

การบวชในวัยเด็กในฐานะภาพสะท้อนความไม่เป็นธรรม เชิงนโยบายและคุณค่าสาธารณะในสังคมไทย

บุญทริกา โคมลพัฒนานันท์¹

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้วิเคราะห์ปรากฏการณ์การบวชเณรเด็กในประเทศไทยในฐานะผลลัพธ์เชิงนโยบายที่สะท้อนความเหลื่อมล้ำเชิงโครงสร้างและข้อจำกัดของระบบสวัสดิการเด็กและการคุ้มครองทางสังคมของรัฐ โดยอาศัยกรอบแนวคิด Public Value Management เพื่ออธิบายบทบาทของวัดพุทธในฐานะผู้มีส่วนร่วมที่ไม่เป็นทางการในการร่วมผลิตบริการสาธารณะ โดยเฉพาะการให้การศึกษา ที่พักอาศัย และการดูแลพื้นฐานแก่เด็กจากครัวเรือนรายได้ต่ำในบริบทที่ระบบสวัสดิการของรัฐยังมีความกระจัดกระจายและไม่ทั่วถึง จากมุมมองรัฐประศาสนศาสตร์ การบวชเณรเด็กถูกตีความไม่เพียงในฐานะการปฏิบัติทางศาสนา แต่เป็นผลลัพธ์ของโครงสร้างการอภิบาลนโยบายที่มีการกระจายความรับผิดชอบด้าน

¹ นักวิชาการอิสระ Email: boontarika.ink@gmail.com

สวัสดิการระหว่างรัฐและผู้มีส่วนร่วมที่ไม่ใช่รัฐภายใต้ข้อจำกัดด้านศักยภาพของภาครัฐ บทความนี้ใช้วิธีวิเคราะห์นโยบายเชิงแนวคิดเชิงคุณภาพ (qualitative conceptual policy analysis) โดยอาศัยข้อมูลทุติยภูมิจากรายงานภาครัฐ งานวิชาการ และเอกสารจากองค์กรพัฒนาเอกชน ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การบวชนเด็กสะท้อนช่องว่างของระบบสวัสดิการ ความไม่เท่าเทียมในการเข้าถึงบริการสาธารณะ และข้อจำกัดของรัฐในการจัดสวัสดิการอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ แม้ว่าวัดจะมีบทบาทในการลดช่องว่างดังกล่าวผ่านการให้บริการในระดับท้องถิ่น แต่บทบาทดังกล่าวมีลักษณะเฉพาะบริบทและไม่ถูกออกแบบให้เป็นกลไกทดแทนความรับผิดชอบของรัฐอย่างเป็นระบบ บทความสรุปว่าการพึ่งพาสถาบันศาสนาในการดูแลเด็กสะท้อนความจำเป็นในการยกระดับระบบสวัสดิการเด็ก เสริมสร้างการประสานงานระหว่างหน่วยงานรัฐและศาสนสถาน และพัฒนารอบนโยบายเชิงสิทธิที่ทำให้เด็กสามารถเข้าถึงการศึกษาและการคุ้มครองทางสังคมได้โดยไม่ต้องพึ่งพาการบวชนเป็นกลไกการปรับตัวต่อความยากจนทางเศรษฐกิจ

คำสำคัญ: การบวชนวัยเด็ก, ความเหลื่อมล้ำเชิงโครงสร้าง, นโยบายสวัสดิการสังคม, การจัดการคุณค่าสาธารณะ

Child Monkhood as a Reflection of Policy Injustice and Public Value in Thai Society

Boontarika Komolwattananun²

Abstract

This article analyzes child monkhood in Thailand as a policy-relevant outcome of structural inequalities and limitations within the country's child welfare and social protection systems. Drawing on the Public Value Management framework, it examines how Buddhist temples function as informal but significant actors in the co-production of public services, particularly in providing education, shelter, and basic welfare support for children from low-income households in contexts where formal state welfare provision remains fragmented and uneven. From a public administration perspective, child monkhood is conceptualized not merely as a religious practice, but as an outcome of governance arrangements

² Independent Scholar Email: boontarika.ink@gmail.com

in which welfare responsibilities are partially redistributed across state and non-state actors in response to institutional gaps and limited state capacity. The study employs qualitative conceptual policy analysis based on secondary sources, including government reports, academic literature, and NGO publications. Findings suggest that child monkhood reflects uneven access to public services, structural gaps in welfare governance, and constraints in the effectiveness of state-led social protection systems. While temples contribute to mitigating these gaps through localized and context-dependent service provision, their role is not systematically designed nor institutionally mandated to substitute for state responsibility. The article concludes that reliance on monastic institutions as informal welfare providers highlights the need to strengthen child welfare governance, enhance inter-agency coordination between state institutions and religious organizations, and develop rights-based policy frameworks that ensure equitable access to education and social protection without requiring entry into monastic life as an adaptive strategy to economic hardship.

Keywords: Child monkhood, Structural inequality, Social welfare policy, Public value management

บทนำ (Introduction)

In Thai society, Buddhist temples have long played a dual role as both religious institutions and informal providers of social support, particularly for vulnerable populations. Among these groups, children from low-income households in rural areas often enter novice monkhood as a means of securing access to education, shelter, and basic living conditions. Although Thailand is classified as an upper-middle-income country, significant structural inequalities persist in access to welfare services, especially in childhood development and educational opportunity. As a result, temples have increasingly functioned as *de facto* welfare providers, partially substituting for state social protection mechanisms that remain fragmented and unevenly distributed.

From a public administration perspective, this phenomenon raises important questions about welfare governance, state capacity, and the production of public value beyond formal bureaucratic institutions. It also highlights the growing importance of collaborative and networked governance arrangements in contexts where state provision alone is insufficient. In such settings, public value is not solely generated

through government action but also through the involvement of non-state actors, including religious institutions, which contribute to education, care, and social protection for disadvantaged groups.

This article adopts the Public Value Management (PVM) framework, drawing on Moore's (1995) concept of public value as a guiding analytical lens. The study is further informed by political ethics and Buddhist ethics to critically examine the conditions under which children's entry into monkhood can be understood as "choice" under structural constraints. The analysis is grounded in secondary data, including policy documents, reports from Thai government agencies, international organizations, and existing academic literature. Rather than testing hypotheses, this article employs a conceptual and interpretive policy analysis approach to examine how child monkhood reflects broader limitations in Thailand's welfare governance system.

The article pursues three main objectives: (1) to examine the relationship between structural poverty and child monkhood in Thailand; (2) to analyze the role of Buddhist temples as informal co-producers of public value within the

welfare system; and (3) to explore policy implications for strengthening child welfare governance through improved collaboration between the state and religious institutions.

Conceptual Framework

This article employs an integrated conceptual framework that combines Public Value Management (PVM), political ethics, and Buddhist ethics to analyze the phenomenon of child monkhood in Thailand as a welfare governance issue.

At its core, the study adopts the Public Value Management perspective (Moore, 1995), which conceptualizes public value as something co-produced through networks of state and non-state actors rather than generated exclusively by government institutions. Within this framework, Buddhist temples are understood as part of a broader governance ecosystem that contributes to the production of social outcomes such as education, care, and social protection. However, this study does not treat temples as formal welfare agencies; instead, it examines how public value emerges in practice through institutional arrangements that develop in response to gaps in state welfare provision.

Building on this structural perspective, the article incorporates political ethics to evaluate questions of justice, responsibility, and inequality. Drawing on Rawls (1999), Nussbaum (2000), and Young (2011), the framework emphasizes that “choice” must be understood in relation to the conditions under which it is made. In contexts of poverty and unequal opportunity structures, individual decisions—such as entry into monkhood—may reflect constrained agency rather than fully voluntary action. These ethical theories therefore provide a normative lens for assessing whether existing welfare arrangements in Thailand satisfy principles of fairness and equal opportunity.

To contextualize these normative concerns within the socio-cultural setting of Thailand, the framework further integrates Buddhist ethics, particularly concepts of intention and moral purpose in ordination. Buddhist ethical thought is used not as a doctrinal explanation but as an interpretive lens to understand how ordination may carry different moral meanings when it is shaped by economic necessity rather than spiritual aspiration. This allows the analysis to capture the tension between religious ideals and socio-economic realities.

Taken together, these three perspectives form a layered analytical framework. Public Value Management explains the governance structure and institutional roles; political ethics evaluates justice and structural inequality; and Buddhist ethics provides contextual understanding of moral meaning within religious practice. The integration of these perspectives enables the article to conceptualize child monkhood as a manifestation of welfare governance limitations and unequal public value distribution in Thai society.

Structural Poverty and Childhood Inequality

Understanding child monkhood in Thailand requires situating the phenomenon within the broader context of structural poverty and inequality in childhood development. Poverty in this article is understood not merely as income deprivation, but as a multidimensional condition shaped by unequal access to education, welfare services, and institutional support. These structural conditions contribute to unequal life chances, particularly among children in rural and economically disadvantaged households.

Although Thailand has experienced sustained economic development and is classified as an upper-middle-income country, significant disparities in access to education and social services remain. Existing literature and policy reports suggest that children from low-income households continue to face higher risks of educational discontinuation and limited access to quality schooling, particularly in rural areas of Northern and Northeastern Thailand. For example, UNICEF (2022) reports indicate substantial gaps in educational continuation between children from different income groups, reflecting persistent inequality in opportunity structures. These disparities tend to accumulate over time and may contribute to intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

1. Limited Educational Opportunities

In rural regions, schools often face constraints related to infrastructure, teacher availability, and educational resources. In addition, households with limited income may encounter difficulties related to transportation costs and indirect schooling expenses, which further constrain children's access to continuous education. In such contexts, Buddhist temples have emerged as alternative spaces for learning through monastic education systems (Pariyatti schools), which typically do not require tuition fees.

Available studies and administrative reports suggest that these temple-based educational institutions provide access to education, accommodation, and basic welfare support for children who may otherwise be at risk of educational exclusion. This development reflects the functional expansion of Buddhist temples beyond religious roles toward informal social service provision. From a public administration perspective, this can be interpreted as an adaptive response to institutional gaps in the formal welfare system, particularly in contexts where state provision is uneven or insufficient.

2. Poverty and Entry into Monkhood

The relationship between poverty and child monkhood should be understood as structurally mediated rather than purely individual or religious choice. Existing qualitative studies (e.g., Terwiel, 2012) suggest that in some rural contexts, entry into monkhood may be influenced by household economic hardship, family instability, or limited access to formal education. In such cases, ordination may function as a practical strategy for securing basic needs such as shelter, food, and schooling.

From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with Iris Marion Young’s (2011) concept of structural injustice, which emphasizes that constrained social structures can shape individual “choices” without direct coercion. Similarly, Nussbaum’s (2000) capability approach highlights that meaningful freedom depends on access to basic capabilities such as education and security. When such conditions are limited, available choices may reflect constrained survival strategies rather than fully voluntary decisions. Rawls’ (1999) theory of justice further supports the view that unequal opportunity structures undermine fair equality of opportunity in society.

3. Vulnerability within the Welfare System

Thailand’s child welfare system includes targeted programs such as child allowances and rural development funds. However, existing policy analyses suggest that these measures remain fragmented and may not fully cover all vulnerable groups. As a result, families in economically marginalized conditions may rely on non-state institutions, including Buddhist temples, for additional support.

This reliance indicates the presence of institutional gaps in the welfare system, where non-state actors play an

increasingly important role in compensating for limited public service coverage. From a public value management perspective, such arrangements highlight the distributed nature of welfare provision, in which public value is co-produced by state and non-state actors in response to unmet social needs.

Overall, structural poverty and inequality in childhood provide the necessary context for understanding why child monkhood persists in certain regions of Thailand. Rather than being interpreted solely as a cultural or religious practice, it should also be understood as an outcome of uneven welfare governance and constrained opportunity structures.

Public Value Management and Governance of Child Monkhood

From a public administration perspective, this phenomenon can be understood through Public Value Management, which emphasizes the co-production of public services and the creation of public value through networks of state and non-state actors. This perspective is strongly grounded in Moore's (1995) conception of public value, which highlights that public value is not produced exclusively by government institutions but can also emerge through collaborative

arrangements involving multiple actors in addressing collective needs. Creating Public Value In the context of Thailand's welfare system, Buddhist temples function as informal but essential co-producers of public value by providing education, shelter, and social protection for children who are excluded from adequate state welfare provision. This reflects a governance arrangement in which public value is generated outside formal bureaucratic structures due to limitations in welfare delivery capacity.

Within this public value management framework, the analysis of child monkhood is further developed by incorporating political ethics and Buddhist ethics as complementary interpretive lenses. These perspectives are used to critically examine issues of justice, state responsibility, and children's capacity to exercise genuine freedom of choice under conditions of socioeconomic constraint.

1. Ordination as “Freedom” or “Coerced Choice”?

In political philosophy and ethics, freedom refers to an individual's ability to make choices and shape their life without external coercion. However, in the context of impoverished children in rural Thailand, entry into monkhood often occurs

amid economic, social, and educational constraints. Hence, it cannot be regarded as fully voluntary but is what Rawls (1999) describes as a “choice under unequal circumstances.”

According to Martha Nussbaum’s (2000) capability approach, true freedom requires that individuals possess basic capabilities that allow them genuine options, such as access to education, food, shelter, and life security. When a child must enter monkhood to secure these fundamental needs, it reflects the state’s failure to provide equitable basic conditions. These children do not “choose to ordain” out of religious devotion but rather comply with ordination as a means of survival. From Iris Marion Young’s (2011) perspective, this is an instance of structural injustice—a form of inequality embedded in overlapping social and institutional arrangements that compel certain groups to act without genuine freedom. Consequently, the religious freedom of impoverished children becomes a moral illusion under an unjust structure.

Therefore, child ordination in this context should not be seen merely as a religious ritual but as a social statement reflecting structural inequality in Thai society. It also poses a critical question for the state: why must monkhood become the only viable pathway to access education and fundamental human dignity?

2. Buddhist Ethics and the Moral Intention of Ordination

From a Buddhist ethical perspective, ordination is traditionally understood as an act rooted in *cetana* for liberation, reflecting voluntary commitment and spiritual awareness. However, when ordination is motivated by economic necessity, such as the need for shelter or food, it may deviate from its moral intention toward a pursuit of mundane benefits.

The Pali Canon (Anguttara Nikaya 22/93/115) classifies ordinations into several types, one of which is the “ordination for the Four Necessities,” referring to those who enter monkhood primarily for subsistence rather than spiritual development. Such ordinations are not morally condemnable *per se* but reflect the conditioned suffering inherent in social life, which calls for compassionate understanding rather than judgment.

From a policy perspective, allowing temples to bear the burden of supporting impoverished children represents a transfer of ethical responsibility from the state to religious institutions without sustainable support mechanisms. This situation not only undermines the sanctity of ordination but also reflects a form of structural moral distortion, arising from the state’s unjust prioritization of resources and its failure to ensure equitable protection for all children.

3. Political Ethics and State Responsibility

From a public value management perspective, child monkhood reflects a governance gap in welfare service delivery, where public value is co-produced by Buddhist temples in response to the limitations of state welfare mechanisms. This understanding is consistent with Moore's (1995) conception of public value, which emphasizes that value creation in the public sector extends beyond governmental outputs and is generated through collaborative arrangements among state and non-state actors responding to collective needs. Creating Public Value Political ethics emphasizes the responsibility of the state to uphold justice and human dignity. In the context of this study, such responsibility entails creating an equal opportunity structure that enables all children to make meaningful life choices without having to rely on ordination.

According to Frederickson's (2005) concept of Social Equity, equality is not merely about providing identical services but about differentiated equality, which allocates resources according to specific needs to achieve substantive fairness. Accordingly, the state should implement targeted policies to support children in impoverished households and rural areas,

such as universal educational scholarships, access to care and housing for children lacking guardianship, and formal mechanisms linking temples with the official welfare system.

From this perspective, temples should not be viewed merely as voluntary helpers, but as co-producers of public value within a networked welfare governance system, in which the state, religious institutions, and local communities jointly contribute to the provision of essential social services in contexts where formal welfare delivery remains insufficient.

4. Redefining “Justice” in the Thai Context

From a public value management and welfare governance perspective, the ordination of impoverished children reflects limitations in the state’s capacity to ensure equitable public service delivery and an imbalanced distribution of public value within Thai society. In line with Moore’s (1995) conception of public value, such value is understood as being generated not only through formal state action but also through broader governance arrangements that respond to unmet societal needs across institutional boundaries. Creating Public Value Rather than being understood solely as a religious phenomenon, child monkhood can therefore be interpreted as

an indicator of gaps in public administration and welfare provision that affect children's access to essential opportunities.

Within this governance context, Rawls' (1999) concept of fair equality of opportunity and Nussbaum's (2000) capabilities approach are employed as normative frameworks to further interpret justice in the Thai context. Justice is understood here as the creation of institutional and social conditions that enable all children to exercise genuine freedom of choice, rather than merely ensuring formal equality or the absence of direct coercion.

When the state is unable to guarantee access to basic rights such as education and social protection, entry into monkhood becomes an alternative pathway to security and opportunity—what may be described as a “space of hope” emerging within an incomplete welfare system. However, such a condition should not exist in a sufficiently just and well-functioning welfare state.

Ideally, Buddhist temples should function primarily as spaces for spiritual development rather than as substitute welfare institutions for children in poverty. This perspective reframes justice in the Thai context as a matter of substantive

public value creation, emphasizing the responsibility of the state to strengthen welfare governance and ensure that all children have equal access to opportunities necessary for human development.

Illustrative Cases from Secondary Sources

This section presents selected illustrative cases to contextualize the analysis of child monkhood in Thailand. The cases are not based on primary fieldwork or ethnographic research but are instead drawn from secondary sources, including government reports, academic studies, and publications by non-governmental organizations. They are used to support the conceptual argument concerning gaps in welfare governance and the role of Buddhist temples as informal co-producers of social support within local contexts.

1. Boys from Low-Income Households in Northeastern Thailand

In several provinces in Northeastern Thailand, including Sisaket, Surin, and Ubon Ratchathani, monastic education programs (Pariyatti schools) have historically provided an

alternative educational pathway for boys from low-income households. Reports from the Department of Religious Affairs (2021) and the National Office of Buddhism indicate that a significant proportion of students in these institutions come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, although the exact distribution varies across regions and administrative datasets.

In these contexts, Buddhist temples often function simultaneously as residential and educational spaces, supported through community donations and local charitable networks. These arrangements illustrate how temples may operate as informal welfare actors within local governance ecosystems, particularly in settings where access to formal state welfare and educational support is uneven or limited. This case is used to illustrate patterns of institutional substitution under conditions of welfare system constraints.

2. Phra Phutthabat Tak Pha Temple, Lamphun Province

Phra Phutthabat Tak Pha Temple in northern Thailand is frequently cited in secondary literature as an example of a temple that provides shelter, education, and basic support for children and youth, particularly those from ethnic minority

communities such as Lahu, Hmong, and Karen groups. According to the Foundation for Education and Community Development (CED, 2022), some children in these contexts face structural barriers, including limited legal documentation and restricted access to formal schooling systems.

In such circumstances, monastic ordination and temple-based education may function as one of several available pathways for accessing basic care and educational opportunities, rather than being understood solely as a religiously motivated decision. This case is used to illustrate how institutional and administrative constraints intersect with welfare access in peripheral communities.

3. Analytical Clarification

These cases are presented as illustrative accounts rather than empirically generalizable case studies based on primary data collection. Their purpose is to demonstrate how structural constraints within Thailand's welfare system contribute to the emergence of alternative care and education arrangements facilitated by religious institutions.

Within the Public Value Management framework, these examples help illustrate how Buddhist temples may function as

informal co-producers of public value in response to gaps in formal welfare governance. At the same time, they also highlight the uneven and context-dependent nature of such arrangements, rather than suggesting a uniform or systematic substitution of state welfare functions.

The Role of Temples as De Facto Welfare Providers

Based on the case materials presented in the previous section, it is evident that child monkhood in Thailand is closely intertwined with broader structural conditions related to poverty, educational access, and the limitations of the formal welfare system. In many contexts, temples appear to function as de facto welfare providers, offering shelter, education, and basic social support to children who may otherwise have limited access to state-provided services. However, this observation should be interpreted with caution, as the available evidence is primarily derived from secondary sources, localized reports, and descriptive case accounts rather than systematically representative national datasets.

From a public administration perspective, this phenomenon can be understood through the concept of non-

bureaucratic service provision, in which non-state actors—such as religious institutions and community organizations—participate in the delivery of social services in response to gaps in formal welfare coverage. Within this arrangement, temples often provide monastic schooling, basic accommodation, and pastoral care for children in need. These functions are not necessarily designed as formal policy mandates but emerge as adaptive responses to local socioeconomic conditions.

At the same time, it is important to avoid overgeneralizing the role of temples across all regions and contexts. The extent and form of welfare-related activities vary significantly depending on local resources, the capacity of individual temples, and the relationship between monastic communities and surrounding populations. Therefore, rather than assuming a uniform “welfare substitution” role, it may be more accurate to conceptualize temples as heterogeneous actors within a broader, uneven welfare ecosystem.

In conclusion, the role of temples as informal welfare providers should be understood as context-dependent and structurally contingent. While they may partially compensate for gaps in state welfare provision in certain areas, their role

should not be interpreted as a formal or systematic replacement for state responsibility. Instead, this phenomenon highlights the fragmented nature of welfare governance and the importance of examining how public value is co-produced across state and non-state institutions under conditions of inequality.

The Outcomes of Child Monkhood

Although child ordination in Thailand reflects underlying structural inequalities and limitations within the welfare system, it may also generate a range of social and developmental outcomes at individual, community, and societal levels. These outcomes should be understood as context-dependent and variably reported, rather than as uniform or directly causal effects of ordination.

1. Individual-Level Outcomes: Educational Access and Personal Development

For some boys from economically disadvantaged households, temporary entry into monastic life provides access to educational opportunities through temple-based schooling

systems, including Pariyatti education programs. In contexts where household resources are limited and access to formal schooling is constrained, temples may function as alternative learning environments that combine basic education with accommodation and subsistence support.

Existing qualitative accounts and institutional reports suggest that such experiences may contribute to the development of discipline, routine, and basic life skills. In some cases, individuals who have experienced monastic education continue their studies in formal education systems after disrobing and later transition into various occupational roles, including education, community work, or public service. However, these trajectories should not be interpreted as universal outcomes, as they are shaped by broader socioeconomic and institutional conditions beyond ordination itself.

2. Community Outcomes: Temples as Centers for Youth Development

At the community level, temples that accommodate novices often function as important social infrastructure in rural areas. Beyond their religious role, such institutions may provide spaces for learning, moral socialization, and community

engagement, particularly in contexts where state welfare services are limited or unevenly distributed.

Monastic institutions in these settings may contribute to maintaining social networks between families, schools, and local communities. Activities such as youth training programs, short-term ordination programs, and community service initiatives are sometimes organized within temple spaces, contributing to forms of informal social cohesion. Nevertheless, the extent and quality of these functions vary significantly across temples and local contexts, depending on available resources and institutional capacity.

3. Societal-Level Outcomes: Moral and Normative Interpretations

At the societal level, child ordination is often interpreted within public discourse as contributing to moral formation and social stability. Such interpretations are frequently rooted in cultural and religious understandings of monastic life as a site of ethical development and value transmission.

Some secondary studies and institutional narratives suggest that participation in monastic life may be associated with increased community attachment or reduced engagement

in risk behaviors. However, these findings should be treated with caution, as they are context-specific and not necessarily generalizable. Rather than indicating direct causal effects, they reflect how monastic institutions are socially perceived as spaces of moral education and structured living.

From a public administration perspective, these perceived outcomes highlight the broader role of non-state institutions in contributing to socialization processes in contexts where formal welfare and youth development systems may be incomplete.

4. Ethical and Policy Interpretation of Outcomes

From a normative standpoint, the outcomes associated with child ordination present an analytical paradox. On one hand, they indicate that religious institutions may partially compensate for gaps in welfare provision by offering education and social support. On the other hand, the reliance on such mechanisms raises concerns regarding structural inequality and the uneven distribution of public services.

In this sense, the observed outcomes should not be interpreted as justification for the continued reliance on child ordination as a welfare substitute. Rather, they point to the

adaptive role of religious institutions within a fragmented welfare system and underscore the need for stronger public policy interventions.

Policy discussions may therefore consider the potential for structured collaboration between state agencies and religious institutions, particularly in areas such as education access, child protection, and youth development. However, such collaboration should be designed in a way that does not normalize economic necessity as a pathway into monastic life.

Ultimately, the outcomes of child ordination should be understood as socially produced and institutionally mediated effects that reflect both the capacities and limitations of Thailand's welfare governance system.

Policy Recommendations and Pathways Toward Sustainability

The phenomenon of child ordination in Thai society reflects a profound imbalance between the potential of religious institutions and the responsibilities of the state in providing social welfare. Ideally, ordination should be a domain of faith and spiritual cultivation. In reality, however, it has become a crucial compensatory mechanism for the deficiencies

of an incomplete welfare system that fails to reach every child equally. Addressing this issue requires a structural reform of Thailand’s welfare regime toward a universal model that guarantees fundamental security for all children.

1. Expanding Universal Welfare and Educational Rights

The state should move beyond targeted assistance for the poor and develop rights-based welfare policies that cover all age groups, particularly in education and social protection. Education must be recognized as a fundamental right—not something to be earned through ordination or religious affiliation. The government should also establish educational shelters for impoverished children through cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development and the National Office of Buddhism, providing families with viable alternatives to ordination as the sole path to opportunity.

Furthermore, legal and administrative mechanisms must be enacted to protect the rights of children within temples, ensuring that ordination is genuinely voluntary and not driven solely by economic necessity.

2. Temples as Policy Partners

Sustainability requires acknowledging temples not as voluntary charities but as policy partners. For generations, temples have served as community welfare centers, offering education, care, and moral guidance. Integrating temples into the formal welfare framework would enhance the state's capacity to deliver services effectively, especially in remote areas.

The government should allocate budgets and resources to temples engaged in child and youth welfare work while developing training programs for monks in child psychology and social management. This would allow monks to function as professional social service providers, operating with both compassion and administrative competence.

3. Building Welfare Networks Across Sectors

Another crucial step is fostering collaborative networks among temples, schools, and public agencies. Temples should be recognized as part of the welfare infrastructure—not merely as spaces of faith, but as a spiritual public sector capable of promoting social justice and youth development. Supporting temples as policy partners should go beyond financial aid; it must represent a reaffirmation of cooperative governance

among the state, religion, and society to build equitable opportunities for all children.

4. Reframing Child Ordination Through Human Rights

A sustainable solution also requires a new understanding of child ordination through the lens of human rights and child dignity. It should be valued as a cultural-spiritual practice, not a tool for poverty alleviation. Future policies must distinguish between faith-based ordination and economic ordination to prevent the temple from unintentionally reinforcing structural inequality. Public awareness of children's rights to choose and to access education outside the temple should therefore become a national child protection priority.

5. Institutional Strengthening and Data Systems

Structurally, the state should establish a national database to monitor and assess children living and studying in temples, such as a centralized registry of novices and Pariyatti school students. This system would enable evidence-based policymaking in education and welfare planning. Collaboration between temples, civil society, and local universities should also be encouraged to enhance children's wellbeing—covering health, vocational guidance, and reintegration into secular life with dignity.

6. Shifting Social Perceptions

Sustainability depends not only on institutional reform but also on social attitude transformation. Child monks should not be viewed merely as recipients of charity but as emerging citizens with potential for growth and self-development. Public communication and media thus play a crucial role in reshaping perceptions of temples as informal welfare providers and of ordained children as seekers of opportunity rather than symbols of poverty. Awareness campaigns—through exhibitions, documentaries, and creative youth programs—can help humanize and deepen public understanding of the complex realities of child ordination.

7. Toward a Cultural Welfare Model

Ultimately, building a sustainable and equitable welfare system requires multi-sectoral collaboration among the state, religious institutions, the private sector, and civil society. Such a network not only enhances resource efficiency but also promotes mutual learning among institutions involved in child protection. If the state can create a policy framework that welcomes temples as social partners—and if temples can align their internal practices with human rights and child protection

standards—Thailand may advance toward a new cultural welfare model: a welfare system rooted in compassion, equity, and the moral capital of its own traditions.

Conclusion

This study examines child ordination in Thailand as a phenomenon that is embedded within broader structural conditions of inequality and uneven welfare provision. Rather than interpreting child monkhood solely as a religious practice or individual decision, the analysis situates it within the context of welfare governance, in which Buddhist temples may partially function as informal providers of education, shelter, and social support in areas where state services remain limited or fragmented.

From a public administration perspective, the findings highlight the importance of understanding public value as a distributed and co-produced outcome across both state and non-state actors. In contexts where formal welfare systems do not fully reach vulnerable populations, religious institutions may play a supplementary role in addressing immediate social needs. However, this role remains context-dependent and

should not be interpreted as a substitute for institutionalized state responsibility.

The analysis further suggests that children's entry into monastic life should be understood in relation to constrained opportunity structures rather than as a fully voluntary exercise of religious choice. Drawing on political ethics and capability-based perspectives, the study emphasizes that meaningful choice is contingent upon access to basic social and economic conditions, particularly in education and child welfare.

At the same time, the outcomes associated with child ordination should be interpreted cautiously, as they are shaped by diverse and context-specific factors. While monastic institutions may contribute to education and social development in certain settings, these outcomes are not uniform and should not be generalized as inherent effects of ordination itself.

Overall, the study argues that child monkhood reflects both the adaptive capacities and structural limitations of Thailand's welfare governance system. It points to the need for strengthening institutional welfare provision and developing more systematic forms of collaboration between state and

religious actors. Such collaboration, however, should be designed to support child welfare directly rather than normalize reliance on ordination as a response to socioeconomic disadvantage.

In conclusion, ensuring equitable access to education, care, and basic social protection remains a central policy challenge. Addressing this challenge requires not only expanding welfare coverage but also clarifying the respective roles of state and non-state institutions in the co-production of public value, so that religious institutions may return primarily to their intended spiritual and cultural functions.

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