

Thesis Title : A STUDY OF THE TEACHING AND MEANS OF
SOCIAL SERVICE OF BUDDHIST TEMPLES :
A CASE STUDY IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

This thesis aims at studying the social services of contemporary Buddhist temples (Wat) in order to find out which of the services are still vital and which are fading out in the circumstances of the changing society. It also aims at examining to what extent the services are in conformity to the teachings and practices as found in the Buddhist Scriptures. It is hoped that the knowledge of these facts may be utilized in the improvement and promotion of the services. Moreover, it will be conducive to the enhancement of the moral development of the people, along with material development, for the real progress and happiness of society. The methodology of this thesis is documentary research, making use both of primary sources in the Pali Canon and commentaries and of relevant documents, as well as observation and interview. The presentation is in

the form of description.

The contents of the thesis are divided into three chapters. The first chapter deals with the teaching found in Buddhist scriptures on the practices of social services, especially the Buddha's conduct and daily routine together with the roles of Buddhists at the time of the Buddha. The second chapter is the documentary study of the development and activities of the Sangha institution. In the third chapter, the study is made of the past and present roles of the Buddhist temple. The past roles are studied from documents, while the present ones are examined by non-participant observation, interview and enquiry. The field-work occupied the period of one year, covering both the usual time and festive occasions of the activities of the Buddhist temples.

The result of documentary research shows that in the old time, the Buddhist temple was the Buddhist institution with vital roles in Thai society. It was the center for almost all kinds of social services. It was educational institution, and the center for disseminating the Buddhist teaching, for social welfare services, for the development of national arts and cultures and for the preservation of artistic works and antiques.

The result of the research on the present roles of social services of the Buddhist temple reveals that the con-

stituents of Westernization, for example modern social institution, technology, communication, educational institution, hospital and entertainment, have more or less replaced the conventional roles of the Buddhist temple in different ways. Some conventional roles of the Buddhist temple are extinct while some are waning, to the effect that the people of the new generation become more and more separated from the Buddhist temple and the monks. The monk's status of intellectual leadership has been crucially diminished. However, to keep pace with the situation, the Buddhist temple has been in initiating many new roles, such as leading in the construction of religious buildings, orphanages, kindergartens and private schools, acting as Buddhist field-preachers and wandering Dhamma-preachers, organizing summer youth training program and running Sunday Buddhist schools, small parks, tranquility and insight meditation courses, museums and libraries. There is now a large number of Buddhist temples all over the country. In Bangkok alone, there are 399 Wats. Therefore, if the social service roles of the Buddhist temples are promoted, the society and the nation will gain invaluable benefits from the activities. The Buddhist temples and the monks are still social forces of prime importance which should not be overlooked.