

## CHAPTER V

### THE PHENOMENON ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

In this last chapter, the route of Jinapanjara's popularity will be analyzed, along with an investigation of the main causes that stimulated this chant to become popular and a description of why it came to be in vogue one decade after "Somdej Toh" died. Also, how Jinapanjara has impacted Thai chanting tradition will be examined as well as some reflections of Thai society through this chanting phenomenon.

#### 5.1 THE TIME LINE OF JINAPANJARA'S NEW APPEARANCE

- 1957 The care taker abbot of **Wat Rakhang distributed photocopies of Jinapanjara.**
- 1960 Wat Rakhang built the Vihan "Somdej Toh" which became a place for chanting Jinapanjara.
- 1975 The supreme patriarch distributed a Jinapanjara chanting book on his birthday.
- 1981 Jinapanjara was mentioned in one of the most widely distributed novels, "Petch Pra Uma", as a sacred mantra which the heroine uses to suppress Frankenstein's monster successfully.
- 1986 The Supreme Patriarch assigned his student to do research on Jinapanjara, which became a book "The history of Jinapanjara", the first academic type book on Jinapanjara.
- 1987 Wat Indravihan built a pavilion where "Somdej Toh" used to practice Dhamma and do meditation and allowed people to come chant inside.
- 1992 A group of Poo Swan followers founded The Jinapanjara Gatha Chanting Club and started a weekly group chanting schedule.
- 1999 Nonsi Nimibutr launched "Nang Nag" which became one of the most popular films, in which "Somdej Toh" is mentioned as a hero who was able to suppress Nang Nag by reciting Jinapanjara Gatha.
- 2001 The Ocean Media company launched Tibetan Chanting Song to the market.
- 2002 Sathienphong Wannapok, A Honorary Fellow of Religious Studies, The Academy of Moral and Political Science, co-

operated with National Artist, Surapol Tonavanik, to produce Jinapanjara on cassette tape as a version of “entertain -Dhamma” and included a new melody to support the content’s translation in the form of a chanting song. The new image of this sacred chant raised many critical comments among Thai Buddhist academics. Some disagreed with the new way of presenting this modern Jinapanjara, while some criticized him as the one who made this sacred chant into a business product.

- 2003 A new modified version on CD was produced and added Buddhajayamangala Gatha “Pahung” as one part of the CD.
- 2004 Supachai Jarusomboon cooperated with Media of Medias, a famous media production house, to produced Jinapanjara on VCD designed to be a “Therapy Version” showing a different selling point from Sathientphong’s “Mantra Therapy”.
- 2007 Jatukam Rammathep phenomenon dominated the amulets market and became a new phenomenon.
- 2007 Jatukam Rammathep continues in popularity whereas Jinapanjara chanters kept their faith on chanting and “Somdej Toh” although not as boom like in the past.

## 5.2 JINAPANJARA POPULARITY ANALYSIS

With respect to the question of when Jinapanjara started its popularity and became a new chanting phenomenon, this research indicates that it might have started around 1957 when Chao Khun Thieng claimed to have distributed about 100,000 copies to the public with a recommendation based on his own practice. Although, this operation looks relatively small and personal, this appears to have been significant inspiration and recognition for people, because today Chao Khun Thieng’s words are still recognized by Jinapanjara chanters. Thus, this is a notable beginning point, and occurred before it was mentioned again, in a hit novel series, *Pet Pra Uma* in 1974.<sup>1</sup>

The next significant event was when The Supreme Patriarch launched his birthday books with Jinapanjara as the main content, in which he pointed out the difference between the two versions, Thai and Sri Lankan. The Sangaraja also gave his own translation and corrected some words by comparing them to the Sri Lankan version. His special birthday books have been in high demand based on the fact that afterwards the same books were reprinted several times and distributed on his birthday occasion. Furthermore, sometimes disciples have asked for permission to reprint these books for free distributing at funeral ceremonies, although there is no exact statistic on how many have been reprinted.

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<sup>1</sup> Chao Khun Thieng words “One who chant Jinapanjara Gatha regularly, the benefit is equal occupying 100 Pra Somdej.”

The Sangaraja is the highest ranking monk in the kingdom and has a reputation as an “Pra Keji พระเก็จ” in which it is believed that he has achieved high meditative power and is capable to make sacred amulets, as well as being regarded as a prominent Buddhist scholar. These facts are significant when considering that he gave his attention to this gatha. In addition, the Supreme Patriarch assigned his disciples **Suchao Ploychum** to research and studies Jinapanjara’s history and releases a book to the public in 1986. This likely brought up Jinapanjara as a social concern again, even in the small circle.

Another famous monk that should be mentioned as a Jinapanjara distributor is Praya Norrarutrajmanit\* or Dhmaavitago Bhikku who is usually called by Thais as Chao Khun Nor. Although he passed away over 30 years <in 1971>, his story still remains and can be seen on several websites organized by his disciples under “เจ้าคุณนรฯ” which also contain a lot of related information. It is told among his disciples that Chao Khun Nor used Jinapanjara as a Mantra in reciting incantation over his amulets. Once one monk asked him which Mantra he used in making amulets and Chao Khun Nor replied clearly that he used Jinapanjara:

*“In term of making amulet, Jinapanjara of “Somdej Toh” Wat Rakhang is the best of the best, to me I used this Mantra whenever I make amulets.”<sup>2</sup>*

Meanwhile, Chao Khun Nor also recommended that his disciple recite Jinapanjara as a great protection from any danger. Moreover, there is a recording of Jinapanjara chanted by Chao Khun Nor with his real voice, which still remains and is distributed among his followers and treated as a sacred version. From a prominent monk who achieved high honor rank, as well as high respect from Thais Buddhists, Jinapanjara can be seen as being certified again by Chao Khun Nor, which caused it to spread to a new group, increasing new chanters.

The next important step in the Jinapanjara phenomenon started when Wat Indraviharn, under the charge of the new abbot Pra Rajarattanaborn, built a Pavilion to cover Bor Nam Mon of “Somdej Toh” and opened it for people to chant and practice meditation. As well, he renovated every place related to “Somdej Toh” as mentioned before. Bor Nam Mon became a chanting center for city people, available everyday from 6.00 a.m.-6.00 p.m. At the same time, in 1986, Samnag Pooawan created a radio show, “Rai Kan Jinapanjara รายการจินบัญชร”, and formed a new chanting community as “The Chanting Jinapanjara Gatha Club”. In addition, he first launched “Somdej Toh’s” history book, “Amata Thera”, in commemoration of his 200th birthday anniversary. Although, the club did not promote itself much, by its product and activities it was like the silently growing seeds of faith in society. It might be

\* Chao Khun Nor used to be a royal page of King Rama VI. After King Rama VI passed away he decided to become a monk and aimed to make merit dedicated to the king. Then he intended to continue his ascetic life, even though he lived his life in Wat Dhebsirin, in central Bangkok, not in a jungle or rural area like a “Pra Pa”. He gained high respect from Thais who adored him as “Arahant in the city”. Also, he is one of the famous monks among the amulet circle as well.

2 Sak Talingchan. ปฐกฐินนพทศกน (Online) available from: <http://www.saktalingchan.com/index.php?lay=show&ac=article&Id=79936>.

said that Jinapanjara was mentioned and recognized much more than ever before in this phase.

Jinapanjara came to the peak of its vogue in 2002-2004 after Sathienphong Wannapok launched his product, Jinapanjara in song, to the market, which was the first time for there to be an obvious commercial sale item. With the reputation of Sathienphong, along with the power of media advertisement and good marketing, it enjoyed high success among people who already knew this chant and for those who did not know Jinapanjara since it was produced in song and modern music, as demanded by the middle class and young generation. Furthermore, the virtue of Jinapanjara was confirmed again when Supachai Jarusomboon reproduced it in terms of chanting therapy or what he called, Mantra Therapy, backed up by Media of Medias company.

Therefore, it can be seen that Jinapanjara's popularity has been influenced by several related factors, which can be put into three groups, as below:

#### **Monastic Factor**

- The Present Supreme Patriarch
- Chao Khun Nor
- Chao Khun Thieng, Wat Rakhang
- Pra Rajrattanaporn, Wat Indravihan

#### **Secular Factor**

- The Jinapanjara Gatha Chanting Club
- Sathienphong Wannapok
- Supachai Jarusomboon
- Dr. Boonchai Kosolthanakul

#### **Media Factor**

- Petch Pra Uma
- Nang Nag
- Chanting books and all related books

With all these related factors in mind, however, this phenomenon might not have occurred as it did without the reviser, "Somdej Toh". All of factors mentioned above seem to be merely minor factors, while the main factors appears to come from its reviser as well as its believers' faith. These two parts would seem to be the main causes behind this phenomenon. From this study, every interview done with Jinapanjara chanters mentioned "Somdej Toh" as the reviser or as the composer depending on their knowledge. This seems to show that "Somdej Toh" is the most influential person in the view of Jinapanjara chanters.

### 5.3 THE MAIN CAUSES OF JINAPANJARA'S POPULARITY

#### 5.3.1. "SOMDEJ TOH" EFFECT

"One thing I noticed when driving to the North is I often find Somdej Toh's statues and Luang Por Tuad statues located in many temples. What does it mean? It means that they might gain respect from local people there or there are some organization sending those statues to several temples. This is quite special and might affect more or less to local belief."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Prawate Tantiphiwattanaskul, psychiatrist from the Mental Health Department, Ministry of Public Health, raised his point that "Somdej Toh's" popularity shows itself in many temples. Interestingly, at the King Naresuan Monument shrine in Donjedi, Suphan Buri, visitors can find Somdej Toh's statue there as well. As a monk who defeated Nang Nag in the famous movie and immortal ghost story, Somdej Toh looks like a hero who is great both in terms of monkhood and superstitious power. In addition, it has been retold widely that he was so modest and lived simply and was easy to access, despite ranking in a high monastic position. This also makes him widely respected.

"Thais do adore this type of monk who is compassionate, simple but great; particularly the one who has superstitious power at the same time.

Pra Paisan Visalo, gave the above analysis on Somdej Toh's popularity. Pra Paisan also believes that "Somdej Toh" is a main factor behind the Jinapanjara phenomenon. Therefore, even though the origin of Jinapanjara is not clear, just a belief that it was selected and introduced by "Somdej Toh" is enough to make Jinapanjara so popular. Somdej Toh has been appreciated and has received high respect from a huge number of Thais, not only in his time but also at the present. He is regarded as a sacred monk with special talent on superstitious power incantations. All stories related to him, such as his behavior, his words, and his works, have been told repeatedly many times such that myth and reality are blurred<sup>4</sup>.

For example, his biography "*Toh Brahamarangi*", printed by Dhamma Sapa, describes his family background, life, personal character and also his teaching. The book has been ranked as the BEST SELLER biography among 17 venerable monks' biography books, which shows that "Somdej Toh" is still in vogue and of interest to Thais, even though he passed away 133 years ago.<sup>5</sup> The book was reprinted 10 times. The top 3 best sellers of 17 venerable monks' biography books by Dhamma Sapa are as follows:

- Somdej Toh
- Luang Poo Man
- Buddhadasa Bhikku<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Dr. Prawate Tantiphiwattanaskul, 16 February 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Pra Paisan Visalo, 7 July 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Somdej Pra Buddhajarn Toh passed away in 1872 at Bangkok when he was 84 years old.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Narin Unti, Dhamma Sapa Distributed Network Staff, 12 October 12, 2005.

Another fact that should be mentioned here is that his amulets, called “Pra Som Dej”, are the most popular amulets among collectors. Today, the price for a perfect one is about 20 million baht and normally “Pra Somdej” is not cheaper than one million baht each. The high price of his amulets is a significant indicator to point out how popular he is at the present time. In this case “Somdej Toh” is like a high quality brand name. With this factor, whatever objects that were created by him are then regarded as the best with no doubt by his followers. This applies as well to Jinapanjara. People know that this Gatha was introduced by him meaning this particular Gatha must have something special as it had been selected by Somdej Toh. Moreover, when King Rama IV asked why his amulet was so popular, Somdej Toh answered that he chanted Jinapanjara Gatha into his amulets.

“Somdej Toh” is well versed in the Tripidok. For this reason Jinapanjara Gatha might be the best of the best he selected.”<sup>7</sup>

“Whenever you chant Jinapanjara it means you will not receive only protection by the power of Gatha but also from “Somdej Toh” as well.”<sup>8</sup>

### 5.3.2 SOCIETY EFFECT & CHANTERS EFFECT

Besides all external factors that have influenced the growth of Jinapanjara chanting, the chanters themselves have been quite influential. This is like a direct sale system propagating its popularity by word of mouth, with strong recommendations to family, relative or friends. This growth path is silent in nature without any coordinated strategy and beyond some marketing plan.

Dr. Prawate Tantiphiwatthanaskul, psychiatrist, explained that in term of psychology the phenomenon of *Jinapanjara* might result from 4 main points:

#### 5.3.2.1 SUPERSTITION CAN BE FOUND EVERYWHERE

Thai society is full of supernatural stories regarding respectable monk masters and also the belief in amulets. This belief is likely at the very root of society and can easily be found in the Thai way of thinking, thus it is not new. Moreover, people older than 40 are possibly inclined to pay attention and believe in this kind of things more than ever. Thai society is a society that has gotten used to supernatural beliefs as its own foundation.

#### 5.3.2.2 A TRUSTFUL CONTENT

With the invitation of many supreme figures in Buddhism coming to give protection to chanters in only one prayer, this is quite unique and trustworthy in terms of belief. Moreover, “Somdej Toh” is also treated as a special figure too; so that has a lot of impact from Thai society,

#### 5.3.2.3 DO LOW INVESTMENT BUT EXPECT HIGH PROFIT

Although this habit can be found in general, not only in Thais, it seems that Thais adapt this idea in terms of karma, asking for a lot of good benefit by doing mere chanting.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Dr. Boonchai Kosolthanakul, 9 October 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Interview with Dr. Boonchai Kosolthanakul.

#### 5.3.2.4 LIVES IN HI-SPEED

As lives at present tend to vary more than ever and science is unable to give exact answers to unpredictable situations, people then seek something to fill their feeling of confidence. For example, even though people have things like ABS or airbags in their cars, nothing can guarantee absolute safety. People need something more than technology, something that provides absolutely safety for them, that is supernatural power which science and technology are unable to disprove.

“I found someone who died in a motorcycle accident because he had strong trust in his amulet. He neglected to wear safety helmet. It sounds unreasonable but this is a belief and found in general in Thai society.”<sup>9</sup>

Apart from fear, people attach their hope to invisible power as their invisible assistance. This can be seen clearly from businesspersons. Dr. Prawate pointed out that many businesspersons seek help from superstitious things in making their investments.

“Although they usually say “Mai Chuea Ya Lob Lu”, meaning “not believe, not insult”, actually they really trust in it. As business investments nowadays is subject to big risk, nobody and nothing is able to make sure it will be successful. So ritual ceremony, amulets or Feng Shui is implemented as the last answer, along with chanting.”<sup>10</sup>

It has been noted that Jinapanjara chanters, when they encounter a situation and get some good benefit, mention that Jinapanjara provided them super safety as well as good luck. Dr. Prawate gave an explanation to this phenomenon as “Self Fulfilling Prophecy.” It is the forecast one has for oneself and tries to make it become true. It is like the concept “you are what you believe.” “Self Fulfilling Prophecy” is the process when you believe in something you usually find evidence to support your hypothesis. For example, if you believe that the Jinapanjara will bring you good luck, then you will spot everything good that happen; and when you pay attention to something specially, it seems that thing you spotted will appear more often than ever. The more you try the more you find.

“Behind this phenomenon there are many stories backing it up as foundation to make it more incredible. But, importantly, it is hard to prove whether the stories are true or not, as well as no one would really like to prove it. I think this theory can be applied to explain other superstition in Thai society as well.”<sup>11</sup>

**Dr. Banjob Bannaruji**, a Chulalongkorn Pali scholar, sees this phenomenon as a reflection of society. People need something to cling to, something capable of providing them with a sense of confidence and security beyond the boundary of reason.

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9 Ibid. Interview with Dr.Prawate Tantiphiwatthanaskul.

10 Ibid. Interview with Dr.Prawate Tantiphiwatthanaskul.

11 Ibid. Interview with Dr.Prawate Tantiphiwatthanaskul.

“The world goes so fast and it changes so fast too. As people have to adapt themselves to the change, it is easy to feel frustrated. They want something to assure success, as well as encourage them when they fail. In addition, nowadays, we should not deny the power of advertisement and media; it has a powerful impact to drive something into popularity.”<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Banjob analyzed this phenomenon to result mainly from Somdej Toh’s reputation, plus the recognition of his amulet (“Pra Somdej”). The explanation as to why “Somdej Toh” has gained such a high respect from Thais comes from the fact that “Somdej Toh” had a significant relation to the monarchy.

### 5.3.3 CONTENT AND INTONATION EFFECT

As addressed previously in Chapter III, Jinapanjara was composed in the form of Patthayawatra Chant, which is easy to write and, importantly, to recite. Probably, this is the an important reason why most Jinapanjara followers agree that, although it looks quite long and is suppose to be very difficult, in reality, it is easier than their expectation. This character is likely a supporting factor that has made Jinapanjara become popular.

Thida Baramanand, the Managing Editor of Rak Luke Books Publishing, and a Jinapanjara follower, compared her feeling between "Jinapanjara" and "Pahung". From her own experience, she has chanted both "Pahung" and "Jinapanjara" regularly, but personally, she prefers Jinapanjara since it is easier to recite while "Pahung" is more difficult.

“Sometime, when my concentration is not good, it is difficult to recite "Pahung" correctly but for Jinapanjara it is easier.”<sup>13</sup>

She is also fascinated by Jinapanjara’s intonation and feels comfortable to chant whenever she is driving with the belief it would save her from every kind of danger.

In the same way, Dr. Boonchai Kosolthanakul M.D. of "FAST ENGLISH", a radio moderator and teacher, whose work is directly involved with voice skill, mentioned the unique character of Jinapanjara intonation that:

"Jinapanjara Gatha gives me many benefits, but one of them is its poetic beauty which enables me to improve both voice skill and communication skill as well, this is very useful to my career. Actually, I do not exactly know the different between them. I just know that personally I love to chant Jinapanjara Gatha and feel free to recite it more than "Pahung".”<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, **Boonyarut Aphicharttrisorn**, International news editor, “Kom Chad Luek” Newspaper clearly explained her impressive of Jinapanjara that:

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Dr. Banjob Bannaraji. 14 November 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Thida Baramanand, 13 October 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Interview with Dr. Boonchai Kosolthanakul.



“One thing about Jinapanjara that impressed me is its poetic beauty. Actually, it is quite long for lay people, but if compared to others, like Pahung or Yod Kan PraTripidok, I do not know why I can remember only Jinapanjara while the other two, I can not chant without a book. To me Jinapanjara is the simplest one and take less effort to recite.”<sup>15</sup>

Suphachai Jarusomboon is regarded as a guru on Mantra Therapy who runs clinics at Sukhumvit and also is a producer of Jinapanjara on audio records. He explained this particular point of Jinapanjara that:

"Jinapanjara provides wonderful benefits either chanting or listening, in term of Mantra Therapy. Listening to Jinapanjara will enable you to receive natural energy from those 9 planets < Dao Noppakroh > which will come to balance all elements in our body .This will create the highest potential in term of diseases prevention from outside."<sup>16</sup>

Suphachai also said that this kind of natural power from 9 planets can be seen from Kirlian Photography < invented by Samyon Kirlian, a Russian inventor> which is known among alternative medicine circle who are interested in Aura Energy. He stated that in case of sickness, listening to some prayers like Jinapanjara is one method of healing since the sound of the Mantra can create vibration which will adjust balance for good health.

In term of its content, the length and intonation, Jinapanjara is not exactly new nor totally different from other prayers in the same category of Parritta. But the point is it is the noteworthiness of its composer <or reviser> that has made it more outstanding and because of its purpose being for protection not for Dhamma illustration.

With its length, although it looks difficult for lay people who are not familiar with a long prayer, but the simplest form of verse was selected which is easy to recite that has made it quite effective in spreading it broadly beyond its limit.

#### **5.3.4. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS EFFECT**

With respect to the economic crisis, it is not as obvious an indicator that this phenomenon has been greatly impacted by the economic crisis. However, if we consider the gradually increasing sale of chanting books from many places after the crisis, plus the popular trend of its audio products that emerged after about 3-4 years, it might be considered to have a significant, although, indirectly impact on the boom of chanting.

According to the marketing information from The Ocean Media, Chula Bookstore and Dhamma Sapa, with respect to the trend of sales of chanting products, both books and audio records items, including Jinapanjara, all have been going up since the year of the economic crisis and have never go down since.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Boonyarut Aphicharttrisorn, 27 November 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Suphachai Jarusomboon, *Mantra Therapy*, Bangkok: Khunpor, 1994, pp 74-75.

In addition, chantings on audio records and many chanting books, some of which include Jinapanjara Gatha as part or all of their content, have been printed after the year 2000, especially after the year 2002, the peak time of the Jinapanjara phenomenon.

The number of young generation interested in this is increasing especially after the economic crisis, while the whole total sale is increasing obviously and still going well until the present.<sup>17</sup>

<The Ocean Media>

“Even though the total sale is not increasing rapidly, but it has a tendency to be a good product, particularly after the economic crisis when the total sales have grown gradually every year until now.”<sup>18</sup>

< Dhamma Sapa >

“It is noticeable that around the year 2002 – 2003 the total sale was obviously greater than before and then it has never reduced until now.”<sup>19</sup>

<Chula Bookstore >

As one factor of Jinapanjara’s popularity, **Sathienphong Wannapok**, accepted that the economic crisis has effected the new boom of Jinapanjara since the value of chanting in Thai society sticks on its appeal instead of its essence. Therefore, when they were in trouble or in crisis, Jinapanjara Gatha was raised as a sacred amulet and eventually gave them supernatural assistance.

Whereas **Dr.Boonchai Kosolthanakul** viewed that suffering and weakness due to the economic crisis might be a strong factor that motivated people to chant Jinapanjara Gatha more than before, as a sort of refuge. He considered it the usual nature of humans that spiritual development would come after the sufficiency of essential elements has been met. However, even though some people try to chant Jinapanjara Gatha for mere material benefit, it still is good, because chanting Jinapanjara Gatha is the simplest way to practice meditation without any side effects.

17 Interview with Preecha Dhammaphipop, 7 October 2005.

18 Ibid. Interview with Narin Unti.

19 Interview with Wuthichai Kongsad, 28 March 2007.

As a new chanter who started chanting for 4 years, **Thida Baramanand**, acknowledged that she was fascinated with chanting Jinapanjara because it works for reducing her stress and suffering. When she was asking, if her life was excellent, would she be interest in Jinapanjara Gatha, and the answer was, may be or may be not.

Nevertheless, after the year 2000, world circumstances looked worse than before, the economic situation seemed unstable, while new illnesses appeared along with the cruel incidents in the Deep South. For these fears, chanting Jinapanjara Gatha was supposed to be the simple way to create self-encouragement for herself.

One interesting point that should be mentioned is that before the economic crisis took place, Jinapanjara Gatha was available on cassette tapes on sale already in traditional style <that is, chanted by monks without music> but it was not popular as at the present. After that, starting from 2001, The Ocean Media, an audio company, launched Tibetan chanting songs in market with quite a good feed back from customers. Afterward, Jinapanjara song was reproduced by Sathienphong Wannapok, who was the first to reproduced Jinapanjara in new image, which was followed by Supachai Jarusomboon and many others.

These chanting songs were actually produced in Singapore by Chinese producers. At the beginning, it was popularized among Chinese-Thais, listening at home or occasionally in Chinese temples. Then, after it become legal, more products were available on shelves.

It might be noted that Sathienphong acknowledged that he got the idea for producing Jinapanjara song years before it was really produced from considered Christian and Mahayana religious songs.

“Christianity is highly success in applying religion to songs, and it works to attract followers’ attention as well as Mahayana Buddhism which also is successful in creating Dhamma songs as well.”<sup>20</sup>

Whether Tibetan chanting songs inspired the appearance of Jinapanjara song is hard to conclude since all producers insist on their own idea. However, if considered by the timing, there might be some connection linking these two chanting song.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Sathienphong Wannapok. 10 October 2005

#### **5.4 JINAPANJARA EFFECT: HOW JINAPANJARA PHENOMENON AFFECTS THAI CHANTING TRADITION**

The Jinapanjara phenomenon has created many new chanters including teenagers and middle class workers that are a new target of this activity. However, looking deeper at their expectation, chanting is not for spiritual development, as it normally has been; but instead it has been used to serve people for worldly and commercial demands. The Jinapanjara's main impact on Thai traditional chanting might be divided into two aspects as follows:

##### **5.4.1 CHANTING SERVES WORLDLY PURPOSES MORE THAN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENTS**

Thais perform chanting as a daily ritual, especially before sleeping, in order to calm down their mind. Some prefer chanting as one kind of practicing "Dhamanusati." But it seems that the Jinapanjara phenomenon has played a vital role in changing people's recognition in chanting such that it could be a tool to gain certain advantages and achievements. For the Jinapanjara chanters, chanting is not only a ritual for spiritual development, it also plays a new role in gaining worldly achievement as well.

"If we are insufficient in essential materials, it is hard to be interested in spiritual development. Jinapanjara provides chanters several stages of benefit, starting from the basic one for those who are insufficient in their well being, and then they can go further for spiritual development. So it depends on the chanters, which stage you are at in, what you can get from the practice of Jinapanjara: success, wealth, health, or mind purification."

As can be seen from above, Dr. Boonchai described Jinapanjara in terms of its benefit. This role is really suitable for people in the consumerist world where they have to survive high competition. For this new image, chanting is treated as an "individual activity" more than "religious ritual" as it used to be.

##### **5.4.2 CHANTING BECOMES MARKETABLE PRODUCTS**

Many Thais have been taught to calm down their mind before sleeping by chanting some famous prayers like Namom Tassa, Itipiso or Pae Metta. With the new image created by the Jinapanjara phenomenon, chanting is now more seriously performed than before and has gained high attention, not only Jinapanjara but also other prayers as well. In book stores and audio shops, many chanting books and audio records are displayed as marketable products. The prayers, similar to Jinapanjara, have created interest, sort of as Jinapanjara byproducts. Many products related to chanting have been launched on the market during and after the peak period of Jinapanjara phenomenon (2002-2005) as can be seen in the table below:

Book Titles	Authors	Publishers	First Year Printing and Re-Printed
“Namo Tassa”	Prasert Boonta	Knowledge Plus	2003/2004
Pahung. The trouble situations of The Lord Buddha	Prasert Boonta	Knowledge Plus	2004
Jinapanjara and its legend	Prasert Boonta	Knowledge Plus	2004/2005
Pahung Mahaga and Jinapanjara	Lek Original	Lek Original	2003
Pray Therapy	Verachet Pongpan	One world	2004/2004/2005
Pray for Good Health, Good luck and wealth.	Verachet Pongpan	One world	2004/2004/2005

Wuthichai Kongsad, Assistant Marketing Manager of Chula bookstore, Siam Square, described his experience and viewpoint regarding Jinapanjara with respect to the sales that:

“After Sathienphong launched his *Jinapanjara* in song and it gained high attention from customers, it was rather influential to the trend of other chanting books as well. Formerly, chanting books merely contained the basic and traditional prayers like Morning Chanting or Evening Chanting with their meaning translation in Thai. But after *Jinapanjara* boomed, a new trend of chanting books emerged.”<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that besides Jinapanjara in song, Sathientphong also launched books on chanting to the market as well. His books are some of the many books that came out, apart from this chanting phenomenon. These are some of Sathienphong books about chanting:

**Gatha Chinabanchorn** “คาถาชินบัญชร” with content focus on describing the history of both Jinapanjara and “Somdej Toh” accompanied with an appendix portraying a list of 28 previous Buddhas that appear in Jinapanjara as well as 7 Sutra and Paritta and, last, a brief story of the important Arahants mentioned in Jinapanjara.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Interview with Wuthichai Kongsad.

**Teaching Kids To Chant, *Son Luke Hai Suad Mon*** “สอนลูกให้สวดมนต์” this book is meant to communicate with parents, encourage them to realize the value and benefits of chanting so they can pass this idea to their children.

**Three Mantra for Young Families, *Sam Mon Gatha Saksit Samrub Krobkrua Wai Jo*** “สามมนต์คาถาศักดิ์สิทธิ์ สำหรับครอบครัววัยโจ๋” with some content like Gatha Chinbanchorn but re-arranged and Itipiso and Pahung added as three sacred Mantras for the modern family. This book was first launched after re-arranging in January, 2005.

The new trends of chanting books after the Jinapanjara boom are not traditional like before, but obviously focus on certain advantages such as wealth and worldly success. Wuthichai gave information that, today, the total sale of chanting books is still going quite well, although not as good as ever during 2002 – 2005.

### 5.5. THE REFLECTION OF THAI SOCIETY

Pra Paisan Visalo, a scholar monk and author of the book “*The Future of Thai Buddhism*”, gave the opinion that the Jinapanjara phenomenon reflected the individualist culture of Thais middle class.

“I think this is a phenomenon in the circle of middle class society more than local society since it can respond to middle class people’s main demands which are wealth and safety. Interestingly, about the expectation from superstitious power, I found that when the villagers pray, they often ask for community peacefulness more than asking for personal demand. Likewise, they do not have a private shrine at home but the shrine normally belongs to community instead. Recently, it has begun to change that city people turned to be more individual such as the fashion of the worship of Paladkhigh and some started to build their own shrine at home.”<sup>22</sup>

At the time this thesis is being written (2007), the phenomenon of Jatukarm Ramathep is running at its peak point, as can be seen from what happened on February 22, 2007 when around 200,000 people went to Wat Mahathat, Nakornsi Thammaraj province, in order to receive this icon. Moreover, Kasikorn Thai research center reported that this year an immense amount of money, about 1,000 million baht increase in the amulet market, because of Jatukarm Ramathep and relevant business. Today, Thais enjoy changing their mobile phone, updating their computer or going crazy in the cyber world. In the opposite way, they turn to be interested in ancient faith which is unable to be proved.

On Songkran and New Year festival, many people are killed by road accidents, several hundreds a year. Some are caused by cars while many are caused by motorcyclists driving without a safety helmet. Furthermore, drunk drivers often cause accidents and make new handicaps on society. This means that every time people go out of their home, either by own car, public bus or motorcycle, they run the risk of having an accident even if they do not break any traffic rules, caused by drunk drivers, careless bus drivers or motorcycle racing gangs as can be often seen from the newspaper.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Interview with Pra Paisan Visalo.

As this point, the Jinapanjara phenomenon does not reflect merely inner insecure of Thai people but it also reflects Thai society as an unsafe place as well. In addition, Jinapanjara phenomenon seems to reflect Thais habit as a SABAI SABAI society in that most are not concerned with safety but still want to be protected. They see the concept of “SABAI SABAI สบาย สบาย or TAM ARAI TAM JAI KUEA THAI THAE ทำอะไรตามใจคือไทยแท้ that they can break any safety rule such as wearing safety helmet or driving while drunk, with the feeling of “Mai Pen Rai ไม่เป็นไร”, “it doesn’t matter.” Instead of establishing an effective system to provide safety they turn to cling to invisible assistance like amulets, especially Buddha Image made by GEJI ARJARN, or perform chanting like Jinapanjara.

The popularity of the Jinapanjara phenomenon appeared after the economic crisis This could reflect that in Thai society superstition is still a social foundation, notwithstanding the advance of science and technology. Instead, science and technology have been used for distributing superstitious belief widely and effectively, as seen from many website demonstrating Jinapanjara and welcoming people to download Jinapanjara on CD which is very easy to reproduce and copying and thus being spread widely.

### 5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As previously mentioned, during the time of writing this thesis, the trend of Jatukarm Ramathep is arising as a hot phenomenon, appearing in newspapers almost everyday either as a news item (fighting over Jatukarm Ramathep) or advertising its producing ceremony. Meanwhile, Khunphantharakrajadej became a celebrity after passed away at the age of 108. His story has been told in several versions in many books available in general book shops. The big icons of Jatukarm Ramathep hang broadly and commonly with the belief and pride as a sort of spiritual fashion.

Going back to the years 2002-2005, at that time Jinapanjara was celebrated at the peak of its chanting phenomenon; related products were selling well; plenty of copies were printed over and over in order to distribute to public. Jinapanjara appeared almost everywhere in book shops, audio shops as well as some temples.

Research for this thesis started in middle of year 2005 until today, 2007, and found many interesting points which provide some understanding of Thai society. One year and a half was spent collecting information and interviewing relevant people. It is quite obvious that Jinapanjara is a new chanting phenomenon which has affected greatly the traditional chanting in Thai society in several aspects. Following are concluding remarks for this thesis.

*First*, Jinapanjara’s origin is still a mystery as to whether it came from a Sri Lankan or Lanna scholar. However, at least 500 years ago it was chanted in the northern part under the name “Jaiyabengchon” as an auspicious prayer in ritual ceremony, and was known among some people who attended ritual performances. Its origin became clearer when “Somdej Toh” received the manuscript from a pagoda in Kampangeth and then revised it and used it in making his amulets. Despite many myths and legends, Jinapanjara’s route is still indistinct. Before it was

added as a part of chanting books around 30 years ago, Jinapanjara likely disappeared from Thai society for a while. No mention in public was made until gradually it emerged with distribution done under the care taker abbot of Wat Rakhang around the year 1957. Subsequently, it was verified by several figures in society both from monastic and secular parts.

*Second*, it is remarkable that this gatha has been associated with many prominent and influential figures that have good educational background, both monks and lay people, such as the present Supreme Patriarch, Chao Khun Norraratjamanit, Phanomthien and Sathienphong Wannapok. In addition, when society was stuck in frustration resulting from the economic crisis, people became nervous due to the unpredictable circumstances and science was unable to assure security. In this circumstance, superstitious came to take place and play a vital role in soothing people and giving them courage and support. With this condition, when Jinapanjara was launched as a spiritual audio product, first created by Sathienphong, it quickly gained wide attention and from society, particularly among the middle class group.

*Third*, it can be said that the Jinapanjara's popularity *unintentionally* resulted from many factors. But without "Somdej Toh" it would not have been as popular as seen at present. The study of the Jinapanjara phenomenon can not be separated from "Somdej Toh" since it was found that "Somdej Toh" is the main factor behind this phenomenon. Most chanters agree that they respect him personally, because of his character, his teaching or even just the feeling that "Somdej Toh" is like their superior relative who has compassion and is ready to give them assistance whenever they need it. This is the special aspect of Jinapanjara that makes it totally different from other prayers.

*Fourth*, in terms of traditional chanting, Jinapanjara is categorized as a type of *Paritta*, a kind of prayer mainly for protection like the Hindu *Atharva Veda*. Chanting for protection itself is not a new custom in Thai society. In Theravada Buddhism, there are many Paritta texts that offer benefit similar to Jinapanjara but have not draw attention from Thais like Jinapanjara. Furthermore, the versification of Jinapanjara was wisely composed, with the simple but beautiful format making it not difficult to remember for lay people in general. This is another interesting factor explaining why most ardent chanters are so fascinated and stick with chanting Jinapanjara, even though it is quite a long. Also, it has been found that the content is one of the outstanding factors of Jinapanjara Gatha. Even though some chanters do not pay much attention to it, this is the only one prayer that mentions most of the supreme holy names in Buddhism, giving strong faith to the chanters as a superpower prayer to bring chanters invisible protection.

*Fifth*, for the effects on Thai traditional chanting, it is found that Jinapanjara has motivated people to pay attention to chanting practice more than ever. It has changed the image of chanting from the practice of old persons to the activity for everyone. The trend of chanting has motivated people to explore other prayers that are believed to provide particular benefits to chanters. Seen from many books and audio records that have been launched recently, it is found that they mostly focus on a specific advantage. Jinapanjara Gatha is different from the past by the detail of



benefit since it is more extended to serve the desire of contemporary people and also has been made into a marketable product.

*Sixth*, to examine people's motivation under this phenomenon, one interesting point has been found, that is, the Jinapanjara phenomenon is one piece of the jigsaw puzzle confirming the belief that superstition is widely rooted in Thai society, not only in poor people, but also the middle class who have a good educational background.

*Seventh*, chanting in Thai society today means more than chanting for mind purification. It is found that most of the Jinapanjara chanters are those who do not know the real teaching of the Buddha. For the Buddhists who are acquainted with Buddhist teaching in the Tripitaka, the Buddha himself criticized the use of magical power as something not real and not sustainable. This seems to make the Dhamma Practitioner Buddhists, those who have enough knowledge to distinguish between Buddhism and superstition, not interested in the Jinapanjara. However, it is not the objective of the thesis to say what should be counted as "real Buddhism." The objective of the thesis is mainly to observe and understand a notable phenomenon called "the Jinapanjara Phenomenon." It is solely done under a belief that to understand Thai society, one way is to explore what Thai people think and do. It seems that the belief in magical power and superstition is one of the very old behaviors of human beings. It persists everywhere in the world. Some people say that sometimes it seems hopeless to imagine that one day this kind of belief will disappear from the earth. The question is, if this thing can never be abolished from our society, how to live with it? This is an important question.

*Eighth*, this phenomenon reflects the conditions when *faith leading wisdom*. Buddhism is considered as a *religion of wisdom* more than *religion of faith*. Actually, faith is useful in order to get achievement but without wisdom it is not different from a power without control or traveling without a good map which makes it very easy to get lost. The chanting Jinapanjara phenomenon, even though it comprises faith more than wisdom, at least chanting Jinapanjara itself is the process that is capable of providing "inner development" because of its length and chanters' belief. Temporary concentration is the first stage of its benefit which chanters achieve no matter what benefit they expect. Thus, it depends on chanters themselves, whether they can develop their lives from this basic benefit of Jinapanjara, or what they learn from Somdej Toh's teaching in being his followers through chanting Jinapanjara.

Chanting Jinapanjara could be a bridge leading chanters to interest in Dhamma, and the opportunity to achieve Buddhist wisdom. Meanwhile, it could be merely a refuge for weak people to console themselves among all the uncertainty of the world without any reason but only faith. This is the interest and challenge for Jinapanjara chanters, to see if they can go beyond the boundary of *faith* and access *wisdom*.