

# Social Change and Changing Roles of Isan 'Development Monks'<sup>\*</sup>

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### Background of the studies

Since the early 1950s “phrasong nak phatthana” (development monks) have conducted various religious and socio-economic activities<sup>1</sup> such as religious training to provide guidelines for people to abandon bad demeanor, establishing child care centers, setting up rice banks, buffalo banks, credit unions, self-help organizations, and so on. Some ‘development monks’ also conserved the traditional medication and magical techniques for healing people (Pinit 1985, 1986). These projects have been referred to as social and human development and have been viewed by various NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and some scholars as an alternative development approach (Darlington 2000). This can reflect an aspect of the development condition that the approach to development in contemporary Thailand has partly been changing from driving economic-growth development to supporting social and human development, promoting self-sufficiency, strengthening community participation and empowerment, and profiting by traditional knowledge and folk wisdom. The ‘development monks’ have evidently taken part in this process of developmental change (Sakurai 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> *According to my first field study (1983-1984) on ‘development monks’ in Isan, I found that the earliest time when the ‘development monks’ started their community development was in 1953 (Pinit 1985: 110).*

From reviewing literature, most sociological and anthropological studies of Thai and foreign scholars during the 1960s and 1970s paid more attention on the role of monks in development as partly resulting from encouragement of the government and the Sangha authorities through the three programs: Dhammaphatthana, Dhammathut, and Dhammajarik. Those programs, however, were considered as political use of Buddhism and the Sangha for the promotion of national development and national integration by the political rulers who sought the national security and stability through the promotion of national development and social welfare (Mole 1968; Mulder 1969; Keyes 1971, 1983; Morgan 1973; Piker 1973; Tambiah 1976; Heinze 1977; Somboon 1977, 1982). Until the early 1980s, some Thai scholars [in particular Anan (1982); Ariya (1983); and Pracha (1983)] conducted their field research paying more attention on voluntary 'development monks' who manipulated their own development activities without any control or support from the government and the Sangha authorities. More interestingly, some voluntary 'development monks' also had some financial support from international NGOs, such as the Asia Foundation, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung Foundation, and so on (Ariya 1983). Their studies give us more information about a new movement of voluntary 'development monks', but provide information only of individual development monks' work and role in specific areas and conditions.

They cannot present a whole picture of the role of 'development monks' in Thai society or a region as an issue of 'area studies'<sup>2</sup> on various perspectives towards religious, social, cultural, economic and political conditions. Consequently, I was interested in studying 'development monks' as an area study to clarify a whole picture of their roles and activities in Isan society.

After I initiated my field research in 1983, there have also been many studies on the 'development monks' as an issue of area studies, particularly in the North and Northeast (Somboon 1994; Sakurai 1999, 2005; Isumi 2003; Urasaki 2003). However, they mostly studied 'development monks' only in a short period of time. This really encouraged me to do follow-up studies in my cases of 'development monks' in Isan as a long-term field study for two decades in order to have more information to clarify the role of 'development monks' in different periods of time.

#### **The long-term field studies**

I conducted my first field research on Isan 'development monks' during 1983 and 1984 initially for my M.A. thesis, having a research fund

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<sup>2</sup> *In social sciences, 'area studies' can be classified as interdisciplinary research and knowledge pertaining to a particular geographical and cultural region. The term exists primarily as a general description for what are, in the practice of scholarship, many heterogeneous fields of research.*

granted from CUSRI (Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute). The study, by using in-depth interview as its main research method, found that in the early 1980s not many Isan people had direct experiences of working together with 'development monks' and they were unable to clarify the exact distinction between the role of 'development monks' and that of non-development monks. Therefore, it was quite hard for them to identify which ones they preferred to have in their community. Even in the same community, there were controversial opinions on the role of 'development monks'. One group expected the monks to get out of the wat and into the lives of the people. The monks should not only preach the Dhamma but also introduce appropriate ways of living for the laypeople and practical strategies to overcome socio-economic problems, because they were natural community leaders who could give good advice to the laypeople. On the contrary, the other group suggested that the monks should stay in the wat and keep out of all secular affairs in order to maintain pure Buddhism. The monks should pay more attention on studying the Buddha's teachings to enable them to put the laypeople on the right path towards salvation. Thus the villagers would not be reluctant to faithfully make merit through the monks. Even now the development participation of the monks is still a controversial issue not only among the laypeople but also between the monks themselves. It has been accepted that the majority of the monks

do not perform the role of 'development monks' as an alternative. They neither want to get involved nor criticize the performance of 'development monks'. The 'development monks', therefore, are the minority group of the Buddhist monks in Isan.

Another important result of the study is that the monks' development projects were mainly influenced by community factors. While some 'development monks' were influenced by outside institutions, many of them originally initiated development projects by themselves in cooperation with local people. Their main motive of development was to liberate the local people from oppression, poverty and ignorance. The study, therefore, supports the assumption that the monk's approach to development is deeply rooted in local conditions and through their own motives. However, due to the limitation of basic information, budgets and time, the study included only 38 'development monks' in 9 provinces of the Northeast. Therefore, I am reluctant to claim that my information can be referred to as the whole picture of the 'development monks' in Isan society.

I conducted a second research during 1989 to 1991 with a budget from a Buddhist NGO, namely the Coordinating Group for Religion and Society (CGRS). I interviewed 96 'development monks' in the whole region by using a research method of 'follow-up study'. From the total of 38 cases of 'development monks' in the first study, there

were 25 monks who continued to play the role of 'development monks' and were included in the second study, while 3 cases passed away, 9 cases disrobed, and another case had a health problem. Therefore, there were 71 new cases of 'development monks' who were recommended by other cases already studied and publicized by various sources from GOs (governmental organizations) and NGOs.

My second research found that many 'development monks' had shifted their locally-oriented development activities to development programs supported by NGOs and GOs in response mainly to fashionable trends of sustainable development, such as forest conservation and integrated farming systems. This appears not to be on the right track for locally self-reliant developmental approaches. Furthermore, I also had some incertitude of which I could not explain clearly about the circumstances of the changing roles of Isan 'development monks'. I was not confident that some monks I interviewed should be exactly 'development monks', but I could not find out appropriate reasons to clarify it. Due to this lack of clarification, I decided not to publish that book and waited for a longer period to find out more information to shed light upon the real circumstances and genuine reasons to make it clearer and more understandable.

My latest research was conducted during 2003 and 2004 with the main research funds from Chulalongkorn University. I conducted

field study for a total of 143 monks in the whole region of the Northeast by using the same research methodology of follow-up studies (96 cases) and interviewed new reference monks (47 cases), but only 56 monks could be classified as 'development monks', while others had stopped working due to various reasons. The total 56 cases of 'development monks' includes 26 cases from follow-up studies, covering 10 cases from the first study and 16 cases of reference cases in the second one, and another 30 new reference cases in the latest field research.

From the 96 cases in the second field research, there were 70 monks who have shifted their roles and their ways of working in community development because of various reasons: 7 cases died, 11 cases disrobed, 9 cases were senile, 6 cases had health problems, 10 cases attained higher positions in the Sangha authorities and had been tied up with their administrative roles, 5 cases moved somewhere else, and the rest 22 cases, as well as the majority of the new 17 reference cases, have given up their development roles due to a lack of support which they had before from some NGOs and GOs. The latter is an important aspect which I could not understand when I conducted my second field research. I found that during the 1980s many Thai and international NGOs, as well as some governmental programs such as Isan Khiao (literally Green Isan) and Phaendin Dhamma Phaendin



Thong (literally Dhamma Land and Golden Land), had provided numerous budgets to support potential monks who can promote development projects in Isan. However, after a period of time when their budgets were depleted and they left the community, those monks could not continue their development role because they were not overly interested in working as 'development monks'. They performed the role of 'development monks' at that time because of readily available budgets forthcoming.

With all these sources of data, my study will analyze and synthesize the changing roles of Isan 'development monks' along with social change during the long period of more than two decades.

#### **Traditional social roles and emergence of 'development monks'**

Theravada Buddhism<sup>3</sup> is an important social institute to uphold Thai society because it plays a vital role in organizing social structures and maintaining social solidarity both directly and indirectly. Buddhism expresses a concern both for the attainment of personal salvation and for the establishment and maintenance of proper order in society. Its

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<sup>3</sup> *There are three main branches of Buddhism: Theravada which still thrives in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand; Mahayana which embraces various traditions within China, Korea and Japan; and Vajirayana which is now primarily associated with Tibet. 'Theravada' is a Pali word made up of thera (an elder of the Buddhist Order, whose status derives from long years in the robe) and vada (speech, discussion, belief or doctrine). It thus means "Doctrine of the Elders" or, in other words, the orthodox Buddhist doctrine transmitted by the elders of the Order (Ishii 1986: xiii).*

roles and functions deal closely with the Thai way of life. It comes into existence as a result of the human struggle, not only to solve the individual problems but also to help the people to live together in peace (Suwat 2003: 44). The core teachings of Buddhism are actually relevant to all individual and social problems because they deal directly with the human suffering and the means of eliminating it (Suwat 2003: 90). However, the importance of Buddhism for the people's way of life depends upon how well Buddhism has blended with the pre-existing culture of the Thai people.

Roles of the Buddhist Sangha in Thai society should be understood through two main aspects. The first aspect is concerned with the social community function of the Sangha, the second one is regarding the function of spiritual guidance in relation to people's everyday life. Both functions can only survive by the adaptation in both the reinterpretation and the actualization of the Dhamma teachings in relation to the rapid social change, with particular reference to modernization and its consequences. These are the important elements within this phenomena in which the Sangha has had to cope with in order to perform their role in modern society.

Despite the fact that monks and laypeople live different ways of life and have different responsibilities, duties, and differing expectations of success in Buddhist practice, both of them have to live together. The

monks cannot live an absolutely solitary life cut off from the lay society, as they are required by the Vinaya to maintain good relationships both among the monks themselves and with the laypeople. Among the monks, they are bound to the Sangha, the monastic community, regulated by the disciplinary rules for all of them to live in harmony by paying respect to one another according to the duration of membership in the Sangha. Towards the lay society, the monks are responsible for social wellbeing through teaching the laypeople in how to live and to conduct themselves as good members of society, and through the counseling of community leaders to conform to their virtues and duties for the benefit of the people which, to all intents and purposes, will form a good society (Phra Rajavaramuni 1983: 17). The monks then have important roles to support and encourage the laypeople for the good of society as a whole.

The Vinaya puts the Sangha and the laypeople into reciprocal relationship as the rightful means of interdependence. For daily living, the monk's life is dependent upon the laypeople for food and other material necessities (Rajavaramuni 1983: 2-9). In return, the monk's task of providing social well-being for the laypeople is both as an act of compassion and as an act of reciprocity which is duly emphasized. Even the monks who are more devoted to individual perfection have to depend on the laypeople for material necessities which in turn can be

readily and adequately supplied only by a secure and peaceful society which the monks thus have to help to maintain. The monks then have important roles to support and encourage the laypeople to reach the good of society.

According to the Buddhist ideals, the Sangha should not be involved in worldly affairs, but in practice the Thai Sangha has been traditionally closely related to the laity. The rural monks, in particular, have social roles and a close relationship with the lay community. In the past the monks fulfilled a wide range of functions in the local community, in that they not only performed merit-making ceremonies and took part in animistic or other non-Buddhist rituals concerned with the agricultural cycle (Tambiah 1968: 79) but might also act as astrologers, traditional doctors, money-lenders, or advisors on a wide variety of domestic and agricultural problems (Kaufman 1977: 113). However, at present only a few rural monks are qualified to give advice on farming or any occupational problems, whilst they have much pressure and high expectations from the laity to develop their secular talents in order to support various secular affairs for the lay community. The urban monks, in contrast, are more isolated from the surrounding laity, not only in terms of community actions but also with regard to the degree of intimacy existing between them and the laypeople. Factually, this is an inevitable consequence that most of them come from outside the town

and are unfamiliar with the members of the lay community. They basically come to live in the urban areas for the purpose their education and religious training. Furthermore, can be considered as an impact of modernization due to the circumstances of the so-called 'urban bias development' (Parnwell 1996), which has created Bangkok to become the center of both secular and religious educations.

Kaufman (1977: 113-115) suggests that in the past the wat in Thailand not only served as a place for performing religious ceremonies and services, but also as an educational center for children. From documental records, it is clear that before the change in the educational system which transferred the responsibility for education to the government in the reign of King Rama V or around the early twentieth century, the monks played a crucial role in education (Palanee 1984: 76). They were the only teachers available to the masses. They taught both religious and secular subjects. Since the government has taken over their educational role, the wats and monks have lost their grip over education and also some other social roles in general. Meanwhile, many of the Sangha administrators, the abbots and other elderly conventional monks, responded to the loss of their social roles, especially their educational responsibilities, by turning to engage themselves in the construction and repair of monastic buildings, holding ceremonies, and performing rites connected with magic and superstition. They seem to

have turned Buddhism into a new age of grandiose monastic buildings, huge Buddha images and luxurious religious ceremonies. At the same time, for the people, stress has been placed on the merit-making activity of making contributions for huge buildings and luxurious ceremonies (Phra Rajavaramuni 1983:50-51).

However, there were some monks that positively reacted against the limitation of their social roles. They interpreted the Buddha's teachings as instructing the monks to be able to play a more suitable role to benefit society. They suggested that the traditional social roles of the monks should be revived and adjusted to suit the modern changing society. With these ideas in mind, they have engaged in a variety of community development and social welfare programs. Although this movement began in the 1950s, it was officially and evidently recognized in the early 1960s as part of socio-religious programs of moral, cultural and material support to rural people, in particular the *Dhammaphathana*, *Dhammathut* and *Dhammajarik* programs,<sup>4</sup> all of which were based on

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<sup>4</sup> The *Dhammathut* program sent monks to mission in politically sensitive and economically poor border provinces, and the *Dhammacarik*, program through which monks worked with the Department of Public Welfare encouraged minority hill peoples to convert them from animism and to develop them, as well as the *Dhammaphatthana* program sponsored by the two national Buddhist Universities. These programs were supported and overseen by the government rather than the Sangha, aiming to strengthen the sense of national identity of peripheral peoples through Buddhism (Somboon 1977, 1981, 1982). However, not all members of the Sangha agreed with either the government's development agenda or the involvement of monks in it.

coordination between the Sangha administration and the government agencies aiming to benefit rural society as well as to achieve national integration.

Since 1963 the two Buddhist Universities, Mahamakut and Mahachulalongkorn, had operated the Dhammaphathana Program for the training of monks who were to be assigned to engage in social welfare activities and teaches the provincial monkhood concerning the techniques of modern welfare work and community development. However, among the ranking monks, in provincial and district authorities who had to follow this approach of modern social welfare and community development, they were still worried that the pressure on the monkhood to cooperate in governmental social welfare programs would reduce the status of religion and monkhood to become mere tools of government, which could hardly be meritorious in interpretation. While some monks seemed to be uncertain how to respond to the approach, the government, who noticed that the Sangha's social influence and ubiquity in the country can serve as an agent to strengthen its national integration, launched Dhammathut and Dhammajarik programs in 1965 by sending trained monks to rural and hill areas respectively. The programs aimed at preventing the communist ideology and used the Sangha for the sake of national integration. Whether or not the programs

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benefited the people in the long run remains doubtful (Prasetyo 1993: 139-140).

However, to run the three programs at the working level, the Sangha authorities had to depend on the active younger monks for manpower. The programs thus served as the meeting points where the older and the younger monks came to cooperate and work together. As a result, some younger monks have benefited from exchanging experiences and knowledge with their older colleagues, and later they have been able to initiate their own development projects and become the so-called 'development monks' themselves.

Since the mid 1960s, Thai governments, throughout the ages, have continued to use Buddhism to support their development agendas. This process was parallel to the rise of independent 'development monks' who challenged the government's concept of development that they believed it caused the Thai people's suffering. The 'development monks' use Buddhist principles to enhance the people's culture, values, and concerns for dealing with social problems and their livelihood. A handful of monks began independent rural development projects based on their interpretations of Buddhist teachings and in opposition to the capitalist and consumerist models promoted by the government. One particular concern was the impact of the government's rapid development programs on the rural people's way of living, and the



erosion of traditional local Buddhist values. These monks were concerned with the effects of growing consumerism and the dependence of villagers on the market economy. They similarly had an idea and ideal that if people were hungry and sick, they would not and could not devote their life toward religious ends; and without spiritual development and commitment, they could not overcome material suffering (Darlington 1990; Somboon 1987, 1988). Working in specific villages and addressing local concerns and problems, these self-proclaimed 'development monks' have promoted development projects for more than five decades around the country. The connection between 'development monks' in the Northeast and the policy of the central Sangha administration as well as of the government is examined as one part of the process of which the 'development monks' have emerged.

Thus, in this confusing period, there were some hopeful signs, as we can see from some practices among active 'development monks'. Being disillusioned and dissatisfied with modernism and consumerism, they let themselves be exposed to many ideas of rural development and tried to revive their traditional roles to effect change. At that time local traditional roles of the monks were scrutinized and interpreted for secular affairs. On the whole, it resulted in a harmonious change in which tradition has continued as part of the change. Some 'development monks' resorted to the Dhamma and local tradition in order to find a

meaning that could be interpreted to encourage rural people to participate in development activities. Some others sought meaning within local tradition itself by making a new interpretation that would lead to an appropriate approach to community development.

#### **'Development monks' in Isan: conceptualization and practices**

An important expected outcome of this study is to give an account as accurately as possible to clarify the viable concept of 'development monks'. The concept of 'development monks' is the formation of various perspectives of the mutual interaction of people who get involved in the monks' development activities, which are ideally expected to incorporate local Buddhist practice and traditions. It also expresses the different ways they participate in those development activities. This article will clarify concepts of 'development monks' by analyzing and synthesizing all primary data from interviewing various key informants.

From my long-term field studies, I have found that the term 'development monks' has been confusingly used in different meanings by various groups of people who get involved in community development. Most villagers and community leaders recognize 'development monks' as the ones who can help them solve their problems and can lead them to the appropriate way of daily living. The

villagers consider the 'development monks' as local intellectual leaders who can give various advices to solve their individual and community problems. Generally, when villagers face any problems, they usually go to ask their local abbot for some advice. They respect their abbot as both religious and secular leader. If the abbot plays only religious role, he will receive less respect than the one who supports the community mundane affairs. A male villager (37 years old) who participates in his abbot's development projects in Kham Sakaesaeng District, Nakhon Ratchasima, specifies the 'development monks' as follows:

*"Development monks are monks who dedicate themselves to lead villagers to work in various activities for solving the community problems. When they realize that villagers have any problems, they don't sit around and do nothing. They usually try to initiate some activities which are expected to solve the problems or respond to the community interests. ... Having a monk to lead and promote development projects, the villagers will have more confidence of having no corruption problem. Everyone believes that cheating the monk and wat will be a big sin and will probably open a door to hell."*

However, some villagers disagree with the practice of 'development monks'. They insist that community development is the duty of community leaders and government officials. Monks should pay more attention to study the Dhamma in order to gain enough knowledge to teach people for good demeanour, as well as providing religious and

traditional rituals for people. If they cannot perform those duties properly, it will affect their faith and respect.

Similar to villagers, most formal community leaders, phuyaiban and members of Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO), accept the role of 'development monks'. They consider 'development monks' as traditional leaders who can demand people's participation for all activities, and also as really good supportive development agents in the community. For example, a phuyaiban (48 years old) in Ubon Ratchathani clarifies the 'development monks' as:

*"Development monks are effective development coordinators. They are very trustful and respectful in the opinion of both government officials and villagers. All development activities with the monks' support have usually gone well. But, the most important point is that development monks have to work closely and together with community leaders. Development monks should not act as a sole development leader. If it happens in that case, people's participation and cooperation will be temporary and also will have less sustainable success."*

A male member of TAO (42 years old) in Sakon Nakhon also gives a definition of 'development monks' as:

*"Development monks are a group of community leaders, but they attain different knowledge and specialty from formal community leaders. Although they have little secular knowledge, they receive most respect from villagers. What ever the monks suggest, most villagers neither argue nor criticize. They may not believe in all what the monks said, but they still follow their suggestion. Most villagers see the local monks and wat as their community"*

*center. ...If development monks and community leaders can properly work together, all development activities can be easily implemented, even though there is no or less development budget."*

The local government officials consider 'development monks' as the facilitators who can help the government organizations to promote development projects in the rural community. Almost all the government officials interviewed agree that the monks have a very high potential for development tasks. They realize that they must seek the coordination and support of local monks if government programs are to succeed. They can implement any development activity easily in the community which has a supportive 'development monk'.

Another interesting point found in this study is the concept of 'development monks' clarified by 'non-development monks'. The majority of 'non-development monks' disagree with playing role as the 'development monks' because it is too much involved in secular affairs. They consider the development role as not the Sangha's duty in accordance with the Vinaya-pitaka, and not suitable for the monk's way of religious practices. A 'non-development monk' (58 years old) who is the head of a District Sangha Authority in Nong Khai Province gives his opinion towards the role of 'development monks' as follows:

"All monks should religiously practice and follow the Buddhist doctrine. The local monk as a spiritual leader should not too much involve in secular affairs, or lead villagers to promote any

development activities. They must pay more attention on teaching Dhamma to laypeople and training them to know how to do good demeanor as good Buddhist followers. Playing development role may lessen the laypeople's respect and faith.”

At the same time, the Isan ‘development monks’ identify themselves in various meanings, as follows:

1) ‘Development monks’ are monks who engage in community affairs and try to encourage local people to help themselves in community development. They realize their development role based on the condition that the monks and the laity have reciprocal relationships. The monks are tied to the laity for their living. They depend wholly on material support given by laypeople, and in return they are under obligation to render service to the laypeople who rely on the monks’ spiritual guidance. The monks are respected as mediator and as a vehicle for Isan people’s merit-making activities. They also have to play secular role and contribute themselves to the community when their laypeople have problems and need help. The monks cannot separate themselves from the laity and community affairs. They have to share both happiness and suffering together with the laypeople. They have to know what happens in the community, and have to learn what its problems are and how to solve the problems and help people. They then have to engage in development role and work together with their laypeople.

2) 'Development monks' are monks who can learn and develop themselves to be both religious and secular leaders. They can apply both the Buddha's teachings and secular knowledge to induce people to solve their own problems and live in a proper way. They are dependable and reliable to give advice for laypeople. While they can support people to promote community activities responding to the people's basic needs, they also teach people to know how to live in a proper way based on the Buddhist practices. They promote both spiritual and material development by applying Buddhist teachings and practices to encourage local people come to work together with them. At the same time, the monks need to practice strictly under the Buddhist doctrine for their exemplary behavior, and also have to work properly in both religious and mundane duties.

3) 'Development monks' are local monks who can support and encourage their laypeople to promote development projects mainly to improve their quality of life and to better their standard of living. Most 'development monks' are local monks who were born in the same community they live. They are relatives, neighbors and friends of local people. They, therefore, not only have seen and realized all individual and community problems, but also have been affected by those problems. They are neutral community leaders because they are neither government officials nor local politicians. They do not need any

achievement to apply for their progress in the Sangha hierarchy. They received high respect, trust and faith from the laity. Consequently, they can require villagers to fully participate in their development activities.

4) 'Development monks' are local monks who try to revive their former social roles which have been interrupted and played by various government officials and business firms. In the past, the Sangha and wat were considered as the center of Isan people's life. With this regard, the monks have played a prominent role and have been very closely involved in the life of Isan people in both religious and social spheres. The 'development monks' have revived and played various social and development roles in Isan society. Their roles in a wide range of activities reflect the capability of Buddhism in term of the Buddhist teachings, the organization, and the creativity of development strategies for local people to cope with rapid social change in Isan.

In short, the term 'development monks' can be identified as the local monks who play a significant role to drive and encourage local people to promote their own community development, mainly for improving their standard of living and changing their socio-economic conditions to solve the community problems and respond to the local needs. Explicitly, the role of 'development monks' gives priority to the ways in which they guide people to develop themselves and work together in order to gain a better quality of life by integrating all



functions of material and spiritual development. Therefore, the monks who solely direct material development, such as building an enormous monastery, road, bridge, and so on, are not accounted for as 'development monks'. However, if their material development projects are implemented with the main purpose of social development, for example, to help people learning how to work together, or how to support and participate in community development, they can be considered as the 'development monks'. More important than that, the monks' development role should be faithfully accepted by their lay community, and should not be against the Sangha rules, Vinaya-pitaka, and Buddhist traditions.

In Isan society, the monks have traditionally been recognized as spiritual leaders, and have received respect from the laypeople as community leaders. In spite of the loss of various functions to modern development agents, the monks, especially the abbot, still appear to be faithfully trusted by Isan people. For the villagers, the abbot and the monks are belonging to their living world. Although, in formal regulation, an abbot has to be authorized by the Sangha Order, the abbot of the village wat in Isan tends to be a local man, selected by the villagers from within the community primarily on the basis of his religious reputation and some special skills that attract the villagers such as capabilities in meditation, knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures,

traditional medical practice, and so on. It is generally accepted that the abbot occupies a very significant position in the village by virtue of his being head of the main center of religious and social activities. This recognized religious status provides considerably his development potential and he may be expected to be one of the most influential village leaders.

Nevertheless, the questions whether members of the Sangha should get involved in secular affairs, and to what extent, are still debated among local monks and laypeople who do not participate in development monks' activities. They are in the situations of pro and con, and many of them cannot give a genuine answer. In general, however, more leadership and readiness to participate in community activities is expected from the monks by Isan villagers and the local Sangha authorities. The wat is also expected to serve as the community center of most lay activities, and to provide various community services as many as possible. The Sangha and the monks, therefore, have not completely lost these functions in Isan rural villages. At least groups of Isan 'development monks' have encouraged the laypeople to voluntarily participate in their communal and development activities.

### **Motives of 'development monks' in Isan**

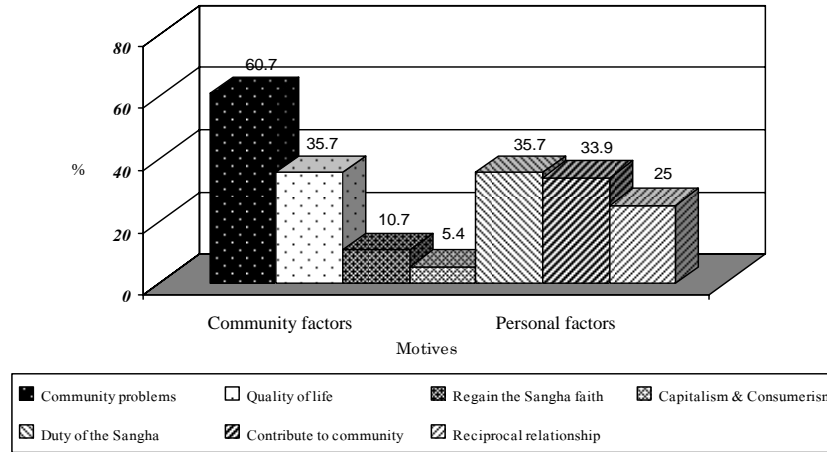
Former studies before the 1980s suggested that the development role of the monks and the Sangha in Thailand were initiated and supported by government agencies to promote national development and national integration in remote areas throughout the country, as well as some of them were supported and motivated by both national and international non-government agencies (see also Keyes 1971; Morgan 1973; Tambiah 1976; Heinze 1977; Ishii 1986; Somboon 1988, 1994; Darlington 1990, 2000). However, my first two field studies have concrete evidence to corroborate that in the early 1950s and the motives of 'development monks' in the rural Northeast were molded by internal factors rather than those of external factors. As discussed before, the monks have not isolated themselves from society since Theravada Buddhism disseminated into Thai society. They have lived closely and shared happiness and suffering along with their laity. The monks were self-conscious to introduce and support villagers to solve their problems and cope with the poverty in their community. Most of them have conceived that they have to depend on villagers' support for living. They then could not be able to remain still when they realized the villagers' problems and suffering. To promote development activities to help people is also a practical way for the monks to help themselves in having a good and comfortable living. These circumstances continued

to remain very important for the motives of 'development monks' in the Northeast during the 1960s and 1970s. After that, the 'development monks' have had more complicated motives for development due to the changing development conditions in both national and local levels as well as the changing social and economic conditions in different periods of time.

From my latest field study (2003-2004), the 'development monks' clarify their seven main motives driving them to play their development role based on two main factors, the community factors and personal factors. There are four important community motives and three obvious personal motives (see Figure 1). The most important motive is the community problems. When the monks see various problems in their community, in particular the poverty and people's bad quality of life, they then want to help people to solve those problems. It is a fact that most monks in Isan are local monks, they live together with people in the same conditions and problems. They can see and realize what happen in the people's daily life. They then promote some development activities purposively to solve the people's poverty and to find a proper way to help people improve their standard of living. They realize that it is necessary to improve the quality of people's life materially while, at the same time, uplifting them morally. These two community motives are

purposively based on the condition that local people's quality of life is under the standard. They really care about the well-being of the people.

**Figure 1** Motives of 'development monks'



However, only realizing the community problems and people's low quality of life is not enough to encourage the monks to play their development role. They also have other three motives of personal factors. At least one-third of the case studies in my latest field research think that it is their duty to help people because of two reasons. Firstly, they mostly were born in the same village. As local people, when they see their relatives have troubles, they think that it is their duty to help them. Secondly, the Sangha's responsibility is to serve society. As

Buddhist monks, when they see their laypeople have suffering and problems, it is their responsibility and commitment to help people get out of all suffering. It is also one-third of them think that they have got a very good chance to study both religious and formal education, and they can claim that they have more knowledge than most laypeople. Then, they should use their religious and secular knowledge to help people. Thirdly, there are one-fourth of them who play their development role because of their reciprocal relationship with their laypeople. They realize that they can learn and practice the Dhamma and live as a monk because of all support the laypeople give them. All monks have to depend on material support from the laity. They are morally obliged to promote the people's well-being, and pay back by doing every thing to help people solving their problems. If people cannot live in a proper way of life, they then cannot support monks to live in a proper way of life as well.

There are also other motives for some 'development monks'. There is a share feeling on the part of the monks interviewed that the Sangha's involvement in development programs is necessary because Isan society is rapidly changing and the Sangha must involve itself in order to maintain its status in society. In other words, the monkhood has to change or it will become obsolete. It is also a matter of fact that the pace of secular development has progressed too rapidly and people

have become excessively materialistic. In consequence, people neglect religion and concern too much on working to earn more money. This leads in return to the weakening of kinship and community ties, rendering village society more prone to social problems.

In fact, the 'development monks' do not have only one motive to drive them play their development role. There are reasonable mutual motives. However, the main point is that if the people have no problems, the monks will not necessarily engage in community development. Most of the monks interviewed maintain that if government services are extended to the village and government officials accomplish their development functions effectively, the monks will not need to be so involved in development activities and can concentrate more on their religious functions to promote Buddhism. The monks have long time tried to provide alternatives for reforming the social and economic conditions of the community. Many of 'development monks' have also changed their motives and roles in accordance with social change in their community.

#### **The role of 'development monks' and social change in Isan**

To understand how the 'development monks' have changed their development role and activities, we have to explore all circumstances of important social change in Thailand. The information

of social change, which has possibly affected the monks' involvement in community development (see Table1), together with information from my latest field research can help us understand the change of the monks' development role and activities during the period of the 1950s and the early 2000s. The analysis will be classified into 5 periods for clarifying the relationship between social change, inauguration of development role (see Figure 2), and change of development role and activities.

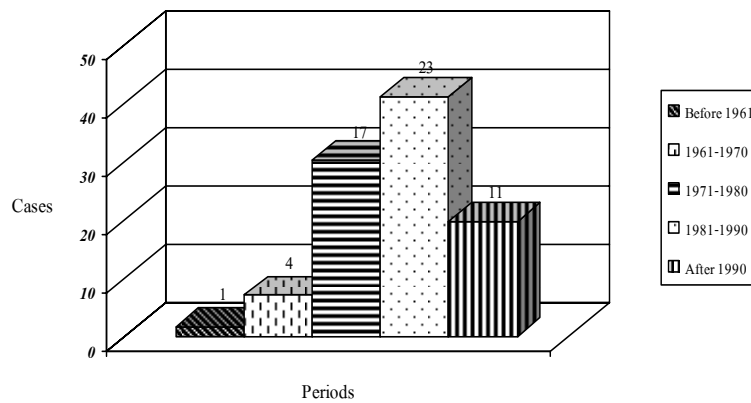
**Table 1 Chronology of important social change in Isan and Thailand**

| Year | Important social change                                                                                                                                                         |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1953 | The earliest year when 'development monks' emerged in Isan. (from field study)                                                                                                  |
| 1961 | The Thailand's First National Economic Development Plan was launched                                                                                                            |
| 1963 | The two Buddhist universities, Mahachulalongkorn and Mahamakut, in Bangkok drew up 'Dhammaphatthana' program to send graduated monks to distant rural areas as Dhamma teachers. |
| 1965 | The Department of Religion Affairs launched 'Dhammathut' program for training and sending monks to promote development activities all over the country.                         |
| 1973 | The student protesters and left-wing intellectuals drove out the dictatorship government.                                                                                       |
| 1976 | Military government came back to rule the country by coup d'etat. A number of left-wing students and activists went to join the CPT.                                            |
| 1980 | The government offered an appeasement policy of amnesty to former left-wing students and activists. Many of them decided to work for newly-established rural development NGOs.  |



|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1981-1987 | NGOs were acknowledged as boosters of grass-root development and presenters of 'alternative development' approach.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1984      | The government launched 'Phaendin Dhamma Phaendin Thong' program.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 1986      | The 'environmentalist monks' emerged.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 1987      | The government launched 'Isan Khiao' program.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 1992      | - General Suchinda Khraprayoon, the Prime Minister, resigned taking responsibility for the large number of injured and dead as the result of the crackdown on citizens' demonstrations.<br>- NGOs changed their supports from community development to political activities, in particular human rights and movements of the poor. |
| 1997      | Thailand had economic crisis.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 2005      | 'Development monks' organized 'the Network for Development Sangha in Isan'.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

**Figure 2** Periods of Starting Developmental Role



### Before 1961

1961 was the year when Thai government under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat launched its First National Economic Development Plan. Presumably, there should not be any obvious influence of government economic and development policy came to rural Isan before 1961. From my first field research, there were 4 interviewed 'development monks' who started promoting their development activities in this period. The earliest 'development monks' I interviewed started his development role in 1953. However, only one of them has still played development role, while the rest were dead. He is Phrakhru Mahavapi Khanaraksa (79 years old), Wat Pa Srisuthathip in Udonthani, who is now the head of the Nong Han Ecclesiastical District Office. Since 1957 he has encouraged laypeople to support labor or any local resource for the community welfare and development on purpose of making merit. He has interpreted such actions as potentially meritorious and contributory to good Karma (Pinit 1985: 154-159). Although his interpretation seems nothing new in the form or intention, as the Sangha has for many centuries played a supportive role to provide meritorious activities for the laity, only the content is changing for a specific purpose of social welfare and development activities. The content can ultimately transmute meritorious form and intention among the laypeople in his community. In the late 1960s, however, his approach to community

development was criticized by some laypeople, in particular the local merchants who tried to oppose his activities. Some monks in neighboring communities also blamed him and suggested him to keep away from the secular affairs, but he ignored them. He argued that in some critical circumstances, such as having widespread drought throughout the community, the laypeople could produce less rice and food to survive, at the same time the wat's barn was full of donated rice. Would it be the responsibility of the monks to supply rice for the laypeople to cope with their sudden suffering? If we could elucidate this incident, it would be clear to explain why, or why not, the monks should, or should not, play their role as a 'development monk'.

In this period, the monks promoted their development projects and activities concentrated on daily life of local people, as well as people's education and health. They involved in mobilizing villagers to cooperate and participate in the construction of community utilities such as village roads connecting to communities around, wells, and water reservoirs. Other roles were school teachers, traditional healers and herbal pharmacists. Their social and development roles were quite obvious in the more remote villages where secular leadership was not sufficiently strong, and only the monks could mobilize the villagers to carry out community welfare and development projects. Their main development strategy was self-reliant by requiring villagers to contribute

their labor to promote community activities for the benefit of the entire village.

### **During 1961 and 1970**

After launching the First National Economic Plan, the Thai government promoted an industrial and export-oriented economic development concentrating on Bangkok and other big cities. Consequently, the economic gap between urban areas and rural villages widened. Specifically, the governmental development strategies in Isan were mainly concerned with the Communist insurgency, spreading slogans urging locals to promote further development and have state loyalties. Many of the governmental development projects focused on the construction of arterial highways connecting military bases. The rapid pace of regional integration and anti-Communist policy conversely heightened the dissatisfaction of local residents. That was because the projects created numerous problems, such as a lack of compensation for land expropriation and the infiltration of a 'commodity economy' due to the highway network. It was beyond the villagers' economic capacities, and caused increasing numbers of indebted peasants (Sakurai 2003).

Another important social change in this period was in the early 1960s when the Sangha was drawn into involvement within national

development policies. The government viewed the Sangha as a tool to strengthen national integration, through which it hoped to promote development as a prestigious governmental program. The Sangha would be able to easily motivate people to participate in community development. In 1963 the Dhammaphatthana program was launched to send graduated monks, often in groups or teams, to distant rural areas as Dhamma teachers who also had responsibilities to assist in the establishment and expansion of naktham schools, Pali school, and monastic private schools; to run Buddhist Sunday schools; to give guidance in meditation for spiritual development; and to take part in local community development programs (Ishii 1986: 134-135). However, the contribution of the Dhammaphatthana teams was concerned primarily with the development of teaching the Dhamma and only secondary in forwarding community development activities.

Building up from the Dhammaphatthana program, the Dhammathut program was promoted by the Department of Religious Affairs in 1965. This program trained monks for two and six months emphasizing the way to promote and coordinate community development activities, with an aim to contribute to the government's efforts in raising the standard of living of the rural population all over the country (Heinze 1977: 96-100). However, it seemingly provided a large proportion of trained monks to promote rural development in the

Northeast, where the government was concentrating its development efforts intensively in an attempt to confront the problem of Communist insurgency. With all the support through the Dhammathut program, the community development during the 1960s and 1970s in many remote areas in the Northeast was claimed to be effectively accomplished with monastic support and cooperation (Somboon 1977). Nevertheless, to compare with the requests coming from provinces in the region, the number of trained monks available to comply with the demand was still too small and was effectively practicable in rural development for only a short period of time. Presently, the Dhammathut program has shifted its main purpose to train missionary monks to go abroad for teaching and propagating Buddhism, especially in Western countries.

Though it can be said that those two programs did not play an effective role to provide a large amount of long-term 'development monks' in Isan, they have been evidently able to encourage some Isan monks to participate in community development, as well as to convince the Buddhist Sangha that playing the role as 'development monks' is also important in Thai society. Evidently, at the early stage of the Dhammathut program, many trained monks were sent to the Northeast for introduction and assist community development in remote areas, but they failed to promote community development in the long run because of various conditions. Firstly, many of them were not the local monks and

had problems of communication with the local people. Secondly, even though they were winning the respect of the local people, they had an inability to take the leading role in rural development because of insufficient training to understand the essential community problems which were deep-rooted concerning the local culture. Finally, many of them just stayed in the community for a short period of time and lacked confidence to lead community development. Only a few local monks, who were trained by the Dhammaphatthana and Dhammathut programs, took part in community development within the region.

From my latest field study, there were 4 'development monks' who initiated their own development activities in this period. Their main development strategy was to promote self-reliant individuals and to respond to basic community needs. The majority of their development activities aimed at solving the people's immediate problems, such as traveling during the rainy season, lacking of clean water supply, living far away from a government health center, and so on. There were also activities to increase agriculture by coordinating with government officials to promote agricultural practices that were more economical and gave higher yields, soil improvement through the use of organic fertilizers, and the introduction of seasonal cash crops. The 'development monks' contributed to these activities by encouraging and mobilizing the villagers not only to participate in governmental

development projects but also to initiate and manage development projects by themselves. More important than that they did not involve in the Dhammaphatthana and Dhammathut programs.

#### **During 1971 and 1980**

This was a period which had radical political change in Thai society. In 1973, the student protesters and some left-wing intellectuals drove out the dictatorship government under General Thanom Kittikhajorn, and in 1976 there was a coup d'etat by the military. From 1976, a number of left-wing students and activists fled to join the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). In 1980 the government offered an appeasement policy of amnesty to former students and activists. After returning, many of them decided to work for newly-established rural development NGOs. As a political consequence, during 1973 and 1976, there were various political movements including a democratic movement among student-monks in those two Buddhist universities. Some of them returned to their home-village and encouraged local abbots to promote some development activities. My latest field research finds that there were 17 case study participants that started their development role in this period.

In the 1970s, the governmental development programs were particularly emphasized in rural development and also infrastructural



development. The rapid-fire pace of those development programs did not respond to the rural people's basic needs and did not solve their genuine community problems. The chief reason is that the development budget for regional administrations was small and development plans made by the central government were all separately implemented by various ministries and agencies. However, although the effect of the series of governmental development programs was extremely limited, some local monks were encouraged to participate in rural development in many remote areas in Isan. Their main development strategies were to improve the people's quality of life and to respond to their basic needs. Their development activities were still aimed at solving the immediate community problems and poverty, but specifically to raise the people's standard of living, which included improving village sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and living conditions.

There were five crucial and helpful development projects promoted by the 'development monks' in this period. Firstly, they managed the community mobilizing funds for making clean water containers. Secondly, they promoted health campaigns, particularly to give up eating raw foods and to encourage villagers to build household toilets for better sanitation. Thirdly, they promoted vegetable planting without the use of chemicals mainly for household consumption. Fourthly, they assisted villagers to set up rice banks and buffalo banks

to solve the poor people's problems of insufficient rice supplies for year round consumption and not having a buffalo for farming. Finally, they supported youth education, particularly setting up community child care centers for taking care of young children for parents who had to work in their fields. This project had two main purposes: to give primary education for children and to feed and raise them with hygienic foods, so that children can be properly looked after. They provided space in the wat to be used as a child care center as well as mobilizing funds for the operation of the center. Some monks themselves even helped to supervise and look after the children. The monks were very concerned about the health of their fellow villagers, especially the village youth. On the whole, these development activities aimed at supporting villagers to improve their quality of life and also responsive to their basic needs.

#### **During 1981 and 1990**

There were 23 'development monks' that initiated their role in this period. This was the peak period of the movement of 'development monks' in Isan because there were many NGOs that went to encourage and support local monks to participate in community development in rural areas. The development role of NGOs has carried out rural development using strategies and concepts differing from that of the government. A prominent circumstance of rural development in Isan at

that time was that governmental development projects could not produce effective results. In that respect, NGO's role as a development agent was important.

However, the government tried to promote their development projects aiming to coordinate with local monks. The 'Phaendin Dhamma Phaendin Thong' program was launched countrywide in 1984. This program was ideologically a 'Buddhist approach' to development, but it did not essentially give positive development impacts in most areas. Local people gave it less priority because it did not directly support cash-economic activities. It aimed to promote a self-sufficient economy and a self-reliant approach. However, there still are some 'development monks' who follow this development approach by applying its ideology in their recent development activities, particularly in Ubon Ratchathani and Amnart Charoen.

Furthermore, around the mid 1980s the disintegration of the peasantry in Isan worsened due to the circumstances that the number of landless peasants went up, debts from the mismanagement of cash crop cultivation snowballed, migration of those in search of odd jobs in urban areas expanded, and deforestation and land reclamation increased. In fact, the forest coverage in the region plummeted from 40% in 1961 to 14.4% in 1985, and in 1989 domestic logging was prohibited in principle. During this period, the NGOs strengthened their

political role regarding environmental issues and human rights protection, and harshly criticized government policies. They supported environmental movements in many areas in Isan. The work of 'environmentalist monks' (or 'phrasong nak anuraksa' in Thai) evolved from these circumstances (see also Darlington 2000).

In 1986 and 1987 the Northeast was hit by droughts and the King advised the government to promote the 'Isan Khiao' project, or the Northeast Reforestation Project, which was implemented from 1987 to 1991. Simultaneously, research on the cause of water shortage, dam construction, and protection of the forests were discussed, but the discussion revolved mainly around technical matters, making light of social factors (see also Sakurai 2003).

According to the development activities of Isan monks in this period, people's participation was the main approach influenced by various NGOs to set up many self-help organizations all over the region. Another obvious development approach in many areas was sustainable development. The concept of sustainability has gained prominence, and has been deeply embedded in the discourse and practice of rural development in Isan after 1986. This comprehensive concept has the integration of people's participation and stakeholders' involvement. Most of the monks' development activities aimed to implement participatory and sustainable development. Environmental conservation activities

were very obvious in many areas, as well as integrated farming and organic farming projects were launched by 'development monks' under consultation from various NGOs. In this period, activities of self-help organization became increasingly attractive to the villagers. The most popular self-help organizations were rice banks, buffalo banks, cooperative shops and village drug stores.

However, although it is quite obvious that in this period there were many 'development monks' that started playing their development role due to various supports from NGOs, it does not mean that the role of 'development monks' was set up by the NGOs. They only came to support some already famous 'development monks' and some having potential to promote development activities at that time. In this period, there were some famous 'development monks' whom the NGOs usually referred to them as exemplary cases to encourage other local potential monks to play development roles elsewhere.

#### **Post 1990**

In 1992, after protests by opposition parties, students, and intellectuals, General Suchinda Khraprayoon, the Prime Minister, resigned taking responsibility for the large number of injured and dead as the result of the crackdown on citizens' demonstrations. That was when many NGOs started playing a major role in political movements

instead of development promotion. It can be said that during 1992 and 1996 was a declining period of 'development monks' because most NGOs preferred to support political activities, especially involving human rights, rather than development ones, causing many former 'development monks' to cease practicing their development activities because of a lack of support. There were only 9 'development monks' who started their development role in the period of 1992 and 1996. In fact those NGOs did not suddenly withdraw from supporting the monks' development projects and activities; they expected the 'development monks' and local people to be self-reliant. However, at that time many of the potential monks who were not genuinely practical 'development monks' became used to having support from both GOs and NGOs. They then could not afford to manage and encourage local people to promote development projects by themselves, and they had to give up their development role.

Moreover, in 1997 Thailand had an enormous problem of economic crisis, providing economic and social constraints to bolster the monks' development activities because most villagers were extremely worried about their economic problems. After 1997 there were only 2 cases of 'development monks' who started their development activities. They were young monks who have learned and received experience of joining development activities through a network of

'development monks' in Nakhon Ratchasima. When they were promoted as their home-village abbot, they then started to encourage villagers to promote their own development activities.

During 1991 and 1996 the main development approach being seen among the 'development monks' in Isan was of sustainable development which encourages some obvious development activities such as forest conservation, integrated farming systems, and organic agriculture. After the harsh economic crisis in 1997, a self-sufficient economy approach influenced by King Bhumipol, the so-called "New Theory", was supported by both NGOs and GOs. The 'development monks' also followed this approach by supporting villagers to engage in integrated farming and organic farming, as well as producing bio fertilizer<sup>5</sup> to encourage villagers to reduce using chemical fertilizer. There were also some monks who provided vocational training and promoted non-agricultural occupations, receiving support from the SIF (Social Investment Fund) in order to provide some alternative occupations for local people to overcome their economic problems.

The above analysis is an outline of how the 'development monks' in Isan have started their development role and activities

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<sup>5</sup> One such bio fertilizer "...is an organic liquid fertilizer called *bueyseeitiratanamongkhon* (literal translation: millionaire jewel auspicious fertilizer) is made by Buddhist monks in Singburi, central Thailand. It is distributed free to poor farmers who need it, and in unlimited amounts" (Gifford 2002: 9).

according to social change in the last five decades. In fact, during the 1950s and the early 2000s various development approaches have been used in Isan community by the 'development monks'. However, the main approach is 'spiritual development', which aims to use and apply Buddhist Dhamma to provide and change the people's way of living to follow an appropriate way by teaching local people how to behave and do good deeds under the Buddhist precepts and Dhamma, as well as teaching them to devote themselves to support development activities for common interests. This approach has been used by all 'development monks' in all the aforesaid periods.

The main activity being implemented for spiritual development is the campaign against Apayamukh, or the causes of ruin. Most 'development monks' view Apayamukh not only as a cause of underdevelopment but also as a hindrance of development. The major causes of ruin are debauchery, drinking alcohol, and indulgence in gambling. Despite their relatively small success in ridding people of the Apayamukh, the work of the 'development monks' is symbolically important. Gambling and drinking alcohol have long been considered social ills in Thai society (Somboon 1994: 19-20). The Apayamukh campaign has also been changed. Now, most 'development monks' pay more attention on drug abuse as another main cause of ruin, particularly



after 2003 when Thaksin Shinawatt, the Prime Minister, commenced the so-called 'war on drugs' countrywide.

Another important activity which supports the monks' development is the cultural preservation and revivification. In the past, the wat served as the center for village culture, tradition and arts. The 'development monks' have attempted to revive certain cultural traditions, viewing local tradition and culture as an effective foundation for building a sense of identity and unity and for preserving a sense of personal dignity and integrity in the process of development. They have also seen local traditions as an effective tool to encourage local people to participate in their development activities, particularly through the process of merit-making.

It is quite difficult to directly compare individual effects of 'development monks' on a local community. Although in the early period many of them were able to assist local people to help themselves in the area where the government development and support were lacking, later they have had to change their development strategies and activities to suit the conditions and circumstances of social change from time to time. For each of their development projects, the definition of 'phatthana' can be different. The means of participation-oriented development by local residents is also different, whether it is in line with the GOs or NGOs. However, those attempts to assist local residents to

develop their own village by bringing in outside knowledge, technology and funds have a common thread, whether it is from the support of GOs or NGOs. Therefore, we need to evaluate the development activities promoted by 'development monks' very carefully in order to understand how deeply those development activities have involved in and effected self-sufficiency of the local Isan people.

It is also important to clarify the consequences of activities and roles that the 'development monks' have allowed NGOs to fulfill, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s. It is factual that in that period their development strategies and activities could easily coordinate with the NGOs, but its manifest consequence was that some 'development monks' were completely financially dependent upon NGOs. Since many of those NGOs were subsidiaries under foreign NGOs, with ample funds, they were able to support development projects for various groups of people including 'development monks'. Once Thailand's economy surpassed the scale of a developing nation in the 1990s, the foreign donors terminated financial support, causing many NGOs to have increased financial difficulties (Srisawang 1995: 39). Consequently, the 'development monks' also were under the condition of reduced budget scale in the late 1990s. After a number of Thai NGOs faced a serious financial crisis, many 'development monks' had negative impacts on their current development projects because the NGOs

withdrew or gave less support, and some 'development monks' did not even try to work independently. The lack of budget was an obstacle for their development continuity mainly because many potential monks in the development process did not have their own motivation to promote development activities in the community. They were largely stimulated by those GOs and NGOs.

**Concluding remarks**

One of the most difficult determinants to be justified in this study is which monks should be, or should not be, classified as 'development monks'. Many monks only want to concentrate on their development projects without any concern whether or not they should be called 'development monks'. Some monks, in contrast, still expect to be labeled as 'development monks', even though they have already stopped or changed their direction of previous development activities. With this regard, the term 'development monks' is not an all-time level of status. It is only the term to express the role of a group of monks who dedicate themselves to support community development in and during a period of time. This term is used to indicate the way they work and have social interaction with local people, rather than to identify the status of the monks. Their working purposes, ends, and trends are more

important to be considered and examined in order to clarify and search for 'development monks'.

To analyze the monks' development activities together with the villagers' opinion and response to those activities are also sometimes complicated and opposite to each other, due to the condition that some 'development monks' may set their development ends in the long run to improve the villagers' standard of living but those ends may interfere with short-time benefits of some villagers or interest groups in the community. There may be continuous conflicts and disagreement between the monks and those groups, especially the ones who give priority only concerning their own benefits rather than the community interests. An obvious case for this circumstance is the predicament which most 'environmentalist monks' face. The villagers want to cut trees and gather forest products for both consumption and selling, while the monks try to keep them for preservation in response to sustainable development as their main purpose of activities. The ways in which most 'environmentalist monks' approach community development may hardly receive good cooperation from the majority. The monks may be isolated by the laity, but we cannot give the wrong classification that they are not 'development monks' because, in the long run, their activities obviously provide a better environment and living conditions for the community as a whole. The development activities are not necessary to contribute to

positive outcomes immediately, as well as the 'development monks' may find it impossible to receive support from all of the villagers; it is just a difficult situation for the 'environmentalist monks' to undertake.

It has evidences that 'development monks' are not either outputs of the government programs and policies or products of NGOs' activities and supports. Monks' development role is a pattern of local Buddhist practice between local monks and local people. The local factors are obviously having influence on their motives and decision to play development role. Community problems are their main motives. However, the potential and ability for them to promote their development activities are due to their religious and social relations between the monks and local people. If the monks do not have good relations with local people and receive less respect from local people, they cannot promote any development activities in their home village. At the same time, if they cannot keep those good relations and respects, they will not be able to continue their development activities.

The nature of the monks' development activities is sensitively related to the needs and requirement of local people whom they are designed to benefit. Being asked about their future development activities, the 'development monks' mostly express that they have not thought about the future activities because it depends upon the community problems and people's needs. They will try to continue their

present activities if they are still helpful for the local people. They will also be very happy to stop their role as 'development monks' if they can realize that their local community and people can solve their all problems. However, some case studies give a clear future plan that they will try to set up networks for development monks in order to support and help each other in the long run, they do not want to depend on either the GOs or NGOs. If 'development monks' can set up a network for the whole region, they think that it will be able to cooperate and help other 'development monks' who are not the members of those networks. Phrakhu Pipithdhammarot (69 years old) at Wat Pa Thammada in Nakhon Ratchasima, for instance, responds to this idea, "...The future of development monks' activities should be under our own hands. We should provide good coordination and support ourselves through the networks for development Sangha in the whole region."

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