

Monks in 26th Buddhist Era: characters of monks in Thai Films Against the Code of Monastic Discipline

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Abstract

According to Thailand's constitution, it is declared that a person has the right to freely express opinions but the movies, showing monks inappropriately conducting the monastic discipline, must be banned or censored even though the film art is trying to tell the truth in the society which Thai Authority feel uncomfortable to accept. Therefore, this research attempted to study monks in different genres of Thai films in terms of monastic disciplines breaking and myths of Buddhism which Thai Authority tries to press not to let audiences know which leads to the ban and censorship. Interestingly, the finding shows that genres of the films affect the consideration of censorship board. The scenes where the monks who break the highest rules, called Parajikka or banishment from the monkhood, especially in crime and thriller films, are banned or edited out while monks in comedy films are allowed to be on screen although they should be punished by lighter penalty. The censorship of the board seems inconsistent, lacks certain standard, and has a lot of exceptions for some films. Even though the board always claims morality and honourable culture of the nation, this causes the destruction and elimination of artistic exuberance. However, audiences have to judge by themselves between monks in the reality and monks in the film art.

Keywords: monks, monastic disciplines, Thai films, ban, censorship

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Introduction

Monks have been perceived and recognized as the ones who are pure in body, speech and mind since they must conduct 227 fundamental precepts (called Pātimokkha) formulated over 2500 years ago in order to preserve doctrine and discipline among Sangkha or monastic community. However, no one could predict that in the next thousands years world, people, and even monks' roles would be changed. In Buddhist society, temples have been a part of the society and people's lives from birth to die. Monks used to be influential leaders of communities such as teachers, counselors, judges, patrons, developers and the most respectful centers in communities. Therefore, there have been a lot of films, one of the media collecting and reflecting whatever happens in a society, referring to monks in various characters depending on local cultures and perception. For instance, in the western world, where Buddhism is recognized as a minority among Christianity and myths which westerners understand that Buddhism, Buddhists and followers still practice the same as they did thousands years ago, they produced films showing calm and pure monks whose goal is the enlightenment and peaceful world such as *Amongst White Clouds* (USA, 2007), *Little Buddha* (UK, 1993) and *Lost Horizon* (USA, 1937). In Chinese films, monks are represented as fighters such as *The Last Kung Fu Monk* (2010), *Shaolin Monks: the Wheel of Life* (2001), *The Way of the Tiger, the Sign of the Dragon* (1972), and *A Touch of Zen* (1971). Additionally, films from Japan dare disclose human being of monks' desire to be punk rockers (*Abraxas*, 2010 and *Fancy Dance*, 1987). In Thai society, Buddha and Buddhism are the most respectful institutions which no one can make fun of. Therefore, there were very few films made in the beginning of Thai film industry not mentioning changing roles of monks except spiritual monastic people such as *Luang Ta* (1980), *The Golden Rider* (1984,2006), *Phai Daeng* (1979), and other films where monks played role as a shaman or ghost buster. Nevertheless, many producers of Thai films in 21st century have tried to challenge traditional myths of Buddhist monks. There have been monks in different genres of films such as comedy, horror, drama or even crime. They play jokes, commit homicide, cry, fall in love, sing a song, protest a corruption, deceive, strangely dress or even are homosexual. This resulted in banning and censorship in some of them by Thai censorship committees (only begun in 2008) due to the fact that it affects the image of monks and Buddhism, especially in the films where monks play as a criminal or have love affairs. However, the censorship committees do not focus on the details of code of monastic discipline; thereby, there are many films escaping although monks in the films conduct against the rules. This raises questions whether they overlook and ignore some less serious faults or they accept the precept breaking (only some of them).

According to the weird exceptions of the Thai censorship committees, the research is conducted in order to find out whether monks in Thai films in 26th Buddhist era abide by monastic disciplines formulated thousand years ago and examine which precepts the monks in films ignore or are abandoned by the committees. Finally, the research will convey whether Thai society can accept new representations of monks based on censorship of films.

Code of monastic discipline and offense

The code of 227 precepts for Buddhist monks or Patimokkha were formulated by the Lord Buddha over 2500 years ago resulting from problematic incidents within the

lifetime of the Lord obstructing them to achieve the enlightenment (Phra Sāsana Sobhaṇa, 2009 and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). The rules control monks to have the right speech, right action, right livelihood, and to live in a community with harmony. When monks break the rules, they may receive both secular penalty (Lokavajja) and monastic one (Pannattivajjas)(Phramaha Rungruang Khantitho (Herdkhuntut), 2013). The former punishment is the judgement from normal people when misdemeanour and felony are committed while the latter plays the role when monastic rules are broken. According to the penalties, the rules are divided into seven levels based on severity of guilt such as expelling, probation for six days, or expiation through confession (Phra Sāsana Sobhaṇa, 2009). In this research, there are only related precepts mentioned for the purpose of conciseness and important digestion from the collected films.

The first category of the code appearing in the films is the Defeater or Pārājika consisting of four serious precepts which can cause monks to get expelled. Mahatthanadull (2014) simply explains that this category includes sexual-intercourse, killing, stealing, and falsely claiming superior abilities. Nonetheless, related offense with lighter punishment will be mentioned as well.

- *Sexual intercourse* with human, non-human or even animals including anal, genital, or oral intercourse can cause monks receive the highest level of punishment which is the monastic ejection. However, there are some rules offering less heavy punishment which is receiving consideration from Buddhist community (called Sangha). This kind of punishment would be assigned to monks when they intentionally emit semen except during a dream, lustfully touch women or comment women's sexual organs or sexual performance. Additionally, if a monk and a woman are together in a private place, it leads to Aniyata offense which entails defeat or communal meeting or confession.
- *Killing human beings* means all genders of human beings in all ages or even a fetus. The killing includes hiring one to kill a person, and inciting one to die. Similar to sexual intercourse, there are other resemble precepts which result in less serious punishment such as killing animals on purpose, pouring and using water that one know there are living things. The punishment for these mistakes is forfeiture and confession (called Nissaggiya Pacittiya).
- *Stealing* anything which costs 1/24 ounce troy of gold or more must be banished from monastic affiliation. If a monk gives a robe to another monk and snatch it back or if a monk utilizes shared cloth or bowl for his own interest, he will be considered by Sangha community and be fined and sent to the confessional process respectively.
- *Boasting or bragging one's superior abilities* to others such as supervision and super knowledge is recognized as vain and idle actions which monks must not do. Otherwise, they are disrobed. Deliberately distorting the truth to another one can affect the second category of the punishment, going to the Sangha community.

Except from the highest penalties for the unacceptable offense mentioned above, there are monks' offenses in the films which result in lighter punishment such as forfeiture, confession, and training. Nissaggiya Pacittiya offense can cause fine and confession. The films which illustrate Nissaggiya Pacittiya offense of monks mention a monk who engages in monetary exchange and a monk who tries to flirt a woman. The lower level of punishment is called Pacittiya which entail confession or acknowledge infraction of the monastic disciplines. Telling a lie, eating after dawn, eating food not formally given, drinking alcohol, sitting in private with a woman, traveling with a woman are not allowed for monks based on Pacittiya rules but they occur in some Thai films without censorship or ban. The last category of the disciplines is called Sekhiyavatta which is the basic guideline for training monks to behave properly. For instance, laughing loudly, receiving alms food inappropriately, and teaching Dhamma to improper people are unacceptable behaviors which monks should avoid, especially when they are in a community among people.

In addition, there are some rules which are not included in the 227 precepts but they are the rules which were formulated in order to qualify those who wish to ordain. Two of them will be referred to this study are being homosexual and killing parents. Before ordaining, those who are about to be ordained as a Buddhist priest must be verified whether they are within the terms of the prohibited qualifications such as being disabled, being animals, or not having ordaining utensils.

Monks in Thai films VS monks in foreign films

Ronald S. Green (2014) described and presented various aspects of Buddhism movies around the world in his book *Buddhism Goes to the Movies: An introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice*. The movies which he referred in the book are divided into four kinds based on the content: dramatic movies with overt Buddhist themes, dramatic biographies of Buddhists, dramatic movies with themes identified as Buddhist, and documentary movies on aspects of Buddhism. This study focuses on only the first one because documentary and biographical movies indicate only venerable monks and most of the movies claiming that they have Buddhist themes do not relate to monks and the themes may be identified as other religions' concepts since many religious ideas are universal.

Movies from the western world represent Buddhist theme as learning the truth of life through time based on the development of the protagonists in the films. For example, *Little Buddha*, a famous Italian-French-British film in 1993, tells about searching for an American boy who Tibetan monks believe that he is their master who reincarnate and *A Buddha* (Un Buddha in Spanish) is a Spanish movie in 2005 illustrates a Chinese monk who wish to promulgate Buddha's teaching to the western world and tries to apply his knowledge to help an abused girl. Another example of monks in movies is the scene in *Tomb Rider* (2001) that Angelina Jolie is sitting among monks spiritually chanting and after she drinks some tea, her wound is miraculously cured. The instances shows that western film makers perceive and would like to represent Buddhist monks as morally ascetic practitioners as same as monks described in the Buddhist scripture or Tripitaka over 2500 years ago. Similarly, McDaniel (2010) told his experience with students when they visited a temple in the Southern California that they was confused and questioned why monks could miss his family and why another laughed despite the fact that they are expected to be as emotionless and calm

as the stereotypical monks they watched in the films *The Little Buddha*, *Angulimala* and *Seven Years in Tibet*. On the other hands, movies from Buddhist countries like Korean, Japan, Hong Kong or Thailand would rather try to disclose monks as real as they are in the present time.

It is known that although eastern countries such as Thailand, Korea, and Japan are the land of Buddhism, most of population devoting themselves to Buddhism, they are in different denominations which are Theravada, Mahayana, and Shinto respectively. This might be the reason why movies from the countries where Mahayana and Shinto play important roles such as China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan dare to present monks in more contemporary points of view than movies produced from Theravada which is recognized as the oldest denomination preserving traditional practice (Dhamma Thai, from <http://www.dhammathai.org/buddhism/theravada.php>) due to the fact that each denomination has different exceptions of monastic disciplines.

- *South Korea* where Mahayana is the main denomination used to produce films depending on the traditionally expected monks but now film makers dare present monks in the opposite expectation. In other words, monks as the monastic ruled guardians or the representative of purity appeared in the films before 21st century. *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East* (1989), for example, describes a middle-age man who intends to ordain and practice Dharma in a remote temple. As the same theme, the monk in *Mandala* (1981) tries to escape from suffering and achieve the truth of life. However, *Hi! Dharma* (2001) and *Flowers in Hell* (2012) entail the character of monks as same as normal human beings who can be sensitive to stimulus around them such as anger or sexual incentive. In 2003, the *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring* became reputed and guaranteed with 13 wins and 8 nominations. Even though there are the scenes disclosing the sensational flirtation and sexual intercourse between a young monk and a woman on a boat, audiences overwhelmingly admire the film because they show the lust in human which leads the monk to the enlightening state at the end. The film tells the beautiful poetic philosophy of life through the contradictory in the monk's mind by comparing with the four seasons. The deep meaningful story line makes audiences overlook the immoral scenes.
- *Japan's* film makers dare reveal monks' characters beyond the leader of spirituality such as a fake monk in *The Burmese Harp* (1956), and a punk rocker in *Fancy Dance* (1987) and *Abraxas* (2010). Although the monk in *The Burmese Harp* is the fake but the film was praised and nominated for Academy Award for Best Foreign Picture and Best Foreign Language Film. Audie Bock (1993), an American film scholar, reviewed only the beauty, deep emotion and the cinematic art of the film. There were not critiques in terms of pretending to be a monk. This may be because the protagonist has good intention to survive and bury the dead soldiers, his compatriots. Moreover, at the end of the story, he has learnt the truth of suffering life and wants to find peace in his mind after the loss of war so

he becomes a part of monkhood. *Fancy Dance* (1987) and *Abraxas*¹ (2010) have the same theme which are punk rocker monks who challenge the monastic rules but their audiences would rather focus on Buddhist substance than being punk rocker as the report from Sundance 2011 about religion in independent films stated that

“*Abraxas* continues to explore, with wisdom and sensitivity, key Buddhist doctrines as the plot unfolds. Along with themes touching on the nature of anicca, anatta, and dukkha, the film provides an intensely beautiful scene illustrating the important doctrine of paticca-samuppada (pratitya-samutpada interdependent origination/arising), the idea that nothing exists independently.”

- *China and Hong Kong* are home of Mahayana so they produce movies based on Mahayana's concepts which are different from Theravada's. Even though the admirable Xuan Zan in *The Monkey King* (2014,2016) and *A Chinese Tall Story*² (2005) has been retold in various versions due to his stereotypical character satisfying Buddhists, the genre which becomes the iconic movies of China and Hong Kong is Chinese martial arts or Wuxia (literally means martial hero) (CRI, 2012). For example, *Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre* (1978), *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin* (1978) *Dragon in Shaolin* (1996), and *The New Shaolin Temple* (2011) present the ancient martial arts taught by monks at Shaolin temple, the legendary temple of China. Interestingly, Chinese film makers try hard to draw audiences' attention. Hence, they need adaptation but still preserve the character of monks as evil busters and helpful hermits in spite of the fact that they are in genre of action, sci-fi, fantasy or comedy movies.
- *Bhutan* is recognized as “the last stronghold of Vajrayana Buddhism” (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2016) but *The Cup*³ released in 1999 surprised audiences in accordance with monks and novices as football obsessors. Khyentse Norbu, the Bhutanese director, said about the reason why he made the film in an interview that “Growing up in a monastery, I've noticed, somehow, that monks everywhere are obsessed with football. I guess there's something similar between religion and a football match.” However, the movie still shows proper behaviors of the monks that need to adapt themselves to the globalized world. Therefore, the movie was not controversially discussed.
- In *Thailand*, most of the movies create monks as ghost busters, highly admirable people or jokers while movies showing the dark side of monks are censored or banned due to the act from the ministry of culture who supports and tends to publicize only the selected fact. Monks as ghost

¹ Based on the novel *Abraxas*

² Both of them are based on the novel *Journey to the West*.

³ The director is Bhutanese Khyentse Norbu but the movie's scene is in Tibet with the picturesque foothills of the Himalayas.

busters can be seen in number of Thai films such as the legendary film, Nang Nak, Flower of the Night, Demonic Beauty, The Coffin, Secret Sunday, and See How They Run. They are created to have magic chants or holy amulets which can subdue evils and ghosts. Monks in Phai Deang and The Golden Riders are plotted to be ideal monks as described in the Tripitaka and as expected by the society. According to the secular penalty or Lokavajja, film makers try to characterize monks as same as the society expects how they “should be” and “must be”. Because the movies with the plain characters of monks have not been paid attention (The latest monk/Buddhist movie in 2016 Wandering are not in current and are not played in commercial cinemas.), monks are reproduced in the genre of comedy movies. Arahant Summer raises novices to play an important role in the movie and let them play joke or let others make fun of them. As novice, they are ruled by fewer precepts than monks; thus, they are characterized in more various roles under fewer limitations than monks. Nonetheless, in comedy movies, monks are created to be more contemporary and accessible since they are not worshiped on the shrine anymore. The Holy Man, Luang Phee Jazz 4G, and Teng Nong Jiwon Bin, for instance, can play joke, wear weird clothes, and give a sermon which sound like singing a song, or behave whatever is not close to the calmness. Doubtfully, they are not censored or banned although they break the monastic disciplines. On the other hands, monks who commit homicide, have an affair with men or women, steal, and boast supernatural abilities, are always judged as the cause of cultural degeneration and banned such as Abat, Mindfulness and Murder, or In the Shadow of Naga.

Censorship in Thai films

In the reign of King Rama VII, The Light of Asia (1925) was banned to show in Thailand since the film distorted the truth of the Buddha’s biography so Prince Nakornsawan Woraphinit suggested that there should be “board of censor” in order to control film making and film makers (King Prajadhipok’s Institute, n.d.). Thenceforward, films have been controlled in agreement with moral pretexts and in 1930 the first film act was enacted. The act was clearly written in section 4 that “Do not make, show or play any films which violate peace and morality. If they are made, showed or played or announced, they are not allowed to be imported or exported from the Kingdom” and section 7 identifies punishment that “If any films violate the section 4, those films will be forbidden to exist anymore and confiscated no matter if they are done or not in order to be sent to committee to consider.” (Film Act, 1930) (Researcher’s translation) Passawan Korakotchamat (2010) claimed that when there was an act for controlling tapes and television in 1987, films which were verified by the board of censor could cause film makers to be sent to prison if there were complainers about pornographic pictures. Consequently, this resulted in film makers’ self-censorship. In 2008, Film and Video Act was legislated based on the first one and was under the responsibility of the National Cultural Committee, ministry of culture. Gautier (2008) described that

“The Board of Film and Video Censors is responsible for a host of duties including inspecting and rating movies to be screened, rented, exchanged, or sold in Thailand; permitting the projection,

exchange, rental, or sale of movies and videos; authorizing the advertisements of motion pictures; approving their exportation outside Thailand; and controlling foreign movies shot in Thailand.”

The act divides films into seven categories; 1) General audience (no age restriction) 2)13-year-olds and above 3) 15-year-olds and above 4) 18-year-olds and above 5) 20-year-olds and above 6) Banned films and 7) Educational films.

In Thai film history, a number of films have been banned, censored or edited out depending on the reasons of politics, sexual expression, religious harm, and image of the nation which results in destroying the area of art. *Suvarna of Siam* (1923) was shot and produced by Henry MacRae but he was forced to edit out some scenes which would spoil the image of Siam (Uabumrungjit, n.d.). In 1925, *The Light of Asia* was questioned about the appropriateness again and it led to the first Film Act in 1930 which the board of censorship had mentioned to control film production for over 70 years. There are four scenes in *Syndrome and Century*, released in 2006, made cuts; a monk playing the guitar, two doctors kissing at hospital, doctors drinking alcohol at hospital, and two monks playing flying toys. After the enactment of the new Film Act in 2008, films have been banned and censored ceaselessly. For instance, *Insect in the Backyard* (2010), exposing LGBT’s world, and *Shakespeare Must Die* (2012), satirizing Thai politics, are banned due to sexual indecency and national security and peace respectively.

Except from the films violating politics and sexual indecency, there are a lot of films which are banned and edited out concerning Buddhist sensitivity. The latest film which was controversially discussed is *Arbat* due to the fact that it presents sexual relation between a monk/a novice and women which offend the highest punishment called *Pārājika*. Although the content tends to be risky, the censorship board permitted it to play on screens after some problematic scenes had been cut and the title had been changed to “*Apatti*”.

In addition, there are two films presenting fake monks but one was permitted to be on screens; the other was banned. The former is another controversial one about criminals in Buddhist ropes *In the Shadow of Naga* which was resulted from the Film Act 2008 because it took three years to be considered by the board of censorship (Matichon Online, 2010). The latter *Sienphra* or *Buddha Image Experts* showing fake young monks who are broke so they disguise to be monks in order to receive food alms and earn money (Lamunbol, 2013). Lamunbol (2013) reported in *Prachatai* that the director Rachata Rungkamolpan thought that being a monk is only a job as same as a police officer who we pay a bribe to escape from cases but we willingly offer money to monks as a bribe to go to heaven. *Khon Graab Maa* or *My Teacher Eats Biscuits* was almost screened in the 1st Bangkok Film Festival in 1997. Unfortunately, it was banned and seems to disappear since it was charged with insulting Buddhism and all religions in Thailand. Fifteen years later, *Sop Mai Ngeap* or *Mindfulness and Murder*, directed by Tom Waller, reveals monks in the globalized world; monks as criminals, monks as drug traders, monks as investigators, monks as gays and fake monks. Surprisingly, it was rated for over 15+ audiences and was allowed to screen in commercial cinemas in Thailand. It should be wondering why this risky-contented

film escapes from the consideration of the censorship board. Is it because the board neglects their duty or the director is a foreigner?

Analysis

Monks whose character should be considered to exile from monkhood or Parajikka are in the genres of crime, horror, and comedy while those who receive light punishment such as confession (Pajittiya) and being retrained (Sekhiyavatta) appear in comedy and drama. The data will be analyzed in terms of the description of monks, characterization in each genre, prototypical monks, monks who are unqualified before ordaining, comparison between monks in myths and monks in reality including monks lost faith by other supporting characters.

Respectful monks:

According to the social norm of Thai society, Buddhism is the untouchable institute and everyone must highly respect so when it is mentioned in any films, especially in the past, film makers try to self-censor by presenting it in only one angle, magnificent morality. The Golden Rider, Phai Daeng, and Luang Ta are the films in 1970s-1980s when people could not reveal the degenerate side of monkhood; hence, the monks in those films were characterized as morally respectable super human. Phai Daeng⁴ was released in 1979 and became controversial because it satirized the communist notion happening in Thai society (Day & Liem, 2010). Phra Krang is the middle-age abbot of a temple in Phai Daeng (Red bamboo) village. He is plotted as same as Luang Phii Sit in the Golden Rider (released in 1984/2006) who is a young monk and helps people escape from the power of capitalism by using Buddha's teaching. Luang Phii Sit is a flat character who has only honorable side whereas Phra Krang is more realistic character due to the fact that he has the conflicts in his mind between devil part, his secular desire, and angel part, his monasticism. However, he chooses to present his angel part to villagers and he wins his secular desire at the end. Like monks in the western myths, Luang Ta⁵ is a prototypical monk, an old kind and calm man, who is like a refuge or protector for people when they suffer. These three films became renowned and praiseworthy when people would like to mention to Buddhist films. Undoubtedly, the censorship board permitted them to play on screen and become a part of Thai film's legend.

Defeater monks:

It is known that defeat or Parajikka rules are the most serious code which monks must conduct and must not violate; therefore, any films dare disclose monks who break the law will always be banned or censored by the censorship board of Thailand with the allegation of morality or noble culture of the nation. Nonetheless, there are some films banned or edited out especially in the genres of crime and horror while some films such as comedy being permitted to screen even though the monks in the film should be exiled from the monkhood. The analysis below will show the films where monks should be sentenced banishment due to sexual intercourse, killing livings, claiming supernatural abilities, and stealing.

⁴ Adapted from the Italian fiction *The Little World of Dan Camillo*

⁵ Released in 1980 and directed by the same director of Phai Daeng ,Phermphon Choei-Arun

Sexual intercourse:

From the collected data, there are four films which illustrate the sexual intercourse between monks and women indifferent genres. Undoubtedly, in crime films antagonists always look fierce like Sing in *In the Shadow of Naga*. He has beard, moustache and tan complexion with aggressive eyes. His utterance sounds like bawling although he is talking to older monks. When he becomes a monk, he still keeps his character. He seemed anxious and moody all the time. While he stays at the temple, he needs to disguise as a monk in order to search for money that another antagonist has hidden. Nevertheless, as a normal man, he calls his prostitute wife to visit him and help him release his lust. Even though the film took three years to be edited some inappropriate scenes, the censorship board let this scene to screen and rate the film for over 18-year-old audiences. The older film which is rated for over 15 is *Mindfulness and Murder* tells a story about a monk, named Jittakootto. He comes from the north of Thailand where people can find weird criminal ritual. His soft voice and calm manners can conceal his fault from others. Furthermore, he claims that he is raped by the dead orphan boy. In fact, he seems content to have sex with the boy the secret relationship leads to the crime which a former cop, the protagonist of the film, has to investigate the truth. He does not kill only the boy but he kills another monk who knows his secret. What Jittakootto does is not better or worse than Sing in *In the Shadow of Naga* does but it should question why they are differently rated. What are the criteria used for rating the films?

The legendary film which was exiled instead of the monks in the film is *My Teacher Eats Biscuits*. It was anticipated to be on screen in the 1st Bangkok Film Festival in 1997 but there are many scenes which are unacceptable for the board of censorship such as a man worship a dog and imitating the dog's behaviors, and a shocking scene of necrophiliac monk. The monk believes that having sex with a corpse is like practicing dharma. Because of the extremely precarious content, this film almost completely disappears from film history and there are some articles referring to it left so no one has ever seen it before.

Arbat is the latest film which became controversial in 2015 since it presents the lust of a monk and a novice. The novice whose father forces him to ordain has a secret lustful relationship with a girl in a village. He looks like a teenager in the uniform of monks because he does not willingly ordain. He is always detracted by his girlfriend in Bangkok and the girl he meets at the temple. While he tends to break the monastic law, he can discover another secret of the former abbot who has sexual relationship with a woman and she bears a child. In the film, there are the scenes showing the monk touches the woman and the woman is getting dressed after they have sexual intercourse. These scenes are the most important elements of the films. Without the scenes, the film cannot complete the whole story, lack reasonability, and cannot lead to the climax so they are not edited out and are allowed to show in public eyes.

Killing human beings:

In the Shadow of Naga, *Mindfulness and Murder*, and *Luang Phii Jazz 4G* are the films showing the cruel image of monks who kill people although it is legislated in the highest penalty of the Buddhist monastic disciplines. The fake monks in *In the Shadow of Naga* kill people and kill each other only to snatch money because they are

not educated and they would like to get free from the poverty. Sing, a lustful and greedy monk, is always paranoid that other monks in the temple know he is not a real monk, know his true intention to stay at the temple, and snatch the money he robs. The scene he is holding a gun and pointing to everyone even an old monk should be cut if the board claims the enactment of film because it destroys morality and purity of monasticism. However, the board consented the scene to screen. This may be because the monk is shot to die at the end as a lesson for audiences and if they had cut it, the film would not have finished. Similarly, *Mindfulness and Murder* obtains the rate for over 15 but the film publicizes the scene the gay monk commits a queer crime by injecting an empty syringe into the vein of the orphan boy, stuffing a big candle into his mouth and then leaving the dead body with gouged eyes into a big earthen jar. It sounds very brutal, particularly the murder committed by the real monk. According to the Film Act in section 4 and 7, these two films had to be banned but the consideration of the board on the films is contradictory. *In the Shadow of Naga* took three years for revision while the board gave *Mindfulness and Murder* the green light with no cuts.

Unlike the previous films, *Luang Phii Jazz 4G*, a comedy film in 2016, also has a minor scene showing two monks hire assassins to kill *Luang Phii Jazz*, the protagonist, because he tries to obstruct them to make people credulous about their supernatural abilities, one of their ways to earn for a living. The title of the film comes from the comparison between 4G, the speed of wireless internet connection, and karmic law yet the critics mostly focused on non-comicality and low quality without film art instead of inappropriateness of monks and supporting characters in the films. Thereby, the film gains the rating of over 15 due to the fact that it was not controversial regarding the monkhood.

Stealing:

Another precept which all Buddhists including monks must conduct is abstaining from theft; nevertheless, it appears in the film *In the Shadow of Naga* as the vital main point to run the story. Theft in Buddhist concept means snatching, robbing or even wanting others' belongings. Although the monks steal the money before they ordain, their greed is revealed all the time when they are wearing the saffron robes so they try very hard to demolish the newly constructed chapel. The film manifests that they are so greedy that they attempt to disguise themselves as monks, practice religious activities like real monks, and search for the robbed money during the night until dawn. As the lesson of the film, at the end two fake monks die and the old monk who is forced to ordain them at the beginning of the story easily grab the money (but finally arrested). What the film tells audiences is full of the truth of the society and nature of karmic law.

Boasting or bragging one's superior abilities:

In spite of the fact that tattooing, chanting incantation, and showing superstition have been believed for very long in Thai society, they are not permitted to involve with, especially for monks since they offend the monastic code. However, films which refer to superstition conducted by monks present only calm old monks with powerful magic to help people survive from black magic, ghosts or wars. For example, the monks in *Maha Ut* (rating of PG-13) and *Necromancer* (Rating of +15) play an

important role in conducting superstition on the purpose of supporting the protagonists in the films. On the other hands, the monks in *Luang Phii Jazz 4G* make love potion, recite incantations over amulets and give a hint for lotteries in order to exchange with money, one of the monastic discipline offense. Although the monks break the law with the highest penalty, the censorship board rated it for +15 audiences.

The films above are in the genre of action and comedy but the monastic code breaking of the monks are not paid attention as much as the independence film *Syndrome and Century*, whose four scenes were edited out; a monk playing the guitar, two doctors kissing at hospital, doctors drinking alcohol at hospital, and two monks playing flying toys. It might be hard work for film makers to guess what they should select to put in their film to gain the greenlight from the censorship board.

Redeeming monk:

Except from the Parajikka code, other rules entail lighter punishment and they are mostly found in comedy and drama; therefore, it is doubtless why they can escape from the censorship board and audiences' criticism. Telling a lie, drinking alcohol, eating at the nighttime, eating food which is formally given by others and other improper behaviors affect the light punishment such as attending a formal meeting, confession, forfeit, or only being blamed. In fact, if monks do those things, they had better be punished by people's reproach or secular penalty called Lokavajja.

Engaging in money:

If a monk engages in money, he disobeys Nissaggiya Pacittiya which can cause him to be fined and confess. The abbot from *Mindfulness and Murder* is presented as a manager of a company. He has his own office and a secretary monk who deals with his business such as conducting religious ceremony or giving a hint for lotteries. He earns for money which is once forbidden in the Buddhist period. Similarly, a scene in *Luang Phii Jazz 4G* displays monks asking for alms and asking for money instead of food. The scene gains a lot of laughs because in reality monks need money for their living as employees but they are employees of Buddhists who conduct religious ceremonies in order to exchange with money for their personal expense. The censorship board may think that this kind of job looks common at present so there is no guilt to be banned or censored.

Telling a lie:

In the Buddhist concept, telling a lie does not mean only lying but it includes raving, talking nonsense, and babbling which are regulated in Pacittiya code, the code entailing confession. It is interesting that the drama film *Mekhong Full Moon Party* dare use telling a lie as the theme of the story. And it is more interesting that the person who tells a lie is an old monk. However, what he does should be called as a *white lie* because he lies about Naga's fire balls floating from Mekhong River on the full moon day of the eleventh month of lunar calendar. The faith of the supernatural phenomena is claimed that Naga, one of the Lord Buddha's followers, let the fire balls float into the sky as an offering to the Lord Buddha. Thereby, he believes that the fire balls can draw attention of Buddhist whose faith is disappearing and this is another

way to preserve the religion to last long forever. The film is not rated because it was released before the Film Act 2008 which is the beginning of rating in Thai media. The monk was not criticized about his lying although he breaks the Film Act 1930 which was still active at that period of time. This can be interpreted that Thai society can accept and except a white lie if it results from a good intention.

Drinking alcohol:

The Holy Man or Luang Phii Teng is a comedy film consisting of three sections and one of them showing a monk fooled by temple boys to drink alcohol until he gets drunk and neglects to do monastic activities in the early morning. He is a new 20-year-old monk who ordains because it is one of the son's duties in Thai tradition for the purpose of gratitude to parents. The drunken monk is played on the screen without censorship and it is a part of funny shot. Drinking alcohol entails confession in front of other monks but as the allegation of the censorship board about morality and inappropriateness, they let the comedy conceal the immorality which they always claim when they ban or cut the scenes in crime and thriller films.

Eating at nighttime and eating food not formally given:

In Novice, a thriller film, a novice does not get used to refraining from eating from the afternoon until dawn so he leaves from his room and eat food which villagers offer to demons called Pretah(in Buddhist belief). He is still a hot-tempered teenager and he unwillingly ordains so he tries to escape from monkhood and does not try to practice. Although there are fewer precepts for novices than for monks, refraining from eating at nighttime and eating food not formally given is the precepts novices must follow to practice tolerance. At the end of the story, the novice has to suffer from his sin; hence, it easily gains the green light from the censorship board.

Improper behaviors:

Improper behaviors mostly occur in comedy films such as running, improperly dressing, playing a joke, singing, diving, or flying in the sky are accepted by the censorship and rated for G or general audiences with no age restriction. Luang Phii Teng in the Holy Man 1 looks calm but he plays jokes with people with respect to solving problems or conflicts among people in a village. In the Holy Man 2, Pra Joey, a former rapper, starts a journey to search for the meaning of life. When he arrives at a lake to imagine how to across it, he imagine to fly in the sky with a paramotor and then he imagines to dive under the water and run away from a crocodile. Another scene shows the monk blown by a storm and got stuck on a tree and he falls from the tree. Moreover, he chants dharma but it sounds like he sings a rap. Other monks in the same section wear helmets which are not proper clothes for monks. In the Holy Man 3, a former signer ordains and chants like singing a song as same as Phra Joey but he is more hot-tempered

Unqualified monks: It Gets Better, Novice

Apart from the monastic disciplines, there are rules enacted to screen people who want to ordain because in the Buddha's lifetime there are unqualified people asking the Lord Buddha to live in the monkhood. It Gets Better and Novice are the two films

found two kinds of unqualified monks; gay monk and monk/novice who kills his own parent respectively. The monk in the former film is forced by his father to ordain after he knows that his son is a gay. He wishes monasticism can change his son's mind but finally his son leaves from the monkhood and completely becomes a transsexual. In Novice, his mother believes that ordination can erase his sin, throwing a stone to passing cars and stealing others' belonging. One day he accidentally hits his father's car and makes him die. At the end of the story, the ordination cannot help him escape from the heavy sin. He is hit to death by stones from invisible hands in the darkness.

Surprisingly, *It Gets Better* obtains over 15 rating and was not controversial about the behaviors of the monk. This may be because the censorship board accepts sexual differences whereas news about gay monks on newspaper is always criticized in the society and the Ministry of Culture. Similarly, killing a parent in *Novice* did not become an issue as well.

Discussion

It must be accepted that Buddha died over 2500 years ago; therefore, his teaching may not be appropriate for the present conditions which result in the offense of monastic code. Many films try to present monks in various points of view, particularly changing duties and roles but the society tend to reject those changes due to some myths propagated by Thai Authority like the Ministry of Culture. When the censorship board bans or orders any film to cut the scenes, they always claim that they are not appropriate and violate morality and culture. Nonetheless, it seems the genres of films can help them from the screen. For instance, the comedy film *Luang Phii Jazz 4G* has many scenes violating the Film Act but it received the green light and was rated for +15. On the contrary, the scenes cut in *Syndrome and Century* are a monk playing the guitar and playing a flying object which do not infringe as much as the former film. This shows that the consideration of the censorship board is not consistent and systematic. The censorship brings incompleteness of the film art's splendor as well.

It can be clearly seen that the films made after 20s dare to tell the contemporary truth to audiences since people understand better that monks are not super human. Traditionally, monks are believed that they are the noble guardians of purity and morality so people expect that they must not do anything tainted (Phanit, 2014). He stated that the Authority of the state use the religion to dominate the citizen and obstruct freedom and creativity. In fact, there are both temporary monks and permanent monks. According to *It Gets Better*, the father of the protagonist forces his son to ordain. This can be because in Thai tradition sons are expected to ordain as showing gratitude to their parents and he believes that monasticism can recall masculinity. Another example is the boy in *Novice* whose mother thinks that ordination can eradicate his sin, killing his father, and escape from legal punishment. Both of the monks are the examples of temporary monks found in reality. They do not intend to practice to be monks so it is possible that they might break the monastic rules. In *Mindfulness and Murder*, monks are presented as employees in robes working in a company called a temple. The monks are closer to human being than the films in 80s and 90s. In the globalization, monks need to adapt themselves such as administrating a temple, teaching dharma through social network, being motivational a speaker. Therefore, monks are like workers in saffron uniform who employ

Buddha's teaching as a tool for earning for their living. They can quit their job any time as normal workers.

Conclusion

To sum up, monks in the films are only characters created in order to transmit art on the screen; however, those kinds of monks may or may not exist in the reality. It should be accepted that world has been changing and monks have been changing too so that they and Buddhism will survive in the globalization era. Attending to monkhood does not longer mean they want to practice and learn dharma but monasticism is a shelter for those who suffer from poverty, misfortune, sin, or chaos in their life. The myth of moral and pure supermonks should collapse. Furthermore, monasticism should be more accessible than it was in the past because people's lives are farther from temples and monks. This causes monks' changing livelihood from asking alms for food to transacting religious business such as selling amulets, chanting for religious ceremonies, advertising temples or dharma through social network, or even giving a hint for lottery's numbers. If audiences and the censorship board are more open minded and can separate between monks in films, a created representative of people in monkhood, and monks in reality, who are only human beings with flesh, blood and feeling, films will become sources of social records which are transmitted by the splendor of art.

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