

เส้นทางเพื่อสันติภาพ : ผ่านทัศนะของ ท่านพระมหาผ่อง สมมาเลิก

The Path to Peace : the Most Venerable
Phramaha Phong Samaleuk's Perspective



พระชัยเดช วงศ์索ภา

Venerable Sayadej Vongsopha

วิทยาลัยสงฆ์ลาว, สาธารณรัฐประชาธิปไตยประชาชนลาว

Lao Sangha Colleges, Lao PDR.

Email: sayadej09@gmail.com.

Doi: 10.14456/jmcupeace.2016.20

บทคัดย่อ

บทความมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอประวัติของท่านพระมหาผ่อง สมมาเลิก ประธานศูนย์กลางองค์การพุทธศาสนาสัมพันธ์ลาว ใน การสนับสนุนการพัฒนาของพุทธศาสนาและประเทศชาติ นอกจากประวัติของท่าน ได้ความสำคัญกับการสนับสนุนของเขามาก่อนการสร้างสันติภาพจากบุคคล โดยใช้ศีล 5 ในทัศนะของท่านผ่านการสอนธรรมะและกล่าวสุนทรพจน์ในการสัมมนานานาชาติของ นอกจากนี้ท่านได้นำเสนอการสร้างสันติในชีวิตประจำวัน โดยท่านมั่นใจว่าแนวทางของศีล 5 จะนำความสงบสุขมาครอบครัว สังคม และสามารถนำไปสู่สันติภาพโลก

คำสำคัญ : เส้นทางเพื่อสันติภาพ, ทัศนะ, ท่านพระมหาผ่อง สมมาเลิก

Abstract

This paper is intended to provide a brief biography of the Most Venerable Phramaha Phong Samaleuk, the late president of Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization and his contribution to the development of Buddhism and nation. Apart from his biography, it is the emphasis on his contribution to the building of peace from an individual by applying the five precepts. His perspective has been developed through his Dhamma talk and speeches on international conferences. He kept on spreading the message of peace in order to urge people to apply in daily life. He assured that through the application of the five precepts, the peace will prevail in family, society and as well as can contribute to global peace.

Keyword : The Path to Peace, Through the Perspective Most Venerable Phramaha Phong Samaleuk

Introduction

In this paper, I am writing a brief biography of The Most Venerable Phramaha Phong Samaleuk, his significant role in teaching and propagating Buddhism, and his enduring contributions to building peace.

The Most Venerable Phong Samaleuk is the late president of Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization. He was born in Baan Kungnoi Village, Takarn Phuetphon District, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand on 10 April 1916. He entered primary school at the age of 10 and became a novice at the age of 14. At the age of 15 he disrobed from being a novice and moved away to live in Phonthong District, Champasak Province, in Laos.

At the age of 20, he came back to Ubon Ratchathani to take a full ordination as a monk on 1 October 1936. Forty-one monks presided over his ordination ceremony, and he was under the preceptor ship of the Phra-Ajahn Rith and other two kammavacariyas.

Six month after ordaining, he then moved to Bangkok to study Pali at Wat Chanasongkram. He spent eight years there studying dhamma and Pali, and another eight years there teaching in the temple. It was at Wat Chanasongkram, where he was teaching in the Pariyatti Dhamma School, where he would join the revolutionary movement of Chao Phetsaraj in 1946. In 1949, as a monk, he became the member of Lao Revolutionary Movement of the Communist Party.

In 1952, he permanently moved to Laos to teach Pali at Pariyatti Dhamma School in Wat Luang Pakse, Champasak Province. In 1955, he went to live in Vientiane to teach at the Pali Institute (at present: Sangha College, in Vientiane) and went back to Champasak province in 1957. Later, he was elected as the ecclesiastical governor of Phonthong district in 1957. He had been in the position of the district governor for 13 years, and later was promoted and elected as the provincial ecclesiastical governor of Champasak Province. In 1975, he joined the liberation movement to liberate Laos from foreign colonization in Pakse District.

After the country gained independence, he attended the General Conference in Vientiane and was invited to live there in Vientiane, and had since 1975. Subsequently, he was appointed as the vice president of Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization for 3 consecutive sessions, until he finally was elected as the fourth president in 2011. He passed away at the age of 100 years and 6 months on 7 October 2015.

His Local and International Recognition

During his lifetime, he fully dedicated himself to serving the nation, the religion, and for the benefit and happiness of others. He taught Pali language and propagated Buddhism. He also tirelessly worked on daily activities such as reading newspapers, books, and wrote Dhamma books even into his advanced-age. Besides this, he led the construction of monks' living quarters, ordination halls, Dhamma halls, schools, hospitals, and roads.

Both local and international organizations and institutions offered him awards and medals for his true dedication and work for society, religion and the nation. There were five educational institutions conferring upon him honorary doctorate degrees for his lifetime working for society namely: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Mahamakut Buddhist University, University of Pathumthani, Rajaphat University, and Vietnam Buddhist University.

In 2001, the government of Myanmar conferred him the ecclesiastical title as: “*Aggamahasaddhamma Jotika Daja*”

He was conferred a Medal of Labor and the Victory Medal from the Lao PDR Government. He was also granted a medal for being the “World Outstanding Buddhist Leader” from the World Buddhist Youth in Thailand in 2015.

At the end of his life, he was invited to be an honorary advisor to the association of the Bodhigayavijjhala 980.

His Significant Roles:

The Most Venerable Phramaha Phong Samaleuk had significant roles in various areas of Buddhism in Laos and the development of the nation as follows:

He taught Pali in Pakse and in Vientiane, and at the same time, he built school for monks and children in Phonthong district, Southern Laos.

He paid a significant role in propagating the Dhamma and taught people to live in harmony, to love and protect the nation. He was a historical symbol of harmony because he unified the two main schools or traditions of Buddhism in Laos: the unification of the Mahanikaya and Dhammayuttika Nikaya become one, simply as “Lao monks”. This effort to unify sects was very hard and unique in the history of Buddhism, and certainly in Laos – unifying the sects into one main tradition of Buddhism.

He was not only a teaching monk, but also a practitioner monk who dedicated himself to the construction of forest temples: Wat Pa Phousamli and Wat Thamprachokhork in Phonthong District, Champasak Province. He supported these two temples, and developed them into being used as vipassana meditation centers.

However, the most significant part of his many roles, is: he joined the revolutionary party, and protected and preserved the two main tasks of Buddhism in Laos - the theoretical and practical tasks. During the time of neo-colonization, Buddhism was invaded by outside-believers who tried to destroy it, by using authority to break down the traditional forest-temple, suing and saying that the forest-temple was a center for supporting the pro-government movement. He controlled the situation and solved the problems by clarifying that both forest and village traditional temples and both tasks of religion are equally significant and cannot be separated. Therefore, the conference agreed to maintain both Buddhist tasks.

The Path to Peace

The Most Venerable Phramaha Phong Samaleuk dedicated himself for the mission of peace. He developed the concept of building peace since he was a young monk. His purpose of joining the revolutionary movement was to liberate the country from foreign oppression, towards freedom or peace, and to save Buddhism in the country.

As vividly found in his Dhamma talks, in his young age he developed the idea of building peace from the core teachings of Buddhism: morality, concentration and wisdom. He always emphasized: morality is the fundamental teaching of peace in general or for ordinary people; concentration or mental development is inner peace, while wisdom is the result of concentration.

Later, when he became the President-monk, he specifically emphasized: peace can be acquired through the observation of the five precepts. Whenever he gave Dhamma talks, he would direct the topic to the building of peace through the observance of five precepts. He would also often mention about the time during 1980s, when attending international conferences in Russia, when he proposed the solution to peace. Later, the preceding, late Sangha-president, the Most Ven. Phramaha Vichit Singhraj (the president monk before his session) also borrowed and applied the same concept in an international conference in New York, 1999. Here is his often-used speech-address, on the path to peace, with recent and additional editing:

Ten years ago, after the World Religious Conference, in New York, in the United States of America – this conference, featuring participants who were scientists, attended the conference under the main theme of: The Path to peace.

At that time, the method of searching for peace, was through the convention of the great gatherings of various world religious adherents. The conference selected a representative from each religion to point out the highest goal of one's own religion. At first, a representative from the Christianity was

selected from the host country, from New York, and representatives from other religions; finally, at the end, a Buddhist leader was allowed to comment. At that time, even though there were many Buddhist participants from many Buddhist countries, the Most Ven. Dr. Phramaha Vichit Singhraj, the Late President of Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization- a representative from Laos, was chosen on behalf of Buddhism to propose a solution to world peace. From his appointment during the conference, he humbly propagated and applied the Buddha's teachings, illustrating: Human beings are city beings, not wild animals; it means that human beings live together in social-group, and do not live in isolation. Buddhism have a teach tradition that emphasizes the religious life of mutual respect, harmony and peace. There are also Buddhist teachings that recommend always holding deliberations, solving problems democratically, without violence to create a prosperous and harmonious life (Priastana, 2014 : 1). And human beings can live happily together with both inner peace and outer peace. (Mansumittrchai, 2015 : 162)

However, as human beings, we have different point of views. Therefore, to coexist with others, our human societies need to have rules or regulations, put into practice. Regulations lead to calmnes a path to peace. The fundamental rules for achieving peace in our societies, to peacefully coexist, or live together, are: (D.III. 235, A.III. 203, 275)

1. Human beings should not do any harm to others,
2. Human beings should not steal other people's belongings,
3. Human beings should not commit adultery,
4. Human beings should not tell lies,
5. Human beings should not take any intoxicants. (P. A. Payutto, 2008 : 175)

The Buddha's teachings composed of the same essences leading to the end of suffering. All of his teachings are all beneficial mankind and concord or link to each section (Venerable Sayadej Vongsopha, 2014 : 11) . For further elaboration, the five rules mentioned above should be put into action, and strict forms of punishment should be implemented towards those who violate

these social-norms. Those who break the first rule and second time should be advised, educated and reminded; and, if - for the third time, should face the death penalty, be put into exile, or incarcerated. For the last rule, it shall be forbidden to produce or import any kind of intoxicant, and for those who breach the rules: they will be punished in similar ways, to any of the other rules.

The rules, as mentioned above, were unanimously adopted and signed by all representatives from each country, as the path to peace in the Buddhist way, and officially recognizing and adopting the Day of Vesak, the full moon of the sixth lunar month as the Day of World Peace, and should be a day off from work, to do activities. With that said, internationally, Buddhists should have strictly implemented the mentioned rules since 1999 (B.E.2542). Yet, until now [edited in January 2016], it has been [seventeen years], since the observation and implementation from the countries adopting the rules - if we superficially examine them, it seems that there hasn't been any result. If we carefully scrutinize the Buddhist principles, we will find that we can achieve remarkably effective results; further, we can see: since this conference, there has been a decrease in the competition between the major super powers.

Therefore, our conference should divert to the above mentioned path which will bring us good results. We examined the implementation of the rules that we have adopted, and we have not yet seen any concrete and absolute measures, and there is no plan to award the countries who implement and arrange activities each year – even through viewing their summary reports and selecting from them some lessons-learned and suggestions for improvement. In fact, we rarely seen others, and we only do things, but never find solutions to problems – we never follow up with our suggestions. For example, the fifth-rule, should be easy to practice, but it is often challenged and abandoned.

Now, we have to look back to review the success of the conference in order to understand that the conference was not initiated and organized by our own religious people; but was convened by intelligent scientists and unanimously signed and adopted - but they have neglected it, and only let the religious side

to implement their own concerns. Not only do they fail to put it into action, they also challenge the principles they agreed to, for instance, the refraining from consuming intoxicants. Human-beings who coexist with others should not take any intoxicants - they do not cooperate with us. There is no strict legal-action for punishing those who break the rule-there is no executions or people in exile, no confinement or confiscation of property. In brief, and generally speaking, we do not need to say: "Do not drink alcohol and drive" – just do not allow having any alcohol or any intoxicants in the world. Specifically, let all of the countries eliminate all means of the production for any intoxicants, for instance: the brewery factories, for beer, whiskey or wine, and so on. We can augment our society by producing other important products. If any factories violate the rules, the government should take immediate legal action (order the shutdown of the factory, cancel authorization licenses, and transfer the factory to be under ownership of the government for lawful manufacturing); and if individual-people violate the rules, lawsuits can proceed in their country, accordingly-if necessary.

Concerning foreign relations, if we are the inviter, we should assure that our country is free from any intoxicants. The door to meeting-rooms and in the room should be free from signs of intoxication. During the meeting, if we find that there is a representative from a country who is seemingly drunk, or if we investigate that there is any intoxicant brought in by delegates from a certain country, we will not invite them next time. If they invite us, we will not accept the invitation, from the standpoint or reasoning that we cannot live with any intoxicated addicts. If we can do as mentioned, in the above proposal, then I strongly believe that peace will undoubtedly prevail."

During the 1980s, after the end of the Cold War, he was a Vice-President of Lao Buddhist Fellowship Organization. He was invited to attend many international conferences in Russia, Mongolia, Japan and these mainly emphasized building a peaceful world. There was the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace (ABCP), which gathered Buddhist monks from Southeast Asian countries to contribute towards peace building. The prominent monks from Laos, included the Most

Venerable PhramahaPhong Samaleuk, paying perhaps the most significant role in contributing for peace.

Conclusion

Apart from his biography, it is the emphasis on his contribution to the building of peace from an individual by applying the five precepts. His perspective has been developed through his Dhamma talk and speeches on international conferences. He kept on spreading the message of peace in order to urge people to apply in daily life. He assured that through the application of the five precepts, the peace will prevail in family, society and as well as can contribute to global peace.

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