



EDUCATIONAL VALUES OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM IN THE KHMER COMMUNITY OF SOUTHERN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

The Khmer people of Southern Vietnam have diverse cultural traditions, customs, and practices, in which Buddhist culture is always associated with the spiritual life of the Khmer people from ancient times to the present. Living in the Mekong Delta and an area of multi-ethnic co-existence, the educational culture of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam still retains its own unique features. In terms of scope, the main characteristics are the unique cultural features in the education of people through words, gestures, and deeds. Because, in the educational culture of the Khmer people, the imprint of Buddhism always stands out as a dominant feature, influencing almost every aspect of life as well as the religious, belief, cultural, literary, and educational elements of the Khmer community. Most Khmer people follow the Theravada Buddhism. Therefore, the temple has an extremely important position in the life and spirit of the Khmer people, a sacred bond throughout their lives. Buddhism in the minds of the Khmer people is also associated with behavior education, forming positive qualities for people, so the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam come to Buddhism to study the canonical scriptures, customs, practices, and cultural and educational values of morality, inherent wholesome qualities of the community.

Index Terms: *Khmer people, Southern Vietnam, Theravada Buddhism, Educational culture, Cultural traditions, Mekong Delta.*

1. Introduction

Theravada Buddhism is one of the major sects of Buddhism and is mainly spread in Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. In Vietnam, Theravada Buddhism is mainly present in the Khmer community in the southern provinces. The majority of Khmer people in Southern Vietnam follow Theravada Buddhism. A Khmer person from birth, growing up until death, all joys and sorrows in life are closely associated with the Khmer Buddhist temple where they live.

Life, culture, education, customs, practices, and festivals of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam are largely influenced by Buddhist thought¹. All behaviors, gestures, or ways of behaving are largely educated through

¹ Pham Thanh Hang No. 12 (109) - 2016.

Buddhist thought. Often in proverbs, puzzles, fairy tales, myths, legends, or literary and artistic genres of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam, the Theravada Buddhist education is deeply imprinted².

The educational values of Buddhism in the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam with unique humanistic views have become an indispensable part of educating people in the Khmer ethnic group. Today, in the context of the country's renovation, due to the strong impact of the market economy along with other ideological and religious theories, Buddhism has undergone strong changes along with the great transformation of the country. That situation, the influence of education in the values of Buddhism is always changing, going through ups and downs in history, so the exploitation of Buddhist values is extremely necessary, if not, it is easy to obscure the humanistic and educational values in both positive and negative directions, to social life, to lifestyle, morality, the spirit of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam is becoming quite clear and has new expressions.

In the period of national renovation nowadays, what is the need to transform the educational values of Buddhism? Is it necessary to evaluate those changes and the necessity of those educational values in a positive or negative direction? What factors need to be promoted in the new situation and in what way to promote the positive effects of Buddhism in the spiritual life of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam are questions that are being raised and need to be clarified.

Within the scope of this article, we are going to study some educational values of Theravada Buddhism in the spiritual and material life of the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam to recognize the values of Buddhism in general and Theravada Buddhism in particular for the Khmer people in Vietnam.

2. Overview and Research Methods

2.1. Research Overview

Author Pham Thanh Hang, Institute of Religious Studies, Beliefs, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics with the article "Khmer Southern Buddhism with sustainable development in the Southwestern region", (Vietnamese version) published in the Journal of Social Sciences Vietnam, No. 12 (109) - 2016, has outlined the influence and impact of Buddhism in the life of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam. The role of Theravada Buddhism in education, preserving culture and promoting patriotism, solidarity in the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam.

Author Danh Men, Southern Pali Supplementary College, Soc Trang province with the article "Understanding the characteristics of Brahmanical Literature and Buddhist Literature" (Vietnamese version) in the Yearbook of the scientific conference "Research and teaching of Literature in the South in the current situation", in 2016. The author also mentioned the value, educational content and influence of Buddhism through the comparison between Buddhist Literature and Brahmanical Literature.

The article "Buddhist Education in the context of globalization and international integration today" (Vietnamese version) by author Nguyen Van Thong published in the Journal of Educational Sciences No. 147 - December 12/2017. The article outlines the history of Buddhism, the philosophy of education in Buddhism, the impact of globalization and international integration on education today.

² Danh Men (2016)

Through the studies, it shows that the recognition of Buddhist thought in human education has been and is being concerned by many researchers, there have been many research works come to existence and have important significance in the practical life today. It is necessary to understand correctly, recognize the role of Buddhist values in education for the life of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam. Today, there is a need for more works in researching the educational values in Buddhism applied to practical life.

2.2. Research methods

Document research method: Based on ethnic cultural documents, religious studies, history, ... the article has synthesized, compared, and also has assessments of the inheritance, integration of religion, culture and Khmer people in Southern Vietnam.

Synthesis and analysis method: To systematize the documents related to Southern Buddhism, documents on educational philosophy in Buddhism and documents on education in the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam.

3. Research results

3.1. Educational values on the law of cause and effect

The philosophy of the law of cause and effect of Buddhism, which states that all living beings in the present are due to creating certain karma, sooner or later will receive the consequences of that karma. In a person's life, life and death are a circle of rebecoming. Contributing to preventing the intention of creating unwholesome deeds of people when they have not yet set into action. People, before doing wrong, harmful deed or harming the lives of others, their conscience often torments³. In their initial thoughts, there is always hesitation, ideological struggle... Therefore, if they are afraid of being punished by karma, the retribution may be immediate to themselves, even suffering long-term consequences later, then they will repent, from which there are positive actions to atone for mistakes and improve wholesome karma. According to the concept of karma - rebirth associated as a pair of categories, the relationship between rebirths is the relationship of Karma and Effect: what you sow in the previous life, you will reap in the next life⁴.

In life to educate people, considering righteousness as the foundation of morality, hatred eliminated by love, live a simple and upright life, kindness, equality and compassion, taking the middle path as the basis of action, view the present moment as the basis of action so that later you can reap wholesome fruits in the future.

Therefore, the idea of karma is always recognized by the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam, becoming a spiritual motivation for everyone to strive for goodness, building people with good character and morality according to Buddhism.

3.2. Educational values about body - speech - mind

According to the Buddhism, all good or bad karmas are performed through body(bodily action) or speech (verbal action) or mind (mental action), that is to say, when doing anything it is the body, saying anything it is the speech, and when thinking about anything it is the mind⁵. Therefore, when we are doing, or speaking,

³ Nguyễn Văn Thông (2017), *Giáo dục Phật giáo trong bối cảnh toàn cầu hóa và hội nhập quốc tế hiện nay*, tạp chí Khoa học Giáo dục số 147 - tháng 12/2017.

⁴ Danh Men (2016)

⁵ Phạm Thanh Hằng No. 12 (109) - 2016

or thinking, we are creating good or bad karma for ourselves. And those karmas are owned by us, therefore sooner or later we will reap their results

In addition to actions, speaking out words is also very important in life, which is verbal karma. Verbal karma is karma performed through words. Anything we say has a beneficial or harmful, good or bad effect, happening immediately or leaving consequences later.

In life, we should regularly checked out things we have experienced in the past so that to do good deeds at the present, not be ashamed of our conscience, which will make our hearts feel truly peaceful, without worry and regret for things we have done, that is accumulating merit for ourselves. Instead, good deeds such as releasing animals, giving charity and helping the needy will make our hearts more peaceful, only when we always think of the community can we accumulate more good deeds, and only when our heart are at peace can our mind become clear so that we can do more right and better things.

Bodily karma and verbal karma are easy to see and easy to control, but mental karma is a deeds done through intention, thought, emotion, and mental activity. It is deep and vague, very difficult to control, so it creates karma every hour and minute hard to know it, and that is why we keep rebecoming lives and lives, since there is karma, there is still rebirth..

Therefore, Buddhism pays special attention to the things that come from the intentional mind. The mind that creates karma is also due to intention. Everyone wants that people have a lot of good intentions, good thoughts and pure mind, then life will be better. Turning love into action and having results, the happiness is even greater, but if it is just a will, it also has an effect and is also stored in the mind.

3.3. Educational values of compassion, joy and equanimity

Specifically, loving - kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are four strengths that connect love and sympathy between people, not harming people nor animals. With compassion, with love for people, Buddhism has broken down the inhuman barriers between people, aiming to eliminate all suffering, bring peace, with joy to eliminate jealous and equanimity to cut off differentiate. Educating people to practice a life based on Buddhist morality is to be good, respect life, practice compassion, joy and equanimity is a way of life that aims to help people stay away from evil, do good, love virtuous life, create trust, peace for every home and for society⁶. This is not only meaningful to nurture compassion, awaken the spirit of humanity in each person but also has social significance.

The principles of kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity help people live better, reduce greed, anger, and delusion. These principles are considered the foundation for forming a moral, justice and harmonious life.

When we understand this truth, we will rise above selfish life and live according to the spirit of "Loving – kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity", with a spirit of philanthropy, loving everyone, deeply sympathizing with the suffering of others such as the suffering of oneself, finding ways to alleviate their suffering, sincerely sharing joy with others as one's own joy, doing everything beneficial for everyone without any hesitation or calculation in mind, not expecting to be repaid, not for profit or fame.

⁶ ibidem

Loving – kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity and charity are one of the most valuable concepts of Buddhism. It not only helps people live a moral, healthy life but also helps prevent and overcome social evils, and at the same time, it stimulates people to love each other and do many good deeds. The modern Buddhist education system must realize this goal by the path of socialization, that is, bringing the Buddha's teachings into life, implementing the message of saving suffering of the Buddha to each individual, each group of people, each collective, moving towards disseminating to the masses⁷.

That is the spirit of Buddhism in life is a synthesis of philosophies with high humanistic meanings imbued with humanity. The noble principle of Buddhism in which aims to express the aspirations of ordinary people in life.

3.4. Educational values of knowing how to use wisdom

A person with wisdom is mentioned a lot in the teachings of the Buddha, and a person with wisdom here is described as a conscience, helping us distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, purity and impurity, happiness and suffering, victory and defeat. The important thing is that wisdom here is no longer a rare quality, one of a kind, but becomes like a conscience that is always present in us, acting like a light shining on us to know how to distinguish and choose between good and evil, between right and wrong, making us able to recognize what should be done, what should not be done, so that we can guide ourselves towards peace and liberation⁸.

Regarding educational content, Buddhism is a vast education full of wisdom, morality and compassion aimed at educating all beings with knowledge, right understanding and full understanding of the laws of the universe and human life⁹.

People must take wisdom as their career; we only take the achievement of enlightenment as the true career of our life. Those philosophies all talk about diligence in learning, that is, learning knowledge to improve knowledge and cultivate wisdom to become good person in the present and the future.

Theravada Buddhism emphasizes great importance to learning and knowledge. Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks regularly study the scriptures and exchange knowledge about Buddhist teachings, helping to develop wisdom. Although it is mainly a spiritual religion, Buddhism also encourages the study of science, education and culture. Buddhist classes and retreats at temples are often places to disseminate knowledge, not only about religion but also about social and life issues.

3.5. Education on the spirit of community and solidarity, protecting the environment

Khmer Theravada Buddhism promotes the spirit of community, solidarity and mutual assistance among members in the family and in society. Buddhist rituals, such as festivals, offerings and charity activities, are all aimed at connecting the community and helping people in difficult circumstances. This spirit also helps develop harmonious relationships between individuals in the collective and in the community¹⁰.

⁷ Nguyen Ngoc Quynh (2021).

⁸ Thich Minh Chau (1990)

⁹ Danh Men (2016)

¹⁰ Pham Thanh Hang No. 12 (109) - 2016

Buddhist teachings always guide people to a life of harmony, friendliness with people and with nature; knowing how to respect and cherish nature, because man and nature have a close, equal and mutually supportive relationship.

The theory of Dependent Origination states that no object exists and operates independently, but each entity exists thanks to its relationship with other entities in the environment. All forms of life on the universe are equal entities in nature and the life of all humans, animals and plants in the world are related to each other, depend on each other and develop in relation to each other¹¹. Therefore, humans cannot live apart from all things and nature. If one side is destroyed, the other hardly exist. That has become a common rule.

Khmer Theravada Buddhism has also emphasized the importance of respecting and protecting the environment. Buddhism advises people to live in harmony with nature, protect all kinds of animals and plants, because all life has value and a close relationship with each other. This has a great impact on raising awareness of environmental protection, an important issue in today's society.

3.6. Honoring the values of family and society, freedom and equality

Khmer Theravada Buddhism also emphasizes great importance to family and traditional values. Monks do not encourage people to abandon their families to become monks, but instead, they honor the role of the family in nurturing morality and educating children. Fathers and mothers are advised to live exemplary lives, love each other, and create conditions for their children to learn and develop. Everyone always adheres to and correctly performs their duties.

Buddhism guides people to build a family in Filial Piety, Compassion, Patience and Morality - Meditation - Insight. Reality proves that Buddhist ethics is consistent with the morality and way of life of people and has made positive contributions to the cause of building and developing families both traditionally and modernly. Today, in the complex context of society, the positive values of Buddhism are once again demonstrated¹².

In Buddhism, the equality is clearly revealed right from the beginning, the concept of "equality" under the wisdom of the Buddha has brought a new, progressive and humane meaning. Buddhism does not promote class, on the contrary, Buddhism promotes the elements related to people that the element of equality has been emphasized more than ever with the spirit of no difference between people with the same red blood and salty tears.

Unlike other ideologies, theories or religions, first of all, recognizing people with an idea of creation or with an idea of supreme divine power governing the fate of people, and then recognizing the fate of people as an immutable destiny, and considering people as a product of the creator; from there, people are equal based on the subjective will of the creator, of the stratification in society with different destiny denominations. Buddhism is the opposite, the Buddha does not recognize people as a product of gods, as a tool of divine value.

In many aspects, the spirit of equality is always the goal of mankind, and because of that spirit, aspects of conflict and social struggle occur as an inevitable consequence of the causes of inequality.... Since ancient times, struggles between social strata have taken place and continued over a long history and corresponding

¹¹ Quoted from; Nguyen Dinh Hoa, Protecting the environment and Buddhism in Vietnam: The environment in scriptures and in the teachings of monks and Buddhists, <http://vacne.org.vn>.

¹² <https://phatgiao.org.vn>

to many different social forms. Wherever there is struggle, it also appears in places of inequality. That is to say that equality is the measure of the progress of a society.

The theory of equality in Theravada Buddhism is not established through struggle; on the contrary, it is expressed by the path of reasoning, mainly to make people understand the true nature of themselves, about the differences in karma, about the differences in skin color, race. Understanding that reasoning, people will be able to empathize and love each other, that is the true equality and also the most common reasoning of Buddhism¹³.

In addition, Khmer Theravada Buddhism also educates people about equality between ethnic groups, religions and genders. In the Buddhist community, everyone is treated equally, with no discrimination in social status, ethnicity or gender. This doctrine helps build a peaceful society, without discrimination or prejudice¹⁴.

4. Conclusion

Khmer Theravada Buddhism is not only a religion but also a profound education system, contributing to shaping personality and building a peaceful, happy and harmonious society. Its educational values are humanistic, practical and have a positive impact on the community and society in general.

We have initially studied the meaning of Buddhist values in the education of the Khmer community in Southern Vietnam. Through that, the beauty and importance as well as the hidden meaning in their life and activities are identified. This is also the premise for studies on educational values in Buddhism later. It helps us to approach and have both an overview and specific view of the meaning of Buddhist values exploited in the Khmer ethnic community in Southern Vietnam.

The inheritance and reasonable promotion of the core of Southern Buddhism in the Khmer ethnic group is always associated with creative thinking, with the reality of the situation and the requirements of the new society. That is the principle that cannot be ignored in the process of inheriting the values in education in particular and the traditional values in general through the Buddhist concept of education.

In short, the system of educational values of Buddhism in the life of the Khmer people has had a long-standing origin deep in the culture, customs, practices and society of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam. Through that, it shows the respect for Buddhism and the rich living experience, the unique creativity of the predecessors of the Khmer people in Southern Vietnam.

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