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DEPICTIONS OF MONKS' SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS IN CONTEMPORARY THAI CINEMA 2005-2021

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Monks play an integral and important role in Thai society because monks in Thailand serve as spiritual teachers, guardians of tradition (Buddhism), and provide services to the community. The phenomenon of monks' integral and important roles in Thailand is not only evident in the socio-cultural realities of society but also in contemporary media narratives, namely Thai cinema. Monks in Thai film narratives appear in various narratives that are inseparable from socio-cultural phenomena in society. Therefore, this study aimed to critically examine how Thai films constructed the spiritual and social identities of monks, revealing the underlying tensions between traditional monastic roles and contemporary societal expectations.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative method, utilizing six Thai films that represented Buddhist monks: *The Holy Man* (2005), *Pee Mak* (2013), *Arbat* (2015), *The Forest* (2016), *Pee Nak* (2019), and *The Medium* (2021). The research data took the form of visual, narrative, and script elements, all of which were relevant to the monk theme. At this stage, the researcher watched the film, read the script in-depth, and interpreted the visual symbols contained in the Thai film. The data analysis technique employed was the stages of identification, classification, reduction, exposition, and validation.

Main Results: The results of this study showed that the representation of monks in Thai films reflects three main dimensions. First, monks and exorcism rituals are presented as part of a complex spiritual role, where monks not only perform exorcisms through religious ceremonies but also face inner conflicts, social tensions, and serve as a bridge between the real and supernatural worlds. Films such as *Pee Mak* (2013), *Pee Nak* (2019), and *The Medium* (2021) demonstrate that exorcism rituals do not always succeed literally, but instead become symbols of human struggles against fear and inner imbalance. Second, monks and self-enlightenment are depicted as a lengthy process involving failure, moral transgressions, and profound reflection. The images of monks in *The Forest* (2016), *Arbat* (2015), and *The Holy Man* (2005) do not achieve holiness immediately, but rather through inner repentance, personal introspection, and taking social responsibility. Enlightenment in this context is humane and contemplative, not always achieved through formal rituals, but rather through awareness and the transformation of the heart. Third, monks and the spread of Buddhism are presented in the form of loving preaching. The monks in *The Holy Man* (2005)



and *The Forest* (2016) convey Buddhist teachings not only through sermons but also through real-life actions, such as helping the community, the oppressed, and giving hope to those who are marginalized.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This research explored the application of Buddhism in contemporary contexts (Thai Films), integrating modern scholarship with traditional Buddhist knowledge to develop wisdom and morality through Buddhism. Through contemporary films, global audiences can better understand and recognize Buddhist wisdom and morality from an aesthetic perspective.

Conclusions: The study concludes that Thai films represent the spiritual-anthropological journey of monks, with three main findings: 1) Monks as exorcists; 2) Monks with self-enlightenment; and 3) Monks and the spread of Buddhism. All three represent the spiritual-anthropological journey of monks in Thai films, with various obstacles that monks must face and overcome. The representation of monks in Thai films is inseparable from the projection of monks in the real world. The world of film and the world of reality are two entities.

Keywords: Monk, Spiritual-Anthropological Journey, Buddhism, Thai Contemporary Cinema

Introduction

Buddhism in Thailand is a religion that constitutes the majority of the population, plays a significant role in society, and is supported by the government (McCargo, 2004); (Karimova, 2022); (Sombatpoonsiri, 2022). Shatnataphat (2024) emphasizes that Buddhism in Thailand has a profound impact on shaping culture, nationalism, government/politics, and spiritualism. Interestingly, although Thailand is considered a pluralistic and secular country, it still pays excellent attention to Buddhism there (Borchert, 2022). That is what makes Buddhism in Thailand a religion that has grown and developed rapidly until now. In the context of Buddhism, one figure who holds an important role is the monk. In Buddhism, monks are often regarded in society as spiritual leaders, guardians of religious traditions, and community servants. In addition, monks can also serve as psychics to exorcise spirits (Muecke, 1992) or to meet ancestral spirits, which is a scholarly debate on the intersection of religion, media, and cultural identity. The intersection of religion, media, and cultural identity in the context of Buddhism has become a scholarly debate, offering an interesting interdisciplinary perspective that integrates Buddhism, media (Film), and the cultural identity of contemporary society in the international sphere.

In the last five years, research on monks and films has been conducted by several researchers, namely as follows. In a study by Zhou et al. (2025), it was found that the presence of a celibate monk in a Tibetan Amdo family significantly reduced the risk of death by 69% in older non-monk family members, indicating a positive impact of religious presence on the family structure on health. Furthermore, research conducted by Bangert et al. (2015) highlighted how European heritage films utilized religious figures such as monks to represent national identity and collective memory in reconstructed historical narratives. Research by Ng (2025) highlighted how the representation of monks in religious films created a distinctive ethical and ritual space, showing how cinema shaped religious experiences that lay between piety and visual aesthetics. Research by Kidpromma & Taylor (2024) showed that in Chiang Mai, monks were presented as



symbols of alternative spiritual paths for transgender people who wanted to live a religious life outside the rules of the traditional monastery. Finally, research by Zhang et al. (2021) noted that the reduction of mythical and religious elements, such as monk figures in contemporary films, affects audiences' perceptions of spiritual values, indicating a change in visual culture consumption patterns.

These studies were fascinating because they revealed that monks also appeared in global films, either as main characters or as supporting characters. Monks in films were also shown as figures who provided Buddhist enlightenment to society. Unfortunately, no research has been conducted on monks associated with spiritualism in the context of Thai films. In this regard, this study aimed to fill the gap in previous research by portraying monks as spiritual figures in Thai films. Specifically, the researcher portrayed monks as anthropological spiritualists in Thai films.

The study of spirituality was initially included in the fields of philosophy (Steiner & Bamford, 2003); (Wane, 2011); (Rousseau, 2019), religion (Maugans, 1996); (Sutcliffe & Gilhus, 2013), psychology (Jung & Adler, 2023); (McNeill, 1998); (McQueen, 2019); (Yang et al., 2012), anthropology (Cooper, 2015); (Davies, 2020), and literature (Holden-Kirwan, 1999); (Neary, 2011). However, in its development, the study of spirituality has been incorporated into various interdisciplinary scientific studies. Historically, the study of spiritualism was able to be traced back through the writings of James (1902), Culpin (1920), and Lohuizen (2011), who initially discussed the study of spiritualism in relation to philosophy, religion, anthropology, and psychology. In this context, researchers focused on spiritual anthropology. Spiritual anthropology is a subfield of anthropology that examines the spiritual context, including religion and beliefs, within a cultural context in society. Parsania (2006) stated that spiritual anthropology focused explicitly on the supernatural, mystical, and belief dimensions in society. Spiritual anthropology intersects with the philosophy of anthropology.

However, spiritual anthropology is more focused on the spiritual context. In contrast, the philosophy of anthropology is more concerned with the philosophical aspects (Ontological, Axiological, Epistemological), which can sometimes be separate from the spiritual (Hindmarsh, 2021). Dimensions in spiritual anthropology appear in three categories: 1) The spiritual dimension of human anthropology concerning oneself; 2) The spiritual dimension of human anthropology concerning society; and 3) The spiritual dimension of human anthropology concerning God/something transcendental. In this study, spiritual anthropology is explored through the lens of Buddhist monks who undertake spiritual anthropological journeys in Thai films. Specifically, this spiritual anthropology focuses on the ideal spiritual context and also the pedagogical-spiritual dimensions in films.

Objectives

This research aimed to critically examine how Thai films constructed the spiritual and social identities of monks, revealing the underlying tensions between traditional monastic roles and contemporary societal expectations.



Methodology

This research method employed a qualitative-interpretative approach, where the researcher narrated the data based on interpretation. The data sources used were selected primary Thai films featuring monks (Table 1). The research data took the form of visual, narrative, and script elements (Ellis, 1990); (Murtagh et al., 2009), all of which were relevant to the monk theme. At this stage, the researcher watched the film, read the script in-depth, and interpreted the visual symbols contained in the Thai film.

Table 1 Main Data of Thai Films Related to Monks

No.	Film	Year	Duration
1.	The Holy Man	2005	92 minutes
2.	Pee Mak	2013	1,52 minutes
3.	Arbat	2015	1,39 minutes
4.	The Forest	2016	1,49 minutes
5.	Pee Nak	2019	1,48 minutes
6.	The Medium	2021	1,30 minutes

This study employed a qualitative-interpretative method. The data collection techniques were documentary. The data analysis techniques were adapted from the views of Huberman & Miles (2002), Creswell & Poth (2016), and Silverman (2016), namely data identification, data verification, data classification, data exposure, and data validation. As for data coding, the researcher referred to Neuman's (2014) view, namely open coding, at this stage the researcher looked for Thai film themes related to Buddhism and groups them; Axial coding, at this stage the researcher identified themes; And selective coding, at this stage the researcher identified the main themes used as the primary data for the research. At the data validation stage, the researcher discussed the research findings with experts in the field of humanities research.

Results and Discussion

Monks and Exorcism Rituals

The representation of monks and exorcism rituals in Thai films shows the complexity of the relationship between Buddhist spirituality, popular culture, and the search for meaning in contemporary society. In an analysis of six films, namely *The Holy Man* (Chernyim, 2005), *Pee Mak* (Maligool, 2013), *Arbat* (Kwanyu, 2015), *The Forest* (Spurrier, 2016), *Pee Nak* (Chotkijadarsopon, 2019), and *The Medium* (Pisanthanakun, 2021), a narrative pattern can be traced that includes three important stages in the relationship between humans, monks, and spirits, namely: The initial stage of the emergence of ghosts; The stage of spiritual struggle or conflict; and The stage of recovery or healing. In the early stages, the appearance of ghosts or supernatural disturbances in films is often linked to spiritual issues or violations of religious teachings. In the film *Pee Nak* (Chotkijadarsopon, 2019), for example, the figure of a ghost appears because someone dies before being ordained as a monk. This causes resentment because the character feels spiritually unrecognized.



On the other hand, *Arbat* depicts the spiritual crisis of a young man who is ordained as a monk without sincere intentions. He violates the rules of monk life, including having an illicit relationship, thus giving rise to inner tension that is the center of the story. In *The Forest*, the character of a monk who comes to the village fails in carrying out his duties as a teacher and spiritual leader. He does not believe in the supernatural stories that are developing in the village, and ends up getting involved in a relationship that makes him feel guilty. As a result, tensions arise in the community that are not only social but also spiritual in nature. Research by Campoli (2015) revealed that Thai horror films frequently employed supernatural imagery to convey Buddhist teachings on impermanence and suffering. In this context, monks and religious rituals function as a means to deal with and understand aspects of life that are difficult to explain rationally. This aligns with the notion that horror films can serve as a medium for reflecting spiritual and social values within society.



Figure 1 Exorcism Ritual in *Pee Mak* (Scene: 01:25:06)

The second stage in the storyline typically shows how the characters in the film attempt to cope with or confront the disturbance. This is where the role of religious rituals and monks becomes more apparent. In the film *Pee Mak*, the monk performs an exorcism ritual in a temple with his equipment, starting from candles, holy water, holy rice, a (Holy) rope wrapped around the mantra reader, and reciting exorcism mantras. To strengthen the spell, the spell is recited together so that the ghost can be defeated/disappear. In the film *The Medium*, the exorcism ritual is performed by a monk and a female shaman. The monk leads the chanting, uses holy water, and performs various ceremonies aimed at purifying the possessed main character. However, this ritual is not entirely successful, and it even ends in tragedy. This shows that some Thai people not only rely on the official teachings of Buddhism, but also believe in spiritual powers from outside religion, such as shamanism and other traditional beliefs. As explained by



Tambiah (1970), Buddhism in Thailand does not stand alone, but coexists with spiritism and local beliefs such as the cult of spirits and guardian deities.

Meanwhile, in *Pee Nak*, the monk is embroiled in an inner conflict with a spirit that seeks to join the monastic community. Efforts to appease the spirit are carried out by symbolically ordaining it, even though it is via video call due to emergency conditions. However, the spirit itself refuses because it is aware that it is not human and is not worthy of being a monk. This shows that in community beliefs, exorcism is not always carried out through violence or coercion, but can also be through a process of recognition and acceptance. The monk's rejection of the spirit also reflects the precise boundaries in formal Theravāda religious practice, as described in a study by McDaniel (2011) on the relationship between images of monks, ghosts, and bodies in Thai temples.

In the film *Arbat*, although no ghosts appear physically, a spiritual struggle occurs within the main character, who is searching for direction in life. He questions religious teachings, experiences conflict with senior monks, and finally chooses to be alone and reflect on his life. This process is another form of "Exorcism", namely, freeing oneself from mental burdens and past mistakes. This aligns with the concept in Theravāda Buddhism, where repentance and meditation are employed as means to cleanse the mind and attain enlightenment (Dockett & North-Schulte, 2004). Thus, *Arbat* not only presents a story about violating monastic discipline but also depicts the spiritual journey of an individual in facing and overcoming inner conflicts, which ultimately leads to self-transformation and a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings.

The endings in these films show various forms of resolution. In *The Medium*, despite multiple rituals, the evil spirit is not completely exorcised, and the film's ending remains somber. This shows that in real life, not all spiritual problems can be resolved through formal religious means. Based on research (Mitchell, 1971), the current Theravāda Buddhist approach emphasizes that mindfulness and ethical awareness are more important than rituals, especially in addressing inner conflicts and suffering that cannot be resolved externally. In *The Forest*, the monk who feels like a failure finally chooses to leave the village with two children who have been marginalized by society. He does not return to monastic life, but instead takes a new path to atone for his mistakes, which becomes a form of personal healing. According to Valle-Lira & Noguera-Solano (2024), compassion (*Karuṇā*) in Buddhist teachings is a force that can purify the mind and free someone from suffering, even outside the context of formal rituals.

Table 2 The Narrative Pattern of The Monk's Exorcism

No.	Session	Activity
1.	Beginning	Search for the ghost, the cause of the ghost's appearance.
2.	Exorcism	Use of sacred objects: Water, rice, incense, candles, rope, and the recitation of mantras.
3.	Battle	A battle of strength between the monk and the ghost.
4.	Ending	The ghost is expelled/returned to the afterlife, and the ghost cannot be defeated.



Table 2 In Pee Nak, resolution occurs when the spirit finally accepts the fact that he cannot become a monk and chooses to release his anger. This shows that inner peace can be achieved not through force, but through awareness and acceptance. In line with this, research (Dong et al., 2024) indicates that meditation practices based on loving-kindness and compassion in Buddhism can help individuals resolve inner conflicts, foster self-acceptance, and cultivate lasting inner peace. Unlike other films, *The Holy Man* presents a monk who brings about significant change in society. He conveys the teachings of Buddhism in a simple and touching way, helping to awaken people who have lost hope. He also manages to prevent suicide attempts with just words of wisdom and empathy, without having to perform formal rituals. Here, healing does not come from exorcism, but from love, care, and understanding of others. This is reinforced by the findings in studies (Gilbert & Van Gordon, 2023); (Condon & Makransky, 2020), which emphasize that spiritual healing in Buddhism does not depend on the power of rituals, but rather on genuine, compassionate relationships between humans, which can touch the soul more deeply.

Monks and Self-Enlightenment

In some Thai films with spiritual and religious themes, the monk character is not always depicted as a perfect and holy figure from the beginning. In fact, in several films, monks appear as humans who have made mistakes, experience inner restlessness, and even violate norms, then undergo a process of repentance and ultimately achieve enlightenment. Through these plots, these films present the human side of monastic life that often does not appear in formal religious narratives. Analysis of the films *The Holy Man* (Chernyim, 2005), *Arbat* (Kwanyu, 2015), and *The Forest* (Spurrier, 2016) shows that the spiritual experiences of the monk characters in these films are not linear or simple, but rather complex and full of inner challenges. *The Holy Man* (Chernyim, 2005) presents a different narrative, yet still explores themes of repentance and enlightenment. The main character is a former gangster who decides to repent and be ordained as a monk. Unlike the characters in the previous film, this character's repentance occurs at the beginning of the story and serves as the starting point for a major transformation in him. Although not everyone initially believes in his sincerity, he proves through real actions that he wants to change. He helps residents in trouble, defends the weak, and conveys Buddhist teachings in a light and touching way.

In the film *The Forest*, a monk character arrives in a remote village to impart the teachings of the Dharma. However, his spiritual journey is disrupted when he falls in love with a female teacher in the village. The relationship they have violates the principles of monastic life, which should be carried out with discipline and maintaining purity. Guilt begins to grow when he realizes that his actions have not only damaged his image as a monk, but also damaged the trust of the community that relies on him as a bringer of goodness. This regret does not immediately lead him to enlightenment, but instead traps him in a profound moral dilemma. This is in line with research showing that violating the principles of monasticism, such as having a romantic relationship, can lead to internal conflict and a crisis of spiritual identity. Jory (2021) explains that Buddhist ethics emphasize the importance of moral discipline as a basis for achieving enlightenment, and



violations of this discipline can hinder an individual's spiritual development. In addition, Coombs & Montanez (2025) highlight that sexual behavior that is not in accordance with Buddhist teachings can damage a monk's moral integrity and the community's trust in him. Thus, the internal conflict experienced by the monk in *The Forest* reflects the reality faced by Buddhist practitioners when emotions and personal relationships test their spiritual principles. These studies confirm that violations of monastic discipline affect not only individuals but also the communities that trust them as moral role models.

In the process of repentance, the monk character in *The Forest* does not immediately perform a purification ritual or repentance in public. Instead, he chooses another path, namely by reflecting, withdrawing from his social role, and admitting his failures privately. One tangible manifestation of this repentance process is when he resigns from his position as a teacher and chooses to leave the village with two children, one of whom has special needs. The other is a mysterious figure related to the supernatural world surrounding *The Forest*. This action illustrates a form of repentance that is quieter and less symbolic, but still meaningful. He not only tries to atone for his mistakes but also takes responsibility for protecting the two children who have been neglected by society. This is a simple but powerful form of spiritual enlightenment, not because the monk returns to the temple or wears a robe again, but because he finally chooses sincere goodness without being bound by formal religious roles. This aligns with research indicating that in Buddhism, repentance is not always expressed through public rituals, but can be achieved through personal reflection and genuine actions that demonstrate moral responsibility. For example, in the study (Sun, 2024), it is explained that repentance in Buddhism can take the form of "Formless" which emphasizes introspection and inner transformation without formal ritual involvement. In addition, research by Ghimire (2025) highlights that Buddhist principles, such as compassion (*Karuṇā*) and non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*), encourage individuals to take on social responsibilities, including protecting children and vulnerable groups, as part of Buddhist ethical practice.

A similar scenario also appears in the film *Arbat*, where the main character, Sangkha, is a young man who was ordained as a monk due to his father's wishes, rather than his own personal desires. From the beginning, he exhibits a rebellious attitude and questions many aspects of monastic life. He does not fully adhere to the rules, even engaging in a sexual relationship with a woman from his past. This becomes a turning point in his life, leaving him feeling empty and confused, and he did not know what to do. Interestingly, this film does not immediately punish him religiously, but instead shows that humans, even monks, can fall and lose their way. Repentance in *Arbat* is not achieved through sanctions or specific purification rituals, but rather through deep contemplation. Sangkha chooses solitude, distancing himself from the crowd to confront his inner self. This is where the process of enlightenment begins. He no longer argues with senior monks, nor does he seek justification for his mistakes; Instead, he begins to accept that spiritual life is indeed not an easy path. This film shows that enlightenment can arise from adversity and that guilt is not the end of everything. It is precisely through such failure that one can understand



the true meaning of religious life, which is not merely as a matter of symbols and rules, but as a sincere journey of continual self-discovery and self-improvement.

This aligns with research indicating that in Buddhist teachings, repentance is not always expressed through formal rituals, but can be achieved through personal reflection and genuine actions that demonstrate moral responsibility. For example, a study by Li (2023) explains that repentance in Buddhism can take the form of deep gratitude and appreciation for the practices. Additionally, research by Ghimire (2025) highlights that Buddhist principles, such as compassion (*Karuṇā*) and non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*), encourage individuals to take social responsibility as part of Buddhist ethical practice.

However, the film also shows that true repentance is not just about changing clothes and social status. The character Sangkha loses society's trust when his past as a gangster is revealed. However, instead of running away or denying it, he chooses to remain within society and continues doing good. The acceptance of society again occurs not because he forces himself to look holy, but because he shows consistency in living a better life. This is a form of enlightenment that arises from genuine action, not from prolonged meditation or elaborate rituals. The film aims to demonstrate that anyone can repent and that a life as a monk can begin with sincerity, rather than holiness, and can lead to meaningful change. This aligns with research that suggests spiritual transformation in Buddhism is not solely determined by one's origin or background, but rather by commitment and genuine action in living a life characterized by love and wisdom. For example, Keown (2016) emphasizes that Buddhist ethics stress the importance of moral discipline (*Sīla*) as the foundation for achieving enlightenment, and violations of this discipline can be overcome through repentance and consistent behavioral change. Additionally, Ghimire's (2025) research highlights that Buddhist principles, such as compassion (*Karuṇā*) and non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*), encourage individuals to take social responsibility as part of their Buddhist ethical practice.

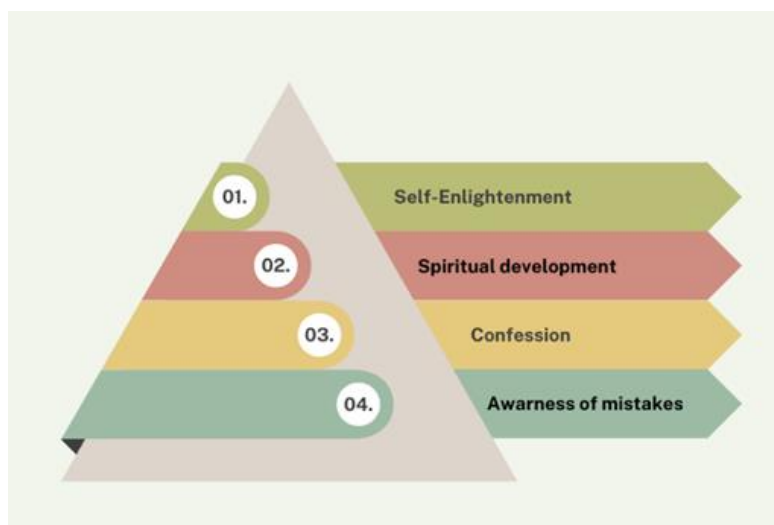


Figure 2 Self-Enlightenment Stage



The narrative and visualization of these films are as follows. First, awareness of mistakes generally shows that the monk who makes a mistake is not depicted as a figure who must be punished harshly, but rather as an ordinary human being who is given space to reflect, improve himself, and learn from experience. Second, when they make mistakes, monks honestly admit them and apologize to themselves, others, and society. Third, in the confession stage, the process of repentance in these films is not always depicted formally through religious ceremonies or temple punishments. However, it is more often shown through contemplative processes, symbolic actions, and meaningful social interactions. Fourth, the enlightenment stage, in this context, is also not always identical to returning to being an obedient or perfect monk. In *The Forest*, enlightenment occurs when the character relinquishes his monk status. In *Arbat*, enlightenment comes after a long period of mistakes and inner suffering. Meanwhile, in *The Holy Man*, enlightenment comes through goodness that is consistently demonstrated, regardless of a dark past as illustrated in Figure 2.

Monks and the Spread of Buddhism

In Thai religious films, monks are depicted not only as individuals living a personal spiritual life, but also as active agents in spreading Buddhism to the broader community. Through stories in films such as *The Holy Man* (Chernyim, 2005) and *The Forest* (Spurrier, 2016), it is clear how the spread of Buddhism has become an integral part of the lives of monks, both through traditional means and more modern and contextual approaches. Each film offers a distinct portrayal of how Buddhism is conveyed, the challenges that arise during the process, and the changes that occur in society afterwards.

The Holy Man film centers on the figure of a monk as the main protagonist in the mission to spread the teachings of Buddhism. What is interesting about this film is the approach to preaching used by the main character, namely, a former gangster who repents and chooses the path of monkhood. On his journey to a village, he not only carries a robe as a symbol of monkhood, but also brings a new way of thinking that is more open and readily accepted by the general public. The monk in this film conveys the Dharma in a humorous, light, and empathetic way, different from the rigid or frightening style of preaching. He approaches the community with patience, helps them directly, and understands the daily problems they face. This is a depiction of a humanistic and down-to-earth preaching model.

One of the primary ways the monk in this film spreads Buddhism is by visiting people's homes, introducing newly reactivated temples, and inviting residents to participate in religious activities. He also does not hesitate to help resolve social conflicts in the community, such as when he breaks up a fight between two groups (*Marriage and Death*), or when he prevents a resident from committing suicide because he has lost gambling. It is done not only to show personal virtue, but also to re-instill the values of Buddhism directly through tangible actions. However, the process of spreading religion does not always run smoothly. In *The Holy Man*, challenges arise from people who have lost faith in religion. Many residents believe more in shamans or mystical practices, and there are even fake monks who use the name of religion to deceive. The monk character in this film must face this distrust and work hard to rebuild the community's faith. When his past



as a thug is revealed, he must also face a crisis of trust, both within himself and from those who begin to doubt his sincerity. However, these challenges do not break his spirit. In fact, through consistency and sincerity in his actions, he was able to change society's views gradually.

Meanwhile, in the film *The Forest*, the spread of Buddhism is presented in a more contemplative and introspective manner. The monk character in this film travels to a remote village to serve as a teacher and spiritual guide. He intends to introduce the Dharma to the village community, particularly to the children. However, the challenges he faces are not easy. In addition to dealing with people who believe in supernatural things and adhere to their local belief systems, he also faces temptations and inner conflicts that compromise his image and mission.

The spread of religion in *The Forest* does not occur on a large scale, but rather through small efforts made by the monk in everyday life. He tries to teach discipline, the value of compassion, and the importance of self-control. However, when he gets involved in a relationship that violates the principles of the monk, everything he has built seems to collapse. The guilt that arises finally makes him resign from his role as a teacher, and he chooses to leave the village. Although it may seem like a failure, the decision to go with two children, especially the mysterious boy in *The Forest*, who is believed to be a ghost and is not recognized by society, reveals another form of moral success. He continues to spread Buddhist values through an attitude of compassion and protection for those who are rejected and marginalized.

The two films offer distinct yet complementary portrayals of Buddhism's spread throughout society. *The Holy Man* depicts the success of the monk's preaching, which is carried out actively, openly, and directly touches the lives of the community. He is a model of a modern monk who remains loyal to traditional religious values while adapting to contemporary society. Meanwhile, *The Forest* portrays the challenges faced by a monk when confronted with complex social realities and personal temptations. However, in the end, both monk characters in the film continue to strive to embody the values of goodness that are at the core of Buddhist teachings.

It is concluded that the spread of Buddhism in Thai films is not depicted rigidly or formally. Preaching does not only occur in temples or through lectures, but can also be done on the streets, in homes, and even in stressful situations. The monks in the films are not always perfect, but through their struggles and self-discovery, the spread of religion becomes more humane and relevant to real life. These films demonstrate that Thai society views Buddhism not only as a belief system but also as a guide to life that can be embodied through simple actions, the courage to change, and a spirit of helping others. Thus, monks in films are not just religious symbols, but also a reflection of the continuous effort to spread goodness amidst the challenges of the times. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that the image of a monk in Thai films is not only depicted as a sacred religious figure but also as an ordinary human being who has weaknesses and faces various challenges. Exorcism rituals are not always the primary method for overcoming spiritual disturbances. In some films, healing occurs through self-awareness, inner reflection, and genuine relationships with others. Through these stories, the films not only present horror

tension but also convey deep spiritual messages about the search for meaning, forgiveness, and sincerity in living life.

This aligns with Wanarathana's (2022) research, which demonstrates that the Buddhist monk community plays a crucial role in social development and community transformation. The study by Wanarathana highlights the importance of Buddhist social work in promoting community development and social justice, emphasizing that Buddhist teachings inspire individuals to work for the welfare of society, including the poor and marginalized communities. In addition, research by Kitanant et al. (2024) shows that monks can play a strategic role in community development through their moral authority and community trust, as well as their adaptation to community needs. Thus, the representation of monks in these films reflects their role as active agents of social change, who spread Buddhist teachings not only through lectures or rituals, but also through concrete actions and direct involvement in community life.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

This research identifies a new body of knowledge related to the spiritual-anthropological journey of Buddhist monks, as follows. First, monks are figures who help those in need, one of which is assisting with exorcisms so that their spirits return to the afterlife. Second, the spiritual-anthropological journey of monks is related to self-enlightenment. The process towards self-enlightenment is inseparable from a long journey, including challenges and trials. Therefore, monks, as human beings, also commit ethical violations, but they recognize them, apologize, make amends, and achieve self-enlightenment. Third, monks spread Buddhism to various regions. Fourth, in the context of transformational studies, film media representation is one strategy-a strategic medium-that can be used to spread/strengthen Buddhist spiritualism in the atmosphere of international society as in Figure 3.

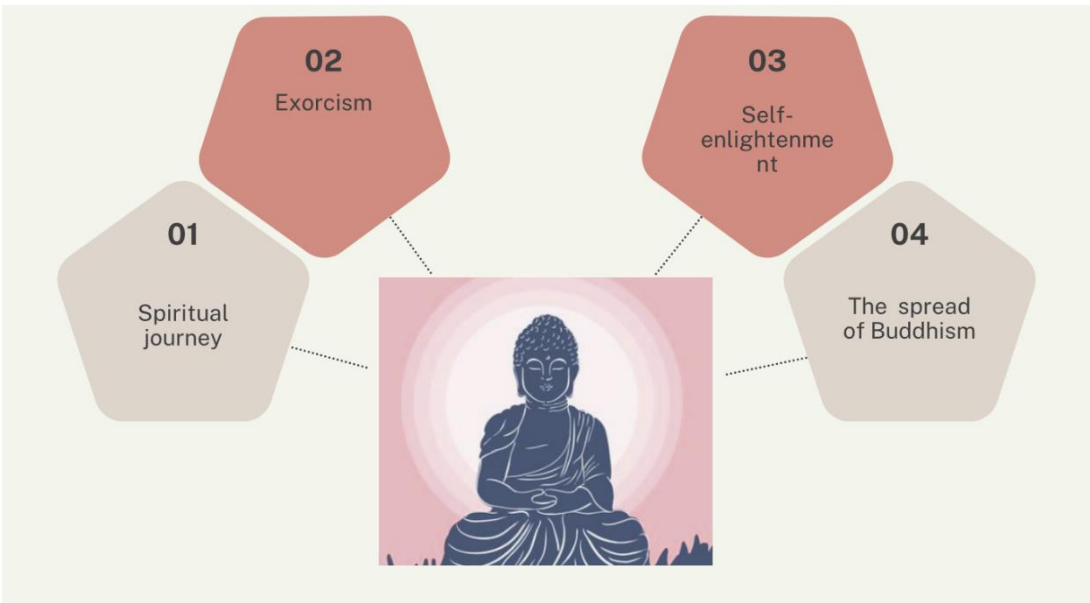


Figure 3 The Cycle of Anthropological Spiritual Journey



Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results of the analysis, the representation of monks in Thai films reflects three main dimensions. First, monks and exorcism rituals are presented as part of a complex spiritual role, where monks not only perform exorcisms through religious ceremonies but also face inner conflicts, social tensions, and serve as a bridge between the real and supernatural worlds. Films such as *Pee Mak*, *Pee Nak*, and *The Medium* demonstrate that exorcism rituals do not always work literally, but rather become symbols of human struggles against fear and inner imbalance. Second, monks and self-enlightenment are depicted as a lengthy process involving failure, moral transgressions, and profound reflection. The monks in *The Holy Man*, *The Forest*, and *Arbat* do not achieve holiness immediately, but rather through inner conversion, personal introspection, and taking on social responsibility. Enlightenment in this context is human and contemplative, not always achieved through formal rituals, but rather through awareness and the transformation of the heart. Third, monks and the spread of Buddhism are presented in the form of loving preaching. The figures of monks in *The Holy Man* and *The Forest* convey Buddhist teachings not only through lectures but also through real-life actions, such as helping the community, protecting the oppressed, and giving hope to those who are marginalised. These films highlight that the role of monks in Thai society extends beyond being a religious symbol to also serving as an agent of social and spiritual change. Researchers recommend the following. First, the roles of monks as exorcists, spiritual seekers, and preachers narrate and visualize key aspects of Buddhist spiritual practice and help provide a more complete picture of how monks are represented on screen. Besides that, the representation of monks in films can also be used as a medium for spiritual education. As an anthropological-spiritual study of Buddhism using film, this research is limited by the quantification of Thai films, which have not been fully explored in detail. Second, this research also suffers from the Buddhist aspect, which only addresses Thai films. For this reason, the researcher hopes that in the future, other researchers can conduct more comprehensive research by examining international Buddhist films with a broader range of film topics. Third, future research also includes conducting diachronic research on the time period from the early days of Thai films to the present. This way, we can explore the role of Buddhism in a more comprehensive spiritual context. This research challenges international film producers to strengthen spirituality in films, both explicitly and implicitly. Policymakers can also use films as an alternative spiritual education for millennials. In a multicultural society, audiences can critically examine spirituality through films.

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MAKING A LINE CHATBOT FOR RELIGIOUS TALK AND CONNECT: A CASE STUDY OF TONCHUEAK TEMPLE IN THAILAND'S DIGITAL TIME

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Tonchueak Temple, situated in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand, has actively embraced digital transformation. Despite utilizing various digital platforms, the temple faced a critical challenge: Effectively engaging its digitally-native lay followers. These conventional methods lacked the real-time, personalized, and interactive capabilities essential for fostering continuous connection and efficient information dissemination, thus creating a significant gap in devotee engagement. To bridge this crucial gap, this study aimed to design and develop a LINE chatbot to enhance communication and engagement between Buddhist devotees and the Tonchueak Temple in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand, while assessing user satisfaction with the implemented system. This innovative tool was specifically envisioned to not only strengthen the temple's communication but also to foster deeper engagement among Buddhist lay followers, intrinsically supporting the temple's faith-based community-building efforts and promoting more effective and meaningful interaction. Additionally, the research sought to assess user satisfaction with the implemented chatbot system.

Methodology: This study adopted a mixed-methods research design. The qualitative phase involved in-depth interviews with five purposively selected key informants, comprising two temple personnel from Tonchueak Temple, one software developer, and two lay users with prior experience using the LINE chatbot. The quantitative phase employed a structured satisfaction questionnaire administered to a sample of 215 individuals, selected through convenience sampling, who had previously interacted with the chatbot. Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation, were used to analyze the quantitative data and assess overall user satisfaction with the system.

Main Results: The output of this study was the development of the Tonchueak Temple LINE chatbot, featuring a user interface that included a rich menu comprising six primary visual options. Users could interact with the system either by selecting commands via the rich menu or by entering text in a conversational format within the LINE application. The chatbot was designed to



process user inputs and provide responses in a variety of formats. Based on the evaluation results from a sample group, the overall user satisfaction with the developed chatbot was rated at a high level, with a mean score of 4.32 and a standard deviation of 0.71. The highest-rated item indicated that users strongly agreed the chatbot effectively reflected Tonchueak Temple's adaptation to the digital era.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This article explored Applied Buddhism and its role in Buddhism and globalization, specifically in the aspect of Buddhism and digital technology. This highlighted how digital platforms could enhance religious communication and engagement in a globalized world. The LINE chatbot developed for Tonchueak temple in this study played a significant role as a supportive tool for facilitating access to religious activities and fostering participation in the spiritual life of Buddhist devotees. It primarily functioned to disseminate information about the temple's major religious events and also provided links to the temple's official communication channels on other platforms, thereby enabling continuous and convenient access for the public. This structural support aligned with Buddhist principles by promoting the right understanding (*Sammā-ditṭhi*) and encouraging the practical application of Dhamma in daily life. Moreover, the ethical and contextually appropriate use of technology exemplified skillful means (*Upāya-kosalla*) in integrating religion into the digital age.

Conclusions: This study developed a LINE chatbot to enhance communication and engagement between Buddhist devotees and Tonchueak Temple, using LINE Messaging API and Dialogflow. User trials revealed a high level of satisfaction, especially with the system's ease of use, friendliness, and the temple's proactive adaptation to digital transformation. Crucially, beyond merely facilitating information exchange, this chatbot proved to be a viable tool for fostering spiritual growth by providing accessible religious knowledge and supporting the formation of a cohesive digital Buddhist community. While acknowledging existing limitations in natural language comprehension and human-like interaction, which highlight the need for advanced natural language processing capabilities, the implemented chatbot represents a promising prototype for religious institutions aiming to deepen faith-based connections and cultivate digital groups in the evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: LINE Chatbot Development, Buddhist Laypeople, Dialogflow, Thai Religious Institution, Digital Religious Engagement

Introduction

In the context of digital communication, where information and communication technologies have become deeply embedded in people's daily lives, the use of communication applications-particularly LINE-has emerged as a vital channel across all age groups. As of 2024, Thailand recorded approximately 56 million monthly active users (MAUs) on the LINE application, accounting for 78.2% of the total population and 85.7% of all internet users nationwide. These statistics underscored the widespread adoption and popularity of LINE as one of the most extensively used communication platforms in the country. The application has been integrated across diverse domains, including personal communication, business operations, and access to various digital services. Such pervasive use highlighted the central role of LINE in Thailand's digital



infrastructure and its growing significance in shaping contemporary modes of social interaction and service delivery. In this evolving landscape, these platforms have fundamentally transformed how individuals connect and engage, extending their influence into religious practices and community participation. Consequently, traditional communication methods often proved insufficient in reaching younger, digitally-native audiences and maintaining their sustained engagement in an increasingly digitalized society.

The LINE chatbot represented a pivotal element within the broader digital ecosystem of the LINE application. It was engineered to function as an automated communication interface, leveraging natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning algorithms to enable dynamic, interactive engagement with users. Operating as virtual assistants, these chatbots facilitated two-way communication, wherein user-generated queries or commands were processed and were met with responses generated through pre-configured logical frameworks. LINE chatbots have demonstrated considerable efficacy in enhancing the communicative capabilities of the LINE platform, particularly with respect to information dissemination and fostering user engagement. Their application spanned multiple sectors. In the business domain, chatbots were shown to significantly improve customer experience and service satisfaction (Daza Vergaray et al., 2023). Within healthcare, they were utilized to support telemedicine, patient interaction, and administrative coordination (Laymouna et al., 2024). In education, chatbots play a constructive role in promoting personalized learning, providing academic guidance, and supporting performance assessment (Okonkwo & Ade-Ibijola, 2021). In the context of cultural tourism in Thailand, LINE chatbots were strategically adopted to strengthen communication and enhance visitor engagement. For example, Rothjanawan et al. (2024) developed a LINE-based chatbot tour guide to support cultural tourism in Narathiwat Province, offering users curated content on local heritage sites, traditions, and events. Similarly, Sookkhee & Chatree (2024) introduced "Nong Lamduan" a chatbot designed to recommend tourist destinations within Sisaket Province. Collectively, these cases underscored the technological potential of LINE chatbots to support tourism development grounded in cultural capital within the Thai context.

Tonchueak Temple is a historically significant and long-established Buddhist temple located in Bang Yai District, Nonthaburi Province, Thailand, in close proximity to the researcher's residence and workplace. At the time of this study, the temple was engaged in the revitalization of its cultural capital through the reconstruction of a new ordination hall, intended to replace the previous structure that collapsed approximately a decade ago. This reconstruction effort had been financially supported by contributions from devout donors through multiple channels, with the objective of achieving timely and effective completion. In alignment with contemporary trends, the temple had integrated digital technologies and modern media as strategic tools to enhance its communication capabilities, disseminate information about religious activities, and facilitate the collection of donations from Buddhist followers. Social media platforms, including Facebook and TikTok, had been actively employed to extend the temple's informational reach to audiences beyond the immediate local community. While these platforms had moderately increased public



participation and engagement, they still faced limitations in providing the personalized, immediate, and comprehensive interaction necessary to deeply connect with a digitally-native and often younger demographic, a gap where traditional temple communication methods were largely ineffective.

In response to the increasing digital transformation and the need to strengthen communication and engagement between Buddhist devotees and Tonchueak Temple, the researcher recognized the importance of developing a LINE chatbot as an alternative channel for facilitating the exchange of information between the temple and its lay community. This initiative was not only intended to enhance the convenience of communication and expand the temple's social capital but also to address an academic gap, as the application of chatbot technologies in religious contexts remained relatively underexplored. Although Wongnasri & Promjuk (2024) proposed innovative strategies for disseminating Buddhist teachings through modern information technologies-emphasizing the formation of online Buddhist communities through discussion groups, workshops, retreats, and seminars aimed at fostering engagement among practitioners in Surat Thani Province-such approaches remained largely confined to the use of general social media platforms and did not yet reflect a concrete integration of chatbot technologies for religious communication. Therefore, the development of a LINE chatbot to support religious communication and engagement represented a promising and scalable approach. The researcher anticipated that the outcomes of this chatbot development would enable Tonchueak Temple to accumulate greater social capital within digital spaces, aligning with the principle of *Sammā-ditṭhi* (Right View or Right Understanding) by fostering accurate and accessible information and demonstrating *Upāya-kosalla* (Skillful Means or Skill in Means) in utilizing modern technology for spiritual benefit. This was expected to contribute to the cultivation of long-term relationships with devoted followers and might subsequently enhance the temple's economic capital, thereby providing a sustainable foundation for the preservation and advancement of its cultural capital over time.

Objectives

This study aimed to design and develop a chatbot to enhance communication and engagement between Buddhist devotees and Tonchueak Temple, located in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand. Additionally, it sought to evaluate user satisfaction with the implemented chatbot system.

Methodology

The research was conducted using the following methodology.

Research Design

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies within a Mixed Methods Research paradigm. This mixed-methods design was chosen for its suitability in addressing the multifaceted nature of developing and evaluating a digital communication tool in a religious context. The qualitative phase provided in-depth insights into current communication gaps and user needs, which were crucial for the foundational design and iterative development of the chatbot. Subsequently, the quantitative phase allowed for the systematic and empirical evaluation of user satisfaction with the developed system,



ensuring a comprehensive assessment that qualitative methods alone could not provide. Initially, the qualitative phase focused on collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing data concerning existing communication patterns and frequently asked questions between Buddhist practitioners and temple officiants. Insights derived from this phase directly informed the design and development parameters of the LINE chatbot. Following this, the study transitioned to a quantitative phase aimed at evaluating user satisfaction with the fully developed chatbot among a selected sample population.

Sample and Informants

For the qualitative research, key informants were selected using purposive sampling. This intentional selection was based on their specific roles and experiences crucial for understanding the temple's communication ecosystem and chatbot development: Two personnel from Tonchueak Temple provided insights into temple operations and devotee needs; One software developer offered expertise on technical feasibility and development challenges; And two general users with prior LINE chatbot experience contributed perspectives on user interaction and expectations. This deliberate choice of informants ensured comprehensive and diverse perspectives vital for the initial needs analysis and design phase.

For the quantitative research, the sample comprised 215 general Buddhist practitioners who had previously interacted with the LINE chatbot. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1953), with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, as the exact population proportion was unknown. Convenience sampling was employed for participant selection due to the specific nature of the study, where participants were drawn from the existing pool of users who had already engaged with the newly developed LINE chatbot at Tonchueak Temple. While it was acknowledged that the potential limitations regarding generalizability, this approach was practical and appropriate for assessing satisfaction among the target user group within the study's scope.

Research Tools

The research instruments employed in this study comprised the following:

1. **Structured Interviews (Qualitative Phase):** A comprehensive literature review of books, academic texts, and online databases was conducted to identify key issues related to digital communication in religious contexts. These insights were then synthesized to define the scope and content of the interview questions, ensuring alignment with research objectives. The draft interview guide was subsequently submitted to three experts for content validity assessment, with revisions made based on their feedback prior to implementation.

2. **LINE Chatbot Development:** The LINE chatbot was developed iteratively based on key findings from qualitative research, serving as foundational data for its design. The development process commenced with a thorough needs analysis. This was followed by the design phase, technical development, rigorous testing, and refinement cycles. LINE Messaging API and Google Dialogflow were specifically chosen due to their robust Natural Language Processing (NLP) capabilities, ease of integration, and proven track record in handling a large volume of user interactions in the Thai language context, thereby supporting complex conversational flows necessary for religious communication.



Feedback from three experts was incorporated at various stages to inform subsequent revisions, which ensured both functional completeness and accuracy. The revised chatbot then underwent a final expert review for validation.

3. Satisfaction Questionnaire (Quantitative Phase): A structured satisfaction questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended items using a 5-point Likert rating scale, was developed. Its content validity was assessed by a panel of three experts utilizing the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). Items with IOC scores below 0.50 were revised, achieving final scores ranging between 0.61 and 1.00. For reliability assessment, the finalized questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 participants whose characteristics closely resembled the actual study sample. The resulting data were analyzed using statistical software to determine internal consistency, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.89, indicating high reliability. The revised instrument was then re-evaluated by the same panel of experts for final appropriateness and confirmed for administration to the actual study sample.

Data Collection

For qualitative data collection, the researcher employed several techniques with five key informants, including direct observation of the temple environment, field note-taking, audio recording, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Upon completion of fieldwork, interview recordings were transcribed and integrated with observational and written notes for data synthesis. The data were then verified for accuracy, completeness, and credibility prior to being subjected to analytical procedures. For quantitative data collection, the researcher first obtained formal permission to survey 215 participants. Subsequently, the finalized LINE chatbot was introduced to the sample group for practical trial use. Alongside the trial, a satisfaction questionnaire was administered to assess user perceptions. The researcher provided further clarification on the research project as needed and encouraged participants to raise any questions. Participants were given sufficient time to complete the evaluation independently, and preliminary checks were conducted to ensure completeness of responses before data analysis. All data collection adhered to strict ethical protocols. Participants provided informed consent (Explicitly or Implied by Completion) after being fully briefed on the study's purpose, their rights (Voluntary Participation, Withdrawal, Confidentiality), and data privacy. Cultural sensitivity guided all interactions, aligning with Buddhist principles.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, a descriptive-analytical approach. All raw data collected from interviews and observations were systematically categorized and coded based on their relational attributes and emerging patterns. The content was then analyzed in alignment with relevant theories and conceptual frameworks and organized into logical thematic categories. Subsequently, the findings were presented in a descriptive narrative format. These qualitative insights served as a foundational basis for designing the LINE chatbot within the context of Tonchueak Temple. For quantitative data analysis, upon completion of data collection, the researcher verified the completeness of responses in the assessment forms. The data were then input into and analyzed using a statistical software package. The results were presented using descriptive statistical measures, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation. These simple



statistics provided a clear overview of the user satisfaction levels, identifying general trends and key areas of approval or areas needing improvement within the chatbot system, thus facilitating straightforward conclusions regarding its effectiveness. The results were displayed in tabular format accompanied by explanatory narratives to ensure clarity of interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The research findings were presented in two main parts, aligning with the study's objectives. Firstly, qualitative insights gathered from key informants were instrumental in shaping the design and development of the LINE chatbot, ensuring its functionality addressed specific communication gaps and user needs. Subsequently, the quantitative results provided a comprehensive evaluation of user satisfaction with the implemented chatbot system. This integrated presentation allowed for a clear understanding of both the development process informed by qualitative data and the empirical assessment derived from quantitative findings, as follows.

1. The design and development of a LINE chatbot aimed to serve as a tool for strengthening communication and enhancing the engagement of Buddhist laypeople with Tonchueak Temple in Nonthaburi Province. Additionally, the chatbot functioned as a medium for disseminating information and promoting the temple's activities. The user interface featured a rich menu comprising six main options: Luang Pho Vihara, About Tonchueak Temple, Tonchueak Temple Museum, LINE Stickers, Tonchueak Temple Map, and Contact Tonchueak Temple, as illustrated in Figure 1(B). The development process was conducted in the following sequential steps:

Step 1: Requirements Analysis: This phase involved analyzing data obtained from the qualitative research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context of the temple and the communication needs of both Tonchueak Temple and its Buddhist lay community.

Step 2: Chatbot Design: An interactive design approach was employed, comprising two key components: Conversation flow design and user interface design. The conversation flow design involved planning how the chatbot would respond to user inquiries, particularly when users input varied and complex questions or commands. Keyword identification played a crucial role in enabling the chatbot to accurately interpret user intentions. The conversational structure was designed using flowcharts to map out the dialogue pathways and interaction patterns between the chatbot and the users. This structure ensured that the chatbot could respond to user inquiries in a systematic and content-aligned manner. Additionally, it facilitated the effective handling of various scenarios, such as providing basic information about the temple or promoting upcoming events. The user interface design incorporated a rich menu as the primary interactive component, enabling users to conveniently select topics of interest through visually structured options. This menu was designed to be visually appealing, user-friendly, and capable of facilitating quick access to essential information. The chatbot's response formats were tailored to the nature of the content, encompassing text messages, infographics, multimedia, or relevant links. Furthermore, the chatbot's language style was carefully designed to be clear, comprehensible, and respectful,



taking into account the religious context-striking a balance between approachability and reverence. This approach aimed to ensure a smooth and engaging user experience.

Step 3: Chatbot Development: This phase employed the LINE Messaging API in conjunction with Dialogflow, a natural language processing (NLP) platform that enabled the chatbot to comprehend user queries and generate contextually appropriate responses. 1) **Intents:** These represented predefined configurations that identified user intentions or desired queries, such as greetings, information about the temple, temple activities, or contact details. 2) **Keywords:** These were specific words or phrases entered by users to express greetings or request information, such as "Hello," "History," "Activities," or "Contact." An example of how user keywords associated with greeting intents were configured was illustrated in Figure 1(A). 3) **Responses:** These were the reply messages that the chatbot delivered when user input matched a predefined keyword within an intent, as shown in Figure 1(B). For instance, when a user typed "Hello," the chatbot utilized a Dialogflow Agent to process the input, converted it into a corresponding intent, and routed it to the appropriate response module that had been predefined for that intent. Each intent could accommodate multiple variations of questions and responses, thereby enhancing the diversity and naturalness of the chatbot's conversational capabilities. However, if a user posed a question that did not match any predefined intents, the chatbot would default to a fallback response (A Generic or Default Reply Indicating it Could not Understand the Query). Therefore, careful and deliberate keyword definition was essential to ensure that the chatbot could accurately detect and effectively process user queries.

ชื่อ
สวัสดี

ชื่อจะไม่แสดงต่อผู้ใช้แต่แสดงในหน้าจอการจัดการเท่านั้น 6/20

ตั้งค่าการตอบกลับ

ประเภทการตอบกลับ

- ☐ ตอบกลับทุกข้อความ
ตอบกลับข้อความทั้งหมด
- ☒ **ตอบกลับตามคีย์เวิร์ด**
ตอบกลับเมื่อได้รับข้อความซึ่งมีคำตรงกับคีย์เวิร์ดที่กำหนดไว้ * ในกรณีที่มีหลายคีย์เวิร์ด จะตอบกลับเมื่อมีคำตรงกับคีย์เวิร์ดคำใดคำหนึ่ง

แต่ละคีย์เวิร์ดต้องมีความยาวไม่เกิน 30 ตัวอักษร

ตั้งค่าอื่นๆ

☒ **ตั้งเวลา**
ทำเครื่องหมายที่การตั้งค่านี้ ในกรณีที่คุณต้องการตอบข้อความในช่วงเวลาหรือเวลาที่เฉพาะเจาะจง ไม่ต้องการเครื่องหมายหากใช้เวลาตอบข้อความของแบบ

(A) Intent and Keywords



(B) Response

Figure 1 Examples of Keywords for the Greeting Intent and Chatbot's Response for the Intent

Step 4: Testing and Optimization: The process was conducted collaboratively by the development team in consultation with three domain experts: A software development specialist, a content expert, and a communication expert. The testing process focused on three key aspects: 1) Conversation Flow Testing: This involved assessing whether the chatbot could accurately guide users through predefined topics, such as temple information, upcoming activities, and contact details. It also evaluated the chatbot's ability to correctly detect keywords and deliver appropriate responses as configured; 2) System Stability Testing: This included assessing the responsiveness of the system and its ability to effectively transmit and receive data between the LINE Messaging API and Dialogflow; and 3) Content and Language Testing: This focused on evaluating the clarity and appropriateness of the chatbot's responses, including the use of polite language, informational accuracy, and consistency with religious context. The feedback provided by the experts was taken into consideration and used to refine the content to ensure clarity, accuracy, and contextual appropriateness within the setting of Tonchueak Temple. Keyword detection mechanisms were also optimized to enable the chatbot to interpret a broader range of user input variations. Additionally, the user interface-including the rich menu-was refined to enhance aesthetic appeal and improve usability. Following these enhancements, the chatbot was rendered more complete and better aligned with user needs and expectations. An illustration of the chatbot's responses to various user queries is presented in Figure 2.

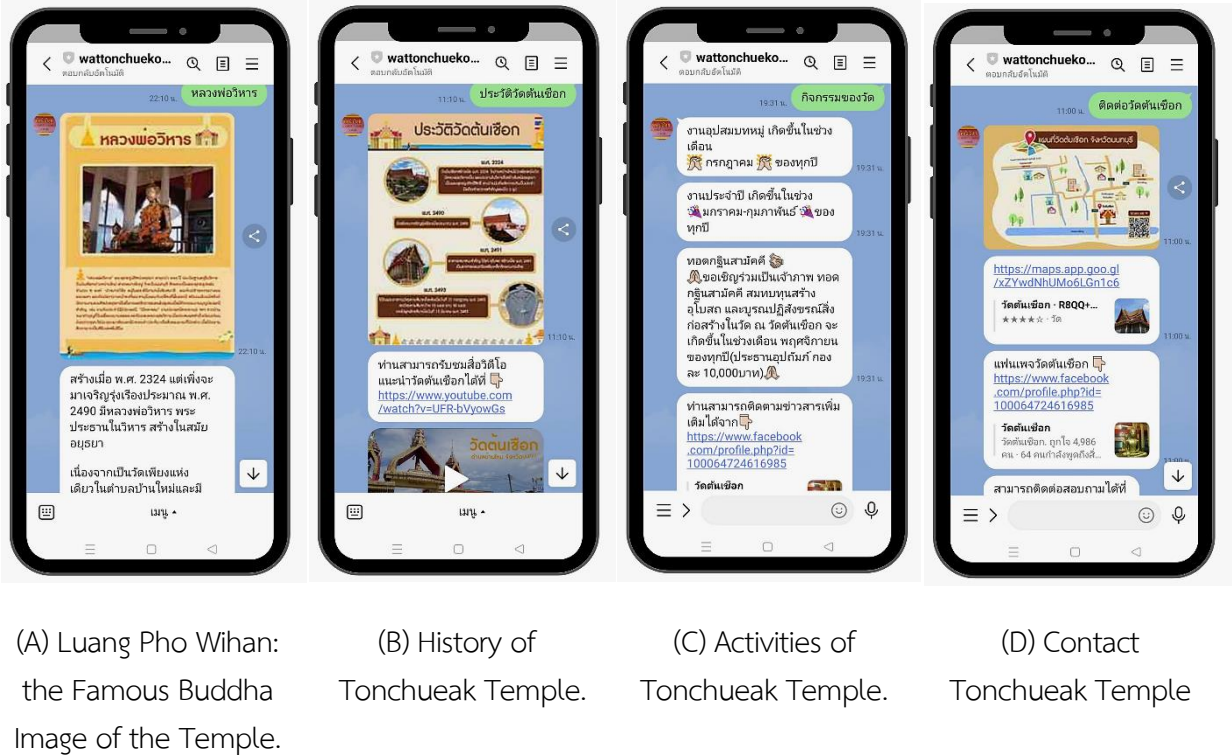


Figure 2 Examples of Responses from the Designed Chatbot



In light of the aforementioned chatbot design and development process, it could be discussed that Dialogflow was predominantly employed as the core natural language processing (NLP) engine for interpreting user queries in chatbot design and development. However, the design of the user interface varied depending on the platform employed. For instance, certain studies developed chatbots as applications or web-based systems, such as the tourism/temple chatbot developed by Sreenivasulu et al. (2024). Their chatbot utilized Google Dialogflow to provide information on historical sites in India, including temple histories, event schedules, and user inquiries, through a conversational interface. The system focuses on enhancing the user experience through natural and user-friendly interactions, accompanied by visual and textual content (Sreenivasulu et al., 2024). In contrast, the Tonchueak Temple chatbot employed a Rich Menu, allowing users to immediately select topics of interest, unlike Sreenivasulu et al. (2024) system, which required users to manually type questions. Another example from a Catholic context was the chatbot developed by Sutono (2019), which aggregated Mass schedules from church databases and delivered them through natural language conversations with users in Indonesia (Sutono, 2019). This system shared key characteristics with the Tonchueak Temple chatbot, as both utilized Dialogflow and NLP for processing religiously contextualized natural language interactions. However, the Catholic chatbot was implemented as an Android application that required users to first download the app to their smartphones before typing messages or selecting menus. In contrast, the Tonchueak Temple chatbot operated via the LINE social media platform, a widely used application in Thailand, which users could access simply by adding the chatbot as a friend. The inclusion of a Rich Menu further facilitated user interaction by reducing the need to manually input commands. Furthermore, studies such as that of Chen & Tsai (2021) explored the use of the LINE Messaging API in conjunction with the Rich Menu in alternative contexts, providing a useful point of comparison. They developed a LINE-based chatbot for managing public buildings, similar to the Tonchueak Temple chatbot, enabling users to access various menu options without manually inputting commands. However, Chen & Tsai's (2021) system emphasized the management of technical building data, necessitating more complex testing procedures. In contrast, the Tonchueak Temple chatbot centered on religious content within a community context, emphasizing accessibility for the general Buddhist public. In summary, a commonality across the Tonchueak Temple chatbot and the aforementioned studies was the adoption of Dialogflow for natural language processing and flexible user interaction, both of which contributed to delivering user-friendly information dissemination. Nevertheless, differences existed in access channels and interface design; The Tonchueak Temple chatbot prioritized the LINE Messaging API and Rich Menu within the LINE application to align with its widespread usage in Thailand. In contrast, other studies developed chatbots directly for web or smartphone applications without employing the LINE platform or the Rich Menu feature. Nonetheless, both approaches possessed distinct advantages tailored to their respective target audiences and usage contexts.

2. The results of the satisfaction assessment regarding the Tonchueak Temple LINE chatbot were as follows.

Table 1 The sample satisfaction assessment result

Assessment Items	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level
Content and Design Aspects			
1. The content presented by the chatbot was accurate and reliable.	4.20	0.77	Satisfied
2. The chatbot was easy to use, required minimal learning, and was user-friendly.	4.55	0.64	Very Satisfied
3. The chatbot delivered information through a variety of formats, including text, images, multimedia, and hyperlinks.	4.43	0.73	Satisfied
4. The information provided by the chatbot was clearly presented and easy to understand.	4.25	0.76	Satisfied
5. The language used by the chatbot was polite, appropriate, and aligned with the cultural and religious context of the temple.	4.30	0.75	Satisfied
6. The chatbot understood various phrasings of questions, conveying the same user intent.	3.95	0.62	Satisfied
7. The color tones of the menu and accompanying visuals were aesthetically harmonious and pleasing.	4.40	0.75	Satisfied
Overall Content and Design Aspects	4.30	0.72	Satisfied
Usefulness and Applicability Aspects			
1. It facilitated convenient access to information about Tonchueak Temple.	4.26	0.75	Satisfied
2. It enhanced the ease of communication with Tonchueak Temple.	4.44	0.73	Satisfied
3. It felt like conversing with a human.	4.07	0.72	Satisfied
4. It reflected Tonchueak Temple's adaptation to the digital era.	4.58	0.54	Very Satisfied
5. It fostered a sense of connection and emotional engagement with Tonchueak Temple.	4.31	0.73	Satisfied
6. It served as a practical and beneficial tool for users.	4.40	0.72	Satisfied
Overall Usefulness and Applicability Aspects	4.34	0.70	Satisfied
Overall Evaluation	4.32	0.71	Satisfied

Table 1 presents the satisfaction evaluation results of 215 participants regarding the developed LINE chatbot, categorized into two aspects: Content and design, usefulness and application. The assessment comprised 13 items in total, with an overall mean score of 4.32, indicating a high level of satisfaction. In the content and design dimension, participants expressed a high level of satisfaction (\bar{x} = 4.30, S.D. = 0.72). The highest-rated item was "The Chatbot was Easy to Use, Required Minimal Learning, and was User-Friendly," with a mean score of 4.55. This reflected that the chatbot's conversational design was well-suited for general users, allowing access and usage without requiring advanced technological knowledge. Additionally, it facilitated a positive user experience and reduced barriers to accessing information about the temple. Conversely, the lowest-rated



item in this category was "The Chatbot Understood Various Phrasings of Questions Conveying the Same User Intent" (\bar{x} = 3.95, S.D. = 0.62). This suggested that the chatbot still had limitations in natural language processing, particularly in interpreting diverse linguistic expressions that convey the same intent. Such limitations might affect user experience in scenarios requiring greater flexibility in system responses. Regarding the usefulness and application dimension, participants reported a high level of satisfaction (\bar{x} = 4.34, S.D. = 0.70). The highest-rated item was "It Reflected Tonchueak Temple's Adaptation to the Digital Era," with a mean score of 4.58. This indicated that participants recognized and appreciated Tonchueak Temple's efforts to integrate contemporary technology in enhancing communication with Buddhist followers, representing an organizational adaptation aligned with current digital information access behaviors. The lowest-rated item in this dimension was "It Felt Like Conversing with a Human" (\bar{x} = 4.07, S.D. = 0.72). This finding implied that, although the chatbot performed well in delivering basic information, it lacked the capability to engage in naturally flowing or emotionally nuanced interactions akin to human conversation. This remained a common limitation of chatbot technology, underscoring the need for further development in emotional intelligence and contextual responsiveness.

In discussing the evaluation results regarding user satisfaction with the Tonchueak Temple LINE chatbot, it was found that the highest level of satisfaction in terms of content and design stemmed from the chatbot being easy to use, requiring minimal learning, and demonstrating user-friendliness (\bar{x} = 4.55, S.D. = 0.64). This reflected a design approach that prioritizes simplicity and user-friendliness. This factor aligned with several previous studies, which indicated that ease of use is a crucial element influencing user satisfaction with chatbots. For instance, Casadei et al. (2023) found that the complexity of tasks performed by a chatbot significantly affects user trust and satisfaction. Specifically, when a chatbot is capable of dividing conversations into clear and manageable steps, it helps reduce complexity and enhance user satisfaction. Additionally, Silva & Canedo (2023) proposed that a chatbot conversation design that is simple, clear, and flexible can significantly improve user satisfaction and engagement. In the context of chatbot deployment in the banking sector, Alshibly (2024) reported that chatbot usability directly influences customer satisfaction. Overall, it was concluded that the Tonchueak Temple chatbot, which targets general Buddhist users who may not possess advanced technological skills, was accessible and immediately usable. This was especially effective when deployed on the LINE application, a platform already familiar to Thai users, thus further facilitating ease of use and high satisfaction. Similarly, in the aspect of usefulness and application, the item receiving the highest satisfaction rating was that the chatbot demonstrated the temple's adaptation to the digital age (\bar{x} = 4.58, S.D. = 0.54). This reflected the capability of religious institutions to adopt digital technology to enhance communication and religious services in alignment with the community context and digital dynamics. Such innovative use of technology exemplifies Upāya-kosalla (Skillful Means or Skill in Means), allowing the temple to effectively promote Sammā-ditṭhi (Right View or Right Understanding) by making Buddhist activities more accessible in the digital era. This conclusion supports the policy recommendation by Ngamkom (2024), which advocates for the integration of technology to empower temples and communities,



thereby preserving peace and cooperation in the digital era. Furthermore, several other studies also reflected such technological adaptation. For example, the study by Müller and Friemel (2024) proposed a dynamic model for digital media use in religious communities, emphasizing that digital media can complement religion's role in creating meaning and fostering social relationships. Similarly, the research by Abiola et al. (2025), which examined the impact of AI-driven social media strategies on religious evangelism and Christian community engagement in Nigeria, found that the use of AI tools such as chatbots and sentiment analysis significantly enhances the participation of believers in digital communities.

Conversely, the aspect of content and design that received the lowest satisfaction from participants was the chatbot's ability to comprehend the diversity of user queries. This finding was consistent with the study by Portugal et al. (2024), which emphasized that intent classification was a critical component in developing chatbots capable of effectively responding to user needs. This was particularly pertinent in conversational recommender systems, where understanding user intent enabled chatbots to deliver more relevant and personalized recommendations. However, the same study by Portugal et al. (2024) also identified intent classification as an ongoing challenge. This challenge arose from the linguistic variability in user communication and the complexity of intents, which might involve multiple layers or ambiguous meanings within a single utterance. Such factors might hinder the chatbot's ability to accurately and comprehensively interpret user intentions. This might partly explain why participants using the Tonchueak Temple LINE chatbot perceived the interaction as dissimilar to human conversation. Consequently, they rated this aspect of the chatbot with the lowest satisfaction. This observation aligned with findings from Laymouna et al. (2024), who reported that chatbots could enhance the quality and efficiency of healthcare services. However, despite high user satisfaction, participants also noted persistent technological constraints, particularly limitations in natural language comprehension and the chatbot's ability to emulate truly human-like interaction. This aligned with broader research; For instance, Liu et al. (2024) examined user perceptions regarding chatbots' capacity to exhibit empathy, finding that even advanced chatbots powered by large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4, despite generating high-quality dialogue, were perceived as lacking human-like empathy. This deficiency negatively impacted the overall conversational experience and user satisfaction, further exacerbated by user expectations (A Potential Bias) for sophisticated interaction from AI tools. Moreover, in the nuanced context of religious communication, specific cultural factors, such as the importance of subtle emotional connection, reverence, and interpersonal warmth in spiritual guidance, might inherently influence user perceptions. The current technological limitations meant the chatbot could not fully replicate these culturally valued aspects, thereby influencing its perceived effectiveness in fostering deeper engagement beyond information dissemination.



Originality and Body of Knowledge

This section presents the unique contributions and the established body of knowledge stemming from the study's findings, as illustrated in Figure 3. This study identified key design and development considerations for religious chatbots, which constituted a novel framework for integrating digital technology into faith-based communication systems. This approach exemplified Upāya-kosalla (Skillful Means or Skill in Means) by employing modern tools to foster Sammā-ditṭhi (Right View or Right Understanding) within the digital sphere. These considerations are articulated through five interrelated components in the figure, each contributing to the scholarly and practical advancement of chatbot applications in religious contexts:



Figure 3 Key Design and Development Considerations for Religious Chatbots

Component 1: Development Model: This study proposed a development model for religious chatbots based on a systems analysis approach, identifying five core components essential for effective implementation: 1) Contextual analysis of the specific temple environment; 2) Conversation design aligned with religious norms; 3) Strategic application of natural language processing (NLP)



technologies; 4) Iterative testing and refinement with input from interdisciplinary experts; and 5) Evaluation based on real user feedback. This model could be further extended into a systems-based conceptual framework for the development of chatbots in other religious institutions, emphasizing design approaches that were effectively aligned with specific institutional contexts and religious principles.

Component 2: Innovative Design: This study introduced an innovative design approach tailored to the religious context of Tonchueak Temple, utilizing the LINE Messaging API in conjunction with Dialogflow to develop an integrated system comprising structured dialogue flows, rich menu interfaces, and natural language processing modules. Unlike general-purpose chatbots, this design was intentionally aligned with Thai religious ethics and cultural context, marking a significant advancement in faith-based conversational technology.

Component 3: Role Expansion: The chatbot developed for Tonchueak Temple significantly expanded the temple's role in the digital space by serving as a proactive communication tool that facilitated "Immediate" and "Continuous" engagement with both local and remote followers. This illustrated how religious institutions in Thailand were adapting to the digital age, fostering new forms of social capital and participatory religious experience through technology.

Component 4: Community Building: This research served as a prototype for digital religious community building by presenting an empirical case of cultivating religious engagement through LINE, a widely used platform in Thai society. This approach provided a replicable model for other temples and religious organizations seeking to establish sustainable online Buddhist communities, effectively bridging traditional cultural practices with modern digital technologies.

Component 5: Technological Gaps: The study also highlighted critical technological limitations, particularly in the chatbot's ability to accurately interpret varied expressions of identical user intent and its lack of human-like responsiveness. These findings underscored the ongoing challenge of achieving "Human-Like Communication" in chatbot design, pointing to a need for further advancement in natural language understanding and empathetic interactions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study uniquely contributed to the digital transformation of religious institutions by pioneering the design and evaluation of a LINE chatbot within a temple context. It filled a critical gap in understanding how interactive AI tools could enhance faith-based communication and community building. This study identified key design and development considerations for religious chatbots, which constituted a novel framework for integrating digital technology into faith-based communication systems. This innovative application of technology embodied Upāya-kosalla (Skillful Means or Skill in Means) as a channel for engagement, thereby strengthening social capital within the Buddhist community and supporting the development of Sammā-diṭṭhi (Right View or Right Understanding) through accessible digital channels. This study yielded two key findings that aligned with its objectives. The first finding concerned the design and development of a chatbot as a tool to enhance communication and engagement between Buddhist laypeople and the Tonchueak Temple in Nonthaburi Province. The resulting system allowed users to input data



either by selecting commands from a rich menu or by typing conversational messages within the LINE application. The chatbot was capable of processing queries and responding with various formats, including text, images, multimedia, and relevant hyperlinks. This system was developed using the LINE Messaging API in combination with Dialogflow. The second finding was derived from the experimental deployment of the chatbot among a sample of 215 participants. The results showed that overall user satisfaction was high, with a mean score of 4.32. The highest-rated aspect was the chatbot's ease of use and user-friendliness. This reflected the success of a design approach intended to facilitate inclusive participation across user demographics. Furthermore, participants expressed high satisfaction with how the chatbot represented Tonchueak Temple's efforts to adapt to the digital age. This was particularly due to its deployment on LINE, a platform deeply embedded in everyday Thai communication. This development indicated that the chatbot thereby extended the temple's communication channels from the local community to external audiences. It also fostered both "Immediate" and "Continuous" engagement with younger Buddhist audiences who prefer digital modes of interaction. Conversely, the lowest-rated aspect was the chatbot's limited ability to understand semantically diverse questions that share a common intent. Users also reported a lack of perceived human likeness in the chatbot's conversational experience. These issues highlighted current limitations in the chatbot's natural language processing capabilities. This challenge highlighted the need to improve intent recognition and to develop communication models that more closely resemble natural human interaction. Based on these findings, it was recommended that chatbot development prioritize the careful and comprehensive specification of keywords, as this directly impacted the chatbot's processing and response capabilities. The successful implementation at Tonchueak Temple highlighted this LINE chatbot as a valuable model, demonstrating how religious organizations could effectively implement these findings to enhance digital engagement. This model held significant potential for scaling or adapting to other religious institutions and diverse cultural contexts, offering a blueprint for deepening faith-based connections in the digital era. Despite these positive outcomes, this study had limitations, including its specific geographical and religious context and the convenience sampling method for quantitative data. Future research should explore broader applications across different religious denominations and regions, investigate long-term user engagement and spiritual impact, and address advanced NLP capabilities to overcome current interaction limitations.

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PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL CAPITAL TO PROMOTE CULTURAL TOURISM OF KALASIN PROVINCE: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Kalasin Province, located in northeastern Thailand, is rich in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including ancient archaeological sites, revered Buddhist temples, traditional Phu Thai and Pong Lang folk art, and longstanding community rituals. However, in recent years, the province has faced increasing challenges in preserving and managing this cultural wealth. Rapid urbanization, youth migration to urban centers, and the commodification of cultural practices for tourism have led to the dilution of traditional values and the erosion of authentic community participation in heritage activities. Additionally, local stakeholders have expressed concerns about the limited involvement of communities in tourism planning and the growing disconnect between tourism development and Buddhist ethical principles. This research explores the strategic integration of participatory cultural capital management in Kalasin Province with a particular emphasis on Buddhist perspectives. The core objectives were: To develop a sustainable model of cultural tourism rooted in Buddhist values and ethical responsibility, and to empower local communities to actively engage in decision-making processes that preserve and celebrate cultural expressions such as ceremonies, crafts, and indigenous knowledge. The study responds to the urgent need to balance economic modernization with cultural preservation by proposing an inclusive, community-led model of cultural tourism. It further addresses the threats of globalization by positioning Buddhist ethical principles and spiritual values as guiding frameworks for a more resilient and culturally grounded tourism strategy.

Methodology: This qualitative study followed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design and utilized participatory observation (n = 100), semi-structured interviews (n = 19), and a focus group discussion (n = 7) involving local leaders, artisans, monks, tourism operators, and residents as key informants. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by principles of cultural capital theory and Buddhist ethical frameworks. The study focused on identifying participatory mechanisms that enable community engagement in managing cultural resources and evaluating such involvement's socio-cultural impacts.



Main Results: Findings indicate that participatory management fosters a sense of ownership, enhances cultural pride, and contributes to the preservation of both tangible assets (e.g., Heritage Sites) and intangible practices (e.g., Rituals, Storytelling, Festivals). Local stakeholders actively engaged in shaping tourism initiatives, co-designing experiences that reflect authentic community values while appealing to visitors seeking meaningful cultural interactions. The research also found that such approaches build stronger social cohesion, facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer, and promote adaptive strategies in response to globalization and modern influences. Educational programs and community forums were identified as critical tools for reinforcing cultural literacy and ensuring broad participation.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This study applied core Buddhist principles to guide the development of a participatory cultural tourism model in Kalasin Province. Grounded in *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Interconnectedness), and *Sotthi* (Communal Well-Being), these principles were integrated to promote ethical tourism practices rooted in cultural respect and social equity. Buddhism served not only as a cultural reference but also as a practical framework for fostering inclusion, dignity, and shared benefit among stakeholders. Within this model, cultural tourism becomes an expression of Dhamma in action, supporting spiritual growth, mindful engagement, and community harmony alongside economic sustainability.

Conclusions: This research concludes that participatory cultural capital management, when deeply rooted in Buddhist ethical perspectives, can transform tourism into a sustainable and spiritually enriching practice. By empowering local communities to co-create tourism experiences and manage cultural resources, the proposed model strengthens social resilience, preserves cultural heritage, and enhances mutual understanding between tourists and local residents. The findings advocate for inclusive tourism strategies that are not only economically viable but also ethically aligned and culturally respectful, ensuring that Kalasin's unique identity is preserved and celebrated. This Buddhist-informed participatory model offers a transferable framework for culturally rich regions aiming to balance traditional heritage with innovative tourism strategies rooted in ethical and spiritual principles.

Keywords: Participatory Management, Cultural Tourism, Buddhist Perspectives, Kalasin Province

Introduction

A comprehensive understanding of participatory management within the context of cultural tourism necessitates an examination of the underlying spiritual philosophies common to the region, particularly given the deep influences of Buddhism in Thai culture. This foundational perspective not only shapes the values and practices of local communities but also informs their approach to managing cultural capital. In Kalasin Province, the intricate relationship between Buddhism and community life provides a unique lens through which the potential of cultural tourism can be harnessed. Local traditions, rituals, and festivals often reflect Buddhist principles, emphasizing harmony, sustainability, and collective well-being. By involving communities directly in the stewardship of their cultural assets, a tourism model can be established that is both economically viable and



ethically aligned with local spiritual values (Khuenkhaew, Phromlah, Chueasakhoo, & Singhapat, 2025). Prior research related to participatory management, cultural tourism, and Buddhist ethics has highlighted that participatory approaches can significantly enhance the preservation of cultural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism practices (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Engaging local stakeholders in tourism planning empowers communities, reinforces a sense of ownership, and ensures that developments resonate with the authentic cultural identity of the area. Unlike conventional tourism models that may impose external interpretations, participatory frameworks enable a more cohesive integration of cultural capital. This is especially crucial for protecting intangible heritage elements, such as storytelling, rituals, and community knowledge, which are often vulnerable to neglect. The infusion of Buddhist teachings into participatory strategies ensures that development initiatives remain respectful of the values cherished by the community.

Cultural capital in Kalasin includes both tangible heritage-such as historical sites and religious landmarks-and intangible traditions like local craftsmanship and oral histories. These resources, when enhanced through community-driven strategies, contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to higher tourist engagement and satisfaction, leading to broader economic gains (Braun et al., 2013); (Bennett et al., 2016). When communities-especially those deeply rooted in Buddhist values of compassion and shared responsibility-are invited to co-create tourism experiences, the resulting initiatives are more inclusive and culturally resonant. This collaborative model not only supports the protection of cultural heritage but also nurtures a tourism sector that reflects and upholds the spiritual and social values of the local population. Kalasin Province, situated in northeastern Thailand, is a region rich in cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. Known for its distinctive blend of prehistoric, ethnic, and Buddhist influences, Kalasin holds significant archaeological and anthropological value. It is home to important historical sites such as Phu Kum Khao Dinosaur Excavation Site, Wat Klang, and Phra That Yakhu, as well as the renowned Phrae Wa silk weaving tradition preserved by the Phu Thai ethnic community. These tangible and intangible heritages are deeply embedded in the province's socio-cultural identity and reflect a unique confluence of Theravāda Buddhist philosophy, animist rituals, and local wisdom (Wannakit, 2023). Spiritual practices in Kalasin are closely interwoven with daily community life. Annual festivals, temple ceremonies, and merit-making rituals are not only expressions of religious devotion but also reinforce communal values such as interdependence, generational knowledge transfer, and harmony with nature-tenets strongly aligned with Buddhist ethics. Temples serve as centers for both spiritual instruction and cultural preservation, especially in rural areas where monks often assume leadership roles in local development initiatives (Prasert, 2024). Despite Kalasin's rich cultural and spiritual landscape, scholarly engagement with the province's participatory approaches to cultural tourism remains limited. While several studies have addressed Isan regional identity, Buddhist influences on local governance, and community-based tourism in northern and central Thailand, relatively few have examined how Buddhist ethical frameworks are integrated into the participatory management of cultural capital in Kalasin specifically. Moreover, existing literature often overlooks the agency of local actors,



particularly artisans, women, and monastics, in shaping tourism models rooted in socio-spiritual sustainability (Phathong et al., 2025).

Furthermore, most tourism research in Thailand prioritizes economic indicators and visitor satisfaction, underexploring the moral, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions that underpin cultural preservation and community empowerment. This gap becomes especially evident in the context of global tourism trends, which increasingly call for ethical, equitable, and ecologically conscious frameworks. This study addresses these gaps by examining Kalasin Province not merely as a site of cultural consumption but as a living ecosystem of Buddhist-informed participatory governance, where spirituality, identity, and tourism development are harmonized through community engagement. By situating cultural tourism within a Buddhist ethical paradigm, this research offers a needed shift from utilitarian tourism models toward a more inclusive and spiritually grounded perspective.

Culturally rich provinces like Kalasin present an ideal context for reimagining sustainable tourism through the integration of spiritual and cultural dimensions. In particular, Buddhist perspectives offer a compelling ethical and philosophical framework for guiding cultural tourism strategies that are not only economically viable but also spiritually enriching and socially inclusive. Understanding the local social fabric and deeply rooted spiritual beliefs is essential for designing tourism initiatives that align with community values and foster long-term resilience (Daniel et al., 2012); (Burkhard et al., 2009). In the face of increasing pressures from modernization and globalization, such as commodification and cultural dilution, sustainable tourism in Kalasin must draw upon community participation, traditional wisdom, and Buddhist ethical teachings-including mindfulness (*Sati*), interconnectedness (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), and compassion (*Karuṇā*)-to cultivate ethical engagement among both residents and visitors. This integrated approach resonates with global discourses on spiritual ecology and cultural sustainability, which emphasize the preservation of intangible heritage and the promotion of meaningful cultural interactions. By embedding local insights, spiritual values, and community aspirations into the heart of tourism strategies, Kalasin can build a tourism system that is resilient, inclusive, and ethically grounded. Such a model promotes stewardship, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and equitable benefit-sharing, thereby preserving the province's unique identity while contributing to the well-being of its people (Jamal et al., 2009); (Okazaki, 2008); (R-Ting et al., 2021). In doing so, Kalasin emerges as a national exemplar of holistic, culturally sensitive, and spiritually informed tourism development, reflecting a harmonious coexistence between heritage preservation and economic transformation (Li et al., 2020); (Scheidel et al., 2020); (Verschuuren et al., 2021).

Objectives

This research aimed to develop a sustainable model of cultural tourism in Kalasin Province by promoting participatory management rooted in Buddhist values and to empower local communities to actively engage in decision-making processes that preserve and celebrate cultural expressions such as ceremonies, crafts, and local wisdom. The study emphasizes ethical and spiritual considerations in tourism, aligning management strategies with the Buddhist principles that guide community life. Additionally, it addresses the challenges of modernization and globalization by proposing innovative



frameworks that support both cultural integrity and economic development. Ultimately, the objective is to strengthen community identity, ensure social justice, and position cultural capital as a driver for resilient and inclusive regional growth.

Methodology

This qualitative research employed participatory observation involving 100 participants, semi-structured interviews with 19 key informants, and focus group discussions comprising 7 participants. Key stakeholders included local leaders, artisans, monks, tourism operators, and residents. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by principles of cultural capital theory and Buddhist ethical frameworks. The study focused on identifying participatory mechanisms that enable community engagement in managing cultural resources and on evaluating the socio-cultural impacts of such involvement.

To ensure alignment with its objectives, this qualitative study strategically employed multiple data collection methods, each contributing uniquely to the research aims. Participatory observation involving 100 participants allowed researchers to witness firsthand the dynamic processes of cultural expression and community engagement, thus revealing how participatory mechanisms function in practice. Semi-structured interviews with 19 key informants—including monks, artisans, and local leaders—provided in-depth insights into the socio-cultural impacts of tourism and the integration of Buddhist ethical principles such as compassion (*Karuṇā*) and interdependence (*Paṭṭicasamuppāda*). Focus group discussions comprising seven participants served as platforms for collective reflection, validating emerging themes and enabling stakeholders to co-develop sustainable strategies for cultural tourism management. These qualitative methods were analyzed using thematic analysis, grounded in cultural capital theory and Buddhist ethical frameworks, ensuring that findings were both contextually rich and philosophically coherent. Each method thus contributed directly to the study's aims: Identifying participatory mechanisms, evaluating socio-cultural impacts, and embedding Buddhist values into a model of sustainable tourism.

Results and Discussion

The development of a sustainable model of cultural tourism rooted in Buddhist values and ethical responsibility (Objective 1)

The research found that grounding cultural tourism in Buddhist ethics provided a compelling framework for sustainable development in Kalasin Province. Buddhist principles such as *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Paṭṭicasamuppāda* (Interdependence), and *Sotthi* (Communal Well-Being) were not merely abstract values but active components of tourism strategy. Informants emphasized that tourism became a form of merit-making and mindfulness when rooted in Dhamma. One local monk remarked, "Tourism here is not for Entertainment but for Enlightenment. We Offer Stories, not Shows." This ethical positioning not only elevated the spiritual depth of tourist experiences but also strengthened local pride and dignity in cultural expression. These findings echo Burkhard et al. (2009), who argue that culturally grounded tourism systems enhance both authenticity and sustainability.



Unlike conventional models that commodify culture, Kalasin's approach used Buddhist teachings to guide participatory governance, ensuring that tourism remained respectful and harmonious with community life (Jamal & Stronza, 2009); (Prasert, 2024).

The participatory framework also fostered new forms of collaboration and co-creation between local communities and external stakeholders. The model emphasized inclusive dialogues in temples, ethical training for tourism operators, and educational programs that integrated local wisdom with Buddhist philosophy. As illustrated in Figure 1, stakeholders-such as monks, artisans, and village leaders-were depicted as interconnected agents forming a holistic ecosystem. These structural elements allowed community members to voice concerns and shape tourism activities in line with their spiritual values. Compared to top-down tourism policies observed in other provinces, this model cultivated a sense of collective ownership and moral obligation. Previous studies (Bennett et al., 2016) note the importance of community empowerment in preserving intangible heritage, but this study advances the discourse by operationalizing Buddhist ethics in the planning and execution stages. The result is a spiritually sustainable model that not only supports local economies but also embodies the moral worldview of Kalasin's residents.



Figure 1 A Sustainable Model of Cultural Tourism



As can be seen in the figure titled "A Sustainable Model of Cultural Tourism", it presents four interrelated pillars-Economic, Ethical, Spiritual, and Communal-surrounding a central Buddha image, symbolizing the guiding influence of Buddhist principles in shaping tourism practices in Kalasin Province. Each segment reflects a key domain emphasized by informants during participatory action research. The Economic aspect highlights how tourism has generated income for local artisans and small businesses, with one shop owner noting, "When Tourists Come for the Silk Festival, My Sales Triple." However, economic development was consciously tied to cultural preservation, as locals were encouraged to share traditional knowledge with visitors. The Ethical domain, represented by the scales of justice, underscores moral responsibility in tourism practices. Monks and community leaders emphasized *Sīla* (Moral Conduct) and right intention as essential values, ensuring that tourism respects cultural norms and avoids exploitation. A monk stated, "If Tourism Brings Only Profit but no Wisdom, then it will Damage our Roots," pointing to the need for ethically guided partnerships and respectful tourist behavior.

The Spiritual and Communal dimensions reinforce the socio-cultural depth of the model. The lotus flower in the Spiritual quadrant reflects the integration of meditation, merit-making, and mindfulness into tourism experiences. Programs such as temple stays and Dhamma tours were not only income-generating but spiritually transformative, as one guide shared, "Tourists Come Curious, but they Leave Peaceful." The Communal segment, depicted by group icons, represents active community participation in decision-making. Informants noted that youth and women now lead cultural events, reversing prior patterns of marginalization. One elder shared, "Now our Young People are not Running Away-they are Leading Festivals and Telling our Stories." At the core of the model, the Buddha figure ties all elements together through the Buddhist concept of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Interdependence), emphasizing that sustainable tourism emerges from the balance of economic, ethical, spiritual, and communal forces. This model aligns with findings by Jamal and Stronza (2009); Verschuuren et al. (2021), who advocate for spiritually informed, participatory approaches to cultural heritage management.

To empower local communities to actively engage in decision-making processes that preserve and celebrate cultural expressions such as ceremonies, crafts, and indigenous knowledge (Objective 2)

The study revealed that community empowerment in Kalasin was achieved by actively involving diverse groups-women, youth, monks, and artisans-in decision-making regarding cultural tourism. Unlike earlier practices where locals were treated as performers or passive beneficiaries, this model positioned them as cultural curators. For instance, a female artisan shared, "Now We decide which Crafts to Present and How We Want them to be Explained. It's no Longer Outsiders Telling our Story." Through participatory action research, villagers contributed to event planning, cultural site interpretation, and the integration of rituals such as Bun Bang Fai into tourism calendars. These findings align with Okazaki's (2008) community-based tourism model but go further by foregrounding ethical agency and cultural sovereignty. Interventions such as temple-based forums and local heritage committees enhanced cultural literacy and encouraged dialogue between generations-allowing



the youth to inherit both craft knowledge and a sense of civic responsibility (Canedoli et al., 2017); (Li et al., 2020).

Moreover, the study emphasized the role of Buddhist ethical education in reinforcing community participation. Local monks frequently led workshops on mindful consumption, the meaning of merit-making, and the spiritual relevance of traditional ceremonies. These engagements helped participants view tourism not as exploitation but as cultural exchange. One youth participant said, "I Used to See Weaving as Old-fashioned. Now I Teach it to Tourists and Feel Proud Doing So." This shift in mindset reflects a deeper transformation in the perception of cultural identity. Ethical tourism also countered the risks of commercialization, as villagers were empowered to reject exploitative partnerships and instead form cooperatives based on trust, transparency, and shared values (Braun et al., 2013); (Bennett et al., 2016). The result is a model where cultural expressions such as Phrae Wa weaving and Buddhist rituals are not commodified but celebrated as living traditions. By aligning Buddhist ethics with participatory governance, Kalasin created a resilient and inclusive tourism strategy that honors both the past and the agency of present communities (Verschuuren et al., 2021); (Mayer, 2018).

Originality and Body of Knowledge

What differentiates this study from previous research is its explicit integration of Buddhist ethical principles into the participatory management of cultural tourism—a dimension largely overlooked in existing literature. While prior studies have examined community-based tourism and cultural heritage preservation, they often emphasize economic development or stakeholder collaboration without deeply engaging with the spiritual and moral frameworks that shape local practices. This research fills that gap by grounding its model in core Buddhist values such as *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Sati* (Mindfulness), and *Paṭiccasamuppāda* (Interconnectedness), offering a culturally congruent and ethically guided approach to tourism governance. In doing so, the study not only advances theoretical discourse on ethical tourism and cultural capital management but also provides a replicable model rooted in spiritual sustainability—positioning Kalasin Province as a case study in how Buddhist ethics can serve as a foundation for inclusive, resilient, and culturally respectful tourism development.

This research presents a novel integration of participatory cultural capital management and Buddhist ethical frameworks to promote sustainable cultural tourism in Kalasin Province, Thailand. Its originality lies in reframing tourism development not only as an economic enterprise but as a spiritually grounded, community-led endeavor that respects both tangible and intangible heritage. Unlike conventional studies that often treat local traditions as marketable assets, this study positions cultural expressions—such as rituals, festivals, and local craftsmanship—as intrinsic elements of identity and collective memory, safeguarded through community engagement and Buddhist principles such as particularly compassion (*Karuṇā*), interconnectedness (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), and Communal Well-Being (*Sotthi*).



Methodologically, the study contributes to academic advancement by employing a mixed-methods approach anchored in Participatory Action Research (PAR), which positions local stakeholders-not as passive respondents, but as active co-researchers-in the design, implementation, and evaluation of tourism strategies. This approach enhances the validity, relevance, and contextual sensitivity of the research, as it captures lived experiences, indigenous knowledge systems, and culturally specific forms of agency. By integrating qualitative tools such as participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, the study ensures a multidimensional understanding of how cultural tourism operates within the socio-religious fabric of Kalasin Province. The participatory model not only reinforces local ownership and fosters social learning, but it also aligns with contemporary discourses on decolonizing research, ethical tourism, inclusive governance, and bottom-up development. Most notably, the study's incorporation of Buddhist ethical considerations-such as *Sīla* (Moral Conduct), *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Sati* (Mindfulness), and *Sammā-Diṭṭhi* (Right View) into tourism management practices represent a novel methodological innovation. This spiritual-ethical integration fills a significant void in tourism and heritage studies, where moral and philosophical frameworks are often marginalized in favor of economic or policy-centric perspectives. By embedding Buddhist ethics into both the research design and the resulting tourism model, this study not only enhances its cultural resonance but also contributes a unique perspective to the broader field of sustainable and community-led tourism scholarship.

In terms of the body of knowledge, this study significantly expands the theoretical understanding of how cultural tourism can function as a vehicle for socio-economic development while simultaneously preserving cultural integrity amid the forces of modernization and globalization. By grounding its framework in Buddhist ethical principles and community-driven governance, the study responds directly to global calls for more ethically grounded and culturally sensitive models of sustainable tourism. It contributes to the evolving discourse on spiritual ecology, emphasizing that tourism must not only be environmentally and economically sustainable but also spiritually and morally attuned to the values of host communities. This is particularly relevant in the context of ongoing international debates on the commodification of culture and the search for alternative development paradigms that prioritize well-being over profit. Furthermore, the study aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for The Goals), by presenting a replicable, community-empowering model that values inclusive participation, cultural continuity, and ethical partnerships. The findings offer an actionable framework for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors in other culturally rich regions, contributing to broader discussions on participatory governance, spiritual sustainability, and resilient cultural economies. Ultimately, this study illustrates that integrating local wisdom and religious worldviews into tourism planning not only safeguards heritage but also fosters empowered, cohesive communities capable of navigating global change on their own terms. As illustrated in Figure 2

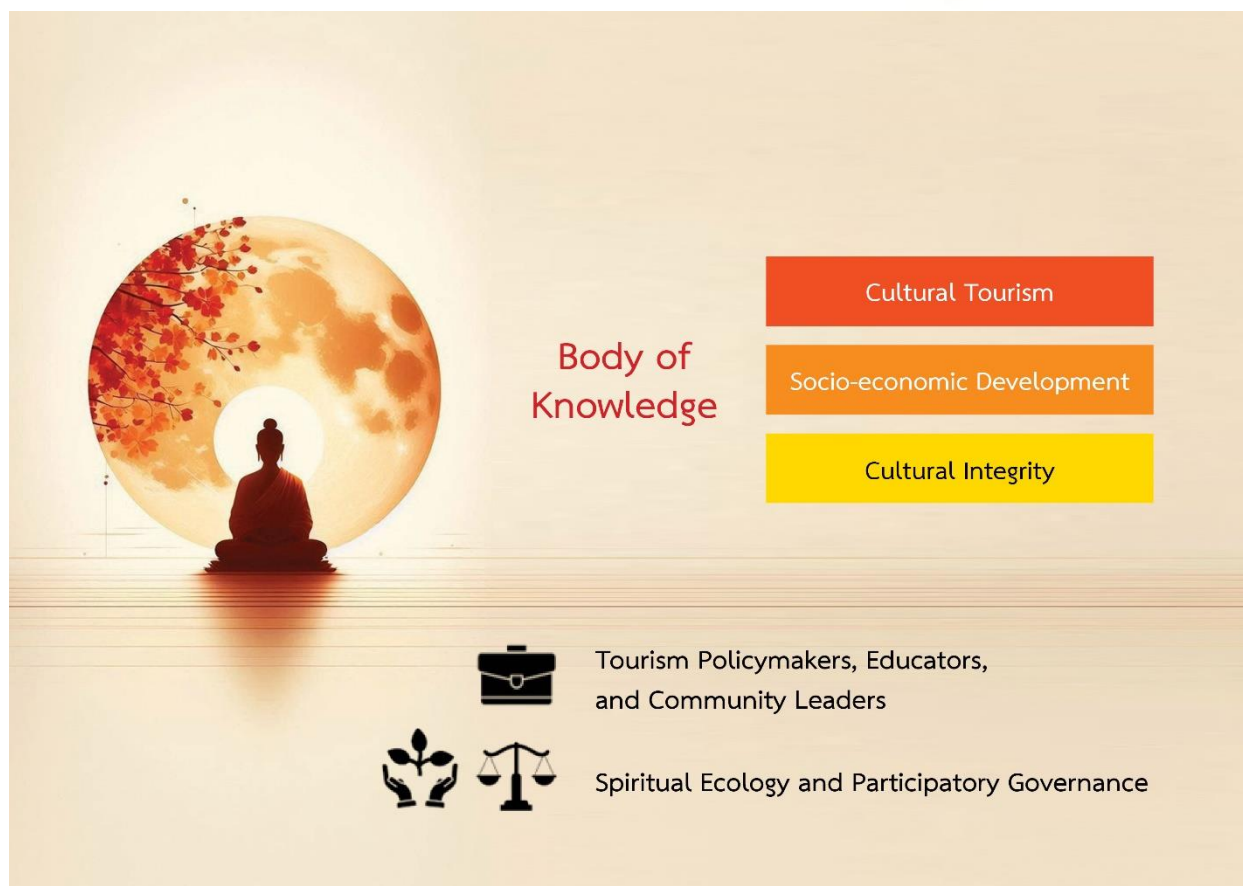


Figure 2 Body of Knowledge

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research concludes that the participatory management of cultural capital, when guided by Buddhist perspectives, offers a powerful and adaptable model for sustainable cultural tourism development in Kalasin Province. By integrating local wisdom and Buddhist ethical principles—such as compassion, interconnectedness, and collective responsibility—tourism initiatives are aligned with community values and spiritual heritage. Active engagement of local stakeholders in planning, decision-making, and implementation processes enhances cultural preservation, strengthens social cohesion, and promotes inclusive economic benefits. The study confirms that both tangible heritage (e.g., Historical Landmarks) and intangible heritage (e.g., Rituals and Crafts) are more effectively maintained when communities possess ownership and agency. The inclusion of Buddhist teachings fosters respectful, mindful, and socially responsible tourism practices, positioning Kalasin Province as a cultural destination and a replicable model for spiritually informed, community-led tourism development in Thailand and beyond. The study recommends several actions to further advance this approach: 1) Institutionalizing participatory management through government policies; 2) Building community capacity with targeted training for artisans, youth, and women; 3) Integrating Buddhist ethics into tourism codes of conduct and educational materials; 4) Designing immersive educational tourism programs such as temple stays and craft workshops; 5) Establishing community-led systems for monitoring tourism's social, economic, and environmental impacts; 6) Fostering Ethical



partnerships among community groups, private sectors, and academia based on transparency and mutual benefit; 7) Encouraging replication of this model in other culturally rich provinces, particularly within the Mekong region; and 8) Launching public awareness campaigns to promote cultural preservation and ethical engagement among both locals and tourists. In summary, the participatory and Buddhist-informed approach demonstrated in Kalasin provides a valuable national and regional benchmark, illustrating how tradition, spirituality, and economic development can harmoniously coexist in advancing sustainable and culturally respectful tourism.

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EFFICIENCY OF ECCLESIASTICAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE PROPAGATION OF BUDDHISM BY THE SANGHA IN SUKHOTHAI PROVINCE

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: The mission of disseminating Buddhism was a principal endeavor essential for upholding the religion's longevity amid the ever-changing society of that time. The effectiveness of such initiatives depended on the systematic administration by the Sangha's executive monks, who served as leaders in monastic governance. The objective of this research was to study the efficiency of Sangha administration in propagating Buddhism by monastic administrators in Sukhothai Province. It primarily aimed to examine the efficiency level and challenges in the administration of Buddhist propagation activities. It also sought to identify the factors that influenced the efficiency of monastic administration in this area and to propose guidelines for enhancing such administrative efficiency among monastic leaders in Sukhothai Province.

Methodology: This study employed a mixed-methods research design that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The population of interest consisted of 331 monks, from whom quantitative data were collected using questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed using statistical methods, including descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations, as well as multiple linear regression analysis for inferential purposes. In addition, qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 32 key informants, who were selected using purposive sampling.

Main Results: The research findings revealed that: 1) The overall level of effectiveness and challenges in the administration of Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical leaders was rated at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.85$); 2) Three variables were found to significantly influence the effectiveness of administration in Buddhist propagation activities (y), with statistical significance at the .01 level. These variables, ranked in order of their impact, were: Dana (Generosity), Samanattata (Equality or Impartiality), and Piyavaca (Kind Speech); and 3) Three key strategies were identified for enhancing the effectiveness of the administration of Buddhist propagation: Public accessibility, public participation, and the development of public knowledge.



Involvement to Buddhaddhamma: This finding was consistent with the framework of the Applied Buddhism Group, which emphasizes integrating Buddhist teachings with contemporary knowledge and employing research on religious principles from new perspectives. In particular, the emphasis on applying the Four Principles of Sanghavatthu (Bases of Social Solidarity) to enhance Sangha administration is well-founded. These principles, taught by the Buddha, are essential for fostering harmony, cooperation, and effective leadership within the monastic community and beyond. Ecclesiastical leaders can implement each principle to maximize administrative effectiveness as follows: 1) Dana (Generosity) - Material and Spiritual Sharing: In addition to material support, Sangha leaders should provide Dhamma guidance, education, and mentorship to junior monastics and lay devotees. Resource Management: Equitable distribution of resources (Food, Robes, Shelter, and Educational Materials) ensures no member is neglected. Selflessness in Service: Leaders should prioritize the welfare of the Sangha over personal interests, embodying the spirit of *Dānaparamī* (Perfection of Giving); and 2) *Piyavācā* (Kind Speech) - Encouraging and Harmonious Communication: Leaders should employ gentle, respectful, and uplifting words to resolve conflicts and inspire unity. Constructive Feedback: Instead of harsh criticism, wise and compassionate counsel helps monastics correct mistakes without resentment. Dhamma-Based Motivation: Regularly sharing inspiring teachings reinforces communal purpose and moral discipline (Vinaya).

Conclusions: The administration of Buddhist propagation activities in Sukhothai should consistently apply the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, emphasizing public accessibility and participation, as well as the development of moral and ethical knowledge among the people. This aligns with the "Baworn" model, which highlights the integrated roles of temples, communities, and schools in promoting a virtuous and moral society.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Sangha Administration, Ecclesiastical Leaders, Sukhothai

Introduction

Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist nation, with Buddhism deeply rooted in its culture since ancient times. Historical records and enduring traditions highlight this religious legacy. Monks, central to Thai society, spread Buddhist teachings, guide moral practices, and maintain religious institutions. Highly revered, they play a key role in community life. As monastic numbers grew, effective Sangha administration became crucial. Formalized under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V), it strengthened Buddhism's role in Thai society. This began with the promulgation of the Sangha Administration Act of R.S. 121 (1902), which laid the foundation for structured ecclesiastical governance (Phrabaidika Katavoot Kavasakatammo, 2020). The organization of the Sangha is considered a core aspect of ecclesiastical administration. It must be carried out in accordance with the Dhamma-Vinaya, the directives of the Sangha Supreme Council, formal regulations, and resolutions, royal commands issued by the Supreme Patriarch, or orders from higher-ranking ecclesiastical authorities. This includes conflict resolution, appeals, and decisions on appointments and removals. Ecclesiastical administrators (Sangha Officials) are responsible



for ensuring that such administration aligns with the ethical and disciplinary codes governing Buddhist monks and novices (Bodeerat et al., 2013).

Modern administrative and managerial advancements should be integrated into Sangha operations to improve monastic governance. While some areas may adopt bureaucratic or private-sector models, others must adhere strictly to the Dhamma and Vinaya. The Vinaya remains the core framework for monastic administration, defining duties, behavior, and unity. It ensures order, personal growth, and a structured society. Without it, the Sangha would lose its unique, disciplined nature, distinct from secular life. (Phrakhru Photikittikhun, 2018).

The administration of the Sangha is a critical factor within the broader religious governance system in Thailand. It is primarily regulated by the Thai Sangha Act, which provides the legal framework for organizing monastic affairs. Effective administration of the Sangha is thus regarded as central to sustaining and advancing Buddhism in a contemporary society characterized by rapid social transformation. In this context, Buddhist monks are increasingly required to understand and respond to these societal changes. Without such awareness, they may fail to fulfill the true social function envisioned by the Buddha and risk being marginalized by the very society they seek to serve. If the Sangha becomes disconnected from the evolving needs and conditions of society, the dignity, relevance, and potential of Buddhism may erode. As such, there is an urgent need for the monastic institution to adapt itself to social change without compromising the essence of Dhamma-based living. However, in the eyes of many lay Buddhists today, the Sangha has seen a decline in credibility and moral authority (Rattanachai, 2022). This situation reflects deeper challenges in the ecclesiastical administrative system faced by monastic leaders at all levels. Common problems include increasing violations of monastic discipline by monks and novices, tensions between monks and local communities, and inappropriate behaviors that reflect a lack of restraint and contentment. These issues not only tarnish the image of the Sangha but also contribute to a broader crisis of faith among the Buddhist public. Therefore, the administration of the Sangha must be grounded in the principles of the Vinaya (Phramaha Charoen Katapanno et al., 2021). At the same time, it is imperative that modern monastic leaders adopt and integrate contemporary management knowledge and innovations into their governance strategies. Strengthening the Sangha's administrative capacity requires appropriate methods of supervising subordinates, maintaining discipline, and ensuring moral conduct within the monastic community. Effective Sangha governance must not only preserve the spiritual integrity of the institution but also foster operational efficiency and long-term sustainability. In this regard, administrators should rely on Dhamma-based leadership principles as a foundational framework for decision-making, both for the benefit of the Sangha and for broader social harmony (Phramaha Nethikit Rungkool et al., 2020).

The administrative structure of the Thai Sangha is firmly rooted in the principles of the Vinaya, which govern the conduct of Buddhist monks, as well as in the legal framework provided by the Thai Sangha Act and other related statutes. Monks are required to adhere strictly to both sets of regulations. Violations of the Vinaya incur penalties as prescribed by the Buddha himself,



while transgressions of secular laws-such as those found in the Sangha Act, regulations of the Supreme Sangha Council, and associated administrative guidelines-are subject to penalties as specified in those legal provisions. However, in cases where certain actions are committed in the absence of applicable laws, or where laws are enacted retroactively, those laws cannot be applied *ex post facto* to impose or increase penalties (Dokthaisong & Lertpairaud, 2019). According to the current Sangha Act, the administration of monastic affairs encompasses six core domains that every monk is obligated to uphold: 1) Ecclesiastical governance; 2) Religious education; 3) Educational support; 4) Propagation of Buddhism; 5) Public welfare (Sanghopakaraka); and 6) Charitable services (Sanghasamakka) (Phra Udomsittthinayok et al., 2024). These six areas reflect the comprehensive responsibilities of the Sangha in both religious and social contexts. This study focuses specifically on the effectiveness of Sangha administration in the domain of Buddhist propagation, which is one of the core responsibilities outlined in the Act. The purpose of this research is to analyze current trends and propose practical strategies for enhancing the administrative performance of ecclesiastical leaders (Phra Sangkhathikan) in Sukhothai Province. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the overall development and improvement of Sangha administration in Sukhothai.

Objectives

The objective of this research was to study the efficiency of Sangha administration in propagating Buddhism by monastic administrators in Sukhothai Province. It primarily aimed to examine the efficiency level and challenges in the administration of Buddhist propagation activities. It also sought to identify the factors influencing the efficiency of monastic administration in this area and to propose guidelines for enhancing such administrative efficiency among monastic leaders in Sukhothai Province.

Methodology

This study on the efficiency of Sangha administration in the propagation of Buddhism by ecclesiastical administrators in Sukhothai Province employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For the qualitative research, in-depth interviews served as the primary method of data collection. A purposive sampling method was employed to select 32 key informants, including 1 Provincial Ecclesiastical Governor of Sukhothai, 2 Deputy Provincial Ecclesiastical Governors, 2 Advisors to the Provincial Ecclesiastical Governor, 9 District Ecclesiastical Governors, and 18 Sub-district Ecclesiastical Governors. For the quantitative research, the study utilized a structured questionnaire administered to a sample group of 331 monks. The quantitative component followed a survey research design. The questionnaire was developed based on variables identified through a review of relevant literature and previous research. It aimed to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. In addition to explaining the research findings, the qualitative method also contributed to the analysis of phenomena by offering deeper insights into the contextual realities of the ecclesiastical administration and its challenges in Buddhist propagation.



Data Collection and Research Instruments in Quantitative Research

1. Primary Data: Primary data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires to a sample group of monks participating in the research study.

2. Secondary Data: Secondary data were obtained through the review and compilation of information from articles, academic journals, documents, books, websites, and related research studies. These sources, identified within the scope of the study, were instrumental in the development of the research instruments, data analysis, and formulation of research conclusions.

3. Population: The population of this study consisted of monks from the Mahanikaya sect under the ecclesiastical administration of Sukhothai Province, covering all 9 districts. The total population included 2,397 monks, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Number of Monks under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction of Sukhothai Province

Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction		Number of Monks
1.	Sukhothai Mueang District Sangha Administration	409
2.	Sawankhalok District Sangha Administration	387
3.	Si Satchanalai District Sangha Administration	378
4.	Kong Krailat District Sangha Administration	310
5.	Thung Saliam District Sangha Administration	136
6.	Si Samrong District Sangha Administration	238
7.	Khiri Mat District Sangha Administration	230
8.	Ban Dan Lan Hoi District Sangha Administration	207
9.	Si Nakhon District Sangha Administration	102
Total		2,397

4. Sample Group: The sample group consisted of monks under the jurisdiction of the Sukhothai Provincial Sangha Administration. The sample size was determined using Yamane (1973), resulting in a total of 331 monks. In accordance with statistical research principles, the sample was proportionately selected from monks across the districts under the Sukhothai Sangha Administration. The researcher employed quota sampling to ensure proportional representation from each district, thereby allowing equal opportunity for all districts to be included in the sample.

5. Research Instrument: The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire developed by the researcher based on a review of relevant concepts, theories, and previous research. The questionnaire consisted of four parts:

Part 1: Questions related to the personal background of the monks, including: 1) Number of years in monkhood; 2) Level of Dhamma education; 3) Level of secular education; 4) Continuous food supply (Nitthayaphat); and 5) Responsibilities and official duties.

Part 2: Questions assessing the level of efficiency and challenges in the administration of Buddhist propagation by Sangha administrators in Sukhothai Province, covering four areas: 1) Planning, 2) Implementation; 3) Monitoring; and 4) Improvement.



Part 3: Questions addressing the factors affecting the efficiency of Buddhist propagation administration by Sangha administrators in Sukhothai Province, based on the Four Sangha-Friendly Principles: 1) Dana (Generosity); 2) Piyavaca (Kind Speech); 3) Atthacariya (Helpful Conduct); and 4) Samanattata (Equality or Impartiality).

Part 4: Questions regarding strategies to enhance the efficiency of Buddhist propagation administration by Sangha administrators in Sukhothai Province.

6. Validation of the Questionnaire: The draft questionnaire was submitted to the thesis advisor for evaluation regarding format, accuracy, content coverage, and language appropriateness. Revisions were made according to the advisor's suggestions.

7. Content Validity Check: The questionnaire was reviewed by five experts to assess content validity. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was calculated, with all items scoring between 0.50 and 1.00. The questionnaire was revised based on expert feedback and resubmitted to the thesis advisor for final review.

8. Try-Out Test: A pilot test was conducted with 30 monks and Sangha administrators in Phitsanulok Province who were not part of the main study sample. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach (1970), resulting in an overall alpha value of 0.997, indicating excellent internal consistency.

9. Data Collection: Data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires. An official request was issued by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Local Development, Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, to seek cooperation in collecting data from the sample. The questionnaires were distributed and collected in person from respondents in Sukhothai District, Sukhothai. All returned questionnaires were reviewed for completeness before being analyzed using statistical software.

Data Collection and Research Instruments in Qualitative Research

1. The researcher selected key informants who are involved in the efficiency of the administration of the Sangha affairs related to the propagation of Buddhism by the ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai Province. A total of 32 key informants were chosen based on the following criteria: 1) One Provincial Sangha Chief of Sukhothai; 2) Two Deputy Provincial Sangha Chiefs; 3) Two Advisors to the Provincial Sangha Chief; 4) Nine District Sangha Chiefs within Sukhothai Province; and 5) Eighteen Sub-district Sangha Chiefs within Sukhothai Province.

2. The research instrument used was an in-depth interview guide developed from a review and synthesis of relevant theories, concepts, and prior studies regarding the efficiency of Sangha administration in Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai. This framework led to the construction of a structured interview guide, which was then submitted to the thesis advisor and revised accordingly to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research issues. The in-depth interview guide consisted of three parts:

Part 1: Examining the current efficiency and problems in how Sangha affairs are managed regarding Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai.



Part 2: Investigating factors affecting the efficiency of Sangha administration related to Buddhist propagation in Sukhothai.

Part 3: Exploring strategies to promote the efficiency of Sangha administration in Buddhist propagation in Sukhothai.

3. The interview process followed a structured format with a predetermined scope and questions aligned with the research objectives. Confidentiality was assured, and permission to audio-record the interviews was obtained. The interviews delved deeply into the specified topics.

4. Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews by the researcher to ensure accuracy and academic rigor, aligning with the conceptual framework. The interview sessions fostered an atmosphere of open discussion, and all responses were audio-recorded for subsequent analysis.

Results and Discussion

The study on the efficiency of the administration of Sangha affairs related to the propagation of Buddhism by ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai Province presents the research findings as follows:

1. The analysis results of the efficiency level and problems in the administration of Sangha affairs concerning the propagation of Buddhism by ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai Province, both overall and categorized by specific aspects, are shown in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation (S.D.) of Efficiency Levels in Sangha Administration Related to Buddhist Propagation by Ecclesiastical Authorities in Sukhothai Province, Overall and by Specific Aspects

The Efficiency of Ecclesiastical Authorities in Sangha Administration Related to Buddhist Propagation in Sukhothai Province	n = 331		Level of Efficiency
	\bar{x}	S.D.	
Planning Aspect	4.73	.55	Highest
Implementation of the Plan Aspect	4.89	.27	Highest
Monitoring and Evaluation Aspect	4.92	.30	Highest
Improvement and Correction Aspect	4.85	.29	Highest
Total	4.85	.33	Highest

According to Table 2, the analysis results of the overall efficiency level of the administrative management of the Sangha affairs in the propagation of Buddhism by the ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai Province are at the highest level (Mean = 4.85). When analyzed by specific aspects, the efficiency of administrative management in the propagation of Buddhism by the ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai Province is also at the highest level across all four aspects, namely: Monitoring and Evaluation Aspect (Mean = 4.92),



Implementation of the Plan Aspect (Mean = 4.89), Improvement and Correction Aspect (Mean = 4.85), and Planning Aspect (Mean = 4.73).

2. The analysis results of the factors influencing the efficiency of the administrative management of the Sangha affairs in the propagation of Buddhism by the ecclesiastical authorities in Sukhothai Province are presented in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3 Analysis Results of Factors Affecting the Efficiency of Administrative Management of Sangha Affairs in the Propagation of Buddhism by Ecclesiastical Authorities in Sukhothai Province (Dependent Variable: y)

Independent Variables	B	S.E.	Beta	t	Sig.
A Constant	.332	.067		4.994	.000
X ₁ Dana	.272	.025	.351	10.982	.000
X ₂ Piyavaca	.261	.046	.273	5.631	.000
X ₃ Atthacariya	.084	.060	.079	1.403	.162
X ₄ Samanattata	.315	.050	.302	6.305	.000

R = .985 R² = .970

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of factors affecting the administrative efficiency of the Sangha affairs in the propagation of Buddhism by the ecclesiastical officers in Sukhothai Province (y), using the Enter method (All Independent Variables Entered into the Regression Equation) as follows:

1. The four independent variables studied have a multiple correlation coefficient of 0.985 (R = .985) with the administrative efficiency of the Sangha affairs in Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical officers in Sukhothai Province (y). This indicates a very high combined correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable (y).

2. The four independent variables account for 97.0% of the variance in the administrative efficiency of the Sangha affairs in Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical officers in Sukhothai Province (y), as indicated by the coefficient of determination, R² = .970. This suggests that the independent variables collectively explain a substantial proportion of the variance in the dependent variable.

3. Three independent variables have a statistically significant effect on the administrative efficiency of the Sangha affairs in Buddhist propagation (y) at the .01 level. These findings are consistent with the research hypotheses. The variables are ranked by their standardized beta coefficients in descending order of influence on the dependent variable as follows:

3.1 Dana (Generosity) (X₁, β = .351)

3.2 Samanattata (Equality or Impartiality) (X₄, β = .302)

3.3 Piyavaca (Kind Speech) (X₂, β = .273)

4. The analysis of recommendations for enhancing the administrative efficiency of the Sangha affairs in Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical officers in Sukhothai Province can be summarized as follows:



4.1 Accessibility to the public: It is recommended to promote the adaptation of Buddhist propagation methods to be appropriate for contemporary times and aligned with the lifestyles of the populace. This includes developing modern, engaging, and easily accessible propagation approaches while strictly adhering to Buddhist principles. Furthermore, increasing the diversity and number of propagation channels will facilitate easier public access.

4.2 Public participation: It is suggested to encourage opening spaces that allow greater public involvement in various aspects of Sangha affairs. This includes raising public awareness and appreciation of Buddhism, fostering a sense of stewardship and readiness to preserve Buddhist values, and promoting temples as community centers and focal points for the spiritual and social unity of the people.

4.3 Knowledge development of the populace: It is advised to enhance the role of temples in conjunction with other community institutions based on the "Baworn" principle, which focuses on the development of morality and virtue within the community. Temples and monks should evolve beyond serving solely as venues for religious rites and ceremonies, becoming centers of learning for the benefit of both individuals and the community. Additionally, temples should be developed as learning centers that complement Buddhist teachings and align with the local context and lifestyles.

Quantitative Research Results

1. Efficiency Levels and Problems in the Administration of Sangha Affairs in the Propagation of Buddhism by Ecclesiastical Leaders in Sukhothai Province: The study found that the overall efficiency and challenges in administering Sangha affairs related to Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical leaders in Sukhothai Province were at the highest level ($\bar{x} = 4.85$). When analyzed by specific aspects, the administrative efficiency was also at the highest level across all four dimensions: Work inspection ($\bar{x} = 4.92$), adherence to plans ($\bar{x} = 4.89$), improvement and rectification ($\bar{x} = 4.85$), and planning ($\bar{x} = 4.73$). These findings align with those who investigated the administration of Sangha affairs based on the Brahmvihāra principles by ecclesiastical leaders in Chang Klang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. Their research revealed that: 1) The administration of Sangha affairs according to Brahmvihāra principles was overall at the highest level, with mean scores descending in order as follows: Work inspection adherence to plans improvement and rectification and planning; and 2) The recommended approaches to promoting the administration of Sangha affairs included: 2.1) Governance-ecclesiastical leaders should study the rules, regulations, and operational guidelines clearly to implement them effectively; 2.2) Religious education-there should be structured educational management for the monastic canon (Pāli and General Studies) as well as encouragement for monks and novices to study diverse canonical texts; 2.3) Educational welfare-providing adequate support to youth and the public to access education appropriate to their potential and capacity; 2.4) Propagation-organizing sermons, meditation training, and Dharma lectures; 2.5) Public utilities-actively promoting the construction and restoration of



religious artifacts and places of worship continuously; and 2.6) Public welfare-assessing needs and providing assistance to monks accordingly (Phrapalad Teerawat Siriphattharathiwat et al., 2023).

2. Factors Affecting the Efficiency of Sangha Affairs Administration in the Propagation of Buddhism by Ecclesiastical Leaders in Sukhothai Province: The study identified three statistically significant predictive variables at the 0.01 level influencing the efficiency of Sangha affairs administration in Buddhist propagation: Dana (Generosity), Samanattata (Equality or Impartiality), and Piyavaca (Kind Speech). This may be attributed to ecclesiastical leader's compassion and desire for other's happiness and liberation from suffering through the propagation of Dhamma (Dhamma Dana). They exhibit generosity in sharing knowledge and guidance with kindness and goodwill. Ecclesiastical leaders act as benefactors and contributors, willing to support material resources and other necessities that benefit the propagation of Buddhism (Amisa Dana). They consistently forgive mistakes and interpersonal offenses (Abhaya Dana) and serve as exemplary figures by sacrificing personal interests for the collective good, thereby gaining respect and faith from the Sangha and Buddhist followers. These results correspond with those who studied the application of the Four Social Principles (Sangahavatthu) in the administration of Sangha affairs in Mueang Nong Khai District, Nong Khai Province. These findings aligned with Natsabut's findings were as follows: 1) The administration framework encompassed six areas: Governance, education, educational welfare, propagation, public utilities, and public welfare; 2) The Four Social Principles are ethical guidelines promoting generosity, kind speech, helpful conduct, and equality or impartiality, to facilitate effective administration; and 3) The application of the Four Social Principles in Sangha affairs administration involved: 3.1) Dana-giving what is beneficial and non-harmful to society, self-sacrifice in strength, personal happiness, and wisdom including both material and Dhamma giving; 3.2) Piyavaca-coordinating through polite, sincere, harmonious, and constructive speech; 3.3) Atthacariya-practicing beneficial conduct by diligently assisting and caring for others; and [3.4) Samanattata-maintaining consistency and appropriateness over time to minimize discontinuity and enhance administrative efficiency. Particularly, Atthacariya and Samanattata contributed to improving the six administrative domains, reducing processing time, assigning appropriate personnel, and increasing work effectiveness toward achieving objectives (Natsabut, 2023).

Qualitative Research Findings

1. The Efficiency Level and Problems in the Administration of Sangha Affairs in the Propagation of Buddhism by the Sangha Officials in Sukhothai Province: The study found that the scope of Sangha administration, which is the responsibility of the Sangha officials, involves governing the Sangha to ensure orderliness and compliance with the Vinaya (Buddhist Disciplinary Code), laws, and regulations of the Sangha Council, rules, orders, resolutions, announcements, and royal commands issued by the Supreme Patriarch. Additionally, Sangha officials are tasked with supervising monks and novices within their jurisdiction, resolving disciplinary issues (Matters Monks must Abstain from), adjudicating penalties, reviewing appeals of orders, or providing guidance and recommendations to subordinates to ensure orderly conduct. They also conduct inspections and hold meetings with Sangha officials within their administrative zone.



The scope of Sangha administration comprises six key areas, especially in Buddhist propagation, which can be explained through management principles as follows:

1.1 Planning (Plan): The findings show that effective administration requires specialized knowledge, expertise, and training in management. It is widely acknowledged that efficient management necessitates that Sangha officials possess a high level of knowledge and skill in the administration, planning, and management of the Sangha and temples.

1.2 Implementation (Do): The administration of Sangha affairs in Buddhist propagation is conducted through various activities such as organizing religious propagation events, Dhamma propagation, meditation retreats, and Vipassana practice sessions. These activities aim to help interested individuals understand Buddhist teachings and practice correctly for genuine happiness.

1.3 Monitoring and Evaluation (Check): Sangha officials play a role in governing and overseeing the Sangha within their jurisdiction in accordance with the Vinaya, laws, the Sangha Council regulations, rules, orders, resolutions, announcements, and royal commands of the Supreme Patriarch. Their duties include supervising monks and novices and maintaining order within the temples.

1.4 Improvement and Correction (Act): The improvement of Sangha the administration depends on the quality of management. Sangha administrators must assess their roles, review, and analyze to improve and develop management, resource allocation, and managerial skills to ensure that Sangha operations achieve planned objectives. These findings align with those who studied the efficiency of Sangha affairs administration in six areas within the Sangha jurisdiction of Sadao District. Their findings revealed: In the administration of Sangha affairs, the six aspects were summarized as follows: Governance: Administrative monks possess appropriate qualifications and effectively instruct monks and novices; Religious Education: Support is provided for all monks and novices to receive efficient Dhamma education; Social Education: Administrative monks support secular education; Buddhist Propagation: Moral and ethical training activities are organized for youth, and Public Utilities: Adequate public utilities are provided, and Social Welfare: Donations of necessities occur regularly and in collaboration with government and private sectors. Recommendations on improving efficiency in Sangha affairs management include: 1) Training monks and novices to adhere strictly to the Vinaya; 2) Developing personnel to become teachers of Dhamma and Pali; 3) Inspiring monks, novices, and youth to engage in learning; 4) Encouraging Sangha officials to embrace modern knowledge and technology in Buddhist propagation; 5) Establishing assembly halls for community activities; and 6) Creating funds to assist disaster victims (Phrakru Bowonchaiwat et al., 2024).

2. Factors Influencing the Efficiency of Sangha Affairs Administration in Buddhist Propagation by Sangha Officials in Sukhothai Province: The study found that the factors affecting the efficiency of Sangha affairs administration in Buddhist propagation by Sangha officials in Sukhothai Province are based on the Four Principles of Social Harmony (Sangahavatthu: 4), which are fundamental Buddhist virtues promoting unity, participation, and cooperation, as follows:



2.1 Dana (Generosity): Sangha officials consistently share and synthesize resources between the Sangha and the community, including material goods and beneficial knowledge. This generosity fosters goodwill, mutual support, and positive relationships among temples, monks, communities, and the public.

2.2 Piyavaca (Kind Speech): Sangha officials speak politely, respectfully, and truthfully, avoiding slander and coarse language. The application of Piyavaca contributes to creating a comforting atmosphere and engenders trust and respect.

2.3 Atthacariya (Beneficial Conduct): Sangha officials serve as exemplary models by acting beneficially with correctness, employing physical effort, heartfelt intention, and wisdom. Such conduct expresses goodwill and builds lasting bonds.

2.4 Samanattata (Equality or Impartiality): Sangha officials maintain consistent impartiality and treat others equally without arrogance or bias. Adherence to Samanattata promotes acceptance and respect, leading to unity and cooperation.

Thus, the Four Principles of Social Harmony (Sangahavatthu 4) are essential for managing Sangha affairs according to core Buddhist teachings, fostering unity, harmony, and connectedness within the Sangha community and society at large. These findings correspond with a study on participatory educational management based on Sangahavatthu 4. The study revealed the following: Dana (Generosity): Allocation of scholarships, lunch subsidies, and educational materials for underprivileged students; Support for research and teaching development grants for teachers; Awarding scholarships for high-performing and well-behaved students; Piyavaca (Kind Speech): Administrators and teachers speak politely, listen to opinions of students and staff, and create a warm, safe, and comfortable school atmosphere; Atthacariya (Beneficial Conduct): Administrators and teachers demonstrate honesty, transparency, and accountability; Students exhibit honesty, respect for rules, and responsibility toward self and society; And Samanattata (Equality or Impartiality): Administrators treat students and staff fairly and equally; Teachers recognize and foster each student's potential to support their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development holistically (Pandi, 2024).

Originality and Body of Knowledge

According to the study, it was found that Sukhothai Sangha administrators can effectively apply the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) model to enhance the administration of monastic affairs and elevate their operations to achieve progress and sustainability, as follows:

In Figure 1. Planning (Plan): Formulate detailed plans and activities, assign responsibilities, allocate budgets, and set timelines. Emphasize innovative methods, especially online channels, to attract students and youth to study the Dhamma; Implementation (Do): Execute the plans to assess monastic administration, particularly in propagating Buddhism. Sangha leaders drive operations toward clear goals, with success depending on collaboration and community involvement; Monitoring and Evaluation (Check): Systematically review results by comparing actual outcomes with planned goals. If objectives are unmet, identify causes for correction, and Improvement (Act):

Use evaluation insights to refine operations. Adjustments feed into the next planning phase, creating a continuous PDCA cycle that supports sustainable development.

The benefits of implementing the PDCA model in the administration of monastic affairs include the following:

1. It establishes a systematic approach to Sangha administration, providing clear direction and structured operations.
2. It facilitates effective problem-solving by enabling step-by-step and targeted interventions.
3. It promotes continuous learning and improvement, allowing the Sangha to evolve in accordance with contemporary changes.
4. It enhances the efficiency and value of resource utilization.
5. It strengthens collaboration and participation between the Sangha and lay Buddhist communities.

Through the consistent application of the PDCA framework, Sangha administrators can lead the monastic organization toward prosperity and become a lasting spiritual refuge for Buddhists and the general public alike.



Figure 1 Efficiency Model of Sangha Administration

Conclusions and Recommendations

To improve Sangha administration efficiency in Buddhist propagation by ecclesiastical leaders in Sukhothai Province, the P-D-C-A principle should be consistently applied. A people-centric approach is key, ensuring easy access to Buddhism and encouraging public participation



in monastic activities. Knowledge development should align with community institutions (Temple, School, Home) under the "Baworn" principle, fostering morality. This study offers practical recommendations, including regular monitoring and evaluation by Sukhothai's ecclesiastical administrators to ensure policy continuity and sustainable development. Government and religious agencies should adopt these guidelines in the long-term. Comparative studies with other regions are also advised to enhance the future Sangha administration.

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FROM INNER ORDER TO URBAN ORDER: A BUDDHIST ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ETHICAL CITIES

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Urban development across the Global South, particularly in Thailand, was increasingly shaped by economic optimization and administrative efficiency. However, these paradigms often overlook the ethical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of space. This paper aimed to propose a Buddhist ethical framework for urban design, drawing on the training principles of *Sīla*, *Samādhī*, and *Paññā* as an alternative model of civic development. The central objective was to reframe city-making as a moral process that emphasized the cultivation of inner ethical consciousness as foundational to spatial justice and civic sustainability.

Methodology: The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive-reflective case study approach. It drew on Buddhist hermeneutics and spatial ethics to analyze urban conditions in Chiang Mai through the lens of the Threefold Training. Data sources included textual analysis of the Handbook for Mankind, planning documents, and observational evidence from urban sites in Chiang Mai. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was applied by cross-checking textual interpretation, field observation, and literature. Urban phenomena such as traffic congestion, PM2.5 pollution, gentrification, and sacred space encroachment were interpreted as ethical dilemmas rather than technical issues. The methodology emphasized thick description and reflexive interpretation rather than empirical generalization.

Main Results: Findings revealed that Chiang Mai's urban transformation embodied multiple ethical tensions. The city's increasing congestion and air pollution violated the principle of *Sīla* by contributing to collective harm. Gentrification in Nimmanhaemin reflected craving, undermining social equity and mindfulness. In the old city area, sacred zones faced profanation due to tourism, diluting reverence and relational ethics. In response, spatial interventions, such as quiet lanes, breathable transit nodes with air-quality displays, heritage-sensitive zoning, and inter-being markets, were proposed to operationalize the Threefold Training. These interventions aimed to reduce harm (*Sīla*), stabilize attention and rhythm (*Samādhī*), and cultivate insight into interdependence and impermanence (*Paññā*). Such proposals demonstrated how Buddhist ethics could guide practical design choices in zoning, mobility, and community spaces.



Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This study contributed to the field of Applied Buddhism, with a focus on Buddhism and sustainable development and Buddhist innovations. Our research was deeply grounded in the principles of Traditional Buddhism, specifically the Threefold Training (Tisikkhā) as taught by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu in Handbook for Mankind. By drawing from the Buddhadhamma, the article provided a comprehensive moral ecology for evaluating urban spaces and reframing spatial decisions as ethical acts. We argued that urban design, often treated as a technical field, could be a form of Buddhist innovation. The research further connected with Buddhist anthropology by asserting that urban space was never value-neutral but a karmic field that either supported or obstructed inner liberation (Buddhism and the Development of Wisdom and Morality). This perspective demonstrated how applying Buddhist teachings could lead to the development of wisdom and morality for individuals and society. The Handbook for Mankind became a foundational text for a new method development that used urban design to cultivate ethical awareness and foster social and moral awakening.

Conclusions: This study contributed to ethical urbanism by proposing a Buddhist-informed design framework that bridged personal transformation and spatial justice. It argued that sustainable urban order had to be rooted in "Inner Order" a cultivated ethical awareness among planners, residents, and institutions. The findings highlighted potential contributions to urban policy, community engagement, and cross-cultural discussions of urban ethics. While the results were context-specific to Chiang Mai, the framework held broader implications for how spiritual traditions could inform urban ethics. Future research should explore comparative religious perspectives and integrate plural ontologies into the ethical urban design discourse. Ultimately, the city became not only a material infrastructure but a moral landscape, where every design act carried karmic weight and ethical potential.

Keywords: Inner Order, Urban Order, Buddhist, Anthropology, Ethical Cities

Introduction

As urban environments across Thailand and the broader Global South experienced intensified pressures of growth, inequality, and infrastructural transformation, prevailing paradigms of planning continued to prioritize administrative efficiency, spatial control, and economic optimization. While these priorities had shaped the development of civic infrastructures—such as government centers, transit hubs, and public spaces—they often lacked consideration for ethical values, cultural identity, and human well-being (Harvey, 2000); (Relph, 1976). Secular urban ethics frameworks typically focus on distributive justice, sustainability, and procedural fairness, yet they rarely integrate inner cultivation or spiritual awareness as foundational to spatial justice.

This gap was especially visible in Chiang Mai, where rapid urban growth had produced traffic congestion, gentrification, and the erosion of sacred spaces. Existing planning frameworks provided limited tools for addressing these challenges in ways that were both ethical and culturally resonant.

This article proposed an alternative framework of Buddhist Urbanism, which reframed the production of urban space not merely as a technical or bureaucratic task, but as an ethical undertaking rooted in inner awareness, compassion, and collective mindfulness. Drawing upon



the triadic disciplines (*Sīla*-Moral Conduct, *Samādhi*-Mental Concentration, *Paññā*-Wisdom), a foundational schema in Buddhist ethics, the study explored how urban design could be informed by a spiritual anthropology that centered moral development and cognitive clarity as prerequisites for just and sustainable civic environments (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Harvey, 2000). Unlike most secular models, which emphasized external structures and rational planning, this approach situated ethical awareness within the individual and community as the starting point for sustainable urban order.

Rather than seeking control through visual order or functional zoning alone, this approach considered how spatial decisions could reinforce or undermine the conditions for ethical life. The article engaged in a reflective analysis that integrated Buddhist thought, spatial justice theory, and humanistic planning traditions to question dominant planning logics and foreground moral intentionality in design. In contrast to prior studies on ethical urbanism that emphasized legal frameworks or technocratic policies, this article advanced a Buddhist-informed model that treated the city as a karmic field, where spatial form both reflected and shaped inner ethical consciousness.

The central argument advanced was that urban order had to arise from inner order the cultivated moral awareness of planners, citizens, and institutions. Without such inner grounding, external structures risked becoming alienating, authoritarian, or spiritually hollow (Norberg-Schulz, 1979); (Sandercock, 2003). Accordingly, this study offered a Buddhist-informed urban ethic that aligned the transformation of space with the cultivation of self, proposing a design framework where built form, moral imagination, and spiritual presence converged.

Objective

This paper aimed to propose a Buddhist ethical framework for urban design, drawing on the training principles of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā* as an alternative model of civic development. The central objective was to reframe city-making as a moral process that emphasized the cultivation of inner ethical consciousness as foundational to spatial justice and civic sustainability.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretive-reflective research design, rooted in anthropological and Buddhist philosophical frameworks. The research central aim was to explore how Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's (1996) Handbook for Mankind-a seminal Buddhist text intended for laypeople-could serve as a moral-ethical lens for understanding and shaping urban space. Specifically, the research sought to construct a Buddhist-informed perspective on "Ethical Cities" by interpreting urban form, behavior, and spatial values through the training principles (Harvey, 2000); (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996).

Theoretical Framework: Buddhist Urbanism and Urban Form

1. Urban Form, Spatial Ethics, and the Threefold Training

1.1 Defining Urban Form

Urban form refers to the physical and spatial configuration of a city, shaped by building patterns, densities, transport networks, and public spaces (Carmona et al., 2010). Beyond its physicality, urban form embodied values such as identity, livability, and social equity (Relph, 1976); (Norberg-Schulz, 1979). Challenges such as sprawl, segregation, and car dependency showed that form



was never neutral-it reflected choices with ethical consequences for equity, dignity, and environmental well-being (Sandercock, 2003); (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2012).

1.2 Understanding Spatial Ethics

Spatial ethics examined the moral dimensions of urban organization, including equity, sustainability, and participation (Soja, 2010); (Sandercock, 2003). Justice implied equal access to housing, education, and clean environments; Sustainability called for resilience across generations; Participation ensured inclusivity in shaping the city (Throgmorton, 1996). Because trade-offs were unavoidable, spatial ethics was best seen as an ongoing process of critical reasoning, requiring pluralistic values, integrity, and long-term vision. This flexibility made it compatible with religious frameworks such as Buddhism.

1.3 The Threefold Training as Ethical Framework

The triadic disciplines offered a lens for spatial decision-making (Harvey, 2000); (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996).

1.3.1 *Sīla* (Ethics/Moral Conduct): Non-harm in land use, fairness in distribution, and environmental stewardship.

1.3.2 *Samādhi* (Concentration/Mental Discipline): Mental clarity for planning, disciplined use of resources, and unbiased judgment.

1.3.3 *Paññā* (Wisdom/Insight): Insight into interdependence, long-term vision, and cultural sensitivity.

These three were mutually reinforcing: *Sīla* provided ethical foundations, *Samādhi* ensured disciplined process, and *Paññā* gave foresight and depth. Neglecting one weakened the whole. Together, they formed a moral ecology of urbanism, guiding cities toward justice, resilience, and spiritual attunement (Relph, 1976); (Norberg-Schulz, 1979).

2. From Inner to Urban Order: A Buddhist Ethical Perspective on Spatial Organization

The phrase "From Inner to Urban Order" proposed a paradigmatic shift in how cities and civic environments were conceptualized and designed. Rather than treating urban order as merely a matter of physical regulation, zoning, or visual coherence, this concept emphasized the primacy of ethical consciousness and inner cultivation as the foundation of meaningful and sustainable spatial design (Harvey, 2000); (Sandercock, 2003).

Rooted in the Buddhist understanding of the mind as the source of all actions (*Manopubbañgama Dhammā*), this approach asserted that the ethical quality of urban space had to emerge from the ethical quality of those who designed, inhabited, and governed it (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996). In this sense, urban order was not imposed, but composed-as a reflection of inner clarity, restraint, and wisdom (Cook, 2010).

This view resonated with the training principles, wherein ethical conduct generated relational harmony, mental discipline fostered attentiveness and calm, and wisdom dissolved attachment and delusion (Harvey, 2000). Applied to urbanism, this triadic framework suggested that just as the mind had to be trained to be free and compassionate, so too had the city to be designed to support freedom from suffering, cultivated mindfulness, and embodied compassion.



Table 1 Conceptual Components

Inner Order (Mind)	Urban Order (Space)	Corresponding Value
Ethical Intention (Sīla)	Zoning that promoted equity, safety, and dignity	Non-harm (Ahiṃsā)
Mental Clarity (Samādhī)	Spatial rhythm, access to quiet, and contemplative zones	Mindfulness (Sati)
Insightful Awareness (Paññā)	Design for impermanence, humility, and adaptability	Wisdom (Paññā)

This framework challenged the assumption that order emerged solely from top-down authority or structural rationalism. Instead, it advocated for an inside-out process, where the cultivation of ethical selves preceded the formation of ethical cities (Throgmorton, 1996); (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2012). In doing so, it aligned urban development with anthropological, spiritual, and cultural dimensions, rather than purely technical or economic logics.

By grounding civic planning in inner moral development, the "From Inner to Urban Order" model provided a non-dualistic, ethical framework that bridged personal transformation and collective spatial justice. It suggested that the future of city-making-especially in culturally Buddhist contexts such as Thailand-required not just smart governance or efficient infrastructure, but mindful presence, moral clarity, and cultural resonance (Relph, 1976); (Spiro, 1970).

3. Supporting Theories and Conceptual Frameworks

3.1 Buddhist Anthropology

Buddhist anthropology investigated the ways in which Buddhist worldviews, ethical practices, and conceptions of personhood shaped human behavior, social institutions, and built environments (Cook, 2010); (Spiro, 1970). Unlike classical anthropology that often focused on external rituals and cultural forms, Buddhist anthropology emphasized the interiority of experience-how suffering (Dukkha), attachment, and liberation were understood and acted upon through social and spatial practices (Tambiah, 1976). In the context of urban planning, this framework allowed us to read cities not merely as functional spaces but as arenas of karmic interaction, ethical cultivation, and existential meaning. Scholars such as Cook (2010) and Spiro (1970) had examined how Buddhist values influenced everyday life, while Thai thinkers such as Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu (1996) had called for Dhammic Society (Dhammānurāga) a community guided by moral responsibility rather than materialism or state control. In this view, a city was not neutral or secular but was ethically charged, and its design either supported or obstructed the conditions for inner growth.

3.2 Humanistic Planning

Humanistic planning emerged from critiques of technocratic and top-down planning paradigms that prioritized efficiency, economy, and control over human well-being, emotional life, and cultural identity (Sandercock, 2003). Grounded in humanist philosophy and often inspired by phenomenology-particularly the work of Relph (1976) and Norberg-Schulz (1979) it emphasized that space was not abstract, but lived, perceived, and experienced through the human body and spirit.



Humanistic planning aligned closely with Buddhist ethics include: 1) Valuing subjectivity and inner life in public space; 2) Encouraging environments that foster dignity, reflection, and compassion; and 3) Opposing alienation caused by overly rational or mechanistic urban forms.

This approach supported the idea that ethical and emotional intelligence should inform how we plan, zone, and structure the city, echoing the core Buddhist aim of ending suffering through mindful action (Harvey, 2000).

3.3 Sacred Space Theory

Sacred space theory explored how certain environments became imbued with symbolic, spiritual, or ritual significance. While traditionally applied to temples, shrines, or pilgrimage routes, contemporary interpretations expanded the notion to include spaces of reflection, transcendence, or existential anchoring even within secular urban settings (Tuan, 1977); (Barrie, 2010).

Key thinkers such as Eliade (1959) argued that sacred space was created through repetition, orientation, and symbolic alignment, while others like Tuan (1977) and Barrie (2010) had emphasized experience and perception as central to sacrality.

In a Buddhist context, space became sacred not necessarily by religious designation but through the quality of presence it fostered—stillness, mindfulness, humility (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996). Thus, a civic plaza or government center designed with ethical intention, natural harmony, and cultural resonance might function as a "New Kind of Sacred Space," supporting collective awareness and moral life.

4. Conceptual Framework: From Inner Order to Urban Ethics

This article proposed a Buddhist-informed conceptual framework for ethical urban planning, grounded in the interplay between urban form, spatial ethics, and the Threefold Training. The model was built upon the understanding that urban space was not value-neutral, but rather a moral field shaped by the intentions, consciousness, and cultural values of those who designed, inhabited, and governed it. This framework was composed of three interlinked domains:

4.1 Urban Form as Moral Medium

Urban form was understood as both a physical configuration and a carrier of ethical values. The arrangement of streets, buildings, public spaces, and infrastructure did more than shape physical movement—it reflected societal priorities, political decisions, and cultural narratives (Carmona et al., 2010). Patterns of inclusion or exclusion, walkability, access to green space, and zoning practices carried moral weight and had direct implications for social equity, well-being, and environmental sustainability (Soja, 2010); (Sandercock, 2003).

In this framework, urban form was not merely a design outcome, but a platform for ethical engagement, serving as the material context in which justice, dignity, and human flourishing either emerged or were constrained (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2012); (Relph, 1976).

4.2 Spatial Ethics as Normative Lens

Spatial ethics was introduced as a normative lens for evaluating the moral dimensions of spatial decisions. They integrated concerns such as: 1) Equity and justice in the distribution of resources and public goods; 2) Sustainability in balancing present needs with future resilience;



3) Participation as a foundation for procedural justice; and 4) Responsiveness to ecological and cultural context.

Ethical spatial planning was not simply about codifying principles but required moral reasoning, interdisciplinary awareness, and sensitivity to pluralistic values (Throgmorton, 1996). The integration of spatial ethics into design processes foregrounded human dignity, ecological care, and intergenerational responsibility (Norberg-Schulz, 1979); (Harvey, 2000).

4.3 Threefold Training as Applied Ethical Practice

The core innovation of this framework was the integration of the Threefold Training as a structured ethical guide for spatial decision-making (Harvey, 2000); (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996):

4.3.1 *Sīla* (Moral Conduct): Anchored urban design in non-harm (*Ahiṃsā*), fairness, and environmental stewardship. Supported planning principles that protected vulnerable communities and ecological integrity.

4.3.2 *Samādhi* (Concentration): Embodied mental clarity and attentiveness in governance. Encouraged transparency, disciplined planning, and mindful allocation of resources.

4.3.3 *Paññā* (Wisdom): Promoted long-term vision, systems thinking, and cultural awareness. Helped planners discern the deeper causes of spatial suffering and avoid superficial or short-term fixes.

Together, these three dimensions created a moral ecology for urbanism, one that cultivated ethical consciousness in both individual planners and institutional systems.

5. Ethical Foundations in Handbook for Mankind

To ground this ethical framework in a culturally resonant and philosophically rigorous source, this study drew on *Handbook for Mankind* (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996) a widely circulated text in the Thai Theravāda tradition, written for laypeople seeking to apply Buddhist principles in everyday life. The book outlined the three disciplines as the foundation of ethical living and spiritual liberation. Rather than presenting these as abstract doctrines, Buddhadāsa emphasized their relevance to concrete situations of social interaction, environmental responsibility, and mental well-being.

By interpreting urban planning and spatial design through the ethical logic, this study repositioned the city as a karmic field of ethical cultivation, where spatial arrangements were both shaped by and shaped human consciousness. The text offered a moral compass for navigating tensions between economic development and spiritual integrity, highlighting how harm, distraction, and ignorance in the built environment mirrored deeper patterns of craving (*Tanhā*) and delusion (*Moha*). Conversely, spatial forms that embodied restraint, mindfulness, and wisdom could serve as vehicles for individual and collective transformation. In this way, *Handbook for Mankind* was not merely a religious guide but an applied ethical framework that aligned inner development with civic responsibility, making it a vital lens for theorizing ethical urbanism in the Buddhist context.

Research Design: Interpretive-Reflective Case Study

The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive-reflective case study design, appropriate for examining meaning, values, and lived experience, particularly when grounded in religious or



philosophical traditions (Geertz, 1973); (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This approach was selected because the research sought to interpret ethical dimensions of urbanism rather than produce generalizable models.

Data Collection Methods

Data were drawn from four main sources:

1. Primary textual analysis of Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu's Handbook for Mankind (Thai and English Editions).
2. Urban planning documents and master plans, especially those related to Chiang Mai's development.
3. Site observations, focusing on areas of congestion, heritage commodification, and temple-related public spaces.
4. Secondary academic literature on Buddhist ethics, urban anthropology, and urban design.

Case Selection Criteria

Chiang Mai was chosen because it was both a historically Buddhist city and a rapidly urbanizing regional hub. This dual character made it a pertinent case for testing how the Threefold Training could inform contemporary urban dilemmas.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor, the study employed triangulation across multiple data sources:

1. Textual exegesis of Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu's Handbook for Mankind (1996).
2. Planning documents and media reports on traffic, air quality, and infrastructure upgrades.
3. Field observations, compiled between January and May 2025.

This triangulation aligned with qualitative case study best practices, privileging thick description and reflexive interpretation (Geertz, 1973); (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Results and Discussion

The research findings were presented in two sections. First, the case study of Chiang Mai was reflectively interpreted. Second, the framework for ethical urban design was proposed.

1. Case Study: Chiang Mai through the Lens of Handbook for Mankind

1.1 Situating Chiang Mai as a Buddhist Urban Landscape

Chiang Mai, capital of the former Lanna Kingdom and now Thailand's second-largest municipality, offered a rare blend of dense Buddhist heritage and accelerated neoliberal urbanism (Askew, 2002); (Shatkin, 2017). Its moat-and-wall old city still anchors more than 300 active temples (Wat), while ring roads, shopping malls, and condominium towers have proliferated in the peri-urban belt over the past two decades. The city thus functioned simultaneously as a pilgrimage site, a creative hub for digital nomads, and an expanding regional service center (Van Esterik, 2000). For this reason, Chiang Mai constituted a pertinent "Moral Laboratory" in which to test how the Threefold Training could diagnose and re-orient contemporary urban dilemmas (Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Harvey, 2000). Moreover, the city's multi-faith demography, Buddhist,



Muslim, Christian, animist, and secular communities, required that ethical design principles be articulated in inclusive, non-confessional terms.

1.2 Ethical Diagnostics (Sīla): Three Manifest Urban Tensions

1.2.1 Mobility, Congestion, and Atmospheric Karma

TomTom's (2025) Traffic Index ranked Chiang Mai 79th globally, with an average congestion level of 37 percent and a 23-minute travel time for every 10 km, 4 percent worse than 2023 figures. Drivers collectively wasted 72 idle hours last year, the equivalent of three full days in stationary vehicles. This vehicular "Dukkha of Delay" intersected with a seasonal public-health crisis: February-April haze events regularly pushed PM2.5 concentrations above 90 µg/m³, rendering the air "Unhealthy" or worse (Pothisiri et al., 2020).

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu framed morality (Sīla) as refraining from harm to self and others; By that standard, both excessive private-car use and routine biomass burning constituted structural breaches of communal precepts (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996). The city's present mobility regime perpetuated Akusala-kamma (Unwholesome Action) by externalizing respiratory risks onto vulnerable groups-children, the elderly, and tourists seeking "Wellness" retreats-while privileging speed and private convenience (Harvey, 2000); (Cook, 2010).

1.2.2 Commodification and Gentrification in Nimmanhaemin

Nimmanhaemin, a once-sleepy university corridor, had morphed into an "Unapologetic Bubble" of specialty cafés, coworking lofts, and boutique condominiums catering to high-spending expatriates and domestic elites (Shatkin, 2017). Rising rents had displaced long-standing family shop-houses and informal street vendors, intensified socio-spatial stratification and diminishing affordability for lower-income residents (Askew, 2002).

In Buddhadāsa's ethical terms, the neighborhood embodied Tanhā (Craving) and Māna (Conceit): Craving for commodified lifestyle aesthetics and conceit in branding itself as a "Global" quarter detached from local interdependence (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Swearer, 2010). Observational transects conducted on weekday evenings (19:00-22:00) recorded averaged decibel levels of 72 dB, well above the 50 dB threshold recommended for residential zones (World Health Organization, 2009), due to amplified music and traffic. Such sensory overload eroded opportunities for mindful dwelling and communal interaction, directly contradicting the moral imperative of reducing harm embedded in Sīla and spatial ethics (Harvey, 2000); (Relph, 1976).

1.2.3 Sacral-Profane Friction at the Old City Moat

Within the 1.6 km² walled core of Chiang Mai, daily rituals, such as almsgiving at dawn, evening chanting, and forest-like temple gardens, still punctuated urban rhythms (Van Esterik, 2000). Yet the narrow lanes around Tha Phae Gate doubled as congested tourism arteries, lined with massage parlors, hostels, and liquor bars (Askew, 2002). Field notes documented monks navigating human "Traffic Funnels," their begging bowls jostled by selfie sticks-an image of sacral space strained by commodified spectacle (Cohen, 2008).

Here, the transgression was subtler: A dilution of Hiri-ottappa (Moral Shame and Moral Dread) that once governed respectful spatial etiquette between laypeople and clergy



(Harvey, 2000). *Sīla*, in spatial terms, asked not merely "Are We Following Rules?" But "Does the Built Environment Cultivate Wholesome Dispositions?" (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996). Current patterns suggested an erosion of place-based compassion as economic imperatives crowded out contemplative atmospheres-illustrating Eliade's (1959) warning that sacred topographies could be destabilized when profane functions dominated.

1.3 Cultivating Concentration (Samādhi): Mindful Spatial Rhythms

If morality (*Sīla*) diagnosed harm, then concentration (Samādhi) offered the therapeutic regimen: Designing urban milieus that stabilized attention and calmed sensory turbulence (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Harvey, 2000). This aligned with urban design theories that emphasized the importance of rhythm, quietude, and sensory legibility in creating livable and mindful environments (Norberg-Schulz, 1979); (Relph, 1976).

Three spatial prototypes emerged from on-site mapping and stakeholder charrettes:

1.3.1 Quiet Lanes

Selected lanes within the moat zone were designated as pedestrian-priority corridors during morning and evening hours (06:00-09:00 and 17:00-21:00). Temporary bamboo gates, modeled on temple entryways, close streets to motorized traffic, enabling walking meditation loops and morning markets. Sound measurements during a two-week pilot dropped to 48 dB, fostering conditions conducive to mindfulness practice (World Health Organization, 2009).

1.3.2 Shade-and-Stillness Pocket Parks

Underutilized temple forecourts were re-landscaped with native teak hardwood and reflective water basins. The design drew on Buddhadāsa's emphasis on natural dharma (Thammachat) as a tutor of calm abiding, cultivating spatial qualities that invited stillness and interiority (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Swearer, 2010).

1.3.3 Breathable Transit Nodes

Bus stops were retrofitted with permeable lattice screens and micro-green walls to filter PM2.5. Though modest in scope, real-time air-quality displays invited commuters to practice awareness of breathing (Anāpānasati) while waiting, converting idle moments into contemplative opportunities (Ashton, 2018).

These interventions demonstrated how Samādhi could serve as both design ethos and planning criterion, countering overstimulation and distraction through forms that anchored attention and embodied presence.

1.4 Designing for Wisdom (Paññā): Urban Insight and Interdependence

Wisdom, in Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's schema, was the ability to see through the illusion of separateness and recognize the profound interdependence of all phenomena (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996). Applied to urban design, Paññā became the lens through which invisible connections, ecological, social, temporal, were made visually and experientially legible (Swearer, 2010); (Cook, 2010).



Urban interventions that encouraged insight included:

1.4.1 Haze Season Installations

LED light masts along Suthep Road depicted hourly PM2.5 data in color-coded gradients. These visual cues allowed pedestrians to witness how agricultural fires 200 km away manifested as localized suffering, provoking reflection on shared responsibility and the ripple effects of human action (Pothisiri et al., 2020); (Harvey, 2000).

1.4.2 Impermanence Walks

Temporary exhibitions curated by local art students mapped flood markers, demolished houses, and changing land prices onto the existing streetscape. These walks helped residents experience impermanence (Anicca) not as an abstract doctrine but as embodied urban memory, encouraging awareness of temporal fragility and historical transformation (Tuan, 1977); (Norberg-Schulz, 1979).

1.4.3 Inter-being Markets

Monthly night markets designed on an "Alms-like" model, where vendors committed to donating 10 percent of profits to temple-run community kitchens. The spatial layout followed a clockwise circumambulation, echoing ritual paths around a chedi, and reinforcing the idea of commerce as circular generosity rather than linear extraction (Eliade, 1959); (Barrie, 2010).

Such design strategies cultivated reflective awareness and moral imagination, aligning physical space with Buddhist insights into interdependence, non-attachment, and communal care-core components of Paññā as ethical urban wisdom.

1.5 Integration with Emerging Transport Infrastructure

The Mass Rapid Transit Authority's proposed three-line Light Rail network (35 km, slated for operation in 2027) was touted as the backbone for a low-carbon Chiang Mai (Bangkok Post, 2025). However, a Buddhist-ethical reading demanded that such mega-projects served more than congestion relief: They had to actively redistribute mobility benefits and minimize spatial resentment (Harvey, 2000); (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996).

Workshop scenarios modeled station precincts as "Wisdom Hubs", integrating:

1.5.1 First and last mile minibuss shuttles subsidized for low-income residents.

1.5.2 Meditation pavilions inspired by northern Salā typologies (Barrie, 2010).

1.5.3 Community noticeboards promoted local farm-to-city produce exchanges.

In effect, the rail system became an "Urban Circulatory System" that not only transported bodies but also circulated compassion and local knowledge, mirroring the *Handbook for Mankind's* call for a society "Moving Together Toward Emancipation" (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996).

1.6 Synthesis: From Diagnosis to Prototyping

Table 2 summarizes how key urban tensions in Chiang Mai are mapped onto the training principles and how these ethical lenses inform spatial interventions with corresponding moral aims. The table reflected the teacher's view that urban life, like monastic life, should be a field for ethical cultivation and liberation-oriented practice (Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Swearer, 2010).

In this sense, design became not merely aesthetic or functional but ethical praxis, a medium for shaping karmic flows through deliberate spatial arrangement (Harvey, 2000).

Table 2 The Ethical Lenses and Spatial Interventions

Ethical Lens	Observed Problem	Spatial Intervention	Anticipated Moral Outcome
Sīla	Congestion & haze	Low-emission transit + vehicle quotas	Reduced harm to community health
Sīla	Nimman gentrification	Affordable retail kiosks in "Inter-being Markets"	Economic equity, restraint of craving
Samādhī	Sensory overload	Quiet lanes & shade parks	Cultivation of mindfulness
Paññā	Sacred-profane dilution	Impermanence walks & LED haze displays	Insight into interdependence & impermanence

This framework underscored that urban form was never merely a technical arrangement of streets, buildings, or infrastructures. Instead, it represented an ethical medium that both reflected and shaped human consciousness. Relph (1976) emphasized that place was imbued with meaning through lived experience, while Norberg-Schulz (1979) argued that architecture provided orientation and identity by mediating between human beings and their environment. These classical insights remained relevant but risk becoming historically bound if not supplemented by contemporary perspectives. More recent scholarship has extended this dialogue, showing how sacred architecture and public space created interfaces of ethical and communal life (Silva Leite et al., 2024). Such work demonstrated that spiritual values and civic design continued to intersect in ways that fostered belonging, relational harmony, and cultural resilience. When integrated with Buddhadaṃsa Bhikkhu's (1996) teachings on the three disciplines, these perspectives illustrated that built form was not static but dynamic: Shaping moral awareness, sustaining communal identity, and aligning physical planning with spiritual liberation.

1.7 Reflexive Limitations

This case study consciously privileged the researchers' positionality as both observer and participant within Chiang Mai's civic and academic networks, offering deep contextual insight but also risking a tilt toward reformist optimism (Clifford & Marcus, 1986); (Cook, 2010). The interpretive-reflective method, while rich in narrative and ethical inference, carried inherent subjectivity-particularly when applying religious texts to urban systems that were technically, politically, and culturally hybrid (Joas, 2001).

Moreover, quantitative data-such as longitudinal reductions in PM2.5 levels, mobility mode-shifts, or behavioral change outcomes-remained provisional. Many of the proposed design interventions (e.g., "Quiet Lanes," "Wisdom Hubs") were in pilot or concept stages, and their long-term moral efficacy required multi-year monitoring and cross-agency coordination (Pothisiri et al., 2020).

Finally, while Handbook for Mankind offered a compelling and universalist Buddhist ethic, it did not fully account for the plural ontologies that shaped everyday spatial practice in northern Thailand. Animist-Lanna cosmologies, spirit-house geomancy, and secular



planning frameworks continued to mediate how space was made meaningful on the ground (McDaniel, 2011); (Keyes & Tanabe, 2016). Future research should explicitly integrate these multiple worldviews to refine and localize the ethical city model, ensuring it resonates with vernacular lifeworlds as well as normative philosophical ideals.

2. Toward a Framework for Ethical Urban Design

Building upon the empirical insights and Buddhist hermeneutics discussed in the preceding case study, this section synthesized a conceptual framework for ethical urban design grounded in Buddhadaṃsa Bhikkhu's Threefold Training. The intention was not to impose a rigid doctrinal model but to propose a reflective toolset—a moral compass—for urban designers, planners, and policymakers who sought to humanize the city through ethical orientation.

2.1 From Buddhist Anthropology to Design Praxis

In Buddhist anthropology, space was never value-neutral. Urban form was interpreted not only through its physical configuration, but also through its capacity to influence behavior, cognition, and moral development (Spiro, 1993); (Cook, 2010). This approach aligned with Buddhadaṃsa Bhikkhu's assertion in *Handbook for Mankind* that the ethical cultivation of laypeople had to be firmly rooted in everyday life—in the spaces of work, movement, rest, and interaction (Buddhadaṃsa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Swearer, 2010).

The city, in this reading, became a moral training ground a Dhammasāla that either supported or obstructed human liberation (Vimutti). Thus, urban space was karmically potent: It carried consequences beyond aesthetics or utility, actively shaping mental states, ethical intentions, and relational dynamics (Harvey, 2000).

Urban design, therefore, became a form of karmic architecture, in which spatial arrangements not only emerged from intention but also reconfigured intention in return. Each built element—walkway, plaza, transit stop—functioned as an opportunity for mindfulness, restraint, generosity, or their opposites. Ethical urbanism, then, was not simply about "Livability" as commonly conceived in Western planning discourse, but about enabling beings to live with awareness, attuned to interdependence, impermanence, and the reduction of suffering (Norberg-Schulz, 1979); (Relph, 1976).

In this way, the shift from Buddhist anthropology to design praxis called for a spatial ethics of liberation, where planning and architecture served not as neutral tools of statecraft or commerce, but as active Dhammic agents in the collective pursuit of well-being.

2.2 Principles of the Ethical Urban Design Framework

Based on the Chiang Mai case and interpretive readings of *Handbook for Mankind*, the following core principles were proposed:

2.2.1 Sīla (Ethical Restraint and Compassion in Form)

Ethical urban design began with minimizing harm—both direct and structural (Harvey, 2000). This involved cultivating urban forms. Buddhadaṃsa emphasized Sīla as the foundation for reducing egoism; In spatial terms this meant resisting design choices that privileged consumerism, privatization, or visual dominance over collective well-being (Buddhadaṃsa Bhikkhu, 1996).

2.2.2 Samādhī (Stabilization of Attention through Spatial Rhythm)

Modern urbanism often fragments attention through overstimulation, excessive signage, and accelerated sensory environments (Relph, 1976). Ethical design under Samādhī centered on mindfulness in motion. Buddhadaśa often referred to "Natural Dharma" (Thammachat) as a teacher of concentration; Ethical urbanism should emulate natural rhythms-sunlight, wind, seasonal cycles-rather than imposed abruptness or speed (Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu, 1996).

2.2.3 Paññā (Wisdom and Design for Inter-being)

The highest aim was to awaken insight: Seeing self as embedded in ecological, temporal, and karmic interdependence (Swearer, 2010). Urban space could serve as pedagogy. Narrative environments, such as signage, public art, and spatial storytelling, made impermanence and causality visible (Tuan, 1977). Designs for mutual support, such as housing and economic zones, enabled circular economies, resource sharing, and ethical trade (Barrie, 2010). Built interdependence by integrating temples, schools, markets, and gardens in proximity could reinforce the inter-being of roles and spaces (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2012). In Buddhadaśa's thought, wisdom (Paññā) arose from direct perception of reality; Ethical urban design should therefore have invited insight rather than enforced control (Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu, 1996); (Harvey, 2000).

2.3 Spatial Strategies across Scales

To make these principles actionable, the framework proposed intervention strategies at three interrelated scales: The body, the neighborhood, and the city-each aligned with a dimension of the Threefold Training. This multiscalar lens drew from humanistic and Buddhist planning traditions that treated space as lived, relational, and ethically charged (Relph, 1976); (Cook, 2010); (Swearer, 2010).

Table 3 Spatial Strategies Across Scales

Scale	Focus	Strategy	Ethical Effect
Body	Sensory experience	Quiet zones, seating under trees, and breathable pathways	Supported mindfulness and reduced sensory aggression (Samādhī)
Neighborhood	Social relations	Community centers, shared markets, and child-friendly walkways	Encouraged compassion, reciprocity (Sīla)
City	Systemic patterns	Transit justice, air-quality transparency, and green corridors	Enabled awareness of interdependence and karmic causality (Paññā)

This multiscalar perspective enabled urban designers and planners to tailor interventions without reducing ethics to formal aesthetics or symbolic gestures (Norberg-Schulz, 1979); (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2012). It acknowledged that ethical spatial practice had to operate simultaneously at personal, communal, and systemic levels, allowing the Tisikkhā to be embedded as a living ethic across scales of the built environment.



2.4 Application in Pluralistic Contexts

While this framework drew from Theravāda Buddhist sources, its practical applications were not restricted to Buddhist-majority regions. The ethical dimensions-non-harming, attentiveness, and interdependence-resonated across spiritual and secular traditions (Harvey, 2000); (Swearer, 2010). However, localized adaptation was essential. In cities with Muslim, Christian, or animist traditions, ethical goals could be reframed in terms of compassion, stewardship, or sacred reciprocity (Tuan, 1977); (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2012). The framework should thus be viewed as contextually grounded yet spiritually portable.

In secular contexts, the emphasis on mindfulness, sensory well-being, and relational design aligned with trauma-informed urbanism, care ethics, and insights from environmental psychology (Davidson & McEwen, 2012); (Carmona et al., 2010). Buddhadaśa's contribution lay in reorienting the urban conversation from material adequacy to spiritual clarity-an intervention that did not require metaphysical assent but instead invited ethical reflection through lived experience.

In implementation, co-design workshops would include monks and lay Buddhists alongside Muslim, Christian, animist, and secular community representatives, with pilot activities hosted not only in temple precincts but also in mosques, churches, spirit-house courtyards, and neutral civic venues (e.g., Schools, Health Clinics, Transit Nodes) to ensure cultural resonance and equal access.

To safeguard religious neutrality in publicly funded spaces, the framework avoided doctrinal iconography and instead emphasized universally legible qualities-shade, quiet, clear wayfinding, and transparent environmental information-so that benefits remained inclusive for non-Buddhist residents and visitors. Design deliberations would translate the ethical aims, in Table 4, into shared values (e.g., Non-harming → Public Health; attentiveness → Sensory Comfort; Interdependence → Community Care and Stewardship), enabling value-equivalent articulation across belief systems.

Table 4 Translating ethical aims into shared values

Ethical Aims	Shared Values
Sīla	Public health, safety, and dignity
Samādhi	Calm, sensory comfort, and focused wayfinding
Paññā	Stewardship, reciprocity, and social cohesion

2.5 Ethical Design as a Path, not a Product

Lastly, the framework reframed ethical urbanism not as a one-time deliverable but as a continuous path (Magga) toward collective flourishing (Harvey, 2000). Urban designers, like practitioners of Dhamma, were co-travelers in a shared karmic field, not omniscient architects of fixed perfection. Ethical clarity, in this view, was iterative and relational-emerging through cycles of reflection, action, and feedback (Throgmorton, 1996); (Sandercock, 2003). The city was thus not a finished object but a living process of mutual awakening (Relph, 1976); (Norberg-Schulz, 1979).

Urban ethics had to therefore be cultivated: In how designers engaged communities, revised assumptions, and welcomed critique-not merely in the final physical output. Buddhadaśa's



reminder that "True Morality is the Heart Trained to Let Go" underscored that an ethical city was not simply one with clean parks or low emissions; It was a city where egocentrism was softened and beings remembered they were not alone.

2.6 From Handbook to Blueprint

By interpreting Handbook for Mankind as an ethical map and Chiang Mai as a reflective mirror, this paper proposed a framework that bridged inner training and outer form. The Threefold Training became, in this view, not only a moral path for individuals but also a design ethic for shared environments. Urban design, in Buddhada's vision, was not separate from the path to liberation-it was one of its most urgent expressions in the modern world. While the framework was derived from Theravāda sources, its implementation plan included multi-faith co-design and neutral public-space cues, which we expected to enhance inclusivity and applicability beyond Buddhist audiences.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

This study proposed a Buddhist ethical framework for urban design (Figure 1), grounded in Buddhada Bhikkhu's *Handbook for Mankind* and anthropological interpretations of spatial ethics. Using the Threefold Training as a guiding structure, the research reimaged urban development not as a purely technical endeavor but as a moral process rooted in inner transformation. By situating this framework within urban studies, the study underscored how spatial form shaped justice, equity, and belonging. At the same time, it engaged religious studies, showing how Buddhist ethics articulated relational responsibility and non-harm in everyday life. Finally, it connected with ethical philosophy, aligning with debates on virtue ethics and moral responsibility in contemporary civic life. Through a case study of Chiang Mai, the study thus positioned urban planning as an interdisciplinary field, where design was simultaneously spatial, cultural, and moral.

Through a case study of Chiang Mai, the essay critiqued dominant planning paradigms focused on efficiency and control, instead framing urban challenges like congestion and inequality as manifestations of collective ethical failings such as craving and delusion. It introduced design interventions like quiet lanes, inter-being markets, and breathable transit nodes as spatial embodiments of Buddhist values.

The study ultimately portrayed urban design as a form of Buddhist praxis, where the city was a moral landscape capable of either reinforcing suffering or enabling ethical living. Designing the city, therefore, became a karmic act, shaping not just space but the spiritual well-being of current and future generations.

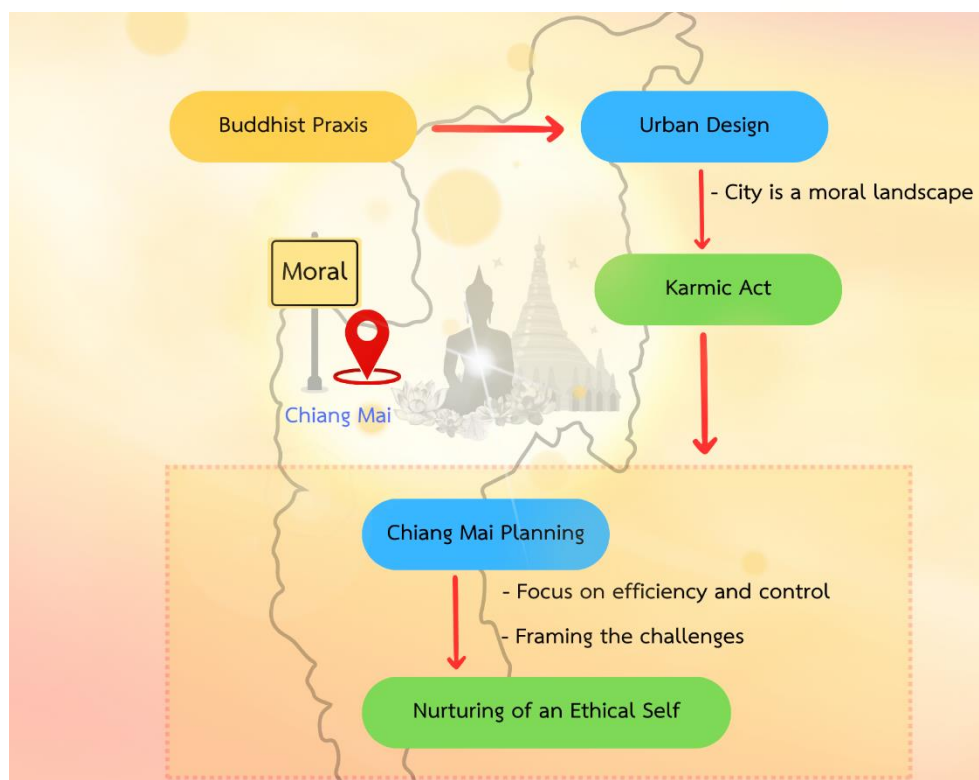


Figure 1 Body of Knowledge: Linking Buddhist Praxis, Urban Design, and Ethical Self in Chiang Mai Planning

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study proposed a Buddhist ethical framework for urban design by synthesizing insights from Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu's Handbook for Mankind, anthropological interpretations of spatial ethics, and a case analysis of Chiang Mai. Grounding the analysis in the Threefold Training. The research presented an alternative model of civic development that began not with technical or institutional priorities, but with the cultivation of inner ethical consciousness. The core argument advanced throughout the paper was that meaningful and sustainable urban order had to be rooted in "Inner Order" the moral, cognitive, and spiritual development of individuals and communities. In contrast to dominant planning paradigms that emphasized administrative efficiency, visual control, or economic optimization, the Buddhist-informed framework reframed urbanism as a karmic process in which spatial forms both shaped and reflected moral conditions. Urban congestion, environmental degradation, and socio-spatial inequality—often treated as logistical or managerial problems—were re-interpreted here as expressions of collective craving (*Tanhā*), delusion (*Moha*), and ethical neglect. As demonstrated through the Chiang Mai study, ethical diagnostics revealed how everyday urban phenomena—from traffic systems to sacred-space encroachments—embodied deeper tensions between self-interest and communal well-being. The proposed design responses—quiet lanes and inter-being markets—illustrated how spatial strategies could operationalize Buddhist ethical principles. The framework was neither utopian nor prescriptive; Rather, it offered a moral compass for navigating the pluralistic and often contradictory terrains of urban development.



By structuring interventions across body, neighborhood, and city scales, the framework recognized the interdependence of interior and exterior conditions and encouraged design that cultivated mindfulness, compassion, and long-term vision. One key contribution of this study was its articulation of urban design as Buddhist praxis: The city became a living ethical field where liberation from suffering could be supported-or obstructed-by built form. In this light, the act of design was itself a moral act, with karmic consequences that rippled across generations. Regarding measurable indicators for the long-term ethical impact to complement the conceptual contribution, we specified a light-touch evaluation suite mapped to *Sīla* - *Samādhī* - *Paññā*. *Sīla* (Harm Reduction) could be achieved from peak/off-peak dB on quiet lanes, heat-stress proxies (Shade/UTCI), and injury rates on pilot streets; *Samādhī* (Attention & Calm) could be attained from pedestrian/bicycle counts, public-transport boardings, 10 km travel-time reliability, and brief intercept surveys on perceived calm/safety/belonging; *Paññā* (Interdependence & Equity) could be obtained from an access within 10 minutes to green/quiet spaces, participation rates in co-design, and distributional checks for low-income groups (e.g., Fare Burden, Market Stall Affordability). Data collection was staged (Pre-pilot, 3-Month, 12-Month) and reported on public dashboards to foster civic learning rather than narrow compliance metrics. Regarding comparative insights beyond Buddhist contexts to broaden applicability, the framework was translated into value-equivalents recognizable across traditions: "Non-harming" on par with public health/stewardship (Islamic Amanah/Ihsan, Christian Caritas/Creation Care), "Attentiveness" comparable to sensory comfort/quiet enjoyment (Secular Environmental Psychology), and "Interdependence" equivalent to reciprocity/common good (Animist Sacred Reciprocity, Civic Care Ethics). Future comparative pilots in mixed-faith districts and secular precincts will use the same indicators to test resonance, with iconography minimized in public settings and universal design cues (Shade, Quiet, Legible Wayfinding, Transparent Environmental Information) emphasized. Regarding the roadmap for policy adoption, local governments could operationalize the framework through: 1) Planning instruments-comprehensive-plan policies that recognized "Quiet/Clean Access" as essential services; Overlay zones for temple-adjacent calm corridors; and Development-control standards for maximum façade noise, greening ratios, and breathable stops; 2) Design guidance-municipal streetscape manuals that included "Samādhī Sequences" (Busy-Buffer-Quiet), pocket-park typologies, and air-quality display protocols; 3) Budgeting & procurement-small-pilot line items, outcome-based contracts tied to the indicators above, and vendor specs for low-noise/low-emission materials; 4) Governance-an inter-departmental ethics and environment taskforce (Planning, Transport, Health, Culture, Religion) plus neighborhood co-design councils; and 5) Monitoring-open dashboards and annual "Ethical City" reports aligning with SDG 3/11/13 to institutionalize learning. However, several limitations remained. The framework was interpretive and context-specific, developed through Thai Theravāda sources and applied in a single regional city. Future research should explore how the Threefold Training can be adapted within Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna contexts, or dialogued with indigenous or Islamic planning ethics. Comparative studies across cities with different religious ecologies would deepen understanding of how spatial ethics manifest in diverse urban imaginaries. In conclusion, From Inner Order to



Urban Order did not call for more "Buddhist Cities" per se, but for more ethical cities, where urban form became a vehicle for moral cultivation and spiritual presence. As cities across Asia and beyond faced rising complexity and fragmentation, the Buddhist-anthropological perspective offered a timely reminder that the path to just, livable, and compassionate urban futures began within.

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DECEPTIVE SPIRIT MEDIUMS IN THAILAND'S FAITH ECONOMY: MOTIVES, METHODS, AND ETHICAL RESTORATION

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: In Thailand, spirit mediumship represents a complex interplay of cultural tradition, local religiosity, and the contemporary faith economy. Rooted in community practices rather than canonical Theravāda Buddhism, which prohibits monks from engaging in such activities, mediumship occupies a culturally significant yet doctrinally peripheral space. While many mediums serve meaningful roles within their communities, others exploit their spiritual authority for personal gain, engaging in deceptive practices that harm individuals and erode social trust. This study aimed to investigate the motives, methods, and impacts of deceptive spirit mediums in Thailand's faith economy, and to explore how Buddhadhamma could support ethical accountability and reform. By situating deceptive practices within both cultural and doctrinal contexts, the research sought to provide insights that contribute to peacebuilding, ethical reform, and community resilience.

Methodology: A qualitative design was employed to capture the complexity of lived experiences. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 purposively selected informants from Krabi, Thailand, including victims, former followers, and reformed mediums. Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis with thematic coding, chosen for its suitability in identifying recurring patterns, psychological drivers, and ethical dimensions within narratives. This interpretive approach provided an in-depth understanding of deception and its broader social consequences.

Main Results: Results revealed that financial profit, social status, and power were the primary motivations for deception. Mediums used staged paranormal phenomena, fabricated messages, and ritual performances to exploit emotional vulnerabilities and consolidate authority. The consequences unfolded on three levels: 1) Economic harm, as victims faced financial exploitation; 2) Emotional harm, including trauma, disillusionment, and betrayal; and 3) Social Harm, marked by the erosion of trust and weakening of community cohesion. This hierarchy underscores the urgent and far-reaching nature of the problem.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This study reflected the principles of applied Buddhism within the context of globalization, integrating Buddhist ethics with contemporary concerns and demonstrating how Buddhadhamma could support ethical accountability and reform. The Brahmajāla



Sutta explicitly prohibits bhikkhus from engaging in wrong livelihoods such as fortune-telling, divination, charms, spirit mediumship, and exorcism, highlighting the incompatibility of these practices with Buddhist discipline. While spirit mediumship lies outside canonical Buddhism, the ethical teachings of Buddhadhamma particularly *Sīla* (Ethical Conduct), *Sati* (Mindfulness), *Karuṇā* (Compassion), and karmic accountability, emerge as culturally resonant resources for reform. The study identifies both the strengths (Cultural Relevance, Moral Grounding, Community Accountability Through the Sangha) and limitations (Selective or Superficial Application of Buddhist Ethics) of relying on religious principles for reform. Integrating Buddhist ethics could enhance spiritual integrity and mitigate manipulative practices in local contexts.

Conclusions: The findings demonstrated that spiritual deception poses significant risks not only to individuals but also to community trust, cultural integrity, and policy credibility. This research illuminated the psychological, cultural, and structural factors that sustain such practices, highlighting the urgent need for ethical reform. A multi-pronged approach is recommended, combining regulatory oversight, public education, and the establishment of clear ethical standards for spiritual practitioners. Importantly, integrating culturally embedded ethical frameworks, particularly those rooted in Buddhadhamma, can facilitate moral transformation, strengthen community resilience, and promote sustainable, trustworthy spiritual practices. Such integration can foster moral transformation, advance peacebuilding efforts, strengthen community resilience, and promote sustainable spiritual practices. Failure to act risks entrenching exploitation and eroding the social fabric, whereas proactive reform offers the potential for transformative change guided by Buddhist ethics.

Keywords: Deceptive Practices, Spirit Mediums, Krabi in Thailand, Faith Economy, Buddhadhamma

Introduction

In recent years, "Faith" has transcended the boundaries of religion and rituals in Thailand. The "Faith Economy" refers to the economic activity generated by religious institutions, organizations, and individuals, encompassing a wide range of goods, services, and financial transactions. It includes activities like donations to religious organizations, consumption of religious goods and services, and the operation of faith-based businesses (DiMaggio, 2018). Over recent decades, there has been a notable increase in both public and academic interest in the practices of spirit mediums, driven by their profound cultural, psychological, and spiritual implications. This surge in attention reflects a broader fascination with how these practitioners serve as intermediaries between the physical and the spiritual realms, offering guidance and comfort to their followers. Spirit mediumship, deeply entrenched in diverse cultures across the globe, plays a pivotal role in many religious and spiritual traditions, revered for its ability to connect the living with the spiritual world. However, this veneration also presents vulnerabilities. Within the community of legitimate spirit mediums, there is a clandestine subset engaged in deceptive practices, exploiting these revered spiritual channels for personal gain. The operations of these fraudulent mediums not only betray the trust of their followers but also have far-reaching consequences, undermining individual financial security,



psychological health, and spiritual well-being. The impact of their deception stretches beyond individual victims, affecting families and communities and eroding trust in legitimate spiritual practices (Kalvig, 2016); (Johnston & Johnston, 2024).

In Thailand, spirit mediums, known as "Rang Song" or "Mar Song," occupy a significant position within the nation's spiritual and cultural fabric. Believed to channel spirits, deities, or ancestral souls through trance states induced by music, chanting, and dance, they function as intermediaries between the spiritual and physical realms. Their practices reflect a syncretic blend of Buddhism and animist traditions, emblematic of Thai religiosity; However, spirit mediumship is associated with local practices rather than scholarly Theravāda Buddhism, which prohibits monks from engaging in such practices. Beyond ritual performances, spirit mediums serve as community healers, counsellors, and guardians, particularly in rural contexts where they play important roles in conflict resolution, life-cycle events, and social cohesion. However, perceptions of their legitimacy vary: While many revere their functions, urban and younger demographics often view them as superstitious or outdated. The commercialization of their practices, especially fee-based services, has also invited scepticism and criticism. Despite these tensions, spirit mediums remain a compelling element of Thai cultural heritage, illustrating how tradition adapts within modernity and offering insight into the dynamic interplay of religion, culture, and societal change (Baird, 2014); (White, 2017); (Pinnukul et al., 2020); (Limwongse & Makoto, 2023).

The phenomenon of spirit mediums, who claim the ability to communicate with the non-physical realm, is widespread across cultures and historically embedded in religious traditions where such figures often occupy positions of reverence and authority (Kitiarsa, 2005); (Patamajorn, 2008); (Yee & Chai, 2021). Yet, this influential status inevitably raises concerns about the authenticity of their claims and the potential for deception. In Thailand, this dynamic can be understood as a conflict between trust and exploitation: While many followers seek guidance, healing, and communal support, others encounter manipulation that undermines confidence in spiritual practices. The principle of compassion (*Karuṇā*), central to Buddhadhamma, provides a culturally grounded approach to conflict resolution by fostering empathy, accountability, and the restoration of social trust. Crucially, spirit mediumship is a folk religious practice, shaped by animist and Brahmanic traditions and later intertwined with popular Buddhism, rather than a feature of canonical Theravāda doctrine, which emphasizes ethical conduct (*Sīla*), mindfulness (*Sati*), and wisdom (*Paññā*). The case of Rang Song thus offers rich insights into the intersections of religion, culture, psychology, and social change in contemporary Thai society. While global scholarship has examined spiritual and religious practices extensively, research specifically addressing deceptive practices in spirit mediumship remains limited. Existing studies highlight cultural, religious, and psychological dimensions but often overlook the integration of psychological drivers and tactical mechanisms of fraud. This study addresses that gap by examining how cultural, psychological, and socio-economic factors interact to enable deception among spirit mediums, and by considering the wider implications for belief systems, community structures, and resource distribution.



Buddhadhamma and Spirit Mediumship

The relationship between Buddhadhamma and spirit mediumship is complex, shaped by diverse interpretations across doctrinal traditions and cultural settings. Classical Buddhism emphasizes liberation through ethical conduct (*Sīla*), mental discipline (*Samādhī*), And wisdom (*Paññā*), focusing on impermanence, suffering, and non-self. This framework discourages reliance on rituals or supernatural intermediaries for salvation or material gain. Although Buddhist texts recognize spiritual beings and psychic powers, such elements are peripheral rather than central to enlightenment. Nonetheless, spirit mediumship remains widespread in many Buddhist societies, particularly in Southeast and East Asia, where Buddhism has merged with pre-Buddhist animistic traditions. In these contexts, mediums serve roles in healing, guidance, communication with the dead, and communal rituals, often legitimized through syncretic blends of Brahmanic and Buddhist practices. Certain traditions, such as Tibetan Buddhism, integrate ritual engagement with spirits, usually for protection rather than personal benefit. Scholars have distinguished between "Dharmic Buddhism," aligned with canonical teachings, and "Karmic Buddhism," which incorporates popular practices involving merit-making and supernatural forces. Consequently, while spirit mediumship lies outside the doctrinal core of Buddhadhamma, its persistence reflects the dynamic interplay between Buddhist orthodoxy and local spiritual needs (Kitiarsa, 2005); (Patamajorn, 2008); (Sirisawad, 2016); (Cohen, 2020).

Psychological Motivations

Psychological research has long examined the drivers of deceptive behaviour, identifying factors such as personal gain, societal pressures, and personality traits like Machiavellianism. The latter, defined by manipulateness, exploitation, and deceit in pursuit of self-interest, is especially salient in contexts where strategic manipulation produces tangible benefits. Within the sphere of spirit mediumship, these psychological predispositions manifest in distinctive ways. Mediums may exploit follower's spiritual beliefs and the trust vested in them to secure financial or social rewards, often through calculated fabrications of supernatural experiences or messages to bolster credibility and authority. This deception extends beyond opportunism, reflecting a deliberate manipulation of religious and cultural sentiments. Moreover, socio-cultural conditions, such as economic instability or collective uncertainty, intensify these dynamics, providing fertile ground for mediums to offer illusory solutions and comfort while reinforcing their influence. Thus, the motivations underpinning deceptive practices in spirit mediumship emerge from a convergence of individual psychological traits and broader social pressures, forming a complex interplay that sustains such behaviours. Understanding these intertwined drivers is essential to grasping the full spectrum of deceptive practices within this spiritual domain (Deci & Richard, 2012); (Samacari, 2017); (Mulyadi et al., 2023); (Seda, 2023).

Methodologies of Deception

The methodologies employed by deceptive spirit mediums are diverse and strategically designed to manipulate the beliefs of their followers. Research identifies several recurrent tactics, including the fabrication of supernatural phenomena through staged events or physical effects. Such performances may involve the use of technology, sleight of hand, or audiovisual manipulations



to create convincing illusions of paranormal activity. Equally prevalent is the delivery of fraudulent messages, wherein mediums claim to transmit communications from deceased relatives or spiritual beings. This practice not only enhances their perceived authority but also exploits the emotional vulnerabilities of individuals seeking solace or closure. These methods reflect a sophisticated grasp of psychological mechanisms, as deceptive mediums skillfully read audience reactions, adapt their performances accordingly, and capitalize on cognitive biases that predispose belief in the supernatural. The integration of technological devices with psychological manipulation strengthens the credibility of these deceptions while simultaneously complicating their exposure or refutation. Consequently, understanding mediumistic deception requires attention to both its technical execution and its psychological underpinnings (Hodges, 2005); (Patamajorn, 2008); (Willard & Norenzayan, 2013); (Earnest, 2024).

Impacts on Followers

The consequences of deception in spirit mediumship are profound and multifaceted, affecting individuals, communities, and broader cultural-religious systems. At the individual level, followers who trust in the purported abilities of mediums may experience financial exploitation, often investing significant resources in services promising spiritual or worldly benefits. Psychological harm is also prevalent, including emotional distress, disillusionment, and a sense of betrayal when spiritual interventions fail or deceptions are revealed. On a communal scale, such practices erode social trust by violating shared spiritual norms, fostering skepticism, and undermining confidence in legitimate practitioners, which can contribute to social discord and diminished cohesion. At a broader cultural and religious level, exposure of fraudulent mediumship can devalue authentic spiritual experiences, challenge traditional institutions, and alter the cultural landscape by prompting the abandonment or heavy scrutiny of historically significant practices. Collectively, these outcomes demonstrate that deception in spirit mediumship undermines both interpersonal trust and the integrity of spiritual traditions, emphasizing the need for vigilant oversight and the enforcement of ethical standards to protect followers and preserve the authenticity of communal and cultural spiritual life (Walach et al., 2009); (Boynton et al., 2013); (Yee & Chai, 2021); (Kassem, 2024).

Objectives

This study aimed to investigate the motives, methods, and impacts of deceptive spirit mediums in Thailand's faith economy, and to explore how Buddhadhamma could support ethical accountability and reform.

Methodology

This research utilised a qualitative design to delve deeply into the motivations and methods employed by spirit mediums in their deceptive practices. Such a design facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the intricate psychological motivations and interpersonal dynamics at play. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. These interviews were structured around a series of open-ended questions crafted to probe into the participant's personal experiences,



perceptions, and responses to the deceptive practices encountered. This approach was intended to elicit rich, detailed narratives that provide insight into the complex phenomena under study. To ensure clarity and appropriateness of the interview questions for the main study, a pilot test was conducted with a select group of participants. This preliminary phase involved presenting the devised questions to the group and soliciting their feedback regarding the clarity, relevance, and overall suitability of the questions. The participants were encouraged to openly share their perspectives, providing insights into any potential ambiguities or aspects of the questions that might lead to misunderstandings. The feedback obtained from this pilot test proved invaluable, highlighting areas where modifications were necessary to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the interview questions. Adjustments were subsequently made to refine the wording and structure of the questions based on this input. Moreover, the pilot test served as a crucial opportunity to assess the comfort level of the participants with the interview process. Ensuring that participants felt at ease during the interviews was paramount, as this would likely influence the authenticity and depth of their responses during the actual study.

This study involved 15 purposively selected key informants, chosen for their direct and meaningful experiences with spirit mediums. The sample included former followers, victims of deceptive practices, and reformed spirit mediums willing to candidly discuss their past engagements. Participants met strict inclusion criteria: 1) Aged 18 or older to ensure informed consent; 2) Thai nationals residing in Krabi province, maintaining cultural and geographical consistency; and 3) Direct experience with spirit mediums as victims or witnesses. These carefully defined criteria ensured that participant's accounts accurately reflected the phenomena under investigation, enhancing the validity of the findings. To further strengthen trustworthiness, the researcher engaged in reflexivity, critically examining their positionality and potential biases throughout data collection and analysis. This involved maintaining reflective notes, questioning assumptions, and continuously considering how personal perspectives might shape interpretation, ensuring a rigorous and balanced analysis of participant's experiences. Data were collected in April 2024, with procedures designed to capture in-depth insights.

The interviews conducted as part of this study were meticulously audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed to enable comprehensive content analysis. This study employed qualitative content analysis, a systematic technique for reducing data into distinct categories or themes. This method relies heavily on the researcher's capacity for inductive reasoning, allowing for the extraction of valid inferences directly from the data. Throughout the analysis, the data were rigorously examined and continuously compared, enabling the derivation of themes and categories directly from the content. In alignment with the qualitative research methodology, the responses from the participants were processed and analysed using Taguette, a specialised software application designed for qualitative data analysis. Taguette supports a diverse array of data types, including interview transcripts, survey responses, and responses to open-ended questions. The software aids in the encoding of text segments, simplifying the process of identifying patterns or themes within the data. This process involves highlighting relevant text segments and assigning



them tags or codes, with the flexibility to introduce new tags as the analysis evolves. Taguette further allows for multiple tags per text segment to accommodate the encapsulation of multiple ideas. Following the initial tagging, the data were exported to a Microsoft Word document for more detailed analysis. This subsequent phase involved a cognitive process of associating similar codes and grouping them into overarching themes. A word frequency analysis was conducted to augment the efficiency of data management and analysis. This analysis highlighted the most frequently occurring words within the data, aiding in the identification of key themes and concepts. The utilisation of a word cloud provided a visual representation of these frequencies, facilitating a more structured and in-depth exploration of the collected data and enabling a more precise navigation through its complexities.

Therefore, in this study, content analysis combined with the use of Taguette served as the primary methodological approach for analysing the interview transcripts. This approach facilitated a systematic categorization and interpretation of the data, enabling the extraction of meaningful insights. The themes identified through this rigorous analytical process were instrumental in addressing the study's objectives and deepening the understanding of the deceptive practices of spirit mediums. A word cloud was incorporated into the data analysis phase to augment the analysis of the interview transcripts. This visual tool proved especially beneficial for rapidly identifying and displaying the most frequently occurring words within the dataset. The use of a word cloud allows for an immediate visual representation of prevalent themes and concepts, providing a clear and impactful overview at a glance. Such visual tools are pivotal in enhancing the comprehensibility and accessibility of complex data, thereby aiding in the more effective communication of key findings and insights.

Results and Discussion

Through a systematic analysis of participant's responses, several prominent themes were identified. The study's results provided significant insights into the motivations and methods utilised by deceptive spirit mediums, substantiating the research objectives with detailed findings. The data collected and analysed revealed a complex interplay of psychological, social, and tactical dynamics that facilitated fraudulent activities in the realm of spirit mediumship. Furthermore, to enhance comprehension of the findings, a word frequency query was generated, yielding a visually represented word cloud (Figure 1). This word cloud prominently displayed the most frequently used words during the interviews, providing immediate insight into the main themes.

The word cloud, as shown in Figure 1, effectively synthesised key themes from a text that scrutinised unethical behaviours in spirit mediumship. This visualisation tool highlighted the frequency and relevance of terms within the document, with larger and more prominent words indicating major topics of discussion. Central themes such as "Deception" and "Practices" dominated the visual field, emphasising the core focus on the manipulative tactics employed by spirit mediums. The word cloud also brought attention to the primary motivators behind these unethical behaviours, with terms like "Financial," "Personal Gain," and "Power" suggesting significant drivers. Additionally, it outlined



"It is true that personal gain, financial benefits, enhanced social status, and power are significant motivators that can be tempting. In my early days, the financial aspect was certainly a driving force. This is not just a spiritual role; It is also a livelihood. The better I performed, the more my services were in demand, which naturally improved my financial situation" (Personal Interview 1, 2024).

"Honestly, it is complicated. Yes, the financial aspect is significant because this is my livelihood. There is a pressure to maintain a certain level of success, and sometimes that means ensuring the clients leave satisfied, which can lead to embellishing things slightly" (Personal Interview 2, 2024).

"Yes, definitely. There is an expectation for spectacular results, sometimes the community's standing relies on this. To preserve my reputation and meet these expectations, I have, at times, fabricated experiences. It is not something I am proud of, but it felt necessary to maintain my position and authority in the community" (Personal Interview 6, 2024).

"My clients come to me seeking comfort or answers, and the trust they place in me is immense. When I use their vulnerabilities to meet community or personal expectations, I justify it by believing that the comfort they receive is real, even if some of the experiences I convey are not" (Personal Interview 7, 2024).

"Being persuasive and sometimes manipulative is part of the role, especially when managing expectations and delivering what the clients seek. These traits help in navigating the complex dynamics of spiritual and community leadership" (Personal Interview 11, 2024).

Methodologies of Deception

The study further dissected the specific tactics employed by deceptive spirit mediums. A common method involved the fabrication of spiritual manifestations, where mediums used a variety of techniques, from simple sleight of hand to high-tech audiovisual effects, to create illusions of paranormal activity. The dissemination of fraudulent messages purportedly from the spiritual realm was another tactic used to cement the media claimed abilities and authority. These messages often promised followers personal benefits such as improved health, wealth, or resolutions to personal dilemmas, which significantly influenced the followers' continued belief and investment in the mediums' services.

"Some of the techniques I am familiar with, well, I have seen a range from simple tricks like sleight of hand, where objects are subtly moved to suggest a spiritual presence, to more sophisticated methods involving audiovisual technology that simulate ghostly apparitions or voices" (Personal Interview 3, 2024).

"As a medium, one might claim to receive messages directly from the spiritual realm. These messages often promise the client relief from personal problems or assurances of prosperity and health, playing on their desires and vulnerabilities" (Personal Interview 8, 2024).

"Well, these tactics are designed to reinforce the medium's perceived abilities and authority. When followers see or hear something they believe to be supernatural, it significantly strengthens their belief in the medium's powers. This often results in continued reliance on the medium's



services, and substantial financial and emotional investments from the followers" (Personal Interview 9, 2024).

"In many cases, it is a mix of financial incentive and the pressure to meet client expectations. If a medium has once claimed to produce paranormal evidence, they might feel compelled to continue to deliver these experiences to maintain their reputation and income" (Personal Interview 12, 2024).

"Reflecting on these practices, it is challenging. Personally, I reached a point where I had to reconsider the ethical implications of my actions. It led me to move away from such practices. Now, I focus on providing comfort and advice based on realistic and ethical grounds" (Personal Interview 13, 2024).

Impacts on Followers and Communities

The consequences of these deceptive practices on followers were profound. Financial exploitation was widespread, with many followers spending substantial sums of money on regular consultations and rituals that promised spiritual or material rewards. Psychologically, the deception led to significant harm, including emotional distress and a pervasive sense of betrayal once the fraudulent activities were exposed. The erosion of social trust was another critical impact, with communities experiencing diminished trust not only in other spiritual practices but also in broader social institutions. This erosion of trust often led to increased scepticism and a general wariness of spiritual or religious engagements, altering the social and cultural fabric of the affected communities.

"I was introduced to the medium through a friend during a particularly tough period in my life. I was seeking some guidance, and it seemed like a good fit at the time. It started small, just a few baths for a reading here and there. But as my involvement grew, so did the costs. I was soon paying substantial amounts for special rituals that promised to bring more direct results, like healing or financial fortune. Over time, I must have spent thousands" (Personal Interview 4, 2024).

"Over a couple of years, I spent thousands of baths on various rituals and consultations. Each session promised some form of spiritual or material gain, which, in hindsight, never materialised in any meaningful way. I know that sounds quite burdensome financially" (Personal Interview 5, 2024).

"Yes, it is not just me. Many in my community who had similar experiences share this deep-seated mistrust now. We have seen a noticeable decline in participation in not only spiritual activities but also community events that were once vibrant and full of trust. It feels like the social fabric of our community has been altered" (Personal Interview 10, 2024).

"In light of these challenges, I would like to see some changes implemented to prevent such deceptive practices in the future. There needs to be more stringent oversight and regulation. People who engage in these practices should be held accountable. Beyond that, there should be more public awareness campaigns to educate people about potential signs of fraud and how to report them" (Personal Interview 14, 2024).

"The psychological impact was severe. Initially, there was a lot of emotional investment because I genuinely believed in the medium's abilities. When I finally realised it was all a deception,



the sense of betrayal was overwhelming. It wasn't just about the money; It felt like a personal violation. I have become very sceptical of any spiritual practices. This experience has made it hard for me to trust not just other mediums but even institutions and systems that are supposed to oversee and regulate these practices" (Personal Interview 15, 2024).

Through a detailed examination of the motivations, methodologies, and impacts of deceptive practices among spirit mediums, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms of deception utilised by these individuals. The findings underscore the complex interplay of personal, psychological, and societal factors that drive such practices and highlight the significant consequences for individuals and communities ensnared by such deceptions. These insights are vital for developing strategies to mitigate these harmful practices and for informing policy and community guidance on the management and oversight of spiritual and religious practices.

Furthermore, the study's findings revealed a nuanced role for Buddhadhamma in guiding ethical reform within the realm of spirit mediumship in Thailand. Despite not being central to scholarly Buddhist teachings, spirit mediumship was embedded in local Buddhist-influenced cultures, often blending animistic and Brahmanic elements with popular Buddhist practices. Participants acknowledged that Buddhist principles, particularly mindfulness (Sati), ethical conduct (Sīla), compassion (Karuṇā), and the law of karma, served as crucial moral reference points. These principles were cited as potential safeguards against the proliferation of deceit, encouraging reflection and moral accountability among the media. Several reformed spirit mediums interviewed expressed that their transformation toward ethical practice was significantly influenced by Buddhist teachings, especially the awareness of karmic consequences and the aspiration to cultivate wholesome action. Furthermore, the concept of Sangha (Spiritual Community) was identified as a valuable communal structure that could be leveraged to promote ethical regulation and peer accountability. Thus, the integration of Buddhadhamma not only offered a spiritual counterbalance to deceptive practices but also provided a culturally resonant ethical framework for both individual and collective transformation.

Discussion

The research elucidated several crucial aspects of deceptive practices among spirit mediums, revealing a complex interplay of psychological motivations, sophisticated deception methodologies, and profound community impacts. Furthermore, the study also revealed that while spirit mediumship is not central to canonical Buddhism, its deep integration into Thai spiritual culture invites ethical concerns, particularly regarding deception. Buddhadhamma offers a meaningful framework to address these issues through principles such as Sīla (Ethical Conduct), Sati (Mindfulness), and Karuṇā (Compassion). Reformed mediums in the study cited Buddhist teachings, especially the concept of karma, as influential in their moral re-evaluation and decision to abandon deceptive practices. Additionally, the Sangha (Spiritual Community) was recognized as a potential mechanism for fostering ethical accountability and community-based oversight. Thus, integrating Buddhadhamma into spiritual practices may serve as both a deterrent to misconduct and a path to ethical reform.



A key implication of these findings lay in the role of compassionate, ethics-driven community engagement as a counterforce to deception. When communities actively embraced values of empathy, accountability, and inclusivity, they created spaces where individuals felt supported without needing to resort to manipulative practices. This aligned closely with the principle of *karuṇā* in Buddhaddhamma, which emphasized the alleviation of suffering through genuine care for others. By cultivating trust through compassion, communities could dismantle the conditions that allowed deceptive practices to thrive. In line with Adabanya et al. (2023) and Berardi et al. (2020), communities characterized by trust were more likely to identify and challenge harmful or deceitful behaviors, as their members were invested in the collective good.

Furthermore, the application of Buddhaddhamma principles, *Sīla*, *Sati*, and awareness of karma, extended beyond individual moral reform to collective peacebuilding. When community structures were guided by these principles, they fostered a culture of transparency, forgiveness, and restorative justice rather than cycles of mistrust or retribution. The Sangha, understood as a spiritual and social community, became a vehicle for peer accountability and ethical reinforcement, anchoring spiritual practices in shared responsibility. Framing the issue within a holistic peace-oriented paradigm highlighted that addressing deception was not only about curbing individual misconduct but also about nurturing social harmony. By grounding responses in Buddhaddhamma ethics, communities transformed deception into opportunities for reconciliation, thereby contributing to a more resilient moral fabric.

The study prominently highlighted personal gain, financial benefits, enhanced social status, and increased power, as the primary motivator for spirit mediums to engage in deceptive practices. The medium's exploitation of their client's vulnerabilities was particularly concerning, as it leveraged the trust and authority bestowed upon them, turning it into a tool for personal enrichment. This manipulation was often justified through Machiavellian traits such as deceitfulness and cynicism, revealing a deep-seated moral disengagement that enabled such unethical behaviour. These findings suggested a need for a rigorous ethical framework within which spirit mediums operated, potentially guided by both community standards and legal regulations to curb exploitation (Bereczkei, 2017).

The adoption of diverse techniques, from sleight of hand to advanced audiovisual technologies, illustrated the lengths to which deceptive mediums went to fabricate spiritual manifestations. The dissemination of fraudulent messages promising personal benefits like health, wealth, or fortune further entrenched client's dependency on their services. This manipulation not only underscored the calculated precision of the deception but also highlighted the vulnerability of clients who, often in desperate circumstances, sought solace in spiritual guidance. Educating the public about these tactics could have empowered potential victims to recognize and prevent fraudulent practices, in accordance with Lev et al. (2022) and Junger et al. (2023).

The consequences of deceptive practices extended beyond individual victims, affecting entire communities. Financial exploitation led to significant economic burdens, while the psychological impacts, ranging from emotional distress to a pervasive sense of betrayal, undermined mental health and well-being. Furthermore, the erosion of social trust had broader societal implications,



diminishing community cohesion and participation in spiritual and communal activities. This degradation of social fabric called for community-led initiatives to foster transparency and accountability in spiritual practices (Hategan, 2021); (Ozcan et al., 2021); (Siridharo et al., 2021). Community engagement guided by compassion and shared ethical values offered a powerful response to these challenges. By prioritizing empathy, honesty, and mutual care, communities created inclusive spaces where individuals felt supported and protected from exploitation. Compassionate engagement encouraged active listening, collective responsibility, and the prioritization of well-being over personal gain, thereby reducing the appeal and effectiveness of manipulative practices. Shared ethical values, rooted in principles such as fairness, accountability, and respect, strengthened communal bonds and rebuilt trust among members. When these values were embedded in local initiatives, such as peer oversight, participatory decision-making, and transparent spiritual practices, they fostered resilience against deception. Such efforts not only mitigated the harms caused by fraudulent mediums but also re-established trust as the foundation of social life, ensuring that spiritual and communal activities contributed positively to both individual flourishing and collective harmony.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

This study reflected the principles of applied Buddhism within the context of globalization, integrating Buddhist principles with contemporary concerns and highlighting how Buddhadhamma could support ethical accountability and reform. It situated Buddhism within a globalized framework by demonstrating how traditional ethical principles could address contemporary challenges that extended beyond local or national boundaries. Globalization had intensified exposure to diverse cultural practices, economic pressures, and technological innovations, which shaped spiritual practices such as spirit mediumship. These modern dynamics often amplify ethical dilemmas, including fraudulent or manipulative practices, which were less common or manifested differently in traditional contexts.

The Brahmajāla Sutta explicitly prohibited bhikkhus from engaging in wrongful livelihoods such as fortune-telling, divination, charms, spirit mediumship, and exorcism, highlighting the incompatibility of these practices with Buddhist discipline. By integrating Buddhadhamma, particularly principles such as *sīla* (Moral Discipline), *sati* (Mindfulness), *karuṇā* (Compassion), and *karma*, the study demonstrated how these enduring ethical frameworks could provide culturally resonant solutions to maintain moral integrity in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world. Furthermore, the study highlighted how the Sangha, as a community of practice, acted as a regulatory and ethical anchor, reinforcing accountability not only locally but also in a globalized context where traditional spiritual authority was challenged by external influences. In doing so, the study bridged local Thai practices with global ethical concerns, showing that Buddhist principles remained relevant and adaptable for addressing moral challenges arising from

cross-cultural interactions, technological mediation, and broader social transformations associated with globalization.

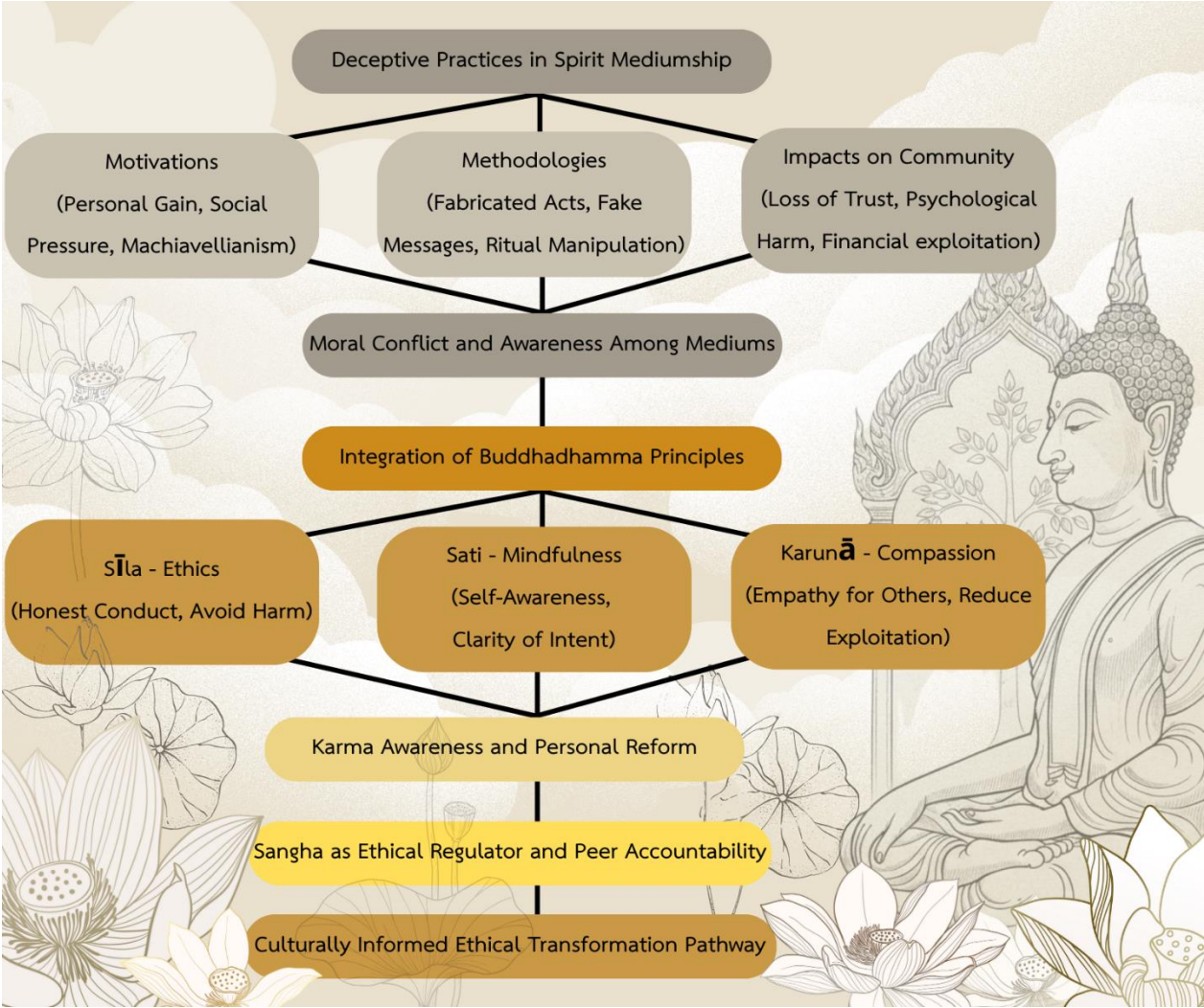


Figure 2 Ethical Reform Framework Based on Buddhадhamma in Spirit Mediumship

Figure 2 presents a conceptual framework illustrating how the integration of Buddhадhamma could serve as a pathway toward ethical reform among spirit mediums engaged in deceptive practices. The model began by identifying the key dimensions of deception, motivations such as personal gain and social pressure, methodologies involving fabricated rituals and fraudulent messages, and their negative impacts on individuals and communities. These deceptive elements often led to a stage of moral conflict or awareness among some media, creating an opportunity for reflection and transformation. The framework posited that the application of Buddhадhamma could foster moral introspection and behavioral change. Awareness of karma further reinforced the importance of accountability and integrity. The role of the Sangha (Community) was also emphasized as a collective mechanism for ethical guidance and peer oversight. This culturally resonant model



led to a "Culturally Informed Ethical Transformation Pathway," offering a sustainable and community-supported strategy for mitigating fraudulent practices in spirit mediumship.

Furthermore, a key strength of this framework lies in its complementarity to formal regulatory and legal approaches. While legal measures, such as licensing, penalties, and oversight, were effective in enforcing compliance and deterring fraudulent practices, they often operated in a top-down manner and faced limitations in cultural acceptance or enforcement capacity at the community level. By contrast, a Buddhadhamma-informed model worked from within the cultural and spiritual fabric of Thai society, emphasizing moral self-regulation, compassion-driven accountability, and restorative practices. This bottom-up approach fostered community trust and long-term ethical transformation in ways that purely legal mechanisms could not easily achieve. When combined, these approaches formed a more comprehensive strategy: Legal and regulatory systems provided structural safeguards and external accountability, while the Buddhadhamma-based framework embedded ethical consciousness and peacebuilding values directly into spiritual practice. This dual model enhanced the practical relevance of the study, offering both policymakers and communities a balanced pathway to counter deception while preserving the cultural integrity of spiritual traditions.

As such, the findings contributed to an emerging interdisciplinary discourse that blended religious studies, moral psychology, cultural ethics, and governance. The proposed framework demonstrated that sustainable reform required not only legal enforcement but also culturally resonant ethical engagement, making this study significant for both academic inquiry and policy development aimed at restoring ethical integrity in spiritual practices.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research explored deceptive practices within spirit mediumship in Thailand, examining the motivations, methods, and consequences of such practices while considering how Buddhadhamma could support ethical accountability and reform. Guided by the central question of what drives deceptive practices, how they are enacted, and their impacts on individuals and communities, the study found that personal gain, manifested as financial profit, elevated social status, and the exercise of authority, constituted the primary motivation, often reinforced by Machiavellian traits and social pressures to deliver miraculous results. Mediums employed sophisticated strategies, including staged paranormal phenomena and fabricated spiritual messages, deliberately exploiting follower's emotional vulnerabilities to foster dependency and consolidate authority, ensuring a steady flow of social and financial rewards. The consequences extended beyond individual victims, who experienced economic hardship, psychological distress, and betrayal, to communities, where trust erosion weakened social cohesion, reduced participation in cultural and spiritual activities, and undermined confidence in legitimate practices and institutions. Addressing these challenges, the study proposed applying Buddhadhamma principles, *Sīla* (Ethical Conduct), *Sati* (Mindfulness), *Karuṇā* (Compassion), and karmic awareness, as a culturally embedded ethical framework for reform, supported by the Sangha for peer accountability and complemented by



formal legal oversight, forming a holistic approach to mitigating deception and restoring trust. The findings highlighted the urgency of proactive ethical reform, emphasizing the risks of continued deception, including further harm to individuals, erosion of community trust, and undermining of spiritual and policy legitimacy. Contributions of the study include advancing scholarly discourse in moral psychology, cultural ethics, and religious studies, while providing practical guidance for policy and community interventions through legal oversight, community initiatives, educational campaigns, and victim support systems. Nevertheless, the study faced limitations, including a small qualitative sample of 15 key informants from Krabi province, reliance on self-reported data subject to social desirability and recall bias, and a narrow geographic focus, which may limit generalizability. Future research should expand sample size and diversity, incorporate unaffected community perspectives, employ mixed-method approaches to reduce biases, explore the role of digital technology in perpetuating or mitigating deceptive practices, and adopt interdisciplinary perspectives from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies to deepen understanding and support the development of effective strategies for fostering ethical and trustworthy spiritual environments.

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A STUDY OF TA KHAMUK (TA SAMUK) HANDWOVEN TEXTILES USED IN BUDDHIST PRACTICES OF PEOPLE IN RAYONG PROVINCE

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Historically, fabric has been one of the four essential necessities, serving not only domestic purposes but also as a cultural medium reflecting belief systems and local wisdom. In Rayong Province, Khmer-Thai communities had preserved traditional weaving through the Ta Samuk cloth, a distinctive textile featuring grid-like patterns that symbolized perseverance, order, and the Middle Way in Buddhism. More than just clothing, it had been used in rituals as an offering and symbol of merit-making, expressing devotion, ancestral respect, and cultural identity. The weaving process itself had been seen as a meditative act that nurtured mindfulness and moral discipline, sustaining both spiritual and cultural heritage across generations. The objectives of this study were to study the motto of woven fabrics in Buddhist scriptures and to study the pattern of pearl weaving cloth (Ta Samuk) used in Buddhism by the people of Rayong Province.

Methodology: A qualitative approach was adopted, combining documentary analysis with ethnographic fieldwork. Data collection included in-depth interviews with fifteen key informants: Five local master weavers, five Buddhist monks and novices, and five ritual leaders (Maccanaiyok). These interviews were conducted in Ban Phe Subdistrict, Mueang Rayong District, a community where Ta Samuk weaving is still actively practiced. Additional data were drawn from traditional textile pattern analysis, primary Buddhist texts (e.g., the Tripitaka), and relevant secondary literature, including scholarly articles and ethnographic records.

Main Results: The findings revealed that textiles mentioned in Buddhist scriptures and traditionally used in Khmer-Thai communities fell into five main functional categories: Garments for the Buddha, symbolic items representing the Dharma, robes for the Sangha, sacred offerings, and ritual-related fabrics. In Rayong, Ta Samuk weaving followed this classification. A unique textile known as the "Pearl-Eyed Fabric" featured geometric grid patterns symbolizing order, harmony, and the Middle Way. Weaving itself was interpreted as a meditative act that fostered mindfulness and spiritual focus. Specific fabric colors carried symbolic meaning: White represented purity, gold denoted wisdom and enlightenment, red symbolized compassion, and black reminded of impermanence. This color codes closely align with moral values emphasized in Buddhist teachings.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: The study highlighted that textile offerings extended beyond material generosity. They embodied core Buddhist principles such as *Dāna* (Giving), gratitude to



ancestors, and Puññānumodana (Transfer of Merit). The weaving process served as a spiritual discipline promoting moral cultivation and communal cohesion. These practices were deeply integrated into the Khmer-Thai cultural-religious framework and have been adapted to modern contexts by combining traditional Buddhist knowledge with contemporary academic perspectives, supporting both ethical development and intellectual growth.

Conclusions: To protect and revitalize this endangered cultural practice, the study proposed four key strategies: 1) Documenting and exhibiting traditional woven fabrics in museums and cultural centers; 2) Integrating Ta Samuk weaving into school curricula, especially in Khmer-Thai communities; 3) Creating multimedia materials to raise public awareness of the spiritual and cultural significance of the textiles; and 4) Promoting Buddhist teachings that emphasize the symbolic and ethical dimensions of weaving and ritual offerings. These initiatives were deemed essential for ensuring the continuity of traditional textile arts, reinforcing Buddhist identity, and preserving the intangible cultural heritage that connects generations through faith, craftsmanship, and shared values.

Keywords: Ta Samuk (Ta Khamuk), Handwoven Textiles, Buddhist Practices, People in Rayong Province, Khmer-Thai Group

Introduction

Fabric was historically recognized as one of the four fundamental human necessities. Beyond its domestic function, it served as a cultural artifact—an artistic expression of emotion and a historical record, particularly from the perspective of women weavers. Woven textiles communicated stories of the past and reflected ways of life, beliefs, values, and local philosophies encoded within their vertical threads.

According to *The Great Journey in the Midst of Religion and Commerce* (Gillow & Sentence, 1999); (Thongchoen, 2003); (Thongchun, 2015), although traditional weaving declined in many regions of Thailand, communities in the East, North, and Northeast continued to preserve this practice (Panitchpan, 2014). In Rayong Province, Thai people of Khmer descent retained much of their weaving identity (Prangwattanakul, 2008). While some Khmer-Thai communities adapted their weaving customs or ceased weaving altogether, such adaptations were insufficient to preserve traditional knowledge (Hintow, 2014). As a result, ancient fabrics deteriorated over time, and tangible evidence of weaving traditions became increasingly rare. This underscored the imminent risk of losing intangible cultural heritage, especially weaving practices deeply connected to local beliefs and Buddhist rituals (Klomklumnum et al., 2024).

One of the most significant traditional textiles was the Pearl-Eye fabric, also known as Ta Khamuk or Ta Samuk. This textile, traditionally woven by the Khmer-Thai people in eastern Thailand, particularly in Rayong Province, reflected both aesthetic sophistication and profound symbolic meaning. The Khmer Thais, an ethnic group descended from ancient Khmer populations, preserved their cultural identity through language, religious practice, and textile arts. Pearl-Eye fabric featured a distinctive grid pattern that symbolized perseverance, order, and the Middle Way in Buddhist thought.



From a Buddhist perspective, the fabric was more than a garment-it was a symbolic expression of the Dharma.

In ritual contexts, Pearl-Eye fabric was used as an offering to the Buddha and as a medium of merit-making (Puñña), expressing gratitude toward ancestors and reinforcing community cohesion. Weaving itself was viewed as a meditative practice aligned with the development of mindfulness and moral discipline. The repeated patterns and structure of the fabric echoed Buddhist paths of concentration and balance. In Rayong's Khmer-Thai communities, the integration of these textiles into religious ceremonies, merit transfer rituals (Puññānumodana), and temple offerings exemplified how woven cloth embodied spiritual devotion and cultural continuity.

Given the decline of traditional weaving knowledge and its entanglement with religious and ethnic identity, this study aimed to examine the role of Ta Samuk woven fabric in Buddhist rituals among Khmer-Thai communities in Rayong Province. The research sought to understand how textile traditions functioned as both religious instruments and cultural symbols. In doing so, the study contributed to broader efforts to preserve endangered forms of intangible heritage and to revitalize local identity through the lens of Buddhist practice and textile art.

Objectives

The objectives of this study were to study the motto of woven fabrics in Buddhist scriptures and to study the pattern of pearl weaving cloth (Ta Samuk) used in Buddhism by the people of Rayong Province.

Methodology

This research combines documentary and qualitative research. The research method is divided into two main phases, as follows:

1. Documentary Research

This phase focuses on tracing the historical origins and significance of woven fabric motifs in Buddhist scriptures. Primary sources include the Thai version of the Tripitaka (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996). Secondary sources include books, articles, academic papers, research reports, theses (Both in Thai and English), and electronic media. The scope of content covers two main areas:

1.1 The physical characteristics of fabric, including its shape, size, color, materials, equipment used, and visible patterns.

1.2 Functional uses of fabric within the context of Buddhism.

This stage also investigates references to traditional cloth in Theravāda Buddhist texts, local temple records, and national cultural heritage registers to understand how these fabrics are preserved or mentioned under religious and legal frameworks.

2. Qualitative Research

This phase investigates the cultural significance and contemporary usage of woven fabrics in Buddhist practices among Thai people of Khmer descent living in Rayong province. In-depth interviews were conducted with key local informants, including five novice monks and five elders (Deacons)



from Ban Phe Subdistrict, Mueang Rayong District-an area where Pearl-Eye weaving traditions are still actively practiced.

The selection of participants was purposive, based on their role in community religious life and textile knowledge. Attention was given to generational differences, weaving knowledge transmission, and the socioeconomic challenges currently faced by weaving households, including youth disengagement, market competition, and modernization pressures.

The study was guided by a cultural materialism framework, incorporating concepts from material religion and symbolic anthropology to understand cloth as both a religious object and a vessel of cultural identity.

Data Analysis

The content analysis method was used to summarize the symbolic meaning and role of pearl-woven fabric (Pearl-Eye) used in Buddhist practices among the people of Rayong Province. Textual data from interviews and documents were coded and categorized based on recurring themes such as merit-making, ancestral reverence, religious aesthetics, and identity expression. Special focus was given to how fabric is used as a material link between cultural memory and Theravāda Buddhist values.

Results and Discussion

Findings

1. The Motto of Woven Fabrics in Buddhist Scriptures

There are 5 types of woven fabrics mentioned in the Tripitaka. The first type refers to cloth which shows the type of material used in weaving, such as Gochao cloth and Khoma cloth. The second includes woven fabrics that indicate the place of origin, such as Ka Si woven fabrics. The third type refers to cloth used for monks' robes, such as the cloth of the trijivara. The fourth includes the cloth used for monks' personal items, such as bedding. The fifth type consists of offerings, such as ceiling and flag cloths, with only limited descriptions of fabric patterns and details. These details are usually found in extended footnotes or quoted in commentaries from the scriptures (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996).

As for the motto of offering clothes to the Buddha or his disciples, it appears only in the Vinaya Pitak and Suttan Tapitak, and is mostly connected to acts of devotion in which a person listened to the sermon and then offered cloth woven by themselves. In some cases, they purchased the cloth or even gave up their own garments to offer as alms. In most instances, the type of cloth is not specified. Exceptions appear in the sutras, particularly the Kuttaka Nikaya, including the Vimanavatthu and Petavatthu, which emphasize the consequences of wholesome and unwholesome deeds, especially through stories of heavenly abodes and the suffering of spirits. These texts highlight the importance of dāna (Acts of Giving) in accumulating merit, which clearly describe the causes and effects of such offerings. These texts mention two levels of Anisong (Merit): Worldly rewards and spiritual rewards. Most of the donors are said to be reborn as celestial beings in heavenly realms. Some are reborn as aristocrats. In the Upalana scriptures, it is stated



that they first attain divine treasures in the heavenly world, and then, when reborn as humans, they become people of high status. Many are born into noble families, become educated, and rise to positions such as monarchs, kings, or even emperors. However, these blessings do not arise solely from offering clothes. As is made clear in many stories, these noble individuals performed countless good deeds beyond almsgiving, including observing precepts and engaging in prayer.

For fabrics and textiles made for use in Buddhism in Thailand, they may be divided into two main categories: Those used as monastic articles (Samnabrikarn) or monk's utensils, such as the trijivara, alms bowl cover (Yam), prostration cloth, scripture wrapper (Talapatra), mattress, pillow, and others. Although some of these fabrics have declined in popularity, such as the scripture wrapper, others have been revived, like the rebel cloth, and some have been reimagined using modern technology, such as garlands and Bai Sri arrangements. These fabrics have been adapted and developed through modern textile innovations to suit today's economic and social conditions.

In the study of the woven fabric style used in Buddhism today. It was found that they can be divided into five types according to their use. The first type includes woven fabrics for Buddhas, such as the God's blanket, thatched cloth, and relic blanket. The second type consists of woven fabrics for the Dharma, including wrapping cloths for scriptures and cloth coverings for the Dharma-hall. The third type is woven cloth for monks, which includes satirical cloths used by monks that come from two sources: Cloth obtained through traditional offerings, such as yam, bandages, sitting cloths, and Sangha bags, and cloth obtained from the kitchen (Thai Dham), most of which appear as small wipes or handkerchiefs. The fourth type includes woven cloths offered as sacrifices, which generally have no specific function but are mostly used to decorate temples, such as Tung cloth (Munjana Cloth). Finally, the fifth type comprises other fabrics, such as the cloth of the face of the Lord (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 1996).

2. The Pattern of Pearl-Eye Weaving Cloth Used in Buddhism of the People of Rayong Province

2.1 Pearl-Eye Woven Fabric Pattern Used in Buddhism

The woven fabric patterns in Buddhism of the Thai Khmer people living in Rayong province reflect a strong connection to the practice of giving alms, which is believed to create and accumulate merit. This belief also extends to the dedication of handwoven and sewn fabrics for deceased relatives, often made using factory-produced materials. Most of these practices are rooted in monastic traditions and local village Buddhism, which still strongly influence the community. This section provides detailed explanations about the stable traditions of Thai Khmer people in Rayong province, as seen through their many traditional fabric offerings, including the origins, uses, and historical changes of various woven fabrics according to collective memory. The characteristic patterns of woven fabrics used in Buddhism among the Thai Khmer remain unique in many ways. Although some fabrics have evolved in material due to changing times, they retain traditional forms and characteristics, such as Tung fabrics, thatched fabrics, and Noi wipes. The most original forms and appearances are preserved in handwoven works made with folk threads, which continue to be popular offerings to this day.



In addition, due to the motto, strong belief, and faith in Buddhism among the Khmer Thais living in Rayong province, especially as seen during traditional events like the Songkran New Year, it is clear that Khmer Thais still hold firmly to the Triple Gem (Rattana-trai). Although this was not explicitly mentioned in interviews, it is reflected in the various offerings made to worship the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, as seen in many types of woven fabrics used in Buddhist ceremonies and rituals. Furthermore, the practice of hanging these fabrics throughout the temple continues to reflect a strong cultural belief: That Tung cloths can help lead the donor from suffering in hell to rebirth in a better realm or paradise. This belief still has a powerful influence on the hearts and minds of the Thai people of Khmer descent living in Rayong province.

Nevertheless, in the past, the Pearl-Eye woven fabric (Ta Samuk) of the Khmer Thai people living in Rayong province has undergone changes in its roles and functions. Some of its uniqueness has been altered to suit commercial demands, to the extent that much traditional wisdom has not been passed down, based on the belief that "It is Difficult, Time-Consuming, and not Worth the Income." Consumers also no longer desire traditional woven fabrics, viewing them as old-fashioned, especially when better, more beautiful, and cheaper fabrics can be bought in the market. When the weavers do not value the craft, and the buyers do not appreciate it, it becomes very difficult to promote Ta Samuk folk weaving. Despite the efforts of local leaders, no matter how much funding is provided, it has been found that the impact is only temporary. The Khmer Thais living in Rayong province still have a deep and enduring faith in Buddhism. Therefore, the role of woven fabrics in Buddhist practices, closely tied to the traditional weaving of the Thai Khmer people, should not be overlooked. The restoration of woven fabrics and Pearl-Eye designs for Buddhist use is still possible, unless the Khmer Thais in Rayong Province eventually "Lose Faith in Buddhism."

Indigenous textiles are an important symbol of the culture and lifestyle of different communities. In Thailand, Rayong province in the eastern region has a distinctive cultural identity, namely the Pearl-Eye woven fabric, also known as Pearl-Eye cloth. This is a hand-woven textile with geometric grid patterns that reflect the local wisdom and beliefs of the Thai people of Khmer descent. In the context of Buddhism, the use of Pearl-Eye cloth holds both cultural and spiritual significance. Traditional textiles in Thailand often feature regional patterns and techniques that have been passed down through generations (Hongyon & Saiduang, 2017). Moreover, the use of cloth in Buddhist rituals is considered an expression of faith and reverence for the Triple Gem (Leksuit, 2018)

2.1.1 Characteristics of Pearl-Eye Woven Fabric

The characteristics of the Pearl-Eye fabric are woven into small square patterns woven using silk or dark cotton threads such as red, brown, and purple, which contrast with the white lines of the grid arranged in an orderly manner. The hand weaving reflects the skill and dedication of the weavers in the community.



2.1.2 Cultural Meaning

The grid pattern conveys stability, harmony, and order in the community. It also reflects the strong relationships among family members within the community. It also shows the connection between the past, present, and future, which form the core of the folklore in the area.

2.1.3 Use in Buddhism

Pearl-eye cloth is used in various rituals such as offering forest cloth, covering Buddha statues, and in ordination and funeral ceremonies. The use of this cloth represents faith and respect for the Triple Gem, a symbol of purity and faith. In addition, weaving is considered a Dharma practice that requires perseverance and concentration.

2.1.4 The Cultural Meaning of Pearl-Eye Woven Fabric (Pearl-Eye)

The grid pattern (Square Pattern or Small Canvas) is the main design of Pearl-Eye fabric, conveying order, stability, and community harmony. It can be compared to a simple but patterned human life, which also reflects the social harmony where community members share responsibilities and support one another.

The vertical and horizontal lines (Grid Outlines) represent the "Path of Life" or "Path of Ancestors" that descendants continue to follow.

The fabric's colors with the base tones such as red, brown, and dark purple often reflect. The white color of the grid represents purity, faith, and virtue. The contrast of dark and light colors symbolizes the balance between the material world and dharma.

Hand weaving represents local wisdom and the role of women in the community. Therefore, woven fabrics used in various religious and merit-making ceremonies carry their own sacredness.

2.1.5 Pearl-Eye Woven Fabric (Pearl-Eye) and Buddhism

Grid = Consistency and Consistency

The pattern is orderly and consistent, comparable to the principle of the Middle Way (Majjhima Patipada). The grid, equal in all sections, conveys a stable and centered mind, not inclined toward extremes or worldly distractions.

Weaving = Prayer and Perseverance

Weaving is an activity that requires concentration, patience, and a firm mind, just like prayer in Buddhism. Fine and orderly weaving is comparable to a mind that has been disciplined through morality, concentration, and wisdom.

The Color of the Cloth = The Dharma in Tangible Form

Dark colors (e.g., Red, Purple, Brown) can be compared to endurance, calmness, and spiritual awakening. The combination of contrasting colors serves as a reminder that Dharma arises from balance rather than extremity.

The Role of Cloth in Rituals

Pearl-Eye cloth is often used in meritorious ceremonies such as offering to monks, covering pavilions, altar tables, and coffins as a way of showing respect for the Triple Gem and expressing gratitude and reverence.



Passing on Woven Fabrics = Inheritance of the Dharma

Weaving and passing down cloth to children and grandchildren, or using it in merit-making activities, is a symbol of transmitting the Dharma and spiritual values from generation to generation.

2.1.6 The use of pearl cloth in Buddhism

Offering to Monks (Forest Robes/Kathin Robes)

Pearl-Eye cloth is often used as an offering cloth in merit-making events, such as weaving forest robes or presenting Kathin robes, symbolizing the act of giving up material wealth to create merit.

Covering the Altar Table or the Monk's Seat

Pearl-Eye cloth is used to cover Buddha statues, altar tables, or monk's seats during merit-making events or ceremonies held at home. This practice is a tangible offering, representing devotion and spiritual generosity, similar to offering the highest gift to a king. It also reflects perseverance and deep faith.

Use in Ordination Ceremonies

In some areas, pearl cloth is used to cover the monk's seat or wrap ceremonial items such as shoes during ordination. It symbolizes purity, humility, and entering the monkhood with sincere faith, following ancestral traditions.

Rituals Related to Ancestors

It is used to cover the coffins or urns during funerals and in ceremonies held to make merit and dedicate good deeds to the deceased. This practice shows gratitude to ancestors and encourages the living to embrace the Dharma with a compassionate heart.

Religious Premises

It is used as a decorative cloth in temples, pavilions, or ceremonial halls, especially during events to honor the King. This reflects simple, local beauty and expresses reverence for sacred spaces.

Therefore, the use of pearl cloth in Buddhism is a form of Dharma-based almsgiving and faith practice that reflects the integration of local culture and Buddhist values. Pearl-Eye cloth is not just a "Cloth," but a symbol of faith, perseverance, and ancestral gratitude passed down through generations.

2.2 In-depth Interviews with Three Sample Groups about Pearl-Eye Woven Fabric Used in Buddhism

These informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their expertise in religious practices and cultural knowledge. The weaving experts are among the last remaining practitioners of Pearl-Eye weaving in Ban Phe Subdistrict, Mueang Rayong District, where the tradition remains active. The monks and deacons were chosen for their roles in maintaining Buddhist rituals and transmitting traditional cloth practices.



The study site represents a unique Khmer-Thai community in Eastern Thailand where cultural identity and Theravāda Buddhist beliefs are deeply intertwined. The population is composed of multiple generations, and the community faces challenges such as reduced youth engagement in weaving, a lack of local textile education, and competition from modern fabrics. These contextual factors were taken into account when selecting participants to ensure a comprehensive view of both the tangible and intangible aspects of cloth tradition. The interview process followed semi-structured formats, developed based on a review of literature and verified by three experts in Buddhist studies and cultural anthropology for content validity. Informed consent was obtained, and triangulation was applied by comparing responses across groups. Interview themes were pre-coded based on symbolic use, ritual functions, and cultural meaning of the textiles.

2.2.1 Results of the Interview with the Pearl Woven Fabric Expert

Experts said that Pearl-Eye cloth is a distinctive handwoven fabric with a square grid pattern that conveys stability and social order within the community. The weaving process uses traditional methods that require both skill and precision. This type of cloth is often used in significant religious ceremonies, especially merit making events and forest robe offerings, which express faith and reverence for the Triple Gem. Weaving is also considered a form of Dharma practice, as it requires concentration, discipline, and perseverance.

2.2.2 Results of Interviews with Novice Monks

The monks and novices stated that Pearl-Eye cloth plays an important role in Buddhist rituals, such as covering Buddha statues and offering cloth during various merit-making events. This fabric carries symbolic meanings of purity, simplicity, and reverence for the Triple Gem. The monks view the act of receiving pearl-woven cloth from the community as a reflection of the villagers' faith and strong connection to Buddhism. This type of woven fabric also helps enhance the atmosphere of the rituals, adding a sense of sacredness and tranquility to the ceremony.

2.2.3 Results of the Interview with the Grandfathers (Deacons)

The deacons, who oversee ceremonies and religious activities in the community, said that Pearl-Eye cloth is a part of tradition passed down through generations. The use of this woven fabric in merit-making, ordination, and funeral ceremonies is an expression of gratitude and faith in both Buddhism and ancestral heritage. The deacons emphasized that preserving traditional weaving practices and the use of ritual fabrics help to maintain community identity and strengthen religious connections. Pearl-Eye cloth is more than just a woven material; It represents the spirit, faith, and perseverance of the community.

Overall, all three groups agreed that Pearl-Eye woven fabric (Tasamuk) is a traditional textile that plays an important role in Buddhism and has a profound cultural and spiritual meaning. Weaving is seen as an act of faith and perseverance. Its ritual use promotes relationships and bonds in the community, as well as a symbol of respect and gratitude toward the Buddha and ancestors.



Therefore, Pearl-Eye cloth in Rayong province is important in both cultural and religious contexts. This study helps to understand the role of indigenous textiles in Buddhist rituals and demonstrates the connection between local culture and the spiritual life of the community.

Discussion

The style of woven fabrics used in Buddhism by Thai people of Khmer descent living in Rayong province today is primarily handwoven with additional yarn or decorative materials during the weaving process. Some fabrics are entirely handwoven, while others are partially embellished with Pearl-Eye woven patterns. These textiles aim to maintain connections to traditional styles and symbolic meanings. Regarding the Buddhist textiles of the Khmer Thai, it can be seen that the fabrics used by the Khmer Thai people in Rayong province today. This is consistent with the findings of Kusupolon (2015), who studied the weaving practices of a group of housewives in Ban That Sobwan, Chiang Kham District, Phayao Province. Her research found that they used natural materials, including cotton and plant-based dyes, highlighting a similar emphasis on traditional techniques and materials.

However, while Kusupolon's study emphasizes raw materials and dyeing techniques, the present study expands further by connecting the woven patterns with Buddhist symbolic thought, particularly the Middle Path, merit-making, and gratitude to ancestors. For instance, the grid pattern of Pearl-Eye weaving is interpreted by informants as symbolizing balance and order, which aligns with the Buddhist concept of Right View (*Sammā Dittṭhi*). The process of weaving itself is seen as a spiritual act, reflecting mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*) through steady rhythm and intention.

Additionally, the fabrics are not only considered beautiful or traditional but are also regarded as sacred media in religious offerings. This spiritual value enhances their role in ritual life, particularly in ceremonies where cloth is given as a form of *dāna* (Generosity). Elders in the community emphasized that these woven fabrics carry accumulated merit across generations, reinforcing the importance of passing on the tradition.

The research also finds that while traditional practices persist, younger generations are increasingly disengaged due to economic constraints and lifestyle changes. This highlights a gap in cultural transmission that requires urgent attention. Compared to earlier studies, the present research not only documents technique but also reflects the lived religious and cultural experiences embedded in cloth, offering a deeper, more integrated understanding of textile heritage in a Buddhist Khmer-Thai context.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

The use of pearl tarpaulin in Buddhism is an example of a harmonious blend of local culture and religion. Woven fabrics with unique patterns serve not only as clothing but also as spiritual and social symbols that reflect the beliefs and values of the community. The Pearl-Eyed fabric of the people of Rayong province plays an important role in both cultural and religious life. The study of this type of woven fabric provides a deep understanding of the lifestyles, beliefs, and Buddhist practices. Its use illustrates how Buddhism and cultural tradition are interwoven in



meaningful ways. These woven fabrics are more than garments or decorations; They are symbols of dharma and faith, created through a weaving process that requires patience, dedication, and mindfulness, qualities that align closely with core Buddhist principles such as morality, meditation, and wisdom.

This reflects not only the functional role of fabric but also its symbolic and spiritual dimensions, forming what can be conceptualized as a cultural-religious model consisting of four interrelated components: 1) Symbol- Visual elements such as the grid pattern reflecting the Middle Way and order in Buddhist cosmology; 2) Process- The weaving itself as meditative action fostering mindfulness (Sammā-sati); 3) Function- Its role in rituals and communal merit-making; and 4) Transmission- Intergenerational teaching that maintains the continuity of Khmer-Thai Buddhist identity.

The use of pearl cloth in Buddhism includes several important functions. First, it is used as an offering to monks and monastics, such as forest robes or Kathin robes, which are often presented during merit-making events. These include handwoven forest cloths or Kathin offerings, symbolizing renunciation and acts of charity. The traditional colors and patterns reflect respect and simplicity, aligning with the monastic way of life. Second, pearl cloth is used for covering altar tables or monk's blankets, often placed over a Buddha statue, altar, or monk's seat during ceremonies at temples or even at home. This practice serves as a concrete act of offering, representing the presentation of a valuable gift, similar in meaning to royal offerings. Third, in some regions, pearl cloth is used during ordination ceremonies, where it may cover the monk's seat or be placed under shoes worn at the event. Fourth, pearl cloth is used in rituals related to honoring ancestors, such as covering coffins or urns at funerals, or in ceremonies that dedicate merit to the deceased. Finally, pearl cloth serves as religious decoration, adorning temples, pavilions, or halls of honor, where it displays beauty in a simple, local style and functions as a respectful tribute to sacred spaces.

Across these roles, pearl cloth becomes a vehicle for conveying Buddhist teachings in a tangible form. Its presence in merit-making, funeral rites, and daily rituals embodies the Buddhist values of compassion, gratitude, and the impermanence of life.

Therefore, the use of pearl cloth in Buddhism is a form of dharma-based almsgiving and a practice of faith that reflects the connection between local culture and Buddhist principles. Therefore, pearl eye cloth is not merely a piece of "Cloth," but a symbol of devotion, perseverance, and gratitude, passed down through generations as a cherished cultural and spiritual heritage from the ancestors. Such understanding can support cultural preservation policies, intergenerational education, and curriculum development on intangible heritage, enabling communities to sustain traditional weaving while promoting its religious and ethical significance in contemporary life. (In Figure 1)

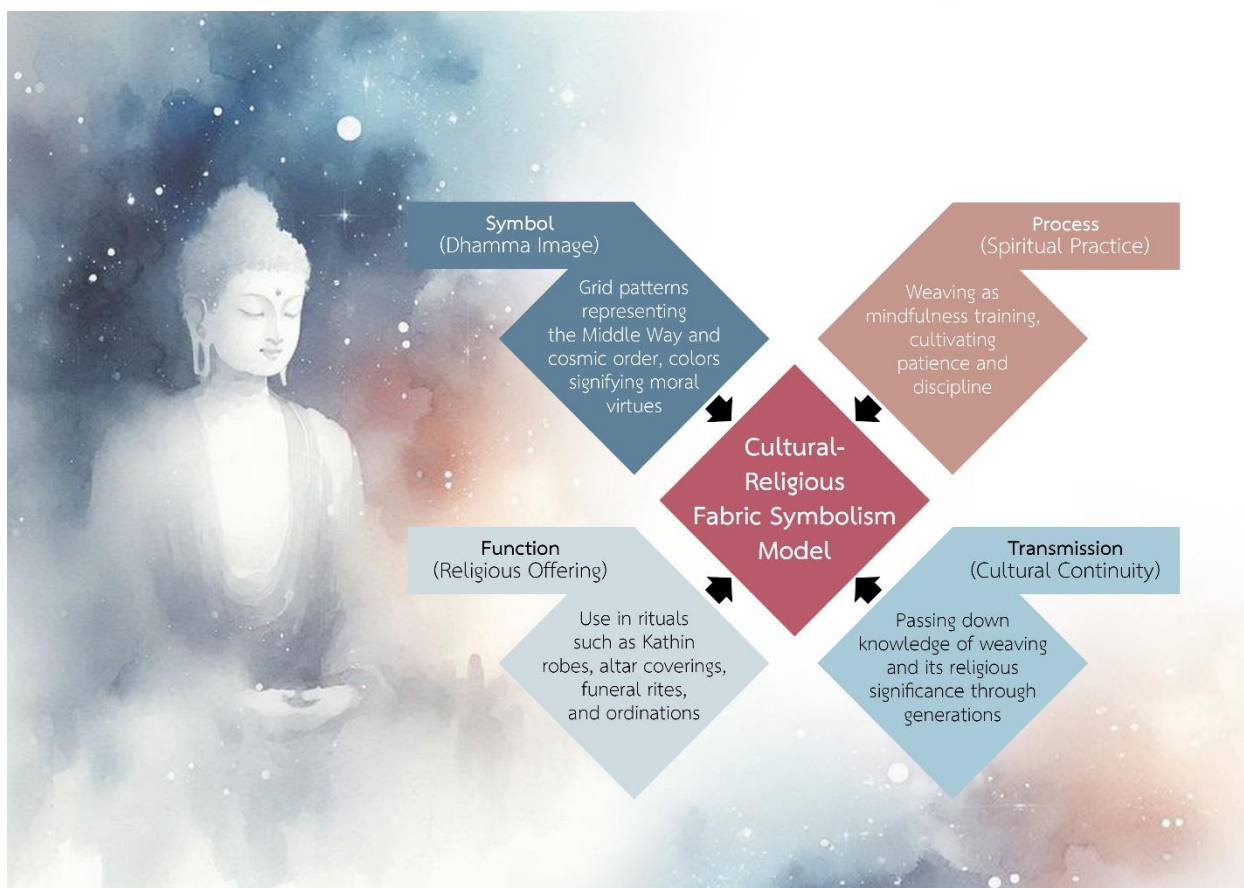


Figure 1 Cultural-Religious Fabric Symbolism Model

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study of Ta Khamuk or (Ta Samuk) woven fabric used in Buddhism by the people of Rayong province reveals that textiles mentioned in Buddhist scriptures play a significant role not only as monastic requisites for monks, but also as offerings made by laypeople to express their reverence toward the Triple Gem. These woven textiles can be categorized into five types based on their usage: Textiles for the Buddha, the Dhamma (Buddhist Teachings), the Sangha (Monastic Community), sacred offerings, and other ritual-related fabrics. Ta Khamuk fabric, traditionally used in Buddhist contexts by the people of Rayong, reflects local wisdom, beliefs, and religious faith through its patterns, colors, and weaving processes. These five types of cloth are not merely categorized by usage, but each holds symbolic connections to core Buddhist values: Offerings to the Buddha signify enlightenment and devotion; Cloths for the Dhamma represent transmission of knowledge; Cloths for the Sangha embody communal harmony; Sacred offerings express Puñña (Merit); And ritual fabrics mark the integration of spiritual life into cultural practice. Symbolically, the checkered patterns represent consistency and the Middle Way; The act of weaving is likened to meditative practice; The fabric's colors convey moral and spiritual virtues; The use of the fabric in rituals signifies generosity and reverence; And the act of passing down the fabric represents the transmission of Dhamma across generations. These meanings align directly with Buddhist teachings on impermanence (Anicca), mindfulness (Sati), and communal merit-making (Sangha-Dāna), reinforcing



the sacred nature of cloth as both object and medium for spiritual cultivation. From these findings, three key areas of knowledge emerge: 1) Symbolic significance of grid patterns as visual metaphors for Buddhist cosmology; 2) The cloth as a communicative tool for transmitting Dhamma across generations and rituals; and 3) The act of weaving itself as a lived expression of Buddhist practice, embodying patience, mindfulness, and discipline. Therefore, the preservation and promotion of Buddhist woven textiles should be encouraged through initiatives such as collecting and conserving fabrics in cultural centers, preaching about the merits of offering cloth in Buddhism, developing textile weaving curricula for youth, and publishing educational materials about Ta Khamuk fabric in its cultural and religious contexts. These recommendations can be implemented by local temples, community learning centers, and educational institutions through workshops, exhibitions, intergenerational craft programs, and collaborations with the Ministry of Culture. In terms of future research, scholars may consider comparative studies of Buddhist textile practices in other ethnic communities, long-term studies on intergenerational transmission of weaving knowledge, or digital archiving of patterns and oral histories to ensure sustainability and broader public access. These efforts aim to safeguard the intellectual and artistic heritage of Thai people of Khmer descent in Rayong province and to foster pride in their local identity.

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LOCAL ARTISANS OF NAKHON: PHRA LAK AND THE ARTISAN LINEAGE IN NAKHON SI THAMMARAT, THAILAND

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: Nakhon Si Thammarat has a rich tradition of crafting Buddha images, particularly the silver repousse Phra Lak, which plays a central role in rituals and the Chak Phra procession. However, due to a shortage of artisans, the craft is in decline and faces the risk of disappearing if not preserved. The objectives of this study are to gather, organize, and examine knowledge concerning Phra Lak (Dragged Buddha Images) in Southern Thailand, with a focus on the artisan traditions of Nakhon Si Thammarat. The study also aims to apply this knowledge to the processes production and the creation of works within local artisan lineage, ensuring its transmission to future generations and promoting wider recognition of the tradition.

Methodology: This study was conducted using qualitative research combined with practical exercises. The study involved practical implementation through the actual creation of Phra Lak images and the training of new artisans. Data collection techniques included general and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, field observations, and both primary and secondary document analysis. These methods produced practical applications and reflective outcomes.

Main Results: The findings reveal that: 1) The Phra Lak images created by artisans of the Nakhon Si Thammarat are predominantly made of silver in the "Alms-Holding" posture. These images are crafted through a distinctive process involving carved wood covered with embossed silver sheets, decorated with gold and alloyed copper (Naak), and designed to be disassembled like traditional puppets. This meticulous and complex technique requires high expertise in both woodworking and metalwork. Today, such images can still be found in temples like Wat Chantharam, Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan, and the Phutthasihing Hall, though very few original artisans remain; 2) The creative application of Phra Lak knowledge resulted in three innovative art products, a table, a tray, and a wall installation, which demonstrated how traditional techniques could contribute to creative economic development and provide income-generating opportunities for artisans; 3) A training program successfully transferred knowledge to seven new artisans, contributing to the continuity



of this unique cultural heritage; and 4) Public dissemination was achieved through research exhibitions, displays of Phra Lak artworks, revival events of traditional Phra Lak ceremonies, and media publications.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This research falls under the category of applied Buddhism, promoting understanding of Buddhism, particularly through the transmission of the traditional Phra Lak creation techniques from the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage to younger generations. Promoting the Buddhist principles of compassion, understanding, and interdependence exemplifies cultural revitalization while nurturing harmony among religions and the development of Buddhist innovations that offer socio-economic solutions and generate communal value.

Conclusions: Buddhist art can sustain cultural identity, foster community pride, and create practical income opportunities through local wisdom, and foster interdependence, serving as a model for cultural revival and interfaith harmony. The Phra Lak craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat, which has long been admired for its intricate silver and gold artistry, now survives through the work of only a few remaining artisans. This research underscores the urgency of preserving the tradition. Strong support from both government and local communities, in funding, education, and policy, is essential for improving artisans' livelihoods, nurturing future generations, and ensuring the lasting continuity of this cultural heritage.

Keywords: Phra Lak, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Artisan Lineage, Artisans Craftsmanship Creative Economy

Introduction

Thai society has long been intertwined with Buddhism, which has become a foundational element of the nation's culture, ethics, and way of life (Supap, 1998). Local art across various regions in Thailand is deeply connected to Buddhist beliefs, resulting in the creation of artistic works that reflect religious values, faith, and spiritual aesthetics (Paijitsakong, 2004). Promoting peace and unity through shared cultural heritage, exemplified by Buddhist and Muslim artisans, fosters harmony, mutual respect, and non-violent social cohesion. These works, whether sculptures, paintings, or architectural structures such as Buddha statues, mural paintings, ordination halls (Ubosot), vihāras, stupas, and chedis, are regarded as invaluable cultural heritage. Historically, such strong religious and artistic traditions led to the emergence of highly skilled artisan groups throughout the country.

Nakhon Si Thammarat, a province with strong historical ties to Theravāda Buddhism, played a crucial role in the dissemination of Buddhist teachings in Thailand. Influenced by Indian and Sri Lankan Buddhism (Mosalinon, 2011), the province is home to Phra Borommathat Chedi, a prototype of Lankan-style stupas. It also boasts the highest number of temples in Southern Thailand, totaling 636 (National Statistical Office, 2022), and a long-standing tradition of crafting Buddha images. This artistic heritage reflects both the region's cultural prosperity and its profound devotion to Buddhism (Eoseewong, 2000). Evidence of this craftsmanship can be seen in unique bronze Buddha images housed in the Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum and at Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan. Notably, historical records indicate that the province's Buddha image production developed significantly



during the Ayutthaya period and has evolved into various forms such as silver-sheet Buddhas, gold-leaf Buddhas, and amulets.

The Phra Lak images of Nakhon Si Thammarat are silver-sheet Buddha statues created as objects of worship, lineage representations, and ceremonial icons for the Chak Phra festival, held on the first waning moon of the eleventh lunar month to mark the end of the Buddhist Lent (Sarem and Kaewsakul, 2022). These statues symbolize the Buddha's descent from Tāvātimsa Heaven. In Southern provinces such as Nakhon Si Thammarat, as well as in the Songkhla Lake Basin, Pak Phanang River Basin, and Tapee River Basin, the Chak Phra tradition involves elaborate processions that allow devotees to pay homage and participate in merit-making ceremonies (Phra Maha Thitiphong Chuchit, 2018).

The artisan tradition of Nakhon Si Thammarat is especially renowned for its excellence in creating Buddha statues and Phra Lak figures. The traditional method of crafting Phra Lak in this region is highly distinctive and complex, involving unique techniques passed down through generations. However, the original methods have largely vanished over the past fifty years. This research seeks to revive and preserve the ancient techniques of the Phra Lak creation specific to the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage. The goal is to recognize this local artistic legacy as a valuable cultural asset that deserves conservation and revitalization, while also ensuring its transmission to younger generations. Traditional techniques are urgent, and the risks are if preservation is not achieved. This would help strengthen the significance of the study.

The researchers recognize the importance of systematically collecting and documenting the body of knowledge related to the lineage of Phra Lak artisans in Nakhon Si Thammarat. It is essential to revive and transmit traditional techniques of Phra Lak craftsmanship to new generations of artisans in concrete and practical ways. Furthermore, cultural innovations should be developed by building upon local wisdom to create new value for traditional craftsmanship, while also enhancing sustainable career opportunities for young artisans and related communities. This process will help promote the local creative economy by adding value to the knowledge and products of Phra Lak craftsmanship, revitalizing Phra Lak as a prominent cultural symbol and unique identity of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to gather, organize, and examine knowledge concerning Phra Lak (Dragged Buddha Images) in Southern Thailand, with special attention to the artisan traditions of Nakhon Si Thammarat. The study also aims to apply this knowledge to the creation of artworks rooted in the local artisan lineage, ensuring its transmission to future generations and promoting wider recognition of the tradition.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative and documentary approaches, along with participatory action research. The methodology consisted of the following components:



1. Documentary Research: This phase involved the analysis and review of existing documents and literature related to Phra Lak and the traditional craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

2. Qualitative Research: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants selected according to the research objectives, categorized as follows:

2.1 Collection, database development, and analysis of knowledge regarding Phra Lak in Southern Thailand and the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage:

Primary informants: Local master artisans from Ten Essential Traditional Craftsmanship in Nakhon Si Thammarat, including: 1) Sculptors, 2) Wood smoothing artisan, 3) Wood carvers, 4) Turners and wood decorators, 5) Furniture makers, 6) Metal engraving and embossing artisan, 7) Goldsmiths, 8) Blacksmiths, 9) Silversmiths, and 10) General woodworkers 11 individuals in total. Additionally, 4 community sages (Phra Lak Artisans), heirs of the traditional Nakhon Si Thammarat craftsmanship lineage, were interviewed.

Secondary informants: 2 cultural custodians, 4 local abbots/monks, representatives from 2 temples, 3 committee members, and 10 local administrators.

2.2 For the application of traditional knowledge to the production and creative design of Phra Lak artworks:

Primary informants: 2 creative designers and 5 community sages with in-depth artisanal knowledge.

Secondary informants: 1 representative from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Commerce Office 1 hotel businessman, 2 representatives from community product development organizations.

2.3 Focus Group Discussions: A panel of 6 participants, including academics, traditional Buddha image artisans, and creative designers, was formed to provide feedback and insights on the research findings and practical implications.

3. Practical training: This phase involved hands-on activities including the actual creation of Phra Lak images, training workshops, and skill development sessions. These were organized for knowledge transmission to a new generation of artisans, seven apprentices in total, through practical engagement and guided mentorship.

Research Instruments

The study employed a variety of data collection tools to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research objectives. These included both general and in-depth interviews, using structured and unstructured formats, small group discussions, knowledge exchange forums, participant observation, and hands-on training workshops.

Data Collection Procedures

To obtain data aligned with the research objectives, the data collection process was divided into seven phases: 1) The first phase involved a research team meeting, which served as the initial stage for planning and coordination among the research team members; 2) Field Study and Field Survey = Site visits and data exploration in relevant local communities. By coordinating with community leaders and related parties to provide information; 3) Target Selection and Artisan



Lineage Mapping = Identification and compilation of artisan lineages in Nakhon Si Thammarat based on field data; 4) Artisan Mobilization for Buddha Image Creation = Collaborative activities involving local craftsmen to recreate Phra Lak images; 5) Creative Product Design = Development of artistic prototypes inspired by Phra Lak traditions; 6) Handson Training Workshops = Skill-based training for the younger generation of artisans from the Nakhon Si Thammarat lineage in traditional Buddhist art techniques; and 7) Academic Seminar and Cultural Exhibition = A scholarly forum on Phra Lak, knowledge exchange sessions, an exhibition, and a traditional celebration featuring Phra Lak art and performance. During the research process, local artisans contribute by creating the Buddha image, passing on their skills to the younger generation, and helping to organize discussion forums. At the same time, community leaders, local scholars, monks, and others share their ideas and suggestions for the creative design of the Buddha image or Phra Lak.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The data obtained from documents, interviews, focus group discussions, knowledge exchange forums, observations, and practical workshops, both primary and secondary sources, were organized and categorized based on the research objectives. The phenomena were interpreted and verified for credibility, completeness, and accuracy using data triangulation techniques. Verification from multiple sources, such as different individuals, times, and locations, as well as cross-examination by multiple researchers to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings. Relationships among data sets were identified and conclusions were drawn. The research findings were presented through descriptive analysis, structured according to the research objectives, and supported by visual materials to enhance understanding.

Results and Discussion

Knowledge of Phra Lak and Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage

The Nakhon Si Thammarat artisanal lineage is renowned for its expertise in crafting Phra Lak, a type of Buddha image that has long held cultural and spiritual significance in the region. The crafting of Phra Lak reflects the community's deep-rooted Buddhist beliefs and is regarded as an important form of local art. Nakhon Si Thammarat is one of the earliest cities in Thailand to adopt and disseminate Buddhism (Sukkarakanchan, 2021), and its Buddha images bear similarities to the elegant and intricate styles of the Ayutthaya period. The Phra Lak typically depicts the Buddha in the alms-holding posture (Phra Pang Umpat) and other postures, such as the Subduing Mara Posture, meditation Buddha, and is commonly found in nearly every temple in the province because of its use in the Buddha-pulling or Chak Phra. These images are ceremonially paraded during the annual Chak Phra (Buddha-Pulling) festival held at the end of the Buddhist Lent. Historically, the ruling governors of Nakhon Si Thammarat have played a key role in sustaining and commissioning high-quality Phra Lak statues, a tradition that continued up to the last royal governor. In Southern Thailand, Phra Lak statues have been created using various materials, including wood, gold, silver, and bronze. A distinctive technique involves covering the carved wooden figures with precious materials such as gold leaf and silver sheets, an artistic hallmark of



the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage. These figures are often adorned with intricate headpieces (Therd) and decorative garments (Phra Phusa) that emphasize their sacred status. The creation of Phra Lak requires the collaborative efforts of highly skilled artisans from the "Chang Sip Mu," particularly the Chang Khreuang Thom (Niello Ware Artisans), who are prominent in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Today, traditional Phra Lak statues crafted with these ancient techniques can still be found in several temples throughout the region, serving as tangible evidence of this enduring cultural heritage.



Figure 1 An Ancient Silver-Sheathed Phra Lak Housed at Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province

In Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phra Lak statues are regarded with a reverence comparable to that of the revered Phra Phuttha Sihing image. According to the survey conducted in this study, several ancient Phra Lak statues are currently enshrined in temples within Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, as shown in Figure 1. Wat Phra Mahathat Woramahawihan houses the largest number, with six Phra Lak statues. This is followed by Wat Chantharam, which houses five. Other temples, including Wat Buranaram, Wat Sritawi, Wat Wang Tawangtok, and Wat Hua It, typically possess one or two statues each. Additionally, the Nakhon Si Thammarat National Museum also preserves several Phra Lak figures, with a total count of no fewer than twenty statues across the province.

The creation of Phra Lak statues serves three primary purposes: As an offering of devotion to the Buddha (Buddha-Pūjā), as a sacred representation of a familial or artisan lineage, and as a central figure for installation on royal barges during the annual Chak Phra festival. Each statue requires several months to complete, highlighting the craftsmanship and religious devotion involved in the process.

The Chak Phra tradition, held on the first waning moon of the eleventh lunar month (The Day After the End of Buddhist Lent), features the ceremonial dragging of these statues through communities with great joy and festivity. As the statues are pulled, chants of "E-sā-la-phā! Hē-lō! Hē-lō!" fill the air, creating an atmosphere of unity and celebration. This vibrant tradition not only pays homage to the Buddha but also serves to strengthen communal bonds and express social harmony.

Through the investigation into the artisan lineages involved in the creation of Phra Lak statues in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, it was found that only one living descendant of the traditional Phra Lak craftsman lineage remains in the Wat Chantharam community. This individual is Mr. Sakchai Sinthurong (Known Locally as Chang Odd), a 69-year-old artisan who traces his heritage back to the "Sinthurong" lineage of craftsmanship. This lineage can be traced through multiple generations, beginning with his great-grandfather.

Although Mr. Sakchai still retains a high level of artisanal skill, he has not engaged in the crafting of Phra Lak statues for many years. The Sinthurong lineage is historically recognized as one of the prominent traditional artisan families in Nakhon Si Thammarat, based in the community surrounding Wat Chantharam in Mueang District. Their craftsmanship represents a valuable cultural legacy that is now on the verge of disappearing, underscoring the urgency of preservation and knowledge transmission efforts.

It was found that there were 11 individuals belonging to artisan lineages in Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat (In the Year 2022), consisting of:

Table 1 Ten Essential Traditional Craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat

Ten Essential Traditional Craftsmanship of Nakhon Si Thammarat	Name-Surname/Age
1. Decorative Arts Artisan	Mr. Sakchai Sinthurong (Chang Odd), age 69
2. Buddhist Art Designer	Mr. Yodkrai Kanchanachai (Chang Boom), age 30
3. Prototype Sculpture Artisan	Mr. Yodkrai Kanchanachai (Chang Boom), age 30
4. Wood Smoothing Artisan	Mr. Santi Damkaew (Chang Ti), age 47
	Mr. Charoenrat Meelert (Chang Thum), age 29
5. Wood Carving Artisan	Mr. Pornchai Wattanawikkit (Chang Piak), age 67
6. Wood Turning and Decoration Artisan	Mr. Suchart Jamnonglak (Chang Bangchat), age 80
7. Metal Sheet Silver Rolling Artisan (Machine-Assisted)	Mr. Chanthip Thipyut (Chang Thip), age 56
8. Metal Forming Artisan and Assistant	Mr. Nopparuj Nukul (Chang Bangleem), age 66
	Police Lieutenant Colonel Kornchat Thonglim (Chang Charoen), age 61
9. Metal Engraving and Embossing Artisan	Mr. Nikom Nokaksorn (Chang Nikom), age 72
	Mr. Nopparuj Nukul (Chang Bangleem), age 66
10. Goldsmith	Mr. Wirat Amrit (Chang Wirat), age 65

The Traditional Process of Creating Phra Lak

The traditional method of creating Phra Lak by the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage has been neglected and left without continuation for more than 50 years. As a result, there are currently almost no artisans skilled in this traditional art form. The research team, therefore, investigated the lineage of Phra Lak artisans to revive this distinctive local art.



The creation of Phra Lak requires two main types of artisans: Woodworkers and metalworkers, using precious materials such as silver, gold, and naak (A Gold-Copper Alloy), in a delicate and refined production process as follows:

1. Buddha Image Design

The design process begins with the study of the physical characteristics (Phutthalakkhana) of Phra Lak images from various sources in Nakhon Si Thammarat. These references are used to sketch the full-scale physical structure and create a prototype sculpture as shown in Figures 2 and 3.



Figure 2 Sketching the Prototype Image at Full Scale



Figure 3 Prototype Sculpture Cast in Plate

2. Woodwork Process

The woodwork stage involves crafting the Buddha image before it is overlaid with silver and other materials.

2.1 Wood Selection

Golden jackfruit wood is commonly chosen because it is a softwood that is easy to carve and is also regarded as auspicious. The selected tree should have a diameter of approximately 50 centimeters.

2.2 Wood Smoothing and Turning

Wood smoothing refers to shaping the wood to the desired dimensions, typically resulting in a height of around 150 centimeters. Wood turning is the process of refining the smoothed wood by sanding and shaping it to achieve a balanced and symmetrical form. The limbs, arms, hands, legs, and feet, are turned separately. The head, face, and torso require additional care and craftsmanship.



2.3 Wood Carving

In this stage, a skilled woodcarver sculpts the prototype from the smoothed wood form, focusing specifically on the head, face, and torso. This carving process demands a high level of skill and precision, using specialized tools and techniques, as can be seen from Figures 4-5.



Figures 4

Figures 5

Figures 4-5 Carving Golden Jackfruit Wood to Form the Buddha Image

3. Metalwork

Metalwork is a delicate process used to overlay the carved wooden core of the Buddha image. The primary metal used in the overlay is silver, which is ordered in sheet form. These silver sheets are measured and sectioned appropriately, then polished to smooth the edges before applying them to the figure.

Steps in the Metalworking Process

Metalwork is applied after the woodwork has been completed, beginning with the lower part of the Buddha image. The fingers and toes are delicate details that require the highest level of craftsmanship, as they are intricate and refined. In Buddhist art, based on the characteristics of a great being, the fingers are long and evenly shaped. It is believed that if the fingers and toes are crafted perfectly, they bring auspiciousness and enhance the beauty of the entire Buddha image. The process includes the following components:

1. Thighs and Feet (Phra Phela and Phra Bat):

Sheets of silver are rolled into cylindrical forms and wrapped around the carved wooden parts.

2. Upper Arms, Arms, and Hands (Phra Paha, Phra Kon, and Phra Hat):

Silver is also used to cover the upper arms, arms, and hands. The length from the fingertips to the wrists is wrapped with cylindrical silver sheets approximately 1 centimeter in diameter. The thumb (Phra Angkuth) is slightly larger than the other fingers. The arms (Phra Paha) are bent forward in the alms-holding posture (Phra Pang Umpat), and thus consist of two separate parts: From the upper arm to the elbow, and from the elbow to the fingertips. All parts are joined together using heat.



3. Robe and Sash (Jiwon and Ratprakhot):

The robe at the back and front of the figure is overlaid with silver, while the sash, made of gold, wraps around the waist. The contrast between the gold sash and silver robe enhances the visual appeal.

4. Torso (Phra Worakaya):

The entire torso is covered with silver sheets both in front and back. Silver rivets, cast like nails, are used to securely attach the sheets to the inner wood, requiring great precision.

5. Neck (Phra So):

The neck is made of a 2-inch-wide silver sheet, forming the connection between the neck and the face.

6. Face (Phra Phak):

This is the most complex part. A pre-modeled facial mold is used to create a cast from a mixture of three metals: Silver, gold, and naak (A Gold-Copper Alloy), known as Sam Kasat (Three Kings), which gives the face a brighter and more refined appearance than silver alone. The hot metal is hammered into a mold to shape the face. The lips (Phra Oth) are given a slightly reddish hue based on the prototype and the preference of the commissioning patron.

7. Crown Cover and Hair (Phra Seun/Phra Sok):

Silver is used to cover the carved wooden head. Hair details (Phra Sok) are created by repoussé artisans using small round-headed chisels to emboss patterns from the inside of the silver cover.

8. Flame Crest (Phra Ketumala):

This pointed flame-like crest at the top of the head is crafted from a blend of three metals: Silver, gold, and naak forming what is called the Sam Kasat Ketumala, symbolizing the radiant aura above the Buddha's head.

9. Ears (Phra Kan):

Two repoussé silver sheets are used, with the front side embossed with grooves to define the ear structure, while the back remains plain. The two pieces are joined to form the ear shape in accordance with traditional Buddhist iconography.

10. Eyes (Phra Net):

This is a final decorative step after completing the face. The eyes consist of a white part made from mother-of-pearl and a black part made from onyx. A gemstone-setting technique is used to inlay the materials directly into the eye sockets on the silver surface.

In the metalworking process of Phra Lak creation, as can be seen from Figures 6-13, the use of "Chan" (Traditional Resin) is essential. This reflects ancient artisanal wisdom used to bond metal to wood. The method is known as "Kan-at Chan" (Resin Pressing Technique). Chan is made from the liver of stingrays, which is boiled down until it becomes a thick, viscous substance. Once the resin's consistency is confirmed to be suitable, it is used as an adhesive between the wooden core and the metal sheets, as well as at various seams, to ensure a firm and seamless attachment.



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

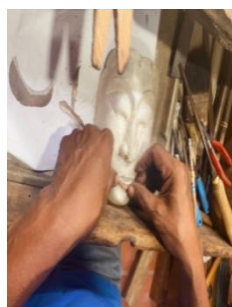


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

Figures 6-13 The Process of Creating Phra Lak by the Artisan Lineage of Nakhon Si Thammarat Province

One unique identity in the Phra Lak creation process by the artisan lineage of Nakhon Si Thammarat is the noticeable red color of the Buddha's lips (Phra Oth). This characteristic has raised questions as to why certain Phra Lak images feature red lips and whether these statues are specially crafted or possess a specific symbolic meaning.

According to the study, this feature is believed to derive from the concept of depicting the Buddha in a female form, a notion that likely originated from the fusion of Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions. Three underlying interpretations have been proposed:

1. As a gesture of reverence: The red lips symbolize the highest form of respect and veneration for female ancestors or matriarchs, reflecting the value of filial piety.
2. As a substitute for female ordination: Since women are not permitted to be ordained as monks in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, the creation of a Buddha image in a feminine form serves as a symbolic alternative.
3. As a reflection of merit-making roles: Historically, women were more likely than men to attend temple ceremonies and listen to Dhamma teachings regularly. They also frequently acted as sponsors or patrons (Yom Uppathak) in the commissioning of Buddha images. Thus, the resulting statues often bore facial features reminiscent of women, including red-colored lips.

In some cases, the Buddha image may even be named after its female patron. For example, at Wat Chantharam, there exists a statue known as Phra Lak Mae Phring (Mother



Phring's Phra Lak). Furthermore, the facial features of each statue vary depending on the artisan's skill, belief system, and the sponsor's faith and intention.

The Process of Creating Phra Lak-Inspired Artworks from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage

The creative process involved developing contemporary and functional art pieces by adapting distinctive elements from the traditional Phra Lak to produce works of both aesthetic and practical value. These pieces were designed for contemporary artistic and commercial purposes based on conceptual sketches and were presented for review by a joint committee.

The creative team held meetings to evaluate and select three initial prototype designs for further development. The selected works include:

Wall Art-decorative wall panel (As Shown in Figure 14)

Side Table-functional table (As Shown in Figure 15)

Tray-serving tray (As Shown in Figure 16).

The process began with design work, drawing inspiration from specific parts of the Phra Lak statues. This was followed by field surveys and the selection of appropriate materials such as wood, metal, and other components. The next steps included designing, planning, and executing the productions, such as metal joining and wood smoothing. Throughout the process, the team periodically reviewed and evaluated the progress of the artwork.



Figure 14 Wall Art Piece



Figure 15 Side Table Piece



Figure 16 Tray

Transmitting Knowledge of Phra Lak from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage to a New Generation of Artisans

As part of this initiative, knowledge related to Phra Lak was transferred by the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage at the Local Artisan Hall (Hor Chang Sin Thin Nakhon), Wat Chantharam, Tha Wang Subdistrict, Mueang Nakhon Si Thammarat District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The program targeted interested individuals who participated in a hands-on training workshop titled "Phra Lak Artisan Training", which aimed to teach the fundamental processes and techniques for creating Phra Lak in the traditional style of the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan.

The training course lasted 8 days, totaling no fewer than 48 hours, and consisted of the following modules:

1. Introductory Training-6 hours, (3 Hours on Foundational Knowledge of Phra Lak and Its Proportions and Forms, and 3 Hours on Materials and Tools Used in Traditional Craftsmanship)
2. Basic Design and Line Engraving Practice-6 hours
3. Repoussé (Metal Embossing) Practice-18 hours
4. Mold Assembly and Metal Joining Practice-18 hours (9 Hours on Metal Joining Techniques, and 9 Hours on Assembly Techniques)



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20

Figures 17-20 Training Workshop Atmosphere

From Figures 17-20, it can be seen that this hands-on training workshop was organized to revive the traditional art of Phra Lak creation in accordance with ancient methods. The program began with a teacher-honoring ceremony (Wai Khru) to invoke auspiciousness, followed by theoretical instruction and practical training in various artisan skills, such as pattern drawing, repoussé (Metal Embossing), welding, and component assembly. Participants were given the opportunity to present their work and exchange knowledge with one another. As a result, seven new artisans gained knowledge and understanding of Phra Lak craftsmanship, as illustrated in Figure 21. This outcome marks a significant step toward the sustainable preservation and continuation of traditional artisanal wisdom in Nakhon Si Thammarat.



Figure 21 New-Generation Artisans who Completed the Training Program



Dissemination of Knowledge about Phra Lak from the Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage to the Public

The dissemination of knowledge about Phra Lak from the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage to the public was carried out through an exhibition titled "Phra Lak of Nakhon City." The exhibition included a presentation of research findings, a display of the Phra Lak Mae Yupa statue, and a ceremonial Phra Lak consecration to revive the traditional ritual. It also featured three creative artworks inspired by Phra Lak designs. An 8-minute documentary titled "Phra Lak of Nakhon City" was produced and published on social media via the Facebook pages of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, and Chang Sin Thin Nakhon (Local Artisan of Nakhon). An academic panel discussion titled "Local Artisans of Nakhon: Creative Economy Based on the Buddhist Way" was held alongside various cultural and creative economy activities to promote temple fair tourism in the new normal era. The event was called "The Wat Jan Temple Fair Festival" and took place at Wat Chantharam, Tha Wang Subdistrict, Mueang Nakhon Si Thammarat District, from June 16 to 20, 2022. Additionally, an e-book titled "Phra Lak: The Nakhon Si Thammarat Artisan Lineage" Published to the public through online platforms, such as Matichon Online Facebook page: Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation and various other channels was produced and published for public access.

The artisan lineage of Nakhon Si Thammarat has produced artistic works passed down through generations, rooted in deep Buddhist faith. Among these, the creation of Buddha images, particularly Phra Lak, holds significant cultural value for the province. Phra Lak figures are distinguished by unique craftsmanship, such as carving from golden jackfruit wood and decorating with silver, gold, and naak (A Gold-Copper Alloy). These statues are constructed in a puppet-like form with detachable parts. Such works not only reflect the artistic excellence of master artisans but also serve as a powerful source of inspiration for younger generations to carry on the tradition. Moreover, Phra Lak functions as a cultural medium connecting artisans across religious backgrounds, including Muslim craftsmen who play important roles in the production process. This collaboration demonstrates communal harmony, unity, and shared spiritual devotion, enhancing the identity and cultural landscape of Nakhon Si Thammarat in terms of Buddhist art and local tradition, as noted by Parinyokul (2024). The production and artistic adaptation of Phra Lak-inspired works have resulted in three functional and contemporary pieces: A table, a tray, and wall art. These works represent a practical application of traditional techniques in modern and commercial contexts. They show potential for further development into sustainable economic opportunities, enabling new generations of artisans to earn a livelihood through ancient techniques such as repoussé (Metal Embossing), silver overlay, and wood carving. These techniques can be applied to decorative items for buildings, tourist sites, wall installations, jewelry, and functional art. This research also contributed to the public dissemination of Phra Lak-related knowledge. A research exhibition was held to present findings, showcase Phra Lak artworks, and revive traditional Phra Lak consecration ceremonies. Knowledge was further distributed through various media, including an e-book, documentary video, and Facebook pages, making it accessible to a wide audience.



The creation of traditional Phra Lak statues in the style of the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage represents an art form that has been preserved and continuously developed since ancient times. It reflects a deep reservoir of artisanal wisdom, closely aligned with historical evidence and rich cultural narratives. According to Kophattha (2013), Buddha images from the Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage exhibit artistic characteristics that highlight the connection between Nakhon Si Thammarat and the Ayutthaya Kingdom during the 22nd-23rd Buddhist centuries and the early Rattanakosin period. This also aligns with Sriaram (2021), who stated that Buddha images are important, valuable, and have an influence on Thai society. According to Intharathep et al. (2017), this body of knowledge and craftsmanship, however, often resides solely in individuals and has not yet been systematically recorded or archived, placing it at risk of gradual disappearance over time. Therefore, it is crucial to actively promote the learning, transmission, celebration, and advancement of this local Buddhist artistic heritage, transforming it into a sustainable cultural foundation, a source of community pride, and a valuable form of cultural capital. This is in line with the needs of the Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture (2019). The creation of Phra Lak is thus not merely the production of religious art but also holds potential as a key mechanism for driving the creative economy and local economic development in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

At present, there are very few remaining artisan lineages involved in Buddha image creation in Nakhon Si Thammarat. However, when tracing back through the historical roots, it becomes evident that the Buddhist art traditions of the province were largely grounded in metalworking, particularly in silversmithing and niello craftsmanship, both of which are cultural hallmarks of Nakhon Si Thammarat. These artisans played a crucial role in the creation of Phra Lak, which stands as a highly valuable cultural and artistic heritage. Such an approach aligns with the SECI Model proposed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), which outlines a process for knowledge creation. In this case, the deeply embedded tacit knowledge of master artisans and the explicit knowledge of techniques and processes are passed on to younger generations through socialization. This is followed by externalization, whereby the internal knowledge of the older artisans is articulated and documented. The process continues with combination, wherein new models and creative innovations are developed, and finally internalization, in which the new generation absorbs and applies this knowledge, leading to the continuation and evolution of Buddhist artistic practices. This ensures that traditional craftsmanship becomes more widely recognized and applicable to contemporary artistic expressions. This concept is in accordance with Inpakdee and Suphakorn, (2016), who found that applying traditional Phra Lak patterns and techniques to product design helps meet modern consumer demands. By selecting appropriate materials and adapting patterns to suit practical use, artisans are able to enhance product value, create cultural significance, and generate income. It also corresponds with the findings of Thosata et al. (2020), who emphasized that the transmission of local wisdom involves transferring knowledge in a way that learners can understand and apply. This process often occurs naturally, outside of formal academic institutions, relying instead on intuitive social learning through imitation, observation, and generational inheritance within families and communities.



Therefore, the aforementioned process and techniques of Phra Lak creation can be further developed to generate sustainable economic income, enabling the younger generation to earn a living. This aligns with the work of Klangrit et al. (2025), which advocates for empowering youth to advance in their careers while achieving work-life balance. The use of traditional Buddhist artisan techniques, such as repoussé (Metal Embossing), silver overlay, and wood carving, can be creatively adapted into handcrafted works, decorative items for architectural spaces and tourist sites, including wall decorations (e.g., Wallpaper), jewelry, and utilitarian crafts. If a communication platform or intermediary were established to connect artisans with hotel and tourism businesses for pre-orders or commercial distribution, it could provide a viable source of income for local Buddhist artisans. These artisans, in turn, would likely be willing to carry on their local heritage. This perspective corresponds with the insights of Phra Maha Pongtharathit Kongsiang, & Buarapa (2015), who argued that Buddhism can play a vital role in economic development. This idea can also be analyzed through the Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework, which evaluates the social value generated from an investment. The Phra Lak creation process requires time and the transmission of artisanal wisdom from master craftsmen. By developing derivative handcrafted products from traditional Phra Lak designs, local communities can foster new economic opportunities. Young artisans gain income from their craftsmanship, while contributing to the preservation and revival of indigenous knowledge and building pride in their cultural roots. Currently, the scarcity of traditional craftsmen in Nakhon Si Thammarat poses a challenge in properly restoring cultural artifacts such as antique tools and ornaments passed down through family lineages. If these skills are passed on to the next generation, they would prove invaluable in conserving and restoring traditional heritage to its original beauty. This would support the growth of a creative economy that relies on intergenerational cooperation for the revival of Buddhist art, bridging local economy, aesthetics, and civilization with both local and global histories. Such a movement could be likened to a Renaissance, a revival of art and knowledge, positioning Nakhon Si Thammarat as a future cultural beacon of Thai civilization.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

The creation of Phra Lak in Nakhon Si Thammarat is not merely a means of preserving ancient art but a foundation for developing a creative economy, shared cultural identity, and a modern system of knowledge transmission. It has the potential to elevate local artisanship, generate careers for the younger generation, and project the city's unique identity onto national and international stages. The key contributions of this study are as follows:

1. Revival and Development of Knowledge about Phra Lak as a Form of Buddhist Heritage

Phra Lak is not only a form of craftsmanship but also a religious medium that embodies continuous faith-based creativity in Nakhon Si Thammarat.

2. Integration of Local Wisdom with Modern Disciplines to Create Contemporary Products

Traditional techniques, such as repoussé (Metal Embossing), silver overlay, and wood carving, were reimagined into modern designs, including tables, trays, and wall art. These traditional skills can be extended into the creative industry, with applications in hotel décor, tourist attractions, and

handmade products. This transforms Phra Lak from a niche religious artifact into a commercially viable product in the creative economy.

3. Interfaith Participation in Buddhist Art
- It was discovered that local Muslim artisans also contribute to the creation of Phra Lak, and are recognized as "Master Craftsmen." This reflects the concept of "Art as a Path to Peace" and highlights the interconnection between art and a culture of peace.
4. Dissemination and Awareness through Contemporary Media
- Modern communication technologies have enabled wider outreach and engagement across diverse audiences, enhancing the accessibility and visibility of Phra Lak-related knowledge.
5. A Community-Based Model for Creative Economic Development Rooted in Culture
- The findings demonstrate the potential of local Buddhist art as cultural capital, capable of generating sustainable employment for younger generations as shown in Figure 22.

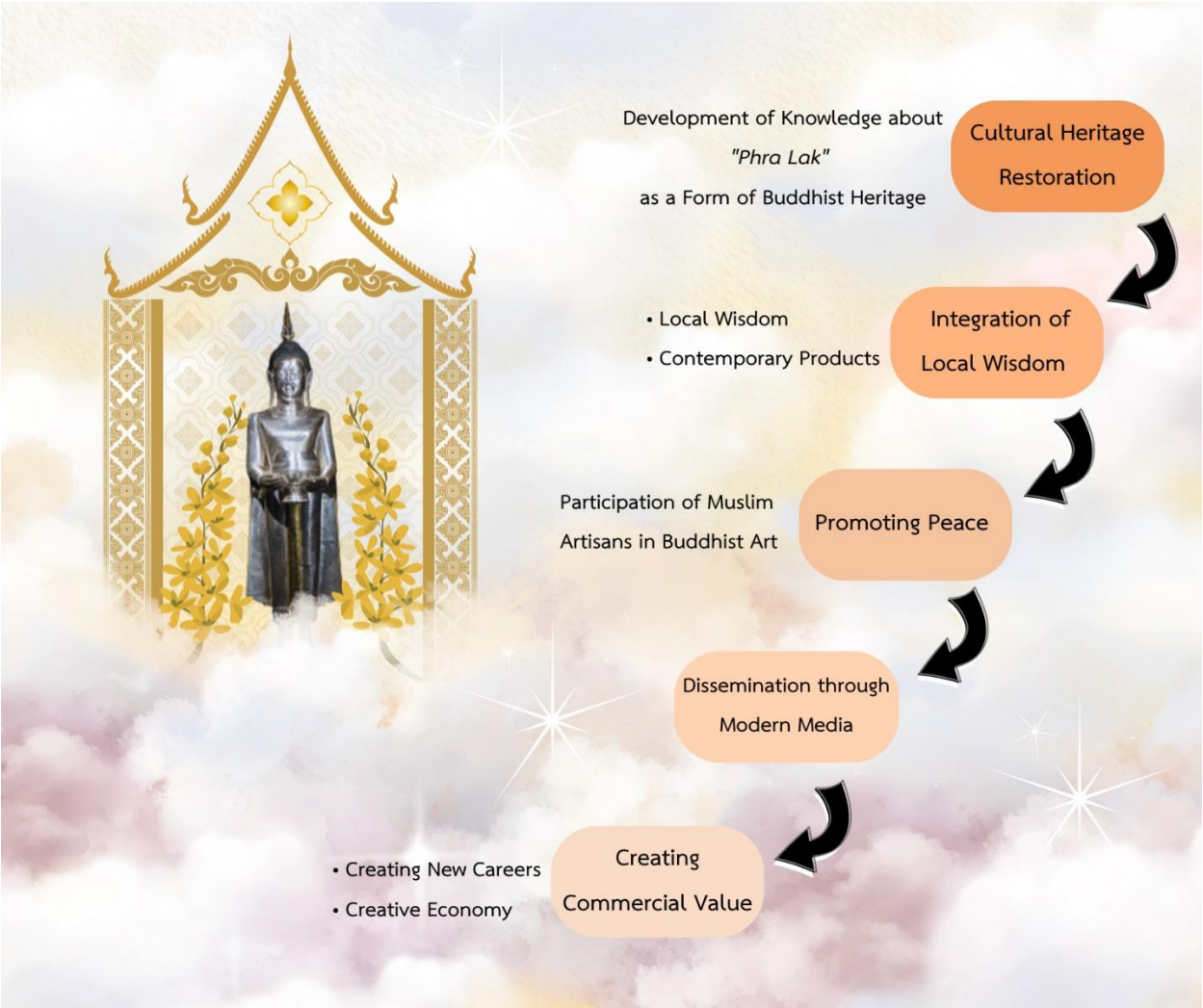


Figure 22 Framework for Developing "Phra Lak" into a Commercial Venture



Conclusions and Recommendations

The Nakhon Si Thammarat artisan lineage has long been renowned for its refined artistic techniques, particularly in the creation of Buddha images and Phra Lak figures. These images are characterized by their exquisite silver overlay, decorated with gold and other precious materials. However, due to the highly specialized and intricate nature of the production process, only a few skilled artisans remain today. This research emphasizes the preservation and advancement of Phra Lak craftsmanship through documentation, artistic innovation, practical training, and public dissemination via exhibitions, cultural ceremonies, and digital platforms. The government has an important role in sharing knowledge and supporting local handicrafts, helping them grow into products that can generate income, while also promoting the skills and status of the next generation of artisans. Funding should also be directed toward improving artisans' quality of life, nurturing young talent, and establishing centers for ongoing art and cultural learning. On top of that, research can play a role in finding ways to enhance artisans' livelihoods further, develop effective marketing strategies, and expand creative techniques into diverse designs that meet the needs of both consumers and entrepreneurs. If society, especially leaders at the community, provincial, and national levels, recognizes the significance and value of this traditional knowledge and collaborates to formulate policies and strategies for its revival, development, and innovation, it can pave the way toward sustainable preservation. Establishing public platforms such as craft exhibitions and artisan showcases would allow for the dissemination of local wisdom and provide opportunities for younger generations to learn the methods and creative processes of this artistic tradition.

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THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF BUDDHISM IN PROMOTING MONASTIC ADAPTATION AMID GLOBAL SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: In the context of accelerating globalization, digital disruption, and socio-political transformation, Thailand faces an increasing demand for governance models that are both ethically grounded and culturally responsive. As a predominantly Buddhist country, Thailand possesses a longstanding tradition of intertwining spiritual leadership with communal and civic functions. Thai Buddhist monks (Phra Song), once regarded primarily as spiritual guides, were now repositioning themselves as active agents in public affairs. This study aimed to investigate the evolving roles of Thai Buddhist monks in public administration, examined how Buddhist moral principles were integrated into policy and service delivery, and identified institutional opportunities and challenges in fostering monk-state collaboration toward ethical and community-centered governance.

Methodology: A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews and document analysis over a one-year period (2023-2024). Thirty key informants were purposively selected from three stakeholder groups: Senior monks involved in community development, government officials overseeing religious and social affairs, and lay scholars or local leaders familiar with both Buddhism and policy processes. Interviews were conducted in-person and virtually, recorded with consent, and analyzed using thematic coding. Documentary sources included state policies, Buddhist canonical texts, and relevant academic literature. Triangulation was used to validate findings across different data types and perspectives.

Main Results: The study revealed a significant shift in the role of Thai monks from primarily ceremonial and spiritual duties to active involvement in diverse public functions such as health promotion, environmental sustainability, youth development, and social welfare. This change was particularly evident in rural areas with limited state capacity, and monks served as informal administrators and moral leaders. Although formal state systems remain largely secular, there was a growing appreciation of the potential for Buddhist principles to enhance governance outcomes. Core values such as *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Saṅgahavatthu* (Social Harmony), and the *Majjhima Paṭṭipadā* (Middle Path) were being applied both formally and informally in public service initiatives, especially where



state and temple collaboration exists. However, significant barriers remain, including fragmented communication channels, a lack of formal institutional linkages between the Sangha and state agencies, and a general underutilization of monks' civic potential.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: The research showed that the integration of Buddhadhamma into public administration goes beyond symbolic references. Buddhist ethical frameworks offer concrete guidance for promoting participatory governance, conflict resolution, and equitable service provision. The study highlights how monks' involvement was not simply a religious duty but a form of moral public service, rooted in the Dhamma's emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, interdependence, and ethical leadership. These teachings serve as soft infrastructure to cultivate trust, legitimacy, and moral accountability in local governance. Moreover, monks trained in both spiritual and administrative competencies were found to be more effective collaborators with governmental and civil society actors, suggesting a new generation of hybrid civic leaders.

Conclusions: This study contributed original empirical and conceptual insights to the emerging field of religion-informed governance. It showed that Buddhist monks can function as co-governors in ethical, community-responsive, and culturally legitimate ways. Policy recommendations include establishing formal coordination mechanisms between the Sangha and state, developing integrated training programs that bridge Buddhist ethics and administrative skills, and institutionalizing participatory governance models that recognize monks as partners in public service. In a time of rapid societal change, such integrative approaches offer Thailand a culturally grounded pathway toward sustainable and ethical public administration.

Keywords: National Office of Buddhism, Monastic Adaptation, Global Social Transformations

Introduction

For centuries, Buddhism has played a central role in shaping Thai society's ethical and spiritual life. Traditionally, Buddhist monks were not just religious figures; They also acted as teachers, community advisors, and even mediators in local conflicts. With temples located at the heart of most villages, the Sangha (Monastic Community) was deeply tied to daily life, supported by close kinship-based communities and a relatively stable social structure (Buaban, 2021). The Sangha's administration was historically centralized under the Supreme Sangha Council (Mahathera Samakhom), mainly focusing on scriptural studies, discipline, and moral education in schools (Phrakru Siridhammapirat et al., 2024). This model worked well in a slower-changing world, one mostly untouched by Western thinking, globalization, or digital technologies. However, in recent decades, Thailand has undergone a significant transformation. Globalization, digital media, and shifting cultural norms have started to pull apart the traditional societal framework, especially in cities. Nowadays, many young Thais, especially those in urban areas, increasingly turn to science and secular worldviews, rather than religion. As a result, monks no longer played the central role in everyday life they once did (Berger, 1967); (Norris & Inglehart, 2004). As Berger pointed out, religious institutions in modern societies often become more private and less public.



That is what we are seeing in many parts of Thailand today traditional preaching no longer resonates strongly with younger audiences like it used to.

This shift was further compounded by the lack of institutional support for monks to adapt to today's challenges. The National Office of Buddhism (NOB) oversees religious affairs. However, it focuses mostly on maintaining ceremonies and rituals rather than equipping monks with skills for the modern world (Thaisuntad, 2023). Training programs in areas like digital tools, communication, or sustainable development were still rare and often not well organized. On top of that, there was a disconnect between national-level religious policies and the realities faced by local temples. This created a patchy approach to reform, where some areas make progress while others fall behind Phrarat Sittivetee et al. (2023) It is worth noting that religious institutions do not have to become irrelevant. Casanova (1994) argued that they can still have a positive role in social development if there's real collaboration across sectors, including policy, academia, and civil society. Similarly, Satasut (2019) pointed out that any successful Buddhist reform would need cooperation between the state, the Sangha, and civic groups.

Interestingly, Keyes (1989) discussed how Buddhism has historically had the power to influence Thai politics and society, especially during times of change. That potential still exists today, but the NOB must take a more strategic role to harness it. This project looks at how the NOB actually helped the Sangha adapt to today's fast-changing world. It's not just about giving monks new skills; It's also about bridging religious life with the real-life struggles people face now. The research also tries to find down-to-earth, long-term ways to make that more effective. At the heart of it, this isn't only about preserving Buddhist traditions. It's about making sure that Buddhism can still guide people morally in a world that's constantly shifting.

Objectives

This study aimed to investigate the evolving roles of Thai Buddhist monks in public administration, examined how Buddhist moral principles were integrated into policy and service delivery, and identified institutional opportunities and challenges in fostering monk-state collaboration toward ethical and community-centered governance.

Methodology

Stakeholder Engagement:

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how the National Office of Buddhism (NOB) in Thailand supported Buddhist monks in adapting to ongoing global social transformations. To gain a broad yet detailed understanding, key stakeholders were purposively selected (Charmaz, 2014). Participants were drawn from three core groups: 1) Senior officers and policymakers at the NOB (5 Participants); 2) Monks actively engaged in digital outreach and social initiatives across urban and rural communities (10 Participants); and 3) Academics, policy experts, and laypeople with close interactions with the monastic community (5 Participants). The diverse composition of stakeholders allowed the research to reflect a wide spectrum of experiences, expectations, and insights related to monastic adaptation in a rapidly evolving socio-cultural context.



Implementation Process:

The research was conducted between June 2023 and May 2024, covering both central administrative locations and community-based temples. Instruments for data collection included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis. These tools were validated by experts in Buddhist studies, public policy, and governance to ensure relevance and reliability. The semi-structured interview guide focused on themes such as institutional strategy, leadership roles, digital engagement, and policy implementation processes. The research also made use of digital communication platforms, like LINE and Zoom, which proved especially helpful when geographic constraints limited in-person interaction.

Data Collection:

Three main data collection methods were used: First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants across policy and practitioner levels. The flexibility of this format allowed participants to expand on their views, particularly in areas relating to policy design, challenges in religious adaptation, and their personal or institutional experiences with digital and community initiatives; Second, focus group discussions were held with monks and laypeople who regularly interact, allowing for rich, interactive dialogue about the evolving role of monastics in the digital era. These sessions surfaced key concerns and hopes about the sustainability of monastic roles in contemporary society; And third, documentary research was used to examine policy texts, internal reports from the NOB, strategic frameworks, and academic work related to religious governance and adaptation strategies. Digital tools were essential throughout the data collection phase. Online interviews via Google Meet and Zoom provided flexibility and a more relaxed environment, which often led to more open and detailed responses. Informal communication through messaging apps also allowed for follow-up and clarification without disrupting the daily routines of the participants.

Data Analysis:

Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), supported by elements of narrative analysis to capture contextual nuances. Audio recordings from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and reviewed to identify recurring patterns, ideas, and themes such as policy gaps, technology integration, and public expectations of the monkhood. Codes were grouped into broader themes reflecting both the challenges and strategic opportunities faced by the NOB. Throughout the analysis, triangulation was employed to ensure credibility, comparing findings across sources and methods. An audit trail was maintained to document decisions and analytical steps, supporting transparency and dependability (Morse & Richards, 2002). This approach aimed to produce actionable insights and policy recommendations that align with the lived realities of Thai monks and the structural role of the NOB in shaping religious life in a changing world.

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the roles and adaptations of Thai Buddhist monks within the evolving landscape of Buddhist public service amidst global socio-political transformations. Conducted over a one-year period (2023-2024; B.E. 2566-2567),



the research adopts a dual-method approach: In-depth interviews and documentary analysis. This methodology aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) advocacy for context-sensitive, exploratory inquiry into complex human phenomena, particularly within spiritual and value-laden domains. Furthermore, the study draws on Phramaha Pongthep Papakro (Loprsoet) (2021) interpretive framework, which emphasizes religious agency and the performative dimensions of Buddhist civic engagement as essential to understanding public religiosity.

Stakeholder Engagement:

To ensure a multidimensional perspective, the research identifies and engages three key stakeholder groups: 1) Senior monks actively involved in community development and social service; 2) Government officials responsible for religious affairs and administrative oversight; and 3) Academics and community leaders with expertise in Buddhist ethics and socio-cultural transformation. A total of 30 participants (10 From Each Stakeholder Group) were selected through purposive sampling, based on their expertise, experience, and relevance to the research objectives. This was a deliberate sampling strategy supported by triangulation of perspectives, enhancing the credibility of the findings, and was consistent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) principles of rigorous participant selection in qualitative research.

Implementation Process:

The research commenced with an extensive literature review focused on Buddhist principles of governance, moral leadership, and public service delivery. Insights from this review informed the development of the interview protocol and guided the thematic framing of the study. Following institutional ethical approval, participants were contacted and provided with clear information about the research purpose, confidentiality, and their rights as informants. Interviews were conducted in both face-to-face and virtual formats, depending on participant availability and geographic location. Each interview lasted approximately 15-30 minutes and was audio-recorded with informed consent, then transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. Concurrently, the study undertook document analysis, reviewing policy papers, canonical Buddhist texts, state administrative guidelines, and recent academic literature relevant to Buddhist public administration. The analytical procedures adhered to accepted standards for documentary analysis in qualitative research.

Data Collection and Data Analysis:

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and systematic document analysis. The study applied thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, discursive themes, and institutional tensions. Coding was conducted manually using an iterative process, with findings regularly validated through peer debriefings and analytical memos to enhance inter-coder reliability and confirmability. Methodological triangulation, the integration of interview data with documentary sources, was employed to strengthen the validity of the findings and ensure data convergence. This was a comprehensive analytical strategy that enabled the construction of an empirically grounded understanding of how Thai Buddhist monks contributed to public administration,

particularly within a Buddhist moral framework that was increasingly shaped by globalization, digitalization, and shifting societal values (Creswell & Poth, 2018), as shown in Figure 1.

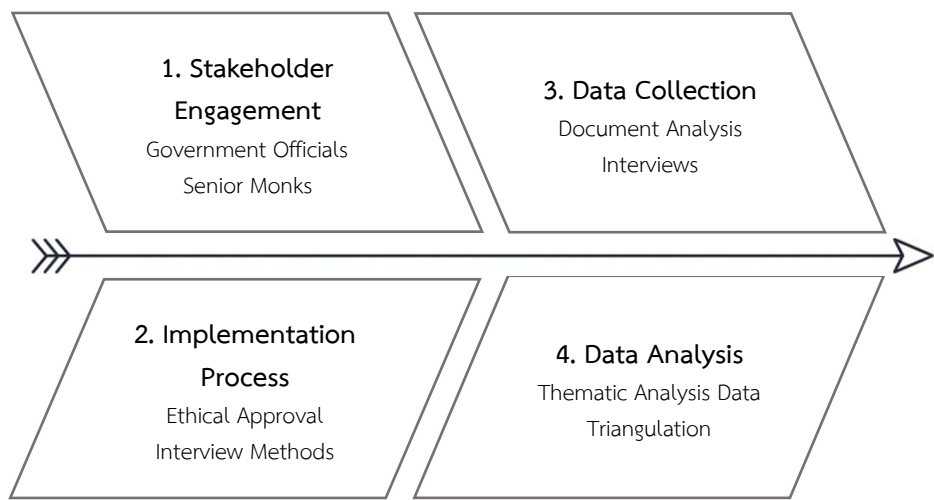


Figure 1 Analysis of the Roles of Thai Monks in Public Administration

Results and Discussion

Findings Related to Objective 1: The Evolving Roles of Thai Buddhist Monks in Public Administration Amidst Global Social Transformation. The findings related to the first research objective revealed a significant transition in the functional roles of Thai Buddhist monks, from traditional religious and ceremonial responsibilities to more diverse and engaged roles in contemporary public affairs. The study showed that monks were increasingly involved in community development, conflict mediation, social welfare, and environmental stewardship, marking a paradigmatic shift from purely spiritual figures to quasi-public actors within the broader governance framework. This transformation was deeply influenced by forces such as globalization, changing socio-cultural dynamics, and the evolving relationship between religious institutions and the state. As Larsson (2018) emphasizes, the Thai Sangha should not be viewed as a monolithic religious entity but as an institutionally governed body integrated into the apparatus of the modern Thai state. This institutional structure has led monks to assume dual roles: As moral-religious leaders and as informal agents of public administration. Monks were frequently called upon to serve as intermediaries between state agencies and grassroots communities, to offer moral legitimacy in policy discourse, and to safeguard cultural continuity amid external disruptions. This aligns with Phrakru Arunsutalangarn (2023) argument that effective monastic leadership in the context of globalization requires a redefinition of temple governance incorporating principles from modern public administration, such as participatory decision-making, transparency, and responsiveness. Interview data reinforces these theoretical insights. Senior monks recounted their involvement in village planning committees, youth education programs, and public health campaigns. Community members also acknowledged the monks' moral authority and their ability to influence local decision-making processes in ways that elected officials often cannot. One informant noted that "The abbot was



the only person that everyone listened to during village meetings, even the local council." Thus, the evolving role of Thai Buddhist monks reflects not merely a passive response to global pressures but a strategic adaptation to the demands of contemporary governance and socio-cultural transformation. By leveraging traditional Buddhist values within modern governance frameworks, monks were increasingly positioned as hybrid actors merging spiritual legitimacy with civic functionality to support ethical, inclusive, and community-based public service delivery.

Findings Related to Objective 2: The Integration of Buddhist Principles into Public Administration and Policy Implementation in Thailand. In addressing the second objective, the study uncovers a nuanced yet evolving interface between Buddhist moral philosophy and contemporary administrative practices in Thailand. The analysis of interview data from monks, government officials, and community leaders revealed a growing acknowledgment of the relevance and utility of Buddhist ethical principles in supporting good governance, participatory policymaking, and social cohesion despite the predominantly secular framework of formal public institutions. While state administrative systems continue to rely on legal-rational norms and standardized procedures, stakeholders increasingly recognize the value of Buddhist teachings in addressing governance challenges such as conflict resolution, inclusive service delivery, and community empowerment. Notably, senior monks and village leaders consistently referred to core Buddhist concepts such as *sanghavatthu* (Principles of Harmonious Social Relations), *karuṇā* (Compassion), and *Majjhima paṭipadā* (The Middle Path) as guiding values for ethical leadership and public integrity. These moral tenets, according to several respondents, can serve as normative frameworks that enhance public administration by promoting moral discretion, deliberative consensus, and social equity. For example, participants cited cases where local temples cooperated with subdistrict administrative organizations (SAOs) to co-produce public services ranging from health education and poverty alleviation to environmental sustainability projects. Such initiatives reflect an emergent form of faith-based collaborative governance rooted in local Buddhist traditions. These findings align with Subrahmanyam (2018) conceptualization of Thai Buddhism as engaged in a "Worldly Deal," a strategic blending of spiritual values with state-led development and regulatory regimes. Moreover, the work of Phra Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto) (2009) reinforces the view that enduring social transformation must be grounded in moral cultivation and spiritual consciousness, rather than being solely dependent on technocratic reform or institutional restructuring. The data suggest that Buddhist moral frameworks, if appropriately integrated, can enhance the soft infrastructure of public governance in Thailand by embedding a culture of mindfulness, ethical responsiveness, and communal responsibility. While this integration remains informal and uneven, particularly more prominent in rural areas, it shows clear potential for supporting localized, culturally embedded, and ethically grounded approaches to public administration. To sum up, the incorporation of Buddhist thought into Thai public administration represents both a promising and feasible trajectory. It offers contextually appropriate alternatives to enhance institutional legitimacy, social trust, and



participatory governance, especially amid the broader uncertainties of global political and economic transformation.

Findings Related to Objective 3: Challenges and Opportunities for Enhancing Collaboration Between the Sangha and State Institutions in Ethical and Community-Centered Governance. In examining the third research objective, the study identified a complex interplay of structural and cultural factors that shape the degree and quality of collaboration between the Buddhist monastic community (The Sangha) and formal state institutions in advancing ethical, community-oriented governance. While there were notable initiatives that showed successful partnerships, significant challenges remain, particularly in terms of institutional coordination, communication, and mutual legitimacy. A primary obstacle revealed through stakeholder interviews was the lack of institutionalized communication channels and the absence of formal coordination mechanisms between the Sangha and state administrative bodies. Many monastic respondents expressed concern that key policies related to moral education, social development, and community welfare were often crafted and implemented by secular authorities without substantive consultation with religious leaders. This was disconnected, resulting in fragmented efforts, missed synergies, and, in some cases, conflicting interventions. These findings resonate with Jones (2008) who argue that while Buddhism in Thailand retains a significant cultural authority, its involvement in state-led reform processes was frequently symbolic or tokenistic, rather than integrated in a meaningful or operational capacity. This was institutional marginalization that limited the capacity of monks to contribute to normative policy discourse and value-based program design, despite their historical role as community leaders. Conversely, the study also highlights several promising opportunities for functional collaboration. Notably, decentralized Sangha networks have independently initiated programs that address urgent social needs, particularly in rural and underserved communities. These include health education campaigns, environmental preservation efforts, and youth rehabilitation programs. Such activities underscore the potential of monastic leadership as an embedded local governance actor, particularly in areas where state presence was minimal. The work of Phra Krawibulkijsunthorn (2011) supported this perspective, emphasizing that effective Sangha governance anchored in collective planning, participatory leadership, and spiritual ethics can serve as a foundation for morality-driven local governance. Furthermore, the study found that monks who have received formal training in public administration, development studies, or social work exhibit greater confidence and capacity to engage with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and cross-sector stakeholders. This points to a critical policy lever: The development of integrated capacity-building programs that blend Buddhist moral teachings with modern governance competencies. Joint training initiatives facilitated by academic institutions, state agencies, and the Sangha Supreme Council could foster shared knowledge systems, administrative fluency, and collaborative problem-solving across institutional divides. To sum up, the pathway toward enhanced monk-state collaboration lies in the National Office of Buddhism (NOB) erization of dialogue, mutual



capacity enhancement, and the recognition of monks not merely as religious figures but as co-governors in ethical, culturally resonant, and community-driven development. Such an approach would strengthen Thailand's pursuit of holistic governance models that were both normatively grounded and practically inclusive.

Originality and Body of Knowledge

This study provides a significant and original contribution to the interdisciplinary discourse on religion and public administration by highlighting the dynamic and evolving role of Thai Buddhist monks within contemporary governance frameworks. In contrast to earlier scholarship that has often portrayed the Sangha as a static or insulated religious institution, this research presents empirical evidence of the gradual transformation of monastic roles in response to globalization, state decentralization, and emerging community needs. Through a triangulated qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews with monastic leaders, state officials, and lay scholars, the study offers rare and context-rich insights into how monks function as both spiritual custodians and civic actors. This dual role not only redefines traditional religious authority but also positions the Sangha as an active stakeholder in public policy processes, community development, and ethical governance. The research expands the body of knowledge by demonstrating how core Buddhist moral principles, including *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Saṅghavattthu* (Social Cohesion), and the *Majjhima Paṭipadā* (Middle Path), were being operationalized within public administration and policy implementation in Thailand. These findings provide concrete examples of value-based leadership practices rooted in Buddhist teachings, particularly in domains such as social welfare, environmental stewardship, and conflict mediation. Moreover, the study contributed a novel perspective by critically examining the National Office of Buddhism (NOB) interface between the Sangha and state actors. It identifies key limitations such as fragmented communication, lack of formal collaborative frameworks, and policy disjunctions while also highlighting emergent best practices and avenues for institutional innovation. Of particular note was the proposal to develop integrated training programs that combine Buddhist ethical foundations with contemporary administrative competencies, thereby creating hybrid leadership models suited to culturally embedded and ethically conscious governance. The study bridges a critical gap between normative Buddhist philosophy and the practical mechanics of public sector governance. It offers a culture-informed alternative governance paradigm that was especially relevant for societies undergoing rapid transformation yet seeking to preserve spiritual continuity and moral coherence. In doing so, the research advances both theoretical and applied understandings of religion-informed governance, and positions the Thai Sangha as a viable contributor to the future of participatory, ethical, and community-centered public administration in Southeast Asia and beyond, as shown in Figure 2.

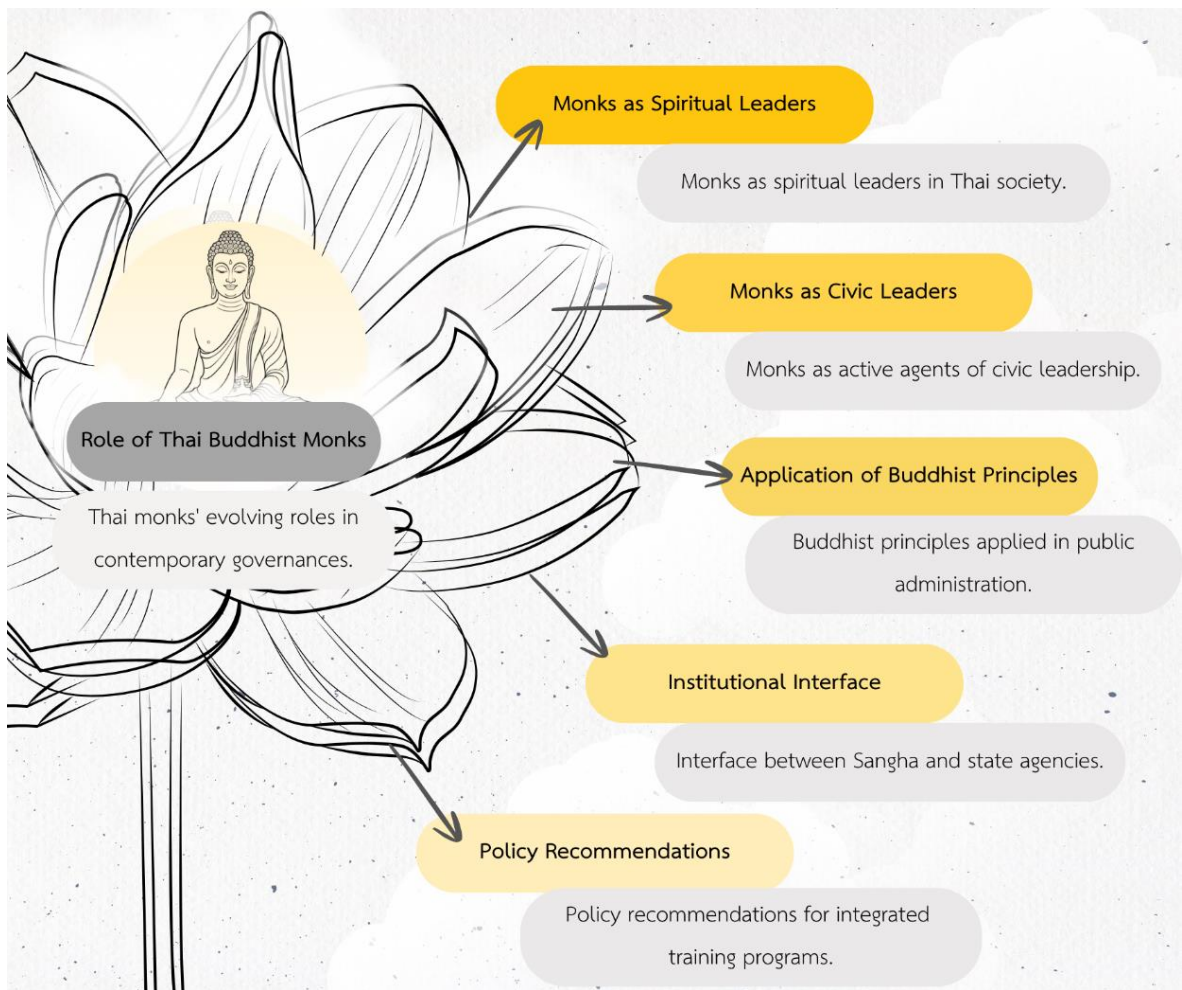


Figure 2 The Multifaceted Roles of Thai Buddhist Monks

Conclusions and Recommendations

Thai Buddhist monks were increasingly stepping beyond their traditional spiritual roles and becoming more involved in public service, especially in rural areas where government presence was limited. Global socio-political changes and evolving ties between religion and the state partly influenced this shift. Today, monks play active roles in areas like community development, policy advising, and leading social initiatives. Their approach brings together Buddhist moral values like *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Saṅghavattṭhu* (Social Cohesion), and *Majjhima Paṭipadā* (The Middle Path) with modern public administration, creating a hybrid form of governance that emphasizes fairness, transparency, and citizen-centered service. However, this growing engagement faces challenges, particularly the lack of formal systems that allow smooth cooperation between the Sangha and government bodies. Without clear communication and collaboration, policy impact remains limited. To move forward, the study suggests a few key steps: Set up formal collaboration platforms at local and provincial levels; Create joint training programs that mix Buddhist ethics with public administration skills; And promote inclusive governance models that recognize monks as ethical guides in community decision-making. These recommendations aimed



to connect spiritual and administrative leadership better, helping Thailand build a governance system that balances moral values with effective service delivery in a rapidly changing society.

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นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ
ของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช
THE POLICY AND PROMOTION ON PAGODA PILGRIMAGE
TO ENHANCE BUDDHIST TOURISM OF PHRA BOROMMATHAT CHEDI,
NAKHON SI THAMMARAT

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บทคัดย่อ

ความเป็นมาและวัตถุประสงค์: พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราชเป็นศาสนาสถานสำคัญที่มีคุณค่าทางประวัติศาสตร์และวัฒนธรรม ทั้งในระดับประเทศและอาเซียน อีกทั้งยังเป็นศูนย์กลางการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธและเป็นแหล่งเรียนรู้ทางศาสนาที่สำคัญและได้มาตรฐาน สามารถรองรับความต้องการการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธและเป็นที่พักพิงของนักท่องเที่ยวทั้งในระดับประเทศและระดับโลก โดยรักษามรดกทางวัฒนธรรมและคุณค่าของสภาพแวดล้อมในชุมชนท้องถิ่นที่เกิดจากการมีส่วนร่วมของประชาชนในการบริหารจัดการการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ เพื่อจะสามารถตอบสนองความต้องการของนักท่องเที่ยวที่เผชิญกับการเปลี่ยนแปลงสภาพแวดล้อมต่าง ๆ ได้ต่อไป ผู้วิจัยได้สนใจศึกษานโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช เพื่อจะสามารถดำรงไว้ซึ่งประวัติศาสตร์และวัฒนธรรมอันสวยงาม โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์ คือ เพื่อวิเคราะห์นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญต่อการหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ เพื่อส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญต่อการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช และเพื่อสร้างเครือข่ายการแสวงบุญต่อการหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช

วิธีดำเนินการวิจัย: เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยการวิเคราะห์เอกสารและการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกับกลุ่มผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญจำนวน 25 คน พัฒนาชุดความรู้ใช้กับกลุ่มเป้าหมาย จำนวน 30 คน พร้อมทั้งประเมินผลด้วยการสังเกตการณ์แบบไม่เป็นทางการแล้วรวบรวมข้อมูลอีกครั้งด้วยการสนทนากลุ่มเฉพาะจากผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ จำนวน 10 รูป/คน

ผลการวิจัย: 1) นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญเพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธเน้นการพัฒนาแหล่งท่องเที่ยวทางศาสนา โดยมีการบูรณาการความร่วมมือจากทุกภาคเพื่อเชื่อมโยงกับการพัฒนาชุมชน เศรษฐกิจ และวัฒนธรรมอย่างครบถ้วน 2) การส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญต่อการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช เพื่อให้พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์กลายเป็นจุดหมายปลายทางเชิงศาสนาแห่งสำคัญในระดับอาเซียน และ 3) การสร้างเครือข่ายการแสวงบุญต่อการหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช เป็นอีกหนึ่งยุทธศาสตร์สำคัญ โดยยึดหลักการมีส่วนร่วมเพื่อสร้างความยั่งยืนทางเศรษฐกิจ สังคม และวัฒนธรรม พร้อมส่งเสริมภาพลักษณ์ของจังหวัดในฐานะแหล่งท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาในระดับประเทศ



ความเกี่ยวข้องกับหลักธรรมคำสอนทางพระพุทธศาสนา: การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีแนวคิดเป็นพระพุทธศาสนาประยุกต์ คือ นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช มีความเกี่ยวข้องกับหลักธรรมคำสอนทางพระพุทธศาสนา โดยเฉพาะ ขันติ (ความอดทน) สมาธิ (ความตั้งมั่นของจิต) และปัญญา (ความรู้แจ้งเห็นจริง) ที่เป็นคุณธรรมพื้นฐานที่นำไปสู่การพัฒนาทั้งทางด้านบุคคล สังคม และการดำเนินนโยบาย อันเป็นกลไกสำคัญที่สามารถตอบสนองความคาดหวังของนักท่องเที่ยวสมัยใหม่ ภายใต้การรักษาคุณค่าทางวัฒนธรรม และการมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนท้องถิ่นในการบริหารจัดการพื้นที่และกิจกรรมท่องเที่ยวอย่างมีส่วนร่วมและยั่งยืน

สรุป: การส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญในมิตินโยบาย ไม่เพียงแต่ช่วยเพิ่มศักยภาพด้านการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา แต่ยังเป็นแนวทางในการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรม พัฒนาคุณภาพชีวิตของชุมชน และสร้างภาพลักษณ์ใหม่ของจังหวัดในฐานะแหล่งท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธระดับชาติ และนานาชาติ ที่มีการเชื่อมโยงศาสนา วัฒนธรรม และเศรษฐกิจเข้าด้วยกันอย่างสมดุล ซึ่งการดำเนินงานในแนวทางดังกล่าวนี้จำเป็นต้องอาศัยความร่วมมือจากภาครัฐ ภาคเอกชน และภาคประชาสังคมอย่างเป็นระบบและต่อเนื่อง เพื่อให้สามารถดำรงอยู่ได้อย่างยั่งยืนและเกิดประโยชน์สูงสุดต่อสังคมโดยรวม

คำสำคัญ: นโยบาย, การแสวงบุญ, พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์, การท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ, นครศรีธรรมราช

Abstract

Background and Objectives: Phra Borommathat Chedi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, is a prominent religious tourism destination and a key center for cultural and educational enrichment, both nationally and within the ASEAN region. Moreover, it serves as a center for Buddhist tourism and an important, well-established religious learning site, capable of meeting the demands of Buddhist tourism and impressing both domestic and international visitors. The site also preserves cultural heritage and safeguards the environmental integrity of the local community, which actively engages in the sustainable management of Buddhist tourism. This participatory approach strengthens the site's capacity to respond to the evolving needs of tourists amidst changing environmental and societal conditions. In this context, the researcher has focused on examining policy frameworks for promoting pilgrimage tourism, with the aim of reinforcing Buddhist tourism at Phra Borommathat Chedi in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The overarching goal is to contribute to the preservation of the site's rich historical and cultural legacy. The specific objectives of the study are: To analyze policies relevant to promoting pilgrimage tourism as a means of supporting Buddhist tourism; To enhance pilgrimage activities that contribute to Buddhist tourism development at Phra Borommathat Chedi; and To establish a collaborative pilgrimage tourism network that strengthens Buddhist tourism in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative research approach, combining document analysis with in-depth interviews of 25 key informants. A knowledge package was developed and implemented with a target group of 30 participants, and the outcomes were assessed through informal observation. Data were further collected via a focused group discussion with involving 10 experts.



Main Results: 1) A policy promoting pilgrimage tourism focuses on the development of religious sites through cross-sectoral collaboration, aiming to integrate community, economic, and cultural development. 2) Pilgrimage promotion at Phra Borommathat Chedi, Nakhon Si Thammarat, seeks to position the site as a leading religious destination in ASEAN and 3) Establishing a pilgrimage tourism network in Nakhon Si Thammarat is a strategic initiative that adopted participatory approaches to ensure sustainable economic, social, and cultural growth, while enhancing the province's image as a premier religious tourism hub.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: This research is grounded in the concept of applied Buddhism, wherein the policy to promote pilgrimage tourism at Phra Borommathat Chedi is rooted in the core teachings of Buddhism, particularly the virtues of Khanti (Patience), Samādhī (Mental concentration), and Paññā (Wisdom). These values are the moral foundation for personal development, social advancement, and effective policy implementation. This approach serves as a vital mechanism for meeting the expectations of modern tourists while preserving cultural values. It also underscores the importance of active community participation in managing tourism spaces and activities, ensuring inclusivity and long-term sustainability.

Conclusions: Promoting pilgrimage through policy dimensions enhances the potential of religious tourism and serves as a means to preserve culture, improve the quality of life of local communities, and establish a new image of the province as a national and international Buddhist tourism destination. This image reflects the balanced integration of religion, culture, and economy. Achieving this vision requires systematic and continuous collaboration among government agencies, the private sector, and civil society to ensure sustainability and generate the greatest benefits for society.

Keywords: Policy, Pilgrimage, Phra Borommathat Chedi, Buddhist Tourism, Nakhon Si Thammarat

บทนำ

แผนแม่บทภายใต้ยุทธศาสตร์ชาติ ด้านการท่องเที่ยวให้ความสำคัญกับการพัฒนาประเทศให้เป็นจุดหมายปลายทางของการท่องเที่ยวระดับโลก โดยมุ่งการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวทั้งระบบ มุ่งเน้นดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวกลุ่มคุณภาพ สร้างความหลากหลายของผลิตภัณฑ์และบริการท่องเที่ยว ให้สอดคล้องกับความต้องการของนักท่องเที่ยว และพัฒนาสาขาการท่องเที่ยวที่มีศักยภาพ ควบคู่กับการรักษาจุดเด่นของประเทศด้านขนบธรรมเนียม ประเพณี วัฒนธรรม อัตลักษณ์ความเป็นไทย และการให้คุณค่ากับสิ่งแวดล้อม ทั้งนี้ ในระยะแรกของแผนการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยว 20 ปี มีเป้าหมายเพิ่มรายได้จากการท่องเที่ยวและบริการ โดยตั้งเป้าให้ประเทศไทยมีรายได้จากนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติไม่ต่ำกว่า 1.2 ล้านล้านบาท และนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยไม่ต่ำกว่า 5 แสนล้านบาท (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2018) สำหรับการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อสืบสานศาสนา ศิลปะและวัฒนธรรมไทยอันดีงามให้ดำรงอยู่คู่ชาติไทย ในแผนแม่บทได้กำหนดให้ใช้รูปแบบการส่งเสริมที่มีเป้าหมายชัดเจน (Focus & Prioritized) และส่งเสริมให้เครือข่ายในทุกพื้นที่มีส่วนร่วมในการจัดกิจกรรมทางศาสนา ศิลปะและวัฒนธรรมที่เป็นประโยชน์กับประเทศชาติ บ่มเพาะปลูก จิตสำนึกและเผยแพร่คุณค่าทางศาสนา ศิลปะและวัฒนธรรม ขนบธรรมเนียมประเพณีของชาติ กระตุ้นให้คนในชุมชนรักผูกพันในบ้านเกิด และภาคภูมิใจในวัฒนธรรมของท้องถิ่น มีศรัทธาและยึดมั่นในศาสนาเพื่อให้เป็นแหล่งสร้างรายได้สู่ภูมิภาค ทุกชุมชนให้สามารถเข้าไปมีส่วนในการเพิ่มรายได้เข้าสู่ประเทศและสร้างเสริมสังคมคุณธรรมที่มีความสงบสุข โดยมีวัดที่เป็นทุนทางสังคมที่มีศักยภาพ เป็นแหล่งท่องเที่ยวที่มีกิจกรรมทางศาสนาที่มีคุณค่าต่อการพัฒนาจิตใจ



ของคนทุกวัยทั้งชาวต่างชาติและชาวไทย ดังนั้น การสร้างเสริมให้วัดเป็นแหล่งท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ จึงเป็นการใช้ทรัพยากรที่เป็นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมให้เกิดประโยชน์สูงสุดต่อคนในชุมชนและยังสามารถดำรงรักษาไว้ซึ่งบทบาทสำคัญของวัดในอดีตให้คงอยู่ตลอดไป โดยยึดความต้องการของประชาชนในพื้นที่เป็นสำคัญ (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2002)

แผนพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช พ.ศ. 2564-2566 ได้กำหนดวิสัยทัศน์ไว้ว่า “นครศรีธรรมราช เมืองศูนย์กลางการท่องเที่ยวเชิงอนุรักษ์ และวัฒนธรรมของภาคใต้” (Nakhon Si Thammarat Province Office, 2020) ปัจจุบันนักท่องเที่ยวเปลี่ยนแปลงความต้องการจากการท่องเที่ยวเพื่อพักผ่อนหรือพบเห็นสิ่งแปลกใหม่กลายเป็นการท่องเที่ยวที่เน้นการมีประสบการณ์โดยตรง โดยการเข้าไปเรียนรู้และมีส่วนร่วมในกิจกรรมทางวัฒนธรรมของสังคมที่ตนไปท่องเที่ยวอย่างลึกซึ้งมากขึ้น รูปแบบการท่องเที่ยวแนวใหม่ที่คาดว่าจะได้รับความนิยมนับจากนี้และอาจจะเป็นโอกาสทางการตลาดของกลุ่มเอสเอ็มอีในอุตสาหกรรมท่องเที่ยวได้ คือ การท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา (Religious Tourism) เป็นการท่องเที่ยวอีกรูปแบบหนึ่งที่ได้รับการนิยมนับอย่างมา จากนักท่องเที่ยวชาวไทยในปัจจุบัน โดยให้ความสนใจเป็นพิเศษกับวัด แหล่งโบราณสถาน และสถานที่ปฏิบัติธรรม (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2022) ด้วยเหตุผลที่ว่า วัดจัดเป็นมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมของประเทศไทย ที่มีเอกลักษณ์เฉพาะตัวและมีการถ่ายทอดมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมมาช้านาน โดยนักท่องเที่ยวมีความเชื่อว่า การได้สักการะสิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์ในวัดจะนำมาซึ่งความเป็นสิริมงคลแก่ชีวิต จุดประสงค์ของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา คือ การท่องเที่ยวพักผ่อนทางกายเหมือนกับการท่องเที่ยวในบริบทอื่น ๆ และแสวงหาความสงบวิเวกทางใจ ผ่านสื่อกลางทางศาสนาความเชื่อและความคาดหวังที่จะได้รับการเติมเต็มทางใจในรูปแบบของโชคลาภจากเครื่องรางของขลังและสิ่งลี้ลับที่เชื่อว่ามีปาฏิหาริย์แฝงอยู่ในนั้น ซึ่งการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาและความเชื่อเป็นวัฒนธรรมที่สัมพันธ์เกื้อกูลต่อกัน การท่องเที่ยวเชิงพุทธศาสนามีลักษณะเป็นการเดินทางเพื่อการศึกษา เรียนรู้ และปฏิบัติในแนวทางที่ถูกตองตามหลักพระพุทธศาสนา (Phetwong, 2018) การเดินทางเพื่อพัฒนาคุณภาพชีวิตและจิตใจของผู้เดินทางให้มีความรู้ ความเข้าใจในการดำเนินชีวิตอย่างถูกต้อง การเดินทางเพื่อสร้างความสัมพันธ์อันดีงามระหว่างเพื่อนมนุษย์ หมู่วัตถุ สังคม และสิ่งแวดล้อม การเดินทางเพื่อสร้างประโยชน์ ความสงบสุข สันติภาพ ต่อมวลมนุษยและสรรพสิ่งอย่างเกื้อกูล (Sirirattthami, 2011) กล่าวคือ แผนพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช (พ.ศ. 2564-2566) มุ่งเน้นการเป็น “ศูนย์กลางการท่องเที่ยวเชิงอนุรักษ์และวัฒนธรรมของภาคใต้” เพื่อตอบสนองต่อแนวโน้มการท่องเที่ยวที่เปลี่ยนจากการพักผ่อนทั่วไปสู่การแสวงหาประสบการณ์เชิงลึกและการมีส่วนร่วมกับวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่น หนึ่งในรูปแบบที่ได้รับการนิยมนับ คือ การท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา โดยเฉพาะการท่องเที่ยววัด โบราณสถาน และสถานที่ปฏิบัติธรรม เนื่องจากสะท้อนมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมไทยและความเชื่อเรื่องสิริมงคล จุดมุ่งหมายไม่เพียงเพื่อการพักผ่อนทางกาย แต่ยังเพื่อความสงบทางใจ การพัฒนาคุณภาพชีวิตและความสัมพันธ์กับสังคมและสิ่งแวดล้อม ทั้งยังสอดคล้องกับแนวคิดการท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืนและการจัดการที่ใช้ชุมชนเป็นฐาน อีกด้วย

ภาคใต้ หรือแดนใต้ เป็นดินแดนงดงามด้วยอารยธรรมทางพระพุทธศาสนา มีพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์และพุทธศิลป์เป็นสัญลักษณ์อันจากการเมืองการปกครอง เป็นศูนย์กลางของชุมชน ชุมทางการค้า การสัญจรและท่องเที่ยว รวมถึงเป็นศูนย์รวมความศักดิ์สิทธิ์ ศรัทธาความเชื่อ และพิธีกรรมของผู้คนสองฝั่งทะเล มีพระธาตุทั้ง 25 องค์ (Office of Nakhon Si Thammarat Provincial Culture, 2019) ซึ่งล้วนแล้วแต่มีความสำคัญทางด้านประวัติศาสตร์ โบราณคดี พุทธศิลป์ ความเชื่อ วัฒนธรรมและพิธีกรรมที่เกิดจากความศรัทธาของผู้คน อันแสดงให้เห็นถึงคุณค่าและความสัมพันธ์ของพระธาตุอันเป็นสิ่งสำคัญในภาคใต้ที่มีต่อชุมชนในฐานะสัญลักษณ์พลังศรัทธาของผู้คนในภาคใต้ ในงานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ผู้วิจัยได้ทำการศึกษาเฉพาะพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช ที่มีชื่อเสียงเป็นที่รู้จักเป็นพระธาตุสำคัญของชุมชนที่เกี่ยวข้องกับวัฒนธรรม ความเชื่อและพิธีกรรม ซึ่งเป็นแหล่งเรียนรู้ทางประวัติศาสตร์และวัฒนธรรม เป็นมรดกสำคัญในภาคใต้ของไทย พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช ตามตำนานกล่าวว่า



พระบรมสารีริกธาตุเสด็จมาสู่หาดทรายแก้ว โดยนางเหมชาลา และพระธนกุมาร เมื่อประมาณ พ.ศ. 834 ปี จึงได้สร้างพระบรมธาตุเพื่อบรรจุพระบรมสารีริกธาตุ ผู้ปกครองเมืองนครศรีธรรมราช จะก่อสร้างตกแต่งเพิ่มเติมอยู่เสมอเพื่อเสริมสร้างความเลื่อมใสศรัทธาของประชาชนที่มีต่อองค์พระบรมธาตุ เช่น สมัยศรีวิชัยได้สร้างเป็นเจดีย์ทรงศรีวิชัย ต่อมาในสมัยพระเจ้าจันทรภาณุ ประมาณ พ.ศ. 1792 ได้ทรงสร้างเป็นเจดีย์ทรงลังกาครอบเจดีย์แบบศรีวิชัยไว้ด้านใน พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์มีหลักฐานการแลกเปลี่ยน (Interchange) ทางวัฒนธรรมกับภูมิภาคอื่น (Fine Arts Department, 2003) เป็นศาสนสถานอันเป็นที่ศักดิ์สิทธิ์ (Sacred Place) ซึ่งใช้ในการสืบทอดวัตรปฏิบัติทางประเพณี พิธีกรรม ความเชื่อ ศิลปะและวรรณกรรมทางพระพุทธศาสนา และเป็นพุทธสถานที่มีชีวิต (Buddhist Living Monument) เป็นประจักษ์พยานการขับเคลื่อนและการสืบทอดเผยแผ่พระพุทธศาสนา เป็นต้นกำเนิดประเพณีสำคัญของเมืองนครศรีธรรมราชหลายประเพณี เช่น ประเพณีแห่ผ้าขึ้นธาตุ ประเพณีตักบาตรรูปเทียน ประเพณีสวดดำน และประเพณีให้ทานไฟ โดยเฉพาะประเพณีแห่ผ้าขึ้นธาตุเป็นประเพณีใหญ่ มีชาวพุทธทั้งจากคาบสมุทรมลายู และดินแดนข้างเคียงมาร่วมงาน สะท้อนให้เห็นประวัติศาสตร์ความศรัทธาของพระพุทธศาสนาในดินแดนคาบสมุทรมลายู และการสัมพันธ์กับดินแดนอื่น ๆ ที่เชื่อมโยงกับการยอมรับนับถือพระพุทธศาสนา (Wasivivat, 2019)

ด้วยเหตุนี้ ผู้วิจัยเห็นว่าพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช ควรได้รับการส่งเสริมให้เป็นต้นแบบการแสวงบุญเชื่อมโยงการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธสู่ทุกภูมิภาค โดยมีนโยบายสนับสนุนจากภาครัฐและเอกชนเพื่อปลูกฝังความรักและศรัทธาในพระพุทธศาสนา ใช้หลักธรรมเป็นรากฐานชีวิต และสร้างความเลื่อมใสแก่ชาวไทยและต่างชาติ ทั้งนี้ ควบคู่ไปกับการพัฒนาเครือข่ายการแสวงบุญที่ได้มาตรฐาน สร้างความประทับใจระดับประเทศและนานาชาติ ตลอดจนการอนุรักษ์มรดกวัฒนธรรม สิ่งแวดล้อม และการมีส่วนร่วมของชุมชนท้องถิ่น ผู้วิจัยจึงสนใจศึกษานโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญดังกล่าว เพื่อรองรับความต้องการของนักท่องเที่ยวในบริบทการเปลี่ยนแปลงสภาพแวดล้อม รักษาคูณค่าทางประวัติศาสตร์และวัฒนธรรม ก่อให้เกิดประโยชน์ต่อพระพุทธศาสนา สังคม และประเทศชาติสืบไป

วัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัย

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญต่อการหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ เพื่อส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญต่อการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช และเพื่อสร้างเครือข่ายการแสวงบุญต่อการหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช

วิธีดำเนินการวิจัย

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวิธีดำเนินการวิจัย ตามลำดับขั้นตอน ดังนี้

รูปแบบการวิจัย เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพแบบกรณีศึกษา (Case Study) โดยการวิเคราะห์เอกสารการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกับกลุ่มผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ และสนทนากลุ่มเฉพาะจากผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ มีขอบเขตด้านเนื้อหาประกอบด้วย 1) การวิเคราะห์นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ ได้แก่ ศึกษาและวิเคราะห์นโยบายของภาครัฐ ภาคเอกชน และองค์กรท้องถิ่นที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญและการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาในจังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช พิจารณาวานโยบายเหล่านี้มีเป้าหมาย กลยุทธ์ และมาตรการสนับสนุนการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธอย่างไร 2) การศึกษานโยบายต่อการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ ได้แก่ การดำเนินนโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญเพื่อเพิ่มจำนวนผู้แสวงบุญและนักท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา 3) การศึกษาการสร้างเครือข่ายการแสวงบุญ ได้แก่ ศึกษาการเชื่อมโยงระหว่างพระสงฆ์ นักวิชาการ นักท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา ผู้ประกอบการ และชุมชนท้องถิ่น วิเคราะห์บทบาทของเครือข่ายในการสนับสนุนการแสวงบุญและการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ และตรวจสอบรูปแบบการทำงานร่วมกัน เช่น การแลกเปลี่ยนความรู้ กิจกรรมร่วม หรือการพัฒนาเส้นทางแสวงบุญ และ 4) ศึกษาข้อมูลเฉพาะของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช ได้แก่ เจาะลึกถึงการนำแนวทางนโยบายไปปฏิบัติในพื้นที่จริง ศึกษาผลกระทบต่อการแสวงบุญ



และการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธในบริบทของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ และพิจารณาบทบาทขององค์กรและชุมชนในการสนับสนุน การพัฒนาเครือข่ายและกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ โดยมีระยะเวลา การเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลระหว่าง 15 กรกฎาคม พ.ศ. 2566 ถึง 1 มิถุนายน 2568

ประชากรและผู้ให้ข้อมูล เพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัย ที่เกี่ยวข้องกับมุมมองครอบคลุม ทั้งด้านศาสนา ประวัติศาสตร์ การท่องเที่ยว และการบริหารจัดการเชิงนโยบาย ทำให้สามารถวิเคราะห์และ สังเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพได้อย่างครบถ้วน จึงมีการคัดเลือกผู้ให้ข้อมูลในการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก ประกอบด้วย 4 กลุ่ม ได้แก่ 1) กลุ่มตัวแทนคณะสงฆ์ 2) กลุ่มนักวิชาการด้านประวัติศาสตร์ทางพระพุทธศาสนา 3) กลุ่มผู้นำท้องถิ่น และ 4) กลุ่มผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกับการท่องเที่ยว จำนวน 25 รูป/คน และการสนทนากลุ่มเฉพาะ ที่คัดเลือก ผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิที่มีความเกี่ยวข้องกับการวิจัย จำนวน 10 รูป/คน

เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการวิจัย

1. แบบสัมภาษณ์แบบมีโครงสร้าง (Structured Interview) มีข้อคำถามลักษณะปลายเปิดเพื่อให้ได้ ข้อมูลเชิงลึก ขั้นตอนในการสร้างแบบสัมภาษณ์ ประกอบด้วย 1) การศึกษาวิธีการสร้างแบบสัมภาษณ์ที่ใช้ ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากเอกสารและงานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้อง เพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์โดยจำแนกออกเป็น 3 ส่วน คือ ส่วนที่ 1 ข้อมูลพื้นฐานของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม เช่น ชื่อ นามสกุล ที่อยู่ สถานที่ทำงาน เพศ อายุ ระดับ การศึกษา วันเดือนปีที่สัมภาษณ์ เป็นต้น ส่วนที่ 2 ประเด็นคำถามเกี่ยวกับนโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญเพื่อหนุนเสริม การท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช เช่น ปัจจุบันท่านคิดว่าการส่งเสริม การแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช มีความจำเป็นหรือไม่ เป็นต้น และส่วนที่ 3 ข้อเสนอแนะและแนวทางนโยบายส่งเสริม เช่น ท่านมีข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อเป็นแนวทางเกี่ยวกับ นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญเพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราชอย่างไรบ้าง เป็นต้น 2) การเสนอแบบสัมภาษณ์ให้คณะกรรมการควบคุมดูแลนิพนธ์ตรวจสอบ 3) การพัฒนาและปรับปรุง แบบสัมภาษณ์ตามคำแนะนำ 4) การตรวจสอบคุณภาพของเครื่องมือเพื่อหาความเที่ยงตรง (Validity) และ ความถูกต้องของเนื้อหา โดยมีผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ จำนวน 5 ท่าน ประกอบด้วย 4.1) เจ้าคณะภาค 16 (ธ) 4.2) อาจารย์ ประจำหลักสูตรปรัชญาดุษฎีบัณฑิต มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาราชวิทยาลัย วิทยาเขตศรีธรรมโศกราช 4.3) ประธานหลักสูตรปรัชญาดุษฎีบัณฑิต มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาราชวิทยาลัย วิทยาเขตศรีธรรมโศกราช 4.4) ผู้ช่วยอธิการบดีฝ่ายกิจการทั่วไป มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาราชวิทยาลัย วิทยาเขตนครศรีธรรมราช และ 4.5) อาจารย์ประจำหลักสูตรบัณฑิตศึกษา สาขาวิชาการพัฒนาสังคม มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาราชวิทยาลัย วิทยาเขตนครศรีธรรมราช เป็นผู้ตรวจสอบ 5) ผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิประเมินความชัดเจนและความเหมาะสมของคำถาม ใช้ Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) ตรวจสอบความสอดคล้องระหว่างข้อคำถามกับวัตถุประสงค์ ผลพบว่า คำถามทั้งหมดมีค่า $IOC \geq 0.5$ จึงถือว่าสอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์ และ 6) การนำแบบสัมภาษณ์ที่ผ่านการตรวจสอบไปใช้ในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลกับผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญสำหรับการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก

2. การสังเกตการณ์แบบไม่เป็นทางการ (Informal Observation) เป็นบันทึกการสังเกตการณ์การเข้า อบรมเชิงปฏิบัติการณ์นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช ขั้นตอนในการสร้างแบบสังเกตการณ์ ประกอบด้วย 1) การนำข้อมูลที่ได้จากการวิเคราะห์ และนำไปใช้ในการสร้างชุดความรู้นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุ เจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช มาสร้างเป็นข้อคำถามในแบบสังเกตการณ์ 2) การสร้างแบบบันทึกพฤติกรรม ของกลุ่มเป้าหมายที่ได้เข้าร่วมอบรมการนโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ ของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช ซึ่งแบ่งเป็น 3 ระยะ คือ ก่อนอบรม ระหว่างอบรม และหลังอบรม โดยให้สอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์ในตัวแปรตาม ด้านเนื้อหาของการวิจัยที่กำหนดไว้ ซึ่งแบบสังเกตการณ์นี้มี 2 ส่วน ได้แก่ ส่วนที่ 1 ข้อมูลพื้นฐานของผู้ถูกสังเกต และส่วนที่ 2 แบบประเมินการสังเกตการณ์การจัดนโยบายส่งเสริม



การแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช และ 3) การนำแบบสังเกตการณ์ที่สร้างขึ้นไปเสนอต่อคณะกรรมการควบคุม ดุษฎีนิพนธ์และผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ จำนวน 5 ท่าน ซึ่งเป็นผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิในกลุ่มเดียวกันกับผู้ตรวจสอบคุณภาพเครื่องมือแบบสัมภาษณ์ เพื่อให้ข้อเสนอแนะในการปรับปรุงแก้ไขให้เป็นแบบสังเกตการณ์ที่สมบูรณ์

3. การสนทนาเฉพาะกลุ่ม (Focus Group Discussion) ใช้ในการสนทนาเฉพาะกลุ่ม ซึ่งมีขั้นตอนการดำเนินการ ได้แก่ 1) การเตรียมการจัดสนทนาเฉพาะกลุ่ม โดยผู้วิจัยกำหนดหัวข้อประเด็นการสนทนากลุ่มเพื่อวิเคราะห์ 2) การกำหนดและคัดเลือกผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิสำหรับการสนทนากลุ่มเฉพาะ โดยผู้วิจัยได้คัดเลือกผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิที่ไม่ซ้ำกับผู้ให้การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกเป็นผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิที่มีคุณสมบัติและประสบการณ์สำคัญที่คล้ายคลึงกัน ในประเด็นนโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช และ 3) การกำหนดขอบเขตเนื้อหาในการสนทนาเฉพาะกลุ่ม ได้แก่ นโยบายที่ส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช

การเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล ได้ดำเนินการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลด้วยการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ ได้มีการพัฒนาชุดความรู้ใช้กับกลุ่มเป้าหมาย พร้อมทั้งประเมินผลด้วยการสังเกตการณ์แบบไม่เป็นทางการแล้วรวบรวมข้อมูลอีกครั้งด้วยการสนทนากลุ่มเฉพาะจากผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ ซึ่งดำเนินการตั้งแต่มกราคม พ.ศ. 2566 ถึง เดือนธันวาคม พ.ศ. 2567 รวมระยะเวลา 1 ปี 5 เดือน ดังนี้ 1) การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก (In-Dept Interview) เป็นขั้นตอนการรวบรวมข้อมูลจากการลงพื้นที่ภาคสนาม โดยการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มผู้ให้ข้อมูลเชิงลึก ดำเนินการตามขั้นตอนโดย 1.1) ทำหนังสือขอความอนุเคราะห์เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากมหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย เพื่อขออนุญาตเข้าทำการเก็บข้อมูล 1.2) ผู้วิจัยเป็นผู้ลงพื้นที่เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเพื่อใช้คำถามที่ถูกสร้างมาไปสัมภาษณ์กับกลุ่มผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ (Key Informants) และ 1.3) นำคำตอบที่ได้ไปรวบรวม นำไปวิเคราะห์และรวบรวมเรียบเรียง และเสนอต่ออาจารย์ผู้ควบคุมดุษฎีนิพนธ์ 2) การสังเกตการณ์แบบไม่เป็นทางการ (Informal Observation) ผู้วิจัยสังเกตพฤติกรรมการเข้าร่วมการเข้ารับการอบรมของกลุ่มเป้าหมาย ซึ่งเป็นพระภิกษุในพื้นที่ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช หรือจังหวัดใกล้เคียง นักวิชาการเชี่ยวชาญด้านพระพุทธศาสนา/วัฒนธรรม/การท่องเที่ยว นักท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาที่มีความสนใจในพุทธศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม และผู้ประกอบการด้านการท่องเที่ยวดำเนินกิจการด้านการนำเที่ยวในเส้นทางศาสนา ตั้งแต่ก่อนเข้ารับการอบรม ระหว่างเข้ารับการอบรม และหลังเข้ารับการอบรม โดยไม่ให้ผู้ถูกสังเกตรู้ตัว มีขั้นตอนดำเนินการ ดังนี้ 2.1) กลุ่มเป้าหมายและผู้สังเกตการณ์ ทำความเข้าใจในวัตถุประสงค์และรายละเอียดของการอบรม สร้างความเข้าใจหรือคลี่คลายข้อสงสัย รวมถึงอธิบายแบบสังเกตการณ์ 2.2) ผู้สังเกตการณ์ปฏิบัติการสังเกต โดยจดบันทึกและเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลในแบบบันทึก การสังเกตการณ์ปฏิบัติตามข้อตกลงในที่ประชุม/อบรมอย่างเคร่งครัด และ 2.3) กลุ่มเป้าหมายปฏิบัติการวิจัย วิทยากร หรือผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิและผู้วิจัยหรือผู้สังเกตการณ์ ได้ปรึกษาหารือร่วมกัน โดยใช้ข้อมูลที่บันทึกไว้ในแบบบันทึกการสังเกตการณ์ ประกอบสรุปการอภิปรายผล ให้ข้อเสนอแนะ และให้ทุกฝ่ายได้เปิดประเด็น ตามวัตถุประสงค์ในการสังเกต และ 3) การสนทนาเฉพาะกลุ่ม (Focus Group Discussion) ผู้วิจัย นำเสนอผลจากการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช ต่อผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิโดยผู้วิจัยนัดหมายวัน เวลา และสถานที่กับผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ โดยได้กำหนด วิธีการสนทนากลุ่มเพื่อให้มีประสิทธิภาพในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลให้สอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์การวิจัยและขอบเขตการวิจัยด้านเนื้อหา

การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ดำเนินการ ดังนี้ 1) วิเคราะห์จากการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก (In-depth Interview Analysis) เป็นการรวบรวมและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงพรรณนา (Descriptive Data) จากผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญ เน้นการตีความความหมาย (Interpretive Analysis) และสังเคราะห์ประเด็นสำคัญ และจัดเรียงข้อมูลตามประเด็นหรือด้านที่เกี่ยวข้อง เพื่อให้เข้าใจง่ายและสละสลวย และ 2) วิเคราะห์จากการสนทนากลุ่มเฉพาะ (Focused Group



Discussion Analysis/Expert Panel Analysis) เป็นการรวบรวมข้อเสนอแนะและความคิดเห็นของผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ ใช้วิธีการสังเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ (Qualitative Synthesis) เพื่อพัฒนารูปแบบหรือแนวทางเน้นการเรียบเรียงประเด็นสำคัญอย่างเป็นระบบและรัดกุม ดังนั้น การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลนี้เป็นการวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพแบบตีความและสังเคราะห์ (Qualitative Interpretive and Thematic Analysis) ซึ่งรวมถึงการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา (Content Analysis) และการสังเคราะห์ข้อเสนอแนะเชิงวิชาการ เพื่อให้ได้ข้อมูลที่รัดกุม สละสลวย และสอดคล้องกับวัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัย

ผลการวิจัยและอภิปรายผล

นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ เพื่อหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ ของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช เป็นวิจัยที่ผ่านการวิเคราะห์ สังเคราะห์ และถอดแบบความรู้จากการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก ผลการวิจัย ดังนี้

1. นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญต่อการหนุนเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ เป็นนโยบายที่เกี่ยวกับการส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญและการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธมีความสำคัญอย่างยิ่งต่อการสร้างสมดุลระหว่างศาสนา วัฒนธรรม เศรษฐกิจ และการท่องเที่ยว โดยผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นประเด็นสำคัญ ดังนี้ 1) ด้านศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม การส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญช่วยรักษาและทำนุบำรุงพระพุทธศาสนา สืบสานอัตลักษณ์ท้องถิ่น และสร้างคุณค่าทางจิตวิญญาณให้กับนักท่องเที่ยวและผู้ศรัทธา ทำให้การท่องเที่ยวไม่ใช่เพียงกิจกรรมเพื่อพักผ่อน แต่ยังเป็นการพัฒนาจิตใจและศีลธรรม 2) ด้านโครงสร้างพื้นฐานและสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกการพัฒนาสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกช่วยยกระดับประสบการณ์ของผู้แสวงบุญและนักท่องเที่ยว ทำให้เกิดการท่องเที่ยวที่มีคุณภาพและรองรับการเดินทางในระยะยาว 3) ด้านเศรษฐกิจและการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาการใช้ทุนทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมเป็นจุดดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวมีผลเชิงบวกต่อเศรษฐกิจฐานรากและธุรกิจท้องถิ่น ขณะเดียวกันยังสามารถเชื่อมโยงกับตลาดนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติที่สนใจประสบการณ์ทางจิตวิญญาณ 4) ด้านการบริหารจัดการและความยั่งยืน การสร้างเครือข่ายความร่วมมือระหว่างพระสงฆ์ นักวิชาการ ชุมชนท้องถิ่น และผู้ประกอบการ ช่วยให้การท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธดำเนินไปอย่างสมดุล ไม่บิดเบือนความหมายของการแสวงบุญ และยังคงรักษามรดกทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมไว้ได้ และ 5) ด้านเทคโนโลยีและการประชาสัมพันธ์การใช้สื่อดิจิทัลและโซเชียลมีเดียมีบทบาทสำคัญในการขยายการรับรู้และสร้างแรงบันดาลใจให้ผู้คนเดินทางมาท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา โดยเฉพาะกรณีศึกษาพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ จังหวัดนครศรีธรรมราช ที่กลายเป็นศูนย์กลางเครือข่ายศรัทธาในระดับประเทศ แสดงให้เห็นว่านโยบายนี้มีได้มุ่งเน้นเพียงการกระตุ้นการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา แต่ยังเป็นกลไกเชิงบูรณาการที่เชื่อมโยงศรัทธา วัฒนธรรม และเศรษฐกิจเข้าด้วยกัน อีกทั้ง ยังเกิดประโยชน์ในหลายมิติ ด้านศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม ช่วยรักษาและทำนุบำรุงพระพุทธศาสนา สืบสานอัตลักษณ์ท้องถิ่น และสร้างคุณค่าทางจิตวิญญาณแก่นักท่องเที่ยวและผู้ศรัทธา ทำให้การท่องเที่ยวได้เป็นเพียงการพักผ่อน แต่ยังเป็นการพัฒนาจิตใจและศีลธรรม ในขณะที่ด้านโครงสร้างพื้นฐานและสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวก การพัฒนาที่เหมาะสมช่วยยกระดับคุณภาพประสบการณ์ของนักท่องเที่ยวและผู้แสวงบุญ และยังสร้างความพร้อมในการรองรับการเดินทางในระยะยาว สอดคล้องกับการศึกษาของ Thanasaro & Siriphaphagon (2020) ได้ศึกษาเรื่องศาสนากับการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมเพื่อการส่งเสริมเส้นทางแสวงบุญสู่วัดไพรพัฒนา จังหวัดศรีสะเกษ พบว่า ความเชื่อของนักท่องเที่ยวมีต่อศาสนาและการแลกเปลี่ยนทางวัฒนธรรมด้านศาสนาและศิลปะได้ โดยมีพื้นที่การท่องเที่ยวเป็นสื่อกลางของการแลกเปลี่ยน คุณค่าจากการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมด้านศาสนา มิติด้านการแสวงบุญทำให้เกิดเอกลักษณ์ประจำถิ่น เป็นแหล่งเรียนรู้ด้านศาสนา ทำให้เกิดรายได้แก่ชุมชนเกิดความโดดเด่นของพื้นที่สามารถพัฒนาสร้างสรรค์ในด้านประเพณี วัฒนธรรม ศาสนา และประวัติความเป็นมา เกิดคุณค่า เกิดพลังทางใจ ทำให้ผู้คนได้ปฏิบัติตามคำสอน และเป็นแนวทางที่ดี โดยเฉพาะด้านการดำเนินชีวิต



2. การส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญต่อการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธของพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช สามารถเป็นกลไกสำคัญในการขับเคลื่อนการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธได้อย่างเป็นรูปธรรม หากมีการกำหนดทิศทางอย่างชัดเจน สร้างการมีส่วนร่วมของทุกภาคส่วนและมีการบริหารจัดการอย่างยั่งยืน นโยบายที่เกี่ยวข้อง เช่น ยุทธศาสตร์การท่องเที่ยวแห่งชาติ แผนแม่บทการพัฒนาศาสนา และนโยบายส่งเสริม Soft Power ด้านวัฒนธรรมล้วนชี้ไปยังเป้าหมายร่วม คือ การใช้มิติทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมมาเสริมสร้างเศรษฐกิจ การศึกษา และจิตวิญญาณของประชาชน แสดงให้เห็นว่าการส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญสามารถเป็นเครื่องมือสำคัญในการขับเคลื่อนการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธได้อย่างสมดุลและยั่งยืน ทั้งในมิติของศาสนา วัฒนธรรม เศรษฐกิจ และสังคม ซึ่งสอดคล้องกับนโยบายและทิศทางการพัฒนาประเทศที่ให้ความสำคัญกับการใช้ทุนทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมการบริหารจัดการที่รอบด้านและการใช้เทคโนโลยีประชาสัมพันธ์ เช่น โซเชียลมีเดีย ช่วยเผยแพร่คุณค่าและสร้างแรงศรัทธา ทำให้การแสวงบุญเป็นทั้งกิจกรรมทางศาสนาและเครื่องมือสร้างคุณค่าเชิงวัฒนธรรม เศรษฐกิจ และจิตวิญญาณ พร้อมขับเคลื่อนการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธอย่างยั่งยืน สอดคล้องกับ Ngamsri (2021) ได้ให้ความหมายว่า การท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ คือ การนำหลักคำสอนของพระพุทธเจ้า เช่น ศีล สมาธิ ปัญญา มาเป็นแนวทางในการท่องเที่ยว เพื่อให้เกิดความสงบทางจิตใจและการเรียนรู้ที่ลึกซึ้งยิ่งขึ้นไม่ใช่เพียงเพื่อความบันเทิงหรือพักผ่อนเท่านั้น การท่องเที่ยวแห่งประเทศไทย (ททท.) ส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ ได้อธิบายว่า การท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธ คือ การท่องเที่ยวที่ส่งเสริมคุณธรรม จริยธรรม ความสงบของจิตใจ พร้อมทั้งเป็นช่องทางเรียนรู้ภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่นและวิถีวัฒนธรรมชุมชนที่มีพระพุทธศาสนาเป็นแกนกลาง

3. การสร้างเครือข่ายถือเป็นหัวใจสำคัญในการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธที่พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช เครือข่ายเชื่อมโยงพระสงฆ์ นักวิชาการ นักท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา ผู้ประกอบการ และชุมชนท้องถิ่นเข้าด้วยกัน เพื่อแลกเปลี่ยนเรียนรู้ ทำกิจกรรมร่วมกัน และบรรลุเป้าหมายทางสังคม ตั้งแต่การสร้างผู้นำ ปลุกฝังจิตสำนึกเรื่องความสำคัญของเครือข่าย ไปจนถึงการขยายฐานสมาชิก การทำงานร่วมกันอย่างเป็นระบบช่วยให้กิจกรรมแสวงบุญดำเนินไปอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพและยั่งยืน โดยพระสงฆ์ทำหน้าที่เป็นศูนย์กลางทางจิตวิญญาณ และชี้แนะแนวทางกิจกรรมให้สอดคล้องกับหลักธรรม นักวิชาการให้ความรู้และออกแบบแนวทางเชิงวิชาการ ผู้แสวงบุญสะท้อนความต้องการและพฤติกรรม นักธุรกิจสนับสนุนระบบการเดินทาง ที่พัก และอาหาร ส่วนชุมชนท้องถิ่นรักษาอัตลักษณ์และจัดกิจกรรมเพื่อส่งเสริมวัฒนธรรม ผลลัพธ์จากเครือข่ายเหล่านี้ คือ การแสวงบุญไม่เพียงเป็นกิจกรรมทางศาสนา แต่ยังสร้างคุณค่าทางวัฒนธรรม เศรษฐกิจ และจิตวิญญาณ เครือข่ายช่วยเสริมการประชาสัมพันธ์ผ่านสื่อดิจิทัลและโซเชียลมีเดีย ขยายการรับรู้และแรงบันดาลใจให้ผู้คนเข้าร่วม การทำงานร่วมกันอย่างเป็นระบบและต่อเนื่องจึงเป็นกุญแจสำคัญในการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธอย่างแท้จริงและยั่งยืน สอดคล้องกับการศึกษาของ Phrakru Khositwatthanukul et al. (2025) ได้ศึกษาเรื่องการท่องเที่ยวเชิงพระพุทธศาสนา: การพัฒนารูปแบบการจัดการท่องเที่ยวของวัดในภาคใต้ที่ได้รับอิทธิพลงานพุทธศิลป์ พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช พบว่า การเสริมสร้างเครือข่ายการจัดการท่องเที่ยวเชิงพระพุทธศาสนาของวัดในภาคใต้ได้รับอิทธิพลงานพุทธศิลป์พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์นครศรีธรรมราช มีแนวทางสำคัญ ได้แก่ การพัฒนาเส้นทาง การท่องเที่ยวเชิงพุทธแบบบูรณาการ การสร้างเอกลักษณ์พุทธศิลป์เชิงท่องเที่ยว การใช้เทคโนโลยีดิจิทัลในการประชาสัมพันธ์ การพัฒนาเครือข่ายความร่วมมือระหว่างวัดและชุมชน การพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานและสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวก การพัฒนาบุคลากรด้านการท่องเที่ยว และการสร้างความร่วมมือกับองค์กรระดับประเทศและนานาชาติ

องค์ความรู้ใหม่

การศึกษานโยบายการส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญในการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธในหลายมิติ ด้านศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมช่วยรักษาและทำนุบำรุงพระพุทธศาสนา สืบสานอัตลักษณ์ท้องถิ่น และสร้างคุณค่าทางจิตวิญญาณ

ให้ผู้แสวงบุญ ด้านโครงสร้างพื้นฐานและสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกช่วยยกระดับประสบการณ์นักท่องเที่ยว ทำให้การเดินทางสะดวกและรองรับการท่องเที่ยวระยะยาว ด้านเศรษฐกิจ การใช้ทุนทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมเป็นจุดดึงดูดสร้างรายได้แก่ชุมชนและผู้ประกอบการท้องถิ่น พร้อมเชื่อมโยงกับนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติที่สนใจประสบการณ์ทางจิตวิญญาณ การบริหารจัดการและความยั่งยืนเกิดจาก เครือข่ายความร่วมมือ ระหว่างพระสงฆ์ นักวิชาการ ผู้ประกอบการ ชุมชน และผู้แสวงบุญ โดยพระสงฆ์ทำหน้าที่ชี้แนวทางกิจกรรมให้สอดคล้องกับหลักธรรม นักวิชาการให้ความรู้และออกแบบแนวทางเชิงวิชาการ ผู้ประกอบการสนับสนุนระบบการเดินทาง ที่พัก และอาหาร ส่วนชุมชนท้องถิ่นรักษาอัตลักษณ์และจัดกิจกรรมเพื่อส่งเสริมวัฒนธรรม เครือข่ายนี้ช่วยให้การท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธดำเนินไปอย่างสมดุลและยั่งยืน ทั้งยังช่วยเสริมการประชาสัมพันธ์ผ่านสื่อดิจิทัลและโซเชียลมีเดีย ขยายการรับรู้และแรงบันดาลใจให้ผู้คนเข้าร่วม จากการศึกษาสามารถสรุปเป็นองค์ความรู้ใหม่ คือ 4Ps Model ดัง Figure 1

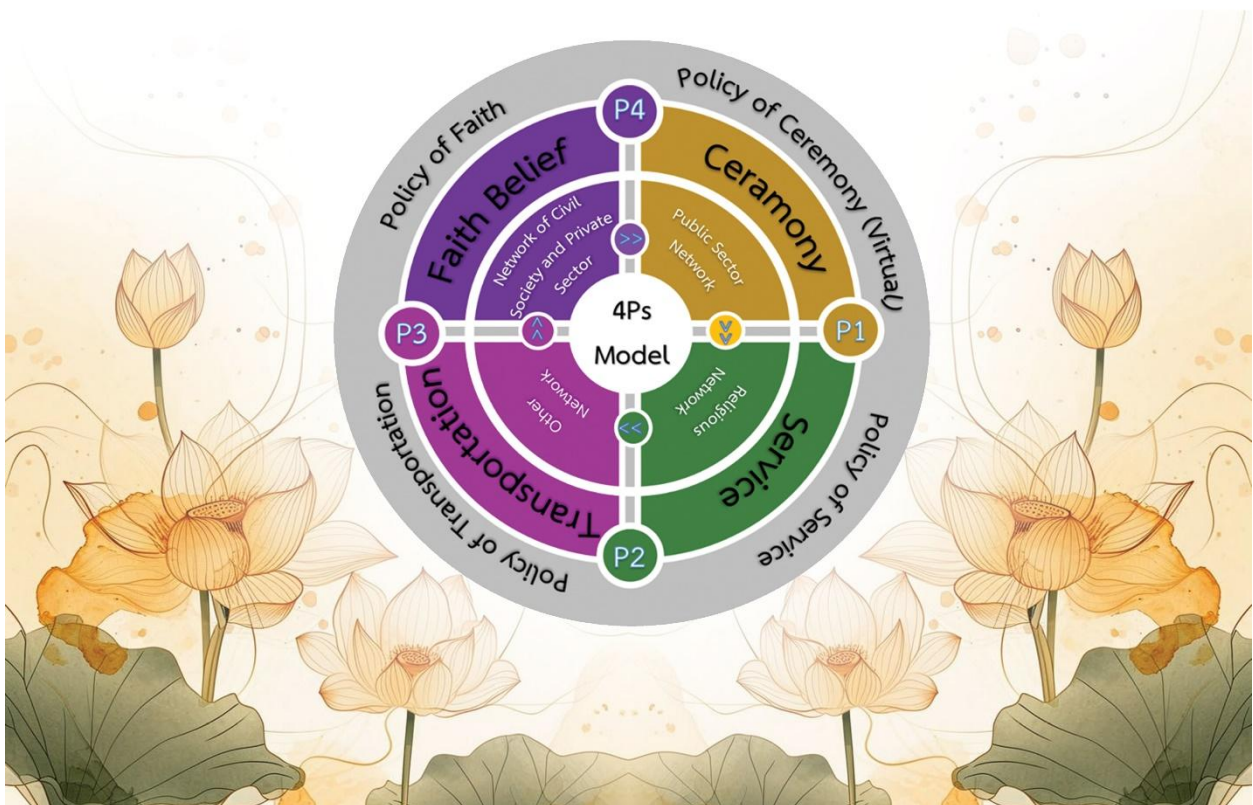


Figure 1 4Ps Model

จาก Figure 1 4Ps Model เพื่อพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม ประกอบด้วย

P1: Policy of Ceremony (Virtual): นโยบายด้านพิธีกรรม เป็นการพัฒนากิจกรรมและพิธีกรรมทางศาสนาให้ศักดิ์สิทธิ์ สอดคล้องกับวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่น สร้างจุดดึงดูดทางการท่องเที่ยวเชิงพุทธ

P2: Policy of Service: นโยบายด้านบริการ ยกย่องมาตรฐานการบริการ ทั้งในด้านข้อมูล การต้อนรับ สิ่งอำนวยความสะดวก โดยอิงหลักจริยธรรมและวิถีพุทธ เพื่อส่งเสริมการยกระดับมาตรฐานการบริการ ข้อมูล การต้อนรับ สิ่งอำนวยความสะดวก โดยยึดหลักจริยธรรมและวิถีพุทธ เพื่อสร้างประสบการณ์ที่อบอุ่นและประทับใจ



P3: Policy of Transportation: นโยบายด้านการเดินทาง พัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านการคมนาคม การเชื่อมต่อแหล่งท่องเที่ยวที่สะดวก ปลอดภัย และเป็นมิตรต่อสิ่งแวดล้อม เป็นนโยบายเพื่อการพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านคมนาคมและเส้นทางเชื่อมโยงแหล่งท่องเที่ยว ให้สะดวก ปลอดภัย และเป็นมิตรต่อสิ่งแวดล้อม อำนวยความสะดวกแก่ผู้แสวงบุญ

P4: Policy of Faith: นโยบายด้านความศรัทธา ส่งเสริมความเข้าใจในหลักธรรมะ และสร้างความศรัทธาที่มีต่อพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ นครศรีธรรมราช เป็นการส่งเสริมความเข้าใจในหลักธรรมะและศรัทธาต่อสถานที่ศักดิ์สิทธิ์ นำไปสู่นโยบายเพื่อการพัฒนาเป็นศูนย์กลางการแสวงบุญเชื่อมมิติศาสนา วัฒนธรรม และการท่องเที่ยว

ดังนั้น โมเดล 4Ps Model จึงมีความครอบคลุมทุกมิติของการส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญ ทั้งในด้านพิธีกรรม ศรัทธา การบริการ และการเข้าถึง สามารถพัฒนาเป็นศูนย์กลางการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธที่มีคุณค่าและยั่งยืน ทั้งทางศาสนา วัฒนธรรม และเศรษฐกิจเป็นแนวทางในการส่งเสริมพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ นครศรีธรรมราช ให้กลายเป็นศูนย์กลางของการแสวงบุญและการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธได้อย่างเป็นระบบ ผ่านการพัฒนาพิธีกรรม การบริการ ระบบขนส่งและการส่งเสริมศรัทธา ช่วยให้เกิดกระตุ้นเศรษฐกิจของท้องถิ่นและเผยแพร่มรดกทาง วัฒนธรรมให้เป็นที่รู้จักในระดับสากลองค์ความรู้

สรุปและข้อเสนอแนะ

นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญเพื่อการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธมุ่งเน้นการพัฒนาแหล่งท่องเที่ยวทางศาสนาอย่างยั่งยืน โดยใช้วัดและสถานปฏิบัติธรรมเป็นศูนย์กลางกิจกรรมทางศาสนาและประเพณีท้องถิ่น พร้อมส่งเสริมเศรษฐกิจชุมชน การพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐาน การประชาสัมพันธ์ และเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศ การสร้างเครือข่ายระหว่างพระสงฆ์ นักวิชาการ นักท่องเที่ยว และผู้ประกอบการถือเป็นยุทธศาสตร์สำคัญ เพื่อยกระดับพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ให้เป็น แหล่งท่องเที่ยวทางศาสนาในระดับอาเซียน ส่งเสริมความยั่งยืนด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคม และวัฒนธรรมของจังหวัด มีข้อเสนอแนะ ดังนี้ 1) ด้านการส่งเสริมศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม โดยให้องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด สำนักงาน พระพุทธศาสนาจังหวัด และสำนักงานการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัด ส่งเสริมให้วัดพระมหาธาตุวรมหาวิหารและวัดโดยรอบ เป็นศูนย์กลางกิจกรรมแสวงบุญทางพระพุทธศาสนาอย่างต่อเนื่อง เช่น โครงการธรรมะท่องเที่ยว สวดมนต์ข้ามปี พัฒนาปฏิทินกิจกรรมแสวงบุญรายปีที่เชื่อมโยงกับวันสำคัญทางศาสนาและเทศกาลท้องถิ่น เพื่อสร้างจุดขายและ แรงจูงใจในการเดินทางสนับสนุนงบประมาณแก่โครงการฟื้นฟูประเพณีพื้นถิ่น เช่น บุญเดือนสิบ การแห่ผ้าพระกฐน การแห่พระบรมสารีริกธาตุ เป็นต้น เพื่อส่งเสริมเอกลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรม 2) ด้านการพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานและ สิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกโดยให้องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด สำนักงานพระพุทธศาสนาจังหวัด กรมทางหลวงชนบท สำนักงานขนส่งจังหวัด ร่วมกันพัฒนาพื้นที่โดยรอบพระบรมธาตุให้เป็นย่านแสวงบุญที่มีทางเท้า ป้ายบอกทาง ที่พักผู้สูงอายุ ห้องน้ำสะอาด และบริการพื้นฐานอย่างเป็นระบบ ยกระดับระบบขนส่งมวลชนและการเชื่อมต่อ ระหว่างแหล่งท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา เช่น รถบริการจากสนามบินสู่พระบรมธาตุ สร้างศูนย์บริการนักท่องเที่ยว (Tourist Information Center) พร้อมเจ้าหน้าที่ที่มีความรู้ด้านศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม 3) ด้านการส่งเสริม เศรษฐกิจและการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนา โดยให้องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด สำนักงานพระพุทธศาสนาจังหวัด สำนักงานวัฒนธรรมจังหวัด และสำนักงานการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัด ร่วมกันพัฒนาชุดกิจกรรม (Package Tour) แสวงบุญที่เชื่อมโยงระหว่างวัด วัฒนธรรม และชุมชน เช่น การเข้าร่วมพิธีกรรม ฟังธรรม หรือเรียนรู้ศิลปหัตถกรรม สนับสนุนผู้ประกอบการท้องถิ่นในการพัฒนาสินค้าพุทธศิลป์ สินค้าที่ระลึกเชิงวัฒนธรรม รวมถึงอาหารพื้นถิ่น ส่งเสริมการจัดงานเทศกาลศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมร่วมกับกิจกรรมส่งเสริมเศรษฐกิจ 4) ด้านการบริหารจัดการและ ความยั่งยืน โดยให้องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด สำนักงานพระพุทธศาสนาจังหวัด สำนักงานการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัด และประชาชน ร่วมจัดตั้งคณะกรรมการบริหารจัดการการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาแบบมีส่วนร่วม ประกอบด้วย



พระสงฆ์ ผู้แทนภาครัฐ เอกชน ชุมชน และนักวิชาการ วางแผนบริหารความหนาแน่นของนักท่องเที่ยวเพื่อไม่ให้เกิดผลกระทบต่อศาสนสถานและวิถีชุมชน ส่งเสริมหลักธรรมาภิบาลในการจัดการรายได้จากการท่องเที่ยว เช่น การใช้รายได้บางส่วนสนับสนุนการบูรณะวัดหรือกิจกรรมศาสนาในพื้นที่ 5) ด้านเทคโนโลยีและการประชาสัมพันธ์ โดยให้องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด สำนักงานพระพุทธศาสนาจังหวัด สำนักงานประชาสัมพันธ์จังหวัด และสำนักงานการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัด พัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มดิจิทัล เพื่อให้ข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับเส้นทางแสวงบุญ พระบรมธาตุ และกิจกรรมศาสนาในพื้นที่ ผลิตสื่อประชาสัมพันธ์หลายภาษา ทั้งแบบดิจิทัลและสิ่งพิมพ์ เช่น สารคดีสั้น E-book แผ่นพับ เว็บไซต์ โซเชียลมีเดีย ส่งเสริมการใช้เทคโนโลยี AR/VR ในการเล่าเรื่องประวัติศาสตร์พระบรมธาตุ เช่น การจำลองพิธีกรรมสมัยโบราณหรือการก่อสร้างเจดีย์ 6) ด้านการสร้างเครือข่ายและการมีส่วนร่วม โดยให้สำนักงานประชาสัมพันธ์จังหวัด สำนักงานการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัด องค์กรบริหารจังหวัด องค์กรบริหารส่วนตำบล ร่วมกับสภาองค์กรชุมชน ชมรม สมาคม วัด และสถาบันการศึกษา เพื่อดำเนินการพัฒนาเครือข่ายความร่วมมือระหว่างพระสงฆ์ ชุมชน นักวิชาการ และผู้ประกอบการให้มีโครงสร้างที่ชัดเจนและต่อเนื่อง จัดเวทีแลกเปลี่ยนระหว่างหน่วยงานในระดับชาติและท้องถิ่นเพื่อเรียนรู้แนวทางการส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญจากพื้นที่ต้นแบบอื่น สนับสนุนการจัดตั้งชมรมอาสาสมัครแสวงบุญ และชมรมไกด์เชิงพุทธเพื่อเป็นเครือข่ายในการดูแลและพานักท่องเที่ยวเรียนรู้ศาสนา และ 7) ด้านการประเมินผลและการพัฒนานโยบายอย่างต่อเนื่อง โดยให้องค์การบริหารส่วนจังหวัด สำนักงานพระพุทธศาสนาจังหวัด สำนักงานสถิติจังหวัด และสำนักงานการท่องเที่ยวจังหวัด ร่วมกันจัดทำระบบฐานข้อมูลการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาในพื้นที่พร้อมรายงานผลด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคม ศาสนา และสิ่งแวดล้อม นำผลการประเมินมาปรับปรุงนโยบายในระยะสั้น กลาง และยาว ดังนี้ 1) ระยะสั้น (1-2 ปี) มุ่งเน้นการจัดกิจกรรมแสวงบุญเพื่อสร้างแรงจูงใจและความสนใจจากประชาชนและนักท่องเที่ยว เช่น โครงการธรรมะท่องเที่ยว การสวดมนต์ข้ามปี และการส่งเสริมประเพณีพื้นถิ่นที่มีเอกลักษณ์เฉพาะถิ่นควบคู่ไปกับการปรับปรุงสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกพื้นฐานบริเวณรอบพระบรมธาตุให้มีความสะดวก ปลอดภัย และเหมาะสมต่อการรองรับผู้มาเยือน ทั้งนี้ ยังรวมถึงการพัฒนาระบบประชาสัมพันธ์ผ่านสื่อดิจิทัลและสิ่งพิมพ์หลายภาษา เพื่อให้เข้าถึงกลุ่มเป้าหมายทั้งในประเทศและต่างประเทศได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ 2) ระยะกลาง (3-5 ปี) มุ่งเน้นการสร้างโครงสร้างพื้นฐานที่เชื่อมโยงการเดินทางระหว่างสนามบิน วัด และแหล่งท่องเที่ยวสำคัญ เพื่ออำนวยความสะดวกแก่ผู้แสวงบุญและนักท่องเที่ยว พร้อมทั้งพัฒนาชุดกิจกรรมแสวงบุญในรูปแบบแพ็คเกจทัวร์ที่เชื่อมโยงชุมชน วัด และศิลปวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่นอย่างมีชีวิตชีวา โดยมีการจัดตั้งคณะกรรมการบริหารจัดการท่องเที่ยวเชิงศาสนาแบบมีส่วนร่วมจากภาคส่วนต่าง ๆ เพื่อให้เกิดการบริหารจัดการอย่างเป็นระบบ โปร่งใส และยั่งยืน รวมถึงการส่งเสริมเครือข่ายอาสาสมัครแสวงบุญและไกด์เชิงพุทธที่มีความรู้ความเข้าใจในด้านศาสนา และวัฒนธรรม เพื่อสร้างประสบการณ์ที่ลึกซึ้งและมีคุณค่าแก่ผู้มาเยือน และ 3) ระยะยาว (5 ปีขึ้นไป) เป็นการยกระดับพระบรมธาตุเจดีย์ให้เป็นจุดหมายปลายทางทางศาสนาระดับอาเซียน โดยใช้เทคโนโลยีสมัยใหม่ เช่น AR และ VR ในการถ่ายทอดเรื่องราวทางประวัติศาสตร์และพิธีกรรมทางศาสนา เพื่อสร้างประสบการณ์ที่เข้าถึงและมีความหมายต่อผู้แสวงบุญและนักท่องเที่ยว นอกจากนี้ ยังมีการพัฒนาระบบฐานข้อมูลเพื่อใช้ในการประเมินผลการดำเนินงานด้านการท่องเที่ยวและปรับปรุงนโยบายอย่างต่อเนื่องให้สอดคล้องกับบริบทที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไป และสุดท้าย คือ การสร้างความยั่งยืนในมิติด้านเศรษฐกิจ สังคม วัฒนธรรม และจิตวิญญาณอย่างสมดุล เพื่อให้พระบรมธาตุเจดีย์เป็นศูนย์กลางแห่งศรัทธาและการเรียนรู้ที่ยั่งยืนในระดับภูมิภาคต่อไป อย่างไรก็ตาม นโยบายส่งเสริมการแสวงบุญเพื่อการท่องเที่ยววิถีพุทธมุ่งพัฒนาแหล่งท่องเที่ยวทางศาสนาและเศรษฐกิจชุมชนควบคู่กับการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรม การดำเนินตามนโยบายมีความเสี่ยง เช่น การพาณิชย์กิจกรรมทางศาสนาอาจลดความศักดิ์สิทธิ์และเอกลักษณ์วัฒนธรรม การขยายโครงสร้างพื้นฐานอาจกระทบสิ่งแวดล้อมและความสะดวกของนักท่องเที่ยว การพึ่งพาการท่องเที่ยวมากเกินไปเสี่ยงต่อเศรษฐกิจท้องถิ่น และการจัดการ



เครือข่ายหรือการประเมินผลไม่เหมาะสมอาจลดความยั่งยืน ดังนั้น ควรมีการสร้างสมดุลระหว่างการท่องเที่ยว ศาสนา วัฒนธรรม และสิ่งแวดล้อม เพื่อลดผลกระทบทางลบและเสริมความยั่งยืนในระยะยาว

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นวัตกรรมการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัล
ตามหลักพุทธธรรม มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย
INNOVATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIGITAL ERA EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT PLATFORM BASED ON BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES AT
MAHACHULALONGKORNRAJAVIDYALAYA UNIVERSITY

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บทคัดย่อ

ความเป็นมาและวัตถุประสงค์: ในยุคดิจิทัล เทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศและการสื่อสาร (ICT) ได้เข้ามามีบทบาทสำคัญในทุกมิติของการจัดการศึกษา โดยเฉพาะในระดับอุดมศึกษา มหาวิทยาลัยจำเป็นต้องปรับตัวเพื่อรองรับระบบการเรียนการสอนและการประเมินผลที่ทันสมัยและมีประสิทธิภาพ มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัยตระหนักถึงความสำคัญของการบูรณาการเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศเข้ากับหลักพุทธธรรม เพื่อรักษาอัตลักษณ์และคุณค่าของสถาบันควบคู่ไปกับการพัฒนาคุณภาพการศึกษาอย่างยั่งยืน งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันของระบบการประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัลของมหาวิทยาลัย พัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษาที่ยึดหลักพุทธธรรม ทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มที่พัฒนาขึ้นในสภาพแวดล้อมจริงของการเรียนการสอน และประเมินประสิทธิภาพและความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้แพลตฟอร์ม เพื่อให้การประเมินผลการศึกษาภายในมหาวิทยาลัยมีความยืดหยุ่น ทันสมัย และส่งเสริมคุณธรรมควบคู่กันไป

วิธีดำเนินการวิจัย: วิจัยครั้งนี้ใช้ระเบียบวิธีการวิจัยและพัฒนา (Research and Development: R&D) โดยดำเนินการผ่าน 4 ขั้นตอนหลัก ได้แก่ 1) ศึกษาและวิเคราะห์ระบบการประเมินผลดิจิทัลในปัจจุบันผ่านการสัมภาษณ์และวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา 2) ออกแบบและพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบ โดยใช้หลักอริยสัจ 4 แห่งพระพุทธศาสนาเป็นกรอบแนวคิด 3) ทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มกับกลุ่มผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสีย จำนวน 215 คน ประกอบด้วย ผู้บริหาร คณาจารย์ ผู้เชี่ยวชาญ บุคลากร และนิสิต และ 4) ประเมินประสิทธิภาพของระบบและความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้ผ่านการประเมินประสิทธิภาพการสัมภาษณ์ และการเก็บข้อมูลทั้งเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพ

ผลการวิจัย: แพลตฟอร์มที่พัฒนาขึ้น ประกอบด้วย 6 โมดูลหลัก ได้แก่ โมดูลการจัดการเนื้อหา โมดูลการจัดการข้อมูลผู้สอน โมดูลการจัดการข้อมูลผู้เรียน โมดูลการประมวลผลรายวิชา โมดูลการจัดการโครงสร้างรายวิชา และโมดูลกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ โดยแพลตฟอร์มที่พัฒนาขึ้นนี้เป็นการบูรณาการและเชื่อมโยงระบบ (LMS) สำหรับนิสิตและระบบจัดการเนื้อหา (CMS) สำหรับอาจารย์ผู้สอนได้อย่างครบถ้วน ผลการประเมินพบว่า ระบบมีประสิทธิภาพโดยรวมอยู่ในระดับสูงมาก ($\bar{X} = 4.55$, S.D. = 0.50) โดยเฉพาะในด้านการใช้งานของระบบ ($\bar{X} = 4.58$, S.D. = 0.49) และความง่ายในการใช้งาน ($\bar{X} = 4.55$, S.D. = 0.50) โดยความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้งานอยู่ในระดับสูงมากเช่นกัน



(\bar{X} = 4.51, S.D. = 0.63) โดยเฉพาะในด้านความยืดหยุ่นในการออกแบบรายวิชาและความสอดคล้องกับกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้

ความเกี่ยวข้องกับหลักธรรมคำสอนทางพระพุทธศาสนา: จุดเด่นสำคัญของงานวิจัยนี้ คือ การนำหลักอริยสัจ 4 ซึ่งประกอบด้วย ทุกข์ สมุทัย นิโรธ และมรรค มาใช้เป็นกรอบแนวคิดในการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์ม โดยนำมาใช้ตั้งแต่การระบุปัญหา (ทุกข์) การวิเคราะห์สาเหตุของปัญหา (สมุทัย) การตั้งเป้าหมายเพื่อยุติปัญหา (นิโรธ) และการดำเนินแนวทางพัฒนาและปรับปรุงที่ส่งเสริมสมดุลระหว่างปัญญาและจริยธรรมของผู้เรียน (มรรค) การหลอมรวมหลักพุทธธรรมเข้ากับเทคโนโลยีดิจิทัลทำให้แพลตฟอร์มไม่เพียงแต่ตอบสนองความต้องการทางด้านเทคนิค แต่ยังช่วยส่งเสริมคุณธรรมและการพัฒนาทางสติปัญญาของผู้เรียน ซึ่งสอดคล้องกับเป้าหมายของการศึกษาเชิงพุทธในศตวรรษที่ 21

สรุป: งานวิจัยนี้ประสบความสำเร็จในการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มประเมินผลยุคดิจิทัลที่ผสมผสานเทคโนโลยีและหลักพุทธธรรมอย่างลงตัว แพลตฟอร์มมีประสิทธิภาพสูงและได้รับความพึงพอใจ เหมาะกับมหาวิทยาลัยสมัยใหม่ ช่วยยกระดับคุณภาพการเรียนการสอนและการประเมินผลที่ยืดหยุ่น ทันสมัย และยึดมั่นคุณธรรม ผลงานนี้เป็นต้นแบบที่สถาบันอื่น ๆ สามารถนำไปปรับใช้พัฒนาเครื่องมือประเมินโดยผสมผสานเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศกับคุณธรรมได้อย่างยั่งยืน

คำสำคัญ: นวัตกรรมการศึกษา, การประเมินผลการศึกษา, แพลตฟอร์มดิจิทัล, หลักพุทธธรรม, อริยสัจ 4

Abstract

Background and Objectives: In the digital era, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a crucial role in all aspects of educational management, particularly in higher education. Universities must adapt to support modern and effective teaching, learning, and assessment systems. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University recognizes the importance of integrating Information and Communication Technology ICT with Buddhist principles to preserve the institution's identity and values while sustainably enhancing educational quality. This study aims to investigate the current state of the university's digital assessment platform, develop a Buddhist principles-based assessment platform, pilot the developed platform, and evaluate its effectiveness and user satisfaction. To make the evaluation of education inside the university flexible and modern, and to promote ethics simultaneously.

Methodology: This research employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach, comprising four main phases: 1) Investigating and analyzing the current digital assessment system through interviews and content analysis; 2) Designing and developing a prototype platform using the Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca 4) of Buddhism as the conceptual framework; 3) Piloting the platform with 215 stakeholders including administrators, faculty members, experts, staff, and students; and 4) Evaluating the platform's performance and user satisfaction using interviews, efficiency assessments, and both quantitative and qualitative surveys.

Main Results: The developed platform consists of six core modules: Content management, instructor management, learner management, course processing, course structure, and learning activities. This platform effectively integrates a Learning Management System (LMS) for students and a Content Management System (CMS) for instructors. Evaluation results demonstrated a very high overall system efficiency (\bar{X} = 4.55, S.D. = 0.50), particularly in functionality (\bar{X} = 4.58, S.D. = 0.49)



and ease of use (\bar{x} = 4.55, S.D. = 0.50). User satisfaction was also very high (\bar{x} = 4.51, S.D. = 0.63), especially regarding the platform's flexibility in course structuring and its alignment with learning activities.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: A key feature of this study is the application of the Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca 4): Suffering (Dukkha), Origin of Suffering (Samudaya), Cessation of Suffering (Nirodha), and Path to the Cessation of Suffering (Magga) as the guiding framework throughout platform development. Starting from identifying problems in the existing assessment system (Dukkha), analyzing causes (Samudaya), setting goals for development addressing both technological and ethical aspects (Nirodha), and defining the development path to promote a balance between wisdom and morality (Magga), the platform successfully integrates digital technology with Buddhist ethical principles. This synthesis not only meets technical requirements but also effectively fosters learner's moral and intellectual growth, aligning well with the context of a Buddhist university in the 21st century.

Conclusions: This research successfully developed a digital assessment platform that harmonizes advanced technology with Buddhist teachings. The platform demonstrates high effectiveness and user satisfaction. It is suitable for modern Buddhist universities, helping improve the quality of teaching and assessment that is flexible, modern, and ethical. Furthermore, this study provides a valuable reference for other educational institutions seeking to incorporate technology and spiritual values within their assessment systems.

Keywords: Educational Innovation, Educational Assessment, Digital Platform, Buddhist Principles, Four Noble Truths

บทนำ

การเปลี่ยนแปลงของสังคมในยุคดิจิทัลได้ผลักดันให้เทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศและการสื่อสาร (ICT) มีบทบาทสำคัญต่อระบบการศึกษา โดยเฉพาะในระดับอุดมศึกษา นโยบายและทิศทางระดับสากล อาทิ Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, 2020) รวมถึงข้อเสนอแนะของ OECD ต่างให้ความสำคัญกับการพัฒนาทักษะดิจิทัล การส่งเสริมการประเมินผลที่มีคุณภาพและความเท่าเทียม รวมถึงการส่งเสริมการใช้เทคโนโลยีอย่างมีจริยธรรมและรับผิดชอบต่อสถาบันการศึกษา (OECD, 2023) แนวคิดด้าน Digital Transformation ในการศึกษาเห็นว่าการบูรณาการดิจิทัลเป็นหัวใจของการเตรียมผู้เรียนให้พร้อมเผชิญความท้าทายในศตวรรษที่ 21 ซึ่งการวัดและประเมินผลในรูปแบบดิจิทัล (Digital Assessment) เป็นส่วนสำคัญที่ช่วยขับเคลื่อนการเรียนรู้เชิงรุก และปรับเปลี่ยนกระบวนการสอนให้ยืดหยุ่น ตอบสนองผู้เรียนหลากหลายกลุ่ม

แม้การนำเทคโนโลยีดิจิทัลเข้ามาใช้ในระบบการศึกษาจะสร้างโอกาสใหม่ ๆ แต่ก็ยังคงมีข้อท้าทายที่สำคัญ อาทิ ปัญหาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านเทคโนโลยี ความเหลื่อมล้ำด้านการเข้าถึงช่องทางดิจิทัล ความต้านทานต่อการเปลี่ยนแปลงจากครูและผู้เรียน รวมถึงความปลอดภัยและความเป็นส่วนตัวของข้อมูลผู้เรียน (Gallego-Arrufat, 2024); (Hulus, 2024); (Kitaboo, 2023) งานวิจัยในหลากหลายประเทศยังชี้ให้เห็นว่าสถาบันการศึกษาหลายแห่งมีความไม่พร้อมทั้งด้านบุคลากรและทรัพยากร ส่งผลต่อประสิทธิภาพของการประเมินผลแบบดิจิทัล (Grosbeck et al., 2024) นอกจากนี้ หลักสูตรและรูปแบบการประเมินผลส่วนใหญ่ยังคงเน้นการสอบแบบดั้งเดิม ซึ่งไม่สามารถสะท้อนผลสัมฤทธิ์การเรียนรู้และทักษะแห่งศตวรรษที่ 21 ได้อย่างครบถ้วน (Meng & Ma, 2023)

สำหรับสถาบันการศึกษาพระพุทธศาสนา เช่น มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย ซึ่งมีพันธกิจผสมผสานหลักพุทธธรรมกับองค์ความรู้สมัยใหม่ พบว่า ยังขาดแพลตฟอร์มที่รองรับทั้งด้านเทคโนโลยีและคุณธรรม งานวิจัยที่เกี่ยวข้องในมหาวิทยาลัยทั้งในไทยและต่างประเทศ เช่น Sitagu Buddhist Academy ประเทศพม่า (Paṇḍavamsa,



2022) และกรณี Buddhist University Platform (Chaiyadet et al., 2024) ต่างชี้ให้เห็นถึงความท้าทายในการส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้และประเมินผลแบบออนไลน์ ทั้งในแง่โครงสร้างพื้นฐาน ความสามารถของผู้สอน ผู้เรียน และความยืดหยุ่นของระบบดิจิทัล ขณะที่ความคาดหวังให้ผู้เรียนได้รับการพัฒนาอย่างรอบด้านทั้งเชิงวิชาการและจริยธรรม กลับยังไม่สามารถเติมเต็มผ่านระบบประเมินผลเดิมได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ (Rampelt & Budde, 2022)

การสนับสนุนการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มประเมินผลการศึกษาในยุคดิจิทัลที่ผสมหลักพุทธธรรมจึงมีความสำคัญอย่างยิ่ง ไม่เพียงเพื่อยกระดับคุณภาพการจัดการเรียนการสอนให้เทียบเท่ามาตรฐานสากล หากยังสอดคล้องกับอัตลักษณ์และบริบทของการศึกษาพุทธศาสนาอย่างสมดุล งานวิจัยในประเด็นนี้จะเป็นประโยชน์ในการนำไปใช้เป็นแนวทางพัฒนาระบบประเมินผลที่ดีสำหรับวิทยาลัยหรือมหาวิทยาลัยสงฆ์อื่น ๆ ทั้งในประเทศและภูมิภาคเอเชียอาคเนย์ ส่งเสริมการพัฒนาศักยภาพความรู้และปฏิบัติที่สอดคล้องกับความเปลี่ยนแปลงของโลกดิจิทัลในอนาคต (Boeskens, 2025); (OECD, 2023)

แม้จะมีความก้าวหน้าของเทคโนโลยีและนโยบายสนับสนุนการศึกษาในยุคดิจิทัล แต่ในทางปฏิบัติหลายสถาบันและระบบการศึกษายังคงประสบปัญหาในการผสมผสานเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศเข้ากับบริบททางวัฒนธรรมและจริยธรรมของสถาบันอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ โดยเฉพาะในสถาบันการศึกษาพระพุทธศาสนา ที่ต้องการสร้างความสมดุลระหว่างการพัฒนาเทคโนโลยีและการรักษาคุณธรรมตามหลักพุทธธรรมอย่างเหมาะสม ซึ่งถือเป็นความท้าทายสำคัญที่ต้องการแนวทางและนวัตกรรมใหม่ในการประเมินผลการศึกษา ดังนั้น การพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษาที่ผสมผสานระหว่างเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศสมัยใหม่และหลักพุทธธรรม จึงมีความจำเป็นอย่างยิ่งเพื่อเสริมสร้างการเรียนรู้และการประเมินผลที่มีประสิทธิภาพ ยืดหยุ่น และส่งเสริมคุณธรรมควบคู่ไปกับการพัฒนาคุณภาพการศึกษาตามมาตรฐานสากลในยุคปัจจุบัน

เพื่อตอบโจทยความต้องการและความท้าทายเหล่านี้ งานวิจัยนี้จึงมุ่งเน้นการศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันของระบบการประเมินผลการศึกษาในยุคดิจิทัลของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย และพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลที่ยึดหลักพุทธธรรมเป็นแนวทางหลัก พร้อมทั้งทดลองใช้และประเมินผลประสิทธิภาพ รวมถึงความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้งานจริงในสภาพแวดล้อมการเรียนการสอน เพื่อเสนอแนวทางการประเมินผลที่เหมาะสมกับบริบทของมหาวิทยาลัยสงฆ์ในยุคดิจิทัลอย่างยั่งยืน

วัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัย

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันของแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษาในยุคดิจิทัลของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย และพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มประเมินผลดังกล่าว โดยผสมผสานหลักพุทธธรรมเข้ากับเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศ เพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับบริบทและอัตลักษณ์ของมหาวิทยาลัยสงฆ์ต่อไป นอกจากนี้ยังมุ่งทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มที่พัฒนาขึ้นในสภาพแวดล้อมจริงของการเรียนการสอน และประเมินประสิทธิภาพ รวมทั้งความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้แพลตฟอร์ม เพื่อให้การประเมินผลการศึกษามีความยืดหยุ่น ทันสมัย และส่งเสริมคุณธรรมควบคู่กันไป

วิธีดำเนินการวิจัย

การวิจัยครั้งนี้ใช้รูปแบบการวิจัยและพัฒนา (Research and Development: R&D) เพื่อสร้างนวัตกรรม การประเมินผลการศึกษาที่รองรับบริบทของยุคดิจิทัล ควบคู่ไปกับการบูรณาการหลักพุทธธรรมตามอัตลักษณ์ของสถาบันอุดมศึกษาพระพุทธศาสนา คือ มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย ส่วนกลางและส่วนภูมิภาคทั่วประเทศ โดยมีการดำเนินการใน 4 ระยะสำคัญ เพื่อให้ได้ผลผลิตที่ครบถ้วนสมบูรณ์ทั้งในเชิงวิชาการและการใช้งานจริง

ระยะที่ 1 การศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบัน ผู้วิจัยได้ดำเนินการศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันของแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลที่มีใช้อยู่ในมหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย เพื่อทำความเข้าใจถึงลักษณะการดำเนินงาน รูปแบบที่ใช้



ประสิทธิภาพในเชิงเทคนิค ความเหมาะสมกับผู้เรียน และแนวทางการประยุกต์ใช้หลักพุทธธรรม รวมถึงศึกษาความต้องการของผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกับระบบการเรียนการสอน เช่น ผู้บริหาร คณาจารย์ บุคลากรสนับสนุน และนิสิต สำหรับการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่าง ผู้วิจัยใช้วิธีการเลือกแบบเจาะจง (Purposive Sampling) จำนวน 15 คน ซึ่งประกอบด้วย ผู้บริหาร 4 คน อาจารย์ที่มีประสบการณ์ด้านการเรียนรู้ดิจิทัล 5 คน ผู้เชี่ยวชาญด้านเทคโนโลยีการศึกษา 3 คน และบุคลากรสายสนับสนุน 3 คน เพื่อให้ได้ข้อมูลที่มีคุณภาพและเหมาะสมในการวิเคราะห์และพัฒนาระบบ การเก็บข้อมูลดำเนินการผ่านแบบสัมภาษณ์กึ่งโครงสร้างและการสนทนากลุ่ม (Focus Group) โดยเน้นการหาข้อสรุปเชิงลึกที่สามารถสะท้อนปัญหาและแนวทางพัฒนาที่เหมาะสมกับบริบทของมหาวิทยาลัย

ระยะที่ 2 การออกแบบและพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบ หลังจากรวบรวมและวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลปัญหาในระยะแรกอย่างเป็นระบบแล้ว ผู้วิจัยได้นำข้อมูลดังกล่าวมาใช้ในการออกแบบและพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบสำหรับการประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัล ภายใต้กรอบแนวคิดหลักของ “อริยสัจ 4” เพื่อผสมผสานคุณค่าทางพุทธธรรมเข้ากับเทคโนโลยีดิจิทัลได้อย่างเหมาะสม โดยแพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบ ประกอบด้วย 6 โมดูลหลัก ได้แก่ 1) โมดูลการจัดการเนื้อหา 2) โมดูลการจัดการข้อมูลผู้สอน 3) โมดูลการจัดการข้อมูลผู้เรียน 4) โมดูลประมวลผลรายวิชา 5) โมดูลการจัดการโครงสร้างรายวิชา และ 6) โมดูลกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ ระบบต้นแบบนี้ ประกอบด้วย LMS (Learning Management System) สำหรับนิสิต และ CMS (Content Management System) สำหรับอาจารย์ผู้สอน สำหรับพัฒนาระบบ ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้วิธีการคัดเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง (Purposive Sampling) เพื่อเชิญผู้เชี่ยวชาญ จำนวน 3 คน ซึ่งมีความเชี่ยวชาญทั้งด้านเทคโนโลยีการศึกษาและพุทธบริหารการศึกษามาร่วมประเมินความเหมาะสมของระบบต้นแบบในหลายมิติ ได้แก่ ด้านเนื้อหาเชิงวิชาการ การออกแบบเชิงเทคนิค และความสอดคล้องกับหลักธรรมทางพระพุทธศาสนา เพื่อให้เหมาะสมและตอบโจทย์การใช้งานจริงในส่วน of เครื่องมือและแบบสอบถามที่ใช้ในการประเมินความเหมาะสมของระบบฯ ได้ผ่านกระบวนการตรวจสอบความเที่ยงตรงของเครื่องมือ โดยการประเมินความเหมาะสมของเนื้อหา (Content Validity) ด้วยค่า Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) จากผู้เชี่ยวชาญในสาขาที่เกี่ยวข้อง และทดสอบความเชื่อมั่น (Reliability) ด้วยค่าความสอดคล้องภายใน (Cronbach's Alpha) ซึ่งมีค่าถึงเกณฑ์มาตรฐานที่ยอมรับได้ ทั้งนี้ เพื่อเสริมสร้างความมั่นใจในคุณภาพของข้อมูล สำหรับการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพที่รวบรวมจากการประเมินและข้อเสนอแนะของผู้เชี่ยวชาญ ได้ใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา (Content Analysis) โดยดำเนินการจัดหมวดหมู่ข้อมูลและการตั้งรหัส (Coding) ข้อมูลอย่างเป็นระบบ และมีขั้นตอนการตรวจสอบความถูกต้องและความน่าเชื่อถือของรหัสข้อมูล โดยใช้เทคนิคการทำ Triangulation เพื่อเพิ่มความโปร่งใสและความชัดเจนของผลการวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพ ซึ่งช่วยให้สามารถระบุแนวโน้ม ข้อเสนอแนะ และสาระสำคัญได้อย่างครบถ้วน โดยผลลัพธ์การประเมินจากผู้เชี่ยวชาญได้ถูกนำไปปรับปรุงและพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบให้มีความสมบูรณ์และพร้อมสำหรับการทดลองใช้งานจริงในขั้นตอนต่อไป

ระยะที่ 3 การทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์ม เมื่อแพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบได้รับการปรับปรุงจนมีความพร้อม ผู้วิจัยได้ดำเนินการทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มในบริบทของห้องเรียนจริง โดยมีกลุ่มผู้เข้าร่วมทดลองใช้ จำนวนทั้งสิ้น 215 คน ประกอบด้วย ผู้บริหาร 4 คน อาจารย์ 5 คน ผู้เชี่ยวชาญ 3 คน บุคลากรสายสนับสนุน 3 คน และนิสิตชั้นปีต่าง ๆ จำนวน 200 คน สำหรับการคัดเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างนิสิต ใช้วิธีการสุ่มแบบชั้นภูมิ (Stratified Random Sampling) เพื่อให้ครอบคลุมตัวแทนนิสิตจากหลายคณะและชั้นปีอย่างเหมาะสม ขณะที่กลุ่มผู้บริหาร อาจารย์ และผู้เกี่ยวข้องกับการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์ม ใช้วิธีการเลือกแบบเจาะจง (Purposive Sampling) เน้นกลุ่มที่มีความเชี่ยวชาญและเกี่ยวข้องกับงานวิจัย เพื่อเสริมความเข้มแข็งและความน่าเชื่อถือในระเบียบวิธีวิจัย เครื่องมือที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูลผ่านกระบวนการตรวจสอบความเที่ยงตรงและความเชื่อมั่นอย่างเข้มงวด ทั้งนี้ เครื่องมือได้ผ่านการตรวจสอบความเที่ยงตรงเชิงเนื้อหา (Content Validity) โดยผู้เชี่ยวชาญ จำนวน 5 ท่าน ใช้วิธีประเมินค่า Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) โดยคัดเลือกเฉพาะข้อคำถามที่มีค่า IOC ตั้งแต่ 0.5 ขึ้นไปเท่านั้น และทดสอบความเชื่อมั่น



(Reliability) ด้วยค่าสัมประสิทธิ์ Cronbach's Alpha ผ่านการทดลองใช้กับกลุ่มตัวอย่างนำร่อง พบว่า มีความเชื่อมั่นรวมเท่ากับ 0.895 ซึ่งแสดงถึงความน่าเชื่อถือที่ดีในการใช้งานจริง สำหรับการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ ข้อมูลจากข้อเสนอแนะและความคิดเห็นของผู้ใช้งานได้ผ่านการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา (Content Analysis) โดยมีการจัดหมวดหมู่หลัก (Thematic Coding) และตั้งรหัส (Open Coding) ตามแนวทางการวิเคราะห์เชิงเนื้อหา อย่างเป็นระบบ โดยใช้การอ่านซ้ำ การจัดหมวดหมู่ และสังเคราะห์ข้อมูล เพื่อเพิ่มความโปร่งใสและความชัดเจน ในการนำเสนอผลการวิเคราะห์ เครื่องมือหลักในการเก็บข้อมูล ประกอบด้วย แบบประเมินประสิทธิภาพ แพลตฟอร์มที่เน้นด้านเชิงเทคนิคและการใช้งาน ซึ่งจัดทำขึ้นสำหรับผู้เชี่ยวชาญ รวมทั้งแบบสอบถามวัดความพึงพอใจ ของผู้ใช้งาน โดยเฉพาะในกลุ่มนิสิตและอาจารย์ผู้สอน โดยใช้มาตราส่วนแบบ Likert 5 ระดับในการให้คะแนน การทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มในระยะเวลาหนึ่งภาคการศึกษานี้ ทำให้ได้รับข้อมูลเชิงลึกเกี่ยวกับประสิทธิภาพ และความยอมรับของผู้ใช้งาน พร้อมทั้งได้รับข้อเสนอแนะที่เป็นประโยชน์สำหรับการปรับปรุงพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์ม อย่างต่อเนื่องในอนาคตอย่างเป็นระบบ

ระยะที่ 4 การประเมินผลการใช้แพลตฟอร์ม หลังจากดำเนินการทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มในระยะเวลา หนึ่งภาคการศึกษาอย่างต่อเนื่องแล้ว ผู้วิจัยได้ทำการประเมินผลการใช้งานแพลตฟอร์มทั้งในด้านประสิทธิภาพ ของระบบและระดับความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้งาน เพื่อให้ผลการประเมินมีความน่าเชื่อถือและเป็นไปอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ จึงได้วางแผนการคัดเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างและระเบียบวิธีวิจัยอย่างเข้มงวด โดยประชากรที่เกี่ยวข้องแบ่งเป็นกลุ่ม ผู้บริหาร 4 คน ผู้เชี่ยวชาญ 3 คน ผู้สอน 5 คน และผู้เกี่ยวข้องกับการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์ม 3 คน รวม 15 คน ส่วนกลุ่มนิสิตแบ่งเป็น 4 คณะ ได้แก่ คณะครุศาสตร์ พุทธศาสตร์ มนุษยศาสตร์ และสังคมศาสตร์ คณะละ 100 คน รวมเป็น 400 คน ในการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่างนิสิต ผู้วิจัยใช้วิธีการสุ่มแบบชั้นภูมิ (Proportional Stratified Random Sampling) โดยพิจารณาให้แต่ละคณะมีตัวแทนกลุ่มตัวอย่างที่เหมาะสมตามสัดส่วน ซึ่งคำนวณขนาดกลุ่มตัวอย่าง ด้วยสูตรทาโร่ ยามาเน่ (Taro Yamane) โดยตั้งค่าความคลาดเคลื่อนที่ยอมรับได้ที่ 0.05 ซึ่งทำให้กำหนดขนาด กลุ่มตัวอย่างรวมเป็น 200 คน แบ่งเป็นกลุ่มละ 50 คนสำหรับแต่ละคณะ เพื่อให้สามารถสะท้อนความคิดเห็น ของนิสิตได้อย่างมีความหลากหลายและแท้จริง ขณะที่กลุ่มผู้บริหาร อาจารย์ และผู้เกี่ยวข้องเลือกใช้วิธีการเจาะจง ตัวอย่าง (Purposive Sampling) เพื่อให้ข้อมูลที่ไดมาจากกลุ่มผู้มีความรู้และประสบการณ์ตรงเกี่ยวกับการพัฒนา และใช้งานแพลตฟอร์มด้วยเช่นกัน สำหรับเครื่องมือวิจัยหลักที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูล คือ แบบสอบถาม ซึ่งถูกสร้างขึ้น ภายใตกรอบแนวคิดและทฤษฎีที่เกี่ยวข้องกับแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษาคุณกิจพิสัยตามหลักพุทธธรรม โดยกระบวนการสร้างเครื่องมือชี้ให้เห็นถึงความใส่ใจในความเที่ยงตรงและความเชื่อมั่น ประกอบด้วย ขั้นตอนสำคัญ คือ การนำร่างแบบสอบถามเสนอให้ผู้เชี่ยวชาญ จำนวน 5 ท่าน ทำการตรวจสอบความตรงเชิงเนื้อหา (Content Validity) รวมทั้งการประเมินการใช้ภาษาและความครบถ้วนของเนื้อหา โดยใช้ตัวชี้วัดดัชนีความสอดคล้อง (Item-Objective Congruence: IOC) ซึ่งเฉพาะคำถามที่มีค่า IOC เท่ากับหรือมากกว่า 0.5 เท่านั้นที่ถูกคัดเลือกใช้ ในขั้นตอนต่อมา ได้มีการปรับปรุงแก้ไขข้อคำถามตามคำแนะนำของผู้เชี่ยวชาญ ก่อนนำไปทำการทดลองใช้เบื้องต้น (Tryout) กับกลุ่มตัวอย่างผู้สอน จำนวน 10 ชุด เพื่อวัดค่าความเชื่อมั่นของเครื่องมือผ่านค่าสัมประสิทธิ์ Cronbach's Alpha และพบว่า แบบสอบถามมีความเชื่อมั่นรวมอยู่ที่ 0.895 ซึ่งแสดงถึงความน่าเชื่อถือที่สูงเพียงพอต่อการนำไปใช้ ในงานวิจัยจริง ขั้นตอนการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลดำเนินการโดยส่งแบบสอบถามผ่านช่องทางออนไลน์ เช่น แอปพลิเคชันไลน์ ไปยังกลุ่มตัวอย่าง โดยมีการติดตามและตรวจสอบความสมบูรณ์ของแบบสอบถามที่ได้รับคืนกลับมา เพื่อมีกระบวนการ วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลที่ถูกต้องและครบถ้วน การวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลปริมาณเริ่มต้นด้วยการแจกแจงความถี่ของคำตอบและ การจำแนกประเภทคำตอบในแต่ละข้อ ซึ่งถูกลกรหัสเป็นตัวเลขสำหรับการจัดเก็บและประมวลผลด้วยโปรแกรม สถิติสำเร็จรูป โดยข้อมูลทั่วไปของผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามจะนำเสนอในรูปแบบตารางแสดงค่าความถี่และร้อยละ อย่างชัดเจน ส่วนข้อมูลการประเมินประสิทธิภาพของแพลตฟอร์มถูกวิเคราะห์ด้วยการคำนวณค่าเฉลี่ย (Mean) และค่าความเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน (Standard Deviation: S.D.) ในระดับภาพรวม รายด้าน และรายข้อ พร้อมนำมาแปลผล



ตามเกณฑ์มาตรฐานที่กำหนดไว้ เช่น ค่าเฉลี่ย 4.51 - 5.00 หมายถึง ระดับประสิทธิภาพหรือความพึงพอใจมากที่สุด สำหรับการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพจากข้อเสนอแนะในแบบสอบถามปลายเปิดและการสัมภาษณ์ผู้ใช้งาน ใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา (Content Analysis) อย่างเป็นระบบ โดยผ่านขั้นตอนการอ่านซ้ำอย่างละเอียด เพื่อให้เกิดความเข้าใจอย่างลึกซึ้ง จากนั้นทำการตั้งรหัสข้อมูล (Open Coding) เพื่อระบุแนวคิดหรือประเด็นหลัก ต่อด้วยการจัดหมวดหมู่ (Categorization) รวมทั้งการสังเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงลึก (Thematic Analysis) เพื่อค้นหาและสรุปสาระสำคัญที่สะท้อนจุดแข็ง จุดอ่อน และข้อเสนอแนะในการพัฒนาการใช้งานแพลตฟอร์มให้เหมาะสม ตลอดจนสร้างความโปร่งใสและชัดเจนในกระบวนการใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัย ด้วยความรอบคอบในขั้นตอนการเลือกกลุ่มตัวอย่าง การสร้างและตรวจสอบคุณภาพเครื่องมือ รวมถึงการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลทั้งเชิงปริมาณและเชิงคุณภาพเช่นนี้ ผลการประเมินแพลตฟอร์มประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัลตามหลักพุทธธรรมของมหาวิทยาลัย จึงมีความน่าเชื่อถือและเหมาะสมสำหรับใช้เป็นแนวทางในการพัฒนาต่อยอดในอนาคตอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

ผลการวิจัยและอภิปรายผล

ผลการวิจัยและอภิปรายผลจากการศึกษานวัตกรรมการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัลตามหลักพุทธธรรมในบริบทของมหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย สามารถสรุปได้ตามวัตถุประสงค์หลัก 4 ข้อ ดังนี้

วัตถุประสงค์ข้อที่ 1 เพื่อศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันของแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษา พบว่า ระบบประเมินผลออนไลน์ที่มีอยู่ยังมีข้อจำกัดหลายด้าน เช่น ไม่มีฐานข้อมูลข้อสอบอย่างเป็นระบบ ขาดกลไกในการวัดผลที่เชื่อมโยงกับกระบวนการเรียนรู้ และไม่มีการบูรณาการหลักธรรมพุทธอย่างแท้จริง ผู้ใช้งานจึงแสดงความต้องการแพลตฟอร์มกลางที่รองรับการจัดข้อสอบ ประเมินผล และวิเคราะห์ผลการเรียนรู้ได้ทันทั่วถึง พร้อมรองรับความหลากหลายของผู้เรียนและสอดคล้องกับหลักธรรมของสถาบัน ซึ่งสอดคล้องกับแนวคิดที่เห็นว่าการจัดการเรียนรู้ออนไลน์แบบผสมผสานช่วยจัดข้อจำกัดในการเข้าถึงและส่งเสริมคุณภาพการศึกษา

วัตถุประสงค์ข้อที่ 2 ดำเนินการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบ ที่ประกอบด้วย ระบบ LMS สำหรับนิสิต และ CMS สำหรับอาจารย์ผู้สอน โดยแบ่งออกเป็น 6 โมดูลหลัก ประกอบด้วย โมดูลการจัดการเนื้อหา ผู้สอน ผู้เรียน ประมวลผลรายวิชา โครงสร้างรายวิชา และกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ ซึ่งทั้งหมดนี้ผ่านการบูรณาการหลักอริยสัจ 4 ตั้งแต่การระบุปัญหา วิเคราะห์สาเหตุ ตั้งเป้าหมาย และหาแนวทางแก้ไข เพื่อสร้างนวัตกรรมเชิงระบบที่รองรับการประเมินผลทั้งด้านวิชาการและคุณธรรมได้อย่างครบถ้วน

วัตถุประสงค์ข้อที่ 3 ทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มในห้องเรียนจริงกับกลุ่มเป้าหมาย 215 คน พบว่า แพลตฟอร์มมีความพร้อมใช้งานสูง สามารถทำงานตามฟังก์ชันได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ และผู้ใช้สามารถเข้าถึงระบบได้อย่างราบรื่น พร้อมทั้งสื่อสารและใช้งานได้อย่างชัดเจน ประสิทธิภาพของระบบยังได้รับการปรับปรุงอย่างต่อเนื่องตามข้อเสนอแนะจากผู้ใช้ ช่วยให้ระบบมีความเสถียรและใช้งานง่ายขึ้น

วัตถุประสงค์ข้อที่ 4 คือ การประเมินความพึงพอใจและประสิทธิภาพของแพลตฟอร์ม พบว่า โดยรวมแพลตฟอร์มมีคะแนนประเมินในระดับ “มากที่สุด” ทั้งในด้านความสามารถในการทำงานของระบบ ($\bar{X} = 4.58$, S.D. = 0.49) ความง่ายในการใช้งาน ($\bar{X} = 4.55$, S.D. = 0.50) และความพึงพอใจโดยรวม ($\bar{X} = 4.51$, S.D. = 0.63) โดยเฉพาะความสามารถในการสร้างหลักสูตรและการประเมินผลที่ได้รับคะแนนสูงสุด แสดงว่าแพลตฟอร์มตอบสนองความต้องการของผู้ใช้ทุกระดับได้อย่างเหมาะสม ดัง Table 1



Table 1 Comparison of Results Before and After Using the Platform

Indicator	Before Using the Platform (\bar{x})	After Using the Platform (\bar{x})
Ability to Analyze Learning Outcomes	3.10	4.52
Ease of System Use	3.15	4.55
Overall Satisfaction	3.20	4.51
Accuracy in Assessment	3.05	4.57

นอกจากผลลัพธ์เชิงปริมาณที่แสดงถึงความก้าวหน้าของแพลตฟอร์มแล้ว ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพจากผู้ใช้งานยังสะท้อนให้เห็นมุมมองและประสบการณ์โดยตรงที่มีต่อแพลตฟอร์มนี้อย่างลึกซึ้ง นิสิตส่วนใหญ่กล่าวชมว่าระบบช่วยให้พวกเขามองเห็นผลการเรียนและได้รับข้อเสนอแนะอย่างทันที ส่งผลให้เข้าใจเนื้อหาและสามารถปรับปรุงตนเองได้อย่างรวดเร็ว อีกทั้งการส่งงานและติดตามผลในระบบยังมีความสะดวก ง่ายต่อการใช้ และไม่ซับซ้อน ทำให้เกิดความพึงพอใจและเพิ่มแรงจูงใจในการเรียนรู้มากขึ้น ในขณะเดียวกัน อาจารย์ผู้ใช้งานก็ให้ข้อมูลว่า แพลตฟอร์มทำให้การประเมินผลมีความแม่นยำและเป็นระบบมากขึ้น ช่วยให้สามารถติดตามพัฒนาการเรียนรู้ของนิสิตแต่ละคนได้อย่างใกล้ชิด พร้อมทั้งชื่นชมฟังก์ชันการออกแบบหลักสูตรที่มีความยืดหยุ่นและสอดคล้องกับหลักสูตรพุทธอย่างชัดเจน ซึ่งส่งเสริมทั้งด้านวิชาการและคุณธรรมควบคู่กันไปอย่างเหมาะสมจากการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเชิงคุณภาพ พบว่า นิสิตให้ข้อเสนอแนะว่าควรพัฒนาระบบให้สามารถให้ Feedback ได้รวดเร็วและชัดเจนมากขึ้น รวมถึงต้องการกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ที่หลากหลายและน่าสนใจ เพื่อกระตุ้นความสนใจและเพิ่มการมีส่วนร่วมในกระบวนการเรียนรู้ให้มากยิ่งขึ้น ส่วนอาจารย์สะท้อนความเห็นต่อระบบประเมินผลและจัดการข้อมูลว่ามีความยืดหยุ่นสูง มีบทบาทสำคัญในการผลักดันให้เกิดการผนวกหลักสูตรเข้ามาเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของกระบวนการเรียนรู้พร้อมกันไป อีกทั้งยังแนะนำให้พัฒนา UI/UX ของระบบให้เหมาะสมกับกลุ่มผู้ใช้ที่หลากหลาย เพื่อเพิ่มความสะดวกและประสิทธิภาพในการใช้งาน แนวทางการพัฒนาที่สำคัญในอนาคต คือการเพิ่มฟีเจอร์มัลติมีเดีย วิดีโอ รวมถึงฟังก์ชัน Interactive ต่าง ๆ ภายในแพลตฟอร์ม เพื่อเสริมสร้างประสิทธิภาพและประสบการณ์การเรียนรู้ให้หลากหลายมากขึ้น พร้อมด้วยการพัฒนาระบบแจ้งเตือนข้อเสนอแนะแบบอัตโนมัติเพื่อช่วยสนับสนุนการติดตามผลและการประเมินผลที่แม่นยำและทันเวลา ตอบสนองความต้องการของผู้ใช้งานได้อย่างเต็มที่ ข้อมูลเชิงพรรณนาเหล่านี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าแพลตฟอร์มนี้ไม่เพียงแต่พัฒนาประสิทธิภาพและความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้ในเชิงเทคนิค แต่ยังช่วยเสริมสร้างความเข้าใจ ความร่วมมือ และคุณธรรมควบคู่ไปด้วยอย่างแท้จริง สอดคล้องกับเป้าหมายของการศึกษาเชิงพุทธในยุคดิจิทัล ที่มุ่งเน้นการพัฒนาองค์ความรู้และคุณภาพชีวิตอย่างยั่งยืนในบริบทของการศึกษาสมัยใหม่

นวัตกรรมการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัลตามหลักพุทธธรรม มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย สะท้อนให้เห็นว่า การบูรณาการองค์ความรู้ด้านเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศร่วมกับหลักธรรมในพระพุทธศาสนา โดยเฉพาะ “อริยสัจ 4” สามารถพัฒนาเป็นระบบการประเมินผลที่ตอบสนองวิสัยทัศน์แห่งยุคดิจิทัลได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพและลุ่มลึกในเชิงคุณค่า สอดคล้องกับสากลและเฉพาะเจาะจงกับอัตลักษณ์ของมหาวิทยาลัยสงฆ์

ผลการศึกษาพบว่า สภาพปัจจุบันของระบบการประเมินผลในมหาวิทยาลัยยังไม่สามารถตอบโจทย์ด้านการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเพื่อการประเมินอย่างเป็นระบบ และยังขาดความยืดหยุ่นในการรองรับผู้เรียนที่มีลักษณะและพื้นฐานที่หลากหลาย ผลสะท้อนนี้คล้อยกับรายงานของ Heil & Ifenthaler (2023) และ Scully et al. (2021) ที่ชี้ให้เห็นว่าการวัดผลในรูปแบบเดิมในระบบอุดมศึกษายังมีขีดจำกัดทางเทคนิค เช่น ความไม่สามารถเข้าถึงการวิเคราะห์ผลเรียนรู้แบบเรียลไทม์ การขาดรูปแบบสะท้อนกลับทันที และความไม่ทันสมัยของระบบประเมิน



ส่วน Redecker (2017) เน้นว่าความท้าทายประการสำคัญในการปฏิรูประบบการประเมินผล คือ การทำให้ระบบมีความโปร่งใส ยืดหยุ่น และสอดคล้องกับนโยบาย Digital Competence ระดับสากล

การพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มดิจิทัลโดยบูรณาการหลักพุทธธรรม ขั้นตอนการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มในงานวิจัยนี้ใช้หลัก “อริยสัจ 4” เป็นกรอบแนวคิดหลัก ช่วยให้กระบวนการพัฒนานวัตกรรมมีความเป็นระบบ แก้ไขปัญหาจากรากฐาน และคงเอกลักษณ์แห่งสถาบันโดยเน้นการหลอมรวมระหว่างคุณธรรมกับความทันสมัยทางเทคโนโลยี (Rampelt & Budde, 2022)

การทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มที่พัฒนาขึ้นสะท้อนถึงประสิทธิภาพในการทำงานของระบบที่สูงมาก โดยเฉพาะด้านการใช้งานของระบบ (ฟังก์ชันการทำงาน) (\bar{X} = 4.58, S.D. = 0.49) และความง่ายต่อการใช้งานระบบ (\bar{X} = 4.55, S.D. = 0.50) ซึ่งสอดคล้องกับผลวิจัยของ Broadbent & Poon (2015) ที่ยืนยันว่าความง่ายในการใช้เทคโนโลยี (Usability) มีผลโดยตรงต่อระดับการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้เรียนในบริบทการเรียนรู้แบบดิจิทัล ผลวิจัยของ Noguera et al. (2019) ยังแสดงให้เห็นว่าผู้ใช้งานมีความเชื่อมั่นต่อระบบมากขึ้นเมื่อตัวระบบมีความคล่องตัวในการให้ Feedback และประมวลผลได้แม่นยำทันที ที่โดดเด่น คือ ความสามารถในการออกแบบระบบตามกรอบแนวคิด “อริยสัจ 4” ซึ่งมีการแปลงหลัก “ทุกข์-สมุทัย-นิโรธ-มรรค” มาเป็นขั้นตอนในการพัฒนาระบบ ได้แก่ 1) การกำหนดปัญหาในระบบประเมินผลเดิม 2) การวิเคราะห์สาเหตุเชิงเทคนิคและเชิงบริหาร 3) การตั้งเป้าหมายการพัฒนาระบบแพลตฟอร์มเพื่อให้ครอบคลุมทั้งด้านประสิทธิภาพและจริยธรรม และ 4) การวางแผนทางดำเนินการและนำไปใช้ในบริบทจริง ซึ่งแนวทางนี้ตรงกับข้อเสนอ และงานวิเคราะห์ของ Karunamuni & Weerasekera (2019) ที่ระบุว่า การศึกษาด้านจริยธรรมในโลกดิจิทัลควรมีฐานคิดแบบพุทธธรรมเพื่อหล่อหลอมกระบวนการออกแบบนวัตกรรมให้คงไว้ ซึ่งความเป็นมนุษย์ในท่ามกลางความเปลี่ยนแปลง

นอกจากนี้ การออกแบบระบบออนไลน์แบ่งเป็น LMS สำหรับนิสิต และ CMS สำหรับอาจารย์ผู้สอน ยังช่วยรองรับกระบวนการสื่อสารสองทาง (Two-Way Interaction) ซึ่ง Tsai et al. (2022) อธิบายว่าเป็นหัวใจของการประเมินผลในยุค Post-Pandemic Education เพราะเน้น “Reflective Assessment” มากกว่า “Punitive Assessment” และสร้างการเรียนรู้แบบมีส่วนร่วม

การประเมินความพึงพอใจและผลเชิงระบบ ผู้ใช้มีความพึงพอใจต่อแพลตฟอร์มในระดับสูง (\bar{X} = 4.51, S.D. = 0.63) โดยเฉพาะความสามารถการสร้างและจัดการหลักสูตร ระบบประเมินผล และการวิเคราะห์ผู้เรียน ผลการประเมินนี้สอดคล้องกับแนวคิดที่ว่ายิ่งระบบมี Usability ที่ดีและ Feedback Real-Time ยิ่งเพิ่มความพึงพอใจและผลสัมฤทธิ์ (Khalil & Ebner, 2017); (Huang et al., 2020) ในมิติระบบ แพลตฟอร์มช่วยยกระดับมาตรฐานการศึกษา ขยายโอกาสทางการเรียนรู้ สร้างเครือข่ายทางวิชาการระดับนานาชาติ และรองรับแนวคิด Digital Transformation ของอุดมศึกษาไทย และระบบการประเมินผลอย่างต่อเนื่อง สอดคล้องกับแนวทางของ Heil & Ifenthaler (2023) และ Redecker (2017) ที่ให้ความสำคัญกับระบบประเมินที่ผู้เรียนมองว่าเป็น “เครื่องมือพัฒนา” มากกว่า “เครื่องมือคัดกรอง”

โดยรวมแล้ว ผลการวิจัยนี้สอดคล้องกับหลักการ Digital Pedagogy และพุทธปัญญาศึกษา (Buddhist Wisdom-based Education) ซึ่งมหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัยให้ความสำคัญ โดยการผสมผสาน “เทคโนโลยี + ธรรมะ” เข้าด้วยกันอย่างมีระบบ เพื่อสร้างสังคมการเรียนรู้ที่มีคุณภาพ มีคุณธรรม และยั่งยืน

องค์ความรู้ใหม่

จากการวิจัยเรื่อง “นวัตกรรมการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัลตามหลักพุทธธรรม มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย” ได้พัฒนาเป็นองค์ความรู้ใหม่ภายใต้ชื่อว่า “โมเดลการบูรณาการพุทธธรรมกับการประเมินผลการศึกษาในยุคดิจิทัล” (Integrated Buddhist Digital Education Assessment Model: IBDEA



Model) ซึ่งเน้นการผสมผสานเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศเข้ากับหลักพระพุทธศาสนา เพื่อสร้างระบบการประเมินผลที่มีประสิทธิภาพ พร้อมทั้งส่งเสริมจริยธรรมและคุณลักษณะอันพึงประสงค์ในบริบทของมหาวิทยาลัยพระพุทธศาสนา

1. กรอบแนวคิดของโมเดล IBDEA

โมเดลนี้สังเคราะห์ขึ้นจากหลักการ User-Centered Design แนวคิดระบบ (System Theory) และหลักอริยสัจ 4 โดยมีจุดเด่นที่ผสมผสานกระบวนการพัฒนาระบบการประเมินผลเข้ากับประสบการณ์ของผู้ใช้ในหลากหลายมิติ ได้แก่ นักวิชาการ อาจารย์ ผู้บริหาร และนิสิต พร้อมแนวทางการพัฒนาอย่างต่อเนื่อง โดยอาศัยหลักธรรมทางพระพุทธศาสนาเป็นแกนกลางช่วยชี้นำการออกแบบระบบดิจิทัลในมิติศีลธรรม

2. โครงสร้างของโมเดล IBDEA

โมเดล ประกอบด้วย 4 ระยะหลัก โดยสอดคล้องกับองค์ประกอบของ อริยสัจ 4 ได้แก่ ดัง Table 2

Table 2 The Four Noble Truths as a Developmental Process for Digital Educational Assessment Platforms

Process Stage	Buddhist Principle	Educational System Context
Stage 1: Problem Analysis	Dukkha (Suffering/Problem)	Identification of key issues in the existing assessment system, such as obsolescence, rigidity, or inefficiency.
Stage 2: Cause Analysis	Samudaya (Origin of Suffering)	Investigation of the root causes e.g. disconnected data, tools that do not meet user needs, or lack of interoperability.
Stage 3: Goal Setting	Nirodha (Cessation of Suffering)	Setting clear targets for the platform: User-Centric (UX), flexibility, reliability, security, and alignment with core values.
Stage 4: Development & Implementation	Magga (Path to the Cessation of Suffering)	Building, piloting, and iteratively improving the platform based on real user needs, with continuous feedback and evaluation.

นอกจากนี้ โมเดล ยังประกอบด้วย 6 โมดูลหลักในระดับเทคโนโลยี ได้แก่ ระบบจัดการเนื้อหาหลักสูตร (Content Management) ระบบจัดการผู้สอน (Instructor Interface) ระบบจัดการผู้เรียน (Learner Profile & Analytics) ระบบประมวลผลความก้าวหน้าทางวิชาการ (Assessment Processing) ระบบออกแบบรายวิชาเชิงคุณธรรม (Curriculum Mapping with Ethical Outcomes) และระบบกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ตามหลักพุทธธรรม (Buddhist-oriented Learning Activities)

3. ลักษณะพิเศษและผลลัพธ์ของโมเดล

3.1 User-Centered: เน้นการพัฒนาจากฐานความต้องการของผู้ใช้จริง ผ่านการสัมภาษณ์และสนทนากลุ่ม

3.2 Flexible Architecture: ระบบ LMS และ CMS แบ่งส่วนชัดเจน รองรับการใช้งานจำนวนมาก

3.4 Evidence-Based Feedback System: มีระบบติดตาม วิเคราะห์พฤติกรรมผู้เรียน

3.5 Buddhist Integration: หลอมรวมวัตถุประสงค์ของหลักสูตรเข้ากับคุณธรรม

3.5 Scalable and Secured: เชื่อมโยงกับระบบอื่นได้ ปลอดภัย และมีเสถียรภาพ

3.6 Continuous Improvement Loop: รับฟังข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มอย่างต่อเนื่อง

4. คุณค่าทางวิชาการและการนำไปใช้

โมเดล IBDEA นี้สามารถนำไปเผยแพร่และประยุกต์ใช้ในระดับอุดมศึกษา ทั้งในบริบทของสถาบันที่มีพื้นฐานพุทธศาสนา และสถาบันทั่วไปที่ต้องการแนวทางการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลที่มีคุณธรรมผสานกับเทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศ เป็นต้นแบบของการศึกษาในยุคดิจิทัลที่ไม่ทิ้งคุณธรรม เพื่อส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้ตลอดชีวิตและคุณภาพชีวิตที่ยั่งยืน

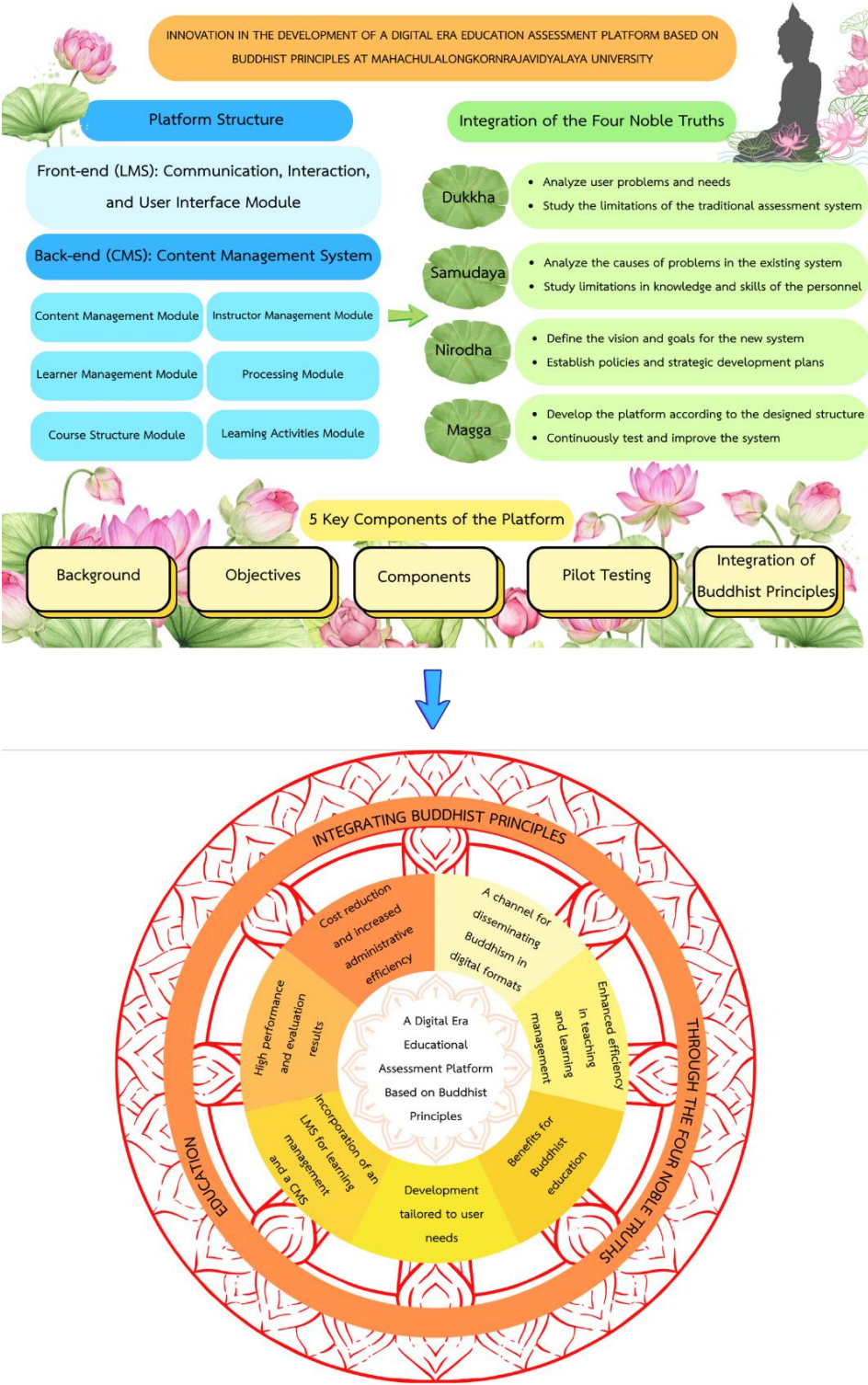


Figure 1 Integrated Buddhist Digital Education Assessment Model: IBDEA Model



สรุปและข้อเสนอแนะ

งานวิจัยเรื่อง “นวัตกรรมการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มประเมินผลการศึกษายุคดิจิทัลตามหลักพุทธธรรม มหาวิทยาลัยมหาจุฬาลงกรณราชวิทยาลัย” ได้เน้นให้เห็นถึงการปรับตัวของมหาวิทยาลัยสู่ยุคดิจิทัลอย่างเป็นระบบ ผ่านนโยบายระดับชาติ การพัฒนาศักยภาพบุคลากร และการจัดตั้งแพลตฟอร์มการประเมินผลออนไลน์ที่ผสมผสานระหว่างเทคโนโลยีสมัยใหม่กับค่านิยมทางพระพุทธศาสนา โดยเฉพาะการยึดถือหลักอริยสัจ 4 เพื่อสร้างความสมดุลระหว่างมาตรฐานวิชาการและคุณธรรมจริยธรรม แพลตฟอร์มต้นแบบ ประกอบด้วย ระบบจัดการเรียนรู้ (LMS) สำหรับนิสิต และระบบจัดการเนื้อหา (CMS) สำหรับอาจารย์และผู้บริหาร ที่มี 6 โมดูลหลัก ได้แก่ การจัดการเนื้อหา การจัดการผู้สอน การจัดการผู้เรียน การประมวลผลรายวิชา การออกแบบโครงสร้างรายวิชา และกิจกรรมการเรียนรู้ ซึ่งได้รับการประเมินจากผู้เชี่ยวชาญว่าอยู่ในระดับ “มากที่สุด” โดยเฉพาะโมดูลการจัดการเนื้อหา การทดลองใช้แพลตฟอร์มกับนิสิตและผู้เกี่ยวข้อง พร้อมข้อเสนอแนะอย่างต่อเนื่อง ทำให้เกิดการปรับปรุงระบบในด้านการลงทะเบียน เมนู UI/UX การเพิ่มมัลติมีเดีย และการแสดงผลคะแนน ส่งผลให้ระบบมีประสิทธิภาพสูงมาก ในภาพรวม รวมทั้งความพึงพอใจของผู้ใช้สูงมาก โดยเฉพาะในด้านการสร้างหลักสูตร การประเมินผล และการติดตามผล นอกจากนี้ แพลตฟอร์มยังช่วยขยายโอกาสทางการศึกษา ยกระดับมาตรฐานสู่สากล รองรับผู้ใช้งานจำนวนมาก มีความปลอดภัยสูง เชื่อมโยงกับระบบสารสนเทศและสร้างเครือข่ายความร่วมมือ ตลอดจนส่งเสริมการเผยแผ่พระพุทธศาสนาในรูปแบบสมัยใหม่ จุดเด่นสำคัญของแพลตฟอร์มนี้อยู่ที่การประยุกต์ใช้หลักอริยสัจ 4 ในการวิเคราะห์ปัญหา วางแผนพัฒนา และปรับปรุงระบบจริงในบริบทของมหาวิทยาลัยสงฆ์ ทำให้เป็นต้นแบบของระบบประเมินดิจิทัลที่ทันสมัย ยืดหยุ่น และคำนึงถึงคุณธรรมควบคู่ไปด้วย ทั้งนี้ ในแง่การขยายผลสู่ระบบคุณภาพการศึกษาในระดับประเทศ แพลตฟอร์มนี้มีศักยภาพที่โดดเด่นในการสนับสนุนกระบวนการประกันคุณภาพการศึกษา จึงควรเสนอแนะแนวทางการบูรณาการร่วมกับระบบประกันคุณภาพภายใน (IQA) และระบบประกันคุณภาพภายนอก (EQA) ของสถาบันอุดมศึกษา เพื่อให้เกิดผลลัพธ์เชิงระบบที่เป็นรูปธรรมและยั่งยืนในวงกว้าง โดยการเชื่อมโยงข้อมูลและผลการประเมินเข้ากับมาตรฐานและตัวชี้วัดของระบบประกันคุณภาพ จะช่วยยกระดับการจัดการศึกษา ส่งเสริมความโปร่งใส และการพัฒนาศักยภาพของบุคลากรและผู้เรียนในระดับชาติอย่างเต็มที่ ข้อเสนอแนะเชิงนโยบาย คือ ให้สถาบันที่มีการกิจด้านศีลธรรมและคุณธรรม นำโมเดลนี้ไปประยุกต์ใช้ พร้อมจัดการฝึกอบรมบุคลากรเกี่ยวกับการออกแบบดิจิทัลและการประเมินผลที่สอดคล้องกับพุทธธรรมอย่างครบถ้วน รวมถึงส่งเสริมการใช้แพลตฟอร์มในการประเมินและประกันคุณภาพภายในอย่างจริงจัง ส่วนข้อเสนอแนะทางวิจัย ควรศึกษาเพิ่มเติมเกี่ยวกับผลกระทบของแพลตฟอร์มต่อพฤติกรรมการเรียนรู้และคุณธรรมของนิสิตอย่างต่อเนื่อง รวมถึงการเปรียบเทียบประสิทธิภาพระหว่างสถาบันที่ใช้และไม่ใช้แนวคิดพุทธธรรม และการพัฒนาแพลตฟอร์มในรูปแบบ Open Access หรือ MOOC เพื่อส่งเสริมการเรียนรู้และเผยแผ่พระพุทธศาสนาในระดับนานาชาติต่อไปอย่างกว้างขวางและยั่งยืน

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VEGETARIANISM IN BUDDHIST ETHICS, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THERAVADA AND MAHAYANA PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Background: Vegetarianism occupies a central position in both historical and contemporary debates on ethical living, particularly within religious traditions that emphasize compassion and non-violence. In Buddhism, vegetarianism is closely linked to the principle of Ahimsa (Non-harming), a moral injunction and central element of spiritual cultivation. Despite its recognition in Buddhist ethics, understanding how these teachings are interpreted and practiced in modern contexts remains limited. Scholarship often treats Buddhist vegetarianism as homogeneous, whereas its application varies across regions, schools, and communities. Questions persist regarding how Buddhists negotiate traditional ethical imperatives alongside contemporary concerns for health, ecological sustainability, and social responsibility. To address this, the study aimed to explore how Ahimsa shaped vegetarian practices in Theravada and Mahayana contexts and their health and ecological implications. A qualitative approach was adopted, combining textual analysis of canonical scriptures and modern literature, enabling exploration of how ethical principles were expressed and aligned with scientific and environmental discourses.

Involvement to Buddhadhamma: Findings revealed that Buddhist vegetarianism could not be understood as a monolithic practice but must be situated within doctrinal, cultural, and historical contexts. In Mahayana traditions of China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam, vegetarianism was strongly emphasized and texts such as the Lankavatara and the Mahaparinirvana Sutras explicitly discouraged meat consumption as incompatible with bodhisattva compassion. Accordingly, many monastic communities and lay practitioners adopted strict vegetarian diets, viewing abstention from meat as an expression of Karuna and the vow to save sentient beings. By contrast, Theravada Buddhism, predominant in South and Southeast Asia, allowed monks to consume meat that was not killed specifically for them, emphasizing intentionality over consumption. Many Theravada practitioners, both monastic and lay, voluntarily adopted vegetarian diets, promoting plant-based foods during religious observances as an expression of merit-making, compassion, and ethical responsibility. Beyond doctrinal interpretation, Buddhist vegetarianism engaged with modern science and sustainability discourse: Plant-based



diets reduced risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, certain cancers, and gallstones, while supporting bone health, glycemic control, and mental well-being. Ecologically, vegetarianism reduces greenhouse gas emissions, land and water use, and eases pressure on global food systems. These findings resonated with Buddhist ethical imperatives and illustrated the application of Buddhist principles to contemporary challenges, especially in promoting sustainable development across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, highlighting Dhamma's relevance beyond monastic contexts. The data highlighted that vegetarianism in Buddhism functioned not merely as a religious ideal but as a multidimensional practice integrating ethical, spiritual, health, ecological, and sustainability considerations, demonstrating how Buddhadhamma guided contemporary lifestyle choices and decisions in accordance with the principle of Ahimsa.

Conclusions: The study concluded that Buddhist vegetarianism represented a dynamic interplay between doctrinal teachings, cultural contexts, and ethical debates. While Mahayana often mandated abstention from meat and Theravada emphasized intention, both shared a concern with compassion and non-harming shaping practice in diverse contexts. Buddhist principles were embodied in monastic and lay practices, linking ethical ideals to contemporary health and sustainability concerns. Thus, Ahimsa retained relevance, guiding dietary practices that reflected compassion, promoted health, and supported ecological balance, and addressed social responsibility, thereby clarifying how ancient ethical commitments intersected with modern scientific insights and shaped ethical consumption and sustainable living.

Keywords: Buddhist Vegetarianism, Buddhist Ahimsa, Plant-Based Nutrition, Environmental Sustainability, Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism

Introduction

Food and nutrition are fundamental to human health, growth, and well-being. A well-balanced diet ensures physical development, supports healthy aging, and enhances resistance to disease. Key nutrients, including carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber, and water, must be consumed in appropriate proportions to meet physiological needs and maintain energy for daily functioning (Ohlhorst et al., 2013); (Murkovic, 2021). While these considerations are crucial, dietary choices are also shaped by cultural, ethical, and religious values that provide moral guidance and social responsibility.

Vegetarianism has gained popularity as a lifestyle choice influenced by concerns about animal welfare, weight management, religious beliefs, and the ecological footprint of animal agriculture (Leitzmann, 2014). Understanding how ethical frameworks inform dietary decisions is essential to appreciating the broader significance of vegetarian diets. Buddhism, in particular, offers a compelling ethical and philosophical foundation for vegetarianism. Its principles of Ahimsa (Non-harming) and (Compassion) guide practitioners in making mindful dietary choices that extend beyond personal health to encompass ethical conduct, spiritual cultivation, and environmental sustainability (Sevmis & Tengiz, 2020); (Harvey, 2000); (Barstow, 2019).



Sustaining a vegetarian lifestyle typically depends on personal conviction, social support, and access to suitable food options (Ruby, 2012). While Mahayana traditions often mandate vegetarianism and Theravada traditions emphasize intention, both share a foundational concern with compassion and non-harming. These principles continue to shape contemporary practices, influencing health behaviors, ecological awareness, and ethical consumption. Exploring this interplay between traditional teachings and modern challenges is particularly relevant today as plant-based diets gain global attention for their benefits to health, society, and the environment.

From the above, this article argues that Buddhist ethical principles, particularly Ahimsa, provide a foundational framework for understanding contemporary vegetarian practices. The paper examines vegetarianism in Buddhist perspectives, compares Theravada and Mahayana approaches, and discusses the types, advantages, disadvantages, and nutritional considerations of vegetarian diets. Dietary guidelines for vegetarian and vegan practices are also presented, highlighting the alignment of ethical, health, and environmental concerns. Finally, the article emphasizes its originality and contribution to the body of knowledge, offering a systematic and detailed academic exploration of the subject.

Vegetarianism in Buddhist Perspectives

Vegetarianism in Buddhism is primarily grounded in the ethical principle of Ahimsa (Non-violence) which underpins the First Precept (Panatipata Veramani), prohibiting the taking of life. This principle, combined with the cultivation of Karuna (Compassion) toward all sentient beings, forms a moral foundation for many Buddhists who choose to abstain from meat (Harvey, 2000). While vegetarianism is not a uniform requirement, it is often regarded as an extension of the commitment to reduce suffering and promote spiritual purity.

In Mahayana Buddhism, especially in East Asian countries such as China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, vegetarianism is both doctrinally supported and widely practiced. Canonical texts like the Lankavatara Sutra and the Mahaparinirvana Sutra denounce meat consumption, associating it with karmic defilement and a lack of compassion (Hiep & Mahatthanadull, 2019). The bodhisattva ideal, central to Mahayana thought, emphasizes the aspiration to alleviate the suffering of all beings, a goal that aligns closely with vegetarian ethics. As such, many Mahayana monastics follow strict vegetarian rules, and the lay community often participates in these practices during religious observances or as a daily commitment.

In contrast, Theravada Buddhism, prevalent in countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, approaches vegetarianism more pragmatically. The Pali Vinaya permits the consumption of meat under specific conditions: if the monk has not seen, heard, or suspected that the animal was killed expressly for them (Mahanarongchai & Marranca, 2015). This guideline shifts the ethical focus to intention rather than action, reflecting a nuanced interpretation of Ahimsa. While Theravada monastics typically rely on alms and may not have control over their meals, many choose to follow a vegetarian diet based on personal ethical reasoning.



The diversity of interpretations across Buddhist traditions underscores the adaptability of Buddhist ethics to cultural and historical contexts. Though Mahayana and Theravada perspectives differ in their application, both recognize the moral implications of dietary choices. In modern times, these traditional values have found renewed relevance amid global conversations on sustainability, animal welfare, and health. As Barstow (2019) notes, contemporary Buddhist communities often promote vegetarianism not only as a spiritual discipline but also as a form of socially engaged ethics.

Ultimately, vegetarianism in Buddhism illustrates a confluence of spiritual practice, ethical reflection, and ecological awareness. It offers a dynamic framework in which ancient teachings respond to modern challenges, reaffirming the role of diet as a vehicle for moral and environmental responsibility. Building on the ethical foundation of Ahimsa and compassion, it is essential to consider how these principles intersect with nutritional science to ensure that a vegetarian diet supports both moral and physical well-being.

Types of Vegetarian Diets

Vegetarianism is broadly defined as a dietary practice that excludes the consumption of meat, poultry, and seafood. However, within this general category, several subtypes exist, differentiated by the inclusion or exclusion of various animal-derived products. Understanding these distinctions is essential in nutritional science, public health, ethics, and cultural studies. The primary types of vegetarians are outlined below (Table 1).

Table 1 Types of Vegetarian Diets (Orzel et al., 2024)

Classification of Vegetarian Diet	Description of Dietary Pattern
Lacto-ovo-vegetarianism	All forms of animal flesh are excluded from the diet. Dairy and egg products are included in the diet.
Lacto-vegetarianism	Excludes all items containing flesh meat, eggs, or ingredients derived from eggs. Dairy products are included in the diet.
Ovo-vegetarianism	Excludes all items containing flesh meat and dairy-derived ingredients. Eggs are included in the diet.
Fruitarianism	All animal-derived foods are excluded from the diet. The diet consists primarily of fresh and dried fruits, with the possible inclusion of nuts, seeds, and select vegetables.
Pescatarian or Pesco-vegetarianism	Excludes all forms of meat, including wild game and poultry. Includes fish and potentially other types of seafood, along with optional inclusion of dairy products and eggs.
Veganism	All animal-derived foods are excluded from the diet.
Flexitarian	The diet emphasizes plant-based foods, with occasional inclusion of meat or other animal-derived products.

The spectrum of vegetarian diets reflects a diverse and evolving set of dietary choices motivated by ethical, health-related, and environmental concerns. Understanding these typologies is

essential for nutrition professionals, researchers, and policymakers seeking to engage with plant-based dietary patterns and their implications for health and sustainability.

Buddhist ethical principles, particularly the concept of Ahimsa (Non-harming) and the cultivation of karuna (Compassion), play a central role in shaping dietary choices among both monastic and lay communities. While Mahayana Buddhism generally emphasizes strict vegetarianism as a spiritual discipline, Theravada Buddhism allows for conditional meat consumption, highlighting the importance of intention in ethical decision-making. Despite these doctrinal differences, both traditions recognize that reducing harm to sentient beings is a fundamental moral aim.

These ethical considerations intersect closely with nutritional science and public health. For instance, the avoidance of meat not only aligns with Buddhist compassion but also affects macronutrient and micronutrient intake, requiring careful attention to protein quality, essential fatty acids, iron, zinc, vitamin B12, and vitamin D. By examining the dietary implications of these ethical choices, we can better understand how traditional Buddhist teachings are applied in contemporary dietary practices and how they correspond with health outcomes. Thus, dietary typologies grounded in Buddhist ethics must also be examined in terms of nutritional adequacy, ensuring that ethical intentions translate into sustainable health outcomes.

To illustrate the relationship between Buddhist ethical perspectives and nutritional considerations, Table 2 provides a comparative overview of Mahayana and Theravada approaches alongside their implications for diet planning, nutrient intake, and potential health benefits. This comparison highlights how ethical motivations and doctrinal interpretations influence practical dietary behaviors and informs strategies for maintaining balanced and sustainable vegetarian or vegan diets.

Table 2 Comparison of Buddhist Ethical Perspectives and Nutritional Implications of Vegetarian Diets

Dimension	Mahayana	Theravada	Nutritional Consideration
Ethical Focus	Strict Vegetarian, Bodhisattva Ideal	Intention-based, Optional Vegetarian	Protein, B12, Iron Adequacy
Typical Practice	Monastics & Devout Lay	Monastics Mostly, Some Lay	Complementary Plant Sources, Supplements
Environmental Impact	Promotes Plant-based Diet	Some Flexibility	Lower Ecological Footprint Aligned with Ethics

Advantages of Vegetarian Diets

A substantial body of research supports the association between vegetarian and vegan diets and improved health outcomes. These dietary patterns are typically higher in complex carbohydrates, fiber, and unsaturated fats, and lower in protein and saturated fat, contributing to



a reduced risk of noncommunicable diseases and enhanced physical health and quality of life (Wang et al., 2023).

An optimal diet, characteristic of populations with low rates of chronic disease, shares these nutritional features. It emphasizes plant-based foods rich in complex carbohydrates, fiber, and water, while limiting fats, cholesterol, salt, and sugars. Protein needs are met through varied consumption of legumes, grains, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Vegetarian diets, closely aligned with the optimal diet, are consistently associated with better cardiovascular outcomes and overall health compared to omnivorous diets, which include both plant and animal products. Cardiovascular diseases, the leading cause of global mortality, are strongly associated with obesity and type 2 diabetes (Orzel et al., 2024). This trend has raised interest in the potential long-term cardiometabolic benefits of plant-based diets. The documented cardioprotective effects of vegetarian diets, including reductions in cholesterol levels and atherosclerosis risk, are largely attributed to two primary factors: The exclusion of high-fat red meat, which can burden the digestive system, and the increased consumption of dietary fiber and complex carbohydrates (Feher et al., 2020); (Sindhu, 2022). Hazelnuts, peanuts, and walnuts are found to reduce the risk of developing these diseases (Sevmis & Tengiz, 2020). Additionally, individuals who follow vegetarian diets exhibit a lower prevalence of hypertension and tend to have lower average blood pressure (Sindhu, 2022). Although sodium intake may be similar across dietary groups, vegetarian diets typically support optimal cardiovascular function and circulatory health.

Vegetarian diets may also contribute to improved glycemic control, facilitating more stable blood glucose levels and enhanced insulin sensitivity (Wang et al., 2023); (Sindhu, 2022). Furthermore, epidemiological evidence suggests that individuals who adhere to plant-based diets exhibit a reduced risk of developing various cancers, including stomach, hematological, colorectal, prostate, and colon cancers (Baroni et al., 2024).

Vegetarian diets are associated with a reduced incidence of gallstone formation. Plant-based proteins, including soy, may help inhibit gallstone development. Additionally, plant-based diets emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and healthy fats (Mono and Polyunsaturated Oils), all of which are rich in fiber and have been shown to lower the risk of cholesterol gallstones. In contrast, diets high in animal protein, particularly from meat, poultry, and fish, have been linked to an increased risk, likely due to components such as heme iron, saturated fat, and dietary cholesterol, which contribute to elevated cholesterol levels in gallstone disease patients (Rose & Strombom, 2020).

Although vegetarian diets can be restrictive and may lead to deficiencies in nutrients such as calcium and vitamin D, potentially increasing the risk of bone loss, osteoporosis, and fractures, many plant-based foods provide bioavailable calcium. These include broccoli, bok choy, tofu, kale, and fortified products such as fruit juices, energy bars, and plant-based milks (Falchetti et al., 2022). Research indicates that individuals following vegetarian or vegan diets may have a reduced risk of developing osteoporosis. While bone mineral density is generally comparable between vegetarians and omnivores in early adulthood, differences tend to emerge in later life. This suggests that the protective effect in vegetarians may stem not from higher peak bone mass, but from a slower



rate of bone loss with aging. Contributing factors may include lower intake of dietary protein and phosphorus, which are associated with increased urinary calcium excretion and tissue acidification (Sindhu, 2022).

Adopting a vegan diet, which excludes all animal products, may alleviate asthma symptoms. This effect is potentially linked to the absence of polyunsaturated fats prevalent in animal-derived foods, which can promote leukotriene synthesis, pro-inflammatory mediators known to induce bronchoconstriction (Sindhu, 2022). Moreover, plant-based diets are associated with reduced inflammation, partly due to their high antioxidant content. Unprocessed plant foods are rich in antioxidants such as vitamins C and E, which neutralize free radicals and modulate immune responses (Orzel et al., 2024). These compounds also stimulate the production of endogenous antioxidant enzymes, contributing to decreased inflammatory activity (Hargreaves et al., 2021).

Adherence to a vegetarian diet may enhance psychological well-being by fostering feelings of purpose, contentment, and benevolence. The pursuit of guilt-free, peaceful eating often motivates this choice, while shared dietary values can strengthen social bonds and promote a sense of connectedness (Feher et al., 2020). Vegetarianism may also reduce social dysfunction and is associated with lower healthcare spending and improved overall quality of life. In addition to individual and social well-being, dietary choices have broader ecological consequences. Choosing a vegetarian diet may bring positive effects, including improved physical well-being, positive emotions associated with embracing a morally upright mindset, a heightened sense of affiliation (With a Vegetarian Group), and a reduced ecological footprint.

Environmental sustainability is a key motivator for adopting and maintaining a vegetarian diet. Extensive research demonstrates that meat production, particularly through factory farming, imposes a substantial environmental burden, while plant-based diets have a significantly lower ecological impact. For example, producing 1 kg of beans requires 3.8 m² of land, 2.5 m³ of water, 39 g of fertilizer, and 2.2 g of pesticide, whereas the same amount of beef requires 52 m² of land, 20.2 m³ of water, 360 g of fertilizer, and 17.2 g of pesticide. These disparities are even more pronounced when comparing the environmental costs per kilogram of protein, with beef protein requiring 10 to 18 times more land, water, fertilizers, and pesticides than protein from beans (Fresan & Sabate, 2019). Overall, vegetarianism has the potential to impact various aspects of quality of life. Beyond ecological considerations, these benefits resonate strongly with Buddhist ethics, particularly the principle of Ahimsa (Non-harming). Choosing plant-based foods not only reduces harm to sentient beings but also supports personal well-being.

Beyond ecological sustainability, the moral dimension becomes central when viewed through Buddhist philosophy. Building on the ethical foundation of Ahimsa and compassion, it is essential to consider how these principles intersect with nutritional science to ensure that a vegetarian diet supports both moral and physical well-being. While Theravada traditions often emphasize individual discipline and compassion expressed through dietary restraint, Mahayana perspectives extend the principle of Ahimsa to a broader cosmological and universal framework, reinforcing vegetarianism as both an ethical duty and an ecological imperative.



Disadvantages and Nutritional Considerations of Vegetarian Diets

Vegetarian dietary patterns, while aligned with ethical and environmental values, often present nutritional challenges, particularly regarding protein adequacy. Although plant-based foods such as legumes, soy products, and whole grains provide valuable sources of protein, they generally lack one or more essential amino acids, thereby reducing their biological value compared to animal proteins (Orzel et al., 2024). To ensure optimal protein intake, vegetarians are advised to adopt strategies such as complementary protein pairing for instance, rice with lentils or hummus with whole grain bread (Wang et al., 2023). In cases of persistent low energy or suspected protein insufficiency, dietary supplementation with amino acid blends may be warranted (Sindhu, 2022). Beyond protein adequacy, other essential nutrients may also be insufficient in vegetarian diets, notably omega-3 fatty acids.

Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), are predominantly found in marine sources such as fish, which are absent in vegetarian diets. As a result, vegetarians often exhibit lower blood concentrations of these long-chain fatty acids, which play critical roles in cardiovascular, neurological, and ocular health. While alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a plant-derived omega-3 precursor found in flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts, can be converted to EPA and DHA, the conversion efficiency is typically less than 10% (Lane et al., 2022). Thus, vegetarian populations may benefit from algal oil supplements, which offer a sustainable and bioavailable source of EPA and DHA (Craig, 2009).

Iron deficiency anemia is another concern among vegetarians, as plant-based diets provide non-heme iron, which is less efficiently absorbed compared to the heme iron present in animal products. Factors such as phytates, tannins, and polyphenols in plant foods can further inhibit iron absorption (Sindhu, 2022). Strategies to enhance non-heme iron absorption include consuming vitamin C-rich foods alongside iron-rich meals or employing food preparation techniques such as soaking, fermenting, or sprouting to reduce antinutritional factors (Craig, 2009). Left unaddressed, iron deficiency may result in fatigue, impaired cognitive performance, and reduced work productivity.

Similarly, zinc intake tends to be lower in vegetarian diets, and its bioavailability is hindered by phytates in legumes and whole grains. Zinc deficiency is associated with growth retardation, impaired immune function, and delayed wound healing (Orzel et al., 2024). Thus, vegetarians are encouraged to include zinc-rich foods such as pumpkin seeds, lentils, and fortified cereals, or consider supplementation if necessary.

Vitamin B12 deficiency represents one of the most significant risks in vegetarian populations, as reliable plant-based sources are virtually absent. Vitamin B12 plays an essential role in neurological function and red blood cell formation; its deficiency can cause megaloblastic anemia, fatigue, and neurological impairments (Craig, 2009). Clinical manifestations may include neuropathy, paresthesia, cognitive decline, and mood disturbances. Given that fortified foods alone are often insufficient, supplementation is generally recommended for vegetarians, particularly strict vegans (Wang et al., 2023).



Vitamin D insufficiency is also prevalent among vegetarians, especially in regions with limited sunlight exposure. Although ergocalciferol (Vitamin D2) can be obtained from mushrooms and fortified foods, its bio-efficacy is generally lower than that of cholecalciferol (Vitamin D3). Vitamin D is essential for calcium metabolism, bone health, and immune regulation (Falchetti et al., 2022). Supplementation with vitamin D2 or plant-derived D3 may therefore be necessary to maintain adequate serum levels and prevent conditions such as osteoporosis.

Although vegetarian diets present certain nutritional challenges, careful planning, monitoring of key biomarkers, and judicious supplementation can effectively mitigate risks. Framed within Buddhist ethics, such mindfulness reflects Ahimsa not only toward other beings but also toward oneself, making vegetarianism a balanced integration of moral discipline and nutritional responsibility.

Dietary Guidelines for Vegetarian and Vegan Diets

Vegetarian and vegan dietary patterns are associated with a wide range of health benefits, including a reduced risk of chronic diseases. However, these diets may also pose nutritional challenges if not carefully planned. The following evidence-based guidelines are intended to ensure nutritional adequacy and support long-term health among individuals adhering to plant-based diets.

1. Protein Quality and Amino Acid Sufficiency

Adequate intake of high-quality protein is essential for the maintenance of muscle mass, immune function, and metabolic health. Since many plant proteins are incomplete, lacking one or more essential amino acids, it is important for individuals to combine complementary protein sources, such as legumes and whole grains, to achieve a complete amino acid profile. The food industry has contributed significantly in this regard by developing a range of alternative protein products, including soy protein isolates (e.g., Textured Vegetable Protein), mycoprotein, lupin flour, and substitutes for egg whites. Additionally, laboratory-produced products such as synthetic meats, plant-based egg whites, and dairy analogues have gained popularity. These alternatives are widely available in supermarkets and are used in various applications, including savory dishes, baked goods, protein bars, imitation meats, and pasta.

2. Essential Fatty Acids

Vegetarian and especially vegan diets tend to result in lower plasma concentrations of the long-chain omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), primarily due to the exclusion of marine-derived foods. Although alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), which is found in flaxseed, walnuts, canola oil, soy products, and hemp-based beverages, can be consumed regularly, its conversion to EPA and DHA in the human body is limited. As such, the inclusion of DHA-fortified foods, such as specific brands of soy milk and cereal bars, is advisable. Supplementation with algae-derived EPA and DHA is particularly beneficial for individuals with increased physiological needs, such as pregnant and lactating women (Craig, 2009).



3. Iron and Zinc

The bioavailability of iron and zinc from plant-based sources is generally lower compared to that from animal-based sources, largely due to the presence of phytates, which interfere with mineral absorption. To enhance iron absorption, individuals are encouraged to consume iron-rich plant foods, such as legumes, whole grains, and fortified cereals, in combination with foods high in vitamin C. To improve zinc intake, emphasis should be placed on consuming legumes, seeds, whole grains, and soy products, which are relatively rich in zinc despite the inhibitory effect of phytates. In certain cases, supplementation or the use of fortified products, such as ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, may be necessary (Craig, 2009). Moreover, the use of specific preparation techniques, such as soaking legumes and discarding the soaking water prior to cooking, can significantly reduce phytate content. Additional processing methods, including sprouting, fermenting, and cooking in the presence of vitamin C-rich ingredients, have also been shown to enhance the bioavailability of both iron and zinc (Wang et al., 2023).

4. Vitamins D and B12

Vitamin D and vitamin B12 are two nutrients of particular concern for vegetarians and vegans due to the scarcity of reliable plant-based sources. To maintain adequate vitamin D status, particularly during the winter months or in populations with limited sunlight exposure, individuals should consume fortified foods such as soy milk, rice milk, orange juice, breakfast cereals, and margarine. In situations where fortified foods are not regularly consumed, a daily supplement providing 5-10 micrograms of vitamin D is recommended, especially for elderly individuals (Craig, 2009). In the case of vitamin B12, regular consumption of fortified foods, such as plant-based beverages, breakfast cereals, meat analogs, and nutritional yeast, is essential, as unfortified plant foods, including fermented soy products, leafy greens, and seaweed, do not provide reliable or sufficient quantities of bioactive B12. Supplementation with bioavailable forms of vitamin B12, such as methylcobalamin or hydroxocobalamin, is strongly recommended. The current recommended dietary allowance for vitamin B12 is 2.4 micrograms per day for adults, increasing to 2.6 micrograms during pregnancy and lactation (Watanabe et al., 2014).

5. Micronutrient-Rich Plant Foods

Nuts and seeds serve as excellent sources of essential fatty acids and B vitamins, and should be incorporated into the daily diet. A varied intake of fresh fruits and vegetables is also necessary to ensure adequate consumption of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and phytochemicals. Particular attention should be given to above-ground vegetables, which generally exhibit higher nutrient densities. Certain techniques are recommended to preserve the nutritional quality of plant foods during preparation. Steaming is preferable to boiling or frying, as it helps retain water-soluble vitamins and phytonutrients. Tearing vegetables by hand, rather than cutting with metal blades, may help preserve enzymatic activity and nutritional integrity. Soaking, boiling, and steaming are also effective methods for reducing phytates and other anti-nutritional factors (Sindhu, 2022).

6. Phytonutrient Diversity

A diet that includes a broad spectrum of colorful fruits and vegetables, often referred to as the "Eat the Rainbow" approach, ensures a wide range of phytonutrients, vitamins, minerals, and amino acids. Such dietary diversity is associated with improved immune function, enhanced cellular health, and a reduced risk of chronic diseases. This principle serves as a foundation for general dietary recommendations in plant-based nutrition, as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3 General Recommendations for a Plant-Based Diet (Feher et al., 2020)

Groups of Ingredients	Recommended Daily Allowance
Vegetables (With the Exception of Starchy Vegetables)	As Desired, with An Emphasis on Diversity
Fruit	2-4 Portions (1 portion = 1 Medium-Sized Piece or 1/2 Cup)
Whole Grain Cereals (e.g., Oat, Brown Rice, Quinoa)	6-11 Portions (1 portion = 1/2 Cup of Cooked Cereals or One Slice of Whole Wheat Bread)
Legumes (lentils, Peas, Beans, Soybean)	2-3 Portions (1 portion = 1/2 Cup of Cooked Legumes)
Leaf Vegetables (e.g., Broccoli, Lettuce, Kale)	At least 2-3 Portions (1 portion = 1 Cup Raw or 1/2 Cup of Cooked Leaf Vegetables)
Oilseeds (e.g., Pistachio, Almond, Walnut)	30-55 g
Seeds (e.g., Chia, Linseed, Hempseed)	1-3 Tablespoons
Vegetable Milk (e.g., Cashew, Soy, Almond)	2-3 Cups
Fresh Herbs	As Desired, with An Emphasis on Diversity

Contemporary dietary guidelines provide a systematic foundation for implementing vegetarian and vegan diets that are both nutritionally adequate and environmentally sustainable. When supported by informed food selection, appropriate supplementation, and sound preparation practices, plant-based diets are capable of meeting essential nutrient requirements while minimizing the risk of deficiencies. A growing body of evidence supports the health benefits of diets characterized by high intakes of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limited consumption of processed foods, particularly in the prevention of chronic diseases.

Holistic Framework of Buddhist-Informed Vegetarianism

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship underscored a convergence between Buddhist ethical principles and modern scientific understandings of plant-based nutrition, advancing a multifaceted model of vegetarianism that embraced both spiritual values and empirical health knowledge. What sets this work apart is its explicit focus on integrating these domains into a dialogical framework, where ethical reflection and nutritional science mutually inform each other, rather than merely being compared. Central to this emerging framework is the alignment of Ahimsa (Non-violence) with public health and ecological sustainability. Within Buddhist thought, dietary abstention from animal products reflected a moral stance on compassion and mindfulness; Increasingly, this ethical commitment was mirrored in scientific literature linking vegetarian diets to reduced risks of non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular conditions, type 2 diabetes, and various cancers. By linking these scientific findings to Buddhist



principles such as mindfulness, moderation, and intentionality, this framework illustrated how ethical values could directly inform the practical design and implementation of healthful plant-based diets.

A critical dimension of the new evidence lies in its detailed guidance on nutritional adequacy. Recent guidelines elaborated on protein quality, emphasizing the need for amino acid complementation through combinations of legumes and grains. They also introduced technological advancements such as textured soy protein, mycoprotein, and synthetic meats, which broadened the availability and functional value of plant-based diets. Furthermore, enhanced strategies to support micronutrient bioavailability, including soaking, fermenting, and co-consuming iron and zinc-rich foods with vitamin C, addressed long-standing challenges related to mineral absorption in phytate-rich diets. This integration of practical dietary strategies demonstrated how ethical values derived from Buddhist principles, such as intentionality and thoughtful consumption, could inform the design of healthful plant-based diets.

The integration of supplementation protocols, particularly for nutrients with limited presence in plant-based sources (e.g., Vitamin B12, Vitamin D, EPA/DHA), reflected a pragmatic shift toward ensuring long-term nutritional sufficiency. For instance, algae-based omega-3 supplements and fortified food products were presented as essential tools in both clinical and public health contexts. Culinary practices aimed at preserving phytonutrients, such as manual vegetable tearing or steaming rather than boiling, underscore the importance of mindful preparation. These insights had practical applications for policymakers, educators, and health promoters, including culturally sensitive dietary guidelines, educational programs combining spiritual and nutritional instruction, and community initiatives that facilitated nutrient-rich, intentional eating.

Importantly, the reviewed literature positioned vegetarianism as a model of sustainable nutrition, demonstrating the markedly lower environmental costs of plant-based protein production compared to animal-based systems. This ecological dimension resonated with Buddhist teachings on interdependence and the minimization of harm to sentient beings and the natural world. Moreover, the integration of mindful eating practices, rooted in *sati* (Mindfulness) and *karuna* (Compassion), complements contemporary psychological insights into eating behavior, emotional regulation, and mental well-being.

Collectively, this emerging knowledge redefined vegetarianism as an integrative practice that united ethical, nutritional, ecological, and psychological domains. It affirms that a well-planned plant-based diet, when informed by both ancient wisdom and modern science, not only supports personal health and spiritual cultivation but also advances broader societal goals of sustainability, ethical responsibility, and collective flourishing as in Figure 1.

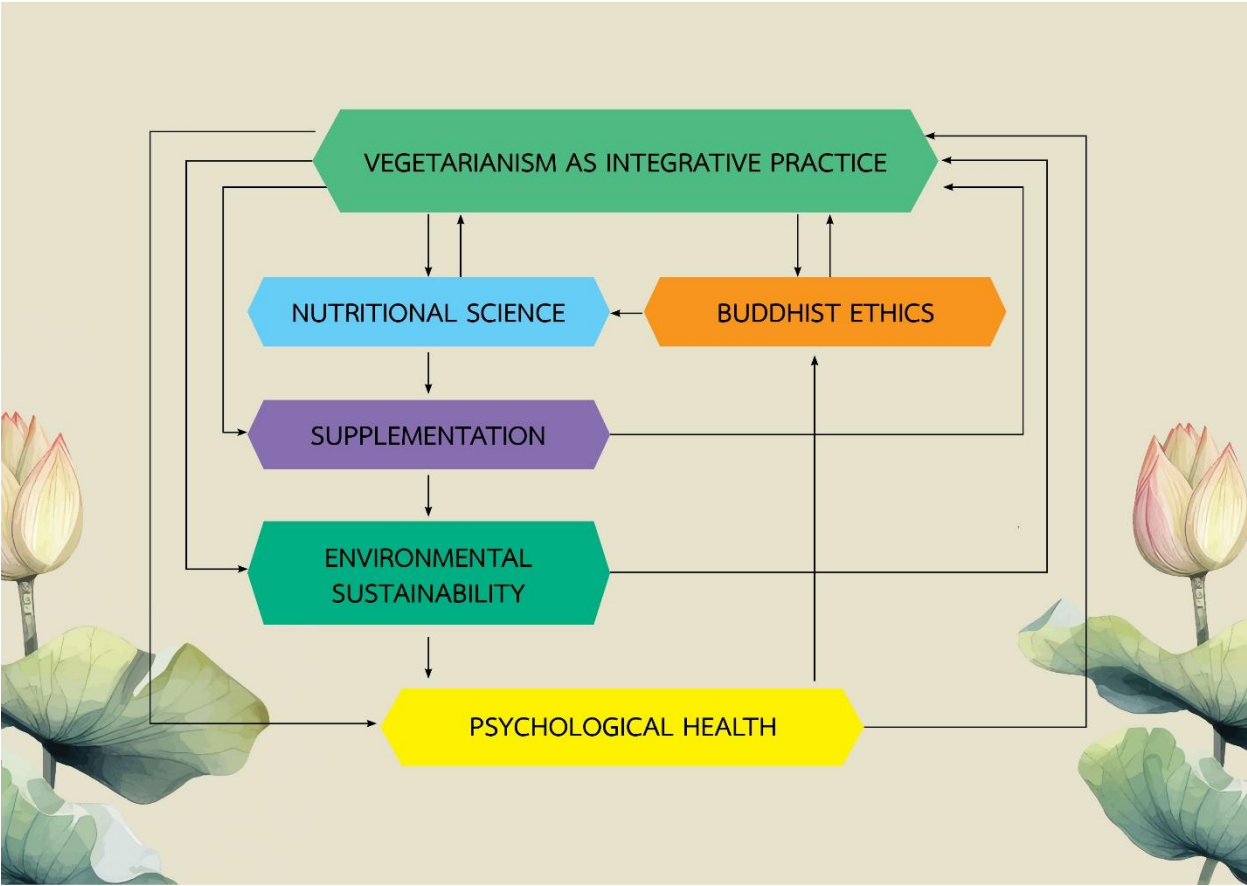


Figure 1 Holistic Framework of Buddhist-Informed Vegetarianism

Conclusions

Vegetarianism, viewed through the lens of Buddhist ethics, embodied compassion (Karuna) and the principle of Ahimsa, or non-harming. In Mahayana traditions, abstaining from meat was an expression of universal compassion, while Theravada emphasized mindful consumption and ethical intention. These frameworks illustrated Buddhism's capacity to adapt to cultural contexts while maintaining its core commitment to reducing suffering. Moreover, in contemporary society, vegetarianism increasingly reflects a synthesis of ethical reasoning and evidence-based knowledge, illustrating how modernity encourages the integration of moral principles with scientific and environmental awareness. Modern research confirmed that well-planned plant-based diets support cardiovascular, metabolic, and psychological health, while also reducing the ecological footprint through lower greenhouse gas emissions, land and water use, and biodiversity impact. Successfully adopting a vegetarian diet requires careful nutritional planning to ensure adequate intake of vitamin B12, iron, zinc, calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids. Accessible education, community support, and fortified food options are essential to sustain healthful plant-based practices. Beyond personal or religious motivations, vegetarianism offers a framework for ethical living, public health promotion, and environmental sustainability. When approached with mindfulness, knowledge, and community support, vegetarianism can foster individual wellness, contribute to global health equity, and promote harmony with all forms of life.



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