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SUNTORN BUNSATHIT : THE STATUS, THE ROLES, AND THE PROBLEMS OF BUDDHIST NOVICES IN THAI SOCIETY. THESIS ADVISORS : TAVIVAT PUNTARIGVIVAT, Ph.D., WARIYA CHINWANNO, Ph.D., SOMPARN PROMTA, Ph.D. 357 p. ISBN 974-664-771-7

There are four assemblies of the Buddhist devout : the assemblies of Bhikkhu (monk), Bhikkhuni (female monk), Upasaka (lay man) and Upasika (lay woman). A novice who prepares himself to enter the monkhood of Bhikkhu after the age of twenty has taken an important role in learning, practising, and preaching the teachings of the Buddha together with the other assemblies of Buddhist since the time of the Buddha.

Documentary research reveals that a novice is lower than a monk both in status and in rank. It is due to the fact that those who want to enter the monkhood have to be trained as novices first. In the time of the Buddha, the problem of novice's low status was solved by the Buddha's disciplines. The Buddha highly praised novices for their attainment of Arahantship and admitted them to the monkhood. Ever since Buddhism spread to Southeast Asia including Thailand, the monarchy has taken part in valuating and supporting the novice's status and roles. For example, His Majesty the King allowed his sons to enter the novicehood. The king also supports the novices who are excellent in mastering the Buddhist scriptures. Thus, it has become a tradition for Thai parents to allow their children to be novices and study in temples. This is one of the main reasons why Buddhism has been successful and popular in Thai society.

It has been found from field research that most of novices and Buddhists have good attitude towards novicehood. Nowadays the number of novices is decreasing. The rich do not have enough interest to encourage their young sons to enter the novicehood. Only the poor and people from broken-homes are still interested in doing so. This has become a serious problem for the future of Thai Buddhism.