

Buddhist Monk Preachers: A Study of Preaching Arts for Increasing Faith in Buddhism of Isan People

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Abstract: Problem statement: Currently people in general dislike listening to dharma because they view that it is only a ritual. Three major reasons why people dislike listening to dharma include: preachers themselves, preaching contents and presenting methods. The reasons as mentioned can cause people not to like listening to dharma. Faith in Buddhism gradually decreases. Purposes: To examine the background of preaching in Isan society, to examine current conditions and problems of Isan people and to investigate the uses of preaching arts for increasing faith in Buddhism of Isan people. **Approach:** The qualitative research methodology was used. Documentary data and field data were collected. Research instruments included: a survey form, an interview form, an observation form, focus group discussion and workshop. Research area covered the Provinces of KhonKaen, Maha Sarakham and Roi-Ed. The sample consisted of 60 informants. The collected data were checked using the triangulation technique and were analyzed mainly upholding the research purposes. Then the research findings were presented by means of a descriptive analysis. **Results:** Preaching began in the period of the Lord Buddha. The Lord Himself was the preaching initiator. Later, holy Buddhist monks, His followers, were preachers of sermons to people in general and the preaching has been practiced in adherence endlessly up to present. As for the background of preaching in Isan, its age cannot be certainly determined. When the preaching began and who the initiator was unknown. However, it is surely believed that Isan people have accepted and believed in Buddhism since the ancient time. They have adhered to Buddhism endlessly. The Buddhism monks are preachers. According to the available evidence, of the belief that there were real karma, increment of the belief in the there were real effects of deeds, to increase the belief that world creatures had their own karma, to increase beliefs in the Lord Buddha's intelligences of enlightenment. Also, listeners to dharma had faith in the three Gems, the Buddha, the dharma and the Sangka. **Conclusion:** Can be summarized that the used of preaching arts for increasing faith in Buddhism of Isan people could provide 4 appropriate types of preaching. They were auspicious activities, inauspicious activities, traditional merit-makings and specific merit-makings. The contents were adjusted to suit the time and to suit current situations. Appropriate arts were obtained for increasing faith and stability of Isan society.

Key words: Buddhism monk preachers, preaching arts, faith Buddhism, Isan people, real karma

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism has been popularly worshipped with faith of people in every age of all classes of people. This must rely on Buddhist monk preachers and Buddhist disseminators who had potentials in demonstrating dharma. Buddhist monk preachers, it was found that Buddhist monk preachers in Isan who had important roles in dissemination of Buddhism in the part were in the period of Phra Ubali Khunupamachan (Chan Sirichantho), Somdet Phra Maha Wirawong (Uan Tisso) and the dharma corps

consisting of Luang Pu sao Kantasilo, Luang Pu Man Phurithatto and others approximately during 1856-1956. During that period, that Buddhist monk had religious practices by making pilgrimages to different places and preaching sermons to Isan people to desert wrong to give up beliefs in animism and to reduce, desert and give up vices, to turn to accept and believe in The Three Gems. This can be regarded as an age of preaching to disseminate dharma which was effective and famous up to present.

The uses of preaching arts consisted of specific self-ability, self-behaving of each preacher, knowing

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how to use appropriate preaching having ability to select appropriate factors and having ability to connect appropriate events. These things would be able to increase faith in Buddhism. They were increment The purpose of preaching were to mainly emphasize benefits of listeners and the maximum goal was to attain marga (nivarna).

Isan people have believed in Buddhism since the ancient time. The way of life has mostly been influenced by the dharma principles of Buddhism. It is so because it relies on Buddhist monk preachers who help teach people to be in the good frame of moral principles and to generate peace, happiness and shade all the time. Therefore, preaching and listening to preaching are important parts of living of Thai people.

At present, it has been found that people in general dislike listening to dharma because they view that preaching is only a ritual. Also, there are 3 major causes for people not to like listening to dharma: the preachers themselves, preaching contents and presenting methods. There causes as mentioned are important reasons why people dislike listening to dharma, causing faith in Buddhism to decrease.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative research methodology was used. Documentary data and field data were collected. The research instruments used were a survey form, an interview form, an observation form, focus group discussion and workshop. Data were collected from a group of 60 informants. They were a group of 10 key informants as experts preaching, a group of 10 casual informants as Buddhist monk preachers and a group of 40 general informants comprising listeners to preaching, key informants or academics. The collected data were checked using the triangulation technique, mainly upholding the research purposes. The findings were presented by means of a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS

The background of preaching began in the period of the Lord Buddha who initiated the preaching. Later, holy monks as His followers were preachers who taught people in general. They have practiced inheritance to one another endlessly up to present. As for the background of preaching in Isan, the age could not be certainly determined. When it began and who initiated preaching could not be identified. However, it is believed that Isan people have accepted and believed in Buddhism since the ancient time by adhering to one another endlessly with Buddhist monks to teach. According to the

available evidence, it was found that the Buddhist monk preachers in Isan who played important roles in disseminating Buddhist in the part were in the periods of Phra Ubali Khunupamachan (Chan Sirichantho), Somdet Phra Maha Wirawong (Uan Tisso) and the dharma corps including Luang Pu sao Kantasilo and Luang Pu Man Phurithatto and another. Approximately during 1856-1956, Buddhist monks practiced religious affairs making pilgrimage to different places and preached sermons to Isan people to give up wrong ideas, to give up beliefs in animism and to decrease, desert and give up vices for Isan people to turn to accept and believe in The Three Gems. That period was regarded as the period of effective and famous dharma preaching and dissemination up to present.

For the current conditions and problems, it has been found that the preaching of Buddhist monk preachers in the areas of 3 provinces has 3 similar aspects: (1) in the aspect of the preachers themselves such as an insufficient number of Buddhist monk preachers, language with unclear voices, education without studying deep dharma principles and so on; (2) in the aspect of contents such as the beginning that meets failure, story development and the contents being not relevant to current situations and so forth; and (3) in the aspect of presenting methods such as lacks of techniques and methods of art uses, the Buddhist monk preachers being unable to present and presenting without participation of listeners. These things cannot generate faith and cannot increase faith.

The preaching arts uses consist of specific self-ability, self-behaving of the preachers, knowing how to use appropriate preaching principles, having ability to select using appropriate factors and having ability to connect appropriate events to each other. These things will be able to increase faith in Buddhism. They are increasing the belief that there are real karma, increasing the belief that there are real effects of karma, increasing the belief that world creatures have karma of their own, increasing the belief in the Lord Buddha's intelligences in enlightenment and the listeners to preaching still have faith in the Three Gems, namely the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha (Suksri *et al.*, 2010).

DISCUSSION

The finding of this study of Buddhist monk preachers and the uses of preaching arts for increasing faith in Buddhism of Isan people from the study area of 3 provinces, it has been found that preaching or Buddhist dharma demonstration is regarded as the principal function of Buddhist monks who must transfer

the ideal and principles of Buddhism to people. It is because Buddhism will be in existence it must rely on Buddhist followers or Buddhist monk preachers who help perform their functions and religious affairs by means of teaching people in general in regularity. Buddhist monks are regarded as a very important factor of Buddhism because they are those who adhere to and disseminate the dharma principles of Teachings Lord Buddha, causing Buddhism to be stably up to present. It has been also found that the uses of preaching arts consist of the specific self-ability, self-behaving of the preachers, knowing how to use appropriate preaching principles, having ability to select using appropriate factors and having ability to connect appropriate events together. These things will be able to increase faith in Buddhism. They were increasing the belief that there are real karma, increasing the belief that there are real effects of karma, increasing the belief that world creature have their own karma, increasing the belief in intelligences in enlightenment of the Lord Buddha and the listeners to preaching still have faith in The Three Gems or the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangka. (Thongwol *et al.*, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This research examined the background, current conditions and problems and examined the uses of preaching arts for increasing faith in Buddhism of Isan people in the area of these 3 provinces: KhonKaen, Maha Sarakham and Roi-Ed. This was because in the area as mentioned there was preaching regularly and continuously all the yeas round. For the current conditions, people dislike listening to dharma because of these major 3 reasons: the preachers themselves, preaching contents and preaching methods. The problems as mentioned could cause the research to obtain 5 methods of using preaching arts. They were specific self-ability, self-behaving of the preachers, knowing how to the appropriate preaching principles, having ability to select using appropriate factors and having ability to connect appropriate events together. Also the research could provide 4 types of appropriate preaching arts in their activities, traditional. They cloud be done by adjusting the contents to be relevant to current situations for increasing faith and stability Isan society (Abdel-Azim *et al.*, 2011).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers express their sincere appreciation for all of support provided.

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