

Buddhism in Lao Pdr: Historical, Cultural, and Social Relations

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were: 1) to study the history of Lao People's Democratic Republic of Laos, 2) to study the relationship of society and culture of Buddhism towards people of Lao People's Democratic Republic of Laos, and 3) to analyze the tendency and Buddhist direction with development of society and culture in Lao People's Democratic Republic of Laos. This research was a qualitative research, studying on documents, interviews, group conversations, and unofficial observations, then, analyzing on those contents.

The research results were as follows. 1) Lao PDR was regarded as a country which was strongly in the relations towards culture and religion as yet. Buddhism reached to Lan Chang Kingdom in the age of Queen YodFah, King's principal consort who used to respect Buddhism before. When in Khom she saw the population worshiped to ghosts and deities, and sacrificed by killing animals, she asked the favor from King FahNgum to bring Buddhism to propagate in Lan Chang Kingdom. Therefore, Buddhism was spread firstly in Lao PDR and got well-patronized from the King. Later, Buddhism was very prosperous in the reign of King Setthathirath according to build approximately 120 temples in the city and importantly Wat Phra Kaew where Emerald Buddha placed. In that era, many literatures were composed, for instance, Sung Sin Sai, Kareketh, and Phra Luck Phra Ram etc. Buddhism caused the unity in Lao as well as was the foundation of culture, tradition, thoughts, and belief towards Laos. In addition, monks were dependent to consult for people and the temple was the center meeting for villagers and official.

2) In terms of social and cultural relations of Buddhism towards Laos, it was really involved in life style as well as people in Northeast Part of Thailand that held the tradition called Heet Sib-song and Klong-Sibsi (Intimacy and Sharing) of Isan lifestyle values for making merit to ancestors and requite to the nature and holy things in creating happy lives. Monks were the leader to make a temple as a center of community as "a constitution of living" which enhanced cultural relation of Laos for stable lives.

3) The tendency of producing the relation and cooperation in terms of Buddhism and culture of Laos after its administration was changed, affected the Lao clergy on converting the way to administrate its system conforming to the modernization. In propagating Buddhism, Lao clergy cooperated with other countries to send monks to study abroad, under the approval of the president of the Lao Fellowship of Buddhists, and when graduated, those monks would back to develop the country. Moreover, many Buddhism colleges were built in Lao PDR. Presently, Lao clergy has provided many projects to enhance youth and population in meditation such as, building moral school, organizing the ceremony to get ordained in summertime, Dharma tour, and praying the sermon in holy days etc.

Keywords : Relation, Buddhism, Culture

Introduction

Buddhism in Laos was regarded as a country, closed to Thailand. According to be colonized by Thai of Laos in the past, the culture was not much different to each other. Formerly, this land used to respect Mahayana. When being invaded by China, Lao people emigrated to Lan Chang. Hundred years later, they turned to respect the Animism, believed in ghost, as before. In 1353, King FahNgum succeeded to the throne as the Twentieth-eight King of Lan Change Dynasty and Phra YaSamsan Thai had kept up Buddhism very prosperously, for instance, building WatManorom Temple, chapel, library, and Dhamma Studies School etc.

In the reign of King Setthathirath, Buddhism was really flourishing and he had built approximately 120 important temples in the city wall. He also built Wat Phra Kaew where Emerald Buddha placed—brought from ChaingMai. Recently, Thailand and Laos were firmly in great relationship and cooperate to fight with Myanmar to build the pagoda (Champaphun, 2014 : 56)

The influences of Buddhism in Laos PDR (Viravong, M., 2010 : 3) were 1) social dimension; Buddhism caused the unity of Lao society and was the foundation of culture, tradition, thoughts (Vongtavan, P, 2014 : 56) Lao's belief, ceremony, and other important days, 2) politics dimension; Buddhism was involved with the politics unavoidably. Then the government under the lead of Lao People's Revolutionary Party approved of the value of Buddhism to social (Phumisak, C., 2014 : 259) so they decreased the strictness towards Buddhism institution to be free in assembling the religious ceremony and got well-patronized from the government to build up monastery education institution such as, Ongtue

Sangha College Vientiane City etc., and 3) economic dimension; as the influences of Buddhism towards the economic dimension, the morality used were hard-working and saving. But in Laos, it was closed-country so that they used self-dependence more than relying on other countries because the economic was mostly agricultural system.

Research Objectives

1. To study the history of Buddhism in Lao PDR
2. To study the cultural and social relations of Buddhism towards Laos
3. To analyze the tendency and direction of Buddhism with social and cultural development in Lao PDR

Research Methodology

This study was a qualitative research used documentary research and field research. It was focused on the Buddhism issues in Lao PDR: historical, cultural, and social relations. The researcher studied the documents with the following scopes:

1. Content

This study was emphasized on the history of Buddhism in Lao PDR, cultural and social relations, and tendency of direction towards Buddhism dimension in social and cultural development in Lao PDR.

2. Documentary Research

2.1. Primary source; documents or literature reviews and other articles in Thai and international languages in university libraries in Thailand,

2.2 Secondary source; documents or literature reviews and articles in Lao and some international languages in university libraries in Lao PDR,

3. Area; provinces or districts, the beginning areas of Buddhism spreading in Lao PDR which were 1) Lan Chang Kingdom of Vientiane, 2) Lan Chang Kingdom LuangPrabang, and 3) Lan Chang Kingdom of Champasak,

4. Field research; The scopes are as follows:

4.1 The researcher created the questionnaire as an instrument used by conducting the validity with five experts who check and correct the context, word used, and structure to get improved before seeing the scholars, and collect data by interviewing the samples, respectively.

4.2 In-Depth Interview of five target groups and interviewing the sample from focus group.

5. Population and Samples

In this study, the researcher determined the target groups as three kingdoms which were 1) Lan Chang Kingdom of Vientiane, 2) Lan Chang Kingdom LuangPrabang, and 3) Lan Chang Kingdom of Champasak. The samples were 25 people chosen by using purposive sampling technique by interviewing. There were five groups: 1) monks, 2) scholars or experts of religion, culture, and social, 3) Buddhism administrators, 4) Laos' monastery students of MCKUKK, and 5) other population.

Research Result

Lao PDR was regarded as a country which was strongly in the relations towards culture and religion as yet. Buddhism reached to Lan Chang Kingdom in the age of Queen YodFah, King's principal consort who used to respect Buddhism before. When in Khom she saw the population worshiped to Animism and sacrificed by killing animals, she asked the favor from King FahNgum to bring Buddhism to propagate in Lan Chang Kingdom. Therefore, Buddhism was spread firstly in Lao PDR and got well-patronized from the King. Later, Buddhism was very prosperous in the reign of King Setthathirath according to build approximately 120 temples in the city and importantly Wat Phra Kaew where Emerald Buddha placed. In that era, many literatures were composed, for instance, Sung Sin Sai, Kareketh, and Phra Luck Phra Ram etc. Buddhism caused the unity in Lao as well as was the foundation of culture, tradition, thoughts, and belief towards Laos. In addition, monks were dependent to consult for people and the temple was the center meeting for villagers and official.

In terms of social and cultural relations of Buddhism towards Laos, it was really involved in life style as well as in people in Northeast in Thailand that held the tradition called Intimacy and Sharing of Isan lifestyle values for making merit to ancestors and requite to the nature and holy things in creating happy lives. Monks were the leader to make a temple as a center of community as "a constitution of living" which enhanced cultural relation of Laos for stable lives.

The tendency of producing the relation and cooperation in terms of Buddhism and culture of Laos after its administration was changed, affected the Lao clergy on converting the way to administrate its system conforming to the modernization. In propagating Buddhism, Lao clergy cooperated with other countries to send monks to study abroad, under the approval of the president of the Loa Fellowship of Buddhists, and when graduated, those

monks would back to develop the country. Moreover, many Buddhism colleges were built in Lao PDR. Presently, Lao clergy has provided many projects to enhance youth and population in meditation such as, building moral school, organizing the ceremony to get ordained in summertime, Dharma tour, and praying the sermon in holy days etc.

Discussion

The overall of this research results was concluded in three ages which were 1) beginning age; the most prosperous of Buddhism under King's bounty in every so that Buddhism settled in Lao society until nowadays, 2) battle age; fighting for survival for Buddhism and nation in pursuing the colony of France made monks became really the center to lead Laos stood for the country, and 3) changing age; adjusting to the world under the socialism was happened but Buddhism was still in Laos' social foundation, therefore, Buddhism could adjust and be revitalized very rapidly such as, administrative management or monastic education which contained studying many subjects as well as building the Buddhism colleges. It indicated that if Buddhism knew how to be flexible and stand for its principle strongly, it could be obviously the leader of any society, consistent with the research conducted by Phra VichiphongPharaphong: Monk with the relation between UbonRatchathani and Champasak in 1989-2009. The research result was found that the characteristics of relations between Thai clergy in UbonRatchathani and Lao clergy in Champasak District was removed because the difference in political ideology of Thailand and Lao PDR: hence, a lot of Lao monks moved to Thailand. When Thailand being liberalized country (1989-2008), it opened for investors and travelers as the policy "a battle field into a marketplace" that generated the international relations more strong as well as between two clergies in education.

Lao PDR had adjusted the policy and developing plan of economic and social using approach strategy to match with ASEAN as in Economic and Social Development Plan, issue 4 which specified Lao PDR to cooperate more with neighbor countries and western countries and allowed private sector and foreign investors to invest freely in business including supporting transportation and telecommunication development. Also, Lao PDR changed the board of official administration and laws in order to get matched international investment by constructing systematic plans and making the confidence towards foreign companies to Lao PDR. Preparing the readiness of workers with cooperating to follow the regulations of ASEAN and specified the important duties after being the members had to be on under the process of diplomacy, consistent with the research conducted by AphiradiKaeso: an economic relation of Thailand and Lao PDR in 1975-1995. Lao PDT changed the policy "New Imagination" or New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986 which emphasized more

on free trade liberalization. While Thailand turned to build the relations with Indochina countries since 1988, it made the process of economic policy of Thai government and Lao PDR conformed to each other in terms of investment, bank, travel, and electric production etc.

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. Proposed Policy

For this study, a researcher would like to suggest the proposed policy in every level of Thailand and Lao PDR, towards government, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, and National Office of Buddhism as well as offices or organizations of Buddhism and culture with government and private sectors in Lao PDR, to sign in Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in order to do Buddhism ceremony. Cultural and social relations of Thailand and Lao PDR were obviously concrete: also, they cooperated to support academic research (ParuyutPatibut and Pativeth). It was started by the researcher of MCKKK and Monastery College in Lao ODR in order to strengthen the relations of Buddhism and culture of social dimension in community, society, and nation for being a great relation strongly and peacefully.

2. Suggestions and Recommendations for Improving this Study

1. A researcher should study the enhancement of the process to propagate Buddhism in developing culture and society in Lao PDR.
2. A researcher should study Lao people the way of life towards Intimacy and Sharing: An aspect of inheriting Buddhism.
3. A researcher should study the enhancement and development of youth in Lao PDR towards the integration of Buddhism.
4. A researcher should the way to enhance the cooperation in education dimension of monastery nowadays between Thailand and Lao PDR.

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