

The Role of Buddhist Education in Khmer Social Development in Travinh Province of Southern Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This study consisted of three objectives relevant to the role of Buddhist education for Khmer social development in the Travinh province of Southern Vietnam: (1) to study concepts and theories of such Buddhist education; (2) to analyze the role such Buddhist education; (3) to recommend the practice of such Buddhist education. The research applied a qualitative research methodology by using documentary research methods. The secondary data was collected from various documents, such as books, dissertations, theses, articles, unprinted documents, and other sources. The researcher analyzed all collected data using content, logical, and comparative analyses to draw research findings and conclusions, and make recommendations. This research found that Buddhist education played a crucial role in Khmer social development in the Travinh province of Southern Vietnam. The Threefold Training, the Three True Doctrines, and the Four Noble Truths, including the Four Noble Truths Action Framework, were the factors that positively impacted the Theravāda Buddhist Studies Program of Travinh province. Relevant recommendations from this research and for future research were provided.

Keywords: Buddhist Education, Role, Khmer Social Development, Southern Vietnam, Travinh Province

INTRODUCTION

Buddhist education plays a crucial role in social development of Khmer ethnic group in Travinh province in Southern Vietnam. Khmer culture and tradition including their mindset and skills are affected by the Buddha's core teachings generally. Thachkeo (2020) emphasized the development strategy of the Theravāda Buddhist studies program (*Buddhikasiksa*) in a case study of the Khmer community in Travinh province in Vietnam that all Khmer communities believe in Buddhism. Buddhism does not only get influenced by Khmer-born Buddhists' spirituality but also by their way of life. Buddhism always helps to create social civilization and happiness for Khmer in terms of engaged Buddhism (p. 2). It is crystal clear that the role of Buddhist education becomes the cause of this study, either the Khmer social development is the effect in this research.

Travinh is a strategic place for maintaining, protecting, and propagating Theravāda Buddhism for sustainable development in the Khmer community. Nowadays, it has become the place for many Khmer Buddhist scholars to conduct their academic works. Thachkeo (2020) claimed in his dissertation that Travinh is considered the land of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam (p. 2). Another study indicated similar evidence, showing that Travinh province is the land of

Khmer Theravāda Buddhism. Khmer people would be endowed with the Buddha's teachings are the potential factors in maintaining peace among the different ethnic groups of Khmer, Vietnamese and Chinese in the particular location, even if they were affected by the political and historical turmoil (Dao, 2017, p. 21). Travinh is located in the Mekong Delta region which is a part of Southern Vietnam. The province had been established with an area of 2,358.2 hectares, a population of 1,045,600 inhabitants, and ten administrative units. The three ethnic groups have lived together in unity and harmony. The Khmer make up 31.63% of Travinh Provincial population. In previous times, the name of the city in Khmer is Preah Trapeang, but the modern one is called Travinh in Vietnamese. There are 143 Khmer Theravāda Buddhist temples. Each year, it has got 3,000 to 3,500 Khmer Theravāda Buddhist monks and novices conduct the three-months rainy retreat in local temples.

The priority way to educate and train Khmer children is based on Buddhist education in Khmer Theravāda temples in local places. From the past up to now, almost 143 Khmer Theravāda temples in Travinh have run a monastic school system standard for Khmer children in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam with 100% free of charge. To share for mindset and to train for skills are the crucial keys to show the Khmer complex culture. Tran (2010) wrote in his thesis, at the center of all Khmer communities in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam are the temples. By supporting the monks in the temples, the laities contribute to making and sharing communal merits. The temples, in return, serve the Khmer community in part by serving as a center of learning (p. 80). Khmer Temples and communities have joined hands together to educate and train their children under Theravāda Buddhist Studies program (TBSP) for the better lives. The accomplishments of the research are going to show at the research findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research applies qualitative research by using documentary research methods; the secondary data is collected from various documents, such as academic books, research papers, review articles, newspapers, and official reports of Buddhist associations and international organizations. The researcher analyzes all collected data by using content analysis, logical analysis, and comparative analysis, to make the research's findings, discussion, and recommendations. The following procedure can be represented by its three objectives as follows:

- 1) To study the concepts and theories of the role of Buddhist education in Khmer social development in Travinh province of Southern Vietnam, and its related research as the Buddhist strategy and Khmer way of life.
- 2) To analyze the inputs, process, and outputs of the role of Buddhist education in Khmer social development in Travinh province of Southern Vietnam. The key concerns are going through the Threefold Training, the Three True Doctrines, the Four Noble Truths, and the Four Noble Truths action framework, including its practice by Khmer people.
- 3) To find appropriate recommendations for the use of Buddhist education in Khmer social development in Travinh province of Southern Vietnam to use from this Independence Study (IS) for further study.

The conceptual framework of this research is presented below:

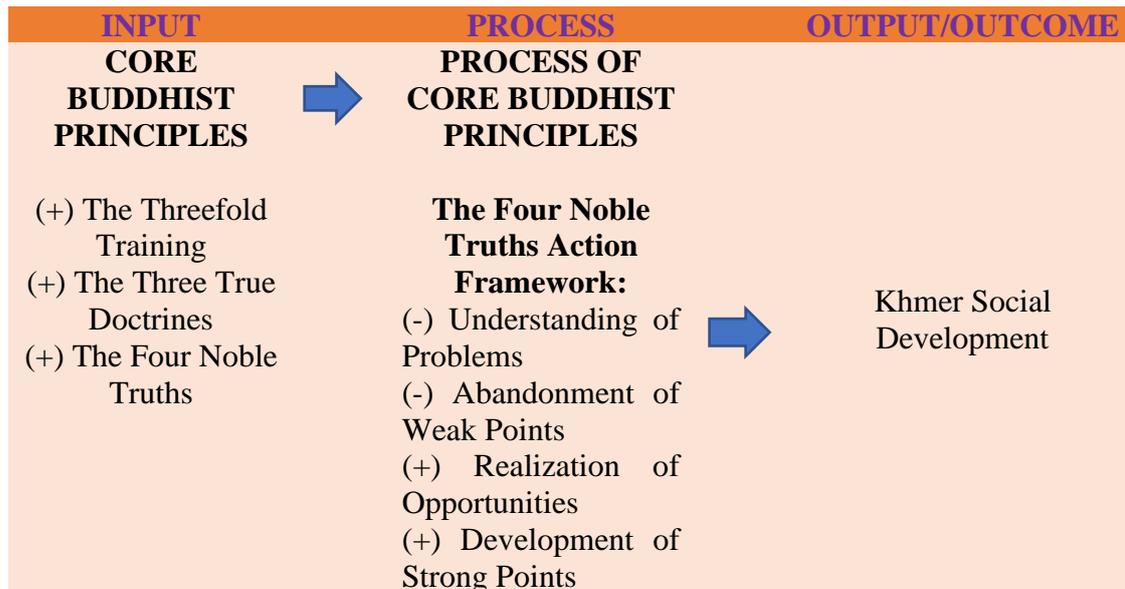


Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework of Research

The researcher analyzes the role of Buddhist education in responding to the social development need of the Khmer ethnic group in Travin province of Southern Vietnam and their way of life as shown in the above conceptual framework.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

It is interesting to study “the role of Buddhist education in Khmer social development in Travin province of Southern Vietnam” by using various documentary sources. The word “role” means the expected behavior pattern of TBSP and the character that is played by United-loving Nation Buddhist Monk Society in Travin Province (UNBMST) in Khmer communities for socially sustainable development. At the same time, another source showed that Buddhist education played a crucial role in developing the Khmer Society in the Travin province in Vietnam in particular. All in all, Theravāda Buddhist activities have become the character of local Khmer communities.

There are three purposes for Theravāda Buddhist Studies Program (TBSP) of Travin: (1) to identify the character of Khmer Buddhist traditional values, (2) to invest intangible capital in Khmer Buddhist scholars, and (3) to propagate the Buddha’s teachings for the benefits, happiness, and peacefulness of the many. One more important thing relating to the role of Buddhist education in Travin is emphasizing the strategic development for TBSP’s introduction, philosophy, slogan, mission, vision, objectives, goal, strategic methods, and headquarters, to attract all respondent sectors for Khmer social development.

There are many Peace Studies and Buddhist scholars paying attention to the role of Buddhist education in Khmer social development. Other scholars claimed that Buddhist education plays a very significant role in Khmer social development in Vietnam. Another study (Tran 2010) emphasized similar information and data, showing Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks taking all 143 temples in Travin as the foundation center of their work and played crucial roles in contributing to the fulfillment and preservation of Theravāda Buddhist culture in the Khmer

Society. Furthermore, there is research found that the Buddha's core teachings, the Threefold Training, the Three True Doctrines, the Four Noble Truths, and its Four Noble Truths action framework are summarized as tools to fix all the known and unknown life problems. More importantly, Buddhism and modern sciences are the truths and facts integrating into a term of strategic development for problem-solving in short.

Society is the shelter of humankind. The more people are born; the more problems are. The potential problems are nonstop. Solving all life problems is known to develop people's lives based on the right way in continuation, as shown in the three important revolutions that shaped the course of history. According to Buddhism, society is created and developed by human beings themselves, which indicates their bodies and minds' responsibilities. So both body and mind are subjected to be trained for being a good citizen because one personality with morality, concentration, and wisdom developed is the basic family unit, a family is the basic socially developed unit, a social is the basic national unit and nation is the basic world qualified unit accordingly. Even all systems can be trained, and an individual is a center for Khmer social development, at least potentially.

Khmer people are accepted to be trained in mindset and developed for wisdom under the Theravāda Buddhist Studies program in their local places. 500,000 Khmer units, with 31.63% of the Travin province population are Theravāda Buddhist devotees, and they had only one teacher previously. Their teacher was the Buddha. They believed in the virtues of the Triple Gem, a reflection of daily activities, and so on, but nowadays they are turning problems. They are divided into three main groups: the first group follows a Vietnamese communist party. The second group depends on overseas Khmer. The last group is the Khmer Buddhists. These are why the Buddha's core teachings are maintained, to make these Khmer social problems solved and united again.

Introduction to Theravāda Buddhist Studies Program of Travin Province

Thachkeo (2020) expounded that the Theravāda Buddhist Studies program in Travin Province of Southern Vietnam, abbreviation as TBSP, is a monastic school system standard by the Buddhist rules and law. TBSP was established in 1965 by the Provincial Society. It provides Social and Sciences Studies 100% free of charge to Khmer children and Khmer social development in Vietnam. The revised core subjects are meditation and computers. Students are required to spend at least seven academic years to finish seven grades, and they are expected to obtain the outstanding outcomes as follows (p. 102);

- (1) Philosophy: Self-minimizing; non self-maximizing; integration of TBSP with modern sciences; sharing for mindset and training for skills.
- (2) Slogan: Ways to liberation.
- (3) Mission: A monastic school system standard with 100% free of charge.
- (4) Vision: An integration of TBSP with modern sciences for greater mental and socially sustainable development.
- (5) Objectives: To study a Buddhist way of life; to approach Buddhism; to build a new code of peaceful life.

- (6) Goal: Liberation of all kinds of life problems.
- (7) Strategic methods: The Four Noble Truths action framework; the Four Great Effort's application; the four BSP actions framework; the eight principles of blue ocean strategy.
- (8) Headquarter office: Travinh Province in Vietnam; contact by Facebook: Salakon Online.

One thing that is modernized by Thachkeo (2020) is a new revised TBSP curriculum. By driving from the eliminate-reduce-raise-create grid for TBSP, he decided to revise a new TBSP curriculum from grade 6th to grade 12th. This new revision had forced by several factors: (1) the eliminating granted factors of some subjects of Social and Sciences Studies, (2) the reducing factors of the learning period, (3) the rising factors of subjects of Buddhism, expanding from learning period to motivating speech in the classroom, high technology in management, and (4) creating factors of subjects of mediation and computers included training mind and developing wisdom methods, integration of TBSP with modern sciences, and five principles of extension of Buddhism if it was compared to the old TBSP curriculum (pp.103-105).

Problems of Theravāda Buddhist Studies Program of Travinh Province

The problems of TBSP are serious issues nationwide. It has no goal, adjectives, mission, vision, seal, slogan, email address, site, newsletters, or philosophy, and not everything is in existence yet, except the visible evidence such as the unprinted documents, oral test, and the existing problems. Based on a reported paper of the executive committee from the Provincial Society, the researcher found two primary problems. Those are the loss of beliefs and the lack of skills and abilities in management in TBSP's administration (The Executive Commission, 2018, pp. 21-22).

According to the Buddhist belief, all problems always have their original causal. So, what are the causes of TBSP's problems so far? The main cases are clear: on the report of summary activities of the Travinh Provincial Society in the 6th term (2013-2018), it quoted that, first of all, some abbots in Travinh have no experience in administration. Their abilities and knowledge in Dhamma and social engagement are still limited. They are not concerned enough to report the serious issues and make a request to the Provincial Society. Those cause obstacles in problem-solving for the officers. Furthermore, they do not pay attention to educating the new monkhood and novices. They will not be interested in the temples and monks. Those are the facts that make monks easily break down the Dhamma and Vinaya of the Buddha and cause negative affecting on the belief of the Buddhists. Secondly, the executive committee of Districts and City, especially the local managers of the village, the membership is not a qualification because of the disruption of monks. The knowledge, abilities, and membership of the executive committee regarding their responsibilities, their tasks, their duties, and their accountabilities are poor. Participation in the Provincial Society is still unavailable. Thirdly, the updating news and report from the Districts to the Provincial Society are not on time. The promotion of the Buddhist rules of the Provincial Society to the membership and monks is not going smoothly. There is a lack of attention, guidance, observation, puss passion, and reminding of the rule of the officers to the local place. Finally, the education and management of monks in some temples are not standard. It is easy to cause immorality and crimes in their society accordingly (The Executive Commission, 2018, pp. 21-22).

To sum up, the lack of skills and abilities in management is caused by some abbots who are poor in managing skills and abilities limitation of UNBMST's people existing from the bottom to the top. The gap between the member participants and the Provincial headquarter office is so large, leading to the mechanical disruption of TBSP. The belief of Khmer communities in monks is going down day by day because of the moral disorder and crimes of Khmer monks frequently. These cause the main issues to the Khmer social development. Khmer people do nothing here. They adapt to them and try to find the proper problem-solution to the weak points, which are considered the cause of suffering or problems in the Four Noble Truths. The researcher hopes that we can propose a new proper strategy to solve these problems completely. Together, we can bring the TBSP of TravinH great again in our motherland.

Opportunities of Theravāda Buddhist Studies Program of TravinH Province

The Standing Members reported that the TBSP of TravinH has become the first value advantage for 57 years. There is no competition and the committees of TBSP never think of competing with others. They follow the appointment of a chairman of the executive board and run the program for the annual academic year. Below is the historic message which is based on the four opportunities in existence for Buddhist Studies to all the world citizens as the global village (The Standing Member, 2018, pp. 5-6):

Firstly, Theravāda Buddhism has become a religion of Khmer families in TravinH Province in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. It is the heart and soul of Khmer communities. Khmer people learn the Buddha's teachings and apply them in their daily life for happiness, peacefulness, and living this life fully with the mindfulness practice.

Secondly, all the monastic schools through TravinH province provide the course 100% free of charge, and temples are becoming the main sponsors from A to Z. All abbots in the 143 Khmer Theravāda Buddhist temples attempt to apply the documents for requesting opening classes for monks, novices and Khmer children in time for the annual year.

Thirdly, every year in TravinH, there are at least 3,000 to 3,500 monks and novices taking the three-month rainy retreat and joining in studying and practicing the Dhamma and Vinaya. This scenario has become the most yellow colorful in the community.

Fourthly, TravinH has belonged to the land of Khmer Theravāda Buddhism for a very long time, and the governor monks here wish to see this land turning into the main strategic place for Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism working together for the benefit of others. That is why Theravāda Buddhism becomes the Buddhist way of life for Khmer communities. So learning, practicing, approaching the Dhamma and Vinaya of the Buddha, and protecting Buddhism are the main duties of Khmer monks, novices, and Khmer generations from the past up to now.

The Four Noble Truths Action Framework

These proceeding dependencies showed that the right understanding is always important for liberation or reform system in Buddhism. According to an integration of the four actions framework expounded by Thachkeo aimed to develop the Four Noble Truths action framework for Buddhist Studies' problem solving in particular (see diagram two). One thing is clear: TBSP

of Travinh needs this philosophy. Diagram two showed the Four Noble Truths in action framework into the problem solving for the Khmer social development in Travinh province of Southern Vietnam because number one is considered as the result of number two, which needs to get the right understanding and abandoning. Number three is the result of number four which needs to realize and develop forever. In contrast, number two is the cause of number one, and number four is the cause of number three. So, there are only two things the researcher has to target. Those are the cause and effect, or the problems and opportunities (Thachkeo, 2020, pp. 57-58).

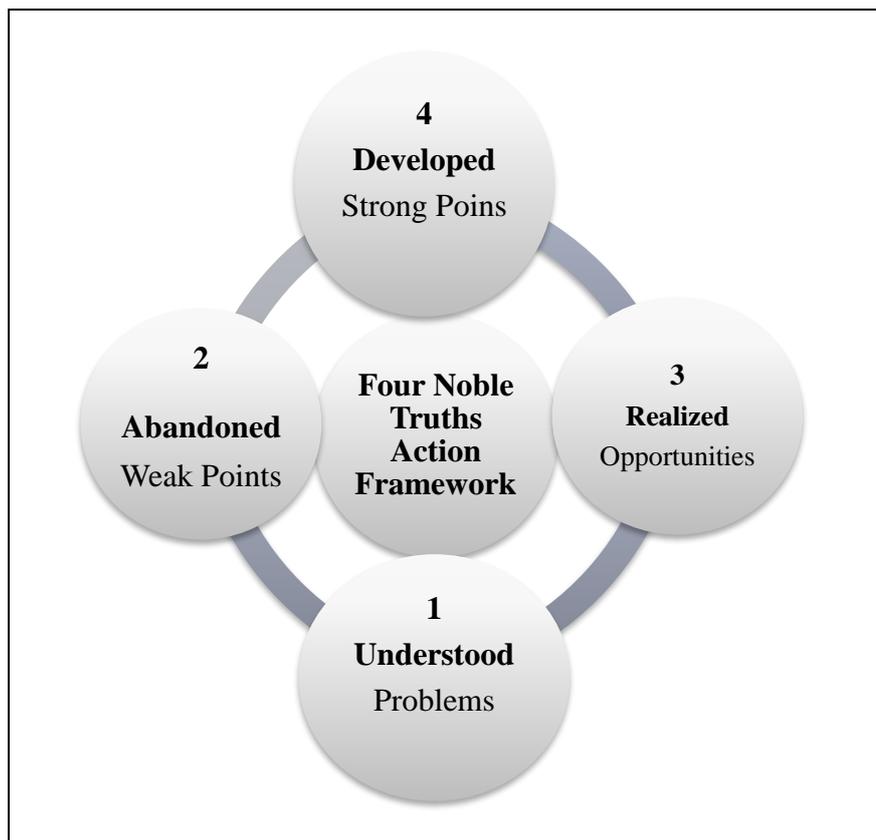


Diagram 2: The Four Noble Truths Action Framework (Thachkeo, 2020)

A lesson learned from this diagram two is important: everything has appeared and disappeared in this world because of its reason and condition or cause and effect. The most important thing we have to approach is the right understanding of things in existence. The right understanding is in need because it is a role of wisdom, and wisdom itself is the highest goal of Buddhist Studies for Khmer social civilization in Travinh province. So, the more problems people resolve, the more wisdom they attain. To resolve all kinds of life problems, wisdom is available for everyone and becomes a common choice for those who strictly follow the Buddhist Middle Way or the Eightfold Path in daily life.

A Comparison Between Weak and Strong Points in the Khmer Society of Travinh Province

A common question has been asked how the researcher would resolve these weak points? The answer must be based on the metaphor of the blue ocean strategy. Kim and Mauborgne (2015)

pointed out that they keep developing strong points by rising and creating opportunities inside TBSP and Khmer Society in continuation. They make all kinds of competition within the 143 temples and Khmer Society irrelevant and rebuild the blue ocean for Khmer social development in the local place (p. 4). This way can help TBSP as well as the Khmer Society to reduce and eliminate the weak points to beat life problems automatically because both points are alternatives. There is an essential thing to remind the researcher how to define and explain the two terms “red oceans and blue oceans” hereby because the researcher used the metaphor of red oceans to capture the reality that organizations increasingly face, while blue oceans captured the endless possibility that organizations could create. “Red oceans” are the known market space. It represents all the industries in existence today. In the red oceans, industry boundaries are defined and accepted, and the competitive rules of the game are known. Another supporting idea the researcher found in the blue ocean strategy expounds that they can create uncontested opportunities for TBSP and Khmer Society within the weak points by expanding the integrated TBSP with modern sciences and the development of strategic boundaries, including the strategic plan, the strategic development, and the day-by-day strategic set. Here is the skill and ability to change from weak points to opportunities (Kim, Mauborgne, 2015, pp. 4-5). Thachkeo (2020) again proposed that all members involved must be committed to following the TBSP strategic development, especially the philosophy of TBSP which consists of (1) self-minimizing, (2) non self-maximizing, (3) integrated TBSP with modern sciences and (4) sharing for mindset and training for skill. The answer is in our mind and soul. No weak point cannot resolve under the real strategy. However, before having arrived at the strong points of Khmer Society and creating opportunities for them, all levels of Khmer people have to recognize the strong and weak points which Khmer ethnic in Travinh province of Southern Vietnam are experiencing as below (pp. 84-85):

(+) Strong Points	(-) Weak Points
Long history (1965)	Old program (no amendment for 57 years)
Strong in traditional and cultural beliefs	Weak in practical Buddhism
TBSP run by Buddhist rules and law	No budget support from a communist Vietnam government
First value advantage of TBSP	No vision to expand
Became a common program in Khmer local region	Unclear goal setting
Got high expectations from Khmer communities	No formulation and execution principles for managers and leadership in management
Studies free of course	Time, risks, and expected benefits are never free by nature
Got high satisfaction rates from Khmer domestic countries and global	The known and unknown problems never put an end
Strong in theoretical Buddhism	Trapped at self-maximization
High sacrifice for Khmer local welfare	Lack of high-technology adaptation
Participated in Khmer social contribution	Lack of skills and abilities in teamwork
Loved the Khmer nation by heartfelt	Destroyed the Khmer nation by ignorance
Understood all the problems	Being afraid of solving problems strategically
Lovers of the knowledge	Never support good learners with a scholarship provision
Big potential of moral subjects	Lack of the classical subjects that sharing for mindset and training for skill

Khmer children became dreamers	Lack of positive thinking, lack of motivated speech, no goal and plan for life, rich of self-maximization
Khmer people preferring to change others	Never changing within themselves
Re-unified in rite and ritual ceremonies	Scared for insight meditation practice.
Khmer helps Khmer.	Khmer discrediting each other.

(Source: Thachkeo, 2020)

Table 1: The Strong Points and Weak Points in the Khmer Society of Travin Province

In this comparative section, the researcher analyzed the findings in the context of the Four Noble Truths action framework, derived from the Buddha's core teachings. These are the Threefold Training, the Three True Doctrines, and the Four Noble Truths including the modern sciences referred to as the four actions framework in blue ocean strategy. This action framework was applied for the context analysis, concept analysis, and content analysis of the Khmer Society. It aimed to understand the problems, realize opportunities, abandon the weak points, and develop the strong points of Buddhist education and Khmer Society under the specific field of Theravāda Buddhist Studies program for Khmer social development in Travin province of Southern Vietnam. Then the researcher decided to reduce and eliminate the weak points to beat the problems of the Theravāda Buddhist Studies program and Khmer Society. On another side, the researcher rose and created strong points to approach the opportunities in existence and the uncontested opportunities for Khmer social development (see diagram two).

DISCUSSIONS

The findings showed the role of Buddhist education in Khmer social development in Travin province in Southern Vietnam. The Theravāda Buddhist Studies Program in Travin province in Vietnam is a monastic school system standard by the Buddhist rules and law. It has been established since 1965 by the Provincial Society and provided Social and Sciences Studies 100% free of charge to Khmer children and for Khmer social development in Southern Vietnam. Potentially, students have to spend their time at least seven years to finish the Buddhist diploma. After that, students are expected to obtain the highest goal of "liberation of all kinds of life problems" and get an understanding philosophy of self-minimizing, integration of TBSP with modern sciences, sharing for mindset, and skill training. Furthermore, students can learn and practice Buddha's teachings in the right way. One more important thing, an old TBSP curriculum was proposed to be replaced by a new revised one.

It has been 57 years since the Theravāda Buddhist Studies program in Travin was established. Naturally, it cannot avoid some mistakes so far, such as (1) the loss of belief, (2) the lack of skills and abilities in management caused by (1) the moral disorder and crimes of Khmer monks frequently, and (2) some abbots being poor in managing skills, and abilities limitation at all levels including the weak points of the Khmer Society as well. These were considered the two primary problems of TBSP of Travin, which the Buddhist scholar proposes to get the right to understand by the Four Noble Truths action framework at number one (see diagram two).

As for opportunities hereby, the researcher divided them into two kinds, which are the highest goal of Buddhist education for mankind: opportunities in existence and uncontested opportunities. For the TBSP of Travin, the researcher found four opportunities that had been explored. Those are: (1) TBSP is directly for Khmer children, (2) the course is 100% free of charge, (3) there are 3,000 to 3,500 novices and Buddhist monks involved in teaching and

learning the Buddhist teachings for an annual year, and (4) TBSP teaches the way of life to Khmer communities. This is considered as the opportunities in which students acquire to meet in accordance with the Four Noble Truths action framework at number three. Khmer people who see either the opportunities in existence or the uncontested opportunities can experience the benefits, peacefulness, and happiness of the Theravāda Buddhist Studies program of Travinh (see diagram two).

According to the Four Noble Truths action framework at number two, the weak points of Khmer Society are the causes of primary problems which the Buddhist scholar proposes to be abandoned completely. The weak points were expounded, like an old program (having received no amendment for 57 years), weak in practical Buddhism, no budget support from a communist Vietnam government, no vision to expand, unclear goal setting, no formulation and execution principles for manager and leadership in management, time, risks and expected benefits never free by nature, the known and unknown problems never put an end, trapped at self-maximization, and lack of high technology adaptation. These are subjected to reduction and elimination as soon as possible to put an end to all kinds of life problems for Khmer social development (see diagram two and table one).

In comparison, the strong points of Khmer Society were also expounded, like the long history of TBSP (established 1965), strong traditional and cultural beliefs, TBSP run by Buddhist rules and law, approached the first value advantage, became a common program in Khmer local region, high expectation from Khmer communities, studied free 100% of charge, got high satisfaction rate from Khmer domestic countries and global, strong in theoretical Buddhism and high sacrificed for Khmer local welfare. These are the causes of opportunities in TBSP for Khmer children, and they have been raised and created in continuation to realize the existing and uncontested opportunities. At the time, these strong points of Khmer Society can make Khmer communities stronger and ready to replace all life problems. One more important thing, the Buddha's core teachings associated with the Four Noble Truths action framework are not only for the Khmer Society but also for everyone (see diagram two and table one).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher has covered all the contexts, concepts and contents of this main topic, neither its creativity nor innovation. It is hoped that other researchers will be interested in finding out relevant answers. To keep the Buddhist education as well as the Theravāda Buddhist Studies program of Travinh moving toward progress, the researcher would ask for help from other researchers to answer the two following research questions;

- (1) What are the expected benefits that TBSP students wish to obtain?
- (2) Which TBSP curriculum, the old or the newly revised, is most satisfied by the students?

Responses to these two questions should be helpful to understand further the role of Buddhist education in Khmer social development in Travinh province of Southern Vietnam.

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