

*The Communication approach for conservation palm leaves text
of Sungmen Temple, Thailand by Buddhism dharma*

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explain the Communication approach for conservation palm leaves texts of Sungmen Temple, Thailand by Buddhism dharma. The methodology for this study including opinion leader in-depth interview such as a monk and a local Wisdom, Participant and Non- participant Observation and related literature reviews. It was found that in the community communication process for preservation manuscripts is involved 5 elements of Buddhism teaching following by 1) Faith - created people preservation awareness by well-known people 2) Morality – proficient organization management 3) Concentration – using the only one unique traditions named Takdhamma to encourage people attended temple activities. 4) Wisdom – Construct learning center and museum including Memorandum of Understanding in term of research with universities and cultural offices. 5) Friendliness – Knowledge transfer activities to public such as training, press release and change temple position to tourist attraction. After adaptation 5 elements for community communication to preservation ancient Buddhism documentaries, Sungmen temple is successful cooperation from internal and external communities including involved government units and private institutions. As above mentioned nowadays Sungmen temple is the role model for encouraging the community to conservation palm leaves text.

Keywords: communication approach, conservation, buddhism dharma

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Introduction

Palm leaf manuscripts are the evidence that reflects the prosperity of Lanna Kingdom's alphabets, language and literature. Also, the Lan Na alphabets featured in the recordings on palm leaf and mulberry paper manuscripts expanded to other nearby towns such as Kengtung, Jinghong and Luang Prabang as well as the northeastern part of Thailand. It greatly reiterates Lanna Kingdom's cultural prosperity which boasted its own speaking and written languages.

Currently, palm leaf manuscripts are preserved and kept in many temples nationwide. Sung Men Temple in Sung Men Sub-District, Sung Men District, Phrae Province is one of the province's oldest monasteries. Boasting 300 years of construction legacy, the temple is also known of having the biggest collection of palm leaf manuscripts in Thailand at 84,500, all collected by Kruba kanjana-aranyavasri buddhist monk

Today, Sung Men Temple's strength is widely acknowledged in terms of knowledge from the palm leaf manuscripts. It also organizes activities that promote the preservation and promulgation of such knowledge. One of the known activities is Takdhamma tradition which is held exclusively in Thailand at this temple every year in January. Furthermore, there is a wide range of activities in line with the varieties of target groups from monks, local scholars, women, youth to tourists and those who express interest in. Those activities include palm leaf scripture workshop, Pāli Canon-wrapping workshop, exhibitions, knowledge on palm leaf boiling and scripture-making to other temples, which always receive active participation from community's residents and those from outside.

Apart from the temple's staff with full knowledge and expertise, strong network and local villagers' participation, another boosting factor that contributes to Sung Men Temple's success in terms of communication for the preservation of the palm leaf manuscript is the adaptation of Buddhist teachings into the communication framework for every sector's palm leaf manuscript preservation work.

Data collection

This research relies on qualitative data collection with 1) In-depth interview with persons of key data resources: the abbot and vice-abbot of Sung Men Temple and community leader who organizes relevant activities 2) Observation of activity preparation, with and without participation and 3) Studies from relevant documents and research works. The observation and participation of the activities meanwhile took place during 2015-2016.

Strategies for preservation of palm leaf manuscripts based on Buddhist teachings

In 2007, Sung Men Temple was just an ordinary monastery which people living nearby only acknowledged that it had a huge collection of Buddhist teaching books. They however had zero knowledge on these scriptures' history and significance, only local scholars and a handful of monks did. Until one day, Soodjai Khaokone, the then mayor of Sung Men District, came up with the idea that there should be promotion and support as the temple has a huge collection of ancient scriptures. This can be done by various activities so that people in the community would realize how significant

they are. The mayor then discussed with those concerned that Takdhamma tradition should be brought back. The committee then set out for a study-visit trip to study Kruba Kanjana-aranyavasri's path of palm leaf manuscript collection in Laos so that they can learn about the preservation of the scriptures. This created awareness to people in the community and inspired them to preserve the tradition and ancient scriptures. (Professor Phra Maha Suthit-aphakaro et al., 2006)

From interviews with those involved, observation of the activities and studies of relevant documents, it is found that Sung Men Temple's preservation of palm leaf manuscripts was gradually initiated beginning from reviving Takdhamma tradition followed by other activities. They were carried out based on the idea of finding the activities that could attract people to join the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts in a manner of happiness and sustainability. Those activities must allow people living around Sung Men Temple comprising monks, local scholars, community residents and women and youth groups to participate in willingness. Provost Panya Saraniwit and Provost Wiboonsorapan, abbot and vice-abbot of Sung Men Temple then introduced 5 Buddhist principles of Faith, Virtue, Concentration, Wisdom and Mercy as the key guidelines in appointing the sustainable strategies for Sung Men Temple's preservation method for palm leaf manuscripts, with details as follows:

1. Faith - It stands for creating awareness for the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts to the temple's staff and those living around the temple who are viewed as the owner of the area. The objective of this aspect is to make them realize the significance of the huge collection of palm leaf manuscripts in Sung Men Temple as well as boosting the preservation spirit of local residents, so that they feel cherished and will continue the preservation tradition. This awareness method is raised in various ways such as:
 - 1.1 By developing the temple into a touristic place, people can come in for a study visit which helps raise awareness in the community's residents in terms of the temple's specialties.
 - 1.2 Inviting key figures to attend the temple's important events from traditional ones such as Takdhamma tradition to other activities related to palm leaf works, for example, when Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's graciously presided over the ceremony of transferring the palm leaf manuscript from former residence to the new one on 11 March 2014. This method also includes invitation extended to provincial key figures such as governor and deputy governor to participate in several events. When analyzing from communication aspect, it is viewed as celebrity endorsement which means that when celebrities or those widely recognized by the target public and society join the events organized by one organization, it helps boost credibility as well as publicity and social acceptance. (Pakittitrisukol, 2011)
 - 1.3 Publicizing development of touristic destination and key figures' participation in activities to the public via the temple's Facebook page which is maintained by the vice abbot of Sung Men Temple.
2. Morality – This means systematic planning of management. Sung Men Temple has laid out the objective that every party should play a part in the planning and appointment of the palm leaf scripture's preservation together through meetings. Official and unofficial valuation outcomes from activities held the previous years by

those in charge are used for each year's planning. Meanwhile a committee is established following the democratic process, with proper system and regulations to reduce tension. Each party is also tasked based on one's skills and suitability. The planning is carried out as follows:

2.1 Management and operational structures are established, with clear tasks given to each party.

2.2 Planning for annual working schedule is designed in advance. This is carried out based on the outcome of the activities and events held during festivals the year before. Activities are organized throughout the year, with tasks being given to specific responsible persons. Some examples are:

- Takdhamma tradition is held during the 13th and 15th day of the 4th waxing moon (North) in January. It is overseen by Provost Panya Saraniwit, abbot of Sung Men Temple and the Sung Men Municipality.
- Lan Na language, palm leaf scripture, palm leaf art and scripture wrapping workshops are held every weekend from May to December. They are overseen by the temple's vice abbot Provost Wiboonsorrapan, local scholars and Buddhist Ground Guide group.
- Guide workshop and scripture wrapping workshop in honour of Their Majesties take place during 11-12 August. It is overseen by the temple's vice abbot Provost Wiboonsorrapan and community female leader's group.

2.3 Regulations for clear implementation are established.

2.4 Management structure of the Institute of Sung Men Temple's Palm Leaf Manuscripts is initiated, with the abbot of Sung Men Temple as the executive chairman, the temple committee as the working team and experts from other units as the Institute's consultant. The working committee is divided in 5: administration, academic, secretariat, service and activity.

3. Concentration – In this context, it means preservation, with the objective to allow every side to participate in the preservation of the palm leaf manuscripts and gain acknowledgement in the teachings of Buddha, so that their mind can reflect on the good deeds. Apart from carrying out the preservation of the manuscripts as planned, the belief system on Takdhamma tradition is also employed as a method to persuade people to join the activity. The tradition used to be performed with the purpose to enrich people with the teachings of Buddha. When Kruba kanjana-aranyavasri reflected that the traditional system was needed to persuade followers and Buddhists to join the preservation, he then selected the rite of performing virtue or “Tan Dharma” as the key activity and allowed the community's residents to take part in every step from copying, verifying, cleaning, sun-drying, procession and collecting the manuscripts. (Phrae Cultural Office, 2015) Takdhamma tradition was revived and takes place every year in January beginning from 2007. As the event is exclusively organized in this area, the people in the community acknowledge the identity and the collective spirit of the tradition. They feel closer to the palm leaf manuscripts and cherish the temple's previous possession. Consequently, the people in the community will realize the significance of Sung Men Temple's palm leaf manuscripts, and that they will open up the opportunity for the younger generation to continue such tradition.

4. Wisdom – It means conducting, developing the learning source and building network in the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts. This is done with the objective to collect data relevant to the palm leaf manuscripts in various aspects before elaborating those details into database and information. Sung Men Temple has carried out the activities as follows:

- 4.1 Museum of palm leaf manuscripts – This place exhibits palm leaf manuscripts that Kruba kanjana-aranyavasri collected from different places. It also shows the history of Takdhamma tradition, instructions of preparing palm leaves for the manuscripts and important books of the teachings of Buddha.
- 4.2 Tipitaka Hall with Lan Na alphabets – This place houses the palm leaf manuscripts in Lan Na alphabets.
- 4.3 Hall of Pāli Canon on palm leaf manuscripts – This place houses palm leaf scriptures, Buddhist and local wisdom as well as the scripture search system.
- 4.4 Pāli Canon wrapping cloth exhibition room – This room is based on Pāli Canon wrapping activity which aims at boosting the leading power from women's group. The act of changing Pāli Canon wrapping cloth from the old one that's more than a hundred years old is considered a valuable deed and tells the origin of each scripture. Sung Men Temple then displays the wrap cloth in this area.

Moreover, the temple focuses on building network with various units such as educational institutes like Palm Leaf Study Center, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Phrae Campus and Mahidol University. They have worked together in education, exchange of documents, knowledge on palm leaf reading, conversion of palm leaf manuscripts to digital form and setting up digital database for search feature. Other units concerned are the National Electronics and Computer Technology Center (NECTEC) and the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA). These units support the activities by providing knowledge about online museum management to the people in the community and Phrae Cultural Office. Also, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Phrae Office provides support in terms of staff for activities as well as broadcasting relevant information.

5. Friendliness – This means passing on and making the palm leaf manuscripts be known. The objective of this stage is to convey the knowledge from the preservation of the palm leaf manuscripts to those interested or other groups in various manners, so that they will become inspired in participating in Sung Men Temple's preservation effort. Looking at this act from Buddhist's point of view, it may be similar to convey the happiness of learning to the public in order to create sustainability of preservation. The temple meanwhile has come up with these following methods:

- 5.1 Developing the temple into a touristic destination in the aspect of palm leaf manuscript's preservation - This can serve the purpose of providing academic service, with staff such as monks, local scholars and guides who can provide knowledge and recommend existing learning sources.
- 5.2 Establishing the project Dharma Ground Guide – This method targets women in the community in which they take turns in welcoming tourists, giving them advice on visits to several places as well as teaching and providing knowledge on wrapping the manuscripts. The last task is the only activity the women can

carry out with full capacity because the ancient belief indicated that making and reading scriptures were reserved for men. If women want to learn more about the Buddha's teachings and benefit from them, they have to weave the fabric and use it as the wrapping cloth for the scriptures.

- 5.3 Promoting knowledge on Lan Na language and other fields from the palm leaves to interested temples and educational institutes
- 5.4 Organizing workshop on palm leaf manuscript art
- 5.5 Organizing classes on Buddhism, Lan Na alphabets and notable wisdom found on palm leaf scriptures to students from Sunday Buddhism class and elementary students from nearby schools
- 5.6 Publicizing information, body of knowledge and activities via different channels such as social media platform, print media and broadcasting media to create recognition for the temple. This will make people in the community feel proud of being a part in palm leaf work and persuade them to join the activities regularly.

The use of Buddhist principles of Faith, Morality, Concentration, Wisdom and Friendliness as the key guidelines of communication for the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts helps enable Sung Men Temple to pull together the potential of participation from every sector surrounding the temple and various groups as well as contribution from outside in generating the efficient preservation work. When analyzing based on the participatory communication framework of John M. Cohen and Norman T. Uphoff (1981), it is found that such method promotes the people's willing participation in the communication which begins from:

1. Participation in decision making – This takes place from brainstorming together to indicate the community's needs until projects and activities are reached to activity process which is creating awareness for the palm leaf manuscript' significance (Faith) and systematic planning (Morality).
2. Participation in implementation – This consists of support in various resources, management of activities and collaboration for assistance in participation in the scripture's preservation in different aspects, for instance Takdhamma tradition, relevant activities (Concentration) and establishment of learning sources or networks in different models (Wisdom).
3. Participation in benefits – This deals with the aspect of social benefits of each individual. It starts from creating learning sources and networks to serve as the place of knowledge for people in the community (Wisdom) to generating participation in benefits which comes from being a part of publicizing the knowledge in various aspects (Friendliness) and eventually leading to community pride.
4. Participation in evaluation – This includes steps in planning of organizing annual activities (Morality) which rely on the outcome of each activity's evaluation as one of the indicators for activity direction.

Conclusion

The community's potential and original cultural capital is considered as one of the aspects contributing to Sung Men Temple's preservation of palm leaf manuscripts. The temple has already established a sound belief in Kruba kanjana-aranyavasri which helps nurture Takdhamma tradition and binds people in the community

together with belief and faith. Furthermore, the uniqueness of the tradition boosts the people's awareness of identity, belonging and participation as a part of the preservation activity.

Establishment of learning sources provides the place for people in the community to exchange their opinions, divide responsibilities and perform activities together. Other activities include strengthening itself through cooperation with various sectors to boost the temple's potential, publicizing knowledge and activities to outside units so that people can value the significance of palm leaf manuscripts. These activities are the key mechanism that helps people in the community to become interested and join the preservation in the long run.

The communication for the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts by Sung Men Temple, Sung Men District, Phrae Province has implemented the basic Buddhist teachings as the main practical guidelines. This is done with the objective that people from every group in the community can participate willingly, understand the teachings of Buddha as conveyed through different activities until they realize and bond with the values of the scriptures. Once achieved, it will generate participation in the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts in the satisfying and sustainable manner. However, such method would not have been achieved if the temple and the community leader had lacked leadership, initiative, communication skills and view on cultural preservation in line with current circumstances.

The achievement of Sung Men Temple's preservation of palm leaf manuscripts took almost 10 years until the people in the community came up with awareness. Such method can be elaborated as the communication model for the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts in temples or other communities. They are however required to adapt the model to their own surroundings in line with their traditional cultural capital and basic potential.

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