Community Development and Theravada Buddhism: Comparative and Chronological Study of “Development Monks” In Northeast Thailand

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Composition

- 1 Social Background in which Monks Engaged in Development
- 2 Research on Development Monks
- 3 Survey Research: Comparative Analysis of the Cases (Similarities and Differences)
- 4 Discussion: Key Points Common with and Different From Those of Previous Studies
- 5 Conclusion

1 Social Background in which Monks Engaged in Development

- “development monk (Phura song nak phatthanaa)” Phinit Laphathanan (Phinit, 1986).
- Somboon Suksamran(Somboon, 1977) cooperative relations between the development-oriented regime and the sangha organization after the Sarit government

2 Research on Development Monks

- Naan, in Surin, between 1980 and 1990, as a spiritual leader: devoted his life to the revitalization of villages, as well as to the spiritual cultivation of the villagers.
- some monks trained the physically disabled and Japanese tourists to do meditation and one where a hospice for AIDS patients and a community center were built on the premises of a Buddhist temple.

3-1 Purpose and Method of the Survey Research

- By comparing the typical activity of the monks who engage in regional development and the general activity of local monks, I would like to discuss the characteristics of development monks’ activities and the corresponding relationships with the social spaces where those monks conduct their activities.
Kalashin Province

3-2-1 Outline of the Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Khon Kaen Univ.</th>
<th>Sakurai, Northeast Thailand</th>
<th>Sakurai, Kamalaasai Sub-district</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey Area</td>
<td>Northeast (mainly in Central South)</td>
<td>Northeast (mainly in the Central North)</td>
<td>Karashin Province (Central)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Method</td>
<td>reputation and hearsay</td>
<td>reputation and hearsay</td>
<td>complete enumeration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Cases</td>
<td>28 (44)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Activities of Monks

- ① Khon Kaen (Northeast)
  - rural development, cooporated with NGOs
- ② Sakurai (Northeast)
  - Conventional role: Medicine man, Ascetic meditation, and teaching Buddhism
  - New role: rural development by donation
- ③ Sakurai (Kamalaasai)
  - Conventional role and care for elderly

Monks (by Khon Kaen Univ.)

Monks (by Sakurai)

Monks (in Kamalaasai District)
### 3-2-2 Attributes of Monks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison Item</th>
<th>Khon Kaen Univ.</th>
<th>Sakurai, Northeast Thailand</th>
<th>Sakurai, Kamalaasai Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of Monks</td>
<td>Mostly in their 60s and 70s; some still young</td>
<td>Uniformly scattered</td>
<td>Mostly in their 40s and 50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Vassavasa” - Training Period</td>
<td>Half had a 10-year or less training period</td>
<td>Uniformly scattered</td>
<td>Many had a long training period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting Period for Development</td>
<td>1970-80</td>
<td>1980-90</td>
<td>No awareness of “development” — thus, start?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3-2-3 Activity of Temples and Its Social Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Sakurai, Kamalaasai Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concordance rate (%) between the monk’s native village and temple site</td>
<td>75% for the province; most go back to their native village.</td>
<td>50% for the province; fifty-fifty.</td>
<td>90% for the Sub-district; They became priests in their native village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class before entering the priesthood</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Farmer, urban middle class</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4-1 Key Points in Common with Previous Studies
- the villager and monk are inseparable entities: If the village is poor, the total amount of offerings from villagers is low.
- the temple also functions as a community center for villagers, as well as a place for devout followers to retreat.
- high-living capitalists and politicians during the “bubble” economy of the 1990s, presented certain monks with a set of temple buildings

### 4-2 Findings Different From Those of Previous Studies
- First, the number of monks who had been frequently observed on the sites of rural development led by the government and regional development NGOs during the 1970s-80s or up to the mid-1990s and who served as leaders in the development of social capital has been on the decline.
- Few villagers including the village head expect monks to exercise leadership. Rather, many hope that monks will make spiritual contributions at the temple.
• Second, unlike the development monks with a clear ideology whom intellectuals and NGOs/NPOs tend to pay attention to, people nowadays give more respect to monks who carry out multifaceted social development with a charismatic air and a smooth preaching style, or a miracle-working prayer or practice. (winning lottery numbers; various types of exorcism or good-luck prayers; osteosynthesis and massage)

• In Northeast Thailand, a monk often plays the dual role of witch doctor called “motam” (medicine man)

Conclusions

• What the author’s findings can add to the previous studies is:
  • 1) the context of social history: Thai monks of Theravada Buddhism began to engage in development.
  • 2) the context of social changes: societal expectations on monks have been changing.