The Arts in Votive Tablets which His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej Participated in the Making

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Abstract - The objective of this research is to honour and promote the remarkable aptitude in Buddhist arts of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The researcher has studied and compiled votive tablets which His Majesty has participated in making since His Majesty’s accession to the throne on 9 June 1946 to present. Data were collected from various sources and with different methods, ranging from documents to field work by interviewing experts, observation and photo shooting. Data were then analyzed.

Keywords – buddhist arts, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, votive tablets.

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is one of the fundamental institutes which are foundations of Thailand. It has significantly contributed to security and preservation of the nation. It could be said that Buddhist ethics have amalgamated into Thai traditions, customs and conventions. Moreover, Buddhism has also been a powerful inspiration for various creations of fine arts including painting, sculpture, architecture and interior design.

Fig. 1 Phra Buddha Chinnarat, Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, Phitsanulok Province

"Votive tablet" is a term used for amulets which has an archeological implication. Votive tablets, a kind of Buddhist arts having both sentimental and social values in Thailand, are Buddha or monk images. They are created out of respect and faith in Buddhism. These auspicious objects carry with them values for remembrance and worship. They are also a means to pass along Buddhism from generation to generation.

Fig. 2 A Dvaravati Buddhist art votive tablet found in Nakhon Pathom Province

Votive tablets were first created after the Lord Buddha’s parinibbana. The Lord Buddha’s followers or buddhists visited the four Buddhist pilgrimage sites, the birth place of the Buddha, the place of the enlightenment, the place of the first sermon and the place of the Lord Buddha’s parinibbana, which each is far away from the others. They made great efforts to travel the long journey to visit those sites. Once there and paid respect to the sites, they felt overwhelmed as if they were before the Lord Buddha himself. When they had to depart those sites, they felt very sad and had an idea to make miniatures of those sites for remembrance and worship when they got home. The idea was then developed to make votive tablets and later amulets.

In Thailand, Buddhism and the Monarchy have a long and inseparable relationship. Not only the making of Buddha images and votive tablets by kings is meant to express their respect for Buddhism and make merit for themselves and their relatives but also to gain political influence. Buddha images and votive tablets are a symbol of love and loyalty between kings and their subjects. They are also thought of as auspicious for the country.

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the current King, is one of the most beloved and esteemed Kings of Thailand. Since His Majesty ascended to the throne on June 9, 1946, he has assiduously and tirelessly worked for the well being of his subjects. His Majesty is a Buddhist who has great faith in Buddhism and has been a strong patron of all aspects of the religion. His Majesty has always made sure that Buddhist related activities are well taken care of.

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In the past, King would bestow a sword upon a town within his kingdom to show his power and authority. However, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej had an idea to additionally bestow Nava Rachabopit Buddha images upon all provinces.

The Nava Rachabopit Buddha image is a Buddha image of Manvichai posture with 23 centimeter width and 40 centimeter height. The base of each Nava Rachabopit Buddha image contains a Somdej Chitratala votive tablet, which was made by His Majesty and given the name “puissance of the land”. The Nava Rachabopit Buddha image is, therefore, an auspicious Buddhist symbol which represents close bonding between His Majesty and his subjects.

His Majesty’s participation in the making of votive tablets ranged from pouring gold liquid to consecration to sprinkling holy water to anointment and to praying for a blessing from the Buddha. The researcher has realized His Majesty’s divine devotion to the making of votive tablets and felt the need to study the artistry aspect of it and record the findings for historical purposes.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH
1) To honour and promote the remarkable aptitude in Buddhist arts of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej;

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2) To study and compile the votive tablets which His Majesty has participated in the making since His Majesty’s accession to the throne on June 9, 1946;
3) To categorize the votive tablets which His Majesty has participated in the making since His Majesty’s accession to the throne on June 9, 1946.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
1) Surveyed and studied related documents for information needed to set the direction and outline the framework of the research, including information needed to present the outcome of the research;
2) Collected field data by interviewing experts, observing and taking photos as follows:
   i. Population and sample of votive tablets used in the research:
      - Population: votive tablets which His Majesty granted approval of making;
      - Sample: 25 votive tablets which His Majesty has participated in the making since His Majesty’s accession to the throne on June 9, 1946;
   ii. Interviewed experts to receive necessary information for the research.
3) Data collection was in the following order:
   i. Examined data from both documents and field work, i.e. interviews, collected additional information for incomplete parts and summarized the information as outlined.
   ii. Examined photos and drawings collected from both documents and field work, collected additional information for incomplete parts and categorized them.
4) Presentation of the result of the research:
The researcher presented his analysis and findings as a descriptive research with photos.

IV. RESULT OF THE RESEARCH
It was found that the 25 votive tablets which His Majesty has participated in the making, ranging from pouring gold liquid to consecration to sprinkling holy water to anointment and to praying for a blessing from the Buddha, could be categorized into 4 categories as follows:
A. Method
   - 5 out of 25 votive tablets, or 20%, were made by compressing;
   - 13 out of 25 votive tablets, or 52%, were made by casting;
   - 6 out of 25 votive tablets, or 28%, were made by imprinting;
B. Type
   - 3 out of 25 votive tablets, or 12%, are low-relief;
   - 10 out of 25 votive tablets, or 40%, are semi high relief;
- 12 out of 25 votive tablets, or 48%, are round-relief;

C. Material
- 6 out of 25 votive tablets, or 24%, are made of non-metal;
- 19 out of 25 votive tablets, or 76%, are made of metal

D. Era of arts
- 1 out of 25 votive tablets, or 4%, is Gandhara Buddhist arts;
- 5 out of 25 votive tablets, or 20%, are Tang Dynasty arts;
- 1 out of 25 votive tablets, or 4%, is Dvaravati Buddhist arts;
V. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULT

For the 25 votive tablets which His Majesty has participated in the making, the findings could be concluded as follows:

1) Casting has been the most popular method;
2) Round – relief has been the most popular type;
3) Metal has been the most popular material;
4) Sukhothai Buddhist arts has been the most popular arts.

The researcher felt very honoured to have an opportunity to study the votive tablets which His Majesty has participated in the making. The result of this research could be further studied to find out how fine arts could be used as a tool to pass down Buddhism from generation to generation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research could not be completed without support and assistance from various organizations. The researcher would like to especially thank the National Research Universities, Office of the Higher Education Commission and, Faculty of Fine Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, for funding this research project.

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