



AN INTEGRATION OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING WITH VOLUNTEER NETWORK'S COMMUNITY WELFARE OF WAT BANG CHANG NUEA, SAMPRAN DISTRICT, NAKHON PATHOM PROVINCE, THAILAND

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Buddhism has been the predominant religion in Thailand for over 2,000 years since the Suvarnabhumi period and remained so until the present day. It served as the religion of most of the population, acted as a cornerstone and fundamental foundation of Thai culture, functioned as a spiritual center fostering unity among the Thai people, and was deeply intertwined with the Thai nation. However, Thai society faced challenges related to urbanization, which negatively impacted the quality of life in communities. There was a pressing need to promote well-being to enhance the quality of life in these areas. Buddhist principles have long served as a foundation for developing individuals, communities, and society, fostering self-reliance and harmonious living. Wat Bang Chang Nuea, as the case study of this research, applied Buddhadhamma with the concept of volunteerism to promote community welfare. Therefore, the objectives of this research were to study the concept of volunteerism and community development according to Buddhist guidelines and to present guidelines for applying the principles of Buddhadhamma to promote community welfare in the context of Wat Bang Chang Nuea, Nakhon Pathom Province.

Methodology: The research employed a qualitative methodology for data collection. A review of relevant literature was conducted to serve as fundamental data for the study. The target group was determined through case study selection. The methodology also included participant observation and focus group discussions.

Main Results: The study revealed the following findings: 1) The study of volunteerism and community development according to Buddhist guidelines aimed to improve the quality of life for people at all levels. Thailand's Buddhist temples served as fundamental institutions for promoting education and improving people's quality of life, with the ultimate goal of achieving a good quality of life. The principles relevant to the context of volunteer work included



Sanghahawatthu and Sappurisadhamma, 2) The guidelines for applying Buddhaddhamma principles to community welfare promotion in the context of Wat Bang Chang Nuea, Nakhon Pathom Province, included: 2.1) Dana: Practicing sharing for the benefit of others; 2.2) Piyavaca: Practicing speaking with sweet and sincere words, avoiding rude or aggressive speech, and saying things that were useful and appropriate; 2.3) Atthacariya: Practicing helping one another; and 2.4) Samanattata: Practicing acting consistently, getting along, being a good companion, avoiding exploitation, facing and solving problems together for mutual benefit, making friends, and supporting one another in times of distress. These practices led to happiness and harmony within the group. Furthermore, Sappurisadhamma was identified as an intellectual principle that individuals should have sought and applied to develop themselves comprehensively. If individuals possessed knowledge and abilities aligned with these seven principles of Sappurisadhamma, they were considered people of good qualities and wisdom, dependable by society.

Involvement to Buddhaddhamma: This article highlighted the application of Buddhist principles by integrating Buddhism with the concept of volunteerism. The development of volunteer networks and the promotion of community welfare were closely linked to improving people's quality of life in various dimensions, including physical, mental, social, and spiritual aspects. This concept corresponded with Buddhism's social benefits, particularly Sappurisadhamma and Sanghahawatthu, which aimed to develop individuals' potential righteously while fostering good communities and a peaceful global society.

Conclusions: The principles of Sanghahawatthu and Sappurisadhamma served as foundational guidelines for promoting a good quality of life and building effective volunteer networks that functioned successfully within society.

Keywords: Well-being, Buddhaddhamma, Volunteer Network, Community Welfare

Introduction

Buddhism entered and gained acceptance among communities in the land of Thailand, which was part of the Suvarnabhumi region, during the reign of King Ashoka the Great of India. In the early 3rd century, he dispatched the ninth mission, led by Venerable Sona and Venerable Uttara, to propagate Buddhism (Watana, 2022). At that time, the land that embraced Buddhism was referred to by foreigners, such as the Indians, as "Suvarnabhumi." The term "Suvarnabhumi" was mentioned in ancient Indian primary documents in both the Pali and Sanskrit languages (Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Culture, 2017); (Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto), 2002). Many academic works suggested that Suvarnabhumi referred to real land encompassing various countries in Southeast Asia, including both islands and mainland territories (Thinapong et al., 2019). The land that initially embraced Buddhism in its early stages became a subject of debate and interpretation among scholars. However, it generally referred to the lands of present-day Thailand and Myanmar. Considering the continuous prosperity of archaeological remains, customs, moral teachings, and Buddhist-related ways of life in both Thailand and Myanmar, scholars believed that these two countries were the first to accept Buddhism (Phra Dhammapitaka



(P.A. Payutto), 2002). Nevertheless, both lands were regarded as part of the Suvarnabhumi region in history (Israngul Na Ayuthaya & Dhammapiya, 2016). Thailand, as part of the Suvarnabhumi region, had embraced Buddhism as its predominant religion for over two thousand years. Thai society was known for having Buddhism as a fundamental cornerstone that permeated beliefs, ways of life, education, customs, and traditions. Buddhism acted as a guiding force that shaped the community's mindset and enabled them to adapt well to changes while maintaining a balanced way of life in the present era (Phra Bhramagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2013).

The diverse nature of Thai communities and society underwent changes influenced by various factors, such as a shifting demographic structure with an increasing aging population and a growing number of vulnerable individuals. The urbanization trend created a demand for a deeper understanding of Buddhism among the population. The adaptation and redefined roles of the Sangha (Buddhist Monastic Community) and the formation of volunteer groups rooted in Buddhist principles played important roles in designing various activities. These aspects were crucial in developing the values of Buddhism to flourish in contemporary society. Through research, studies, and reflections on case studies, the qualities of Buddhism were identified as genuinely contributing to the management and provision of a high quality of life for the people (Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2019); (Office of the Secretary of the National Strategy Committee, 2018).

The selection of the research area considered the phenomenon of diverse practices based on Buddhist principles within the context of group dynamics, interactions, continuity, and sustainability. The research area was chosen based on various activities and projects that had taken place in the area, emphasizing their continuity and community participation. The driving issues were linked to the well-being and quality of life of community members. Each activity reflected the application of Buddhist principles in practice. By selecting the case study of Ban Wat Bang Chang Nuea in Sam Phran District, Nakhon Pathom Province, which integrated the core principles of Buddhist teachings or Buddhadhamma with community welfare and the volunteer network, the research observed how Buddhist principles were applied to the foundations of social capital and culture. This integration included homes, temples, and schools, all interconnected within a community where both monks and community members initiated and participated in development activities.

The development of volunteer groups was guided by Buddhist principles, serving as a tool for voluntary work in the area. The vulnerable groups in the community, who had basic needs for livelihood, were identified as a clear target group. The strengths of the case study lay in its ability to integrate Buddhist principles into practical management, which became a sustainable part of community development. This case study served as an example of how Buddhist principles could be aligned with current societal needs.

Objectives

The Buddhist principles were designed to develop individuals, communities, and society to enhance self-care potential and the ability to live harmoniously in daily life. The objectives



of this research paper were to study the concept of volunteerism and community development according to Buddhist guidelines and to present guidelines for applying Buddhist principles or Buddhadhamma to promote community welfare in the context of Wat Bang Chang Nuea, Nakhon Pathom Province.

Methodology

This research was conducted following a systematic sequence of steps, as outlined below:

1. Research Model: The study employed a qualitative field research approach, which incorporated documentary analysis, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation.

2. Key Contributors: The research involved 12 key informants who were selected through purposive sampling. This group was chosen to ensure that the information gathered was accurate and comprehensive, in alignment with the study's objectives.

3. Research Tools: The instrument used was a semi-structured interview questionnaire, which had been developed based on relevant theories and reviewed by three experts to ensure efficient data collection and alignment with the study's objectives.

4. Data Collection: Data was collected using the Focus Group Discussion technique and was analyzed through content analysis. The Triangulation technique was applied to verify the credibility of the data by checking for consistency across multiple sources. This included presenting the data to participants for verification (Member Checking) or using diverse sources to confirm accuracy.

5. Findings Presentation: The findings were presented in a descriptive format, emphasizing narration and interpretation of the data in accordance with the study's objectives.

Results and Discussion

1. The study of volunteerism and community development according to Buddhist guidelines revealed that the concept of the volunteer network had been initiated and developed into the Bang Chang Nuea Temple Volunteer Network in 2004. A clear management framework had been established between 2005 and 2006. The sub-district of Klong Mai Buri Ram had become part of the network's community well-being initiatives at the sub-district level. A project health team had been appointed to facilitate the distribution of essential items to those in need in the Klong Mai sub-district. The network's initial missions included:

- 1.1 Coordination and Capacity Building of the Volunteer Leadership Team: This involved coordinating the participation of volunteer leadership networks in activities within the area and organizing various events to enhance the team's capacity for effective volunteer work.

- 1.2 Field Visits and Provision of Essential Items to Vulnerable Groups: This included conducting field visits to designated households and providing essential items sourced from central authorities to target groups on the 11th day of each month.



1.3 Health Services and Health Promotion for Target Groups: This consisted of offering on-site guidance and basic care to target groups, conducting preliminary assessments, and developing care and health promotion models.

1.4 Identification and Proposal of New/Old Target Groups for Consideration: This involved data collection, assessments, and providing beneficial recommendations to the committee for the network's operations at the local level.

These missions had been mutually agreed upon by the sub-district working group but were flexible enough to adapt to specific needs. Resources had been mobilized through the central role of the temple, combined with support and regular donations from relatives in accordance with religious traditions and occasions. Traditional Thai items, such as rice, soap, toothpaste, cooking oil, and household medicine, were essential resources for vulnerable visiting groups.

The working structure of the Bang Chang Nuea Temple Volunteer Network, though formally appointed, had operated informally in practical management. Meetings and discussions followed the guidance of the advisory committee, which included the network consultant and the temple abbot. The management mechanism had been characterized by high flexibility and a spirit of mutual support and care, resembling a sibling-like and family-like structure. The working committee comprised key stakeholders, including regular temple volunteers who served as volunteer leaders. Community leaders, such as village headmen and representatives of the monastic community, had also been part of the committee. All members played roles in determining the suitability of home visits and assessing individuals' eligibility to receive support from the volunteer network.

In addition to this, it was evident that in the execution of the operational mission of the volunteer network, there had been a clear format and working mechanism. There was a working structure with a committee established by the local public health agency—specifically the community health-promoting hospital—as the party responsible. The abbot had served as the consultant for the volunteer work. The volunteer work was not separated from the responsibilities of the community health volunteers (CHVs). Everyone involved possessed experience and familiarity with ethical principles and had maintained a good working relationship with the temple. They served as the initial core leadership group and were also local volunteer leaders, such as village health volunteers (VHVs), assistant village heads, village heads, and community leaders. Moreover, these core leadership groups regularly engaged in visits. The provision of traditional Thai attire for visits to vulnerable groups had also been a way for these core leadership groups to establish good relationships with the community. It could be said that the initial goals set by Luang Pho and the working committee during the early stages of the operation included: 1) Procuring and mobilizing essential resources for livelihood support and healthcare assistance for vulnerable groups in the community; 2) Conducting surveys of vulnerable populations who were unable to help themselves in the surrounding areas of Bang Chang Nuea Temple and Khlong Mai Sub-district; and 3) Cultivating awareness in self-care and developing measures to assist vulnerable populations in the area.



The volunteer network had been operating for approximately three years and had accumulated valuable lessons and experiences in promoting diverse aspects of well-being. During the program's initial phase, a model for providing care and support for vulnerable groups in the community had been successfully established. Residents had become aware of the activities being undertaken, and community collaboration had been observed in terms of resource mobilization, information dissemination, and the observation and evaluation of vulnerable groups to ensure their well-being in terms of behavior and self-care. Around 50 families from the vulnerable groups participated in these activities, with about 20 volunteer leaders taking turns in their responsibilities for the care of this population.

The abbot and the committee have reached a mutual agreement to establish guidelines for caring for vulnerable groups within the community. They have implemented surveillance to address inappropriate behaviors, such as alcohol consumption and the selling of donated items for personal gain. These measures are designed to promote ethical and moral practices at a fundamental level. In cases of violations, warnings have been issued, and individuals involved have been excluded from receiving further home visits or donated items. These actions aim to raise awareness among the target group about the importance of self-care.

Overall, the network has made significant progress in creating a supportive environment and promoting well-being among the vulnerable population while also implementing measures to uphold ethical and moral practices within the community.

The results of the study aligned with Singsorn et al. (2023), who found that lifelong learning had been a deeply rooted educational principle in Thai society. This principle represented a process of transmitting knowledge and culture to subsequent generations. It also corresponded with findings from the Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation (2017), which identified Buddhism as fundamental to fostering a peaceful country and improving the quality of life in all aspects. Similarly, Thinapong et al. (2019) highlighted that Buddhism has profoundly influenced Thai society and culture over time.

2. Guidelines for Applying Buddhadhamma to Community Welfare Promotion. In the context of Wat Bang Chang Nuea, Nakhon Pathom Province, the following Buddhadhamma principles were identified: 1) Dana: Sharing for the benefit of others; 2) Piyavaca: Speaking kindly and sincerely. This included avoiding rude or aggressive speech, speaking only when appropriate, and ensuring that words were beneficial and kind; 3) Atthacariya: Helping each other; and 4) Samanattata: Acting consistently. This involved fostering harmony, refraining from exploitation, and solving problems collectively for mutual benefit. It emphasized being supportive during times of distress and working together to create happiness and unity within the group. Sappurisdhamma was an intellectual principle that individuals were encouraged to seek and apply to develop themselves comprehensively. It was said that those who possessed knowledge and abilities according to these seven principles of Sappurisdhamma were regarded as individuals with both good qualities and wisdom, dependable by society. The seven principles of Sappurisdhamma included: 1) Dhammanyuta: Knowing the cause and understanding what needed to be done.



People studied and learned how to achieve their goals in the right way; 2) Atthanyuta: Knowing the results. This principle required individuals to analyze phenomena, understand their causes, and develop the skill of observation. They memorized experiences, used them as information to determine the origin of incidents, and predicted future outcomes based on existing data; 3) Attanyuta: Knowing oneself. This involved recognizing one's status, gender, strength, knowledge, ability, aptitude, and virtue. Individuals assessed their condition and behavior to improve themselves; accordingly; 4) Mattanyuta: Knowing appropriateness. This principle emphasized the coexistence of all things in perfect harmony. It highlighted the importance of finding the right balance to ensure smooth progress, as excess or deficiency led to discomfort and difficulty in achieving goals; 5) Kalanyuta: Knowing the right time. This referred to conducting activities at the appropriate time, such as determining the right season for production or knowing when to speak; 6) Parisanyuta: Knowing the community. Individuals were encouraged to understand their community's nature, needs, traditions, environment, and lifestyle. Since each society was unique, this understanding was vital for successful collaboration; and 7) Puggalaparoparanyuta: Knowing the person. This principle focuses on recognizing differences in people, including their feelings, abilities, and virtues. It guided individuals on how to treat others appropriately based on their condition, especially those who were weaker or in need.

The results of the study, in line with Wasi (2004), showed that Buddhist principles had served as the social and cultural foundation of Thailand. Integrating these principles with the lifestyle of people in the community was considered an important way to promote a happy society. Similarly, a study by Watana et al. (2021) found that Buddhism had created value in the economic field. The Buddhist Suvarnabhumi Civilization had been developed and integrated according to the "Suvarnabhumi Model" under the name "Buddhist Suvarnabhumi Civilization" in seven aspects: 1) Buddhist Ecology (Well-Being Living); 2) Buddhist Sociology (Secured Living); 3) Buddhist Cognition (Creative Living); 4) Noble Confidence (Worshipful Living); 5) Noble Peaceful Action (Spiritual Living); 6) Buddhist Calm Meditation (Mindful Living); and 7) Buddhist Insight Meditation (Wisdom Living). The strategic proposal suggested that the government and related agencies should have capitalized on the value of Buddhism to promote further development. This approach aimed to create value in the economic, social, and cultural dimensions at the national and regional levels to ensure long-term sustainability.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

The ability to create welfare for the community was based on the relationships among community members who aimed to improve their well-being. Thai society had long regarded Buddhism as an important form of social capital. Therefore, the application of Buddhadhamma or Buddhist principles for learning to develop a network of community volunteers was highly consistent with the way of community life. Lessons from the case study reflected that Buddhadhamma, or Buddhist principles, encouraged individuals to make sacrifices and volunteer to help their fellow human beings achieve physical well-being, mental health, social harmony,



and spiritual fulfillment. Buddhist monks in Thai society played a significant role in education, public health, and the development and psychological welfare of community members. This was because people already held faith in and worshipped Buddhism as a foundational aspect of their lives. The application of Sanghahawatthu and Sappurisadhamma provided a strong fundamental principle for developing welfare within the community. These principles aimed to contribute to society and analyze the community comprehensively. The resulting improvement in the quality of life contributed to the well-being of the community, as summarized in Figure 1.

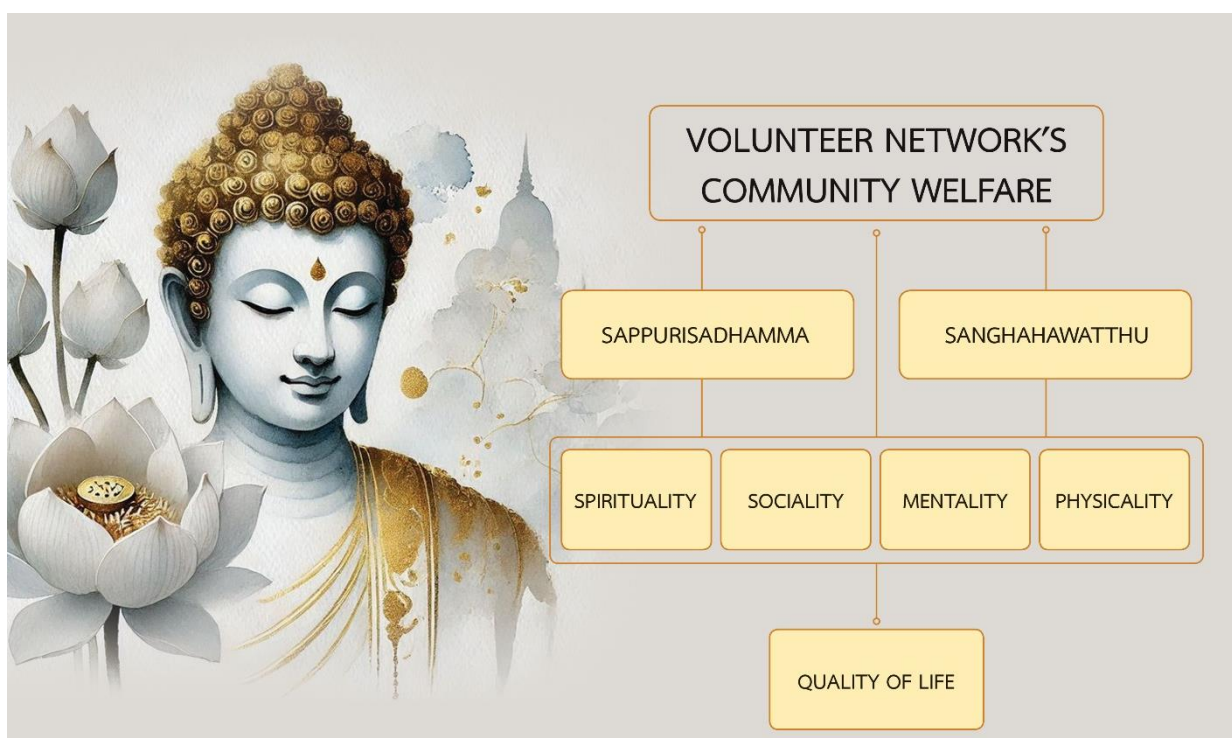


Figure 1 Linkage of Integration of Buddhadhamma with Volunteer Network's Community Welfare

Conclusions and Recommendations

The development of volunteer networks and the promotion of community welfare were closely related to people's quality of life in various dimensions, including physical, mental, social, and spiritual (Intellectual) aspects. Such a concept was aligned with Buddhism, which aimed to develop one's potential in the right way. Building good communities and a global society for peace was, therefore, important. Applying principles consistent with how people lived in the area and addressing their real needs was essential. The Buddhist principles consisted of Sanghahawatthu and Sappurisadhamma, which served as fundamental guidelines for promoting a good quality of life for the people and as work principles for the development of volunteer networks in the actual social context. The findings from this study reflected that Buddhadhamma, or Buddhist principles, were vital for living and contributing to the existence of communities. These principles could be diversified according to the needs and benefits of the community. Therefore, the application of



Buddhist principles should have been encouraged to improve the quality of life in communities across all aspects. Recommendations for future research included integrating education, research, lessons, and practices from the community into innovative work models or management systems for public dissemination and sustainable development.

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