

# THE ROLES OF LAO SAṄGHA OF THE BUDDHISM FOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (BDP) IN LAO SOCIETY



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## ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative research with three main objectives as stated below:  
(1) to study concept of Buddhist Social Development in Theravada Buddhism  
(2) to study the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao society (3) to analyze roles of Lao Saṅgha of the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao society.

The documentary research appearing in chapter 1 introduces the significance, purpose and scope of the study, Key words and approaches used in this chapter are explained based on examples. Much of the discussion in chapter 2 involves the concept of social development in Theravada Buddhism, the definition, aim and doctrine relating to social development, Factor contributing, the ethical concept used by monks and the methods of Social Development in Buddhism; the discussion appearing in chapters 3 and 4 deals with Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao Society and Roles of Lao Saṅgha of the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao society, Chapter 3 focuses on a case study of background and objective of the BDP, structural system, administration of BD and departments of BDP; the discussion in chapter 4 is the opportunities and Barrier of working in the BDP, the roles of (BDP) in Lao society and impact to the society Chapter 5 summarizes the preceding four chapters the concept of social development in Theravada Buddhism.

Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao Society, roles of Lao Saṅgha of the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao society and suggestions for organization and further research work; the findings show that the Buddhism for Development Project have six objectives to (1) Vipassanā meditation, (2) Dharma Sanjorn or Mobile Dharma, (3) Community development, (4) Media and Communication, (5) Training and Curriculum, (6) Mettadharma (Networking Project); the all of departments in the BDP have function to social development each side in Lao society but have only one objective is missionary of Buddhist doctrine to people in society, the use full dharma to living life and using the concepts of Buddhist social development to community such teaching Buddhist morality in schools, temples, cause of younger, students, children become good person, have a morality and away from drugs; especially have grateful of parents, knowledge of tradition, culture and good understanding of Buddhism also make Buddhist ceremony of novices to children, leading people in the community make of organic agriculture without chemical, support and keeping of the environment; besides that have role to protection and relief of abomination HIV and tuberculosis in society.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Social Development, Engaged Buddhism, the roles of Lao Buddhist Saṅgha.

## INTRODUCTION

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is located in the Centre of Indochina. It borders China to the north, Myanmar to the northwest, Thailand to the west, Cambodia to the south and Vietnam to the east. It has been a Buddhist country for a long time. The Laos country has an area of 236,800 k<sup>m<sup>2</sup></sup><sup>1</sup> and a population of 6.8 million. Almost all ethnic or "lowland" Lao are followers of Theravada Buddhism 79 % percent of the population<sup>1</sup>.

The remainder of the population belongs to at least 48 distinct ethnic minority groups. Most of these ethnic minorities are practitioners of animism, with beliefs that vary greatly among groups; Animism is predominant among most Sino-Thai groups, such as the Thai Dam and Thai Daeng, as well as among Mon-Khmer and Burmo-Tibetan groups. Even among lowland Lao, many pre-Buddhist animistic religious beliefs have been incorporated into Theravada Buddhist practice. Catholics and Protestants constitute approximately percent of the population. Other minority religious groups include those practicing the Bahai faith, Islam, Mahayana Buddhism, and Confucianism; a very small number of citizens follow no religion. Theravada Buddhism is by far the most prominent organized religion in the country, with nearly 5,634 temples serving as the focus of religious practice as well as the center of community life in rural areas. In most lowland Lao villages, religious tradition remains strong. Most Buddhist men spend some part of their lives as monks in temples, even if only for a few days. There are approximately 15,564 monks and 19,994 novice total 35,558 in the country, indicating years of study in temples<sup>2</sup>. In addition, there are approximately 206 Phokhao (man) and 721 nuns, generally older women who are widowed, residing in temples throughout the country. The Buddhist Church is under the direction of a supreme patriarch who resides in Vientiane and supervises the activities of the temple's central office, the Dhammasapa hall.

Buddhism has been an influence in Lao society for many centuries to the present day; Buddhism is the most popular religion of the Lao people. Buddhism is a vital feature of daily life and casts a strong influence on Lao society; Lao women can be seen each morning giving alms to Buddhist monks and novices; Lao men are expected to become

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<sup>1</sup>National Assembly Committee, **The Constitution of Lao People's Democratic Republic** 1991 C.E 1996 p.1.

<sup>2</sup>Statistics of Administrative organization of Lao Sangha 2015-2016.

monks at least for a short time in their live<sup>3</sup>. The Lao Sangha is in a unique position in the development role; with the historical background that all present senior members of the Sangha played an active role in mobilizing people to join the successful 1975 revolution<sup>4</sup> the Sangha was not eradicated by the communist regime, although a large number of monks and nuns disrobed or left the country, those who remained slowly regained the respect of the communities and played active roles in society such as teaching in schools. The recent revival of meditation practice also means that the real spirit of Buddhism is coming back, with the healing power that comes from maintaining mental strength; the proposed programme is designed to utilize local culture and wisdom, to be pro-Buddhist in the sense of using traditional Buddhist values, while remaining inclusive of all religious and ethnic groups. The Lao style of socialism is threatened by three big neighbors, Thailand, China and Vietnam where increased capitalism and the spread of rampant consumerism have created many social problems<sup>5</sup>. Lao, too, is discovering that subsistent peasant communities are being up-rooted, albeit slower than in neighboring countries, Young people particularly in the big cities are unhappy and discontented with a traditional way of life.

They are eagerly responding to the pulls of modernization and consumerism which is only now becoming evident in Laos society many turn to drugs; the Sangha leaders feel that Lao society is facing these new challenges and they themselves can play meaningful roles if members are well trained in understanding their own spiritual and cultural roots as well as the complication of globalization and the social, cultural and environmental issues related to it<sup>6</sup>. they also see the benefit and sustainability of the participatory approach to community development where people are empowered to make their own decisions in the process of improving their own situations. Once the monks and nuns, who are natural cultural leaders in Theravada Buddhist communities, are equipped with these knowledge and skills, they can facilitate community development in an egalitarian way consistent with the spirit of Buddhism and Lao moderate socialism, for this to be practical, lay people

<sup>3</sup>Mr. Soukaseum Bodhisane, **National Tourism Authority of Lao P.D.R.**,2000, p.2.

<sup>4</sup>(Bounleuth Sengsoulin, **The Lao Shagha of Luang Prabang and their Social Roles in the Post-1975 Period**, 2004, p3.

<sup>5</sup>Ronald D. Renard, Mainstreaming Alternative Development in Thailand, Lao PDR and Myanmar, 2007.

<sup>6</sup>University of Hawaii. **Laos and Its Religious Culture**, 2009.

must also be deeply involved, and so this proposed project targets young people to work in partnership with monks and nuns.<sup>7</sup>

The Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) was registered in 2003 with permission from the Lao Front for National Construction on March 23rd, as a non-profit organization to undertake the mission goal for Lao Saṅgha is skilled in promoting dharma and has a role in community development and the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) is one organization build during at time of change in the Lao society with economic development and the problem issues in society. thus have a gathering of Lao Saṅgha, Buddhists people and someone want to help, reduction and resolve social by using doctrine in Buddhism and create monks to be leader of social development was using the concept of Buddhist social development; teaching Buddhist morality to people in the society and the children, youth in the every schools to know, understanding and prevention, reduction of problem issues in Lao society; Thus the BDP cause of Lao Saṅgha have more roles of social development such as teaching Buddhist morality to people and the children, youth in Lao society, using Buddhist doctrine to living life, conserve of environment and organic agriculture; thus the researcher needs to do this thesis in order for the benefit of the Lao people as well as the people around the world.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research work is a documentary research; the research methodology can be divided as follows of the collecting data primary source of Pali Canon, Tipitaka in order to explore the body of know from about the Pali Canon, Three Pitaka Commentaries and Sub-commentaries, by using the Pali Text Society's English translations series and sources which concerning this research for instance printed books. Research and encyclopedias of Buddhist development in Lao Social, the data of this research will be collected of Buddhism for development in Lao social from the related original books in English, Lao and Thai languages and electronic devices such as internet, CD, DVD, TV, analyzing and synthesizing the raw data as well as systematizing the collected data in order to give a clear picture of Buddhism for Development Project (BDP).

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<sup>7</sup>Homhun Buorapha, Laos Buddhism under the Ideal of Socialism 1975-1985, 2015, p. 6.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

After the research of this case study of the Roles of Lao Sangha of the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao Society, objectives of the research there are three main objectives as stated below (1) to study concept of Buddhist Social Development in Theravada Buddhism (2) to study Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao society (3) roles of Lao Sangha of the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao society, this qualitative researcher work is a documentary research and in this qualitative research work is a documentary research and sources which concerning this research for instance printed books; the research and encyclopedias of Buddhist development in Lao Social, the data of this research will be collected of Buddhism for development in Lao social from the related original books in English, Lao and Thai languages and electronic devices such as internet etc.

## THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

The aims of social development in Buddhism have two steps, namely: primary aim is development good living life in society, developing human right, nature, environment; and secondary aim is development to be noble person, the Buddha teaches only suffering and the end of suffering and teach of nirvana is nirvana and deliverance of the mind<sup>8</sup>. The Nibbāna is purely and solely an ethical state, to be reached in this birth by ethical practices, contemplation and insight; and the doctrines in Buddhism are more important to social development and related doctrine relating of five precepts, four Saṅghaha Vathu, threefold training and noble eightfold path.<sup>9</sup> The ethical concept used by monks to development they are have three of ethical is morality of Buddhism, self-reliant of economic, middle way of Buddhism, and especially method is impotent and necessary to social development because of planning and the ways of working so that more impotent to develop and necessary for using the doctrine in Buddhism to social development and the doctrines for development in Buddhism are the Vinaya Pitaka, Sutra Pitaka; from this point of view, the Vinaya methodology becomes an effecting means or method in order to vacate the faith

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<sup>8</sup>Robert E. Buswell Jr and Donald S. Lopez Jr. 2014, p. 112.

<sup>9</sup>T. W. Rhys David, Ph.D. and William Stede, p. 550.

towards society.<sup>10</sup> In concluding the methods of social development in Buddhism is more impotent in develop.

The ethical method in Vinaya and Sutra is more impotent and necessary use to social development bemuses of planning, the ways to good and performance working. Rules in Vinaya Pitaka (Pātimokkha) have a part of development special for the monks on time of working cannot make a mistake and can be good example, ways of practice, and good general rule of social development; the ethical method in Sutra Pitaka is the ways of performance development in Buddhism. In the Sutra so many different Sutra to using everything so that in this reached we using some ethical to development are four Iddhipāda in Maha-parinibbana Sutta and four Brahmavihara in the Mettā Sutta. So that the methods of social development in Buddhism is more impotent and necessary in development in society because of the ethical in Vinaya and Sutra is ethical for good performance of development.

### **1) Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao Society**

The Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) was registered in 2003 with permission from the Lao Front for National Construction on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, as a non-profit organization to undertake the mission to development in Lao society; Lao Saṅgha is skilled in promoting dharma and has a role in community development and objectives, to produce Vipassanā master and Vipassanā Meditation centre for training to Buddhist followers, To teach dharma to children at schools and young people at Somsanga Center and Ophthalmology center, to build sustainably developed model community, to create supporting materials for teaching ethics and applied dharma to social development, to enhance and strengthen resource person and BDP members, to receive domestic and international fund to adequately support BDP's activities, to produce volunteer for social development activities.<sup>11</sup> The BDP have six of departments to working social development have to divisions of six element in Buddhism for development and so strength and developing in development organization and society; every divisions of PDP have responsibility of working social development such of missionary of Buddhist doctrine (Vinaya and Sutta) to Lao Saṅgha and people in Lao society, some divisions can build of new personnel every year to developing and more propagate

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<sup>10</sup> Sanu Mahatthanadu. 2016 p.82-83.

<sup>11</sup> Phra Pinthong isakhun, Nanaphon, Vongphet, **A case study of Sinxay primary-Junior Secondary school, Chanthabouly District**, 2013p 18.

activity of development to society, so that the BDP can have the more opportunities and acceptance from Lao government and every Lao people in the society, and especially of the BDP until can have opportunities and cooperation with international organizations to of development Lao society,<sup>12</sup> can look supporting the money and protect from Lao government, international organizations and Lao people in society; in the social development have more course of training to development and can use dharma in living life society, training Vipassanā meditation, training of organic agriculture, training and helping to who are drug addict, HIV in Lao society to happy living life and understand of Dharma the Dharma can helping them very well, and until can look of the responsibility of divisions of six element in BDP more here: (1) Vipassanā meditation are the provide training on both principle and practice for monks, nuns and interested lay people, (2) the Dharma San-jorn or Mobile Dharma: Teaching dharma to children at schools, communities and at two centers: Somsanga Center (Treatment and Vocational training for drug addicts center) and Ophthalmology center (Thong pong) to become happy and useful to society, to encourage them to live confidently in the community, (3) Community development: Motivating the villagers to produce sustainable agriculture of organic products and handicraft, while protecting the community environment and culture, (4) Media and Communication: Two radio programs on FM 103.7, broadcast on Saturday 10-11pm and Sunday 6-6:30pm, publication of dharma books, newsletter (3 issues per year) and website: [www.laobdp.org](http://www.laobdp.org). Are means of communication to disseminate BDP social work (5) Training and Curriculum: Training BDP members to become leaders in supporting BDP's activities in the community, developing the training curriculum to be more accurate. (6) Mettadharma (Networking Project): Training monks, nuns, volunteers and community leaders to disseminate understanding on HIV/aids and put an end to discrimination among HIV/aids victims, especially CEDC children. The BDP is knowing, popular and acceptance in Lao society now, especially the radio and magazine of BDP good work to publicize, the BDP have planned to accordance with requirements good working in future and same time the Lao government looking more importance of BDP means cooperation and every ease from government.

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<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Dr. Thammanuk Kitivesakhun, **Report of Buddhism for development Project**, 2015, p.17.

## THE ROLES OF LAO SAṄGHA OF THE BUDDHISM FOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (BDP) IN LAO SOCIETY

The Lao Saṅgha has maintained intercalation relationships from 1975 C.E. to the present day; the Lao Saṅgha has acted in accordance with the foreign policy of the government, The foreign policy of peace, independence, friendship and cooperation with various religions, especially has cooperated with Buddhist countries to work on Buddhist activities concerning Buddhist education, the world Buddhist propagation conference, Buddhist world peace, social welfare, the promotion of Buddhism, and has supported and preserved Buddhist tradition, culture and custom.<sup>13</sup> Buddhism has played important role in Lao society from former time to the present day; the BDP is more impotent roles of development in Lao society, especially the attempt and great sacrifice of Lao Saṅgha working to development society, the doctrine in Buddhism can resolve society problems and can use to good living in daily life, and the roles of Lao Saṅgha on the Buddhism for Development Project in Lao society and the role in Social Development, role in Politics, role of monk in temple, role in the Lao Buddhist Saṅgha, role in Lao People's Revolutionary Party and impact to the society.<sup>14</sup>

Buddhism has made tremendous impact on daily life, way of life, and world view of Lao people, Buddhism is the religion of peace, loving-kindness, compassion, and has enriched the lives of Lao people, living them not only a gentle and harmonious way of life, but encouraging their creativity. Buddhism has taught Lao people to live in peace with each other, not to interfere with others' religious beliefs, to honor ancestors, parents and elderly and particularly to respect the three jewels and those are (1) the Buddha is founder of Buddhism,(2) the world Dhamma has many shades of meaning such as bearer, constitution, nom, Law, doctrine, justice, right consciousness, quality, thing, object of mind and phenomenon, literacy, etc. (3) The Saṅgha or monks, literally, it means herd or congregation, As a community of Noble ones, signifies third of the three jewels and form one object of contemplation.<sup>15</sup> Buddhism is teaching people good living in Lao society and especially

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<sup>13</sup> Grant Evans, **Short history of Laos**, 2002, p.10-11.

<sup>14</sup> Ven. Khamsao Civilize, **A Study of the Present Laoian Buddhist Sangha Satatus and roles in Educational Administration**, 2007, p.107-108.

<sup>15</sup> Prime Minister's Office, **Decree and Management and Protection of Religious Activities in the Lao P.D.R.**, 2002, p.1-2.

the young people or new generation of Lao people, have important to development human, the Lao society has happiness, peace, good tradition and culture from Buddhism teaching to be good human, in family, school, organization and every education or everywhere in Lao the impact of Buddhism can make to good society and happiness.

The Lao Buddhist Saṅgha has played an important role in education of the young and the comfort of the olds; many schools are situated in temple grounds, and Buddhist monks teach children in schools; as the same time, the temple has been and still is an information center and center of ritual and social life of the village. The temple is the site not only of all religious rituals and festivals, but also of all community meetings concerning important secular affairs of the villages.

## CONCLUSION

After the research of this case study of the Roles of Lao Saṅgha of the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao Society; the researcher found is the roles of Lao Saṅgha to social development by useful Dharma, and specially the role of BDP are (1) Vipassanā meditation training (Theravada Buddhist meditation) is Provide training on both principle and practice for monks, nuns and interested lay people, (2) Dharma Sanjorn or Mobile Dharma are teaching dharma to children at schools, (3) Community development is motivating the villagers to produce sustainable agriculture of organic products and handicraft, while protecting the community environment and culture, (4) Media and Communication is the advertising and published of dharma to society, (5) Training and Curriculum is training BDP members to become leaders in supporting BDP's activities in the community, developing the training curriculum to be more accurate, (6) Mettadharma (Networking Project) is the training monks, nuns, volunteers and community leaders to disseminate understanding on HIV/aids and put an end to discrimination among HIV/aids victims, especially CEDC children.

Buddhism has been the principle of self-training and philosophy of life Lao people for many years, if one looks back on the history of Lao, one may cleanly see the close relationship between Theravada Buddhism and Lao nation since 1353 C.E., in reign of king Fa Ngum, the great king of Laos and the first king of Lan Xang kingdom, Before theose days, the Lao capital was at Luang Phrabang, which was called Mueng Xiang Thong or Mueng Sisattanakanahut, respectively, the former town of Xiang Thong, the capital of the past, changed its named into Luang Phranang at that time for it was the capital and Phrabang (Buddha image) served to as a palladium of capital; Even after the establish-

ment of the new political, social, and economic system from 1975 C.E. to present day Buddhism still has a deep and significant influence upon the character, the mind, and way of life of Lao people and society. Buddhism has made the civilization of Laos, and is a religion of peace and compassion, giving the Lao not only a gentle and harmonious way of life, but Buddhism is the foundation of Lao culture and civilization, the creative force behind literature, sculpture, arts and architecture, fine arts, song, music and education; The Buddhism is teaching people good living in Lao society and especially the young people or new generation of Lao people, have important to development human, the Lao society has happiness, peace, good tradition and culture from Buddhism teaching to be good human, in family, school, organization and every education or everywhere in Lao the impact of Buddhism can make to good society and happiness; Buddhism came to Laos's country on B.E 1353 by king Fa Ngum at that time Lao people belief of ghost, nature, mountain and god so that after Buddhism coming the Lao people change to belief the Buddhist religion, because of Buddhism teaching and good example to Lao society, teaching the truth and reason of life, teaching the way of good living in society, teaching to be good human, teaching of five precepts, Noble Eightfold Path, Four Noble Truths, the Lao people belief and understand of Buddhism and can using to living daily life, to happiness, sincerity, cohesion and helping Lao society so that Lao people even in regime still belief and practice following Buddhism.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

This research focuses on the analysis study Roles of Lao Saṅgha of Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) in Lao society and this qualitative research work is a documentary research, so that overall Roles of Lao Buddhist Sangha to development people in Lao society; However the Buddhism for Development Project (BDP) have many departments of roles to social development and suggestion for further should to study one department to interesting in BDP. My suggestion for further are:

- 1) An analytical study of Buddhism and Development Lao societies from 1975 to 2017
- 2) An analytical study the influence of Theravada Buddhism on the art and architecture in the Luang Prabang
- 3) An analytical study the influence of Theravada Buddhism on the tradition and culture in the Luang Prabang

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