

THE ROLES OF BUDDHIST MONKS IN PROMOTING SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL WORK IN CHANGING TOWARDS THE ERA OF DIGITAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

The research article aims 1) to study the connection between Buddhist philosophy and concepts and theories of social welfare and social work; 2) to explore the problems, obstacles, and limitations of monks in promoting social welfare and social work; and 3) to propose guidelines for the development of monks' roles in promoting social welfare and social work as Thailand transitions into the digital society era. This study employs a mixed methods approach. The findings indicated that several influencing factors reached statistical significance at the 0.05 level on integrating Buddhist philosophy into the promotion of social welfare and social work including frequency of engagement in Buddhist activities, educational backgrounds (university affiliations), parents' occupations, and monthly household income were significant. The factors influencing opinions on the obstacles and limitations monks encounter in promoting social welfare and social work also reached statistical significance at the 0.05 level on the application of key Buddhist philosophies “Four Saṅgahavatthus” in promoting social welfare and social work. This aligns with the core principle of social work “helping people to help themselves.” The study identified attitudes as central obstacles that monks face in their efforts towards social welfare and social work. The study proposes the following guidelines: 1) The Department of Religious Affairs under the Ministry of Culture should take a leading role in promoting and facilitating the integration of technology within the domain of monks' work related to social welfare. 2) Regional, provincial, and district Ecclesiastical offices should establish dedicated departments focused on social welfare and social work with a proactive approach and designate primary and secondary personnel responsible for these initiatives. 3) The Office of the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor should collaborate with the Council of Social Professions to implement Buddhist philosophical principles in advancing social welfare and social work, in the demands of the digital society.

Keywords: Role of Buddhist Monks, Social Welfare and Social Work, Digital Society

Introduction

Religion encompasses a set of human beliefs and holds a significant place within society as a crucial social institution. Moreover, it plays a vital role in shaping individuals' behavior within the community. Each religion offers teachings that aid in cultivating the mind to exert control over one's actions, speech, and thoughts, fostering goodness and preventing harm to others. In the context of Buddhism, Wichit Rawiwong (1984) asserts that it stands as one of the three major world religions and is characterized as an atheistic belief system. The principle of self-reliance is propagated, encouraging individuals to develop their capabilities to depend on themselves, rather than waiting for external assistance. This is encapsulated in the Buddha's adage: "He is his own refuge. He needs no other refuge because he has diligently trained himself; he will find refuge even amid difficulties." The Buddha's teachings also emphasize a considerate approach to aiding others, underlining the importance of not rendering them dependent through assistance. Genuine support should not foster a reliance solely on external help. This philosophy aligns with the fundamental principle of social welfare: helping individuals help themselves. Over its 2,600-year history, Buddhism has endured and evolved. Monks, who hold priestly positions within Buddhism, serve as spiritual guides, directing people on the path to virtuous living. They also actively contribute to society, following the example set by the Buddha's conduct (Buddha-cariyā). The practice of Dhamma and discipline necessitates that monks maintain close connections with society and engage in activities that bring benefits to people. As a result, historical evidence attests to monks consistently fulfilling this societal role since ancient times. They have been steadfast in advancing society by enhancing the mental well-being and overall quality of life for villagers—a role that harmonizes with their monastic commitment.

As a result, Thai society began to transition into a more modern style in alignment with the advancements in Western science. Thai lifestyles and values started to deviate from their traditional norms. New material developments and institutions were embraced, leading to a shift away from the previous central role of temples and monks within the Thai community. This transformation, which has roots in the distant past, continues to shape the present and could extend into the future. These factors prompted monks to become more proactive in efforts to enhance and restore people's standing within society. This motivation also led monks to engage in activities that align with government policies, particularly in urban communities. However, in rural areas, monks still maintain close relationships and garner respect from the villagers. Monks have taken on roles in social welfare and social work, encompassing areas such as temple development, community enhancement, mental well-being, education advancement, and various other services for the general public. Furthermore, monks are committed to making meaningful contributions to society, driven by genuine intentions and a willingness to make sacrifices. This dedication has helped fortify people's faith and encouraged them to provide support and cooperation for the betterment of broader social welfare.

Thailand is a country with a long history, marked by invaluable institutions that rest upon three main pillars: the national institution, the religious institution, and the monarchy – with special emphasis on the religious establishment. For a considerable duration, Buddhism has commanded profound respect from the Thai populace. Consequently, monks have assumed a pivotal role in the lives of Thai people throughout various epochs. The enduring presence of Buddhism necessitates individuals dedicated to perpetuating its doctrines ceaselessly, even adapting them to transcend changing societal contexts through the integration of modern technology and innovative approaches. Despite their status as Buddhist monks, these individuals hold an additional role as citizens of the nation, subject to its laws. It is incumbent upon monks to contribute to the nation's progress by nurturing individuals who are not only "good people" in the religious sense, but also "good citizens" of both the nation and the global community. Therefore, it becomes crucial for monks to hone their understanding and knowledge in this realm, further refining their roles as spiritual guides who steer towards virtuous living and meaningful societal contributions in alignment with contemporary norms. The purposes of this research are to study the connection between Buddhist philosophy and concepts and theories of social welfare and social work; to explore the problems, obstacles, and limitations of monks in promoting social welfare and social work; and to propose guidelines for the development of monks' roles in promoting social welfare and social work as Thailand transitions into the digital society era.

Research Objectives

- 1) To study the connection between Buddhist philosophy and concepts and theories of social welfare and social work.
- 2) To explore the problems, obstacles, and limitations of monks in promoting social welfare and social work.
- 3) To propose guidelines for the development of monks' roles in promoting social welfare and social work as Thailand transitions into the digital society era.

Review Literature

The monks have applied essential principles from Buddha's teachings, including the Four Saṅgahavattthus, the six Sāraṇīyadhammas, and the four Brahmavihāras, in their efforts to assist individuals, communities, and society at large. The primary objective driving the monks to take action is to alleviate the suffering experienced by people across various domains.

A majority of challenges within temple-based activities for public welfare are rooted in issues such as work policies, inadequate management plans, task allocation, and the limited extension of social welfare initiatives to the entire community. These efforts lack widespread coverage and often suffer from a lack of sustainability and specificity. Additionally, the insufficiency of funding, support, and coordination with government bodies and private sectors,

and the endorsement and involvement of monks further compound these challenges. The collaboration among different temples is also deficient, as is the availability of qualified personnel and operational efficiency. This dearth of resources hinders the ability to support a multitude of future undertakings. Consequently, a consistent trajectory is absent, impeding the advancement of social welfare and social work in alignment with Buddhist principles (Phra Samuh Charan Carudhammo, 2012).

Social welfare constitutes a vital endeavor for monks, aimed at aiding villagers and the broader populace. This responsibility aligns with the primary duty of the abbot, as outlined in Section 37 of the Sangha Act of 1962. Article 4 of the Act emphasizes the provision of "reasonable convenience in making merit." To establish a model for social welfare development rooted in the Buddhist way of life, monks must adhere to fundamental Buddhaddhamma principles. These encompass the four Brahmavihāras, Rājasaṅgahavatthus, Cakkavatti-vatta, Aparihāniyadhamma, Dasarājadhamma, Sāraṇīyadhammas, Sappurisadhamma, and more. Consequently, monks are tasked with pursuing two distinct forms of social work development, both of which society anticipates: material assistance and psychological support. This dual approach seeks to foster sustainable development and societal cohesion. The aim is to create an environment conducive to lasting progress and unity within the community (Phra Khru Baidika Surapol Asapo, 2015).

Assisting individuals within the community and society necessitates an approach that is both suitable and timely. This approach facilitates the establishment of connections among households, temples, and schools, all contributing to the enhancement of people's overall quality of life – encompassing both mental and physical aspects. The physical dimension pertains to material well-being, encompassing equilibrium across the physical, verbal, and mental realms. Temples and their monastic leaders play pivotal roles in various capacities, contributing to the betterment of society. Their efforts are geared towards promoting mental development, elevating the overall quality of life, fostering community and societal advancement, and preserving cultural heritage. This collective endeavor ultimately cultivates happiness among individuals, benefits society at large, and contributes to the progression of the nation (Phra Maha Santi Thanvaro, 2018).

Research Methodology

This research employed a mixed methods approach, specifically utilizing the Explanatory Sequential Design. The study was structured into two distinct phases. The initial phase encompassed quantitative research, which aimed to address the research inquiries. Subsequently, a qualitative research phase was undertaken to elucidate and provide comprehensive explanations for the findings derived from the quantitative analysis.

Quantitative research: An online questionnaire was administered to a sample of undergraduate students enrolled in social work programs across five public and private

universities. These institutions include Thammasat University (Rangsit Center), Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, College of Local Management and Development, Phibunsongkhram Rajabhat University, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Chiang Mai Campus), and Mahamakut Buddhist University. The sample size was determined using Thanin Siljaru's formula (2012:45), accounting for a margin of error of 0.05, resulting in a total sample size of 435 participants. The sampling approach involved selecting individual institutions and employing accidental sampling until the desired sample size was reached.

Qualitative research: For the in-depth interviews with key informants, the sample was categorized into four distinct groups as outlined below:

- 1) Those who played a role in spreading Buddhism in a wide range and are known in Thai society (Ecclesiastical Governors)
- 2) Those who have a role in working in social welfare and social work to help the underprivileged or needy people of society (monks)
- 3) Academics who specialize in social welfare and social work
- 4) Academics who specialize in using technology in a digital society.

Upon completion of data collection, the researcher employed both the collected questionnaire data and the interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the information. This assessment was conducted in alignment with the research's conceptual framework and objectives. Subsequently, the quantitative data from the questionnaire were subjected to analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The statistical analyses employed encompassed:

Descriptive statistics including Frequency, Percentage, Sample Mean, and Standard Deviation, were employed in the analysis. The interpretation of the overall sample results was conducted using a 5-level measurement tool, which encompassed the following categories: highest level, high level, moderate level, low level, and least level. This classification was determined based on the calculated criteria derived from the interval scale.

$$\frac{\text{Highest Score} - \text{Lowest Score}}{\text{Interval scale}} = \frac{5-1}{5} = 0.80$$

Therefore, the level criteria and the interpretation of the sum of the samples using a 5-level measurement tool, namely

Mean	1.00 - 1.80	signifies	at the lowest level
Mean	1.81 - 2.60	signifies	at the low level
Mean	2.61 - 3.40	signifies	at the moderate level
Mean	3.41 - 4.20	signifies	at the high level
Mean	4.21 - 5.00	signifies	at the highest level

Inferential statistics were employed for analysis, which included techniques such as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the F-test. Additionally, Post Hoc differences in means were examined through Scheffe's method. Moreover, content analysis and inductive

analysis were conducted on the qualitative data obtained from the interview forms. These qualitative analyses aimed to distill and summarize the findings derived from the interviews, ultimately contributing to the research's results.

Results

1. The first objective focused on examining the connection between Buddhist philosophy and concepts and theories of social welfare and social work. The results indicated that a significant portion of the sample held the belief that Buddhist philosophy should play a prominent role in advancing social welfare and social work. Most notably, the principle of "helping people to help themselves" garnered the highest agreement. This underscores the perception that social welfare and social work activities operate in alignment with this principle. As a consequence, Buddhist social welfare emerges as an intricate web of connections between individuals and their societal contexts. Phradebvedi (Prayudh Payutto), also known as "The Most Ven. Phrabuddhagosācāriya," posits that when considering social welfare and social work, a comprehensive understanding of societal foundations and cultural influences is imperative. Notably, Thai society lacks a formalized social work system or structure. Nonetheless, there exists an ingrained aspect within the daily lives of Thai individuals and harmonious community living. Each community effectively manages itself as an interdependent entity (Prasert Poontin, 2009: A).

Within the realm of Buddhist social welfare, the primary focus tends to revolve around two forms of aid: *Āmisa-saṅgaha*, which encompasses material support or requisites that facilitate practical living, and *Dharma-saṅgaha*, involving spiritual assistance through the provision of knowledge and Dhamma for living. It is consistent with the viewpoint of Phra Methee Vajirodom (W. Vajiramedhi), who emphasizes the significance of applying fundamental Buddhist philosophy to propel social welfare and social work efforts, particularly in aiding the marginalized segments of society and directly fostering societal progress. The concept of the four *Saṅgahavatthus* - *Dāna* (generosity), *Piyavācā* (kind speech), *Atthacariyā* (beneficial actions), and *Samānattatā* (harmony) - is pivotal within this context. These principles hold the potential to be effectively utilized in advancing social welfare and social work, empowering underprivileged members of society to gain self-sufficiency and problem-solving skills, thereby contributing to direct societal development. Therefore, the application of Buddhist philosophy to social welfare and social work serves as a guiding framework for assisting without bias or inequality, aiming to benefit individuals, communities, and society at large. Buddhism's objectives extend beyond mere intellectual and mental development; they encompass multifaceted support, bringing happiness to diverse individuals in various ways.

Buddhadhamma as a means of social welfare is a doctrine that teaches individuals how to live their own lives to achieve the benefits that are the goals of life are called the three Attha: 1) *Ditthadhammikatha*: This method involves aiding individuals in obtaining the four

essential bodily requisites sufficiently. It focuses on individual relief. 2) Samparāyikattha: This approach aims to foster societal harmony, contributing to peace within the community. It constitutes a collective response and targets the resolution of social issues. 3) Paramattha: This method focuses on cultivating a stable and tranquil state of mind for individuals. It involves addressing mental well-being and serves as a comprehensive solution to various challenges.

The Three Atthas represent methods of social work grounded in Buddhism, designed to yield practical outcomes that address life's necessities and resolve challenges spanning personal, societal, and spiritual dimensions. This approach aligns with the principles of social welfare adhering to Buddhist tenets, essentially enacting social welfare initiatives in congruence with the core ideals and principles of social work as per the Buddhist ethos. The application of Buddhadhamma as a conduit for social welfare serves as a pedagogy guiding individuals on how to lead their lives in a manner that facilitates the attainment of life's objectives. This philosophy resonates with the essence of social work encapsulated in the maxim "helping people to help themselves." This concept underscores that assistance should not diminish the self-reliance of those being helped. Similarly, when the Buddha imparted teachings, He did not bestow enlightenment upon individuals but offered guidance, refraining from substituting their own efforts. The principle of Buddhism is that "he is self-reliant." As a result, the term "social work" encompasses a principle that cultivates harmonious coexistence within society, fostering peaceful interaction, unity, and concord. This transcends mere material giving or service and encompasses the broader objective of sustaining a cohesive and supportive social fabric.

The second objective delved into the problems, obstacles, and limitations of monks in promoting social welfare and social work. The findings revealed a prevalent lack of comprehension among the majority of Thai Buddhists regarding the social welfare responsibilities of monks under the Buddha's teachings (Buddha-cariyā). This concept signifies the actions that ought to be undertaken for the welfare of all sentient beings, as follows: 1) Lokattha-cariyā: He conducts for the well-being of the world by propagating Buddhism and guiding the extinction of suffering. 2) Nātattha-cariyā: He conducts for the benefit of his relatives, for example, Buddha's father and mother, and removal of their views. 3) Buddhāttha-cariyā: He performs the beneficial conduct as functions of the Buddha, following the five Buddha's daily duties and teaching the four assemblies of Buddhists.

It becomes the problems, obstacles, and limitations faced by monks in their endeavor to promote social welfare and social work. For instance, instances where monks extend help during disasters like floods or fires are sometimes perceived as activities that deviate from their monastic role. Monks are expected to engage in two forms of social work development that society anticipates: providing material assistance and offering mental support. The aim is to foster sustainable and lasting societal integration. Monks are often seen as having a primary role in disseminating Buddhist teachings and making community visits to reach target groups, especially

women, children, teenagers, working-age individuals, and senior citizens. In practice, it's deemed necessary to have a companion present for appropriateness. This arrangement presents challenges when it comes to aiding individuals in distress, such as those in need, homeless individuals, and beggars. Monks are subject to constraints, such as refraining from soliciting donations for the assistance of underprivileged groups. Additionally, there's a sentiment that temples should not function as venues for welfare activities, and monks should refrain from establishing foundations or public benefit organizations, among other restrictions. These conditions can influence the faith of Buddhists who may lack understanding or hold negative views. These observations align with the findings of Phramaha Santi Thanavaro (Prasopsuk) (2018), which stress the importance of appropriate and timely assistance to individuals in the community and society. While monks play a pivotal role in their communities, this role is multifaceted. Kanokwan Jaitiangtrong's study (2013) further substantiates this point, illustrating how monks like Phra Khru Palad Somporn Thanadhammo have contributed to community development spanning environmental, economic, moral, and ethical dimensions, as well as education, through diverse projects and activities. The outcomes of these initiatives have yielded improved livelihoods for villagers, demonstrated by their enhanced quality of life. Moreover, these efforts have generated appreciation for the preservation of nature and have been instrumental in enhancing the well-being of families, communities, and society at large.

The third objective, which concerns the guidelines for the development of monks' roles in promoting social welfare and social work during Thailand's transition into the digital society era, has illuminated several crucial considerations. It underscores that Buddhist monks need to stay attuned to evolving social dynamics, global developments, and the tenets of the Dhamma. This awareness is essential because when they engage with society to assist, their contributions should be focused and effective. Furthermore, monks are advised to be proficient in utilizing technological media, recognizing its significance in contemporary life. Integrating technology, particularly social media, serves as a powerful platform to disseminate information about social work endeavors, raise funds for aiding the impoverished, and address various challenges. To operationalize these ideals, specific steps are recommended. First, regional, provincial, and district-level Ecclesiastical offices should establish dedicated departments singularly focused on social welfare and social work. These departments should adopt a proactive stance and appoint personnel to spearhead primary and secondary responsibilities within these initiatives. The involvement of numerous disciples working within these departments can substantially amplify the impact of social welfare and social work activities.

Discussion

The research findings have illuminated the deep connection between Buddhist philosophy and the foundational concepts and theories of social welfare and social work. Buddhist social welfare is essentially a comprehensive system that intricately interweaves

human interactions with social contexts. This concept is exemplified by Phradebvedi (Prayudh Payutto), also known as "The Most Ven. Phrabuddhagosācāriya," who emphasizes that for effective social welfare and social work, it's imperative to examine the bedrock of society and culture. While Thai society lacks a structured system of social work, there exists an embedded ethos within the daily lives of Thai individuals and the fabric of harmonious community living. Each community essentially operates as an interdependent entity, managing its affairs collectively (Prasert Poontin, 2009: A). The "Social Welfare Promotion Act 2003" defines "Social Welfare" as a comprehensive framework encompassing social service provisions that address developmental challenges, foster social stability, and fulfill the fundamental needs of the populace for a high quality of life and self-sufficiency. The principles of fairness and standards of education, health, housing, employment, income, and recreation are integral to this framework. It underscores the importance of justice, human dignity, and the right of individuals to access social services at all levels. Buddhist social welfare is characterized by a dual approach to assistance. It primarily focuses on two modes: *Āmisa-saṅgaha*, which entails providing material aid or requisites to facilitate practical life management, and *Dharma-saṅgaha*, which involves offering spiritual aid by imparting knowledge and Dhamma for living. This perspective resonates with the viewpoint of Phra Methee Vajirodom (W. Vajiramedhi), who advocates for the integration of essential Buddhist philosophies to propel social welfare and social work. In this context, the concept of the four *Saṅgahavatthus* - *Dāna* (generosity), *Piyavācā* (kind speech), *Atthacariyā* (beneficial actions), and *Samānattatā* (harmony) - stands out. These principles can be effectively applied to advance social welfare and social work, particularly in aiding the marginalized sections of society, enabling them to enhance self-reliance and problem-solving skills while contributing to direct social development. Overall, the application of Buddhist philosophy to the realm of social welfare and social work theories serves as a guiding framework that promotes unbiased, fair, and equal assistance to individuals, communities, and society at large.

The problems, obstacles, and limitations of monks in promoting social welfare and social work revealed the role of the monks in Buddhism as they endeavor to advance social welfare and social work. Within the context of Buddhism, the role of monks is fundamentally one of education and guidance, inspiring individuals to cultivate virtues, morality, and ethics. This role aligns with societal expectations and carries the responsibility of upholding and disseminating the teachings of Buddhism. Society anticipates that monks assume the role of propagating Buddhist principles and demonstrating virtuous conduct. The ideal role for monks is to exemplify good behavior and moral integrity. However, it's acknowledged that some monks may adopt roles that vary from this ideal due to personal beliefs, pressures, or opportunities. Obstacles and important limitations of monks in promoting welfare Society and social work are the attitudes of Thai Buddhists because many do not understand that the monks have

duties of social welfare according to Buddha's conduct (Buddha-cariyā), meaning the work that must be done to the benefit of all beings as follows:

1) Lokattha-cariyā: He conducts for the well-being of the world by propagating Buddhism and guiding the extinction of suffering.

2) Nātattha-cariyā: He conducts for the benefit of his relatives, for example, Buddha's father and mother, and removal of their views.

3) Buddhāttha-cariyā: He performs the beneficial conduct as functions of the Buddha, following the five Buddha's daily duties (going out for alms round in the morning, teaching the Dhamma in the afternoon, giving sermons to the monks in the evening, addressing inquiries or conversing with celestial beings at midnight, and assessing beings nearing enlightenment before dawn to guide them towards liberation. Additionally, the monks are tasked with instructing the four assemblies of Buddhists. These assemblies pertain to those who study the Dhamma for understanding, apply it to their lives for personal benefit, aid others in grasping and implementing the teachings for their benefit, and protect the Dhamma when confronted with misconceptions or insults. This is consistent with the findings of Phra Khru Baidika Suraphon Asapo (Yamchum) (2015), whose study underscores that public welfare work stands as a vital mission for monks. This mission involves assisting villagers and the general populace, aligning with the primary duty of the abbot as defined in Section 37 of the Sangha Act 1962. Article 4 of this act emphasizes the provision of reasonable avenues to engage in merit-making. Consequently, it is suggested that monks should embrace two forms of social work development that society anticipates: material assistance and mental support. This dual approach is aimed at fostering sustainable development and societal integration. These multifaceted roles encompass the duties of Buddhāttha-cariyā and align with the broader mission of monks to facilitate social welfare and support, thereby contributing to the well-being of individuals and society as a whole.

For the development of monks' roles, applying Dhamma principles to help the underprivileged, monks are still a problem. There's a perception that the conventional role of monks might not be fitting for engaging in social welfare and social work. Furthermore, the monks might not be seen as actively empowering or motivating those facing difficulties. Nonetheless, it's important to acknowledge that while monks hold a religious role, they are also citizens of their respective nations and are bound by the laws of their countries. Hence, there is a call for monks to play an active part in aiding the state's efforts to cultivate morally upright individuals within the religious dimension, ultimately contributing to the creation of "good citizens" who are beneficial to their countries and the world at large. This necessitates the monks' personal development to gain a deeper understanding of this dimension and to refine their role, ensuring that they continue to serve as spiritual leaders who guide individuals towards virtuous living and meaningful contributions to society. This responsibility is especially

pertinent in the current era, often referred to as the Digital Society era. In this era, the focus is on cultivating a society characterized by optimism, happiness, harmony, sufficiency, equality, minimal inequality, environmental awareness, and good health. Monks have the potential to inspire and guide individuals in fostering these attributes, fostering a society that embodies these ideals. Despite the challenges, the potential for monks to positively impact society remains significant, as they adapt to the evolving needs of their communities and leverage their spiritual wisdom to guide individuals towards a more fulfilling and harmonious life.

Conclusion

The application of Buddhist philosophy in promoting social welfare and social work revolves around the fundamental principle of "Helping people to help themselves." This tenet underscores the interconnectedness of Buddhist principles and social welfare work, with the potential for seamless adaptation to bring about benefits and solutions. This becomes especially evident during times of societal crisis, where the integration of Buddhist principles with social welfare theories and concepts can lead to sustainability. The essence of this approach lies in empowering individuals to take charge of their own well-being. For monks, assuming a role in promoting social welfare and social work aligns with Buddhism's core focus on aiding people. It's paramount that assistance doesn't diminish the individual's capacity or self-reliance. Under Buddhist teachings, each individual is their own refuge, emphasizing the principle of "Atta Hi Attano Nātho." This self-reliance concept remains particularly relevant in the current era, characterized by the coexistence of physical space and the digital realm. As technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robots, becomes increasingly pivotal in various aspects of human life, monks must adapt and evolve. They should continually equip themselves to remain aligned with the evolving societal landscape while judiciously utilizing technology in their endeavors. By adhering to the principle of "Helping people to help themselves," and through the integration of Buddhist values and social welfare practices, monks can play a transformative role in society. They can help individuals overcome challenges, maintain their self-reliance, and navigate the complexities of the modern world, including the digital realm, in ways that are ethical, harmonious, and sustainable.

Suggestion

The researcher has recommendations at the policy level and implementation level for the development of the role of monks in promoting social welfare and social work in the era of digital society as follows:

Suggestions for Policy Level

- 1) The Department of Religious Affairs under the Ministry of Culture should take a leading role in promoting and facilitating the integration of technology within the domain of monks' work related to social welfare. It is considered to be the role of the monks to apply the

Buddhist principles to help society both in terms of material assistance and mental assistance at the same time, as well as being involved in improving or amending the Sangha Act to be consistent with Thailand in the era of digital society.

2) Regional, provincial, and district Ecclesiastical offices should establish dedicated departments focused on social welfare and social work with a proactive approach and designate primary and secondary personnel responsible for the social welfare and social work plan to drive social welfare and social work.

3) The Office of the Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor should collaborate with the Council of Social Professions to implement Buddhist philosophical principles in advancing social welfare and social work, in the demands of the digital society to drive social welfare and social work.

Suggestions for implementation level

1) Monks must play a role in promoting social welfare and social work by being a voice for those who are socially disadvantaged because monks are a spiritual refuge for those who are suffering and must have a proactive working style, including knowing how to use technology media because it is important to the way of life of people in the era of digital society.

2) Monks must work with people of faith to achieve cooperation and a positive attitude towards the role of monks in promoting social welfare and social work until they become a stable working power and can assist under social welfare principles and social work processes at the individual, group, and community levels.

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