

CHAPTER III

BACK TO THE ORIGIN OF JINAPANJARA: AN UNIDENTIFIED MANTRA

The *Jinapanjara* is an ancient prayer chanted exclusively in Buddhist countries like Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. It was introduced and revised by Somdej Toh to Siam during the time of King Rama IV. This *gatha*, as we have seen, still widely exists in Thailand. It is portrayed as a sacred chant and is increasingly popular among contemporary Thai Buddhist. This chapter tries to explore the origin of *Jinapanjara*, within the limit of the information readily available. Actually the real history of *Jinapanjara* is not of importance for the chanters. What is important for them is its benefit. They only know that this *gatha* belonged to Somdej Toh and that is sufficient for them to keep on chanting. The origin of this unidentified mantra is very interesting since there are several versions of *Jinapanjara* today and one of them is included in the traditional Northern chanting book as an auspicious *gatha* for ritual ceremony. Surprisingly, it has been recognized among local scholars in the North for almost 500 years ago, although today general Northern people are not familiar with this chant. The *Jinapanjara* is more popular as a chant in central Thailand. To understand the route of the *Jinapanjara* phenomenon, we should start from the name, Jinapanjara, or “Chinabanchorn,” in Thai pronunciation.

3.1 THE MEANING OF “JINAPANJARA”

“JINA” means “conqueror,” but in this case, it represents an epithet of the Buddha, while “PANJARA” has been interpreted with several meanings such as cage, window and armor. In terms of linguistics, “PANJARA” means window or cage but in this case likely means something like armor since the chant is used as a great protection for chanters. Thus, JINAPANJARA could be translated with several meanings, depending on the various view points of translators, such as:

- “The Golden Cage of the Buddha”¹
- “The window of the Victorious One”²
- “The Great Armor of the Buddha”

However, it would appear that its exact meaning does not matter to general chanters as much as its reputation. As the contents of the chant contain the names of the 27 previous Buddhas, the present Buddha, 15 prominent Arahants, and 4 Buddhist Suttas, invite all to give Dhamma protection to chanters. For better understanding, all the gathas will be illustrated through colors as follows:

Text in **bold** letters means previous Buddhas.

Text in *italic* letters means Arahants.

Text with underline means Suttas or Buddhist scriptures.

1 Sathienphong Wannapok, *Jinapanjara Gatha*, (Bangkok: Ariyamag Funds, 2004), pp. 34-35.

2 Suchitra Onkom, *Buddhist Chanting: Pali – Thai – English*, p.43.

JINAPANJARA GATHA

1. JAYASANAKATA BUDDHA JETAVA MARAM SAVAHANAM
CATUSACCHASABHAM RASAM YE PIVIMSU NARASABHA

Those Buddhas who defeated the Mara and his hosts, were the most brave, sublime, noble and mightiest of men who had sipped the immortal taste of the Four Noble Truths.

2. **TANHAMKARADAYO BUDDHA** ATTHAVISATI NAYAKA
SABBE PATTITTHITA MAYHAM MATTHAKE TE MUNISSARA

The twenty-eight Buddhas, one of whom was Tanhankara Buddha, were true leaders of the world. May each and every one of those wise sages be dwelling upon the crown of my head.

3. SISE PATTITTHITO MAYHAM BUDDHO DHAMMO DAVILOCANE
SANGHO PATITTHITO MAYHAM URE SABBAGUNAKARO

May all the Buddhas be enshrined on my head and in my eyes their Sacred Teachings; in my heart the community of noble disciples of blessed. One who are the spring of all virtues.

4. HADAYE ME *ANURUDDHO* *SARIPUTTO* CA DAKKHINE
KONDANNO PITTHIBHAGASMIM *MOGGALLANO* CA VAMAKE

May Anuruddha Thera dwells in my heart, Sariputta Thera the Chief Disciple at my right side, the Elder Kondanna at the back and Moggallana the other Chief Disciple be at the left.

5. DAKKHINE SAVANE MAYHAM ASUM *ANANDA-RAHULO*
KASSAPO CA *MAHANAMO* UBHASUM VAMASOTAKE

Likewise, may Ananda and Rahula dwell at my right ear, and at my left ear dwell Kassapa and Mahanama.

6. KESATO PITTHIBHAGASMIM SURIYO VA PABHANKARO
NISINNO SIRISAMPANNO *SOBHITO* MUNIPUNGAVO

May the mighty sage, Sobhita, seated in all his glory, like the blazing sun, dwell upon every hair-tip on my back.

7. *KUMARAKASSAPO THERO* MAHESI CITTAVADAKO
SO MAYHAM VADANE NICCAM PATITTHASI GUNAKARO

May Kumara Kassapa Thera, one who seeks the greatest virtues, commands fine speech and is the spring of fine virtues, always be the dwelling guardian of my mouth.

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| 8. <i>PUNNO ANGULIMALO CA</i>
THERA PANCA IME JATA | <i>UPALI-NANDA-SIVALI</i>
NALATE TILATHA MAMA |
|---|--|

May these five Elders: Punna Thera, Angulimala Thera, Upali Thera, Nanda Thera and Sivali Thera, be just like the auspicious marking anointed on my forehead.

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| 9. <i>SESASITI MAHATHERA</i>
<i>ETESITI MAHATHERA</i>
JALANTA SILATEJENA | <i>VIJITA JINASAVAKA</i>
<i>JITAVANTO JINORASA</i>
ANGAMANGESU SANTHITA |
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May all the rest of the eighty great disciples and sons of the Buddha, the Victorious One, who have defeated all their defilements and prosper by the moral disciples they adhere to, condescend in to be with me all the minor and major organs of mine.

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| 10. <u>RATANAM PURATO ASI</u>
<u>DHAJAGGAM PACCHATO ASI</u> | <u>DAKKHINE METTASUTTAKAM</u>
<u>VAME ANGULIMALAKAM</u> |
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May the Ratana Sutta be remained to my front, may the Metta Sutta be at my right side, may the Dhajagga Sutta be remained at the back and may the Angulimala Sutta be remained at my left.

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| 11. <u>KHANDHA MORAPARITTANCA</u>
AKASE CHADANAM ASI | <u>ATANATIYASUTTAKAM</u>
SESA PAKARASANTHITA |
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The Khandha paritta, Mora Paritta, Atanatiya Paritta and the rest form sheltering frame for me, just like the canopy above or the wall around me.

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| 12. <i>JINANA VARASAMYUTTA</i>
VATAPITTADISANJATA | <i>SATTAPAKARALANKATA</i>
<i>BAHIRAJJHATTUPADDAVA</i> |
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May the sublime Dhamma which is the power of the Victorious One be adorned upon me just like a seven-layer wall protecting me from all outside and inside dangers or perils which may arise from whatever natural causes, wind or bile so that there will be none of these dangers remain.

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| 13. <i>ASESA VINAYAM YANTU</i>
VADATO ME SAKICCENA | <i>ANANTAJINATEJASA</i>
<i>SADA SAMBUDDHAPANJARE</i> |
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Let all the remaining illness be got rid of by the power of the Victorious One whose virtues are endless, all throughout the time when I still observe the moral disciples of such a moral person like, for example, the Buddha.

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| 14. <i>JINAPANJARAMAJJHENAHI</i>
SADA PALENTU MAM SABBE | <i>VIHARANTAM MAHITALE</i>
<i>TE MAHAPURISASABHA</i> |
|--|---|

May all those great and brave Noble Ones who live in the midst of the Victorious One on this earth protect and guard me.

15. ICCEVA MANTO	SUGUTTO SURAKKHO
JINANUBHAVENA	JITUPADDAVO
DHAMMANUBHAVENA	JITARISANGHO
SANGHANUBHAVENA	JITANTARAYO
SADDHAMMANUBHAVAPALITO	JACARAMI JINAPANJARETI.

Indeed, thus am I well protected as all the distresses have been rid of by the Victorious One; so many whatever potential dangers there may be in the future, be eliminated by the power of the Dhamma and the Sangha and may the same power of the truth of Dhamma protect and guide me that I may live and thrive in the path of the Victorious One.³

3.2 CONTENT AND INTONATION

One significant point that should be noted is Jinapanjara is composed in the form of a basic verse “Pathayawatra Chant ปฐยาวัตตรจันท์” which is recognized among Pali specialist as the simplest one .Comparison can be made to another popular gatha like “Pahung” or Jayamangala Gatha, which is more traditional, and the less popular Pahung, which is composed in form of Wasantadilaka Chant วสันตติลกจันท์ and thus is more complicate and difficult for either composing or reciting. **Dr.Banjob Bannaruji**, Pali scholar at Religious and Philosophy Department, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University made this point:

“One of the distinctive point of Jinapanjara as a prayer is that chanters are able to empower themselves every time they perform it. It is similar to the celebration ceremony of Buddha images in those monks have to recite incantation over Buddha images. But in this case, as the content emphasizes inviting the previous Buddhas and important Arahants to come to give protection to the chanter though, it is the same concept that you are reciting an incantation “ปลุกเสก” over yourself, by yourself.”⁴

Dr.Banjob also pointed out that the original composer must have been a person who had a high degree of knowledge of Pali. This can be seen from the wording and grammar appearing in Jinapanjara even though it is composed in the form of a basic poem, “Pathayawatra Chant ปฐยาวัตตรจันท์”, but in terms of poetics, it is really beautiful and exceptional.”

Accordance to Sathienphong who affirmed that whoever composed this gatha must be a prominent person, who has a great talent for Pali composition.

“The style of composing is quite wonderful”⁵

Interestingly, some Pali specialists have an opposite view in that Jinapanjara Gatha is merely common and basic in terms of Pali verse.

³ Ibid. Suchitra Onkom, pp.43-48.

⁴ Interview with Dr.Banjob Bannaruji, 14 November 2006.

⁵ Interview with Sathienphong Wannapok, 10 October 2005.

“With respect to Pali language, there is nothing special in term of poetics. It is merely a basic verse with a basic form and not too long for lay people.”⁶

Similarly, Pra Srisitthimuni, the Dean of Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, claimed that:

“It is a very basic one, give me 10 minutes and I will compose a new one like this to you .It is just bringing many holy names in Buddhism and arranging them in form of verse, that is it.”⁷

As for the content, there is no Dhamma doctrine set forth in *Jinapanjara Gatha*, which is quite distinctive compared to other chants in Buddhism. Most chants demonstrate, in some form or another, the teaching of Buddha or at least eulogies his virtues. Sathienphong Wannapok gave a comment on the *Jinapanjara*'s contents saying that it is unique, totally different from others.

“As all supreme names are invited, *Jinapanjara Gatha* is like an amulet providing chanters a feeling of extraordinary safety.”⁸

Whereas Suchao Ploychum, associate professor at Rajanagarindra Institute of Linguistics and Cultural Studies, Kasetsart University pointed out that *Jinapanjara* is not exactly new or different from others:

“In terms of Paritta, *Jinapanjara* is not exactly new in term of content in that it mentions important figures named in Buddhism. Maha Upasantiluang มหาอุปสันติหลวง also mentions Buddha's names as well, but actually it is not as apparent as in *Jinapanjara*.”

Although, there are several different views on *Jinapanjara* content and intonation, the important point is that it was composed in the easiest form of Pali verse, which is easy to recite for lay people and apparent for its content. In addition, *Jinapanjara* contains most of the supreme holy names in Buddhism, and, even though this character is not exact a new style, the *Jinapanjara* composer made it more obvious than before. Therefore, what is the real original propose of this controversial gatha?

3.3 THE HISTORY OF JINAPANJARA GATHA

According to related documents, *Jinapanjara Gatha* was first mentioned in the reign of King Rama IV when Venerable “Somdej Pra Buddhajarn Toh Brahamarangi” or “Somdej Toh” was chanting before him. The king expressed his appreciation and asked about its origin. At that moment, “Somdej Toh” answered that it was an ancient chant but he himself had later revised and shortened it. Then, it is said that this *gatha* became popular among royal lineages and nobles. For example, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab adjusted the *Jinapanjara Gatha* to his own

6 Interview with Suchao Ploychum, 7 November 2006.

7 Pra Srisitthimuni, discussion on thesis defense, 26 April 2007

8 Interview with Sathienphong Wannapok, 10 October 2005.

purpose by reciting only the eighth verse to pronounce incantation over his cleaning water every morning, believing it would bring him charm and admiration.⁹

In the biography of "Somdej Toh" printed by The Chanting Jinapanjara Club, it is mentioned that the chant had been first discovered by "Somdej Toh" in an old pagoda at Kampangetch Province when he visited his relatives there. It was said that in the night time, "Thao Mahabrahama Jinapanjara", the high-rank deity who proclaimed to be a disciple of Pra Mogallana, the great left side disciple of the Buddha, appeared to him by omen or "NIMIT" and taught "Somdej Toh" some techniques to create divine power, particularly how to produce superstitious objects (recite incantation over amulets.) For this reason, after "Somdej Toh" studied that ancient manuscript, he was determined to revise it and named it "*Jinapanjara*" in order to honor "Thao Mahabrahama Jinapanjara." Today, the belief of "Thao Mahabrahama Jinapanjara" is still seriously respected by members of The Jinapanjara Gatha Chanting Club, as his statue was built and placed in the main hall of its head office.

As mentioned before, most history books on Jinapanjara are full of miracles and myths since they have been written by ardent followers with the aim to propagate *Jinapanjara* and "Somdej Toh." It is difficult to utilize these sources in making an academic analysis of the *Jinapanjara*. However, one document that attempts to find the fact of *Jinapanjara* is a small book written by the present Supreme Patriarch or "Sangaraj," This book was first published in 1975 on his birthday.

In the book entitled "*Jinapanjara Gatha*" the Supreme Patriarch tried to correct words in *Jinapanjara* by comparison to a Sri Lankan version from the book "The Mirror of The Dhamma" by Narada Thera and Kassapa Thera (printed in Sri Lanka, in 1961). He also addressed the question, that he wondered about for a some time, about the origin of this chant and was unable to point out whether Somdej Toh had composed himself or received the manuscript from somewhere.¹⁰

It might be said that this book by the Supreme Patriarch was the first attempt to make an academic study on *Jinapanjara*. Eleven year later, the Supreme Patriarch assigned one of his disciples, Suchao Ploychum, associate professor at Rajanagarindra Institute of Linguistics and Cultural Studies, Kasetsart University, to conduct research on the *Jinapanjara*, which subsequently became a book named "The History of Jinapanjara" and was first distributed in 1986. In this book, Suchao mentioned the name of Pra Dhammananda Thera, a Burmese monk at Wat Thamao, Lampang province. This monk claimed that *Jinapanjara* is not only popular in Thailand but also in Myanmar. In the past, it was widely recited by Burmese temple boys with belief it can protect them from any kind of harm and danger. He himself has been able to recite the whole *gatha* since he was 7-8 years old. He also said that *Jinapanjara* was actually composed at Chiang Mai in the reign of King Anoradha in

⁹ The eighth verse of Jinapanjara Gatha is:

"PUNNO ANGULIMALO CA	UPALI-NANDA-SIVALI
THERA PANCA IME JATA	NALATE TILATHA MAMA"

¹⁰ Somdej Pra Yanasangvara, the Supreme Patriarch, *Jinapanjara Gatha*, (Bangkok: Dhamma Sapa, 2005.)

the year B.E. 2123, but could not specify who was the author. At that time magical rituals were generally practiced in Chiang Mai. According to this belief, King Anoradha felt unhappy with occultism practiced in his kingdom. He made an effort to change people to believe in the Buddhist way by encouraging them to worship Buddha images instead of spirits. The celebration ceremony on Buddha images was promoted as a new auspicious rite replacing spiritual worship that had been worshiped before.

With this aim, the names of various Buddhas, the name of Buddhist scriptures, as well as the name of Arahants, including other sacred Buddhist figures, were put into Buddhist chants for people to recite instead of magical mantra. It is claimed that this is the origin of the celebration ceremony on Buddha images since it never was known to happen before.

Apart from Pra Dhamma Thera, Suchao also pointed out that there are other indications that *Jinapanjara* might have originated at Chiang Mai during the reign of King Anoradha in B.E. 2123 but he was not able to specify the source. However, according to this book, *Jinapanjara* seems to appear in several sources, for example:

-It was found on the first page of the Sankhayapakasakatika (both Burmese script version and Khmer script version), a ancient Northern Buddhist scripture written by Pra Sirimangalajarn a prominent Chiang Mai scholar monk in B.E. 2063. In this text it was called “Rattanapanjara Gatha.”

-Another version was found on a palm leaf manuscript in Singhalese language called “Jinapanjaraparitta.”

Today, these documents are preserved in the National Library. According to this information, it means that *Jinapanjara* gained some level of popularity since ancient times and either monks or some lay people have been chanting it before under several names. The various names of *Jinapanjara* are:

“Sutracheyyabengchon” (สูตรเชยยเบงจร)

“Jaiyabengjon” (ไฉยะเบงจร)

“Chaiyabenchon” (ชัยเบญจร)

In this case, *Jinapanjara* is used for various occasions such as:

-Extending life ritual (พิธีสืบชะตา)

-Celebrate new house ceremony (ขึ้นบ้านใหม่)

-Asking for rain ritual (พิธีขอฝน)

In the reign of King Muang Kaew (B.E.2038-2068), *Jinapanjara* was mentioned as one of compulsory suttas to be chanted by monks. Thus it might be said that *Jinapanjara* appeared in Chiang Mai around 500 years ago, the same time as when Pra Sirimangalajarn composed his prominent Sankhayapakasakatika in B.E.2063. From this evidence, Suchao assumed that *Jinapanjara* might have been composed in Chiang Mai, then discovered and revised by “Somdej Toh.” Since the

original edition was quite long; he edited and shortened it keeping all of its essence with the aim of making it easier to recite.

“Burmese evidence said clearly it was created in Chiang Mai and it was spread by word of mouth among Burmese monks and novices as PraDhammananda Thera, Burmese monk, the abbot of Wat Thama-o, Lampang said that he could recite *Jinapanjara* since he was young before moving to Thailand.”¹¹

This assumption does not comport with the idea that *Jinapanjara* was written by a Sri Lankan scholar and then imported to Thailand via Chiang Mai. Nevertheless, a new theory was put forth by Sathienphong Wannapok in his book “*Jinapanjara Gatha*”, saying something similar to that said by Suchao, that is, *Jinapanjara Gatha* was formerly called “Rattana Panjara.” Sathienphong believed it was composed by some unnamed Sri Lankan scholar. The time when it was composed might be the same period as when the *Jinakalamalipakarana*, an ancient text of The Lanna Kingdom, was composed.¹²

Even though it might be difficult to conclude with certainty that *Jinapanjara* was first composed in the Northern part of Thailand, it is clear that *Jinapanjara* was known and used for 400 years in Lanna before “Somdej Toh” introduced it to the court and people in the Central part. Accordingly, it would seem that *Jinapanjara* should be well known among Northern people. However, based on interviews with a local historian, a local ritual leader and a domestic resident, who are connected to many people, all confirmed that, in general, Northern people do not know much about *Jinapanjara*. On the contrary, most of them know *Jinapanjara* from the Central part of Thailand as a mantra of “Somdej Toh.”

Deja Tiangket, local historian and one of organizers of “Pithee Saha Moncol Sueb Chata Nai Luang” (พิธีมหามงคลสืบชะตาในหลวง), an auspicious rite for blessing the king, is very interested in Lanna history and also Lanna scriptures. He also worked on the same team as Paothong Thong-Juea promoting local heritage conservation at Mae Cham.

“If you ask older original Lanna people who don’t know much about stories from outside, you will be surprised because most of them don’t know either *Jinapanjara* or Somdej Toh.”¹³

According to Deja, Northern people who know *Jinapanjara* and are able to recite it, usually come from these two groups:

1. “Mor Kwan” (หมอขวัญ) that is local learned persons who conduct ritual ceremony by reciting some Mantra. *Jinapanjara* is merely one of mantra sets used by them. There is nothing special for this mantra, which is called different names, such as “Jaiyabengchorn (ไยยะเบงชร)

¹¹ Ibid., Interview with Suchao Ploychum.

¹² Sathienphong Wannapok, *Jinapanjara Gatha*, (Bangkok, 2004), pp.33-35

¹³ Interview with Deja Tiangket, 13 October 2006

2. Young generation who have been educated from Bangkok or are connected by working with people from Bangkok or other central provinces. Some adapted this belief to practice as their personal ritual with the perception that this *gatha* comes from the Central part of Thailand and belongs to “Somdej Toh.”

Even though, it is not popular for general local people and it is not Lanna culture to chant in daily life, Deja believes *Jinapanjara* could have been adapted from Lanna to Central part of Thailand. In the past there were several wars between Lanna and Siam after which Lanna people were taken to Siam as captives. Moreover, there are several Lanna prayers having been brought to practice in Siam without reference being made to Lanna.¹⁴

Por Nan Chan Sanglar (พอนานจันทร์ แสงหล้า), one of “Mor Kwan” who was born and lives in Payao province, accepts that *Jinapanjara* is one mantra used in ritual ceremonies such as new home ceremony, ordination, or bad spirit suppressing ceremony. However, Por Nan Chan emphasizes it is not a mantra for general people but for specialists who are capable of conducting rites such as spirit suppressors, and monks and novices who are well trained in magic. Nan Chan learned this *gatha* from his monk master while he was a novice 30 years ago.

“I don’t know much about it. I just heard that it came from Tibet. For me I cannot recite without a book. I just remember some parts. It might be known by some groups, not in general. I heard that it works for suppressing spirits or when we want protection from sacred figures. Most normal Northern people don’t know about this. We called it by different names: “Jaiyabengchorn” or “Benjabengchorn”¹⁵

As for ordinary people, Prathana Hanmethee who was born and lives in Lampang, now runs her own ceramic factory and is responsible for a community radio program. As a business woman and local media owner, she knows many groups of people in the area. From her experience, *Jinapanjara* has been used among business people who want something to encourage themselves.

“I know *Jinapanjara* from Bangkok, not from Lampang. Personally, I don’t chant but some of my business friends usually chant it for prosperity and good luck. We just know it came from “Somdej Toh Wat Rakang.”¹⁶

3.4 DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF JINAPANJARA GATHA

Today, *Jinapanjara Gatha* is found in 3 countries: Thailand, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka and there are several versions differing in detail and length. Suchao Ploychum has compiled different 8 versions of *Jinapanjara* in his book, “Prawat Gatha Chinnabanchorn.”<see Appendix A> In 1992, The *Jinapanjara Gatha* Chanting Club was founded to encourage people to chant for peacefulness. The club has its own interpretation of the text. It is quite different from other versions chanted in Thailand. All versions are similar in terms of content but different by their length,

¹⁴ Ibid. Deja Tiengket.

¹⁵ Interview with Por Nan Chan Sanglar, 23 November 2006.

¹⁶ Interview with Prathana Hanmethee, 8 December 2006

type of poetry style and some words. For example, regarding the first stanza, there are at least 3 versions written:

-JAYASARAKATA BUDDHA
 -JAYASANAKATA BUDDHA
 -JIYASANAKATA BUDDHA

The present Supreme Patriarch, gave his words on *Jinapanjara*'s origin in 1975 that:

“Each *Jinapanjara* Gatha version from each religious school is not similar, it would be better if we could end all as once.”¹⁷

Whereas Sathienphong Wannapok confirmed that in term of Pali translation, all dissimilar words have some meaning, even though a little bit different.

“If we chant for auspicious power, the meaning does not matter; but if we chant for faith and wisdom we should know its exact meaning.”¹⁸

For Thai chanters, it seems that some dissimilar wording is not a problem; they just trust the one they chant without any doubt, although there are at least 9 versions of *Jinapanjara* making it difficult to identify which one is the original. With the fact that it is composed in Pali which most lay people do not know much, it has becomes like a sacred verse. People are not that concerned with its accuracy; they just recognized that it was revised by Somdej Toh, who is very respected as a virtuous monk as well as a great amulet maker. Significantly, people recognize *Jinapanjara* as the prayer used by Somdej Toh in reciting incantation over all his amulets. Thus it is likely *the best of best* selected by “Somdej Toh” among all prayers in terms of its superstitious power.

As there is a strong connection between “Somdej Toh” and “*Jinapanjara* Gatha”, whenever chanters recite *Jinapanjara* they have to think of “Somdej Toh” and, vice versa, when they want to contact “Somdej Toh”, they have to chant *Jinapanjara*. Why does a monk who passed away over 130 years ago still persists in people's attention as if he is still alive? This question will be addressed and we will come to know “Somdej Toh” in a next section.

17 Somdej Pra Yanasangvara, the Supreme Patriarch, *Jinapanjara Gatha*, (Bangkok: Dhamma Sapa, 2005.)

18 Sathienphong Wannapok, *Jinapanjara Gatha*, (Bangkok: Ariyamag Funds, 2004), p.36.

3.5 “SOMDEJ TOH” JINAPANJARA REVISER SOMDEJ PRA BUDDHAJARN TOH BRAHAMARANGSI



As 90 percent of the Thai population is Buddhist, it is not strange for Thais to rely on venerable monks for refuge. But, in case of “Somdej Toh” it is quite distinct since even though he passed away 133 years, he is still admired by followers as if he was alive. His story has been retold many times; with his pictures appearing on CDs, VCDs and books. His name is usually mentioned among amulet collectors and Jinapanjara chanters whenever they chant.

Why is this venerable monk so attractive to Thai Buddhist? Somdej Toh’s story has many versions, like his *Jinapanjara Gatha*. In books published by “The Jinapanjara Gatha Chanting Club”, it is stressed that he was an illegitimate son of King Rama II and a Kampang Petch villager called “Ngud.” Whereas another version says he was the illegitimate child of King Rama I instead. Meanwhile, other version believes he was born in 1788 as such a commoner in Ayutthaya and then moved to Angthong and Bangkok.

However, the theory he was the lineage of a king seems to be believed more than others. Sathienphong Wannapak, a researcher on “Somdej Toh’s” background agreed that “Somdej Toh” is most likely of royal lineage since there are two pieces of evidence to confirm this. The first piece of evidence showing his royal lineage is that when he passed away in 1872, he was recorded with the royal word by Somdej Pra Mahasamanachao Krom Praya Pavaresvariyaalongkorn. This raised a big question since the royal word, “ถึงชีพิตักษัย”, normally is applied only to a royal family member.¹⁹ Another piece of evidence mentioned among researchers is that King Rama II presented him a royal boat “เรือกันยาหลังคากระแซง.” This kind of boat is usually used only by royal member in the level of “Pra Ong Chao” (พระองค์เจ้า).

¹⁹ Sathienphong Wannapak, *Jinapanjara Gatha*, referred to Somdej Pra Mahasamanachao Krom Praya Pavaresvariyaalongkorn, *The raining account chronicle*, No.3 p.44.

Of course, the evidence set forth above might be a condition to make him become a more charismatic figure. But the more significant point seems to be his remarkable behavior. According to history, even though he was very intellectual and proficient in both Tripitok and meditation practice and, importantly, admired by the King, “Somdej Toh” usually kept his life far from wealth and power. He preferred to live as a humble and simple monk. It was not until the reign of King Rama IV that he was admitted to be in the high rank as Somdej Pra Buddhajarn. About his proficiency, Sathienphong Wannapok stated that:

“For my opinion, only *Jinapanjara Gatha* is enough to show his ability on Pali since it was very perfectly composed.”

If *Jinapanjara Gatha* is the evidence showing his ability in Pali, probably “Pra Somdej” (his amulets) might be evidence of his meditation practice since they are very successful in terms of sacredness among collectors. “Somdej Toh” died in 1872 when he was 84 years old. One hundred years later, his amulets gained high demand, as well as *Jinapanjara Gatha*, his fine piece of revising becomes widely chanted by people in Thailand.

Considering the evidence and information, the history of *Jinapanjara* is still a mystery. No one is able to confirm exactly the place and time it was written. It is possible that it was written by a Sri Lankan scholar then passed to Thailand, or it was a masterpiece of a Chiang Mai scholar monk which was then copied by Sri Lanka and after that returned to Thailand, again with unknown origin background. This chanting verse has appeared for at least 500 years in Thailand before it was introduced to the court by Somdej Toh and became widely accepted by common people since the reign of King Rama IV.

In that case, the question is why is it so popular and well-known by Thai people? What are the main factors stimulating *Jinapanjara* into the top of vogue among various other prayers in Thailand? Is it merely the influence from “Somdej Toh” or are there other factors? In the next chapter we will study the *Jinapanjara* chanters and the benefits they think can be obtained through the chanting in order to know more about people’s motivation behind this phenomenon.