

ABSTRACT

The Buddhist symbols were created to represent something related to the Buddha the inventor wanted to mean, and to propagate Buddhist teachings which were expected to lead to emancipation from the suffering. The creation of Buddhist symbols was also purported to transfer something beyond human perception, which could not be explained verbally but expressed in symbols for the followers to perceive and understand through their experience and faith in Buddhism. So the Buddhist symbols were considered media to transmit beauty and wisdom of the creation in expressing imagination from subjectivity to objectivity, thereby Buddhist followers became interested in studying all the contents related to Buddhism.

Results of this research were the collection of knowledgeable data on the Lan Na Buddhist symbols. The research was attempted to make the readers understand the purpose of Buddhist symbolic creation, and the creation pattern and process, and its development. It was also intended to propagate the informative data in order to apply them creatively and conservatively, to develop monasteries as a learning center, to make appropriate use for business, and to respond to social needs among the changes owing to the current world situations.

Based on the study of primary and secondary documents, it was found that the Buddhist symbols were found in the Buddha episodes, Jataka tales, Traibhumikatha, cosmos, and Himalayan Forests. All the religious accounts contained therein transmitted all of the past, present and future situations to younger generations; it was an amalgam of the mundane and super-mundane worlds together so as to show the symbolic reality in Buddhism, that is to say, the time beyond, showing a space above imagination, perception of all matters with the Buddha as a proclaimer of ultimate reality being above all things, in which the Buddha and his teachings were a symbol central to all the universe.

One of the research problems was the lack of recording these symbolic meanings in written language. So the research work had to depend on studying documents from the site and interviewing the learned people, from which were obtained the data with diversity of forms and meanings of the Buddhist symbolic works. The aforesaid diversifications were pointed up to enable those who looked at the Buddhist symbols to perceive and imagine until they understood those meanings by themselves, and were not limited by definite meanings, in which the perceiving and

understanding were subject to changes in consonance with space and time that was never static. In this regard, it was assumed by the researcher that it might have been a main reason for not finding the recording of definite meanings in creating the Buddhist symbols in Lan Na Kingdom.

However, the problem of lacking evidences affected the perpetuation of current knowledge which was based on education through education system, textbooks, and curriculum teaching which was testified by reasoning in learning process. Therefore, education system by transmitting through training and instructing regarding the Buddhist symbolic works from generation to generation vanished as it happened in the Lan Na society in the sense that the Buddhist symbolic works were improperly used, resulting in the opinions and viewpoints deviant from the original works that served as media to transmit ideological knowledge to merely artifacts, whose the business value could be constituted; it was a concept that had been changed according to educational, social and cultural conditions of the present time.

The presentation of evolution of Buddhist symbolic works in the last part of the research dealt with the forms of Buddhist symbols, created and developed to serve Buddhism, and with the change of worldviews towards the Buddhist symbolic works that had taken place since the change of Lan Na administration through the Siamese central government mainly with the reform of administration, religion, education, society and culture under the conceptual system and acceptance of higher culture for survival.

A combination of various cultural elements and Lan Na culture was obviously expressed in Buddhist architecture, fine arts, sculpture and handicrafts. However, the change in their forms did not affect the symbolic meanings, but the changes in worldview and readjustment for their existence under socioeconomic changes of the modern world had certainly reduced the realizing and understanding of the values and meanings of Buddhist symbols.