

The Roles of Ecclesiastical Monastic Administrators in Promoting Democracy within the Sangha in Loei Province*

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Abstract

This research aims to 1) study the role and duty of the Sangha chief in promoting democracy of the Sangha (Thammayut) in Loei Province, 2) compare the Sangha chief with different ages, seniority, positions, religious education, general education, and Pali studies levels, and their opinions on their roles and duties in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province, and 3) study the problems, obstacles, and solutions regarding the role and duty of the Sangha chief in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province. This research is a mixed method research consisting of quantitative research and qualitative research. The sample group is 201 Sangha chiefs in Loei Province. The research instruments are a 5-level rating scale questionnaire and an interview form. Data are analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and one-way variance test.

The research results found that:

1. The role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy in Loei Province
The research results found that overall, the average value of the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy was at a high level, which was (mean = 3.6)

2. The aspect with the highest average value was the aspect of promoting democracy (mean= 4.25), while the aspect with the lowest average value was the aspect of educational welfare (mean = 2.65) 2. Comparative analysis of the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province as a whole, classified by age, years of ordination, position, religious education, secular education, and Buddhist studies, found that there were statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level.

3. Problems, obstacles, and solutions regarding the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province using the Content Analysis Technique, totaling 3 items. The results of the interviews As follows, the overall opinions of the Sangha leaders on the role and duty of promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province have the same opinions, such as coordinating with local

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agencies, participating in the development and renovation, everyone has the rights, freedom, equality of being a citizen in a democratic regime and unity, respecting the law of the country, the Sangha Supreme Council's rules, and following the Dharma and Vinaya.

Keywords: Role, Sanghadhikara, Democracy

Introduction

During the time of the Buddha, the Buddha used the system of unity as the main principle in governing the Sangha. He was the head or president of all monks. He granted equality to all monks. There was no discrimination for monks who had different statuses. There was no caste division. After the third Buddhist Council, King Ashoka the Great, the President of the Religious Patron, sent 9 great monks to proclaim Buddhism. Thailand in particular was affected by the proclamation of Buddhism at that time. Buddhism spread to every corner of the world and created important benefits, which was creating unity among the people of the nation. Because it relied on the principles of Buddhism as the main principle, Buddhism led people to live well and eat well. Thai people accepted Buddhism since the 2nd Buddhist century and considered it the national religion. Therefore, Buddhism played an important role as a spiritual leader, which was the center of the community. However, when the social conditions changed, it lost its role in the past several years. That is, the original education system was in the temple. The monks played a leading role. But later, the center of education was moved out of the temple's care. This caused less education for monks. This inevitably led to other impacts as well. However, The temple has not lost its role entirely. It still maintains its position as a spiritual leader and a refuge for Buddhists until the present day, with monks driving such role. Buddhism is one of the main institutions of Thai society. Thai people have accepted and respected it since ancient times and it has been passed down to the present day. According to Article 9 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2550, it states that the King is a Buddhist and the supreme patron of religion. The majority of Thai people are Buddhists, approximately 94.57 percent. Religious institutions are a subsystem of Thai society, with temples as religious places and monks as religious persons, representing religious activities that will make Buddhism help develop communities, society, and the country significantly. Since the beginning of Thai society, the majority of Thais have been Buddhists, since the Sukhothai period until the present day. It has become a cultural belief in the daily life of Thais. Approximately 95 percent of Thais are Buddhists and have applied the principles of Buddhist practice as a guideline for their lives, until it has become a cultural foundation and the identity of the Thai nation (Supattra Suphap, 1993: 106). Even all Thai kings are Buddhists and are Buddhists. He is a Buddhist patron. For this reason, Buddhism has become so involved with politics and governance that it is inseparable. In terms of creating political legitimacy and eliminating political conflicts, Buddhism has the characteristic of living together without holding absolute power of any one person. Normally, it adheres to the principle of reason. These characteristics are important characteristics of a democratic society, which is the ideology of the democratic system of government (Narong Puangphit, 2005: 85). Democracy is a great force for peaceful coexistence. In this world, there are dense populations in every perspective, and it causes crowding in housing, consumer goods,

and daily necessities. In addition, there are rules for living together between people and people, and people and objects, according to the appropriateness of the causes and effects that will be determined. When this is the case, no one wants to be under anyone's command. They want to be independent and do not want anyone to control them. Therefore, they must find a way to solve the problem in their communities, villages, districts, provinces, and even the country. The law provides protection and care for all citizens and gives equal rights to everyone, regardless of who they are. That is, people live well and eat well. If there is no democracy, there will be no independence. Democracy has many meanings, including political democracy, family democracy, and personal democracy.

Although the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting the democracy of the Sangha (Thammayut) in the administrative area of Loei Province is currently smooth, the researcher wants to study to develop the role and duty of the Sangha (Thammayut) in promoting the democracy of the Sangha in the administrative area in every district of Loei Province. Are there any obstacles or problems? In order to adjust and improve, and for the Sangha to adjust to work proactively to stimulate the work of the Sangha to be more efficient. The researcher sees the importance and is interested in researching the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting the democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province. The Sangha who have positions and duties in governing the Sangha in Loei Province have promoted and performed their duties in accordance with the Dhamma-Vinaya, the Sangha Act, and the regulations, rules, and rules of the Sangha Supreme Council.

Objective

1. To study the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha (Thammayut) in Loei Province
2. To compare the opinions of Sangha leaders with different ages, seniority, positions and education levels on their roles and duties in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province
3. To study the problems and solutions regarding the role and duty of the Sangha leaders in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province

Literature review

The intersection of Buddhism and democratic governance has been the subject of scholarly interest across Southeast Asia. In the Thai context, the role of the Sangha—particularly ecclesiastical monastic administrators—has been increasingly examined for its influence on civic and political culture, especially in rural provinces like Loei.

1. Buddhist Doctrines and Democratic Principles

Buddhism's moral and philosophical teachings offer frameworks that align with democratic values such as participation, accountability, and ethical leadership. The concepts of *sangha-kamma* (community decision-making) and *kalyāṇamitta* (virtuous friendship) reflect participatory and dialogical approaches that are foundational to democratic governance (Keyes, 1999). Moreover, the principle of *upanissaya-paccaya* (indirect conditioning) in Theravāda Buddhism reflects how religious influence can shape civic attitudes over time (Swearer, 2010).

2. The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and Local Governance

Thailand's Sangha Act (last revised in 2018) outlines a centralized hierarchy where ecclesiastical monastic administrators (*Phra Sangkhathikan*) hold both spiritual and administrative authority (Ishii, 1986). These monks are responsible not only for monastic discipline but also for public engagement through temple schools, moral teachings, and community development projects. In provinces like Loei, where state institutions have limited reach, these figures can be seen as moral leaders and informal political educators (Taylor, 2012).

3. Monastic Involvement in Civic Education and Democratic Norms

Several studies have documented the involvement of monks in civic education programs, especially through *Dhamma talks*, youth activities, and moral training. Charoensin-o-larn (2013) observed that Thai temples serve as spaces for cultivating *civil virtues*, such as tolerance, compassion, and mutual respect. Ecclesiastical leaders often facilitate community discussions and mediate local disputes, thereby fostering participatory decision-making at the grassroots level (Bowie, 2004).

4. Challenges to Monastic Engagement with Democracy

Despite these roles, the ability of monks to explicitly promote democratic principles is often constrained by political sensitivities and hierarchical control within the Sangha itself. The influence of state control through the Sangha Supreme Council and the risk of violating secular boundaries limits overt political participation (McCargo, 2009). In Loei province, which borders Laos and has a history of political conservatism, these limitations may be even more pronounced.

5. Case Studies in Rural Thailand

Empirical research in northern and northeastern Thailand shows that ecclesiastical administrators in rural provinces often take on expanded civic roles, particularly in areas lacking state infrastructure. For instance, Pinit (2016) found that monastic leaders in Isan provinces conducted forums for village consensus and promoted nonviolent principles during election periods. In Loei, similar patterns are likely, though under-documented, suggesting a research gap this study seeks to address.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

The reviewed literature affirms that ecclesiastical monastic administrators in Thailand, including in Loei Province, play nuanced roles in promoting democratic values—primarily through moral education, community engagement, and informal civic leadership. However, their capacity is constrained by institutional and legal boundaries. The need for empirical studies focused specifically on Loei is evident, as regional variation may significantly influence monastic-political dynamics.

Methodology

This is a quantitative research mixed with qualitative research. The population used in this study is 412 monks in Loei Province. The sample size was found using the Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1973; cited from Suwimol Thirakanan, 2003: 198). The sample size was 201 monks.

The research instrument is a questionnaire developed by the researcher according to the framework of the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province to collect data from the sample group used in the research. It is divided into 3 parts as follows: Part 1 is a questionnaire about general information of the respondents, including age, years of ordination, position of the

Sangha, general education qualifications, religious education qualifications, and Buddhist studies qualifications, which is a multiple-choice questionnaire (Check List). Part 2 is a questionnaire about the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province in 5 areas, which is a rating scale (Bunchom Srisat, 2545: 102-103). Part 3 is about problems, obstacles, and other suggestions in the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province, which is an open-ended question. Part 4 and the interview guide are unstructured interview guides for interviewing the Sangha, which are flexible questions that require in-depth information from the interviewee. By interviewing 11 selected monks as the target group (Purposive Sampling)

Data collection The researcher conducted the data collection in the following steps: 1) Write a letter introducing the researcher and requesting permission to collect data for the research from Mahamakut Buddhist University, Srilanchang Campus, Chum Phae District, Khon Kaen Province to the Sangha chiefs in the Sangha administration area in Loei Province to request their cooperation in collecting data selected as a sample. 2) The researcher went to the Sangha administration area in Chum Phae District, Khon Kaen Province, explained and distributed the questionnaires to the Sangha chiefs to answer the questionnaires. Then, the information was sent back to the researcher. 3) The returned questionnaires were used to analyze the data.

Data analysis In this research, the data was analyzed by using a computer using a social science program. The statistics used in data analysis are as follows: 1) Data obtained from a checklist questionnaire were used to find the frequency and percentage and presented in a table. 2) The role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province by finding the mean ($(\bar{X})$) and standard deviation (S.D.) and interpreting the meaning according to the specified criteria by considering the scope of the average score obtained from the questionnaire and the results of the interpretation (Samroeng Chan Suwan, 2004). 3) Comparative analysis of the roles of the Sangha in the administration of the Sangha under the democratic regime in the Sangha administration area in Chum Phae District, Khon Kaen Province, classified by age, years of ordination, position, and education level using the t-test. (Independent-t-test) and one way ANOVA were significant at the 0.05 level. 4) Information about problems and obstacles, roles and duties of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province, which is qualitative information in the Sangha administration area in Loei Province, used content analysis, categorization and descriptive analysis (Descriptive Approach) and then presented in a narrative essay format (Chai Posita, 2013: 187).

Results

1. From the study of the role and duty of the Sangha chief in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province (Dhammayut), including all 5 aspects, the role and duty of the Sangha chief is at a high level. To consider each item, it is found that it is at a high level, consistent with the study results of Phra Khru Suchat Wutthikit (Chalermchai Aphichato) (2011) Research on the role of the Sangha chief in the administration of the Sangha in Maharat District, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. The objectives and results of the research are as follows: 1. The opinions of monks and novices on the role of the Sangha chief in the administration of the Sangha in Maharat District, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, in all 6 aspects, are at a high level overall

(mean = 3.54). When considering each aspect, it is found that opinions on governance, religious education, public utilities, and public welfare are at a high level. Opinions on educational welfare and the dissemination of Buddhism are at a moderate level.

2. From the results of the comparison in terms of age, it was found that the different ages of the Sangha leaders had a role in the level of the performance of the Sangha leaders' duties in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province (Thammayut) with statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This may be because the Sangha leaders who are not the same age have different opinions and knowledge, so their opinions are consistent with the research results of Phra Maha Monthian Wora Thammo (2013) who studied the topic of "The Role of the Sangha leaders in the Administration of the Sangha in Phang Nga Province". The research results found that the Sangha leaders who are different in age and number of years ordained have different roles in the administration of the Sangha with statistical significance at the .05 level. The results of the study in terms of years ordained found that the different years ordained of the Sangha leaders in the level of the performance of the role and duties of the Sangha leaders in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province (Thammayut) were different. This may be because the work, flexibility, and dissemination of knowledge, both in terms of monks with different years ordained, have different understandings in disseminating knowledge in detail, which is consistent with the research of Phra Maha Monthien Wora Thammo (2013) conducted a research study on "The Role of the Sangha Chiefs in the Administration of the Sangha in Phang Nga Province". The research result found that the role of the Sangha Chiefs in the administration of the Sangha in the province was significantly different at the .05 level. The study of the positions found that the positions of the Sangha Chiefs in the level of practice, roles, and responsibilities of the Sangha Chiefs in promoting democracy in Loei Province (Thammayut) were different. This may be because the knowledge and abilities of the Thammayut Sangha Chiefs in Loei Province are different. Some Sangha Chiefs have a higher level of education and therefore have different abilities. This is consistent with the research result of Phra Maha Anan Anando (Noramat) (2009) who conducted a research study on "The Administration of the Sangha in Chumphon Province and the Application of the 7 Bhikkhu Aparihaniyadhamma Principles". The study result found that: Comparison of the application level of the 7 Bhikkhu Aparihaniyadhamma principles in the administration of the Sangha of the Sangha leaders in Chumphon Province found that the positions of the Sangha leaders and the experience in performing the duties of the Sangha leaders were significantly different at the .05 level. The results of the study of religious education found that the religious education of the Sangha leaders in the level of practice, roles, and duties of the Sangha leaders in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province (Thammayut) was different, probably because the Sangha leaders had different levels of Dhamma education and thus had different understandings of the principles of Buddhist teachings, which was consistent with the research results of Phra Kasem Sak Worasakkho (Asanatong) (2012) who researched on "The Role of the Sangha Leaders in the Administration of the Sangha in Chumsaeng District, Nakhon Sawan Province" and found that monks with different levels of religious education had different opinions on the administration of the Sangha in Chumsaeng District, Nakhon Sawan Province, with statistical significance at 0.05. The results of the study of secular education found that: The secular education of the Sangha leaders at the level of practice, role and duty of the

Sangha leaders in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province (Thammayut), classified by secular education. The differences may be because the Sangha leaders have different levels of secular education, which causes their opinions on the roles and duties to be different. This is consistent with the research results of Phra Kasem Sak Worasakkho (Asanatong) (2012) who researched on “The Role of the Sangha Leader in the Administration of the Sangha Affairs in Chumsaeng District, Nakhon Sawan Province”. The research results found that the administration of the Sangha affairs according to the principles of the performance of duties of the Sangha leaders in Chumsaeng District is at a high level in all aspects. When comparing opinions on the administration of the Sangha affairs in Chumsaeng District, Nakhon Sawan Province, it was found that ordinary education leaders have opinions on the administration of the Sangha affairs in Chumsaeng District, Nakhon Sawan Province. There is a statistically significant difference at 0.05. The results of the study of the level of Buddhist studies found that the level of Buddhist studies of the Sangha leaders in the practice level, role and duty of the Sangha leaders in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei (Thammayut) area are not different, which is consistent with the research results of Phra Maha Monthian Wora Thammo (2013) who studied the topic of “The role of the Sangha leaders in the administration of the Sangha affairs in Phang Nga Province”. The research results found that the role of the practice in the administration of the Sangha affairs in Phang Nga Province found that the Sangha leaders with different levels of Buddhist studies have no different roles in the administration of the Sangha affairs.

3. Interview Results from the interviews with the 3 questions from the Supreme Patriarch on the role and duty of the Sangha chief in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province (Dhammayut) in all 5 areas:

Government Overall, the Supreme Patriarch has the same opinion that they should study and follow the Dhamma-Vinaya, the Sangha Supreme Council's rules, regulations, or orders as the main principles of governing the Sangha and the laws of the country. Religious education Overall, they see the importance and should promote and support monks and novices to receive education at all levels, namely, Pariyatti Dhamma, General education, Pali studies, and finally higher education. The Supreme Patriarch shows the same importance in the same direction. In terms of overall educational welfare, the Supreme Patriarch has the same opinion in supporting and promoting the provision of funds to support both monks and novices, as well as underprivileged children and youth, so that they can study in existing schools for the welfare of the temple and to study at higher levels. In terms of overall propagation of Buddhism, The importance of important Buddhist days should be recognized and Buddhist activities should be organized within the temple, promoting and training ethics for children and youth, and the Supreme Patriarch has the same opinion. In terms of overall public utilities, the Supreme Patriarch has the same opinion on the management of renovation and restoration within the temple. It is necessary to coordinate with local agencies to participate in expressing opinions and finding factors to support the renovation and restoration to preserve Buddhism forever. In terms of promoting democracy, the Supreme Patriarch has the same opinion, which is to know how to exercise rights and freedoms, equality, giving importance to everyone, participation in expressing opinions, respecting the law of the country as citizens in a democratic regime. The role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province in 5 aspects as a whole, found to be at a high level. When

comparing age, seniority, position, and education level, it was found that opinions on the role and duty of the Sangha in promoting democracy of the Sangha in Loei Province were significantly different at a statistical level. 0.05 and from the interviews with 11 Sangha leaders, overall it was found that the leaders who answered the interviews had the same idea in all 5 areas, which can be summarized as follows: there must be coordination with local agencies, participation in the development of renovations, everyone has rights and freedoms, equality of citizenship in a democratic regime and unity, respect for the laws of the country, the Sangha Supreme Council's rules, and comply with the Dharma and Vinaya.

Discussion

1. Overall Role and Performance in Promoting Democracy

The findings indicate that the roles and duties of Sangha chiefs in Loei Province across five aspects—governance, religious education, educational welfare, propagation of Buddhism, and public utilities—are rated at a high level. These results align with **Phra Khru Suchat Wutthikit's (Chalermchai Aphichato, 2011)** study in Maharat District, which similarly found that the Sangha's administrative roles were performed effectively across various aspects, particularly in governance and public welfare.

This suggests a consistency in the ability of Sangha administrators across different regions of Thailand to act as moral leaders and community developers. Their integration of religious principles with civic duties highlights the Buddhist approach to ethical governance (*dhamma-nayaka*), which inherently supports democratic ideals such as fairness, transparency, and participation (Keyes, 1999; Swearer, 2010).

2. Demographic and Educational Factors Affecting Role Performance

The results further demonstrate statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in the performance of democratic roles based on age, years of ordination, position, and educational background (both secular and religious). This is consistent with findings by **Phra Maha Monthian Wora Thammo (2013)**, who reported that age and seniority significantly influenced Sangha leaders' administrative roles in Phang Nga Province. Younger monks may exhibit different understandings or approaches to democratic principles than their older counterparts, possibly due to generational exposure to civic education or digital media.

Additionally, the study's findings on secular education influencing performance are in line with **Phra Kasem Sak Worasakkho's (Asanatong, 2012)** research in Nakhon Sawan, which revealed that monks with higher secular education demonstrated broader understanding and engagement with administrative tasks and civic-oriented responsibilities.

In contrast, Buddhist doctrinal education (Pariyatti studies) did not show a significant impact on the differences in democratic role performance. This corresponds to Phra Maha Monthian's conclusion that religious education level did not strongly differentiate the practical administrative roles among Sangha members.

3. Insights from Interviews with the Sangha Supreme Council Representatives

Qualitative interviews with Sangha leaders revealed strong consensus on the importance of democracy-compatible values such as equality, participation, and rule of law. All interviewees emphasized the integration of **Dhamma-Vinaya**, national laws, and the regulations of the Sangha Supreme Council as essential in governing the monastic community and interacting with lay society.

Their shared perspectives reinforce Buddhist democratic ethics, where communal harmony, participation, and moral responsibility are emphasized (Ishii, 1986; Charoensin-o-larn, 2013). The emphasis on education, propagation of moral values, and collaboration with local agencies for public works points to a model of engaged Buddhism that supports democratic culture from the grassroots level (Taylor, 2012).

The alignment in opinions from different levels of monastic leadership reflects the institutional strength of the Dhammayut order in Loei Province, particularly in harmonizing religious, legal, and democratic responsibilities.

Conclusion

The results reinforce the idea that ecclesiastical monastic administrators play a substantial role in promoting democratic values within Thai society, especially in rural areas such as Loei Province. Their moral authority, administrative role, and educational outreach contribute to cultivating civic virtues and supporting democratic engagement. However, demographic and educational differences among Sangha leaders do influence the extent and nature of this engagement. Continued support for religious and civic education, as well as policy encouragement for monastic involvement in community development, can further strengthen this synergy between Buddhism and democracy.

New knowledge

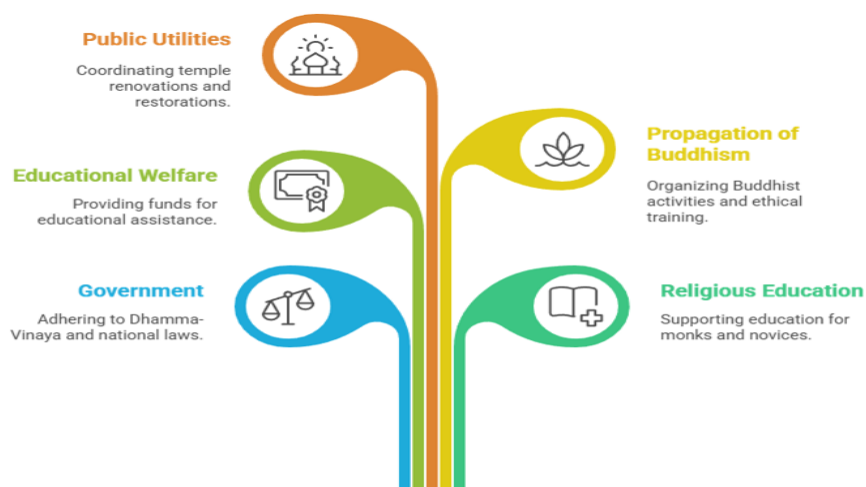


Figure 1 New knowledge, 2024

The image is a color-coded infographic designed in the shape of a stylized tree, representing the five key roles of ecclesiastical monastic administrators (Sangha leaders) in promoting democracy within the Sangha. Each branch of the tree symbolizes one specific area of responsibility, as follows:

1. Public Utilities (Orange)
 - Icon: Temple building with sparkles
 - Role: Coordinating temple renovations and restorations.
2. Educational Welfare (Green)
 - Icon: Certificate or diploma
 - Role: Providing funds for educational assistance.
3. Government (Blue)
 - Icon: Scales of justice
 - Role: Adhering to Dhamma-Vinaya and national laws.
4. Propagation of Buddhism (Yellow)
 - Icon: Lotus flower
 - Role: Organizing Buddhist activities and ethical training.
5. Religious Education (Teal/Light Green)
 - Icon: Open book
 - Role: Supporting education for monks and novices.

The visual presentation emphasizes growth, interconnectedness, and the holistic responsibilities of Sangha leaders, with each function branching from a common core—symbolizing unity of purpose in sustaining Buddhist values and democratic engagement.

Recommendation

Comparative Studies

1. Compare Dhammayut and Mahanikaya Sects

Examine how roles differ between Thailand's two major monastic orders in promoting democratic values, especially in rural vs. urban areas.

2. Cross-Provincial Analysis

Study differences in Sangha leadership roles between Loei Province and other provinces (e.g., Chiang Mai, Ubon Ratchathani) to see how local context affects democratic engagement.

Suggestions for future research

1. There should be a joint agreement, emphasizing strictness in governance, especially compliance with the rules, regulations and orders of the Sangha Supreme Council.

2. There should be a fund to promote education for monks and novices, sending monks under the organization to receive training in computer use for the benefit of data preparation within **the temple and for the propagation of Buddhism using modern technology.**

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