



## Lanna Oral Buddhist Literature: Identity, Development, and Value-adding in a New Dimension

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### ABSTRACT

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This study was aimed at 1) analyzing the identity and development of Lanna oral Buddhist literature, 2) analyzing the contents and principles in propagating Buddhism for new generations, and 3) proposing the guidelines for value-adding and management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension. The sample consisted of 1) the sample who responded to the questionnaire: 152 monks and 152 deacons, and 2) the interviewees: 2 monks, 2 deacons, and 2 scholars. Research tools used to collect data consisted of 1) questionnaire, where percentage, statistics, mean, and standard deviation were used for data analysis, and 2) structured interview, where a descriptive analysis was conducted for data analysis.

The results indicated that 1) the identity of literature included indigenous preaching, Ventan (alms offering), asking for forgiveness from the Triple Gem and others, Lanna proverbs, asking for forgiveness from dead bodies, storytelling, morals, and Tan praying (folk praying), and the development of literature stemmed from a mix with current events, changing based on the community context, integration with other local languages, adaptations over time, and compliance with the regime, 2) contents in the propagation of Buddhism included diligence, education, learning, use of intelligence to solve problems, folk tales, lives of the people, and dharma-based fairy tales, and 3) guidelines for literature value-adding included creating a new body of knowledge from oral Buddhist literature, organizing a "Local Northern Preaching" short course, preparing a handbook on oral Buddhist literature, promoting the learning for children, youth, and higher education, providing a subject in local Buddhist literature, preparing dharma-based Lanna books and tales, teaching and learning on oral Buddhist literature from the secondary education, and producing books on oral Buddhist literature.

### KEYWORDS:

Identity, Buddhist literature, and Lanna oral traditions

### INTRODUCTION

Oral literature promotes good behavior and ethics for readers or listeners by offering examples and tips for living a good, mentally healthy life. It is important to inspire and enhance understanding and wisdom in various aspects of life so that people have efficient and happy lives and their locally unique identities, such as Buddhist literature with a unique Lanna identity. According to Phra Palad Jatuporn Wachirayano (2019), the identity arises from interaction between society, community, and individuals, but only one acceptable identity will be chosen and used under certain conditions of time and area. This identity may

be determined either by the individuals or by the community; therefore, identity and community are inseparable. Community identity is the root, or social culture, which it is formed and used to adhere to wisdoms, customs, and traditions in that society (Boonsiri Sukpromsap et al., 2018). Creating the community identity of Lanna Buddhists enhances the strength by using the Buddhist principles that comply with the needs of the community as an important tool leading to the creation of the propagation principles of Buddhism to meet the needs of the rapidly moving community and society. It can be regarded as a national development policy for sustainable security (Phra Palad Boonchuay Thita Jitto et al., 2023). According to Watcharin Kaenchan (2013), Lanna literature not only shows the relationship with the social context in reflecting the model of society through language, but it also reflects the management of status, creation of legitimacy, concealment, merging, diversification, and reinforcement of what exists to continue existing.

From the aforementioned reason, the research team extracted knowledge from relevant research on local oral literature

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and found that oral Buddhist literature developed in line with that society and was inherited to become a local identity, including folk tales, Jataka tales, and Buddha stories arising out of respect for their ancestors and nature and faith in religion, causing the pride in Lanna. There might be parody, satire, and humor contents, making people have a mental basis or anchor, relieve stress in their occupations, and get ideas for their lives. This was the source of this study for value-adding and management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension, which was an important part in propagating the principles and teachings of Buddhism to new generations.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyze the identity and development of Lanna oral Buddhist literature;
2. To analyze the contents and principles in propagating Buddhism for new generations; and
3. To propose the guidelines for value-adding and management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was mixed-method research. The sample was divided into two groups as follows:

1. The sample responding to the questionnaire included preaching monks and deacons at each temple in Chiang Mai, a total of 1,458 monks/people. Using the sample size determination according to the Krejcie & Morgan's table, the sample of 304 monks/people was obtained. Statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used for data analysis; and
2. Interviewees playing an important role in the propagation of Lanna oral literature in Chiang Mai included 6 people, including monks, deacons, and scholars, who were chosen through the purposive sampling. The content analysis was conducted.

### **RESULT**

#### **1. Analysis results of identity and development of Lanna oral Buddhist literature**

1.1 The sample agreed with the identity of Lanna oral Buddhist literature at a high level with a total mean of 4.43 and a standard deviation of 0.613, which could be arranged in a descending order as follows: 1) Indigenous preaching and Ventan (alms offering), 2) Asking for forgiveness from the Triple Gem and others, 3) Lanna proverbs, 4) Asking for forgiveness from dead bodies, especially monks, and storytelling and morals, and 5) Tan praying.

Ventan (alms offering) is characterized by informing the participants of the current merit-making ceremony and admiring the gratitude of the Buddha, angels, gods, and Mother Earth for acknowledgment of this merit-making ceremony. Lanna indigenous compassion (sharing of loving kindness) is not the same as those in the north and has its own identity in every area of Lanna. For Lanna, asking for forgiveness from dead bodies is

characterized by letting monks and novices stand or sit around the coffin and ask for forgiveness at the same time together.

1.2 The sample agreed with the development of Lanna oral Buddhist literature at a high level with total mean of 4.18 and a standard deviation of 0.794, which could be arranged in a descending order as follows: 1) Mix with current events, 2) Changing based on the community context, 3) Integration with other local languages, 4) Adaptations over time, and 5) Compliance with the regime.

Traditionally, worshiping the Phra That Chedi is done by narrating the history of that Phra That Chedi. However, it is now conducted in a way of informing the participants of the purpose and the host of the event instead. Currently, Ventan (alms offering) has been changed to be shortened and inserted with the host's biography, including the use of words of offerings and alms prayed in the central region, and has kept changing with the times. In most cases, Lanna-style Ventan is conducted along with the use of words of offerings and alms prayed in the central region. Traditionally, Tan praying is done overnight and is intermittently chanted during auspicious ceremonies, such as the celebrations of Viharn, Ubosot, Phra That Chedi, or other important abodes of the temples. Sacred objects are recited at the same time. At present, Tan praying is done for no more than 1-2 hours.

#### **2. Analysis results of contents and principles in propagating Buddhism for new generations**

2.1 The sample agreed with the contents in the propagation of Buddhism for new generations at a high level with a total mean of 4.46 and a standard deviation of 0.477, which could be arranged in a descending order as follows: 1) Diligence, 2) Education and learning, 3) Use of intelligence to solve problems, 4) Folk tales and lives of the people, and 5) Dharma-based fairy tales.

Contents that are legitimate principles according to the principles in the Dharma should be propagated by adhering to the scriptures and getting to know Lanna cultures and traditions both related to Buddhism and local wisdoms adapted for the ceremony or education for listeners. The contents should be up-to-date and communicated so that listeners can easily understand and apply them. They should be true, modern, concise, appropriate for the occasion, and beneficial for lives, with no excessive ritual.

2.2 The sample agreed with the principles in the propagation of Buddhism for new generations at the highest level with a total mean of 4.66 and a standard deviation of 0.375, which could be arranged in a descending order as follows: 1) Sublime states of mind (kindness, compassion, sympathy, and equanimity), 2. Rare people (those with gratefulness), 3) Bases of meritorious actions (generosity, observation of religious precepts, and mental development), 4) Dharma with great support (apperception), and 5) Foundations for accomplishment (passion, diligence, consciousness, and investigation).

It should focus on dharma principles related to self-dominance, people dominance, and work dominance as basic principles, which are not too difficult to follow. These include Five basic Buddhist precepts of moral practices, Five dharma precepts,

Four sublime states of mind, Four bases of sympathy, Four foundations for accomplishment, and Eight worldly conditions, which are the principles that should be disseminated because they are suitable for the current situation in Thai society. For young children, the principles related to education and diligence in seeking knowledge should be mixed with discipline training. For teenagers, it should focus on principles that can be practically applied to solve their everyday problems.

### **3. Guidelines for value-adding and management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension**

3.1 The sample agreed with the guidelines for value-adding of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension at a high level with a total mean of 4.45 and a standard deviation of 0.571, which could be arranged in a descending order as follows: 1) Creating a new body of knowledge from oral Buddhist literature and organizing a "*Local Northern Preaching*" short course, 2) Preparing a handbook on oral Buddhist literature, 3) Promoting the learning for children, youth, and higher education and providing a subject in local Buddhist literature, 4) Preparing dharma-based Lanna books and tales, and 5) Teaching and learning on oral Buddhist literature from the secondary education and producing books on oral Buddhist literature.

Adding value and giving an attitude in life to adhere to good morals instill the awareness of the value and importance of the environment, which increases the moral value of children and young people to point out the value of correctness. Ways to add value include making and giving CDs, creating new apps, or producing YouTube channels to publish digitally, etc. to stimulate cultural value and create economic value. They may be issued as documents or books with clear steps that are likely and appropriate to the economic value of that person. In addition, they may be published through videos or media on what should and should not be done.

3.2 The sample agreed with the guidelines for management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension at a high level with a mean of 4.46 and a standard deviation of 0.551, which could be arranged in a descending order as follows: 1) Involving other local scholars in gathering information, 2) Creating a course for young propagators, 3) Analyzing principles that are appropriate for new generations, 4) Analyzing philosophical concepts from literature and making a website for disseminating Buddhist literature, and 5) Establishing a learning center for oral Buddhist literature.

Guidelines for management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension through the teaching and learning by community scholars both in the formal and non-formal education systems can be done by promoting activities, supporting a network to inherit oral literature, and researching and collecting wisdom data as a way to inherit local literature. In addition, Lanna oral Buddhist literature should be systematically published in online media with a responsible agency and systematic management so that they can be visible in the media with the same guidelines or forms of practices.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

**1. Identity and development of Lanna oral Buddhist literature:** According to the aforementioned results, the identity of Lanna oral Buddhist literature included indigenous preaching and Ventan (alms offering), asking for forgiveness from the Triple Gem and others, Lanna proverbs, asking for forgiveness from dead bodies, especially monks, and storytelling and morals, and Tan praying. Ventan (alms offering) is characterized by informing the participants of the current merit-making ceremony and admiring the gratitude of the Buddha, angels, gods, and Mother Earth for acknowledgment of this merit-making ceremony. The development of literature stemmed from a mix with current events, changing based on the community context, integration with other local languages, adaptations over time, and compliance with the regime. Traditionally, worshipping the Phra That Chedi is done by narrating the history of that Phra That Chedi. However, it is now conducted in a way of informing the participants of the purpose and the host of the event instead. Currently, Ventan (alms offering) has been changed to be shortened and inserted with the host's biography, including the use of words of offerings and alms prayed in the central region, and has kept changing with the times. Similarly, according to Laphatsarin Chatwangkhiri (2018: 87), Lanna identity is defined and linked to cultural pluralism in Lanna society, which co-exists peacefully among ethnic diversity. Lanna identity is also built and modified in the context of contemporary Thai society in the era of cultural globalization. She demonstrated self-transformation in a dimension negotiated with the state-determined center of power, including playing with culture in globalization, western culture, local trends, and gender status in the present day.

**2. Contents and principles in propagating Buddhism for new generations:** According to the aforementioned results, the principles in the propagation of Buddhism for new generations included sublime states of mind (kindness, compassion, sympathy, and equanimity), rare people (those with gratefulness), bases of meritorious actions (generosity, observation of religious precepts, and mental development), dharma with great support (apperception), and foundations for accomplishment (passion, diligence, consciousness, and investigation). It should focus on dharma principles related to self-dominance, people dominance, and work dominance as basic principles, which are not too difficult to follow. These include Five basic Buddhist precepts of moral practices, Five dharma precepts, Four sublime states of mind, Four bases of sympathy, Four foundations for accomplishment, and Eight worldly conditions, which are the principles that should be disseminated because they are suitable for the current situation in Thai society. This is a complete civilization, making people get better in physical, verbal, and mental conditions. However, whoever is unsteady in civilization, he or she should at least control himself or herself in both physical and verbal conditions by following Five precepts (Ang Panjak 22/172/227). As such, he or she can be regarded as a moral person, i.e. a person abstaining from killing animals, taking other's things in a way of stealing, having

sexual misconducts, telling lies, and drinking liquors and intoxicants.

**3. Guidelines for value-adding and management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension:** According to the aforementioned results, guidelines for management of Lanna oral Buddhist literature in a new dimension included involving other local scholars in gathering information, creating a course for young propagators, analyzing principles that are appropriate for new generations, analyzing philosophical concepts from literature and making a website for disseminating Buddhist literature, and establishing a learning center for oral Buddhist literature. In addition, the teaching and learning by community scholars both in the formal and non-formal education systems can be done by promoting activities, supporting a network to inherit oral literature, and researching and collecting wisdom data as a way to inherit local literature. Lanna oral Buddhist literature should also be systematically published in online media with a responsible agency and systematic management so that they can be visible in the media with the same guidelines or forms of practices.

This is in line with the concept of the National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 10, 2007-2011, which has established strategies to develop the quality of people and Thai society to become a society of wisdom and learning. Therefore, it aims to lay a foundation for developing people to have immunity and be ready for changes. It serves as a force in developing the country and knowledgeable people, coupled with enhancing strong morality by developing the quality of people to have a good mental foundation, know how to preserve and carry on the good cultures, traditions, and values, have a strong body, and learn continuously and equally. Similarly, according to Buaphin Fakaew et al. (2011), the development of local literary learning process relies on five knowledge management tools: (1) powerful stories, (2) Knowledge extraction, (3) Synthesis of core knowledge, (4) Recording results after learning activities, and (5) Lesson extraction. The local literary learning process is taken through a knowledge management process that is consistent with local contexts and needs. The learning process consists of four main steps: 1) Study of the needs of local literature learning management, 2) Design of local literature learning activities, 3) Local literature learning process, and 4) Assessment of local literature learning process.

## SUGGESTIONS

### 1. Policy suggestions

1.1 Chiang Mai monks, National Office of Buddhism, Phrapariyattidhamma Schools are required to prepare categorized handbooks of oral Buddhist literature for propagators, including a handbook for preaching monks, a handbook for deacons, a handbook for followers and general public, and a handbook for teaching and learning in educational institutions.

1.2 Mahamakut Buddhist University, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, and Phrapariyattidhamma Schools should establish a policy to have

instructional media that facilitates learning, use information technology in the learning process as a guideline for conservation of local literature that is suitable for learners and local people, and encourage teaching and learning in line with local courses.

1.3 Mahamakut Buddhist University, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, and Phrapariyattidhamma Schools should plan to systematically manage oral Buddhist literature, starting from researching and gathering information and guidelines for creating economic value for the community and society in the form of participation between government organizations and communities, including houses, temples, and schools.

### 2. Research suggestions

Suggestions for further research are as follows:

2.1 There should be research on the process of establishing a learning center of oral Lanna literature for students and people in the north;

2.2 Research should be integrated into local oral literature to conserve oral literature by establishing a learning center;

2.3 Research should be done on development model of religious successors for the learning of oral Buddhist literature, which promotes Buddhism to prosper further; and

2.4 Research should be done on guidelines for developing preaching monks and deacons, who are important persons in the conservation, promotion, and development of local literature to remain with the local community.

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