

# Buddhist Religious Leaders' Participation in Promoting Informal Education in Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

The purposes of this documentary research were to identify and analyze the states of Buddhist religious leaders' participation in promoting informal education in Thailand from 1946 to 2011. The research data were obtained from primary and secondary documentary sources. There were 84 documents comprising 21 primary documents and 63 secondary documents available at libraries and work agencies and on electronic databases. The research instruments comprised a document quality evaluation form and a data recording form. The methods of data collection involved: searching published, unpublished paper and electronically stored documents; document selection; and document evaluation. The data were analyzed using content analysis.

The research findings concluded that Buddhist religious leaders participated in three aspects of informal education promotion in Thailand—namely: 1) establishment of learning resource centers by establishing sub-district public training units, educational parks and public libraries; 2) teaching and learning support by the propagation of Buddhism, organizing activities for moral and ethical development, and cultural-traditional transmission, and 3) educational media and technology by establishing television and radio broadcasting stations and by developing internet media and print media.

**Keywords:** educational participation, informal education, Buddhist religious leader

## บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเอกสารนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสืบค้นและวิเคราะห์สภาพการเมืองส่วนร่วมของผู้นำศาสนาพุทธในการส่งเสริมการศึกษาตามอัชญาศักยในประเทศไทย ในช่วงปี พ.ศ. 2489–พ.ศ. 2554 ข้อมูลการวิจัยได้มาจากการอ่านด้วยเอกสารชั้นต้นและเอกสารชั้นรอง จำนวน 84 ฉบับ ประกอบด้วยเอกสารชั้นต้น 21 ฉบับ และเอกสารชั้นรอง 63 ฉบับ ซึ่งได้ทำการเก็บรวบรวม

จากแหล่งข้อมูลต่าง ๆ เช่น หอสมุด หน่วยงานต่าง ๆ และฐานข้อมูลอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ เครื่องมือการวิจัยประกอบด้วยแบบประเมินคุณภาพเอกสาร และแบบบันทึกข้อมูล เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยการสืบค้นเอกสาร ทั้งการสืบค้นด้วยมือ สืบค้นด้วยคอมพิวเตอร์ และสืบค้นเอกสารที่ไม่มีการตีพิมพ์เผยแพร่ การคัดเลือกเอกสาร และการประเมินเอกสาร วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยวิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา

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ผลการวิจัยสรุปได้ว่า ผู้นำศาสนาพุทธมีส่วนร่วมในการส่งเสริมการศึกษาตามอัชญาศัยในประเทศไทยครอบคลุมใน 3 ประเด็น คือ 1) ด้านการจัดตั้งแหล่งการเรียนรู้ โดยการจัดตั้ง “หน่วยอบรมประชาชนประจำตำบล” “อุทิศการศึกษาในวัด” และ “ห้องสมุดประชาชน” 2) ด้านการสนับสนุนการเรียนการสอน โดยการ “เผยแพร่พระพุทธศาสนา” “จัดกิจกรรมพัฒนาคุณธรรมจริยธรรม” และ “สืบสานวัฒนธรรมประเพณี” และ 3) ด้านสื่อและเทคโนโลยีทางการศึกษา โดยการ “จัดตั้งสถานีโทรทัศน์และสถานีวิทยุ” “จัดทำสื่อทางอินเทอร์เน็ต” และ “จัดทำสื่อสิ่งพิมพ์”

**คำสำคัญ:** การมีส่วนร่วมในการจัดการศึกษา การศึกษาตามอัชญาศัย ผู้นำศาสนาพุทธ

## INTRODUCTION

The Thai educational administration has been governed by its central authority for over a century. This type of ministry administration gradually has had a lot of impacts on Thai society and its educational management, including “the centralized budget system”, “delayed working process”, and “inadequate school autonomy” (Sirittarangsri, 1998). The solutions to these problems demanded the return of power to the people and led to the enactment of the first National Education Act in 1999 to ensure public participation in education in order to successfully bring the education plan into practice.

Buddhist religious leaders are key persons who have supported education in Thailand since the Sukhothai period (1249 to 1438). Later, their roles gradually diminished when learning in monasteries was replaced by formal schooling (Gosum, 1999). Even though the religious leaders played a passive role in formal education, their roles in informal education should not be ignored. These religious leaders were highly respected and admired by the Thai people as the monasteries were believed to be

the center of spirituality and had many precious resources. If these leaders participated in education, it would help greatly to achieve the objectives narrated in National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and amendments (Second National Education Act B.E. 2545 (2002)) section 6, “Education shall aim at the full development of the Thai people in all aspects: physical and mental health; intellect; knowledge; morality; integrity and desirable way of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other people” (Office of the National Education Commission, 2003).

The purposes of this research were to identify and analyze the states of Buddhist religious leaders’ participation to promote informal education in Thailand from 1946 to 2011. This study would provide useful information to encourage other religious leaders in promoting informal education to make the Thai education system more effective. A research framework was identified within the context of the Buddhist religious leaders’ participation in informal education during the reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol starting from the first year of his accession to the throne up until the present. King Bhumibol is the current King of Thailand—a model and a key player supporting learning society in Thailand who seriously works to develop the quality of life of the Thai people and also uses participation as a tool to bring the agencies together.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concepts of participation have been widely used. Cohen and Uphoff (1977) defined participation as the people’s involvement in decision-making processes, implementing programs, the benefits of development programs, and efforts to evaluate such programs. There were three dimensions of participation: *what* participation; *whose* participation—local residents, local leaders, government personnel or foreign personnel; and *how* was participation undertaken during the project? In

this study, the focus was on local leaders' participation where these leaders are Buddhist religious leaders.

The First National Education Act section 15 stated, "there shall be three types of education; formal, non-formal and informal" (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). Promotion of Non-formal and Informal Education Act, B.E. 2551 (2008) noted that "informal education means educational activities in the daily lifestyle of a person through which a person may choose to continue learning throughout his/her lifetime pursuant to the interests, needs, opportunities, preparedness and learning aptitude of each person" (Ministry of Education, 2008). Furthermore, Section 6 stated "the promotion and support of informal education shall uphold the following principles: access to educational resources which are consistent with the interests and lifestyle of learners in every target group; development of educational resources in order to create diversity in both local wisdom components and educational technology components and provision of educational framework or guide-lines that are beneficial to learners". Informal education was regarded as an important factor in every period of life, especially nowadays, because people have had to face rapid changes in social living, the environment, and technology. Thus, people have needed to learn all the time to fulfill their thirst of knowledge.

Several research studies on religious leaders' participation in informal education have been carried out in many countries. Among those, Orubuloye, Caldwell, and Caldwell (1993) on "The role of religious leaders in changing sexual behavior in Southwest Nigeria in an era of AIDS" found that Nigerian Christians and Muslim religious leaders had long preached against premarital and extramarital sexual relations. Nearly all of them preached that the AIDS epidemic was a divine punishment for sexual immorality and most of them had intensified their teachings against extramarital sex. The study by Ali and Ushijima (2005) titled

"Perceptions of men on the role of religious leaders in reproductive health issues in rural Pakistan" also discovered that religious leaders could contribute positively to community education and suggested ways in which the religious leaders could educate the community in reproductive health issues. The study concluded that involving religious leaders in rural settings could enable reproductive health programs and services to reach more conservative groups in society, and thus contribute effectively to bring about positive change in the attitudes of Pakistani society towards reproductive health. Kenyatta University (2008) undertook a study titled "Role of women religious leaders in managing and resolving ethnic conflicts in Kenya: The case of the rural women peace link". This work investigated the various roles of female religious leaders in resolving and managing ethnic conflicts by bridging ethnic divides and promoting peace at the grassroots level. It concluded by noting that female religious leaders made positive contributions in peace building and managing and resolving conflicts.

The religious leaders also used various forms of media to promote informal education. Becker and Cabrita (2013) studied "Religion and media in twentieth-century Africa". They explored, the creation of public-religious and otherwise in interactions with various forms of old and new media, the media making and contesting sacred texts, literacy as a bundle of traits with varying social and religious implications, official or authorized (rather than subversive) media performances and the establishment of religious orthodoxies, orality and authenticity, e.g. invoking natives, preaching, media used and new or emergent subjectivities, including religious disciplines of the self etc. Lamoureux (2013) in his paper "Technologies of speaking and writing: New gendered Christian roles among Moro women in Sudan" found that the technologies of speaking and writing enabled new social roles for Moro Christian women. Through language socialization and literacy events associated with the Moro ethnic movement, women performed a

conservative Christian role while informally they crafted a more progressive Christian subjectivity. They used a variety of media (newspaper, cassettes, facebook, YouTube) to promote their cause. Most adult Moro people, especially women with no formal education, could nonetheless read and write in the Moro language. In addition, they had acquired the formulaic and ritualized genres of praying, preaching, and other practices (hymn-writing, record-keeping etc.) which involved certain linguistic skills (entextualization, indexing Biblical Moro, prosody etc.) and culminated in the performance of faith through written, verbal, and embodied techniques. Gordon (2013) studied “Power in the interface between the written and the oral: The church of Alice Lenshina in Colonial Zambia”. He found that the churches employed various forms of writing, including passports to heaven, narratives, and commandments which were written by missionary-educated church members. These texts were sacred documents that underpinned the moral teachings of the church, served to support its bureaucracy, and legitimized the church with respect to European missionaries, the colonial government, and the African nationalist movement.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was a documentary research whose aim was to find out the facts of the involvement of Buddhist religious leaders in promoting informal education in Thailand. The research covered 65 years of study from 1946 to 2011. Research data were obtained from the following sources: 1) primary documents which were recorded by the people who were directly involved in the events. These documents were legislative documents, announcements of the public sector, photos etc. and 2) secondary documents which were recorded by people after the events took place. These documents were agency documents, annual reports, research papers, articles, books, and data from the electronic media. The data were

collected from libraries, work agencies, and electronic databases. The research instruments comprised an evaluation form on document quality that was approved by three experts for checking the content validity of this form and a data recording form.

The methods of data collection were: document searching (hand searching, computerized searching, and searching for unpublished materials), document selection, and document evaluation. A content analysis inductive approach was used for analyzing the qualitative data. The results were presented in descriptive writings.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

A literature review of relevant documents yielded the states of Buddhist religious leaders' participation in education in Thailand. There were 84 documents consisting of 21 primary documents and 63 secondary documents. The primary documents were 12 legislative documents and 9 photos. The secondary documents were 21 research reports, 10 books, 6 annual reports, and 26 files from the Internet. The findings indicated that Buddhist religious leaders participated in: 1) the establishment of learning resource centers by developing sub-district public training units; educational parks, and public libraries; 2) teaching and learning support by the propagation of Buddhism, organizing activities for moral and ethical development, and cultural-traditional transmission; and 3) educational media and technology by creating television and radio broadcasting stations, Internet media, and print media. Details are as follows:

### Establishment of learning resource centers

The learning resource centers were based on a regulation mechanism and the people's faith was used to ensure effective implementation. Establishing learning sources included sub-district public training units, educational parks, and public libraries.

### Sub-district public training units

These were established based on "Regulations on Sub-District Public Training Establishing of Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand 1975 (Revised Edition 2003)" (Watprempracha, 2013). This regulation mechanism raised awareness among the monks to play their vital roles in educating the people and to take responsibility for their own work to serve both their own purposes and their country's development. Due to these rules and regulations, sub-district committees were formed. The head of a monastery was appointed as the chairman of each training unit and other monks and key people in the community played their roles on the committee. The committee's goal was to educate the people in eight topics: calmness, morality and culture, health, education support, public support, piety, honest livelihood, and harmony. Sub-district training units were established nationwide and by 2011, there were 5,945 units (Office of the National Buddhism, 2011), which equated to 80 units per province on average.

### Educational parks

These were established in the monasteries with the concept that the monasteries should be used as learning resource centers where architecture, sculpture, ancient photographs, and other ancient valuable objects would be kept and displayed and would be used as a source of learning by the people. Establishing learning resource centers in monasteries was another alternative that tried to use existing resources in an efficient way and to increase the roles of Buddhist religious leaders to what they had been in former times. The Office of the Education Council (2009) found that 64 percent of the monasteries were used as learning resource centers. Furthermore, the Office of National Buddhism (2011) recognized monasteries annually that had good educational parks when they had met the following criteria: 1) had a museum or folk museum; 2) organized education activities and disseminated information to monks, novices, and residents; and 3) arranged areas to publicize

Buddhist teachings and principles in various ways such as Buddhist doctrines, Buddhist proverbs, and academic knowledge (Figure 1). Additionally, it selected annually the monasteries which were better or had the best development as educational parks to be honored.

### Public libraries

The research results showed that Somdet Phra Maha Ratchamangalacharn (Chuang Vorapunyo) a member of the committee of the Sangha Supreme Council and the head of the Paknam Pasi Charoen Monastery, along with the people jointly built the Maharsirinat Buddhism Archive as a learning resource center and research center in Nakhon Pathom province to celebrate the 60th birthday of Her Majesty the Queen as shown in Figure 2 (Maha Sirinath International Buddhist Library, 2010). Other public libraries were also built in monasteries to serve as learning resource centers so that the people could find useful information and gain knowledge to use it in their daily lives and to earn a better living. They also served as learning resource centers in non-formal education.

### Teaching and learning support

The Buddhist religious leaders played an important role in teaching and learning through the following activities:

#### Propagation of Buddhism

An important role of Buddhist religious leaders has been and continues to be giving sermons



**Figure 1** Educational park in a monastery

**Source:** Chiang Rai Focus, 2010

(Figure 3). This occurred in 99 percent of cases. Other activities were organized, such as the provision of knowledge on Buddhism, mind training etc. with 87 percent occurrence, while television broadcasts were conducted by 4 percent of the leaders (Office of the Education Council, 2009).

#### Organizing activities for moral and ethical development

In 1999, ethical and moral development activities were organized in 5,780 monasteries (Office of the National Education Commission, 2003). These activities were organized in various forms such as: providing training for the monks to become lecturers at the Buddhist Summer Camp for Kids; organizing Dhamma practice projects for

devout laypeople; and teaching monks, novices, Thai people, and foreigners how to meditate (Figure 4).

#### Cultural-traditional transmission

The Office of the Education Council (2009) indicated that 80 percent of the monasteries participated in transmitting the Buddhist tradition; 52 percent of the monasteries organized a Summer Mass Ordination Project and a Summer Buddhist Novice Ordination Project whose objectives were to promote Buddhist learning and to conserve ancient traditions. In the summer of 2008, 200,000 youth were involved in this project to celebrate HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's birthday (Ministry of Culture, 2007) as shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 2** Maha Sirinath International Buddhist Library

**Source:** Maha Sirinath International Buddhist Library, 2010



**Figure 3** A monk giving a sermon to people

**Source:** Trueplookpanya, 2013



**Figure 4** Monks engaging students in ethical development activities

**Source:** Ministry of Culture, 2006



**Figure 5** Monkhood Summer Ordination

**Source:** Thairath Online, 2013

Educational media and technology

Buddhist religious leaders have played their roles in educational media and technology by establishing television and radio broadcast stations, and producing media for the Internet and other print media.

## Establishing television and radio broadcast stations

There are some long-standing examples of this activity, such as Luang Phor Panya Nantha Bhikkhu who started giving television and radio sermons in 1960 (Lan Dhamma Jak, 2010). This led to the establishment of many other channels such as World Buddhism Television at Yannawa monastery (Figure 6) and the Dhamma Media Channel television station (Dhamma Media Channel, 2010) which are on air all the time. The Office of the Education Council (2009) discovered that the monasteries propagated Buddhist teaching 56 percent by broadcast tower and 25 percent by radio (Figure 7). Some channels have broadcast Dhamma issues both in the Thai and English language (Jud Ta Kaieng Group, 2010).



**Figure 6** Buddha Television Station

**Source:** Watyannawa, 2013



**Figure 8** Dhamma website

**Source:** Palungjitzdotcom, 2013

## Internet media

From 1999 to 2011, the rapid growth of information technology pushed methods of Buddhist teaching into new channels through the Internet. Many websites and radio and television stations on the Internet and web boards were used by many Buddhist organizations to obtain easy access to learning resources and to create more interactive communication channels in Dhamma issues (Figure 8). Dhamma is more attractive today than in the past because now it is produced and presented in three-dimensional animated tales and online games (Figure 9).

## Print media

The Office of the Education Council (2009) reported that 36 percent of the monasteries generated print media in various ways such as books, journals, brochures, calendars, and compact disks.



**Figure 7** A monk giving a radio sermon

**Source:** Thitopaso, S., 2013



**Figure 9** Dhamma online game

**Source:** Larbngern, 2010

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The ultimate goals of this study were to identify and analyze the activities of Buddhist religious leaders in the promotion of informal education in Thailand from 1949 to 2011. The research results indicated that they participated in informal education in Thailand from three aspects: the establishment of learning resource centers, teaching and learning support, and educational media and technology. The research findings are summarized in Figure 10.

The following information resulted from the study.

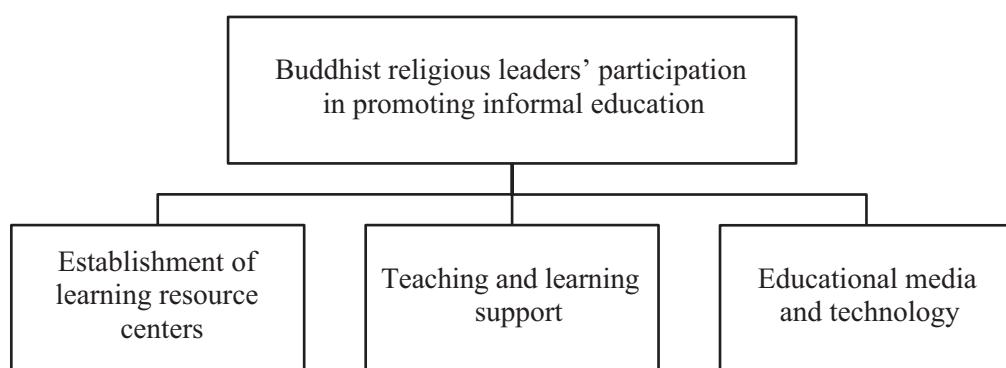
### Establishment of learning resource centers

The research results revealed that Buddhist religious leaders participated in establishing learning resource centers. As a consequence of the Great East Asia War (1941–1947), Thailand suffered extensive damage and needed large amounts of quality restoration of resources (Sinlarat, 2005). Then, during 1999–2011, learning resource centers were established progressively, which may have been a result of the G8 summit in 1999 where it was stated, “There are aims and ambitions for lifelong learning which concern the challenge every country faces in how to become a learning society and to ensure that its citizens are equipped with the knowledge, skills and qualifications they will need in the next century.

The next century will be defined by flexibility and change; more than ever there will be a demand for mobility. Today, a passport and a ticket allow people to travel anywhere in the world. In the future, the passport to mobility will be education and lifelong learning. This passport to mobility must be offered to everyone” (G8 Information Centre, 2010). Thus it was an eye-opening moment for Thailand to progress to having more activities about informal education and lifelong learning. Permanent learning resource centers were created where anyone could gain easy access at any time to support and education information in Thailand.

### Teaching and learning support

Buddhist religious leaders have been involved in this field continuously since 1946. It could presumably be concluded that learning support was one of the duties of Buddhist religious leaders that could be clearly seen in the Sangha Act 2505 B.E. (1962) with the revised 2nd edition in 2535 B.E. (1992), article 57 which determined that “the duties of the abbot were undertaking teaching and providing training to monks and laypersons to preach the book of discipline” (Office of the Prime Minister, 1992). In fact, this was not just implemented under this Act as it had been progressively practiced since the Sukhothai period (1249 to 1438). During this period, monasteries were mainly dedicated to education as there was no



**Figure 10** The states of participation by Buddhist religious leaders in promoting informal education in Thailand from 1949 to 2011

formal schooling. An individual learner used to be taught by an individual monk. This shows that the participation of Buddhist religious leaders in informal education started in Thailand more than seven hundred years ago (Wesarat, 1984). Later on, the roles of monks gradually diminished when learning in monasteries was replaced by formal schooling (Gosum, 1999). At that time, Buddhist religious leaders changed their roles. They worked to support formal education for those people who could not get access to government services. However, when the government provided education services widely, the roles of the monks in formal education gradually diminished again. Regardless, whenever the roles of formal education declined, Buddhist religious leaders used their abilities to support teaching and learning through informal education.

### **Educational media and technology**

The research results indicated that Buddhist religious leaders were involved in educational media and technology during 1999–2011 more than during 1946–1998. This increased involvement might have resulted from more recent globalization as information technology has progressed rapidly and caused wide changes (Dulyakasem, 2005). Thus, the Buddhist religious leaders who realized the importance of technology used it as a tool to promote informal education. For instance, during 1946–1998, the leaders mostly used amplifiers at public meetings to propagate Dhamma, but during 1999–2011, they established radio stations, television stations, and Buddhist websites to support informal education. This enabled everyone to learn anywhere at any time.

The analysis of the research indicated that the religious leaders were actively involved in all aspects of the process of participation, such as participation in planning and decision making, in operations, in taking responsibility for the outcomes, and participation in evaluation.

### **Participation in planning and decision making**

The nation, religion and kingship are the three main institutions in Thailand where religion is highly respected by the Thai people. Buddhist religious leaders have educated people to adopt good morals, patronized poor people and cured the patients. This elevated their esteem among the Thai people. Thus, the Thai people always sought their advice in everything they did. This resulted in the religious leaders receiving wide consent from society. This was a good medium for the mobilization of local resources as well. Therefore monks participated extensively in the planning and decision-making processes.

### **Participation in operation**

The research results showed that Buddhist religious leaders participated in three aspects; the establishment of learning resource centers, teaching and learning support, and educational media and technology. People always admired their participation in operational matters. The fact of the matter was that monks were considered to be the most honest people who according to Buddha's teachings could not accumulate worldly wealth and if a monk steals anything he is nullified from the monkhood and he cannot be ordained to be a monk again in his lifetime (Jendhamuni, 2010) and this brings shame on his family and society; thus, in order to maintain their dignity, they abstain from stealing. For this reason people strongly believed that all of their donations and charity toward the monasteries would be used in an appropriate manner for the well being of the nation. Thus people gave generously to these charities and the charity money was used in three aspects mentioned above. This concept is widely practiced today and the people participate to a very large degree.

### **Participation in taking responsibility for the outcomes of education**

Learning support was one of the duties of Buddhist religious leaders that is stipulated in the

Sangha Act 2505 B.E. (1962 A.D.) with the revised 2nd edition in 2535 B.E. (1992 A.D.), article 57 which determined that “the duties of the abbot were undertaking teaching and providing training to monks and laypersons to preach the book of discipline” (Office of the Prime Minister, 1992). The monks’ contributions started to be reflected in the attitude and the behavior of society. The monks understood that their goals were being achieved. They were delighted that their actions could benefit mankind and make people live together happily in peace and harmony.

### Participation in evaluation

Informal education can be acquired by anyone, anywhere, at any time, so no evidence was available to judge its success. However, the study found that Buddhist religious leaders participated in evaluation in various projects to improve their management.

Although the study identified that Buddhist religious leaders have a lot of involvement in informal education, Bunchua (1998) raised some interesting issues that participation in education by the religious institutions in Thailand did not get the support from the government that it should have. In a nut shell, they had been successful in educational management in the past and proved themselves a valuable resource and full of potential. They showed their strength by playing an important role in promoting education in society, despite the fact that the role of religious institutions in promoting education remains very low when compared with their potential.

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