monks have supported community in terms of conservation and social development projects as the followings.

For Education: Phra Somsak (Phrakhru Attakitkosol), the Abbot of Wat Kokepiew at Kohyor Sub-district, Muang Songkhla District was the one who supported orphan and homeless children as he would ordain them to be Buddhist novices by building a Dharma School in the temple for those. If some of those Buddhist novices would like to keep on their education outside this temple, he would have supports for those. For religious matters, he also organized a camping to practice meditation and gave training of moral practices to students and other villagers during the religious holidays, weekends, and school recess. Personally, he was very well-behaved to follow Buddhism discipline strictly. This was one of the monks who equipped intellectual weapons for ones who are disadvantaged [8].

For Art and Cultural Conservation: Phrakhrupalad Somporn Thanthummo, the Abbot of Wat Klonghae at Hat Yai District was also very well-behaved to follow Buddhism discipline strictly. He was fond of southern art and cultural conservation. He resurrected some cultures lost for a long time in the past

such as Piti Kuan Kao Matupayat (rice porridge stirring ritual). He hired trainer to train Manora Dancing (a form of folk-dance in the south of Thailand) for small children. He realized that culture would help to create strong mind and strength for people in the society, indirectly [9].



Fig. 2 Piti Kuan Kao Matupayat



Fig. 3 Manora Dancing

For social development: Luangpoh Pun (Phratelyanmolee), the Abbot of Wat Saikao at Thung Wang Sub-district, Muang Songkhla District was the core person to lead some local leaders and both Muslim and Buddhist villagers living at Ban Saikao village and nearby village. He urged those for the campaign to collect funding for the village development. Funding collected was used for several purposes. For example, funding was used for building water reservoir, building public tap water, building weir, buying new land for public health office, providing village electricity, and building monk training center. Especially, the monk training center has been operated to give some training of moral practices for the number of thousands of participants each year. Doing these at Ban Saikao village, villagers had done something turned to be examples for other villages. From the interview, the author found that Luangpoh Pun hardly spoke to anybody. However, his words or what he spoke seemed to be in term of teaching and building peace [10].

The results of this study indicated that monks were culture heroes of Songkhla province. Monks were participants in several activities of the village. By participating in those activities, monks created a good harmony among villagers in the village which conformed to Srisak Vallipodom [11] as he mentioned that culture heroes were ones who could help to let society and community have cooperation and self-management occurred in that society and community.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Monks, culture heroes in Songkhla Province should be deserved to receive high respect from people. This means that monks will follow Buddhism discipline strictly, hardly speaking to anybody, practice tranquility, practice meditation, and practice praying. This can be said that these monks have behaved to follow religious matters properly [12]. However, these monks still perform their duties related to secular matters by supporting people and community for benefits of the society. This is because religion cannot be separated itself from the society, but religion and society have to support each other which conforms to the "Exchange Theory" of Mauss [13] which mentioned that exchanging/giving were key factors of controlling social power and would had bonding of giving and returning. Giving also means benefits for the spirit or mind such as cooperation in the group, respect, and faith that bring to creating of ritual culture/icon to let people express gratitude to those benefactors. These will enhance people in the society to live in unity that will lead to the integration of development for the nation [14]. Supporting those mentioned above will help to build stability and wealth of people in the society.

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