

An Analytical Study on the Buddhist Ethics as Found in Keng Tung Tai People's Lifestyle

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Abstract

This research entitled “An Analytical Study on The Buddhist Ethics as Found in Keng Tung Tai People's Lifestyle” is of 3 objectives: (1) to study the way of life of Tai people in Keng Tung, Shan State, Myanmar, (2) to study the concept of Buddhist ethics concerning to Tai way of life. (3) to analyze the way of life of Tai people according to the Buddhist ethics.

The research methodology is qualitative research beginning with documentary research having collected the written data in Burmese, Shan, Thai and English language. Furthermore, it was studied the way of life of Tai people in Wan Pung village, Keng Tung township, Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The in-depth interview was acted with the fifteen key informants from that village and analyze the way of life of Tai people according to the Buddhist Ethical concepts. The tools used in this research are an interview form, interview questions, self-introduction letters, mobile phone, Zoom Meeting online program and recorder etc.

Its results were found that the teaching to the Buddha has influenced on Tai culture, festivals, rites, rituals and their lives. After having influenced from the Buddha's teaching, most of Tai people believe in Buddhism and apply the Buddhist ethics in their everyday lives such as five precepts, three misconducts and three good conducts and so on.

Finally, an analysis on the way of life of Tai people according to the Buddhist ethics was found that in order to identify historical background of Tai people in Keng Tung and their ways of life who live in Wan Pung village, Keng Tung township, eastern Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the ethical teachings of the Buddha have influenced on their practical cultures, traditions and ways of life in many aspects.

Keywords: Buddhist ethics, Tai people, Keng Tung, Lifestyles

Introduction

This research is a study on Tai People's Lifestyle, including Buddhist ethics and the way of life Tai people who lives in Keng Tung Township, Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. There are 40 households in Wan Pung village. The villagers are Tai and Arkha ethnics. The villagers have been surviving by growing rice other crops during the wet reason. Their main livelihood is farming. The villagers grow rice, corn, mustard greens. There are about 200 people living in Wan Pung village.

Shan State used to be divided into over thirty principalities, ruled by their own hereditary chieftains. Even when the British colonized Burma/Myanmar, the Shans were allowed to continue self-rule. The Shan agreed to join the rest of Burma to independence on condition stipulated in the constitution, but was never granted. (Sao Saimong Mangrai, 1965 : 4)

Keng Tung is one of the capital city in eastern Shan State and had a palace, built by Sao Kawng Kiao Intaleng in 1905. Keng Tung is an interesting town and located near the Golden Triangle – close to Laos, Thailand and China. It displays various cultural influences, particularly Burmese and Thai. There are a number of 19th century Buddhist temples in town that are quite different to those found in other parts of Myanmar. Keng Tung has a unique culture, especially people who live in Keng Tung. (Sao Saimong Mangrai, 1965 : 197)

Keng Tung has a blended lifestyle. The city lies by the idyllic natural lake and surrounded by the beautiful hill sides. Tai Lifestyle or Tai likelihood: Shan calls themselves the Tai race. They are Mongolian in type, but until their heads can be scientifically measured, it is possible to know from whom they are descended. Their language is allied to Chinese, but that does not prove their ancestry, as the fact that many Hottentots in Cape Colony speak only Dutch does not prove that they are descended from Dutch ancestors. Most of the older Shan women teeth dyed black from chewing betel nut. For men with traditional tattoos and farmers. (Sai Htwe Maung, 2007 :12-13)

In addition, the reason of doing this research is to analyze the way of life of Tai people who live in Wan Pung Village, Keng Tung Township, Myanmar with the application of Buddha's teaching. The researcher hopes that the study of the way of life of Tai people based on the Buddhist ethics will motivate the young generation of Tai people who live in Wan Pung village, in Loi Long village Tract, Keng Tung Township, eastern Shan state, the Republic Union of Myanmar.

Objectives of the Research

- 1) To study the way of life of Tai people in Keng Tung, Shan State, and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.
- 2) To study the concept of Buddhist ethics concerning to Tai way of life.
- 3) To analyze the way of life of Tai people according to the Buddhist ethics.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research methodology is both in documentary research and qualitative research which is to study on the Tai people's Lifestyle based

on Buddhist Ethical Perspective at Wan Pung, Loi Long Tract, Keng Tung Township, Eastern Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

This research began with documentary research by collecting data on Shan Literature and gathering the data from written in Burmese, Shan, Thai and English. Furthermore, it will be studied the life of Shan people in Shan State including Shan literature through the related thesis, books, article, online sources to analyze the way of life of Shan People according to the Buddhist Ethical concepts.

Next the in-depth interview was acted with the 15 key informants from that village.

Research Tools

The data was collected by an observation of the way of people's daily life in Keng Tung, and the in-depth interview with Tai people that created by the researcher. Then the researcher went to interview who are concerned with this research. Research tool used in this study is an interview form, interview questions, self-introduction letters, mobile phone and recorder etc.

Data Collection

The researcher watches and practices with the situation and what happens, listen to what is said, and/ or ask questions through the natives' villagers' interviews, and collects documents and artifacts. The researcher studied people actions and accounts in everyday contexts; not in fixed or formal conditions such as in highly structured interview. In short, this research was conducted in the field; Data was collected from a range of sources, including participant observation and/ or relatively and informal conversations with available agencies and a small number of case studies in order to facilitate an in-depth study. Participation observation and in-depth interviews were applied.

Key Informants

They are 15 persons by purposive collection selected whose ages are having divided into three groups:

- a) Five persons from a group of 18-35 years of age (Youth)
- b) Five persons from a group of 36-55 years of age (Adult)
- c) Five persons from a group of above 60 years of age (Elder)

Data Analysis

After finishing data collection, the researcher analysis data that collecting from the interview and wrote transcripts of the interviews. All answers in these transcripts were content analyzed to explain clearly and giving suggestions which may be useful to help in improving presentation in the upcoming future. It was useful for getting information based on their experiences and suggestions. All information was collected from the key informants in Keng Tung, Shan State, Myanmar.

Scope of the Research

The Analytical study of the way of life Tai people in Wan Pung village, Loi Long village Tract from eastern Shan State, Republic of Union of Myanmar. The more information was from Shan scholars, thesis, books, articles and online sources related to Shan Buddhism and Literature, cultures and other related books written in English, Myanmar, Thai and Shan languages. This research is aimed to study Tai people lifestyle in Keng Tung Township, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Here are the followings:

Contents of Research

The way of life, Tai people in Keng Tung Township, eastern Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The concepts of Buddhist ethics and the analysis on the way of life of the Tai people who live in Keng Tung according to the Buddhist ethics.

Population of Research

The populations of this research are the Tai people living in Wan Pung village, Loi Long village Tract, Keng Tung Township, and there is total 200 persons. (40 Houses X 5 = 200)

The Sampling Group : The researcher interviews the sampling group about 15 persons as the key informants whose qualities are young people adult and elder, they are divided into three groups:

- a) Five persons from a group of 18-35 years of age (Youth)
- b) Five persons from a group of 36-55 years of age (Adult)
- c) Five persons from a group of above 60 years of age (Elder)

Totally 15 persons (Sampling group)

The Area of Research

The area of this research is the Wan Pung village, Loi Long village Tract, Keng Tung Township, Eastern Shan State, Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

The Times of Research

The times of this research to collect the data during a year, the researcher was starting from March 2021 - April 2022. (12 months)

Results

After analyzing on discussion with key informants about this topic, most of key informants have mention that the teaching speeches of the Buddha are very important for Buddhist people. In daily life, we, the Buddhists may have lots of guides on how to live our life in daily life in order to live happily and meaningfully accordingly with the Buddhist ethics, life would definitely be worthwhile.

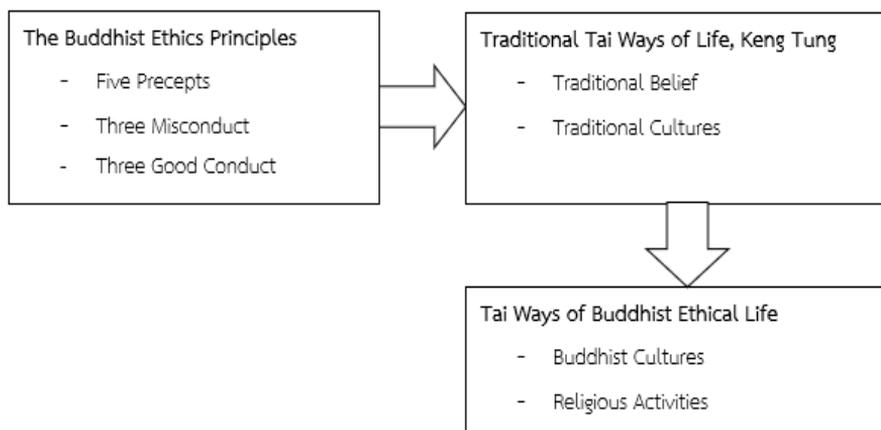
Buddhist Ethics is the first foundation of human beings. Buddhists are the fundamental of Buddhism who have faith in Buddhist teaching and have to obey and practice. To live is to act, and our actions can have either harmful or beneficial consequences for oneself and others.

Buddhist ethics is concerned with the principles and practices that help one to act in ways that help rather than harm. The core ethical code of Buddhism is known as the five precepts, and these are the distillation of its ethical principles. The precepts are not rules or commandments, but ‘principles of training’, which are undertaken freely and need to be put into practice with intelligence and sensitivity. Buddhist ethics are a way of showing devotion to the Buddha through ceremonies, festivals, different types of meditation and retreats. Buddhist practices include rituals, a visual way for Buddhists to demonstrate their beliefs. (Peter Harvey, 2000 : 77)

Tai Buddhist is considered a philosophy for how to live one’s life and numerous Buddhist principles – such as tolerance, calmness and merit – are values found throughout culture. Most Tai or Shan people visit their local temple during special holidays and ask for blessings from monks in the event of a wedding, birth or funeral. The Sangha is an important institution in the village in Shan State. Traditionally, it was the Sangha that offered education for the population. Whilst Buddhist educational bodies exist in contemporary society, they are usually designed for people seeking to be a part of the monastic community. (Roberto Thomas Arruda, 2021 : 115)

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used this research are as the followings chart.



Discussions

On discussion with key informants about this topic, most of key informants have mention that the teaching speeches of the Buddha are very important for Buddhist people. In daily life, we, the Buddhists may have lots of guides on how to live our life in daily life in order to live happily and meaningfully accordingly with the Buddhist ethics, life would definitely be worthwhile.

Buddhist ethics can be looked at in several different ways. There is the situation of the man in the street who is concerned with life in the world of the senses. On a superior level arises the aim of experiencing the joy and peace of a higher consciousness [through meditation]. Higher still is the desire to achieve the ultimate goal with a direct realization of the supramundane. Superficially the last two of these aims are only the concern of a small minority, but in practice such a clear distinction cannot be drawn. The ethic designed for the ordinary man is intended both to be beneficial in its own right and to lead in the direction of the levels above. Normally a given individual will derive his standards from elements of all three, although the 'mix' may vary. The primary ethical activity which a Buddhist learns to develop is giving or generosity, *dāna*, which forms a basis for further moral and spiritual development. In Southern Buddhism, it is the first of the ten 'bases for effecting karmically fruitful actions' (*Puñña-kiriya-vatthus*): giving, keeping the moral precepts, meditative development, showing respect, helpful activity, sharing karmic fruitfulness, rejoicing at the karmic fruitfulness of others, teaching Dhamma, listening to Dhamma, and straightening out one's views. (Peter Harvey, 2000 : 61)

The foundations of Buddhist ethics are the virtuous character traits that constitute the minds of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Consequently, the primary concern of Buddhist ethics is to cultivate virtuous character traits, that is, mental development. Such virtue cultivation and mental

development require the contribution of all sections of the Buddhist path. Buddhist virtue cultivation and mental development is achieved through the three trainings of the Buddhist path: training in “Sīla” (moral conduct), training in concentration (Samādhi), and training in wisdom (Paññā). If it is the case that Buddhist ethics is primarily interested in virtue cultivation and mental development, and if such things require the contribution of the entire Buddhist path, then Buddhist ethics is inseparable from meditative practices intended to promote not only good moral conduct but also wisdom and concentration. (Hong Duc, 2019) : 20

Their walk of life is very normal, simple, easy, joyful, and humble. They live with nature and by nature, no matter how the world and technology are changing, at this moment; they still are the same as they have been since the old days. However, it is not guaranteed that their stereotype lifestyle will be exactly the same as in the previous time if they have received more influences from the outside world such as technology, social impact, economy change, and influx of tourists which we can see some examples from other places. One thing that if the Keng Tung people can preserve their norm, tradition, culture, faith, and belief in Buddhism and they still practice their routine life regularly, the researcher strongly believes that everyone who has an opportunity to visit Keng Tung, he or she will be impressed and will be touched by friendly and nice Keng Tung people. This is one of the happy places on earth where everyone can reach by oneself and experience on one’s own. Lastly, the researcher would recommend to implementing the above model to new generation in Keng Tung for their bright future and the sustainable development of Buddhism in that region. (Petcharat Lovichakorntikul, 2017 : 129)

Benefits of the Research

- 1) Knowing the way of life Tai people in Shan State, Republic of

the Union of Myanmar.

2) Understanding the concept of Buddhist ethics concerning to Tai way of life.

3) Knowing the way of life of Tai people according to the Buddhist ethics.

Conclusions

This research was to study the way of life of Tai people in Keng Tung, Shan State, Republic of Union of Myanmar, to study the concept of Buddhist ethics concerning to the way of life of Tai people and to analysis the way of life of Tai people according to the Buddhist ethics. The population of this research consists of 15 key informants and divide into three groups. The tools used for this study are general background of key informants, interview questions and Zoom Meeting online. After having collected the answers from key informants, all data are analyzed with culture, traditional beliefs, rites and rituals, education, and the customs of the Tai people.

Firstly, the history of Tai people in Keng Tung in order to identify historical background of Tai people and its way of life who live in Wan Pung village, Keng Tung, Shan State, Myanmar. Theravada Buddhism had influenced Tai culture, festivals, rites and rituals. Before Theravada Buddhism had influenced the Tai society, Tai people followed their own traditional beliefs such as beliefs in gods. After Buddhism had influenced their life, most of Tai people believe in Buddhism and apply the teachings of Buddhism in their everyday life.

Secondly, Buddhism is the major religion of the Tai society. Theravada Buddhism has a long history in the region of Keng Tung. Buddhism was brought by Buddhists from different areas, such as

Thailand, India, China, and several regions of Myanmar. According to some Myanmar folklore beliefs, Buddhism came to Myanmar first among the Asian countries. After Buddhism had influenced on Tai people's way of life, they apply the teachings of the Buddha such as five precepts, three misconducts and three good conducts in their everyday life.

Finally, local people were interviewed by researcher about Buddhism, Tai culture, festivals, rites and rituals. The local people have given a difference option on culture, tradition, festival, rites and rituals. After having collected the answers from local people, all data are analyzed with culture, traditional beliefs, rites and rituals, education, and the customs of the Tai people.

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