Fragrant Corpses: Commodification of Charismatic Monk's Corpses in Thai Society[1]

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Abstract

This research examines unburnt corpses in Thailand. Case studies are taken from famous clerical masters whose bodies, as claimed by their devotees, should not be burnt, but must be well treated as living persons in glass coffins. In general, corpses are regarded as useless objects and undesirable. However, this ethnographic research found that in practice the corpses of charismatic monks can be commoditized and produce significant income in the form of donations. Undeniably, the corpses can clearly represent the true persons being more accessible than the bones or biographies in books. Two cases – Paṅñānanda Bhikkhu in Nonthaburi and Khruba Jayawongsa in Lamphun – exemplify this assumption. The case of Paṅñānanda shows that the corpse of a scholar monk, who protested folk beliefs, as well as supernatural power, was finally commercialized to produce financial profit. These corpses symbolize a consumerist society in Thailand where religion and economy strongly converge. Finally, this article proposes that religious commodification is facilitated by local cultures and different lifestyles of consumers.

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Introduction

The corpses of charismatic monks demonstrate the relationship between Buddhism and economics in Thailand, even though these two factors are often viewed as opposites. While religion symbolizes pureness, money, especially from religious commodification, represents dirtiness. According to Scott Rachelle, religion and economics are indivisible. Although many monastic communities regard renunciation as an absolute rejection of the world, not all traditions pursue such view in practice (Scott, 2009, p. 5). Consumption plays an important role in Buddhist lives, especially for householders. Visakha and Anathapindika are elaborate examples of the Buddha's time. In terms of religious organization, economics is a vital factor to support the functions of Buddhism. The denial of money or financial gains might have occurred after the colonial period when Theravada Buddhism was viewed as authentic Buddhism that emphasizes reason and embraced modern science in order to compete with the Christian faith (Scott, 2009, p. 8).

As a result, local beliefs were marginalizing and financial gains stigmatizing from selling religious items as improper behavior. Wealth is, in the Buddhist perspective, a sign of merit earned in previous, as well as present, lives, which ultimately becomes the Buddhist identity (Scott, 2009, p. 157). This concept clarifies the collaboration between religion and the economy widely found in Thailand and other Theravada countries. Therefore, there is nothing new and wrong about religious commodification because everything can be commercialized for some specific purpose. If one accepts that cremation services (Panya, 2005) and funerary practices (Suzuki, 2002) have been involving with marketing, it is useless to deny that preservation of the corpses of charismatic monks will not be commodified. The question raised in this article is what are the forms and purposes of commodification of the corpses of famous monks found in Thailand?

Charismatic monks are mummified not for the purpose of resurrection as in Christianity. According to the Theravada tradition, the Buddha's corpse was cremated within the seventh day. However, preservation of corpses by different techniques is an effort of many

generations since 6,000 years ago. In South America, a severed head dated as 6,000 years old was found in 1936 at the site named Inca Cueva No. 4 (Léo Dubal and Monique Larrey, 2016). In China and Southeast Asia, mummification seems to be motivated by the concept of ancestor worship. Some mummies in modern time are also preserved for secular and educational purposes, such as Jeremy Bentham's (UCL, 2016). Interestingly, although Buddhists are taught to consider the dead body as an icon of impermanence, all preserved corpses of monks are not aimed for such purpose; instead, they are believed to be sacred items that can produce good luck and thus must be treated as living persons.

This paper is organized into six parts. It begins with Introduction, which provides some relationships between religion and commodity, and followed by the research question. Secondly, Literature Review on commodification of funeral ceremony and services, commodification of cultures, religion, and tourism of previous studies are discussed in order to fill the gaps. Thirdly, Conceptual Framework on commodification is briefly demonstrated. Fourthly, my fieldwork will be analyzed. Methodologically, my approach is ethnographically grounded in two temples as well as surrounding villages. Participant-observation and In-depth interview are conducted. Pańńānanda Bhikkhu and Khruba Jayawongsa are depicted as case studies in the fourth part. At this stage, some specific characteristics of religious commodification, norms of Buddhist and popular cultures in Thailand will be elucidated, which will provide some reasons why charismatic monks' corpses are commoditized without condemnation as other kinds of religious commodity. In the fifth part, some further discussions are added in this part to answer why the commodification of corpses is found in Mahanikaya monastic order only, not in Dhammayut. Finally, all main issues are briefly restated in the Conclusion.

Literature Review

By focusing on large Japanese funeral companies, Suzuki Hikaru (2002) elucidates funerary practices as classic rituals that reinforce community ties and values. In order to perform an acceptable funerary ritual, several processes of commercialization are conducted. Suzuki demonstrates the practices of those who provide commercial funeral services, the motivations, behavior of the mourners who purchase those services, and the role of funeral companies. Furthermore, the concepts of dying, death and the deceased in contemporary Japan have been changed by these commercial services. According to Suzuki, Japanese society can be studied and understood by examining this phenomenon. This research project's methodology and argument are similar to Suzuki's. However, it is argued that community ties and values in Thailand can be preserved, even though the corpse is not burned and funerary rituals are not performed. Instead, other ceremonies are initiated to serve those purposes.

Panya Lertsukprasert's work (2005) emphasized the commoditization of funeral services provided by the temples. A significant turning point in the evolution process of funeral services began during the reign of King Chulalongkorn when the government allowed temples to perform cremation services regardless of social status. Temples started to convert their function into business activities. In addition, in Panya's perspective, the cremation ritual currently is performed no longer for religious purposes, but mainly to present the economic and social status of those who passed away and their relatives. The consumption of social status has increased the price of the ceremony and ultimately has led to conflicting roles of temples as being spiritual leaders and that of being a business unit.

Panya considers religion to be an enemy of consumerism or capitalism. This idea is based on the belief that Buddhism in Thailand is (or at least used to be) authentic. My historical explanations in this article will show that Thai Buddhism was localized and monks are not necessarily alienated from the economic dimension. It is not totally right to claim that current cremations are not performed for religious purposes – transferring merit to the dead relative is an excellent

example – because commodification is theoretically developed basing on local cultures and practices. Undeniably, the huge ceremony, either for lay people or charismatic monks, is supported by the belief of life after death, which is a general idea that can be found in Southeast Asia.

In contrast to Panya, Pattana Kitiasa (2007) does not perceive religious commodification as immoral. According to Pattana, the commodifying processes are part of postmodern religious characteristics. Commodity is viewed as turning religion into marketable goods (Pattana, 2007, pp. 1-3). He, however, tends to believe that religious practices in premodern Buddhism were not be commoditized. Similarly to Pattana, York Michael (2001) also proposes that religions in the new age conform to spiritual pluralism, becoming public property and are no longer the private preserve of elites due to free-market values.

My case study of Khruba Jayawongsa argues that religion in daily practice, especially in the remote areas, either in premodern and modern eras, are very diverse and not overwhelmed by, but are also against, elites. Interestingly, Pattana, and the examples of commodification of his colleagues, are not limited to only material objects, such as amulets, that consumers can buy and possess as personal belongings. Commodification also refers to unpossessed things, for instance, blessings for material wealth and good health (Cohen, 2007, p. 68). These practices, based on Cohen's study of Chinese popular religion, can be broadly found in China and Southeast Asia. In addition, tourism and several other kinds of commodification are motivated by an expectation of good fortune. Additionally, negotiating and expressing people's ethno-economic class identities also support the process of religious commodification.

A number of scholars in the field of Thai Studies, such as Silber Ilana Friedrich (1995), Patrick Jory (1999), and Rory Mackenzie (2007), tend to believe that the idea of charismatic leader (*phu mi boon*) has been facilitated by Buddhist doctrine. Apinya Fuengfusakul (1998, cf. Rory 2007, p. 57) views the powerful leader as those who carry tremendous amount of power (*amnat/ittiphon*) – Phra Dhammajayo of Wat Phra Dhammakaya is an example. For Ilana and Jory, kingships and other local charismatic leaders in the Theravada tradition always

are associated with the righteous value of Bodhisattvas who were reborn as leaders in order to save other beings, which ultimately leads to religious legitimacy in Theravada culture. I do agree that the concept of charismatic leader in Theravada countries is quite popular, but my two case studies of the charismatic monks will assert that the charismatic leaders did not necessarily refer to their previous lives, instead were approved in such position by performing numerous social activities in this very life only.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of commodification is employed to clarify how the corpses of charismatic monks are commercialized in Thai society. Regarding Marxist theory, commodification is the process in which non-saleable items are changed into saleable ones (Kosoy and Corbera, 2010, p. 1229). Not only products, but also services, lifestyles, as well as ideas, can be commoditized (Douglas Rushkoff, 2005). A monk's corpse is undoubtedly not religious material that a consumer can everlastingly possess at home, but is a kind of spiritual service that is facilitated by the idea of pilgrimage and the accumulation of merit.

According to Mara Einstein, the market and religion are not at war against each other. Instead, religion adopts market logic. The market, in turn, may adopt religious faith to support its economic profits (Einstein, 2007, pp. 12-14). Religious commodification practiced by Thai Buddhists should theoretically not be perceived as degeneration of religion, but rather as another process of religious adaptation in a different atmosphere. As mentioned by Talcott Parsons (1964) and Robert Bellah (1970), secularization is part of the increasing complexity and diversity of modern industrial society. Moreover, it is the later stages of the evolutionary process that allow individuals to make choices about which worldview they will accept (Cf. Roberts and Yamane, 2012, pp. 328-329). In order to survive in the modern era, many religions reinvent themselves to compete for attention and affiliation from consumers in the spiritual marketplace (Roof 1999 and Einstein 2007, cf. Pattana, 2010, p. 564). Rapid transportation and communicative technologies have been facilitating

religious commodification. Therefore, religious commodification is nothing new, but is intensified by the new technology; consequently, all religions can be branded and sell their worldview (Ward, 2006, p. 185).

This research project proposes that authentic Buddhism is very diverse. The term "authentic" or "pure" has been broadly used, at least since 1833 when the Dhammayut order began as a reform movement. Notably, this term denoted a Tripitaka-based practice, however, according to my ethnographic methodology, different Buddhist groups claim their own styles of authentic tradition. This means that all charismatic monks are believed to be authentic in the perspective of devotees. Claiming to be authentic is, as suggested by Appadurai, a prominent value of modernity (Appadurai, 1985, p. 45. cf. Cohen, 1988, p. 371). In addition, according to Macdonald (1997), cultural commodification can be used by locals as an instrument to affirm their identity, tell their own story and establish the significance of local experiences (Cf. Stroma, 2007, p. 956).

Commodification here refers to the consumption of religious faiths and objects, corpses in particular, that produce merit by visiting the corpse and donating money to fulfill the temple's project. Therefore, pilgrims or consumers have to transfer their money into spiritual profits by expecting good fortune in return. However, I do not propose that any society in which people believe in the charismatic leader will lead to the preservation of corpses. Rather, such phenomenon must be supported by traditional belief and also driven by a consumerist society, such as Thailand, where religion, local culture and economics strongly converge. As Peter Jackson (2002) argues, the rational calculus of the market is inescapably embedded in a range of cultural practices.

Two Case Studies

Paññānanda Bhikkhu

Paññananda (1911-2007), Pan in an official name, was born in Patthalung province, southeast Thailand. He ordained as a novice since eighteen years old and then became a monk at the age of twenty.

Within a few years, he gained the certificate of Dhamma Study Grade III and Pali Grade IV. Because of World War Two, he quit learning and lived in Malaysia where he had the opportunity to study Chinese and English. He preferred to stand up while other monks always sat while giving a sermon. In addition, he emphasized rational doctrines, criticizing folk beliefs. He visited Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1993) and they became companions in the Dhamma. In 1949, he was invited to propagate Buddhism in Chiang Mai where he began to publish his own journal entitled *Chaoput* (meaning: Buddhists) and wrote monthly articles to be published in *Chao-Neu* (Northern People) Newspaper as tools to communicate among Buddhists in Chiang Mai and educate them on scripture-based religion. In 1959, he was invited by the Director General of the Irrigation Department to be the first abbot of Wat Chollaprathan, central Thailand, where he educated Buddhists and reformed various religious practices until his death in 2007.

From field-interviews with Phra Withun in Wat Chollaprathan Rangsarit in January 2016, it can be said that Pańńananda's teaching attracted audiences from every social status. While educated people were satisfied by his rational and critical doctrine, villagers were able to access those teachings by the use of funny stories. The relationship between Pańńananda and the state was quite strong – his clerical name, Phrabharmmangalacariya, was offered by the king without any request as found in the cases of other monks. The one who invited him to central Thailand was also a bureaucrat. Also, through field-observation in Wat Chollaprathan in 2005, it was observed that most people who attended his Sunday Dhamma Talk were from the middle class. A Thai TV channel conducted a documentary about his life, Turning Point: Body decays but Dhamma does not, Pańńananda (จุดเปลี่ยน: กายสิ้น ธรรมไม่สิ้น หลวงพ่อปัญญานันทะ), broadcasted on October 17, 2013. He said to the interviewer: "I have many diseases, but I am trying to work as much as possible, because I am going to die." As he said, he worked hard every day until he died at the age of 96 in 2007.

Sunaree, my informant who participates in the temple's activity every Sunday, stated that she has been attending this temple's activities for more than ten years since her son was ordained. What impressed her was that Pańńananda told every candidate to throw away their shaved

hair, while other temples usually recommended treating those hairs with respect. Thai people always try to keep the shaved hair, covered with the lotus leaf and put under a Bodhi tree. Pańńananda stated that Buddhists must maintain the core teachings and develop one's life, and not be involved with blind faith. In fact, the ordination program in his temple was held monthly without any extravagant celebrations as in other places. Musical brands and night party were prohibited. This golden rule was applied to cremation rituals as well. The long-term chanting of Pali words was replaced by giving a Dhamma Talk in Thai. Notably, although Pańńananda extremely criticized popular Buddhist traditions, amulets and animism for example, he did not oppose megaprojects, such as constructing public schools and hospitals. It is probably one of the various identities of Buddhists in the modern time.

Before his death, he decided to be a host seeking donations to build a chanting hall (Uposatha) to be located in the midst of the river. This hall belongs to Mahachulalongkornvidayalaya University in Ayutthaya, costing USD 5,882,580 or THB 193,000,000 (MUC, 2010). Pańńananda died in 2007 while the construction was on going, therefore his followers decided to keep his corpse without cremation. By so doing, a lot of donations still flowed in from Buddhists around Thailand who came to worship his real body. It can be said that although he had died, his unburnt corpse still accumulated funds to fulfill his goal. In this case, commodification is different from other cases in terms of social status. It shows that commodification is also available for those who are from the educated high and middle classes, who often identify themselves as rational in religious studies and practices.

However, it is quite negative to claim that his corpse was preserved for the sake of donations only. According to Phra Narong, the corpse was preserved because Pańńananda told his pupils that he would live for 100 years. In order to fulfill his determination, the monks then planned to burn his mummified body in 2017. While the chanting hall was completed in 2013, in order to arrange for the cremation of Pańńananda's corpse, the new abbot initiated construct of a large commemorative building to contain Pańńananda's portfolios. Many millions of Thai baht are flowing to this temple mostly from

those who are impressed by Pańńananda's teaching. Many other activities are also promoted by putting his photo, such as an ordination program of women who observe eight precepts (2016), Big Cleaning Day (2015), Donating Eye Glasses to the Elderly (2015), collecting money to build a Dhamma radio station (2014) and so forth, to attract donors.

It makes sense to ask why the commodification process of Pańńananda's corpse has not been widely condemned? First, most consumers of Pańńananda's teaching are from the high and middle classes, Pańńananda was, however, never commercialized by the production of amulets as for other charismatic masters, who were criticized by him during his life. Therefore, the commodification methods of Wat Chollaprathan are not to sell sacred religious materials, but Dhamma books for consumers who identify themselves as rational and modernists. Similarly, constructing of the buildings and supporting the temple's programs, used to educate people in an authentic doctrine, is not considered as being done by blind faith. Pańńananda's case shows that religious commodification is also possible among the educated high and middle classes.

Khruba Jayawongsa

Khruba Jayawongsa (1913-2000), or Wong, was born in Lamphun, northern Thailand. Although his family was poor, his mother was a very strict Buddhist Karen. She always took him to the temple every Buddhist holiday. It was repeatedly said that Wong's playing was different from other boys. While his friend liked to sculpt animals, he preferred to sculpt Buddha images, both for entertainment and worship. He started to help his parents by working in the rice field, as well as other jobs, since he was five years old. At the age of twelve, he ordained as a novice under Khuba Chailanka, one of famous saints at that time. According to Khruba Jayawongsa's biography, his whole life, before ordination, after becoming a novice, as well as after gaining full ordination as a monk, was miserable. However, those depressing stories, I believe, aim to show his great tolerance. This is a primary step for reaching the position of charismatic leader.

Khruba Jayawongsa began to travel alone when he was twenty. He once stayed in the Karen village, Pagakeyor or S'gaw, who moved from Burmese border to Lamphun. The Karen's religion was animism at that time. He converted them by introducing the five Buddhist precepts. All the precepts seem to correspond to their own customs, except the first precept, meaning they had to quit hunting and eating meat. Jayawongsa himself ate vegetarian since the age of twelve. There is no rational explanation of how Jayawongsa could convert all the Karen people to become vegetarian. However, it can be assumed that the Karens might have been convinced by his strange practices, such as eating vegetarian, wearing monk's robes instead of ordinary cloths, and the ability to travel alone in the forest. Those possibly convinced them to view Jayawongsa as a miraculous or charismatic person. Interestingly, all Karen members in that village, Ban Huaitom, after become Jayawongsa's followers, also observe a vegetarian vow until today.

In 1925, Khruba Srivichai (1878-1938), and Jayawongsa as an assistant, were constructing the road to Suthep mountain in Chiang Mai. This is an important case to show that charismatic monks, in people's perspective, were more powerful than the state's power. Faith in those monks contributed many advantages to their province. In 1926, he was forced to disrobe on the grounds that he was Khruba Srivichai's pupil, who at that time was called to Bangkok to re-adjust his attitude because he ordained monks without permission of the Supreme Sangha Council. However, Jayawongsa did not want to disrobe, and wore some white cloths, as also practiced by Khruba Kawpii, and perceived himself as a monk. *Lanna* (northern) villagers at that time coined a proverb "the yellow-robed monks were the state's, but the white-robed monks were ours." This example contradicts the belief that Buddhism always serve the elites. Buddhism, in fact, is usually adapted to function for the locals as well. There are 600 Karen families, or around 3,000 members, around Wat Phra Phuttabat, Jayawongsa's temple (Field Interview with Suchart, 2016). In 1947, the Karens were first invited by Jayawongsa to move and settle in a new village nearby his temple. As a result, it can be said that this temple was repaired, supported and developed by Karens. Jayawongsa initiated a secondary

school, Phrapariyattidham Wat Phraputtabathuitom, in his temple, and invited Karen boys to ordain as novices, providing them an education.

Interestingly, his vital role serving the villagers was mentioned not only in terms of spiritual needs, but also as a mediator between different ethnic groups. In 1972, another group of Karens migrated to Lamphun. During their struggling for acceptance by the local Karens, and lacking some material objects, they received support from Jayawongsa, a Karen Khruba. Faith in the charismatic monk helped eliminate the boundary between different ethnic groups. When he died in 2000, his body was stored in a glass coffin. His body was cleaned, covered by golden pieces and exhibited to the public. In 2014, his robes were offered by the king. The ceremony was attractively decorated and many thousands of his devotees participated. This event also produced a lot of donations. Nowadays, the daily worship of his corpse and selling of various types of amulets produces a huge profit, from both tourists and locals. Surprisingly, more than 200 monks and novices, who are students in the secondary school managed by this temple, are well supported by commodification of Jayawongsa's corpse.

Additionally, it is important to note that in 1995, Jayawongsa built a Shwedagon Pagoda nearby his temple, 71 meters in height, 40 meters in width, with the top of pagoda covered by gold. His purpose was so that Karens, who would have to go to Burma every year in order to worship at Shwedagon, could worship at his newly-built pagoda instead. It can be interpreted that Karens would not waste their time in traveling, but it can also be asserted that he helped reduce their Burmese identity by creating a new religious site. However, this pagoda's title was later changed to Phraborommathatcedi Sriviangchai, a new name provided by the last Supreme Patriarch (Charern Suvaddhano).

As mentioned earlier, charismatic leaders do not necessarily identify with the concept of the reincarnation of some god. Karens do not perceive of Jayawongsa as a Bodhisattva accumulating righteous acts to become the next Buddha. Instead, they believe that he already become an Arahant, which means there would be no rebirth for him. The mantra provided by the temple for worshiping his copse mentions.

> Sadhu Aham namami Phrajayawongsabhikkhu "Ariyena" Manggalavijayo Pandito Dasaparamiyo Dasaupaparmiyo Dasaparamatthaparamiyo Katam Punnam No Me Natho Me Natham Sirasa Namami.[3]

My observation in May 16-17, 2007, the annual ceremony of Jayawongsa's death, will be discussed here. In the section of offering alms food, a bowl was also put in front of his image. Devotees and monks treated him as a living master. Three languages – central Thai dialect, Northern dialect and Karen – were used. Most people, especially Karens, will never enter the temple with their shoes. They also have beads and a white wrist strap received from the temple. Many people cried when Jayawongsa's copse was carried in the parade, showing that the close relationship between Jayawongsa and Karens is annually reproduced through this ritual. Every Buddhist holiday, the ceremony of Vegetable Alms Giving is conducted in this temple. All the vegetables offered will be stored for cooking in one week. Previously, people would offer their own planted vegetables, as told by Pha Malee, but many of them are now weaving, and many are tourists. Consequently, in order to preserve the old tradition, a vegetable market (Kad Wan Siin, in Northern dialect) has been started to serve several groups of devotees. This stage clearly shows that religious culture can be commodified and preserved by new techniques of marketing.

Jayawongsa's image has been distributed and sold as amulets in many versions. This kind of religious commodity is broadly condemned on the ground that people can possess religious materials just by paying money. Nevertheless, preserving his corpse has not been condemned because this process was decided by Jayawongsa himself. My field-interview with Kittinan in 2016 found that before his death, he told pupils not to cremate his corpse on the ground that his dead body could feed all monks and novices in that temple. Moreover, preserving the corpse is not general for any other monks, but reserved

[3] While this Pali mantra is grammatically problematic, it can be roughly translated as: "I pay respect to Jawawongsa, 'the Noble or Arahanta', the victor, the wise, who had fulfilled 30 perfections. Merit I have done will protect me. I worship (to Jayawongsa?) with my head."

for only the great charismatic masters who are broadly respected, which is different from material selling. Rather, this can be seen as an instrument to attract people to visit and make merit. Interestingly, such corpses can perform miracles. At least, as told by villagers, they are incorruptible without chemicals. Hair and nails grow naturally after some period of the death. This phenomenon is considered and advertised as some sort of supernatural power.

Additional Discussion

Preserving a charismatic monk's corpse is generally found in the Mahanikaya tradition only. For Dhammayut, Luangpor Lee's corpse, Wat Asokaram in Samutprakarn, is an exception. It is reported that this is because Lee (1906-1961) was the reincarnation of the king Asoka of India (268-232 BCE). In order to cremate that corpse, the host of the ceremony must only be a king full of perfection (*barami*). However, inviting the king was seen by his pupils as a kind of disturbance. Therefore, they agreed to preserve his body in a glass coffin. Of course, many tourists travel to Wat Asokaram to visit Lee's corpse.

According to Winzeler (2011), the cult of ancestor worship is commonly found in Southeast Asia, where people believe and make offerings to a house spirit (*phi ruan*). Also, some rituals are performed to lead the spirit back home and sometimes a ritual is arranged to transform ghosts into ancestral spirits. Not based on Buddhist belief only, the Vietnamese pattern is based on Confucian practice. In doing so, kinship is intensified (Winzeler, 2011, pp. 148-159). However, ancestor worship in this particular region is still popular, where people try to treat their passed away relatives as living persons who always join their daily life. Although there is no tradition of preserving corpses in Southeast Asia, the idea of ancestor worship and modern scientific knowledge can help develop what we are witnessing today as mummified corpses of charismatic monks.

Notably, all corpses of the charismatic monks that are preserved in Thai society can be found in Mahanikaya order only, not in Dhammayut. Why Mahanikaya? In contrast to Mahanikaya, the Dhammayut monastic order, another Theravada tradition in Thailand,

turns their attention to worship a master's relic, or it can be called the relic cult. Possibly, the relic cult of Dhammayut was started before the corpse cult of Mahanikaya. The relics of Luangpu Mun Bhuritatto, the first master of Dhammayut, have been preserved since 1949. Meanwhile, Luangpu Sod Candasaro's corpse, one of Mahanikaya meditation masters, has been well kept in a glass coffin since 1959.

In the Theravada tradition, possession of a relic of the Buddha could bring legitimacy, as in the case of Buddhagosa in the 5th century who owned a relic and used it as criteria for building a proper monastery in Sri Lanka. In addition, Richard Gombrich (1971) stated that there is only one temple in Sri Lanka that does not claim to possess a relic (Strong, 2007, p. xiv). Relics of arahant masters in Dhammayut are physical evidence confirming their existence in the past, not as ordinary people, but as the Noble Ones who had perfectly purified their minds from all sinful matters. This mental quality is very difficult to evaluate, hence the expectation of a physical miracle, such as crystal bones (relics), can identify such purification. In general, the relics of these Arahants are used for recollecting the passed away teacher who tirelessly exerted himself to meditate and finally reach the Arahant status. However, these relics are traditionally not allowed to be scientifically verified.

In fact, the traditional forest monks of Dhammayut prefer to immerse themselves in meditation rather than religious studies. In consequence, they are not scholarly experts in Dhamma explanation. The crystal relics, which are broadly recognized as the result of the right ways of practice, therefore, become an important tool for their religious legitimacy. Dhammayut, as a order that identifies itself as more authentic than Mahanikaya, has to follow the funeral tradition as suggested by the Pali scriptures. To sum up, these two reasons, the need of a master's relics for worship and the intention to follow the tradition of the Buddha as an authentic doctrine, encourage the Dhammayut sect not to preserve the corpses of their masters.

Conclusion

The corpses of charismatic monks are preserved, I argue, not only for the purpose of veneration, but also for financial gains. The commodification of corpses is increasingly popular in Thailand, where the concept of charisma is continuously reproduced under the high level of modern marketing. Notably, the commodity cannot occur without local cultures – ancestor worship in this case. In some sense, an ancestor or charismatic monk, such as Jayawongsa, is believed and treated as a living family member who can produce good fortune for the worshipers. In the case of Paṅṅananda, it is fascinating to find that a corpse can be commercialized by the groups of those who criticized the blind-faith practices and identify themselves as rational Buddhists. That is because the commodity is motivated by local cultures of a particular area and various lifestyles. Donating a lot of money to fulfill Paṅṅananda's projects, for those followers, is not blind-faith behavior, but for the long-term benefit for the community. These cases show the influence of the charismatic leader, along with identity confirmation of the followers. Religion in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) should, therefore, be understood as localized practices rather than by pure doctrines depicted from the scriptures (Swearer, 2003, pp. 9-10).

To sum up, although various kinds of religious commodification in Thailand are criticized in many ways, charismatic corpses are an exception, with features not commoditized by the form of material selling, but rather to provide opportunity for veneration, although they ultimately produce a lot of money. However, it should not be assumed that financial gain is the only purpose of such commodification, such as in the case of Jayawongsa that helps intensify the identity of Karens who use Jayawongsa and his temple to maintain their culture. It might, then, be suggested that religion and economics in Thailand, especially by examining the commodification of the corpses of charismatic monks, can converge and be mutually supportive, thus becoming one of the complex part of the identity of Thai Buddhists in this capitalized age.

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