HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM IN THAILAND: PRACTICES, LOCAL PATRONAGE, AND CHALLENGES

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Introduction

Humanistic Buddhism is an approach that emphasizes Buddhist principles in daily life to promote societal harmony and personal satisfaction. In the early 20th century, Taixu, a Buddhist reformist, defined Humanistic Buddhism as a form of Buddhism that places a higher value on human concerns rather than solely on spiritual existence or the afterlife.[1] Master Hsing Yun further refined this ideology by emphasizing the practice of altruism, kindness, and the pleasure derived from assisting others.[2] According to Donald K Swearer,[3] Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand has integrated the Theravāda heritage with contemporary principles to address modern social issues.

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[1]   Cristina Rocha, "Buddhism and Globalization," in *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. David L. Mcmahan (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 289–303.
[2]   Eric Goodell, "Conservative and Progressive Models for Buddhism under the Republic of China," *Religion, Culture, and the Public Sphere in China and Japan*, ed. Albert Welter and Jeffrey Newmark (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 43–68, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2437-5_3.
[3]   Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2010).

Empirical research suggests that Humanistic Buddhism improves social life using communal engagements, rituals, and meditation. Sallie B. King[4] found that temples in Thailand made substantial contributions to the community's welfare by implementing educational and health initiatives, while Cristina Rocha[5] noted that Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan prioritized community empowerment, a practice subsequently adopted in Thailand. However, challenges continue to exist. Urbanization, globalization, and the erosion of traditional values are among the obstacles that hinder the practice of Humanistic Buddhism, as noted by Swearer[6] and Dat Manh Nguyen.[7] In East Asia,[8] underscored the importance of collaboration between Buddhist institutions and the government in the context of government funding and assistance. However, this strategy has not been completely implemented in Thailand.

The implementation of Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand is significantly influenced by its three components—individual, universal, and transcendental. The practice of meditation and introspection to achieve inner tranquility are separate components.[9] illustrates that meditation aids individuals in grappling with the pressures of modern life.[10] observed that the global aspect includes an invitation to promote social harmony, suggesting that Buddhist teachings aid in unifying diverse societies. As Xue Yu[11] articulated, the transcendental dimension

[4]   Sallie B. King, "Socially Engaged Buddhism," in *Buddhism in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 195–213.
[5]   Rocha, "Buddhism and Globalization."
[6]   Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*.
[7]   Dat Manh Nguyen, *Crafting a Buddhist Public: Urban Buddhism and Youth Aspirations in Late-Socialist Vietnam* (Boston, MA: Boston University, 2020).
[8]   Yoshiko Ashiwa, "Positioning Religion in Modernity: State and Buddhism in China," in *Religion in Today's World*, ed. Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 125–45, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804771139-004.
[9]   Jianxun Shi, "The Path to Liberation," in Jianxun Shi, *Mapping the Buddhist Path to Liberation: Diversity and Consistency Based on the Pāli Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021), 21–50, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1152-0.
[10]   Phrakru Arunsutalangkarn, "Buddhism and Education in Thai Society," *Journal of Buddhist Education and Research (JBER)* 2, no. 1 (2016): 8–16.
[11]   Xue Yu, "Re-Creation of Rituals in Humanistic Buddhism: A Case Study of FoGuangShan," *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 4 (2013): 350–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2013.831609.

emphasizes the ultimate goal of existence as the transcendence of suffering and attaining enlightenment.

Humanity, Emphasis on Daily Life, Altruism, Joyfulness, Timeliness, and Universality are the six characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism, which are separated from the three aspects.[12] posits that Buddhist teachings should be applied for the benefit of humanity rather than solely for spiritual purposes. The importance of Buddhist teachings in addressing commonplace issues is emphasized by the emphasis on daily life.[13] According to Sallie B. King,[14] altruism fosters empathy for others, as evidenced by the temple's participation in social initiatives. Buddhist practices, such as meditation and communal activities, are motivated by joy to help individuals achieve contentment.[15] The concept of timeliness emphasizes adapting Buddhist doctrines to address contemporary challenges, such as urbanization and environmental concerns.[16] Ultimately, universality emphasizes the importance of peace and inclusivity, as demonstrated by Humanistic Buddhism's call for inter-religious tolerance.[17]

Recent studies suggest a lack of research on Humanistic Buddhism.[18] Most research focuses on the Chinese context[19] or Vietnam;[20] however, few exhaustive studies pertain to Thailand. Thailand is distinguished from other Southeast Asian nations by its unique and extensive Buddhist

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12 Goodell, "Conservative and Progressive Models for Buddhism under the Republic of China."
13 Hasrina Mustafa et al., "Malaysian Generational Cohorts in the New Media Era: Historical Events and Collective Memory," *Media Asia* 49, no. 3 (2022): 235–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2021.2018536.
14 Sallie B. King, "Mindfulness, Compassion and Skillful Means in Engaged Buddhism," *Mindfulness* 14 (2023): 2516–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-01847-1.
15 Rocha, "Buddhism and Globalization."
16 Nguyen, *Crafting a Buddhist Public*.
17 Arunsutalangkarn, "Buddhism and Education in Thai Society."
18 Rocha, "Buddhism and Globalization"; Arunsutalangkarn, "Buddhism and Education in Thai Society"; Nguyen, *Crafting a Buddhist Public*; Shi, "The Path to Liberation"; Theo Stapleton and Yu Tao, "The Emergence of Transcultural Humanistic Buddhism through the Lens of Religious Entrepreneurship," *Asian Studies Review* 46, no. 2 (2022): 312–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2021.1970105.
19 Rocha, "Buddhism and Globalization"; Stapleton and Tao, "The Emergence of Transcultural Humanistic Buddhism through the Lens of Religious Entrepreneurship."
20 Nguyen, *Crafting a Buddhist Public*.

heritage. Moreover, the impact of local patronage, such as governmental support and local finance, on implementing Humanistic Buddhism within Thai culture has generally not been explicitly examined in prior studies.[21] Internal dynamics and the development of empathy among community members are among the current issues that have not been sufficiently addressed in this context.[22]

The discourse on the three principal components (individual, universal, and transcendental) has been delineated in prior research, but their interactions in developing comprehensive religious practices have not been synthesized. In the sociocultural context of Thailand, the six fundamental qualities of Humanistic Buddhism (Humanity, Emphasis on Daily Life, Altruism, Joyfulness, Timeliness, and Universality) are rarely examined in depth.[23] Additionally, most current research lacks empirical methodologies that involve direct respondents through surveys or interviews.[24] This study examines the practices, local support, and obstacles in implementing the three primary features and six characteristics within the country's unique social and cultural environment.

Three Aspects of Humanistic Buddhism

The primary focus of Buddhist Humanism is on the emancipation of oneself from what is most commonly referred to as suffering (dukkha).[25] This pattern is typically expressed in the form of four noble

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[21]   Arunsutalangkarn, "Buddhism and Education in Thai Society"; Yaoping Liu, "A Study of Chinese Lay Buddhist Societies in Thailand: History and Current State," *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*, no. 16 (2021), https://thecjbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/75-114_Liu_Chinese-Lay-Buddhist-Societies-in-Thailand.pdf.

[22]   Nguyen, *Crafting a Buddhist Public*; Shi, "The Path to Liberation."

[23]   Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*; Goodell, "Conservative and Progressive Models for Buddhism under the Republic of China"; Dongxiao Zheng and Yaoping Liu, "China–Thai Cultural Diplomacy Through the Buddhist Wat: A Case Study of the Thai Wat in Chaozhou Kaiyuan Si, Guangdong," *Religions* 15, no. 11 (2024): 1365, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15111365; Yaoping Liu, Pharatt Run, and Metteyya Beliatte, "Eco-Sattva: A Buddhist Response to the Plastic Waste Crisis in Thailand," *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (2025): 1482883, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1482883.

[24]   King, "Socially Engaged Buddhism."

[25]   Kristin Culbertson, *Embracing the Non-Ideal: A Suffering-Oriented Ethical Approach* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 2021); Kamlesh Singh et al., "Buddhism and Its Contribution to Positive Psychology," in *Religious and Spiritual Practices in India: A Positive*

truths. The third truth, "the truth of the cessation of suffering" (duk-khanirodha), defines the emancipation from suffering as an objective. In the Buddhist doctrine of emancipation, various specific concepts and terms are employed.[26] These terms can be categorized into three classes in order to differentiate between three distinct aspects of the doctrine of emancipation: terms that are derived from the verb root "to awaken" (bodhi, samyaksaṃbodhi, abhisambodhi, etc.), terms that express the meaning of cessation (nirodha, nivṛtti, and niṣṭhā), and terms that are derived from the verb root "to release" (vimokṣa, vimukti, and nirmocana). All of these are executed on three distinct levels: the (human) individual (pudgala), the domain of sentient creatures (sattvadhatu), and the level of transcending the world (lokottara). The three-level paradigm for interpreting Buddhist Humanism is based on this classification: individual, universal, and Transcendental Humanism.

The traditional Buddhist path of spiritual development, known as individual Humanism,[27] is designed to liberate the individual from suffering. The original Buddhist doctrine of emancipation is formulated as the eightfold path contained in the fourth noble truth, with a focal point on the individual. This prompts the individual to engage in personal endeavor, adopt a specific worldview, engage in particular behaviors and lifestyles, and engage in spiritual exercises, ultimately leading to the attainment of Buddhahood. An individual who embodies this ideal is known as arhat, or "the one who has attained Buddhahood," and in the Mahāyāna texts, pratyekabuddha, or "Buddha for oneself."

The concept of Humanism is predominantly conveyed in this context by the concept that the unique opportunity to be born as a human being should be utilized, at the very least, to enhance one's condition

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and, ideally, to accomplish complete emancipation from suffering.[28] Nevertheless, this encompasses the universal and transcendental aspects of Humanism. Initially, the obligation to transmit the tradition, or, in Buddhist rhetoric, "to keep the Dharma wheel turning," is primarily attributed to bhikshus or mendicant priests. Secondly, the cultivation of the ethics that serve as the foundation of the spiritual path through one's actions, which has the potential to influence others. The third objective is the realization of long-term evolution, as Buddhism posits that the entire sequence of birth and rebirth through an incalculable number of lives in the samsara is, in the ideal sense, intended for maturation and preparation for the final emancipation. This obstacle has been surmounted through arhat, thereby achieving the transcendental state.

Universal Humanism, as exemplified by the Bodhisattva path,[29] is primarily cultivated in the Mahāyāna schools and sects and is extensively and meticulously described in numerous Mahāyāna sutras. It is crucial to underscore the type of individual who attains the Buddha state independently: the Bodhisattva (awakening being). However, they have extended the objective of relief (or, more precisely, liberation) from suffering to all sentient beings, including humans. Uncompromising altruism, or mahākaruṇā (great compassion), is the primary characteristic of Buddhist Universal Humanism. A Bodhisattva is an active social type who deliberately works toward this goal and vows to alleviate the suffering of all beings.

Additionally, Universal Humanism is inextricably linked to the other two. Despite its subsidiary significance on the scale of values, individual emancipation, with all of its principles and series of endeavors,

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[28]   Oliver Kozlarek, "From the Humanism of Critical Theory to Critical Humanism," *European Journal of Social Theory* 24, no. 2 (2021): 246–63, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431020960958; Jana S Rošker, "The Human Being as the Core of Humanism," in Jana S Rošker, *Humanism in Trans-Civilizational Perspectives: Relational Subjectivity and Social Ethics in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 77–103, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37518-7.

[29]   Jian Chen, "Humanistic Buddhism: Plurality and Humanistic Buddhism in the Context of a Buddho-Christian Comparison," 人間佛教學報 藝文 = *Humanistic Buddhism Journal, Arts, and Culture*, no. 26 (2020): 164–205, https://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-BJ010/bj010591739.pdf.

is an unavoidable prerequisite for realizing the Bodhisattva ideal of Universal Humanism. The Bodhisattva also achieves the objective of Transcendental Humanism by liberating creatures, which involves restructuring the universe by establishing states of consciousness that transcend worldly realities (laukika dharma).

Transcendental Humanism is a term that refers to the tendency in all branches of Buddhism,[30] particularly the *Mahāyāna* sutras, to describe the emancipated state as a new reality. This is a completely restructured universe in which the laws of the ordinary universe of the unawakened mind do not apply, and the causes and conditions that generate suffering have been eliminated. This universe, which is emancipated through a transformative essence, is defined as a Buddha-field that has been completely purified (parisodhita buddhaksetra).[31] Buddha is the human variety that corresponds to that level. In its most comprehensive form, all Buddhists are involved in the realization of this transcendental objective, which encompasses both individual and universal humanism and their emancipation doctrines.[32] However, purified Buddha domains are also called emancipated universes in the plural. There are a great many Buddhist mythological cosmologies, and they have varying names and structures.

While Humanistic Buddhism is rooted in the values of compassion, social ethics, and relevance to daily life, it is important to distinguish it from another reformist trend known as Socially Engaged Buddhism. Both of these movements share a commitment to addressing suffering and promoting ethical living, but they differ significantly in their historical origins, philosophical orientation, and methodological approaches to social engagement. Humanistic Buddhism was developed by several reformers, such as Taixu and Master Hsing Yun. The purpose of the reformation is to incorporate Buddhist teachings into

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[30]   Seth Zuihō Segall, *Buddhism and Human Flourishing: A Modern Western Perspective* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37027-5.

[31]   Georgios T. Halkias and Richard K. Payne, eds., *Pure Lands in Asian Texts and Contexts: An Anthology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019).

[32]   Makola Mangala Thero, *The Evolution of the Concept of the Buddha Within the Pāli Canon and Commentaries* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of the West, 2022), https://ir.uwest.edu/files/original/8aa3082686700017993fcef53615103203f3a5b85.pdf.

everyday life to foster individual spiritual growth and social harmony. The practices emphasize altruism, inner joy, and cultural adaptation as they are often manifested through community service and education within institutional frameworks supported by state or local patronage.[33] In contrast, Socially Engaged Buddhism, popularized by figures such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa, is more activist and politically responsive. This tradition emerged as a direct response to structural oppression, conflict, and social injustice, emphasizing critical engagement with issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, and social discrimination.[34]

These differences also reflect different responses to the challenges of modernity, such as globalization, urbanization, and the erosion of traditional values. Humanistic Buddhism tends to respond by consolidating cultural values and local welfare programs and creating stable spiritual spaces without directly confronting the political system. In contrast, Socially Engaged Buddhism seeks to dismantle the root causes of inequality through advocacy, protest, and grassroots community empowerment. In the Thai context, Humanistic Buddhism, as practiced by Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi, emphasizes social stability through peaceful integration, while Socially Engaged Buddhism, as practiced by Phra Phaisal Visalo and organizations such as the Sathirakoses-Nagapradeepa Foundation, actively critiques corruption, class inequality, and structural injustice. This framework thus helps us understand Humanistic Buddhism not simply as a spiritual practice but as a cultural response that negotiates with existing social structures—as opposed to Socially Engaged Buddhism, which is transformative and confrontational in shaping contemporary Buddhist discourse and social action.

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[33]   Goodell, "Conservative and Progressive Models for Buddhism under the Republic of China"; Rocha, "Buddhism and Globalization."

[34]   King, "Socially Engaged Buddhism"; Linda Jane Douglas, "Ethical Underpinnings and Social Work: A Case Study on the Role of Buddhist Compassion in Cambodian Sustainable Development," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 43, no. 3 (2024): 348–77, https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2024.2365803.

Hypothesis and Research Question

I. The Conceptualization and Practice of the Core Principles of Humanistic Buddhism

This study hypothesizes that the Thai Buddhists' conceptualization and practice of the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism—namely humanity, daily life, altruism, joy, timeliness, and universality—are positively correlated with their levels of religious engagement, community involvement, and exposure to Humanistic Buddhist teachings. To test this, key principles are operationalized into measurable variables: "humanity" and "altruism" are assessed through self-reported acts of compassion and volunteerism; "daily life" and "timeliness" are measured by the frequency and integration of Humanistic teachings into routine activities; "joy" is captured through well-being indicators linked to spiritual practices; and "universality" is evaluated via attitudes toward inclusivity and interfaith openness. Given the patterns and themes identified in the preceding discussion, it becomes essential to formulate a hypothesis that can be tested through further investigation.

Hypothesis

H1: Thai Buddhists' conceptualization and practice of the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism.

Research Question 1:

How do Thai Buddhists conceptualize and practice the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism in their daily religious and social lives?

II. Local Patronage and the Continuity of Humanistic Buddhism

This study hypothesizes that local patronage significantly contributes to the development and continuity of Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand through financial, social, and symbolic support. Specifically, it posits that (1) financial contributions from local lay patrons are positively associated with the institutional growth of Humanistic Buddhist temples; (2) the social influence of patrons enhances the sustainability of

Humanistic Buddhist programs and outreach efforts; and (3) community engagement encouraged by patronage correlates with the perceived relevance of Humanistic Buddhist values, such as altruism and application in daily life, among practitioners. These hypotheses are operationalized through measurable variables including donation amounts, the number of influential patrons involved, the frequency and longevity of temple programs, volunteer retention rates, and survey responses capturing lay perceptions of Humanistic principles. Building upon the background and context outlined above, the following hypothesis is proposed to guide the direction of this study.

Hypothesis:

H2: Local patronage significantly contributes to the institutional and community-based growth of Humanistic Buddhist practices in Thailand.

Research Questions 2:

How does local patronage influence the development and sustained practice of Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand?

III. The Challenges in Practicing the Core Principles of Humanistic Buddhism

This study hypothesizes that Thai Buddhists face specific social, institutional, and personal challenges in practicing the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism, such as humanity, altruism, daily relevance, joy, timeliness, and universality, and that these challenges are associated with factors such as religious education, local temple support, and societal attitudes. To test this, these challenges are operationalized into measurable variables: institutional barriers are measured by the reported lack of temple programs aligned with Humanistic values; social resistance is assessed through perceived community acceptance using Likert-scale survey items; and personal challenges are evaluated by the self-reported difficulty in applying Humanistic principles in daily routines. Additional variables include the frequency of exposure to Humanistic teachings, participation in temple-led initiatives, and demographic factors such as age, education, and region. These considerations naturally

lead to the formulation of a hypothesis that seeks to address the core issues raised in the previous section.

Hypothesis:

H3: Thai Buddhists face specific social, institutional, and personal challenges in practicing the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism

Research question 3:

What challenges do Thai Buddhists encounter in practicing the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism?

These research questions and hypotheses provide the conceptual foundation for investigating how Humanistic Buddhism manifests in contemporary Thai society. By linking the doctrinal principles with lived practices, and examining both the enabling and constraining factors, this study moves toward a methodological framework designed to capture these complex dynamics.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-method approach, conducted over one year from August 2022 to July 2023. The collection of quantitative data involved distributing questionnaires to 400 respondents across two locations in Thailand—Fo Guang Shan and the Tzu Chi Foundation in Bangkok. This approach aimed to capture the diversity of Buddhist practices within the largest Buddhist community in the country. The questionnaire was crafted considering three dimensions of Humanistic Buddhism (individual, universal, and Transcendental Humanism) and six defining traits of Humanistic Buddhism (humanity, emphasis on daily life, altruism, excitement, timeliness, and universality).
Additionally, qualitative data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with 30 participants from a diverse range of Buddhist communities, encompassing monks, regular practitioners, and community leaders. This interview seeks to investigate individual experiences and obstacles encountered when practicing Humanistic Buddhism. Participants were selected for the interviews due to their active engagement in Buddhist activities, guaranteeing that their perspectives represent authentic experiences within Humanistic Buddhism. This qualitative data

will offer a comprehensive view of the challenges encountered in this tradition, which will subsequently be examined through thematic codes to uncover the primary patterns and themes.

Participants

There were 400 participants in this investigation. The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling method, targeting individuals who are actively engaged in Buddhist practices and institutions that emphasize Humanistic Buddhism. The distribution of respondents is based on the location, region, the cultural and religious influence of selected Buddhist institutions in Thailand, gender, and age. The demographic profile of the respondents includes a balanced gender distribution and diverse age groups. The participants ranged from 20 to 65 years old, with an average age of approximately 37. This diversity enabled a broader understanding of how humanistic Buddhist values were perceived and practiced in different life stages and gender identities. Table 1 explains the sample distribution.

Table 1. Sample distribution

Location	Region	Cultural and Religious Significance	Respon-dent	Gender (M/F)	Age range
Fo Guang Shan	Bangkok (Central Thailand)	The political and cultural heart of Thailand, a major center for Theravāda Buddhism	250	110/140	20-65
Branches of The Tzu Chi Foundation	Bangkok (Central Thailand)	A strong historical Buddhist presence, a major center for Theravāda Buddhism	150	60/90	22-60

Additionally, 30 respondents participated in the interview activities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles associated with the practice of Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand. Table 2 provides the distribution of the interview sample.

Table 2. Distribution of the interview sample

Region	Location	Cultural and Religious Significance	Number of respondents	Gender (M/F)	Age range	Interview Duration (minutes)
WBangkok (Central Thailand)	Fo Guang Shan	The political and cultural heart of Thailand, a major center for Theravāda Buddhism	18	9/9	30-60	30 – 55 (avg: 42 min)
	Branches of The Tzu Chi Foundation	A strong historical Buddhist presence, a major center for Theravāda Buddhism	12	5/7	28-57	28-60 (avg: 48 min)

Instruments

Questionnaire

The researchers have developed a questionnaire to investigate Buddhist beliefs and practices within Humanistic Buddhism. This instrument is based on the fundamental theory of Humanistic Buddhism, which includes key principles such as Universality, Transcendental Humanism, Universal Humanism, Joyfulness, Timeliness, and Humanity, as well as Emphasis on Daily Life and Altruism. It is designed to clarify the aspects of Buddhist teachings that emphasize the attainment of lofty spirituality, moral development, and human welfare in ordinary life. The dimensions and characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism and Local Patronage are each reflected in the 35 items that constitute this questionnaire, which are categorized into multiple sections. An explication of the 35 questions included in this questionnaire is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Items in the questionnaire

Aspect	Characteristics	Number of items	Example statement
Individual Humanism	Humanity, Emphasis on Daily Life, Altruism	10 items	"I integrate Buddhist principles into my daily life" (Daily Life)
Universal Humanism	Humanity, Altruism, Joyfulness	10 items	"I believe Buddhist teachings can help build a compassionate society" (Humanity)
Transcendental Humanism	Joyfulness, Timeliness, Universality	10 items	"I experience inner peace through meditation" (Joyfulness), "Buddhism remains relevant in modern times" (Timeliness)
Local patronage	Political and funding	5 items	

The researcher subsequently conducted a focus group discussion and consulted experts in Buddhism studies to ensure that the questionnaires developed were pertinent to the context of Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand. Following the preparation of the questionnaire, a pilot test was implemented to guarantee the instrument's reliability and validity. This test included soliciting feedback from the Buddhist adherents who were the focus of the respondents.

Semi-Structured Interview

This interview instrument encompassed the three aspects of Humanistic Buddhism: Individual, Universal, and Transcendental Humanism, and was structured around the six characteristics (Humanity, Emphasis on Daily Life, Altruism, Joyfulness, Timeliness, and Universality), featuring 15 open-ended questions. The following is a detailed enumeration of these fifteen questions: 1) the individual dimensions of Humanism include four inquiries, 2) the universal dimensions of Humanism include four inquiries, 3) the aspects of Transcendental Humanism include four inquiries, and 4) there are three inquiries aimed at exploring challenges within the practice of Humanistic Buddhism.

Theoretical Framework for Instrument Design

Items measuring Universal and Transcendental Humanistic Buddhist beliefs and practices (Tables 5 and 6) were formulated based on classical Buddhist ethics and soteriology. Universal Humanism reflected Bodhisattva values such as *mahākaruṇā* (great compassion), *mettā* (compassion), and social connectedness, as emphasized by Hsing Yun and discussed by David W. Chappel,[35] Sallie B. King,[36] and Jian Chen.[37]

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[35]   David W Chappell, "Buddhist Social Principles," in *Psychology and Buddhism: From Individual to Global Community*, ed. Kathleen H. Dockett, G. Rita Dudley-Grant and C. Peter Bankart (New York: Springer, 2003), 259–74, https://doi.org/10.1007/b105375.
[36]   King, "Socially Engaged Buddhism."
[37]   Chen, "Humanistic Buddhism: Plurality and Humanistic Buddhism in the Context of a Buddho-Christian Comparison."

Statements such as "I practice empathy…" and "The Buddha's teachings help people live harmoniously…" represent how these values are internalized in everyday life. Transcendental Humanism, meanwhile, is based on the concepts of the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodha*), the Noble Eightfold Path, and the attainment of nirvāṇa, integrating Theravāda and Mahāyāna perspectives.[38] Items such as "The main purpose of life is to transcend suffering…" and "I experience happiness through meditation…" reflect the aspiration for liberation as a lived spiritual practice.

Table 7 discusses Local Patronage, which was based on studies of the sociology of religion, specifically state-religion relations and institutional support in the Southeast Asian region.[39] The items in this section were designed to assess the perceptions of the government's involvement in supporting the sustainability of Buddhist practice, through policy support, funding, and cultural recognition. For example, statements such as "Government programs have a positive impact on my community" and "Political leaders support the integration of Buddhist teachings into public policy" operationalize how structural patronage influences the public role of Humanistic Buddhism. Overall, this instrument bridged doctrinal values with attitudes and behaviors that could be measured in the sociocultural context of Thailand.

Data Analysis

A quantitative analysis was performed to investigate the data gathered from the questionnaire regarding the beliefs and practices of Humanistic Buddhism. The study emphasized descriptive statistics to summarize and outline the key features of the data, specifically concentrating on the three aspects of Humanistic Buddhism (Individual, Universal, and Transcendental Humanism) and the six characteristics

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[38]   Jay L. Garfield, "Buddhism and Modernity," in *The Buddhist World*, ed. John Powers (Routledge, 2015), 294–304, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315688114; Shi, "The Path to Liberation."
[39]   Ashiwa, "Positioning Religion in Modernity"; Tomas Larsson, "The Political Economy of State Patronage of Religion: Evidence from Thailand," *International Political Science Review* 40, no. 4 (2019): 576–90, https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512118770178.

(timeliness and universality). The information gathered from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 32.0. Responses from each participant were systematically coded to the questions about the three aspects of Humanistic Buddhism and the six characteristics. For each question in the questionnaire, responses were assigned numerical values (for example, on a Likert Scale from 1 to 5), representing levels of agreement or the frequency of the practices. The examination was carried out for each of the three dimensions of Humanistic Buddhism (Individual, Universal, and Transcendental Humanism) along with the six defining characteristics:

- Individual Humanism: assessing beliefs and practices emphasizing personal development, self-agency, and unique spiritual practices.
- Universal Humanism: emphasizing the Interconnectedness of All Beings, Compassion for Others, and the Wider Societal Impact of Buddhism.
- Transcendental Humanism: Focusing on Spiritual Enlightenment, Moving Beyond Material Concerns, and Reaching an Elevated State of Awareness.

Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews conducted with 30 participants were analyzed using qualitative methods. This qualitative methodology was designed to comprehensively examine the respondents' beliefs and practices about Humanistic Buddhism, with a particular emphasis on identifying any obstacles they encounter when seeking to implement its principles. The analysis also examined the consistency between beliefs and practices, as well as identified emerging challenges in the lived experience of Humanistic Buddhism, by comparing the results of the questionnaire with the responses from the interviews.

Result

RQ 1: *How do Thai Buddhists conceptualize and practice the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism in their daily religious and social lives?*
The results of the questionnaire distributed to 400 Buddhists across Thailand about their beliefs and practices in Humanistic Buddhism, which includes three aspects, namely 1) individual humanistic,

2) universal humanistic, and 3) transcendental humanistic, which also accommodates the six characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism, namely Humanity, Emphasis on Daily Life, Altruism, Joyfulness, Timeliness, and Universality.

The respondents have high confidence in the first aspect, and the average score for each item is above 4.00 (Table 4). The highest measurement indicator in the first is related to meditation, which is believed to be an essential component for respondents. The 3rd statement, "Meditation is essential to my spiritual growth and self-reflection", with an average score of 4.6, reflects the importance of meditation as the core of Buddhist practices that help individuals understand themselves and achieve spiritual transformation. Then, the item "I believe that the practice of Buddhism is integral to my overall well-being" shows that the respondents believe Buddhism is central to the whole peace. This belief is supported by the practice stated in the item "I take personal responsibility for my actions and their consequences, in line with Buddhist teaching," which gets the second-highest average score of 4.5, showing that each individual is responsible for each of their actions under Buddhist teachings.

Furthermore, in the second aspect, Universal Humanism, which indicates the respondent's award for the universal principle of humanitarianism in Buddhism, each measurement item has an average score above 4.00 (Table 5). In this second aspect, there are two items with the highest score (4.7), namely "I like how Buddhists encourage people to become friends," and "I think Buddhist teachings can help people live harmoniously, regardless of their background." This shows the strong belief of the respondents that the teachings of Buddhism, such as the concept of mettā (universal love), are widely accepted as an approach that supports friendship and harmony.

The item with the second-highest average score is "I think Buddhist teachings can help people live harmoniously, regardless of their background," with a score of 4.6. Buddhist teachings are often translated into daily life practices that support social tolerance and harmony. Furthermore, the item with the lowest average score, but still above 4.00, is "Every person has the right to find happiness and achieve their full potential regardless of belief." Also, "I practice empathy by trying to

Table 4. Individual Humanistic Buddhist beliefs and practices

No	Item statement	Mean	SD
1	I treat others with kindness.	4.1	1.08
2	I integrate Buddhist principles into my daily life.	4.0	1.22
3	Meditation is essential to my spiritual growth and self-reflection.	4.6	0.0625
4	I try to act with awareness and mindfulness in all areas of my life.	4.2	1.11
5	I take personal responsibility for my actions and their consequences, in line with Buddhist teachings.	4.5	1.15
6	My Buddhist practice helps me manage my emotions and thoughts.	4.4	1.12
7	I aim to cultivate a compassionate mindset toward myself and others through Buddhism.	4.3	0.99
8	The teachings of Buddhism have helped me understand the nature of suffering in my life.	4.1	1.01
9	My Buddhist practices have made me more patient and tolerant.	4.0	1.03
10	The practice of Buddhism is integral to my overall well-being.	4.5	0.89

Table 5. Universal Humanistic Buddhist beliefs and practice

No	Item statement	Mean	SD
1	I like how Buddhists encourage people to become friends.	4.7	1.002
2	We must give support to people experiencing poverty and the needy.	4.4	1.12
3	It is important to promote social harmony and peace among all people.	4.5	0.98
4	My Buddhist beliefs encourage me to help those who are suffering in society.	4.6	1.23
5	Every person has the right to find happiness and achieve their full potential regardless of belief.	4.2	1.31
6	People who have helped us a lot deserve our special respect.	4,35	0.89
7	Buddhist teachings can help people live harmoniously, regardless of their background.	4.7	0.97
8	I respect Buddhists for giving food and money to their monks.	4.25	1.2
9	I practice empathy by trying to understand others' feelings and perspectives.	4.2	1.24
10	I admire Buddhists for respecting all living things.	4.3	1.11

understand others' feelings and perspectives." Although high, this score shows that universal empathy and justice may require further reinforcement in daily life, especially in communities that are less exposed to the values of pluralism. However, in ten items that measure aspects of Universal Humanism, there are items that several respondents give a score of 1, namely "I Admire Buddhists for Respecting All Living Things," although the average score for this item is still high at 4.3. This shows the existence of disparity in understanding or appreciating the universal value of Buddhism.

The third aspect is Transcendental Humanism. Out of the ten items assessing this aspect, eight achieved an average score exceeding 4.00 (Table 6), reflecting a strong appreciation for Buddhist teachings aimed at profound spiritual objectives. Nonetheless, one item received an average score below 4.00, indicating difficulties in implementing specific practices. Among the eight items that received an average score exceeding 4.00, the item with the highest average score is "I experienced deep satisfaction and joy through prayer or meditation," which boasts an average score of 4.6. Buddhist meditation and prayer practices are crucial in helping individuals attain inner peace and profound happiness. According to Gethin (1998), meditation is the primary component of Buddhism, and it aids individuals in transcending suffering and fostering inner understanding. Then, the statement "The ultimate goal of life is to transcend suffering and achieve enlightenment" received an average score of 4.5. This finding illustrates the respondents' comprehension of the fundamental principles of Buddhist teachings, specifically the endeavor to transcend suffering (dukkha) in pursuit of enlightenment (nirvana). One item received an average score of less than 4.00, specifically "I believe that the pursuit of wisdom and compassion can lead to transcendence." While this score remains near 4.00, it indicates that certain respondents might encounter difficulties comprehending or incorporating the idea of wisdom and compassion to achieve practical transcendence in their lives.

Table 6. Transcendental Humanistic Buddhist beliefs and practice

No	Item statement	Mean	SD
1	The ultimate goal of life is to transcend suffering and achieve enlightenment.	4.5	1.12
2	Spending time meditating is a constructive use of one's time.	4.1	1.15
3	Buddhists should not kill any animal.	4	1.16
4	I experienced deep satisfaction and joy through prayer or meditation.	4.6	1.21
5	The Eightfold Path seems a good way to achieve happiness.	4.2	1.23
6	Spiritual awakening leads to a deeper understanding of the universe.	4.2	0.99
7	I find inner strength and/or peace in my prayers or meditations.	4.1	0.98
8	I regularly engage in rituals or ceremonies as part of my spiritual growth.	4.1	1.09
9	I feel deeply connected with the Buddha's teachings on the nature of existence.	4.4	1.07
10	The pursuit of wisdom and compassion can lead to transcendence.	3.9	1.2

RQ 2: *How does local patronage influence the development and sustained practice of Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand?*

Local patronage in Humanistic Buddhism is investigated through five specific statement items. The five statement items exhibit strong performance, with four items achieving an average score exceeding 4.00 (Table 7), while one item records an average score of 3.7. Among the five items, the third item, "I am aware of how government funding is allocated to promote Buddhist cultural events," received the highest average score of 4.6. The item "Government Programs to Support Buddhist Practices Have Positively Impacted My Community" received the second-highest average score of 4.5. One item that gets an average score below 4.00 is "Political Leaders Actively Advocate for the Integration of Buddhist Teachings in Public Policies," with an average score of 3.7. The findings indicate that respondents generally exhibit lower levels of agreement regarding the role of political leaders in incorporating Buddhist teachings into public policies.

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Table 7. Local Patronage in Humanistic Buddhism

No	Item statement	N	Mean	SD
1	I believe government funding helps preserve Buddhist temples and infrastructure.	400	4.2	1.11
2	Government programs to support Buddhist practices have positively impacted my community.	400	4.5	1.12
3	I am aware of how government funding is allocated to promote Buddhist cultural events.	400	4.6	0.98
4	The government's political stance reinforces the role of Buddhism as a national identity.	400	4	0.78
5	Political leaders actively advocate for the integration of Buddhist teachings into public policies.	400	3.7	1.09

The quantitative findings are corroborated by the interviews conducted with respondents, where the aspect of government funding and the budget for policy implementation emerged as the most significant factor cited by participants about the local patronage model within Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand. The participants emphasized that government backing, through direct financial assistance and budget allocations for policy execution, was crucial for maintaining the ongoing success of the Humanistic Buddhism program. This program encompasses religious education, skills training, and social welfare initiatives tailored to the community's needs. For instance, certain respondents indicate that the availability of government funding for temple activities not only enhances public access to Buddhism-related services but also reinforces the temple's role as a hub for social activities.

RQ 3: *What challenges do Thai Buddhists encounter in practicing the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism?*
According to the findings from interviews with 30 participants, the primary challenges identified in the practice of Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand include 'Overcoming Internal Struggles,' 'Cultivating Compassion in Relationships,' and 'Managing Existential Understanding.' This analysis addresses the inquiry "What are the Key

Challenges that Humanistic Buddhism Encounters in Thailand?" by outlining three interconnected dimensions of challenges:

- Addressing Personal Challenges. This challenge pertains to individuals confronting internal conflicts, particularly the disparity between spiritual and material needs. Participants indicate that contemporary ways of living, frequently prioritizing materialistic values, pose challenges for numerous individuals when applying Buddhist principles in their daily lives. Furthermore, the rise of digital distractions and the absence of thorough reflection hinder the individuals' capacity to fully internalize Buddhism's teachings as a comprehensive system.

- Fostering Empathy in Connections. In the social context, participants indicated that establishing and sustaining affectionate relationships poses a significant challenge, particularly amid rising social pressures and the fragmentation of communities. Numerous individuals struggle to maintain consistent compassion in social interactions, influenced by varying cultural values, heightened economic competition, and insufficient community support. This highlights the necessity for a more nuanced approach to enhance the values of compassion in contemporary society.

- Overseeing the Comprehension of Existence. This challenge pertains to the complexities involved in comprehending and grasping the fundamental principles of Buddhism concerning life, suffering, and existence. Participants indicated that Buddhist education frequently remains overly dogmatic, which complicates the connection between the existential ideas of Buddhism and the actual experiences of contemporary society. This leads numerous individuals to perceive these teachings as less applicable to their life challenges, including economic instability, societal transformation, and environmental issues.

Discussion

The Conceptualization and Practice of the Core Principles of Humanistic Buddhism

The results of the initial inquiry emphasized the respondent's beliefs and practices concerning three aspects of Humanistic Buddhism: individual humanistic, universal humanistic, and transcendental humanistic. Regarding the individual humanistic perspective, participants perceive meditation as a crucial element in attaining peace. They consistently incorporate Buddhist principles into their daily routines and strive to engage in all aspects of their lives with awareness and mindfulness. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Catherine N. M. Ortner, Sachne J. Kilner and Philip David Zelazo,[40] which indicates that meditation significantly contributes to developing individual emotional and spiritual balance while also enhancing the capacity to manage the pressures of contemporary life by fostering mindfulness as both a cognitive and an emotional skill. The findings indicate that individuals who regularly engage in meditation demonstrate a greater capacity to confront life's challenges with a composed and introspective mindset, aligning closely with the fundamental principles of Humanistic Buddhism. This finding aligns well with the studies conducted by Kamlesh Singh, Kamalpreet Kaur Sohi, Harshmeet Kaur, and Purnima Singh,[41] which investigate the impact of meditation on enhancing well-being and life satisfaction. This study demonstrates that meditation enhances individuals' ability to comprehend and embrace suffering while fostering empathy and strengthening connections with others. This finding is significant for participants who highlight that engaging with awareness and mindfulness enables them to promote healthier social connections and enhance community harmony.

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[40] Catherine N. M. Ortner, Sachne J. Kilner, and Philip David Zelazo, "Mindfulness Meditation and Reduced Emotional Interference on a Cognitive Task," *Motivation and Emotion* 31 (2007): 271–83, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-007-9076-7.
[41] Singh et al., "Buddhism and Its Contribution to Positive Psychology."

Prior studies corroborate this finding, including the work of Anran Chen and Yue Tang,[42] which indicates that incorporating meditation into mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) practices aids individuals in managing stress while enhancing cognitive and emotional flexibility in daily life. The investigation revealed that meditation emphasizing complete awareness can improve the individuals' capacity to confront life's challenges more constructively, particularly within the framework of intricate urbanization and globalization. In Thailand, meditation linked to Humanistic Buddhism encompasses a profound aspect, focusing on spiritual integration that seeks individual well-being and enhances social connections and contributions to local communities. This finding emphasizes that meditation is a tool for self-improvement and a link that aligns individual values with shared interests, thereby rendering Humanistic Buddhism significant in contemporary society. Nonetheless, this discovery should also be contrasted with the work of Qiang Xie and colleagues,[43] which emphasizes the difficulties associated with practicing meditation in contemporary society. The study indicated that numerous individuals struggle to dedicate time consistently to meditation due to the demands of work and the escalating intensity of digital life.

Additionally, the second finding from the initial inquiry pertains to universal elements of humanistic principles. Participants indicated strong convictions and behaviors that aligned with universal humanistic principles. They appreciate how Buddhists promote friendship and believe that Buddhist teachings can assist individuals in living harmoniously, irrespective of their backgrounds. Participants indicated a consistent application of empathy by making efforts to comprehend the feelings and perspectives of others. This finding aligns with the work of David W. Chappell,[44] which demonstrates that the teachings

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[42]   Anran Chen and Yue Tang, "Exploring the Facilitating Environment for Mindfulness Meditation: Establishing a Framework through Analysis of Means and Exploratory Factor Analysis," *Mindfulness* 15, no. 10 (2024): 2519–35, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-024-02442-2.

[43]   Qiang Xie et al., "Understanding the Implementation of Informal Meditation Practice in a Smartphone-Based Intervention: A Qualitative Analysis," *Mindfulness* 15, no. 2 (2024): 479–90, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-024-02304-x.

[44]   Chappell, "Buddhist Social Principles."

of Buddhism, particularly the concepts of mettā (affection) and karuṇā (compassion), can enhance interpersonal relationships, promote acceptance, and inspire individuals to coexist more harmoniously, irrespective of their social or cultural differences. Tan posits that these values foster social cohesion within a diverse community. This finding also aligns with the results of the study conducted by Linda Jane Douglas,[45] which indicates that the teachings of Buddhism regarding equality and empathy contribute to enhancing mutual respect within a diverse society. The study revealed that individuals who engage with the principles of Buddhism are generally more receptive to differences and demonstrate a greater commitment to fostering diversity across various dimensions, including religion, race, and culture. Participants in the study indicated that empathy is not merely a passive attitude. Still, active behavior manifests in everyday social interactions, a quality also observed in the responses from individuals in Thailand.

This finding aligns with a study by David W. Chappel,[46] highlighting that Buddhist teachings, particularly the concepts of interdependence and shared humanity, robustly support universal humanistic values centered on understanding and appreciation for our common humanity. Bodhi posits that Buddhism not only imparts lessons on affection but also encourages individuals to perceive their connections with others without limitations, encompassing dimensions of religion, race, and social status. This perspective aligns closely with our findings, as participants consistently express the importance of empathy by striving to understand others' viewpoints. This principle enhances interpersonal relationships and fosters a more inclusive community. The results of studies conducted by Makiko Takeda[47] further support this finding, demonstrating that the teachings of Buddhism, which emphasize social harmony and the appreciation of diverse backgrounds, can enhance

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45   Douglas, "Ethical Underpinnings and Social Work."
46   Chappell, "Buddhist Social Principles."
47   Makiko Takeda, "Building Equality and Social Cohesion in Myanmar: Plurilingualism as a Platform for Establishing Peace Culture," in *Social Transformations in India, Myanmar, and Thailand: Volume I: Social, Political and Ecological Perspectives*, ed. Chosein Yamahata, Donald M. Seekins and Makiko Takeda (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 29–50, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-9616-2.

the social experience of individuals in a pluralistic society. Nonetheless, applying these values on a broader scale within an increasingly fragmented society still necessitates cooperative endeavors among religious and social institutions.

Nevertheless, this discovery must also be contrasted with the results from the research conducted by Michael A. Pirson and Paul R. Lawrence,[48] which indicates that while Buddhist teachings advocate for harmony and empathy, significant challenges arise in consistently applying these values within the complexities of social life. In certain environments, particularly in large urban areas characterized by significant social and economic disparities, the principles of equality and camaraderie can often be challenging to implement in tangible ways. This indicates that while there is a robust conviction in the universal principle of humanistic values, their implementation necessitates a more extensive social process, including education and social policies that facilitate the incorporation of these values into individuals' lives.

Additionally, the third finding from the initial inquiry concerning the transcendental dimension of humanistic principles indicates strong beliefs and a notably consistent practice. Participants stated that they felt profound satisfaction and joy through prayer or meditation. There is a belief that the ultimate aim of existence is to overcome suffering and attain enlightenment. They also indicated a consistent involvement in rituals or ceremonies as an aspect of spiritual development. This finding aligns closely with the work of Jay L. Garfield,[49] who discovered that meditation and prayer within the Buddhist tradition serve as methods for attaining inner peace and as tools for overcoming suffering. He articulated that attaining peace encompasses not just an internal journey but also possesses a transcendent aspect that enables individuals to detach from worldly concerns and reach a state of higher happiness, aligning closely with the core goals of Buddhism, specifically enlightenment (*nirvāṇa*).

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[48]   Michael A. Pirson and Paul R. Lawrence, "Humanism in Business – Towards a Paradigm Shift?," *Journal of Business Ethics* 93 (2010): 553–65, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-009-0239-1.
[49]   Garfield, "Buddhism and Modernity."

This finding aligns closely with the study conducted by Shi,[50] which indicated that meditation and prayer within the Buddhist tradition serve as a pathway to attain inner peace and a method to alleviate suffering. They articulated that attaining peace not only encompasses an internal journey but also possesses a transcendent aspect that enables individuals to detach from worldly concerns and reach a state of elevated happiness, aligning closely with the core aims of Buddhism, particularly enlightenment (nirvāṇa). However, as noted by James Gould,[51] despite reporting deep happiness and satisfaction from meditation and ritual practices, many people struggle to maintain consistency in their spiritual practice amidst a fast-paced and disruptive life. External factors, including professional and social obligations, frequently impede the depth and consistency of their spiritual endeavors. This indicates that while there is a profound conviction in the inherent value of Buddhist teachings, the practicalities of everyday existence can pose a significant challenge to attaining higher spiritual goals.

The Influence of Local Patronage on the Development of Humanistic Buddhism

The findings demonstrated that there is a clear understanding of the government's allocation of funding specifically aimed at promoting Buddhist cultural events. They acknowledged that government programs designed to support Buddhist practices have made a positive impact on their communities. Beyond financial support, respondents emphasized the broader social benefits generated by these initiatives, highlighting improvements in community cohesion and cultural preservation. This finding aligns with previous research by Phramaha Danai Srichan and colleagues,[52] who documented the Thai government's

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[50] Shi, "The Path to Liberation."
[51] James Gould, "Becoming Good: The Role of Spiritual Practice," *Philosophical Practice* 1, no. 3 (2005): 135–47, https://doi.org/10.1080/17428170600595846.
[52] Phramaha Danai Srichan et al., "The Soft Power of Buddhism: Fostering Social Harmony and Cultural Identity in Thai Society," *The Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC)* 10, no. 1–2 (2024): 301–19, https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/ibsc/article/view/280168.

active role in funding and endorsing various religious and Buddhist cultural activities. According to this scholarship, the government views Buddhism not only as a significant component of the nation's cultural heritage but also as a vital instrument for fostering social harmony and reinforcing a shared national identity. Within this framework, government-sponsored programs supporting Buddhist practices are instrumental in strengthening social structures and nurturing interpersonal relationships among community members—an outcome reflected in the positive perceptions reported by respondents in the present study.

Moreover, this finding was corroborated by Tomas Larsson's study,[53] which indicated that government policies promoting Buddhist events enhance society's spiritual experience and reinforce social connections within the community. Larsson emphasizes that these programs not only prioritize the preservation of culture but also the advancement of sustainable social development by fostering spiritual awareness and mutual care within the community. This illustrates a mutual connection between governmental assistance and Buddhist traditions that enhance the community's social and spiritual well-being.

Data from local patronage in Thailand demonstrates how political systems and ideological conflicts influence government spending on spiritual patronage. In Bangkok, it has been observed that democratic governments typically allocate greater financial resources to religious initiatives than their autocratic counterparts, with electoral competition playing a crucial role in shaping religious patronage. This largely arises because electoral competition drives politicians to meet their constituents' material and spiritual expectations. This clarifies, at least in part, the notable increases in government spending on religious issues that frequently occur when lawmakers take control of public expenditure decisions from authoritarian governments (and their technocratic allies). While it is expected that autocratic leaders will act as proponents of Buddhism, the difficulties they face often appear less severe. As a result, there is usually a noticeable inclination to decrease the funding designated for religious support, particularly following an increase implemented by their predecessors elected by popular vote.

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53   Larsson, "The Political Economy of State Patronage of Religion."

Autocratic political leaders might understand the significance of acting as patrons of Buddhism to attain legitimate religious authority. However, religiously inclined Thai autocrats, like the absolute monarchs of the past, would be motivated to direct their religious patronage toward the geographic and symbolic epicenter of the polity as far as they are able. Unlike democratic parliaments, autocrats require less widespread public support, resulting in diminished incentives to systematically extend their religious patronage to village temples nationwide. Autocratic regimes necessitate the support, or at least the passive acceptance, of communal elites at the national level. In the context of Thailand, this includes the monarchy and the senior Sangha hierarchs in Bangkok. Gaining their favor necessitates ritual demonstrations of loyalty and submission, consistent with royalist interpretations of Thai nationalism, yet does not involve excessive expenditure on religious bureaucracy. Historically, the military has served as defenders of 'nation, religion, and king,' leading Thai military autocrats to view the legitimacy of their royally endorsed rule with significant confidence. In contrast to parliamentarians, they have not been required to secure the support of the broader monkhood to the same degree.

The Challenges of Humanistic Buddhism Practices in Social Lives

The findings from the third research question underscore the challenges encountered by Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand. Interviews with 30 respondents identified three main obstacles to practicing Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand: 1) overcoming internal struggles; 2) cultivating compassion in relationships; and 3) managing existential issues. The initial challenge, addressing internal struggles, involves inner conflicts related to emotions such as anger, greed, and hatred. Participants reported that, although they wished to follow Buddhist principles, they often faced challenges from negative emotions and worldly desires that were difficult to control. This finding corresponds with Naranjo's research,[54] which emphasizes the considerable challenges

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[54]   Claudio Naranjo, *The Revolution We Expected: Cultivating a New Politics of Consciousness* (Berkeley, CA: Gateways Books, 2018).

facing Humanistic Buddhism in dismantling entrenched cognitive patterns and negative emotions in individuals. Naranjo stated that self-control in Buddhism requires ongoing practice and patience, as well as an educational process to recognize and overcome feelings of anger, anxiety, and greed. In Thailand, individuals face considerable challenges in improving their mental quality through meditation and awareness cultivation, as this practice requires sustained discipline and extended effort.

Furthermore, the second challenge pertains to developing compassion within interpersonal relationships. Respondents report that this principle is difficult to apply in everyday interactions, particularly in complex family or community dynamics, despite Buddhism's emphasis on compassion (*karuṇā*).[55] offers evidence that compassion is a fundamental component of Buddhist teachings; however, its practical application in daily life frequently encounters substantial obstacles, particularly in relationships marked by emotional distress or conflict. Goleman and Davidson[56] argue that the development of profound empathy is necessary for the cultivation of authentic compassion, which allows individuals to comprehend the perspectives of others and cultivate a desire to alleviate their suffering. An individual's capacity to respond with empathy and sensitivity is frequently impeded by external factors, such as tension and social pressure, which present practical challenges in demonstrating compassion.

The third challenge, Managing Existential Understanding, is concerned with the understanding and acceptance of the inevitabilities of life, such as sickness, mortality, and uncertainty. Despite their knowledge of Buddhist teachings regarding Anicca (impermanence) and Dukkha (suffering), respondents reported difficulty integrating these concepts into their daily lives. According to Timo Ennen,[57] the challenges associated with understanding existential reality are closely

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[55]   King, "Mindfulness, Compassion and Skillful Means in Engaged Buddhism."

[56]   Daniel Goleman and Richard J. Davidson, *Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body* (New York: Avery, 2017).

[57]   Timo Ennen, "The Self-Knowledge of Not-Self: On the Problem of Modern Buddhism and the Basic Character of the Buddha's Teaching," *The Journal of East Asian Philosophy*, 2024, 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1007/s43493-024-00034-x.

related to the incapacity of individuals to embrace the inevitability of life events, such as mortality and suffering. Batchelor notes that even though Buddhism asserts suffering as an inherent aspect of human existence, individuals often attempt to avoid or deny it. Engaging in comprehensive spiritual practices, such as contemplation and meditation, is imperative to effectively navigate this existential awareness. At the same time, these practices allow individuals to maintain inner calm while embracing the acceptance of challenging life realities.

Conclusion

This investigation contributes significantly to Humanistic Buddhism by analyzing three critical components: the challenges it faces in its implementation, the influence of local patronage in supporting Buddhist beliefs and practices in Thailand, and the humanistic perspective associated with these practices.

This study investigates the beliefs and practices of Buddhism within Humanistic Buddhism, emphasizing three primary dimensions: individual humanistic, universal humanistic, and transcendental humanistic. The results suggest that practitioners demonstrate high confidence and consistency in their practices, including pursuing enlightenment as the ultimate life goal, compassion in social interactions, and meditation for inner calm. The respondents underscore the importance of meditation and awareness in their daily lives to achieve personal tranquility. The universal aspect of Humanism posits that Buddhist teachings can cultivate harmonious relationships among individuals, irrespective of their heritage, and improve empathy. Regarding the transcendental aspect of humanism, the respondents maintain that the primary objective of life is to transcend suffering and achieve enlightenment, primarily through meditation and rituals. This research investigates the role of local patronage in promoting Humanistic Buddhism, with a particular emphasis on the beneficial effects of government programs in Thailand that provide funding for Buddhist activities and cultural events. The respondents exhibited a high level of cognizance regarding allocating government funds for Buddhist activities. They indicated that this support positively impacted the reinforcement of Buddhist practices at the local

level. These programs reinforce societal human values and enhance interpersonal relationships, all while facilitating spiritual development. This study identifies three primary challenges in Humanistic Buddhism in Thailand: 1) overcoming internal struggles related to the management of negative emotions such as anger and greed, 2) cultivating compassion in social relationships, which are frequently impeded by tension and conflict, and 3) addressing existential understanding regarding the acceptance of suffering and the uncertainties of life. These obstacles demonstrate that, despite a fervent desire to integrate Buddhist teachings into daily life, such a practice requires continuous effort and in-depth contemplation.

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