

**BUDDHISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS: FOREST MONKS'  
PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND THE SANGHA ADMINISTRATION**

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The Thai Buddhist order also known as the *Sangha* has experienced many challenges resulting from modernization of the Thai state. The most challenging, were the several attempts conducted by the state to reform Buddhism which raised concerns regarding the human rights of local Buddhist traditions. To this study, the forest tudong tradition has become the study focus, towards understanding in terms of human rights, the impacts by the State on the Sangha. Looking at the impacts from a human rights perspective involves an inquiry into forest monks' perspectives on human rights and moreover, perspectives on the Sangha administration.

The study employs an anthropological approach, and relies on the use of semi-structured interviewing of key informants combined with direct participant observation. It was discovered that Tudong monks conceive the world around them through two opposing worldviews or paradigms that are at times in conflict; 1) Buddhist paradigm and 2) secularism. In effect, human rights are understood through the prior cultural model as a secular concept that attempts to alleviate human suffering at the conventional level. However, analysis shows that underlying values and principles in human rights and Buddhism are fundamentally the same in that both progress towards the cessation of human suffering.

Forest Tudong monks perceive the administrative body as having a responsibility to protect the Sangha by means that ensures the preservation of local traditions. Findings of the thesis however, clearly display how the Sangha administration functions as an extension of the state; hence it has an agenda to serve the state rather than the Sangha. As a result, policies of the administration are geared towards centralization and control, consequently having an impact on the cultural rights of diverse local traditions, the right to freedom of movement of Buddhist monks, the right to self-determination and also questioning the manner in which freedom to religion is expressed.

**KEY WORDS: FOREST MONKS / HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVES / SANGHA ADMINISTRATION / IMPACT**

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