
BUDDHISM AND AN AGEING SOCIETY IN THAILAND AS A PART OF SUVARNABHUMI LAND

S o m b o o n W a t a n a

Introduction

In terms of history, since more than 2000 years ago, *Suvarnabhumi* land has referred to what is now Southeast Asia. Buddhism was first propagated in this region around the third Buddhist era, especially in some parts of Thailand and Myanmar, by the eighth line of Buddhist missionaries led by the Indian Buddhist monks named Sona and Uttara, which was supported by King Asoka, the Great. In terms of *Suvarnabhumi* land in part of Thailand, history talks of the acceptance of Buddhism since the early third Buddhist era. Nakhon Pathom City and Uthong City, Suphan Buri province, Thailand, were the evidence concerning Buddhism found by the scholars. From that era to the present day, when the city was stronger and stabilized, there have been many kingdoms, and the kings became leaders. From the Dvaravadee kingdom from the 1st to the 11th century, from the Srivijaya kingdom from the 6th to the 13th century, from the Lop Buri Kingdom from the 9th to the 13th century, from the Sukhothai Kingdom from the 13th to the 15th century, from the Lanna Kingdom from the 14th to the 17th century, from the Ayudhaya Kingdom in 1350-1767 C.E., from the Thonburi Kingdom in 1767-1782 C.E., and from the Ratanakosin Kingdom from 1782 C.E. to the present, Buddhism has been the main religion and has contributed to Thai society constantly. Here, the teaching of Buddhism has been propagated, interpreted and applied in

the religious, societal, economic, cultural and individual dimensions for the sake of the well-being of the people. Consequently, in the present century, one global issue is an ageing society. Thailand has already become an ageing society, and Buddhism has been interpreted and applied to solve this issue.

In the earlier 21st century, the ageing population has shown a continuing upward trend. According to a report by the United Nations Population Fund in 2012, 2 people are celebrating their 60th birthday every second, and in a year, there are about 58 million new elderly people around the world. Consequently, the one in nine people in the world aged 60 years or more is predicted to increase to one in five by 2050.¹ The global population aged 60 years or more was 962 million in 2017, which was more than twice as large as in 1980 when there were 382 million elderly people globally.² The ageing population globally is predicted to reach over 1.5 billion in 2050.³

Thailand defined the “elderly” (or senior citizens) in 2003 in the “Elderly Person Act 2003” as a person who is aged 60 years or over and has Thai nationality.⁴ Thailand has been an ageing society since the year 2006 when the population aged 60+ years reached 10.4 %, and was about become an aged society in 2021 due to the number of the ageing population reaching 13 million or 20% of the country’s population.⁵ The impact of this change in the population structure, if it is not prepared for effectively, will lead to other consequences, such as affecting

¹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and A Challenge* (New York, and HelpAge International, London, 2012), 12, <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Ageing%20report.pdf>.

² United Nations, *World Population Ageing 2017 Highlights* (New York: United Nations Publication, 2017), 1, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017_Highlights.pdf.

³ United Nations, *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights* (New York: United Nations Publication, 2020), 1, https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesd_pd-2020_world_population_ageing_highlights.pdf.

⁴ Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University and Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute (TGRI), *Situation of the Thai Elderly 2017* (Bangkok: Deuan Tula Printing House, 2019), 14, <http://www.dop.go.th/download/knowledge/th1552463947-147-1.pdf>.

⁵ Department of Elderly Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand, *Measures to Drive the National Agenda on Aging Society (Revised Version)* (Bangkok: Amarintara, 2019), 8.

society, the economy and the allocation of resources in the future. The number of people in the labour age groups will be reduced, which will affect the country's gross development production. Meanwhile, the allocation of resources for age-related caregiving in the country will increase and will affect the economic and social stability of the country in the long term. It will also significantly affect the country's budget burden as the state will have to allocate the tax money of working people to welfare for caregiving. The higher proportion of the ageing population will influence the government to use more of the budget for age-related caregiving. This situation may affect the long-term fiscal stability of the country.

Due to the complete transition into an ageing society, the Thai government has prepared to face this challenge in many areas such as the country's policy and the national government's responsible department, etc. The government has established policies and plans to support the ageing society in both the National Economic and Social Development Plans. These plans have a concrete and clear vision to develop the quality of life of the population in the ageing society so that every member of the Thai population is born into a quality environment that is developed at all ages, which can be a powerful driver for the growth of the country with stable security. Following this agenda, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security has established strategic issues to lead the practice.⁶ In spite of the efforts of many such sectors, better quality age-related caregiving is needed. This does not only require physical factors such as budget, accommodation and government policy – no less important is a philosophy or concept of caregiving for ageing people, because this is an important factor that will lead to the real goal of quality caregiving for the ageing population. Thai society is a Buddhist society because about 93.5% of the population believes in Buddhism.⁷ Elderly people would be familiar with a

⁶ Department of Elderly Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand, *The Strategic Plan of the Department of Elderly Affairs 20s, BE 2561-2580* (Bangkok: Samlada, 2018).

⁷ National Statistical Office, *Social, Cultural and Mental Health Conditions 2018*, accessed November 3, 2022, <http://www.nso.go.th/sites/2014/DocLib14/News/2561/09-61/N21-09-61-1.pdf>.

way of life that is close to Buddhism as their religious capital. Buddhism has been deeply rooted in Thai society for thousands of years since the age of Suvarnabhumi where Thailand is now located. It has made many contributions to Thai society in terms of teachings about living, education, arts, culture, traditions and beliefs, as well as the aspect of buildings such as temples, Buddha images, pagodas, etc. Hence, in this paper, the Buddha's teaching about age-related caregiving in the case of parents in the Pāli Canon and the research papers of Thai scholars, as well as the Buddhism project for ageing people, will be interpreted and applied to propose alternative age-related caregiving that is suitable for the well-being of the ageing Buddhist Thai society.

The concept of Ageing People in Buddhism

The Meaning of Ageing People in Buddhism

The term “ageing people” refers to the term “*Phusungaāyu*” in Thai, which was first enacted in Thailand in 1962 by Maj. Gen. Luang At-tasitthi Sitthisunthorn.⁸ The terms “*Phusungaāyu*” and “*Phusungwai*” in Thai indicate the number of people that are older counting the age from birth (Chronological age) and who are generally referred to as “*Konkae* or *Konjarā* (old person).” The Office of the Royal Society, BE 2554 (2011), gives the meaning of the word “*Kae* (old)” as having more age or being of old age, and gives the meaning of the word “*Jarā* (old)” as old with age and worn out.⁹ In Buddhism, there is no word “*Phusungaāyu*” directly, but there is a word in Pāli, “*Jarā* (old)”, which, in Thai, means, *Kae* (aged), *Koaw* (old) and *Kramkra* (mature). The dictionary of the Royal Institute, B.E. 2546 (2003 C.E.), used all these words to give the meaning of “*Phusungaāyu* (ageing person).” In Buddhism, the word “*Jarā*” appears in the scriptures as the Buddha said, “Oh! Monks, what is *Jarā* (old) ... (it) is the condition of old teeth, falling grey hair, the age of decline, the old age of human beings and

⁸ The Royal Institute, *Definition of Elderly, Dictionary of the Royal Institute 2003* (Bangkok: Nanmee Books Public Class, 2003), 347.

⁹ Puangthong Kraiphikul, “Older Person,” accessed December 9, 2021, <http://haamor.com/th>.

all other beings, this is called “*Jarā* (old age).”¹⁰ The ageing of human beings and other sentient beings means the deterioration of the various components i.e., physicality and the potentiality related to that physicality, such as vision, listening, movement, etc., which has the meaning of “the old age of *Indriya* (the faculties),” with the word “*Indriya*” also meaning the ability of the body and behaviour related to the body and the mind. *Indriya* is great in their duties, such as the ears (*Sotindriya*) that are responsible for listening and the eyes that are responsible for seeing. Each part has a different duty or function in its way, so it is called “*Indriya*”.¹¹ Therefore, the ageing person is old. An ageing person experiences their physical ability and behaviour related to the body diminishing compared to a younger age.¹² There are many definitions of an ageing person given by many organizations according to the language of their own countries. However, all the definitions mean a person who enters old age and maturity.

In terms of the importance of elderly people in Buddhism, stories talk of the importance of ageing people who have maintained Buddhism. In the Buddhist scriptures, there are many stories of elderly people who are important in preserving Buddhism in various fields, as in the following example:

An Anāthapindhika millionaire has been praised by the Buddha as being a great Buddhist disciple in giving alms. He has achieved *Dharma* and proclaimed himself as a worshiper. He donated a lot of property, built 54 temples in *Rajgirh* town to *Savatthi*, and regularly offered food to 2,000 monks per day. He also established the first monastery called *Chetavana* for the Buddha.

The Chivakakomarabhacca (medical doctor) was a physician of the Buddha and other monks as ordered by *Bimpisala*, the King of *Magada* state. In addition, king *Bimpisala* appointed Chivakakomarabhacca as

¹⁰ Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage, *Tripitaka, and Commentary 91 Books the 200th Anniversary of the Chakri Dynasty Rattanakosin* (Bangkok: Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage, 2003), vol. 26, 92.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 17, 117.

¹² Somboon Watana, “Concept of Elderly Care in Theravada Buddhism,” *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences Burapha University* 24, no. 44 (2016): 173-193, <https://soo6.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/husojournal/article/view/55972/46738>.

a regular doctor. Chivakakomarabhacca gave special treatment to the Buddha 2 times. The first time, he prepared a special laxative to drain the accumulated things in the body of the Buddha, and the second time when Phradevadatta rolled a stone to kill the Lord Buddha, fragments of which struck his feet causing them to bleed, he made a healing medicine. Chivakakomorabhacca also provided treatment for monks who were ill with various diseases without charge.

In addition, there are many shreds of evidence indicating the beneficence of elderly people in the Buddha's time in the scriptures and that the Buddha has praised many people who have contributed to Buddhism, for example, Mrs. Khushchutara, Mrs. Samāvati, Mrs. Uttaranundā, Mrs. Supavasakoliyadhītā, Mrs. Supipiyā, and Mrs. Katiyāni.¹³ Ashoka, the Great King, maintained Buddhism and propagated Buddhism to various lands in India and other countries, helping it spread throughout the world today.

Examples of various people who uphold Buddhism show that those people in the Buddha's time and later, such as the kings and wealthy persons, young and old, inherited Buddhism till the end of their own lives. These cases were only partly presented in this work. Many other cases show the importance of elderly people who have contributed to the succession of Buddhism.

In the Buddha's time, there was no issue of an ageing society. However, in this paper, the author will take the case of the parents as described in the *Pāli* canon as ageing people, since parents imply ageing people because it can be assumed that generally all parents live to old age and all ageing people are parents till the end of their lives.

Apart from assigning importance to elderly people as mentioned above, Buddhism shows the importance of elderly people as the parents of sons and daughters. In Buddhism, ageing people as parents are important to their children and daughters because they give birth, and give favours to their children. Ageing people as parents have a love and compassion for their children, which is pure and a difficult thing to

¹³ Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage, *Tripitaka and Commentary 91 Books the 200th Anniversary of the Chakri Dynasty Rattanakosin* (Bangkok: Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage, 2003), vol. 33, 152.

have for as many people as possible. The Buddhist scriptures spoke of the importance of ageing people as the parents of sons and daughters in many places, which can be summarised in the following sections.

Importance of Ageing People in Buddhism

Buddhism mentions that the birth of sons and daughters in the present life must rely on three important factors, one of them being the relationship between the mother and father. As the Buddha said in *Mahātanhasaṅkhaṃsuttā*, because of the meeting of the 3 factors, namely, 1) the mother and father live together 2) the mothers are of reproductive age, and 3) there is *Gaṇḍabbo* (Citta (mind) at the moment of birth in the human world) or the birth of the baby in this human world. After that, the mother keeps the baby for nine or ten months, then the mother gives birth to a burdensome baby with a lot of risks and fed the heavy burdens that were born with their blood and a risk to life itself.¹⁴

The Buddhist scriptures have shown the importance of the parents as high moral people who were well-regarded in the Buddha's time. The Buddha has praised parents as the *Bhraman*, the first angel, the first teacher, etc. of sons and daughters.¹⁵ Based on the above evidence, it can be concluded that Buddhism gave honour praising parents as equivalent to the highest people because they have supported sons and daughters. Buddhism glorifies, praises and honours the parents of sons and daughters. If any son or daughter does not give importance to parents and are ungrateful, their hearts are rough and are unable to develop themselves to have good morals and ethics. Buddhism praises the grateful person as the symbol of a good person, as the Buddha said that a *Sattapurisa* (good person) would be grateful. They are grateful people and they all are praised by the *Sattapurisa* (good person). Gratefulness is a basic aspect of a good person ...¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 19, 452.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 45, 286.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 33, 277.

An Interpretation and Application of Buddhism for the Well-Being
of Ageing People in the Ageing Society in Thailand as a Part of
Suvarnabhumi

According to the perspective of Buddhism, ageing people are not a problem of society, they are long social contributors, long-life experts, and a storehouse of knowledge. Therefore, the elderly should be taken care of by the younger generation, and the younger generation should give praise and learn long life experiences from them to develop our society as well.

Obviously, in the Buddha's time, there was no issue with an ageing society. This paper will take the case of parent caregiving by sons and daughters as described in the *Pāli* canon concept. Here, parents' caregiving implies elderly caregiving because it can be assumed that generally all parents live to old age and all ageing people are parents till the end of their lives. Hence, the Buddhist concept of caregiving for parents or the elderly will be pointed out here. According to the Buddhist philosophy, through ontological analysis, man consists of mind and body (*Rupa*, *Kāya* (corporeality) and *Nāma*, *Citta* (mentality)), which are not duality and not identity but are both in a state of becoming and cooperating under the law of Buddhist causation (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*), as supported by Chien-Te Lin (2013), who said that the Buddhist position could perhaps be best described as a middle way approach of 'neither-duality-nor-identity.' And what is called "man", according to Buddhism, can be classified in more detail as *Pancakhandha* (Five Aggregates), namely, 1) corporeality, 2) sensation, 3) recognition, 4) mental formation and 5) consciousness. A person who consists of these five aggregates must be developed and cared for according to these five aggregates (or in brief, *Rupa*, and *Nāma*). For age-related caregiving, in Buddhism, corporeal caregiving and mentality caregiving should be taken in balance.

According to Buddhism, human beings are components of the body and mind, or *Rūpa* and *Nāma* in the Buddhist language, which are composed of 5 aggregates, namely the *Rūpa* (the body and its properties including various behaviours that are due to the body), *Vedanā* (feeling), *Saññā* (memory, determination, knowing what it is), *Saṅkhārā* (thoughtful preparation, conceptualization) and *Viññāṇa* (consciousness).

Accordingly, if a human is both body and mind, then a human should take care of himself both physically and mentally in parallel with the development of life. To Buddhism, elderly people are similar to general people in terms of the five aggregates (*Pañcakkhandā*). Human life is in the state of *Patīccasamutāpāda* (dependent origination). The human life development principle in Buddhism is *Trisikkhā*, which consists of 1) *Silasikkhā*, 2) *Cittasikkhā*, and 3) *Paññāsikkhā*. *Silasikkhā* is the pattern for developing human life to have a good relationship with the environment. *Cittasikkhā* is the pattern for developing human life to have a meditated mind, to be aware of restraint, stability, steadfastness, healthy mental development, strength and happiness, which is conducive to intellectual use. *Paññāsikkhā* is a framework for life development to discriminate between what should be and should not be, what is useful and non-useful, what is right and what is wrong, and what is real, in order for the effective development of life until free from the suffering. Since ageing people are the parents of us or of others, they have made a high contribution to society, and all of us should find ways to take care of them as the best reward for them.

Therefore, according to Buddhism, the application of *Trisikkhā* to age-related caregiving should always consider that the *Trisikkhā* is like the principle or framework of development and development guidelines. There are many guidelines according to various doctrines, but here we will propose the development of the so-called *Bhāvanā 4*. The *Bhāvanā 4* can be used for development in 4 areas. Both *Trisikkhā* and *Bhāvanā 4* are the caregiving method that can develop the body, behaviour, environmental relations, mind and wisdom in balance. *Trisikkhā* is the development principle and the main part. The *Bhāvanā 4* is the practice method to measure whether or not people have been developed by *Trisikkhā*.¹⁷ Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P.A. Payutto), the well-known Thai scholar and Buddhist monk, said about the real meaning of the development of elderly people in terms of Buddhism: “what’s important is that...old persons have grown to a matured stage, which means they have become fully endowed with

¹⁷ Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto), *Buddhadhamma (Original Edition)* (40th edition 2021), 301, https://www.watnyanaves.net/th/book_detail/302.

mental and intellectual strength that can be the core and the leader of true development.”¹⁸

Accordingly, Somdet Phra Buudhaghosacariya (P.A. Payutto), when he was given the name *Phradhammapīṭaka* (P.A. Payutto), stated concerning how to develop humans in terms of Buddhism that life should be developed in a balanced manner, including 4 aspects: physical development, to be known, to use the eyes and organs, the hands, feet, mouth, etc., and to have a relationship that is supportive of the physical environment. An orderly society contains relationships that are supportive of fellow human beings with a system of appropriate expression methods and discipline in development. Accordingly, the development of life with the *Bhāvanā* 4 is to develop people to understand and realize the truth of life. Firstly, human development in precepts should be taken. To be able to perform the precepts, they must be composed of the body and organized properly. When the body is complete, the precepts are born. When a person has the precepts, it will lay the foundation for the mind to be kind. And with wisdom, they will gain more knowledge and understanding of what should be done and should not be done.¹⁹ For this reason, the application of Buddhism as the Buddha’s teaching for the care of elderly people is to apply the principle of *Trisikkhā* and the teaching of the *Bhāvanā* 4 as the philosophy for caregiving for ageing people.²⁰ This philosophy, for all the stated reasons, is an appropriate way for age-related caregiving in a Buddhist society. The Doctrine of *Bhāvanā* 4 for the development of 4 aspects of humans has the following meanings:

- 1) *Kāyabhāvanā* (Physical Development) is physical training according to the five sensations to get in touch with all five things outside of the sense organs, treat those things in a way that is

¹⁸ Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University and Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute (TGRI), *Situation of the Thai Elderly 2017* (Bangkok: Deuan Tula Printing House, 2019), 2, http://www.dop.go.th/download/knowledge/th1552463947-147_1.pdf.

¹⁹ Phra Phrom Kunaporn (P. A. Payutto), *Buddhist Holistic Wellbeing* (Nakhonpathon: Wat Yanavesakawan, 2014), 142–144.

²⁰ Uthaiwan Sukimanil, “Concepts of Health Care for The Elderly under Buddhist Methods and Laws,” *Journal of MCU Peace Studies* 8 (Supplement Issue 2020): 395, <https://soo3.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/journal-peace/article/view/241410/164884>.

beneficial for our lives, promote moral improvement, and developing relationships with the physical environment.

- 2) *Silabhāvanā* (Moral Development) is discipline training, not encroaching or causing damage, remaining well with others, and supporting each other.
- 3) *Cittabhāvanā* (Emotional or Mind Development) is the mental training to be strong, stable and grow with all the virtues such as benevolence, diligence, patience, concentration and freshness.
- 4) *Paññābhāvanā* (Wisdom Development) is wisdom training, to know and understand the things that are true, knowing the world and life according to conditions, able to manage the mind free from suffering, and solving problems through intelligence.²¹

Applying the Buddha's teaching of *Bhāvanā* 4 to caregiving for ageing people can be interpreted as follows:

- 1) *Kāyabhāvanā* (Physical Development) is the physicality caregiving of elderly people, caring for the healthy bodily development and relationships with the physical environment, physical and behavioural caring for ageing people's bodies, such as encouraging them to exercise properly, supplying medicines, providing the right food for them, caring for and preventing various dangers that may occur to them. Accordingly, James Stuart has explained why elderly people should be taken care of, saying that in the Buddhist tradition, providing for ageing people's needs is the main way of showing respect. In many cases, parents live with their children and may help raise their grandchildren. Young people should also take care of their parents' financial and other personal needs.²² In the year 2016, the author conducted research on "Caring for Elderly Parents According to the Buddhist Teachings of Thai Buddhists" by surveying a sample population in the Bangkok area of 632 people who take care of elderly parents on the issue of taking care of them by helping the elderly parents

²¹ Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Bangkok: Sahadhammik, 2002), 70.

²² James Stuart, "Buddhist Belief in Respect of the Elderly," accessed January 20, 2022, <https://classroom.synonym.com/buddhist-belief-in-respect-of-the-elderly-12085136.html>.

to exercise appropriately, to have a proper food supply, better hygiene, taking them to a doctor in time, helping pay for their medical expenses and providing money for them to spend in daily life. The result was that in the overall sample group, 95.4% had taken care of their elderly parents according to the guidelines of *Kāyabhāvanā*.²³

- 2) *Silabhāvanā* (Moral Development). Moral development for ageing people is a kind of caregiving to take care of the ageing people in social relationships and the social environment so they can live well with others. Therefore, those who care for ageing people should consider helping the elderly to interact well with the people around them such as relatives, friends, sons, daughters, etc. In addition, caregivers should help ageing people take care of their health by themselves. Accordingly, the research entitled “Caring for Elderly Parents According to the Buddhist Teachings of Thai Buddhists” by surveying a sample population in the Bangkok area of 632 people who take care of elderly parents in terms of *Silabhāvanā*, inquired about taking their elderly parents to visit relatives, friends’ houses, doing social activities, facilitating transportation in doing social work, taking them to travel for relaxation in a good environment, taking them to the temple to make merit, giving to the underprivileged, and creating benefits for society in various ways. It was found that in the sample group, 93% of the sample took care of their elderly parents according to the guidelines of *Silabhāvanā*.²⁴
- 3) *Cittabhāvanā* (Emotional Development) is the care of the mind, feelings and emotions of ageing persons. The caregivers should take care of the elderly by helping them have a strong mind, happiness, joyfulness, stability, a lack of loneliness, and a lack of anxiety. Those who care for ageing persons should pay special attention to this aspect because the elderly often need the honour of caring from the caregiver. In addition, since the ageing

²³ Somboon Watana, “Caregiving for Elder Parents in accordance with the Buddhist Doctrine in Thai Buddhist Families,” *Journal of Community Development Research (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 10, no. 2 (2017): 74, <https://www.journal.nu.ac.th/JCDR/article/view/1821/1103>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

persons are senior citizens. They have wisdom accumulated over a long lifetime; younger people can show respect by listening to the advice of their ageing persons. Buddhists also extend the idea of filial piety to all ageing persons as senior citizens.²⁵ Accordingly, in the year 2016, the author conducted research on “Caring for Elderly Parents According to the Buddhist Teachings of the Thai Buddhists” by surveying a sample population in the Bangkok area of 632 people who take care of elderly parents in terms of caring for *Cittabhāvanā* (Emotional Development) inquiring about supporting practice meditation, friendly talk, creating an atmosphere that is always happy and cheerful, always showing love and respect for the elderly, etc. The result revealed that in the overall sample, 97.3% took care of their elderly parents according to *Cittabhāvanā* guidelines.²⁶ Supporting ageing people through practicing *Cittabhāvanā* (Emotional Development) to be mindful can fulfil their spiritual well-being because religious aspects are often associated with spirituality.

- 4) *Paññābhāvanā* (Wisdom Development) is caring for the ageing persons in terms of intelligence. Caregivers should support the ageing persons to understand the nature of life and create opportunities for them to be close to the Dharma teachings in Buddhism. *Paññābhāvanā* is the practical way to obtain Buddhist spiritual well-being. In this stage, elderly people will be happy and have peaceful minds. The research entitled “The Effectiveness of Buddhist Doctrine Practice-Based Programs in Enhancing Spiritual Well-being, Coping and Sleep Quality of Thai Elders”²⁷ has presented the significance of *Paññābhāvanā* (Wisdom Development) promoting the spiritual well-being of the Thai ageing people as the result of the research revealed that ageing people who practiced *Vipassanā* meditation demonstrated significantly

²⁵ Stuart, “Buddhist Belief.”

²⁶ Watana, “Caregiving,” 76.

²⁷ Rodchana Wiriyasombat et al., “Effectiveness of Buddhist Doctrine Practice-Based Programs in Enhancing Spiritual Well-being, Coping and Sleep Quality of Thai Elders,” *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research* 15, no. 3 (July–September 2011): 203, <https://he02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/PRIJNR/article/view/6512/o>.

better spiritual well-being at one, two and four months after completing their intervention. Those who practiced chanting showed a significant increase in spiritual well-being, only two months and four months after completing their intervention. The control group demonstrated no significant changes over the three measurements. Although all three groups revealed significant changes in coping, at various times during the three measurements, both the *Vipassanā* meditation group and the chanting group showed better coping than the control group. Regarding sleep quality, both the *Vipassanā* meditation and the chanting group, compared to the control group, demonstrated significant increases in sleep quality four months after completing their invention. Accordingly, in the year 2016, the author conducted research on “Caring for Ageing Parents According to the Buddhist teachings of Thai Buddhists” by surveying a sample population in the Bangkok area of 632 people who take care of ageing parents in terms of caring for the intellectual development of ageing people, asking about issues of taking parents to make merit, to listen to sermons at the temple and to practice *Vipassanā* meditation, etc. The result revealed that in the overall sample, 91.1% took care of their ageing parents according to *Paññābhāvanā* guidelines.²⁸

Buddhism Activities for Age-Related Caregiving in Thailand

Following the Buddha’s teaching of the willingness for human well-being, to respond to the ageing society in Thailand, some activities for age-related caregiving in Thailand of the Thai Buddhist monks will be taken as examples as follows:

Wat Suan Kaew Ageing Care Home: The Wat Suan Kaew Ageing Care Home, located in the Nonthaburi province of Thailand, was established by well-known senior Thai Buddhist monk Luang Por Payom Kalyāno in 1992. The rationale of this project is that nowadays offspring are burdened with having to pursue a career and raise a family, leaving no time to take care of their parents and grandparents. At present,

²⁸ Watana, “Caregiving,” 77.

ageing people experience hostile loneliness, a disease that destroys the mind and body prematurely, a disease that can occur in ageing people of all levels. So, for ageing people who have been abandoned by their offspring, Luang Por Phayom Kalyāno also provides a comprehensive upbringing for them. Moreover, the ageing people who come to request aid have never been rejected. Accordingly, he provided medical care for those ageing people until the end of his life as a nursing home project. The project was established as an association, a club to exchange views, a collection of experiences of ageing people, and also the opportunity to help the activities of the temple, which is considered a charity that elderly people will receive for the last moment, a value to the heart.²⁹

Wat Dhammaraksa Nivesana Ageing Care Home: This project, located in Lopburi Province, Thailand, was established by the well-known Thai Buddhist monk named Luang Por Alongkot Tikkhapanyo who is the abbot of the Wat Phra Bat Namphu temple, Lopburi Province, Thailand, where there is a rehabilitation facility for people with AIDS. This is a new extended project of this Thai Buddhist monk. The main mission aims to provide late-stage shelters for abandoned ageing people. The rationale of this project is based on the increase in abandoned ageing people. Consequently, Luang Por Alongkot Tikkhapanyo, with his compassion for ageing people, stated “if temples and monks do not reach out to help, then who will help them to have a proper place to eat and die?” Hence, the Wat Dhammaraksa Nivesana Ageing Care Home has been divided into an ageing care tower for elderly people who can still help themselves and also for those who are less able to help themselves. Additionally, ageing people who are less able to help themselves, such as those who are blind, have lost limbs, have Alzheimer’s, or have excretory problems, are looked after by volunteers to provide caregiving for both physical and mental health. Furthermore, a health service system has been provided that is linked to the health insurance of the Nong Muang Hospital, a public hospital. And for ageing people who can help themselves, such as being able to walk and eat, the temple provides daily activities for them to do, such as waking up to collect mattresses, clea-

²⁹ “Wat Suan Kaew Aging Care Home,” Suan Kaew Foundation, accessed January 30, 2022, https://www.kanlayano.org/home/projects/projects_10.php.

ning the premises, watering the plants, planting trees, exercising, eating, listening dharma, listening to or playing music therapy, watching movies, listening to music, and participating in group conversations.³⁰

These two examples of Buddhist activities for age-related caregiving in Thailand were established and managed by well-known Thai Buddhist monks, namely Luang Por Payom Kalyano of the Wat Suan Kaew temple and Luang Por Alongkot Tikkhapanyo of the Wat Phra Bat Namphu temple. These two monks are called in Thai “*Luang Por*” in the sense of ageing, beloved, respected monks of various Thai people because they have sacrificed their life for monkhood in Buddhism, then followed the Buddha’s teaching for human well-being by doing work of social engagement for the long time of around 40-45 years. It is not too much to say that these two monks are leaders in social engagement work in Thai society and even on the issue of the ageing society in Thailand.

Conclusion and Discussion

Thailand is a part of *Suvarnabhumi* land where Buddhism originally arose around 2300 years ago. Buddhism, as it has been interpreted and applied, has created various contributions to the Thai people such as culture, society and the economy, as well as a moral way of life, etc. The ageing society is a new issue in the 21st century. It is the result of the development of science and technology in terms of medical sciences and economic growth in the past century. In the present year of 2022 C.E., Thailand is an ageing society. In the perspective of Buddhism, ageing people, or the parents referred to in the *Pāli Tripitaka*, are important. The ageing people or the parents have been praised by the Lord Buddha and are regarded as a noble equivalent to *Brahma*, the saint of the sons, etc. Hence, the age-related caregivers or the sons and daughters should take care of the ageing people or their ageing parents. Buddhism has praised caregiving for ageing people or ageing parents in terms of both the body and the mind for comfort.

³⁰ “Open Thammaraksa Temple to help the elderly,” *Thairath Online*, accessed January 25, 2022, <https://www.thairath.co.th/content/140303>.

Moreover, the Buddha suggests that age-related caregivers (such as sons or daughters) should take care of them, for the sake of the sustainability of caregiving. Ageing people or ageing parents should be taken care of by the Buddha's teaching of *Bhāvanā* 4. Buddhist age-related caregiving can be an innovation for age-related caregiving in the 21st century to promote spiritual well-being in the global world. Otherwise, the age-related caregiving trend will be strongly promoted in terms of physical and mental caregiving but will ignore spiritual caregiving, which is the most important dimension of the elderly in a Buddhist society like Thailand. Both practical and academic approaches regarding age-related caregiving are still needed to advance both the quantity and quality to promote the Buddha's teaching about age-related caregiving for better human life from generation to generation. Age-related caregiving in an ageing society is not the duty of any one person but is an important agenda for all in societies to respond to this duty together in the best and most suitable way for ageing people. Since ageing people are the model of the future generation, taking care of them appropriately would create an ethical norm of generosity for each other and would be a society that cultivates the virtues of gratitude that is the basis of the goodness of living together in society.

In addition, to support the agenda of age-related caregiving in an ageing society in Thailand, there are 4299³¹ Buddhist temples that the Thai government and related sectors plan to use as the religious capital for age-related caregiving according to the Buddha's teaching for human well-being. How can this idea be realised? To answer this question, the above 2 example projects of Luang Por Payom Kalyano and Luang Por Alongkot Tikkhapanyo should be models for other Thai Buddhist temples. To support this idea, the research on the "Preparedness of Buddhist Temples for an Ageing Society" conducted by Pornsiripong, Sasiwongsaroj and Burasitdhi³² should be taken as an example. The findings of the research were that almost all of the temples were moderately

³¹ "Temple Registration System," National Office of Buddhism, accessed January 30, 2022, <http://binfo.onab.go.th/Temple/Dashboard.aspx>.

³² Saowapa Pornsiripong, Quanjit Sasiwongsaroj, and Yongyut Burasitdhi, "Preparedness of Buddhist temples for an ageing society," *Journal of Language and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2014), 100, <https://soo3.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JLC/article/view/21723/18736>.

ready. They were highly prepared for social networking and social space and moderately prepared for life-long learning and health promotion. Factors affecting different degrees of preparedness included: the abbot's potential, the number of monks, the qualifications and knowledge of the resident monks, support from communities nearby, and experience in social networking. The means for developing the preparedness of the temples were: sharing knowledge on best practices, training programs for abbots on active administration, educating monks on aspects of ageing people, supporting temples in establishing networks, and creating an age-friendly environment." Accordingly, James Stuart³³ observed the modern practices of the Buddhists and found "prolonged life-spans have changed the way senior citizens live, and this has affected the way Buddhists practice respect for ageing people. Since many people are healthier for longer, they want to remain independent and work long into their old age. Some Buddhist temples have begun organizing clubs to bring senior citizens together with younger people, and many Buddhist organizations celebrate special days intended to focus attention on respect for the ageing people." These 2 examples of academic studies indicated the potentiality and possibility of utilizing the Buddhist religious capital for society, as well as for the well-being of the elderly in the ageing Thai society. Again, the author, as a lecturer on the course "An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy" in the Bachelor of Arts Program in Religious Studies of the Mahidol University of Thailand, has designed the topic of Buddhist Philosophy and Age-Related Caregiving in this course and taught more than 100 students for 4 years from 2014 to the present to prepare them for challenging the ageing society in Thailand. All these attempts are a way to apply the Buddha's teachings to the challenge of the ageing society in the 21st century. All these attempts of Buddhism in Thailand to be concerned with the new challenge of the ageing society have a foundation in the religious capital of Buddhism continuing from the *Suvarnabhumi* age more than 2000 years ago. Lastly, it can be said that the interpretation and application of the Buddha's teachings originally rooted in the *Suvarnabhumi* age and continuing to the

³³ Stuart, "Buddhist Belief."

present in Thailand are the way Buddhism in Thailand promotes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN). The 2030 Agenda's transformational vision and the pledge of SDGs to "leave no one behind" means that development agendas must include all people of all ages. The implementation of SDGs must essentially rely on equality, social justice and human dignity and recognize that ageing people have an equal right to development.³⁴

B i b l i o g r a p h y

Department of Elderly Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand. *Measures to Drive the National Agenda on Aging Society* (Revised Version). Bangkok: Amarintara, 2019.

Department of Elderly Affairs, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security of Thailand. *The Strategic Plan of the Department of Elderly Affairs 20s, BE 2561- 2580*. Bangkok: Samlada, 2018.

Kraiphikul, Puangthong "Older Person" [In Thai]. Accessed December 9, 2021. <http://haamor.com/th>.

Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, and Foundation of Thai Gerontology Research and Development Institute (TGRI). *Situation of the Thai Elderly 2017*. Bangkok: Deuan Tula Printing House, 2019. http://www.dop.go.th/download/knowledge/th1552463947-147_1.pdf.

Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage. *Tripitaka and Commentary 91 Books the 200th Anniversary of the Chakri Dynasty Rattanakosin*, Vol. 26, 92. Bangkok: Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage, 2003.

National Office of Buddhism. "Temple Registration System." Accessed January 30, 2022. <http://binfo.onab.go.th/Temple/Dashboard.aspx>.

National Statistical Office. "Social, Cultural and Mental Health Conditions 2018." Accessed January 5, 2022. <http://www.nso.go.th/sites/2014/Pages/News/2561/N21-09-61-1.aspx>.

Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto). *Dictionary of Buddhism*. Bangkok: Sahadhammik, 2002.

PhraPhromKunaporn (P. A. Payutto). *Buddhist Holistic Wellbeing*. Nakhon Pathom: Wat Yanavesakawan, 2014.

³⁴ Stakeholder Group on Ageing, "Ageing," United Nations, accessed October 26, 2022, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/ageing>.

Wiriyasombat, Rodchana, et al. "Effectiveness of Buddhist Doctrine Practice-Based Programs in Enhancing Spiritual Well-being, Coping and Sleep Quality of Thai Elders." *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research* 15, no. 3 (2011): 203–219. <https://he02.tcithaijo.org/index.php/PRIJNR/article/view/6512/0>.

Pornsiripong, Saowapa, Quanjit Sasiwongsaroj, and Yongyut Burasitdhi. "Preparedness of Buddhist Temples for an Aging Society." *Journal of Language and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2014): 99–125. <https://soo3.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JLC/article/view/21723/18736>.

Watana, Somboon. "Concept of Elderly Care in Theravada Buddhism." *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences Burapha University* 24, no. 44 (2016): 173–193. <https://soo6.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/husojournal/article/view/55972/46738>.

Watana, Somboon. "Caregiving for Elder Parents in accordance with the Buddhist Doctrine in Thai Buddhist Families." *Journal of Community Development Research (Humanities and Social Sciences)* 10, no. 2 (2017): 67–80. <https://www.journal.nu.ac.th/JCDR/article/view/1821/1103>.

Stakeholder Group on Ageing. "Ageing." United Nations. Accessed October 26, 2022. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/ageing>.

Somdet Phra Buudhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto) *Buddhadhamma (original edition)*, 40th edition 2021. https://www.watnyanaves.net/th/book_detail/302.

Stuart, James. "Buddhist Belief in Respect of the Elderly." Accessed January 20, 2022. <https://classroom.synonym.com/buddhist-belief-in-respect-of-the-elderly-12085136.html>.

Thairath. "Open Thammaraksa Temple to help the elderly." Accessed January 25, 2022. <https://www.thairath.co.th/content/140303>.

The Royal Institute. Definition of Elderly, Dictionary of the Royal Institute, 2003. Bangkok: Nanmee Books Public Class, 2003.

United Nations. *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights*. New York: United Nations Publication, 2020. https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesapd-2020_world_population_ageing_highlights.pdf.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). *Aging in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and A Challenge*. New York, and HelpAge International, London, 2012. <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Ageing%20report.pdf>.

United Nations. *World Population Ageing 2017 Highlights*. New York: United Nations Publication, 2017. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017_Highlights.pdf.

Sukimanil, Uthaiwan. "Concepts of Health Care for The Elderly under Buddhist Methods and Laws." *Journal of MCU Peace Studies* 8, Supplement Issue (2020): 386–402. <https://soo3.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/journal-peace/article/view/241410/164884>.

Suan Kaew Foundation. "Wat Suan Kaew Aging Care Home." Accessed January 30, 2022. https://www.kanlayano.org/home/projects/projects_10.php.