



BUDDHISM AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN THAILAND

Chattawat Shatnataphat

Faculty of Business Administration and Public Administration, Western University, Kanchanaburi, Thailand

Corresponding author E-mail: chattawat.sh@western.ac.th

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Buddhism strongly shapes Thai culture, rule, and national identity, mixing religious ideas with public management. This study looks at how Buddhist lessons fit into Thai governance, checks the Sangha's role in building national unity, and finds issues in changing these ideas for today's administrative structures. This research aimed to examine the incorporation of Buddhist principles in Thai public administration and evaluate their contributions to fostering national unity amidst the difficulties of modernizing these principles in today's governance. By studying where religion meets management, the study shines a light on how Buddhist lessons change Thailand's rule and gives views on keeping cultural heritage while handling the needs of a changing administrative setup.

Methodology: A simple method was used, including deep talks and group chats to get full ideas. Three types of main informants were picked: public workers who make rules; Buddhist monks and thinkers; and teachers and experts in public management. Also, three groups were held with community heads, everyday people involved in Buddhist work, and people interested in public management and Buddhism. Information obtained from these talks and chats was written down and examined with topic analysis to find common ideas and important points to give a clear view of the link between Buddhism and public rules.

Main Results: The study shows that in Thai public work, key Buddhist ideas like the Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path, and Six Perfections play a big part. They guide the right leadership and decision making where public workers focus on kindness and love during government tasks. The Sangha is very important for community growth because it leads efforts such as building schools and healthcare centers while promoting values of compassion, giving, and harmony within the neighborhood. Monks help to fix local fights by using Buddhist thoughts of no violence and care, thus maintaining peace and social unity. Modernizing these ideas brings challenges like finding a balance between old habits and current duties, making sure their meaning stays strong in changing society and stopping their use for political aims.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: Applied Buddhism has a tricky job in terms of social benefits in Thailand's public care system. Its ideas are mixed into the country's school system, which helps build a feeling of national belonging and togetherness among young people by teaching moral ideas, strict rules, and respect. The Four Noble Truths the Noble Eightfold Path and Six Perfections is significant



influences. With the active help of the Sangha in local community projects and solving fights, they show their important role in keeping peace and unity all over the land. Their respected place and trust in Thai societies improves their helpful effect on different kinds of individuals.

Conclusions: Incorporating Buddhist principles like the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path in Thailand's public administration helps promote effective governance and social cohesion. Sangha's involvement in enhance national solidarity further solidifies this framework by linking ethical behavior with efficient management. This strategy encourages collaboration between Buddhist organizations and governmental agencies strengthen moral decision-making. Although there are obstacles due to contemporary modifications, advantages such as improved societal tranquility surpass them. This outcome underscores the efficacy of integrating Dharmic values into administrative practices. Buddhist principles are kept relevant through continuous research and flexibility helping Thailand progress and maintain cohesion in the face of international shifts.

Keywords: Buddhism, National Integration, Public Administration

Introduction

Buddhism has a deep influence on Thai culture and society, shaping the way governance is conducted and how national identity is perceived. The exploration here delves into its historical roots, including how Buddhist principles have been woven into governing practices as well as its significance in bringing about national unity bolstered by perspectives from researchers within Thailand. For more than one thousand years, Thailand, once called Siam, remained a bastion for Theravada Buddhism. Since it was introduced in the era of King Ashoka, originating from India, Buddhism rose to prominence and became an integral part of Thailand's state religion permeating through aspects of cultural, ethical norms and administrative guidelines (Akins, 2019). During the era of Sukhothai, which span between the 13th and 15th centuries, Buddhism was integrated into Thai society. It was promoted as a tool for legitimizing the monarchy and to establish social order. This trend was maintained throughout the Ayutthaya period from the 14th up until the 18th centuries with more institutionalization of Buddhism. (Srisuwan, 2019)

Buddhist values are clearly integrated into Thailand's ruling procedures as they draw from Buddhist philosophies in their public management. Buddha's insights especially the Dhamma, which represent universal law and balance, have directed policymaking and governance methods. Notions like empathy karuna friendliness Metta together with the Four Noble Truths have shaped a framework that is both moralistic and ethical used by the government. (Arphattananon, 2020a). The "Dhamma leadership" concept focuses on moral uprightness and ethical behavior. They influence the standards and actions of government officials in Thailand. It advocates for compassionate and knowledgeable leadership according (Boonyaratana, 2020). Buddhism has been significant in fostering national unity in Thailand especially during social and political turmoil. This belief system encourages cohesion among the country's varied ethnic and cultural



communities, establishing a collective identity that is fundamental for maintaining stability and progress at the national level (Thanasombat, 2019).

Buddhist lessons are included in the national curriculum to foster patriotism and solidarity among young individuals. Furthermore, Buddhist rituals and celebration promote community cohesion and reinforce cultural identity (Kittiprapas, 2019). The Sangha, the Buddhist monastic community plays an important role in encouraging social harmony and integration. Monks act as mediators in disputes and advocate for fairness. They extend their influence to societal and political issues. Their involvement in community development projects underlines their efforts to enhance unity within nation (Thavorn, 2021). Though it makes positive contributions, challenges are encountered in integrating Buddhism with the Thai governance and national integration efforts. A significant obstacle comes from the politicization of Buddhism. This happens when religious symbols and teachings are used to validate political interests, and as a result, weakening religion's ethical influence and fostering rifts within both the Buddhist community and society (Prachachat, 2020). Another issue is when you try to reconcile old-fashioned values with what is needed for today's modern governance. When you mix Buddhist teaching into nowadays administrative methods, it needs a deep understanding of both Buddhism and the current public administration (Wongchai, 2022).

The diversity in the Buddhist community creates challenges to fostering unity nationally. In Thailand, a range of Buddhist sects exist that follow their own distinct beliefs and rituals. It's crucial for the government to handle these diversities with care so as to promote a unified sense of national belonging (Khamnoon, 2021). The profound influence of Buddhism on socio-political aspects in Thailand, especially its function in public administration and national unity, highlights its importance. Constant conversation and change are crucial for tackling the problems to guarantee that Buddhism keeps making a beneficial impact on Thailand's development and peace. As Thailand experiences modernization and globalization, how Buddhism adapts within public management and contributes to uniting the nation can give valuable lessons for other countries facing similar challenges.

Objectives

This research aimed to examine the incorporation of Buddhist principles in Thai public administration and evaluate their contributions to fostering national unity amidst the difficulties of modernizing these principles in today's governance. By studying where religion meets management, the study shines a light on how Buddhist lessons change Thailand's rule and gives views on keeping cultural heritage while handling the needs of a changing administrative setup.

Methodology

This study examines the incorporation of Buddhist philosophies within Thailand's government operations while evaluating how the Sangha contributes to fostering country-wide unity and delving into the hurdles associated with contemporizing processes. Insights will be procured through a qualitative method involving comprehensive interviews as well as collective conversations over a period spanning February 2022 until January 2023.



Key Informant Interviews: Three clusters consisting of five persons each come from public servants, Buddhist clergy, and learned people, along with educators in government management. They must craft a flexible interview framework that includes open-ended inquiries that are custom-fit for every cluster when they should run a trial to ensure its clarity as proposed. (Patton, 2002). When carrying out interviews, arrange them in a space that maintains confidentiality, ensure to obtain approval before recording, and it's essential to make comprehensive notes (Nasawaeng, 2024). For conducting data analysis, transcribe and examine interview records through NVivo software, carry out a thematic evaluation to pinpoint prevalent themes as suggested (Chaisuwan, 2021).

Focus Groups: Selection was conducted by three groups of ten individuals each: Community leaders, regular participants in Buddhist activities, and students or individuals just beginning their careers. Creating a conversational framework that reflects the stated goals of the study is part of the preparation process (Sangkhapreecha, 2020). Have an experienced moderator lead the conversation, make sure recordings are made with participants' consent, and carefully record the proceedings (Srichan et al., 2024). Analyzing data entails recording talks, identifying recurrent themes, and comparing the outcomes across various groups as described in the work (Vaughn et al., 1996).

Integration and Reporting: Synthesizing involves the integration of insights gathered from both interviews and focus group discussions while cross-verifying the data to ensure their validity as per Denzin & Lincoln's (2011) framework. Mandatory is the compilation of an in-depth report encompassing methodology findings and suggestions, employing quotations for exemplifying key points (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Sharing involves three key group-researchers, practitioners, and policymakers-to maximize influence. Researchers share result in academic publication and present them at convention. Practitioners utilize workshops to implement new learning. Policymakers engage in focus dialogue to shape policy. Credibility is maintained through various methods such as cross-checking by multiple raters, confirmation by group members, using pretested query and continual feedback loop (Yin, 2018).

Results and Discussion

Results of Research Objectives on the Integration of Buddhist Principles in Thai Public Administration

To explore the integration of Buddhist principles in Thai public administration. The examination of discussions with the three categories of main source (Government Officials, Buddhist Clergy and Experts, and Scholars) unveiled numerous important findings regarding the incorporation of Buddhist beliefs in Thailand's governmental operations.

Every group strongly emphasized how central Buddhist beliefs, including the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and Six Perfections or paramitas, are crucial in forming ethical administrative behaviors and practices. Those who serve the public underscored those principles such as compassion or karuna and loving-kindness metta guide how they engage with people and



affect their choices during decision-making. Monks and academics in Buddhism pointed out governance rooted in Dhamma which backs a leadership style focused on moral values, compassion, and the health of communities noting teachings from Buddha encourage fairness and openness also responsibility among leaders (Phra Kittikun Khwathichak et al., 2024).

In implementing governance, they in the public sector has brought up examples where Buddhist principles are used. Methods for solving conflicts often use Buddhist meditation and approaches of reconciliation that focus on non-violence and understanding each other. Programs with goals to boost public welfare, such as initiatives for social justice and projects for development in communities, often incorporate values from Buddhism to make them more effective. Public officials have pointed out that this work serves both spiritual and material well-being, lining up with the all-encompassing ethics in Buddhism.

While positive integrations were seen, various barriers were acknowledged. Authorities and academics confess the difficulties to harmonize classic Buddhist principles with modern governance needs. They emphasized its vital for civil servants to educate continuously in Buddhist beliefs for successful implementation. In addition, concern about the politicization of Buddhist teachings was expressed as a concern. Monks and scholars have emphasized the importance of maintaining the integrity of Buddhist principles and preventing its manipulation for political purposes (Ratanakul, 2021).

Incorporating Buddhist beliefs is seen as a way to improve the ethical foundation of public administration. Respondents have mentioned that this inclusion encourages kinder and more principled administrative setting fostering trust and collaboration between government and citizens. It is also acknowledged for its role in strengthening national unity by upholding common cultural and religious beliefs promoting wider social peace and steadiness.

The main focus of the study was to explore how Buddhist principles are included in administration in Thailand. Study results show that core Buddhist teachings like the Four Noble Truths go deep into the administrative method and help shape decisions in the Thai government. Officials point out how they use things like compassion and kindness when they govern, which are a key part of Buddhist beliefs. This mixing helps make sure there is good ethical leadership and looks after the welfare of people, connecting day-to-day admin work with moral and spirit values too. This backs up previous studies about religion playing a big role in government work. Swearer observed in 2010 that Buddhist moral values significantly influence Thai leadership methods and administrative procedures. It encourages ethical behavior and decisions made with compassion and mindfulness. Similarly, Keyes recorded in 1987 (Ratanakul, 2021) how Buddhist doctrines are used to promote social justice and resolving community conflicts which reinforce social unity and trust within government agencies overall inclusion of Buddhist ideals in Thai public administration seem to enhance the ethical foundations of governance leading to a nurturing of compassionate and morally sound administrative environment (Ganwiboon, 2022).



The findings indicate that Buddhist principles significantly and positively affect how the Thai government is managed. It highlights the need to apply these ideas thoughtfully and in response to current challenges.

To assess the role of the Sangha in promoting national integration in Thailand. In the study, interviews with three main source types were examined-community leaders' people involved in Buddhist customs, and young professionals and students. It became clear how Sangha helps to encourage national unity through this process.

Different members from multiple collectives pointed out the important roles that the Sangha plays within community development tasks. Monks is leading efforts in creation projects such as building schools, health care centers and spaces for everyone to gather. Such actions satisfy present social necessities while also forwarding Buddhist values like benevolence, mutual support, and fellowship. Individuals who are not ordained recognize how Sangha organizes occasions that strengthen relationships in communities. This includes spiritual ceremonies programs for meditating and festive cultural gatherings. Occurrences strengthen bonds within a group and promote a sense of unity and shared identity among community individuals (Phramaha Anan Buakham et al., 2024).

The Sangha are known for their involvement in resolving conflicts. Monks are frequently asked to help settle disputes within communities by applying Buddhist values like non-violence, empathy, and understanding. This method of conflict resolution contributes to sustaining peace and order, strengthening social unity. Leaders from various communities have pointed out cases where the Sangha effectively mediated conflict involving land disagreements, family matters, and community disputes. The monks were respected for their status and neutrality, which were seen as important elements in them being successful mediators.

Throughout histories the Sangha have been playing a crucial role in education. Monks and laypeople alike highlight the value of Buddhist teaching in educational settings. By incorporating Buddhist values into schools, Sangha help s in fostering ethical behaviors, self-controls and reverence for others among young individuals. The moral supports offered by Sangha through its educational initiatives are recognized and valued by students and young adults alike. They observed that these lessons encourage a feeling of patriotism and cohesion, equipping youth to make constructive impacts on society.

Challenges and Constraints: Although the Sangha holds a positive influence, various issues need to be addressed. Leaders of community and laypeople have highlighted the necessity for Sangha adjusting to modern societal transformations. Maintaining relevance of Buddhist teachings in an always changing world presents a crucial challenge. Concerns about the potential political exploitation of Sangha influence have also been raised. Maintaining the Sangha's neutrality crucial, and stopping their involvement in political issues that could undermine their responsibilities to promote national unity is essential (Sakul, 2021).

The participation of Sangha in community development, conflict resolution and education play an essential role in enhancing national integration. By bridging gaps between diverse cultural



and ethnic groups, the monk contributes to fostering a cohesive national identity. The high regard and credibility enjoyed by Sangha within Thai society augment their capacity to impact different population segments positively therefore nurturing enduring social harmony and stability.

The second goal of the study was to explore how the Sangha affects Thailand's national unity. Findings indicate that the Sangha is key in promoting growth and unity within communities. Monks lead initiatives such as building schools, medical facilities, and spaces for the community that cater to practical and spiritual needs alike. This improves social infrastructure and strengthens values like compassion giving and harmony in the community rooted in Buddhist teachings. Along with these; It was noted that Sangha plays a role in resolving disputes. Monks often help solve societal disagreements using Buddhist principles of

nonviolence and empathy. This encourages peace and helps keep things orderly. Their role strengthens the Sangha's position as a stabilizer in Thai society, making people stick together more and relieving social tension. This matches what past research has found. McCargo (2004) pointed out how monks made significant contributions to progress in rural areas because they impact local communities and help resolve conflicts (Rattana & Athapol, 2021) also stressed how effective Buddhist monks are when it comes to helping unite society and solving arguments, highlighting how important the Sangha is for fostering unity across the nation. The Sangha plays a vital role for fostering national unity in Thailand by being actively involved in community development and conflicts resolution (Phra Kittikun Khwathichak et al., 2024).

The findings highlight how important the Sangha is in Thai society. It shows both its contribution and the challenges it faces in promoting unity across the nation.

To investigate the challenges of modernizing Buddhist principles in contemporary Thai governance. When talking to officials, clerics, and scholars, it has become clear that there is a substantial understanding of the challenges and complexities involved in blending Buddhist teachings with modern government practice in Thailand.

All parties express the challenges of upholding traditional Buddhist values while they meet modern governance requirements. Officials pointed out that timeless Buddhist principles such as ethical leadership and compassion need to be adjusted to fit present-day administrative procedures and societal demands. Spiritual leaders stressed the importance of integrating Buddhist teachings in ways that maintain their fundamental beliefs, expressing worry about potentially watering down key principles during modernization process (Pongpaew, 2022).

Academics and policymakers emphasize on the significance of continuous education and training initiatives for public officials so they understand and apply Buddhist principles effectively in their roles. Although the current civil servant curriculum covers Buddhist ethics, there are calls for more extensive hands-on training modules. Religious leaders have recommended cooperative ventures between Buddhist institutions and government bodies to create programs that are spiritually fulfilling but also practically applicable.

Buddhism teachings face challenges of secularization and politicization as different groups have noted. Instances were highlighted where political motives have exploited Buddhism's



principles, which weakens its moral basis. Religious figures have emphasized on safeguarding purity of Buddhist teachings to prevent their exploitation in politics. They advocate for clear boundaries to maintain ethical and non-political nature of Buddhism's involvement in governance (Uthaisa et al., 2023).

A variety of interpretations and customs within the Buddhist community itself presents challenges. Different schools of thought and customs make it complicated to establish a cohesive method for incorporating these principles in governance. Scholars have emphasized the importance of inclusive discussions that acknowledge different interpretations and customs within Buddhism. Decision makers have proposed standardized framework created through agreement among religious scholars and government officials to help implement Buddhist principles in public administration.

While obstacles exist, incorporating Buddhist values into governance has its merits. Interviewees pointed out that such integration fosters a more compassionate, ethical, and understanding administrative atmosphere. They believe it strengthens community unity and trust between government and the public. To address challenges, the interviewee recommended increasing collaboration between Buddhist groups and government bodies, implementing better training programs, ensuring that Buddhist principles are applied ethically in politics, and encouraging inclusive dialogue to harmonize different perspectives.

The third goal of the research is to find out what makes it challenging to update Buddhist principles in contemporary Thai governance. They find many big obstacles. Trying to align old Buddhist values with today's modern administrative needs and ensuring that the teachings of the Buddha remain useful when everything changes quickly while stopping the misuse of these principles for some political purposes is very tough. Policymakers agree that, yes, Buddha's moral teachings provide a strong base for leadership with good ethics, but using them right now requires some change so we can deal with problems in how things run today. Problems like this have also been seen before in other studies. Pongpaew (2022) says it is hard to keep doing old religious practices within modern administrative work. You need to make adjustments all the time to teach people so they all stay relevant and do their jobs well. McCargo discusses the dangers associated with the politicization of Buddhist principles, which can weaken their moral base and create division within the community. To deal with these challenges, continuous conversation and partnerships between Buddhist organizations and government bodies are needed, along with clear directives to prevent the exploitation of Buddhist doctrines for political purposes (Pongpaew, 2022).

In Thai management research, there is a focus on harmonizing tradition and modernity. The incorporation of Buddhist principles into Thai management poses a challenging yet important endeavor. It involves striking a balance between traditional beliefs and contemporary approaches to ensure top-notch education in line with Swearer's emphasis on flexible Buddhism. By examining historical connections such as the role of Sangha in governance, one can see how Buddhist teachings influence ethical leadership in management practices. This integration serves to

strengthen the objective of melding ancient wisdom with current governance for enduring ethical leadership (Arphattananon, 2020b).

Originality and Body of Knowledge

The chart displays five main elements of blending Buddhism into Thai public management and its effect on national unity. Each element signifies a separate realm of understanding, emphasizing the significance of Buddhist values in running the country and community (In Figure 1).

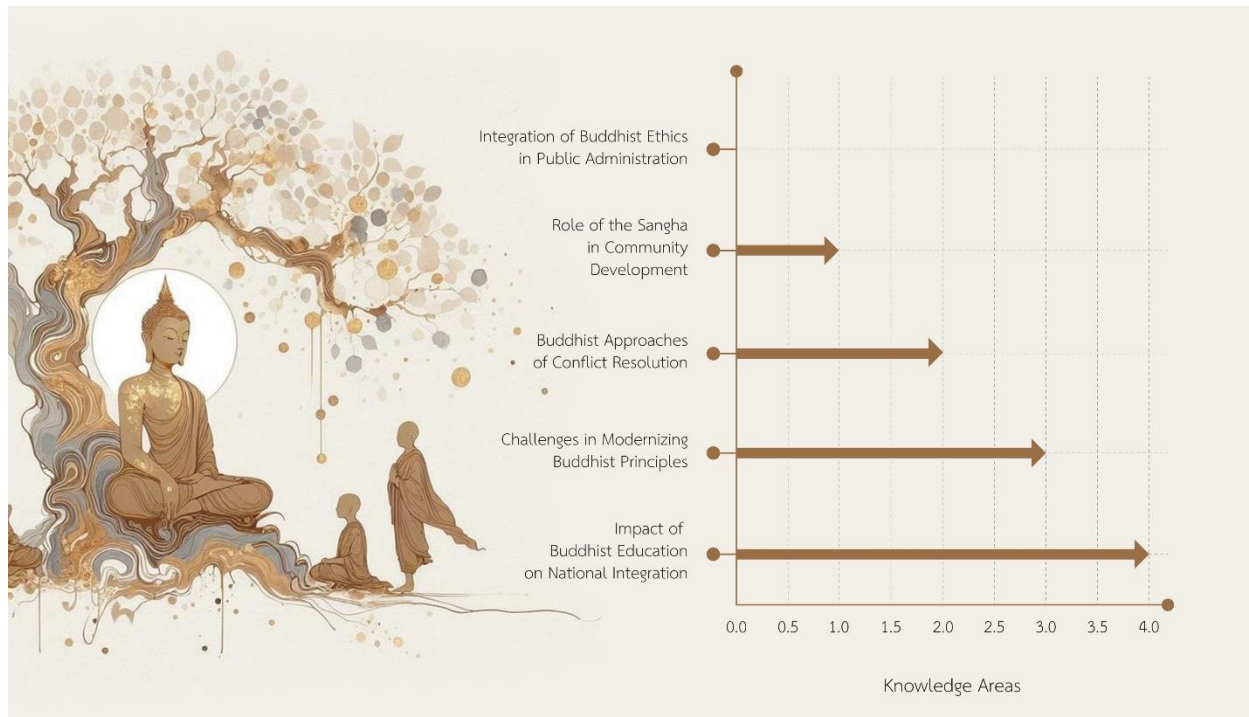


Figure 1 The role of Buddhism in Thai public administration and national integration

1. Integration of Buddhist Ethics in Public Administration: This facet highlights the influence of Buddhist morals, notably concepts like Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path, on administrative operations and decision-making in Thai governance. These principles support moral leadership, empathy, and a dedication to community well-being crucial for establishing kindhearted and equitable administrative setting.

2. Role of the Sangha in Community Development: The Sangha, referring to the Buddhist monastic community, has a vital role in various community development endeavors throughout Thailand. Monks spearhead projects like constructing schools, medical facilities, and communal buildings to meet both physical and emotional requirements. These actions enhance social structures while instilling principles of kindness, benevolence, and unity.

3. Buddhist Approaches to Conflict Resolution: In Thai communities, a vital role is played by Buddhist beliefs in resolving conflicts. Monks mediate disagreements by promoting



nonviolence, empathy, and comprehension. This strategy fosters harmony, strengthens social unity, and minimizes violence and discord in the community.

4. Challenges in Modernizing Buddhist Principles: Adjusting age-old Buddhist principles to suit the needs of contemporary governance brings various hurdles. These encompass harmonizing tradition with modernization, maintaining the significance of teaching in a swiftly evolving world, and averting politicization of Buddhist philosophies. Ongoing education and cooperative endeavors between Buddhist organizations and governmental bodies are vital for successful execution.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The examination was about how Thailand's public management has been influenced by Buddhist philosophy, revealing important insights. Fundamental teachings of Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Six Perfections, play a critical role in shaping moral behavior in governance. Officials within the government emphasize kindness and goodwill as crucial components that direct interactions and the choices they make. Moreover, the Sangha's involvement in social advancement, resolving conflicts, and improving educational systems contribute to unity across the country. Monks lead initiatives like building schools and health centers, which foster a sense of community collaboration. They also facilitate disputes and encourage harmony and organization. Integrating Buddhist principles runs into obstacles. Balancing traditional values with the need for modern governance is tough. Continuous education and training for public officials are essential to implement Buddhist teachings correctly. There are concerns about the politicization of Buddhist principles, which highlights the importance of maintaining their integrity and ensuring they are not misused for political gain. Despite these challenges, infusing governance with Buddhist values promotes a compassionate, ethical, and understanding administrative environment that enhances community cohesion, fostering trust between the government and the public. The research stresses the significant positive effects that Buddhist principles have on Thai public administration. They show the importance of thoughtfully applying these principles to meet modern-day challenges, which helps ensure they stay relevant and effective in today's governance. If Buddhist institutions continue to work together with government bodies and there are substantial training programs, they can get past these hurdles and help create a more ethical and efficient administrative environment. Recommendations: 1) Educational programs are to be created for government official on how they can implement Buddhist philosophy in administration. This should be formulated by experts from Buddhist circles and governmental bodies; 2) Establish a distinct supervising body to ensure Buddhist principles are correctly applied in government operations while protecting them from political influences; and 3) Encourage comprehensive discussion among diverse Buddhist schools to establish a uniform structure for governance.



Acknowledgement

Understanding influence of Buddhist doctrines on public service delivery efficiency in Thailand underscore their significance in governance. For example, training programs focusing on mindfulness for government employees could boost concentration and lessen stress levels with compassion exercises potentially elevating standard of services rendered. Studies indicate that Buddhist values might encourage ethical conduct and responsibility as evidenced in initial trials within Thai governmental departments. Nevertheless, constraints like limited sample sizes and regional focus hinder conclusive results. Extending research to encompass international assessments of religious involvement in governance such as Bhutan's Gross National Happiness framework could offer broader understanding regarding implementing faith-driven principles practically.

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