Wat Phra Dhammakaya: Models of Network Management for the Stability of Thai Society

Natnapa Pujjungkato[1], Songkoon Chantachon[1] & Kosit Paengsoi[1]

[1] The Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Muang District, Maha Sarakham, Thailand

Correspondence: Natnapa Pujjungkato, Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Muang District, Maha Sarakham 44000, Thailand. E-mail: nnatnapa@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research was to study 1) the historical background establishment of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network in Thai society, 2) the current circumstances and problems of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network management in Thai society, and 3) the models of network management for the stability of Thai society. Fieldwork data and documents collected using a survey, observations, interviews, and focus-group discussions. Sixty informants were selected from Chiang Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Prachin Buri Provinces. It was found that Wat Phra Dhammakaya network was established during 1986-2012 due to faith in teaching of Dhammakaya Enlightenment. The existing situation and problems were organization management, personnel administration, seeking resources, assistance, public relations, and team work. Network management models for stability of Thai society included governance, promotion of education, propagation, and infrastructure.

Keywords: Wat Phra Dhammakaya, network management, stability, administration, Dhammakaya enlightenment

1. Introduction

From past to present, Buddhism in Thailand has been changed periodically. There are several important factors that led to the current circumstances of Buddhist clergy. First, the rapidly changing world and society which is diverse and affects all religions. To some extent, people often lack understanding of the main Buddhist principles and their religious traditional practices. Second, the problem is caused by factors within the clergy it self, in particular, the state of Buddhism having Dhammayut in 1833, King Mongkut was at the time ordained. He was trying to revive Buddhism as it was quite defective. Monks constituted misconduct of the Buddha's teachings. The emergence of Dhammayut created a rift in the Sangha, the Maha Nikai. Such was considered a chism in the interpretation some disciplines or cases leading to different approaches, such as wearing robes, not handle money or wearing shoes when out of temple. Major cause of the conflict arose from the un acceptance of being Buddhist monks between the two seets (Chankaew, 1990)

Presently, the Buddhist clergy is vulnerable especially its structure concerning practices but is quite strict in carrying out traditions. During the past 50 years, there were concept and new religious movements in Thailand in order to include or reinforce what was missing and addressed new events meeting the needs of people in society. There is a call for people in society to return to what was inherited from the past by bringing the role of temple back building Thainess with the scent of universality. With consciousness, the people recognize their own position as individual and of himself/herself to the world. Religion gives such a sharp increase awareness. In turn, the review of individual and social identities will lead to a review of the core material and content of teaching. A return to the past is to turn back to review and adjust the definition of Buddhist morality (Boonnuin. 2000)

To rethink the role of Buddhism in Thailand has given rise to the concept and new religious movement in Thailand for several reasons. New religious groups are distinctive today. Such is a group of Wat Phra Dhammakaya. This is an example of the modern religious leaders. It is an interesting temple. People are interested in the role as well as its on going movements. It is one of the temples in the country that can attract the most lay people. The temple has a movement that aims to restore and propagation of Buddhism emphasizing meditation practices with a declared goal of enlightenment taught at the temple using modern methods that people can easily understand and turn their attention to Buddhism (Phoonpipat, 1996)

The faith of the people towards Wat Phra Dammakaya resulting in the establishment of Centers of Wat Phra Dhammakaya to various parts of Thailand in 2005 with 28 branches and 40 overseas, such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Bahrain, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Israel, Qatar, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, Italy, and South Africa (Bun, 2007). The growth of branch Centers of Wat Phra Dhammakaya has affected the propagation of Buddhism in Thailand causing current restoration through activities of Buddhist rituals of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and branch Centers continuously.

Figure 1. The Dhammakaya Cetiya, Wat Phra Dhammakaya Pathum Thani province

Figure 2. Ubosoth of Wat Phra Dhammakaya, Pathum Thani Province

2. Objectives

- To study the historical background establishment of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network in Thai society.
- To study the current circumstances and problems of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network management in Thai society.
- To study the models of network management for the stability of Thai society.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Study Areas and Respondents

This qualitative research was based on documentary studies and field work. The researcher spent time reviewing documents and research literature. The field work was carried out in three Provinces: Chiang Mai, Prachin Buri, and Nakhon Ratchasima. In each Province, a branch of Wat Phra Dhammakaya was chosen for the study. The actual study sites were Chiang Mai Meditation Center, Prachin Buri Meditation Center, and Nakhon Ratchasima Youth Training Center. The research areas and 87 respondents were 15 key, 60 casual, and 12 general respondents respectively.

3.2 Research Tools and Data Collection

The research tools used for data collection besides documentary studies included a basic survey, interviews, observations. The field work was carried out between September 2010 and September 2011.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done descriptively and was based on the research objectives using a triangulation technique. The cultural theories were also appropriately used to verify the research results.

4. Results

4.1 The Historical Background Establishment of Wat Phra Dhammakaya Network in Thai Society

Upon the historical background establishment of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network, the study found that the establishment temple network was based on faith in teaching of Dhammakaya Enlightenment and the people's need of having a representative of Wat Phra Dhammakaya where Buddhist teaching could be propagated in their areas. They began by offering land to Father Dhammajayo, then the about of Wat Phra Dhammakaya. One was at Sansai District, Chiang Mai Province and Muang District, Phrachin Buri Province. For the piece of land at Nakhon Ratchasima Province, the people their donated it to deputy abbot Phra Phavana Viriyakhun (Phra Phadet Thatthachivo.) Each of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network was a place intended to hold religious activities for and by the people living in the area and were interested in teaching taught by Dhammakaya Enlightenment. The temple network located within community was convenient for the people to participate. As a whole, each temple network was very peaceful and suitable for meditation and religious practices.

Figure 3. Lanna Walking Meditation, Chiang Mai province

Figure 4. Prachin Buri Walking Meditation, Prachin Buri province

Figure 5. Nakhon Ratchasima Youth Training Center, Nakhon Ratchasima province

Figure 6. Offering alms, 1,000 Buddhist Monks, Amphoe Hod, Chiang Mai province

4.2 The Current Circumstances and Problems of Wat Phra Dhammakaya Network Management in Thai Society

The objective focused on six aspects: How to manage the organization (planning, structure, command, coordination, and control); personnel administration (staff, finance, materials, procedure); acquiring resources (personnel and financial resources); relief; public relations; and teamwork. The management of the organization, as a whole, was carried out using planning and meetings in which the head monk presided as the chairperson and attended by monks, lay people, merit leaders, and good friends. Under the administrative structure, the members of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network attending the meetings always knew their own responsibility especially job division. Every temple network operated under the administrative structure of Wat Phra Dhammakaya rather than the Provincial clergy. The reason for so doing was because the three members of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network were not Buddhist temples. Yet, each had to submit their operation plan to District clergy in order to prevent conflict or misunderstanding locally. Each had to build good relationship with local clergy and community by offering various forms of assistance, such as Dhamma media, scholarships or staff assistance. Based on job division, each Buddhist monk was assigned certain responsibility. At the same time, some personnel and volunteers were standing by, temple network also used such income for network restoration and on going public relations using various means, such as documents, printed materials, and radio programs.

4.3 The Models of Network Management for the Stability of Thai Society

4.3.1 The Governance Model

The Model was divided into two aspects: The management of organization and personnel management. 1) The management of organization was done effectively and systematically. It comprised of preparation, impressive events, and the teaching of the Buddha preached by monks which could be applied in everyday life and reflected strength and weakness of work performances. Such information could be used for further job improvement. 2) The personnel management of the organization was carried out using three principles: respect to the order of

seniority, teamwork, and the doctrine of merit.

The governance system positively enhanced the stability of the family. Wat Phra Dhammakaya temple network helped to build relationships between families. The temple network also treated the personnel of Wat Phra Dhammakaya located in their area very responsibly based on teamwork and respect for the seniority principle. For the doctrine of merit, the study found that the rituals carried out at the temple network designated identity that was inherited from Wat Phra Dhammakaya. Activities were performed neatly and carefully. Such could build the Buddhist faith among new lay people. Meanwhile, the network should avoid creating any conflict with the people in the community.

4.3.2 The Education Model

The temple network supported the organization to get first chance to study continuously. Wat Phra Dhammakaya set up such an operation plan. Head monks were required to receive leader's training courses. The network personnel, monks and novices, to study Pariyat (Dharma) and Buddhist practices. Monks and novices were expected to preach in order to provide practical guidance to lay people who were encouraged to study Dharma. Monks and novices were given scholarships if they engaged themselves in studies Dharma. Scholarships were also provided for lay people, needy students, and volunteers working at temple network. The scholarships helped ease the burden of parents immensely. They also enhanced the stability of the clergy and laity. Each temple network assisted teachers and students of all levels in holding the Buddhist activities so that they could learn more about Buddhism.

4.3.3 The Propagation Model

The Propagation Model comprised of three aspects: proactive public relations, preaching and teaching, and relief. This model described enhanced the stability of families. To a great extent, Wat Phra Dhammakaya temple network helped the families to practice meditation together. Members of families received moral training which was purposefully good for them. Economic activities held by members of temple network, such as offering alms to monks, walking pilgrimage of monks and novices, helped boost the economy of the areas. People bought goods to take to temples, thus generating income for local people. Many people got their jobs at construction companies building houses, temple buildings, and several jobs, such as preparing basic necessities, construction building materials, infrastructure, office facilities, and printing materials. All generated income of people in the community. Furthermore, preaching and teaching also helped people to be healthier due to their concentration on everyday living and speech, both physical and mental. They could socialize and do activities happily with other people.

4.3.4 The Infrastructure Model

The model put forward the application of public relations of various merit making activities in each temple network, such as Visakha or Vesak and ordination for monks and novices projects. The Modle, of course, enhanced the stability of families by allowing family members to work together based on one's ability and team working. For governance, each temple network had a job division allowing or her to do own work actively and respectively. On education, each network had publicized various projects carried out for general public. Those were interested in such projects could find their time to participate in the network's Buddhist studies fully and continuously.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Historical Background Establishment of Wat Phra Dhammakaya Nerwork during 1976-2012 in Thai Society

The temple network located in three Province (Buri & Ratchasima) were established due to belief and faith of lay people in Buddhism and Buddhist practices held at Wat Phra Dhammakaya. Each network later disseminated Buddhist doctrine and practices to local people. Such brought the network's personnel and the people living in the given areas to work together and help disseminate the Buddhist teaching. Such was in agreement with Fritz Graeb and Wilhelm Schmidt that original cultural centers were several, not just one. Each cultural center or culture circle disseminated its cultural practices around itself. Since the nature of man is to communicate between each other. Also cultures are frequently borrowed and/or exchanged to ease as well as promote communication. As a result, the proliferation of information has become increasingly broad like throwing a piece of stone into a pond which will cause a ripple out almost indefinitely.

5.2 The Current Circumstances and Problems of Wat Phra Dhammakaya Network Management in Thai Society

The discussion under this section was divided into two parts: the current circumstances and the problems of

temple network. Firstly, the current circumstances focused on organizational management and personnel administration. The organizational management of Wat Phra Dhammakaya network focused fully on the system and efficient functional structure of the management. Such was in agreement with Apinya Fuangfooskul (1998) that Wat Phra Dhammakaya network could draw belief and faith in Buddhism from people in the given areas. The personnel administration involved the personnel, finance, material, and operation method. The personnel worked hard and did not expect any return. They also believed that their work had both merits and met the Buddha's doctrine, "We are born to create power". Such was in agreement with Radcliffe-Brown (1964) that society was like a living organism. Organs of man are the same; each has own structure and function. For finance, material, and operation method, lay people donated their money to the temple network in various occasions so that all the network had sufficient budget for improvement of buildings and infrastructure. The propagation of Dhamma followed the ruled of Wat Phra Dhammakaya using teamwork and meetings. Such were in agreement with Niyapan Wannasiri (2007) and Kohlberg in Somboon Sarnyacheewin (1983) that merit brought unity to people involved and working as a team helped the job done consistently.

Secondly, the problems of Wat Phra Dhammakaya temple network management in Thai society included a lack of adequate personnel and spending budget. The budget, largely came from monthly donation, was limited; the public relations was insufficient, sometimes was too slow and caused misunderstanding among personnel; and a lack of team members.

5.3 The Models of Network Management for the Stability of Thai Society

The study revealed four models of network management. They included the Governance Model, Education Model, Propagation Model, and Infrastructure Model.

5.3.1 The Government Model

The Model focused on the effective and systematic management. Such was in agreement with Khatthiya Kannasut (1990) that most of the operational management lending to progress and achievement was based on effective management of personnel and adequate finance. As for Wat Phra Dhammakaya and its temple network, Phra Thep Maha Muni, the Abbot, was the utmost respected. The personnel, monks, novices, and volunteers, all gave him great respect. Such was in agreement with Noppadon Khwanchanapakdee (1987) that most personnel, monks, and novices at Wat Phra Dhammakaya were polite and unique due to training they received. Working as a team, they often held meetings for job evaluation and planning. Such was in consistent with Phra Maha Boonpian Panyaviriyo (2001) that families and family members were important in Thai society. They not only lived together but also shared duties and responsibility. They were like merit leaders who brought good things to families and their country. Wat Phra Dhammakaya and its temple network recruited personnel, monks, novices, and volunteers who had warm and stable families. Such was in consistent with Apinya Fuangfooskul (1998) that Wat Phra Dhammakaya's personnel of all levels were well disciplined in Dhamma. They set good examples of conducts to Thai society attracting lay people closer to Buddhism and Dhamma.

5.3.2 The Education Model

The Model was based on a support of personnel working in the temple network to have an opportunity to study continuously. Such was in consistent with Secretary of Education Council (2005) that trainings held by Wat Phra Dhammakaya on, "Teaching Technique of Pali", despite a pilot project, promo led Dhamma teaching and propagation of Buddhism. The project helped teachers with teaching prepagaration, curriculum improvement, and learning new teaching Pali method that could benefit their students directly.

5.3.3 The Propagation Model

The Model put forward three operational methods: pro-active public relations; effective planning for Dhamma preaching and teaching; and public assistance. For pro-active public relations, the personnel coordinated with all concerned parties (government, non-government, and public) systematically using available media. Such was in consistent with Sukhothai Thammathirat University (1997) that effective planning for Dhamma preaching and teaching emphasized the application of television, slide-multi vision and videos for better attention and understanding of the Buddha's doctrine. Such was in agreement with Sujittra Poonpipat (1996) that using technology for propagation of Buddhism could help people to turn their attention to learning more about Buddhism. For public assistance, the temple network provided public assistance in various activities. First, monks from various temples were invited to receive food from people showing unity among Buddhist monks and novices. Second, the food giving to monks and novices helped boost the community economy. Such was in consistent with Phra Maha Thammajariya Kruangthip (1999) that Luang Phor Wat Pak Nam had provided a lot or public assistance. People could earn income as they participated in the community Buddhist activities. In

return, the people donated their income to temples.

5.3.4 The Infrastructure Model

The Model was based on publicized merit making and Buddhist related activities, such as vesak and the priesthood ordination project. Such was in consistent with the symbolic interaction theory that people created their own symbols and lives within the world of meaning. They interpreted both what to them from outside as innovations and their responses to them

References

Boonnuin, C. (2000). Re-writing of New View Point for Problem-Solving of Thai Sangha Today. *Journal of Buddist Studies, 7*, 5-29

Chankaew, C. (1990). *Tutorial Series of Lectures Course 12304: Faith and Religion in Thailand*. Nonthaburi: Sukhothai Thammathirat University.

Chomrom, P. (1977). *Know Wat Phra Dhammakaya*. Bangkok: Rung Silpa Printing.

Fuangfooskul, A. (1998). Modern Urban Community Religious Landscape. *Journal of Buddhist Studies, 5*, 85-87

Kannasut, K. (1990). *Non-Government Organizations for Development (3 Cases)*. Bangkok: Nonthaburi: Sukhothai Thammathirat University.

Khwanchanapakdee, N (1987). *Comparative Studies on Role of Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke Buddhist Place in Religious Propagation among Youth in Thai SocietyToday*. Bangkok: Mahidol University.

Kruangthip, P. M. T. (1999). *The Role of Luang Phor Wat Pak Nam Foundation and Welfare of Social Development*.

Poonpipat, S. (1996). *The Role of Wat Phra Dhammakaya in Today's Thai Society*. M.A. Thesis. Bangkok: Krirk University.

Punyaviriyo, P. M. B. (2001). *Concepts and Methods of Socialization in the family Institution alone Buddhism*. An M.A. Thesis Bangkok: University of Chulalongkorn Rajawittayalai.

Secretary of Education Council. (2005*). Forms of Educational and Religious Propagation: A Case of Wat Phra Dhammakaya, Amphoe Klong Luang, Pathum Thani*. Bangkok: Secretary of Education Council.

Sukhothai Thammathirat University. (1997). *Tutorial Series of Lectures Course: Principles and Theories of Communication Unit 1-8* (2nd ed.). Northaburi Sukhothai Thammathirat University.

Copyrights