

MAHACHULA-ACADEMICS: PROACTIVE PROPAGATION OF BUDDHISM AT KHON KAEN CAMPUS



Dr. Niraj Ruangsang

ABSTRACT

This paper claims that ‘Mahachula-academics always support the propagation of Buddhism’. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Khon Kaen Campus has its vision to be ‘the International Buddhist University for Mental and Social Development’. Besides the academic development, the essential means used in the mental and social development is the effective dissemination of Buddhist teaching. To reach the set goal of the campus, the model of the network building for the Buddhist proactive propagation is created and operated in collaboration with other organizations and educational institutes. This paper discusses the model of network building for the Buddhist proactive propagation of Khon Kaen Campus based on the research of the Deputy Rector of the campus, Phra Sophonphatthanapundit (Assoc. Dr.), conducted in 2016. In so doing, it will first provide some of background of the topic: the dissemination of Buddhism in Thailand, network building of the main campus, proactive propagation of Buddhism in the northeast; and then it will provide some perspectives on the propagation of Buddhism based on the model.

Keywords: network creation, model of Buddhism’s proactive dissemination

INTRODUCTION

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University stipulates the organization of education and propagation of Buddhism as its primary mission by establishing both national and international networks. Following the main campus philosophy, Khon Kaen Campus has its vision to be ‘the International Buddhist University for Mental and Social Development’ and also to spread Buddhism in the northeast of the country. To reach such specified goal of the campus, the model of the network building for the Buddhist proactive propagation is created by the Deputy Rector of Khon Kaen Campus, Phra Sophonphatthanapundit (Assoc. Prof. Dr.) and operated in the collaboration of the other organizations and educational institutes. The outputs of the model application rely on outstanding betterment of the religious dissemination in the region. Of course, the model is not simply created as it requires the intensive governmental and academic experiences of the deputy rector as well as the well support from his subordinates. It is very interesting how the model is developed and implemented in order to promote Buddhism within the region. The key of success in applying the model is the network building and cooperation of the network institutions. This paper discusses the model of network building for the Buddhist proactive propagation of Khon Kaen Campus based on the research, conducted in 2016, with 2,005 study samples. In so doing, it will first provide some of background of the topic: dissemination of Buddhism in Thailand, network building of the main campus, proactive propagation of Buddhism in the northeast; and it will then provide some perspectives on the propagation of Buddhism based on the model.

BUDDHIST DISSERMINATION IN THAILAND

The dissemination of Buddhism has its root in the time of the Pāli Canon where the Buddha ordered sixty Arahant disciples to propagate the religion.

Wander, o *bhikkhus*, on a wandering for the benefit of many folk, for the happiness of many folk, out of sympathy for the world, for the welfare, for the benefit, for the happiness of angels and mankind. Do not the two of you go as one. Declare, o *bhikkhus*, the dhamma, beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, beautiful

in the end, both in meaning and in letter; announce the fully and totally complete and pure holy life.¹

After the passing away of the Lord, his religious heirs have continued the propagation of the religion in many parts of the world. During the 5th to 13th centuries, Southeast Asian empires were influenced directly from India, following Mahayana Buddhism and according to the Chinese pilgrim Yijing, who noted in his travels, all major sects of Indian Buddhism flourished in these areas.² After the decline of Buddhism in India, missions of Sinhalese monks gradually converted the Mon people and the Pyu city-states from Ari Buddhism to Theravāda and over the next two centuries also brought Theravāda Buddhism to the Bamar people, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia where it supplanted previous forms of Buddhism.³ Since then, Theravāda has become the dominant sect in Thailand.

Today, it is undeniable that there is a close relationship between Buddhism and the Thai people. The majority of Thai people apply teachings of the Buddha as a guideline in their daily lives. Also, Buddhism influences the Thai society in many areas such as social and cultural studies, social work, economy, and even politics. Buddhism and Thai people therefore are bound in a relationship like ‘an unbroken network’.⁴ The root of the prosperity of Buddhism in Thailand is the existence of the Sangha governmental organizations, which has continued the propagation of Buddhism for a long time. The Sangha in Thailand plays an important role in spreading the religion in three main aspects: dissemination of Buddhism to the communities in the form of the Dhammadūta (religious propagators) mission, using modern information technology and accessible language based on knowledge or research; dissemination of Buddhism to the communities by means of educational welfare allowing the temples or

¹*‘Caratha bhikkhave cārikam bahujaṇahitāya bahujaṇasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. Mā ekena dve agamittha, desetha bhikkhave Dhammaṃ, ādikalyāṇaṃ majjhekalyāṇaṃ pariyosānakalyāṇaṃ, sātthaṃ sabyañjanaṃ; kevalaparipuṇṇaṃ parisuddhaṃ brahmacariyaṃ pakāsetha’*. Vi.M., (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Press, 2006), p.40.

²Bhikkhu Sujato, **Sects & Sectarianism: The Origin of Buddhist Schools**, (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundaton, 2007), p. 72.

³Richard F. Gombrich, **Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Banares to Modern Colombo**. (London: Routledge, 2006), p.3.

⁴Phra Sophonphatthanapundit, “**Model of Network Building for the Buddhist Proactive Propagation of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University at Khon Kaen Campus**”. (paper presented at the The 3th National and the 1st International Conference: Integration of Buddhism with Research to develop a Sustainable Society, Khon Kaen, Thailand, 30 March 2016 2016), p.395.

religious facilities as learning centers for people at all levels of society, providing further education beyond the official education system of Thailand; promoting public health by using the temples and religious facilities as vocational centers for the community such as hospitals, health care stations, residential places, convalescent homes and vocational workshops.⁵ From above, it is said that the propagation of Buddhism involves social assistance, social service, education and management. The propagators today do not only require Buddhist knowledge but also service, academic and administrative skills. Mahachula Buddhist University seems to be the only training center to utilize these religious propagation skills.

MAHACHULA BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY: NETWORK BUILDING

In 1887 (2430), His Majesty King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) established the first Sangha college in Thailand ‘Mahadhatu Witthayalai’, which was in Wat Mahadhatu, Bangkok. It was intended to be an institute where monks, novices and laity come to study the Buddhist doctrines and higher education. On 13th September 1896 (2439), the college was given a new status and name in relation to His Majesty King Chulalongkorn as ‘Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University’.⁶ An essential progress was made in 1997 (2540), where the Thai Parliament passed the Act, recognizing the university as a legal entity and the university under the government supervision.⁷ Since then, its educational management has expanded all over the country. Thousands of both home and overseas students registered to study. Operated by hundreds of staff members, the university now has 11 campuses, 16 Sangha colleges, 3 Extended Classrooms, 14 Academic Service Units, 1 Domestic Affiliated Institute and 5 International Affiliated Institutes.⁸ Currently, the university is offering the postgraduate education in 11 programs under the supervision of the Graduate School; the bachelor programs are under the management of the four faculties: Buddhism, Education, Humanities and Social Sciences. For social service, the university has academic service units to operate the Abhidhammajotika College, Buddhist Sunday School, Buddhist Research Institute, Vipassana Meditation Institute, Language Institute and ASEAN Studies Centre.⁹

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*, p.8.

⁸*Ibid.*, p.10.

⁹*Ibid.*

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University stipulates the organization of education and Buddhist propagation as its primary mission by establishing both national and international networks through the activities it organizes such as the Vesak Celebration Ceremony in Thailand together with the participation of attendees from over 80 countries.¹⁰ Most of the university's missions at the organizational level relate to academic collaboration with its external networks. For instance, the International Seminar on 'Buddhist Dhamma and Development of Society and Economy' was organized by the university together with the participation of 85 countries. Also, a number of activities such as Project of Dhamma Teaching in Schools, International Dhammadūta Propagators, and International Conferences are organized with the same purpose. Besides the regular education management of the university, one of the most important activities is 'Morality Training for the Public' sponsored by the Ministry of Education in the fiscal year 2008. In order to achieve the goal determined, the university has approached many agencies and networks to ask for their collaboration such as Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Office of National Buddhism and the Sangha in Area 14.¹¹

The university's model for the creation and maintenance of external and internal networks depends on the cooperation of many people both inside and outside of the university. It is operated by integration between Buddhism and modern sciences as a corpus for connecting people, organizations and parties. The most advantageous point of MCU is that the institute was established at the initiation of King Rama V as a Buddhist University. Besides its reputation in education management for the Mahanikāya Sangha Buddhist tradition, the university has been honored domestically and internationally for its devotion to Buddhist teaching preservation. The international mission is organized in accordance with the vision of Phra Brahmapundit (Prof. Dr.), Rector of the university who said that 'International-hood appeared through organizing the Vesak Ceremony as the world important day, the university is assigned by the government to organize the conference, leading to the agreement for establishing Thailand as the centre of Buddhism'.¹² The effective education management of

¹⁰ International Council for Day of Vesak, **"Program: The 13th United Nations for Day of Vesak Celebrations,"** (Thailand: The Royal Government of Thailand, 2016), pp.5-122.

¹¹ Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, **Development Plan of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Higher Education, Version 11 (2012 -2016).** (Bangkok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Press, 2549), p.150.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.151.

the university leads to the increasing size of its network. The university has also gained trust among the networks for constantly organizing many international projects.

KHON KEAN CAMPUS: NETWORK BUILDING MODEL OF PROACTIVE BUDDHIST PROPAGATION

Following the main campus, Khon Kaen Campus approaches the propagation of Buddhism with a mission to create a network within and outside the country by organizing Buddhist activities with the participation of institutions such as educational institutes, government and private sector agencies, the public, and the Sangha working in local, national and regional areas. This leads to the acquirement of a model of network creation and proactive propagation of Buddhism in the northeast of Thailand. In other words, this creates a domestic and international institutional collaboration, makes possible the establishment of a network inside and outside of the country, and creates a clearer practical guideline and means of participation in the proactive dissemination of Buddhism. In Khon Kaen Campus, the network of proactive dissemination is built in two levels: 1) Domestic Level: the network within the country divided into three levels (local, provincial, and national); 2) International Level: the network at the regional level which was a connection between countries in the Indochina region such as Laos, Vietnam and China.

DOMESTIC NETWORK

According to the mission of MCU, to organize Buddhist education together with the dissemination of Buddhism to all regions of Thailand, MUC KK, as one campus of the mother university, critically attempts to increase the effectiveness of Buddhism dissemination by stipulating the vision of creating networks to seek the collaboration of various related agencies inside the I-San region. The university joins hands with the Sangha in Area 9, official agencies, educational institutes, local administrative organizations in Khon Kaen and surrounding provinces to proactively spread Buddhism.

The model of network building for MCU KK's proactive propagation of Buddhism was carried out through participation of other institutes (mainly classified into three groups: educational institutes; public, government and private sector organizations; Sangha network) and the general public through the activities of the campus. Integrated with the strategies of the university, the university organized projects and activities such as the projects of 'Tipitaka

Study’, ‘Buddhist Idol Development’ and ‘Seminars on Local Wisdom’, in collaboration with educational institutes such as police, military, faculty of teachers, and local residents. The empirical results of these can be seen in the increasing number of Buddhist monks and laypersons coming to visit and study at the campus and eventually the campus is well-known in the community. And, now a number of important government and private sector units surrounding the campus participated in the campus’ activities more and more. This clearly indicates that the model of proactive propagation of Buddhism is effective and gradually shows its successful outcomes.

The model of network creation through a group of Sangha networks was brought about by organizing Buddhist activities or ceremonies with the collaboration of the Sangha in different areas. The university together with the Office of Morality and Ethics and Stability Promotion of Nation, Religion and Monarch organized the project to celebrate 2600 years of the Buddha’s enlightenment. There were many activities in this ceremony such as ‘Sīlācāri-Sīlācārīnā Ordination’, ‘Tipiṭaka Recitation’, ‘Enlightened Wisdom of the Buddha Exhibition’, ‘Buddha and Arahant Relics Exhibition’, and ‘Triple Gem Virtue Walking’. The organized projects are consistent with the university strategy to promote Buddhism, art and cultures as mentioned in Strategy 01: to support students and personnel in organizing activities to promote Buddhism and conserve art and cultures, and Strategy 02: to develop the campus as a national and international learning resource of Buddhism and other cultures.

INTERNATION NETWORK

Building the network of Buddhist propagation in the Indochina region is one of the primary missions of Khon Kaen Campus. It is the international network building in a region which has had the same cultural and social basis. The university has established the network centre of Buddhist learning in the Indochina region at Thatsrikhotbong Temple, Thakheak City, Khummuan State, Laos. The most tangible outcome of this can be seen in the increasing number of the students from Laos, Cambodia and other countries coming to study at the campus. Through organizing the international conference, the campus gains collaboration from international governmental organizations such as the Consulates of China, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Furthermore, the campus is now working on its first international journal ‘Journal of Buddhist Education and Research, JBER’ joined by the scholars from USA, Australia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Singapore, China, India, and Sri Lanka. This is also the result from building the international network based on the model. The international journal can

be used as a medium of dissemination of Buddhism in the form of academic activities as they allow the scholars to exchange knowledge and give an opportunity for those who are interested in learning the academic Buddhist knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Created by the Deputy Rector of Khon Kaen Campus, the model of networking building for proactive propagation of Buddhism of Khon Kaen Campus is effective in terms of implementation within the region. The model is clearly developed from the network building of the main campus and is adjusted to suite the working contexts. For the domestic network relationship maintenance, there does not seem to be a major issue for the campus as all network institutions uses Thai as the official language to communicate. This is simple to create understanding between the institutes. Yet, for the international one, the campus needs more personnel with capacity in languages. This leads to the establishment of Language Institute of Khon Kaen Campus at the beginning of this year, 2017. Following the main campus, Khon Kaen Campus also issues the notice of English proficiency for the staff and organizes English training for all the personnel. This could be the best way to get all the campus staff ready to maintain the international network in the future. Moreover, to deal with risk management, highly qualified personnel with high English proficiency are recruited to support the mission. Even though the foreign language development for the personnel of the campus is an academic matter, it is a very intrinsic operation which could support the propagation of Buddhism in the region. The model application is truly consistent with the main mission of the main campus and could be the prototype for dissemination of Buddhism in other regions as well. So, it is the primary mission of Buddhist University to improve the quality of both academic matters and staff simultaneously to serve its unique mission which is ‘the educational development and propagation of Buddhism’. From the above discussion, this can definitely be said ‘*Mahachula-academics always support the propagation of Buddhism*’.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the international mission of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University is expanding rapidly in many parts of the country under the leadership of the Rector, Phra Brahmapundit (Prof. Dr.) to meet the vision of being ‘the International Buddhist University for mental and social development’. This truly benefits the spread of the Buddha teachings inside and outside of the country. As the branch in the northeast of the country, Khon Kaen

Campus now is developing its personnel to be prepared for this mission. The model of network building for the propagation of Buddhism at Khon Kaen Campus is being implemented to expand its networks and to propagate the religion in the assigned areas. The most empirical result this mission wishes to accomplish is ‘*to prolong existence and prosperity of Buddhism within the region*’. Wherever, there are the religious heirs, teachings, and followers Buddhism will definitely exist on earth. ‘*Mahachula-academics*’ are truly the key for this.

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