

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of the Problem.

The status of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam has changed over the years, and the Bhikkhunīs have always shared the fate of the Vietnam nation and people. They have strived their best to serve the society. The status of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam society has become more vivid. They are devoted to the spreading of the Dharma, opening Buddhist schools for Bhikkhunīs, teaching, publishing, translating books, Buddhist activities within the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha. They also participate in many social works and establishing charitable organizations to promote the social development.

The social development, according to the Buddha's teaching, occupies a prominent place in Buddhist practice. The "social development" is defined here as "promoting people's welfare"¹ which is central to the Buddhist practice. To follow Buddhism means to walk in the path of self-liberation, and to promote the welfare of all people with kindness and compassion. The central concept of Buddhism is to develop well-being of all living beings and help them to overcome sufferings.

¹ The readers should keep in mind that the definition of 'social development' has been defined in many ways in many different fields such as: psychology, sociology, social work, development studies, and so forth. A deep and thorough reflection of various concepts or definitions of 'social development' of various disciplines is beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, the definition or concept of 'social development' used in research is 'promoting people's welfare' as defined by James Midgley, **Social Development: The Development Perspective in Social Welfare**, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1995), p. 13.

Based on this formula, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha is engaging in the society for the welfare of many people.²

The Buddha's life is one of the most notable examples of social engagement. The Buddha himself worked for the welfare of all living beings, an effort that began after enlightenment and persisted to the end of his life (Nibbāna). During the time of his long social engagement, he strove tirelessly to promote mankind and taught diverse subjects for the welfare of all people.³ The Buddha and his Saṅgha worked diligently for the welfare of society and for the happiness of all people.

Following the example of the Buddha and his Saṅgha, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunīs also reach out to people. They have built schools, hospitals, orphanages, and shelters for the old and disabled.⁴ Moreover, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha is taking part in the following activities: (1) promoting people's moral and spiritual development for a happy, peaceful and contented life; (2) teaching economic welfare as a requisite for human comfort; (3) social philanthropy; (4) social activities.⁵ After all, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha are benefiting the societies

² The Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee. **Document Conference the Summary Record of Buddhist Activities in 2015 of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee**, (Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City Religious Publication, 2009), p. 13.

³ K. Sri Dhammananda, **What Buddhists Believe: Expanded 4th Edition**, (Kuala Lumpur, Buddhist Missionary Society, 2002), pp. 185-187.

⁴ Thich Nu Nhu Duc, **A Brief History of the Vietnam Mahāyāna Bhikkhunī Sangha**, (Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City Religious Publication, 2009), p. 237. See also: The Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee, **The Summary Record Present Ceremony of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee, Term VI (2007-2012)**, (Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City Religious Publication, 2009), p. 55.

⁵ For this comment as evidence see the following books. Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang, **Engaged Buddhism and Development**, (Ho Chi Minh City: Culture and Information Publisher, 2008), pp. 23-32.

in which they live. They have involved in social development issues such as the education, health, social welfare, social harmony, and so on.

With that spirit, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha has always been highly esteemed by the Vietnamese people. They are the models of virtue and compassion for the people in society. Their activities related to work for the social welfare are praised and respected. However, people does not really appreciate their management activities, even after they have done lots of social works. Therefore, as a Vietnamese Bhikkhunī studies in the Buddhist field, the researcher realizes that there are many books, magazines, and journals about Bhikkhu Saṅgha but not Bhikkhunī. So, I, the researcher, am researching this field of study. There are many reasons for the researcher to perform this dissertation. The main reasons are following:

Firstly, although, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha has been worked much for Vietnamese Buddhism and society. But there is a rare book or magazine has memorable writing about it.

Secondly, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha's establishment is an important event of Bhikkhunīs. The activities consist of 26,500 Bhikkhunīs who provide services to the Vietnamese Buddhism and society. Nevertheless, everyone does not know those activities.

Therefore, the dissertation addresses various aspects and problems relating to the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha as the history of establishment, Buddhist and social activities, and proposing the perfect activities instead of failure activities for future. By doing so, the researcher found out the workable solutions that can be applied by the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

1.2 Objectives of the Research.

1.2.1 To study the history of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

1.2.2 To study the status and role of Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

1.2.3 To propose the working model of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

1.3 Research Questions.

1.3.1 What is the history of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha?

1.3.2 What are status and role of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development?

1.3.3 What propose the working model of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development?

1.4 Scope of the Research.

The scope of the dissertation will be focused on the status and role of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. The following scopes will be discussed as follows:

1.4.1 Scope of the Contents:

Firstly, the study will focus on the history of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

Secondly, this study will focus on status and role of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

Thirdly, this study will focus on proposing the working model of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

1.4.2 Scope of the Population:

The proposing of this study is three hundred thirty Bhikkhunīs who are abbess, vice-abbess and ordinary nuns live at the Bhikkhunīs temples in Vietnam.

1.4.3 Scope of the Sample:

This study is a kind of qualitative research. Qualitative research is the researcher will invite ten people as key informants. The ten people are: four Bhikkhus, four Bhikkhunīs, and two lay Buddhists.

1.4.4 Scope of the Area:

This study will only focus on the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha temples in Vietnam such as: three temples in Ho Chi Minh City, two at An Giang province and Vietnamese Bhikkhunīs who are studding at Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalay University.

1.4.5 Scope of the Timetable:

The schedule of the research will be started from the beginning of December 2014 and ended around December 2016.

1.4.6 Scope of the Sources:

This study will collect information from books, documents, theses, articles, newspapers, journals, reports, pictures which relate to the contents of the status and role of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. Moreover, the study also collects information from the interview with ten people who are Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs and lay Buddhists.

1.5 Definitions of the Terms Used in the Research.

1.5.1 Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha means Buddhist monastic order of the female clergies (Bhikkhunīs) in Vietnam.

1.5.2 Status and role means the position of Bhikkhunīs in Vietnamese society and the effect of working activities of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha to the development of society.

1.5.3 Social development means the promotion of human welfare.

1.6 Review of Related Literature.

1.6.1 Thich Tri Quang wrote another book entitled “*Engaged Buddhism and Development*”.⁶ This book contains information regarding the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha. The author includes the following chapters: “Buddhism and Vietnamese people,” “Buddhist education,” and “the activities of Vietnamese Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunīs on social works for the welfare of Vietnamese people.” In addition, this book included details about (1) the plan of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha in social development, (2) the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha has worked out the direction for activities and development benefit for the Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, and disciples, (3) the contribution of the Vietnamese Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs, and disciples to the social development. This book is very useful for this research.

1.6.2 Member of the VBSCS wrote another book entitled “*The Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee in 2015*.”⁷ The authors of this book said, “The Buddhist activities and social activities of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha are based on the spirit of harmony and solidarity.” The authors went on to say, “The development of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha is from the efforts and the determination of individuals in the Bhikkhunīs community.” In addition, this book’s content consists of (1) the report of the activity of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha subcommittee in different provinces, (2) the difficulties and advantages of the activities of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha subcommittee, (3) a general report about the current situation of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, (4) the Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha Central Subcommittee’s planned orientation activities, (5) the departments’ reports of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha subcommittees, and (6) a general summary of the activities of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee. The book can be

⁶ Thich Tri Quang, **Engaged Buddhism and Development**, (Ho Chi Minh City: Culture and Information Publisher, 2008), p. 59.

⁷ The Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Sangha Central Subcommittee, **The Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee in 2015**, (Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City Publication, 2015).

summarized as a composite of Buddhist activities, social activities, development, report of activity results, difficulties and advantages, current situations, orientation activities, and a general summary. The information from this book is related to this dissertation.

1.6.3 Thich Nu Nhu Duc wrote a book entitled “*A Brief History of the Vietnam Mahāyāna Bhikkhunī Saṅgha*”.⁸ This book contains information regarding the activities of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. The author noted that “the activities of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha always conform to the specific situation of the country and the people’s lives.” He also writes “the central education and practice for the Bhikkhunīs in Vietnam are towards the stage of the development”. In addition, this book included details about (1) the brief history of Vietnamese Bhikkhunīs, (2) the establishment of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, (3) the development of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, (4) the Bhikkhunī’s laws, and (5) the Bhikkhunī’s in modern times. The book can be summarized as a guide that explains the Vietnamese Bhikkhunīs’ Saṅgha activities, education, brief history, establishment, development, and laws. This is essential information for the study of the status and roles of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. It can be acknowledged that this book is very useful for this research.

1.6.4 Members of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee [VBSCS] wrote a book entitled “*The Summary Record of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee*”.⁹ The purpose of this book is to “provide reports of the Bhikkhunī activities and information about the proposed plans of the forthcoming activities of the

⁸ Thich Nu Nhu Duc, **A Brief History of the Vietnam Mahāyāna Bhikkhunī Saṅgha**, (Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City Religious Publication, 2009), p. 160.

⁹ The Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Sangha Central Subcommittee, **The Summary Record of the Central Subcommittee Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, Term VI (2007-2012)**, (Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City Religious Publication, 2009), p. 15.

Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.”¹⁰ The activities included in the book are positive activities and the contributions of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. In addition, this book’s content consists of (1) the Bhikkhunīs’s activities in the North, Central, and South of Vietnam, (2) reports about situation of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in different provinces, (3) the personnel composition of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee, (4) the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha Central Subcommittee rules, (5) the Bhikkhunīs’s subcommittee reports about the activity results of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, (6) the process of the formation and development of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, (7) the preaching of today, and (8) the representative speeches for the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Mahāyāna tradition, the Vietnamese Bhikkhunīs Mendicant tradition, and the Vietnamese Nuns Theravāda tradition. The book can be summarized as a composite of activities, contributions, personnel composition, by-laws, and a report of activity results, formation, development, preaching, and speeches. The information in this book is useful for the topic.

To sum up, all of the aforementioned written works included research about the “contribution,” “activities,” and development of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. However, none of the books included studies about the present “model.” Therefore, this present work will provide knowledge about the working model of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

1.7 Method of Research:

This study is a qualitative method based on the textual research, observing, interview and so on. It will be developed based on the following methods:

1.7.1 Research Design:

This study is a kind of qualitative method in nature. The researcher will collect information from ten key informants who are

¹⁰ The Central Subcommittee Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Sangha, op. cit, p. 20.

Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs and lay Buddhists living at MCU and five temples in Vietnam.

1.7.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The study will collection information from ten key informants to know the status and role of Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development as ten key informants who are understanding of Bhikkhuī's situation in Vietnam, of which four Bhikkhus, four Bhikkhunīs and two lay Buddhists.

1.7.3 Methods of Data Collection

The study collects information from primary data and secondary data.

1) Primary Data: this data will directly collect the information from ten key informants of Bhikkhus, Bhikkhunīs and lay Buddhists at MCU and Vietnam. The researcher will interview the ten key informants who know the status and role of Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development by in-depth interview.

2) Secondary Data: this study will collect information from educational articles, magazines, research studies, websites, journal and internet sources which related to the status and role of Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

1.7.4 Tools of Data Collection

The study is a kind of qualitative method. So, the researcher will use the research tool of in-depth interview to understand more the status and role of Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

1.7.5 Analysis of Data

The researcher analyzes the data of the ten key informants from the in-depth interview at MCU and Vietnam.

1.8 Expected Benefits.

By the end of this study, the benefits or outcomes of the dissertation could be:

1.8.1 Having a greater knowledge of the history of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha.

1.8.2 Gaining more knowledge about the status and roles of Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Sangha in social development.

1.8.3 Gaining a clearer understanding of the working model of the Vietnamese Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in social development.

1.8.4 This research can serve as the grand for making policy so that Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Vietnam can realize their status and role relating Vietnamese society. Furthermore, this research can paw the way to the development of Bhikkhunī Saṅgha quality of life.