

# The Roles of Buddhism for Supporting Thai Community in Thailand



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## ABSTRACT

Buddhism has separated to Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, and Vajrayana Buddhism. In Thailand, Theravada Buddhism has a long history before 5 B.C. and Buddhist people are majority of Thai population. Buddhism has gathered with three jewels as Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. These jewels support Buddhist people and Thai community with the positive outcomes. Buddhist people have respected three jewels and practiced Dhamma for improving their attitudes. Buddhism can be applied to support Thai community in many levels. The roles of Buddhism have always supported Thai community. For example, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu conserves environment, eradicates poverty, and brings the well-being for Thai people and community by socially responsible activities; Phradhamsiddhimongkhon (Chin Chotiko) suggests to use loving-kindness for resolving all conflict in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat Provinces; Local Governmental Organizations (LGOs) focus on the good governance which is applied from the Buddhist perspective into their organizations. Therefore, Buddhism has impacted for supporting Thai community through various ways.

*Keywords:* Buddhism, Mahayana, Thai Community

## Introduction

Buddhism is a religion that has spread in many countries, especially in Asia Pacific. Buddhism today has been classified to three branches: (i) Mahayana Buddhism is in East Asian countries such as China, Japan, South Korean and Vietnam; (ii) Theravada Buddhism is in South and Southeast Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia; and (iii) Vajrayana Buddhism is in Tibet and Bhutan.<sup>1</sup> Through archeological evidences in Thailand, Theravada Buddhism was founded before 5 B.C. Nearly 94% of Thai population are Buddhist people.

In Thailand, Theravada Buddhism has two dominant characteristics: Pragmatic and Popular Buddhism. Pragmatic Buddhism has been initiated by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu for improving community through socially responsible activities for conserving environment, eradicating poverty, and improving Thai community. Popular Buddhism is known as Folk Buddhism; Popular Buddhism has been adapted, absorbed, and practiced of animism, Mahayana Buddhism, and even Hinduism. Thai monks studied the Holy Scriptures in Sri Lanka and they practiced mantras as the good magic rituals. Mantras are intended to preserve the religion and later developed to prevent harm, which calls “*paritta*.” Leading to Buddhist people, they have strongly believed in mantras that come from the Holy Scriptures of Buddha.<sup>2</sup>

In Thailand, Buddhist monks teach Buddhism for Buddhist people and for creating peace in Thai community.<sup>3</sup> For example, the project of “Morality Teaching Monks in Schools” is the mission to teach Buddhist morality and ethics for young students in Thailand. The teaching contents include as three parts: (i) Buddhist theories (Pāli: *pariyatti*); (ii) Buddhist practices (Pāli: *patipatti*); and (iii) Buddhist truths (Pāli: *paṭivedha*). Thai government expects this project will bring knowledge, skills, attitudes for Thai youths effectively. Then, the roles of Buddhism have supported Thai community in Thailand.

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<sup>1</sup>Lylla Winzer, Bhubate Samutachak, and Rossarin Soottipong Gray, “Religiosity, Spirituality, and Happiness in Thailand from the Perspective of Buddhism,” *Journal of Population and Social Studies* 26, no. 4 (2018): 334-5. <https://doi.org/10.25133/JPSSv26n4.023>.

<sup>2</sup>Dilok Boonim, “Faith in Mantra Buddhist of Thai Buddhists,” *Dhammathas Academic Journal* 18, no. 2 (2018): 269-70.

<sup>3</sup>Vitthaya Tongdee, Suraphon Promgul, and Niraj Ruangsang, “Development of the Learning Management Model of Morality Teaching Monks in the Northeast of Thailand,” *Dhammathas Academic Journal* 16, no. 3 (2016): 157.

## The Roles of Buddhism for Supporting Thai Community in Thailand

The roles of Buddhism have supported and improved Thai community in Thailand. Buddhism combines with three parts: Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. All three parts gather with each other to become Buddhism. Buddhist people always respect and practice from three parts. Thailand is considered as Buddhist country because Buddhist people are nearly 94% of Thai population. The importance of Buddhism leads to the fusion of the practice of Dhamma by the Thai nationwide.<sup>4</sup> The roles of Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha have resolved various circumstances for Thai people. To resolve social issues, Thai government has policy with new dimensions of Buddhism by using three pillars: home, monastery, and school. Monastery is the center of three pillars and Buddhist monks perform for developing Thai community. Then, the roles of Buddhism have improved Thai community in Thailand.

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, who lives in 1909-1993, is one of famous Bhikkhus in Thailand; his activities are recognized in national and international levels.<sup>5</sup> Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu argues that the founders of all religions should bring the truly benefits for all beings in the world. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu claims that Buddhism is a socialistic religion for bringing the human rights, improving the good community, and reaching the well-being to people. Buddha's teachings such as *sīla* (morality), *vinaya* (precept), *metta-karunā* (loving-kindness) and *dāna* (giving), etc. lead for the peaceful community. Buddhist people practice Buddha's teachings to deal with social issues in Thai community.

Phradhamsiddhimongkhon (Chin Chotiko) suggests the approach way to resolve conflict in Three Southern Border (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat) Provinces of Thailand through the Buddhist approach. The Buddhist approach has been based on three viewpoints: (i) to identify concepts of conflict; (ii) to examine of conflict in Three Southern Provinces of Thailand; and (iii) to resolve conflict in Three Southern Provinces of Thailand.<sup>6</sup> Beginning

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<sup>4</sup>Ketsada Phathong and Teerapat Serirangsan, "Buddhism and Politics in Thai Society," *Valaya Alongkorn Review* 8, no. 1 (2018): 195.

<sup>5</sup>Pranab Barua, "Religious Movement of Buddhadāsa: Reformation and Development of Thai Buddhism," *The Journal of the International Buddhist Studies College* 5, no. 1 (2019): 56.

<sup>6</sup>Chakkapong Thamtanaphap, Phrakrukosalattakit, Phrakrukositwattananukul, and Sawat Anothai, "Guidelines to Stabilize Buddhism in the Midst of the Conflict in the Southern Thailand through Phradhamsiddhimongkhon (Chint Chotiko)," *Journal of MCU Nakhondhat* 6, no. 4 (2019): 1799-800.

with disagreements, conflict leads to be various types of violence. To resolve conflict, it needs to diagnose the roots of disagreements or conflict. For example, Buddha introduces metta-karunā (loving-kindness) for human being and peaceful world. Buddha teaches how to bring loving-kindness for all living beings. By the Buddhist approach to peace, Phradhamsiddhimongkhon recommends to apply loving-kindness for bringing all living beings to live together peacefully in Three Southern Provinces in Thailand.

Buddhism also focuses on the good governance. In Thailand, Local Governmental Organizations (LGOs) adapt Buddhist perspective on good governance within their organizations. For example, the models of good governance are studied from four communities: Mai Riang community in Chawang, Nakhon Srithammarat; Santi Asok community in Bang Kapi, Bangkok; Khlong Pia community in Chana, Songkhla; and Prik community in Sadao, Songkhla.<sup>7</sup> The results find out that four LGOs have practiced Buddhist perspective for integrating management into their organizations. Therefore, the phenomena of Buddhism have impacted for supporting LGOs and Thai community in the positive ways.

Buddhist people always participate within social activities. In Northeastern of Thailand, there are the Reclining Buddha images in many places such as Putthanimitr (Phu Kao) and Intarapratarnporn Temples in Kalasin province.<sup>8</sup> Buddhist people occasionally gather to conserve and restore the Reclining Buddha images. They clean the areas around the Buddha images, provide garbage bins for different wastes, and repair the temples. Community members take opportunities for conserving and restoring the Reclining Buddha images. Then, the roles of Buddhism strengthen Thai community.

The roles of Buddhism affect to Thai community. For example, the Buddhist model of “Propagation Organization Network” in Thailand are examined by many scholars. This Buddhist model is defined as “BGM Model.”<sup>9</sup> BGM Model has three levels as the

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<sup>7</sup> Vanida Chumnum, “Buddhism Good Governance: A Case Study of Local Administrative Organizations in Thailand,” *Journal of Southern Technology* 11, no. 2 (2018): 60.

<sup>8</sup> Pra Subin Khawduesee, Sastra Laoakka and Sitthisak Champadaeng. “Reclining Buddha: Conservation and Restoration by Participation of the Community in the Northeast of Thailand,” *Journal of Politics and Governance* 9, no. 1 (2019): 207.

<sup>9</sup> Phramaha Phaithoon Chaiyakun Phabassaro, Sin Ngamprakhon, and Uthai Satiman, “A Model of Buddhist Propagation Organization Network in Thai Society,” *Journal of Education Review* 5, no. 2 (2018): 192-204.

following: (i) B is standing for Buddhist teaching; (ii) G is standing for common goals; and (iii) M is standing for management—within (a) common destination, (b) people, (c) network, (d) creating senses, (e) developing transparent and verifiable. There are generally managed by the common goals. Personnel are planning for linking smoothly the cooperation and for achieving the common goals. Propagation Organization Network is intelligence network by using mindfulness meditation from Buddhism to develop Thai community.

Buddhist monks present the developing model to Thai community and promote the social well-being for people in Thailand.<sup>10</sup> Monasteries are places to use the developing model through four dimensions: (i) “Physical Dimension” means that monastery has provided some areas for Thai people to work out or to play sports; (ii) “Mind Dimension” means that monastery has supported chanting and meditation activities for Thai people and workers to improve their abilities of mind; (iii) “Wisdom Dimension” means that monastery has shared Buddhist wisdom for Thai people to get spiritual knowledge; and (iv) “Society Dimension” means that monastery has promoted the useful concepts of Buddhism, such as the five precepts, for Thai people and community. The activities of the Buddhist official monks promote the social well-being to community by four processes: (i) “Teaching Process” means to launch the training projects for developing mind of Thai people; (ii) “Participation Process” means to participate with Governmental Organizations (GOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Thai people for the unity of well-being; (iii) “Management Process” means to deal with issues by managing and enhancing for quality of life for Thai people; and (iv) “Spiritual Process” means to balance between new knowledge and old wisdom dimensions for Thai people. The developing model and the social well-being through Buddhism have increased qualities and abilities for Thai community in Thailand.

The Buddhist propagation from Thai monks are investigated in Saohai District, Saraburi, Thailand. The Buddhist propagation is clarifying within three points: (i) concepts of Buddhist propagation of monks; (ii) opinions from Buddhist people on Buddhist propagation of monks; and (iii) development of Buddhist propagation of monks.<sup>11</sup> The findings indicate on the positive outcomes. For example, Buddhist people appreciate the Buddhist propagation

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<sup>10</sup> Phrakhrusiripanyanuyok, Phrasuthirattanabundit, Wiwat Harmontree and Cholvit Jearajit, “A Model of Sangha Administrator’s Social Well-Being Promotion in Thai Society,” *Journal of MCU Nakhondhat* 6, no. 4 (2019): 2141-3.

<sup>11</sup> Phrakhruwisuthisilapiwat, “Buddhism Propagation of Monks in Saohi District, Saraburi Province,” *Journal of Selaphum Academic* 4, no. 1 (2018): 26-7.

of Thai monks for supporting Thai community at the good level. However, Buddhist people give the suggestions for Thai monks as the following: (i) Thai monks should find out the positive approach for Buddhism propagation; (ii) Thai monks should develop their abilities; (iii) Thai monks should be trained to manage budget for propagation's activities; and (iv) Thai monks should work together as teamwork.

Buddhism impacts Thai community through various ways such as cultural, traditional, economy, etc. The propagation of Buddhism has relationship with Thai people for guiding their lives.<sup>12</sup> Buddhism and Thai people have bound with each other. In Thailand, Buddhist monks gather within Sangha as group or organization. Sangha plays an important role in Buddhist mission (or *Dhammadūta* mission). Mahachula Buddhist University sets the training center for utilizing propagation skills for propagators. As the propagators, Buddhist monks launch educational welfare, social welfare, and social development for Thai people in society. Buddhist monks work with GOs and NGOs to provide both formal and informal education for Thai people. Buddhism improves Thai community too.

Thailand is a member of "Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)." ASEAN is established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand. ASEAN has been gathered with eleven countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Cambodia. In the meantime, Thailand is a part of "ASEAN Community" along with other ASEAN neighboring countries. People who live in these countries have their own religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hindu, etc. In Thailand, Buddhism is professed by the most of Thai people and Buddhism is the fundamental of Thai culture.<sup>13</sup> There are the challenges for Thai people. However, the roles of Buddhism can erode these challenges and support Thai community to be good partner of ASEAN Community as well.

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<sup>12</sup> Niraj Ruangsang, "Mahachula-Academics: Proactive Propagation of Buddhism at Khon Kaen Campus," *The Journal of the International Buddhist Studies College* 3, no. 2 (2017): 91-2.

<sup>13</sup> Worrakrit Thuenchang, "Buddhism and Challenges in ASEAN Community," *Panidhana Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 13, no. 2 (2017): 268-9.

## Conclusion

In Thailand, Buddhism is Theravada Buddhism and Buddhist people are nearly 94% of Thai population. Buddhist people have practiced from Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha by the Thai nationwide. Thai monks have supported Thai community since Buddhism was founded in Thailand. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu who lives in 1909-1993 is recognized in national and international levels for supporting Thai community. Phradhamsiddhimongkhol (Chin Chotiko) suggests the approach way to resolve conflict in Three Southern Border Provinces of Thailand through the Buddhist approach: identifying concepts of conflict; examining of conflict in Three Southern Provinces; and using Buddhist ways to resolve conflict in Three Southern Provinces of Thailand. Buddhism can be applied to create the good governance too. Local Governmental Organizations (LGOs) have adapted Buddhist perspective on good governance within their organizations. The Buddhist model of “Propagation Organization Network” is “BGM Model” as standing for Buddhist teaching, common goals, and management and is useful for Thai community as well. Buddhist monks present the developing model for Thai community and promote the social well-being for Thai community. Monasteries are places to use the developing model through four dimensions: (i) physical dimension, (ii) mind dimension, (iii) wisdom dimension, and (iv) society dimension. Monastery has also promoted the useful concepts of Buddhism, such as the five precepts, for Thai community. Then, the roles of Buddhism have supported Thai community in Thailand.

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