



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“*Ye Dharma Hetu Prabhava Hetun Teschan Tathagato Hey Vadat Teshan Ca Yo Nirodha Evam Vadi Maha Shramanah*” the gatha that Assashi Thera said to Saributra inspiring him to become a monk. Subsequently, this gatha appeared often in Dhavaravati culture <A.C.6-10> with the abbreviation “*Ye Dharma*” on several objects such as terracotta Buddha images or some stamps. In fact, according to archeological evidence, it might be said that it is the most popular gatha found during the Dhavaravati period. Just these only 2 words attempt to portray the essence of Buddhist doctrine, although no one really knows how popular this short gatha was at that time.

Turning to the present time, among all Buddhist prayers in Thailand, Jinapanjara Gatha is recognized now as the most popular gatha. Interestingly, it enjoys great popularity and respect among various groups of people, without regard to age, education and career. The chanting of Jinapanjara is believed by the chanters to provide many benefits, for example; safety, prosperity, health, wealth, success, and even charm.

Jinapanjara is not only used for chanting but is also popular for listening too. Its popularity has boomed, helped by its reproduction in CD and VCD format accompanied by modern music and is widely available in many bookstores and audio shops. Furthermore, it is interesting that Jinapanjara is the only prayer in Thailand that has inspired clubs to be formed, the “The Jinapanjara Gatha Chanting Club”. Given the popularity of this particular prayer, it is interesting to study why Thai people in the 21st century pay a lot of attention and effort to reciting this long gatha. What are the factors behind the rising popularity of this chanting phenomenon?

Normally, chanting is treated as a religious activity, which has been quite well accepted as such in Thai society. But, in the case of *Jinapanjara Gatha*, the difference is it has been used with expectation of gaining more. Generally, passed by word of mouth, the popularity of chanting Jinapanjara has spread wide. It has even been claimed that at least 10,000,000 copies have been distributed for free in various occasions.¹

Actually, this is not a new prayer, but it has gained high attention from Thai people as a new social chanting phenomenon. This phenomenon has created many firsts:

- The first time that people have been interested in chanting like this.
- The first time people gather together as a particular club, lasting for over 10 years.
- The first time people go to a particular place to chant the same prayer.

¹ Interview with Preecha Dhammaphipon, 7 October 2005.

- The first time a chant has been reproduced with music aimed at relaxation, with at least 200,000 copies being sold.

- The first time that chanting has been practiced in cars instead of just at temples or at home.

- The first time chanting and a specific monk are joined together as a product and brand, with advertising appearing in several kinds of media.

The history of Jinapanjara Gatha is still in question. Most Thai Buddhists know that it is connected to Somdej Toh. He is one of the most respected monks that has lived during the Bangkok Period and who is famous for his amulet "Pra Somdej" which is the most expensive among the amulet circle. There are several books related to Jinapanjara, but in fact the documented history is quite limited to make serious academic research.

With regard to its content, Jinapanjara is categorized as Paritta, but it is not a traditional Paritta. In the past, monks did not chanted Jinapanjara in Morning and Evening Chanting. However, today, Jinapanjara has been included as a part of "Tham Wat Chao" <Morning Chanting> at Wat Rakhang Ghositaram and also at some particular monasteries.

Thus, this thesis aims to investigate, to the extent possible, the origin of Jinapanjara chanting, as well as examine how Jinapanjara gained popularity. Also, this thesis will study Jinapanjara's effects on the Thai chanting tradition and what it has done to changes in society. Importantly, this study will look at Thai people's motivation in order to better understand current Thai values and beliefs. It is hypothesized that "Somdej Toh" is considered as the main factor for Jinapanjara's popularity, with its content, media promotion and monastery promotion assumed to be additional stimulating factors that have made Jinapanjara widely known among contemporary Thai people, particularly, after the time of the 1997 economic crisis.

As a contemporary phenomenon study, the research methodology applied in this thesis comprises a literature review and direct interviews. With respect to literature review, there are a limit number of academic documents on this matter, most of stories are focused on myth and superstition. Thus, direct interviews have been conducted as the main part of the research. The research focuses on several groups of people who are connected to this phenomenon.

This thesis contains five chapters, starting from exploration of Jinapanjara's popularity in Chapter Two, which appears to have started its vogue through the media, starting from audio records, and seems to have been the sparking factor making it more widely known in a short period.

Chapter Three is a historical survey, investigating Jinapanjara's origin to try to understand whether it originated locally or was imported from Sri Lanka. The possibility that it was composed in ancient Lanna Kingdom is explored and interviews with local connected people are described who related their experience with regards to Jinapanjara in the context of society and belief. This chapter also explores the background of Jinapanjara's reviser, Somdej Toh and how he became

one of a most notable monk of the Bangkok period, still well-respected by Thai people. Significantly, the relationship between him and Jinapanjara is examined.

Chapter Four contains nine cases studies of chanters, examining their first inspiration and motivation to become Jinapanjara chanters. An analysis is done to find out unique characteristics and significant factors behind this phenomenon. In order to better understand the relationship between Jinapanjara and its reviser, the way in which Somdej Toh influenced the Jinapanjara phenomenon will be looked at.


Chapter Five contains an analysis and conclusion, pointing out the possible causes of Jinapanjara's popularity and whether Somdej Toh's influenced is the main factor and what other factors impact this phenomenon. Finally, there is an examination of how Jinapanjara phenomenon has affected Thai chanting tradition and a discussion of the reflection of society through the context of Jinapanjara phenomenon. In addition to these five chapters, there is an appendix showing some related pictures.


This thesis takes a look at this phenomenon as an observer to see and understand what is beneath the surface and try to look at it without any bias. There is the hope that this is the one step in the sphere of academic research on superstitious phenomenon which exists in Thai society since from the past until today.

TECHNICAL TERMS AND PARTICULAR NAMES

As can be expected, there are many Pali terms mentioned in this thesis, which for consistency will be spelled using the Thai pronunciation. However, the term "*Jinapanjara*", which according to the Thai pronunciation "ฉินบัญชร" should be spelling as "*Chinabanchorn or Chinnabanchorn*", will be set forth using the Pali spelling since it is internationally accepted.

In addition, it should be noted that Jinapanjara usually is accompanied with the term "Gatha" and "Mantra", which have similar means:

"Gatha"  a verse or the poem in Pali,
the sacred word²

"Mantra"  the sacred word, word for chanting³

² The Royal Institute, *Thai Dictionary*, the edition of the year 1999, p.183

³ *Ibid.*, p.628.