

Thailand should make it illegal for monks to own private properties

“Whatever precious jewel there is in the heavenly worlds, there is nothing comparable to one who is Awakened” was told by Buddha 2,500 years ago. However, thus, seem to be absent from Thai buddhism. Thailand is the place where Buddhism flourished in the most cultivated way. The temples in Thailand were attractively decorated, exquisitely coloured and dramatically assembled. William P stated on "The Society and Its Environment" that the history of Buddhism in Thailand roots back in 13th century when Theravada Buddhism was made the state religion along with the establishment of the Sukhothai Kingdom. It was uncommonly repeated in 19th century where King Mongkut came to the power in 1851. The king himself had been a monk for 27 years (Library of Congress, 2013). As a consequence, Buddhism in Thailand became more steadily, more centralised and more institutionalised. The result is Buddhism in Thailand indistinctly settled down in the Thai profound history. It can be contended that Thai people was married off to Buddhism ever since. However, Washington Post on Hardliner “tries to reform Thailand’s Buddhist monks behaving badly” wrote: “handling between US\$3–3.6 billion yearly in donations, mostly untraceable cash, with over 38,000 temples, populated by 300,000 monks, Thai Buddhism are easily targeted for corruption” (The Guardian, May 2015). It is common to read extreme story of misbehaviour of Buddhist monks in the Thai media. Such scandals captured the whole nation attention. It created controversial among Thai people. There is public criticism that Thai Buddhism became more business like in which it supposes to help people ending suffering and to guide people discovering true peace within. People are more increasingly talking about the abolition of monks owning private properties. They argued that without solid regulation in the Buddhism constitution in Thailand, it will leave a void for the greedy to take advantage from the monk privilege. Therefore, it can be concluded that Thai government must make it illegal for monks to own private properties.

First, with un-solid regulation in religion section, combine with a little understanding of real Buddha teaching of Thai people, Buddhism in Thailand becomes one of the most profitable business that allows the capitalist to make a living on Thai belief. For example, a famous monk, Luang Pu Nen Kham Chattiko. South China Morning Post wrote: “Luang Pu Nen Kham was photographed in July 2013 wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses, holding a Louis Vuitton bag full of US dollars, and was later found to be a trafficker of

methamphetamines, an abuser of women and the lover of a pregnant 14-year-old" (Post Magazine, 2015). Luang Pu Nen Kham is known as Thailand's jet-setting fugitive monk, his bizarre story amazed the whole country with daily headlines of lavish excess, promiscuity and alleged crimes. Jocelyn Gecker of Associated Press wrote: "Thailand's Anti-Money Laundering Office has discovered 41 bank accounts linked to the ex-monk. Several of the accounts kept about 200 million baht (\$6.4 million) in constant circulation, raising suspicion of money laundering. Investigators also suspect that Wirapol killed a man in a hit-and-run accident while driving a Volvo late at night three years ago." "It remains stunning how much Wirapol did get away with. During a shopping spree from 2009 to 2011, Wirapol bought 22 Mercedes worth 95 million baht (\$3.1 million), according to the DSI. The fleet of luxury cars were among 70 vehicles he has purchased. Pong-in said. "Luxury travel for the monk included helicopters and private jets for trips between the northeast and Bangkok. "I always wondered what kind of monk has this much money," said one of his regular pilots, Piya Tregalnon. Each domestic roundtrip cost about 300,000 baht (\$10,000) and the monk always paid in cash, he said in comments posted on Facebook". This shows that how much Thai Buddhists are willing to do for their prophet. This kind of dedication for their belief comes in the most exclusive way. It creates money worship culture that if you give enough money, you will go to heaven. However, this kind of culture is basically against the real Buddhism teaching. The kind of 'selling-virtue' has created unusual contemporary culture that is linked to capitalism. The temple in Thailand becomes, as it compares, like a business. It becomes one of the most profitable business because it plays with people belief. By banning monk to own private properties, it can prevent greedy people who do not really want to learn Buddhism but rather seek for their own interest to exploit religion constitution in Thailand.

Second, Temples allow monks to avoid money inspection from the authority, which led to the chance of corruption in Buddhism constitution. For example, Phra Dhammachayo. This temple is known as one of the most famous alternative Buddhism doctrine in Thailand. It is seen as a very rich temple with many rich followers. Many members of the temple donate extraordinary huge amount of money to this place each years. It created public criticism that many people believe that this temple involves with money laundering service for its member. Even the authority could not inspect the donation money due to its complexity of money tracking. However, Bangkok post wrote: "In March, the temple faces

theft, money laundering charges. The DSI says founder Phra Dhammachayo of Wat Dhammakaya was directly involved in use of embezzled funds, part of which went to new buildings. Over 1.2 billion baht in cheques paid to Wat Dhammakaya monks and nuns indicates collusion to siphon off money from credit union, DSI believes. In March, the DSI revealed it had investigated 878 cheques worth 11.3 billion baht paid by the credit union and authorised by Mr Supachai. Of these cheques, 43 were worth 932 million baht and were paid to Wat Phra Dhammakaya and its monks, including abbot Phra Dhammachayo. In addition, 27 cheques worth 348 million baht were paid to temple followers with close ties to Mr Supachai. This included 12 cheques worth 272 million baht paid to ex-Wat Phra Dhammakaya monk Sataporn Wattanasirikul and his SW Holding Group, and three worth 46 million baht paid to the Mongkol Setthi Credit Union Cooperative, which was founded by Mr Supachai" (June 2015). This lawsuit is just one example of how religion organisation capable of. In reality, there are many of hundred of temples in Thailand that many Thai seem to be respect and willing to show it at any prices. This is probably good if only those temples do not have greedy people concealed within. As a result, Thai monks were allowed to involve in transaction which increased chance for monks to violate the Buddhism rules. There is no need for monks to involve with money in Buddha teaching. Abolishing the rights to own properties for monks not only decreases the chance of corrupting in temple, but it also shows the intension of people who really want to sacrifice their secular happiness for peace within. It will show how idealistic monks should be according to Buddhism.

However, some people debated that by abolishing the rights for monks to own private properties, there will no people who want to be a monk because it makes their life much more difficult in today world to live without money. If there is something beyond their control happened someday, it would be very risk for them. But it can be argued that, it is the way of how monk should be. Nowadays, there are many corrupted monks who lived in the temple just because it is free. Many thief, the greedy, the lazy became a monk because it is the easiest way for them to take free money from believers. But if the rights to own private properties was abolished, there would be no point for them to have money because they can not buy anything that belong to them. They will not have a chance to corrupt over 1,800 bath worth of money. They will not be able to have private-jet. They will not be able to receive 878 cheques worth 11.3 billion baht. Even the reality is more complex than that, but it can be

argued, abolishing the rights to own private properties for monks is the good way to start reforming such a corrupted constitution and the great way to make Thai Buddhism back to the real traditional Buddhism, again.

In conclusion, there are many reasons for Thai government to make it illegal for monks to own private properties. Not only it would decrease the chance of corruption in Buddhism organisation but it would also lead to the true Buddhism and, hopefully, would make Thai people see the precious of Awaking rather than the jewel in this heavenly world.

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