

ภูมิธรรมภูมิปัญญาในการปฏิบัติหน้าที่ของพระอุปัชฌาย์  
ตามหลักพระพุทธศาสนาในภาคอีสานตอนล่าง  
**MORAL ETHOS AND WISDOM ON THE DUTY OF BUDDHIST  
PRECEPTORS IN THE LOWER NORTHEAST OF THAILAND**

พระครูอุดมชัยสิริ กุลสุวรรณ\* พิสิต บุญไชย และบุญช่วย พาณิชย์กุล  
Phrakhru Udomchaisiri Kulsuwan\*, Pisit Boonchai, and Boonchuay Panichkul

Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University  
\*corresponding author email: usiri254@gmail.com

**บทคัดย่อ**

งานวิจัยนี้มีความมุ่งหมายเพื่อ 1) เพื่อศึกษาประวัติความเป็นมาของพระอุปัชฌาย์ในภาคอีสานตอนล่าง 2) เพื่อศึกษาสภาพปัจจุบันและปัญหาในการปฏิบัติหน้าที่ของพระอุปัชฌาย์ในภาคอีสานตอนล่าง และ 3) เพื่อศึกษาภูมิธรรมภูมิปัญญาในการปฏิบัติหน้าที่ของพระอุปัชฌาย์ต่อผู้เข้ามาอุปสมบทตามหลักพระพุทธศาสนาในภาคอีสานตอนล่าง การวิจัยครั้งนี้ได้ใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ เก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลเอกสาร และข้อมูลภาคสนาม โดยกำหนดพื้นที่จังหวัดนครราชสีมา บุรีรัมย์และสุรินทร์เป็นพื้นที่ที่ศึกษา ประชากรกลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นผู้ให้ข้อมูลจำนวน 102 รูป/คน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า สภาพปัจจุบัน พบว่า การทำอุปสมบทกรรม การทำบุญพิธีสังฆกรรม การออกหนังสือสุทธิ และการสงเคราะห์พุทธศาสนิกชน เป็นไปตามพระธรรมวินัย และกฎหมายอาญา มาตรา ๓๒๖ ซึ่งพระอุปัชฌาย์ได้ปฏิบัติอยู่เป็นประจำ สภาพปัญหา พบว่า การบวชในปัจจุบันมีเงื่อนไขของวันเวลา บางคนบวชตามประเพณี ซึ่งทำให้ความตั้งใจที่จะปฏิบัติจริง ๆ ลดลง เป็นปัญหาต่อการเตรียมความพร้อมในการบวช บวชเข้ามาแล้วก็ปฏิบัติน้อย หรือบางพื้นที่ไม่ได้มีการสั่งสอนให้ปฏิบัติตามพระธรรมวินัย เนื่องด้วยพระอุปัชฌาย์ซึ่งเป็นพระสังฆาธิการมีศาสนิกจมาากมาย ดูแลสังฆกรรมไม่ทั่วถึง ภูมิธรรมภูมิปัญญา พบว่าองค์ความรู้ความสามารถของพระอุปัชฌาย์มีวิธีการสอนตามหลักพระพุทธศาสนา กล่าวคือ บทบาทในการให้คำปรึกษา การฝึกซ้อมขานนาคและมารยาทของผู้จะบวช การตรวจสอบคุณสมบัติมีใบขออนุญาตอุปสมบท การเข้าพิธีบรรพชาอุปสมบท ด้านการปกครอง พระอุปัชฌาย์มีการระงับอธิกรณ์ลงโทษตักเตือนตามสมควร ดูแลกิริยามารยาท จัดศึกษาให้การสนับสนุนได้ศึกษานักธรรม บาลี และการศึกษาพระปริยัติธรรม แผนกสามัญศึกษา สงเคราะห์ให้เวลาและโอกาสแก่สังฆกรรมกริการิกเข้าหาเพื่อสนทนาและปรึกษา เป็นที่พึ่งให้คำแนะนำในเรื่องพระธรรมวินัย

**คำสำคัญ:** ภูมิธรรม ภูมิปัญญา พระอุปัชฌาย์ พระพุทธศาสนา

## **Abstract**

The purposes of this study are to: 1) study the background of preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand; 2) study the current problems and conditions of preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand and 3) study the moral ethos and wisdom on the duties of Buddhist preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand. Data were collected from documents and field study. The study area covered three provinces: Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram and Surin. A sample group consisted of 102 individuals. It was found that preceptors, or Buddhist instructors, usually act upon their duties to take ordination, take care of co-residents, issue Monk ID Cards, assist the public in matters of social discipline and participate in the Sangha Association. It was found that current problems with ordinations are due to time restrictions. Only some candidates ordain following the customs, which reduces the level of dedication towards real practice. This in turn causes problems with preparation for ordination ceremonies and commitment to post-ordination duties. In some locations, these problems are caused by instruction that is inconsistent with the actual discipline practiced by Buddhist monks. This is largely due to the overburdening of some preceptors, who hold official roles and cannot take care of all co-residents in addition to their official duties. This investigation found that preceptors instructed following Buddhist principles. The roles of preceptors include guidance, leading of chant practice, instructing the candidate in the etiquette of ordination, and preparing new monks for the qualification test. During the ordination, the role of preceptors is to warn and punish the new monk properly, teach proper manners and provide study material and activities in subjects including Dhamma and Pali language. Moreover, preceptors should assist the public and give advice to other Buddhists.

**Keywords:** Moral ethos, wisdom, preceptors, Buddhism

## **Introduction**

Buddhism, as one of the oldest major religions, is important for the world. Buddhists around the world recognise the importance of Visakha Puja Day. This day marks the birth, enlightenment and nirvana of the Lord Buddha (Parinibbana). On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1999, the United Nations accepted meeting resolutions that Visakha Puja Day is one of the most important days in the year and should be recognized internationally. The official day was called Vesak Day, following the proposal of the International Buddhist Council in Sri Lanka in November 1998

(United Nations, 1999). This day, held on the 15th day of the waxing moon in the 6th lunar month (Vesakha), was declared as a worldwide public holiday. The major ceremony held in tandem with Vesak Day in Thailand is the ordination ceremony for men wishing to enter the monkhood.

The popularity of the ordination ceremony in Thailand can be traced back to the Sukhothai period and King Luethai. As historian George Coedes (1968) documented: "Loe Thai's devotion to Buddhism and his religious works earned him the title Dharmaraja or Dharmikaraja, 'Pious king'." In 1341, the Sukhothai Kingdom adopted the Theravada school of Buddhism from Sri Lanka and King Luethai invited a monk from Ceylon, Sumana Thera, to his court. The Sri Lankan monk was a preceptor for the king, who entered the priesthood at Aranyik Temple (Treenarong, 1977). A preceptor is a senior monk who advises and instructs younger, more inexperienced monks in the ways of the clergy. The current Thai monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, believed in Buddhism from an early age. He is also particularly interested in the philosophy of Buddhism and the Buddha's principles. King Bhumibol has adopted these principles in his practice throughout his reign and has acted as a role-model for the Thai people. He entered the priesthood at Wat Phra Kaew on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1956. This ceremony was marked as one of the greatest days in Thai history and citizens flocked from across the country to respect and admire King Bhumibol Adulyadej's ordination ceremony. After the ordination, the King stayed at Panya Palace, Wat Bowon Niwet. He studied Buddhist metaphysics and respected the temple patriarchy. It showed that he had high morals and made people believe in him and be proud of him. The King ordained for 15 days and left the Buddhist monkhood on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1956 (Department of Religious Affairs, 2012).

The role of the National Office of Buddhism is to support and protect Buddhism following the Thai Civil Registration Act (No.2) B.E. 1991. Its duties are also to organise and support the clergy and publications, as well as to promote, support and protect Buddhism and its development. According to these acts, the National Office of Buddhism should support and present work to the clergy and Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand. The quality of people who want to become monks should be defined and made into law to help solve current problems (Swearer, 1999).

## **Materials and Methods**

This study examines the background of preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand and, as such, will benefit Phra Pariyattit Dhamma schools, Dhamma

scholar's offices, the district ecclesiastical office, the provincial ecclesiastical office, the National Office of Buddhism and the provincial culture office. Field investigation for this qualitative research began in June 2014 and was completed in March 2016. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify three provinces as the research area. These provinces were Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram and Surin. The sample population consisted of preceptors, prayer leaders and residents in the three provinces. The sample of 102 individuals was divided into three groups: 39 key informants, 36 casual informants and 27 general informants. During the data collection stage, the research tools used were non-participant observation, structured interview, unstructured interview and focus group discussion. All results were validated using a methodological triangulation process. These results were then categorized according to the three aims of the investigation and analysed with inductive analysis and typological analysis methods. The research framework is presented visually in figure 1. The results are presented here as a descriptive analysis.



**Figure 1** Research Framework

## Results and Discussions

### **The background of preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand**

Throughout history, the temple has played an important role in fostering both Buddhist principles and community values in Thai society. Most Thai temples are located at the centre of local communities, reflecting their standing and importance to everyday life. However, the importance of temples in modern society has dwindled as there is less need for their multi-functionality (Saengkanong, 1996). As the role of temples has become increasingly diluted, so the role of monks has also changed. In the past, ordination ceremonies were simple and disengaged from the laity. However, modern ordination ceremonies in the Theravada school of Buddhism are complex and influenced by modernization and society. Thai men wish to ordain into the monkhood for a variety of reasons but they are increasingly delaying their ordination until they have completed all of their worldly goals. In addition, many men do not ordain out of a sense of duty, but rather ordain because they want to escape guilt or gain more power (Suntornwipak, 1986). These modern motives and nuances are against the objectives of Buddhism.

The duties of a priest are as follows: to develop intelligence, to read Buddhist holy scripts, interpret them and instructs people in the principles of Buddhism. Furthermore, monks teach academic and occupational knowledge to people. Buddhist monks are leaders in education (Jan, 1999). As society has become more results-driven and consequently faster-paced, the length ordination has reduced. The period that Thai men can enter the monkhood could be 1 month, 15 days, 7 days or just 3 days, depending on the occasion. Traditional Thai customs stipulated that when men became 20 years old, they had to be ordained. The ordination a main mission of adulthood and monks-to-be had to study Dhamma intensively. It was a chance for Thai men to learn good practice and behave appropriately. This knowledge could then be applied to their daily lives. Ordination was a considered a great life milestone (Metawittayakun, 1989).

Somdet Toh stated that the main duty of preceptors is to ensure the inheritance of Buddhist values. For this reason they need to be highly knowledgeable and up to date. Preceptors have to follow three principles: 1) discipline, 2) the laws of the Supreme Sangha Council, Issue 17 (B.E. 2536) and 3) the law of Thailand (Department of Religious Affairs, 1998).

In the past, people in the north east of Thailand (Isan) were under constant attack from disasters and disease. Isan is the largest region of Thailand and public health services did not cover all areas. Besides, some areas were covered by rainforest and remote. The traditional characteristics of Isan people are kindness, humility and gratitude, especially towards parents and elders. In the past, Isan people believed that gratitude can be shown by ordination. It was a way to show respect to grandparents, parents and benefactors. When men became 20 years old, they had to be ordained (Rogers, 1996).

### **The current problems and conditions of preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand**

Thai ordination ceremonies are always held on Buddhist Lent Day, but in the last few years, the number of ordination ceremonies has decreased, especially in the rural areas. This problem is new and it is the duty of preceptors to solve it. In order to achieve this, Buddhist monks should focus on local wisdom because the instructions of the past are very important for present education. Due to the short length of ordination, new monks do not get all the knowledge and guidance required to train appropriate moral behavior. This has caused a weakening of Buddhist values. Some monks are drug addicts and alcoholics. Some claim to be magicians. These behaviors are portrayed in the daily news, alongside concerns with sexual relations, prostitutes, illegal activities and politics. Such reports make people feel mistrustful of organised religion and unwilling to continue respecting monks.

The findings revealed that the main role of preceptors is performing ordination ceremonies for candidates who want to study Buddhism. The first candidate's preceptor (Upajjhaya) was the Lord Buddha. The first monk to be ordained by the Lord Buddha was called Ehi Bhikkhu. Shortly after, Buddhism was disseminated across Asia as the Lord Buddha allowed the clergy to find suitable monks to be preceptors and ordain good sons. This method was called Yatti Kamma Vaja. When they became monks, the sons had to be instructed and trained in good behavioral practices to be regarded as monks and help the preceptors in their work (Dickson & Thera, 1963).

Appointed preceptors have the potential to take care of those ordained to Buddhist offices. The preceptors in the lower northeast of Thailand are expected to strictly follow the Supreme Sangha Council (Chayapa, 2001). Other preceptor duties towards the inheritance of Buddhism include: 1) Giving advice to

candidates. The candidates should have time to listen to a preceptor's suggestions before the ordination to build belief. These findings are also consistent with the research of Suntornwipak (1986); 2) Leading qualification tests. Preceptors must conduct basic screening of people wishing to be ordained. The preceptors must have faith in the ordination process and prepare candidates to receive all conditions of Buddhism (Theerawaso, 2004); 3) Ordination. The general ordinations are the same as in the past because these ceremonies were legislated by the Lord Buddha. The selection of individuals to study Buddhist metaphysics and discipline is related to the Lord Buddha's principles outlined in the Tripitaka (Anderson, 1994); 4) Issue of Monk ID cards. Preceptors should strictly monitor the issue of ID cards and must not allow co-residents to process their own cards; 5) Send lists of co-residents to the Supreme Sangha Council. The preceptor's duty is to follow the regulations of The Supreme Sangha Council, which are divided into three items: 1) Practicing candidates, qualification tests, performance of chanting ceremonies, meditation, offerings, ordination management following Buddhist discipline and clerical regulations; 2) issuance of monk ID cards for co-residents; and 3) annual submission of co-resident names (Suksamran, 1982).

The initial punishment for disobedient novices is the same as a monk's penance. This includes acts such as quarantine, fetching water, carrying firewood and gathering sand. The second level of punishment requires the monk to write 227 items and regulations of the temple, which is related to the law of the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand, issue 17 (B.E. 2536).

### **The moral ethos and wisdom on the duties of Buddhist preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand**

Preceptors are expected to support the education budget of their trainees and offer regular, continuous praise and morale-building for co-residents, including support for them to seek further knowledge of the Tripitaka and Pali by themselves. The clergy should realize the importance of preceptor's quality development. The role of preceptors is assistive and should not detract from the instruction of discipline. This attitude will benefit newly ordained monks. Co-residents living in the temple should receive all stages of nursing care and, importantly, each temple should have a budget to support monks when they are sick and have to stay in the hospital.

In general, preceptors are Buddhist ecclesiastical officials. Moreover, these monks have to assist Buddhists with basic needs and offerings. This assistance

should be free from evil and sin. The moral ethos and the wisdom of duties of Buddhist preceptors revolve around kindness to disciples. This attitude is key to progress. Despite the rules and models, ultimately it is this personal touch and experience that allows preceptors to find their own ways to teach dhamma to disciples.

### **Conclusions**

The purposes of this study are to: 1) study the background of preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand; 2) study the current problems and conditions of preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand and 3) study the moral ethos and wisdom on the duties of Buddhist preceptors in the lower northeastern region of Thailand. The investigation found preceptors, or Buddhist instructors, usually act upon their duties to take ordination, take care of co-residents, issue Monk ID Cards, assist the public in matters of social discipline and participate in the Sangha Association. It was found that current ordinations are restricted by their long duration. Some candidates ordain following the customs. There are problems with ordination ceremonies, including preparation and knowledge of post-ordination duties. These problems are caused by insufficient instruction from preceptors. Often preceptors hold official roles and cannot take care of all co-residents in addition to their official duties. This investigation found that preceptors instructed following Buddhist principles. The roles of preceptors include guidance, leading of chant practice, instructing the candidate in the etiquette of ordination, and preparing new monks for the qualification test. During the ordination, the role of preceptors is to warn and punish the new monk properly, address proper manners and provide study material and activities. Moreover, preceptors should assist the public and give advice to others.

### **Acknowledgments**

The researchers wish to acknowledge senior monks in Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram and Surin. The researchers would additionally like to thank all respondents who provided information and assistance during this investigation. Finally, the researchers wish to thank all academic and administrative staff at the Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University for their support in facilitating this investigation.

## References

- Anderson CS. Practices of a Buddhist Doctrine: the Four Noble Truths in the Tipitaka. Chicago: University of Chicago Divinity School; 1994.
- Chayapa PS. The Role of Preceptors in the Development of Monk Quality: A Comparative Study of Preceptors in Bangkok. Bangkok: Mahidol University; 1991.
- Coedes G. The Indianized States of Southeast Asia. Susan Brown Cowing. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press; 1968.
- Department of Religious Affairs. Problems and Obstacles to the Duties of Preceptors. Bangkok: Department of Religious Affairs; 1998.
- Department of Religious Affairs. His Majesty the King and Religion. Bangkok: Printing House of The Agricultural Cooperative Federation of Thailand; 2012.
- Dickson JF. Thera P. Ordination in Theravada Buddhism. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society; 1963.
- Jan NS. Religious Studies. Bangkok: Thai Wattanapanit Printing; 1999.
- Metawittayakun S. Sanggap Pitigam. Bangkok: Odeon Store; 1989.
- Rogers P. Northeast Thailand from Prehistoric to Modern Times: In Search of Isan's Past. Bangkok: DuangKamol; 1996.
- Saengkanong U. The Role of Temples in Thai Society. Bangkok: Odeon Store; 1996.
- Swearer DK. Centre and periphery: Buddhism and politics in modern Thailand. In: Ian Harris, ed. Buddhism and politics in twentieth-century Asia, London: A & C Black; 1999: 194-228.
- Suksamran S. Buddhism and Politics in Thailand: A Study of Socio-Political Change and Political Activism of the Thai Sangha. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; 1982.
- Suntornwipak S. A Study of the Importance of Buddhist Ordination to Modern Thai Society: A Case Study of Bangkok and Suphanburi Province. Bangkok: Mahidol University; 1986.
- Theerawaso P. A Study of Role Fulfilment Among Buddhist Preceptors in Nakhon Ratchasima. Nakhon Ratchasima: Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University; 2004.
- Treenarong P. The History of Buddhism in Thailand. Phra Nakorn: Klang Wittaya; 1977.
- United Nations. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly. 1999. Available at: <http://www.worldlii.org/int/other/UNGARsn/1999/192.pdf>. Accessed August 22, 2016.